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WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY IN ST. LOUIS
Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures

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The German Jewish Post-Holocaust Novel: Narrative and a Literary Language for Loss

by

Corey L. Twitchell

A dissertation presented to the
Graduate School of Arts & Sciences
of Washington University in
partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree
of Doctor of Philosophy

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Corey L. Twitchell

Washington University in St. Louis

May 2015

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

The German Jewish Post-Holocaust Novel: Narrative and a Literary Language for Loss

by

Corey L. Twitchell

Doctor of Philosophy in Germanic Languages and Literatures

Washington University in St. Louis, 2015

Professor Erin McGlothlin, Chair

This dissertation investigates how a constellation of German Jewish post-Holocaust novels confronts the paradox of recovering and recuperating lost stories of Holocaust victims. I analyze how works by Edgar Hilsenrath, Jurek Becker, and Fred Wander reveal a preoccupation with the innumerable stories and testimonies of the individuals who did not survive the Nazi Judeocide to contribute to the archive of experience. These novels gesture toward an epistemological alternative to this loss: they consider possibilities for recovering the unarchivable. These German Jewish authors employ a particular cluster of varied narrative strategies: the dialogic, linguistic and cultural elements of Eastern European Jewish culture, and a literary trope I term the “almost lost story,” as components of a narrative practice that allows the novels’ narrators—and by extension, the readers—to imagine a discursive space for this disnarrated testimony, or “anti-archive.” This study uncovers the extent to which post-Holocaust German Jewish literature is underpinned by a conception of *Ashkenaz* that encompasses both German Jewish and Eastern European Jewish culture and thought. My dissertation shows that the problems of trauma, loss, memory, and memorialization in post-1945 German Jewish fiction are above all problems of narrativity.

Introduction:

The German Jewish Post-Holocaust Novel: Narrative and a Literary Language for Loss

“This is also a way—perhaps the only way—to listen to what is unsaid.”

--Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*¹

Tynset

German Jewish author and visual artist Wolfgang Hildesheimer's 1965 novel *Tynset* features an anonymous, melancholy insomniac narrating-I that relates his search for nocturnal diversion by thumbing through a stack of nighttime reading options, none of which prove to be sufficiently soporific to lull him to sleep. Instead of slumber, this series of reading materials engenders one digression after another, all of which cumulatively make up the novel's narrative. Ensnared in his “Winterbett” (7), holed up in an ancient, drafty domicile that creaks and moans with every movement of the wind, Hildesheimer's narrator reaches for a 1963 Norwegian railway guide consisting of page after page of train schedules for destinations never visited. While flipping through this “Kursbuch,” he ponders at length images evoked by the phonetic quality of the names of several Norwegian locales, including the eponymous town Tynset's “metallen” two-syllable moniker (25), distinguished by the presence of the letter “y” that is “noch nicht einmal recht aussprechbar” (26). As if fueled by the Latin proverb “nomen est omen,” the narrator engages in something akin to a vespertine game of nominative determinism, extrapolating elaborate, discrete descriptions of various Norwegian hamlets based on what he assumes he can glean from appellation alone. This epistemological inquiry into the significance of the interplay between sign and referent propels him to interrupt his monologue on the acoustics of Norway's place names, as he recalls his former habit of turning to a German telephone book during periods of sleeplessness when he previously lived in Germany. Shifting from the present tense to the past tense and from a Norwegian reference work to a German one, the text's narrating-I transfers, by way of analepsis or narrative flashback, his enthusiasm for

¹ Giorgio Agamben, *Remnants of Auschwitz*, 14.

² In “Antworten über *Tynset*,” Hildesheimer specifically identifies these figures in the text as perpetrators who

nomenclature from one target to the next, switching from the designations for geographical locations to the names of German citizens. As a result of this analepsis, the reader learns what compelled the narrator to leave Germany in the first place.

After having perused the seemingly innocuous telephone book, the narrator endeavored to interpret the copious pages filled with generic German surnames. He explains how he concluded that “die Dokumentation ist nicht vollständig, es klaffen Lücken, in denen jene sitzen, die kein Telefon haben” (29). Here, he concerns himself with both the narrated and the disnarrated, with what the text reveals and what it also simultaneously obscures. He recounts how he had imagined the names that do not appear in the pages of the telephone book and the reasons for their absence, which range from the benign to the potentially sinister:

Es fehlt das schadenfrohe Lächeln einer Geheimnummer, der abgewandte Blick des Außenseiters, der das Telefon verschmäht, und die Gefallsucht des feinsinnigen Verächters, der schon seit je auf seinen Anschluß verzichtet hat, um sich seiner Mißachtung rühmen zu können, alle diese sind von den Tintenfingern der Ämter nicht erfaßt. (29)

Devising something akin to a thought experiment regarding the sociological landscape of postwar West Germany, Hildesheimer’s narrator attempted to profile the various personalities or social types that might desire to remain so anonymous as to never appear in the local telephone directory. Some individuals may simply wish to lead lives of peaceful seclusion; others, the narrator suggests here, coquettishly thumb their noses at the governmental authorities charged with the task of keeping tabs on the Federal Republic’s citizenry. While pondering the sort of West German citizen who might wish to remain unattainable by way of a public telephone directory, Hildesheimer’s narrator, gesturing toward “das Verdrängte” (29) in postwar German

society, found himself compelled to orchestrate acts of telephonic revenge against individuals whom he identified as criminals, “die verjährten und pensionierten Verbrecher im Kreise ihrer Schwiegerkinder und Enkel” (30).

Hildesheimer’s narrator reminisces about how he, while flipping through this telephone book, stumbled upon a name that he recognized as belonging to a neighbor with whom he shared barely a passing acquaintance. Pondering the name “Huncke,” while peering out at his neighbor’s window and desiring to test the accuracy of the information provided by the telephone book, the narrator impulsively dialed the phone number. Having successfully roused his neighbor, as evidenced by both the sudden illumination of an apartment window across the street and a drowsy voice announcing the name “Huncke,” the narrator improvised a line of conversation, engaging the man in an impromptu dialogue about guilt. The narrator asked Huncke whether the man suffers from feelings of guilt. While the narrator claims that he for his part could answer the question with a simple negative, Huncke’s voice betrayed an individual both riddled with guilt and incapable of coping with the complex emotions arising from having perpetrated some unspoken deed. The narrator received a highly emotional response from his interlocutor that quickly escalated from hesitant wavering to staccato virulence: “Seine Stimme zitterte, als er nun sprach, seine Schuld war aufgerufen, war plötzlich ins Unermeßliche angewachsen, er zischte unter dem Atem: ‘Warte nur! Bald sind wir wieder da! Dann geht es Euch an den Kragen!’” (32-33). Huncke initially addressed his interlocutor in the singular, before immediately shifting to the plural. Provoked by specific circumstances to which the narrator was not privy, Huncke delineated an ostensibly clear boundary between two sets of entities in his deployment of the plural first- and second-person pronouns “wir” and “Euch,” referring to a population apparently divided into two distinct groups: “we” and “you.” The

antagonism imminent in the threat of violence that the man predicted would be ushered in when the “we” group, to which he claimed to belong, returned to power resembles an us-versus-them mentality. During this telephone conversation, Huncke claimed allegiance to a group that has unfinished business with this unidentified group labeled as “you,” establishing a strict dichotomy between the two subject positions.

The episode then escalated further when the narrator, thrilled by a sense of momentary triumph in compelling his interlocutor to admit his feelings of guilt, replied to Huncke’s belligerence with a threat of his own. Though he claims not to know to whom Huncke’s “Euch” exactly referred (“Ich weiß nicht, wen er mit ‘Euch’ meinte” [33]), Hildesheimer’s narrator occupied the “you” subject position in opposition to his German interlocutor’s “we,” at least rhetorically. The narrator, continuing the performance, exclaimed into the telephone receiver, “Herr Huncke, hören Sie mir jetzt bitte gut zu: es ist alles entdeckt. Alles, verstehen Sie? Ich möchte Ihnen daher raten: fliehen Sie, solange Ihnen noch Zeit bleibt!” (33). As if engaging in a game of poker, the narrator called Huncke’s bet and raised the stakes, claiming that Huncke’s “we” will be stymied by the loss of anonymity and some other external authority that has been allegedly “discovered” or been alerted to their identity. The narrator stated that flight from his home (and perhaps exile) would be Huncke’s only avenue for avoiding what he implied would be the German’s detection, imprisonment, and possible prosecution for some unnamed criminal act. And the narrator’s ploy proved successful. Shortly after both parties had ended the call, he observed from his window how Huncke’s apartment became the site of a flurry of late-night activity that culminated in an obscured figure evacuating the building accompanied only by two suitcases and speeding off in a taxi (33). Huncke failed to realize that his mysterious interlocutor clandestinely observed his midnight departure.

What may at first glance appear to be a willfully malicious prank has specific historical implications when we consider the larger socio-cultural context in which this nocturnal telephone conversation is situated. The narrator clearly explains that he placed the telephone call while residing in West Germany, a few years prior to the time of narration, and the 1963 date of the Norwegian “Kursbuch” further establishes the setting as the second decade following the end of World War II. Though the narrator did not explicitly accuse Huncke of being a Nazi, his inquiry regarding guilt most certainly evokes one of the dominant discourses that defined postwar German engagement with the recent National Socialist past—namely the “Schuldfrage” (Brockmann 21). When Hildesheimer’s narrator mentions “Schuld” in a text published in 1965, while embroiled in an antagonistic telephone conversation with a randomly selected West German citizen, he implicitly references a larger historical framework of which the highly charged postwar debates in the Federal Republic regarding German guilt were a constitutive component. As Robert C. Holub explains, “In the immediate postwar years, guilt was not an abstract concept, and while the Allies were in a position to decide how to deal with the most abhorrent Nazi criminals, the Germans were left to themselves to confront the appalling crimes undertaken in their name” (825). By introducing the question of guilt, the narrator invites the reader to ponder who belongs to the two groups “we” and “you” to which Huncke referred. For a narrating-I that demonstrates himself to be preoccupied, if not obsessed, with ascribing meaning to the names of people and places, Hildesheimer’s narrator appears to skirt the issue of historical particularity in favor of an open-endedness derived from the lack of precisely articulated nomenclature—but only at first. As the episode unfolds and the narrator depicts how he had placed a number nighttime phone calls, each conversation with a different interlocutor, it becomes evident that he had been engaged in tracking down former Nazis and had been situating

himself, in the context of these conversations with Huncke and those that followed, in the subject position of a Jewish Holocaust survivor and witness to Nazi crimes. We soon realize that Huncke used the pronoun “we” to describe a cohort of Nazi criminals and the pronoun “you” to refer to their past and potentially future Jewish victims.

Taking pleasure in this thrill, Hildesheimer’s narrator repeated this act of revenge on several additional occasions, enjoying his ability to intimidate his interlocutors. After Huncke, he telephoned, among others he can no longer remember, men with last names such as Kabasta, Malkusch, Obwasser, and Selbach. All these recipients of the narrator’s phone calls fled as a result of the conversation, with the exception of Kabasta. The phone call to Kabasta, the last one that the narrator made of this sort, distinguished itself by the fact that the narrator had been personally acquainted with this interlocutor in some way prior to the conversation.

Hildesheimer’s narrator explains that he knew Kabasta to be capable of violence or criminal deeds (“Er war der einzige Partner in meinem Spiel, von dessen Existenz—einer furchtbaren Existenz—ich vorher gewußt, and dazu der einzige, den ich jemals gesehen hatte” [42]). At an earlier moment in the postwar period, the narrator had once sat at a table next to Kabasta in a German inn and had observed him carousing with fellow members of a hunting party, drinking copious amount of beer and liquor, devouring “etwas Schreckliches,” and raucously recounting detailed war stories (43). Kabasta’s loud and boorish behavior at the inn reminded the narrator that he had been seen the man at some point previously, during the war (we assume that the war to which he refers is World War II). The narrator had once witnessed Kabasta murder an acquaintance named Bloch. Hildesheimer’s narrator explains that Bloch “war, soweit ich mich jetzt erinnere, der einzige Mensch, den ich jemals gekannt habe, der sich buchstäblich sein Grab selbst schaufelte” (63). After Bloch had been forced to dig his own grave, Kabasta shot him in

the back of the head, letting the man's body crumple and fall into the freshly dug pit. What unfolds here in the text is an doubled act of witnessing: the narrator had witnessed Kabasta kill a man in cold blood and then witnessed him some years later living in apparent impunity, enjoying German village life and serving as the local "Landrat" (42).

Though Hildesheimer's narrator does not explicitly name the circumstances in which the murder of Bloch and his witnessing of it took place, he nonetheless provides clues that link this murder to the Holocaust. In the same paragraph that he relates the fate of his acquaintance Bloch, the narrator also discusses a woman named Doris Wiener who perished "in einer Gaskammer . . . installiert von der Firma Föttle und Geiser" (63). What emerges with this overt reference to a gas chamber, in conjunction with the narrator's recollections of perished comrades and his erstwhile habit of placing phone calls to perpetrators like Kabasta, is the self-portrait of a Holocaust survivor representing, in stream-of-consciousness fashion, his struggle not only with the past, but also with the present in postwar Germany. The narrator implies that he had been a fellow prisoner along with Bloch, perhaps in a concentration camp where Kabasta had served as a guard or some other figure of authority. The narrator is perhaps the sole witness in West Germany who could attest to the grisly circumstances of the man's death. Additionally, the narrator reveals that he once beheld "Lampenschirme . . . aus heller menschlicher Haut, gefertigt in Deutschland von einem deutschen Bastler, der heute als Pensionär in Schleswig-Holstein lebt" (139), thus referencing grisly deeds perpetrated by Nazi officials against Jewish victims. Details such as these provide the reader clues that Hildesheimer is actively engaged in depicting, explicitly and implicitly, "die unmittelbare deutsche Vergangenheit und Gegenwart" (Lea 43). A subsequent reference to the narrator's family further establishes him as a Jewish Holocaust survivor. In *Encrypting the Past*, Kirstin Gwyer argues that "[e]ven the narrator's own father is included in

the ranks of the victims [discussed] in *Tynset*" (190). His father, who "nicht sanft ins Jenseits hinübergeschlummert [ist], sondern erschlagen von christlichen Familienvätern aus Wien und Weserland" (156) perished as a result of "Christian" brutality. In opposition to these Christian patriarchs from throughout the German-speaking world meting out violence and death, the narrator and his father emerge as non-Christian, i.e. Jewish, victims of Nazi violence. At a subsequent moment in the text, the narrator remarks that, while envisioning a jaunt through a German city called Wilhelmstadt, he feels the architecture of the city come to life, forcing him step by step into the "Judengasse, wo ich hingehöre" (118). The narrator reveals himself to be a German Jew who can provide eyewitness testimony to events associated with the Holocaust. And the men whom he calls on the telephone all have a past as Nazi perpetrators.² The narrator's recollections of these phone calls and the moments of witnessing that engendered them form a Holocaust testimony.

After having furtively observed Kabasta living in impunity in postwar West Germany, Hildesheimer's narrator felt compelled to add him to his list of phone call recipients. He explains how he had hoped to produce "in einem solchen Mann auch nur das geringste Schwindelgefühl" (42). While Huncke, as well as several additional conversational partners, was ultimately intimidated into fleeing, Kabasta called his bluff, as it were, and threatened to track him down (44-45). Fearing that he had stumbled upon someone without feelings of guilt or remorse, with unknown resources and connections, the narrator hung up on Kabasta and put an end to his game of revenge. The narrator, suffering great anxiety as a result of his conversation with this man, chose to leave Germany shortly thereafter. It is only in the act of exile that the narrator claims to

² In "Antworten über *Tynset*," Hildesheimer specifically identifies these figures in the text as perpetrators who played a role in the Nazi Judeocide: "Obwasser und Kabasta existieren tausendfach, ich kenne sie, ich war Simultandolmetscher in Nürnberg, war auch bei außergerichtlichen Verhören zugegen, und ich weiß auch, wer frei ausging und noch geht. Auch den Lampenschirmen aus menschlicher Haut—und Schlimmeres—habe ich gesehen. Ob der Verfertiger heute noch in Schleswig-Holstein lebt, weiß ich nicht, halte es aber für wahrscheinlich" (384).

have been able to escape this feeling of dread caused by the presence of these men—only after he had fled the country (“Heute hat sich diese Angst gelegt, seit ich mich ihnen entzogen habe” [39]). Although the narrator claims that he relished these few moments in which he was able to intimidate this series of Holocaust perpetrators (with the exception of Kabasta), their seemingly ubiquitous presence in postwar Germany leaves him feeling perpetually unsettled. In *Tynset*, “the most important thematic nexus,” Gwyer argues, “is made up of variations on the theme of persecution, which are played out in reference to an ever-growing assortment of so-called ‘Häscher,’ shadowy figures from the past” (189). The narrator feels as if one of these “Häscher” could at any moment emerge to do him harm. With these “Häscher,” the narrator conjures both the idea of Nazi perpetration and the presence of former Nazi officials and agents of varying degrees of complicity in the National Socialist regime who often lived in postwar West Germany in a state of ostensible legal indemnity. The narrator also depicts himself as a Jewish Holocaust survivor whose attempts to live postwar Germany leave him unable to shake the sensation of being persecuted.

While the cultural discussion surrounding German guilt in the immediate years of the postwar period often failed to address Jewish victimization in particular, Germans found themselves increasingly confronted with the atrocities associated with the Holocaust. By the time Hildesheimer published *Tynset* in 1965, Germany’s “Schuldfrage” negotiated questions of German guilt and the Nazi past in light of a burgeoning discourse surrounding witness testimonies of Holocaust survivors, nourished in part as a result of the widely publicized prosecution of high-ranking Nazi official Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 and the 1963-65 Auschwitz Trials held in Frankfurt. The polarizing division between the “we” and “you” that Huncke evoked during the first nighttime telephone conversation, when considered within the

larger sequence of telephone calls and the information that the narrator reveals, resembles a confrontation between a Nazi perpetrator and Jewish Holocaust survivor. Seen in this light, Huncke's "we" refers to the Nazis and his use of the "you" pronoun refers to Jews. Huncke threatened the return of the Nazis to power and a continuation of the Nazi persecution of European Jews. This conversation recalls the dynamic between and discussions regarding the concepts of *Täter* and *Opfer* in postwar Germany. And because the confrontation and Huncke's flight are initiated and staged by the narrator who slips into the subject position of "you" in opposition to the German's "we," the dialogue emerges as an act of revenge, specifically Jewish revenge.

But rather than revenge in the form of physical punishment or imprisonment, the narrator's vengeance arises as a result of the act of witnessing—through the assertion of knowledge of the past deeds of these "Häscher." In *Remnants of Auschwitz*, Giorgio Agamben outlines revenge as one of various reasons that drove Holocaust survivors to bear witness to their experiences in Nazi-run ghettos and concentration camps in the form of testimony (15). The acts of telephonic revenge in Hildesheimer's novel, an extension of previous acts of witnessing such as that of the murder of Bloch, employs the language of guilt, perpetration, and witnessing for the purpose of exposing Huncke, Kabasta, and the others, with the intent of driving them from their position of postwar bourgeois comfort in unidentified West German locales. Hildesheimer's narrator deploys the discursive tools of the perpetrator-victim dynamic to tease out the guilt lying dormant in the psyche of an otherwise average German citizen (a tack that proved successful, until the phone call with Kabasta). The telephone receivers into which the narrator and the "Häscher" speak recall the electronic devices used for simultaneous translation and interpretation during court cases. We are reminded of the images of Eichmann sitting behind a bulletproof

shield during his trial in Israel, intently listening to the German translation of the court proceedings by way of a headset nestled against his ears. Other notable war crime tribunals also come to mind, such as the Nuremberg Trials (at which Hildesheimer served as a simultaneous interpreter). The narrator's midnight phone calls resemble aspects of such courtroom scenarios. By inquiring as to whether his interlocutors experience feelings of guilt, Hildesheimer's narrator seeks to provoke them to confess their crimes, to admit their past deeds as Nazi perpetrators.

But these technological devices—the telephone, the headset—also emphasize the act of communication. The narrator's act of revenge is made possible by dialogue, however fraught with tension it may be. The narrator's engagement with Huncke, Kabasta, and the others is both confrontation and conversation. The interplay between two discrete voices, I argue, creates a discursive space in the narration for the dialogical interaction between “we” and “them”—between perpetrator and victim. This dialogical interaction interrupts the narrator's monologue (and his insomniac solitude), serving as a vehicle for a Jewish Holocaust survivor to begin to address and come to terms with the Nazi past.

The German Jewish Post-Holocaust Novel

I take the example of Hildesheimer's *Tynset* as a starting point for *The German Jewish Post-Holocaust Novel: Narrative and a Literary Language for Loss*, because it encapsulates many of the philosophical, historical, aesthetic, and linguistic concerns that German-language Jewish writers confront in the post-Holocaust period. The novel also highlights many of the narrative features that I identify and discuss in the four German-language Jewish post-Holocaust novels that I explore in the following four chapters. The episode with the telephone calls highlights part of what is at stake for German and Austrian Jews writing in the wake of the Holocaust, in a language problematized on account of its implementation and instrumentalization

under National Socialism, for an audience often more concerned with the recent German past and Germans' own problems of guilt or notions of victimhood than with the experiences of the victims of the Nazi regime. Hildesheimer's novel gestures toward the problems inherent to representing for a postwar German readership the survivor's traumatic past and traumatized present, including the difficulties posed by the act of witnessing in the framework of the German language. These problems include the mode of address, the representation of voice, the search for dialogue between perpetrator and victim, and anxiety regarding the possibilities and limitations of narrative. Hildesheimer's text reminds us that the problems German Jewish authors face after 1945 are both mitigated by and further complicated through the act of narration. The novels analyzed in this dissertation all reveal a preoccupation with narration and narrative, as they self-reflexively, often by way of the figure of the narrator, call attention to the process of telling and bearing witness to the Holocaust. The narrators, who often position themselves as eyewitnesses to the traumatic violence of the Shoah, reflect on the act of relating not only their own stories, but also stories belonging to others who perished.

This dissertation is a study of a constellation of post-Holocaust novels by German Jewish authors that articulate, through particular narrative strategies, an alternative history or "anti-history" of the Nazi Judeocide. I analyze *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* and *Der Nazi und der Friseur* by Edgar Hilsenrath, *Jakob der Lügner* by Jurek Becker, and *Der siebente Brunnen* by Fred Wander to demonstrate how the writers, all of whom survived the events of the Shoah, respond through imaginative fiction to the loss of millions of lives and millions of stories—the lost testimonies—of these millions of lives. Because these millions of Jews did not survive, their stories in turn cannot contribute to the archive of historical experience. In grappling with this disnarrated body of Holocaust testimony—the lost minute details of individual lives that cannot

be recorded and therefore fall largely outside of the purview of history—these novels gesture toward that which has been lost and thus resists representation on account of its very absence. In constant tension with the historical reality of the Holocaust, the alternative history or “anti-history” articulated in these novels provides scenarios that both imagine the possibility of Jewish agency through narrative and simultaneously underscore the limitations of narrative and its inability to change the past.

This novelistic engagement with the Holocaust is, I argue, both commemorative and elegiac. In four chapters, each devoted to one of the four novels under consideration, I examine how Becker, Hilsenrath, and Wander revive various aspects of the Eastern European Jewish literary tradition prior to the Shoah, while simultaneously mourning the loss of Eastern European Jewry. I employ the term elegiac particularly with respect to the ways in which *Jakob der Lügner*, *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, and *Der siebente Brunnen* pay tribute to the lost world of Ashkenaz.³ The elegy is an expression of grieving or lamentation that channels the emotional process of mourning into an aesthetic form. For their part, these novels lament the near eradication of Eastern European Jewish culture, and this lamentation pays tribute to this culture, at least in part, by incorporating and aestheticizing in the German language elements of Yiddish literary culture—Yiddish being one of the primary languages of *Ostjudentum* (especially in the eyes of many German-speaking Jews). In these texts, Becker, Hilsenrath, and Wander tend to focus on the experiences of Eastern European Jewry in the Holocaust rather than those of German Jews, even though these texts were all written in German and by German-speaking Jews. It is not that the history and culture of German Jews lacks relevance or importance for these authors—quite the contrary. By highlighting elements of Ashkenaz, these texts explore

³ I use “Ashkenaz” here as a synonym for Eastern European Jewry, though the term can technically refer to Germany as well.

cultural, historical, and linguistic connections and links between German Jews and Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jews. To some extent, these post-Holocaust novels present a German Jewish articulation of the process of commemorating Ashkenaz, a version of German Jewish memory of Eastern European Jews. By memorializing and mourning primarily the near destruction of Eastern European Jewish life, these works engage, to various degrees, thematically with the population that made up both the center of density of Jewish life in Europe and the vast majority of Holocaust victims. In my view, these texts offer a meditation on the process of seeking a sign for a referent that resists easy signification. I do not wish to suggest here that the Holocaust is ineffable, for these novels, along with many other works of fiction and non-fiction, demonstrate the contrary. But the near destruction of Ashkenaz as a result of the Nazi Judeocide and the magnitude of this loss present a challenge in terms of representation. In other words, these texts endeavor to articulate a narrative framework that can gesture toward that which was and that which is no more: the presence of Eastern European Jewish life prior to the Holocaust and its absence after. Additionally, these authors all have biographical connections to Eastern European Jewry: Becker grew up in a Jewish family in Łódź, Poland and spent much of his early childhood in the Jewish ghetto there after the Nazis occupied the city in 1939; Hilsenrath spent a portion of his youth living in the *shtetl* Sereth in the Romanian Bukovina before being deported to the ghetto Mogilev-Podolsk in 1941; and Wander grew up in Vienna in a working class Jewish family, the son of recent immigrants from Galicia.

Their texts evince, in varying degrees, a preoccupation with Eastern European Jewish life prior to the Holocaust that encompasses the following: the spaces associated with Ashkenaz, such as the *shtetl*; cultural and literary practices such as storytelling; and Yiddish language and literature. My investigation reveals how three of these novels, *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*,

Der siebente Brunnen, and *Jakob der Lügner*, specifically incorporate Yiddish modes of storytelling and defining elements of Yiddish narrative style in the tradition of writers such as Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Yankev Amramovitsh (also known as Mendele Moykher Sforim). In the case of all four novels, I explore the dialogic, or the interactions among various voices and levels of narration, as well as a literary trope I term the “almost lost story.” All of these narrative elements are deployed in various configurations to engage an active search for a metonymical stand-in for the many stories and testimonies of Holocaust victims that cannot be told. The “almost lost story” serves as a moment of resistance to an otherwise infinite ellipsis that can never be truly filled in. Taking into account both historical analysis and critical insights from the field of narrative theory, I pose questions about how these narratives operate both thematically and structurally. Novelistic discourse allows for the emergence of a sustained use of various rhetorical strategies in narrative. The long form of the novel provides these authors the wide range of possibilities available in imaginative fiction to formulate an “anti-history” of the Holocaust that privileges the personal minutiae of lost millions over an often seamlessly constructed history that has no access to the anti-archival evidence of lost testimony. In the German Jewish post-Holocaust novel, lost testimony can be accounted for and (at least partially) documented and recuperated through imaginative fiction.

Voice

One of the principal concerns of my investigation into these texts is voice. For the purposes of this dissertation, *voice* refers to two distinct, yet often interwoven or interlocking, narrative components. Firstly, voice refers to the human voice as it is represented in narrative, often in the form of reported speech. The novels that I analyze are all characterized by a preoccupation with rendering voices, either in the form of the narrator’s own voice or in various forms of reported speech placed into the mouths of various characters. These post-Holocaust

novels represent the voices of a survivor-narrator who survives to bear witness both to personal experience and to reconstruct the voices—and by extension, the lives and stories—of perished friends, comrades, and fellow prisoners in ghettos and concentration camps. These narratorial voices thus mediate the voices of others. In *Der siebente Brunnen* and *Jakob der Lügner*, the principal narrators situate themselves as Holocaust survivors whose primary concern is employing narrative as a mode for memorializing those who perished and cannot speak for themselves. In this respect, the narrators deployed by Becker and Wander both rely on narrative form to provide an avenue for representing their memories of individuals whom they once knew. In *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, an unidentified narrator constructs a text with parallel narrative strands. One strand represents the words of the eponymous Jossel Wassermann, who survives the Holocaust after emigrating to Switzerland and leaving his hometown, the *shtetl* Pohodna, behind, while another strand depicts the words and deeds of various residents of Pohodna in the moment of their deportation by train to a concentration or death camp. The devious narrator Max Schulz in *Der Nazi und der Friseur* represents his own voice, as both narrator and as character, in the diegesis. On the extradiegetic level, he is the perpetrator Max Schulz, and on the diegetic level, he speaks in the purloined voice and identity of Holocaust victim Itzig Finkelstein. While inhabiting both subject positions, Max emphasizes the representation of speech, often in the form of direct quotation.

Secondly, *voice* refers to narrative voice or narrative perspective. My investigation into these four novels is underpinned by an understanding of narrative voice nourished by narratologist Gérard Genette's interrelated concepts of mood and voice. Genette famously employs terms lifted from the field of structural linguistics and applies them more broadly to narrative texts. According to his framework, "mood" and "voice," which conventionally refer to

aspects of verbal tense in language, help readers of narrative to formulate answers to “the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*” (186). For Genette, the otherwise ostensibly “indicative” mood of all narratives, whose purpose is “simply to tell a story and therefore to ‘report’ facts (real or fictive),” can be complicated by considering the manifold ways in which narrators represent themselves and the characters for whom they are responsible (161). While narrative itself is never conditional or subjunctive per se, what is narrated is communicated with varying degrees of reliability and with various “voices.” Sometimes we encounter the voices and perspectives of characters provided by a narrator who obscures his or her own presence in the act of narration. At other times, the narrator plays a demonstrative role in showing the reader what and how he or she narrates.

And because the narrators in the four novels under analysis here are all in the position to tell stories belonging to victims of the Holocaust, we see an anxiety about their own role in telling the stories and representing the words of individuals who, on account of historical violence, cannot provide testimony in their own right. Genette’s hesitation regarding the “mood” of narrative takes on particular contours, I argue, when considering Holocaust literature in general and these novels more specifically. In their own way, the principal narrators in these novels all raise the following epistemological questions: What would happen if I were not here to tell these stories? Can my telling do justice, however incomplete it may be, to those whom I endeavor to memorialize? How does narrative perspective occlude or reveal the essence of those who cannot speak in their right? The “mood” of these novels, while indicative in a strict sense, all border on the subjunctive or the conditional. Without the intervention of the narrator, the stories related would be lost to oblivion. To combat this anxiety, these narrators emphasize the

representation of speech and the voices of others, thus also highlighting the process of mediation and the role of narrative perspective.

The Dialogic

The preoccupation in these texts with the representation of voices often expresses itself in the interaction between two voices or among multiple voices. All the principal narrators in the novels that I explore demonstrate a desire to represent the act of verbal communication with other voices—other human subjectivities, be they real and remembered according to the logic of the story world or imagined. This interaction produces, I argue, dialogical exchange between discrete subjectivities, often between the figure of the character-narrator and other characters in the text. In addition, the narrators of these texts often deploy metaleptic shifts back and forth between diegesis and extradiegesis. These shifts in turn engender self-conscious reflection on the extradiegetic level regarding the process of narration occurring on the diegetic level. This metaleptic oscillation also energizes dialogical interplay among the structural levels of narration. For the purposes of this dissertation, I propose an understanding of the terms “dialogical exchange” and “dialogical interplay” that is consonant with Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the dialogic. In discussing the term *heteroglossia*, Bakhtin explains the concept of *double-voiced discourse*, in which we find “two voices, two meanings, and two expressions that are dialogically interrelated [...]” (324). Though Bakhtin principally argues that double-voiced discourse involves the voice of the author and that of the character, his discussion sheds light on the dialogical interplay between narrators and characters in the four post-Holocaust novels that I discuss. What we encounter in these texts are various constellations of voices in communication with one another. At times, these exchanges resemble diaphony, while at other junctures a multitude of voices in conversation with one another, such as in *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, have a

multivocal character. The dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense emerges out of the interaction between separate identities, orchestrated by the character-narrator.

Overview of Chapters

In my first chapter, I analyze how Hilsenrath's *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* establishes metaliterary links to Sholem Aleichem's *Railroad Stories* in his deployment of a poetics of locomotive movement that creates a literary bridge between Yiddish-language depictions of Jewish train travel prior to World War II and the ubiquitous post-Holocaust trope of the cattle car associated with the "Final Solution." What emerges is a post-Holocaust railroad story in the tradition of Sholem Aleichem and other Yiddish writers. Although the world belonging to the Jews from the Eastern European *shtetl* Pohodna, and by extension the entirety of Eastern European Jewry, would, as the narrator elegiacally remarks, never again be the same after the Holocaust, the novel is predicated on a narrative practice that attempts to represent literarily and to recuperate facets of this lost world. This chapter investigates the mechanics of this recuperation, demonstrating how Hilsenrath articulates in *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* a poetics of train transportation that makes overt intertextual overtures to pre-Holocaust Yiddish writing, carving out a space for Jewish agency that arises precisely out of the practice of imaginative fiction.

In my second chapter, I argue that the narrator Max Schulz's "dialogues" with his murdered Jewish friend Itzig are key to interpreting Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur*. These conversations, which occur only in his narration, come to the fore at the precise moment when Max, who has taken on Itzig's identity in order to evade prosecution for crimes he committed as an SS officer, emigrates to pre-state Israel aboard a sailing vessel named *Exitus*. While in the guise of Itzig, Max the Holocaust perpetrator depicts the story of the emigration of a

European Jew to Palestine and his survival following World War II, but this story must remain, no matter how attractive it may be to readers, an illusion, for Max persistently reminds his audience that the real Itzig is dead and a counterfeiter inhabits the existence he might have had, had he survived. I analyze how Max establishes a dual identity as both victim and perpetrator with the practice of unreliable, injured narration that is ostensibly linked to sexual abuse he suffered as a child. Taking Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic as a point of analytical departure, I also investigate how Hilsenrath's devious narrator animates and manipulates a dialogical interaction between his discrete identities as victim and perpetrator. Max's deployment of this dialogic articulates a post-perpetration self that constitutes a continuation of the former self that perpetrates (i.e. the self that murdered) after the crimes have been committed and the perpetration itself has ended. I assert that his elaborate strategy for evading detection and responsibility in the post-Holocaust period by living in the pilfered guise of one of his victims operates as a narrative iteration of the self that perpetrated war crimes in the Holocaust. While Max's manipulation of narration and performance of multiple identities are certainly not tantamount to the original crime of murder, his self-contradicting narratorial habit of switching between opposing subject positions for the purpose of evading guilt reinforces for the reader his status as mass murderer and war criminal, thus reaffirming his identity as perpetrator.

In my third chapter, I illustrate how Fred Wander's *Der siebente Brunnen* foregrounds various rhetorical strategies that its narrator deploys for staging multivocality. I employ the term multivocality to refer to the chorus of voices belonging to various characters that speak their own words or tell their own stories over the course of the novel. These stories arise out of conversation between the narrator and these other characters. Wander's novel, I argue, is fundamentally underpinned by dialogical interaction—interaction that creates multiple sites in

the text for the cultivation of memory and the expression of mourning. My analysis focuses on narration and the narrator's portrayal of other characters who narrate either in their own words or through the words the narrator recalls or imagines them uttering. I analyze three particular characters and the narrative instances or configurations that allow the narrator to explore various strategies for mediating the voices of others. An analysis of each of these configurations reveals how Wander's novel assembles both structurally and thematically multivocal discourse. I investigate the narrator's dialogical interactions with Eastern European Jewish storytellers, the narrative's deployment of Yiddish language and Yiddish literary techniques, and the narrator's development of a type of "midrash" that allows for the empathetic interpretation of the suffering of others. The Buberian theoretical model of the "I-Thou" relationship, Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic, and narrative theorist Lisa Zunshine's scholarship on theory of mind and the representation of fictional characters' mental states provide a theoretical framework for investigating these three narrative figures. I demonstrate how Wander's Holocaust survivor-narrator repeatedly eschews purely monological narration in favor of animating dialogical interaction that recuperates the memory of the dead.

My fourth chapter, devoted to Jurek Becker's novel *Jakob der Lügner*, examines the staging of language. I explore Becker's largely monolingual representation of the historically multilingual world of Jews imprisoned in a Nazi-run ghetto. Though this multilingual milieu is represented in the novel nearly entirely in German, there are moments in the text in which linguistic difference is installed on the semantic level, mostly as evidenced by the presence of a scattering of Yiddish vocabulary throughout the text. Becker's narrator struggles to find a way for the experiences of others to come to the fore. While Becker's narrator appears cognizant that his perished friends and fellow ghetto internees can neither speak for themselves nor tell their

stories in their own words (or voices), he nevertheless endeavors to find a narrative structure that can speak in two voices at once, his and those of the characters whom he portrays. Despite its monolingual representation, Becker's narrator seeks a form and structure in his narration that can approximate a "dialogic monologue," or a blending of voices and perspectives. Echoing the complex interplay between monologue and dialogue in the medium of radio, Becker's narrator develops narratorial strategies that gesture toward the dialogic within the framework of primarily monologic discourse.

My investigation into these four texts reflects a desire to participate in the scholarly conversation regarding German Jewish writing in general and German Jewish fiction about the Holocaust more specifically. I situate this study into this larger conversation, which has a complex and somewhat fragmented history, as postwar German Jewish fiction has often occupied something of a blind spot, in both *Germanistik* and Anglo-American Holocaust Studies respectively. In her 2014 study of German Jewish Holocaust novels written by members of what she terms the "first generation," Kirstin Gwyer insightfully summarizes the historical trajectory of the scholarly reception of German Jewish writing about the Holocaust. She explains how "[l]iterary scholarship in Germany came late to studying German-Jewish survivor writing in any form and to this day rarely gives consideration to the Holocaust novel (as it has established itself internationally, particularly in the US)" (2). She further outlines how postwar German literature abounds with examples of representations of Germany's National Socialist past, but most often this past "has almost exclusively been presented from the perspective of the perpetrators and not the persecuted," in works penned overwhelmingly by non-Jews (2). As Gwyer explains it, German Jews have, for the most part, been either excluded from Germany's literary engagement with the Nazi past or have been "subsum[ed], [such as] in the case of Peter Weiss [...] under the

general heading of *Nachkriegsliteratur*” (2). Nevertheless, there have been important scholarly works by German academics on German Jewish fiction about the Holocaust that aim to “counter this incorporative or appropriative trend and make space for the viewpoint of the excluded [Jewish] *other*” (Gwyer 3), such as Stephan Braese’s 2001 *Die andere Erinnerung*, Norbert Otto Eke and Hartmut Steinecke’s 2006 edited volume *Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*. Anglo-American Holocaust Studies has also failed, for the most part, to provide a fruitful platform for scholarly engagement with German Jewish post-Holocaust fiction, as scholars in this arena have often ignored German-language texts (Gwyer 5). In the realm of Anglo-American German Studies, there have been several insightful contributions to the study of German Jewish fiction on the Holocaust, including *Verfolgung bis zum Massenmord: Holocaust-Diskurse in deutscher Sprache aus der Sicht der Verfolgten* by Dagmar Lorenz; Leslie Morris and Jack Zipes’ 2002 study *Unlikely History: The Changing German-Jewish Symbiosis, 1945-2000*; *German-Jewish Literature in the Wake of the Holocaust: Grete Weil, Ruth Klüger, and the Politics of Address* by Pascale R. Bos; Katja Garloff’s 2005 *Words from Abroad: Trauma and Displacement in Postwar German Jewish Writers*; and the 2008 volume *Rebirth of a Culture: Jewish Identity and Jewish Writing in Germany and Austria Today*, edited by Hillary Hope Herzog, Todd Herzog, and Benjamin Lapp. But there is still much scholarly work to be done in the realm of Jewish fiction on the Holocaust penned by speakers of German, which often “represent[s] a point of view that is too Jewish for the German literary canon but at the same time too German for any international canon of Holocaust fiction, even though both the trigger for, and the conditions of, [this] writing would absolutely warrant its inclusion into the latter” (Gwyer 5). The study that I undertake here participates in drawing attention to this lacuna, to this underresearched area of both German Studies and Holocaust Studies.

Gwyer's *Encrypting the Past* mirrors the scholarly impulse behind my study in many ways, but with significant distinctions. Her study focuses on what she terms "first generation" German Jewish writers who all personally experienced the Holocaust in some way and responded to it, often obliquely, in works of fiction. While this designation allows her to concentrate on German Jewish writers such as H. G. Adler, Jenny Aloni, and Erich Fried, who have been almost entirely neglected by the general public and scholars alike, her use of the term "first generation," even though stemming from a desire to be inclusive, nonetheless performs an exclusionary gesture of its own. The term "first generation" is, in my view, somewhat artificial in the case of German Jews who compose works of fiction about the Holocaust. There are several German Jewish authors, such as Jurek Becker and Edgar Hilsenrath, whose relatively young age during the Holocaust would situate them, according to Gwyer's model, somewhere in between a generation of Jewish writers who survived the Holocaust and a subsequent, younger generation whose members have no personal memories of the Shoah per se.⁴ Because it is first and foremost a literary history, Gwyer's study relies on this designation of "first generation" as an organizing principle for defining and shaping a history of German Jewish literary output in the years immediately following the end of World War II (roughly 1945-65). The analyses I put forth in the following four chapters do not endeavor to comprise a literary history or an historical survey of German Jewish post-Holocaust fiction. Instead, *The German Jewish Post-Holocaust Novel: Narrative and A Literary Language for Loss* concentrates primarily on the features of narrative in novels by Jurek Becker, Edgar Hilsenrath, and Fred Wander. Though I take into account the

⁴ In *Crises of Memory and the Second World War*, Susan Rubin Suleiman proposes the term "1.5 generation" as a way of re-thinking the concepts of "first generation" and "second generation" with respect to Holocaust survivors, their children, and the complex processes of memory (178-214). Suleiman's concept underscores the need for nuance and (greater) precision when considering categories as seemingly unfluctuating as "Holocaust survivors" and "children of Holocaust survivors." Jurek Becker and Edgar Hilsenrath, among other Jewish authors writing in German, arguably belong to this "1.5 generation."

specifics of historical events of the Holocaust referenced in the four literary texts that I investigate, my approach relies first and foremost on insights from the field of narrative theory as a theoretical framework. My research into these German Jewish post-Holocaust novels reveals a preoccupation with the processes and practice of narration. These novels all self-reflexively call attention to their narrativity in marked and important ways. The tools of narratology help us unlock the structural operations of these texts, in turn enriching our understanding of the possibilities and limitations of narrative as a method for Holocaust memorialization and commemoration. I have chosen to place these four novels into conversation with one another, because they all point to narrative form and structure as essential components in registering the experience of the Holocaust and conveying this memory to the reader.

Chapter One:

Imagining Jewish Agency Through the Lens of a Yiddish Literary Past: The Poetics Movement
in Edgar Hilsenrath's *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*

Introduction

The prologue to Edgar Hilsenrath's 1993 novel *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* commences with a group of Jews from the fictional Romanian *shtetl* Pohodna who are in the grip of preparing for the train journey that will most assuredly lead to their annihilation in a Nazi-run concentration or extermination camp. In the opening paragraph, the unidentified narrator sets the stage with an initially picturesque portrayal that takes on a foreboding tenor as the reader begins to suspect the destination and purpose of this journey:

Es hatte die ganze Nacht geschneit, aber am frühen Morgen als die Shtetljuden mit ihren Bündeln und Koffern zum Bahnhof gingen, lockerten sich die Wolken auf, und über dem Bahnhof öffnete sich ein Stückchen blaßblauer Himmel. Es war ganz klar. Dort oben hatte der liebe Gott ein Guckloch in die Wolken gebohrt, um die letzten Juden noch einmal zu sehen, ehe sie fortzogen. Vielleicht wollte Gott auch das Shtetl sehen, zum letzten Mal, denn es würde nie wieder so sein wie es war. (7)

In this instance, the reader has access to both a divine and human perspective, as we see a clear, blue sky stretching all the way into the infinite heavens on a bitterly cold winter day as the “last” Jews line up to board a train marks the moment of irrevocable change. The narrator's depiction of the Jews being observed in transit by God, who in this context appears not quite as omnipotent or as omniscient as we might like him to be, recalls the image of the original Exodus. This intertext does not, however, efface the historical particularity of the moment depicted in the passage above. The image of a group of Jews boarding a train in a text written and published after 1945 automatically conjures up the systematized and brutal deportations of the Nazis' “Final Solution.” Nevertheless, the opening lines of the novel, while foregrounding a diegesis predicated on actual historical events, clearly evince features of imaginative fiction, such as

allusion, visually rich descriptions, and an ostensibly omniscient narrator. This initial setup provides the reader with key tools for charting the work as a whole.

The intermingling of historical reference and imaginative literary detail present in the prologue is illustrative of the novel's overarching narrative project. While the novel is firmly grounded in a specific historical moment, it is ultimately a work of imaginative fiction telling its own story—its own version of this history. How Hilsenrath shapes this imaginative fiction both structurally and thematically, with a nod to the Yiddish literary tradition (as well as Jewish writing more broadly), forms the foundation for my investigation into his novel. What emerges is a post-Holocaust railroad story in the tradition of Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh, arguably best known by his nom de plume and literary alter ego, Mendele Moykher Sforim. Although the world belonging to the Jews from Pohodna, and by extension the entirety of eastern European Jewry, would never again be the same after the Holocaust, as the narrator elegiacally remarks, the novel is predicated on a narrative practice that attempts to represent literarily and to recuperate—however fleeting and ephemeral—facets of this lost world. This chapter investigates the mechanics of this recuperation, as I demonstrate how Hilsenrath articulates in *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* a poetics of train transportation that makes overt intertextual overtures to previous Yiddish writing, carving out a space for Jewish agency that arises precisely out of the practice of imaginative fiction.

Imagined Possibilities: Narrative Movement and Jewish Agency

As post-Holocaust readers, we know, or can measurably infer, the nature of what is about to befall this group of Jews about to board the cattle car; however, lest we forget, one of the non-Jewish *shtetl* inhabitants observing the deportation informs his compatriots (in turn reminding the reader): ““ich habe gehört, daß die Juden ins Feuer fahren”” (7). Despite the terrible events

that will have taken place by the novel's epilogue, the prologue remains focused on the lives and individual histories of the people on the train. Once the Jews board the train car with the few belongings they have been allotted by Romanian authorities, the narrator shifts perspective away from the exterior space of the small train depot to a depiction of the cattle car's confining interior. The reader "follows," as it were, the Jews on their journey and "enters" the train car along with them (at least temporarily). And by focalizing much of the depiction of the deportation through individual characters (particularly Jankl) now locked in the cattle car, the novel invites the reader to consider this experience specifically from the perspective of the victims. In *The Train Journey: Transit, Captivity, and Witnessing in the Holocaust*, Simone Gigliotti argues that the "debilitating effects [of the cattle car experience] were concealed behind the Nazi propaganda image of trains in constant and circuitous motion to different wartime destinations" (2). "Deliberately omitted from this vision," she further asserts, "was the hidden struggle of the deportees," which could include "overcrowding, unwanted touch, unexpectedly erotic moments, shame, nakedness, starvation, insanity, death, and affirmations of human will" (2). The depiction in the novel's prologue of Jewish *shtetl* inhabitants rounded up and deported by train resists this kind of impulse to obfuscate the extent of human suffering in the context of train deportations engineered by the Nazis, offering the reader instead glimpses inside a train car that will contain the kinds of experiences that Gigliotti discusses.

Highlighting the train journey's moment of embarking, the narrator reveals to the reader what occurs inside the train car in the initial moments following departure:

Noch herrschte keine Panik im Waggon, denn sie waren kaum eine Stunde unterwegs.

Noch war genug Essen da und auch genug Wasser, denn jeder hatte vorgesorgt. Auch

mußte keiner dringend seine Notdurft verrichten. Der Güterwagen, in anderen Zeiten für

den Transport von Gütern und Schlachtvieh bestimmt, war völlig überfüllt und alles andere als bequem, alle wurden hin- und hergeschüttelt, und viele mußten aus Platzmangel stehen, aber da die Fahrt erst angefangen hatte, murrte noch keiner. Man versuchte, es auszuhalten. (8-9)

The narrator indicates that the horrors we have come to associate with these transports to concentration and extermination camps—thirst, hunger, overcrowding, filth, etc., will eventually befall the Jewish characters whom the narrator subsequently introduces—but not just yet. In place of details relating suffering that has not yet begun to develop, the narrator portrays something seemingly unexpected given the context: the *shtetl* Jews begin to tell one another stories. In particular, the poor water carrier Jankl Wassermann narrates the story, in dialogue with several other characters, of how he recently found out that he has been named heir to his Uncle Jossel's fortune. He received word of this astonishing development shortly before the deportation decree. The *shtetl's* other inhabitants desire the full story. We learn that Jankl's uncle, a former resident of Pohodna and the eponymous Onkel Jossel in the novel's title, whose life story will constitute the novel's main narrative, has named a beneficiary—his last living blood relative. From the outset, we suspect that Jankl will never live to enjoy his inheritance; nevertheless, the narrator provides the opportunity for him to tell his story. Movement through time and space in the story world, as we shall see, provides the catalyst for the act of narration. The train car becomes a vehicle not only for transportation but also for the act of storytelling. Jankl provides the lawyer Fischel Rosenkranz and the matchmaker Chane Sure with details regarding his uncle Jossel's testament, which in turn engender a conversation about what Jankl might do with his windfall (9-11). He discusses with his compatriots his desire to marry. They try to convince him that his newfound wealth would make possible a marriage to one of the

rabbi's daughters—a high honor in the community. Interspersed throughout their conversation and storytelling, we find details regarding the movement of the train and its effect on Jankl's body: "Der Wasserträger sagte nichts mehr. Er blickte eine Weile in den leeren Raum über den Köpfen der Menge. Sein riesiger Körper, an die Tür des Waggons gelehnt, fing das Rattern des Zuges auf und zuckte beim Klicken der eisernen Räder" (13). After briefly mulling over their advice in silence, Jankl insists that he would prefer to take the hunchbacked Rifke, daughter of the cobbler Katz, as his wife (13). Like the rattling of the train car and the forward movement of the locomotive, Jankl's announcement of his plan to marry Rifke and the subsequent conversation this news engenders carry his thoughts further, encouraging him to imagine a future life with Rifke. Pondering a life after the war and energized by the hope such thinking brings, he imagines: "Der Wasserträger war gar nicht müde. Je später es wurde, um so wohler fühlte er sich. Denn er wußte jetzt genau, was er wollte. Er wollte Rifke [. . .] Es wäre ja gelacht, wenn [der Schuster Katz] Rifke nicht hergeben würde. Und er konnte es jetzt wirklich sehen: Er und Rifke unter dem Baldachin. Und später in ihrer warmen Hütte" (15). He imagines the life they might have together, in which they love one another deeply, despite their respective physical irregularities (15-6). Jankl's private love story is encapsulated within the circumstances of the journey. The narrative foregrounds how the Jews from Pohodna, trapped and helpless in the grueling environment of the cattle car, resort to an activity that allows them some measure of relief. Not only does this storytelling provide a means of imaginative escape, no matter how temporary, it also provides a degree of agency, however limited in scope.

The trope of the enclosed space of the train car, along with the conversation and storytelling that arise as a result of the circumstances of the railway journey, harken back to famous stories by one of the masters of Yiddish literature, Sholem Rabinovitch, also known by

his pen name Sholem Aleichem. Written between 1902 and 1910 and published as a collection for the first time in 1911 (Halkin xxxii), *The Railroad Stories: Tales of A Commercial Traveller* (*Di Ayzenbangeshikhtes*) feature a principal character-narrator whose conversations with and eavesdropping on various groups of Jews on train journeys throughout the Russian Empire provide the impetus for narration. According to Leah Garrett, as a result of the spread of modernization from Western Europe eastward (even into the poorest and least industrialized corners of the Pale of Settlement), “for [Sholem Aleichem] and the Jews he was describing, the railroad car became a setting for telling stories” (Garrett 106). In these stories, the narrator finds himself time and again traveling in third-class train compartments occupied almost exclusively by fellow Jews. The character-narrator, with one foot in the diegesis and another in the metadiegesis, situates himself as observer of the interactions in these compartments and as interlocutor who provides the opportunity for characters to “speak” to readers outside the confines of the railway car. The characters he introduces tell their stories in their own words in the presence of the narrator and other passengers, resulting in a web of stories embedded within the larger narrative framework. David Roskies succinctly explains this phenomenon:

“Sholem Aleichem invented a new kind of topical tale that was open and closed at one and the same time: framed within a narrative with an arbitrary ending was a story that was structurally complete. The only one who could move in and out of the two frames was the storyteller within the tale, which made him, by default and by design, the story’s proper hero. To raise the stakes in the contest between history and story, Sholem Aleichem transplanted the art of storytelling to the most secular and unstable setting yet: the third-class compartment of a Russian train.” (177)

The character-narrator's metadiegetic preambles glide seamlessly into the principal story world of the train car, which in turn blends effortlessly into the diegetic world of a new tale being told by one of the character passengers. The shifting between metadiegeis and diegesis and from one diegetic level to the next in Sholem Aleichem's stories reflects the physical movement of the train, which chugs along the tracks from one station to the next, back and forth across the Russian landscape.

In one such tale, "Baranovich Station," the narrator describes the raucous din of conversation in a packed compartment, as several figures jostle to tell a story enthralling enough to hold everyone else's interest. Sholem Aleichem's narrator evokes a dynamic space specifically characterized by conversation and a communal desire for storytelling: "Everyone tried to think of some fresh, juicy item that would make all the others sit up and listen, but no one was able to hold the stage for long. The subject changed every minute" (Sholem Aleichem 152). The conversation, like the scenery observed from the compartment windows, takes on its own life as a result of the motion of the train car. But then one Jew among the crowd interjects, interrupts the loquacious stream, and calls the rest of passengers "cattle," thereby allowing the narrator to shift focus exclusively to this particular figure, branded as the "Jew from Kaminka" (152-3). This particular narrative, the subject of this story, is thus embedded into the larger framework provided by the principal narrator, as the other Jews suddenly pay exclusive attention to the Jew from Kaminka: "Having been unexpectedly branded as cattle . . . the whole car was as dumbfounded for a moment as if a bucket of cold water had been poured over everyone's head" (153). The Kaminka Jew then proceeds to tell his story in the form of directly quoted speech.

The embedded tale dates back to the time of czar Nicholas the First and has been passed down from generation to generation within the Kaminka Jew's family. The story pertains to a

loud-mouthed and stubborn Jew named Kivke who gets into trouble with the local Russian authorities. Charged with blasphemy on account of some ill-spoken commentary overheard by non-Jews in a tavern one night, he is sentenced to run the gauntlet. The narrator's grandfather, Reb Nissl Shapiro, intervenes to save Kivke's life. Reb Shapiro, with skillful negotiation as the town's president of the Burial Society and with a few judicious bribes, informs the local authorities that Kivke died in prison and needed to be buried immediately according to Jewish custom. With Kivke playing dead, the Jews are able to sneak him out of town while pretending to bury him. He subsequently settles in Brody and is free from the very real physical threat of the gauntlet. Because the train in which the Jews are traveling reaches the Kaminka Jew's destination, Baranovich station, he must interrupt his tale. The character-narrator curses his bad luck at missing out on the end to such a delightful story, exclaiming: "I wouldn't mind if Baranovich station burned to the ground!" (163).

In his analysis of *The Railroad Stories*, Todd Presner argues: "The railway compartment frames the narratives, and the stories themselves are written as if told in the time between the train's departure and its arrival at a given destination" (107).⁵ The narrative structure of these stories consciously reflects the particularities of train travel. The frequent metalepses between one narrative strand and the next are occasioned not only by the interplay between various narratorial voices, but also because of the train's movement: characters hop on and off the train as one person's destination is reached and another's journey begins. Sholem Aleichem's stories-within-a-story, with its interplay between the diegesis of the train car and that of the Kaminka Jew's tale, stages the impact of train movement on the process of narration.

⁵ Presner situates Sholem Aleichem's *Railroad Stories* within a larger historical development of literature by European Jewish authors writing in a variety of languages, in which the train and the railway car become a common literary trope for negotiating both the freedom and radical social change brought by advances in technology during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, particularly within Jewish communities in Eastern Europe.

Representations of trains and their impact on Jews have been marked by a strong sense of ambivalence since the trope began appearing in Yiddish literature. Leah Garrett explains the complex impact of train technology on *shtetl* communities in eastern Europe and the tradition of storytelling taken up by Yiddish writers like Sholem Aleichem: “A train would seem to be the ideal locale for storytelling: group setting, disconnected from a grounded location, and representing the archetypal Jewish community. Yet the train is also a symbol of the encroachment of the machine on rural spaces. It is thus a space in which one can enact stories that reflect the ascendancy of industry and the concomitant breakdown of the rural, enclosed, isolated shtetl” (Garrett 106). We see traces of this complex relationship in tales such as “Baranovich Station.” Nevertheless, such tales, I argue, also underscore a sense of agency available to the Jews in the train car. Not only does the tale of Reb Shapiro illustrate a moment in which Jews are able to intercede and alter the fate of one of their own, it also allows its narrator, the anonymous Kaminka Jew, to claim narratorial authority, however briefly, over the cacophony of competing voices that are divided between a desire to tell and one to listen to a well-crafted tale. Sholem Aleichem’s salesman-narrator foregrounds the possibility for a type of Jewish agency made possible through narrative, specifically through the intricate staging of multiple diegetic layers held together by the principal’s narrators organizational wisdom.

The railway car in the prologue to *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* operates in a fashion strikingly similar to that depicted in Sholem Aleichem’s *Railroad Stories*, though with distinctions made necessary by the historical specificities of the Holocaust. In Hilsenrath’s novel, the cattle car functions as a space for the development of narrative, while simultaneously becoming increasingly claustrophobic and dismal. Hilsenrath’s portrayal focuses on the moments before the material deprivations of this particular kind of train journey become apparent. The

imaginative possibilities of storytelling are caught within the boundaries of a much more insidious train timetable: we know that there is limited time during which the Jews locked in these cattle cars will be physically capable of sharing their stories. The storytelling and the potential agency it makes possible, however, arises precisely out of the tension between the rapid movement of the train and the rigid confines of the train cars in which the characters find themselves.

In conjuring a Yiddish-speaking *shtetl* community's train journey to extermination, Hilsenrath's German-language post-Holocaust novel overtly situates itself within the larger context of eastern European Jewish literary history; his evocation of this trope establishes a clear metaliterary link to his Yiddish-language predecessors. In doing so, he references larger historical connections between Jews writing in both German and Yiddish (Schachter 84-120).⁶ Allison Schachter summarizes: "The railroad car itself is the quintessential Jewish space of Yiddish literature" (98). *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* articulates a connection between the world of pre-1945 Yiddish storytelling and a post-1945 German-language text. In doing so, Hilsenrath not only gestures towards the lost world of the eastern European *shtetl* but also re-enacts these connections and overlaps in a post-Holocaust context.

Similar to the stories of Sholem Aleichem, vehicular movement in Hilsenrath's text emerges as a potent trope and organizing principle. We observe movement and mobility not only thematically but also experience it structurally. The transportation of the Jews in the train car in the story world runs parallel to the frequent and fluid metaleptic slippages. The narrator provides the overarching framework that reports the speech of characters and character-narrators like Jankl who tell their own stories; however, the introduction of an additional narrative element

⁶ Schachter discusses the historical connections between Yiddish- and German-language authors in the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-centuries in the chapter "Yiddish Modernism in Weimar Berlin" (84-120).

complicates this schematic. The *shtetl's* rabbi, who stands among the members of his congregation, has heard rumors about the destination to which these trains are taking the Jews, and he has begun to suspect what will happen by the novel's conclusion (Hilsenrath 17-18). He becomes increasingly concerned for his community's welfare and the survival of its history, and he strives to find a way to preserve the memory of all these individuals (along with their language and culture), lest their stories fall into the abyss of forgetting. He decides that the Jews must hide their history. What follows is the stuff of legend. In response to impending danger, the entire history of this community, including every single personal detail (each baby's cry, each bodily function—everything) escapes out of the train and hovers on top of its roof, where these details take on a life of their own, transforming into a collective of innumerable voices called “Quasselstimmen,” without bodies to bind them to the physical world. They chatter with one another and become responsible for documenting the Jews' history. These voices, situated on top of the train car, are afforded a teichoscopic view of the Jews of Pohodna.

The verbal interaction between the *shtetl's* rabbi and the wind further foregrounds the novel's articulation of Jewish agency through the literary imagination. The human rabbi has direct access to these voices and can call upon them to intercede in the realm of human affairs—at least where memory is concerned. The rabbi tells the wind that the non-Jews back in the *shtetl* have not managed to plunder the Jews' most precious possession: their history (17). The wind initially believes that, like material goods, the Jews' history must have been left behind prior to their deportation, but the rabbi explains that only “die Spuren unserer Geschichte sind zurückgeblieben” (18). In a metaleptic shift back to metadiegesis, the narrator interjects to explain:

Und auch das ist wahr. Die Spuren waren zurückgeblieben. Aber die Zeit würde sie allmählich verwischen, und es würde nichts zurückbleiben. Nichts. Und so sagte [der Rebbe] zum Flüstern des Windes: “Wir haben nur das Vergessen zurückgelassen, and was wir mitgenommen haben, ist das Erinnern.” Und der Rebbe kriegte plötzlich Angst, denn die Geschichte der Shtetljuden und das wahre Erinnern, das war in großer Gefahr. (18)

What follows is the description of a plan to save this history. The rabbi decides to hide the history of his community on the roof of the train car, since no non-Jew would ever think to look for it there (18). The rabbi’s plan, formulated solely in his thoughts, turns into a viable course of action through imaginative fiction: “und siehe da: Kaum hatte der Rebbe diesen Gedanken zu Ende gedacht, da huschte die Geschichte der Shtetljuden aus den schlechtgelüfteten Waggonen und hockte sich auf das Dach des Zuges. Auf welchen Waggon? Na, wo schon. Auf den letzten natürlich” (18). The historical reality is that countless Jewish communities throughout Eastern Europe, both urban and rural, faced near—if not, total—destruction at the hands of Nazi genocide. Not only millions of individual people, but also their individual voices and testimonies vanished as a result of the violence of the Holocaust. Hilsenrath’s thematization of this very act of annihilation and his particular rendering of history that diverges from the dominant historical narrative of total destruction allows for a discursive space in which other ontological possibilities can occur.

These voices in fact evoke a kind of agency through narrative, which they attribute to Jewish culture. One of the “Quasselstimmen,” while discussing the various types of details they are absorbing and their subsequent purpose for History writ large, instructs his fellow voices: “Der Jude kennt immer zwei Möglichkeiten, eine so und eine so. Es könnte ja sein, daß dort, wo

die Endstation ist, ein Geheimnis auf sie lauert. Vielleicht ist dort ein Sanitorium? Freundliche Ärzte und Schwestern in blütenweißen Kitteln würden die Shtetljuden empfangen?" (23). We know that this benevolent destination defies the historical reality of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the text emphasizes a particular capacity on the part of Jewish culture for employing narrative—especially in the form of dialogic exchange—that stresses the need for imaginative alternatives. We are reminded here of Sholem Aleichem's Reb Shapiro's finesse at shaping the narrative he related to the Russian authorities regarding the "dead" Kivke; an imaginative fiction is able, in that case, to save a life. A train journey that ends in pleasure rather than pain is presented in Hilsenrath's prologue as one possibility. But then the narrating voice interrupts this reverie, remarking: "Aber es gibt noch eine zweite Möglichkeit," sagte die Stimme. 'Und wenn diese stimmt, dann gibt es dort kein Sanitorium'" (27). The "Quasselstimmen" proceed to discuss various potential outcomes, including a noodle factory in need of hard-working employees, before reminding the reader of the historical reality of a train journey that ends in "Feuer und Rauch" (28).

The "Jewish" Legend: The *Salzhering* and Jossel's Emigration to Switzerland

This preoccupation with the narration of imaginative possibilities further frames the transition from prologue to the novel's main narrative. At the end of the prologue, one of the "Quasselstimmen" requests that a fellow "voice" tell the story of Jankl's uncle Jossel: "Dann erzähle mir also Onkel Jossels Geschichte, die zugleich die Vorgeschichte der Erbschaft ist, die für die Juden des Shtetls zu spät kommt ... oder auch nicht, falls ein Wunder geschieht" (33). Though the voice knows what will happen to the Jews in the cattle car, namely that they will never again return home, it nonetheless evokes the possibility of a miracle. Though the likelihood of such a miracle that could intervene and rescue the Pohodna Jews from death

following deportation is slim, Hilsenrath nonetheless emphasizes the act of imagining such a possibility. The novel thus enacts, in the moment of closure prior to the beginning of the main narrative, the practice of Jewish imaginative agency.

This practice, vividly present in the prologue, also appears over and over again in Jossel's autobiographical digressions. Following the prologue, the novel presents Jossel and his mania for storytelling in two main segments that are further divided into discrete chapters. In these two sections, the reader encounters Jossel's account of his own life and that of his family's rich history. Uncle Jossel, who left Pohodna during World War I to serve in the Austrian military and eventually became a wealthy Swiss factory owner, lies on his deathbed. Before he dies, his final wish is to have his autobiography recorded and his fortune bequeathed to his closest living relative, his nephew Jankl. Julian Preece summarizes the embedded narrative: "As Jossel lies on his death-bed on 31 August 1939, he narrates his story to his two lawyers whose secretaries commit it to paper. Stories are about the past, and Jossel's autobiography begins—after an invocation of Adam, his ancestor—with the first Jewish migrations eastwards" (31). The team of lawyers and secretaries, along with the reader, provide the audience for Jossel's string of tales. In relating his life story, Jossel narrates his memories of his hometown, the *shtetl* Pohodna; the unidentified narrator also allows the reader access to other perspectives in addition to Jossel's, including those of his parents, grandparents, and great-grandparents.

A crucial episode in the novel that borders on the legendary further underscores Hilsenrath's literary engagement with the idea of Jewish agency through imaginative fiction. According to his narrative, Jossel's grandparents moved from Polish Galicia to Pohodna, near Czernowitz, to establish a life for themselves and subsequent generations (86-91). They opened a modest tavern with the hope of anchoring themselves and their family in a small, albeit lucrative,

business. Catering to both Jewish and non-Jewish clientele alike, the *Schenke* offered on its bill of fare the alcoholic beverages distilled and favored by the various ethnic groups inhabiting the area (“rumänischen Cuika, serbischen Sliwowitz, russischen und polnischen Wodka,” as well as “jüdischen Schnaps”), in addition to onions, garlic, bread and salted herring (111). Jossel relates a story about how the most important event in this history of the family business was an impromptu visit by the Austrian emperor, Franz Joseph I. Told in its own chapter, this story, like many others throughout the novel’s embedded Jossel narrative, takes on a life of its own. A dialogue between Jossel and his lawyers regarding the specifics of the tale about to be told serves as an introduction:

“Genau einundzwanzig Jahre vor meiner Geburt”, sagte Onkel Jossel, “passierte die Sache mit dem jüdischen Salzhering und dem österreichischen Kaiser.”

“Welcher Kaiser?” fragte der Notar.

“Nicht Joseph der Zweite”, sagte Onkel Jossel, “sondern Franz Joseph der Erste.”

“Also der berühmte Kaiser Franz Joseph. War er schon damals an der Macht?”

“Ja”, sagte Onkel Jossel.

“Und was hatte Kaiser Franz Joseph mit einem jüdischen Salzhering zu tun?”

“Das wollte ich Ihnen ja erzählen”, sagte Onkel Jossel. (95)

The passage above introduces an anecdote that plays the role of a legend, in which the emperor visits the Wassermann family’s tiny tavern. During an amusing, albeit implausible, turn of events, Franz Joseph’s life is saved by Jossel’s elfish grandmother. Jossel describes how military maneuvers taking place nearby bring the royal person and his entourage within the vicinity of Pohodna (95). On account of this news and the rarity of such an occurrence, the *shtetl* Jews begin to wonder about the possibility of the emperor making a stop in their own village. As luck would

have it, not only does the emperor visit Pohodna, but he also wants to take in the local flavor by visiting an “authentic” Jewish tavern: “Und dann passierte, was alle vorausgesehen hatten: Der Kaiser wollte eine landesübliche Schenke sehen. Und da es keine bessere gab als eben die Wassermannsche, kamen, wie erwartet, zuerst zwei Gendarmen mit Federbüschen am Hut [...] Und da waren sie schon: noch ein paar Uniformierte, und einer von ihnen, das war der Kaiser” (109). The emperor takes in the sights and sounds of the locale, accompanied by his officers and magistrates, including his treasurer and court physician, while Jossel’s grandfather and grandmother attempt to serve the impromptu party. The rest of the family looks on in wonder: “Und hinter dem Vorhang stand die Familie und guckte durch den Spalt, aber auch durch die Löcher im Stoff, denn es war ein sehr alter Vorhang, der noch aus Kolomea stammte, aus der Zeit, als die Familie noch in Galizien wohnte [...]” (110). Jossel as narrator imbues his familial history with the same importance as that of the Austro-Hungarian Empire by placing them side by side: Jossel’s grandfather had inherited the tattered curtain from his parents who had lived at a time when Maria Theresia, “die Kaiserin von Österreich, nicht mal in ihren kühnsten Träumen daran gedacht hatte, Europa unter österreichischer Flagge bis an die Grenzen der russischen Steppen auszudehnen, nun, vielleicht nicht ganz so weit, aber immerhin. Also dort, hinter dem Vorhang standen sie, auch die kleinen Kinder, und guckten” (110). In this tale, family memory and national history are combined, literally taking up the same space in the locus of the tavern.

And the site of the tavern in particular situates the Wassermann family into the larger history of Eastern European Jewish life. In his 2014 study *Yankel’s Tavern: Jews, Liquor, and Life in the Kingdom of Poland*, Glenn Dynner discusses the historical phenomenon of Jewish tavernkeepers and liquor distilleries, which started in the Kingdom of Poland-Lithuania and continued even after the kingdom was gobbled up by various neighboring powers, including

Austro-Hungary, between 1772 and 1795 (1). Dynner explains that Jewish tavernkeepers, at the behest of the ruling powers, were overwhelmingly responsible for steering the manufacture and sale of liquor to Polish peasants (1). Their “omnipresence,” he argues, “reflected a centuries-old *modus vivendi* between Poles and Jews” (1). The Jewish tavern, such as the one depicted in Hilsenrath’s text, which “often constituted a bar, distillery, country store, hotel, stable, post office, and bank wrapped into one,” was a crucial component of life and commerce in Polish territory (Dynner 17), and Jossel situates his family within its epicenter. In this scene, Jossel as narrator of the events composes an historical addendum to this larger history of Jewish tavernkeeping, but one that a traditional historiographical account of the Austro-Hungarian Empire and the lives and deeds of its rulers would most likely not contain. Anecdotal evidence of the kind Jossel provides has often remained disnarrated, as it treads the line between fact and fiction, resembling more a story passed down within a family than archival evidence.

The rest of the family members observing this astounding event look on in wonder, as if a miracle were taking place at that very moment in the confines of the inn. The characterization of their gaze foregrounds the emperor’s visit as legend, so profoundly wondrous and strange is the sight of the Austrian emperor sitting in their humble environs. Aaron Tate defines legend as “a traditional narrative that provides an etiology (i.e., an account of the origin or cause) of some extraordinary local detail or the narrative of a person, place, or event as if it were based on historical actuality” (276). I argue that Jossel’s story about the emperor takes on the form of a legend, in that it imbues the history of Pohodna with an element of the extraordinary through the construction in narrative of a remarkable event that arises out of a particular spatial and temporal context. Tate defines the legend further: “From the performative point of view, the telling of a legend frequently leads directly to debate or discussion between teller and audience, thus

complicating narrative authority and confirming the peculiar status of the legend” (276). The manner in which Jossel introduces this anecdote in conversation with his lawyer highlights this performative aspect—Jossel’s narration of the event is couched in a larger dialogue with his interlocutor regarding the history of his hometown and why it is important. In this case, the legend concerns the particular events of the Austrian emperor’s 1855 visit to one specific *shtetl* among thousands throughout the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Hilsenrath employs a specifically Jewish legend that makes possible a Jewish etiology. The extraordinary events in Hilsenrath’s legend allow a Jewish origin story to come to the fore in which Jewish agency becomes a possibility through narrative—particularly in the context of the historical persecution that Jews faced in Europe. Similar to the Kaminka Jew’s story in Sholem Aleichem’s “Baranovich Station,” Jossel’s anecdote highlights, as we will see, a Jew’s ability to intervene in a positive fashion in the fate of his fellow Jews.

The legend that Jossel narrates is made possible by the juxtaposition of the everyday and the extraordinary. The Wassermann family inn, one of countless Jewish-run taverns throughout the Austro-Hungarian realm, serves as the site for the arbitrary confluence of what the reader might justifiably assume to be the powerful (the royal personage and his entourage) and the powerless (Jewish *shtetl* inhabitants in possession of relatively few rights and privileges). The legendary quality of Jossel’s story arises from the possibilities that this confluence engenders. The emperor places his order and begins to consume the local delicacies served by Jossel’s grandfather: ““Er soll mir was zum Lachen und zum Weinen geben und zum Niesen und zum Husten und ein paar Salzheringe und Zwiebeln und Knoblauch und Brot”” (111-2). The emperor, while enjoying his refreshments, begins to choke on the fare: “Der Kaiser fing plötzlich zu husten an. Nun, husten ist gesund. Das Schlimme war nur, daß der Husten in ein gefährliches

Röcheln überging and dann ganz aufhörte. Der Kaiser lief rot an, rang um Luft, blies die kaiserlichen Backen auf, die mit einem Backenbart, und riß die Augen weit auf” (112). The extraordinary character of this tale comes to the fore most clearly in the resolution of this royal emergency. In the chaos of the attempts on the part of the court physician and other members of the imperial retinue to relieve the emperor’s choking, all of them unsuccessful, “die alte Jente”—Jossel’s grandfather’s mother—appears from the kitchen to save the day:

Es trug sich also zu, daß sie watschelnd aus der Küche kam, verhutzelt, aber quicklebendig, mit wirrem Haar und warren, rollenden und immer wütenden Augen [...] Die alte Jente kam also aus der Küche und fragte meinen Großvater: “Was hat dieser Goi in seinem trefenen Maul?” (113-4).

Upon learning that the emperor (an anonymous non-Jew in the eyes of the great-grandmother) is most likely choking on a tiny pickled herring, she reaches for the man’s mouth and forces it open: “[sie] riß den Mund des Kaisers auf, streckte ihre alten, runzeligen Finger, die mit den langen schmutzigen Fingernägeln, in des Kaisers Rachen und zog den Hering aus der falschen Kehle” (114). Jossel’s great-grandmother saves the emperor’s life, thus preventing the certain doom that would befall the Jews should the royal personage die on their watch (112-3). The grandmother figure performs here a variant of the *deus ex machina*, appearing as if out of nowhere to accomplish what no other character or figure can, including the emperor’s own personal physician. The tale becomes even more unbelievable when the emperor, grateful to the woman who saved his life, offers her a reward. After she refuses monetary compensation, Jossel’s grandfather intervenes and requests that the emperor instead grant emancipation to all the Jews of the empire (116-17). Although Franz Joseph initially forgets his promise, he remembers many years later and puts his pledge into action: “Das war in den frühen

Morgenstunden des neuen Jahres 1867. Im selben Jahr, durch den Ausgleich mit den aufsässigen Ungarn, die Reformen und die Gründung der Doppelmonarchie, erhielten auch die Juden des Kaiserreiches die vollen bürgerlichen Rechte” (118).

The legendary quality of this imaginative portrayal of an emperor visiting a humble community is heightened only by the introduction of an even stranger and more miraculous personage in the form of Jossel’s great-grandmother. Hilsenrath makes overt use of legend—with its complex relationship to both truth and fiction—in this tale about the emperor and the Wassermann family in order to establish through imaginative fiction a parallel ontological universe in which Jossel’s great-grandmother is singlehandedly responsible for bringing about the actual historical reality of Jewish emancipation in 1867 in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. The author’s portrayal of history offers the reader a lively alternative to the historical narrative more readily associated with Jewish emancipation in the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Dry bureaucracy and slow-evolving political negotiations take a back seat to rapid efficacy of a legend that can change the course of history in the time it takes to pluck a fish from the gullet of a choking emperor. Jossel’s legendary tale from the annals of his family’s history further highlights the novel’s commitment to staging Jewish agency through the imaginative. According to his version of historical events, Jewish emancipation originated with the Jews, rather than with the non-Jews. The legend, with its emphasis on an incredible (or nearly incredible) origin story cast in the guise of “historical actuality” (Tate 276) offers a blend of fact and potential fiction that serves Hilsenrath’s narrative practice of formulating a narrative alternative to the kind of historiography that cannot take an anecdote like Jossel’s into account. The novel’s imaginative depiction of history runs parallel to textbook history, offering readers the opportunity to imagine multiple

versions of a particular historical episode—in this case, the emancipation of the Jews in the Austro-Hungarian empire.

Jossel's depiction of his "accidental" emigration from Pohodna to Switzerland also operates as a Jewish legend that highlights agency through narrative. While serving on the Italian front in the Austrian army in World War I, he and two other Jewish soldiers are sent on what is believed to be a suicide mission to gather intelligence regarding enemy hideouts and supplies. After surviving a salvo of gunfire by hiding in a wheat field, Jossel encounters a group of Italian soldiers who take aim to gun him down. He throws his weapon down and surrenders, but is not taken prisoner. On the contrary, Jossel is surprised to see the Italian soldiers also throw their weapons away because they have grown weary of fighting. Jossel convinces them that life in Austria (even if in a POW camp) would be comfortable, complete both with Austrian specialties like *Sachertorte* and Italian staples like spaghetti and tomato sauce. With this extraordinary turn of fate, Jossel turns an act of cowardice into one of heroism. He leads 254 Italian prisoners of war back to his troop and is celebrated: "Die Presse bekam Wind von der Sache. Jossel Wassermanns Bild machte Titelseiten. Ein österreichischer Held. Ein Soldat des Kaisers, tapfer, beherzt, einer aus den Ostprovinzen, der Beweis, daß Österreichs Präsenz im Osten von Gott bestimmt and das Kaiserreich nicht verloren war" (272). He is heralded as a model soldier, given a silver medal for bravery, and made a corporal. In a final moment of recognition, he is granted an official audience with the emperor—the same Franz Joseph who had granted the Jews equal civil rights after being saved in his family's inn.

In a comical twist, Jossel asks the emperor whether he remembers the episode with the salted herring. The emperor, perhaps too old to remember, responds in the negative and remarks: "Gut gemacht, Korporal" (273). Jossel's tale emphasizes his role as active agent in determining

his destiny. The events he relates, rather than reflecting historical verisimilitude, function as a legend that highlights his own agency. The Jewish soldier from humble circumstances wins a silver medal and acclaim right before starting his life over again in Switzerland. But his renown does not end there. When asked by a journalist what the emperor should do with the prisoners of war, Jossel replies that they should be let free to return to their families, an act that would, according to his “Jewish” logic, lead to the war’s end and “zu einem Stillstand der Geschichtsschreibung” (275). Jossel advocates a version of historiography that, through an imagined armistice, would put an end to hostility and the kind of political maneuvering that cares little for human casualties. No one takes his suggestion seriously, and the reader knows that people like Jossel will never write the history books.

After returning to the front a second time, Jossel is taken by the Italians and flees captivity—this time away from his duties as a newly minted corporal. Upon reaching Lake Lugano, Jossel pays smugglers to take him by boat over the border into Switzerland. But before they reach the Swiss side of the lake, they rob him of all his belongings, including his clothing, and throw him overboard. Despite suffering a concussion, Jossel survives and swims to safety. He approaches a group of Orthodox Jews vacationing at a lake resort in a scene that is reminiscent of Odysseus emerging from the ocean, except with minor details altered to make it a Jewish story. Jossel describes, “Nackt kam ich aus dem Wasser. Die Juden erschraaken, sagten aber nichts und starrten gebannt auf mein beschnittenes Glied, dann auf mein Gesicht. Einer von ihnen lachte auf, dann lachten auch die anderen. Ich redete sie auf jiddisch an. Die lachten aber bloß” (282). The Orthodox Jews, amused at the sight of the naked, circumcised man emerging from the water and fascinated by the explanation of his identity and his subsequent tales, agree to come to his aid. He befriends Froike Honigmann, a Galician Jew who possesses both a Swiss

passport and a successful matzah factory. He eventually marries Honigmann's daughter and inherits his father-in-law's business and money, living out the remainder of his adventurous life in the relative peace of neutral Switzerland. His tale of successful emigration is a legend of flight and subsequent survival. The poetics of movement foregrounded in the prologue have a clear analog in the peripatetic Jossel. His autobiographical project imagines a version of *galut* (Jewish Diaspora) that transforms wandering and suffering through emigration into a stable and relatively welcoming democratic state. If the prologue and epilogue remind the reader of the historical reality that millions of European Jews died in the Holocaust, Jossel's narrative of emigration and survival stands in stark contrast to the Shoah, offering an alternative couched within the larger practice of Hilenrath's imaginative fiction. Jewish agency, in the form of anecdotes embroidered with legendary qualities, provides a literary counterbalance to the stifling train car that the Pohodna Jews are forced to occupy.

Jewish Agency and the Dialogic

With the introduction in the novel's prologue of the non-corporeal voices of the "Quasselstimmen," the boundaries between various diegetic levels in the novel become increasingly difficult to demarcate. The number of voices narrating multiplies, and the narration bounces back and forth from narrator to character to "Quasselstimme." The result is an emphasis, as I have discussed above, on narratological movement or a poetics of mobility. The rolling of the wheels down the track and the process of movement are thus mirrored in the novel's structure. The text's trope of train travel mirrors this movement in the various diegetic and metadiegetic levels. Instead of a monolithic narrator in charge of structuring the reproduction of every minute detail, this choir of "Quasselstimmen" has the task of observing the minutiae of the Jews in the train car below, and their figuration in the text underscores the importance of

individual memory and experience for the project set forth in the novel. Coupled with the text's additional emphasis on reproducing conversations that take place among the humans and the "Quasselstimmen," the text's multivocality evinces a strong tie to the dialogic. Hilsenrath's representation of speech, in the form of dialogue and the conversational, is closely related to the idea of Bakhtin's *dialogic*. Brian McHale explains the fundamental connection between the two within the field of narrative theory: "In the light of dialogism and *Textinferenz*, speech representation comes to be reconceived as only more or less discrete instances of the pervasive heteroglossia of the novel, its multiplicity of voices" (440). We see this "multiplicity of voices" both in Hilsenrath's novel and in Sholem Aleichem's "Baranovich Station." For Hilsenrath, the dialogic forms an integral component in his practice of highlighting Jewish agency as constructed in imaginative fiction. It is important to mention, however, that the emphasis on representing individual characters' thoughts, feelings, etc., recorded by non-corporeal voices that seemingly exist outside of the story world's temporal and spatial limits, does not, however, make light of the historical realities of the Shoah. Hilsenrath's novel is just as concerned with the ethics of memorializing the dead as it is with foregrounding Jewish agency. The extraordinary aspects of certain events that take place in the text, such as the grandmother's legendary interaction with the Austrian emperor, do not detract from the larger narrative of eastern European Jewish history marked by persecution, pogroms, and the Holocaust.

Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr foregrounds conversation not only among the human characters, as we saw in Jankl's discussions with fellow Jews in the train car and in Jossel's interactions with his lawyers, but also among these "voices," whose sole mission it is to talk and record. These voices are responsible for the kinds of personal details and historical information for which there is no archive. The history of the Pohodna Jews in the train car cannot be written

down and as such cannot become part of human memorialization. Hilsenrath's narrative practice in the novel makes possible an alternative to conventional history through these voices that are able to do what no historian can do. They record that which has no referent in the post-Holocaust world. The narrator enables these individual voices to come to the fore and emphasizes their drive to converse with one another in order to preserve what will otherwise be lost to history:

Und da die Geschichte der Schtetljuden viele Stimmen hat, hockerten auch die Stimmen auf dem Dach des Zuges, im Wind, im Schneegestöber. Sie quasselten erregt durcheinander, denn sie erzählten alles, was in den Waggons passierte. Alles war wichtig und nichts unwichtig genug, um nicht registriert zu werden. Natürlich schrieben sie nichts auf, aber das brauchten sie gar nicht, weil Worte nicht verloren gehen auf dieser Welt, und Worte des Erinnerns schon ganz und gar nicht. (21)

These “Quasselstimmen” are imbued with their own authority as character-narrators, who in turn converse above—both figuratively and literally—the humans, whose thoughts, memories, experiences, and potential futures they record. The narrator explains that, in lieu of pen and paper (“Natürlich schrieben sie nichts auf”), the “Quasselstimmen” possess a seemingly infinite capacity for memory, particularly where the words of memory (“Worte des Erinnerns”) are concerned. Although one might reasonably assume the spoken word, unless documented or preserved in some fashion, to be an unstable or ephemeral piece of information or unit of knowledge, the narrator insists that the “Quasselstimmen,” without the need for human technology, create a repository that prevents words from disappearing from the world (“weil Worte nicht verloren gehen auf dieser Welt”). According to the narrator's description, these voices appear to assemble an oral archive composed of information that one would otherwise most likely assume to be unarchivable without the benefit of pen and paper or a tape recorder.

Unburdened by such material concerns, the “Quasselstimmen” act as the custodians and archivists of human experience, as it is expressed in every word, gesture, and thought, no matter how ostensibly trivial.

And we must note here that Hilsenrath’s narrator describes these vibrant, loquacious voices as the various voices of history, not as those of the people per se. While they are seemingly connected to the voices of the individual Jews in the train car in some (heretofore) unexplained manner, they also become characters in their own right. These “Quasselstimmen,” who observe the Jews in the train car below, converse among one another, and in turn narrate their observations. The voices call attention not only to the act of conversation and verbal informational exchange, but also to the frequent metalepses from one diegetic level to another.

The novel’s structural and thematic concern with dialogical interplay, highlighting both the representation of direct human speech and the communication between diegetic levels, effects, as I have argued, a postwar recuperation of Yiddish narrative techniques. Hilsenrath’s novel not only borrows obvious features of Yiddish literature, such as stock characters like the *shlemiel* and the matchmaker and the use of Yiddish-language vocabulary and cultural terms,⁷ but it also adapts structural elements from Yiddish literature, as we saw with the comparison to the stories of Sholem Aleichem. The structural similarities between Hilsenrath’s text and those of his predecessors writing in Yiddish bear repeating. Anne Fuchs argues that Hilsenrath’s intertextual references to the tropes of classic Yiddish literature firmly place the author in conversation with the multifaceted, multilingual tradition of Eastern European Jewish writing:

⁷ In an attempt to explain various aspects of Jewish culture to his Swiss lawyers (and thus to readers of German most likely unfamiliar with the nuances of traditional Eastern European Jewish life), Uncle Jossel routinely employs Yiddish vocabulary throughout the narration of his will and testament. Among many others, he explains the terms “Pessach” and “Matzekloß” (55-7), “Mikwe” (59), “Apikeurim” (63), “Tefillin” (65), “Balegules” (68), “Bakschisch” (104), “Naches” (122), “Chupe” (126), “Kaddisch” (127), “Chevre Kaddische” (150), “Parnusse” (162), “Schmatte” (171), “Chumez” (188), and “Schofar” (232).

Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr continues the tradition of Jewish ghetto writing in that Hilsenrath's stories recall a world which is peopled by quaint characters and loveable types who display wit and ingenuity in managing their daily lives. Like the great Yiddish narrators, Hilsenrath employs what one might call a poetics of insignificance which evokes a concrete sense of the life in the *shtetl*." (188-9)

While Fuchs is, in my view, correct in pointing out the general connection between Hilsenrath's novel and Yiddish writing, we must expand upon her observation. Firstly, her observation remains general, as she does not cite specific examples of Yiddish authors or "great Yiddish narrators." Secondly, we should take care lest the notion of a "poetics of insignificance" be employed without an understanding that narrators in modern Yiddish literature often self-reflexively makes use of this "quaintness" or "folksiness" as a specific rhetorical strategy (Schachter 32-7). We would need to employ the term "poetics of insignificance" in such a way as to avoid obscuring the narrative complexity of this poetics. That being said, Fuchs' term rightly highlights the parallel between the aestheticization of the quotidian in works of (modern) Yiddish literature and the use of a similar technique in Hilsenrath's novel.

Abramovitsh's novella *Fishke der krume* (*Fishke the lame*, 1869) provides an example of this "poetics of insignificance" that further deepens our understanding of *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*. The author's loquacious, wandering narrator, *Mendele Moykher Sforim* (Mendele the Book Peddler) is reminiscent of and provides a kind of blueprint for Hilsenrath's peripatetic, verbose narrator, Jossel Wassermann. In *Fishke the lame*, Mendele begins his tale by addressing the reader directly, in an off-hand conversational manner that deemphasizes the distance between narrator and narratee (and reader). Before we encounter the narrative strand that focuses on the figure of Fishke, Mendele, while on one of his many peripatetic commercial excursions from one

Jewish community to the next, engages in conversation with Reb Alter, a fellow traveler and connoisseur of storytelling (21-6).⁸ The conversation between Mendele and Alter gives rise to the story about Fishke through reciprocal speech acts in the form of loquacious and lively banter (27-53). Their friendly, jocular rapport underscores the emphasis on dialogue as the birthplace of storytelling:

Alter gave me a glare. Then he nodded his head angrily, grumbling the whiles, as if addressing himself only:

“Talk about your Jewish rogues, by golly! For here’s a man sits afore him, weighed down so cruel by afflictions, so his guts is near fit to bust for it; and why’s even pouring his griefs out to him [...] Though, what’s it to him anyhow? Why, ain’t naught! For no; he won’t turn a hair. Thinks only of his own precious self. ‘*Aye!*’ says he, ‘*fit for a bathhouse!*’ Only fancy! Why tush! Sun’s got the poor thing all hot ‘n’ bothered. Bathhouses—Humph! [...] Oh, don’cher worry, sir! For I do know all about sudden dainty airs, put on by Jewish gents what’s backing outer deals, on account t’other feller’s got no cahs, an’ won’t turn him no profit!”

“Gracious! No, but Reb Alt [...],” I’d cried out in protest, and gave Alter’s beard a friendly tug—as is only the custom amongst us—saying: “No, but Reb Alter, how can you think such a thing of me? For I’d something very different on my mind. On my honor! Was only the end of your story put me in mind of a yarn what happened on a time. In a bathhouse. Can’t seem to get the thing out of my head. And it is a first-rate yarn [...]. (52-3)

⁸ Similar to Sholem Aleichem’s *Railway Stories*, many of Abramovitsh’s Mendele the Book Peddler stories also employ a poetics of movement. Like the travelling salesman in the *Railway Stories*, Mendele is constantly on the move and his travels provide the impetus for the stories he relates and hears related to him (Garrett 27-30).

The embedded narrative concerning the principal protagonist Fishke begins immediately after this dialogic exchange. Mendele's conversation, which evokes the cadence of human speech, provides the narrative fuel for the portrayal of the figure of Fishke, who exists within a diegetic realm separate from that of Mendele and Reb Alter, at least at the beginning. Fishke, a poor orphan, grows up in a tiny *shtetl* community, travels from yeshiva to yeshiva, becomes apprenticed as a cantor singer, and subsequently meets one misfortune after another. The tale of Fishke is born out of this meandering conversation, jostling between the character Mendele and the character Reb Alter as they travel. Mendele exists both inside and outside the story world he creates, as a figure that both speaks with his fellow characters and addresses the reader directly. Alter, who has no obvious access to or awareness of the reader, occupies a metadiegetic level and narrates, in conjunction with the figure of Mendele, the separate diegetic level inhabited by the pitiable Fishke and the characters populating his environment.

These diegetic levels do not remain neatly separated from one another. The embedded narrative concentrating on Fishke bleeds into the metadiegesis of Reb Alter and Mendele when it becomes clear that Reb Alter is in all actuality Fishke's long-lost father, who had previously abandoned his mother before her death. The boundary line between these levels begins to dissolve. The separate diegesis concerning Fishke "crashes" into the metadiegetic/diegetic realm occupied by Alter and Mendele, and two ostensibly discrete diegetic strands are thus merged through a surprise turn of events. Boundaries are blurred; narrative levels, once distinct and seemingly independent, grow hazy—all to the delight of the reader, or the listener, of such a tale. Yiddish literary texts, such as those by Sholem Aleichem and Abramovitsh investigated in this chapter, remind us that the boundary between character and narrator is a construct: one that the narrative can either reinforce or call into question through multiple metaleptic slippages. I argue

that this blurring of the lines between the diegetic levels also simultaneously underscores the dialogic aspect of this entire narrative complex: the tale of Fishke is so close to the tellers of his story—the raconteurs Alter and Mendele—that the very act of its telling brings about the realization that one of the character-narrators is in fact Fishke’s long-lost father.

Similar to *Fishke the Lamé*, *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* provides us at the outset with multiple levels of diegesis and metadiegesis: the realm of the narrator who initially sets the stage and depicts God’s atmospheric peephole, out of which he looks down on the *shtetl*, that of the Jews in the train car struggling with conditions that worsen by the hour, and the separate ontological plane occupied by the “Quasselstimmen.” I emphasize here that the reader encounters a dialogic exchange between these various levels of narration that is remarkably similar to the complex interplay between levels of diegesis in Abramovitsh’s Yiddish-language text. As we have seen in *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, the rabbi’s initial conversation with the wind catalyzes the history of the Pohodna Jews, in the form of countless individual voices, to flee to the roof of the train car. Jossel also foregrounds the use of the dialogic in his own brand of narrativity: his dialogue with his lawyers is reminiscent of Mendele’s on-going conversation with Reb Alter. The diegetic level on which Mendele and Alter exist is in a dynamic state of constant flux with the many other character-narrators they encounter and the separate tales (and subsequently, separate diegetic levels) that these encounters engender. These conversations that give rise to tales and stories form an extended dialogic exchange in the form of direct speech in the written narrative.

The framing story and the embedded narrative of texts such as *Fishke the Lamé* and *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* stand in dialogic exchange with one another. One of the hallmarks of Yiddish writing—an aspect toward which Hilsenrath gestures in his post-Holocaust

evocation of Yiddish literary tropes—is an emphatic gesture toward leaving the story or tale open to further acts of narration. Practically speaking, Yiddish-language tales often leave the reader (or listener) wanting more. As we saw in “Baranovich Station,” the Kaminka Jew suddenly departs the scene to reach his destination, leaving the salesman-narrator eager for the end of the story. In *Fishke the lame*, we are similarly left craving additional information in our desire to connect all the dots as the boundaries between diegetic levels disintegrate and we learn of Reb Alter’s paternity. Again and again, we encounter a non-totalizing effect⁹ in narrative. These various conversations—the sustained informational and cultural exchanges that occur across diegetic levels—demonstrate a hesitation to conclude the narrative once and for all. The polyphony of conversations across multiple levels of diegesis signals a narrative that, from its very structure, defies finality. Yiddish literature emphasizes a refusal to close off its narratives and the various diegetic levels that make up said narratives; *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* also eagerly partakes in this tradition. The diegetic level occupied by the “Quasselstimmen,” who resist taxonomic categorization, easily permeates the human realm of the Jews suffering in the train car, but also maintains a certain amount of autonomy—the anti-Jewish elements in society, be they Nazis or their collaborators, have neither power nor agency in the ontological realm they inhabit. The only agency that comes to the fore in the text is Jewish.

This interplay among the characters and character-narrators and the interplay between diegetic levels operate together to open up the possibility for the Jews and their words to be memorialized outside of the confines of a conventional historiography that would otherwise

⁹ In *Magic Realism in Holocaust Literature*, Jenny Adams argues, “Dialogism as understood here refers to discourse that is non-total in the sense outlined above, to the utterance that places itself in the context of other utterances, subjectivities and worldviews and consequently participates in an (actualized or unactualized) dialogue. Central to the concept of dialogism as interpreted here are two key interrelated attributes: dialogic discourse is both unfinalizable and anti-totalizing” (56). While Hilsenrath’s novel is not an example of magic realist fiction, its dialogic qualities allow for an open-ended-ness in accordance with her definition here.

overlook the particularities that these conversations underscore. Karin Bauer argues that individual stories in the form of these voices are integral to Hilsenrath's literary representation of a particular moment in Jewish history:

Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr beschwört die Tradition von jüdischer Kultur und Gemeinschaft noch einmal herauf und widersetzt sich somit der in der realen Welt schon längst vollzogenen Zerstörung von Gemeinschaft, Erinnerungsvermögen und Erzählung. Der Roman besteht aus erinnerten Erfahrungen, aus mündlich Erzähltem und Reflexionen über das Erzählen, und Geschichte konstruiert sich hier nicht als universalgeschichtliches Sinnkonstrukt, sondern aus erzählten Geschichten, deren Fokus zwar die individuelle Lebensgeschichte ist, die diese aber in ihrer Verknüpfung mit dem Zeitgeschehen, d.h. im Kontext der jüdischen Geschichte der Unterdrückung, Verfolgung und Hoffnung auf Gleichberechtigung und ein friedliches Zusammenleben zeigt. Die Erzählstimmen übernehmen die Rolle des Erzählers und Chronisten jüdischer Geschichte(n) in der Verflechtung von individueller und gemeinschaftlicher Geschichte. (345)

Bauer's observation here underscores both the limitations of conventional historiography and the novel's strategy of employing a multiplicity of voices as an imagined alternative to this historiography.¹⁰ The writing of conventional history, based principally on archival evidence and tangible documentation, by its very nature, cannot account for these kinds of details that are necessarily lost to history. The point, however, is not to negate what Hilsenrath's novel appears

¹⁰ Fuchs articulates a similar argument about the role of conventional historiography in Hilsenrath's novel. She asserts that *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* "poses an alternative to historiography and its tendency to adopt a top-down perspective on historical development and change. For in clear contrast to the macro-level of historiography and its marginalisation [sic] of the individual, the poetics of insignificance adopts a bottom-up perspective which makes the individual's experience of history its central concern" (189-90). With the "Quasselstimmen" that record the minutiae of the lives of the Pohodna Jews trapped in the train car, Hilsenrath's narrator gestures toward the possibility of a multivocal, multi-perspectival approach to the writing of history of the Holocaust, one which supplements what might be considered to be a more conventional approach to historiography that relies first and foremost on archival material as its basis.

to perceive as conventional historiography, but rather to supplement it—to bring additional contours to it by way of imagined possibilities. I do not wish to construct here a false dichotomy between literature and history; rather, I endeavor to tease out how the author’s use of these chatty voices expands upon the idea of an approach to history that draws its conclusions and shapes its narrative primarily as a result of engaging with the material archive. The words, thoughts, and experiences of the Pohodna Jews imprisoned in the cattle car are a kind of anti-data to which the archivist and historian have no access. Hilsenrath creates the ontological realm of the “Quasselstimmen” in order to create a space in which these anti-data can be stored, preserved, and valued. I argue that the interplay between these two ontological codes (that of the voices and that of the humans in the train car) and the emphasis on the conversational further underscores a reluctance on the part of the text to close off or finalize the fictional world.

The “Almost Lost Story” and an Elegiac Epilogue

We see the text’s anti-totalizing quality most urgently in its epilogue. Even though Jossel’s function as character-narrator comes to a close at the end of the embedded narrative, the epilogue begins with a conversation among the non-corporeal voices regarding Jossel’s fate (267-9). They ponder his life and remind themselves of the particular details surrounding his death. But Jossel’s story is not told with any sense of finality: the “Quasselstimmen” in charge of recording the network of his tales and stories comment to the wind on the unfinished and incomplete nature of their knowledge:

“Wo ist Onkel Jossel eigentlich begraben?” fragte der Wind, der die ganze Geschichte vom Onkel Jossel aufmerksam verfolgt hatte.

“Vorübergehend in Zürich”, sagte die erzählende Stimme.

“Und wann wurde er begraben?”

“Gleich nachdem der Krieg ausbrach. Am nächsten Tag.”

“Das ist aber mehr als drei Jahre her. Und das nennst du vorübergehend?”

“Man konnte ihn nicht nach Pohodna bringen”, sagte die Stimme. “Es war unmöglich wegen der politischen Lage. Nach dem Krieg werden seine Überreste nach Pohodna gebracht.” (269)

The voices speculate and leave open the possibility for future action. Jossel’s testament could potentially be carried out in the postwar period; the reader knows, however, that were this repatriation eventually possible, Pohodna and its residents will no longer exist. Although the voices’ knowledge may be incomplete, or “unfinalizable,” this lack of totality does not represent a weakness in their project of memorialization. The lack of an anti-totalizing impulse is also connected to the articulation of Jewish agency. The novel leaves certain events open-ended, allowing for the imagination of possibilities through narrative. We need only recall the “Quasselstimmen” discussing “jüdische Möglichkeiten” in the prologue to see how this reluctance to close off the events of the story world propels imaginative fiction forward rather than denying closure. Similar to the Yiddish-language tales by Sholem Aleichem and Abramovitsh, Hilsenrath’s narrative leaves the door open for possibilities.

We can find an emphasis on Jewish agency and the imaginative in an additional device in the novel—one that I refer to as the “almost lost story,” which I define as the reproduction of multiple, albeit often fragmented, stories within the novel, which self-reflexively highlights its preoccupation with portraying the stories of individual people who perished in the Holocaust. The individual stories of the Pohodna Jews in danger of being lost and thus silenced as a result of Nazi terror are “saved”—or at least partially recuperated—through the intervention of the narrator, even if the people themselves are not. I argue that this technique allows Hilsenrath as

narrator to mark the delicate line between gesturing toward the historical absence of the millions of stories that can never be told, i.e. the disnarrated body of human experience; and the desire for a metonymical proxy, for a moment of resistance to an otherwise infinite ellipsis that can never be truly filled in. Language—in the form of the stories told and the discussion surrounding them—thus marks absence as much as it does presence. The “almost lost story” provides a method for marking, through narration, that which cannot be narrated in its entirety. The imaginative intervention of the “Quasselstimmen” allows the memory of the *shtetl* Jews trapped in the cattle car to be saved.

With its deployment of the “almost lost story,” Hilsenrath’s novel underscores the role of imaginative fiction in the larger practice of Holocaust remembrance. Bauer argues, “*Jossel Wassermann* ist ein komplexes Geflecht individueller Geschichten, die sich im Prozeß des Erzählens zu einer heterogenen, brüchigen Geschichte des Judentums zusammenfügen” (343). The act of representing the multiple voices of the history of the Jews of Pohodna signals a deep-seated concern regarding the actual historical loss of millions of individual human lives and the countless narratives associated with those lives. In response, the text overtly thematizes this anxiety and offers, as a gesture of consolation to the reader, the multi-stranded narrative of Uncle Jossel and his nephew Jankl. While we as readers could never—or only with great difficulty—process all the details recorded by the “Quasselstimmen,” we find ourselves actively entertaining the possibility of rescuing the memory of the many Jews on their way to their deaths in the train car, a gesture encapsulated within the narrative that does come to the fore. What we therefore encounter is the thematization of the possibility of narrating through what has “almost” been lost. Without the intervention of the text in the interplay between the realm of the human and the non-corporeal voices of history hovering above the train car, Jankl’s and Jossel’s stories would be

most likely lost to the destruction that accompanies war, genocide, and human forgetting. They thus play a metonymical function; they serve as fragments or pieces that strive to stand in for the whole, i.e. the millions of lives and stories that were lost in the Holocaust. The trope of the “almost lost story”—the story of Jankl and his path from inheritance to deportation, and, to a certain extent, the stories of the many characters in Jossel’s narration—reminds the reader of both the monumental loss associated with the Holocaust as well as the on-going project of memory and memorialization surrounding this series of historical events.

Although the novel cannot reasonably reproduce all stories recorded by the voices it creates, it thematizes the possibility of this kind of heterogeneous, multivocal approach to historiography. The narrator distinguishes between the voices whose purview is the kind of conventional history that appears in history books and the “smaller” voices in charge of an alternative type of historiography: “Und tatsächlich: die kleinen Quasselstimmen erzählten alles, was unter dem Dach des Zuges passierte. Kein Geräusch, nicht das geringste, ging ihnen verloren. Nur jene Stimmen, die festhielten, was später mal in den Geschichtsbüchern stehen würde, die schwiegen” (22). Rather than eschewing the writing of history altogether, Hilsenrath’s novel foregrounds an additional historiographical project that can gesture toward the individual stories and details that usually do not appear in a conventional, monological historical narrative that aims to draw the larger brushstrokes of historical events. *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* calls our attention to the possibility of an alternative historiographical project that emphasizes individual and specific histories. These histories are preserved in what Bauer terms Hilsenrath’s “erzählende Umsetzung in eine reflektierende, vielstimmige Geschichte” (344). I argue that *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* constructs a web of dialogic exchange in response to larger cultural concerns regarding representation and the mimetic tradition. That these levels do

not remain hermetically sealed wholes, but rather often blend into and interact with one another—à la Sholem Aleichem and Abramovitsh—further problematizes the notion of an unwavering system of signification and meaning-making. The point bears repeating: Hilsenrath's novel, perhaps at first blush a naïve and homespun portrayal of *shtetl* life, belies a sophisticated, multifaceted system made possible precisely through its complex implementation of narrative structure and techniques, paired with a complex investigation of Jewish history and the telling of the recent Eastern European Jewish past.

Hilsenrath's novel articulates possible additions, addenda, and emendations to a conventional historiography built principally on archival evidence. *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* employs a practice of storytelling as an alternative means for attempting to encompass the sheer gravity and overwhelming breadth of an event as complex as a genocide. He approaches the Holocaust not as something ineffable, but rather as a topic that, due to its very nature, requires linguistic and narratological experimentation in order to at least attempt to render the complexities of the human experience in words. The use of a mode of narrative dialogicity inherited from Jewish culture, specifically Yiddish literature, coupled with the rich possibilities offered by legend, provides fertile ground for an imaginative fictional engagement with Holocaust representation.

But it is crucial to note here that *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* does not use imaginative fiction to deny the historical veracity of the Holocaust; the novel demonstrates its limits when faced with the historical reality of the deaths of millions of people. The novel is, first and foremost, a project about mourning and an elegy for the lost world of Eastern European Jewry. Hilsenrath's narrative practice remains ambivalent about the postwar culture of memorialization; the “Quasselstimmen” save the history of the Pohodna Jews, but not the Jews themselves. The

poetics of movement that characterizes the prologue and Onkel Jossel's autobiographical project comes to a standstill when the train stops in its tracks. In the epilogue, this poetics becomes detached from the railway car when only the wind can leave the site of the railway car in search of information. The "Quasselstimmen" remain on the roof of the train car, while the wind, with which the rabbi of Pohodna spoke in the prologue, blows over forest and field in order to find out when the train car can begin to move again, after the voices tell it their final two stories. When it becomes clear that an answer to the question about when the train will move cannot be found by asking other natural elements such as the sun, the wind takes leave of the Jews and the "Quasselstimmen": "ihr Ziel war unbekannt, und auf Dauer war die Nähe der Juden zu riskant" (289). As if the wind were human, it exhibits anxiety over the looming fate of the Jews in the cattle car.

The wind, however, like the "Quasselstimmen," is not subject to the same physical rules to which the humans in the novel are. The wind continues in its journey, this time searching for the spirit of God. It speaks the novel's final words: "Die Sonne verspricht einen freundlichen Tag. Ich mache mich jetzt auf den Weg. Und ich mache mich auf die Suche. Vor mir kann keiner was verbergen. Ich wette mit dir, daß ich den Geist Gottes irgendwo finde" (290). The novel ends on a dialogic note, though it remains unclear to whom the wind refers with the pronoun "dir." The confusion regarding whom the wind addresses invites us into a final moment of conversation. The wind ends on an elegiac note; the novel's last words are a plaintive call for meaning in a world otherwise drained of order and justice. While the novel never actually depicts the train car headed to its final destination, the wind reminds us that the voices preserve the Jews' individual stories so that they will not be lost with their deportation and death (319). With the "Quasselstimmen" and a narrative practice that emphasizes Jewish agency, *Jossel*

Wassermanns Heimkehr formulates an imaginative alternative to conventional historiography, while simultaneously underscoring an ambivalence about the larger cultural project of Holocaust memorialization and the nature of what and how we remember. The novel thus situates itself within a larger tradition of Yiddish writing that recognizes the complex, often fraught and sometimes dangerous, historical reality that many Eastern European Jews experienced. In a manner similar to the Yiddish literary texts that I explored in this chapter, Hilsenrath's novel evokes imaginative possibilities in narrative as a method for confronting and establishing a degree of agency in contending with this reality.

Chapter Two:

Max Has A Screw Loose: The Dialogic, Narration and the Articulation of a Post-Perpetrator Identity in Edgar Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur*

Introduction

Edgar Hilsenrath's second and arguably best known novel, the dark satire *Der Nazi und der Friseur* [*The Nazi and the Barber*, 1971 in English translation, 1977 in the German original]¹¹ is a meditation on the consciousness of a perpetrator, specifically a Nazi perpetrator named Max Schulz. The novel consists of six books, each of which chronicles a specific period in his life: childhood and his rise in the Nazi party; his complicity in the murder of innumerable Jewish victims of the Nazi genocide; his escape from the Red Army at the end of World War II; his assumption of the identity of his former childhood friend, the German Jew Itzig Finkelstein, whom he claims to have killed by his own hand; his immigration to postwar Palestine; and his participation in the founding of the state of Israel as a Zionist freedom fighter, followed by a successful career as a barber and a peaceful death by natural causes. Max owes his escape from prosecution as a war criminal and his ability to live out his life under an alias to the theft of a Holocaust victim's identity, including this person's past, present and future. As Erin McGlothlin characterizes this heinous deed, "By murdering Itzig, assuming Itzig's identity, and living out the life that he brutally robbed of Itzig, Max commits a particularly vituperative act of identity theft, a brutal expropriation of the life of one individual that functions as a synecdoche for both his massacre of multiple victims and the Nazis' project of destroying and effacing from memory millions of European Jews" ("Narrative Perspective" 165). In narrating his many crimes, Max

¹¹ In "Entstehungs- und Publikationsgeschichte des Romans *Der Nazi und der Friseur*," Helmut Braun provides a detailed description of the novel's complex, circuitous publication and reception history. Braun explains how Hilsenrath first wrote the novel under contract with the American publishing house Doubleday (41-43). Hilsenrath composed the text, though it was originally intended for English-language publication, in German (44). Doubleday commissioned an English-language translation, and the novel appeared for the first time in 1971 under the title *The Nazi & the Barber* (44). Italian and French translations of *The Nazi and the Barber* appeared in 1973 and 1974, respectively (44). Finding a German publisher willing to release the novel proved more difficult. Despite receiving overwhelmingly positive reviews in the United States and elsewhere, Hilsenrath's novel was rejected by more than sixty German publishing houses, often on grounds that its content could potentially stir up anti-Semitic sentiment (45-47). In 1977, Helmut Braun agreed to publish the novel, and it appeared under the auspices of his small literary press under the title *Der Nazi & der Friseur* (47).

demonstrates over the course of the novel a tendency toward flight, both physically and psychologically. He flees the permanence of and culpability involved with self-identification as a perpetrator by cycling back and forth between identities and subject positions, a tactic that assists him in claiming at various points in the novel status as both Holocaust perpetrator and Holocaust survivor. In constructing a character narrator who bifurcates his personality for the purpose of avoiding what would be for him the trap of a fixed identity as perpetrator with the concomitant guilt and responsibility, Hilsenrath appears to evoke, in satirical form, a pattern of behavior common in postwar Germany among Nazi perpetrators (and among many other Germans with varying degrees of complicity vis-à-vis the Nazi past) that Gesine Schwan terms “destructive splitting” (728). Schwan argues that the failure to come clean regarding the exact nature of one’s guilt and one’s participation in the crimes of National Socialism often led to a psychological state that was marked (and harmed) by the strain of contradiction, by the split between the acknowledgement of what one knew to be true and what one was willing to admit (727-8). One significant distinction between Schwan’s real life subjects and Hilsenrath’s narrator is that Max willingly narrates his past and refers to the crimes he commits. He does not, however, explicitly accept responsibility for them. Max strives to force open an interstice between the categories of victim and perpetrator, not because he endeavors to challenge critically the assumption of a strictly dichotomous relationship between the two in order to uncover the lies maintained by the society around him, but for the purpose of deferring rhetorically the repercussions of accepting responsibility for his crimes.

Max’s creates this interstitial space through a specific articulation of the dialogic, or perhaps more accurately, through various dialogical constellations. In the following chapter, I analyze how Max establishes a dual identity as both victim and perpetrator within the larger

context of a practice of unreliable, injured narration that is ostensibly linked to sexual abuse he suffered as a child. Taking Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic as a point of analytical departure, I also investigate how Hilsenrath's devious narrator animates and manipulates a dialogical interaction between the discrete identities as victim and perpetrator. Max's deployment of this dialogic articulates, I will demonstrate, a post-perpetration self. This post-perpetration self is a perpetuation¹² of Max's former self that perpetrated (i.e. the self that previously murdered). It is this post-perpetration self that the reader encounters in the novel—an articulation of the self after the crimes have been committed and the perpetration itself has ended. I assert that his elaborate strategy for evading detection and responsibility in the post-Holocaust period by living in the pilfered guise of one of his victims operates as a narrative iteration of the self that perpetrated war crimes in the Holocaust. And while Max's manipulation of narration and performance of multiple identities are certainly not tantamount to the original crime of murder, his self-contradicting narratorial habit of switching between opposing subject positions for the purpose of evading guilt reinforces for the reader his status as mass murderer and war criminal, thus reaffirming his identity as perpetrator.

Max's "Loose Screw": Injured Narration and Manipulation

The opening chapter of the first book of *Der Nazi und der Friseur* provides signposts key for understanding how the text's narrativity, in the ways it is practiced and structured by the text's principal narrator, at once reveals and conceals information. These signposts or narrative cues provide the reader, as I argue, with tools necessary for interpreting the text as a whole. The novel commences as the autodiegetic narrator, who identifies himself as Max Schulz,

“unehelicher, wenn auch rein arischer Sohn der Minna Schulz ... zur Zeit meiner Geburt

¹² Here, I adopt Verena Hutter's idea of perpetuation and apply it to Max's perpetration and self-understanding. She argues that Hilsenrath's dark satire presents us with a diegesis in which “lies, hatred, and violence are blissfully perpetuated” (1).

Dienstmädchen im Hause des jüdischen Pelzhändlers Abramowitz” (Hilsenrath 7), sets the stage for an “autobiographical account” (McGlothlin, “Narrative Perspective” 163)¹³ that will be characterized by violence and deceit, couched within a practice of unreliable narration. Max’s initial self-identification as a “pure” Aryan (i.e. non-Jewish) German who grows up in a social milieu with German Jews immediately sets the stage for what follows, namely tension between seemingly discrete and ostensibly oppositional subject positions, i.e. non-Jewish German versus German-Jew, Nazi supporter versus Nazi persecuted, insane versus sane, etc. As I will demonstrate over the course of this chapter, this tension between various constellations of identities is often instantiated by way of dialogic interaction, constituted in the act of narration itself. Max pokes and prods anxiety regarding identity (and self-identification) through the conscious manipulation of narrative voice.¹⁴ Throughout the novel, the narrating-I habitually flips back and forth between various identities—a practice that is foregrounded in Max’s narration of his childhood. Within the first few pages at the novel’s outset, Max gestures toward his inhabiting two (ostensibly) dichotomous subject positions, that of victim and perpetrator—a gesture that will become a narrative tic that he often repeats throughout the novel.

We observe the first instance of this practice of dual identification as both perpetrator and victim as Max recounts the details of his own birth and the nearly simultaneous birth of a German-Jewish boy named Itzig Finkelstein, whose family is well acquainted with Minna Schulz’s employer. While relating the details of Itzig’s circumcision eight days later, Max interrupts himself to address his audience directly. He inquires: “Ich nehme an, daß Sie wissen,

¹³ Several scholars, including Andreas Graf, Bernhard Malkmus, Verena Hutter, and Erin McGlothlin, have discussed Max’s deployment of various conventions associated with both the picaresque novel and autobiographical discourse. I quote McGlothlin’s argument here because her work provides a helpful point of departure for discussing Max’s use of narrative voice as this chapter progresses.

¹⁴ I employ here McGlothlin’s terminology, because an understanding of Max as purposefully manipulative has provided crucial insight for the development of my analysis of Hilsenrath’s text (“Narrative Perspective” 10-13).

was eine Bescheidung ist and daß Sie, wenn Sie Jude sind, Ihr eigenes verstümmeltes Glied nicht nur betrachtet, sozusagen begutachtet, sondern sich auch zuweilen Gedanken über die symbolische Ursache der fehlenden Vorhaut gemacht haben. Habe ich recht?" (Hilsenrath 10). Here, in this first instance of direct engagement with the narratee, Max teases his interlocutor, suggesting that he can predict how his audience will react to the topic of circumcision. The seemingly playful teasing that we find in this paragraph quickly takes on a more sinister tone in the following paragraph, when Max ponders the symbolic significance of circumcision, which he terms "... eine symbolische Handlung, die ich als Massenmörder gar nicht genug loben kann" (10). Here, Max's narrating-I identifies himself as a mass murderer, thus implying that the experiencing-I (the man who will become the adult version of the child described in this first few pages of the novel) will grow up to become a perpetrator. This moment provides us an initial, albeit uncontextualized, glimpse into the future: Max hints that he will occupy at some point in the text the role of mass murderer after committing deeds that will justify this label. And we are doubly confused as to what he intends to communicate regarding this revelation and its connection to the concept of a "symbolic act" ("eine symbolische Handlung") that he claims to praise. Though Max positions himself as the protagonist of the life story that he has just begun, he throws a metaphorical wrench—however temporary—into the mechanics of reading and readerly expectations. Without further explanation, Max returns to the topic of Itzig's *brit mila*, leaving the reader to ponder what to make of this outrageous admission cast as a parenthetical aside. The lack of further explanation at this point in the narrative forces the reader to assimilate this piece of information without fully comprehending its significance. Max provides us at this moment with a crucial autobiographical detail but fails to provide us the means to integrate it into our comprehension, either with respect to the events related or with respect to his role as

narrator. As readers, we rely upon the narrator to provide information necessary for filling in epistemological gaps. The structure of narrative prevents the telling of all information at once, and Max appears to exploit this aspect of it. This exploitation, as we will see, operates as part of a larger constellation of rhetorical strategies that Max deploys throughout the text. This reference to a later identity as mass murderer stands in stark contrast to and is complicated by what follows.

After completing this troubling aside and relating the details of Itzig's successful circumcision, Max narrates how his mother Minna Schulz endeavors to repeat the ritual, though in bastardized form. Upon witnessing Itzig's circumcision, she convinces her five lovers—all of whom are mentioned as possible fathers to Max—to help her copy the rite that she has just witnessed (though entirely misunderstood on account of superstitions she holds regarding Jewish religious practice), this time with her newborn son. Eager to participate, these men proceed to grant her wish, even after she begins to express anxiety about the possibility of irreparably harming the baby Max. In response to the adults' irresponsible fumbling and the impending violence of the situation, Max relates how "etwas Seltsames geschah" (13): the infant version of himself refuses to allow one of his five potential biological fathers to play *mohel* and perform what he also fears will turn out to be a botched *brit mila*.¹⁵ Max describes a momentary burst of power and self-possession in evading the clutches of ill-meaning parental figures: "Ich, Max Schulz, acht Tage alt, sprang dem Fleischer plötzlich mit einem Aufschrei an den Hals, biß kräftig zu, obwohl ich noch keine Zähne hatte, ließ mich auf den Fußboden fallen, kroch in Windeseile zum Fenster [...]" (13-14). Here, Max narrates an event that leaves the reader (at least

¹⁵ Max employs in his relation of this event the standard Hebrew terminology regarding the Jewish practice of male circumcision, reflecting his subsequent close relationship with the Finkelstein family and participation in Jewish religious practice, all of which lays the groundwork for his assumption of the identity of a Jewish Holocaust survivor following the end of World War II.

momentarily) incredulous, but he does so within the context of an act that, without this unbelievable intervention, would surely constitute both physical disfigurement and child abuse for the young Max. We are left to ponder a moment that is both incredible and chilling. We must negotiate an overall account of the ominous threat of physical violence perpetrated upon the body of an innocent child with the narrator's tendency to contradict himself. Max insists that his infant self, despite lacking teeth, bit down hard in an effort to impede his would-be assailants. As readers, we struggle to reconcile the relief we experience as Max escapes the clutches of these men and their dubious intentions with the unreliable manner in which the episode is narrated. In contrast to Max's previous reference to being a mass murderer, this scene of narrowly circumvented child abuse could possibly evoke empathy in the reader, were it not for the seed of doubt germinated by the unreliability of the account. From the beginning of the text, Max's narration is riddled with contradictions that underscore his narratorial impulse to reveal and conceal simultaneously.

Max further complicates this moment of potential empathetic identification between himself and the reader when he directly addresses his audience a second time. As if already anticipating the difficulty that readers will likely find in believing that the infant version of Max possesses superhuman strength and an acute awareness of his surroundings, Max interjects:

Sie glauben wahrscheinlich, daß ich mich über Sie lustig mache? Oder Sie glauben es nicht, und Sie werden sich sagen: "Max Schulz spinnt! Er bildet sich ein, daß man ihn umbringen wollte ... weil er ein Bastard war ... und das alles unter dem Vorwand einer Beschneidung, so wie das bei den Juden üblich ist: am achten Tag nach der Geburt. Was will Max Schulz? Was will er mir einreden? Wem will er die Schuld in die Schuhe schieben? Seiner Mutter? Den Juden? Oder dem lieben Gott?—Und das mit der

Selbstwehr des Säuglings, seiner Flucht ... Unsinn! Sowas gibt es nicht! Ein Alptraum!
Nichts weiter!” (14)

Here, Max tells us what he thinks we want to hear by addressing the issue of reliability in an ostensibly direct and open manner. He feigns engaging in a dialogue with his audience, thereby asserting (or reasserting) monologic control over the narration. He does not follow his reference to his own unreliability with an explanation of why he narrates the way he does. This lack of explanation, however, speaks volumes in its own right. Quoting this same passage, McGlothlin aptly argues that “[n]ot only does Max figure himself [...] as the original victim of violence, a claim that conflicts with his self-identification just a few pages earlier as a ‘mass-murderer’ [...] but he also models to the reader how she should consume his text: with skepticism as to its veracity and with an awareness of his psychological and narratorial instability” (“Narrative Perspective” 164). McGlothlin pinpoints how Max, in self-identifying as both victim and perpetrator in the novel’s first chapter, paints two images of himself that contradict one another—not because a perpetrator can never be victimized nor because a victim can never commit an act of perpetration—but because he fails to address the contradiction he constructs here within the framework of his narration and to explain the connection between the two identities as they pertain to his autobiography. Rather than helpfully deconstructing the categories of “perpetrator” and “victim” and perhaps addressing the fluid nature of identity as the result of a life filled with disparate experiences, Max litters his narration with puzzles that frustrate the readers’ attempts to solve them as part of the reading process. In these opening pages, Max foregrounds a pattern to which he returns repeatedly over the course of the novel: he evacuates (temporarily) his perpetrator subject position in favor of occupying an identity as victim—a narrative technique that allows him to defer guilt and deny complicity. This narrative

tic, whereby he switches back and forth between identities, will repeatedly remind us over the course of the novel of his crimes and his efforts to evade responsibility for them. Max's tactic, which serves as a method of flight, simultaneously reaffirms his status as mass murderer and Holocaust perpetrator.

Directly following his interjection about how his readers might react to his unreliable narration, Max muddies the water further. He sums up his narratorial approach: "Aber ich will ja nur meine Geschichte erzählen ... in systematischer Reihenfolge ... drückt man sich so aus? ... obwohl ich Ihnen nicht alles erzähle, sozusagen: nur das Wichtigste, oder das, was ich, Itzig Finkelstein, damals noch Max Schulz, für ganz besonders wichtig halte" (Hilsenrath 14). In this passage, Max's asserts that he will narrate the events of his life according to a logical, systematic unfolding of events. This assertion is unsettled by his insistence that he can be trusted to select the most important, germane details and our burgeoning realization that "key features of Max's diseased narrative include his deliberate manipulation of narrative perspective and his employment of a strategy of obscuration, both of which allow him to withhold from the reader his true relationship to and motivations for his crimes" (McGlothlin, "Narrative Perspective" 164). At this point in the narrative, Max has only hinted at the crimes that will form the foundation of his identity as mass murderer. But based on what and how he has narrated thus far, we would be wise to be wary both of taking his utterances at face value and of presuming that at the core of his narration lies an impulse toward an ethical engagement with both his audience and the subject matter he depicts.

As if the novel's narrator were not satisfied with complicating the reader's process of identification with the personality articulated in his autobiographical project, the passage quoted above reveals an additional element that contributes to our overall sense of disbelief and

confusion regarding our relationship with the figure steering the narration. Touching upon McGlothlin's argument that Max willingly endeavors to deceive, I wish to call our attention to the narrating-I's deliberate unsettling of identity. Up until this passage, we assume that the "I" narrating the text is synonymous with the name "Max Schulz." The assumption is justified, for the narrating-I has identified himself as Max Schulz on three separate occasions thus far (7, 13, and 14). At the end of this passage, however, the narrator de-stabilizes his identity, claiming two separate names, both Max Schulz and Itzig Finkelstein. Again, the narrator refuses explanation of the significance of a gesture that calls his identity into question. We must contend with the possibility that the narrator's "I" does not simply or unequivocally correspond to the name Max Schulz. The discursive entity that narrates the novel introduces here a fundamental slippage between the narrating-I and the notion of a static name that he employs for purposes of identification. After establishing two discrete individuals and two separate identities, one German and the other German-Jewish, this "I" makes use of both names and thus of both identities simultaneously. Given that we have begun to recognize the unreliable nature of this "I"'s practice of narration, this destabilization of the "I" that narrates the text foreshadows the lengths to which Max the murderer will later go in order to obscure his identity and delay our understanding of his intentions.

The specific brand of identity politics that the narrating-I, who up to this point in the narration identifies himself primarily as Max Schulz, foregrounds in the first chapter of the first book, with his problematic gravitation toward identifying as both perpetrator and victim, gains an additional facet when the young Max, who was once able to avoid irresponsible adults and their maleficent intentions, narrates an event during which he is unable to escape abuse. In the subsequent chapter, the second of the first book, Max relates how the Abramovitz family fires

his mother on account of her licentiousness, an action that provokes her to take up residence with the barber Anton Slavitzki. Max's depicts his new stepfather as a "Kinderschänder" (18) and his place of business-cum-domicile as "schäbig" (20), more of a "Friseurstube" than a "Friseurladen" (20), especially when compared to the proper Finkelstein family barber shop "Der Herr von Welt," located directly across the street. During their first night there, the man makes sexual advances toward Max's mother. Because he has offered Minna Schulz and her son a place to live, he automatically assumes that sexual gratification will be offered him as recompense. After being denied sexual satisfaction from his new "bride," Slavitzki reacts in a grotesque manner. Max explains: "Als Slavitzki schließlich einsah, daß er verspielt hatte, kannte seine Wut keine Grenzen. Er stürzte wie ein Wilder aus dem neuen Ehebett, nackt, mit gerecktem Glied, Schaum auf den Lippen, Schweiß auf der flachen Stirn, verklebtem Haar ... und stillte Wut und Juckreiz an mir" (22). Here, Max portrays Slavitzki as a man utterly lacking in scruples, whose grotesque physicality (with his monstrous penis) is matched only by his seemingly boundless libido.¹⁶ Unable to assert sexual ownership over Max's mother (at least in this scene), Slavitzki claims the powerless Max instead, victimizing him. But the description of this gut-wrenching scene of traumatization does not end there. Max interrupts the portrayal of the crime perpetrated against him with another address to the audience:

Können Sie sich das Ausmaß des Verbrechens vorstellen? Ich, Max Schulz, gerade sieben Wochen alt, zukünftiger Massenmörder, zur Zeit aber unschuldig, lag wie ein Engel in meiner neuen Wiege, dem Waschbecken, in das Slavitzki aus Gewohnheit

¹⁶ With the figure of Slavitzki, male potency becomes concomitant with violence and perpetration. This constellation of potency and perpetration is later transferred to the Nazis in general, when Slavitzki becomes an ardent supporter of Hitler (43-5). Slavitzki's penis, with its grotesque proportions, serves as part of Hilsenrath's satire of the Nazis. Katharina Gerstenberger and Vera Pohland argue: "Die erzählerische Konzentration auf den Phallus ist satirisch auffaßbar als Verfremdungsmittel" (84).

pinkelte, das jedoch ganz trocken war, denn meine Mutter hatte es ausgewischt, lag eingehüllt in warme Windeln ... und dem Deckchen, schlief friedlich, träumte von meinen Kollegen, den Engeln, träumte und lächelte ... wurde plötzlich aus dem Schlaf gerissen, hochgerissen ... wollte die Engel um Hilfe rufen, konnte aber nicht schreien, riß entsetzt die Augen auf, pisste vor Angst in die Windeln, verschluckte mich, bekam Erstickungsanfälle, kotzte Muttermilch auf Slavitzkis Hand, streckte Händchen und Beinchen aus, wollte meine Unschuld verteidigen, sah das gewaltige Glied Slavitzkis, dachte, es wäre ein reisiger Bandwurm, murmelte Stoßgebete, obwohl ich das Beten noch gar nicht gelernt hatte, wollte sterben, sehnte mich zurück in den dunklen, aber sicheren Schoß meiner Mutter ... und landete plötzlich bäuchlings auf dem Friseursessel, der vor dem Waschbecken stand. (22)

Here, Max invites his audience to imagine the magnitude of a crime (“Ausmaß des Verbrechens”) that arguably most, if not all, readers would find unimaginable: the anal rape of a male infant perpetrated by a paternal figure. Anticipating that his audience will find the topic anathema and taboo, Max supplies the scene above. He follows up his call for the reader to imagine this scene—and thus empathize with him—by providing a detailed depiction of his physical and emotional reaction to what Slavitzki does to him. Max depicts the panic he experiences upon seeing the naked Slavitzki approaching his makeshift crib. Before falling to the barber chair in the prone position, Max expresses a yearning to return to the relative safety of his mother’s womb. All the more horrifying is Max’s depiction of his mother’s reaction to the rape that Slavitzki perpetrates against her son. Max’s wish for maternal protection, however, remains unfulfilled. In a further grotesque twist, Minna Schulz casually looks on as the abuse takes place and refuses to intervene:

Meine Mutter stand neben dem Klappbett [...] stand dort und guckte, guckte verschlafen mit gläsernem Blick, sah Slavitzki, sah den Friseursessel, sah meine Samthaut ... arisch, schneeweiß, unschuldig ... leckte ihre Lippen, prüfte ihre Zähne, wollte beißen, überlegte sich's anders, suchte eine Zigarette, fand sie schließlich hinter dem rechten Ohr, nicht hinter dem linken, steckte sie in den Mund, zwischen die starken weißen Zähne, fand auch ein Streichholz, nicht hinter dem rechten Ohr, sondern hinter dem linken, hob das magere Bein, das linke, rieb das Streichholz gegen die Pantoffelsohle, sah die Flamme, zündete ihre Zigarette an, paffte, starrte auf den Mammutknochen des Friseurs Slavitzki, grinste verlegen, kicherte, weil Slavitzki schwitzte ... und zuckte dann plötzlich zusammen. (22-3)

In this complex passage, we notice how Max underscores his mother's complicity in the act of sexual abuse. She not only fails to intercede on her child's behalf, but also appears to take a kind of perverse pleasure in witnessing the scene, at least up until the moment when she winces. By positioning his mother as on-looker who observes from the sidelines without complaint, the narrator Max constructs a triangular constellation that mimics (and foreshadows) the triad of identities that will emerge in post-Holocaust discussions regarding German wartime aggression and postwar guilt: perpetrator, victim, and bystander (*Täter, Opfer, and Mitläufer*). His mother's role as bystander is further highlighted when we notice how the moment of abuse—of sexual contact between Slavitzki and the baby Max—is focalized through Minna Schulz's perspective. The bite she contemplates, along with the smoldering cigarette dangling from her vulgar visage, underscores her consumption of the scene that takes place before her. We observe her in the act of observing the moment leading up to penetration and thus to the act of perpetration, as her gaze wanders from Slavitzki's mammoth member to the perspiration glinting off of the rest of his

body. An ellipsis interrupts the flow of description, presumably as he proceeds to abuse the child. The ellipsis—a literal gap in the narration—operates, I argue, as a stand-in for the sexual act itself. This moment of disnarration and the cringe that appears on Minna Schulz’s face are the only indicators that her perverse viewing pleasure is obscured by the exaggerated, taboo nature of the crime committed.

Similar to the previous incident regarding the narrowly avoided circumcision, Max depicts this scene of sexual abuse with an intensity of detail and level of sophistication to which no baby has access. Humans cannot remember and therefore cannot narrate their own experience as infants; nevertheless, Max depicts this incident of trauma as if he had direct, unhampered access to the memory. He thus claims to be capable of accomplishing the impossible—yet another signal of unreliable narration. His narration of this scene also fails to provide readers with tools for understanding this scene of sexual abuse and its exaggerated character. He offers no framework for his method of telling, he makes no mention of the fact that his narration—to be plausible—would have to arise entirely out of imagination. While we might imagine that Max bases this detailed representation on the memory of abusive incidents he suffers at a later point in life, when he is old enough to be a conscious subject and therefore physically and psychologically capable of having memory of said incidents, Max offers us no information to corroborate a hypothesis such as this. It’s not the emotional content of the depiction of the primal scene of sexual abuse that provides cause for doubt, but rather the veneer of verisimilitude to which Max as narrator ostensibly clings. Instead of establishing an interpretive framework for his audience or an explanation that his adult self is strategically contriving impossible childhood memories through the act of telling, Max feigns recognition of his unreliability, interjecting: “Ich weiß, was Sie sagen: ‘Max Schulz spinnt! Ein Alptraum! Nichts weiter!’” (23). But in admitting

that he realizes that he appears psychologically untenable, he sidesteps the need for explanation by introducing into his monologue a moment of “dialogue” with the reader. Reacting to his audience’s likely disbelief, he sums up his terrifying depiction with a series of rhetorical questions: “Aber warum behaupten Sie das? Hat der liebe Gott nicht die Urschuld erfunden, damit sie zertreten wird ... hier auf Erden? Und werden die Schwachen und Wehrlosen nicht von den Starken überrumpelt, niedergeknüppelt, vergewaltigt, verhöhnt, in den Arsch gefickt? [...] Ist es nicht so? Und wenn es so ist ... warum behaupten Sie dann, daß Max Schulz spinnt?” (24). In this passage, Max aggressively counters accusations of unreliability by underscoring his status as victim, aligning himself with anonymous others who have also been unable to defend themselves in the face of violence. But it is crucial to note here that he demands that we acknowledge the veracity of the abuse he suffered as a child with his assertion that it is not unique in human history. This acknowledgement, in turn, also entails absolving him of the charge of insanity—or at least narratorial mendacity. When we look closely, however, we realize that this rhetorical turn is a further ploy in Max’s deception. As readers, we don’t necessarily question that the abuse occurred, we simply question Max’s method for depicting it. Max’s rhetorical gesture of constructing a kind of artificial ‘conversation’ between himself as narrator and the narratee mimics dialogic exchange between discrete subjectivities. However, in playing both conversational partners, Max calculatingly disregards the transformative potential of the dialogic.¹⁷ He ends up reaffirming instead his monologic shaping of the narration.

¹⁷ With the transformative potential of the dialogic, I refer to narrators who address their audiences in the spirit of productive debate and intellectual exchange. Both parties ideally stand to gain from dialogic interaction. Let us consider for example the narratorial position taken up by Holocaust survivor and Germanist Ruth Klüger in her memoir *weiter leben*, in which she urges her readers to engage with her in a critical manner: “Ihr müßt euch nicht mit mir identifizieren, es ist mir sogar lieber, wenn ihr es nicht tut; und wenn ich euch ‘artfremd’ erscheine, so will ich auch das hinnehmen (aber ungern) und, falls ich euch durch den Gebrauch dieses bösen Wortes geärgert habe, mich dafür entschuldigen. Aber laßt euch mindestens reizen, verschanzt euch nicht, sagt nicht von vornherein, das gehe euch nichts an Werdet streitsüchtig, sucht die Auseinandersetzung” (142).

Max's self-positioning as child victim is further complicated by another instance of self-identification as mass murderer. In relating his reaction to Slavitzki's violence, he declares: "Ich, Max Schulz, zukünftiger Massenmörder, zur Zeit noch unschuldig, stieß einen markerschütternden Schrei aus [...]" (23). Here, Max once again refers to himself as mass murderer as he did in the previous chapter, this time adding the adjective "zukünftig," thus implying that his victimized child self will one day grow up to become a future self that commits murder on a mass scale. These references to his future criminal activity remind us that his autobiographical account constitutes not only a memoir of childhood victimization but also one of perpetration. In his study of actual (non-fictional) Nazi memoirs, Alan Rosen analyzes the complex ethical dimension with which readers of these notorious autobiographical texts contend. Rosen argues that as readers, aware of the memoirist's criminal past, we automatically approach such a text "with some hesitation [...] unsure whether the destruction of which the authors are capable might find its way into the narratives they compose," and are "apprehensive lest these criminals convince [us] they are less evil than universally assumed" (553). As a result of this hesitation, the dynamics of identification between the reader and the autobiographical text's narrating-I are complicated. The relationship between reader and Nazi memoir, according to Rosen's argument, is one marked by antipathy rather than empathy (554). As readers of *Der Nazi und der Friseur*, we experience, I argue, a tension analogous to the one that Rosen describes. Max's deployment of autobiographical and associated confessional conventions invites us, particularly in light of these early scenes depicting the abuse that he suffered as a child, to empathize with him as victim and survivor of sexual abuse. On the other hand, Max's unreliability, willful manipulation of the narration, coupled with his self-identification as a future perpetrator, provide us reason enough to begin cultivating doubt and recognizing an impulse

against empathy and toward antipathy—which is also a form of identification, albeit a negative one. As the reader encounters contradictory narrative cues—some which invite empathy, others antipathy—the dynamics of identification take on a dialectical dimension.

Central to Rosen’s investigation of Nazi autobiographical texts is his incorporation of one penned by Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss while in prison. In Höss’s text, Rosen identifies a particularly insidious rhetorical strategy whereby Höss’s narrating-I manipulates the narration of an event in order to cast himself as victim and downplay his actual, historical role as perpetrator: “This pattern of reversal, in which victimizer becomes victim, surfaces regularly in Höss’s memoir, most notably—and, for the reader, excruciatingly—when Höss, as commander of Auschwitz, bemoans the terrible scenes he is compelled to witness” (556). Rosen’s analysis provides helpful insight for my discussion of Hilsenrath’s text, for I assert that Max’s narratorial manipulation involves a rhetorical strategy similar to Höss’s. While the reader of Höss’s memoir approaches the text with prior knowledge regarding the nature of his crimes and thus knows beforehand that he is a Holocaust perpetrator (despite his slippery attempts to claim the contrary), Max introduces in the depiction of his childhood, even before he relates the crimes he commits later in life as an adult, a similar “pattern of reversal,” according to which he switches back and forth between what is often understood—usually for good reason—as diametrically opposed subject positions. In one moment he refers to himself as a future perpetrator, and in the next he goes to considerable lengths to demonstrate his victimization, perpetrated by his insidious and lascivious stepfather and tacitly supported by his ethically reprehensible mother. Keeping Rosen’s “pattern of reversal” in mind, let us imagine Max’s practice of self-identification that we have seen thus far as a mechanism positioned on an axis that can be rotated and then reversed at a moment’s notice or from one sentence to the next, allowing him to

navigate the narrative without the need to explain the true nature of his intentions in constructing this autobiographical account. And having established this pattern or mechanism at the beginning of the novel within the greater context of narratorial unreliability, Max is able throughout the rest of the text to sidestep the logical expectation on the part of the reader that his narrating-I represents a fixed identity.

Max's mechanism of self-identification as both victim and perpetrator gains additional contours with the appearance of the trope of the loose screw. After the initial scene of sexual abuse represented in the second chapter of the first book, Max depicts himself in the subsequent chapter as a troubled child growing up in a household brimming with dysfunction and anti-Semitic sentiment, as the child-rapist Slavitzki cultivates an envy-driven hatred toward his neighbor and competitor, the German Jew Chaim Finkelstein, father of Itzig Finkelstein (Hilsenrath 25-28). Against this maleficent backdrop, Max describes himself as a boy:

Als Junge schlug ich seltsame Purzelbäume. Ich konnte auch Radschlagen, verstand es, meine Glieder zu verrenken, machte Handstand, Kopfstand, Spagat, konnte an meiner großen Zehe lutschen, zog Grimassen, lachte oft ohne Grund, stotterte, warf Steinchen auf kleine Mädchen, trat Jungens, die schwächer waren als ich, in den Hintern, schlug Fensterscheiben ein, kletterte auf Dächer, pinkelte von Dächern auf die Straße und so fort. (28)

Max provides a succinct overview of his childhood pastimes, starting with harmless activities that depict a boy with a benign penchant for gymnastics. But as the list continues, Max's favorite pastimes become less innocuous and more violent. The boy Max exhibits the behavior of a bully who enjoys terrorizing fellow children—early signs of potential sociopathic behavior. In addition to delighting in harming others, he damages property and exposes himself by urinating from the

roofs of buildings. While these proclivities are not necessarily conclusive indicators of future wrongdoing, there is the sense that something is not quite right with the boy. He narrates a conversation between his mother and stepfather, in which they speculate about the cause of the boy's deviance:

Einmal sagte mein Stiefvater zu meiner Mutter: "Weißt du, Minna, ich glaube, bei dem Jungen ist 'ne Schraube locker." Meine Mutter sagte: "Weißt du, Anton. Beim ersten Mal ist es passiert."

"Wie meinst du das?" sagte mein Stiefvater.

"Dein Schwanz war ganz einfach zu groß," sagte meine Mutter, "und zu lang. Der stieß an seinen Hirnkasten an. Oder an sein Dach. Und was entstand: ein Dachschaden!"

"Ein Dachschaden," sagte Slavitzki.

"Ja, Anton," sagte meine Mutter ernst. "Ein Dachschaden." (28-9)

Here, we encounter a moment in which someone other than Max questions his mental health. Max the narrator positions his parents as the source of an amateur diagnosis, but he does not explain how he acquired knowledge of this exchange. The conversation is depicted as if they are observing from afar and commenting to one another regarding what they observe. Slavitzki asserts that the boy Max has a "screw loose," and Minna draws a causal connection between the sexual abuse that Max has suffered at the hands of Slavitzki and the boy's apparent odd behavior. Referencing the first occurrence of rape and thus implying that Max has been subjected to a routine pattern of sexual abuse at the hands of his stepfather, Minna offers her assessment casually, without accusing her lover of any criminal behavior. In her explanation of what Slavitzki did and how it affected the young Max, she combines a grotesque and fallacious understanding of human anatomy (reminiscent of her superstition-riddled conception of Judaism)

with a common German euphemistic expression employed to describe someone who exhibits odd or deviant behavior or who appears to have some kind of mental disorder. According to her interpretation, Slavitzki's gargantuan penis struck the baby's developing brain from the inside during the act of anal rape, and as a result the boy Max has a "Dachschaden," i.e. a hole in his roof, i.e. in his head. Max's injury is the literal manifestation of a figure of speech—a joke in itself. The "Dachschaden" also operates synecdochally here, representing the physical, mental and emotional damage that Max has incurred not only as a result of the first instance of abuse, but also as a result of subsequent abuse.

After this initial diagnosis of his childhood behavior, Max often refers to his "Dachschaden," establishing it as a trope that reminds the reader of the psychic damage he incurred as a result of systematic sexual abuse perpetrated by his stepfather.¹⁸ Like a Homeric epithet, Max employs the image of the loose screw within the larger context of his complex methodology of self-narration. I argue that we must read Max's construction of and elaboration on the trope of the "loose screw" within the larger context of his manipulative and unreliable narratorial practice. Let us return to McGlothlin's analysis of Max's narration. Borrowing and expanding upon Andreas Graf's terminology, she convincingly illustrates that Max's manipulation of narrative voice and his "markedly self-conscious unreliability" are features of a

¹⁸ Max refers to his loose screw on several occasions throughout the novel. In the fourth chapter of the first book of the novel, Max, in discussing his experiences attending high school, states, "Die Jahre im Gymnasium drückten mir, Max Schulz, Sohn einer Nutte, Stiefsohn eines Kinderschänders, Rattenquäler mit Dachschaden . . . einen neuen Stempel auf" (35). This loose screw accompanies him through his school years and into early adulthood and is present when he goes to hear Hitler give a speech from atop the "Mount of Olives" in 1932. The religious association is not lost on Max, who depicts himself as a downtrodden supplicant in need of a savior. While conversing with a former teacher whom he encounters in the crush of enthusiastic revelers clamoring to get a good look at the *Führer*, Max rhetorically inquires: "Und haben Sie auch Kopfschmerzen, Herr von Salzstange? Ist das von der Sonne? Die ist verdammt heiß. Und ich dürfte gar nicht hier rumstehen . . . in der Sonne, mein' ich . . . wegen meines Dachschadens . . ." (52). In keeping with the logic of his mother's original euphemistic explanation of his behavior, Max claims to worry for the health of his brain lest the sun beat down too intensely and heat up that hot metal screw rattling around in his head. A day later Max joins the Nazi party, along with Slavitzki and his mother (62), and he is inducted into the *Schutzstaffel* shortly thereafter (66). In addition to these references to his loose screw in the first book of the novel, Max also employs the trope on several occasions in subsequent books. See for example: 195-198, 240, 307, 316, 344, 407, 454, and 464.

“pathological narration” (“Narrative Perspective” 164). Taking Graf and McGlothlin’s taxonomy of pathology and disease as a point of departure, I propose the further expansion of the bio-medical metaphor to discuss Max’s narration as an “injured” one. On account of his unreliability and his penchant for describing grotesque, exaggerated human bodies that perform acts of unspeakable violence, it comes as no surprise that his narrative practice—though not necessarily his consciousness per se—lends itself to being understood in terms of medicine or hygiene, as the product of a seemingly neurologically impaired brain. The term “injured” denotes both Max’s portrayal of his subjectivity as wounded or damaged on account of his brutalization and rape as a young child and his narration, since he manipulates narrative voice in order to present a split subjectivity, often claiming to be two people at once: Max Schulz and Itzig Finkelstein. Whether or not Max as the narrating figure or the “I” that shapes the text that we read actually suffers from a medical condition or illness is less critical to my analysis than the fact that he desires the reader to draw a connection between the extreme nature of the childhood trauma he suffered and the “loose screw” that he illustrates as a permanent part of his psychological makeup. Whenever he deploys the trope of the “Dachschaden,” he forces us to consider the psychic link between this original injury and the later context in which it appears, whether it be when he relates his experiences in school (34-37) or when inspired by Hitler’s speech on the “Mount of Olives” and becoming a member of the National Socialist party (47-68). In the third book of the novel, while assuming the identity of the dead Itzig Finkelstein and composing a fatuous autobiographical summary under his newly developed alias, Max goes so far as to transfer his loose screw from his previous Max-identity to his new Itzig-identity, claiming to suffer from mild brain damage as a result of the traumatic events he experienced and witnessed while he was supposedly interred in Auschwitz (193-202). While narrating a fabricated scene in

which he stands before a DP-camp committee charged with the task of inspecting new internees for the purpose of authenticating their Jewish identity, Max, speaking in the guise of Itzig, infers his interlocutors' thought process, "Die Herren starrten nur noch auf meine Auschwitznummer, denn ich hatte meine Hose ja wieder zugeknöpft. Ich konnte ihre Gedanken lesen [...] Ich las sie stumm, mit zusammengepreßtem Mund: Der war in Auschwitz! Der hat einen Dachschaden! Kein Wunder!" (198). I assert that Max's deployment of the trope of the loose screw invites the reader to consider a causal relationship between it and his later behavior as an adult. When Max describes himself as a mass murderer who participated in the killing of 20,000 Jewish prisoners in the Nazi-run concentration camp *Laubwalde* (78-79) and who also happens to have a "Dachschaden," he models for us the logic that he wishes us to employ for interpreting his behavior. Max wants us to believe, I argue, that his loose screw is a reason for his becoming a perpetrator later in life. It is important to note that he does not explicitly make this claim; instead, he employs rhetorical strategies available to him as narrator so that we might arrive at this conclusion through the process of reading.

We have already seen how Max often leaves certain pieces of information out of his storytelling, such as failing to explain how he can vividly describe episodes that occurred when he was only an infant. Max seems to "suppress" certain crucial data, even while relating a scene or an event that otherwise appears rich in detail. In her scholarship on causality, Emma Kafalenos explains the process by which we mentally organize and digest information that we receive while reading:

Missing information matters because we interpret and reinterpret events, from moment to moment, on the basis of the information that is available to us at that moment. We understand events, I shall argue, by viewing them as elements in chronological and causal

chains of events. First we organize the events we know about in a chronological sequence, and then we look for possible causal relations among the chronologically ordered events. We consider whether there is an event or events in the sequence we have constructed that could have caused subsequent events, or been caused by prior events. When information that an event has occurred is deferred or suppressed, the event is missing from the chronological sequence that perceivers construct. If the missing event is crucial, the causal relations that seem to obtain among the known events are different from the causal relations one would be able to perceive if information about the missing event were available. (35)¹⁹

Because Max tells his life story more or less in chronological order, the reader of *Der Nazi und der Friseur* spends less time determining when specific events occurred and more time pondering why they took place and the “causal relations” that bind them together (Kafalenos 36).²⁰ According to Kafalenos, the reader interprets occurrences in a text and negotiates gaps retrospectively by way of “configurations” (38-41). She explains that when we read we construct configurations, which entails mentally stringing together the pieces of information that we perceive in the text, adding each new piece that we encounter to what we have already read. When reading a discrete text, we assume that events are related to one another in some way. That is to say, we are constantly attempting to extract meaning from the sequence of events that form narrative. At any one point in a text, we seek to understand what we have read thus far, because “to comprehend events as a configuration is to grasp a number of events as a single complex of

¹⁹ Kafalenos employs and expands upon narrative theorist Meir Sternberg’s categorization of narrators as “suppressive” or “omnicommunicative.”

²⁰ Citing the Russian Formalists, Kafalenos asserts that there are two separate sequences when consuming a text, “*sjuzhet* (the representation) and *fabula* (the chronological sequence abstracted from the representation).” The reader encounters the *sjuzhet* in the form of the text and then constructs the *fabula* through the process of reading. She argues: “Positing *sjuzhet* and *fabula* as parallel sequences permits conceiving instances of deferred or suppressed information as gaps in one or both sequences. *Sjuzhet/fabula* relations illuminate gaps” (36).

relationships” (Kafalenos 39). We therefore rely upon the process of configuration as a cornerstone for interpreting what we read.

Keeping the concept of the configuration in mind, let us return to Hilsenrath’s text. Max tells us that he is sexually abused as a child, suffering permanent brain damage as a result. Later, as young man, he becomes an ardent supporter of the Nazi regime and then rises in the ranks and joined the SS. All the while this loose screw has been rattling around in his head. The “configuration” that Max thus invites us to draw is a causal connection between his victimization and his later perpetration. But if we consider the sequence of information more closely, we see how Max strategically leaves critical gaps in the information that he presents. The “loose screw” does not account for the murder he commits, nor does it explain his transformation from enthusiastic acolyte of the National Socialist regime into Holocaust perpetrator. He does not explain how he passes the rigorous standards for admission into the notorious SS, and he even tells us that he will not explain how it all happened:

Mein ehemaliger Deutschlehrer Siegfried von Salzstange hatte einmal zu mir gesagt:

“Max Schulz, in der braunen SA findet jeder Platz, der richtig furzen kann. Aber nicht in der SS!”—Denn die SS, das war der Verband der Schwarzen Puritaner, die Elite des Neuen Deutschlands. Für Mäuschen wie den Max Schulz, die nicht wie Herrenmenschen aussahen, sondern wie Untermenschen ... genau so und nicht anders ... eben so aussahen, als ob sie die Ethik des Völkermords nicht kapieren würden ... gar nicht kapieren ... für die war der Eintritt in die SS alles andere als leicht.

Was hab ich gesagt? Nicht leicht? Das stimmt. Ich muß hier allerdings hinzufügen, daß gute Beziehungen ... und zwar zu den richtigen Leuten ... im Leben oft eine entscheidende Rolle spielen. (66)

Here, the ellipses ironically speak louder than words. Max inserts his hesitation, his pauses to consider carefully how he wishes to proceed, into the text. He gestures toward what he is leaving out, hinting to us that there is more to the story but that he is unwilling to reveal all. We are supposed to be satisfied with the explanation that his former teacher Herr von Salzstange had the right connections and that he somehow passed “durch das meckrige Rassen- und Bewährungssieb des Schwarzen Korps” (66-67). It is important to note here that Max endeavors a few pages later to downplay the role he plays in the SS, even asserting that the SS victimized and used him much like his stepfather had once done: “Die SS ließ mich nicht los. Die brauchte mich genauso wie Slavitzki, der mich immer gebraucht hatte. Die brauchten meine Hände. Und die brauchten auch meinen Hintern, damit er eines Tages herhalten sollte für den Rückschlag des großen Glückrads, mit dem wir damals Geschichte machen wollten” (70). Max casts himself in the role of the victim of history and of the machinations of his superiors rather than accepting his portion of the responsibility and admitting to his complicity and to his willing involvement in this history. For having a “Dachsaden” does not mitigate the fact he chose to participate in the SS, and it also does not nullify his subsequent role in the Nazis’ “Final Solution.”

His loose screw also does not explain his motivations for willingly participating in killing numerous Jewish victims as a member of an *Einsatzgruppe*, nor does it elucidate his thought process when he serves as a guard in a Nazi concentration camp. Something is missing in this regard in his account. His assumption that membership in the Nazi party directly correlates to actual participation in the systematic murder of Jews and other targets of the Nazi genocide is the product of false logic. Max implicitly explains (and perhaps attempts to justify) his transformation into murderer and perpetrator by relying on the amorphous, unspecific concept of the “Dachsaden,” instead of engaging in an explicit investigation of what he was actually

thinking and experiencing when said transformation took place. The loose screw (ostensibly) results from something that happened to him as a passive, helpless victim, but it cannot account for the decisions that he actively makes as an independent, autonomous subject, however much he attempts to convince the reader of its applicability.

The trope of the loose screw is therefore a red herring, rather than a reliable factor for interpreting Max's behavior in the diegetic world. It does, however, assist us in further developing an understanding of his behavior as narrator and his injured narration. McGlothlin convincingly argues that Max transgresses both in the diegesis and as a narrator on the extradiegetic level for the purpose of evading criminal prosecution and deferring responsibility for his crimes as mass murderer and Holocaust perpetrator ("Narrative Transgression" 220-39). I view the trope of the loose screw within the context of this narratorial practice, because Max's subtle manipulation of a story regarding unspeakable sexual abuse perpetrated against him as a child—the implied reason for why he later became a murderer—is nothing if not transgressive. Max's injured narration allows him to perform the role of mentally unstable criminal in the diegesis and psychologically disturbed narrator in the extradiegesis—even if the narrating-I is, as I suspect, not in fact "crazy" and is in fact extremely clever and conscious of the rhetorical strategies he deploys for evading guilt and responsibility.

In the eleventh and final chapter of the novel's first book, Max disingenuously informs his audience: "Viel gibt es nicht mehr zu erzählen" (Hilsenrath 75), despite the fact that what follows is his extremely brief narration of his involvement in the SS in Eastern Europe as a member of *Einsatzgruppe D*, which was responsible for rounding up and executing Jews in southern Ukraine and the Crimea. Citing his and what he assumes to be his audience's lack of patience with the topic, he tells his readers that he will keep this part of his story succinct: "Aber

ich halte Sie unnötig auf. Stimmt's? Sie wollten doch wissen, wann ich zum Massenmörder wurde? Also: Ich, Itzig Finkelstein, damals noch Max Schulz, werde versuchen, mich so kurz wie möglich zu fassen. Sie haben keine Geduld mehr. Und ich auch nicht" (76). Max feigns critical, discursive engagement with what is arguably the most fascinating and compelling aspect of his autobiographical account, dangling the question before our eyes like a carrot. And yet at this point in the text when he arrives at the moment in his life story when he must relate the circumstances that will constitute his personal complicity in events associated with the Holocaust, he fails to go into any substantive detail. In depicting the actions that he personally committed as perpetrator, he offers us less than four pages' worth of narration (76-79). Since the beginning of the novel, he has claimed to be a mass murderer, but his description of the murders he commits and his reasoning for perpetrating them remain vague: "Ich weiß das, da ich ja damals sozusagen 'mitbeteiligt' war, obwohl ich mich heute nicht mehr genau erinnern kann, wieviele Gefangene ich damals erschossen, erschlagen oder erhängt habe" (79). He explains that as a guard at *Laubwalde*, he participated in killing 20 000 Jewish prisoners: "In Laubwalde waren 20 000 Juden. Wir haben sie alle umgebracht. 20 000! Trotzdem war das ein kleines Lager, denn die meisten Gefangenen wurden gleich nach ihrer Einlieferung kaltgemacht. Das was praktisch. Denn auf diese Weise hatten wir nie zu viele von ihnen zu überwachen. Wie gesagt: ein kleines Lager!" (79). Here, Max employs the pronoun "we" instead of "I," underscoring his role as member of a larger collective, i.e. the SS. He admits to participating in this systematic killing, but he clearly leaves much out of this account. The insight into the motives of the perpetrator that Max's narration ostensibly offers leaves us in this instance wanting more, for Max evades a longer, more detailed depiction by citing his impatience with the topic. Compared with his elaborate depictions of the episodes from his childhood, his

portrayal here of deeds in which he was a willing actor appears truncated. Moments in the narration such as this one frustrate us rather than leaving us with any sense of greater understanding of the thought process that Max employed when he committed murder. But Max's aim is to shed light neither on his motivations for killing nor on his true intentions with his narration. Rather, his goal is to obscure the truth. The conclusion of the first book of the novel coincides with the end of World War II: "Dort in Laubwalde tat ich Dienst, bis der Krieg zu Ende war, das heißt: bis zu jenem denkwürdigen Tag, als der Krieg für mich, Max Schulz, später Itzig Finkelstein, endgültig vorbei war" (79). Here, at the end of a brief explanation of his participation in the Nazi Judeocide, the "narrating"-I reinforces the split identity, claiming two names and two identities, one a Holocaust perpetrator and the other a Holocaust victim. At the conclusion of the first book, we are left to wonder whether his childhood victimization and the accompanying loose screw serve in some fashion as a psychological foundation for his assumption of Itzig Finkelstein's identity as Holocaust victim and survivor. But Max never explains the connection; instead, he conflates two radically different experiences of victimization and invites the reader to do the same. His injured narration thus often confuses us, throws us for a loop. The end of the first book delineates a *limnus*, marking the conclusion of his criminal actions as Holocaust perpetrator, but this does not, however, mean that his identity as perpetrator comes to an end. His final rhetorical gesture in the first book of claiming two identities as both victim and perpetrator reinforces a pattern with which we are already familiar—one that will characterize the remainder of the narrative. Max never convinces us, unlike the characters whom he encounters in the story world, that he is a Holocaust survivor. Instead, his assumption of Itzig's identity, along with the narrative tic of switching back and forth between subject positions, reminds us of his criminal past and the fact that he goes unpunished for his crimes.

Aboard the *Exitus*: Shaping a Dialogue Between Victim and Perpetrator

In the second book of *Der Nazi und der Friseur*, Max Schulz witnesses the German loss of World War II, flees the advancing Red Army, takes refuge in the Polish forest, and travels under cover to Berlin to start life anew. In this portion of the novel, first-person narration is exchanged for a third-person narrator. Nevertheless, the unnamed heterodiegetic narrator features the character Max narrating stories to other characters in the novel's diegesis. Engaging with Graf's argument that "the narrative anomaly of the second book represents a variant, however alienated, of Max's function as a pathological narrator," McGlothlin observes that "even when Max is patently absent as the diegetic narrator in this part of the novel, he is recuperated as an intradiegetic narrator and thus, in a more alienated fashion, still controls the text's narration" ("Narrative Perspective" 166).²¹ I concur with Graf and McGlothlin and propose that we also consider the possibility that the narrating-I of the first book shifts narrative perspective to the third person in the second book, meaning that Max pretends to distance himself from the narration in the guise of an unidentified narratorial figure. Seen in this light, the second book provides additional contours to Max's pathological narration: he disguises himself on the diegetic level as Itzig Finkelstein and acts as ventriloquist on the extradiegetic level, masquerading as an unnamed third-person narrator who ostensibly does not participate in the events of the story world. Considering Max as the narrative authority responsible for all six books, including Book Two, thus further underscores "his slippery vocal identity" (McGlothlin "Narrative Perspective" 166). At the end of this book, Max narrates to his interlocutor Frau Holle his decision to change his identity in the story world by taking on the name and biography of his dead childhood friend, the German Jew Itzig Finkelstein.

²¹ See also Graf's discussion (143).

In the third book, Max chronicles this transformation while he ekes out a living in Berlin in the immediate postwar period. Using gold teeth that he purloined from the victims at *Laubwalde* as a form of black market currency, he arranges for a corrupt doctor to perform a circumcision and has an Auschwitz number tattooed on his forearm. Max marks his body in this fashion in order to “pass” as a victim of the National Socialist regime that he had enthusiastically supported. At the end of Book 3, Max makes his new identity in the story world a permanent strategy for avoiding detection and judicial prosecution for his crimes by boarding a passenger ship named *Exitus* and immigrating to Palestine, creating geographic distance between himself and the site of his homicidal crimes in Eastern Europe and the judicial authorities who might prosecute him, were he to be discovered. But Max’s transgressions, to employ McGlothlin’s term again, do not end with the heinous deeds he commits in the novel’s story world as a Nazi agent and as a war criminal on the lam. As she eloquently argues,

Max commits his violations not only physically, in the fabula, or story world, of the text; he also transgresses on the level of the text’s discourse as the narrator of these events by parading before the reader not only his iniquities and his uncanny ability to evade capture and judgment, but also his astonishing lack of shame or guilt for the crimes he has perpetrated (“Narrative Transgression” 233).

An additional aspect of Max’s extradiegetic transgression entails his treatment of the memory of Itzig during the ocean journey. While on board the *Exitus*, Max shifts the focus of his narration from an anonymous narratee to speaking directly to and naming Itzig as his interlocutor.²² I argue that this shift in narratorial address in the fourth book operates as a crucial turning point in his manipulation of narrative voice. A careful investigation of Max’s narration of his ship voyage

²² McGlothlin also fittingly describes Max’s transformation into Itzig as a hubristic act of identity theft (“Narrative Transgression” 220-39).

reveals how his switch of narratee from the reader to Itzig animates a dialogic between perpetrator and victim that reveals further insight regarding the subjectivity that Max endeavors to craft through his practice of narration. With cool, precise calculation, he manipulates the novel's narrative structure to reanimate the dynamics of perpetration. Max's transgressions as narrator certainly are not tantamount to the murder he committed as a Holocaust perpetrator; however, the articulation of his post-perpetration subjectivity relies upon the vestiges of his past self as a perpetrator. By murdering Itzig and stealing his identity, Max obliterates Itzig's past, present, and future. The real story of Itzig is lost as a result of Max's use of his name and history. In evading responsibility for his crimes in the postwar period by claiming status as Holocaust victim and manipulating the narrative in such a way as to slip back and forth between his past identity as Max Schulz and his present identity as Itzig Finkelstein, Max in effect perpetuates his past criminal behavior and past self as Holocaust perpetrator. Max's post-perpetration self thus has his proverbial cake and eats it, too: he commits murder with impunity as a Nazi official involved with the events of the "Final Solution" and subsequently evades prosecution for his war crimes, benefitting from the camouflage provided by the name and biography of a once-intimate Jewish friend whose identity he has coveted since childhood.

At the beginning of the fourth book, Max Schulz poses the question: who killed Itzig Finkelstein—the "real" Itzig Finkelstein back in 1942? Max ponders this query and articulates a response:

Das große Fragezeichen ... im Finstern ... über meinem Bett ... vor meinen Augen ...
nicht sichtbar ... und doch so greifbar nah ... schon hab ich's eingefangen ... mit meinen
Blicken ... das Unsichtbare ... die Vorstellung ... ich hab's ... da hab ich's ... könnte es

aufrollen ... will aber nicht ... könnte das fragende Häkchen umbiegen ... könnte das Zeichen verwandeln in einen Strich. Ich will aber nicht! (243)

The answer he formulates here to his initial question allows him to ponder the epistemological dilemma regarding the identity of Itzig's murderer without offering a finite solution. This fragment reveals crucial details for interpreting both this section of the novel and Max's overall practice of narratorial manipulation. His reference to a looming question mark hanging over his head during the night might at first glance seem to belie the idea that Max the perpetrator experiences feelings of guilt or some kind of moral compunction for the deeds he has committed. But Max's gesture here turns out to be, not surprisingly, disingenuous. He highlights his manipulative nature by implying that he could unfurl and reshape the curlicued, interrogative punctuation to reveal the answer this question, only to follow up this implication with the declarative statement: "Ich will aber nicht!"

After asserting that he will allow this query to remain an unanswered, unresolved question ("Ich aber sage: 'Laß die Frage Frage sein!'" [243]), his form of address abruptly shifts. Occupying the position of narrator, Max has the power to address—at least theoretically—whomever he chooses. Up until the fourth book (not counting the second book), Max addresses a generic readership. If we take into consideration the schematic of the communicative act of narrative proposed by classical narratology, the text's narratee is a figure that occupies the same diegetic level as the narrator and serves as (imagined) auditor receiving the information related in the narrator's tale (Diengott 338). Were the narrator and narratee actual human beings, we might imagine them sitting opposite one another while the narrator speaks and the narratee listens. Throughout the first and third books of the novel, Max addresses an unidentified narratee with the formal German pronoun *Sie*. We saw an example of this phenomenon in the first few pages

of the novel when Max asserts to his narratee: “Ich nehme an, daß Sie wissen, was eine Beschneidung ist [...]” (Hilsenrath 10). Max implies that he and his audience enjoy a shared context, something perhaps approaching intimacy. At the beginning of the fourth book, Max shifts the focus of his narration to another intimate relationship, this one from his past. Immediately following the question regarding the identity of Itzig’s murderer in the passage quoted above, Max evokes the figure of Itzig Finkelstein and addresses him directly. As if a phantom version of the murdered Itzig stood before him in response to his question, Max states: “Lieber Itzig. Du weißt nicht, wer dich erschossen hat. Damals in Laubwalde. Du hast ‘Ihn’ nicht gesehen. Weil ‘Er’ dich überrascht hat. Weil ‘Er’ nicht wollte, daß du es siehst. Und weil ‘Er’ hinter dir stand. Zwei Schritte hinter dir” (243). Switching to the German informal pronoun “du” and calling his interlocutor by name, Max signals a profound shift in narration. Max singles out one of his many victims—his childhood friend—to function as his audience to his recollections of the agent of his past deeds, to whom he refers in the third person (“Er”). Max reconfigures the character of Itzig Finkelstein from the novel’s fabula and situates him in the role of narratee. Disregarding the (ostensible) distinction between the realm of the narrator and that of the story world and the fact that Itzig is dead, Max reorders the narrative’s ontology. Max plucks the character of Itzig—or at least the memory of him—out of the story world that is under Max’s narratorial control and reshapes him into a passive listener. According to the structuralist narratological model, the narratee, unlike the narrator, exerts no direct control over the mechanics of narration. By reviving his former childhood friend as a narrative function, Max further underscores Itzig the deceased character’s lack of agency. McGlothlin argues for an additional layer of complexity in this form of address, asserting that the “referent of the ‘you’ of the address is ambiguous; at times ‘you’ designates Max’s former friend and his murder victim,

with whom Max conducts an imagined, one-sided dialogue” (“Narrative Perspective” 166), such as the “you” that appears in the passage quoted above. But “[a]t other times, however, the narrator refers to himself in the second person” and “in those instances in which Max’s second-person address is formulated as a self-dialogue, the ‘you’ to which it is directed is not his Max-self, but rather his newly figured Itzig-self” (166-7). Referencing Brian Richardson’s discussion of second-person narration, McGlothlin argues that “[b]y virtue of its highly constructed, artificial and mutable mode [...] second-person narration seems tailor-made for Max, a narrator who is nothing if not polymorphic and synthetic. The ‘you’ of his narration in the fourth book is as unstable and protean as the ‘I’ in the rest of the novel” (167). While I agree with her deft assessment, my analysis focuses primarily on Max’s use of the pronoun “you” to invoke the position of the deceased Itzig, a pivotal figure in Max’s formulation of a post-perpetration self.

After invoking Itzig’s name and taunting the figure of the murdered Itzig for not being able to identify his killer, Max elaborates further:

Er hat auch deinen Vater erschossen. Den Chaim Finkelstein. Und auch deine Mutter.

Die Sara Finkelstein. Er hat euch alle umgebracht.

Kennst du ‘Ihn’? Weißt du, wer der Mörder ist? Dein Mörder? Und der Mörder deines Vaters? Und der Mörder deiner Mutter? Soll ich dir das Geheimnis verraten? Ha? Ich laß dich zappeln. Reiß ruhig deine toten Augen auf! Und spritze deine toten Ohren! Es wird dir nichts nützen. Ich verrate das Geheimnis nicht. (243-4)

Max torments the figure of Itzig here, even though the “Itzig” evoked here is no longer living and serves only as narrative conceit. Both Max and the reader are aware of his crimes, but the actual Itzig, like other characters in the story world, could know of Max’s deeds. Max implies that Itzig and his family members were not aware of their killer’s identity when they died

because they were taken by surprise (“Weil ‘Er’ dich überrascht hat. Weil ‘Er’ nicht wollte, daß du es siehst.” [243]). His game is an epistemological one, revolving around who has access to the knowledge of what he has done and how he positions himself vis-à-vis his past crimes. Let us also take notice of the pronoun “he” (“Er”). This switch in pronoun demonstrates an additional grammatical split in Max’s psyche. Instead of employing the pronoun “I” to identify the agent who surprised and shot Itzig and his family from behind, Max deploys the third-person pronoun “he.” In doing so, Max further disavows, I argue, his own responsibility and culpability for the murder not only of the Finkelsteins but also of all his other victims. Max foregoes a confession of his crimes here by avoiding the “I” that would equate his identity with that of the killer. Additionally, his use of the pronoun “he” further underscores McGlothlin’s assessment of Max as “polymorphic” and “synthetic.”

Let us investigate more closely the disturbing interior “monologues” in which Max addresses Itzig. As we have seen, Max speaks in the voice of Itzig, “inserting himself in the position of Itzig’s I-narrator” (McGlothlin, “Narrative Transgression” 223). Max’s manipulation of his victim’s memory goes beyond identity theft—he conjures up the dead Itzig and addresses him within a rambling interior monologue that takes the form of a dialogue. In one of these monologue-dialogues, Max discusses the topic of anti-Semitism:

Lieber Itzig. Es heißt, daß man haßt, was man verleugnen will. Ich, Itzig Finkelstein, damals noch Max Schulz, habe immer wie ein Jude ausgesehen ... obwohl das nicht stimmt. Aber man hat es gesagt. Ja, man hat es gesagt: Der sieht wie ein Jude aus! Denk mal nach, Itzig. Schon aus diesem Grund hätt’ ich euch hassen müssen. Um zu verleugnen, was ich gar nicht bin ... bloß, weil ich Angst hatte, ich könnte es sein. Oder: weil sie glaubten, daß ich es bin, obwohl ich wußte, daß ich es nicht bin. Kapierst du das?

Na also. Du kapiert das. Ich auch. Trotzdem hab ich euch nicht nicht gehaßt. Sonderbar ... wie? Das stimmt aber. Ich, Itzig Finkelstein, damals noch Max Schulz, habe die Juden nie gehaßt. Warum ich euch nicht gehaßt habe? Ich weiß es nicht. Ich stelle nur fest: Ich, Itzig Finkelstein, damals noch Max Schulz, habe die Juden nicht gehaßt. (244)

Here, Max stages what appears to be a question-and-answer session with “Itzig” (the imaginary interlocutor rather than the character), inquiring as to whether “Itzig” comprehends his complex relationship to his stereotypically “Jewish” appearance and the reasons for his active participation as a Nazi perpetrator. Max’s utterances to a figure he addresses as Itzig might be understood as a kind of dialogue, because Max appears to respond to himself as Itzig, as if he imagines Itzig attentively listening and nodding at the appropriate moments. And on account of Max’s invocation of Itzig’s name and his persistent use of the second-person pronoun “du,” this monologue resembles, at least structurally, an extradiegetic dialogue between two speaking partners. But because Max occupies the positions of both speaker and listener and thus produces all aspects of the “conversation,” his monologue can mimic, but not constitute, dialogue between two discrete subjective entities. Max’s digressions directed at “Itzig,” I argue, constitute a hybrid form combining elements of both, a “monologic dialogue.” Max’s monologic dialogues underscore the fact that he is in a constant state of flux, shifting repeatedly from one position to another. He speaks as both Max and Itzig, and, though he may convince others in the story world that he is a Holocaust survivor, he can never consolidate the two disparate identities of perpetrator and victim. Instead of fully inhabiting his dead friend’s identity both physically and mentally, Max’s narrating-I performs a split identity, occupying multiple identities at once. McGlothlin asserts that “although Max has incorporated Itzig’s identity into his own, at the same time, on the level of pronomial reference and in the act of narration, Itzig and Max remain

radically unintegrated, a condition made all the more evident by Max's disingenuous second-person address to the deceased Itzig whose identity he has hijacked" ("Narrative Perspective" 167). Max's split identity, as it appears in the fourth book, is, I argue, another aspect of his practice of injured narration that he established in the first book. Similar to the fallacious connection that he endeavors to orchestrate earlier in the text between the childhood abuse he suffered and the perpetration he later commits, Max invites us to assume a causal relationship between his ostensible loose screw and the self that comes to the fore in these "monologic dialogues" during this ocean voyage on the *Exitus*.

The reader may wonder why Hilsenrath constructs the narrative device of the "monologic dialogue" in the first place. By employing this technique (and others), Hilsenrath constructs what McGlothlin terms the "perpetrator's subjectivity" ("Narrative Transgression" 235). The communication that occurs between the two narrative positions "Max" and "Itzig" serves as a constant reminder that Max remains throughout the novel the perpetrator who committed horrible crimes as an officer in the SS, even after he assumes the outward signs of a Holocaust survivor's identity and enjoys a long, productive life, first in Palestine and subsequently in Israel. Hilsenrath employs Max's "monologic dialogues" with "Itzig" on the extradiegetic level as a form of interaction between Max's perpetrator identity and the crimes he committed on the diegetic level. The two levels of the narrative structure mutually inform one another. But let us take the argument a step farther. In the form of these monologic dialogues, the novel creates a dialogue between two identities, between perpetrator and victim—a dialogical relationship dictated by the figure of the perpetrator. What I propose here is an understanding of the dialogic that is consonant with Mikhail Bakhtin's concept.²³ In discussing the term *heteroglossia*, Bakhtin

²³McGlothlin also identifies a connection between Max's deployment of narrative voice and Bakhtin's understanding of double-voiced discourse. She argues that Max's malleable use of the pronoun "you" is a

explains the concept of *double-voiced discourse*, in which we find “two voices, two meanings, and two expressions that are dialogically interrelated [...]” (*The Dialogic Imagination* 324).

Though Bakhtin principally argues that double-voiced discourse involves the voice of the author and that of the character, his discussion sheds light on the dialogical interplay between victim and perpetrator in *Der Nazi und der Friseur*. What we encounter here is something appearing to be diaphony but in fact only reflects one “real” voice—Max’s. The dialogic in the Bakhtinian sense emerges between two identities orchestrated by the same character-narrator. The double voices are evidence of Max’s narratorial transgression and serve to remind us further of the performative quality of his narration. Max’s identity as perpetrator is reaffirmed on the level of narration by way of this performance. Max’s narrating-I bounces back and forth between subject positions, between a voice claiming to be the victim and another claiming to be the perpetrator. But the consciousness in charge of the narrative invariably remains at its core the perpetrator Max’s. I contend that he negotiates, within the interstitial space between these two subject positions of perpetrator and victim, a new sense of self—a kind of dialectical sublation of thesis and antithesis—that neither disavows the crimes of the past nor fully admits to them. The dialogic between perpetrator and victim that we observe in the fourth book affords Max the opportunity to articulate a post-perpetration self that is based on the vestiges of the past. Max is careful to obscure his perpetrator past in the story world (at least until shortly before his death after what he depicts as a glorious, nearly legendary, existence in Israel), but the narration and manipulation of it provide him the means to reanimate the dynamics of perpetration, to transfer patterns of transgression between diegesis and extradiegesis. Max’s extradiegetic interactions

“particularly pathological and almost literal version of Bakhtin’s notion of double-voiced discourse” (“Narrative Perspective” 167). I agree with her assessment and employ here a Bakhtinian reading that arrives at a parallel take on Max’s use of voice. For my part, I focus on the dialogical interaction between the Max-self and the Itzig-self in Max the narrator’s double-voiced discourse.

with the figure of “Itzig” are a narrative iteration of his dialectical positioning in the novel’s diegesis: as a character, he never ceases to be Max Schulz, though he presents himself in the story world as Holocaust survivor Itzig Finkelstein. Max never receives judicial punishment in the story world for his crimes, and no other authority compels him to come to terms with his criminal past after he arrives in postwar Palestine. Despite inhabiting the stolen identity of a Holocaust survivor, he retains his subjectivity as perpetrator. Every time he falsely identifies himself as Itzig Finkelstein, Max Schulz reminds himself and the reader of the reasons for this shift in identity. Let us view Max’s post-perpetration self as the same as his perpetrator self who pulled the trigger at *Laubwalde*. Though his manipulation of narrative is not tantamount to murder or actual acts of perpetration, it nevertheless reflects a subjectivity that never ceases to consider itself a perpetrator. In the postwar period, the consciousness that is Max Schulz continues to occupy the subject position of perpetrator on the extradiegetic level, even while he pretends to be a victim on the diegetic level. With each instance of Max identifying himself as Max Schulz or Itzig Finkelstein (or both in the same sentence), his post-perpetration self recalls the dynamics of perpetration that gave rise to this dual identity, thus simultaneously re-claiming status as perpetrator.

Because the perpetrator/post-perpetrator Max is ultimately the figure that shapes the narrative, we are afforded a glimpse into a grotesque²⁴ world of Holocaust perpetration and the psychological mechanisms of a perpetrator’s subjectivity. While reading *Der Nazi und der Friseur*, we are forced to see through the eyes, literally and figuratively, of a Holocaust perpetrator. The concern with such a narrative strategy might be, at first blush, that the reader could be drawn into Max’s perspective without realizing the implications of identifying with the

²⁴ For discussions of Hilsenrath’s use of the literary grotesque, see for example Peter Arnds, Dietrich Dopheide, Hans Otto Horch, and Robert Lawson.

protagonist. Max Schulz would like nothing better than to seduce the reader into seeing things from his point of view, and the secondary scholarship bears out varying opinions regarding this point. On the one hand, Astrid Klocke argues: “The reader becomes too personally engaged with Schulz to allow any truly critical evaluation of his character [...] However outrageous Schulz’s crimes may be, and however skeptical we may be regarding his reliability, we see his point of view and wonder whether [...] he will manage to escape from Germany” (501). On the other hand, a number of other narrative techniques are in place to make it possible for us to be intrigued by Max’s story, but also to recognize his chicanery. Andreas Graf maintains: “Der Leser bleibt nicht ein Aufnehmender, sondern wird von Anfang an zu einem aktiv Teilnehmenden und Fragenden. Der sich treuherzig gebende Ton [...] könnte den Leser dieser ‘confessions monstreuse’ in einer trügerischen Sicherheit wegen, störten nicht sogleich die eingebauten Widerhaken” (137). In her discussion of Max’s act of disguise, Anne Fuchs arrives at a similar conclusion: “[T]he displacement of Schulz’s scandalous mimicry is of course perceived by the reader as who cannot reconcile the rupture between Schulz’s past and his disguise as Finkelstein in the present” (171). Taking a slightly different tack, Alexandra Heberger discusses how Max’s exaggerated language also contributes to creating distance between his mind and that of the readers (64-94). Several factors thus inhibit the reader from identifying with Max, including his repeated references to the crimes he committed, his monologic dialogues with the figure of Itzig, the grotesque and the abject, the inherent antipathy generated by perpetrator memoirs that Rosen discusses, and the performative quality of narration. Our engagement with Max constitutes an unsettling, though potentially instructive, experience.

With these interior monologue-dialogues between Max and Itzig, Hilsenrath constructs a complex engagement with questions related to the Holocaust and Germany's Nazi past. The "dialogic form," in conjunction with other devices, argues Wiebke Sievers, "serve[s] as a means of Brechtian defamiliarization," which "def[ies] the readers' demand for identification with the protagonists' personal fates and thus enable[s] them to understand the political motives and the ideological processes that lead to genocides" (290). The dialogic between victim and perpetrator thus plays a critical role in Hilsenrath's critique of postwar Germany and Israel. Exposure to and revulsion in reaction to the perpetrator's consciousness, within the framework of a satire, provokes us to consider the social, historical, and political context that the text depicts. McGlothlin argues that Max's trickery (or attempted trickery) serves a larger purpose within Hilsenrath's critique:

In his public role as Itzig, the Holocaust survivor, Max speaks fluently the language of sacred respect for those who experienced or perished in the Holocaust. At the same time, he profoundly undermines this respectful rhetoric with his astonishingly easy and unproblematic transformation from a self-admitted mass murderer into someone who is universally recognized and accepted as a survivor. Max's successful metamorphosis thus points to the ways in which the postwar world, even as its discourse about the Holocaust progressively has taken on the character of the sacred, has betrayed both the victims and the survivors by allowing the perpetrators go unpunished for their crimes.

("Narrative Transgression" 229)

By constructing a text in which a Nazi is able to don the identity of his murder victim, Hilsenrath satirizes postwar German memory culture, laying bare contradictions and problems, such as the "destructive splitting" that Gesine Schwan describes. We are reminded that the case of Max

Schulz, while an extreme, exaggerated one, is rooted in historical reality. Similar to the real-life Nazi perpetrators who provide the historical basis for Hilsenrath's Holocaust perpetrator, Max evades punishment and escapes detection, enjoying an outward appearance in the postwar period that engages publicly with an anonymous, collective past without being forced to come clean regarding the true nature of his complicity, i.e. the murders he committed, in the shaping of said past.

Conclusion: Max's Reaffirmation of the Monologic Dialogic at the End of His Life

At the end of the sixth and final book of *Der Nazi und der Friseur*, Max Schulz, after leading a long, eventful life as Itzig Finkelstein since immigrating to the *Yishuv* after World War II, is an old man. Toward the end of his life, he seems to want to reveal his secret, to tell someone the truth and unveil his decades-long identity theft. During a game of cards, he attempts to confess his true identity as Holocaust perpetrator to his long-time friend and former German judge Wolfgang Richter. At the end of an alcohol-fueled conversation between the two men, one of them an actual German-Jewish immigrant to the new state of Israel and the other a Holocaust perpetrator masquerading as a German-Jewish Holocaust survivor's identity, the judge, exhausted from wine and Max's rambling, is too enervated to deliver judgment. Max insists that his comrade pass judgment on the case he has presented to him:

Der Richter überlegte. Er suchte nach einer Lösung. Ich sah es ihm an. Er konzentrierte sich nicht auf die Karten. Nicht so wie sonst. Wir spielten noch zwei Runden. Dann nickte der Richter ein.

Versuchen Sie, uns zu sehen! Zwei ratlose Männer. Sie haben ein Spiel gespielt. Sie sind müde. Besonders der Richter. Er ist eingnickt. Und er wacht wieder auf. Er blickt mich an. Er sagt: "Max Schulz. Es gibt keine Lösung. Das ist ein schäbiges Spiel."

Ich sage: "Ein Urteil muß gefällt werden!"

Und der Richter sagt: "Ich bin müde. Mir fällt jetzt nichts ein. Und das ist ein schäbiges Spiel. Und ich bin ein alter Mann."

Ich frage: "Soll ich das Urteil fällen?"

Und der Richter nickt, sagt: "Ich bin müde. Was ist das Urteil?"

Ich sage: "Freispruch!"

Und der müde alter Mann nickt . . . sagt: "Freispruch!" (457)

As Richter nods off, Max as Itzig whispers his ideal verdict: acquittal. Max exploits an inebriated conversation partner in order to achieve a desired outcome. Even as a man of advanced age and weakened by a heart condition, Max manipulates his confused interlocutor. The preference that Max the narrator demonstrated in the fourth book for orchestrating conversations between two ostensibly discrete conversation partners (in the "monologic dialogues") finds an analogy at the end of the novel in his purposeful guidance of this drunken conversation with the former judge. Even when appearing to wish to confess to a lifetime of criminal activity and unethical behavior, Max nonetheless remains a perpetrator (or post-perpetrator) impervious to reform and resistant to any rhetorical move, either in the diegesis or in the extradiegesis, that might, once and for all, precipitate an admission of full responsibility for his crimes. At the end of the novel, his post-perpetration self endures.

In the eleventh and final chapter of the sixth book, Max suffers an apparent heart attack and as a result is on the cusp between life and death. As he slips in and out of consciousness and his awareness of his surroundings begins to break down, Max narrates the experiences of a confused consciousness that seems to defer the inevitable caesura in narration that will

accompany his demise. Invoking once again the trope of the loose screw, Max describes his experience attempting to make visual sense of what is happening to his physical form:

Ich sehe, wie meine Gedanken aus der Dachschadenecke herausschlüpfen, sich befreien, um die Augäpfel herumschleichen, aus den Froschaugen quellen, hervorquellen, zu schweben anfangen, im Raum herumschweben, an der Zimmerdecke hocken, mich anstarren, mir etwas zuflüstern. (464)

In his reverie, Max's thoughts attempt to free themselves from the confines of his brain, from the prison of his physical form. He describes how they slip out of the dark corner of his mind, no longer held in place by the loose screw. The hole in the head, the ostensible telos of Max's lifelong pattern of perpetration, serves at his moment of death as a point of egress for his thoughts—for the consciousness that has manipulated the narration from the beginning. With his consciousness liberated from the confines of his physical form, Max narrates an attempt at circumventing mortality. According to his unreliable depiction, his thoughts possess the ability to exist beyond his death. His success in this endeavor remains a question of interpretation. But just as we know that he cannot remember his infancy, we suspect that this phenomenon cannot happen either.

In the novel's final lines, Max invokes the practice of memorialization associated with the "Forest of the Six Million," referring to the six million Jews who perished as a result of the Nazi Judeocide. As Max draws his final breaths, he imagines a wind that wafts through his room, a wind that brings with it the essence of memory:

Und es kommt mir vor, als käme der Wind aus dem Wald der 6 Millionen. Der Wind!
Und der Wind packt die weißen Gardinen vor meinem Fenster. Und schüttelt sie. Und allmählich werden sie dunkler. Die Gardinen am Fenster. Werden dunkler und dunkler,

haken sich los, werden zu Flügeln, schwarzen Flügeln, fangen zu flattern an, lassen sie tragen vom Wind, vom Wind, der aus dem Walde kam, dem Wald der 6 Millionen. Und die Flügel packen mich, krallen sich fest an meinen ausgestreckten Armen. Und der Wind erhebt sich, trägt meine Flügel, und auch mich. Irgendwohin. Dorthin! (465)

Here, Max claims that this wind, originating somewhere in this forest planted to honor the memory of those who perished in the Holocaust, carries his winged form to some undesignated destination. While this destination does not necessarily entail salvation, it also does not clearly signify a site of punishment and retribution. Max implies that the memory of those whom he killed, the energy propelling the wind, transports him to an unspecified place where his ambiguous identity does not dissolve but continues to exist in some shape or form. With these final utterances, Max's reference, to both the millions of Jews who died in the Holocaust and the imperative associated with the forest planted to memorialize them subverts the practice of memorialization. At the end of his life and in the liminal moment adjoining death, he is apparently subject to no final judgment; there is no recourse for the perpetrator who claims the identity of one of his victims so that he might self-servingly avoid detection and evade punishment for his crimes. With his final words, Max's post-perpetration self defers responsibility indefinitely, if not infinitely. In the wake of his practice of injured narration, the reader is left to contemplate Max's motivations as perpetrator and to consider the actual nature of his loose screw.

Chapter Three:

Memorializing Lost Voices, Mediating Memory: Yiddish and Dialogicity in Fred Wander's
Der siebente Brunnen

Introduction

Holocaust survivor and Austrian Jewish author Fred Wander's 1971 novel *Der siebente Brunnen* experiments with voice—in the form of both speech and narrative perspective—as a method for depicting what was lost in the Nazi Judeocide.²⁵ The text operates as both elegy and eulogy, simultaneously mourning the collective loss of millions of European Jews as a result of genocidal violence and celebrating the memory of individual victims who appear as characters. Wander's unnamed narrator assembles the novel's discrete, vignette-like chapters, positioning himself as a kind of teichoscopic witness to the Holocaust, who often downplays his own presence in the diegesis in favor of highlighting the experiences and speech of friends and fellow prisoners in the camps. Featuring both fictional and non-fictional elements, *Der siebente Brunnen* might be best read as an autobiographical novel. Erin McGlothlin argues that a “referentielle Beziehung” connects the narrator's experiences “im ‘I’ univers concentrationnaire” with “Wanders eigener Geschichte in Auschwitz, Buchenwald und anderen Lagern” (97). The reader must, she argues, take this “overlapping” between autobiography and fiction into account, because the novel clearly situates itself as a fictionalized representation of actual historical events associated with the Holocaust (97).²⁶ Establishing an historical referent, the link between the narrator's life story and Wander's autobiography lends veracity, perhaps a degree of authenticity, to the horrors depicted in the novel.

Walter Grünzweig describes Wander's impetus with this novel: “Er wollte den im Lager gestorbenen Freunden ein Denkmal setzen” (307). He seeks to construct, with the figure of the narrator, a record, however incomplete, of these fallen comrades. Wander's novel functions both as mnemonic tool and means for memorialization; the narrative serves as the medium for the

²⁵ *Der siebente Brunnen* was originally published in 1971 by the East German Aufbau Verlag.

²⁶ McGlothlin also argues that the narrator's search for an identity as storyteller operates as analogue to the search for self that often appears in autobiographical texts penned by Holocaust survivors (103-7).

narrator's recollections and providing the reader concrete examples of individual lives and narratives lost on account of the violence of the Holocaust. In much the same way that Orpheus sought refuge in the lyrical representation of the past as a method for engaging with the memory of his perished lover Eurydice, Wander's narrator shapes the narrative to memorialize his dead friends and compatriots and provide a mode for representing their lost voices and individual stories.²⁷ Wander's narrator struggles with the burden of the memory of millions of perished Jewish victims of the Holocaust. Though this burden cannot ultimately be shouldered by one survivor's testimony or one single narrative, Wander's novel thematizes this psychological and intellectual conundrum both thematically and structurally. The narrator gestures toward the innumerable lost lives in the Holocaust with his focus on memorializing individuals with whom he was once personally acquainted—individuals who did not survive to tell their own stories in their own words. While these perished companions cannot be revived or brought back from the dead, the narrator endeavors to depict them as he remembers them in life, representing their words through the vehicle of his own. Wander's gesture here is to return to the characters in this novel their "almost" lost stories. The novel self-reflexively thematizes this tension between the enormity of what was lost and the struggle to retain something of what little remains. While the text cannot recuperate these characters' lives, it can strive to recuperate their memory. The "almost lost story" balances on the razor's edge of the conditional mood, hovering between

²⁷ Thomas Schmidt asserts that Wander engages the question of Holocaust "Repräsentierbarkeit" through the act of narration itself, particularly by establishing an overt connection between his novel and Jewish culture. He argues, "Erst im Kontext der jüdischen Kultur offenbart sich die Selbstthematizierung des Erzählens dann auch in ihrer ganzen Komplexität. Über den Zweck hinaus reflektiert die Erzählung nämlich ebenso die Mittel, mit Hilfe derer sie ihren Gegenstand zur Sprache bringt. Dabei steht allerdings die Frage nach der Repräsentierbarkeit des Holocaust nicht im Mittelpunkt, den Wander versteht Sprache nicht allein in ihren abbildenden Möglichkeiten, sondern exponiert, wie erläutert, ihre humanisierende Qualität: als mühsame Suche nach dem 'richtigen' Wort, das der Mensch um seiner selbst Willen sprechen oder hören muß" (97). The narrator's search for the "right words" leads him to seek instruction in narration from the consummate storyteller Mendel Teichmann. The text depicts the process itself of coming to terms with, though perhaps not entirely solving, the problem of employing language as medium for depicting trauma and loss.

memory and oblivion, between the indicative and the subjunctive: had these stories not become a part of Wander's novel, had the narrator not preserved the memory of these individual characters and folded them into the narrative, their names and the details of their lives and deaths may have otherwise left no trace.

To depict these "almost lost stories" that would otherwise be lost on account of traumatic and violent events, the novel relies, I argue, on the implementation of voice, i.e. narrative perspective, and the interactions among various actual voices. The narrative representation of voice, in the form of direct speech and indirect discourse, operates as a rhetorical strategy for memorializing individual personalities, fellow camp internees, with whom Wander's narrator was acquainted. Each chapter of the novel highlights a particular story or sequence of events articulated from narrator's personal experience, and each chapter focuses on a particular character or series of characters. Over the course of the novel, the reader encounters these characters and hears them speak their own words or what the narrator imagines to be their own words, as each individual struggles to survive in a series of Nazi-run concentration camps. In her afterword to the 2005 edition of the novel, Ruth Klüger describes Wander's literary approach: "Fred Wander nennt sein KZ-Buch einen Roman, man könnte es auch mehrere, ineinander verwobene Erzählungen nennen, mit verschiedenen Helden. Er selber ist nicht einer dieser Protagonisten, er ist die Kamera, die wahrnimmt" (154). Klüger's comparison is apt inasmuch as the narrator, mimicking the camera's synthetic eye, often temporarily recedes into the background so that particular character can be brought to the fore and made the focus of the narration. But because voices, rather than photographic or video-recorded images, are what the narrator reproduces, at least from memory and cast in his own words, we might be better served by comparing Wander's narrator to an audio recorder that has the capacity for preserving speech

and replaying it at a later moment. The narrator not only reproduces their words, but also gestures toward the acoustic quality of their voices, endeavoring to capture their cadence, idiosyncrasies, and linguistic particularity. Even after the characters have died, their voices persist in the narrator's memory. The narrative provides means for playing back memory, for replaying and preserving for posterity these voices that would otherwise remain lost and forgotten.

In the following chapter, I discuss various rhetorical strategies that Wander's narrator deploys for staging multivocality. I employ the term multivocality to refer to the chorus of voices belonging to various characters that speak their own words or tell their own stories over the course of the novel. Wander's novel emphasizes storytelling, with each chapter operating as a discrete story or series of stories. These stories arise out of dialogue staged between the narrator and these other characters. Hans Höller insightfully argues that Wander's work privileges the interaction between two speaking partners, which he terms "eine Form der dialogischen Anerkennung des Gegenübers" ("Bruchstücke" 68). I build on Höller's argument by exploring how Wander's novel is fundamentally underpinned by dialogical interaction—interaction that creates multiple sites in the text for the cultivation of memory and the expression of mourning. My analysis focuses on narration and the narrator's portrayal of other characters who narrate either in their own words or through the words the narrator recalls or imagines them uttering. In the following chapter, I analyze three characters and the narrative instances or configurations that allow the narrator to explore various strategies for mediating the voices of others. My investigation includes the Yiddish storytellers Mendel Teichmann and Meir Bernstein, as well as the young Talmud prodigy Tadeusz Moll.²⁸ I argue that these figures form the crux of the

²⁸ Wander's novel portrays numerous characters whose depiction warrants careful exploration, but for the purposes of my analysis I will concentrate of these three figures.

narrator's engagement with narration. With Mendel, we encounter a character narrator who narrates in his own words within the novel's diegesis. Meir speaks in his own words, but not at the time of narration. The narrator reconstructs from memory a story that Meir once told. The narrator stages a dialogical interaction in which Meir's words are reproduced for the reader in the narrator's voice, a re-telling of a story made possible by a specific deployment of narrative perspective. In the case of Tadeusz Moll, Wander's narrator constructs a narrative strand out of what he imagines the boy might be thinking and feeling in the final moments of the boy's life. An analysis of each of these configurations reveals how Wander's novel assembles both structurally and thematically multivocal discourse. I investigate the narrator's dialogical interactions with Eastern European Jewish storytellers, the narrative's deployment of Yiddish language and Yiddish literary techniques, and the narrator's development of a type of "midrash" that allows for the empathetic interpretation of the suffering of others. My exploration of these features of Wander's narrative is nurtured by the Buberian theoretical model of the "I-Thou" relationship, Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic, and narrative theorist Lisa Zunshine's scholarship on theory of mind and the representation of fictional characters' mental states. I demonstrate how the Holocaust survivor narrator in *Der siebente Brunnen* repeatedly eschews purely monological narration in favor of animating dialogical interaction that recuperates the memory of the dead.

Wander's Narrator and Mendel Teichmann: Dialogue Between East and West

In *Der siebente Brunnen*, the narrator foregrounds at the beginning an overt preoccupation with the construction of narrative, or with the narrativity of the text he produces through his narration of events that take place in the concentration camp story world and pertaining to the thoughts he entertains in reaction to what he witnesses. "Narrativity," as Gerald Prince defines it, operates as (but is not solely limited to) a "function of the disnarrated and the

richness and diversity of so-called virtual embedded narratives, story-like constructs produced in a character's mind" (387). We see something similar to what Prince describes here at work in Wander's text. Wander's narrator inserts into the diegetic world of the concentrationary universe a series of embedded narratives, often in the form of stories told by fellow camp internees. Narrativity in Wander's novel involves a subtle negotiation of narrative voice and perspective, as the narrator endeavors to portray and underscore the experience of other characters that populate the diegetic world, to represent their voices and mediate what would otherwise remain disnarrated or lost as a result of historical violence. As I will illustrate in this chapter, Wander's narrator develops a structurally complex text involving multiple diegetic layers, all of which result from a central crisis regarding the representation of historical trauma and the memorialization of the dead.

Wander's novel is self-conscious about narration. To a significant degree, Wander's narrator offers the reader insight into his meditations on and anxiety concerning the act of narration. In the novel's first chapter, *Wie man eine Geschichte erzählt*, the narrator portrays interactions he has with a man named Mendel Teichmann. The backdrop against which these conversations are set is the brutal reality of the novel's story world—a reality whose conditions emerge detail by detail over the course of the first few paragraphs. I offer here a close reading of the narrator's introduction of the figure of Mendel—an introduction that sets the stage for the narrator's practice of representing various characters and their voices. Careful attention to how the narrator portrays Mendel and fills in certain gaps to complete his portrayal and understanding of the character's experience sheds light on the novel's narrativity and provides a point of departure for unpacking the intricate narrative complexities of Wander's text.

The novel begins *in medias res*. Before the reader learns of the novel's setting, the narrator, employing the first-person and switching between German imperfect past and future tenses from one clause to the next in a single sentence, situates himself as a witness to the events that take place in the story world, informing his interlocutor that he will relate the details of a conversation that he once had with Mendel. The narrator underscores the urgency and necessity of his portrayal of this dialogue, informing the reader in the first line of the novel: "Drei Wochen nach dem Gespräch, von dem ich nun berichten werde, sollte Mendel sterben" (7). The reader immediately learns that Mendel will perish and will therefore not live to tell his own tale, and we are left in these initial moments wondering what the circumstances of his death will be. But his death is not the narrator's focus. Instead, we are told of Mendel's verbal virtuosity:

Aber noch immer hatte er seine äußerste Konzentration auf das Betrachten menschlichen Verhaltens gelenkt, überschüttete er uns, auf dem Holzplatz, beim Abladen von Baumstämmen oder auf dem Marsch, mit glühenden Schmähungen, Flüchen, Verherrlichungen der Schönheit, mit seinen zu Versen geschmiedeten düsteren Prophezeihungen, Wortergüssen, mit seinem Stolz. (7)

Here, the narrator underscores Mendel's charismatic prowess at speaking and capturing his audience's attention. His medium is the spoken word, and his speech consists of curses, taunts, rants, and poetically structured prophecies. Before he quotes Mendel directly and in great detail, the narrator tells us about Mendel's words and the quality of his speech. He depicts the storyteller from his perspective as fellow camp inmate, and we are afforded a glimpse into what the narrator witnesses and the details he finds significant. What emerges from the outset is the characterization of Mendel as a figure for whom the spoken word is an integral and unassailable

component of existence, an essential tool for engaging with and creating meaning out of the world around him.

Several scholars discuss the significance of dialogue and speech for Wander's overall project. Hans Höller asserts that *Der siebente Brunnen* and Wander's other texts "beziehen ihre sprachliche Kraft vor allem aus der erzählerischen Vergegenwärtigung der mündlichen Rede, aus der Evokation der vielsprachigen, vielstimmigen Welt des Judentums. Schreibend erschafft Wander jenen Raum des gesprochenen Worts [...]" ("Bruchstücke" 67). The narrator's depiction of Mendel underscores Höller's observation here. Höller identifies here a crucial component of Wander's text: the interaction between two discrete entities—between speaker and interlocutor, between subject and counterpart. The narrator's characterization of Mendel in the first few pages of the novel foregrounds the importance of the spoken word and the role that dialogue plays in providing a point of contact for these two entities.

Christa Wolf also points to Wander's preoccupation with representing in narrative form the act of interpersonal communication. She argues, "Vom ersten Kapitel an [...] denkt er über die Voraussetzungen menschlicher Sprache, des einander Zu-Sprechens and Miteinanderredens nach, gerade dann, wenn sie—aus gutem Grund, vom Standpunkt der Bewacher aus—als schweres Verbrechen geahndet werden" (18). Here, Wolf's argument points to the complexities inherent to the novel's representation of voice.²⁹ I employ the term voice here to refer not only to

²⁹ Ulrike Schneider argues that a crucial element of Wander's text is the portrayal of a diverse array of Jewish victims of the Holocaust and their voices (the first of which is Mendel). She argues, "Mit dieser Erzählung stellte der Schriftsteller Fred Wander seine Perspektive auf die nationalsozialistische Judenverfolgung und –vernichtung dar, verfasst aus der Position des jüdischen Überlebenden der Vernichtungs- und Konzentrationslager. Diese Erfahrung bildet ein wesentliches Moment der literarischen Darstellung, in deren Mittelpunkt die vielfältigen Stimmen von jüdischen Verfolgten aus unterschiedlichen europäischen Ländern stehen (149). According to Schneider, Wander endeavors to represent something of the spectrum of European Jews who were deported to Nazi concentration and death camps. Wander's portrayal highlights the fact that Jews from various geographic and linguistic backgrounds co-existed—even if only temporarily—in the camps. Wander's narrator stages an encounter with this multi-linguistic, diverse environment, highlighting discrete Jewish personalities such as Mendel Teichmann. Though my

a character's quoted speech but also to narrative voice, i.e. narrative perspective. Considering how speech is portrayed and how we are afforded access to this speech are principal concerns of the narrative that the narrator signposts for us from the outset. The narrator's depiction of the spoken word is also closely related to his portrayal of the act of storytelling, which is also foregrounded in his characterization of Mendel.

The narrator informs us that Mendel composes images and details culled from his acute power of observation and attention to detail. The narrator contextualizes Mendel's speech with references to the setting of the concentration camp that makes up the diegesis: imprisonment, forced labor and torture. With every sentence, the reader encounters additional details that underscore the fact that the novel's story world is a Nazi-run concentration camp. The narrator and fellow characters are internees, and Mendel's talent for speaking extemporaneously provides the prisoners with a modicum of distraction from the camp's grueling conditions. With his depiction of Mendel, Wander's narrator provides additional indicators regarding the novel's setting and additional details regarding the context in which Mendel narrates:

Einmal, als ihn einer unserer Wächter mit einem Kubel Wasser übergieß, weil er stehend eingeknickt war, beim Schichten von Holz, vor Müdigkeit und Schwäche, und die Gestiefelten schallend lachten (es fror an diesem Tag, die Posten waren in Schafpelze gekleidet, hatten von Satttheit und Wärme rote Wangen), da streckte sich Mendel, sein nasses graues Haar klebte in der Stirn, die Augen lugten scharf darunter hervor, nicht hassend oder klagend, sondern gespannt. Was tut dieser Mensch, fragten die Augen. (7)

In this intricate description of Mendel's appearance and his potential mental response to being doused with icy water, we observe the narrator's attention to detail and skill at characterization,

analysis concentrates specifically on the Eastern European Jewish cultural elements in the novel, Wander's text also depicts several characters from Western European countries.

even as he underscores his friend's verbal abilities in this chapter. The narrator effectively employs his own prowess with words to provide an analogue to Mendel's oratorical faculty. Wander's narrator juxtaposes Mendel's talent for the spoken word and cool reserve in the face of adversity with the faceless, nameless camp guards (the "booted ones") who mete out harsh, senseless punishment for the slightest "infraction" against camp rules. The narrator positions himself as eyewitness to Mendel's humiliation at the hands of the guards. He attempts to interpret Mendel's thoughts and emotions as a result of cues provided by posture and facial expressions. The narrator concludes that Mendel, rather than hating his captors for subjecting him to torturous cold, questions their behavior, analyzing them in search of clues that might allow him to construct meaning out of meaningless cruelty. Mendel's ability to concentrate on the vicissitudes of the actions of the people around him includes that of both fellow camp internees and the guards responsible for their suffering. Mendel's keen sense of observation thus takes into account both fellow victim and perpetrator.

Mendel responds to the particular social logic of the concentration camp by rallying a sense of community with other prisoners in the camp. Mendel's speech constitutes more than an outpouring of aesthetically formulated, though seemingly disconnected, utterances. The narrator's previous description of Mendel's taunts and rants becomes more contoured as we learn that Mendel is also a master storyteller. Wander's narrator explains that Mendel regularly provides fellow prisoners with distraction in the form of narrative,

An jedem zweiten Sonntagnachmittag (wir hatten nur zwei Ruhetage im Monat) pflegte Mendel Geschichten zu erzählen. In der Essensbaracke versammelten sie sich. Juden aus Warschau, Sosnowiec und Krakau, fasziniert vom Wort. Das Wort hatte magische Kräfte, es zauberte eine reichgedeckte Sabbattafel herbei, die Lieblichkeit eines jüdischen

Mädchens, Duft von süßem Palästinawein und Rosinenkuchen, verlorene schöne Welt.

(8)

In this passage, Wander's narrator constructs with the figure of Mendel the image of an Eastern European Jewish storyteller who possesses the ability to tap into the "magical" power of the spoken word for the purpose of evoking a "lost, beautiful world." The lost world to which the narrator refers in this passage is the world of Eastern European Jewry prior to the Holocaust. The Polish cities to which he refers—Warsaw, Sosnowiec, and Krakow—stand in metonymically, I argue, for any and all cities, towns, settlements and *shtetlekh* once inhabited by Eastern European Jews. Evoking a kind of communal nostalgia, Mendel's stories remind his interlocutors of their past lives prior to the Nazi persecution and the sweetness they once knew. Mendel eulogizes here the world of Eastern European Jewry that the Holocaust eradicates. His audience no doubt consists of Jews from diverse walks of life, including, but not limited to, devout Hasidic Jews from close-knit Jewish communities in rural Galicia and working class Jews from urban centers in Eastern Europe. With references to a richly appointed Sabbath table, sweet kosher wine, and the pulchritude of young Jewish women, Mendel translates into narrative form topoi commonly associated with central and Eastern European Jewish life and religious practice. His audience members recognize and share a mutual cultural understanding of these references. Mendel's narration evokes a communal sense of *yidishkayt*, or Ashkenazic Jewishness. Mendel's narration is powerful, as he is able to captivate his listeners, even if his enchantment provides only a temporary respite from the daily horrors to which the prisoners are subjected. The sense of *yidishkayt* that Mendel conjures up also has linguistic implications: his original words, addressed to a Jewish audience whose constituents hail from various locations in Eastern Europe, most likely take place in Yiddish. In relating this scene, Wander's narrator positions himself as a

member of Mendel's audience during one of his Sunday afternoon storytelling sessions—a witness to Mendel's talent and therefore also capable of understanding, and perhaps also of speaking, Yiddish. The narrator in turn mediates in the postwar period his memories of Mendel's Yiddish storytelling in German. I will demonstrate how Wander's novel is not monolingual (at least not entirely), gesturing instead toward multilingualism, as the narrator shapes the German-language text to convey Yiddish in a variety of ways. The aforementioned passage and its reference to the “lost beautiful world” hint at the novel's complex portrayal of Yiddish—a portrayal that I examine over the course of this chapter.

In this scene, in which he portrays himself as audience member and interlocutor, Wander's narrator models his method for downplaying his own experiences, thoughts, and feelings in favor of underscoring the words of others. Because Mendel Teichmann and the other characters are already dead at the time the narrating-I relates the events of the novel, the narrator has no choice but to employ his own voice as the means of representation. Nonetheless, the narrator endeavors to portray what would otherwise be lost to oblivion. Wander's narrator attempts to obscure his own presence even as he deploys his own words to capture the voice of another. By way of the narrator's voice, we are afforded access to Mendel's words and stories. By downplaying his own presence and participation in the action he depicts in this moment in the text, the narrator allows Mendel's voice to come to the fore. The narrator's technique of eschewing quotation marks in his depiction of the quoted speech of others, so that the boundaries between direct and indirect (and free indirect) speech are often blurred, underscores the novel's multivocal quality. The narrator's voice thus blends seamlessly into the voices of the people whom he portrays, as he mediates multiple voices and experiences of Jewish victims who did not survive to tell their own stories. The comparison of Wander's narrator to an audio recorder gains

purchase here. Wander's narrator de-emphasizes himself with the goal of memorializing others who cannot speak for themselves. By highlighting the figure of Mendel, the narrator gestures both toward the individual with whom he was once personally acquainted and the innumerable Jews like Mendel whose voices cannot be heard and whose untold stories constitute a body of disnarrated testimony—an anti-history reminiscent of the one we encountered in Hilsenrath's *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*.

As the first chapter unfolds, Wander's narrator further highlights Mendel's function as Jewish rhapsode in the concentration camp. Mendel's drive to narrate does not abate in light of adverse circumstances, a fact that further underscores both the tenacity of Mendel's talent and the role that storytelling plays as an act of defiance and a strategy for survival. The narrator follows up his depiction of Mendel's narration of the Sabbath table and the kosher wine by relating the crowd's affective response to what they hear. Mendel's storytelling prowess elicits a range of emotions communicated by a variety of physical symptoms: "Das Wort, kaum daß es erklang, machte die Männer erbleichen, es verwandelte sie, kehrte ihre Blicke nach innen, ließ sie Tränen vergießen and lachen, geißelte sie, erstickte sie, ließ sie ächzen und sogar schwitzen" (8). By highlighting the complex emotional reaction that Mendel's words evoke, the narrator implies that he, along with the rest of the men, sat in awe of Mendel's abilities. The narrator metaphorically doffs his hat to Mendel, as an apprentice might do to honor the abilities of a master craftsman. The narrator sees in Mendel a potential mentor. He retrospectively reconstructs a past moment when he expressed the desire to learn how to construct the kind of story that Mendel can, requesting his tutelage, "Zitternd, mit belegter Stimme, hatte ich angedeutet, dass auch ich versuche, das Handwerk des Erzählens zu lernen" (8). There is more indicated here than simple curiosity and the wish for what might amount to honing one's social

skills. As a Holocaust survivor, the narrator has, by the time he narrates the text, experienced and witnessed atrocities, and in the postwar period subsequently wrestles with finding ways of relating these (traumatic) experiences after the fact. The title of the chapter, “Wie man eine Geschichte erzählt,” gestures toward an intellectual, ethical struggle regarding representation. The reader is invited to participate in the narrator’s ruminations regarding how to do justice to the stories of those who did not survive to tell their tale. A possible solution, or at the very least a point of departure, lies at the intersection between experience and story: the narrator’s conversation with Mendel provides a literal starting point for fashioning a narrative that can give expression to what unfolds over the course of the novel. After asking for lessons in storytelling, the narrator is taken aback at Mendel’s response, “Erst schien er mir nicht zuzuhören, dann überraschte er mich mit einem Wortschall, dessen Bedeutung ich erst viel später erkannte. Doch wie soll ich es wiedergeben—verglichen mit dem Glanz and der Kraft seiner Rede, kann mein Bericht nur Gestammel sein” (8). Here, the narrator employs *litotes*, or understatement, as a rhetorical strategy that further deemphasizes his own voice in favor of Mendel’s. Despite the narrator’s emphasis on Mendel’s superior narratorial acumen, we see in his description of Mendel in the first chapter evidence of his own skill at storytelling. We recognize that the narrator, whose self-representation focuses on his lack of talent for crafting narrative, has literally found his voice by the time he narrates his recollections. The implication is that Wander’s narrator will have learned the lessons that Mendel offers him at some point between the time of the events that are narrated, i.e. the diegetic world of the camps, and the time of narration, i.e. the narrator’s act of relating what he experienced in the camps after his survival.

McGlothlin argues that Wander’s narrator gains facility as a storyteller as the novel progresses, articulating his own voice through the voices of others (109-117). His search for

narrative voice operates in tandem to his search for self. I wish to expand on her argument. The novel affords the reader, I argue, two images of the narrator. We observe both his development as storyteller throughout the novel and his burgeoning sense of self-awareness and a finished product that underscores the narrator's abilities from the novel's inception. The point bears repeating: on the one hand, Wander's narrator stages his development as one of the text's central themes, but on the other, we are aware all along that his quest to learn how to tell a story will be fulfilled on account of the skillful narration and textual complexity apparent from the beginning. The mature narrating-I at times presents himself as the naïve narrated-I. The narrator occasionally splits narrating-I and narrated-I into two discrete entities for effect. The naïve, awestruck narrated-I, enthralled by Mendel's ability to weave a story, belies the degree of narratorial sophistication that Wander's narrator achieves in his portrayal of Mendel and other characters. This gentle wielding of narrative voice—a far cry from Max Schulz' insidious manipulation of voice in *Der Nazi und der Friseur*—further serves to downplay the narrator's experiences in favor of underscoring the words and experiences of others.

The narrator's description of his conversation with Mendel reveals another constellation that I contend is crucial for Wander's project, namely the evocation of Yiddish storytelling and literature. Wander's formulation of a character narrator named Mendel as master storyteller is far from arbitrary. The name Mendel, or its diminutive form "Mendele," is more than just a common Yiddish name. With the articulation of the character Mendel Teichmann, Wander's novel establishes, I argue, a metaliterary link to Yiddish literature, in particular to texts penned by the "grandfather" of modern Yiddish literature, Sholem Yankev Abramovitch.³⁰ Abramovitch, "the

³⁰ Several scholars and commentators, such as Brand, Lauckner, Lewis, and Renoldner have discussed, to varying degrees, the role that Yiddish plays in Wander's text or the author's relationship to the language. Lauckner argues that "Wander relieves the stark realism of his work and provides a more universal context by using techniques typical of the Yiddish tradition. Thus, he uses Biblical quotations, letting the words of Jeremiah and Ezekiel about

first writer to produce Yiddish novels on a par with nineteenth-century fiction in other European languages,” first garnered significant popularity with Yiddish readers on account of his novellas *The Little Man* and *Fishke the Lame*, which I discussed in Chapter 1 (Frieden ix-x). In both works, the reader encounters Abramovitsh’s lively narrator, Mendele the Book Peddler (this moniker also served as the author’s pen name). Dovid Katz explains that “Mendele is a traveling salesman of books and religious articles who gets to ride all around the Pale [of Settlement] with his horse and wagon and observe Jewish life up close” (205). Mendele depicts his adventures as he journeys from one *shtetl* community to the next. He tells his own stories and also reproduces the tales that other characters relate to him. He is simultaneously salesman, storyteller, and interlocutor. On the surface, he appears to be a “Jewish Everyman” (Miron 181) who speaks a “folksy Yiddish” (Schachter 32). Dan Miron argues that “Mendele himself often encourages his readers to regard him as [...] a universal Jewish commoner” (180). The figure of Mendele, however, is more sophisticated than he lets on and constitutes far more than a cultural type or “*folkstip*” (Miron 169-202).³¹ Mendele is not only the narrator of these novellas, but also Abramovitsh’s “demonic double,” the mischievous literary persona whose name appeared on publication title pages and who afforded the real-life author the freedom of anonymity to mock the aspects of Yiddish and Eastern European Jewish cultural and religious life that “he considered worth parodying” (Roskies 65).

ancient persecutions symbolize this one as well, and he also places the holocaust [sic] in the context of other persecutions by quoting the wisdom of later Jewish sages” (144-45). While I agree with Lauckner’s assessment that Wander’s text evinces a strong relationship to Yiddish language and literature, she fails to explain what the characteristics of this “Yiddish tradition” are beyond her vague reference to Bible quotations. Lauckner’s analysis does not take into consideration the sophisticated nature of Yiddish literature and Wander’s equally sophisticated deployment of aspects drawn from it.

³¹ Dan Miron’s excellent analysis underscores how complex and rich Abramovitsh’s Mendele is. He explains that on the one hand Mendele is “an ordinary Jewish bookpeddler of the old school. The familiarity implied in the diminutive form of his name as well as in its commonness (Mendel) suggest the ordinary Eastern European Jew in his most workaday, unceremonious aspects” (131). But on the other, Mendele is “a *conférencier* or a one-man chorus” (173) that “*performs*” multiple roles for both the characters whom he introduces in the diegesis (and who in turn tell their own stories that form embedded narratives) and the readers (175).

Abramovitsh's "demonic double" plays many roles at once. A homodiegetic narrator, Mendele addresses an audience of readers and participates as a character in the diegetic world, interacting with and collecting stories from fellow characters. For example, in *Fishke the Lame*, Mendele's rambling conversation with Reb Alter provides the impetus for Alter to tell the story of Fishke, which forms a metadiegetic level within the framework of the diegetic world that Mendele and Alter inhabit. As the narrative figure in charge of constructing the text, Mendele is a master of metalepsis, organizing and orchestrating multiple metadiegetic levels with their embedded narratives. The "spoken Yiddish" that Abramovitsh "conjure[s] in [his] prose" serves as medium for the copious storytelling that occurs within his novellas (Katz 220). But we need to take care not to identify Abramovitsh's text simplistically as a string of Yiddish folk tales. The stories that Mendele and other characters relate operate as elements of a complex narrative that self-reflexively employs said stories in the service of a literary project. Abramovitsh's Yiddish narratives are often purposefully cloaked in ostensibly folksy Yiddish stories that may at first glance belie the text's sophisticated diegetic structure. His Yiddish-language texts, and those by other Yiddish writers such as Sholem Aleichem, position themselves as literature about storytellers and storytelling. As a component of what Allison Schachter terms his "self-conscious narrative style," Abramovitsh employs a narratorial figure that takes on the guise of the traditional Yiddish storyteller as a literary device that references traditional Yiddish culture while simultaneously serving as a narrative tool that not only highlights sweeping social and cultural changes affecting entire swathes of Eastern European Jewry over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, but also serves to signpost the transformation of Yiddish into a modern literary language (32-37). The Yiddish storytelling that Mendele the Book Peddler

enacts is called upon in the service of articulating modern Yiddish literature. Mendele is thus traditional Yiddish storyteller and modern narrator all at once.

Mendele Moykher Sforim is Mendel Teichmann's literary antecedent. I argue that Wander's text evokes Mendele the Book Peddler and his practice of Yiddish storytelling for the purpose of situating itself as beneficiary of Yiddish literary culture. Mendel Teichmann embodies the role of Yiddish storyteller and serves as the pivotal figure that instructs Wander's narrator in crafting not just stories in general, but specifically Yiddish stories. The narrator's depiction of Mendel evoking the "lost beautiful world" of Eastern European Jewry provides an introduction into Mendel's storytelling art and his practice of narration. In a manner that resembles the narratorial position that Mendele Moykher Sforim occupies in Abramovitsh's texts, Mendel Teichmann models for Wander's narrator over the course of their conversation the deployment of seemingly "folksy" stories as a tool for constructing an intricate narrative.

Let us return to the narrator's depiction of this dialogue with Mendel. Wander's narrator feels a drive to narrate, but he is at a loss as how to construct a story. Mendel Teichmann responds to the narrator's query with a question, "Wie man eine Geschichte erzählt, möchtest du also wissen? Nun, sagte er, das hat man oder hat es nicht" (8). The narrator approaches Mendel much like a Jew seeking the answer to a religious question might entreat a rabbi. Mendel responds to the request by demonstrating his art for his interlocutor. Instructing by way of example, Mendel constructs a tale out of thin air, rich in detail, about a young man of ill repute from a working class, predominantly Jewish neighborhood in either Łódź or Warsaw (9-12). Mendel's metadiegetic story begins with a conversation similar to the one Mendel has with the narrator. Mendel recalls that another young man had also once asked him to reveal the secret of storytelling, entreating the raconteur to initiate him in the poetic arts (9). Mendel responds by

engaging in dialogue with the young man, asking him about his origins, family life, and other biographical details. The young man (anonymous up to this point in the story) responds by explaining that he grew up “[i]n einem alten Haus [...] in einer übelriechenden Straße, am Rande der Stadt [...] Ein Haus voll von beschränkten, widerlichen Leuten” (9). This few meager pieces of information are sufficient for Mendel to evoke in his own words the scene that the young man describes. Mendel is capable of constructing an entire narrative starting with these details, for he declares, “und das genügt mir, ich kann es sehen, riechen kann ich das Haus” (9). This young man recedes into the background as Mendel the storyteller imaginatively inserts himself into his story’s diegesis. The storyteller enters the building that he imagines to be the young man’s childhood home and encounters a long-time resident who remembers the young man and his destructive, anti-social behavior as an abused child and delinquent teenager. Mendel describes how this old man, eager to converse with him, a stranger, provides a detailed account of the boy’s past. Similar to Abramovitsh’s Mendele, Mendel Teichmann introduces into his narrative a character narrator who narrates his own story that forms a metadiegetic level embedded within the context of the larger diegetic world.

In response to Mendel, the older man recalls that the young man’s name was Mottl Leiser, “Ein Bursche, ohne Vater aufgewachsen, die Mutter schwach und krank, schlägt ihn, er schlägt zurück, brüllt, zertrümmert Tisch und Bänke und Fenster, stiehlt, räubert, belästigt Frauen, was wollen Sie noch hören, sagt der Alte, ein Ganef ist Mottl, ein Strolch, klein wie ein Zwerg, aber stark und finster wie die Nacht!” (10). Here, the deployment of vocabulary borrowed from Yiddish, such as the term “ganef” for thief, as well as the Yiddish names Mendel and Mottl, signal to the reader the story’s mediated nature. “Ganef” serves as an example of the interaction that the text stages between the Yiddish and German: German Jews, even those who

spoke little to no Yiddish, would have understood and used the word “ganef” (the German word “Ganove” is called to mind). The deployment of this word is a nod to the complex history between Yiddish and German, between German Jews and Eastern European Jews who spoke Yiddish. Here, the word “ganef” serves as a point of contact between Yiddish and German, as a moment of linguistic overlap between the two languages, and by implication, between the two speakers, Mendel and Wander’s narrator.

Let us return once again to Mendel’s narrative. Mendel relates how the old man in the apartment building tells his story about Mottl, but quickly changes the topic to discuss himself. What follows is Mendel’s depiction of a man who craves conversation, yearns for a chance to tell the many stories he has bottled up inside. Mendel explains to Wander’s narrator,

Du merkst natürlich an der umständlichen verschlagenen Art des Alten, er sucht ein Gespräch, sonst nichts. Mit allen Mitteln will er dich in eine Debatte verwickeln, als ginge es um Leben und Tod, so wichtig ist es für ihn. Nun ja, ein fremder Mensch! Endlich einer, verstehst du, dem er alles noch nicht erzählt hat, der das noch nicht kennt. Wann hat man schon das Glück, ein neues Gesicht zu sehen. Er kommt nicht mehr weit, der Alte, die Knochen sind kaputt. Und nun hat er dich eingefangen, holt dich in die Stube hinein, hat dir eine Zigarette entlockt, eine von den ausländischen guten, die er sich längst nicht mehr lesiten kann, schlurft erregt hin und her, senkt die Stimme and weiht dich ein: Denn er kennt das Haus! Von Mottl Leiser schwenkt er direkt auf sich selbst.

(10)

Here, an ordinary old man who otherwise possesses little has the capacity to waylay a storyteller as skilled as Mendel Teichmann. The old man’s ranting about Mottl, in turn, serves as the stuff of Mendel’s narration. As Wander depicts it, storytelling, arising out of conversation, plays a

vital role in Eastern European Jewish culture. Here, Wander's narrator depicts a conversation within a story told within a conversation—very much like Abramovitsh's *Fishke*, which has numerous embedded narratives. Wander links storytelling to dialogue, to dialogic exchange. Monologue is downplayed in favor of diaphony. I assert that the narrator depicts Mendel presenting him not only an introduction to storytelling in general, but also an entrée into a particular type of narrative, born out of dialogue, associated here with Yiddish-language storytelling. As we have seen with the narrator's initial gesture toward the complex world of Eastern European Jewry encapsulated in the phrase "lost, beautiful world," Wander's narrator seems keen to capture through storytelling something of what was lost as a result of the Holocaust, in this case Eastern European Jewish literary culture and the Yiddish language.

Mendel's narrative also removes us temporarily from the diegesis of the concentration camp, replacing it with a scene depicting an example of Eastern European Jewish life prior to World War II. Directly prior to the conversation between the narrator and Mendel and the story about Mottl, the narrator depicts himself and Mendel changing physical location as they traverse the concentration camp Hirschberg, anticipating the shift to a narrative space outside of the camp, all of which is made possible by Mendel's embedded story. Wander's narrator explains, "Als er mich zur Seite nahm, um mit mir zu reden (sie feierten damals das Pessachfest, versteckt in der Waschbaracke, aber er, der Hochpriester ihrer Träume, glaubte nicht an Gott), gingen wir schnellen Schrittes, um bei der Wache nicht aufzufallen, die Baracken entlang, die vielleicht zwanzig Baracken des Lagers Hirschberg im Riesengebirge" (8). Here, the narrator highlights the presence of both devout and apostate Jews in the camp. While one group of Jewish prisoners attempts to cobble together a makeshift, clandestine Passover celebration, Mendel and the narrator sneak off to engage in a different kind of Jewish activity, namely dialoguing in the form

of storytelling and recounting memories of Eastern European Jewish life prior to the Holocaust. Mendel's narration serves as a parallel in the novel's diegesis to the narrator's narration on the extradiegetic level. The interplay between diegetic levels is, I argue, a rhetorical strategy that further underscores an emphasis on the dialogic. Similar to the interplay between diegetic levels in the train car that I discussed in my analysis of Hilsenrath's *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, the various diegetic levels conjured by the various narrators and the interaction among, here Wander's narrator, Mendel, and the old man in Mendel's story, arise directly out of dialogue, out of the act of characters and character narrators speaking to one another within the text. The dialogical exchange preserves, at least to some degree, structural and thematic elements that are linked in *Der siebente Brunnen* to the practice of storytelling in Yiddish-speaking Eastern European Jewish culture.

In contrast to Mendel Teichmann, Wander's narrator might be best viewed as a Western European, German-speaking Jew. Though Wander's narrator reveals few clues about his past and remains an anonymous figure in the text, we can nonetheless infer certain details regarding his identity. If we take into account the autobiographical overlap between author and narrator, Wander's narrator is likely an Austrian Jew whose native language is German but who also understands and speaks Yiddish.³² We might best view the narrator in *Der siebente Brunnen* as a mouthpiece, a representative of particular aspects of Wander's traumatic past as Holocaust

³² As a result of his upbringing as the son of Galician immigrants in a working class Jewish neighborhood in Vienna, Wander understood and spoke some Yiddish. Wander's autobiographical writing provides evidence for this fact. In his 1996 memoir *Das gute Leben*, Wander recalls his maternal grandfather's habit of reading stories aloud to him in Yiddish. Wander relates this experience: "Als mir Großvater Isaac Hoffmann die Märchen aus Tausendeiner Nacht erzählte, auf jiddisch, in dieser kraftvollen, grotesken Sprache, die in ihrer lapidären Kürze und Farbigkeit äußerst poetisch wirkt. Die Geschichten von 'Aladin und der Wunderlampe' oder 'Alibaba und den vierzig Räubern' mußte er mir Jahre hindurch immer wieder erzählen. Er war ein kleiner Schneider und kannte nur die hebräische Schrift. Woher hatte er diese Märchen? (34). Wander's description here underscores a fascination with Yiddish as a vehicle for stories. It is important to note, however, that the texts he mentions his grandfather reading aloud are translations of classics of world literature into Yiddish and not originally works of Yiddish literature.

survivor and his search for an authorial identity. Wander views himself as a writer whose aesthetic influences include Eastern European Jewish storytelling and literary culture. In a 1994 questionnaire that appeared in the Austrian literary magazine *Literatur und Kritik*, he explained, “Ich sehe mich als Erzähler. Ich sehe mich durchaus in der Tradition der jüdischen Geschichtenerzähler, die als Handwerker, als Schnorrer oder Heiratsvermittler durch die Dörfer und Ghettos des Ostens zogen und sich Ansehen verschafften, indem sie den Leuten Nachrichten aus der übrigen Welt überbrachten, Anekdoten und Schnurren aus dem schweren Leben der Menschen” (“Nicht jeder braucht eine Heimat” 41). Here, Wander refers to itinerant Eastern European Yiddish-language storytellers who once traveled from one Jewish community to the next, carving out a living in their respective trades, telling stories and engaging customers both as sources of income and interlocutors. These Yiddish storytellers, in Wander’s view, employ narrative as method for constructing meaning in a world that was often harsh, marked by poverty and unpredictable outbreaks of anti-Jewish violence. Wander’s characterization here bears striking resemblance to both his novel’s narrator and Yiddish literary figures such as Mendele the Book Peddler.

The interactions between Mendel and Wander’s narrator constitute, I argue, the confluence of two narratorial voices, each of which represents a particular incarnation of the European Jewish life and culture. I contend that the result of the conversation between Mendel and Wander’s narrator is a dialogue between East and West—between two languages and literary traditions, Yiddish and German. Wander’s narrator stages here in the text a dialogical interaction between two linguistic entities that emerges as the reader interacts with the text’s multiple layers of narration. The German-speaking narrator stages a crucial step in his aesthetic education, which is dependent on his interaction with Mendel, the Eastern European Jew who, as

a metaliterary reference to Mendele the Book Peddler, models Yiddish storytelling and simultaneously gestures toward the multifaceted role that storytelling plays in the development of modern Yiddish literature. Wander's narrator situates the act of storytelling, as well as discussion regarding the importance of telling stories effectively, within the framework of the novel. The dialogue between Mendel Teichmann and the narrator, as well as the Yiddish literary forebear that Mendel evokes, sheds new light on Wander's autobiographical statement quoted above. The conversation between Mendel and Wander's narrator becomes emblematic for the dialogue that Wander's text endeavors to establish with Yiddish literature. This metaliterary link to a modern Yiddish literary idiom and the storytelling that plays a crucial role in the formation of it are in turn additional components of the memorialization and mourning that the novel enacts. In doing so, Wander's text eulogizes not only the "lost beautiful world" but also the world of Yiddish literature and Yiddish speakers and readers.

Adjacent to dialogue, the dialogic, I assert, plays a crucial role in Wander's novel and provides a point of departure for situating Wander's work within the larger context of German-Jewish thought. In her analysis of *Der siebente Brunnen*, Andrea Reiter argues that Wander's novel is influenced by Hasidic stories.³³ Within the context of her argument, she draws a connection between Wander and Austrian-Jewish philosopher Martin Buber (74-76) and contends that Buber's work on Hasidism provides a link both to Eastern European Jewish storytelling and Bakhtin's notion of the dialogic. In the following section of this chapter, I

³³ Reiter argues, "Die Erzählform Wanders wurzelt in der Tradition des Chassidismus, einer volkstümlichen Bewegung im Judentum des 18. Jahrhunderts" (74). She also asserts that Wander's narrator positions Mendel Teichmann in the role of a "Zaddik," the figure in Hasidic tales that serves as spiritual leader, wise man, and sometimes faith healer (76). While I agree that Mendel performs in Wander's novel some of the functions that the *tzaddik* does in Hasidic literature, Reiter's focus in her analysis on Hasidic tales myopically obscures the complex intertextual relationship that the novel constructs to Yiddish literature, particularly modern Yiddish writers such as Abramovitsh and Sholem Aleichem. Reiter's analysis is, in my view, indicative of German scholarly reception, which is largely ignorant about Yiddish and Yiddish literature.

explore a triangulation among Wander, Buber, and Bakhtin to highlight the dialogical aspects of Wander's text—an aspect that underpins the theoretical work of both Buber and Bakhtin.

In *Martin Buber: The Life of Dialogue*, Maurice Friedman argues that significant consonance exists between Buber's concept of dialogue, as foregrounded in his seminal 1922 study *Ich und Du* (translated into English as *I and Thou*), and Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogue and the dialogic. Friedman explains that Buber's thinking revolves around the distinction between two types of configurations: "the 'I-Thou' relationship, which is direct, mutual, present, and open, and the 'I-It,' or subject-object, relation, in which one relates to the other only indirectly and nonmutually, knowing and using the other. The essential element is not what goes on within the minds of the partners in a relationship but what happens *between* them" (354). In other words, Buber's "I-Thou" constellation constitutes dialogue between two discrete entities, while the "I-It" relationship, which is essentially one-sided, exists in the form of monologue. According to Buber's philosophy, the human subject requires both types of interactions for a genuinely productive existence. According to Friedman, the dialogue so crucial to Buber's thinking finds a kindred spirit in Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic. Quoting Bakhtin, Friedman argues,

[T]he achievement of self-consciousness and the most important human acts arise out of the relation to a "Thou." "Life is dialogical by its very nature. To live means to engage in dialogue, to question, to listen, to answer, to agree." In exact parallel to Buber's contrast between I-Thou and I-It, dialogue and monologue, Bakhtin defines "monologism" as the denial of the existence outside oneself of "another *I* with equal rights (*thou*)." Authentic human life can only be verbally expressed in "*open-ended dialogue*" in which one participates wholly and throughout one's whole life. Entering into dialogue with an

integral voice, the person “participates in it not only with his thoughts, but with his fate and with his entire individuality.” (356)

What can constitute a “Thou,” the reciprocal dialogical partner of the “I,” remains open-ended: a “Thou” with which the “I” dialogues can be another human being, nature, a text, or the self. On account of the close connection between dialogue and language, an understanding of the “I-Thou” relationship often sees a link between dialogical interaction and the spoken word (and, by extension, the written word). Steven Kepnes asserts that the Austrian-Jewish philosopher develops, as a result of his thinking in *Ich und Du* and his evolving understanding of Hasidic literary culture, a “dialogical hermeneutic method” (18). According to Kepnes, Buber “developed a notion of interpretation as a dialogic relationship between the reader and the text” (19). Buber’s understanding of the relationship between reader and text is inspired by and analogous to the primacy of dialogical exchange in Hasidic stories, primarily between the figure of the *tzaddik* and other characters that pose questions and seek answers from him (19-20). For Buber, the back-and-forth that these stories often instantiate illustrates the mutually reciprocal relationship between *tzaddik* and interlocutor associated with an “I-Thou” relationship. Interpreting Hasidic texts, in turn, thus requires that the reader pay close attention not only to what the *tzaddik* expresses and but also to how he delivers his message and the ways in which his message is received within the context of an individual story’s diegesis.

In the forward to *Die Erzählungen der Chassidim*, one of the volumes of Hasidic tales that he translated from Yiddish into German, Buber emphasizes the importance of and analyzes the function of dialogue and dialogical exchange characteristic of many of these stories. Buber explains that these tales position the *tzaddik* not only as a literary character, but also as a speaker whose interpersonal communication or dialogue with his listeners the text preserves: “Aber der

Zaddik soll nicht bloß in Handlungen gezeigt werden, die dazu zeigen, in Sprüche überzugehen, sondern auch in seinem lehrenden Sprechen selber, das wesentlich zu seinem Handeln gehört” (10-11). Here, Buber identifies as a crucial element of these stories the conversational back-and-forth between the figure of the teacher and his audience. The dialogical interaction, in the form of human conversation articulated within the narrative, is elevated to an “I-Thou” relationship, because the content of the exchange between teacher and follower takes on mystical significance as an expression of “the truth about ‘Being’ to which the Hasidic text points” (20). Buber explains the mechanics of this technique in many Hasidic tales, explaining, “Der Lehrer, der Zaddik wird gefragt, nach der Bedeutung eines Schriftverses, nach dem Sinn eines Brauchs, er gibt Auskunft, und indem er sie gibt, lehrt er mehr als der Fragende zu lernen hoffte” (10-11).

This description is reminiscent of the ways in which Wander’s narrator beseeches Mendel to instruct him in the ways of storytelling. The dialogical interaction between the narrator and Mendel Teichmann represents the communing of two subjectivities within the context of the extreme conditions of the concentration camp. This relationship, I argue, assumes contours of a Buberian “I-Thou” relationship. Mendel teaches by way of example, answering the narrator’s question with question, a gesture that provides the impetus for the evocative story about Mottl that serves as example of how one effectively channels observation and imagination into a successful story—one that will capture the attention of one’s listeners. The narrator not only learns the craft of storytelling from Mendel, but his interactions with the master raconteur also catalyze in the narrator a transformation of self. This transformation recalls Buber’s explanation of how the subjectivity of the “I” composes itself within the space of the reciprocal relationship generated between said “I” and “Thou”: “Der Mensch wird am Du zum Ich. Gegenüber kommt und entschwindet, Beziehungsereignisse verdichten sich und zerstreuen, und im Wechsel klärt

sich, von Mal zu Mal wachsend, das Bewußtsein des gleichbleibenden Partners, das Ichbewußtsein" (20). The narrator's subjectivity as a narratorial authority achieves consciousness in the interaction with Mendel, the "Du" or "Gegenüber" whom he addresses. In keeping with the tradition of Hasidic tales, the narrator encounters in an everyday occurrence something approaching mystical significance, such as experiencing the evocation of the "lost, beautiful world" of Ashkenaz when listening to Mendel narrate. We also observe how the "I-Thou" relationship between Wander's narrator and Mendel is mediated by the interplay among diegetic and metadiegetic levels. Mendel embeds a story within a story within the framework of the larger text produced by the narrator. Wander's version of the "I-Thou" dialogical interaction takes place both in the speech acts between the narrator and Mendel and on the level of narrative structure, in the layers of metadiegesis that are inserted into the diegetic world when Mendel constructs his story about Mottl. Eastern European Jewish storytelling, articulated by Mendel, is built into the German-language text. But similar to Mendele the Book Peddler, Mendel Teichmann negotiates his role as narrator while simultaneously staging the storytelling of another character narrator. Mendel is both *tzaddik* and modern narrator. Buber's work on Hasidic tales thus provides a framework for understanding the significance of the dialogical exchange between Mendel and the narrator and further underscores how the narrator's portrayal of Mendel situates the novel within the larger history of Yiddish literature that includes both Hasidic tales and modern Yiddish writing by authors such as Abramovitsh.

In addition to employing Buber's notion of the "I-Thou" relationship, we also find in Wander's novel a particular iteration of Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the dialogic. Similar to my analysis of the dialogic in Hilsenrath's *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* and *Der Nazi und der Friseur*, my reading of *Der siebente Brunnen* finds inspiration in Bakhtin's theoretical work on

novelistic discourse. For Bakhtin, the modern novel possesses a choral quality, an aggregate of multiple voices that speak from multiple positions. Bakhtin explains the idea of double-voiced discourse, in which we find “two voices, two meanings, and two expressions that are dialogically interrelated [...]” (324). Though Bakhtin principally argues that double-voiced discourse involves the voice of the author and that of the character, his discussion sheds light on the dialogical interplay between Wander’s narrator and those whose voices he represents, such as Mendel. I argue that the narrator in *Der siebente Brunnen* endeavors to mimic diaphony when he represents interactions between himself and individual characters. The Bakhtinian dialogic emerges in the congress between discrete identities. These multiple groupings of narrator and character in the story world culminate in a structure that privileges multivocality over monologue. Wander’s text brings voices into conversation with one another in several ways. We have observed the emphasis on the representation of dialogue, particularly between Wander’s narrator and various characters, including the consummate storyteller Mendel. We have also observed the dialogical interaction that Wander stages between German and Yiddish literature. In the following section, I discuss how the text stages this dialogical interaction on a semantic level, between German and Yiddish languages in its portrayal of another master Yiddish storyteller, Meir Bernstein.

Yiddish and German Entwined: Wander’s Narrator and Yiddish Storyteller Meir Bernstein

Mendel Teichmann’s storytelling in the first chapter serves as an introduction to a dialogue between East and West—between Yiddish and German—that has multiple permutations throughout the text. The novel’s preoccupation with Yiddish is also evident in the fifth chapter, “Der siebente Brunnen,” in which Wander’s narrator overtly sutures a Yiddish-language tale (or “mayse” [*majsse* as the word is rendered in the text in German orthography]), into the larger context of his depiction of a storyteller named Meir Bernstein, whose talent, the

narrator claims, rivals that of Mendel (47). Framed within his depiction of Meir Bernstein and his storytelling habits, Wander's narrator further explores the portrayal of experiences related to the Holocaust through the lens of Eastern European Jewish storytelling.

This chapter of the novel opens with the narrator and a group of inmates imprisoned in a train car that has departed from the concentration camp Hirschberg, a satellite camp of Groß-Rosen, and is destined for Buchenwald.³⁴ The narrator describes how the men locked in the car, their meager food rations depleted, approach mental breakdown as their physical and psychological energy dissipates. Trapped in these horrific circumstances, they begin to speak "mit sich selbst, im Fieber, in der Agonie" (44). The movement of the train provides the sole acoustic respite from the sounds of the prisoners' moans and gasps ("Wenn der Zug fährt, wird das Geraune und Todesröcheln vom Rattern der Räder übertönt" [44]). Among the many sights and noises filling the train car, the narrator perceives Meir Bernstein, previously a passionate, energetic storyteller, lying in silence, drained of energy and on the cusp of death. Because he wears a decent pair of shoes and a warm jacket, two men patiently await his death, so that they may inherit the only earthly possessions he will leave behind.

Wander's narrator recalls the Meir who once was and the stories he told about his family and the plenitude of the holiday feasts he once celebrated with them. The narrator imagines what Meir ponders as he approaches his final moments, assuming that his friend and storyteller, along with the other Jews on the train, are filled with fantasies and memories even in this moment in which they are too enervated to speak ("Alle Ostjuden erzählten gerne von den Festen. Jetzt reden sie nicht. Sie phantasieren" [45]). Ignoring his personal suffering, the narrator endeavors to inhabit Meir's perspective. He empathetically projects what he thinks Meir experiences, basing

³⁴ Wander's narrator does not explicitly state at this point in the text from whence the train has departed and whither it is destined. This information is revealed in subsequent chapters.

his depiction on his acquaintance with him and the stories he has told in the past. Wander's narrator explains his thought process:

Ich kenne die Geschichten der Toten, die dort auf der vorderen Plattform des Wagens liegen. Ich kenne die Geschichten von Meir Bernstein, oft hat er sie erzählt. Seine Lippen bewegen sich, was flüstert er. Vielleicht ein Dankgebet? Ich danke dir, Ewiger, wispert er in die kalte Luft, ich danke dir, daß du mich noch einmal meine Chanah und die Kinder hast sehen lassen, ich danke dir, ribonje-schel-ojlem. Da stört ihn das Holpern über Weichen, reißt ihn aus seiner Vision. (45)

Here, Wander's narrator translates his knowledge of Meir and his storytelling habits into narrative. The narrator represents a man in his final moments of life, engaged in the act of prayer. Though the narrator cannot be certain that he interprets Meir's facial expression and demeanor correctly, he constructs an imaginary dialogue with Meir's thoughts, as an act of memorialization that commences prior to the man's death in the diegesis. The narrator's voice shifts seamlessly into Meir's voice, without quotations marks. The narrator's inquiry ("Vielleicht ein Dankgebet?") is followed by an utterance in Meir's voice ("Ich danke dir, Ewiger, wispert er in die kalte Luft, ich danke dir, daß [...]"), and then the narrator resumes the depiction from his own perspective ("Da stört ihn das Holpern [...]"). We observe how the narrator's words are punctuated by speech attributed to Meir. The narratorial gesture in this passage emphasizes diaphony in place of monologue, in that the narrator shapes narrative voice to stage an intermingling of two distinct voices that arises out of the narrator's switching between his own perspective and the perspective that he imagines Meir occupies.

As the train journey progresses, Wander's narrator reproduces a specific story that Meir used to tell. He relates Meir's tale about an experience the loquacious farmer once had on the Sabbath:

Und Meir erzählt mit kunstvollen Ausschmückungen, beinahe so gut wie Mendel Teichmann und andere, die seit Jahrhunderten verfolgt sind und daher im Worte leben. Hert mich ojss, pflegt Meir Bernstein zu beginnen, well ich aich dazejln a majsse ... will ich euch eine Geschichte erzählen: Ist gewesen Schabbes und haben alle gewußt, daß Schabbes im Haus des Meir Bernstein ist ein Jom-tew, ein heiliges Fest. Zwar ist Meir Bernstein nicht gewesen einer von den Jiden, die erfüllt haben die Gebote des Talmud buchstabengetreu. Gottgläubig ja, aber nicht buchstabengetreu! Weil Gott lebt in mir und in dir und in jedem Strauch, und ist größer als der Buchstabe, und auch ich bin also größer als der Buchstabe. Aber Schabbes ist Schabbes. Wird kein Licht angezündet von eigener Hand, Wagen und Pferd bleiben im Stall. Kommt doch Freitag abend ein Bauer vorbei, ein Christ. Kein schlechter Mensch, aber hat schon getrunken und will mir beweisen—ich soll sein ein Meschumed und gar kein Jid! (47)

Before the narrator commences with his depiction of Meir's narrating his tale in action, he emphasizes the historical continuity of Jewish storytelling by reminding the reader that both Meir and Mendel are preceded by a long chain of raconteurs who also "lived in the word" as a result of an existence often fraught with religious persecution and other dangers. Wander's narrator, too, must live in the word, as his project of memorializing fellow Jewish victims who do not survive the Holocaust (and depicting his own experiences in the concentration camps) can only take place in language.

The narrator then transitions to the content of Meir's tale, signaling the introduction of Meir's voice with a linguistic shift to Yiddish ("Hert mich ojss"). The narrator cites the original story rather than paraphrasing, reproducing, at least at the tale's beginning, Meir's native Yiddish. The narrator constructs here a moment in the text in which German and Yiddish intermingle. He creates a hybrid that is composed of elements of what are usually two discrete languages, and he provides the (German) reader with the information necessary for decoding it. The narrator effectively translates the original Yiddish twice: first, by shifting the orthography from the Hebrew letters in which Yiddish is written into the Latin alphabet; and second, by placing a German rendition of the story's introductory words side by side with the Yiddish ("[...] well ich aich dazejln a majsse . . . will ich euch eine Geschichte erzählen"). The phrase "well ich aich dazejln a majsse" also highlights both the Germanic and the Hebrew components that contribute to the Yiddish language. The narrator's deployment of Yiddish further acts as a mimetic gesture, an attempt to capture something of the spoken quality of Meir's storytelling. Wander's use of the term *majsse* further underscores the linguistic and historical authenticity of Meir's tale. The German narrative gently mediates the Yiddish story.

The remainder of Meir's tale, a nocturnal adventure with the non-Jewish farmer, entails a less than kosher journey to a local Polish tavern and Meir's clever management of Jewish/Christian relations. Aware of the Jewish prohibition on work and travel on the Sabbath, an anonymous Pole mischievously insists that Meir offer him a ride into the village, an action that involves the laborious hitching of horse to wagon. Because Meir's non-Jewish servant lies in the barn intoxicated and incapacitated, Meir fulfills the task without complaint and ferries the non-Jew into town. Upon arriving at the tavern, it becomes clear that Meir's neighbors have collectively conspired against him in a drunken prank. Thinking that they have hoodwinked the

Jew and tricked him into tergiversation, they celebrate their apparent victory and jokingly offer him a round of “Pflaumenschnaps und trejfetiges Fleisch” (48). Meir, however, emerges as victor when he discursively defends himself by claiming that the night in question was not, in fact, the Sabbath. In an attempt to prove him wrong and assert their dominance, they inquire of both the sober innkeeper, to whom Meir once generously loaned money, and the respectable Catholic priest regarding the day of the week. Both side with Meir. Meir relates how the priest employs a trick of logic to vindicate the Jew: “Da schüttelt er den Kopf: Wenn Meir Bernstein hat das Kummert angefaßt und am Wehr gedreht, kann nicht sein Sabbat, Meir hat recht!” (48). In his tale, Meir emphasizes Jewish agency, humor, and linguistic finesse, which in his self-aggrandizing narrative triumph over non-Jewish boorishness and inebriation. As far as his adversaries are concerned, Meir avoids transgressing Jewish law because of the high regard in which the community generally holds him. He does not lose face and is not seen as apostate (*Meschumed*). Meir obeys the spirit, if not the letter, of the law. He says of himself, he is devout but not “buchstabengetreu.”

Meir’s storytelling is reminiscent of Mendele the Book Peddler’s narratorial habits. His ingenious deployment of language as a mechanism for evading the mischievous intentions of his non-Jewish neighbors could just as easily come from the mouth of Mendele, as he spins a yarn about his adventures for a fellow traveler and storyteller such as Reb Alter in *Fishke the Lame*. Wander’s narrator also mimics Abramovitsh’s narrator. His embedding of Meir’s story into the larger frame narrative of the “concentrationary universe” of the camps and train car also reminds us of Mendele’s practice of situating metadiegetic stories that others tell him within the context of the diegetic world that he narrates. In this way, Wander’s narrator evokes also in his depiction of Meir and his *majsse* Abramovitsh’s narrative style.

The humor and good cheer that mark Meir's Yiddish tale are framed by the narrator's depiction of the train car destined for Buchenwald, the depleted prisoners, and the two men who anticipate their relative gain with Meir's last breath. After nodding off during the journey, the narrator is asleep when Meir dies. Upon waking, he witnesses Meir's ignoble end: "Auf der vorderen Plattform des Wagens lagen die Toten aufgehäuft, wie auf einem heidnischen Altar, einer über dem andern, obenauf Meir Bernstein. Lang hingestreckt und ausgeglüht lag er da, das knochige Gesicht fast schwarz, Mund und Augen geschlossen" (52-53). In contrast to the injustice of what would otherwise be an anonymous death, Meir's narratorial abilities are recuperated, even if only partially, by the story Wander's narrator tells. The presence of Meir and his story in the text serve both to mourn and memorialize. In lieu of official documentation and Meir's family members (who have also been killed), the narrator's depiction of Meir must serve the function of both obituary and *kaddish*, the Jewish prayer for the dead, traditionally recited every year by a close family member, often a son, on the anniversary of the deceased person's death. Here, the narrator eulogizes both his perished friend and the language that he spoke and deployed to tell his stories. The depiction of Meir's tale and the overture made to include Yiddish in the German-language text remind the reader that Meir's death, as well as the demise of millions like him, entails the near-destruction of Yiddish culture and Eastern European Jewry. The *kaddish* that the narrator in effect articulates for Meir Bernstein serves as a metonymical reference to the millions of Holocaust victims whose memory the text cannot preserve.

The portrayal of Meir's "mayse" is, I argue, emblematic of the integral role Yiddish language and literature play in Wander's German-language novel. The narrator weaves the two languages together at this point in the text, mapping out a point of dialogical exchange between the two. In addition to recreating Yiddish speech of the past, as recalled by the narrator, and

building it into the linguistic structure of the novel, the narrator thematizes the act of dialogue and the dialogic interaction of storytelling. In much the same way that the text enacts a dialogue between German and Yiddish in the conversation between Mendel and the narrator, we observe here a dialogical interaction between Meir's Yiddish story and Wander's German text. In the case of Meir's story, we see German and Yiddish woven together on the semantic level. This intermingling of the two languages also operates as a version of Bakhtinian double-voiced discourse, signaled by the overlapping of two voices, the narrator's and Meir's. The reader witnesses, I argue, the preservation of the Yiddish in black and white, on the literal page of the book. Through the act of reading (and re-reading), we participate in this process of the preservation of the words and memory of Meir Bernstein. Similar to Mendele the Book Peddler, who elevates the "folksy" Yiddish tale by making it the subject of a literary text, Wander's narrator aestheticizes Meir's Yiddish tale by situating it within the framework of novelistic discourse.

With the blending of Yiddish and German in Meir's story, Wander's text also gestures toward the history of European Jewish culture and literature as multilingual rather than monolingual. Monolingualism, as a cultural construct with a specific historical trajectory that is connected to Western European nation-building and hegemonic language politics often associated with nationalism, has recently received considerable scholarly attention. In *Beyond the Mother Tongue: The Postmonolingual Condition*, Yasemin Yildiz discusses, in the context of German-language literature, writing practices that critique or disrupt the monolingual paradigm. She identifies a variety of multilingual practices that demonstrate—and arguably often contribute to—a shift toward postmonolingualism. In contrast to monolingual literature, Yildiz examines authors whose works demonstrate varying degrees of engagement with more than one

language, what she terms “diverse forms of multilingualism” (15). There is no one single method for a writer to engage in multilingualism: some authors are bilingual and write in two languages at once, while others compose in a language different than their native tongue (15). I argue that Wander’s text, in the case of the reproduction of Meir’s Yiddish story, participates most closely in what Yildiz refers to as the “mixing different languages in one text” (15). She cites as examples of authors who mix different languages together James Joyce and Gloria Anzaldúa: Joyce, in *Finnegans Wake* for example, creates a polyglot text from vocabulary drawn from English, French, German, Irish, Italian, etc., and Anzaldúa employs a combination of English and Spanish, i.e. “Spanglish,” in her writing. I contend that we may add Fred Wander to this list if we take *Der siebente Brunnen* into consideration. In its formulation of dialogical interaction between German and Yiddish and its quotation of Yiddish speech and storytelling, Wander’s novel formulates a constellation of rhetorical and narrative strategies that gesture toward both the multilingual, Babel-like environment of the Nazi concentration camps and the complex cultural and political history that links German-speaking Jews in Germany and Austria and Yiddish-speaking *Ostjuden*. Wander’s construction of a metaliterary bridge to modern Yiddish literature also provides an example of a post-Holocaust literary interchange between German and Yiddish. I argue that *Der siebente Brunnen* is an experiment in postwar German-Jewish literature that seeks to galvanize the German language as a medium for the representation of traumatic memory and loss through the enrichment of Yiddish language and literature.

Imagining Tadeusz Moll: Theory of Mind and *Midrash* on Suffering

Thus far, we have encountered two examples of narratorial figures that, through the intervention of Wander’s narrator, are portrayed in the act of uttering their own words. Mendel narrates by way of conversation with Wander’s narrator. In the case of Meir Bernstein, the

narrator introduces Meir's storytelling as a recollection, reproducing the man's words in his own voice. The emphasis on the representation of the spoken word of other characters underscores the novel's implementation of a kind of multivocal model of novelistic discourse. Instead of privileging the narrator's personal experience first and foremost, the text reveals a particular concern for other victims (who do not survive like the narrator does) and the understanding that their voices have been otherwise silenced. The stories that Wander's narrator is in a position to represent are nonetheless contoured by the innumerable lives and testimonies lost due to the Shoah. The narrator negotiates the delicate line between gesturing toward the historical absence of the millions of stories that can never be told, i.e. the disnarrated body of testimony, and the desire for a moment of resistance to an otherwise infinite ellipsis. The narrator's sense of responsibility toward his perished comrades and their memory fuels the novel's engine. This sense of obligation takes a different form when violent events in the story world foreclose the narrator's access to a particular character's interiority, which would otherwise be available, as in the case of Mendel and Meir, by virtue of the stories he tells or the words he utters.

In the novel's tenth chapter, "Woran erinnert dich Wald?" the narrator relates how he is drawn to a young man named Tadeusz Moll. We learn that Tadeusz has survived Auschwitz after being assigned a work detail with a *Sonderkommando* and is subsequently deported to another camp. The narrator is in awe of the youth's apparent innocence and light-heartedness in the face of what he experienced at Auschwitz. Wander's narrator empathizes with what he has learned regarding Tadeusz' personal experience of Nazi persecution and imagines the spiritual and psychological resources that exist in the boy's mind: "Ich frage mich, welche unerschöpflichen Seelenkräfte in diesem jungen Menschen wohnen. Wie konnte ein Sechzehnjähriger die Gaskammer überstehen, ohne Schaden zu nehmen?" (110). At the beginning of the chapter, the

narrator alternates between describing Tadeusz and depicting his speech, allowing the boy to tell details of his own story as the narrative rapidly switches back and forth between indirect and direct discourse. The boy reveals himself to be a *tzaddik* who appears to live and breathe the teachings of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Hasidic movement in Eastern Europe (111). He also demonstrates himself to be a sophisticated scholar of Jewish learning, capable of quoting from memory entire swathes of the Talmud. He even corrects a fellow inmate who disputes his mnemonic accuracy (114-115). The narrator underscores the significance of the boy's faculties by depicting Tadeusz in the act reciting from memory a passage related to Enoch: "mit geschlossenen Augen leierte seine Sprüche Tadeusz Moll: *Gott nahm mich aus der Mitte des Geschlechtes der Sintflut hinweg und trug mich auf Windesflügeln zum obersten Himmel*" (114). In addition to employing reported speech, the narrator signals that he is quoting Tadeusz by rendering the recited words in italics. The narrator's depiction of Tadeusz also underscores the boy's ability to employ his extensive learning as a framework for locating meaning in the world around him. An expert at *midrash* or Jewish biblical exegesis, Tadeusz applies his spiritual understanding and scholarly expertise to the bleak situation in the concentration camp. The narrator relates how the youth blinks at him and offers encouragement, "Tadeusz Moll blinzelt mir zu: Der Körper leidet, die Seele halte heraus. Tröste sie, gib ihr ein gutes Wort. Wenn der Körper leidet, die Seele soll lachen. Das hat uns Baal-Schem gelehrt" (111). Inspired by the wunderkind's interpretative abilities, the narrator employs, I argue, a technique that resembles *midrash* when he imagines and explicates Tadeusz' final moments.

The narrator's reflection on Tadeusz' ability to withstand psychologically the inhumane conditions of the camp and his seemingly unassailable spirit is interrupted when the boy is singled out by the camp commander for torture and execution. After this moment, the narrator

can no longer speak to the boy or hear what he has to say. After Tadeusz mistakenly misses a roll call, the camp guards seize him and lead him away for execution (“Bei der Zählung nicht dazusein, bedeutete für die SS einfach Flucht. Auf Flucht stand die Todesstrafe” [121]). Along with a handful of men also sentenced to death for transgressing camp rules, Tadeusz is tied to a post on a platform in the middle of the camp and tortured prior to being hanged. Jörg Thunecke argues that “Wander himself—as he stressed in more than one interview—constantly seems to have been especially interested in those cases where an inmate’s will is shown to break, his reflexes become paralyzed, and the fight for survival ceases, as happened with Tadeusz Moll” (252). Wander’s narrator describes how Tadeusz visibly suffers as his physical and mental strength is depleted by the strain of being forced to stand lashed to the merciless wooden stake for hours on end. The narrator is deeply affected by Tadeusz’ fate. He observes the boy’s suffering and seeks to find a modicum of meaning in what is otherwise a meaningless incident of violence (123-124).

The narrator, who at this point can no longer relate Tadeusz’ actual words or allow him to express his own thoughts and experiences (“Keiner, der unter jenem Galgen gestanden hat, konnte eine Nachricht hinterlassen oder auch nur ein Wort” [124]), instead imagines what the young man might be thinking as he is tortured. The narrator spins out various possibilities and scenarios; in one moment Tadeusz begs for forgiveness and sees in Christ on the cross a forebear to his suffering. In another version, “[er liebte] niemanden mehr, nichts mehr. Was übrigblieb, was Kühle, Klarheit, Erkenntnis von der Sinnlosigkeit ales Seins oder vom NICHTS, aus dem wir kommen und in das wir sinken” (128). Though the narrator can never be certain regarding the veracity of his projections, his rambling thoughts represent an attempt to provide a voice where no voice could be heard. The narrator expresses his desire to find some kind of meaning in

his companion's suffering as he witnesses the boy's physical form endure torture. Like some kind of angelic figure, similar to Enoch in the passage Tadeusz quotes, that can witness and record but never intercede, the narrator remarks, "Der Kopf lag jetzt in der Schlinge, der goldene Kopf. Ich kann es drehen und wenden, wie ich will, mein Freund, es kommt immer wieder auf eines heraus: Wenn der Mensch sterben soll, entdeckt er den Zauber des Daseins" (130). In lieu of a physical intervention that could save Tadeusz' life, the narrator resorts to the only thing that can preserve the boy in any form. The narrator "rescues" the story of a boy who survives Auschwitz only to be killed in another camp on account of a comparatively minor infraction of camp regulation. The mind reading that Wander's narrator attempts serves as homage to Tadeusz' talent for *midrash*. The narrator develops his own version of *midrash*, which engenders a meditation on suffering. In lieu of speaking directly with the dying boy, the narrator conjures a dialogical exchange between what he can subjectively observe and what he imagines Tadeusz to think and feel in his final moments.

The episode depicting Tadeusz Moll further underscores the narrator's practice of empathetically inferring and imagining what another character thinks and feels in moments when said characters are unable to speak for themselves. We are reminded of the narrator's description of Meir Bernstein as he lies dying in the train car, too enervated to speak. The narrator observes Meir's suffering and infers, based on episodes from the past and their acquaintance, what the dying man might be thinking and feeling in that moment. In similar fashion, Wander's narrator witnesses Tadeusz in his final hours prior to being executed and imagines what the boy's thought process might be in reaction to what he suffers. In an empathetic manner, the narrator endeavors to "read the minds" of other characters, so to speak, to construct meaning out of the facial and other physical signals that he perceives. In his representation of Tadeusz' final moments, the

narrator energizes a dialogical dynamic, reminiscent of the Buberian “I-Thou” relationship that he stages in his portrayal of Mendel and Meir, between his own subjectivity and the version of Tadeusz that he conjures in his imagination.

The narrator’s pattern of interpretation is an isolated incident neither in other literary texts nor in the broader scheme of human existence. Narrative theorists such as Lisa Zunshine have adapted the concept of “theory of mind,” which has roots in the field of cognitive science, to the study of narrative and often employ it as a fundamental cognitive principle for understanding how humans interact with others humans and, by extension, how readers engage with fictional characters. As Zunshine understands it, “theory of mind” is a form of mind-reading that “has nothing to do with plain old telepathy” and instead refers to “our ability to explain people’s behavior in terms of their thoughts, feelings, beliefs, and desires” (6). Zunshine explains how most humans apply theory of mind unconsciously as a matter of course as they interact with others and attribute to them particular states of mind (6-10). In *Why We Read Fiction*, Zunshine takes as her point of departure the concept of theory of mind as a near-universal human cognitive faculty and explores how fictional texts such as novels depict the mental states of fictional characters and how readers subsequently interpret these representations by employing the same faculty of theory of mind that they use every day when interacting with their co-workers, neighbors, friends, family, etc. While Zunshine is concerned first and foremost with how real life human readers engage with literary characters, her understanding of theory of mind also entails how fictional characters often endeavor to interpret the psychological states of fellow characters. To cite one example of fictional characters employing theory of mind with each other, she discusses Elizabeth Bennet’s (sometimes incorrect) attempts to interpret Mr. Darcy’s state of mind on the basis of his behavior in Jane Austen’s *Pride and Prejudice* (61-65).

Though she plucks the majority of her textual examples from the realm of English-language literature, Zunshine argues that her insights, because they are based on a cognitive apparatus belonging to (nearly) all humans across all cultures, potentially have universal application for readers of fiction in any language. Her work enriches my analysis of *Der siebente Brunnen*. I argue that Wander's narrator often makes use of theory of mind, and his practice of inferring the states of minds of others culminates in the episode with Tadeusz. Analyzing the narrator's habit of "reading" the minds of others in terms of theory of mind situates it within the broader framework of cognitive behavior; he performs through the act of narration a universal psychological function. In this way, Wander's narrator demonstrates a mental similarity to other fictional characters and to real life humans. Viewed in this light, the narrator as a semi-autobiographical figure exhibits behavior characteristic both of human subjects in the real world and of characters that populate a fictional text. Understanding the narrator as a practitioner of theory of mind helps us to envision him as a combination of fact and fiction, as a narratorial figure whose cognitive abilities model how readers might engage with fictional characters in narratives about the Holocaust. In imagining the thoughts and feelings of characters and fellow camp internees such as Tadeusz, Wander's narrator provides an example of how to approach the literary representation of a character that suffers. The narrator demonstrates empathetic concern for Tadeusz while recognizing that witnessing the boy occurs at an epistemological remove. This is not to say that identification with a fictional Holocaust victim is entirely foreclosed, but the dynamics of reader identification might be tempered by the knowledge that the reader, much like the narrator, perceives aspects of but cannot ever fully know what Tadeusz experiences while suffering. In his description of how he attempts to interpret Tadeusz' thoughts and feelings, Wander's narrator, I argue, invites the reader to approach the episode, and by extension the other

traumatic events that take place in the text, with an understanding of the mediated nature of what is represented. In this way, *Der siebente Brunnen* gestures toward the ethical implications of the mechanics of literary identification for post-Holocaust readers.

Conclusion: Wander's "Almost Lost Stories"

As we have seen in this chapter, Wander's narrator employs narrative as a means for memorializing individuals with whom he was personally acquainted and who did not survive to provide their own testimony. To investigate the novel's mechanics of memorialization, I have analyzed the narrative configurations of Mendel Teichmann, Meir Bernstein, and Tadeusz Moll, whose memory and stories survive, at least partially, due to the narrative intervention of Wander's narrator. The narrative strives to recuperate the memory of these individuals, to salvage their "almost lost stories." Though these "almost lost stories" succeed in preserving the names of a handful of characters, the narrative's depiction of them also reminds us of the millions of Jews whose stories and testimony—and not to mention their lives—are unrecoverable. Sketching out what she identifies as Wander's "poetological concept," Schneider identifies a link between Wander's narrativity and Jewish historiography. She argues, "Der Rekurs auf die jüdische Erzähltradition erlaubt Wander, die Erfahrung des Exils und der Konzentrations- und Vernichtungslager zu verarbeiten und sie auf die jüdische Geschichtsschreibung zu beziehen" (334). The "Jewish narrative tradition" to which Schneider refers appears, I have argued, in the form of Wander's specific deployment of Yiddish language and literary tropes. Wander explores in *Der siebente Brunnen* the possibilities—and limitations—of narrative with respect to Holocaust memory and the practice of memorialization with the help of narrative strategies drawn from Yiddish and Eastern European Jewish culture. More specifically, Wander's evocation of Yiddish serves as a reflection on the role that Yiddish

literature might play in post-Holocaust German-Jewish writing.

To conclude my analysis of *Der siebente Brunnen*, I return to the narrator's depiction of Mendel Teichmann. After the conversation with Mendel that Wander's narrator depicts in the first chapter, the master storyteller appears or is mentioned frequently throughout the remaining chapters. In the sixth chapter, "Karel," the narrator evokes *Chelm*, an imaginary *shtetl* from Eastern European Jewish folklore that often appears as a literary trope in Yiddish-language texts, such as Isaac Bashevis Singer's *The Fools of Chelm and Their History* and Aaron Zeitlin's *The Wise Men of Chelm*. Wander's reference to Chelm³⁵ provides another example of the novel's construction of a metaliterary bridge to Yiddish literature. While relating the story of the Jew named Karel, the narrator depicts a nocturnal scene in the camp barracks. Interspersed among the sounds of sleeping arises a chorus of lamenting voices: "Nachts hörte man verhaltene Klagegesänge, Ächzen und Stöhnen in den Baracken" (65). As the men lie in their bunks at night, voices emerge from the darkness, giving expression to mourning and suffering. During one particular night, a kind of conversation forms as various voices, guided by Mendel, settle on the topic of Chelm. The narrator provides a sketch of the exchange:

Denn die Welt ist schön, hörte ich Mendel Teichmann leise und mit zärtlicher Stimme rezitieren, und der Tau netzt deine müden Augen, die nicht aufhören zu staunen über deine Schönheit. O Morgenröte, lächle über unseren bösen Träumen ... Aber wenn ich zurückkomme nach Chelm, lispelte im Fieber ein galizischer Jude, was soll ich sagen? Wie werde ich dastehn, allein. Die Fenster werden nicht mehr leuchten, Schabbes, von Lichtern und von den Augensternen der Kinder. Wenn ich zurückkomme nach Chelm ...

³⁵ "Chelm" is also the name of a real life community in the Lublin district of Poland. Wander's reference in this chapter of the novel, however, is to the Chelm of Eastern European Jewish folklore.

Niemand wird zurückkommen nach Chelm, sagte ein anderer galizischer Jude, weil Chelm liegt nicht mehr auf dieser Welt. (66)³⁶

Here, the voice of one Galician Jew transitions seamlessly to the next. Narrative perspective appears to glide effortlessly from one character to the next, another instance of the novel's emphasis on multivocality. We also observe additional aspects of the "lost beautiful world" of Eastern European Jewry that Mendel evokes with his storytelling in the first chapter. In this passage, the shared nostalgia that the characters experience in "Wie man eine Geschichte erzählt" when recalling a richly appointed Sabbath dinner table is replaced by a communal longing for a mythic home of Chelm, the *shtetl* that they call by name and recognize as a group. In Wander's depiction, Chelm becomes a site of collective fantasy, a metonym that represents their individual homes to which they will never again return. The evocation of Chelm in the passage (and the meaning ascribed to it) is predicated upon the sort of dialogical interaction and the intermingling of voices and minds that appear throughout the novel in various constellations: from the narrator's depiction of his conversation with Mendel and his explanation of how to tell a story, to the multilingual representation of Meir's Yiddish tale, to the mind reading that the narrator employs for the purpose of attributing meaning to the dying Tadeusz. Wander's narrator is ultimately a dexterous figure that deploys a variety of rhetorical strategies that serve a single goal: the preservation of and memorialization of the dead in the form of narrative. The narrator is the "I" who downplays his own story in favor of recuperating, however temporarily, the "almost

³⁶ In his otherwise excellent 2008 translation of Wander's novel, Michael Hofmann mistakenly translates "Chelm" as "Chelmno" (66), confusing the *shtetl* for the Nazi extermination camp. Given the context in which this name appears—in this conversation among Jewish prisoners expressing yearning for a time and a place far away from their current site of torture and imprisonment—a reference to "Chelmno" makes little sense. On the one hand, this infelicity in the translation reveals a lacuna in the translator's knowledge of Yiddish literary culture, but on the other hand, it underscores the apparent linguistic overlap between the two names. It is bitterly ironic that the literary Chelm, in contrast to Chelmno (the site of innumerable murders that contributed to the near-annihilation of Eastern European Jewry and Yiddish culture), is routinely populated by "*schlemihls* and *schlimazls*," who "[comically misrepresent reality]" as they humorously bungle their way from one problem to the next (Pinsker 10). I am indebted to Erin McGlothlin for bringing this wrinkle in Hofmann's translation to my attention.

lost stories” of others. He acts as audio recorder in his depiction of the speech of his perished comrades, as empathetic interlocutor who seeks to find speech for his conversation partners even after they are no longer able to speak for themselves.

Chapter Four:

An Elegy for *Ashkenaz*: Yiddish, Radio, and the Dialogic in Jurek Becker's *Jakob der Lügner*

Introduction

The information presented on the back cover of a 2008 biography on East German novelist, screenwriter, and essayist Jurek Becker, penned by Olaf Kutzmutz and published in the *BasisBiographien* series by the Suhrkamp publishing house, underscores both Becker's traumatic past and memory, and the lacunae in the latter, as primary epistemological tools for engaging his literary output. This blurb, which appears in form of a quotation by Becker followed by a brief interpretation by the biographer, is intended to distill some quintessential aspect of Becker's life story and literary career:

“Ich wurde am, in, als einziges. Mein Vater war, meine Mutter. Bei Kriegsausbruch kam ich, wo ich bis zum. Nach Ende des blieb mein Vater mit mir, was ich bis heute nicht. Er hätte doch auch. Jedenfalls ging ich zur und wurde ein halbwegs normales. Das änderte sich, als ich den Beruf eines. Wenn ich auf mein bisheriges zurückblicke, dann muß ich leider sagen.”

Lauter Leerstellen bestimmen das Leben Jurek Beckers. Sein Werk füllt diese Lücken mit Weltliteratur—von Miniaturen auf Postkarten bis hin zu Jakob der Lügner.³⁷

Here, the paratext underscores the significance of absence when considering Becker's life and work. In his introduction, Kutzmutz explains the source of the chosen quotation, “Diese Leerstellenerfahrung verdichtet Becker auf einer seiner letzten Postkarten zur poetischen Miniatur” (8). The “Leerstelle” is an absence that punctuates the written word—a site of emptiness gesturing toward what is lost to oblivion. The “Leerstellen” or ellipses that this paratext performs on the semantic level refer to the fragmented nature of the early years of Becker's childhood in Łódź, Poland, which was interrupted by Nazi violence. The author's early

³⁷ Olaf Kutzmutz, *Jurek Becker*, Suhrkamp BasisBiographie 32, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008, back cover.

years were characterized by traumatic loss—loss of home as a result of being imprisoned in the Łódź ghetto, loss of his mother after subsequent deportation to the concentration camps—and the “Leerstellen” associated with this loss. This blurb underscores how Becker’s identity, framed by events associated with the Shoah, comes to the fore in the manner in which publishers and editors present him as an author.

Jurek Becker’s life story, in particular his Jewish heritage and status as a child survivor of the Holocaust, also serves many critics and scholars³⁸ as a lynchpin in an interpretive framework for analyzing the author’s life in general and, more specifically, his 1969 novel *Jakob der Lügner*. Though perhaps over-determined, the paratextual blurb on the back cover of this biography nevertheless highlights a decisive element: absence. While Kutzmutz’s biography demonstrates “Leerstellen” or absence to be a key factor in the larger matrix of Becker’s life story and oeuvre, it is particularly applicable in discussing his novel *Jakob der Lügner*. We should think of the novel, I argue, as a dialogue about absence, signposted from the outset, both thematically and structurally. Firstly, absence refers to the novel’s characters, who, with the exception of the narrator, have all perished in the Holocaust by the time of narration. Secondly, absence occurs in the realm of language. The multilingual complexities of Eastern European Jewish life and culture are rendered in the novel in an almost entirely monolingual paradigm.

³⁸ A cursory perusal of the secondary literature on Jurek Becker reveals the central role that the author’s biography—particularly the Jewish aspects of his life story—plays in the analysis of texts penned by him. See Jürgen Egyptian (“Die Riten des Erzählens und das Stigma der Identität”), Sidra DeKoven Erzahi (“After Such Knowledge, What Laughter?”), Manfred Karnick (“Die Geschichte von Jakob und Jakobs Geschichten”), Sander Gilman (*Jurek Becker: A Life in Five Worlds*), Grant Henley (“Confronting *Kulturpolitik*”), and David Rock (*A Jew Who Became A German?*). Andrea Stoll, for example, opens her essay “Das Lebensthema Jurek Beckers” with the statement, “Im Erzählwerk Jurek Beckers gibt es *einen* Schwerpunkt: das autobiographisch erfahrene Trauma der jüdischen Vernichtung durch die Nationalsozialisten” (332). Stoll argues that Becker’s narrators, including the unnamed narrator in *Jakob der Lügner*, act as mediators or mouthpieces not primarily for their own stories, but for stories about the Holocaust that in turn become entwined with and inseparable from their personal histories. This entwining foregrounds the dialogical quality that underpins post-Holocaust literary texts such as *Jakob der Lügner* and *Der siebente Brunnen*, in which a single narrator tells multiple strands of various stories belonging to an array of characters who do not survive the Holocaust to tell their own stories in their own words. Narrators who depict themselves bearing this responsibility negotiate monological discourse for the purpose of constructing (or gesturing toward) a mode of storytelling that can assume the contours of dialogical or multi-voiced discourse.

The narrator does not build into his narration any overt evidence of the rubbing together of various languages (such as the kind of linguistic blending and interplay that we see for example in Wander's novel), particularly for the Jews under German occupation in the diegetic world. All characters, including the Germans and the Jews, regardless of origin, are shown to speak the same language. The novel relies instead upon a smattering of Yiddish vocabulary to gesture toward the larger multilingual configurations of Eastern European Jewish life that remain otherwise disnarrated. Absence speaks volumes, as it were. Becker's text engages with absence as a method for constructing an elegiac contemplation of the lost world of Ashkenaz.

The epistemological problems related to absence are linked intrinsically to the specific place depicted in the novel. The setting of *Jakob der Lügner* is an unnamed ghetto under German military occupation during the Second World War.³⁹ Similar to Wander's novel *Der siebente Brunnen* discussed in the previous chapter, *Jakob der Lügner* features an unnamed narrator and Holocaust survivor who narrates in the first person and relates the experiences of friends and fellow prisoners in the ghetto who do not survive. In contrast to Wander's narrator, however, who situates himself principally within the diegetic world of the concentration camps even as he

³⁹ Though the ghetto in the novel is never explicitly named, many readers assume a connection between the text's diegesis and Becker's biography. Sidra Ezrahi explains, "The *mise-en-scène* has been identified by readers as the Lodz ghetto, where Jurek Becker himself was incarcerated as a child. But like the other ghettos and camps in the fictions under consideration [in this article], the ghetto is never named, and takes on a generic quality" (293). Sara Horowitz maps Becker's status as real-life survivor of the ghetto in Łódź onto the novel as a way of delineating the ontological and epistemological divide between author and reader, who occupy the realm of the living, and the fictional Jewish characters who, with the exception of the narrator, perish either in the ghetto or at some point following deportation. She argues, "The novel ends with the ghetto's liquidation. The narrator—sole survivor of Jacob's transport—learns what the author, a Lodz Ghetto survivor, and the reader have known all along: that fabricated broadcasts prove no match for history. The confabulated narrative of hope that Jacob produced in the ghetto masked but could not ultimately displace the narrative of destruction" (68). In contrast to the general trend of which Ezrahi and Horowitz speak, Rachel Halverson asserts that Becker's narrator relates "life in the Warsaw Ghetto during World War II" (454). Halverson does not specifically substantiate this claim. The specific history of the Warsaw ghetto, including the 1943 Warsaw Ghetto Uprising (an event without parallel or reference in the text), cannot logically serve as a model for the story world of *Jakob der Lügner*. Among the ghettos in Poland, only the Łódź ghetto was still in existence in 1944 by the time Russian forces reach the area of Bezanika, the place name mentioned in conjunction with the advancing Red Army during the German radio broadcast that Jakob overhears in the precinct.

narrates from a position of after, Becker's narrator, though also eyewitness to the (often horrific) events that he relates, underscores the temporal and spatial boundary separating the diegesis of the ghetto and the extradiegetic realm of postwar Germany. Becker's narrator, while presenting the reader with a number of characters, organizes his story around a particular individual, a Polish Jew named Jakob Heym, who has perished as a victim of Nazi aggression by the time of narration. Positioning himself as eyewitness to the events that he relates and as a personal acquaintance of the subject of his narration, the narrator endeavors to mediate to a post-Holocaust (East German) audience a two-fold story: one of Holocaust survival, i.e. his own, and one of Holocaust destruction, i.e. the murder of a population of Jewish internees imprisoned within the ghetto. Like the other characters that appear in the story world, Jakob does not survive to tell his own story, to provide testimony regarding what he experienced. The narrator must provide this otherwise lost testimony by proxy. Slipping metaleptically between diegesis and extradiegesis in his mediation of the past in the present tense of the time of his narration, Becker's narrator constructs a dialogical exchange with the memory of those who have perished.

Throughout *Jakob der Lügner*, Becker's narrator displays a preoccupation with narration, particularly as it is related for him to the process of communicating with others. The narrator's desire to tell the story of Jakob and his radio, as it appears in the form of the narration of the novel, is prompted by an anxiety involving the transmission of memory and the complexities of conveying traumatic experience through the medium of language. The choice of language and the manner in which it is deployed is paramount for the narrative project of *Jakob der Lügner*, a text about the Holocaust written in German. I examine the language in which the narrator relates his story and analyze specific episodes that reveal a fundamental linguistic tension in the novel. The narration remains overwhelmingly monolingual, employing few gestures toward the

polylinguality that existed historically among the Jewish inmates of Nazi-run ghettos. The Jews imprisoned in the ghetto in Łódź, for example, communicated chiefly in an amalgamation of Yiddish, Polish, and German—a reflection of the primary languages spoken in the Polish city prior to German occupation and the construction of the Jewish ghetto (Rosen 2). Under Nazi occupation, German became the language of power in which all official discourse took place. Nevertheless, Polish Jews continued to speak their native Yiddish, Polish, or some combination of the two, in addition to the German they were forced to speak with German authority figures. Alan Rosen explains that “[i]n the ghettos of Eastern Europe, Jews continued to be enmeshed in family and community life that, while subject to unprecedented deprivation and danger, still bore resemblance to what had preceded it, as was true of languages as well” (4). What is missing is the recognition on the part of the text that Jakob actively speaks and thinks in Yiddish or Polish (or both). The names of other languages do not appear in the text; there are no extradiegetic explanations provided by the narrator to indicate that the characters speak anything other than German. The novel also does not gesture toward linguistic difference by explaining how characters such as Jakob contend with having to speak German with figures of authority or navigate a multilingual environment. While Jakob may have had some familiarity with German prior to the Nazi occupation, there is no explanation of how he acquired it. In this respect, Becker’s novel is monolingual, or linguistically monotonal. And the absence of gestures toward linguistic difference is striking: literary texts about the Holocaust often overtly thematize the radical confrontation with language, specifically with the plurality of languages in the ghettos and camps. To name but one example among many, one thinks of Primo Levi’s discussions of language in his memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*, including his portrayal of his encounter with the cacophony of languages in the concentration camp.

However, the novel develops an alternative to directly depicting this kind of direct linguistic confrontation. Becker's narrator, I argue, makes use of German as a proxy for a larger constellation of languages as they overlapped in a site like the ghetto depicted in the novel. And it is not just any German, but an "impure" German. One of the clues for unpuzzling Becker's German as a language of experience in the Holocaust is his occasional use of Yiddish. The only linguistic interruptions in an otherwise monolingual text appear in the form of a smattering of Yiddish vocabulary. "Yiddish words and intonations," David Roskies argues, "are all that survive in a German echo chamber whose sole inhabitant is a young German-speaking Jew, formerly from Lodz" ("Laughing off the Trauma of History" 70). I read *Jakob der Lügner* within a theoretical framework informed by Yasemin Yildiz's 2012 study on the monolingual condition, which speaks, I argue, to German Jewish post-Holocaust texts such as Becker's novel that tackle critical questions regarding representation and language. I demonstrate how Becker's narrator constructs in the telling of his story about Jakob and his non-existent radio discursive strategies for engaging the problem of employing specifically the German language to convey a narrative about Jewish victimization and the virtual annihilation of Eastern European Jewry.

In conjunction with the deployment of German punctuated with Yiddish, *Jakob der Lügner* emphasizes the narrator's struggle over representation and communication in its preoccupation with radio. Jakob Heym's clandestine, yet non-existent, radio serves as both a literary trope that operates to advance the plot and as a metaphor for the novel's overarching structuring principle. As a result of technological specificities, radio practice involves a constant interplay or tension between monologue and dialogue. Radio is a medium that mimics or reconstructs through the transmission and reception of electromagnetic pulses the patterns of human communicative interactions: "On the radio, as in life, monologue and dialogue are the

two primary modes of speech” (Barnard 180). Analogous to narrative, radio is monological in the sense that an often authoritative, narratorial voice operates as mediator in the broadcasting of information to the recipient. Human voices are transmitted over airwaves and the listener’s relationship to the disembodied voices is predominantly one of passive reception.⁴⁰ But radio, similar to a narrator who creates (or re-creates) the voices of various characters or focalizes them, can nevertheless approximate dialogical interaction, particularly when we consider how the medium often entails not just a single announcer or speaker but a multiplicity of voices engaged in conversation or theatrical performance. In its deployment of radio, *Jakob der Lügner* mimics this tension between monologue and dialogue. In a critical scene in which the novel’s protagonist performs a series of radio programs for the orphaned child Lina, the technological boundaries of radio become malleable and weigh in favor of the dialogic, as Jakob provides his audience of one with a fantasy of how radio can operate. Jakob blurs the lines between the medium of radio and his own performative abilities as he engages with Lina in a conversation in which he not only explains the features of radio to a novice but also allows her to make specific requests as an audience member, eradicating the fourth wall separating the active performer and the passive listener. A key Yiddish word also appears in this scene, establishing a link between the fantasy of radio and the linguistic strategies at work in the rest of the novel. In offering Lina and readers such a fantasy of radio as a dialogical interaction in which audience members can actively engage in determining and producing radio content, the novel, I argue, articulates by way of radio an elegy for the loss the true dialogical exchange. In depicting this scene with Jakob and Lina, Becker’s narrator gestures toward an alternative version of technology and history in

⁴⁰ Let us consider situations in which the radio listener appears to interact dialogically with the radio announcer, such as during phone-in programs. Upon closer inspection, these ostensible formats for conversational interplay with the medium of radio nonetheless retain the patterns of monologic discourse. Stephen Barnard explains, “Phone-in programmes offer an opportunity for the public to converse with a presenter or guest over a chosen topic, but again the conversation is weighted in favour [sic] of the presenter, who can cut a caller off at the touch of a button” (181).

which dialogical reciprocity exists and the subjugated have the agency to alter the course of their fate in the face of genocidal violence. But like the novel's articulation of an alternative—yet imaginary—ending, fantasy cannot undo history. In this manner, the radio also serves as voice box, allowing the narrator an outlet to mourn the loss of characters like Jakob and Lina, who ultimately perish either in the ghetto or following deportation in cattle cars.

In this chapter I examine the staging of language, particularly at moments in the text in which linguistic difference is installed on the semantic level. In my discussion of *Der Nazi und der Friseur*, I argue that the unreliable narrator Max Schulz constructs what I term monologic dialogue, cloaked in the veneer of dialogical exchange with an interlocutor that nevertheless remains contained firmly within the grip of his monologic control. Max's ostensible conversations with Itzig Finkelstein resemble a cat-and-mouse game in which the victim is perpetually trapped under the perpetrator's discursive control. In distinct contrast to Max Schulz, Becker's narrator, often in ways parallel to Wander's narrator, struggles to find a way for the experiences of others to come to the fore. While Becker's narrator appears cognizant that his perished friends and fellow ghetto internees can neither speak for themselves nor tell their stories in their own words (or voices), he nevertheless endeavors to find a narrative structure that can speak with multiple voices at once: his own and those of the characters whom he portrays. As a first-person narrator, he shapes monologue. But as someone eager to represent the words of dead comrades and thus also the memory of them, Becker's narrator seems to yearn for the conversational interplay between two discrete subjectivities. He seeks a form and structure in his narration that can approximate a dialogic monologue, or a blending of voices and perspectives. Echoing the complex interplay between monologue and dialogue in the medium of radio, Becker's narrator develops narratorial strategies that gesture toward the generosity often implied

in the dialogic, with respect to both the subjects of his narration and his audience. Similar to the mutually respectful kinship that Martin Buber envisions within the relationship between his concepts of “I” and “Thou” (*Ich und Du*), Becker’s narrator is eager to develop with the narrative tools at his disposal a double-voiced practice of narration, something along the lines of an interview between two parties broadcast over the radio—two independent, yet mutually cooperative, voices channeled to the interlocutor from a single source. By investigating how voices communicate with one another in the text and the language in which this communication occurs, I demonstrate how Becker’s novel probes the tension between fact and fiction, between the necessity of acknowledging history and the desire to re-write it or at least append it. *Jakob der Lügner* contends with the real horrors of the Nazi Judeocide, while simultaneously imagining alternatives—no matter how fictive and illusory—to the murder of the Jews in the ghetto, and by extension, the almost total annihilation of Eastern European Jewry. The product of this tension between recognizing the past and a desire to alter aspects of it is an act of mourning, an elegy for Ashkenaz.

Yiddish as *Fremdwort* and Metonymy

The preoccupation with finding the appropriate words—the “right” language—for representing violence and historical trauma is foregrounded in the opening pages of the novel. Becker’s narrator, through a series of metalepses between diegesis and extradiegesis, oscillates between the time of the narrated events and the time of narration. From one paragraph to the next, the narrator situates himself within the walls of the ghetto and then outside them. Grant Henley gestures toward the text’s concern regarding the act of narration: “On several occasions in the text and often through means of an open narrative excursus that addresses the reader, Becker’s primary narrator comments on the nature of the story itself and on his source, Jakob

Heym, the hero protagonist” (26). Henley highlights the discursiveness of Becker’s narrator, whose digressions (“excursus”) in his one-sided conversation with his audience function as a vehicle for staging his anxiety regarding his function as narrator. Becker’s narrator, I argue, performs this anxiety as a rhetorical strategy that both underscores his personal relationship with respect to the story’s subject matter and foregrounds the novel’s overall dialogical quality. At the outset, the narrator demonstrates a yearning for dialogue, both with receptive interlocutors and, more poignantly, with the subjects of his narration—his perished companions, such as Jakob Heym, who do not survive the Holocaust. Upon establishing his position as an eyewitness and fellow prisoner who was also imprisoned in the ghetto and subject to Nazi abuse and violence (“Ihr seid Juden, ihr seid weniger als ein Dreck” [Becker 9]), the narrator remarks that his attempts at narrating the story in the postwar period have often been undermined. He mournfully explains, “Ich habe schon tausendmal versucht, diese verfluchte Geschichte loszuwerden, immer vergebens. Entweder es waren nicht die richtigen Leute, denen ich erzählen wollte, oder ich habe irgendwelche Fehler gemacht. Ich habe vieles durcheinandergebracht [...]” (9). Here, the narrator claims that his difficulties with narration are rooted in both language and audience: in the act of narration itself and in locating receptive interlocutors (two not entirely unrelated problems). For Becker’s narrator, the act of relating the story he wishes to tell involves searching for a kind of narrative logic or form that can approximate or provide linguistic contours to traumatic experience that appears, as he describes it, to resist transmission—at least in the form of conversation at a bar. With a subtle metaleptic shift, the narrator reflects on past difficulties finding people willing to listen and respond to him in an ethical, emphatic fashion, while in the act of addressing an alternative recipient, i.e. the reader. There is hope that we as readers might become the narrator’s ideal audience, as he engages in a fictive dialogue (or dialogic monologue)

with us, rather than with those who in the past have proven incapable of receiving his story. But we are also implicitly problematized as potentially disappointing narratees.

But the narrator's concern with representation hinges not only on what to say and when to say it, but also on the choice of linguistic form. The narrator searches for a language that will be accessible to his audience. The mistakes ("Fehler") to which Becker's narrator refers may have something to do with the transfer and translation of memories from one historical and linguistic context to another. Though the narrator's linguistic background is never made explicit in the text, we infer that he is a fluent speaker of German. David Rock identifies Becker's narrator as a German-speaking European Jew who strives to communicate with a non-Jewish German audience. He argues that "in the person of the narrator and the other Jewish figures in *Jakob der Lügner*, Becker articulates the speaking Jew for his German readers through its narrative tone and language and through the oral narrative form of the novel,⁴¹ through repeated interaction between the narrator and his assumed listeners which partially reconstructs the discourse of the East European Jew" (70). Rock's argument here underscores the role of the narrator as mediator between a postwar German audience and a story that thematizes Jewish victims of the Nazi Judeocide.⁴² The East European Jewish discourse to which Rock refers is multilingual, for "European Jews have had a long history of multilingualism" (Rosen 2). The narrator translates this discourse so that it takes on the veneer of monolingual discourse—in this

⁴¹ It is not clear what Rock means here by "oral narrative form of the novel." Perhaps he references the kind of folksy storytelling that often appears as a sophisticated narrative device in modern Yiddish literary texts, such as in tales written by Abramovitsh and Sholem Aleichem. At any rate, Becker's narrator has readers, not listeners. There is no evidence that he is speaking this story at the time of narration, even though he seems to have done so in the past.

⁴² In discussing Becker's novel within a constellation of other post-Holocaust texts that "resurrect a cultural Jewish attitude," Ezrahi argues that "[w]riting a 'Yiddish' story in post-war East Germany is, as David Roskies claimed, like writing in an echo chamber" (294-5). She highlights the complex role that readerships in particular cultural and political contexts play in the configuration and reception of works such as *Jakob der Lügner*. Becker's novel, written in German (at least initially) for a German-speaking audience, has often been called upon by critics and scholars to communicate the multitudinous voices of pre-war European Jewish discourse interrupted and displaced by Nazi censorship and violence.

case a German-language discourse aimed at a non-Jewish German audience. Sander Gilman discusses Becker's narrator in multilingual and transcultural terms, asserting that the narrator speaks German with an identifiable Eastern European Jewish inflection. He contends that the narrator's language has a "pseudo-Yiddish tone" that does not entail "*mauscheln*" per se but rather "the intonation of the Yiddish speaker" ("Jewish Writers and German Letters" 132). Though Gilman does not specifically demonstrate what constitutes the narrator's "pseudo-Yiddish tone" (he offers, for example, no close reading of a passage from *Jakob der Lügner* to illustrate his observation), his argument provides a point of departure for considering the text's particular deployment of the German language.

Both Gilman and Rock understand the narrator's deployment of German as a linguistic mode that bears traits associated with central and East European Jewish language and oral culture. But I wish to push their arguments further on this point. The German that Becker's narrator employs for narrating the text and in turn places into the mouths of his characters represents a deviation of sorts from the monolingual norm. Though the text is written almost entirely in German, the narration evinces moments of linguistic tension and rupture. Taking Yildiz's argument here as a point of departure, I propose that we interpret Becker's novel as a German-language text "in which German ceases to be a unified language with impermeable boundaries" (57). Furthermore, the narrator is self-reflexively aware, I aver, of this internal tension or lack of cohesion and gestures toward it as a piece of the puzzle in his overall struggle regarding representing the past and memorializing his perished comrades.

We see evidence of this linguistic dynamic in the narrator's past attempts to engage an audience and free himself of the burden of telling this story ("diese Geschichte loszuwerden"). He makes reference to German interlocutors who listen to his story only in anticipation of the

moment when they can interject to provide proof (“beweisen” [25]) of their lack of guilt. The implication here is that the narrator’s audience often consists of Germans seeking to absolve their guilty conscience in an act of projection onto a Jewish Holocaust survivor in the midst of telling his (and others’) story of suffering and victimization. Becker’s narrator subtly relates previous interlocutors’ insistence on their blameless involvement in World War II, making claims such as, “Aber als der Krieg zu Ende war, war ich gerade erst ...” 25). Here, the ellipsis functions not only to signify absence, i.e. the words that the narrator chooses not to provide, but also to gesture toward an excess of presence, i.e. the many excuses and deferrals of guilt to which the narrator has been submitted on any number of previous occasions when he attempted to relate the story he now tells.

This moment in the text constitutes, I contend, a rupture in the communicative model between speaker and listener, implying a pattern of tension and lack of resolution that the narrator has experienced during previous endeavors in which he sought dialogue with an audience. This tension, which appears to have its source in an aborted conversation between the Jewish Holocaust survivor-narrator living in postwar Germany and the non-Jewish German reader with an unspecified wartime affiliation, is closely associated with a related linguistic tension that underpins the entire novel. Becker’s narrator channels the German language in specific ways that echo pre-war and pre-Holocaust debates and questions regarding the status of Jews as speakers of German. In his particular employment of the German language, the narrator gestures, I contend, toward the historical anxiety of Jewish Germans and Austrians regarding linguistic dispossession and dislocation (Yildiz 36-43). If we concur with Gilman’s and Rock’s assertions that Becker’s narrator communicates in a discourse identifiable as possessing a Jewish particularity, then we must also take into account not only the multilingual aspects of European

Jewish culture but also the intricate history of European Jews engaging in German and Austro-Hungarian languages, cultures, and politics (Yildiz 36-43). I argue that the narrator makes use of this linguistic tension—or constellation of tensions and dislocations—as a rhetorical strategy, so that “what looks like a monolingual text may, in fact, suggest the contours of a multilingual paradigm” (35). I identify here a parallel between the use of German we encounter in *Jakob der Lügner* and the “uncanny” quality characteristic of Kafka’s writing practice, which, as Yildiz demonstrates, interrogates the “boundaries, coherence, and identity” of the German language “from within” (Yildiz 56-7). Though the text is monolingual in that it is written almost exclusively in German and in its overall lack of gestures toward linguistic difference among the Jews in the ghetto, it nevertheless contains moments in which the German language is unsettled.

We observe the tension and signs of dislocation within the German language not only in the narrator’s extradiegetic reflections on previous attempts at engaging an audience and telling his story, but also in the first description he offers of his protagonist, Jakob Heym. As Jakob rushes through the streets of the ghetto at twilight to return home, he encounters a German guard who insists, perhaps jokingly, that he has been caught in violation of curfew. The guard sends Jakob to the nearby precinct (“Revier”) with orders to request from the German officials stationed there a suitable punishment (“eine gerechte Bestrafung”). As Jakob walks toward the precinct and is illuminated by a spotlight, the guard interrupts his journey and demands that the prisoner state for a second time the nature of his errand (11-12). The soldier appears to tease Jakob, treating him as if he were a child who must be reminded to complete a chore. The narrator emphasizes Jakob’s struggle to maintain the appearance of calm in what must be a terrifying moment and to access the vocal and linguistic qualities critical for a Jew speaking with German authorities:

Er schreit nicht, nur unbeherrschte oder respektlose Menschen schreien, er sagt es aber auch nicht zu leise, damit ihn der Mann in dem Licht deutlich über die Entfernung hin verstehen kann, er gibt sich die Mühe, genau den richtigen Ton zu treffen. Man muß merken, daß er weiß, worum er bitten soll, man muß ihn nur fragen. (12)

Here, Jakob strives to telegraph to his German interlocutor rational, cool-headed behavior in response to threatening interrogatives. As though attempting to communicate in an ostensibly foreign language and not being entirely certain about stress and intonation, Jakob speaks in this scene after careful deliberation. Fully aware that his life potentially hangs in the balance when interacting with these guards, he is anxious to demonstrate his full assimilation into the German-run system of the ghetto. This striving for assimilation is coded here in terms of language. Jakob must speak “their” language—the language of subjugation. But the reader also notes that the narrator makes no explicit reference to the specific shifts between languages that Jakob might need to make for the purpose of communicating with the occupying forces. The text does not register any possible feelings of terror on Jakob’s part in being forced to speak German. This lack of anxiety about speaking German, specifically with a German guard in a moment of extreme danger, is striking. One imagines that even a Polish Jew with a high level of familiarity or facility with German would experience some kind of trepidation regarding specifically the language itself, particularly when being forced to speak with a figure of authority. Instead, the image of Jakob the reader encounters is something more like an actor playing a part for an audience whose members he must convince. In this case, Jakob’s relationship to the German language appears to revolve around performance or the manner in which he responds to the guard, rather than around linguistic alterity. According to the description, we might well read Jakob’s effort to achieve the correct “tone” as a psychological issue, born out of anxiety, rather

than a linguistic one. In this scene, the narrator does not specifically elude to any difficulties that Jakob might have in speaking German in a particular way because it might constitute a foreign or non-native tongue for the Polish Jew. Nevertheless, as the depiction of his journey into the precinct progresses, the emphasis on Jakob and language persists.

The precinct is a notoriously perilous site in the ghetto, which no Jewish entrant ever survives to describe (11). The escalating dramatic tension of the scene as Jakob makes his way from the street outside into the precinct overlaps with anxiety regarding language, made evident when he must speak with the guard commander on duty inside the precinct. When the commander, interrupted while taking a nap, cordially inquires as to the reason for the unexpected visit, Jakob again evinces, in the narrator's depiction of him, difficulty in finding the proper mode in which to communicate. After he hesitates too long, the commander inquires again. Because the scene is focalized through Jakob rather than through the commander, the reader is privy to both the conversation and Jakob's thoughts as he scrambles to utter an acceptable response:

Jakob rechnet zu lange, der Wachhabende wird ungeduldig, das ist nicht klug, auf seiner Stirn bilden sich Falten. "Redest du nicht mit Deutschen?" Selbstverständlich redet Jakob mit Deutschen, wie wird er nicht mit Deutschen reden, dieser Eindruck soll um Himmels willen nicht aufkommen, wir sind doch alle vernünftige Menschen, da kann man doch miteinander reden. (18-19)

Here, the protagonist struggles to speak with the commander according to the discursive expectations of the ghetto. Because the scene is related by way of Jakob's perspective, the questions regarding language take on particular valence. The commander's question, "Redest du nicht mit Deutschen?" bears a double meaning and telegraphs the insidious threat of violence.

The subtext of the guard's question is a derisive, mocking inquiry, posed to find out whether Jakob, as a "lowly" Jewish prisoner, "deigns" to communicate with Germans. Anything other than a humble answer in the affirmative or the equivalent from Jakob might pique the commander's ire and serve as justification for immediate and harsh punishment.

But the commander's question also bears another meaning. He seeks to assess Jakob's linguistic skills in an attempt to discover whether the disenfranchised Jew speaks the language well enough to converse with the occupying forces and can adhere to the logic of the power dynamic enforced under German rule. It is as if the commander poses two questions at once, "Redest du nicht mit Deutschen?" and "Redest du nicht Deutsch?," but utters only the former, even though the latter would be more logical, given the circumstances. Jakob responds in time to appease his interlocutor with a well-formulated statement ("Die Antwort [...] klingt gehorsam, hinreißend ehrlich" 19), and he even procures the officer's misplaced cigarette lighter from its hiding place under the office couch—an additional gesture of deference, servility and acquiescence intended to pacify the menacing authority figure. The commander spares Jakob's life and sends him home without further ado. In this scene, Jakob demonstrates to both the commander and the reader that he has become attuned to the linguistic codes necessary for navigating the vicissitudes of Nazi rule and the absurd logic of the prohibitions in place in the ghetto. But the commander's inquiry regarding Jakob's linguistic competence displaces the question of language onto the speakers of that language.

Nevertheless, the commander's direct inquiry regarding Jakob's ability or willingness to speak with the German occupiers opens up the question of Jakob's language faculties. The narrator positions the commander's interrogative "Redest du nicht mit Deutschen?" in such a way that we wonder what languages Jakob speaks and how he has gotten to the point that he can

perform the role of the obedient prisoner in the German language. Because we are privy to Jakob's thoughts and emotions during the sequence in the precinct, the reader also encounters his recollection of the building when it served a different purpose in the days prior to Nazi occupation. As a resident of the city prior to the creation of the ghetto, Jakob has already seen the inside of this municipal building. Sidra Ezrahi explains that, while the ghetto depicted in the novel "takes on a generic quality," we nevertheless comprehend "that it is the former hometown of the Jews who have become its inmates. The 'baseline,' therefore, is the space where life was conducted: a community of barbers and pancake-makers, of trees and tax collectors" (293). Jakob's normal life and the architectural space that once constituted it, therefore, still exists in his and his many of his compatriots' memories. The city, once fulfilling the definition of home, has become the opposite: a prison, a site of torture and death. Ezrahi explains further, "Every place, every edict, is a measure of deviation from that norm, from that place where Jakob *Heym* is truly *at home*" (293). The ghetto reverses the logic of home; its rules and restrictions deny the possibility of sustaining life and guaranteeing the hope for futurity.

The linguistic delicacy and tact that Jakob demonstrates in his interactions with the German soldiers does not, however, shift when, immediately after he enters the precinct, he recounts a memory of entering the same door in an entirely different context. Before the Nazis had converted the building into the central administration office for the ghetto, it had been the tax office in Łódź. Jakob remembers how the building's fixtures used to be arranged and how the Polish bureaucrats engaged with the local citizenry:

Er war schon oft hier, früher hat gleich links neben der Tür ein kleiner Tisch gestanden, dahinter hat ein kleiner Beamter gesessen, seit Jakob sich erinnern kann, immer Herr Kominek, und hat alle eintretenden Besucher gefragt: "Womit können wir dienen?" –"Ich

möchte meine Steuern für das Halbjahr bezahlen, Herr Kominek,” hat Jakob gesagt. Aber Kominek hat so getan, als ob er Jakob noch nie gesehen hätte, obwohl er von Oktober bis Ende April fast jede Woche in Jakobs Diele gewesen ist und dort Kartoffelpuffer gegessen hat. (12)

Here, we encounter an element of the uncanny in the manner in which Becker’s narrator relates this scene. What at first appears to be an analogy constructed between Jakob’s experience at the tax office and his experience interacting with Nazi soldiers—the alienation and anxiety he experiences in both contexts ostensibly links the two moments together—becomes complicated when we consider the question of language. The entire reminiscence occurs in German, even though Jakob’s memories must logically have been in Yiddish or some combination of Yiddish and Polish. The fact that Jakob is shown to think in German is congruous with the linguistic logic that the novel employs. The German language presumably serves as the artificial interface for the Yiddish and/or Polish in which he thinks and other Polish Jewish characters likely speak and think in the novel. What is striking in this scene is that Jakob exhibits no difficulty speaking German flawlessly with the Nazis. After all, Jakob is a Polish Jew, not a German Jew or an Eastern European Jew with an educational background that would substantiate the level of German proficiency that Jakob appears to have obtained. What complicates the issue of language further still is the apparent lack of linguistic distinction between the exterior world of the ghetto, with the enforcement of German from the outside, and the inside of Jakob’s mind. While he appears to speak German well enough to satisfy the Nazis in charge, his private thoughts would likely take place in the language (or languages) in which he feels most comfortable. Becker’s text remains monotonal with respect to the multilingual reality of Łódź’s Jewish population.

Though the commander's question is positioned in such a way that we ponder the humble Polish Jewish shopkeeper's linguistic background, the narrator offers no explicit clues regarding the mental gymnastics that would be necessary for code-switching between the language of the occupying force, nor does he gesture toward the historical reality regarding how Polish Jews dealt with the issue of language while under German military occupation. While we are privy to Jakob's reflections on the previous history of the precinct building as the tax office during the previous (i.e. pre-ghetto) period of interwar Poland, we receive no explicit information here regarding the role discrete languages most likely play in Jakob's thought process. An explanation of Jakob's ability to speak or think in Yiddish and Polish is absent from this sequence of events. On the surface at least, the narrator renders this overlapping of two separate temporalities mapped onto the site of the precinct building in monolingual discourse. The point bears repeating. When encountering this richly layered scene, one could imagine a scenario in which the narrator comments, even in German, on Jakob's negotiation of the linguistic slippage between past and present—between, on the one hand, his former life conducted in Polish and Yiddish, and on the other, his current subjugation under Nazi rule and the enforced usage of the language of the hostile enemy. But instead of calling direct attention to the language politics at play by way of an overt description of the protagonist's linguistic abilities, Becker's narrator gestures toward this issue by way of implication. The German commander's question to Jakob regarding his capacity for communicating with Germans signals linguistic tension. The issue of linguistic difference—with Jakob's ostensible need for contending with the German language—is displaced onto a more general question of communication: "Redest du nicht mit Deutschen?" This subtle gesture invites us to pose our own questions about Jakob's relationship to language,

and we are left to undertake the interpretive work of untangling the linguistic labyrinth that his journey to the precinct should evoke, but in fact does not.

Following this initial sequence, which provides the catalyst for the action of the novel and Jakob's decision to start the rumor regarding the radio, the text provides signals that imply the particularities of language among the Jewish prisoners in the ghetto. The linguistic tension and dislocation that surround the depiction of Jakob and his deployment of German with the Nazi officials take on greater contours when the narrator deploys a series of Yiddish words in the text during a scene that follows the depiction of Jakob's anxiety-ridden journey into the precinct. This vocabulary is implemented in conjunction with a character's intense emotional reaction to the news regarding the protagonist's radio. When Jakob confides in his fellow prisoner Mischa and tells him the news that he in fact overheard being transmitted over the radio in the precinct office (rather than from a secret radio that he claims to possess), the narrator inserts Yiddish vocabulary into his description of Mischa's response to the news: "Sie sitzen noch ein bißchen, Mischa lächelt glücklich mit seinen Augen wie ein Goj, so hat ihn Jakob zugerichtet" (32). Here, Yiddish is employed to underscore the intensity of Mischa's positive emotional response to the potentially uplifting news that the Russians might be approaching. Mischa's emotional response is portrayed in his physical response, as his eyes appear to laugh with mirth and hope. The crucial initial response that Jakob witnesses upon presenting a fellow prisoner with potentially life-affirming news is presented in a combination of German and Yiddish. In addition to this word, we also encounter two other words that remind us that the conversation between Jakob and Mischa takes place between two Eastern European Jews who share a common cultural and linguistic context. Becker's narrator provides details from Mischa's background, and we learn that prior to being imprisoned in the ghetto, Mischa had been a mildly successful athlete as a

“Hakoah” (Jewish sports club) boxer (28). This detail serves to explain why Mischa possesses, at least for the time being, more strength and endurance while hauling the heavy burdens in the arduous work details assigned to the prisoners than the relatively physically weaker and clumsier Jakob.

The narrator also mentions that Jakob talks endlessly about food, as he attempts to keep Mischa wrapped up in conversation while they labor. In describing how Jakob prattles away, the narrator underscores the privation of the ghetto by listing typical Central and East European food to which the Jewish prisoners no longer have access: “eingelegte Heringe [...] gebratene Gänse [...] Millionen Töpfe voll Tscholent” (29). By mentioning *cholent*, the narrator refers to a typical Ashkenazic dish consumed as the primary Sabbath meal, thus further situating Jakob’s loquaciousness within the context of East European Jewish culture. *Cholent*, a staple recipe of Jewish kitchens throughout Galicia and the Pale of Settlement, serves to evoke nostalgia, echoing yearning for Eastern European Jewish cultural life that has been interrupted by the German occupiers and the system of the ghetto. Jakob’s reference to the dish (and his overall tendency to talk about food) also underscores the fact that the prisoners in the ghetto are all starving. In the novel, Ashkenaz has a rich past, a quickly eroding present, and no future.

The Yiddish words “Hakoah,” “Tscholent,” and “Goi” serve as components of a code for Jewish speech that is otherwise primarily rendered in German. They represent Jewish concepts for which there is no good equivalent in the German language and serve as passwords or shibboleths that signal linguistic alterity. These Yiddish and Hebrew-derived words, along with a handful of other examples of Yiddish vocabulary scattered throughout the novel,⁴³ play a

⁴³ Rock provides an overview of the Yiddish vocabulary that appears in *Jakob der Lügner*. He argues that Becker’s use of words such as “Chassene,” “Schabess,” “Moissi,” “Jontefarbeit,” “Zoress,” etc. serves to “give us a miniature cross-section of East European culture” (70). He also argues that Becker folds “some of the rules of colloquial Yiddish [in]to High German” (70), but his assertion remains a generalization. He offers no sentence-level analysis of

decisive role in deciphering the text's relationship to and portrayal of language. Becker's strategies for deploying language, specifically the German language, can be understood more fully, I contend, when we consider the signals of linguistic variation provided by the words of foreign—particularly Jewish—extraction. Yiddish vocabulary words operate as *Fremdwörter*, or foreign words, that are contained within the grammar and syntax of German. Thomas Jung describes how these words can operate as an interruptive force, compelling the average German reader to seek out additional reference material for explanation. He explains, “Diese Worte sind in der deutschen Alltagssprache zwar nicht unbekannt, aber dem Durchschnittsleser in ihrer eigentlichen Bedeutung nicht präsent und mögen diesen veranlassen, den Lesefluß zu unterbrechen und sich in *Fremd-Wörterbüchern* zu erkundigen” (109). Here, Jung underscores the potential power that *Fremdwörter* such as the Yiddish and Hebrew vocabulary in the text have in destabilizing the reading experience. These words interrupt the process of reading, however temporarily, and invite an active engagement with the subject matter, as they contrast sharply with the otherwise monolingual flow of the text. Decoding the “foreign” Jewish words that exist side-by-side in the text next to “native” German words encourages, I argue, an exercise in epistemology; tensions and ruptures within the text act as metaphors for the historical and political tensions depicted in the novel.

But let us return for a moment to the Yiddish word itself. “Goi,” as it appears in Becker's narrative, or “goy” as it is commonly rendered in English, is usually translated as “Gentile” or

a passage from the novel to substantiate his claim that Becker weaves Yiddish-specific syntax into his German-language text in addition to Yiddish vocabulary. While he may be correct in this regard, the lack of detail and depth in this aspect of his interpretation is in keeping with a larger trend that I have noticed in scholarship by Germanists who seek to examine the usage of Yiddish in German Jewish post-Holocaust writing. This scholarship seems for the most part unfamiliar with the specificities of Yiddish language and literary history. If anything, less-than-sophisticated analyses of this sort do justice neither to the literary skills and linguistic and cultural sensitivity of the German-language authors in question nor to Yiddish as a language and literature.

“non-Jew.”⁴⁴ The narrator seems to use the term ironically, for it is employed to describe Mischa, a fellow Jewish prisoner. Mischa’s eyes appear “non-Jewish,” because his face reflects a positive psychological state—one that is systematically denied the ghetto inhabitants by the Nazis and their strict system of rules and regulations and the daily threat of violence, deportation, and death. Sandwiched into a sentence that is otherwise entirely in German, the Yiddish term evokes the linguistic, social, cultural, and political divide between Jewish prisoners such as Jakob and Mischa and their German captors. It also performs a metonymical function, standing in for the larger linguistic particularities that would be at work in a scene such as the one in which Jakob speaks with a fellow Jew, rather than with a German guard. It replaces what might otherwise be a depiction or overt reference to Jakob’s need to translate literally from German into Polish or Yiddish the news about the advancing Russian troops that he overheard in the precinct by way of a German news report broadcast over the radio. Instead, the Yiddish word strategically indicates the act of translation in a text that is otherwise primarily monolingual. The act of translation is also displaced onto the mutation of Jakob’s real source for the information he shares with Mischa into the prevarication about the imaginary radio.

In a 1984 interview that Rock references, Jurek Becker explains that he “had written the novel in a quite specific language which he had virtually constructed for himself and could not

⁴⁴ Another layer of irony comes to the fore when we observe that the term “goy,” in addition to referring to an individual person who is not Jewish, can also mean “nation” or “people” and is used at various points in Biblical Hebrew to describe both Jews (Israelites) and non-Jews alike. Philip Birnbaum explains, “The Torah speaks of Israel as *goy kadosh* (Exodus 19:6), a nation destined to be holy. The plural, *goyim*, is employed in the Bible to signify the nations of the world. In the course of time, the singular (גוי) was used interchangeably with נכרי (*nokhri*) . . . to designate a non-Jew” (464). Seen in this light, the term possesses a certain amount of ambiguity. Mischa’s eyes could very well appear both “non-Jewish” and “Jewish” at the same time. In Yiddish, the term is used almost exclusively to denote a non-Jewish person, and that is the meaning the word carries in this context, but the historical flexibility of the word opens up interpretive possibilities and hints at parallel linguistic slippages within the German language. In this respect, the word “Goi” is polysemantic, reflecting linguistic tension within itself as a Hebrew/Yiddish word and also as it is situated within the German-language text. When we take the larger semantic field of the Yiddish word into consideration, it emerges as a signal for both the permeability and the possibility inherent in language in general, and in the German language in this specific context.

repeat” (70). Given this self-evaluation of the writing process, we ask ourselves how this specific language operates and how we might identify its features. Sander Gilman contends that the linguistic landscape of Becker’s novel has a clear historical antecedent. I quote his argument here at length as he makes a series of rhetorical moves, the analysis of which helps us understand Becker’s use of language. He asserts,

Jurek’s novel is a continuation of an East German literary tradition that deals with the fascist past, but in a new and extraordinary way. His book is in a German tradition but is read as a “Jewish” novel about the East. In *Fiddler on the Roof*, the English libretto represented the language of Eastern European Jews. They are all supposedly speaking Yiddish, even Tevye’s Russified future son-in-law, when they are actually speaking English. But what language is imagined in the unnamed ghetto described in Jacob the Liar? The German soldiers speak German, but so do the Orthodox Herschel Shtamm, the Polonized Dr. Kirschbaum, and the totally assimilated German Jew, Leonard Schmidt. Indeed, so does Jacob, the owner of a small restaurant with his Polish and Yiddish-speaking clients, who can also understand the formal German of the radio without hesitation. What is the common denominator that “German” here represents? It is the *Lagersprache*, making a sudden reappearance. The bits and pieces of German overlying the fragments of all of those languages spoken in the ghettos and the camps was the lingua franca that was necessary to survive. This is the key to understanding the novel as a novel of the Shoah. The fragments of Yiddish are not window dressing but part of a patois that made it possible to understand and simultaneously misunderstand all the languages in the ghetto. (*Jurek Becker* 76-77)

Here, Gilman underscores an autobiographical connection between the specific use of German in the novel and the author's complex personal relationship to both language and memory. And while his argument here opens up an insightful line of inquiry into Becker's use of language, it needs unpacking. His analogy between *Fiddler on the Roof* and Becker's novel pays compliment to Becker and situates *Jakob der Lügner* within the greater context of Jewish literary history. But his comparison does not entirely do justice to Sholem Aleichem, the author of the Tevye stories on which *Fiddler on the Roof* was based. The analogy here obscures to some degree both the rich history of modern Yiddish literature and Sholem Aleichem's considerable role in the articulation of it. The tales of Tevye the Dairyman enjoyed massive popularity in the original Yiddish in both Europe and the United States (Roskies, "Introduction" 1). Additionally, *Fiddler on the Roof*, originally produced in 1964 before being made into a film in 1971, was the result of a particular level of fame and familiarity that Sholem Aleichem and his stories had attained in the English-speaking world (Dauber 340-370).⁴⁵ The English deployed in the musical stands in specifically for the original Yiddish of the Tevye stories. The musical's libretto translates and adapts the sophisticated literary idiom in which Sholem Aleichem writes. Sholem Aleichem's development of a complex, polyvalent brand of Yiddish, which often incorporated "trilingual wordplay" (Roskies, "Introduction" 1), cannot be accurately characterized as a "patois."

Gilman's comparison compels us to consider carefully the specific historical and linguistic context that provides the backdrop for Becker's novel. Firstly, the language of *Jakob der Lügner* is not the result of a translation from one literary text to the next. Secondly, Becker's

⁴⁵ Jeremy Dauber discusses the translation and publication history of Sholem Aleichem's writings for an American audience. He sketches an overview of the process whereby individual texts by the Yiddish author often reached a wide English-speaking audience in the context of anthologies, on account of theatrical adaptations, and as a result of a 1943 biography by Maurice Samuel entitled *The World of Sholom Aleichem* [sic] (306-353). He explains the author's enduring appeal by asking, "What was valuable about Sholem Aleichem's stories, particularly for non-Jewish readers [in the United States]? They showed non-Jews what real Jews were like. And what made an authentic Jew? Tradition" (326).

German does not recreate the *Lagersprache* used by Jews incarcerated in Nazi-run concentration camps; instead, it gestures toward the very different configuration of languages spoken in a ghetto in Poland. Gilman appears to assume that *Lagersprache*, the rough, bastardized language spoken by people in the concentration camps who didn't speak German, is the basis for Becker's language, but there are significant historical differences between the linguistic worlds of the ghetto and the concentration camp, respectively. Jews imprisoned in ghettos in Eastern Europe still engaged with language (or languages) in a manner congruous with "family and community life" prior to Nazi occupation, "[b]ut the concentration camps proceeded according to different criteria, linguistic and otherwise" (Rosen, *Sounds of Defiance* 4). In his Holocaust memoir *Survival in Auschwitz*, Primo Levi discusses the tumultuous mélange of languages spoken by prisoners in the concentration camp, explaining that "[t]he confusion of languages is a fundamental component of the manner of living here: one is surrounded by a perpetual Babel, in which everyone shouts orders and threats in languages never heard before, and woe betide whoever fails to grasp the meaning" (38). The confusion of languages that Levi describes as an integral component of life in the concentration camp is decidedly missing from the diegetic world of Becker's novel.

We must also take care, I argue, to distinguish between the historical phenomenon of camp prisoners' need for a linguistic hybrid and Becker's deployment of what Gilman also rightly identifies as a sophisticated literary language. In this case, we would have to view Becker's use of language as an evocation of the complex of languages spoken in a Polish ghetto, not of the *Lagersprache* of the concentration camp. It is more helpful to consider language in the novel as an aestheticization—rendered in German—of the historical amalgam composed primarily of Yiddish, Polish, and German. Consequently, the scattered words in Yiddish that

Becker's narrator inserts into his narration represent a feature of this aestheticized Polish Jewish ghetto speak, relatively sparse though they may be throughout the text. It is a fascinating rhetorical gesture: Becker's literary German, peppered with Yiddish, represents the complex of languages of the ghetto. The Yiddish words in the text thus serve an integral role in providing clues as to the ways in which the narrator positions himself through language as a Holocaust survivor addressing a non-Jewish, German-speaking post-Holocaust audience.

Considering *Jakob der Lügner* in terms of the monolingual and the multilingual will help us arrive at a more nuanced understanding of what is happening in the text with respect to choice of language. As I argue in the previous chapter, Wander's use of Yiddish in *Der siebente Brunnen* operates according to a strategy that seeks to weave Yiddish into German as part of a dialogical exchange between the languages. I identify Wander's relatively sustained deployment of Yiddish as an example of something bordering on multilingual writing. The deployment of Yiddish in Becker's text, however, takes on a different valence. Rather than constituting an interplay between two discrete languages, Becker's use of Yiddish signposts ruptures and tensions inherent in the primary language of the text, i.e. German. The narrator inserts Yiddish into *Jakob der Lügner*, I argue, to gesture toward the multilingualism of both the Jewish speakers depicted in the narrative and the "Jewishness" of the German language, even as the dominant discourse of the novel indicates no narrative slippage between languages. Viewed in light of the presence of Yiddish vocabulary and the historical events to which the diegesis refers, the German of *Jakob der Lügner* emerges as a particularly Jewish, literary iteration of the languages of the Polish ghetto, rather than an assortment composed of various *Lagersprache* parts, as Gilman argues. As a "novel of the Shoah," Becker's novel wrests German from the Nazi

aggressor and re-appropriates it as a medium for depicting Jewish victimization and the historical violence and trauma of the Holocaust.

Yildiz's insightful argument regarding German Jewish philosopher Adorno's engagement with *Fremdwörter* resonates with the Yiddish-sprinkled German of Becker's novel. Yildiz describes how Adorno actively engaged in the use of *Fremdwörter* in his own writing and in an extended philosophical discussion of them over the course of his career. She contends that Adorno's self-conscious use of foreign-derived, often Latinate, words signals the tensions and ruptures inherent in any language, but especially in the case of the German language. According to Yildiz, nationalist political leanings in Germany and anxiety regarding maintaining the ostensible purity of the German language, particularly in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, often underpinned discourses regarding the status of *Fremdwörter* (74-77). Though Adorno published almost exclusively in German (with the exception of a handful of texts written in English during the period of his exile from Germany), his specific deployment of language gestures toward both recognizing and delighting in the non-Germanic elements of German and dismantling the assumption regarding language purity and the chauvinistic politics that accompanied this idea (77-84). She asserts, "this partial adherence to the monolingual paradigm combined with partial departure from it signals the manner in which Adorno's practice partakes of the tensions constitutive of the postmonolingual condition" (93). Yildiz' insightful discussion of the Frankfurt School philosopher is especially pertinent to my reading of Becker in that she underscores the role that the German language and its specific constitutive components can play for an author and thinker who employs what might at first glance appear to be a monolingual medium while simultaneously dissecting it and charting in its fissures and tensions its inherently permeable character. In her analysis of the philosopher's 1959 essay "Wörter aus

der Fremde,” Yildiz observes: “In Adorno’s writing, foreign-derived words consistently open up paths out of an enforced monolingualization of language” (94). In this manner, the German language is revealed to be an aggregate, composed of linguistic elements not only of Germanic origin, but also from many other sources, including French, Latin, ancient Greek. Though Adorno does not explicitly discuss Yiddish-derived words, Yiddish belongs in this list of languages that have historically had contact with and have exerted an influence on German. With its Yiddish vocabulary inserted into the text without the benefit of being glossed or explained by way of footnote, Becker’s literary language operates, I argue, in a manner parallel to Adorno’s articulation of German contoured with technical, often Latin-derived loan words.

In his sustained analysis of *Fremdwörter*, Adorno also compares foreign words to Jews. Following the end of World War II, Adorno “introduces into the *Fremdwort* discourse the element of racialization,” describing these foreign and foreign-derived words metaphorically as “the Jews of language” (Yildiz 84-85). When we view Becker’s use of Yiddish in light of Yildiz’s discussion of Adorno’s comparison, the Yiddish *Fremdwörter* in *Jakob der Lügner* are put in greater relief. The Yiddish terms and vocabulary that Becker deploys perform a metonymical function, not only standing in for the Yiddish language as a whole, but also for the Jews themselves. In addition to the emancipatory potential of German articulated as a Jewish language, the Yiddish that appears in the novel serves an elegiac purpose. By situating Yiddish words within the narrative, Becker’s narrator develops a specifically post-Holocaust version of the discourse of the Eastern European Jew, in which the common denominator is German rather than Yiddish. But the scattered *Fremdwörter* are also *Fremdkörper* that represent the few surviving examples of an otherwise annihilated population or an otherwise seamless linguistic integration. Yiddish gestures toward what is irretrievable, not only with respect to the author’s

traumatic memory, but also with respect to the lives of the millions who perished in the Holocaust. The Yiddish in *Jakob der Lügner* is thus a stark reminder of what was lost in terms of East European Jewish life, language, culture and history—what can be referenced and refracted, but can never be recuperated—by the German language that the narrator employs to tell his story.

The Dialogic in the Monologic: Jakob’s Multi-Voiced Radio

The preoccupation with language and the role of Yiddish in the text are also connected to the novel’s trope of the radio. The plot of Becker’s novel hinges upon Jakob’s purported possession of a clandestine radio. As a Latin-derived term created to refer to the wireless device invented by Marconi in 1895 that transmits and receives electromagnetic signals, “Radio” is arguably the novel’s primary *Fremdwort*, in this case a foreign-derived word rather than a foreign word per se. The word also designates a *Fremdkörper* in the novel’s diegesis, for the Jews imprisoned in the ghetto are, according to the rules enacted and strictly enforced by the German authorities, forbidden from owning radios. Any prisoner caught with such contraband is subject to severe punishment, including execution. Jakob initiates the rumor that he owns a radio because he fears being unable to convince others that he overheard the piece of news that he is so eager to share during a scarcely believable episode in the “Revier.” The protagonist lies about his radio both to legitimate his news and to provide fellow prisoners justification to hope that the advancing Russian army might also entail liberation of the ghetto. His radio—more precisely, his purported possession of a radio—proves to be both blessing and curse. Though the otherwise unremarkable and unassuming Jakob begins to be showered with a great deal of attention from fellow ghetto inhabitants, he must strive continually to substantiate his claim of owning this

radio by improvising ways both to provide his curious companions with fresh news and to justify his reluctance to allow the coveted apparatus to see the light of day.

Additionally, the absence of a real radio provides the impetus for his performance for the orphaned girl Lina, for whom he serves as avuncular guardian. In a pivotal scene that brings Lina, and by extension the reader, as close as possible to the desired, but non-existent, object, Jakob performs the radio that he claims to own and have hidden. The interaction between the protagonist and the girl in this sequence is made possible on account of two factors: Jakob's talent as a performer and Lina's lack of prior experience with radio technology. Because she has no clear picture of how a radio might operate and has no knowledge of its possibilities and limitations, Jakob is free to re-invent radio for his own purposes through his performance, as long as he can entertain and satisfy his audience of one. Obscured behind a curtain, Jakob crafts for Lina three episodes that are intended to reproduce the aural experience of listening to a radio. By altering his voice and mimicking a radio announcer, an interviewer, an interviewee, musicians, and a fairy tale narrator, he creates his own version of a radio broadcast. His purpose in this scene is to satisfy the child's growing curiosity about the radio and convince her of its "existence" without showing her something he cannot actually reveal. Acoustics, rather than vision, must provide ontological proof of the radio's presence in the basement of Jakob's apartment building.

During the initial portion of his radio performance, Jakob provides Lina a three-voiced broadcast involving a radio announcer "mit hoher Stimme," a news reporter "in mittlerer Stimmlage," and, most ingeniously, the ostensible voice of English Prime Minister Winston Churchill who speaks "mit sehr tiefer Stimme und deutlich fremdländischem Einschlag" (165). Jakob impersonates these three individuals by splitting and modulating his single voice to take

on the contours of three separate voices distinct from his own normal speaking voice for the purpose of creating the illusion of a radio program featuring multiple personalities that all play a particular role in the mediation of information for the listening audience. In a Bakhtinian sense, Jakob performs for Lina and the reader the multi-voiced discourse of broadcast radio within the framework of novelistic discourse. In this episode, Becker's narrator stages, by way of the protagonist, a miniaturized version of his larger practice in the novel of gesturing toward his paradoxical yearning to animate a dialogical interplay with the past—between himself and perished friends and companions such as Jakob. In this way, Jakob, as storyteller and narrator of this radio-inspired sequence, animates dialogical interaction with Lina by way of the imagined radio.

Jakob's radio performance also underscores the linguistic tension in the novel, particularly in light of the insertion of the "foreign" English Prime Minister. As the performance progresses, Jakob, acting as transmitter and receiver, creates a realm of fantasy that apes the artifice of technological reproduction through his deployment of artifice. The interplay among the various voices of the imagined speakers whom he conjures for Lina reflects the larger pattern of rupture within the German language previously discussed. This tension in language and the ping-ponging back and forth between linguistic registers comes to the fore most clearly in the guise of a Yiddish-speaking Winston Churchill. Jakob fantasizes a conversation between the Prime Minister and an ostensibly Jewish reporter who operates outside of the German sphere of influence and poses questions tailored specifically to the interests and geographical location of the ghetto prisoners. Universalized in this world, the reporter has the ability to garner airtime with one of the most recognizable Allied leaders of World War II. Jakob orchestrates the interview:

Reporter: "Ich begrüße Sie sehr herzlich in unserem Senderraum. Und gleich zur ersten Frage: Würden Sie unseren Hörern bitte sagen, wie Sie aus Ihrer Sicht die augenblickliche Situation einschätzen?" Sir Winston: "Das ist nicht allzu schwer. Ich bin fest davon überzeugt, daß der ganze Schlamassel bald zu Ende sein wird, allerhöchstens noch ein paar Wochen." Reporter: "Und darf man fragen, woher Sie diese schöne Gewißheit nehmen?" Sir Winston (etwas verlegen): "Nun ja, an allen Fronten geht es gut vorwärts. Es sieht ganz so aus, als könnten sich die Deutschen nicht mehr lange halten." Reporter: "Wunderbar. Und wie steht es speziell in der Gegend von Bezanika?" (166)

Here, fantasy and hope for a swift end to the war combine in the imagined voices of the interviewer and the figure identified as Winston Churchill. Churchill assures his interlocutor and, by extension, his radio audience, that the Nazi-led German army will not be able to withstand the combined power of the Allied military presence on multiple fronts. Churchill discursively reduces the entire war and the Nazi threat to a series of unfortunate events, referring to it as a "Schlamassel" (a German word derived from the Yiddish *shlimazl*, one of whose meanings is misfortune or bad luck). In using this word of Yiddish origin, Jakob's Churchill humorously downplays the events, implying that the entirety of the Second World War was one large mess caused by the Nazis that the Allies needed to finish sorting out. The purpose of this understatement is not to deny the reality of the war and the inhumane conditions of the ghetto, but to take some of the power, at least within the realm of language, away from the Germans.

Imprisoned in the ghetto and members of a persecuted minority, Jakob and his fellow Jewish prisoners have no access to radio news and announcements of the sort that he provides Lina (with the exception of the protagonist's fleeting experience catching a snippet of German news during the episode in the precinct). Even if Jakob and his companions were to gain access

to radio at this time in Europe, news reports would likely not speak to the specifics of Jewish experience. Jakob's performance of a conversation with Churchill is not only a fantasy of liberation and an end to Nazi terror, but also serves as an imagined discourse that is particularly Jewish. And with the insertion of the word "Schlamassel" into the narrative at a pivotal moment in what is arguably the novel's climactic scene, Becker's narrator, by way of Jakob's performance, further establishes the linguistic strategy of deploying Yiddish vocabulary to signal the articulation of a particularly Yiddish-inflected Eastern European Jewish discourse within the larger framework of the German language. In this way, Churchill is to some extent domesticated both for a Jewish audience in terms of the novel's diegesis and for the German-speaking reader. As a Yiddish-derived word that many German speakers would no longer recognize as a *Fremdwort* per se, "Schlamassel" acts as a point of linguistic contact between the Jewish characters in the ghetto and the post-Holocaust East German reader.

This imagined interview with Churchill also serves as a moment in which the narrator, framed by Jakob's understatement regarding his own abilities as performer, places both Jakob's storytelling and by extension the entire novel as an inheritor of modern Yiddish literary culture—a body of work that includes, as we have seen, texts by Sholem Aleichem and Sholem Yankev Abramovitsh. Anxious that his performance might not have succeeded, and prior to joining Lina on the opposite side of the curtain, the protagonist mutters to himself, "man ist, das ändert sich leider nie, kein Scholem Alejchem an Erfindungsgabe, verlangt nicht zuviel von einem geplagten Mann, für heute wird es hoffentlich reichen" (167). By invoking the name of one of the most well-known and celebrated modern Yiddish writers, who aestheticized Yiddish storytelling in his articulation of a modern Yiddish literary idiom, Becker's narrator, despite Jakob's negative self-evaluation of his abilities, invites the reader both to draw parallels between the German-language

text and Yiddish writing and to search for metaliterary links between the novel and Eastern European Jewish literary predecessors.

On account of this reference in his novel and other rhetorical strategies arguably drawn from aspects of Eastern European Jewish culture, one question often put forth in the secondary literature on Jurek Becker is to what extent we can consider his work to be a post-Holocaust, German-speaking variant of the Eastern European Jewish literary tradition of 20th-century Yiddish-language authors such as Sholem Aleichem and Isaac Bashevis Singer.⁴⁶ Grant Henley discusses how in 1971 German literary critic Wolfgang Werth “was one of the first to comment on the possible link between Becker’s narrative style and the *Fabulierkunst* of Jewish writer Sholem Aleichem. Werth even mentions various Yiddish characters from Aleichem’s work by name in his brief review of Becker’s *Jakob der Lügner*” (23). Despite their overt connection between Becker and Sholem Aleichem, however, neither Werth nor Henley offers a detailed analysis of the overlap between the narrative techniques of the two authors. Manfred Karnick argues that Becker’s novel establishes, with the narrator’s technique of mimicking the act of conversation, a clear metaliterary link to Yiddish literature. He analyzes the novel’s opening lines and concludes that out of this technique “[e]ine Situation mündlicher Kommunikation entworfen [wird]” (210). While this observation certainly rings true when one analyzes the narrator’s staging of his crisis regarding language and representation, as I previously demonstrate in this chapter, Karnick fails to explain the specificities of the connection between this technique of portraying human speech in Becker’s novel and rhetorical techniques in Yiddish literature. He appears to be operating under the assumption that one of the primary features of Yiddish

⁴⁶ See for example, Sander Gilman, Grant Henley, Manfred Karnick, David Rock, et al.

literature is the representation of conversation, i.e. of the spoken word, but he does not specifically articulate this particular position.

Though Becker claimed to have read the stories of Sholem Aleichem only after drafting the manuscript of *Jakob der Lügner*, Karnick nevertheless insists on the intertextual connection, asserting, “[d]er Hintergrund ist aber trotzdem da. Und Becker mag sich bei der Vorbereitung des Buches wohl auch gekümmert haben. Es ist die Lebens-, Denk- und Sprechform der osteuropäischen Shtetlwelt” (211). Karnick argues for a continuity between Jewish literature written about *shtetl* life in Eastern Europe and works such as Becker’s novel that depict Jewish life and suffering in the ghettos and concentration camps. In drawing a connection between Yiddish literature and Becker’s novel, his analysis fails to take into account the historical differences between the *shtetl* to which he refers and Łódź, which was the third-largest city in Poland and is the setting of the novel. Missing from Karnick’s argument is a detailed analytical comparison that illuminates the specific metaliterary links between pre-Holocaust Yiddish writing and Becker’s post-Holocaust German-language novel. It is clear that the novel, as we see in Jakob’s comparison of himself to Sholem Aleichem, gestures toward the rich tradition of Yiddish storytelling and literature in its citation of perhaps the best-known Yiddish-language author. But I argue that *Jakob der Lügner* is more preoccupied as a text with articulating an elegiac position in the German language with regard to Eastern European Jewry and its near total destruction as a result of the Shoah. Jakob’s Winston Churchill is a fantasy about and from the perspective of the Yiddish-speaking world—in German—precisely at a moment when this world is on the brink of extinction. Becker’s novel depicts this tension on purpose as a strategy for demonstrating just what is lost as a result of the Holocaust. The *shtetl* world that was already undergoing immense transformation in the works of Yiddish literary giants such as Sholem

Aleichem is largely erased from the European landscape by the time the narrator tells the story of Jakob. Becker's novel tempers its overtures to Yiddish literary predecessors with harsh historical reality, recognizing that it can act only as a palimpsest that scribbles over the absence of Ashkenaz by mourning its loss.

Jakob's disavowal of storytelling abilities similar to those of Sholem Aleichem nevertheless sets up an intertextual link to Yiddish literature. Jakob's dialogical engagement with Lina and his metaleptic shifts from diegesis to the metadiegesis of the radio program that he narrates and performs are reminiscent of a narrator-character in a modern Yiddish literary text, such as Abramovitsh's Mendele the Book Peddler, who engages both the reader and the characters in the story world. Following his performance of the radio interview with Churchill, Jakob, anxious about being able to maintain the artifice, endeavors to wrap up the evening's entertainment. Lina nevertheless convinces him to turn the radio on again for another segment of listening, which forces Jakob to engage in additional mimicry. Before commencing with a second act, he inquires as to what Lina might want to hear ("Was willst du denn hören?" [168]), as if she had the ability to make particular requests, were the evening of radio entertainment composed of a mere flipping of a switch. The lines between radio and ventriloquism become blurred as Jakob's second act involves his impersonation of a music ensemble. Recalling his father's ability to imitate with astonishing accuracy a wide variety of musical instruments, Jakob allows muscle memory to take over, and he mimics a group of *klezmerim*, modulating his voice to sound like the brass, percussion, and woodwind voices of Eastern European Jewish music. In doing so, loses his inhibitions regarding his abilities to perform convincingly ("Jakob verliert, wie es heißt, alle Hemmungen" [168]). As Jakob's

musical interlude reaches its conclusion, Lina once again enthusiastically and successfully appeals for more, arguing that “aller guten Dinge sind drei, jetzt erst recht” (170).

The dialogical interaction underpinning this scene as a whole reaches a crescendo when Jakob and Lina discuss the fairy tale that makes up the third portion of her benefactor’s act. Jakob pretends to adjust the dial, and Becker’s narrator explains that, as luck would have it, he lands on a station with programming tailored to the interests of children: “Lina hat großes Glück, Jakob findet bald die Rundfunkstation, in der Märchen erzählt werden, von einem freundlichen Onkel, der sagt: ‘Für alle Kinder, die uns zuhören, erzählt der Märchenonkel das Märchen von der kranken Prinzessin’” (170). In his zeal to satisfy his interlocutor, Jakob interrupts his metadiegetic narration of the fairy tale and metaleptically slips back into the diegesis with Lina, asking her, “‘Kennst du das?’” (170). This subtle slippage between narrative levels is crucial: in a moment of forgetfulness, Jakob defies what would otherwise be the technological limitations of the medium of radio. Lina does not appear to notice this moment of dissolution in the artifice and subsequently engages her radio-performing uncle in a brief exchange about the purpose of a fairy tale narrator for children and the logic of the ghetto prohibition against radio (170-1). And when Jakob takes advantage of too long a caesura in his performance in his attempts to reconstruct the fairy tale from memory, Lina interrupts his reverie and goads him into begin narrating (“‘Wann fängt es denn endlich an?’ fragt Lina” [171]). As a result of this performance, radio, according to the fantasy version that Jakob creates, takes on the contours of dialogical interplay, allowing for interaction and mutual reciprocity between radio announcer and listener. The fantasy version of radio that Lina enjoys is tailored specifically for her; she is offered an animated performance in which she has agency to make active requests that the “radio” in turn fulfills. The monological elements of radio are downplayed in favor of highlighting its dialogical potential. In Jakob’s

fantasy version, radio's otherwise primarily monologic form allows for the listener to engage with it dialogically. In Jakob and Lina's dialogue about the performance before and in between the three radio acts, we also observe, I argue, a kinship akin to the Buberian model of the "I-Thou" relationship, similar to the dialogical interaction between the narrator and Mendel Teichmann in Wander's *Der siebente Brunnen*. Lina and Jakob share a connection that is underpinned both by joint storytelling and dialogical exchange, in which both subjectivities are transformed by way of sustained interchange. Becker's version of the "I-Thou" relationship comes to the fore in the form of a child asking questions of an adult and learning from him, and an adult gaining new insight and experience as a result of interacting with an inquisitive child—all against the backdrop of the daily horrors of the ghetto and the struggle to survive and maintain some sense of normalcy. Jakob and Lina provide each other a necessary counterpart in an ongoing dialogical exchange that allows a degree of intellectual and emotional respite from their bleak surroundings. This dialogical relationship continues to the end of the novel, when the narrator finds himself in the proximity of Jakob and Lina in the railway car during deportation and in the position to relate details of their dialogue with one another. The narrator's ability to provide elements of an eyewitness account of Jakob and his radio-inspired activities provides the narrative conceit. Neither Jakob nor Lina survives to tell the story of their relationship in their own words.

Jakob's telling of the fairy tale of the afflicted princess also exists in dialogical interaction with the rest of the novel, between the imagination and fantasy that characters such as Lina and Jakob possess and the ontological realities of the diegetic world that they inhabit in the ghetto. The scene also represents a fantasy with regard to the process of listening to the radio. With the exception of instances in which listeners make telephone calls to radio stations and find

themselves on the air, speaking to a radio announcer or host, listening to the radio is monological in that the listener receives the radio program and cannot engage it in dialogue. While the medium of radio often features dialogue between speaking partners who are both (or all) on the air simultaneously and addressing an audience of listeners, the listener cannot normally intercede in any direct manner and participate in the “conversation” that she hears. But in this scene, Lina, unaware of how radio normally operates, assumes that she can engage in a dialogue with the radio as she does with Jakob. For her, there seems to be no difference between her dialogical interaction with Jakob as radio and the staged conversation she hears between the radio announcer and Winston Churchill. Jakob does not disabuse her of this notion and endeavors to give his sole listener what she desires, to the best of his vocal and theatrical abilities. Jakob’s fantasy version of radio articulates an imagined alternative to the suffocating reality of the ghetto.

A Double-Voiced Conclusion: The Novel’s Two Endings and the “Almost Lost Story”

But this fantasy is fragile and fleeting. Ultimately, fantasy cannot alter the conditions or subvert the limitations of radio technology, nor can it accelerate the advance of the Russians and the liberation of the ghetto before the Germans deport the remaining Jews. Nevertheless, Becker’s narrator offers readers both fantasy and reality at the close of the novel. *Jakob der Lügner* concludes with the presentation of two endings, an imagined one that involves the liberation of the ghetto and Jakob’s death, and a real one that entails the narrator being deported, along with Jakob, Lina, and the others, to a concentration camp. Becker’s narrator is sole survivor, the only one remaining who can tell his story, Lina’s story, and the story of Jakob’s radio. Just as Jakob indulges Lina by relating a fairy tale about a sick princess who is cured by the power of imagination, the narrator indulges our (and his) desire to experience an ending

different from the one that involves the liquidation of the ghetto and the deportation of its remaining Jewish prisoners. Becker's narrator bemoans his inability to alter the story of Jakob's fate and that of the other prisoners in the ghetto, including his own ("Jakob kann tausendmal wiederfinden berichten Schlachten ersinnen und in Umlauf setzen, eins kann er nicht verhindern, zuverlässig nähert sich die Geschichte ihrem nichtswürdigen Ende [257]); nevertheless, he proposes an alternative. The narrator is careful not to obscure the ontological reality of the "real" ending, which entails liquidation of the ghetto and deportation of all remaining Jews. But his imagination and desire for something idealized compel him to consider another possibility ("Ich [...] erfinde [...] ein Ende, mit dem man halbwegs zufrieden sein kann, eins mit Hand und Fuß, ein ordentliches Ende läßt manche Schwäche vergessen" [258]). According to the imagined ending, Jakob attempts to flee the ghetto and is shot by a guard while doing so. But his act of apparent suicide, ostensibly to avoid the necessity of admitting that he has been lying about possessing a radio and thus crushing the hopes of all the ghetto prisoners who have been buoyed by his prevarication. While reflecting on the two endings, one real and one imagined, Becker's narrator foregrounds a sense of conflict in his desire to fabricate an imaginary ending and the need to tell the true ending as he personally witnessed it. Out of this conflict arises, I argue, a dialogical interaction between the two endings. The narrator weaves the two narrative strands together, each informing and shaping the contours of the other. Without historical reality, fantasy would be an empty gesture. And the possibilities provided by imagination allow the narrator a degree of agency in the formulation of this particular act of memorialization and in the representation of the violence of the Holocaust. This conflict, or tension between the real and the imagined, also constitutes a variation on the "almost lost story." Without the intervention of the narrator, there would be no story of Jakob and his radio, as it would be lost to oblivion. And the

dialogical interplay between the two endings gestures toward the contours of narrative, reminding us of its possibilities and limitations.

Jakob der Lügner presents a nearly entirely monolingual text that communicates the narrator's and all characters' speech and thoughts in the framework of literary German. There is no direct mention in the text of the historical configuration of languages that existed in a Polish ghetto, whose prisoners were primarily Jewish, and no meta-textual reflection on the part of the narrator regarding the need that figures such as Jakob would have had for code-switching back and forth between German as the bureaucratic language of authority under Nazi occupation and the combination of Polish and Yiddish (and potentially some German) that Polish Jews would have used for everyday discourse, particularly when speaking not to a guard but among themselves. In this respect, the novel is monolingual. Becker's novel thus deploys a particular version of German that elides the complex of languages spoken in Polish ghettos. The primarily monolingual system presented in the novel overlays the historical reality of multilingual Łódź. Nevertheless, the text contains moments of tension, fissures in the monolingual paradigm. These fissures become evident, I argue, in the novel's deployment of a handful of Yiddish words and concepts. The words of Yiddish derivation provide the sole "visible traces of internal multilingualism—that is, traces of constitutive contact with an other" that appear in the text (Yildiz 77). These Yiddish words must bear the majority of the weight of gesturing toward both the multilingual tension inherent in the German language and the multilingual life and milieu of Polish Jews, both prior to the Holocaust and while under occupation in Nazi-run ghettos such as the one in Łódź.

With my discussion of the deployment of language in *Jakob der Lügner*, I do not wish to imply that I find fault with how Becker renders the historical multilingualism of the Polish

ghetto. Becker's novel is a diverse and rich text in its own right. But the ways in which Becker shapes the German language to tell a story about the Holocaust do illuminate crucial issues related to representation. What is striking about this literary text is how German is placed in mouths of both perpetrator and victim alike. In the novel, German soldiers and Jewish prisoners communicate seamlessly—contrary to the historical experience of many, if not most, Eastern European Jews incarcerated in ghettos. However, the occasional Yiddish words employed throughout the text remind us, albeit subtly, that, despite the presentation of a nearly homogenous linguistic environment, Polish Jews in Łódź and by extension Eastern European Jews in general, “had a long history of multilingualism” (Rosen, *Sounds of Defiance* 2). In the act of disnarrating this multilingual pre-Holocaust history and culture, the novel gestures toward the staggering extent of what was lost as a result of the Shoah, in terms of individual human lives, as well as the language and culture. Becker's novel thus employs German, along with a smattering of Yiddish, as a medium for memorializing the dead and articulating an elegy for Ashkenaz.

Conclusion:

Narrative Voice and Regulating Rhetoric

Literary texts often provide signposts that assist in indicating an approach to reading them. These signposts can be expressed in many forms and combinations. Sometimes these interpretive clues come to the fore in the act of narration itself, such as in the narrator's depiction of and relationship to characters in the diegesis, or story world; in the narrator's extradiegetic reflections on events or episodes that take place in the diegesis; or in the narrator's engagement with the narratee, or implied audience. In a point of departure in analyzing *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, *Der Nazi und der Friseur*, *Der siebente Brunnen*, and *Jakob der Lügner*, I have endeavored to identify and unpack some of the narrative signposts in these texts and to demonstrate how their subject matter and structure of narrative operate in tandem, mutually informing one another. In this vein, my investigation has concentrated on how the narrators in these post-Holocaust German Jewish novels position themselves with respect to the events and characters that they narrate in the context of diegetic worlds inflected by historical events associated with the Shoah. The narrators of these novels interact with the characters and the narratee, constructing dialogical interplay—or the illusion of dialogical interaction—on various levels of narrative structure. In keeping with this emphasis on dialogical exchange, they evince a preoccupation with modulating *voice*, in the form of both represented human speech and narrative perspective. This emphasis on voice and the multiplicity of voices offers readers insight into how these novels operate. Through the careful observation of the implementation of voice, we open up productive avenues for understanding how these texts position themselves with respect to both the subject matter and the reader.

Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr, *Der siebente Brunnen*, and *Jakob der Lügner* articulate acts of elegiac memorialization, expressing lamentation over individuals who perished in the Holocaust. The narrators in these three novels endeavor to lend voice to those who can no longer

speak for themselves. In *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, the unnamed narrator presents the voices of the Pohodna Jews in the moment of their deportation on board a train car. Through an intervention in the form of the “Quasselstimmen,” every utterance of every individual in the train car is recorded. These non-corporeal narrative agents rescue the voices of the Jews of the *shtetl* Pohodna from oblivion. Wander’s character-narrator in *Der siebente Brunnen* positions himself as a Holocaust survivor and as something of a human *Sprachrohr* that channels the voices of murdered comrades and fellow concentration camp inmates, using his voice as a medium for representing their voices. Wander’s narrator reproduces the speech and stories of perished friends who did not survive Auschwitz, Buchenwald, and other Nazi-run concentration camps. Similar to Wander’s narrator, the unnamed character-narrator in Becker’s *Jakob der Lügner* highlights the voices and stories of fellow prisoners of a Nazi-run ghetto in Poland. Instead of providing an account of his own persecution and victimization at the hands of the Nazis, imprisonment in the ghetto, and subsequent survival, Becker’s narrator relates the story of an acquaintance in the ghetto named Jakob who claimed to own a forbidden radio. Jakob does not survive to provide his own account of the radio; the narrator’s words must provide a proxy for what Jakob might tell had he survived. All three of these novels present the reader with a sense of immediacy; the stories told could have just as easily been lost rather than recuperated (at least partially) in the form of the narrators’ portrayal of them. The stories of these characters who do not survive, but whose voices are preserved to some extent through the act of narration provided by the narrator-witness, are all “almost lost stories.” Their “almost lost” or rescued stories operate as a metonymical proxy for the innumerable stories and testimonies associated with the victims of the Holocaust whose voices and identities have been otherwise effaced from history

and memory. These three novels model for the reader a method of mourning and memorializing lives lost as a result of the Nazi Judeocide.

One component of this mourning and memorialization is the use of Yiddish. To varying degrees and in various permutations, these three novels employ Yiddish linguistic and literary elements as a narrative strategy for gesturing toward Eastern European Jewish culture. The deployment of Yiddish vocabulary, as well as intertextual references to Yiddish literature, in particular to oral storytelling as a device in modern Yiddish literary texts by authors such as Sholem Aleichem and Abramovitsh, represents an avenue for these authors to confront the challenge of gesturing toward what was lost as a result of the near destruction of Ashkenaz, perpetrated by the Nazis and their collaborators. The connections created in these works between German and Yiddish serve as part of a larger act of mourning and a project of commemoration. The Yiddish words, couched within these primarily German-language texts, serve, on one level, as reminders that the characters and narrators who utter these words are Eastern European Jews (or German-speaking Jews familiar with the language). The Yiddish that we encounter in these novels serves to reproduce, to some degree, the acoustic and linguistic particularities of Yiddish speakers and their voices. In *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr* and *Jakob der Lügner*, Yiddish is placed into the mouths of characters as a way of identifying them as Jewish and of signaling the presence of linguistic difference and variety within the German language. Yiddish serves to complicate these otherwise predominantly monolingual texts. In *Der siebente Brunnen*, the sophisticated and sustained employment of Yiddish interacts dialogically with German. This interplay, which comes to the fore in multiple episodes, echoes the multilingual environment of the Nazi concentration camp system, as well as the historically complex (and sometimes tense) relationship between German-speaking Jews and Yiddish-speaking Ashkenazi Jews. These three

texts seek to galvanize the German language as a post-Holocaust medium for the representation of traumatic memory, specifically the memory of Ashkenaz.

Hilsenrath's *Der Nazi und der Friseur* is in some ways an outlier within this cluster of novels that I have analyzed. The principal narrators in the other three novels position themselves in close proximity to the Holocaust victims depicted in the narration. This proximity seems to possess ethically responsible dimensions, particularly in *Der siebente Brunnen* and *Jakob der Lügner*, whose character-narrators are fellow prisoners and victims of the Holocaust. The principal narrator in *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, though more distant from the diegesis, as he (or she) is not also a character in the novel, expresses concern about finding adequate means for memorializing the Pöhdna Jews. The character-narrator in *Der Nazi und der Friseur* presents an entirely different case altogether. As a Holocaust perpetrator who disavows responsibility for the murders he once committed, the novel's narrator Max Schulz provokes and prods readers, rather than directly inviting them to participate in an act of mourning. Max employs narrative voice according to a series of rhetorical strategies that allow him to defer guilt and obscure his true intentions. In keeping with these strategies for deferral, the novel's narrating-I shifts constantly back and forth between names and subject positions. But despite this pattern of evasion, Max appears to relish the presence of an audience, often addressing the reader directly in the form of ostensibly amiable asides. It is as if he desires an accomplice or co-conspirator. At turns, Max invites the reader to empathize with him, to see his past deeds from his skewed point of view. While other mechanisms are in place in the narrative for undermining his credibility and our potential positive empathetic connection with him, he nonetheless attempts to bring us within the field of his discursive influence. The story of Itzig Finkelstein, in contrast to the "almost lost stories" in the other works, appears to be "almost lost" and "rescued" by Max, but in reality it is

totally effaced. I have included *Der Nazi und der Friseur* in this project specifically because it offers, in contrast to the other three novels, a radically different take on Holocaust representation and the potential for employing voice not as a means for memorializing Holocaust victims per se but as a way of satirizing postwar West Germany and exposing the fissures and tensions in a culture that, similar to the one in which Hildesheimer's narrator in *Tynset* engages, was perhaps all too eager to suppress the voices of Holocaust victims (and survivors) and their testimonies in favor of allowing former perpetrators to retain a certain degree of discursive control.

In addition to their narrative complexity and sophisticated use of narrative voice, these four novels partake in the search for an audience. As a parallel to the dialogical interactions that they construct in various configurations and on various levels of narration, these novels seek a form of dialogue with the reader—or at least with an imagined reader. What is striking is that this search has taken place despite a cultural climate that was often less than receptive to narratives penned in German by Jewish authors about the Nazi persecution of European Jews. *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*, *Der Nazi und der Friseur*, *Der siebente Brunnen*, and *Jakob der Lügner* were composed within the context of rhetoric that might otherwise appear as if to regulate rather than promote imaginative literary engagement with the Holocaust. For my purposes here, I situate these four novels with respect to two interrelated strands of this regulating rhetoric. Rather than functioning as some form of official or legal set of rules and regulations, this regulating rhetoric has discursively contoured, at least in part, the social and cultural landscape in which these novels were penned and published.

The first strand of this rhetoric pertains to Theodor W. Adorno's famous and much debated dictum regarding Holocaust representation. As Michael Rothberg has demonstrated, scholars have often quoted and misquoted what has been interpreted as the philosopher's

formulation of a prohibition (“After Adorno” 46). First published in his 1951 essay “Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft,” Adorno’s dictum has often been distilled from the words, “[n]ach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch” (30). Some have interpreted this opinion as a general prohibition against representations of the Holocaust, particularly with respect to works of art that employ literary or fictional discourse to depict events associated with the Shoah. According to Sigrid Weigel, Adorno’s ostensible prohibition against imaginative or aesthetic representations of the Holocaust has had significant consequences for postwar German philosophy and cultural production. She argues:

Der Topos eines Sprechens nach Auschwitz, der über lange Zeit den kulturellen Diskurs im Nachkriegsdeutschland bestimmte, hatte dabei durchaus dazu beigetragen, daß eine radikalere Konfrontation mit zentralen Momenten eines ‘Denkens nach Auschwitz’ durch eine Redeweise aufgeschoben blieb, die mit universellen Kategorien wie der des *Unaussprechlichen* von der Spezifik der Shoah immer wieder absah. (130)

Weigel depicts a cultural landscape in postwar (West) Germany that clung to an interpretation of Adorno’s ostensible prohibition that it made possible, at least for several decades, to consider the Holocaust as fundamentally out of the reach of human comprehension, thus rendering it ineffable. This interpretation in turn provided an excuse for Germans to largely ignore not only aspects of the Holocaust, particularly with regard to Jewish suffering, but also to overlook artists and writers who, working against or in reaction to an atmosphere colored by this “prohibition,” portrayed events and experiences related to the Holocaust. Weigel describes a culture that was often less than receptive to authors—particularly Jewish authors—who penned texts about the Nazi Judeocide, especially prior to a renewed discussion of the Shoah in the mid-1980s in West Germany, sparked in part by the *Historikerstreit* (130).

The second strand of regulating rhetoric is in regard to writing about the Holocaust specifically in the German language. Following World War II and in light of Nazi atrocities, some have viewed German as an inappropriate, even impossible, vehicle for artistic representation. For example, in his 1959 essay “The Hollow Miracle” (later included in the collection *Language and Silence*), George Steiner claims that “the post-war history of the German language has been one of dissimulation and deliberate forgetting” (109). According to Steiner, the Nazis corrupted the German, employing it as the bureaucratic language to administer “hell” (100). His appraisal of the detrimental influence that the Nazis exerted over German went so far as to arrive at the conclusion that the language has as a result “gone dead” (96). Consequently, according to Steiner’s interpretation, Nazi instrumentalization left German, at least as he saw it in 1959, incapable of being employed as a literary or aesthetic language. Following his line of reasoning, Jewish authors writing literary texts about the Holocaust in German might find themselves in a difficult position, perhaps even in the double bind of being destabilized with respect to and displaced from both language and an audience to whom they might communicate.

And yet, German Jewish post-Holocaust writing has been produced within the context of these strands of regulating rhetoric. While Adorno and Steiner were not in a position to prohibit German Jewish writers from writing as they saw fit (and perhaps never actually wished to do so), their ideas, along with others, circulated in such a way that contributed to a cultural landscape that was often indifferent or at times even hostile to the writing of German Jews. Authors like Becker, Hilsenrath, and Wander, as well as many others such as Jean Améry, Paul Celan, Wolfgang Hildesheimer, Jakov Lind, and Nelly Sachs, have been in a position to push against the strictures of this rhetoric, to write against and around it, in social, cultural, and political

environments not immediately receptive to the representation of Jewish suffering in the Holocaust. The picture I wish to paint here is not one of strict opposition. Rather, Jewish authors writing in German have often composed their works in ways that engage with and dispute this kind of rhetoric. Within the framework of various strands of regulating rhetoric that might otherwise mute or downplay works in German depicting Jewish suffering in the Shoah, these authors have actively engaged in ways of problematizing problems associated with this rhetoric, of finding ways to express their voice, their perspective.

And because they have composed their texts in the less than receptive atmosphere that Weigel outlines, these authors often wrote, with respect to readers at least in the German context, in a vacuum. Nevertheless, the novels that I have analyzed in this dissertation—perhaps more Germanophone than “German” per se—all endeavor to communicate, at least with their initial publication, to a German-speaking audience or at least the idea of a German-speaking audience. And these audiences were, prior to the *Wende*, geographically specific: Hilsenrath encountered specific challenges in attempting to address an audience in West Germany, while Becker and Wander navigated the political vicissitudes of publishing in the German Democratic Republic literary works that possessed a particularly Jewish inflection. But the story of these novels, with their articulation of voice and their search for an audience, also entails a transnational component. How these novels have been published and received both within the German-speaking world and outside of it is a tale that involves a both/and, rather than an either/or, configuration. These novels, all of which have been rendered into excellent English translations (as well as in many other languages), speak in a variety of registers, gesturing toward the magnitude of what was lost as a result of the Shoah, underscoring both possibilities and problems associated with post-Holocaust attempts at memorializing and mourning those who perished.

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