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Fragmented Identity:
A Comparative Study of German Jewish and Canadian Mennonite Literature after World War II

by

Elfrieda Neufeld Schroeder

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines the common theme of fragmented identity in the literature of German Jewish and Canadian Mennonite authors after World War II.

An historical perspective given in the introduction clearly indicates that the Jewish and Mennonite peoples, whose origins are rooted in religion, have a similar history of persecution resulting in genocidal atrocities in the twentieth century. This has become part of their collective unconscious and has influenced how they view themselves.

Significant for a background to this work are Erik Erikson's psychological insights and theories on identity development in adolescence, as explained in his book *Identity and the Life Cycle* (1980), particularly his theories on ego-identity and identity diffusion. The main chapters are a close textual analysis of several works of German Jewish and Canadian Mennonite authors, using the four-dimensional discipline of comparative literature as defined by François Jost in his *Introduction to Comparative Literature* (1974). Erikson's identity theories, as outlined in the introduction, are implied in these chapters and serve as a background for the discussion.

Chapter One compares Jurek Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder* with Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. A close character analysis reveals what happens to the identity of people who have experienced persecution and torture when that experience is repressed by them, and how this in turn influences their community and those who look to them as role models.

Chapter Two, a comparative study of Barbara Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus nichts* with selected poetry by Sarah Klassen, demonstrates the coping mechanisms employed when it becomes apparent that identity is no longer intact. The helplessness of the victim in the face of nameless terror reveals itself in several ways: the person suffers from a persecution complex, indulges in role play, retreats into flights of fancy, and employs language as a means of control.

The final chapter, a comparison of Rafael Seligmann's *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* with Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*, illustrates the mocking of identity. The protagonists are scapegoats of the major cultures to which they relate and develop pathologies that are also symbolic of the minor cultures in which they find themselves. By satirizing the social norms of their group and amalgamating the languages of both cultures, they take a mocking look at some of the idiosyncrasies inherent in their world.

All of the authors in this study, as well as their protagonists, must find their identities in a dual culture, in which the majority stigmatizes the minority and the minority internalizes that stigma. Caught in this dilemma, the authors then try to demonstrate that the stigma does or does not fit. Each of them experiences the tension between assimilating to the new society and desiring to retain the culture of the old one.

By comparing German Jewish and Canadian Mennonite literature, this study links individual and group identity of two minor cultures within two major cultures and demonstrates what takes place in the human psyche when one group attempts to dominate another.

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This thesis is dedicated to my late grandmother, Katharina Kroeger, who refused to become assimilated to the Canadian culture, and to my father, Bernhard Neufeld, who did not know how to assimilate. They both fostered in me a love for the German language and for German literature.

I thank my mother, Katharina Neufeld, for her encouragement and support in all my endeavours, and for her hard work in helping all eight of her children to become useful and productive Canadian citizens.

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INTRODUCTION

WER BIN ICH?

Wer bin ich? Sie sagen mir oft,
ich träte aus meiner Zelle
gelassen und heiter und fest
wie ein Gutsherr aus seinem Schloß.

Wer bin ich? Sie sagen mir oft,
ich spräche mit meinen Bewachern
frei und freundlich und klar,
als hätte ich zu gebieten.

Wer bin ich? Sie sagen mir auch,
ich trüge die Tage des Unglücks
gleichmütig, lächelnd und stolz,
wie einer, der Siegen gewohnt ist.

Bin ich das wirklich, was andere von mir sagen?
Oder bin ich nur das, was ich selbst von mir weiß?
Unruhig, sehnsüchtig, krank, wie ein Vogel im Käfig,
ringend nach Lebensatem, als würgte mir einer die Kehle
hungernd nach Farben, nach Blumen, nach Vogelstimmen,
dürstend nach guten Worten, nach menschlicher Nähe,
zitternd vor Zorn über Willkür und kleinlichste Kränkung,
umgetrieben vom Warten auf große Dinge,
ohnmächtig bangend um Freunde in endloser Ferne,

müde und leer zum Beten, zum Denken, zum Schaffen,
matt und bereit, von allem Abschied zu nehmen?

Wer bin ich? Der oder jener?
Bin ich denn heute dieser und morgen ein andrer?
Bin ich beides zugleich? Vor Menschen ein Heuchler
und vor mir selbst ein verächtlich wehleidiger Schwächling?
Oder gleicht, was in mir noch ist, dem geschlagenen Heer,
das in Unordnung weicht vor schon gewonnenem Sieg?

Wer bin ich? Einsames Fragen treibt mit mir Spott.
Wer ich auch bin, Du kennst mich, Dein bin ich, o Gott!

(Bonhoeffer 179)

The above poem was written by the German theologian, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and sent to his fiancée from his prison cell. He was imprisoned by the Nazis on April 5, 1943, for his participation in the political resistance movement against them. On April 9, 1945, he was executed in the concentration camp at Flossenbürg. Imprisoned for two years, he faced an existential crisis of major proportions that drove him to self-analysis and questions of self-identity.

"Wer bin ich?," the title of Bonhoeffer's poem, is a question that appears at the beginning of each of his short stanzas and again in the last two stanzas. The long stanza between the shorter ones begins with the question: "Bin ich das wirklich?" Bonhoeffer's continuous quest to know himself drives him to exasperation. He struggles with the concept of identity, desperately trying to come to terms with himself. Is he this person today and tomorrow that other person? Is he both a hypocrite before others

and a weakling in his own eyes? Can he be both at the same time? He has no answers, only questions.

In the first three stanzas Bonhoeffer summarizes how others perceive him and he asks himself whether that's who he really is. Then, in the middle stanza, he expresses what he knows himself to be—restless, afraid, sick, angry, ready to give up and die. Bonhoeffer's conclusion tells the reader that he has decided to look outside of himself, to go beyond his human limitations, in order to come to terms with the fragmentation he feels within.

Bonhoeffer's poem illustrates the complexity of the concept of identity. Questions that reach into the experience of most human beings and to which each life has its own answers might be: How do people define themselves? What does their way of defining themselves make them think, feel, and do? What causes them to embrace or reject a group? How does their relation to the group affect their identity as individuals?

Aims of the Study

German Jewish literature by authors such as Jurek Becker, Maxim Biller, Esther Dischereit, Barbara Honigmann, Rafael Seligmann, and Robert Schindel compares in many ways to the Canadian Mennonite literature which began in the 1960s with the novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, by the well-known author Rudy Wiebe, and continues today with writers such as Armin Wiebe, Patrick Friesen, Di Brandt, Audrey Poetker, and Sarah Klassen. The above questions about identity are evident themes in their literature and these common themes are explored by comparing and contrasting several works in each category.

The fragmented identity evident in these two groups is due in part to the effect of a similar history of persecution, resulting in genocidal atrocities[1] in the twentieth century. This shared history links the Jewish and the Mennonite peoples and is part of their collective unconscious, part of who they perceive themselves to be.

This study focuses on three aspects of identity in order to explore the concept in the literature that is being compared and contrasted. The first is that of a threatened identity, which becomes evident by comparing Jurek Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder* and Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. Secondly, the search for a lost identity is emphasized in the comparison of Barbara Honigmann's novel *Eine Liebe aus nichts* with Sarah Klassen's three volumes of poetry: *Journey to Yalta*, *Violence and Mercy*, and *Borderwatch*. Finally, there is an exploration of the mocking of identity by comparing and contrasting Rafael Seligmann's *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* and Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*.

The mutual religious heritage of Jews and Mennonites provides an interesting perspective on the question of identity. Although both have the Hebrew Bible (called the Old Testament by Christians) in common, the

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[1]The Holocaust is classified, according to Totten, Parsons, and Charny as "the single most terrible event of genocide to date in human history, to such an extent that it has become the *archetypal* or generic statement of mass murder" (*Century of Genocide*, xv). These editors also include fourteen other examples of oppression, forced exile, and extermination in this century, among them the Soviet man-made famine in the Ukraine and the Soviet deportation of whole nations. In explaining the unspeakable ferocity with which thousands of people branded as "Kulaks" were exiled from their homes, Lyman H. Legters (who authored the deportation article) claims that "this program begins to smack of genocide—in the sense that the integrity of a national group was placed in jeopardy" and "it is certainly permissible to speak of such practices as genocidal in their implications" (115). Although the Mennonites are not specifically named, they were part of an ethnic minority deliberately classified as Kulaks, by definition the wealthier peasants. James E. Mace, the author of the famine article, states that "Stalinism attempted to explain the world by using class categories rather than the racial ones employed by the Nazis" (81). In his view, Hitler and Stalin had in common a dualistic view of human society in which they perceived themselves and their group as the good force destined for victory which had to utterly destroy the forces of evil. (For Hitler these were what he considered the racially polluting elements of the Jews and Gypsies, for Stalin they were the "exploiter classes").

patriarchal, warlike tone of the Old Testament is mitigated by the New Testament emphasis on pacifism in the Mennonite faith. Not being allowed, because of their own inherent code of ethics, to take revenge on atrocities committed against them, brings about a certain kind of schizophrenia in the Mennonite psyche. This is examined in light of the literature and contrasted to the Jewish relentless search for compensation and justice.

A certain discomfort with language, common to both groups, also affects how these groups perceive themselves. Both have a holy language set aside for worship and study (Hebrew for the Jews and High German for the Mennonites) and another language that is used in a more informal setting (Yiddish for the Jews and Plattdeutsch for the Mennonites). The everyday earthy language in each group emphasizes the bodily and erotic spheres and lends itself to a peculiar brand of humour common to each group. This humour is used as a mechanism to cope with what the major culture in which each group is situated perceives as peculiar, an attitude that threatens to undermine identity. How this "grotesque realism," as Bakhtin calls the culture of folk humour, is part of an effort to maintain the identity of the group and the individual within the group is investigated in this study.

Beyond their own group, the Jews and the Mennonites must deal with the language of the larger culture in which they find themselves, which is German for the Jews in this study, and English for the Mennonites in their Canadian setting. For generations the assimilated Jews embraced the German language as their own, but since the Holocaust it has become the language of the persecutor. This situation again is cause for fragmentation of identity. For Mennonites, until recently, the English language was the language of the worldly group with which one did not associate unless

absolutely necessary. This Canadian English is already a modification of the British English from which it originated. This ever present unease with language and the effect it has on identity is explored.

Definition of Identity

Charles Poncé, in his reflections on Jungian psychology, refers to three different types of persons that shape who we are:

The first type is the cultural person who is composed of the amalgamation of the peculiarities that distinguish one culture from another. These would include body type, movement, emotional reaction, gesticulation, and all other mannerisms that identify us as members of a specific group. These are aspects of ourselves which take several generations to wear off.

The second type is the social person who is shaped by the cooperative actions and reactions of others toward one another in society. Through self-reflection, social persons seek to imitate or complement the way other people in the group are acting. As they interact with the society in which they find themselves, the opinions and expectations of that society form and shape them. Rather than incorporating their society's meaning, ideas and values as cultural persons do, social persons embody and personify their society's rules of relationship, the laws that control social action. Social persons come to know themselves by how others perceive them to be. Their relationship to themselves is affected by the relationship others have with them.

The metaphysical being, who is the third construct making up the identity of a person, is the result of the ontological answers to existence

which that particular culture has devised in order to create and maintain a sense of meaning and a reason for existence. Every culture and society constructs such metaphysics and through it a sense of kinship develops in the group which gives meaning and purpose to its members and allows them to bond with each other.

This three-dimensional nature of an individual is made up of the constraints and restraints that have been taught as being the inevitable conditions for inclusion in social existence. If persons refuse or are unable to agree with these values, they are deemed to be pathological (Poncé 71-76). Poncé defines pathologies as "negative meanings needed to substantiate the integrity of a group's value," and says society should not only seek to alter them but rather change the social structures that produce indices of exclusion in order to define themselves (82).

The person, states Poncé "is also a composite of the diversities arising among the three. Choice, chance, and circumstance ultimately determine in what way the three socially constructed persons will find agreement with one another in the figure of the individual. [. . .] This is the source of [. . .] ego-consciousness, [. . .] not only contoured by the values of the three persons, [but] a function created and shaped by them" (121). This ego (according to Freud) stands between the Id (representing the autonomous instinctual responses that seek to freely express themselves) and the Superego (a form of social conscience that would disallow the Id's free expression) and tries to determine which of the two to follow, always attempting to reconcile their conflictual intentions, torn between the two opposing phenomena: Nature in the form of instincts and the demands of society in the form of the Superego.

In his work *The Concept of Identity*, de Levita traces historically the divergent viewpoints on identity, claiming that the search for identity is as old as philosophy, since Aristotle already occupied himself with it extensively. It is rooted in the dim past with the Greek concept of the different roles a person can play in drama, expressing the contrast between the individual and society, and the rights of the free citizen as well as the role expectation placed on such a citizen. Locke and Leibniz develop opposing views on identity with Locke stressing memory as the source of identity and Leibniz stating that memory is impossible without the identity of the personality. For Hume as for Locke, the remembered image is the principal root of identity. Kant states that it is through contemplation of things that we arrive at knowledge, but that this knowledge has no validity when separated from the person. Since the time of Kant, claims de Levita, identity of the person seems to be bound together with the consciousness of oneself and to an ego which is absolute and to which all the different facets of the individual relate (17-21).

William James is called by de Levita the father of the modern concept of identity. The 'self,' as James labels the combination of the 'pure ego' and the ego in reflection, has three facets: the material, the social, and the spiritual self. James stresses that, in order for the individual to have a feeling of continuity, a constant relationship with the outside world is very important (de Levita 29-30).

Since James, ongoing studies have stressed how important the continuity of the individual is for the community. Erik H. Erikson is instrumental in completing the development of the reciprocal relations between individuals and their world. Like James, he does not choose between the Leibnizian and the Humian views but accepts them both. He

differentiates between them by calling the first "personal identity" and the second "ego-identity," and elaborates especially upon the latter and on how it has grown historically. From his observation of the Sioux Indians, Erikson establishes a concept of group identity which he then later uses as an analogue of personal identity. What he earlier describes as a dialogue between the community and the individuals forming the community, he later formulates as a dialogue between the personality and the factors which form the personality (de Levita 45-55).

From this overview of the struggle to come to some sort of definition of identity in the past, we are conscious of how recent events in the twenty-first century are shaped by these various attempts at defining identity. When we see how the Supreme Court of Canada has validated rights granted to the Mi'kmaq under treaties signed in 1760, and how recent explosions of terrorism by neo-Nazis in East Germany toward people of other races are being dealt with, we realize that the past does indeed influence and shape our sense of identity in the present. The struggle for fishing rights of Canadian natives in Burnt Church, New Brunswick, and the conflict that continues between Caucasians and members of other races in Germany, shows us that in spite of all that has been studied over the years, there is still much to learn about the concept of identity and its relationship to memory and to society.

Struggle for Stability: An Historical Perspective

From the above definition of identity, it becomes obvious that individual and collective identity are closely interwoven and that many of the characteristics of individual identity can be observed in national or

collective identity. For this reason, it is important in the present study to take into account the influence of the groups that have shaped and molded the individuals under observation. Change occurs over time and is an important factor in both individual and group identity. Identity formation is an attempt to maintain stability despite change and must incorporate not only stability but change as well. As Susan Bassnett states in her critical introduction to comparative literature: "Coming to terms with the past means facing the ambiguities of a plural history. [. . .] What remains is the need to recognize the complexities of the historical processes that have resulted in such pluralism" (82).

Tradition offers a sense of legitimation and orientation, but can also be problematic when the context in which it appears changes. In such cases, continuity and identity itself can be called into question. However, groups can and will try to adapt their sense of who they are and who they have been to achieve a sense of balance between the two.

Taking a look at the history of the two groups—the Jews and the Mennonites—discussed in this dissertation, it is not difficult to determine the identity crisis in which they find themselves today, as they have tried to adapt to the various changes that have confronted them over time.

A brief synopsis of the history of the Jews taken from Adler's historical perspective, *The Jews in Germany*, will indicate the changes of tradition which have threatened their sense of continuity and identity. The Jews, of course, have a much longer history than do the Mennonites. The group migrations to various nations, lands and cultures began with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. By the 11th century there is documented evidence of settlements in all major cities. A valid question took shape during this time, a question that lasted into the Age of

Emancipation (which was a question also asked about the Mennonites, especially in regard to their stance on pacifism, wherever they settled). This question was: Is it possible for a Jewish minority to exist in a Christian state, given that this minority follows a despised foreign religion and is clearly distinguished from the ruling nation in language, culture, tradition, and socio-economic structure?

It was during the crusades that many countries exiled Jews altogether. Like Italy, Germany never enforced a wholesale exile, and Jewish history was uninterrupted, as was not the case in other countries. The situation of the Jews in Germany grew consistently worse from the first crusade until after the Reformation, then stabilized for a century, and improved somewhat after 1648 and through the Ages of Pietism and Enlightenment, but this improvement was felt only by a privileged few. There were numerous bloodbaths from the crusades until the early 16th century. The year 1349 was the worst year for Jews in Germany until the time of Hitler. The inhabitants of more than 350 communities were slaughtered and there were substantial emigrations from Germany to Poland, Italy, and Turkey during the 14th, 15th and 16th centuries. Those who stayed developed an incredible attitude of acceptance.

Individual Jews such as Mendelssohn, a close friend of Lessing, and Gabriel Riesser, jurist and politician (1806-1863), helped the coming of emancipation for the Jews, but it was individual emancipation, never that of the group. "We must refuse everything to the Jews as a Nation, but must grant the Jews everything as individuals", formulated Clermont-Tonnerre in the French Convention of 1791. "This principle," says Adler, "is still the standard that governs the position of the Jewish minority in the civic structure of Germany" (3).

Although spiritual and social isolation had been forced on the Jews to some extent, as was true of the Mennonites, it was also a group desire. Adler points out that this changed entirely in the Age of Enlightenment and Mercantilism. By the late 18th century, most Jews desired nothing so much as to be German. Voluntary assimilation and profound national and ethnic self-destruction was the result. Adler asks the question: "How then, did a truly Jewish question survive?" His answer: "More than assimilation was asked of the Jews; they were asked to conform completely, which would have meant the abdication of every kind of individualism, and which would have been a kind of extinction. The Jews could not possibly assimilate quickly enough for their enemies" (5).

The end of the Age of Jewish Emancipation in Germany came in the1930s with the institutionalism of anti-Semitism by the Nazi state in 1933. The Jewish people as such were "poison," to be counteracted and eradicated (Adler 136). Following Hitler's order to exterminate all Jews, Nazi firing squads shot thousands of men, women, and children. The Germans killed millions more in concentration camps. By the end of the war in 1945, the Holocaust (as the Nazi campaign of mass murder came to be called) had wiped out about six million of the ten million Jews in Europe. Out of this tragedy came a new determination to establish a nation in Palestine where Jews could be secure. The Jewish state, which called itself Israel, declared its independence on May 14, 1948.

The Anabaptist movement with which Mennonites identify to this day was, in its formative stages, a social religious entity that was faced with a number of disagreements and opposing ideas, such as the role of political power in ecclesiastical affairs, the rights of the church to tax and otherwise oppress the peasantry, the moral practice of the clergy, the nature of the

structure and administration of sacraments and offices, the interpretation of the Christian scriptures regarding pacifism and oaths, and the role of economics in the church (Redekop, Calvin 88).

Thus, from their beginning, the Mennonites were persecuted in many countries. Dutch Mennonites moved to northern Germany and Prussia in the 1600s, and to the Russian Ukraine in the 1700s. Mennonites in Soviet Russia went through some of the most vicious persecution and oppression in human experience, beginning in 1917. As a small ethno-religious minority, they became objects of ethnic, religious and class hatred and violence, involving, at various times, Imperial German armies, nationalist Ukrainians, peasant anarchists, Nazi occupiers, and especially radical Bolshevik rulers. During the 1930s and '40s, 55,000 Mennonites were forcibly relocated to labour camps, arrested or exiled. Some 30,000 out of a population of 100,000 died violent or unnatural deaths. 35,000 Mennonites were able to escape to the west with the retreating German army in 1944. Of these, 23,000 were compelled to repatriate by the Western Allies, shipped in box cars to labour camps in the Siberian Gulag; 8,000 were able to find a new home in Canada; another 4,000 went to Paraguay.

There have been many personal accounts of the "Soviet Inferno" in the 1930s and '40s, including Stalin's "Great Terror" of 1937 and 1938. It is only recently, with the unexpected collapse of the USSR in 1991, that Mennonite academics have found extensive documentation in Soviet and KGB archives, showing that the Mennonite people were targeted by a systematic program for eradication because of their singular defiance of the Soviet regime and Sovietization (Plett 1).

Peter Letkemann, in a recent article entitled "Mennonites in the Soviet Inferno, 1917-1956" states: "No government has ever offered an

apology and no officials have ever stood trial for their crimes against humanity. Yet none of the individuals whom I interviewed called for revenge. All seemed to be prepared to forgive" (11).

Calvin Redekop, in his article "The Mennonite Identity Crisis," summarizes this group's struggle to keep its identity in the midst of upheaval and change since its inception in the early sixteenth century. He appropriately uses the metaphor of the traveler, while emphasizing the group migrations to various nations, lands and cultures; the experience of individual Mennonites moving in, through and out of the Mennonite tradition; and the historical experience of the Mennonite "faith community" as it has survived through historical developments and contexts (88). He shows how the group began to experience a change of identity through rejection, persecution and annihilation. In many cases it entrenched the faith of the followers, "but it is equally true that many followers of the early faith adapted to the pressures of the time rather than suffer loss of limb and life" (90). A change that probably affected Anabaptist-Mennonite identity more than any other according to Redekop, was the influence of Pietism which provided emotional release and support. Jung-Stilling's influence on Mennonites in the nineteenth century is well documented (91).

The humanistic tradition also altered Anabaptism, but to a lesser degree, as Mennonites became increasingly isolated in the hinterland of Europe. "[Their] concern for human dignity, welfare and reverence for life had more than New Testament justification," writes Redekop (91).

Nationalism was pervasive in various forms throughout Mennonite history, changing the group's identity insidiously. Redekop makes the point that beliefs can be held relatively intact if the host country is intolerant; but once equality was espoused by a country, the Mennonites were forced to

accept the requirements of citizenship or emigrate. In countries where they achieved close to total autonomy and were left almost entirely to themselves, nationalism developed to a startling degree (as in Russia, Manitoba, Mexico, Paraguay, and Bolivia).

After World War I and during World War II, a more strident nationalism became evident, and pacifism, a cornerstone of Mennonite belief, no longer took priority over the sovereignty of the nation. It is known that many Mennonites in Russia and in the Third Reich openly supported Hitler. Many in Canada held an intolerant and racist view of the Jews and were unwilling to help them emigrate to Canada (Davies and Nefsky 106-114). In Paraguay, under pressure from the US government, two Mennonite leaders were exiled from the Chaco for their active support of Nazism (Thiesen 191).

A different kind of nationalism is the one born of an appreciation for the benefits and wealth that the host countries, especially Canada and the United States, have provided. This includes political participation, especially in office holding. As Redekop states, "it is clear that the original Mennonite identity of being the 'separated people of God' cannot prosper when the nation-state is accepted as determinative for life in the faith community" (93). For the Mennonites, this nationalism together with religious fundamentalism and higher education led to a high degree of assimilation and beliefs which were until then not part of the Anabaptist-Mennonite belief system (96). This was also evident in Russia in the 1870s, during the country's great reforms after the defeat in the Crimean War (Urry, *Saints* 210).

Redekop's view is that all of the above changes which came to the Mennonites from the outside were slow enough to allow the Mennonite

society to integrate them into the system. However, in modern times, the rate of change in the structure of the Mennonite community has increased drastically. The social and technical dimensions of human life have usurped such elements as the centrality of the congregation, the social and economic support of the village or rural community, the emotional and status strength of the family, the positive stability of agriculture, the dependability upon the soil and nature, and the presence and stability of authority. Many of these basics have suddenly been almost totally lost (97-100).

Redekop's three areas of emphasis that are relevant to the traveler metaphor for Mennonites (group migration, movement through tradition, historical experience), are also applicable to the changes experienced by the Jews. Egon Schwarz, in his article "Jews and Anti-Semitism in Fin-de-Siècle Vienna," gives a socio-historical analysis of the changes experienced by this group and how it was affected by these changes. He sees it as an "almost unavoidable paradigm" in the group's history (58). As a result of changing conditions, the Jews departed from the Eastern ghettos and entered trade, business, or industry. They then rose to relevant affluency, at which time the males often married the daughters of assimilated families. These daughters were better educated than their husbands and taught the children about German culture and German literature. The children became intellectuals, artists, writers and musicians. The end result was the loss of orthodoxy, indeed of almost the entire Jewish cultural heritage. This led to the renunciation of Yiddish in everyday speech and of Hebrew as the sacred language. Further steps toward assimilation were the adoption of the Christian religion and the adaptation of Western manners (59). This was

the Jewish situation before their fate took a tragic turn in 1938 (Kristallnacht).

Under Hitler's regime, the sole fact of their origins threatened the very existence of people of Jewish ancestry. For many this forced their Jewish identity into a position of unaccustomed centrality. Whether they wished to be a part of this group or not, they became the principal enemy of the authorities. Their forced identification dictated their circumstances and determined their fate. Having gone through such persecution, they were stigmatized, patronized or rebuffed. Those who changed their identity and lived under an assumed one experienced this new identity in a variety of ways. Some were always conscious that they were using a disguise; for others it became second nature, making their previous lives distant and unreal. Some chose to take on a non-Jewish identity, others were forced into it.

Kenneth Jacobson, in his book *Embattled Selves*, investigates the nature of identity through oral histories of Holocaust survivors. He asks the question:

> What happens when two elements of identity, the urge to survive and the need to belong, come into conflict? Can the pull of the group truly rival the instinct of self-preservation? And if the latter wins out, is its victory as complete—and as free from consequences for the individual—as the logic of evolution might suggest? (87)

This conflict was experienced by Mennonites innumerable times when they compromised their Anabaptist doctrine of nonresistance. For example, during the Crimean War (1854-1856), although not participating directly in combat, the Mennonites colonies, under government orders, supplied food,

transportation, and medical help to the Russian armies. Fearing that this was the beginning of military conscription, a large contingent left Russia for Canada in the 1870s. Those who remained behind had to come to terms with forms of alternative service for their country (Urry, Mennonites 9-26).

In 1919, during the civil war in Russia after World War I, arms-bearing young Mennonites found themselves in combat not only against anarchist-bandit forces but also, briefly, against the Red Army, the regular troops of the Communist government of Russia and Ukraine. This made them guilty of treason. The issue came down to a bitter choice between religious idealism and urgent pragmatism, and was debated at a Mennonite General Conference (the Lichtenau Conference) June 30–July 2, 1918 (Reimer, Al, "Sanitätsdienst" 140-141).

Like the Mennonites, who turned their backs on pacifism and took up self-defense in order to protect their lives, many Jewish people in Germany had denied their Judaism as a type of self-defense, and their descendants had grown up without practising their faith. Under Nazi rule, which prompted the tracing of "racial" affiliations, people like this were suddenly confronted with a Jewish background and the ensuing danger. They were faced with questions such as:

> What happens when two basic elements of identity—how one is seen by others, and how one experiences oneself—come into conflict? To what extent does each determine who one is and where one belongs? And is the identity one presents to others, or even to oneself, always consistent with inner reality? (Jacobson 163)

The 35,000 Mennonites who had fled Russia to the west with the retreating German army in 1944 were also faced with these questions of

identity. Although they had left Germany for the Russian Ukraine in the 1700s, they had never become part of that culture but had always maintained that they were German. At the end of the war they feared for their lives. Because they were born in Russia, the Soviet Union insisted that their citizens return to Russia. The Russians regarded them as traitors to be brought back for punishment, usually concentration camp or death. Thousands were forced to return to the Soviet union, often with the cooperation and help of American and British occupation troops. These Mennonites had never thought of themselves as Russian, had never been assimilated into the culture of the country in which they had lived for two hundred years, but now this identity was forced on them.

It was out of desperation, that some of them recalled roots that went even farther back than their German affiliation. In August 1945, a small group of Mennonite refugees arrived in Holland, with an "incredible and strange story," write Peter and Elfrieda Dyck in their account of the rescue of thousands of war-ravaged Mennonite refugees by the Mennonite Central Committee (MCC) of North America. "They said their forebears had left the Netherlands under persecution in the sixteenth century, fled to Prussia, and later moved further east to Russia. To the perplexed and bewildered immigration officials, they had announced that they had come home. It all seemed a bit preposterous" (82). Dutch linguistic experts interviewed them and found their language to be neither Dutch nor German, though there were strong resemblances to both. The Netherlands strongly considered expelling them because of "their undetermined identity, farfetched story, and no documentation, passports, visas or entry permits" (82).

The Dycks go on to write how they happened to be in Holland at the time and were able to identify them and plead their case, promising that the

MCC would assume full responsibility for both their maintenance in Holland and their resettlement in some other country. For the time being they put these Mennonites up in Fredeshiem [sic], a camping and retreat centre established by the Dutch Mennonites in the 1920s. (In the early 1940s, this same centre had sheltered many Jewish children slated for the gas chambers) (106).

The above historical synopsis of the two groups is helpful in understanding the examples which have been chosen for this study, of individuals in both Jewish and Mennonite literature. These individuals were not directly involved in the horrors experienced by members of their group but are immediate descendants of people in those groups. Not being directly involved, but relating to close relatives who experienced the horrors of persecution, has its own set of identity struggles, as this study will show.

Method

Comparative literature is a four-dimensional discipline which includes:

1. Analogy between several works in a giver-receiver, or cause-effect, relationship to one another
2. Studies of movements and trends
3. Analysis of literary works from the viewpoint of their inner and outer forms, from their genre
4. Studies of themes and motifs, related to topics like patriotism, revolt, friendship, death (Jost, Foreword 7-10)

This comparative study includes all four of the above approaches. However, it is not just a comparison of English and German literary

works, but a comparison of what has traditionally been called "minority literatures" which in itself is a derogatory term. It is more appropriate to use Bruce King's term "the new literatures" (56). Both the German Jewish literature and the Canadian Mennonite literature belong in this category (see "Resources," below).

The overarching theme in all the works discussed is the concept of fragmented identity. The term "identity" is defined at the outset by exploring some of the historically divergent viewpoints on this concept, based on de Levita's work *The Concept of Identity*. In order to show the forces that shaped the literatures of both Jews and Mennonites over time, this definition is followed by an historical synopsis of the two groups.

The main body of the dissertation is a close textual analysis and comparison of several works by Jewish and Mennonite authors. Detailed character study as well as a comparison of themes, form, and structure are the methods used in the textual analysis of Jurek Becker's *Bronstein's Kinder* and Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. The emphasis is on threatened identity, as sacred beliefs and traditions are challenged in a confrontation with the outside world and with patriarchy from within the group.

A desperate search for identity is most prominent in the works of Honigmann and Klassen and is analyzed by comparing and contrasting themes as well as form and structure of Honigmann's novel *Eine Liebe aus nichts* with selected poems of Sarah Klassen. Although it may seem somewhat odd to compare a novel and poetry, *Eine Liebe aus nichts* has been described as more lyrical than narrative by literary critics, and Sarah Klassen's poetry, especially in *Journey to Yalta* leans toward the narrative,

as it traces her mother's journey from Russia to Canada, and continuously moves from the present to the past and back again while telling the story.

The aspect of self-hatred and protective clowning is the theme of the third chapter in which a comparative analysis of Rafael Seligmann's *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* and Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* is rendered. Again, it is a thematic as well as a character study. Form and structure are compared, with a special emphasis on the use of Yiddish and Low German words and phrases.

The major portion of the analysis of the characters in the literary works being compared is based on Erik H. Erikson's psychological theories of ego-identity and identity diffusion, as explained in his book *Identity and the Life Cycle*. A synopsis of these theories follows.

Pattern: Erikson's Ego-Identity and Identity Diffusion

This study, comparing the fragmented identity of several literary characters belonging to two smaller cultural groups within a dominant culture, reflects some of the psychological insights of Erik H. Erikson who occupied himself with the concept of identity. Especially significant for this work are his insights and theories on identity development in adolescence, particularly his theories on ego-identity and identity diffusion as explained in his book *Identity and the Life Cycle*. What follows is a brief synopsis of these theories.

Erikson's studies of identity begin with group identity, and these observations are later used by him to establish his theories about personal identity. The sequence of stages he proposes for development in childhood, and how this influences the identity of the person in a positive way is called

ego-identity. An impairment of identity occurs wherever these processes fail and is called identity diffusion.

During the adolescent period, the person is primarily concerned with attempts at consolidating social roles. The integration that takes place during this time is largely dependent on each successive childhood stage, when successful identification led to a successful alignment of the individual's basic drives with his endowment and his opportunities. These ego values are called ego-synthesis and culminate in a sense of ego-identity, which can be described as "the accrued confidence that one's own ability to maintain inner sameness and continuity (one's ego, in the psychological sense) is matched by the sameness and continuity of one's meaning for others" (de Levita 62).

The concept of basic trust in childhood (de Levita 64-65) implies that:

1. the child sees itself as a separate being from the persons and things in its environment,
2. there is an attribution of sameness to oneself and to the persons in one's environment,
3. there is a capacity for some generalized thinking, brought about by a consistent loving attitude of the adults in a child's life, and that
4. there is a basic self-esteem, or an autonomy versus shame and doubt.

Qualities of a healthy personality entering adulthood with an intact ego-identity are juxtaposed by Erikson to characteristics of an impaired personality who experiences identity diffusion (Erikson 100-105):

1. Intimacy and distantiation versus self-absorption

Before being able to lose oneself in another human being, one must first know and find oneself. Distantiation, or the readiness to repudiate, isolate and destroy those forces and people whose nature seems dangerous to one's

own, is the counterpart to intimacy. Erikson defines lack of ability in exercising these two functions as "self-absorption."

2. Generativity versus stagnation

Failure to establish the next generation leads to a pervading sense of stagnation and personal impoverishment which regresses to an obsessive need for pseudo-intimacy.

3. Integrity versus despair and disgust.

Persons of integrity accept the fact that their lives are their own responsibility. There is only one life cycle available to them and only one set of people with whom they interact. When such ego-integration does not occur, the result is often despair and an unconscious fear of death because "the one and only life cycle is not accepted as the ultimate of life" (Erikson 104).

The following is a brief summary of Erikson's features of identity diffusion, or the inability of the ego to establish an identity (de Levita 69-72):

1. The syndrome occurs between the ages of 16-24, when the individual faces many very significant choices, such as commitment to physical intimacy, occupational choice, competition with others, and psycho-social self-definition.

2. Isolation of the self, resulting in stereotypical and formalized inter-personal relationships or intimacy with the most improbable partners.

3. Disturbance in sexual identity, in which fusion with another becomes identity loss.

4. Inability to concentrate and to derive satisfaction from activity.

5. Disturbance in time perspective.

6. Characteristic family structure, featuring a dominating, intrusive mother and a successful but passive father.
7. Symbiotic sibling relationship, in which the identity of one is surrendered to that of the other in the hope of regaining a bigger and better one by the act of merging with the other.

It will become obvious to the reader while studying the comparative character analyses in the following chapters, that all of the above features can be applied to the different protagonists as well as the other characters in the works of this study.

Erikson states that, in order to proceed to normal adolescence, an ideological system of shared images, ideas, and ideals provides a coherent even though simplified orientation. This may be based on a formulated dogma, an implicit world view, a structured world image, a political creed, or a way of life. These ideologies provide a challenge for the adolescent because they ask for uncompromising commitment to a set of values and rigid principles of conduct, such as obedience to tradition, total resignation, total martial discipline, total inner reform, or abandonment to production and teamwork (168-170).

Again, it will become clear in the present study that, where such an ideological system is in place, and where it is genuinely adhered to by significant adults in the adolescent's social circle, identity diffusion does not come about. Where the significant adults give lip service only to the established ideology, ignore it, or deny its existence, a strong ego-identity is very difficult to establish.

Resources

Since this study analyzes fragmented identity in a literary context in which specific works from two different cultural groups are compared and contrasted, some research relating to theories and criticism in this area was necessary. Susan Bassnett, in her critical introduction to comparative literature, gives a history of how comparative literature has evolved from a monolithic national viewpoint to an "auxiliary discipline," bridging the gap between Western cultural models and those of other cultures. This post-European model of comparative literature reconsiders "key questions of cultural identity, literary canons, the political implications of cultural influence, periodization and literary history" (Bassnett 41).

Ashcroft's study of post-colonial literary theory and practice, concerned with the literature of those cultures formerly colonized by Britain, provides a theoretical background for the Canadian literature dealt with in this study, but is also relevant to countries colonized by other colonial powers and relates to all cultures that have experienced the inappropriate use of power. Ashcroft concentrates on post-colonial literature, which is defined in *The Empire Writes Back* as "[Literatures] that have emerged in their present form out of the experience of colonization and asserted themselves by foregrounding the tension with the imperial power, and by emphasizing their differences from the assumptions of the imperial centre" (2). Place, displacement, and a concern with identity and authenticity are features common to all post-colonial literatures. A sense of self may have been eroded by dislocation through migration, enslavement, transportation, or removal for indentured labor. Or a crisis in

self-image may have been brought about by "cultural denigration," as the supposedly superior racial or cultural model consciously or unconsciously suppressed the indigenous personality, producing alienation of vision and crisis in self-image, even for the free settler within the first generation of settlement (Ashcroft 8-11).

The Jewish people in Germany share with colonized races and peoples an intimate experience of the politics of oppression and repression, and like them they have been forced to articulate their experiences in the language of their oppressors. Jews, like post-colonial peoples, have had to construct a language of their own when their only available tools were those of the colonizer (in the German Jewish situation, their exterminator). Rather than calling it "Minoritätenliteratur," Thomas Nolden, in his book *Junge jüdische Literatur*, refers to the German Jewish writing of the generation after the Holocaust as "Konzentrisches Schreiben." This, in a play on words, alludes to the Nazi concentration camps but encompasses much more. It has in common the tension between the post-Holocaust generation and the cultural, religious and historical understanding of the pre-Holocaust Jew, as well as the tension between the present German Jewish generation and that of the German and Austrian societies after World War II (10-11).

Volume 15 of the journal *Review of National Literatures* focuses on new perspectives in comparative literary theory. Published in 1989, the contribution by Bruce King ("The New Literatures: Some Implications") was especially valuable for this study. King includes Theoretical Studies, Feminist Criticism and New National Literatures (which is literature from newly-independent nations that "have their own canons, traditions, histories, aesthetics and relationships" and "destabilize received notions of

literary criticism" because they are linked to their own social, political and local cultural context) (56-57).

Heidrun Suhr's article, "Ausländerliteratur: Minority Literature in the Federal Republic of Germany," published in 1989 by the journal *New German Critique*, provides valuable insight into the production and reception of this kind of literature in Germany and the potential conflicts that must be dealt with.

Identity, being a psychological concept, necessitated some research in this field. The previously mentioned historical review, *The Concept of Identity* by de Levita (see "Method," above), furnishes a broad perspective on what has been studied and researched prior to Erikson and beyond him.

Erik Erikson's psychological theories of ego-identity and identity diffusion (see above), as explained in his book *Identity and the Life Cycle*, provide a pattern for the literary characters analyzed in this study. A very useful tool alongside Erikson's psychological theories is *Embattled Selves: An Investigation into the Nature of Identity Through Oral Histories of Holocaust Survivors*, in which Kenneth Jacobson presents case studies of Holocaust survivors whom he interviewed for his book. Jacobson's studies validate many of the conclusions reached in the literary analyses of this study.

Insight on how groups create the category of the "Other" has been gained by Sander Gilman's psychological theory in which groups with a fragmented identity project their own dark visions of themselves as weak or different onto the "Other," who then pick a sub-group from their own ranks, onto which they in turn project the characteristics assigned to them by the dominant group, thus distancing themselves from this sub-group. Gilman calls this internalized vision of the self, "self-hatred" (Jewish Self-Hatred 1-21).

Adler's work *The Jews in Germany*, which traces the history of the Jews from the Enlightenment to National Socialism, helped to gain a perspective on the historical problems that led to their demise and eventual destruction by a nation they claimed as their own. The volume *Insiders and Outsiders: Jewish and Gentile Culture in Germany and Austria*, a collection of essays edited by Lorenz and Weinberger, also gives historical insight as well as information on the contemporary German Jewish culture and the relationship between Jews and Germans today.

Various academic journals and papers were perused for information on the Mennonites. Especially valuable was Calvin Redekop's article "The Mennonite Identity Crisis." A new volume by Leo Driedger, entitled *Mennonites in the Global Village*, gives a modern perspective to Redekop's research. Smiths *Story of the Mennonites* supplied a historical background. The book *Diary of Anna Baerg* 1916-1924, translated and edited by Gerald Peters, provided original diary entries of that troubled time in Russia. *Agatchen: A Russian Mennonite Mother's Story* is a fictionalized biographical account of Sarah Klassen's great grandmother and supplies valuable background information for the Honigmann/Klassen comparison.

Contribution

Comparative literature is an ongoing medium for international understanding, a potential for cultural exchange. A comparative study dealing with two relatively "new" literatures can help foster this kind of understanding and broaden horizons with fresh insights.

Both literatures under analysis come from cultures in which unspeakable atrocities were committed. Language had not yet invented

words for these atrocities. New images have to be evoked by those who write about these events and experiences. My study will cause people to have an improved awareness of the continuous struggle the human mind makes to confront and express the horror, not just to cope with the information.

The insider/outsider motif evident in Jurek Becker's and Rudy Wiebe's novels will help create understanding of these two cultures especially because the writer/narrator speaks from within the community but adopts in his fiction the "radical [. . .] stance of the outsider, that is, the responsible critic who refuses to replicate the comfortably idealized image the community wishes to perpetuate" (Reimer, "One foot in, one foot out" 154-155). These novels are "a sacrament of disturbance, involving the reader in the most drastic sort of exposure to unwelcome experience and unfamiliar truth" (Reimer, "One foot in, one foot out" 155).

Barbara Honigmann's novel and Sarah Klassen's poetry deal artistically and poetically with the effect that atrocities suffered by parents and grandparents had on the next generation. The survivors often have not been able to talk about their experiences and this becomes a problem for their children, who lose their sense of identity and are forever in search of it. How can the unspeakable be uttered? It is important for students of philology to be aware of this aspect in the literature of the latter half of the twentieth century, known to be the century of widespread genocide.

Both Seligmann's and Armin Wiebe's novels are, to quote Magdalene Redekop, a "celebration of grief," and a "desire for escape from martyrdom" (12). With recent interest in "New Literatures," there is also a growing interest in dialects that have become obscure. By focusing on the Yiddish of the Jews and the Plattdeutsch of the Mennonites, attention is drawn to two

Germanic languages that are practically defunct in their country of origin (Thiessen, *Yiddish in Canada*).

Since the Holocaust, many Jewish authors whose parents and grandparents were assimilated Jews that had little or no connection to orthodox Judaism are trying to reclaim their Jewish identity. Their works become a means of keeping the Holocaust alive, a way of asserting that there still is a remnant that refuses to die. In contrast, many Mennonite writers today are continually trying to write themselves out of their Mennonitism, more like the Jewish intellectuals before the Holocaust who often denied their Jewishness. These Mennonite writers might want to think again about the implication of this when they are confronted with Jewish history and with the disastrous result of the Jews' denial of their culture, tradition and ideology (Keim, 215-232).

It has been documented that second- and third-generation Jewish writers in America, who write about the effect of the Holocaust, have received much more attention than their contemporaries in Germany (Nolden, "Contemporary Literature" 78). These German Jewish authors also warrant attention and critical analysis.

Ashcroft notes that Canadian literature, with its claim to a mosaic cultural determinant, might have generated a climate in which cross-national or cross-cultural comparative studies would be privileged, but little work of this kind seems to have been done (36). This situation has improved somewhat since 1989 when his study was published, but his observation points to the fact that much more work of this kind needs to be done.

By doing a comparative analysis of German Jewish and Canadian Mennonite writing more attention is drawn to both of these groups. In addition, new interest is generated as cross-cultural literary studies

gradually infiltrate the classical canon and multiculturalism becomes more common. As Ashcroft notes: "Both literary theorists and cultural historians are beginning to recognize cross-culturality as the potential termination point of an apparently endless human history of conquest and annihilation justified by the myth of group 'purity,' and as the basis on which the post-colonial world can be creatively stabilized" (36).

Rather than a "destructive cultural encounter," as has been the case too often in this century, this study contributes to an "acceptance of difference on equal terms" (Ashcroft 36).

ABBREVIATIONS

B ..... *Borderwatch*

D ..... *Damals, dann und danach*

J ..... *Journey to Yalta*

K ..... *Bronsteins Kinder*

L ..... *Eine Liebe aus nichts*

P ..... *Peace Shall Destroy Many*

R ..... *Rubinsteins Versteigerung*

V ..... *Violence and Mercy*

Y ..... *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*

CHAPTER ONE

Identity Threatened:
Jurek Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder*
and
Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*

> It is commonly assumed that we move toward the future the way a driver drives a car [. . .]. The better metaphor is that of a rower rowing a boat. What is always in front of us is not our future but our past. It is from our past that we get our bearings and set our course (James Downey, *Friends of the Library Lecture*, May 1993).

This chapter examines the process of identity diffusion in adolescents by comparing the struggle both protagonists in Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder* and Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* have with this problem. Significant adults in their family and community, to whom they relate, have been unable to achieve a healthy ego-identity because of their experience as victims of violence during their own youth. Feeling out of control, these adults attempt to regain control by acting out the violence they themselves experienced.

The adolescent protagonists, struggling with their own psycho-social self-definition, and immensely threatened by what they consider to be uncharacteristic behaviour of the adults who have been role models for them, challenge the behaviour of these adults. Unable to carry out their control, the adults give in to despair. This despair threatens to shatter the identity of the adolescents.

Since identity formation is dependent in part on the process by which a society or community identifies and recognizes the young individual, this chapter also explores the role of the community in which the protagonists, struggling for a sense of identity, find themselves. Some of the minor characters who have achieved a healthy self-image, as well as others who have not are compared and contrasted with the protagonists.

The effect of a system of beliefs, an ideology or the lack of it on the individual is examined as the two protagonists, one with an ideology firmly in place, the other without are compared and contrasted.

Finally, through close examination of the text, the question is posed: Is there hope for the future for the two protagonists? Is the damage done to ego-identity formation at adolescence irreversible? According to Erikson identity formation neither begins nor ends with adolescence but is a lifelong development largely unconscious to the individual and to his society (122).

A biographical sketch of both authors at the outset will facilitate an understanding of their work as both Becker's and Wiebe's struggle for identity is compared and contrasted.

Storytellers With Their Focus On Belonging/Identity

Of the six writers in this study, Jurek Becker and Rudy Wiebe have garnered the greatest attention from scholars since their first works were published: Becker's *Jakob der Lügner* (1969) and Wiebe's *Peace shall Destroy Many* (1962). They are the older more established writers in the group to be discussed. Partly they have received attention because of the political nature of their works but also because they are such good storytellers. Both of them present reality as fiction in the works I am comparing.

Mennonite storywriters have been characterized as "mischief-makers [. . .] who confront their readers with new ways of configuring what is true and in so doing, subvert the familiar, comfortable assumptions that sustain convention" (Tiessen, *Liars and Rascals* xi). This description is fitting for both Becker and Wiebe, especially in the two works which are being compared: Becker's *Bronsteins Kinder* (1988) and Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962). Becker turns the familiar picture of the Jew as victim upside down, and creates a Jew who is a victimizer, torturing a German. Wiebe shows us a community of Mennonites, normally thought of as peaceful and idyllic, "the quiet in the land," who find it impossible to live in peace and harmony. Their leader is a pacifist Mennonite who, having been tortured by his own people as a youth, commits a murder and tries to deal with the resulting guilt by controlling others.

Both Becker and Wiebe grew up listening to stories, and have turned their listening into telling. In his characteristically sardonic manner, Becker states: "Seit meiner Kindheit war mir Radio ein wichtiges Ding. Ich hatte niemanden, der mir Geschichten erzählte, sämtliche Großmütter und Onkel und Tanten waren mir abhanden gekommen, also habe ich mich hingesetzt, das Radio angemacht und solche Sender gesucht, auf denen geredet wurde" ("Verschwinden" 205). This listening to the radio, by himself, is an indication of Becker's unique and very lonely childhood.

Becker, born September 30, 1937, in Lodz, Poland, was moved to the Lodz ghetto with his parents where the family lived until 1939. From 1939 to 1945 they were in the concentration camps of Ravensbrück and Sachsenhausen. After the war Becker's large extended family was reduced to three survivors consisting of his father, one aunt, and himself. Becker's

father, who had been in a different concentration camp, found his then almost eight-year-old son with the help of an American organization.

Although old enough to remember the time before his father found him, Becker can recall nothing of his life in the ghetto or the concentration camps. His father spoke only seldom and very reluctantly about it, and by the time Becker was curious enough about his background to ask relevant questions his father had died.

Becker spent considerable time pondering the fact that he could not remember anything about his early childhood. In an article entitled "Mein Judentum," he gives several reasons for not remembering:

> Zum ersten muß der eigenartig späte Beginn meiner Erinnerungen natürlich etwas mit Verdrängungen zu tun haben. Ein Schutzmechanismus, dessen Vorhandensein wohl ein Glück ist, könnte mich von einer schlimmen Zeit trennen und so in gewisser Weise vor ihr bewahren. Zum zweiten, denke ich mir, wird es auch kaum etwas zum Erinnern gegeben haben. [. . .] Zum dritten [. . .] wird das, was ich damals geführt habe, kaum Leben genannt werden dürfen; gerade so verdiente es den Name Existieren. [. . .] Vermutlich wird alles, was geschah, von einer Art gewesen sein, daß derjenige, der ich damals war, es nicht für wert hielt, daß es in der Erinnerung bewahrt werde. (16)

In spite of his rationalization that it is probably much better for him psychologically that he does not remember his early childhood, he regrets this blank page in his life: "Ohne Erinnerungen an die Kindheit zu sein, das ist, als wärst du verurteilt, ständig eine Kiste mit dir herumzuschleppen, deren Inhalt du nicht kennst. Und je älter du wirst, um so schwerer kommt

sie dir vor, und um so ungeduldiger wirst du, das Ding endlich zu öffnen" ("Stadt" 114).

Becker recalls staring at a photo of the ghetto in which he spent his early years, especially at the women, because he can't remember his mother who died in the concentration camp, and no photo of her exists. No matter how hard he tries to remember, nothing comes to him:

> Unentwegt das Gefühl, mich beim Erinnern nur etwas mehr anstrengen zu müssen, anstatt so träge zu sein und faul aufs Erinnnern zu warten. Dabei strenge ich mich an zum Verrücktwerden es kommt nichts; nur die Bilder liegen im Zimmer, so unbegreiflich nah [. . .]. Ich möchte zu ihnen hinabsteigen und finde den Weg nicht. ("Stadt" 116-117)

As Irene Heidelberger-Leonard points out in "Auschwitz denken Auschwitz schreiben," Jurek Becker, in the writing of his three main novels (*Jakob der Lügner*, *Der Boxer*, and *Bronsteins Kinder*), creates his own Auschwitz, his own pictures of that forlorn place he cannot bring up in his memory. He remains always a searcher (204).

Rudy Wiebe's childhood, growing up on the prairies of Saskatchewan, seems very different from that of Jurek Becker's at first glance, but there are also some similarities. He too grew up with stories, but they were stories told in community. Since there was no external entertainment, their community, which was Russian Mennonite, had a tradition of getting together and telling stories about what it was like in the Old Country, where almost all of them had come from. Of that time Wiebe says:

> My parents told me lots of stories; my brother, who was fourteen when he came here, told me stories. [. . .] [My parents] came to this country in 1930, four years before I was born.

> They'd tell me a lot of tales about Russia, so I grew up with a strange kind of dislocation and a peculiar sense of living in a different place than my parents had lived. (qtd. by Bergman 164)

The stories his parents told him were, he says "of Russia, of czars and villages and Bolsheviks and starvation and anarchists and war and religious fights: all very good in their way because they kept the childish story-necessity alive in me, nurtured it when I did not even know it needed that or would be lost forever" ("Novelist's" 217).

Rudy Wiebe was born on October 4, 1934 in Fairholme, Saskatchewan, the youngest of seven children, whose family had fled to Canada in 1930, to escape war, famine, and religious persecution in Russia, only to eke out a pioneer existence in the community of Speedwell-Jackpine. Here Wiebe spent the first thirteen years of his life.

Later, in his adult life as a historian and a writer, Wiebe began to explore what he felt to be a poignant loss of the past. Although it was not as personal or as painful as Becker's loss of family and subsequent loss of memory, Wiebe too has constantly sought for that past in his novels. It probably began with his feeling of personal loss. As a child he was different from the rest of his family who had all experienced a past in Russia in which he could only participate vicariously through hearing their stories, and later writing about those stories in the form of novels.

Eventually Wiebe changes the focus of his writing from Mennonites to that of the life of a lost people in Canadian history, the native people. In a talk given at the University of Calgary in 1974 to discuss his new novel *The Temptations of Big Bear*, he expresses his anger at being deprived of this history as a child in a Canadian school system:

> In forcing me to discover the past of my place on my own as an adult, my public school inadvertently roused an anger in me which has ever since given an impetus to my writing which I trust it will never lose. *All* people have history. The stories we tell of our past are by no means merely words: they are meaning and life to us as *people*, as *particular* people; the stories are there, and if we do not know of them we are simply, like animals, memory ignorant, and the less are we people. ("Trail" 134)

Common to both these authors is a preoccupation and a certain feeling of awkwardness with language that comes in part as a result of having a mother tongue that is different from the language used in school. Becker's mother tongue is Polish. When he was reunited with his father in 1946, at age nine, he went to Berlin with him and began school there. He had to learn German as quickly as possible, "als Resultat einer organisierten Anstrengung" (Becker, *Warnung* 10). He and his father worked out a system in which he was rewarded for his scholastic achievements, especially in dictation and creative writing. He admits, however, that it was his need to be like the others, to speak like them and to have their respect, that was the driving force behind his compulsion to speak and write without making mistakes (*Warnung* 10-12). This striving for perfectionism in language, he now feels as a writer, has been a detriment to him. As a reader he is attracted to writers who play with words, but this is a literature he is incapable of producing. When he tries to do so, it seems artificial to him. He is enchanted by writers who break the rules, and thus add new quality to their work. He however, sees himself as someone who always has to

prove how well he learned the rules, and how well he knows them (M.Birnbaum 100).

Wiebe's critics have noted a certain awkwardness in his language and style that has been attributed to his learning a second language when he began school (M. Redekop, "Translated" 98). Wiebe, when writing about his favorite author Frederick Philip Grove, is indirectly speaking of his own style when he states:

> When reading a Grove novel one often has the feeling of wanting to change things, to correct this, to edit and alter that. One feels the author is after the right sentiment but he does not quite express it in the right way. It seems to me that we should by now know better [. . .]. I trust Grove's awkwardness a great deal further than the superficial smoothness of the numerous critics now peeping about his knees, and in relation to him I am not ashamed to confess artistic ignorance in certain places and to let him stand as he was pleased to let himself stand. ("Novelist's" 223)

Raised by his Mennonite parents to speak Low German until he learned English at public school, Wiebe experienced more intensely what it means to be part of a cultural minority than many of his contemporaries. Not only was he separated by language but also by the traditions and beliefs of his people. In 1947, when he was thirteen, Wiebe's family left the dying community of Speedwell-Jackpine for southern Alberta. Like Becker, Wiebe felt that he didn't belong because he came in the middle of the school year when friendships were already established, and he wore overalls to school and was stigmatized as an odd kid. He solved that problem by making friends with the Japanese kids. (Bergman 164-165).

Both Becker and Wiebe have, throughout their adult life, retained their early school experience of being an outsider. Becker says in an interview with Marianne Birnbaum when she questions him about where he actually feels at home: "Seit ich mich erinnern kann, hatte ich immer den 'touch' eines Fremden. Nie war ich dort aufgewachsen, wo die meisten anderen aufgewachsen waren, nie hatte ich dieselbe Muttersprache wie die anderen. Deshalb hat mich ziemlich früh die Frage beschäftigt: Wie fühlt man sich, wenn man sich zu Hause fühlt?" (93).

In many ways Becker's father, who had lost confidence and trust in everyone after the Holocaust, fostered this feeling in him. His father told him that he did not feel Jewish until he was forced to accept this identity by the Nazis. He very seldom went to the synagogue, and when he did, it was only to meet acquaintances, never to worship. His son never entered a synagogue (Becker, "Judentum" 16-18). Becker's father had no desire to go to the west, for him it was a place where Nazi war criminals roved about freely.

As a teenager Becker joined the youth organization FDJ, because he wanted to be like everyone else, to be normal for a change. After graduating from high school in 1955, he joined the communist party, but got into trouble when he noticed that what they wrote in their books did not match what they did in actuality. He did however maintain a basic loyalty to the party throughout this time. He spent two years in the military (Nationale Volksarmee der DDR) then studied philosophy at Humboldt University. His exams at the university always ended in clashes with authority, because he saw through the party tactics, and eventually he was kicked out (Meyer-Gosau 109-11).

Becker was a film scriptwriter and freelance author from 1960 until 1977 in East Berlin, where he was a member of the SED from 1957 until his release from that organization in1976. In the spring of 1977 he left the "Schriftstellerverband" of the GDR in protest of party policy. Since the end of 1977 he lived in West Berlin, with long stays as guest lecturer and writer in residence in the USA since 1978. He was also guest lecturer at the Gesamthochschule in Essen in 1978, at the University of Augsburg in 1981, and poet in residence at the Goethe University in Frankfurt (Heidelberger-Leonard *Jurek Becker* 347-348). He had two sons from his first marriage with Rieke and lived in a second relationship with Christine with whom he had one son. He died of cancer in 1997 (Raddatz 56).

At a writers' conference in Dublin in 1993, Becker speaks of being well integrated in the West, but at the same time not one of his books in the sixteen years that he has been there has as its setting the place in which he lives: "Noch heute, nach immerhin sechzehn Jahren, handelt kein einziges meiner Bücher vom Westen, noch heute spielen alle Texte, die ich seitdem veröffentlicht habe, in jenem Land, das es nicht mehr gibt, in der DDR" ("Schriftsteller" 173). Again, he writes about a place that no longer exists, a home to which he cannot return except through his fiction. In his obituary Becker is quoted as saying: "Der Schreibtisch ist der einzige Ort an dem ich ein klein bißchen fliegen kann" ("Nachruf" *SpiegelOnline*).

Becker's novel *Bronsteins Kinder* was originally entitled *Wie ich ein Deutscher wurde*, and the author sees it as "ein Buch der Ratlosigkeit" (Pascheck 43). To become German meant for Becker the author, and for Hans, the protagonist of his novel, to deny their Jewishness. This was a denial of a part of their identity, even though for both Becker and Hans it

was a part of their subconscious, a part of their lives which they no longer remembered.

The idea for the novel was born ten years before it was written, but it took only two years to write. Its theme is how the survivors of the Holocaust learn to live with that legacy and how their actions affect the next generation. A denial of the family's Jewishness is suggested in the German name "Bronstein."

Of his intention in writing the novel, Becker says that it always seemed to him the events described should have happened more often in reality. His novel, however, is not based on a real event but on a story he remembers from his childhood, where a case of taking justice in one's own hands occurred. He was inspired to write *Bronsteins Kinder* while attending a court case, in which a perpetrator was declared innocent and the witnesses walked away without protest (Pascheck 44).

Arno Bronstein in *Bronsteins Kinder* is a victim and a survivor of the Holocaust. A widower with two children, a daughter Elle and a son Hans, he never speaks of his experiences to his children. Hans's identity is intact, and he thinks of himself as German until he accidentally discovers in a shocking way, by some very uncharacteristic and violent action of his father that he is Jewish. The novel deals with Hans's struggle to come to terms with his father's actions and the consequences for him when he represses this knowledge and tries to work it out himself.

Like Becker, Rudy Wiebe has never felt quite at home in his surroundings. When asked in a 1984 interview if he enjoys going back home, he answers with a question: "Where's home? [. . .] It doesn't exist. I know this is a cliché but really, you can't go home again" ("Blindman" 334). Russia, the place where his parents and siblings had been at home and

which they constantly referred to as home, was not his home because he was the one who was born in Canada. Speedwell-Jackpine, where he spent his childhood years, no longer existed as a community after World War II. In "Tombstone Community" Wiebe describes the loneliness and back-breaking work of homesteading on a quarter section of thin rocky soil that finally caused people to give up after the depression. Wiebe tells of going back for a visit to Speedwell-Jackpine in 1963 and seeing all the small decaying cabins of the homesteaders with their collapsed barns as "individual letters on the face of this tombstone community of Speedwell and the homestead idea that once lived, and now is buried, there" (24). Since "Tombstone Community" was written, the landscape has changed again. In 1971, when Wiebe visited there once more, he still recognized the site of their homestead but the land had been bulldozed in order to grow grass. He writes sadly: "To me, having climbed up those slashed trees with the sweet rotting earth still tangled in their roots but in their branches and dead leaves also, it was obscene" (qtd. by W.J. Keith, introduction to "Tombstone Community" 17).

Wiebe, the youngest member of his family, was the first to receive a university education. After his studies at the Alberta Mennonite High School, he entered the University of Alberta in Edmonton in 1953 as a first-year medical student but switched to the study of English literature during his second year. He took a creative writing course with F.M. Salter and won first prize in the National Federation of Canadian University Students' short-story contest, for the story "Scrapbook" in which he draws largely on the experience of the death of his seventeen-year-old sister when he was eight or nine. Like Becker, he learned at an early age the frailty of survival.

In 1956 Wiebe graduated with a BA. That same year his short story "The Power" was chosen by Earle Birney to appear in *New Voices: Canadian*

University Writing of 1956. During 1957-1958 he spent a year studying at the University of Tübingen, thanks to a Rotary International Fellowship. He married in 1958 and is the father of a daughter and two sons. In 1960 he received his MA degree (Whaley 1-5).

Wiebe's Master's thesis was his first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, which was published in 1962. Because his novel concentrates on a rural Mennonite community, it caused a lot of controversy in Canadian and American Mennonite circles. The *Winnipeg Free Press Weekly* was working at a condensation of the novel for its magazine section, but problems developed with certain large Steinbach and Winnipeg Mennonite advertisers and the serialization did not run until five years later.

Wiebe had no choice but to resign as editor of *The Mennonite Brethren Herald*, a Mennonite church paper which he edited after completing his Bachelor of Theology degree at the Mennonite Brethren Bible College in Winnipeg and beginning his career as an English teacher in a high school in Selkirk, Manitoba. He left Canada and accepted an offer from a Mennonite liberal arts college in Indiana as assistant professor of English, where he taught from 1963 to 1967 (Wiebe, "Skull" 14-19).

The following year, Wiebe returned to Canada with his family, and began teaching at the University of Alberta in Edmonton; he has been a full professor of creative writing there since 1976 (Whaley 2-3). Of his time in the United States Wiebe says:

> I think it was really important for me to go away from Canada and live [. . .] in the United States for four years and come back and see [. . .] Alberta (actually I hadn't lived in Alberta for eight years by that time): the West really became very very important to me in a sense that I saw it in a whole new dimension,

> through the glass of those eight years that I'd been in other places and seen other things. (Neuman 239)

He goes on to say that meeting with a group of educated Mennonite thinkers over an extended period of time, especially with the well known theologian John Howard Yoder, whom he calls a brilliant thinker, influenced him a great deal, and is reflected in his more mature writing style in *The Blue Mountains of China* and subsequent works (Neuman 242-243). *The Blue Mountains of China* was published in 1970. A first "epic" novel, it presents the story of the Mennonite people scattered throughout Russia, Paraguay and Canada.

Wiebe's first novel, *Peace Shall Destroy Many* takes place in Wapiti, a fictional Mennonite farming community and Indian settlement in Western Canada, probably Saskatchewan. The time frame of the novel is the later years of World War II and consequently the crisis faced by this historically pacifist community is conscription. This crisis is the motivating factor in exploring the tensions of a religious community increasingly threatened by the encroachment of the outer world from which it wants to remain separate, while at the same time dealing with the traumatic, repressed past of the Russian Revolution.

In looking at the lives and writing of these two authors, it is not difficult to see some obvious similarities: their lonely childhoods in which they often played the role of observer and listener; their preoccupation with language and with words; their willingness to risk not being part of the status quo, not toeing the party line, not staying within the defined boundaries of what the group to which they belonged required of them, while at the same time exhibiting a loyalty toward the group which no

amount of criticism or ostracism could destroy (in Becker's case this would be Socialism, not Judaism).

One very obvious difference between the two writers needs to be mentioned, and that is their religious orientation, which also contributes to their dilemma of whether they are outsiders or insiders. Jurek Becker's fragmented identity is evident in the themes of his novels. As Heidelberger-Leonard observes, there is a mathematical symmetry to the chronology of his works. Almost all his novels take place in the DDR where Becker lived until he protested the expulsion of the author Wolf Biermann. Each of his works is a more or less fictional reconstruction of his own biography, with the first, third and fifth novel (*Jakob der Lügner*, *Der Boxer*, and *Bronsteins Kinder*) having as its main theme the difficulty of being Jewish, the second and fourth (*Irreführung der Behörden* and *Schlaflose Tage*) the difficulty of being a socialist. Throughout his works, Jew and socialist are in search of an identity ("Schatten" 20-21).

Becker, although critical of the socialist system, embraces socialism. However, he adamantly denies being Jewish, evasively declaring when asked about his Jewish background that his parents are Jewish. About himself he says that he never went to a synagogue; he never avoided neither did he seek fellowship with other Jews. For him, belonging to a religious group is not about exterior appearance but about a definite intellectual decision to do so, based on conviction, rites and confession of faith ("Judentum" 12-15). He declares himself to be an atheist: "Mir, der ich ein Atheist bin, kommt die jüdische Religion nicht einsichtiger vor als jede andere, und die Beschäftigung mit ihr—eine zugegebene nur oberflächliche—hat mich der Erleuchtung um keinen Schritt nähergebracht" ("Judentum" 18-20).

Becker recalls one incident from his childhood in which he was introduced by his father to an old Jewish man with a long beard and cap who had come from another country. This man picked him up in his arms, held him in a close embrace and wept over him, his whole body trembling as the tears ran down into his beard. The child wanted to comfort the old man, but didn't know how. Later, when he asked his father why the man had cried so much, his father evaded the question, telling him he wouldn't understand.

This man, although Becker never saw him again, became for him a symbol of what it means to be a part of something outside of oneself that is more important than anything else: a sense of belonging to a group of people. Becker claims to know very little about such a feeling, and says he has not experienced it ("Judentum" 21-22). He claims that in his childhood there was no opportunity to accept or deny Judaism: "Da waren keine Bindungen zu durchtrennen und keine Sitten abzustreifen, und es waren keine Traditionen da, die mich vor die Wahl gestellt hätten, sie zu akzeptieren oder abzulehnen" ("Judentum" 22-23). He admits that in order to become a Jew he himself would have had to take the intiative, because no one showed him how, and on his own he didn't do it: "Ich hätte mich also, um Jude zu werden, schon selbst bemühen müssen. Es gab niemanden, der mich auf einen solchen Weg geschickt hätte, und aus mir selbst heraus habe ich es nicht getan. Ob gut oder schlecht, ich habe es einfach nicht getan" ("Judentum" 23).

Becker's attitude developed from the existential dilemma in which he found himself as a young boy. This dilemma is aptly described by Hannes Krauss, in his article "Sprachspiele—bitterernst" (40). Because Becker was robbed of his identity when his family was forcefully taken from their home

and destroyed, says Krauss, he had to find a new identity in a place to which he had not come of his own free will. Identities forced on him because of the situation in which he found himself (such as orthodox Jew, victim, or object of pity) were not an option. His father rejected them and so consequently did the young Becker. As Krauss says:

> Es blieb ihm, ein Deutscher zu werden. Das hieß, im Lande der Täter deren intellektuelle Merkmale (Sprache, Denktraditionen) sich anzueignen, sich mit Hilfe der Sprache unter die Nachkommen seiner potentiellen Mörder zu mischen. Das genügte, um nicht aufzufallen, konnte aber nicht verwischen, daß entscheidende Phasen der Lebensgeschichten konträr verlaufen waren. Mit derselben Sprache mußte sich Becker deshalb zur Wehr setzen gegen gängige Bewältigungsmuster, vorschnelle Erklärungen, Verdrängungen, aufgezwungene Rollen, Sentimentalitäten und oberflächliche Harmonisierung. (40-41)

As adamantly as Becker professes to be an atheist, Wiebe proclaims his Christianity. In an interview which took place in 1973 when Wiebe gave a reading from the new novel *The Temptations of Big Bear* at the University of Waterloo, he was asked how his identity as a Mennonite and a Christian shaped him and the things he considered writing about. His reply at that time was unapologetic:

> I've always felt pretty strongly about my Christian vocation. I'm a Christian so I write from that viewpoint, there's no point in being apologetic about it. I write as a Christian just as Camus writes as an existentialist. [. . .] To write the kind of stuff that I do you have to write out of yourself, genuinely. You write with

> what you have at hand, with your own beliefs. (Reimer and Steiner 127)

Like Becker, who did not want to be classified as a Jewish writer or as a victim of the Holocaust, Wiebe too fought against being stereotyped as a Christian ("prophetic", "theological") writer, a Mennonite ("minority culture") writer, or a regional writer. In a partly-comic, partly-serious or "mock" interview (Paul Tiessen, "The Naming" 118), the interviewer asks Wiebe to begin by telling him where he was born and where he grew up. Wiebe, in an ironic protest against stereotyping, takes on a different persona. In an elaborate farce, he describes himself as being British, and having made up his Mennonite identity because in Western Canada there's much more point to being ethnic than English. He says to his dumbfounded interviewer:

> Actually, a Canadian writer has an enormous disadvantage in being English, as you perfectly well know, rather than Ukrainian or Greek or Icelandic, or Mennonite. I had the races of the world to choose from and I made a really bad choice; I should have chosen Jewish, which would have given me tremendous literary contacts in ways I can never have as a Mennonite (Mennonites generally don't read and never buy books—at best they borrow them) but really, I'm English. ("Blindman" 322)

Wiebe's argument is absurd because everyone knows he is a Mennonite, but the very absurdity of it forces the reader to see Wiebe without his labels, stripped of his Mennonite identity that mark him as separate.

In the article "On Death and Writing," Wiebe again takes an ironic look at his situation and comes to the conclusion that his position in life is a place that does not foster a rich source of ideas for a writer. He wishes he had the experiences of Alexander Solzhenitsyn in Stalin's Gulag. If only his parents had been sent back to Russia, he laments, he would have had a similar opportunity as Solzhenitsyn. It all comes together for him when he meets one of his cousins who survived fifty years in the Soviet Union, and was allowed to settle in Germany in 1979. His cousin was sentenced to twenty five years of hard labor in Russia, for leading groups in prayer and Bible study, but he reassured Wiebe that he only got four years because Stalin died and Khrushchev came into power. Like the Jewish man Becker remembers from his childhood, who held him in a long embrace and wept over him, so Wiebe is profoundly impacted by this cousin from Russia who cannot let go of him: "And he holds me, laughing and laughing, there is no limit to his happiness at meeting me" (357). Wiebe comes to the realization that

> [t]he poet is parent to his people; the poet makes his people known and recognizable, an acting and speaking manifestation; he begets them, he enfleshes them, yet, he gives birth to them.
>
> [. . .] The true writer writes her people, her place into existence. Out of herself; and in this sense 'birth' is a more natural image than 'inventing.' People and landscapes and historical events do not create poets: it is exactly the reverse. (358)

The secular critics of his first novels accused Wiebe of didactism. His own Mennonite constituency charged him with betrayal, with airing dirty linen in public. *Peace Shall Destroy Many* was the first realistic novel ever

written about Mennonites in Western Canada. Similarly, Becker's novel *Jakob der Lügner* (1969) was the first German novel about the Jews after the Holocaust, written from the perspective of the victim.

Bronsteins Kinder is written from the perspective of Hans, the son of Arno Bronstein, a victim of the Holocaust. Hans is not well informed and can only give glimpses of what he himself has learned about his father's past by piecing together bits and pieces of his life through photographs and occasional comments his father has made. Hans's much older sister Elle is in a mental asylum due to the effects of her separation from her parents during the Holocaust. Hans, an adolescent, lives with his father.

One day Hans discovers his father and two of his father's friends, Gordon Kwart and a man called Rotstein, holding captive a former concentration camp guard by the name of Arnold Heppner. He is shackled to a bed in his father's cottage and is periodically tortured by these men during the course of a whole year. Ironically and tragically for Hans and his girlfriend Martha, this cottage, which has been their sanctuary where they go to make love, has turned into a torture chamber.

Hans's father has also been involved in other, less traumatic illegal activities, such as trading on the black market to meet the expense of keeping Elle in the asylum and having a nurse fired whom Elle doesn't like and whom she falsely accuses of giving her sleeping pills. These dishonest and secret misdeeds are part of the reason why he builds walls around himself and his son. In the end he gives in to despair and depression, neglecting himself and his son. He is discovered by Hans in the same room as his victim, dead from an apparent heart attack.

The action in this novel alternates between an urban setting, that of the city of Berlin, and an isolated cottage in the woods. It takes place thirty

years after World War II. What is fearfully anticipated by the Mennonite community in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* has already taken place in *Bronsteins Kinder*. There is no solid community, only a dysfunctional family ripped apart by the Holocaust and trying to come to terms with repressed feelings built up over the years. These feelings eventually explode and are directed against a former concentration camp guard. This is an act of despair which leads to Arno Bronstein's death.

In Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, the Mennonites live on farms beyond the bush, cut off from the world, with the church as the central gathering point. Wapiti is a closed Mennonite community that could belong to any one of several groups that came to Canada from Russia in the 1920s. After having experienced the Russian Revolution and the resulting chaos and famine that tore their communities apart, these people have formed a new farming community and settled in the Canadian wilderness to once more tame the land the way their forebears did in Russia.

Deacon Block, the leader of the isolated community in Wiebe's novel and father of two children, Elizabeth and Peter, has a secret that haunts him and influences all his actions and emotions. In Russia he killed a man who stole the food Block had illegally and secretly stashed away for his family. Fleeing Russia, he builds up a community that he wishes to shelter from the violence of the outside world. When tragedy happens as a result of his repressive measures on his family and community, he is a broken man. His daughter Elizabeth bears an illegitimate child, and both she and the child die in childbirth. This becomes another secret to be kept from the group. Block threatens to castrate the Métis Louis, assuming Louis raped his daughter. When Louis tells him that Elizabeth asked him for sex, he buys out the whole clan and tells them to leave.

The protagonist of this story, Thom Wiens, who respects and admires Deacon Block, is a witness to the gradual disintegration of Block's family and the community. He in turn must keep secret what has happened in Block's family. The effect this has on him is profound.

In Wiebe's book, the narrator uses Thom as a vehicle to reveal how the community feels and thinks. He does this through conversations he has with the various characters and through the letters he receives from Joseph Dueck, a Mennonite who comes to teach in the isolated community. In Becker's book, Hans plays this role of first-person narrator.

Hans is more fully developed as a character than Thom, and much more complex. This is understandable, given that *Peace Shall Destroy Many* is Wiebe's first attempt at a novel, whereas *Bronsteins Kinder* is written toward the end of Becker's writing career. Hans, as first-person narrator, gives the reader a perspective that comes from inside his head rather than from an omniscient narrator commenting about how he feels, as is the case with Thom. This results in a much more intricate development of the main character. Hans incorporates in one character the different characteristics of Thom, Joseph and Peter in Wiebe's novel. Like Thom, he develops from an unquestioning, accepting boy to a thoughtful, questioning man who objects to what his father (or elder in Thom's case) does when he sees the hypocrisy in his behaviour. He is not radical or rebellious, but his sensitive nature causes him to see the inconsistencies and incongruities in his father's life. These are threatening to him, and like Thom, he reacts to them. Like Joseph, he challenges sacred beliefs and traditions; like Peter, he has a hard time making decisions and likes to procrastinate.

Jurek Becker's novel begins with the announcement of a death. In a very laconic manner, the first-person narrator, Hans, tells his readers the

outcome of the action of the novel they are about to read: "Vor einem Jahr kam mein Vater auf die denkbar schwerste Weise zu Schaden, er starb" (K 7). This is the first of a series of flashbacks, as the chapters alternate between the present and the past, accounting for a year in the life of Hans and the few people who are close to him. The events of that year (between August 1973 and August 1974) are of such magnitude for the protagonist that at the end of it he wishes for the death of all emotion and for the ability to see everything clearly and rationally.

> Das Trauerjahr geht zu Ende. Wenn man mich vor den goldenen Thron riefe und nach dem einen großen Wunsch fragte, brauchte ich nicht lange zu überlegen: Gebt mir das steinerne Herz. Was die anderen mit ihren Gefühlen leisten, würde ich sagen, das möchte ich mit dem Verstand erledigen. In Zukunft kann mir sterben wer will, noch so ein Jahr wird mir nicht mehr passieren. (K 7-8)

Thus begins the story of a year that changes Hans from a young, irresponsible adolescent of 18 to a man who, struggling with depression and guilt, slowly begins to live a more normal life again. The reader is subjected to the difficult task of constantly switching from the present to the past and vice versa, while judging the events from Hans's perspective. Martha's parents, Hugo and Rahel Lepschitz have taken him in after his father's death. He knows that he cannot fulfill their expectations of him and he is incapable of setting any goals for himself.

Wiebe's novel also takes place within the exact time frame of one year, divided into sections of spring, summer, autumn and winter of 1944. Pathetic fallacy is used very effectively; seasons portray events, and as part of nature, they are cyclical. The straight logic used by everyone in the

community to explain things to Thom, the protagonist, is not cyclical and is in stark contrast to the rhythm of nature.

The events of Thom's year are just as horrific as those experienced by Hans in *Bronsteins Kinder*. The work ethic of the patriarchal community in which Thom finds himself clashes with Deacon Block's daughter Elizabeth's cyclical body rhythm and the child within her dies, as she herself dies. Thom, like Hans, is caught in the confines of a small space— here a community that dictates what is right and wrong, who is inside and who is outside, according to a strict code of ethics that is not being followed by many of those who claim to adhere to it.

When asked by Razia, the school teacher and an outsider to the community, "who is a Mennonite?" Thom isn't sure: "Some say only church members are Mennonites, others that we're actually a race of people. Most who are born with Mennonite names but refuse to join the church don't want to be known as Mennonites—guess they feel somehow it commits them" (P 178).

Storytellers like Jurek Becker and Rudy Wiebe hold up a mirror to society with their story telling. It is from stories heard and read that humanity becomes aware of identity, both as individuals and as a society. The negative way of establishing identity is to withhold the story because we are uncomfortable with it and cannot look at ourselves. This creates in us the need to control our environment so that our story does not get out.

The result of this negative way of trying to find ourselves is violence. How the repressed feelings of a victim of violence give rise to certain actions and how the protagonist in each novel deals with the consequences of these actions will be explored in the following section.

Violence and Patriarchal Control: Bronstein and Block

Becker and Wiebe examine the effect of violence on an individual and how that experience then manifests itself in the person, the family, and society as a whole. The victims become the perpetrators in both novels.

The main cause for becoming a perpetrator is that the story has not been told by the victim and therefore cannot be processed by him nor by the society of which he is a part. In an essay called "On Refusing the Story," Wiebe says that "[s]ongs, stories are the memory of a people, the particular individual rivers of the sea of life which constitutes us all. And when you hide that, when you insist the river of your life is [. . .] opaque, you are defying the ancient assertion of that sea" (319).

When telling the story of abuse the victim deals with the violence positively. However, attempting to keep it quiet has a negative effect on the person and the society and often results in control tactics. In a patriarchal manner both Arno Bronstein and Deacon Block position themselves as head of their family and the community, with women and children under their command. Secrecy and deceit play a large part in the control tactics of both Bronstein and Block.

Arno Bronstein has a more subtle way of control than does Block. Hans was already twelve years old and Elle thirty-one when his father finally told him that he had an older sister in a mental institute. Until then, Hans had thought of himself as an only child (K 37). When they at last get to know each other, Hans and Elle form a special bond, as is typical of siblings in an identity crisis (de Levita 72). When the father realizes that Elle prefers her brother's company to his, he goes to visit her alone (K 126).

However, he can't stop Hans from seeing her and he can't stop Elle from writing to her brother. He is disturbed when he discovers that Hans gets letters from her and he doesn't. He reprimands Hans for not sharing them with him, and says they are not his to keep for himself (K 127).

Hans tries to bring as much of the outside world to Elle as possible, but her father tries to keep the outside world away from her, not even buying her a radio (K 195 -196). He is very angry at Hans for sharing with Elle what her father and his friends are doing in the cottage (K 245).

Arno also treats his son, who unlike Elle is perfectly normal, like a child who doesn't know anything. When Hans asks him to explain what they think they are doing with the captive in the cottage, his father mocks him instead of treating him as an equal. Hans asks him to tell what happened from the beginning, and his father mockingly says: "Von Anfang an. [. . .] Von meiner Jugend an vielleicht?" (K 79) Hans conveys his impression of how his father treats him with the following words: "Er sah mich an, als wäre ich ein Kind, dem die Voraussetzungen für eine so schwerwiegende Geschichte fehlen" (K 79).

Arno's attempts to control are evident in small every-day habits as well. He tries to convince his son to eat his boiled eggs just the way he does, and is always surprised when Hans does not comply (K 92). He attempts to control Hans by making him feel guilty about using up the money allotted for their groceries (79-80). He continues to neglect his son, partly because he is distracted by his illegal activity but also as a strategy. If Hans becomes preoccupied by having to fend for himself more, perhaps this will take his attention away from what is going on at the cottage.

When Gordon Kwart takes him and his father out for dinner Hans can only think of food because he hasn't had a warm meal for days (K 187).

His father thinks Hans is too immature to understand what is going on, and resents the fact that Kwart treats Hans as an equal. When Kwart pours wine for Hans, his father takes it away and puts an empty glass in its place (K 183), signifying that he is not yet adult enough to handle his wine.

In contrast to Arno Bronstein, Deacon Block in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* wants to give his children what his father neglected to give him; strong guidance for making life's decisions. This is an admirable goal in itself. However, it also becomes a control issue. The problems begin when Deacon Block blames his father rather than choosing to be accountable for his own actions. His father is faulted for not paying attention to him, not teaching him, i.e., not controlling him, and so it is his father who is to blame that his son committed a crime. Instead of teaching his children to think for themselves and to make their own decisions, Deacon Block believes that he needs to do that for them. He needs to have absolute control in order to make sure the same thing that happened to him doesn't happen to his son.

In Wapiti, the community in which *Peace Shall Destroy Many* takes place, control was a way of life. It had become their culture and their religion:

Once past fifteen and grade eight, girls stayed home with their mothers and took care of the farmyard. They visited their friends on Sunday, when there were fathers or brothers to drive them. When, rarely, work was done, [Thom] himself rode around where he wished, but women were always at home, working, there to return to when one was hungry and cold. (P 41)

Deacon Block explains this way of life to Thom:

> [. . .] [O]ur fathers found the correct way of acting. Through the years, this action has developed into our culture. If we do not follow them in their way, then we stand in grave danger of losing our eternal salvation. That is why we are so rigid about certain matters in the church. The Russians around our villages in Russia had traditional ways of acting too, but when they came to Canada and once knew about acting differently, they let the old way slide because the new way suited better here. But we hold that our actions are eternally important; our fathers found the right moral and spiritual action. Therefore we withdraw from the influence of the outside world and train up our children in seclusion where they can learn the correct way unhindered. (P 203)

Thom challenges this system by asking Deacon Block: "Children must always be told what to believe?" (P 203). It is then that Block reveals to Thom why he is so passionate about firm rules and an authoritative stance. He says to Thom:

> My father was a huge man who did not care what he did, as long as the church elders did not protest. He never told me a single thing of what I should or should not do. As long as I didn't annoy him, I could do as I pleased. That was the trouble with my youth—I was taught no control or moral principles. And that's why when I was bigger—apparently a good upright member of the church—I still did not really know what Christianity and beliefs of our fathers were, even though I thought sincerely I did. Then a terrible thing happened. [. . .]

> There, when in that upheaval my life was changed at last, I resolved that no child of mine should ever be forced through that agony of having acted in spiritual ignorance. (P 203-204)

Arno Bronstein's son Hans, in *Bronsteins Kinder*, has the same complaint about his upbringing as does Deacon Block:

> Der Gedanke, daß ich Vater hätte retten können, wenn ich mich ihm entschiedener in den Weg gestellt hätte, verfolgt mich da schon eher. Dennoch weiß ich nicht einmal heute, wie ich mich damals hätte verhalten sollen, selbst wenn mir klargewesen wäre, was auf dem Spiel stand. Kein Mensch hatte mich gelehrt, Widerstand zu leisten, niemand hatte mir gezeigt, wie man das macht, was man für richtig hält. [. . .] Auch Vater hat nicht eben einen Kämpfer aus mir gemacht. Zwar hat er mich nicht dazu erzogen, den Mund zu halten, mich aber auch nie ermuntert, ihn aufzumachen. Ich glaube, er hat mich überhaupt nicht erzogen, er war nicht interessiert an mir. (K 85-86)

Arno Bronstein's background is not revealed to the readers in the same way as that of Deacon Block, but one reason why he does not show interest in his son Hans is ironically his initial profound need for perpetuation of the species, another way of controlling his environment. All his attention is focused on his first child. When she cannot be healed from her compulsion to attack adults at random and scratch at their faces and their eyes, the Bronsteins decide to have another child, and their son Hans who is nineteen years younger than his sister is born (K 161). The second child was born only because the first child was no longer able to function normally in society. As Bronstein's son Hans observes:

> Manchmal glaube ich sogar, daß die Bemühungen um Elle seine ganze Vaterliebe aufgebraucht haben und daß nur deshalb nichts für mich übriggeblieben ist. Vermutlich hat er seine dunklen Nachkriegsgeschäfte wegen Elle angefangen, er brauchte Beziehungen und Geld, um sie zu all den Ärzten zu schleppen, die ihm als Spezialisten angepriesen worden waren. (K 37)

For Block, it was the son, the one who would carry on the name that was important. "That night as rats scrabbled under the bunks of the snoring men, his son-necessity hammered through him. Little Elizabeth was not enough; she would help form someone else's family. He, the lone survivor of thirteen children, was a mere vacancy without a son" (P 126).

This intense desire to perpetuate themselves causes the fathers to act desperately, to the point where they are willing to go against the law when they feel their offspring's existence is threatened. It was for Elle that Bronstein pursued his black market activities; it was for her that he had a nurse fired under false accusations, simply because Elle wasn't comfortable with her. It was for his son, Peter, that Block illegally hid the food rations, and for him that he killed someone who threatened to take that security away.

Their control was so intensely concentrated on one child, that they neglected the other. Arno Bronstein did not care about Hans with the same loving concern he had for Elle. Deacon Block never realized anything was wrong with Elizabeth until her child was born, even though the two of them worked closely together in the fields every day, ate and slept under the same roof at night and worshiped in the same building on Sunday (P 132).

It was essential to have unity of mind in order to have absolute control. In *Peace Shall Destroy Many* the community's unity of mind is especially evident in corporate worship. Chapter Four opens with Thom at a church meeting. "Singing he felt that everyone in the building stood separate yet united, one body crying with one voice to the one great known worthy of worship" (P 50).

There are certain fundamentals of the faith to which everyone is expected to adhere in this community. This is revealed in a conversation Thom has with Pastor Lepp, in which the pastor carefully outlines what all who are baptized believers should take as a code of ethics for themselves. These fundamentals are as follows: The Bible is God's recorded revelation to man[kind]. It is sacred and must be obeyed. Mennonites must be followers of Christ. They are peculiar in this world and cannot participate in worldly affairs, and must avoid worldly practices. Obedience to Christ's commandment of love and simplicity of life are expected (P 86-88).

In the daily life of the community, unity of mind was achieved in the following way: "The men agreed on all matters, their opinions on any occurrence outside their own community being formed by general surveys of one Mennonite German weekly and by what Deacon Block told them. Block spoke English fluently and his business took him as far as North Battleford" (P 29). Because Block is in absolute control, he can do what he likes, without argument from the others.

In *Bronsteins Kinder*, Bronstein and his two friends Kwart and Rotstein have decided that the society in which they live, is not trustworthy and they are taking the law into their own hands. They look down on the German society and separate themselves from it in the same way that Deacon Block separates himself and his community from the Métis and the

English. They do not have a strong community in the sense that Deacon Block has, but the three of them are in agreement that the society around them does not command their respect (K 80).

Like Deacon Block, who makes all the decisions for his community, Arno Bronstein is the person who makes the decisions about how to handle their captive. He supplies the place—his own fairly secluded cottage in a woodsy area—and hits him the hardest (K 101). Not much is conveyed about Rotstein to the reader (Hans does not know him very well), but Kwart is a musician whom Hans has always seen as a weakling: "Ich kannte ihn als Schwächling: als verlegen, als scheu und linkisch, als Maus von einem Menschen" (134). Hans does admit in retrospect that he underestimated him: "Heute weiß ich, daß ich ihn unterschätzte" (K 134).

It is when Hans decides to meet with Kwart alone that he realizes Kwart is not as weak and indecisive as he always seems to be when he is together with his father: "Ich hatte ihn immer nur in Vaters Gegenwart getroffen; war das der Grund, warum er plötzlich ein anderer geworden war?" (139). When Hans tries to get him to understand that they are endangering themselves by what they are doing, and appeals to him for help, Kwart does nothing except listen politely (K 134-137).

In *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Pastor Lepp, with whom Deacon Block works very closely, is in a similar position as Kwart is to Bronstein. Both men are open minded and humanitarian, but afraid to challenge those stronger than themselves. Like Kwart, Lepp is friendly and polite when Thom approaches him with questions, but refuses to take a stand, and does not want to risk helping him. When Thom asks him to preach a sermon some time on being a Christian witness to the Métis so that he will have some moral support from the community for what he wants to do, Lepp

says: "[A]s leader of the church I can give you little help other than such private advice as I can offer. What you do, you must do on your own" (P 90).

Lifestyle is a very important means of control in the Wapiti community. According to the older men, the poor people living around them are in that condition because of God's judgement on their godless behaviour of never going to church and indulging in worldly pleasures: "The Bible clearly said of the righteous man that 'whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.' The Mennonites surveyed their own growing fields and sleek cattle. When you live decently, do not waste your money and health on tobacco, whisky, dancing, shows, fancy clothes, then prosperity comes" (P 33).

The people in the Mennonite community who do not adhere to this code of ethics are looked down upon and despised. Block tries to help them in his dictatorial way, but even he can't force everyone to be the way he wants them to be. There is Herb Unger, a sloppy, lazy farmer whose cattle get into the Wienses' oat field because Unger doesn't obey the rule made by the community that there should be a double wire around crop-lands, not one wire and a rail at the bottom (P 67, 73). He does not even pretend to be a Christian like the rest of the community. Thom's mother points this out to Thom when he complains about it, and suggests leniency, but Thom is fed up. Much to Thom's disgust, instead of challenging Unger, the older Wiens goes to Deacon Block with his complaint. The Deacon also suggests to "go carefully" because Unger is "far from the church" (P 73). So, rather than going directly to Herb on his own, Wiens goes with Block to talk to Herb's father, who confesses that he does not know how to handle his son. Resentfully Herb acknowledges their presence, mumbling that he is old enough to run his own place. Deacon Block reminds him: "If you're old enough to run your own place, you obey the rules of the community" (P 77).

He then advances him the money for the wiring of the fence and gives him some other suggestions about how to improve the farm which has been completely neglected (P 78).

The secrets, which both Arno Bronstein and Deacon Block are afraid to divulge to their family and community because they fear that the false identity they have portrayed will be shattered and they will be exposed, are one reason for maintaining absolute control. As the secrets begin to leak out, and their hypocrisy is exposed to their children and to the adolescents they mentor, confusion results in the minds of those who look up to them for leadership. It is exactly this confusion which they have tried so hard to prevent, a weakness they recognize in themselves and deny.

One method of keeping this confusion at bay and maintaining absolute control over identity is to declare oneself as part of a group that is ascribed dominance, when one belongs to a group that is labeled inferior by the dominant group. Arno Bronstein decided to identify with Germans, to become assimilated to the point of denying his Jewishness. Another method is to define oneself and one's group as dominant over and superior to others, which Deacon Block has done. Both of these artificial means of identity broke down.

In Chapter Two of *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, Wiebe gives the reader an insight into two communities, that of the Mennonite community and that of the Métis, as seen through Thom's eyes. The only time the two groups meet is at the annual school picnic. Wiebe writes: "Only a few Mennonites ever neared the Moosomin homestead, and they never went inside the four-walled shack or knew the mixture of common-law wives and husbands and children that were crammed there. Breeds lived as they lived: they were part of unchangeable Canada for the Mennonites" (P 31).

Peter and Thom, after one of Thom's Bible lessons with the Métis children, have a discussion about this. Peter says: "Thom, our people could not accept a half-breed into our church. Can you honestly imagine such a thing?" Thom cannot imagine it (P 195). Some time later, in a long discussion he has with Thom about his Bible lessons with the Métis children, Deacon Block asks Thom the same question: "But to have breeds members of our church? Can you imagine it? They're not the stuff" (P 205). He dismisses them as "culturally and morally backward" and exonerates his people, the Mennonites as having "found the correct way of acting" (P 203).

By keeping the group secluded Deacon Block believes that he will keep them from immorality. He feels that he himself, had he been held more accountable by his father, would not have committed the crime of killing the Russian thief. The deacon's logic falls apart, when he realizes that his strict control tactics did nothing to protect his daughter but brought about her death (204). It also did not keep his son from being sexually attracted to the outsider, the Canadian school teacher Razia who joined the community when the former instructor, Joseph left (P 123, 235).

Beyond these two communities is the world out there, "the poor white stuff that clung along the edges of Beaver district" (P 32), and the world beyond that, exemplified by the airplanes overhead that caused the cattle to stampede and lose the calves they were carrying (P 22). Years ago they had bought out all the English so that they could have a district of Mennonites. Now there were only four breed families left, and war prices had almost cleared them of their debt (P 20-21).

Deacon Block is in a quandary. He wants the community to be aware of the outside world, so that they won't be ignorant, but he also wants to keep them in seclusion. "If the children could be taught just enough to

know about the world's evil, they would be happy to remain in their seclusion. [. . .] A teacher was needed who knew the way of the world and yet adhered strictly to the Christian principles of the fathers" (P 70). Joseph Dueck, although Mennonite, was too liberal in his teaching, taught the young people to question what the elders were doing, and was a threat to Block. The next teacher, Razia Tantamount, was not even a Mennonite; Mennonite teachers were scarce because of the war: some were at the camps, some had denied their pacifist position and gone to war (124). Among those who have gone to war is a young man from Block's own community, Hank Unger, the brother of Herb, who distracts everyone at the most important social event of the year, the school Christmas program, by showing up unannounced in his military garb (P 222-223).

The marriage of Herman Paetkau, a Mennonite, to Madelein Moosomin, a half-breed, is seen as a threat to the group. Herman himself is treated as an outsider by Block, because even though he has grown up among Mennonites he is the child of a Mennonite farmer's daughter and a Russian farm hand. His mother died in childbirth and Herman was given to the older married sister and her husband. Herman had asked for Elizabeth's hand in marriage and was refused by Block because he was a "bastard." Herb's mother's story is a foreshadowing of Elizabeth's story later on (P 114).

Deacon Block's worst nightmare comes true when he finds out that Elizabeth is pregnant through the Métis, Louis, whom he himself had hired as a farmhand. At Elizabeth's funeral he decides that he must get rid of those "breeds" at the edge of the Mennonite community, no matter what the cost. That way they can destroy themselves without involving others (P 153-154).

It becomes quite obvious that the control Arno Bronstein and Deacon Block have struggled to maintain is on a downward spiral. Their suppressed feelings, a result of dealing with the violence they themselves experienced, are no longer containable and demand an outlet. They helplessly repeat the violence submerged in their subconscious until now.

Attempts to Regain Control Through Repeating Past Violence

In this section it will be shown that, when people have lost their sense of identity through violence they have experienced but have suppressed their feelings, these seemingly normal people suddenly behave in a way that seems to be totally out of character for them. Wartime experiences in which they were the outsiders deliberately marked to be hunted down, tortured and killed, often by the community of which they were a part, have left them twisted inside. Like the people who persecuted them, these victims/perpetrators are not rational, even though they carry out their violence in a cold and calculated manner. For years after the war they have shown to the outside world a tranquil exterior that is not part of who they are inside. Desperately trying to regain control while feeling totally out of control, they resort to the same violence they themselves experienced. This shocks the people who have known them but with whom they have not shared their volatile past.

When Hans inadverdently stumbles into the cottage and finds there a torture chamber instead of the love chamber he is used to occupying with his girlfriend, Martha, he verbalizes what is also evident in Deacon Block's behaviour and reactions that seem so out of character to Thom: "Ich hatte geglaubt, nach dreißig Jahren könnten sie wie normale Menschen leben,

und plötzlich dieses Zimmer; als hätten sie drei Jahrzehnte lang nur auf eine solche Gelegenheit gewartet. Als hätten sie, wenn sie sich scheinbar normal verhielten, nur eine Maske getragen" (K 27).

Hans does not know what his father and the other two men, who were torturing the former prison guard in order to press a confession of wartime atrocities out of him, had experienced during the war, because his father has never spoken of these things. He notices however that his father is uncharacteristically violent toward the man he holds captive in his cottage. In a conversation with Hans, Arnold Heppner, the captive, says: "Tut mir leid, Ihnen das sagen zu müssen: Ihr Herr Vater ist der Schlimmste." Hans replies: "Er schlägt Sie als einziger?" Heppner responds unemotionally: "Das nicht, aber am meisten und am härtesten" (K 101).

Deacon Block's first experience as an outsider and a victim of violence, introduced about half way through the novel as a memory Block has while bindering the last of his green-feed, was in the forests of Siberia where he had been sent as a conscientious objector in World War I. Ironically, the perpetrators are Mennonites who subject him to an initiation rite "in a desperate attempt at amusement during month-long isolation" (P 125). Their first attempt at torture is to pick him up at night while he is asleep and drop him into a horse-trough of ice cold water. Since he refuses to amuse them by reacting to this humiliation, but returns to his bunk bed for the rest of the night, they devise another method of torture. They force him to kneel before a tree stump blindfolded, then count to five and swing a razor-sharp axe down onto his head, cutting his hair just to the hair line of his scalp.

Block survives this close brush with death and manages to walk away from them with an air of nonchalance. However, at night he is overwhelmed

by a sense of his mortality: "If that unerring axe had slipped—the answer was the first in his life he could not face. And for the three unending years of Forstei duty, he knew himself clamped in the relentless fist of God" (P126-127).

Block returns home to face a civil war, and again he is earmarked an outsider and is victimized. The Mennonite group to which he and his family belong is targeted by both the Red and the White army who appropriate their horses, stock and wagons. Added to this is the famine of 1921. Block has a daughter, but finally, after seven years, his wife bears a son. This happens during the famine, and Block's obsession is to have enough food so that his son can survive. All villagers are required to surrender a certain amount of food to the government. Block gives the barest necessity, then slaughters a cow, salts the meat and puts it away in a hiding place, not caring that the others will have to make up his deficit.

On the day he discovers his cache stolen, rage wells up inside him. He and the protective association leader of the village discover the two Russian thieves (Bashkirs) in a deserted barn and beat them with ropes until they confess that another Mennonite showed them the hiding place: "After the man gasped out that John Esau had told them of prospects in turn for a share of the booty, they beat the boy. Names of Bashkirs came as the night ebbed. When morning dawned they left the senseless thieves roped rigid in the barn and marched to Esau's yard" (P 130). Block then beats Esau (a father of fourteen children) into a confession at the colony administrative centre and goes to his sleigh to drive the two Bashkirs to the Russian authorities. When the older of the two Bashkirs tries to escape, Block's rage gets the better of him and he beats him to death:

> He had lashed the thieves with ropes, as was the judicial custom, but now he sprang at the man, seized him away with a strength that knew no source save madness, and smashed the crook-nosed head back and forth, his frozen hide mitten like a club on his hand. The Bashkir collapsed to the hard snow with barely a moan when Block hurled him back. [. . .] With his worn boot, Block poked at him. He was dead. (P 131)

Esau, who is imprisoned for his deed, dies of starvation in prison. Block's act of murder turns him into a man "driven by furies" (P 131). It drives him to leave Russia and establish a Mennonite colony in Wapiti: "To have a colony of true Mennonites again! In the last stragglers to escape Moscow, he found the people he wanted: poor, but with the convictions of faith on their conscience" (P 132).

Although Block himself knew what it was like to be an outsider in a group (first by the actions of others done to him, and then by the acts he himself committed against the community) he does not allow outsiders into his community except on his own terms (P 153, 204). When these terms are not met, he drives them away, forcefully. He almost commits another violent act when he finds out it was Louis who got Elizabeth pregnant, but when he discovers it was she who asked for sex, he tells Louis to leave the community without harming him physically (P 184-185).

When Hans witnesses the violence at the cottage, he is horrified by it. He never expected his father to act like that and he is left with a shattered identity. He cannot bring himself to tell Martha about it, even though he loves her. Instead, because his feelings have not been shared with anyone and have built up inside, he becomes violent, just like his father. This is illustrated by what happens at the swimming pool shortly after Hans's first

encounter with the prison guard and his father and friends at the cottage. When Norbert, a German boy with an inferiority complex (he is small and pimpled), decides to be self-important by being legalistic, and points to a sign that says bathing suits are to be removed when showering, Hans ignores not only the words on the sign, but Norbert's words as well. When Norbert becomes insistent, Hans punches him. Hans explains: "Plötzlich hatte ich das Empfinden, daß er ein Schuldiger war: einer von denen, die gern peinigen und nur dann Ruhe geben, wenn sie an einen Stärkeren geraten. Ich weiß noch, daß ich überlegte, ob ich ihn unten oder oben treffen sollte. Er sagte herausfordernd: 'Du, ich rede mit dir'" (K 42).

The normally nonviolent Hans cannot understand why he was so provoked that he became violent. He wonders if he has developed the same illness as his sister: "Wodurch war ich in einen Zustand geraten, in dem es einem gewöhnlichen Kläffer gelang, mich um die Beherrschung zu bringen? Der Gedanke, es könnte sich um ein Symptom desselben Leidens handeln, das bei meiner Schwester schon weit fortgeschritten war, beun-ruhigte mich ziemlich" (K 44). It is beginning to dawn on him that the person who is violated easily becomes a perpetrator, often without realizing it.

Thom Wiens in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* also feels himself becoming violent and is surprised by it. Herb Unger has bugged him throughout the picnic and at the ball game, when Herb illegally interferes by nipping his bat with his glove, Thom explodes. If Joseph had not grabbed him and made him drop the bat he would have swung it at Herb with all his might. "He stiffened, aghast at what he had already committed in his mind and the flashing joy of that committal. He could have sunk with gladness beyond earth into oblivion. But he had to stand there, before them all" (P 36).

Thom's close brush with violence becomes a reality at the school Christmas program toward the end of the novel. Razia the school teacher has left the church and gone to the barn with Hank Unger, where Peter catches them in an embrace. Jealous and enraged, Peter hits Hank, then is in turn attacked by Hank's brother Herb. Thom attacks Herb, and there is a full-blown violent fistfight in this pacifist community. The second generation of survivors of the horrors of war act out the feelings of the community, feelings that have been lying dormant but smoldering for too long in a false expression of pacifism. Suppressed emotions erupt into violence. Ironically, this happens on a night when "peace on earth" is celebrated by the community as they remember the birth of one who came to bring them that peace.

Hans and Thom are children of fathers who suppressed the stories of the violence they experienced. Not only those who have been victimized directly but also the children, helplessly frustrated by the inconsistencies they see in their elders, resort to violence in an effort to regain control in their lives.

Feeling of Identity Undermined: The Sons Hans and Thom

At the beginning of each novel the protagonists Hans and Thom feel secure in their environment, their feeling of identity intact: Hans in his school environment feels German and Thom feels that he belongs to, and is a part of his Mennonite community. In the following section it will become evident how this feeling of belonging is shattered.

Both Hans and Thom go through a year of trial and error in which they question both the rules and the lack of rules set by their elders and their community. It is a year of horrific events that leave them emotionally

drained and reeling, as things they have taken for granted in their family and their community begin to unravel. The people with whom they have identified strongly and very closely (for Hans it is his own father, for Thom it is Deacon Block, his spiritual father), suddenly prove to be less than desirable role models and behave in a very uncharacteristic and unpredictable way. This causes anxiety and turmoil in which all relationships come into question for them.

Hans is a normal teenager who doesn't care much about anything except himself and his girlfriend Martha. They are happy and secure in their relationship. He and Martha especially enjoy going to his father's comfortable cottage in the woods where they make love (K14). This is something Hans does without his father's knowledge, having secretly duplicated his father's key to the cottage.

When Hans discovers his father and his friends torturing a former Nazi guard at the cottage, his world turns upside down. He challenges his father about the fact that they are acting against the law, and tries to get him to listen. His father is so shocked at Hans's discovery that he becomes alternately violent, then loving. He grabs Hans by the collar, tearing the button on his shirt, then pushes him against the wall. He then takes him in his arms and hugs him, whispering his name. When he loosens his embrace, he is angry again (K 22).

Obviously he is in turmoil, knowing that everything will be much more complicated now that his son is involved. He is right. It is the last time Hans will feel his father's arms embracing him. Their relationship is profoundly affected because Hans cannot agree with his father's actions. He has no desire to be involved in his father's illegal activities and is helpless about what to do. This time, his father has not been able to hide the truth

from Hans. Acting outside the existing law, a law that is sympathetic toward victims of war, his father has deliberately placed himself outside the community in which he lives.

Hans begins to feel intentionally undermined and mistreated by his father. As a defense mechanism and as a way of distracting him from the real issues, his father mocks him and treats him like a silly child who doesn't know what he is talking about. Hans feels ridiculed, insecure and inferior. He cannot have a conversation with his father without being constantly interrupted and treated with sarcasm and irony (K 130). His father is derisive and impatient, often mocking him, and seldom taking what he says seriously (K 129-131). Hans feels humiliated by his father's remarks in front of Kwart, while they are having dinner in a restaurant. His father says to him: "Ich will dir die Wahrheit sagen: Gordon ist der Ansicht, wir sollten mit dir reden, damit du uns besser verstehst. Ich bin nicht dieser Ansicht. Erstens glaube ich nicht, daß du etwas verstehst, zweitens ist es mir egal. Aber wenn er darauf besteht, dann bitte. Rede, ich höre zu" (K 184).

The one time that his father is willing to have a serious conversation with him Hans cannot finish a sentence, and his father humiliates him by waiting for a long time, then asking him to please stop giving him advice, indicating that he doesn't know what he's talking about anyhow. Hans says: "Nie wieder wollte ich so blind in eine Diskussion mit Vater hineintaumeln, ohne Argument, ohne Aussicht auf Erfolg" (K 82).

Violence can be committed with words as well as with action, as Hans, who has been a victim of his father's sharp barbs, realizes. His father has put him in his place many times through sarcasm and belittling. Hans

turns around and tries to use his father's method with words to put a rift between Gordon Kwart and his father. He says:

> Aus meinen Gesprächen mit Vater während der letzten Tage klaubte ich diejenigen Sätze und Floskeln zusammen, die mir am ehesten geeignet schienen, die Entführung in ein schiefes Licht zu rücken. Ich weiß, daß mir kein einziger neuer Gesichtspunkt einfiel. Trotzdem hielt ich den Versuch, einen Keil zwischen die Entführer zu treiben, nicht für aussichtslos; es war denkbar, daß irgendeins meiner Worte, die von Vater abgeprallt waren, den schwachen Gordon treffen würde. (K 134)

Hans is not successful in his verbal sparring with Kwart: "Heute weiß ich, daß ich ihn unterschätzte," he says in retrospect (K 134). Kwart interrupts and patronizes him. When he catches him giving out some information Hans learned from the prisoner, Hans gives up: "Auf einmal war er der Starke und ich der Schwache, was hatte ich falsch gemacht?" (K 135).

Hans's conversation ends with Kwart giving him the advice to think about with whom it is he identifies: "Und wenn ich dir einen Rat geben darf: Du solltest überlegen, zu wem du gehörst. Wenn du das beantworten kannst, erübrigen sich viele Fragen" (K 139).

Kwart, without realizing it, has put his finger on Hans's dilemma. Hans suddenly does not know with whom he identifies. His father and Kwart have been the closest people in his life until now. Hans can no longer agree with their actions. For Kwart the answer is simple. If Hans identifies with him and his father, he doesn't need to ask questions about their illegal activity. He will at least be quiet and accept their activity if not participate in it. Kwart and Hans's father make no attempt to understand that Hans is

a generation removed from the ones who experienced the Holocaust directly and therefore does not share their feelings and emotions.

In *Peace Shall Destroy Many* it is the young man Thom Wiens who begins to doubt the wisdom or practicality of what his community so strongly endorses: pacifism at all times. Until now he has felt secure and at peace in his religious environment. Earlier in the novel, at the beginning of the church meeting in which Joseph is chastised, one of Thom's most poignant childhood memories comes to him: that of the building of the church when he was six years old, and the words of the blacksmith that this church will last because it is built on the Rock. Thom finds solidarity and comfort in the fact that Wapiti Church belongs to a larger body of fifteen thousand members called the Canadian Conference. His church only has fifty-six members and he has never been to a larger gathering. He recalls sacred events that took place in the church, such as his brother's ordination for missionary service, and, as an adolescent, his own baptism and consequent membership and first communion (P 50-53). "Singing he felt that everyone in the building stood separate yet united, one body crying with one voice to the one great known worthy of worship" (P 50).

In spite of his mother's calm assurance about the sovereignty of God in all the happenings of the community, Thom is now racked by doubts:

> His reason told him this should not affect him so, but as remembered details fitted into the design only too smoothly, he could not deny that something had crashed within him. In the past six months he had questioned [Block's] almost [. . .] every act: surely his own Christian faith should not now be affected. But the one log that held the jam had been jarred and he could

> sense within him only the numb void that remained after the rush had vanished. (P 219)

The sense of trust Thom has in his community has been badly shaken by the recent events in his life. Like his friend Joseph, the young Mennonite teacher from outside the Wapiti community, he must now begin to think for himself, to formulate his own truths in light of what has happened. It is especially poignant now because there is a war going on and Thom is of conscription age:

> Lying there, he felt doubts settle in his mind like mud in the hollows of the spring-soaked land. [. . .] If only there were enough trees and hills and rocks [. . .] to hide us from a Hitler who has tasted power [. . .]. But once a man has tasted power, you cannot pen up or dispose of him like a blooded boar, and he the greater danger. And Thom felt the persistent, recurring prick: sometimes you think you should help try, anyway. (P 13)

Just as is the case with Hans, discussion plays a great role for Thom in trying to come to terms with his confusion. However, in contrast to the undermining, belittling, and sarcasm experienced by Hans, the discussions in the Mennonite community are of a serious, intense, and often didactic nature.

When Thom tries explaining the principle of nonresistance to his little brother Hal, whose persistent questions about the war give him no peace, he ends up being frustrated with his own answers. Hal's innocent question about someone in their own community who has joined the military does not help him. Hal asks: "Does Hank Unger fly a plane to kill people so we won't be hurt and killed?" (P 16)

Thom's doubts have been triggered by Joseph. Their long conversations on Sunday afternoons have given Thom much to think about (P 17). When he sees the war planes flying overhead and how they scare the cattle, he vows that he is of one mind with the community and will go to court if necessary to state his convictions (P 22). However, at the church picnic he realizes that outwardly the group adheres to the principle of pacifism, but within the community the people are not acting like pacifists, he himself included. He gets very angry with Herb Unger over his taunting about who won the canoe race, who caught the most fish and the cheating at the ball game (P 23-39).

The debate over the use of language, also triggered by Joseph, has caused Thom to ponder something he took for granted in the past. In the Mennonite community of Wapiti, it is very important to use the right language for the appropriate occasion. It is the German language that keeps the people separated and isolated from the English-speaking world around them, but in the community itself there are three languages in constant use: "High German was always used when speaking of religious matters and as a gesture of politeness towards strangers; a Low German dialect was spoken in the mundane matters of everyday living; the young people spoke English almost exclusively among themselves. Thought and tongue slipped unhesitantly from one language to the other" (P 20).

Joseph breaks the rules by speaking English at an occasion that should have required the use of High German since it was a church function. Joseph chose English because he wanted everyone to understand what he was saying and there were people there from both districts, some of them non Mennonites and Indian. His inclusiveness and his audacity to use English without asking for permission angers Deacon Block and Joseph is

taken to task at a church meeting. When reprimanded he defends himself and points out the inconsistencies and hypocrisies of the community (P 55-58). He is reminded that he has left out the older people of the community who cannot speak or understand English. Deacon Block says to him: "If we are to have a witness in the land we must remain firm in the ways of our fathers! You young people will ruin the work that God has given us if you neglect the teachings of your elders" (P 59).

It begins to dawn on Thom that it is not "the witness in the land" about which Deacon Block is so concerned, but rather about the fact that he will no longer be in control to make sure things go the way he wants them to. He actually hinders "having a witness" by insisting that only German be used, because then no one "out there" can understand them and will not be attracted to them.

Later in a conversation, Thom asks Pastor Lepp,"Then how, for example," confident of his direction now, "are we acting particularly as Christ's disciples by using only German in our church services?" In his answer Pastor Lepp manages to evade the issue by emphasizing obedience to authority as more important than witnessing to the community: "Obedience to authority goes against our human nature sometimes, but godly behaviour is always difficult. Discipline and restraint can only strengthen our spiritual convictions, even though the things we wish to do may not be terribly wrong in themselves" (P 87-88).

Joseph challenges not only the community's exclusive use of the German language, but also the fact that they do not genuinely adhere to the cornerstone of their faith, their belief in pacifism. He points out that it is easy to claim pacifism as love for your fellow men when it means not going

into active military service, but not so easy to show that love to the outsiders of their community who live right around them (P 58-63).

Joseph has a Bible class with the Métis families on the edge of the Mennonite community and gives it over to Thom when he leaves (P 69). This activity does not really meet with the approval of the Mennonite community. They give lip service to mission efforts: they approve of the work Thom's brother is doing in India but do not tolerate this kind of undertaking so close to home because it is a threat to them. Through Joseph Thom is made aware of the inconsistencies in the community when it comes to living out basic beliefs.

There are many discussions between Thom and Deacon Block's son Peter in which Peter defends his father's and the community's way of life, and Thom has a different perspective. The work ethic of the Mennonite community is outlined for the reader in a conversation between Thom and Peter. Thom ponders it later: "Hacking a farm out of the wilderness demanded women strong as men, but once comparative security was reached—in work where did virtue end and cupidity begin? He could not remember anyone ever having shown him the line: it was never even mentioned" (P 81-82).

In another conversation in which Peter tries to convince Thom about the futility of his Bible lessons to the Indian community, the issue of language as well as life style is raised. Peter says: "They can't join our church. [. . .] They don't live like us. You were in that cabin all afternoon—and she had even tried to clean up a bit. They're like—and they speak Cree and English. You know they could never become members of our Mennonite Church. Look what happened to Herman. They're just not like us" (194). When Peter says these things about the Métis he is simply echoing what his

father so strongly believes and has verbalized to Thom in a long discussion he has with him (P 201-206).

Joseph, who came in as an outsider and left the community again to go out into the world to help in relief work, re-enters Thom's closed world through the letters he writes to him after he leaves. These letters are very precious to Thom and he reads them over and over. They are more like sermons than letters. As Joseph says at one point: "But I must stop preaching!" (P 162). Through these letters speaks the young theologian/ author Wiebe, in a rather preachy, didactic way, that can be tiresome to the reader, but is a means of giving Thom some insight he needs to help him formulate his own path to independence and self-identity.

Because his father had ignored his Jewish identity all of his life, Hans's shock is greater than Thom's and his journey toward coming to terms with his identity more arduous. Hans's father was an assimilated Jew when the war broke out, forced to accept his Jewish identity by those who wanted him to be an outsider. Even after the war he denies that there is such a thing as an authentic Jew. Hans says: "Eine Theorie meines Vaters, die ich bei verschiedenen Gelegenheiten gehört hatte, lautete: Es gebe überhaupt keine Juden. Juden seien eine Erfindung, ob eine gute oder eine schlechte, darüber lasse sich streiten, jedenfalls eine erfolgreiche" (K 48). If this is a serious statement on Arno Bronstein's part, he is as pathological as his daughter. If it is meant ironically, it is not something he should be saying to his son who would not catch the irony but become confused about his own identity. Why should he identify with a race of people his father doesn't even deem worthy of existence? Until now Hans's identity has been that of a German and he has felt secure. Suddenly his father, who has been

in total denial about his Jewishness begins to act and talk like a Jew. This is enormously threatening to Hans.

When Hans encounters his father and his father's accomplices speaking Yiddish to each other in his father's bedroom, he feels the rift between himself and his father more than ever, and he feels betrayed. His father had never indicated to him that he knew this language, he had never heard him speak it before: "Es war unfaßbar, daß Vater sich in dieser Sprache verständigen konnte, ich wollte glauben, dort säße ein Fremder mit Vaters Stimme. Er hatte es bisher nicht nur vermieden, in meiner Gegenwart Jiddisch zu sprechen, er hatte auch nie angedeutet, daß er dazu imstande war" (K 221).

After intense concentration Hans finds that he is able to understand most of what his father and his friends are saying, but when he realizes that they are not speaking of the event at the cottage, but of the suffering they have experienced at the hands of the Nazis, he makes a decision not to listen any more. That topic does not interest him. He does not want to know something that might justify his father's illegal untertaking in his eyes (K 223). He only wants to know how to stop it.

Hans, like his father, is not willing to change from his position. He feels himself to be German not Jewish, and anything that threatens that position, must be vehemently denied: "Auch im Bett waren die Stimmen zu hören, die unglückseligen Stimmen, nach Vater Kwart, dann Rotstein, dann wieder Vater, ein Potpourri der Leiden. Ich schlief ein, doch nicht versehentlich: ich entschied mich für die bessere Möglichkeit" (K 223).

Because his father has denied his Jewishness to the extent of making a declaration that it doesn't exist, Hans has accepted this stance and identifies himself as German. There was a time in his childhood when Hans

was interested in his father's story and had asked him to come to school and share it with his classmates, but his father denied his request (K 18). Like Deacon Block, he doesn't speak of the past. Whatever Hans knows of it, he has learned through observation and by piecing together things his father has said. He has come to the conclusion that his father was very well off at one point in his life, just after the war. The evidence lies in the cottage he bought and in the expensive renovations that went into it. Apparently his father made his money as a dealer on the black market, illegally smuggling wares such as steel from West to East (K 17-18).

Hans does not even know that the word "Neuengamme" is the name of the concentration camp in which his father had been held: "Am Nachmittag hatte ich zwar behauptet zu wissen, was Neuengamme bedeutet, doch nun, in der Nacht, merkte ich, daß es kaum mehr als ein böses Wort für mich war" (K 32). He has to go to an encyclopedia to find out the information he wants to know about the concentration camp. He does this furtively, quickly turning off the light when his father comes in (K 32). Intuitively he knows that he cannot speak of these things with his father.

When Hans asks his father why they are committing the lawless act of capturing a German citizen and torturing him to extract a confession from him of wartime atrocities his father has an explanation that shocks Hans:

> [. . .] [D]ann folgte eine haarsträubende Erklärung: daß er und Gordon Kwart und Rotstein sich darin einig seien, in einem minderwertigen Land zu leben, umgeben von würdelosen Menschen, die ein besseres nicht verdienten. [. . .] Wer stark genug sei, könne diesem deutschen Gesindel seine Überzeugungen diktieren, ob er nun Hitler oder sonstwie heiße.

> Darum hätten sie beschlossen, die Sache selbst in die Hand zu nehmen. Wenn es ein Gericht gäbe, das von ihnen anerkannt würde, wären sie nie auf eine solche Idee gekommen. (K 80)

In retrospect, Hans thinks about this conversation often, and wonders how exaggerated his father's perceptions were. He doesn't have an answer for himself, admits that he has no means of comparing his society with another, since he has never been past the border of his own country. He also doesn't know many people with whom he can talk about this and draw a conclusion from their input (K 83-84). Like Thom he lacks experience with the outside world, even though he lives in a city. More than that, he lacks what Thom has and what Deacon Block strove so hard to provide for his son—the solidarity of a community. That solidarity, however, became highly questionable in the light of the events that took place.

There is a very significant scene in which it becomes clear to the reader that Hans is experiencing an identity crisis, even as his father gradually deteriorates and loses the control he tried so rigorously to maintain. One day Hans arrives at home to find the house looking as if two old men live in it who don't know how to take care of anything any more. The mess in the house is symbolic of the state of confusion in which both father and son find themselves. There is no longer any order in their lives because the father has become a stranger to himself and to his son. Identity diffusion is illustrated by what Hans does during a desperate attempt to clean up the mess left in the house by both of them. When he is finished with the clean up he is extremely hungry and angry with his father. Fuming in his room, he verbalizes what is a key concept in the novel, that of the victim/perpetrator symbiosis: "Wie ein gefangener Marder lief ich in meinem Zimmer herum und legte mir wüste Sätze für Vater zurecht. *Du verwechselst*

mich mit deinem Nazi, warum sonst gibst du mir nichts zu essen? Oder: *Glaubst du, jeder Jude sollte wenigstens einmal im Leben anständig hungern?"* (K 243).

With these words Hans expresses his own confusion of identity resulting from his father's unexpected and uncharacteristic actions. Is he German or is he Jewish? What does his father think he is? From this confusion arises a plan in which he takes a photo out of Heppner's briefcase and puts it together with his father's family photos. He comments: "Noch heute weiß ich nicht, ob ich eine Spur legen wollte, die meine Mitwisserschaft bezeugte, oder ob ich einfach den Verstand verloren hatte" (K 243).

Hans understands the feelings of hatred his father and his friends have toward the former guard; this man tries to justify his actions by claiming that different laws existed during the war years. However, Hans questions why they must act outside the current legal system: "Aber sie nahmen sich ein Recht heraus, das niemandem zusteht, selbst ihnen nicht. Und wenn er hundertmal mein Vater war: ich konnte doch nicht für richtig halten, daß ehemalige Opfer sich ihre ehemaligen Peiniger griffen" (K 33).

It is ironic that when he beats up the German boy Norbert at the swimming pool, Hans, confused by the identity crisis his father has passed on to him, acts out the very thing for which he condemns his father. He is enormously threatened by the fact that Norbert thinks that he did not want to take off his swimming trunks to shower because he was circumcised and didn't want to admit his Jewishness. Hans is not circumcised, and wishes he had a chance to explain that to his teacher and Norbert. He would rather they think of him as a nasty German boy who hits people on a whim than to feel sorry for him because he is Jewish and a Nazi victim (K 48-49).

Later, in an argument with Lepschitz about designating the fact that he is a Holocaust victim on his university application, he remembers how much his father hated being treated as a victim, and how angry he was about it. He considered it a humiliation, not something to be proud of (K 52-53).

Although he is grateful to the Lepschitzes for taking him in after his father's death, he gets annoyed by the habits they have that portray their Jewishness, such as the fact that Herr Lepschitz eats Matze every evening, and that there is actually a store that doesn't sell oranges, beef or tomatoes, but it sells Matze for Hugo Lepschitz (K 9).

Hans is angry that Martha accepts a part in a film in which she is portrayed as a Jewish victim, but doesn't have the courage to tell her so: "Während einer Fahrt, deren Ziel es doch war, uns in Ruhe zu umarmen, konnte ich Martha nicht die Wahrheit sagen: daß ich es bitter fand, eine jüdische Abstammung oder ein jüdisches Gesicht zu Geld zu machen" (K 213).

His disapproval of her participation in the film is not the only thing Hans keeps from her. He has obviously learned to repeat his father's habit of keeping things to himself. Feeling that their intimacy will be threatened, and not knowing how to broach the subject, he has never shared with her what is going on at the cottage between the former prison guard and his father and his friends. Suppressing the story has a much more detrimental effect on the relationship than if he had shared it. He begins to lie to her when she notices things are not as they should be and they become estranged from each other (K 30-31). Their loving relationship, something Hans considered of utmost importance in his life before he discovered his

father's illegal activity at the cottage, and something that indicates an intact identity, deteriorates until they barely tolerate each other.

Even though he left Martha in the dark about an affair that consumes every aspect of his being, he resents the fact that she goes out and makes a life for herself by beginning an acting career. He doesn't like the influence of that outside world on her at all, and would like to keep her the way she was before: "Mit rasender Geschwindigkeit verlor sie eine schöne Eigenschaft nach der anderen. Sie benutzte fremde Wörter, sie warf mit fremden Blicken um sich, sie las andere Bücher, sie nahm Lidschatten aus dem Westen. Und von einem auf den anderen Tag trug sie keine Röcke mehr, sondern ausschließlich Hosen" (K 15).

When comparing the relationship each of the protagonists has with the opposite sex, it becomes very clear that Hans's identity has been threatened to a greater extent than Thom's, although both struggle with very significant issues. Thom's relationship with Annamarie, Pastor Lepp's daughter, is not of the same intensity as Hans's relationship with Martha Lepschitz. The reader is first introduced to Annamarie at the school picnic. Thom notices her among the other girls, and to him she seemed different, "[s]he looked at peace" (P 32). Unlike Hans and Martha, who have progressed to a physical relationship, their relationship is still in its beginning stages. However, the reader senses that this relationship is an attraction not based on the physical but on the spiritual. It is not the shape of her nose or eyes that Thom remembers, but rather the expression on her face, the inner quality of her being: "He did not seem to see what she looked like, rather he saw her, and he abruptly felt a lifetime would not be long enough to forget" (P 32).

When Thom takes Annamarie home from the picnic, it is she who suggests going to see the Wapiti River at night in the moonlight. For her to go see it on her own, as Joseph had suggested to her at one time, was more than a Mennonite girl would be allowed to do. It was incomprehensible to them both that they had never seen such a beautiful sight as the Wapiti River under the moonlight when they lived only three miles from it. A suggestion that the community in which they find themselves is restrictive, comes with the question they ask themselves: "[W]hat else had they missed and were they missing at this moment?" (P 44).

Unlike Hans, who cannot discuss his problem with Martha, Thom and Annamarie do have a discussion about some of the things that seem hypocritical to them in their community, especially the stance on pacifism. The sexual attraction they have for one another is cloaked in pathetic fallacy by the author, as he describes "[t]the clean curve of the moon [hanging] naked at its height in the north" and "the long river [. . .] holding the island as in its arms" (P 48). In this scene, of the first and only time that they are alone with each other, there is a hint that they will have a future together that is based not only on sexual love but on a covenant relationship: "They looked at each other. He could not have touched her if he had thought of it. They, too, had to leave and he led the way back to the horses and buggy, and the glances that had met and the sound of their footsteps on the trail were a covenant between them" (P 49).

In a later scene, in which the young people are berry picking, Annamarie is portrayed as being "unconscious of her own charming femininity" and of having "no idea of Thom's upheaval" after they have another discussion about war involvement and the CO camps (P 95). She is more self-confident than Thom, more at ease about not always agreeing

with what the community dictates. After watching Thom leave for the wagon, she thinks: "You've started, Thom. But you will have to let go more—much more" (P 101).

The larger problems, that impact the community as a result of its hypocrisy, occur later and cannot be discussed between Thom and Annamarie because Annamarie has left the community to train at the Battleford Hospital. Thom sees her again at the Christmas program, sitting among the other young women. Probably due to the fact that so much has happened in the community since Annamarie's absence, she seems to him "far away, as if there was now little hope of his nearing her" (P 226). Thom compares her to the schoolteacher Razia; to his horror, he finds himself dwelling on Razia's body. He had never had such thoughts about Annamarie, who was to him "beautiful, but beauty which had little to do with her shape" (P 227).

After all that has happened to them and to the people in their family and community in the past year, it is difficult for both Hans and Thom to pick up their lives again. They are not the same people they were, and as a result, neither is the world out there. In Hans's case this becomes very clear when he ventures out for the first time. Hans has been in his room for months since his father's death and decides he needs to get accustomed to the outside world again before he goes shopping with Martha, who has asked him if she can borrow money from him to buy her father a birthday present. He goes out alone first, so he will not look like a fool when he is with Martha: "Ich fahre mit der Straßenbahn in meine alte Gegend, ohne Grund. Allmählich muß ich mich daran gewöhnen, wieder mit der Stadt zu leben. Das letzte Jahr hindurch bin ich wie eine Katze nur um das eigene Haus herumgeschlichen" (K 141).

Hans has all kinds of sexual fantasies while on the streetcar, and suddenly he is overwhelmed by a sense of panic and the need to get up and off as soon as possible. There is here a hint of the persecution complex from which his father and Elle suffer, an echo of the trains that took their victims to the concentration camps: "In was für eine Bahn bin ich geraten, es wispert und tuschelt unaufhörlich, ein kochender Atem trifft meinen Hals. Aber wenn ich mich umdrehe, werden sie alle wie auf Kommando harmlos tun und sich benehmen wie normale Menschen" (K 144).

Hans feels disoriented and greatly frustrated. It is the same feeling he had when he first discovered his father and the other men at the cottage. At that time the normally self-confident Hans began to feel threatened by such a small thing as a dog standing off at a distance looking at him: "An der Bushaltestelle setzte ich mich ins Gras und behielt einen Hund im Auge, der neben der Wartehalle stand und zu mir hersah. Vater war in meinen Augen immer ein besonnener Mensch gewesen, ein Logikfanatiker; die ganze Kindheit über hatte er mich mit dem Satz verfolgt, ein kühler Verstand sei nützlicher als ein heißes Herz" (K 28).

At the end of this emotion-filled year, Hans longs for a heart of stone and the vanishing of all emotions because of the pain he has experienced. The expression "a heart of stone" is a metaphor used by the prophet Ezekiel in the Old Testament, to describe those people who were forced into exile. As Ezekiel predicts the returning of the scattered people of Israel to their land, this is what God tells him to say: "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 11.16).

Perhaps a heart of stone was his father's defense against the tragedies of his own life. Because it seemed to work for him, he passed that advice on

to his son when he cautioned him to act rationally, not emotionally, as a child. However, this kind of repression of emotions is not a healthy balance and can lead to extremes as it obviously did in Hans's father's life and as it threatens to do in his own life. In order for a healthy personality development to take place there needs to be a balance of logic and emotion, or as the prophet Ezekiel says "an undivided heart."

Thom too is disoriented and full of questions. At the annual Christmas program, an event greatly anticipated by the whole community, Thom's state of mind is described by the author: "Repelled at Block's dogmas that had hounded Elizabeth to death, he had existed five days in fearful vacuum. What difference did it all make anyway?" (P 226). As his world seems to fall apart, he starts to lust after Razia, "the tantalizing figure in the tight green dress" (P 227). He begins to comprehend that he has more in common with Herb Unger than he realized.

While watching the program and hearing one of the wisemen say: "Yes, we must follow the Star. Wherever it leads" (P 231), Thom applies this saying to his own life. He believes that "Truth must be followed as a Star" (P 231), but then begins to wonder if Deacon Block really has an edge on the truth, and does this truth come from the fathers? He compares the rigidity of Block's position on pacifism with Hank Unger's flaunting of ribbons and medals across his chest and asks himself: "So where was the truth that must be followed? Was there only the old Block or the young Unger way?" (P 231). The wisemen seem to have found the answer to their search in the barn at Bethlehem, but Thom struggles to find an answer for himself as he thinks about the war recruitment and the possibility of finding a letter in his own mail box to which he would have to give an answer. He also

realizes, seeing old Moosomin, that "[t]here was more than one war to be faced in Wapiti" (P 232).

Thom cannot believe the hypocrisy of Deacon Block's words at the end of the program: "To be happy at the approaching feast of our Lord, undisturbed by the world, that is when we understand what those words mean, first spoken at his birth" (P 233). Knowing how deeply unhappy the deacon really is, Thom wonders how he can speak like this after what has happened in his family.

The evening culminates in chaos as violence, accompanied by the convulsive laughter of Razia and the broken sobs of Deacon Block, erupts between young men raised with a belief in pacifism. Thom has participated in this violence and no longer understands himself or his community.

Both Hans and Thom, dealing with many changes that come about naturally due to their adolescent years, must also struggle with their elders' unresolved conflicts from the past, which bring turmoil and confusion to their family, community and their own identity.

Confrontation With the Outside World: The Daughters Elle and Elizabeth

Hans's and Thom's identity is threatened, but there is still hope. The following section will show the reaction of two young women close to them, members of their family and community, whose sense of identity is hopelessly diffused. Both Elle and Elizabeth are beloved daughters who cannot cope with how the war has affected them and their families. Both are prisoners, Elle in an institution and Elizabeth in her own home. Neither has a good relationship with their father. Elle and Elizabeth have become

pathological victims of violence (directly and indirectly) and can no longer be a part of normal society.

It is Elle's unpredictable behaviour of attacking people at random, hitting them and clawing at their faces, that forces her parents to institutionalize their beloved daughter. Before the war Elle was a happy and contented child. Forced to entrust her to strangers for her own protection during the war, the parents become painfully aware of the change this separation has brought about in their daughter who returns to them irritable and distrustful of others.

Between bouts of antisocial behaviour which sometimes doesn't manifest itself for weeks, other times is repeated within a matter of hours, Elle is a highly intelligent person. This is evident from Hans's account of Martha's astonishment at first meeting her. Expecting her mental illness to be much more obvious, Martha has resisted visiting Elle. When she finally does, she cannot believe a person of her caliber is institutionalized (K 36). Elle and Martha form a friendship and exchange letters. The letters to Martha are not recorded, but Hans too has a correspondence with her and greatly looks forward to her letters.

The first recorded letter written to Hans tells the reader that Elle is astute and insightful. She has sympathy for her friend and fellow inmate Albert, but chuckles with Hans about Albert's advice to tie everything down that she does not want to have stolen. Her shrewd judgement of character is revealed in how she assesses Hans as being careless and flighty (K 123). Hans has corroborated that statement for the reader earlier in the novel when he judges himself to be like that (K 87).

Elle is in tune with nature. This is evident in her description of the night and its sounds. She is also well-read, knowing what has been

written about the famous bird, the nightingale whose song she would rather not listen to because it keeps her from hearing the rustling of the trees (K 123).

Elizabeth, Deacon Block's oldest daughter, is also very insightful and observant. She has assessed the situation in the community long before Thom becomes aware of it. Ironically, because of her father's own prejudices, he keeps his daughter from fulfilling the traditional role that is expected of her as a Mennonite woman: that of wife and mother. Block judges Herman Paetkau, the man who asked for Elizabeth's hand in marriage, as not good enough for his daughter because he is part Russian by birth, even though raised as a Mennonite.

For years Elizabeth slaves on her father's farm, frustrated and unfulfilled. Just like Hans in *Bronsteins Kinder* acts out of anger, defiance, and frustration by mixing Heppner's photo with those of his father's family photos, so Elizabeth decides to mix her "pure" Mennonite blood with that of the Métis Louis, in defiance of her father's tyrannical control. With the utmost secrecy she chooses to have sex with him while he sleeps in her father's barn at night. She becomes pregnant, then dies while giving birth. Her baby dies also. Not only has she lost the role of wife and mother but also that of the dutiful Mennonite daughter who obeys her father. There is no other choice left but to die.

Before she dies, she urges Thom to leave the community: "Thom—go away from here [. . .] for a few years. [. . .] You'll be buried here under rules that aren't as important as this chaff. Go! while you can! [. . .] God in heaven! Can't you see what's happened to me?" (P 140-141). She also strongly suggests to her brother Peter that he should leave Wapiti. Peter remembers Elizabeth's words at her funeral but he can't understand them.

All he can understand was that she has left him forever, and he can't imagine life without her:

> He had never known what life was like without her: she was there, to care for him, as far back as his memory could stretch. When his father disciplined him sharply, she would slip him a cookie and hold his hand until he slept. Grown up, he had not thought about her presence in any particular way, for she was still always there, occasionally speaking a helping word. (P 152)

Like Elizabeth and Pete, Elle and Hans are also very close. Elle's letters are precious to Hans because they signal her desire to communicate with him, to be part of his world, even though only through words written on paper. She confides in Hans and tells him things that few other people know about her. Hans, too, feels he can safely talk to Elle about his father's problem with the former prison guard. He verbalizes this for the reader: "Was wußte sie schon von draußen? Sie lebte außerhalb der Zeit, in einer Umgebung, die nur durch Bücher, durch mich und Vater und durch das Radio mit der Außenwelt verbunden war, nur durch Worte. War ich verrückt geworden, gerade sie zu fragen!" (K 68). Hans asks her for help because he knows that she is not part of that outside world, and therefore a safe person to talk to about his problem: "[. . .] [S]chön wäre es gewesen, den alles klärenden Hinweis von ihr zu hören, den Rat, der meine Ratlosigkeit beendete" (K 68).

In spite of her inherent intelligence, it is also evident from her letters that Elle is a confused person. Hans knows this, but in his feverish desire for advice he chooses not to think about that too much. Although Hans has just shared with Elle about the events at the cottage, she doesn't mention it in her letter. He thinks maybe the letter was written before his visit to her.

Actually it's a letter communicating to him that she too is a victim and does not like to be one. She writes:

> Im Essenraum höre ich daß auch Andere
> bestohlen worden sind
> das freut mich insofern
> als ich nun Nicht als das einzige Opfer dastehe. (P 122)

It also communicates that she has a persecution complex. She writes to Hans that the beautiful picture he had given her has disappeared as well. When Hans finishes reading the letter he says: "Ich habe Elle noch nie ein Bild geschenkt" (K 124). From this statement the reader has a hint that the stealing Elle writes about to Hans is only in her imagination. She asks Hans to keep this information to himself, further indication that she fabricated the whole thing. She even produces someone else who has been part of this experience, but in the letter she first calls him Albert, then changes it to Alfred.

In this letter Elle is obviously trying to distract Hans from continuing to bother their father. She is capable of this kind of deviousness, that has been proven with the incident concerning the sleeping pills. Hans has observed that Elle likes to play different roles. Besides portraying herself as a victim she also finds the role of the dependent one useful. Hans says: "Nicht zum erstenmal kommt mir der Verdacht, daß sie mir etwas vorspielt: daß sie von Zeit zu Zeit an der Rolle einer Unmündigen Gefallen findet" (K 156). When something Hans tells her is unpleasant, Elle plays the role of the confused one very well. She says to Hans when he complains about his situation with the Lepschitzes: "Wozu erzählst du das alles? [. . .] Ich vergesse ja die Hälfte wieder" (K 157). The place where she is staying also takes on a different persona for her, depending on her mood. As Hans

observes: "Auch die Anstalt verändert sich ständig, sie ist Kurort, Klinik, Pflegeheim, Klapsmühle, Irrenhaus, je nach Stimmung und Wetterlage. Ich fahre in ein Sanatorium los und komme in einer Friedhofswartehalle an, auch umgekehrt" (K 156).

The night, so often mentioned in her first letter, is a metaphor for the mental state in which she finds herself. It is clear from this letter that Elle deliberately chooses to stay in this state of confusion and embraces it so that she does not have to face the real world. She writes: "Aber es ist schön in der Nacht. [. . .] Es ist eine Zeit die jeder einmal versuchen sollte / auch du" (K 123). Like Elizabeth, urging Pete and Thom to leave the Mennonite community for the outside world, Elle urges Hans to leave his world and join her in the only world in which she can cope. She does this again when he visits her, long after their father's death, and complains about not being able to find a room. She tells him that there is a room free on her floor (K 157), and that the centre of the world is in a small field bordering the wall that marks the boundary of the institution where she resides (K 159-161).

She invites Hans to join her because she knows that then he doesn't have to deal with the outside world which she finds so threatening. At the same time she longs for that outside world. When she writes about the rustling of the trees at night she wistfully asks Hans if there are trees outside his window or not. In her typical droll way of putting together words that are not really words, but serve to describe her innermost state of being, she calls the mental institute a "Wirrenhaus" instead of an Irrenhaus (K 123).

Like Elizabeth, Elle refuses to be the dutiful daughter her father longs for. He desires communication with her and is disappointed that she never

writes to him when he discovers that Hans gets letters from her on a regular basis. The communication the father so desires to have with his oldest child is lacking because she does not trust him the way she trusts her brother. Elle has no choice about who visits her at the institution, but she can choose with whom she communicates by letter. She distances herself from her father by not writing to him the way she does to her brother and to Martha, both of whom she loves. Subconsciously she probably resents the fact that her parents left her, even though as an adult she understands why they had to do it. Perhaps she still feels threatened by that, and does not want to be hurt by her father again.

In spite of her obvious lack of affection for her father, she understands him better than Hans does. This is evident from the second letter Elle writes to Hans. This letter concerns the events at the cottage, and how she feels about them. Her feelings are the same as those of her father. She is not unhappy that the former concentration camp guard is getting what he deserves, and even his death would not be of great significance (K 192). Although this event consumes all of Hans's thoughts, Elle can easily turn from it and change the subject to something much more trivial, such as her need for coffee or her desire to learn to play an instrument (K 193).

In Elle's third letter she writes that she feels she is incapable of giving Hans the advice he so anxiously longs for, because of her limited contact with the outside world. She then proceeds to plead with him to leave her father alone and to ignore the problem entirely. She calls the former prison guard inhuman and writes that Hans has a choice to be on the side of this inhuman being or on the side of their father. She is compassionate toward her father and excuses his behaviour:

Weißt du denn Nicht
daß Nicht Jeder immer nur das tun kann
Was Jeder für richtig hält
darum endgültig und zum letzten Mal
Laß ihn bitte laß ihn. . .
Dieser fremde Unmann oder unser Vater
es gibt dabei Nichts Drittes
da kann es dir Nicht schwer fallen zu entscheiden. (K 282)

She warns Hans that if he continues to go on the way he has been, the relationship he and his father have with each other will be in jeopardy:

es wäre zu traurig
wenn eure Verhängnisse
einander so feindlich gegenüber stehen würden
da könntet ihr ja Nicht zueinander gehören
und das glaube ich einfach kaum. (K 283)

Elle understands her father's action better than Hans does because she has in common with him their unspoken past, that other world that haunts them and makes them act in an unpredictable manner.

Their parents and the community in which they live have failed to give both Elle and Elizabeth a secure identity. Elle can no longer live as a normal person in her family and community but is institutionalized for her unpredictable behaviour and condemned to spend the rest of her life in this way. Acting out of desperation, Elizabeth loses her life, which was of little value to her as it was.

Secure In Their Identity: Martha and Razia

In contrast to Elle and Elizabeth who are confused and out of touch with their identity, there is in each of the novels a female character who is untouched by the problems of identity. Both Martha and Razia manifest all the signs of a healthy personality: they have actively mastered their environment, show a certain unity of personality and have a correct perception of themselves and their world (Erikson 53). This will be explored in the following section.

Hans assures the reader of Martha's maturity at the beginning of the novel. When he speaks about their earlier relationship he says: "Damals hat es mir nichts ausgemacht, daß sie anderthalb Jahre älter war als ich und daß manche sich wunderten, wie eine so reife und erwachsene Person sich mit einem Kindskopf wie mir abgeben konnte. Heute kommt sie mir vor wie eine Greisin" (K 8).

The above quote reveals several things to the reader. It shows that before Hans's identity crisis neither he nor Martha got upset about what other people thought because they were secure in themselves and their relationship. He realized his own immaturity even then, and was aware that others compared it with Martha's maturity, but he wasn't bothered by it and neither was she. Their age difference did not matter to them. Later, when he begins to have problems because of his father's actions, everything looks dismal. He gets angry when he observes other young men being attracted to Martha, who calmly tells him: "Das mußt du dir schon gefallen lassen, bei einer Freundin wie mir" (K 165).

Hans felt so stable in his relationship with Martha that he was looking forward to a future with her which included having children. As Hans states: "Vor einem Jahr hätte ich meinen Kopf verwettet, daß wir drei Kinder haben würden und daß ein riesiges Glück vor uns lag. Vor einem Jahr habe ich gezittert, wenn ich sie nur um die Ecke kommen sah" (K 9). In hindsight, Martha now seems to Hans so beyond him in maturity that she appears ancient to him. Certainly not like someone with whom he is passionately in love and with whom he wants to further the next generation.

Martha's and Hans's secure and loving relationship gradually breaks down because Hans cannot share with Martha what has happened between him and his father. His struggle to maintain his identity is so all-consuming that he can no longer sustain a stable relationship with someone of the opposite sex. Since the novel is written from Hans's perspective, the reader is not able to observe the situation from Martha's point of view. However, she can be judged by her actions in the face of this whole tragic event.

It is obvious from the text that Martha is very much in love with Hans until he stops confiding in her, and so it can be concluded that the breakup of their relationship must have been difficult for Martha as well. When Hans does not tell her what has happened at the cottage, she being an astute person, notices there is something wrong. Out on a date with her, Hans is at the point of sharing his problem with her, but doesn't know where to begin. Sensitive to his mood, she asks him if something is depressing him. Instead of taking the opportunity to tell her the whole event, he denies that anything is wrong, and changes the subject. When she persists he resorts to name calling and says to her: "Mach nur so weiter

[. . .] [m]it deinen jüdischen Spitzfindigkeiten" (K 169-170). She walks away from him at this insult, but has the grace to return to him. Martha has an open and forgiving spirit, not easily daunted, in spite of Hans's rudeness, due to his own insecurity.

Already before their breakup, Martha understands Hans's identity problem, his acute anxiety and fear of anything that would brand him as a Jew, and his resulting denial of anything Jewish. When he expresses his anger at Martha's willingness to take part in a film production about the Holocaust in which she plays the role of a victim, she says to him:

> Ich weiß seit langem, daß man über ein bestimmtes Thema mit dir nicht reden kann [. . .]. Kaum fängt ein Wort mit Jot an, bricht dir der Schweiß aus. Die wirklichen Opfer wollen andauernd Gedenktage feiern und Mahnwachen aufstellen, und du willst, daß geschwiegen wird. Du bildest dir vielleicht ein, das wäre das Gegenteil, aber ich sage dir: es handelt sich um dieselbe Befangenheit. (K 251)

The above quote shows that Martha has an inordinate amount of wisdom and insight for one so young. Words like these are not spoken lightly or thoughtlessly by her, she only says them after an exorbitant amount of immature behaviour by Hans (K 250-251).

Martha has been helpful to Hans right from the beginning of the catastrophe, even though he did not confide in her. It was she who felt pity for him after his father's funeral and persuaded her parents to take him in. According to Hans that was the cause of the end of their relationship: "Bestimmt hatte sie die besten Absichten, auch wenn heute alles verloren ist" (K 8).

Martha does not show agitation or frustration about the breakup of their relationship but seems to take it in stride. This is evident in a scene at the beginning of the novel in which Hans has just been challenged by Martha's father about their relationship. Martha comes in and rescues Hans from the embarrassing situation. He, feeling nasty because he doesn't know how to respond, tells Martha in front of her parents that they have just been speaking about her and that he has told them he no longer feels attracted to her. Without getting upset or making a scene, Martha lightly remarks that the parents have probably noticed it without his explanation. When the mother presses her point, asking how it could have happened, the two simply look at each other for a long time, with a lingering smile. This prompts Hans to share with the reader that he and Martha still feel a certain amount of affection for each other and will never be enemies (K 13). This is largely due to the mature way in which Martha has handled the whole situation.

At times Hans, in his befuddled state of mind, makes no sense. When Martha, after the embarrassing situation between Hans and her parents graciously invites him to have a glass of wine with them, his nonsensical response does not evoke mockery or anger in her. Instead, she simply asks him to repeat what he said, and when he replies in the same manner, she nods her head as if she understands and leaves the room (K 15).

Martha is wise enough to realize that she needs to have a change, and is not afraid of something new. She embraces the opportunity to try an acting career instead of pursuing her Germanistik studies. Hans sees this as a catastrophe and detests the change it brings about in her. Unlike Martha who does not lament the inevitable, but goes on with her life, he thinks if they still had the cottage to go to, this would not have happened (K 15). For

Martha change is not threatening, for Hans it is something to be avoided at all costs. When he discovers, by reading Martha's script, that she will have to have her hair shaved off for her part in the film, he is horrified. Martha, however, casually accepts this fact, even though she wasn't aware of it when she agreed to the part (K 111).

When Martha tells Hans how much money she is going to earn by accepting the role in the movie script, Hans replies that he didn't know she was so greedy for money. To this unwarranted attack on her character, Martha does not react in a defensive manner. She simply says: "Dann wird es Zeit, daß du mich kennenlernst" (K 112).

Besides beginning a new career, Martha also decides to pursue a new relationship. This shows that unlike Hans, who cannot bring himself to do anything of the sort (K 10), she has the strength and the maturity to move on with her life. She does not involve her parents, with whom she lives, in her decision-making process, but is very independent (K 89).

Like Martha, Razia, the Canadian school teacher in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* is not afraid to try something new and different. She wanted to have a city school; instead, she finds herself "two hundred miles from nowhere [. . .] [i]n the bush, as quiet as a midnight grave" (P 120). Finding herself in a situation that is totally foreign to her, and knowing nothing about Mennonites, she panicks slightly but does not allow herself to be overwhelmed.

Razia is fully in control of her students, calling them to order authoritatively when they want to stay and play ball after school. She reminds them that they are to go directly home, that they are not to sneak out the ball and bat again, but return them to the cupboard immediately. She knows and identifies Jackie, a potential troublemaker and speaks

confidentially to him, placing her hand on his shoulder (P 120). She looks forward to teaching "these poor bush-buried kids [. . .] about the world" and is confident that she can conquer her loneliness by reading and listening to the radio (P 120).

Despite her self-assurance and self-confidence, Razia senses that she will have few resources to cope "with the oddness of the community." She comes to this conclusion after being picked up by Deacon Block upon her arrival and after meeting him and his tired-looking wife on a Sunday afternoon visit. Observing the behaviour of the Mennonite children, who are easily quelled into submission by their older siblings, confirms her impression (P 121). However, she does not allow herself to be intimidated, resolving to start a community dance herself if necessary.

Like Martha, Razia is self-confident in relating to the opposite sex. She has already assessed the head deacon as "grimly handsome with splendid steel-like hair," and even guessed his age (P 120). She is a bit disappointed in Peter Junior, but soon has him showing her how to make a fire in the wood stove and rigging up her aerial for the radio (P 121-123). At his suggestion that she should have boarded out instead of living in the teacherage, she is quick to assert her independence: "I want to live as I want to. Not bother other people—have friends visit me when they wish—you know—" (P 123). She is a shrewd judge of character and finds Pete somewhat lacking in self-confidence compared to his father. She also finds it disturbing that she cannot read his emotions or feelings about her, although she notices immediately when he blushes (P 123).

Razia's interest in men is obvious by her reaction when she first sees Thom at Elizabeth's funeral. She is interested in life, not in death, and so she does not notice the homemade coffin, but rather the handsome pall

bearer. She doesn't think about the dead body in the coffin. Instead she wonders about the handsome live body inside the out-dated clothes (P 150). She does not understand a word that is being said at the funeral, but instead of being frustrated she finds ways of entertaining herself.

When Thom comes to Razia to get help with his math, she compares him with the other men who have come to her and finds them wanting. His shirt fits better on his shoulders than does Pete's and he is clean and polite compared to Herb Unger. She has respect for someone like Thom who tries to teach children impossible theological concepts, but she despises a man like Herb who has only hateful things to say about his own Mennonite community. Thom's presence causes Razia to recall Herb's visit and how she challenged Herb about his identity, asking why he was so hateful toward Mennonites when he himself was one of them. With her logical mind she gave him a solution to his problem: "Why don't you get out then, if you hate everyone so much. I wouldn't stay" (P 172). At his resulting fit of rage, she told him in no uncertain terms to leave. He was not about to leave. The ensuing battle, which she won by pitting her wits against his physical strength, was terrifying, but it did not intimidate her nor did it keep her from letting other men visit her (P 173-174).

With Thom, Razia discusses the principle of nonresistance, and she is surprised at his full and detailed explanation, after the lame one she received from Pete. When Thom leaves, she is frustrated and somewhat disappointed that she could not entice him to be attracted to her. She is not used to this kind of treatment from men. However, her frustration is momentary. She amuses herself by finding significant places to show him in a book she is currently reading, *The Sun Also Rises*, and cheers herself up by listening to a lively fox-trot on the radio. Like Martha in *Bronsteins Kinder*,

she does not waste time fretting over what cannot be changed but goes on with her life.

Razia is proud of the way she has trained the children for the Christmas program and it is no mean accomplishment. She intuitively knows what the community wants: "If they [like] religion, she [can] dish it up" (P 228). This is similar to Martha in *Bronsteins Kinder* who is not bothered by accepting the part of a Jewish victim in the film. Like Razia, she can separate her real self from the character she pretends to be in order to earn some money.

Long after their breakup, Martha comes to Hans and asks him to lend her some money to buy her father a birthday present. This situation has the potential to be embarrassing, especially since Martha excitedly shared with Hans about how much money she was going to make with her movie contract and Hans accused her of being greedy. For Hans, who has never lent anyone money, it is "ein Augenblick großer Peinlichkeit" (K 117-118), but Martha, the borrower, is not embarrassed. She tells him how much money she needs, the length of time it will take to pay him back, and after a moment of reflection, increases the amount of money slightly. After confessing that she does not know what to give her father, she agrees to Hans's suggestion to shop for a present together. All this is accomplished by Martha with self-assurance and grace.

When the agreed upon date for the shopping expedition arrives, Martha tells Hans that she will not have time to go on this day. She is genuinely sorry, and says so with feeling in her voice. Hans resorts to sarcasm, to which Martha does not reply, except to look at him with raised eyebrows. The reader gets the impression that she does not use this appointment as a weapon to get even with him, as Hans seems to imply. It

really is for her a time issue. For him, with his raw nerves, it is another blow to his ego (K 141).

When Martha cannot go with him, Hans decides to go downtown anyhow, just to get accustomed to it. By chance, while on the streetcar looking out the window, he sees Martha with her new boyfriend. Through Hans's reflection while observing the two of them, the reader learns a few things about Martha. Hans gives credit to Martha that she has never brought her new boyfriend to the house. This shows that she is sensitive to Hans's feelings and does not want to embarrass him.

Hans also reminisces about his father's relationship to Martha. His father was always cool and reserved toward her, something Hans couldn't understand. Martha in turn, never mentioned his attitude toward her, but she also never did anything to try to win his affection. This puzzles Hans, who recognizes that if Martha tries to win someone over she is usually successful. Martha, self-confident as she was, did not feel the need to try to impress Hans's father. She respected his feelings and genuinely liked him as is evident by Hans's remark: "Bei Vaters Beerdigung war sie die einzige, die schluchzte, da nützte es nichts mehr" (K 146).

When Hans gets off the street car he decides to walk toward Martha and her boyfriend, and greets Martha by name. Instead of the expected look of embarrassment or of speechless shock, Martha reacts quite naturally, asking him what on earth he is doing downtown (K 148). She has no need to play games with their relationship the way Hans does.

Martha is an affectionate person and is not embarrassed to show her affection. When Hans visits her at home before their breakup they are in her room where Martha is trying to finish an assignment for her studies. She works with concentration, but is not frustrated at interruptions. She

handles them with humour and aplomb. Several times her mother comes in, ostensibly with legitimate questions or news, but is really doing her duty as a Jewish mother to make sure they are behaving themselves. Martha decides, in a mischievous moment to give her something to worry about, pulls down the bedcovers and flattens the pillows, rendering her mother speechless the next time she comes in. Martha does not even let the news of Walter Ulbricht's death break her concentration. When Hans finally decides to leave in frustration, she stops studying, pulls him on her lap and caresses him. Hans knows that she kisses him out of love, not because she wants to justify her actions. When her mother again interrupts, Martha will not let Hans get off her lap, but, much to his embarrassment brazenly lets her mother see them in a compromising position. With this she lets her mother know that she is old enough to be left alone, and independent enough to make her own decisions (K 248-253).

This independence is also obvious when she sneaks Hans into the house one night, after he has an encounter with his drunken father and becomes drunk himself, then goes to see her at her film site late at night. He spends the night in her bed, sleeping off his drunkenness, then sneaks out of the house in the morning. Martha is not afraid to take risks like this (K 277-280). It is not something her parents would approve of, but obviously she knows they would not do anything drastic if she was caught. If they did, she would be able to handle it.

Razia is an independent risk taker as well. To leave the Christmas program before it was officially over for a romp in the hay with Hank, whom she met before she came into the Mennonite community, is a daring act. When Pete discovers them and doesn't know how to respond, she taunts him by saying: "You should have asked *Papa* what to do" (P 235). Pete's total

dependence on his father's authority baffles her as much as she is puzzled by the quiet acquiescence of the younger children at school to their peers. It is contrary to her self-reliant nature. When the men become violent and start punching each other the incongruity of their act with the pacifist teaching of their community strikes her and she breaks into loud, mocking laughter. It is at this point that she realizes she herself is in a compromising position as the school teacher in the community, and her brazen self-assurance begins to falter as her convulsive laughter changes to sobs and she leaves the scene (P 236).

Unlike Razia at the end of the novel, Martha never falters in her actions, neither does she lose her self-assurance. When Hans goes to see her during the lunch hour at the scene where the movie is being filmed, she embraces him in public in a long embrace, which even he finds a bit peculiar (K 197). Hans is not used to displaying his emotions at home with his father, never mind in public. Always the optimist, she manages to shake his dark mood by pointing to a cloudless sky and the beautiful weather, hinting that it is symbolic of their relationship, and that they will have a good time after she finishes the filming (K 197-198). She has planned a great surprise for both of them, an outing in her uncle's boat. She proves to be a skillful sailor, even though she has never operated a motor boat before. Her cool head and self-confidence help her in every situation, and she actually performs a miracle by putting the ever morose Hans in a good mood, not an easy accomplishment (K 217).

In a domestic scene at the home of her parents, long after their breakup, Martha and Hans are cutting up green beans. Hans has never done this before and tries to do it faster by cutting ten beans at a time, but realizes Martha's way is better. In the midst of giving him advice about

cutting beans, she asks him about his acceptance at university, and he admits to her that he is looking for another place to live. Always magnanimous she promises to help him in his search (K 208-209).

With Martha's help Hans does find a new place to live, one with a balcony, just like he had envisioned. Martha goes with him to see it, and to his astonishment she entwines her arm in his. She does it very casually, he however finds it very significant and berates himself for always attaching such importance to everything (K 292).

Hans's personal observations during his yearlong stay with the Lepschitzes give the reader an inside glimpse into Martha's home. She is a much-loved only child of Jewish parents who provide her with a stable environment. They are compassionate people who take the grieving Hans into their home and do everything to make him comfortable. Concerned about their daughter's future, they would like nothing better than to have her and Hans continue their relationship. However, they do not force their ideas on her and she is allowed to pursue her own interests. In contrast, nothing is revealed to the reader of the family background of the beautiful Razia, but her independent spirit as an outsider in the Mennonite community would lead one to assume that she received much affirmation as a child.

It is obvious from the above that Martha and Razia are two characters with a healthy self-esteem. Both of them have made mature decisions about their vocation and are comfortable with their relationship to the opposite sex. In contrast to the other characters that have been examined who are either struggling with their self-identity or have given up in despair, Martha and Razia show an independent spirit and are not afraid of change, but rise to the challenge when something new comes their way.

Identity Formation and Community

Identity formation, although it begins at home, is dependent not only on the interaction the individual has with other members of the family, but also on the way the individual interacts with and relates to members of the community. The amount of interest and affirmation by the community plays an important part in the individual's attitude toward society. How this takes place in the lives of the protagonists Hans and Thom is examined below.

There are people in the communities in which Thom and Hans find themselves who are able to give mature and strong guidance to them, accepting them for who they are in their struggle toward the process of self-identification. Others contribute only in a negative way.

The community is especially significant for Hans whose mother died when he was just a baby, leaving him vulnerable to community influence at an early age. However, the sense of community and responsibility toward others was minimal in Hans's environment as an infant. The babysitter hired by his father was not reliable because she drank, and often parked the baby buggy at the local pub instead of going for a walk in the park. When he fired her, Arno Bronstein took over the care of the baby himself, asking an old woman in the neighbourhood to help out when necessary. Hans remembers the woman well, and if her name "Halblang" signifies anything, she didn't amount to much. She also had one eye missing, and a set of false teeth, the absence of which frightened Hans one morning to such an extent that he remembers it still (K 86). He slept on a couch with two chairs pushed in front of it so that he would not fall off. This was not exactly a

child-friendly environment. Most of the time, once he could entertain himself, Hans was accountable to no one, something he enjoyed during his childhood (K 87) but regretted during his adolescence (K 85-86). He blames his lack of focus and concentration on these early childhood circumstances (K 87).

Thom in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* has grown up in a much more secure environment than Hans, in a loving family that is intact. However, he finds his father to be weak and indecisive, even about such minor incidents as telling Herb Unger to keep his fence repaired (P 67). In contrast, he sees a role model for himself in Deacon Block, the self-appointed leader of his community whom both he and his father admire and respect greatly:

> For Wiens, as for his third son, there was one rock in the whirlpool of the Canadian world. They were both thinking of him at the same time. Deacon Peter Block. Where even the middle-aged Pastor Lepp was at a loss, the Deacon held the church community solidly on the path of their fathers. He seemed to understand how the newness of Canada must be approached. (P 21)

It isn't until he sees the results of Deacon Block's rigidity that he begins to comprehend where the strength in the community really lies. Unlike Hans, he is fortunate to have a mother whose role in the community is of greater importance than Block's, even though this is not acknowledged publicly. She is a wise midwife who, by her vocation, is aware of the family secrets in the community that no one else is supposed to know. From her Thom receives the self-confidence necessary to ask meaningful questions about life. In the novel this happens in a memorable scene while she is baking buns in the kitchen. Thom grabs the buns and eats them as they

come piping hot from the stove, something he was often told not to do as a child. He goes into an elaborate explanation of why they are best eaten that way, and he and his mother are "quiet in contentment" (P 213).

It is this serene nurturing atmosphere, this quiet acceptance of him as an adult, even in such an insignificant thing as when and how to eat a bun, that gives Thom the courage to ask his mother some very significant questions. He asks her about the real meaning of Christian love: "Why must we in Wapiti love only Mennonites?" Her answers are not authoritatively or flippantly given: "She was silent for a long time, knowing he knew the answer perhaps better than she, her hands flying from pan to floured table, forming the buns, row on row, doubled with a dimple in the top" (P 215).

Thom's mother recognizes in him an adult who must be treated as one, whose demand for answers must be met, and who can be trusted with the knowledge of the community she alone possesses. She reminds him that in spite of everything that happened to Elizabeth she loved and forgave her father before she died, and that he must do likewise. She is consistently affirming the youth of the community. In an earlier scene, while blueberry picking, Herb Unger acts very immaturely, and in bidding farewell to Mrs. Wiens and Mrs. Lepp says "Hope my visitin' doesn't sour your fruit." Mrs. Wiens reacts with gentle laughter:

> "Now why should it do that?" She pitied him with all her mother's heart, this embittered man who was like an evil genius to her children, a man unloved and battering his better nature against the wall of what he knew he should do. Somewhere, along the line of his life, some Christian had possibly made a mistake. Or perhaps many. (P 100-101)

It is through her mature faith in a loving and forgiving God, genuinely lived and practised, that Thom's mother combats the evil in her community.

Like his mother, Thom has until now felt secure and at peace in his religious environment. The war and the subsequent events in the community have left him, like his biblical namesake, a "doubting Thomas." At the end of the novel, while driving home from the Christmas program in the family cutter, he has time to reflect. He wonders how much of what he had earlier thought so important to the community was really valid, in the face of "conscienceless violence or one man's misguided interpretation of tradition" which had brought nothing but chaos (P 237).

The recollection of the Christmas program, in which the Métis boy, Jackie Labret, had the part of the wiseman who leads the way to the manger, helps Thom gain some perspective on the situation. He realizes that it is not the outside world, torn by two wars, that confronts him and begs for resolution; it is his own inner two faces. It suddenly dawns on him that force, suppression, and avoidance are not the answer to the world's problems but rather proactive love. Only this is the way toward real peace, "God's peace" (P 237-238). This insight has come to him from that other community, the Métis, who have been ignored and avoided by his own community, and indirectly from Razia who gives Jackie an important part in the Christmas program.

There has been a false peace to which the community adheres when they quietly agree to do everything Deacon Block wants. Joseph's letters are a vehicle through which the author of *Peace Shall Destroy Many* can express the real peace which is transformed into positive action, such as Joseph exhibits by joining the Medical Corps. Joseph explains this in a letter to Thom: "Peace is not a thing static and unchanging: rather a mighty inner

river (read Isaiah 48:18) that carries all outward circumstances before it as if they were driftwood. This was the peace Christ brought" (P 162).

Even as Thom's most important lessons about genuine love and peace are learned from the weakest members in his community, the Métis children, so Hans is most loving and tolerant when he is with his sister Elle in the mental institution. She tells him that he belongs there and that it is the centre of the world. Even though Hans is too intelligent to take this literally, he takes Elle seriously and refuses to mock her. He also realizes that indirectly he owes his own existence to Elle's confusion. His parents would not have had another child if Elle had remained normal (K 159-161).

Hans looks forward to Elle's letters as much as Thom anticipates Joseph's letters. Even though she doesn't agree with him about how to handle the situation with their father, Elle reminds him at the end of one of her letters that it was she who gave him his name (K 284). This is significant because it really has nothing to do with the rest of the letter, except perhaps to reassure him that because she named him he is very important to her, and she is not dismissing his problem lightly even when she doesn't agree with him. Hans is a very German name, it may have been given to him by Elle to keep him safe, to make sure that he would be like everyone else in the world around him, not like she who suffered because of her Jewish background and her confused state of mind. It is a sign of her love for him and a willingness to stand by him no matter what his decision.

At Hans's father's funeral, it is the Lepschitzes rather than his father's friends who invite him for dinner and who help him move his things, sharing their own already crowded accomodations with him. Hugo Lepschitz has given up one of his vacation days to do this (K 89). The Lepschitzes are not religious, but they adhere to some of the traditions of

the Jewish faith and family traditions are important to them. While shopping for a birthday present for Hugo Lepschitz, Hans recalls how they celebrated his 19th birthday:

> Zu meinem eigenen Geburtstag im letzten Oktober wurde eine Torte aufgetragen, in der neunzehn tropfende Kerzen steckten. Von Lepschitz bekam ich Rasierzeug, das war mir peinlich, doch nützlich war es auch, denn über den Flaum, der um mein Kinn wuchs, machte Martha schon Witze. Rahel schenkte mir ein Handtuch und einen Waschlappen, auf die sie das wort *Hans* gestickt hatte. Sie nehmen Geburtstage ungewöhnlich ernst, zudem bin ich der wohlhabendste in ihrer Familie. (K 227)

With this birthday celebration the Lepschitz family acknowledges Hans's adulthood by presenting him with a shaver. They also recognize him as an individual with an identity by giving him something with his name on it. Although Hans chafes under their roof, mocking their staid habits and small rituals, they have provided for him a stability that was lacking in his life with his father, especially in the last year. In a very domestic scene in which Hans helps Rahel hang up the laundry in the attic, he admits that he will miss them when he leaves, especially Rahel: "Nichts wird mir davon abhalten, sie hin und wieder zu besuchen, wenn ich in eine andere Gegend wohne, am meisten wird mir Rahel fehlen. Wir hängen das letzte Laken auf und stehen uns gegenüber, mit Blicken, als lasse sich das große Unglück doch noch abwenden" (K 115). In this scene Hans acknowledges by the sympathetic looks he exchanges with Rahel, that he too feels it is tragic that he and Martha are no longer a couple, and perhaps there is a chance to do something about it still.

In spite of the despair experienced by both protagonists as they search for meaning in life and strive to establish their own identity, there are hints that they are moving toward wholeness and integrity. This is more evident with Thom than it is with Hans. Thom comes to this realization at the Christmas program when he thinks about Elizabeth and her father. He begins to understand Deacon Block, even though he doesn't agree with his actions:

> Abruptly Thom could not avoid the conviction that Elizabeth had faltered; his compulsion against Block could not forever hide the fact that, despite her father's rigidity, she still had to consent personally to that act. If she was not really responsible, then Block was not either, because then he also had been, helplessly, moulded by his training. Following that back, you arrived at Adam: What then? You blame God. And you go through life doing what you do because you can do no else. No. There was no need to follow your body with its every impulse, or acclaim yourself a murderer before your fellow men and brandish ribbons and medals like scalp-locks strung across your chest. So where was the truth that must be followed? (P 231)

Hans too, during his year of reflection comes to a kind of understanding and sympathy for his father. He remembers his father's anger that he had discussed the affair at the cottage with Elle and he feels remorseful at his relentless hounding of his father: "Tausendmal habe ich mir inzwischen Vorwürfe gemacht, ich hätte nur mein Gekränktsein im Kopf gehabt und nicht begriffen, daß ich nur eine Randfigur war. Tausendmal habe ich mich gefragt, aus welchem Grund ich Vater für einen Herkules hielt, dem jede Anstrengung zugemutet werden konnte" (K 245).

There is a communications encounter toward the end of the novel that is a very positive and happy experience for Hans, a hint that things will eventually get better. He goes on a search for Heppner's residence, an indication that he wants to make a closure to his year of torture, and is willing to face someone who inadvertently caused a lot of anxiety and grief in his life. On his search he comes upon a deaf-mute couple. He, who panicked when he heard his father and friends speaking Yiddish, communicates with these people very well, even though he does not know sign language. The difference is that, in spite of their handicap, in spite of being in a world of their own because they cannot hear or speak, they are happy self-confident people who ingeniously know how to solve their problems (the doorbell is actually a light switch that blinks on and off when pressed). They are better communicators than all the other characters in the novel who are able to hear and speak. What is more, they love to chat and visit. They are able to tell Hans that Heppner no longer resides in East Germany but has gone over the wall and never returned. This is good news for Hans, because he is finally able to break away from that unhappy symbiosis that caused him so much grief: "Es ist mir nie gelungen, ihn von Herzen zu hassen, ich wollte immer nur gründlich von ihm getrennt sein. Das ist ja nun erreicht, er vor der Mauer, ich dahinter" (K 261). This scene provides a closure to the traumatic year, and hints at a new beginning.

Although *Peace Shall Destroy Many* ends with winter, Thom's young brother Hal says at the end of the book that the world is round and things must die in winter, but they are reborn in spring, the season that follows winter. This is a symbol of hope, a sign that growth and maturity will occur from all that has happened to the protagonist within the confines of one year.

Summary

It becomes clear from this chapter with its focus on threatened identity that the two authors, Becker and Wiebe, have themselves wrestled with the problem of fragmented identity. Both write from the perspective of their culture of origin but in their everyday world they find themselves in the context of a different culture with which they have identified since they left home to go to school (German and English Canadian). Themselves second-generation survivors of peoples who have experienced oppression and persecution, these two authors write about what happens to victims of violence who suppress their experiences.

Both of the role models or father figures of the two protagonists have a secret to guard, the disclosure of which causes them great anxiety. The need to control their environment, using violence if necessary, impacts the community and those who look up to them as role models. Their fear of losing control has certain ramifications for themselves as well as their offspring. As they struggle to regain control, they either succumb to despair, give in to confusion, or repeat past violence.

The two protagonists Hans and Thom are both secure in their identities until the circumstances in which they find themselves cause them to question everything they believe about themselves, their role models, and their communities. Their secure identities gradually disintegrate as they struggle to come to terms with their own insecurities.

It becomes evident that the protagonists can begin to form a positive identity only by questioning some of the basic principles held to be sacred truths by the person in control and by searching for their own answers to

the questions of life rather than giving in to despair, confusion, or violence. This requires a great deal of effort and struggle and the difficulties become almost overwhelming.

There is a character in each of the novels who does not survive a threatened identity. Both Elle's and Elizabeth's psyche has been gravely injured and they can no longer live as normal human beings. Their function in the novels is to warn the protagonists of the danger to their own identities and urge them to leave before it is too late. Elle beckons Hans to leave the normal world and join her in the institution, and Elizabeth pleads with both Pete and Thom to leave the closed community.

Each of the novels also has a character whose identity is intact. Martha, the young Jewish woman, serves as a contrast to Hans. She is always poised and mature, very sensitive and intuitive. When frustrated or annoyed, she reacts with a sense of humour and dignity, accepting others because she accepts herself.

Razia, the non-Mennonite school teacher, serves as a contrast to her peers in Deacon Block's Mennonite community. They all suffer from a lack of self-confidence due to their parents' fragmented identity and their authoritarian upbringing. Razia's almost blatant self-confidence at all times receives a knock at the end of the novel, but she is a survivor.

Finally, the contribution of the community in the lives of each of the protagonists is very significant. Although receiving some affirmation in their own circles, both Hans and Thom need to go outside their community for healing to begin. Each finds help by learning from another culture that is considered to be minor: Hans is helped by a deaf-mute couple who illustrates what communion and community is all about; Thom takes on Joseph's work with the Métis children to gain a new perspective.

CHAPTER TWO

Identity Lost:

Barbara Honigmann's *Eine Liebe aus nichts*

and Selected Poems by Sarah Klassen

> Aber was verbindet mich mit meinen beleidigten, gequälten, deportierten, vergasten und erschossenen Vorfahren, von denen ich nicht einmal ein Bild habe? [. . .] Fremd, wahrlich fremd sind mir meine eignen Wurzeln; schon meine Mutter hat sie abgeschnitten [. . .]. Nichts als eine phantastische, pränative Erinnerung bleibt mir, ein stumm tickendes kulturhistorisches Gedächtnis, welches vorerst wohl eher in der Brust als im Kopf sitzt. Es ist das Zerrissene, das in den Boden Gestampfte, das mich mit meinen Vorfahren verbindet [. . .]. Uns alle verbindet das Sterben. (Schindel, *Gott schütz* 29)

The burden of remembrance is part of the Jewish and Mennonite heritage, part of trying to piece together an identity that has been shattered by persecution and its aftermath. Those who suppress their story because of the horror that occurred leave a burden with the next generation.

Hand in hand with the struggle for remembrance is a desperate search for home in the midst of uprootedness and a desire for some sort of resistance to the violence and horror that has been done. In both Barbara Honigmann's novel and Sarah Klassen's poetry these themes are present. The protagonists/speakers search their memories, they look for a home away from home, and with their words they attempt to form a kind of resistance to the evil that has been done to them and to the group with which they identify.

This chapter, focusing on the works of two authors, one of Jewish and one of Mennonite background, concentrates on how traumatic events of the past have shaped the sense of identity of these two writers and how this is revealed in their writing (which has been interpreted as autobiographical to a large extent) and is part of their collective unconscious.

The idea of a collective unconscious comes from Jung's revision of the Freudian model of the person and refers to a deeper level of unconsciousness shared by members of every race. It includes patterns of human thought called archetypes which have developed through the centuries and enable people to react to situations in ways similar to their ancestors (Pollock 159). Jung defined an archetype as "the instinct's perception of itself" and demonstrated how the collective unconscious could be investigated empirically in the dreams of modern men and women (Poncé 36-37). Jung states that "the goal of psychological, as of biological development is self-realization, or individuation" (qtd. in Poncé 93). He goes on to say that "because individuation is an heroic and often tragic task, the most difficult of all, it involves suffering, a passion of the ego: the ordinary, empirical man we once were is burdened with the fate of losing himself in a greater dimension and being robbed of his fancied freedom of will. He suffers, so to speak, from the violence done to him" (qtd. in Poncé 94).

Tracing Haunting Memories

Barbara Honigmann's novel *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, portrays a protagonist's desperate search, as a postwar German Jewish writer and artist, to cope with a fragmented life, due in part to the second generation trauma of the Holocaust. Honigmann is one of several German Jewish

women writers who do not return to family or home, but search their memories. Karen Remmler says they "practice a genealogy that follows family lines as webs, woven across the branches of dead family trees that no longer bear fruit but whose roots remain alive in the stories told by distant relatives" (190).

Honigmann's novel obviously contains what Guy Stern calls "pastiches of fictionalized biography" (329). The themes of her novel are expressed in a poem she wrote about her parents' disrupted lives, first displayed in her 1992 exhibit "Selbstporträt einer Jüdin," and then published in her latest work, the autobiographical *Damals, dann und danach*. The poem reads as follows:

> Die Routen des Exils
> Überfahrten bei stürmischer See
> Versunkene Städte
> Die Treue der Gefährten
> Die Untreue der Gefährten
> Das rettende Land
> Die Insel des Überlebens
> Eine fremde Sprache
> Wien vor dem Krieg
> Berlin vor dem Krieg
> Paris bis zur Okkupation
> London/Bomben auf London
> der Blitz. (D 12)

Like her first-person narrator, Honigmann desired to know more about her past. Stories told by relatives were scarce, because Holocaust experiences had left the survivors drained and empty, unable to deal with

the guilt they felt because they had survived and their loved ones had been killed. This is pain too deep to bring to the surface, too horrible to speak about. Honigmann's protagonist in *Eine Liebe aus nichts* writes:

> Meine Eltern konnten sogar sagen, daß sie noch Glück gehabt hatten, aber sie mußten für den Rest ihres Lebens mit den Bildern und Berichten derer leben, die kein Glück gehabt hatten, und das muß eine schwere Last gewesen sein, so schwer, daß sie immer so taten, als hätten sie damit gar nichts zu tun gehabt und als hätte niemand jemals zu ihnen gehört, der in einem Getto verreckt oder in Auschwitz vergast worden ist. (L 34)

Like her narrator in *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, Honigmann was spared the horrors of the Holocaust but lives in the shadow of the concentration camps. She was born in 1949 in East Berlin, a place to which her parents moved in 1947 after their exile in England. Here she studied drama and became a dramaturgist, producer and artist. Her search for identity culminated in her effort to learn the Hebrew language and identify with Judaism. However, the strained relationship between Jew and German, this "negative symbiosis," as Dan Diner calls it in his article "Negative Symbiose—Deutsche und Juden nach Auschwitz" (245), proved to be too problematic for her. She had to remove herself from this tension in order to make it the material for her creative work.

Honigmann left East Germany for the West, and then moved to Strasbourg, France in 1984, "einen Ort außerhalb, aber dennoch in der Nähe Deutschlands" (qtd. in Braun 3). She wanted to be in a community that reflected her own Jewish heritage, but not too far from the land where her language was spoken. Here she still lives with her husband and two

children. Of her wanderings, and her search for her roots she says: "Hier bin ich gelandet vom dreifachen Todessprung ohne Netz: vom Osten in den Westen, von Deutschland nach Frankreich und aus der Assimilation mitten in das Thora-Judentum hinein" (qtd. in Wieser 185). She cannot really point to a physical place on the map and call it her home.

In *Damals, dann und danach*, Honigmann writes: "Das Geheimnis der Erlösung heißt Erinnerung" (D 101). In this sentence two components of the themes important to her life are combined for Honigmann: that of her existence as a writer and that of her identity as a Jew. To be a writer means to avail yourself of the past. In her case, as in the case of so many of the Jews whose parents and grandparents had assimilated to German culture and society, this proved an almost insurmountable task. Her novel *Eine Liebe aus nichts* expresses this in a very melancholy, lyrical style.

Honigmann's novel is not divided into chapters, but rather into untitled vignettes; short, descriptive literary sketches that are very lyrical, each vignette almost like a poem written in blank verse. The first of these vignettes is very important to the novel because here the reader has a detailed glimpse into the father's character. It is written in retrospect, after the death of the protagonist's father.

Besides giving the reader an insight into the father's character, this first section also touches on the main themes that will be brought out in the novel later. One of these themes is fear. An irrational fear of death possesses Honigmann's narrator, to the point of panic. The word *Angst* is mentioned three times in one paragraph of this introductory section. She wants to see her father once more to make closure because she arrived after he had died, and can hardly believe that his body is in the coffin. At the same time she is afraid to see him dead, just like she was afraid to see him

ill. She realizes that she put off coming to see him, that she could have at least inquired about the possibility, but again it was fear that kept her from doing so—fear mixed with revenge for the way he had neglected her all of his life.

Meaninglessness and hopelessness of life are two more themes explored in Honigmann's novel, and introduced at the outset. She looks through her father's things, hoping to find something to take with her, a memory that will sustain and comfort her. Instead, she finds only clothes strewn about, looking as empty and lost as his dead body now was:

> [. . .] auch all die anderen Gegenstände, die zu seinem Leben gehört hatten und eine Erinnerung daran trugen, erschienen mir nur wie abgefallene Stücke, die ihren Halt verloren und nun keinen Sinn mehr hatten; eine Weile werden sie noch hin und her geschoben, in die Hand genommen und dann doch wieder weggelegt. (L 9)

She finds two personal items that she decides to keep. One is a small, red, leather-bound English calendar used as a notebook by her father, and the other is a Russian wrist watch which he always wore. Both of these items are significant because they tell the reader at the beginning that her father emigrated to England, and that he had important connections to the Soviet Union. Like her father's life, the watch has stopped and there isn't any way she can wind it to make it work again. She takes it to Paris and has it fixed, but the person who repairs it makes disparaging remarks about Russian clocks. At this point the author also touches on another important theme in her novel, that of a sense of disorientation and homelessness experienced by the protagonist. When the watch repairman asks her if she is from Russia, she denies it. When he continues to probe her origin, she

avoids his question: "Und dann hat er mich gefragt, ob ich von dort käme, und ich habe geantwortet, nein, nein, aber woher denn, daher käme ich nicht" (L 10).

Sarah Klassen echoes memories of sorrow and suffering in her poetry, deftly interweaving the Russian/German/Mennonite past with her Canadian present. A native of Winnipeg, Manitoba, she was born there in 1932, the second child in her family. Klassen's parents left their home in Russia in 1926, after the Revolution, and were married in Manitou, Manitoba, in 1930. Klassen began school near Petersfield, in Manitoba's Interlake area, where her parents had begun farming. By the time she started high school, the family had returned to Winnipeg. After high school she entered teacher's college and began teaching elementary school. While teaching she finished her university degree at the University of Winnipeg, majoring in English Literature. She subsequently taught high school, mainly English Literature, holding positions both in Brandon and in Winnipeg.

Klassen began writing in 1980 and published her first collection of poetry, *Journey to Yalta*, in 1988. It was awarded the Gerald Lampert Memorial Award that year. In 1990 she retired from teaching in order to have more time to write; she published *Violence and Mercy* in 1991 and *Borderwatch* in 1993. *Violence and Mercy* was nominated for the Pat Lowther Memorial Award, and for the McNally Robinson Manitoba Book of the Year Award. *Borderwatch* was written after her return from Lithuania, where she spent the summers of 1991, 1992, and 1993 at an institute designed to help teachers of English and other professionals as well as students upgrade their English. From 1995 to 1997 she taught English literature at Lithuania Christian College in Klaipeda, Lithuania. She credits these experiences and

her mother's stories about Russia as being influential on her writing. Klassen resides in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

Klassen's parents both grew up in Barvenkovo and went to school together there. Their fathers and another Mennonite man jointly owned a farm machine factory which they lost at the time of the revolution. Her grandmother had tuberculosis and after the factory was lost, her grandfather decided to take his wife to Yalta for treatment—a risky business given the troubled times and disrupted rail system. Upon their return, they didn't risk staying in Barvenkovo but moved to Wassilyevka, where her grandmother's sister, a widow with four children, owned a farm. Klassen's grandfather helped the widow with the farm work, and when his wife died, he married the widow. Klassen's mother, a teenager at the time these events occurred, had great difficulty accepting them. Four more children were born and in 1926 the blended family came to Manitou, Manitoba.

Just as Honigmann records events in the poem about her parents' turbulent lives, Klassen also writes about what her relatives experienced. The poem "Storm" captures their persecuted past. The setting is a Manitoba blizzard, and while the narrator is shovelling snow, she is suddenly transported back into the violent world her relatives experienced. She tries to set the record straight and control the story, but is unable to do so. She thinks back as far as Germany and finds them "stuck in the Russian zone." She shovels furiously until her "arms are stiff from lifting / the first heavy snow" but is unable to help them:

> I can no longer control
> their story, I can't revise
> the cold clacking of north-bound trains
> barbed wire fences

marking the stark limits
of the mind's endurance.

When the wind finally dies
and the sky breaks open
whiteness blots out the world.

Dazzled by the pure silence
I can barely see
the blurred outline of hounds
and grim guards marching
with guns cocked
on the empty driveway. (J 34)

Her first volume of poetry, *Journey to Yalta*, is dedicated to her mother who first told her about Yalta, as Klassen indicates in the dedication. The book is divided into three sections, the first of which is called "Journey to Yalta." In this section the poet delves into the past, but weaves back and forth from the present to the past, sometimes in one poem. In the second section, called "Minor Oracles," the author journeys much farther into the past as she paints vivid character sketches of Old Testament prophets, patriarchs, one lone woman (Pharaoh's daughter) and Herod of the New Testament, and tries to adapt their words to life as she lives it today in her modern world. The third section, called "Neighbourhood Watch," is solidly anchored in the modern world and deals with problems faced by the author in her daily suburban existence.

Violence and Mercy, Klassen's second volume of poetry, is divided into five parts. The first, called "Doing Time," focuses on her Canadian high school students to whom she teaches English. In the second part,

"Outpatients in October," a group of poems take her back mostly to her Manitoba Interlake childhood, containing references to her mother's past in Russia. Other poems in this same section deal with her mother in the present, who is undergoing cataract surgery. "Wind and Shadow" is a section in which the author relates impressions of her travels in China. "In such circumstances," the fourth part of this volume, attempts to come to terms with suffering. In these poems Klassen moves from the present to the past and back to the present. A number of poems refer to biblical events and characters. In the fifth grouping, "Wingspan," Klassen explores the mind of Leonardo da Vinci.

Klassen has written her third volume of poetry, *Borderwatch*, "for the women of Lithuania and for my mother" (dedication). It is divided into three sections, the first of which, "Between silence and breath," captures her experience in Lithuania, with a special emphasis on borders. These borders are not just visible structures but also represent invisible boundaries, such as prejudice, fear, and conformity, which often are more restrictive than the physical borders set up by totalitarian regimes. The literal borders are metaphors for these invisible borders that need to be confronted regularly in order for true freedom to be obtained. This group of poems takes up more than half of the book. "Between heaven and earth," the second section, captures the author's moods during different Canadian seasons in the present, with only the last poem "Impressions" being a flashback to her childhood. In the third section, "Still breathing," Klassen explores the trials of old age, especially that of her mother in a seniors' home.

Klassen's speaker knows more about her relatives than Honigmann's does. She speaks of her great grandfather, her grandparents and their experiences, her mother and herself. The picture she paints of this extended

family can be seen as symbolically representing the tragic Russian-Mennonite story and its bitter aftermath, just as Honigmann's novel represents that of the survivors of the Holocaust.

Honigmann's story is that of a father and daughter. Much of Klassen's poetry deals with the relationship between a mother and her daughter, in which the mother copes with many of the same fragmented feelings as Honigmann's protagonist.

The mother of Klassen's persona is fifteen when with her family she leaves her home in Barvenkovo, Ukraine. They have been hiding in the cellar for ten days and upon emerging on Easter Sunday discover that the tulips and yellow irises are blooming in the midst of the destruction of their home. On the day when they should be celebrating the Resurrection, they must come to terms with death and ruin, deliberately carried out by anarchists (J 5). They go by cattle car to Yalta so that her mother can be treated for a lung ailment. In Yalta they find more evidence of war, even though it was carefully camouflaged (J 7). There the fifteen-year-old is totally absorbed with caring for her mother who is dying. She knows about and identifies with the fifteen-year-old Russian princess who lies "covered with last year's leaves in a forbidden forest" (J 10). She tries desperately to remember her home in Barvenkovo, but the image gradually fades. All the years of her life this obsession with Barvenkovo never leaves her. In the poem "Collector" the narrator speaks of how her mother keeps everything, because

> [s]he tells me she's had to abandon too much
> in Russia. Scent of apricot blossoms
> in April, the green silk dress her mother made
> shade of a twisted oak, rough-branched, rooted

beside rivers. Friends

and the graves of sisters. (J 40)

Klassen conveys to the reader that the past encroaches on the present, that even when you try to rid yourself of it, it haunts you and creeps up on you, because it is a part of who you are and a part of the environment in which you live. It affects what you do and how you act, even when you try to ignore it.

In "Interlake childhood I" the speaker is caught up in the past against her will, and feels a captive of her mother's morbid preoccupation with it. She remembers her mother using cutlery to recreate the village of Barvenkovo on the oilcloth table. She is a Canadian child and wants to break free from what she considers to be a past that has nothing to do with her. Woven between the memories of her mother are the poet's own experiences, those of a child growing up in Canada. She is suddenly back in a different past, a historical rather than a personal past. She has tried to get away from her mother's past only to be confronted by another history, that of "ancient footprints," of "warriors gripping bent bows / and poisoned arrows in their brown hands" (J 28). This is the child's imagination, working on what she has learned at school about her Canadian past. It is also the writer's imagination, comparing and contrasting two very different histories, both of which become a part of the child, a part of what will form a new identity. She is a Canadian child, whose roots go back into her mother's history in the old country as well as into the history of another people in the new country.

The "perfect strawberries" ripening at her feet are both "wild and sweet." This represents the future of a child who embraces what has happened in the past. It is where the poet finds herself at the present time,

with memories both painful and enjoyable of a long ago day in her childhood. As an adult, thinking back, she recalls every detail. It has become important to her, something precious for her to retain, a part of her identity. Her mother instinctively knew that this was so. As the author writes: "She's doing this for me" (V 8).

Trains are a significant metaphor for the journey from the present into the past and vica versa. They take their passengers either from the familiar to the unfamiliar, moving them ever farther from what they have come to know and love, or from the unknown back to the known. The poems "November, 1918" and "Train, 1929" describe pensive reflections the speaker's mother has while on trains. In the first poem the grandmother has gone through her cure at Yalta, and her young daughter dreams of going home to Barvenkovo for Christmas. However, the looming grey battleships, faintly seen through the fog, ominously threaten any thoughts of home. Death imagery is present in the leafless beech trees which are likened to "spidery skeletons," contrasting them to the "summer sweetness of mulberries" in Barvenkovo that are now just a memory (J 12).

In the second train poem, the mother feels as if they are "boxed in like cattle," forced to make a change no one wishes to make. She wants this terrifying journey to be over, wishes she could get out and help push, get past this uncomfortable part of life. The slow pace of the train takes her back in memory to the slow pace of time when the family strolled in the orchard, played lawn croquet and had a cup of tea before bed. This leisurely way of life is contrasted with the horror of bandits attacking their home and ruining everything. Finding a new home in Canada, she finds solace only in old photographs that portray the peaceful life before the revolution. This is her entertainment on long winter evenings when the train has almost

disappeared, when the memory of this forced journey has begun to fade (J 27).

The poet writes about returning to the places of which her mother has spoken, trying to find healing in the waters of her mother's homeland. Repelled by "the malignant toxins of Chernobyl" which "surge into the Dnieper River where [her] grandfathers swam," she knows that these poisons will dissolve into the Black Sea and plaintively asks: "Now where can we go for healing?" (J 13).

Honigmann's narrator is equally unsuccessful in finding healing as she searches for the places where her relatives used to live. The past haunts her constantly and so when she leaves Berlin to go to Paris, she first makes a trip to Frankfurt and Wiesbaden where her father is at the time, and where all her relatives used to live before the war. For Honigmann as for Klassen, the train serves as a metaphor signifying a change which brings with it trauma and heartache. She takes the train for this trip, but her father is not there to meet her at the train station. She tries to reconstruct places and names for herself: "Hatte mein Vater Rheinstraße oder Steinstraße oder Weinstraße gesagt, als er von seinem Geburtshaus sprach? Den Namen des Sanatoriums hatte ich auch vergessen. So lief ich ganz orientierungslos in den Villenvierteln von Wiesbaden herum" (L 66). The bus driver, who mentions Romans, Celts, Germanics, and Franks, does not mention her forebears, and she cannot find their names at the cemetery. Her frustration at her inability to reconstruct the past is summed up in one sentence: "Ich habe nichts finden können, keine Erinnerung, kein Zeichen, kein Andenken, keine Spur" (L 69).

The train as metaphor for change is again evident when Honigmann's protagonist arrives in Paris by train. She compares the train station to a new residence with bare walls in which change is anticipated:

> Ich habe mich in dem Bahnhof, der sehr hell und sehr groß ist, umgesehen wie in einer neuen Wohnung, die man zum erstenmal betritt; man sieht die kahlen Wände an und fragt sich, was einen hier wohl erwartet und was man alles erleben wird, und ist ängstlich und neugierig zugleich und auch stolz, daß man sich in das Abenteuer gestürzt hat und daß es nun kein Zurück mehr gibt. (L 12)

When she leaves the train station, she is totally disoriented and cannot even find the entrance to the street because of the construction going on everywhere. Finally arriving at the street, she doesn't know where she is going: "Eine kleine Verzweiflung hatte mich schon gepackt, eine Kopflosigkeit jedenfalls—wohin, wo entlang?" (L 13). Like Klassen's relatives, who have had to stay for months in the basement and have become strangers to the outside world, she too lives in a basement suite, and watches people's feet go by. When she ventures out herself, she feels like she doesn't know who she is or where she belongs: "Eine Einwanderin, eine Auswanderin, eine Spaziergängerin" (L 20). She tries desperately to identify with people, joining strangers on sidewalk cafés and trying to experience the warmth of people's homes by looking into their windows and going into their entrances. People look at her strangely and she becomes aware of her bizarre actions, but can't help herself. She is in desperate search for belonging, for a home away from home.

Klassen summarizes this feeling of being an exile in a poem she calls "Summer stories: exile." Her mother's stories are stories of longing for home:

> Protagonists are priests, or your own
> father and mother. They have just one motive:
> home. They dream, curled around the cold
> heart's mortal wound,
> of fabulous blue lakes, light-flecked
> forests, the Baltic Sea's white sand.
> [. . . . . .]
> We are exiles. The next episode
> unfolding, its eventual telling
> unknown even to you. (B 32)

Memories of Death and Dying

As they search their memories, death is never far from the thoughts of the writers or their protagonist/speaker. Death is a part of memory. Since the dead can no longer tell of their experiences and the survivors can rely only on what is remembered, death sharpens memory, or causes the survivor to focus on memory. Michal Bodemann, in his essay "Reconstruction of History," writes that "[w]hen we speak of commemoration of historical events and of historical memory, we are obviously not merely concerned with individual acts of remembering but with acts of collective remembrance" (181). He points out that both the German verb "gedenken" as well as the English word "memory" have a common etymology with the meaning not only of 'recording' but also of 'mourning' and 'martyr,' and thus attest

to the "fundamental social nature of remembrance." This associates these words with death and personal sacrifice and surrounds them with an aura of sanctity (181).

The connection to the ancestors through death is very evident in both Honigmann's and Klassen's work. It is instrumental in defining their identity and that of the group to which they belong. In a poem entitled "Origins" Klassen writes:

> [. . .] Mennonites
>
> [. . . . . .]
>
> having come a long way
>
> like to return
>
> in herds like lemmings
>
> to places of death. (J 3)

Death imagery dominates the work of Honigmann and all three volumes of Klassen's poetry are drenched with it. Death acts as a framework to both Honigmann's story, which begins and ends with her father's death (L 1-10; 94-106), and to Klassen's *Journey to Yalta*, in which the first and last poems speak of death (J 2, 85).

The father of Honigmann's protagonist does not leave a will, only a few lines about where he wishes to be buried. His daughter is very surprised that his dying wish is to be buried in a Jewish cemetery in Weimar, according to orthodox Jewish specifications. It surprises her because her father has never had any ties to Judaism; he didn't even have a Hebrew name. There is a kind of homecoming indicated here, an ever so slight sign of hope in the midst of all the heaviness. It is downplayed, however, by the fact that the Jewish cantor does not know the protagonist's father, has never seen him, and continually mispronounces his name.

> Der Kantor [. . .] der meinen Vater gar nicht gekannt und nie gesehen hat, fügte deshalb an den entsprechenden Stellen des hebräischen Singsangs einfach den deutschen Namen und lächerlicherweise auch noch den Doktortitel ein, und er hat keine der endlosen Wiederholungen ausgelassen und nicht aufgehört, mit seinem sefardischen Akzent immer von neuem den Namen meines Vaters zu entstellen. (L 7)

The protagonist makes it quite obvious that her father's identity has never really been tied to Judaism in his lifetime and it is therefore awkward to claim it in death. His Germanism always intrudes, making his Jewish identity less than authentic. She herself feels estranged and repulsed by the cantor. This is indicated by her negative description, using derogatory phrases such as "hebräischer Singsang," "endlose Wiederholungen," "sefardischer Akzent."

Inside the death framework is Honigmann's story of her narrator's desperate search to belong. At the end of the novel she returns to the scene of her father's death, to the Russian clock and the English notebook. She reveals to the reader what her father has written in his diary. There are only eight entries, very brief and unemotional, which is odd since he was a journalist. The last diary entry connects him to his daughter who, throughout the novel, tries to come to terms with who she is and how she can better relate to her father, but fails to do so. He writes: "Gehe traurig nach Hause, weiß so ganz genau nicht, wo ich bin. Ein bißchen so wie der Italiener eben im Zirkus, der eigentlich aus Rußland kommt. Genau so ein Italiener wie ich" (L 99). Like his daughter, his identity is fragmented.

Again, however, the slight sign of hope ties the end to the beginning. Just like her father, who has a suppressed desire to get back to his Jewish

roots, and does so at his death, the daughter has a desire to get back to her roots. She begins by connecting with her father in continuing the diary in which he wrote. Again, like the poet Heine who could not be a romantic but continually ironized his own writing, she too cannot leave the reader with the impression that all is now well; she points out that the calendar is in fact outdated, suggesting that life has really passed both of them by (L 100).

The four diary entries she writes are quite different from those of her father. In them she speaks longingly of the few good memories of her childhood, of the grief she experiences because she can no longer relate to her father now that he is dead, of her return to her residence in Berlin, and of her effort to reconnect with old friends there. She speaks to one of them and realizes this person didn't even know that she had left to live elsewhere some time ago. This picks up again the theme of meaningless relationships.

At the end of the novel, Honigmann's narrator goes back to Paris in a sleeping coach, with the curtains drawn because she cannot bear to face the world (106). The train imagery returns at the end of the book, signifying a change in her life that is cause for unhappiness. She has been taken somewhere she does not wish to go. Her father's death closes another door to her search for identity. The closed curtains in the sleeping coach tell the reader that the protagonist is shutting herself out of a world that has caused her more grief than she can bear to face.

Although the novel has her father's death as a framework and comes to the conclusion that life is devoid of meaning, it describes the valiant efforts of the protagonist to be life affirming. She does this first by leaving Berlin and going to Paris. When she leaves Berlin, she throws away all the dead flowers she kept, symbolically ridding herself of death to begin a new life (L 41). She wants to escape from this living death, this existence in a

vacuum. She compares her home in Berlin to a "Blumenfriedhof," in which she is not alive and needs to strip off this painful identity and slip into a new skin (L 48).

Both the director of her unsuccessful drama and Alfried, the German writer and drama director with whom the narrator has an intimate relationship, have told her that there is no new life, only the dream of a new life, an illusion (L 60, 75). This seems to be confirmed on her arrival in Paris. Because of all the construction going on, she cannot find the street when she leaves the train station, but faces a giant hole. She encounters it again and again before she finally finds her way to the street.

The ensuing feeling of panic, and the sense of disorientation she experiences as a result, indicates to the reader that this hole is symbolic of a mass grave and the train that brought her there symbolizes the trains that brought the victims of the Holocaust to the concentration camps. It also serves to foreshadow her father's death. This picture of living death is further developed by the fact that the protagonist lives below the ground and is terrified of the city. She becomes a captive in her own room, a prisoner of her grotesque imagination, lying in bed completely still, trying to imagine what it is like to be her dead father, until everything in her body aches (L 87). This, too, is a picture of the Holocaust victims hiding in their rooms, filled with terror.

Klassen's first poem in *Journey to Yalta*, "Small Deaths," speaks of the natural deaths of the babies of the narrator's grandparents and how these deaths affected them. The narrator relies on photographs and on the stories told to her to convey this to her readers. Like Honigmann's protagonist, the grandmother in Klassen's poem feels guilt and remorse,

anxiously examining herself to see if these deaths could perhaps be her fault:

> Grandmother, grieving
> searched all conceivable corners
> of her soul
> for evidence of unexamined sin. (J 2)

The grandfather, like the father of Honigmann's protagonist, seems to have no feelings at all:

> [H]e stares straight past me
> facing unafraid
> the omniscient eye of God who is merciful.
> Who is just. (J 2)

His identity is intact, because he does not question what he has learned about God's justice and mercy from the group to which he belongs. His faith makes him fearless. His wife, too, accepts the teaching of the group and looks for religious answers to her questions about why this happened. She blames herself, thinking there is some evil in her of which she is not aware. This too reflects what she has learned in her community. There has to be a reason why things happen as they do. If nothing else, it must be a punishment from God for personal failure.

The last poem in *Journey to Yalta*, entitled "Encounter," is a scene from the natural world in which a hawk drops from the sky and swoops up a squirrel. Klassen describes what she calls "a necessary death":

> I am left. The only witness
> to this necessary death. I will testify
> it was no accident
> there was ample justification

and some negligence

on the part of the squirrel. (J 85)

This brings her poem in line with the quote by Virginia Stem Owens beneath the poem's title: "All dying does somebody good." The conclusion of the poem gives this quote an ironic twist, as the speaker applies what she has learned from this incident to her own life:

[. . .] I will say

it happened under this brilliant sky

on this mountain which I continue to climb

carefully, poised

listening for the noise of wings. (J 85)

Klassen's narrator is more controlled than Honigmann's protagonist, the panic more carefully monitored. She rationalizes that death is a necessity and "does somebody good," but when it comes to her own personal life, the narrator will not be negligent like the squirrel swooped up by the hawk. There has been too much death in her family and in her historical past for her not to watch for it, not to be constantly mindful of it.

Within the framework of the poem about dead babies in Russia and that about the modern day hapless death of a squirrel, the poetic voice recounts memories her mother has in which death plays a prominent part. This is due to atrocities the mother witnessed or heard about as a young girl during the Russian Revolution. The poem "Easter (Barvenkovo, 1918)" tells of hiding in wet cellars and returning at Easter: "The wet smell of death welcomes them home" (5). "Yalta: 1918" recounts the aftermath of war as "aristocrats, officers and other gentlemen" are "dismembered [. . .] their lives declared abomination / their legs and arms discarded / in the

Black Sea" (J 7). In the poem "August, 1918" her mother turns fifteen, with the spectre of death never far from her mind:

> That summer in Yalta you turn
> fifteen, knowing the beautiful queen
> and her virgin daughters lie
> covered with last year's leaves (J 10)

Not only does she see death all around her caused by war and revolution, she also has to come to terms with a personal death, that of her mother's slow death from tuberculosis:

> [Y]ou find your mother
> spitting blood again. Shrouded in red-
> flecked sheets she slowly approaches
>
> sainthood. Shaping a grave smile
> you place white bread
> into the outstretched hand
> she offers you. (J 10)

Interspersed with these memories of her mother are modern day events the author has experienced. One poem speaks of a car accident in which a small daughter and her mother are killed. The speaker tries to understand the reason for this senseless, accidental death:

> *If it isn't God*
> *who did it, then*
> *who is it?* (J 36)

This modern death is a reminder to the speaker of the deaths of her ancestors. She returns to the memory related in the first poem about the deaths of small babies. Her ancestors too experienced the finality of death.

Memories of their grieving give her a sense of continuity and community, a connectedness to a group, an identity that has been shaped through coping with calamities in life together:

> When we're able to think again
> of singing
> we'll begin not with our lips
> but with memories
> of our grandmothers
> grieving beside small coffins
> heads bowed
> everyone singing. (J 37)

Both writers speak of searching for names on the gravestones of their ancestors. When Honigmann's protagonist takes the trip to Frankfurt before going to Paris, she hopes that it will be a sort of home-coming because that is the city her father called home, the home also of many of her relatives of whom her father spoke with great pride. She also expects to see her father who is there at the time, and perhaps attend her own theatre production with him. This all turns out to be a great disappointment because her father has left the city by the time she gets there, her theatre production is a failure, and she has to try to find her own way around the city. In desperation she takes a tourist bus, only to be disappointed again. The bus driver does not speak of her forebears, the Jews, although he mentions the Romans, the Celts, the Teutons, and the Franks. She cannot even identify the names of her ancestors on the gravestones at the cemetery. Honigmann writes:

> Später habe ich auf kleinen Friedhöfen vergeblich die Gräber meiner Großeltern und Vorfahren von der Bergstraße gesucht,

> ich konnte sie nicht finden, obwohl auf vielen Grabsteinen ihre Namen standen, oder gerade deshalb, denn ich wußte nicht, welche von den vielen Weils und Sanders es waren, ich kannte keinen Geburtstag oder Todestag, kaum einen Vornamen, und wußte nichts von einer so verzweigten Familie. (L 68)

Klassen, in her poem "Origins," describes a group of Mennonite tourists, she among them, going back to the Ukraine to search for their roots. The "frozen forests" to which many of her ancestors were banned cannot be visited. Old buildings stand in ruin and for these tourists there is not much to see of the once proud Mennonite colonies. Like Honigmann's protagonist, they long for something that will remind them of their identity. Like her, they find some small comfort in an ancient tree and in weathered gravestones. They surround an old oak tree which was already five hundred years old when the first Mennonite settlers in the Ukraine gathered under its branches in 1789. It remained solidly rooted when the Mennonite world became uprooted and dispersed during the wars and revolutions of the twentieth century, a symbol of strength and solidarity in the midst of the chaos in which the Mennonites found themselves. Wherever Mennonites scattered they remembered it:

> Frozen forests declared out of bounds
> we surround the old oak tree we owned
> once. We stretched warm limbs
> along its rough-ridged branches, its roots
> loved the same rivers we loved. We believed
> it would be always summer
>
> always Sunday. On Khortiza Island

we fall to our knees
searching reluctant undergrowth
for evidence of our having been here.
Our fingers trace names
once chiselled deep
in weathered stone.

Hildebrand Friesen Regehr. (J 3)

Klassen relates desperate attempts at going back into history, trying to locate names at a family gathering:

Peter Kornelius Froese
born and buried in a vanished village
somewhere in the Ukraine. We've lost the name
of his first wife. We need evidence
that his twelve sons our grandfathers lived
where we say they lived
completed what we believe. (J 32)

Responding to names is the beginning of community. If the names can be found, the facts lined up correctly, then there is a place in history for each person. This validates the lives of those who still remain; it gives them an identity, a reason for carrying on. People who are numbered, rather than named, are less than human. Slaves, throughout the centuries had their names taken away. If people are nameless they can be mistreated with a clear conscience. People in the concentration camps had numbers branded on their arms for that very reason. They were to die a nameless death, their identity erased, their degradation completed.

The Quest for a Meaningful Life

When meaningless and senseless death becomes overwhelming and overshadows everything else in the lives of the survivors, life itself becomes futile. What sense is there in trying to establish an identity that will be snatched away? Hand in hand with the subject of death goes that of the futility and hopelessness of life. Klassen explores this in a number of her poems. In "Small Deaths" the grandmother searches for a reason why she loses so many of her children. If she can find a reason (she thinks it is unexamined sin in her life), then life has meaning, something can be done about it. If there is no reason, life loses its meaning (J 2).

In the poem "By the waters," the speaker contrasts the life lived by her grandfathers to that of modern life. The waters of the Black Sea, so cool and soothing, were a comfort to the boys who swam in them. They could dream of sweet watermelon and village girls while swimming. Today the toxins of Chernobyl have poisoned these very same waters. Life no longer makes any sense when humanity pollutes its own waters that are there for healing (J 13). This theme is continued in "Yalta: 1945" where war has ruined the beauty of nature. In this poem the young Sarah Churchill accompanies her father to Yalta. Klassen imagines the impact of the ruins of war on this young, impressionable girl. She can identify with this other Sarah because her identity is wrapped up in what happened back there, in the place her mother called home, the place she loved and longed for all of her life:

> Sarah
> saw only a wilderness
> of broken trees
> and shell-holes

torn bodies crawling
from shattered eyes
of dead houses.

Nothing seemed wholesome
not even sunlight
filtered through
trees. The dull sea
convulsed with malice.
Waxen gulls fell
screaming from the sky. (J 22)

"My mother and the princess" is a poem about two women who have been displaced by war in their youth. Later they turn up in other places, far from their homes, doing things they never would have done had they been allowed to grow up where they were born, allowed to clap their hands and dance. Their minds are still back there, clinging to the things they loved, unable to let go of the security of their childhoods, finding no meaning in the present existence. The princess dreams of "the peasants in Yalta / shouting Easter morning / before sun up / *Khristos Voskres*" (J 38). Klassen's mother just wanted it all to be over: "She wanted an end to the rain / and the stubborn breeze. / An end to the endless rising / and setting of the sun" (J 39).

In the poem "Born of a woman," a baby's reluctance to move into this world is contrasted with the joy a mother feels when the birth process is over and the baby has finally moved out of her belly into the world. When babies are reluctant to be born, it takes every ounce of strength a woman has to push them out. Some breathe the air for a while, then refuse to stay in it and die. They are not ready to face this world: "[. . .] Then / as if unwilling to be /

small accomplices lured into light / and sound conspiracies / they puffed out their last thin breath / turned resolutely / blue and so silent" (J 65).

The poem "Show business" explores the effect of grief on a person, and how life can lose meaning when a loved one is lost. In spite of all the criticism he faces, the prophet Ezekiel continues his street theatre year after year, always playing the lead role in all performances. He is so enthusiastic about it, that he runs one show for a whole year without intermission. Then his wife dies and he needs to grieve. "[. . .] They said / even the best director on earth / could never persuade him now to believe / this show must go on" (J 48). In the biblical account, however, Ezekiel is instructed by God not to grieve the loss of his wife publicly, as a sign to his people not to mourn openly for Jerusalem, and he obeys (Ezekiel 24.15-27). Klassen's poem differs from the biblical account. She says life cannot go on if you do not allow yourself to grieve.

Both Honigmann and Klassen use the imagery of the theatre to portray life that has lost its meaning. The father of Honigmann's narrator lives a life that is like the theatre production of his childhood. This production, he told his daughter, was very carefully prepared in his imagination, but he never wrote it down, even though he announced to his parents that he was preparing it and they were to invite the entire family. His proud father even invited his colleagues from work. He chose a title for the play, made all the costumes, invitations, program, and character sketch, but in his excitement he never wrote a word of the play. Much to his and to his parents' embarrassment, he had nothing to show for his efforts when everyone arrived to enjoy the play (L 36-37). In much the same way as his childhood turned into a fiasco, so in his estimation his life has amounted to nothing. His

inability to settle on an occupational identity is a direct result of his identity diffusion.

Honigmann's protagonist fears that her life will be like her father's. She searches for identity through her work, but her art work is not successful and the dramas she writes don't amount to much: "Ein Regisseur, der nichts kann und ein Stück, das nichts taugt—es habe sich wahrhaftig nicht gelohnt, die wochenlangen Proben, die ganze Arbeit, das sei alles umsonst gewesen, für nichts und wieder nichts" (L 61).

In a poem entitled "The readiness is all," Klassen has the same image of life as a theatre production. She compares the final act to the end of life, which she does not want to think about, and which she cautiously calls the "denouement":

> You don't even try to think
> the denouement. The immutable
> mute tableau of the last act,
> slivers of glass and the spilt wine. (J 66)

Her speaker has gone a step further than Honigmann's father and has rehearsed the words, but is never sure that they have been rehearsed often enough, that she has practised enough, that she will not be caught off guard:

> Yes. But you're never sure
> waiting in the wings
> the words will come on cue.
> You can't be certain you've rehearsed them
> with the necessary fervour. (J 66)

She resorts to biblical language, to ward off despair, to give some hope to the situation:

You want to keep believing

there's providence in a sparrow's fall. (J 66)

The hopelessness of relationships contributes to the feeling of despair. The protagonist in Honigmann's novel has known fragmented relationships since birth, at which time both parents were in their second relationship. The father eventually marries four different women. The woman who follows her mother is an actress, and Honigmann describes the theatrical world in which they live from the perspective of her protagonist as a child.

It is a surrealistic world in which nothing seems real, not even the real world: "[. . .] und nur wir standen zwischen dem dunklen Zuschauerraum und der künstlichen Welt auf der Bühne und der Welt hinter der großen Tür nach draußen, die aber irgendwie auch nicht die richtige Welt zu sein schien" (L 26). The actress to whom her father is married is part of this surrealism in the little girl's mind as she watches the woman take off her mask and her costume after a performance.

This woman does not function well in the real world. She cannot produce a child, and has countless miscarriages, but never a real baby. Like Klassen's babies in "Born of a Woman" (J 65), her babies refuse to live in this world. The closest she came to having a child is an embryo swimming in a jar of fluid, which her parents tell their daughter is a brother who was never born. Because of her childlessness, this woman cries all the time and the protagonist dances for her to cheer her up. This too is role play, as the child dresses up in her dancing outfit, and uses the bedpost for a partner (L 27). In this world of unrealities no genuine partner is available; this becomes very evident in her later life.

Honigmann's narrator says of her childhood and her relationship to her parents:

> In meiner ganzen Kindheit bin ich zwischen meinen Eltern hin und her gependelt, und es hat mir weh getan, zu kommen, zu gehen, wieder zu kommen und wieder zu gehen, und so hat es wohl zwischen uns nie etwas ganz Vertrautes gegeben, weil sich immer von neuem, bei jedem Wiedersehen, die Schalen der Fremdheit darüber gelegt haben. (L 28)

The narrator's mother eventually moves to Bulgaria and forgets the German language. Her daughter does not know Bulgarian, and so they cannot speak to each other (L 30). Her relationship with her father is very complex. She admits that she ran away from him because he always expected too much from her (L 17), but in Paris, where everything is so strange, she is homesick for him (L 20). She keeps all her old letters, but is afraid to look at them because of what this will do to her emotionally.

As she unpacks her things, the letters fly about the room, reminding her of a past life she is trying to forget. She restacks and rebundles them, returning them to the bottom of the carton in which they had been packed, but in the process she glances at certain pages fearfully: "Wenn mein Blick doch auf eine Seite fiel, dann erschrak ich, so fern waren mir diese Schriften aus einer anderen Zeit, wie Nachrichten aus der Unterwelt erschienen sie mir, die mich bei längerem Hinsehen ganz hinunterziehen könnten" (L 22). These letters symbolize her life, fraught with uncertainties and doubts that threaten to undo her.

On top of the stack she places her father's letter, which was written to her shortly after she left Berlin. In it he wrote a quote from Hölderlin. With this quote he indirectly blames his daughter for leaving him, underlining the word "Mord" and insinuating that this separation is going to cause his death at her hands. He does not seem to realize that their

separation happened long ago, caused by his attitude toward his daughter as she was growing up. She relates that she never gained stature in his eyes: "Als Kind war ich ein kleines Kind, und als Erwachsene blieb ich eine kleine Erwachsene" (L 23). He conveyed his dissatisfaction with her physical appearance to her which caused her to have inferiority feelings about herself. He blamed her for never loving him and for being cold and uncaring, when in reality he was the one who left her. She in turn perceives his love toward her as distant, consisting only of meetings and common experiences; they never had a meaningful relationship by actually being together (L 24).

She is excited about meeting her father in Frankfurt, the city in which he grew up, in order to explore it and to discover more about her past. But he leaves her a letter, informing her that he isn't well and doesn't want to say last good-byes: "Wenn du in Frankfurt ankommst, sitze ich schon im Zug nach Weimar. Wahrscheinlich werden wir aneinander vorbeifahren, wir könnten uns im Vorüberfahren gegenseitig einen Vogel zeigen" (L 62).

Metaphorically this is a picture of their relationship. They pass each other, catching fleeting glimpses. They make signals of acknowledgement but never stop to share memories. The father is not able to give his daughter what she craves above all else—a life filled with meaning, brought about by an intimate family relationship, through which she will achieve a genuine identity.

In his letter her father writes about how he drags his girlfriend, a much younger actress, from one familiar place to another in Frankfurt and Wiesbaden, showing her the places he wanted to show to his wife who had refused to go with him. These are the places his daughter so desperately wants to see with him. He goes with a stranger but he cannot go with her.

She is haunted by the relationship of her father with the young actress and seems to see them everywhere (L 67). The narrator's father has time for other women, but never for his daughter, not even when she becomes an adult. He doesn't seem to realize how selfish he is and how much he hurts her. Theirs is not a genuine father/daughter relationship, but a relationship by letter.

Klassen is more obscure in revealing frustrated family relationships. In the poem "Dark room" Klassen develops a family portrait from a negative (J 67). The narrator obviously does not remember a loving family relationship, even though the family she describes appears to be intact. This is not the ideal family picture where the subjects lean into each other, a mother lovingly holding a child's hand, a father touching a son's shoulder. In this picture no one touches the other, each stands separately.

The reader can only guess at what is going on in the lives of the individual family members by subtle hints the narrator drops about each person in the photograph. The father strikes the reader as someone who is faking a smile, rather than being genuinely happy, with a "mouth clamped into a smile [but] his forehead furrowed." The furrowed brow reveals someone worried and anxious. The mother lives in her own world. She is out of touch with reality and very tense. The narrator describes her as having "hands that grip each other like steel teeth. [. . .] She's returned from wherever the lost live [. . .] [with] distance in her eyes." The brother is ready to escape into a life outside the family confines, "poised to escape," he looks like he will leave the family as soon as possible and pursue his own interests. The sister's "tight shoulders" and trembling chin reveal the tenseness and agitation of her mother.

The reader might ask why the narrator herself has trembling hands and "nothing to say," but no answer is given. The reader can only deduce that this is not a family that communicates with each other by sitting around the table to relive and discuss the events of the day: "We had just finished supper / and there was nothing to say" (J 67).

According to the psychoanalyst Erik. H. Erikson, much of the indignity and uncertainty that is aroused in children is a consequence of the parents' frustrations in marriage, in work, and in citizenship. Children feel the tensions, insecurities, and rages of their parents even if they do not know their causes or witness their most overt manifestations. Their spirits can be broken by making them the victims of adult anxieties, the victims of tensions which the adults cannot correct in themselves or in their surroundings (Erikson 100-107).

Klassen depicts the hopelessness of unreturned love in a poem called "Hosea." The biblical Hosea's relationship to his unfaithful spouse is symbolic of God's relationship with Isreal (Hosea 2). Hosea takes his wife back, just like God accepts Israel again even though she has turned her back on God (Hosea 3). The main purpose of the book of Hosea is to proclaim God's compassion and the love that cannot let Israel go. Klassen's Hosea, however, does not take his wife back, because he knows that she will not remain true to him: "Clear from the start / she doesn't love you. / [. . .] You'll never take her back / into your arms again" (J 49).

The love of Honigmann's narrator for Alfried is also hopeless. She calls it "eine Liebe aus nichts, in der nichts passiert und die sich endlos im Nichts verliert" (L 78). They could not have a meaningful relationship because Alfried was a German. She couldn't even stand his name:

> Von Anfang an habe ich Alfrieds Namen gehaßt, ich konnte ihn nicht über die Lippen bringen, weil er so germanisch klang und weil ich keinen Germanen lieben wollte, denn ich konnte, wollte und durfte den Germanen nicht verzeihen, was sie den Juden angetan hatten. Weil die Germanen Mörder gewesen waren, konnte ich Alfrieds Namen nicht aussprechen. (L 46)

The protagonist's relationship to Alfried symbolizes the ambivalent feelings between the Germans and the Jews. Just like Barbara Honigmann had to physically remove herself from Germany but remains drawn to it, so her protagonist continues to be repelled by and attracted to Alfried: "Denn wie gegen meinen Willen liebte ich ihn ja, und diese Liebe ist mir oft wie ein Zusammenhang oder gar Zusammenhalt vorgekommen, aus dem wir nicht heraus könnten" (L 46).

Their relationship can never bear fruit. It is similar to the babies in Klassen's poem "Born of a woman" (J 64) who died at birth, and it resembles the miscarriages resulting from Honigmann's father's relationship with the actress (L 27). Her narrator laments: "Manchmal wünschte oder fürchtete ich, daß wir ein Kind hätten. Ich sah das Kind aber in Alpträumen, wie es nur lose aus einzelnen Teilen gefügt war, die nicht zusammenhielten, und wie es dann auseinanderfiel und zerbrach und nicht aufrecht bleiben konnte" (L 46).

They could never speak about this problem: "Er sagte nichts und ich fragte nicht, wir schwiegen darüber wie über alles andere auch" (L 44). It is too painful for Germans and Jews to speak about their love/hate relationship due to the Holocaust. They continue to acknowledge each other's existence but constantly struggle to ignore the tension that lies dormant between them, caused by their identities of victim/perpetrator with

which the history of their forebears has saddled them: "Er wollte diese Wirklichkeit meines Lebens nicht sehen, die ich nicht gewählt hatte, aber die doch schwer wog und deren innere Wahrheit offensichtlich und verborgen zugleich war, auch für mich selbst" (L 47).

There is no real communication between the two lovers. They meet secretly at night, and the only way he can let her know that he has arrived is by calling her name loudly, since there is no doorbell and she lives on the second floor. This again is an illustration of the abnormality of the Jewish/German relationship. Everyone knows about it, but no one is willing to acknowledge or admit a personal relationship in open daylight. Alfried does not want her in his personal life, but gives no reason for it: "Alfried hat mir gesagt, daß er mich nicht in seiner Wohnung empfangen möchte, allerdings, einen Grund dafür nannte er nicht" (L 44).

She finally decides to see where he lives when he is on a trip, but cannot find the key she knows is hidden near the door. She is able to enter by using one of the extra keys she has brought along. It doesn't help to make her feel closer to him, however. In fact it distances her even more (L 45).

With this example Honigmann illustrates that it is impossible for the Jew to enter the German private domain without feeling like an intruder. The Germans do not allow it, they do not invite them and they leave no key. The Jews have their own key; it is their victimization at the hands of the perpetrators that allows them access, but when they make use of it they feel ashamed. Their Jewish/German identity is wrapped up in victim/perpetrator definition only, not in open acceptance and free communication.

Alfried continues to send her postcards but never letters, and the postcards carry no return address (L 47). This is an example of a power play in which the German continues to relate to the Jew, but only when he/she chooses to do so, and never with the intent of eliciting a response.

In Paris, where she hopes to establish a new identity, Honigmann's protagonist does get a letter from Alfried, with a return address and telephone number. He feels she is too far away in Paris and should join him in Munich. She is excited about his letter and writes back quickly. On the way to mail the letter, she discovers that he is in Paris with a theatrical piece he wrote many years ago in Berlin. She feels disappointed and betrayed that he did not mention he was coming to Paris in his letter. She goes to his production and when she asks him why he never wrote her that he was coming to Paris, he just laughs and says that they will always find each other and that it is impossible to lose each other, so no appointments are necessary between them (L 70-75).

The author insinuates with this incident that Jews and Germans, because of their unique relationship, will not be able to get away from each other. Honigmann's Jewish narrator constantly fantasizes about this relationship and longs for it to be genuine. The German Alfried's arrogance is obvious; he does not contact her when he comes to Paris and makes no effort to foster their friendship. The Jewish/German relationship remains an unhappy symbiosis.

Neither Alfried nor Honigmann's protagonist have kept the Gingko Biloba leaves they picked up at Belvedere when they visited her father together (L 76). This illustrates that the Jewish/German relationship is not based on shared memories and keepsakes, on mutual love or sentiment, but on racism, prejudice and genocidal atrocities.

Honigmann's protagonist is sad about this; she leaves before the theatre production is over and goes back to her basement suite. The street leading to it is described as "ohnmächtig," "lang hingestreckt und grau im Gesicht" (L 78). With this description the author suggests that there is no hope in this homecoming.

Honigmann's protagonist's love for the young Jewish man Jean-Marc also ends in nothing. She can identify no more with him than she can with Alfried. She does not tell Alfried about her relationship with Jean-Marc (L 77), implying that she is ashamed of her Jewishness. What she has in common with Jean-Marc is the haunted past of their parents. Honigmann writes: "Ihre Emigrationsrouten und Erlebnisse in den fremden Ländern waren wie Mythen unserer Kindheit und unseres Lebens überhaupt, wie die Irrfahrten des Odysseus" (L 55).

Jean-Marc and Honigmann's protagonist are more comfortable with each other than Alfried and she are. They go to see each other regularly, she to his place up in an attic, or he to her place down in the basement. However, they have a degree of discomfort with each other, because neither speaks the mother tongue of the other fluently and so they agree to speak only French (L 55). Later, in a letter, Honigmann's protagonist writes that she regrets this, and that only the words they said to each other in their mother tongues have remained meaningful (L 104). Feigning a foreign identity, both denied their mutual Jewish identity.

The two also had some other misunderstandings that kept them from fully identifying with each other. Jean-Marc could never understand her loyalty to Germany and to the German language and literature. He wanted to persuade her to identify with him totally and come to live in New York, something she wished she could do but was never able to do (L 56). Jean-

Marc also leaves her and goes to America. Regretfully she says: "Gerade hatten wir uns kennengelernt, da verabschiedeten wir uns wieder" (L 81).

According to Erikson, it is only after a reasonable sense of identity has been established that real intimacy with oneself, any other person and the opposite sex is possible. He says that "the counterpart of intimacy is distantiation" (101). There can be no generativity, no interest in establishing and guiding the next generation without this firm sense of identity. Inability to adapt to "the triumphs and disappointment of being," leads to despair (100-104).

In the poem "Metallurgy," Klassen describes a relationship that could be that of Alfried's or Jean-Marc's with Honigmann's protagonist. The poem depicts two people playing Scrabble. They are in a relationship that is about to break up. Very careful not to be emotional, the author defines the relationship with the words that two players connect in a Scrabble game. They use all their letters, everything they have, they put it all out:

> Putting down all seven letters
> you'd spelled out *fracture*, attaching it
> to my *rage*. I couldn't let you
> get away with that. (V 59).

The word *fracture* is attached by her partner to her own word *rage*. He uses all seven of his letters and she can't let him get away with that so she adds *ductile*. The author contrasts this word with brittle metal that snaps easily, rather than with soft metal that is capable of being drawn out or hammered thin; it is more pliable. The word *ductile* implies some hope in the relationship.

In "Dreaming the moon" Klassen shows no hope in an association that once was warm and loving like "the wind breathing joy into your blood"

(J 69). This relationship has turned from spring and the renewing of life to winter and darkness and cold seeping deep into the bones. It is a description of the death of love in which "blood-thick darkness / stamped out the moon."

In the poem "Geography" Klassen's narrator remembers the English-speaking ladies of her childhood, and how fearful her Mennonite mother was of them when they came to visit: "She serves tea nervously with cream in good chipped cups on a frayed tablecloth. Her fear shatters my summer dreaming under blue sky, the cool shade of poplar" (V 31). She remembers especially her mother's desperation because her English was not that good:

> 'Wie sagt man *Dorf Obstgarten zurueckgeblieben fortgeschickt*
> auf englisch?' my mother whispers. I suffer her clumsy answers
> to their curious presence, the apron of bleached flour sack,
> her terrible need of my tongue. (V 31)

She describes how different her mother's past is from their past, and how they can't understand her because they have not gone through the experiences that her mother has had:

> 'You should speak English to your daughter,' the ladies say. These ladies suffer, if they suffer, in a different geography. They can't imagine watermelon fields rampant in September, a white fence lining the village street, blossoming apricot orchards that float pink clouds around my mother's longing. They can't hear the choir singing *Grosser Gott*, hoofbeats like gunfire. They are deaf to the wind that won't stop moaning in corners of her torn heart. (V 31)

An assumed identity is helpful when life loses its meaning, when relationships fall apart and when the search for identity is unsuccessful.

Klassen summarizes this in her poem "Undercover." Again, the imagery of the theatre is prevalent in this poem. Klassen's speaker says:

> I've rehearsed this
> repertoire of faces
> poised on my dressing table
> waiting to be worn. Each one
>
> precisely fashioned to fit
> any occasion in life
> or death [. . .].
> [. . . . . .]
>
> I assure you recognition is impossible. (J 68)

Klassen's protagonist hides in her room, anxiously examining the costumes and props she uses out in the world, to make sure no one has discovered the true identity she tries so valiantly to hide from others, her vulnerability and insecurity:

> When I return to this room
> I'll examine each piece for wear
> meticulously join torn parts
> with needle and thread
> recover each frayed edge.
> I must let no one
> discover my true skin
> my fragile flesh, quick breathing.
>
> If anyone touches

the trembling underneath

I am undone. (J 68)

She is like Honigmann's protagonist who returns to her basement room after exploring Paris or seeing Alfried's theatre production to try to figure out who she really is and what life is all about.

Finding Identity through Literature

Both writers turn to literature as their reference point, as the only place where they really feel at home. Honigmann refers to her German cultural heritage and Klassen to her Mennonite religious heritage which is rooted in German pietism. Klassen also refers to English and Russian literature.

Like her protagonist, Honigmann couldn't rely on her parents to tell her of their memories, so she turned to other memories, the delightful ones of language and literature. Her language as a child growing up was German. Language and literature became her home, they were her roots in the midst of uprootedness. Honigmann constantly refers to well-known writers of German literature: Rilke, Hölderlin, Goethe; Klassen also refers to authors of great literature (in several languages), as well as to biblical characters and Anabaptist heroes and martyrs.

Honigmann is obviously well aquainted with Rainer Maria Rilke, the great symbolist of German literature. Not only does she quote from his poetry, but *Eine Liebe aus nichts* has some striking similarities to Rilke's *Die Aufzeichnungen des Malte Laurids Brigge*. Like Rilke, Honigmann uses a variety of narrative devices, such as diary entries, letters, anecdotes, musings, and reflections of the first-person narrator. These reflections shift

constantly from present to past and vice versa. Her episodes and anecdotes "are borrowed from precise observations of ordinary occurrences rather than from the large sweep of history" (Stern 332), and told in simple but very poetic language. She has said, "The political book is not my genre" (Stern 344, footnote 13), but like Rilke she points to an oppressive and dysfunctional system through her poignant observations of ordinary life.

Not only is there great similarity in structure and style between Rilke's and Honigmann's novel, but their themes are also strikingly coincidal. Alienation and disorientation, at times bordering on insanity are prevalent. Before the narrator in Honigmann's novel decides to leave for Paris, she quotes the Rilke poem which she and her friends have been discussing. This quote is taken from a longer poem of Rilke's entitled "Der Auszug des verlorenen Sohnes," in which the speaker desires to travel into an unknown land to make a new start. He is tentative about leaving the known for the unknown, having no solid reason to do so and perhaps risking a lonely death in a foreign land (*Sämtliche Werke* 41-42).

In the biblical account on which this poem is based, the son who leaves home loses his inheritance through riotous living and is faced with the bleak prospect of starvation. However, he chooses to return home rather than die alone and is forgiven and accepted by a loving father (Luke 15. 11-32). The poet poses the question of the where and the why of this leave-taking. The where question is not so difficult. It should be an unkown country, neutral and warm, where his fragmented identity can be left behind and a new start can be made. He is not so sure as to the why of leaving. He has several answers:

> [U]nd fortzugehn: warum? Aus Drang, aus Artung,
> aus Ungeduld, aus dunkeler Erwartung,
> aus Unverständlichkeit und Unverstand.
>
> (qtd. by Honigmann, L 42)

All of these reasons for leaving are also those of Honigmann's narrator. She asks the question: "Warum hatte ich eigentlich alles hinter mir stehen und liegenlassen wie einer, der flüchten muß" (L 38)? Her answer is that her life as she knows it in Berlin is boring and she is tired of it to the point where her own lethargy is making her fearful: "Das Vertraute war so bis zum Überdruß vertraut, daß es nur noch eine Müdigkeit und Schwäche in mir ausbreitete und eine Faulheit des Lebens, die mir angst machte" (L 40). Her room and her surroundings become like a cemetery to her, and she decides that she needs a new identity: "Und ich saß in meiner Wohnung inmitten des Blumenfriedhofes und habe mich gar nicht mehr wohl in meiner Haut gefühlt und dachte, das Weggehen könnte auch so etwas wie ein Verwandeln sein, bei dem man die alte Haut einfach abstreifen würde" (L 48-49).

Both Rilke's and Honigmann's narrators leave for Paris, where Rilke's narrator acts in the same bizarre manner as Honigmann's, as he sits with other unknown readers in the library trying to imagine what they are reading, and pretending that they all know they belong together (*Malte* 38-40). He feels strangely drawn to individuals on the street who are poor, homeless and ill, to the point where their plight becomes his (*Malte* 38-69). Like Honigmann's protagonist who lies in her bed completely still, trying to imagine what it is like to be her dead father until everything in her body aches, so Rilke's narrator is a captive in his room, caught in his own bizarre mental world (*Malte* 60-63).

Irrational fear possesses both Rilke's and Honigmann's narrators, a fear of death that is all pervasive and dominates them to the point where even the dogs succumb to death and leave their masters without a friend in the world (Honigmann. L 80; Rilke, *Malte* 151).

Honigmann refers to Hölderlin by quoting several lines from his poem "Der Abschied":

> Trennen wollten wir uns, wähnten es gut und klug.
> Da wirs taten, warum schreckte wie Mord uns die Tat.
> Ach wir kennen uns wenig. (L 23)

The poem from which Honigmann quotes was writen by Hölderlin for his beloved Diotima (Beck 109), in reality Susette Gontard, a married woman. Their mutual love remained forever unfulfilled. Susette died a few years after she met Hölderlin, and he became schizophrenic for the rest of his life.

Although Honigmann does not spell this out in her novel, the link between Hölderlin's tragic life and that of the narrator's is quite obvious. Hölderlin's and Susette's relationship is like a mirror that reflects the hopelessness of Honigmann's narrator's relationships with her parents, her friends and her lovers and the resulting loneliness and disorientation that sends her to the brink of insanity.

Goethe's poem "Gingo Biloba" is an analogy to the divided self-image of Honigmann's narrator and to that of the Jews and their relationship to the Germans. The Gingko Biloba belongs to an extremely old species of trees of which only one species survives today. It is native to Asia but many are grown in Europe and the United States. In China and Japan the Gingko is considered a holy tree, grown in Buddhist temples and gardens. It was first brought to Europe from East Asia by the Netherlands in 1754, and

brought to Germany in 1780, first in the parks in Weißenstein at Kassel, Mannheim and Schwetzingen. It is a single species that bears seeds but has neither fruit nor cones. The seed is surrounded by a poisonous, evil smelling outer shell, and an inner stone-like shell. Goethe, an avid botanist, imported the tree to Weimar and transplanted it in the park of Belvedere.

In his poem "Gingo Biloba" Goethe asks questions about the tree. He asks if it is a living being, divided against itself, or if it is two separate beings who chose each other and are now known as one.

> Ist es ein lebendig Wesen,
> Das sich in sich selbst getrennt?
> Sind es zwei die sich erlesen,
> Daß man sie als eines kennt? (348)

Goethe identifies with the tree and questions his own double nature.

By using this poem Honigmann shows that the Jews growing up in Germany feel torn like Goethe feels about himself in the poem. They are in the land of the aggressor, speaking the language of the people who tortured and killed their people. Honigmann and her protagonist choose to cross borders to get away from their sense of isolation and fragmentation and to begin a new life. Although she encounters the signs of death in Paris as well, the Gingko Biloba becomes a sign of hope in the novel. In Weimar it suffers but in Paris it thrives (L 75).

The narrator in Honigmann's novel saves the leaves of the Gingko Biloba in her pocket as a symbol of remembrance. They will turn to dust, just like her father's body, just like her people, but they will remain in her pocket, mixed together with all the other dirt and crumbs in it (L 105). She is keeping something that was of importance to her father, and mixing it in with her own things, so that the family legacy can continue. She does this

also with the diary her father leaves behind. The few pages on which he has written are precious to her. She continues to write in the same diary in which her father wrote, beginning the process of weaving together her own experiences with those few her father so briefly recorded in his diary.

Klassen's narrator also crosses borders, and the poems about the memories her mother had as a young girl are interspersed by Klassen's own travel memoirs. She goes back to the places her mother tried to recreate for her, but finds no healing,

> [. . .] only a wilderness
> of broken trees
> and shell-holes
> torn bodies crawling
> from shattered eyes
> of dead houses. (J 22)

In "On first stepping into the Black Sea" she identifies with Naaman of the Old Testament, who was reluctant to step into the polluted Jordan River in order to find healing. She too is reluctant to immerse herself into the murky waters of the Black Sea:

> Naaman would have understood
> perfectly
> my unwillingness
> to offer my body to it.

She realizes, however, that she can be healed only by immersing herself innumerable times into her mother's experiences. Naaman was only healed "after the seventh immersion" (J 11).

She visits a museum where the Russian writer Chekhov wrote *The Cherry Orchard*. Chekhov (1860-1904) authored short stories and plays

which concentrate on ordinary men and women who cannot seem to understand each other and who become lonely as a result. There are no heroes and heroines and not much dramatic action. Because they fail to understand each other in their search for a purpose in life, they find existence difficult and meaningless (Simmons, 308- 309). Chekhov died of tuberculosis, the same disease the poet's grandmother had. A common disease and their search for words links the two:

> [. . .] Chekhov
> who had T.B. like Grandmother
> searched for words
> eloquent enough
> for the final act.
>
> [. . . . . .]
> [. . .] She was shaping words
> she'd whisper when
> entering the white silence
> she'd raise the cup to her mother. (J 14-15)

In "Sanctuary" Klassen writes of returning to the place where her grandmother received treatment for her tuberculosis. She speaks with a patient and tells him she is from Canada. Their conversation turns to English literature. He is familiar with *Trail of the Sandhill Stag* and John Donne in translation. The conversation becomes dangerous when she in turn asks about Ossip Mandelstam's widow and whether she is still alive (*Journey* 16). Mandelstam was a Jewish student at the University of St. Petersburg and a writer whose poem against Stalin in 1933 caused his imprisonment and subsequent death (*Mandelstam*, introduction).

Klassen's poem "Origins" speaks of a group of Mennonite tourists going back to the Ukraine to discover places where their forebears lived. The conversation in the bus turns to the first Anabaptist martyr, Felix Manz, who was drowned near the head of the Lake of Zurich in January of 1527 (Smith 8). Klassen reminds her readers that that is the place of their real origin:

> Rare for us to travel
> the whole bloody way
> back to the cold Limmat River.
> Felix Manz in the small boat
> bound hand and foot, his heart breaking
> free
> to watch sunlight dancing
> on radiant peaks of ice-topped mountains.
>
> It's where we were born. (J 4)

Describing a modern day car accident in which a mother and a daughter were killed, Klassen cites the German words of a hymn of pietistic origin. Her grandmothers derived comfort from this song when they buried their small babies:

> *Herzen die mit uns geweint und gelacht*
> *Augen mit frohem Blick*
> *liegen entschlummert, o sagt es sanft*
> *lassen uns Schmerz zurueck.*
>
> *O wann werden wir uns wiedersehn?* (J 37)

A whole section of Klassen's *Journey to Yalta* refers to Old Testament prophets and their oracles:

Isaiah "rehearses the oracles / fresh from the mouth of God." His words are "spoken slowly over and over." His lips "bear the weight of woes unwillingly" (J 44).

Jeremiah is beaten and put into stocks for his prophecy of the destruction of Judah and of Jerusalem (J 45).

Ezekiel causes a stir by walking through the valley of bones and has a vision of wheels and wings. The words he hears are "pure fire and the voice that spoke them beautiful / beyond imagination" (J 46-47). Klassen has Ezekiel threatening to "rewrite his script" in disobedience to God who ordered him not to mourn publicly for his dead wife (J 48).

Amos receives a vision and as a result speaks in a voice that summons "the unveiled / glory of God (J 50).

Haggai, the overworked prophet, has no poetry but "offers promises in prose" (J 53).

The reluctant and fearful Jonah, after his harrowing experience in the belly of a whale, develops a voice that is "a trumpet / clearly to be reckoned with" (J 51).

The lips of these prophets proclaim what the people are afraid to hear. The oracles banish the fear even as they articulate it, helping the people to recognize themselves and their fears. Robert Schindel defines literature as "Auskunftsbüro der Angst in der Form des Orakels und der Prophetie" (*Gott schütz* 46). He writes: "Orakel entstehen aus Angst und produzieren sie. Vorher war Angst, dann kam das Orakel hinzu, jetzt ist aus dem Ausgesprochenen zusätzlich gespitzte Angst getreten" (*Gott schütz* 43).

Language as Resistance

Honigmann and Klassen use language both as a tool and a weapon with which to resist the enemy. This resistance takes shape by calling to memory the traditions of the past that were intentionally wiped out by the horror of the Holocaust and the persecution in Russia. It is only as the survivors move from denial to conscious identification with those who were victimized and destroyed that resistance and creativity can begin to happen. This proves an intimidating and frustrating task, especially when the language used by the writer to try to identify with the victims is the language of the abuser.

"Sleeping with the enemy" causes a great deal of anxiety for Honigmann's protagonist, because the enemy is also all wrapped up in what she has experienced since childhood as the essence of her being, her "Muttersprache." How can she embrace the language of her enemy? On the other hand, how can she not speak the language closest to her heart?

Jean-Marc, the Jew from America, challenges her and they solve the language problem by speaking French with each other (L 55). Later, after they have parted ways, she writes to him and expresses regret that they have used a foreign language to communicate with each other. She feels this was not conducive to their relationship. It left her with an emptiness when she tried to remember their conversations: "Es tut mir jetzt leid, daß wir immer in einer fremden Sprache miteinander gesprochen haben, und nur die Worte, die wir zu dieser Sprache dazu erfunden haben, scheinen mir jetzt noch einen Sinn zu haben" (L 104). Unlike Jean Marc, she has a love and a nostalgia for the German language and culture and wishes to show him

Berlin and Weimar, the Belvedere and the Ginkgo Biloba. Much to her regret he shows no interest (L 56).

In spite of her attachment to all things German, Honigmann's protagonist remains an outsider who has made a conscious effort to leave Germany and lives in Paris. She expresses her paradoxical and frustrating conflict after she has lived in Paris for a few months:

> Wie im Gefängnis, dachte ich da, und nicht wie in der neuen Welt, und hatte nachts Alpträume von Kälte und Verbannung. Bald war ich mir schon gar nicht mehr so sicher, was ich denn nun hier anfangen will. Ja, ich hatte aus einem alten Leben in ein neues aufbrechen wollen, aus einer vertrauten Sprache in eine fremde, und vielleicht habe ich sogar so etwas wie eine Verwandlung erhofft. (L 12)

She compares herself to those Jews who emigrated to America over a hundred years ago:

> Nun sitzt [der Einwanderer] auf Ellis Island, der verdammten Insel, hat sein ganzes Leben hinter sich abgebrochen und Amerika noch nicht mal mit einem Fuß betreten, aber er ahnt schon die grausamen Wahrheiten der neuen Welt und muß sich manchmal fragen, ob er nicht viel zuviel für viel zu wenig hergegeben hat. Ein Zurück in sein russisches, polnisches, ungarisches, litauisches oder sonstein Dorf aber gibt es nicht mehr. (L 14)

Ellis Island becomes a metaphor for home to Honigmann's protagonist. She says to Jean-Marc "Ellis Island ist meine Heimat" (L 57), to which statement he replies: "Ach, Ellis Island gibt es doch schon lange nicht mehr" (L 57). Ellis Island, a small three and a half acre mud bank in

Upper New York Bay was no one's home. It was the gateway to America, known as the Isle of Hope and also as the Isle of Tears. There was hope in a new beginning, but there were tears in the process of rigorous medical and legal inspections, long waits behind barbed-wire quarters, and a confusion of languages in which thousands of immigrants had their names misspelled, anglicized, or even changed. People were often cheated and abused but didn't protest, for fear they would not be admitted. (Roth 15-20).

During her initial adjustment to Paris, Honigmann's protagonist certainly feels like she is on Ellis Island (L 20). She observes people communicating with one another and pretends to be part of them, but the language barrier defeats her: "Ich hörte sie, aber ich verstand sie nicht" (L 16). As she makes a valiant effort to learn this new language, she finds herself dwelling in the past, imagines herself communicating with her old friends:

> [W]enn ich Vokabeln für den Französischkurs an der Volkshochschule lernte und versuchte, die Formeln des täglichen Lebens um mich herum aufzuschnappen—merci—merci de même—, war ich oft hin und her gerissen zwischen einem Wohlgefühl der Fremde, dem Stolz, daß ich die Kraft gehabt hatte, mich von meinem alten Leben zu trennen, und einer Art Heimweh, das gar kein richtiger Schmerz war, sondern nur darin bestand, daß ich fast immer an eine andere Zeit dachte, eine frühere. (L 18-19)

The height of frustration with language for Honigmann's narrator is that she cannot even communicate with those she loves the most. She cannot pronounce her lover's name because of the association with Germany and the atrocities committed by the Germans toward her people (L 46).

Her mother was Bulgarian and had forgotten the German language, which had always been a foreign language to her. Honigmann's narrator regretted that before her mother's death they were unable to communicate with each other: "Kurz vor ihrem Tode haben wir gar nicht mehr miteinander sprechen können, weil sie nur noch Bulgarisch verstand, doch das hatte ich ja nie gelernt" (L 30). The communication with her parents had always been sparse at best because the unspeakable past of the Holocaust could not be overcome (L 34) and because her father had trouble relating to his only child (L 23).

Like the main character in her novel, Honigmann herself cannot physically feel at home in Germany and cannot live there. In her latest work, *Damals, dann und danach*, she writes:

> [Ich habe] den Konflikt zwischen den Deutschen und den Juden immer als zu stark und eigentlich als unerträglich empfunden. Die Deutschen wissen gar nicht mehr, was Juden sind, wissen nur, daß da eine schreckliche Geschichte zwischen ihnen liegt, und jeder Jude, der auftauchte, erinnerte sie an diese Geschichte, die immer noch weh tut und auf die Nerven geht. (L 15)

However, Honigmann does feel at home in the German language and literature and it is her love of it that keeps her close to the country in which it is spoken. She claims that she belongs to Germany only culturally. Like her protagonist, her home is Ellis Island, a no-man's-land. She knows that it is paradoxical to be a German author when she doesn't feel like a German and hasn't lived in Germany for years. Honigmann's identity as a writer is that of the language in which she writes:

> Ich denke aber, der Schriftsteller ist das, was er schreibt, und er ist vor allem die Sprache, in der er schreibt. Ich schreibe nicht

> nur auf deutsch, sondern die Literatur, die mich geformt und gebildet hat, ist die deutsche Literatur, und ich beziehe mich auf sie, in allem was ich schreibe, auf Goethe, auf Kleist, auf Grimms Märchen und auf die deutsche Romantik, und ich weiß sehr wohl, daß die Herren Verfasser wohl alle mehr oder weniger Antisemiten waren, aber das macht nichts. (L 18)

Physically Honigmann has left Germany but her language relocates her there: "Als Jude bin ich aus Deutschland weggegangen, aber in meiner Arbeit, in einer sehr starken Bindung an die deutsche Sprache, kehre ich immer wieder zurück" (L 18).

This is a struggle that cannot be resolved and with which many other German Jewish writers have wrestled. The Jewish presence in Germany is a type of resistance, a constant reminder of what has happened, and that it must never happen again. It is a way of replacing those who have been forcefully removed, thus filling a vacuum (Diner 255). That is a noble but difficult task, too daunting for Honigmann and for the protagonist in her novel who remain outsiders incapable of integrating themselves into German society.

Klassen, as a teacher, also expresses frustration with language. The first section in her book, *Violence and Mercy*, deals with her experiences while teaching English in a Canadian high school. Even though they speak the same language, and Klassen is Canadian, it is obvious to her that her students live in a very different world from the one she occupies, and so communication becomes difficult and frustrating. In her poem "Language arts," she contrasts her world and that of her students by the use of grammatical terms. Hers is a safe world confined behind a desk from which she dispenses terms couched unmistakably in words that are lofty,

authoritative, clear, and self-confident. Everything she says is logical and connected:

> I dispense connectives
> guaranteed to link thoughts
> and speech smooth as honey
> phrases graced with simile
> resonant vowels
> Verbs reverberating
> confident as trumpets
> their message unmistakable (V 11)

The world of her students, however, the people to whom she relates every day in the classroom, is not a connected world, but one of "disconnected fragments, dangling dangerously free from sense or structure" (V 11). It is a world that comes alive when they leave the room, pulsating and beating, to the point where words are no longer necessary:

> The metaphors they grasp
> have motors revved for violent rhetoric
> they choose raw decibels
> unmodified beat that speaks
> persuasively to fluent limbs
> eyes electric with understanding
> superlative and running on
> beyond the need for words (V 11)

Klassen's world of words is the Apollonian classical world. It is in stark contrast to the Dionysian romantic world of her students, which cannot be captured in words.

In the last stanza Klassen's speaker confesses that her words, so carefully modulated, have no meaning in this other world:

> Mine echo in the empty room
> and settle harmlessly
> into the chalk dust (V 11)

In the poem "Evidence," she reads the journals her students write and is amazed at their frankness and vulnerability, in spite of the "tough nouns and verbs" (21). She confesses:

> [. . .] [T]here is nothing
> I can do. Nothing
> except point out perhaps the lack
> of punctuation, circle the misspelled words
> with a soft pencil, join
> all disconnected fragments. (V 21)

Although her students are not victims of war and persecution in the global sense of the word, they have their personal problems, their own private wars. They too are victims in the sense that they do not fit into the adult world and the society in which they live. The teacher's inability to do anything about her students fears and terrors becomes a "dead weight" which she carries everywhere "sleeping or waking" (V 21). She does the only thing a writer knows how to do. She makes words and forms them into a poem, confessing her helplessness.

The terrible need of words is described again in Klassen's volume of poetry called *Borderwatch*. In the poem "A matter of language," she is once more on the opposite side of a desk, trying to communicate with a student, a victim of a "violent border incident" (B 21). She searches for words, experiencing a desperate need to verbalize to "flesh out" to "utter this

deadly, this unspeakable assault." The victim, however, is mute and unable to speak, to express any "hope and desire," knowing that:

> Language
> or lack of it
> can not protect flesh
> against the brute thrust
> of bayonets,
> cold malice of bullets. (B 21)

The narrator introduces the poem "On the banks of the Nile" by saying that "[a]ll things begin and end with words" (V 78). However, people choose to either believe or ignore words. She complains that her prophet's words of warning are not heeded:

> They don't believe you
> when you speak of wolves
> wild in wheat fields, foxes
> skulking in the vineyards. (V 78)

Her Jeremiah laments:

> Something you learn
> living this close to that aching
> hunger and death:
> there's only so much you can do
> with words. (V 79)

As a poet Klassen realizes that there is a time to speak and a time to silently meditate. As she says of her "prairie prophet":

> She grows wise and understands
> that even now it is too soon
> for words. (V 85)

Honigmann and Klassen use words to poetically describe the fragmented legacy of their forebears and of all those who are victims of violence and abuse, but at the same time they express their frustration and helplessness with language:

> Almost no one believes any longer
> in plot
> or theme. Least of all
> in the ultimate significance,
> the warm grace of words. (B 33)

Identifying with the victims of atrocities, but also keeping the memories alive for the perpetrators and their children, is a task Honigmann and Klassen have set for themselves as writers. In the pages of her father's red diary, so poorly kept by him, with so little information for someone who is desperate to know about her past, Honigmann's protagonist records how she goes about accomplishing this task. She describes her journey back into her childhood by returning to the places she remembers. She records her sorrow that she can no longer find her father, and sees him in every old man passing by. She writes about returning to her old accomodation in Berlin. Although she doesn't see any of her old friends, she sits down there and writes a postcard to Alfried in Munich and a letter to Jean-Marc in New York. She expresses regret to Jean-Marc that they communicated in a foreign language to one another.

Taking small but significant steps in a deliberate attempt at getting in touch with her own past, Honigmann's protagonist differs from her parents who denied their past. It is a frustrating task, and she is suddenly overwhelmed by the seeming futility of it all:

> Plötzlich, wie ich da vor den Häusern stand, ist mir aller Sinn abhanden gekommen von Weggehen und Wiederkommen und Freundschaft und den verschiedenen Orten der Welt, als ob sie sich alle auflösten oder in die Luft aufstiegen, wenn man sich ihnen nähert, und eigentlich kann man nicht wissen, ob sie sich verflüchtigen oder ob man selber flieht. (L 105)

The hopelessness is mitigated by the last act she records. She writes about going to the park at Belvedere and taking a few leaves from the Ginkgo Biloba tree to keep as a memory of her father. However insignificant a few dry leaves crumbling in a coat pocket may seem to others, they are for her a memory in which she connects with her past and with that of her ancestors.

In Section IV of *Violence and Mercy*, Klassen writes a series of poems in which she tries to come to terms with suffering, by going over past events in which atrocities were committed. She moves from the comparatively mild event of the break up of a friendship or a love affair in the cryptic poem "Metallurgy" (V 59), to suicide in the poem "How I imagine it" (V 60-61), then on to the rape and murder of a young girl on a beach after a rock concert in "and the music" (V 62-63). The author concludes this poem by wishing she didn't know about evil, and didn't have to spell it out to the innocent: "I want to be deaf / to the violent dirge of lake waves. / The hard wild song of blood on a summer night" (V 63).

Individual suffering gives way to mass suffering in "Advent: Montreal,1989," which incongruously compares the massacre of fourteen university women in Montreal to the Advent season, a time of anticipation and waiting for Christmas and a new birth. The new birth is short lived,

ending in the brutal death of Christ on the cross at a young age, just as the massacre ends in the death of the young:

> We light the first candle for Advent:
> Waiting that ends always in death
> more brutal than expected. (Birth
> first, a sharp gleam of joy.
> A small cry leaps out:
>
> *My God!*) (V 64)

In the poem "Mass graves," Klassen walks her readers through different places where mass murders have occurred over time, and issues the warning that bones are difficult to hide:

> You find them in places
> Like Timisoara, Auschwitz
> Babi Yar.
>
> (How strangely these names ride
> on your tongue, somewhere between
> horror and delight.
>
> Names of the dead
> if they were known to you
> would be unspeakable.)
>
> In Belsen,
> bones of the old
> and young must be somehow

disposed of. Thrown together
under cold earth and lime, skulls
leg bones, clavicles of all kinds

fuse. Most years at Christmas
you'll find them covered
poorly with snow. (V 66)

Klassen links the dreadful litany of place-names to Christmas, a celebratory, joyous event. She reminds her readers not to forget the existence of these bones. Their memory must be "celebrated" and they must not sink into oblivion. Bones do not disintegrate and the evidence of mass murder does not disappear.

In the poem "Incarnation," Klassen's prophet Ezekiel celebrates the bones. He "wades knee-deep / through bleached bones." He "lean[s] gently against fine hip bones / belonging once to children" (J 46). The last stanza provides a glimpse of hope in the dreadful abyss. These bones can never be brought to life again, but walking through them, acknowledging them, trying to give an account of what has happened can cause healing in those left with a fragmented identity:

Ezekiel knows no singing
or whistling will make these bones grow
flesh and blood, rise up from the valley floor
leaping and dancing.
Only his walking through them
causes stir. That and the small silk wind
rippling from hills and the sun

sending a shaft of warm light

into the large and small hollows. (J 46)

Many Jewish intellectuals, having escaped the Holocaust, have singlemindedly pursued the task of working tirelessly so that this kind of a horror will not be repeated again. The fact that they escaped when their relatives and friends were murdered is not to be seen as a disruption of the relationship they had with them, but rather as a solidification of that relationship. As Max Horkheimer has written: 'Was immer wir erfahren, hat unter dem Aspekt des Grauens zu stehen, das uns wie ihnen gegolten hat. Ihr Tod ist die Wahrheit unseres Lebens. Ihre Verzweiflung und ihre Sehnsucht auszudrücken, sind wir da (qtd. in Diner 257).

Summary

This chapter demonstrates how the two authors, Barbara Honigmann and Sarah Klassen, try to cope with the realization that their feeling of identity is not intact. They do this in several ways:

Captives of their parents' morbid preoccupation with the past, they continually return to it, attempting to trace the haunting memories of their parents in order to find healing for themselves. This proves to be an almost insurmountable task. The subject of death, a part of memory and a connection to the ancestors, permeates their writing.

In their quest to establish a meaningful identity, the futility and hopelessness of life is a constant theme. This theme is revealed in their relationships with parents and lovers and results in an assumed identity, in which role playing and the wearing of masks becomes a coping mechanism.

Both authors find a certain identity through literature. Honigmann in her German cultural heritage and Klassen in her Mennonite religious heritage and in English and Russian literature. Literature gives them a certain sense of security, but at the same time it also articulates their insecurities and their fears.

These two authors try to reinforce their identity by keeping memory alive. Language becomes a means of resistance but also proves inadequate and frustrating. It evolves into an escape mechanism and a tool with which their powerlessness is expressed and thus utilized to manipulate those who are in power.

CHAPTER THREE

Identity Mocked:
Rafael Seligmann's *Rubinsteins Versteigerung*
and
Armin Wiebe's *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens*

> To both belong and not to belong, to be both visible and invisible in a culture, does demand the construction of complicated psychological structures in order to both cope with this positionality as well as to be creative [. . .] within the culture to which one needs to belong and feels that one can never quite belong (Sander L. Gilman, *Jews in Today's German Culture* 47).

The effects of a dual identity caused by living in two cultures can be a source of tension for the individual caught in this predicament. This topic has been emphasized in the previous chapters and becomes the main focus in this chapter. The tension comes about when one of the cultures is stigmatized as a minority culture by the other, and the culture so stigmatized internalizes that stigma. The group that is deemed to be the minority is perceived by the other group to be peculiar, and this attitude threatens to undermine identity. The struggle to maintain the identity of the perceived minority group and of the individual within that group is the topic of Rafael Seligmann's and Armin Wiebe's novels. In writing these novels, both authors use the peculiar humour that characterizes the everyday earthy language in both the Jewish and the Mennonite culture. This is a coping mechanism for dealing with their situation of living in two cultures, and is employed by the authors as well as by the protagonists they create.

Coping With A Dual Identity

Like their protagonists, both authors of the novels analyzed are members of two cultures: Rafael Seligmann is a German Jew and Armin Wiebe is a Canadian Mennonite. Given that fact alone, the work of these two authors can be called autobiographical to some extent. By examining the individual background of each author it will become more obvious to what extent this is so.

Rafael Seligmann was born in Palestine in 1947 and came to Munich with his parents when he was ten years old. This made him old enough to remember his life in Palestine, but young enough to absorb and embrace the German culture to which his parents brought him. Seligmann underscores that during the first ten years of his life in Israel he had no experience of anti-Semitism and that "[t]his may be one reason why I write directly against the avowed enemies of the Jews, and why I have the fewest qualms about describing Jewish fears and phobias" ("What Keeps" 180).

Seligmann received his education in political science at the University of Munich, and became a German expert on Israeli defense policy, publishing his dissertation on that topic in 1982. In 1988 Seligmann published his first novel, *Rubinsteins Versteigerung*, followed by the novels *Die jiddische Mamme* in 1990, *Der Musterjude* in 1997, *Schalom meine Liebe* in 1998 and *Der Milchmann* 1999 (Gilman, *Jews* 47-48).

Seligmann freely acknowledges that *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* was influenced to a great extent by his own experiences and feelings and is therefore largely autobiographical (*Hoffnung* 151). He has no hesitation in saying that his purpose in publishing the novel was didactic:

> Meine persönliche "Abrechnung" hatte mir geholfen. Ich war überzeugt, daß mein Überfühlen und -denken der Situation als deutscher Jude auch anderen, vor allem jüngeren Menschen, Juden wie Nichtjuden, nützen konnte. Indem es ihnen aufzeigte, daß ihre tabuisierten Emotionen, ihre Nöte, Ängste und Bedürfnisse auch von anderen geteilt wurden. (*Hoffnung* 152)

Unfortunately the publishers did not view the novel from this perspective. They were keenly aware of somehow ruining their reputation by publishing such an "anti-Semitic" work. Even Lea Fleischmann could not bring herself to recommend its publication, citing her hesitation as due to the language the protagonist used toward his parents (*Hoffnung* 153). Seligmann notes that this same reason for not accepting his manuscript was given repeatedly: "Die schnoddrige Sprache und die vielfach verletzende Art meiner Aussagen würden der 'ernsthaften Bedeutung der deutsch-jüdischen Beziehungen' nicht gerecht" (*Hoffnung* 153).

After four years of searching, Seligmann gave up trying to find a publisher for *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* and had the book printed at his own expense (Seligmann, "What Keeps" 179). *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* generated a great deal of controversy in the Jewish community, just as Rudy Wiebe's book *Peace Shall Destroy Many* did in the Mennonite community. Immediately Seligmann was labeled a "defiler of the nest" by the weekly *Allgemeine Jüdische Wochenzeitung*. The Munich monthly *Jüdische Zeitung* which Seligmann himself had founded called the book "wretched." Eva Elisabeth Fischer, a Jewish editor with Munich's *Süddeutsche Zeitung* labeled him a "pornography-monger" and a "callboy." (Seligmann, "What Keeps" 179). Others saw in him an exhibitionist, sometimes in the negative,

other times in the positive sense; negative in that being made visible in German society caused intense anxiety to Jews; positive because it stressed the necessity of the oppositional role of the Jewish writer to dominant culture, not only the national culture but also the culture of the Jews (Gilman, *Jews* 50).

In its original publication by Wander-Verlag, *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* was introduced as a German *Portnoy's Complaint* (the American novel by Philip Roth). Gilman writes in *Jews in Today's German Culture*: "Roth represented for Seligmann (as well as his publisher) the successful, international voice of a Jewish writer who stood at the very center of his (American) culture and who identified himself as a Jew" (49). It was emphasized in a review of Seligmann's book by Aron Krochmalnik, in the Munich Jewish youth magazine *Nudnik*, that Seligmann's novel is "a point of orientation in the search of the post-war generation [of Jews in Germany]" (qtd. in Gilman, *Jews* 51). Non-Jewish reviewers were unanimously positive, praising Seligmann's novel as a new Jewish voice.

In his book *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung*, published in 1991, in which Seligmann describes the history of Jews in Germany from his perspective and his own place in that history, he gives a detailed account of his reasons for writing *Rubinsteins Versteigerung*. He claims to have written the novel as an act of self-examination, in which he could clarify for himself, without feeling threatened, his emotional inability to deal with the anti-Semitism he encountered in his German environment. In the process of writing the novel, he came to the realization that this anti-Semitism had been utilized by him as a convenient "Märtyrermaske," behind which he could hide his own negative traits of supersensitivity, aggressiveness, and stubbornness. Venturing even further, he began to ask himself if his hatred for the

Germans was any better than the anti-Semitism of the Nazis. He confesses that the writing of the novel began a process in him in which his hatred for the German anti-Semite turned to pity, because he saw in this person a deficient character with a huge inferiority complex. At the same time he admits that the more he despised the Germans, the more he idealized the Israelis. This also changed through the writing of his novel as he began to realize the great emotional divide between the Israelis and those Jews living in the diaspora (*Hoffnung* 148-151).

In an article written for *Der Spiegel* in 1992 entitled "Die Juden leben," Seligmann addresses the fact that very little has been written in the way of contemporary literature by German Jews since World War II. He blames it on fear, and asks if this fear is justified, since there are so many in German society who openly declare their love of Jews. This philosemitism, claims Seligmann, compounds the problem, because it paints an unrealistic picture of the Jew, and no real flesh-and-blood Jew can live up to this saintly idealization of "Nathan the Wise." It is better, states Seligmann, for the German Jews to be provocative and confrontational, in order to allow them to conquer the isolationism they experience in their society:

> Diese Auseinandersetzung wird mitunter zwangsläufig schrill geführt werden. Sie bleibt unabdingbare Voraussetzung, will man die isolierte jüdische Existenz im Nachkriegsdeutschland überwinden. Knapp ein halbes Jahrhundert nach dem Ende des Dritten Reiches sollten die Nichtjuden endlich begreifen, daß sie es trotz vergangenem Mord und Totschlag nicht mehr ausschließlich mit toten Märtyrern und Heiligen zu tun haben, sondern mit lebenden Juden. (78)

In another Spiegel article entitled "Republik der Betroffenen" written in 1994, Seligmann urges his fellow German Jews to let go of their Holocaust identity. The reduction of Judaism to a constant focus on grief and suffering has become a substitute for the spirituality of their ancestors, which they lost in the process of assimilation to German Society, claims Seligmann. To minimize Judaism to that of a community of victims would be the ultimate triumph for Adolf Hitler, he declares. Seligmann does not advocate the erasing of history, but the erasing of the paralyzing fear that the memory of that history of persecution has caused for those whose parents and grandparents were murdered in the concentration camps. In order for this to take place, Germans and German Jews need to realistically confront one another, get rid of stereotypes and clichés, and let go of pretenses (92-93). This must happen "Wie in der Judenschul," the title of another one of Seligmann's *Spiegel* essays in which he promotes healthy dispute over repression (66).

In the conclusion to his article "Contemporary German Jewish Literature," Thomas Nolden aptly exresses the purpose of the provocative writing style of Rafael Seligmann and his contemporary Maxim Biller:

> Seligmann's and Biller's gestures of provocation are not at all aimed to sever the bonds that join the members of the younger generation of Jewish Germans to their parents and ancestors. The gesture rather points to a new position within the history of the German Jewish relationship: a position that is aware of the traumas of the past and yet attempts to find a space beyond the shadows of the Holocaust. (87)

It is more difficult to find biographical material about Armin Wiebe than about Rafael Seligmann. When asked personally for a biographical

sketch since none exists in written form, Wiebe was typically evasive in his reply: "I don't believe a complete biographical sketch of Armin Wiebe exists anywhere. I've never felt moved to write one, thinking that it's my writing that may be of interest while my life is largely private. Those who try to figure out my life from my novels would likely invent some amazing things" ("Re: Biogr. Sketch"). He did, however, give a brief sketch of his life in answer to an e-mail request.

Unlike Rafael Seligmann, Armin Wiebe was not required to make a cultural adjustment by moving from one country to another.[2] Rather, he moved from one school district to another within the province of Manitoba, which is also stressful for a child. He was born in Altona, Manitoba in 1948. His father was a teacher and he lived in country school yards "in what Mennonites refer to as the West Reserve" ("Re: Biogr. Sketch"). Wiebe's teenage years were spent in a border community called Halbstadt. In a special issue on "New Mennonite Writing" in the literary magazine *Prairie Fire* (1990) he writes of this time in his life:

> I lived the first eighteen years of my life in southern Manitoba between the Red River and the Pembina Hills, after the war and

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[2]Wiebe's forebears came to Canada in the 1870s, fearing escalating persecution. Several decisions were made by the Soviet government at this time that gave just cause for concern: the decision to govern the colonists directly from St. Petersburg; Russian as the official language in the local government and as a subject of study in all the schools; the supervision of all German schools by the imperial educational authorities; the abolishment of military exemption (Smith 440). The Mennonites were to become full-fledged Russian citizens with no special favors in ten years. The Canadian government promised them, in advance, that they could conduct their own private schools in Canada and that they would be exempt from military service.

However, once in Canada, the Mennonites were forced to attend public schools (*Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, 94-128). There was also much subtle persecution after World War I because of their German orientation. (*Mennonites in Canada 1786-1920*, 392). Fearing social integration and ultimate assimilation, many left Canada for Mexico and Paraguay in the 1920s. In Paraguay they received complete freedom to live their lives separately, but this was not so in Mexico (*Mennonites in Canada 1920-1940*, 127-128). Although Wiebe's forebears escaped the massive and severe persecution in Russia, it can be argued that they continued to be part of a minority group which experienced ongoing persecution throughout its history; this most certainly influenced their identity formation (see reference to "collective unconscious" on page 126 of this dissertation).

> before the hippies. Most of my published fiction to date is set in that time and place when we still spoke Low German a lot in a way that the kids following us did not. This time and place is now largely an unreliable region of my memory where my characters stumble through their lives. Conscious attempts to write "Mennonite" tend to result in writer's block. ("Schneppa," Afterword 114)

Wiebe can no longer go back to that Low German community from which he came, because it no longer exists except in his memory. That society is an entirely different one from the large city of Winnipeg, where he attended the Universities of Winnipeg and Manitoba after graduating from high school in 1966. He received his BA and Cert. Ed. from these universities, then taught high school English for five years. As a change he worked in a peanut butter factory for a year, then began writing fiction. He returned to teaching in a Hutterite Colony and took some creative writing courses. Of this time he says: "The language patterns I was surrounded by on the Hutterite Colony likely helped bring back the Low German I had been away from for ten years and helped me to write in Yasch Siemens's voice ("Re: Biogr. Sketch").

Finding out who in his life had used certain expressions inspired Wiebe to write creative fiction:

> In the process of tracking down this voice I heard the crows outside the barn and saw Muttachi sitting on the milking stool. [. . .] Certainly, the Flat German of Yasch is related to the Low German of southern Manitoba, and he uses many of the actual words found in that dialect. But in essence the language of

> Yasch is a buggering up of both English and Low German. ("Schneppa," Afterword 114)

Shortly after Wiebe's book was published by Turnstone Press in 1984, it was reviewed by Margaret L. Reimer, a Mennonite editor who grew up in the same area at about the same time as Wiebe. Her astonishment and delight at the authentic way in which Wiebe captured the essence of that Mennonite community is evident throughout her review. Reimer sees the community itself, now a thing of the past, come alive in the pages of Wiebe's book. She writes: "When I was reviewing a history of my home town recently, I lamented the fact that the spirit and life of these people could never be captured in a parade of facts. This hilarious book fills in the gaps; it provides the other 'facts' which also beg to be recorded." She goes on to express her amazement at Wiebe's "uncanny grasp of details, the instantly recognizable sights and sounds of the region where I grew up." Reimer calls *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* "a book written from the inside—it is the voice of southern Manitoba Mennonites conversing around the kitchen table." It brought to her mind other ethnic traditions, especially the Yiddish, because, like the Jews, "Wiebe recognizes that the essence of a people is rooted in their spoken language" ("'Low German'" 10).

Wiebe's own people, like Seligmann's, did not accept his novel very well and promptly banned it from their bookstore shelves. However, as Reimer writes, "[They] bought it anyway," even though they hastened to say that they didn't really identify with the book themselves, but they knew people exactly like those in the novel ("'Low German'" 10).

The book was bought up eagerly by non-Mennonite readers and sold very well. It won the Stephen Leacock Medal for Humour and appeared on the short list for the *Books in Canada* first novel award. Since this first

publication Turnstone Press has published two more of Armin Wiebe's novels: *Murder in Gutenthal: A Schneppa Kjnals Myster* in 1991, and *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst*, in 1995. He has also written short fiction in anthologies and periodicals, as well as book reviews, poetry and children's stories. A play, *Pitch to Me, Yasch Siemens*, written in 1995, is a continuation of Wiebe's first novel, in which the three characters are Yasch, Oata and Sadie Peters (with whom Yasch was very much in love throughout the novel).

Armin Wiebe also taught in the Northwest Territories where he began to write *Murder in Gutenthal*. In 1989 he and his wife moved back to Winnipeg and he continued his writing. He served as writer-in-residence at the Saskatoon Public Library in 1992-93, writing the initial draft of *The Second Coming of Yeeat Shpanst* at that time. In 1994-95 he served as writer-in-residence at the Parkland Regional Library in Dauphin, Manitoba. Since 1996 he has taught creative writing in the Creative Communications program at Red River College in Winnipeg ("Re: Biogr. Sketch").

Central to both Seligmann's and Wiebe's novel is an adolescent protagonist and first-person narrator who struggles with his sexuality and with the rules of the religious community which are in conflict with his desires. Each of the characters exists in two cultures with very different value systems, which further compounds their problems.

Jonathan Rubinstein, nicknamed Jonny by his friends, is a German Jew growing up in the city of Munich. As a child he emigrated to Germany from Israel with his parents. Identifying with both Germans and Jews, he cannot completely embrace either culture and is constantly struggling to decide to which one he should give himself.

In Wiebe's novel, Yasch Siemens, a young man living in the Mennonite village of Gutenthal, Manitoba, describes the world around him to his readers from a farmer's perspective. Born and raised in Canada, he experiences at an early age, on a personal level, the Mennonite adage "this world is not my home." While Yasch is still a young child, his father moves from one Mennonite community to another, never settling in one place. This leaves young Yasch not only feeling estranged from the "English" beyond his farming community but also from his own people.

The novels begin when Jonny and Yasch are eighteen and sixteen years of age. Their escapades, as they gradually reach young adulthood, are related to the reader from the perspective of comic self-mockery, with both author and narrator adopting a strongly satirical and ironical mode.

In describing the sexual exploits of the young men who pursue and experiment with many different women, Seligmann, in contrast to Wiebe, is very direct and explicit. Wiebe describes the sexual act metaphorically, usually using farming terms.

Both protagonists finally settle on the one woman who, although a misfit in the minor culture with which the protagonists identify, seems to meet their need like no other. The woman Rubinstein settles on is German and not acceptable to his Jewish mother and to the Jewish community. Yasch's woman is Mennonite but looked down upon and ostracized in her own Mennonite community for various reasons.

Seligmann's novel can be designated a "Bildungsroman," in which the conflicts of puberty gradually resolve themselves. The protagonist comes to an understanding of his own identity by separating himself from his parents, relating to the opposite sex, and rebelling against the rules and social norms of the previous generation. However, it is the anxiety about

place—Israel or Germany—that keeps the protagonist from finding his niche in society, and also keeps him from a full realization of his own unique identity.

Wiebe's main character evolves from the naive "Simplicissimus" type of individual of the picaresque novel, who is forced into the world without realizing what is happening to him, to one who gradually comes to an understanding and acceptance of the world around him and his purpose in it. In contrast to Jonny Rubinstein, who is provocative and aggressive when he feels insecure, Yasch is more laid-back and waits for things to happen to him rather than being the instigator of events. His observations are relayed to the reader through the interior monologue of the narrator/protagonist in such a comic and droll manner that the reader cannot help but feel empathy towards Yasch as he moves from one ludicrous situation to another. In contrast Jonny, with his brusque and crude behaviour, often loses the sympathy of the reader and is usually responsible for his own predicaments. He too makes use of the interior monologue to inform the reader how he feels about himself and about what is going on around him.

Both novels are made up of a loose series of single episodes. Seligmann's divisions are not really chapters, but individual sections with titles of their own, giving the impression of short stories in which the same characters reappear. Wiebe, on the other hand, numbers his chapters, even though there is at times a lack of continuity between them. Originally Wiebe wrote these chapters as short stories then wove them together as a novel. This leaves a rather uneven effect.

Seligmann's novel begins with Jonathan's "Versteigerung," as indicated by the title of the book. He auctions off his seat beside his German history teacher, Hilde Taucher, to one of his classmates, Franz Bauriedl.

Jonny, as he is called by his friends, is sexually attracted to this teacher, and discovers that the attraction is mutual. He is drawn to many other women as well, and finds himself frustrated because the Jewish community is very strict about keeping their women pure for marriage. He has no respect for his mother who constantly tries to control every move he makes. She is especially vigilant when he relates to the opposite sex. His special name for her is Esel. His father, Fred (Friedrich), is also under her thumb. Portrayed as a weakling from Jonny's perspective, his father gradually changes to a man Jonny can respect in some ways.

Mara Levy, a Jewish girl with whom Jonny strikes up a relationship, is too proper for him. Since Esel approves of Mara, Jonny soon finds that relationship stifling and turns to her friend, Rachel Blum, who is also Jewish but less inhibited than Mara. She eventually challenges Jonny to marry her if he wants to have a relationship, and he backs off. He then meets a young German woman, Susanne Andreesen, in a park and introduces himself to her. They soon strike up an intimate relationship and plan to go to Greece together, but the relationship does not last because of her German background.

That the Germans just cannot be trusted is demonstrated by Jonny's classmate Kraxä. However, Itzchak Polzig, the mentor of the Jewish adolescents who have formed a group interested in returning to Israel some day, is no more trustworthy. Jonny is also very disillusioned by General Almagor (formerly Isaak Gottesfürchter), the Israeli general who comes to speak to the Zionist group. Jonny's disappointment is validated by Mottl, a friend who went to Israel with high hopes, only to return bitter and cynical.

The elderly Jewish couple from Israel, Herr und Frau Frankfurter, whom Jonny and Susanne meet at the spa when they go to visit Esel there,

are the first people with whom Jonny is able to have a decent conversation about the Holocaust. This helps him to understand some things about himself and the society in which he lives, but is not enough to reconcile him to his situation.

In the novel *The Salvation of* Yasch Siemens, Yasch needs to be saved from himself and his mixed up ideas. The novel opens with Yasch reminiscing about all the women in his life. He idealizes Fleeda Shreeda who is Shaftich Shreeda's daughter, but that does not become a relationship. He works on the beet field with the Stoezs girls, Shtramel and Shups, and he and his friend Hova Jake take them out because Fleeda is grounded. He has an illicit adventure with Shups when the two of them climb the T.V. tower which is across the border in the United States.

Yasch's Muttachi, a gentler equivalent of Esel, tries to teach him how to behave. She herself is an outsider in the community because her husband (Yasch's father) left for Mexico and never returned. Another outsider, Serena, who is Willy Wahl's English wife, gives Yasch his first kiss and, like Jonny with his German teacher, Yasch is completely overwhelmed.

Sadie is the lithe and beautiful daughter of Ha Ha Nickel for whom Yasch works as a hired hand. He is in love with her throughout the book, although he admits she is too young for him. She prefers Pug Peters who, in Yasch's eyes, is not worthy of her.

The English women, who come to Knibble Thiessen the bone setter for treatment, introduce a strange and exotic element into the community.

Gradually Yasch goes through a metamorphosis, as he reluctantly enters into a relationship with Oata, the obese daughter of Nobah Naze and his mentally ill wife. These people, although Mennonites, are looked upon

as dysfunctional by the rest of the community and are ostracized for that reason.

As Yasch reflects on his life, he remembers Forscha Friesen, the schoolyard bully from his childhood days. Emmanuel Rempel, the new kid from Mexico who with quiet confidence thwarts Forscha's reign of terror in the schoolyard, also comes to mind. Forscha gets his revenge, but the memory of Emmanuel's Christlike example helps Yasch to expose Forscha's hypocrisy as a young adult in church. It also helps him to come to terms with some of his own problems which he has not been willing to face.

Pathological State of the Protagonists:

Feelings of Isolation

In their struggle for self-discovery, both Jonny and Yasch exhibit deviant behaviour when confronted with outside influences that complicate and confuse the issue of their cultural identity. There is an aura of isolation and loneliness about them. In part this is due to their family circumstances which are very similar.

Neither Jonny or Yasch have any siblings. Jonny still has both parents, but it is the domineering mother and wife who controls every aspect of family life. Her husband cowers before her, and Jonny becomes belligerent and aggressive. There are many examples of how dysfunctional this family is because of Esel's excessive need to dominate. It causes Jonny to be disrespectful toward his mother and disdainful of his father. As a result he struggles with guilt and remorse and is unable to share his innermost feelings with anyone. The fact that he has no siblings exaggerates

the problem since he has no outlet for his frustrations except that of his parents.

Yasch's mother does not play as large a part in the novel as Jonny's does. Oata, Yasch's girlfriend, is more like Jonny's mother Esel, although she too has a softer more humane nature than Esel does. Like Esel, Yasch's mother, whom he calls Muttachi, is concerned that her son make something of himself. She urges him out of bed in the morning, hits him with a fly swatter when he procrastinates and makes him go to weed beets and find jobs with the various farmers in the area (Y 31-33).

Whereas Jonny's father shrinks into oblivion, Yasch's father, whom he calls Futtachi, has totally absented himself from the family and the reader learns about him only through Yasch's reminiscing. His father went to Mexico to visit an uncle and never returned. Ostracized by that very conservative group of Mennonites who refused to ride in his car because it was sinful, he acted out against this conservatism the way Jonny does, belligerently and aggressively, and got killed in the process.

Muttachi didn't go to Mexico with her husband. According to Yasch it was because she got sick when riding in a car. She clings to the idea that he will come home some day, and is a rather pathetic, isolated person as well, an outsider in the community with its strict moral code (Y 48). Yasch is more considerate and kind to her than Jonny is to his mother, probably because the father is absent and he feels the need to take his father's place (Y 33-34).

The isolation Jonny feels in his family is intensified when he is with his so-called friends. Disdainful of his Jewishness he tries too hard to impress his German classmates. *Rubinsteins Versteigerung* opens with a scene in which Jonny aspires to become the hero of the classroom and ends

up totally humiliated. The teacher, Hilde Taucher, challenges the class to be less conforming and more daring by asking someone to volunteer to sit next to her. When Jonny rises to the occasion, she rewards him by taking his hand in hers and slowly raising it. This causes bedlam as the students now all want a turn to sit beside their teacher. Jonny relishes the occasion to be the centre of so much attention and offers to give up his place to the highest bidder. He receives one hundred Marks from Kraxmayer and must exchange places with him. His bubble quickly bursts when another classmate, Bauriedl, brands him an opportunistic Jew for selling his place. Bauriedl calls out mockingly into the now silent classroom: "Da schau her! Kaum reicht ihm eine deutsche Frau die Hand, schon versteigert der Rubinstein sie meistbietend. Jetzt verstehe ich, wie ihr zu eurem Geld kommt" (R 7). The racist comment hits its mark and Jonny, not knowing how to react, stumbles out of the classroom. Disgusted with himself and with his classmates, he shares his inner turmoil with his readers: "Tränen schießen mir in die Augen. Raus! Nur raus hier! Sonst sehen die mich noch flennen. Ich laufe los. Werfe die Tür zu. Renne zur Toilette, stürze in die erste Kabine, schlage meinen Kopf gegen die Holzwand. Weine, weine. Scheißdeutsche!" (R 7).

When Jonny returns the next day after his hasty exit from the classroom, his classmates ignore him. Even his usual friend, Klaus Winterer, acts as if he isn't there. Wishing to somehow redeem himself he is the first to react when Wolfgang Pauls, a former friend who has become a neo-Nazi, asks if anyone has fifty "Pfennig" to lend him. Jonny gropes in his pocket and throws him the money only to have it thrown back at him disdainfully. Jonny is angry with himself for giving someone the opportunity to treat him disdainfully again. Sadly he muses to himself:

> Sind die Antisemiten selbst arme Schweine, wie mein Freund Peter ständig behauptet? Oder sind mir Typen wie Franz Bauriedl oder Wolfgang Pauls wirklich überlegen? Auf jeden Fall gelingt es ihnen, mir weh zu tun, wann immer sie Lust dazu haben. Und warum? Weil sie in diesem Land zu Hause sind und wir, trotz allem Gerede, Fremde. (R 17)

Another humiliating event occurs when Jonny borrows Kraxä's house key in order to have a private tryst with Rachel, only to have Kraxä and his bunch of drunken buddies walk in on them just as they are about to have sex. The amount of fear experienced by Jonny and Rachel is almost disproportionate to the event. The tense atmosphere is that of a pogrom. There is the danger that Rachel could be forced to stay behind and be gang raped by the Germans. Klaus Winterer, Jonny's one time friend at school who is less drunk than the rest of the group, helps them to get out. Rachel's bra, which they have forgotten in the bedroom in their haste to leave, is thrown at them from the window. Rubinstein catches it only to hear the racist comment: "Schaut her, der Rubinstein will eine Textilfirma eröffnen" (R 80). Jonny's fear turns to hatred and his interior monologue shows how much of an outsider he feels himself to be, and how pogrom-like this event is for him:

> Euch Schweine werde ich nie vergeben! Sobald ich die Gelegenheit habe, werde ich es euch zurückzahlen, mit Zins und Zinseszins! Das gleiche haben sich unsere Leute seit Jahrtausenden immer wieder geschworen und dennoch stets aufs neue eins aufs Dach gekriegt. Aber jetzt ist es anders! Jetzt haben wir Israel, ihr Dreckskerle! (R 80)

However, Jonny's Zionist friends also prove to be a disappointment to him, and he to them. When he is challenged because he wants to take part in the executive committee meetings of the "Jüdische Gruppe Sinai," which he is not allowed to attend (it is only for elected members), Jonny plans his revenge. Noticing their overreaction when he confronts them on their use of donated funds, he thinks he is on to something. He accuses the committee of misappropriating funds and instigates a new election. After all is said and done he wonders if it was worth all the fuss. He confesses to the reader that it is easier for him to take revenge on his Jewish friends than his German classmates and that in part he overreacted because of his frustration at school. He asks himself:

> War das die Mühe wert, weil du zwei Minuten vor der Tür gestanden hast? Ja, denn irgendwann mußte das Faß überlaufen. Diese Heuchelei und die dauernden Demütigungen Polzigs und seiner Lakaien konnte ich nicht länger ertragen. Vor allem—hier kann ich's den Burschen heimzahlen. In der Schule dagegen bin ich allein. (R 26)

Yasch, too, is often maligned by his so called friends. When Yasch is almost sixteen, he and his friends, bored with the idea of spending New Year's Eve on a church bench, revive an old tradition from Russia which involves going to different homes in the community with a homemade drum ("Brummtupp") and reminding those people who have stayed at home to go to church. Yasch is the smallest of the lot and is forced to do what no one else wants to do and that is to dress up like a woman. Not only does he have to act the part of a woman, he also has to ride in the back of the truck because it is too cold for the drum to be back there. Yasch is too naive to realize what else is involved with dressing up and his friends have a few

laughs on him when he encounters some pleasant and some not so pleasant experiences (Y 15-30).

Yasch's dreams to go out with Sadie Nickel do not materialize. She uses him to get a ride to the ball game, but once there she decides to go out with Pug Peters after the game. Yasch is left pretending that the catcher's glove is Pug's head every time he pitches. Later, Pug drops Sadie off at her driveway and on his way home Yasch meets up with her again. She doesn't say anything to him, and he feels lonely, sad and used, both by Pug and by Sadie. "It feels a little bit like I'm a big brother driving his sister home. [. . .] The truck radio plays a Johnny Horton song, 'All for the love of a girl' and I sit there feeling the song and wishing that the singer wasn't dead in a car crash and could sing more songs like that" (Y 53).

When he begins to attend church because of his relationship with Oata, he encounters Forscha Friesen, and remembers how he was new in school in grade four and how Forscha, one of the big grade eight boys and also the school bully, tried to boss him around. He sees Forscha and he wonders, after all Forscha did to him and his friends, "how Forscha Friesen can stand there behind the pulpit and talk about Jesus like there is nothing to it. I mean, I would think that such a thing would bother a person. But then it has sometimes fallen me by that maybe Forscha Friesen isn't a person at all" (Y 121).

Forscha Friesen is still the same bully he was at school and tries to embarrass Yasch by asking him to give a testimony at church. He also phones into a Christian talk show on the radio and pretends to be Yasch having a problem with a fat bossy girlfriend. Yasch is already feeling sorry for himself because of Sadie Nickel and Pug Peters and is drinking beer alone in the car when he hears the talk show and recognizes Forscha's

voice. It makes him angry: "Well, that for sure makes me mad! How come he so much knows about me and Oata? It's a good thing I have no gas or I would drive right over to Forscha's place and plow him one on the nose. But he's not worth walking five miles for. That's for damn sure. But I can't let him get away with this. For sure not!" (Y 129).

Betrayed by the women he loves and dreams about, and stuck with the fat Oata in real life, Yasch is a lonely young man trying to make his way through life as best as he can, aware of his own shortcomings even while he is angry at his peers for the way they treat him.

Negative Identity

Both Jonny and Yasch are completely preoccupied with themselves. This is obvious from both their actions as well as from what they share with the reader in their many interior monologues. They have established a negative identity which manifests itself in a poor self-image; they are completely self-absorbed. This kind of self-absorption occurs when both the capability for intimacy as well as the readiness to get rid of those forces and people whose nature seems dangerous to one's own is lacking (de Levita 63).

Jonny constantly berates himself for his actions, thus reinforcing his negative identity. This is obvious in the many interior monologues and asides that follow his activities and inactivities. He calls himself "ekelhaftes Schwein" and "Versager" after his experience with the prostitute (R 11), "Mimose" und "Heulsuse" when he thinks about how he ran out of the classroom after being subjected to Bauriedel's racist taunting (R 15). Following the quarrel with his parents he sees himself as "verfluchter Idiot" and, worse than anything, as a Nazi who bullies those that are weaker than himself (R 30). When his friends take advantage of him he is "der dümmste

Jude aller Zeiten" (R 36). "Hosenspritzer" is another favorite putdown when he feels himself to be sexually inadequate (R 64).

At other times he blames his parents for his feelings of inferiority, accusing them of leaving Israel and returning to the land of the Nazis because they are losers (R 28).

He ponders often about the difference between himself and his German classmates and realizes that the outward sign of circumcision is just the beginning of this difference: "Fremd bleiben wir in jedem Fall. Wir gehören nicht dazu! Wollen es nicht und können es auch nicht—nach all dem, was die Kerle unserem Volk angetan haben" (R 70).

Yasch, too, copes with feelings of inferiority and frustration. He expresses a root problem that both he and Jonny have in common: their feeling that they have no control over what happens to them. While sitting on the tractor Yasch says: "[T]hat tractor is the only thing I can boss around. Everything else in the world bosses me around. It matters nothing what I want to do, there is always something to make me do what I don't want" (Y 59). Bullied by Forscha, snubbed by the beautiful Sadie and chased by the obese social outcaste, Oata, he also has to placate his Muttachi and the farmers for whom he works. He is "Yasch the oabeida", the "knecht," the "hired man" (Y 56), the one "born on the wrong side of the double dike" (Y 51). When Ha Ha Nickel, the prosperous farmer who has promised him work "from saddle time til after threshing," doesn't need him anymore, he sends him to work for Nobah Naze where Yasch gets stuck with Oata. On top of that Muttachi tells him to marry Oata. Yasch says he feels "like a tumbling weed that the wind just rolls over the field any old way" (Y 92).

Yasch has been thinking about marrying Oata for some time, but for him this has been more about the land than about Oata. Marrying Oata is

the only way he can see himself becoming a farmer because then he could inherit her land. In a magazine at the doctor's office he reads an article about fat people dying young, and the black thought occurs to him that Oata will die shortly after he marries her; then he can marry the beautiful Sadie Nickel and have Oata's land as well. He is ashamed of this thought and recognizes the evil that lurks within him, but he can't seem to get rid of it. It sticks to him like sticky tar. He thinks to himself: "Could I do such a thing, marry Oata for her land and wait for her to go dead from fat? Yasch, Yasch, you are a real black one, I say to myself" (Y 86).

Only much later, when he and Oata have grown close and have come to know each other as persons, do the visions of Sadie, "stretching and jumping to catch a wild pitch" (Y 87), diminish and almost vanish altogether. As Yasch says: "Well, such a thing [being heista kopp in love with skinny Sadie Nickel] you never really forget all the way, but for sure Oata has made me to see things different, like maybe it's not so bad to do things that other people do, like go to church and get married and be a farmer " (Y 150).

The difference between the two protagonists is that one cannot come to terms with his dual identity and the other finds his identity as land owner and family man. Jonny's despairing cry at the end of the novel, when his German girlfriend has left him and he lies sobbing on his bed is "Ich bin ein deutscher Jude!" (R 189). Although Yasch becomes a satisfied family man with land of his own, his cautious remark at the end of the novel, after he decides not to buy a television antenna, is: "In these troubled times you have to watch out" (R 176). He, too, fears that outside world and all of the implications it will have for himself and for his family.

Sexual Confusion

There is a direct link, from the cultural confusion of the protagonists and from their inability to establish where they belong, to their sexual confusion. When Jonny is humiliated by his classmates and, through his own blundering, becomes the object of racial taunts, he goes to a prostitute out of desperation. However, he is totally impotent and the experience leaves him embarrassed and ashamed (R 8-11). When his history teacher, Hilde Taucher, invites him to her place he is afraid that the same thing will happen to him. Although sexually arroused by her, he is embarrassed because he has a premature ejaculation. His interior monologue after that experience is a good indication to the reader of the confusion of his cultural identity and how that plays havoc with his sexual identity: "Rubinstein, du bist ein guter Deutscher, wenn auch leider mosaischen Glaubens. Vernünftig, diszipliniert, ordentlich. Recht so. Auch ein guter Jid, verdammt nochmal, macht immer das, was seine Mamme und ihre Geschlechts-genossinnen verlangen" (R 63).

When his teacher invites him to her place, Rubinstein is immediately suspicious that this invitation is more than just a discussion about their classroom problems. He feels that she will use him for her pleasure the way he uses the Jewish women in his community. He says to himself: "Die ist mit mir genauso umgesprungen wie ich mit unseren Mädchen. Womöglich geht sie bei sich zu Hause auf mich los wie ich auf Rachel und Ester Karmi. Aber ohne Faxen—direkt ins Bett" (R 56). He himself admits that he uses the Jewish women to whom he relates for his self-gratification. When they demand a commitment from him that requires more of him he is not capable of staying in the relationship. He goes from Esther, known to be

ugly but sexually available as long as marriage follows (R 37), to Mara, who flirts with him but is sexually more reserved and likes to converse with his mother (R 35, 48). From Mara he turns to Rachel who is as eager for sex as he is but demands marriage in return and makes it an ultimatum for their relationship (R 114-115).

It is with his German girlfriend, Susanne, that Jonny finally finds a satisfying relationship. Ironically, this does not last because she is the daughter of a former SS guard and cannot see herself relating to Jonny's family without feeling guilty and torn (R 186).

As with Jonny, Yasch's cultural confusion is linked to his sexual confusion. This is highlighted by the New Year's Eve event when Yasch is "only almost sixteen" and his friends make him dress like a woman, down to his mother's size-49 brassiere. They stop at the house of an obviously very dysfunctional bachelor; an outsider in the community, who has never made it on his own (They call him Hauns Jaunses' Fraunz, as if he still belongs to his father). Yasch's friends force Fraunz to kiss Yasch, then tease Yasch about it later. He quietly resolves to get even somehow (Y 23). Without realizing it he gets his chance when they stop at Willy Wahl's place.

Having served in the army and married an English woman, Willy is another person who doesn't meet community expectations. Serena, the English woman, overwhelms the Brummtuppers by her warm acceptance of them and they cannot play a trick on her. She sympathizes with Yasch because he is the smallest person in their group and they have picked on him by making him dress like a woman. She rewards Yasch by giving him a long and lingering French kiss while the rest of the boys stare jealously. He has never been kissed before, and even when the guys start teasing him about it, once they are back on the truck, it doesn't bother him because he

knows they are jealous (Y 26). Having been forced to kiss both an ugly sweaty old man and a beautiful woman Yasch has learned the difference. It is a kind of sexual awakening for him.

All of the people they sang to on Saturday night appear in church the next morning, and Yasch is really bothered by Serena, Willy Wahl's wife, sitting there in that church context. Yasch, like Rubinstein with his German girlfriend Susanne, wants to keep Serena "separate, something special" (30). He confesses that her appearance in the Mennonite church confused him: "I was really mixed up. Everything was connected loose again" (Y 30).

Yasch is both repelled and attracted by the outsiders in the community and especially fascinated by the English women and their strange ways. When he takes his mother to Knibble Thiessen, the "rightmaker," he has an opportunity to observe "these women from the States with their red lips and earrings" (Y 35). One of them, whom he calls "the fishnet lady" because of her nylon stockings, gets stuck in the snow and Yasch is only too willing to run out and help her. As he pushes the car, it suddenly spurts away and he is left sprawled on the frozen snow unable to get up because of the pain in his back (Y 40). The woman never looks back, neither does she thank Yasch for helping her. His Muttachi comes to his rescue, calling the Knibbler to come and fix him up. Not only does Knibble Thiessen alleviate the pain, to Muttachi's joy he also knows a place where Yasch can begin to work.

Yasch's humiliating adventure with the fishnet lady is a metaphorical image of the same experience Rubinstein had with the prostitute. Rubinstein's mother, however, did not help him but only annoyed him with her undending questions and demands (Y 12-15).

When Oata and Yasch go to Winnipeg together and head to Eatons to shop for a suit, he sees "[s]o many women a guy could go crazy in such a place" (Y 107). All are strange and exotic with red lipstick and toenails, high heels and open toes, wearing shorts, dresses and pants. This changes when they get to the cellar and Yasch is finally relieved from all that erotic stimulation by hearing Flat German and seeing people from Gnadenthal, Winkler, Reinland and Rosengart (Y 108).

At the motel he is fascinated by a striptease dancer and decides to tell Oata all about it, but Oata is stuck in the tub and Yasch needs to perform a rescue operation. Wisely he decides not to tell her about the dancer. Even though he is tempted to go to bed with her, he is sensitive to her feelings and does nothing until she is ready for him. With this attitude he wins her over and she proposes marriage to him (Y 112-116). Oata is the first woman Yasch sleeps with. Ironically, what he says at the beginning of the novel when all women attract him comes true at the end: "[C]ome to me baby I'm a one-woman man" (Y 3).

In many ways, the scene with Oata and Yasch at the motel in Winnipeg parallels the scene in *Rubinsteins Versteigerung*, when Jonny also spends the night with a woman for the first time. Susanne, too, satisfies Jonny in a way no other woman has but, unlike Oata and Yasch, they can't marry because of irreconcilable differences in their backgrounds. Susanne is the daughter of an SS man. She knows instinctively, especially after meeting Jonny's mother, that this will never work. Jonny himself realizes this and admits it: "Mein Haß ist absurd. Das ist mir spätestens durch die Begegnung mit Frankfurter klargeworden. Wenn nicht einmal dieser Mann alle SS-Leute haßt, welches Recht habe ich Rotznase, ein ganzes Volk zu hassen? Wie kann ich jetzt überhaupt weiterhassen—ich liebe doch eine

Deutsche! Aber irgend jemand aus ihrer Mischpoche war bestimmt dabei, wenn nicht in der SS, dann in der SA oder in der Partei oder in irgendeinem anderen Kack. Gibt es keinen Ausweg? Ist man als Jude in Deutschland zum Wahnsinn verurteilt?" (R 177).

Rebellion against Authority

Although both Jonny and Yasch have problems with their attitudes toward those who are in authority over them, Jonny's problem is greatly intensified because he lives in Germany where his relatives were systematically killed by the authorities, and many of those killers are still respected members of society. Jonny remarks to himself: "Jeder kann ein Mörder gewesen sein. Sogar jeder Arzt. Der selbe Kerl, der mich heilt, hat vielleicht Eseis Geschwister zu Tode gespritzt" (R 177). This adds a macabre twist to everything in his life. He returns to the classroom after his hasty exit the previous day, imagining that the teacher took the opportunity of expounding on the evils of anti-Semitism. He believes that this approach achieves exactly the opposite of what it is supposed to achieve. He also asks himself: "[. . .] [H]ättest du als Deutscher wirklich anders gehandelt? Weißt du sicher, ob nicht auch du in die Partei oder gar in die SS eingetreten wärst?" (R 16).

In class he acts provocatively and causes disciplinary problems for his teacher. When she asks to speak to him after class, his interior monologue reveals his dilemma to the reader: "Was wird die Taucher von mir wollen? Sicher hat sie meine dauernden Provokationen während des Unterrichts satt. Was soll ich sonst tun? Eine Liebeserklärung kann ich ihr nicht machen. Also streite ich mich mit ihr. Da muß sie wenigstens reagieren—ob sie will oder nicht" (R 55). Not capable of intimacy with her, he argues with

her. Jonny cannot believe how docile everyone becomes when the teacher gets authoritative. He writes a blistering essay about how the Germans need authoritative commanders in order to function and what the implications of this are: "Wer von seinen Eltern und Lehrern zum Gehorchen dressiert wurde, wessen Wille gebrochen wurde, kann selber nur gehorchen oder befehlen. In diesem Sinne wird in Deutschland eine Generation nach der anderen zu 'guten' Untertanen erzogen werden—ad infinitum" (R 67). He uses this type of reasoning as an excuse for not cooperating with the authorities in his own life.

Later in the novel, when Jonny takes Susanne to a hotel, he is confronted by a German in uniform and proves his theory. The uniformed man is just a hotel clerk who refuses to give them a room with a double bed when he finds out they are not married. He tells Jonny that it is against the law and to please understand that he cannot break the law. Involuntarily connecting the uniform and the clerk's authoritative stance to the SS, Jonny takes this relatively minor incident much too seriously. In his head there is a throbbing thought: "Verstehe—und wenn die Vorschrift es von dir verlangen würde, täglich 5000 Juden nach Auschwitz zu schicken, würdest du es heute genauso tun wie dein Vater und dein Onkel und dein ganzes mieses Volk dreißig Jahre zuvor" (R 169). Jonny decides he, too, must act decisively and blatantly replies that they have just had a "Blitztrauung." Predictably, the clerk gives in to his demands (R 169).

Itzchak Polzig, the forty-year-old mentor of the "Jüdische Gruppe Sinai," does not have Jonny's respect, which is obvious by the way he is described to the reader. Jonny mocks the way he walks: "Mit dem tänzelnden Schritt des ehemaligen Jeschiwa-Studenten nähert sich unser vierzigjähriger Mentor" (R 19), and also the way he looks: "Seine intro-

vertierten Augen hinter den dicken Brillengläsern fixieren einen imaginären Punkt hinter mir" (R 19). Jonny also challenges Polzig's teaching about Zionism, which no one has ever dared to do: "Alle sitzen erstarrt. Bislang hatte keiner von uns gewagt, offen Polzigs Autorität in Frage zu stellen, nun habe ich ihn als Heuchler und Schmarotzer angeprangert" (R 22).

Jonny is in constant conflict with his parents. In a discussion with his friend Peter he uses the language of the enemy to describe the relationship of Jewish parents to their children. When Peter asks him why none of them can keep secrets from their parents, Jonny says: "Weil wir im Ghetto leben. Im Ghetto der Vorurteile unserer Eltern" (R 32). He claims that Jewish parents control their children's behaviour by throwing parties for them, thus keeping them occupied and under the watchful eyes of their parents: "Mit Fressen und Musik erkaufen sie sich die Kontrolle über das Geschehen" (R 33).

With such an attitude it is no wonder that he shows little respect for his own parents. He accuses parents of using their children in a manipulative manner, but he himself treats his parents as objects to be used in meeting his needs. Since they function only for his satisfaction he does not owe them any respect, treating them like his slaves and the target of his scorn.

When Jonny's mother asks him why he is late coming home from school he answers: "Das geht dich einen Dreck an." When she defends herself by asking how she is supposed to know when to warm up his meal if she doesn't know when he is coming home he replies arrogantly: "Sobald ich es dir befehle" (R 12).

Jonny calls his father by his first name and describes his father's lack of driving skills by saying to his mother: "Friedrich kann nicht mal richtig

Auto fahren. Hat immer eine feuerrote Birne, wenn er hinter dem Steuer sitzt, der Zwerg" (R 13).

When Esel tells Jonny how much water to use while taking a bath, he warns her that if she doesn't shut her mouth, he will throw her in the tub, clothes and all. When she continues to harp at him, he climbs out of the tub and chases her, stark naked, while she flees screaming to the kitchen (R 14).

Jonny loses control when his father refuses to give him the car. He accuses his father of being a loser and a liar: "Du bist der größte Versager weit und breit" and labels his mother a "Giftmischerin" (R 28-29). He calls them both the scum of the earth ("Abschaum der Menschheit"). This is enough to cause his father, a former athlete, to rush toward him in anger. Jonny reacts in self-defense and injures his father. He ends up apologizing and his father gives him the keys to the car, warning him not to tell his mother (R 29-31). Predictably, Jonny totals the car that night. Fred's only concern is the safety of the passengers, not the condition of his vehicle, a typical response of a loving and concerned parent (R 40).

Another confrontation with his parents occurs when Jonny announces that he wants to go to Israel. Caught between Esel and Jonny, Fred does not know what to do and is reduced to tears (R 108-110).

Yasch's disrespect for the law is hinted at in the first chapter of Wiebe's novel, when he makes an illegal border crossing and climbs a T.V. tower that has a sign on it DANGER DO NOT CLIMB. It is at night, and there are no authorities to catch him and Shups, so it is simply a daring adolescent thing to do, a challenge Shups throws at him more than defiance of the law. This event also serves as a metaphor for an illicit sexual

adventure. They make sure they go back before the border patrol catches them (Y 12-14).

The car is a status symbol for Yasch just as it is for Jonny, a sign that they have made it in society and are people of importance. It is significant that in both cases the protagonists do not drive their own cars but appropriate someone else's status symbol as their own. Although he has been caught speeding before Yasch tries to outrace his buddies when he drives Oata in her father's car, afraid that they will tease him if they catch up to him. When the police catches him instead he is humiliated because the policeman tells Oata to get behind the steering wheel and drive them home. He has to sit on the "woman's side" and the policeman embarrasses him some more by asking him: "Aren't you getting a bit old for these tricks?" (Y 67-69). Just as Jonny has to humble himself in front of his parents by admitting that what they expected to happen, did indeed happen when he totalled the car, so Yasch has to relinquish his sense of being "somebody" by sitting in front of the wheel to being a "nobody" on the woman's side.

The strict rules that the church has laid down for the young people do not appeal to Yasch and his buddies. On "Sylversterabend" they are in the hayloft rolling smokes instead of sitting on a church bench waiting for the new year to come in (Y 19). Yasch does not attend church regularly as he is expected to do in the Mennonite community until he gets engaged to Oata and she makes him go. Yasch verbalizes to the reader why he does not go to church. He is an outsider who does not fit the mold and he is aware of the hypocrisy of its Leaders:

> This going to church business just makes me feel more cut off. And then to have to deal with Forscha Friesen yet. I see him standing there so shtollt and Christlich while the last prayer is

> prayed and when he thinks nobody is looking he turns his head and he looks me on with those light green eyes with dark centers and I can see that for sure he is the same Forscha that used to be boss in the school yard and that this testimony thing is his way to nerk me. (Y 123)

The Mocking of a Culture:

Church and Community

Through their protagonists both Seligmann and Wiebe take a hard look at the ideology of their religious community, exposing the hypocrisy and self-serving attitudes that are often denied both by outsiders and insiders of a culture. Although both protagonists are apprehensive and distrusting about the world out there (the German society for Jonny, the secular world for Yasch), they are also aware of and expose many problems within their own cultures, often mockingly exaggerating a situation to make a point.

Zionism, the hope for all Jews to live on their own land and thus obtain a measure of independence and security from the racism and persecution that has plagued their history, is given lip service only by the "Jüdische Gruppe Sinai" of which Jonny is a member. Jonny, a selfish adolescent who clamors for his share of attention, makes demands on the group which they are not prepared to meet because they have been misappropriating the funds that they have extracted from their members for years. The corruption that has been practised by the leadership of the group, including their forty-year-old mentor, is exposed by Jonny and his clamoring cohorts who turn the planned discussion about emigrating to

Israel into a challenge about what has been done with the money designated for this purpose (R 21). Those who are outsiders within the group reveal the group politics of the insiders. Jonny says to Polzig: "Die Art von Zionismus, die Sie und Ihre Konsorten predigen, Herr Polzig, ist in Wahrheit eine Perversion des Zionismus. Durch ihren Vorbereitungszionismus nehmen Sie den Juden hier ihr schlechtes Gewissen, in Deutschland statt in Israel zu leben (R 22).

In the same way that Jonny sees the hypocrisy in Zionism as it is practised by German Jews, so Yasch discovers flaws in pacifism, the cornerstone and distinguishing feature of the Mennonite faith. He himself becomes angry and all Mennonite pacifism leaves him when he goes to church with Oata and realizes how very different he is from the others and how they are judging him. He says: "But even yet I can feel Sadie and Pug and Forsch Friesen in the back of my head and sometimes when I alone am I get so mad that I feel like borrowing a .22" (Y 132).

In his scheming to get Oata's land by marrying her when he really loves Sadie Nickel, Yasch feels himself to be as black a hypocrite as anyone (Y 78, 86). Eventually he repents of his greed and is satisfied to be a small farmer instead of a big shot because then he has time for his family (Y 164-165).

Jonny too has his dreams about land. He has hopes of going to Israel, to the place where he can feel at home with his people. He vows to do this after visiting the Jewish cemetery near Ichenhausen, his father's former home before the Holocaust. This is not a spiritual vow but a very practical one of identifying with his people. Before leaving the cemetery Jonny says:"Die unbedingte Lobpreisung des Herren, der dies zugelassen hat, ist mir vor diesen Gräbern nicht möglich. Hier liegt deine Familie, dein Volk, zu

dem du zurückkehren wirst, aber bis dahin darfst du nicht vergessen! Du mußt die Zeit nutzen, Rubinstein!" (R 104).

After Jonny meets the much anticipated General Almagor from Israel and hears him speak, he becomes disillusioned with the general's cold hearted answers about the use of napalm. Mottl, who has just returned from Israel, explains: "Almagor heißt: ohne Angst. Sakrament! Innerhalb einer Generation, was sag ich, innerhalb weniger Jahre: vom Gottesfürchter zum Mann ohne Angst. Vom Juden zum gefühllosen Automaten. Zum Preußen des nahen Ostens" (R 85). Jonny questions his own identity:

> Muß ich werden wie Mottl, der sich in seiner Kultur vergräbt und vor jeder Auseinandersetzung davonläuft, oder wie der General und seine Israelis, die genauso skrupellos geworden sind wie die anderen, oder wie Feinberg und Polzig, die in Deutschland hocken und sich als Zionisten fühlen? Kann man als Jude nirgends so leben, wie es einem paßt—ohne verrückt oder krankhaft normal sein zu müssen? (R 88)

Yasch too experiences these inconsistencies in his Mennonite culture. He observes the greedy Mennonites who aspire to be politicians, and Pug Peters who loses his land, and he agrees with what his friend Laups Leeven says: "You know Yasch, in this world a man has to decide how much he needs to live on, and then be satisfied with that. How much farm does one man need?" (Y 164).

Sitting in the Jewish synagogue with his father, Jonny can think of only one reason for being there, and that is to find out if there really is a God. However, he seems to be the only one concerned about this. The worshippers are steeped in traditions that he does not understand, and it seems to him that they don't care about what really bothers him: the

relationship between the Jews and the Germans, and the fact that God allows the kind of suffering the Jews have endured for centuries. He remarks: "Aber gerade danach fragt hier niemand. Wichtig ist den Alten nur, daß man regelmäßig in die Synagoge geht, koscher ißt und unsere Mädchen unberührt läßt" (R 70). He decides it is a waste of time to stay there any longer and goes home.

Yasch too is disillusioned with church and the meaninglessness he experiences there. He cannot understand why the young people need to sit on the church bench on New Year's Eve when there are so many other more interesting things to do. He and his friends have decided it isn't worth being there, and they play hockey or hang out in the barn rolling smokes. An idea comes to them in which they use a long lost tradition to revitalize the boring New Year's service. This is the tradition of the "Brummtupp," a homemade instrument which the Low German people used to entertain themselves years ago when they couldn't go to church in the evening because there was no hydro (Y 20). This instrument was never used in church but Hova Jake, a talented musician who is bored by the church, decides to inject some life into the worship service.

After visiting all the people in the area who haven't gone to church, and reminding them to do so, the Brummtupp party ends up at church. They first stage a drama in which they review the history of the Mennonites (from Eve tempted by the apple, to the breakaway from Catholicism, then on to the Russian Revolution and finally to the influence of pietism). They then break out in a joyous rendition of the hymn "Joyful, joyful, we adore thee." When Hova signals the congregation to sing along with them they do so. The effect stuns Yasch who suddenly "feel[s] all connected up with everything" (Y 30). This feeling of connectedness is disturbed the next

morning when, due to the prompting of the Brummtupp group the night before, all the "outsiders" join in the worship service. Everything is "connected loose again" (Y 30).

The hypocrisy of the church and community is exposed at Nobah Naze's funeral by the speech Zamp Pickle Peters makes. He describes how Nobah Naze was ostracized by the community because of his life style. He was "like a soldot that didn't march in the same step with the others" (Y 83) and this was held against him. Peters poses the question: "[W]hat happens when the soldoten all march together with the same step and they over a bridge go? The bridge crashes down" (Y 83). Peters points out the same problem in this community that Jonny saw in German society where everyone marched to the same step with those who were in authority, and the result was a disaster the Germans will never live down (R 66-67, 169).

A sarcastic and humorous exposure of inconsistency in the Mennonite community is the chapter on Knibble Thiessen's business. The frequent changing of his sign tells the reader that this "rightmaker" is all things to all people. His sign says "Knockenartzt," "General Massage," and "Foot Masseur." His hair is oily and he makes the women cry and moan. Yasch's adventure with the "fishnet" woman tells the reader what happens to men who involve themselves with women like that. Yasch falls flat on his back in the snow and can't get up (Y 40).

Some who no longer adhere to the principles of the Mennonite community cannot brave the ostracism they experience as a result and leave altogether. The best description of this is the humorous portrayal of Tiedig Wiens, his Mumchi and their son Melvin who is learning to become an RCMP officer. The Wiens family no longer lives in the Mennonite

community but has moved to town, ostensibly to be closer to the hospital so that Mumchi Wiens can visit the sick and the dying. But Yasch knows her husband is a drunk who has had his driver's licence taken away, and this is one way he can be close to the beer parlor. Mumchi Wiens is proud that Melvin doesn't smoke or drink and attends the RCMP church on Sundays. Pacifism has gone out the window in this family! Yasch will never picture Melvin as an RCMP officer. Instead he sees him, still wearing his Sunday pants, being dumped into the pigpen by a runaway horse (Y 65).

It is very important for the Jewish community to adhere to the family traditions and keep their children in the community. And it is much more difficult to do that in an urban setting than in a rural Mennonite community. Rubinstein describes sarcastically how important this issue is to the parents; he speaks of the sacrifices they are willing to make in order for community to happen. He calls it "Jüdische Party-Logik" (R 33).

The parents are afraid of two things: They are fearful that their children will marry German rather than Jewish partners and that their children will lose their virginity before marriage. Jonny says: "Unsere Tradition verlangt unerbittlich, daß ein jüdisches Mädchen jungfräulich in die Ehe geht—genau wie in Sizilien. Das Entscheidende ist aber die panische Angst unserer Alten vor einer 'Mischehe' ihrer Kinder" (R 32-33).

Since the sacred teachings, often lost in the long assimilation process, have not been internalized and are no longer a motivating factor that determines behaviour, the parents substitute the secular. Jonny verbalizes this at the grave of his namesakes, his great-great-grandfather Isaak and his grandfather Jonathan: "Was kann ich heute, in der Nach-auschwitzära, in der jüdische Eltern ihren Kindern statt Tradition und

Religion Neurose anerziehen, von Isaak-Jonathan Rubinstein lernen?" (R 103).

In Jonny's community the sacred has all but disappeared, leaving a semblance of tradition. In Yasch's community the sacred is in the process of gradually giving way to the secular. The question that the writer poses is whether or not the sacred can be incorporated in the everyday life or whether it will be separated and thus gradually die. For this reason the grand confusion of the sacred and secular is a larger theme in *The Salvation of Yasch Siemens* than in *Rubinsteins Versteigerung*. It runs throughout the narrative and is best illustrated by the strange and mythical figure of Emmanuel, who comes to Yasch's mind when he starts attending church more regularly because of Oata.

Yasch remembers Emmanuel as the new boy at school who challenged Forscha Friesen's reign of terror. Emmanuel appropriates all the characteristics of Christ but at the same time he is a trickster. He can do magical things with cards and makes a marvelous lasso out of braided binder twine ropes the girls use for skipping. He is able to juggle shiny balls of different colors and he enables the children to laugh at Forscha and his gang instead of being afraid of them (Y 120-130).

Emmanuel appears again to Yasch when Yasch, now a young adult, gives his testimony at church. This vision is an affirmation that fun and laughter, fellowship and community are also a part of the sacred and need not be condemned by the community of believers. Furthermore, the vision implies that in telling the story of pain and humiliation, bitterness and sorrow relinquish their grasp (Y 144-148).

At Knibble Thiessen's place Yasch again confuses the sacred and the secular. He looks through the church papers *The Young Ambassadors* and

Good News Broadcasters, but he does so simply because he is looking for the *Time* magazine. When he sees a beautiful young girl come out of Knibble Thiessen's office, he describes the look on her face as "pure Himmel-shine" and remembers a calendar he saw as a small boy with a picture of a cowgirl and the words of the song "I'll be a cowgirl, a Christian cowgirl" underneath it. When he sees her bare feet they "seem to sparkle and glow like Jesus' feet did when Mary washed them with her hair" (Y 37).

The Western music Yasch hears on the radio makes him feel "churchy in a funny way" (Y 62). It reminds him of a time when he was a small boy and enjoyed church because "that's where the action was" (Y 62). It was a time when people worshiped from the heart. Later, as they became more educated, they began to hide their spontaneity. A curtain was put in front of the choir loft to hide the girls' legs, strange choir exercises were introduced and people no longer played their guitars, but sang Cantatas. That is when Yasch stopped going to church and listened to his radio instead (Y 63). The spiritual component of the culture, instead of pervading every aspect of life, has become a separate entity as foreign influences are injected into the culture. In the Jewish community the sacred is all but erased for the young people; in the Mennonite community it reveals itself as something alien.

Language

Language within the culture shows the separation of the sacred and the secular since one language is used for church and school and another for the home. The old people have their religion, teaching and tradition, but there seems to be nothing for the young people. Sitting in the synagogue Jonny asks himself: "Ich sollte wohl beten. Aber was? Ebenso wie die anderen Typen in meinem Alter verstehe ich die althebräischen und

aramäischen Gebete nicht" (R 70). When his father asks him why he didn't stay until the end of the worship service "wie es sich gehört," Jonny's frustration is evident: "Gehört! Gehört es sich eigentlich, stundenlang ein Zeug anzuhören, das niemand versteht? [. . .] Die erklären einem höchstens wieder, was koscher ist und was nicht. Aber ob es überhaupt jemanden gibt, zu dem man betet, fragt niemand. Nicht mal meine sogenannten Freunde" (R 72).

Further fragmentation occurs because there is still another separate language, that of the second culture, German for Jonny and English for Yasch. Wiebe's novel shows very clearly how these languages begin to intertwine as the cultural distinctions blur. The quote from Skvorecky at the outset of his novel is an indication of this: "My God, how we adored this buggering up of our lovely language for we felt that all languages were lifeless if not buggered up a little" (Introduction).

The use of the German, English, and Low German languages and the effect they have on the people is best illustrated in Wiebe's novel by Nobah Naze's funeral. Preacher Funk preached in German and that was "so long that the people were shrugging their hind ends on the benches already and blowing more noses than when everybody had a cold" (Y 81). Obviously that did not touch the core of their being. When Preacher Janzen preached in English the people sat a little stiller, but again it was too long and people began to think about food. The only Low German in the church service was spoken by Preacher Funk when he invited the people to stay for something to eat after the burial. The subject of food, obviously not a spiritual topic, could be addressed in the heart language of the people.

When all hypocrisy ends only the heart language will do, and at the graveside of Nobah Naze, Zamp Pickle Peters speaks in Flat German. He

"comes from the wrong side of the double dike just like the rest of us and he always tells it like he believes it" says Yasch (Y 82). People are not bored this time, but listen, because someone is speaking to their hearts in their heart language: "People start to fuschel but they hurry stop when he starts to talk again" (Y 83).

"Twa Corbies," the poem referred to throughout Armin Wiebe's novel, is an example of the "buggering up of a language." Originally an English ballad published in 1611 called "The Three Ravens," it is about a knight who lies dead in a field but is protected by his hounds and his hawks, so that the ravens who are discussing what to have for breakfast, cannot get at him. He is buried by a doe in the morning, who herself dies before evening. The "Twa Corbies" is a cynical version of the original ballad written in a Scottish dialect, in which the lady has "ta'en another mate" and his hawk and hound have deserted the dead knight so that the ravens can anticipate a feast. Yasch tells Sadie: "You see, this poem is like it was made up from Flat German mixed up with English" (Y 46). The subtleties of the humour are probably lost on those without a good knowledge of Low German.

Sitting beside the freshly showered Sadie, Yasch is very aware of her sexuality; this influences his interpretation of the poem as he explains it to her. Furthermore, Yasch connects Sadie's black bra that she wears while driving tractor with the "Twa Corbies." When her father tells him to "look out for the crows," Yasch replies, "Twa corbies. That's French for two crows" (Y 49). The poem "Twa Corbies" also reminds him of the death of his father.

Like the person who changed "The Three Ravens" from its courtly romantic version to the cynical version of "Twa Corbies," so both Seligmann and Wiebe are intent on disrupting old paradigms by their use of language. Seligmann does this effectively by shocking the reader with the coarse and

disrespectful language of the protagonist and by explicit description of sexual scenes. Wiebe too uses coarse barnyard humour and the earthy Low German "heart language" of his people already influenced by the English culture around him. One gets the sense, however, that Rafael Seligmann's language is full of self-loathing and pain, whereas Armin Wiebe has a lot of fun playing with language.

The sexual humiliation Jonny experiences with the prostitute mirrors the racial humiliation he feels in the classroom. There is no hiding behind metaphors here, and the painful encounter leaves the reader with the same feeling Jonny expresses when he leaves the prostitute: "Ich habe einen üblen Geschmack im Mund" (R 11).

Seligmann uses very direct language in all of his sexual scenes. About his relationship with Mara he says: "[D]as Vögeln einer jüdischen Frau vor der Hochzeit ist einfach undenkbar" (R 47). He coldly calculates and describes his orgasm: "Schau zu, wie du möglichst unauffällig zu deinem Orgasmus kommst. Also los, Rubinstein!" (R 47).

When Jonny's German teacher Taucher invites him, Jonny fully expects a sexual encounter and says to himself: "Die Alte [. . .] lädt dich zu sich ein. Das heißt sie mag dich. [. . .] [D]ann will sie auch mit dir vögeln. Nicht wie die jüdischen Mädchen, die es zwar auch wollen, aber trotzdem nicht tun. Mit der Taucher wirst du schlafen" (R 57). To his surprise, she too raises objections, that of the teacher/student relationship. Her resistance is soon overcome but to his chagrin he has a premature ejaculation. Disgusted with himself, he calls himself a "Hosenspritzer" (R 64).

Jonny's planned sexual rendezvous with Rachel in the house of his German classmate is first portrayed as the leisurely, pleasant event Jonny had envisioned. Rudely interrupted by Jonny's classmates, this experience

becomes pogrom-like for them both and is described in terse, staccato-like terms (R 77-80).

Eventually Rachel demands more than sex, she is looking for marriage, and Jonny backs off: "Alles hat sich gegen mich verschworen," he says. "Kaum ist die Freundschaft mit Rachel schön geworden, schon verwandelt sie sich in eine Zwangsjacke" (R 121)

When he finally meets a woman who is sexually available Jonny minces no words expressing his frustration at his sexual impotency (R 148). Eventually he achieves the physical and spiritual union he has always longed for with Susanne, the German woman he would like to marry, but is ridiculed and embarrassed by his mother in front of her (R 156-167). Their marriage can never work because Susanne's father was in the SS (R 168-187).

Wiebe's approach is less explicit and much more metaphorical than Seligmann's. His sexual metaphors are present throughout the novel, beginning with the climbing of the CN Tower with Shups: "Let's go all the way to the tower" (Y 8), which "is just practice" for the next time with Fleeda. The "Twa Corbies" are symbolic of Sadie's breasts clad in a black brassiere: "Only the thin black strips that hold up the crows can I see now against the bones of her shoulders" (Y 49). These crows are out to get him, especially when he sees Oata bouncing along the field road in her ford tractor: "My dry bones start to rattle and I try to look away but it is like a magnet is pulling my neck around and I [. . .] just have to try to get away from those two bouncing crows that grow bigger and bigger and bigger" (Y 54).

Other metaphorical sexual images are seeding oats: "Ha Ha has put her to work on the 4010 with the deep tiller on the sixty acres next to the

oats that I am seeding" (Y 48-49); driving truck in the rain: "The half-ton is schwaecksing from side to side on the slippery mud" (Y 73); playing baseball: "She bends and stretches so easy, so lightly she hops for the high ones" (Y 45); plowing the field: "[S]he is covering me with her acres and the crop is so big that I almost can't breathe and there is so much to disk and to plow and to seed and it seems like it will never be finished" (Y 116); and taking care of Oata's mustard: "I saw the double dike and the wild mustard blooming on Nobah Naze's field. Somebody would have to take care of Oata's mustard" (Y 77).

Names are used metaphorically in both novels. Jonny's second name, Isaak (Yitzhak in Hebrew), means laughter or "wird lachen" but this beautiful meaning has been distorted. The laughter that comes from the German connotation of Yitzhak is not joyful laughter but laughter due to mockery and stereotyping. Jonny's parents leave Yitzhak off the German passport to keep him from being teased by the nasty school rhyme: "Jude Itzig, Nase spitzig, Beine heckig, Arschloch dreckig" (R 102).

Oata cannot escape humiliation at recess. It is caused not by people of another culture but by Mennonite children who have singled her out because she is different from the rest. Everyone at school knows the rhyme made up by Penzel Panna: Oata, Oata / Ossentoata / Pesst em Woata / Truff ein Koata / [. . .] (Y 56-57).

Jonny calls his mother "Esel," the German word for donkey, implying that she is grey, ugly, stubborn, uncooperative. When his girlfriend Mara asks him why he calls her that he explains that it is a pet name from his childhood. Under his breath he mutters that he should have called her "Egel" or leech, because her true nature is to cling like a leech and to never let go of him (Y 44).

Patriarchy

With the character of Esel, patriarchy is successfully debunked and matriarchy reigns. This Esel/Egel is a domineering, manipulative, stubborn woman, whose peace-loving husband, aptly named Friedrich, is a weak, loving, and gentle man. He gradually fades away as the novel progresses, only to reappear in the end to try to comfort Jonny in his despair. Living up to his name, Friedrich wants to give his son some measure of peace.

Fred functions much better in the absence of his wife. After he suffers a mild heart attack, survives and returns home from hospital, Esel goes to Bad Mergentheim, and Jonny brings his German girlfriend home for dinner. This incident shows clearly that it is his mother that causes all the turmoil at home. Fred is polite to Susanne, makes a delicious nonkosher dinner of Wiener schnitzel and has a nap after dinner, leaving Jonny and Susanne completely to their own devices. Jonny can't believe the difference in the atmosphere at home and remarks as an aside to the reader about his father: "Der Bursche ist wirklich rührend—wenn er nicht geeselt wird" (R 147). Role reversal is successfully applied by Seligmann to mock his culture.

Social norms are also mocked by Wiebe as he portrays Yasch's absent, dysfunctional father, who travels from place to place. A victim of his own culture's strict moral code, he flaunts his difference but is unable to survive (Y 48). Yasch describes his father in retrospect, not as the judging community sees him but as the child remembers him. The nine-year-old is not afraid of the harsh penalty the community doles out to those who do not conform, because his father does not judge him (Y 156). His father is a man who does not shirk from what the community calls women's work

when his wife is ill after childbirth, but washes dishes, cooks and plays games with his son (Y 157).

Yasch's mother is the independent female figure in the Mennonite community who longs for acceptance but does not receive it because there is no husband to validate her existence. She does not accept the role that the community would like her to have, that of the dependent widow who needs a man in her life. She lives alone and tries to make ends meet as much as possible. She makes sure her son is gainfully employed, not hesitating to use the flyclapper if she has to (Y 3, 32), but equally skillful with the telephone (Y 32). She is frugal, using old flour sacks for clothing and curtains and practical boots for the outside work. Her flyclapper is homemade from a hockey stick handle and a piece of old threshing machine belt (Y 31). She knits Yasch's hockey socks in several colors of wool and makes him hockey garters from a pink girdle she no longer wears (Y 38). She is resourceful enough to fix up Futtachi's old Sunday suit for Yasch so he can be usher at Nobah Naze's funeral (Y 89).

Muttachi likes to know what goes on in the community. She reads the Steinbach Post and makes sure the door is open when she sits in the beckhouse so she doesn't miss anything even when she is going to the toilet (Y 33). In spite of her own independence, she is concerned about Yasch's moral reputation and what people in the community will say. When Yasch stays with Oata after the funeral of her father, Muttachi phones him at "almost half eleven" to tell him she will come with the flyclapper to get him if he doesn't come home (Y 88). When he comes the next morning Muttachi suggests marriage with Oata (Y 91).

Oata's father is dysfunctional and does not meet the standards of the community. Unlike Yasch's father, he is a jealous and possessive husband

who drives his wife insane (Y 79-80). Oata's mother breaks under such domineering patriarchy. When her husband dies she is at his graveside gleefully grabbing the spade and shovelling dirt over her husband's casket, laughing "like a baby that has never before laughed" (Y 83).

Nobah Naze also mistreats his daughter. She is his work horse, always on the farm and not allowed to go out. When she does go to Winnipeg with her father he only goes to the stockyards (Y 115). However, Oata is not like her mother and finds ways around her father's bizarre behaviour. She is not your typical obedient Mennonite daughter but sneaks along to the ball game on the back of the truck, much to Yasch's chagrin (Y 44). She is the equivalent of Esel in Seligmann's novel. When Yasch refuses to take her along, she lets the air out of his tires (Y 55); when he tries to sneak away without her, she hides his glove (Y 56). She does not sit quietly at the ball game but embarrasses Yasch by cheering loudly for him (Y 56). When she's ready to go home, she sits in the truck and honks the horn (Y 56). When Yasch is successful in sneaking away from her, she pours sand or water into his bed so that he has to go home to Muttachi to sleep. Then Muttachi gets mad at him because Nobah Naze is supposed to give him board and room (Y 56).

Wiebe uses role reversal to take a mocking stab at his patriarchal conformist Mennonite culture. This is especially obvious in his depiction of Oata's and Yasch's relationship. Oata does not allow anyone to boss her around. She is not overwhelmed by the loneliness and isolation she experiences in the community because of her obesity and her dysfunctional family situation. Rather, she chooses to become a part of the community and not ostracize herself because she sees value in community (Y 122). Yasch begins to attend church because Oata wants him to (Y 119). Oata is

the one who suggests marriage, even though Yasch has been thinking about it because of the land (Y 115). She is the one who directs the traffic when Yasch tries to drive the Honey Wagon into Eaton's parking place in Winnipeg (Y 108).

When Yasch is engaged to Oata and starts working on the farm, she is the one driving the combine and sends him to milk the cows, make breakfast and wash two days of dirty dishes while she drives to town to get a new sprocket for the John Deere tractor. She also tells him to feed the pigs and chickens while she is gone. Yasch can't believe his ears:

> Well I start to get dizzy. I mean it seems like something is turning the wrong way here. *I* should be getting the parts and *she* should be washing the dishes. I think maybe we should start having devotions and reading the Bible by breakfast time so that Oata can learn herself that the man is supposed to be the boss in the house. (Y 152)

Yasch goes to his Muttachi for sympathy but receives none. When he reminds her that: "In the Bible it says the man is supposed to be boss in the house," she tells him: "Then go be boss in the house and wash your dishes!" (Y 155). When he asks his Muttachi to make some dinner for him, she replies: "Go pull a carrot out of the garden and wash it off for yourself" (Y 155). Yasch can't believe what he is hearing from his own Muttachi. It causes him to go back to Oata's place and think: "I hear again my Muttachi say that for twenty-three years she cooked for me and wiped my narsch and for sure Muttachi is right like Muttachis always are. I feel real small. I look at the cupboard and the dishes. I get up, switch the range on and heat up a pail of water" (Y 157).

At the end of the novel Oata is a respected member of the community because of her marriage and family, and she has done something about her weight problem (Y 168).

It is obvious that both Seligmann and Wiebe have a quarrel with the idealization of their respective cultures and are debunking some of the myths that have been manufactured about them. They deliberately confuse the sacred and the secular, the spiritual and the erotic, and poke fun at their culture's social norms and expected gender roles. In the process, they create a work which leaves the reader coping with confused emotions, simultaneously: at times disgust and sympathy, at other times sadness and laughter.

Futility of Remaining in the Past

In his book *Mit beschränkter Hoffnung*, Rafael Seligmann writes that the present and the future are available to be mastered but that it is impossible to overcome the past. The past is to be the theory which serves to master the present but cannot be a substitute for the present. Remaining in the past can have the same result as negating the past: the inability to meet the demands of the present (16). Seligmann illustrates this idea with several experiences Jonny has when he unsuccessfuly attempts to reconcile the past with the present in order to secure his identity.

The victim mentality of Jews after the Holocaust becomes a topic of satire and irony. Jonny and Esel ruthlessly exploit their victim status by appealing to Jonny's school authorities when he is in danger of failing first of all his French course and then the whole Abitur. When Jonny first suggests appealing to his French teacher whom he knows to have an anti-Nazi stance, Esel is incensed at the idea. She says to her son: "Du willst

von der Ermordung meiner Geschwister profitieren, du Lump! Du bist ein skrupelloser Verbrecher, kalt, gefühllos, berechnend. Genau wie die Nazis" (R 91). Jonny confesses he is lazy and believes he has no talent for languages. He can think of no other way out. Esel complies reluctantly (R 92).

When Jonny admits to Esel that he has probably failed his Abitur, Esel is the one who insists on appealing to the principal and Jonny is the one who is sickened: "Mir ist übel geworden. Wird diese Nazi- und Verfolgtsein-Kotze nie ein Ende nehmen? Wird es immer so weitergehen, daß man, sobald man in der Klemme sitzt, an das schlechte Gewissen der Deutschen appelliert und um Gnade winselt, sich also moralisch noch tiefer stellt als das Herrenvolk?" (R 144).

Both times Esel and Jonny compare themselves to the Nazis, realizing that they are as opportunistic as the next person and have no right to judge the immoral acts of others. This implies that they need to free themselves from a judgmental attitude about the past.

As a youth living in Germany, Jonny cannot help but be reminded of the past. If he had stayed in Israel with his parents, he would not have had to deal with the prejudices of his German classmates nor with his own discomfort of thinking that the perpetrators and their children were breathing the same air he was. He would not have been given the opportunity for laziness or whining about his victim status. He blames his parents for taking him away from there and putting him together with those who killed his relatives.

After Esel has helped him out of the dilemma of failing his French class, Jonny decides he needs a day of rest before studying for his exams. He asks his father if he can have the car to drive to Ichenhausen, his father's former home. He wants to get away from his depressing thoughts, but,

instead, thoughts of what happened in the Holocaust overwhelm him and he calls the trip his "masochistische Pilgerfahrt nach Ichenhausen" (R 97). He reflects somberly: "An welchem Fleck in diesem Land hat es vor 1933 Juden gegeben, denen es nicht ebenso ergangen ist, wie denen in Ichenhausen? Solange du dich in Deutschland herumtreibst, wirst du diesen Dreck nie loswerden" (R 97).

Jonny decides to go to the Jewish cemetery. Here he sees gravestones that date back to the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries and says a prayer over them. Then he discovers the grave of his great-great-grandfather Rubinstein from whom he received his second name Isaak. He also sees the grave of his great grandfather Jonathan, whose name he carries. He wonders what he can learn from these ancestors and receives an inspiration. He will correct his father's mistake of returning to Germany by going back to Israel (R103). He thinks that in Israel his problems will be solved. He seems to have forgotten his recent painful impressions—the cold ruthlessness of General Almagor and his friend Mottl's disillusionment on his return from Israel.

Esel is totally against Jonny's idea of going to Israel, and Fred is caught in the middle of the battle between them. His resulting heart attack stops Jonny's plans and he promises not to go. The vision inspired by thinking of the past and joyfully embraced at the graves of his ancestors crumbles in the light of the problems he experiences in the present (R 120).

In contrast to Esel's and Jonny's shameless exploitation of the system, Herr Frankfurter, whom Jonny meets when visiting his mother at the Kurort, is scrupulously honest and would prefer not to testify at the court proceedings in which former Nazis are to be judged. He says to Jonny: "[U]nsere Toten haben nach all dem, was ihnen vor ihrer Ermordung

angetan wurde, das Recht, in Frieden zu ruhen. Und ich glaube, daß ein Großteil der Aufmerksamkeit, die dieser Prozeß schon jetzt erregt, mehr der Gier nach Sensationen entspringt als echter Anteilnahme" (R 164). However, Frankfurter feels that if a few people can be brought to their senses by the court process, it is worth going through with it. He condemns doing anything out of revenge because he thinks that will help no one and will only create more bitterness. He is convinced that hating the Germans collectively is the easy way out. He himself feels incapable of hatred, first of all as a survivor who is fatigued and emptied of all emotions, and secondly as a person who sees the Germans as they really are without their uniform: "[W]ie konnte man Leute hassen, die nicht mehr waren als ein Häufchen Elend und Angst, sobald sie ihre Uniformen auszogen. Die im Gegensatz zu uns nicht einmal das gute Gewissen des unschuldigen Opfers hatten, sondern das schlechte des schuldigen Täters. Nein, ich kann keine Menschen hassen" (R 166).

Frankfurter's insights and clarification of the past are personally liberating for Jonny. He gives Jonny hope by affirming his talents. However, he too is unsuccessful in freeing Jonny from his predicament. Jonny admits his hatred of the Germans is absurd. He admits that he loves Susanne who is German, but cannot imagine having children with her (R 177).

After his discussion with Frankfurter, his confrontation with his mother about Susanne, and Susanne's flight and return to the hotel room, Jonny has a nightmare. This nightmare is one he experienced for a time after visiting concentration camps as a boy in school with his classmates (R 180). When Susanne asks him why he slept so restlessly, he shares the nightmare with her. She in turn tells him that her father was in the SS. The

past is a wall between them that Susanne feels cannot and should not be removed. She challenges Jonny to recognize this:

> Jonathan, wieso machst du dir ständig was vor? Du bist nicht so stark und gefühllos. Du bist deiner Mutter nicht gewachsen. Du bist von ihr abhängig, glaub es mir. Und die Vergangenheit ist auch in dir noch sehr lebendig. Du mußt dich nur mit einem Mann wie Herrn Frankfurter unterhalten, und schon träumst du, daß du vergast wirst. Du kannst diese Vergangenheit nicht über Bord schmeißen, nur weil du mich kennengelernt hast. (R 186)

In shock, Jonny returns home. He realizes that the main problems from which he wants to be released by going to Israel and finding true love (his hatred of the Germans and his insatiable sexual appetite) have been resolved through meeting Frankfurter and Susanne. He wonders why his peace of mind, so difficult to obtain, must suddenly be snatched from him again. What is left for him? "Wofür ich gelebt habe, ist dahin—Israel und Suse. Mir bleiben Deutschland und Esel" (R 188).

Yasch, too, feels "all connected up with everything" when he and his friends have revived a tradition from the past, introduced it into the church successfully, and caused a kind of revival. He describes the atmosphere in the church after Hova Jake has sung the hymn 'Joyful, joyful, we adore thee': "And then Hova Jake starts to sing the first verse again and he is signaling the people to stand and slowly they do and they start singing along with him and the sound that is filling the church is just unbelievable. Everybody is singing, even me, and we sing that first verse three times" (Y 30).

Even the people who never come to church are there the next morning because they have been reminded of their failure to do so and warned about the consequences. However, rather than rejoicing at their success in bringing these people back into the community, Yasch feels uncomfortable to see them there and somehow can't accept them being part of the community. "Everything was connected loose again" and he "was really mixed up" (Y 30).

Yasch nostalgically remembers the church of his boyhood and recalls people playing guitars and mandolins; they didn't have "such high music like Contatas" (Y 63). He has chosen to stay home and listen to Western music on the radio since all the changes took place. Staying in the past does not help him to remain part of the community. When he begins going to church again with Oata he feels like he does not belong there (Y 123). Partly this is due to the prejudice of the people in the church, but he has also brought it on himself by choosing to stay in the past and not dealing with changes in a constructive way.

Feeling out of place in the church reminds Yasch of past incidents in which people were singled out as scapegoats, especially because the school yard bully Forscha Friesen is the one who has a lead role in the church service. Yasch remembers how he felt when he lifted his hand for prayer at an evening church service and all the boys teased him after (Y 124). He remembers Oata and how she was teased because she was fat and different. Someone made up a nasty Low German verse about her at school and Oata reminded him that he was the one who translated it into English (Y 57-58). This gives Yasch a guilt complex, and Oata as the victim is dehumanized. She becomes an object of pity rather than someone who is appreciated for her genuine qualities or despised for her annoying characteristics.

Above all, Yasch remembers the persecution of Emmanuel, the Christ-like figure who comes into his mind when he is asked by Forscha Friesen to give a testimony at church. The memory of Emmanuel has been buried in Yasch's subconscious but when he finally dares to speak of the torture that Emmanuel endured at the hands of the school bullies and how they made him participate in tormenting Emmanuel, he is personally liberated. It helps him to expose the hypocrisy of the church leadership and frees him from the guilt he has carried until now.

Yasch is also confused and stressed at his vulnerability before the whole congregation. He literally falls on his face at the end of his testimony by tripping over the top step of the platform. This falling on his face can be interpreted in several ways: it can symbolize embarrassment at his emotionalism and it can also show a contrite heart for his part in the bullying. (Y 148).

Yasch's confused emotions are reflected in the novel by the constant shifting of events from the present to the past and vice versa; this is symbolic of his search after meaning and how it can impact the present.

There are two memories of the past that are totally redeeming for Yasch. One is the memories he has of his father's gentleness and caring during times of family crises. This does not take away from the fact that his father later deserted his family, but it mitigates his action (Y 156-157). The other memory is that of the birth of his son Doft. When he was waiting for him to be born, Yasch had plenty of time to think. He remembered all the bad things he had done but came to terms with himself: "Yeah, I gribbled about all this till my shirt was as wet as it gets at haying time but in the end the head straightens it all out and the nurse came to tell me to come look at my boy" (Y 169).

These last two memories are the reason for the transformation of Yasch's identity, from a negative to a positive orientation; they save him from despair. They represent redemption from the past and hope for the future, and make him secure in the present. He becomes a respected member of his community because he has gained respect for himself.

Jonny, too, knows gentleness from his father who comes to comfort him at the end of the novel. However, Jonny has the added problem of his German/Jewish identity and has not yet come to terms with his future the way Yasch has.

Summary

Both novels analyzed in this chapter are written by insiders. Consequently they are too revealing of the peculiar cultures from which they come to be comfortably accepted by the people who are described. The authors highlight sensitive issues in a mocking, ironic and satirical manner and thus their intentions can easily be misconstrued. Disillusionment with leadership both in community and church is underscored and group politics exposed, often in a hilarious manner. The use of language, including coarse barnyard humour, disrespectful name calling, Yiddish expressions and Low German mixed with English, results in a colorful, irreverent look at each culture. One very effective device used less by Seligmann than by Wiebe is the confusion of the sacred and the secular.

The sexuality of the adolescent reigns with unabashed fervor, expressed very explicitly by Seligmann and more metaphorically by Wiebe. Sexual behaviour is celebrated and myths exposed by deliberate reversal of male and female roles.

The autobiographical elements in both novels become quite obvious when examining the lives of the authors. However, Seligmann's novel is overtly autobiographical with didactic intentions and in many ways his life dovetails with that of his protagonist. The intensity and passion with which he portrays his protagonist is not just a literary device but evidence of Seligmann's own struggle with the problems encountered by Rubinstein.

In contrast, Wiebe's approach is gentler and less jarring. His character is a more naive narrator and his irony not as savage as that of Seligmann's, his pathos not as intense. Rather than being autobiographical of Wiebe himself, the novel is autobiographical of his people, the Low German-speaking Mennonites of Southern Manitoba. Evidence of this is the revealing book review of Margaret Reimer who grew up in that area.

The pathologies of the protagonists are symbolic of those of the minor culture in which they find themselves; their fragmented identities are largely due to the fact that they are the scapegoats of a major culture to which they also relate. Both live with a feeling of isolation due to their particular family circumstances and their relationships to friends and classmates. Jonny, disdainful of his Jewishness, is betrayed by both his German classmates and his Jewish friends. Yasch, the new kid at school, is bullied and ignored. He in turn participates in the type of bullying that has been so hurtful to him.

Because they both feel out of control and are bossed around by everyone, the protagonists have problems with authority figures and are both defiant toward them and humiliated by them. They struggle with teachers, parents, church leaders and police, mocking them and being mocked by them. They have a very poor self-image, constantly berating themselves for their actions and blaming others for their problems.

The cultural confusion of the protagonists is reflected in their sexual confusion. As adolescents they are plagued by the need for sexual release which contributes to their distorted picture of the opposite sex. They are repelled as well as attracted by outsiders and cannot distinguish between sexual attraction and love. When they finally settle on the woman who satisfies them, this woman is one who is considered an outsider by their culture. In Rubinstein's case the union does not last. Yasch's marriage to Oata becomes his salvation once he overcomes some of his preconceived prejudices and his traditional patriarchal way of thinking.

The protagonists, searching for meaning and identity by revisiting the past, realize that the solution to their problems does not lie in remaining in the past as victims. Each protagonist must decide to confront the past, make use of what has been learned from it, and then apply it to the future. This is explained to Jonny by Frankfurter, himself a victim of the Holocaust.

Jonny, however, remains confused at the end and lies sobbing on his bed while his concerned father waits for him at the door. He is unable to reconcile his German and Jewish identities because of the Holocaust. Yasch, too, is apprehensive about the influences of the outside world but has gone a step further than Jonny by marrying Oata who herself has undergone a metamorphosis. His salvation lies not only in his marriage to Oata but also in remembering the gentleness of his father and in putting his hopes for the future in his son.

CONCLUSION

Dietrich Bonhoeffer's poem "Wer bin ich," quoted in the Introduction, ends with an expression of trust in a transcendental being who knows him even when he doesn't know himself:

Wer bin ich? Einsames Fragen treibt mit mir Spott.

Wer ich auch bin, Du kennst mich, Dein bin ich, o Gott!

Both the Jewish and Mennonite writers of this study have their primary social and cultural roots in religion. Persecuted for their faith throughout their history, the temptation to assimilate to the major culture was always very present and very real for these people.

The role of religion in identity formation is addressed by Erikson. From religion, claims Erikson, the individual must derive a faith which is transmitted to infants in the form of basic trust. Religion provides "the insight that individual trust must become a common faith, individual mistrust a commonly formulated evil, while the individual's need for restoration must become part of the ritual practice of many, and must become a sign of trustworthiness in the community" (67). Erikson qualifies this by saying that "whosoever claims that he does not need religion must derive such basic faith from elsewhere" (67).

For the assimilated German Jews, the Holocaust was a special kind of suffering because they were hunted by the very people with whom they identified. Having lost their religious moorings due to assimilation into the German culture, how were they to identify with their Judaism after the Holocaust? Assimilation was no longer an option because of the danger of once more creating a terrible enemy. Unable to embrace orthodox Judaism

after years of assimilation, many of the survivors and their children re-acquaint themselves with the Jewish culture and practise the traditions of their forebears. This is an attempt, but tenuous at best. Aaron Hass writes: "There is an adherence to custom among the second generation, but a vacuum of fundamental belief in religious precepts. Survivors' loss of religious conviction, despite the enhanced Jewish identity forced upon them, may prove a severe diluent for their children and the generations that will follow" (146).

Mennonites are taught not to aspire to build their home on this earth, but to strive for a heavenly one. When the Mennonites do settle down between their periods of moving around due to religious conviction or persecution, they tend to become prosperous because of their work ethic. This evokes a sense of guilt in them, often assuaged by striving for a simple lifestyle, serving those who are poor, or dispensing with religion altogether. By blindly following religious creeds or embracing only the cultural and traditional aspects rather than the religious ones, they too lose the connection that binds them to their ancestors.

This is a common problem in both Jurek Becker's and Rudy Wiebe's novels. Hans, the protagonist of *Bronsteins Kinder*, is Jewish, but his family has assimilated and no longer practises the Jewish religion. He is hardly aware of his Jewishness and identifies himself as German until he is confronted with the unexpected violence his father exhibits toward a former German concentration camp guard whom he captures and tortures. Hans's basic trust in his father's stability and in his own identity as a German is shattered. Suddenly he is faced with the fact that he is Jewish, but has no idea what exactly that means. No longer able to trust his father and insecure in the identity he has claimed until now, his world falls apart.

Unlike Hans, Thom in *Peace Shall Destroy Many* adheres to personal and corporate religious convictions in his Mennonite community. However, the basic trust that this religious community provides for him at the beginning of the novel is threatened as Thom feels the outside culture encroaching and making demands on his religious community which it cannot meet without compromising its convictions. At the same time he notices that a trusted and admired leader within the community does not live up to its standards. Although he renders lip service to pacifism, Deacon Block practises violence in his personal life. This threatens Thom's identity: he loses faith in the integrity of the leader of his community.

Erikson defines integrity as "acceptance of one's parents as they are, and an acceptance of the fact that one's life is one's own responsibility" (104). This is an inner identity, as Freud pointed out. He called it "die klare Bewusstheit der inneren Identität" (qtd. in Erikson 182, footnote 2), less based on religion or race than on a readiness to live in opposition and on a freedom from prejudices (Erikson 109). Both Hans and Thom struggle to achieve this inner identity, as they move into adulthood and come to terms with some of the inconsistencies of their role models who have not displayed that integrity.

Integrity is the pinnacle of adulthood in Erikson's outline of the three stages of adulthood. It is seen by him as

> the acceptance of one's own and only life cycle and of the people who have become significant to it as something that had to be and that, by necessity, permitted of no substitutions. [. . .] It is a sense of comradeship with men and women of distant times and of different pursuits, who have created orders and objects and sayings conveying human dignity and love. [. . .] The lack or

> loss of accrued ego-integration is signified by despair and an often unconscious fear of death: the one and only life cycle is not accepted as the ultimate of life. (104)

There is an aura of fear that haunts the literature of the poets and prophets whose people have succumbed to torture. They have problems with the concept of a God who allowed this terrible thing to happen (Hass 144-153). Both Honigmann and Klassen make their readers aware of the gap that exists and needs to be bridged in order for healing to take place by recounting stories of their own struggles and that of their forebears. They constantly go to the past in search of names and evidence to validate the existence of those ancestors who were violently taken from life. Because there is little evidence it becomes a frustrating task. Death as the only connection permeates their own existence in the modern world, and they tread carefully, always aware of danger. An assumed identity becomes a way of coping with their fear and seems safer than their own.

Like Jurek Becker, who said it was only at his desk, writing stories, that he felt like he could fly a little, Klassen and Honigmann search for a lost identity by using the wings of their imagination. Literature becomes their refuge, a place in which their fears and insecurities can be articulated. In *Violence and Mercy*, Klassen entitles a section of poetry "Wingspan," in which the outstanding metaphor is wings. Klassen gives her readers a vision of liberated souls, "our limbs lighter than breastfeathers, [. . .] spirit at last, [. . .] free from the dead weight of gravity and guilt" (108).

About the process of identity formation Erikson writes:

> Identity formation begins where the usefulness of multiple identification ends. It arises from the selective repudiation and mutual assimilation of childhood identifications, and their

> absorption in a new configuration, which in turn is dependent on the process by which a society (often through subsocieties) identifies the young individual, recognizing him as somebody who had to become the way he is, and who, being the way he is, is taken for granted. (122)

Through the adolescent young men, and to a lesser degree young women, of Jurek Becker's and Rudy Wiebe's novels, and especially through the protagonists Thom and Hans, the authors illustrate what can happen during the final stage of a person's identity formation when the developing personality is more apt than ever to suffer from a diffusion of roles.

Erikson, in his book *Identity and the Life Cycle*, calls this diffusion "social play," often leading to experimentation in fantasy and introspection as the adolescent's ego develops. He says further that "adolescence is a crisis in which only fluid defense can overcome a sense of victimization by inner and outer demands, and in which only trial and error can lead to the most felicitous avenues of action and self-expression" (126).

This social play of trial and error is most aptly expressed by Jonathan Rubinstein and Yasch Siemens in the novels by Rafael Seligmann and Armin Wiebe, as their protagonists experiment with the opposite sex and attempt to define themselves in the dual cultures in which they exist. They challenge some of the dominant myths and societal norms of their own culture, such as the forbidden terrain of sex before marriage, respect for authority and religion, and strict adherence to certain roles assigned to males and females. They debunk stereotypes, such as the servile and victim mentality of the Jews, and the self-effacing, honest, peace-loving profile of the Mennonites. These authors also emphasize that there is no solution to

identity formation by remaining in the past and being victimized by that past.

All of the authors and their protagonists on which this study concentrates must find their identities in a dual culture. This is not a theoretical concept but a real entity in which "literature is a kind of superstructure, a highly complex and well worked out embodiment of that phenomenon" (Shaked 392). Tension arises when the majority stigmatizes the minority and the minority internalizes that stigma. The authors, caught in this dilemma, then try to demonstrate that the stigma does or does not fit.

The Jewish authors write in German, the language of the enemy but also their heart language, with a sprinkling of Yiddish words or phrases; this aspect is more pronounced in Seligmann, who emigrated from Israel as a pre-teen, than it is in Becker or Honigmann. The Mennonite writers, raised in Low German- and German-speaking rural communities in Canada, write in English, the "worldly language" from which German was to shield them, with a sprinkling of Low German and German words and syntax. These Yiddish and German words function as signs of cultural distinctiveness and "stand for the latent presence" of another culture (Ashcroft 62). The use of German in Rudy Wiebe's novel is minimal, because that kind of experimentation with language was discouraged when he wrote *Peace Shall Destroy Many*, but it is present in his later works. Today this play with language is seen, in Josef Skvorecky's words, "as an interesting linguistic phenomenon with great humorous potential" (31).

In his book *Zion als Ziel und als Aufgabe* (1936), the Galician German-influenced Jewish philosopher and writer Martin Buber (1878-1965), defines his position toward Germany, and at the same time disengages himself from

assimilation. He states that the Jewish people living in Germany do not wish to be different because they do not want to be treated as aliens. He acknowledges that in reality they are different but they are not foreign, and German culture is to the Jew "familiar, different but not essentially strange, and we love it: the language which taught us to think; the landscape which taught us to see; the creative depth of a great nationhood which has given us this lovely and fateful present" (qtd. in Adler 139).

The Holocaust had not yet taken place when Buber wrote those words. The authors who are born after the Holocaust must deal with the horror of what has happened to their people. This event is often what defines them rather than the rich legacy of their ancestors. While searching for new ways of defining themselves, they feel obligated to express the despair and the longing of those who were denied their right to live.

In the tradition of Martin Buber, German Jewish authors like Becker, Honigmann and Seligmann, rather than denying their Jewish heritage and renouncing their Jewish identity and religious practices, are actively at work in shaping a new Jewish identity. These authors desire to move beyond the victim mentality, not denying that history but also not wishing to be defined by it. By taking a mocking look at what has happened to the German/Jewish symbiosis and exposing this false utopia, they create a picture which is shocking at times but helps people to move beyond idealism into reality.

Canada, the home of the Mennonite writers in this study, views itself as a tolerant, welcoming nation. This has historically not always been so. The restriction of native Canadians to reserves, the head tax collected only on Chinese immigrants, the internment of Japanese Canadians, and the

refusal to accept European Jews before the Holocaust, all tell another story (Hutcheons 11).

Canadian literature did not reflect its cultural mosaic until the late 1940s, when, beginning with Jewish authors, a new generation of writers looked to their cultural roots for inspiration. Although Canada takes pride in its multiculturalism, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, declaring as its goal the preservation and enhancement of Canada's multicultural heritage, was passed only recently, in July 1988 (Hutcheon and Richmond, preface).

As Linda Hutcheon points out: "[E]thnocentrism and xenophobia cannot be discounted, even in a country that since 1971 has been officially multicultural" (12). Many Canadians not of French or English heritage fear assimilation and there is a tension between wanting to be a Canadian who is totally accepted in this new society and wanting to retain the culture of the old one.

The Mennonite writers in this study are offspring of a people who suffered persecution in disturbed and troubled times in Russia's history—after the Crimean War, during World War I, and at the time of the Communist Revolution and the ensuing civil war. All of their immediate families, however, escaped Stalin's purges and settled in Canada before World War II. That is perhaps why their protagonists are not as disturbed as the ones created by the Jewish authors. However, these Mennonite authors also provide a realistic portrait of a people whose ancestors have experienced ongoing persecution and torture and come to a new land where they must deal with the world beyond themselves and discover what it means to live in both worlds without denying their identity.

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