Beyond Origins

_Heimat_ and National Identity in Selected Works
by Herta Müller and Libuše Moníková

Sarah Goodchild

University College London

Submitted for the degree of PhD
Abstract

This thesis engages with a body of contemporary German literature which explores notions of collective belonging in the context of migration. I contend that the texts dealt with here fundamentally challenge two current imagined constructions of community: *Heimat* (pre-modern origin) and nation (modern phenomenon) are non-contingent structures which banish anxiety. Yet new theories addressing the exclusions they create necessitate a revision of both discourses.

I examine in Herta Müller's stories their negative analyses of *Heimat* and its images with particular attention to the implications for women which they divulge. Already discernible in *Niederungen*, women's complicity receives further elaboration in *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*, where it unsettles the critique of men's desire. This announces the entry of hopelessness into Müller's texts which pushes her work into a political impasse. My analysis of *Herztier* demonstrates how a rigorous examination of what constitutes resistance prevents the heroine from disrupting the structures of *Heimat* and totalitarianism which restrict her. Drawing on theories linking adolescence with moral striving, I show how dissidence in the novel is equated with youthful naivety and as such defined in retrospect as unsustainable.

Libuše Moníková's interrogations of national affiliation inform her exploration of Czech/Bohemian history. Within the context of recent theories of historiography which insist on the proximity of history's 'true account' to fictional narrative and Benedict Anderson's concept of the nation as a fictional construct, I argue that Moníková's re-configurations of her national and cultural heritage negotiate a new story/ basis for a new (re-imagined) nation. The damaging city of *Eine Schädigung*, the crippled nation of *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin*, the two irreconcilable Pragues of *Treibeis* are symptomatic of the nation's inadequacy. In *Die Fassade* and *Verklärte Nacht*, I show how Moníková turns her estrangement into a vantage point from which she challenges narratives of origin by thinking past the nation as a monolithic entity.
# Table of Contents

**Abstract**  
2

**Table of Contents**  
3

**Introduction**  
5  
- *Heimat* and Nation in Flux  
- Current Views on the Meaning and Function of *Heimat*  
- Müller’s Literary Background and Position in Relation to the *Heimat* Genre  
- The Nation Today  
- Solutions  
  - Difference 1  
  - Difference 2 (Julia Kristeva)  
  - Hybridity  
- Defending a Collective Identity Based on Origins  

**Part One: Herta Müller**  
35

**Chapter One: The Early Stories**  
35  
- “Der Mann mit der Zündholzschachtel”. The Firestarter as Image of Hatred and Guilt  
- “Das Fenster”: Metaphorised Female Images of *Heimat* and their Subversion  
- *Heimat* and Instrumental Reason in “Niederungen”  
  - Adorno and Horkheimer’s Concept of Man’s Separation From Nature  
  - The Story’s Critique of Rationality  
  - Narrative as a Mode of Resistance  

**Chapter Two: Heimat and Domination in Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt**  
56  
- Fasan, the Conventional *Heimat* Novel and the Problem of Autonomy  
- Man’s Autonomy and Women’s Oppression  
- Women and the House in *Fasan*  
- Sexuality and the Struggle for Control  
- Professional Disempowerment and the Bid for Control  
- The Power of Nature and the Domination of Women in *Fasan*  
- Submission and Desire in *Fasan*  
- Heimat Renounced?  

**Chapter Three: Herztier - A Youth in Totalitarianism**  
87  
- Resistance  
- Resistance and *Heimat*  
- Persecution - Despondency - Resignation  
  - Unsafe Friendship  
  - Nature as Threat  
  - Uncontrollable Language  
- Fear and Death  
- *Heimat* and Adolescence  

**Part Two: Libuše Moníková**  
125

**Chapter Four: The City as a Home for Women? Eine Schädigung and the Deconstruction of Allegory**  
125  
- The Running Girl and Political Freedom.  
- Allegory and Disembodiment  
- Mara’s Colony and Feminist Methodology  
- The First Three Weeks  
  - The Women on the Streets  
  - The Taxi Driver  
  - The Senses Return  

3
Irene and Svidor 139
The School Reunion 140
Time for Reflection 141

Chapter Five: The Melancholy of Exile: Pavane für eine verstorbenen Infintin 144
Francine as Feminist Heroine 146
Theories of Melancholy 149
Francine’s Melancholic Malady 151
Francine’s Visions 156

Chapter Six: Die Fassade - Commemorating Bohemia 164
Restoration as Performed History 166
Vilma: National Origins I 172
History as Farce: National Origins II 179
The Facade of Soviet Ideology 182
Behind the Soviet Facade 185
State Power “ohn’ Unterlaß” 187

Chapter Seven: Treibeis - Alienation and the Interrogation of Community 189
Prantl: “‘Leben’ wäre übertrieben” (83) 194
Community: an Expedient for Coping with Death 198
Karla: “Ich bin eher eine Stalinistin” (177) 200
Karla: From Fearlessness to Vulnerability 204
Karla’s Dream of Prague 206

Chapter Eight, Verklärte Nacht: Postnational Fable and Immortal Wanderings 212
In Search of the People of Prague 216
Thomas/Tomáš 219
Leonora Marty/Emilia Marty 222

Conclusion: Can we Transcend our Origins? 228

Bibliography 233
Primary Texts 233
By Herta Müller 233
By Libuše Moníková 233
Secondary texts 233
Introduction

This thesis analyses texts by two contemporary ‘German’ writers and pays particular attention to the meaning and value they attribute to Heimat and national identity. Both the authors I have chosen for this project have been allocated a special status within German literature on account of the fact that Germany is not their home country. Certain critics have seen in their specific backgrounds justification for categorising their writing as a separate phenomenon and in doing so, have highlighted its difference from the remainder of German literature. Antje Hamisch, for example, contends of Müller’s status as foreigner in Germany: “Diese Position der Marginalität erlaubt es, unter die Oberfläche verkrusteter Sichtweisen zu dringen und vertraute Versionen von Kultur und Gesellschaft in Frage zu stellen.” Herta Müller grew up in a German-speaking enclave in the Romanian Banat and fled to West Berlin in 1987 after suffering persecution by the Securitate (secret police) and the gradual withering away of her professional and personal freedom. Libuše Moníková, a Czech national, was likewise compelled to leave her country because of the change in political climate after the Soviet intervention, settling eventually in Berlin, where she died in 1998. A native Czech speaker, she chose to write in German because of the distance which a second language could afford her to her subject matter. The minority status of these authors within a mainstream German literature is not the concern of this study. The notion of a ‘normal’ German literature which is pre-supposed by any inference of a foreign or different perspective which particular writers are thought to occupy is nebulous and its

---

1 My choice not to translate this word reflects normal usage in English language scholarship on German literature. Opinion is divided as to whether or not there is an equivalent in English. Peter Sloterdijk, for example, finds no difference between the word Heimat and terms found in other languages to denote the positive aspect of human habitation (home or homeland in English). Cf. Peter Sloterdijk. “Der gesprengte Behälter. Notiz über die Krise des Heimatbegriffes in der globalisierten Welt.” Spiegel Spezial: Heimat. Nr. 6, Juni 1999, 24-29, 24. Most, however, deem it untranslatable (Cf., for example, Rachel Palfreyman. “Reflections of the Heimat Genre: Intertextual Reference in Reitz’s Heimat.” German Life and Letters, 50:4, October 1997, 529-543, footnote 1, 529, and Jochen Kelter. “Vorwort.” Jochen Kelter (ed.). Die Ohnmacht der Gefühle. Heimat zwischen Wunsch und Wirklichkeit. Weingarten: Drumlin, 1986). It seems fair to surmise that while English has a word for Heimat, it is more neutral and less resonant. Finally, since Heimat has been ideologised and mythologised in Germany as it has not been elsewhere in Europe, it is more useful to this study to retain the German word. Cf. also Hermann Bausinger’s excellent commentary “Heimat in einer offenen Gesellschaft. Begriffsgeschichte als Problemgeschichte.” Kelter, 89-115, 95 and Vilém Flusser. “Wohnung beziehen in der Heimatlosigkeit”. Vilém Flusser. Von der Freiheit des Migranten. Einsprüche gegen den Nationalismus. Berlin and Vienna: Philo, 2000.

During a recent reading by Emine Sevgi Özdamar, one listener persistently sought the author's affirmation of his contention that her imagery is the direct product of the influence of her knowledge of Turkish on her German. This well-meaning gesture is prototypical for what has become the *topos* of the 'fremden Blick' in the reception of German authors from non-German backgrounds. It denies the author's language its own literary quality and their literature its status within *German* literature since it views both as half foreign and insinuates a normal or pure German language and literature in which their writing does not partake. However, my refusal to consider the authors’ perspectives on *Heimat* and the nation as dependent on their outsider status is not to deny the influence of their particular experiences as migrants on their writing. It rather insists on upholding a distinction between the biographies of authors and their literary production.

My choice of Müller and Moníková for this study reflects the prominence in their work of the themes of *Heimat* and nation respectively, both of which are currently subject to a process of theoretical re-evaluation mainly within the fields of politics and philosophy. Müller's portrayals of village communities who live according to traditional values constitute a trenchant counterpart to literature which idealises such lifestyles. They scrutinise fantasies of *Heimat* above all as deceptive narratives. Moníková’s protagonists are fierce Czech patriots who during the course of the narrative are compelled to re-examine their received notions of their nation as well as the purported sense of community in which their national identity invites them to partake. By tracing the development of the significance these authors assign to *Heimat* and national identity in terms of the extent to which they are able to fulfil certain basic human needs, I aim to discern a challenge to these forms of community from within German literature. Here, the views of Müller and Moníková are not seen as being representative of others, but rather as two individual perspectives which voice issues which I see as being particularly pertinent to contemporary

---


4 The role and function of *Heimat* has attracted the attention of a broader range of disciplines than the nation which with surprisingly few exceptions has remained the domain of political history and cultural studies. Since the beginning of the last century, *Heimat* has at various times been the focus of literary and educational scholarship ('Heimatkunde' is a compulsory subject in German primary schools) and more recently doctoral theses on the topic have appeared in the fields of linguistics and geography. Cf. Andrea Bastian. *Der Heimat-Begriff. Eine begriffsgeschichtliche Untersuchung in den verschiedenen Funktionsbereichen der deutschen Sprache*. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1995 and Michael Neumeyer. *Heimat. Zu Geschichte und Begriff eines Phänomens*. Kiel: Geographisches Institut der Universität Kiel, 1992.
debate. Crucial to this study then is not only the authors' thematisation of Heimat and nation, but also the existence in their work of a questioning and critique of the discourses about these places with which their texts take issue.

The texts selected for analysis in this thesis all explore what Heimat or nation does and can mean for individuals and each reflects a particular problematic aspect associated with the choice (or compulsion) to identify with these collectives. These range from a critique of the appropriation of women's bodies in allegorical representations of the city in Moniková's Eine Schädigung to Müller's portrayal of the tendency of the Heimat to entrap women which is expressed most radically in her short story "Das Fenster." My project is to investigate the problems which these texts expose and to assess the authorial view about the desirability of Heimat and national identifications. In the following introduction to these topics, I begin by examining the reasons why they are currently attracting academic interest. Since the debates both for and against Heimat and the nation are complex, I then outline the theories which are currently most influential. Reference to these theories will enable me to align the literary representations of Heimat and nation with topical discussions and to ascertain to what extent the former constitute progressive or conservative, innovative or worn reworkings. My choice of two women writers for this project reflects my intention to determine, where appropriate, how a review of Heimat and the nation can be informed by a feminist critique. While feminist concerns are not prioritised by either author, their work in some cases reveals implications of belonging to a Heimat or a nation which are specific to women. Against the background of the current situation in which a concerted feminist challenge to Heimat and nation is outstanding, it is part of this project to point out what the work of Müller and Moniková could contribute to a feminist-based critique.

Heimat and Nation in Flux

Heimat and the nation are geographical spaces which have historically provided the people who dwell within them a sense of belonging or identity. The nation is a relatively young form of territorial-based collectivity, with many modern nations being 'born' after World War I. They historically supersede larger imperialist empires. Heimat is both a smaller space and one which is historically and geographically indeterminate. It exists parallel to and in spite of larger politically determined areas. Heimat tends to be provincial, often rural and distinguishes itself as a specific landscape and in its special customs, folklore and tradition. In contrast, the nation either already has or strives for political unity (the nation-state) and unites people across large distances highlighting and even forging commonalities
such as language, religion, political ideals and history. It is often based on a doctrine of popular freedom and the people’s sovereignty, that is, it promises those it represents a particular status and certain rights, while the Heimat above all offers maternal warmth and shelter from anonymity.

Globalisation and increased mobility are placing demands on identity-giving structures which base themselves on a convergence of self and place. The loss of Heimat began with industrialisation when mass migration commenced in response to the search for work and the promise of increased prosperity. Heimat ceased to be a real possibility with the decline of an agrarian way of life and has now reached a state of permanent crisis with the collapse of a culture of settlement. The inevitability with which we today view the move away from our place of origin is reflected in current definitions of Heimat as “die Gegend, in der wir Kind waren”\(^\text{5}\) or the place “worin noch niemand war.”\(^\text{6}\) On the heels of modern man’s widespread uprootedness from his Heimat which can either be caused by departure or by the transformation of its landscape is the dissolution of national cultures and borders. Increasingly, people are exiled from their home countries and nations are peopled by individuals with complex national affiliations who do not remain in the territorial-cultural ‘container’ into which they were born. Individuals are becoming multi-local, that is, they inhabit a number of different places, and places polyethnic - peopled by individuals who come from elsewhere. The nation, like the Heimat, is now also in decline. This is the point of view articulated by Peter Sloterdijk in a recent essay on the psychopolitical challenge of the new global age. He contends that the new heterogeneous, multi-cultural societies weaken the traditional function of nations as closed containers which had provided its residents with immunity and self-assurance. The challenge of post-modernism then, is to design new ways for individuals to achieve immunity (by which he means, a sense of security or protection). The demise of the nation is visible in a current lack of solidarity with political communities and in the de-politicised individual who “sein immunologisches Optimum von jetzt an nicht mehr (oder nur noch in Ausnahmefällen) in seinem nationalen Kollektiv, vielleicht noch partiell in den Solidarsystem seiner


\(^{6}\) This quotation from Ernst Bloch is perhaps the most frequently cited definition of Heimat and one which lends the notion a utopian dimension by imagining it as the possible realisation of a liberated democratic society. Ernst Bloch. Das Prinzip Hoffnung. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973, Bd. 3, 1628. For a discussion of the passage from which the quotation is taken, see Manuela Fiedler. Heimat im deutschen Film. Ein Mythos zwischen Regression und Utopie. Coppengrave: Coppi-Verlag, 1995, 5-6.
‘Minderheit’ oder seiner community, am klarsten jedoch in privaten Versicherrungsarrangements findet’.7

Proponents of a new world order who declare the nation moribund are not, however, appearing in the large numbers one might expect in light of the consensus which does exist about the uncertain future of nation-states. The voices which emerged in Germany in the fifties which defamed the sovereign nation-state as outdated and reactionary and described its reinstitution by the Allies at the end of World War II as an “unverdiente Restauration”8 have given way to a widespread consensus that the nation fulfills certain basic human needs. Karl W. Deutsch has adjudged the nation-state as offering “den meisten seiner Mitglieder ein starkes Gefühl an Sicherheit, Zugehörigkeit, Verbindlichkeit und sogar an persönlicher Identität, als jede andere größere alternative Gruppe es vermag.”9 Both political scientists and historians generally hold the view that while the role of the nation will continue to undergo a transformation, it will not entirely disappear from the new world order. The nation’s new function is conceived variously as provider of legitimacy of new supranational and subnational mechanisms10 or as a form of resistance or bulwark against cultural standardisation and Americanisation.11 In the debate about the future of the nation, different stances can be discerned depending on whether the nation is considered in terms of a cultural or a political-economic unit. While a gradual erosion of the nation’s role as economic manager and a relocation of political governance away from the level of the national are generally regarded as necessary and acceptable developments, the continued existence of the nation as a cultural entity remains desirable.

Concurrent with globalisation and its perceived weakening of homogeneous national cultures is an increased interest in Heimat. The immense enlargement of world communication, an increasingly tangible world market and American mass culture effectuate anonymity and homelessness which fuels a longing for the intact world of the past. The last Renaissance of Heimat began in the 1960s and 1970s as part of the critique of economic growth and the new consumerist society. When writers such as Jean Amery, Martin Walser and Sigfried Lenz began to depict a traditional provincial way of life in a positive light, the resonance of their work was explained in terms of its timely reply to a

---

7 Sloterdijk, 29.
general loss of security: "der wieder einmal gesteigerte ‘Bedarf’ an Geborgenheit in einer
bedrohten Welt ist offenkundig". The “wieder einmal” is significant: Heimat appears
wherever people feel threatened by social change. In Herta Müller’s work too, there is a
relationship between political resignation and the development of a reconciliatory attitude
towards life in the backward provinces. Crucially, the prerequisite for the new function of
Heimat to fulfil a human need for protection is its non-existence or one’s own state of not
being in the Heimat. Heimat today has an intrinsic nostalgic dimension; it alleviates
longing for a better world by seeking refuge in the past. “Zur Befriedigung dieser
Sehnsüchte erfolgte ein pauschaler Rückgriff auf Werte und Gegenstände der
Vergangenheit, eine Flucht vor der Gegenwart in das vermeintlich bessere ‘damals’”.
Thus, paradoxically, the end of Heimat also signals its birth. The widespread
relinquishment of a way of life in which it was customary to spend one’s days in the
community into which one was born has given rise to a new discourse on Heimat revealing
a fascination which has not yet been put to rest.

Current Views on the Meaning and Function of Heimat

After outlining above the reasons why the nation and Heimat are undergoing a Renaissance
and transformation at the end of the twentieth century, the following section summarises
the most common meanings currently attributed to Heimat.

Two aspects can be distinguished in recent theoretical discussions on the role and
function of Heimat: firstly, an appreciation of Heimat as being able to supply certain
perceived human essentials, such as a place of belonging, community and stability and
secondly an indictment of its denial of reality. Often, both views can be found in the same
context, resulting in an ambivalent assessment. That Heimat no longer refers to a real
place let alone one which one actually inhabits appears unquestioned. Rather it is now
accorded meaning as an emotion evoked by memory. Within the context of Heimat as loss,
homelessness is seen as being a negative aspect of social change. Heimat as past memory
is often associated with childhood and the desire for Heimat is in this sense the wish to roll
back time to a point where everything is possible and where everything was as it should be
(and no longer is). Contained in this meaning are also feelings of security which are

12 Herwart Vorländer. “Heimat und Heimaterziehung im Nationalsozialismus”. Peter Knoch and
Thomas Leeb (eds.). Heimat oder Region? Grundzüge einer Didaktik der Regionalgeschichte.
Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Munich: Diesterweg, 1984, 30-43, 42.
13 Neumeyer, 51.
retrospectively associated with childhood. In fact, security (variously expressed in the literature as ‘Geborgenheit’, ‘Aufgehobensein’ and ‘Schutz’) is the most prevalent of the functions currently attributed to Heimat. Klaus Weigelt, for example, claims that a “in der Heimat wachsende Geborgenheitsgewissheit des Menschen eine zentrale Voraussetzung ist für sein Leben auf dieser Erde”, and that enforced exile is so traumatic because it “verletzt das Menschenrecht auf Leben, weil sie [Vertreibung] dessen Geborgenheit zerstört”.\(^{15}\) The Heimat emotion of security is in his view something which we once enjoyed and which is becoming increasingly unavailable. It can be triggered variously by the sight of the parental home or a church spire, the sound of a certain dialect or song, as well as by tastes and smells. In Müller’s early stories, a distinct avoidance of the nostalgic backward-looking perspective on Heimat can be observed. Instead, the texts approach the Heimat from the perspective of the child and use their immediate perceptions to work against idealisations and to produce something different than retrospective images of Heimat.

In the sections which follow, I distinguish between an affirmative and a critical/heedful attitude towards Heimat which divides academic opinion. That humans somehow need Heimat is the basic assumption behind all positive appraisals and at the same time one which is oddly unfounded. Ina-Maria Greverus, for example, has asserted her belief in a “territorial imperative”\(^{16}\) which she explains as man’s intentional orientation towards a territory and something which allows him to gratify his need for safety. For her, Heimat is the human counterpart to an animal’s territory, that is, a space which he stakes out and defends as his own in order to guarantee in this way sufficient sustenance as well as a place to rest. The need for territory is in this view part of our genetic make-up and a human universal. Because man is essentially a ‘homo regionalis’, he will inevitably respond to city life with a nostalgic regression into his childhood Heimat, or a quest for a woman home-maker or regression into primary affection on the psychiatrist’s couch. Elisabeth Bronfen and Benjamin Marius go one step further in explaining the particular human dimension of the search for security by connecting this to a quest for identity. “Heimat”,
they write, “bedeutet die Möglichkeit des Rückgriffs auf nicht-beliebige, vertraute Strukturen” and this is exactly “was Identität ermöglicht”.17

While Heimat is often assumed to be a rural landscape, there is now general agreement that it can also be a city environment. This extension of its reference reflects less a reversion back to the earlier pre-ideological meaning of the Heimat as one's immediate surroundings than it does a new fear of losing one's familiar city environment. Industrial chimneys just as much as country parish church spires can unleash nostalgia for Heimat. Publications from the beginning of the last century document an increasing acceptance of the city as human habitat, which Linse sums up as proving “daß nicht nur das Land und die Natur Heimat bieten, sondern ebenso die Großstadt.”18 However, despite the dramatic rise in urban population at that time (Berlin’s inhabitants doubled between 1877 and 1910 to two million), Heimat continued to signify a rural space until the end of World War II. During this time then, the place of Heimat does not change, but its function does - from real lived environment to the psychological effect of urban trauma. Linse notes in this regard: “Diese rasante Urbanisierung in der zweiten Hälfte des 19. Jahrhunderts, verbunden mit einer gewaltigen Ortsveränderung und damit Entwurzelung von Menschen - 1900 lebte jeder zweite Deutsche an einem anderen Ort als dem seiner Geburt - wirkt bis heute traumatisch nach.”19

More constitutive of Heimat as lost place of security than the rural/urban aspect is both its size and its status as a place of origin. It appears that the relatively confined space of the Heimat facilitates its protective function. Gisela Ecker argues that after World War II, emotional attachment to Heimat facilitated a flight from the realities of history which had been played out on a national level. She equates the large interest in provincial life and customs with a dehistoricisation of the past, “da sie [Heimatpflege] bestimmte historische Ereignisse unserer Geschichte ausblendet und da sie darüberhinaus selektiv das Land vor der Stadt setzt, den Festtag vor den Alltag, die wiederkehrenden Riten und Ereignissen vor die tatsächlichen historischen Akte.”20 Because of its small size, Heimat is a space of innocence, untouched by history. In a recent publication of memoirs from the Third Reich, the traditions of the Bavarian village of Kreuth where the author spent the last months of the war occupy a prominent place in her recollections with the description of the traditional

19 Linse, 1857.
Bavarian ‘Tracht’ donned for the various occasions extending over a paragraph. The horrors and extraordinary circumstances of the war barely affect life in the village and their exclusion from the text is an example of Ecker’s ‘Realitätsflucht’ and mirrors the narrator’s vehement denial of guilt which she states quite plainly. Generally, the requirement that Heimat be the place where you were born is just as obligatory as its insularity. Bullnow writes, “unter Heimat versteht man [...] den Lebensbereich, in dem der Mensch geboren und aufgewachsen ist” and Iring Fetscher senses insurgency in his claim that Dresden is his Heimat, since as he explains “ich, in Württemberg geboren, von zwei süddeutschen Eltern stammend, in Dresden nur ‘aufgewachsen’ war”. If you form an attachment to a place which is not your place of origin, this can at best become a second Heimat. The new Heimat of the immigrant does not allow him to overcome his exclusion since it gives him something which is only secondary to and never of equal status with an authentic original home.

The switch in the meaning of Heimat from designating a place where one lives to a past utopia has been well documented in the literature. I do not mean to repeat the history of this development here. However, before turning to current negative appraisals of Heimat, it will be important to consider the historical misappropriations of the term (what Greverus terms “Heimat as a difficulty”) since the extent to which these are still found within the conceptualisations outlined above constitutes the point of departure for critique.

It is virtually impossible to pinpoint the emergence of literary idealisations of a rural lifestyle and glorifications of the peasant. Manuela Fiedler traces the genre back to the late nineteenth century, when court poetry featured an agrarian romanticism which had little in common with the authentic lifestyle of those who worked on the land. However, as far back as the Roman times, poets sang their praise of the simple lives of shepherds. Virgil’s pastorals express urban nostalgia and Shakespeare’s As You Like It is set in the forest of Arden, a green refuge from the troubles and complications of ordinary life. Around 1900 then, longing for rural life as a flight from reality was not a new phenomenon. It did,

---

20 Ecker, 29.
21 She writes, “I also failed to see, and still do, how and why I should be held personally responsible for things I did not do and events I could not possibly have influenced in any way.” Helga Tiscenko. Strawberries with the Führer. A Journey from the Third Reich to New Zealand. Christchurch: Shoal Bay Press, 2000, 106.
23 Fetscher, 17.
however, around that time, take on particular dimensions which are now interpreted as
constituting points of connection between ‘Heimatkunst* and fascist ideology, a view which
in turn makes Heimat as nostalgic reaction from that point onwards dangerous terrain.

The ‘Heimatkunst’ movement at the turn of the last century was a programmatic
reaction to naturalist and expressionist literature and decadent art. Concepts formed as a
targeted counterpart to these cultural developments such as the healthy farmer and certain
key metaphors like the image of man as being rooted in the soil are reiterated and extended
in national socialist racial theory and were easily reconcilable with its anti-intellectual,
anti-urban ideological tendencies. Heimat with its spatial referentiality, as can be found in
Eduard Spranger’s popular “erlebte und erlebbare Totalverbundenheit mit dem Boden”,26
became the ideological support of Nazi territorial expansionist politics. In 1936, the
Heimat novel is extolled as the epitome of that genre in Germany. The
“landschaftsgebundene Mensch” represents an “in sich ruhenden Punkt” in the midst of
“lebensvernichtende Chaos”.27 Existing notions were adopted for ideological purposes but
these were also radically transformed. In the Third Reich Heimat turns into something
mystical, even sacred. The farmer novels (“Bauernromane”) of the ‘Heimatkunst’
movement had not sought to conceal the harshness of rural life, but rather heroised those
who, in spite of great hardship, still led what was perceived as man’s true and destined
existence.28 In national socialist revisions, the actual conditions in the provinces and the
images of rural life definitively part company. In tandem with the growing fixation on the
figure of the farmer is the ever decreasing possibility for rural dwellers to meet their basic
needs - such as work and security - on the land. Under the influence of economic misery,
the agrarian lobby became increasingly fanatical and racist. The concept Heimat became
simultaneously value-laden and diffuse, an experience characterised as “geistiges
Wurzelgefühl”,29 which leads us “aus der geistigen Zerrissenheit der Gegenwart”.30 Heimat
is “ein Gewebe von sehr geheimen Fäden”31 and to learn about Heimat is to study an
“Alleben, dessen Gesamtsinn [...] der menschlich-subjektiven Erfassung nur in Ahnungen
und in Gleichnissen zugänglich ist.”32 The notion of man as an outgrowth of the soil and
Spranger’s definition of the relation of man to his environment as ‘metaphysical language’

26 Greverus, 9.
27 Eduard Spranger. Der Bildungswert der Heimatkunde. Leipzig: Reclam, 1943, 12. This text was
written in 1923 and went through several reprints until well into the 1950s.
28 Bausinger, 100.
30 Spranger, 12.
31 Spranger, 43.
32 Spranger, 17.
33 Spranger, 22.
mark the shift in the meaning of Heimat away from a factually extant space to an emotional experience. The superiority of the Nordic-Germanic race rested on the myth of the ‘Scholle’ or clod of earth and of the rural lifestyle as the original German way of life. This ‘agromanic’ aspect of Nazi ideology does not contradict the importance to the Third Reich of industrial expansion and urban development: Heimat did not stand apart from the rest of the nation, but rather became the smallest piece of the fatherland: regional particularities were overlooked so that identification with a Heimat was by extension affiliation with an entire national people. An image emerged of Heimat as an abstract unitary rural landscape void of particular localised features. Heimat could in this sense be synonymous with the fatherland and this made it useful for mobilising forces for the war effort since defending the nation was made into a “Verteidigung des persönlichen Hab und Gutes, des eigenen Glücks.” The implications of this imbrication of an appropriated concept of Heimat in National Socialist thought have not lost their relevance despite the astonishing hesitancy of critics to reflect on and take account of the contamination of the word. The anthropological tone in which Spranger wrote his text has not lost its potency. His idea of Heimat as the necessary centre of a deep existence constitutes the possession of Heimat as an essential criterion of human existence which, despite the fact that it was used to legitimate German war crimes, continues to receive widespread affirmation.

Today, the popularity of Heimat not only disregards historical burdens, it also creates a falsely homogenised image of a heterogeneous society, excluding those who do not have or want a Heimat, just as the notion of Heimat as a small patch of German soil denied vast differences between regions in the Third Reich. This is one of the reasons which leads Ecker to reject Heimat, even in a rehabilitated form - it leaves “alle Spielarten von Migration, von der unsere Welt gezeichnet ist, ausgeschlossen.” She views attempts to redefine Heimat with scepticism, despairing that it can be merely a matter of purifying the discourse and ridding it of its historical burden. Of those scholars from various disciplines who admonish Heimat, most do so on the basis that it is illusory or deceptive. Not only does it paste a poetic fantasy over a generally prosaic reality by looking from the city to the country or from adulthood back to childhood, it is a “Sakralisation von Banalem” and a compensatory space in which only “scheinbar die Spannungen der Wirklichkeit ausgeglichen sind.” In an essay on the deceptiveness of Heimat, Müller succeeds with

---

33 Bausinger, 101.
35 Flusser, 26.
36 Bausinger, 96.
greater precision than many who approach Heimat with unease at explaining why its illusory dimension is so reactionary. In this text, she writes of her conviction that both the transformation of living space into Heimat and the longing for past security represent a particular form of guilt denial which is so pervasive because it is sanctioned by society: "Sie ist ein unauffälliges, weil zugelassenes Mittel der ‘guten Menschen’ zur Verdrängung und Verfälschung."37

Müller’s Literary Background and Position in Relation to the Heimat Genre

Herta Müller belongs to a group of young writers who, from 1970 onwards became representative of the last epoch of Romanian-German literature. These were members or associates of the literary circle “Aktionsgruppe Banat” and included apart from Müller other well-known names such as Richard Wagner and Rolf Bossert. While they dominated the German literary landscape in Romania, they did not however identify themselves with the Romanian-German phenomenon. They understood themselves as outsiders in the German community and placed themselves in clear opposition to its traditional Heimat authors. They were, as Wilhelm Solms writes: “Autoren [...] die nach dem Verständnis ihrer Landesleute und nach ihrem eigenen Verständnis Außenseiter gewesen sind und die in Opposition zu den traditionellen Heimatautoren gestanden, also eine anti-rumänische Literatur verkörpert haben."38 The generation of writers who appeared after 1970 did not want to be read as the successors of Romanian-German authors such as Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn and Erwin Wittstock and oriented themselves instead towards German literature as a whole, naming among their influences Bobrowski, Brecht and Celan. In German literature they read reflections on industrial society which seemed better suited to the new social realities in Romania. Their new standpoint effected a clear break with the long upheld tradition of ‘Heimatliteratur’ in both the Banat and Transylvania.

The Heimat genre had thrived in both these regions since the beginning of the twentieth century as a kind of compensatory measure for a gradual loss of political power suffered by the minority under Hungarian and Romanian governments. The writers reacted by trying to forge a community back together, which was being threatened with break-up on political, economic and cultural fronts. They wanted to recuperate their political losses through idealism, ensure continuity and guard against the loss of identity.39 Thus for them,

just as for their German counterparts, the *Heimat* movement was about myth-making rather than preserving existing traditions.\(^{40}\) Literary production began to fulfill an emphatically didactic function - by strengthening emotional ties to *Heimat* and extolling the particular virtues of the minority, it contributed to its self-preservation.

After World War II, this flourishing *Heimat* tradition seemed in retrospect to contain the seeds of Nazi ideology. As Alexander Ritter emphasizes in his historical overview of the German reception of the literature of the minorities, the Germans in Romania suffered the in retrospect unfortunate fate of engaging the attention of German scholars in as far as this supported certain nationalistic political aims. The discovery of the German minority for scholarship in Germany had gone hand-in-hand with a myth-making process around the concepts ‘Germanen’ and ‘Volk’ which at the beginning of the nineteenth century had compensated for a lacking national unity.

During the sixties, new positions critical of ‘Volkstümlichkeit’ began to emerge in Romania. Paul Schuster’s *Heimat* novel *Fünf Liter Zuika* (1961) drew a boundary between true love of *Heimat* and nationalistic fanaticism. For Herta Müller, however, there can be no such distinction. She cannot differentiate between a desirable and a pernicious *Heimat*. One of the strongest reproaches she makes of the German minority is directed against their fascist attitude, which she claims continued to prevail even after the war: “Es haben schon viele festgestellt, daß der Faschismus nicht eine historische Zeit ist (oder nicht nur eine), sondern eine Haltung. Diese Haltung meine ich, wenn ich davon spreche im Kontext meiner Kindheit und dem Verhalten dieser Leute.”\(^{41}\) Although “völkische Gesinnung” in the Banat is historically quite a separate affair from the same phenomenon in the Third Reich, for Herta Müller and other writers of her generation, an almost allergic reaction to anything remotely resembling *Heimat* literature is the expression of their need to separate themselves from their parents’ generation with their fascist tendencies; for them the two are firmly interconnected.

In Germany as well as Austria, a strong counter tradition has existed alongside the *Heimat* genre.\(^{42}\) Critiques of the *Heimat* genre were present to a much lesser degree,

---

40 Indeed, *Heimat* literature commonly functions in this way. Celia Applegate has commented in this respect: “*Heimat* has never been a word about real social forces or real political situations. Instead it has been a myth about the possibility of a community in the face of fragmentation and alienation.” Celia Applegate. *A Nation of Provincials. The German Idea of Heimat.* Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990, 19.

41 Klaus Hensel. “Alles, was ich tat, das heißt jetzt: warten.” [Interview with Herta Müller]. *Frankfurter Rundschau.* 8.8.1987

42 This began in the 1920s when writers like Marieluise Fleißer and Ödön von Horváth started to feature *Heimat* as a repressive, restrictive and socially divisive force in their plays and novels. In the 1960s and 1970s, the plays and films of Rainer Werner Fassbinder and Franz Xaver Kroetz were particularly unrelenting in their protest against what they considered a marketing of *Heimat*. 
however, in the Romanian-German context. The progressive elements in the novels of Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, such as his attempts to foster transnational understanding, were largely overlooked by his conservative reading public who admired his work for its images of ethnographic culture. For a brief period, from 1907 to 1914, Adolf Menschendorf published a cultural journal, *Die Karpaten*, which aimed at countering the programmatically inward-looking *Heimat* art in Transylvania by facilitating connections to German and other European literatures.

Müller takes up the idea of *Heimat* as myth and radicalises existing critiques of this function when she refers to its deceptive capacity. Particularly in her early stories, she criticises this inherited discourse which often served in political rhetoric to manufacture a sense of national unity. The fact that the same rhetoric is mobilised in various political situations which share this aim is thematic element in *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*. In a kindergarten, the children are taught to think of their socialist environment as their home: "Das sind die Städte unseres Vaterlandes", sagt Amalie. "Die Städte sind die Zimmer dieses großen Hauses, unseres Landes. [...] So wie unser Vater im Haus, in dem wir wohnen, der Vater ist, ist Genosse Nicolae Ceausescu der Vater unseres Landes."43 In socialist rhetoric, the word *Heimat* meant the fatherland and was connected with progress, the party and the government.

The critique of *Heimat* in Müller’s early stories did not go unnoticed. Sibylle Cramer writes in the *Frankfurter Rundschau*: "Sie zeigte die Agonie einer schwäbischen Heimatlichkeit im rumänischen Sozialismus."44 In *Die Zeit*, Marina Münkler writes about the second volume of stories with reference to the author’s resettlement in Germany: "[E]s erzählt von der Unmöglichkeit, sich hier heimisch zu fühlen, eben weil die zurückgelassene *Heimat* nicht der Ort wehmütig-sentimentaler, sondern bedrängend-abstoßender Erinnerungen ist."45 These critics quite rightly note that in Müller’s stories, *Heimat* becomes exceedingly gruesome. In my analyses of her texts, I elaborate on this broad observation, adding my own insight that *Heimat* as depicted throughout Müller’s work oppresses women in particular.

---

The purpose of this section has been to survey current approaches to the *Heimat* phenomenon. In doing so, it has been important to highlight the tension featured in the literature between positive negotiations of the large-scale emotional response to *Heimat* and an uneasiness which emerges in response to its aestheticising function (of landscapes, traditions, childhood and so on). Much of Müller's work participates most obviously in the latter variety: “Niederungen” explores the farmer's instrumentalisation of his environment, overturning the myth that *Heimat* can have anything to do with living in harmony with nature. Other stories from her early work use the perspective of those who cannot or do not want to conform to village tradition, concentrating on the victims of *Heimats* border maintenance, or expose how the protection offered by an enclosed familiar space is achieved at the expense of women. Yet as I will argue, a discrediting of the other pole of the debate is not the consequence of such hefty critique of the *Heimat* genre. In a television interview, Müller has spoken of her feelings for the village community where she grew up as “ein Haß, der einem wehtut, weil man ihn gar nicht haben möchten.” The hurt that accompanies hatred seems here to allude to the dimension of need outlined above which is neglected when you are made homeless. However, the feelings for *Heimat* which for her have now turned into hurt are not something you are born with, but which emerge in response to social expectation - Müller speaks in this regard of “Ansprüche, ein Gefühl zu haben für das, was dich umgibt.” Does the fact that the *Heimat* feeling is a social convention not mean that it is something which can also be overcome? Central to my analysis of *Herztier* in chapter three will be to pay attention to the ways in which liberation from the *Heimat* is construed as an ethical imperative but also one which is extremely difficult, even impossible to maintain, and to consider whether the failure of moral striving in the novel which is so closely associated with leaving home constitutes a development away from rejection to acceptance of *Heimat*.

**The Nation Today**

In a fashion similar to current appraisals of *Heimat*, opinion on the role and desirability of the nation is divided between those who decry national collectives as fomenting hatred of the other and those who counter that commitment to one's nation forms the basis for ethical responsibility and moral action.48 This thesis addresses the nation as a collective which acts

47 Kohly.
as a buttress for identity claims rather than as a political entity within a particular world order (that is, as a state), although the two sides cannot always be held apart. In the following section, I consider how nation differs from Heimat, paying particular attention to the role of history in national identity, before turning to the main charges made against the nation and the various solutions offered to counter its inadequacy.

The collective of the nation is imagined rather than truly experienced. Benedict Anderson, who has stressed the creative rather than the hegemonic aspect of the life of nations, has coined the notion of the 'imagined community' to express the way in which the nation forges a kind of family out of individuals who live far apart and partake in a communal body by means of a common fantasy. This notion, that is, that the community of the nation is somehow invented and is therefore neither essential nor natural, is central to all current thinking on the nation regardless of whether an optimistic or a pessimistic opinion on its role is being expressed. The nation differs from the Heimat in that history rather than customs and traditions constitute its particular identity and distinguish it from other nations. This is the main reason why it is appropriate to consider Monšková's texts as national literature, since the identities which are negotiated by the protagonists, while often associated with a place which also figures as a Heimat (Prague), are inseparable from their awareness of their nation's historical role.

While Heimat is encased in cyclical time which follows the change in seasons and allows through its insularity a flight from history, the nation is historical and it is the memory of history which makes national identities what they are. As the 'Historikerstreit' or historians' quarrel of 1986 and 1987 in Germany made evident, there is widespread consensus today that national self-awareness, to the extent that this is still necessary and useful (and it seems it will remain so as long as the nation state continues to be a political institution which orders social relations), should rest on an interpretation of national histories. At the same time, under the influence of postmodernism and poststructuralist insights into the arbitrariness of the signifier, recent thinking on the nation posits a problematic relationship between the past and a national history which represents the past in a certain way. Like Lacan's speaking subject, who identifies with his mirror image and thus misrecognises himself as unified, the nation's homogeneity and intactness is an illusory projection and covers over internal differences and divisions. To Herder's dictum that every people has its own ways and that history must be remembered on pain of rootlessness, the new critics of nation counter with Renan's formula that collective identity

---

emerges out of forgetfulness (Anderson). That a *forgetting* of history is just as much a part of forging national identities as its commemoration is something reflected in Moníková's longest novel *Die Fassade*, in which a Renaissance castle covered in images which fade with time and are either lost or renewed, operates as a metaphor for national historiography. The novel further explores the issue of how the past is mediated from the present and whose versions of the past become history. With its attention to the role of historiography in constructing national narratives and by asking who in fact makes national history, this novel queries whether the people who identify with a particular nation are also able to participate in its invention. The construction of national consciousness therefore always encompasses the construction of a national history, which because it serves a national agenda (forging unity between the people) constitutes a biased mediation of events. The ways in which Moníková negotiates the problematic relationship between the past and its representation as national history is one of the focal points of this study.

The most widely perceived problem with nations and their culture is that they define themselves negatively. National narratives commonly derive their coherence and their claim to universal value from their opposition to other national narratives. The construction of the national Other produces a totalised image of the national community and a national identity is structured in the imagined relation of absolute difference from this national enemy. As Julia Kristeva puts it, the determination of a border between the inside and the outside proceeds according to the logic of excluding filth. The nation may be profaned by the presence of strangers or foreign cultural products, in which case the 'unclean' element must be cleansed. The us/them dichotomy on which national consciousness rests fuels wars and other forms of aggression between opposing nations. Furthermore, the totalising image which allows us to define our neighbours as opponents is a fantasy and has come under attack because it encompasses the denial and repression of difference within the borders of the nation. In reality, there are no fixed national cultures, only political imaginaries of pure or impure political horizons. Holistic models of nation not only no longer adequately reflect the realities of post-war population movements, transnational capital and global communications, they produce intolerance towards 'strangers', leading either to their expulsion/elimination or their assimilation. Of the various standpoints on the nation I elaborate below, virtually all share a basic task of negotiating between the power of borders and 'pure' national identities on the one hand and their exclusion and oppression of strangers on the other.

A similar argument directed against the notion of the nation as a collective of like-minded people who share a common culture views the former as an instrument of oppression imposed on the people from above. According to this line of reasoning, the
nation is a fictional narrative and a mystification of state power. It is only seemingly the correlate of the individual's desires, the world s/he wants and is really a world imposed by the state.\(^5\) The contradictory relation between difference and sameness out of which national narratives and national identities are fashioned can only be resolved into a unity through the state's intervention. State power is required to constitute (and enforce) the national unity that the individual presupposes as a property intrinsic to the nation. Furthermore, national narratives of belonging disguise actual subjection to state power. Donald Pease expresses this view as follows: "Narrativizing a relationship between a 'people' and a civil-territorial complex thereafter construed as 'natural', national narratives effected imaginary relations between national peoples and the states that secured them to their apparatuses."\(^5\) He writes in the past tense because he believes that we have entered a post-national age in which national narratives are being desymbolized and subverted.

In a related vein, the nation is criticised because it, more so than the Heimat, demands sacrifice. Loss of life brings people together and strengthens the sense of togetherness which the nation needs to invent. In contrast, the community of the Heimat can be experienced 'live' rather than through imaginative participation. New Zealanders - although their country was still not a sovereign nation - commenced to realise themselves a nation after eager participation and heavy loss of life in World War I.\(^2\) Nationalist ideologies actively demand sacrifice of life and glorify death 'for the cause'. Monuments to fallen soldiers adorned with epithets such as 'For the glory of our Nation' suggest that personal death somehow enhances and revitalises the collective life and thus secures the perpetual existence of the dead through the nation which, having gratefully absorbed the sacrifice, will be the victims' lasting achievement. Thus nations are also an accomplishment of sublimated violence, unities pasted together by the will to power. Moniková displays an awareness and critique of the nation's transmutation of suffering in Treibeis, in which she has her male protagonist Prantl reject Karla's wish to cast him as national hero when she learns of his war injury.

\(^\text{51}\) Pease, 4.
Solutions

Difference 1

The nation is assessed as an inadequate image of social reality for those who acknowledge and affirm the law of difference. Différance is normally defined in Derridean terms as expressing the irreducible spatio-temporality of language. The sign signifies, has meaning, by its place in the chain of signs, by differing from other signs. Any moment of signification also defers or postpones any completion of its meaning. Any utterance has a multiplicity of meanings and directions of interpretation in which it can be taken. For Derrida, pure present meaning is an illusion, it detemporalises the signifying process and conceives of the being and truth of things as lying outside time and change. When applied to social philosophy, the irreducibility of difference leads to an indictment of community since this falsely presumes subjects who are both present to themselves and who can understand one another as they understand themselves. Community denies difference within and between subjects. In place of community, Iris Young posits a model of the "unoppressed city" where "persons live together in relations of mediations among strangers with whom they are not in community." Another solution to the nation's stigmatisation of the Other is to reject the notion of collective identity altogether. Collectives, whether the face-to-face community of the Heimat or the imagined community of the nation, have been criticised on the basis of their participation in a metaphysics which denies difference. In these critiques, replacing identity with difference becomes the solution to identity's exclusionary operations. As Judith Butler has stressed, identification is a process of recognising commonalities which means that in order to function, differences have to be ignored. Identification can facilitate understanding between people, but this comes at a cost. Identity claims which "hold out the promise of unity, solidarity, universality" involve repressing certain desires. While Butler is not prepared to jettison collective identification since she acknowledges that this can act as a motivating political factor and facilitate emancipation, proponents of difference suggest that we live together without participating in community.

54 Young's article presents such an objection.
**Difference 2 (Julia Kristeva)**

A less radical version of Young’s castigation of collective identifications is the suggestion that we retain national community, but acknowledge and accept its impurity. Whether national identities are ‘good’ or ‘evil’ depends on the ability (and right) of members of national collectives to engage in reflexive self-critical distancing from their own cultural discourses, and hence also to recognise the potential validity of other discourses. Problematising the breakdown of the homogeneous nation-state, Julia Kristeva has made a suggestion of how to deal with heterogeneity which has received some acclaim. In *Strangers to Ourselves*, she connects the idea of the foreigner as stranger to the estrangement which is at the heart of our subjectivity. The key to coping with the stranger in our midst is to realise that alienation is intrinsic to subjectivity and that we are therefore all strangers to ourselves. Such a realisation, she asserts, would facilitate a relationship of respect towards those different from us. Following Lacan, Kristeva supposes that the loss of unity with the mother to be the fundamental precondition for obtaining subjectivity. This loss both founds subjectivity and makes one an exile. Lacan locates the moment of transition between undifferentiated being and a demarcated subjectivity in what he calls the mirror stage, the time when an infant begins to recognise its image in a mirror. The infant achieves subjectivity through a process of identifying with this image which it mistakenly takes to be itself. The image provides a sense of self-unity which it does not actually experience in itself. The ego is created by identification with alien images, but the sense of unity which these provide is purely fictive. Kristeva adds to this mirror stage an earlier moment which she argues is equally important to subject formation: the child’s abjection from the body of the mother. Prior to abjection, the child experiences a state of being one with all, immersed in what Kristeva (going back to Plato) calls the *chora*, meaning receptacle. It then expels or abjicts the mother’s body, and begins to form personal boundaries. Abjecting the mother is also self-abjection. Kristeva writes “I expel *myself*, I spit *myself* out, I abject *myself* within the same motion through which ‘I’ claim to establish *myself*.“ Moreover, the abject, that which the self has spumed, is not entirely forgotten, but returns in moments of anxiety, threatening to confound the self’s boundaries.

In *Strangers to Ourselves*, the threat of the foreigner is likened to the threat of the abject. Kristeva writes, “the other leaves us separate, incoherent” and “[c]onfronting the foreigner whom I reject and with whom I at the same time identify, I lose my boundaries, I

---

no longer have a container." Norma Claire Moruzzi explains the analogy: "For the subjective identity of the nation-state, this threatened return, that would dissolve the national self into undifferentiable physical parts, is posed by the stranger." A nation constitutes its own boundaries by excluding its others. The foreigner makes us anxious because he signals the return of a national pre-subjectivity, a state before the national borders were drawn. According to Kristeva's analogy, the abject comes back to haunt the subject and the nation and strangeness can never be eradicated from either entity. For her, the power of the abject to confound meaning and coherency and the foreigner's capacity to disintegrate the nation's fixed identity is something we must recollect and thereby learn to cope with. She believes that we can learn to accept both our own foreignness and the presence of strangers around us and envisages a multinational society, "made up of foreigners who are reconciled with themselves to the extent that they recognize themselves as foreigners."

Regrettably, when it comes to envisaging a new social order, Kristeva has not been able to mobilise the dynamic potential in her alignment of the foreigner with the abject. While her early work identifies the moment when the abject returns as the starting point for the generation of new meaning, her recent proposal that we transcend nationhood is rife with ambiguities which indicate an insurmountable fear of the foreigner. A brief discussion will nevertheless be of interest here since Kristeva's hesitancy to see the French nation unseated is emblematic of the pervasive human desire for a home. Against the resurgence of new nation-states in Europe, Kristeva posits in her book Nations without Nationalism a vision of a future society determined by international or polynational confederations. But while her ideal world transcends national borders, she contends rather nostalgically that in order to attain this goal, we must first witness a transnational phase or a gradual withering away of the nation. Staging a belated rehabilitation of the nation, she equates national pride with the child's reflection which it elaborates into its ego and concludes that lacking in national identity we could fall prey to depression. For the phase of transition, Kristeva advocates a humanist form of nation in which a 'general interest' is placed above individual interests. This, she stresses, is a French national idea. Indeed, in her book, France appears so much the ideal nation that we forget why in the future it should wither away. Moreover, when she interrogates the reasons migrants elect France as their new

59 Kristeva. Strangers, 195.
home, her tone is resentful, intimating a dislike of cultural mixing. This becomes more apparent in the open letter to Harlem Désir, in which she suggests that he “ponder the social and moral values of the ‘body France’, into which foreigners, whose right to vote we want them to obtain, wish to be integrated.” Foreigners, it seems, should be welcome only if they mean to become French. Her request that they align themselves with French culture echoes a fear that immigration may weaken the cultural homogeneity of the nation, the same nation for which she conversely advocates dissolution into a larger, more heterogeneous confederation. Moruzzi has provided a useful insight into the nature of Kristeva’s patriotic turn. She comments: “Ironically enough, Kristeva’s recent nostalgia is completely consistent with her own theory of the self’s resistance to the return of the abject.”

The same unwillingness to accept the presence of foreigners within the nation which has emerged in Kristeva’s political writing is displayed by the protagonist in Verklarte Nacht. In my discussion of this text, I demonstrate how the author draws on the situation of the exile returned home to create a protagonist with strong patriotic feelings. The relationship of love which this novel posits as the antidote to Leonora’s antagonism towards strangers seems to share many similarities with Kristeva’s ethics of respect. It expresses acceptance of the stranger, yet just as in Kristeva’s political writing in which she is only able to accept strangers in so far as they want to become French and thereby less strange, the couple’s love-making in Verklârte Nacht is an act of incorporation which means that it solves the problem of the foreigner by turning strangeness into intimacy rather than through tolerance of difference.

Hybridity

Because the nation is conceived as homogeneous and relies on this conception for its self-understanding, minority groups, migrants and refugees are denied participation in and identification with its community. One answer suggested to this predicament, that is, of how to redress the presence of the ‘stranger’ within the nation, is to stress the existence of a mixed, or hybridised culture and to exploit this awareness in order to weaken the power of categorial oppositions. In place of the nation as a cultural whole, certain theorists want to redefine it as a “hybridised cultural subjective consciousness” that can act as a “bulwark

61 Moruzzi, 147.
against racism.**^ Hybrid in this sense means mixed or fused and is a theoretical perspective on an existing social order. Of course, cultural hybridity is not a new phenomenon which now replaces a former cultural purity. Rather, it has always been a part of the nation, but veiled by national discourse. Despite the illusion of boundedness, cultures evolve historically through unreflected borrowings, appropriations and exchanges. As Aijaz Ahmad puts it, the "cross-fertilisation of cultures has been endemic to all movements of people [...] and all such movements in history have involved the travel, contact, transmutation, hybridisation of ideas, values and behavioural norms.**^ However, this might be seen as an idealised view of hybridity, since once we recognise that cultures are always hybrid, it becomes difficult to maintain the transgressive power of hybridity. Werbner, who sees this flaw in the hybridity discussion, suggests that the new potential of hybridity might lie in the fact that this is for the first time a conscious event.**^ She uses a distinction made by Mikhail Bakhtin between organic and aesthetic hybridity to theorise how something which has always been an element of culture can become a mode of resistance to the social order. He applies the term organic hybridity to the historical evolution of culture which, because unreflected or unconscious, does not disrupt its sense of continuity. Aesthetic hybridity on the other hand, differs from routine cultural borrowings by national groups and designates conscious or intended interventions in the nation's monological culture. Organic hybridity casts doubt on the viability of models of cultural holism, whereas intentional hybridity relativises singular ideologies. The notion that individuals can, on account of their difference, revitalise and hybridise national narratives is explored by Moníková in Die Fassade. In figuring her heroes as participants in the narrative of their nation's history, she reflects on the ability of individuals to shape their nation. For Moníková, however, the existence of internal differences within the nation does not easily lead to a disruption of an official unified discourse. Of particular pertinence to my discussion of this work will be the issue of agency. Particularly by drawing attention to the difference between the participation of heterogeneous experience in the forging of a national narrative and the interpretation of this experience by official state-run bodies who propagate it, Moníková questions whether and to what extent the people's different voices can be heard within the nation. The fact that visitors to the castle can only look at it from a distance and therefore receive a false impression of the facade as an organic whole is an

---

63 Ahmad, 18.
64 Werbner, 4-5.
acknowledgement of the tendency of our perception to create coherence out of chaos. The difference between the actual hotchpotch of motifs on the facade and the public's perception of a uniform decoration implies that the creation of coherent narratives is a basic human trait. In this way, Moníková acknowledges in this novel the fact that the homogeneous nation is not purely terroristic, but is also the result of a fundamental human desire for meaning and coherence and fear of contingency.

Critics are indeed far from unanimous that the nation is an unjust institution and to be approached with pessimism. Instead of viewing the nation as a falsely unifying narrative which denies the existence of different cultural and minority groups within its borders, for Homi Bhabha, perhaps the most cited commentator on the nation at the present time, nationalism is never homogeneous, but rather a liminal space created by the permanent and ongoing transgression of national grand narratives by the quotidian 'daily plebiscite' of many national voices and by cultural discourses from the margins.65 By proposing a different understanding of national discourses which denies that these can ever be bounded, Bhabha's theory redeems rather than rejects national life. In place of a relationship of conflict between 'pure' national discourses and their 'strangers' (other cultural/ethnic groups), he suggests that the hegemonic centre and the national people exist in a relationship of negotiation and agonism. Like Young, Bhabha deploys a Derridean notion of différance as a counter to totalisation, insisting that subjectivity is polymorphous, community heterogeneous and social formations mutable. Because our articulations of the national discourse can never reproduce it exactly as it is, all voices, but particularly those from the margins (since the difference of these articulations, that is, those of migrants and minority groups, will it seems be greater), continually interrupt and transform the narrative of the nation. His theory conceives of a nation which embraces heterogeneity, which means that unlike Young, he is not out to topple the nation (as she does community per se), but merely redescribes the laws of its construction. He shifts the position of the nation's Other from victim to participant, recasts his relationship to its natives as transactual and shifts the focus of the nation's exclusion of others to the productiveness of its internal differences.

Starting from Ernst Renan's famous definition of the nation as existing on the grounds of the people's affirmation of their will to nationhood, Bhabha posits his thesis that instead of guaranteeing the nation's perpetuity and continuity, the people's affirmations decentre the totalised national narrative. Rather than constituting a synchronous voice, the people articulate their will in succession which means that their

65 Homi Bhabha. The Location of Culture. London; New York: Routledge, 1994, 142 and 158.
discourse (Bhabha calls this the performative) will always be in excess of (pre)existing images of the nation (which he terms the pedagogical). He theorises a constant tension between the totalising aspirations of the official national narrative which erases differences and demonstrations of difference within the nation which challenge and subvert the narrative. The suppression of the Other as different and inferior is always and necessarily being disputed, since the people’s articulation of their differences breaks down the violent hierarchy which the discourse installs. The presence of minorities within the nation, in particular, is responsible for disturbances to the nation’s unity. They “intervene in those ideological discourses of modernity that attempt to give a hegemonic ‘normality’ to the uneven development and the differential, often disadvantaged, histories of nations, races, communities, peoples [...] to reveal the antagonistic and ambivalent moments within the ‘rationalizations’ of modernity.” The nation’s mastery is always asserted, but it is also always ceaselessly displaced and never complete. The recognition that all culture is hybrid is a crucial part of Bhabha’s theory of national life and the agency he accords to its people, since it is because each individual articulates a slightly different identity that enables him/her to add to the national narrative. Bhabha writes: “It is from this incommensurability in the midst of the everyday that the nation speaks its disjunctive narrative.” For Bhabha, then, the nation does not suppress the Other, but rather the otherness within the nation is productive and revitalises national culture. Nations today are not originary but hybrid.

In Moniková’s novel Die Fassade, she thematises the variety of individual experience which makes its way, whether by way of rebellion or accident, into official presentations of a nation’s identity. The focus of my analysis in chapter six will be to examine the way in which the different characters’ articulations of their national history and identity relate to the official national narrative. Of particular pertinence to the theme of national narratives and their putative exclusions will be to consider whether or not her novel locates, as Bhabha’s theory has done, a productive and subversive agency of the people in their articulation of difference.

Defending a Collective Identity Based on Origins

It is, however, far from clear whether, in order to avoid the exclusion of the Other which has been part of having national identity, national peoples can simply be conceptually reconfigured into groups which envisage their culture as impure, dynamic and fused.

---

66 Bhabha, 160-161.
67 Bhabha, 171.
68 Bhabha, 161.
Werbner echoes a widespread hesitancy about the capacity of hybridity to weaken the threat of the stranger when she writes that rather than being open and subject to fusion, identities seem to resist hybridisation.\(^6^9\) This is a reservation which is likewise articulated in Moniková's later work. Thomas in *Verklârte Nacht* is a figure who disrupts the narrator's rigidly held notions of Czechs and Germans by presenting himself as a mixture of both. But in the end, he appears from the perspective of his Czech companion to have been subsumed by his Czech identity, and her acceptance of him is based on her changed perception of him as being Czech rather than (but not as well as) German. This version of overcoming the foreigner by making him familiar insinuates the resilience of pure and essential national categories and the ease and normalcy with which they are utilised.

Another strand of the sceptical response to hybridity theories is the insistence that the continued preference for national and other group categories needs to be acknowledged for what it achieves; that is, we need to view communities in terms of their function to address certain human needs. Against Young's repudiation of collective identity and her argument that alienation and violence can and do exist in face-to-face relations, there are many who feel that a nostalgic desire for roots or belonging cannot so easily be dismissed and argue that rather than rejecting it as reactionary, it is politically crucial to develop a response which would enable the articulation of a 'we' which is not exclusionist. David Morley, for example, suggests that in relation to communities such as nations we should cease to "reify what is contingent as if it were absolute."\(^7^0\) The search for a new kind of we which does not preclude recognition of difference is not entirely dissimilar to Bhabha's project which aims to uncover the differences already contained within any 'we'. The difference is that it envisages new improved social relations (Morley mentions a current right-wing political rhetoric of exclusion which in his view needs to be overthrown), while Bhabha's work celebrates the status quo.

The power of original collective identity is acknowledged and reflected throughout Moniková's work. In *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin*, estrangement from the nation with which the narrator had previously identified is experienced as traumatic and necessitates a period of mourning and psychological leave-taking. Part of this process is a re-examination of a formerly unquestioned identification and an acknowledgement that national sentiment can produce distorted images of a nation, but it also affirms that our

\(^6^9\) Werbner, 3.

affiliations to our place of origin are deeply set within our psyches and thus negotiates between national identity as emotional legacy and barrier to our relations with strangers.

Finally, it needs to be made clear that the homogeneity of the nation does not always figure as treacherous and that there are also reasons for approaching revisions to the traditional notion of national identity with caution. Bhabha in particular has been criticised for distorting reality when he posits colonialism as a competition of peers rather than a hostile struggle between the subjugated and the oppressor. Arif Dirlik finds in his work "a reduction of social and political problems to psychological ones and of the substitution of poststructural linguistic manipulation for historical and social explanation." Benita Parry rejoins that he "ruins the representation of colonialism as combat" and that his theory "contradicts countless narratives of the dispossessions the West visited on other worlds, is at variance with the audible violence in its many colonialist utterances, and is perversely indifferent to explaining the success and longevity of colonialism." While these charges made against him are directed against the fact that he renders harmless the oppression of native peoples under colonial rule, they can also be applied to the state's suppression of minority groups within the nation. These theoreticians suggest that national identities are not inherently evil but that their desirability depends very much on the political context in which they are articulated. They suggest that within the context of colonialism, national consciousness is an indispensable precondition for motivating liberation movements. A similar distinction between desirable and undesirable forms of nationalism can be found in Verklârte Nacht which focuses on the Czechoslovakian Velvet Revolution and is set in the period which follows. The narrator's feelings of nationalist pride concerning the enforced retreat of Soviet troops from their Czech bases in an extremely short space of time leaving the country to native rule is not problematised in the text and is treated on quite a different level to the nationalist sentiment which causes her to regard tourists and other non-aggressive foreigners in her midst with contempt. One of the major criticisms of hybridity advanced by theorists who maintain that an identity based on place is crucial for effective political action is that the use of difference to dissipate grand...
narratives is ultimately levelling and homogenising. As an analytical tool, difference conceals the distances between cultures while affirming that all are equal and does therefore not acknowledge the economic, social and political disempowerment of subaltern groups. Thus, these writers question whether hybridity can be empowering and transgressive.

The most important point to emerge from the previous sections is that collective identity based on a place of origin is somehow both unfavourable (violent, exclusionary, repressive) and indispensable (aiding identity formation). One of the aims of this thesis is to reflect how both authors mediate between the suppression of difference of the Heimat and the nation and their own recognition that communities are useful to the extent that they offer protective structures which contribute to eradicating contingency. In the chapters which follow, I locate the authors' individual texts within current discussions of Heimat and nationhood, examining their specific literary qualities to show how narrative perspective, characterisation and imagery work together to produce an often ambiguous rhetoric of places of origin and identity.

In my introduction, I have established that Heimat has undergone a shift in meaning away from a specific living space to a memory of childhood harmony and to an emotion which we feel we are reminded of the world in which we grew up. Interest in retrieving a relationship with a particular, often rural or provincial region frequently accompanies rapid social change or a similarly unsettling event (such as political down-turn) which reveals that Heimat is understood as being able to offer compensation for personal instability or dissarray. Heimat as past utopia is problematic because it produces a deceptive view of rural realities. In my analysis of Müller’s story ‘Niederungen’ in chapter one, I demonstrate how it counters notions of man’s harmony with his surroundings with an examination of his instrumentalisation of nature. Furthermore, Heimat with its particular customs and code of behaviour and membership provides protection only for those who fulfil its requirements – its rhetoric of origins excludes foreigners and its strictures against difference ignore the conflicting interests contained within communal groups.

The oppression of the Other through exclusion has been my key focus in the above delineation of current theories of the nation. One of the main differences between discussions on Heimat and nation is that criticism of the former persistently leads to renunciation, while many of the nation’s detractors envisage transformation rather than revocation. Thus, many of the positions outlined above negotiate possibilities for including

75 Coombes, 110-111.
the Other in the nation. On the one hand, this difference in approach can be explained by the interrelationship which is identified within the German context between the popularity of *Heimat* in the past and the National Socialist programme. On the other hand, an increasingly urban society may find it easier to dispense with a generally rural *Heimat* than they would their identification with a nation which is both widely operative and inclusive of their current lifestyle.

My overview has shown that the nation is uniformly conceived as a story or narrative which unites people by depicting their commonalities. Depending on the particular perspective, this is approached either as invention and therefore illusory, or as a creative vision which both represents and unites its people. Homi Bhabha, currently the most powerful proponent of the latter view, contends that the nation is the people’s performance while others, such as Donald Pease, see the people as being deceived by a national narrative which is only seemingly a reflection of their imagination and in actual fact a mystification of state power. While Moníková’s work tends towards an expression of the latter view, the prominence and significance assigned to Czech culture and history in her texts mean that these also support a national agenda which is defended for its preserving function and articulated as an act of resistance to Czechoslovakia as a blind spot in Europe. This is most obvious in *Die Fassade*, which can be read as programatically situating Czechoslovakia in the centre of Europe. Central to my analyses of Moníková’s texts will therefore be to trace the fluctuations in attitude they display toward national affiliation and to explore what they criticise as well as on what basis Czech national identity is defended.

The first chapter of the first part of my thesis addresses stories from Müller’s first publication, *Niederungen*. My focus is on the imagery she employs to highlight the cruelty of *Heimat* to women and those who do not conform. In my discussion of the title story, I show how Müller takes issue with received notions of man’s relationship with nature in the *Heimat* and identify a redemptive function of narrative which distinguishes this text. Narrative point of view becomes central to an understanding of Müller’s first short novel, *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*. In chapter two, I investigate the implications of a male perspective for the story’s depiction of a derogatory attitude towards women in provincial Banat, arguing that this mirrors the text’s message that these women are unable to articulate a subjectivity independent of male desire. My analysis of *Herztier* concludes part one of the thesis. In this novel, an acknowledgement of the emotional impact of *Heimat* which appears for the first time at the end of *Fasan*, pervades this text, preventing Müller’s protagonists from achieving their desired emancipation from the *Heimat*. In this chapter, I reflect on the text’s conflation of *Heimat* and dictatorship as well
as the extent to which the conditions in communist Romania determine the protagonists' failure to leave home.

Chapters four to eight trace the development of the theme of national identity in Moniková’s five (completed) novels. In Eine Schädigung, this takes the form of a critique of the phallocentric imagery which dominates narratives of the city and a search for a place for women in the city. Chapter five examines Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin, focussing on the text’s insistence that the exile must learn to mourn her loss as a prerequisite for accepting her new life in a foreign country. The disclosure of the inadequacies of national narratives characterise both Die Fassade and Treibeis. In chapters six and seven, I assess the arguments both for and against national affiliations which are pitted against each other in these works, paying attention to issues of perspective and the use of humour which aid interpretation. Finally, chapter eight discusses the relativisation of the binary opposition us/ them which is attempted in Moniková’s last completed novel, Verklärte Nacht. Central to this novel is in my view its examination of the place and function of the stranger within national narratives and its articulation of a future vision of the nation which might include rather than spurn its strangers.
"Der Mann mit der Zündholzschachtel". The Firestarter as Image of Hatred and Guilt

"Jeden Abend brennt das Dorf nieder. Zuerst verbrennen die Wolken" (113). One of Müller's shortest stories provides a succinct example of her portrayal of her Banat Heimat as inhospitable and of human relations there as ruined by envy and resentment. It begins with an observation of a village in the evening. In all probability, the phenomenon being described is the setting sun. The way it is perceived is startlingly unconventional: in place of aesthetic appreciation, the observer projects onto the red sky a narrative of destruction. The burning village returns with every setting sun. The image does not reflect a momentary outburst of malevolence, but feelings which recur with predictable regularity and which find their expression in a cyclic natural phenomenon. Both the narrator responsible for the description and the state of mind reflected in the image remain at first anonymous. The story proceeds from a third person perspective and we assume an absent narrator.

The glow of a fire, it seems, does in fact often fill the village sky, while not every evening. First the cause is said to be the hot summer weather. "Jeder Sommer nimmt eine Scheune mit" (113). But then the narrator brings another culprit into view - a man with a box of matches who is the first to know of the newest fire. His motive seems clear: as a boy he had been made to work for the family who owns the haybarn and he now bears a personal grudge against them for making him sleep in the stall, and against the girl who called him "Knecht" (113) and squirted the juice from her oranges in his face. The suspicion with which the man is met by the other villagers seems to affirm the certainty of his deed. A man on the street stares at him "mit kleinen harten Augen" and "im Wirtshaus setzt er sich an einen andern Tisch" (113).

When the village is alerted to the fire, the narrator unexpectedly speaks to us in the first person announcing her involvement in the story. The narrator's reactions are distinct from the those of the other village women who are collectively stricken with fear as they watch the spectacle; she is rooted to the spot ("die Beine wachsen mir aus dem Hals", 114),

76 Herta Müller. "Der Mann mit der Zündholzschachtel". Herta Müller. _Niederungen_. (first edn. 1984); Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993, 113-115. Unless otherwise indicated, all page references in this section refer to this story.
speechless ("Ich habe nichts als diese zugeschnürte Kehle", 114) and feels as if the fire is burning her up ("meine Beine sind schwarzes verkoktes Holz", 114). She inculpates herself ("Ich habe das Feuer gelegt", 114), imagines her punishment ("sie werden mich zu Tode bellen", 114) and feels the eyes of the villagers on her who, she later admits, were not looking at her at all. Like the man with the match-box, she does not form part of the group. While he embodies hatred of the village, the first person narrator displays an attendant emotion - guilt. She blames herself for not being like the other women, for not being able to participate in their ways. The two sides of one coin are illustrated using two different characters, but when they stand together as a couple, his hatred and her guilt become one emotional complex. "Sein Ellbogen, da neben meinem Arm ist sein Ellbogen" (114). The other villagers shun the man with the box of matches, but the narrator is so close to him as the hay barn burns that their arms almost touch.

By standing next to the arsonist, the narrator secures her ostracisation by the village women. They turn away from her - "sie schließen mich aus" (115). Her expression of admiration for the man who "tanzt wunderbar" (115) seals her complicity in a deed which seems to mimic her feelings. This brief tale explores the dividing line between thought and action, imbricating the former in the latter. It powerfully conveys the personal suffering which results from an inability to identify with one's community, a theme which recurs in later texts. Here, the narrator projects her guilt of the emotional harm she causes onto a tangible act of destruction in search for a way to express the effects of bearing such guilt.

"Das Fenster": Metaphorised Female Images of Heimat and their Subversion

In the following analysis of a further story from Niederungen, I explore my initial contention that Müller's critique of Heimat is directed against an intrinsic degradation of women which this implies. In order to support my contention, it will be necessary to reflect on the semantic associations of Heimat which she negatively cites in her work in order to expose this undesirable aspect of a traditional way of life in the provinces.

The feminine, often the maternal, determines the mythical construction of Heimat. The word invokes a yearning for an imaginary and impossible place/ time. Much of its emotional impact derives from an association of Heimat with childhood and hence with loss or separation from the mother. Heimat can thus be explained as a kind of psychological regression and reaction against the loss of the mother which means that
*Heimat* functions as an ideal mother. Metaphors containing mythical ideal female images penetrate all narrative and poetic constructions of *Heimat* from literary studies to political speeches. It pastes over and obscures in many cases the real situation, which can include absence, banishment and exile. The individual relationship to very specific space is erased and replaced by ontologising images with female connotations. The literature of *Heimat* indeed contains many images of women who embody a certain narrow range of qualities deemed necessary for creating an harmonious environment. These women are diligent, loyal, virtuous, gentle and loving. The texts which subscribe to the programmatical corpus of *Heimat* literature in German-speaking culture gather together a number of figures who substantiate the relationship between *Heimat* and femininity. Of course, the Romanian-German *Heimat* novel is likewise peopled by such ideal women. In *Die Glocken der Heimat* by Adam Müller-Guttenbrunn, the most well-known representative of the genre among the Banat Swabians, there is a female figure who reacts to the loss of a beloved son to a Hungarian school with a long period of speechlessness. The father’s decision to send his son to the school is viewed by other characters in the novel as a threat to the *Heimat* and the mother’s grief which expresses itself in physical disablement functions as an embodiment of the emotional damage. This female figure and many others have been enlisted to convey using metaphor a concept which can not be pinned down in the concrete. They are conceived almost without exception as nurturing, strength-giving, protective mothers. When, as in the example of Bärl Haffner in *Die Glocken der Heimat*, this strength crumbles, it is a sign that something is amiss and that the idyll has been disturbed.

Müller’s thematisation of women’s bodies and sexuality addresses the use of women as representatives of *Heimat*. In her early stories, she deconstructs idealised images of women as good, moral, de-sexualised figures content in their roles as mothers and carers. In her texts it becomes evident how the discourse of a desired locus *Heimat* operates at the expense of women.78

The title of the story “Das Fenster” refers to a part of a house which marks a spatial boundary between an inside and an outside. Other than a door, a window does not generally function as a passageway between the two spheres, but rather as a way of

---


78 Ecker explains her choice to refer to *Heimat* as a discourse in the Foucauldian sense on grounds of the word’s multi-dimensionality and the fact that it gathers together a number of basic assumptions that cannot be individually substantiated and which have come to form the basis of specific mental and linguistic configurations. She writes: “Ein ganzes System von diskursregelnden, produktiven wie
Footnotes continued on the next page
perceiving life on the other side. Depending on which side you stand, you can either look in, to the inside of the house or out of the window. In Müller's stories, women often appear at the window. They are nearly always on the inside and men are often on the other side, looking in. In Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt which I discuss in the next chapter, the woman's body is presented as a house with windows and either opened or closed curtains. As Windisch spies on the carpenter having sex with his wife, her legs “stehen wie ein weißer Fensterrahmen auf dem Bettuch.” And when he returns home to surprise his wife masturbating, her legs are “wie aufgerissene Fensterflügel auf dem Bettuch.” In this later story, a clear paradox is at play between a convention which demands that women dress in long layered skirts like the narrator’s dress in this story, which seems to prohibit any bodily display, and the gazes of men, like Windisch, who looks between women’s legs as if they were the curtains of a window. The house is a synecdochical representation of Heimat and the banishment of women to the home which is a recurrent focus of Müller's stories supports constructions of Heimat as a feminine site of belonging. Female figures must represent or even embody Heimat and therefore remain static. They are in the Heimat, inside the house, while men desire Heimat and leave it in order to be able to move back to it. Thus, Heimat is very much for men and there can be little gratification for women in identifying with it. In her novel Herztier, Müller’s young female narrator is critical of her family’s use of the word ‘Mutterland’ for this very reason: “Der Großvater, der Frisör, der Uhrmacher, der Vater, der Pfarrer und Lehrer nannten Deutschland das Mutterland”. She counters that it was the fathers who fought for Germany, not the mothers, and that it was the fathers who, on returning home from the war, lamented their lost chance to live on German soil: “Obwohl Väter in die Welt marschierten, war es das Mutterland.” Heimat seems to the narrator to matter only to men. Furthermore, the term motherland conceals the oppression of women in the Heimat. As I argue, these oppressive effects of Heimat for women are insinuated in “Das Fenster” through the story’s suggestive images.

As I stressed in my introduction, Heimat is often represented not only in terms of a geographical space but also as a set of moral and behavioural norms. To be part of the Heimat is to conform to these prescribed values. In the story “Das Fenster”, Swabian national dress is used as an image to describe in a richly suggestive comparison the

_außschließenden Prinzipien sind für eine solche Bündelung verantwortlich.” (Gisela Ecker. “Wo alle einmal waren und manche immer bleiben wollen: Zum Beispiel Viebig, Beig und Walser.”, 129)

79 Herta Müller. Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt, 12.
80 Müller. Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt, 17.
restrictedness of provincial life and its moral code for women in the Swabian Banat. The traditional costume the narrator puts on to go dancing becomes an image for the damaging and restraining force of folkish culture on a young woman’s life. The stony folds (“steinige Falten”, 109) of the dress evoke the coldness of old buildings, or even prison walls, as does the lace which has whitewashed veins like the walls in the old mill. The lace is also described as “das schmale Geripp” (109); with its skeletal-like pattern it is associated more with death and dying than with youth and gay festivities. The dress is fastened with nine strings pulling in its nine skirts around the girl’s hips - later we read that the village too is “zugeschmört” (112), making it clear that the village is the real bind, at least for a woman. The spatial relation between the girl’s body and her dress suggests that in her traditional role she is confined to a place radically inside. On top of the stone-like underskirts, which connote the walls of a house, comes the topskirt which is reminiscent of nature: its colour is light grey “wie die Pflaumen am Morgen” (109) and it is printed with white flowers. The narrator, however, cannot feel the patterned skirt from underneath the many layers - by analogy then, her place within the village is inside the stony walls and she is cut off from the outside. The only experience she has of nature is the feeling that she is surrounded by it on all sides and that it too is pulling her in, oppressing her. Of the flowery-patterned topskirt the narrator says: “Ich spür nur seine heiße Schnur” (109). In the sex scene under the bridge, a fantasy sequence which blocks out for a moment the ordeals of the dance, the overskirt with the flowery pattern is once more an analogue to a restrictive natural environment; Müller enlists this correspondence in order to attack a central aspect of the Heimat discourse: the idea of the women of Heimat as nature-loving and nature-bound.

At the beginning of the story, the narrator is being dressed for the dance by her mother. She experiences the traditional role, which is being passed down to her as confinement and suffocation: “Die Schnüre [...] zerdrücken mir den Atem in den Hals” (109). During the dance, the strings pull in so tight that she eventually faints. As she falls, the old women who have been watching, rush forward to catch her and she falls into their skirts: “Ich sink in die unruhigen Falten der schwarzen Röcke der uralten Frauen, in die greifenden Hände, in den zahnlosen Mund” (112). Partaking in the traditional dance in traditional dress, the narrator has become the recipient of a traditional female role handed down to her. The dance becomes a metaphor for a woman’s life in the village and through the presence of male dance partners an analogy for married life. The old women stand on the periphery and observe, but for them the dance is over. When the narrator faints and falls out of the dance, she joins for a moment the village widows and is made aware of

---

82 Müller. Herztier, 238. The Banat would have become German territory had the Nazis won the war.
what awaits her at the end of her life. These women, with no husband to take care of and to fall prey to, have nothing left to do but wait for death. Their “greifenden Hände” (112) indicate their want of occupation.

The window the narrator makes with her partner during the dance mimics the window of a house and displays the place of a married woman in the house. The man she would have preferred to dance with is on the other side, she looks at him through her window: “Ich sehe durch das Fenster Tonis halbes Gesicht” (111). The dance is not at all an enjoyable occasion for the narrator. The dance makes her dizzy and hot and Peter’s hands, knees and stiff collar are uncomfortably hard. The dress and the music are alienating. The narrative technique the narrator adopts of making various distinct parts of her body and dress perform the dance creates an effect of narrative immediacy - she does not stand back and watch herself dancing, rather she is dancing and when she looks down all she sees is her skirt flying. And at the same time because no unified self-image appears, it is a technique which renders vivid the alienating effects of the dance. It is not the narrator herself dancing, but just pieces of her body and dress which do not synthesise into a unified whole: “Die weißen Glocken werden schwindlig und rauschen einen Takt” (109). The same disintegrated self-perception is maintained throughout in comments such as: “Meine Knie schwimmen an den Brückenrand” (111) or “Meine Finger kleben in Peters Finger” (111). The I as subject of a sentence is often avoided, and in its place there are pieces of a fleeting I.

In the episode where the narrator flees the dancehall with Toni and lies with him under the bridge, the idea of a threshold which is contained in the image of the window in the story’s title recurs in new forms. Firstly, the pair flee to the edge of the village - the “Dorfrand” is the first boundary and the fact that they do not cross it indicates the failure of the escape. If we read the dance as a metaphor for life and the dancers as married couples, then we could read this scene as an incident of adultery, but one which does not change anything in the narrator’s life. Secondly, the bridge they lie under is a place of transit, also a means of getting to the other side. As with all thresholds in Müller’s stories, the bridge is not traversed, rather the narrator becomes trapped under it. In this part of the story, Müller uses two tropes which are central to Heimat literature: firstly, the idea of Heimat as ‘mütterlicher Boden’, the mother of Heimat who sustains a close metaphorical association with the idea of mother earth and the natural environment. Notably, because this is the narrator’s fantasy, the scene makes evident that the Heimat discourse has penetrated even the narrator’s desire. The idea of the nature-bound woman as a representative (and embodiment) of Heimat was already introduced at the beginning in the description of the narrator’s flowery overskirt and is now repeated. This time the grey skirt
is made to have the characteristics of fog: “mein Rock ist dämmerig und hebt sich wie Nebel” (110). In misplaced tropes such as “das Gras seufzt” (110), where in all probability the narrator is sighing and “der müde Regen” (111), where again it is the narrator who is tired, there is a deliberate mingling of the two spheres of the female and the natural. Secondly, in the description of the sexual encounter there are phrases which are suggestive of a burial. Burial scenes are also commonplace in depictions of Heimat: one is ideally supposed to be born and die in the Heimat and the grave contains the symbolic dimension of ‘die letzte Heimat’. At the climax of the sex scene, the images intimate now a drowning, now a burial: “In meinen Bauch fließt heißer Schlamm und breitet sich über mir aus, und klebt mir den Atem zu, und vergräbt mein Gesicht” (111). The image of the narrator being buried provides a further connection to her mother, whose “stechende Augen” (111) fall into the earth at the edge of the village. The narrator’s vision of her mother’s eyes buried in the ground suggests that she is blind to anything outside of or beyond the village. The repetition of the image makes it clear that the narrator has not escaped her pre-destined role by running off with Toni - Peter crushes and paralyses her and Toni buries her. When she dances with Peter, she is spun around and when she describes her encounter with Toni, the motif of spinning recurs: “Die Brücke dreht sich um meine Hände, und meine Zunge dreht sich in Toni Mund” (111).

At the end of the story, the images of burial and of restraint mingle in the word “totverschränkt”: “Mein Fenster ist blind. Meine Arme sind totverschränkt in Peters Armen” (112). The narrator’s blindness on her side of the window forms a further connection to her mother, whose eyes fall into the earth. In this passage at the end of the story, the landscape takes on one of the old woman’s physical features: her black beady eyes: “Die stechenden Augen schwimmen aus dem kantigen Gesicht, aus dem schwarzen seidenen Kopftuch, schwimmen ans Ende der offenen Straße, ans Ende des zugeschnürten Dorfes. Hinter den letzten Gärten, hinter der hohen Brücke brechen die stechenden Augen die Erde und fallen hinein” (111).

The mother’s piercing black eyes watch over the entire village. She is an omnipresent constituent element of the village. In the narrator’s imagination the eyes detach themselves from her face and make their way through the village streets and gardens until, having reached its borders and the end of their domain, they can go no further and fall into the earth. The mother is utterly confined within the village. Her eyes are a part of her physical self, her body, and the organ through which she sees and views. When these fall into the earth at the edge of the village, the narrator intimates that she cannot see or know anything beyond; it is also an image in which her body and the landscape merge.
The village, like the narrator's body in her dress, has sharply defined borders which are not to be crossed by its (female) inhabitants. The narrator is pulled in tight and can barely breathe. In her dress which has been worn by countless generations of women before her, she is made to feel that she has stepped into their shoes. Furthermore, the imagery suggests that she has become synonymous with the village itself. Generations of women were unable to breathe in their tight dresses and the village itself is "zugeschnürt".

In this story, the female body and its dress provide the characterising elements and qualities of the locus of Heimat. Müller uses this literary and rhetorical convention subversively. In place of the bountiful and benevolent mother of Heimat rhetoric, the mother in "Das Fenster" has harsh sharp-edged features and is toothless. While the women of Heimat are also supposed to show signs of their sacrifice, their hard work and their childbearing on their bodies, Müller presents women's bodies as senselessly damaged in the service of men and although, as in nearly all her stories, there is no psychological detail, the images of confinement and entrapment take the place of inner monologue and make it clear that the narrator cannot be content in her role as provider and protector of Heimat.

Whether folkishness represses male freedom to the same extent is not altogether evident, although the more active and directive role of the young men in the dance, which is the focal point of the story suggests that it does not.

The last paragraph combines once more features of women's bodies and features of the landscape: "Die schwarzen Röcke sind so offen wie die Straßen, so zugeschnürt wie das Dorf, so gebrochen wie die greifende Erde hinter den letzten Gärten, hinter den stechenden Augen, hinter dem zahnlosen Mund" (111). Mention is made of a beyond (a 'hinter'), but there is no perspective of hope, no hint that the narrator will escape her village confinement. In fact the only utopia which appears throughout the Niederungen is death.

As I have shown in my analysis, Heimat in this story appears as both a spatial and a moral or behavioural concept and using images associated with dancing and dancing dresses, including one particular dance in which the couple make a window with their arms, Müller depicts the village and village conventions as oppressive and confining.
Heimat and Instrumental Reason in “Niederungen”

The longest of the stories in Müller’s first collection, “Niederungen” is a study of family life in a small village in the Banat. It is told from the perspective of a young girl who grows up the only child of a farming family. Her impressions which, strung together, constitute the narrative, concern alternately her social environment - the afternoon nap at her grandmother’s or the Sunday church service - and the world out of doors which she is left to explore during the day. The two realms of adult-regulated society and mysterious wild nature do not, however, receive the same weighting throughout the story. Instead, the child’s exploration of the world outside dominates the first half, while an abandonment of the wild and shift in focus to life inside the house increasingly characterises the latter part of the story. In my analysis of this story, I continue my examination of the role played by nature in Müller’s work. While in the story “Faule Birnen”, a child’s disgust at the world of adult sexuality is expressed by means of comparison with her parallel perceptions of a decaying and rapacious nature, nature in this story is something which man learns to master and fear as a precondition for rational thought.

The child narrator’s integration into communal village life and her preparation for her future adult role within the community is achieved in tandem with changes in her relationship with the world outside the house. Her play switches from hunting cabbage moths and eating acacia blossom to games which focus on adult behaviour. She plays husband and wife with her playmate and practices the role of the domestic wife. More and more decisively, she integrates herself into society which is built on order, compulsion and repression through her imitative play and her acceptance of the adults’ rules. Her adherence is described as a painstaking process of self-sacrifice and her frequent inability to conform is punished in ways which disable her senses. In one instance, she is left neither able to move nor speak. Playing with her father, she accidentally touches his face, which he has forbidden her. He abruptly ends the game and pushes her away with such force that she topples and falls. The child’s bewilderment and affliction is such that she is unable to articulate any words in her defence: “Ich wollte etwas sagen, aber ich hatte den Mund so voller Zungen, daß ich kein einziges Wort hervorbrachte” (67). Her hands, the culprits of her wrongdoing, are temporarily lamed: “Ich sah auf meine Hände. Sie lagen wie abgehackt vor mir auf dem Fensterbrett, ganz regungslos” (67). The child’s misery, which is described at length, has a regulative effect on her behaviour. The next time she looks

83 Herta Müller. “Niederungen”. Herta Müller. Niederungen, 17-94. Unless otherwise indicated, all page references in this section refer to this story.
forward to playing with her father’s hair, she has become determined to resist touching his face, a condition of her play which she until now had neither been able to accept nor comprehend: “Ich werde heute seine Schläfe nicht berühren. Ich greife Vater nie mehr ins Gesicht.” (76).

The social world in which the child is invited to participate is depicted as excessively brutal and inhuman. Failure to comply with its rules is cured with slapped cheeks and beatings and those who persist in non-conformity are ostracised. The child’s grandmother tells the story of a woman who was labelled a witch when her hair prematurely turned grey and was avoided by the other villagers because of her changed ways: “Sie redeten nur noch von Zauberei und ließen sie mit sich allein. Sie gingen ihr aus dem Weg und beschimpften sie, weil sie ihr Haar anders kämmte, weil sie ihr Kopftuch anders band, weil sie ihre Fenster und Türen anders anstrich als die Leute im Dorf [...]” (39). The narrator’s playmate Wendel is teased by the other children because of his silence:


The use of passive which omits a subject in the first half of the above quotation contributes to the impression that the stigmatisation of Wendel is a collective act. The use of the modals ‘muß’ and ‘darf’ indicates how even the behaviour of the children is dictated by an awareness of strictly controlled distinctions between the proper and anomalous.

Acceptance in the adult social world as it exists in the provincial Banat is depicted throughout as a denial of corporeality and sensuality. The female body in particular is banished out of sight and out of reach by concealing it under layers of thick material. From the perspective of the child, the skirts are, however, no effective barrier against nature. Instead, the skirts of the mothers seem to accentuate their affiliation with their natural surroundings: “Auf dem Pflaster gehen die Mütter in schwäbischen Rücken, die aus ganzen Ballen Stoff genäht sind, deren Falten beim Gehen Baumkronen gleichen” (60). The only manifestations of modernity, the short skirts worn by the younger generation, display a changing attitude towards the female body which is deceptive since in spite of their bare legs, the young women do not attain any real freedom from the regime of their mothers: “Ihre Töchter haben die Tracht nur scheinbar überwunden. [...] In ihren engen Kleidern gehen sie trippelnd mit nackten Beinen in stummer Abhängigkeit neben den wippenden schattigen Kitteln her. Auch sie tragen schwarze Schuhe, schwarze Strümpfe, die aber durchsichtig sind, und schwarze Kleider” (61). The colour of the daughters’ dresses indicates a willingness to adhere which renders their superficial rebellion harmless. Their
exchange of the swaying movements of long skirts for tottering steps in high heels and tight skirts does not prevent them from conforming to the conventions stipulated for mourning.

The child who narrates the story does not fare any better than the generation of young women who are exposed to her critical view. Her integration, despite all the repressions it occasions, is viewed from her perspective as the only option available to her. This comprises the pessimistic tone of the story which has a gripping poetic effect and which will become the trademark of Müller's prose: the resignatory outcome of the child's submission to the adult rules fills the reader with despair since this represents the text's failure to open up a way out of the separation of the natural and the human worlds. As I argue below, the story posits this as a terrible exigency and one of the negative aspects of the Heimat. The insistence on this separation also constitutes one of the many ways in which Müller's writing differs that of conventional Heimat authors since these create a world in which man lives in harmony with nature.

Adorno and Horkheimer's Concept of Man’s Separation From Nature

In Müller's refusal to employ the dialectic nature/civilisation as a vehicle for idealisation, we are reminded of Adorno and Horkheimer's theories of myth and Enlightenment and their conviction that mind necessarily entails the domination of nature. By stressing the parallels between the depiction of nature in “Niederungen” and its role in Adorno and Horkheimer's theory, it is possible to demonstrate that despite the threats posed by both myth and Enlightenment, the narrator is able to resist the dominating and repressive world of human intercourse through the transformative act of retrospective narration: narration which itself depends upon the separation from mythic nature.

The child's play with nature which she later gives up as she orientates herself toward the adult social world, bears much resemblance to an earlier stage of man's relationship towards nature which Adorno and Horkheimer have called mythological. They interpret the process of Western civilisation up until the mid-twentieth century as the steadily increasing banishment of myth and the domination of nature which this necessitated. In *Dialektik der Aufklärung* they make a further distinction between myth and magic, both of which represent stages previous to modern Enlightenment. Since however, the characteristics of both stages are not clearly held apart by the authors and since I mean to distinguish a relationship to nature that is generally different to Enlightenment's separation from and objectification of nature, my discussion omits the magical stage. The requirement to

dominate nature arises from a fear of nature which in turn is the consequence of its objectification. Objectification of nature, the distanciation of subject from object, is a precondition of abstract thought. Particularly in the opening pages of the story when the interest of the child pertains almost solely to the world out of doors, her understanding of nature is placed in stark contrast to that of the adults around her. The beetle which creeps into her ear, her consumption of acacia blossom and marigold suggest a state of ‘unseparateness’ with nature, and her instinctive lack of fear connotes a state of being in the world which is pre-enlightenment or mythical.

A further characteristic of the mythical stage which can be found in the text is the fateful fallenness of man in the cycle of nature. In the first half of “Niederungen”, the child demonstrates a keen awareness for the cyclic processes of nature, in which she finds herself hopelessly involved. Repeatedly, her observations are directed at the cruelty of the food chain and the entwinement of man with nature through his need for nourishment. The goose her grandmother carves for Sunday dinner smells of half-digested frogs (37); the smell of earth in her father’s excrement and the half-digested corn in her own vomit contribute to her awareness of man’s entanglement in nature’s cycle. The child’s initial explorations reveal her as being naturally at ease in her surroundings and free of inhibitions. She spends her time in close proximity with nature and has straw in her stockings from playing in the barn. She experiences nature as her playground: she dresses up kittens in doll’s clothes, hunts butterflies and dissects flies.

During this phase of uninhibited ease in the outdoors, the child’s games are imitative of grown-up behaviour and enact instances of control over nature. The grandfather who oversees the child’s play constitutes an early directive presence and shows her how to separate herself from and to dominate nature. When he pours methylated spirits into her ear “damit mir den Käfer nicht in den Kopf kriecht” (17), he moves into the centre of the child’s perception (“der Hof drehte sich, und Großvater stand riesengroß mittendrin”, 17), which lends his actions an exemplary status. He forbids her to eat marigold and acacia blossom, but when she stabs butterflies with a needle and drowns flies, he looks on with approval and teaches her to differentiate between useful and harmful animals, demonstrating the centrality of useful or instrumental reasoning (“Nur die Schwalben muß man leben lassen, es sind nützliche Tiere, sagte er. Und das Wort Schädlinge für Kohlweißlinge und Luder für die vielen toten Hunde”, 19). For the child at the beginning of the story, however, nature is also vast and unfathomable. Distinctions between human and

---

natural worlds are non-existent - the houses seem to her from a distance to be like a herd of cows (“Aus den Feldern sieht man das Dorf als Häuserherde zwischen Hügeln weiden”, 22) and laws of nature, such as distance, are incomprehensible: “Alles scheint nahe, und wenn man darauf zugeht, kommt man nicht mehr hin” (22).

The child’s sense of ease in her natural surroundings is upset by an event which releases feelings of fear and aversion towards nature. When the family cow lifts her up with her horns and deposits her on the other side of a ditch, she learns to fear for her life. Comprehending that the power of life and death resides outside (“Ich hatte Angst, daß durch diese offenen Knie der Tod in mich hineinfindet, und ich legte rasch die Handflächen auf die Wunden”, 24), she begins to resent nature. In the mind of the child, death is something which resides outside her skin - she fears it may enter into her through the openings in her skin caused by her wounds. According to Horkheimer and Adorno’s version of myth, man perceives from the outset the otherness of nature. He experiences nature with feelings of fear which originate in the fact that it is something external to oneself. The domination of nature which is the achievement of the Enlightenment is a solution to this mythical fear since by making nature an object, man also recuperates and reclaims nature for himself. The child resents the fact that nature has demonstrated to her her own mortality while letting her live: “Und weil ich noch am Leben war, kam der Haß” (24). From this point onwards she begins to observe more keenly the presence of death around her: the death in the houses you are only allowed to view once it is complete, “obzwar man ein Leben lang daneben wohnte” (26); the mouse squashed by her mother with an ear of corn whose pale blood seems to signify the smallness of its life (“So wenig Leben, daß auch das Blut bläß bleibt”, 28); the death of a man whose pale and transparent skin make the reeds where he is buried “hoch und durchsichtig wie noch nie” (39). As if in submission to nature, she finally seeks her own death. This appears to her as something beautiful and virtuous. After washing her wounds in dirty water, she becomes feverish and sees her reddened cheeks in the mirror as a sign of beauty: “Ich [...] hatte abends wirklich rote Wangen und sah im Spiegel, wie ich immer schöner wurde” (24).

The girl with red cheeks is the first of several allusions to a snow white figure in whom beauty colludes with death. The child’s interest in fairytales has already been demonstrated in the story. When she shares her sunflower seeds with the hens, she recalls a fairytale in which a girl had always given the hens their feed before eating herself (21). Motifs from the story of snow white later spring into her mind when, tormented by

Footnotes continued on the next page
nightmares of the pig slaughtered for ‘Kirchweih’, she goes out into the snow-covered yard to confront the victim: “Blutflecken auf dem Schnee. Schneewittchen hatte Haare so weiß wie Schnee und Wangen so rot wie Blut. Schnee mit Blut bespritzt, Schnee und Blut über sieben Berge” (32). The child’s incorporation of her experiences of death into a fairytale world in which death is aestheticised enables her to make these part of her fantasies of escape and her childhood rejection of the rational adult world.

The child’s death fantasies reach a climax when she accompanies her grandfather to a river valley to shovel sand. Watching a passing train, she sees the beautiful women inside it who will never alight in her village. Faced with this vision of the beauty and the technology of the city, the child senses her own mortality to the extent that she feels as if the train is killing her:


The child is once again filled with resentment, this time for these beautiful women who live exciting lives in the city quite apart from nature. In her self-pity, she decides to retreat into her environment, to surround herself with and sink into nature and await her death: again death appears to offer the chance to find beauty which is otherwise absent from her everyday life in a rural farming community. She chooses a green patch of grass to lie down and die, somewhere with no stones to scratch her face, so that she will be beautiful in death: “Ich wollte im Schatten auskühlen und eine schöne Tote sein” (78). When oblivion does not come, she tries once more, this time closer to the river, and then again in deeper grass. She senses her proximity to nature, as if she is part of the landscape around her (“Die wilden Grasblumen krochen mir unter die Haut”, 78) and imagines herself turning into a swamp conjuring up wishful images of herself as a “schöne sumpfige Landschaft” (78). Yet, she does not die. This explicit death wish is a turning point in the story. Through her failure to die, the child realises that she is not part of this nature which is at the mercy of death, but that she is rather set apart from it because of her ability to defend herself from death. A short time later, her grandfather once again demonstrates man’s ability to intervene in nature’s course when he whisks her out of the water and spears a watersnake. Now the child understands. Like her earlier confrontation with the cow, she perceives the real presence of death around her. However, this time she observes how man is in a
position to outsmart fate. Now she decides that she does not want to die and feels the
dryness of her skin to reassure herself that she does not in the least resemble a swamp: "Ich
wollte auf einmal keinen Sumpf mehr sein. Meine Haut war trocken, als ich mich mit den
Fingerspitzen zaghaft befühlte" (81). The child's decision neither to die nor retreat into
nature is an important precondition for her acceptance of and her integration into the adult
world which has mastered nature and incessantly re-establishes and reiterates its
domination.

The child's emergence from her mythic interaction with nature is also a pre-condition
of the story itself, since the degree of reflection required for the act of narration is not
possible as long as she remains in the mute captivity of nature. Horkheimer and Adorno,
despite their wholly negative assessment of Enlightenment rationality, remain convinced
that mind never exists apart from the domination of nature. The child of the first half of the
story, whose experiences largely take place in the outdoors, is young and has as yet little
self-awareness. Particularly at the beginning of the story, many sentences lack a verb - they
consist rather of a sequence of images which are not the objects of any subjective impulse:
"Die Akazienblüten in den Dorfstraßen. Das eingeschneite Dorf mit den Bienenvölkern im
Tal" (17). The first time the 'I' appears, it is the object of the sentence and nature, the
beetle, is the subject: "Der Käfer, der mir ins Ohr kroch" (17). The single disconnected
flow of images is on the one hand the product of an absent or weak subjectivity. On the
other, it connotes the flow of narrative as an act of remembering, giving the impression that
the narrator is reaching back into a past which is only arduously or gradually accessible.
The random images correspond to an uncontrollability of memory, they give the impression
that the narrator has yet to find her way in(to) her own past. The initial single visual
images reflect the effort of remembering and as this becomes easier, as the narrator gains
confidence in her memory, the images connect and lead into whole narrative sequences.
The story's retrospective presentation is a vital part of its logical structure since the young
girl at the beginning does not possess sufficient self-awareness to relate and narrate. At one
point in the story, the reader is informed of a backward chronological jump back to a time
in the past. The narrator explains that the foot rags her mother is hanging up to dry are
made out of material from an old dress and goes on to recall the occasion when she was
given it. The retrospective leap is signalled by the word "damals" (44). Whether or not the
narrative returns back to its previous chronology is not clear. The lack of clarity does not
irritate, but rather lends conviction to the concept of the narrative as memory. It gives the
impression that the entire story is being guided by a narrator who is looking back from a
level beyond the narrative; the mixing up of the exact sequence of events is a side-effect of
the fallibility of memory.
The imposition of time is also something which belongs to the adult civilised world, to which the child only gradually begins to submit. The difference in the story between the world of the child which dominates the beginning and the adult world on which the narrator increasingly focuses demonstrates many similarities with the difference between myth and Enlightenment and the story shows the inadequacies and horrors of both states. Myth and Enlightenment are never fully inseparable, even before the child decides that she wants to live and will abide by the adult rules, her relationship towards nature is not always mythic. Similarly her ‘different’ view of things, like for example her perception of spring as the result of winter devouring itself (“Die Eisblumen verschlingen ihre eigenen Blätter”, 43), recedes and resurfaces throughout the story and is not suddenly replaced by the conventional perception of her parents when she decides that she does not want to die. The ascendance to ‘instrumental rationality’ and mastery over nature is a disruptive, dialectical process. Under the influence of her grandfather, for example, the child feels the desire to spite nature through her cunning. She remembers her grandfather telling her not to open her mouth when picking flowers since a bee could sting you and choke you to death on your swollen gum. Although there are no bees in sight, she wishes one would come along so that she can practise what she has learnt in theory: “Ich wollte aber, daß eine kommen soll. Und ich werde weiter summern und ihr zeigen, daß sie mir nicht in den Mund fliegen kann” (22).

In Horkheimer and Adorno’s *Dialektik*, cunning represents a moment of intersection between mythology and Enlightenment. Cunning, defined as the deception of the victim, contains the beginning of Enlightenment rationality. It contains a mixture of mimesis (which belongs to myth) and ratio (Enlightenment), since it entails an act of assimilation to a stronger opponent. Here the plan of the child is to adapt to her dangerous opponent by keeping her mouth closed. The cunning is contained in the fact that her conformity is no longer passive, but outsmarting - it makes her more powerful than her ‘naturally’ stronger opponent (whose natural advantage is its sting) and allows her to step out of the mythic natural cycle.

The realms of nature and the social world to which the narrator’s parents belong are kept strictly apart by the latter. The adult world is characterised by efforts to uphold a boundary between the human and the natural and this separation is intrinsic to their enlightened state. Yet the adults’ preoccupation with the erecting and upholding of barriers also betrays their inability to feel secure in their position of domination and a fear of possible regression. The mother is avid in her removal of all dirt from the house and in her removal of birds’ nests from the roof. The transformation of nature into spaces of man’s domination is an ongoing process and the proximity of ‘wild’ nature to the small provincial village makes the assertion of man’s mastery a daily battle. The threat of natural invasion
is ever-present and neglect quickly leads to nature reclaiming its lost territory: household objects discarded at the edge of the village are rendered useless by nature ("Aus einer Waschschüssel ohne Boden wächst Gras [...] Der Wurm frisst im bitteren Fleisch der Schlehen und treibt einen farblosen Saft durch die blaue verhauchte Fruchtschale", 35).

Sometimes, nature even resists man’s control. A bridge in the valley, for example, is dry while the river flows unconcernedly past but not under it: "Unter der Brücke ist im Winter Schnee und im Sommer Schatten. Wasser ist nie darunter. Der Fluß kümmert sich nicht um sie, er fließt an ihr vorbei" (35).

Those who do fail to participate adequately in the fight against the wild are frowned upon by the rest of the community and even ostracised. While the child’s mother’s daily battle against dirt and mice and the birds which build their nests in the roof is accepted as normal and proper behaviour, her neighbour receives hefty criticism for reading instead of doing housework: "Mutter kam aus dem Schuften nicht heraus. Die Dorfleute lobten sie aber nicht für ihren Fleiß. Nur über die Nachbarin redeten sie, daß sie am hellen Tag Bücher lese, daß der ganze Haushalt bei ihr Purzelbaum schlage und daß ihr Mann auch nicht mehr wert sei als sie, weil er das alles dulde" (69). This passage points to books and narrative as an alternative mode of perception which does not form part of the adult world of instrumental rationality. Books and narrative have no place in the Heimat and constitute a cornerstone of resistance to the authoritarianness of its discourse which the narrator herself discovers in her recourse to retrospective narration.

The Story’s Critique of Rationality

The world of adult rationality with its cunning tactics aimed at outsmarting nature is depicted as having a damaging effect on the child’s senses. She is punished for possessing a different kind of perception to the adults and her experience of punishment results in her increasing conformity. She hears, for example, a bird depicted on one of her mother’s wallhangings singing. One day, however, the bird closes its beak and falls silent and when the child runs to tell her grandmother, she reacts with anger, threatening to pull the child’s ears off which have heard something they are not supposed to. In this way, the very earliest of the child’s perceptions is eradicated. She has known the magical bird for as long as she has been able to see:

In the next episode, the child experiences herself being blinded by her mother. As she watches her mother removing a bird’s nest from the roof, she feels as if her mother, standing on the ladder above her, is standing on her eyes: “Mutter steht noch immer auf der langen Leiter. Die Sprossen drücken ihre Fußsohlen breit. Mutter steht mit den Fußsohlen über mir. Sie zerquetscht mir das Gesicht. Mutter stellt sich auf meine Augen und drückt sie ein” (75). The father’s drunkenness and violence and the mother’s scolding and weeping are the effects of repressions necessitated by man’s separation from nature. One of the child’s first steps towards social assimilation is constituted by the repression of her corporeality and sexuality. She learns that a woman is not supposed to look at herself in the mirror when she is naked since her body is sinful (“Die ganze große Fläche Haut”, 60) and the curbing of the corporeal is so much a part of her social milieu that she begins to participate in and perpetuate the customs of repression without questioning them. When she sleeps in the same room as her cousin Henni, she tries to urinate soundlessly in the chamber pot so that he will not find out that she has bodily needs (48). The child’s integration into the adult world is thus only partly a result of her own chosen acceptance (which culminates in her decision not to become a swamp) and also partly enforced by social expectation.

The female figures are more in danger of regressing back to mythology than the male characters. While the men are always depicted carrying out tasks which strengthen the barriers between the natural and the human (“Manchmal ist das Dorf eine riesengroße Kiste aus Zaun und Mauer. Großvater klopft seine Nägel hinein”, 87), the grandmothers in particular appear precariously close to nature. This seems to be partly caused by their age, that is, by their connection with an earlier period in the life of the village when the threat of nature was greater and man’s methods of repelling it less effective. The child’s grandmother, for example, is able in her perception to bring the snakes back into the village by telling stories of a time when they were a commonplace menace. As she speaks, the child can see the snakes issuing forth from her body: “Und dann bringt Großmutter eines Tages die Schlangen wieder her. Sie kriechen aus dem Sattel ihrer Bluse, aus ihren Stimmbändern, aus einem Gespräch, das wie immer mit ‘früher’ beginnt” (38). Her other grandmother lives in a house constantly under siege by nature: the walls are damp and musty, in the evening goats come and lick the salty substance which has settled on the decaying house and inside the walls are lined with a trail of sand left by invading ants. The child is afraid to sleep there - the walls seem to her not adequately to block out nature: “Draußen in der Nacht peitschten sich die Bäume. Ich sah sie durch die Wände. Großmutters Haus war wie ein Haus aus Glas geworden” (47). The grandmother enjoys the rain. Rain is observed and experienced by the child as the removal of all barriers
between man and nature. When it rains, the smell of plants intensifies to the extent that it settles on her gums and tongue (64-65). Just as she once feared that death could penetrate her skin through her open wound, the child now watches in trepidation how her grandmother purposefully seeks work out of doors so as to let the rain seep into her skin: “Wenn es regnete, suchte sie sich im Hof eine Arbeit und ließ sich nass werden bis auf die Haut” (64).

The natural world into which the grandmothers regress is, however, no less gruesome than the social in which the child has to obey her mother and remain silent. Snakes bite new-born babies, lightening strikes a man dead in a field and the first sensation the narrator can remember is the pain of being bucked by a cow. Images of blood and death are constant reminders of mortality: the light-coloured blood for the small life of the mouse and the disgusting white milk which issues from the squashed moth. Natural processes are consumptive, destructive. The strong feed on the weak (the half-digested frogs inside the goose on her plate) and the process of nature is destructive rather than creative. Nature in the “Niederungen” is constantly de-aestheticised: ducks are birds with “verkümmernte Flügel” (36), bushes appear deformed by their search for light (“Die Zweige stoßen sich aus dem Graben, sie wachsen in langen spitzen Stacheln zu Ende und verformen sich auf der Suche nach Licht”, 35) and the hay in the barn is rotted from the rain “wie Schlamm” (38).

Yet I argue that this view of nature as terrible does not constitute a critique of myth and a concession to the necessity of human ascendance to rationality. Rather, it must be read as part of the child’s successful integration into the Heimat and her appropriation of the adult’s instrumental rationality. According to Horkheimer and Adorno, one of the earliest forms of rationality which characterises the transition from myth to Enlightenment is represented by the projection of the human onto nature. This is aimed at bridging the gap between man and nature. They write:

87 Horkheimer and Adorno, 12

At the beginning of the story, before the intervention of her grandfather, nature was for the narrator full of pleasurable experiences. Before she learns that acacia blossom makes you mute, it was a flower full of juice which she held in her mouth as long as possible in order
to savour its sweetness (17). The cruelty of nature is a product of the villagers’ own subjectivity with which they have gained control over nature and thus reflects their own hostile, terrible nature.

**Narrative as a Mode of Resistance**

What remains beyond all pessimism in "Niederungen" in respect of the terrors of rationality is the reflection and acknowledgement of the sacrifices and repressions on which the narrator’s social conformity is based. The story can thus be read as a confession of the mind as domination. But it also contains depictions of a childlike attitude towards nature which can be read as constituting a step towards dissolving the authoritative claim that also enslaves the mind to nature. In conclusion to my analysis of "Niederungen", I introduce the ideas of the Freiburg philosopher Ute Guzzoni who has attempted to locate a moment of optimism in Adorno’s critique of the Enlightenment. By finding a way out of the resignation contained within this critique, Guzzoni’s work enables me to locate within the story the articulation of an alternative both to mythological submersion in nature as well as to domination.

In search of a point of departure for conceiving of a different reason in the work of Adorno, one which no longer bears the stamp of the ‘old’ rationality, Guzzoni formulates a “mindfulness of nature in the subject.”88 This can replace the conceptual thinking which leads to the “demon of identity”.89 Identity has become suspect in critical theory because of the fact that it entails the objectification, classification and quantification of objects. Guzzoni contends that mindfulness can salvage reason from its calculative propositions of which identity is born. The “attentive and receptive” thinking which she develops out of certain traits of reason already conceived by traditional philosophy provides a productive way of approaching the passivity of the narrator in "Niederungen". It entails, for example, interaction with rather than an appropriation of the object. In the story, the narrator’s judgments are reduced to reactions to observations and experiences which are characterised by the fact that they approach the object of observation without categorising it and refuse to make connections and assimilate the object. She describes events for what they are without the need to compare. The dreadfulness of the slain calf, for example, is

---


communicated by highlighting an aspect of the scene, rather than by drawing a comparison or by ordering it into a pattern. The presence of the nesting swallow which witnesses the killing fills the child's thoughts: "Als der Onkel den dicken Hammer hochhob, lief ich in den Hof und stellte mich unter den Pflaumenbaum, und hielt mir mit beiden Händen den Ohren zu. Die Luft war heiß und leer. Die Schwalbe war nicht mitgekommen, sie mußte brüten über einer Hinrichtung" (58). Equally, the story does not rely on symbolism. The narrator of "Niederungen" does not categorise and analyse according to any pre-determined schema, but rather describes and reflects on something and endeavours to capture it as it had appeared to her at the time. Her relationship towards nature as she retroactively creates it, is thus more reconciliatory than the dominating and appropriating relationship towards nature practised by her parents who see in the calf only its usefulness for man. It is in this way that the story does succeed in pointing toward change: by creating a character with a new, an alternative reason which "would let its objects be, letting them come to speak by themselves."  

I discussed above why, for reasons of narrative logic, the child's story must be told from a retrospective point of view. This retrospectivity of the narrative also means that the child's perceptions are not related in their immediacy, but are rather relived in the memory of an older narrator. This acknowledgement within the text of the child's story as reconstruction also means that her perceptions are selectively presented; the narrator is able to omit and to remodel to allow her child to fulfill a narrative task. If we understand this task as being her embodiment of a new kind of reason, then the narrative in "Niederungen" can be read as transformative and as constituting a mode of resistance to the Heimat's instrumental rationality. This function which I attribute to this text constitutes its qualitative superiority over the shorter stories discussed earlier in the chapter in which the author restricts herself to presenting highly concentrated and vivid images of oppression and exclusion. In my analysis of "Niederungen", I have identified the possibilities offered by retrospective narration, however, in my subsequent chapter on Herztier, the theme of narrative and its relationship to resistance is further explored and more critically appraised.

---

90 Guzzoni, 32.
91 Guzzoni, 25.
Chapter Two: Heimat and Domination in Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt

The story which is the focus of this chapter is somewhat longer than "Niederungen" and was originally published as a short novel. Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt deals in a number of ways quite explicitly with the conventions of the genre Heimat novel and is a clear expression of pessimism towards Heimat. It depicts a community which, after clinging to an archaic understanding of collective identity based on Heimat, is beginning to disband in the face of its increasing untenability. The disintegration of the German community in the story reflects the political situation in Romania in the eighties when the West German government began to offer the Romanian authorities 'Kopfgeld' for every Romanian of German origin who resettled in the Federal Republic. It focuses on one family who see themselves thwarted by Heimat. Forced to relinquish its sanctuary, they hope for a better life in cosmopolitan and materialistic Germany. The story is concerned with depicting the events and circumstances which drive Windisch and his family to such a drastic move. The reader builds up a certain degree of sympathy for the male protagonist, based on a familiarity with his preoccupations and worries, which enable us to appreciate his choice while at the same time wonder at its wisdom and at the feasibility of the solution. The issues in Fasan present an extremely thought-provoking and astute contribution to contemporary debate on the role, and indeed the desirability of Heimat in a global post-industrial society. For its Western readers, the theme of daily life in a Romanian village introduces a new perspective into the Heimat debate, reminding us that the legacy of totalitarian regimes as well as ongoing globalisation processes have made Heimat in its conventional sense uninhabitable.

I begin this chapter with an exploration of the key features of the Heimat genre and their centrality to Müller's text, showing how this is evoked in the story through its reference to time and nature as well as to key symbolic structures such as the war memorial and cemetery. My observations on the story's participation in a traditional discourse on Heimat are supported by Müller's own comments about the continued

---

92 Hereafter abbreviated as Fasan. Unless otherwise indicated, all page references in this chapter refer to this text.
93 In 1978, Chancellor Helmut Schmidt signed an agreement with Ceaușescu over an annual quota of emigrants and the payment of DM 8000 to the Romanian government for every Romanian-German who 'returned' to Germany.
existence in the Banat of a “bäuerliche, herkömmliche Rolle von Mann und Frau”: in this text, an outdated genre is used to convey to the reader this old-fashioned way of life. In the first section, I analyse the extent to which the story reproduces and/or subverts the conventions of the Heimat novel, exploring the motif of ‘das Ende’ which Windisch sees around him in relation to these conventions. The theme of man’s relationship to nature which was central to my discussion of “Niederungen” is once again in this story an important aspect of Müller’s depiction of a Heimat which is lost and at the same time emotionally insurmountable.

The second important aspect of this story on which I focus in this chapter is the theme of sexual exploitation and its relationship to the material poverty and hollow morality of the Heimat setting. In her story Fasan, Müller gives her readers a more involved picture of the patriarchal structures of domination which persisted in a remote German minority community than she has previously attempted. Windisch pays a high price for his successful emigration: he sells his daughter’s sexuality. Leading up to the passage in which he breaks the mirror when it shows his daughter’s ‘customers’ instead of his own reflection, I examine the connections between the restrictiveness of provincial life in the Banat and Windisch’s domination and degradation of his daughter. I argue that Windisch’s desire to be in control results in the victimisation of Amalie. A male desire for autonomy, concomitant with recent theories of our narcissistic age, is thwarted by both the political system and the extreme hostility of the natural environment of the Banat; to compensate, Windisch resorts to degrading women.

The insight contained within the text that provincial realities, especially when paired with political subjection to a totalitarian state, including a lack of opportunity to exert autonomy, can set the scene for male domination is, I contend, this story’s most noteworthy critical statement and its original contribution to the anti-Heimat genre.

Just as importantly, the story does not let Amalie off the hook and resists the temptation to valorise the oppressed. Amalie’s complicity in her own subjugation which forms the final focal point of my discussion, stresses that women and men are equally reprehensible and equally implicated in the breakdown of human relationships into alienation and domination which is fostered by provincialism and totalitarianism. The nightwatchman’s successful reinvention of Heimat which takes place in the story’s epilogue, is indicative of the text’s ultimate insistence that neither nature nor politics necessarily cause domination and makes the moral message of personal accountability unmistakable at the end of the narrative.

94 Kohly. My emphasis.
Fasan, the Conventional Heimat Novel and the Problem of Autonomy

While the word Heimat appears nowhere in the story, the decimation of Heimat manifests itself in the setting which centres around key prominent sites. Cemeteries are of particular symbolic importance to a conventional understanding of Heimat, since this is where the deceased are returned to the land. The Romanian presence in the German cemetery in Fasan causes anxiety, as does the mention of foreign cemeteries and the thought of being buried away from home. When the furrier returns from his trip to the mountains, the Walachian cemeteries are vivid in his memory: "'Von oben sieht man die Friedhöfe', sagte er, 'sie hängen schief an den Bergen runter.' Windisch legte die Hände neben die Schlüssel auf den Tisch. Er sagte: 'Dort möchte ich nicht begraben sein'" (23). In front of the village church there is a war memorial which glorifies human sacrifices made in the name of land claims and behind this is the place where a mythical apple tree once stood, embodying the (former) Germanness of the community and their rootedness to the land. These three features clustered around the church are the symbolic cornerstones of the village, since they testify to the people’s emotional investment in a particular place and to the importance of the land for deriving their collective identity. A closer look at what happens to these geographic features of the village reveals that the Heimat they once embodied is in decline. The church is often locked when Windisch passes by, and in the cemetery, Romanians are buried alongside Germans. The apple tree has been cut down and the war memorial is slumbering in a fairytale-like manner behind a hedge of roses: "Um das Kriegerdenkmal stehn Rosen. Sie sind ein Gestüpp. So verwachsen, daß sie das Gras ersticken" (5).

The opening scenes of Fasan set up a tension between the time of the village and Windisch’s attempts to counteract it with his own sense of time; a tension which is central to his wish to escape. The opening scene of the story emphasises the cyclic nature of time which is characteristic of the Heimat novel.55 It is dawn, another day is unfolding, and as he does every day, Windisch rides his bicycle to the mill and hits a rut in the road. Windisch imposes linearity onto this endlessly repetitive time by counting the days. The cycle of the seasons becomes a progression for him since he has a goal and registers the passing of time as leading towards something, rather than turning round in circles:

55 Time in the Heimat novel is typically organised around the return of central moments, such as birth, different phases of life (youth, old age) and death as well as the cycle of the seasons. In his typology of the Heimat novel, Karlheinz Rossbacher notes that the circularity of time as opposed to linearity and causality is a manifestation of the people’s dependence on the laws of nature. The perpetual, natural cycle of the seasons and of religious festivals in the Heimat novels are "Mittel, die Footnotes continued on the next page
"Zweimal hat das Rosengestrüpp kahle Dornen gehabt und das Unkraut darunter war rostig. Zweimal war die Pappel so kahl, daß ihr Holz fast zerbrochen war. Zweimal war Schnee auf den Wegen" (5). Windisch's habitual counting of the days and years forces his time to break out of the cycle and imposes linearity. He calls the cycle of time "die stehende Zeit" because it does not progress. While it is good enough for those who want to stay in the village, he himself is afraid of losing sight of the passing of time and has begun to associate the standstill village time with 'the end': "Seit Windisch auswandern will, sieht er überall im Dorf das Ende. Und die stehende Zeit für die, die bleiben wollen" (5). His time-counting consumes him to the extent that he feels as though his head has turned into a clock: "Windisch hört seine Schläfen klopfen und denkt: 'Mein Kopf ist eine Uhr'" (7). When the furrier receives his permit to emigrate, Windisch is made painfully aware of the length of time which has passed since he himself applied for his exit visa. Aware of his neighbour's success in escaping the empty village time, as he watches them pack up, he feels an acute sense of helplessness in the face of the repetitive cycle of time. Time appears to turn on the clock without clockhands, so that there is no sense of moving forward: "Ohne Zeiger ist die Zeit. Nur die schwarzen Flecken drehen sich" (19). He senses something threatening in the unrecorded time: "Windisch öffnet den Mund. Er spürt sie wachsen im Gesicht, die schwarzen Flecken" (20). Windisch's premonitions of 'the end' he sees everywhere in the village are closely connected to the village time, which he tries to counteract by counting each day which elapses since the submission of his visa application. Since circular time is the time of Heimat, Windisch's belief in an approaching doomsday can be interpreted as the end of the village as Heimat.

Circular time is one of a number of features of the Heimat genre which can be found in Fasan. The unity of place is similarly evoked in the enclosed space of the village.96 There is a clear border where the street ends and the wilderness begins: "Windisch friert. Er schaut die Straße runter. Wo sie aufhört, schlagen die Gräser ins Dorf" (6). The plane beyond the village is a fearsome alien place - the untamed nature of the "schlagende Gras" threatens the village which is evoked here as a place which offers protection from the external elements. When Windisch and his family finally leave the village, the border is a black wall of corn at the end of the streets ("Der Mais ist an den Straßenenden eine schwarze Wand", 106). The border also designates separation from civilisation (to cross it, Windisch's wife has replaced her plaits with a modern perm and Windisch is wearing a

---

96 Rossbacher describes the space of Heimat as a "Totalmodell der Abgeschlossenheit". As a "Garant für Schutz" it offers protection from the surrounding landscape. Rossbacher, 139f.

new suit). In the typical Heimat novel, whoever crosses the threshold to the outside cannot return and is exposed to the perceived dangers of civilisation. His or her downfall in the world beyond is normally a swift one and is portrayed in the novel as a kind of reproof for having left the Heimat. In Peter Rosegger’s Jakob der Letzte, for example, Jakob’s son leaves home to join the army and is killed in service. In Fasan, Dietmar receives his call-up and is shot in the south on the banks of the Danube.

Müller’s appropriations of the attributes of the Heimat genre are partial ones. In the Heimat novels, the static condition of being in the Heimat, evoked in Fasan in the motif of the ‘stehende Zeit’, is coexistent with the poetic structures of the idyll which depict Heimat as a rural haven, untouched by the fast pace of modern life. Müller’s inscription of the time of Heimat without the idyll is symptomatic of her exposure of Heimat’s deceit. Fasan combines elements of the conventional provincial novel as laid out in Rossbacher’s typology with a subversive approach towards other elements more typical of anti-Heimat pieces. On the level of language, Müller mimics the traditionalists in a number of ways, albeit with differing results. The lack of psychologising in her narrative technique repeats a tendency recognised by Rossbacher as typical for the Heimat genre, where feelings are not expressed, but rather exist unspoken, since to utter them would be paramount to intellectualising. While the effects in the traditional context are to create characters with hidden depths, the ordinariness and banality of description in Müller’s transformation - manifest in simple subject-predicate sentences like “Die Nächte sind lang” or “Mein Magen ist leer” (7) - leaves its figures flat and empty.

Nature is depicted quite differently in this story than in “Niederungen”. While in the earlier story, Müller exposed man’s harmony with nature in the Heimat as a myth, replacing this with her insights into his actual domination over his environment and his view of nature in terms of its utility, her creation of characters in awe of nature in Fasan is more typical of the Heimat genre. In this case, it is the attitude itself which she attacks, showing how a backward mentality hinders the characters in their search for personal happiness. Despite their respect for their environment, the characters in Fasan experience no sense of accord with nature and in this respect they resemble their counterparts in “Niederungen”. Disruptions to man’s peaceful harmony with nature form the main events in the Heimat novels and are often the work of a contrary force of nature. Rossbacher describes them as “Äußerungen einer manchmal gnädigen und gleichgültigen, immer jedoch erhabenen und in den meisten Fällen Schicksalsschläge austeilenden Natur.”

Footnotes continued on the next page

97 Rossbacher, 158. In Clara Viebig’s novel Das Weiberdorf, moments of communion with nature are rare rewards for good behaviour; the presence of nature represents by-and-large a physical threat to
the characters have retained something of the archaic awe of nature which is expressed in such events. The carpenter’s mother’s description of a hot summer (“Das ist ein Sommer, der aus allen Jahren Feuer wirft”, 15) depicts nature as willfully antagonistic towards man. The men, however, are more fearful of nature than the women, or at least more mindful of its power and of the ensuing damaging effects on their autonomy. Often Windisch observes in nature reflections of his own emotional state. His angry frustration at the thought that he may have to use his daughter’s sexual attractiveness to achieve his goal of emigrating seems to be echoed in nature when the millpond “schlägt Wellen” (52). Bent on saving himself from ending his days in abject poverty in the Banat but at the same time uncertain of success, he is afraid of what fate nature might reveal to him. When a storm breaks out he is first drawn towards it, but then takes shelter back inside the house, afraid that the lightning will illuminate some horrible knowledge about man’s and particularly his own mortality: “Windisch stand im Vorzimmer und wußte, daß er, wenn er nicht ins Haus gegangen wär, durch die Gärten hindurch das schmale Ende aller Dinge und sein eigenes Ende überall gesehen hätte” (17). Towards women, nature is at times mocking. But, unlike the men, the women are less inclined to draw consequences for their own lives out of natural occurrences. During a gathering of the village women to mourn for the old lady Kroner, a fly mimics their excessive praying and weeping by flying around the room with a tear on its wing and buzzing in time with the women’s words of prayer. On this occasion, Windisch’s wife believes that the fly has come back to haunt her from a dream; thus, in this instance she also regards nature as possessing some kind of intention. However, she does not seem to fear the prospect of nature’s authority to the same extent as her husband. She very calmly shoos the fly away and continues her prayer: “Sie seufzt, daß ihre Hände sich bewegen. Daß die Fliege auf ihrem Fingernagel den Seufzer spürt. Daß die Fliege über ihre Wange ins Zimmer fliegt. Im leichten Lippensummen betet Windischs Frau ein Bittfährungs-Gebet” (54).

Unlike the Heimat novels, the characters in Fasan experience no basic sense of being at peace in their surroundings. Indeed, nature and man sometimes appear to be separated by an unbreachable rift. In the sections ‘Der Apfelbaum’ and ‘Das Lied’, nature is an alien external force which inspires fear and even incredulity in the men who perceive it as a threat to their existence. There are no overtones which suggest a relationship of recognition

human existence. It can even function as a corrective to man’s folly, as in the case of a thunderstorm which strikes just as a squabble amongst the women is getting out of hand. The storm echoes the explosive emotions of the women, making them recognise their own precociousness, both scaring and subduing them. The storm is at once an extension of their own inner selves and a higher authority which demonstrates with its show of power the pettiness of their warings. Clara Viebig. Das Weiherdorf. Roman. Berlin: F. Fontane & Co, 1900.
or reflection between man and the external world, neither does nature's demonstration inspire in any way peaceful joy in the beholder, which was an intrinsic function of the idyllic passages in the Heimat novels. The village legend of the apple tree which ate its own apples documents a history of a deep-set fear of nature which has now become part of the (male) villagers' collective identity. According to the story, the nightwatchman's father had been the first to witness the tree's self-destructive powers. The experience caused him to have a fitful night's sleep ("Er schlief im Schweiß", 32). The next day, the village judge refused to believe the report, but his laughter belied his actual fear: "Der Nachtwächter hörte durch sein Lachen die Angst. In den Schläfen des Dorfrichters klopften die kleinen Hämmer des Lebens" (32). Later the nightwatchman's claims were authenticated by a specially recruited 'Sommernachtskommission' who watched over the fearsome tree. This is what they reported witnessing: "Zwei Stunden nach Mitternacht begann der Apfelbaum zu zittern. Oben, wo sich die Äste teilten, öffnete sich ein Maul. Das Maul fraß Äpfel" (34).

Windisch displays an anxiety towards nature similar to that contained within these men's conviction about the apple tree's monstrous powers. When he hears a song about Berlin which turns his thoughts to his daughter and her relationships with men, it is night and the long shadows make nature appear larger and more menacing than before. He has the feeling that the leaves are growing and pushing up against the verandah, lifting it up: "Die Veranda wächst hinauf, wenn es so dunkel ist. Wenn die Blätter Schatten haben. Sie drücken sich unterm Pflaster hoch" (38). Here, nature once more oversteps its bounds; it threatens the house - a space created by man and one which symbolises his separation from nature.

While the characters in Fasan do see nature as wielding power over them, they do not understand why nature should make them suffer. There is no calm acceptance of nature's authority which is found in the Heimat novels; they do not experience the harsh climate and the natural disasters as just castigation for some wrong they may have committed. There is also no tuning into or listening to nature, no silent communion with the natural world which the Heimat novels of the turn-of-the-century took as their point of departure and to which they returned again for closure after the upheavals of the story to signal the restoration of order. While Windisch fears nature, he lacks the resignation as well as the

---


Footnotes continued on the next page
quiet contentment of the characters of the *Heimat* novels. This is why his life in an archaic provincial village becomes so problematic. Indeed Müller's critique of the *Heimat* discourse's glorification of provincial life consists in showing us that people who live in rural villages are not simple peasants content to leave themselves in the hands of fate and untouched by modern narcissism.

In the above commentary, I have tried to stress that the men are more fearful of nature than the women. They demonstrate considerable apprehension when they perceive women getting 'too close' to nature. When the carpenter recalls the incident with the white dahlia and the melon which the villagers think caused his mother's death, a female neighbour claims that the dahlia was like a face, while the carpenter describes it as something sinister and unbearable ("Das hält man nicht aus", 13), which was his mother's "Verhängnis" (13). The sight of his mother eating the melon was similarly intolerable: "Ich habe weggeschaut [...] Ich habe Angst gehabt vor der Melone" (15). The threat of nature in *Fasan* is a threat to the men's precarious subjectivity since its intervention in their autonomy could engulf them and cause them to regress back to some archaic pre-rational, even pre-conscious state, like the old lady Kroner, whose face before she died became younger and younger until she had retreated "hinter die Geburt" (44). Thus, the need for autonomy is largely a male need.

**Man's Autonomy and Women's Oppression**

In the last chapter, I discussed the correlation between man's domination over nature and his ascendance to reason. In *Fasan*, fear of nature is an obstacle to the construction of a rational subjectivity since this depends on the conquest of nature and the feminine. The process of technologisation changed the concept of nature in the nineteenth century: the fear and awe of nature which had prevailed for thousands of years is replaced by the belief in man's ability to control and manipulate his environment. As I demonstrate below, Windisch's outstanding autonomy in *Fasan* is caused by his lack of control over nature and is compensated for by his domination of women. In the sections 'Der Apfelbaum' and 'Das Lied' discussed above, nature becomes threatening at night and both times the experience of fear is followed by a compensatory assertion of autonomy through the subjugation of women. After hearing the story of the apple tree, the village judge beats his wife because he had visions of apples in his soup: "Nach dem Mittagessen schlug der Dorfrichter seine Frau. Er hatte in der Suppe schwimmende Äpfel gesehen" (32). In the

*besonderer Berücksichtigung der Werke Martin Walsers.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993, 24–

Footnotes continued on the next page
section ‘Das Lied’, Windisch finds respite from the shadowy undergrowth in a song which degrades women. Over the span of a generation which separates these two incidents, the domination of women has shifted from the physical to the discursive – the judge hits out, but Windisch’s violence is behind his words, which are in turn the words of a popular song from Berlin (“Windisch kennt das Lied”, 38); they are social language, discourse.

Female figures in Fasan are viewed as possessing the same incalculable and antagonistic potential as nature. Stories of their irrational acts, such as the story of Rudi’s great-grandmother who froze to death in a field after spending too much time out and about away from home, become village legends. The women’s exploits are also viewed by the men who judge them as dangerous liaisons with nature and act as warnings against regressing back into a state of symbiosis with nature. By placing women in close connection with the natural world, the men equip themselves to exert authority over nature: they achieve this by dominating women. The death of the old lady Kroner is seen in retrospect to have been caused by a combination of an excessive intake of tea made with the blossom of the linden tree in the cemetery (“In den Tassen war der Tod”, 43) and the juice of a weed which she picked from the fields and rubbed into her wounds (“Sie rieb die Wunden mit dem braunen Saft ein. Die Wunden wurden immer größer. Sie rochen immer süßer”, 44). The linden tree which has a sweet smell reappears in this passage which discusses the cause of death in the sweetness of her wounds, which suggests an internalisation of the tree. This idea is further supported by suggestions that the old lady Kroner sang “Lindenblütenstrophen” (44) and that something was blossoming in her face. These interpretations, which are made by an impersonal narrative voice, but which flow on from Windisch’s reflections and certainly represent a male view, also include the conclusion that the old woman’s death was the climax of a regression back into youth which carried her beyond birth: “Ihr Gesicht war jung. Das Jungsein war Schwäche. Wie man vor dem Sterben jung wird, war das Gesicht. Wie man immer jünger und so jung wird, bis der Körper bricht. Bis hinter die Geburt” (43-44). The passage expresses through the creation of a myth of feminine proximity to nature and death which weakens women’s susceptible subjectivity (and in this case destroys it) the men’s fear of a regression back to their maternal-natural origins. Their fear and awe of nature is another manifestation of this same danger and the reason why their relationships with women are characterised by domination.

In her third section of The Second Sex, ‘Myths’, Simone de Beauvoir provides an inventory of the representations of woman and femininity that man has created. To fulfill
her function as the absolute Other, woman had to be invested with special traits. The characteristics are contradictory – healer and witch, madonna and whore – because woman has to be everything man is not. Woman especially represents the corporeal and the natural. All ambivalent feelings evoked in man by nature have been projected onto woman – his fear of death and his need for life. In the male discourse which makes up the narrative voice in Fasan, women are not present as subjects, but rather as embodiments of mythical images of femininity, as projections of male fears and desires. Lena Lindhoff summarises this phenomenon which has been linked to patriarchal culture: “Die Weiblichkeitsbilder dienen dazu, das kollektive Abgewehrte in eine kulturell akzeptable Form zu bringen, um es dadurch stillzustellen, kontrollierbar und verfügbar zu machen.”

Windisch’s daughter Amalie is particularly affected by man’s construction of woman as Other. She is unable to articulate an identity which is independent of the patriarchal myths of femininity which are projected onto her. Windisch has a vivid memory of an incident in Amalie’s childhood when she had come home from playing with her friend Rudi with bitten nipples. Instead of chastising the boy and considering Amalie’s pain and confusion (which certainly occurred to me as I read this section!), Windisch feels that his daughter has acted shamefully: “Windisch wiegte den Kopf: ‘Amalie wird uns noch Schande machen’, sagte er” (40). His view that his seven-year-old daughter has been sexually promiscuous is outrageous. The insight the reader gains at this point into his mentality enables us to grasp the impossibility of Amalie becoming anything other than what she has been for her father since she was seven: temptress, seductress, whore. He recalls the episode from Amalie’s childhood after hearing and singing along to the misogynist Berlin song, which presents women as sexually insatiable and always willing to submit to men. He uses the song and its images in the service of his own desire. As he listens, he starts to masturbate: “Windisch greift mit seiner kalten Hand in die Rocktasche” (39). But he needs to say the words himself before he can feel stimulated: “In der Rocktasche hängt kein Stein” (39). After Windisch has achieved sexual satisfaction by fantasising about sex-crazed women, he immediately thinks of his daughter’s lost virginity and thereby aligns her with the girl in the song who wants to fuck the whole night through. The comparison is more than fanciful projection – it is a projection with which reality catches up. On closer examination, the words of the song are remakable paraphrases of the positions occupied by the policeman/ pastor, Amalie, and Windisch and his wife in respect of Amalie’s later ‘prostitution’: a man demands to have the daughter of someone his social inferior (he is addressed by the latter as ‘Mein Herr’), his interlocutor refuses, dismissing


65
the suggestion on the grounds that it would offend the law of common decency ("das schickt sich nicht", 39), while the daughter for her part insists on acquiescing ("lass mich doch"). Even the idea of the daughter succeeding the mother expressed in the words "O Mutter borg mir deine" return to haunt the reader when we learn along with Windisch that the pastor will ask for his daughter in place of his wife who is now too old: "Der Nachtwâchter hat gelacht. 'Deine Frau', hat er zu Windisch gesagt 'ist ihm zu alt. Deine Käthi läßt er in Ruh. Aber deine Tochter kommt auch noch dran" (51).

The man who sings the song is an anonymous passer-by; he is just 'someone' on his way home from work. He could be anyone, though we do know that the voice is male, it is "eine Männerstimme" (38). The Berlin folk song suddenly becomes pertinent to the Banat - it is the men's song and when Windisch joins in he participates in a collective male discourse which derogates women as morally weak.

Women and the House in Fasan

The men in Fasan align women with nature and express fear of both. In the story, this is a side-effect of their fear of and failure to dominate nature, while the parallel set up between woman with nature is also a common feature of the traditional Heimat novel. In this section, I show how, in order to compensate for their lack of control over their environment, the men also equate women with the houses in which they live in order to enable themselves to establish control. Furthermore, the narrative's focus on women as being confined within the home revokes the easy equations of the feminine and the natural which operate in the Heimat novels.

Heimat is conventionally imagined as a space which excludes rationality and intellectualism and the Heimat discourse construes women as part of or very close to nature.100 Heimat appropriates maternal female figures to embody man's origins and rootedness in a fertile earth. Peter Handke uses such a semantic construction of Heimat in his play Zurüstungen für die Unsterblichkeit, when he places "zwei hochschwangere Frauen mit gewaltigen Bâuchen" alongside the king in the opening scene.101 However, nowhere is the féminisation of Heimat more evident than in the Heimat novels published around the turn-of-the-century. In Viebig's Weiberdorf, Heimat is simultaneously an idealised landscape and the place where womenfolk dwell:

100 Müller's story "Niederungen" discussed in the previous chapter breaks with this convention by describing a provincial people who purposefully distance themselves from a lifestyle amidst nature in a bid to achieve rationality. Cf. 43.
Hier konnte man die Eifelsöhne finden: [...] sehnsüchtig des Heimathimmels gedenkend, der sich rein und kühl über den Eifelkuppen wölbt; unter dem die wohnen, die ihnen das Leben gegeben; die auf sie warten, denen sie die Ehe versprochen, oder die sie schon gefreit haben; wo die Kinder nach den Vätern verlangen.  

Throughout this novel, portraits of female figures who form a real and substantial presence in the landscape of the Eifel village - the men have been forced to leave the village and seek work in industry - are coupled with feminised metaphors used to depict nature, semanticising the characters’ Heimat as a feminised space. In one episode, Peter, the one man who was not tempted away from home by the promise of employment, is ambushed in the forest by a group of lustful women. After he has escaped them, the wind in the trees sounds like the rustling of their skirts and in his imagination, the women and nature are indistinguishable: “Immer glaubte er, rufende Stimmen zu hören; wie mit Armen griff es nach ihm, heißer Atem blies ihm ins Genick, Röcke rauschten und raschelten - hochatmend hielt er inne. Ach, das war ja nur der Buchenwald, der rauschte so!”

Feminised landscapes as a literary strategy in the Heimat novels fed an imagined symbiosis of woman and nature which helped construe the Heimat as a refuge offering security and shelter. Gisela Ecker demonstrates that this is a male fantasy which obscures and suppresses the actual physical strains placed on rural women. Müller, who stresses the pressures to fit in that exist in small tightknit communities and the irrevocable alienation that occurs to those who can or do not as the flipside of Heimat’s “Hort der Sicherheit”, connects her female figures in Fasan to another source of images - the house. In so doing, she engages in a conscious avoidance of the myths and mystical biologising metaphors used in Nazi ideology of the soil and points instead to the reality of

---

102 Viebig, 17.
103 Viebig, 93-94.
104 She writes: “Aus der Sicht derer, die vor dem begehrten Ort aus schreiben, ergibt sich ein anderes Bild. Der Ort des Begehrens ist das Produkt weiblicher Anstrengung, ob physisch oder psychisch begriffen.” Ecker. “’Heimat’: Das Elend der unterschlagenen Differenz.”, 22.
hard domestic labour which reflects many women’s experience of provincial life. The prominence of the house and the corresponding retreat of nature as the site of belonging in the story also reflects the crisis affecting a collective identity based on Heimat which affects the village community of Fasan and which motivates the characters to seek various solutions outside or beyond the existing collective, which range from Windisch’s emigration to the nightwatchman’s reinvention of Heimat.

The house and its immediate surrounds is for the women a workplace; they sew, bake, sweep the yard and slaughter the chickens. For the men, it represents the preservation of a traditionally ordered domestic realm and the last intact remnant of a way of life which - as Windisch clearly sees it - is coming to an end. In the thunderstorm, Windisch takes refuge in his house, afraid that if he were to remain outside the lightning would shed light on his fate. Faced with a natural environment which responds to man’s presence with unrelenting hostility, the house receives a special place of prominence for the villagers in Fasan as the symbolic site of Heimat. In the scene in which Windisch relates how he and his wife paired up after the war, he tells us that he was sure of being back home when he found his trousers in the wardrobe: “Windisch wußte, daß er nicht gestorben war. Daß er zu Hause war. Daß diese Hose hier im Dorf, im Schrank auf ihn gewartet hatte” (47).

The domestic abilities of the women become central to the community’s collective sense of identity. On returning from a trip to the mountains, the furrier hastens to amend his praise of the Walachian women by pointing out that they cannot cook like the Swabians: “‘Leider Gottes’, sagte er, ‘sind es Walachinnen. Im Bett sind sie gut, aber kochen können sie nicht wie unsere Frauen’” (22). The house offers protection from the threat of an engulfing force outside. However, the balance of power is unstable. The threat of nature increases at night and in the dark it seems poised to engulf and take over the house: “Die Verandah wächst hinauf, wenn es so dunkel ist. Wenn die Blätter Schatten haben. Sie drückt sich unterm Pflaster hoch. Auf einem Stiel” (38).

The totalitarian political situation in post-war Romania with its negative effects on the autonomy of the small German communities also troubles the villagers’ conception of themselves as inhabiting Heimat. The centrality of possession in the Heimat discourse can be traced back to the origins of the word which was a concrete term to designate ownership of a house and/or estate. The importance for the villagers’ sense of collective identity that key symbolic sites remain in German hands is reflected in the story when the pastor claims that the Romanian graves do not belong to the cemetery: “Der Pfarrer sagt, daß die Gräber

106 Hard and, at times, crippling physical labour as part of a provincial woman’s everyday life is also a theme in Handke’s Wunschloses Unglück and Anna Mitgutsch’s Die Züchtigung.
der Rumänen nicht zum Friedhof gehören. Daß die Gräber der Rumänen anders riechen als
die Gräber der Deutschen" (43). At the same time, their rights to possess have been
severely restricted by the regime. Windisch tells Amalie about the ‘Enteignung’ which took
place after the war,107 and condemns Rudi’s grandfather for being the only one who did not
resist the authorities who came to take away their land and houses. In the period covered
by the story, the Germans had regained ownership of their own homes, but taxation laws
were particularly harsh on Romania’s German ‘co-habiting national group’ and required
them to hand over most of their agricultural products to the state. This disheartening
experience is depicted in Fasan and is also a reason why the domestic achievements of the
women are depicted as being central to the way in which the Germans view themselves as a
collective. The villagers fear the introduction of even wider restrictions to their autonomy.
Windisch believes that the nightwatchman, the only one who does not want to leave the
Banat, will eventually lose the most crucial ingredient of Heimat. He warns his friend of
the uselessness of staying: “Das Haus werden sie dir auch noch nehmen, und den Hof”
(79). In addition to the natural hostility of the environment in the Banat, the totalitarian
state intervenes in the community’s relationship to the land and results in a reduction of
Heimat to the house. The nightwatchman does not possess the same ambition as Windisch
to outsmart fate. The differences between the two men illustrate the connection Windisch
perceives between hanging on to his autonomy and escaping the provinces. At the
beginning of the story, it is the nightwatchman who cites the proverb “Der Mensch ist ein
großer Fasan auf der Welt” (8). Windisch, understanding the reference to the pheasant as a
German might, that is, as the most magnificent of birds, rejoins that man is also superior
on account of his strength: “‘Der Mensch ist stark’, sagt er, ‘stärker als das Vieh’” (8).
The nightwatchman is less optimistic about man’s qualities and later in the conversation, it
becomes clear that for him the proverb draws on the Romanian popular view of the
pheasant, that is, as a bird doomed to lose the chase: “‘Dumm ist der Mensch’, sagt der
Nachtwächter, ‘und immer bereit zu verziehn’” (9).

In a manner which is reminiscent of the conflation woman/landscape found in
traditional Heimat novels, the female villagers become at times indistinguishable from the
houses in which confine them. They are perceived by men from whose perspective the story
is narrated as part of a house. In episodes which contain echoes of the story “Das Fenster”,
part of a woman’s body is described using the terminology of windows. As Windisch
voyeuristically spies on the carpenter having sex with his wife, her legs “stehen wie ein

---

107 In the 1950s the Germans in Romania were disadvantaged in their professional and social lives
because of their large-scale participation in the SS and this culminated in the seizure of their entire
Footnotes continued on the next page
weißer Fensterrahmen auf dem Bettuch" (12). This image renders vivid the sudden visibility of the woman’s sex which fills the space of the window through which Windisch directs his gaze. As has already been discussed in relation to “Das Fenster”, it also equates a woman’s body architecturally with a house. Women who are confined by their social roles to the home become in the male discourse of the text inextricable from the house itself - both provide the men with a ‘zu Hause’, a Heimat and both - in the male economy - exist for and are freely accessible to men. Windisch gets home that night to find his wife masturbating in bed and this sudden sight of female sexual organs is framed this time by window shutters which have been flung open on an unexpected sight: “Er knipste das Licht an. Die Beine seiner Frau standen wie aufgerissene Fensterflügel auf dem Bettuch. Sie zuckten im Licht” (17). By equating his wife’s legs with window shutters, Windisch perceives his wife’s sexual activity as a violation of his property. Here the open window connotes an invasion or an act of trespass, with the shutters still quivering as if the burglar has only just quit the scene. The image of the window thus conveys the accessibility of the women for men while in this second example it indicates the transgression of the man’s right to his wife’s body by the woman who takes her own pleasure.

**Sexuality and the Struggle for Control**

The conflation woman/ house replaces to some extent the standard woman/ nature image in the Heimat discourse. The reassignment of women to a space over which the man has charge is symptomatic of the male desire to maintain control.

Male desire to control women is coupled with a fear of their sexual power. Windisch’s fear is particularly acute; he feels vulnerable and is afraid of his wife’s potential agency. His fear inflates to the extent that he feels threatened by the women’s domestic abilities. A further domestic image, sewing, connects the two housed and bedded women who are the objects of Windisch’s gaze, itself both fearing and desiring, at the beginning of the story. The carpenter’s wife is busy sewing with a needle and grey thread when the carpenter begins his advances: “Sie hat ein gestreiftes Nachthemd an. Sie hält einen Nadel in der Hand. An der Nadel hängt ein grauer Faden” (11). The sewing theme resurfaces in Windisch’s musings as he walks home and the repetition connotes his preoccupation with the scene on which he eavesdropped. The wind seems to be sewing a sack in the ground: “Der Wind klopft ans Holz. Er näht. Der Wind näht einen Sack in die Erde” (15). Having arrived home, he varies the metaphor and the groans of his wife are property. In 1955 they were able to reclaim their houses.
"wie eine Nähmaschine" (17). The sack sewn by the wind reminds us of the sacks of flour which Windisch has been delivering to the mayor; in his imaginings it turns into a sack in the ground, an image of death. When the wind sews a sack of flour and buries it, women and the domestic realm connect in Windisch’s mind with hostile nature and assert power. Windisch’s thoughts reflect his fear of women’s power. He perceives their sexuality as the source of their power and relates this in his mind to his own powerlessness.

Later, we learn the reasons for his fear. Like the carpenter, Windisch wishes to emigrate and is dependent for the success of his venture on the favour of certain men in positions of power. The carpenter’s wife’s willingness to submit to her husband’s advances is associated in Windisch’s mind with his deliveries of flour since they both represent independent efforts to gain the authorities’ favour and the two are connected textually through the image of the needle. The needle sews the flour sack into the earth, making it a grave and seemingly leading to ‘sein eigenes Ende’ of which Windisch is so fearful, and it is wielded by the carpenter’s wife who has a commodity more valuable in the corrupt provincial economy than Windisch’s flour, namely her sexuality. While Windisch tries to please the mayor by making him regular gifts of flour, the carpenter’s wife has procured the necessary documents by sleeping with the pastor and the policeman. The sack of flour turned into grave prefigures the failure of Windisch’s modest bribe of flour to help his family obtain passports and the success of female sexuality as the only effective commodity for exchange. The idea of the wind sewing the miller’s sack of flour into a death sack intimates a conspiracy between nature and the women - who with their needles are accomplices to the wind - to confound his hope of more or less ‘earning’ his passport through honest work (symbolised by the sack of flour). Indeed, it is the women who successfully rob him of this avenue with their more valuable exchange commodity. When he imagines the wind to be the agent sewing his death sack, Windisch projects this threat onto nature.

Windisch’s fear of female sexuality is best illustrated by his preoccupation with his wife’s finger. Ever since the night of the thunderstorm when she did not hear him come home and he saw her masturbating, the image of her sticky finger will not leave him. When on one occasion he comes home after staying out till five o’clock in the morning, he looks at her finger for signs of sexual activity: “Windisch schaut ihren Finger an. Er ist nicht schleimig” (49). When she licks the salty water from her fingers which Amalie’s glass tear has cried, he is reminded of that stormy night: “Windisch schaute, wie sie an dem Finger leckte, den sie in der Gewitternacht schleimig aus dem Haar gezogen hatte. Er spürte den

108 Cf. 38.
Schleim im Mund. In seinem Hals drückte der Knoten des Erbrechens" (26). Windisch’s disgust expresses an anxiety about his wife’s sexuality which no longer responds to his own, but rather exists beyond and despite his own desires. Until the night of the thunderstorm, Windisch had probably believed his wife’s story that in refusing to sleep with him, she was only following doctor’s orders. What he discovers makes him believe she has deceived him. He sees that she has a sexual desire which is not directed at him and which has evaded his control. Her sexual independence represents a threat to his agency. He responds with increased degradation and dominance. When she starts to assert herself, he hits her in order to put her in her place: “Windisch geht auf sie zu. Windisch schlägt ihr ins Gesicht. Sie schweigt. Sie senkt den Kopf” (49).

**Professional Disempowerment and the Bid for Control**

Windisch’s fear that the women are able to achieve with their sexual attractiveness what the men cannot is part of a general professional disempowerment which largely affects the men of the village. Critics have paid attention in passing to the fact that the characters in *Fasan* are named according to their profession. Windisch is the exception among characters who are variously named the carpenter, the nightwatchman, the prayer leader and the pastor. These professions and official positions are, I believe, of more significance than has hitherto been acknowledged. Their use parodies a tendency in the *Heimat* novels to label characters as members of a particular family or household rather than use personal names. The professional titles are ironical reminders of a work ethic which has been rendered inoperative. It is rare that the reader is presented with the figures actually carrying out the occupation which has been assigned them. The traditional professions diminish in terms of their exchange value in what has become an economy of sexual favours. The postwoman spends more time reading than delivering letters, the only piece of work the carpenter makes is a coffin for old Mrs Kroner, and the furrier seems to have stuffed more animals than he has made fur coats. The degeneration of traditional professions adds another dimension to the loss of *Heimat*. The death imagery of the sack draws an important connection between Windisch’s feeling that the end is nigh and his professional life as a miller.

Work played an important role in anti-industrialist support for provincialism. In the blood-and-soil literature, the representations of farming as well as other archaic professions were invested with the function of recapturing a lost unity. Those who partook in the idealisation of farming and other traditional manual professions (for example miller, furrier) resorted to mythical and trans-historical characterisations in order to present them
as an effective cure for the economic misery of the petty-bourgeois readers. Uwe Ketelsen writes in his review of folkish National Socialist literature: "In dieser Sparte der regressiven Fluchtliteratur müssen ‘Bauern’, überhaupt alle angeblich archaischen Berufe, die Funktion übernehmen, die verlorene Ganzheit über eine angeblich mythische Distanz hin rettend zu repräsentieren". These traditional professions are radically robbed of any effectiveness in the village economy of Fasan and this collapse of labour is one of the factors which hasten the end of Heimat.

This failure of old-fashioned honest work is made explicit in the case of Windisch, who is the village miller. Windisch’s ability to produce flour is, as he sees it, the most ethically possible resource available to him which could help him achieve his desire to emigrate. He has made a deal with the mayor to deliver him flour in exchange for the money he needs to apply for a passport. Yet the mayor attaches no value to the sacks and despite endless deposits of them in his yard, which he promises to pay in arrears, little remuneration is forthcoming. Windisch feels cheated: "Der zwölfe Transport seitdem, und zehntausend Lei, und Ostern ist längst gewesen’, denkt sich Windisch" (16). As he is delivering another load at the beginning of the narrative, the sack “hängt wie ein Schlafender über dem hinteren Rad. ‘Wie ein Toter’, denkt er, ‘hängt der Sack hinter mir’" (12). The depiction of the flour sack as a death sack, which reappears in the scene discussed above, in both instances associated with the motif of ‘the end’, reflects Windisch’s acknowledgment of his failure in his capacity as ‘honest’ miller to provide for his family in the way which they expect.

The example of the carpenter’s family, who employ unethical tactics to receive permission to emigrate strengthens Windisch’s outward resolve to preserve his and his family’s morality. The next time he looks through the window of the carpenter’s house, his wife is alone at the table and the bed is made up with a thick red cover. This setting stands in stark opposition to the previous occasion Windisch peered into the room, when the carpenter was pushing his wife from the table onto the ‘open’ bed. Perhaps it is his awareness of this difference which prompts Windisch to recall another development in the lives of his neighbours (and between the lines of Windisch’s train of thought lies the

---

109 Uwe Ketelsen. Völkisch-nationale und nationalsozialistische Literatur in Deutschland 1890-1945. Metzler: Stuttgart, 1976, 76-77. It may be pointed out that the Viebig novel quoted above does not participate in such ideology. Babbi, the most sympathetically portrayed character, realises even as she enjoys the success of her labour, the necessity of abandoning her crops and moving to the city. His honesty is only comparative to that of the other men who also want to get a passport and emigrate. Windisch does make use of bribes, but his offerings of flour are in his view more ethical versions of bribery than others who use money and even their wife’s bodies in their bribes, such as the carpenter, whose agreement with his wife’s prostitution appears to Windisch to make him more reprehensible than himself.

73
intimation that this new event accounts for the fact that the marital bed is now ‘zu’). Windisch recalls that the carpenter’s wife “wird mal zum Pfarrer gerufen wegen dem Taufschein, mal zum Milizmann wegen dem Pass” (51). He has now also found out from his friend, the nightwatchman, how the other families succeed in getting their emigration documents, namely by allowing their wives to submit to the sexual demands of the pastor and the policeman in exchange for the birth certificates and signatures they require. The nightwatchman also tells him that they will not be interested in his wife since she is too old but that he will have to rely on his daughter instead: “deine Tochter kommt auch noch dran. Der Pfarrer macht sie katholisch, und der Milizmann macht sie staatenlos” (51). All this is going through his mind when he resolves not to give in to such an unethical economy: “Er kriegt Mehl, aber meine Tochter kriegt er nicht” (51).

The Power of Nature and the Domination of Women in Fasan

In his article which highlights the theme of departure in Fasan, David Midgley writes about Amalie that “[t]he expression of her sexual self-confidence is also an intimation of her sexual subjugation”. This is one of a number of pertinent comments he makes about the text’s “erogenous display” and which point towards certain ideological implications which lie beyond the bounds of his short analysis. As I give these more detailed consideration below, I underpin my discussion with a theoretical framework which enables me to locate the theme of Amalie’s moral decline within a broader debate about women’s subjectivity and oppression.

Windisch is arguably one of the story’s more sympathetic characters. Even though his idea of morality may not measure up to our own, he does stand out in his attempts to maintain some kind of moral footing. Windisch is prepared to participate in a little gift-giving. But, he is not prepared to go any further than the relatively ethical bribe of a few sacks of flour. He is for a time quite determined to spare his wife and daughter from any immoral acts and also fails at the last moment to deliver a monetary bribe to the gardener in the city. He is condemned for this by his wife and daughter who bemoan his naivety and lack of cunning and eventually forced to give into the village economy. However, although Windisch appears on the surface to be morally superior to the carpenter because of his reluctance to give in to the sexual bribes expected by the corrupt authorities, his fear of women’s power, manifested in the connection he draws between sewing and his personal

downfall, is a fear of female agency which is co-extensive with a degrading attitude towards women.

Jessica Benjamin's analysis of the dynamics of power and surrender in patriarchal societies provides a useful theoretical framework which can help to illuminate some of the causes and implications of the pattern of sexual exploitation in Fasan. Benjamin's main aim in *The Bonds of Love* is to recast Freud's view of domination. It was Freud's conclusion that our innate propensity for aggression is attested to and repressed by the cultural injunction to love our neighbour. Benjamin counters that domination is not, as Freud would have it, an innate human trait, but begins in the breakdown of tension between self and other. Opposing the previous emphasis in psychoanalytic theory on the role of the Oedipal phase in identity formation, Benjamin claims that the latter already takes place within the relationship between mother and child, since in her view each of these participants learns to recognise the other as an independent subject. Her reassessment of the psychoanalytic model stresses the intersubjective dimension of experience in which recognition is crucial. She explains this human need as follows: "Recognition [...] makes meaningful the feelings, intentions, and actions of the self. It allows the self to realize its agency and authorship in a tangible way."  

The self's wish for absolute independence clashes with the self's need for recognition. The struggle for recognition, which the subject requires to affirm itself, results in the realisation that if we fully negate the other, we will have negated ourselves as well, since we will have no-one to recognise us. Thus, the self is required to relinquish its claim to absoluteness. The paradox of the self's attempts to establish herself as an independent entity and the necessity of recognising the other to be like herself in order to be recognised by her, creates a tension. The success of differentiation and identity depends on the subject's ability to unite two opposing tendencies, to achieve a balance between assertion and recognition. Patriarchal culture, Benjamin argues, has been unable to maintain this tension. Instead, the conflict within the self between dependence and independence is replaced by polarity. Assertion has been ascribed to masculinity, recognition of the other to femininity. The confrontation with an independent other, the continual exchange of influence, which Benjamin sees as "a real condition of development and change" has been replaced by domination and submission.

---

112 Midgley, 34.  
114 Benjamin, 12.
Domination emerges out of the subject’s refusal to accept his dependency on someone he cannot control. By subjugating the other, he forces the other to recognise him while supplying no recognition in return. The association of master with masculinity and slave with femininity arises in boys’ and girls’ different relationships to mother and father. The male child develops his gender and identity by denying his original identification with his mother and establishing his difference from her. The repudiation of the mother gives rise to an objectifying attitude; the boy can easily lose hold of his capacity for mutual recognition and this extends into erotic love, causing a co-extensive development of erotic domination. Similarly, the girl’s uninterrupted identification with her mother is an underlying cause of her submissive attitude. Since the mother is deprived of subjectivity, identification with her involves a loss of self. Benjamin is prepared to entertain the possibility that the breakdown of tension is “built-into” the psychic system, but contends that the recreation of tension and the renewal of mutual recognition must also be possible and that in an ideal world this restoration would preclude the fall into domination.

The conventional Heimat discourse, in which man figures as subservient to nature, does not cater for the human need, recognised by Benjamin, to realise one’s agency. While the men in Fasan feel powerless in the face of a hostile natural environment, they satisfy their desire for conquest through their domination of women. The depreciation of women which Benjamin claims continues to permeate adult culture emerges in Fasan in a conversation between Windisch and the nightwatchman in which they acknowledge a complete absence of recognition in their relationships with women: “‘Weiß Gott’, sagt Windisch, ‘wozu gibt es sie, die Frauen.’ Der Nachtwächter zuckt die Schultern: ‘Nicht für uns’, sagt er. ‘Nicht für mich, nicht für dich. Ich weiß nicht, für wen’” (9). The assertion of women’s essential uselessness for men is followed by a further devaluation when the nightwatchman characterises first his deceased wife, then Amalie and finally all women as deceitful: “‘Ich sag dir Windisch’, ruft der Nachtwächter, ‘die Frauen betrügen’” (10). The nightwatchman shouts out this last sentence to Windisch who has already started walking home; it rings out in the night and in the reader’s ears throughout the narrative.

---

115 Benjamin, 171.
116 For Benjamin, the devaluation of femininity is far from inevitable. Rather, it is one of culture’s pitfalls brought about by the domination of the oedipal construction of difference in our cultural representation of gender: “within the oedipal model, difference is constructed as polarity; it maintains the overevaluation of one side, the denigration of the other [...] once the boy has renewed access to women, the symbolic level on which they are depreciated can be counteracted. But the symbolic depreciation of women and their sexuality permeates adult culture, just as it did Freud’s own theory, which retained the oedipal boy’s phallocentric perception of women. All the evidence of women’s objectification testifies that the oedipal riddle - the repudiation of femininity - continues to bar the way between men and women.” Benjamin, 168.
The two men’s total incomprehension of the female sex introduces the theme of male domination. The comments made at the beginning of the story about women set the scene for its ensuing depiction and reflection of the postures of oppressor and oppressed in provincial society. When Windisch exercises his authority over his wife, the alienation between the couple escalates, affirming Benjamin’s insight that in the assertion of domination, the absence of the Other is at its most profound. When Windisch expresses his disgust at his wife’s act of self-gratification - his ironical “gnädige Frau” alluding to her actual moral dubiousness and the mention of her bladder an accusation of deceitfulness - his wife sobs so long and hard that he no longer recognises her. Her voice changes from the one he knows to one which is completely foreign to him: “Sie weinte kurz und leise mit der Stimme ihres Alters. Sie winunter dreimal mit der Stimme einer anderen Frau. Dann verstummte sie” (18). Windisch’s vocal degradation seems to push her further into an unknowable femininity, symbolised by the ‘Schlamm’ which seems to engulf her as she sleeps: “Windisch hörte, wie der Schlaf sie weit hinunterdrückte unter diesen Schlamm.” (18). Her breathing is empty and “fern von allen Dingen” (18) and her slimey finger symbolises her desire, which is destroyed by Windisch’s gaze and verbal reprimand. She withdraws her finger and does not know what to do with it, suddenly estranged from her desire. When she presses her legs together “bis Windisch nur noch ein einziges Bein und zwei Fußsohlen sehen konnte” (18), the repression of her unsanctioned sexuality seems complete.

The nightwatchman is a negative influence on Windisch in regard to his opinion of the opposite sex. Windisch is concerned that his daughter has lost her virginity and this knowledge drastically affects his relationship with her. He notices that she now has calves the size of melons and that when he seeks eye contact, a new presence is barring the way, preventing reciprocity: “ich kann ihr nicht mehr in die Augen sehen. Sie hat einen Schatten in den Augen” (9). The nightwatchman persuades him to abandon his efforts to look her in the eye, telling him that she will only deceive him and thereby seals the breakdown in relations between father and daughter: “Die Augen lügen’, sagt der Nachtwächter, ‘die Waden lügen nicht’” (9). From now on, Windisch is obsessed with finding evidence of his daughter’s fallenness. When she comes home with a present from Rudi, he notices “wie Amalie die Hüften wiegte” (25) and when he hears a man singing a song about sex (or rather, about men’s sexual fantasies), he thinks about her gait which seems to fit the nightwatchman’s description of the way a girl walks when she has lost her virginity. In shifting his gaze from her eyes to the rest of her body, Windisch’s gaze denies Amalie her individuality and turns her into a sexual object. She exists for him henceforth, not as
another subject with an independent centre, but as an object who mirrors his fears and fantasies.

Since his conversation with the nightwatchman, Windisch believes that he has discovered indisputable proof that Amalie is no longer a virgin. After nightwatchman has told him that women who are no longer innocent in sexual relations comport themselves in a particular way, he sees his daughter walking in exactly this manner. He thinks about it after masturbating to the Berlin song: “‘Amalie’, denkt Windisch, ‘stellt die Fußspitzen beim Gehen seitlich auf die Erde’” (39). When she leaves the house for her appointment with the policeman, he sees the tell-tale gait again. His initial awareness of the shape of his daughter’s calves and later obsession with her comportment demonstrate a hermeneutical practice of reading the body as a text that can provide evidence of the nature of her inner person, her moral being. Windisch makes the assumption that behaviour mirrors the inner being and may be used to judge the character of the individual and he also seeks his own signs and reads them as he desires. There is no other textual evidence other than Windisch’s own observations, encouraged by the nightwatchman, that Amalie does walk on the side of her toes. The fact that he perceives such a change tells us more about his desire than about Amalie’s sexual experience. Significantly, his first comments appear in a section which immediately precedes the episode of Amalie’s bitten breasts in which there is no doubt that Windisch’s judgment of his daughter’s manners is misguided. He is jumping to his own conclusion in his evaluation of Amalie’s gait as a sign of sexual depravity. He sees Amalie no longer walking straight. His visions of her leaning on the sides of her feet connote opened legs - his desire opens his daughter’s legs.

A conflation similar to Windisch’s equation of his sexually active grown daughter with the image of the greedy lustful girl in the song takes place during Amalie’s flirtation with Dietmar. Midgley has quite deservedly drawn attention to the fact that this narrative section is immediately preceded by the account of a gypsy girl who is given money to lift her skirt to the men in the pub. He fails, however, to recognise the significance of the narrative progression from shameless gypsy straight to Amalie’s submission to Dietmar - namely that the conflation of the two women is produced by a narrative consciousness which is very close to Windisch. Windisch’s mind (and the narrative) have already made this same kind of progression through association. When the song finishes, Windisch thinks of Amalie’s lost virginity and this is followed by a recollection of the bitten breasts episode. While this time, it is not Windisch who compares Amalie’s submission to Dietmar’s quickie in the alleyway with the gypsy woman in the pub (he cannot, since he did not witness either event), it is made by a semi-omnicient narrator who repeats his
character's gesture of situating his daughter in the proximity of salacious female figures, both imaginary and real.117

The impersonal narrative consciousness which jumps from the scene in the pub to the meeting between Amalie and Dietmar via an association between the publicly lifted skirt and Amalie reiterates Windisch's preoccupation with aligning his daughter with images of female promiscuity. The repetition of an associative response which was in the first instance clearly made by Windisch, is now universalised since it is carried out by an unspecified narrative voice. Windisch's tendency to see all women as sexually depraved becomes the discourse of the text. In the latter scene, Amalie is admittedly more active than she had been at age seven. She leans on her companion and "geht unter seinen Rock geschmiegt wie eine Schulter" (66). She is, in fact, now already acting out the identity which has been projected onto her. The desire she articulates in this scene is not her own, it is the desire of the other. She conforms to the image Windisch has of her, which is a projection of his desires and fears.

Amalie is a young women whose phase of sexual discovery intersects with a corrupt economy of sexual exchange. She is unable to articulate an identity independent of or outside the patriarchal myths of femininity which are projected onto her. The reader witnesses an escalation regarding both the moral inappropriateness and the frequency of her sexual submission to men. The psychological consequences of her final climactic prostitution are not overtly explored since this would detract from the story's perspective, which is held by Amalie's father. Windisch is anxious about his daughter's sexual activity since it exposes her to the desires of the village authorities. As indicated earlier, his dilemma consists of the impossible pairing of his firm wish to emigrate and his instinctive moral resolve not to achieve this by dishonest means. But his moral integrity proves assailable, his appeals to propriety and respectability are overridden by his weakness. His desire to escape Romania overtakes his moral impulses which for a long time prevent him from offering any kind of bribe except for sacks of flour. Yet while Windisch first becomes

---

117 The narrative progression of episodes is often determined by an association of similarity triggered by a random textual detail. This is not only the case when the narrative follows the progression of Windisch's thoughts, as in the progression from girl in the song to Amalie coming home with bitten nipples, but also when it is no longer clearly Windisch who is narrating. This happens, for example, when the long scene depicting the old lady Kroner's funeral which ends with a gravedigger left "barfuß und allein im Friedhof" (58) is followed by an episode which centres on a girl who finds herself alone in the waiting room of a railway station. The narrative jump is occasioned by a connection drawn between two figures who - in very different circumstances - suddenly find themselves alone. The reader thus becomes accustomed to the way that the text operates with comparisons which focus on a single detail, like the characters' solitude in the above example, and armed with this awareness, is then able - if s/he chooses - to recognise progressions motivated by Footnotes continued on the next page
angry with himself at the end of the story for losing hold of his moral footing, the text allows for a reading which interprets his final moral defeat as he contemplates his daughter’s prostitution as a moment of truth in which he confronts himself, not as a broken man, but rather as the man he always has been.

While the story points to some of the real difficulties of maintaining a moral standpoint in totalitarianism, it does not exculpate Windisch. The sexual subjugation of his daughter which he is outwardly bent on preventing is not a situation which is being imposed on him by some external power. Objectification and devaluation of women is not solely the attribute of a third person miscreant whose practices can be clearly differentiated from his own, rather the instances of this by pastor and policeman (and their colluders) represent a continuation by others of a discourse about women in which Windisch participates. The change in Windisch’s understanding of himself from a figure of strength (“Der Mensch ist [...] stärker als das Vieh”, 8) to defeated underdog (“Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt”, 84) indicates his Knowledges of his loss of moral integrity, but does not include any admittance of guilt. A careful examination of the text reveals a large degree of shared responsibility for the exploitation of women in rural Banat.

Our enduring sympathy for Windisch is strengthened by his moment of insight towards the end of the story. By admitting to himself his own part in his daughter’s degradation, Windisch does, notwithstanding the belatedness of the realisation and the extremity of the degradation, become a human who is implicated in social processes and caught up in them. After Amalie has left for her first appointment, he repeats the proverb of the story’s title, but is no longer able to utter the words with any conviction: “Was Windisch hört, ist nicht seine Stimme. Er spürt seinen nackten Mund. Und gesprochen haben die Wände” (84). The strangeness of his voice attests to his sense of failure to hold his moral ground and it registers a change of mood from confidence in his inner strength to resignation and a sense of powerlessness. At this stage, Windisch feels that he is the victim and that he has been forced to acquiesce in the prostitution of his daughter. Feeling sorry for himself and dreading the loss of face which appears to be his main consideration (his sense of the shame completely overrides any concern for his daughter’s welfare), he refuses to go to church.

Yet as Windisch continues to dwell on his wounded pride and the shame his daughter has caused him, another event produces a further change in his attitude. When he sees the other villagers emerging from church, he begins to reflect on the fact that Amalie has not more subtle comparisons, such as that between the gypsy girl’s and Amalie’s raised skirts in which the latter is only implied.
come home and while he tries to tell himself that she has probably just gone into town ("Immer ist sie in der Stadt", 84), his thoughts quickly turn to her appointment with the policeman. In his frustration, he starts to drink and the burning "bullet" of alcohol (the section is entitled 'Die brennende Kugel') prompts a vision in which he realises his own guilt. When he looks in the mirror he sees his own face in the policeman's uniform. In his inebriated state, his identification with Amalie's oppressor is an admission of his own dominating and degrading behaviour:


Twice the word 'superior' emphasises the power which Windisch, dressed as a figure of authority, now sees himself wielding rather than being at the mercy of. The policeman and he conflate into a figure with one single intention. Their words, spoken in unison, mock all his attempts to act ethically and the policeman's wet lips is an unpalatable reminder of their joint sexual persecution. Windisch's identification with the policeman reveals the hypocrisy of his perceived victimisation and, robbed of his clear conscience, he lashes out with his fist, shattering both the mirror and the vision.

One of the main reasons for the gripping and shocking effect this story has on the reader is its coupling of the Heimat genre with an economy of sexual domination and submission. Müller uncovers an ironic and tragic social reality of pretence; a community which defines itself through the calibre of its women ("Die schlechteste Schwäbin’, hat der Kürschner gesagt, ‘ist immer noch mehr wert, als die beste Deutsche von dort.’”, 42), yet in which the men, despising and fearing women's sexuality, still their anxiety through domination. Women in Fasan are simultaneously an original source of goodness, a threat and a desired object. By privileging the male voice, the narrative technique enables the reader unfiltered access to the men's fear of women, which often goes unacknowledged in depictions of male domination.

Submission and Desire in Fasan

Amalie's apparent willingness to make her body available to men's desires reflects Benjamin's belief that women's missing desire often returns in the form of masochism. The father's withdrawal pushes the girl back to her mother and her aspirations for
independence turn inward. Windisch certainly repells his daughter at the first sign of her femininity with his assertion that she will bring shame to the family and reiterates this in his obsessive denunciations of her on account of her purportedly lost virginity. Amalie enjoys a closer relationship to her mother than to her father. Her mother understands and shares her admiration for the vase she ardently wishes to possess, licks the salty water from her ornamental tear - which repulses Windisch - and helps her into a pink petticoat before she appears before the policeman and pastor. Amalie is also seen to be stepping into her mother’s shoes when she agrees to present herself as the sexual bribe; she takes the place of her mother who is too old for the job.

Amalie’s prostitution is difficult to interpret since we discover very little about her own attitude towards the act or her feelings afterwards. This is partly because we mainly follow Windisch’s perceptions and he is occupied with the shame it brings on him rather than the pain it might be causing his daughter. However, the incident is problematic for another reason. While her experience obviously fills her with revolt - afterwards she feels “ein Stück Glut” (102) in her forehead and when she looks out the window, the apple tree has become a grave: “Im Apfelbaum hängt ein Schatten. Er ist schwarz und aufgewühlt. Der Schatten ist ein Grab” (104) - she also complies with her deed with no protestation. The mutual participation of mother and daughter in Amalie’s preparations for her appointment with the policeman creates a symbiosis of the two figures and seals Amalie’s identification with her mother’s own earlier war-time prostitution.

A naive feminist reading of this text would posit Windisch as the powerful father who degrades his daughter by deeming her a sex maniac and a shame to the family, and Amalie as the suffering oppressed or colonised other. Yet, such a reading would ignore the fact that Amalie does not rebel or undertake anything to assuage her suffering. The tearfulness of the young seven-year-old gives way to toleration (of Dietmar) and willingness (in the case of the policeman and the pastor). Hegel taught us that power cannot just be repressive, otherwise we would not obey it. Power also produces things - in Foucault’s view it induces pleasure and forms knowledge. Benjamin draws on this insight to challenge Freud’s repression hypothesis: we do not repress our desire, she says, our desire is formed by and through domination. She writes:

The concept of repression cannot grasp that power holds good not by denying our desire but by forming it, converting it into a willing retainer, its servant or representative. It cannot grasp domination as a system that transforms all parts of the psyche. Only when we realise that power
The narrative of *Fasan* refuses to privilege the perceptions of the women who suffer. This allays easy reader sympathy for the victim and allows us instead to consider the possibility of how the women use their submission as a means to experience desire and participate in their own suffering.

In its treatment of Amalie, the text problematises the position of women as receptors for men's desire. Amalie is not a suffering victim, or at least she is not *only* that. She also acquiesces to her own subjugation and derives pleasure through identification with the feminine figures of men's desire. Her early sexual abuse at the hands of her playmate Rudi is the first instance of a sexual oppression which repeatedly objectifies her and gradually turns her into an embodiment of male desire. Yet, the experience also produces desire. Her preoccupation with a freestanding vase she has seen in a shop window illustrates her acceptance of the identity projected onto her of tempting sexual object. The vase depicts a dancer in a white lace dress. Not only is the vase an image of the empty receptacle which Amalie herself has become, but her identification with the figure painted on its surface recreates her first experience of male domination as object of Rudi's fantasies of power. On that occasion, Rudi had placed Amalie in a barrel tipped on its side and surrounded it with pieces of glass, signifying her as an object to be bought with precious gifts: “Rudi hatte die Rocktasche voller bunter Glasscherben. Er legte die Scherben um den Rand des Fasses. Die Scherben schimmerten. Amalie setzte sich auf dem Boden des Fasses” (40). Glass figures prominently as a commodity of exchange in the story. Rudi makes presents of glass objects he obtains from the factory to an official from the security bureau who in turn helps the family to emigrate. These bribes range from being harmless to ethically dubious when it becomes clear that the numerous gifts Amalie brings home from the town are not, as she claims, from her affectionate pupils. When she comes home at the weekends, she brings a bag full of crystal with her and soon the cupboards are full of it. When she surrounds herself with glass objects, she is not expressing a desire of her own, but rather submitting to Rudi's desire and to that of the men who presumably bestow upon her such rewards. This interpretation is strengthened by the narrative form which places the story of Rudi's preoccupation ahead of Amalie's. In the section entitled “Die Manschettenknöpfe”, we learn about Rudi's job in the glass factory and are told he once brought a whole suitcase full of glass home: “Die Ohren, die Lippen, die Augen, die Finger, die Zehen aus Glas brachte Rudi in einem Koffer nach Hause. Er legte sie auf den

118 Benjamin, 4.
Fufiboden. Er legte sie in Reihen und Kreise. Er schaute sie an" (45). Dietmar's sexual conquest of Amalie also occurs immediately after she has shown him the vase in the shop window. By collecting glass and idealising an erotic figure on a glass vase, Amalie participates in and reproduces her subjugation. Her attraction to crystal is intertwined with her submission to the sexual demands of men, however the sexuality intimated by the image of the vase remains in excess of being simply a projection of their desire - Dietmar to whom she shows the vase as they walk through town has only sexual conquest on his mind and is not at all receptive to her fascination. The petticoat Amalie later wears for her appointment with the policeman and which she dons in order to secure a successful business transaction has white lace like the dancer's dress on the vase, so that for a moment there is a conflation of Amalie as exchange commodity and the image of the exotic other woman she longs to be.

The image of the vase which reaches up to Amalie's hips is more ambivalent than is suggested by this initial reading: her attraction to this object also captures an aspect intrinsic to Heimat, yet often occluded in its representations - 'Fernweh'. Heimat as self/same depends on an opposed notion of the other or the exotic and contains within itself its negative and other. The other is requisite for defining what the Heimat is not. This means that as well as offering security, warmth and inclusion, Heimat stops people from leaving and so produces 'Fernweh' (longing for distant places). Amalie's desire for the vase combines the composite figure of Heimat and its other, representing her attraction to the distant and exotic. A woman in a lace dress on television later captures the attention of Amalie and her mother. She is standing in front of the sea and a seagull which swoops down one side of the screen embodies the exotic which for a moment becomes so tangible that it bursts into the living room of the Heimat: "Eine Möwe fliegt übers Wasser. Sie fliegt knapp am Bildschirmrand vorbei. Sie stößt mit der Flügelspitze ins Zimmer" (92). The exoticism of the sea coast captivates Amalie's mother so much that instead of bread rolls, she puts "Sandkipfel" on the table for supper. Although the woman in the lace dress is singing about Romanian girls, her appearance and the coastal landscape come from a distant world far away from and in stark contrast to the Heimat.

Furthermore, 'Fernweh' and unfulfilled female sexuality are coextensive in the story. The men do not feel constrained by the Heimat and do not display the same wanderlust as the women. Although Rudi works in the glass factory in the mountains for three years, his father only visits him there once. The impersonal narrator stresses that this is infrequent: "Der Kürschner fuhr in diesen drei Jahren ein einziges Mal zu seinem Sohn" (20). And although he had planned to stay away a week, he returns after just three days. The furrier admits the attraction of the foreign women away from home, but unlike the longing of
Amalie and her mother for different sexual relations, it does not persist once he is back home. His desires are fulfilled by the womenfolk of the Heimat. The allure of the seagull and of the luxury of a freestanding vase are for both Amalie and her mother inseparable from images of female eroticism which promise something beyond their experience and their yearning is an expression of sexual unfulfilment. Amalie confirms that the lace dress of the woman on television which is “bestimmt nicht aus Rumänien” (92) is just like the dress worn by the dancer on the vase. The cavernous shape of the vase with its inner depths and open form alludes to the female imaginary theorised by Luce Irigaray which, based on the morphology of the female body, could constitute the basis for a female symbolic, that is, a language in which women could articulate their own perspective.119 Thus the vase represents in the story both Amalie’s desire as a correlate of the desire of men and, additionally, an excess female sexuality suppressed by the male economy of the Heimat. Her refusal to let her father give her money to buy the vase and insistence that she pay for it herself further indicates that for her, the vase has a status quite different to the other glass objects she accepts as gifts.

Passages in the story which focalise the perspective of the female characters are few and the kind of sexuality the women sense is denied them is articulated in vague terms only. As Karin Bauer has shown, the inaccessibility of the female perspective in Fasan reproduces the condition of its subordination and repression by the male voice. But Müller does not simplistically blame the men for oppression and sympathise with the oppressed. Rather, she explores the origins of a complicity in the reproduction of the roles of male subject and dominated other in which both sides take part. The engagement of Windisch as the central consciousness in the text allows her to explore with some specificity the other side of the power equation, which can become quite schematised in narratives which concentrate on the portrayal of oppressed women. Crucially, this means that this story also shows the negative effects of domination to both parties. Windisch, who hits his wife to silence her accusations and, scared of his wife’s desire and his daughter’s rapidly developing sexuality, controls his anxiety by reducing them both to whores, is discontented and unfulfilled. In her equally sympathetic/critical treatment of both oppressor and oppressed, Müller refrains from assigning blame. Neither does she claim to hold any answers to domination. While she could be and has been criticised on account of her failure to envisage social betterment and to conceptualise improvements in both relations between the sexes and to our troublesome psychological connections to a land of origin, she does, I argue, carry out the more thankless task of providing the groundwork for such revisions.

Heimat Renounced?

Despite all harsh indictments discussed above which the story makes in relation to provincial communities, a return to and recuperation of Heimat is discernible. A visit made by Windisch and his family back to the village as an epilogue to the story makes evident that the materialistic gains of life in the West have provided little compensation for the loss of an original home to which they continue to feel part of despite their chosen exile. Instead of confirming that he has done the right thing by leaving, a tear on Windisch’s cheek portrays him filled with sadness and remorse. Objectively, some things have changed, others have remained as they were: the rut in the road is still there as is the owl which brings death to the village elders. There is now a greater intermixing of Romanians and Germans, represented by the nightwatchman’s new wife, a Romanian milkmaid he obviously adores. The most vital change has occurred in Windisch’s perception. When he left the village, he viewed the church as a corrupt institution: this was epitomised in the pastor’s exploitation of his power and symbolised by Windisch’s visions of Saint Antonius locked up behind closed doors with a passport instead of a prayer book in his hands. Now on his return, the church appears to function as normal: “Die Vorbeterin geht mit dem dicken Gesangbuch langsam durch die Kirchentür. Sie trägt das Buch des heiligen Antonius” (111). This change in Windisch’s view is clearly connected with his recent nostalgia. It illustrates the highly subjective and personal nature of feelings both for and against the Heimat and the impossibility of making an objective assessment of its value.
Chapter Three: Héritier - A Youth in Totalitarianism

In Müller’s first longer novel, *Héritier*, describes the political hopes and ventures of four students and is set in the city. The provincial homes of the protagonists constitute a second important setting of the novel meaning that *Heimat* remains topical to their struggles, whether as something which thwarts their efforts at political action or as a welcome space of respite from the cruelty of the city.

*Héritier* begins as a story of political resistance to an inhuman regime and develops into an account of failure, bitterness and grief. The narrator and her friends - Edgar, Kurt and Georg - meet and form a close friendship through their common desire to offer resistance to Ceauşescu’s politics. Each engage in their own way in forms of opposition to the socialist politics in their country: Edgar and Georg write subversive poems, Kurt records the atrocities of daily life on film and sends the photographs to the West; the narrator resolves to keep alive the memory of one of the victims of the regime, her former dormmate, Lola. The narrator’s association with her three student companions dates back to an incident which incites their common outrage: her dormmate commits suicide and the authorities contrive the circumstances to serve their own political aims. The concentration of early narrative sequences on Lola points to her centrality despite the fact that she quickly disappears from the story. She hangs herself in her college dormitory when she becomes pregnant to the gym instructor and he threatens to report her to the Party (of which she was at the time an enthusiastic member). While the Party authorities defame her in front of the student corpus as an unworthy citizen, the friends agree that Lola’s case was one of murder; from now on they refer to the guards who carry out Party orders as “die, die Friedhöfe machen” (58). Their efforts at resistance are aimed at igniting the hatred of these men who are responsible for Lola’s death: “Und ich dachte mir, daß alles etwas nützt, was denen schadet, die Friedhöfe machen. Daß Edgar, Kurt und Georg, weil sie Gedichte schreiben, Bilder machen und hie und da ein Lied summen, Haß anzünden in denen, die Friedhöfe machen” (57-58). Lola’s fate as a victim of political terrorisation thus provides some of the initial motivation for the friends’ resistance.

However, the injustices done to Lola after her death do more than just inspire the friends to action - they also warn them of its likely consequences. It is crucial that the above reference, as every other, to the friends’ political activities, is narrated from a distance which imposes judgement. In this instance the judgement remains an implicit one:

---

120 Unless otherwise indicated, all page references in this chapter refer to this text.
‘I thought (but I was wrong). Herztier is neither a text about heroism nor, as has been suggested, a testimony of suffering. A reading of Herztier as a narrative which illuminates the terrors of dictatorship overemphasises a small section of the book and wrecks the demand that the text be read from the perspective of human failure. The resistance for which the friends suffer continual surveillance and sanctions to their freedom is never presented in the text with any sustained viability. It is not so much a survival story, that is, a testimony, but rather a text which questions. The future perspective with which the story starts knows of the ultimate failure of the friends and does not conceal this knowledge. The narrator looks back, not merely to pass on, but to re-examine her doubts about the usefulness of political action and is disheartened at her own conclusions.

The novel begins and ends with a framework narrative. This is kept largely distinct from the main narrative level, in which the narrator recounts events in chronological order and describes with immediacy her feelings and thoughts as they were at the time. The framework, however, makes us aware from the outset of a future time from which the story is being told and it provides the reader with advance information about the story’s ending as well as introducing an element of retrospective judgment. Since Edgar and the narrator are the only participants in the frame, we already know, or can guess, that Georg and Kurt do not survive. In addition to the main and future narrative, further narrative levels are introduced. Thus, the main narrative is interspersed with episodes from the life of a child, which while related in the present tense, are most readily interpretable as memories from the narrator’s childhood. And towards the end of the novel, the narrator jumps ahead in the chronology to narrate the loss of her friend Tereza before returning to the main chronology.

In this complexity of relationship between the narrative levels that form the text is a direct reflection of the unrecorded tensions between aspiration and disappointment, resistance and distanation, and friendship and resentment. It is the narrator’s engagement with these themes that I shall now proceed to analyse. In section one in this chapter I outline the initial motivations and aims behind the dissidence of the protagonists as well as the strategies they develop to protect themselves and to facilitate the fulfilment of their goals. I then trace the onset of failure and resignation, paying as I do so continued attention

---

122 I agree with Driver Eddy’s interpretation of this forward leap in the narration as a disruption which reflects the extreme degree to which Tereza’s death continues to affect the narrator. She writes: “This [Tereza’s death] is a tender spot in the novel, the point of the narrator’s greatest vulnerability. As such, it bursts into the middle of the narrative, disrupting the narrator’s chronological reconstruction of her adult life in Romania.” Driver Eddy, 64-65.
to the interpretative implications of the technique of framed and retrospective narrative employed in *Herztier*. This allows me to demonstrate that what the narrative contests is the dividing line between the categories of dissidence and complicity.

The second section of the chapter incorporates the theme of *Heimat* into the plot of resistance/failure. Here I discuss how the narrative of failure extends to the friends' endeavours to escape the influence of the provinces and to free themselves from dependency on their parents. While *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt* confronts the desire to leave the *Heimat* and the trials of the period of waiting which precede departure, *Herztier* concentrates on the lives of four young people once they have left home and on the task of psychological leave-taking which continues to pose challenges after the physical separation. While none of the four protagonists refers to their parental homes explicitly as *Heimat*, their emancipatory project is directed at a rural lifestyle as well as at maternal dependency, aspects I have already determined as attributes of the *Heimat* constellation. The differences between city and country life addressed in *Herztier* represent a new way of negotiating an already familiar theme in Müller's work. In this second section, I am interested in the reciprocal play of influence between dissidence and attitudes towards the *Heimat*. I show how the protagonists' political activism reflects a dedication to practising the freedom of thought and expression which is repressed within the traditional coercive way of life they have experienced in the provinces.

Next, I return to the reasons for the onset of resignation in the friends' attitude. In this section, I will bring together the elements of the previous discussions and examine more closely why the friends fail and why they resign themselves to the inevitability of failure. Section four is dedicated to an examination of the role of fear in the novel, which Müller depicts as a source of salvation for those of her characters who do not lose it. Finally, I address the issue of adolescence. In this section, I examine the protagonists' idealism in *Herztier* as a characteristic adolescent phenomenon and link the anti-*Heimat* theme with its goal of becoming something better and different to adolescent moral striving.

**Resistance**

The narrator's personal resistance effort consists of holding on to the memory of Lola and in ensuring that she is not forgotten. Lola's fate both fascinates and affects her. However, the reason she feels compelled to keep her memory alive is political rather than personal; it

---

122 Cf. 12 and 36.
concerns the fact that the others want to forget her in the interests of their own safety. After the suicide, the narrator tries to talk about Lola with the other girls in her dormitory and she tries once more later with Tereza. However, only Edgar, Kurt and Georg express and share her interest. Although they had all lived in the same room, the other girls quickly forget Lola because they recognise that this will bring them safety and peace of mind: "Ich wollte über Lola reden, und die Mädchen im Viereck sagten, ich sollte endlich schweigen. Sie hatten begriffen, daß ohne Lola der Kopf leichter war" (42). Tereza, a friend from the factory where the narrator later works, is likewise eager to avoid the subject. When the narrator mentions Lola, she stops swearing and suddenly becomes serious as though reminded of something she would rather forget. As if to ensure the topic is not brought up again and to allay any suspicion of personal involvement, she stresses that she only knows and did as much as everyone else: "Tereza zerriß die Himmelfahrten. Ich war auch in der großen Aula, sagte Tereza, wir mußten alle hin" (117). The girls' speedy removal of all traces of Lola from their environment and their easy elimination of her from their minds ("Sie hatten vor Lolas Blättern keine Angst", 42) frightens the narrator. She realises that what is occurring is the suppression of the value and regard for another human life. It impresses upon her the inhumanities of totalitarianism and encourages her to do what the others dare not to - to think about and remember Lola: "Ich wollte Lolas Heft im Kopf behalten" (42).

Thus while the story of Lola is interrupted by her untimely death, her story continues for a time in the form of the narrator's memories and these constitute another kind of retrospective narration. Only some of Lola's portrait consists of directly reported observations; the rest is made up of the narrator's memory. The reader is dependent on the 'additional' retrospective information contained in the memories in order to gain a reasonably full impression of Lola, since the narrator's earlier 'direct' observations were tainted by her irritating blindness in respect of her dormmate. Only in retrospect does the narrator come to an understanding. As with the other kinds of retrospection in the text, the additions to Lola's portrait function in the novel as a way to highlight understanding as an ongoing process.

Remembering Lola proves to be a difficult task. When her diary disappears from the narrator's locked suitcase two days after the suicide, the only trace which remains of her is the narrator's memory from two days of reading and her own prior observations. She soon recognises what she had seen of Lola makes a poor reconstruction of how Lola actually was. When Lola was alive the narrator had been irritated by her failure to understand her ("Diese Blindheit quälte mich", 24). Now, as she repeats her observations of Lola's activities to her friends, they look at her as if they are waiting to hear the real story: "Edgar
Lola further influences the lives of the friends in that the memory of her suffering prompts them to develop strategies of self-protection. They recognise in her goals and motivations a parallel impulse to their own desire to be different, which means that they can identify with her to some extent and conceive of her fate in terms of a warning. Lola did not reject provincial life to the extent that the friends do, but she did strive for an improvement in her circumstances. She never doubted that she would return to her village, yet at the same time she recognised the oppression which particular kinds of rural existences create and vowed to insure that her life would be different: „nie wieder Schafe, schreibt Lola, nie wieder Melone, nur Maulbeerbäume, denn Blätter haben wir alle“ (11). Similarly, the four friends are determined to become something better than the “Proletariat der Blechschafe und Holzmelonen” (51) they see around them - villagers, that is, who come to the city to seek an improvement in their circumstances but retain a provincial mentality.

Lola had wanted to improve her social standing in her village by marrying an educated man from the city; the friends believe they can attain moral superiority by reading forbidden books from the West. The parallel between them is constituted by a mutually strong spirit of rebellion, but also by the commonly felt weight of social pressures to renounce their differences. For Lola and later for the four friends, initial determination inspired by youth becomes increasingly difficult to maintain. Lola’s suicide is motivated by an event which renders hopeless the goal she had hoped to achieve through her affair with a man in a white shirt. Instead of an offer of marriage, she was faced with rejection and pregnancy. The friends’ observation of her failure to improve her social standing pre-empts their own failures, while the degree to which this parallel is reflected and acknowledged by narrator and reader is subject to fluctuation; this creates an openness in the text which constitutes one of its strengths.
Lola both inspires the narrator to resistance and prompts the friends to develop strategies for survival in the totalitarian regime. Her misfortune makes the friends keenly aware of their own life-threatening situation. Because they want to survive and because they, contrary to Lola, believe in a third way beyond assimilation or suicide, they develop a strategy based on the avoidance of what they understand as Lola’s mistake. Lola made herself vulnerable to persecution through her affairs. When her activities are exposed and she is turned in to the authorities by her lover, she becomes the victim of the double morality of a patriarchal regime which makes women particularly susceptible to persecution on the grounds of their putative sexual promiscuity. The gym instructor emerges from the affair unscathed since he has at his disposal his higher social status but also his confidence that as a man, he will not be considered the one at fault. This enables him to defame Lola successfully. Yet, the friends observe, such victimisation can only happen if there is someone who has a motive to renounce you. The friends see that there is a lesson to be learned from Lola’s fate concerning the danger of intimate relationships.

To avoid the danger they perceive, the friends develop a tactic of mistrust. The emotional cost of withholding trust is one of the novel’s most compelling themes. In Müller’s persuasive treatment of the theme of friendship, the coextensiveness of a heightened need for companionship and the danger of bestowing trust constitutes one of the cruellest realities of the totalitarian state. In totalitarianism, personal involvement with another person implicates you in their activities and vice versa. If you engage in non-sanctioned activities, not only you, but all those involved with you become open to attack, which could either cause them suffering or induce them to switch sides. Lola became a victim of the second scenario and the rejection of other relationships apart from their own highly controlled friendship is the friends’ way against preventing the same thing from happening to them. Edgar, Kurt and Georg warn the narrator of getting involved with the other girls in her dormitory and until their hopes are entirely dispelled, all of the four avoid sexual relationships. The dangers of yielding to affection impress themselves on the narrator on a number of occasions and the conscious renunciation of love is an important survival strategy for all four friends, facilitating a degree of personal freedom by minimising the possibility of being blackmailed.

The friends’ wariness of becoming too reliant upon one another is based on their consciousness of a different, albeit related danger. One of the terrorisation techniques of Ceaușescu’s regime, aimed at forcing troublemakers into submission, was to persecute

---

124 The theme of sexual discrimination as persecution is treated by Müller in depth in her novel *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet.* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1997).
friends and relatives. The friends know that it is much more painful to them when people they love are tormented than when they themselves are. Suffering induced from anxiety, not for yourself, but for those who are important to you, is particularly difficult to bear. The authorities use this knowledge to their best advantage. They send men to ransack the homes of the friends’ parents with seemingly calculated results: later the children receive letters from their distraught mothers: “Nach jeder Durchsuchung schicken die Mütter Briefe mit ihren Krankheiten. [...] Edgars Vater schrieb an den Rand: Du kränkest deine Mutter zu Tode” (76). It is also painful to the narrator to learn of the hearings to which her friends are subjected, all the more since they are made to suffer much more violence than she is. The experiences of suffering from another’s pain make the friends aware of the precarious balance their friendship has to maintain between interest and indifference. In that they fulfil with their trust and reliance on one another a basic human need, they also make themselves vulnerable. This is a further reason why the friends do not want to form any more attachments than they can help; the fewer friends they have, the fewer the targets they have through which the authorities can hurt them and force them to back down. This is the warning contained within the poem by Gellu Naum that becomes the friends’ motto:125

jeder hatte einen Freund in jedem Stückchen Wolke  
so ist das halt mit Freunden wo die Welt voll Schrecken ist  
auch meine Mutter sagte das ist ganz normal  
Freunde kommen nicht in Frage  
denk an seriöse Dinge

In the poem it is the good advice of a mother not to make too many friends in times of terror, because you will be the one to suffer when they are dead (that is, in the clouds). The poem recommends us to prioritise our own personal well-being and self-interest and possesses a cold-heartedness which the friends strive to maintain. The message contained within it reverberates at key points in the narrative as the narrator endeavours to abide by its message - she says it to herself when she is with the girls in her dormitory to prevent herself from developing any feelings for them: “um mich dran zu halten, wenn ich mit den Mädchen im Viereck sein mußte” (87). She has greater difficulty rejecting friendships than Kurt, Georg and Edgar. She is unable to recite the poem out loud in front of them and attaches considerable importance to its message and its applicability to her own life: “Das Gedicht versteckte seine lachende Kälte. [...] Aber diese lachende Kälte täglich zu halten war schwer. Vielleicht mußte das Gedicht deshalb so oft gesagt werden” (87). Like their own friendship with one another, the poem both helps the four friends and gives their

125 The poem is by Gellu Naum and appears in German translation in the forepiece to the novel.
oppressors something to work with. Its reference to times of terror gives Pjele, who is responsible for their case, reason to denounce them as opponents of socialism and the poem becomes the focus of the numerous hearings they are called to. Thus, the poem becomes both a kind of spiritual talisman containing their survival strategy and part of their resistance against state ideology. Rebelling against literary censorship is one of the friends’ main ways of providing resistance to the regime. They sing forbidden songs in public places and smuggle books into the country from West Germany.

The narrator’s name for the dangerous love of the poem is ‘angebundene Liebe’. This is an expression which comes from a narrative level of the child which recalls the occasions when a mother ties the child to a chair. The episodes of the child are distinctly different to the rest of the story which is anchored in a realistic plot. They have a surreal, dreamlike quality supported by an unspecificity of the narrative consciousness (that is, we are unsure about the identity of the child narrator) and contain the same motif of the poem of injury through love. Not only does the mother restrain the child, she cuts off its fingers and, in the imagination of the injured child, she even consumes these secretly in the garden: “Das Kind weiß: Die Mutter muß in ihrer angebundenen Liebe die Hände zerschneiden. Sie muß die abgeschnittenen Finger in die Tasche ihres Hauskleids stecken und in den Hof gehen, als wären die Finger zum Wegwerfen. Sie muß in den Hof, wo sie keiner mehr sieht, die Finger des Kindes essen” (14-15).

The mother’s love is injurious and obsessive. It transcends ethical considerations, such as the taboo of cannibalism: “sie liebt es wie eine Sucht und kann sich nicht halten” (14). The child’s father displays similarly harmful emotions. His portrayal contains murderous overtones: “der Vater liebt es wie eine Sucht. Daß er sich in seiner Liebe nicht halten kann. Daß er, der Friedhöfe gemacht hat, dem Kind den Tod wünscht” (22). The narrative level of the child contains a commentary on the negative effects of love, which compliment the theme of love and friendship as it appears in the main narrative level.

Love appears wholly undesirable, even deadly. Tereza’s doctor boyfriend refuses to treat her - as it turns out, terminal - complaint out of love; Lola’s search for love ends in suicide; the narrator considers it safe to sleep with a colleague because he does not mention love: “Von Liebe sprach er nie. Er dachte an Wasser und sagte, ich sei ein Strohhalm für ihn” (170). Towards the end of Herztier, the parallel between love and destruction reaches a new climax when the narrator reflects on the difference between loving someone and being an accessory to their death: “Weshalb und wann und wie geht angebundene Liebe ins Mordrevier” (162). No question mark follows the accumulation of interrogatives; the thought is an assertion - when love becomes dependency it damages the loved-one. At this point the narrator looks back at herself as she was at the time she is narrating and surveys
the damage caused by her relationships of love. The loss of faith which has taken place since the narrated time is absolute; it seems to her now from her future perspective (that is, from the time of narrating) as if love deceives itself: "Mir ist, als wäre dieses Wort zu sich selber nicht ehrlich" (163). The preceding quotations are reactions to Tereza's betrayal which I discuss in section four. When Tereza dies, the narrator changes her views and concedes the indispensability of love. While this allows her to cope with her conflicting emotions surrounding her lost friend, it remains an unconvincing epilogue to the theme of love in the story. The attempt to stage a reconciliation with love is insufficient to dispel the negative appraisal of love in the novel, which begins as a survival strategy and is confirmed through the experience of betrayal.

Resistance and Heimat

Beyond their political dissidence and their resolve to monitor their relationships, the friendship between the four students is based on a mutual desire for self-betterment which relates specifically to their provincial backgrounds. Their common experience of childhood in German-speaking provincial Romania strengthens the basis of their friendship and provides the thematic springboard from dissidence to the second source of their discontent which links Herztier to Müller's earlier works: the oppressions and restrictions of provincial existence. The friends scrutinise their Heimat above all as a mentality which is for them inseparable from a rural lifestyle and which is characterised in terms of a particular status it assigns to nature. The world view which is dominant in the provinces, they observe, is characterised by fatalism and subservience to nature. It considers the natural world as the manifestation of a higher authority: the narrator remembers how, where she comes from, reasons are sought in nature rather than in one's own mind: "Als ich ein Kind war, wußten die Namen der Pflanzen für das, was ich tat, einen Grund" (90). The friends' rejection of this mentality is ethically motivated by a wish for self-improvement. Their goal is to free themselves from the memory of the provinces and of their provincial identity which they believe fosters coercion and constraint. This is symbolised in the image of the child tied to the chair which appears in the memory narrative particularly throughout the first half of the novel and in the paralysis of one of the guards in the city: "Vielleicht lähmte den Wächter [...] die Spur der Kindheit. Vielleicht stand ein Dorf in seinem Schädel" (120).

The friends have their own ideas as to how their freedom can be achieved and of what it might consist. Physical removal, they observe, has not sufficed. The hold which the memories of provincial life continues to have on those who move to the city, even after
many years, is evoked in a dream-like episode at the beginning of the novel. The narrator finds herself in a courtyard where an old man is sitting under a mulberry tree. A flash of insight, described as a thread of light connecting the treetop with the man's face, allows her to see into his past when he left the land and carried a mulberry tree in a sack with him to the city. The loneliness in the man's eyes makes her shiver. The courtyard with the mulberry tree is a space of nostalgia and the narrator as she relates the dream stresses her anxiety about being there. As if needing to prove to herself that she will not engage in such remembrance of the past, she explains that she was there by chance ("für mich selber unerwartet", 10) and that she was only looking: "Ich tat nicht mehr als das, was ich sah" (10).

To free themselves from the 'hold' of the provinces, the friends dedicate themselves to a conscious change in lifestyle and mentality. The parents' efforts to achieve autonomy are seen to be thwarted by their proximity to nature. The father who appears with the child at the beginning of the story is occupied in a constant battle against powerful, vigorous plants. With his persistent hacking in the garden ("Ein Vater hackt den Sommer im Garten", 21), he is able to secure a small autonomous space, while the fight to maintain it is an ongoing one. His fear and ultimate deep respect for nature prevents him from controlling its forces any more than is necessary for his own survival. After the narrator's father dies, her mother likewise senses the seemingly unassailable power of nature's profusion ("Die Disteln nehmen überhand", 151). Nature seems to her to be wholly hostile and defiant in its withholding of its usefulness: "Der Mohn fällt aus, sagte sie, der Mais bleibt klein, die Pflaumen sind schon längst geschrumpelt" (152).

The friends reject the 'village' mentality with its consciousness of an ever-present and potentially destructive nature. This attitude is embodied above all in the world view of the friends' fathers who directly confront it, and is the focus of the narrator's description of her father at the beginning of the novel. While we understand the father in this passage to be the narrator's, he is introduced with some ambiguity: he is 'a father':¹²⁶ this narrative gesture extends the field of reference beyond personal testimony to encompass Romanian provincial life in general. The actions of 'a father' are thus presented as prototypical for many other such fathers. These are driven above all by a fear and reverence for nature which is understood as an unquestionable higher authority. In the above scene, he passes his fearful attitude on to his daughter, who until now had felt an instinctive sympathy with nature and had hoped that the plants would survive the father's axe. He warns her not to

¹²⁶ A similar narrative strategy is used in respect of the child, who also appears here alongside the father. Cf. my discussion of ambiguity in the child memory narrative, 94.

This reverential attitude towards nature contains a number of parallels to Horkheimer and Adorno's 'mythical' thinking, which in their dialectical theory both precedes enlightenment and constitutes its precondition. Myth is marked by fear of nature and a sense of the natural world as sacred. In the mythic phase, humans perform rituals of assimilation and imitation (referred to as mimesis) to express their close connection to nature. The oneness with nature enacted through mimesis is reflected in the portrayal of the narrator's mother who embodies her surroundings: "meine Mutter war Bäuerin und hatte vom Feld etwas Verhärtes an sich" (53). Fear of nature which lies at the heart of mythic ritual emerges in Herztier in superstitions such as the belief that swallowing the stones of green plums will cause deadly fever or Kurt's father's preference for green clothes: "Mein Vater ist abergläubisch, meine Mutter näht ihm immer grüne Jacken. Wer das Grüne meidet, den begräbt der Wald" (53). Such instances of a mythical mentality leave behind indelible traces in the narrator's thinking despite all insistent avowals to be different. When she sees a guard eating plums, she recalls her father's words of warning and the intrusion of this superstition into her thoughts distances her for a moment from her friends: "Auch Edgar, Kurt und Georg aßen als Kinder grüne Pflaumen. Ihnen war kein Pflaumenbild im Kopf geblieben, weil kein Vater sie beim Essen störte. Sie lachten mich aus, wenn ich sagte: Man stirbt und niemand kann helfen, vom hellen Fieber brennt die von innen das Herz aus" (60-61).

In rebellion against the fatalistic attitude and 'mythical thinking' of their parents, the friends in Herztier believe that they can achieve freedom through thought and discussion. Because they are determined to spite their own fears, the city opens up new possibilities. It not only brings them together, permitting their conversations and discussions to unfold and starting a subversive and therefore dangerous friendship, its sheer size also guarantees that there will be someone or somewhere secure for their subversive material. The smuggled books the narrator's friends hide in a secret garden provide ample material for thought and discussion. They use their privileged information gained through their reading, to raise themselves above those around them and to emancipate themselves from the 'dörfliche

Stille' of the unreflecting city dwellers. A perceived moment of triumph over provincialism is symbolised early in the novel when they imaginatively dispose of sacks containing mulberry trees, which they understand as the placeholders of a lost nature in the city: “Wir suchten Unterschiede, weil wir Bücher lasen. Während wir haarfeine Unterschiede fanden, stellten wir die mitgebrachten Säcke wie all die anderen hinter unsere Türen” (54-55). This perceived superiority enables them to execute a separation from nature and thus - since this is a precondition for self-consciousness⁰ - replace a traditional mimetic relationship with nature with modern autonomy. The comment, “wie alle anderen”, just like the others, is a judgement from the narrator’s future perspective and points to another understanding which she has gained in retrospect. Yet, for the moment, the protagonists believe in their difference from the others.

The friends’ reading activities enable them to imagine their intellect to be a tool with which they can control and tame nature and reduce the engulfing threat of its presence. Because their distance to nature is precarious, perception of nature is felt to be a dangerous temptation. In an episode in the ‘Bodega’ the friends resist the invitation to surrender themselves to its contemplation and reduce its influence on them to a momentary distraction from their conversation:


For a time, an enlightened state appears to replace mythology. Simultaneous with their refusal to be drawn into nature’s processes, the friends lose the capacity to be receptive of nature (“Unsere Augen hatten nicht die Geduld”, 68). Nearness to nature is seen by them as having damaging effects on the mind. The guards in the city who eat green plums are driven not by hunger, but by a homesickness for the provinces. They still their desire for the rural existence they have been forced to relinquish by eating plums, which in the narrator’s view affects their mental capacities: “Die Pflaumenfresser waren Bauer. Die

grünen Plaumen vernarrten sie. [...] Sie aßen nicht vor Hunger, sie gier ten nur nach den sauren Geschmack der Armut, in der sie noch vor einem Jahr wie vor der Hand des Vaters die Augen niederschlügen und den Nacken einzogen" (60). The friends want to set themselves at a distance from nature in order to clear the way for reflection. By imaginatively transplanting the grass into their heads, a frequent synecdochial image for nature in the novel, they perform a reversal of the master/ slave relationship between man and nature and express confidence in the power of their reflective abilities: "Das Gras steht im Kopf. Wenn wir reden, wird es gemäht. Aber auch wenn wir schweigen" (8). The silent mowing of the grass refers to the friends' writing activities: Müller takes on board with this thought Ilse Aichinger's idea that writing is on the best ways of being silent. The grass in their heads is a metaphor for the provincialism which they inherit from a rural childhood and which they want to overcome in the city. Like the imaginary mulberry trees, over which they assume control through intellectual assertion, by placing the natural object, grass, into their minds, the friends construe the world around them in the Hegelian sense of a creation of the mind. Hegel reclaimed truth for the subject and argued that the subject is the source from which the world flows and to which it returns. The most commonly cited passage from Hegel in which he argues for this 'absolute' subject is from the foreword to the Phänomenologie des Geistes in which he claims that everything depends on "das Wahre nicht als Substanz, sondern eben so sehr als Subjekt aufzufassen und auszudrücken". The friends' commitment to becoming subjects and their belief in the necessity of an ongoing commitment to reflection is evident in the metaphor in which the grass is never completely uprooted and always grows back again. For them, the authority Hegel claims for the subject is not automatically at their disposal, but is much more something which can be achieved through mental exertion. The beginning of reflection effects for the four friends a separation from nature. Not only do they create nature as object by positing it, they also need to deposit it, that is, push it away from themselves and liberate themselves from its threatening nearness. The narrator's origins, however, come back to haunt her. The separation of subject and object is never complete. The grass grows back and demands the narrator's ongoing attention. Her fantasy of treading down grass is similar to her father's weeding and this point of comparison between father and daughter indicates the futility of denying one's origins. In an earlier story "Die Grabrede", Müller thematises the guilt she feels for her father's misdeeds as an SS soldier. Here, the regrowth of the grass is an analogy for persisting memories from a childhood which are interspersed in the main narrative.

The kind of subjectivity the friends strive for is also one which stresses intersubjective experience as a vital element in self-perception. As soon as the narrator of Herztier becomes aware of herself as an individual with her own opinions and aspirations, she seeks out the company of like-minded peers as if she needed this interaction as affirmation of her new-found subjectivity. The narrator’s regular meetings with Edgar, Kurt and Georg begin in the text immediately after she utters her desire to remember Lola and ceases, in doing so, to be a mere ‘jemand’ among the other girls in the dormitory: “Ich wollte Lolas Heft im Kopf behalten. Edgar, Kurt und Georg suchten jemanden, der mit Lola im Zimmer war. Und weil ich Lolas Heft nicht allein im Kopf behalten konnte, traf ich sie, seitdem sie mich in der Kantine angesprochen hatten, jeden Tag” (42-43).

In addition to thinking, in which the narrator and her friends train themselves by reading censored literature from the West, language plays an important role in their bid to become something better. The emancipation the friends strive for is achieved in conversation with one another. They talk about the day they left home to come to the city (51) and later about their fears and nightmares. They meet in the park to talk, in the ‘Bodega’ when it is cold and go to the cinema when the ‘Bodega’ is “voller Geschrei” (78). There they sit in the back row where they can talk undisturbed: “Wir setzten uns in die letzte Reihe. Kurt sagte: Hier kann man reden” (78). The narrator’s own emergence as a distinctive ‘I’ coincides with a desire to speak (“Ich wollte über Lola reden”, 42). This is what distinguishes her from the other girls in the dormitory. The friends’ new, ‘better’ identity requires of them to speak a new language. The narrator stresses that the smuggled books they read are written in a language different to both the language of the villages and the official language of the state. Although the books are written in German, it is a German which is different to the German they grew up with, to the language they heard at their bedsides - it is a German which endorses thought:


Confidence in language is also reflected in the image of the ‘Herztier’, which the narrator sees at various points in the story. It is an embodiment of the connection to a place of origin which always remains part of oneself, but also something which can be banished with words. The image comes from her maternal grandmother, who knows “daß jeder ein Herztier hat” (81). The narrator sees it when she and her friends are walking along the river bank, deep in conversation. It is so cold that their breath causes vaporisation she sees
in the air and the narrator sees in Georg's suddenly visible speech his 'Herztier': "ich sagte zu Georg: Schau, dein Herztier zieht aus" (89). She then watches their own 'Herztiere' disappear into nothingness as they speak, an image which contains a connection between speech and the disappearance of a part of the self: "Unsere Herztiere flohen wie Mäuse. Sie warfen das Fell hinter sich ab und verschwand in Nichts. Wenn wir kurz nacheinander viel redeten, blieben sie länger in der Luft" (90). For the narrator and her friends subjectivity presupposes both thought and linguistic expression. The subjectivity they strive for is linguistic, social and intersubjective.

In many ways, the city appears to favour the friends' endeavours to cast off their provincialism. The barrenness and desolation of the park at its centre reveals the radical separateness from nature which the technological rationality of the city has accomplished. It is 'struppig', "verwahrlost" (63) and a place to be avoided, "durch den niemand mehr ging" (11). The garden of the 'Bodega' has retained mere token reminders of a natural sphere: "Das Garten war verdorrt, die Erde aufgewühlt von eilig ausgedrückten Zigaretten. Am Zaun der Bodega hingen Geranientöpfe mit nackten Stielen. An den Spitzen wuchsen drei, vier junge Blätter nach" (37). Despite the banishment of nature, however, the new city environment does not prove entirely conducive to the kind of intellectual education with which the friends had hoped to overcome their provincialism. Here they find that the continual surveillance is just as preclusive to free thought as the village silence they had found so oppressive. Quickly they realise that in a dictatorship, a city becomes like an oversized village. Georg says: "Alle hier bleiben Dörfler. Wir sind mit dem Kopf von zu Hause weggegangen, aber mir den Füßen stehen wir in einem anderen Dorf" (52). Kurt agrees that their new environment does not constitute the change they desired: "man steigt in den Zug, und es fährt nur ein Dorf in ein anderes Dorf" (52).

The dialectical interplay between myth and enlightenment is already evident in the narrator's memories of rural life and it re-emerges to cloud her experience of her city freedom. The interplay between myth and enlightenment in Herztier contains the same dialectic tension theorised by Horkheimer and Adorno. The central thesis of their Dialektik der Aufklärung is that while myth gave way to enlightenment, enlightenment reverts back to myth. This interplay between the two stages means that the one never exists independently of the other. Rather both attitudes can be observed at any one time in

---

130 Lacan demonstrates the insufficiency of thinking alone when he points out the paradox of the Cogito: "this I think, for us, certainly cannot be detached from the fact that he can formulate it only by saying it to us, implicitly - a fact that he forgets." Jacques Lacan. The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis. ed. by Jacques-Alain Miller. London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psycho-Analysis, 1977, 36.
varying degrees of prominence while the degree to which they are dominant will vary. Similarly, the mentality of the people in the provincial Banat in *Herztier* is not exclusively mythical. In his historical overview of the perception of nature, Dirk Solies emphasises that a mythic and pragmatic attitude to nature are not mutually exclusive. Nature as myth is in his account the first of four stages of perceiving nature followed by nature as allegory, as a pragmatic category and finally as aesthetic landscape. These stages are neither distinct nor can they be unambiguously attributed to different historical stages. Rather, there is considerable overlap between them. The pragmatic view of nature, for example, still exists alongside a more distanced aesthetic evaluation. The narrator's father is also engaged in transforming nature into something useful for man, in the disenchantment of nature. The conscious and frequently verbalised attention the villagers pay to trimming their hair, beards and fingernails uncovers on the one hand ritualistic behaviour (and can accordingly be categorised as belonging to the mythical), while the reasoning behind the ritual exposes it as a way of emphasising their humanity and difference from the animalistic. The barber and the grandfather have a regular appointment with one another and the barber's work is carried out in ceremonial fashion: "Am nächsten Tag und jeden Mittwoch seither kommt der Frisör des Großvaters ins Zimmer. Der Großvater sagt: Mein Frisör. Der Frisör sagt: Meine Schere" (16). But the importance of haircare is explained thus: "Der Frisör sagt: Wenn man die Haare nicht schneidet, wird der Kopf ein Gestrüpp" (17). Haircutting is profiled as a necessary measure because it differentiates man from nature. It prevents our heads from looking like a bush, stops us going wild; it is a performance of divorce from nature, setting up a distinction between the natural and human realms. While mythical rituals express nearness to nature, haircutting enacts separation. Cutting fingernails is another related ritual and one which leaves psychological scars on the narrator because it is associated with the restraining measures of a possessive mother who compels her to participate in the village rituals:


The narrator's renunciation of the mentality and enforced behaviour code of the villagers is explained from the perspective of this experience of enforced conformity. Despite the substitution of an anonymous child in place of the first person pronoun, the episodes of the child clearly pertain to the narrator's own past. This 'memory' passage ends with the words which continue to accompany her emancipatory struggle: "Losbinden, losbinden"
(17) On the level of the universal (the transition from the personal to the universal is facilitated in the memory passages by use of present tense), the insinuation is that in the provinces, indoctrination and oppression of individuality prevail. This is enforced through ritualistic behaviour, even though the content of the rituals are not purely mythical.

Likewise, the narrator’s father demonstrates at times a pragmatic view of nature, but this exists alongside his mythical attitude. He cuts down the plants ‘before they can fly’: he performs a useful task, but believes that the plants have the power to fly. His work on the land transforms nature into an agriculturally useful surface, under his hands nature becomes an object of human instrumental action. However, this useful task of controlling weed growth is accompanied by a ritual which relies on assimilation with nature. The father rids himself of his bad conscience (presumably from his war crimes) transferring it to the weeds: “der Vater steckt sein schlechtes Gewissen in die dämsten Pflanzen und hackt sie ab” (21). The father in the above passage is occupied in a controlling act, manipulating nature for his own interests (producing fertile land), however, he has not yet dominated nature.

Just as progress away from myth can be discerned in the depictions of the way of life in Banat, regressive moments push life in the city back towards myth. The narrator observes around her in the city the failure of emancipation from the oppressions of rural life and the totalitarian regime is seen to be responsible. The surveillance by the state authorities of its citizens precludes enlightenment values of freedom and justice just as much as mythic relationships to nature are indifferent to them. Places of the city become in the imagery of the text the instruments of control which ensure the enslavement of the workers to socialist ideology. The city’s ears prevent freedom of speech: “Die Fabrik, die Bodega, Läden und Wohnviertel, die Bahnhofshallen und Zugfahrten mit Weizen-, Sonnenblumen- und Maisfeldern paßten auf. Die Straßenbahnen, Krankenhäuser, Friedhöfe” (39). The failure of the city to foster human progress is expressed in metaphors of hybridisation which blend the rural and industrial into monstrous products; the farmers who swore never again to tend sheep and harvest melons, produce ‘Blechschafe’ and ‘Holzmelone’ in the city’s factories and the narrator refers to the guests in the ‘Bodega’ alternately as workers and farmers. For her, their hybrid objects are evidence of the lack of change, of betterment in their lives after moving to the city. The four friends’ awareness of the deceit of the city reduces their possibilities for realising their vision of a new generation of young Romanians (“In einer Diktatur kann es keine Städte geben, weil alles klein ist, wenn es bewacht wird”, 52).

Herztier stages a change of scene from the Romanian villages of Müller’s early stories to the city. The insistent parallel she inscribes between the provincial village of the
child and the guarded city of the young woman narrator is an original contribution to contemporary understanding of totalitarianism. The friends observe others who have come to the city from the countryside and establish that these people’s new lives have not undergone even the slightest change. The totalitarian regime reduces the city to a village. Work in the factories is just as mindless as farm work to the extent that the workers fail to internalise the difference and do not adjust to their new task. For them there is no difference between tending sheep and shaping metal, between harvesting melons and sawing wood. They protect themselves from the secret police with their fear which prevents them from saying anything political which could be held against them. This fear persists even when they are drunk, ensuring that the uncontrollable tongue does not make any errors: “Wenn auch die Zunge nur noch lallen kann, verläßt die Gewöhnung der Angst die Stimme nicht” (39).

Persecution - Despondency - Resignation

If the narrator’s interest in Lola triggers her to form ideals, her attraction to Tereza reflects their renunciation. In the following section, I limit my discussion to three facets of the friends’ disillusionment: their inability to maintain a strategic cold-heartedness, their change in attitude towards nature and towards language.

Unsafe Friendship

The narrator’s friendship with Tereza coincides with the beginning of an attitude of resignation among the friends and is the most detailed example in the text of their failure to maintain their ideals. The narrator’s mistrust fails to prevent her warming to Tereza. At first she is careful not to let on too much of herself to Tereza and to be drawn in by her. Her suspicion of some kind of connection between Tereza’s father and her interrogator Pjele helps her to maintain emotional distance from her colleague. She is attracted to her for her practical and uncomplicated attitude and her ability to enjoy life: “Erst als Tereza lachte, sah ich sie an” (107). The ease with which Tereza speaks represents a welcome change from her encoded communication with Edgar, Kurt and Georg: “Tereza sprach arglos. Sie redete viel und dachte wenig nach. Schuhe, sagte sie, und es waren nur Schuhe” (117). The narrator’s relationship to Tereza which deepens in spite of her best intentions, is a compelling illustration of the need for affection which results from a habitual attitude.

---

131 When they learn that they are to be forcibly split up by being sent to work in different parts of the country, the friends agree upon a code for their correspondence so that they can let one another know if they are danger. In this code they write the word ‘shoes’ if their flat has been searched.
of mistrust fostered by totalitarianism. The mistrust which is practised as a way of avoiding danger has damaging side effects. The narrator observes how a routine of suspicion feeds on hopes and fears, affecting her ability to distinguish truth from slander and making it difficult to maintain. She comments:


Gradually, the narrator loosens her guard and allows an attachment to Tereza to develop. After she has emigrated to Germany, she misses her friend bitterly and begins to realise the extent of her feelings. The price she eventually pays for abandoning her ideals and herself to love and trust is doubly hurtful. First Tereza betrays her by spying on her for Pjele during a visit to Germany and later her death by cancer is experienced as a further betrayal. Caught between hatred and desperate grief, in the end she remains loyal to her friendship despite ensuing feelings of guilt: “Terezas Tod tat mir so weh, als hätte ich zwei Köpfe, die zusammenspringen. In dem einen lag die gemähte Liebe, im anderen der Haß. Ich wollte, daß die Liebe nachwächst. Sie wuchs wie Gras und Stroh durcheinander und wurde die kälteste Beteuerung in meiner Stirn. Sie war meine dümmste Pflanze” (250). Attesting to her love for her friend, love is expressed using the image of grass, however, now the narrator no longer has any desire to hinder its growth. Despite all her suffering caused by love, she ceases to resist it.

Her experience of friendship with Georg, Kurt and Edgar likewise teaches the narrator the uselessness of resisting emotional attachment. Despite efforts to the contrary, the four spend so much time together and share so many experiences that they quickly begin to rely on one another. They need each other’s company in order to relieve their fear, yet their dependence on one another is also a source of anxiety. When they feel threatened by the intimacy of their friendship, they employ tactics to distance themselves from one another:


105
They swear at one another in Swabian dialect, targeting the other’s sore point: their regional identity. By undermining their mutual arduous projects of ‘losbinden’, injury is guaranteed. Like the grass in their heads which stands for their provincial heritage, too much love can clog up the brain and has to be trodden down from time to time with hate: “Der Haß durfte treten und vernichten” (84). However, the friends are unable to maintain the distance they achieve with their jibes for long. Like the provincial mentality which returns if they stop thinking and discussing (captured in the image of the growing grass), love always grows back after it has been cut down. “In großer Nähe zueinander die Liebe mähren, weil sie nachwuchs wie das tiefe Gras” (84). Looking back, the narrator views their efforts to preserve mutual independence with pessimism and admits that the effect of breaking and making up had been to strengthen their reliance on one another even more: “Der gesuchte Streit war immer Absicht, nur was er antat, blieb ein Versehen” (84). In addition to the intended fight, something unintentional and unspoken was occurring - dependency. At this point in the story, however, the friends have not yet abandoned their initial resolves. The image of mowing reveals a confidence in their personal capacities to achieve their aims: like the provincial mentality which can be repelled though intellectual activity, love can also be kept at a distance.

Nature as Threat

The friends’ resignation is further characterised by a loss of faith in their ability to exert control over nature. When Georg is let down by his lover, ‘die Nachbarin mit den gesprenkelten Augen’, he perceives nature as violent, even murderous: “diese Gräser sind schön, aber mitten in ihnen, wohin man auch sieht, öffnen die Felder, so scheint es, das Maul. Der Himmel zog weg, die Erde klebte an den Schuhen. Die Blätter, Stengel und Wurzeln der Gräser waren rot wie Blut” (224). When the narrator visits Edgar in the town to which he has been transferred from the city, she sees the negative effect of the change as traces of his new environment in his face. Nature appears to overwhelm him: “Ich sah Lolas Gegend in Edgars Gesicht” (95). While the narrator does not yet show any signs of mythical regression, at one point she expresses sadness at the loss of a naive belief in nature’s supremacy which, once overcome, cannot be recuperated. She experiences the friends’ initial acknowledgement of personal autonomy and accountability as difficult to maintain, since this means that the reasons for her actions lie with her alone: “Die

Achieving and maintaining control over the natural world is perceived as a challenge which the friends are in the end no longer able to stand up to. Their failure to maintain their distance from nature develops simultaneously with the increasing loss of autonomous spaces open to them in the controlled city. After she has been translating operating instructions for hydraulic engines for a while (and has as a consequence little opportunity for intellectual exchange), the narrator begins to sense nature as a threat. When she leaves work, she is startled by the greenness of the grass as well as its steady growth (powerful, overwhelming nature) and becomes hesitant at the sight of trees: “Das neue Gras war so grün, daß seine Farbe in den Augen stach. Man sah es wachsen. Jeden Tag, wenn Tereza und ich aus der Fabrik kamen, war es um eine Spanne länger. […] Und zwischen den Häusern warteten so kahle Bäume, daß man vor den Schatten ihrer Äste auf dem Boden zögerte bei jedem Schritt” (124). As long as she continues to work for the state, the narrator has no opportunity for ‘grass-mowing’; the grass grows while she is forced to translate. A transition from a metaphoric or imaginative level of the grass in their heads to the concrete occurs in a passage when Georg is scything grass. The friends have met to compile a list to send to the West of those who had recently been killed while fleeing the country. Kurt, Edgar and the narrator write down the names, drink schnapps and watch Georg: “Georg sichelte Gras. Unsere Köpfe waren schwer von der Liste und vom Schnaps. Georg wurde nährisch, und wir sahen ihn zu” (173). This passage towards the end of the novel contains images of a regression back to the pre-enlightenment mythical. The ethical tasks the friends had set themselves in order to ensure their difference from their parents and from those in the city who are unable to let go of their provincialism become a burden; the intellectual activity makes their heads heavy. In place of reason which the mowing of the grass is supposed to make way for, the long grass is taking effect on Georg and making him go crazy. Also by replacing the mental act of grass-cutting with a physical one, Georg reverts back to the mythical state of being surrounded by nature, rather than it being subordinated to the sphere of the mind.

The friends’ change in attitude towards their initial aim of freeing themselves entirely from the negative effects of provincial life is foreshadowed in the figure of Lola whose beliefs, I contend, exert an unacknowledged influence on the narrator in particular. The exploration of Lola’s aims and values occupies a central position in a proportionally small part of the novel. After this, the narrator recalls her less and less until she disappears from the narrative almost entirely. The text’s initially exclusive focus on the story of Lola
insinuates a considerable influence of this on the narrator’s own story, the main subject of
the narrative. Yet, against the reader's expectations, there are no further significant
reflections of Lola and the reader is largely left to figure out the mystery for herself. A clue
can be found in the narrator’s changing attitude towards nature. I believe that this appears
in the text as a subliminal manifestation (in the sense the narrator does not admit to any
awareness of it) of the influence of Lola, whose conviction concerning the impossibility of
complete severance from nature gains, I argue, the narrator's increasing acceptance and
leads eventually to a partial reconciliation with Heimat (via her mother). Unlike the four
friends, Lola did not harbour any desire to cast aside her identity as a villager. This
standpoint which at first appears strange and in every way different to that of the narrator
and her friends, lingers throughout the text after her death in the memories and reflections
of the narrator and becomes subject to constant revaluation in light of the friends’ and
particularly the narrator’s changing attitudes and realisations attained through experience.
After her dismissal from the factory where she worked as a translator, the narrator records
an inability to perceive nature from a distance. Instead, she sees in the trees and the sky
signs of her own predicament. She is unable to perceive nature for what it is (she sees
“ohne Blick”) because she is unable to distance herself from nature, which would be the
precondition of such a perception. The narrator’s choice not to reveal unambiguously the
extent of the ongoing influence of Lola of the narrator is a stylistic gain, since it lends the
text an interpretative openness.

Uncontrollable Language
While the friends’ optimistic period is distinguished by their faith in language as an
instrument for expressing a more enlightened consciousness, by the end of the story
language has turned into something which can also be destructive and coercive. The image
of mowing grass which conveys the significance of the friends’ discussions appears now in
an image of destruction which points to scepticism towards the emancipatory power of
language: “Mit den Worten soviel zertreten wie mit den Füßen im Gras" (7). We can trace
the narrator’s recognition of the inescapability of her socially determined being on the level
of language.

Part of the disillusionment of the narrator concerns the idea of being in control of
language. During the time when the friends have separated and are pursuing the jobs
allocated to them, something takes place in the narrator’s perception which makes her think
that she has lost control of her utterances and prompts her to reflect on the relationship
between language and subjectivity. In a letter from Georg, she is struck by a particular
sentence because of the uncanny way in which it echoes a statement she had herself made some weeks previously. Georg, who is now employed in a sawmill, attempts to portray the wretchedness of his new occupation. He writes: “Hier haben die Leute Holzmehl im Haar und in den Augenbrauen” (98). The narrator lingers over Georg’s description because of the way it echoes an earlier accusation she had made to injure her friend (“Du bist aus Holz”, 89). Now months later, she reflects, something curious has taken place between herself and her utterance - Georg’s letter has transformed the relationship between herself and her sentence. When she first spoke it, it had had nothing to do with wood. She said it because she had wanted to hurt Georg and because she had heard people use the expression to designate insensitivity: “Der Satz war nicht von mir. Mit Holz hatte der Satz nichts zu tun. Damals. Ich hatte ihn oft von anderen gehört, wenn jemand zu ihnen grob war” (98).

At the time of utterance, the sentence was not entirely her own, but it did not belong to the others who had previously uttered it either: “Er war auch nicht von anderen” (98). Now, months later, the narrator unexpectedly becomes the subject of her past sentence, as if she has caught up with her own words. In the reappearance of her sentence, the narrator catches a glimpse of a retroactive subjectivity which is beyond her control: “Monate waren vorbei, und der Satz war nicht vorbei. Mir war, als hätte ich zu Georg gesagt: Du wirst aus Holz” (98).

The narrator’s experience of language as taking on a life of its own, of becoming and making her something beyond her intentions, is reminiscent of Jacques Lacan’s linguistic theory of subjectivity. The theme of the function and effectiveness of the friends’ words occupies a central position in the text. Furthermore, the way the friends experience themselves as subjects contains parallels to Lacan’s linguistic, social and intersubjective subject. Since Müller employs the theme of language and intentionality to depict the friends’ diminishing belief in their abilities to effect change, a brief outline of a theory which insists that subjectivity does not precede language can aid an understanding of how the friends’ experience of language is part of their general loss of faith in individual agency.

The Lacanian subject precludes the kind of autonomy the friends have been striving for - one they hope to achieve on the basis of their power to separate themselves from nature with their words, since the subject is denied any real authority over language. Lacan’s subject is not only preceded by language, but also ‘barred’, that is, restricted by it and ‘hidden’ beneath the signifier. The only degree of freedom for the subject consists of what Lacan terms the ‘fleeting subject’. This is a surplus product of language, Joan Copjec
calls it “the excess that language appears to cut off”. While most readings of Lacan which stress that his is first and foremost a speaking subject claim that the speaker is subjected to language rather than master of it, the subjectis, nevertheless, not so much constituted by a pre-existing signifying chain as it is the agent of its own placement within the chain. Subjection to language is necessary since it is the only place offered to the subject. Yet, according to Lacan, every human being who learns to speak is thereby alienated from him or herself since language distorts its referent. Language is also permanent lack: our alienation within language which the narrator experiences when her sentence takes on a meaning she never intended severs our original experience of oneness between our body and its desired objects. The foreign language we must learn to speak constitutes the presence of the Other within ourselves.

Thus to speak is also to experience alienation. When the subject says something, the signifier replaces it and it disappears, so that “the very existence of the subject is simultaneous with society’s failure to integrate it, to represent it”. Speech in this way occasions a splitting of the ‘I’: the signifier brings forth false being (Freud’s ego) and suppresses the subject of the unconscious. Moreover, for Lacan the subject of the unconscious re-emerges from behind the signifier, manifesting itself in discourse as an interruption of something foreign. This pulsation, as he describes it, is the ‘fleeting subject’. The subject brought forth by the narrator’s sentence displays similarities with Lacan’s split subject. The status of language as other is revealed in the text in the narrator’s contention that the sentence was not from her, which points to a separation or split between the subject of the sentence and some other kind of self which has been banished by the sentence. The sentence negates the subject (‘nicht von mir’) and brings forth a non-self.

As she reads Georg’s letter, the narrator reflects on what words do: “Mit dem Wort im Mund soviel zertreten wie mit den Füßen im Gras, dachte ich mir” (98). She realises that something has been trampled on with her words and affirms the narrative of loss in which Lacan implicates language. Müller also relates experiences of a retroactive subjectivity in her reflections of poetics. She writes: “Und dann gibt es diese Sätze.

---

133 For Lacan, our submission to language is a choice. “The choice of submission is necessary if one is to come to be as a subject, but it maintains its status as a choice since it is nevertheless possible to refuse subjectivity”. Bruce Fink. The Lacanian Subject. Between Language and Jouissance. Princeton/New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1995, 50.
134 Cf. Fink, 50.
135 Copjec, 124.
136 The ego is for Lacan a distortion or repository of misunderstanding.
Schwarz auf weiß, wie ein Kleidungsstück, in dem man selber nicht drin ist. Im nachhinein kann man es anziehen.\textsuperscript{137} In Lacan’s diagram ‘the elementary cell of desire’,\textsuperscript{138} the vector of subjective intention ‘quilts’ the vector of the signifier’s chain in a retroactive direction. The effect of meaning is produced backwards and what emerges is not the subject but Lacan’s ‘$\$’, the split subject.

Graph I: the elementary cell of desire

![Graph I](image)

The recognition that we retroactively become the subject of language is echoed in the novel’s form. \textit{Herztier} as a framed narrative begins and ends with a scene in which the narrator and Edgar are sitting on the floor and looking at Kurt’s photos and in-between we are told the story of the four friends political resistance. The narrative begins and ends with the same sentence and thus ‘comes full cycle. The first time around the sentence is intriguing and elusive and like Lacan’s pre-symbolic ‘subject’, we go back in time to discover its meaning.

The narrator’s sudden keen awareness of a lack of control over her utterances reflects the phenomenon described by Lacan that the way her words appear to society differs from what she had actually meant them to express. Indeed the narrator’s insight at this point in the story constitutes the beginning of a deep mistrust of language which is largely responsible for her gradual loss of hope in her ability to influence events. Only the fact that she later chooses to relate her story in the form of narrative indicates that this loss of faith in language as a vehicle for self-expression has not been absolute.

Fear and Death

Whether or not the friends’ resignation at their failures drives them to death depends on the presence of fear. In Herztier, Müller arrives at a positive appraisal of fear, since in her view, it can aid survival. Their need of a close relationship of mutual trust which the friends attempt less and less to deny becomes so vital because it helps them to cope with their fear. The opportunity to relieve fear by sharing it is mentioned in relation to their own friendship: “Wir angst hatten, waren Edgar, Kurt, Georg und ich täglich zusammen” (83). Fear is the unavoidable consequence of their resistance, since this places them in great danger. The friends are caught in a ‘catch 22’ situation: remaining faithful to one resolve makes it impossible to maintain the other. The fear which results from their respective illegal activities forces them into a reliance on one another in that they become more receptive to the comfort this offers, a reliance, however, which they had been equally determined not to enter into. Soon their friendship is no longer able to relieve their growing fear. Fear becomes their main emotional state, over the course of the narrator’s interrogations, it becomes something strong and dependable (“Ich fiel aus der Angst in die sichere Angst”, 105). Herztier’s examination of fear is as central as the theme of friendship. The state of fear is, despite it inhibiting the friends’ goal of upholding an attitude of cold-heartedness, a comparatively healthy state to be in. Indeed, fear becomes important as a survival strategy, which the reader is gradually led to respect. For most of us who have not suffered oppression or persecution, it seems a comforting thought that, should disaster strike in our lives, our human capacity for hope would help us to see through the bad times. Müller, however, like Ruth Klüger, impresses upon us the more banal reality that fear is our instinctive - and effective - survival strategy. Hope in the novel translates into thoughts of fleeing the country, which impinge on one’s ability to live within the given conditions, and leads to real escape attempts, which nearly always end fatally. “Jede Flucht war ein Angebot an den Tod” (69). And those who are scared of fleeing foster an equally unlikely hope that the dictator will soon die: “Die Angst vor der Flucht machte aus jeder Reise des Diktators eine Dringlichkeitsreise zum Arzt” (69).

The friends’ fear of death becomes the key to their survival. The narrator’s male friends make frequent trips to the barber’s - care of their hair becomes a way of reassuring themselves that they are alive. The narrator explains the connection thus: “Mir fallen

---

112

Footnotes continued on the next page
immer der Frisör und die Nagelschere ein, weil Tote sie nicht mehr brauchen. Und, daß Tote nie mehr einen Knopf verlieren” (7). Obsessive hair and nail cutting is of course a legacy from their provincial childhood. The friends’ imitation of the same rituals performed in their families shows that under the influence of new insights, they are increasingly unable to resist the influence of a mentality they had earlier hoped to overcome. The ritualistic hair and fingernail cutting I discuss as part of the provincial mentality of the friends’ parents, is now performed by the friends to affirm a separation from nature. In the villages, this was also practised as a trick to ward off death. The barber explains: “Wenn man die Nâgel nicht schneidet, werden die Finger zu Schaufeln. Nur die Toten dürfen sie tragen” (17). Thus the child enters life in the novel when the mother cuts her nails. While the narrator does not often have her hair cut, her frequent visits to a seamstress is her way of upholding a connection with the living, since in an extension of the logic behind the ritual, the dead do not need new clothes any more than they need their hair cut. Hair and nail-cutting and sewing on buttons all become important emphatic life-affirming gestures for the friends and increase in urgency the more immediate the proximity of death. When Kurt visits the narrator after her dismissal, she notices a loose button on his jacket and is unable to suppress a compulsion to sew it on more tightly for him: she hates Kurt for his loose button and his dirty finger nails because they demonstrate a disregard for life. Kurt has lost his fear of death and this makes the narrator resentful because it opens up a gulf of difference between them: “Ich haßte seine dreckigen Fingernägel, weil sie Tereza mißtrauten. Ich haßte sein verzogenes Kinn, weil es mich halb überzeugte. S einen lockeren Knopf am Hemd haßte ich, weil er zum Abreißen nahe an einem Faden hing” (183).

Of the four, Kurt retains the original ideals of the friends the longest. During this visit, he seems particularly attentive to the friend’s earlier resolves: he disapproves of the narrator’s friendship with Tereza and talks about being political. The narrator, however, has already chosen to hang on to life rather than place herself in too much danger by clinging to her morals. She now resents Kurt because of the deliberate lack of self-regard which he is flaunting, that is, because he is hastening his death, but also because he is so convincing; the narrator’s hate stems from an anxiety that he could influence her to act in the same way again. She is suspicious from the first of Kurt’s new politicised attitude since he has no fear with which to protect himself.

As the friends begin to lose their belief in their ideals, fear of death becomes increasingly persistent. Kurt, Edgar and Georg become pre-occupied with trips to the

barber. The shift from a preoccupation with the fundamental to the superficial highlights the fragility of their situation and is connected with a loss of faith in autonomy. The act of hair-cutting signifies an attention to the fact that their hair is growing, that is, that they are therefore not dead. In their dreams, the barber becomes a figure of great authority and the granting of an appointment is equated with a life extension. The narrator observes how close old people are to death in the city - the names of the old women who visit the graves of their deceased husbands are already engraved on the tombstones. They react in a way similar to Kurt, Edgar and Georg - they clean their shoes and tie their laces as a way of ascertaining and asserting the fact that they are still alive: "Es kamen Leute, sie gingen ganz allein zu einem Grab, das bald ihres wurde. [...] Manchmal suchten sie ihr Taschentuch, bückten sich und wischten den Staub von den Schuhen und banden die Schnürsenkel fester und steckten das Taschentuch wieder ein" (45). Kurt has a dream which reflects his fear of being refused a hair-cut. When he arrives at the barber's there is a crossword puzzle drawn up on the wall which must be solved before the barber will cut any hair: "In diesem Traum waren Männer beim Frisör. An der Wand oben hing eine Schiefertafel, sie war ein Kreuzworträtsel. Alle Männer zeigten auf die noch leeren Würfel und sagten Buchstaben. Kurt setzte sich vor den Spiegel. Die Männer sagten: Bevor das nicht gelöst ist, gibt es keine Frisör" (85). The narrator's father reacts in the same way to the threat of death. However, while the obsession with hair-cutting may in the case of the friends constitute a survival strategy (by preventing them from committing suicide), the narrator's father goes to the barber when he is already past salvation. In retrospect, the narrator is angry with him for denying his situation: "Statt sich um den Tod zu kümmern, dachte ich mir, hat der Vater etwas mit dem Frisör angefangen. Er hat mit dem erstbesten Frisör an der ersten Straßenecke etwas Falsches angefangen" (73).

It is when the characters lose their fear of death that the friends' resignation reaches an acute climax and puts their lives on the line. The narrator survives because she never lets go of fear. Her plan to get revenge on Pjele by smearing the word 'Schwein' or 'Schuft' on his front door with her own excrement fails because she loses all courage at the crucial moment. Georg loses his will to live because, unlike the narrator, he finds it impossible to accept any degree of reconciliation with his parents. Now that all four have lost their jobs, they are forced back into parental dependency. For Georg this is an intolerable situation:

With no way forward and no way back, Georg is robbed of an aim and a direction: "Die Wartenden haben von Morgenzügen gesprochen, als ich ging. Sie hatten alle ein Ziel" (217). The final failure is represented by the emigration. The friends have suffered hearing, separation and dismissal before they begin to consider it: "Zu unserer Entlassung hatte Edgar gesagt: Jetzt sind wir auf der letzten Station. Georg hatte den Kopf geschüttelt: Auf der zweitletzten, die letzte ist die Ausreise" (195). Kurt commits suicide rather than leave the country and Georg, the first to leave, is driven to his death before the others arrive.

Talking about her own decision and that of other young German-Romanian writers to emigrate to Germany, Müller has commented: "Damit, daß wir weggingen, habe wir aufgegeben. Wir mußten einsehen, daß wir nichts verändern konnten, daß es sinnlos war, daß sich nichts machen läßt. Das ist natürlich eine traurige Bilanz."\(^{140}\) Herztier traces the downward spiral from hope to resignation, from the four friends' proud and resolute "Wir wollten das Land nicht verlassen" (69) and carefully maintained distance from those "die mit ihrer mitgebrachten Gegend durch die Stadt gingen" (55) and those who "lebten von Fluchtdenken" (55), to their own visa applications and/or suicides.

A gradual loss of faith in their capacity for autonomous action drives all four friends to despair. The narrator feels a cold shudder pass through her as she realises that her actions are entirely restricted by her environment and that she is not at all free: "Ich fror ein bißchen und konnte nur so gehen wie in diesem Land" (128). She comes to believe that her entire subjectivity is nothing more than the fulfilment of a social demand. In her specific case, she is forced to admit that her dissent has only fuelled a totalitarian regime: "Ich wußte damals noch nicht, daß die Wächter diesen Haß für die tägliche Genauigkeit einer blutigen Arbeit brauchten. Daß sie ihn brauchten, um Urteile zu fällen für ihr Gehalt" (58). This is one of many narrative comments which contain judgements made from the future perspective from which the narrator is relating her story. One of the reasons that make this novel stand out for its maturity is that the overwhelming resignation which represents the story's climax is already present from the outset: the narrator does not start from the beginning, but rather from the end of the story, which means that the reader's focus reaches immediately beyond the level of what will happen onto the how and why of what she knows is imminent. In the early stages of the story, the narrator imposes on the reader her hindsight and signals that her character's early optimism and hope will soon recede, that she will become the 'mistake' that she in the end (and on the first page) calls herself

---

and her friends. With this particular opening (for the narrative) and final (for the story) self-degradation, the narrator's self-esteem has reached a lowest possible ebb. With her statement she picks up on and repeats a phrase of Edgar's and places herself as well as her friends on a par with the dictator: "Sie spürten vielleicht anders als wir, daß der Diktator ein Fehler ist, sagte Edgar. Sie hatten den Beweis, weil auch wir für uns selber ein Fehler waren" (7).

The starting point of the text is a position of complete hopelessness: "Wenn wir schweigen, werden wir unangenehm, sagte Edgar, wenn wir reden, werden wir lächerlich" (7). The silence of the friends is felt as unpleasant because it testifies to the failure of their political activism which entailed speaking out about the atrocities of Ceaucescu's regime: the ridiculousness of speaking out refers to their experience that by doing so they were in no way able to undermine the regime, but rather gave the authorities cause to exert and justify their power. However, quite a different view follows on from Edgar's complaint about the uselessness of their political action, namely one which now interprets both speaking out and remaining silent as productive. Unlike the above quotation, this view is uttered neither by Edgar, nor directly by the narrator and is thus not restricted in its relevancy to the time of this opening passage. It is reiterated at the end, before the narrative delves into the past to recall the friends' aims and their plight: "Das Gras steht im Kopf. Wenn wir reden, wird es gemäht. Aber auch wenn wir schweigen" (8). It contains a perspective of hope and constitutes an incentive for the narrator to re-examine her past. Whether they are talking or remaining silent, the mowing of the grass indicates the movement of reflection, of thought which is taking place and which, regardless of whether an utterance occurs, is what is at stake. This reflection is more modest in its effectiveness than the youthful aims of the friends; it is one which provides no perspective for bringing about any permanent changes ("das zweite, dritte Gras wächst nach", 8), yet it suffices to keep the desperation in check. This mature, realistic attitude enables the narrator to value her own opinions even after she has become disillusioned by political action and no longer acts on them. It also places her at a distance from herself as she was at the time the pictures were taken which she and Edgar now contemplate, and constitutes a precondition for her journey into the past and her re-examination of her 'failed' dissidence.

The friends ultimately fail in their endeavours to disassociate themselves from their parents and in their aims as dissidents. After being split up and sent to work in different towns, the torment of being persecuted and interrogated by the secret police becomes too difficult to endure. Robbed of their motivation in life, they give in to despair, which escalates when they lose their jobs and eventually drives Kurt and Georg to their deaths. Georg withdraws to the provinces and lodges with Edgar's parents. The narrator is the first
to admit that their break with the generations of their parents is not sustainable. She disagrees with Kurt who argues that while you cannot choose your father, you do not have to acknowledge him: “Ich zerbiß den Faden und schluckte ihn: Hat sich schon jemand seinen Vater aussuchen können. Kurt hielt seinen Kopf in den Händen. Es gibt Leute, die ihren Vater nicht mehr kennen, sagte er. Ich fragte: Wer” (184). The friends begin to compromise their pledge to exercise mistrust. They have affairs and the narrator has long since become attached to Tereza. Without the intellectual stimulation, they lose control of the grass in their heads. Nature overwhelms them and their relinquish their authority to it. In the end, all that is left for them is to hope that the next generation will fare better. When at the end of the novel, Edgar and the narrator contemplate Kurt’s photographs, they linger over a shot depicting Pjele crossing the square with a child at his side. The narrator projects her last remaining hope onto this child, that he may grow up to feel enough hate to rebel: “Ich wünschte mir, daß der Hauptmann Pjele einen Sack mit allen seinen Toten trägt. Daß sein geschnittenes Haar nach frischgemähtem Friedhof riecht, wenn er beim Frisör sitzt. Daß das Verbrechen stinkt, wenn er sich nach der Arbeit zu seinem Enkel an den Tisch setzt. Daß dieses Kind sich vor den Fingern ekelt, die ihm den Kuchen geben” (252).

With this thought, Müller is able to hinder her novel from becoming overly heart-wrenching. Rather, it ends on a philosophical note, with the recognition that while it is too late for the friends and while they are unable to conceive of any improvements in Romania, it is now over to the next generation to try again.

What is more, the wish contains many of the key poetic images which typify the text’s remarkable use of language. Against the background of the narrator’s disillusionment by her recognition discussed above that the relationship between language and subjectivity is not what she originally thought it was, the concentrated poetic style of her final utterance likewise points to something beyond mere disillusionment. The ongoing paradox contained within the text between the narrator’s loss of faith and her engagement of poetic language in the narrative receives a partial resolution with this hint at a renewal of hope. Echoing Ruth Klüger’s comments on the importance of reciting poems as a means for survival and in spite of perceived failures, the narrator’s last wishes in Herztier articulate a mode of poetic resistance.

**Heimat and Adolescence**

The Heimat theme which I trace through Müller’s work receives a new dimension in Herztier in the conflation of its rejection with adolescence. Remaining with the centrality in the novel of the friends’ political and ethical motivations for renouncing their parents’ way
of life, their determination to break out of their mould can further be read as an adolescent conflict. My motivation for including this aspect in my discussion is related specifically to the thematic framework of my thesis. As a counterpart to Ecker’s reflections on the oedipal construction of *Heimat*, the theme of adolescence can be viewed as a structural paradigm for anti-*Heimat* sentiment: while the *Heimat* constellation is oedipal, the anti-*Heimat* constellation is adolescent. Müller couples the repudiation of *Heimat* with the adolescence of her protagonists. This not only constitutes an interesting sequel to the idea outlined in my previous section that love of *Heimat* can be explained psychologically as a re-enactment of oedipal desire, in that it carries forth the maternal constitution of *Heimat*, but also if we understand adolescence as a time of searching for moral ideals, by attaching this rejection to the adolescent phase, Müller depicts the disavowal of *Heimat* as an ethical act.

It is widely accepted that adolescence is accompanied by a hitherto non-existent and often intense moral striving. Adolescence is the phase in which “das einst machtlose, moralisch unterwürfige Kind [sich] zum Schütz- und Gesetzgeber der nächsten Generation entwickelt”,¹ it is where our ‘adult’ orientation towards the achievement and maintenance of moral integrity is firmly set in place: “Eines jener Vermächtnisse, das die Jugendzeit dem Erwachsenen mit auf dem Weg gibt, ist der Drang nach ethischer Vervollkommnung.”¹² The various determinations voiced by the four young people in *Herztier* are aimed at moral integrity. These include apart from their political activities a clear renunciation of the provincialism of their parents and the traditional folkish (Swabian) way of life which is preserved in their villages. Parallel to the friends’ development of new values is their occupation with emotional severance from their parents (particularly from the mother), indeed the rejection of the values of their parents can be seen in this light, that is, as a strategy which aids severance and as part of the adolescent task.

Louise Kaplan describes the task of adolescence as the renunciation of incestuous desire. The threat of incest becomes relevant when the child becomes aware of her genital sexuality. In order that the adolescent child successfully avoids the incest taboo, she must firstly resist her sexual (genital) desires for as long as these are fixated on the parents (severance), and secondly redirect this desire onto a person outside of the family circle (libido transference). A number of strategies can be observed among adolescents who enter this developmental phase when genital desire begins to replace infantile non-genital desire; these are rated by Kaplan according to their degree of success or failure. Among the most

---

common and ‘normal’ methods for achieving libido transference (in the sense that they have no pathological consequences) are physical asceticism, the development of an uncompromising attitude (moral integrity) and the gradual renunciation of the past, which is replaced by new relationships. More problematic solutions include a sudden and irrevocable severance from the parents (for example, leaving home), new relationships which are formed too hastily and are too intense, the transformation of incestuous desire into hate and scornfulness as well as the unaltered, unadulterated emotional devotion to the parents (which is indeed no solution at all).

Many of the above-mentioned severance and transference strategies can be found in *Herztier*. The adolescent task of the four friends is exasperated by their mutual decision to avoid relationships. Despite rumours to the contrary which reach the narrator’s mother, the narrator does not have a sexual relationship with either Kurt, Georg or Edgar and indeed for a long time consciously avoids one with other men. If as Kaplan claims, the acquisition of new extra-familial love objects constitutes an unavoidable pre-requisite for a successful resolution of the adolescent task, then its neglect in the case of the four friends can explain the difficulties they experience in releasing themselves from emotional dependency on their mothers. Maternal dependency is symbolised in the narrative by the image of the child bound to the chair, which occurs in the narrative of the child discussed in the previous section and is remembered or retold several times. When the child rebels against having its fingers cut, the mother ties it to a chair with her belts: “Ein Kind läßt sich die Nägel nicht schneiden. Das tut weh, sagt das Kind. Die Mutter bindet das Kind mit den Gürteln ihrer Kleider an den Stuhl” (14). From now on the word ‘losbinden’ (untying) is used to refer to the project of the narrator and her friends of escaping their mothers’ influence. The plea of the child becomes a lifelong desire for freedom from the constraints of the family. It is uttered at times as an incantation indicating the determination or the desire of the friends to achieve release and at the same time demonstrating the fact that the wished-for achievement is still outstanding. In this instance, the disinclination of the mothers to loosen their emotional ties to their children is perceived as the obstacle to severance. The mother in the above scene is tied to her love and her child: “weil ihr Verstand genauso an die Liebe angebunden ist, wie das Kind an den Stuhl” (14). All four mothers succeed in retaining the bond with their children by compelling them to feel empathy. They send regular letters to their children in the city complaining about their physical sufferings. The children feel

---

142 Kaplan, 12.
143 The semantic pair losbinden/ anbinden recurs in *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*: the narrator’s mother is described as ‘losgebunden’ when her father dies, she now sleeps better and stops aging. (Herta Müller. *Heute wär ich mir lieber nicht begegnet*, 88-89)
trapped by the 'snare' of their mothers' complaints: "Mit den Zügen, in die wir nicht mehr
einstiegen, schickten sie uns den Schmerz ihrer Galle, ihres Magens, ihrer Milz, ihres
Kreuzes nach. [...] Die Krankheiten, dachten sich die Mütter, sind eine Schlinge für die
Kinder. Sie bleiben in der Ferne angebunden" (54). This aspect of parental responsibility in
failed severance is not mentioned by Kaplan. She explains the motivation of the adolescent
to leave home as an over-compensatory reaction to the child's acknowledgement of her
own incestuous wishes; the child becomes so fear-stricken by her unlawful desires, that she
seeks the most direct way of overcoming them. From the point of view of the young
protagonists in *Herztier*, however, the mother's desire is the source of panic. Thus, there
appear to be two reasons why the protagonists remain 'angebunden', why they fail, that is,
to attain complete severance: firstly because of the damaging effects of the emotional traps
of their mothers and secondly because they, for reasons outlined above, resist the second
part of the adolescent task - the relocation of the libido.

Lola faces quite different adolescent problems than the narrator and her friends. She
seems in some respects more grown-up in comparison to the other girls in her room. While
all the girls have left home and are already at a physical remove from their parents, regular
parcels from home represent for most of them the continued existence of strong ties. The
cheese, sausage and mustard sent from home upholds the parents' role as providers and are
signs of the girls' reliance on their parents. Instead of parental provisions, Lola has gifts
from her lovers in the communal refrigerator. They are workers in a meatworks and bring
her the tongues or kidneys of the slaughtered animals:

Wenn ich den Kühlshrank öffnete, lagen ganz hinten im Fach eine Zunge oder eine Niere. Vom
Frost wurde die Zunge trocken, die Niere platzte braun auf. Nach drei Tagen war hinten im Fach
der Platz leer. [...] Weder in der Kantine noch in der Turnhalle sah ich Lola an, ob sie die
Kleinigkeiten der geschlachteten Tiere aß oder wegwarf (23).

According to the theory supported by Kaplan, however, early libidinal transference is
cause for concern. In the case of Lola, her relationships with men have a connection for her
with her childhood and are thus signs of a less successful transition to adulthood than those
around her. While Lola receives no parental support during her time in the student hostel,
her parents do in fact continue to constitute love objects for her. Lola's adolescent 'case' is
different to the narrator's in this respect. While the latter's conflict is aggravated by a
clinging mother, Lola is still yearning for the sole affection of a mother who has never paid
her sufficient attention: in this mother/daughter constellation, the child is the one who
cannot let go. Lola's excess of libido which the girls once witness as she masturbates on
her bed, is commentated on in the text as being connected with a lack of love: "Ich hörte
Lola die Liebe mähen, die nie gewachsen war, jeden langen Halm auf ihrem dreckigweißten Leintuch“ (26). Her nocturnal activities reflect immature attempts at transference and the men she stalks become replacements for the parental love that she never enjoyed: “Es raschelten Blätter über ihr Gesicht, solche wie damals vor Jahren einem halbjährigen, von niemandem als von der Armut gewollten sechsten Kind. Und wie damals waren Lolas Beine zerkratzt vom Geist. Aber nie ihr Gesicht” (20). She does not find the love she is looking for with these men, but only perpetuates her childhood and the cycle of abuse which it contained, insinuated in the image of her scratched legs. The lack of love from her parents for which she is now trying to compensate is also suggested in a diary entry where she writes of a ‘small’ childhood. Here she explains her neglected emotions as the result of being the last of too many children:

Zwei, drei Kinder im Dorf haben keine Blätter, und sie haben eine große Kindheit. Es sind Einzelkinder, weil sie Vater und Mutter haben, die geschulte Leute sind. Die Blattflöhe machen aus älteren Kindern jüngere Kinder, aus einem vierjährigen ein dreijähriges, aus einem dreijährigen ein einjähriges. Und noch ein halbjähriges, schreibt Lola, und noch ein frischgeborenes. Und je mehr Geschwister die Blattflöhe machen, umso kleiner wird die Kindheit (14).

Lola is instrumental in triggering the narrator’s sense of individuality and her fascination with Lola is inseparable from her first experience of self-determination. The recurrent use of the subject ‘jemand’ in the early stages of the narrative (“Jemand im Viereck fragte”, 18; “Jemand ging ans Fenster”, 19; “Jemand sang”, 11; etc) in which the narrator retrospectively includes herself (“Vielleicht hieß ich in den ersten drei Jahren in diesem Viereck jemand”, 19) insinuates a minimum degree of particularity. She is even still a ‘someone’ when she first begins to associate with Kurt, Edgar and Georg: “Edgar, Kurt und Georg suchten jemanden, der mit Lola im Zimmer war” (43). Lola’s difference to the other girls in this regard, that is, her greater degree of individuality, is what attracts the narrator to her, an attraction which in turn forms the foundation of the narrator’s first clearly formulated self-determined aim: “ich wollte Lola im Kopf behalten” (42). Furthermore, the narrator’s formulation of a concrete aim has Lola’s death as its prerequisite. Her death attaches an importance to the act of remembering, making this a worthy aim. More crucially, it is the fact that Lola’s aspirations dissolved in tragedy which leads to the narrator’s decision to act: Lola’s death awakens in the narrator a sense for justice and instrumental to her acquisition of a moral standpoint. The irony is that in the act of procuring justice for Lola (by paying tribute to her memory), in her endeavours to counteract the injustices already committed against her, the narrator begins to proceed along the same path which has already for Lola ended in defeat. The ironic repetition of a
narrative of failure is portrayed in the novel as both (increasingly) self-conscious and unavoidable.

The narrator’s decision not to enter into sexual relationships with men, although not made explicit in the text, can be explained as a reaction to Lola’s experiences. The theme of the suffering and oppression of women in socialist Romania on account of their ability to become pregnant and bear children is touched on at several points in the story. Frau Grauberg, for example, who lives in the same building as the narrator, looks after a grandchild because the mother died from the complications of a caesarean, and the mentally handicapped homeless woman whom the narrator observes on her rambles through the city is frequently pregnant as the result of being raped by passing guards. Because of the unavailability of contraception and the criminalisation of abortion, women in socialist Romania were subjected to far greater oppression than men and this too is Lola’s bitter experience. When she becomes pregnant, she is condemned as the sole guilty party and has no choice other than to keep the unwanted baby or commit suicide. The narrator’s disidentification with the other girls in her dormitory and her preference for male companions can be seen as a fear of her socially imposed gender role whose implications she becomes aware of by observing Lola. When the narrator does, for a few months, have an affair, she consciously avoids emotional attachment (“und nachher keinen Moment an seinen Augen hângen”, 172) and thus succeeds in upholding her independence from men.

Beyond her catalysing role in the narrator’s individuation process, Lola’s association with the narrator extends to the former’s aforementioned attempts at libido transference. One of the common successful methods for achieving libidinal transference is, according to Kaplan, giving a peer group the representative role of the new love object. While up until her suicide the objects of Lola’s transference are older men, her final act points towards a new choice. When Lola commits suicide, she hangs herself with the narrator’s belt, a gesture which leads the other girls in the dormitory to place the blame on the narrator and the narrator herself to feel implicated in Lola’s crisis. The belt, already a symbol of a forced emotional bond, now connects Lola and the narrator. The narrator had already felt drawn to Lola (her attempts to ‘see’ or understand her) and now, in death, Lola has made a gesture which may have helped her had she lived - she has ‘tied’ herself to the narrator. Lola thus becomes post mortem a new love object: the diary she finds in her suitcase confirms the intention of the gesture and from now on she dedicates herself to Lola. She continues her efforts to dispel her blindness and understand her. But the new bond is a posthumous one, it is difficult to maintain and Lola often appears to be slipping away.

The bond with Lola, a girl her own age, is too fragile to help the narrator achieve severance from her parents. The doting mother remains the narrator’s main hindrance.
Later in the novel when the narrator meets her mother in town, she perceives a sudden new degree of detachment between them. Yet, instead of rejoicing that her efforts at ‘losbinden’ have finally come to fruition, she registers a feeling of ambivalence at the loss of unity: “Wie gingen in den Laden. Wir redeten nichts miteinander. Wenn ich einen der beiden gleichen Körbe getragen hätte, wären wir für Fremde wahrscheinlich wie Mutter und Kind gewesen. So aber gingen Passanten immer wieder zwischen uns hindurch, weil Platz genug war” (185). The narrator both perceives her separateness from her mother and imagines at the same time how they could be reunited. However, this remains a fantasy and the course she continues to steer with her mother is one of defiant estrangement. When her mother begins to criticise her changed ways, the narrator asserts herself by threatening to break off all contact: “Ich schrie sie an. Wenn du mich nicht in Ruhe läßt, dann siehst du mich nie wieder, wenn du noch ein Wort sagst” (186). The narrator’s momentary regret at the rift which opens up between herself and her mother is caused by the fact that the mother’s retreat has not proceeded as amicably as it might. The mother’s letters demanding affection are suddenly replaced with rent payments when the narrator loses her job; the mother’s strong love eventually bows to disappointment and anger as her daughter’s actions appear increasingly incomprehensible to her.

The four friends’ rejection of the values and lifestyle of their parents is a moral act, typical of the adolescent stage and can be seen as part of their attempts to loosen their emotional ties/ libidinous desire for their parents. Their anti-Heimat attitude (that is, their rejection of a traditional provincial way of life with the attendant attitudes discussed in the previous section) is a manifestation of adolescence, an intensification of the adolescent conflict. As I discussed above, their rejection extends to their parents’ attitude towards nature. In opposition to their parents’ fatalism and their belief in their reliance on the natural world, the four friends conceive of themselves as self-autonomous beings, able to control nature. The metaphor for this control, the act of mowing grass, recurs significantly in relation to adolescent desire, in the scene where Lola masturbates in the dormitory. In the narrator’s commentary, love becomes synonymous with grass, that is, it is like nature, something which has to be controlled and which threatens to grow back. Lola deals with her love by letting it all out, the narrator by abstinence. What is significant is that in the narrator’s mind, both reliance on nature and love (for the adolescent, the dangerous incestuous desire) must be overcome. The two tasks are so similar that they form the same image in her mind: parental love is like the grass from the provinces - it has to be mown and kept at bay. In this way the two themes of adolescent severance (mowing love) and anti-provincialism become entwined in the language of the narrator. The narrator’s metaphor of her father’s guilt as a former member of the SS as a plant which he
continually attempts to weed out evokes the concept of *Heimat* as being rooted to the soil and connects this with fascism, making *Heimat* morally unsound. Yet, at the end of the novel the narrator concedes love for a departed friend which is likewise improper since the latter had been a liar and a traitor. The image of this love as her “dümme Pflanze” aligns it with her father’s guilt and connotes a new acknowledgement of irrational feelings which includes *Heimat*, the grass in her head which she had to keep cutting back.

The above analysis has shown that in her late work, Müller starts to make concessions towards *Heimat* and is increasingly unable to depict it in terms which are purely disclamatory. As discussed in the previous chapter, a return to and recuperation of *Heimat* is already discernible in the ending of *Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt*. Indeed, the frequently made observation about *Heimat* that this becomes meaningful only after leaving it finds an affirmation in both these texts in which the influence of origins is seen as being both unavoidable and ongoing. In *Herztier* as in *Fasan*, it is the human need for emotional attachment which prevents the protagonists from disavowing both dangerous friendships and their provincial *Heimat* despite the damaging effects these are seen to have on their freedom.
Part Two: Libuše Moníková

In part one I examined the status and value ascribed to Heimat in selected texts by Herta Müller. I thereby traced a development in her work from a denunciation of Heimat’s oppression of women and outsiders as well as its instrumental view of nature, which she sought to counter in her postulation of a contrasting and alternative mode of perception, to her later work in which I found a retraction of this earlier radical critique. In part two, I turn my attention to the second related theme of this thesis – the nation – posing similar questions: do Moníková’s texts purport national identity as desirable, harmful or simply dispensable? What meaning does she accord the nation in her work? In the following chapter on Eine Schädigung, the place of belonging is the city of Prague, the capital and cultural heart of the Czech nation. My analysis of this text centres on its exploration of the gender question in relation to the construction of places of belonging and its elaboration of a male bias within the imagined community (in this instance, the city).

Chapter Four: The City as a Home for Women? Eine Schädigung and the Deconstruction of Allegory

Moníková’s literary preoccupation with Prague begins with her first ‘novel’, in which her heroine is constructed as an embodiment of the damaged city. It is set in the national crisis of the late 1960s and centres on the changes which transform Prague from a city viewed and enjoyed by its people to a “bewachtes Objekt” (13). The heroine is a student who works nights as a tram driver during university holidays. The story opens with an account of her route which takes her to a desolate and abandoned hilltop and back down into the city centre. To shorten a part of the route when there are no passengers, she adjusts the brakes, alights and sprints down the hill ahead of the tram. The beginning of the story focuses on the girl as she is running downhill - a race which she performs night after night. This description presents the heroine as young and daring, full of energy and with exuberance that is unperturbed. A reader with some knowledge of the author’s background begins to recognise in her an embodiment of the Czech(oslovak) nation during the euphoria of the Prague Spring. Her dash through the streets of Prague connotes the heedless

---

144 In retrospect Moníková preferred to call this early work a novella or story (‘Erzählung’). Libuše Moníková. Eine Schädigung. Roman. (first edn., 1981); Munich: dtv, 1990. Unless otherwise indicated, all page references in this chapter refer to this text.
optimism which emerged in the political thaw under Dubček in the late 1960s when generous reforms were aimed at creating a socialism with a 'human face'.

Beyond its function as a vehicle through which to present history, the analogy between city and female protagonist leads, in the form of an increasing concern within the text with the heroine as a private individual, to a feminist critique of particular forms of representation. In the following, I argue for a reading of the presentation of the heroine as first heedless and free and then gagged and raped as allegorical and interpret the injury of the title as that done to women when their images and bodies are appropriated for the purposes of allegory. My focus on the critique of allegory in the text leads to a reading of the ensuing narrative (that is, the story beyond the allegory) as an attempt by the narrator to negotiate a space for her heroine within a male economy. My first concern in the following discussion of Eine Schädigung will be to establish the allegorical dimension of the central image of the running girl and the way she functions within the text. Next, using a feminist critique of allegory, I show how the narrator abruptly divests her heroine of this function, and elaborate the reasons for this change in narrative intention. Finally, I demonstrate how Moniková's reconstruction of her heroine is a negotiation of the possibility of female (literary) subjectivity in the (literary) city.

The Running Girl and Political Freedom.

When abstract values and features which characterise a historical situation are projected onto a literary character (in our case, those which characterise the historical situation of the Prague Spring), the portrayal becomes allegorical. Moniková's image of a girl running through a dark and empty city evokes the tension between freedom and the looming imposition of restrictions at the end of the Prague Spring. In spatial terms, the tram route through an empty city represents one of the last spaces where freedom is asserted, which has not yet come under the control of the new bureaucratic power which towers over the city. The tram continues to provide public access to the top of the hill despite the fact that the forest and the garden restaurant have been replaced by a new bureaucratic complex. While the tram route is tolerated by the new government as a quaint and "harmlose Rarität" (9), the emergence of hardline politics points to the probability of further sanctions to the people's freedom in the form of its closure ("Die Stillegung der Straßenbahn ist nur noch eine Frage von Tagen", 9). The girl's attitude is one of blind trust in the safety of familiar surroundings ("sie wird auf sicherem, bekanntem Boden sein", 11) and stubborn refusal to capitulate to the dangers which surround her on the way. She runs past the new watchtowers on the hill and she finds them fearful, but manages to curb her fear by
blocking out in her perception the realities of her actual surroundings and by focusing instead on her goal: "Wenn sie durchläuft, denkt sie an das Ziel, das sie unten erreichen muß. Die Umgebung ist ein beliebiges Terrain" (10). The watchtowers function during the day, but only some work automatically at night, making night a time which offers the most opportunity for moving freely through an otherwise strictly patrolled city and lending a temporal dimension to the tension between freedom and control. The route the girl drives is thus in both spatial and temporal terms a facet of the analogue set up between the anonymous student driver and the city of Prague on the eve of 'normalisation'. It takes her through parts of the city which are barren and abandoned - she is the last person to move freely through this terrain: "Der Verkehr beginnt eigentlich unten am Kai, bergauf fährt niemand mehr" (9). Moníková's young Prague heroine occupies one of the last spaces of freedom in an increasingly guarded city. She herself represents the last breath of freedom of the Prague Spring.

The downward direction of her course and her quick and carefree pace are ominous signs of the crash course of Prague history. When the narrator tells how one night the girl runs into a concrete wall and is raped by a policeman, the story of the girl continues its parallel course with history - the Soviet occupation is evoked as sexual violation and disabling physical injury. After the rape and the girl's astonishing act of self-defence, the drama subsides. With the help of strangers, Jana recovers. And this is where the real story begins. For the aim of this book does not lie in its exploration of rape as a literary metaphor for a political occupation, but rather in a critique and deconstruction of the use of female bodies to transport abstract or 'higher' meanings. In an essay on female aesthetics, Moníková refers to the necessity for women writers in the seventies to "reveal and validate their body for literature" and to "thematize the social and physical injuries that have been done to it." The injury of the title of her first novel refers not only to the physical and psychological damage of rape, but also to the historical wrongs done to her people, as well as to the social injury that is done to women when their bodies and images are appropriated as a means of representation. While the author seems intent throughout not to stray beyond the concrete theme of rape, the historical message introduced in such an obvious manner at the beginning fades in favour of a feminist idea which emerges during the rape scene. Up until and including the rape/retribution sequence, the plot seems to be driven by the intention to produce a literary improvement of Czech(oslovak) national history. Moníková chooses a young woman to carry out her repair work - her violent

\footnote{Libuše Moníková. "Some Theses Regarding Women's Writing." *Women in German Yearbook.* 13 (1997), 7-9, 7.}
attack on her rapist is a symbolic corrective of history. It reverses the usual historical account of passive resistance to Soviet occupation and contains a tribute to Jan Palach to whom the novel is dedicated. Then, as if having become aware while narrating the rape that in the service of representation a real person has been overlooked, the narrator continues her story on another level, switching from the national and abstract to the individual and concrete. My reading of this switch in authorial intention is supported by the fact that the rape sequence is narrated twice. While the first ‘telling’ blends external commentary with the girl’s immediate perceptions, the second time it is re-told entirely from Jana’s perspective as she looks back to and interprets the events analytically. The feminist interpretation of the rape/ retribution which I discuss below and which motivates the change in focus to Jana as an individual, emerges in this second, analytical narration with both greater insistence and increased clarity than in the first narrative passage. Jana’s recollections and assessments, which I discuss in more detail below, read like a clarification of the author’s new novelistic concerns.

In her own commentary to Eine Schä digung, Mončková has stressed that her aim in writing the novel was to carry her protagonist past the parable she is part of at the beginning of the story. In an interview with Jürgen Engler she says: “Aus dem Parabelhaften wollte ich ihn herauslösen - sonst hätte er seine Glaubwürdigkeit, seine Verankerung im Realen verloren.” Mončková is concerned in her first novel not with images, but with women’s realities. While Mončková speaks of parable, I find that the term allegory better captures the function of the image of the girl running down the hill. Allegory, a literary or artistic presentation of an abstract concept using an image, often contains a personification, while a parable is a comparison which extends through the length of a story. And at the beginning of Eine Schä digung it is the image of the girl, rather than her story which has the greater impact. The narrative technique which describes the girl’s race once, and then returns to the beginning to relate it a second time contributes to both the timelessness and painterliness of the scene. The repetition is more detailed than the first rough ‘draught’ which occupies little more than half the first page. In the first version, the girl runs on the main street and in the second version, we learn that this is paved with

---

146 The ‘correction’ of Czech history is likewise a facet of the work of the artists in Die Fassade and Francine in Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin corrects literary history by re-writing parts of Kafka’s Das Schloß.

147 One of the events which marked a decisive turning point in the Prague Spring was the tragic self-immolation of 21-year-old philosophy student Jan Palach on 17 January 1969. His act expressed the futility and the heroic efforts of the Czechoslovak people to maintain their political sovereignty in the face of foreign intervention.

“glatten rotbraunen Fliesen, mit denen auch die umstehenden Gebäudewände belegt sind” (7). The double narration lends rigidity to the scene, so that despite the movement contained within it, it receives the clear and stable contours of a single image. The repetition lends the scene the eternal quality of a static picture.

In allegory, the general principles, norms or deeper meanings represented in the image are frequently embodied in female form. As part of monuments, female figures allegorise abstract values such as peace, strength, truth or nationhood. Female personifications of cities, ranging from the whore of Babylon to the city as a protective mother or seductive lover, are examples of allegory. The etymological meaning of allegory is “to say something in a different way” (from the Greek *allos agoreuein* = to speak differently than on the Agora, that is, no longer in public, accessible to all). The image produced of the girl running through the streets evokes an image of freedom in a way that is different to a realistic description. Its meaning is communicated in a way that is indirect, suggested.¹⁴⁹

The girl’s body in *Eine Schädigung* is used to illustrate an abstract principle. As a student she stands via synecdochical substitution for the political reformers. Borne along by the wind, she represents with her energy and daring the people of Prague moved by the spirit of political optimism: “Der Wind vom Fluß hat sich erhoben und strömt gegen den Berg, das Mädchen taucht in seine Stöße, läßt sich tragen und mitbewegen” (11). The stormy conditions she faces on her route through the city which issue from the river below contrast with the “Windstille” (8) in the new bureaucratic city centre at the top of the hill - this connotes the paralysis, the political apathy which has already emerged in the population out of the failure of reform. Finally, the anonymity of the youthful headstrong athlete supports a reading that links Moníková’s heroine beyond the abstract concept of freedom to Prague in the spring of 1968: the city as headstrong maiden.

**Allegory and Disembodiment**

Moníková feels compelled to continue her story beyond the symbolic constellations of a girl running through the night and rape because only by moving through and *past* the allegory is her heroine able to become a bodily, sensual and intellectual subject in the city. In an essay entitled “Traum-Stadt-Frau”, Sigrid Weigel discovers in literary portrayals of

cities a use of female allegory which has drastic consequences for women's writing: it doubles the space of the female protagonist.\textsuperscript{151} On the basis of a literary tradition in which female images and bodies are activated and appropriated in the service of semantic constructions of city settings (Weigel picks up this tradition in her analysis of modern and contemporary works by Italo Calvino, Paul Nizon, and Walter Benjamin), the image and body of a female protagonist in texts with city settings become subject to a seemingly inevitable mobilisation in allegories and metaphors of the city, so that alongside her place in the city, a second or double place as the city emerges 'automatically' and this appears to hinder women becoming literary subjects in city settings: Weigel writes of a double perspective "die \textit{zwangsläufig} entsteht, wenn eine Frau als Autorin in die Geschichte der Stadtschriften eintritt."\textsuperscript{152} In the history of the literature of the city, women are not subjects of the text - they are not the 'flâneuse', but rather the cityscape, through which the flâneur walks. At the beginning of \textit{Eine Schädigung}, Moniková inscribes her narration into a tradition which Weigel calls "das literarische Verfahren der Verkörperung und Verbildlichung [der Frau] in Weiblichkeits-Allegorien und -Metaphern."\textsuperscript{153}

Disregarding Weigel's problematic assumption that a female author will necessarily create a female heroine to inhabit her literary city,\textsuperscript{154} her essay delves into a problem created by a (phallocentric) literary tradition which Moniková's text attempts to answer. When a female body is used to produce, give meaning to and represent a city, this usage is an enlisting or appropriating of the female body, which for a female protagonist means the loss of her body. Weigel refers in this regard to an 'Entleiblichung' or disembodiment: "Aus der Perspektive der Frau ist das literarische Verfahren der Verkörperung und Verbildlichung in Weiblichkeits-Allegorien und -Metaphern als \textit{Entleiblichung} zu bewerten".\textsuperscript{155} In modern literary depictions of cities, the act of founding a city is revealed as the attempt of men to realise a dream, to (en)capture the object of their desire. The city itself becomes a paradigm of symbolic production - the female image in which the city is constructed refers to the place where the feminine does not exist.


\textsuperscript{152} Weigel, 190. My emphasis.

\textsuperscript{153} Weigel, 190.

\textsuperscript{154} She writes: "Auf die Schwierigkeit für eine Frau, als \textit{Autorin} einen Standort in einer Bildgeschichte zu gewinnen, welche die Plätze in geschlechtsspezifisch derart eindeutiger Weise verteilt, geht Benjamin in ironischer Wendung ein [...]." Weigel, 181. My emphasis.

\textsuperscript{155} Weigel, 190.
The personification of ideas or abstract concepts in female figures empties the figures presented of their concrete meaning. The depicted female figure can only function as a sign for something else when she does not refer to a real woman. The personification of abstract concepts such as virtues, of sciences or of arts serves to bring the concept alive, to make it more vivid for the spectator/reader. But, it also de-individualises and de-historicises the female image. Since it represents a concept, the female image does not refer to a subject. In order to function as the vehicle of allegory in the literary production of meaning, the female body must be empty of meaning. That is why the male body is unsuitable for allegory - the presentation of the male body refers to a concrete person, a male subject. The female body is not a subject, but rather a body of representation. Silke Wenk locates the reason for the use of female figures in national allegories in the absence of public and political roles for women. In her study of the female allegories contained in public statues in nineteenth-century Berlin, she traces the reasons why memorials to great men repeatedly enlist female figures in allegorisations of their skills and achievements. In contemporary commentaries, she discovers references to a problem of the ‘incidental’ physical features of great men and of their ‘unmistakable individuality’ which hinders the expression of the general and generalisable. The need for additional allegorical figures is felt to be particularly pressing in the case of monuments to poets, philosophers and men of spiritual grandeur, since these statues have the task of representing and playing tribute to an ‘inner being’. Since the expression of this ‘inner being’ is blocked by the man’s ‘physical mask’, further strategies were deemed necessary to communicate the desired content. Wenk concludes that in the general opinion, the man’s specificity was seen to prevent his body from being able to represent common and abstract concepts. She writes: “Offenbar war der Mann so mit Partikularität behaftet, daß er das “Allgemeine” nicht mehr repräsentieren konnte. Der Körper des Mannes ist der eines Privatmannes. Das Problem ist offenbar die sich abgrenzende männliche Persönlichkeit [...] Die Frauen stehen außerhalb dieser Konkurrenz, wie sie auf der Ebene der kapitalistischen Ökonomie existiert”. Her concluding theses is that, since women were not so involved in public life as men, their bodies did not refer to a concrete or particular person and could therefore transport abstract concepts.

In Eine Schädigung, the portrayal of the rape demonstrates the disembodiment that occurs when the female form is used as a vehicle for the communication of meaning. The

156 Wenk, 100.
157 She writes: “die Allegorien sind ‘weiblich’, weil nur Bilder von Frauen - außerhalb der (ökonomischen und staatlichen) Konkurrenz stehend - geeignet waren, die imaginäre Gemeinschaftlichkeit zu repräsentieren.” (Wenk, 101)
rape turns the girl into an allegory of the occupied city. And it robs her of the full range of normal bodily sensations, reducing her perception to her sexual organs: her mouth is “verstopft” (15), her cries are “unhörbar” (15), her legs are “bewegungslos” (16), the calves “gelähmt” (16). The girl’s revenge on her attacker, the agent of her disembodiment, is narrated in terms of providing the pre-conditions for a re-appropriation of her body. She lashes out at him with his baton and the movement arises out of a need to regain her lost mobility: “Nach der langen schmerzhaften Starrheit hat sie das Bedürfnis, die Hand zu beschäftigen und in Bewegung zu halten” (18). It seems that, by fighting off the policeman, the girl has created the necessary circumstances for shedding her symbolic role in the story and for receiving a personal history. At the end of the first chapter she speaks her name (Jana) and a few pages later the narrator claims that she emerged from the rape with a new memory: “Sie bekam ein neues Gedächtnis” (25). After she has heaved the policeman into the river she completes her route, but she has already distanced herself from her (allegorical) role as tram driver to the extent that she sees her hand on the controls “aus einer ungeheuren Entfernung” (22) and steers the tram back to the station “ohne dazu zu gehören” (22) - in a state of estrangement from the situation and her actions.

The significance of Jana’s self-defence, which culminates in murder, as a life-saving retrieval of her body and a resuscitation of her numbed senses, is made particularly clear when the event is narrated for the second time, now from a perspective of temporal distance. Lying in bed, Jana recalls what happened and tries to make sense of her murderous revenge. As she recalls the experience she remembers feeling reduced to a state in which the only knowledge she had of herself was her gender (“sie kannte ihr Geschlecht, weil es brannte und blutete, sie wußte, daß es weiblich war”, 24). The rape emptied her of all her individual features, it reduced her to a female receptacle. Her reaction set in motion the reconstruction of a body which had been silenced (“Es brachte sie aus der Stummheit zur Artikulation”), emptied of particularity (“zuerst mußte der Baukasten der eigenen Person gefüllt sein”), and reduced to a sexual organ (she “ergänzte die entsprechenden Organe”). Jana’s sudden violent activity marked the beginning of a literary project of reclaiming a female subject for the city. Whenever she finds herself on the periphery of the city, she decisively returns to the centre, making clear how crucial it is for the narrator that her heroine discover and experience particularity at the place of its loss. The project of retrieval centres on four different aspects of subjectivity: the physical, sensual, historical and intellectual. Jana’s physical retaliation sets the project in motion by giving her back her own body (“Ihr Körper, neu zusammengestellt”, 24), yet she remains de-individualised (“ohne Einmaligkeit”, 25) and with no personal history (“ohne Vergangenheit”, 25). While her act of self-defence is a key event in the story and a major step towards the recovery of
a distinctive subjectivity, it does not effect a complete turn-around. The losses for female subjects which have occurred in a long history of literary representation cannot be made up for in one night, no matter how eventful, or indeed in one story. Jana reflects on her act of revenge and decides that it was not sufficient to balance out the wrong done to her: “Der Schlag ins Gesicht saß, er war genau und nötig, die nächsten zogen mechanisch nach, aber ein Ausgleich war es nicht” (25). Neither does the novel attempt to refill the entire skeleton of the female ‘flaneur’. By choosing a time frame of three weeks, Monšková’s vision remains in the hatching stage and is left open for continuation even at the end of the novel.

Mara’s Colony and Feminist Methodology

The second springboard to individuality and subjectivity is Jana’s meeting with Mara. In interaction with Mara, Jana is reminded of the sensual and historical aspects of her self. The compulsion to respond and react to someone who sees her as something other than a means to something else (sexual satisfaction, representation) enables her to experience individuality: “Der Aufenthalt durch Mara hatte ihr das Gefühl zurückgebracht, daß sie gemeint wurde, und wer das war” (25). Attempts to smile, to remember and to speak, which at first fail (“Sie sucht nach Wörtern, aber in ihrem Kopf wirbelt es und nichts fällt ihr ein, sie kann sich nicht erinnern, was sie sagen wollte”, 20) meet with more success under Mara’s care: “Bevor sie einschläf, gelingt ihr ein Lächeln” (21).

Mara’s offer to accommodate and hide her new friend, while attractive, is not (yet) the right option for Jana and she remains hesitant towards the invitation. Within the feminist project of the text, the alternatives Jana faces between moving to Mara’s colony and remaining in the city represent a choice between two different feminist standpoints: between the rejection of a male, patriarchal rationality and its structures and a rehabilitation of the suppressed feminine and the attempt to critique and change these structures from within. The first option represented by Mara’s colony outside of the city has much in common with the feminist project developed in the seventies by Luce Irigaray.138 Irigaray’s theory links up with Weigel’s critique of the use of the female form in allegory, in that it allows us to view the allegorical female figure as a projection onto the female form of a male Imaginary. Irigaray’s feminist project stems from her conviction that women have no access to their unconscious or to their sexuality, and that within the patriarchal order they embody instead the male Imaginary. The Imaginary, the desiring relationship with the world, has rigidified to a male Imaginary, on which the male
Symbolic order is based. For Irigaray, there can be no immediate access to the body within the Symbolic order centred on the phallus, let alone to the female body. Her demand that a female Imaginary must be based on female morphology will in her view provide the basis for a new Symbolic which she conceives of as emerging beside and apart from the existing male/phallic order.

Mara’s association with fluidity (she lives on a houseboat on the river) has strong parallels with Irigaray’s new female Imaginary, which for her comprises a new medium with which to revalidate the repressed female body. The colony, which Mara founded one summer with a (female) friend, represents in the text a female Symbolic as theorised by Irigaray, that is, a realm providing a social existence for women grounded in a specifically female Imaginary. The renovation of old dilapidated houses is an alternative way of rebuilding a lost female subjectivity beyond the male symbolic. The metaphor of construction links the different ways chosen by Mara and Jana in the story, thus forming a basis for comparison. Just as the narrator describes Jana’s task of reclaiming her individuality as a filling of a ‘construction kit’ (‘Baukasten’), Mara speaks of how she and her friends rebuilt and ‘adapted’ four abandoned houses: “In den ersten Jahren hat es uns jedesmal die ganzen Ferien gekostet, die Häuser bewohnbar zu machen, zwei haben wir als Ziegelbruch verwendet, jetzt sind vier adaptiert und es kommen noch Balkenhütten dazu” (46). The territory Mara occupies throughout the text is entirely distinct from the realm which falls under the control of the phallic towers; in order to find her friend, Jana has to descend a flight of steps which leads to the river and out of view of the towers: “Vor der Sperre bog sie zu den Treppen, die zum Fluß führten. Sie stieg langsam ab, jederzeit vorbereitet, daß man sie anhielt, aber niemand rief ihr nach. Die Kaimauer verdeckte die Türme und die Spannung, die von ihnen zog, wch dem Gefühl des Absteigens” (37).

Irigaray conceives of female morphology as a return to those spheres which have always been assigned to women - nature and mimesis. Similar to Julia Kristeva’s idea of a female writing, her Imaginary is an attempt to recapture the pre-oedipal memory of the body and the mother and incorporate it into the symbolic and it entails a rejection of Lacan’s postulate of the irreversibility of the Symbolic and the ensuing irretrievable loss of the pre-oedipal. Mara’s pronounced maternalness connotes the houseboat as a pre-oedipal space where Jana experiences respite from the disabling phallic city. When Jana meets her for the second time she is presented in a nurturing role, warming milk for and stroking the cat. She has round ‘feminine’ arms and her softness and calmness causes Jana to desire her

---

138 Irigaray’s major work, *Speculum of the Other Sex*, appeared in German translation in 1980, one year before the publication of *Eine Schädigung*. 

134
caresses: “Es ist in ihr so viele Ruhe, daß Jana süchtig ihre Berührung auf dem weichen Fell nachspürt” (41). As has already been the case with Jana and the city, there is considerable overlap between the attributes pertaining to Mara and those which refer to the river environment. The atmosphere in the bay where the boat is anchored is described as a “weiche Stille” (40); Mara is calm (“Es ist in ihr so viel Ruhe”, 41) and leaves behind a strong impression of softness (“der Eindruck ihrer Weichheit”, 41). Indeed the entire realm surrounding Mara shares her attributes - even the softness of the cat’s fur adds to the impression of her gentleness. The softness and calm of Mara and her realm constitute the opposite pole to the harsh disturbing city.

When Jana hesitates to leave the city and join Mara, we can read this as an expression of mistrust towards a feminist endeavour which seeks to empower women outside of existing structures. Her admission of the importance which the city holds for her is accompanied by signs of the difficulties associated with its consequences. Jana’s statement, “Für mich ist die Stadt immer noch wichtig” (40) is articulated with an “angebrochene Stimme” which brings to the fore her speechlessness. Jana’s articulation of her wish to remain in the city impairs her speech and thereby raises the question as to the validity for women of anything derived from this male economy. Mara’s chosen existence outside of the city is depicted from Jana’s viewpoint as presenting fewer conflicts/hurdles than the attempt which she undertakes to remain within it. When she meets Mara for the second time on her houseboat, their trip out onto the river is described as a break from the trials of the city. The chance to observe the calmness of a seagull’s flight “schaft eine Pause” (44) and the small thickly glazed windows of the boat make the dangers of the city appear “klein und ferngerückt”. The boat which offers “Verborgenheit und Sicherheit” (44) is connotative of the pre-symbolic and symbiotic and Mara’s association with the river creates parallels between her territory and an Irigarian female Imaginary, the basis in her theory of the new female subject.

Jana’s decision to remain (for the time being at least) in the city despite the fact that this is the more difficult of the two options open to her can be read as a critique of Mara’s alternative. For Irigaray, if women want to retrieve their subjectivity, they should strive to position themselves in their difference to men. Whereas for her predecessor, Simone de Beauvoir, woman’s otherness imprisons her in immanence and prevents her from becoming a transcendental subject, for Irigaray, women can now celebrate a new kind of difference which differs from their initial misogynist oppression by the fact that it is freely accepted. In this way, she argues, women’s difference can become the first serious threat to the male hegemony. While this new position of difference is typified in her theory by women’s physiological fluidity which has been criticised as an appropriation from a misogynist
cultural tradition, Irigaray is adamant that she is not interested in creating a universal female subject. Rather, her intention is to disclose the oppressing fiction of a universal subject. This, she believes, is a patriarchal discourse which she does not mean to perpetuate:

Zu behaupten, daß die Weiblichkeit sich als Begriff zum Ausdruck bringen kann, heißt bereits, sich in ein ‘männliches’ Repräsentationssystem verreinnahmen zu lassen, innerhalb dessen die Frauen in einer Ökonomie des Sinns gefangen sind [...]. Ich glaube, die Männer tun genug dazu, eine Theorie der Frau auszuarbeiten. In einer Sprache von Frauen würde der Begriff als solcher nicht stattfinden.159

Nevertheless, by retaining the notion of woman’s otherness and particularly in her insistence on her specific corporeal reality, Irigaray’s theory can be criticised for its reduction of woman to her anatomy - which also amounts to her universalisation. Mara in *Eine Schädigung* possesses a number of attributes, both physical and behavioural, which can be aligned with a particular phallocentric image of femininity: she is nurturing, protective and performs a task “mit einer frauenhaften Rundung der Arme” (41). She represents femininity and is not the living individual female subject which Irigaray envisages as existing beyond her various guises. Mara perpetuates the problem of woman as allegory, this time as the all-caring mother/rural idyll and this is the reason for Jana’s hesitation. Her choice to remain in the city reflects a feminist position which prefers a confrontation with rather than a rejection of the phallus.

The hostile male-centred city symbolised by the phallic watch-towers is an environment which is inhibiting. When suddenly they come into sight, Jana feels disempowered: “Ihre Nähe ließ sie erlahmen” (35). The power of the new hardliners in the city is depicted in the text in Foucaultian terms. The power is not real, but imaginary, its instruments, the watchtowers and the barriers which signal the boundaries to forbidden zones, rely for their effectiveness on the people's belief in them. Mara knows that while the watchtowers do not carry out any ‘real’ work, the hollow constructions nevertheless fulfil their purpose: “Psychologisch arbeitet es vollkommen, schon der Anblick lähmt” (48). Indeed, for her, this is the most dangerous kind of power: “Aber es ist keineswegs harmlos, es ist gefährlich, schlimmer als direkte Gewalt” (49). The fact that the power of the restrictive government is enforced through the consent of the people, however, opens up a possibility for escaping or subverting it on the level of the people. Despite Mara’s opinion that if the people were to realise that the surveillance techniques were an artifice, the government would react with actual surveillance, Jana seems to gather hope from the revelation. Just as Foucault’s concept of “spontaneous resistance”, that is, resistance which
occurs whenever there is power, remains a vague and rather utopian attempt to lead his theory of an all-consuming power in a more positive direction, so too does Jana’s determination to escape oppression assume only nebulous articulations. Yet her conviction that ‘something’ can be done to counter the ‘empty’ power of the oppressors (she asks Mara twice, “Kann man nichts machen?”, 49) motivates her hesitancy to leave the city.

The First Three Weeks

The remainder of the text depicts Mara’s efforts to refamiliarise herself with the city and to probe the possibilities it offers for habitation. As she begins to participate anew in the activities which it presents for her, she makes a number of encounters which lead her to ponder on the various types of citizens harboured by the city and to measure these against her own hopes for herself. These meetings furthermore structure the narrative, functioning as building blocks both for her growing self-confidence as well as for the story’s progression.

The Women on the Streets

Jana’s revenge on the policeman and the help and support she receives afterwards from Mara are not sufficient to enable her to overcome the appropriation of her body and the erasure of personal meaning she has suffered. Even her physicality and sensuality which have now been roused are, in the weeks which follow, in constant need of re-establishment and re-enactment. Interaction is at the beginning important since it causes an ongoing reactivation of Jana’s dulled senses. When she ventures onto the streets for the first time after the rape, she feels anonymous and her blurred vision hinders her perception of the other women around her. The individuality which she had experienced with Mara has receded. She feels holy and untouchable; she does not exist in the city, but somewhere beyond or above it: “Heilig sein schloß manchmal das Gefühl zu schweben ein” (31). On the street she looks for women with whom she can identify, perhaps with the aim of testing her environment and in the hope of disproving Mara’s belief that it is no longer possible to live in the city (“In dieser Stadt kann man nicht mehr leben”, 21). We are told that her search for women to direct her is something new and that until now she had been guided by men: “Bisher waren es Männer, mit denen sie rechnen mußte, sie bestimmten die Grenzen” (32). The boundaries are those of the feminine, which were determined and enforced by men: “Jede unweibliche Handlung rief Gegenmaßnahmen hervor” (32). Despite her

---

137

Irigaray. Das Geschlecht, das nicht eins ist, 128.
unfocussed vision, Jana can perceive enough to conclude that the girls she sees walking along the street do not present her with any role models. They are "ohne Denken" (32) and clothed in the same tight fashionable trousers which draw attention to their genitals and make them "kaum beweglich" (33). Their presence makes Jana recall and re-experience the immobility she wants to overcome: "Gedrängt von losen Mündern und Bäuchen spürte Jana immer deutlicher ihre verprügeltten Beine" (33). Jana’s negative response to these women is a disavowal of a female identity which consists of conforming to male-imposed norms and of a use of the female body in the service of men which leads to abuse.

**The Taxi Driver**

The taxi driver with whom Jana is obliged to interact triggers more positive reactions and provides her with the next opportunity to experience personal feelings and defend them in her responses. The ability to articulate and act out her own wishes and desires which was epitomised in the murder and banishment of the male aggressor (and agent of her appropriation) can only become tangible as a durable and viable female quality through repetition and practice. The reversal of her situation as victim, in which she can neither speak nor move, through the revenge which enabled her to regain movement and speech, must be repeated in ‘real-life’ situations. The taxi driver confronts Jana with particular expectations which provoke this as yet uncommon and difficult behaviour from Jana. He is made uneasy by her silence and stiffness; this forces her to smile and prepare herself for conversation. When he lights a cigarette, he brings Jana into a situation in which she knows she has found herself before. But, whereas in the past she would have tolerated the fumes and suppressed her own wish for clean air, she now compels herself to react differently. This episode distinguishes new from old, overly permissive ‘erroneous’ behaviour. The new reaction requires a high degree of self-discipline and determination. It does not come naturally, and Jana uses the memory of her attack on the policeman to make the next step towards correcting the wrongs of the past: “Von selbst ging es nicht. - Sie fühlte die Geste der ausgeholten Hand gegen den Polizisten noch einmal nach und sagte plötzlich ganz ruhig: ‘Rauchen Sie bitte nicht’” (34). As Jana nears her destination, however, the sight of the towers which suddenly come into view engenders renewed passivity. In spaces which expose her to the towers, the obvious manifestation of the male power economy, she is susceptible to experiences of self-annihilation. The proximity of the towers unleashes in her paralysis and tension: “Ihre Nähe ließ sie erlahmen” (35). Her legs become heavy and she feels a “Spannung, die sich von ihnen zog” (37). Even at the end of the story, the city streets remain difficult terrain and places to pass through without lingering.
The Senses Return
Of the contents with which Jana begins to fill her 'construction kit' self, sensory perceptions are central. These have been - like her former mobility (as tram driver) and agility (as running girl) - numbed by her rape experience, which for the purposes of this discussion is understood primarily in terms of a loss of individuality resulting from the use of her body in an allegorical personification of Prague. The symptoms of sensory loss are frequent in the days immediately following her rape: she is distressed at her inability to hear the words of other women on the street (32) and when she steps back out onto the street after the 'healing' darkness of a cinema, she feels numb ('betäubt') and her eyes burn (69). As she begins to regain her senses, it becomes clear that this is an important step towards separating the individual Jana from the allegory. On her first venture out onto the streets after the rape, Jana perceives no difference between her physical state and the occupied city around her - the latter displays in her eyes the same attributes of lameness and emptiness which describe her own state: the city centre is 'evacuated', it is characterised by its "beängstigende Gespanntheit" and "unnatürliche Stille" (40). Three days later, Jana goes out onto the street once more, this time in search of something to eat. She has developed hunger. She wants to eat something fresh and cold, but is overcome by a vanilla smell from a bakery and buys a piece of cake. The activation of her senses of smell and taste changes her perception and enables her to separate and distance herself from the city around her: "während sie aß, veränderte sich die Straße durch den Geschmack und durch das Gefühl der Sättigung, sie rückte weiter, wurde fremder und klarer, und die Menschen rückten mit" (81). Next she begins to focus on and name the various shops and offices which line the footpath; this stresses the objective and distanced relationship she has achieved towards her surroundings and this is interpreted by the narrator as an exercise in perception: "sie konzentrierte sich auf ihre Wahrnehmungen" (81).

Irene and Svidor
Irene represents the first positive female role model for Jana in terms of freedom and individuality who, unlike Mara, lives in the city. With her keys to numerous houses, she is a 'flaneur', behind locked doors. It is no accident that Jana meets her old friend after she has overcome much of her sensory loss. Through Irene, who finds her counting trees on the street, Jana meets Svidor, an academic who reawakens her intellectual capacities, a further building block of her 'Baukasten'. The intellectual element of Moníková's new female city subject can emerge once the physical wounds have begun to heal. On her way to an
arranged meeting with the renowned philosopher, Jana moves for the first time free of pain.
The misuse of female images in allegories of the city which denies women a concrete and individual subjectivity in the city has for Moniková both physical and intellectual dimensions. Jana’s intellectual starvation is made evident in her attitude before the meeting. She can think of nothing she wants to discuss and therefore approaches the appointment as a continuation of her new friendship with Irene. She is distracted from the ideas which used to interest her, some of the problems she has forgotten, others have lost their urgency: “Jana hatte nichts Dringendes zu besprechen, von ihrer Lektüre war sie abgelenkt, die Probleme, die sich ergeben hatten, waren teils vergessen, teils durch die Entfernung gelöst, sie wollte von Svidor nichts. Sie nahm den Besuch als Fortsetzung des Treffens mit Irene” (85). Svidor’s enquiry into her reading is an easy introduction back into the activity of intellectual exchange. It encourages her to dispel her doubts about whether philosophy can be of any importance to her (“Es war ihm sehr ernst, obwohl Jana sich fragte, ob es sie noch etwas anging”, 87). However, like the taxi driver, Svidor is an ill-meaning catalyst to Jana’s developing self-awareness. He is another man who, with his particular expectations of Jana’s behaviour, projects a male Imaginary onto women and defends it with threats. Jana even sees in him an extension of the destructive desire of the policeman: “Es gab keinen wesentlichen Unterschied zwischen ihm und dem Beamten. Beide hatten Drohungen bereit” (88). Like the taxi driver’s expectation that Jana will suppress her own discomfort, which she overcomes by asking him not to smoke, she shatters Svidor’s expectation, which is in this instance refers to women’s inability to understand philosophy. Jana experiences a triumph in explaining how she approaches Hegel and particularly in her achievement of understanding much of the introduction to his *Phänomenologie des Geistes*. The experience of her intellectual victory has positive effects on her physical subjectivity. On her way out of Svidor’s flat, her mobility and agility are extreme (she executes a “tödenden fünf Stockwerke langen Steptanz”, 88) and she is still pain-free. A more lasting effect is the motivation to extend her knowledge: “Später dachte sie, daß sie den Namen der Frau gern gewußt hätte” (88).160

The School Reunion
The continuation of a plot structured on a series of meetings emphasises the intersubjective dimension of subjectivity. Every new interaction unleashes improvements or setbacks to Jana’s ‘construction’. Jana’s meeting with a group of her former classmates who are less self-assertive than Irene has, for example, injurious results. Their experiences of

160 Svidor had claimed that only one woman in history had ever understood philosophy.
housework, child-bearing and rearing combine with a stifling atmosphere in the full tram carriage where they are celebrating their school reunion. The closeness in the tram takes Jana back to the edge of paralysis and she seeks freedom and movement to escape the threat. Jana escapes by leaping out between stations and twists her ankle. The limping gait with which she emerges from this encounter is a vivid contrast to her improvised dance after talking to Svidor: "sie bemühte sich, ohne Hinken zum Bürgersteig hinüberzugehen, den Schmerz im Knöchel überwindend" (100).

Progress and relapse are thus both present during the three weeks after Jana's rape. While no fully self-assured female 'flaneur' emerges in the text, Jana's encounters which structure the narrative bring movement into the construction and ensure that by the end of the story the first building blocks are in place. The speedy erection of an outer shell together with references to an ongoing inner injury make it clear that the physical, sensory and intellectual losses have been much easier to overcome than the psychological damage. When the narrator declares in the last chapter the completion of the 'Baukasten', this is a reference to a basic structure. The healing process is stated at the end of the novel as being complete on an 'external' level, which intimates the need for inner re-growth. I suggest that Jana's escape in the last chapter to hidden places in the city delineates the beginning of the process of inner healing. In contrast to the outer healing, which has taken place so far, and during which interaction and confrontation with others was central, the courtyard Jana seeks out at the end is a place where she meets no-one ("Sie begegnet in diesem Garten niemandem", 103).

**Time for Reflection**

The physical "äußer[ ] Heilung" (101) which has been achieved three weeks after the rape consists of movement and perception and equips Jana on a very basic level to survive in the city. Out of a position of enforced passivity - gagged and bound, able to neither move, speak nor breathe, "daß sie nicht mehr atmet, nicht lebt" (26), reduced to a metaphor for the occupied city - Jana is now, at the worst of times, at least sure of her existence: "Sie hat oft das Gefühl, nur die bloße Existenz zu behaupten" (102). Her continued reliance on her memory of the maternally connoted Mara is a regressive fantasy and thus an indication of her ongoing psychological trauma which produces the need for protective motherly warmth; the narrator refers to this as the "eigentliche Schädigung" (101) which is deeper and will need more time to heal than the physical injuries. In the last scene, she is wearing Mara's sweater and at night when her fear escalates, she calms herself by imagining that her friend's voice is speaking to her. The recollections of Mara also express the ongoing
temptation for Jana of the colony outside of the oppressive city. Jana’s desire both to meet up with Irene and to join Mara reflect two poles of a conflict (city/colony) which has not been resolved: “Sie würde gern Irene treffen, vielleicht würde sie in die Kolonie fahren” (102).

While Jana can now walk through the streets, she lacks the leisure of the ‘flâneuse’. She has not become like the male literary hero in the city, who embraces and occupies the city. Her impatience and inability to linger in one place (“sie hält es an einer Stelle nicht aus, sie ist noch ungeduldig”, 103) point to the ongoing problems for her as a literary heroine in the city. The city has been depicted as the ravished woman, and for Jana herself the city environment reminds her of her rape, which means that it, particularly where the towers are in view, reinstates her objectification and disempowerment. The few places which Jana has already discovered which ‘relate’ to her (“Manches in dieser Stadt bezieht sich auf sie”, 103) are places away from the phallic power of the towers and constitute the emergence of a new territory from which an opposing female city subject can emerge. She continues to avoid brightness, which throughout the novel is connotative of the phallic - the policeman’s torch, the more intensive light in the administrative centre. Darkness is accordingly associated with safety, both after the rape and the agony of her menstrual cramps, Jana seeks the darkness behind closed eyes - it is “ausgleichend” (17) and inviting: “in der Dunkelheit bleiben, nicht sehen, sie will hier nicht sein”, 17). Although the desire for darkness also indicates an escape from reality, it is an escape from a particular reality only, that is, the ‘hier’, the reality which appropriates and disables the feminine. The places which Jana claims relate to her in the final chapter, where she finds self-confirmation, are hidden and far away from the towers: the suburban cinema, for example, where the friendliness of the usherette makes up for the long walk through the streets to get there. The courtyard is likewise an interior space (she passes through two other courtyards before she reaches it) and the stillness she finds there, combined with an atmosphere from a past time and a view over the old part of the city, make it an oasis away from the realities of the occupied city. These are places which provide the chance to reflect and consider the possibility of resistance.

There is an indication that the way to find the support she needs to secure her existence, even her subjectivity, in the city is to train her intellectual capacities. Jana claims that thinking is an empowering experience and indeed the only way to empowerment: “Während sie nachdenkt, ist sie nicht ohnmächtig, sie kann auf nichts anderes stützen” (102). She remembers that her intellectual victory over Svidor brought her satisfaction. Her reflections on the cause and meaning of her rape lead her to regret her obedience and to identify this as a contributing factor to her sexual abuse. Whether thinking and scoring
intellectual victories will suffice to overcome abuse and objectification in the city is questionable. Jana is still not sure whether Mara may in fact be right after all, and that for women the city has indeed become inhabitable. Nevertheless, the fact that Moníková leaves her heroine at the end of the story in a state of comfort and security in the city indicates optimism towards the possibility of a narrative of the city which is open to women and includes a female perspective. While Jana’s choice of place is yet to be made, she has in spite of her injuries not yet relinquished Prague.

An optimistic tone at the end of the story emerges out of the perspective of gradual change which will bring improvement: the last sentence of the novel, “Es ist die Zeit der Äquinoktialstürme” (103) alludes to the fact that from now on, the nights will become longer again. That is, it is a promise of a time increasingly favourable to Jana’s desire for darkness.\(^{161}\) It seems then that the city does offer opportunities to experience female subjectivity and this positive ending intimates that Jana will remain in the city.

\(^{161}\) The time span of the novel - three weeks - is also an imposition of female time, since we are told that Jana’s menstrual cycle lasts 21 days.
Chapter Five: The Melancholy of Exile: Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin

kein Land sonst verstümmelt

Moniková’s second novel is an exploration of exile. It depicts the crisis in the life of a young Czech woman academic who has emigrated to West Germany and first feels troubled by her situation after many years of residence. The issue of place and its cultural and historical contents as a dimension of identity is already discernible in Eine Schädigung and from Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin onwards, it occupies the central position in Moniková’s literary concerns. In the first novel, a sense of duty or obligation to remain in Prague, acknowledged yet more instinctive than rationalised, holds Jana back from leaving the city where she has been violated and where she suffered an occlusion of agency. The heroine of Pavane, despite initial attempts to deny it, is no less immune to feeling allegiance to a home territory. Outwardly she shares none of her predecessor’s hesitancies and self-doubts; she has long since made the move of which Jana remained so unsure (that is, leaving Prague) and pursues a successful academic career in West Germany. Parallel to her apparent successes, however, a nagging hip complaint intrudes which uncovers the presence of a psychological instability.

Francine’s commuter lifestyle epitomises her unrest in her not-so-new environment - she divides her time between Göttingen and another unspecified German city where she has a part-time position as a university lecturer. Literature and film are her passion and influence her to the extent that at times she is no longer able to perceive a boundary between her own life and that of fictional characters. After reading an excerpt from Vita Sackville-West’s portrait of Virginia Woolf, she claims to be able to taste the bread crusts which the latter according to her friend had so enjoyed eating. Nonetheless, her literature seminars at the university are a disappointment. She finds her colleagues conservative, the students more interested in passing time than in learning and the caretaker lacking in respect. Her wholly negative attitude towards German academia reaches a climax when a female colleague from another discipline, with whom Francine had hoped to discover common intellectual interests, insists on talking about decorating.

Francine’s ill-humour prevails in all spheres of her daily life, wherever, that is, she believes to discover evidence that she is living in a country lacking in consideration for

---

162 Libuše Moniková. Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin. Roman. (first edn., 1983); Munich: dtv, 1988. Referred to in the following as Pavane. Unless otherwise indicated, all page references in this chapter refer to this text.
others and - in the worst scenario - in basic humanity. Her outrage at 'German' behaviour (or rather the way people behave in Germany) leaves no-one unscathed. From her students’ motivations (“Sie sind gekommen, um zwei Stunden lang Spannung zu haben, um sich an mir zu stoßen”, 26), to her neighbours’ customary greetings (“Ernst gemeinte Grüße gibt es hier nicht”, 16) and a shop assistant’s apparent disinterest (“Die Verkäuferin nimmt mich nicht wahr”, 64) - Francine judges everyone around her with unmitigated animosity. In addition to her harsh criticism of others, her physical complaint is brought to the reader’s attention: the hip pain she suffers increasingly compels her to limp.

In the following reading, I show how Francine’s crisis which begins with a limp and leads her to take sick leave from her lectures, suspend all her former social contacts and begin a new life in a wheelchair, represents a failure to address the effects of the loss which preceded emigration. While Francine has already been living in Germany for a number of years (long enough, at least, for her relationship to her husband to have stagnated), she has up to this point not admitted the psychological effects of this upheaval. Paying attention to the intrusions into the narrative of fantasies, visions and hallucinatory visitations, I contend that the defunct crown princess heralded in the story’s title and who surfaces in variously modified guises, is emblematic of a nation which is dead for the narrator, but not yet buried, that is, not yet consciously acknowledged as being lost and represented in a way that would facilitate an acceptance of loss. Thus, my reading of Pavane interprets Francine’s increasingly inwardly directed pursuits as the work of mourning the loss of a nation.

The theme of staged incapacitation in Pavane has prompted many feminist commentators to direct their attention towards its protagonist. The result is that while the novel has become the subject of more frequent quotation and discussion than any of Moniková’s other texts, this has almost always taken place against the backdrop of attempts to somehow fit Francine into predetermined models of feminist action or wilful subversion of the status quo. I begin my discussion with an outline of these readings as a point of departure for my own interpretation of Francine’s physical and performed injuries as a psychic imbalance which renders her socially incapable. I argue that they misinterpret the tone of narration by failing to adequately consider the implications of a suspicious first person narrator and that this leads to a crucial oversight which I try to redress. Following this, a summary of the theories of mourning and melancholy offered by Freud and Kristeva precede my interpretation of Francine’s crisis. Throughout the chapter, I pay attention to the implications of a first person narrative technique for an interpretation which hinges on denial, arguing that the author’s utilisation of the dreams and visions as well as the
addition of appraisals of Francine made by her friends and relatives, allow the reader early access to the nature of the narrator's denial.

**Francine as Feminist Heroine**

Critics who have already offered interpretations of Francine's crisis remain on the whole sympathetic to her behaviour. Sigrid Weigel sees her choice of transportation as positively emphasising a symptom which instead of suppressing it, enables Francine to play out her status of non-belonging and to practice a new identity which acknowledges imperfection. She writes very much to Francine's credit: "Sie konfrontiert sich mit ihrer eigenen Schädigung und erhält mit dem Rollstuhl ein sichtbares demonstratives Zeichen dafür. [...] Im Rollstuhl erprobt die Ich-Erzählerin eine Unabhängigkeit, die keine Vollkommenheit [...] voraussetzt."\(^{163}\) In her reading of the story, Maria Kublitz-Kramer more aptly finds Francine's symptoms to be a sign of a hidden complaint; she calls it a "Zeichen, dessen 'Wahrheit' es zu entdecken gilt."\(^{164}\) For her, however, Francine is also a figure suffering from some kind of social wrong. She reads her limp as resistance ("Hinken in der Erzählung bedeutet Auflehnung gegen die Ordnung", 111). By situating the responsibility for Francine's crisis in German society (Kublitz-Kramer describes her limping as a "Gestus ihres Widerstandes gegen das, was ihr die Gesellschaft antut", 107), these authors fail to give adequate consideration to the fact the social injuries are only available to the reader through the eyes of Francine, who because she is the victim, is far from an objective source. The few comments made by others about Francine which 'accidentally' come to the attention of the reader, betray that Francine is 'difficult' and her attitudes unacceptable and this compels us to place doubt on her own condemnations of others. Readings which ignore the moments in the text which invite the reader to laugh at as well as laugh with, and to become suspicious of Francine's unconvincingly furnished explanations for her objectionable behaviour do not adequately problematise the situation of denial which is blocking the possibility of peaceable relations for Francine. By offering too sympathetic a view of Francine, they fail to recognise the way the text - through the figure of the inassimilable and physically incapacitated protagonist - demonstrates the wholly undesirable effects that can be the result of neglecting the losses incurred by migrancy.

---


\(^{164}\) Maria Kublitz-Kramer. "Was man nicht erfliegen kann, muß man erhinken. Auf den 'Straßen des weiblichen Begierens' - Libuše Moníková's Erzählung *Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin.*" Footnotes continued on the next page
Furthermore, these interpretations which view Francine's limp as a 'different', alternative, subversive way of moving (limping for Kublitz-Kramer represents "die Struktur eines anderen Wissens, das im Geradegehen verdeckt wird. [...] ein wider die Ordnung Schieflaufen."165) appear to me too willing to see in Francine the positive heroine and feminist role model and thereby too insensitive to the fact that her limp and disability fetish are part of a psychological crisis which hinders her socially and professionally.166 Any praise for Francine should be reserved for her ability to overcome her crisis and not for the actions which pertain to the crisis. Kublitz-Kramer includes her study of Pavane in a larger project on streets and femininity in literature and is at pains to find within contemporary German literature female figures who claim the city as their own territory. She ignores the inclusion in the narrative of Francine's visions, concentrating on her external appearance. The visions, however, are crucial. They figure symbols of Czech national culture, which when taken together with Francine's limp and disability performance, provide clues to their cause which lead my reading of Francine's symptoms in a different direction. Ulrike Vedder accounts for the visions in discussion of Heimat and nation in Moniková's work.167 However, while she recognises the centrality of these passages to the theme of the protagonist's loss, she understands them (also positively) as consciously managed fantasies. She reads Francine's confrontations with her national history as acts directed against the "vergesliche Historiographie" practised by the Germans,168 who, in Francine's experience, treasure misleading memories of the good times they had while living in Prague during the war.

Margaret Littler likewise provides a positive assessment of Francine's limitations. In her view they constitute a successful way of dealing with alienation; they "facilitate [...] Francine's establishment of an identity in the city."169 Like Kublitz-Kramer, she approaches Moniková's heroine from the perspective of the female subject in the city. Her reading is less programmatical but not unproblematic: it is based on a consideration of intertexts and a co-extensive rather dubious assumption that allusions to literary role-


Kublitz-Kramer, 111.


168 Vedder, 481.
models made by the protagonist could provide the missing interpretative clues to the novel. Rather than relying on intertexts to conjecture about the meaning of Francine's symptoms, it seems to me more useful to examine within the narrated text Francine's own motivations for desiring a wheelchair. An acknowledgement of Francine's actual motivation for acting out disability is crucial since it reveals her actions to be based on irrational premises and this also undermines her narrative authority.

I suggest that these interpretations fail to take sufficient account of the physical and mental release which Francine experiences at the end of Pavane when she discards her wheelchair and the healing that this represents and which is apparent in her own description of her act as a driving out of the dead. Francine's evident joy at regaining a healthy normality after having thrown her wheelchair off a cliff implies that the phase during which she is preoccupied with her pretend disability was a crisis from which she is glad to have emerged and for which the story's ending represents a resolution and a healing.

The implausibility of Francine's own explanations for her limp testify to the existence of another, unconscious cause. In the following discussion, I want to suggest that both her limp and her choice to sit in a wheelchair - something which she is equally incapable of explaining - indicate an identification with the lost object and are as such symptoms of melancholy. As I show, Francine's well-being in Germany is hindered by her (at first unwitting) failing to mourn the loss of her native country. As opposed to the various readings I have outlined above, the contention on which I base my following discussion is that Pavane addresses the fact that national allegiance is - often in spite of one's own assessment - deeply seated within one's personal identity and that a switch or even relinquishment of such allegiance, no matter how ardently this may be wished for, cannot be accomplished by physical removal only. Francine's mistake is to underestimate the psychological implications of leaving her 'home' country. While herself unable to furnish any convincing explanation for her retreat from her social obligations and parallel development of a wheelchair fetish, there are signs in the story which make her crisis most readily comprehensible in terms of dealing with the unfinished business - the psychological inheritance - of exile. Nevertheless, the text should not be read as an appeal in support of nationalism and against contemporary globalisation/ migration trends. When her

---


170 Littler derives her reading of Francine's disability as a "positive attempt to fix meaning" from Jorge Luis Borges' interest in Levi-Strauss' notion of 'productive reduction' and justifies her recourse to this author on the basis of Francine's acknowledged interest in his work. (Littler, 55).
abandoned nation comes back to haunt her in dreams and visions, Francine is compelled to take issue on a conscious level with a part of her identity she has suppressed. This 'taking issue' with the nation should not be read as the issue of a demand on the part of the author to uphold original national affiliations, but rather it constitutes an acknowledgement of the emotional force that national culture asserts on the people among whom it forges a community. Thus, in my examination of Pavane, I want to stress that Moníková does not argue for the preservation of an original national identity, nor does she valorise the nation as a protective community. Instead, Pavane highlights the necessity, where national ties exist and are deeply rooted, of mourning as a process through which the individual can overcome the lost nation on a psychological level and as a consequence become free to restructure his/her collective identity. Francine does not divulge any information about her departure from her native Czechoslovakia or about the life she left behind and this gap in the story points to the real wound. Its message is that in order to unseat the narrative of the nation, we must first acknowledge its former hegemony and the traces this has left on our psyche.

Theories of Melancholy

Freud's "Mourning and Melancholia"171 appears to offer a stable division between a 'normal' process and an 'abnormal' blockage. The work of mourning acknowledges loss and is the painfully slow withdrawal of libido from the absented object. Detachment from the libido is accomplished by addressing in turn each of the memories and expectations felt in relation to the object. After the bit-by-bit withdrawal, the work of mourning is completed and the ego becomes free and uninhibited again. Melancholy, on the other hand, blocks the process by a form of denial. Rather than acknowledging loss, the ego's object loss remains unconscious. In this case, the libido, which was bound to a beloved object, is robbed of the latter and retreats into the ego, internalising and producing an identification with the lost object. The self-accusations and loss of self-regard of the melancholic are the result of an identification with the lost object returning to accuse the ego of its negligence. The melancholic's behaviour is often strange and inexplicable because we are unable to see what absorbs her - her loss remains hidden. In Freud's later study entitled "The Ego and the Id",172 he however inverts the initial opposition between ego and object identification. Now identification with the object, previously associated with abnormal blockage, is

understood as being the usual way we constitute the object relation. In this reformulation, melancholic identification is viewed as being ‘common and typical’. Partly under the influence of the Oedipus complex, object-cathexes (that is, concentrations of psychic energy on a single goal) have to be abandoned; cathexis becomes identification.

Freud’s late widening of his concept of melancholy to refer to a universally experienced depression and a typical preliminary to normal subject-object relations paves the way for Kristeva’s subsequent work. In her description of melancholy, she both carries this idea to its logical extreme and seeks to lend it more precision and detailed consideration. In her version, the infant’s separation from its mother is the primary loss for which we are all seeking solace. However, while she further develops Freud when she theorises that in effect we must all go through a ‘depressive phase’ when we separate ourselves from the maternal object, she offers a motivation for melancholy which is substantially different. While Freud sees melancholy as a displacement onto the ego of resentment towards the object on account of its absence, Kristeva argues that the problem lies in the failure of the relation to materialise. Where Freud sees in melancholy a hidden attack on the other, Kristeva emphasises that the person suffering is aware of his loss but does not challenge it. Hence, in her view, melancholics do not so much refuse loss as they refuse to accept that the symbolic system adequately compensates for their loss. In the normal case, language enables a dénégation of loss, which Kristeva explains as a retrieval of the lost object through symbolisation:

[...] language begins with a dénégation (Verneinung) of loss, at the same time as depression occasioned by mourning. ‘I have lost an indispensable object which is found to be, in the last instance, my mother’, the speaking being seems to say. ‘But no, I have found her again in signs, or rather because I accept to lose her, I have not lost her (here is the dénégation), I can get her back in language’.

While the mourner elaborates a response to loss in signs and symbols, those who are melancholic retreat from the symbolic and act out the loss that language mandates. They fail to believe that the other can be appropriately mourned through the process of representation touted by the symbolic. While most of us are able to express the pain of the

loss of the mother or even bring her back through language, the melancholic denies
language this maternal capacity and acts out instead the pain of loss which needs to be
elaborated in signs.

While Freud and Kristeva concur that the melancholic identifies with the object, the
latter is much more precise about what the failings of the melancholic are and how these
can be addressed in the symbolic. That is, she demonstrates how the melancholic can
successfully deal with his loss, by retrieving it from within and exposing it to a society
ordered by signs. She highlights the political stance of melancholics in terms of the fact
that they resist the behest of the symbolic. Because she connects the work of mourning to
the symbolic commemoration of loss, Kristeva's views are particularly pertinent to this
study which interprets Francine's malady as a condition which needs to be overcome rather
than celebrated.

The analysis that follows draws on theories of melancholy by Freud and Kristeva in
order to show that Francine's increasing inability to cope - both physically and emotionally
- with her environment is due, not to the rudeness of Germans, but rather to the absence of
her home country. In psychoanalytic terms then, Francine's dissatisfaction with Germany
is a melancholic denial of loss and caused by a failure to withdraw the libido from the
absented love object. I begin by outlining Francine's own explanations, indicating the
reasons why these are in actual fact blockages around a denial. Then I turn to Francine's
visions, in which the denial is lifted, exposing the existence of psychological conflict.

**Francine's Melancholic Malady**

Francine's hip problem has - on her own admission - no physical cause and appears
whenever her tolerance levels are stretched to the limit. She is unable to pinpoint the
problem with any exactitude beyond the conjecture that it is connected with her
assimilation in Germany: "Ich habe mich angepaßt, ich kann manchmal vor Schmerzen
kaum gehen." (12) When she informs us that her hip is "vom Tag her beschädigt" (12), she
means since her arrival in Germany: "seit cinem nicht mehr feststellbaren Tag, seit meiner
Ankunft hier" (12). Somewhat later, she is more precise about when she first began to limp
and the circumstances during which it occurred. She recounts how, arriving home one
evening without her key, she had knocked at the caretaker's door to collect a spare and
been admonished for not observing his office hours. Because of the sight of the artificial
hand which had handed her the key, she had suddenly felt unable to utter protest. Francine
knows that her limp which started around this time, is a reaction to her experience of
people who are in some way less able than herself. She knows that the caretaker's injury is
responsible for her feeling of defencelessness: “Gegen Hausmeister bin ich wehrlos, besonders gegen versehrte” (44). She relates two more incidents with disabled people which she associates with the beginning of “das innere Flattern [...] das sich in meiner Hüfte festgesetzt hat” (45) - one with the one-armed caretaker of the university who told her in an unfriendly manner to hurry and collect her bag and another with a blind woman who reacted to her offer to help her over the street by clutching her handbag more tightly, as if Francine were about to rob her.

Francine’s frequent overreactions to the disabled tarnish her character and allay any feelings of sympathy which the reader may have tentatively been developing (her recollections of her seminar on women’s literature, for example, are extremely funny). Despite the fact that this is a first person narrative and the reader is therefore almost solely reliant on Francine’s biased view of affairs to formulate an opinion of her, the reader nevertheless senses that there is something amiss in her repeated complaints about the alleged impertinence and audacity of the disabled and suspects that she is the one who is being unjust. While those less physically able than herself prompt Francine to experience pain in her hip, her overreactions extend beyond the insolence of the disabled to encompass a large array of ‘negative’ traits which she finds in almost all those with whom she comes into contact. She finds fault with the inconsistency of her young neighbours’ political correctness, with the expectations of her students that she will give them good grades and with a train conductor who summons the police when he catches a teenager without a ticket.

The sheer frequency of Francine’s objections leads the reader to suspect quite quickly that she is judging others far too harshly. Despite the fact that Pavane is told in the first person and there is no distance between narrator and heroine, a number of Francine’s own admissions serve as caution to the reader against siding with her. If it is not already incredible enough that all those around her should be full of such negative traits as the ones she depicts, we are given occasion to strengthen our doubts when we learn that those who know Francine well describe her as obstinate and impossible. When she publicly asserts her intolerance of an invalid in Paris who plays tricks on passers-by and asks for donations, her friend Geneviève complains that she is not complying with social etiquette and defends the invalid against accusations: “Natürlich ist es unmöglich, was der Mann macht, aber das kannst du ihm doch nicht sagen, er ist doch ein Invalide!” (74). Francine’s older sister’s opinion of her as “schwierig” (39) provides the reader with added reason to

175 These are not in all cases Germans. The neighbour whose cough awakens her in the night, for example, is Portuguese. It seems to suffice that the people she meets and lives with are not Czech.
react with scepticism to her accusations of others. While both her friend Geneviève and her sister recognise and criticise her inability to fit in, Francine herself tries to argue that her limp is proof of her successful assimilation to a country which, as Geneviève had herself once noticed, is full of cripples. Francine’s absurd idea that she is limping to fit in blurs out the fact that disability is everywhere, including in Germany, and that it arises from real injury or illness and is neither a social custom, nor a choice for those who live with it. What is more, her claims of having assimilated are undone by her repeated outbursts of anger which are often targeted at what she obviously perceives as being stereotypically German behaviour.

For a long time, then, Francine misreads her symptom, associating it with a feeling of helplessness in relation to the physically impaired and as a gesture of adaptation. The caretaker of her apartment unites both characteristics to which she reacts so compulsively: he is disabled and authoritarian. Recalling an incident with another caretaker, she inwardly assigns him the blame for her limp:


Francine is likewise incensed by people who are self-assured and directive in their manner, which she for her part considers to be effrontery. Her limp is often a semiconscious reaction to confrontations with people of this type and she explains to herself (or at least to the reader) the reason for wanting to sit in a wheelchair as the only way to guarantee better treatment from ‘rude’ people in Germany. The self-importance of Germans makes her feel powerless. As becomes particularly clear in the triumph she feels when a train conductor’s behaviour is transformed by the sight of her limping (“er möchte mich zurückdrängen, aber als er bemerkt, daß ich hinke, läßt er mich durch, ohne ein Wort. Ich hinke vergnügt weiter”, 53), Francine is motivated to sit in a wheelchair by the desire to reverse a

Footnotes continued on the next page

153
perceived power relationship and she becomes convinced that being disabled is a sure way of receiving the courtesy she covets. The evidence she finds for this conviction in the behaviour of others is complemented by her own experience of feeling guilt and a compulsion to assist when she is confronted with disability and injury. During the same train journey, she had been grateful for being able to come to the assistance of a woman who was missing a limb: ‘Ich nehme eifrig einen Pappbecher und will ihn unter den Wasserhahn halten’ (53).

Unlike Francine, whose crisis unleashes socially unacceptable notions, the reader has little difficulty in recognising the self-delusion involved in an attempt to achieve empowerment through a pretence of helplessness. A passage early in the novel illustrates that Francine’s resentment is in fact misdirected and that her reactions to particular people have a connection with her home country. Replying to a caller for her husband who is curious about her nationality, she says she is from Prague. His rejoinder, “Ah, aus der Tschechei” (41). His use of an abbreviated name drives Francine into a rage - she continues the conversation with “gereiz[te[m] Ton” and bemoans after hanging up the ignorance and the impertinence of the Germans, their simplifications and “das fette Nicht-Wissen” (41). Later on in the story, when Francine succeeds in nearing the reason for her oppressive state of dissatisfaction and begins to recognise and represent her loss, it becomes clear why in this instance, her sensitivity had been roused. When the same word is used during an international film festival which Francine describes at the beginning of the story, she reacts by complaining that the speaker has mutilated her country: “kein Land sonst verstimmelt” (7). While she, on both these occasions, accuses the Germans of decimating her country by choosing a word which represents only a portion of it, she later confronts this same atrophied nation in a number of visions which make the reasons for her difficult behaviour discernible. These visions constitute one of the most striking narrative features of this novel. They are distinct narrative passages which appear either as dreams or apparitions and contain the symbols and emblems of the Czech nation. They both reveal to the reader her work of mourning and contribute to the forward movement of the plot since in them she takes her leave from her lost nation.

The insurance salesman on the telephone as well as the cinema director in Oberhausen unintentionally hit upon the inadequacies of the Czechoslovak nation which have caused it to become ‘lost’ to, that is, uninhabitable for, Francine. The ‘old’ nation which appears in Francine’s visions, in which it refers via the images of the Bohemian lion and various

stresses the necessity of correcting herself as part of the learning process in a new country, supports my claim that we as readers should in no way condone Francine’s offences.
figures of female sovereignty to an unspecified pre-socialist past, has been crippled by its own neglect. In the last vision, the appearance of the Libuše figure is blended with references to the misdeeds which have injured the nation and revoked the possibility of national pride (the renunciation of manuscripts to the Bodleian Library in Oxford, the loss of Ruthenia, the non-commemoration of the Hussite movement, etc.). The resurfacing of the mutilated land from the cinema director's speech in Francine's unconscious dream world shows that the reason for her outburst of anger against these men is that, with their ill-chosen words, they have stirred the memory of a loss, which she has not yet been able to represent. Her reaction is a gesture of denial. The abbreviated form for her nation which she hears in the speech of older men who are unaware or uninterested in the current usage, reminds her - on a subconscious level - of the actual condition of her homeland. She deflects this knowledge by directing her discontent onto those who unwittingly provide the intimation.

Francine's failure to examine and work through the loss of her nation hinders her in all aspects of her life including her relationship with her husband. Her estrangement from Jan, who she claims is still important to her, is underlined when, in a passage describing a day they spend together, the narrative switches from the first person to the second person formal 'Sie' form. The tension created by a dysfunctional relationship is so intense that Francine feels alienated from herself. It compels her to actions that are strange to her. Because she wants to keep the peace, she adheres to his routines: "Sie werden den ganzen Tag darauf achten, daß Sie keinen Lärm machen, und bald auf sein Erwachen zu warten beginnen" (51). While Francine gives us to understand that her husband's unsociable habits are to blame for their strained relationship, his own feelings which she reports enable another view. In his version, he senses Francine's resentment at being forced by him to leave her country and this indicates that Jan is perhaps another victim of her anger. When she is surprised by his voice on the telephone, she recalls his accusation of her silent animosity against him: "Wie kann ein Mann allein so schuldig sein? Weil ich dich in dieses Land geholt habe, du hast dort deine Sprache, deine Stadt gelassen, deine Leute hast du nicht gefunden. Denkst du, das ist mir gleichgültig?" (137).

In this section I have tried to provide evidence for my contention that while Francine knows that her hip pain is connected with her anger at the disabled, there is a reason behind this anger which remains unconscious and, when it becomes clear to the reader in the latter part of the story, provides an explanation for her exasperating and often preposterous unfairness towards those around her. Francine recognises that her hip pain represents the concentration of numerous conflicts which gather together in one point in her body (12), yet she is unable to elaborate on the nature of the conflict. The images of a crippled and
maimed nation which later emerge in the visions which I discuss in the next part of my discussion of *Pavane*, reflect the fact that every time Francine overreacts, her intolerance is ignited by a memory of her loss. When she limps, she is not as she claims adapting to a country where everybody nurses some kind of physical complaint (as the university lecturers are when they save their breakdowns for the semester break), nor does she achieve a power advantage by pretending to be disabled. Instead, the sight of disability is an unconscious *reminder* of the disabled Czech nation, and the feeling of intimidation vis-à-vis those who are particularly assertive recalls, although Francine does not or cannot admit it, her country’s lack of direction. Thus, Francine’s limp and fake disability are a melancholic identification with her nation - she acts out its damaged and helpless state - and an expression of the grievances she has against her nation which caused it to become lost to her.

**Francine’s Visions**

The title of the story is also a dance by Maurice Ravel which connotes grandeur and its demise, the same fate which Francine attributes to her homeland and which causes her malady. The title also underlines the centrality of music in the narrative. Indeed music in the text operates as a medium which assigns meaning to Francine’s impossible behaviour, setting in motion a transition between her conscious thoughts and actions and the realm of her fantasy, where elaborately staged identifications with figures from the Czech past reveal a strong attachment to the absented object. Because these sections of the narrative are partitioned off from the remainder of the text through chapter divisions as well as by means of the background of musical experience, the reader is invited to treat them separately. Indeed, in the context of a first person narrative which can, at least in theory, only relate what is consciously known to the narrating protagonist, it seems plausible that by introducing music into the narrative, Moníková has found a way of including the narrator’s unconscious. Unleashed by different pieces of emotionally expressive music, which include Ravel’s ‘Pavane pour une infante défunte’, these lead the reader beyond Francine’s thoughts and into a realm of dream-visionary experience. My discussion of these ‘unconscious’ narrative passages is motivated by the belief that they contain an explanation for Francine’s mimicry of the disabled which contrasts starkly to her conscious motivation.

The prelude to Francine’s first ‘fantasy’, Janáček’s second quartet for strings and Ravel’s ‘Pavane’, render her motionless with their intensity. Listening to the latter piece, she imagines that she is “die große Kônigin von Böhmen” (41) and that she is suffocating
to death in front of her people. Here we discover Francine’s secret internalisation of her lost nation and uncover her identification with the mythical founder queen of Bohemia (she explicitly states that she is the queen). We also find an ambivalence towards the object and a masochistic element to her object attachment: the motionless state in which she had listened to the music is transposed into part of an execution. She imagines herself victim of a pagan ritual, laid out on a stone plank, “den Leib nach dem Brauch zur Atemlosigkeit verschnürt” (41), all movement denied her. In Freud’s theory, sadistic elements in melancholy often arise from identification with the object whose loss has been caused by disappointment or loss of faith, rather than by death. In this first vision, the idea of a nation which does not move emerges for the first time in the story in Francine’s unconscious. It is precisely this motionlessness of which Francine both accuses the Czech nation and with which - in her failure to mourn her loss - she identifies when she sits in her wheelchair.

The figure of the Bohemian queen and her restricted and bound corpse which is linked to a dead past, contains echoes of Francine’s self-restriction in her wheelchair and thus helps to solve the mystery of her bizarre behaviour. Francine’s visions contain defunct national symbols and reveal her unacknowledged feelings for her nation which she resents for its stasis, for its entrapment in memories of a glorious past and its lack of dynamism and political inventiveness. Later, she is consciously able to recognise her nation’s negative trait of passivity and this signals the beginning of a process of detachment which precedes her symbolisation/commemoration of the object. The first indication of this conscious concession occurs when Francine is overcome by a feeling of disinclination towards the festive atmosphere of the city after a football match. Her first explanation for her reaction already encompasses an acknowledgement of loss: she sees herself for the first time in the role of the mourner and therefore not in a position to celebrate: “ich lasse mich von einem lokalen Jubel nicht mitreißen, ich bin aus der Trauer einer ganzen Nation weggegangen”. Then, she corrects herself, confronting as she does so the necessity of her loss: “Sie war damals auch nicht mehr in Trauer, nur lethargisch, aus der Trauer wäre ich nie weggegangen” (134). It is not by accident that this transition in Francine’s attitude towards her nation is preceded by her first wholly negative experience of being disabled. Her anger at a man who pushes her over the street without her consent (“In mir vermischt sich eine

177 Presumably the mythical Queen Libussa is meant here. However more crucially, the various appearances of a female royal figure throughout the *Pavane* are amalgamations of various mythical and historical accounts from Hagek von Libotschan’s Bohemian chronicles to Müstus’ fairy tale *Libussa*. One could surmise from the claim of the narrator of *Verklärte Nacht* that Libotschan’s chronicles played a major role in her doctoral dissertation (Libuše Moníková, *Verklärte Nacht*. Munich; Vienna: Hanser, 1996, 24) that the author’s own familiarity with the myth of Libussa is based on her knowledge of this work.
Art Dankbarkeit mit Empörung, das Unbehagen überwieg”t (132) causes her pretensions about the advantages of being disabled to collapse. She senses discomfort and is forced to reconsider just what it is she is trying to achieve.

The topography of Francine’s next vision again points to the process of repression. Accompanied this time by Allan Pettersson’s Sixth Symphony, Francine takes a dreamlike trip to the origins of Czech history. She sees Prague after the Thirty Years War as “leblos” and “erstarrt” (76): the only movement perceivable is the wind. Now she is a princess, and following the Bohemian lion through the tunnels under the Vyšehrad, she journeys forward through time (the tunnels are “Die Einschnitte der Geschichte, an denen ich entlang kam”, 78) until she is walking along the city’s newly excavated underground train line and has reached the 1960s. During her journey, the paralysis which was so vivid to her at the beginning of her journey, continues to manifest itself: the river she glimpses through a sewerage grating is frozen over. Bemoaning her country’s weak instincts of self-defence which resurface throughout its history, she proclaims in despair: “[k]ein Ausweg aus dieser Vereisung, aus der Erstarrung, keine Geste des Widerstands” (78). Finally, she arrives in a timeless space and looks at the lion who is now crushed and encumbered under the weight of his own crown. Once again, Francine both identifies with the nation - she is the princess and the lion her own heraldic symbol - and gives full rein to the grudges she bears against the lost object. Bohemia’s national past is uneventful, void of heroism and crippled under the weight of an erstwhile glory. It is a nation with “vergebliche Geschichte” and one which slowly “seit tausend Jahre zugrunde geht” (79).

In Greek mythology, truth is characterised in terms of a journey or a descent into the earth. The catacombs which are the first stage of Francine’s pursuit of the figure moving ahead of her indicate that like the invisible world which Odysseus penetrates, she too is in the land of the dead. The Greek word for truth, alêtheia, comes from lêthe meaning forgetfulness and hence signifies unforgetting or unconcealment. Like the woman who gives up her secrets only after a long course of trial and who allegorises truth, the lion reveals his identity to Francine at the end of the chase: the truth he bears is his dishevelled, neglected state.

Francine’s identification with a Bohemian princess surfaces at other points in the narrative outside of the realm of music and fantasy. When she refers to her wheelchair as her “ambulanten Thron” (147), she affirms the connection between her dream identity as Bohemian princess and her adoption of an alternative method of conveyance. Francine’s incorporation of an object which has become lost because it is in demise, leads to a melancholy which reiterates and recalls the object through inertia. The story is divided into two parts which correspond to a ‘before’ and ‘after’ in relation to the acquisition of a
wheelchair, a structure which underlines the centrality of the wheelchair fetish to Francine's crisis. The first part ends with Francine's reflections on Nabokov's *Pale Fire*, where the hero escapes from his daily existence by secretly identifying with an imaginary king of a "fernen kargen Landes" (95), and the second part opens with her initial appearance in her wheelchair. The juxtaposition constitutes a further subtle parallel between Francine in a wheelchair and her own secret royal identity. Furthermore, the reference to Nabokov's hero ends with the line "Majestät auf der Flucht in die Literatur" (95). This contains an understanding of the hero's royal identity as the element of reality in this novel and his pre-occupation with literature as the escape, foreshadowing Francine's own escape from her personal reality, which she likewise accomplishes through literature.

The answer to Francine's distress is not, as she seems for a time to believe, to encounter Germans under the guise of physical impairment and in this way avoid what she perceives as their rudeness. The moment of delight she experiences when she realises that her wheelchair inhibits people from staring at her and allows her instead to stare at them, is a pitiful triumph and does nothing to address the actual reason behind her resentful attitude towards those around her. Occasionally, Francine's reflections reveal that her attack on the Germans/ non-Czechs around her only seemingly pertains to them and that they are in fact the recipients of misplaced anger which is actually meant for the absent object. Dwelling on one of the many grievances she harbours apparently for the Germans, she concedes that her dislike of customary greetings dates back to her experiences as a child in Czechoslovakia. Their counterpart in Göttingen awakens unpleasant memories: "In Göttingen grüßten mich die Insassen des Landeskrankenhauses am Ende des Viertels. Sie grüßten eifrig, unter einem Zwang, den ich kannte - seit meiner Kindheit: 'Grüß doch, was denkst du, daß du bist' -, seit ich versuchte herauszufinden, wer ich bin. Ich war die, die grüßten sollte; auch die Jünger im Haus" (15).

The last of Francine's visions requires no stimulating music. Like the previous one, it occupies a separate chapter and this time unleashes the first signs of Francine's recovery. In it, Francine fantasises about a queen who undertakes to right all the catastrophes of her nation's history. Her "Regierungsgeschöfte", which include reforming the university, publishing a piece of banned literature and forcing tourists to speak Czech, reveal the grievances Francine has been bottling up against her nation and indicate a refusal to accept the negative developments she perceives. At the same time, the scene that she conjures up in her imagination is not an unambiguous denial of her losses. The apathy of the people, which Francine has just recently admitted as being a reason for her having left Prague (see 134), is present here too. Among the crowd who have gathered to view their queen are men who push their way through the crowd only suddenly to lose their courage ("erstarrt vor
eigener Kühnheit", 139) and others who scream in their helplessness. Similarly, the
"magnificence" of the queen who comes forward to announce the rehabilitation of her
country is undermined by her less than ideal appearance. She is wrinkled, her teeth are
black and she wears a wig. These disturbing ambiguities are familiar to the reader from the
previous two visions, in which death and disfigurement corrupt the vitality of the object.
This time, however, no claims of identification are made between Francine’s unconscious
and the maimed nation. And on this occasion too, Francine approaches the Bohemian
queen more closely. Imagining her undress, she strips the queen of the layers, one by one,
and with them the accessories of her construction, revealing this to be artifice. Without her
corset and shoes, she is a sunk-in figure and her paralysed feet reiterate the motif of
immobility which was also the meaning of Francine’s limp and wheelchair confinement.
From her chafed skin to her artificial breast, every stage of her undress uncovers a new
impotence. This gradual removal of all life from the queen is, in terms of the work of
mourning which it sets in motion, a dismantling of all the pretences and denials Francine
had been harbouring about Czechoslovakia. The queen who, stripped bare, issues “einen
leichten Leichengeruch” (141) cannot reverse the course of history any more than she can
her own decay.

In this last dream-vision, Francine has disengaged herself from the idea of an
immortally great nation and has achieved the transition from melancholy to mourning.
When she emerges from the dream, her actions resemble a ritual of distanciation: standing
in front of the mirror, as the queen had done while undressing, she counts her openings in
order to affirm her mortality and thereby demonstrates that she no longer identifies with the
immortal, but dysfunctional Bohemian queen of her dreams. Referring to the queen’s
external trappings, she disavows the connection: “Ich bin kein gepanzter Skorpion, ich
habe gebrechliche Rippen” (142). The result of the psychic retreat from the lost object is
that, almost immediately, Francine finds ways to commemorate the country she has left.
The symptom of her melancholic identification retreats as she performs a step from a
Czech dance and then the Slovakian version “zu Ehren von Jánosík und Matica
Slovenská”(142).

Before the process of mourning is successfully completed, Francine performs two
further tasks of commemoration. In the next ritual, she finds expression for her antagonism
towards communism and recognises this as a further reason for her loss of affiliation to her
native country, which she is now able to symbolise. When Francine throws her wheelchair
over a cliff from the top of a quarry, the place she has chosen for burying the accessory to
her melancholy replicates the environment in her second vision from where her journey into
Prague history began. Josef K. was executed in a quarry, which therefore constitutes for
Francine a site of cultural significance. She attaches a makeshift mannequin representing her sister to the wheelchair and throws her overboard along with the chair. Dwelling on her sister’s concurrence with and suitability for communism, she then signals to the reader the significance of her act - it is a symbolisation of her detachment from communist Czechoslovakia. Her sister, she explains, had always fulfilled the socialist ideal, while Francine felt as if she were “aus schwarzem Mehl gemacht” (145). As a child, she was often chosen to play a representative role in state functions: “Meine Schwester hatte den Kopf zum Streicheln für Politiker” (145). Francine’s recourse to a Bohemian tradition reflects her continued deep attachment to her homeland. The difference now is that the pain of loss has become consolable. The ritual demanded by the ceremony is also particularly suited to representing Francine’s particular loss - like the Bohemian queen who is no longer a coherent nor a functioning personage, the figure which she attaches to the wheelchair before abandoning it to the depths of the quarry is also a fake, an “Attrappe”. Throughout Francine’s visions, death has operated as a trope for her loss. Now the death she is banishing is the death for her (that is, the loss) of contemporary Czechoslovakia. The death she is driving out can, however, also be understood as her own former proximity to death. After pushing herself to the border of destruction, by withdrawing from the symbolic, Francine turns her identification with the object back into a subject-object relation. By replacing the protective distance that language provides the subject from the object, she accepts the precepts of the symbolic, or the social world and returns in a sense from the dead.

Proper to a scholar of literature, the last of the three rituals of commemoration Francine performs is in textual form. A pre-occupation with Kafka represents the first productive solution and constitutes the point in the story when the ‘abnormal blockage’ of melancholy is assuaged by successful mourning. Francine’s social isolation is both part of her malady and provides her with favourable circumstances for regeneration. Her interest in the world outside dwindles to the extent that she seldom goes out, buries her telephone under a pile of cushions and only occasionally suffers from her lack of contact: “Nur abends warte ich noch manchmal, daß es klingelt” (108). Once she has bought her wheelchair, she suspends all lecturing duties and dedicates herself to producing a corrected

---

**Footnotes (continued on the next page**
version of part of Kafka’s *Das Schloß*, which she considers “ein sinnvolleres Unternehmen” (108). This behaviour fits in with Freud’s description of melancholia in which he refers to the refusal of the afflicted to carry out any action or task unless it bears some relation to the memory of the deceased (or lost). Francine revises Kafka’s novel and occupies herself in this way with her national culture. In her volume of essays, *Schloß, Aleph, Wunschtorite*, in which she reprints Francine’s attempts to change the fate of the Barnabas family and rescue them from their exclusion from the village community, Moniková admits the extent to which she feels personally affected by the injustices done to the family: “Hier befinde ich mich auf der untersten Stufe der Lektüre, auf der Ebene der unmittelbaren Beteiligung, als hätte ich erst an diesem Text das Lesen zu lernen” (84). I suggest that her sense of involvement stems from her own experience of non-belonging in Czech society after the Prague Spring and that this is also what Francine is addressing and, - initially at least - attempting to change when she retreats to the solitude of her apartment to write. While this is a conscious undertaking, the idea originates from an evening when she had arrived home intoxicated after a wine tasting show. In her inebriated state, Francine fantasises an encounter with her mentor: she imagines a conversation with Kafka in which he encourages her to write a sequel to his novel.

As Littler has astutely pointed out, Francine’s ambivalence towards her nation is exemplified by her relationship to Kafka.179 On the one hand, she feels close to him - in her drunken vision he speaks German with her accent. Her given name (in Czechoslovakia she is called Franza) is a feminised version of his. On the other hand, she is unable to accept the terrible fates to which he condemns his characters (“So viel Schrecken - und er sitzt unbewegt da.”, 94). Furthermore, Francine’s preoccupation with *Das Schloß*, which in another essay Moniková interprets as a discourse of power and the village’s “unerschütterlicher Überbau”,180 can be understood as a confrontation with communist Czechoslovakia. Through her writing, Francine achieves a transition from acting out her loss (as she does when she plays at being disabled) to expressing the pain of loss in signs - and thereby a transformation from melancholy to successful mourning. The idea to write comes from a vision, the medium which had hitherto contained elaborations of her melancholic identification with the object. But this one, unlike the others, follows an evening during which Francine had both enjoyed the company of those around her and met

---

179 Cf. Littler, 45.
a woman who knows Prague by its Czech name (85ff.). Hence we can understand the change in Francine's way of dealing with her loss, represented by her writing, as the result of a change in attitude towards the non-Czechs around her, which makes it impossible for her to continue blaming them for her suffering.

Francine's own understanding of her attempts to rehabilitate the Barnabas family as therapeutic to those who feel excluded from communist society is indicated by a footnote which she adds to the text. Annotating a blank space Kafka left in the text for the addressee of a letter from the castle, she writes: “hier setzen Sie den Namen Ihres Vaters ein, - des Alkoholikers, verirrten Parteimitglieds, - dem Sie nach drei Jahrzehnten endlich verziehen haben” (124). After two unsuccessful efforts at finding the right ending for the Barnabas family through rehabilitation, the third attempt envisages something quite different. In an earlier essay version of these Kafka revisions, “Vier Versuche, die Familie Barnabas zu rehabilitieren”, Libuše Moníková had called this third attempt (in the essay, it is the fourth) the only possible solution. In it, Olga, the Barnabas girl who played the role of pariah, leaves the village. This third and final version thus also constitutes Francine's third ritual (after her deconstruction of the fake queen and the ceremonial destruction of her wheelchair) in which she accepts her loss and the one in which the loss is expressed in a form which both adheres to the demands of the symbolic and is personally of particular significance to her as a literary scholar. Olga pauses on the bridge as she leaves to cast a final glimpse at the village and sees only houses: “kein Schloß weit und breit” (147). A sober, unencumbered view - and this is equally valid for Francine's view of her lost Czech nation - can only be had at a distance from the object being viewed. The apple trees in blossom which Olga passes on her way out of the village signal the end of the winter which has presided over both texts (Kafka's as well as Moníková's), while the dust along the road relativises the atmosphere of optimism: the future promises both good and bad. The road ahead intimates a freedom of movement which was not possible from within the closed structure of the village and this freedom extends to Francine who has emerged from the no-exit of Czech history.

---

Chapter Six: Die Fassade - Commemorating Bohemia

Moniková’s critics consider her third and longest novel Die Fassade to be her most important. It took her five years to complete and in 1987 she was awarded the Alfred Döblin prize for the unfinished manuscript. Interestingly, its reception has varied considerably from that of her other texts. Many who undertake a survey of Moniková’s work invariably choose to omit Die Fassade and although more review essays appeared on this book in the German press than any other by the author, only two academic articles has attempted a sustained interpretation. Admittedly, it is a difficult novel. The split perspective and the multitude of facts it includes on divergent subjects make it difficult to trace the development of one dominant theme. Yet, as I hope to show, an attempt to grasp the nature of Moniková’s utopian project is a worthwhile undertaking. While Eine Schädigung and Pavane are suggestive of quite private issues concerning perhaps the author’s own feelings about the changes that occurred in Prague as a direct consequence of the Soviet invasion and the continuation of her conflictual relationship to her homeland some years later, Die Fassade is concerned with presenting and reflecting national history and problematising the idea of a nation from a perspective of distance and playfulness. It is political, but also fantastical and self-reflective. The author’s motivations exceed a presentation of the Czech nation which would reinstate the conventional modern notion in which nations look back to a past origin and describe themselves as organically evolved bodies. This is the facade which she pierces, exploring new ways to view and present history and drawing attention to the internal differences and heterogeneity within the nation. The novel explores ways in which projected narratives of nation can be altered and looks for agency in the optimism of individuals: this is a vision which, quite distinct from

---


184 Brigid Haines excludes it since in her assessment it exceeds her concern with the imbrication of power and the personal. Brigid Haines. “‘New Places From Which to Write Histories of Peoples’: Power and the Personal in the Novels of Libuše Moniková.” German Life and Letters. Vol. 49, No.4, October 1996, 501-512. While not feeling the need to validate her omission, Ulrike Vedder is also clearly deterred by the text’s multiple perspective. In her analysis of Moniková’s depictions of nation and Heimat, she concentrates on their significance as viewed from the perspective of the individual. She explains that in the works she includes “geht es - jenseits von Ontologisierung und Symbolisierung - um einen irritierend ‘schiefen Umgang mit Heimat und Nation’. Und dies geschieht zum einen durch die Konfrontation nationaler Bilder und Mythen mit einem Ich, einem instabilen Ich.” Vedder, 478.

the narratives of loss which structure her other texts, conceives of a future for the nation, even if this is “in gewisser Hinsicht eine Idylle.”[^1] Taken together with her other novels, *Die Fassade* represents a complement to their more despairingly realistic appraisals of the disappointments and inadequacies of national identifications. And its empowerment of individuals contributes to a more positive outcome which it shares with *Eine Schädigung*. The novel’s attention to the complexity of cultural and political borders, its demonstration of the interweaving of cultural experience and attendant determination that this need not go astray in the fabrication of a collective, broaches issues which remain relevant to a Europe in the process of redefining the roles of region and nation in relation to a new overreaching form of community.

The facade of the novel’s title belongs to a Renaissance castle in Bohemia which is being restored by four artists from Prague. The castle and surrounding town are closely modelled on Litomyšl to the east of the Czech capital. But the author borrows its name from another famous site further north from where Wallenstein led his army into the Thirty Years’ War: Friedland, a word in which the utopian quality of the text is writ large. The novel uses a third person omniscient narrator who switches between external and internal focalisation (that is, between a view from the outside and submersion behind the thoughts of a character), whereby the perspectives of all four artists as well as other characters in their entourage are included and alternately privileged. The first half encompasses one season of the artists’ work, the second part a journey they undertake across Siberia to Japan and a brief third section deals with their arrival back at Friedland and resumption of the restoration process. The novel opens with a long description of the task faced by the artists on the scaffold and establishes the castle’s facade as a central metaphor for historical and other ideological discourses which become the focus of other strands of the narrative. Since work on the facade constitutes an overarching idea or theory about the relationship between individuals and grand narratives and a reference point for interpreting the heroes’ subsequent participation in specific discourses, it will be important to begin my interpretation with an examination of the kind of interaction Monfková posits between artist and historical surface. I then turn my attention to some of the specific re-workings of national and imperial narratives performed in the shadow of the facade: from the novel’s first section these will be two quite different reflections on Czech national origins, one pertaining to the foundation of the first Czechoslovakian nation-state in 1918, the other to

the nineteenth-century National Revival. These are then followed by an investigation of the travellers' enforced affirmation of Soviet ideology from the second section of the novel.

A crucial aspect of my analysis is its attention to the novel's dominant comical tone. Much like the visionary quality of this text, this has been often acknowledged by critics while its interpretative implications remain unaccounted for. Braunbeck, for example, notes that "in Die Fassade male agency has replaced female victimhood; the narrative mode of the picaresque novel, humour, satire and the comical have replaced the mourning and melancholy of the first two books," but considers neither possible reasons for nor effects of these changes. Karen Jankowsky comes closest to identifying the function of comedy which in my view discredits the heroes when she writes that it is precisely "[t]he restorers' ironic relationship to Castle Friedland" which "allows them to reformulate its symbols performatively."

Restoration as Performed History

The castle's facade is made up of row upon row of individual squares each of which frames a different motif. In order to restore the faded designs, the artists apply a new layer of mortar to the wall and bring forth the motifs by chiseling this off to reveal the contrasting colour underneath. The artists' work therefore consists of a covering over and a selective retrieval of existing images. It is an ongoing process since simultaneous with their restoration is the facade's rapid deterioration. Only sometimes is the previous image retained in the restored image. More often, when it is no longer able to be made out or when the artists are feeling inventive, they apply their own new images. In this sense, restoration represents the historiographic process of remembering the past where history is not static, but rather subject to a constant process of reinterpretation and redefinition. By putting this reinterpretative work in the hands of her four heroes, Monfkova emphasises both our duty as individuals to maintain and reflect on our national histories, and enables the individual to shape history in a conscious way. In the passages of the novel which depict the artists at work, their manipulation of the original is foregrounded.


166

Another example of the many changes the artists make to the ‘original’ is Orten’s addition of a third eye to the Justitia. Moniková’s inclusion of a fictional allegory of justice on the facade is programmatical. The injustice which the allegorical figure is unable to redress on account of her blindness is the Western historical imagination which figures Bohemia as some ‘far-away’ Eastern country on Europe’s periphery. The title of the first half of the novel, “Böhmische Dôrfer”, plays on the German expression “Das sind mir böhmische Dôrfer”, which roughly translates as “It’s all Greek to me”, and announces Bohemia as a blind spot in Europe which Moniková seeks to render visible by retrieving its cultural heritage and embedding it into the minds of her Western, predominantly German, European readers. The inclusion of the names of the five main characters in the novel’s title in a conglomerate formed from their combined initials indicates a functionality in the novel in addition to their individuality as characters. The letters - M.N.O.P.Q - are taken from the middle of the alphabet, and the three artists, one entomologist and one historian for whom they stand are the tools through which Moniková relocates Bohemia back into the centre of European history.

My concern in this study, however, is with the author’s treatment of her cultural heritage which she reclaims for Europe. By using the motif of the artistic refashioning of images, as is undertaken, for example, by Orten as he renovates the Justitia figure, Moniková contemplates the constitution of heritage and history and deconstructs the outward claims made by historical artefacts such as Friedland to being authentic and representative for a whole nation. From the point of view of history and its appropriate representation, it is significant that Moniková does not choose a historical novel in order to depict her nation’s past. Instead of transposing her narrative into a particular period in Czech history, she uses the present as a springboard for recollecting and journeying into the past. Again and again we find that the past is only accessible through the palimpsest of the present and that it is furthermore wholly contingent on present concerns. The author’s sustained emphasis on historical reconstruction as personal creation and thus as a subjective account fulfils in my view recent demands made on historiography that it make

---

188 Paradigmatic for Western Europe’s ignorance of Czechoslovakia is a remark made by Neville Chamberlain who called it “a faraway country inhabited by quarrelling peoples of whom we know nothing.” BBC radio broadcast from 27th September 1938. The Times. (London), 28.9.1938.

visible the traces of its relativity. The main proponent of this critique of traditional historiography, Hayden White, argues for the inclusion of the ‘inexpungeable relativity’ contained in every discursive field into the historical account and rejects traditional narrative accounts because of their failure to acknowledge personal and political interests involved in the creation of meaning. While White’s stance is not unproblematic and has failed to make sufficiently clear what kind of conceptual transformation is required of historians, he has been particularly successful in convincing his readers of the necessity of any factual narrative to become more self-reflective about the positions from which it is written.

Moniková’s own interpretation of the central metaphor of the facade provided in interviews following the novel’s publication has contributed to a widespread consensus among the critics. Drawing on her characterisation of the artists’ work as “ein Akt des Sich-Erinnerns, Bewahrens” and “Arbeit gegen das Vergessen”, it has been depicted as “eine markante Metapher für die Arbeit am Mythos ‘Geschichte’” and “an allegory of historiography”. These formulations identify the restorative function of historiography, however, they overlook the inventive and creative aspect of the artists’ work which means that they are not just maintaining history, but actively changing it. Instead of proposing an alternative reading, it is my purpose here to elaborate a metaphor which has hitherto been too hastily set aside. Starting from the fact that we as individuals normally conceive of ourselves as the passive receptors for stories of the past but not as actively intervening in them, I examine in what sense Moniková’s heroes can be understood as being invested with the ability to influence the portrayal of history. I follow a suggestion already made by Jankowsky and reiterated by Braunbeck that the alteration of symbols on the facade

---

191 He has been widely criticised for his conflation of fact and fiction. This is seen as disempowering historians from being able to contribute to the field of politics, since such participation is dependent on the assumption that their work communicates facts about the past.
194 Braunbeck, 497.
195 She writes: “The particular way in which notions of nation are contextualized in the book’s mosaic of identities and illusions can best be probed by considering Homi Bhabha’s distinction between the pedagogic and performative aspects of a national culture.” Jankowsky, 1996, 204.
196 Braunbeck draws on Bhabha’s ideas on forgetting as an incentive for reinvention in order to stress that Moniková’s writing produces counter-narratives to official historiography. Braunbeck, 489-490.
represents a 'performative' reinscription of a 'pedagogical' national discourse. My intention is to clarify these terms which have been elaborated by Homi Bhabha in his postcolonial theory and to propose how his notion of a relationship of negotiation between coloniser and colonised can help elucidate how Moniková's heroes unseat national and - in the case of the Soviet Union - imperial discourse.

The modern nation is traditionally conceived as the expression of the will of its people. Yet poststructuralist findings about the instabilities of enunciation open up a subversive potential inherent in this demand that the national people participate through affirmation in the world imposed by the state. It is the impossibility of repeating a statement that produces what Homi Bhabha has theorised as the tension between between the pedagogical and the performative modes of national narration. As I understand him, his pedagogical narrative form denotes an ideological discourse, an image of how the nation should be which is hegemonically regulated. In Bhabha's various elaborations of the term, the pedagogical intends to raise an instable order to the status of essence "without letting its contingency appear", it signifies the people "as an a priori historical presence" and is the "masterful image of the people" and the "nation's totality". The performative mode, on the other hand, "intervenes" in the signification of the people as homogeneous and "introduces a temporality of the in-between". The national narrative as people's performance is its "enunciatory present" marked in the repetition and pulsation of the national sign. Bhabha's performative mode refers to the repetition by individuals of national culture which can never produce similitude. He uses a Derridean language model to insist on its disruptive potential. Performing the nation is in his assessment analogous with Derrida's notion of writing, according to which instead of creating the same, the movement of the sign ensures that repetition can mimic but not reproduce the original.

197 Eder has likewise identified in Moniková's historical re-tellings a disruptive effect. He writes of the story of Vilma that "Der Mythos von der nationalen Einheit wird [...] aufgebrochen" and draws attention to the fact that her histories are told from a new perspective. They constitute in his assessment an "Erinnerung an das Abweichende, an das Divergierende." Eder, 91.
198 See, for example, Renan's famous argument that the non-naturalist principle of the modern nation is represented in the articulation of the nation-people and that their will rather than race or language unifies historical memory. "A nation [...] supposes [...] the approval, the desire, clearly expressed, to continue the communal life. The existence of a nation (pardon this metaphor!) is an everyday plebiscite [...] The desire of nations to be together is the only real criterion that must always be taken into account." Ernst Renan. "What is a Nation?" Cited in John Hutchinson and Anthony D. Smith (eds.). Nationalism. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994, 17.
199 Bhabha, 147.
200 Bhabha, 149.
201 Bhabha, 154.
202 Bhabha, 147.
203 Bhabha, 148.
204 Bhabha, 147.
In his influential *On Grammatology*, Derrida undertakes a reappraisal of writing. He argues that throughout the course of Western philosophy, theories of language have set up a hierarchy according to which the thought was considered the primary signified, the spoken word its privileged signifier in which the signified itself is present, and writing as mere retrospective doubling of the spoken word. Writing was thus doubly derived, doubly secondary and he cites examples from Aristotle through to Heidegger and Saussure to corroborate his argument. Derrida reverses this hierarchy. For him there is no original signified behind writing, no prior meaning but only one created through an endless play of signifiers. Writing also marks an absence of the sign itself, since writing is not existence but pure movement in which each element is constituted through the others. Furthermore, the linguistic sign is theorised as a substitute and supplement of the thing it signifies. It is this Derridean notion of the supplementarity of the sign which Bhabha appropriates to characterise the nations’ performativity. The image of the people becomes the thing signified and the people's performance the signs which articulate and substitute it. Bhabha writes: “It is in this supplementary space of doubling - *not plurality* - where the image is presence and proxy, where the sign supplements and empties nature, that the disjunctive times [...] can be turned into the discourses of emergent cultural identites”.

In her descriptions of the artists' restoration work, the narrator of *Die Fassade* reveals to the reader a subversion of the facade's evenness and stability which can be likened to Bhabha's notion that the peoples' performance opens up the nation's boundedness, and imperceptibly but continually adds to and alters the original national image. The castle at Friedland, or rather its facade, since this is what is visible to the surrounding vicinity and where most of the restoration funds are invested, is an artefact which functions as pedagogical presentation of the nation. The symbols on its walls and its reference to a past era evoke a relationship that connects the 'people' to a particular location and signifies them as an 'a priori historical presence'. The castle's role in the *Fassade* as pedagogical image of the Czech nation is underlined by its public profile. It is the most significant Renaissance building north of the Alps. The government attaches

---


206 Bhabha, 154.

207 He writes: “The address to nation as narration stresses the insistence of political power and cultural authority in what Derrida describes as the 'irreducible excess of the syntactic over the semantic'. What emerges as an effect of such 'incomplete signification' is a turning of boundaries and limits into the in-between space through which the meanings of cultural and political authority are negotiated.” Homi Bhabha. “Introduction”. Homi Bhabha (ed.). *Nation and Narration*. London; New York: Routledge, 1990. 1-7, 4.
sufficient importance to the site to commit itself to funding its restoration for the next
decade and state workers are rewarded for their high productivity with a guided tour.

While she does not criticise the value of historical sites to forge a sense of collective
identity, Moniková does point out to us the deceit involved in national pedagogies. As we
follow the restorers at work on the scaffolds, we come to realise that the presence of the
past is not as immediate as is suggested by the official status of the site as cultural artefact
and that the historic origin to which it connects the people is indeterminate. The emphasis
in the narrator's descriptions on the fact that the process of restoration *enables* the past to
become accessible encourages an awareness that the connection to the past is never direct
but always mediated. By showing that the mediator at best filters the past and that the
representation he creates will always contain traces of his own individuality, Moniková
jettisons the possibility of remembering the past as is was. She insists on the individuality
of the artists which inevitably flows into their work as narrators of history as well as on the
participation of the present in our perception of the past. Even when the restorers
consciously attempt to produce a true copy of the original Renaissance motifs, their
personal styles, the influence on these of current artistic trends and their differing artistic
abilities are visible in the end result. As Podol regards a row of apples above him, he is
easily able to recognise which of his colleagues produced the various images: "er erkennt
die vorsichtig schraffierten von Patera, die plastischen Äpfel von Maltzahn und Orten, an
Ortens Äpfel sind Blätter, Maltzahns sind kahl, zwischen zwei seitlichen Wellenlinien, die
das obligatorische Ornament andeuten sollen" (194). The lives of the artists too leave traces on the facade: we are told that many of the female figures have the legs of Podol's
wife. Thus, subversion of the original images is less a conscious attempt to deform, but
rather represents the inevitable shifts in meaning which occur during the process of
retelling history.

The rapid deterioration of the facade makes the artists' efforts to render the past
visible arduous and they are often no longer able to make out an original at all. The
"zerstörte Vorlagen" (10) connote both the forgetting which is intrinsic to the
historiographical process and to nation-building and the non-existence of an original
signified: they allude to an understanding of history as having no original meaning or truth,
only subsequent interpretations - here the restorative act. While the motifs outwardly lay
claim to historical authenticity, we find out that not only are some of them invented in the
“time-lag”\textsuperscript{208} between past and present, but that others originate in pure accident. “[Podol] empfindet einen leichten Schwindel, zum ersten Mal seit Jahren. Er greift in den feuchten Mörtel an der Fassade, um sich abzustürzen. Die Fingerkuppen hinterlassen Abdrucke, er schließt sie mit zwei Linien ein und zeichnet noch weitere Kapseln dazu: ein Bündel Erbsenschoten” (194). Furthermore, previous restorers have often tampered with the original motifs. The artists’ application of a third layer to the facade is reminiscent of both Derrida’s notion of writing and Bhabha’s performativity. The image the public sees is a substitute of the original. While from a distance the facade appears uniform and authentic, a closer view uncovers the traces of intervention and loss and an actual forgetting of the past which is covered over and obscured by the overall effect of restoration.

A further dimension of the theme of the layering of history which is illustrated through the accumulation of images on the facade, is thematised in the architectural style of the national monument. The chateau was built in the Renaissance style, which is itself a style of borrowings, not only from ancient Greek and Roman art, but also in the case of the Czech Renaissance, a style which is highly influenced by the earlier Italian variety. The narrator acknowledges the Italian influence in her description of the Friedland facade: “Im ersten Stockwerk sind es zwei symmetrisch geordnete Kriegsszenen, in der Mitte getrennt durch eine Sonnenuhr. [...] die rechte ist ein Ausschnitt der Schlacht an der Milvaner Brücke, frei nach einer Kopie des Wandgemäldes von Guilio Romano in der päpstlichen Galerie” (8). Thus, the cycle of copy upon copy magnifies; origins are not only elusive, but in this case, truly illusory.

**Vilma: National Origins I**

While work on the facade operates as a metaphor for historiography throughout the first half of the novel, Czech history is retrieved and maintained in other strands of the narrative. After introducing and establishing her concerns with the ways a nation’s past is represented in the present, the narrator turns to the setting and characters which she builds up around Friedland and uses as a platform for exploring different approaches to the past. Behind the theoretical complex of the facade, she narrates her nation in a parallel fashion to her artists’ redrawing of the motifs - not as something “continuist” and “accumulative”, but rather as a “recursive” undertaking in which she stresses the excesses and the heterogeneous histories which the national discourse has elided in its hegemonic narrative.

\textsuperscript{208}Time-lag is a term used by Bhabha meaning the temporal break between the signifier and the signified. He explains it as the gap “between the event of the sign [...] and its discursive eventuality”. Bhabha. 1994, 183.
Marie’s reconstruction of and reflections on her family history in chapter four of *Die Fassade* emphasises the role of individuals in remembering the nation’s past and finds in the private realm an opportunity for preserving stories which challenge or run counter to official histories. Furthermore, Marie’s narrative does not seek to conceal the personal interests involved in projecting meaning; by narrating the past through the perspective of a character in the novel, history is seen as being wholly embedded within specific present considerations on which it depends for its depiction and interpretation.

Marie is essentially a peripheral figure in the novel. She is not involved in the restoration work on the facade and recedes altogether once the artists embark on their journey to Japan. Yet she becomes one of the most memorable characters because of her involuntary involvement in an absurdly comical lover’s triangle in which a younger man’s desire complicates her attempts at forming a more equal relationship with one of the artists.

Marie is introduced in the first part of the novel as a doctor in the local hospital who with her “aseptischen Flair” (230) attracts the rivaling affections of two of our heroes.209 She is the reason why Qvietone, an entomologist in the local museum, sought work in Friedland and managed to finish a PhD in the months preceding her arrival, in “seinem libidinösen Schub” (52), as the narrator tells us. However, the fourteen year younger admirer who “verfiel bei ihrem Anblick in einen Freudentaumel” (52) is an embarrassment to Marie, particularly when she hears that he has named a new species of desert woodlouse after her. When she meets Orten for the first time, she feels immediately attracted to him on account of his similarity to the actor Richard Burton (she herself looks like Elizabeth Taylor) and to Qvietone’s disappointment begins to spend her time with him.

Marie’s story of her father’s cousin Vilma and her flight across Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War I is embedded in the novel during a visit to an underground cavern with Qvietone. As her admirer climbs over a wooden rail to pick her a limestone rose, he loses his footing and falls down a ravine. In a panic, Marie searches for the exit and while she is making her way back to town she recalls Vilma’s story. Her motivation for remembering is the sight of her outstretched hand as she spontaneously reaches out to try and catch her friend. Her gesture makes her think of how Vilma must have held out her hand to her husband Jan as his body disappeared in front of her into the swamps of Belorus. “Sie sah ihre Hand, die sich nach ihm streckte, manchmal war es seine Hand, und

---

209 The amourous constellation of one woman and two men recurs throughout Monikova’s work - Francine in the *Pavane* has a husband and a lover, and in *Verklärte Nacht* Leonora imagines a choreography for one female and two male dancers which she calls a *pas de trois*. The autobiographical source of the latter example has been alluded to by her friend and colleague, Erica Pedretti in her article “Das Leben ist seltsam, vielseitig und lustig.” Delf Schmidt and Michael Schwidtal (eds.). 54-60.
manchmal war es Vilmas Hand, die in den Stümpfen Weißrußlands die Hand ihres Mannes vergeblich zu fassen versuchte, bis es nichts mehr zu fassen gab" (70). For Marie, reconstructing her family history is clearly a way to interpret and experience events in her own life by comparing her situation to that in which others found themselves in the past. In this instance, when she puts herself in the place of Vilma who has her husband's suicide on her conscience, she is conflating her panic and concern for her friend - she has until now "noch nie so intensiv an ihn gedacht" (69) - and indulging in her feelings of guilt in order to deal with the fact that she has left him behind: "in die Gedanken an Qvietones Entkommen [schossen] Mahnungen hinein, Sentenzen von fossiler Fatalität, mit denen sie bei ihrer Schuld verharrte, sie auslotete und genoß" (69). The history which follows is therefore depicted as being relevant as it interacts with and informs the present.

The chapter which begins with Qvietone's fall now diverts from the main diegetic level (Friedland in the 1970s) and transposes the reader back to 1917, when Vilma along with other Czech settlers is forced to leave Ukrainian Tarnopol which is being plundered by the Germans. For the remainder of the chapter, Marie recalls the life of this remarkable woman which spans the Russian Revolution and Civil War, the founding of the first independent Czechoslovak Republic and the Nazi occupation. It is a fascinating account which shatters dichotomies imposed by standard historical accounts (for example, the Revolution as a struggle between the Reds and the Whites) and the coherency they impose in favour of experience which defies categorisation and runs counter to the narratives imposed by history. By beginning with the end of the war, it also disturbs the focus of historiography on the events of 1914-1918 and blurs the standard opposition between war and peace. Forgotten histories, such as the anarchist movement led by Nestor Machno, are remembered and unambiguous roles assigned to historical figures dissolve into complex webs of affiliations which take more than one reading to sort out. Jaroslav Hašek, whose story is included as a parallel to Vilma's, sympathises first with the Czech Legion and is instrumental in their acquiring independence from the Austrians, before switching his allegiances to the Reds. "Hašek [...] argumentiert für die Fortsetzung des Kampfs in Rußland: erst wenn die Weißen geschlagen sind, kann die Revolution zu Hause siegen" (72). Vilma and Jan themselves support first the Reds, then the anarchists and Jan originally came to the Ukraine with the Austrian army. Vilma is categorised variously "als Tschechin, als Russin, als die Frau eines Deutschen - von Kulaken, Menschewiken, Esseren, Bolschewiken" (86). The designation of her abjectness changes in accordance with the different political interests to which she does not conform. Thus, meaning and coherency are subordinated in this account to a view of non-conformity and experience which falls outside of the traditional definition of war as military conflict between nations.
and in binary opposition to peace. Marie’s account of the birth of her nation as a history of political difference produces a “community-in-discontinuity” and is a remembrance which does not form a we-identity. It can be aligned with Foucault’s concept of genealogy: “The purpose of history, guided by genealogy, is not to discover the roots of our identity, but to commit itself to dissipation. It does not seek to define our unique threshold of emergence, the homeland to which metaphysics promises a return: it seeks to make visible all of those discontinuities that cross us.”

Braunbeck has commented on the non-coherence of Monškova’s national narrative which for her functions as a “validation of subjective experience, as a (dissident) counter-production to official historiography, and as a representation of a fragmented national biography.” The story of Vilma and Jan relates some of the central events which preceded the foundation of the first independent Czechoslovak state in 1918 and demonstrates how history can be told from the perspective of an individual. It redirects the attention of history away from the traditional foci of political figures and central events. The references to the Russian Civil War and Red Army and the contextualisation of the couple’s activities within a broader political situation clearly identify it as an historical account. But the historically more central conflict between the communists and White Russians becomes peripheral to the movements of the Czech Legion, reclaiming future Soviet parts of Eastern Europe as sites of Czech as well as Russian history. By relating what is generally recounted under the auspices of Russian history from the perspective of Czech and Slovak involvement and by viewing events in terms of their impact on the birth of Czechoslovakia in 1918, the narrator preserves a Czech perspective on events otherwise known (by German readers, for example) from the perspective of the Russian Revolution. What is more, unlike ‘conventional’ historical narrative, it sheds an alternative light on these events by assuming the perspective of two people who have been left behind by the main action. Vilma follows the other Czechs in the Ukraine to Kiev and while most of the Czech Legion who have been fighting with the Russians against the Austro-Hungarians now join French troops together with whom “sie [...] für die Interventionspläne der Entente eingesetzt werden” (70), she remains behind in Samara with the other supporters of the Revolution and nurses Jan who has caught typhoid. When “eine Verständigung zwischen den tschechoslowakischen Rotarmisten und den tschechoslowakischen Legionären scheitert” (73), they are forced to leave the city and flee further south. After Jan falls ill

210 Bhabha, 1994, 198.
212 Braunbeck, 497.
again and commits suicide in order not to be a burden to her, Vilma crosses the Polish border and returns to Prague. There, she continues her political involvement, helping German socialists find work in Prague and organising an air raid to England. When the next war breaks out, her marriage to Jan, who is Jewish, is discovered and she dies in Auschwitz.

Vilma's story is narrated from the perspective of Marie and the reader has the impression that she is reconstructing her cousin's past from what she knows. However, throughout this episode, this narrative voice remains impersonal and at no point speaks to us explicitly as Marie. The general effect of this coherency in narrative voice is to give Vilma's story much the same immediacy and priority as the remainder of the text. There are no stylistic differences between Marie's narration and that of the extra-diegetic narrator during the remainder of the novel. Here too, external focalisation, that is, objective description, alternates with passages which are internally focalised and encourage our emotional involvement in the story. Internal focalisation dominates the middle of the narrative when Vilma and Jan are driven out of Kiev and have to endure hunger and inadequate shelter. However, changes in pace differentiate this section of the novel from the main story. The narrative lingers on particular events and then speeds up noticeably towards the end which, taken with the tale's epic dimensions lessens its immediacy so that we do in fact remain at a greater distance to Vilma than to Marie. The effect of this narrative technique is to enable us to forget Marie, it submerges her behind Vilma, while the change in pace ensures that the episode remains clearly distinct from - and subordinated to - the main diegetic level. In other words, we are aware of the fact that the inclusion of this story is dependent on the main story which encloses it. The use of Marie as the implied narrator of chapter four means that the subjective element of narrative choice can be laid bare. In this way, history is not allowed to stand alone, to be told for its own sake. Rather, its telling is seen to be dictated by the circumstances and needs of the person who is recalling. The border between fact and fiction is deliberately blurred in Marie's account since she tells us nothing about the source of her information. We are told twice that she never knew her cousin and the narrator comments at the end of her narrative that Vilma avoided all contact with her relatives. "[M]ehr erfuhren sie aus der Presse" (88). Like the artists' confrontation with original images submerged underneath subsequent re-patchings, Vilma's story can only be reproduced third-hand.

The story of Marie's past follows on immediately from Vilma's, suggesting its influence on the former. Throughout Moníková's novels, female figures are identified as independent and ambitious by refuting their fathers' wishes that they become nurses. Leonora is plagued in her dreams by this paternal demand and Pepi, the castle caretaker's
teenage niece, plans to go to university “[a]uch wenn mein Vater den Ehrgeiz hegt, mich als Krankenschwester zu sehen” (211). Marie’s first thought when she concludes her interior narration of her cousin’s life is that her medical profession was her father’s idea: “Nach dem Wunsch des Vaters studierte Marie Medizin, ‘weil Ärzte im Krieg nicht erschossen werden’” (88). Marie’s profession thus represents for her not only her own submissiveness, but also her lack of courage since in her father’s opinion doctors’ lives are not put at risk. In this context, Vilma embodies everything she herself seems to lack. Vilma’s intrepidity fuels an awareness of her own cowardliness and she stylises herself as the vulnerable female: “ein weiches Tier ohne Schale, M wie Molluske” (69). For Marie, the past is a tool for criticising the present. The past becomes an arena where an individual can consciously explore the problems she faces in her own life. Marie’s admiration of Vilma clearly produces her strong feelings of inadequacy, makes her life appear too comfortable and conformist. She derives the courage from the memory of Vilma to emancipate herself from her father’s preconceptions concerning her life and to pursue her interests (cinema, art and music). The times are different to her cousin’s and she retains the financial security of a medical career, but balances this by - and this is what she has learnt from Vilma’s example - devoting her free time to her personal passions. She remembers how as a student she was unable to muster any enthusiasm for her studies and “statt in der Vorlesung zu sitzen ins Wasser starrte.” When she met a sculptor and was introduced to his work, she felt “einen verzweifelten Neid” and “wußte, daß sie betrogen war” (88). The inclusion of Vilma’s story further intimates that her example gave her the courage to run away from her career, and, won over by its promise of financial freedom, to rechannel her newfound inner strength back into her studies. “Mit der zweiten Wiederholungsprüfung schaffte sie das Studium, im Unterschied zur Mehrheit der ehrgeizigeren Kommilitonen, die die Nerven dazu nicht hatten” (88-89). Thus, remembering an historical figure becomes a vehicle of self-definition and remembering the past a strategy which can help shape our values.

The resumé of Marie’s life contains parallels to Vilma’s; while Vilma danced for the soldiers after the war, Marie poses for artists and becomes “für sie die vage Muse” (89), and like her cousin after her husband’s death, she prefers a single existence. The act of narrating is a form of dialogue through which the narrator can reach an understanding of her present position. Marie shares the propensity of Moniková’s female figures for identification with personages from myth or history. Yet while Francine and Leonora make no distinction between themselves and their various others, Marie’s reverence of her
father’s cousin stems from feelings of her inadequacy and she tries to broach this difference and cope with her lacking self-regard by reliving parts of Vilma’s life.2\(^{13}\)

Vilma’s story breaks up the notions of a nation as a homogeneous body of people by stressing political and social groupings which form regardless of and beyond the generalisations of national interests. Jan in particular fails to display the loyalties expected of him on the grounds of his Germanness. Using the character of Marie, the narrator shows that history is neither a coherent story nor purely what is written in history books, but that it also takes the form of stories that we carry within us and which provide individuals with direction in their lives. By telling the history of the origins of the first Czechoslovak state as family history which is passed on by individuals and survives alongside conventional history, the narrator emphasises remembering the past as a task carried out by individuals. However, the interiority of Vilma’s story to Marie’s reflections is also problematic since it perpetuates the exclusion of both women’s history and alternative histories (here of Czech refugees in post-war Eastern Europe) from ‘proper’ history. In her discussion of the literature of World War I, Friederike Emonds has highlighted the central role of war narrative in shaping national identity.2\(^{14}\) Contending that men’s experiences have traditionally maintained authority over the historiography of war, she criticizes the male-defined master narrative of war which enters into the cultural memory of a nation while women’s experiences are seldom institutionalized. While Marie’s story of Vilma deconstructs the static position of the female character who awaits the soldier’s return and serves as a model of inspiration for Marie, her story remains in the private sphere of personal recollections. This reflects the author’s pessimism towards the ability of individuals to influence master narratives. Marie does not keep Vilma entirely to herself and tells Orten about “ihrer nie gekannten Verwandten” (215) in reply to his story of his first love whose courage he was unable to match. However, while Orten’s friend is remembered for her artistic achievements in the dictionary of modern art, the extent to which Vilma is known beyond the press reports of her time remains open to conjecture and presumably remains the exclusive property of Marie.

\(^{213}\) Cinema has the same function as her imaginative reconstruction of her cousin’s life. Identifying with characters in films enables Marie to deal with her single lifestyle and her recurrent role as confidante for unhappily married men by ironising it. The narrator tells us that Marie “lebte den Kitsch aus dem Kino, mit einem Schuß Selbstironie.” (90)

History as Farce: National Origins II

The second sustained example of historical reception is a comedy which the four artists perform in the castle theatre to pass the time until the next delivery of materials arrives. By playing historical personages and speaking with their voice, Moníková's artists clearly resemble Bhabha's performative national people whose activity, as shown above, has been theorised using a linguistic model. The genre of the farce both participates in the novelistic project of remembering the past by reviving a distinctly Czech theatrical tradition, and it allows the exploitation of the gap between original statement and its Derridean 'supplemented' reiteration, which in Bhabha's formulation creates the ambivalent movement of the sign which constitutes the nation's representation. The main feature of farce, according to Abrams, is its exaggeration of character-types. By over-emphasising and pushing the traits of their characters to ludicrous extremes, the four artists ensure that their performance cannot be mistaken as being an authentic reconstruction of the past.

Podol, the most historically knowledgeable of the four, has assigned each of the artists the role of one of the Czech national revivalists from the nineteenth century. After an evening researching their parts, they then present in interaction with one another their characters' main achievements in the castle theatre. By acting out the activities of these 'Erneuerer' as they are called in German, the artists, themselves occupied with the restoration of national culture, pay tribute to their forebears and to a tradition of creating and consolidating Czech culture which reminds us that nations are not simply born, but are consciously and creatively constructed. The town of Litomyšl is rich in associations with the national revival - many of the personalities they recall at some time lived there or were connected with the place. Podol plays Magdalena Dobromila Rettigová, one of the first to encourage the widespread use of the Czech language and who popularised Czech cuisine and lived and educated young women in Litomyšl. Patera takes the part of Bedřich Smetana, who used folkish themes in his compositions and was born in the local brewery.

215 For a harsh critique of Bhabha's use of the language metaphor, see Benita Parry. "Signs of Our Times. Discussion of Homi Bhabha's The Location of Culture." Third Text. 28/29, Autumn/Winter 1994, 5-24. For her, Bhabha's interest in "establishing the autarchy of the signifier [...] existentially diminishes the narrated event." (Parry, 8)

216 In Verklärte Nacht, Leonora tells us that Czech farce had been performed in the 'Ständetheater' in Prague since the eighteenth century. (Moníková. Verklärte Nacht, 82) Braunbeck writes that farces were staged in Litomyšl's castle theatre in the nineteenth century but does not give a source for her information. Braunbeck, 496.


218 Benedict Anderson stresses the creative aspect of national invention, preferring this to the notion of falsification or fabrication. Anderson, 15.
Orten is Jan Evangelista Purkyně, a physiologist who developed Czech as a scientific language and Maltzahn plays Alois Jirásek, a historian and writer who helped shape a consciousness of Czech national history and who taught for a time in the town's gymnasium.

The farce humorously recalls the revivalists’ efforts to Czechify and particularise their culture. At the same time, the artists-turned-actors enter into competition with one another, each intent on proving that his particular character was the most patriotic. This in turn leads to their repeated attempts to undermine the national achievements of the other characters which results in a caricature of nationalism, but also in a simultaneous remembrance and discrediting of real Czechness. Rettigová criticises Purkyně’s use of Latinates (“Für Nerven wünsche ich mir ein tschechisches Wort!” 121) and complains about Smetana’s reliance on German: “das Libretto zu Dalibor hat Wenzig für Sie deutsch gedichtet. Und sogar, und das ist die größte Schmach - auch die Originalfassung der ‘Libuše’! Beides mußte erst von Spindler übersetzt werden” (122). Purkyně likewise considers Smetana to be contaminated by foreign influences and finds it “bedenklich, wenn der gefeierte Komponist sich ausgerechnet für seine beliebteste und nationalste Oper einen Konfidenten der österreichischen Geheimpolizei als Librettisten aussucht” (129). By introducing rivalry among the actors in their play, each of whom is bent on proving his character to be the most patriotic, Momkova finds a way to imagine the nation’s origins which pays attention to contradictory moments and forces in national culture. Rettigová’s citation and preparation of authentically Czech recipes exposes the dishes as borrowed from other cultures and simply renamed so that they seem to be Czech. Her offal is a Hungarian speciality to which she adds cream and serves with dumplings to make it Czech. Further changes made to the names and ingredients of dishes in the actor’s own time point out in a light-hearted manner the ongoing adaptation of national culture to the changing political climate and to state-imposed discourses. Rettigová’s entrée selection includes “Metternich-Salat, umbenannt nach dem Turnvater und Sokol-Gründer in Tyrš-Salat” and “Prager Eier, vor 1968 noch als Russische Eier gegessen” (119). The farce breaks the purity of the nation, insisting that foreign influences and contaminations are internal to even the putatively most pure Czech cultural artefacts. The facade of the chateau too is impure. It bears the traces of a history of foreign ownership (the coats of arms) and is decorated in an Italian style, which in turn looks back to an ancient tradition. Friedland represents the nation which only from afar seems homogeneous and fixed, whose homogeneity exists in the eye of the observer. On closer examination it is crossed by impurities, foreign intervention and accident.
The farce also produces an historical narrative which contains and consciously reflects on its ‘inexpungeable relativism’ in a more radical fashion than Marie’s personal commemoration of Vilma. The actors lack professionalism and are unable to sustain their character for any length of time. Their slippages back into their real selves are indicated in the text which reads like the text of a play by exchanging the name of the character for that of the actor. Mixed performances when the actor is partly in and partly out of character are likewise documented (Maltzahn/Jirásek or Purkyně/Orten). Their disinclination to suppress their annoyances with each other’s character renditions also causes frequent interruptions to the play as well as obvious manipulations of their characters. Orten, for example, who is irritated by Podol’s over-acting, pronounces his proposal to replace the Latin word ‘Nerven’ with the Czech ‘Gefühlsfäden’ as “beschissen” and then retrieves his slippage for his character: “Frau Rätin, sie sehen ja, ich kann auch volkstümlich” (121).

The comical interlude has no audience, nor is there any indication that the artists are rehearsing for a planned performance. At one point, Podol laments the fact that no-one will learn about their admirable undertaking: “Du solltest [...] ein paar Aufnahmen machen, der Denkmalschutz soll sehen, wie wir hier die Tradition pflegen” (137). The matter of the missing viewers is an important point for it connects the artists’ reconstructions of historical personages to their ‘performances’ on the facade. These are likewise not available for public viewing - the individual accents they apply become lost through the imposition of distance and the viewer can take in the overall effect only. This raises the important question about the individual’s role in constructing a national history which has already been problematised in relation to the artists’ work on the facade. Moníková’s inclusion of the problem of the reception of alternative history belies in my view any impression that the novel affirms the possibility of individual agency conceived in the performative aspect of culture. Instead, while the performative is seen to be a mode to which all individuals have access, Moníková questions the visibility of the people’s enunciations and their capacity to subvert the pedagogical presentations (represented by the unified and homogeneous appearance of the facade). The tension in the novel between making history and making it known announces a scepticism towards the people’s performance and the range of its effectiveness.

The conclusion to the farce contradicts the play’s seeming intention to revive nationalism. Purkyně who has been crouched over his microscope for some time, suddenly proclaims the positive result of his experiment on a human heart: “Die Erregung setzt aus” (152). The other actors try to rescue the situation of the capitulated heart, but their closing line which insists on the longevity of Czech sentiment (“Das tschechische Herz kennt keinen Starrkrampf!”, 142) is an unconvincing reversal of the scientifically proven fact. As
a whole, this episode is a clever and compact reflection of Moníkóvá's ambivalence towards national culture. On the one hand, it commemorates those who contributed to creating a specific Czech identity while on the other hand it simultaneously reveals the latter's artifice and disables national feeling.

The Facade of Soviet Ideology

In the second part of the novel, Moníkóvá turns her attention to her nation's colonised present, figuring the Soviets as imperial rulers who deploy a discourse of brotherhood between fellow Slavs in order to legitimise their intervention in Czechoslovakia. The artists' extended stay in Siberia is unintended and the hospitality of the Soviets is portrayed as a truly deceptive facade, concealing actual captivity. When the restoration work at Friedland finishes for the season, Orten learns that he has been offered a contract for a film set in Japan and the others - in hope of work and a little adventure - spontaneously decide to accompany him. Patera, who is sixty and has trouble keeping up with the pace of restoration, declines to join the travellers and is replaced by Qvietone, the entomologist from the museum and Nordanc, the homosexual archivist from Luxembourg. It is this newly formed constellation to which the novel's subtitle refers: M.N.O.P.Q. During their flight from Moscow to Chabarovsk, the heroes' plane lands unexpectedly in Novosibirsk.

While waiting for the next flight, they decide to do some sightseeing and hitchhiking back to the city ('gorod'), end up instead in Akademgorodok. Here they are compelled to stay as visitors long enough for them to start purchasing thicker clothing in preparation for the upcoming winter and finally they are held there as suspected state enemies. In 'Potemkinsche Dörfer', an expression meaning a deceptive image, the author leads her artists to a new site where a national identity is paraded, only this time, the official state imposed fantasy, which in Friedland had been a structure the artists had been able at least in part to develop freely, now appears wholly rigid.

Akademgorodok is the Soviet counterpart to Friedland to the extent that it is also a showcase location. Founded in the 1960s as a research centre for the country's elite scholars, it consolidates national identity based on scientific progress. The respected foreign visitors (their guide, Dobrodin, would obviously have preferred to show off to real Westerners, however, since 1968 they have stopped coming) are shunted through the

---

219 Moníkóvá's inclusion of a character from Luxembourg is a tribute to the historical connections between the two countries.

220 Potemkin was Russian politician and field marshall and a favourite of Catherine the Great. During her visit to the Crimea in 1787, he is supposed to have had artificial facades and props erected in the villages in order to conceal from the empress the region's actual impoverishment.
various research units and have explained to them all the latest findings. The artists' hosts praise the eternal friendship between Czechs and Russians in order to compel their guests to stay and admire the city. Because the travellers are Czech, they are included in the national narrative as ‘brothers’, a narrative tactic which elides the reality of Soviet occupation in the same way that the narrative of the scientific community erases Soviet colonialist expansionism in Siberia. The way the heroes unintentionally arrive on Soviet territory is a parable of the occupation of Prague in 1968. They never intend to go to Russia, but are ‘highjacked’ en route to Japan and forced to stay and celebrate brotherhood with the Russians. By designating the Czechs as brothers, the Soviets are seen to manipulate the past in order to justify on the basis of historical kinship their annexation of neighbouring communist countries. As Derek Sayer points out in his Czech history, the idea of the Czech people had indeed been constructed in the nineteenth century out of images of the popular, which the communists could later ‘twist’ into evidence of a shared tradition of class struggle.  

They could also recycle Jan Hus and Jan Žižka as class warriors because they had been secularised as heroes of this “popular” nation (311). In particular, Jan Kollar’s idea of “Slav reciprocity” and his classification of the Czechoslovak language as a Slavonic dialect which had had a lasting influence on mass opinion served as ammunition for Stalinist policies in the 1950s. Kollar had conceived of the narod (people) to unify the Slavs, since he saw disunity as the main obstacle to Slav reciprocity. Moniková’s travellers do not share their Soviet host’s classification of them as brothers, but are forced into compliance because they are afraid of what might happen with their lost luggage and passports if they do not. They find the Russians “größenwahnsinnig” (393), Podol needs no translation when he hears the words “njeruschimaja druschba” (unbreakable friendship), the phase incenses him too much for him to be able to forget it: “das bleibt hängen” (312).

When Podol does resist the imposed narrative of brotherhood by beating up a Russian zoologist who is proud of his role in the occupation of Prague, the travellers find that their passports have been confiscated. In order to attain their freedom, they must now demonstrate their good will towards their hosts. They have no choice but to reiterate the official Soviet discourse which oppresses them. Only after three such demonstrations, are they successful in proving their friendly attitude: the five perform a classical Russian comedy (Gogol’s Inspector), Podol sculpts a dove of peace, and finally they challenge the scientists to a game of hockey (which the Russians apparently learnt to play so well from

---

the Czechs). While in the first part of the novel, the artists had freely participated in the propagation of national ideology, Moníková now shows us that within totalitarian systems the people's performance is not an expression of one's own will. Nonetheless, the heroes' demonstrations of admiration for Russian culture and their reiteration of Soviet supremacy are not mere recreations of the discourse in which they have been required to participate. Rather, echoing the poststructuralist notion of the indeterminacy of the sign, they mimic the discourse, repeating it but at the same time altering and subverting it.

The heroes' performance of classic Russian drama both reiterates and supplements official national culture. The heroes recuperate agency through acting since, if we follow Bhabha's thinking, this is enacted at the level of enunciation and discernible in the indeterminate moment of narrating the event. Their poor knowledge of Russian and inability to adhere to the text produce an imperfect rendition. Moreover, their choice of text introduces a more intentional supplementarity into their tribute to Russian literature. The play is about a community which hurriedly conceals its dire state of affairs in order to make a good impression on a visitor whom they suppose to be the government inspector and can thus easily be interpreted as commentary on Akademgorodok, itself a projection of a unified community which conceals the actual oppression of minorities taking place beyond its borders. Much in the same way that socialist writers used classical themes as a vehicle of critique, by performing a play which belongs to the official national canon, the heroes both say what is expected of them, successfully convincing their captors of their compliance (Maltzahn reports their success: "Dobrodin meint, wir wären einen Schritt weiter gekommen", 308), and state their real opinion about the academic city. Podol's gift of a sculptured dove of peace is likewise a performance which is both obedient and unruly. While the director of the institute for nuclear physics accepts it as an "Andenken an die Freundschaft zwischen unseren Völkern" (312), the dove does not at all resemble Picasso's rounded stylised bird and its features are empty of the symbolic force of the latter. Orten "bewundert Podols Sicherheit, mit der er seine Vorstellung von einer Taube realisiert, ohne Rücksicht auf die aufgezwungene Symbolik" (312). Instead of connoting peace between two nations, the object makes Orten thinks of Podol's studio. "Der schierende Vogel versetzt ihn aus diesem sterilen Saal mit Isolierplatten an den Wänden in Podols Atelier mit bemalten Schränken und Klöppelarbeiten seiner Frau an den schrägen Wänden, mit dem Blick auf dem Hradchin und die Dächer der Kleinseite, mit lauernden Katern und nistenden Schwalben" (312).

It is important to note that for all its critique of Soviet projections of brotherhood in Eastern Europe, Moníková does not fail to miss the opportunity to honour the achievements of Soviet culture. While viewing an exhibition of Soviet architecture from
1917 to 1932, Orten reflects on the daring and optimism of the artists' designs, many of which were never realised – “Wo ist der Revolutionselan geblieben?” (284). When the Russians perform a concert of Czech music, in their honour, the travellers expect Dvořák and are pleasantly surprised by the musicians' unexpectedly broad repertoire. Orten recognises a piece by Janáček he had listened to with Marie and he registers the stirring of this memory with a mixture of gratitude and cynicism: “Als wäre er an diesem fernen Ort verschlagen, nur um ohne Schuldgefühle an sie denken zu können” (288). Here, Moniková acknowledges Russian achievements even as she lays bare the mechanisms of a totalitarian system.

**Behind the Soviet Facade**

The travellers eventually succeed in leaving Akademgorodok and its facades (except for Qvietone who is enthused by the research opportunities) and discover in their further errings two different minority communities in Siberia who seem to be successfully eschewing state integration policies and maintaining their own culture identity and lifestyle which the new Soviet empire seeks to replace. Most of the secondary literature on the *Facade* finds in these episodes an attitude of optimism towards the performative dimension of nation. Braunbeck recognises in them elements of fantasy and utopia, but fails to consider the implications of these in her overall analysis. In her account, Moniková's novel depicts the nation as “a complex tradition of shared historical experience and cultural production” in which the people “can and will participate actively, albeit subversively” (498). A careful reading reveals, however, that the leader of the eskimo people (the Evenks) who cure Maltzahn's toothache only participates in traditional ceremonies “damit die Alten sich freuen” (363) and that he carefully attends state directives concerning which areas are still ‘free’ for herding reindeer and is reliant on cattle breeding for his revenue. The eskimos, therefore, do nothing to challenge or disrupt the Soviet empire, but are rather seen to be gradually assimilating to the Soviet model. In Podol's view, they are no more subversive than the collective farm members who won a visit to Friedland as a reward for being such model citizens.

The all-female nomadic community where the travellers stay while Orten convalesces from the effects of the ‘Turga’ (a particularly hostile snowstorm), on the other hand, do participate in subversive activities. When state officials try to compel them to conform, the women change them into reindeers. Elueneh, the community leader, shows Orten one of the victims who had wanted to include her people in a census: “Dieser Gaffer ist der Koordinator von der letzten Volkszählungskommission. Ich warnte ihn noch, Genosse, bei
uns gibt's nicht zu zählen [...]. Sieht eigentlich ganz vernünftig aus, nicht? Du hättest ihn vorher sehen müssen" (380). Those who come to destroy the environment are dealt with in a similar manner: Elueneh explains, “Ehe ich zulasse, daß diese Stümper die Flüsse umlenken, hier weitere Bäume fällen und die Tiere töten, vermehre ich lieber meine Herde” (380). The introduction of fantasy into the narrative differentiates this utopia from the more realistic, albeit humorous depiction of Akademgorodok, in which the narrator’s concessions to Soviet achievements in the fields of architecture and classical music are the only mitigations of an otherwise critical and generally realistic depiction. The change in narrative tone to the fantastic seems to me to be crucial for making sense of the traveller’s penultimate station of their Siberian journey (they also spend time in Irkutsk before boarding a train to Moscow). The depiction of the community is utopian and extravagant: women can influence the sex of their babies and give birth to girls only, and their herbs give Orten the power of flying and an insatiable sexual appetite. The fact that they are not included in official statistics seems to confirm that we are not dealing with a community for whose existence there is any evidence. The travellers have twice lost their bearings before Orten is found by the women; once in the snowstorm which interrupted their flight out of Novosibirsk and a second time when they are chased by members of the communist youth league when they leave the eskimo settlement. Thus, Elueneh and her people appear to exist not only outside of the Soviet state (which begs the question of how their cultural performances can “inform[ ] the nation’s narrative address”⁵⁵⁵), but also beyond the novel’s reality.

The fact that the community obviously does not exist to the same extent at least, that the Evenks and Akademgorodok do (anyone who would question this need only think of the reindeer) can be assessed and positioned in relation to the novel’s overall concern with the contradictions internal to the ideological homogeneous nation in the following way: instead of conflating this utopia with optimism, it could be argued that Moníková finds no possibility for the expression of conflict and difference which could disable the state’s will to power and instead of bemoaning her conclusion, chooses to reverse it. By rejecting patriarchal power structures and a culture based on inhabiting a particular place, the female community topples the most entrenched characteristics of European society and provides a space of respite from an otherwise gloomy black comedy. Thus Moníková opens up a utopian space as a space for reflection, but ultimately rejects it. Orten’s unsuccessful attempt to capture Eleueneh’s likeness on the facade when he arrives back at Friedland suggests that the female nomads can have no impact on an official or widely

⁵⁵⁵ Bhabha. 1994, 154.
accessible national culture. Much like Jana’s suspiciousness towards Mara’s colony in Eine Schädigung, the narrator of Die Fassade cannot envisage any productive role for a separatist female community in the fashioning of a nation. A reading of this episode which stresses its political ineffectualness aids an understanding of the novel as a whole, since the latter’s dominant message is that, in the end, a nation is a more valid option than disunity despite its exclusions. The heroes’ ultimate allegiance to the nation is made explicit in the novel’s third and concluding section in which they return to their work despite (or indeed because of) their acute dissatisfaction with the abuse the facade has suffered in their absence.

State Power “ohn’ Unterlaß”

When the heroes arrive back in Friedland, it is the 1st of May and they find themselves caught up in the celebrations. To their great annoyance, one of the parade exhibits is a model of their castle which is decorated with all the key dates in official communist history:

Auf einem Sockel ist das Pappschloß Friedland als Wahrzeichen der Stadt mit Mai-Emblemen dekoriert. Eine große 1, eine 5, der Prager Nationalaufstand, vier Tage vor dem Kriegsende, und eine 9, die Befreiung des Landes, nachdem Berlin bereits gefallen war, prunken in Gold über den Sgraffiti, die Motive in den Quadern erweisen sich beim näheren Hinsehen als schablonierte Hämmere, Sicheln, Gerben und Militärwappen (421-422).

The appropriation of their facade for the propagation of communist ideology does not please them: “Ich habe schon unterwegs ein ungutes Gefühl gehabt!” (422) declares Podol. In the absence of the artists, their work and the supplementarity it introduces into the nation’s story has been covered over by rigid national pedagogies. The concluding chapter of Die Fassade concedes the powerlessness of the artists to shape their nation’s identity which the narrative has up until this point striven to overturn. When they arrive back at the castle, they find that their creations of the last season have already faded and many of the motifs are beyond recognition: “der Fahrradausweis von Josef K. ist unkenntlich, ebenfalls die Fratze des Gefängniskapitans und der nackte Hintern der Gelegenheit, den hier Podol variiert hat” (430). While the artists do not lose heart and immediately resume restoration, the novel’s conclusion foregrounds the senselessness of their task and the lack of impact of their individual performances in comparison with the power of state imposed pedagogies. Orten, who, unlike the other artists, we are invited to take seriously, is overcome by the pointlessness of dedicating themselves to the facade and thinks it would be more productive to resume personal projects. “Was er nicht möchte, ist, diese Fassade anstarren, jahraus, jahrein, die produktivste, wärmste Zeit des Jahres an einer öde Wand vertun, mit fremden
Staub in den Augen und im Mund, unsinnige Zierrate in den Verpuz kratzen. In der Zeit könnte er im Freien miißeln, ausholen” (430). In this context, the arena of the people’s performances where individuals voice alternative and supplementary discourses is located behind the facade and are, like Marie’s private tribute to the heroes of the past and the artists’ performance in an empty theatre, neither readily perceivable to others nor politically effectual. The humour with which Podol and Maltzahn’s enthusiasm is portrayed as they fervently inscribe images from their journey onto the castle’s walls slips into pathos in the final paragraph. Against the background of the ‘International’, the narrator proclaims the victory of her heroes and foresees the endurance of their good work: “Dann scheint die Sonn’ ohn’ Unterlaß” (439). The reader smiles incredulously. If we have not done so already, we now realise that the narrator’s humour is to be mistrusted and that the function of comedy in this novel has been to present the opposite of what it conveys. In this instance, we are in fact to understand the illusoriness of the idea of endurance. The humour in Die Fassade thus represents a way of broaching the impasse between the author’s visions of a more inclusive representation of nation and her insistence on the necessity of individual participation on the one hand and her awareness of the realities of state power which is not so easily surmountable on the other. It allows her to formulate her vision and view it with scepticism. Moreover, my contention that the novel’s humour alludes to the heroes’ ultimate failure to leave their mark on official presentations of their nation makes it possible to read the text as a critical response to Bhabha’s theories. His eagerness to see resistance in articulation is approached with scepticism; the most serious reservation contained within the text is constituted by the problem of visibility/perception which it persistently addresses.
Chapter Seven: Treibeis - Alienation and the Interrogation of Community

As I have shown in the previous chapter, *Die Fassade* facilitates a minimum of familiarity with its heroes, enough to enable us to distinguish them from one another and no more lest we wince at their follies. Monšková's return to a depiction of individual conflict in *Treibeis* represents a development away from the sustained distanced narrative approach to her characters in *Die Fassade* where the portrayal of individual personalities was clearly subordinated to a broader concern with the nature and purpose of national cultures and histories. *Treibeis* approaches the nation from the perspective of personal desire, examining our basic human need for community as well as the foundation on which our sense of belonging is based. It tells the story of two Czech émigrés who after a chance meeting in Austria spontaneously embark on a love affair which is more a pretext for a journey into their pasts than an expression of mutual endearment. The occupation of sightseeing is likewise an external platform for inner explorations of personal and collective memory. The feelings which are evoked through remembering - injury, anger and nostalgia - are foregrounded and become a source of tension between the lovers.

Similarities between *Treibeis* and Monšková's previous novels have prompted critics to draw comparisons. Helga Braunbeck finds a connection in narrative technique to *Die Fassade*, arguing that Czech national history which in the latter was one part of a "gigantic collage of cultural and political world history" now "holds centre stage". Brigid Haines too identifies a "return" to the historical theme. However, to posit narrative continuity between the two works on the basis of the mere inclusion of history in *Treibeis* obscures the issue of the role of the presentations of Czech history to the overall concerns, which in both novels is quite different. In *Die Fassade*, the reinterpretation and representation of history is explored as a possibility for the individual to participate productively in the constructions of the nation and to break open its 'pedagogical' homogeneity through subversion. National history in *Treibeis* is likewise seen as being informed by the concerns of the time in which it was made, that is, it is a discursive production which mutates over time, but now history's indeterminacy is seen as introducing alienating discontinuity between the generations who look at it from different angles. Furthermore, the degree to which an individual is able to reflect on a particular discourse is seen to depend on the

---

224 Braunbeck, 499.
particular social context in which we form our identities and in which we are inextricably implicated. Thus, different or suppressed histories which in Die Fassade were seen to be accessible to the individual and evidence of the existence of difference despite all political demonstration of unity, are seen in this novel as rendered effectively unimaginable by certain political regimes. While Die Fassade playfully explores the possibility of nation as the people’s performance, Moniková now abandons this ‘utopianism’ to re-examine the emotional impact of national pedagogies: those who grew up with communist ideology must initially experience fear in confrontation with different versions of history and the disunity they lay claim to. The novel pays particular attention to the role of the national community in counteracting death. Its demonstrations of the psychological benefits of community through the figure of Karla thereby furnish a timely interjection into postmodern celebrations of difference by insisting that a disentanglement of unity cannot be had without sacrifice; we are reminded, in other words, of the reasons which led us to form collectives across internal divisions. More specifically, the novel shows how two political upheavals in our century - the second world war and Stalinism - have influenced the protagonists’ respective ideas concerning their nation, producing discrepancies so substantial that the articulation of a national ‘we’ is enfeebled. The generation gap introduces a rift between the two lovers which destabilises the younger woman’s identity and thus leads rather to despair than to hope.

The first and longest chapter introduces Jan Prantl, an émigré Moravian Czech who now leads a solitary existence in the northern outskirts of Europe. The detailed unhurried description of the rugged conditions faced by the few eccentric continentals who choose to settle in Greenland and the culture and beliefs of the Kalaatdlit constitutes a long prologue to a story that really begins with Prantl’s return to Europe. Greenland is peripheral to the story and to Europe, but central to understanding the consequences Prantl has drawn from his injured national identity: his life in a place of endless winter represents a rejection of warmth and security, that is, of the shelter which the nation provides.

Karla, the novel’s heroine whom Prantl meets in Austria, has at the outset at least, quite a different attitude to her national identity. Like Prantl, she has experienced alienation from her people, which in her case stems from disappointment at their complacency towards the recent arrival of Russian occupiers. However, she reacts to her loss of similarity with other Czechs by seeking shelter in the recollection of places and events of her childhood and in nostalgia for a lost paradise where the national coherence she now

---

225 Haines. “New Places from which to Write Histories of Peoples”, 507.
misses seemed to have been intact. Furthermore, her joy at meeting Prantl and the hope she places in their relationship (despite, we are told, mutual unattractiveness and a considerable age difference) indicates that she has not yet experienced a loss of faith in community. While she does not deny her experience of difference from other Czechs, she does avoid its consequences and consoles herself with the vision of a retrieval of community. Her wounds are fresher than her fellow expatriate’s, although possibly not so deep: it is two years since the Soviets occupied Prague and one year since she left to work in Germany before flying to Japan.

_Treibeis_ is narrated by a third person omniscient narrator who is generally self-efficaciously. Already in the first chapter, the narrator is frequently submerged behind the perspective of Prantl and the love story plot is constructed using unmediated dialogue which is intermittently broken by the events of the lovers’ journey. These are swiftly related by the narrator and the external events, generally arrivals in a new place, provide parallel starting points for new memory narratives.

The two lovers meet in a forest in Semmering. Prantl, bored by his education colleagues’ jostling for attention at the conference he has been sent to attend, has been exploring the surrounding countryside. After a series of bizarre events, which he later claims to have been all Karla’s doing ("Ich bin den ganzen Tag von dir abgedeihen worden", 78), he literally falls into her arms. Karla, working as a stunt woman for a new film, is tied to a tree, above her a mythical bird-like creature poised to attack. Prantl, somewhat dazed by alcohol, the heat and a fresh snake bite, fails to recognise the fiction and heroically rescues the maiden in distress. First angry, then amused, she in turn rescues him from an enraged camera crew and the two roll down the steep slope of a river bed in tandem, protected by the wings of Karla’s costume which she wraps around them. The drama of their meeting, a parody of a seduction and reminiscent of Czech myth, is bizarrely entertaining: this we realise is why Prantl had to leave Greenland. His instinctive ability to react to danger, acquired in an environment of extreme temperatures, polar bears, and crevices in the ice is completely inappropriate and makes him a stranger to his own culture, in Karla’s description a “Zurückgekehrte von einem anderen Planeten” (79).

---

227 After the death of Libuše, the maidens wage war against her widower Prámysl. This reaches a climax when Vlada ties the beautiful Šarka to a tree in order to lure Círad and his men into the forest. In one version of the legend, he falls in love with her and frees her. Šarka uses a potion to make his men fall into a deep sleep and then the other maidens rush out of their hiding to kill the men. Antony S. Mercante (ed.). _Encyclopedia of World Mythology and Legend_. New York; Oxford: The Facts on File, 1988, 2615. Monšková relates a slightly different version in her novel _Verklärte Nacht_ in which Šarka is tied to a cliff. (Monšková, _Verklärte Nacht_, 117)
The slapstick humour which reaches a climax in the meeting of the protagonists does not subside completely, but is from now on relegated to the provision of a light-hearted frame for the pair’s exploration of the emotional issue of their exile. When Karla discovers that her companion is a compatriot, she decides to stay with him and reminisce about Czechoslovakia, which she sorely misses. They hitchhike eastwards as far as Graz, spending Prantl’s savings on hotel rooms. Austria, which appears clouded in quaintness and kitsch, becomes the main target of the comedy while the heroes’ reflections on Czechoslovakia are earnest and fraught with emotion. The love affair sours when Karla finds herself having to admit that her Prague is not something in which her companion is able to participate. The novel then comes to an abrupt end when she decides that it is better to end their journey rather than expose herself to greater disappointment.

In an interview, Moníková aligns Treibeis with Pavane and its delineation of exile as a condition capable of unleashing extreme individual reactions: “Für mich ist Treibeis eine Art Pendant zu Pavane, es ist eine Pavane à deux, wie Lacan von der folie à deux spricht, also vom Wahn zu zweit.” My analysis likewise stresses the continuity between these two works. Treibeis picks up on its theme of exile, but this time by exploring and bringing into conflict two different ways of living away from the home country, both deconstruct national identity and tries to salvage something tangible from its wreckage. While Pavane demonstrates the importance of recognising and negotiating the loss endemic to exile as a prerequisite for adapting to a new environment and for formulating a new identity, Treibeis ponders on what kind of self is viable/desirable for the exile who has experienced alienation from the national community. Moníková negotiates between her nostalgia for home and for a place of origin and her conflicting intellectual knowledge that home is more fantasy than fact, by polarising these two positions and allotting them to two different characters. The equal weighting in the novel of the perspective of Karla and Prantl indicates that she does not wish to privilege one position over the other, but rather to explore the implications and advantages, both personal and political of each.

Treibeis begins as Prantl’s story and ends as Karla’s. Karla is the one who drives the plot forward, she intervenes in Prantl’s misdeeds, turns a chance encounter into a relationship and decides when it is time to part. Prantl lets himself be driven by Karla as

---

228 The Austrian idyll, however, ceases to be harmless when we reach Graz, where the rivers are polluted with industrial waste and the city by relics from the Third Reich.
230 After learning his name, she asks: “Können wir hier nicht bleiben?” (79)
he has been by others in the past. Both figures are successors to Francine in Pavane: they are conscious of the traumatic effects of their exile, something which Francine had needed time to admit, and have already developed strategies for dealing and living with this loss. The novel's conflict derives from the different consequences each has drawn from their disappointments and injured identities. The first chapter which relates Prantl's life in Greenland is balanced by the final chapter which explores Karla's dream life. The switch to a first person narration in the latter case encourages us to sympathise with Karla who is suffering from the attack launched on her belief in community, while the greater degree of narrative distance upheld towards Prantl reflects his chosen state of isolation.

The analysis that follows investigates the two very different attitudes towards home which are espoused by Karla and Prantl respectively. I describe the destabilisation of identity which Karla experiences as a result of her exchange with Prantl with particular attention to the theme of human mortality, which I see as central to understanding the power of discourses which bind individuals to imagined communities, such as Bohemia or Czechoslovakia. Finally, I argue that what critics have identified as a weakness in the text, that is, the failure of any real dialogic interaction between the two lovers, is a productive standstill in relation to the text's deconstructive quest. By widening the rift between two compatriots as far as she is able, Moniková uncovers nationality or a common place of origin as an ideological fantasy which only functions as long as inner conflict and antagonism is denied. My examination of the two characters' respective stances and of the challenges made to Karla's view by her confrontation with Prantl aims to locate the concerns of this novel within current discussions, mainly within the field of postmodern politics and philosophy, on community and difference. In order to maintain this focus, my commentary does not extend to the education conference since these episodes which

---

231 Of his first wife, he says, "eigentlich hat sie immer alles entschieden" (180) and his second wife proposed to him after they had known each other for six weeks. (182)

232 See also my discussion in chapter eight of Verklärte Nacht, in which the heroine's mobile lifestyle coexists with an identification with immortality.

scathingly parody the pedagogical revival of the seventies, do not contribute to the theme of community. In the following discussion, I therefore restrict myself to a delineation of Prantl and Karla’s divergent forms of exile, attending to the reasons for their respective choices as well as the implications these have for collective identity. In particular, it will be shown that the idea of community can alleviate the fear of death and that to reject membership in a community exposes the individual to the unavoidability of his/her own mortality. Since Prantl’s position remains unchanged throughout the novel, I begin by exploring this. It will then be shown how his recognition of neither a common place, history nor culture constitutes a challenge to Karla’s national idealism, forcing her to re-examine and reformulate her ideas of home and the national collective.

Prantl: “‘Leben’ wäre übertrieben” (83)

The ‘Greenland chapter’ provides a comprehensive introduction to the kind of exile Prantl has chosen. He has fled, so he tells us, to the icy climes of Greenland because it is a country suited to small kayaks rather than big ships: “Das ist vielleicht der Grund, warum er hier lebt.” This “Widerspruch, der so stimmig ist” (38), that is, the greater chance of one man as opposed to a group, is explained by the form of the icebergs: “Die Masse des Eisbergs unter Wasser schlitzt eine Schiffswand auf wie nichts” (87). The living conditions in Greenland are thus, in contradistinction to those in Europe, solicitous to the loner. It is a place where loners are not only accepted, but also one which can only be truly appreciated in solitude. Greenland represents a transformation and aestheticization of the real-world referent into intense sensual experience. Prantl’s wonderment at the wealth of wildlife that thrives among the icebergs and his dreams of paddling out to the glaciers, “das Dröhnen des Großen Geistes vernehmen” (208), reveal an aesthetic approach to and withdrawal from life. Prantl is described by the narrator at the beginning of the novel as having a “Hang zur Radikalität” (5). His chosen existence can be seen as embodying a radical ethical attitude which heroises alienation. His heroes are Knud Rasmussen, Alfred Wegener and Fridtjof Nansen (who introduced a passport for stateless people in 1922), explorers who risked their lives to traverse Greenland in order experience ultimate solitude, as well as the Sirius Patrol, a voluntary rescue organisation, “[e]ine Elite-Einheit, die einsamste” (86). His Greenland is a continent of lonely heroes. It is a trope for isolation, the resonances of which did not go unnoticed by the critics in the German press. Radisch writes that Moniková’s Greenland is a way out of “den verwunschenen Winkeln des
Heimatromans - hinaus in die Früste der Freiheit. Sigrid Löffler was even more full of praise for the metaphor in the literary discussion forum, ‘Das Literarische Quartett’: “Gute Metapher, die Arktis. Für Kälte. Für Isolation. Für extreme Ausgesetztheit. Für innere und äußere Erstarrung. Für Entfremdung.” In a country of ice, nothing can take root, the cold is connotative of lack of feeling and emotional deprivation. Prantl has long lost the feeling in his little toe (88) and this is a symptom of a feeling of alienation with which he identifies and which he chooses to confront and accept rather than suppress.

In Greenland, Prantl works at the local school where he teaches the children English, “damit sie dann die Amerikaner nach Hause schicken können” (18). He admits equal animosity towards the Soviets, who if given the chance would adopt the same tactics as their enemies, namely endangering the lives of the defenceless in the name of their ideological battles. We are in the middle of the Cold War, the Americans are flying over Greenland with nuclear weapons and Prantl is embittered about the conflict which divides Europe. And he has good cause. He himself was forced to leave Czechoslovakia when the communists came to power in 1948. After risking his life in the war as a parachutist in the allied resistance in Bohemia, he found himself tarnished by the new Czech government as a capitalist and forced into exile. “Bereits Mitte '46 hat man mir angedeutet, daß ich unerwünscht bin” (172), he remembers. His experience of being relegated from national hero to class enemy has ruined all possibility of conceiving community as a natural entity. By revealing the contingency of inclusion and exclusion, it compels him to view the national community as an ideological construct defined solely in accordance with the power interests of state power. The welcoming treatment he receives in England, where he is granted immediate residence on account of his services during the war on the side of the allies, only confirms that political interests dictate who belongs to a nation and who does not. Prantl explains to Karla his luck at being accepted, “Ich hatte einen Orden von ihnen [...] So jemanden konnten sie nicht gleich ausweisen” (179).

However, the reader does not learn Prantl’s story until later, when through unexpected circumstances he finds himself back in Europe and begins to recall his past.

---

234 Radisch.
236 Cf. Pease’s characterisation of the postcolonialist critique of the nation as “an ideological mystification of state power.” According to this view, the nation is essentially a deceptive metanarrative which imposes subjection while seeming to do otherwise. “The metanarrative aspect of national narratives, as this critique might now be summarized, constituted a metaphysical mediation between the state and the lifeworlds of its subjects. Metanarratives recast the reason of state as a teleology (a horizon of narrative expectations emanating from a national origin and organized by a national purpose) and thereby induced the state’s subjects to collude in their own subjection.” Pease, 4.
Even then, we are forced to read between the lines and conjecture about the reasons which compelled him to choose solitude and non-belonging over other possible forms of exile (identification with another national community, for example). Throughout the lovers’ excursions into the past, Prantl divulges few of his feelings to Karla, restricting his stories on the whole to factual statements. One inadvertent comment indicates the motive for his reserve, particularly in relation to his new life in Greenland. Noticing that he has hurt Karla by rejecting the idea that she visit him in his new home, he first hesitates to provide an explanation, then confesses that rather than not desiring her presence, he only wishes to protect her. “Wie könntte ich dich in so etwas reinziehen?”, murmelt er” (187). The ‘something’ in which he does not want to involve Karla is his loner’s existence. While for him it has become the only plausible way to live, his instinctive desire to prevent others from emulating him indicates that he does not judge his isolation to constitute a viable alternative to community or a constructive solution to the crisis of community. It is doubtlessly this protective instinct, revealed in the above admission, which accounts for his hesitancy to participate in the exchange of experience which Karla initiates with her fervent questioning and which is responsible for his emotional withdrawal.

The reader is given more opportunity to understand Prantl than is Karla. The first Greenland chapter provides essential insights into his attraction to the harsh northern environment and leaves us equipped for his story in a way in which Karla is not. Furthermore, occasional passages of interior monologue which interrupt a narrative otherwise dominated by dialogue nearly all pertain to Prantl’s thoughts, thereby ensuring that the distance he maintains from Karla does not prevent the reader from finding out what she is not supposed to (for example, when he tells Karla yes, she can stay with him, we learn his apprehensions: “Er ahnt, daß sie noch ein Problem wird. Daß sich die Liebe, die er nicht wollte, vor die sich die Ereignisse des ganzen Tages gestellt haben, nicht mehr aufhalten läßt”, 79). These monologues indicate that it is not the narrator’s intention to prevent the reader from understanding Prantl (as opposed, for example, to the method adopted in *Die Fassade*, in which with the exception of Orten and Marie, the narrator deliberately limits her characters to a minimum of attributes).

While Karla refuses to leave behind her city, recreating it in her memory when she is unable to be there and thus holding onto a fantasy of belonging, Prantl uses his peregrinations as the focus for his exiled identity. The ice floe of the novel’s title is an image of both Prantl’s and Karla’s exile, like pieces of ice which have broken off from a larger mass, they have become separated from and abjected from their home country. The deployment of ice floes as a counter image to the stability of land provides a model of identity which is based on flow and movement rather than on rootedness. While Karla is
unwillingly set adrift ("Ich wollte aber nicht fort", 142) and seeks to return to her place of origin through remembrance, Prantl has blocked out memories of his first home and has come to base his identity on not-belonging. Rather than attaching himself to a new place, he drifted, living first in England and then in Denmark before finally choosing to reside at the edge of civilisation among others who seek a way out in the icy northern climes. Prantl’s colleagues at the village school are hermits like himself: the young chemistry teacher Kleist “ist verschlossen, scheint aber zäh zu sein” (31) and spends his time shut away in Prantl’s glass house; Brennhovd, the educational adviser, is estranged from his wife and “unglücklich und erfolglos” (41) in his efforts to turn the Eskimos into good Christians. These men’s experience of living in a place so different to their European homes, one that offers the chance of survival but little protection, affirms rather than assuages alienation. For the Eskimo people who have inhabited in Greenland, community is not viable since the harsh conditions do not always provide enough sustenance for all. When there is famine, it becomes necessary to betray even the closest ties of kinship in order to survive: “Die Kalaaldit töten auch ihre eigene Kinder oder geben sie weg, wenn der Hunger zu groß wird” (90). At one point, Prantl comments about his existence in Greenland that to call it living would be an exaggeration. This is a place to which you cannot adapt. The heavy drinking in which all who live there partake provides respite from homesickness. Prantl’s reflections on his colleagues’ estrangement apply equally to himself: “Es ist nicht ihre Welt” (41). His choice to remain in Greenland is a choice to identify with homelessness and with the state of being adrift.

It is also a choice to acknowledge rather than to deny our essential alienation. When we later learn the circumstances of Prantl’s exile, we find out that his experiences during the war decisively influenced his perspective on collective identity, destroying any faith he may have had in the idea of a collective of like-minded, homogeneous people. Flying above Europe with pilots who navigated by the stars, he discovered that Bohemia is just one small part of a vast continent: “Böhmen war so klein geworden, daß es schwer zu finden war” (159). When he learns about how many Czechs were co-operating with the Nazi government, he begins to lose his sense of community with a national people which has already appeared to him as just one of many possible places. While he had met with people who were willing to help him after his jump, he tells Karla that most of the parachutists had quite different encounters with the population: “Die Adressen waren meist taub, die Menschen ängstlich, weggezogen, verschleppt, getötet, zu Kollabateuren geworden.” While he acknowledges that in some cases the people had risked their lives in the war, the realisation that even Czechs often chose collaboration represents a deep disappointment “Es gab Fälle, daß Parachutisten aufgegeben hatten, ihre Aufgaben nicht weiter verfolgten,
weil sie für solche Landsleute nicht mehr ihr Leben einsetzen wollten" (160). When in 1948, he found himself on the state's black list and was forced to leave, he is no longer able to deny the arbitrariness of the collective, the fact that a national community is not naturally evolved, but constructed and deployed for political purposes. His numbed arm during the demonstration he takes part in against the communists before emigrating is a metaphor for the loss of any feelings of national affiliation. In his memory, Prantl conceives of the collective as a strategy for combating death. Realising that his disillusionment has robbed him of something which makes it easier to live, he envies the students who are able to find meaning in their protest: "Ich war sechsundzwanzig und habe sie beneidet, es kam mir vor, als hätte ich das Leben schon hinter mir" (172).

When pressed by Karla to categorise himself in terms of nationality, Prantl is hesitant, unwilling to pin himself down. He answers that he is a mixture of Czech and Eskimo: "Ein mährischer Inuk" (186), but precedes the definition with an "I don't know", indicating that identity is more complex than the categories which exist for it. For Prantl, identity becomes a relation and is more about routes than roots. His crossing of borders also involves transcultural, transnational sexual desire. Whereas he fell in love with his first wife because of her difference, Karla demonstrates her patriotism by losing her virginity at home, rather than risk it happening with a 'stranger' in a foreign country. Prantl's loss of belief in the possibility of community based on similarity is expressed in his awareness of the arbitrariness of commonality, which contrasts with Karla's insistence that people from a nation will possess certain traits. While Karla, for example, finds it unusual that Prantl's red-haired wife was Scottish (since she associates red hair with the Irish), Prantl points out that there are also Czech women with red hair (179-180).

Community: an Expedient for Coping with Death

In Prantl's retrospective commentary, solidarity becomes associated with being in the middle of life, whereas alienation from the common cause engenders loss of feeling and transports one away from life. The consequence then, of his decision to choose alienation and homelessness over the illusion of community, is a heightened awareness of his own mortality. Benedict Anderson has suggested that the nation should be understood as a cultural system which replies to the inescapability of man's dying by transforming fatality into continuity. He writes: "few things were (are) better suited to this end than an idea of nation. If nation-states are widely conceded to be 'new' and 'historical', the nations to which they give political expression alwaysloom out of a memorial past, and, still more important, glide into a limitless future. It is the magic of nationalism to turn chance into
Indeed, the crucial function of national history which, outlined in the last chapter, utilizes symbolic sites to connect the people to a particular location and to signify them through reference to a long past as an a priori historical presence, is to turn the length and weight of the group’s past existence into a resource for assuring the group’s future survival. Often, symptomatically, that past existence is talked about from the start as ‘our immortal heritage’. Elisabeth Bronfen and Benjamin Marius affirm Anderson’s views that the decline of a ‘sacred semantics’ creates the need for a new kind of compensatory structure which would ‘smooth over’ the arbitrariness of the sign system by installing meaning and coherency. They write:

Die Nation kann so als imaginäre Gemeinschaft verstanden werden. Es handelt sich um eine phantastmatische Konstruktion, die auf ein fundamentales Begehren nach Sinn und Kohärenz reagiert. In psychosemiotischer Terminologie könnte man davon sprechen, daß solche imaginären Phantasmen die paradoxe Funktion haben, eine notwendige Lücke in der symbolischen Ordnung zu verdecken, indem sie sie artikulieren. Die Nation ist eine Schutzdichtung, der für eine gewisse Zeit die Aufgabe übertragen wurde, menschliche Gesellschaft und Kultur (ihre ‘Realität’) zunächst in Europa, dann in anderen Teilen der Welt, vor einem Einfrieren des Realen zu bewahren, d.h. letztendlich vor der Bedrohung durch Kontingenz, Fehlbarkeit und Sterblichkeit zu schützen.²³⁸

Based on the above, we may then conjecture that Prantl’s experience of being categorised first a hero then an enemy of the nation quashed any belief he may have had in the continuous and a priori nature of the nation and that instead it appears contingent and fraught with contradictions and instabilities. It is this experience which has led him to repudiate community for isolation with the result that he no longer enjoys protection from the knowledge of his mortality. Prantl’s role models are the Samurai who live in constant preparation for their death. He concedes to Karla that their ‘Hagekure’, a teaching of life as a path towards death, is “[i]n gewisser Hinsicht” (203) his own and Karla herself comes close to saying that he acts like someone resigned to death:

“[…] Wenn es [der Selbstmord] nicht möglich ist, geht es darum, vorbereitet zu sein.”

[…]

“Manchmal kommst du mir auch so vor”, sagt Karla.

“Wie?”

“Wie jemand, der …”, sie blickt sich verstört um (203).

When Karla indicates that she should be getting back to her career rather than watching other people’s movies, a long passage follows in which Prantl envisages his own suicide. Placing two memory cards which depict icebergs side by side, he creates a passage in the middle and dreams that he paddles out to hear the “Getöse des Gletschers” (208). Part of

²³⁷ Anderson, 19.
what fascinates him about Greenland is the proximity of the glaciers, which for the Inuit are akin to the beginning of the world. The journey out to the glaciers and to the origins of the world's oceans is a rite of initiation but also a journey to one's death. In the dream, he neither arrives at his destination, nor returns and along the way he recalls the Samurai credo: "~ Steht es zwischen dem Tod und dem Leben unentschieden... ~" (208). The resolution, we know, is to choose death.\textsuperscript{299} An iceberg ruptures his kayak, the water rushes in and the journey ends with a kaleidoscope of changing colours ending in white. In Prantl's imagination, death is a picturesque colour display. Narrative aestheticisation emerges as a strategy of coping with fears.

An identity which is adrift and has no place is therefore seen in the novel as being on the one hand consistent with the experience that nations are structures which suppress difference and on the other as being problematic. The repudiation of community is not depicted as a viable alternative to identification with an imagined national community since self-destructive urges are a symptom of his estrangement.

Karla: "Ich bin eher eine Stalinistin" (177)

Like Prantl, Karla also experiences a feeling of numbness in reaction to having been made homeless. While she is picking apples in Germany to earn money for her flight to Japan, she hears the news that the border to Czechoslovakia has been closed: "wir waren wie gelähmt" (145). And like Prantl's experience of suddenly being excluded from his nation, she loses her ability to identify with the Czechs during the occupation of Prague. When she tells Prantl about what it was like in the city when the tanks arrived, she distances herself from the indifferent behaviour of the population and by calling them 'the Czechs', asserts her disidentification with the nation. "Ich ging nach Hause, und es stand ein Panzer da, und ein asiatischer Soldat wollte mir in schlechtem Russisch den Durchgang verbieten. Ich sagte, daß ich auf jeden Fall durchgehen werde, und die Tschechen, die herumstanden, sagten zu mir, ich soll vernünftig sein. Versteht du, ich sollte vernünftig sein" (143).

However, while Prantl confronts alienation and makes it the basis of a new identity, Karla suppresses her non-belonging and relies on memories of the past to uphold her identification with a place she can call home. Her experience of the Soviet occupation is a trauma which has not yet been adequately symbolised. Neither has she arrived at an effectual strategy for coping with its implications. She has not achieved any objective

\textsuperscript{298} BronfC and Benjamin, 2-3.

\textsuperscript{299} The predicate which Prantl quotes in full when Karla bemoans the human casualty of Heydrich's assassination is: "beendet du den Zustand besser dadurch, daß du auf der Stelle stirbst." (203)
distance towards her exclusion from the community as Prantl has towards his experience of
the February victory parade. This is underlined by her frequent urge to narrate the event
(“Ich kann es nicht oft genug erzählen!”, 228) and the exasperation which accompanies its
memory. Since the memory of her loss of nation is still a painful one, Karla seeks
compensation in an idealised Heimat rather than acknowledge her exclusion.

In their study on collective identity and death, Uzarewicz and Uzarewicz show how,
like religion, Heimat offers solace from the knowledge of one’s own death.²⁴⁰ It achieves
this by positing its members as part of a backward-looking continuity (while religion - and
indeed the nation - assures future continuity). Karla’s preservation of an image of home as
it used to be represents an avoidance of a confrontation with the discontinuity of the
collective. Her family anecdotes from the war and childhood memories create in retrospect
an image of a harmonious people united by common values. Karla is born after the end of
the war (“ein freies Kind!”, 223) and is thus fully embedded within the communist
narrative of a Czech nation allied to the Soviet Union through eternal friendship and united
in the struggle against fascism. While she has in the meantime distanced herself from her
former identification with communism, typified by the fear and fascination with which she
reacted to the images of an exhibition of class enemies as a young schoolgirl (“Ich konnte
vor Schrecken nicht einschlafen”, 173), her fond recollection of the Russian anti-fascist
songs (“diese Lieder waren so zuversichtlich”, 133) indicates a longing for a time when her
world was structured by a naive belief in a clearly differentiated ‘us’ and ‘them’. Her
labelling of herself as ‘essentially a Stalinist’ is a reassurance that she once had an identity
and it is a strategy to enable her to cope with its loss.

Karla’s relationship with Prantl forces her to relinquish her strategy of constructing
an idyllic past to compensate for present alienation. He begins to disturb her paradise of a
unified community in the past, forcing her to concede that neither was the community
which she remembers unified, nor its culture ‘pure’. When she irritatedly refutes Prantl’s
suggestion that her favourite children’s film was “von Disney gestohlen” (175), she is
angry at him for shattering her illusions. The pain caused by reminders of her impure
nation demonstrate that she is reluctant to recognise the conflict which her reified memory
elides. The nation as a community of persons who relate to one another and recognise
themselves in each other because they have shared purposes is a notion she is not yet ready
to renounce. If this transparency of subjects to one another has been suspended in her
recent experience, she clings to a belief that it at least existed in the past. When Prantl tells

her how many Czechs collaborated with the Nazis during the war she reacts with hurt
resignation: "'Das waren Tschechen.' Karla sieht vor sich hin" (160). His assurance that
there were also those who helped the allied resistance does not alleviate the pain which
accompanies the disturbance of her glorification of the past. Prantl’s stories have a
perturbing effect on Karla because they make her face her suppressions and remember
what she does in fact know about the terror of structure.

Karla shares Prantl’s knowledge of the exclusions and the arbitrariness of
communities. However, she is unwilling either to confront this or to accept the
consequences Prantl has for her own life. Like her lover, she has her own personal
experience which has taught her the suppressions involved in forging communities - when
she visits Hiroshima she receives a book about the city which to her horror contains no
mention of the atomic bomb and thus suppresses the issue of Japanese guilt: "überall
Lächeln, Kirschlorbäume, blauer Himmel. Kein Hinweis auf die Bombe, kein schwarz-weiß
Foto von der Verwüstung" (147). The realisation troubles Karla so much that she is unable
to sleep until she has rid herself of her gift and the next day she refuses to appear at the
farewell dinner: "Ich konnte dort nichts wettmachen, also wollte ich mich zumindest an
ihrem Wohlstand nicht beteiligen" (150). In spite of her naivety concerning her own nation,
Karla’s views of the history of other countries does attend to events which run counter to
usual narratives and thwart the meaning they impose by introducing complexity and
disrupting clear distinctions between opposing sides. Her astute views on Japanese history
are comparable with Prantl’s explanation of how the complicated allegiances of the
Vlasov Army determined its role in the liberation of Prague and she defends Hâcha (the
Czech president during the war) against his reputation as a traitor. The difference,
however, is that Karla does not turn her knowledge of the artificiality of structures like
historical narrative into a repudiation of structure. This is a point which I return to in my
conclusion where I show how Karla retains her national identity while acknowledging the
nation’s discontinuity.

Karla is attracted to Prantl because she believes she has found in him one of her own
people. After discovering that he speaks Czech and that, like her, he has been exiled from
his country, she quickly decides to spend her time with him rather than return to her
camera crew. Karla automatically assumes that although they are a generation apart, the
place they remember will be the same. She hopes that by spending time with a compatriot
she will find compensation for her sadness at having been forced to leave her home by
recuperating in their togetherness a small part of the lost collective. The importance to her
that Prantl might know Prague like she does and that they identify with the same place is
underlined by her elaborate descriptions of the city’s cinemas which she makes in the hope
that he will confirm his knowledge of them (137-139). However, initial certainty that he
must know at least the ones that have been there the longest, gives way to a disappointment
which is paradigmatic for the journey as a whole. The discussion about the cinemas makes
it clear that Karla is looking for recognition from Prantl, but not so much of herself, that is
of her personal identity, as of the place with which she identifies. When she senses her need
for Prantl is not reciprocated, she finds the explanation for their incompatibility in the
difference between their respective memories of Prague. “Wir können uns nicht einmal über
die Stadt verstündigen” (190). Prantl puts her idealisation of the nation as a community of
familiar people down to the recentness of her exile (“Er weiß, daß bei ihr der Schmerz und
die Trauer um das Land, das sie verlassen hat, größer ist, frischer als bei ihm. Sie ist erst
seit kurzem fort, kann sich nicht umgewöhnen” (190). Failure to receive confirmation from
another native Czech that he knows her country like she does becomes tantamount to the
demise of the nation’s continuity. Karla becomes increasingly annoyed with her partner for
stressing their differences rather than what they have in common. His refusal to recognise
the cinemas that she knows remains a sore point for her. Angered at his disinterest (“daß
[...] du dich von nichts bewegen läßt”, 154) and his insistence not only on their age
difference, but on the consequence he has already drawn from this of the dissimilarity of
their experiences (“Ich weiß, daß du einen Kopfstand kannst, und russische Lieder, und
andere Kinos kennst…”, 154), she accuses him of aggrandising difference: “Laß mich in

Karla’s desire to bring her nation into a unity generates a logic of hierarchical
opposition. To determine certain things as being ‘Czech’ entails the assumption that others
are not. Karla’s differentiations between Czech and non-Czech reflect attempts to keep the
borders firmly drawn. Although they are travelling through Austria, Karla is constantly
thinking of Czechoslovakia and Prantl too increasingly thinks of Greenland and at times
Stoke-on-Trent. Yet there are differences between the way each compare the Austrian
landscape and culture with their respective homes. When Karla compares Austria to home,
she registers difference. Prantl, on the other hand, is struck by similarities. Looking at the
Alps, he sees that the mountains have nearly the same colours as the icebergs in Greenland:
“Die weißen Gipfel erinnern an Grönland: beim Wegsehen blau, das wässrige Grün der
Eisberge wird an den Gletschern grau violett. Prantl versucht sich die richtigen Farben
vorzustellen” (188). Karla’s identification with her Heimat is seen in the novel as an
impediment to successful exile, since it causes her to be disparaging of everything which is
not Czech. It leads her to make constant comparisons between her present foreign
environment and home, in which the latter always emerges more favourably. She finds
people in the West unfriendly and unapproachable (“Im Westen benehmen sich auch Tiere
wie Eigentum”, 141) and the cinemas in Austria are disappointingly empty (“Karla denkt an Prag, wo die Karten durchnummeriert und die Kinos voll waren”, 205). She knows that her mother’s apple strudel is the best before she has even tried the Austrian version. Prantl notes of his companion that her nostalgia for home makes it impossible for her to adapt: “Sie führt sich durch das Haar - ein verstorber kiwi. Prantl stellt fest, daß sie es überall schafft, nicht hinzugehören” (199). Her reified image of Heimat makes her hostile to anything which is strange or not like home.

Karla’s sexual choices constitute a further dimension of her identification with a notion of a pure, non-conflictual Heimat. Traditionally, Heimat necessitates the maintenance of a border between home and ‘Ausland’ since the existence of the internally coherent community depends on the exclusion of all forms of otherness. Her determination before she left home to study for a semester in Göttingen not to lose her virginity to a foreigner is an example of such border maintenance and a concern with preserving the purity of the community (Prantl calls it patriotism). Because it had not ‘worked’ with the boy with whom she was really in love, she slept with someone else, preferring to ensure that she was deflorated by a compatriot rather than risk it happening abroad, even though this meant sacrificing the ideal of first love. “Ich schätzte den Jungen nicht, aber ich wollte die Tschechoslowakei nicht als Jungfrau verlassen” (140). Her liaison with Prantl reflects a continued preference for Czech men which is reminiscent of the expectation to marry close to home which can be found in the Heimat novel. In this genre, ‘foreign’ suitors are generally regarded as posing a threat to the community’s internalness.

**Karla: From Fearlessness to Vulnerability**

One of the ways in which the cleft between Karla’s idealism and Prantl’s resignation is characterised, is through their respective attitudes towards death. Karla as a stuntwoman performs death-defying feats and her courage and sense of adventure betray a general sense that she is indestructible. This undergoes a change throughout the novel which is clearly linked to Prantl’s influence. While at the beginning of their journey, Prantl is the one who sustains frequent injury and displays a vulnerability in relation to being plunged back into memories of his past, it is later Karla who becomes feverish. At the beginning of chapter seven, Prantl is “angespannt, in der Nacht fiebrig” (152). For Karla, on the other hand, there are no barriers to her sense of being unassailable. There is no mountain that she does not wish to climb and when the pair arrive at a bridge which has been closed off to public usage, she instinctively wants to test its stability: “Sie betritt sie sofort, sie liebt die eigene Gefahr” (153).
The motif of sickness is in Karla’s case directly linked to her ebbing idealism in relation to the national community. The more she realises that Prantl’s knowledge of his home country is not only different (“Du kennst ein anderes Prag!”), but often at cross purposes to her own, the more her initial physical boldness gives way to growing fragility. After Prantl rejects her attempts to advance him to a national hero (168), disputes that he is purely Czech and makes it clear that Karla would not fit in to his life in Greenland (186-7), the balance tips and she becomes physically assuaged by the dangers of their journey. In Carinthia she is bitten by a tick and then by a hornet and spends three days in bed with a swollen eye and fever. Her original vitality is clearly undermined. The narrator stresses the change in relation to the beginning of their relationship: “Sie ist wunder als er, reizbarer, seine ursprüngliche Müdigkeit hat sie angesteckt, auch die Hitze verträgt er schon besser” (189). Karla’s unease escalates and reaches its peak in her dream in chapter eleven in which, in battle with Prantl, heavy armour and weapons fail to guard her from her own mortality. When she wakes from this dream, in which she confronts her own vulnerability, she is sufficiently frightened at a new-found presence of death to decide to end the journey and with it her relationship with Prantl while she is still alive: “Noch lebe ich. Es heißt, sich zurückziehen” (233). Like Prantl, Karla is brought to the edge of death, but whereas he copes with the fear of death through aestheticising it in fantasies, she has no formula for dealing with it.

Not all cultures view death as the universal characteristic of life. Rather, Western awareness of death is shaped by Christianity. The idea of human life as something which is always nearing an end can be given meaning when the notion of finality is countered by an overarching concept that is not affected by finitude (God, infinity, eternity, immortality). The important thing is that this idea has a transcendental character. In modern Europe, individual death is negated and transformed into the immortality of the community to which one belongs. Individuals are contingent and exchangeable while the collective is durable because of this exchangeability. Under certain conditions, the death of the individual even becomes a requirement (the hero who dies for his country). In their discussion of the experience of death as a founding moment for collectives such as the nation, Uzarewicz and Uzarewicz define collective societies as the finite individual’s dream of the infinitude of human life. In their view, society - and one could easily substitute here nation as the paradigmatic social form of the modern period - is an endlessly self-reproducing organism. The individuals which partake in it are comparable to cells that have to die to ensure the survival of the social body. The authors write: “Dieses Modell des ewigen Werdens und
Vergehens ist der Strohhalm, an den sich die Sterblichen klammern." A condition for the individual’s reassurance that after his own death he will continue somehow as part of the collective, would be the secure knowledge of this collective’s continued existence. This, I argue, is precisely the assumption which becomes unsettled when Karla meets Prantl and is what is responsible for her growing unease and eventual fear-instilling confrontation with her own mortality.

Prantl’s influence on Karla clearly catalyses the change which takes place in her from being oblivious of death to the point of defiance, to being able to sense death as something tangible and conceivable. In her dream, the battle is a staged one and she is a stuntwoman playing a role: the blood is “eine Art roter Sirup” (232). However, she finds that she no longer enjoys the simulation because she senses that the death she is performing is no longer so unreal: “es ist mir zu viel Simulation – ich bin doch nicht so unverwundbar” (232). When the blood spurts from her mouth and she performs her death, she cites the words spoken by Shakespeare’s Cleopatra, divulging the depth of the influence which Prantl has on her; he is the Shakespeare scholar (he wants to visit the Italian cities in his plays) and her knowledge of English scant.

Karla’s emergent sense of her own mortality seems to me particularly central to the novel’s overall theme of national identity and the challenges made to it by twentieth century political alienation. It may be argued that Prantl with his multiple collective affiliations embodies a kind of post-national subject, where the post-national is defined as the struggle “to make visible the incoherence, contingency, and transitoriness of the national narratives and to reveal this paradoxical space”. Karla in contrast, who clings to her Czechness, represents an outmoded naive position, based on a belief in a stable homogeneous national people which she is eventually forced to relinquish. However, it is crucial to recognise not only the change which Karla undergoes under the influence of her embittered companion, but also to acknowledge what kind of identity she envisages at the end of the novel. In the concluding section of my analysis, I show how Karla does not give up her identification with a home place and that she actually finally insists on this identification as the only way to overcome death.

Karla’s Dream of Prague

The last chapter of Treibeis begins with a change in narrative technique to the first person. The focus on Karla not only redresses the imbalance of the initial exclusiveness of Prantl’s

---

241 Uzarewicz and Uzarewicz, 20.
point of view, but by ending with Karla’s perspective, the novel can also be seen to privilege it. While the only vision of the future offered by Prantl is that of his death, which he copes with through aestheticization, the choice to conclude the novel with Karla’s vision suggests that the latter may contain a more constructive alternative.

In a series of dreams, Karla first imagines herself on a conveyor belt. The machinery which has created her is an image of her embeddedness in a national community. The nation appears as a machine which pierces her skin, forming her, but without injuring: “womit spürte ich das Kitzeln der Stahlfedern, die sich blitzschnell spannen konnten und wieder lockern, bei der Anspannung drangen sie unter die Haut, ohne zu ritzen, zu verletzen” (229). The reiterated question “Mich?” reveals an uncertainty about whether the machine has created her or the other way around, suggesting that she has become unsettled in her belief that the nation is a primordial presence. The next dream is a series of staged battles with Prantl, for each of which the opponents select a suit of armour and a suitable weapon to match. The armour now symbolises the structure or discourse with which each identify and which protects them. Prantl’s last choice is the suit of armour of a Samurai warrior. His surety and suppleness (he “bewegt sich flink, federt in den Hüften, ist wach”, 232) contrasts with Karla’s increasing difficulty: she loses balance and has trouble breathing. Her falls and loss of various pieces of her costume connote the loss of security she suffers when Prantl compels her to interrogate her idealisation of Heimat.

In her final dream, however, Karla’s recovers stability. She imagines herself and Prantl making love and at every climax to their lovemaking, she is able to recapture a particular place in Prague and confirm her sense of belonging to the city.


The narrator’s decision at the end of Treibeis to let her heroine defend her affiliation to her home and resist the influence of an embittered hermit can be seen as an articulation of the necessity of socially produced structures or identity formations. Such an insistence on the necessity of community could, for example, be grounded on the claim that community is a pre-requisite of any effective politics. Indeed, as Prantl’s feeling of apartness from the

---

242 Pease, 7.
243 Cf. Morley.
Protests against communism has shown, it becomes difficult to support a political stance when you no longer feeling part of (and that means obligated to) the collective which would benefit from the politics you espouse. Before I analyse Karla's final dream of a return to Prague, I first outline contemporary debate on community and difference in the context of which I place her search for community (which is the motivation behind her affair with Prantl).

In recent years, various forms of postmodern and poststructuralist theory have given rise to what is often referred to as a new politics of difference. One key text in the construction of this discourse has been Iris Young's critique of what she terms the metaphysics of presence implicit in the very idea of community. Her position follows Lyotard in equating all forms of unity with terror. She repudiates any possible notion of community since members of a community see themselves as a non-conflictual, monadic unit and their identification with others in the community works only by silencing experiences different from one's own. She writes: "any move to define an identity, a closed totality, always depends on excluding some elements, separating the pure from the impure."

More recently however, and partly in reaction to Young, there has been a move towards a rehabilitation of community. Its proponents defend community on political or moral grounds. In an article addressing postmodern 'narratives of return', John Su argues that being haunted by places sustains our moral obligations to one another, since "to belong to a place means that one's sense of self is not independent of other's who identify themselves with the same place." If his argumentation rests on assumptions which he struggles to ground, his rehabilitation of place can certainly be seen as part of a nascent revival of communal identity which founds itself in a reappraisal of what has become, in its view, an easy equation of the desire for belonging with a politically regressive form of reactionary nostalgia. Central to this undertaking is the assumption that the desire for community is an intrinsic human quality and that it is therefore essential to develop a way to respond to it as well as the conviction that it is possible to envisage a 'we' which is no longer fixed or exclusive. Proponents of the rehabilitation of community reject the equation

---

244 Paradigmatic for this is Bhabha's idea of the people's performance which continually introduces difference into the nation's narrative. Cf. 169.
245 Young, "The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference."
246 Young, 7.
of unity with terror and stress that recognising that in any particular formation of an identity structure something will always be excluded is different from the claim that such delimitation is in itself "terroristic". Rather, communal understanding is seen to not necessarily preclude the simultaneous recognition of difference.

One recent challenge to the repudiation of structure has been the work of Homi Fern Haber. Starting from the premise that structure necessarily entails the repression of difference, her project entails the search for a notion of solidarity which does not universalise totality, that is, one which attends to "the plural, or 'protean', nature of selves, community, and culture." A position which denies the possibility of any and all structure, she argues, is incoherent since "we cannot think or speak, much less act, in any purposeful manner without having structured our world and our interests in some heuristically useful way." The key is rather to acknowledge that any structure or unity is necessarily subject to redescription. Using the fact of difference to rethink our idea of structure, Haber suggests that we need to give up on the possibility of discerning essences or identifying structures which are timeless and unchanging and reformulate it as being open to redescription and to deconstruction. In this way, we can continue to speak as a 'we' without claiming that this unity is absolute, homogenous or normalised. Haber writes:

By the following formulation I want to suggest both my repudiation of the poststructuralist demand for the universalization of difference and my solution to the political problems it engenders: unity (the requirement that a thing be at least minimally coherent enough to be identified and redescribed) does not necessitate "unicity" (the demand that we speak with one voice). This is to claim that coherency does not necessitate speaking with one voice, that instability does not necessarily result in incoherence.

While *Treibeis* does seem to privilege Karla's need for unity over Prantl's solitude by ending with a first person narrator who embodies her point of view, it in fact refrains from passing judgement over the different choices of the two protagonists. Both positions - the search for unity and its rejection - are seen as being problematic and neither is seen as representing potential solutions to the break-up of community. While Prantl's identification with isolation and with the Samurai creed is seen as unleashing fears of death and human vulnerability which are otherwise contained by the assurance of the community's continuity, Karla's sense of belonging is no more viable an option since it can only be achieved through a suppression of difference. There are no substantial indications that

---

249 This in turn rests on the (poststructuralist) assumption that language is undetermined and that therefore all determinations, that is, all ways of choosing to use language to build structure, amounts to an artificial and strategic imposition of an interested programme.

250 Haber, 4.

251 Haber, 5.
Karla’s confrontation with Prantl has led her to think past a model of community which assumes that its members constitute a non-conflictual monadic unit. Rather, the novel’s conclusion represents a suppression of her experience of conflict as the prerequisite for her retrieval of a sense of home which this is seen to endanger. As if in order to banish the disturbing dream in which during the play-act battle Karla suddenly feels that she could sustain real injury, she conjures up a new one in which, making love to Prantl, she finds herself back in Prague. This last dream is certainly a wish fulfilment and represents an inversion of her actual relationship with Prantl, which instead of facilitating a sense of belonging, made it appear impossible by splitting up her one into a many. Karla’s dream indicates that her desire for identification with a place has not grown any weaker since the outset of their journey, which leaves the reader to wonder what she will make of the story of their love which she promises to write.

At the end of the novel, Karla finds something which endures political changes. Since she is unwilling or unable to cope with the vulnerability to which she feels exposed through her alienation from the nation she recovers a similarity between herself and other Czechs on the basis of a familiarity with place. Familiarity with place becomes the new basis for an identification with a collective which can be shared despite other dissimilarities. While the fact that Prantl knows Prague differently had first made her believe that they had nothing in common, she now finds a similarity despite this difference in the fact that they both know Prague (albeit differently). In other words, she chooses to stress the similarities which exist - even if these be minimal - beyond differences in order to forge unity, since without unity there can be no protection. Her words “Es kann heißen wie es will” indicates that while others may know the places by different names, while their memories of places will differ and the political narratives of the nation will be constantly redescribed, enough similarity can be recovered to retain identity beyond difference. The fact that she knows these places, that she grew up with them, enables her to confirm her belonging. Even the sight of Prague’s ugliest suburbs provide her with a feeling of security because they are “halb vertraut”. The image of herself as a baby connotes her sense of being sheltered by the city. While her sense of place provides respite from the unpleasantness of alienation, it remains unclear whether it will provide a sufficient basis for a new identification with being Czech and how this will negotiate her experience of difference.

Like Treibis, Verklärte Nacht, Moniková’s last completed novel, examines national identity weighing up its advantages and drawbacks for the individual. The theme of

252 Haber, 120.
mortality and the strategies we employ in order to be able to face up to and accept this human trait is once again central to the portrayal of the effects of national affiliation. In *Treibis*, the nation is seen to provide protection against the knowledge of death. In this last novel, however, the relationship between the nation and mortality has changed: the protagonist's non-participation in her national community is equated with a desire to be exempted from the processes of sickness and aging which lead to death.
Chapter Eight. Verklärté Nacht: Postnational Fable and Immortal Wanderings

While *Treibeis* is concerned with the extent to which the nation can represent the individual, in *Verklärté Nacht* Moníková turns her attention towards the place of the foreigner within the nation and the binary opposition national/foreigner which continues to structure the concept of the nation. Leonora, the novel’s first person narrator, is a well-known principal and artistic director of a touring dance ensemble. After leaving Czechoslovakia in 1971 she is now back in Prague to perform for the first time in the city where she was born. When the story begins, the other dancers have already moved on, leaving her to spend a further two weeks in the city before joining them at Christmas in Metz for the next rehearsals. It is the winter of 1992, three years after the ‘Velvet Revolution’ and the recent tumult of changes makes it difficult for Leonora to recover a familiarity with ‘her’ city. The changes to the names of tram stops and streets unsettle her old familiarity and oblige her think about their meanings. The names have lost their self-evidence and this is experienced as both alienating and as occasioning a cognisance of place which is dependent on foreignness. She now has to learn the new names as she would a foreign language - by thinking about them. “Früher habe ich über Namen nicht nachgedacht, sie waren selbstverständlich, wenn auch nicht immer klar, noch die Unklarheit war vertraut. Jetzt bin ich mir keines Wortes sicher” (6).

The first half of the novel is concerned with Leonora’s impressions and thoughts of the places she visits and her comparisons between the past and present. She examines every detail of her surroundings as if she needs to confirm that the city of her memory is not a phantasmatic projection. She spends her time seeking out the places of her childhood, calling on a school friend and reading old newspapers she finds in her rented apartment. Then an encounter changes the course of her visit and compels her to re-examine her notions of real Czechs and Slovaks who in her view belong in Prague (a category in which she includes herself) and infiltrating foreigners. She attends a matinée of an opera by Janáček in which she once danced the title role in her own arrangement and is accompanied out of the theatre by an admirer who has spotted her in the audience and who claims to have been following her movements through Europe. On hearing his German accent, she is immediately defensive. She has come to Prague to mingle with her own people and has no time for foreigners. But Thomas (or Tomaš as he suggests she call him) is persistent, and

---

233 Moníková, *Verklärté Nacht*. Munich and Vienna: Hanser, 1996. Unless otherwise stated, all page references in this chapter refer to this text.
by the end of the novel he causes her to approach and even become intimate with the object of her anxiety.

On the surface, this is the story of a woman who because of an admirer's insistent pursuit, is given the opportunity to overcome her prejudices as well as the distance she has been carefully maintaining between herself and others. It combines familiar themes from earlier texts. Like Jana in *Eine Schädigung*, the heroine Leonora is a 'flâneuse', searching for security and belonging in a relationship with the city. She shares Prantl's reclusive impulse in *Treibis* (which likewise surfaces in *Pavane* where isolation becomes a precondition for successful mourning) and the visions of death and dying which Francine, Prantl and Karla all have to varying degrees, overwhelm and obsess her. Parallels between this work and *Pavane* are most easily drawn since both novels feature a first person narrator who gets herself into trouble because of her passionate patriotism. Leonora explains that for her the fact that she was born in Prague gives her a "Gefühl einer besonderen Auszeichnung" (34). Her great respect for the city causes her to regard her birth there as a piece of good luck. Yet her wonderment at her right to say that she is from Prague which is in the first breath self-effacing is overtaken in the next by a coextensive aggrandised sense of self-worth her pride in her origins bestows upon her. "Als hätte ich in einem früheren Leben etwas Wichtiges oder Großes getan, daß ich in dieser Stadt geboren wurde und in ihr leben dürfte" (34). The double-edged nature of Leonora's musings is typical of the inconsistency of her character. Her overarching sense that she is first and foremost from Prague has a positive and a negative side. It dictates her interest in and concern for the city, but when it expresses itself in possessiveness and veneration, it produces prejudice and inhibits the development of a normal everyday relationship to place. "Ich überlasse mir dem unwirklichen Gefühl, in dieser Stadt zu sein" (34).

Leonora is not as deluded about her people as Francine lets herself be for a time. Because she returns to the city periodically, she never loses sight of how things really are (or were) and while she enshrines the city as well as to a certain extent its people, she is also - unlike Francine - capable of critique. Whereas Francine's knowledge of her nation's negative traits slumbers in her unconscious, particularly when she spends time in the city, Leonora is capable of registering the low points in her nation's history. In her reactions, disinvolvment ("Meine Landesleute! Die sich immer so gern als Opfer ausgeben!" 140) alternates with readiness to accept responsibility for her nation's ill deeds and inadmirable qualities. At one point she claims that it is just as uncomfortable to be Czech as it is to be German: "ein Tscheche sein ist auch nicht angeneher, nicht einfacher oder schmeichelhafter" (140). Her prolonged reflections on the *Spartakiăddni* at the beginning of the novel, in which she had participated in her youth, exemplify her ability to distinguish
the positive from the negative as she looks back on the period of communism in which she grew up. She remembers the atmosphere of excitement in the city, the sweaty, scantily clad men and women in “kollektiver Euphorie” (12) and the opportunity for the women to find distraction from their housework. But she also knows that their enjoyment of the spectacle was inhibited by considerable stress caused by the high expectations placed on them by their managers and that the bodies on display were “kaputt von der Arbeit - von der Familie, den Kindern, den Männern.” (12) She realises that the demonstration of unity, of “Körpern, alle der gemeinsamen Sache ergeben” (14-15), came at the price of the individual. In the soldiers’ formation, the highlight of the games, the huge human pyramid could only be sustained by injuring the men who made up the bottom layers. Photos which until recently were not available for public viewing show “Füße, die den unten Stehenden die Finger einklemmen, auf Haaren und über Gesichter abrutschen, gequetschte Nasen, angerissene Augenbrauen, blutige Stirnen” (14). Later in the novel, Leonora is able to balance this negative view of communism when she reads a newspaper report about a Russian soldier who recently died of hunger because the army can no longer afford to provide its men with sufficient sustenance - something which presumably would not have been conceivable before the ‘Wende’. Leonora’s capacity for criticism is not restricted to those in power and she does not shy away from reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of her generation. She is able to curb a swell of pride at the rapid retreat of Soviet forces from Czechoslovak territory as she reads through a list of names of all those who cooperated with the StB, the Czechoslovak state security bureau. Recognising people she knew at university, she registers that the blame for the communist regime must also be placed on the people. But neither is she satisfied with a one-sided image of her generation as collaborators and driven by self-protection. “Da war noch etwas. Das kann nicht alles sein” (64). Searching her memory, she pays tribute to a friend who suffered imprisonment because of his multi-lingualism and whose suffering represents an experience which is different from the comfortable lives of the StB agents. “Während seine Freunde Karriere machen, ist er nicht imstande, aus seiner Vergangenheit Kapital zu schlagen” (65).

Because Leonora is capable of reflecting critically on her nation, the first person narration does not pose the same difficulties and occasion the same ironisation of the narrator as it did in Pavane. Indeed while in the earlier novel, as I have argued, the statements which Francine tells us others have made about her confirm our inclination to disidentify with her and to disapprove of her intolerance, no such distancing techniques obviate the authorial sympathy for Leonora which the first person narrative technique encourages. While not portraying her as irreproachable, Moníková presents her heroine as a woman who has a capacity for differentiated reflections on the Czechs and their history.
By stressing that she is perceptive of the misdeeds as well as the achievements which her nation has brought forth, that she is able to feel shame as well as pride, and is discriminating of both the positive and negative sides of socialism in her country, we are invited to commend her astuteness. As a result, the prejudices which she harbours and which subsequently begin to impinge upon our positive opinion of Leonora disconcert since discrimination is not clearly connected with narrow-mindedness or psychic disturbance. The merit of this book is its attempt to relocate the propensity for prejudice into our midsts, its insistence that this is pervasive and something of which all of us can be guilty. It is also the story of the unmaking of one woman's prejudice towards German 'strangers' in Prague and therefore a narrative which expresses optimism towards the fusion of identities in Europe after the 'Wende'. Disappointingly, however, the book does not adequately reflect the degree to which the heroine's nationalism is informed by or otherwise connected with her exile from the nation. While it seems fair to say that prejudice is more widespread than is often acknowledged, nowhere in the novel is there any indication that Moniková has taken on board the constitutive role of exile in nationalistic sentiment. Leonora's character, she is a woman whose over-concern for her city prevents her from being able to live there, is a counterpart to Homi Bhabha's migrant whose unhomeliness and transgression of borders protects him from boundedness (that is, pinning oneself down to one pure essentialised identity). Migrancy can reinforce rather than disperse homogeneous identities, exemplify rather than elude the "politics of polarity". In *Verklärte Nacht* there is a conflation of exile with a glorification of the place of origin which one has left. However, the relationship between not living in a place and reifying it remains vague. When Leonora is thinking about her relationship to Prague, she reflects that her experience of the city changes depending on whether or not she has a task to carry out. If she does, the journey through the city is burdensome, she is "angespannt, gereizt und ungeduldig, von Anfang an überzeugt, daß es nicht klappen würde" (34). Only when she has no business to attend to does she feel in harmony with her environment: "Wenn ich von der Stadt nichts will, komme ich mit ihr am besten klar" (34). The conclusion which can be drawn from Leonora's self-observations is that when you live in a place and are reliant on it for the fulfilment of your everyday needs, it has a more sober reality than for the visitor who experiences it with an "unwirklichen Gefühl" (34). Nationalist pride is from Leonora's perspective an endangered human capacity, while the reader asks herself whether

255 Homi Bhabha. 1994, 38.
it is fact no more than an indulgent luxury which does not contribute at all to life’s practicalities. Leonora does attend to the differences which separate her from the ‘normal’ citizens of Prague. She claims to demonstrate more interest in her national history than her compatriots - she is the only visitor to the graves of Mácha, Neruda and Němcová in the ‘Ehrenfriedhof’ (39) and comes close to claiming that her excessive devotion to her city is coeval with her inability to live there (34). Yet, even when she admits her heightened interest in the nation (102), she does not consider this to be a specific product of her exile.

In Search of the People of Prague

Leonora’s dance career has turned her into a professional traveller. She has no fixed abode and is in her own description a nomad: “seit ich kein festes Zuhause habe und nur noch vagabundiere, kann ich kein Tier an mich binden, keine Pflanzen” (20-21). Occasionally she visits Prague where she rents an apartment and she mentions sojourns in various French cities, Italy, New York, Greenland and Israel. Her perpetual state of homelessness and wandering erects an impassable barrier between herself and other ‘normal’ people who live in one place. She claims, intentionally, or at least knowingly, to avoid belonging and community. “Ich versäume jede Zugehörigkeit, jede Gemeinschaft” (136). She has transformed a childhood tendency to shut herself up into a way of life. In a dream she recalls placating her mother who is worried about her isolation by pointing out that other more sociable girls get pregnant and she hears the admonishing words of her father: “Sei nicht so düster. Geh mal an die frische Luft, unter Leute!” (109-110). Even now, the characters in her choreographies dance alone.

While her life is characterised by an avoidance of steady, durable relationships whether to people or to places, discontentment and a feeling of emptiness has motivated her to seek out exactly these things. As she explains, she has begun to sense that there is something that she is missing out on: “Das Leben - wie man sagt; ich kann nur nicht begreifen, daß es schon alles sein sollte” (73). Like the tragic figure in Janáček’s opera The Makropulos Case, she envies others their proximity to things, whereas she feels oddly removed, a spectator. “Wenn ihr weßtet, wie leicht ihr lebt! Ihr seid so nahe an allem. Für euch hat es einen Sinn” (81) laments the heroine Emilia Marty, with whom the narrator closely identifies. While she watches others around her carrying home shopping, repairing toboggans and collecting their children from school, her own attempts to perform ‘everyday’ tasks appear false, “ähneln einer Inszenierung” (72). She envies what she perceives as other people’s capacity to live spontaneously and naturally (“sie leben unmittelbar ins Reine”, 72) while her life seems to be an essay for which she has no clear
concept. Leonora claims to be in Prague to enjoy for a short time a little familiarity and community which she otherwise jettisons. During a visit to an old school friend, she divulges her reason for staying on in the city after her official engagement: “Ich will die Stadt für mich allein haben” (25). As becomes more obvious as the story progresses, her desire to be alone has less to do with a solipsistic urge (although, as I show later in my argumentation, unconsciously it in fact does) as it has with her idea that without the other members of her ensemble, she will meet and spend time with her fellow Czechs: being alone in Prague means for her without her non-Czech colleagues. When a woman speaks to her in the shower room at a swimming pool where she goes to warm herself up, she feels as if her day has ended on a successful note and that she is achieving what she set out to. “Keine allzu große Verzweiflung, keine allzu große Leere” (49). Much later, she clearly formulates her aim, this time however, it is tinged with a sense of failure: “Ich bin auf meine ‘Landesleute’ neugierig, die wiederum nichts von mir wissen wollen” (92).

By this stage, however, we do not feel sorry for Leonora’s failure, since we know that in spite of pretensions to be doing otherwise, she has in fact been avoiding contact with the population. She does not know anyone in her apartment building because her prejudices against the older generation prevent her from knocking on their doors: “Vormittags sind meist nur Rentner zu Hause, alte Frauen, mißtrauisch, [...] die meisten würden wohl gar nicht öffnen” (73).256 The comment made by the woman in the shower room which she interprets as a moment of successful interaction with her people is in fact an expression of envy on the part of her interlocutor and therefore an affirmation of Leonora’s difference rather than a gesture of inclusion. “So schlank möchte ich auch sein’, sagt eine und sieht mich an” (49). By seeking out and speaking to other Czechs, Leonora hopes to find some respite from her chosen alienation. A party she celebrates with former acquaintances in her hotel suite while she is performing in the city leaves behind fond memories of the intimate unconstrained atmosphere (37). She has, however, no pretensions that she will be able to experience any real sense of community or be for a while like the Czech women she sorely misses. When she observes the haste of other women on the streets, she is made acutely aware of the differences which segregate her from her compatriots and despite the fact that she is in no doubt about the banality of their lives, is made to feel unsure whether her

256 This is probably one of the author’s own ‘Feindbilder’ which she speaks of slowly learning to admit to and correct in a speech about German-Czech relationships. (Moníková, “Über eine Nachbarschaft.”) It also appears in Eine Schädigung, when Jana tries to find out what day it is from an elderly neighbour and meets with a firmly locked door and a defensive reaction. (Moníková, Eine Schädigung, 27-28) The prejudice is corrected towards the end of this novel by Thomas who gets to know the neighbours in the house who turn out to be - contrary to Leonora’s presumptions - welcoming and open.
choice to leave Prague and to opt for a lifestyle unencumbered by ‘normality’ was the better one:


As with the brief communication with the woman in the swimming pool shower room, the envy of her acquaintances obviates identification and reinforces the barrier between Leonora and the women of Prague.

At times it appears as if the real reason, perhaps Leonora’s subconscious reason, for coming to Prague is to affirm rather than to remove the distance she has been maintaining to her people. This certainly seems to be true for her visit to a school friend in the first chapter, whom she knows in advance she will find repellent. Explaining her friendship with the class social reject, she mentions that he was the most intelligent and most interesting at school, but also that his ugliness was part of the attraction: “er war mir physisch widerwärtig, auch darin lag ein Reiz” (21). She tells us that she just wants to surprise him, knowing that he has probably not heard that about her scheduled performances: “ich wollte nur überraschen und wieder gehen” (25). However, she stays longer than planned and before he sees her out, she finds herself sexually excited and lets him fondle her. The ensuing caresses are void of tenderness and bring no pleasure. Radek’s strength is ‘terrible’ and his hands are grabbing. He is rapacious and clumsy and Leonora soon pushes him away. Her arousal is replaced by repulsion, “draußen überwiegte der Ekel” (27). Clearly, Leonora has an ulterior motive for this visit which she does not admit in her claim to want to surprise an old friend. It is as if by filling herself with disgust at being intimate with another person, she seeks to reinstate rather than to break down barriers. His physical handicap dominates her perception of him as does the difference between them which this creates: “Einen größeren Kontrast könnte es nicht geben; ich ging in Stepptanz- und Ballettkurse, und er konnte sich kaum bewegen” (21). Undermining Leonora’s search for people like herself is an habitual avoidance of similarity and an inclination to relate to others through an acknowledgement of difference which fuels her seclusion. By confirming the disgust she feels for Radek, she verifies that it is best for her to retain her detachment from others.
Leonora may or may not be consciously aware that her undertaking to mingle with Czechs is not likely to eventuate. The quotation marks placed around the word fellow countrymen (‘Landsleute’, 92) indicate her underlying suspicion both of this term and of the assumption it expresses that people can be unambiguously identified in this way, and by implication, of her own goal of finding such people. While comments she makes about the elusiveness of real Czechs make her appear close to underrating the reasons for her failure (that is, that her actual hesitancy to approach them stems from a fear that her valorisation of them may suffer as a result), they do not hinder her from positioning herself in a polarised discursive field with the ‘Czechs’ on one side and the ‘foreigners’ on the other. Leonora’s repeated invocations of her ‘Landesleute’ (a gender neutral equivalent of countrymen) and her intention to seek them out and talk to them which she never seriously pursues, indicate that this is a desire for something which, like Heimat, is always already lost. That is, Leonora can only uphold her idea of who the people of Prague are as long as she does not get too close to them.

Leonora may from the start have been unsure whether she will succeed in meeting real Czechs, but she has quite obviously not envisaged spending time with a foreigner as an alternative. The prejudices she displays against other nationalities, against Americans who have “keine Ahnung” about Soviet communism (36), tourists who barely know the names of famous Czech personalities (39), and Japanese girls who never laugh aloud (90), augment when Thomas introduces himself to her after the opera. When she inquires after his nationality, he eludes an unambiguous classification of himself as German: “Ich wohne seit einem halben Jahr in Prag” (91). But Leonora immediately places him into this category and as such considers him a foreign infiltrator and someone who in her view has no moral right to be in her city. “Neben den dreißigtausend Amerikanern siedeln sich hier bei der Wohnungsnot jetzt auch noch die Deutschen an” (91). Our growing agitation with the narrator increases when she meets Thomas. As they walk through the city together, she is more shocked than ever at the large number of ‘foreigners’ who have flocked to Prague, robbing it of its authenticity. “Ist es überhaupt noch mein Prag?” (125) she asks herself. Her observations contain no appreciation of the fact that many of these ‘Americans’ and ‘Germans’ in all probability have Czech ancestors and are now able for the first time to return to what they consider their origins. Neither does she reflect that she too is a Western visitor with Western currency. Even the Czechs are behaving strangely now that the Westerners are there: “die früher so nüchterne Bevölkerung hat sich über Nacht in ein Volk
von Gauklera verwandelt" (94). The counterpart to Leonora’s censure of the internationalised atmosphere of the ‘Altstädter Ring’ is her interest in a group of Slovakian women selling traditional Christmas decorations and an elderly couple who are singing Jewish songs in Russian. In her description, the women are perceived as part of a rustic idyll and their poverty is idealised as proof of their authenticity:

Sie sitzen da in ihren breiten Röcken, eingemummmt in schwarze Wolltücher mit Fransen, und wärmen sich mit Tee aus Thermosflaschen. Bei spärlichem Licht flechten sie kleine Sterne zum Aufhängen und Baumketten aus Stroh, schnitzen Holzfiguren, Tiere für den Stall, im Lärmt und Gedränge kaum beachtet (95).

The fact that neither of these groups have attracted the tourists (the Jewish singers have only a small circle of listeners) and that both are situated away from the main action of the Christmas market, the Slovakian women “[i]n den Arkaden um den Platz” (95) and the singers on a pier which is difficult to access, connotes their culture as endangered by new attractions tailored to Western tastes and pockets. Leonora’s discrimination against American visitors and for traditional cultures, which in her view belong as of right in the city, is exaggerated in the text. In an essay written by the author entitled “Prag der neunziger Jahre”, many of the themes can be found which she later reiterates in the novel. Here, however, her scathing attack on the Americans who proclaim their political affiliations on the fronts of their T-shirts and her un concealed irritation of their mass arrival in Prague is balanced by an attempt to understand their motivations and a capacity to recognise the positive effects of the new presence. When it comes to foreigners, Leonora is capable of no such concessions. The heroine of Verklärte Nacht is for this reason, if for no other, clearly not an autobiographical figure.

Leonora’s German companion who continues his pursuit despite her obvious disinterest confronts her with her prejudice: “Sie würden am liebsten alle rausschmeißen, nicht? Die Deutschen und die Amerikaner” (102). Somewhat later he makes himself more obvious: “Sie sind eine Rassistin” (102). After they both fall down an iced-over flight of steps into the Vltava, they catch a taxi back to Leonora’s apartment and Thomas stays on to nurse Leonora’s fever. He defies her polarisation of Czechs and Germans, proving that identities are always mixed and crossed and never pure. At the Christmas market, he had already surprised her with his knowledge of Janáček and his ‘un-Germanlike’ humour. Now he impresses her with his knowledge of Czech history and proves with his traditional

257 Cf. 8.
Bohemian cooking, which she “schon immer nicht vertragen konnte” (131), that in some respects he is more Czech than she is. This is something, however, of which only the reader is made aware and which is never commented on or reflected on by the narrator. The differences between Thomas’ tolerance and hybridised identity (a mixture of Czech and German) and Leonora’s stubborn patriotism are played out in the harmless sphere of cooking. Thomas displays willingness to cook something German for a change and makes enthusiastic suggestions. Leonora, however, disapproves of them all. To his ‘Pichelsteiner Topf’, she reacts with disgust: “Gaah!” (132). Even Czech lentils are better than German ones which to her mind are “[z]u dick, zu fett, braun, ein undefinierbarer Brei” (132).

Although we have no extra-diegetic narrator and the ideological aims of the text are nowhere stated, the obviousness of Leonora’s prejudice coupled with the persistence of the stranger makes it relatively simple to foresee the resolution, namely that Leonora will find herself attracted to him. The difficulty of the narrative method lies not in discerning the narrative project, but rather the ability of this text to convince us that its heroine undergoes the change in opinion which we expect of her.

Leonora’s eventual acceptance of Thomas as her lover is the only textual evidence that she has corrected her prejudices against foreigners in Prague. Right up until the turnaround in their relationship on the second-last page of the novel, she reiterates her anti-German pro-Czech sentiments, epitomised on a playful level by her insistence that it is correct to eat carp at Christmas and goose at New Year (Thomas would have it the other way around). On a more serious level, it is foregrounded in her reaction to finding out that Thomas’ father is from the Sudetenland. She is highly irritated that the man she is housing is not merely German, but also one of those Germans who used to populate the same country as ‘her’ people. With her eager affirmation that she would indeed call his father’s birthplace Jihlava and not Iglau, she vents disapproval of German culture on Czech soil. Her incongruous statements underline the fact that she now intends to be hostile towards her carer at all costs. Her question “Und wie ist es bei den Pfingsttreffen so?” (138) critiques the homesickness of the Sudeten Germans by making fun of it. But when Thomas explains that none of his family attended the annual gathering (except one uncle who found it “zu dumm”, 138), she is equally scornful, this time of their apparent lack of appreciation of her country: “Schade, die ‘Heimat’ ist nämlich schön” (138).

The night when Leonora and Thomas make love for the first time is described by the narrator in terms of an approach towards and exploration of something unknown. “Einen fremden Körper berühren. Ein Wagnis” (147). The dissolution of boundaries is stressed on both a physical and a psychic level. “Bisher war er ein Fremder. Jetzt vertiefen wir uns ineinander” (148). The narrator reflects, “es erinnert an eine Geburt und an ein Sterben”
(148), that is, it reminds her of events of transition from the familiar to the unknown. The alignment of this night in importance with momentous occurrences such as birth and dying signals to the reader that she considers this experience to be a turning-point and this is likewise accentuated by the reference to transfiguration in the novel’s title.

The author’s priority is to expose the artificiality of the barriers we erect in our minds between ethnic and national groups and to plead that we ‘dare’ to approach the strangers in our midst and to make the boundaries more fluid: “alle Öffnungen sind Eingänge” (148). The union of the lovers, which remains unbroken the whole night through (“Wir wissen nicht, wem welcher Körperteil gehört. Es gibt keine Teile. So schlafen wir ein”, 148) is clearly euphemistic and can be understood in terms of a ‘Wunschbild’, a utopian image of future understanding between Germans and Czechs. Yet, Leonora’s transcendence of difference remains in the end unconvincing since her change in opinion towards Thomas is preceded by his efforts (and their success) to prove that he too is a good Czech. Thomas’ Bohemian cooking which Leonora enjoys despite its effects on her figure, his knowledge of problems between Czechs and Slovaks and the fact that he speaks “fast wie bei einem Mährchen” (91) are all plus points as far as Leonora is concerned and ones which make him seem more like her and less a ‘German’ and therefore foreigner or stranger. When Thomas becomes heated about the injustices in Czechoslovak history in order to prove that he can be serious, Leonora is suddenly surprised at the similarity in their outlook: “Mir scheint’s, als haben wir die Rollen getauscht” (145). From this point of view, the narrator’s claim to touch a “fremden Körper” at the end of the novel refers to a physical strangeness only. By the time they make love, she has ‘Czechified’ him and appropriated him onto the ‘right’ side of her Czech/foreigner economy. “Wie heißt er mit Vorname? - Thomas, Tomáš” (129).

Leonora Marty/Emilia Marty

The conversations between Thomas and Leonora and the switch in Leonora’s behaviour towards him from tenuous tolerance to fondness occupy in fact only little over half of the narrative section which begins with their arrival at her apartment. As a result of their fall into the Vltava, Leonora develops a fever and spends five days in bed submerged in a dream world. When she surfaces between dreams, she is puzzled by the man’s presence: “Ich kann mich nicht genau entsinnen, warum er da ist und was er hier eigentlich will” (111-112). When she awakens, Thomas tells her that over the last few days she was sometimes awake “aber nicht ansprechbar” and “ziemlich weit weg” (124). The dreams which are included in the first person narrative are permeated with death and dying and
enact a development away from the heroine's former firm identification with immortality. Earlier in the novel, Leonora is quite explicit about the affinities she feels and deliberately accentuates between herself and the character in Janáček's opera Več Makropulos, Emilia Marty. When she danced this role, she cultivated the identification by changing her surname to Marty and letting the press speculate about whether the similarity was accidental or intended. She recalls with pleasure the reports: "besonderer Umstand - die Namensverwandtschaft mit der Gestalt, vielleicht ein künstlerisches Pseudonym" (25). Today, she reaffirms her similarity with Emilia by contemplating a poster of herself dancing the role which decorates her otherwise empty apartment: "Eine Furie, in wehenden Kleidern, mit einem Gesicht, das dreihundert Jahre alt sein kann oder dreißig. Emilia oder Leonora Marty. Diese Frau bin ich" (29). She also refuses to be known by her real name. When Thomas asks her if she is really called Marty, she replies, "So ähnlich" (143). Emilia Marty is the last of a series of names Janáček's tragic heroine has adopted in her long life. As a girl she was made immortal by a life-giving potion her father had concocted for the emperor who ordered him to try it out on his daughter. For three hundred years she wanders through time, changing places and countries and identities. In the opera, she feels that the potion is losing its effect and returns to Prague to renew it. Once there, however, she becomes so disillusioned by her long life and its deadening effect on the soul that she chooses death. The change Emilia undergoes in Prague parallels and predicts Leonora's own growing dissatisfaction with her chosen independence. Like Emilia, she impresses all who see her while maintaining her distance from them, "ohne beteiligt zu sein" (86). As I discussed earlier, her visit to Radek allows her to enact this role and confirm her ability to remain aloof. When Emilia arrives in Prague, she proves her cold-bloodedness by proclaiming no interest in her by now numerous relatives: "ich bin schon lange, lange keine Dame. Ich kümmer mich den Teufel um meine Brut" (86). Eventually, however, she becomes affected by the capacity for love of those who fall at her feet and wishes that she could feel the way they do. Leonora's softening towards Thomas parallels this figure's change in attitude epitomised in her tribute to their care for one another which makes their lives meaningful: "Ihr glaubt an die Menschheit, an Größe, an Liebe! Aber in mir ist das Leben stehengeblieben! Und kann nicht weiter! Die schreckliche Einsamkeit!" (87). Leonora's identification with Emilia Marty is not just phantasmatic, but also felt as physical. I have already discussed her perception that her movements through the city are slower than those of the other women on the streets, and as she lies in the sauna after swimming her body appears to be governed by a different kind of time: "ich spüre, daß sie viel mehr schwitzen als ich. Als wäre bei mir alles verlangsamt, der Stoffwechsel, die ganze Entwicklung" (48). In another example, she imagines that her blood flows slowly.
Already somewhat recovered from her fever, she tries to reassert her identification: “Keine Hitze mehr, kein Wallen des Blutes. Monotones, langsames Fließen dünnen Bluts in blaulichen Adern, seit dreihundert Jahren” (123).

In Leonora’s dreams of the mythical pre-history of Prague and the Egyptian queen Hatschepsut, the motives behind her identification with immortality become clearer. After the warring Czech maidens had launched a particularly vicious attack on the husband of their deceased leader Libuše, killing both him and his men, the men retaliate by not only slaying all the maidens, but also by destroying all traces of their dynasty. The dreaming Leonora bemoans the pitilessness of the men’s revenge and the fact that their deeds ensured that no traces of the maidens survived. “Die Mädchengrund - Děvín - wurde dem Erdboden gleichgemacht, auf daß kein Beleg existiere von der einstigen Macht und Wehrhaftigkeit der Frauen” (117). Like Vlasta and the other warrior maidens, Hatshepsut’s achievements were endangered by the attempt of a man to undermine female power; this time it is the queen’s nephew and successor who takes care that nothing remain of her name and her life’s work. In her dream, Leonora invokes her greatness from a position of identification with the ancient queen:


The queen’s immortalisation through written records and objects fashioned in her likeness is threatened by the hateful nephew, who sets about removing her images as soon as she is dead. Leonora imagines herself as the queen lying in her coffin listening to her nephew dismantling her empire: “Ich höre bereits, wie sie alles schleifen - die Bildnisse von den Wänden, die Statuen, meine Obelisken, die Inschriften, meine Kartuschen. Der Neffe hat es eilig” (120).

In these dreams, Leonora’s fear of death becomes connected to her gender. She is afraid that like these women, she will be ‘wiped out’ after her death and removed from history like the warrior maidens, “ins Mythische abgeschoben” (117). Her identification with immortality emerges in this context as an avoidance of the frequent fate of great women of being forgotten, even purposely deleted from collective memory. At the same time, by dancing the role of the immortal Emilia Marty, Leonora is facilitating her own continued existence by making a name for herself on the stage. She confirms her identification with Emilia Marty by looking at the poster of herself, that is, at an image which remains as evidence of her own achievements. Thus it is fitting that the last of
emerges in Leonora's possessiveness and resentment towards foreigners in Prague - and also because, as we gather from Leonora's description of her loner existence, to remain unattached to a place means resisting relationships with others, foregoing the experience of being in community with others. Thomas, the man for whom she discards her emotional isolation, is not a Czech national and through him the text also reflects on the status of the other within the nation and problematises the dichotomous pair national/foreigner. Leonora's initial refutation of Thomas' advances is reminiscent of Kristeva's insight discussed in the introduction that fear of the foreigner stems from his/her capacity to confound the nation's fixed identity. Leonora disapproves of the presence of people of other nationalities in Prague because she fears that her city is losing its Czechness. While her acceptance of Thomas appears on the surface to echo Kristeva's conviction that respect for strangers can exist alongside national allegiance, my reading has shown that in fact it rests on her recognition that Thomas is basically Czech and therefore not at all strange. Verklarte Nacht can be read as a text which attacks the logic which uses birth or blood to define national affiliation and argues for a more subjective and open system of membership. This is one aspect of Leonora's acceptance of Thomas - his knowledge of Czech history and culture and the ease with which he befriends Leonora's neighbours persuades her that he belongs there just as much as she does. However, because Leonora's voluntary relationship with Thomas is preceded by this recognition that he is actually just as Czech as she is, the novel also contains a sobering message about the nation's treatment of the foreigner, concluding that acceptance and respect can only be achieved through assimilation. Thomas' mixed cultural background and his enthusiasm for Leonora's nation blurs distinctions between national categories, revealing these to be more fluid than is normally assumed, but the effect of this is also that he ceases to be a foreign presence in the text. Verklarte Nacht thus delivers no promises that national subjects can or will learn to cope in a respectful and accepting way with the non-nationals in their midst.

259 Cf. 24.
Conclusion: Can we Transcend our Origins?

Heimat and national identity are both conceived as something we obtain primarily through birth or alternately, early socialisation or blood. If someone was born in Oberammergau, then she is German and her Heimat is Bavaria. If, however, she moved to Meersburg at the age of two and lived there till she was eighteen, then the area around Lake Constance will be her Heimat. And if her parents were born in Istanbul and emigrated to Germany in the sixties, her nationality will be Turkish. If Turkish traditions are practised at home, she may consider Turkey to be her Heimat. Both authors in this study confirm that those places which are determined at an early stage in one’s life as being one’s Heimat and home country remain forever relevant to our identity and that the attachments we form to these places and their people and culture can be repressed but never reversed. The places we come from and the people we grew up with endow us with feelings of responsibility and nostalgic longing. This is the insight to which these writers inevitably return despite all demonstrations of the oppression and prejudice intrinsic to the structures of Heimat and the nation and their failure to represent the interests of the individuals they shelter.

While in her early work, Müller concentrates on depictions of the restriction and confinement experienced by women in communities whose culture perpetuates the Heimat discourse and the wretchedness felt by those who can or do not conform, the texts she writes in German exile are characterised by an awareness of the involuntary or unintended desire for home which thwarts all efforts at disavowal. In her story “Der Mann mit der Zündholzschachtel”, the resentment of one woman caused by her pariah status in the village is made vivid through her silent identification with a pyromaniac’s destructive act. In “Das Fenster”, the fate of provincial women to remain imprisoned in the village and particularly in the domestic realm is communicated through the form of a popular dance, and the protagonist’s dizzy spell caused by her tight corset is a trope for coercion and confinement. In these texts, writing is an outlet for rancour. Müller elaborates a feeling or human condition into a poetic image rendering it both tangible and insistent. These early stories do not reflect on the role which narrative might play in assuaging or transforming hatred. The longest and most ambitious story in the volume, however, “Niederungen”, does succeed in offering more than description – it proffers an alternative. Here, the author once more endows her protagonist with a characteristic perspective on objects which makes her different to those around her. But this time her different perception no longer seals her excommunication, but is rather remembered by the narrating protagonist who is looking back. She has now learnt to think and behave as the others but recalls in the story an earlier uneducated view. The mode of
thinking which the narrator looks back on once having possessed is one which, as I argued in chapter one, lets its objects be (Guzzoni), or as Haines has expressed it, refuses to impose hermeneutic closure. Müller locates this utopian kind of perception in the instinctual behaviour of a child and retrieves it through retrospective narration. This enables her, beyond her depiction of man’s brutal rationality which, along with its concomitant fear of women for their perceived proximity to nature, is for her one of the most negative aspects of the Heimat, to reconstruct an alternative and thereby refute the inevitability of this mentality.

Müller’s first longer text, Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt, contains the first warning of an easy dismissal of the psychological legacy of Heimat. Windisch is in no doubt that his home village is a dead-end street – his perception of ‘the end’ and his fear of the cyclic and for him empty time of the village clearly indicate his certainty. Yet, after he has escaped to the West, we glimpse Windisch once more and this time he is plagued with homesickness and regret. While too proud to admit it, his well-meaning gifts and eagerness on his return visit to linger in conversation despite the fact that he and the nightwatchman have little left to say is a clear statement that neither original attachments should be underestimated, nor can leaving suffice to achieve the better life which the Heimat seemed to withhold. The story’s expression of scepticism towards the possibility of fleeing Heimat affirms current approaches which define the latter as a feeling rather than a particular geographical location.

Fasan can be compared to Moniková’s second novel Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin which likewise oscillates between longing for the nation and repudiation. Whereas Fasan ends with Windisch’s exile, in Pavane exile and glorification of the lost place, here too depicted as coextensive, are established at the outset. In this novel, the answer to nostalgia for one’s origins is to mourn adequately the loss which produces it. This creates the pre-requisite in the novel for the protagonist’s detachment from her nation and thereby expresses optimism in the transcendence of origins. A more diffused view can be found in Moniková’s later work. Treibeis, for example, portrays the renunciation of national affiliation as emotional coldness. Prantl’s flight from his country and his past is also seen as sharpening his awareness of his mortality, while Karla eventually parts company with her companion for fear that too many unpleasant revelations about her nation might ruin a belief in a place and a fantasy of belonging which provides security against senselessness and the certainty of death. Here, national identity is re-examined in terms of a helpful fiction even while its exclusionary mechanisms and its illusory projection of unity are laid bare.

Moniková’s hesitancy to react to the problems and flaws of the national community with rejection (and an advocacy of exile, nomadism or diaspora, for example) is already apparent in her first short novel, Eine Schädigung. Jana’s physical injury during the communist takeover of Prague is expressed as a product of a phallocentric urban environment and her ensuing uncertainty as a feminist dilemma. Yet, her unwillingness to join Mara in her separatist existence outside of the city already demonstrates that for the author, the failures and oppressions which encumber certain discourses (in this case the allegorical use of women’s bodies in imagining the city) do not preclude these from functioning in an overall positive way. This means that even though Jana experiences a number of seemingly insurmountable difficulties as a woman in the city, Moniková hesitates to pronounce the city an undesirable place to live and points to the functions it continues to fulfil for her protagonist (the tranquillity of the hidden garden, for example).

Moniková’s longest novel Die Fassade, examines the paradoxical nature of national representations without questioning the desirability of the nation as imagined culture and community. Playfully seeking a way to envisage the nation as reflecting the people’s experience and thus as constituting in Anderson’s sense the product of their imagination, she uses the issue of reception to trouble the notion that a national narrative can be performed by the people rather than dictated by the state. The novel depicts its heroes as committed to their nation to the bitter end, but in light of their failure to alter perceptions of the nation, leaves the reader to judge whether this is commendable or perhaps just foolishly naive.

Moniková’s work oscillates between nationalism which expresses itself in a sense of responsibility to preserve her nation’s past, but also in a kind of patriotism which jettisons foreign elements, and a quest for liberation from national ties. The former is seen as hindering orientation in a new country (Pavane für eine verstorbene Infantin), necessitating a forgetting of history (Treibis) and operating via false bifurcations between nationals and foreigners (Verklärte Nacht). Just as nostalgia creates optimism towards the Heimat, distance from the national community is the primary cause of nationalist sentiment. Moniková’s protagonists leave their nation because they no longer feel able to identify with the national narrative. The invasion of Prague by Soviet troops in 1968 and the communist regime’s condemnation of Czech involvement in the resistance movement in World War II (which they considered as collusion with the capitalists) are events which relied for their justification on national narratives imposed from above (in the first example, by Soviet imperialism). These narratives thus cease to reflect the people’s wishes and no longer function in accordance with Renan’s

261 Cf. 10ff.
formulation. Once in exile, however, a longing for the lost nation sets in, reflecting the fundamental human desire for meaning and coherence which the nation in retrospect seems to have provided. Unlike Müller who repels suggestions that she writes about her Heimat and despairs about the fact that she will never rid herself of the Romanian-German label, Moniková’s Czech identity was always central to her self-awareness and she did not hesitate to describe her books as national literature. While her overall acceptance of national identity can be contrasted with Müller’s repudiation of love for the Heimat, this does not correspond to an absence of critique in her work. In fact, while Müller’s later texts are tinged with concessions to the emotional power of childhood and home, Moniková’s heroines are never fully able to embrace and take part in the Czech national community.

Moniková’s stance towards the nation differs from Müller’s towards Heimat to the extent that for her it is not essentially corrupt. The figure of Prantl who is embittered by the non-inclusiveness of community and chooses to live in isolation, embodies a renunciation of national community, but there is no privileging of his position, rather this is balanced in the novel by the figure of Karla: her firm belief in a place of belonging is intrinsic to her fearlessness and sense of invulnerability which she displays in her job as stuntwoman. Moniková’s work is more affirmatory of nation/origins than Müller’s, even while she continually qualifies this affirmation with her considerations of various other possible stances. Müller’s work, on the other hand, can be read as an exposure of the far-reaching and personally debilitating effects of Heimat combined with an awareness that origins cannot be escaped. Because she is unable to identify any quality or function which might redeem Heimat, the failure of her later texts in particular to liberate their protagonists from their origins is an expression of hopelessness and resignation. In Herztier, the image of a child tied to a chair portrays Heimat as incarceration and the child’s conviction that her mother has cut off her fingers and devoured them in the garden recasts the maternalness which characterises Heimat in terms of possessiveness and parasitism. In this narrative, membership of a community (as well as friendship) thwarts political engagement since the protagonists’ responsibility towards their families back home makes them vulnerable and open to attack from the Romanian government. Unwilling to cause injury to their mothers, the friends are compelled to cease their activities. While their particular failure to sever their relationship to their Heimat is closely related to the context of political dictatorship, the novel’s depiction of Heimat as grass in one’s head which grows back and has to be mown suggests that rational

262 Cf. footnote 189.
264 She explains in interview with Müller, “das ist ja so ein Wort, mit dem man alles anstellen kann.” Herta Müller in conversation with Wolfgang Müller, 469.
arguments about the constraints of Heimat (that is, the words with which the friends mow the grass) can only ever weaken our emotional attachments to our homeland, but never nullify them. The quality of language in Müller’s work creates a striking counterpart to this otherwise pessimistic tone. In regard to Herztier, the story is narrated in an ongoing poetic style which is most apparent in the novel’s frame with which the narrative begins and to which it returns. Considered together with the fact that language is experienced by the novel’s protagonists as disempowering, the author’s own evident faith in the communicative ability of poetic images evokes an underlying faith in narrative which assuages the despair which would otherwise overwhelm the reader. This tension between poetic style and pessimistic message in Müller’s work renders her approach to the problem of origins more complex than the more formulaic quality of Moniková’s texts. While the latter’s consideration of the issue may be described as analytic, Müller’s painfully evocative language is able to be more attentive to the emotional effects of rejection and loss.

Finally, it is important to add that in the work of both these authors, desire or need for Heimat and national identification always emerges as a consequence of exile and loss. Leonora in Verklärte Nacht wishes to reclaim her city after years of living abroad; Francine in Pavane spends her time in Germany being disparaging about all things German; the four friends in Herztier move to the city only to have to contend there with the ‘grass in their heads’. However, the texts’ treatment of this particular aspect of exile does not lead to a warning not to underestimate the function of these identity-giving structures. Rather, these texts demonstrate an awareness of a tendency to idealise the past which obscures rather than elucidates life in the Heimat national community. In Pavane, unpleasant truths about the Czech nation and their repression lurk at the heart of Francine’s discontent and newspaper reports about Czechs who collaborated with the communists check Leonora’s national pride in Verklärte Nacht. Nevertheless, neither author is able to articulate a definitive and unambiguous position in relation to the desirability of Heimat and nation. Our origins, it seems, have not lost their relevance and will continue to unsettle and confound us for some time to come.
Bibliography

Primary Texts

By Herta Müller


Niederungen. (first edn., 1984); Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1993

Der Mensch ist ein großer Fasan auf der Welt. (first edn., 1986); Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1995

Herztier. Roman. (first edn., 1994); Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1996


By Libuše Moníková

Pavane für eine verstorben Infantin. Roman. (first edn., 1983); Munich: dtv, 1988


Treibeis. Roman. (first edn., 1992); Munich: dtv, 1992

“Prag der neunziger Jahre”. —. Prager Fenster. Munich; Vienna: Hanser, 1994, 114-120

Verklärte Nacht. Munich; Vienna: Hanser, 1996

“Some Theses Regarding Women’s Writing.” Women in German Yearbook. 13 (1997), 7-9


Secondary texts


Alter, Peter. Nationalismus. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985


Bloch, Ernst. *Das Prinzip Hoffnung.* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1973


---. *The Location of Culture.* ---, 1994


---. “The Body of the Nation: The Texts of Libuše Moníková.” ---, 489-506


Dirlik, Arif. "The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism." 

Driver Eddy, Beverley. "Testimony and Trauma in Herta Müller’s *Herzstück*." *German Life and Letters*. 53:1, January 2000, 56-72


Fiedler, Manuela. *Heimat im deutschen Film. Ein Mythos zwischen Regression und Utopie.* Coppengrave: Coppi-Verlag, 1995


Frisch, Max. "Die Schweiz als Heimat. Rede zur Verleihung des Großen Schillerpreises." —.


Hensel, Klaus. “Alles, was ich tat, das heißt jetzt: warten.” [Interview with Herta Müller]. *Frankfurter Rundschau*. 8.8.1987


Ketelsen, Uwe-K. *Völkisch-nationale und nationalsozialistische Literatur in Deutschland. 1890-1945*. Metzler: Stuttgart, 1976


Kohly, Uwe (Regie). *Herta Müller im Gespräch mit Peter Huemer.* (Sternstunde Philosophie).
Mainz: ZDF, 1997

---. *Strangers to Ourselves.* ---, 1991
---. *Nations without Nationalism.* ---, 1993


Nuchtern, Klaus. “Ich mag Eisbären”. *Falter.* Nr. 50, 1992


Prahl, Eckhart. *Das Konzept Heimat. Eine Studie zu deutschsprachigen Romanen der 70er Jahre unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Werke Martin Walsers.* Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1993


Vorländer, Herwart. "Heimat und Heimaterziehung im Nationalsozialismus." Peter Knoch and Thomas Leeb (eds.). *Heimat oder Region? Grundzüge einer Didaktik der Regionalgeschichte.* Frankfurt am Main; Berlin; Munich: Diesterweg, 1984, 30-43


239


