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LITERATURE AND MNEMONIC MIGRATION

REMEDIATION, TRANSLATION, RECEPTION

Edited by Eneken Laanes, Jessica Ortner, Tea Sindbæk Andersen

MEDIA AND CULTURAL MEMORY

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Remediation, Translation, Reception

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Eneken Laanes, Jessica Ortner, Tea Sindbæk Andersen

Literature, Interlingual and Cultural Translation, and Mnemonic Migration: Introduction

Olga Grjasnowa's German-language novel *All Russians Love Birch Trees* (2012) tells the story of the interpreter Mascha from a Russian-Jewish migrant background, who loses her German boyfriend to a sports accident and travels to Israel, where she falls in love with a Palestinian woman. Mascha's Jewish background and her move to Israel evoke the difficult legacies of Nazism and the Holocaust in Germany, and the occupation of Palestinian territories in the post-war years. But this amalgamation of the past and present familiar in Germany, in the linguistic and cultural context of the novel, is unhinged by an additional history that is brought into the equation through Mascha's personal experience as a witness to ethnic cleansing in Baku in 1990 during the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenians and Azerbaijanis, and her subsequent journey as a refugee to Germany. There she is expected to play the role of a Jewish Holocaust survivor, which contradicts her "explicitly non-Jewish and non-German experiences" (Braese 2014, 289) in Baku. The travel from the personal and collective memories of Azerbaijan, where her Jewish background and her grandmother's flight from the Nazis had been of minor significance, into a social framework of memory in which the Holocaust is central, alienates her from her new place of residence. Grjasnowa's novel is part of the rapidly growing body of literature in various languages across Europe, where translingual authors who write in their second or third language[1] stage encounters between the historical imaginaries prevalent in their host country and those that they bring with themselves from their country of origin. This is one of the phenomena in contemporary literature that we call *mnemonic migration.*

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1 On translingual authors as those who write in one of their additional languages, see Kellman 2003, Kellman and Lvovich 2022.

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We understand *mnemonic migration* as the movement of memories across mnemonic borders through the medium of literature (Ortner, Sindbæk Andersen and Wierød Borčak 2022; Ortner 2022). Literature facilitates mnemonic migration when it enables memories and the cultural forms in which they are expressed to travel into new "social frameworks of memory" [*cadres sociaux de la mémoire*] (Halbwachs 1925) and "media cultures" (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017, 10), meaning into the patterns and templates of representation that prevail in a given mnemonic community. Next to the concept of mnemonic migration in this volume, we propose to look at both interlingual and cultural translation as a "new model for conceptualising the transnational travel of memories that operates through transcultural memorial forms" (Laanes 2021, 43). Interlingual translation has always played an important role in the travel of memories. Literature has always been a transnational phenomenon that has reached audiences in different parts of the world through translation and disseminated historical imaginaries that are born in one specific language or in one cultural framework into others. Through intertextual relations with other texts from other languages and cultures literature has made stories, narrative patterns and tropes and motifs from one context travel into another and be transformed there (Erll 2019; Lachmann 1997, 2022). Interlingual translation and remediation have thus enabled the travel of stories about local histories for centuries. In this volume we focus on modern literature and the ways in which it facilitates the migration of memories. The works of postcolonial authors have brought colonial histories told from the perspective of the formerly colonised into major European languages, but there are also new ways in which stories about local histories travel in literature today. New waves of refugees, asylum seekers and economic migrants have had an impact on literary fields, sometimes generations later, when the children of the migrants start to write their stories. Additionally, as Rebecca Walkowitz has noted, many contemporary authors are "children of globalisation rather than colonisation [...] [who] have travelled among metropolitan centres for education and work" (2020, 323–324). Most of the contributions in this volume address authors who have a migration or refugee background, or texts that thematise migration in both a literal and a metaphorical sense.

Mnemonic migration

In her programmatic call for transcultural memory studies, Erll (2011b, 11) argues that cultural memory has always been constituted through movement.[2] Transcultural memory studies therefore explore "the incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms, and practices of memory, their continual 'travels' and ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders" (Erll 2011b, 11). In response to the earlier nation-centred conceptualisations of cultural memory in the 1990s, many scholars have emphasised the fundamentally deterritorial nature of cultural memory that becomes visible through a transnational lens (De Cesary and Rigney 2014; Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017). Michael Rothberg has argued that all acts of memory are actually "knotted" independently of their national framing, meaning "rhizomatic networks of temporality and cultural reference that exceed attempts at territorialisation (whether at the local or national level) and identitarian reduction" (2010, 7).

The concept of *mnemonic migration* develops further the idea of travelling memory, which Astrid Erll describes as an "ongoing exchange of information between individuals and the motion between minds and media" (Erll 2011b, 12). Of the different dimensions of travelling memory that Erll elaborates on, two are especially important for the development of the concept of mnemonic migration. The first is that memory travels through migration, displacement, flight and travel of people, turning them into "carriers of memory" that diffuse "mnemonic media, contents, forms and practices across the globe" (Erll 2011b, 12). The second is that memories travel through media as "books, movies and TV disseminates the past across space" (Erll 2011b, 13). This could potentially create "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg 2004) as a way of adopting the experiences of others.

2 For transcultural and transnational memory studies, see Crownshaw 2013; De Cesari and Rigney 2014; Bond and Rapson 2014; Bond, Craps and Vermeulen 2017. While "transcultural" and "transnational" are often used interchangeably in memory studies, De Cesari and Rigney (2014, 3–4) establish a slight difference between the two. While 'transcultural' sets the perspective for the travel and flows of memory, 'transnational' firstly stresses the entanglement of cultural practices with social formations and institutions, and secondly makes a case for the continuing importance of national borders in the movement of memory, and "frictions" between different scales of public remembering, whether local, national or global. Rothberg, for his part, defines transcultural memory as the "hybridization produced by the *layering* of historical legacies that occurs in the traversal of *cultural* borders, while transnational memory refers to the *scales* of remembrance that intersect in the crossing of *geo-political* borders" (Rothberg 2014, 130). For a comprehensive overview of the concept of transcultural memory, see Ortner and Sindbæk Andersen 2025.

The reason we propose mnemonic migration as the key concept in this volume is that the travel of memories and historical imaginaries in contemporary literature is increasingly linked to physical migration of people. There is a growing number of authors who have experience of migration; who might write not in their first language, but rather in their second or perhaps in their third; and who deal in their work with experiences of migration. The underlying idea behind the concept of mnemonic migration is then both to focus on how physical migration impacts the transnational circulation of memory in literature, and to widen our understanding of what happens in the process of migration. When people migrate to a new place, they enter not only a new political and cultural structure, but also a new social, cultural and political framework of memory (Halbwachs 1925; Rothberg 2014), and so they need to adjust their historical imaginaries, thereby perhaps also contesting and expanding the framework that they enter. Consequently, we are especially interested in the interplay between the dimension of people who function as "carriers of memory", and literature as a medium of memory that re-presents migration into another social framework of memory and media culture. By writing about this experience and by addressing readers that are socialised in the mnemonic framework of the host countries, these writers contribute to disseminating "the past across space" (Erll 2011b, 13) through the medium of literature. However, *mnemonic migration* denotes not only how literature represents the memories of migrants, but also how these deterritorialised memories arrive at their point of destination, and how readers react to those memories.

In this volume, we examine how contemporary literature addresses specific historical legacies, juxtaposes them multidirectionally and disseminates them in the original form or through translation in different parts of the world and in various social contexts. We address both the literary representation of the encounters between different memories and the frameworks of memory (Ortner 2022), and the different memorial forms, narrative templates and tropes that facilitate the cultural translation of memories (Laanes 2021). This volume contributes to the exploration of literature not only as a medium of powerful affective and engaging representations of the past, but also as an agent in the form of a stepping stone, a transitory station, or a vehicle in the dynamic processes of the reproduction, rethinking, remediation, redistribution, and movement of memory.

Why literature?

Before exploring the different ways in which we approach mnemonic migration and cultural translation in literature, a look at how literature has been theorised as a medium of cultural memory is in order. Since the boom of both public remem-

bering and memory studies in the 1990s, literature has been theorised as an important site for working through painful memories of violent histories in trauma studies and as a powerful medium of cultural memory for consolidating communities. Fiction was initially distrusted in the last decades of twentieth century as a medium for coming to terms with the Holocaust, for learning about it and commemorating it (Adorno 1977 [1951]; Langer 1991), and the emergence of witness testimonies in both factual and fictional form provoked heated debates about the adequacy of aesthetic and cultural media, but literature, with its experimental, self-reflexive and often modernist modes, became an important medium for representing events that seemed unrepresentable and for offering consolation, healing or at least symbolic retribution for the victims (Eaglestone 2020; Erll 2011a, 79).[3]

More recently, literary memory studies has widened its focus from the narratives of victimhood to those of different forms of perpetration, collaboration and implication (Rothberg 2019) in historical violence. Here literature likewise has an important role in offering an opportunity to learn from history by trying to understand how ordinary people become perpetrators in wars and state terror. The perpetrator narratives have been studied from the perspective of the different modes of identification that they solicit from the reader to fulfil ethically the function of facilitating historical reflection (McGlothlin 2016; Knittel 2019). In a movement away from the traumatic paradigm altogether, literary memory studies has also followed the call for attention to be shifted to the memories of hope that could work as a catalyst for new scenarios for the future (Rigney 2018; Sindbæk Andersen and Ortner 2019). Amir Eshel believes literature could expand our "vocabularies, by probing the human ability to act, and by promoting reflection and debate" (2013, 4; see also Adelson 2013).

Pioneering cultural memory studies by scholars like Pierre Nora, and Jan and Aleida Assmann initially viewed literature as one of the powerful cultural media for shaping and consolidating the collective identities of different communities,[4] but the work by Ann Rigney and Astrid Erll, among others, has pushed the interest in the field from the texts as "sites" of cultural memory to their dynamics, and to "the way texts give rise to commentaries, counter-narratives, translations into other languages, adaptations to other media, adaptations to other discursive genres, and even to particular actions on the part of individuals and groups" (Rigney 2008, 348 – 9, 345). This has encouraged researchers to scrutinise different ways in

3 The research on literature and trauma is enormous. For classical texts, see Caruth 1995, 1996; Felman and Laub 1992; for recent overviews, see Davis and Meretoja 2020; Kurtz 2018.

4 Jan Assmann defines cultural memory as the "body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image" (1995, 132).

which literary texts sustain, solidify, and perpetuate cultural memories through constant renewal, and also reshape and change them through "remediation"[5] and "morphing" (Rigney 2008).

Rigney differentiates between five different functions of literature as a medium of cultural memory. It can pick up and remediate stories, figures and images, and because of its nature as a cultural and aesthetic medium it can give them a wider relevance by acting as a relay station for different memories (Rigney 2008, 351; 2012a, 25). Works of literature sometimes do not only relay a historical event or figure, but also bring them into public memory for the first time, thereby becoming a catalyst for relevant cultural memories. Rigney suggests that the creative arts have the ability to function as a "catalyst in creating new memories, supplementing what has been documented with imaginative power and creatively using cultural forms to generate vibrant (if not always literally true) stories that may then be picked up and reworked in other disciplines" (2021, 12). By catalysing or relaying cultural memories, a literary text functions as a stabiliser. It turns the memorial material into a monument, a representative part of cultural memory. A literary text can also itself be an object of recollection that is kept up to date through various remediations in different media by new generations. Finally, it can work to calibrate cultural memory as it critically revises its ways of imagining the past, not only through new remediations, but also through revision of canonical literary texts.[6]

The role of literature and other aesthetic media in bringing into public remembering the experiences of individuals and groups that have been silenced by the hegemonic discourses of cultural memory, and in offering counter-memories and alternative interpretations to those discourses, has been highlighted by many scholars in both trauma studies and cultural memory studies. Geoffrey Hartman has argued: "When art remains accessible, it provides a counterforce to manufactured and monolithic memory" (1995, 80). Aleida Assmann has suggested that "artistic creation plays an important part in the renewal of memory, in that it challenges the firmly drawn border between what is remembered and what forgotten, continually shifting it by means of surprising compositions" (2000, 27). It is enough here to think of the testimonial literature by the Holocaust survivors in

5 Following media scholars Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, Erll and Rigney understand remediation in memory studies as the use of stories, images and metaphors of the past present in earlier media in a new media form: "memorial media borrow from, incorporate, absorb, critique and refashion earlier memorial media" (2009, 5).

6 See also Rigney and Erll (2006), who define the role of literature as "medium of remembrance", "object of remembrance", and "medium for observing the production of cultural memory"; for Erll's extensive work on literature's "rhetoric of cultural memory", see 2003, 2009 and 2011a.

the immediate post-war years in Europe (Rothberg 2009) or the "antagonistic mode" (Erll, 2011b, 159) of literary representation that is often encountered in feminist and postcolonial texts.

In arguing for "the agency of the aesthetic" (Rigney 2021), Rigney and Erll explore the specific aesthetic capacities of literature that enable it to fulfil its various functions in cultural memory and turn it into one of the most powerful media of memory. Alongside the wide mode of circulation that makes literature a good relay station, catalyst and stabiliser of cultural memories, Rigney also stresses what she calls the "stickiness" of the stories, figures and images of the past in literature: "Stories 'stick'. They help make particular events *memorable* by figuring the past in a structured way that engages the sympathies of the reader or viewer" (Rigney 2008, 347; see also 2012a, 17; 2021, 14). Erll (2011a, 154) for her part has elaborated on the role of emplotment in making events memorable. Through the narrative devices of characterisation and focalisation, literature can create vivid characters, give closure to events (Rigney 2001, 13–58) and design an experiential and immersive mode of narration that engages the reader (Erll 2011a, 158; Rigney 2021, 15). Rigney (2012a, 34, 38) also stresses that it is not only the power of the seamless image of the past offered in literature that makes it powerful as a form of cultural memory, but sometimes also the unreconciled contradictions in the complex aesthetic structure that make literary texts procreative in cultural memory by provoking revisioning remediation and thereby boosting the dynamics of cultural memory.[7] While these theoretisations in both trauma studies and cultural memory studies highlight the role of literature in working through traumas or in mediating memory, the ability of literature to enable mnemonic migration firstly by disseminating memories through interlingual and cultural translation and secondly by entering new mnemonic frameworks and being received by readers in that new memorial context, has not yet been fully explored.

Mnemonic migration: translation

Questions of the interlingual and cultural translation of memories have only belatedly moved into the focus of transcultural memory studies. Little thought was initially given to the fact that the texts, both fiction and witness testimonies, that were part of the memory boom in the second half of the twentieth century and that have come to be considered as the canon of Holocaust literature were originally written

7 Rigney defines procreativity as the capacity "to generate new versions in the form of other texts and other media" (2012, 12).

in different languages and owe their status as canonical texts to translation (Boase-Beier et al. 2017; Davies 2018). Bella Brodzki (2007) was one of the first to point to the role of translation in mourning and in the intergenerational transmission of memory, building on Walter Benjamin's understanding of translation as the transformative afterlife of texts. Susan Brownlie (2016) has brought various concepts from memory studies to bear on translation studies and has offered a framework for exploring the relevance of interlingual translation for various forms of memory of human rights. Angela Kershaw (2019) has studied the movement of literary memories of the Second World War from France to Britain in 1940–1960 from the combined perspective of memory studies and translation studies. Recent handbooks and comparative volumes testify to the vibrancy of the nexus of interlingual translation and cultural memory (Deane-Cox and Spiessens 2022; Jünke and Schyns 2023).

As these studies make clear, mnemonic migration is not exclusively a modern phenomenon. Literary texts have never stopped at linguistic, national or cultural borders, but have travelled into other languages and cultures in the original or in translation (Damrosch 2014). In that sense, the cultural memory held in literary texts as "portable monuments" (Rigney 2004) has always been "unbound" (Bond, Craps and Vermeaulen 2016). By circulating their stories across linguistic and cultural boundaries among people who do not identify linguistically or culturally with their protagonists, literary texts have contributed to "defining and shifting those boundaries by creating the imaginative conditions for new affiliations with strangers and hence virtual mnemo-regions that transcend traditional solidarities" (Rigney 2022, 166; see also Rigney 2021, 15).

However, there have also always been real material, symbolic and cultural obstacles that literature has had to overcome in order to travel, and the borders between languages are only the most obvious of them. Literature as a global cultural medium is written in different languages and has to be translated in order to travel across the borders of linguistic communities. When it is translated, however, complex processes of linguistic and cultural domestication and foreignisation occur (Venuti 1998, 2013). The travel of memory in literature should consequently not be imagined as a smooth flow, because there are borders that exist, not only those crossed by translation, but also others that are established by the power structures and the symbolic and economic hierarchies of the world republic of letters (Casanova 2014; Rigney 2022, 164). These hierarchies mean that not all the texts that are important for a linguistic or national community for how they mediate cultural memory get translated or travel internationally. Conversely, some literary texts are "born translated" (Walkowitz 2015), as they are consciously written with multiple reading communities in mind so that they can travel, be read, and be un-

derstood outside of their linguistic community and their place of writing or publication.

But the concept of translation has also been used metaphorically in memory studies, in the sense of cultural translation, to explore what happens in the process of transnational travel of memories. Susannah Radstone and Rita Wilson have recently called on scholars "to conceive of memory's migratory journeys as translations across and between the intersecting domains of time, place, language, the senses, culture, media, institutions, ideology, and politics" (2021, 6).[8] Laanes (2021) has argued in favour of translation as a new model for conceiving the transnational travel of memories as it works through the transculturally shared memorial forms of narrative templates and schemata, tropes, and icons that facilitate the articulation, travel, and dissemination of cultural memories. As they are transculturally familiar, these memorial forms help make peripheral memories understandable in a new context. Rigney has shown how Walter Scott's fiction developed a memorial form that became available through the widespread transnational circulation of Scott's oeuvre for other cultural contexts to articulate their historical experiences because it

> offered a model of remembrance for dealing with other events in which a comparable struggle between modernizers and traditionalists, or between intruders and natives, was played out. In the absence of many precedents at the time, the Waverley model worked as a catalyst for writing the story of other groups by providing a template for shaping national histories. [...] Scott's narrative matrix proved to be as portable as the novels themselves. (2012a, 108)

Laanes (2021) has shown how war rape as a transcultural memorial form has been employed not only to articulate the local past, but also to make that local past understood transnationally because it is a form that is intelligible and familiar in many other contexts. Erll (2011a; 2019, 147–149; 2019) has specifically focused on how literary genres and literary narrative devices can boost the travel of memories into new contexts.

While the metaphor of cultural translation premised on the common-sense understanding of interlingual translation retains the idea of the locatedness of texts, culture and memories that are unidirectionally transposed from one distinct "language" or memory culture to another, the translation historian Kristin Dickinson has shown that translation has an omnidirectional "disorienting" potential that displaces the configuration of target and source and changes both the original

8 Radstone and Wilson urge us "to encompass those complex and multi-layered processes of parsing by means of which the unfamiliar and the familiar, the old home and the new are brought into conversation and connection" (2021, 1).

and the translation (2021; see also Laanes 2024). Dickinson's idea of translation is extremely useful for the study of mnemonic migration and the processes of vernacularisation of cultural memories in a new place, because it urges us to explore how travelling memories configure national frameworks of memory in places where they are adopted, and also how those memories themselves are reconfigured by these new encounters at their point of destination.

Mnemonic migration: reception

Although the focus in the past decade has been on the transcultural encounters of memories and their transnational mobility, Susannah Radstone has reminded us that both memory and theories of memory are always located, since they are born in a specific place, in a cultural and political context, and they are also "instantiated" in different other specific places in the course of their travels. When a memory's potential to travel is activated in a "memory event", this event is experienced by a particular person who is always localised in a culture, "however hybridised, complex, multiform" (Radstone 2011, 118). Transnational memory studies should consequently explore the "locatedness of engagements with memories on the move, rather than with their 'non-location'" and "attend to these processes of encountering, negotiation, reading, viewing and spectatorship through which memories are, if you like, *brought down to earth*" (Radstone 2011, 110–111). Indeed, as Barbara Törnquist-Plewa, Tea Sindbaek Andersen and Astrid Erll put it, "successful memory transmission entails reception [...] For Transcultural memory to actually come into existence, deterritorialised transmission must be followed by localised reception" (2017, 3). Rothberg stresses in relation to post-migratory societies that the local should not be imagined as an organic community, but as "a locatedness expressed in the interplay of both diverse historical layers and legacies, and disparate scales and temporalities" (2014, 133). He argues that the memories that are brought into a society by communities of migrants from their culture of origin encounter the pre-existing frames of memory of the titular nation *in that place* and "jostle each other in an unsettled present" bringing about a "thickening"[9] (Rothberg 2014, 125–127) of that culture and its frames of memory. Rothberg points out that migration always also means "immigration into the past" (2014, 123–125) of the host country and problematises the expectation that migrants

9 On "thickening" as becoming a "setting of the variegated memories, imaginations, dreams, fantasies, nightmares, anticipations, and idealisations that experiences of migration, of both migrants and native inhabitants, bring into contact with each other", see Aydemir and Rotas 2008, 7.

should be concerned with, for example, German history, while at the same time are excluded from this very past "because they are not 'ethnically German'" (2014, 137). This case exemplifies the inevitable frictions that arise from migration between social frameworks of memory and highlights the difficulties of dissemination and reception that the term mnemonic migration addresses. As Radstone and Rothberg agree, a meaningful study of travelling memories needs to focus not only on the modes and modalities of travel, but most importantly on the "instantiation" of the memory that has travelled and the "thickening" of memorial cultures that together lead us to the renewed interest in the reception of literary texts.

Little can be said about mnemonic migration in literature without consideration of how literary texts that travel are "brought down to earth" and are read in a certain cultural context. Many scholars have pointed to the desideratum of the study of the reception of memory media in transnational memory studies: "no mediation of memory can have an impact on memory culture if it is not 'received' – seen, heard, used, appropriated, made sense of, taken as an inspiration – by a group of people" (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017, 3; see also Kansteiner 2002). Rigney has located the reasons for this desideratum in the tradition of literary studies, where for a long time "the unit of analysis has been the discrete text seen as the *terminus ad quem* of everything that came before with claims being made about the role of literature on the basis of readings of single works independent of their afterlife" (2012a, 19). Hence the traditional approach of close reading of literary texts can only make assumptions about how the texts work as media of cultural memories, but in order to explore truly the ways in which memories travel, we need to return to the question of reader response.

A number of ideas in trauma and cultural memory studies about how literature and other cultural media supposedly impact their audiences assume that the memories that are transmitted through these media are fixed and that "memory consumers" are somehow passive receivers of that given fixed meaning. However, as both the responses of readers and the observations of poststructuralist critics have shown "reception is an active process, which can produce diverse 'readings' or appropriations of the same message" (Hall 1980).[10] A text does not contain one singular image of memory, but several possibilities for actualisation that the reader can chose between. The actualisation of a text is influenced among other things by cultural schemata constituted by the social and collective frameworks of memory that the readers participate in (Kansteiner 2002; Ortner, Sindbæk Andersen

10 For the reception studies we draw on, see Gadamer 1960; Fish 1980; Barthes 1990; Iser 1976, 1991.

and Wierød Borčak 2022; Sindbæk Andersen and Wierød Borčak 2022). The knowledge, prejudices and values of the readers, and the multiple group identities they adhere to inevitably steer their interaction with and their response to a literary text. To understand the impact of transnationally circulated memory carriers, it is necessary to look at the "social and cultural patterns of thought" that determine the interpretative strategies (Fish 1980) that guide the memory consumers in their interpretation of a given literary text.

Wulf Kansteiner warns though that "it would be a 'receptional fallacy' to study reactions and memory negotiations among individuals or aggregations of individuals (for example, a group of viewers' reactions to a film) and to draw from there conclusions about collective memories" (2002, 9). However, focus group interviews with lay readers, such as those undertaken and discussed by Ortner, Sindbæk Andersen and Wierød Borčak (2022), may help to define the *potential* of how a certain memory media may affect cultural memory, by investigating for example how the memories expressed in distinct texts are received in the experimental framework of specific groups of people who are embedded in, and presumably influenced by, the distinct national, generational and other contexts in which they were socialised. No reading can actualise all the potential meanings of a text. Each empirical reader composes their reading by choosing from among the several possible ways of actualising the text and for filling in "the gaps of indeterminacy" (Iser 1976, 282–283), and so it is of the utmost interest to explore whether and how the frameworks of memory determine the reader's interpretation and to analyse the extent to which the memory of distinct events travels, and what arrives at the point of destination. Furthermore, as Welzer points out, "reception is not the final destination of the memory process, but can lead to further (individual and collective) productions" (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017, 6 in reference to Welzer 2010).

The structure of the volume

This volume addresses the multiple questions that rise from the discussion above. How does literature function as a vehicle of mnemonic migration? How does it disseminate historical imaginaries produced in different local or transnational contexts? What role does interlingual and cultural translation play in this dissemination? Which factors facilitate the travel of memories in literature and why? What is gained and lost on the way? What are the obstacles to that travel? How do we study and estimate the effects of that travel? How are memories received and "instantiated" by specific individuals and in new cultural contexts? How do they "thick-

en" memory cultures both at the point of destination and also at the origin of the travel?

Our volume on mnemonic migration and cultural translation in contemporary literature is divided into three parts that explore different aspects of mnemonic travel: multidirectional remembering and remediation in literature; travelling through interlingual and cultural translation; and the role of reception in mnemonic migration. In exploring these aspects of mnemonic migration and interlingual or cultural translation, we draw on lessons from the established fields of world literature studies, translation studies and reception studies, but also from the fields of transnational literature, migrant literature and multilingual literature. These fields do not always focus specifically on the issues of the circulation of cultural memory in literature, but they can be drawn on to explore those questions. The literatures and authors explored in this volume are mostly European with a particular focus on authors with Eastern, Central and South-Eastern European backgrounds, which reflects the regional research interest of the editors and authors of the volume. What is explored in this volume is thus primarily mnemonic migration within modern European literature. However, memory processes across Europe are inevitably and increasingly concerned with global and transcontinental issues such as slavery, colonialism and climate change. The issues we explore – the capacity of literature to transmit and share memory across cultural and political boundaries – are as relevant in literatures outside Europe as within it, as Hanna Teichler's contribution in this volume lucidly testifies. Hence we hope that despite its regional limitations, this volume offers broader theoretical insights that will be helpful in studying the circulation of historical imaginaries in and between other literatures of the world.

I Travelling memories, multidirectional remembering, and remediation

The contributions in the first part of the volume engage with some of the most fruitful ideas in transnational memory studies of the past decade, such as multidirectional memory and the remediation of stories and texts across linguistic, national and cultural borders. Rothberg's idea that "memory emerges from unexpected, multidirectional encounters – encounters between diverse pasts and a conflictual present, to be sure, but also between different agents or catalysts of memory" (2014, 9; 2009) has inspired various studies of how different histories of violence emerge together or intersect in literary texts, or how culturally and politically more "visible" memories are drawn upon to help to articulate publicly a cultural memory that is peripheral in a culture or in a public sphere. In literature,

the multidirectional encounters of memories are often staged through the remediation of earlier literary texts and the intertextual reworking of them in a new context (Erll 2019). The contributions in this part of the volume take these ideas further by exploring how histories of refuge, migration, and exile "thicken" and complicate further the sites where the multidirectional encounters of memories happen.

Both of these ideas are dealt with in **Colin Davis**'s reading of Jorge Semprun's play *The Return of Carola Näher.* Davis highlights both Semprun's transnational background as a Spanish-French survivor of a Nazi camp, and the transnational trajectories of the protagonists of the play and the remediated texts that are chosen as its focus. The play features the German actress Carola Näher, who fled Nazi Germany to be killed in the Soviet state terror. It remediates Goethe's play *Iphigenia in Tauris,* which Carola Näher had played in, and the remediation of Goethe's work by Jewish intellectual Leon Blum in the context of German antisemitism at the beginning of the twentieth century. The remediative intertextual web of the play is anchored in the specific geolocality of a Soviet military cemetery near Buchenwald, where Semprun was held during the Second World War, and near Weimar, the cultural capital of German classicism. The territorial anchor and the choice of characters and texts to be remediated bring together multidirectionally not only the cultural heritage of the Greek myth and of German classicism and the histories of perpetration in Germany through antisemitism and the Nazi camps, but also the Soviet state terror and the contemporary atrocities of the Bosnian war that was raging at the time the play was premiered. Davis is interested in how the transmission of these memories after the death of the survivors is explored in Semprun through the figure of the ghosts who come to speak to one another and meld their memories together. Even if the dense layering of seemingly unrelated memories may appear to send a message of ubiquity and of the unbreakability of the circle of violence, the ghost from the future, who appears in the figure of a Bosnian Muslim, shows us the way towards how that circle of violence can be broken. Davis's chapter implicitly questions the limits of multidirectionality and the reterritorialisation of transnational memory.

Rafael Baquero's contribution focuses on the ways in which Max Aub's literary oeuvre has belatedly gained prominence as a catalyst for reframing Francoism as part of the transnational history of European state terror in mid-twentieth-century Europe. Baquero highlights how the French-born Spanish author of German and French-Jewish descent, who was interned in a French concentration camp for his resistance to Franco and later escaped to Mexico, has been rediscovered, partly through contemporary literary remediations following the excavation in the 1990s of the memories of Francoist state terror in Spain, after he had written and published his work in exile many decades earlier. Baquero shows how Aub's Jewish

background and his experiences in the French concentration camp let him draw multidirectionally on Holocaust memory to reinterpret Franco's regime not as a phenomenon that was specific to Spanish national history, but as a part of the wave of state terror in mid-twentieth-century Europe.

In her chapter on the transnational travel of the memories of the Holocaust through Anne Frank's diary and its remediations, **Unni Langås** explores both the trajectory of the diary into the canonical "site" of the transnational memory of the Holocaust, and its remediations in different national contexts in the US and in Norway in Philip Roth's novel *The Ghost Writer* and Kristian Klausen's novel *Anne F.* Langås argues that Roth parodically reflects on the travel of the Holocaust through cultural media when he thematises the famous 1955 sentimental remediation of the diary on Broadway in his novel to draw attention to the post-war commercialisation of the Holocaust in the US and the negotiation of Frank's story as the core of the American-Jewish identity. In Langås's second case study, the story of Anne Frank is transposed to Norway and "brought down to earth" by being literally mapped onto the townscape of the small town of Drammen. Next to the role of geographical space in the mnemonic migration in *Anne F,* Klausen is, like Langås, interested in the materiality of objects, as the novel thematises the material production, survival, and travel of Anne Frank's diary.

Hanna Meretoja's chapter on Herta Müller's novel *The Hunger Angel* focuses on the ability of fiction to open up the past as a space of possibilities. Meretoja argues that the primary aim of reading fiction is not to give the reader the factual knowledge to "know" about a past reality that is distant to us, but to let them imagine that past world as a space of possibilities and ways to act that contributes both to understanding of that world and how it felt to live and act in it, and to our perception of our own present world as one that is pregnant with different choices that we make on a daily basis without necessarily being aware of them. In terms of mnemonic migration, Meretoja shows how an author from a German minority background moving from Romania to Germany as a refugee brought the memories of the collaboration of that minority with the Nazis and its repression by the Soviets into the German public sphere in her new host country, where what was previously her minority writing language was now the majority one.

II Multilingualism, interlingual and cultural translation

Part II of the volume elaborates on the questions of multilingualism, and the interlingual and cultural translation of memories. The first three contributions in this part explore the multiple roles of interlingual translation in the migratory context and the thematisation of linguistic differences; various forms of translation such

as self-translation and pseudo-translation in the work of translingual authors; and the role of multilingualism in highlighting the multiethnic and multireligious histories of many regions. They also show how the figure of the interlingual translator in the texts and films explored becomes a metaphor for the cultural translation of memories.

The chapters in Part II examine examines the cultural translation of memories and the role of transcultural memorial forms in that process by looking at literary genres as a vehicle for the cultural translation of memories that can boost the travel of those memories into new contexts (Erll 2011a, 147–149; 2019). This idea is based on an understanding of literary genres as fluid virtual phenomena that emerge from the process of what Wai Chee Dimock, drawing on Bolter and Grusin's concept of remediation, has termed "regenreing", a constant "cumulative reuse, an alluvial process, sedimentary as well as migratory" (2007, 1380). The last two chapters in this part of the volume focus specifically on the ways in which literary genres and other genre-specific literary devices facilitate mnemonic migration, and the movement and cultural translation of memories across linguistic, national and cultural borders. We are interested here in how the reader's memory in literary genres as travelling sedimented media in the world republic of letters facilitates their engagement with culturally distant memories that are represented in that genre.

In her contribution **Una Tanović** is critical of the metaphorical use of the concept of translation for referring to transnational remembering in literature, and insists on the need to explore the role of the interlingual translation that is ubiquitous in situations of migration and take seriously the hard language barrier as a power differential that is at work in cases of asylum, refugeedom, and migration. Her chapter on the novel *Ukulele Jam* by the Bosnian-Danish author Alen Mešković addresses the key issue of the link between literature and mnemonic migration that is grounded in the refugee experience and the question of how memories of violent histories are brought to the new host country and how they are articulated in a new language and culture. She is interested in the ways in which linguistic difference and translation is thematised in the work of translingual authors who, as first generation migrants or refugees, write in their second or third language. Translingual writing is "at home" in a national literature because it uses the majority language, but Tanović shows that Mešković signals the translated origin of the text through the different literary practices of self-translation and pseudo-translation. In a certain sense, he writes originals in the target language. Tanović explores how Mešković is able to produce prosthetic memories of the Bosnian war for his Danish and international readers by foreignising the Danish original by giving the impression of the story unfolding in a language that is different both to its original Danish and to its possible translations into other languages.

Furthermore, Tanović shows that when the Danish novel is translated into Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, it functions as a prothesis for the community fractured by the Yugoslav wars, leavening its phantom pain. By using literary practices of pseudo-translation, the novel gives the impression of taking place in the pre-war Serbo-Croatian language, a language that became extinct after the disintegration of Yugoslavia, and that is different from contemporary Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian. As such the novel helps to remember and mourn the lost community and lost language. Tanović shows that neither translation nor mnemonic migration is a one-way process in mediating traumatic memoires of the Bosnian war across linguistic and national borders and social frameworks of memory, but that literature in its travel and translation experiences encounters that transform both the target and the source, or both the point of departure and the point of destination.

The article by **Damjan Božinović** and **Stijn Vervaet** views translation as a practice of mnemonic migration and a metaphor for it. They first discuss a contemporary bilingual collection of poems by Norwegian authors about the Bosnian war that was prompted by encounters with Bosnian refugees in Norway and largely premediated by global mass-media images of the war. Božinović and Vervaet show that not only the events of the war in Bosnia and their mediated response in Norway are enmeshed in this project of transnational solidarity, which addresses the implication of Europe in the Bosnian war, but earlier layers of mutual history such as literary and cultural contacts between Norway and socialist Yugoslavia are also involved, as are the Nazi occupation of Norway and the memory of Yugoslavian forced labour in the Norwegian Nazi camps. Next to the poetry project, this chapter also considers the figure of the war translator in the film *Quo vadis, Aida* by transnational Bosnian-German director Jasmila Žbanić, and explores the links between translation, witnessing, memory and migration. The authors show how the way that this transnationally-produced film highlights the paradoxical position of the translator as a survivor at the cost of others thanks to the very task of translation, and also as a witness, implicates its Western audiences in the Bosnian war not only by providing prosthetic memories of that war, but also by asking about the responsibility of the communities they are part of for how that war played out.

Mónika Dánél's article on Adam Bodor's oeuvre explores the ways in which multilingual novels dealing with language histories encrypt in themselves various histories and cultural memories. Bodor's novels engage imaginatively with the history of the multiethnic and multilingual region at the border zone between Poland, Ukraine, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia, which hosted not only the histories of those peoples, but also Jewish history and an Austro-Hungarian imperial presence. Danel shows how Bodor's way of featuring the names of characters that cannot be pronounced without an awareness of the other languages that are present in the

region, turns his readers into accented readers who become aware of the complicated histories of multiethnicity, religion and multilingualism by reading the novel.

Anja Tippner's contribution explores the migratory power of the family novel as a literary genre that serves to shape the memories of an author about their family according to literary convention, while at the same time also making those memories more understandable to culturally diverse audiences through the shared literary convention that is embodied in the conventional genre. Tippner argues that family novels by post-Soviet Jewish-German authors writing in German such as Sasha Marianna Salzmann and Marina Frenk do not so much deal with memories of Soviet Russia, as negotiate the identity and cultural alterity of the authors in their new migratory context in Germany, and the generational differences between the authors and their parents in adapting to the migratory setting. She also shows how these novels innovate the genre because the families they write about are fragmented not only by the pressure from the Soviet state on familial structures in the past, but also by the experience of migration that creates physical distances between family members and alienates the generations from one another. The texts also reframe the German memory culture in which Jewish-German life-writing is linked to the Holocaust, since in these texts the Holocaust is not central and is multidirectionally entangled with the Soviet experience.

Aigi Heero's chapter on Bosnian-German author Saša Stanišić's novel *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* deals with the child's point of view as a transcultural narrative device that helps to translate the memories of pre-war Bosnia under late socialism into the Germanophone literary and cultural space. Heero reads Stanišić in the context of the Eastern turn in German literature (Haines 2015) and compares his representational choices to those of the Jewish-German authors Wladimir Kaminer and Vladimir Vertlib. Heero draws on Rothberg's distinction between transnational and transcultural memory, where transnational designates the crossing of geopolitical borders and transcultural is the process of hybridisation in the encounter between different cultures (Rothberg 2014, 130), to illuminate how experiences from Bosnia travel to a German-speaking readership through literature that is written from a child's perspective, and also how the German-language cultural space is hybridised and "thickened" by these memories.

III Circulation, reception, and the protocols of reading

Part III of the volume studies mnemonic migration in the reception of literary texts, this time in terms of how those texts impact memory cultures. Recognising

that literature contributes to cultural memory only to the extent it is engaged with, read, viewed, visited, and elaborated on by real people (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll 2017, 3), the articles ask how literary texts are received as media of cultural memory and remediated, and how their reception can be studied. They explore the "social life" of texts and turn new attention to the question of how to study literary reception in such a way that it could tell us more about how literature impacts cultural memory. The contributors to this volume have previously applied different methods of studying the reception of memory media, investigating literary analysis in academic circles, public reception in professional reviews, and the reception by lay readers, who have been studied through focus group interviews (Ortner, Sindbæk Andersen and Wierød Borčak 2022). The focus group interviews can give fascinating insights into how social frameworks of memories and personal experience influence the interpretation of texts that circulate as distant events. However, the focus group interviews are unable to predict the long-term influence of these books on readers and how they might influence cultural memory. Three contributions to this section of the volume consequently engage in a debate about the limits of how the reception of literature can be understood as a medium of memory.

In this section **Jessica Ortner** explores the work of Bosnian-German author Saša Stanišić and its reception as a process of the mnemonic migration of memories of the Bosnian war, using the method of focus group interviews with lay readers in three different European countries, Germany, Denmark and the UK. She shows that the capacity of the readers to connect to this distant narrative of war and refuge, which is obscured in its historical context by the perspective of the child used in the novel, is dependent both on the reader's personal frames of reference from personal experience of other wars or trips to the former Yugoslavia, and on their national, generational and familial frameworks of memory. Drawing on Astrid Erll's (2014) concept of the rhetoric of collective memory, Alison Landsberg's (2004) concept of prosthetic memory, and Iser's concept of "the gaps of indeterminacy" (1991), the article shows that the mode of memory transmission has different outcomes and depends on the ability of the reader to fill in the narrative gaps that are left by the naïve child narrator. Whereas this proves difficult for Western readers, the experiential "rhetoric of collective memory" that Stanišić uses in the text speaks directly to the memory of Bosnian readers, who have their own or familial memories of the Bosnian war. The article discusses the limits of prosthetic memory and argues that the readers' frameworks of memories are decisive for their ability or willingness to become emotionally engaged with the memories transmitted in literary texts.

Anita Pluwak's chapter on the memoirs of the wives and daughters of important Polish politicians is interested in how popular reception of these memoirs me-

diates the memory of the political upheaval under late socialism, in particular the Solidarity movement and subsequent martial law in Poland at the beginning of the 1980s, which are a major source of political polarisation in contemporary Poland. By looking at the reception of the texts in a popular Polish online forum over the past ten years, Pluwak shows how the afterlife of the texts has turned them into dynamic sites of negotiation about political and social issues in the past and in the present. Pluwak also argues that, contrary to the widespread dismissive stance taken towards the female celebrity memoir as a genre in professional literary criticism circles, the genre proves to be an extremely fruitful one for mediating memories of the past and for negotiating contemporary politics, gender roles and female political participation. Polish female celebrity memoirs modelled on the global narrative template of memoirs of famous first ladies are symptomatic of post-socialist society, the resurgence in it of traditional values, and its negotiation of the role of women as political agents. Even if professional critics tend to disregard this popular genre because of its arguably predictable function as a medium of memory and political contestation, Pluwak's research findings show a variegated response and fruitful negotiation of the burning political issues of Polish society in the social life and afterlife of literature.

Hanna Teicher offers a thoughtful analysis and discussion of the canonical theories of reading and asks if those theories also apply to reading as a process of mnemonic migration, when the potential travel of memory would be conditioned on the reader's ability to uncover vague and symbolically sophisticated mnemonic references that are highly dependent on an understanding of the cultural context. She takes as her case study the novel *The Dragonfly Sea* by Kenyan writer Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor to show that some novels use the mnemonic strategy of what Teichler calls "mnemonic mannerism" in order to describe the sheer overabundance of mnemonic cues that cannot be picked up in their entirety by any single reader. This leads her to ponder the paradoxical question of whether the extraordinary and rich literary quality of such novels may actually result in a mnemonic blockage of the text and in the end prevent the migration of memory.

In implicit conversation with Teichler **Kaisa Kaakinen**'s chapter argues in reference to Bosnian-American writer Aleksandar Hemon's novel *The Lazarus Project* that a novel presenting its readers with an overabundance of mnemonic cues does not need to lead to the failure of each singular reading process, but rather constitutes the very poetic principle of transnational historical narration that, through the sense of failure, signals the presence of differently situated reading positions towards the text. Kaakinen's contribution shows that when memories cross borders through literature, they should be understood as a movement of the local not to the transnational defined in universal terms, but to different localised contexts that cannot together be conceived of as a unified community. Kaakinen de-

scribes such novels as "born migrated" because they reveal an awareness of their historically differently-situated readers and so of their transnational context of reading.

In the final chapter **John Greaney** questions the idea of mnemonic migration in relation to what Roland Barthes has termed radically symbolic texts, which are those that do not close in on a story or setting as a specific signified, but are interested in the deferment of that story by the play of the signifier. As poststructuralist critics have reminded us, literary realism is a code of representation that does not possess a more direct form of referentiality than other forms of literature, and the historicist understanding of literature that the idea of mnemonic migration is based on may be applicable only for certain types of literature. Greaney asks what happens to mnemonic migration in radically symbolic texts, and by discussing examples of such texts by Samuel Beckett and a more recent text by Anna Burns, he explores how we can think of this kind of literature without reducing it through historicist modes of reading.

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I Travelling Memories, Multidirectional Remembering, and Remediation

Colin Davis

The Circulation of Memory: Semprun, Goethe, and Carola Neher, from Buchenwald to Stalinism and the Bosnian Genocide

> Thus the sons
> Of Tantalus, with barbarous hands, have sown
> Curse upon curse; and, as the shaken weed
> Scatters around a thousand poison-seeds,
> So they assassins ceaseless generate,
> Their children's children ruthless to destroy [...].
> (Goethe 2015 [1779], 42)

Soon there will be no one left who has a personal memory of the Nazi concentration camps and so the question arises of how we should recall what no one can still recall, and which genres and media will serve best to keep the memory alive. In the years after the Second World War, some survivors felt that fiction could never and should never play a role in representing the Holocaust;[1] but second and third-generation witnesses, increasingly distanced from the experience of life and death in the camps, need to combine imagination with historical research if they are to continue to talk about the unspeakable. Moreover, eye-witness memory of the Holocaust may be dwindling, but the post-war history of atrocity rages unabated in Cambodia, Rwanda, Bosnia, Ukraine, and on and on. How can we speak about these matters, should we treat them separately, as unique and unrepeatable, or should we attempt to conceive of them together as markers of a terrible historical continuity?

These issues are, I suggest, at the core of memory studies today. Some of the most powerful work in the field addresses two key questions: how do later generations recall and live with the experiences of their traumatised forebears, and how can we understand the connections and differences between separate historical atrocities? Marianne Hirsch's influential concept of *postmemory* illuminates the fraught endeavour of later generations to come to terms with the traumas of their parents and grandparents. She describes, for example, how Art Spiegelman's *Maus* played an important role in enabling the work of postmemory in the 1980s

1 Elie Wiesel (1987, 49), for example, insists that there can be no such thing as a novel about Auschwitz.

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and 1990s (Hirsch 2012, 40). *Maus* portrays a son's attempt to reconstruct, understand and represent what happened to his parents during the Second World War. Its dual focus is on past experiences and their continuing impact on the children of survivors. The son wants to share his parents' experiences the better to comprehend his own situation, as he explains to his wife: "I know this is insane, but I somehow wish I had been in Auschwitz with my parents so I could really know what they lived through!... I guess it's some kind of guilt about having an easier life than they did" (Spiegelman 2003, 176).

Although the term *postmemory* initially applied to those who had some biographical connection with the Holocaust (Hirsch 2012, 4), it can also be extended to include people who are not the descendants of survivors but who nevertheless feel implicated in traumatic histories. One prominent example of this is the author Jonathan Littell, who was born in 1967. His grandparents were Russian Jews who emigrated to the United States, but he does not identify as Jewish, and he has no immediate family connection with the Holocaust. Yet his novel *The Kindly Ones* (2009, *Les Bienveillantes,* 2006) is, I would hazard to claim, the single most powerful literary work to have been written about the Holocaust so far in the twenty-first century. Narrated by an unrepentant Nazi perpetrator, it takes its reader into a massively disturbing encounter with the heart of evil. In Jan Assmann's (1997) terms, "communicative" memory is now giving way to "cultural" memory, as the role of preserving, transmitting and interpreting memory passes from direct testimony to other cultural forms and media (Hirsch 2012, 32–33).

The waning of direct memory of the Holocaust comes together with the challenge of understanding how different atrocities may be interlinked, either in historical causality or in our memorial practices. Hirsch warns against the risk of comparative approaches, in which "comparison can slip into problematic equation and distressing competition over suffering" (2012, 19). At the same time, she acknowledges the urgency of exploring what she calls "affiliative structures of memory beyond the familial" (Hirsch 2012, 21). It is not only personal histories that can be traumatic, but also the fluid, anguished interconnections of private, collective, intergenerational, and international pain. As Gabriele Schwab puts it, memories are "always already composites of dynamically interrelated and conflicted histories" (2010, 30). One of the most productive strands of academic study has consequently been the exploration of how memories of different historical atrocities interact with and inform each other in ever-changing constellations. Major works such as Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory* (2009) and Max Silverman's *Palimpsestic Memory* (2013) have shown how the recollection of atrocities is complex and layered, and in particular how the memory of the Holocaust has become imbricated with subsequent histories of decolonisation. The danger here is that incomparable events are levelled down, and so work in this field consistently strains

to maintain the tension between difference and similarity, finding connections without obliterating the individual nature of each atrocity. Rothberg's *multidirectional memory* focuses on "a differentiated collective memory capable of holding together similarity and difference and of mobilizing remembrance in the service of political responsibility without relativizing or negating historical specificity" (2009, 211).[2] The Holocaust has sometimes been conceived as utterly singular and therefore incomparable to other historical atrocities.[3] How can we respect that singularity whilst also endeavouring to understand the inner relatedness that lies beneath the long history of violence?

This chapter explores the stakes of memory, postmemory, multidirectional memory and palimpsestic memory by examining one literary work, Jorge Semprun's play *The Return of Carola Neher* (*Le Retour de Carola Neher*, 1998).[4] I follow the lead of Schwab's *Haunting Legacies* (2010) and suggest that the circulation of memory is linked to the return of ghosts.[5] The dead return because trauma remains unresolved. Ghosts come back to tell us of past and future pain and, in Semprun's play, to suggest a possible end to the history of violence.

Two models of haunting

Semprun was born in 1923 in Spain and in the 1930s he went into exile with his Republican, anti-fascist family, ending up in France. As a member of the Communist Resistance in occupied France during the Second World War, he was captured, tortured and sent to Buchenwald. After the war he became a leading member of the Spanish Communist Party, engaged in clandestine missions in fascist Spain, until his expulsion from the Party for political reasons in 1964. He went on to become a major literary figure, writing mainly in French, with novels, screenplays and memoirs to his name. After the end of fascism in Spain he served for a while as Minister of Culture in the first Spanish socialist government; he died in 2011. Semprun was a quintessential European intellectual, immersed in the languages, cultures and politics of his native continent.[6]

2 For discussion and further development, see Sanyal 2015, 7; see also Schwab 2010, 272 and Silverman 2013, 4.

3 For discussion, see for example Rothberg 2009, 8.

4 Throughout this chapter translations of French material are my own.

5 See for example Schwab "While we can foreclose mourning by burying the dead in our psyche, those dead will return to us as ghosts" (2010, 2).

6 The secondary bibliography on Semprun is now substantial. For an overview of his life and work, see Ferrán and Hermann 2014. On the importance of Europe in Semprun's work, see espe-

The principal argument of this chapter is that mnemonic migration is conveyed in Semprun's play *The Return of Carola Neher* through the theme of haunting, with ghosts returning to speak to one other and their audience about past and future atrocities. To clarify the role played by ghosts in this play, I distinguish between two models of haunting. The first is what I have called elsewhere the "unfinished business" model (Davis 2007, 3). In this model, ghosts return because the proper processes of bereavement, burial or mourning have somehow been derailed, as the body of a deceased person has not been buried appropriately, or a crime has gone unacknowledged or unavenged. Something has gone wrong, and it needs to be put right. In the first century of the common era, Pliny the Younger (1963, 204) described a haunting that led to the discovery of human bones; a dead person had not been buried according to the appropriate rites, but once those rites had been carried out, the haunting ceased. In Shakespeare's *Hamlet* the ghost of Hamlet's father returns to demand revenge for his murder. The dead cannot rest until their souls have been calmed, until wrongs have been righted, the truth acknowledged and justice done. We have to settle our debt to the past before we are free to create the future.

The significance of this model of haunting for Holocaust narratives is not hard to see. Holocaust testimony and fiction are replete with ghosts. They remain amongst us because their stories remain untold, misunderstood, neglected, or disbelieved. Survivors sometimes identify with ghosts even though they themselves are not literally dead. They feel as if part of them has died, as if they are alive in appearance only, their true lives having ended in the camps. The survivor is a *revenant*, a ghost who returns but also does not return, who lives on but who has also died. The verb *revenir*, from which revenant derives, means to come back, to return; revenants are beings who come back, but who also in a sense do not come back because they are no longer fully alive. Auschwitz survivor Charlotte Delbo plays on this ambiguity in the title of her *None of us will return* (1968, *Aucun de nous ne reviendra,* 1965) for example. Delbo would not be able to recount her tale if she had not returned, but her testimony insists that none will return; so, she has both come back and not come back, she has returned precisely as a revenant, the returner who does not return, the living being who is also dead. One of the survivors to whom Delbo gives voice, a woman named Mado, insists that contrary to appearances she is not alive: "I died in Auschwitz, and no one sees it" (Delbo 1971, 66). Semprun echoes this when he describes the days after the liberation:

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cially Tidd 2014. My understanding of Semprun's work is particularly indebted to the research of Avril Tynan (2016). Some critics prefer so spell Semprun's name in the Spanish way, with an accent on the final vowel (Semprún); for discussion, see for example Tidd 2014, 11. In this chapter I use the spelling that appears on Semprun's French texts and their English-language translations.

"We are not survivors, but revenants…" (1994, 99). Revenants have survived without surviving. They return because the past has not passed, and it will not have passed until we have fully come to terms with it, if we ever could.

The second model of haunting is associated with Jacques Derrida and especially, though not only, his book *Spectres of Marx* (1993). In this model, haunting is as much about the future as the past. The famous opening sentence of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels's *Manifesto of the Communist Party* (1983) states that "A spectre is haunting Europe – the spectre of communism". This spectre is not something that returns from the dead, but rather it is a foreshadow of what is to come: communism is declared to be the future of Europe, not its past. The ghost in this case is something that comes and speaks to us from a position of radical otherness, to question us and demand our attention. It is not, then, a revenant, something that returns, but what Derrida calls an *arrivant*, a word left untranslated in English editions of his work. *Arriver* in French means to arrive, but also to happen, to occur. So an *arrivant* is not something that returns from the past; it is something that arrives, that happens, that appears unexpectedly as an event which is more about what could be than what has been. This ghost cannot be anticipated or turned into an object of knowledge. It does not deliver a message that will allow it to be laid to rest once the message has been deciphered and properly understood. As Derrida says, "The arrivant must be absolutely other, an other that I expect not to expect, that I do not expect, for whom expecting consists in not-expecting, an expecting without what in philosophy is called the horizon of expectation, when a certain knowledge still anticipates it and deadens it in advance" (1996, 21). This ghost does not announce the return of what we did or could have known. Instead, it is an envoy from alterity that throws the familiar into confusion.

What is at stake in these two models of haunting is whether the ghost *returns* to re-establish what has been lost, be it an item of knowledge, or justice or both, or whether it *arrives* to destabilise the present and foreshadow a possible future. To test the borders between these two models, I want to look at Semprun's play *The Return of Carola Neher* (1998), which is a work about haunting and is also itself a haunted work, one that is full of ghosts. It is possessed by and negotiates with literary monuments and spectral figures from the historical and mythical past. Through the issue of haunting, we can see the underlying question of how memory survives and circulates. The ghost returns from the past to tell us of what has already happened; but it also speaks of what is to come, and of the need to create a viable future that escapes our history of violence.

The return of Carola Neher

The Return of Carola Neher was first performed in 1995 in the Soviet Military Cemetery in Weimar, Germany. The location is already redolent with significance, and it belongs to a dense historical, political and literary network upon which the strange power of this play, and Semprun's writing in general, depends. Weimar was the place where German literary culture flourished in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but it is also close to the site of the Buchenwald concentration camp, where Semprun was imprisoned. Weimar/Buchenwald thus brings together the high point and the low point of German history and culture. It is a place of pride and a place of shame. The key figure in Weimar classicism was Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, and he is also one of the principal ghosts who appear in *The Return of Carola Neher*. Some of the exchanges recorded in Johann Peter Eckermann's *Conversations with Goethe* (Eckermann 2022 [1836]) took place on the site where Buchenwald would later be constructed. Another of the ghosts who appear in Semprun's play is Léon Blum. He was a French Jewish intellectual who published his *New Conversations of Goethe with Eckermann* in 1905, in which he imagined what Goethe's view of Europe might be at the time of rising antisemitism that was epitomised by the Dreyfus affair. In the 1930s Blum would go on to be the first and only socialist Prime Minister of the French Third Republic, and its first and only Jewish Prime Minister. In the 1940s he was imprisoned in Buchenwald, albeit under favourable conditions.

In his earlier works *What a Beautiful Sunday!* (1982, *Quel beau dimanche!* 1980) and *Literature or Life* (1997, *L'Écriture ou la vie*, 1994), Semprun had already explored the interpretative possibilities of the links between Goethe, Weimar, Buchenwald, and Blum.[7] One of the central obsessions of Semprun's work is when apparent coincidence should be interpreted as meaningful correspondence. In *What a Beautiful Sunday!*, Semprun refers to Goethe, Weimar, and the Weimar Republic that was founded in Germany after the end of the First World War, speaking of "a series or sequence of events of which the mutual relations, the reciprocal influences, the obscure links – if they at first appear to be contingent, even improbable – later prove to be strongly structured, so that in the end they reach such a degree of determined coherence that they attain the semblance, however illusory it might be, of being obvious" (1980, 18–19). The key question for Semprun and his readers is the network of connections between events, places and people that might seem to be utterly disparate. Is it mere coincidence that Buchenwald

7 For discussion, see Kelly 2010 and Tidd 2014, 149–155.

was constructed close to Weimar? Semprun asks us to consider that more meaningful historical, cultural and political factors may be in operation.

Semprun's *The Return of Carola Neher* summons back the ghosts of Goethe and Blum to discuss the state of Europe, democracy and totalitarianism. In the play they are accompanied by a kind of chorus of Muselmann prisoners from Buchenwald.[8] These prisoners are themselves ghosts, revenants, hovering between life and death, not quite dead and not quite alive. They are described in the play as being "beyond life, beyond the will to live" (Semprun 1998, 46). There are two other important figures in the play, the Survivor and the Actress. The Survivor, who is clearly to some extent linked with Semprun,[9] reveals himself to be the last living witness to the camps. This is his final day on earth, and he is impelled, he says, to call back all his ghosts: "I must summon all my ghosts" ["Il me faut convoquer tous mes fantômes"] (Semprun 1998, 35). It seems that the whole play is his dying dream, populated by Goethe, Blum and the Muselmänner, and also by the Actress. Why must he bring back these ghosts, and in particular the Actress? Three times, the Actress asks him why he has made her return. Why must the ghosts come back to Weimar, to the Soviet Cemetery, and to Buchenwald? In posing this question, Semprun's play raises one of the issues described earlier in this chapter: how will we remember the camps when everyone with personal memories of them has gone?

The Actress in the play is identified as Carola Neher, the figure named in the play's title. In his Preface, Semprun explains how he first discovered Neher through a poem by Bertolt Brecht (1998, 11–12). Neher was a German actress in the 1920s and 1930s for whom Brecht wrote important roles. With the rise of Hitler, she fled Germany and settled in the Soviet Union. Denounced as a Trotskyite, she was imprisoned, then her husband was executed and she died in prison in 1942. The play quotes from a letter she wrote in prison to the orphanage that her son

8 The word *Muselmann* is German for *Muslim.* Various explanations have been proffered for why the word was used to refer to some prisoners in Auschwitz and other camps, but there is little agreement on its origin; for discussion, see Agamben 1999, 44–45. The Auschwitz survivor Jean Améry (born Hanns Chaim Mayer) describes the Muselmann in *At the Mind's Limits: Contemplations by a Survivor on Auschwitz and its Realities:* "The so-called *Muselmann*, as the camp language termed the prisoner who was giving up and was given up by his comrades, no longer had room in his consciousness for the contrasts good or bad, noble or base, intellectual or unintellectual. He was a staggering corpse, a bundle of physical functions in its last convulsions" (1980, 9; quoted in Agamben 1999, 41). A Muselmann plays an important role in Semprun's *The Dead Man We Needed* (*Le Mort qu'il faut,* 2001). In that work, Semprun describes the Muselmann as being "between life and death" and "beyond life and survival" (2001, 35).

9 Kelly refers to the Survivor as "Semprun's double" (2010, 27), and Tidd refers to him as "co-extensive" (2014, 153) with Semprun.

was living in, asking about his well-being. Her son received the letter 26 years later, in 1967, only then discovering who his mother was and when she had died. Neher was a victim of both Nazism and Stalinism, a fitting ghost to haunt a Soviet Cemetery and a German concentration camp.

When the Actress first appears in Semprun's play, she is seen preparing to perform the role not of Neher but of Corona Schröter, who is herself preparing to perform the role of Iphigenia in Goethe's play *Iphigenia in Tauris.* This suggests another set of intertwining histories. In 1779 Schröter appeared in Weimar as Iphigenia, with Goethe himself playing the role of Orestes. *Iphigenia in Tauris* is the most important literary intertext in *The Return of Carola Neher*, and it creates another connection between Goethe, Weimar, Neher, and the Soviet Union since Neher had performed the role of Iphigenia at a house party in the Soviet Union in 1935, as we are informed in the play. Throughout Semprun's play Goethe and the Actress recite passages from *Iphigenia in Tauris*, and the themes of Goethe's work resonate powerfully with those of Semprun. In Greek myth, Iphigenia is the daughter of Agamemnon, who is called upon to sacrifice his child in order to obtain fair winds so that he can participate in the Trojan war. On his return from Troy, he is murdered by his embittered wife, Clytemnestra, who is in turn killed by their son, Orestes. Some versions of the story of Iphigenia end with her sacrifice, but Goethe draws instead on earlier variants of the story, and on a play by Euripides also known in English as *Iphigenia in Tauris*, in which Iphigenia is secretly saved by the goddess Artemis (or Diana in Latin versions) rather than being killed, and is taken to be her priestess in Tauris. There, it is her role to sacrifice foreign intruders, the latest of whom turns out to be her brother Orestes. At first Iphigenia does not recognise him, but when the king insists that she must kill her brother, a plan is formed that might allow her to escape her terrible destiny. Iphigenia belongs to a cursed family, the House of Atreus, in which fathers kill daughters, wives kill husbands, and sons kill mothers. As Goethe's Iphigenia puts it in the passage used as an epigraph to this chapter, "as the shaken weed / Scatters around a thousand poison-seeds, / So they assassins ceaseless generate, / Their children's children ruthless to destroy". What is at stake in the play is whether this murderous cycle can be broken, and in the end it is, when the King of Tauris ultimately allows Iphigenia to depart with Orestes.

There are clear resonances here with the issues of Semprun's play. Iphigenia is supposed and believed to have been sacrificed by Agamemnon, and so she is someone who has in a sense survived her own death. In this she resembles the returning dead, the undead, of Semprun's play: Goethe, Blum, Neher, and the Muselmann prisoners who are suspended between life and death. Semprun's play also reflects the unstoppable cycle of violence that afflicts Iphigenia's family. This is the point of the connections between Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union, as realised

in the fate of Neher, who flees from Nazi Germany only to die in a Soviet jail. And on this point of connection, the play reserves a final twist. One of the Muselmann prisoners is younger than the others and does not belong in the Survivor's memories. When questioned by the Survivor, he explains that he is indeed a Muselmann in the literal sense of the word, as he is a Muslim. Rather than a Muselmann from the Nazi camps, he is in fact a Bosnian Muslim, a victim of the Bosnian genocide. He was put in a camp when he was twenty years old, the same age as the Survivor when he was imprisoned. Written and performed in 1995 whilst the war in Bosnia was still being fought, the play insists on the terrible parallel between contemporary events and atrocities committed half a century earlier. The cycle of violence depicted in the mythical story of Iphigenia and her family is reflected and repeated in the genocides and purges of twentieth-century Europe, in Nazi Germany, the Stalinist Soviet Union, and then Bosnia.

These links between Greek myth, Nazi Germany, Stalinism and Bosnia clearly resonate with Rothberg's multidirectional memory or Silverman's palimpsestic memory. Different events and time periods are recalled and reinterpreted in the light of what comes before and after them, while our memory of the past is continually and dynamically revised through changing circumstances and new interpretative contexts. The danger this creates is the temptation to compare, and to see similarities that might simplify and distort singular events. Semprun's Bosnian Muslim warns of this danger: "Oh, I know that we must not compare, I have been told it often enough! But I have no intention to compare [the Bosnian genocide]… Neither with Hitler's camps, nor with Stalin's… Nor with any massacre from the past…" (Semprun 1998, 53–54). Kelly refers to the "Semprunian leitmotiv" (2010, 30) whereby Semprun warns against comparing different historical events before proceeding to make implicit or explicit comparisons. This ties in with the acute awareness in the work of the most sensitive exponents of memory studies that exploring the links between different atrocities should not make us forget the singularity of each of them. The difficult line to negotiate here is to establish connections between past and future atrocities without reducing them to being the endless repetition of the same event. Every murder is different, every death is unique.

At the beginning of this chapter I outlined two versions of haunting. In *The Return of Carola Neher* there are plenty of ghosts of the first kind, ghosts who return from the past, returning as diminished versions of themselves, surviving their own deaths. These are the ghosts of Goethe, Blum, the Muselmänner and Neher, and maybe also of Iphigenia and Orestes, ghosts who call on us to respect a debt to the past. They inhabit the Survivor's dream as he summons them on his final day lest they be forgotten. To continue to hear these ghosts is important to

Semprun and his alter ego, the Survivor, and important to us also, as we live in a time when there will very soon be no more living survivors of the Nazi camps.

The Bosnian Muslim, however, is a different kind of ghost. He does not belong to the Survivor's memories or his dream. He is more like the second kind of ghost described earlier, an arrivant rather than a revenant, a ghost who comes from a place of otherness to question and to unsettle, rather than to deliver a message or an injunction from the past. He is not part of the Survivor's story, but he throws open the meaning and resonance of that story. He does not belong in the Survivor's dream but he has a place there, as the Survivor acknowledges: "I have found in a dream the ghosts of my past… And you entered into my dream… I bear you no grudge!" (Semprun 1998, 55). This ghost asks questions rather than delivering answers, and his question here is crucial: "What can I do for you?" (Semprun 1998, 55). The ghost has no message to deliver; he does not demand acknowledgement and does not offer to restore truth or justice. The question is not what does the ghost want of me, why has it returned, what message does it have to deliver, and what must I do to put right what has gone wrong? Rather the question is now what do I want of the ghost, what can it do for me, and how can it redeem my world? When he is asked what he wants the ghost to do, the Survivor responds: "Remember…" ["Vous souvenir…"] (Semprun 1998, 55). This act of remembrance is crucially different from that of survivor-witnesses who speak of what they have seen; it is rather a haunted memory, someone else's memory, a memory of something that is not one's own, a memory of something that one has not witnessed or experienced. The survivor of one atrocity calls on the victim of another to preserve the memory of violence. And I would suggest that we as the audience are also among the future ghosts that Semprun's dying Survivor addresses here. Reading, studying, interpreting, and re-interpreting are forms of the remembering that the Survivor appeals for. At a time when the primary witnesses are dying, we are being called upon here to keep alive the memory of that which we do not remember.

Haunting in Semprun's play is first of all a matter of recalling the past, of not letting the memory of Buchenwald and the death camps disappear once their last primary witnesses have died. But haunting is also a matter for the unknown and unformulated future, and on this point the relation with Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris* is once again vital. The key issue in that play is whether the cycle of violence can be broken. As a priestess of Diana, Iphigenia is called upon to sacrifice her brother, Orestes. The play revolves around the hope that the cycle can be brought to an end. *The Return of Carola Neher* suggests that the cycle goes on, from the curse of the House of Atreus, to which Orestes and Iphigenia are bound, to the murders in Nazi Germany, the Soviet Union, Bosnia, and beyond. However, the play itself, in calling back the ghosts of Goethe, Blum and Neher, and in drawing

on great works of Western culture stretching back to Goethe, Euripides and earlier stories, is a remarkable document of confidence and faith in European culture as something that is of immense value. That culture is a place where ghosts roam and appalling cruelty is recalled, but where there still lingers the shaken conviction that something of what we left behind is worth preserving. *The Return of Carola Neher* is a play about haunting, and it is also a play that is itself haunted by Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris*, by its hope that telling and retelling the stories of the past – always in different ways – is important, even if those stories speak only of atrocity and pain; and it is haunted by Goethe's hope that, against the odds, the cycle of violence might sometime be broken. In the final words of *Iphigenia in Tauris*, the King releases Iphigenia and Orestes and offers them the prospect of a future that in spite of everything may escape the repetitive violence of the past: "Fare thee well!" ["Lebt wohl!"] (Goethe 2015, 90).

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Rafael Pérez Baquero

Mnemonic Migration in Max Aub: Reframing the Spanish Civil War as a Transnational Phenomenon

This paper explores the entanglements between the memory of the victims of Francoism and the memory of the victims of fascism in Europe through the lens of Max Aub's oeuvre. The Spanish Civil War (1936–1939) has been reframed in recent decades as a prelude to the Second World War, and has been described by various historians as the beginning of the stream of violence that spread across Europe in the middle of the twentieth century (Preston 2015). The violence that unfolded on Spanish soil has recently been contextualised through a transnational European lens rather than being considered the result of national political and social tensions. This transnational view of the Spanish Civil War has undoubtedly reframed the way it is being remembered, as metaphors, cultural frames, and mnemonic figures derived from transnational European memories of the violence of the twentieth century are increasingly being used to depict the victims of Francoism.

Spanish history in the twentieth century saw the havoc caused by the Civil War of 1936–1939, the merciless Francoist repression in 1939–1977 of the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic, and the lack of justice during the Spanish transition to democracy in 1977–1983, all of which have left lasting traces within Spanish soil, where around 114,000 unidentified victims, known as *subterrados*, are still waiting in common graves for their bodies to be recovered and for their memories to be restituted. Various studies have observed how the social movement that has been striving to recover these bodies since the 1990s has engaged with the transnational framework that is built on the memory of the Holocaust (Hristova 2016). This has foregrounded the debate about how far the Holocaust can be compared to other historical crimes and thus work as a kernel for the remembrance of those events. The formation of European memory at the end of the twentieth century has ultimately reinforced comparisons between the Holocaust and the Spanish Civil War.

The connections underlying the transnational memory of the Holocaust and other events have been theorised most powerfully through the concept of cosmopolitan memory of Daniel Levy and Natan Sznaider, and Michael Rothberg's idea of multidirectional memory. Levy and Sznaider (2006) argue that the transnational dimension of the memory of the Shoah highlights possible ways of transcending ethnic and local ties, even to the extent of depicting different stories of violence

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by resorting to the mnemonic frames that are embedded within the memory of the Holocaust. Through a process of decontextualisation, the memory of the victims of the Shoah becomes a universal symbol of human suffering that may play a role, through comparison, in the remembrance of those who have suffered state-sponsored violence elsewhere. Rothberg similarly claims that memories are not elaborated solely in a homogeneous and national space, but that on the contrary, it is within the global and interconnected public sphere that their contents and functions are modulated: "The content of a memory has no intrinsic meaning but takes on meaning precisely in relation to other memories in a network of associations" (2009, 5). These transnational frames for remembering the past are undoubtedly key in the Spanish context. Historians, journalists, and anthropologists within the social movement that seeks to recover historical memory in Spain have framed the victims of Francoism using figures and symbols from the universalised memory of the Holocaust. This has resulted in the memories of the crimes committed on Spanish soil intertwining with the memory of the Holocaust. These connections have then reinforced different historical comparisons, between the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic who ended up in Nazi concentration camps and the Jewish victims of Nazism, and between Hitler and Mussolini and their ally in Spain, the dictator Francisco Franco. Such analogies have strengthened the demands of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain.

These new transnational trends have led to political debates around the remembrance of this controversial past. The transnational narrative directly contests the hegemonic historical narratives that were popular during the 1970s and that underlie the Spanish transition and the Pact of Forgetting. The hegemonic narrative is that the Spanish Civil War was a tragedy, a collective madness for which all of Spanish society bears the responsibility, and from this perspective, there were no victors or vanquished, and no perpetrators or victims. All of Spanish society was equally to blame. The transnational narrative by contrast embeds the memory of the victims of Francoism, criminalises Franco as one of Hitler's allies, and places the blame for the crimes committed in the war squarely on his shoulders. In this way the transnational memory undermines the view of the war that held both parties equally to blame for the crimes.

These new transnational depictions of Spanish history draw from the social influence of different accounts of the past in contemporary literature and films, which need to be explored in detail. The perspective endorsed by this paper echoes not only the transnational perspective on the remembrance of the Spanish Civil War, but also what could be labelled as a turn to mediality in memory studies. As Erll and Rigney claim, "media provides frameworks for shaping both experiences and memory" (2009, 9). In this regard, the role of literature in shaping the collective memory cannot be emphasised enough: "literature proactively contributes

to the negotiation of cultural memory" (Neumann 2008, 335), even to the extent of providing the resources to contest a particular depiction of the past. This is why literature can be said to be filled by a "critical force that undermines hegemonic views of the past" (Rigney 2008, 348).

This chapter focuses on the role of the oeuvre of Spanish writer Max Aub (1903–1972) in reframing the contemporary cultural memory of the Spanish Civil War within the transnational perspective. Aub produced numerous novels, theatre plays and essays that stand out not only for their stylistic quality, but also for the events they depict. His works took a ground-breaking approach to the memory of the Spanish Civil War and exile, as his transnational and Jewish background offered new avenues for reframing complex events in Spanish and European history. Aub was born in France to German and French Jewish parents, but grew up in Spain and then emigrated to Mexico to escape the Franco regime. His literature was first disseminated outside Spain and only later in Spain itself, and so it provides fertile ground for exploring through literature how memory travels. Aub's writings resulted from his efforts to recover and keep alive the memory of the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic, and the remembrance framed by his literature acts against the backdrop of various politics of memory that sought during both the dictatorship and the transition to erase the stories and rights of the victims of Francoism. Moreover, his work blurs the borders between the Spanish and the European aspects of the civil war, thus undermining the hegemonic views of the past. This means that analysing the travels of Aub's texts during and after his exile to Mexico offers a priceless opportunity to delve further into how memories of trauma, exile, and rootlessness travel through literature.

Transnationality, statelessness, and writing out of space

Aub's background deeply influenced his transnational perspective on the memories of the Spanish Civil War. His life was marked by his experience of exile. He was born in Paris and moved to Spain when he was eleven with his family after the outbreak of the First World War. He grew up in Valencia and his experience there formed his sense of belonging to Spain, which never faded even though he was the son of a German father and a French Jewish mother. During the 1930s, Aub became deeply involved in the Second Spanish Republic of 1931–1936, and so after the republic was defeated in the Spanish Civil War of 1936–1939, he had to escape from Spain to France. However, the return to his country of

birth turned out to be deeply disappointing (Malgat 2008). His position as an exile was entrenched by the waves of violence that engulfed Europe in the middle of the twentieth century from the Spanish Civil War to the Second World War. False reports accused him of being a communist agent in France and so he was imprisoned in the French concentration camp of Verget, and later in Djelfa, Algeria. These concentration camps were created to control the Spanish population that had arrived at the French borders at the end of the Spanish Civil War. This experience gave birth to a motif in Aub's poetic imagination as he lamented the absence of his fatherland because of the war and the spread of violence and fascism. After suffering the hardships of the Djelfa camp for a couple of months, Aub managed to escape to Mexico, reaching Veracruz and then Mexico City, where he spent most of the rest of his life. Exile thus became permanent for Aub, and it was only several decades later, in 1969, that he was allowed to return to Spain to visit a country that he could not recognise as his former home. His diary *The Blind Chicken* (*La Gallina Ciega*, 2015b [1971]) presents his experiences in Spain, which he summarises by saying: "I am a tourist in reverse. I came to see what no longer exists" (Aub, *La gallina ciega*, 39).[1] Aub was therefore an exile who could not return to his homeland as it did not exist anymore (Hirsch 2011). This life experience undoubtedly accounts for Aub's transnational perspective, which was also reinforced by his multilingualism. He was able to read and write in Spanish, French and German, though he wrote creatively only in the language he learned in Spain.

His experiences meant that Aub's writing is conditioned by permanent traumatic feelings of rootlessness and longing for a homeland he could never return to. Transnationality from his viewpoint was not a particular historical experience but rather his defining identity. Sebastiaan Faber notes that "Max Aub presents himself as the conscience of exile par excellence" (2002, 18). Moreover, the impossibility of returning to the Spain he had been raised in strengthened his attachment to it: "The attachment to Spain had been by choice and that choice was made for life" (Balibrea 2014, 64). Furthermore, his time in the Djelfa concentration camp brought to the fore the transnational dimension of his experience that he later presented in his literature, as his depiction of the trauma of living as an inmate under harsh conditions is similar to the stories that emerged from the various European camps. Aub's literature in this way testifies not only to the dreadful experience of the Spanish Civil War, but also to the tragedy that engulfed other European democracies during the 1930s and 1940s.

Aub's permanent experience of exile explains why rootlessness is the basis of his writing, which has given his literature an aporetic sense. While he was in exile

1 Throughout this chapter translations of Spanish material are my own.

in Mexico, Aub tried to describe, tell stories of, and keep contact with the homeland he longed for, but the persistent physical distance between him and Spain made it impossible for him to speak of and realistically describe the events that were unfolding in Spain at the time. He was thus forced to write about Spain from an unbridgeable distance, and this marked the style and structure of his writing. His oeuvre encompasses different literary genres, from poetry to short stories, and from novels to theatre plays. Despite the range of styles and genres that he employed, there is an underlying trend within Aub's writing that is the attempt to engage critically with Spanish history and culture despite his exile.

These endeavours are also intertwined with Aub's Jewish background, which is given prominence as it underlies his reframing of the past, and deeply conditions the transmission of his memories. Consequently, Jewishness not only permeates most of Aub's writing, but also explains why and how the memories in his writing travelled between Spain and America. Similarly, his Jewish background also explains the ways in which the memories displayed in his work travelled back to Spain and were read again, decades after he himself had passed away. In the later recovery of his works, this background has invited comparisons and analogies between the Holocaust and the Republican stories of exile, as is explored at the end of this chapter.

Since the transnational frame underlies the recovery of the memory of the Spanish victims of Francoism, Aub's texts have propelled this reframing of the memories of the Spanish twentieth century. That he was both Jewish and a Spanish exile accounts for the connection between the two stories of victimhood, those of the victims of Francoism and of the victims of Nazism, which is expressed by the depiction of events in his writing and by the display of memories in the travels of his works. These analogies exist in different texts by Aub. One is the tale *Raven's Manuscript* (*Manuscrito cuervo*, 1946), which offers an allegory of life in a concentration camp in the mid-twentieth century from the perspective of a raven as an external observer. From the raven's viewpoint, the hardships of the inmates striving for survival are deeply decontextualised. The reader never gets to know where the camp is located, and the events described could be taking place in a Nazi concentration camp in Europe or in a French concentration camp in Algeria. This blurs the differences between Spanish and Jewish stories of victimhood as the narrative focuses on the random violence the prisoners suffer only because of the place they came from: "Man, for his own sake is nothing [...] His value depends on the place he came from, on his language" (Aub 2011, 105). This may explain why, when Aub's work started to be republished again in Spain at the end of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century, these works have reframed the remembrance of a traumatic and contested past in a groundbreakingly transnational way.

Literature as historical testimony?

These biographical and historical circumstances that he faced meant that Aub's writing in exile resulted from his stubborn effort to keep alive the memory of the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic in the decades that followed the end of the conflict, and so it can be considered a historical testimony. Aub suggests this possibility for some of his texts: "My *Campos* are not novels, but chronicles. And in that sense *Saint John, No, Diary of Djelfa* and so many other things are not, and do not want to be, anything but testimony" (1998, 236). Reframing Aub's literature as historical testimony does not, however, mean that Aub endorsed a realistic representation of history. Although he narrates the events he had witnessed in the Spanish Civil War and in the French concentration camps, their traumatic nature prevented him from depicting them realistically. He resorted instead to polyphonic narratives that employ multiple voices that fragment the plot and withhold any possibility of realistic representation. Despite his attempts to offer a lucid and critical testimony of the hardships suffered by the supporters of the Second Spanish Republic, Aub's experiences of trauma and exile are the reason why he cannot achieve this. His literature is "the expression of the impossibility of realist writing" (Faber 2002). Aub was thus caught between the push of bearing witness to the historical events he had lived through and the pull of their overwhelming nature, which escapes realist representation.

These tensions can be explored further by looking into Aub's *Blue Pages* (*Páginas azúles*), which comes in the final part of *The Field of Almond Trees* (*Campo de almendros*, 1965). This short text interrupts the narrative of the traumatic events surrounding the last supporters of the Second Spanish Republic at the end of the Spanish Civil War and introduces Aub's own considerations about whether or how to plot such historical experiences. As Daniel Aguirre-Oteiza outlines, *Blue Pages* is a "ten-page excursus of meta-literary reflection on the conditions of possibility for narrating the experiences of thousands of Republicans held in Francoist concentration camps" (Aguirre-Oteiza 2020, 135). This is how Aub expressed the difficulties of realistic representation:

> Twenty, thirty, forty thousand people crammed into the Port; plus thirty thousand in the city, not counting the thirty thousand who are arriving and will not arrive. Thirty thousand I can't talk about, thirty thousand who can't sleep, thirty thousand who know they are lost. Numbers are never exact. To give an idea of the reality, the author would need thousands of skulls, to squeeze out thousands of convoluted thoughts (if they emerge from the skulls), to explain the tortures, the hopes, the disappointments of those piled up in the harbour, asleep, awake, transient. He is not sure he wants to because he is too old to do it. He cannot. (Aub 2019, 420)

Nonetheless, the gap between the traumatic experiences and writing does not prevent such memories being represented in his works. His different novels comprising *The Magic Labyrinth* (*El laberinto mágico*, 1943–1968) stand out in particular for their new ways of combining fiction, testimony, and meta-fiction to provide new avenues for reframing and remembering the Spanish Civil War. The different ways of plotting the historical events in his Campos are polyphonic and self-reflexive. They are polyphonic because different testimonial voices pervade his narrative and interact with each other so chaotically that they prevent a common thread forming through the narrative. His writing techniques were self-reflexive insofar as the problems underlying the act of writing are brought up in the text, as his *Blue Pages* evidences. This is why Michael Ugarte framed Aub's writing as "ambivalent and fragmentary" (1989, 45). By endorsing a meta-discursive and self-reflexive perspective on the difficulties of transmitting the memory of those events to new generations in Spain, Aub's writing expresses a longing for this memory to survive and be displayed. In the last book of *The Magic Labyrinth*, *The Field of Almond Trees*, Claude Piquer, the father of a child who observes dumbfounded the exile of the last supporters of the Spanish Second Republic, is trying to move through Alicante's harbour and orders his son:

> Those that you see now, scattered, battered, furious, flattened, unshaven, unwashed, filthy, dirty, tired, biting, disgusting, broken, are, however, don't forget it son, don't ever forget it no matter what, they are the best of Spain, the only ones who, truly, have achieved, without anything, with their hands, against fascism, against the military, against the powerful, for justice alone; each one in their own way, in their own way, as they could, without caring about their comfort, their family, their money. Those you see, broken Spaniards, defeated, overcrowded, wounded, sleepy, half dead, still hoping to escape, are, don't forget, the best in the world. It is not beautiful. But it is the best thing in the world. (Aub 2019, 415)

Nonetheless, such an imperative to remember may not endure and transcend the borders of space and time, as Aub's narrator ponders: "Claudio Piqueras [...] speaks the truth. I would have wanted what he is saying to his son to remain indelibly engraved in his memory. He knows it is not possible and he is truly sorry for that" (Aub 2019, 416). Interestingly, these references to the difficulty or impossibility of displaying memories of war and exile have been highlighted by various readers of Aub as a new mnemonic device that points at the transmission of these memories (Buschmann 2022). Contemporary critiques of Aub's literature have outlined how referring to the drama of Spanish exile as a consequence of not being heard or understood by new generations in Spain has worked as a path for introducing readers to particular stories and memories of the exiled Spanish. Similarly, the impossibility of referentiality within Aub's writing led him to adopt different

representation techniques to make this impossibility explicit and thus provide new avenues for adventurous readers to follow to recover his memories.

The first technique can be defined as blurring the limits between fiction and historical accuracy (Rigney 2014). As Javier Zapatero asserts, "the lie of fiction can more effectively convey reality" (2014, 97). Within the different novels that make up *The Magic Labyrinth*, fictional characters interact with historical ones in a distinctive way that serves Aub's thematic purposes. In Aub's work, historical characters often interact with fictional ones in situations that may not be historically accurate. This interplay allows him to explore hypothetical scenarios, alternative stories, and the impact of personal relations on different historical events. Thus Aub writes from the "threshold between historical figures and fictional characters" (Aguirre-Oteiza 2020, 133) by subtly introducing autobiographical experiences through the perspectives of the characters. The introduction of such historical references may support the accuracy of Aub's novels, and by co-existing with these historical characters, the fictional ones may come to represent all the nameless subjects who have not been given a voice within the historical discourse, thus making Aub's literature even more powerful as a medium of different forgotten memories.

Secondly, the traumatic nature of the events that Aub aims to grasp is reflected in a particular temporality that underlies a significant part of his work. Michael Ugarte states that Aub's writing reveals "the impossibility of recovering and ordering the past from the place and time of exile" (1989, 284). Since traumatic experiences are defined as provoking a "crisis of temporality" in which the unsettling past continues to haunt the present, Aub's literature does not fit in with the linear temporality of historical events. On the contrary indeed, the relation between the present and the past within Aub's writing is not only continuous but also dialectical. Aub's tendency to play with temporality when narrating historical events is clear from the way he resorts to different uchronias[2] of twentieth-century Spanish history, such as in *The True Story of the Day in which Francisco Franco Dies* (*La verdadera historia de la muerte de Francisco Franco*, 1960), in which Aub speculates about what would have happened if historical events had unfolded differently. Uchronias undoubtedly reframe and disturb linear and homogeneous temporality as they present events that are different from the historical ones, which highlights the extent to which history could have happened differently. Although such historical scenarios are presented as uchronias, the realistic accuracy with which they are depicted stimulates the imagination and retrospectively reinforces the idea

2 Ucrhonias are fictional reconstructions in the past that are based upon events that could have happened but did not.

that changes within history could have been possible. Mari Paz Balibrea (2008, 207) argues that Aub writes from a different temporality, which gives him different strategies for putting the actual reality before the critical gaze. By disrupting linear temporality and resorting to uchronias, Aub "presents reality as susceptible to being reframed by man" (Aznar Soler 2003, 49).

The transnational Spanish Civil War in Max Aub

Both Aub's transnational background and his use of critical and non-realistic writing techniques paved the way for him to reframe and display the memory of the Spanish Civil War in a transnational way. When he deals with memories of historical events that unfolded during the 1930s and 1940s, Aub's "border-crossing, cross-historical, plurivocal, and multilingual writing" (Aguirre-Oteiza 2020, 145) brings to the fore the entanglements between Spanish and European twentieth-century history.

The European dimension of his writing, if it is considered a mnemonic medium, is evidenced primarily in his early writings on concentration camps. By bearing witness to the traumatic experiences he suffered in Vernet and Djelfa, Aub undoubtedly engages with a transnational and universal topic. The debate on similarities and analogies between Nazi and French concentration camps is far-reaching (Naharro-Calderón 2006) in contemporary literature and sheds light on the extent to which Aub's *Djelfa Diary*, like the literature on the Holocaust concentration camps,[3] is intended to express the impossibility of describing the level of dehumanisation and systematic violence that he went through. Although Aub did not consciously establish analogies between the experience he suffered and the hardships of the Jewish inmates in Nazi concentration camps, his writing nevertheless invites such comparisons. José María Naharro-Calderón (2017) brings to the fore the similarities between Aub's representation of Djelfa and Vernet on the one hand, and the depictions of Nazi concentration camps in the Holocaust literature on the other, by suggesting that the common ground between them is the space in which random and senseless violence has become the basic rule of daily life. The internment of undesirable groups, the forced labour, the harsh conditions, and other similar things, were common features of both the Nazi and French concentration camps after all. In Aub's *Raven's Manuscript* mentioned above, the raven as the external observer narrates what it witnessed in a concentration camp by documenting the senseless logic underlying life in those circumstances:

3 For the impossibility of representing Holocaust trauma, see Langer 1991.

"The inmates were brought here by an administration. This administration has disappeared, but the men are still here. Another one happened to that administration, which brings more inmates. As the former cannot claim the administration that brought them here, because it no longer exists, they have no one to turn to request their freedom, and here they will continue until death" (Aub 2011, 83).

Different parts of Aub's work intertwine the remembrance of the victims of Francoism and that of the victims of Nazism by connecting them strongly to how the story unfolds. This is particularly clear in theatre plays such as *For Some Time Now* (*De algún tiempo a esta parte*, 1949), *The Kidnapping of Europe (El rapto de Europa*, 1946), *Dying To Close One's Eyes (Morir por cerrar los ojos,* 2007 [1944]), and *Saint John* (*San Juan*, 1942), in ways that are discussed below.

Aub's plays and novels show the Second Spanish Republic as founded upon the European ideals of modernity and enlightenment. They show that Spanish society had striven to eliminate the burden of reactive and conservative social and political forces that had for decades hindered the foundation of a liberal and modern democracy in Spain. Through this European lens, the conflict in which the Second Spanish Republic became involved could be understood as a struggle for core European cultural values. Similarly, the forces that stopped such a project being fulfilled in Spain were the same as the ones that threatened the foundation of European democracies. This analogy is expressed throughout Aub's work, and for instance the main character in *From Some Time Now* (2018 [1949]), claims in a monologue set in Austria after the annexation that: "It seems that there, in Spain, the Republic was a bit like ours and that they [the fascists] wanted to take power, like here; but Germany is far away and they could not prevent the people from opposing it" (Aub 2018, 53).

This transnational perspective explains why Aub was so critical of other European democracies that abandoned the Spanish Republic. In his view, signing the non-intervention pact meant that France and the United Kingdom reinforced the anti-democratic political forces that finally engulfed Spain and then the other democracies as well. Spain is depicted in this regard as the first victim of what Aub defines as the kidnapping of Europe (*El rapto de Europa,* 1946), which finally affected the entire continent. This perspective is present in one of his most famous plays, *Dying To Close One's Eyes.* In this play, the dialogue between the characters gives rise to comparisons between the suffering of the French after the Nazi invasion and the Spanish Civil War.

> Luisa: If it wasn't for you, I would be at home in Neuilly, with my dogs, and not here, lost, abandoned on a road. It's because of you that we have a war. All that infectious filth of Spaniards [...] María: That's enough, madam. If you're afraid, it's not my fault. Do you hear the bombings? They are the same ones who bombed Barcelona. (Aub 2007, 190)

Another common feature in the stories of both the Nazi and Francoist victims that Aub employs in his work, and one that is directly bound to his experience, is exile and homelessness. This diasporic background is admittedly reinforced through his Jewish origins, which accounts for "the Spanish and Jewish feeling of having no future" (Muñoz Molina 1999, 82) that he feels becoming embedded in his writing.

When they try to flee into exile, the victims of Francoism are depicted as homeless. In *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age* Daniel Levy and Nathan Sznaider (2006) suggest it is precisely the diasporic and extra-national condition of Jewish history that accounts for the memory of their suffering being tied to the cosmopolitan memory that may encompass historical cases other than Jewish ones. Aub explores this feature of Jewish history in his play *San Juan. San Juan* tells the tragic story of a boat loaded with a large group of Jews trying to escape antisemitism in the 1930s. The reader does not know where they come from or where they are. They are desperately wandering across the Mediterranean trying to find a safe harbour and a new home, but they are rejected from every place they try to land outside Germany. Their tragic destiny is initially framed within the long story of the Jewish Diaspora, with San Juan representing yet another episode within it. This is how Esthers, one of the characters in the play, presents their situation: "More than fifteen hundred pogroms. Pillage, rape, and death. I hoped the whole world was going to rise up and avenge us. But nothing happens. Only silence. Snow on the ruins. And oblivion" (Aub 2006, 221). Saint John goes beyond this Jewish and victim-centred frame though, precisely because this story of victimhood suddenly turns into a narrative of the resistance of different members of the group. By describing the suffering of the exiles who found no haven, the story presents those countries that did not allow the boat to land as responsible for the situation. The story of Saint John thus turns into a political denunciation of the countries that did not join the struggle against fascism and fight to protect its victims. By echoing the tragedy of the Jews in Europe, this play therefore also becomes a strong criticism of the non-intervention pact of the Spanish Civil War. The story seems in this way to encompass other narratives of suffering, such as that of the Spanish victims of Francoism.

These examples of Aub's work depict how different stories of victimisation are intertwined, thus bringing to the fore the transnational and European perspectives, which Aub uses to recuperate the memory of the Spanish Civil War and his exile. In order to grasp the transnational and European grounding of the memory of Spanish twentieth-century history as it is displayed and reframed by Aub though, it is necessary to investigate how such "mediated memory" of the war and exile has been retroactively reshaped. As Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney point out, "there is no mediation without remediation" (2009, 4). Remediation, a "form of diachronic intermediality", is key to understanding the extent to which Aub's

literature has contributed to reshaping contemporary memory of the Spanish Civil War.

Remediation: *Sefarad* and Max Aub in twenty-first-century Spain

Despite the amount that Aub wrote on the Spanish Civil War, it was only at the turn of the twenty-first century that his legacy started to regain its place in the public sphere. Mexican publishing houses including Fondo de Cultura Económica and UNAM published some of his novels and tales during his exile in Mexico, but despite their value as historical evidence of the Spanish Civil War, his writings did not reach a wider audience in the local cultural space of Mexico. The majority of his readers were from the community of Spanish exiles in Mexico, and so Aub's oeuvre provided a mnemonic space for Spanish exiles to remember their own experiences during the war. Another group of readers of Aub was the Mexican Jewish community, which was fascinated by the relationship of Aub's writing to the Jewish story. This explains why the Mexican Jewish community read and contacted the Spanish writer even though Aub's literature did not reach larger audiences in Mexico. According to Raúl Cardiel Reyes, "his close relations with the Mexican Jewish community were known" (1973, 97). This affinity is also evidenced by the antisemitic reception of his writing in Mexico. As José-Ramón López-Garcia outlines, "Aub's Jewish status was brought up in antisemitic attacks by some members of Mexican culture, but also, in many other cases, that origin contributed to the favourable reception of Aub as a manifestation of his cosmopolitanism and belonging to a prestigious tradition of cultural internationalism" (2013, 63). The reception of his works in Spain during the dictatorship and the transition to democracy was even more disappointing. The publication and distribution of his works was limited and subject to censorship, and even in the 1970s after the censorship was lifted, the distribution and publication of his novels proceeded very slowly, and he was not able to witness it as he passed away in 1973. Aub (*La gallina ciega*, 48) himself said that the difficulties of publishing and reaching a larger audience in Spain weighed heavily on him, though during the 1960s and 1970s, he managed to publish some of his most important texts in Spain. The different novels in *The Magic Labyrinth* series were published by Alfaguara in 1978 for instance, though the books did not reach the audience Aub would have expected. Only after the movement for the recovery of historical memory emerged in the 2000s has Aub's oeuvre gained popularity as a testimony of Francoism. The different novels of *The Magic Labyrinth* started to spark readers' interest and to be reedited again, this time by the publish-

ing house Cuaderno del Vigía. The resurgence of Aub's works should therefore be considered as part of the process of the recovery of memory in contemporary Spain. The transnational turn, which has supported the rehabilitation of the victims of Francoism and exile in Spain, aligns with Aub's perspective and reinforces it, as his writing on French concentration camps facilitates comparisons between the victims of Francoism and the victims of Nazism. This transnational background has consequently determined how Aub's literature is framed and read, thus opening the door to new avenues for its mnemonic migration. Given this, it may be worth outlining some insights into the recovery and reframing of Aub's literature in contemporary Spain.

Aguirre-Oteiza notes that the recovery of Aub's work in contemporary Spain "has been largely informed by Antonio Muñoz Molina's worthy effort as a public intellectual to bring to light neglected or forgotten testimonial accounts by Spanish Republican writers who became exiles as a result of the war" (2020, 163). This means that Aub's relevance for Muñoz Molina, who is one of the most important Spanish writers in contemporary literature, cannot be emphasised enough. Antonio Muñoz Molina is a contemporary Spanish writer known for his exploration of memory, identity and history. He frequently refers to Aub's particular way of addressing the memory of the Spanish Civil War in his work. In his official speech when he became a member of the Spanish Royal Academy in 1996 (*Discurso de ingreso en la Real Academia Española de 1996*, 2004), Muñoz Molina revised and restaged Aub's work *The Spanish Theatre Brought to Light in the Darkness of Our Times (El teatro Española sacado a la luz de las tinieblas de nuestro tiempo*, 1942). Aub's fictional text is a creation in which he speculates about what would have happened if the civil war had not taken place and his literary production had been rewarded by the Spanish Royal Academy. Muñoz Molina's speech on Aub's work highlights the transnational nature of Aub's writings and biography in exile, as he argues that Aub's literature can be reframed as testimony of the "European Civil War" during the twentieth century. Aub witnessed "the great night of Europe [...] crossed by long sinister trains, convoys of goods or cattle wagons with their windows closed, advancing very slowly towards winter moors covered with snow or mud, delimited by barbed wire fences and watch towers" (2001, 49). Muñoz Molina reframes Aub's biography and literature to bring to light the entanglements and equivalences between Spanish and European stories of victimhood and exile.

Muñoz Molina's transnational and universalised reframing of Aub's literature is taken to the extreme by the main trope Muñoz Molina resorts to when depicting the experience of the exile: *Sefarad.* In his book under the Sephardic name of the Iberian Peninsula, Muñoz Molina introduces a partially fictionalised set of testimonies from twentieth-century European exiles. *Sefarad* is a metaphor for destruc-

tion, expulsion and loss that encompasses a heterogeneous set of narratives and stories, including that of exile after the Spanish Civil War. By moving beyond the rootlessness experienced by the Jewish people, such a metaphor may include everyone who has suffered state-sponsored violence. According to Aguirre-Oteiza, "Muñoz Molina master metaphor of destruction, expulsion or loss, is therefore a trope that universalised the experience of victimhood" (2020, 164). I would argue that Muñoz Molina's reframing of Aub's literature through universal victimhood may be criticised, since a universal victim figure may cause the past to become decontextualised and the specific features of individual stories of suffering blurred.

Aub's literature bears witness not only to his traumatic experiences in the Spanish Civil War and his subsequent exile, including the time spent in the French concentration camps, but also to the collapse of the entire European society during the 1930s and the 1940s. As Muñoz Molina's explains:

> Reading [*Dying To Close One's Eyes*] gave me, at seventeen, an overwhelming notion of the apocalypses of this century, and added to the raw perception of anguish for which one is so gifted at that age a very precise awareness of the historical future in which the vagaries of human lives are inscribed. (2004, 32)

Conclusion

The contribution of Aub's literature to shaping the cultural memory of the Spanish Civil War comes from diverse synchronic and diachronic processes that are entangled in the travel of his works. The current social and cultural influence that textual depictions of Spanish twentieth-century history have had however, has paved the way for new figures and symbols to emerge that mark recent turns within the collective remembrance of past events in contemporary Spain. It is no coincidence that the new editions of Aub's previously out-of-print books coincide with the emergence of the Association for the Recovery of Historical Memory in Spain. Similarly, the transnational framework, which has reshaped memories of the Spanish Civil War, aligns perfectly with Aub's perspective in his various works, from *Dying To Close One's Eyes* to *Saint John.* From his account of the tragic story of the last supporters of the Second Spanish Republic trying to escape from the Francoist troops in Alicante's harbour to his tale about a group of Jews who spend their last hour in a drifting boat because no nation would offer them refuge, Aub's concern with the fate of the many victims of war and exile has created bridges between Spanish and European history and memory of the mid-twentieth century. As a result, the transnational elements that underlie Aub's work are best analysed by highlighting the role played by literature in configuring collective memory or by

considering how literature "mediated acts of remembrance that 'performs' connections between people" (Rigney 2008, 369). Moreover, the dynamics of cultural memory encompass not only how the events of the past are framed by different texts and symbols, but also how those memories are retrospectively mediated. As Erll and Rigney (2009) indicate, the configurations of cultural memory depend on how mnemonic mediations are mediated. By bringing these theoretical insights into the historical case of the Spanish Civil War, it is possible to outline the extent to which the reframing of Aub's works in contemporary Spain has come to reinforce the transnational perspective in remembering the war and the subsequent exile. Muñoz Molina's critical framework for understanding and reshaping Aub's contribution within the collective memory in contemporary Spain has proven to be useful in this regard for addressing the extent to which the mediation and remediation of memories in Aub's work in exile have shed light onto the connection between Spanish and European twentieth-century events and memories. Aub's literature travelled to Mexico during the twentieth century, where it brought and displayed the memories of the war, even though his books were read mostly by other Spanish exiles. Decades later, those memories travelled back to Spain because his works were being published again, thus providing new frameworks for remembering Spanish twentieth-century history. In the context of the contemporary Spanish battles for memory, Aub's work has consequently paved the way for a transnational narrative of the history of the Second Spanish Republic that aims to dignify the memory of those who perished fighting against fascism in Spain.

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Unni Langås

Two Stops on the Itinerary of Anne Frank's Diary

The notion of cultural commemoration as a travelling process has been discussed from different angles, but a recurring tendency in such discussions is the use of texts that describe historic events or give credible interpretations of a usually traumatic past to illustrate theoretical assumptions. Astrid Erll shows how the First World War classic Erich Maria Remarque's *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1929) created memories of the war and shaped a notion of being lost that is specific to that generation. To Erll the novel is "a striking example of how generationality is produced in the act of representation and how the transnational travel and translation of memory texts actually occurs" (2014, 391). Ann Rigney (2021) argues in her discussion of transferred memorial forms that such forms are constructions of a certain common past. She offers as prominent examples Mulk Raj Anand's novel *Across the Black Waters* (1939) about colonial soldiers in the First World War and Philip Scheffer's film *The Half-Moon Files: A Ghost Story* (2008) about prisoners of war in a camp near Berlin, also during the First World War. Key to her understanding of memory as an open-ended dynamic process is that it works as a "feedback loop between narratives about the past and solidarities in the present" (Rigney 2021, 13). Eneken Laanes uses Sofi Oksanen's novel *Purge* (2010) as an example of "born translated memories" and argues that this novel about rapes in Estonia at the end of the Second World War modelled on war rapes in the Bosnian war and in Berlin in the Second World War exemplifies "translation as a new model for conceptualising the transnational travel of memories that operates through transcultural memorial forms" (2021, 43).

Erll's case study illustrates how travelling memories can produce a new transcultural concept of generational identity, Rigney emphasises the agency of literature in the continuous remaking of memory in social contexts, and Laanes proposes translation as a new model for conceptualising the transnational travel of memories. In the extension of these contributions I suggest here another angle to the question of how literature addresses aesthetic inheritance and interpretation in the context of cultural memory. Instead of focusing on how a particular novel reinterprets past events, my approach deals with the ways in which a book written by a time witness, Anne Frank (1929–1945), has influenced fiction with a more complex agenda than just reinterpreting the past. Its transcultural travel has produced remediations that inspire reflection on the very act of the aesthetic transformation of memories.

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The Diary of Anne Frank, published in 1947 under the title *The House Behind* (*Het Achterhuis*), is an astonishing example of a text that became an international success against all the odds. It has now been translated into more than 70 languages and remediated into numerous theatre productions and movies, and is a stunning example of a canonisation that may seem both random and surprising.[1] *The Diary of Anne Frank* also prompts attention because it is not occupied with past events but is an account of everyday life in the present. Although Anne wrote the diary as an eyewitness to the wartime sufferings of the Jews and had hoped that it would be published at some point, its temporal layout is different to that of the other texts mentioned above. The writer is not looking back but is reflecting on her difficult circumstances in the here and now, and dreams about a better life in the future. Throughout the history of its reception though, her book has been *made into* and *used as* a prominent testimony of the Holocaust, the genocide of the Jews.

The Diary of Anne Frank is an especially moving read because of the young girl's hopeful expectations, which are juxtaposed with the horrible destiny that we know was hers.[2] The book is mostly written in the present tense and addressed to a confidant Kitty, who is the diary itself. It consists of observations and descriptions of a life in internal exile, and it does not deal very much with times that have passed. Instead, the author articulates her longing for a future without the sufferings of the present day, and she is not without vigour and ambition when she looks forward to a normal life after the war. It can thus be argued that while *The Diary of Anne Frank* was conceived as a day-to-day report of extreme circumstances, it has been transformed through its reception and adaptations and given the status of an important remembrance of the past.

There are several reasons why *The Diary of Anne Frank* has achieved canonical status, one of which may be its capacity to work as a travelling memory even though it is set in the present and does not take a retrospective attitude. We can explore this ability to fascinate new audiences and generations again and again by reading novelistic works that clearly allude to the book as their forerunner.[3] I have chosen Philip Roth's *The Ghost Writer* from 1979 and Kristian Klausen's *Anne F.* from 2021 as two remediations that make clear reference to their predecessor text, but also imaginatively incorporate the author herself into their fictional worlds. Roth and Klausen explore the idea of travelling quite literally and move

1 Information about the publication and its reception history can be found on the website of the Anne Frank House: https://www.annefrank.org/en.

2 Anne and her sister Margot died of hunger and disease in Bergen-Belsen in February 1945.

3 Many of these remediations of Frank's diary are books and picture books for children and young adults.

Anne Frank to locations in the United States and Norway respectively, thereby studying the potential cultural crossovers of her diary. Both authors prominently address meta-perspectives at the same time, such as the writing, reception, and distribution of a literary text, in this way reflecting on the conditions and possibilities of fiction as an agent in memory processes.[4]

The two novels are an interesting comparison because they also reveal different motivations for the interest of their authors in Anne Frank and her diary. Roth engages with the diary's reception, remediation, and customisation into an American post-war commercial culture. His text is saturated with an ironic rhetoric that provokes reflection on how literary parody may be used in commemoration processes. Klausen engages with the production and survival of the diary in a Norwegian culture besieged in wartime. His text is concerned throughout with the aesthetics of an urban landscape, which incites him to explore his material and spatial surroundings as a support for remembrance and as part of the substance of it.

Here I will discuss how Roth and Klausen exploit fictional invention, with an emphasis on parody in the first case and spatiality in the second, to reflect on the relationship between literature and history, and the distinctive quality that literature has of causing memories to travel. In these cases, the notion of mnemonic migration helps us scrutinise and understand not only how aesthetic articulations remember the past and work as memory agents, but also how they independently investigate the mental and mediative processes of remembrance. I intend to illuminate how these novels both performatively show and meta-reflectively address the ways in which aesthetic articulations make memories travel.

4 Roth's use of Anne Frank recurs in several books (see McLennan 2009), and she has frequently been read as his muse. Stephen Wade interprets her function as a designation of "dichotomies involved in 'being a Jew' and being an American, the identity of a writer and the art of narrative, and the woman and sexuality as a metaphor for creativity" (1996, 118). Klausen's use of Frank occurs mainly in one novel, but he has experimented with the idea of moving a historic person from one country to another, which is the central aesthetic concept of *Anne F.*, in two other novels, *Death and Work* (*Døden i arbeid,* 2020) and *The Little Man from Argentina* (*Den lille mannen fra Argentina,* 2022), which respectively portray Mark Rothko and Adolf Eichmann. None of these have been translated into English; the translations here are mine.

Invention as parody

The Diary of Anne Frank was presented to the American audience in 1952.[5] The translation was launched with an introduction by Eleanor Roosevelt and quickly became a bestseller. A dramatisation written by Hollywood screenwriters Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett premiered at the Broadway Cort Theatre in 1955, and the script of it formed the basis for the 1959 film adaptation *The Diary of Anne Frank*, directed by George Stevens. Both the Broadway play and the Hollywood film production were awarded prestigious prizes and received a great amount of acclaim, but they were also controversial because of the ways in which they related to and produced Holocaust remembrance.[6]

Critics have pointed to the deliberate attempts to adapt to public tastes, for instance by moving Anne's romance with Peter van Daan and her erotic longings to centre stage. In an article at the time, Algene Ballif argued that Anne had become a caricatured combination child-woman, created by what Ballif saw as Broadway and Hollywood conventions of love stories and female desire. She calls the play a "travesty" that is guilty of "misrepresentations" and fails "to catch the spirit of the work from which it springs" (Ballif 1955). Others have noted an effort to "downplay both the real terror of Nazi totalitarianism and the ethnic or cultural specificity of its Jewish victims" (Spargo 2001, 98). Bruno Bettelheim, in a 1960 speech on the remediative chain of the book, the play and the film, discusses what he sees as a universal and uncritical response. He argues that the adaptation directs the audience's attention to the private and intimate sphere of Holocaust victims in order that they may forget the gas chambers and other Nazi crimes. This cannot be explained unless we recognise in it an effort to glorify "the ability to retreat into an extremely private, gentle, sensitive world", Bettelheim (1979, 247) argues.

Philip Roth's novel *The Ghost Writer* (1976) introduces the first-person narrator Nathan Zuckerman, who tells the story about himself in the 1950s, looking back

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5 The first translation was made by B. M. Mooyaart-Doubleday and published 1952 under the title *Anne Frank. The Diary of A Young Girl.* Later editions (1986, 1995) are published under the title *The Diary of Anne Frank.*

6 On Holocaust remembrance in the US, see Deborah E. Lipstadt 1996. She maintains that the "prominence of the Holocaust in American Jewish identity is particularly noteworthy since throughout the 1950s and most of the 1960s it was barely on the Jewish communal or theological agenda" (Lipstadt 1996, 195). But "it was not totally absent from the American popular cultural agenda. In contrast to what has often been the general impression there were a significant number of movies, plays, television productions, and books on the subject well before the end of the 1960s" (Lipstadt 1996, 195). According to Lipstadt, the translation and remediation of Anne Frank's diary is foremost among the media events that gained substantial attention.

from twenty years later at when he is a nascent writer obsessed with great literature, who visits his idol, the author E.I. Lonoff, in his New England residence. The first chapter, "Maestro", describes the widely acclaimed author, who is an unparalleled hero in Nathan's idolised universe, with an emphatically ironic touch. He has withdrawn from social life and lives in a now sexless relationship with his desperately distressed wife, Hope, in a "hideaway [...] at the end of an unpaved road twelve hundred feet up in the Berkshires" (Roth 2007, 3). His asceticism and anti-materialism have developed to such a degree that he demands half an egg for breakfast and cares for nothing other than writing; "Then we go for a walk in the hills and I'm haunted by the loss of all that good time", he confesses to Nathan (Roth 2007, 12). At the same time though, his writing appears as a futile and pathetic drive toward perfection, or perhaps towards writer's block, when he describes his daily routines: "I sit down at my little Olivetti and start looking at sentences and turning them around" (Roth 2007, 12). Lonoff, "the great man" (Roth 2007, 3), in his self-inflicted seclusion incorporates all the artistic ambition that Nathan longs for, but reveals himself as a writing ghost with hardly any suitable recommendations, though with some rather ridiculous ones, for his budding apprentice. Lonoff says that an author's individual voice is something "that begins at around the back of the knees and reaches well above the head" (Roth 2007, 47; for similar expressions, see also 51 and 70).

The parodic portrayal of Lonoff carefully resonates with the narrator Nathan's depiction of himself and makes the two of them each other's ghosts. Nathan repeatedly describes Lonoff's style as satire and even self-satire, but he is also confused about its meaning and is incapable of seeing the consequences of his own admiration of Lonoff. He refers to a student paper he had written in which he presents without reservation this venerated author with his "'translated English'" that lends "a mildly ironic flavour to even the most commonplace expression" (Roth 2007, 9). Nathan uses words like irony, satire, and parody in his dialogue with Lonoff and in several references to canonical titles and authors, but he fails to understand the hermeneutics of the concepts. Instead they work as reminders to the reader of how we must see Nathan as a product of Roth's exposure of his protagonist's blindness. By not bringing Nathan to see through his own naivety, the novel exposes the writers as either profoundly caught up in their own artistic egotism in the case of Lonoff or unable to decipher the many material and literary signs to which they are exposed in the case of Nathan.

One of these signs is a short but important reference to the Broadway theatre production of Anne Frank in a letter from Judge Wapter to Nathan that "strongly advises him" (Roth 2007, 66) to go and see it. Roth is unquestionably ironic when he lets Wapter describe the play as an "unforgettable experience" (Roth 2007, 66). The letter is an intervention in a conflict between Nathan and his father, who has vain-

ly tried to instruct Nathan to refrain from publishing a short story that his father believes will compromise the family and reinforce damaging myths about the Jews. Nathan's strict position is at once a defence of art as an independent discourse and also a refusal to depict Jews in an idealised or at least sympathetic way.

This attitude is obviously shared by the author Roth, who uses the Anne Frank story to discuss Jewish identity and self-understanding, and the commercial exploitation of Jewish history. He lets his protagonist invent a copy of Anne in the character of Amy Bellette, a twenty-six-year-old student and assistant of Lonoff, who works in his home and is present during Nathan's visit. Nathan is immediately fascinated by this woman, who plays multiple roles in the novel as a rival to Lonoff's wife Hope, as a child who longs for a father's love, as a student with ambitions in need of a mentor, and as the object of sexual desire for the young visitor. After a sleepless night spent listening to what he thinks is an intimate rendezvous between Lonoff and Amy, Nathan writes a story (chapter three, "Femme Fatale") in which he imagines that Amy is the surviving Anne Frank.

Amy's resemblance to Anne Frank is constructed in the novel as a mix of ekphrases of the well-known black-and-white photos of the Dutch girl, and of the popular Broadway and Hollywood remake of her. In the photos she is close to the real world and to history, and it is this version that Nathan recognises at the first glance, though he also gives her a high Shakespearean forehead. He says of his first sight of Amy: "[...] and there she was, hair dark and profuse, eyes pale – grey or green – and with a forehead that looked like Shakespeare's" (Roth 2007, 11). In the play and film she reflects the child-woman from stage and screen, whose appearance is mysteriously inconsistent: "Here she appeared again. But what had seemed from a distance like beauty, pure and simple, was more of a puzzle up close" (Roth 2007, 15). This second version seems to take power in the listening scene, where Amy begs for the love of her employer, who is old enough to be her father.

This scene, which also has its comical ingredients, echoes the many scenes of listening in the diary, and one episode of eavesdropping in the film of Anne Frank. Instead of alluding to the historically real fear of being found, which must have consumed the families in hiding, it parodically exposes a young man's erotic fantasies and jealous feelings towards his mentor, who seems to have won the young woman's heart. Roth's irony has one of its peripeties at the end of chapter two, "Nathan Dedalus", when his young protagonist digests the scene between Amy and Lonoff that he has just picked up on: "Oh, if only I could have imagined the scene I've overheard! If only I could invent as presumptuously as real life" (Roth 2007, 78). Nothing is more attractive to him than portraying real life, but life is never more real than when it is invented. So he writes a story about Amy as Anne, which is revealed in the novel as chapter three, "Femme Fatale".

The mix of reality and invention escalates in this chapter, since Amy appears not only as a lookalike but emerges as the real Anne Frank, or believes herself to be so in Nathan's version. She has survived the death camp and has moved to the United States. Here she visits the theatre production based on her own book and sits "amid the weeping and inconsolable audience at the famous New York production of *The Diary of Anne Frank*" (Roth 2007, 80). Amy's identification is complete, and yet is insane. She tells her story of escape to Lonoff, who sympathises with her and her delusions, but who refrains from telling Hope about them, perhaps because she would have confirmed what he knows are the true causes of the girl's mental collapse: "[I]t was for him, the great writer, that Amy had chosen to become Anne Frank" (Roth 2007, 100). Roth's ironies underpin the implied criticism of the patriarchal structures and oedipal tensions that saturate the novel, and also young Nathan's pathetic admiration for his great forerunners in the literary tradition.[7]

The revelation of chapter three as Nathan's own imagination adds to the ironies of the text and emphasises how it parodies the legacy of Anne Frank as collective memory. Nathan's invention of Anne as a survivor in the American cultural scene reflects how her diary was used by powerful influencers who had interests other than commemorating the Holocaust. Roth does not use the word "parasite", but his description of the writers Lonoff and Nathan, and of the theatre production and its audience comes close to a judgement that they are living off and exploiting Anne's life and work. In Roth's ironic style, Nathan's blind admiration of his idol Lonoff becomes a subtle criticism of a narcissistic attitude to literature. The aspiring young man's comment that he has "evolved" his invention about Frank and the Lonoffs while he was lying "in the dark study, transported by his [Lonoff's] praise and throbbing with resentment of my disapproving father" (Roth 2007, 101), seems to be self-ironic but is nevertheless not refined enough to acquit him of the same narcissism.

In Nathan's invented chapter, "Femme Fatale", Amy describes the Broadway production in her testimony to Lonoff. She appears in a New York hotel room to her famous mentor, who has driven down from the Berkshires at night, as a primary witness not of the genocide, but of the play. She had been "[w]eeping hysterically" when telling him on the phone about the theatre experience, and she explains now that her hysterical reaction is caused "by the people watching with me. [...] Carloads of women kept pulling up to the theatre, women wearing fur coats, with expensive shoes and handbags" (Roth 2007, 79). She watches them

7 The novel not only features an ambitious young writer but is also soaked with references to literature through titles, genres, characters, and canonical authors. Its four parts are called "Maestro", "Nathan Dedalus", "Femme Fatale", and "Married to Tolstoy". Amy has taken her name "from an American book she had sobbed over as a child, *Little Women*" (Roth 2007, 81).

cry and listens to their screams, but her problem is not the audience's affective responses; rather it is the thought of what disclosing her survival will mean. "I have to be dead to everyone" (Roth 2007, 80), she thinks, including to her father. Amy has discovered from a magazine that Otto Frank is still alive, but she cannot now get in touch with him because the illusion of her death must be preserved. One of her conclusions, as Nathan presents it, is that the impact of her story would not have been the same if she had been a survivor.

If we read Amy Bellette as a psychoanalytic interpretation, her hysteria results from the shock when she is confronted with her own masquerade. What she witnesses in the theatre is the emotional response from spectators who believe in the story of her deportation and death. To them her survival is a betrayal, and she must hide it. But this psychoanalytic perspective is not Roth's concern. Instead he makes Amy confess to Lonoff that retelling the show to him, her "Dad-da" (Roth 2007, 80), is an imitation of his art. She has staged a little personal drama in the Biltmore hotel, "a joke" (Roth 2007, 80) in her own words, only in order to reuse and perform what she has experienced in the theatre as a typical Lonoff narrative. Amy's testimony, in Nathan's imagination, is in other words an ironic insertion of the great writer's work into the commodification and commercialisation that is the American culture of Holocaust remembrance.

Roth's novel has many semantic layers, mirrors, and doubles, and its predominantly ironic style makes it a complex narrative and a challenging read. Roth unquestionably replies to the strong tendency to sanctify the Holocaust, and the risk of being read as a violator of the Jewish inheritance was not far off at the time the novel was published.[8] His earlier provocative publications and his controversial status in the American literary scene meant that Roth was indeed prepared for a lot of negative reaction, and as expected, many contemporary critics accused him of trivialising the memories of Anne Frank.[9] To read the novel as a frivolous account of the Jewish genocide and a disrespectful treatment of the Jewish destiny, it must first be assumed that Roth is mocking Frank's diary. He evidently takes a great risk when he lets his fictive character Nathan change the most sacrosanct myth in Jewish-American culture and the rich connotations of martyrdom around

8 Among the critical voices arguing against trivialising the Jewish experience was Elie Wiesel. In a famous review of the TV series "Holocaust", he concludes: "The Holocaust must be remembered. But not as a show" (Wiesel 1978). R. Clifton Spargo points at "luminaries such as Theodor Adorno, Eli [*sic*] Wiesel, and Lawrence Langer", who argue that "to treat the Holocaust through fiction is already to trivialize it" (Spargo 2001, 91).

9 R. Clifton Spargo refers to a review by Jack Beatty as perhaps the "most condemnatory" (2001, 114). In *The New Republic*, October 1979, Beatty calls Roth's appropriation of Holocaust history a severe "lapse of taste" (Spargo 2001, 114).

Anne Frank's life and death, but a closer reading must recognise that the object of parodic reinvention for the novel is not the diary itself but the ways in which it has been adapted and customised into the American production of commercial and sentimental memory.

There are parts of the novel that diverge from the generally ironic style of Roth, and these are the passages in chapter three where Nathan describes Anne Frank's life, destiny and diary. He reveals earlier, in a telephone conversation with his mother, who criticises him for his stubborn attitude to Judge Wapter, that he has not seen the theatre production, only read the book: "I didn't see it. I read the book. *Everybody* read the book" (Roth 2007, 69). His rejection of the play is contrasted in the "femme fatale" chapter with an unironic account of the birth of an author, Anne Frank. Here, Nathan's – and surely Roth's – unreserved admiration of the young Dutch girl's talent shines through: "Who realized she was so gifted? Who realized we had such a writer in our midst?" (Roth 2007, 87). Even her Jewishness is addressed when Nathan learns from the diarist about how minimal the Jewish rituals were in the household, and about the father who reads "Goethe in German and Dickens in English" (Roth 2007, 93) instead of the Bible to his two girls. Ultimately, the "ghost" (Roth 2007, 95) in the novel is Anne, whose haunting presence in the life of Nathan throws shadows into every corner of his existence. However, her ghost does not haunt him like the phantom we know from Abraham and Torok's psychoanalytical theories.[10] Instead, she is a ghost *writer*, and so the astonishing achievement of Anne Frank as an author can be considered the novel's primary concern in its interaction with the past.

An interesting approach to the novel's parodic structure is proposed by R. Clifton Spargo, whose enlightening and comprehensive reading discusses *The Ghost Writer* in its ironic negotiations with American commercialism. Spargo argues that Roth "transforms Nathan's potentially trivialising appropriation of a Holocaust story into a parodic account of a cultural memory already implicated in patterns of falsifying commemoration" (2001, 111). He states that for Roth it is a critical commonplace that fiction might act as a "distorting lens" (Spargo 2001, 88) in its remediation of history. By overstating this distortion through pure invention, *The Ghost Writer* addresses the "very possibility of interpretation" (Spargo 2001, 88). Spargo's aim is to reveal how Roth's novel "recalls several layers of cultural memory through which Anne Frank has been made a property of the American

10 Abraham writes: "It is a fact that the 'phantom,' whatever its form, is nothing but an invention of the living. Yes, an invention in the sense that the phantom is meant to objectify, even if under the guise of individual or collective hallucinations, the gap produced in us by the concealment of some part of a love object's life. The phantom is therefore also a metapsychological fact: what haunts are not the dead, but the gaps left within us by the secrets of others" (Abraham 1994, 171).

popular imagination" (2001, 89). In this project, he also reflects substantially on the "give and take between history and cultural memory" (Spargo 2001, 89) and wonders how fiction can be "whimsically inventive and perhaps irresponsible" (Spargo 2001, 88–89) in relation to historical facts, but how it also takes the opportunity to show "just how much or how little people make of the history available to them" (Spargo 2001, 89).

Spargo's reading is highly relevant to the discussion of travelling memories, and I concur with him when he suggests that literature can be a distorting lens through which the past is changed into a different present. I also accept his point in foregrounding parodic invention as a response to the various uses of a historic text. Because of this invention, the novel is clearly about the "very possibility of interpretation" (Spargo 2001, 88) and addresses the many problematic ways in which the past is remembered in the collective memory. I am more reluctant about the word "falsifying", which is reasonable to a certain point in the context that Spargo analyses, where the diary is re-enacted and performed in a truly "distorted" way. However, the premise of the concept of falseness is the theoretical dichotomy of the dualism of right and wrong. As a text about interpretation, Roth's ironies reject clearcut oppositions and instead provoke the reader to reconsider their convictions and prejudices. Its motif of travelling – on many levels – joins in with the moving of memories but refuses, as I see it, to fix the interpretation as either true or false. The erotic and oedipal motif that the Broadway and film adaptations pick up and expand for instance are not pulled out of the blue, which would make them "false", but have some explicit base in references in Anne's diary. These motifs are textually anchored but are enlarged and altered to adjust to a foreign audience and a different commercial market. As a novel about interpretation, and with parodic invention as a stylistic strategy, Roth's commemoration project highlights these implications of the diary's cross-cultural travelling.

My reading of *The Ghost Writer* in the context of mnemonic migration emphasises the inventive possibilities of fiction. Roth uses the Anne Frank motif to hypothesise how an imagined life of the deceased girl would look like if she had survived. He also transfers her from the context of war in Europe to an American post-war commercial culture, where the genocide of the Jews reappears as tear-jerking entertainment. Even the established literary scene is given a critical self-examination as a responsible working-through of the crimes of the past. However, Roth also recognises the potential of fiction for documenting the past and preserving the memory of it. Embedded in his parodic narrative of a young man's pathetic admiration of his immediate forerunner is a story about a girl who managed to write a text that affects him deeply. In the perspective of travelling memories, *The Ghost Writer* contributes to our understanding of the ways in which fiction

works as a site where remembrance is negotiated in the tension between history and parody.

Invention as space

Moving on to the contemporary literary scene, I have chosen a Norwegian novel as an example of mnemonic migration. The plot of Kristian Klausen's *Anne F.* (2021) gives both literal representation and an aesthetic thematisation to the question of travelling memories, which is highly relevant here. Unlike Roth, Klausen does not make use of ironic rhetoric, but rather he examines the ways in which space and materiality work in aesthetic articulations as preservers and inventors of memory. Both authors indisputably share an admiration of Anne Frank and her diary, and this also motivates the comparison.

The Diary of Anne Frank has appeared in three translations into Norwegian, by Inger Hagerup in 1952, by Tormod Haugen in 1995, and by Bodil Engen in 2010.[11] The play by Frances Goodrich and Albert Hackett has been translated and performed in Norway several times, but it has not, as far as I have been able to establish, been reviewed in a critical way like the American theatre production. The reception of the diary has first and foremost focused on the Jewish girl and her family's tragic history in continental Europe, and until recently the story of Anne Frank was not linked to the fate of Norwegian Jews, a fate that for a long time did not get much public attention.[12] Only during the past decade and thanks to the books by Bjarte Bruland (2017), Marte Michelet (2014, 2018) and Synne Corell (2021) has the involvement of the Norwegian police and bureaucracy in the deportation of the Jews and the confiscation of their property triggered extensive debate. Recent life writing from second and third-generation Jewish family members has also been important in illuminating the experiences of the Norwegian Jews and their descendants.[13]

While *The Ghost Writer* parodically deals with American adaptations and receptions of *The Diary of Anne Frank*, Kristian Klausen's 2021 novel *Anne F.* engages

11 The 1995 version, which was published on the fiftieth anniversary of the liberation, was the first complete edition.

12 The destiny of Norwegian Jews was not totally unknown but for a long time it was generally ignored or silenced. Important contributions to their story are Herman Sachnowitz's testimony *It Also Concerns You (Det angår også deg*, 1978) and testimonies published by Lothe and Storeide (2006) and Lothe (2013). However, it is probably correct to say that there has been a boom in attention to the history of the Jews in Norway over the past ten years.

13 See Mona Levin 2015, Monica Csango 2017, Nina F. Grünfeld 2020 and Irene Levin 2020.

instead with the creation and the critical survival of the book. It does not reflect on current controversies around the fate of the Norwegian Jews but focuses entirely on questions of aesthetics and remembrance. Klausen's invention is to move the war story from Amsterdam in the Netherlands to Drammen in Norway, a city of about 26,000 inhabitants in 1940 and 66,000 today, and to reflect on the memories in their relation to space. The author calls his novel a "contrafactual fantasy" and writes in a note that it is "spun out of certain biographical markers and is replaced into new (Norwegian) places" (Klausen 2021, 137).[14] He informs the reader that the ways in which Jews were treated in the Netherlands have reappeared in the novel's Norwegian context, where the situation was slightly different, and that historically speaking some of the descriptions of Drammen in the 1940s are incorrect. His intention, in other words, is not to recapitulate the people, environments, and events from the past in a historically accurate way, but to create a new universe with well-known historic people and a recognisable local landscape. As a contribution to the cultural memory of the Holocaust, *Anne F.* certainly keeps the historic trauma alive, but uses the allusions in the diary to elaborate on the transformation of memories and on the commemoration processes themselves. Like Roth's novel, it dissolves the static opposition of wrong and right and draws attention to the ways in which memory is produced by a more dynamic process of travelling.

Anne F. features Otto Frank as its main character and is a third person narrative written from his point of view. The novel's plot is set in the past, mainly in the period from October 1942 to the liberation in 1945, but with a few retrospections and a summary of Otto Frank's life until 1949 (the real Frank died in 1980). Dates and hours are usually precisely noted and correspond well to historic events, but time as a human way of understanding is principally constructed through space, using several strolls around the city, and a central sculpture. The strolls are corporeal practices, and the sculpture is a physical object, but both motifs serve as an aid to understanding how memories are embedded in an environment and essentially connected to materiality. A third aspect of the mental-material issue lies in the metafictional dimension of the novel, which is about writing as a memorising practice.

Anne F. leads the reader into a geography with a lot of Norwegian place names. In the very first sentence we learn that Otto Frank has locked himself out of the house at 17 Griffenfeld's Street, where the family has taken refuge, and in the rest of the chapter we follow him through a city with names like Selmer's Street,

14 "en kontrafaktisk fantasi [...] spunnet ut fra visse biografiske markører og omplassert til nye (norske) steder". All the translations from Norwegian in this chapter are mine.

Konnerud Street, Bragernes and Strømsø Square, into the Lauritzen bookstore where he buys a notebook for Anne, until he ends up in a café in the Globusgården department store from where he looks down at the bronze sculpture on a roundabout. In the last chapter we learn that in the autumn of 1945 the family's apartment at 29 Sehested's Street has been sold because Otto Frank cannot stay in a flat filled with memories of his dead family members. From his new dorm in the paper factory district Grønland, he can view the past, which is represented by the two former addresses at Griffenfeld's Street and Sehested's Street. His life, in other words, is summed up in a triangle of street names and from a point of view where the past is always present.

With this significant use of names, semantic threads are drawn between perceptions from sensations in the present and remembrance of memories of the past, and accordingly between time and space. The place brings back memories, and in the thoughts of the fictive character Otto Frank, mental ribbons are tied between places he experiences now, and people with whom he visited those places in the past. In a paragraph towards the end of the first chapter, the narrator explains this application of names as a way of remembering and preserving relationships. Here, Otto Frank looks back not only at his own experiences in the houses he has inhabited but also at places and streets he experienced together with a former girlfriend Synnøve Bakke, and with his youngest daughter Anne: "He associated her [Synnøve] with Erik Børresen's Street, Engene, Haugen's Street, Blich's Street, Tollbu Street, and Lange's Street. Strangely enough, Anne also loved to walk with him through the city, and then they inevitably had to walk through the same streets, exactly the same streets"[15] (Klausen 2001, 16).

Together with the strolls around the city streets, the sculpture *The three districts*[16] is central to the novel's reflections on time and space. The name of the sculpture is allegorical, as it does not depict districts but is shaped as three women, and this urges consideration of the intertwined relationship between verbal and visual representation. Klausen informs the reader in a note that the artwork was made by Per Hurum in 1952 and therefore does not have an authenticating function. The real sculpture from 1952 appears in Klausen's 2021 novel as an ekphrasis denoting a piece of art from 1942 that always oscillates between the verbal three districts and the visual three women. Klausen uses this material motif

15 "Han forbandt henne [Synnøve] med Erik Børresens gate, Engene, Haugens gate, Blichs gate, Tollbugata og Langes gate. Det snodige var at Anne Frank også likte så godt å gå turer sammen med Otto gjennom byen, og da gikk de jo uunngåelig i de samme gatene, nøyaktig de samme gatene".

16 "De tre bydeler".

that he establishes through his protagonist's memories to emphasise and scrutinise the power of art to engage in memory processes.

The ekphrases in *Anne F.* are dominant parts of the text and thus underscore the sculpture's significance in the novel's exploration of memory-making. Its triangular form and dynamic character are qualities that mirror the novel's own structure. In the first chapter, Otto Frank sits in the café in Globusgården and looks down at "a sculpture group in bronze on a plinth" (Klausen 2021, 9).[17] It depicts three naked women with their backs turned toward each other and holding hands, who are meant to represent the three districts Bragernes, Strømsø and Tangen.[18] However, to Otto Frank they not only express the geography of the city but also reflect his erotic life and the three women he has had relationships with. These women – Birgitte, Synnøve and Edith – are then described one after the other, with Edith as the most important because she is the one he marries and with whom he has his two daughters, Margot and Anne.

The sculpture itself is far from static, as it corrodes, and acquires marks and a turquoise-green shading, but Klausen emphasises its ability to set perceptions, thoughts, and memories in motion. At first it reflects Otto's three girlfriends, but it changes meaning in the two last chapters, as he tries to return his life to normal after the war. He approaches the sculpture again reluctantly, as if he fears it has been transformed, and now indeed it does not appear like it did before. In his re-experience, one of the women is still Edith, but now she is totally devastated by grief and suffering. In his thoughts she is "[n]aked and lost in the death camp"[19] (Klausen 2021, 124). The two others are no longer Birgitte and Synnøve, but Margot and Anne, who, before he knows what has happened to them, "constituted a ring of hope"[20] (Klausen 2021, 124). As Otto perceives the sculpture at different times in his life, it changes meaning and triggers memories of various kinds. Ekphrases of the sculpture work as manifestations of how an aesthetic object provokes, materialises, and processes memories.

The last ekphrasis of the sculpture points to the third important aspect of the novel's investigation of the mental and material relations in acts of memory. On a metafictional level it constructs an analogy between the sculpture's work as a memory site and the creation of both the diary and the novel. In this ekphrasis Otto verbalises his thoughts about the implications of this analogy: "Anne stood there and held the hands of her sister and mother, they made up a circle of living,

17 "en skulpturgruppe i bronse på sokkel".
18 "representere de tre bydelene Bragernes, Strømsø og Tangen".
19 "[n]aken og fortapt i dødsleiren".
20 "utgjorde en ring av håp".

because they would always be living, in the diaries"[21] (Klausen 2021, 129). The common denominator of artwork and fiction is, in other words, the ability to preserve and animate memories, which is expressed in this thought by the metaphor of "living".

The diary that Anne writes is not only a theme in the novel and a pretext for the remediation of it, but also a material object that somebody must provide for, take care of, and distribute. These circumstances attract a great deal of attention, and the "living" literature explicitly occurs as a product of targeted strolls to and from the bookstore and the attic. This narrative strand starts with the story of how Otto Frank buys a diary with the brand name "Andvord", a word he recognises because it reminds him of the German "Antwort", meaning 'answer'. The intertextual relevance here is that Anne Frank's diary is today read as an answer to the German aggression and the Jewish genocide, while the novel we are about to read, *Anne F.*, is an answer to the diary. Klausen positions his project in the frames of Holocaust remembrance, but most of all he underscores the material conditions and the memorising possibilities of creative fiction.[22]

Gradually, Anne fills the notebooks, and the family's helpers, Jan and Miep Gies, buy new ones. Chapter one is a detour in the memories of Otto Frank past the places he went on his stroll with the primary goal of purchasing the book, and then the end of chapter three is a parallel narrative with Jan and Miep Gies in the main roles. On Jan's trip to the Lauritzen bookstore, the reader learns about his work as a lecturer at the Latin high school, his fascination with the literature of antiquity, his many travels in the world of literature, and his only real journey, which was to Sicily with his wife Miep. We learn about Miep's work in the school kitchen, how she meets Jan on her way home, how they buy food with their

21 "Anne sto der og holdt hendene med sin søster og mor, de dannet en krets, av levende, for de ville nå alltid være levende, i dagbøkene".

22 Even Philip Roth is concerned with the material conditions of literary creation. Firstly, in a comic way, he describes Nathan's reluctant considerations when he climbs onto Lonoff's desk the better to hear the couple above him: "I had gone far enough already by expropriating the corner of the desk to compose my half dozen unfinished letters home" (Roth 2007, 75). Secondly, and quite elaborately, an emphasis on materiality is put in Nathan's account of Amy's illusion of having written Anne's diary. In Nathan's imagined story, she orders the book from Amsterdam and picks the package up at the post office: "When she had finally untied the string and unfolded, without tearing, the layers of thick brown paper, it seemed to her that what she had so meticulously removed from the wrappings and placed onto the lap of her clean and pretty American girl's beige linen skirt was her survival itself" (Roth 2007, 86). From that position, a retrospection on the beginning of her writing starts: "Until she ran out of pages and had to carry over onto office ledgers, she made the entries in a cardboard-covered notebook that he'd given her for her thirteenth birthday" (Roth 2007, 86).

coupons and finally bring the food and the diary up to the attic. In this way, the city strolls are closely tied to their most important function as a prerequisite for the creation of a text.

After the betrayal and deportation of the families, it is Miep Gies who launches a rescue operation to find the texts that Anne has written. Her risky undertaking is meticulously described through her wanderings through the city and into the house, until she finds the notebooks strewn around in the attic. She picks them up and puts them in a shoe box that she puts under her arm as she goes to Strømsgodset church, passes the churchyard, and walks up to Thomas Bjerknes's street. When the war is over and Otto Frank has come home, he is given the shoe box by Miep: "It contained two green Andvord books, two blue Emo books, six black Moleskine books, three larger Moleskine books, and eight Leuchtturm books in different colours"[23] (Klausen 2021, 127). The last part of the novel depicts Otto's struggle with editing and transcribing the notebooks, and his futile attempts to interest Norwegian publishers in publishing it. As an alternative, he buys a tape recorder and reads the text that Anne wrote and he transcribed, and then finally he sits down to listen to his own reading of Anne's diary. The narrator explains that he does this because his sight is deteriorating, but by listening to his own voice, and to the silences and cracklings from the tape, Otto gets a richer experience of his memories than he could get only by reading.

Klausen's 2021 novel underscores the inventive character of his universe but maintains a relation to the text it is built on that makes the reader reflect on the connection between them. *Anne F.* positions itself in a contemporary landscape as a novel that emphasises memory as invention, but that does not have the parodic elements that Roth uses from his American point of view in 1979. Instead it foregrounds spatiality as an aesthetically pertinent approach to remembrance, and so it fits into the discussion of travelling memories in ways that first and foremost highlight materiality as an essential requirement for memory. It proposes an understanding of mnemonic migration as a process of transition that is fundamentally based upon and distributed by physical objects that help memories travel, and on which those memories even ultimately depend.

Material objects like streets and sculptures are usually considered static and the opposite of movement and travel. In his book *Space and Place. The Perspective of Experience*, Yi-Fu Tuan underscores that place is "essentially a static concept" (1977, 179), but he also offers various approaches to understanding the relationship between time and place, and reflects on "place as time made visible, or place as

23 "Den inneholdt to grønne Andvord-bøker, to blå Emo-bøker, seks sorte Moleskine-bøker, tre større sorte Moleskine-bøker, og åtte Leuchtturm-bøker i ulike farger".

memorial to times past" (1977, 179). In a similar vein, Astrid Erll emphasises how mnemonic constellations "may look static and bounded when scholars select for their research, as they tend to do, manageable sections of reality (temporal, spatial, or social ones), but they become fuzzy as soon as the perspective is widened" (2011, 14). Kristian Klausen's novel addresses the seemingly stable object of a sculpture and the static space of the urban landscape in fuzzy intertwinements with memory processes, both as the mental phenomenon of individual remembrance, and the media phenomenon of the book and the tape recorder.

The triangular pattern of the novel, which is manifested by the three women in different assemblages, the three districts, and the three addresses through which Otto Frank remembers his past, corresponds to a material matrix that foregrounds memory as a vibrant negotiation with spatiality. My reading of the novel's triangular pattern emphasises three strands of its thematic, which are its elaboration of the strolls, its focus on the sculpture, and its metafictional aspects. A last reflection on this triangularity is that it may underpin a hermeneutics of memory that refuses to see it in a dualistic sense as a relationship between past events and present commemorations. Artistic works and literary fictions intervene in these processes, thereby problematising their status as straightforward mental and material transporters of events. The notion of travelling memories receives a reciprocal but anti-linear dimension that calls for a dynamic understanding of their ways of working. My interpretation of *Anne F.* has unearthed the understanding of what Astrid Erll calls the "multilinear and often fuzzy trajectories of cultural remembering and forgetting" (2011, 14).

Conclusion

Both of these novels are part of the collective remembrance of the Holocaust even though their immediate concerns are both decidedly subjective and clearly local or culturally specific. Both authors are undoubtedly impressed by the young Dutch girl's talent for writing, and they use her text as an inspiration for their own. Their admiration is not explicitly mentioned, but it serves as an implied motivation for bringing her story into their projects, which deal more with the creation of literature than with the destiny of the Jews. In these two novels Anne Frank's diary does not represent first and foremost an occasion to investigate the Jewish genocide as a historical catastrophe, or the policy of extermination as an antisemitic ideology, but gives the chance to consider the different aesthetic effects of remembrance of the genocide. Both authors take it for granted that the historical circumstances are well known, letting them emphasise instead the aesthetical aspects of the processes of remembrance and remediation. The memorialising effect of

their fiction is nevertheless unquestionable, and it demonstrates how Frank's book has successfully travelled and been used in new cultural contexts.

In Roth's *The Ghost Writer*, the remediation of Frank's diary works as a symptom of an American cultural imperialism that is relatively blind to otherness and past atrocities. The novel, with its ironies, directs its gaze inwardly to the Jewish-American community's reluctance to cope with its past, and outwardly to the mass media industry's servile adaptations to mainstream entertainment. Roth's parodic invention of Anne Frank as a post-war immigrant in the US and the hypothesis of her watching the play based on her own book demands a critical reflection on the ways in which Holocaust memory is remediated. This metafictional thematic, with its focus on a series of remediations, turns the question sharply onto the novel itself and illuminates various mechanisms of mnemonic migration.

In Klausen's *Anne F.*, the diary is thematised as a literary expression that allows past events and people to be remembered and to stay aesthetically alive. *Anne F.* is not critical and ironic in the way *The Ghost Writer* is, and it is reconstructive where Roth's is deconstructive, but Klausen's use of fictional invention has a similar overstating profile. The narrative concept of moving the internally displaced people from Amsterdam in the Netherlands to Drammen in Norway facilitates a thought experiment where various aspects of remembrance can be aesthetically scrutinised. In his contrafactual fantasy, Klausen proposes material objects and an urban landscape as an important support for, or substance of, memory, thus emphasising both the mental and mediative processes of remembrance.

Both novels address transcultural remediations and inspire reflection on the very act of aesthetic transformation of memories. Both novels scrutinise how aesthetic articulations not only remember the past and work as memory agents, but may also independently reflect on the mental and mediative processes of remembrance. Different in attitude but comparable in mode, the two novels investigate the relation of a literary text to its antecedent sources and foreground a hermeneutics of invention. As fictions of a distinct meta-discursive kind and of complex intertextuality, they offer sophisticated approaches to the meaning of travelling memories.

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Hanna Meretoja

Literature as an Exploration of Past Worlds as Spaces of Possibility: Herta Müller's *The Hunger Angel*

This chapter develops the concept of a space of possibility to theorise how literature functions as a medium of cultural memory and mnemonic migration. I suggest that an important way in which fiction can help us understand past worlds is by dealing with them as spaces of possibility in which certain modes of action, thought and affect were possible, while others were impossible or unlikely. Crucial to why we read historical and memory fiction is perhaps less the desire to know "historical facts" about a specific historical world and more an interest in getting a sense of what it might have been like to live in that world. Through engagement with narrative fiction we can obtain not only a sense of that world as *a space of possibilities* in which individuals negotiate their life choices but also resources to reflect on the relevance of that space for our current *sense of the possible* (Meretoja 2018, 2, 14 – 16, 90 – 97). The notion of a space of possibilities allows us to resist the reification of the past and to see both that individuals have agency in shaping the course of events that may seem to have been necessary and that such agency has limits set by the historical world in which it is embedded. I suggest that cultural memory studies would benefit from paying more sustained attention to the aspect of the possible in looking at how cultural memorial forms travel and shape our understanding of past and present worlds. I will develop this theoretical approach in dialogue with how Herta Müller's novel *The Hunger Angel* (2012, *Atemschaukel,* 2009a) depicts a Soviet forced labour camp as a space of possibilities in which certain modes of action, thought and affect were possible and others were impossible or extremely difficult.

Spaces of possibilities

Ever since Aristotle, philosophical and theoretical reflection on literature has been dominated by the idea that literary fiction belongs to the realm of the possible, which is contrasted with the realm of the actual and real. Aristotle (1985, 1451a) argued that literature is more philosophical than history since it deals with the possible, or with what could be and what is probable, including general wisdom about life, whereas history deals with the actual and what is contingent, that is, with the randomness of what happens to happen. In the memory boom of the

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past few decades, however, it has become a widely shared view that literature is an important medium of cultural memory, which implies that literature is seen as playing a role in how we understand actual past worlds.[1] Literature helps shape how we remember the past, and it contributes to debates on whose experiences and stories get heard, and how the past is used in the present to mould identities and orientations to the future. It not only draws on cultural memorial forms, but also challenges and renews them.[2] As literature carries memories of the past to new contexts and as it transnationally transports memories from one cultural context to another, it functions as a vehicle of mnemonic migration. What I would like to suggest in this chapter is that, in this process, literature shapes our understanding of past worlds as spaces of possibility, and it can thereby open new possibilities for us in the present and as we imagine different futures.

As I have argued in my earlier work, the conceptual dichotomy between the actual and the possible has led to a dismissal of how a sense of the possible is integral to who we are and how it constitutes an important aspect of intersubjective reality in every actual world. This sense is crucial to how a historical world is experienced. By a *sense of the possible* I mean a sense of what possibilities were open in a specific historical world or social situation and a sense of how things could be otherwise. Fiction can explore past worlds as spaces of possibility in which certain modes of action, thought and affect were possible and others were impossible or unlikely. This means it can depict actual past worlds and also open new possibilities for us in the present and for the future. The way in which people in a past world understood their possibilities is a constitutive aspect of that past world as a space of possibilities. Literature not only provides interpretations of actual worlds past and present through its own literary means, but it can also enrich and expand our sense of real worlds as spaces of possibilities.[3]

Both literary theorists and philosophers have tended to share Gottlob Frege's view that fiction lacks truth value and so is not, as Dorrit Cohn puts it, "subject to judgments of truth and falsity" (1999, 15; see also Doležel 2010, 36–42; Frege 2008 [1892], 23–46). Cohn defines fiction as "nonreferential narrative" and argues that a fictional world "remains to its end severed from the actual world" (1999, 9, 13). Such theories of fictionality rely on the idea that reality consists of "facts" that can be objectively observed, but this position ignores the way in which human reality also consists of such invisible phenomena as patterns of experience, affect

1 On literature as a medium of cultural memory, see e.g. Erll 2011a, 144–171.

2 On cultural memorial forms, see Laanes and Meretoja 2021.

3 As I here develop the idea of mnemonic migration as a process of understanding past worlds as spaces of possibilities, I will draw on my discussions on the possible in Meretoja 2018, 14–15, 90–93, 2023, 2024a, 2024b.

and meaning-giving. Past worlds are also constituted by thoughts, feelings and representations, or by what is invisible and perishable, and so the study of the past should also involve mapping the possibilities of the past (Salmi 2011, 173–174; Wyschogrod 1998).

Fiction can be a particularly productive mode of exploring past worlds as spaces of possibilities. It can give a sense of how inhabiting a world means inhabiting a particular space of possibilities in which it is possible to experience, perceive, think, feel, do, and imagine certain things, and difficult or impossible to experience, perceive, think, feel, do, and imagine other things (Meretoja 2018, 14–15, 2023, 140). In developing this idea, I have been inspired by Paul Ricoeur who argues that fiction can function as a "detector of possibilities buried in the actual past": "What 'might have been' – the possible in Aristotle's terms – includes both the potentialities of the 'real' past and the 'unreal' possibilities of pure fiction" (1988 [1985], 191–192).

This understanding of the power of fiction also draws on Reinhart Koselleck's concepts of "space of experience" [*Erfahrungsraum*] and "horizon of expectation" [*Erwartungshorizont*] (2004). The space of experience refers to the way in which a certain historical world is shaped by frameworks of meaning, an important aspect of which is how it understands the past. The horizon of expectation, in turn, signifies the way in which the people of that world orient themselves to the future and imagine the yet-to-be (Koselleck 2004 [1979]). Narrative practices shape both spaces of experience and horizons of expectation, and the shifting relationships between them. Neither the space of experience nor the horizon of expectation of a particular world, however, is as homogenous as Koselleck makes them sound. As Rancière puts it, each age includes the "co-presence of heterogeneous temporalities" (2013 [2000], 26). In a sense, a historical world always consists of a multitude of historical worlds.

Fiction can deal with historical worlds as heterogeneous spaces of possibility by depicting them from multiple perspectives and showing that they do not provide the same possibilities to everyone. Different possibilities are available from different subject positions, which are constituted through relationships of power (Meretoja 2023, 138). It is also important to acknowledge that a temporally changing sense of the possible is crucial to how individuals experience a historical world as a space of experience. I will next discuss this idea in relation to Herta Müller's novel *The Hunger Angel*, which shows how extreme conditions, such as those in a forced labour camp, diminish the inmates' sense of the possible.

The Soviet labour camp as a space of possibilities

Herta Müller's *The Hunger Angel* recounts the experiences of a 17-year-old gay man called Leo Auberg who is deported from his small Romanian hometown to a Soviet labour camp, known as the Gulag.[4] In the 1940s, Romanian-Germans were ordered to contribute to rebuilding the Soviet Union in forced labour camps, and some 60,000 – 75,000 Romanian-Germans were deported, of whom at least 3000 died in the camps. The forced labour camps were part of the Soviet plan for German war reparations. In *The Hunger Angel*, Leo Auberg ends up spending five years of his life in a camp in Nowo-Gorlowka (Novogorlovka, Ukraine, now part of Gorlovka), with paralysing hunger as his constant companion. Initially, he welcomes the forced departure from his hometown where he has felt suffocated by homophobia and conservative norms, but in the camp severe hunger quickly transforms his life, and he becomes permanently a captive of what he calls the "hunger angel" [*Hungerengel*]. The novel draws on the real-world experiences of Oskar Pastior, a Romanian-born German poet who was deported in January 1945 to the Soviet Union for forced labour, like many other ethnic Germans from Eastern Europe after the war. Herta Müller planned to write the book together with Pastior, but after he died, Müller ended up writing the book on her own. Müller also drew partly on her mother's experiences in the camp and particularly on the silence that surrounded her experiences (Müller 2009b).

While many commentators have emphasised the documentary aspects of *The Hunger Angel*, others have argued that a "dichotomy between truth and fiction is at the core of Müller's poetics" and that the novel "belongs to fiction and not to historical narrative" (Shopin 2014, 198, 212). Such a dichotomy, however, is highly problematic. I suggest that we can transcend it by seeing the novel as a way of imagining the camp as a space of possibilities that set boundaries on what was possible for the prisoners, and that this is elemental to the way *The Hunger Angel* contributes to the cultural memory of the Soviet labour camps. Müller deals with these experiences as a German novelist with a background in Romania. She writes in a language that made her a minority writer in Romania and that happens to be a majority language in Europe. In 1987, Müller emigrated to West Germany after being persecuted for years by Nicolae Ceaușescu's government. *The Hunger Angel* manifests mnemonic migration in the way it transfers the fictionalised memories of a forced labourer in a Soviet labour camp to German-language audiences, both German minorities in Romania and other Central and Eastern Europe-

4 The Gulag was a system of forced labour camps that Joseph Stalin established during his reign, from the 1920s to the early 1950s. They incarcerated about 18 million people.

an countries, and German-language majorities in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. At the same time, this widely translated novel transfers these memories from the 1940s to twenty-first-century Europe and to the collective memory of those camps that have received little attention in comparison to the Nazi concentration camps.[5] Müller has been called an author who moves between cultures (Marven 2005). Through her migration from Romania to Germany, she has become an important witness of Soviet terror in the Western European context.

The Gulag is a very particular kind of space of possibilities or impossibilities. It forms a closed reality of its own, a micro-cosmos that nevertheless reflects the realities of the outside world. The camp sets clear limits on what is possible and impossible for the forced labourers. They have to follow strict orders, they are kept in hunger, and they have to endure harsh physical labour. Many die of malnutrition and illness; all of them suffer from excruciating hunger. One of the key questions the novel asks is whether it is possible to remain human in such inhumane conditions.

The novel suggests that in such conditions, humans are reduced to numbers: "Each of us had to know his number day and night and never forget that we were not private individuals but numbered laborers" (Müller 2012, 21).[6] In consequence, humans also lose their gender and sexuality: "Of course you go on saying HE or SHE but that's merely a grammatical holdover. Half-starved humans are really neither masculine nor feminine but genderless, like objects" (149).[7] Leo compares them to "draft animals" and suggests that through this reduction to animality they also lose a sense of shame: "[I]n our nakedness we looked like worn-out draft animals. But no one was ashamed. What is there to be ashamed of when you no longer have a body. Yet our bodies were the reason we were in the camp, to perform bodily labour. The less of a body we had, the more it punished us. The shell that was left belonged to the Russians" (224).[8]

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5 *The Hunger Angel* is her internationally most successful, best-known, and most widely translated novel (Sievers 2013, 178).

6 "Jeder musste sich seine Nummern Tag und Nacht merken und wissen, dass wir Nummerierte, keine Privatleute sind" (Müller 2009a, 29). In the following only the page numbers will be given, for the English translations by Philip Boehm in the main text and for the German original quotations in the footnotes.

7 "Man sagt zwar weiter DER oder DIE, wie man auch der Kamm oder die Baracke sagt. Und so wie diese sind auch Halbverhungerte nicht männlich oder weiblich, sondern objektiv neutral wie Objekte" (158).

8 "[N]ackt sahen wir aus wie ausgemustertes Arbeitsvieh. Geschämt hat sich keiner. Wovor soll man sich schämen, wenn man keinen Körper mehr hat. Aber seinetwegen waren wir im Lager, für körperliche Arbeit. Je weniger Körper man hatte, desto mehr war man durch ihn gestraft. Diese Hülle gehörte den Russen" (235).

The novel links this bodily dis-identification to a profound loss of a sense of selfhood and to a sense that one's life no longer belongs to oneself. This loss of self provokes an identity crisis, as the person suffering it does not know who they are and what their dreams and hopes are. The forced labourers also lose most of their agency, since their actions are regulated by their role as forced labourers and everything that they do or think is dominated by hunger. In this situation, they are both together and alone. Being stripped of all privacy and reduced to basic human needs creates a certain sense of commonality, a sense of connection, as when they are told to defecate in a field in the middle of their train journey of deportation (18). In the camp they share the reality of hunger, but "hunger has its secret side and its public side" (149).[9] Everyone has "hunger words" for example, which "make up a map, but instead of reciting countries in your head you list names of food"; "but even so, you're still alone", since "[y]ou can't hunger together" (148–149). The hunger angel provides "each of us with our own individual agony, and yet we were all alike" (149).[10] It defines their shared condition but also makes them unable to share it with one another.

Their humanity, agency and sense of self are diminished because all they can think about is hunger: "What can be said of chronic hunger? […] How can you face the world if all you can say about yourself is that you're hungry. If you can't think of anything else" (17–18).[11] In such conditions, all action is reduced to hunger: "No matter where I was, in my bunk or between the barracks, at the yama on a shift or with Kobelian on the steppe […] – everything I did was hungry. Everything matched the magnitude of my hunger in length, width, height, and color" (149).[12]

Extreme hunger means that you no longer have a choice even about how to treat your loved ones. A shocking example is the way one prisoner steals his wife's soup and thereby contributes to her death. Leo the narrator suggests that this is what happens when people are put in an impossible situation:

> The naked truth is that Paul Gast the lawyer stole his wife's soup right out of her bowl until she could no longer get out of bed and died because she couldn't help it, just like he stole her

9 "[A]m Hunger selbst das Heimliche und das Öffentliche gibt" (158).

10 "Hungerwörte sind eine Landkarte, statt Ländernamen sagt man sich die Namen vom Essen in den Kopf. […] man bleibt doch allein. […] Der Hungerengel […] besorgte jedem seine eigene, persönliche Qual, obwohl wir uns alle glichen" (157–158).

11 "Was kann man sagen über den chronischen Hunger. […] Wie läuft man auf der Welt herum, wenn man nichts mehr über sich zu sagen weiß, als dass man Hunger hat. Wenn man an nichts anderes mehr denken kann" (24–25).

12 "Egal wo ich war, im meinem Bettgestell, zwischen den Baracken, in der Tag- oder Nachtschicht auf der Jama oder mit Kobelian in der Steppe […], alles, was ich tat, hatte Hunger. Jeder Gegestand glich in Länge, Breite, Höhe und Farbe dem Ausmaß meines Hungers" (158).

> soup because his hunger couldn't help it […], and the days couldn't help being a chain of causes and effects, just like all causes and effects couldn't help it that they were the naked truth […]. That was the way of the world: because each person couldn't help it, no one could. (219)[13]

Leo suggests that it is the hunger angel who possesses him and continues to do so after he returns from the camp, but in reality it is of course the Soviets who exert their power over the forced labourers and treat them as if they were responsible for Germany's war crimes even when they have had no role in the war: "None of us were part of any war, but because we were Germans, the Russians considered us guilty of Hitler's crimes" (36).[14] While many Germans participated in the Holocaust in Romania and were antisemites, like Müller's father who was a member of the Waffen-SS, others were against Hitler and against the antisemitism of his regime; even so, fascist attitudes remained widespread among the German minority in post-war Romania. As Brigid Haines (2013, 121) puts it, by choosing a protagonist who is a "young German untainted by Nazism, Müller risks simplifying a situation in which many undoubted perpetrators and 'Mitläufer' suddenly found themselves victims", but in the Gulag camps there was no discrimination between former Nazis and others, and the younger ones were less likely to have participated in the war; in any case, *The Hunger Angel* places Leo in the position of a double victim, as he is persecuted by the Soviets and is vulnerable because of widespread homophobia.

Over time, the prisoners depicted in *The Hunger Angel* internalise the idea that they are mere numbers. When the first one of them dies of hunger, Leo knows who will be next. People become numbers to him too. By March of the fourth year, 330 people have died. "With numbers like that you can no longer afford separate feelings. We thought of the dead only briefly" (79).[15] This draws attention to the way the possibility of feelings is not self-evident and cannot be taken for granted. Only in a certain space of possibilities are certain feelings possible. When the labourers are reduced to a mere empty space for the hunger angel, they are unable to nourish feelings within themselves: "We are the frame for the hunger" (79).[16] It is difficult for people who are treated as mere animals to en-

13 "Die nackte Wahrheit ist, dass der Advokat Paul Gast seiner Frau Heidrun Gast aus dem Essgeschirr die Suppe stahl, bis sie nicht mehr aufstand und starb, weil sie nicht anders konnte, so wie er ihre Suppe stahl, weil sein Hunger nicht anders konnte, […] so konnten auch die Tage nichts dafür, dass sie eine Kette von Ursachen und Folgen waren" (230).

14 "Wir waren alle in keinem Krieg, aber für die Russen waren wir als Deutsche schuld an Hitlers Verbrechen" (44).

15 "Da kann man sich die deutlichen Gefühle nicht mehr leisten. Da hat man nur noch kurz an sie gedacht" (90).

16 "Wir sind das Gestell für den Hunger" (89).

gage in rational or ethical reflection: "My bloodlust had swallowed my reason. And I wasn't the only one, we were a mob" (103).[17] The novel thus makes clear that it is extremely difficult, or perhaps impossible, in a space of possibilities like a Soviet labour camp to cultivate a sense of ethics or related forms of relationality such as solidarity, care, compassion, or empathy.

Different realities within the camp

As I noted earlier, no historical world is a uniform space of possibilities. Each world has different subject positions available for people who are placed in different social groups. The guards and the inmates in *The Hunger Angel* live in radically different spaces of possibility even though they seemingly share the same reality of the camp. The narrative makes it clear in particular that the commander, Tur Prikulitsch, has a completely different set of possibilities available to him than what the prisoners have: "He doesn't know the hunger angel, so he can give commands at roll call, strut around the camp, smile cunningly in the barber room" (22).[18] The camp is a space of possibilities in which there is a strong division between "us" and "them", and this means that there are also things that the guards cannot do as they are not part of "us": "But he can't take part in our conversation" (22).[19]

The Hunger Angel conveys a sense of how a certain historical world is both a world that objectively sets certain limitations on what is possible for its inhabitants and a lived world that is shaped by how the inhabitants understand their possibilities. The camp is a space of possibilities where there are different degrees of privilege and extreme lack of privilege, which are defined by strict hierarchies. The barber, for example, is not a commander but he is higher in the hierarchy than the prisoners: "The barber was not an accomplice of the camp administration, but he was privileged" (38).[20] Nevertheless, even those who are not high in the hierarchy but high enough to be spared hunger live in a completely different world. Leo suggests that those who administer the bread have absolute power over those who are starving. He describes in most detail Fenya, the "mistress of the bread and accomplice of the hunger angel": "We smiled out of necessity and out of principle […]. So as not to challenge her sense of justice but to encourage

17 "Mir hatte die Mordlust den Verstand geschluckt. Nicht nur mir, wir waren eine Meute" (113).
18 "Wer den Hungerengel nicht kennt, kann auf dem Appellplatz kommandieren, auf dem Lagerkorso stelzen, in der Rasierstube schleichend lächeln" (30).
19 "Aber mitreden kann er nicht" (30).
20 "Der Rasierer war kein Komplize der Lagerleitung, aber privilegiert" (46).

it, and if possible even increase it by a few grams" (98).[21] Calling the way in which bread is rationed "justice" strikingly brings out the difference between real justice, which would involve the right to life and the right not to be starved to death, and the twisted "bread justice" that is the only form of justice possible in the camp: "Bread justice has no prologue or epilogue, it is only here and now. […] [V]iolence meted out by bread justice is different from hungerless violence. You cannot approach the bread court with conventional morality" (104).[22]

The Hunger Angel depicts reification both from the side of the labourers and from the side of the guards (Berger and Luckmann 1987 [1966], 192). While the guards treat the prisoners as thing-like, the prisoners tend to reify those who work for the administration by perceiving them not as human but as part of a necessary system akin to a sacred, unchangeable law: "Fenya was neither good nor bad, she was not a person but the law in a crocheted sweater" (100).[23] Her justness in rationing the bread makes it appear necessary and renders the prisoners "submissive" (100). Leo seems to think that the inevitability of her way of operating has a certain power that affects the prisoners and makes them slaves to hunger so that they are even capable of killing in its name: "Early on […] it dawned on me that Fenya's saintliness, cold and cruel, had crept inside the bread, which is why we were capable of killing in the name of hunger" (99).[24]

The novel shows that the privileged ones have immensely more space to make choices than the forced labourers. They have the privilege of being able to treat others humanely for example, as this does not threaten their own chances of survival. Although the possibility of treating the labourers as humans is open to them however, very few of them seize the opportunity. Leo remembers a "construction supervisor" as a particular exception: "He considered us thinking human beings and not just forced labourers, which is why I remember him so well" (247).[25] Leo generally remembers the camp as a space where things are repeated ad nauseam, day after day, but there were also exceptional moments, such as this one, when someone treated them humanely. Even though the narrative focuses closely

21 "[eine] Brotherrin und Komplizin des Hungerengels"; "Man lächelte notgedrungen und grundsätzlich, […]. Um Fenjas Gerechtigkeit nicht zu riskieren, sondern aufzumuntern, wenn es geht, die Gerechtigkeit um ein paar Gramm zu erhöhen" (108).

22 "Die Brotgerechtigkeit hat kein Vor- und kein Nachspiel, sie ist nur Gegenwart. […] Auf jeden Fall ist die Brotgerechtigkeit anders gewalttätig als hungerlose Gewalt. Dem Brotgericht kann man nicht kommen mit der gängigen Moral" (114).

23 "Fenja war weder gut noch böse, sie war keine Person, sondern ein Gesetz in Häkeljacken" (110).

24 "Schon ein halbes Jahr vorher […] dachte ich mir, dass wir vor Hunger imstande sind zu töten, weil sich Fenjas kalte Heiligkeit ins Brot geschlichen hat" (109).

25 "Er sah in den Deportierten denkende Menschen, darum habe ich mir das gemerkt" (258).

on Leo's experiences, it nevertheless gives a sense of the camp as a space of possibilities that was radically varied, as it was different for people in different social groups, depending on their place in the power hierarchy. At the same time, however, the novel also shows that it was possible, particularly for the powerful ones, to break the norms and be unexpectedly kind.

Imagining alternatives: A sense of the possible

As *The Hunger Angel* describes the camp as a lived world that is shaped not only by the actual limitations it sets for its inhabitants but also by how they understand their possibilities, it links that understanding to the faculty of imagination of the inhabitants, and to the way the conditions of the camp damage this faculty. The interaction between the inhabitants and the stories they exchange shape their sense of the possible, which is severely diminished by the conditions of the camp. When their lives are dominated by hunger, there is little scope for imagination: "In the camp, all wishing was taken away from us" and they didn't "dare yearn ahead" (248).[26] During the last year of their time in the camp, however, they are less hungry and this makes it possible for them to imagine different paths to different futures.

One of Leo's pass-times is precisely to imagine different futures. This involves a recurring dream of strolling down "elegant lanes, where people have a different way of life than in the small town" (246)[27] where he was born. Presumably this "different way of life" would make it possible for him to be openly homosexual. He also dreams of living in a country with mountains: "Someday, I thought to myself, who knows in which year of peace and in which future, I'll come to the land with the mountain ridges" (247).[28]

In addition to such private day dreaming, the prisoners engage in collective imagining. Much of this collective imagining of the future is about their homecoming:

> There are many variations on the theme of going home, different scenarios circulated through the camp. According to one, our best years would be behind us by the time we made it back.

26 "Im Lager wurde einem das Wünschen abgenommen. […] man traute sich nicht in die Sehnsucht nach vorn" (260).

27 "Ich dachte mir, einmal werde ich aufs elegante Pflaster kommen, wo man anders zu Hause ist als in der Kleinstadt, wo ich geboren bin" (257).

28 "Ich werde einmal, dachte ich mir, wer weiß im wievielten Frieden und der wievielten Zukunft in das Land der Bergkämme kommen" (258).

> […] [I]n other versions we never even leave […]. Or we wind up wanting to stay here because we no longer know what to make of our home and our home no longer knows what to make of us. (247–248)[29]

The prisoners are migrants who come mainly from German-language communities in Romania and other Central and Eastern European countries, and their collective imagining and remembering creates attachments between them.[30] Remembering and imagining are entangled in the way they deal with their longing for home.

One of the processes conveyed by the narration is the process of diminishing human beings with a need for self-expression to mere flesh that cannot imagine or be creative. Leo has a need for poetic self-expression, but hunger efficiently destroys the possibility of all artistic creativity: "But he also knows that hunger devours nearly all artistry" (74).[31] In the beginning he has a strong need to write, to express himself through literature, but this need is juxtaposed by the "cement" that is integral to the labour they are forced to conduct:

> In the camp every type of work made you dirty. But nothing was as relentless as the cement. Cement is as impossible to escape as the dust of the earth […]. It seems to me there's only one thing in our minds quicker than cement, and that's fear. And the only explanation I can give for why, as early as the beginning of the first summer, I had to jot this down in secret on a piece of thin brown cement-sack paper:
> SUN HIGH IN THE HAZE
> YELLOW CORN, NO TIME. (32)[32]

Leo feels like he is "made of cement" and there is less and less of him so that one day he may disappear altogether (33).[33] The cement keeps him from writing more. He would like to write "Deep and crooked and lurking reddish / the half-moon

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29 "Eine Variante des Heimfahrens, die hier im Lager zirkulierte, besagte, dass unsere besten Jahre vorbei sind, wenn wir dann mal nach Hause kommen. […] Oder die anderen Varianten: Dass wir überhaupt nicht von hier wegkommen […]. Eine andere Variante sagt, dass wir zuletzt hierbleiben wollen, weil wir nichts mehr anfangen können mit dem Zuhause und das Zuhause nichts mehr mit uns" (259).

30 Erll argues that migrants are carriers of memory, understood as "individuals who share in collective images and narratives of the past" (2011, 12).

31 "Er weiß aber auch, dass der Hunger fast die ganze Artistik frisst" (84).

32 "Im Lager war man immer dreckig von jeder Arbeit. Doch kein Dreck war so zudringlich wie der Zement. Zement ist unausweichlich wie der Staub der Erde […]. Mir scheint, nur eins ist im Kopf des Menschen noch schneller als der Zement – die Angst. Und nur so kann ich mir erklären, dass ich schon im Frühsommer auf der Baustelle heimlich auf ein Stück von dem dünnen braunen Zementsackpapier notieren musste: / SONNE HOCH IM SCHLEIER / GELBER MAIS, KEINE ZEIT"(40–41).

33 "Ich bin doch auch aus Zement und werde auch immer weniger" (41).

stands in the sky / already setting", but he does not write that, just says it quietly under his breath, "where it shattered" (33),[34] and the cement grinds in his teeth and makes him fall into silence.

The tension between language and silence and the struggle to express *the inexpressible* [*Unsagbare*] are central to *The Hunger Angel.* The novel also shows how language participates in constituting and reflecting the space of possibilities in a certain life world. Müller foregrounds language in many ways through her poetic style, which has been described as an interplay between simplicity and complexity (Boase-Beijer 2013, 191), or between "the concentration of poetry and the frankness of prose" (The Nobel Prize). Müller uses the German language to rebel against that very language. She invents compound nouns that form new words for example, such as *Hungerengel* [hunger angel] or *Atemschaukel* [breath-swing]. Jean Boase-Beijer suggests that Müller's "language reflects her themes: of silence, censorship, fear. Her language is fragmented, full of gaps, non sequiturs, repetitions, and compressions" (2013, 192). Müller thereby rebels against the norms of the German language, refusing to be obedient to it: her "characters are studies in what happens when you internalise rules and norms, and when you transgress them. And her language echoes this concern, [...] by deviating very slightly from its accepted behaviour, creating a sense of displacement, of not quite fitting, of quiet rebellion" (Boase-Beijer 2013, 194).[35] Such quiet resistance pervades both the agency of the characters, particularly that of Leo, and Müller's relationship to the German language.

This dual resistance can be seen in the way the novel deals with one of the most devastating of the questions that haunt Leo and the other forced labourers throughout their imprisonment: the question of whether or not it will be possible for them to return home. The novel's narrative structure means the reader can guess that the narrator has survived the camp experience and is narrating retrospectively, but the oscillation between tenses is a way of refusing a neat, grammatically coherent sense of narrative mastery and instead conveys a profound sense of undecidability, uncertainty and layeredness of the experience of time. The possibility of the imprisonment ending and of the inmates returning home sustains Leo, but it is also a burden that makes camp life unbearable because the chance of returning home is so uncertain. At one point he fills in two little bottles in his toilet kit with cabbage soup as a kind of memento that he might bring home one day. When the commander finds out, he makes it clear what such an act of stealing

34 "Tief und schief und rötlich lauernd / steht der halbe Mond am Himmel / schon im Untergehen"; "Es ist gleich zerbrochen" (41).

35 On Müller's "aesthetics of resistance", see also Vinter 2020.

makes him: "I was a Fascist, a spy, a saboteur, and a pest, I had no culture, and by stealing cabbage soup I was committing treason against the camp, against Soviet authority, and against the Soviet people" (152).[36] Leo is unable to understand even for himself why he stole the soup, but it seems to involve the dimension of resistance, of sustaining at least a minimal sense of agency:

> To this day I don't know why I filled the bottles with cabbage soup. Did it have something to do with my grandmother's sentence: I know you'll come back. Was I really so naïve as to think I'd come home and present the cabbage soup to my family as though I were bringing them two bottles of life in the camp. [...] Was going home even the opposite of staying here. I probably wanted to be up to both possibilities, if it came to that. I never lost my yearning to go home, but in order to have something besides that, I told myself that even if they kept us here forever, this would still be my life. (154)[37]

Imagining the possibility of the camp life turning out to be his only life seems for him a way of trying to cope with the uncertainty and trying to make the life that is forced on him nevertheless his own. In a way, he prepares himself for the possibility that he would be forced to become Russian: "After all, the Russians have their lives." He remembers a Russian inmate saying something about "the grassy soul of the steppe and his Ural heart": "That could beat in my breast as well, I thought" (154).[38] Through such "imaginative variations of the self", he prepares himself for different futures, including ones in which the camp turns out to be his whole world.[39]

The lingering effects of the camp experience

Memories travel with people, and while Müller's novel deals with mnemonic migration from the Soviet labour camp to Romania, at the same time it contributes to

36 "Dass ich ein Faschist, Spion, Saboteur und Schädling bin, dass ich keine Kultur habe und mit gestohlener Krautsuppe das Lager, die Sowjetmacht und das Sowjetvolk verrate" (161).

37 "Ich weiß bis heute nicht, warum ich die Flacons mit Krautsuppe füllte. Hatte das mit dem Satz der Großmutter zu tun: Ich weiß, du kommst wieder. War ich wirklich so arglos zu glauben, ich komm wieder und präsentiere der Familie zu Hause meine Krautsuppe als zwei Fläschchen mitgebrachtes Lagerleben. [...] Waren Heimfahren und Hierbleiben überhaupt noch Gegensätze. Wahrscheinlich wollte ich beidem gewachsen sein, wenn es so kommt. [...] Den Wunsch nach Heimkehr wurde man nicht los, um aber außer ihm noch etwas anderes zu haben, sagte ich mir, wenn sie uns für immer hierbehalten, so ist es doch mein Leben" (162–163).

38 "Die Russen leben ja auch"; "von der Grasseele der Steppe und seinem Ural-Gefühl. In meine Brust geht das auch, habe ich mir gedacht" (163).

39 On imaginative variations, see Ricoeur 1992 [1990], 148.

that migration by narrating fictionalised memories of the Gulag for German and other Western European audiences. The novel shows how the memory of the camp keeps hold of the forced labourers and never lets them free. It thereby deals with what it means in concrete terms to live with a diminished sense of the possible and how that may linger on later in life and determine the course of a person's life. The protagonist cannot help remembering, the memories force themselves upon him, and he struggles to free himself from them without success:

> For sixty years now, at night I try to recall the objects from the camp: the things I carry in my night-suitcase. [...] And it's against my will that I have to remember. [...] Occasionally the objects from the camp attack me, not one at a time, but in a pack. Then I know they're not – or not only – after my memory, but that they want to torment me. [...] I'm pursued by objects that may have had nothing to do with me. They want to deport me during the night, fetch me home to the camp. (26)[40]

This defines his sense of the possible later in life. He carries the memories of the past with him to the present, and as traumatic memories they permanently shape his sense of possibilities. Through this the novel shows how memories live in us as layered time, so that even when we confront a new situation, we necessarily experience it through the horizon of expectation shaped by our earlier experiences. This is already evident in the way that Leo's experience of the camp is coloured by his earlier experience of being different at a time when homosexuality was not socially acceptable. He had to hide it from his family, and at the camp he has to hide it from the other inhabitants of the camp. In reality, it is impossible for Leo to practise any kind of sexuality at the camp, not only because starvation destroys sexuality but also because he has to hide his homosexuality: "I had to keep out of all the mixes and make sure no one had any idea why" (233).[41] When he returns home, it remains impossible for him to be openly homosexual, and even when he leaves home to search for a more open-minded community, he never feels at ease with himself.

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40 "Seit sechzig Jahren will ich mich in der Nacht an die Gegenstände aus dem Lager erinnern. Sie sind meine Nachtkoffersachen. [...] Ich muss mich erinnern gegen meinen Willen. [...] Manchmal überfallen mich die Gegenstände aus dem Lager nich nacheinander, sondern im Rudel. Darum weiß ich, dass es den Gegenständen, die mich heimsuchen, gar nicht oder nicht nur um meine Erinnerung geht, sondern ums Drangsalieren. [...] Gegenstände, die vielleicht nichts mit mir zu tun hatten, suchen mich. Sie wollen mich nachts deportieren, ins Lager heimholen, wollen sie mich" (33–34).

41 "So wie ich mich aus allen Mischungen heraushalten und aufpassen musste, dass keiner ahnt warum" (243).

An important question the novel raises is when is it possible to feel at home? It deals with this question in relation to "homesickness", which is, for Leo, a permanent condition. It torments him both at the camp and after his release from the camp. Before his deportation, it was not possible for Leo to be himself in his small hometown where homosexuality was a crime, and so he did not feel "at home" even before his deportation. This makes him initially welcome the deportation, at least partly, but in the harsh conditions of the camp, he soon begins to feel homesickness and misses his home. After returning home however, the homesickness does not go away. It is a longing for a place where he could be himself, feel at home and at ease, nourished and safe. When he returns, he feels alienated because people are unable to understand what hunger did to him and how it continues to affect him.

An important factor here is the traumatic experience of not being able to trust anyone. This is one of Leo's key experiences at the camp and it never leaves him: "Mistrust grows higher than any wall" (30).[42] After the camp experience, Leo never lets anyone close to him: "Every day since I came back home, each feeling has a hunger of its own and expects me to reciprocate, but I don't. I won't ever let anyone cling to me again. I've been taught by hunger and am unreachable out of humility, not pride" (237). His intersecting traumatic experiences make him cautious and unwilling to be open to others in his vulnerability. Refusing intimacy is a way of maintaining some sense of control and agency for himself: "I need much closeness, but I don't give up control. […] Since the hunger angel, I don't allow anyone to possess me" (283).[43] His layered, intersecting traumas mean that his diminished sense of the possible does not allow the construction of a multifaceted narrative identity through a process of narrating where he comes from, where he is now and where he is going; his temporal horizon remains diminished, so that he is unable to imagine how things could be otherwise and, in particular, how his life might be entangled with someone else's life, someone whom he could trust, be intimate with, and think of as integral to who he is.[44]

This is a paradoxical situation in which Leo seeks to protect himself from the camp, but it takes hold of his mind, and he cannot protect himself from it, neither by keeping silent nor by telling stories about it: "That the camp let me go home only to create the space it needed to grow inside my head. […] The camp stretches on and on, bigger and bigger, from my left temple to my right. So when I talk about

42 "Höher als jede Wand wächst das Misstrauen" (38).

43 "Ich brauche viel Nähe, aber ich gebe mich nicht aus der Hand. […] Seit dem Hungerengel erlaube ich niemandem, mich zu besitzen" (295).

44 On how layered, intersectional traumas shape Leo's narrative identity and diminish his sense of the possible, see Merivuori 2021. On the concept of narrative identity, see Meretoja 2018, 65–68.

what's inside my skull I have to talk about an entire camp. I can't protect myself by keeping silent and I can't protect myself by talking" (282).[45] The hunger he had to go through at the camp has been so strong that it has left an emptiness inside him: "empty on the inside ever since I no longer have to go hungry" (283).[46]

Mnemonic migration: Expanding the readers' sense of the possible

Even though *The Hunger Angel* deals with a radical diminishment of a person's sense of the possible, the novel as a whole can, in contrast, expand the readers' sense of the possible through our ability to imagine what was possible and impossible in that historical world, how the legacy of the Gulag affects contemporary societies, particularly in the area of the former Soviet Union, and how learning from the past could help us prevent history from repeating itself. We can distinguish between mnemonic migration within fictional worlds and mnemonic migration through fiction. In this last section, I will focus on the migration through fiction from the perspective of how *The Hunger Angel* contributes to the cultural memory of the Soviet forced labour camps.

Müller is a migrant who writes in German, which is her native language but also that of her country of destination. She has crossed linguistic, cultural and national borders as a migrant and as a writer, and as she is a widely translated author, the memories of the Gulag that she has given shape to have entered new linguistic, cultural and historical worlds around the globe. The Western narrative imagination of camps has for a long time been dominated by a cultural memory that revolves around Nazi concentration camps. The Soviet labour camps, the Gulag, have certain similarities to those camps but there are also important differences. Gulag camps were an extreme form of incarceration and were a combination of imprisonment and penal colony. Food was scarce and about 10 % of the prisoners perished, but the vast majority survived and were able to return home. In Nazi concentration camps, in contrast, the aim was systematically to kill certain parts of the population, most notably the Jews. The inmates were either

45 "Dass mich das Lager nach Hause gelassen hat, um den Abstand herzustellen, den es braucht, um sich im Kopf zu vergrößern. […] Immer mehr streckt sich das Lager vom Schläfenareal links zum Schläfenareal rechts. So muss ich von meinem ganzen Schädel wie von einem Gelände sprechen, von einem Lagergelände. Man kann sich nicht schützen, weder durchs Schweigen noch durchs Erzählen" (294).

46 "ich von außen bedrängt und innen hohl bin, seit ich nicht mehr hungern muss" (295).

killed immediately or exploited with extreme work and almost no food until they died. The prisoners in the Gulag worked long days of ten to fourteen hours a day, and the extremely exhausting physical work in inhumane conditions left a lasting mark on them.[47] Müller lived surrounded by "damaged people", including her own mother, who had returned from the camps and were unable to talk about their traumatic experiences (Haines 2013, 124).

For a long time, the way in which the Holocaust was presented as the ultimate evil to which nothing else can be compared prevented any comparison of the Nazi concentration camps and the Soviet Gulag, and made it difficult to deal with the traumatic experiences of the Gulag. The continuation of Communist rule also prevented any open discussion of Soviet terror. This started to change gradually after the fall of the Iron Curtain, and historical distance from the Soviet era has made a critical re-evaluation of that era possible over the past couple of decades. Müller's works originally received far more attention in Western Europe than in Eastern Europe; her works were censored and then banned in Romania, and while she first became known for her criticism of the backward and fascist attitudes of the German minorities in Eastern Europe, she then became famous as a witness of communist terror, especially after she had left Romania for West Germany. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, interest in her work and in German literature more broadly has increased continuously in Central and Eastern Europe (Sievers 2013, 176–177). Even so, at the time *The Hunger Angel* was published, even most Germans did not know about the deportations of Romanian-Germans to the Gulag (Shopin 2014, 198). It was a time when German wartime suffering was emerging as a topic in literature, but the portrayal of Romanian-Germans as the victims of deportations was still taboo in Romania and the topic had not yet been dealt with in literature (Haines 2013, 119–121). *The Hunger Angel* is consequently an important contribution to a little-known aspect of Gulag memory and has contributed to the travel of Gulag memory, particularly to a language-area in which the Holocaust memory is rich and varied but also beyond that to other language-areas. Moreover, at the time I am writing this, the war that Russia is waging in Ukraine provides a new context for re-evaluating the legacy of Soviet state violence. Reading Müller's novel in the present moment brings it into contact with Russia's war in Ukraine and the camps to which they are now sending Ukrainians for imprisonment and "re-education" (Khoshnood 2023).

The Hunger Angel has taken shape through Müller's interpretation of Oskar Pastior's stories about his camp experience, mediated by her own experience of Soviet terror in Romania. Later, it has been read through the lens of the knowledge

47 On the history of the Gulag, see e. g. Khlevniuk 2004; Applebaum 2011.

that emerged about Pastior's involvement with the Romanian secret police agency the Securitate.[48] Reading involves an ongoing process of reinterpretation that always emerges as an encounter between the world of the text and the world of the reader. Now I am interpreting Müller's interpretation of Pastior's experiences from my own theoretical and experiential horizon marked by my interest in the sense of the possible and also by the current world-historical context, including the war that Russia is waging in Ukraine. Many European countries are currently in a process of re-evaluating their relationship with Russia in the light of the recent events. This process has been particularly evident in Finland, which famously suffered from Finlandisation during the Cold War, exercising self-censorship in refraining from opposing its Eastern neighbour in its diplomatic effort to hold onto its independence. Now the new war has reactivated old historical traumas linked to Russian aggression and oppression over the centuries. In Finland, there is currently a lively debate on what was possible in the post-war period and during the Cold War. Would it have been possible for us to be more assertive and critical of the Soviet Union and yet maintain our independence? Should we have applied for NATO membership much earlier, at the same time as the Baltic countries? Trying to imagine the past world as a space of possibilities can guard against unwarranted hindsight and abstract demands about how we should have known better at the time, but it also helps in seeing the past world as a space in which different options existed – it was not part of a predetermined order of events but rather a space in which choices were made and certain possibilities were seized while others were disregarded for various reasons. At the same time, this perspective can allow us to see some blind spots that are only visible from a distance.

Overall, it is important to acknowledge that mnemonic migration is a phenomenon that takes place at both the individual level and the collective level. As I hope to have shown in this chapter, the memories that are forced on Leo in *The Hunger Angel* accompany him throughout his life and permanently diminish his sense of the possible. This conveys how not only imagination but also memory and the entanglement of the two are important aspects of how our sense of our possibilities takes shape. By imagining the experience of the deported Romanian-Germans and transporting this previously little-known aspect of Gulag memory to the German cultural context, and through translation to other cultural contexts, Müller's *The*

48 After four years of surveillance by the Securitate, Pastior then worked for them as an informer in 1961–1968, until he obtained a scholarship that allowed him to leave the country and settle in West Germany. The revelation of his collaboration came out in 2010. It was "presumably the threat of blackmail as a gay man that made Pastior collaborate", and this "points to ongoing silences within Romanian remembrance, here in relation to the activities of the Securitate" (Haines 2013, 122).

Hunger Angel shows how literature can participate in shaping transcultural memory and processes of mnemonic migration by dealing with a past world as a space of possibilities. Through such processes, literature can contribute to our understanding of the complex and entangled dimensions of histories of violence and thereby also to our ways of orienting ourselves in the present. By enriching our sense of past worlds as heterogeneous spaces of possibility, literature can also shape our sense of the possible in the present and for the future.

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II Multilingualism, Interlingual and Cultural Translation

Una Tanović

On Prosthetic Memories and Phantom Limbs: Borderline Translation in Alen Mešković's *Ukulele Jam*

"Is there or is there not a literature of migration in Denmark?"

The term *travelling memory*, coined by Astrid Erll to reconceptualise transcultural memory as "the incessant wandering" of memory-related expressions and their carriers across linguistic, social and political borders is, as its originator herself pointed out, "a metaphorical shorthand" (2011, 11). This useful metaphor is actually quite unmetaphorical though, because it foregrounds the literal movement of people over territorial boundaries: "[t]ravel, migration and transmigration, flight and expulsion, and various forms of diaspora lead to the diffusion of mnemonic media, contents, forms and practices across the globe" (Erll 2011, 11). In other words, the production of transcultural memory often involves people crossing borders or sometimes being forced to cross borders, and this always means that they carry meaning in the form of words, languages and stories across borders. Where there are migrants, there will be movement of memories through migrant literature.

In Denmark however, the dominant discourse on migrant literature in the country has centred on the lack of it, despite the obvious presence of migrants, continually highlighting both the need for and the absence of migrant writing (Gaettens 2013, 69). In an article contrasting the global significance of migrant literature with the perceived scarcity of migrant writers in Denmark for example, the literary scholar Søren Frank felt compelled to ask, "Is there or is there not a literature of migration in Denmark?". The question, which is also the title of Frank's article, is provocative on purpose and Frank goes on to argue that migrant writers are out there, "that is if one looks hard enough". We must take this question at face value though, because Frank also states that "one could claim, with good reason, that there are no migrant writers in Denmark" (2013, 197). Frank asked the question in 2013, two years before the migrant crisis that brought some 21,000 new arrivals to Denmark at its peak in 2015, but it is still surprising. In that same year of 2013 after all, the Danish-Palestinian poet Yahya Hassan was catapulted into the pages of the *New York Times* for selling over 100,000 copies of his debut Danish-language poetry collection (Smale 2014), prompting another

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scholar of literature, Hans Hauge, to echo Frank's question in one of Denmark's largest-circulation newspapers, *Berlingske:* "Can immigrants write literature?" (Hauge 2014).

What should we make of this repeated questioning of the existence of migrant writers in Denmark? To make sense of it, we must look more closely at the reasons Frank lists for the seeming absence of migrants on the Danish literary scene, and of particular interest is language, because that is the reason that Frank returns to repeatedly in his analysis.

Having established that the Danish language "functions as a hurdle" and poses "overwhelming problems of expression and creativity to immigrant writers in particular", he also cites Danish publishers who reject manuscripts from aspiring migrant writers because of their "poor Danish language" and because "the quality of the language hasn't been good enough" (Frank 2013, 209). Given this supposed dearth of migrant writers who are competent in Danish, Frank ultimately argues that we should rethink the category of migrant literature so that it can accommodate non-migrant Danish writers who address issues of migration in their work because, after all, in Frank's words, "we live in an age of migration in which we are all, to some extent, migratory beings" (2013, 209).

While there is certainly merit in rethinking migrant literature as a more expansive and inclusive category and while an argument can and has been made against using an author's ethnic background and lived experience as a lens through which to understand migrant writing, which is a practice that is both homogenising and marginalising, I would question here whether this should be done from the monolingual assumption that the literature of migration in Denmark must be written in Danish, or more generally, by presupposing that there is a monolingual national literary canon. I do this by focusing on an example of migrant literature that is actually written in the host language and by discussing the novel *Ukulele Jam* (2011) by the Bosnian-Danish author Alen Mešković as a case study in post-Yugoslav translingual writing.[1] I focus on translingual writing because it challenges the yoking together of subject, language, culture and nation that we can trace back to at least Johann Gottfried Herder and the linguistic nationalism of the German Romantics; and unyoking this is, not incidentally, a prerequisite for travelling memory as defined by Erll (2011, 7).

My main point is that translingual migrant writing can usefully be described as an exercise in translation, and that certain concepts from translation studies –

1 According to Steven G. Kellman, who coined the term, translingual authors like Mešković are "authors who write in more than one language or at least in a language other than their primary one" (2000, 9). Mešković publishes primarily in Danish but also translates into and has published essays in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S).

primarily borderline translation practices such as self-translation and pseudotranslation – can be mobilised to analyse it. Furthermore, analysing it in this way provides an insight into how memory travels across and beyond borders and allows us to rethink Alison Landsberg's notion of prosthetic memory in a way that both reinforces the possibility of a universal identification with the migrant condition and outlines its limitations at the same time. For Landsberg, prosthetic memory occurs "at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past" when "the person does not simply apprehend a historical narrative but takes on a more personal, deeply felt memory of a past event through which he or she did not live" (2004, 2). Crucial to this definition is that prosthetic memories are not derived from actual lived experience. Mešković employs self-translation and pseudotranslation in his novel, and these practices not only create a space where prosthetic memories can be formed within his adopted Danish-language community by enabling that community to identify with the migrant condition, but they also register the phantom pain left in the wake of the violent disintegration of his former homeland of Yugoslavia, and the fragmentation of the once common tongue Serbo-Croatian, thus opening up a new understanding of prosthetic memory as a mechanism for the work of mourning that, to some extent, excludes those who do not share the same or at least a similar lived experience.

Migration, translation, and memory

The term "travelling memory" foregrounds the literal movement of people, but metaphor imposes itself here almost immediately because migration is, metaphorically speaking, translation as the Greek *meta phorein* meaning "to carry across" meets the Latin *translatio*, again "to carry across". Salman Rushdie notes the Latin etymology of the word "translation" in his essay *Imaginary Homelands*, and famously claims that writers in his position, the "exiles, or emigrants or expatriates", are "translated men" (1991, 71). By extension, all migrants are translated people in some sense, having moved or been removed from a source environment to a target culture. Considering migration and translation in conjunction has opened up a new area of scholarly inquiry, as evidenced by the proliferation over the past two decades of academic conferences, university seminars, dissertations, special issues of journals, and academic monographs addressing this intersection.[2] To date, however, translation studies has not grappled with how trans-

2 In marked contrast to the absence of almost any mention of migration in the 1998 edition for example, the 2008 edition of the *Routledge Encyclopedia of Translation Studies* contains separate

lation is implicated in reproducing limiting, assimilation-based narratives of migration. Traditional approaches to translation that conceptualise it as the unidirectional movement of a text across a linguistic border with equivalence as the end goal endorse a narrative that also characterises migration as a simple, if sometimes painful, unidirectional process, an interlude between the homeland and the host country as fixed points of departure and arrival, with assimilation as an idealised endpoint.

More recent theoretical approaches to translation that seek to redefine it without recourse to the concept of the border can help us avoid these pitfalls of binary thinking (Pym 2003; Sakai 2012). Edwin Gentzler explains:

> [W]hat if we erase the border completely and rethink translation as an always ongoing process of *every* communication? What if translation becomes viewed less as a speech-act carried out between languages and cultures, and instead as a *condition* underlying the languages and cultures upon which communication is based? [...] If there is no border, then there is no source or target language; distinctions between 'home' and 'foreign' tend to disappear. (2012)

Gentzler's call to reimagine translation as neither a product presented as the translated text, nor the finite process that is the act of carrying a text across a boundary, but rather as a process and a mode of communication that is always ongoing resonates with long-standing efforts within the study of migrant literature to recognise that for many people, migration is not "a mere interval between fixed points of departure and arrival, but a mode of being in the world—'migrancy'" (King et al. 1995, xv).[3] Furthermore, reconceptualising translation as more than a one-way transfer across a linguistic border also resonates with research into transcultural memory and Erll's claim that "memory fundamentally means movement [...] across and *beyond* boundaries" [emphasis mine] (2011, 15).

This potential intersection between memory studies, translation studies and migrant literature has not been explored sufficiently. Bella Brodzki and Siobhan Brownlie have offered productive approaches from the perspective of translation studies for conceptualising the interface of memory and translation, but neither

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entries dedicated to "Asylum" and "Mobility", while the 2020 edition also includes an entry on "Migration". Inghilleri's *Translation and Migration* (2017) is a recent academic monograph that focuses on migrants as agents and objects of translation, and a number of other monographs have applied translation studies frameworks to the study of migrant literature, including Cutter 2005, and Karpinski 2012.

3 In an interview with the Bosnian press, for example, Alen Mešković states, "[M]eni koji sam od četrnaeste godine migrant, i još uvijek sam i uvijek ću to biti, to nije na taj način društveno-politička tema" [For me, because I've been a migrant since the age of fourteen, and I am still a migrant and will always be one, migration is not a socio-political topic in that way] (2019b).

fully addresses the context of migration (Brodzki 2007; Brownlie 2017).[4] Furthermore, existing scholarship on the nexus of memory and translation tends to focus on cultural translation. Eneken Laanes's recent article on "born-translated memories", which applies Venuti's notions of domestication and foreignisation strategies to the "cultural translation of Soviet state terror" (2021, 42) in order to theorise the transnational travel of memories and to problematise the notion of prosthetic memory, is a good example of this. In my reading of Mešković's *Ukulele Jam*, I follow Laanes's call to

> explore both the enabling and the problematic domesticating and foreignising effects that result from the use of transcultural memorial forms in the articulation of local memories in different parts of the world as well as the ethical and political questions raised in this process of translation. (2021, 51)

However, I will move away from utilising the concept of cultural translation, which is necessary when addressing migrant writing because, as Boris Buden, Brigit Mennel, and Stefan Nowotny among others have argued, the concept of cultural translation runs the risk of reinforcing the exploitation that migrants are already all too often exposed to. The notion of cultural translation places significant emphasis on the metaphorical link between spatial and linguistic mobility to present a vision of a post-national society where the hybrid individual can freely traverse fluid boundaries without obstacles. But although translation is not just the transfer of linguistic units between languages, it is *also* that, and as such it plays a part in the exclusionary processes of nation-building, where migrants "appear as the human embodiment of untranslatable foreignness today" (Buden et al. 2011). In other words, translation takes place in actual social and political situations and is intricately intertwined with questions of power. Any refugee who has had to navigate state bureaucracies, where translation is a tool in the administration of power, would tell us as much (Blommaert 2009; Maryns 2017).

Instead of cultural translation, which does away with the idea of translation as an activity applied to a text involving at least two languages, I employ the concept of "borderline translation", which retains an emphasis on translation as a textual practice involving multiple languages and can provide an analytical tool for understanding translingual writing. "Borderline translation" is a term first proposed by G.C. Kálaman (1993) in a short but generative article in order to critique Jakobson's

4 In a very recent contribution to the *Routledge Handbook of Translation and Memory*, Brownlie (2022) addresses the role of translation in the mnemonic trajectories of migrant stories.

classic paradigm of intralingual, interlingual and intersemiotic translation.[5] Káláman does this by highlighting marginalised translation practices such as self-translation, where the identity of the author and translator are at stake; those such as pseudotranslation, where the existence of a source text or target text is at stake; and those such as zero translation, where the distinction between the source language and target language is at stake. Káláman's investigation and classification of borderline translation practices that destabilise the binary oppositions like author/translator, source text/target text, or source language/target language that structure the traditional approaches to translation has been taken up by translation studies scholars to reconceptualise translation as fundamentally non-linear, meaning it is more than a one-way transfer from one language into another. I would argue that this is also a useful concept for both memory studies and the study of migrant literature because, as the following case study illustrates, neither the circulation of memories nor the travel of migrants is a simple unidirectional process. I examine here the specific forms of borderline translation that are deployed in Mešković's *Ukulele Jam* as strategies for mediating traumatic memories across linguistic and national borders in order to highlight the crucial role played by borderline translation practices in the travel of memories from the Yugoslav wars across multiple social frameworks of memory.

Alen Mešković's *Ukulele jam* (2011)

Alen Mešković is arguably the best-known Scandinavian representative of post-Yugoslav migrant writing and he has also achieved a degree of literary fame across the former Yugoslavia.[6] While the majority of post-Yugoslav migrant writers in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway continue to write and publish exclusively in

5 Jakobson famously classifies all translation into three categories: intralingual translation or rewording is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of other signs of the same language"; interlingual translation or translation proper is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of some other language"; and intersemiotic translation or transmutation is "an interpretation of verbal signs by means of signs of nonverbal sign systems" (1959, 233).

6 It could be argued that Slavenka Drakulić, who left Croatia for Sweden in the early 1990s and now lives in Stockholm and Zagreb, is better known both internationally and in the former Yugoslavia. Drakulić, however, was already a well-established journalist and non-fiction writer on the Yugoslav literary scene before the outbreak of war in the former Yugoslavia and became famous, or infamous, in the early 1990s when she was denounced in the nationalist Croatian press for her anti-war activism.

their first language of Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, or B/C/S,[7] Mešković belongs to a generation of writers who learned Danish, Swedish, or Norwegian at a younger age and have either switched completely into one of these languages or, like Mešković, write in multiple languages.[8] In this sense, his work is an interesting case study in the movement of memories across and beyond borders through the medium of migrant literature because it is possible to trace its reception both within Scandinavia and in the former Yugoslavia, and also to trace the role that translation plays at each site of reception.

Mešković's published work to date consists of a collection of prose poems, *First Return* (*Første gang tilbage*, 2009), and two novels, *Ukulele Jam* (2011) and *One-Man Tent* (*Enmandstelt*, 2016), and it all straddles the space between autobiography and fiction and can best be described as autofiction, or fiction that is heavily indebted to autobiography, which blurs the distinctions between the author, the narrator or speaker, and the character. *Ukulele Jam*, his first novel and the case study for this article, features a first-person narrator who is identifiable in many ways with Mešković himself, and so a short biographical sketch of the author may be helpful.

Mešković was born in 1977 in Derventa in what was then the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, and he and his family were forced to flee from the newly independent Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992, across a newly established national border and into neighbouring Croatia. In a recent interview, Mešković reminisced that as a fourteen-year-old boy living in Derventa, he dreamt of two things – playing for Sarajevo Football Club and being in a rock'n'roll band. Instead though, he became a refugee at fourteen, and fourteen years later, having made his way to Copenhagen and into the Danish language after two years in a Croatian refugee camp, he became a published author in Danish in 2006: "I became a writer in another country and another language, in Denmark and in Danish" (Mešković 2022, 0:40)[9] he comments. Mešković debuted on the Danish literary scene with a selec-

7 The language formerly known internationally as Serbo-Croatian was given its present name, Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, or "the virally echoing BCS acronym" by translators at the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia (ICTY) (Longinović 2011, 283). In this article, I use "Serbo-Croatian" to refer to the official language used across the former Yugoslavia before its dissolution and "Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian" or "B/C/S" to refer to the standard language after the dissolution.

8 In his comprehensive study of Bosnian migrant writing in Denmark, Sweden, and Norway, Muratspahić (2019) documents the work of 87 writers, with 60 residing in Sweden, 17 in Denmark, and 10 in Norway. Of these, only 17 have published in Swedish, Danish or Norwegian. Muratspahić's study does not cover authors who have switched into a third language, like Elvis Bego and Adnan Mahmutović, who both write in English.

9 "Postao sam pisac u jednoj drugoj zemlji i na jednom drugom jeziku, u Danskoj i na danskom". Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

tion of poems in the *New Voices* (*Nye stemmer*) anthology that was the result of a competition for "ethnic literature" initiated by Denmark's leading publishing house Gyldendal, and this coincided with what critics have described as "the beginning of a real breakthrough for immigrant writers into Danish literature" (Gaettens 2013, 63). Although Mešković never fully embraced the description of him in the Danish literary scene as an "immigrant writer" (Krasnik 2009), he maintains that: "I don't think that it's a coincidence that so many refugees become artists. Being a foreigner, if you ask me, is stimulating to art" (Mešković 2019a).[10]

Mešković's refugee experience certainly informed his debut novel, *Ukulele Jam*, which chronicles two and a half years in the life of a teenage Bosnian refugee, Emir Pozder or Miki for short, who lives with his parents in a Croatian refugee camp on the Adriatic coast. With his brother missing in a Serbian detention camp, Miki experiences flashbacks to his childhood in Bosnia and the beginning of the war there, and he yearns to escape to the Promised Land, which in his case is Sweden. The novel ends on a cliffhanger, where Miki has run away from the refugee camp but only made it as far as the next town along, with vague plans to travel on to Zagreb, the capital of Croatia, and from there to Sweden. It is only in the novel's sequel, *One-Man Tent*, that we meet up again with Miki, who is now a refugee in a Danish asylum centre, having been detained there on his way to Sweden. It might seem counterintuitive to focus on *Ukulele Jam*, a novel that largely takes place in a Croatian refugee camp, when looking at post-Yugoslav migrant writing in Scandinavia, given that it is the sequel that takes place in Denmark, but the very role of Scandinavia as nothing more than a far-off fantasy in this novel makes the author's decision to write it in Danish and its reception in Denmark all the more interesting.

Ukulele Jam as a self-translation into Danish

Mešković composed *Ukulele Jam* in Danish, and so the novel is not a self-translation in the more restricted sense of the term of an author translating their own text from one language into another, resulting in two written texts. In a broader sense, however, self-translation can be viewed as "the translation process occurring when a bilingual writer chooses to write in a second or acquired language", whereby self-translation becomes "an integral part of the 'original' creative writing process" of multilingual authors (Evangelista 2013, 178). Strictly speaking,

10 "Jeg tror heller ikke, at det er et tilfælde, at flere tidligere flygtninge bliver kunstnere. For det at være udlænding, tror jeg, er kunstnerisk set stimulerende".

Ukulele Jam is an instance of the narrow self-translation embedded within broader self-translation, because after initially composing the first twenty to thirty pages of the novel in B/C/S in 1998, Mešković returned to the project some years later, heavily editing this initial manuscript before rendering it into Danish and completing it in that language (Mešković 2011, 04:53). In this sense, *Ukulele Jam* is an original work written in the target language or, in Rebecca Walkowitz's formulation, an example of a literary work written in "languages that are translated from the start and owe their present shape to prior words and prior users of words". In such cases Walkowitz argues, where multilingual authors push against the primacy of the original language, "[w]e are confronted with dynamic processes of production and circulation featuring multiple beginnings and revisions" (2022, 325).

One of the reasons that Mešković gives for choosing to write *Ukulele Jam* in Danish after the failed attempt to write it several years earlier in B/C/S, is that he needed additional distance in both time and language to narrate the main character's traumatic experiences during the Bosnian War, and the subsequent trauma of becoming a refugee. In an interview in B/C/S, Mešković reflects on this need for another language, which he was able to satisfy with Danish: "When therapists work with traumatised patients who cannot narrate their experience, they say, 'Give it a go in English!'. Similarly, that linguistic distance allowed me to address things that perhaps I couldn't have in Bosnian" (2011, 04:53).[11]

The risk of being unable to address a traumatic event and the role of literature in countering that risk is discussed in a similar vein by the Bosnian poet Senadin Musabegović in the introductory note to his collection of war poetry, *The Shovel from Heaven* (*Rajska lopata*, 2004):

> In the peace that follows war, we are confronted with a spine-chilling silence where all the fractures, stress and echoes of war are congealed. The chaos of war [...] emerges from that silence, breaking through as a stifled moan or repressed scream, muted by the post-war silence. [...] The drama of war is ensnared in that scream, but never fully articulated. In other words: it has not been shaped into a Munch-like scream that would externalise all the terrors of war and post-war reality. In such circumstances, peace begins to resemble war [...] and in this peacetime, war begins to dictate our inner existence, stretching our skin from within, pressing us down with silence. [...] This poetry is just one attempt to voice the scream that will break through the silence that represses and oppresses us. (Musabegović 2004, 3–4)[12]

11 "Psiholozi kada rade sa pacijentom koji ima traumatični događaj i nije u stanju da ga prepriča kažu, 'Probaj na engleskom!' Isto tako, ta jezička distanca, ili otklon, mi je omogućila da se dotaknem stvari koje na bosanskom možda ne bih".

12 "U miru, što dolazi poslije rata, sudaramo se sa jezivom tišinom u kojoj su zgusnuti svi ratni lomovi, stresovi, odjeci. Iz te tišine izviruju ratna rasula [...] probijaju se kroz prigušeni jauk, ili

Musabegović says that the chaos of war, a word derived from the Germanic *werra* [confusion or strife] is manifested in peacetime in the traumatised silence of the survivors. For healing to happen, the trauma must be articulated "into a Munch-like scream that would externalise all the terrors of war and post-war reality". The purest representation of war, therefore, takes the shape of "an unquotable scream of pain" (McLoughlin 2009, 17), the verbal equivalent of Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream.* As Elaine Scarry has argued, however, pain "has no voice" and it "does not simply resist language but actively destroys it, bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language" (1985, 3–4). The scream of pain, therefore, is not only inarticulate but is in a very real sense silent; it takes the form of "the voiceless cry, which breaks with all utterances, […] exceed[s] all language" (Blanchot 1986, 51). Literature faced with war finds itself in a perilous position then, since silence may be the only possible response to war and yet a response must be articulated if war is not to be allowed to continue.

Mešković deftly sidesteps the paradoxical constraint that war cannot be, and yet must be, represented through the very language that it "actively destroys" by translating his representation into another language. At the same time, the inadequacy of any language to convey trauma fully is made apparent in the final pages of *Ukulele Jam* where Miki, having run away from the refugee camp, fantasises about an asylum interview at the Swedish Embassy in Zagreb. He imagines a friendly consul, Mr. Nilsson, who greets him at the Embassy, but in response to the consul's polite question of "Mr Pozder, tell me what you would like, sir?" (Mešković 2018, 366),[13] Miki can only manage an incoherent torrent of words:

> The shells fell. The space around us closed in … But … had I lived a little further away … or many, many kilometres away … like some … yes … But I lived there, and so did my friend Adi! Adi was a nice guy for the most part … I don't know what he's like now … We were crammed into buses one day, the army's buses, and you see Mr Nilsson: I have never liked riding in buses! Nor has my father. He is … (366)[14]

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potisnuti krik, što ga je poslijeratna tišina ušutkala. […] Ratne drame su zapravo u tom kriku kao u kulpku umotane, ali se do kraja ne artikuliraju. Drugčije rečeno: one se nisu uobičile u jedan munkovski krik koji bi svu jezu ratne i poslijeratne stvarnosti ospoljio. U tim i takvim okolnostima mir sve više počinje bivati rat […] tek u miru rat počinje da kreira našu unutrašnjost, da nam iznutra kožu steže i da nas kroz tišinu pritišće. […] Ova poezija je samo jedan napor da se ispusti krik koji će probiti opnu tišine što nas pritišće i štišće".

13 "Hr. Pozder, sig frem, hvad vil De?" (Mešković 2018, 391). All translations into the English are from Mešković 2018, all quotations from the original in Danish are from Mešković 2018. In the following only page numbers will be given for English translation in the main text and for the original in the footnotes.

14 "Granaterne faldt. Rummet omkring os snævrede ind… Men… havde jeg boet lidt længere væk… eller rigtig mange kilometer væk… som nogen… Ja… Men nu boede jeg altså dér, og det

Although Miki tries to heed the consul's instructions to calm down, stop waving his arms about, and be more specific, each subsequent attempt to tell his war story, which takes up the entire penultimate page of the novel, degenerates into a similar muddled mess. Eventually, he abandons all attempts to recount his story, as the otherwise confident, even cocky, voice of the teenage narrator breaks down into a series of ellipses, nonsensical statements, and non-sequiturs.

The asylum interview is, of course, almost always a fraught exchange. In his novel *From Nowhere to Nowhere* (2021, *Nigdje, niotkuda*, 2008), the Bosnian-Norwegian writer Bekim Sejranović presents the interview from the perspective of a Bosnian interpreter, who is unable to convey the sufferings of his fellow countrymen to the uninterested Norwegian bureaucrats: "They would strip naked, and with their muddled thoughts try to give shape to their pain and explain the injustice they had suffered to public officials who, with a few exceptions, generally couldn't care less" (2015, 118).[15] In Sejranović's telling, the asylum interview becomes an illustration of the lack of empathy in a system that can neither acknowledge nor accommodate a refugee's past, and it also becomes an indictment of the inadequacies of translation. Sejranović's narrator is painfully aware of the inability of translation to help traumatised testimony negotiate the gap between languages and cultures, and his sense of helplessness eventually leads to him quitting his job as an interpreter.

In *Ukulele Jam* however, Miki's asylum interview takes place in his imagination, where his interviewer is a representative of a utopian "civilised Sweden, the country where [...] even neo-Nazis liked Bosnians" (136)[16] and where he, as the interviewee, has no need for an ineffective interpreter. But although Miki may be able to do away with the language barrier in his imagination, even he understands at some level that he cannot translate his trauma into a coherent narrative. As the legal scholar Ilene Durst states, asylum applications are often rejected because of "the inability of the asylum applicant, [...] to translate the persecution suffered into a narrative graspable by the adjudicator, and/or the adjudicator's inability to transcend the barriers created by the inherent otherness of trauma" (2000, 128). Perhaps that is why Miki decides before his fantasy asylum interview that he will show the Embassy staff the marks on his body from a recent attack at the refugee camp: "I'll go to Zagreb, find the Swedish embassy, and show them all

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samme gjorde min ven Adi! Adi var en fin fyr... for det meste... Jeg ved ikke, hvordan han er nu... Vi blev proppet ind i busser en dag, i hærens busser, og ser De, hr. Nilsson: Jeg har aldrig rigtig kunnet lide at køre i bus! Det har min far i øvrigt heller ikke. Han er..." (392).

15 "Skidali su se goli, pokušavali svojim zbrkanim mislima dati oblik i objasniti svoju patnju i nanesenu im nepravdu službenicima koje, čast iznimkama, uglavnom nije bilo briga za sve to".

16 "Civilisered Sverige, landet, gvor selv nynazister [...] godt kunne lide bosniere" (143–144).

this swelling and bruises" (365).[17] Miki seems to realise intuitively what Liisa Malkki notes in her article on the significance of medical examinations in Hutu refugee camps: "Their bodies were made to speak to doctors and other professionals, for the bodies could give a more reliable and relevant accounting than the refugees' 'stories'" (1996, 381). Wounds are accepted as objective reality at the asylum interview, where words are always suspect.

Miki has already told his story to the Danish-reading public, however, and told it well, and in Danish no less. His incoherent attempts to tell his story at the asylum interview are a garbled version of the novel's plot, and by placing the imaginary asylum interview at the very end of *Ukulele Jam*, Mešković ensures that his readers will be able to decode Miki's incoherent testimony. The attentive reader can for example connect Miki's random interjection, "you see Mr Nilsson: I have never liked riding in buses!" (366),[18] to an earlier scene in the novel when Miki and his family are packed into "old, stinking buses and driven deep into Serbian territory" (48),[19] where Miki's older brother is taken away by the Serb forces in an episode that marks the rupture between Miki's idyllic pre-war childhood and his war-time exile as a refugee, and forms the traumatic core of the novel. By making such connections possible, Mešković creates the conditions where his readers in Danish can understand Miki's asylum interview testimony and empathise with his position, thus paving the way for prosthetic memories to form.

It is interesting to note that while Landsberg claims that "prosthetic memories can produce empathy and thereby enable a person to establish a political connection with someone from a different class, race, or ethnic position" (2004, 48), prosthetic memory functions somewhat differently in relation to migrant stories. Landsberg focuses on the second great wave of immigration into the United States that brought some thirty-five million immigrants from Europe, and to a much lesser extent from South America, Asia and Africa, to the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, and examines how early twentieth-century immigrant authors in the US mobilised prosthetic memory in their texts to counter rampant nativism and xenophobic prejudice by demonstrating to the American public that the "huddled masses" could assimilate successfully into American society. She looks at accounts of migration like Mary Antin's autobiography *The Promised Land* (1912) and Henry Roth's novel *Call It Sleep* (1934) and argues that migrants write themselves out of the margins and into the nation in these texts by conflating their stories with grand national narratives, thus taking on the prosthet-

17 "Jeg tager til Zagreb, finder den svenske ambassade og viser dem alle disse hævelser og blå mærker" (391).

18 "Ser De, hr. Nilsson: Jeg har aldrig rigtig kunnet lide at køre i bus!" (392).

19 "gamle, stinkende busser og kørt dybt ind i det serbiske territorium" (49).

ic memories of an Anglo-American past. While they were ultimately successful in serving their political purpose of countering a rising tide of nativism and anti-immigrant prejudice, these stories fail at producing empathy across social borders because they reinforce dominant national narratives by rejecting linguistic and cultural differences (Landsberg 2004, 78–79).

Mešković, however, does the exact opposite in *Ukulele Jam.* The setting that is removed from the Danish context together with the self-translation mean that Miki's refugee story is not domesticated into the recognisable narratives of the target culture, but rather this foreign story is brought into a language that is familiar to the Danish readers, and in the process the text becomes foreignised. Lawrence Venuti, who introduced the terms "domestication" and "foreignisation" into translation studies, says that domesticating translations constitute "an ethnocentric reduction of the foreign text to target language cultural values" (1998, 242); they render the presence of translation and cultural differences invisible, resulting in "acculturation, in which a cultural other is domesticated, made intelligible, but also familiar, even the same, encoded as it is with ideological cultural discourses circulating in the target language" (Venuti 2010, 27). Conversely, a foreignising translation foregrounds the fact of translation in order to "register the linguistic and cultural differences of the foreign text" (Venuti 1995, 68). Mešković maintains his text's foreign status by not covering up the presence of translation in his novel. The very first chapter of the novel ends, for example, with Miki drifting off to sleep while pondering the linguistic connections between the name of the Japanese electronics company Sanyo, the maker of his beloved cassette player, and the Serbo-Croatian word "*sanjati*", meaning "to dream"; in the text, the foreign verb is visually marked by the use of italics, serving as an explicit reminder to the readers in Danish that they are being made privy to Miki's inner thoughts through the medium of translation. Another example of where translation is made explicit in the novel occurs when Miki is tasked by the local Casanova, Igor, to act as an interpreter between him and an attractive English-speaking female tourist. In the ensuing three-way dialogue, the names of Croatian pop bands, which have already been translated into Danish in the exchange between Igor and Miki, become even more ridiculous when rendered into English through Miki's amateurish interpreting efforts. Here, Mešković not only exploits the introduction of a third language, English, for comedic effect, but also uses it as another reminder that for the readers in Danish, Miki's story, like his friend's taste in music, is in any case already mediated through translation.

By refusing to domesticate Miki's story throughout the novel, Mešković effectively activates not only prosthetic remembering in his readers in Danish but also what Elisabeth Oxfeldt has termed "Scandinavian guilt" [*skandinaviske skyldfølels-*

er],[20] an affect that can also be a productive political emotion. This kind of prosthetic remembering that enables empathy while recognising the alterity of the Other has been termed "subtitled memories" or "memories that cross borders while retaining their alterity" by Ann Rigney, and their production is made possible by "the translation of narratives from one European zone to another" (2014, 353). While Rigney focuses on instances of actual interlingual translation, such as the translation of novels by the Yugoslav Nobel Prize winner Ivo Andrić from the Serbo-Croatian into Western European languages, *Ukulele Jam* illustrates how translingual works of literature can also become contact zones and vehicles for prosthetic memory, in this case, allowing the Danish public to understand and share in Miki's trauma.

Ukulele Jam as a pseudotranslation from the Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian

In foreignising his novel, in Venuti's term, Mešković also uses pseudotranslation. Pseudotranslation is a term with a complicated history in translation studies and it has been used to refer to a range of disparate practices and phenomena (O'Sullivan 2011, 123). Anton Popovič, who was the first to define pseudotranslation, puts it under the rubric of "fictitious translation", as "not only a text pretending, or purporting, or frequently taken to be a translation, but also [...] a translation that is frequently taken to be an original work" (Robinson 1998, 183). While pseudotranslation is most often defined in this vein as texts that claim falsely to be a translation, I take it here in the broader sense of a mode of reading. In her essay *When is a Translation Not a Translation?*, Susan Bassnett radically expands the term pseudotranslation beyond the inauthentic source to encompass practices ranging from self-translation to invented dialogue in travel writing. The crux of her argument is that pseudotranslation is not necessarily a property of the text, but it can also be a mode of reading. This mode of reading is premised on what Bassnett terms a "collusion" between the writer and the reader: "[w]hen we collude with something, we go along with it, we agree with it, but only to a certain point", she explains (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, 25). Pseudotranslation thus becomes a means of redefining translation as a "set of textual practices with which the writer and reader collude" (Bassnett and Lefevere 1998, 25). This thread is taken up by Brigitte Rath in a paper presented at the 2014 annual meeting of the American

20 "Scandinavian Guilt" or "Scan Guilt" is a feeling of discomfort among Scandinavians when confronted with a global, underprivileged Other (Oxfeldt 2016, 9).

Comparative Literature Association (ACLA) and later included in the ACLA State of the Discipline Report, in which she argues for pseudotranslation as a mode of reading "that oscillates between seeing the text as an original and as a translation pointing towards an imagined original, produced in a different language" (Rath 2014). In *Ukulele Jam*, the Danish-language reader colludes with the author in imagining *in Danish* events that had to have taken place in a different language.

Although she does not use the term "pseudotranslation", Rebecca Walkowitz identifies a similar practice as one of the features of born-translated texts.[21] *Ukulele Jam* is "born translated" because Mešković composed the novel in Danish but, as he has stated in multiple interviews, always with an eye towards its eventual translation into B/C/S. Like the Danish original however, the B/C/S translation functions as a pseudotranslation in asking of its readers to collude in imagining events that had to have taken place in a different language, in that case Serbo-Croatian, which is a language that in some ways can no longer exist. The fragmentation of the common tongue in the wake of the violent dismemberment of Yugoslavia need not be retraced here,[22] but how this fragmentation affected the translation and reception of *Ukulele Jam* in B/C/S should be considered.

Tomislav Longinović has written persuasively about how translation has been used in the post-Yugoslav context as a political tool for constructing differences.[23] He discusses malicious attempts by nationalists knowingly to cause political division by the use of translation, but sometimes this outcome is both inadvertent and inescapable, as with the translation of *Ukulele Jam* into B/C/S. On the very first page of the B/C/S version of *Ukulele Jam* for example, Miki refers to his uncle as "*amidža*" (Mešković 2016, 9), and the post-Yugoslav reader cannot help but hear an ethnic valance in this term. B/C/S does not contain a term for this particular familial relation of the father's brother that is not ethnically marked, and so the translator had no choice but to choose a term that would draw the attention of the reader in B/C/S to the narrator's ethnicity. The way that the new idiom makes

21 "These works [born-translated texts] are *written for translation*, in the hope of being translated, but they are also often written *as translations*, pretending to take place in a language other than the one in which they have, in fact, been composed. Sometimes they present themselves as fake or fictional editions: subsequent versions (in English) of an original text (in some other language), which doesn't really exist" (Walkowitz 2015, 4).

22 After the initial conjoining of the language and the people in the nineteenth century, Serbo-Croatian became an official language as its speakers were united into the various iterations of Yugoslavia after the First World War, and then it followed its speakers again through the 1990s, when they went their separate ways and deprived it of its official status.

23 "The conclusions drawn from the post-Yugoslav case prove that translation can be effectively used as a political tool for the construction of differences and the tearing down of cultural bridges that promote understanding" (Longinović 2011, 283).

no room for the ethnically neutral, or at least the ethnically ambiguous, is best seen when Miki tries to make sense of the coverage of the war on the evening news. Both the Danish and English versions of *Ukulele Jam* contain references to "Bosnians" – "Serberne og os bosniere, nu kaldet bosniakker, som præsidenten stadig kaldte for muslimer" (20) / "The Serbs and us Bosnians, now referred to as Bosniaks though the president still called us Muslims" (Mešković 2018, 20)] – but the B/C/S version only references Muslims and Bosniaks: "*O Srbima i nama Muslimanima, sada zvanim Bošnjacima*" [About the Serbs and us Muslims, now called Bosniaks] (Mešković 2016, 9). In short, the language itself need not have changed significantly from Serbo-Croatian to the new idiom, and while Mešković worked closely with his translator to recreate a mixture of Bosnian and Croatian that was reminiscent of the pre-war language of his narrator, the changed context in which the language is being received means that the B/C/S reader approaching *Ukulele Jam* inevitably reads it also as a pseudotranslation pointing towards "an imagined original, produced in a different language". This different language is the Serbo-Croatian that, in the early days of the war at least, would have been Miki's mother tongue, something Mešković hints at in the B/C/S version with terms like "hrvatski dinari" [Croatian dinars] (Mešković 2016, 21) for example, using the once-common Yugoslav *dinar* currency to refer to what in the new Croatian language would be the new Croatian *kuna*.

The significance of *Ukulele Jam* functioning as a pseudotranslation even in B/C/S, and the way that this can be useful in reframing prosthetic remembering, is best illustrated through Mešković's use of epistolary conventions in the novel. Miki receives two important letters in the course of the novel, and the contrast between them is telling. One is from his childhood friend Adi, whose letter makes it clear that he has fallen prey to a nationalist ideology that is now encoded in the very language of his letter: "Are there Chetniks over with you?", Adi asks before urging his friend to "Punish those you can, man, and those you can't – Allah will take care of!" (311–312).[24] Even Adi's attempts at nostalgic reminiscence, "Do you remember the good old days? … We played Germans and partisans…" (312),[25] ultimately serve only as a bittersweet reminder that times have changed, and instead of playing Nazis against Tito's Partisans, the teenage boys are living in a world divided between Serb Chetniks and the followers of Allah.

The other letter arrives from Miki's brother Neno, who has been a significant absence at the heart of the novel and who is presumed before the letter arrives to

24 "Er der četnikker ovre hos jer?"; "Straf dem, du kan, mand, og dem, du ikke kan – vil Allah tage sig af!" (332).

25 "Kan du ikke huske de gode gamle dage?… Vi legede tyskere og partisaner…" (332).

be missing in a Serb detention camp. Although this letter is the subject of an entire chapter, which gives detailed descriptions of the postage stamp, the return address with its unfamiliar Swedish orthography, and even the quality of the Swedish paper it is written on, the readers hear the contents of what they are told is a sixteen-page letter only through a few fragments and some paraphrasing. The reader is largely asked to imagine the contents of the letter, and B/C/S readers at least are free to imagine it in whatever version of the common tongue is theirs. This opens up a space in the reader's own language for empathising with Miki, for whom the arrival of this letter signals the end of *his* war, more than any peace talks in some far-off American city could.

I emphasise *his* here, because Mešković does so as well: "*Min krig var forbi*" (278) / "My war was over" (Mešković 2018, 262) / "*Moj rat je bio završen*" (2016, 257). In commenting on the sense of isolation that permeates both *Ukulele Jam* and its sequel, Mešković draws a distinction between Miki's sense of isolation that is produced by being an outsider in Denmark, and the isolation in *Ukulele Jam* that arises because collective trauma is never *really* collective. As Aleksandar Hemon has written eloquently, "once war starts, all the individual lives commence their own, ruthlessly unique trajectories" (2015). War, in other words, besieges. Allowing B/C/S readers to imagine Neno's letter through pseudotranslation however, means that Miki's war becomes our own, and for a moment at least, the letter breaks through the siege, undoing some of the isolation caused by the loss of the shared Yugoslav cultural space and the fact that every refugee's experience is "ruthlessly unique". The resulting prosthetic memory for B/C/S readers is a reminder of the impossibility of a shared Yugoslav cultural space, since the absence of that space is the reason why prosthetic remembering is needed in the first place, and it is also an opportunity to mourn collectively this space for those who share at least a common loss, if no longer the same lived experiences.

Conclusion: Prosthetic memory and phantom pain

In a poem in Mešković's first publication in Danish, the speaker finds an old letter nestled between the pages of an atlas and he comments that, "Even though the road from Me to You is not the same as the road from You to Me, they both wind through the same atlas" (Mešković 2009, 24).[26] This travel of memories across

26 "Selv om vejen fra Mig til Dig ikke er den samme som vejen fra Dig til Mig, snor de sig begge i det samme atlas".

atlases and through letters leads us to another mode of travel, air travel. At 13:01:15 on 15 December 2011, the Iraqi-American artist Wafaa Bilal uploaded a photograph of an aeroplane to his website. The image is unremarkable, showing a large window, slightly out of focus and haphazardly framed, that looks out at the nose cone of a Delta aeroplane parked on the tarmac. The next image in the series, captured exactly one minute later at 13:02:15, is of the same scene with the camera angle adjusted slightly to show the tail end of the aeroplane. More images with more variations follow at one-minute intervals, as a Gate Gourmet catering truck appears next to the aeroplane in one shot, while someone's shoulder enters the frame in another. The sixth image in the series is a non sequitur, as the camera's perspective swings down to capture a dark passageway. The photographer has presumably stepped onto a passenger boarding bridge.[27]

None of these photographs are particularly accomplished in their execution. We should not blame the photographer for the aesthetic shortcomings of the images though, as his hand and eye had nothing to do with the photographic process. The *3rdi* photographs were taken by a prosthetic in the form of a digital camera implanted into the back of Bilal's head that was rigged to capture automatically one image per minute. The result, says the artist, is a "platform" for producing and disseminating "technological-biological images" (Bilal). These new media buzzwords should not obscure the picture though, because *3rdi*'s technological apparatus may be novel and apparently futuristic, but the artist's purpose is not future-oriented. Bilal's art is shaped by his past. As a refugee from Iraq, he comments in his statement about the work that the *3rdi* project arose "from a need to capture my past as it slips behind me" and goes on to explain that during his journey from Iraq to the US, he left many people and places behind. He wishes he could have recorded them to serve as a reminder of all the places he was forced to leave behind and may never see again. *3rdi*, then, arises from the artist's need to counter the predicament of the refugee, which is the inability to look back and remember because sometimes memories do *not* travel but are petrified. *3rdi*, then, is Bilal's answer to Lot's wife, who having nowhere to turn, turns and is turned into a pillar of salt.

The function of prosthetic memory, as defined by Landsberg, of enabling others to empathise with a traumatic past they have *not* experienced has been discussed at length, and has rightly also been criticised at length, but less has been said about the effects of prosthetic remembering on those who supposedly share

27 These photographs are a small part of Bilal's *3rdi* project, commissioned by the Mathaf: Arab Museum of Modern Art in Doha for its inaugural exhibition. The entire *3rdi* archive numbering tens of thousands of images is available online at http://3rdi.me.

a collective trauma. Landsberg likens prosthetic memories to artificial limbs with her focus on the "inauthenticity" of the artificial limb (2004, 20). I would argue though that prosthetic memory has another significant function within communities that have experienced trauma; like an artificial limb, or indeed like Bilal's prosthetic eye, it can serve to heal phantom pain. Phantom pain, caused by the amputation of a limb, is more likely to result after a traumatic injury. There is no cure, but one of the most successful treatments is to use a lifelike prosthetic. The neurologist V.S. Ramachandran notes that this treatment is successful because it restores to the body a sense of wholeness, as it literally re-members the body, while the mind is given time to process the absence of the actual limb (Hicks 2013, 18–19). Similarly, Neno's letter in *Ukulele Jam* acts through pseudotranslation as an artificial limb that temporarily creates a shared linguistic and cultural space so that the work of remembering and the work of mourning that space can begin.

And so, finally, what does this post-Yugoslav, translingual, migrant text have to say about the question, "Is there or is there not a literature of migration in Denmark?". What insights can it offer about migrant literature more generally and the role of prosthetic memory within it? I believe we can read *Ukulele Jam* simply as a text composed in Danish, and one that is thus worthy of being included in the canon of Danish migrant writing. But if we recognise translingual literature as an exercise in translation, we may also recognise the value of translation for this canon, precisely because, like Neno's letter, translated texts are not necessarily addressed to us. By recognising this, we can understand that prosthetic memory, in the context of migrant literature, does not always aim to highlight that we are all in a way like migrants. Instead it sometimes allows migrants to reclaim a past that is uniquely theirs by enabling their memories to travel across and beyond linguistic, cultural, national and temporal borders.

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Damjan Božinović and Stijn Vervaet

Translating Memories of the Bosnian War: Translators as Memory Brokers of Violent Conflict

One of the most dramatic scenes in the 2005 memoir *Postcards from the Grave* by Emir Suljagić is when he recounts his unexpected encounter with Ratko Mladić, the commander of the Bosnian Serb Army (Army of the Republika Srpska), hours before the genocide in Srebrenica.[1] Asked by the Serb officers to present his identification at a checkpoint, Suljagić gave his translator ID, which Mladić himself inspected. Suljagić had to explain where he came from, that he translated for the UN, that he had never been a soldier of the Bosnian Army, and that he was a minor when the war started (2005, 184). After this brief exchange of words, which would haunt him for years, Suljagić was released; the "yellow paper, coated with plastic" (2005, 184) saved his life. Suljagić, who was seventeen years old at the time, survived the genocide because he was employed by the UN as a translator, and he was subsequently evacuated together with the Dutch peacekeepers.

This episode encapsulates the precariousness of wartime translation and spotlights the intersection of translation and memory. Not only did Suljagić's temporary profession save his life, but translating during wartime also enabled him to tell the tale of the genocide and of his own survival *afterwards*, giving the events in Srebrenica their literary afterlife. Furthermore, the episode highlights the highly problematic role played by the international community before and during the genocide. As Guido Snel notes, "there is a strong sense throughout Suljagić's literary memoir that the failure of the international community to act appropriately was due to its incapacity to identify with the citizens under siege, who were consequently considered as part of the same, alien, 'Balkan' cultural constellation as the besiegers, hence as part of a hopelessly diverse and convoluted realm on the rim of or even outside Europe" (2014a, 195). Suljagić is very critical of the disengag-

1 Emir Suljagić's 2005 non-fiction book titled *Postcards from the Grave* [*Razglednica iz groba*] is a harrowing account of life in Srebrenica, Bosnia, during the war in the early 1990s, which culminated in July 1995 when the Bosnian Serb Army killed more than 8000 Muslim men and boys. Suljagić is today the director of the memorial centre in Srebrenica. For a discussion of Emir Suljagić's memoir, see Snel 2014a and 2014b. The Bosnian Serb Army was created on 12 May 1992, when units of the Yugoslav People's Army units stationed in Bosnia and Herzegovina were transformed into the Army of the Republika Srpska (VRS), under the command of General Ratko Mladić (Delpla, Bougarel and Fournel 2012, xv).

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ed and overly passive role taken by the Dutch battalion in Srebrenica, but at the same time it was precisely a bureaucratic formality in the form of his ID issued by the UN that ensured his own survival.

Bella Brodzki (2007) argued, building upon Walter Benjamin, that translation is more than interlingual transmission, as it is actually a necessary condition for the survival of memory. Benjamin's much-quoted preface *The Task of the Translator* (Benjamin 1997 [1923]) to his translation of Baudelaire describes translation, in Bella Brodzki's elegant phrasing, as "a redemptive mode that ensures the survival, the living on of an individual text or cultural narrative, albeit in a revised or altered form" (2007, 1–2). As Jacques Derrida importantly stressed in his text *Des Tours de Babel* (1985), Benjamin used two different terms *überleben* [survive] and *fortleben* [continue to live, live on] as two sides of a coin that time and again return in literary and artistic works that address the mutual entanglement of memory, especially traumatic memory, and translation, as this article will show.[2]

This chapter takes the role of translation both as praxis and as metaphor as a point of departure for discussing the complex travels of memories of the Bosnian war. It asks what the role of art and cultural translation is in countering balkanising views of Bosnia,[3] and how translators serve as mediators of memory. We explore two case studies that, each in a different way, articulate, recall, and help circulate memories of the war, and shed light on the various roles of translation and the translator in these mnemonic processes. The first is the 1999 bilingual anthology of contemporary Norwegian poetry devoted to the Bosnian war titled *Mourning That Blooms Dark* (*Sorg som blomstrer mørkt*, 1999), edited by the Bosnian-Norwegian poet and translator Munib Delalić, who also translated the Norwegian

2 For recent scholarship on the nexus of translation and memory, see Siobhan Brownlie's *Mapping Memory in Translation* (2016), which engages with theoretical concepts from memory studies and applies them to translation studies. Doris Bachmann-Medick (2018) proposes that translation can be used as an analytical lens for re-thinking migration, and we would also add for examining memory. In *Translating War* (2019), Angela Kershaw explores the remediation of memory through translations of war literature in the Anglo-French context. Building upon Rebecca Walkowitz's concept of literature that is "born translated" (2015), Eneken Laanes has recently argued for the need to study "memories that are born translated", suggesting "translation as a new model for conceptualising the transnational travel of memories" (2021, 1).

3 By balkanising views we mean what Maria Todorova (1999) described as Balkanism, following Edward Said's understanding of Orientalism, as a set of predominantly negative stereotypes perpetuated by mass media and culture, that frame the Balkans as Western Europe's less civilised Other.

poems into Bosnian.[4] The second case study is the 2020 film *Quo Vadis, Aida?* directed by Jasmila Žbanić. By looking at the figure of the translator, we draw equally on translation and memory studies. In this context, translation lays bare the potential and limitations for the transnational travel of memories of violent conflict at different scales, within and across European borders.

The first section explores the ways mnemonic migration is fostered by poetry in translation, which we read as a zone of convergence between the expressions of empathy, ambivalence and guilt in the anthology *Mourning That Blooms Dark.* This anthology consists of poems by twenty renowned Norwegian contemporary poets, including well-known names such as Paal Brekke, Stein Mehren and Jan Erik Vold, and it borrowed its title *Mourning That Blooms Dark* from the closing verse of the poem "War" ("Krig") by Sidsel Mørck (Delalić 1999, 64 – 69): "The refugee's resting place / is a mourning that blooms dark"[5] (Delalić 1999, 68). The poems are placed side by side in Norwegian and Bosnian. Delalić was not only the initiator of the project and the editor of the anthology, but also served as the primary translator of the poems into Bosnian. How the book came into being demonstrates how the memory of the Bosnian war travelled to a new setting in a process that exemplifies memory in motion and its perpetual transformation across borders of different types (Erll 2011). A first mnemonic migration could be said to occur when Norwegian poets, in a dynamic process of premediation and remediation (Erll and Rigney 2009), decided to write about the Bosnian war. A second way of memory travel can be seen in Delalić translating the Norwegian poems into Bosnian. We argue that the anthology unveils a link between what Elisabeth Oxfeldt has called "Scandinavian feelings of guilt" (2016, 2018) and empathy with the victims of the Yugoslav wars, and of the war in Bosnia in particular. Even more so, the poems facilitate what Michael Rothberg (2019, 12, Ch. 5 and 6) calls "long-distance solidarity", meaning "solidarity premised on logics of difference rather than on sameness and identification". At the same time, the poems and translating practices discussed here have the potential to shed light on similar issues in the present, like the war in Ukraine.

The second part of our chapter turns to the figure of the translator in Jasmila Žbanić's multiple award-winning 2020 film *Quo Vadis, Aida?* The film narrates the Srebrenica genocide from the perspective of the main character, Aida Selmanagić, a local Bosnian teacher of English who translates for the Dutch UN forces that were

4 Delalić was born in Ljubuški, Bosnia and Herzegovina, in 1950 and emigrated as a war refugee to Norway in 1993, where he later taught Yugoslav literature at the University of Oslo. He is a prolific translator of modern and contemporary Norwegian prose fiction into Croatian.

5 "Flyktningens hvilested / er en sorg som blomstrer mørkt". All the translations from Norwegian in this chapter are ours.

responsible for protecting Srebrenica.[6] The film illustrates the blatant complicity of the international community in the subsequent genocide. It zooms in on the personal drama of the protagonist, who survives because she is a UN employee but eventually loses her husband and both of her sons, but it also brings to the fore the precarious position of the translator in a war zone. Aida is literally and metaphorically caught in the crossfire between the perpetrators (the army of Republika Srpska), the victims (the inhabitants of Srebrenica, including her own family), and Dutchbat, the supposed peacekeepers, and she occupies a liminal space in several respects. Presented as a survivor of genocide and a mediator of memories, the character of Aida sheds light on the complex entanglement of translation, witnessing and remembering, including questions of trauma and survivor guilt.

We analyse the figure of the interpreter as a mediator, not only between languages, but also of the collective memory of the genocide. What both case studies have in common is the overall sense that Europe did not do enough to prevent the genocide and stop the atrocities in Bosnia. In the conclusion, we sum up how our case studies foster reflection upon the potential and limitations of travelling memory. We will demonstrate that the poems go a long way to provincialise Scandinavian memory culture, while the film asks about Western Europe's complicity in, and responsibility for, the war crimes that happened during the Bosnian war.

Writing and translating poetry: The poetics and ethics of long-distance solidarity between feelings of empathy and guilt

Before analysing the poems in *Mourning That Blooms Dark*, we will look at the foreword, as this meta-text points the way for understanding the dynamics of mnemonic migration, circulation, and the translation of the literature about the Bosnian war in the Norwegian context. Delalić notes the double purpose of the anthology, which is meant primarily as a testimony to the war in Bosnia from an outside perspective, but also gives readers from the former Yugoslavia an insight into contemporary Norwegian poetry.

Delalić first encountered Jan Erik Vold's poetry about the war in Bosnia in 1996, and this prompted him to collect work on the same topic by other contempo-

6 Srebrenica had been declared a Safe Area by the UN Security Council on 19 April 1993 and was put under the protection of the United Nation Protection Forces (UNPROFOR, known as the blue helmets), which was first a Canadian unit and later a Dutch battalion.

rary Norwegian poets. He himself says that the result is a collection of poems that undoubtedly vary "with regard to generation, poetic form and, of course, the strength of their poetic expression" (Delalić 1999, 6), but that nonetheless offer an insight into modern Norwegian poetry, centred around a common topic. Delalić (1999, 7–8) suggests furthermore that the book is a window into how others saw the Bosnians at a time when their identity and survival were at stake, and it is a sign of support for the Bosnian cause that tells them "You are not alone". Although Delalić himself doubts the actual power of literature to intervene effectively in politics, the book nonetheless serves as valuable literary evidence of transnational solidarity and empathy.

As several of the poems suggest, vivid images of the war reached the Norwegian spectator or poet mostly through the mass media, and they served both as a source of inspiration for the poems and as the subject matter for them. These poems illustrate the importance of what Astrid Erll and Ann Rigney (2009) call the dynamics between premediation and mediation in the construction and circulation of cultural memory, meaning how the images of the war that circulated in the mass media actually premediated some of the lyric reflections upon the war in the poems. Some poets, such as Paal Brekke and Lasse Tømte, reflect on how the media impacted their own perception of the war. Other poems seem to have been directly inspired by the poets' personal encounters with refugees from the war, as in the case of Ida and Mathis Mathisen (Delalić 1999, 8). Poems such as those by Paal Brekke show that he, and probably other poets of his generation as well, cherished personal memories of travel to socialist Yugoslavia and participation in literary events in the country.[7] These personal contacts at the state and regional level were mirrored and enabled by several bilateral initiatives and organisations that fostered Yugoslav-Norwegian friendship, most of which were directly initiated by the memories of the forced labour of Yugoslav citizens, mostly from Serbia, in German work camps in Narvik in the north of Norway.[8] As Delalić puts it, freely paraphrasing Brekke, Norwegian poets went through different stages, "from love to the

7 Perhaps, though this remains only speculation, Brekke's personal experience as a war refugee in Sweden in the Second World War might have fostered his understanding for the Bosnian cause even more.

8 Material and non-material instances of these bilateral relations include the establishment of the Norwegian-Yugoslav friendship association and several declarations of friendship between Norwegian and Yugoslav, now mostly Serbian, municipalities, but also smaller post-war monuments in the Vigeland park in Oslo and the 1987 House of Yugoslav-Norwegian Friendship in Gornji Milanovac, which changed into the House of Serbian-Norwegian friendship in 2008. For the problematic aspects of building Yugoslav-Norwegian friendship on the foundations of a notion of victimhood that, moreover, blended Yugoslav victims of Nazism and partisan fighters, see Ognjenović 2016.

previous country to distrust when the Yugoslav state building started cracking in its joints to the observer's desperation and helpless withdrawal, confronted with all this evil" (1999, 6–7). In this respect, the anthology shows that mnemonic migration was a multi-faceted process that happened as a result of real-life migrations and the communication between people, as well as in response to exposure to the mass media.

Equally though, *Mourning That Blooms Dark* could be seen as offering the Bosnian reader, and also the Croatian and Serbian reader, a window into modern Scandinavian poetry, turning this book into a two-way street in which memory and mnemonic exchange have the potential to travel in both directions. Though it is difficult to gauge whether that potential is actually realised and what the outreach of a book is once it begins its afterlife (on reception, see section III of this volume), *Mourning That Blooms Dark* nonetheless offers valuable material for understanding how transnational solidarity becomes articulated in literary form. One of the recurring motifs that bind most of the poems together is the interplay of empathy and guilt, which is interwoven with reflections about the deep ambivalence of these feelings. In "In the Plane (Over Yugoslavia on our Way to Crete)" ("*På Flyet* (*Over Jugoslavia på vei til Kreta*)") for example, Jul Haganæs questions the morality of flying over Yugoslavia on the way to a summer holiday, while knowing very well what is happening down below:

> We are on our way / to southern beaches / at the sunny-blue sea / sailing freely / above shining / homes of clouds // But we know – about / the crunched land / with walls of blood / down in the shadow / where we should have been / with extended hands // How perplexing / that a creator / loves us so much / that we are on our way / to the promised land / even though we / don't do / anything. [9] (Delalić 1999, 36)

The final lines seem to articulate a mix of guilt and shame, suggesting that Yugoslavia is where the speaking subject and his companions should be, stretching out a helping hand. Indeed, the speaking subject wonders where this almost undeserved privilege comes from – it is undeserved since they are on their way to Crete, "the promised land", even though they are not doing anything about the war raging below.

Elisabeth Oxfeldt and her research team have observed that "Scandinavian feelings of guilt" (Oxfeldt, Nestingen and Simonsen 2017; Oxfeldt 2017, 2018) proliferate in contemporary literature and culture in Scandinavia, across different gen-

9 "Vi er på veg / til sudrøne strender / ved solblått hav / siglande fritt / over skinande / skyheimar // Men vi veit – om / det krasa landet / med blodvegar / nede i skodda / der vi skulle vore / med utrekte hender // Gåtefullt då / at ein skapar / har oss så kjær / at vi er på veg / til det lova landet / sjølv om vi / ingenting / gjer".

res and media, both highbrow and lowbrow. Superficially, "Scandinavian guilt" could be described as an offshoot of "liberal guilt" or "white guilt", which are feelings of guilt felt by those born in an economically, socially, culturally or genetically privileged milieu. In the US, white guilt is specifically related to the country's legacy of slavery and so is framed within the national context as guilt towards a national Other, while feelings of guilt in Western Europe may similarly be related to the colonial past of different countries. Scandinavian guilt, however, seems to emerge from contact with others who are not as privileged, either from witnessing global injustices through the media, or from encountering migrants and refugees, who have been arriving in Scandinavia in bigger numbers since the 1990s, and more recently it has also emerged in reaction to the participation of Scandinavian countries, especially Denmark and Norway, in international warfare and weapons exports (Oxfeldt 2016, 12–14). Taking her cue from Judith Butler, Oxfeldt further points out that narratives of guilt in the Scandinavian context can indeed function as stories that run against the grain of idealised media images of Scandinavia, including the widespread notion of "Nordic exceptionalism" (Oxfeldt 2016, 14), which suggests that because they allegedly had no colonial history, Scandinavian nations do not share the burden of colonialism with the British, the French, the Belgians or the Dutch. Feelings of guilt can in other words serve as an avenue leading towards transnational solidarity (cf. Butler 2010, 47; see also Rothberg 2019, esp. part III).

Several of the poems in the anthology echo feelings of guilt that are similar to those suggested by Oxfeldt and seem to ask the question that is central to Butler's 2010 book about grievable lives; are Bosnian lives less grievable than Norwegian or West-European ones and if so why? In the poem "Dying Bosnian" ("Dødende Bosnier"), Brekke's lyric I reflects on its own position as a subject. He is steeped in luxury, lying next to his swimming pool while watching a portable television screen that shows how a wounded Bosnian peasant is lying on the ground in front of his burning house, prodded with machine guns by two men in camouflage uniforms, and he calls himself "the coward in an outside-land"[10] (Delalić 1999, 28). A horrible perplexity that is triggered by an awareness of how the mass media and especially the internet, which was emerging as a new technology at the time, make the contemporaneity of events very palpable pervades several of the poems. One of them is Lasse Tømte's poetic vignette "Naked Moose" ("Naken elg"), which evokes the paradoxical feeling of living in parallel worlds, where the poet is safe in his house in snow-covered Scandinavia, while citizens in Bosnia are killed by snipers, killings that are recorded and published on the internet simultaneously:

10 "Jeg er den feige i et utenfor-land".

> The house lies in a snowdrift. Into the snowdrift goes a phone cable, a lifeline and umbilical cord. I'm digging myself in, take my place at the PC and connect myself to the world. *Hello?* Cool, these 1990s. *Is there anyone there?* [...] On the net you can follow what is happening in Sarajevo from hour to hour. [...] When the man on the roof shoots, hits, and a human being falls, a notification about the event ticks on the net. I'm reading it in the same instant. I'm sitting in the snowdrift and reading it.[11] (116)

The internet connection that connects the poet to the world like an umbilical cord thus becomes a tool that the perpetrators in Bosnia can use to record their crimes, letting the poet follow the killings in real time in an uncanny way. When the reader reaches the end of the prose poem, the narrator's earlier comment "Cool, these 1990s" ("Fete, disse nittiåra", 116) takes on a rather cynical sense.

Paal Brekke's poem "Dying Bosnian" ("Dødende Bosnier") addresses even more openly the contradictory ethical responses that stem from the mixed feelings of closeness and remoteness, of involvement and detachment.[12] The poet recalls his own memories of Yugoslavia, from Belgrade, where he was "driven to the countryside in a limousine" where "Tito gave a speech, and I read a poem", to encounters in Zagreb, Dubrovnik, and Ljubljana, and at the end of the first stanza he sums up his own personal relationship with the country as "and so I loved Yugoslavia" (Delalić 1999, 24). But as the subtitle "studies in the ambivalence of an outsider" [*studier i en utenforståendes ambivalens*] suggests, the poem then goes on to think through the ambivalence of the position of the outside observer who is speaking, and to put this relationship in a historical perspective. Images from the Bosnian war on television remind the poet of the suffering of the Jews in the Second World War, and also of colonial policies in Africa:

> as in a déjà-vu on the screen I see also
> how naked Jews are chased with rifle butts
> into the gas chamber
> and I see in the same déjà-vu the handsome
> cricket boys in khaki and pith helmet
> wide-legged in their kano, midstream on

---

11 *"Huset ligger inne i en snøskavl. Inn i skavlen går en telefontråd, livline og navlestreng. Jeg graver meg inn, setter meg ved pc'en og kobler meg inn på verden. Hallo? Fete, disse nittiåra. Er det noen der? [...] På nettet kan man følge utviklingen i Sarajevo fra time til time. [...] Når mannen på taket skyter, treffer og et menneske faller om, tikker meldingen om hendelsen ut på nettet. Jeg leser det i samme øyeblikk. Sitter inne i snøskavlen og leser".*

12 Paal Brekke (1923–1993) was an important Norwegian modernist poet and translator, who made his debut as poet at the age of 20 as a refugee in Sweden during the Second World War.

the African river
to subjugate an inferior race.[13] (Delalić 1999, 28)

Brekke's use of the imagery of the Holocaust and colonialism to try to describe and grasp what is going on in Bosnia points a finger at Europe's dark legacy, which continues to contaminate the present. Such poetic imagery arguably serves to shed light on the current conflict by drawing an analogy with other well-known instances of state-supported extreme violence and historical injustice. Michael Rothberg (2009) discussed this logic in *Multidirectional Memory*, in which he shows how Holocaust remembrance can help articulate seemingly unrelated historical injustices and state supported violence elsewhere, such as colonialism and slavery, either by offering mnemonic templates or by lending vocabulary. In the closing stanza, the poet in an apostrophe addresses the dying Bosnian who is the subject of his poem, admitting that awareness of history repeating itself does not offer any consolation to the victims of the war, nor does it give the dying Bosnian a voice. After this apostrophe, which for an instant appears on the portable television to bring together the speaking I and the Bosnian war victim, the poet can only conclude by repeating his earlier reflection that he is "the pale cowardly observer in an outside land" (Delalić 1999, 28).

However, it would be reductionist to argue that what the poems are doing is merely, or mostly, articulating feelings of guilt. As Iris Maria Young puts it, while guilt is backward-looking and related to our deeds in the past, "the meaning of political responsibility is forward-looking" (2011, 92). Quite a few of the poems in Delalić's anthology address questions of responsibility, and so Oxfeldt's point about Scandinavian guilt gains an additional dimension. Importantly, the question of responsibility is mostly framed through the lens of Europe as an entity with ethical duties. A number of poems address Europe's responsibility explicitly, such as Jan Erik Vold's poem "This Europe they are talking about" ("*Dette Europa de snakker om*") with the suggestive subtitle *Bosnia 93 – Warszawa 43*, which points at the complicity of Europe while drawing parallels with Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto:

This
Europe
they are talking about, this Europe

13 "som i et déjà-vu på skjermen ser jeg også / nakne jøder føyses med geværkolber / inn i gasskammeret / og ser i samme déjà-vu de kjekke / cricketboys i stivet khaki og med solhjelm / skrevende på sin kanonbåt, midstrøms opp / den afrikanske floden / for å underlegge seg en mindreverdig rase".

is burning. This
Europe they are praising, is now killing
its
own people. That which happened
in Auschwitz, is now happening
in Bosnia-Hercegovina
Does one have to be a politician, to be able
not to see this? (Delalić 1999, 118)[14]

Again, the reference to Auschwitz and the Warsaw Ghetto is not made by chance, since the Holocaust has served as a reference point for subsequent conceptualisations and debates about a number of extreme crimes against humanity, from slavery to the war crimes and genocide in the Yugoslav wars of succession. The poem suggests that Europe is a broader community with certain ethical responsibilities, an idea that also is implicit in Žbanić's film *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, which is discussed below.[15]

Expressions of friendship and love for Yugoslavia and Bosnia are also highlighted, which amplifies the feeling of collective guilt around the events of the war.[16] Delalić (1999, 10–11) mentions in his introduction that the book is a symbol of Norwegian-Bosnian relations. Interestingly, most of the poets in the anthology were born before the Second World War and so belong to a generation that remembers not only the struggle against Nazism but also a different, peaceful, socialist Yugoslavia, where they had friends, colleagues, and translators.[17] The Bosnian war in summary seems to function in many of the poems as a trigger for Scandinavian guilt, but it is also a cue for the poets to think about issues of international solidarity and the role of Europe as peacekeeper in its own house, the question of whether Europe treats the Balkans in general, and Bosnia in particular, as its internal other, and all the way to questions of transnational memory. However, while the Norwegian poems explicitly bear witness to the suffering of Bosnian citi-

14 "Dette / Europa / som de snakker om, dette Europa / brenner. Dette // Europa de lovpriser, dreper nå Sine / egne. Det som skjedde / i Auschwitz, skjer nå / i Bosnia-Hercegovina / Må man være politiker, for ikke å se det?".

15 See also Jan Erik Vold's "Requiem in October" ("Rekviem i oktober"), which likewise calls out the EU for its inaction.

16 This friendship has many interesting chapters. One of the streets in Skopje, North Macedonia, for example, bears the name of Thorvald Stoltenberg, the father of Jens Stoltenberg, the incumbent secretary-general of NATO, who helped during the aftermath of the 1963 earthquake, since he was a diplomat in Belgrade at the time.

17 As it happened, they also grew up in an era in which life in Norway was far less prosperous, before oil started to be exploited on large scale, and Norway was not necessarily perceived as one of the rich, privileged parts of the world.

zens, it seems as if the translator has erased himself from the anthology and made himself invisible. This erasure echoes Stahuljak's (2000) criticism of testimonial genres such as Claude Lanzmann's documentary film *Shoah*, and of trauma studies in the late 1990s, specifically Shoshana Felman's and Dori Laub's book *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*, which use the translator as a mere metaphor, thus erasing them from historical testimonies: "Although the act of translation thus represents the process of testimonial transmission, the translator is nevertheless reduced to a position of minor consequence", whereas "the interviewer, the historian and the spectator are thus given testimonial stances" (Stahuljak 2000, 39). In the next section we approach the question of mnemonic migration from yet another perspective, focusing now not only on film, which as a genre is usually considered the medium par excellence for creating prosthetic mnemonic communities (Landsberg 2004), but also on a particular film that puts the translator as witness and survivor in the limelight.

Quo Vadis, Aida? The interpreter as implicated subject, witness, and survivor

At the very beginning of *Quo Vadis, Aida?*, after a brief opening panning shot of the Selmanagić family, the film transitions to a black screen with the words "Europe, Bosnia – July 1995" and "Evropa, Bosna, juli 1995" in white letters, in English and in Bosnian, immediately after which we see the army of Republika Srpska entering the town of Srebrenica. The choice of words and their order is not incidental, though it may seem redundant to place the word "Europe" next to "Bosnia". Emphasising the seemingly self-evident fact of Bosnia being in Europe sets the tone for the rest of the film though, and foreshadows how translation is inseparable from the greater picture of war by reminding us of Apter's thesis that "the translation zone is a war zone" (2006, ix), and setting the stage for the protagonist Aida, who as a translator becomes a witness, survivor, and subsequent mediator of memory of the genocide. By placing the word "Europe" first, the film literally states that a heinous crime happened in the middle of Europe, with Europe as a geographical signifier, while simultaneously highlighting the prominent but often neglected role played in the Srebrenica massacre by Europe as a metonymy for the international community stretching beyond its physical borders. Conversely, the coupling of Europe and Bosnia can also be interpreted as an oxymoron from a geopolitical and cultural point of view of the centre and the periphery, because has Europe ever regarded Bosnia as constituent part of it, or is the whole region destined to lie perpetually on Europe's outskirts? This question is particularly haunting in the case of

Srebrenica, since, as Guido Snel (2014a, 2014b) emphasised, the perceived non-Europeanness of Bosnians, and of the people framed as Bosnian Muslims in particular, may have fed into the international community not identifying with, and so not properly protecting, the inhabitants of the enclave they were supposed to protect.

As Dijana Jelača pointed out, the glaring omission of on-screen physical violence that characterises *Quo Vadis, Aida?* is quite atypical for a film that deals with such a brutal theme. The film succeeds in "conveying the horror of mass atrocity without making a spectacle out of death and suffering, without subjecting the traumas of the victims and survivors to an exploitative gaze" (Jelača 2021, 201). Rather than fetishising graphic violence, Žbanić focuses on Aida's personal battle and the actions or inactions of the parties involved and their consequences, both immediate and future. While Jelača builds on the absence of spectacle and the politicisation of violence in the film to conceptualise what she calls "women's world cinema [which], made by women, speaks to women's experiences" (2021, 198), we argue that Žbanić's choice of a female protagonist who is at the same time a wartime translator is not accidental, but allows her to show how translating and witnessing, survivor trauma, and remembering genocide are entangled in multiple ways.

After the opening credits and images of tanks entering Srebrenica, the scene moves to representatives of the Bosniak community, including the mayor, asking for direct military help from the Dutch battalion commander Lieutenant Colonel Karremans as the town is taken over. As the interpreter, Aida is also present at the table at the Dutchbat headquarters and the film places her as the focal point of the scene, in the middle of the frame, as a symbolic border *and* a bridge between Bosnia and Europe. The atmosphere is unbearably tense as those present listen to a radio broadcast about the advances of the army of the Republika Srpska, while we see the actors in extreme close-up at the table, with almost everybody in the room smoking nervously, which simultaneously gives a sense of camaraderie and amplifies the overall anxiety, the mayor fidgeting with a lighter, Aida with a notepad, and Karremans with a marker pen. After a brief silence, Karremans explains the situation to the mayor and assures him that everything possible is being done to block the Serb advance. The mayor begs for help and complains that not enough is being done, since the same story is repeated daily, while the enemy gets closer by the minute. Aida not only translates from English into Bosnian and back again, but she also serves as a cultural mediator and bridges the gap between two different registers. Karremans attempts to stay composed and uses quite vague military lingo in a bureaucratic fashion, while the mayor's Bosnian is unsurprisingly more direct, down to earth, and emotionally invested, which further exem-

plifies the misunderstanding between Dutchbat and the people caught in the enclave.

The opening negotiations scene involving the mayor and Karremans is quite indicative of how the responsibility of the UN forces is depicted, as at one point, Karremans says to the mayor: "I am just a piano player", wanting to suggest that he has only a minor role in the conflict. Karremans actually said these words followed by "don't shoot the piano player", during his conversation with Ratko Mladić on July 11 to ease the tension when he was confronted about firing at the soldiers of the Army of Republika Srpska (Dobbs 2012; Sijpels 2011).[18] This was a last-ditch effort to halt the advance of the Army of Republika Srpska and prevent them from entering Srebrenica. In the film, the mayor looks at him in disbelief and asks Aida to clarify the meaning of the phrase, to which she responds that he is just a messenger, or a pawn in the game. The mayor hurls insults at him which effectively ends the meeting. The scene serves as a proverbial example of shooting the messenger, or the translator,[19] and sets the stage for the inquiry into the failure of the UN to prevent the genocide.

From the very beginning of the film, the audience sees that Aida is an indispensable link in the chain of communication, as she is physically and verbally more than a conveyor of messages from one language to another.[20] At one point, she interrupts the mayor when he gets too carried away, and she asks him to pause so she can convey the message in the clearest possible way, so that Karremans will comprehend the gravity of the position the Bosniaks have found themselves in. She does not pause him just because he is saying too much at once, she pauses him so that she can filter and re-package the message, intervening directly in the process. Aida is hesitant at first to translate the mayor's accusation when he says that Karremans will be accountable should the Serbs enter the town, in order not to complicate the negotiations further by possibly irritating a UN officer. Conversely, when she interprets Karremans's words to the mayor, she attempts to sound as reassuring as possible, though it is not clear whether she or Karremans are convinced by what he is saying in the first place. Aida herself wants to believe him, which is why she has a reaffirming tone in her voice despite the troubled expression on her face. This juxtaposition of emotions is brilliantly portrayed by Jasna Đuričić, whose acting in this scene perfectly captures the immense pressure put on the interpreter, as Aida looks absolutely exhausted by the toll that translating during a war has taken. This scene recalls an important point made by Stahul-

18 This has been changed in the film for narrative purposes.

19 Cf. Beebee 2010.

20 Stahuljak (1999) points out that this is typical for wartime translators.

jak, who argues that wartime translators are the embodiment of the conflict they interpret, torn between political allegiance and professional neutrality: "In order to translate the violence of the war, she becomes herself the site of a violent conflict" (1999, 36).

In his article titled "Shoot the Transtraitor! The Translator as Homo Sacer", Thomas Beebee highlights the paradox that translators and interpreters face: "If the translator works literally, then she is reduced to a mere machine or mouthpiece of the author, unworthy of ethical treatment; if she alters the text, then she may be persecuted for incompetence, for unethical behaviour, or for expressing her own opinions rather than merely conveying those of another" (2010, 303). However, in Aida's case the stakes and the eventual consequences are infinitely higher than possible accusations of incompetence and unethical treatment, since she is responsible for much more than just her own life. Beebee (2010) is referring to Agamben's (1998) concept of the *homo sacer* from antiquity, who is the sacred man who exists outside the law, and who may not be sacrificed but may be killed without legal consequences, as his life is essentially not worthy of either taking or saving. In a sense, this encapsulates Aida's situation very well, since she indeed exists outside the laws that govern the safe area of Srebrenica. Her job as a translator for the UN gives her much greater rights than the vast majority of the Bosniaks caught in the enclave during the genocide, because she is allowed to move around the factory complex where the Bosniaks are seeking shelter for example, and she manages to pull out her husband and her sons from the crowd outside the fenced area and get them in. However, this seemingly privileged position does not in the end benefit her much, as the survival of her family and several thousands of other Bosniaks eventually proves to be unattainable. Although Aida herself survives and is eventually evacuated, her position outside the law makes her lose everything except her own life.

Aida manages to smuggle her family inside the compound after she convinces the UN official that her husband, an educated man, is a perfect representative for the people of Srebrenica in the negotiations with Mladić. As they are ushered in, we hear a barely audible 'I am *just* a translator here' from Aida, as the other people are confused by what is happening and demand answers, which she provides albeit shyly. Before Aida puts forward her husband's name as a negotiator, she tries to persuade someone from the crowd to volunteer for the task. When she addresses the crowd, she is significantly more persuasive than the UN official whose words she is translating, adding words and phrases, trying hard to get somebody to cooperate. In that sense, Aida embodies the paradox Beebee describes, as she is

constantly balancing between staying true to the message and enhancing it, because the stakes are simply too high for her not to intervene.[21]

While her husband is in a meeting with Mladić, the army of the Republika Srpska enters the complex in search of armed men. Aida attempts to reassure people that there is nothing to fear since the search is just a formality. Again, we see Aida attempting to look more confident and optimistic than she actually is, so that at this point she comes across as a guardian more than an interpreter. As the plot develops, Aida does less and less interpreting; the more hopeless the odds get as the enemy closes in, the more diminished her role as an interpreter is, until it has fully disintegrated and been taken over by her role as a mother in a futile attempt to save what can be saved. The corporeal aspect of translation and interpretation comes to the fore, and Aida, as an embodiment of the conflict and its tragic outcome for the Bosniaks, is gradually transformed from a physically static and seemingly optimistic participant at the negotiating table to a more kinetic figure, jostling around the factory compound in the hope of preventing that which the spectator of today knows is going to happen. Not only does this character development add to the overall tension and create a sinister atmosphere, it also serves as a powerful commentary on the nature of wartime translation itself.

In what is arguably the most emotionally charged scene as the film reaches its climax, Aida begs on her knees for a UN official to put her family, or at least one son, on the list of people who will be evacuated. Her husband is granted permission as a negotiator, but since the sons are not, he refuses to leave them. The UN official gives them a bureaucratic explanation for the refusal, effectively sentencing them to death. The three men are put on a truck with others and driven away to a nearby cinema, which has been repurposed to be used for mass executions. After a moment of silence and close-up shots of the frightened men, AK-47 rifles protrude through the projector holes – we see muzzle flashes, and the scene cuts to nearby children who are playing football. Disturbed by the noise of automatic rifles, they run away, and the scene fades out.

So how does the translator function as a mediator of memory in *Quo Vadis, Aida?* To answer this, we approach the interpreter in a way that gauges the involve-

21 Later, in one of the very few scenes in which Aida is not featured, the Bosniak delegation together with Dutchbat negotiate the terms of surrender with Mladić. Karremans believes that he has managed to negotiate a solid deal for the Bosniaks, while the Bosniaks themselves who are present are not convinced and feel that the whole process was a charade, which eventually proves to be true. Aida's omission from the scene has a strong symbolic value because the official explanation for her absence is that Mladić has his own translator and that her services are simply not needed. Although the interpreter is nominally a non-implicated, neutral figure, every side in the war has their own interpreter and their own way of interpreting history.

ment not only of the interpreter herself but of all the parties involved in the question of responsibility. The issue is raised on two levels. One is the involvement of the peacekeeping force and the role of the United Nations, Dutchbat and the EU in the genocide. This involvement is depicted by showing the peacekeepers as taking a bureaucratic stance of "these are the rules, I am just doing my job", as is highlighted during the decisive moment when Aida's family is denied a place in the convoy in the midst of the massacre.[22] The second level is shown in the final part of the film, which explores the question of ethical and moral responsibility towards the victims from the perspective of a survivor, through survivor guilt, reconciliation, and cohabitation with the perpetrators.

After Aida's family is killed, the film cuts to a scene of a car driving through a snowy landscape. We soon learn that this is Aida returning to Srebrenica after an unspecified time following the main events. The contrast in the scenery is sharp. The first part of the film is set during the summer heat and aesthetically has a warm, saturated colour palette, but cool tones are now employed to symbolise not only death and sadness but also the post-war change in Srebrenica; Aida comes to a town that has changed completely and become an ethnically, politically, socially and ideologically different place. The temporal rupture also importantly indicates the different roles that Aida inhabits over time, as the film never fixes her identity as a victim.

The onlookers scan her as she walks the streets, and the actors stare almost directly into the camera in what seems like complete surprise. Filming Srebrenica residents from Aida's point of view creates the impression that the audience is being subjected to their gaze, as if both Aida and the audience are being asked "What are *you* doing here?". Aida goes to her old apartment, which is now inhabited by a young mother and her child; Aida picks up a small case containing all that remains from her previous life, including several photographs of her family. Finally, she asks the woman to vacate the apartment as soon as possible so that she can move back in. On her way out, she is greeted by a neighbour in passing. Aida realises that the man is a war criminal, one of the Serbian commanders during the genocide. To make matters worse, he is the husband of the woman she has just talked to, which puts her in a complete state of shock.

The scene shows the complicated dynamic between the idea of post-war reconciliation and the possibility, or impossibility, of the victim and the perpetrator coexisting. In addition to her role as a wartime interpreter, Aida is transformed

22 The way in which the Dutchbat, and Karremans in particular, is represented in the film recalls Hannah Arendt's (1964) characterisation of Eichmann as someone who refuses to take on responsibility for his own acts but instead presented himself as a cog in a machinery, minimising his own role in the mass destruction of Jews.

into living proof of the genocide, who now serves as a mediator between the past, the present and the impossible future, forced to live next to the perpetrators of the genocide. Recalling Stahuljak's (1999) point that interpreters are the embodiment of war helps us see how Aida embodies not only the war as an interpreter but also the memory of the victims as a victim herself. Aida seems to exemplify at least two different types of witness: the witness as third party [Lat. *terstis*] and the witness as survivor [Lat. *superstes*] (see Agamben 2002, 17; Assmann 2006, 85–92).[23] In the portrayal of responsibility, Aida's character encapsulates not only the responsibility towards the memory of the victims, but also the responsibility towards the ethical and aesthetic representation of victimhood in film. In the closing scene of the film, we see Aida attending a school play, having returned to her pre-war job as a schoolteacher. The children dance cheerfully in slow motion, while we see the Serb commander in the audience, watching his son perform. Aida looks directly into the camera, which mirrors an earlier scene when she was looking through the fence of the factory complex. Even if the war is over, the feeling of being left alone remains, perhaps akin to "the feeling of cosmic loneliness which a man sentenced to death can feel", which Suljagić (2005, 10) highlights in his first description of life in the enclave of Srebrenica.

Conclusion

As Doris Bachmann-Medick observed, "the disrupting dimensions of migration constitute a central and defining force. I am referring here on the one hand to the active power of migrating individuals: the power to deal with cultural displacements, discontinuities, interventions, and shifting social contexts; to be confronted with misunderstandings and obstructions: and even to exercise agency in triggering social transformations" (2018, 275). Perhaps this also applies to the translator and the agency they have in mediating memories and fostering the travelling of memories on different levels. As our case studies show, translators and translation play a crucial, and sometimes unexpectedly varied, role in fostering mnemonic migration. Translation can sometimes have an activist edge, as in the case of the poet and translator Munib Delalić, himself a migrant and a refugee, who brought together poems that shed a specific light on the way the Bosnian war was perceived in Norway. In *Mourning That Blooms Dark*, the poets reflect on the Bosnian war as outsiders and simultaneously critically speak of, and on behalf of, Europe. These

23 Both Agamben and Assmann follow Emil Benveniste for their etymological mapping of the different origins and meanings of our modern understanding of witnessing and testimony.

poems articulating feelings of guilt and empathy could be read in line with what Oxfeldt has named Scandinavian guilt, but they also show how "memories are mobile, histories are implicated in each other" (Rothberg 2009, 313) and how feelings of being implicated can serve as a platform for thinking about issues of transnational solidarity and responsibility. In doing this, the poems help the reader rethink and remember the Yugoslav wars beyond the borders of the ex-Yugoslav cultural space. If we consider the Norwegian poems to be a *translation* of the Bosnian war from a Scandinavian perspective, then we can see them as de-balkanising, in the sense that translation challenges the ideas of distance between the us in Scandinavia and Europe and the them, the Other, in Bosnia.

Quo Vadis, Aida? then brings to the fore other aspects of translation as a crucial force in mnemonic migration, showing as its protagonist a wartime translator who moves beyond the role of the linguistic go-between and becomes a witness, a victim and a survivor. At the same time, the film shows how being a victim or a perpetrator or an implicated subject "is not an ontological identity" but "a position that we occupy in particular, dynamic, and at times clashing structures and histories of power" (Rothberg 2019, 8, 48), thus creating an ethical complexity that does not make the film easier to watch. *Quo Vadis, Aida?* could be called a film that is born translated, as it is a co-production from several countries, in which four languages are spoken, and which shows how Srebrenica is, and should be, part and parcel of Europe's collective memory – a conclusion that was already suggested in the mid-1999s by the Norwegian poets in Delalić's anthology. Sooner or later this will need to be addressed in terms of how Europe is implicated. As the poet Terje Skulstad wrote, "we decided that the Balkan nightmare is a religious-tribal war" (Delalić 1999, 98); the categories that Europe used to describe the war were indicative of its very unwillingness to understand and intervene.

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Mónika Dánél

Multilingual Locals and Accented Reading as a Remediation of Shared Multi-Ethnic Memories: Ádám Bodor's *The Sinistra Zone* and *The Birds of Verhovina*

> To read the names from the slabs with your hands you have to tear off the moss. [...] Besides this, there must be ruins of languages, words, ruins of letters, of this movable memory. (Yuri Andrukhovych 2018, 5)

East-Central Europe as multilingual

East-Central Europe as a historical in-between territory where dislocating maps have for centuries continuously re-framed static spaces and their inhabitants merges traces of different national and ethnic memories.[1] The cultural interferences and juxtapositions mean that the internal heterogeneity and hybridity can be seen as key aspects of the East-Central European cultural space, where "multilingual self-awareness" (Thomka 2018, 34) is probably the most common human experience.

This essay argues that cultural interferences mean the multi-ethnic hybridity of East-Central Europe as a shared territory between different national and ethnic groups can be seen as a common non-national context. I chart how the phenomenon of "multilingual locals" (Laachir, Marzagora and Orsini 2018) deconstructs ethnic and national spaces, and also literary hierarchies. I focus on Hungarian literature as a medium for multilingual cultural memories that restructure Hungarian cultural perception in a way that results in the Hungarian language oscillating between accents. The novels of Ádám Bodor that I examine transform the deterri-

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1 East-Central Europe as a geopolitical term in its broadest sense covers Poland, Hungary, Czechia and Slovakia, and also "the Baltic states, Belarus, and Ukraine, as well as southeastern Europe and the Balkans, Brandenburg-Prussia and – for the second half of the 20th century – the German Democratic Republic (East Germany)" (Puttkamer 2015, 1). A visual conceptualisation of Europe, and especially East-Central Europe, by a group of French-Hungarian artists *Société Réaliste* (2007) shows a dense veining of borders because of the stratification of different maps from different periods.

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torialised and then reterritorialised Hungarian language into an audible archival medium of multilingual cultural spaces that create "located perspectives" (Laachir, Marzagora and Orsini 2018, 6) and juxtapose potentially conflicting mnemonic legacies and differences.

New research on multilingualism in literature argues that "a located and multilingual approach shows that the imperial centre-colonial (or quasi-colonial) periphery axis was only one among the vectors of circulation, that European literature was also co-constituted through this axis rather than being a prior formation, and that language, or rather multilingualism, may indeed be a better starting point than the nation for comparative literature" (Laachir, Marzagora and Orsini 2018, 7). While these new "located perspectives", which also imply located theories and methodologies, are linked to colonial areas, these ideas are also fruitful on many levels for East-Central European contexts. The heterogeneity and hybridity of the East-Central European cultural space shows many parallels with postcolonial cases, but it is also important to highlight the differences. Unlike in many postcolonial areas, the power relations here have been inverted multiple times in history, driven by the impulse to seek retribution for previous repressions.[2] National and ethnic memories, which are different from one another but have become impregnated with each other in the course of their coexistence, are layered onto one another together with power hierarchies and asymmetries that have also been altered because of the changes to geopolitical maps.[3]

Beáta Thomka explains that the organic unity of the nation, language and literature is denaturalised and restructured by new literary phenomena. A multitude of literary works find their audiences beyond their linguistic and national borders, and moreover, they can even originate outside the original national languages and cultures (Thomka 2018, 48–49). Contemporary authors from the region,

2 Transylvania is an example of a 'movable' multi-ethnic territory, where the Romanian population was oppressed under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, but when Transylvania was re-mapped as part of Romania after 1920, the Hungarian population turned into an ethnic minority. During the communist period, strong Romanian nationalist tendencies ruled and the Hungarian names were Romanised. The re-mapping in 1920 is also the basis of a literary phenomenon that has been described from the Hungarian perspective as "Transborder Hungarian Literature", meaning the Hungarian minority literature in Romania, Slovakia, Ukraine and former Yugoslavia.

3 Like Transylvania, Transcarpathia (*Zakarpattia Oblast*) in Ukraine is a historical region on which different maps were constantly superimposed. The term *Transcarpathian Ukrainan Literature* defines specifically the literature of the *rusini* (Ruthenians) "who were born in the territories of present Eastern Slovakia (Priashiv region) and the Transcarpathian (*Zakarpats'koi*) region of the Ukraine" (Babatová 2001, 45). For a detailed historical summary of the development of Transcarpathian Ukrainian Literature in the twentieth century, see Babatová 2001.

such as Agota Kristof, Herta Müller, Terézia Mora, Nicol Ljubić, Melinda Nadj Abonji, Alexandar Hemon, Saša Stanišić, Ismet Pricić, Ilma Rakusa, and Dubravka Ugrešić are bilingual or trilingual authors whose poetic languages create specific "commuting grammars" (Thomka 2018, 146) between different languages, and juxtapose cultural worlds and social experiences. Consequently, their affiliation cannot be described using just a single national literary category, but they need to be analysed within multiple category systems. These multiple affiliations to different languages, cultures and spaces – which do not assume that there must be any loss or lack of origin, identity or totality – allow the works to be viewed as sites of negotiation between cultures and nations. Their inner linguistic otherness dislocates the traditional descriptive categories of literary history and of national literary canons. As Beáta Thomka claims: "The cultural homogeneity is counterbalanced by becoming multi-faceted, and the national literary horizons and hierarchy are replaced by a non-centred, networked, transcultural relationship system" (2018, 19). Marko Juvan (2019a, 2019b) joins Thomka in focusing on the aesthetic potentiality of multilingualism in East-Central Europe and outlines the theoretical possibilities of "post-monolingualism"[4]. Juvan points out that hegemonic monolingualism of the official language, and monolingual conceptual systems and states in the East-Central European geo-cultural space reduce the multilingual environments and complex identities in the region. It is by creating local social and historical connections that the multilingual literature of the East-Central European region could mark a new direction in the research into multilingualism that focuses on national, ethnic, class, gender intersectional, hierarchical, historical, and other stratifications and configurations of social and historical localities.[5]

Multilingual and multi-ethnic memory: acoustic poetics of invented names

Ádám Bodor (b. 1936) is an ethnic Hungarian born in Cluj-Napoca/Kolozsvár in Transylvania, who emigrated to Hungary in 1982 because of the communist dicta-

4 The idea of the "post-monolingual condition" was conceptualised by Yasemin Yildiz in 2012.
5 It is significant that in the recently published influential volume *Multilingual Literature as World Literature* (Hiddleston and Ouyang 2021), the region is completely absent and does not feature in global circulation. One of the East-Central European multilingual borderlands is explored in *Literary Multilingualism in the Borderlands: The Challenge of Trieste* (Deganutti 2023).

torial and anti-minority regime of Nicolae Ceauşescu in Romania.[6] His novels are examples of "commuting grammars", in which the texts are written with a "multilingual self-awareness" (Thomka 2018, 146, 34 – 35) that transmits and translates the multilingual experience and polyphonic cultural memory of East-Central Europe. They create localised perspectives by juxtaposing conflicting mnemonic legacies and differences, and by remediating them as audible vernacular memory into dispersed and accented contemporary reading experiences.

Bodor's poetic language is extraordinary because it transforms the Hungarian literary language into a fictitious blending. His oeuvre evokes the memory of a multi-ethnic community in the past by inscribing in it a continuous oscillation between the memory of other languages, covering Armenian, Yiddish, Hebrew, Ruthenian, Transylvanian Saxon, Zipser German, Romanian, Ukrainian and Polish, which is translated by his texts into a Hungarian linguistic and poetic experience. As I will analyse below, his novels transform the deterritorialised and reterritorialised Hungarian language into the medium of preservation for the multilingual cultural spaces. By being set in multi-ethnic borderlands, Bodor's novels create a fictitious, intermediate discursive space where the different cultural and multilingual references are inseparable and saturated with each other in the most organic way. By creating multi-ethnic and multilingual literary worlds, they indirectly question traditional thinking about languages and cultures that is based on the triad of nation, language and country.

Bodor's novels feature multilingual hybrid characters and place names that provoke the monolingual reader. Their hybridity means the names can be pronounced in several ways and they inherently have a range of possible pronunciations. The novels therefore implicitly embody their readers as accented. Names are oscillating aural archives in which pronunciation will always preserve the aural memory of another language. If they are pronounced in only one language, there is a reductive expropriation of the shared linguistic, mnemonic and cultural border zone experience. Bodor's fictitious multilingual textual borderland worlds are consequently remediated as aesthetic reading experiences that by their multilingual and accented nature "restructure cultural perception" (Erll 2011, 150)[7] and

6 Under Nicolae Ceauşescu's dictatorship, the non-Romanian cultural heritage in multi-ethnic Romania was progressively destroyed and the minority populations like the Hungarian minority in Transylvania, of which the writer himself was a member until he emigrated, was consistently Romanised.

7 Astrid Erll re-contextualises Wolfgang Iser's triadic conceptualisation of the literary texts as the result of "fictionalising acts" (2011, 149 – 150), which is a relevant theoretical frame for Bodor's novels because of the interplay of the real, such as names, and the imaginary in the fictional world that is created.

indirectly render the expropriating national(ist) interpretations impossible. Through reading with accents, or by oscillating between different pronunciations, and merging different languages and dialects as a post-monolingual condition, the literary text is embodied by the reader as an oral and aural medium. Through the accents, even the monolingual reader experiences a multilingual poetic world.

Bodor's first novel *The Sinistra Zone: Chapters of a Novel* (2013, *Sinistra körzet. Egy regény fejezetei*, 1992), is set somewhere in a Romanian, Ukrainian, Polish, and Moldovan border zone that appears to be an interface between real and imaginary worlds.

> This secret vista – a crag that jutted out slightly beyond the spruces and firs – formed a rocky part of the crest of Pop Ivan Mountain. From it you could see far across the border to the bluish, rolling, forested hills of Ruthenia. Dark smoke rose from behind the furthest hills, perhaps from as far away as the open country beyond. As if night were already coming on, a purplish curtain draped the horizon to the east, but it faded with the rising sun. When, hours later, the valley filled with the opalescent lights of afternoon, the forest commissioner packed away his binoculars and picked up his hat: the reconnaissance had come to an end. Whether he had in fact caught a glimpse of what he sought on the slopes across the way – of the waxwing or some other sign of the Tungusic Flu approaching from bush to bush – this was to forever remain his secret; nor did I ever figure out why he had taken me – a simple harvester of wild fruits, and a stranger at that – along to the Ukrainian border that day. (Bodor 2013, 4)

In this fragment, "the hills of Ruthenia" ("a ruszin erdővidék")[8] appear together with the Ukrainian border, featuring as two different geographical markers, one showing the geopolitical existence of a contemporary state border, the other a trace of an ethnic group's existence. Both the Ukrainian border and the Ruthenian hills signal existing geopolitical entities, but they do so in very different ways. The history of the Ruthenians as an ethnic group without an independent state renders the border of the Ukrainian nation state a historical construct in this stratified, mobile historical perspective. Ruthenia signals its difference from the Ukrainian border as a contemporary geopolitical entity, since the Rusyns/Ruthenians are a stateless, cross-border ethnic group.[9]

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8 In German "des ruthenischen Waldgebiets" (Bodor 1994, 6). As in the Hungarian text, Ruthenian in the German translation remains an adjective.

9 The Ruthenians, according to Paul Robert Magocsi "The Rusyns – also known as Carpatho-Rusyns, Carpatho-Russians, Carpatho-Ukrainians, Lemkos, Rusnaks, Ruthenians, and Uhro-Rusyns" (2002, vii), are a group of Slavic people living in East-Central Europe at the crossroads of contemporary Poland, Slovakia, Ukraine, and Romania. Carpathian Rus encompasses the Lemko Region in Poland, the Preškov Region in Slovakia, Subcarpathian Rus' in Ukraine, and Maramureş in Romania, northeastern Hungary, and the Vojvodina region of former Yugoslavia: "Rusyns have never

Astrid Erll observes that "literary works can display and juxtapose divergent and contested memories and create mnemonic multiperspectivity" (2011, 151). The English translation of Bodor's novel encourages the reader to search for the country of Ruthenia, and this could be a good starting point for experiencing that mnemonic multiperspectivity. The text juxtaposes different territorial definitions and cartographic constructions from different eras. The description of the landscape layers the different geopolitical divisions of the space on top of each other as archived maps.[10] The history of the Rusyns condenses and expresses the stratification of geopolitical maps, and the text recalls this continuous geopolitical re-framing of this ethnic group, which renders the construction of the border itself as a historically mobile phenomenon. Through the narratorial viewpoint, the natural landscape appears as an archive of historical changes, of the contesting and contested layered maps.[11] The narrator's point of view has a local and internal historical consciousness that underlines the hybrid vernacular nature of the border region.

The "Ukrainian border" and "Tungusic Flu" create another interplay between the real and the imaginary. In the novel, the authorities postpone vaccination, which is consequently interpreted by locals as them having the power to postpone even the epidemic.

> The ganders announced that everyone should go on home in peace since this winter would be epidemic-free, and there would be no need for inoculations. [...]
> "They've postponed the epidemic", observed Doc Oleinek.
> "Yeah."
> "You believe that?"
> "Why not." (Bodor 2013, 89 and 91)

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had their own state, and some of the governments which have ruled over them have ignored or actively tried to suppress the Rusyn historical past. For instance, in the second half of the twentieth century, Carpathian Rus' was ruled by Communist States (the Soviet Union, Poland and Czechoslovakia) which banned the name Rusyn and refused to acknowledge that Rusyns comprise a distinct people, or nationality [...] Rusyns and their cultural heritage were described as Ukrainian, and those individuals, organisations, or publications that did not support the Ukrainian national orientation were, in general, disregarded" (Magocsi 2002, vii).

10 Ruthenia evokes Galicia in the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy: "Rusyn – ethnonym used to describe the East Slavic population of Carpathian Rus' [...]. Until at least the outbreak of World War I the term remained widespread as a designation for Austro-Hungary's East Slavs living in eastern Galicia and northern Bukovina as well as in northeastern Hungary" (Pop 2002b, 407–408).

11 Alarmingly, the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 meant that the poetic depiction of a historically layered landscape became a tragic reality.

This very cryptic repartee gives an impression of the logic attributed to the authorities depicted in the novel, and also of the novel's peculiar humour. Through the fictionalising act of the narrative, an element of external reality, the Ukrainian border, interacts as a sign with an invented imaginary epidemic, Tungusic Flu, as "lured into form" (Iser qtd. in Erll 2011, 145) in the medium of fiction. As a result of this merging interplay we can follow how one imaginary element creates other imaginary processes as natural evolution in the fictional world, where the authorities can postpone the vaccination and so indirectly postpone the epidemic.

The novel's characters are from their first appearance multi-ethnic, bringing into play a non-existent imaginary cultural state of the past. All the names in the novel are written in non-Hungarian order.[12] Béla Bundasian is a Hungarian-Armenian name for example, Mustafa Mukkerman is a Turkish-German name, Zoltán Marmorstein is a Hungarian-Yiddish/German/Saxon name, and Aron Wargotzki could be a Hebrew/Yiddish-Polish name. The name of Colonel Izolda Mavrodin-Mahmudia or Coca Mavrodin contains the contemporary names of two Romanian villages, as Mavrodin is a village in Teleorman County, Muntenia, and Mahmudia is a village in Tulcea County, Northern Dobruja.[13]

The text provokes the reader, and probably not only the monolingual reader, because the multilingual hybrid characters and place names make the reader reflect on the aural aspect of the literary text. In this textual poetic world, we are faced with a permanent oscillation between the written and spoken languages. Even the title must be read in a non-Hungarian way, as the Hungarian spelling should be *Szinisztra*, while the name that is spelt in the title as Sinistra would be read phonetically in Hungarian as *Shinishtra*. The novel inscribes its accented reading through the names, and implicitly embodies its Hungarian and international readers as accented. Their hybridity means that most of the names can be pronounced in several ways, and therefore the languages and nationalities of the characters remain openly undecided. There is most probably no reader who could pronounce every name without an accent. This is not a matter of language skills, as these names have inherently dispersive possibilities for pronunciation, which makes the names into oscillating aural zones between different languages and accents. The accent preserves the other language, and the interaction of languages, as an audible present.

12 Even the name of the Hungarian Géza Kökény appears in a non-Hungarian order. The Hungarian name order would be Kökény Géza.

13 Other character names suggest different ethnic belongings: Hamza Petrika, Géza Hutira, Augustin Konnert, Father Pantelimon (in original "Pantelimon pópa", where *pópa* is an Orthodox priest), Elvira Spiridon, Bebe Tescovina, Colonel Jean Tomoioaga, Colonel Velman, Toni Waldhütter, and Aranka Westin.

The first-person narrator's name Andrej Bodor – a mixed Romanian-Hungarian alias name – is a good example:

> From his pocket he removed a sheet-metal dog tag that dangled, glistening from a watch chain. On it, freshly engraved: ANDREI [ANDREJ] BODOR. My alias. Colonel Puiu Borcan himself put it around my neck, and then clamped the loose ends of the chain at my nape with little pliers. No sooner had he done so than the metal began warming my skin. Andrei, now that part of my new name I especially liked. (Bodor 2013, 25)

The name contains the writer's Hungarian surname *Bodor*, making it fertile territory for the interplay of reality and fiction, but it is also a hybrid name with a Romanian first name *Andrei* that has a non-Romanian letter in the original *Andrej;* in Hungarian text this appears as a Hungarian phonetic transcription of the Romanian unvoiced final *i*, and consequently it also sounds like a Slavic name. It remains uncertain though whether we should pronounce the *A* as a short Romanian and Slavic *a* or, because we are reading a Hungarian novel, as the darker Hungarian vowel, halfway between *a* and *o.* Unfortunately, in the English version this aspect of the multilingual-sounding juxtaposition remains silent since the first name features as the Romanian *Andrei Bodor.* Names in this novel are thus oscillating aural archives in which pronunciation will always preserve the aural memory of another language.

Multilingual originals in translations

The novel is mostly a first-person narration by Andrej Bodor. The characteristics of the cultural scene, the names of the characters, and the references to a dictatorship with its surveillance, state control over intimacy, and unconditional obedience to authority indicate that it is set in Romanian society before 1989 and that the characters speak mostly in Romanian, or eventually in some other language, depending on who the interlocutors are. All the dialogues play out in a hybrid textual and linguistic space. The narrative is written in Hungarian but the dialogues could be considered as translations because of the multi-ethnic border zone they are held in. The novel therefore does not just condense traces of other languages, as the language it uses could itself be interpreted as a translated language. *The Sinistra Zone* as a fictional text restructures Hungarian cultural perception in such a way that we could imagine a Hungarian poetic language that is a "born translated" (Walkowitz 2015), one that also simultaneously oscillates between different accents. The novel preserves this continuous oscillation, the inscribed memory of other languages, and the reality of a multi-ethnic community in the past on the territory signalled as a border zone, and they are all translated by the text into a Hun-

garian linguistic-poetic experience. By doing this, *The Sinistra Zone* transforms the deterritorialised and reterritorialised Hungarian language into the archiving mnemonic poetic medium of multilingual and multi-ethnic cultural spaces.

The habits of the locals and the languages used are suggested in the novel through the figure of the stranger. The Red Rooster seemed to be an idle wanderer.

> He was a slight, wispy fellow who spoke Ukrainian, Romanian, Hungarian, and even Carpathian German. But he spoke none of these well. The Red Rooster probably didn't have a decent command of a single language spoken around here. Even his way of walking, a self-assured swagger, wasn't the way the locals walk. Besides, he seemed to spend all his time outside, as if to leave no doubt in anyone who might see him that the only reason he was rambling along the Sinistra River was to gaze in awe at the mist-shrouded mountaintops. (Bodor 2013, 5–6.)

Equally though, the region's vernacular languages are embodied, in a ruined mode, by Cornelia Illarion, or Connie Illafeld to use her artist name. Her original surname Illarion indicates her Rusyn origin.[14] In Bodor's poetic world, the destroyed, ruined multilingualism is interconnected with the brutality of a dictatorial system, and the victim is a female character.[15] After a medical torture, Cornelia Illarion or Connie Illafeld can only speak in a ruined, multilingual, gibberish language that reveals all the existing languages together in their ruined disappearances. In a controversial way, the violence preserves and makes audible all the languages spoken in the region through their destruction:

> [S]he no longer spoke any one single language. Instead she mixed them left and right, and the only people who could communicate with her somewhat had to know Ukrainian, Swabian German, Romanian, and Hungarian, and it didn't hurt to know Carpathian German and Ruthenian dialects as well. Few such people lived in the Dobrin forest district, but one of them happened to be the chief bear warden, my friend Doc Oleinek. (Bodor 2013, 101)

She was transformed by what was presumably an overdose in a medical treatment into an animal-like "hairy figure" (Bodor 2013, 109), and she forgot her own name. The authorities dehumanise her female body and at the same time conserve her

14 Ilarion was the Orthodox bishop of Mukachevo, Subcarpathian Rus, from 1556 to 1561 (Pop 2002a, 205).

15 An intertextual connection could be detected with another multilingual East-Central European writer Danilo Kiš's *A Tomb for Boris Davidovich*, where the plurality of local languages is connected to a death by murder of a young girl: "The story that I am about to tell, a story born in doubt and perplexity, has only the *misfortune* (some call it the fortune) of being true: it was recorded by the hands of honourable people and reliable witnesses. But to be true in the way its author dreams about, it would have to be told in Romanian, Hungarian, Ukrainian, or Yiddish; or rather in a mixture of all these languages" (Kiš 2001, 3).

significant historical name on a "shiny metal nameplate" (Bodor 2013, 109), which thus commemorates her Rusyn inheritance and her former social status. The Carpatho-Rusyn name around the neck of an animal-like hairy figure consequently turns into a dishonouring medium for the Rusyn historical and cultural legacy preserved by the name itself. The diabolic mechanism of an authoritarian and nationalist system is shown by this process of destroying through preserving.

Cornelia Illarion, with her family name's historic allusion and with the paintings she sells, metaphorically crosses the geopolitical and nation-state borders and so indirectly contests them. Under the unnamed dictatorial regime depicted in the novel, using a pen name could be interpreted as an act of voluntary self-silencing or of covering the Rusyn memory and legacy of her surname:

> Connie Illafeld was a sort of pen name. The progeny of the Illarions – landowning, serf-holding Bukovinian boyars – this woman, who lived among simple mountain folk on her family's onetime estate, had originally been named Cornelia Illarion. [...]
>
> Connie Illafeld, the pen name of this last member of the Illarion family, lived as a recluse and made her living by painting everyday scenes from antiquity on small, pocket-size plates of glass; she worked on commission for Jews from Chernivtsi and Lviv, though how she managed to get them across the border to the Ukraine[16] was a mystery. [...]
>
> The tunnel watchman, who never slept, claimed that a foreign traveller was wooing her – a fellow from Galicia[17] who supposedly swam across the Tisza River every night and who sometimes paid her a secret visit, too. (Bodor 2013, 101–104)

Béla Bundasian is later the one who most probably ends the process of dehumanisation of his ex-lover by killing the humiliated figure of the former Cornelia Illarion. At the same time, by disconnecting her name from "her" body, he also stops the destruction of the Rusyn memory orchestrated by the authorities through their transformative methods: "The blood on her neck – where someone had ripped off her dog tag with no little violence – was dark blue, like clotted blueberry juice or

16 In the English translation "to the Ukraine" is an insertion. In the Hungarian text there is just "across the border" (Bodor 1992, 94).

17 Here the text uses another historical name for the broader region as a liminal space between two different European civilisations, which also makes palpable the cartographic multi-layered aspect of the textual poetic world depicted. Janeczek and Wünsch explain: "Red Ruthenia, Halyč-Volhynian Rus', Crown Ruthenia, southwestern Rus', Galicia, Lesser Rus' (Malorossiya), Eastern Lesser Poland (Małopolska Wschodnią), Czerwień Land (Ziemia Czerwieńska), Western Ukraine – different names used over the centuries to designate a region of shifting territorial extent, a vast land that spread from Lesser Poland in the west of Podolia in the east and from Podlachia in the north to the Carpathians in the south. The changing names and migrating borders are indicative of the stormy political fortunes of this region, which was continuously subject to fluctuations of state affiliations, conquests, partitions and annexations" (2004, 7).

like the blood of the Illarions, Ruthenian boyars" (Bodor 2013, 111). The body that has been killed and detached from the Rusyn name is transformed back into Ruthenian memory, or blood, by the narration.

The narrator reflects on the description with a knowledge that shows he is local, and so historically multi-ethnic and as part of the processes of violent transformation. At the same time, his allusion to "Ruthenian boyars" gives his located perspective a trans-bordering and historical aspect. The natural landscape depicted at the beginning of the novel, where the "hills of Ruthenia" combine with the "Ukrainian border", and the description of the violated and dehumanised body transmediate the Ruthenian memory of the multiply bordered region, both working as natural archives.

Transformed and translated memories

The Sinistra Zone evokes Ruthenian cultural heritage and the traces of historical memory in the multilingual poetic space through a transnational and trans-bordering narratorial perspective, but Bodor's third novel *The Birds of Verhovina: Variations on the End of Days* (2021, *Verhovina madarai: Változatok végnapokra*, 2011) is dedicated to Jewish cultural traces[18] in a poetic world in which Hungarian appears as an incomprehensible language. The novel preserves the historical layers of a multi-ethnic region and depicts it as saturated by Jewish/Yiddish and Hungarian cultural ruins. The unfolding transformative processes of repurposing mark the former presence of a material and spiritual Jewish, Yiddish and Austro-Hungarian cultural legacy.

The imaginary poetic world of *The Birds of Verhovina* is situated somewhere further east than the previous novel, in the mixed Romanian-Polish-Hungarian-Moldovan-Ukrainian Transcarpathian region, and it is also set in a time closer to today. While in *The Sinistra Zone* Chernivtsi appeared "across the border", Czernowitz in *The Birds of Verhovina*[19] seems to be in the same geopolitical space as where the story is set: "Two weeks before he was arrested, my adoptive father, Brigadier Anatol Korkodus, bought me a brand-new Stihl petrol chainsaw. He said he had ordered it from Czernowitz" (Bodor 2021, 23).

18 Allusions to the Jews living across the border already appeared in *The Sinistra Zone*. See the passage quoted above in which Cornelia Illarion sold her paintings "for Jews from Chernivtsi and Lviv" (Bodor 2013, 104).

19 I will discuss the translations of the names later.

The Sinistra Zone is infused with the technologies of power and media of a dictatorial system that controlled and abolished the private sphere, which is typical for the second half of the twentieth century in East-Central Europe. *The Birds of Verhovina* is framed by a more recent capitalist system that replaces a previous structure, which had the contours of a more egalitarian system.[20] In this sense, Bodor consistently writes his imaginary historical vision of the transformations in East-Central Europe. In his view, structural and political transformations make visible the region's stratified multi-ethnic memory and heritage that is framed differently by various systems, but is still present as natural and cultural ruins. *The Birds of Verhovina* preserves the different historical layers of the space, and also the memory of a multi-ethnic region, this time imbued with the cultural ruins and linguistic debris of Jewish, Yiddish, and Hungarian culture. The most fascinating aspect of this world is the marking, tracing and staging of transformations and transfigurations. Following Hartmut Böhme's idea of the aesthetic of ruins, the novel is set around buildings and in a natural and cultural landscape in which the traces of a former vanished world appear with a new semantics, converted into a new function. The Jewish-built and spiritual heritage appears as movable memory in a process of transformation, which as memorial ruins "become the silent sign language of history" (Böhme 1989, 287). Consequently, the narrative uses cultural ruins as transformative signs to create a bridge between "a past that is not yet completely lost and a future that is already present" (Böhme 1989, 287):

> The square, squat building with its ornate façade and oval windows had been built with Isac Gold's money as a kind of small synagogue, but by the time it was completed both the entire Gold clan and the entire Man clan had converted to Lutheranism. The building stood empty for years, until Anatol Korkodus had it converted into a public wash-house. It was fed by hot water from the slopes of the Paltin's thermal springs. Above the stone troughs set into the walls there ran a conduit with taps carved from oakwood. (Bodor 2021, 88)

The synagogue reused as a public wash-house gets a new function with a new semantic according to Böhme's ruin concept. The disused and converted synagogue is the architectural trace of a Jewish community in the novel's world, one that has mostly disappeared in a process of transformation. The repurposing of the architectural heritage, however, was preceded by a religious transformation: "the entire Man clan had converted to Lutheranism" (Bodor 2021, 88). Through the converted building and the religious conversion, the former function of the synagogue and the former religion are preserved as absent. In describing the transformation processes, the narration stratifies the former architectural and spiritual heritage

20 At the end, the novel is dated as 2011.

of the transformed Jewish community. Their former presence is converted into a transit memory that is preserved by other languages, different religions, and new functions for buildings. The Jewish-built and intellectual heritage is represented in this process of repurposing, mediating, and transformation. And the transformations continue: "Nowadays, as visitors are few and far between, Ed Pochoriles mostly spends his days reading, buried in the former Lutheran school's books before he uses them for kindling" (Bodor 2021, 212). The Austro-Hungarian institution of Lutheranism and the material memory of it are also converted.

Like *The Sinistra Zone*, this novel is written in Hungarian, but in the textual world depicted the Hungarian language appears as a forgotten language, and as a cultural ruin that nobody understands.[21] The disappearance of the Lutheran school is accompanied in *The Birds of Verhovina* by the disappearance of the Hungarian language, which makes it clearer that although we are reading a Hungarian novel, the characters of the world created in it do not speak Hungarian. The first-person, and therefore unreliable, narrator himself does not understand Hungarian, and he can only read it.

> For years now, Friday mornings had belonged to Klara Bursen [*Klara Burszen*]. Miss Bursen felt resentful towards Yablonska Polyana [*Jablonska Poljana*], only visiting the settlement on high days and holidays, so once a week I do her shopping and take it to her on the Boursin farm in a saddlebag. On my way there I would borrow the odd Hungarian-language book from the library of the former Lutheran school and take that as well. She doesn't understand Hungarian, yet she veritably devours books in the language. Once I arrive with the saddlebag, and the book in it, she asks me to take a seat and, while she makes me elderberry-cordial pancakes, asks if I would read her at least a page or two from the book I have brought. While I do that she is careful to make not even the slightest noise with the dishes, so that not a syllable escapes her attention. It's all quite pointless: she doesn't understand a single word, but she listens in awe with her eyelids lowered. Sometimes we make a joint effort to guess what the piece I'd read might be about. But we never get anywhere. (Bodor 2021, 46)

As this quote shows, the language of the novel, Hungarian, appears as a non-spoken and incomprehensible language in the diegesis, but its acoustics and its sound have an effect on the listener. The Hungarian language appears in its sound and its

21 The motif of the ruins of languages and different ethnic sites, such as Jewish, Armenian or Lemko cemeteries, in the Transcarpathian region is also central for Yuri Andrukhovych in Ivano-Frankivsk in 1960. See his autobiographical essay *The Central-Eastern Revision: My Final Territory* (2018). Consequently, Andrukhovych "is one of the first writers in post-Soviet Ukraine who began to conceptualise the existence of various historical regions within the country. [...] The author tried to open up Ukrainian collective memory to the previously marginalised and criticised Polish, Jewish, Austrian and Central European history of the region" (Dvoretska 2017, 5, 8).

acoustic materiality as an aural medium like music.[22] The earlier presence of the spoken and written Hungarian language is also marked by the transformative process of repurposing. Through reading and listening, the incomprehensible Hungarian appears in its acoustic materiality as a liminal linguistic ruin and not as a meaning-centred language, since its acoustic materiality manifests as a reminder of a former linguistic meaning, and in its new function it works as an audible site for attuning.

The unreliable narrator is playing ironically with the reader reading in Hungarian, who by now at the latest has to reflect on the language of the novel and on the languages of the diegetic world. However, as a self-reflective metaphor of reading, this sensitises the readers not just to multilingualism, but also to the acoustics of languages, which is an aspect that is often weakened in our focus on meaning processes, especially when prose is read silently. The sound could also work as a site of memory in its acoustic materiality.

In harmony with this, the text consistently asserts the distinction between the spoken and written forms, for example the forms of the French word *Boursin.* In the original text, the French last name of *Klara Burszen* is written in Hungarian following its Hungarian pronunciation, which is significant in comparison with *the Boursin farm* (*Boursin-tanya*), which has preserved the French form.[23] The narrative indirectly preserves the distinction between the spoken and written languages, French or otherwise, consequently transmitting and mediating the audible presence of other languages. The written narrative thus creates the diegetic world as an oral world too, in which the characters' names appear, meaning they are written, as they are pronounced by other characters. The names being written differently within the novel creates an imaginary spoken multilingual world in which people pronounce the multi-ethnic names differently with different accents.

A suspicious reader may ask why Klara Burszen's surname is written in a language she does not understand, but to which "she listens in awe with her eyelids lowered" (Bodor 2021). The Hungarian narrative is very consistent in considering

22 See also: "I think Klara Bursen understood none of it. Still, I read aloud, crunching and fracturing the alien words, as the lady pricked up her ears, trying hard to attune them to the sound of Hungarian speech" (Bodor 2021, 135).

23 In English translation *Klara Bursen* translates the Hungarian spelling version of the name, with the Hungarian *sz* replaced by *s.* In contrast to the English translation, the French translation preserves the distinction from the original text, with the character's surname as it is written in Hungarian to match the pronunciation and the place name in French. See: "Il y a des années que le vendredi est la matinée de Klara Burszen. La demoiselle, un peu fâchée contre Jablonska Poljana, ne s'y rend qu'à l'occasion des fêtes. Une fois par semaine je lui fais donc ses courses et marche jusqu'à Boursin une gibecière sur l'épaule" (Bodor 2016, 28).

and spelling the surname *Burszen* as Hungarian and not only because of the Hungarian *sz*. Under Hungarian orthographic rules, suffixes can be added to foreign names in different ways. If the last letter of the name is pronounced, then the suffix is attached to the name in writing, so "belonged to Klara Bursen" in the Hungarian text appears as "a Klara Burszené" (Bodor 2011, 28).[24] If the last letter, or the diphthong *ɛ̃* in the case of *Boursin*, is silent or semi-silent, then the suffix is attached with a hyphen. In the novel's narration, the name *Boursin* with the French spelling appears only as part of a place name marking a territory, and in this case the hyphen has a different function, as it connects two words, a proper noun and a common noun.[25]

In the novel, Miss Klara Bursen [Burszen] loves "a Hungarian army officer":

> Klara Bursen, filled with a fantasy of love, awaited a Hungarian army officer from Beszterce who the clairvoyant had said would soon come to fetch her on horseback, sweep her up into the saddle before him, and ride off with her beyond the mountains, into Trans-Sylvania, just as seamstress Aliwanka had foretold.
>
> Aliwanka used threads of wool for divination, balls of yarn, though she could also divine from sand, but especially from water, swirling currents of it, raindrops that spread out ringlike in puddles, from the mist, from the clouds. And, of course, from saliva, beads of sweat, and even from Klara Bursen's teardrops. (Bodor 2021, 135–6)

Her "fantasy of love" is the reason why the narrator, Adam[26] reads to her "from a book in Hungarian on the orography and hydrography, and the flora and fauna, of Máramaros County" (Bodor 2021, 135–136), even if Hungarian is incomprehensible to her. The Hungarian language thus appears, beside the apparently ruined material memory like old "mouldering Hungarian books" (Bodor 2021, 46) in a fantasy of love, as an aural medium, as a voice, even if it is one that is incomprehensible to its listener. This could be another example of how the novel emphasises the oral nature and the aural aspect of a language in the world created. Beside the written and architectural forms of memory, the text suggests the different forms of orality

24 Emphasis is mine. The Hungarian version of Klara Burszen's name would be Burszen Klára.
25 In Hungarian orthography, such place names are written with a hyphen: "Délután hajat mosott, új ingét magára vette, és kezében a celofános csokorral kibaktatott a behavazott *Boursin-dűlőn a Boursin-tanyára, Klara Burszen kisasszonyhoz* [emphasis mine], hogy tizenkilenc éven át tartó konok harag után bocsánatot kérjen tőle" (Bodor 2011, 140), ["In the afternoon he washed his hair, put on his new shirt, and, with the cellophane-wrapped bouquet in his hand, trekked over the snow-covered Boursin vineyards to the Boursin farm, to Miss Klara Bursen, in order to beg her forgiveness after nineteen years of stubborn rancour" (Bodor 2021, 160)].
26 Like in *The Sinistra Zone* the narrator's name in *The Birds of Verhovina* recalls the author's name, this time his first name, written in non-Hungarian without the specific Hungarian accents of Ádám.

as considerable media for mnemonic migration.[27] In the novel's mnemonic technology, the Hungarian schoolbooks as material remnants of the earlier Austro-Hungarian epoch are interwoven with a personal fantasy of love that is trans-mediated by oral divination. The material, the ritual, and the imaginary mediate the Hungarian legacy as absent, as a missing culture that is present in this oral trans-mediation process. In comparison with "the Boursin farm", in which the name signals the earlier presence of the French language, the name of the semi-Hungarianised *Klara Burszen* recalls the linguistic inheritance of the Magyarisation that occurred under the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy.[28] Through the transformation from *Boursin* to *Burszen*, the narrative also condenses a former power structure into an inheritance.

The novel preserves real Hungarian names for regions and towns like *Máramaros* and *Beszterce*,[29] which indirectly creates a possible past or present Hungarian map that lies beyond the mountains from the location of the story. Equally though, these North-Transylvanian Hungarian names are intertwined in the novel's Hungarian allusions with the old Latin name of *Transsylvania*, trans-written into Hungarian as *Transszilvániába* [into Trans-Sylvania].[30] This hybrid archaic use that again condenses a previous epoch for contemporary Hungarian readers creates the sensation of historicity and foreignness, because the contemporary Hungarian name of Transylvania is *Erdély.* The narration thus strengthens its consistent poetic position that names cannot be appropriated by a single language and definitely not from a Hungarian perspective, including even the Hungarian names indicated here.

In a more ironic sense, *Trans-Sylvania* appears as a liminal space between the love fantasy derived from a divination of teardrops, and a generic geo-location beyond the mountains. It is written about in a polyphonic way, and its real place is in the novel's poetic and diegetic space. Stressing the love fantasy that transposes the person desired from beyond the mountains like in a fairy tale, the self-relativising narrative also discourages any realistic siting of *Transszilvánia.* Its poetic location becomes more evident in the translations of the name as *Transsylvanien* in Ger-

27 In the context of the Jewish legacy in the novel, the orality also recalls the strong oral tradition of the Jewish, Yiddish culture.

28 For an analysis of the Magyarisation process as a social pressure and personal aspirations through which non-Hungarian names where Hungarianised, see Erdélyi 2015, 68–76.

29 Maramureş, Bistriţa. Today both are in Northern Romania.

30 Almost all the translations of the novel known to me preserve the Hungarian names of *Beszterce* and *Máramaros*, but the archaic use of Transylvania in the Hungarian original is turned into the contemporary international equivalent in each language. The German translation uses the German name *Bistritz* but preserves the Hungarian version of *Máramaros* (Bodor 2022, 129).

man, *Transylvanie* in French, *Transilvania* in Italian, and *Trans-Sylvania* in English.[31] The translators' choices emphasise the past form of the word *Transszilvánia.* This Hungarian transcription is archaic because of the letter *á* in the name, but it preserves the Latin name with its geographical reference of *trans silvam* as [beyond the forest], and its spelling draws attention to Latin as a pre-national language, the legacy of which is also emphasised in the English translation by its separation. The hybrid archaic *Transszilvánia*, pronounced *transsilvania*, in the novel's oral vernacular archives a pre-national status of the name that is contaminated in Hungarian history by national trauma, as Hungary lost two thirds of its territory, including Transylvania, after the Treaty of Trianon in 1920.

The ambiguity of the names is emphasised even more in the translations. The name *Csernovitz*, or its variant Hungarian spelling, *csernovitzi*, is written in the same way in both novels analysed, but it is translated differently into English as *Chernivtsi* in *The Sinistra Zone*, and *Czernowitz* in *The Birds of Verhovina.* The first form is the contemporary English transcription of the Ukrainian name, the second translation has chosen the German version of the name of the city, and so preserves a past historical condition in the name.[32] In the network of the translations, the hybridity of the variant name in the Hungarian original becomes more evident. *Csernovitz* written in this hybrid way looks and sounds like a Hungarian hybrid spelling of the German and Slavic names. The city's name in Hungarian is *Csernovic.* The written form of the name as a memory of the hybrid pronunciation again stresses the existence of an interethnic and multilingual oral vernacular. The poetics of the names in the novels present a multi-ethnic city that was the site of several geo-political re-mappings but preserves or archives its actually identical name in this mixed variant. The poetic Hungarian language of the novel does not appropriate the name for a Hungarian past or legacy, rather it creates the name as an aural site of movable memory, where the historic juxtapositions and the multilingual co-existence are inherently and audibly inscribed. In Bodor's poetics the names exist and can be understood only in a non-monolingual way.

Different accents and pronunciation possibilities intersect in both novels, in the names with their performative sounds. Even if they are pronounced in a single way, they remind the reader of their multi-layered transnational form and ori-

31 See Bodor 2022, 127–128; 2016, 115; 2019, 140; 2021, 135.

32 The city, which had a strong Yiddish presence between 1775 and 1918, was part of Austria and later of the Austro-Hungarian Monarchy, and it became part of the Kingdom of Romania in 1918 with the Romanian name Cernăuţi. It was allotted to the Ukrainian SSR during the Second World War and after 1944. Since 1991 it has been part of independent Ukraine. Its name was changed more than once, as German-speakers, Poles, Romanians, Russians, and Ukrainians each had their own name for it. On the context of other multilingual cities, see Horel 2023, 496.

gin.[33] They incorporate the transformation of a multi-ethnic zone that is continuously displaced by different political epochs and stratified cartography, and they inherently embody the memory of another language and possible pronunciation. In this way the novels do not represent a stratified multi-ethnic multilingual past, but they rather reimagine it poetically in that their readers, who are determined by their accents, are incorporated and embodied as multilingual in the inter-ethnic oral vernacular of the novels. Through the poetics of the novels and the accented reading of them, we can imagine a world that is not separated by languages and nations, but is rather from the very first interconnected, with cultures saturated by one other. The lost or absent memories of a language or culture are preserved as born translated by other languages through accented translation (Laanes 2021).

The Birds of Verhovina itself could also be seen as a translation without an original, whose Hungarian narrative functions as a transnational medium of multilingual cultural memory and of shifted epochs. We do not know which languages the characters speak to each other in, but the nature of their fluidly interacting and layered world means that they presumably switch languages. The difference discussed above between the spoken and written languages is accompanied by some information at the end of the novel. The local written language contains no vowels:

> He says that as he panned up and down the meadow he could see by the foot of the trees and shrubs a number of small wooden crosses, all with the same legend: STLN 2011. He guessed that they might indicate different plots of land, but all the numbers were the same, every little cross bore the same letters and the same numbers. So what's all that about?
>
> You're not wrong, I say. What you see are small crosses marking graves. They mean no more than what they say. In these parts we don't use vowels. We write using consonants, the rest everyone adds in their head. STLN – does that mean anything to you? No? Then there's nothing to talk about. (Bodor 2021, 265)

The date 2011 connects the textual world depicted to the present and the partially-explained language that "we write using consonants" could be deciphered as Hebrew, which appears as a medium for a distinction between local people and newly arrived people. What is certain is the distinction between the written and spoken languages within the diegetic world. The narrator's ironic remark "the

33 Horel says that in multi-ethnic regions such as Bucovina this kind of saturated language use was common practice in everyday life: "The so-called '*Bukowinismen*' used in everyday language were common to all four languages: one could hear the same term in a German, Romanian, Ruthenian or in a Polish sentence. Since this vocabulary was mainly spread through oral practice, there were indeed many illiterate people who were bi- or trilingual" (2023, 102).

rest everyone adds in their head" could be conceived as a kind of self-reflective guidance for the reader, too. Furthermore, as an *ars poetica,* it reflects on the text that is itself created and perceived as an open imaginary narrative that combines multiple transnational memories and can therefore never be homogenised or totally expropriated, and can consequently never be finished. The layers of the past that act in their own absence, and the cultural and ethnic registers that form and act in their own absence, are shaped as an open and transformative mobile poetics of the novel into which the reader's reflection is also incorporated as an active possibility. The novel creates multilingual cultural memory as a transformative process of translation, and as a memory that by definition is born and survives in translation.

Conclusion

In these two novels by Bodor, which can be regarded as media of multilingual and transnational memory, orality has a prominent mnemonic function next to the material and cultural agencies of ruins, re-purposed buildings and linguistic traces in mediating different ethnic and historical registers and layers. In the trans-mediating Hungarian language, the diegetic worlds of the novels are shaped as a multilingual spoken language space through a vivid multi-ethnic coexistence that is evidenced by the names that emphasise the oral and acoustic principle of the multilingual vernacular dialect even in their written forms. By emphasising the oral vernacular dialect, the novels indirectly highlight multilingualism as a broader phenomenon that cannot be reduced to written high culture and to the elites, as it often is today. In multi-ethnic regions, polyglot illiterates were a widespread phenomenon because of the need for everyday communication and mutual understanding.[34] Furthermore, orality is again amplified and acoustically enlivened in the accented reading through the uncertainties of how to pronunce the hybrid names. The readers of these novels are by default in contact with multilingualism as an aural space, since the place names and character names cannot be read in a purely monolingual way, nor appropriated by a single language.

As open narrative structures, a characteristic that is highlighted by the subtitles of the novels *The Sinistra Zone: Chapters of a Novel* and *The Birds of Verhovina: Variations on the End of Days*, these novels create variability and mobility as a

34 Horel argues that in the beginning of twentieth century, "[p]olyglot illiterates were not a rarity in some places like Czernowitz, where coach drivers, waiters, hotel doormen and employees of various kinds had a command of at least the necessary words of their profession in two, three or more languages" (2023, 73).

poetic principle. This cannot be attributed purely to their postmodern aesthetics, but is an open compositional basis formed by the absent presence of languages, and the cultures and ethnicities that are preserved in their disappearance. The fragmentary and iterative narration as an unfinished, variable, mobile form developed by the poetics of these novels is linked to the vanished worlds of different epochs, the traces of which appear in a ruined, transformed form as natural relics and shifted memories. Absent cultures, languages and ethnicities are present in traces, and through the memories of their past presence. The worlds of the novels are posited as narrative worlds that are constantly changing and thus incomplete. The cultural, social, ethnic and linguistic transformation of a region is thus expressed as a poetic principle in narrative or structural openness and variability. Transformation is the main characteristic of these multi-ethnic spaces, in which the resulting gaps and absences are an inherent part of the poetic world. The open narrative structure also anticipates the possibility of further transformations in the future.

The imaginary worlds depicted are constantly saturated through the transformative mobile poetics by other missing worlds, and their totality could only be imagined through the infiltrating absences of peoples, cultures and languages. The traces of the previous epochs, cultural conditions and ethnic constellations as in-transformation, in-transmission and perpetual transmigration are part of these textual worlds. In these imagined worlds, which combine the multiple and disparate historical and cultural legacy of East-Central Europe, the plurality of languages and their traces preserve the fertile ground for inter-ethnic connections and co-existences, but at the same time also mark the restless tensions and conflicts that have been present in the region's history.

Bodor's novels create imaginary worlds that are interwoven with transnational and interrelated memories. The novels not only map East-Central European multi-ethnic regions in their shifted and stratified historicity, but also through their multilingual written narratives and their emphasis on orality trans-mediate the shared inter-ethnic legacies into an oral and accented reading experience. The "sound" of these novels is multilingual even in a silent reading. Through accented reading, their intertwined legacies and vernacular memories could be re-enacted by international readers as embodied "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg 2004). Bodor's stress on accent as an audible medium of transnational movable memory, and at the same time as a performative sound that destabilises national and monolingual appropriation, shows the way ahead for current research into multilingual literature and memory.

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Anja Tippner

The Transnational Family Novel as Memory Form: Mnemonic Migration in Marina Frenk and Sasha Marianna Salzmann

Introduction

Historical novels as a mobile or exportable form play an essential role in the migration of memory (Rigney 2005, 25–26). The family novel is one subgenre of historical fiction that can invoke individual and collective historical experiences that occurred in one country and let them resonate with contemporary experiences in another. As a genre, the family novel shapes memories and imbues them with literary knowledge that transcends national literatures (Dimock 2007). The family novel can be seen as the preferred genre for conveying mnemonic migration and for navigating fraught historical and transnational identities, and the transnational family novel fuses local language and literary genre traditions from, say, German, English, and Russian with the extraterritorial experience, which may be Soviet, Jewish, post-dictatorial, or migrant. In the opinion of Franco Moretti (2013), it is the genre, rather than the content, that is truly transnational. Authors writing a family novel can apply an established genre to give voice to the unique experience of transnational families and to multiply the perspectives on history and memorial cultures. The family novel comes with its own genre memory in different literatures, as Russian authors evoke the novels of Tolstoy and Dovlatov, which serve as "'contacts' with the genre" (Morson and Emerson 1990, 295–297) that add to the meta-narrativity of the books, while German authors refer to Thomas Mann and Walter Kempowski.

The texts discussed in this article are those created by Jewish authors born in or after the Soviet Union whose families hailed from the former Pale of Settlement, which spans parts of today's Baltic states, Belarus, Moldova, Russia, and Ukraine that were later incorporated in the Soviet Union, and who emigrated to Germany, the US, or Israel from the 1980s onwards. The family novel here is not a metaphor for a greater national collective but designates a place where identities are shaped by migration, exile, and alterity and a shared cultural history. Contemporary literature by these authors does more than recreate a family's historical and migration-

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al trajectory in fiction, as it also engages with different attitudes towards history and different concepts of Jewish identity. Prominent examples are Alina Adam's *Nesting Dolls* (2020), Boris Fishman's *A Replacement Life* (2014), Marina Frenk's (*A Very Long Time Ago and Not Even True* (*ewig her und gar nicht wahr*, 2020), Lena Gorelik's *Who We Are* (*Wer wir sind*, 2021), Jan Himmelfarb's *Star Divination* (*Sterndeutung,* 2015), Katja Petrowskaja's *Maybe Esther* (2018, *Vielleicht Esther*, 2014), and Sasha Marianna Salzmann's *Glorious People* (2024, *Im Menschen muss alles herrlich sein*, 2021). They are representative of an ever-growing corpus of texts in English and German, and also in Russian since the family novel as a form of memory also appears in contemporary Russophone literature that explores transnational memories, as is evident in Sergei Lebedev's *The Goose Fritz* (2022, *Gus Fric,* 2018), Maria Stepanova's *In Memory of Memory* (2021, *Pamiati Pamiati*, 2017), or Lyudmila Ulitskaya's *Jacob's Ladder* (2019, *Lestnitsa Yakova,* 2015) (Tippner 2019b).

The transnational family novel as a memory form moves between story and history. These novels weave historical and contemporary storylines and meander between Germany, the US, and the Soviet Union, and also through modern Ukraine, Belarus, Moldova, and Russia, dislocating the past and locating it elsewhere. Transnational family novels bring different historical experiences into contact and translate them, relying on fiction where history fails. They are rooted not only in the migration of memory but also in the effects of migration itself. The parents in these novels are doubly victimised, first as former citizens of a now defunct authoritarian state and then again as migrants. Their children acquire the new language in the country of destination much faster than the parents and then serve as translators or interpreters for them, and the trouble the parents have in adapting to the new circumstances strongly affects the generational order and reverses the power balance between parents and children. It is no coincidence that many of the narrators in these stories work with language and are professional fabulists, artists, writers, translators, or journalists. They focus on aspects of the Soviet and post-Soviet past like antisemitism, the Great Terror, and the Gulag, but also on the Holocaust by Bullets of Jews in the occupied Soviet Union, invoking a history that is less present in the Western public discourse and stressing its significance for the protagonists in the novels. Tracing family histories is not straightforward for these authors since the thorny Soviet past often obfuscates family histories. While family histories written in Russian are often conceived of as counter-histories (Tippner 2019b, 203), the transnational versions in English or German often strive rather for self-understanding or to give voice to experiences and memories that are marginalised in the culture of translocation.

So these transnational family novels reconstruct a family past that has taken place not only a long time ago but also in another country, another society and an-

other language. The authors often opt for a meta-memorial and translational approach, stressing the communicative aspects of memory transmission and omission, since family secrets are as important as the stories that are told. They also stress what is lost in translation, highlighting different means of expression, and presenting the reader with different forms of mnemonic migration. Commemoration of family histories invariably leads to hybrid forms of attachment and belonging in these texts.

The family novel and mnemonic migration

The family novel or family chronicle as a memory form makes use of the position of families as "actors in the historical process", as the historian Paul Ginsborg (2014, xiii) noted. Since the fall of communism, the genre has steadily gained in popularity in Russian texts, as well as in English and German texts, with authors exploring the relationship between individual history and collective history in times of radical change. Many transnational family novels take the writer's family history as their starting point, trying to reconstruct the cultural context that shaped their grandparents, their parents, and themselves, even if they barely remember anything about it directly. Most of these texts are written by authors who emigrated as children with their families from the Soviet Union, Ukraine, Russia, or Belarus to Germany, which is a biographical point that they share with their protagonists.[1]

The family novel's status was complicated in Soviet times, not least because the status of families in the Soviet Union was complicated. One of the defining aspects of Soviet family politics was the immense pressure put on family structure in the times of societal transformation and terror since "there could be only one primary allegiance and it was to the state, not the untrustworthy family" (Ginsborg 2014, 417). Focusing on family matters and family history could thus be seen as disloyal, individualistic and bourgeois. Starting from straight after the Russian Revolution, collective violence and persecution fragmented families and often destroyed the natural generational order. The (il)logic of persecution confronted family members with the tragic choice of whether to associate themselves with the party line and protect their personal safety or to stay loyal to their loved

1 This is a generational pattern that also applies to transnational authors writing in English like Boris Fishman, Irina Reyn, or Gary Shteyngart. Like their German-language counterparts Lena Gorelik, Olga Grjasnowa, Jan Himmelfarb, Slata Roschal, or Vladimir Vertlib, they explore complicated questions of identity in their novels about different aspects of Soviet history ranging from the siege of Leningrad and the Great Terror to the Holocaust and antisemitism.

ones and risk persecution. The creation of literary genealogies also had to contend with the challenge that pre-revolutionary grandfathers and grandmothers often did not fit easily into the communist genealogy. The same holds true for transnational families. Transnational or rather non-Russian affiliations, be they Jewish, Polish, Ukrainian, or other, were a cause of discrimination and sometimes persecution, especially in Stalin's times.[2] Thus it was only during late socialism that transnational and ethnic family chronicles or novels gained prominence again, with a few exceptions like the works of Aleksandra Brushtein and Frida Vigdorova, since these novels allowed historical events that were often suppressed in public discourse, like state terror, the Gulag, or the devastation by hunger, to be highlighted in a private frame. The late Soviet and post-Soviet rise of the family novel is a part of the new-found interest in memoirs and fictional texts that try to come to terms with the Soviet past (Paperno 2009; Balina 2015). In its transnational generational guise, the genre is primarily motivated by the wish of children to understand the world their grandparents and parents came from. Gaining a deeper understanding of Soviet history means that the children also gain a deeper understanding of their parents. A secondary motivation is to integrate the specific post-Soviet perspective into the memorial cultures of Western European literatures. These novels recount family events alongside Soviet and post-Soviet histories that are rarely remembered in Western European literatures, thus enriching, and diversifying the knowledge of readers about European history.

Despite the pressure on real families and the attempts to weaken the ties within the family unit, the family served as a core metaphor and model for conceptualising the multinational Soviet Union. Soviet discourse "focused on primordial attachments of kinship and projected them as the dominant symbol for social allegiances" (Clark 2000, 114).[3] The "symbolic family" of Soviet ethnic groups and nationalities was built around "fathers", who were political leaders and mentors in places of work, and "sons", who were the young guard. The Soviet family order placed Russians as the more senior members of the Soviet ethnic family, and they were mainly described as benevolent older brothers. The focus on "ethnic brotherhood" (Clark 2000, 118) may also explain why generational differences receded into the background. Despite the horizontal organisation of a nation of brothers, the ethnic axiology placed Russians on the top, and other nationalities below them, with Jews, Germans and Central Asian ethnic groups at the bottom.

2 Olga Lavrenteva's graphic novel *Survilo* can be seen as an example for writing transnational family histories in a Russian context, featuring memories of persecution due to nationality (Tippner 2024).

3 Katerina Clark points out that "leaders became 'fathers' […], the national heroes, model 'sons', the state a 'family'" (2000, 114).

Though this master narrative has long been discarded, its after-effects are still visible in the geography of post-Soviet family narratives and language choices, and in how history is constructed and translated into other languages and literary contexts. The authors who were children of Soviet Jews who lived in the periphery, like Grjasnowa from Azerbaijan, Frenk from Moldova, Salzmann and Himmelfarb from Ukraine, or Friedmann from Belarus, grew up with this mindset and continue to criticise it through their literature. Although they were all born outside Russia proper, Russian and not Ukrainian, Belarusian, or Yiddish was the language of choice for their parents.

I believe it is no coincidence that almost all the authors who use the family novel as a genre template write from a peripheral standpoint that involves migration or dislocation. That these family histories are grounded in diasporic and migrational experiences and internal displacements imbues the narration with a degree of "exterritoriality" (Kilcher 2002)[4] both before and after emigration from the Soviet Union, which is typical for hyphenated Jewish literatures. This disintegration process was set into motion by the Great Terror and the Second World War and exacerbated by exile and migration, which further dispersed family members. The spatial and temporal distancing from emigration and the collapse of the Soviet Union combine with fictionalisation to enable the narrativisation of these family histories. Authors like Salzmann, Frenk or Himmelfarb situate their protagonists simultaneously across German and Soviet or post-Soviet memory cultures in Russia or Ukraine, allowing them to assess and reassess family histories within different cultural frames. They ask their readers to reflect upon their vantage point over history and think differently about their preconceived memories. The family is, in this context, the main locus of the transmission of disputed and conflicted memories.

Most literary theories situate family-focused narratives at the intersection between history, life-writing, and fiction or autofiction. The genre-dividing line between various autobiographical novels and family-centred autofictions is often difficult to draw, but in any case these fictions use "the family as the individual's personal connection to history, as the vehicle for the transmission of tradition and heritage" (Mason 1981, 18). Mason states: "The family […] [novel] treat[s] the responses the members of a family make, [to crisis but also to the] change of time. The family [novel] stratifies time in an almost geological fashion, generation by generation, and this stratification becomes […] a structural device […]" (1981, 2). As noted above, the natural familial and generational order was fractured in the

4 Kilcher uses this term for the German-Jewish experience, but it holds true for the Jewish experience in Russian literature, too. The literature on Russian-Jewish authors does not usually stress this point as much though, see Murav 2011.

Soviet Union, and this is apparent in Frenk's and Salzman's texts, which are written from a post-Soviet, transnational generational standpoint that they share with other authors. Even so, family history proves to be a uniquely suitable device for writing the Soviet-Jewish historical experience into German or other literatures.

In addition to the fracturing of the family structure in the Soviet Union, migration creates a complex contemporaneity of historical narratives. The novels use different mnemonic templates to access the family histories. Frenk presents the reader with a lived and inhabited family memory that is passed on orally in a seemingly uninterrupted flow, layering story upon story, while Salzman shows us a family memory that is suppressed and must be researched in books to resurface again.[5] In all the texts, the geological strata result in layers of family lore and memories, documents and documentation, and historical events that invade the private sphere. The main disruptive historical events are the Second World War, and the collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent decade of transformation and upheaval. Against this backdrop, the post-war Soviet years, especially late socialism, are viewed by contrast as a time of peace and security. The narrators use documents like photo albums or letters, and political events like the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the military conflicts between Armenia and Azerbaijan, or the annexation of Crimea to start to excavate their family history and its secrets.

Like the author herself, the first-person narrator of Frenk's debut *A Very Long Time Ago and Not Even True*, Kira Liberman, was born in Moldova in 1986 and came to Germany with her Russian-Jewish parents in 1993. The autobiographical foundation of the novel is underlined in the dedication, which reads: "I am grateful to my dispersed family and its stories which I transformed" (Frenk 2020, 235),[6] stressing at once the fictionality as well as the factuality of her writing.[7] Reflections on Kira's own past of emigration from Moldova, arrival in the Ruhr region, her crises as a painter, her first relationships and a traumatic miscarriage, her fraught relationship with the father of her son, and her role as a mother, are interspersed with episodes from the lives of her grandparents and parents under fascism and communism. In dream-like passages, Frenk superimposes the experiences and catastrophes of her family with her own life and traumatic experiences in a time frame that runs from Moldova in the late 1930s to present-day Berlin and the suburbs of Haifa. Both the past and the present are linked by motifs of homelessness and loss and the search for identity and belonging. Like the German third-gener-

5 Salzmann's and Frenk's novels could also be classified as "autobiographically based generational novels" (Fulda and Jaeger 2019, 9–14).

6 All translations from German in this chapter are mine.

7 It may be noted that the author links the autobiographical and the literary in the paratext too, citing family members as well as authors as source and inspiration (Frenk 2020, 235).

ation authors recounting the stories of their grandparents who were Nazi perpetrators or Jewish survivors, these transnational authors see the origin of their own identity troubles in the lacunae in their family history, epistemologically and aesthetically linking memory and identity in their writing, while also addressing more contemporary issues of gender roles. To understand her parents, the writer reads historical research and witness accounts. In the end she is none the wiser but has got closer to her parents and transcended the generational estrangement. Even so, she wonders what these emigré parents see "when they stare through their net curtains with their Soviet eyes into the streets and backyards of a medium-sized East German town. Why they tilt their heads to the side. Why they wear those clothes. That make-up." (Salzmann 2024, 185).

Sasha Marianna Salzmann's second novel *Glorious People* tells the stories of four women. They are Lena, who witnesses the collapse of the Soviet Union and eventually emigrates to Germany with her Jewish husband; her daughter Edita or Edi, who is trying to make her way as a journalist in Berlin; Tatjana, Lena's best friend, who also emigrated from Ukraine to Germany; and Tatjana's daughter Nina. The mothers' lives in the Soviet Union of late socialism are told, with flashbacks to their grandparents' experiences that recall the war, the Holodomor, and the Shoah. Despite their radically different backgrounds, where one is Jewish and a hairdresser while the other is Russian and a doctor, they form a new elective family in emigration. Their mutual bond is based on their shared past in Soviet and then post-Soviet Ukraine, their alienation from German society, and their marital problems.[8] The mothers' biographies, especially the hidden truths and their former life in Ukraine, encroach upon their life in Germany, blocking out the here and now in favour of the "past or the future" (Salzmann 2024, 187).

"When I look at the reminiscences of former Soviets, I have the feeling they've never spoken to each other and have no idea how different their realities were—what totally different lives they led [...] They won't ever find out, either—not as long as their only communication with each other is through quotes by long dead writers." (Salzmann 2024, 186). This passage from Sasha Marianna Salzmann's novel echoes the title of Marina Frenk's novel *A Very Long Time Ago.* Both quotes hint at the unreliability of pasts that are reconstructed through the family frame and translated into a new cultural environment. Being aware that the "tropes of testimony, witnessing, belatedness, trauma, postmemory are [exhausted]", as Leslie Morris (2018, 69) wrote, the authors expand the discursive frame of contempo-

8 This is reminiscent of the many patchwork families and "elective" families in Lyudmila Ulitskaya's novels, which also stress affinity over genealogy. In Salzmann's novel, the biological fathers are absent; in Edi's case her father is substituted by a loving Jewish father, in Nina's case her German birth father is just absent.

rary commemoration through fictionalisation, transcending the already formulaic approach to documentation and research in the family archive. Frenk in particular explores confabulation as an way of filling in the gaps in the family history, fictionalising aspects of Soviet-Jewish history and using dream sequences to insert her family in these suppressed histories. These novels are marked by multiperspectivity that results from their different focuses, temporal on then or now, spatial on Russia, Ukraine, Moldova, or Germany, or cultural as Soviet, German or Jewish. The Jewish perspective is especially evident in Frenk, who incorporates the Holocaust, antisemitism, Jewish culture and the significance of Israel in her book, while Salzmann's narrator is estranged from this side of her biography.

Frenk and Salzmann position their protagonists in theory, translation, and transition following their own biographical experience. It is of significance that neither Nina nor Edi nor Kira has ever been to Ukraine or Moldova as adults. Edi does not get assigned to report from Donbas as she wishes, and Kira's first attempt to go back on her own is aborted because she has forgotten her passport (Frenk 2020, 153). Their country of origin consequently retains an imaginary quality for both of them. It is filled with stories taken from the family archive and from literature, and thus the motif of confabulation is already present in the stories told by their parents and grandparents quoting Russian literature. The narrators in both texts point the reader towards this, indicating the fictionalisation. When Kira cannot describe Moldova, she is told to "make it up" (Frenk 2020, 41). Her novel is the literary answer to questions about the Soviet Union from her German friends and lovers, or in Edi's case from her editors and colleagues.

Soviet histories – experienced and acquired, contested and fused

History in these texts is located somewhere else, as it lies in the Soviet past rather than in the German past. These texts do not narrativise the immigration into German history that Andreas Huyssen (2003, 154) described for Turkish-German literature but rather a transfer of other histories and pasts into a German history that becomes transnational (Tippner 2019b). They introduce history on two planes through the memories and stories of the Soviet-born parents and grandparents about their life and the stories their children have created about this past, which is already fictionalised. In a fashion that is typical of Russian post-catastrophic texts, these novels view the Holocaust and Soviet state violence in the Holodomor or the Great Terror as entangled, not just chronologically but also ideo-

logically.[9] The stories allude to traumatic events but rarely explore the darker sides of the family history, refraining from addressing those in the genealogy who perpetrated such events.[10] In this aspect, they depart from a trend in third-generation German authors who try to revise their family history by including perpetrator histories (Agazzi 2005, 134–166) that were often left out of second-generation texts. In this aspect they are more aligned with contemporary Russian literature, which also tends to subdue acts of perpetration in the family narration. The authors integrate memories of the Holocaust, antisemitism, the Second World War, and the Holodomor alongside love stories, creative endeavours, everyday life, and transnational dynamics, describing the past and the present in equal measure. As is evident in texts by Fishman or Vertlib, authors with a Soviet and post-Soviet background do not necessarily understand the Holocaust as an incomparable event or as the most important one in twentieth-century history, but they rather conceptualise it as one of several violent events that mark the Soviet Jewish experience. They thus contest the dominant Western narrative and offer a contrasting vision of the twentieth century and its after-life for both German and post-Soviet audiences, but they also in a paradoxical way repeat the Soviet narrative.

Despite the spatial-temporal and cultural distance from the Soviet era, no visible moral distance divides the generations. In contrast to the literature by the second and sometimes third-generation authors who address the Holocaust from a German or Austrian perspective, these texts are devoid of accusations and criticisms or expressions of shame and guilt. Conflicts are played out on the personal level of life choices, and questions of parenting or sexuality, but less on a societal level of discussing historical agency and complicity in state organisations. Parents and grandparents are predominantly depicted as victimised and bathed in a benevolent light, in which little quirks and irritating traits are mentioned, but problematic involvements in historical events are not commemorated or questioned. Alexander Etkind (2013, 2014) has pointed out the differences between the German and post-Soviet Russian memory cultures, stressing the shared refusal in Russia today to engage critically with the past.

Where German second-generation authors might take the moral high ground in confronting the past, the narrators in Frenk's and Salzmann's novels are too in-

9 Boris Fishman's *Replacement Life*, Julia Alekseyeva's *Soviet Daughter* (2020), or Lyudmila Ulitskaya's *Jacob's Ladder* for example. For the concept of post-catastrophic entanglement, see Artwińska and Tippner 2021.

10 Ulitskaya is an exception here, as she does not shy away from addressing the fact that most Soviet families contained not only victims but also perpetrators. In *Jacob's Ladder* she writes about the denunciation of the protagonist's grandfather, a writer, by his own son, something that Nina, the protagonist of the novel, discovers in the KGB archives.

vested in their family's past to distance themselves in this way. This attitude is often found in the children of parents who suffered through late socialism and the transformation. Kira remarks that even as a child, she subdued her questions and avoided causing problems since "mum and dad had enough problems and suffering of their own" (Frenk 2020, 148). Kira, Nina, and Edi see the after-effects of the collapse of the Soviet Union in their parent's disorientation and their inability to put down roots and their refusal to let go of the past: "The only sure thing is that there are still aftershocks" (Salzmann 2024, 184–185). This sentence echoes how the collapse of the Soviet Union is assessed and the very different interpretations of this event in the narration. The Holocaust, though also present in the family narrative, recedes into the shadow of a distant past and does not gain the importance it has in the novels written by German generational counterparts. The memory politics at play here may be an effect of belonging to the third generation after the Holocaust while being "generation 1.5" (Suleiman 2002)[11] in the context of migration and exile. Another explanation resides in the make-up of these families, as both Frenk and Salzman have not only Jewish family members but also a Ukrainian or Russian one, and not all of the inner circles of their Soviet families experienced Nazi persecution.

Of particular importance are the conflicting attitudes towards Ukraine that are shaped by the Soviet experiences and Russian hegemonic attitudes of the older generations, and the views of their Europeanised children. The texts do their share towards translating these experiences into German literature and de-stereotyping Western attitudes towards Eastern Europe, but they rarely reflect on the inherent principles of the Russian imperialist and colonial attitudes towards Ukraine or Moldova that the parents voice, and so the authors do little to deconstruct the implication of their parents in the Soviet system. Even though they have lived in Germany for more than twenty years, the older protagonists inhabit a predominantly Russian-speaking environment in which they watch Russian television, read the Russian classics, and dream of their hometowns, their youth, and their holidays on the beach at the Black Sea.[12] This way of life infuses their children raised in Germany with a distorted vision of the past and of present-day Ukraine and Moldova. The parents have an ambivalent mix of nostalgia and haunting memories of persecution and turmoil during late socialism and the transformation era.

11 Suleiman (2002) developed this generational distinction with regard to child survivors of the Holocaust.

12 One exception to this is the cuisine, which conveys the transnational family set-up and the Ukrainian influence, as they eat foršmak, salo and blini.

Their children try to make sense of these confusing images by confronting them with prosthetic memories as they watch films and videos, read literature, and study history books. Here again, it is evident that the meta-reflexive approach is a means of distancing; instead of engaging directly with the Soviet past of their parents, the narrators absorb texts and stories, viewing their parent's histories also as stories, with Edi then turning them into journalism and Kira into art.[13] Trying to make sense of the contradictory stories that her parents tell, Nina muses:

> I still can't make head or tail of it all. There was a housing shortage in the USSR, but some people had their homes of their own; they were all Communists, but believed in God and money; they were Jewish and atheist at the same time. No one did their job properly, but everyone had a much better education than anyone in the West (Salzmann 2024, 185).

The parental view on Russia's hegemonic claims is shaped by their Soviet experience and clashes with Edi's and Nina's view of the war in Donbas and the occupation of Crimea. The opinions are formed by the very different emotional and political attitudes towards empires and autocracies and the place of Russia and Ukraine in modern-day Europe. Kira's grandparents tell her that Odesa is the capital of crime (Frenk 2020, 93). Lena's and Tatjana's families constantly voice their derisive attitude towards Ukraine and Ukrainian, denying their children the chance to Ukrainian, a language which their own mothers in Soviet times deemed to be a "relic" and "not important" (Salzmann 2024, 61); using the Russian names for Ukrainian towns;[14] siding with Russia in the question of the occupation of Crimea and the Donbas; and ripping up their Ukrainian passports on arrival in Germany (Salzmann 2024, 311).[15] Edi says of such opinions, "OK, he had some crazy views sometimes, but who didn't?" (Salzmann 2024, 280). All the while, her parents believe her to be too German to understand anything at all when it comes to the Soviet Union or Ukraine today. Similarly, the memories that Kira's parents and grandparents have of Moldova and Ukraine are shaped by antisemitism and their deeply ingrained fears of persecution and insecurity. Kira explains to her German friend,

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13 It must be noted that both ways of coping are deemed faulty and deficient by their creators.
14 For example, Gorlowka instead of Horlivka, Dnepropetrovsk instead of Dnipro, or Kiev instead of Kyiv.
15 For a similar attitude see Dmitrij Kapitelman's novel *Eine Formalie in Kiev* (2021). Here the narrator recalls a conversation with his parents about the annexation of Crimea: "'Crimea has always been Russian! The people of Crimea want that', my mother shouted at me. 'Everything you take away from those thieving goats in Kyiv is something saved! But you Germans don't understand that!' On that day in March, I realised abruptly that I didn't want to understand it at all. That, on the contrary, I coveted the German passport to separate myself from Vera and Leonid" (Kapitelman 2021, 28). The same accusation of being "too German" can be found in Salzmann.

Nele: "My parents ran away from independence, which can sometimes be dangerous and unpredictable" (Frenk 2020, 43). This fear has been transmitted by the parents to their daughter not rationally but viscerally, and it haunts her dreams.

Sasha Marianna Salzmann's dramatisation of her novel, which premiered at the Thalia Theater in Hamburg in October 2022, can be seen as an attempt to counter this bias in the light of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.[16] Two Ukrainian songs frame the dramatised text. Salzmann uses "Tyolky" by DakhaBrakha and Dakh Daughters' "Other Places" (*Inshe Misto*) as the prologue and epilogue to her drama, and scales back the parental anti-Ukrainian sentiment and introduces Ukrainian language elements into the textual world that is otherwise interspersed with Russian (Salzmann 2021, 3, 86).[17] Edi's attitude towards her mother and Lena in the play still highlights the clash of present convictions about Russia, Ukraine and the USSR though. It is evident that the eyewitness generation have lost their authority as they no longer have the power to dominate their children's view of the Eastern European past. Their memories and assessments are not aligned with the wider German memorial or political discourse, which has become that of their children, and the translation has stopped halfway. The parents of Kira, Edi and Nina are the living proof for the dictum of Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbæk Andersen and Erll that official memory culture can clash with embodied memories and unconscious memories through "cultural templates and schemata, [that are] often embodied, [and] even unconscious and often not explicitly articulated, [creating] cultural constraints for memory production and reception and shape[ing] cultural frames of memory dynamics" (2017, 11).

This becomes even more complicated for the Russian-speaking immigrants from the former Soviet Union, since the official memorial cultures in the USSR, in Ukraine, and in Russia today are widely different to that in Germany and to the lived experience of contemporary witnesses. While the Second World War was an integral part of Soviet memorial culture and is still weaponised in Russia today, the Holocaust was never made part of the public discourses about the past. The competing experiences, memories, and discourses call for narrative and interpretative frameworks that can reduce complexity and make these life experiences consumable and comprehensible for the offspring of the migrants. The rise of the family novel as a memory form, and also the deconstruction of it, is the ultimate result of this mnemonic migration. The contested and conflicting memories based

16 The play premiered at Thalia Theater in Hamburg on 27 October 2022 under the direction of Hakan Savaş Mican. I would like to thank *Verlag der Autoren* for providing the unpublished manuscript of the dramatisation.

17 https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Qlkz2UmBrY; https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nMCpKrYuxQI.

in mnemonic migration set these transnational family novels written in German apart from their more strictly German counterparts.

Fictionalising family histories

It may be worth mentioning at this point that the family as a stable heteronormative unit consisting of a mother, a father and children is already deconstructed in these texts. Edi's Jewish father is not her biological father, Nina's German father abandons his Russian lover and daughter when they arrive in Germany, and Kira's Jewish grandfather Yuri fathered two children during the war who he supports financially but refuses to acknowledge. Kira's own relationship with Marc, the German father of her son Karl is unstable to say the least, while the elective ties between Lena and Tatjana are perceived to be stronger than any blood ties. These complicated family ties result in lies and omissions that further destabilise the family history as an authoritative account and make stories of genealogy and identity almost impossible. Even so, it is the family bond or experience that triggers the interest in prosthetic memories in the first place.

Memories in these novels are formed in equal measure by prosthetic media such as literature and film, since the family is no longer the dominant "platform for the articulation and transmission of [...] memories" (Lizarazu 2020, 132). The family still provides a conceptual framework for the fictionalisation of the voids in public and private discourse around the catastrophic events in Soviet history that left few traces in the archive though. The scarcity of images and media representations of many of the most traumatic episodes of Soviet history like the Holodomor, the Great Terror, or the Holocaust by Bullets stands in marked contrast to other memorial cultures that have an abundance of archive material. Ann Rigney has stressed the importance of the historical novel as a "memorial form" that gives "access to marginalised aspects of the past [that] are not met by the availability of archival evidence" (2005, 22). Fictionalisation is thus a means to compensate this scarcity, but it is also a device for creating multi-perspectivity and split personalities who embody ambivalent attitudes towards the past. In contrast though to contemporary Holocaust literature, which adopts a "postfamilial" stance (Lizarazu 2020, 16) and transcends the family frame, the family still serves as a form for structuring the narrative in these novels. Fictionalisation in transnational family novels makes two marginalised experiences accessible; these are the aspects of the past that are marginalised by the dominant history regimes of an imperial and hegemonic state ideology, and those that are marginalised in the process of migration, ultimately introducing different historical narratives and viewpoints into literature. Here again, the genre of the family novel is a frame for looking

back and for organising the knowledge gained from different types of oral narrative, written documentation, and literature.

Marina Frenk takes the process of fictionalisation one step further by laying bare the constructed and random nature of her own family history. Kira, the protagonist, asks herself several times, "what if". What if we had stayed in Moldova? What person would I be? What life would I have had? These questions challenge the family narrative about the need to emigrate, ponder on the perils of living in a collapsing empire, and address the advantages of a better Europe in contrast to the deficient Eastern European version. Kira plans a journey to Moldova to test these assumptions, which makes her realise that she "would probably do the same things she does in Germany" (Frenk 2020, 152). This realisation contradicts the picture painted by her parents of the grim future she would have had if they had stayed, where she would be selling Chinese counterfeits at the market. She also realises that Moldova is really something other than "the better Europe of the EU" (Frenk 2020, 153) and that one day "it might be Russia again, just like it was the Soviet Union" (Frenk 2020, 153). Passages like these are important not only for their assessment of Eastern Europe but also because they extend the timeframe of the novel into the future, creating new perspectives and visions of history and identity, fusing memories and projections. One of the last chapters of Frenk's novel contains a dream sequence in which she imagines all the members of her extended family together with those of her German partner travelling together in a freight train that resembles the freight train that brought her Jewish great-grandparents and grandparents to relative safety in Central Asia during the war.

This image merges the Soviet and Germany histories, creating a shared past and future. The author thus recreates and questions the family memories as translations of larger historical discourses, since the wagons of the freight train are more reminiscent of those used for deporting Jews in the Reich than of those of Soviet rescue trains, and she envisages the creation of new discourses and futures in the condensed image of "a train filled with family [that] travels in an unknown direction, and no one can escape from this [...]" (Frenk 2020, 213). Passages like these, or the discussions at a festivity in the Jewish community centre in Jena in Salzmann's novel, illuminate the new chapter in the family history and its shortcomings. The new chapter narrates partial transformations, and the emergence of a new and hybrid life that integrates the German experience into a larger picture through partners, work life and literature. What is impressive in both novels is the cohesive narrative power of misunderstandings, jokes, and silences, which bind the family together despite their apparent flaws and distortions.

Conclusion

The transnational family novel proves to be a viable medium for mnemonic migration, since it departs from clichéd images of the Soviet Union and what happened "there", fusing together concrete images and memories that are grounded in the family archive with a memory discourse and literary images that convey multilayered and multifocal views of the past. Rather than telling straightforward family histories, these novels use confabulation and comment to convey uncomfortable truths about history and, to a lesser degree, about the author's own family. The generational divide in the transnational family novel is also a cultural divide that is not easily bridged, juxtaposing Soviet-raised parents and their German-educated children. As has been seen, the texts do not just "highlight the limitations and omissions of the cultural memory of the host country" (Ortner 2022, 12), they also point us towards the omissions of the cultural memory of the country of origin, resulting in fictionalisation and metamemorial and metaliterary writing styles.

Post-socialist migrant family histories no longer serve as counter-narratives or correctives to the flawed and ideologically distorted history presented in the Soviet media of the past, and on Russian television today. Instead, as the quotes above show, they share these discourses one way or another. They are fused with a metamemorial narration that engages not only with memory as such but also with "the representation of these representations via the various institutions of cultural memory (such as historiography, museums, artistic engagements, political debates, etc.)" (Lizarazu 2020, 171). The characters use literature and works of memorial culture rather than their parents' biographies to get a clearer picture of history. Edi for example reads Oksana Zabuzhko's *Fieldwork in Ukrainian Sex* (1996, *Polovi Doslidzhennya z Ukrainskovo Seksu*, 1996) and Serhiy Zhadan's *The Orphanage* (2021, *Internat, 2017*) (Salzmann 2024, 191–192) to learn something about contemporary Ukraine; Kira cites a Romanian poem by Celan to evoke the Shoah in Moldova (Frenk 2020, 216) and refers to Svetlana Aleksievich as "inspiration" (Frenk 2020, 235). The protagonists rely partially on literature to provide them with a language for their own experiences and to help them translate their family stories from Russian or or the "mix of German and Russian words pressed into a more or less German syntax" (Salzmann 2024, 193) that has become their family language into a meaningful text, though one that is still tainted by lacunae and misunderstandings.

In a central episode in Salzmann's book, Edi is commissioned to write an article about the popularity of the far-right AfD[18] party among voters with Soviet

18 Alternative für Deutschland.

roots in the in the Eastern federal states. She is conflicted about this assignment, partly because she does not want to make her roots her "unique selling point" (Salzmann 2024, 192) as she writes ironically, but also because her beloved father is one of the AfD-voters, something she is loath to admit. Instead, she dreams about commenting in the editorial meeting on the assignment and the stereotyping of the politics of Soviet immigrants with a mis-remembered dictum about the war in Donbas that "sometimes […] you come to an edge, that just breaks off" (Salzmann 2024, 192) from Serhiy Zhadan's book *The Orphanage* (2017). The quote is a means of both countering the stereotyping and absolving her father, transforming this into something existential.[19] This passage points to the multiple and constant translations, often mistranslations, that the narrators are forced to perform, often losing themselves and the general meaning in the process. It also demonstrates that translations produce new forms of alterity, perpetuating new forms of alienation. It is a reminder that you can be discriminated against as Jewish or a migrant one moment, and then go along with colonial Russian thinking the next. The integration of mnemonic migration through the family novel allows for the admixture of the Soviet worldviews of the Soviet-raised parents to the contemporary stories of their German-educated sons and daughters. It seems to be easier for the authors to ignore their parent's stories about their Soviet life and the discrimination they faced than to engage with their questionable politics about Ukraine; safer to read contemporary Ukrainian authors such as Zabuzhko and Zhadan than to investigate the complicated mix of discrimination and feelings of cultural superiority in the Russian-biased views of their parents about Ukraine. It also places the family lore metonymically on the same level as fictional stories, underlining the emotional and cognitive distance of the 1.5 generation from the Soviet past of their parents.

The joint project of the narrators in these books is situated in a cultural space that emerges after memory theory and discourses of migration, assimilation, or hybridity. They integrate parts of that available discourse, including the discourse of memory studies, while refuting other aspects. The narrators veer between understanding and guarding their family history and trying to shape their memories without the staples of the Soviet memory culture that their parents, and by association they themselves too, grew up with, using not only the family mythology itself but also the media and historical discourse. This stands as a marked difference to similar family histories written for Russian audiences by Lyudmila Ulitskaya, Elena Chizhova, or Sergei Lebedev for example, who are highly critical of public

19 The most enthralling feature of Zhadan's text is the refusal to take sides and its ability to obscure allegiances to the point of making them almost irrelevant.

memorial culture and prioritise the family narrative as more authentic.[20] The novels also diverge markedly from the dominant national rhetoric used for commemoration in Russia today. It seems only logical then that only very few of the books discussed here that address multiple and hybrid audiences are translated into Russian or Ukrainian. Even though these texts themselves concern Russian and Ukrainian history, the memory form that they use, with the focus on Soviet history as only one identity-shaping factor alongside others such as gender or creativity, and so not as the defining one, puts these texts in conflict with Russian readers and contributes to their foreignisation (Laanes 2021).[21] Ironically then, these texts of mnemonic migration are unlikely to be translated into the discursive environment that their authors were born into.

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20 Especially in the Russian-Jewish context, the family history still serves as a corrective for the grand ideological narrative that omits the Jewish experience and other dissident and minority experiences. See Tippner 2019b; Urupin and Zhukova 2020.

21 Laanes has discussed the foreignisation of local memories in Sofi Oksanen's novel *Purge* in Estonia, but it works here, too.

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Aigi Heero

Remembering Višegrad: Memories of Childhood and War in Saša Stanišić's *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone*

In his debut novel *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* (2015, *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert*; 2006)[1] Saša Stanišić tells the story of young Aleksandar, who is forced to flee from war-torn Višegrad in Bosnia-Herzegovina to Essen in Germany in 1992. He is the son of a Serbian father and a Muslim mother, who experiences a beautiful childhood until the year 1991, when his beloved grandfather Slavko dies. In the same year that the grandfather dies, the carefree old world also ends. In 1992 Višegrad is occupied by the Serbian military forces and ethnic cleansing begins. After he escapes to Germany, Aleksandar must adapt, learn a new language, and establish new roots. When he is settling in, he describes his feelings about his old and new hometowns as follows: "I feel as if one Aleksandar stayed behind in Višegrad and Veletovo by the Drina, and there's another Aleksandar living in Essen and thinking of going fishing in the Ruhr sometime" (S2, 121). Two places that are wide apart in time and space are connected in this quote to illustrate Aleksandar's multifaceted identity, as he feels at home in Essen, but at the same time he wishes to keep alive the memories of his youth and his nostalgic longing for Višegrad. To do that he begins to remember and retell stories in the way that his late grandfather did. These two aspects mean that Stanišić's novel can be read as a story about a lost Bosnian childhood before the Yugoslavian civil war, and concurrently, as a coming-of-age novel that deals with issues of migration and migrant identities in Germany.

When *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* was first published in Germany in 2006, transnational literature[2] had already been established in German-

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1 The editions of the novel used in the present article are: Stanišić, Saša. *Wie der Soldat das Grammofon repariert.* Munich: Luchterhand, 2006 (marked with the abbreviation S1 and page number in the text) and Stanišić, Saša. *How The Soldier Repairs the Gramophone.* Trans. Anthea Bell. London: Pushkin Press, 2015 (marked with the abbreviation S2 and page number).

2 The terms *transcultural* and *intercultural literature* are also used in German, with *intercultural* being the older term. *Transcultural literature* is now more commonly employed, and it is often con-

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speaking Europe as a separate phenomenon. This concept was traditionally applied to authors who, "by choice or because of life circumstances, experience cultural dislocation, follow transnational life patterns, cultivate bilingual or plurilingual proficiency" (Dagnino 2015, 1), and who describe the experiences of cultural minorities and seek cultural synthesis in their writing (Chiellino 2007). Haines (2008, 135) argues that part of that literature has taken the Eastern Turn in recent years. She means by this that the number of authors from Eastern Europe and former Yugoslavia, who have settled in German-speaking countries since the fall of communism or just before it, and for former Yugoslavia since the break-up of the country, has increased substantially. Furthermore, as Isterheld (2017, 149) points out, the writings of these authors quickly became popular because of their engaging, lively storytelling when they present the quite unordinary lives of the migrants. The migration of people from Eastern Europe after 1989 has consequently brought with it the travel of memories, as those migrants brought their stories with them and successfully distributed them in German culture and society through their writing.

According to Haines (2008, 138–139) the transnational literature from Eastern and South-Eastern Europe implicitly projected a collective subject that was united by memories of Soviet and post-Soviet times, and sometimes by a common mission to enlighten and inform Western readers about the history of their Eastern neighbours. This resulted in their works having a large amount of similar stylistic elements, including inventive use of the German language, humour in depictions of the communist past, and the incorporation of cultural stereotypes to illustrate their adaptation to the West and their nostalgic recollections of a childhood before 1989. The authors who migrated from Eastern Europe after 1989 thus not only share common experiences but also employ similar approaches to writing to make their narratives accessible to Western readers, particularly when they write in German instead of their native tongue.

It can consequently be asserted that a new form of transnational memory emerges within the nation state, in this case, Germany, as a shared space, where, as Erll (2011, 11) highlights, different memory forms and practices continuously evolve across temporal, spatial, social, linguistic, and political boundaries. Similarly, Rothberg (2014, 129–130) explains that in contrast to transcultural memory, which merges historical narratives that arise from the intersection of diverse cultures, transnational memory is the remembering of events and experiences at a broader, international level, often involving individuals from various countries

sidered synonymous with *transnational literature.* In this article, the term *transnational* is mainly used as an overarching label encompassing all three concepts.

who share and preserve their collective memories. The influx of new narratives, or what Rothberg terms "new imports of mnemonic material" (2014, 130), therefore generates novel forms of memory through migration, shaping the recollections of both migrants and the residents of the destination country. Given that, Rothberg (2014, 133) then proposes the notion of *thickening* of a place as histories and memories are blended, which facilitates the formation of new cultural linkages that result from migration.[3] Thickening can here be understood as the presence of different transnational layers of memory that may lead people to tell their own personal and unique story using other memories, stories, and models of remembrance that are already in circulation. This in turn can influence what is actually remembered and in which form that memory is presented to a broader audience (De Cesari and Rigney 2014, 12). How migrant authors convey their personal memories might be influenced by the experiences of their fellow migrants and by the new local culture, in our case German. Similarly, they contribute unique perspectives to German literary culture, creating nuanced narratives in their works on specific topics such as historical events.

One constantly recurring motif in the works of Eastern Turn authors is childhood, which is mostly connected to nostalgic memories of a carefree past that builds a contrast to the difficulties of everyday life in a new country. It must be emphasised that the motif of childhood also plays a very important role in German-language literature and culture. The literary approach to childhood as the stage of life when a person's personality and behaviour are formed has been developed in various genres and strands since the time of Goethe. However, the representation of childhood has changed in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, because alongside Goethe's model of childhood idealisation that sees the child as the embodiment of purity, innocence, and serenity (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2005, 166 – 174), autobiographical literature in German now describes the childhood years as an ambivalent phase of life as well. Moreover, the topic of overcoming trauma, particularly from war, has appeared in literary descriptions of childhood since the late twentieth century (Wagner-Egelhaaf 2005; Vaguet 2019, 9 – 22). The descriptions of childhood and youth represented in literature are therefore affected by various cultural and collective factors and also by social and political issues (Cardell and Douglas 2015).

In this chapter, I am interested more specifically in autobiographical writing about a past childhood that takes the perspective of the child. The child's perspective can be seen as a separate genre – a type of literature that has a specific form, content and style that are mostly tied to audience expectations (de Geest and van

3 Rothberg refers to Aydemir and Rotas 2008, 7.

Gorp 1999, 42–44). In literature, the child's perspective can be particularly effective at helping readers to understand and empathise with the experiences of others, especially their experience of war and other catastrophes. The child's perspective might thus be seen as a cultural memorial form, a model of sense-making, which carries certain universal meanings (Erll 2011, 13), makes possible a translation between individuals and groups, and enables empathy for the past of a foreigner.[4]

Stanišić's semi-autobiographical novel *How the Soldier* vividly portrays the harrowing impact of the civil war in former Yugoslavia from the perspective of an adolescent. Stanišić was born in Višegrad, Bosnia and Herzegovina, to a Bosniak mother and a Serbian father, and fled to Germany with his family in the spring of 1992, escaping the horrors of the Bosnian War. Stanišić most probably draws upon his personal experiences in this novel, crafting a poignant narrative that captures the devastating effects of war through the eyes of a child. Recent literary research has often linked *How the Soldier* to transnational literature in German (Aumüller and Willms 2020, vii; Haines 2008, 136–137; Steinberg 2019; Uca 2019). Even though the idea of labelling authors with a migrant background as representatives of their native culture, who serve as intriguing and quite unique additions to the domain of German literature, has been criticised by Stanišić (2008, 193–196) himself among others, Stanišić does indeed deal in this novel with a particular linguistic and cultural situation that is based on his experience of migration (Aumüller and Willms 2020, viii), reprocessing certain shared images and experiences of the socialist past and of the lives of the migrants in Germany (Erll 2011, 12–13). This novel can be read concurrently as a fictional childhood autobiography that is intended to raise the awareness among the readers of certain catastrophic events. Given this, the present chapter examines how Stanišić retells his memories of the socialist past and the Bosnian war through the lens of a childhood story, and how his memory work enriches the narrative landscape, contributing to a deeper, more nuanced understanding of historical experiences, and thereby enhancing the thickening of collective memory in Germany within the literary context.

Childhood in pre-war Višegrad

This section analyses Stanišić's novel *How the Soldier* as a depiction of Bosnian childhood. It discusses how its composition and the use of certain shared transna-

4 I would like to thank Anja Tippner for this idea offered as a comment to my paper at the conference "Mnemonic Migration: Transcultural Transmission, Translation and Circulation of Memory Across and Into Contemporary Europe" on 28 April 2022 in Copenhagen. For the idea of the genre as a mnemonic carrier, see also Laanes and Meretoja 2021, 3.

tional images and ways of describing the past in the East might be helpful in making the experience of being a child in pre-war Višegrad more understandable for readers in the West.

This novel can be read as an autobiographical narrative written by the protagonist Aleksandar Kršmanović (Uca 2019, 186). It consists of different stories that form an inconsistent, fragmented assembly. In these loosely connected stories, the narrator Aleksandar recalls different memories and tales from his childhood in Višegrad, and between them appear diverse other texts such as lists, newspaper clippings, school essays or imaginary letters.[5] Lange (2008, 23) notes that a childhood autobiography often has a fragmented structure in which fleeting memory images are shaped in loosely connected small stories, as an outcome of which another, distant, childlike self appears. However, a childhood autobiography usually has little psychological interest in one's own childhood, as it is rather a confrontation with personal or collective contemporary history, presenting an alienated view of the historical and personal circumstances of the past (Lange 2008, 211). Douglas (2010, 20) states that childhood autobiographies are products of and confrontations with the collective ways in which the past is remembered, constructed, and made intelligible within a culture. A fictional autobiography might thus also contain a blend of memory, experience, and real history (Roberts 2002, 140–141). This form of autofiction can be found in numerous examples of German literature (Vaguet 2019, 15–22); more specifically, a number of other works of the Eastern Turn are also composed as collections of loosely connected stories or even anecdotes that together form a complex representation of a topic, such as a depiction of the author's childhood memories (Heero 2009, 222). In this way, Stanišić's account might also reflect real time and events in some detail from pre-war Višegrad that describe events that actually happened to the author himself for example, and provide a perspective that we can use as a source for cultural and historical research as well as for memory studies, even though we are dealing with an autofictional work that interprets historical events through a literary prism (Roberts 2002; Wagner-Egelhaaf 2010, 196–199).[6]

In recollecting the stories of his childhood, Aleksandar sometimes endows life in Višegrad with nearly a mythic quality, as the town appears in *How the Soldier* as a place that hosts nostalgic memories of youth in the form of nostalgic flashbacks, making a "place of longing" (Heero 2009, 217), a feature familiar from the writings

5 The structure of this novel has been analysed in Previšić 2009, 201–202, and Karpenstein-Eßbach 2010, 34–36.

6 Contemporary scholarship has increasingly focused in recent years on various types of personal documents and life-writing, including autofictional ones, as the political perspective of late socialism has been replaced by cultural studies, see Mrozik and Tippner 2021, 5.

in German of many transcultural authors. Pre-war Višegrad appears as a construction that exists only in the memories of Aleksandar, as a collection of remembrances of a picture-perfect childhood world, where "everything was all right" (S2, 137), grandpa Slavko was alive, and the boys could go fishing in the Drina river without any obstacles. In the narration, the lost home comes back into existence and telling the story helps to give a palpable shape to the imaginary place of longing. In contrast to the "places of longing", there are also "everyday places" in transnational writing in German, which mostly describe a new home in a new land and try to explain unknown circumstances (Heero 2009, 208). When Aleksandar depicts his everyday life in Germany and his memories about the lost home in Višegrad, the longed-for past and the cruel present therefore blend with one other: "I miss the moody Drina, Asija, apparently there's a river here, it's called the Ruhr, but I don't think just every watercourse that happens to flow along deserves the name of river" (S2, 120). Višegrad in the past can thus be seen as an ideal place, in contrast to life in Essen where Aleksandar's father is forced to work on the black market and where his mother has a backbreaking job in a laundry and "has lost the ability to see things in a good light" (S2, 119). This situation is countered by nostalgic memories of the past as a place of longing and refuge.

It must be noted that the author uses the perspective of the *experiencing I* in the first part of the novel to describe events as they are perceived by Aleksandar and as they unfold in the present of the past (Bal 1997, 19–20). When the young narrator visits the abandoned house after Slavko's death, he shares his immediate reactions: "Grandpa's apartment. I take a deep breath. The kitchen. Fried onions, nothing left of Grandpa. Bedroom. I press my face against the shirts" (S2, 16). The life in Višegrad is also depicted through the tales told by different people who Aleksandar knows from his childhood and whose stories he recounts. There are different voices. Some stories are told by Aleksandar's contemporaries. His friend Zoran for instance recounts how Milenko Pavlović, known as Walross, discovered the adultery of his wife (S1, 93–99). The narrator re-tells stories in his text that have been passed on through communicative memory (Assmann 1988, 10–11; Assmann 2008, 111); he has heard these tales in the past and they are now evoked in the course of the process of remembering that past. Here again, Stanišić has an affinity with other authors of the Eastern Turn such as Wladimir Kaminer and Vladimir Vertlib, who both draw on the oral tradition of telling anecdotes that was widespread in the former Soviet Union (Heero 2009, 222–223).

As Haines (2008) noted, authors from Eastern backgrounds may identify themselves as "ambassadors" of the pre-1989 era. Certain writers, like Kaminer, who are influenced by pop literature may then opt to commodify their cultural knowledge and use exoticism as well as humour strategically as a marketing strategy (Haines 2008, 140). Isterheld (2017, 182–183) shows how cultural clichés are applied on pur-

pose: to entertain the readers, but sometimes also to expose those clichés and national stereotypes. Exploiting such clichés might serve the aim of making the stories about the Soviet past seem more tangible, and hence more marketable, in the literary world of the West (Haines 2008, 139). To some extent this idea also applies to Stanišić. When he describes the exuberant Balkan festivities linked to plum-picking in the village of Veletovo, he uses well-known images as the harvest and the opening of the new privy are celebrated with all the neighbours being summoned (S1, 38), plenty of food laid on (S1, 40–41) and a five-man band playing engaging music (S1, 41). Stanišić deliberately employs an exaggerated cliché while simultaneously distancing himself from this image, indicating his awareness of its potentially stereotypical nature by letting Aleksandar's uncle who works in Germany state dryly: "Abroad they think we have parties here the whole time […]" (S2, 26). However, when we read the depictions of Balkan life in Stanišić's account, we sense a certain criticism beneath all the happiness and nostalgia. Haines says that by using the "child narrator, who then matures into a reflective adult, Stanišić peels away the veneer of ethnic harmony in pre-war Bosnia to reveal the deep tensions underneath and the fragility of the provisional order" (2008, 146). The happy party in the plum-picking scene is suddenly interrupted by an armed soldier. This gives a presentiment of the upcoming war and shows how another cruel reality creeps slowly into Aleksandar's world and intimates the horror to come (Rock 2012).

The question of how Tito is evaluated in the pre-war Yugoslav world also arises in the novel. Josip Broz Tito (1892–1980) built a very powerful cult of personality around himself, developing his own style of dictatorship called "Titoism" (England 2018, 67). Tito's popularity reached cult status in the 1950s, when it resembled a religious fervour. He meticulously crafted a sophisticated, aristocratic public image, and he was portrayed as a hero in various media. This cult persisted well into the 1980s and Aleksandar's childhood (Perović 2011, 131–132; Troncotă 2015, 124; Lazarević Radak 2020, 289–290; England 2018, 72, 77–81). In the post-war Balkans the memories of Tito have led to "Titostalgia", "derived nostalgic images and feelings, 'invented' positive memories and inclinations of individuals and groups" (Velikonja 2009, 299–300).

Tito is consequently for young Aleksandar not a dictator, but a mythological, omnipresent figure who continued to live despite his actual and symbolic death. He is everywhere: on television, in films, in festivities and, of course, in educational spaces:

> Tito lived on longest in our textbooks. History, Serbo-Croat, even maths couldn't get along without him. The distance from Jajce to Bihać is 160 kilometres. A Yugo drives from Jajce to

> Bihač at a speed of 80 kph. At the same time Josip Broz Tito is walking from Bihač to Jajce at a steady speed of 10 kph. At how many kilometres from Jajce will they meet? (S2, 61)

Despite this naive and childish view, there is also a subtle criticism of the cult of Tito, presented here from a humorous perspective. To hide the fact that he cannot solve this maths puzzle, Aleksandar thematises its illogicality: "I protested that obviously you couldn't have a Yugo and a Tito on the same road at all, because if our President had wanted to go for a walk, the road would have been closed to everyone else. As a safety precaution, I added, and I for one would have welcomed it" (S2, 61).

Aleksandar shows how critical voices were muted in his childhood, however, without actually commenting on it: "A new teacher once got so angry about Tito's life as told in the history textbook that he could be heard from the corridor, shouting away in the headmaster's office. I am a historian, he shouted, not the presenter of a children's story hour on TV!" (S2, 61). The next day, Aleksandar's grandfather visits the school to call the history teacher to order: "Out in the corridor, we were able to hear my grandpa's voice, but not the historian's" (S2, 62).

Despite the glimpses of oppression, Aleksandar describes his childhood in the communist era as a relatively normal period of life, a feature shared in common with other authors with Eastern European roots writing in German. The political element and the criticism of the circumstances of the era are not excluded from the texts, but they are somewhat softened by the child's perspective. Svetlana Boym's concept of "reflective nostalgia" (2001, 41–50) might be relevant here, as Kodzis-Sofińska (2021, 247–248) has applied it to early works by Wladimir Kaminer. Reflective nostalgia dwells on longing and loss, and the imperfect process of remembering. It can be ironic and humorous, but it is different both from restorative nostalgia that aims to rebuild the past and from the "Ostalgia" that is often associated with aestheticisation of socialist reality (Kodzis-Sofińska 2021, 246). Reflective nostalgia combines longing with critical thinking. In the context of Kaminer's work for instance, the humorous, nostalgic, and exaggerated depictions of Soviet life are replaced by clear criticism of the "East" in his later novels such as *Uncle Wanja Comes* (*Onkel Wanja kommt,* 2012) (Kodzis-Sofińska 2021, 247–257; Kaminer 2012, 5–16). A similar approach can be seen in Stanišić's work. Nostalgia prevails in *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone*, but there is also a gentle, covert critique of the socialist system. Višegrad as the "place of longing" is presented in a fragmented form, with different voices and stories from the communicative memory used alongside the immediate perspective of young Aleksandar. In Stanišić's novel *Where You Come From* (2021, *Herkunft,* 2019) however, we see less of other peoples' perspectives or of stories circulating in the communicative memory. The focus of the narrator is on his personal memory and his family history,

which functions as a medium for critical observations of Yugoslavian history (Stanišić 2019, 11–35).

The representation of a Bosnian childhood in Stanišić's *How the Soldier* draws both on the local, German, literary tradition of using the child's perspective, and on the transnational, Eastern European, memories circulating in the German-speaking literary scene. By doing this, the novel becomes a transnational text that transcends both geopolitical and transcultural boundaries. It effectively merges with the stories of other migrant authors from the Eastern Turn, creating a hybrid narrative that enriches the German-speaking literary landscape. Taking Rothberg's concept of thickening (2014, 136), "thickening the text" in the context of Stanišić's novel signifies the process where the narrative becomes more complex and multilayered by incorporating diverse perspectives and memories, by interweaving local and transnational literary traditions with migrant experiences from the Eastern Turn, and by blending personal experiences with German frameworks both literary and commemorative.

Višegrad during and after the war

The next section examines how the Višegrad massacres in 1992 are depicted from the viewpoint of a child in Stanišić's novel, and how the immediate perspective of a child might differ from a distant view of an adult. It also discusses how certain transcultural memorial forms and templates, such as references to Holocaust memory and its well-known motifs such as "writing against disappearance"[7], are deployed to portray the catastrophic events in Višegrad.

The attacks in Višegrad by Serbian paramilitary troops began on 6 April 1992, but the situation escalated after 19 May 1992 when Serbian armed forces attacked and destroyed a number of Bosnian Muslim towns and villages. Hundreds of civilians in Višegrad were killed in random shootings. Every day people were shot on the famous bridge on the Drina and their bodies were dumped into the river. Many of the Bosnian Muslims were arrested and detained. The Serb soldiers raped many Muslim women, and beat and terrorised non-Serb civilians. There was widespread looting daily and non-Serb homes and property were destroyed together with the two Bosnian Muslim mosques in Višegrad (*United Nations International Criminal*

7 "Writing against disappearance" [S*chreiben gegen das Vergessen*] refers to a series of artistic and educational projects in Germany and Austria to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and raise awareness about the dangers of fascism, racism and antisemitism. The exact origin of this term cannot be specifically attributed as it has become a widely recognised concept in literature and cultural discourse.

Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia; *Višegrad Genocide Memories*; Vukušić 2021, 66 – 67).

The Višegrad massacres are depicted in the first half of the novel through the baffled eyes of a sensitive child, and through his spontaneous, immediate descriptions of various events and his somewhat naive comments. The perspective of the child switches in the second half of the novel, which now looks to preserve and convey memories from the detached and analytical viewpoint of an adult. In the beginning, the war is something distant for Aleksandar and his friends. They know what is happening as they observe how the adults listen to the news of the war on the radio (S1, 107), but they are not yet aware of all the horror. However, war and violence are soon a part of their everyday life. The children quite naturally integrate everyday events into their activities as Aleksandar and his friend play war games, including acting out the gruesome attacks of Serbian soldiers (S1, 103 – 105). As the Serbian paramilitaries march in, we see the outbreak of brutality, shooting and killing through Aleksandar's eyes in fragmented but very detailed images or even photographic impressions of various events that border on flashbulb memories delivering a good recall of the details because of the personal impact of the dramatic scenes. The details of a flashbulb memory are remembered particularly well because there is a link between the personal history of the person remembering and world "History" (Roberts 2002, 136). Aleksandar's flashbulb memories are thus very vivid and enduring, picturing his experiences in great detail. Interestingly, the visual impact of the images in his memory is amplified through his sense of hearing, as there is almost never silence in the images of wartime Višegrad but constant noise from the war, the noise of shooting, shouting, rampaging, swearing, and screaming. Moreover, the violence is often accompanied by music, and Aleksandar mentions in his account the loud singing of the Serbian soldiers (S1, 119). Serbian troops under the command of Milan Lukić often moved around in Višegrad in broad daylight in vehicles with music blasting from their cars (Vukušić 2021, 75 – 76). The presentation of these memories gives the impression of these pictures being immediate, describing what Aleksandar as an "experiencing I" instantly saw, heard, and felt (Bal 1997, 19 – 20).

In the description of the violent invasion of the Serbs, we perceive the narrator's anger, his instinctive desire to resist, and his helplessness. Aleksandar witnesses Serbian soldiers celebrating after taking the town by drinking alcohol, singing, and dancing, and by repairing a looted gramophone, which is described as an act of violence:

> He's dragging a gramophone along behind him, he's taken hold of it by its horn and lifts it over the threshold as if taking a goose to be slaughtered [...] The victor with the biggest

> head in the world puts the pick-up arm on the record, but nothing happens. Don't you dare! he shouts, hitting and kicking the gramophone. (S2, 100)

When the gramophone is up and running, the party begins; at the same time, a war rape is committed:

> The soldier with the gold tooth sings along too, the one who wanted warm bread, the one who held Amela's hands in his and tipped them into the dough. He comes out of Amela's apartment, the song on his lips, his shirt unbuttoned. Amela is kneeling behind him with a veil of wet hair over her face. (S2, 101–2)

Aleksandar does not comprehend everything, as he naively thinks that the soldier visited Amela to get some bread, but he instinctively feels that what is going on is wrong, unjust, and devastating. He wants to help but is not able to do so: "If only I were a magician who could make things possible. I'd give objects the gift of defiance; banisters, gramophones, guns, the napes of necks, braided hair" (S2, 102).

Young Aleksandar intuitively perceives the horror but cannot really put it into words. Moreover, he seems to try to fit it into his concept of normal in some way. When he and his friend see the heap of defiled class diaries in the destroyed school building, they don't think about the damage caused by the war; instead, they want to find out what grades they got in the oral exam for Russian. Looking at the diaries smeared with faeces they settle for a mark of four in the written part of the exam, "which is kind of alright" (S2, 104). Such scenes in the novel have been interpreted as comic, as Uca for instance argues that one of the key reasons for Stanišić's popularity is his use of humour in his portrayal of trauma, a common theme in both Bosnian and German contemporary culture. Humour in its various forms, especially dark humour, may provide a welcome break from the monotony of trauma and may be a political statement in its own right (Uca 2019, 188–189). This argument seems to hold only partially as we also seem to be dealing with the incompatibility of the perspectives of the adult and the child here. The view of an adult is deliberative, but a child's account consists of more incoherent, photographic memories. A very young narrator consequently does not usually contemplate what they see in these photographic images that are stored directly in their memory (Assmann 2006b, 131, 145). This sincerity and naive directness may seem comic or entertaining for adults but it hides the darker side of an unprocessed experience within it.

When Stanišić describes the devastated city through Aleksandar's eyes, he often uses pictures or vocabulary connected to well-known images from the Second World War. When he comments on the destruction of his school by the Serbian troops for example, Aleksandar notes: "The way our school looks, we won't be

needing those [pencil sharpeners] again" (S2, 104). In the middle of what had been the teacher's room Aleksandar and his friend observe "[…] mountain of red volumes, shabby class registers. […] [T]here's a huge pile of dried shit on top of the mountain, with two flies making rectangles above it" (S2, 104). The motif of the heap of tattered books may echo the book burnings by the Nazis in 1938, evoking the uncivil nature of the act of demolishing libraries and books in general. As the books in Višegrad are class diaries, this image can also be interpreted as the deliberate destruction of an archive and hence of a collective memory (Brunow 2015, 37–38). Several libraries, including Bosnia's National and University Library and the Sarajevo Oriental Institute were shelled and burned by Serbian forces in 1992. Riedlmayer (1995, 7–8) notes that libraries holding documents of Muslim heritage were targeted for destruction in an attempt to eliminate the material evidence of the existence of the different ethnic and religious traditions that were once shared as a common heritage in Bosnia. This attitude is also evident in Stanišić's novel where the class diaries are not burned but rather defiled, which is an even worse fate. Another example of the use of such images is Rabbi Avram's story of the destruction of a synagogue, most probably the one in Višegrad (S1, 100–102). In this story, the property of the synagogue is thrown into a lake and the rabbi is tortured and humiliated. The Višegrad synagogue was built in 1904–5 but was plundered in 1940 by German troops who turned it first into a storeroom and then into a stable for their horses. This story told by Rabbi Avram can be seen as an example of communicative memory, which is created through everyday interaction and has the historical experiences of contemporaries as its content (Erll 2005, 113). Moreover, the Rabbi's narration is placed immediately before the description of the entry of Serbian troops into Višegrad. Stanišić is thus using a story from the Second World War to illustrate another war that is taking place fifty years later, loading both these events with the same severity.

It should be noted here that Rabbi Avram's story can be seen as an additional layer in the evolving cultural and traditional remembrance of the Holocaust in Germany, helping thicken the collective memory in the context of memory and migration. As Rothberg explains, the *Neighbourhood Mothers project*, which was held in 2009 in Berlin to involve female Muslim immigrants in learning about Holocaust remembrance in Germany, showcases how immigrants engage with Germany's past not in order to integrate or conform, but to establish their own identity in relation to a national history that is marked by violence against others. Through collaboration with non-immigrant partners, these initiatives create new, culturally rich memories that blend local and global influences, and challenge conventional models of collective memory by breaking free from nation-state boundaries (Rothberg 2014, 134–142). In his novel, Stanišić skilfully interweaves Aleksandar's personal experiences with collective memories. Notably, including the Rabbi's story

not only makes the novel richer and deeper, but also makes a bridge to connect the individual ordeals of the characters to a broader, transnational historical framework, drawing parallels between the experiences in Višegrad and the Holocaust. This narrative technique beautifully embodies the essence of Rothberg's concept of thickening (2014, 134–142), where memories are layered, resulting in an account that delves deeper into the understanding of both personal and collective pasts.

Another motif that is relevant for Stanišić in this context seems to be the idea of "writing against disappearance". In German-language literary studies this motif is usually found in texts that strive to stop the past being forgotten and trauma suppressed (Tippner 2004, 74), and that are mostly autobiographical or autofictional prose by or about Holocaust survivors that aims to keep the memory of the Shoah alive. Today, the term is also used for various educational and art projects that serve to commemorate the Holocaust.[8] However, the idea has also been adapted for writings that deal with traumatic losses in other historical circumstances and with ways to prevent them being forgotten or suppressed.[9] The motif appears in Stanišić because in his account Aleksandar passes on what he perceived in 1992 in Višegrad. As Assmann (2006a, 263) notes, this kind of narrative focuses less on describing concrete events and more on telling what it felt like to be in the centre of those events. Aleksandar shares how he experienced war and violence as a child, providing very personal insights and, concurrently, targeting the strategies and impulses of forgetting and denying.[10] The child's view thus fits well for describing the events in Višegrad in May 1992 and thereafter, as the child witness simply tells the truth as he knows it without any adornments and emphases on the entire horror he experienced. In this regard, Stanišić's novel can be seen as a memory site for Višegrad, which is often overshadowed by other, better-known locations like Srebrenica (Viejo-Rose 2013, 133).

Familiar images appearing in Stanišić's novel like a ruined library or a demolished synagogue could be seen as him employing transcultural memorial forms. These forms, as described by Laanes (2021, 43), serve to express and comprehend

8 The artist Margarete Rabow for instance has developed a memorial campaign in which many people can take part. The names of the victims of the Shoah in a city, a region or an entire country are written on the floor in a public space with white school chalk, and the action is streamed live and documented on film. See Rabow 2020 and *Schreiben Sie mit!* (no date).

9 A French-German cooperation project "Rwanda–Ecrire par devoir de mémoire" (in German "Ruanda – Schreiben gegen das Vergessen") for example, dealing with the depiction of the genocide in Rwanda in the literary works of African authors. See for example Kopf 2010.

10 The issue of denying war crimes is still relevant in the present day since there is enduring discussion about guilt and the diverging visions of what happened in Bosnia in the 1990s. See David 2020.

novel and challenging experiences; they can be seen as a tool for cultural translation that enables individuals both to grasp their own experiences and to convey those experiences effectively to others (Laanes 2021, 44; Assmann 2006b, 187–188). Erll has explored the concept of "mnemonic forms" (2011, 13–14), such as symbols, icons, or patterns of memory, that enable repetition and carry significant meaning, and are an aid in interpreting new and different experiences. Stanišić employs these memorial forms through his young narrator, Aleksandar, to confront and comprehend the horrors of the past. This dual purpose aids Aleksandar in processing his trauma while providing a relatable framework for understanding the collective devastation in Višegrad. By sharing his experiences, he lets readers empathise with the impact of war and displacement, thereby contributing to a broader and more profound understanding of the past.

Alongside the use of memorial forms connected to the Second World War there are certain other transcultural motifs that are understood in many cultures around the world. The cruelty of the invaders is shown in a scene where Aleksandar and his friend witness the soldiers shoot at a dog for entertainment, betting who can hit it more accurately (S1, 122). Animal cruelty is often seen as a predictor of future violence against human beings, including crimes of assault, rape, murder, and arson (Hovel and Macias-Mayo 2018). The scene of extreme violence on a smaller scale against a much weaker being without a voice of its own predicts the violence to come against human beings on a much larger scale. As the scene is set at the very beginning of the Bosnian war, it implies the future progression of the war; later in the same chapter a horse is shot and his owner humiliated, showing how the violence escalates very quickly.

Stanišić alludes to historical events by using fascinating references to world literature or to well-known cultural concepts. The entrance of the Serbian forces into Višegrad for instance is presented using the vocabulary of a wedding procession: "Outside, a wedding party broke the silence, hooting horns. […] Bearded bridegrooms in camouflage jackets and tracksuit trousers drove past. Cross-country vehicles hooted, heavy trucks hooted. An army of bearded bridegrooms drove by, shooting at the sky to celebrate taking their bride, our town" (S2, 90–1). The imagery of the town being likened to a bride with the Serbian troops as bridegrooms celebrating their conquest might portray a nationalistic understanding of the country as a woman to be won, emphasising the symbolic connection between the nation and its land, which is often depicted in gendered terms. This image may furthermore represent the violation of the town, or the bride, by the invading forces, highlighting the brutality and sexual violence that often accompanies wartime occupations (Laanes 2021, 49–51). This scene can also be read as a more specific reference to the Sarajevo Wedding Attack on Sunday 1 March 1992, which is commonly referred to among Bosnian Serbs as the Bloody Wedding.

On that occasion, a Bosnian Serb wedding procession in Sarajevo's old Muslim quarter of Baščaršija was attacked, resulting in the death of the father of the groom and the wounding of a Serbian Orthodox priest. The attack took place on the last day of the referendum on the independence of Bosnia and Herzegovina from Yugoslavia and is sometimes interpreted as one of the events that caused the civil war to escalate (Troncotă 2015, 125).

The strategic use of memorial forms, familiar cultural symbols, and the concept of "writing against disappearance" in literature not only facilitates understanding but also serves as a powerful tool for confronting historical traumas. Stories like Aleksandar's might then encourage dialogue and understanding between different communities and perspectives, and help in exploring paths toward reconciliation, addressing questions of justice, forgiveness, and coexistence. In the second part of the novel, which takes place about ten years after the escape from Višegrad, Aleksandar re-writes his story about his childhood and the story of the war. This process can equally be seen as a reappraisal of what happened in 1992, and as an attempt to find a way to reconciliation.[11] Interestingly, Aleksandar's earliest memories are once again given as photographic images of various occasions such as state festivities (S1, 167), fishing with neighbours (S1, 182), playing chess, and talking to grandpa Slavko (S1, 186). However, Aleksandar as an adult also remembers, next to the beautiful moments, the events that testify to the underlying hostility, like the brutal exclusion of Francesco, a foreign engineer, who was suspected of being gay (S1, 188–96).

To find out what really happened, Aleksandar eventually begins a Google search on 11 February 2002 about the events in Višegrad on 6 April 1992, intending to reconstruct the facts (S1, 212). In the process, more and more memories resurface and the boundaries between probability, truth, and fiction become blurred. For this reason, Aleksandar decides to go back to Višegrad to reassess his memories and to find an "objective" truth (Rock 2012, 6–7). In Višegrad, he finds that people have been marked by the war in different ways. His visits to familiar places activate more and more painful memories, but at the same time, Aleksandar feels a growing desire to reconcile. This is once again expressed in the various stories contained in Aleksandar's second account (Oberpfalzerová, Ullrich and Jeřábek 2019, 5–6), which can be seen as a conscious reconstruction of memory in interaction with others (Assmann 2006b, 123). To show that one injustice cannot be ruled out by another for instance, he tells a story from his friend Kiko about

11 In recent years several projects, promoting storytelling by the victims of the Bosnian war as a way to find empathy as well as to reconcile with the traumatic past have started. See Oberpfalzerová, Ullrich and Jeřábek 2019, 14–15.

the games of football played by Serbian and Bosnian soldiers on the battlefield during a ceasefire (S1, 232–53). Even though reconciliation is a long process for him, he is taking the first step by simply accepting that, like the water of the Drina river, time cannot run backwards (S1, 311–12). Integrating diverse memorial forms like well-known images and the child's perspective, common motifs like "writing against disappearance", and thickening narratives with shared cultural symbols in literature can therefore not only enrich the storytelling experience and deepen the reader's understanding of the past, but can also foster understanding, empathy, and reconciliation.

Conclusion

The migration of people from Eastern Europe to Germany after 1989 brought not only their physical presence into German culture and society, but also their stories and memories through the literary accounts. Issues of identity, belonging, migration, and memory are central to many of these works and resonate with readers who have experienced similar challenges in their own lives or in the past of their nations. These memories then travel and transform over time and space, and are shaped by individual and collective experiences as well as by their cultural contexts.

The German literary landscape has in recent decades emerged as a significant platform for Eastern European memories, contributing to the thickening of the cultural context as defined by Rothberg (2014). In this chapter, the concept of thickening has been examined as a process that involves the integration of various transnational layers of memory into a specific cultural context. Thickening thus transforms the way that stories are woven, enhancing their depth and breadth by incorporating a multitude of perspectives and memories.

Stanišić's novel *How the Soldier* provides a compelling example of the impact of thickening on personal storytelling and cultural memory. The novel is an illustration of mnemonic migration as it portrays in German the experience of a young boy forced to flee his war-torn hometown in Bosnia and seek refuge in Germany. Stanišić weaves personal experiences together with collective memories of the Bosnian war, Holocaust memory, and Eastern European history and culture. To bring Aleksandar's story closer to German readers, Stanišić applies different literary conventions and transcultural memorial forms that can provide a means of understanding and a way of representing historical events and transcultural experiences. The most important of those is the perspective of the child, as Aleksandar's story is mostly told from the point of view of a child. A child's perspective is easy to understand in different cultures because the emotions of a child and

their reactions to war, violence, or displacement are often similar across different cultures and contexts. The child's perspective can thus help to bridge the gap between different societies by delivering insights about complex historical events. Additionally, memorial forms linked to Holocaust memory in German-language culture are used to explain Aleksandar's experiences in Višegrad in 1992, such as "writing against disappearance". Blending these diverse elements in the novel creates a layered and multifaceted narrative, reflecting the historical and cultural influences on individual storytelling. Stanišić's *How the Soldier* is thus an example of mnemonic migration as it tells a historically specific personal story that crosses linguistic, national, and cultural boundaries.

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III Circulation, Reception and the Protocols of Reading

Jessica Ortner

The Puzzled Reader: Reception Strategies and Gaps of Indeterminacy in Bosnian Wartime Memory

Can literature function as a medium of transcultural memory and circulate the traumatic memories of the Bosnian war across cultural, mental, and mnemonic borders? This chapter explores this question by analysing Saša Stanišić's German language novel *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* (2008; *Wie der Soldat das Gramofon repariert*, 2006), which describes the conquest of the Bosnian town of Višegrad and the ethnic cleansing in which the Muslim citizens of the town were killed. By investigating how the memories expressed in the novel relate to the readers of the novel, I ask which narrative techniques migrant authors from the former Yugoslavia use to make these experiences memorable (Rigney 2021) for non-Bosnian readers in Copenhagen, Manchester, and Berlin, enabling them to become emotionally immersed in memories of an event that is from their perspective distant and opaque. By analysing focus group interviews with actual readers of the novel in three western towns and two Bosnian ones, I ask how the social frameworks of memory (Halbwachs 1925) that the readers are socialised within affect how they make sense of the experiences represented in the novel. I use Wolfgang Iser's reader reception theory to investigate the transcultural reception of memory. Iser argues that literature has two poles, one of them artistic and the other aesthetic. The artistic pole is the literary text itself, while the aesthetic one is the concretisation of that text by the reader. The literary work of art only fully exists in the convergence of the two poles (Iser 1976, 38). Furthermore, the act of reading primarily depends on the ability of the reader to fill in or counterbalance the "gaps of indeterminacy" that offer different possible interpretations (Iser 1989).

This chapter investigates the extent to which one single articulation of memory transmission acquires different concretisations at different destinations. It demonstrates that the reader activates several, often overlapping frameworks to fill in the gaps of indeterminacy in migrant literature. I combine this reader-centred approach with Alison Landsberg's concept of "prosthetic memory" (2004) and Ann Rigney's (2015) redefinition of that concept. Landsberg suggests that museums, theatres, and movies are powerful memory media that can not only transmit knowledge about other people's experiences but also make people affectively adopt a memory they did not live through. The memory media do this by creating an emotional "interface between a person and a historical narrative about the

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past" (Landsberg 2004, 2). Following Landsberg, Rigney suggests that not only movies but also literature can create prosthetic memory "thanks to the surplus aesthetic pleasure offered by art" (2014, 353). Fiction, she suggests, can translate memories between different zones of Europe, and so shape the emotional bonds between countries that are economically interlinked but distant from one another in their historical experiences (Rigney 2014, 354). This article refines Landsberg's concept of prosthetic memory, arguing that since readers activate different frameworks of memory in order to decode a text and fill in the gaps of indeterminacy, the prosthetic memory that one reader might adopt may be different to that of another reader, while some readers do not get emotionally attached at all. How the specific mnemonic and affective potential of a text is activated depends on the readers' set of mnemonic frameworks and how they are situated in social contexts. This article further suggests that prosthetic memory is prompted if the reader is able to fill in the gaps of indeterminacy by associating the experiences described in the text with a memory of their own that touched them emotionally. Finally, I show that frameworks of memory are also decisive for how readers respond to the "rhetoric of cultural memory" (Erll 2009, 219) that a novel employs. Whereas a reader who has no knowledge about the historical event described will activate several related, perhaps less relevant reference points, readers who have embodied memories of the event will read the same novel in a "monumental mode" (Erll 2001a, 157–160) in which the event represented is understood as a reference to the horizon of cultural memory. In this case the gaps of indeterminacy are filled in with historical knowledge bolstered by the reader's own experiences of the historical event.

Frameworks of memories and gaps of indeterminacy

According to Astrid Erll, reception has always implicitly been a central concern of memory studies. She writes that "all media of cultural memory need to be actualised, charged with meaning, in order to unfold their mnemonic potential and to have an effective presence within the social sphere. Literature as a medium of cultural memory is therefore first and foremost a phenomenon of reception" (Erll 2011a, 160). The issue of reception is even more critical in transcultural memory studies. Landsberg's (2004) prosthetic memory deals explicitly with memory reception and "describes it graphically as the 'taking on' of a mediated 'memory limb'" (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbaek Andersen and Erll 2017, 4), highlighting the role of empathy as an important requirement for memory transmission. Following the logic

of mnemonic migration (Ortner 2022, 8–13), migrant literature makes memories "travel" between different social frameworks of memory. Migrant literature represents protagonists who immigrate into a new social framework, and this mnemonic media has the special ability of highlighting memories that have fallen out of the mnemonic framework of the host country and of finding a vocabulary to express these particular new memories with. Migrant literature as a media of cultural memory thus "disseminates versions of the past across space" (Erll 2001b, 13). This leads to a deterritorialisation of memory, since "for transcultural memory to actually come into existence, deterritorialised transmission must be followed by localising reception" (Törnquist-Plewa, Sindbaek Andersen and Erll 2017, 3). It is precisely the localised reception of travelling memory in different national contexts that is the focus of this chapter.

Migrant literature negotiates the social frameworks of memory that govern the reader's preconditions for reading a given text, and it does so by voicing memories that have not earlier been deemed important to remember and that were therefore excluded from the living memory of the canon (Assmann 2008; Rigney 2016, 69–70). According to Halbwachs every person's individual memory is influenced by a number of social frameworks of memories, such as family, class, religion, or nation. These frameworks "shape what people remember by filtering narratives according to their collective significance" (Rigney 2018, 245). People's individual memory is simultaneously facilitated and also limited by these multiple frameworks of memory, without which no memory would be possible at all.[1] Frameworks of memories, or "cognitive schemata that guide our perception in particular directions" (Erll 2011b, 15), are created by several different agents and may point in diverging directions. National frameworks of memories are created by official decision-makers, who select and mediate memories that legitimate the identity and unity of their society, and embed these memories in the long-term memory of the community. These national memories intersect or compete with generational memories that are formed by decisive historical events which people of about the same age experienced themselves or have been exposed to through various media. Generational memory is an embodied memory that lasts for the short time frame of about thirty years. A third dominant framework of memory is formed by the transgenerational transmission of memories in families, which recycles memories within a period of 80 to 100 years, "which is the period within which the generations of a family [...] exist simultaneously, forming a community

1 Jeffrey Olick names the individual memory that is influenced by the social framework "collected memory" (1999). Collective memory in contrast is the shared memory that a society has accepted as being important for its identity.

of shared experience, stories, and memories" (Assmann 2006, 214). In the present age of globalisation moreover, people are increasingly affected by transnational and transcultural frameworks that transcend the boundaries of national cultures and are shaped by global dissemination of memories, travels, migration, and the heterogenic composition of modern societies. De Cesari and Rigney (2014, 5, 9), working along these lines, identify a multi-scalarity of mnemonic frameworks, which means that people are part of a large amount of partly overlapping frameworks including "the intimate and local as well as the regional and global" (Rigney 2018, 250).[2] This chapter argues that these various social frameworks of memory influence not only how people remember their own lives in the process of *collected memory*, but also how readers make sense of the memories that are transmitted in fictional texts. All these frameworks provide different reference points that come on top of each person's specific knowledge and that are activated in the "act of reading" (Iser 1976).

I assume that frameworks of memory are decisive for how readers fill in the gaps of indeterminacy in literary texts. Of course, no reading can actualise all the potential meanings [*Sinnpotential*] of a text, but the empirical reader composes their own reading by choosing from among several potential actualisations of the text [*Aktualisierungspotential*] (Iser 1976, 55). Iser defines these different paths into the text as the implied reader. Gaps of indeterminacy are passages in the text where the reader can engage with the text by filling the gaps in with their own ideas, prior knowledge, and prejudices (Iser 1976, 282–283).

I aim here to tease out the extent to which readers can apprehend and perhaps also be emotionally touched by the mnemonic content of migrant literature about the Bosnian war, and how the style of the writing about it promotes or hampers this emotional engagement. Erll's idea that memory-making novels use the rhetoric of cultural memory is very useful for exploring what Iser calls the artistic pole of the texts, since it fits with Erll's idea that literature can have "*potential* memorial power"[3] (Erll 2009, 220) depending on the written medium and the manner of reading. She defines a number of modes for the rhetoric of cultural memory that are characterised by "clusters of narrative features", whose interplay may "contribute to a certain memory effect" (Erll 2009, 220). She distinguishes between the experiential, monumental, antagonistic, and reflexive modes. All of these modes convey the past by using certain narratological features. For example, the experiential mode represents the past as "lived-through experience" (Erll

2 Recently, Erll (2022) also introduced the concept of unconscious memories, which are memories that are remembered without the person remembering being able to determine a specific media or event that formed them.

3 Emphasis in original.

2009, 220). There is extensive use of "the present tense or of lengthy passages focalised by the 'experiencing I' in order to convey embodied, seemingly immediate experience" (Erll 2009, 220). In contrast, "monumental modes envisage the past as [...] part of the 'Cultural Memory'" (Erll 2011a, 158) by anchoring the individual experience in shared dates and facts that are well known in specific mnemonic communities. Finally, "literary forms which help to promote one version of the past and reject another constitute an antagonistic mode" (Erll 2011a, 159), and the most obvious technique used in this mode is negative stereotyping. Erll thus finds that authors use several literary qualities that urge the reader to choose a particular path in their reception of the text, but she equally points out that it is impossible to predict how actual readers will receive the text. I extend this idea by showing that the effect of the mnemonic modes varies with the mnemonic community in which the reader is socialised. Though an author may use the narratological means of the experiential mode, groups of readers in cultural or mnemonic settings where the event narrated is already part of cultural memory will actualise the potential meaning of the text as if it were written in the monumental mode, which is the mode that links a literary text to cultural memory. Other groups might also see the text as part of a memory contest, reading it then in an antagonistic mode.

My analysis of Stanišić's novel *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* asks which clusters of narrative features are at play in the novel, how frameworks of memory determine the strategies for counterbalancing gaps of indeterminacy, how the strategies of German, Danish, or English readers differ from those used by the Bosnian readers, and how the frameworks of memory affect the choice of which prosthetic memory to adopt.

Mediating the Bosnian war

Stanišić's novel *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone*[4] is an autofictional description of the Bosnian war through the limited perspective of a child. The novel can be very roughly divided into four parts. It begins by describing the peaceful childhood of the boy Aleksandar in the idyllic town of Višegrad, where he goes fishing and has a good time with his friends from school. The idyll is disturbed by the death of his beloved grandfather Slavko, who was a passionate communist, and by the looming nationalism that he senses in the schoolyard and that makes its first violent appearance at a family party, when a family friend threat-

4 All quotations are from Stanišić 2015. In the following only page numbers will be given.

ens a band that he accuses of playing gypsy music instead of "songs from the glorious days that once we knew and that will come again" (46–47). The second part describes the invasion of Višegrad, and here the perspective of the child is seen in full effect. The invasion is not described from a conscious, historically and politically informed point of view, but is instead viewed through a cellar window and heard about in unintelligible messages on the radio. After playing at soldiers and war in the cellar during the shelling, the child sees the soldiers suddenly enter the house and start harassing and raping its inhabitants. These events are narrated as an immediate experience that transmits only the pure sensory account of what Aleksandar sees and hears. The events are represented in a fragmentary manner, so that a rape scene does not show what happens between the soldier and the girl for example. Instead the reader only gets the point of view of Aleksandar, who sees the soldier closing the door behind him and the girl Amela and shortly after leaving the room again with a satisfied smile.

At the beginning of the third part, the family flees the town to take refuge in Serbia, which is the part of Yugoslavia that had attacked Višegrad. From that point onwards, the novel begins to disintegrate, as Aleksandar's arrival and integration in Germany is only described in the letters that Aleksandar writes to Asija, who he had met immediately before the invasion of the town and whose contact he had lost in the turmoil of the flight. The third part also contains numerous phone calls to Sarajevo, as Aleksandar had heard that Asija might have fled there. There is also a text within a text in the form of a book about the time "when everything was alright", and numerous lists of Aleksandar's memories of Višegrad. Finally, in the fourth part, Aleksandar visits Višegrad after the end of the war and begins to compare what he sees with the lists of memories he had made during his time in Germany. He finds that everything has changed. His best friend has disappeared, while another friend has turned into a bitter and traumatised young man whose memories estrange him from Aleksandar, who had survived the war in safety. The novel ends without closure with a phone call that may or may not be from Asija. The most remarkable feature of the novel is its style, which has a chaos of memories and emotions; combines features from several genres covering diary entries, letters, lists, phone calls, and a separate sub-novel; and switches between various narrative situations and narrators.

The description of the war scenes in the novel are typical of the rhetoric of collective memory, which Erll (2009) describes as experiential mode. In this narrative mode the past is represented as the living memory of a generation or a family. It presents an immersive first-person account and internal focalisation that give the impression of a seemingly immediate detailed experience of everyday life in the past (Erll 2009). Novels that serve as media of memory usually tend to represent one and the same event, the Bosnian war in this case, in two different regis-

ters of memory at once (Erll 2011a, 158–159). The war appears both in the "near horizon of memory" that is connected to the lifeworld of those who remember and that is told in the mode of communicative memory, and also in the "distant horizon of memory" of cultural memory. The entanglement of these two registers lets memory-making novels affect both horizons of memories. Telling about an event in the communicative mode makes distant cultural memories present and understandable for the reader. Representing individual memories as paradigmatic examples of common experiences means they can be transferred into the distant horizon of cultural memory and gain general validity (Erll 2003, 152; 2022, 32). Rigney describes this function as a *pars pro toto* "which allows a general situation to be depicted through the select number of singular individuals with whom viewers or readers can empathise and with whose fate they become involved" (2016, 70). Memory-making novels are thus able to subvert the fixed perception of the past by transferring elements of communicative memory into the collective and liable realm of cultural memory, and vice versa (Erll 2003, 152). However, an explanatory voice that adds to the individual observations has to be included, or the narrating protagonist has to be given the authority to understand and explain the historical circumstances. Neither of these apply in Stanišić's novel. He avoids combining the personal voice of the figure Aleksandar, who is living through the events, with an "authorial voice" (Lanser 1999, 15) that provides sense. This lack of an explanatory voice, according to Iser, "opposes the desire for consistency, which we constantly reveal when we are reading" (Iser 1989, 27). Furthermore, this feature creates a discrepancy between the violent events described and the narrating voice of the child, who lacks the authority to understand and to explain to the reader what is happening. He makes no moral judgement about the events and is more concerned with the personal and family consequences of the war such as whether he will still be able to go fishing, whether the soccer season will go ahead, and when the school will open again (314).

An example of the lack of an explanatory voice is the scene in which the soldiers conquer the city. The narrator reacts with distrust when his friend Edin says that he has seen soldiers in the streets:

> Soldiers shot men in the stomach. They fell forward, like when you get hit with a volleyball – just like that. I saw it from the upstairs window, Edin fantasised when he came back [...] I didn't believe a word he said, but I didn't say anything, and anyway, what soldiers? (110)

Later, when Aleksandar himself sees the soldiers, the reader still does not get any explanation about who has actually conquered the town. The boy identifies the sound of the horn with wedding parties and describes the soldiers as "bearded bridegrooms" who "celebrate their bride, our town" (113). In the following section

I will investigate how readers react to the experiential cluster of narrative features that Stanišić makes use of. What does the lack of an explanatory voice mean for the ability of readers to fill in the gaps of indeterminacies? Which social frameworks of memory do they activate to decode the text? And consequently, how do these pre-existing frameworks of memory influence the circulation of the memories across national borders, and the creation of the prosthetic memory of the Bosnian war?

Reading the Bosnian war

These questions are answered by the results of three focus group investigations that were conducted by the research project *Mnemonic migration* of the University of Copenhagen in Berlin, Copenhagen and Manchester. A total of 47 readers were divided into seven groups and given four weeks to read the book before the discussion session.[5] We composed groups that had an equal number of men and women, and in which both an older generation that would be able to remember the time of the Bosnian War, and a younger generation that presumably had little memory of the war or of Yugoslavia were represented. Almost all of the readers felt that the novel was a complicated and demanding read, and some even found the novel almost unintelligible. Many of the readers were especially frustrated and discouraged by the lack of historical information, and it is true that the child's perspective particularly means that the novel intentionally contains numerous gaps.[6] One reader put it as follows:

> Because it doesn't describe what happens, how the battle took place and that people killed each other, you need to have previous knowledge in order to understand the background and to interpret the book. I think you need to know roughly what happened there. (Berlin 1)

This reader counterbalanced these gaps by activating his own previous historical knowledge about the war while reading. Quite a lot of the readers tried to fill the gaps of indeterminacy that were produced by the lack of an auctorial voice

5 The Covid-19 pandemic meant that we had three focus groups with only five people in each group so that we could ensure there was sufficient distance between the participants. In Berlin and Manchester, we had two focus groups with eight participants in each. The focus groups are numbered here by giving the city and the number of each focus group.

6 Iser (1976, 15) claims that authors increased the indeterminacy of their writings in the period of modernism. Stanišić's novel seems to be at the same level as novels like *Ulysses* by James Joyce for the number of its gaps.

by searching for information about the war on the internet. This was most often the case for younger readers, who were often only dimly aware of the war. One reader explained that: "All I knew about Yugoslavia is that it existed, and then it didn't. I never knew why" (Manchester 1). In contrast, older readers tended to activate their generational and transnational memories. Many had had refugees from Bosnia as classmates and many of the German readers especially had childhood memories of their holidays in the former Yugoslavia. As an older German reader noted: "For our generation it is really still Yugoslavia. For it is not so long ago" (Berlin 2). News coverage was another source for many of the older readers. A middle-aged Danish reader explained how he had a clear memory of the war: "The war was something we talked a lot about back then, because what happened was so mad" (Copenhagen 1). However, not all readers felt the need to fill in the missing information. A reader from Berlin found the lack of an auctorial voice interesting:

> Nobody explained why the Serbs attacked Bosnia. The whole historical background was not explained, but the story took place when he was young. He did not understand it. That is something that fascinated me in the book – that it is written from the point of view of a child. Suddenly there are soldiers, and they are carrying weapons. ...and he does not know why they are there and why his father is driving their car to Serbia – to the enemy, because the Serbs conquered Bosnia [...] he does not answer the questions but only asks them. (Berlin 3)

This reader not only accepts the gaps as a necessary literary feature of the book, but is also fascinated by this style of writing. It is precisely the style that was the most significant cause of frustration about Stanišić's novel. However, it is possible to detect two opposing opinions. For some, the complex style meant that the plot of the novel was almost unintelligible, and those readers found the book annoying. Other readers accepted the style and described it as, for example, "patchy and jumpy" and "a bit chaotic" (Manchester 2) but supposed that it was meant to be like that. One Berlin reader who likewise understood the confusion to be intended suggested that the number of jumps and mental leaps were meant to show how Aleksandar as the protagonist of the book was "a very bewildered person" (Berlin 3). The readers used different techniques to counterbalance the gaps of indeterminacy produced by the style. A younger reader from one of the Berlin groups found the book both interesting and captivating because the mental leaps allowed her to use her own imagination, to think along ["*mitdenken*"] and "to contemplate a little bit how the book might continue and what he [the protagonist] thinks" (Berlin 3). Another reader ceased to understand the book as a novel and read it instead as a series of short novels that he found "quite amusing" (Berlin 3). Yet another reader used her family memory to actualise the text: "I liked how the book represented

the point of view of the ordinary people. I was able to imagine it. I have often been to Yugoslavia and still go there often" (Berlin 1). Interestingly, this reader could only relate to the very first part of the book, which reminded her of her own experience of the former Yugoslavia. Even though she had found a way to fill in the gaps of indeterminacy about life before the war, she did not engage in most parts of the novel. Perhaps as a consequence, when she was asked about what touched her the most, she stated that she felt no compassion for anyone in the novel.

The most radical reaction to a text, according to Iser, happens when the text "contradicts our own preconceptions to such a degree that it calls forth drastic reactions such as throwing the book away or, the other extreme, being compelled to revise those preconceptions" (1989, 8). The first reaction was exactly what one of the readers of our focus group in Berlin felt, as she gave up reading the book entirely. The reaction was not prompted by a disagreement with the world described in the book, but by a dislike for the style: "The book was so bad that I did not want to read it. Long-winded like chewing gum" (Berlin 1).

It could be concluded from these examples that the novel's "cluster of narrative features", meaning its strict experiential mode, often impeded the direct transmission of memories of the Bosnian war. This was the case when readers wanted the book to give them some historical information but found they had to look for it in other sources, or when the style estranged the reader to such a degree that they entirely stopped the process of filling in the gaps of indeterminacy. Even those who appreciated the style or the dim historical context of the novel did not necessarily learn anything new, even though it activated memories from when they were young and came into contact with refugees, travelled to the former Yugoslavia, or followed the news coverage about the war. However, prosthetic memory does not depend on cognitive knowledge being learned. Rigney (2014) states that the ideal reading experience would have the effect of producing emotional bonds to historical experiences that the reader did not live through. This expectation matches Iser's idea of the most extreme reaction being that the reader revises their preconceptions. Landsberg (2004) and Rigney (2014) find that the reaction of a reader revising their preconception or adopting a new memory does not have anything to do with whether they learn any knowledge on a rational level, but comes from becoming emotionally immersed in the text. Although emotional immersion is not considered in Iser's systematic account of reader reactions, I would suggest that it seems to be a precondition for a reader counterbalancing the gaps of indeterminacy. The following section outlines the extent to which the readers were touched by the text and how the diverging frameworks of memory affected the kinds of prosthetic memories that they could take away from their reading experience.

Social frameworks of memory as a backbone of prosthetic memory?

Even though a lot of readers expressed difficulties with reading and understanding the novel, most of them were emotionally affected by at least one aspect of it or by an event described in the book. From these emotional responses, it becomes obvious that the attachment depends heavily on the reader's social frameworks of memory, which influence how they counterbalance the gaps. A reader from Manchester with a background as a migrant explained for example that her personal background supported her emotional reaction: "Because it was from the child's perspective, I could relate. I was a child when I moved – not because of war, but just immigrated – I could relate to what he went through when he came to Germany" (Manchester 2). Another example demonstrates a reference to Germany's national framework of memory. The reader reacted emotionally to the scene where the soldiers entered the house. He stated that the scene "really stuck with [him] and reminded [him] of the Second World War" (Berlin 1). Since this was a young reader without previous knowledge about the Bosnian war he used the Second World War as a template to understand it. That he did not live through these events himself does not change the fact that a dominant cultural memory provoked his emotional reaction and affected how he filled the gaps. A third reader related the war scenes to the contemporary wars she had experienced through global media: "The whole book is quite emotional because, as I am reading it, it feels real. I know it's a story, that stuff happens, it happens now, it is happening. Reminds me of Syria and Iraq. Got emotional hearing about all the death, the bodies in the river, the football match. That stuff happens" (Manchester 1). Even though this does not exactly express a transmission of the specific memory of the Bosnian war but rather a universalised understanding of a war situation, I would argue that these comparisons show a renewed awareness of the Bosnian war being just as bad as current events, and therefore just as important to remember.

I consider that the feeling of "being there", of being drawn into the world of the text marks the passage from being emotionally affected to adopting the memory in the sense of Landsberg (2004). One reader stated that the war scenes in the book reminded him of the news coverage that he had seen in his youth and that had made a deep impression on him back then (Berlin 2). However, the descriptions in the book were even worse, because it appears that the news cameras had avoided the most terrible scenes. Whether or not the author had really experienced the war, the reader confessed that the descriptions of the war captivated him, painfully reminding him of those he had seen before, and hijacking him into another world (Berlin 2). This example shows the powerful impact that the

transnational framework created by global news media has had on this reader. The scenes described in the book couple with earlier media-mediated memories in an uncomfortable way and seem to stick more emphatically in the mind of the reader. These two examples show how earlier social frameworks of memory are decisive for emotional engagement with a text and for filling in the gaps of indeterminacy. These frameworks also determine what memories the reader ends up adopting as prosthetic memories. In the first case, the mnemonic potential is realised by a link to the television images of the wars in Syria and Iraq. Here, the prosthetic memory about the Bosnian war is formed by the analogy with other, more recent wars. In the second case, the war scenes in the book activated contemporary media-mediated memories of the Bosnian war, but also added to the earlier memory of the war by offering more gruesome pictures. This then indicates that literature has the potential to create prosthetic memory, but the capacity to impress the reader emotionally does not depend exclusively on the mode of literary representation. Rather it depends on the ability of the reader to find reference points in their own social frameworks of memory, or otherwise, that add to the world described in the text. Again, transmission of memory does not necessarily happen when gaps of indeterminacy are filled in with historical information from the internet, but rather when the reader can engage with the text because of associations that have earlier had an emotional impact on them.

Destabilising the narrative mode

As stated earlier, the reader's own experiences can be crucial for the realisation of literary texts. This becomes especially evident in the focus group readings by Bosnian readers, who almost univocally stated that Stanišić's representation of the war was authentic. We conducted four focus group discussions on Stanišić's novel in Bosnia-Herzegovina, two in Sarajevo and two in Banja Luka, involving a total of 25 respondents. The book was deemed "real" in Sarajevo, even "100 per cent real" (Sarajevo 2).[7] One reader related the events in the novel to their family framework of memory: "In Višegrad they fell asleep in peace and woke up to war. That's literally the way it was. My Mum told me" (Sarajevo 1). In Banja Luka too, the representation was acknowledged as authentic: "What he described in the book – the war was like that" (Banja Luka 1). A reader from Sarajevo says about the football match on Mount Igman: "As far as I know, the stories are quite

7 I am indebted to Fedja Wierød Borčak's translation and the consideration of the Bosnian focus group interviews in Andersen and Borčak 2022.

real. That football [match]. Even worse things than that happened" (Sarajevo 1). This was then confirmed by another reader: "Yes. A lot of similar, perhaps even worse situations that we've heard about, seen or experienced" (Sarajevo 1). In Iser's reader response theory, these readers are filling in the gaps of indeterminacy by referring to external verifiable factors in such a way that the book "appears to be nothing more than a mirror reflection of these factors" (1989, 7). Indeed, the accuracy of the representations was to a large extent judged against the readers' own memories, whether first or second-hand, and their personal conceptions of what the war was like. Iser debases this into a mere fact-checking exercise that almost empties the text of its aesthetic quality, but I would rather emphasise that this reading technique demonstrates how far the social framework of memory in which the reader is socialised causes the entirely different reactions to the "clusters of narrative features" (Erll 2009, 220), which are the representation of the past as a lived-through experience, the use of the present tense, and the focalisation by the 'experiencing I'. In other words, it is not the narratological structure alone that allows certain entries into the text, since both the potential meanings [*Sinnpotential*] and the mode of writing change according to the mnemonic context. As mentioned above, what Erll calls a monumental mode sees the past as part of cultural memory by anchoring the individual experience in shared dates and facts that are well-known in specific mnemonic communities (2011a, 158). This is often done in the text itself by adding an auctorial voice, but in this case the Bosnian readers themselves interlink the memories described in the novel with their memories. There was a tendency for the readers in Sarajevo to treat the texts as memory accounts that represent a shared, collective image of the war even though they are based on the perspective represented artistically. Thus, the readers undertook a monumental reading in which the text is anchored firmly in a certain version of collective memory.

However, since the memory culture in Bosnia is highly diverse, the readings sometimes resulted in a negotiation of collective memory. This point becomes especially relevant in the focus groups in Banja Luka, which is the capital of Republika Srpska, a part of Bosnia Herzegovina that is populated mainly by Serbs and has its own separate social framework of memory. In contrast to the perception of the Sarajevo focus groups, where respondents thought the account was fairly objective, the sentiment among the Banja Luka readers was that the Serbs are portrayed as the "bad guys", and exoticised as primitive, war-loving cavemen (Banja Luka 1). One reader expressed a wish for more objectivity (Banja Luka 2), while several readers thought that the book neglected to talk about atrocities committed against Serbs. In this particular framework of memory the content is consequently seen not as part of collective memory, but as a version of the past that leaves out the history of the Serbs, leading to the conclusion that the novel in this context is

part of an antagonistic memory discourse. Addressing the memory conflict between the Bosnian and Serbian parts of Bosnia Herzegovina directly, one reader states that, "of course people in Republika Srpska don't perceive it that way [meaning how the novel represents the past] and you won't hear it in any media here. It'd probably be the same thing if it were the other way around" (Banja Luka 1). In Sarajevo though, the texts supported the reader's position in the Bosnian memory landscape by confirming much of the memory discourse in the Federation, the other part of Bosnia Herzegovina. It could be argued that there are some slight indications of such an antagonistic discourse in the novel. When the family flees, they take the road towards Belgrade, directly into "the enemy's arms" but the father's Serbian descent means that they are allowed to cross the border to Serbia. After arriving at his uncle's house, Aleksandar remarks: "Višegrad was on the TV first but the people who are defenders on our TV at home are the aggressors here, and the town didn't fall, it was liberated, because a madman and not a hero was trying to blow up the dam" (139–140).

The focus groups indicate that similar memory conflicts govern their reading of the novel. Some readers from Banja Luka expressed a more liberal notion though, accepting that the war looked different from different perspectives:

> All of us from this region have our own war stories. Never mind if you fled or stayed. We all look at these things from our own angle. He [Stanišić] wrote from his angle. This is what he saw. In his mind, the war, the killings, the people whom he knew are all associated with men with beards. (Banja Luka 2)

For some younger readers the book served as a source to complement a fragmented memory transmission within the family. A reader in her thirties stated that:

> [There are] many things we don't get to hear about from our parents. Maybe they told me about certain things, but I have always carried the question with me: What else happened? What other situations were there? I'm glad that I read this book. This is but another piece of the war and what happened that I don't know about or am not familiar with. It'd be good for my generation to hear about. (Sarajevo 2)

In another comment the novel is part of coming to terms with a very personal family history:

> I'm from a generation born right before the war; I was born in 1991. My father lost his hands in the war. Lately, he's gone into himself more, dwelling on his problems and bringing thoughts from the front. I'm looking for some answers, because I can never get them from him; he never speaks about it, because he doesn't want to, he runs away from it. Then I gather information from others, younger people who weren't as affected, who didn't lose limbs. I follow it a lot. The events themselves, from the testimonies of soldiers, commanders; who

> was what, who did what, what were their stories, how did they end up in their positions? Then I also watch films, from different angles. (Sarajevo 2)

These readings can be explained by Rigney's idea that literary texts may serve as a means to make the past "memorable". Indeed "for things worth remembering to be constituted as memory, they must also be translated into transmissible experience" (Rigney 2021, 13). The example above indicate that the novel helps in remembering an event that the parental generation has lived through but is unable to communicate. Read as a monumental representation of cultural memory, the novel provides the younger generations with a means of understanding their family history.

In contrast to the Western readers, who related the war to World War Two and the war in Syria, only a few Bosnian readers read the book outside the specific Bosnian frame. One reader thought the novel was "nicely packaged", because it was general or universal in its outlook, focusing on individual human experiences and avoiding nationalist discourse, or "talk of Muslims and Serbs" (Sarajevo 1). In stark contrast, other respondents read the book as a very specific story about Bosnia, stating that Europeans and even certain groups within Bosnia would not understand the book.

> I don't think this book is for everybody. I think it's for some older generations. And I think it's a local book [...] I don't know how others in Bosnia and Herzegovina will understand the book. Some things they won't understand, some they will. Not to mention the European market! Neither do I think that somebody at the age of 17 or 18 will get anything. I believe they'd be struck by great confusion. They wouldn't get it. Here's somebody killing somebody else, why, how? It wouldn't have the same effect as it had on me, who remembers the war and the time before it. (Sarajevo 2)

Indeed, this reader very precisely describes the type of confusion that Danish, English and German readers expressed, which is nonetheless confounded by the fact that the book was a bestseller in Germany and was translated for numerous European countries. It is clear however, that most western readers would not be able to understand the multiple political implications of the book, but would rather particularly like or dislike its style, and that Western readers have to fill in a lot of gaps of indeterminacy that the Bosnian readers fill in with their personal experience, family stories or particular cultural memories. It may be supposed that the political relevance of the book is one of the main reasons why the style of writing was discussed less in the Bosnian focus groups. Many readers in both Sarajevo and Banja Luka liked the style and were touched by the depictions of the events of the war. One reader from Sarajevo said for example that: "the value [of the book] is the writing style, how in every sentence there is a richness, and he [the author] is able

to keep that a constant" (Sarajevo 2). A reader from Banja Luka agrees, that "you notice he knows what he's doing, the man is imaginative, and funny at that" (Banja Luka 1). Indicating the emergence of prosthetic memory, one reader there stated that Stanišić managed "to describe Višegrad in such a way [...] that it's easy to imagine it. It's scenically described" (Sarajevo 2). "You're able to see it in your head, what happened and how". Other readers appreciated the stylistic features as a distancing factor that made it bearable to read about these events, perhaps because, as one reader says: "it gives enough information" without traumatising the reader (Sarajevo 1).

Conclusion

The investigation of the localised reception of transcultural memory has shown that we must take a reader-centred approach in order to gain an insight into the processes of what happens to mnemonic migration in literature when it arrives at its destination, which is the reader in different mnemonic contexts. A reader-centred analysis looks at the reference points that readers use when confronting historical reality represented in a literary text. The differences between the reference points that are activated offer various ways of actualising a text, filling the gaps of indeterminacy, and gaining prosthetic memory. The examples selected from the focus group interviews show that readers in the Western European contexts tend to fill the novel's numerous gaps of indeterminacy by drawing on their own generational memory, as some of them followed the Bosnian war in the news media when it was happening or had refugees as schoolmates. Other readers had acquired memories from family members who have (post-)memories from World War Two, who had fought in current wars in Syria and Iraq, or who had, in contrast, nice memories from holidays in the former Yugoslavia. Bosnian readers on the other hand drew on embodied family and cultural memories and current memory. What does this tell us about the ability of literature to forge prosthetic memory? It seems that the large amount of gaps of indeterminacy produced by the experiential mode of Stanišić's novel and its lack of an auctorial voice complicates its transmission of memories. For many readers, the style and the lack of historical information were an obstacle to any deep emotional immersion. Often, more comfortable memories of the time before the war were adopted instead of the descriptions of the war, and they were added to with the reader's own memories from holidays. Rather than creating new memories, the book tended to trigger earlier memories. One German reader who felt drawn into the text had powerful memories of the war from public broadcasting. The novel reactivated the negative sentiments and added more gruesome pictures to a memory that was al-

ready established. The ability of such a text to impress the reader emotionally consequently does not depend exclusively on the mode of literary representation, but rather it depends on the ability of the reader to find reference points in their own social frameworks of memory that can fit with the world and the events described in the text. Furthermore, this chapter has shown that the "clusters of narrative features" of the text is only one aspect that decides which mode the reader applies when decoding the text. The experiential narrative features of the novel have a different effect in a mnemonic context where various embodied and cultural memories circulate. In Bosnia, the difficult stylistic features of the text lost their importance or were appreciated because they did not complicate the understanding of the text to the same extent. The novel was read not as a communicative memory of a confused child, but rather as an expression of cultural memory (monumental mode), or as an intervention in the memory debate between the Federation of Bosnia Herzegovina and Republika Srpska (antagonistic mode). The gaps of indeterminacy are thus filled in with historical knowledge bolstered with embodied memories and various circulating cultural memories. This produces an entirely different prosthetic memory to that encountered in Western European countries, as it is one that does not travel across large geographical distances but crosses cultural and mnemonic differences, perhaps forging an understanding of the point of view of others. Prosthetic memory as a potential outcome of the reading that happens when mere understanding switches into a feeling of "being there" is variable and changes together with the mode of reception, as both depend on the frameworks of memory that are activated in the act of reading.

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Anita Pluwak

"I Have Such Mixed Feelings": Readers Respond to Memoirs by Political Relatives on Lubimyczytac.pl

This chapter explores online reader reviews of popular memoirs authored by female relatives of prominent politicians from post-socialist Poland. The books whose vernacular reception is considered in this article are *Secrets and Dreams* (*Marzenia i tajemnice,* 2011) by Danuta Wałęsa, wife of former Solidarity leader and president in 1990–1995 Lech Wałęsa; *Lady Comrade* (*Towarzyszka Panienka,* 2013) by Monika Jaruzelska, daughter of Wojciech Jaruzelski, the military general and de facto leader of socialist Poland in 1980–1989; *Between Us* (*Między nami,* 2013) by Małgorzata Tusk, wife of Donald Tusk, liberal prime minister of Poland in 2007–2014[1] and president of the European Council in 2014–2019; and, *Secrets of a General's Wife* (*Tajemnice generałowej,* 2015) by Maria Kiszczak, wife of Czesław Kiszczak, the notorious minister of internal affairs and head of the police apparatus in 1981–1990.[2] All these books generated an intense public response, not least through the discussions in online recommendation sites for books such as *Lubimyczytac*, which is a popular Polish platform for readers to connect with one another, read and post reviews, and discuss literary topics. The Lubimyczytac reviews are a rich if complex source of material that has not yet been systematically explored. This paper presents a textual analysis or close reading of a sample of the reviews with the emphasis on identifying their recurring features and themes. I will consider what motivates readers to take up the books, how they engage with them, what functions the texts serve, and what value readers ascribe to them. The paper draws on research into contemporary readers and reading practices and on cultural memory, life writing, celebrity, and first lady studies, as these can help

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1 Donald Tusk returned to office as prime minister of Poland in December 2023 after emerging victorious in parliamentary elections that were widely seen as one of the key political events of the year in Europe.

2 There are numerous other texts of this type, including Jolanta Kwaśniewska's series of self-help books published between 2009 and 2015, and Marta Kaczyńska's 2014 memoir about her parents among the best known. None of them, however, has achieved similar resonance to that of those explored in this chapter.

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elucidate the ambivalence that underlies the cultural fascination with the life narratives of the wives and daughters of prominent politicians. By focusing on reader responses to four memoirs that represent different types of life writing, different types of political relatives, and different perspectives on the past, the paper provides new insight into how a popular genre is received as media of memory within its contemporary social and cultural context.

While the books whose reception this paper investigates are sometimes considered less than serious and lacking authenticity, they and the responses of readers to them are relevant for at least three reasons. First, they are part of a larger boom in celebrity memoirs that swept post-socialist Poland in the new millennium, marking a significant departure from a tradition of more egalitarian life writing that had dominated the national culture for some two hundred years (Hellich 2016; Rodak 2012). The shift towards elitist life writing, which is epitomised by the celebrity autobiography, was linked to the embrace of individualism after 1989 in the context of commodity capitalism, and it elicited ambivalence from professional critics among academics and journalists because it was often perceived to be a purely commercial undertaking. Many critics bemoaned the popular obsession with celebrity, which they saw as a fashion rather than as intrinsically linked to the structure and dynamics of society, driven by a new economy of visibility and attention (Antonik 2019). The unprecedented intensity and scope of the reception for books authored by Danuta Wałęsa and other female relatives of frontline politicians actually influenced the perceptions of celebrity memoirs in Poland, so that the genre increasingly came to be seen as salient and imbued with both public and private significance (Kułakowska and Łuksza 2015; Nadana-Sokołowska 2018). Literary scholars for instance began to view the popularity of such texts as part of a wider democratising shift in culture that brought into focus the social contexts of reading and what people actually *do* with literature (Hopfinger 2018).

Second, the four memoirs and their reception matter because the emergence of political spouses as significant political actors tells us a lot about post-socialist society. This development is linked to the rise of democratic politics with a free but market-driven press and free elections (Olczyk 2013; Luthar 2010), and simultaneously to a resurgence of traditional values in politics and culture (Korolczuk and Graff 2018). Research on political spouses from the US and Europe confirms that they, perhaps more than other contemporary public figures, embody conventional expectations for women (Anderson 2004; Widlak, Pont-Sorribes and Guillamet Lloveras 2016; Vigil 2019). As a symbolic resource for male politicians, they tend to reinforce traditional dichotomies between the public sphere, which is political, male, and important, and the private sphere, which is female, domestic, and trivial (Van Zoonen 1998; Harmer 2015). In Poland, where political spouses have traditionally had few sociocultural functions, their newfound prominence also

demonstrates how global collective memory shapes narrative templates for previously absent public roles or paths, such as that of the first lady (cf. Ling and Berkowitz 2018), where frequent comparisons are made to Jaqueline Kennedy or Hillary Clinton.[3]

Finally, and most pertinent for the current volume, the memoirs circulate in a larger context of debates about how to interpret Poland's post-war history, particularly the contested meaning and nature of the social upheaval of the early 1980s. The books came out some thirty years after Solidarity emerged as a left-wing workers' movement that stood against a supposedly left-wing workers' state (Ost 2020), only to be driven underground when that state, represented by General Jaruzelski and General Kiszczak, imposed martial law in 1981–1983. In the thirty years that separate the historical events covered by the four memoirs from their publication, the liberal perception of Solidarity as a symbol of a national anti-communist struggle became the norm and the received wisdom, and the ideological ambiguity of the movement faded from view (Kubik 2015; Ost 2020; Szcześniak 2022). As Polish politics in the new millennium turned into a clash between the national conservative right and its liberal or neoliberal centre-right opponents led by Donald Tusk, and all sides sought to project an image of Solidarity that served their political interest, the question of how to assess the legendary movement and its onetime leader, Lech Wałęsa, became a key dividing line between the two camps. In this setting, any hint of scandalous revelation made the afterlives of reputations or legacies highly contentious, with a political figure's perceived status as a hero or villain potentially shifting over time, even posthumously.[4]

The four texts of self-life-writing thus emerged as part of broader networks of texts about contemporary culture, about fundamental shifts in post-socialist politics, and about contested history, to function in the words of Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson as "supplements, remediations, and new versions interacting with new generations of readers", and as "dynamic sites open to interpretation over the course of their textual afterlife" (2020, 11). Ongoing present-day interest in the four memoirs suggests that the readers expect them to illuminate aspects of the past that do not come across in official histories or other types of memory.

3 For a recent example, see a biographic publication on Jolanta Kwaśniewska, whose title translates as *The First among Ladies* and is a reference to Kwaśniewska's post-1996 invention of a non-existent first lady trajectory for the new Polish democracy (Priebe 2023). The book's cover is adorned with an image that plays on Kwaśniewska's physical similarity to Jackie Kennedy and the protagonist is repeatedly referred to as the "Hillary Clinton of the East" (Priebe 2023, 7, 26).
4 As evidenced by the allegations that Lech Wałęsa was a communist-era informant or the polarisation that surrounded the multiple trials after 1989 of General Jaruzelski and General Kiszczak for their role in imposing martial law. Jaruzelski died in 2014, Kiszczak in 2015.

Does this mean that these life stories function as modifications to the official narrative that frequently depicts socialism and its end in monolithic terms, conjuring up socialist lives that were rigidly uniform, always oppressed, and chronically unfulfilled? And what happens when personal life accounts are placed within a larger archive of narratives that affects both their scope and their circulation? These are some of the questions this paper aims to explore by analysing the Lubimyczytac reviews.

In the subsequent sections, I briefly characterise the four books and their reception in the mainstream media and scholarly outlets, before accounting for how I go about reading the Lubimyczytac reviews. I then move on to investigate the main themes in the reader responses.

The books that launched a thousand debates

The four memoirs discussed in this paper exemplify the generic hybridisation of contemporary life writing, where the distinction between autobiography and biography appears to be increasingly fluid (Antonik 2019, 84; Medecka 2017, 139–141). None of the four is an autobiography in a strict sense, as the books by Wałęsa and Tusk were, to some extent, written or co-written by others as someone else wrote *about* the famous public figure using information provided by that person themselves; Kiszczak's is a book-length interview, so it is structured by someone else; and Jaruzelska's is a collection of sketches.[5] This genre fluidity is reflected in the Lubimyczytac reviews, where the designations *autobiography*, *biography*, and *memoir* are used interchangeably, and sometimes even in combination like *memoir-autobiography*. Whereas an autobiography typically "moves from birth to fame and beyond", a memoir "focuses on a particular time in the writer's life that is somehow significant" (Avieson, Giles and Joseph 2018, 1), which makes it a fitting description here, since all four authors concentrate mainly on their relationship with the famous political relative, and on the 1980s and Solidarity as *the* transformative events of recent history. While all the books maintain a chronological structure, the three spouses dwell little on their premarital life. The opposite applies to Jaruzelska, who is a politician's daughter and whose memoir is centred more on her childhood. Jaruzelska, who is a popular journalist and animal rights crusader, was already more of a celebrity before the publication of her book than

5 Wałęsa's book was co-authored by Piotr Adamowicz, a former Solidarity activist who is strongly engaged in the memorialisation of the movement. In 2013, stories emerged that the book was in fact the work of a professional ghostwriter, see Nadana-Sokołowska 2018, 330. For Tusk's book, see Medecka 2017, 140.

the other women were. Moreover, despite the obvious differences in the political legacies of the four politicians, the books use a similar narrative strategy in their biographical portrayal of the men who are hailed as efficient and visionary statesmen, but at the same time criticised for their failings as husbands and fathers.[6]

Wałęsa's *Secrets and Dreams* by far exceeded the other books in terms of publicity and coverage, and the difference in circulation and reception is mirrored in the different sizes of the datasets of reviews for each memoir. The book was adapted for the stage and incorporated into film; it became a veritable "collective cultural experience"[7]. Public interest in Wałęsa's intimate life was not limited to domestic audiences, as the book was widely discussed in the international press and translated into French, Portuguese, Russian, and other languages. Much of the national and international media coverage centred on how Wałęsa's focus on personal relationships and everyday life had shed light on women's experience of history, and how her book provided an important amendment to official memory scripts by exploring a more intimate legacy of a contested past. At home, liberal feminists celebrated Wałęsa's decision to "stand up for herself" as an example of female agency that could empower working-class women within Wałęsa's age group.[8] A conflict soon emerged about the modes of representation that Wałęsa and other political spouses were afforded, as more left-leaning feminists argued that the politicians' wives were cast in highly limited roles that made them inadequate role models for contemporary women, and that their books were part of a neoliberal system of governance that furthered the depoliticisation of society (Mrozik 2012, 2013). This dispute rehearsed not only longstanding disagreements about how to define female emancipation and how to assess the socialist and post-socialist period, two issues that remain closely interwoven in Polish debates (Fidelis 2010; Kościańska 2021; Lišková 2018; cf. Hopfinger 2017, 33–35), but also the arguments about today's popular culture and two contrasting opinions of it, one that is overly positive and a second that is markedly pessimistic.

National conservative commentators saw all four books as evidence of what they perceive as the endless multiplication of "lies" about the origins and meaning

6 Because her husband was still in office, this proved particularly contentious for Małgorzata Tusk and led to intense media speculation that she was strategically deployed to compensate for emerging inadequacies in her husband's political profile. For an overview, see Medecka 2017, 145–146.
7 I use this term in the definition coined by Meredith Nash as quoted in McDonell 2014, 73. The public debate about Wałęsa's marriage and her own role in Solidarity coincided with Andrzej Wajda's filming of *Wałęsa, Man of Hope* (2013). On the convergence of Wajda's film and Wałęsa's book, see Medecka 2017, 141. On the stage adaptation *Danuta W.*, see Kułakowska and Łuksza 2015, 63–65.
8 For an overview, see Nadana-Sokołowska 2018, 333–336.

of the post-1989 Third Republic. They consider that Lech Wałęsa was not a hero but a traitor and a communist informant, and that his legend, which they believe false, is the very symbol of the Third Republic that they believe to be a sham democracy designed to benefit former communists and those Solidarity elites that colluded with them. Sławomir Cenckiewicz (2011), a controversial conservative historian and one of Lech Wałęsa's chief detractors, claimed that Danuta Wałęsa's "propagandistic" memoir was meant to revitalise this myth. The books by Jaruzelska and Kiszczak seemed to provide even more proof of how communist influence persists in Polish society. The conservatives said that the aim of the books was to confuse the public and obscure any revelation of truth, and that their popular success vindicated conservative calls for a radical renewal of Polish society. These commentators agreed with Cenckiewicz (2013), who argued in a special issue of the prominent right-wing weekly *Do Rzeczy* dedicated to Małgorzata Tusk and other political spouses turned memoirists that the books were prompted by their authors' desire to bolster positive perceptions of the political records of their relatives and to profit financially from the brand that was the family name. At the same time, the conservatives delighted in the critical depiction in the books of the private conduct of the authors' political relatives, as views on political integrity increasingly became intertwined with assessments of private behaviour. It was implied that an absent father or an inattentive husband could not be trusted to act responsibly in other aspects of life, and a similar focus on intimate details dominated in the tabloids. One tabloid wrote that "Danuta Wałęsa comes from a dysfunctional family and has many secrets" (Radż 2015), while another used Małgorzata Tusk's book to reveal that the prime minister relied on the advice of his mother-in-law, who told him "how to govern" (Chajko 2013).

While the books generated polarised reactions along partisan and ideological lines, there were also similarities in the critical engagement across the political divides. The ways in which gender expectations were embraced or challenged in the memoirs became a central issue, and frequent recognition of the books' commercial success was combined with emphasis on their subordinate position in cultural terms as popular texts by and for women. The judgement of the critics included many assumptions about the audience response but little if any actual account of it, and that response was imagined to be a uniform bloc. Critics attached importance to readers' emotional investment in the narratives, but defined this investment as a one-dimensional process of identification that drew on similarity to the narrating I. Moreover, the concern expressed by both leftist and conservative commentators about how mass culture manages, forms, and weakens political agency was valid, but failed to explain the meanings and values attributed by the readers to the memoirs, or their appeal to readers.

Reading book reviews on Lubimyczytac

Founded in 2009, *Lubimyczytac* [we like to read] is the largest online reading community in Poland (Szajda 2009; Marczak 2011). At the time of writing in July 2023, the website reports 1.2 million users, 3.3 million reviews, and 586,000 books that have been added to the virtual bookshelves. Users on Lubimyczytac can give the books star ratings, write and react to reviews, participate in discussion forums, and get suggestions for future reading choices based on their reviews of books they have read previously. The site also offers literary news, author interviews, book lists, and competitions. In many ways, Lubimyczytac is like Goodreads, the global network that has become an important domain of reception in contemporary book culture (Thelwall and Kousha 2016). Literary and media scholars, among others, have studied reviews on Goodreads as performative acts that function as "a social network identity display", and as texts that are "written in ways learned through use of the social media platform" (Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo 2019, 257; Bartlett et al. 2022, 567–568), and therefore best understood as constituting a genre unto themselves. Other established features of Goodreads reviews are that they focus on describing the reading experience; they are more reader-oriented than other forms of shared reading like book clubs or book festivals, which are more author-oriented; and they tend to express positive rather than negative opinions (Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo 2019, 250–257).[9] Many studies of Goodreads reviews apply digital humanities methods, but this study uses close reading and looks at both individual reviews and whole sets of Lubimyczytac reviews. The themes that interest the readers are expressed in a multitude of ways, making it difficult to capture them through automated methods. To gain a better picture of the material, I coded it manually for recurrent traits and themes: I divided the reviews by category or topic like "politics", "history", and "motherhood", and ran searches for particular phrases like "mixed feelings" or "autobiography".

I examined reviews spanning a decade, from the oldest, published in December 2011 after Wałęsa's *Secrets and Dreams* came out, up to 31 December 2021. This longer period of time was chosen to test whether there were both consistent and fluctuating elements in the textual afterlives of the books. The dataset of readers' responses was taken from the Lubimyczytac site as it appeared on 6 June 2022. The reviews were captured along with the date, the onscreen name of the reviewer, the star rating, and the number of likes the reviewer received from other members. There are 348 reviews and 2297 ratings for Wałęsa's book with an average star rat-

9 For a critical position on the commercial underpinnings of Goodreads, see Murray 2021, Nakamura 2013 or Trzeciak 2013.

ing of 6.0 out of ten stars; 174 reviews and 1143 ratings for Jaruzelska with an average rating of 6.7 stars; 49 reviews and 241 ratings for Tusk with an average rating of 5.8 stars; and 21 reviews and 70 ratings for Kiszczak with an average rating of 5.4 stars. In total, my sample consists of 592 reviews. More than one in six readers who gave a star rating to the books wrote and posted a review. While some reviewers post long texts, most write a short paragraph on what they thought about a book. Some reviews quote extensively from the books or refer to content published elsewhere in other versions of the same review posted on a blog or on Instagram. The majority of reviews in the sample analysed were written by younger, female readers, and fewer than 10 % were posted by male readers.[10] A possible explanation for this gender disproportion is given by the male reviewers themselves, who often regret that the political spouse memoir is associated with female readers, and express the belief that the genre has broader relevance.

There is no such thing as a typical Lubimyczytac review, but many contain a brief explanation of why the reader chose to read the book; comments on different aspects of the text such as its style of writing, main themes, author or protagonist, and genre designation; and assessment of the book in the form of a recommendation based on a reading experience that the reviewers frequently describe as subjective. In the case of the four memoirs, the main motivation for the readers to pick up the books is an interest in recent history, often in combination with curiosity aroused by the publicity and hype surrounding the books. A string of topics relating to the 1980s, Solidarity, and martial law are the themes referenced most in the reviews, followed closely by issues revolving around the definition of a "good" woman such as motherhood, marriage, and spousal or filial loyalty. Two other prominent themes are the readers' ambiguous relationship with politics and an ongoing moral evaluation of the memoir writers as public figures and as "expressive elites" that "provide a means of cognitive orientation and constitute the embodiment and reference points for both social stability and processes of social change, representing emerging as well as established social 'characters'" (Van Krieken 2019, 13). These four major themes are closely interwoven in the reviews, and underpin the discussion of numerous other issues that the reviewers address, including those of agency, authenticity, appropriation, myth, identity, and re-mediatisation, and a set of problems associated with the public visibility of female political relatives. In the following sections, I do not present an exhaustive reading of the memoirs, but I do include elements of the textual analysis of them when such an analysis may help elucidate the expectations or engagement of readers. One recurrent reaction to the memoirs reported by the reviewers is ambivalence, cap-

10 The average for Goodreads is that 75 % of users are female (Thelwall and Kousha 2016).

tured in numerous phrases, most markedly perhaps in the phrase "mixed feelings" [*mieszane uczucia*], which appears thirteen times in the reviews. The two foremost areas that provoke heightened ambivalence in readers are the depiction in the books of the socialist past, and the question of personal loyalty, which the readers see as challenged by the undertaking of the memoir writer.

Socialism with a domestic face

The dominant motivation for engaging with the memoirs expressed by the Lubimyczytac reviewers is the desire to learn about life before 1989. Wałęsa's book especially is referred to as a "lesson in history" or "history in a nutshell" [*historia w pigułce*].[11] Some reviewers allude to nostalgia or travelling back in time to a bygone childhood or youth, but the most affective responses are often posted by those who were not present at the time. The early 1980s and Solidarity are conceptualised by the reviewers as "revolutionary" or "momentous events" that "rolled across our country" and "changed the course of history", and there are numerous references to national identity as a natural framework for discussing the movement. The 1980s appear as a historical moment of contestation and negotiation, and an apex of collective and individual agency, but also as an era that is unknowable ("everything is so complicated [...] it's impossible to know where the truth lies") and constantly reconfigured ("everyone should know about Lech Wałęsa, regardless of [how we might judge him today]"). Despite frequent reference to its political consequences, what intrigues the readers about Solidarity are the mass movement's cultural and biographical effects, or the effects it had on individual lives. The readers expect the memoirs to bring a different kind of understanding of the past and to imbue the events with new meaning through the less-explored terrain of the domestic and the quotidian, captured in the repeated phrase *od kuchni* [from the kitchen], meaning to take a look behind the scenes or to glimpse what is usually hidden from public view.

Some readers confess that before turning to the books they had asked family members about life under martial law, but found the responses too bland or devoid of drama:

> – Mummy, were you afraid when martial law was imposed [in December 1981]?
> – Sweetie, it was winter, I had a baby at home, and I really had other problems to deal with.

11 When quoting from the reviews, I will not cite the reviewers' usernames. For the reasons behind this choice, see Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo (2019, 250–251). The translations from Polish are mine.

> To tell the truth, I was a bit disappointed by my Mum's attitude to historical events. Workers were on strike, there was martial law, and the murder of Father Popiełuszko – well, yes [she says], all those things happened […] yes […] she was concerned, but […] she had a young child at home […] there was enough to think about. The event that made the greatest impression on her during those years was the explosion in Chernobyl […] But I was so insanely curious about how it all looked from the inside. That is why I reached for Danuta Wałęsa's book.

Socialism is depicted in the books through a flexible evaluation of the past that makes it possible to merge stories of a happy life told from the perspective of a child (Jaruzelska), a naïve girl (Tusk), or a young working-class mother (Wałęsa) with questions about the regime's legitimacy (cf. Nugin and Jõesalu 2016; Silova, Piattoeva and Millei 2018). Kiszczak for example seeks to balance her mostly positive image of the old system by criticising issues like bureaucracy or the inefficient management of resources, and she emphasises her initial eagerness to join Solidarity (2015, ch. "Chcę wstąpić do NSZZ 'Solidarność'"). Wałęsa and Tusk on the other hand combine their disdain for the regime with an appreciation for some parts of life under socialism, mainly by focusing on living environments and their complex relationship to social mobility, as there was a lack of visible inequality and a strong sense of community but also shortages of housing and of consumer goods. Both reject the label of poverty as irrelevant to their life stories or, more broadly, to the socialist period.[12] But while the authors' evaluation is flexible, so are the reactions of the readers, and the readers use the notion of "communism", or the more neutral acronym PRL for the People's Republic of Poland, to describe various features of everyday life under socialism, even those that are not distinctive to the pre-1989 era. They are also able to reconcile the more nuanced accounts presented in the books with obstinate generalisations, by acknowledging that the socialist era was "less materialistic" for example while at the same time reviling it for its dire "poverty".

Two elements, however, prove difficult to incorporate into a flexible interpretation, and cause consternation among younger readers especially. The first is that the four books pay only scant attention to the year 1989, which the younger readers expect to be portrayed as more of a turning point. The second, and more important, is the account in the books of martial law. The focus in the memoirs on mundane spaces disrupts the totalising account of a perpetual state of oppression, and of victimised citizens living in constant fear, which lies at the heart of the

12 Wałęsa 2011, 77, 81; Tusk 2013, ch. "Nasze 'dorosłe' życie bez obowiązków". In fact, the protracted end of socialism during the 1980s triggers a sense of loss in the four books and requires a complex reconstruction of the self in its wake. Tusk, for example, details the depression she suffered when she moved from a socialist form of housing to an individualised, private form (2013, ch. "Nie mogę się przeprowadzić" [I cannot move]).

totalitarian interpretation of history that is prevalent among younger readers on Lubimyczytac. The expectations created by this interpretation clash with how the books describe the conduct of the communist-era security services and the level of repression experienced both by activists and by ordinary people; in Wałęsa's book for example, the security service agents give her a lift to the hospital when one of her children falls ill. "I honestly expected the activities of the security services to be depicted as more brutal", notes one reviewer, while another writes:

> Reading [Wałęsa's] book I conclude that back in the day, Lech was safe, no one tortured him during interrogations, home searches were civilised, and security services were not that bad! When [Lech] was interned [during martial law], things were not so bad either: his wife visited and he could take some time away from the kids.

Even so, only a few reviewers respond by either "romanticising" or "demonising" the past (cf. Hopfinger 2017, 28–29, 31–32). Of the 174 reviews of Jaruzelska's book, six could be classified as partisan anti-communist for their strong bias, and only two of those do not mention any positive features of the book at all such as its sense of humour or that it is well written. For the majority of reviews, the intersection of genre, gender, subject position, and power means that the four narratives are rarely perceived as a threat to dominant discourses. Their status as popular memoirs, the distance between public figures and ordinary people, and differences of age and class all influence how the readers perceive the truths presented by the text. The reviewer who expressed disappointment with her mother's lack of heroics concludes:

> I thought that Lech Wałęsa's wife would choose a different focus for her memoirs. But, in her book, I find the same aspect of reality that was and still is most important to my Mum. [...] I think it is good that [Danuta] dared to write these memoirs. Her voice should be heard too. [...] History will judge everything the way it sees fit, anyway, we can only hope that, in the end, the truth will triumph rather than a version that suits those in power.

Moreover, the four authors face different constraints in writing about their life before 1989. For Wałęsa and Tusk, these constraints arise from the demands of dissidence and the recognition of that within the text. To downplay the heroic aspects of the democratic opposition, as Tusk does when she injects humour into the description of her husband's political engagement in the 1980s, risks causing offence (Karaś 2013). Jaruzelska and Kiszczak meanwhile have to acknowledge their privileged position under socialism and negotiate it in the text. This is challenging for Jaruzelska who writes about herself as a child in a manner that is both playful and fragmentary, and about her parents as individuals who are weighed down by the sheer pressures of life as much as by specific political events. The Lubimyczytac

reviewers acknowledge the allure of this account of an innocent child, but they also object to how the adult author fails to address the child's lack of knowledge. Because of this "style of writing", the book is deemed "shallow", evasive, without reflection, or "depth", and the narrator is considered "either naïve or dishonest". Many readers express regret that Jaruzelska's book lacks more "serious" engagement with the events of martial law, which, some believe "could have been the strongest part of her autobiography".

There are other aspects of the socialist past that create uncertainty and inconsistency in the reviews. One is family and gender, which produces a series of often contradictory statements ranging from perceptions that socialism was a "hotbed of patriarchy" to the opposite view; and another is the status of the Catholic church, whose wide-ranging autonomy in Poland after 1956 is difficult to align with any dualistic vision of the socialist era. Another topic that provokes strong reactions is the international communist movement and socialist Poland's links to the global South. Twelve of the reviews in the Jaruzelska sample foreground and explicitly criticise the book's description of a visit to Cuba and the author's praise, however restrained, for the Cuban version of socialism.

Politics without politics

While the Solidarity era is recalled by the authors and their readers alike as a time of possibility when people "stood up for themselves" and "spoke their mind", contemporary politics is seen as lacking in both inclusivity and transformative potential. And where the liberal interpretation of Solidarity that dominates the reviews represents the ultimate fantasy of national unity, post-socialist politics quashes all hopes of consensus and a conflict-free state. Most disturbing to the readers is the growing polarisation that they believe is shaping every aspect of public life, and is becoming a negative lens through which both policy issues and current and past political figures are viewed. In this polarised environment, political wives and daughters appear as figures that embody "an idealised version of politics, contrasting with the political world dominated by men and linked to negative stereotypes" (Widlak, Pont-Sorribes and Guillamet Lloveras 2016, 78).

An important element that helps the four authors rise above the partisan fray, even as attitudes toward their politician relatives shape feelings towards them, is their embrace of the traditionally feminine traits and values of restraint, empathy, and discretion. Jaruzelska for instance awakens respect for her "positive attitude to life" and to other people, including her father's political adversaries. Wałęsa's consistent criticism of her husband's political opponents meanwhile is dubbed "controversial", and Kiszczak, who comes across as brash and makes excessive

statements about her husband's political importance and legacy, is reprehended. The preference for a conciliatory tone in the reviews extends to the controversial politicians themselves, who are the husbands and fathers of the authors. The conventional depiction of Polish attitudes towards Wojciech Jaruzelski is that he roughly splits the population into two halves, where half see him as a patriot, and half as a traitor, a "*Ruski* general in a Polish uniform" according to one review, but the majority of responses on Lubimyczytac do not match these extremes. The biographical, or autobiographical, lens of his daughter's book shifts the focus onto the attachments of her father other than party political, primarily those of his aristocratic class background, his Catholic upbringing, his occupation as a "typical" soldier, and his personal life, and this creates a space where the reviewers can move beyond tacit assumptions of an easy convergence between institutional histories and individual life stories (cf. Mrozik 2016).[13]

However, the status of an author as the wife or daughter of a prominent politician also provokes antagonistic reactions in the readers. Many profess annoyance with how the publicity surrounding Wałęsa's book depicted her as "heroic" when, in the eyes of many readers, "unlike ordinary women, she had ample help" and "even back then, the Wałęsas were relatively well off". While some scholars identify a democratic discourse in Wałęsa's book, exemplified by her unimpressed account of interactions with US presidents, European royalty, and famous artists (Nadana-Sokołowska 2018, 354), the Lubimyczytac reviewers perceive the same stories in a different light. Rather than seeing her attitude as evidence of egalitarianism, many admonish Wałęsa for being "indifferent", "arrogant", or, perhaps worse, incapable of fully benefiting from the opportunities she had been granted in life. Notwithstanding elements of "celebrity bashing" or ambivalence about power in the hands of women in this criticism, the antagonism is also caused by the conviction that major positions of influence should be reserved for those elected to office, and by discomfort with how the growing emphasis on individuals removes the focus from collective endeavour, which is a problematic tendency with a mass movement such as Solidarity.

The question arises, whether, despite reviewers often declaring their aversion to politics, reading and discussing this reading with others could prompt them to reflect on the implications of being part of larger communities. One reader claims to have picked up Tusk's book as part of a search for a "polityka bez polityki" [politics without politics], a concept she proceeds to define as a "reality that is so close to and yet so independently distinct from great national events". This phrasing

13 Of course, the most startling element in Jaruzelski's biography is the family's deportation to the Soviet Union during World War II and his subsequent conversion to communism.

brings to mind Lauren Berlant's influential concept of *intimate publics* (2008, X), whose readers do not directly address social or political issues but thrive in "*proximity* to the political [...] often [...] acting as a critical chorus that sees the expression of emotional response [...] as achievement enough".[14] One notable feature of the Lubimyczytac reviews is the importance placed on how the book was acquired, whether it was bought, and if so, whether at a reduced price; recommended by a friend or another poster; or borrowed, with recurrent motifs including mention of waiting lists for books and receiving advice from librarians. Reviewers also find it relevant to mention whether they will keep the book once they have read it, display it on a shelf, exchange it for another book, or make it available to other potential readers by passing it on to a public library. Reading on Lubimyczytac thus involves interacting with others and making frequent reference to "the materiality of the book" in the quality of its paper, illustrations or copyediting.[15] In addition, the reviewers often remark how reading the memoirs is "like talking to a friend", "meeting over coffee", or even becoming "part of the family". This tendency to evoke informal exchanges taking place in domestic, gendered spaces can be interpreted in different ways. Conversations "over coffee" might be seen as a way of recasting "female" issues as valid political concerns, but they might also place interpersonal relations above public deliberation, thus "reinforc[ing] the idea that women's political power is, or should be, grounded in their ability to influence others relationally" (Vigil 2019, 76).

Mothers and wives, above all?

Given the unique status of Solidarity in the national imagination, and the status of mothers as agents of cultural memory, it is hardly surprising that the traditional patriotic ideal of the Polish mother [*matka Polka*] is frequently invoked in reviews of Wałęsa's book.[16] But motherhood is also a central prism for discussion of the other three authors and their lives, though it is framed in very diverse ways.

The Polish mother trope places national political import on the role of women as mothers who create new generations of patriots. Deriving legitimacy from its links to the Catholic cult of the Virgin Mary and to Romantic literature (Walczew-

14 See also Fuller and Rehberg Sedo 2013 or Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo 2019, 249.

15 Driscoll and Rehberg Sedo find the opposite tendency in Goodreads reviews, where books as "material container[s] of the text" (2019, 253–254) have limited importance.

16 The title of this section is a reference to Vigil's (2019) excellent discussion of the impact that republican motherhood rhetoric has on US presidential elections and on public ideas about the female presence in political space.

ska 1999; Jabłkowska and Saryusz-Wolska 2011), this concept makes a familiar yet highly versatile point of reference for the readers. The phrase "a typical *matka Polka*" can denote a noble ideal of enduring relevance, but it can also signal a reviewer's rejection of perceptions of women as "incubators" [*inkubator*] or "baby machines" [*maszynka do rodzenia dzieci*], two depreciative terms used about Wałęsa in the reviews. Readers who take a positive view of the Polish mother trope emphasise that it allows recognition for those who historically received little attention, and a reassessment of what counts as political participation. One Lubimyczytac reviewer portrays Danuta as just as much, or "perhaps even more", of a hero as her husband, and wonders "how things would have turned out" if it had been *her* and not him "who jumped over the shipyard fence [to join the strike in 1980]". The defining characteristic of a mother, whether traditional or otherwise, is that she is self-sacrificing and puts the needs of others before her own. Wałęsa is seen as a heroic mother by the reviewers when she appears as a skilful manager of her family's daily life so that her husband can pursue his all-important engagement in politics. Conversely, her maternal credentials are called into question when she is deemed to focus too much on herself, for example when she prioritises a hairdresser's appointment even though two of her children have gone missing. Meanwhile Kiszczak, though she married young and had two children, is hardly ever referred to as a mother in the reviews because she is perceived as egoistic and "self-obsessed". Her admission that she had an abortion is pitted against her claim that she was a practising Catholic and she is branded a hypocrite. However, despite this concern with self-sacrifice, positive depictions of female lives on Lubimyczytac portray women who both are mothers and deal successfully with other challenges in life. Readers consistently applaud professional achievement and consider it natural for women to work outside the home, whether to improve their family's quality of life, contribute to society, or fulfil their own ambitions. Any tendency for women to define themselves exclusively through their children or spouse is mocked.

A shift in focus to the potential for a crisis in motherhood is evident in Jaruzelska's book, whose narrator oscillates between motherhood and daughterhood. Feminist scholars have criticised how the daughterly self's working through relationships and their meaning in Jaruzelska's memoir ultimately becomes a search for and recognition of the father within the self and the self within the father, while the mother is sidelined or rejected (Piekara 2020). Even so, almost half of the reviewers on Lubimyczytac comment on how the book portrays mother-daughter relations as a source of conflict and discontent, thus signalling the continuous importance that is attributed to the presence of a maternal force. A different emphasis on maternal ambivalence appears in Tusk's account of postnatal depression, her difficulty in relating to her newborn child, and her child's illness as a mo-

ment of breakdown followed by a transformation for the maternal subject. This narrative wins widespread reader approval because it is coupled with the rhetoric of traditionalism, since the book stresses in the end that children are a mother's greatest happiness. In contrast, Kiszczak also describes the loneliness she experienced as a young wife and mother, the sense that her first child came "too soon", and a subsequent abortion that she had because she could not cope with another child at this point, but she does not embed this narrative in traditional values and so the result is a low level of reader approval. Tusk's book also stands out for how it depicts domesticity, another hallmark of traditionalism. She is the only one of the four women to document her housekeeping prowess not only by providing detailed descriptions of the family home but also by including culinary recipes and amusing stories about her initial struggles with household chores. This aspect of Tusk's memoir garners positive responses even from those readers who claim not to have enjoyed the book otherwise. When her life story is compared to Wałęsa's, Tusk is often deemed to embody a more relevant social character.

Being a good mother is often linked to being a good and loyal wife. For a memoir writer however, closeness to the other, in the words of one life writing scholar, "mak[es] it hard to demarcate the boundary between where one life leaves off and another begins" (Eakin 2004, 8). Is it even possible to tell a wife's story or a daughter's without infringing upon the stories or truths of their intimate others? One reviewer of Wałęsa's book states:

> I have read the book, but I believe that it should not have been written in this form. As a fan of biographies, I have a certain boundary, as recent events and the lives of others should be respected. And some parts of the information were too personal to share with a broader group of recipients, namely the fragments that dealt with the very intimate relationship with Lech. [...] My intuition tells me that this has not helped the marriage.

On top of that, the books' dual strategy of hailing the men as great politicians while criticising their failings at home often makes it difficult for the readers to decode the intentions of the authors. What is the purpose of a political spouse who publicly reproaches her husband? Criticism beyond mild complaints such as an unhealthy diet or hogging the remote control invariably becomes problematic. Kiszczak, who portrays her husband as a deeply flawed human being, is praised for her honesty but widely condemned for staying in the marriage. Wałęsa, meanwhile, is not only criticised for her perceived disloyalty to her husband, but also for being "passive" and "indifferent", *and* for not providing enough support for Lech.

Passing moral judgement on political wives and daughters

Where the highest praise for an author on Lubimyczytac is *liking* them or wanting to engage in friendly exchanges over coffee with them, the most scathing rejection is that an author is not "someone I would like to befriend, work with or even be neighbours with", which is a comment from the Kiszczak sample. There is occasional mention of admiration or identification, but the reviewers focus much more on raising questions about the life choices and personal motivations of the authors. Julie Wilson comments that contemporary texts about the private lives of female public figures, or celebrity gossip, provide readers with "standardised testing centres" (Wilson 2010, 32) for negotiating their own social roles, and for testing their attitudes to a range of topics oriented towards personal choice. Such topics in the Lubimyczytac reviews include marriage and romantic relationships, family, parenting, and work-home balance, with readers consistently praising honesty, self-sacrifice, and loyalty, while condemning envy or hypocrisy.

One topic of significance for the processes of moral adjudication taking place in the reviews is how proper names are handled, as they, according to Phillipe Lejeune, "possess a sort of magnetic force, and convey an aura of truth to everything that comes close to them" (Lejeune quoted in Bartlett et al. 2022, 563). The reviews repeatedly cite Jaruzelska's decision to retain her family name despite its controversial associations as evidence of her admirable filial loyalty, while the fact that Wałęsa's actual first name is the less glamourous sounding Mirosława triggers suspicion: "Danuta (Mirosława)?", "Danuta *vel* Mirosława". In addition, the tendency of Wałęsa and Kiszczak to refer to their spouses as "my husband" or, even more impersonally, by the husband's last name tests readers' credence and their trust in the authors' depiction of their marital relations. This naming practice awakens doubt about the sincerity of the narrator's emotions, influencing the overall impression of the readers: "This is a book written without passion, feeling, sensitivity, magic and all the things that a book should have. [...] the most frequently used words are [...] 'my husband' – strange – there is no Leszek, Lech, Lesiu".

Another prominent issue is appearance and the choices made between different modes of femininity. The question of dress as a site of political contestation remains relevant even after the end of the authoritarian era, with the mnemonic afterlives of Wałęsa's 1983 trip to Oslo to receive the Nobel Prize for peace on behalf of her husband as an obvious example. Her performance, carefully built around items of clothing functioning as cultural reference points, was a self-confessed rare moment of political agency, and it is recognised as such by readers on Lubimyczytac. However, it is in the context of the socioeconomic change after

1989 that the relationship between legitimate cultural capital and appearance becomes more complex. McRobbie (2009) and others have argued that presenting an authentic version of oneself in all aspects of daily life is crucial for successfully navigating and portraying one's identity in a neoliberal society. Clothing choices are seen as moral choices by readers because they show who the authors *really* are. Jaruzelska's rejection of a hyper-feminine appearance, which is associated in her book with the mother, and her subsequent adoption of a more androgynous style is valued as a natural mode of femininity that is tied to notions of class and authenticity. One reader links this display to the book's overall moral legitimacy: "In the words of Monika Jaruzelska herself: 'minimalism and class' will always come out on top". However, the valorisation by readers of styles that are related to "Western" middle-class ideals of restraint is not easily disentangled from remnants of the socialist ideas of virtue and frugality, and the traditional notions of being "cultured". This is evident in relation to the books' accounts of official visits and foreign travels, as this is an area that invites particular scrutiny of the appearance of political relatives and raises the issue of whether the women are worthy representatives of the nation. Here, the readers express interest in details of dress and insider gossip, but at the same time they voice the belief that people in positions of privilege should be able to tell enlightening or relevant stories about their travels abroad, so that any excessive focus on appearance by the authors is deemed inappropriate.

Conclusions

This paper approached memoirs authored by female relatives of prominent politicians as both a rich resource for examining larger societal transformations, and as productive cultural artefacts whose complexity is reflected in the reader reviews on Lubimyczytac. The Lubimyczytac reviewers find the memoirs by political relatives to be ambiguous and contradictory texts that are at once a source of pleasure and of apprehension. They give readers the chance to engage with contentious issues like the legacies of the Solidarity movement and the 1980s; a perceived deficit of democratisation and other inadequacies in post-socialist politics; the enduring yet far from static ideals of womanhood in Polish culture; and a string of ethical concerns that are reconfigured around personal choice. At the same time, the memoirs are perceived as non-threatening, which allows the reviewers to confront some issues and equally evade others. For example, the reviewers frequently state their interest in and desire for representations that might supplement or complicate the dominant interpretations and social memories of socialism, but these declarations do not lead to any direct discussion of the varied meanings that could be

attached to recent history. The recurrent themes articulated in the readers' reviews correspond largely with those identified by professional critics. However, the readers' assessment does not always match the expectations of others. The professional critics tended to highlight identification, equating it with a relatively narrow concept of role models, as an important element in the reception, but my analysis suggests that the response of the readers to the memoirs is more multi-layered, and that moral criticism plays a prominent role in this. The professional critics also emphasised the significance of Wałęsa's book while the other three books were deemed less relevant, but from the perspective of the online reviews, all four books are remarkable. Tusk's book for example is highly interesting for the way it employs discourses associated with new traditionalism and personal responsibility.

It is easy to see how the public interest in the wives and daughters of politicians is problematic from the perspective of gender politics, as it calls to mind conservative ideas of traditional womanhood. However, the Lubimyczytac reviewers do not embrace these concepts in an uncritical manner. The "mixed feelings" experienced by the readers suggest that they see the memoir of the political relative first and foremost as dealing with the paradoxes and contradictions of socialist and post-socialist lives. The reviews become a discursive space in which these incongruities are articulated and discussed, and in which the wives and daughters of prominent politicians appear not simply as the embodiment of traditional femininity but as contradictory figures who elude easy categorisation. Moreover, because the four texts of self-life-writing are closely linked to one other in time and by historical circumstances, and because the reviews compare and draw parallels between the different life experiences and social practices of the four authors, and between the multiple roles they inhabit across longer periods, the reading of one story fluctuates depending on the afterlives of the others. By constantly reshifting the four life narratives within the changing contexts of socialist and post-socialist society, the Lubimyczytac reviews create new reference points and open potential new strains of conversation between the life stories themselves and between the life stories and the readers.

The findings of this paper raise further questions about the political spouse memoir and its reception, including the relevance of research on material that is not in English, and the extent to which reception should be studied separately from, or in combination with, textual analysis. In addition, public perceptions of the spouses and relatives of politicians under socialism and post-socialism warrant more scholarly attention than this topic has received so far.

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Hanna Teichler

On the Limits of Mnemonic Migration in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea*

The burgeoning field of memory studies reoriented itself profoundly in the second decade of the twenty-first century. The fascination, or perhaps obsession, with memory and remembering was very prominent during the twentieth century, with its world wars and other cataclysms, but the twenty-first century with its own set of seismic events required a reorientation of some of the key premises of memory and the study of it. Previous theoretical paradigms emphasised the importance of where memory is located and the intrinsic connection of memory to a discrete national framework or cultural sphere, but there was a major change in the terms, key concepts and ideas about memory during the first decade of the 2000s. The transcultural turn was perhaps started by Michael Rothberg's (2009) seminal study on remembering the Holocaust across borders and within the colonial and post-colonial context. Astrid Erll's field-defining essay on "travelling memory" (2011b) argued that the "inner complexity of cultural formations" seemed to be at odds with the methodologies and figures of thought that were available to memory studies at the time (Crownshaw 2014). The subsequent rise of transcultural paradigms in memory studies is both an indicator and a result of how much harder it is becoming to pinpoint clear delineations between ethnic and cultural identities, particularly in the wake of totalitarian forms of governance and mass migration. The realisation that any individual may hold "multiple mnemonic memberships" (Erll 2011b, 10) became the core conviction of this third wave of memory studies, as it has subsequently been dubbed. Movement and mobility became the dominant modes or characteristics of transcultural and travelling memory, as researchers explored the "incessant wandering of carriers, media, contents, forms and practices of memory" and the "ongoing transformations through time and space, across social, linguistic and political borders" (Erll 2011b, 11). Key to understanding this shift in memory studies is an appreciation of the power of aesthetic and symbolic form to produce a "mnemonic relationality" (Erll 2017) that supersedes national, linguistic and cultural borders.

The idea of mnemonic migration has been put prominently on the map by Eneken Laanes, Jessica Ortner, and Tea Sindbaek Andersen (Ortner, Sindbaek Andersen and Wierød Borčak 2022), and has in turn highlighted the vexed question of mnemonic reception as another aspect of the study of transcultural memory that has previously been largely neglected. The concept of travelling memory states that

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it is important to trace "the paths which certain stories, rituals and images have taken" (Erll 2011b, 11), and also to study how these mnemonic artefacts and narratives come to function in the communities that they travel to. My understanding of the term mnemonic migration is that people can travel from one mnemonic context to another because "people, media, mnemonic forms, contents and practices are in constant, unceasing motion" (Erll 2011b, 12). But if they travel, do they also arrive?

The inherent mobility of memories means that mnemonic migration can occur without people needing to leave the comforts of their armchair. Mnemonic relationality and multiple mnemonic memberships are gained through the act of reading, interpreting and decoding a symbolic text. In essence, "mnemonic relationality directs our attention towards a structuring process: towards the acts of connecting and blending, co-constructions and negotiations that are necessary for bringing heterogeneous mnemonic elements into meaningful relations with one another" (Erll 2017, 6).

"Travelling transcultural forms" (Laanes 2021) allow migration from one mnemonic context to another. Specific forms of medial narration like the novelistic form produce and relate "changeable mnemonic assemblages" (Laanes 2021, 7) that are brought into contact with the preformed conceptions, expectations, and epistemological equipment of the individual reader. This means that the recipient must have some degree of transcultural mnemonic literacy for mnemonic migration to occur.

This essay addresses the process of mnemonic migration through reading and points out its limitations, both as a metaphor and as a reading practice. It starts with a *tour d'horizon* of influential contributions to the field of reception studies to help the reader understand and navigate the complex connection between reading and remembering, and the danger of confusing the two terms. Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novel *The Dragonfly Sea* (2019) is presented as an example of the literary strategy of mnemonic mannerism, which could hamper mnemonic migration through reading. I understand mnemonic mannerism as referring to the sheer abundance of mnemonic cues that a text sets out for the reader to make sense of. In Owuor's text, traces of historical legacies and allusions to them are scattered throughout the narrative in a largely obscure manner. A text that is mnemonically mannerist requires "initiated readers", in the phrase of Jihad Karim,[1] as such texts seem to cater to in-groups, in this case Indian Ocean collectives, rather than to potentially global audiences. Rebecca L. Walkowitz famously argues that "born-trans-

1 Jihad Karim is pursuing a PhD project at the Institute of English and American Studies of Goethe University Frankfurt, in which he conceptualises the idea of the "initiated implied reader".

lated" novels trouble the notion of "literary belonging" that a text generates, as such texts "block readers from being 'native readers,' those who assume that the language they are encountering is, in one proprietary or intrinsic way, theirs" (2015, 6). There is no advance "mastery or knowledge of the work" (Walkowitz 2015, 49), and the novel targets both an initiated and an uninitiated readership. Whilst this argument is entirely convincing for world literature and translation, it leaves the question of how and where *remembering* occurs in such texts. By the same token, what is the difference in literature between an interpretation that may be hampered, or "close-reading at a distance", and remembering? This essay and argument are motivated by the question of how we as observers, literary critics, and memory scholars treat texts that are so replete with mnemonic references that mnemonic migration and entering a different mnemonic universe becomes challenging to achieve. How do we allow for the reader that might be resistant, unable, or uninitiated? How do we treat the possibility of the critic making a mnemonic fallacy? Do we take mnemonic mobility and flexibility for granted? Do we remain content, then, with the idea of mnemonic potentiality and latency, and the assumption that mnemonic texts will unfold and function differently for different people? And if we do not accept this, then where do we go next?

Reading as mnemonic mobility?

Let us start with the first premise that literature is a medium of memory, a carrier whose aesthetics and politics tie in with and shape collective memory discourses. Texts as mnemonic objects circulate and travel to other contexts, but they remain inert and their mnemonic action latent until they are read by a reader or an audience.

Two aspects need to be differentiated here, as there is memory *in* literature, and there is memory *of* literature, as Erll (2011a) has theorised. Memory of literature is conceptualised in literature's travelling forms of narrative templates like the coming-of-age novel, the picaresque novel, or the epos that have sustained certain constant features as they travelled through time, and were adapted in many different versions. Memory of literature can also mean formative narratives that were adapted over and over through time, like Homer's *Odyssey* (Erll 2018) and its re-writings for example, or Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719), a seminal text that was aped in numerous so-called Robinsonades. Memory *in* literature in contrast, is the many strategies that the literary genre with its protocols, aesthetics, and politics uses to describe the processes of remembering. It is concerned with how memory enters individual texts.

If we understand literature to be a carrier of mnemonic content, then reading and interpreting are the modes used to access this content. Remembering through literature in this way is then contingent on reading and interpretation. Memory enters literary texts through the linguistic and aesthetic encoding of mnemonic content, and it is the individual process of reception that should then in theory bring this textualised memory into being.

This understanding that a literary text has mnemonic latency arguably resonates with the aesthetics of reception of the literary theorist Wolfgang Iser (1994 [1987]), who argues that literary texts offer evaluative positions that are evoked by the aesthetic structures of the text, and require the reader to be actualised and brought into existence. Iser believes there is such a thing as a proper reading of a given text, one that is dehistoricised and detached from the reader's immediate environment of ideology and politics. I extend Iser's idea to argue that there is memory hidden in the aesthetic composition of a text, and that the reader can, but also must, detect and decipher these mnemonic positions. In the tradition of New Criticism, the literary critic becomes the model reader who supposedly catches all of the clues embedded in a text. In a similar vein, the model reader should be the model remembering agent, and it is challenging, if not impossible, to be that reader or to find that reader.

Narratologist Peter J. Rabinowitz (1987) responded to Iser's concept with a more nuanced understanding of the entangled nature of production and reception in literary texts. He stated that a text can be compared to an unassembled swing set, as it is an actual thing that offers opportunities for free play when completed, which can be more or less restricted depending on the particular model of swing, but that has first to be assembled (Rabinowitz 1987, 38). It comes with rudimentary directions, but you have to know what those directions are and how to do some basic work. It comes with its own materials, but the user must have some certain tools of their own. Most importantly, the instructions are virtually meaningless unless the user knows beforehand what sort of object they are trying to build. Someone who has never seen a swing before has only a small chance of building it successfully without cracking their head open (Rabinowitz 1987, 38).

The problem with Rabinowitz's swing model is readily apparent, because only if all the parts of the swing are assembled correctly can anyone ride safely on it. Equally, it can only operate properly once it has been assembled correctly. There is little, if any, room for error. A novel will not pose a health hazard to its readers whether or not they fail to make sense of it, and there is certainly more than one way of interpreting a text. Rabinowitz's model is interesting for the dynamics of mnemonic migration however, because it suggests that there is a certain basic mnemonic structure in texts, and that the structure can be accessed by tapping into its history. This approach supposes that there are mnemonic structures in

the text that are readily available, or that are simply and evidently there for anyone who knows what they are looking for. Readers can only make sense of a text in the same way they make sense of anything else in the world, which is by applying a strategy of simplifying it by highlighting it, by making it symbolic, and by otherwise patterning (Rabinowitz 1987). If you know that you are reading an explorer narrative, you will look for the representation of the exploration and the protagonists who do the exploring. If you know that *Robinson Crusoe* was trapped on an island for more than 25 years, you will look for similar experiences in the text's adaptations. This search for recognisable patterns and familiar plot structures "premediates" how the individual text is decoded and so preforms and potentially predetermines the reading experience (Erll and Rigney 2009). Whether or not the search for identifiable patterns opens up what Reinhart Koselleck calls the reader's "horizon of expectation" [*Erwartungshorizont*] (2004), or whether it actually narrows the scope of interpretation, remains unanswered.

Cognitive narratologist David Herman moves in a similar direction to Iser when he argues that any given text is replete with intentional structures that are more or less readily available to the reader (Herman 2009, 2012). He considers that stories are "grounded in intentional systems" and readers "assume that stories [...] are told for particular reasons, in the service of communicative goals about which interpreters are justified in framing at least provisional hypotheses" (Herman 2008, 244). These structures of intent allow us to read a text in the absence of any creational agent like an author, as there are structures that are present but inert before the reader engages with the text. Herman's contention resonates with Ann Rigney's (2021) thoughts on textual mnemonic power, as she emphasises that the aesthetic agency of the literary helps determine which memory discourses and narratives are deemed worth writing about, and so worth representing and worth remembering. Psychologist Brian Schiff (2017) suggests that remembering is essentially a private mental act that is both embedded in and indicative of social practices, and that remembering unfolds against the backdrop of collectively negotiated symbolic universes. Erll and Rigney (2009) argue that cultural memory is contingent on the construction, recognition, and circulation of narrative patterns, and of mnemonic forms that are mediated, and which in turn remediate and premediate narrative patterns and "mnemonic schemata". All three approaches seem to have one thing in common in that they depend on recognition, familiarity, and comparison. The Robinson Crusoe example above illustrates this, because if memory in literature is a specific act of interpretation, then similar processes of patterning will occur and readers might compare the mnemonic references in a text with their own archive, which is their individual set of mnemonic references that are always already transculturally determined. The reader, however, is the person who may be the least aware of the transcultural nature of all

memories. If mnemonic migration is the mobilisation of mnemonic inventories in readers through texts, this process of comparison may simply lead to a reification of the existing mnemonic structures within a reader, and so could unfold without mobilising anything at all.

Moreover, this setting requires readers to ignore or downplay other aspects of the texts and read them predominantly through a memory prism. While this may work for scholars who read with an interest in and focus on memory, it does not necessarily help us theorise how a reader arrives at the point where they recognise the mnemonic grid of a given text, or how much of that grid they actually identify through the act of reading. Anthropologist Arjun Appadurai reminds us that "neither images nor viewers fit into circuits or audiences that are easily bound with local, national or regional spaces", which leads him to conclude that product and recipient "are in simultaneous circulation" (1996, 4). Textual structures or textual intent are then in constant movement too, and so they may escape the grasp of the national and the cultural in the singular form. The unmoored text and the unmoored reader have become hallmarks of a specific brand of modernity, one that favours detachment over attachment. Walkowitz proposes for world literature that "[i]nstead of identification, these texts offer readers partial fluency, approximation and virtual understanding" (2015, 30) instead of the illusion of textual mastery that is so prominent in Iser and, to some extent, Herman. She insists that such born-translated texts "[f]orce readers to grapple with partial fluency" (Walkowitz 2015, 42), and thus face the potentially unsatisfactory experience of being distanced by the text instead of being drawn into it.

There are many more influential takes on the dynamics of memory and representation that could and should be listed here. There is also Alison Landsberg's idea of "prosthetic memory" (2004), where people take on the memories of other groups and wear them like artificial limbs. This implies that aesthetic mediation, through moving images for Landsberg, gives people the chance to affectively position themselves towards memories that are not their own, that they did not experience themselves, and that do not necessarily connect to their most dominant mnemonic membership. A lot has been said about the ethical pitfalls that such an approach to memory has to navigate, and so it need not be repeated here (Abel 2006), but the main issue for me is that Landberg's idea, like many of the approaches that I outlined in this tour d'horizon, emphasises the perspective of the observer and prioritises the production of mnemonic material over the vexed question of its actual reception. Prosthetic memory concerns the transportability of memories and their capacity to be externalised and shared. We cannot be sure though that consuming memory vicariously will lead to anything other than introspective navel-gazing by the reader rather than a full-scale mobilisation of their mnemonic inventory.

Most recently, Rothberg (2019) proposed implication as a strategy and an outcome of entangled remembering, an idea that has already become influential. This interesting concept addresses reception, as it seems to be a realisation that the reader can arrive at. Although Rothberg emphasises that implication is not to be confused with a subject position, it nevertheless suggests a reader who vicariously remembers through reading and realises their own implication in the structures of intent laid out by the text, and by the broader structures of oppression that form the extra-textual frameworks to which textual intent refers in Rothberg.

Implication and the implicated subject suffer from a similar problem to Landberg's prosthetic memory, as in both cases the reader themselves and the act of reading become ethical, even if they are not explicitly ethicised. Prosthetic memories function as extensions of the remembering mind if they are taken on in the intended way, so that trauma remains painful in its impact even if it is only taken on vicariously and in a heavily mediated manner. Implication is not primarily understood as the reader being implicated in constructing the textual aesthetics as in Iser, or in discovering intentional structures as in Herman. These positions and these experiences of being implicated or folded into memory discourses that are not your own cannot be understood as anything other than a moral positioning of the reader towards what is vicariously remembered. Rothberg's implicated reader arguably closely resembles Iser's or Rabinowitz's model reader, who is at the centre of textual interpretation, but who takes on the function of a theoretical construct or a textual function and can hardly be regarded as a real person of flesh and blood.

There are, however, very real implications to memory literature, whether or not the experiences of other peoples are filtered through literary fiction. A lot of the mnemonic contexts we deal with are traumatic in nature, and many of the protagonists and agents are scarred by the past. These texts are fundamentally difficult to read because of the affective demands that they make, and many of them are also complex in their narrative structures, linguistic multiplicity, and aesthetic inventory.

> The more difficult the book the better. Difficulty is a challenge, an opportunity to struggle and to win, to overcome resistance, uncover the codes, to get on top of it, to put one's finger on the mechanisms that produce pleasure and pain, and then call it ours. We take up an unyielding book to conquer it and feel grand, enriched by the appropriation and confident that our cunning is equal to the textual tease that had, after all, planned its own submission as the ultimate climax of reading. Books want to be understood, don't they, even when they are coy and evasive? (Sommer 1992, 105)

Don't they?

Mnemonic mannerism in Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's *The Dragonfly Sea*

In her 1992 essay on *Resistant Texts and Incompetent Readers*, Doris Sommer comments on the limits of reading as understanding:

> Some books resist the competent reader, intentionally. They mark off an impassable distance between reader and text, raising questions of access or welcome. These books produce a kind of readerly 'incompetence' that more reading will not overcome, because a rhetoric of socially differentiated understanding blocks the way. Resistance does not necessarily signal a genuine epistemological impasse; it is enough that the impasse is announced in this strategy to position the reader within limits. (105)

Some texts can indeed prove unruly for one reason or another. For Sommer, it is social difference that can hamper textual access and understanding. For this case study, it is the abundance of memory references that potentially exclude the uninitiated reader. As the previous section showed, it is difficult to pinpoint how we read and interpret, and what we as readers gain from texts and their symbolic configuration. The reasons why a text might be received as inaccessible are equally manifold, though the reasons why a reader would feel particularly welcomed by a text are also comparatively numerous. This section presents a unique case study, Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor's novel *The Dragonfly Sea.* To some readers this text may come across as resistant, inaccessible and challenging because of the background knowledge that is required to make sense of a large part of the narrative. *The Dragonfly Sea* may even be a case where mnemonic migration reaches its limits. The limitations that this text sets on mnemonic migration do not necessarily arise from its dense and challenging poetic language, or from the sheer intricacy of its plot, but from the overabundance of cues that the narratives set out for the reader, and that have a connection to mnemonic complexes. By mnemonic complexes I mean clusters of mnemonic activity that centre around a nodal point, usually a historical event with a major impact like 9/11 and the subsequent War on Terror, the Holocaust and its legacies, or colonialism. Mnemonic activity means the different forms of memory work that unfold around these historical events, and this activity occurs in the forms of official, institutionalised commemoration or grass root initiatives, literary imagination and cultural production, or individual or collective memories rendered in some form of narrative (Rothberg 2009, 2).

Naturally there are some mnemonic complexes that are more visible than others. While I am writing this essay, I occasionally look at a globe that sits on my desk, to provide some orientation for me as I navigate oceanic literatures. It is only because of my interest in these literatures that I realised that this globe fea-

tures the seemingly most important expeditions, the ones that transformed the world permanently, while others were simply left out. My finger can trace the sea routes that James Cook took across the Indian Ocean, or Vasco da Gama's travels in the fifteenth century, or, most famously perhaps, I can see where Christopher Columbus went when he discovered the New World, which was, as we know today, not so new after all. What is blatantly missing from this globe are the sea routes that a Chinese explorer, Zheng He, took during the fifteenth century. Zheng He is supposed to have been the first to navigate and cross the Indian Ocean westwards and lay the foundations for the manifold Afrasian relations and entanglements that are increasingly visible today (Yuan 2020).

Kenyan author Yvonne Adhiambo Owuor published her second novel in 2019, and in it she fictionalises the legacies of Zheng He's imperial endeavours. Set on the island of Pate, just off the Kenyan coast, this coming-of-age novel tells the story of the young girl Ayaana who is discovered to be of Chinese descent. Ayaana's heritage earns her the moniker "the Descendant" and gives her the chance to study in China. The trip is both free and costly, as she is a guest of the Chinese government, whose interests extend no further than the project of "excavating, proving and entrenching Chinese rootedness in Africa".

The novel's main protagonist is modelled on an existing person, Mwamaka Sharifu, a girl from Lamu Island in Kenya who was then 19 years old and who set out towards China to start a scholarship in 2005 ("Is This"). This scholarship was awarded to her as part of a series of commemorative events celebrating the six hundredth anniversary of Admiral Zheng He's first major voyage around the Indian Ocean. Zheng He is considered the first explorer to use a direct sea route westward (Yuan 2020). His expeditions were diplomatic in nature, and he presented gifts of gold, silver, porcelain and silk to foreign dignitaries, and in return, China received ostriches, zebras, camels or ivory, among other things.

Zheng He undertook as many as seven such Ming treasure voyages, as they were known, across the Indian Ocean, until he perished at sea in 1435. Legend has it that his fleet was shipwrecked, and the surviving sailors sought refuge on the islands surrounding the Swahili Coast. These sailors went on to marry local women and converted to Islam. Mwamaka Sharifu says that she is the descendant of sailors travelling with Zheng He, and thus lays claim to Chinese heritage. In 2002, Chinese experts visited her and did DNA tests to substantiate this claim scientifically, and perhaps unsurprisingly it was confirmed.

The Dragonfly Sea was quite quickly received and discussed within the field of postcolonial literature and beyond. It has been read as a contemporary Kenyan author narrating transnational encounters in and on the Swahili Sea to make a point about Kenya's place in the world (Otieno 2022). The Swahili Sea here becomes a point of reference for the multitudes of cultures and histories that exist along

the coast of the Indian Ocean. It is not India that is the centre of the Indian Ocean world, as the label suggests, as that world should much rather be considered a centreless space, characterised by movement and mobility and the need and desire for them (Hofmeyr 2012). The dragonfly is the symbolic animal for these movements, and *The Dragonfly Sea* explores the historical legacy and present condition of Afrasian relationships through a fictional, poetic prism (Achenbach et al. 2020). Owuor's novel is not primarily interested in evaluating Kenya's relationship with the former colonial powers from the West, but rather turns eastwards and reflects on these geopolitical entanglements. It thus showcases how re-calibrations of relationships between different parts of the Global South unfold, what their trajectories, aesthetics, and politics are, and how they relate to oceanic spaces (Hofmeyr 2012; wa Ngugi 2012). *The Dragonfly Sea* is deliberately expressive of indigenous epistemologies relating to the sea, seafaring, and a sense of community (Kosgei 2022). The novel also revolves around non-human agency and presents a case study of how such post-humanist approaches to representation, narration, and memory function in literature (Neumann 2021). In this regard, *The Dragonfly Sea* is part of a broader trend that the paradigms of production and reception of contemporary literature have shifted towards (James and Morel 2020).

The Dragonfly Sea is an unusual novel. It relishes the beauty and power of language and representation, and it brims with joy when it muses how the "*matlai* [easterly morning wind] conspired with a shimmering full moon to charge the island, its fishermen, prophets, traders, seamen, seawomen, healers, shipbuilders, dreamers, tailors, madmen, mothers and fathers", all against the backdrop of the "music of a rolling tide" (Owuor 2019, 5).[2] The ocean forms, entices, nudges, decides, selects, and condemns; it brings whatever it wants to Pate's shores, and sometimes with unintended consequences. The ocean's "song turns an illiterate boy into a seeker, traveller, reader, and sleuth" (17). The protagonists give themselves over to the "sea's service" in enchanted captivity, but "man and matter", as the narrative voice poignantly remarks, "not the sea, would rip the fabric of his being" (18). It comes as no surprise that the ontological distinctions blur when Muhidin, the illiterate-boy-turned-sleuth, first lays eyes on the main protagonist, Ayaana: "In that luster, he had glimpsed a being leaping in the ocean, cavorting like a baby pomboo, a dolphin. It had dived under water and emerged several meters away. It was not that Muhidin believed in the existence of djin, but as an explanation for the specter in the water" (19).

Indeed, Ayaana is not a *djin*, but a descendant, the mythicised and mytho-poetic missing link between China and Africa in general, and between Zheng He's

2 In the following only the page numbers will be given.

imperial voyages and the Swahili coast in particular. In resonance with the real-life events and news coverage surrounding the apparent discovery of Mwamaka Sharifu, Ayaana is thrown into the middle of these geopolitical recalibrations that require a strong and convincing narrative backbone. The novel deals with this delicate position in the following manner:

> Ayaana. The child's name was not common to Pate. Ayaana—"God's gift." Of course, Muhidin knew her story. Everybody did. The child had come to the island one high tide seven years ago. She arrived in the arms of her then skeletal, mostly vanquished, on-the-tail-end-of-a-scandal mother, Munira, daughter of prestige—pale-skinned, narrow-eyed, as slender as a bird's foot, and just as delicate. Her previous haughty, loudmouthed, angular, and feral beauty had been sheared off and dimmed by whatever it was she had tangled with in two and a half years of life away from the island. (20)

The prodigy, the bridge between Kenya and China, is not of noble or prestigious descent; she came to the island on the tide and was born to a mother of questionable status. This spectral being with its somewhat exotic looks attracts people, attracts attention, and is almost sold to human traffickers as a result. As soon as her Chinese ancestry is apparently discovered, Ayaana becomes the centre of a mnemonic complex that reaches back to Zheng He's explorations across the Indian Ocean.

> "An eternal sea unites our people", concluded the intoning man. "Because of the water, we are one destiny. The string of destiny binds our feet." "Yes", echoed the Nairobi man. "'String of destiny'?" Munira frowned. The woman spoke slowly: "China is in your blood." And she looked at Munira as if she were a dear relative. (154)

Ayaana subsequently embarks on a journey to China, where she is supposed to receive a stipend. Her journey to China and her experience there is the focus of the second narrative strand of the novel and occupies the second half of the text. It stands in contrast to the idealisation and reverence that Ayaana is seemingly initially met with:

> "An emissary to China…" "…a bridge…" "Our friend…" "We desire her presence…" "…a Descendant…" "Yes." "…our Descendant…" "An ambassador…" "From the good-willed people of Kenya…" "To the good-willed people of China." "Yes." "Bearing the treasure of a neglected past." "Yes." "She'll find friendship…"
> "Yes." "…and kindness." "Kindness". (155)

This episode showcases the power of the literary aesthetic to represent mnemonic processes and entanglements. The musings about Afrasian connections that reach back for centuries but seem to culminate in this little girl with her supposed Chinese roots are rendered as free indirect discourse and so seem to reference a col-

lective voice. But this murmuring, this oblique shorthand is typical of Owuor's writing and makes this text a case of mnemonic mannerism that could make any mnemonic migration into Afrasian entanglements difficult for the uninitiated reader. It may prove difficult to grasp that Afrasian connections long predated colonial intrusion to Africa, and were part of a most intricate web of commerce that existed long before the advent of modern capitalism. The reader may learn from Owuor's novel that these increasingly visible connections, as evidenced by Sharifu's story and the fictional rendition of it, are examples of South-South solidarities that are often considered as antidotes to the persistent dominance of the political West in the global arena. Owuor's text also subtly hints that these South-South connections offer little potential for romanticisation, as they are by no means unproblematic or without their own internal hierarchies. An example of this is the scandal surrounding the fairly recently built headquarters of the African Union ("China"), where China staunchly denies the accusation that it planted listening devices in the walls and furniture and will be downloading sensitive material for years to come. The headquarters was built and paid for by the Chinese government. All these examples and anecdotes are steeped in their own mnemonic complexes and discourses, and how they relate to one another is an intricate web to disentangle. This is perhaps the most straightforward explanation of why the text only uses them in a veiled, mannerist manner.

What does mannerism mean? It has a long history as a concept, particularly in the visual arts and in literary criticism. The term etymologically links back to *maniera* [manner], which in its use in art, simply and plainly means style (Shearman 1990, 16). Towards the end of the sixteenth century, "it was understood that *maniera*, whether in people or works of art, entailed a refinement of and abstraction from nature" (Shearman 1990, 18, emphasis in the original). In very general terms, mannerism in the visual arts has come to be associated with affectation and artificiality as its main driving factors, and it is seen as a countermovement to the "balance and self-confidence of the Renaissance" (Anzulovic 1972, 4). John Shearman almost poetically holds that mannerism is "a silver-tongued language of articulate, if unnatural beauty, not one of incoherence, menace and despair, it is, in a phrase, the stylish style" (1990, xx) . As such, the term made its way into art history via the literatures of manner:

> The concept of *maniera* was borrowed from the literature of manners, and had been originally a quality – a desirable quality – of human deportment. [...] In turn the word had entered Italian literature from French courtly literature of the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries. There *manière* [...] meant approximately savoir-faire, effortless accomplishment and sophistication; it was inimical to revealed passion, evident effort and rude naivete. It was, above all, a courtly grace. (Shearman 1990, 18; emphasis in original).

In the context of the literatures of manners however, mannerism was framed in the sense of transporting "unnatural, affected, self-conscious or ostentatious" (Shearman 1990, 18) poetic language and literary imagination. Such literary texts gained their apparent superiority through their linguistic and poetic virtuosity, and their "copiousness and abundance" (Shearman 1990, 22), but they also effectively made their symbolic universes rather inaccessible (Shearman 1990, 21). The ornamental language and affective style (Semler 1998, 18) provided the aesthetic frameworks and protocol for "eccentric expressiveness and extreme refinement" (Semler 1998, 21).

How does this relate to a mnemonic reading of Owuor's novel? *The Dragonfly Sea* is, as has already been stated, an example of linguistic and poetic virtuosity. The mental images, the plays on language and translatability or untranslatability in this polyglot narrative space, and the explorations of the entangled nature of human and non-human agency in the diegetic universe, are unusual, striking, surprising and sometimes rather challenging. This is particularly the case if all the mnemonic cues that the text drops as the two narrative strands unfold are taken into account. Consider for example the following scene, the representation of the impending Tsunami of 2004.

> If he had been a fisherman longer, he would not have been mesmerised. He would have known to read the action of fish that had abandoned their feeding grounds that day. He would not have tried to read or wrestle with the whirling, potent current coming in. The secret things of the sea revealed would not have transfixed him. He might have turned his body and boat to face the incoming, speeding, giant waves. He might have understood that he could not make it back to shore in time. He might even have heard the echoes of 250,000 people screaming from the shores along this ocean, as they were swallowed up in five seconds, and he would have heard the howl of broken people trying to hold on to them. Like Ziriyab Raamis, many had forgotten how to decipher the habits of animals that, before dawn, had, in a rush, sought to hide. The second wave caught his boat sideways, and splintered it. He was breathing in water, being whirled in and swept out, and swept in and out and in again. (102)

There is a certain sublime element to this rendition, as there is the calm before the literal storm, and then the moment of realisation that fate and oceanic providence are inescapable. The conditional tense used in this episode illuminates the fragile being-in-time of the protagonist, and his vulnerability on the ocean. It is also a cautionary tale of what can happen if you turn away from oceanic epistemologies. But although Pate Island is arguably as remote as can be, the novel portrays how its specific connection to the ocean means this tiny place is where the world's grand and uncanny memories come to meet. The text establishes connections with the Arab Spring, 9/11, the Tsunami that wreaked havoc in 2004, and human trafficking towards both the West in Europe and North America and the East in Russia. The combination of this plethora of seismic events and manmade catastro-

phes and the overarching mnemonic background of Zheng He's fleet and its legacy as the foundational moment of Afrasian connections make *The Dragonfly Sea* replete with mnemonic cues. None of these mnemonic complexes are spelled out for the reader, as they are subtly hinted at and left in the text as a trace of what came before and what might come after. Any process of interpreting a text must remain incomplete since there is no model reader or model reading, but remembering as reading is more dependent on contextual knowledge or "contextual literacies" (Appadurai 1996, 4) if a text is to be read through a memory prism. Notions like "partial fluency", or partial availability, remain confined to the realm of the conditional and the potential. Walkowitz and Appadurai among others state correctly that circulating texts subvert and undermine reading protocols and the expectations of audiences, but how mnemonic migration unfolds, or what the conditions for this mobilisation of mnemonic patterns are, remains unaddressed.

L. E. Semler succinctly remarks that one of the merits of the mannerist literary aesthetic is that it "assists in the construction, propagation and subversion of the socio-cultural formations in operation and, simultaneously, is modified by these forces" (1998, 16). In other words, a mannerist text plays with the conventions it is steeped in, mainly aesthetic ones but also socio-political ones, while at the same time affecting and changing these conventions. By obscuring certain aspects, it makes them visible. This implies that Owuor's novel caters to different types of reader, firstly because the global, transoceanic dimension of Owuor's entangled mnemonic legacies means that citizens of the world and those with knowledge of world history can make sense of the cues relating to the events of 9/11 or the Tsunami that shocked the tourism industry. Juxtaposing these individual events productively and presenting them as world history, or history with a global reach, is an achievement of this text. These grand narratives come to the shores of the tiny island, and reach the young protagonist Ayaana, who sets out to conquer her own mnemonic legacy. She herself represents the second type of reader that Owuor's text seems to target, which is the Dragonfly Sea audiences, as it is the Swahili Sea communities with their transcultural disposition and their unique historical legacies that may be able to decipher the encoded legacy of Zheng He's Treasure Voyages. These are the initiated implied readers that *The Dragonfly Sea* seems to write back to. More to the point, it is an act of "writing back to self" (Mwangi 2010), as it is aimed at the Afrasian communities, and not at any of the former colonial centres. As mentioned above, withholding something or impeding the reader's sense of mastery of the text marks an important departure from Iser's idea of the model reader and model interpretation, but it leaves us with the realisation that there are multiple audiences, and multiple registers and expectations that may or may not be addressed by the text.

What does this mean for the dynamics of mnemonic migration? There is some potential embedded in the text for seeing mnemonic complexes through someone else's eyes. Owuor does not follow the argument of L.E. Semler and her emphasis on the transformative powers of literary mannerism, but picks up on and represents two of the main forces that drive literary remembering. The first of these is the process of inscribing the radically local into global and globalised mnemonic narratives, and so positioning the Global South in general, and Kenya in this case in particular, firmly within the shifting geopolitical landscapes of power and visibility, and of disaster and warfare. Secondly, by invoking an in-group historical legacy, one that might arguably require specialist knowledge, *The Dragonfly Sea* sets itself apart from these grand narratives and invokes a different narrative in its own right, that of long-existing Afrasian connections, ambivalent though they may be. This specialist knowledge may arguably also be required within the group that is spotlighted, and there is no certainty as to how much is known about Zheng He and his crew in, say, Kenya. But in response to these shifting landscapes of power, Owuor's novel productively entangles local flavours, style, and epistemologies with some of the globalising mnemonic forces like the legacies of 9/11. This strategy makes it a challenge to gain a sense of mastery over the text, and to assemble the swing set as it were, because it remains doubtful whether the reader is indeed able to make sense of the plethora of mnemonic cues, and to subscribe successfully to one of the groups invoked by Owuor's narrative.

The issue is that the native reader and the non-native reader remain textual constructions, and potential audiences that can be actualised in *The Dragonfly Sea.* The act of interpreting a text works by selectively engaging with the linguistic clues that the text holds for the reader, and remembering vicariously is the outcome of that interpretation, and so requires the reader to go one step further, as they need to be able to contextualise historically and aesthetically what is offered by the text. While the different reading experiences may not hamper the act of reading, it seems that there is much that is yet to be said about the impeded vicarious remembering that does not simply unfold for the reader.

Conclusion

Mnemonic migration depends on the reader being able to mobilise and potentially broaden their own mnemonic inventory through the act of reading. Mnemonic migration can be seen as the possibility for the reader to mobilise their own mnemonic inventory, and the chance to tap into their "space of [literary] experience" in the phrase of Koselleck (1997). The interactions between literary texts and their readers are by default highly subjective, but they are also conditioned by the cultural or

transcultural environments that the reader is embedded in. Mnemonic reading thus seems to be particularly reliant on the individual and collective dynamics of reception and interpretation coming together. Reading is, in this sense, a mode of remembering, and not its result. Writing is then a mode of remembering as well, and not its outcome. Remembering through literary texts, a process that is at the heart of mnemonic migration, presupposes interpretation and is contingent on it. But interpretation is not to be conflated with remembering, as it requires the additional step of being able to tap into the historical dimensions at play.

Mnemonic migration that is understood as requiring transcultural mnemonic literacy, especially in a mnemonically mannerist text like *The Dragonfly Sea*, is consequently not something that can be framed in terms of successful or unsuccessful reading. Partial interpretation can of course occur, as in any act of reading, and there is no model reader, nor any model reading of any text. Remembering through literature is, however, more than interpretation. Mnemonic mannerism can also be understood as an act of emancipation from the most visible mnemonic narratives that circulate in our globalised media cycles, like the narrative of 9/11. As I have shown, Owuor's novel caters to a Swahili Sea in-group and initiated readers. Counter to the argument of Mwangi (2010), this novel might write back to Afrasian communities, but such a text requires there to be initiated readers to be written back to. Framing literature as a mnemonic medium then also means thinking about its inability to deliver by mobilising mnemonic inventory. A text may cater to different audiences by appealing to their ability or inability to make sense of what is presented to them, but in terms of memory communities, it may end up reifying the boundaries around these communities simply because of the inaccessibility of the mnemonic content presented.

A lot of attention has been paid to the subject position of the observer, as they may well have a transcultural vantage point over the textual product. The participant or actor, which is how Erll (2011a) understands the communities that are written about and that write in a sense, may find themselves deeply embedded in structures that block mnemonic complexes from view if they do not relate to the immediate transcultural environment. How we can get beyond the point of speculating on how a text unfolds mnemonic potential, and how it functions within transcultural memory dynamics, could indeed be researched through sample reading groups and qualitative interviews, as Laanes, Ortner, and Sindbaek propose in their research project. There are certain limits to such an approach, as it remains difficult to structure the sample groups and to establish productive research paradigms for how to select and reach a target audience. Moreover, it will remain challenging to gain a sense of quantity and of how texts function when read by groups as opposed to individual acts of reading, particularly in terms of obtaining sufficient funding for such a large-scale project.

However, if we as memory scholars want to go further than being able to speculate about the impact and the functional potential of mnemonic carriers, we could indeed open ourselves up towards other research methodologies rather than the ones that are available to us from our disciplinary training. As a literary scholar, I am interested in treading new routes that would lead me beyond close and juxtapositional readings. Perhaps a turn towards data science and both quantitative and qualitative research methods from the social sciences could very well lead to new insights for transcultural literary memory studies.

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Kaisa Kaakinen

Narrating Historical Experience for Heterogeneous Readerships: Transnational Reading as Limited Participation in Aleksandar Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*

In a black-and-white photograph on page 52 of Aleksandar Hemon's novel *The Lazarus Project* (2008), a bearded man dressed in a suit and a hat is holding the head of another man, who is sitting on a chair with his eyes closed. Although it may not be apparent at first glance, the man seated on the chair is dead. Readers have by now learned that he was a Ukrainian-Jewish immigrant to Chicago named Lazarus Averbuch, who had survived a pogrom in 1903 in Kishinev, now Chișinău in Moldova, before coming to the United States. The first chapter of the novel imagines a historical incident, recorded in archives, in which Averbuch was killed by a Chicago police chief in 1908 as a suspected anarchist. Reading further, it becomes apparent that the chapters about Averbuch have been penned by the narrator and protagonist Vladimir Brik, a Bosnian-born emigrant, who came to Chicago from Sarajevo in the early 1990s, just before the Bosnian War, and is now trying to write a novel about Lazarus.

In an article written for *Bomb* magazine, the writer Hemon recounts that the archival images from 1908 in which the dead Averbuch is "being triumphantly offered by a blazingly white policeman to the American public", were the starting point for writing *The Lazarus Project:* "In 1908 these photos were supposed to show that [Lazarus's] alleged anarchist proclivities were visible in his body and that the foreign life in said body was successfully terminated by law and order" (2014). Hemon adds that when he later saw the photographs from Abu Ghraib,[1] he recognised their structural and ideological similarity to the photographs of Averbuch. He explains that his aim in writing the novel was to "engage the readers into confronting the history that is signified in the photographs".

But what kind of history do readers confront when reading *The Lazarus Project?* As Hemon's comments suggest, the structure of historical analogy is at the heart of the novel's poetic concept, and this structuring principle gives the readers plenty of freedom to determine the status of the suggested narrative and historical linkages. It is possible to read *The Lazarus Project* in relation to several historical concerns, such as the early twenty-first century war on terror in the USA and its

1 Hemon (2008, 188) also mentions them in the novel.

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historical precedents, the history of transatlantic migration, or the memory of the Yugoslav Wars, which the novel brings into contact with the US context. Furthermore, the broad temporal and geographic scope of the novel points to a more general problematic of the comparative exploration of histories of violence and their lingering effects. Given the proliferation of potential connections, it is not all that surprising that, in his generally positive review of the novel, the critic James Wood suggested that there may be "one project too many" here. "Brik is pursuing his 'Lazarus Project,' Hemon is pursuing *his* 'Lazarus Project,' and the book's photographs represent another kind of mimetic project" (Wood 2008). However, this multiplicity need not be interpreted as a failure of coherence; it may instead be seen as part of the novel's concept. The perception that readers may feel unable to participate in all of the novel's narrative projects might actually be crucial for grasping the novel's take on transnational historical narration.

Hemon's whole oeuvre of short stories, novels, and essays is profoundly focused on the condition and experience of migration, and he excels in depicting how the life stories of migrants bring together separate experiential and discursive spheres that are distinguished by different affective histories. Furthermore, Hemon's oeuvre is marked by its sustained exploration of the relationship between history and fiction, and of what Hemon himself has called "the overlapping zone" or "the exchange zone" (2014) between them. In this analysis of *The Lazarus Project*, I will study the protocols of reading that emerge from the novel's poetic strategies and ask how the novel's specific poetics of historical narration contributes to its transnational dimension.[2] I pursue this analysis in the spirit of reception aesthetics, as I ask how the text's formal strategies interact with the changing horizons of expectation of the readers. However, while this analytical interest has much in common with the approach proposed by the Constance School theorist Hans-Robert Jauss (1982) in the middle of the twentieth century, the contemporary transnational reading context emphasises the need to devote more concerted analytical attention to the effect of the readers having heterogeneous historical imaginaries and cultural proficiencies. Even when readers share the same present, they may bring very different experiential and narrative frames to the event of reading. Many contemporary literary works resist reading modes in which the co-presence of the heterogeneous experiences of readers is contained by a unifying idea, such

2 I have written extensively about the legibility of literary narratives of history, active modes of reading and the heterogeneity of twenty-first-century reading contexts in Kaakinen 2017, which analyses the conditions of reception of twentieth-century literary texts by Joseph Conrad, Peter Weiss, and W. G. Sebald. Furthermore, the current analysis draws significantly on my earlier article, which discusses transnational narration of historical trauma in Hemon's *The Lazarus Project*, relating it to Teju Cole's novel *Open City*. See Kaakinen 2020.

as the nation – an imagined community that allows readers to imagine themselves belonging to the same frame of reference. I will approach Hemon's novel as a "born-migrated" text,[3] in the expression introduced by Rebecca Walkowitz in her book *Born Translated* (2015). Walkowitz shows that certain pieces of contemporary literature "begin in several languages and several places" (2015, 30), address multiple audiences simultaneously, and "build translation into their form" (2015, 6). She thus proposes that a heterogeneous context of literary production and reception shapes the very structure of texts, as authors anticipate that the texts work differently when they encounter differently situated readers.

What is crucial for my purposes in Walkowitz's analysis is her articulation of how born-translated or born-migrated literature intervenes in the habits of reading:

> Whether or not they manage to circulate globally, today's born-translated works block readers from being "native readers", those who assume that the book they are holding was written for them or that the language they are encountering is, in some proprietary or intrinsic way, theirs. Refusing to match language to geography, many contemporary works will seem to occupy more than one place, to be produced in more than one language, or to address multiple audiences at the same time. (2015, 6)

Walkowitz also points out how born-translated novels are "not produced from nowhere to everywhere" (2015, 28), as they offer an alternative both to national simultaneity and to global disarticulation of particularity. Walkowitz's analysis focuses on multilingual strategies, but I want to extend the consideration of heterogeneous audiences to the analysis of strategies of historical narration in the context of transnational literature and the literature of migration. This contributes to the project of transcultural memory studies by combining analysis of the formal innovations of twenty-first century literature with analysis of the conditions of transnational literary reception.[4]

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3 I will use the term "born-migrated" throughout this article as a shorthand for my claim that Hemon's novel evidences a consciousness of a transnational context. Since my analysis does not focus primarily on language and multilingualism but instead foregrounds historical narration and the heterogeneity of the readers' horizons of expectation, I prefer to use the term born-migrated rather than born-translated.

4 My reading does not focus on the empirical reception of Hemon but on the protocols of reading that are implied by the text's poetic strategies and on the conditions of reception of literary texts that engage with historical material from several cultural contexts. In another study, it would be interesting to study empirically the reception of Hemon's novel among different audiences. For an empirical study of the reception of literary works connected to the history of the Bosnian War, including Hemon's *The Question of Bruno*, see Ortner, Sindbaek Andersen, and Wierød Borčak 2022.

Hemon's novel is interesting for our analytical work on literature and mnemonic migration, because rather than simply transmitting local memories to faraway audiences or transposing them into a transnational idiom in a universalist register, the novel's poetics directs attention to the very structure of the transnational context in which the translation of memories takes place. *The Lazarus Project* portrays the transnational or global as consisting of multiple social spheres, which may be in contact through both historical processes and globally circulating media, but which cannot be understood as a unified audience or mnemonic community. In the first part of the article, I will show how Hemon's novel brings together historical material from multiple local contexts and creates the impression of a heterogeneous address. In the second part, I ask how the novel's narrative mode, which combines documentary material, immersive narration, and self-reflective strategies, can be analysed in relation to the novel's status as a transnational narrative with a potentially global reception. I draw here on discussions on contemporary literature after postmodernism (Boxall 2013; Huber 2014) and on new approaches to the interplay of immersive and self-reflective effects in reading literary fiction (Polvinen 2022). I also note Fredric Jameson's (2013) and Alexander Kluge's (2013) theorisations of storytelling in order to articulate how we can think of the historical mediation of experience in relation to heterogeneous contexts of literary production and reception. Hemon's novel highlights the power that storytelling has to manipulate people's historical and cultural imaginaries, but instead of simply showing that all experience is always mediated by language and discursive conventions, the novel brings this problematic to a historically specific register, pointing to contexts and situations in which storytelling is pressured by histories of violence and imbalances of power. Through its sophisticated poetics of historical narration, *The Lazarus Project* outlines a world in which different frames of experience and storytelling come into contact and conflict and have material consequences in people's lives.

Hemon's poetics thus provides a more particularist alternative to translational models that rely on translation from the singular to the universal, such as the "prosthetic memory" (Landsberg 2004) model, in which readers' experiential engagement with cultural artefacts results in them incorporating memories from distant contexts into their own mnemonic archive. I propose that in order to analyse the role of literary writing in the dynamics of mnemonic migration, we need models that are more differentiated than the concept of translation as the transposition of singular experiences into a universal register, or the idea of reading as a dialogue in which the two horizons of the text and the reader merge. The aim of my analysis of Hemon's novel is to show that literary narratives may also prompt readers to become conscious of the co-presence of other readers who are differently situated as an important horizon for their process of reading. In *The Lazarus*

Project, a struggle may be sensed with the problem of articulating situated experiences transnationally in a world marked by divergent frames of experience and uneven power relations.

Outlining a heterogeneous address

> What always interests me – indeed obsesses me – is the way we engage in history. Except there is no "we." Americans do it differently, and, often, irresponsibly and without particular interest. Abu Ghraib is long forgotten now; no lesson seems to have been learned. (Hemon 2014)

The Lazarus Project compares explicitly the suspicion or indeed the outright paranoia shown towards newly arrived immigrants by the most established social groups in Chicago in the early twentieth century, with the obsession with terrorism in the United States after 9/11. However, the novel's broad geographic scope and the presence in the narrative of the Eastern European context and the Yugoslav Wars of the 1990s opens the historical analogy up in further directions. The different geographic and cultural locations are woven into the narrative through the narrator Brik, whose life story is made to resemble in many ways that of Hemon himself.[5] When Brik wins a generous grant from an American foundation to work on a book about Averbuch, he asks an old acquaintance from Sarajevo, a photographer named Rora, to join him on a research trip to Ukraine, Moldova and Sarajevo. During this trip, Rora comes to tell Brik a lot of stories about the Bosnian War, of which he, unlike Brik, had personal experience. The novel's two storylines are separated by black pages that, when turned, reveal black-and-white photographs with a more or less indirect relationship to the text.[6]

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5 Hemon ended up moving to the US and staying in Chicago indefinitely, although he did not intend to do so, because he happened to travel from Sarajevo to the United States just before the war broke out in Bosnia in 1992. Today he is highly acclaimed in the Anglophone literary context for his imaginative use of the English language, attracting comparisons to famous "translingual" Anglophone authors like Vladimir Nabokov or Joseph Conrad. Furthermore, the figure of the photographer Rora can be read as modelled on the photographer Velibor Božović, Hemon's long-time friend, who took many of the photographs reproduced in the novel. Hemon and Božović have also published together the book *My Prisoner* (2015), which addresses the Bosnian War.

6 For an analysis of the role of photographs in *The Lazarus Project*, see for example Weiner (2014). Weiner emphasises in her analysis how a migrant consciousness and its "fractured yet facilitating perspective" (2014, 215) manifests itself in Hemon's novel and in the use of photographs in the text. Weiner emphasises the ability of the migrant consciousness to look at the world from multiple perspectives, referring to Salman Rushdie's image of a broken mirror (2014, 218), but my own analysis

By articulating experiences and histories that are linked to the Bosnian context, Aleksandar Hemon brings experiences from a European semi-periphery into the field of transnational Anglophone literature. That Hemon writes his works in English, a dominant language, and a lingua franca, creates further conditions for the reception of his texts. While the United States is an important context for Hemon's works, today's fast transnational circulation of literature, especially of literature in English, means that his books are likely to reach considerable audiences elsewhere across the globe. As Walkowitz observes, "[t]o write in English for global audiences [...] is to write for a heterogeneous group of readers. [...] readers of English-language texts are likely to have very different experiences: the work will be foreign, strange, or difficult for some; it will be familiar to others" (2015, 20 – 21).

How does the transnational context of production and reception register in the narrative of the novel? One way is that the novel's narrator figure Brik is portrayed as a voice that can convey experience from various locations. This is how he introduces himself in the second chapter:

> I am a reasonably loyal citizen of a couple of countries. In America – that somber land – I waste my vote, pay taxes grudgingly, share my life with a native wife, and try hard not to wish painful death to the idiot president. But I also have a Bosnian passport I seldom use; I go to Bosnia for heartbreaking vacations and funerals, and on or around March 1, with other Chicago Bosnians, I proudly and dutifully celebrate our Independence Day with an appropriately ceremonious dinner. (Hemon 2008, 11)[7]

The narrator enters the narrative with this gesture of placing his loyalties in multiple locations, in Hemon's signature tone of dark and snarky humour. The narrator's perspective is contrasted to the "native" perspective of someone like Brik's wife Mary, a neurosurgeon who comes from a family of Irish descent that is well established in the US. Brik reflects repeatedly on the difference, or even the chasm, between his perspective and Mary's. In one of these passages, he recalls a fight with Mary about the interpretation of the famous Abu Ghraib pictures from 2004 that showed how Iraqi prisoners had been tortured by US soldiers (188). Brik portrays Mary as settled in her security and affluence, and unable to imagine the reality of human violence and to perceive how she might be implicated in it as a citizen of a war-faring superpower.

highlights how Hemon's migratory poetics makes visible the disjunctive co-presence of different frames of experience in contemporary contexts of reception.

7 In the rest of the chapter only page numbers will be given.

The novel gestures at addressing more settled readers from a perspective that unsettles the "native" stance that takes the position of the implied reader for granted. The mode of native reading is contrasted with the perspective of someone like Brik, whose experience of the world is characterised by partial belonging in several contexts. The mode of native reading is shown to be unable to fathom the existence of what Brik calls "parallel universes" (68), places that are not subordinated or subsumable to a reader's own cultural location. Brik presents Mary's father George as someone for whom the United States represents the centre of the civilised world, and for whom people from remote places can "arrive at humanity only in the United States, and belatedly" (162), evoking developmental ideas of world history that sustained the imperialist project of the Western powers.

Hemon's narrative outlines a different perspective, in which no single centre co-opts the multiplicity of perspectives on the world. The novel highlights the heterogeneity of the US context itself, as Brik is presented as someone who observes the US both as a participant, with particular political affiliations and the right to vote in the US, and also as an observer, who is able to illuminate and manipulate the thought mechanisms of more established Americans. The novel particularises the US context further by embedding its story in the local history of Chicago. The Lazarus chapters convey to the readers a sense of the deep social divisions and political tensions between the established and the outsiders in early twentieth-century Chicago, connecting this location to a larger network of historical relations. This contributes to the presentation of the United States not simply as the centre to which the material from Bosnian, Ukrainian, and Moldovan locations is translated, but as one of the local contexts in the narrative.

The awareness of a heterogeneous context is reflected also in the novel's linguistic texture, which suggests a dislocated perspective on the Anglophone sphere or on the English language.[8] Other languages have a subdued presence in the novel, for instance when the narrative includes untranslated Bosnian expressions (18, 45) or refers to the central square of Lviv with the word *Rinok* without translating it (75). The word is readily understandable as a "marketplace" to readers familiar with Slavic languages, but it is not necessarily so to others. On other occasions the novel seems to take both Anglophone and Bosnian audiences into account. It reproduces a Bosnian nursery rhyme in its original language for in-

8 The subdued multilingualism of *The Lazarus Project* resonates with Rebecca Walkowitz's analysis of the various multilingual effects used by contemporary writers in Walkowitz, *Born Translated.* Like Walkowitz, I see the multilingual effects as a literary strategy that contributes to the sense that the text addresses multiple audiences. As Hemon's novel deals with historical experiences and memories, this sense of the heterogeneity of the novel's audiences also reminds us that the text may spark connections to multiple historical narratives and mnemonic communities.

stance, but also translates its meaning into English in the ensuing narrative (38). However, the centre-periphery relationship is subverted in this passage, as it recounts how Rora tricked Western tourists into pulling out their wallets by making up exciting stories about Sarajevan locations and by adding the words "Isus Krist" to the nursery rhyme, presenting it to American pilgrims as a Bosnian prayer.

Furthermore, Hemon's variegated English vocabulary and his way of playing with the material and sensory qualities of words ("a bus disgorged a gaggle of high school kids" (40)) creates the sense that the reader is overhearing the English language from the point of view of someone perceiving it both as a participant and an observer. To give one more example, when Brik refers to his wife's father George, he accidentally uses the word *dead* where he means to say "dad", making a grave mistake that arises from the transcription of how a person with a certain American accent would pronounce the word, and that hints at revealing something about Brik's relationship to George (162). The shades of multilingualism and the accentuation of the materiality of the English language contribute to the impression that the narrative addresses multiple proficiencies.

The effect of the novel bringing together historical material from various contexts is that situated readers will amplify some resonances of the novel's historical material more than others. The associations sparked by the word *Chetnik* for instance depend both on the knowledge of readers and on how those readers position themselves in relation to the Bosnian war. As the passage on Abu Ghraib already suggested, the novel evidences an awareness of how histories of war and violence divide people's experiential horizons. When Brik describes a Bosnian Independence Day party in Chicago, he presents himself as a partial insider, since he, unlike many others in the Bosnian immigrant community, does not have direct experience of the Bosnian war. Those who actually experienced the war seem to create bonds through stories and humour.

> Inevitably, over the dessert, the war is discussed, first in terms of battles and massacres unintelligible to someone (like me) who has not experienced the horrors. Eventually the conversation turns to funny ways of not dying. Everyone is roaring with laughter, and our guests who do not speak Bosnian would never know that the amusing story is, say, about the many dishes based on nettles (nettle pie, nettle pudding, nettle steak), or about a certain Salko who survived a mob of murderous Chetniks by playing dead, and now is dancing over there – and someone points him out: the skinny, sinewy survivor, soaking his shirt with the sweat of lucky resurrection. (12–13)

Here, the narrative manages to translate an impression of the dark humour of those who experienced the war. However, it also illustrates how what these funny stories mean to them cannot really be translated.

In some passages, non-American or non-Western readers may find themselves observers to the translation that Brik is involved in, when he transmits his experiences from his trip to Ukraine, Moldova, and Bosnia. The travelogue passages could be read as illustrating how Brik brings with him not only the American passport he has acquired, but also some specific cultural scripts, as he notes, for instance, a "Darth Vader-like Orthodox priest" (73) walking down the street in Lviv. Brik's descriptions of the scenery in Ukraine and Moldova may even appear to some readers to be pervaded by a certain "Western gaze", depending on the affective relationship of the readers to the locations in question. However, the hyperbolic character of the travelogue passages, with their veritable procession of seedy hotels, brutal businessmen, prostitutes, casinos, and sex trafficking, also connects to the novel's repeated references to how storytellers embellish details to create a particular effect on their audiences. In a scene in which Brik phones his wife Mary, he describes Lviv as "depressing" (72), with filthy streets, Soviet architecture, and so on. The scene suggests that Brik feels a growing sense of disconnect from Mary's world back in the United States and tries to counteract this by telling Mary what he thinks she expects to hear. Brik portrays hyperbolic narration as characteristic of Bosnian attitudes to storytelling, with Rora being a prime example of this in the novel, and he distances himself from the American way of dividing stories neatly between fiction and nonfiction (102–104). All this attention being focused on approaching storytelling not through its verisimilitude but through its effects could be taken as a hint that the later descriptions of Ukraine and Moldova should not be taken at face value either. However, the novel also reminds readers about the very real existence of violence, for instance in the scene in which Brik and Rora realise that they have unwittingly become accomplices to human trafficking, as they have travelled in the same taxi as the traffickers and their victim (263–264). In the next section, I will delve into the novel's constant thematisation of the relationship between storytelling and history, and its use of self-reflective strategies.

As a born-migrated text, *The Lazarus Project* does not assume that its implied readers share the public sphere or cultural discourses of the context within which it is produced, nor does it expect readers to translate the text into their own experiential world by way of the universal human condition. The narrative seems instead to register the existence of different reading horizons that are partly separate and partly intertwined. Although the narrator of *The Lazarus Project* may be said to be addressing US audiences in a specific, post-9/11 moment, the text implies that this conversation is surrounded by the co-presence of other situated points of entry to the archive of historical experience explored in the novel. Furthermore, Brik's perspective is likely to resonate with those readers who recognise something familiar in how the structures of experience created by migration are

depicted, whether or not they are familiar with the novel's cultural references. Such readers bring into the event of reading their experience of becoming a material link between contexts that belong to separate spheres of historical experience and discourse. Furthermore, the born-migrated quality of the narrative can also accommodate a semi-peripheral reader, who may recognise a familiar structure of experience in Brik's negotiation of a position of European margins in the transnational circulation of cultural discourses. This interaction with migratory or semi-peripheral readerships does not assume that the readers share the same cultural discourses and proficiencies. These examples remind us that the experiential horizons of readers are not divided only by their linguistic, cultural, and national belonging, but also by more complex frames of mnemonic belonging that are linked to various processes of socialisation, and by the position of the readers in the structural hierarchies that underlie transnational contact.

Narrating experience with immersive and self-reflective strategies

> As a diasporic person I've learned that it's in fact really easy to leave your country. What is difficult is leaving its history, as it follows (or leads) you like a shadow. That kind of history is in your body (as it was in Lazarus's) and cannot be relegated to a museum or, as in America, to entertainment. (Hemon 2014)

These words by Hemon betray a preoccupation with the historicity of experience, which also manifests itself in how Hemon's texts use the affordances of literary storytelling to highlight embodied experiences while constantly reminding readers of the status of the narrative as a textual construct. The remainder of this article analyses how this tension in Hemon's novel contributes to the sense that the implied readers of the novel are made aware of different experiential horizons that are co-present in the same slice of time, and that each reader is being only partially addressed in the text.

The double gesture of inviting readers to become immersed in "the world as it had been in 1908" (41), and of laying bare the devices used for storytelling can be seen right at the outset of the novel.

> The time and place are the only thing I am certain of: March 2, 1908, Chicago. Beyond that is the haze of history and pain, and now I plunge:
>
> Early in the morning, a scrawny young man rings the bell at 31 Lincoln Place, the residence of George Shippy, the redoubtable chief of Chicago police. The maid, recorded as Theresa, opens the door (the door certainly creaks ominously), scans the young man from

> his soiled shoes up to his swarthy face, and smirks to signal that he had better have a good reason for being there. (1)

After reminding readers of how sparse the known historical facts about Averbuch's death are, the narrator makes an ironic remark about the creaking door, as if reminding readers of the narrative conventions that are designed to create certain effects in the audience. However, the brief reference at the beginning of the passage to the "haze of history and pain" suggests a certain commitment to the dimension of history as something that envelops and pressures these gestures of storytelling. There seems to be a double impulse of laying bare the literary devices while still remaining committed to the ability of storytelling to convey something about the historicity and materiality of experience.

Furthermore, the narrative sets out to engage readers' senses, as it continuously zooms in on conspicuous sensory effects. Before Lazarus enters Chief Shippy's house and is killed, the novel narrates his visit to a grocery store and invites the reader to imagine Lazarus's experience of hunger, the shifts in his consciousness between the present in Chicago and the past in Moldova, and the contempt and suspicion of the store owners who look down on him. The narrative repeatedly returns to the detail of a lozenge, which Lazarus buys at the store with his last coins. The lozenge, slowly dissolving in his mouth throughout the passage, becomes connected with language and migration when Lazarus feels the contours of the foreign American names Billy and Pat, as if tasting them in his mouth. The detail of the lozenge subtly moves readers from imagining Lazarus's sensory environment to picturing his relationship with the English language:

> The young man's stomach growls again, and he takes another lozenge. He is glad he has a few more left; he enjoys possessing them. Billy. That's a nice name, a name for a fretful, yet happy, dog. Pat is weighty, serious, like a rusted hammer. He has never known anybody named Billy or Pat. (6–7)

Finally, the sensation in the mouth becomes associated with muteness and with the disconnection between Lazarus and his surroundings. This sense of a disconnection finally reaches its climax when Lazarus is shot dead before he has been able to explain why he has come to Police Chief Shippy's house. The narrative transitions here from its focus on Lazarus's experience to the perspective of public narratives that have supposedly remained in the archives. It introduces a citation from the newspaper The Tribune: "'Throughout the struggle,' William P. Miller writes, 'the anarchist had not uttered a syllable. He fought on doggedly with that cruel mouth shut tight and the eyes colored with a determination terrible to behold. He died without a curse, supplication, or prayer'" (9). The subsequent chapters

demonstrate how both those in power in early twentieth-century Chicago and the anarchists on the fringes construe their own political narratives and instrumentalise Lazarus's death for political purposes. The Lazarus chapters portray how more powerful stories come to obscure the entangled reality, and how the narration of such histories takes place in a world that is pervaded by uneven structures of power.

The Lazarus chapters thus operate in a state of tension between inviting readers to immerse themselves in Lazarus's experience and encouraging them to become conscious of the narrative devices that aim to create specific impressions. One way in which the narrative draws attention to its constructed nature is through the use of expressions and names that are repeated both in the Lazarus chapters and in the chapters on Brik. There are for instance two reporters named Miller in the novel, the second of whom reports on the Bosnian War in the 1990s. Another example is a bartender in early twentieth-century Chicago named Bruno Schulz (52) after the Polish writer, who lived in present-day Ukraine, close to the region that Brik visits on his trip. Such devices ironically emphasise that we are becoming immersed in a world that is constructed by the imagination of Brik, and also of Hemon.

However, the self-reflective dimension of *The Lazarus Project* does not only remind readers that history is a product of our ways of telling it, which has been argued to be the key concern of late-twentieth-century historiographic metafiction (Boxall 2013; Huber 2014; Hutcheon 1988). It instead uses strategies that are familiar from late-twentieth-century postmodern fiction to highlight the pressure of history on storytelling and to accentuate the disjunctive coexistence of different frames of experience in the same present. Hemon's novel has a twenty-first-century, or post-postmodernist historical sensibility that, in the words of Peter Boxall, evidences a "new sense of a responsibility to material historical forces" and a "gap between our experiences of living [...] and the empty, circling, repetitive narratives which we have available to give expression to that experience" (2013, 42). The interplay between documentary and metafictive impulses is a part of the novel's overall exploration of the gaps between lived experiences, and the discursive resources or cultural scripts that are available for articulating those experiences. Furthermore, the novel conveys how the divergent frames of interpretation have material consequences, like in the case of Lazarus, who moves across separate frames of reference and is shot because he fits the Chicago police officer's preconception of a foreign anarchist.

The poetic gesture of prompting readers to imagine Lazarus's world as a sensory environment amplifies the temporal dimension that Fredric Jameson has called the open present, or a "present of consciousness" (2013, 15–26), which opens the linear narrative temporality of past-present-future to a sense of the mul-

tiple possibilities that are inherent in historical instances. The gesture of amplifying the present of consciousness both invites readers to connect experientially with the text, and encourages them to approach the historical dimension with an awareness of the multivalence of each present moment. I would like to propose that this poetic strategy, together with the invitation to observe narrative conventions and their use in particular contexts, directs readers to approach the historicity of experience relationally and beyond the self-enclosed conceptions of the subject. I draw here on the thoughts of German writer and filmmaker Alexander Kluge about the relationship between experience and storytelling, which build on the tradition of German critical theory. Kluge asserts that writing has a unique ability to mediate experience "independently of time", in a manner that does not leave it "imprisoned in individual biographies" (Kluge 1993, quoted in Combrink and Arnold 2011 [translation mine]). Kluge does not approach experience as being intrinsically linked to a biographical subject or to the narratives that sustain personal and collective identities. Instead he approaches experience as "raw material for the imagination", which can spark the imagination of readers in remote contexts and engage their critical faculties against the power of "homogenised reality narratives" (Kluge 2013 [translation mine]). In this conception of storytelling and experience, reading is not about identifying with someone else's experience. Instead it involves an active and critical orientation in the spaces of experience that condition lives and narratives, and that change through time.

I would also like to highlight Kluge's metaphor for biographical forms, as it suggests that experience can be narrated in a frame that opens up to multiple directions of address instead of simply building the story of a subject in a linear time frame: "80 or 16 eyes glance outside from biographies, and the world and other people look back – they build the united biographies of experience" (Kluge 1993, quoted in Combrink and Arnold 2011 [translation mine]). Hemon uses the historical biography of Averbuch as a device that makes it possible to highlight the disjunctive co-presence of different experiential horizons coexisting in the same slice of time. The novel's narrative mode invites readers both to immerse themselves in Lazarus's experience, and to observe the heterogeneity of the context that his life traverses and the context of the narration of that life.

My reading of the function of self-reflective strategies in *The Lazarus Project* is also influenced by recent analysis of literary artifice by Merja Polvinen, who draws on enactive or second-generation approaches to cognition in cognitive literary studies, and on the rhetorical view of fiction of Richard Walsh. Polvinen emphasises that we should not see the self-reflective and immersive strategies of fictional texts as implying antithetical modes of reading (Polvinen 2022). If we approach literary texts as cognitive environments, we can see how self-reflective artificiality and immersive reading work together within the experience afforded by the

text, and how readers may experience these aspects of the cognitive environment quite seamlessly.

Polvinen's analysis, which approaches fiction not as an ontological category but as a quality of communication, is useful for articulating how the self-reflective dimension in Hemon's novel contributes to the reading roles I have described as a combination of participation and observation. In her own study, Polvinen uses the case study of David Eggers's memoir *A Heartbreaking Work of Staggering Genius* (2000) to show how "communicative techniques typical to fiction", which includes self-reflective strategies, "initiate a moment of *joint attention* in readers". This

> form of participatory sense-making [...] involves readers' mental processing in a triad that includes the object of attention (the story events), another person's actions in drawing our attention to that object (the metalevel commentary) and self-referential processing of our own actions in the shared situation (awareness of our own role as readers).

Polvinen proposes that such communicative techniques may afford readers "an experience of interpersonal cognition, even when the artificiality of their communicative contact" (2022, 121) with the text is made explicit. If we apply this to the problematic of transnational reading, we may say that Hemon's readers are prompted to take both a participatory stance towards the experience narrated, and the stance of an observer. This also helps them observe the co-presence of the text's heterogeneous audiences, whose frames of experience do not cohere with their own. The heterogeneous audiences engage in shared attention and participatory sense making, but they cannot assume that they are immediately all part of the same conversation.

Finally, I would also like to illustrate how the gesture of foregrounding the unreliability of stories participates in the novel's project of indirectly conveying the memory of the Bosnian War. Rora is the main source of stories about the war in the novel, but he is also presented as a highly unreliable narrator who tends to practise hyperbolic fabulation. During the trip by the narrator and Rora to Ukraine and Moldova, Rora tells about a person named Rambo, a Sarajevan criminal known to Rora since adolescence, who led an armed unit during the Bosnian War. Rora tells Brik chilling stories about Rambo and suggests that when he returns to Sarajevo, he will be in danger, because he knows that Rambo was responsible for the death of an American war reporter called Miller. And then, when Brik and Rora return to Sarajevo, Rora is shot while sitting outside a café. The narrator interprets this as Rambo's revenge, piecing together a story based on Rora's earlier accounts. However, Rora's sister Azra questions this explanation and suggests that Rora had made up his stories about Miller and Rambo's wartime adventures. She

claims that Rora's killer was just a boy, who was shooting recklessly while on drugs, and who took Rora's camera to sell it for money.

Rora's death thus appears as a random act that may have had nothing to do with Rora's wartime activities, which recalls Lazarus's death from the bullet of a suspicious police officer. Both deaths take place in a context where it is tempting to find a single cause or plot line. The relational impetus of the narrative, however, directs us away from this simplistic causation and towards a perspective that sees both deaths as embedded in complex historical structures. The narrative structure of a frustrated mystery plot is used to portray history as a complicated network of relations that must be conveyed with more intricate modes of narration.

There is also an interesting twist earlier in the narrative, as Rora suggests that it was he who brought Brik along on their trip and not the other way around, so that Brik would write down his stories about the war (84). The importance of this inversion is also underlined by the remark of Azra the doctor that Brik's broken hand has to be taken care of as he will need it for writing (292).[9] This suggests that the memory of the Bosnian War is an important thread in the narrative we have been reading, despite all the emphasis on the unreliability of Rora's fabulations. Beyond its explicit narrative, the novel points to a realm of reality that can only be conveyed indirectly, just as Rora seems to withhold his real experiences of wartime Bosnia from Brik. The black pages that divide the sections of the text also evoke a sense of the unsayable by creating the repeated visual experience of facing a black wall.

However, the emphasis in the novel's narrative mode on a particularistic and relational historical narration acts against a generalising mode of reading that focuses on the suggestion that everything points to an unsayable, traumatic kernel, to violence as a transhistorical fundament. As I have tried to show, a lot of poetic energy is spent on directing readers to the level of historical particularity and relationality, as the narrative continuously portrays moments of disjunction between the different interpretive frames that people use to make sense of the world. Since there is such a strong sense of multiple perspectives in the text, the black pages evoking the unsayable could be read as contact points functioning in the logic of approximation, or what Michael Rothberg (2009, 39) has called the multidirectional sublime, directing attention to the historically specific level of circulation of discourses about traumatic histories. While certainly posing questions about the difficulty of representing violence directly, Hemon's novel brings this question to a

9 It is also interesting that this injury, which is here linked to the act of writing, comes about when Brik attacks the human trafficker with his fists. This seems like another reminder of the connections between the realm of violence and pain and the novel's textual universe.

specific historical level and highlights the challenges of mediating histories of trauma in an uneven world.

Conclusions

> Readers do half the work of a book's life; that means we must do half the heavy lifting of its project. (Castillo 2022, 50)

In her recent essay collection *How to Read Now,* US-based writer Elaine Castillo identifies the reading position of the "expected reader", whose position towards reading literature on remote contexts and experiences is described as the posture of being "the only reader I have ever been expecting". In a biting critique of this common habit of reading, she calls forth the "unexpected reader", who registers that what binds people together in the world is not "sham empathy that comes from predigested ethnographic sound bites passing as art in late capitalism" but "the visceral shock, and ultimately relief, of our own interwoven togetherness and connection" (Castillo 2022, 49–50).

Hemon's poetic endeavour is also characterised by the negotiation between an attempt to find a transnational mode for conveying historical experience and the recognition of the need to place checks on simplistic modes of translation.[10] Hemon's novel contributes to a cultural project of finding new literary and narrative forms for conveying the challenge of transmitting experiences and memories, especially those related to histories of violence, across a disjunctive transnational powerscape. I have analysed the novel as a born-migrated narrative that encourages reading modes marked by a combination of participation and observation. These reading modes do not simply immerse readers in remote experiences nor expect the text to translate those experiences into the readers' own frames of reference. The novel's narrative mode suggests that the awareness of the co-presence of other situated readers functions as an important horizon for the readers', engagement with the text. Readers are put in the position of not belonging to the

10 I would also like to note a gesture where Hemon refuses the translation of experience in his more recent autobiographical narrative *My Parents: Introduction/This Does Not Belong to You* (2019). The address to a you in the second part of the title can be read as a provocative reminder that the text should not be read as a highway to someone else's life world. In the actual narrative, Hemon writes: "This does not belong to you. But neither does it belong to those who might read it in Bosnian, simply because it all happened a long time ago, to a small number of kids whose later lives were subsequently filled up to the brim with events large and heavy, and some of those kids have grown up to die, some too soon, some too late, no one on time" (2019, 185).

sole implied readership, and they find themselves overhearing some conversations as they notice signals targeted at differently positioned readers.[11] Furthermore, Hemon's use of self-reflective strategies does not simply underline the constructed nature of historical narratives but contributes to the invitation to the reader to register the co-presence of other situated readers. The protocols of reading implied by the novel can be described as a combination of participation and observation, as readers are invited both to engage with historically situated experiences, and to recognise their own position in a heterogeneous transnational reading context in which readers' horizons of expectations do not cohere.

The novel's narrative is thus not fitted into the frame of translating foreign experience for a transnational arena by way of the universal. Instead, *The Lazarus Project* contributes to a cultural archive of poetic strategies that register how transnational interaction puts everyone in the position of "partial fluency" (Walkowitz 2015, 30) and "limited participation" (Phillips 2001, 5), and in the position of overhearing some conversations. *The Lazarus Project* is a narrative articulation of the coexistence of different memory collectives and readerships, which are linked through entangled historical legacies and transnational circulation of media, but which do not easily share experiences in a common conversation. The novel shows that while transnational migration brings these separate spheres into relation, there is no pre-existing "we" that would have convenient access to the whole world. What gets translated across borders is consequently not so much a historical narrative as a structure of experience and an invitation to read the world in the mode of limited participation.

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11 For a discussion of overhearing as a structure of experience and a mode of reading literary texts, see Kaakinen, "Entangled Histories", and Kaakinen 2017, 130–164.

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John Greaney

Reading Modernism in the Contemporary: Translation, Setting, Mnemonic Migration

This essay responds to the recent conceptualisation and reading of literature as a form of mnemonic migration; that is to say, as a vehicle which transmits experience into new frameworks of memory. Specifically, it addresses Jessica Ortner and Tea Sindbæk Andersen's research in this area, which has provoked me to meditate on the relationship between radically symbolic literary forms and travelling memories. Ortner's and Andersen's work (Ortner, Sindbaek Andersen, and Wierød Borčak 2022) has focused on Aleksander Hemon's short story "A Coin" (1997), and Saša Stanišić's novel *How the Soldier Repairs the Gramophone* (2006) as examples of literary memories of the Bosnian War. Hemon's and Stanišić's texts slide between moderately and radically symbolic textualities, borrowing from Roland Barthes's elucidations of these terms where the moderately symbolic text closes in on a signified, and the radically symbolic text is structured but off-centred and without closure. For Barthes, in *From Work to Text* (1987), literatures which correspond to a "work", or which are moderately symbolic, "close in on a specific signified and [...] function as a general sign and it is normal that it should represent an institutional category of the civilization of the sign" (1987, 158). In contrast to the "work", Barthes develops the idea of the "text" to describe acts of literature which accomplish "the very plural of meaning: an irreducible (and not merely an acceptable) plural" (1987, 159). The text is thus "radically symbolic" and is "approached, experienced, in reaction to the sign"; the field of the text "is that of the signifier and the signifier must not be conceived of as 'the first stage of meaning,' its material vestibule, but in complete opposition to this, as its deferred action" (Barthes 1987, 159). Thought of in such terms, we can locate Hemon's and Stanišić's work within a certain lineage of modernist-through-contemporary literature which is concerned to display a preoccupation with the relation between literary symbolism, form, and content. While Hemon's and Stanišić's texts lend themselves to being read in terms of the history of the Bosnian war, and thus validating a historicist interpretation of their narrative strategies, the question of mnemonic migration has compelled me to wonder how and if other radically symbolic literatures – texts which are ostensibly concerned with the field of the signifier and which practise the deferment of the signified – could be read through the lens of a similar or adapted methodology. That is to say, do such literatures – think James Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* (1939), Samuel Beckett's *The Unnamable* (*L'Innommable*, 1953), Tom McCarthy's *Satin Island* (2015), Anna Burns's *Milkman* (2018) –

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interrupt conceptualisations of fiction as a convenient mnemonic form? And moreover: do such literatures pose problems to invocations of literature as a mode of prosthetic memory, following Alison Landsberg's terms, where readers adopt stories told into their personal stock of memory and, in the process, establish affective connections between their lives and the lives of those represented in literary texts?

At their base, such accounts presuppose a referential memory that literature mobilises, a circumstance explicable by the prominence of aesthetic and literary realism in western culture since the nineteenth century. Realism has become such a familiar custom in culture at large that it has, for a long time, seemed a natural and unvarnished mode rather than a code of representation. Its dominance in culture has had a significant impact on criticism; it has enabled a default historicism to install itself as the base of literary and cultural studies, as is evident in Landsberg's account, which suggests that people can "take on memories of events not 'naturally' their own" because media representations "feel real" (2004, 18). Yet, as Roland Barthes suggests in *S/Z* (1970), realism is not a copy of the real, but a copy of a copy of the real. Literary and filmic representation operate at a double remove from the real, yet both modes produce the deception that they belatedly and referentially imitate the real. The literary device of setting, which seems to materialise history and index the extratextual world more than other aesthetic or narrative concepts, is crucial in this respect as it supplies historicist minded critics with a hermeneutic primer for assuming direct forms of imitation and referentiality in literary texts. Indeed, the idea of an indexical signifier suggests a connection between language and matter, and, when its implications are scaled up, between representation and (material) history. However, the relationship between a signifier and a purported signified has never been guaranteed. In this sense, we must not forget the foundational insights of deconstructive criticism, despite the decline in prominence of such methods of reading. As Paul De Man has concisely written: "Literature is fiction not because it somehow refuses to acknowledge 'reality,' but because it is not a priori certain that language functions according to principles which are those, or which are like those, of the phenomenal world" (1986, 11). This is not to suggest that literature is anti-mimetic, but it does complicate understandings of the registration of extratextual realities in literary texts as presupposing forms of direct referentiality. We may thus treat with suspicion, as Eneken Laanes (2021) has signalled, the idea of an originary or source memory that has not already been touched by (cultural) translation. Laanes takes the example of Rebecca Walkowitz's "born-translated" model to elucidate this point. While Walkowitz's idea finds voice through the globalised condition of contemporary literature, this circumstance is not unique to late-twentieth or twenty-first century literature. The problem of authenticity and translation is particular to both the history of twentieth century philosophy, as well as modernist literature,

coordinates which provide philosophical and literary antecedents to the question of mnemonic migration and the related role of fiction. My overarching question then is this: how do we read transcultural mnemonic migration, and where do we locate cultural memory, in relation to radically symbolic literatures that do not particularly close in on a specific signified and that build problems of translation and untranslatability into their forms?

My cue is taken from Jacques Rancière, who provides an illuminating account of the preoccupation with aesthetic scepticism that traverses modern literature in his book *Mute Speech* (2011). In contrast to the historicist assumptions operative at the intersections of the new modernist studies and literary memory studies, Rancière narrates the turn to aesthetic doubt in modern literature as inspired by the institution of literature itself, and thus not as determined by historical events, realities, or trauma. "Suspicion", Rancière writes,

> with respect to literature and the withdrawal before a more fundamental "unworking" [*désœuvrement*] were not born in the 1940s from historical trauma or the political demystification of the function of discourse. They belong to the system of reasons that make "literature", since the Romantic revolution, the name given to the productions of the art of writing. (2011, 170)

Notably, Rancière's description of the occurrence and proclivities of modernist form differ significantly from the reading strategies that have become orthodox in literary and cultural studies since the 1990s. Over the past thirty years, during which so-called high theory gave way to historicist, materialist and postcolonial modes of criticism, literary and cultural critics have often explained modernist aesthetics in terms of the conditions of textual production. One famous and influential example is Terry Eagleton's suggestion that the realist novel never happened in Ireland for economic reasons: "That the novel never flourished as vigorously as its English counterpart is surely no mystery. For culture demands a material base; and a society as impoverished as Ireland was hardly in a position to provide one" (1996, 145). Eagleton's comment was in tune with, and anticipatory of, a tide of criticism which would read the peculiarities of literary modes, and particularly the jagged shapes of modernist forms, as determined by historical events, realities and traumas, and the uneven development of modernity. Note, for example, Susan Stanford's claim in her magnum opus, *Planetary Modernisms* (2015), that modernism is the aesthetic expression of any given modernity. Such reading strategies and dictums have also been foundational to, and influential in, the field of memory studies. Indeed, memory studies emerged as a disciplinary field around the same time that postcolonial studies, new historicism, and cultural materialism became the dominant modes of inquiry in literary and cultural studies. The overlap between these fields has long been evident, and we can detect these influences at

the base of, for example, Landsberg's work, which tacitly incites a historicist understanding of cultural production as a belated and referential imitation of a historical referent or setting; a circumstance that tells us how art and media, in this disciplinary formation, become conceptualised and read as memory.

The implications of Rancière's argument establish a problematic concerning the motives behind the modern writer's aesthetic scepticism, and its growth or development across a corpus. Rancière offers an account of the writer torn between the history of literature and the history of their world: after Flaubert, "neither its object or its intention have ever served as a guarantee"; and because literature has the "misfortune of speaking only in words, it thus has to make the work both the realisation and the refutation of its intention" (2011, 175). As Rancière writes, "the weakness of the means at its disposal [...] is what taught literature to tame the myths and suspicions that separated it from itself to invent the fictions and metaphors of a sceptical art in the strict sense of the term" (2011, 174). In these terms, Rancière outlines a lineage of aesthetic *désœuvrement* [unworking] that is concerned with turning literature towards telling the story of the conditions of its own making. Rancière thus suggests that literature, extending through Flaubert, Joyce, and Proust, becomes an "ambiguous stage on which two anti-genres, the novel and the essay, double, oppose or intertwine with one another" (2011, 174). The ambiguous stage that literature has become serves to establish a response to literary, as well as to material and political, history. This circumstance makes modern literature, which is not necessarily anti-mimetic, an art that "investigates itself, that makes fictions from this investigation, that plays with its myths, challenges its philosophy, and challenges itself in the name of this philosophy" (Rancière 2011, 174).

Beckett and the historicist problematic

Samuel Beckett's fiction is a radical case in point for this interrogation of the capacity of radically symbolic texts, or literatures that correspond to Rancière's history of aesthetic scepticism, to act as forms of mnemonic migration. Beckett was a European migrant writer who wrote in English, French, and German and published in American, British, French, and German publishing houses and theatres, and his writing features a host of transcultural and trans-European traces of traumatic events, military activity, and war. His corpus thus constitutes a literary accumulation and dispersal of diverse historical traces which travel across languages and borders. Simultaneously, Beckett's writing prominently belongs to, and by many accounts represents an apotheosis of, a literary history of aesthetic *désœuvrement* which is concerned with turning the literary work against its own mak-

ing. Beckett's travelling traces thus occur in two overlapping frameworks: the framework of linguistic literary traditions, and the framework of a modernist history of aesthetic underdevelopment. In the following, I consider the implications of this dual aspect of Beckett's corpus for how we read radically symbolic literatures as examples of mnemonic migration and transmission. Similarly, I demonstrate how Beckett serves as an important precursor for the consideration of the styles and forms of certain experimental contemporary literatures and their relation to socio-political events and realities; like Hemon and Stanišić, we can nod to J. M. Coetzee and Anna Burns as obvious examples in this respect.

Though Beckett was once received as a formalist distant from cultural and political points of reference, the historicist turn in literary and modernist studies has allowed his corpus to be examined in relation to national and transnational European histories. Beckett is thus no longer an ivory tower modernist "assimilated to a vague metaphysics, in a strange, solitary place, or an existentialist [inhabiting] an inarticulate [or] shapeless language" (Casanova 2009, 9). Particularly, historicist work has lit up the cultural signifiers in Beckett's corpus to reveal a writer whose French, English and German texts offer oblique accounts of Irish histories of exile and republican nationalism, vestigial traces of French, German, and Belgian military histories, and faint references to the Second World War. *Mercier and Camier* (*Mercier et Camier*, 1970), for example, features references to Patrick Sarsfield, the murder of Noel Lemass, The Battle of Aughrim, The Flight of the Wild Geese, the Battle of Landen, Charles Chalmot de Saint-Ruhe, (a French cavalry officer who served Louis XIV), and Gestapo surveillance culture. Focusing on the origins of such traces, a branch of Beckett criticism has responded with a positive critical grammar for reading his work as presenting, remembering, and reconstituting aspects of the historical past. Indeed, as per Theodor Adorno, Beckett's writing is uniquely related to the history from which it emerges. Adorno writes: "Beckett has given us the only fitting reaction to the situation of the concentration camps – a situation he never calls by name, as if it were subject to an image ban" (1973, 380 – 381). Beckett, in one sense then, is undoubtedly a writer of the migration and relocation of memory. In turn, Beckett's bilingual corpus can be read as actively transmitting elements of Irish history into twentieth-century French literature, as well as traces of European military histories into Anglophone literature. In terms of such analytic lenses, radically symbolic literatures, which also partake in a history of turning the work of art against the conditions of its making, become amenable to determined historicist analysis.

Notwithstanding such advances in criticism, however, Beckett's writing still remains resistant to historicist reading strategies, despite their ever-increasing sophistication. The cultural traces littered in Beckett's work refrain from cohering around any fixed signified. Borrowing a memory studies vocabulary, we might

label such floating traces as mnemonic forms; that is, as Astrid Erll describes in her seminal essay "Travelling Memory", "condensed figures of remembering that enable repetition and are often themselves shorthands that are eminently transportable and thus powerful carriers of meaning. In their displacement, memory figures tend to be stripped of their complexity, detached from the details and contextual meanings to which they referred" (Erll 2011, 13–14). This can lead, as Erll writes, to a distortion and even a perversion of memories. Indeed, this distortion and perversion of memories, as well as their detachment from historical context, is one of the aesthetic features and legacies of modernist literatures, and of Beckett's writing more particularly. In *Mercier and Camier* and throughout his Trilogy – *Molloy* (1951), *Malone Dies* (*Malone Meurt*, 1951), *The Unnamable* (1953) – Beckett establishes his minimalist aesthetic of referential diminution (his paring back of historical traces in his texts) that would become typical of his corpus, and that would allow him to subvert the narrative and formal structures – unity, space, time – that had constituted and signalled the accomplishment of fictional and theatrical genres. In these novels, Beckett's styleless style – or writing degree zero, with its process of undermining a statement upon its assertion – destabilises the meaning of the historical traces within his textual operations.[1]

A particular example of this occurs in the first of Beckett's *Texts for Nothing* (*Textes pour rien*, 1955), which, as Sean Kennedy has suggested, is haunted by an uncompleted mourning for an Ireland still present as a spectral landscape. *Texts for Nothing* is comprised of thirteen short prose pieces which Beckett composed after the completion of his Trilogy. Following the complete disintegration of the subject across *Molloy*, *Malone Dies* and *The Unnamable* (the subject is in motion in *Molloy*, stationary and dying in *Malone Dies*, and disembodied in the *Unnamable*), the first story of *Texts for Nothing* signals a return to the body and, with that, landscape description. On the first page of the first story, the milieu – "Quag, heath up to the knees, faint sheep-tracks, troughs scooped deep by rains [...]. Glorious prospect, but for the mist that blotted out everything, valleys, loughs, plain and sea" (Beckett 2010b, 3) – seems to signal an Irish landsape, one akin to the parts of the Dublin mountains which have often been dubbed "the Beckett Country". As does the subsequent suggestion that the narrator's "home" could be seen from his location: "[b]ut for the mist, with good eyes, with a telescope" (Beckett 2010b, 3). As is well known, Beckett's family home in Foxrock was within walking distance of the Dublin mountains. Similarly, Beckett's aphasic narrator has heard tell "of the view, the distant sea in hammered lead, the so-called golden vale so often sung, the double valleys, the glacial loughs, the city in its haze" (Beckett

1 For more on Beckett as a proponent of writing degree zero, see Rabaté 2016b.

2010b, 3). These details, which seem to indicate the narrator's proximity to the Irish sea, Dublin city, and the glacial valley of Glendalough, *Gleann Dá Loch* [valley of two lakes] in Irish, further reinforce a reading of Ireland as the setting of the text. And pertinently, Beckett does not subject these descriptions to the process of epistemic qualification and negation – cancelling a statement as it is uttered – that became the signature of his style. Indeed, Kennedy reads these geographic details deterministically. Taking Beckett and the narrative voice to be related, he writes that this "is an Irish place, as the mention of the 'golden vale' makes clear, one that is close to the narrator's homeland" (Kennedy 2009, 17). Thus, for Kennedy, "Irish landscapes persist in the work [...] partly because they sustain certain precious memories of the father" (2009, 17), for whom Kennedy reads *Texts for Nothing* as a nostalgic ode. Thus, "this subject is spoken by its ghosts, and all the voices that exert claims on him at various points in the *Texts* constitute elements of his personal hauntology" (Kennedy 2009, 17). Kennedy takes umbrage with the critic Jonathan Boulter, whose polemical reading of *Texts for Nothing* suggests that "trauma and mourning are deeply nostalgic concepts and processes that presuppose categories (self, history, memory) that themselves no longer have any operational viability" (Boulter 2004, 345). Against Boulter, Kennedy decries a (strawman) postmodern eradication of memory and history. Such ripostes were and are (unfortunately still) common to the perceived and misunderstood critiques of historicist methodologies in literary and cultural criticism. Notwithstanding, Kennedy has a good point, but so does Boulter, even if he generalises the implications of his cogent reading of *Texts for Nothing* too much when he suggests that the categories of self, memory, and history, because they are not readily applicable to Beckett, do not have broader operational viability in literary and cultural criticism. While Kennedy enables a model for personal and cultural memory to be read in *Texts for Nothing*, his reading sidelines the process of disintegration to which Beckett subjects his narrators. Thus, in pursuing his argument – Beckett's *Texts for Nothing* entails a difficult return to "painful landscapes of memory" (Kennedy 2009) – Kennedy's analysis risks deciding what remains undecidable in the text. His critique insists on *Texts for Nothing* as belated representation and bypasses Beckett's particular unravelling of the subject upon which the usual coherence of fiction is built. On this point, Boulter's argument is well taken: he suggests that the paradigms of trauma and mourning interact unconvincingly in *Texts for Nothing* because "we have a subject who cannot maintain with any certainty that the experiences he describes are in fact his own" (2004, 337). A pertinent feature of Beckett's texts with and after *Molloy* is a plural first-person narrative voice containing multiple speakers whose accounts overlap and disperse beyond the possibility of centralised accumulation. In the case of the narrator of the first story of *Texts for Nothing*, the self-estrangement particular to Beckett's character – "We seem to be more than

one" (3); "It's not me" (4); "I was my father and I was my son" (6) – undermines the possibility of a simple designation of a coherent subjectivity. Similarly, the narrator casts in doubt the consistency of its location: "How long have I been here, what a question, I've often wondered. And often I could answer, an hour, a month, a year, a century, depending on what I mean by here, and me, and being, there I never went looking for extravagant meanings, there I never much varied, only the here would sometimes vary" (4). Thwarting affiliation, Beckett's text dispenses with a coherent representation of a broader portrayal of an existing state of affairs in favour of a discontinuous and fragmentary narrative which is replete with absence and lacunae. While the account of the narrator's region invites a critical intervention to make it mean more than it relates, Beckett's ongoing *désoeuvrement* of the tenets of fiction makes the story overabundant and recalcitrant to deterministic explanation. Thus, what Boulter identifies – a split and unstable narrator that resists equation with an original subject or scene of trauma or loss – can only misleadingly be labelled a postmodern embrace of a free-play of difference. This notwithstanding, Kennedy is not wrong either to attempt to read the faint biographical, cultural, and historical traces in(to) Beckett's work. Beckett's text clearly invites investigation and consideration in this direction, though, crucially, it resists deterministic historicist explanation.

In turn, these facets of Beckett's writing raise an important question: is memory dependent on a stable subject or a geographical marker? In the case of Beckett, his styleless style, with its focus on absence, lacunae, and negation, defers the possibility of generating self-present meanings that would lead to the disclosure of historical referents. For this reason, Beckett's writing remains interminably open and resistant to contextual explication, and thus beyond accumulation to a historicist discourse that would complete and qualify the structural gaps of modernist literatures with historical details, or scale smoothly between the literary text and a macro historical metanarrative. As a result, Beckett's supposed referents are destinations that happen only after the fact of linguistic play taking place. This is not to deny the various important and real histories that precede the texts, but rather to suggest that these histories, because of the radical symbolism instituted through Beckett's aesthetic of diminution, can only arrive after the fact through the critical act, a circumstance which opens Beckett's modernism to radically different histories and ever new contingencies. Rendered through a strategy of epistemic qualification and negation, as well as a series of aporias, Beckett's text maintains an irreducible distance to any implied cultural predicament which it might be said to represent and thus can be read as both similar and irreducibly different to the cultural memories it supposedly transmits. In this sense, Beckett's text anticipates an insight which Jean-Michel Rabaté, whom we can perhaps position between Kennedy's historicism and Boulter's anti-traumatic reading, derives from Jacques

Lacan concerning the relation between truth, trauma, and fiction: "truth can only be brought to us through language; hence it is always 'half-said' [*mi-dite*] in a steady structure of fiction. Therefore, the part that has to be left unsaid, the other half of the half 'well-said', cannot be simply equated with the traumatic. The pathos of trauma is superfluous, for the 'holes' that any narrative contains are due to the structural conditions of language" (Rabaté 2016a, 160). Rabate's account of the relation between fiction and truth does not deny the potentiality of a historicist or traumatic reading of Beckett's (or any writer's) texts. Yet, with its focus on the status of fiction, it does not enable the accumulation of a traumatic or historical origin which would be the cause of linguistic abnormality or play. Simultaneously, Rabaté does not suggest that understandings of self, history, and memory are irrelevant to literary analysis. Rather, he indicates that these ideas, because of their grounding and communication in and through fiction, are always less transparent and more slippery than a deterministic historicist criticism allows. By these lights, Beckett's texts remain both similar and different to a memory of a personal or cultural event or history, a situation which is made even more complex and profound when we consider the question of (auto)translation which hangs over his corpus.

Lost in translation

Texts for Nothing was originally composed in French, wherein the potential Irish referents become less stable and more alien. The narrator's view of the landscape, when rendered as "la mer la-bas, au fond en plomb repoussé, la plaine dite d'or si souvent chantée, les doubles vallons, les lacs glaciaires, les fumées de la capital" (Beckett 1995, 117)[2] requires translation into an Irish context in order to operate referentially in terms of Irish history and geography. Thus, where the apparent Irish content of the first story of *Texts for Nothing* seems to allow for the text to be read in terms of specific criteria, the first text of *Textes pour rien* can problematise the stability of that mode of reading: the narrator's landscape is at an even greater remove from an Irish location in the French text. As such, Beckett's fictions always defer self-present meaning as they are elsewhere rendered in another language. Moreover, the self-translations confound the idea of the original text, as well

2 "of the view, the distant sea in hammered lead, the so-called golden vale so often sung, the double valleys, the glacial loughs, the city in its haze" (Beckett 2010b, 3).

as disfiguring its structure.[3] In this sense, Beckett radically foresees the idea of the born-translated novel (Beckett composed and adapted his works in multiple languages; he practised self-translation; he built problems of translation into his works), and contributes an important aesthetic coordinate to an ongoing philosophical conversation on exile and dispossession in one's own language. Prominently, Martin Heidegger located this problem in relation to national paradigms of thought in *Hölderlin's Hymn "The Ister"*. Underlining the necessary role that translation plays for a people in relation to its 'own' literature, Heidegger writes:

> To the extent that we have the need to interpret works of poetry and of thought in our own language, it is clear that each historical language is in and of itself in need of translation, and not merely in relation to foreign languages. This indicates in turn that a historical people is not of its own accord, that is, not without its own intervention, at home in its own language. (1996, 65)

Thus, for Heidegger, a national language and poetry are that which require continuous translation, in the hermeneutic sense, in order to be understood; simultaneously, a national language or poetry are that which can never be absolutely translated. Translation, then, is a necessary and interminable intervention concerning being-at-home in one's own language.

This question of being at home in one's own language was pushed to its radical limit by Jacques Derrida in *The Monolingualism of the Other; or, the Prosthesis of the Origin* (1998). In that autobiographical text concerning the relationship between language and the origin which would apparently give it stable meaning, Derrida demonstrates, through his methodological deployment of aporias, that language is both alienation itself and that it does not alienate anything. In this autobiographical text he writes of himself as a monolingual French speaker that

> speaks a language of which he is deprived. The French language is not his. Because he is therefore deprived of all language, and no longer has any other recourse [...] because this monolingual is in a way aphasic [...] he is thrown into absolute translation, a translation without a pole of reference, without an originary language, and without a source language. For him, there are only target languages, if you will, the remarkable experience being, however, that these languages just cannot manage to reach themselves because they no longer know

3 For example, Connor demonstrates that "Beckett's translation is concerned to bleed the two languages [French and English] together into a mixed or mongrel condition", where the act of "translation for Beckett would always seem to be at one and the same time an act of confederacy, and of secession, which always distinguishes two languages in the act of uniting them" (1988, 124). Mooney suggests that "we are forced into a realisation that Beckett's writings are never fully present to themselves, but are radically distracted from their textual moment" (2011, 19).

> where they are coming from, what they are speaking from and what the sense of their journey is. (Derrida 1998, 61)

Deprived in the sense of lacking ownership, language, for Derrida, "is never purely natural, nor proper, nor inhabitable [...]. There is no possible habitat without the difference of this exile and this nostalgia" (1998, 61). Thus, where a language requires translation for Heidegger, translation is a habitat for Derrida. Derrida's never inhabitable, natural, or proper monolingualism, and its sense of translation-without-origin as the predicament and motivation of writing, indicates an irreducible distance between a literature categorised in national terms and its relation to that nation's social and political history.

Beckett's work is exemplary in this respect; for his narrators, who have been "thrown into absolute translation", language "lacks nothing that precedes or follows it" (Derrida 1998, 25). The condition of translation haunting Beckett's work – the substitutability of all language which inhibits one's ability to coherently locate identity – is replete throughout his corpus. In *Molloy*, the eponymous character struggles to communicate successfully: "It is perhaps one of the reasons I was so untalkative, I mean this trouble I had in understanding not only what others said to me, but also what I said to them. It is true that in the end, by dint of patience, we made ourselves understood, but understood with regard to what, I ask of you, and to what purpose?" (Beckett 2009, 49). It is continued in *Malone Dies:* "But I tell myself so many things, what truth is there in all this babble?" (Beckett 2010a, 63). And it is pushed further in *The Unnamable* to completely distort the origins of the subject: "Having nothing to say, no words but the words of others, I have to speak"; "these voices are not mine, nor these thoughts, but the voices and thoughts of the devils who beset me" (Beckett 2010c, 25). Beckett's imbrication of absolute translation as habitat into his writing, which destabilises the identity and subjectivity of his characters, further problematises how and where we locate cultural memory in relation to his texts. Beckett's literature thus presents foundational questions regarding how we read radically symbolic texts as carriers of memory: do these texts transmit cultural memory? Or is cultural memory located in the texts through analysis and critical reading, and then, in a certain transgression of the form and style of the text, located as preceding the text and underpinning its play?

Burns and mimetic contagion

This history of aesthetic underdevelopment does not begin or end with Beckett (though it does perhaps find its apotheosis in his corpus, particularly when we con-

sider the question of auto-translation which his work presents). And neither is it confined to texts which refuse to close in on any obvious geographical location. James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), which doubles Dublin with various other locations is a prominent case in point. In his book *Tense Future*, the critic Paul Saint-Amour provides a pertinent example of how *Ulysses* operates in this respect: L.E.O Charlton, a Royal Air Force Officer, reads Joyce's novel precisely at the same time as he is considering the parameters of aerial warfare in Mesopotamia in 1922. Uncannily, Charlton finds that *Ulysses* can serve as a guidebook to the region. The radical symbolism of *Ulysses* enables, as Saint-Amour (2015) suggests, the strange star of Mesopotamia to hang over the bough of the novel.

Moreover, we can see this lineage continuing in contemporary letters. One such example is Anna Burns's Booker Prize winning *Milkman* (2018), a novel which, since its publication, has garnered attention for its Beckettian influences. Like the indeterminacy of Joyce's and Beckett's texts, *Milkman*, as critics have recognised, "is both a story of Belfast and its particular sins but it is also a story of anywhere" (*Irish Times* 2018). Indeed, Burns has suggested that though *Milkman* is "recognisable as this skewed form of Belfast, it's not really Belfast in the 1970s" (*The Guardian* 2018). In an interview in *The Guardian*, Burns suggested that she "would like to think it could be seen as any sort of totalitarian, closed society existing in similarly oppressive conditions. I see it as a fiction about an entire society living under extreme pressure, with long term violence seen as the norm" (*The Guardian* 2018). Critics have thus read the novel as a response to other regimes and their modus operandi, including medieval witch hunts, Stalinist Russia, the operations of the Taliban, the Skripal poisoning, and the broader context of the #MeToo movement. Like Beckett, then, Burns's text invites multivalent referents, a circumstance which begs us to consider her textual operation in modernist terms.

Indeed, the reception of *Milkman* bears a likeness to that of J. M. Coetzee's *Waiting for the Barbarians* (1980), which critics have read as a representation of South African Apartheid, and also as a novel about the power mechanisms of any kind of totalitarian control. And notably, Coetzee is very deliberate about the Beckettian influences in his work.[4] Like the potential referents of *Texts for Nothing*, *Waiting for the Barbarians* is overabundant in terms of the colonial and postcolonial themes it can be made to connect with. The novel's setting is a remote outpost on the territorial frontier of "the Empire" where natives are con-

4 In *Doubling the Point*, Coetzee writes: "Beckett has meant a great deal to me in my own writing – that much must be obvious. He is a clear influence on my prose. The essays I wrote on Beckett's style are not only academic exercises, in the colloquial sense of the word. They are also attempts to get closer to a secret, a secret of Beckett's that I wanted to make my own. And discard, eventually, as it is with influences" (1992, 25).

trolled by white and seemingly European forces, and so it remains translatable to extratextual historical referents. Notwithstanding, as Derek Attridge writes, "to allegorize is to translate the temporal and the sequential into the schematic: a set of truths, a familiar historical scene" (2005, 47). As Attridge suggests, Coetzee's novel is replete with moments and structures which both invite and defy critical equation with extratextual detail (manifested in the Magistrate's inability to understand his own setting), thus making the novel, like Beckett's work, both similar and different to the cultural memories it supposedly transmits.

Milkman is less referentially oblique than Beckett's *Texts* or Coetzee's novel. Simultaneously, it contains prominent features – a paranoid and digressive first-person style, a resistance to naming, a loss of stable difference between fiction and reality, an exploration of a society of spectacle – which make the novel recalcitrant and overabundant to accumulation in terms of an extratextual referent. In the following, I focus on Burns's resistance to naming the novel's location. More than an attempt to write Belfast or a universal novel relevant to any sort of totalitarian or closed society in oppressive conditions, Burns's text recounts a society lost in a generalised mimetism and ritualised behaviour, prominent features of what the critic Tyrus Miller has dubbed late modernism (for which Beckett serves as one of Miller's main examples). For Miller, a prominent characteristic of late modernism is the penetration of everyday life by mimetic practices. As Miller describes: "Such generalised mimetism was at once an involuntary process for individuals, a compulsory lowering of the threshold of difference between subjects and objects, their unconscious assimilation to an objective environment – and a social phenomenon consciously manipulable for political and commercial ends" (1999, 43). While Miller describes late modernism as an interwar phenomenon, many critics have expanded the temporal scope of the term since the publication of his book in 1999. Pertinently, his criteria are relevant to Burns's 2018 novel, wherein life and fiction merge into one another, making her characters imitators, and pre-programmed role-players in a social reality which has been depersonalised and deauthenticated to such a degree that the reality which middle sister, the novel's protagonist, inhabits seems more like theatre than a geographically locatable city.

Consider, for example, middle sister's description of the milkman, the eponymous character whose predations on her constitute the main arc of the novel:

> He may have been some chancer, some fantasist, one of those Walter Mitty people who, whilst not being in anything themselves, attempt, or even manage, to have built upon around themselves mythic reputations – in this case as some top renouncer intelligence gatherer – all based entirely on others' misperceptions of him. Could it be that this milkman had started off as one of the armchair supporters, the type who, in their ardour and fanaticism for

> the renouncers, sometimes went batty and started to believe, then to hint, then boast, that they themselves were renouncers? (Burns 2018, 116)[5]

Here, middle sister contemplates if the milkman had any authentic motive for his involvement in paramilitary activity; that is, whether his identity and reputation is as much based on mimicry and performance as it is on a genuine concern for the cultural conflict. While she speculates about the milkman, she is certain some characters in her social orbit have become lost in total translation. One such example is Somebody McSomebody, who is romantically interested in middle sister: "it happened to Somebody McSomebody. Certainly, he'd be in the throes of considering that he was some top-drawer renouncer himself" (117). And as middle sister continues, to become a leading state renouncer was to become a local James Bond: "This was Bond in his irresistible, irrepressible, superhuman, bucking-the-trend demeanour, especially the higher up the renouncer-ladder of rank any individual prepared to die for his cause happened to be" (120). Notably, ritualised behaviour extends beyond superhero identifications in the male populace. According to middle sister, the female community promotes the imitation of James Bond-like celebrity in their community: "Those fast, breathtaking, fantastically, exhilarating rebel-men [...] were the very men then, through whom these ambitious women hoped to fulfil their own cause" (121). Indeed, so pervasive is the culture of imitation that it obscures all human relations. Middle sister, for example, finds herself accused of taking part in this general scenario, despite her intentions to the contrary. Her mother admonishes her for being "drugged to the eyeballs [...] with ambitions, aspirations and dreams" (122). Middle sister must thus realise, as per her mother's recommendation, "that these men were not movie stars, that this was no make-believe, no template of a grand passion such as foolishly I pursued in those old-time story books" (122). The theatre of the community has thus seeped into the family unit and determines perceptions and relations between its members, whether or not they are following the pre-programmed social script. So theatricalised and involved in a generalised mimicry has society become that a mother can only assume, following reports from observers that middle sister was seen with a supposed paramilitary soldier, that her daughter has already been swept up in this involuntary process of contagion role-playing.

In *Milkman*, then, the evaporation of the distinction between art and life ensures the total mimetic contamination of the subject. The present has been flattened into a scenario of general mimetism through which life has been derealised and replaced with simulacra and spectacle and is determined by caricature and

5 In the following only page numbers of the novel will be given.

aestheticised social practices. The local, in this sense, is already alienated from itself; what Laanes calls "foreignising forms" (2021) – which interact with local memories to produce a global memory culture – are already integral to its structure. When middle sister suggests "these *were* the James Bonds" (120), she indicates that any original James Bond has been displaced by the total integration and assimilation of that character type in her community, so much so that the local James Bonds and any other James Bond are rendered on an equal and atemporal footing. In such terms, the locale is lost in a culture of total translation without a pole of reference. Already foreign to itself, the social world of Burns's *Milkman* bears strong similarities to Belfast throughout the 1970s and 80s, but also, because of the loss of stable difference which Burns represents, to other societies existing under oppressive conditions.

Burns's representation of the erosion of the subject may be read as provoked and determined by the historical condition of the Troubles in Northern Ireland; simultaneously, Burns's concern with the breakdown of the difference between fiction and life partakes in a broader late modernist preoccupation with a disintegration of symbolic unity, a circumstance which underpins the aesthetic scepticism of modern writing concerning imitative and realistic representation. In this latter sense, middle sister, her family, and her location all remain unnamed because modern literature, following the collapse of the myths of literary artifice, lacks the means to engage a re-presentation of reality in received and stable identitarian forms. Indeed, Burns invites us to question middle sister's account in this respect; when her mother admonishes her for conflating reality with "those old-time story books", we may wonder if the theatricalised society she represents is also dictated by the literary forms she is reading, and thus whether middle sister too is unable to sustain a difference between reality and fiction. In such terms, then, the textual operation of *Milkman*, like Beckett, Joyce, and Coetzee before, is both similar and different to the cultural memories it supposedly transmits.

Only the radically symbolic?

In conclusion, then: certain radically symbolic literatures, in the terms tended here via Barthes, Rancière and Beckett, are not so much moving memories but irreducible sites of attachment for a multitude of histories and memories. Through an investment in non-representation, aesthetic scepticism, a mobilisation of epistemological doubt, and obliquity, the respective and unique aesthetic modes of such literatures leave context and setting undefined rather than enacting and reinforcing their enclosure. As a result, we may suggest, such works remain untranslatable – in the sense that the untranslatable invites translation but is never satisfactorily

translated – to determined historical metanarratives. As such, we might often find more than one context, history, or memory which corresponds to, or seems to anchor, the play of the text in question.

Our critical bind in this instance thus asks us to consider whether historical memory proceeds or precedes the reading of the radically symbolic text. In turn, how we approach and understand mnemonic migration in literature becomes a question of methodology: do we locate the text in its context to enable the reading of literature as historical memory? This remains the obvious route in literary criticism today, even if ideology critique is on the wane. Indeed, the forms and styles of radically symbolic literatures will continue to be explicable and explicated through the histories of their places and times; Adorno, as we have seen, provides us with the validity of this perspective. Simultaneously, as I have been endeavouring to show, if we suspend certain historicist assumptions (within reason, of course), we might also analyse how a novel's formal and stylistic procedures resist signifying determined histories to enable the evocation of a host of other, perhaps hitherto unimagined, histories and memories. The texs by Joyce, Beckett, Coetzee and Burns cater for this possibility. For example, traces of distanced and dispersed cultures continue to be discovered in Joyce's *Finnegans Wake.* And perhaps the translatorial effects and over-nourishing signs of Beckett's prose also comprise the evasive and shameful means of dealing with his activity of expressing sympathy with former collaborationists – Georges Pelorson and Francis Stuart particularly – in the aftermath of the war. Such potentialities add another layer, less heroic and more bathetic, to the ethics of Beckett's fiction and his investment in a writing degree zero with its attendant distaste for pseudo-heroics.

Going one step further, and to end on a question: should we reduce such possibilities to radically symbolic literatures? And is Barthes's distinction between a moderately symbolic literature and a radically symbolic literature, though I find it very useful, really tenable? Thus, I am asking: can we read more moderately symbolic literatures as radically symbolic texts to show how such novels can also operate as irreducible sites of attachment for a multitude of histories and memories? Indeed, an answer to this question was already provided by Jakob Lothe in his wonderful talk at the "Mnemonic Migration" conference held in Copenhagen in 2023, from which this collection of essays springs. There, Lothe argued that Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989), by refraining from qualifying the gaps in the text with historical details, resisted symptomatic and psychobiographical reading. Lothe followed the moderately symbolic textual operation of *The Remains of the Day* to show how Ishiguro's narrative omissions, which are secrets without secret and crypts without depth in the text, remain recalcitrant and overabundant to historicist explanation, in the process restoring the iterability of the literary work and its irreducibility to historical metanarratives.

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