FOREIGN WRITING AGENCY: ABBAS KHIDER & MARÍA CECILIA BARBETTA

WRITING TOWARDS CATHARSIS IN GERMAN AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

AFTER TRAUMA

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by
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ABSTRACT

Authors Abbas Khider and María Cecilia Barbetta both came to German as adults and have since written and published novels in German as non-native speakers of the language. While this decision to write in German as non-native authors of the language is in itself of interest, the reasons either author gave for their decision to write in German as opposed to their native languages inspired and shaped this dissertation. Both authors explained in various interviews that their debut novels could not have been written in their respective native languages of Arabic and Spanish. For Khider, writing in German allows him to build an emotional buffer between himself and the challenging events of his past; Barbetta described the language as a magic cloak, a Tarnkappe that allowed her to revisit the Buenos Aires of her memory, seemingly immune to its effects. The content of Khider’s and Barbetta’s first novels is strongly influenced by their respective experiences of dictatorship in Baghdad and Buenos Aires, experiences I have argued as traumatizing in this dissertation, in that they have a profound impact on the identity development of either author. After analyzing the intersections of Khider’s and Barbetta’s debut novels, I have concluded that traumatic experiences serve as both catalyzing as well as figurative influences in the writing process, both initiating and shaping the writing. The writing generated takes the form of a trauma narrative, a first-person account, marked by challenges to traditional boundaries between fantasy and reality and to time. Treating Khider’s and Barbetta’s novels as trauma narratives provides a context for understanding the capacity for writing to heal, or at the very least, address the symptoms of trauma. Whereas writing the narrative provides a framework for processing trauma, the process of writing in a foreign language, and writing in German as a foreign language in particular, provides perspective distance to the event, a venue for reinventing identity after trauma, and an avenue for healing play. My decision to compare and analyze Khider’s and Barbetta’s works in this dissertation was initially informed by student testimony in response to foreign language journal writing, by author interviews, and finally by the
contextual factors that brought about this writing, including the controversial Chamisso Prize. In this dissertation, I bring together trauma research from the field of psychology and from literary theory to establish the contexts through which the catalyzing and formative influence of trauma on the text, the restorative capacity of the texts as trauma narratives, and finally the dynamic of foreign language acquisition in facilitating the writing and recovery processes became apparent. While the question why authors find writing in German as a foreign language preferable to writing in their native languages remains as the heart of this dissertation, pursuing the answer to this question raised further questions regarding genre and ethical responsibility.
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EPIGRAPH

“Dich aber, milde sprache Deutschlands habe
ich selbst erwählt und ganz allein gesucht.”

- J. L. Borges
Chapter 1: Non-native writers of German in Germany

In 2013, author Abbas Khider reported in an interview with Die Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, that he could not have written his first two novels in Arabic. Only with the help of the German language was he able to establish some distance between himself and the traumatic events of his past. Similarly, author María Cecilia Barbeta reported finding freedom in the German language that her native Spanish could not offer her. Barbeta described German as a Tarnkappe, a magic cloak that allowed her to revisit her past unnoticed (Gruber). These two authors are not without precedent: at the end of the eighteenth century, Adelbert von Chamisso found refuge in both Berlin and the German language. The born-Frenchman, Adélaïde, chose a German identity for himself embodied in the German name Adelbert. From 1985 to 2017, the Robert-Bosch-Foundation awarded German-language authors in Chamisso’s name; until 2012, the authors awarded were exclusively among those who wrote in German as a foreign language, but after 2012, the prize parameters were broadened to include all authors writing in German who have been influenced by a change in culture. Barbeta received the Chamisso prize in 2009; Khider first received the prize in 2010 and now again in 2017 for his latest work, Ohrfeige. The list of Chamisso prize-winning authors has grown to 77 in the last 32 years and the stories that can be told about their relationship with the German language are numerous. With this dissertation, I would like to tell you the story that connects two of these Chamisso Prize winning authors: a story of speechlessness in a native tongue caused by traumatic experiences overcome through an adopted one. Khider’s and Barbeta’s first novels are autobiographical to varying degrees, but more than this, their relationship with language, both native born and adopted, is reflected in the trials of their protagonists. These protagonists themselves suffer from trauma and subsequent speechlessness. The trauma itself within either protagonist’s narrative serves as both a catalyzing force as well as a creational one. While the process
of narrating itself provides a framework for processing trauma, a technique employed by both Janet and Freud over one hundred years ago, the conspicuous multi-lingualism of either narrator illustrates how foreign language provides perspective distance to trauma, a venue for reinventing identity after traumatic interruptions, and an avenue for healing play.

1.a. Chamisso

1.a.i. The Chamisso Prize for Literature

The Chamisso Literature Prize was born out of an initiative in the form of an essay put forth by Dr. Harald Weinrich, now emeritus faculty from the University of Munich, then head of the University’s Institute for German as a Foreign Language. Published August 1983 in *Merkur*, a monthly German-language magazine dedicated to the intersection between the political and the cultural aesthetic, Weinrich’s essay, “Um eine deutsche Literatur von außen bittend”, or “In request of a German literature from outside [the established German literary scene?]”, argues that West Germany had become “ein Vielvölkerstaat” (a state of many different peoples) (912), one that was not only multinational, but also multicultural. What is more, these multinational and -cultural authors were writing about Germany in German. Weinrich particularly distinguishes forerunners Franco Biondi and Aras Ören1, guest workers from Italy and Turkey respectively, as being greatly instrumental in supporting the birth and growth of this literature. For the guest workers of the 70s, *Deutsch* was considered the “Sprache einer übernationale Arbeitsolidarität” (915), or language of supra-national worker-solidarity. To illustrate the connection non-native writers of German have with the language, Weinrich quotes Turkish-born author Yüksel Pazarkaya, who considers authors Lessing, Heine, 

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1 Aras Ören’s initial works were in fact written in Turkish, but for a German audience and subsequently translated. Later works highlight the foreignness of a non-native speaker of German as part of his aesthetic style.
Schiller and Brecht as gifts of the German language. These writers, according to Weinrich, serve to remind readers of the value of their language, a point that Zafer Şenocak also makes in his social commentary Deutschsein.²

Weinrich made a point of distinguishing between three different groups of writers: not only Germany’s Gastarbeiter (guest workers) were writing in German, but there were also an increasing number of asylum seekers, refugees and other displaced persons, as well as a large number of students and interns from abroad dedicating themselves to both language and literature. It is these authors who were studying the language with such delicacy and care so as to appreciate the finest nuances of the language, who, according to Weinrich, had a better command of the language than many native German speakers. Their skill grew from the challenge of learning German that forced them to pay greater attention to the words and their meanings and that also compelled these writers to dedicate themselves more fully to the language.

Due in large part to Weinrich’s efforts to bring attention to non-native writers in Germany, the Chamisso Prize was then created in 1985 with the motivation of bringing this diverse demographic of authors to the attention of German-language readers. As a function of this awareness, the prize also served to highlight those works that provided an affirmative answer to the question through their Sprachkraft (power of language), whether these adopted sons and daughters of German could, in fact, do the language justice. Together with the Bavarian Academy of Fine Arts and the Robert Bosch Foundation, Weinrich helped to establish a main prize of 15,000 Euros,

² “Fällt es so schwer zu glauben, dass Deutschland ein Land ist, das geliebt wird, in dem man gerne lebt, und zwar nicht nur wegen des sozialen Netzes, sondern wegen den vielfältigen Möglichkeiten, etwas aus seinem Leben zu machen, egal ob man Mann oder Frau, Türke oder Deutscher ist?” (92) “Is it so hard to believe that Germany is a land that is loved, that people like to live in, and not just because of the social system, but because of the manifold opportunities to be able to make something out of life, no matter if one is a man or a woman, Turkish or German?” [All translations are my own, unless otherwise stated.]
supplemented by up to two secondary prizes of 7,000 Euros each. The first Chamisso prize was awarded 1985 to Aras Ören, and a secondary award of support to Rafik Schami. From 1985 to 2017, the Robert Bosch Foundation awarded 77 authors with the Chamisso Prize, and these authors continue to support the flourishing writing community by giving readings and writing workshops as part of their obligation for receiving the prize. Before 2012, the prize criteria limited the pool of authors considered to those whose works were written and published in German, by non-native speakers of that language. The first prizewinner, Aras Ören, was a bit of an exception, as he wrote his works in Turkish for a German audience, which were then collaboratively translated. After 2012, the criteria expanded to include all authors whose works have been influenced by a cultural change, an expansion that has allowed for the inclusion of a steadily growing population of authors with backgrounds of migration, who are nonetheless native speakers of the German language. Included among those authors awarded since the parameter change of 2012, Sherko Fatah (Chamisso 2015), for example, was born in East Berlin to a German mother and an Iraqi father, and writes about war and terror and the complicity of German history in his father’s country of origin.

Each year, a mixed jury of scholars, critics and writers chooses winners. As of April 2015, these members included Dr. Wolfgang Herles, Michael Krüger, Prof. Dr. Klaus-Dieter Lehmann, Dr. Wiebke Porombka, Denis Scheck, Dr. Insa Wilke and author Feridun Saimoglu. After founder Harald Weinrich retired, he donated his collection of ‘Chamisso’ literature to the Marbach Archive, which now holds the largest collection of Chamisso Prize literature and which hosted a meeting in 2011 to discuss the future of the prize and predict future developments of this literature.

Subsequent Chamisso Prize winners will be distinguished by (Chamisso Year) in this chapter. Linking authors with the year they received either the Chamisso Prize or the Förderpreis fuels the argument that the prize is reductive. Scholars and authors, like Lena Gorelik, have criticized the prize as pigeonholing multicultural/multilingual authors as curiosities rather than appreciating their authentic contribution to German literature. Sensitive of this issue, I have nonetheless decided to provide these dates to further highlight the chronological developments of the literature through its authors.
Since 2009, the foundation has also published a journal under the title *Chamisso. Viele Kulturen* – *eine Sprache* (Chamisso. Many cultures – one language), which primarily showcases the award winners and their works, but which also includes essays on topics such as the impact of this literature. In the March-May 2009 issue, German scholar Monika Stranáková argued that the Chamisso Prize itself was to thank for the growing awareness of and appreciation for the demographic of authors recognized by the Chamisso Prize. In an optimistic estimation of the work of Chamisso Prize authors, she credits them with causing the transformation of German society into a multicultural one (21). With the demographic of authors rapidly increasing, one might also argue that it was just a matter of time before enough deserving works proved the merit of this literature as a whole. Being awarded a prize for being different also begs the question of whether the literature is being awarded for its novelty rather than its actual quality.\(^4\)

But this final question as to the propriety of awarding a literary prize according to parameters of otherness has become something of a moot point, as the Chamisso Prize was awarded for the last time in early 2017. According to Uta-Micaela Dürig, the chief executive of the Robert Bosch foundation, “Der Preis hat die zum Start gesetzten gesellschaftlichen Ziele aus unserer Sicht erreicht: Kulturelle Vielfalt ist in unserer Gesellschaft und in der deutschsprachigen Literatur inzwischen in weiten Teilen zur Normalität geworden.” (Im Fokus 51).\(^5\) This opinion in itself has sparked considerable debate among critics and Chamisso Prize winners alike. The Chamisso Prize has garnered considerable critique over the years for its perceived paternalism, being an organization

\(^4\) Particularly because this opinion was published by the organization awarding the prize, it should certainly be read with a critical eye. Further, while Khider is certainly an engaged and skilled writer, critics have considered his latest work to be his least polished. In light of the refugee crisis in Germany, the increasing conservatism as evidenced by the rise of the AfD, it begs the question whether Khider’s winning the prize for one of his lesser works was not a politically motivated decision by the prize committee.

\(^5\) “The prize has achieved the societal goals it set at the start, in our opinion: cultural variety has by now become, to a large extent, status-quo in our society and in german-language literature.”
that professes to support authors from an underrecognized demographic. After the foundation announced the dissolution of the prize in September 2016, Ilja Trojanow, José F. Oliver and Artur Becker, themselves past Chamisso Prize winners, reflected nostalgically on the origins of the prize, and questioned the prudence of the foundation’s decision to discontinue the prize in the midst of Germany’s refugee crisis. Dürig argued in an interview posted to the Robert Bosch Stiftung website that the foundation’s decision was also motivated by the desire to support a stronger feeling of unity among the literary community. The dissolution of the prize thus addresses complaints, many from the authors themselves, that they were unfairly pigeonholed as trick-ponies rather than authors of their own merit. Yet, the foundation’s proclamation that the goal had been accomplished, resonated as an inappropriate extension of the paternalistic posturing the plagued the foundation throughout its existence.

Moving forward, the Robert Bosch Foundation plans to continue its support of youth by organizing school visits and author workshops, particularly for students with migration backgrounds, as they have most benefited from the foundation’s support in the past. I hope the irony of this paradox is not lost: the prize is no longer needed, not least, Dürig includes, because many of the authors awarded were second-generation immigrants anyways… except for kids who benefit from their workshops. Further, will the foundation continue to cherry-pick authors for their workshops along the parameters of migration and cultural shifts? The icing on the cake, however, comes with program director Frank Albert’s lack of regard or responsibility for the spirit of what Harald Weinrich hoped to support and convey with the prize’s origins, or for the feeling of togetherness that Dürig maintained. When asked whether the prize might be extended to include and support Germany’s newest migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, Albert maintained, “Diese Literatur gibt es noch nicht, es wird noch lange dauern, bis sie entsteht. Dann wird man neue Instrumente finden.
müssen, sie zu fördern” (Kister). It will be interesting to see what will happen with the future of the prize, as Becker appeals to founder Weinrich in his editorial in the Frankfurter Rundschau last fall to take up the torch and carry on the prize with a different foundation.

1.a.ii. Chamisso the Predecessor: Why Chamisso Literature Should Be Read

Returning to the more innocent days of the prize’s origins, it takes its name, as was explained above, from a predecessor of these authors, similarly influenced by a cultural change. Louis Charles Adelaïde de Chamisso de Boncourt was born 1781 to a noble family in France. His family fled during the Revolution, eventually landing in Berlin three years later, in 1796, where his family found themselves working to support themselves for the first time. Chamisso eventually learned German and began writing poetry in the language, but retained a French accent throughout his life. Thomas Mann waxes more poetically on the peculiarities of Chamisso’s foreignness: “Er zählte französisch. Es ist überliefert, daß er, produzierend, bis zuletzt seine Eingebungen laut auf französisch vor sich hin sprach, bevor er daran ging, sie in Verse zu gießen [...]” (Mann 308).

His fairy tale, Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte, written while Chamisso was in hiding during the summer of 1813, tells the story of a man who sells his shadow for endless wealth. Everyone Schlemihl meets, however, is immediately aware of his shadowlessness, and reacts with suspicion bordering on hostility. Understanding Schlemihl’s shadowlessness as a metaphor for Chamisso’s French-accented German paints for readers an idea of the stigmatization Chamisso must have faced in his daily life at a time when the French Revolution and the continental dominance of Napoleon

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6 “This literature doesn’t exist yet, and it will be a long time before it exists. Then someone will have to find new instruments to support it.”
7 “He counted in French. It’s also been said, that he, while in the production phase, up until the end, spoke to his surroundings out loud in French before he then went on to shower them with verse.”
8 Translated into English by Sir John Bowering, 1823, as Peter Schlemihl. Encyclopedia of the Romantic Era.
were provoking negative reactions in German speakers against all things French. Further, Schlemihl’s plight (after failed attempts to integrate into society, he surrenders his life to a global existence of Siebenmeilenstiefel-propelled travel in pursuit of science) provides further perspective on the plight of migrants and refugees in Germany today, many of whom are also met with a range of reactions from mild suspicion to hostile Ausländerfeindlichkeit (xenophobia).

In his essay on the author, Thomas Mann argues that Chamisso’s accomplishment with Peter Schlemihl demonstrates that being a foreigner and being a German writer are not mutually exclusive identifications. In fact, the question of identity is further complicated by the fact that, after many years of travel, Chamisso chose German nationality for himself. Mann further explains that Schlemihl’s shadow caused quite a stir in the reception of the tale. He therewith identifies a problematic that has persisted through to today. Chamisso complained that readers of his fairy tale were fixated on the shadow and what its lack represented in the piece rather than looking beyond to the solide that cast it. This is the same critique that many of the Chamisso-Prize winning authors have somewhat ironically echoed, feeling themselves similarly pigeonholed by their differences, by a lack (of native fluency, for example), rather than what they actually consist of. Interestingly, Mann ignores Chamisso’s appeal to ignore the shadow and look at the man, by describing the shadow as a marker of belonging to a social group.

Artur Becker (Chamisso 2009) extends Chamisso’s shadow metaphor by tracing it to the sun. Through this extension, he demonstrates why this demographic of authors should be read: they wield a greater sensibility for the similarities between human beings, beyond national distinctions and boundaries. In a reading sample posted to the Robert Bosch Foundation’s website dedicated to Chamisso authors, Becker writes “aber die Sonne ist unser eigentliches Zuhause, unsere Hoffnung
Can this vision be labeled utopian or even cosmopolitan? To label this communion under the sun, which extends beyond constructions of nationality, begs association with the homeless and wandering Jews, who were also unable to assimilate fully into their new societies. But the term cosmopolitan summons images of cityscapes and dense urban settings of the \textit{polis} or city, and these authors escape more frequently to nature. Becker flees to the sun, for example, and, as we will see later, author Abbas Khider flees to the desert.

Becker identifies the important association between one’s tongue and loneliness – one’s ability to speak dictates their ability to assuage the banal, domestic loneliness:

\begin{quote}
und ich habe mir – ähnlicher wie Sie es getan hatten – eine deutsche Zunge von besten Schneidern und Schustern Preußens anfertigen lassen, damit ich hier in meinem neuen Land nicht einsam zu Abend essen muss, allein vor dem Spiegel sitzen und trinkend: Und das verstehen Sie besser als jeder andere Dichter wie teuer uns die Einsamkeit kommen kann (Becker)
\end{quote}

This short paragraph closes like a letter; though the addressee remains unnamed, it is not unlikely, given the reference to shadows and in acknowledgment of the dated geographical marker, Prussia, that Becker is addressing his predecessor, Adelbert von Chamisso. To overcome domestic loneliness, one learns the language, but the costly and profound loneliness of the author remains, something the addressee knows well, presumably. To live alone as a foreigner prepares a mirror of internal reflection and a lasting state of \textit{Einsamkeit}. The Grimm dictionary reveals an ambivalence in

\begin{quote}
9 “But the sun is our actual home, our hope and our determination, because it is in the sun that the shadows of all earthly nations reside.”
10 “And I had – similar to what you had done – a German tongue fashioned for me by the best tailors and cobblers in Prussia, so that I would not have to eat all alone in my new country, sitting alone before my mirror and drinking: And that is what you understand better than any other poet, the cost that can come with this loneliness.”
\end{quote}
this word; in its original use, *Einsamkeit* conveyed the idea of unity and communion. It was not until later that the word came to describe solitude. The fascination associated with this ambiguity is that it is precisely Becker’s state of *Einsamkeit* that allows him to realize the unity of beings under the sun. Becker challenges yet another conceivable mutual-exclusion: Thomas Mann described Chamisso as both foreigner and German author; Becker reconciles the greater unity between the domestic and the foreign with his experience of solitude. Like the mirror placed on Becker’s dinner table, both Chamisso and Becker bring oppositional images together on a single surface. What is so profound about authors navigating two cultures? Their ability to recognize an accord.

Returning to Weinrich’s essay, “Um eine deutsche Literatur von außen bittend”, we see another important peculiarity of foreign writers of German, namely their independence from the majority culture. Pazarkaya’s poem, “deutsche sprache” (German language), elaborates on this independence, and Weinrich supports its importance by complimenting it with, “Es ist gut, daß es Ausländer gibt, die Deutsche gelegentlich daran erinnern, was die deutsche Sprache wert ist, wenn kein Missbrauch mit ihr getrieben wird” (917). Weinrich’s use of the term *Missbrauch*, or misuse, alludes to the temporal stain left on the German language by its affair with the National Socialists from 1933 to 1945, as well as the rhetoric associated with later manifestations of prejudice and xenophobia. In keeping with this, Pazarkaya explains with his poem, that the misuse occurs when language is used to either humiliate or exploit.

[...] 

die in ihr ein werkzeug der erniedrigung

die in ihr ein werkzeug der ausbeutung seh'n

---

11 “It is a good thing that there are foreigners who remind Germans on occasion what the German language is worth, that is, when it isn’t being misused.”

12 See Victor Klemperer’s “The Language of the Third Reich.”
What the poem further demonstrates, however, is the phenomenon of a relationship developing between language and adopted writer, largely independent of the majority population. Pazarkaya writes of the magnanimity of the language, which gave him a sense of home and security (*Geborgenheit*), of hope for the future (*Zuversicht*), as well as the spiritual and intellectual nourishment of writers like Lessing and Heine, or philosophers like Hegel and Marx. Most importantly, Pazarkaya writes that the language offers up: “eine Welt in der sich leben lässt” (916). 

It is difficult to ignore the sense of belonging the German language has provided this author; but this belonging exists largely independent of the contemporary speakers. Pazarkaya writes: “die ich vorbehaltlos liebe – […] die mir mehr gab als die / die sie angeblich sprechen”. Further demonstration of this exclusionary independence comes in the third stanza, when he refers to those who fall silent in the language or those who hold speeches at the top of their lungs, or yet those who use language as a tool, as was explained above, for humiliation or exploitation, none of these speakers are truly within the language. Not like the author, who loves the literature and the culture, who listens and speaks softly.

This presents an interesting challenge that requires further enquiry, though not for this study: what capacity does a language have to give, and what can be given? Is it wrong to reduce the relationship between author and language to a matter of transaction? Can purely economic terms be used to describe an exchange of intangibles? It better serves the argument here to focus on the receivers of the transaction, the “adopted” authors of the language, and what they express the language has made available to them. It is better to analyze the personal relationships that develop

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13 “Those who see in her a tool for humiliation/those a tool for exploitation/they are not within her, not them.”
14 “A world in which living is allowed”
15 “Whom I love unconditionally – […] who gave me more than those / who allegedly speak her”
between late speakers of a language both independent of and in conjunction with the majority community of language speakers.

Returning to the independence highlighted in Pazarkaya’s poem, Heidi Rösch comments on this independence briefly, but in the context of narrative content. In the literature of a group of authors, whom she labels “die jungen Wilden in Migrationsliteratur” (the young wild ones of migration literature), Rösch notices a shift in narrative focus from the experience of the foreigner in the context of the majority culture, to the experience of the minority culture directly, whereby the majority culture plays only a minor role. This shift in narrative focus is a direct reflection of the shift in authorial ownership of the language as demonstrated by Chamisso authors in the past 30 years as much as by the establishment of multicultural communities within Germany into the third and second generations.

1.a.iii. Who are the Chamisso Prize Winning Authors?

Although the Chamisso Prize recognizes only a percentage of authors working in German today, this percentage is surprisingly diverse. Some of the initial prizewinners wrote about their experiences in Germany in their native languages, like the first prizewinner, Aras Ören. Their works were then translated into German for publication. Both Aras Ören and fellow-forerunner Franco Biondi (Chamisso 1987) came to Germany as Gastarbeiter, or guest workers, and were instrumental in establishing the first groups and publications to support non-native writers of German. Biondi later studied psychology in Frankfurt and discovered his love of literature first by way of the German language. Another of the first prizewinners, Ota Filip (Chamisso 1986), came to Germany at roughly the same time, but as a political exile from the Czechoslovak Soviet Republic. He and Syrian author Adel Karasholi (Chamisso 1992) came to Germany following a writing ban in their respective countries. And other authors followed, migrating to Germany in search of better opportunities made
possible by the German state. Olga Partynova (Support Prize 2015), for example, emigrated with her husband and son from Azerbaijan at the age of 30, knowing no German, and has since become a celebrated writer of German prose, winning the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize for Literature in 2012. Other Chamisso winners learned German abroad in German schools, like María Cecilia Barbetta (Chamisso 2009), whose parents thought she would receive a better education there as opposed to the Argentine state schools. Marjana Gaponenko (Chamisso 2013) learned German in school in the Ukraine and chose it as her main language of literary expression as a teenager. Many Chamisso authors were so enticed by the German education system as to travel to Germany and take up residence there, like Turkish-born author, Yüksel Pazarkaya (Chamisso 1989). Galsan Tschinag (Chamisso 1992) studied in Leipzig but did not stay in Germany. Instead, he became a German teacher upon his return to Mongolia, writing about his tribe in German.

The Chamisso authors who came to Germany, Austria or Switzerland with parents searching for better opportunity, refuge, etc., represent the largest demographic. Zafer Şenocak (Support Prize 1988), Zehra Çırak (Support Prize 1989, Chamisso 2001), Feridun Zaimoğlu (Chamisso 2005) and Ilija Trojanow (Chamisso 2005) are just a few names among this group of twenty-two. Yet other authors were born in Germany, Austria or Switzerland to immigrant parents, like José F. A. Oliver (Chamisso 1997) and Zsuzsa Bánk (Chamisso 2004), or born abroad to parents in a marriage of mixed-nationality, like Sudabeh Mohafez (Support Prize 2006), who was born in Teheran to a German mother. In 2016, the demographic of Chamisso Prize Winners expanded to include German-born, German-heritage authors and translators. Both Esther Kinsky (Chamisso 2016) and Uljana Wolf (Chamisso 2016) explore themes of multi-linguality and multi-cultural identity in their texts.

This diverse group of authors complicates overly reductive attempts at defining a national literature. A cursory definition yields expectations of literature written by Germans, for Germans, in
German, in Germany. The fact that German is the official language of not just Germany, but Belgium, Austria, Switzerland, Luxembourg and Liechtenstein as well, already begins to complicate this definition. Both language and literature further complicate matters, having historically evaded geo-political and social limitary demarcations since Martin Luther’s translation of the Christian Bible established the New High German language standard in the early 16th century. Tumultuous variance has been the norm these last five hundred years, interrupted only by the relative social stability which followed the Second World War and the creation of the European Economic Community and the European Union.

Further, the increased recognition and esteem that, for lack of a better term, “Chamisso” literature (that is, literature written by non-native speakers of German and others, that explores states of multilingualism and multiculturalism), has entertained over the last 30 years suggests that this literature is neither novelty nor peculiarity, but rather a viable development of German literature today. In fact, Ilja Trojanow joked in an interview with Walter Fabian Schmid that being a migrant is becoming something of a competitive edge in the literary scene, “Meine deutsch-deutschen Kollegen spötteln schon, es sei ein Wettbewerbsvorteil, Migrant zu sein” (Trojanow). This trend in valuing the “migrant” or the multicultural perspective is not new. One of Chamisso’s contemporaries, theologian and Berliner Romantic Friedrich Schleiermacher, argued in support of multifaceted contact with what he termed der Fremde (the foreign or other), in order to inspire the otherwise complacent German language and to keep it fresh. Validation from predecessors and through the Chamisso Prize, as well as through other highly-esteemed literature awards, like the Ingeborg

16 “My German-German colleagues already scoff that being a migrant has become a competitive advantage.”
17 “So fühlen wir auch, daß unsere Sprache, weil wir sie der nordischen Trägheit wegen weniger selbst bewegen, nur durch die vielseitige Berührung mit dem fremden recht frisch gedeihen und ihre eigene Kraft vollkommen entwikkeln kann” (Schleiermacher 69). - “And that is how we feel as well, that we move our language relatively little, because of northern inertia, and only through multifrontal contact with the foreign can it stay fresh and develop its own strength completely.”
Bachmann Prize,\(^{18}\) as well as the weight of numbers, support the argument that multicultural literature in Germany exceeds its evaluation as novelty or even curiosity literature and demands reevaluation as a valid and established manifestation of German literature that continues to grow and redefine itself.

This tradition of reassessment begins, arguably, with Thomas Mann and his essay “Chamisso”. Mann fondly remembers his time as a student reading Adelbert von Chamisso, who was then considered one of the canonical voices of German literature. As was explained in the discussion of his essay above, Mann calls Chamisso both a foreigner and a German writer. This move not only praises Chamisso’s difference (the overall tone of the essay supports this positive evaluation of Chamisso), but also sets the challenge to understand writers as embodying seemingly oppositional identities. Literary scholars since Mann have similarly reevaluated the German canon for its multicultural value. Franz Kafka, praised by many for his exemplary German, has lately been argued by scholars like Judith Butler to be an author influenced by his own multilingual and multicultural background as a Jew in Prag writing in the language of the university, German.\(^ {19} \) Elias Canetti received the Nobel Prize for work written in German as arguably his third language (learning to speak first Judesmo in Bulgaria, then English in Manchester, before learning German as a boy in Austria).\(^ {20} \) And Rainer Maria Rilke composed poetry not only in German, but in French as well.

\(^{18}\) Since its inception in 1976, this prize has been awarded to three Chamisso authors: Emine Sevgi Özdamar in 1991, Terézia Mora in 1999, and Olga Martynova in 2012.

\(^{19}\) For an engaging discussion of the implications of Kafka’s multilingualism and multiculturalism in light of the legal proceedings to determine ownership of Kafka’s remaining writings, see Butler’s article “Who Owns Kafka?” published March 2011 in the *London Review of Books.*

\(^{20}\) See Jean Améry’s 1977 article on Canetti “Sprache, Tod und Eifersucht” in *Der Spiegel.*
1.a.iv. Why Chamisso-Authors Write in German

To Schleiermacher, it was clear that German language and literature should be receptive to outside influence to ensure its own vitality, but the motivation for non-native speakers to come to German ranges from the pragmatic and concrete to the idealistic and abstract. As to the pragmatics of language choice, geographic location made the decision for many of the Chamisso Prize winning authors. Whether through their parents’ or their own immigration or education choices, many authors did not consciously choose German per se, rather they acknowledged the practicality of writing in a language they were immersed in. Emine Sevgi Özdamar (Chamisso 1999) expressed as much in an interview in 2012 with POINTS – Potsdam International Network for TransArea Studies. She writes in German, because it is the language she is surrounded by. Franco Biondi began writing by keeping a journal, “aufgrund meiner Lebenssituation fiel es mir leichter das, was ich erlebt hatte, auf Deutsch zu beschreiben als auf Italienisch” (Amodeo Interview).

The pragmatic reasoning behind language choice extends to the socio-political as well. Selim Özdogan (Support Prize 1999), born 1971 in Cologne, states that, not only is his German better than his Turkish (again, thanks to the predominance of German in his geographic location), but the size and demand of book markets in Turkey and Germany played a surprising role in his decision as well. In an interview with Fabian Neidhart, Özdogan explained, “Erstens ist mein Türkisch leider schlechter als mein Deutsch, zweitens lesen in der Türkei weniger Menschen Bücher und ich habe mich in die Position gebracht, vom Schreibe leben zu müssen” (mokita). For María Cecilia Barbetta (Chamisso 2009), not only the quality of the schools in Buenos Aires factored into her decision to

21 “Because of my living situation, I found it easier to write about what I had experienced in German rather than in Italian.”
22 “First, my Turkish is unfortunately worse than my German; second, fewer people in Turkey read books, and I put myself in the situation of having to live from my writing.”
study German, but also the fact that, because so many people already spoke English in the city, German would have given her a competitive advantage over her peers.23

The language decision for some authors proved to be a political decision. Artur Becker (Chamisso 2009), in reflecting back, speculates that his decision to write in German instead of Polish, or even as a bilingual author, coincided with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. “Was will ich werden? Ein bilingualer Autor, oder will ich nur auf Polnisch oder nur auf Deutsch schreiben? Diese drei Fragen tauchten auf. Ich erzähle das jetzt sehr bewusst, aber so bewusst war mir das gar nicht. Es geschah im Affekt im Jahr 1989. Damals habe ich, ohne es zu wissen, mich zu meiner Karriere als deutscher Autor entscheiden” (Müller 46).24 His future lay in Germany. Ota Filip (Chamisso 1986) was expatriated at the age of 44 in 1974 from his Soviet Czechoslovakia. He reports ‘fleeing’ to the refuge of the German language: “Ich habe die Flucht in die deutsche Sprache angetreten […]” (Filip).25 The poet Adel Karasholi (Chamisso 1992) came to Germany after a writing ban in his native Syria left him effectually silenced in his mother tongue. He later completed a doctorate at the University of Leipzig in Brechtian Theater and writes both poetry and essays in German. Another graduate of the University of Leipzig, Galsan Tschinag (Chamisso 1992), began writing in German to circumvent writing censures in his native Mongolia, which forbade writing on the ethnic tribes of his country.26 Tschinag is the leader of his nomadic tribe, the Tuvans, who are

23 “Die Entscheidung für das Studium Deutsch als Fremdsprache fiel zunächst ganz pragmatisch: Englisch können viele Argentinier, Deutsch dagegen ist seltener.” (DAAD Interview) – “The decision to study German as a Foreign Language was an entirely pragmatic one: many Argentinians could speak English, but German was less frequent.”

24 “What do I want to become? A bilingual author, or do I want to write just in Polish or just in German? These three questions surfaced. I tell you this now fully aware, but I wasn’t so aware of this then. It happened, in effect, in 1989. That is when I decided, without realizing it, on my career as a German author.”

25 “I enlisted for the flight into the German language.”

well-known for the art of throat singing. In each of these scenarios, the German language is giving voice to the disenfranchised.

Germany’s particularly auspicious political environment not only gives voice to the disenfranchised, but also facilitates pragmatic decisions to come to and stay in Germany (and to a certain extent Austria and Switzerland). Germany first opened its borders in the 1950s and 60s to Gastarbeiter from Italy, Greece, Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and Yugoslavia to support the unexpected economic growth of the country following WWII. Although legislators initially intended for these guest workers to return to their homes after their work permits expired, many enjoyed the improved quality of life and made the decision to stay. To say that this process of staying has been easy is to overlook the measures passed to discourage immigration, but the overwhelming political climate has allowed many guest workers, students, interns, other migrants and asylum seekers to stay in the country, and, in many cases, to thrive in the language. Furthermore, the German population is full of avid readers with book fairs in Leipzig and Frankfurt each year. The Frankfurt book fair hosts a foreign country each year, for readers to explore and visit through reading. In addition to this widespread interest in reading and learning, the government finances numerous language classes and higher education at low cost, as well as guaranteeing a higher standard of living through artificially lowered food prices.  

Author Yoko Tawada (Chamisso 1996) speaks to the auspicious climate for multicultural authors, “Man merkt wirklich, dass die Leute hier interessiert sind daran, dass die deutsche Sprache von Ausländern geschrieben wird” (Hamm). Her contemporary, Ledá Forgó (Support Prize 2008) marveled at a similarly warm reception. Her decision for German also had political reasons. The Mongolian censor was stricter than in the GDR and did not tolerate stories about the ethnic minorities.”

27 Anita Wilms (Support Prize 2013) explained that her decision to stay in Germany was largely influenced by the improved quality of life upon coming to Berlin to begin a doctoral degree.  

28 “It is really apparent that the people here are interested in the German language being written by foreigners.”
expectation of being treated like someone with the plague due to her Sprachdefizit, or her language deficiency, was completely countered by the interest people took in listening to her: “Stattdessen hörte man mir interessiert zu” ( Forgó). For an illustration of this receptivity towards multicultural literature, one has only to look to the creation and persistence of the Chamisso Prize, as well as the popular success of many non-native German writers. The impact of the Chamisso Prize will certainly be put to the test in the years following its dissolution, to see if literature written by non-native speakers of German will continue to captivate the interest of German readers without the support of this exclusive literature prize.

The motivations towards language learning and writing in German flow in a spectrum from pragmatic and concrete, through to the idealistic and abstract. As a less concrete reason, many authors learned the language to be able to express themselves. Artur Becker’s “Leseprobe” on the Robert-Bosch-Stiftung website demonstrates the utility of learning a foreign language to combat loneliness, but intrinsic in this idea is the desire to communicate, to be understood. Léda Forgó explained the process, from wanting to say things and not being able to, to developing interesting thoughts in the language that needed telling, to experiencing the depth of the language, in her case, through Rainer Maria Rilke. “Meine erste Zeit in Deutschland war, Vieles sagen zu wollen, aber nichts zu können, […] Ich fand, dass fast jeder meiner Gedanken ‘zog’ und Interesse erzeugte, so habe ich Lust bekommen, zu erzählen […] Ich gelangte in die Tiefe einer Sprache (zu der ich vor Kurzem keinerlei Bezug hatte), welche ich früher für das Privileg einer Muttersprache hielt. (Forgó)

Complimentary to this basic desire to communicate is the desire to share cultural experiences. Forgó is not alone in her swift transition from wanting to communicate on a basic level

29 “Instead, people listened to me with interest.”
30 “My first time in Germany was wanting to say a lot but not being able to […] I found that almost every one of my thoughts enticed and aroused interest, so that I gained the desire to talk […] I landed in the depths of a language (to which I had until recently had no ties at all), which I had previously considered to be the privilege of a mother language.”
to initiating a cultural exchange. Saša Stanišić (Chamisso 2008), who left war-torn Bosnia-Herzegovina for Germany with his mother in 1992, wanted to share stories of his home. And Lingyuan Luo (Support Prize 2007), who developed her German by reading books about her native China, began writing in German to rectify the misperceptions of China she had encountered in these books. Yüksel Pazarkaya (Chamisso 1989), who came to Germany at the age of 18 to study Chemistry in 1958, felt an intense desire to see Turkish literature in the German language. His translations are what ultimately helped him to develop his language skills in German, “Erst allmählich kam dann das Deutsche, getrieben auch von dem Wunsch, erst einmal große türkische Namen der Literatur auf Deutsch zu sehen” (Pazarkaya 18).31

Ilija Trojanow (Chamisso 2000) caused quite a stir with his comment that the German language was more foreigner-friendly than the Germans themselves. But his explanation provides insight on the abstracts that are so appealing to many writers of German: “Die Sprache fordert einen nicht auf, sich zu assimilieren, sondern lädt den Autor geradezu ein, sie zu gestalten und zu formen” (Trojanow). The German language, he maintains, does not demand assimilation from its speakers, rather it invites them to create in it, to form the language to their purpose. Returning to Chamisso’s contemporary, Friedrich Schleiermacher, and his thoughts on the German language, the title of his essay suggests that he was most likely thinking of, for him, contemporary translations of world literature, like Johann Heinrich Voß’ translations of Homer, or Ludwig Tieck’s Don Quixote translation, or the Schlegel-Tieck translations of Shakespeare, but his enthusiasm for “foreign” influence livening up the German language extends nicely to foreign language writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. Voß did not assimilate Homer to German culture, rather he enriched the German language by introducing the Greek dactylic verse to it. María Cecilia

31 “First, gradually, German came, also driven by the desire to see big Turkish literary names in German for the first time.”
Barbetta (Chamisso 2009) brings magical realism to the German language in a similar manner, as we will see in greater depth in the following chapters.

Assimilation into German culture, however, eliminates the distance many authors feel and value as a part of the attraction of foreign language writing. The distance helps provide an extrospective look, or a look outside of self at a greater, meta-structure. Léda Forgó and Yoko Tawada both discuss the distance they necessarily feel to the German language coming to it as outsiders. Being able to see language and culture from a distance interrupts assumptions, and allows authors to ask questions, to challenge preconceived language constructions, and to innovate. As Tawada writes, “Aber das Fremdsein braucht der Autor immer, auch im eigenen Land, dass man nicht ein blinder Teil von einem Ganzen ist, dass man Distanz hat, dass man nicht einverstanden sein kann oder selbstverständlich empfindet, dass man immer denken kann, es könnte anders sein, das ist fremd sein” (Tawada 2009).

Not only does the language provide extrospective distance, which is necessary for freedom of experimentation within the language, but it provides introspective distance as well. Léda Forgó is helpful here again for explaining what this introspective distance is and how it functions. She argues that writing in German as a second language allowed her to view herself from outside, and to find a tone of her own without having to search for it in her native language, “Dieses Laster ist jetzt mein Profit, es hilft mir pathosfrei zu bleiben, mich selbst durch die fremde Sprache von Außen zu betrachten und ohne großartige Suche einen eigenen Ton zu besitzen” (Forgó 2009). The use of foreign language allows her to introspect without the threat of over-emotionalism. Forgo’s experience with foreign language writing echoes that of Samuel Beckett, who wrote in both his

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32 “But the author always needs foreignness, in their own country as well, so that one is not a blind part of the whole, that one has distance, that one cannot be in agreement or find something self-explanatory, that one can always think it could be different, that is being foreign.”

33 “This burden now works to my profit, it helps me remain without pathos, to see myself through the foreign language from the outside without a grand search to maintain a tone of my own.”
native English as well as French, frequently translating between one language and the other to develop his own voice “sans style” (Beer 215). Abbas Khider (Chamisso 2010) describes an experience with German similar to Forgo’s, “Im Deutschen bin ich sehr viel systematischer und nicht so emotional wie in meiner Muttersprache” (Der Westdeutsche). The process of writing through the introspective distance provided by German as foreign language allowed him to write with less emotion.

While many authors write about the abstract concept of non-geographical distance provided by language, others write about the German language as a tool. As was briefly explained above, María Cecilia Barbetta describes the German language as a Tarnkappe (a cloak of invisibility) that allows her to revisit places in her memory she would not otherwise have dared:


Barbetta’s language in this quote suggests a conscious application of foreign language as tool, as she uses the verb ‘to employ or use’ her foreign language to the purpose of protecting herself from emotionally taxing, past memories. The reasoning for her choice of the word Tarnkappe, is, however, neither explained in her text nor further explained in the interview this quote surfaces in.

34 “In German, I am much more systematic, and not as emotional as I am in my mother tongue.”
35 “On the other hand, this feeling of security I am talking about, has first and foremost to do with the fact that I use the foreign language as a protective language. It is a type of (fantastic) camouflaged cloak, thanks to which I trust myself, through writing, to touch foot to areas that I would not otherwise. That goes primarily for Buenos Aires, the city I grew up in and spent twenty-four years of my life in.”
As was explained above, Barbetta also explained that she used the language (as well as the geographic location in which German is spoken, Berlin) as a tool for redefining herself. Marjana Gaponenko (Chamisso 2013) describes a similar experience with the German language. In an interview with the *Neue Westfälische Zeitung*, Gaponenko explained, “Wenn man eine fremde Sprache beherrscht, verändert man sein ganzes Wesen, wenn man diese Sprache spricht”.36 She based this conclusion on her ability to overcome her own stutter in spoken German, although she continues to stutter in her mother tongue: “Ich stottere in meiner Muttersprache. Das hört man auch im Deutschen noch ein bisschen, aber ich bin die Stotterei zu 99 Prozent losgeworden in der deutschen Sprache, weil ich sie mir erkämpft habe”.37 Ilma Rakusa’s (Chamisso 2003) poem, “Mit zwei Zungen” (with two tongues) provides yet another example of the relationship between language and identity. In this poem she talks of two tongues, two languages.

Mit zwei Zungen
Kinderzunge für Kosen
und Küche Kartoffel
für Kleckse Kekse
und Zimmerkatastrophen
die andere schreibt
um nicht zu schreien
die Zäune stehen dazwischen
die Meere und schweigen. (lyrik line)38

36 “When one masters a foreign language, they change their entire being, when they speak this language.”
37 “I stutter in my mother tongue. You can still hear it a bit in my German as well, but I am about ninety-nine percent free of the stutter in the German language, because of my hard work.”
38 “With two tongues/Kid’s tongues for cooing/and kitchen carrots/for clots cookies/and room catastrophes/the other writes/to keep from screaming/fences stand between them/the ocean and
The first is the language of everyday experiences of childhood: munchies, messy rooms, and moments of tenderness. The second is used to write to overcome the compulsion to scream. The distinctive identities relegated to either language are further marked by the cocophony of hard consonant sounds in the first half of the poem, contrasted with the sibilance of the second half of the poem, marked by silence.

This last point, that language can be used as a tool for revisiting traumas, and for working through them, either by overcoming stuttering or by releasing pent up anxiety through writing, moves us towards the content of this dissertation. The next chapters delve into the debut novels of María Cecilia Barbeta (Chamisso 2009) and Abbas Khider (Chamisso 2010) to understand how these authors have used the German language as a tool to revisit past traumas, to craft narratives to alleviate the symptoms of trauma, and to generate a sense of catharsis through the (re)establishment of identity and play. The paragraphs above have included a fairly balanced mixture of interview material from authors as well as literary text; the following chapters, however, will concentrate primarily on Khider’s first novel, *Der Falsche Inder*, and Barbeta’s first novel, *Änderungsschneiderei Los Milagros*, to explore the dynamics of trauma and literature and language through the structures of the texts themselves, their plots and their protagonists. Interpreting both Khider’s and Barbeta’s texts as the trauma narratives of their protagonists illuminates this multi-nodal interaction in a way that is not necessarily dependent on the autobiographical details of either author.

silence.” - In returning to this poem, I am drawn to the dividing line she places between what she describes as an ocean and the silence. This tension plays a role in catalyzing the writing process after trauma, but it also serves as the point of origin for identity development, as I explore later in Chapter 4.
1.b. Background

1.b.i. The Historical Background Enabling this Writing

In 1955, West Germany passed legislation inviting the first *Gastarbeiter*, or guest workers, to the country to help fulfill the workforce demands of the rapidly growing German economy. From 1955 to 1973, the German government issued appeals to Italy, Greece and Spain, Turkey, Morocco, Portugal, Tunisia and Yugoslavia for temporary workers. While the agreements made with each of the countries varied, the legislators intended that workers would rotate through and return to their homes after a certain period of time. This idea was in conflict, however, with standard business practices, which preferred a more consistent workforce that did not need to be retrained every few years. While there was increased pressure for the guest workers to return to their homes throughout, legislation in 1971 was modified to allow workers living in Germany for 5 years or more to apply for work permits that were not dependent upon the state of the economy. A recession in Germany from 1966 to 1967 saw a reduction in the number of guest workers called to Germany and, by 1973, the *Bundesregierung* (the West German government) began taking measures to reduce the number of guest workers in Germany and officially retracted the appeal for foreign workers in November, in a motion called the *Anwerbestopp*, or a stop to the recruiting of foreign workers. The oil crises and a spike in oil prices in the 1970s was also accompanied by a negative shift in public opinion towards immigrants and foreigners. And while the Kühn Memorandum was passed in 1979, as a proposition to facilitate the integration of the guest workers who had remained in Germany, this legislation was made ineffective by opposition within the government. Meanwhile, the question of the Turkish
problem began to dominate public discussion, and by 1993, Überfremdung (over-foreignization) had become the Unwort des Jahres (the un-word of the year).\textsuperscript{39}

The question of voting rights and taxation without representation of a significant part of the population colored legislation from the 70s onwards. Only Hamburg was able to put legislation into effect that granted immigrants the right to vote on certain issues. The legislation motioned by Schleswig-Holstein was countered before it could be enacted in 1989. This in turn lead to modifications in the Ausländergesetz (immigration laws) in Germany, which stipulated at which point one could become a German citizen. The changes in 1990 granted immigrants the freedoms of speech and assembly, and the right to join a union and political parties. Unfortunately, opponents to this legislation, who found it did little to encourage immigrants to leave the country, hindered the development of this legislation, hindering the legislation from making any real strides towards addressing the immigration problem domestically. The following year, 1991, Bundeskanzler Helmut Kohl reported that Germany was no land of immigration (Kohl), a statement that seemed directly counter-factual to the reality facing Germany, with some 5.2 Million immigrants living within the country immediately before the reunification in 1990.\textsuperscript{40}

At around the same time Germany started closing its doors to migrant workers, other doors began to open to asylum seekers. From 1972 to 1993, Germany saw a dramatic increase in appeals for Asylum. The numbers rose to hundreds of thousands per year until an asylum compromise was made in 1993, which drastically reduced the opportunities to apply for asylum. These numbers began to rise again from 2013, until over 1 million asylum seekers arrived in Germany in 2015 alone.

\textsuperscript{39} Dr. Horst Dieter Schlosser initiated this distinction in 1991 as a means of exercising critique of the language. Since 1991, the Gesellschaft für deutsche Sprache has continued to identify words that have most affected the language awareness and sensibility of the public. Becoming the Unwort of the year is a rather dubious honor.

\textsuperscript{40} For a more detailed description of immigration to Germany in the twentieth century and the legislation most closely aligned with it, see Yano, Hisashi. „1. Migrationsgeschichte.“ Chiellino 1-17.
German citizenship is not recognized by right of the soil, *jus soli*, but rather by blood right, *jus sanguinis*. This changed, however, in 2000, when the *Staatsangehörigkeitsgesetz* (law of citizenship) was modified to extend citizenship to those children born to immigrants who had spent at least 8 years legally in Germany, and who had an unrestricted residence permit. This made quite a difference for many families, whose second and third generations had been born in Germany, and were still unable to obtain German citizenship (Bundesamt).

The asylum and immigration legislation was directed at impeding the influx of immigrants to Germany and certainly had an obvious effect in dramatically reducing the numbers, but it also had a stabilizing effect on the populations already residing in Germany. Of the 14 million guest workers who came to Germany during the *Anwerbeprozess*, or recruitment process, about three million made the decision to remain in Germany when the process was halted in 1973. This number grew to around 4.8 million by 1978, as workers who stayed appealed for their families to join them. Migration researcher Klaus J. Bade explains that many stayed because the quality of life was decidedly higher in Germany than in the country of origin for many of the workers. Further, the legislation itself essentially forced the hand of many guest workers to make a definite decision to stay. They would no longer be able to apply for a work permit to stay in Germany if they interrupted that permit for a brief residence in their home countries.

Bade recognizes the *Anwerbestopp* legislation as the point at which Germany’s *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers) became *Einwanderer* (immigrants). Maria Nasarre Lorenzo’s article makes the connection between sociology and the research of literature by referencing sociologist Ulrich Herbert. It was not only a matter of legislation, but the resulting social stabilization that followed that made it possible for former *Gastarbeiter* to reside within Germany. Herbert explains that a migrant worker in Germany would first be objectively recognized as an immigrant after ten years had passed: “Die Länge des Arbeitsaufenthalts ab 10 Jahre, durch die sich ein objektiver
Einwanderungsprozess der Arbeitsmigranten in Deutschland entwickelten der erst mit der Zeit auch subjektiv von den Personen als solche wahrgenommen wurde.” (Herbert 220). By 1980, 38% of the immigrant population in Germany had resided there for over 10 years (Yano).

1.b.ii. Background: Literary Developments

The increasing number of immigrants in Germany through work opportunity and through asylum, coupled with the economic slump of the mid 60s and the oil crises of the 70s, was accompanied by increased Ausländerfeindlichkeit, or xenophobia, as Hishashi Yano remarks, “Die Zahl der fremdenfeindlichen Straftaten stieg vom Ende der 80er Jahre bis 1991 von rund 250 auf mehr als 2.400” (14). The literary tradition of German writers from culturally diverse backgrounds, many of whom were non-native speakers of German, appears to have grown out of this climate of conflict between the dominant culture and its growing, self-establishing minority populations. Horst Hamm identifies the growing xenophobia of the 70s as one of the main reasons why a few of the first generation immigrants to Germany decided to write. “Die zunehmende Ausländerfeindlichkeit in den siebziger Jahren war für einige der ersten Generation dann auch Anlass, doch zu Feder und Papier zu greifen” (Hamm 89).

Seemingly parallel to the discussion about gaining a political voice during the 70s was the desire to find a social voice, through writing. Recalling Chamisso Prize winning author Forgó from the discussion above, she explains her motivation to write being born

41 “The number of xenophobic criminal offences rose from the end of the 80s until 1990 from around 250 to more than 2,400.”

42 “The increasing xenophobia in the 70s was, for some of the first generation, also a reason to reach for pen and paper.” - His turn of phrase, to reach for the feather, is reminiscent of social propaganda in the GDR, which encouraged the working class to write stories of social realism. Hamm neglects to explain this association between the burgeoning Gastarbeiterliteratur and the writers’ movement of the GDR, however, but the association might have been a subconscious recognition of the political motivation of both movements to get workers to speak out.
out of the moment of having much to say, and not having the means to do so. Writing is one thing, however, publishing is quite another.

Certainly there were journals and newspapers published for individual minority groups prior to 1980. Already in 1949, the journal *Volk auf dem Weg*, or *A People on the Road*, published articles and fiction for heritage Germans from Russia living in Germany, known as *Russlanddeutsche*. By 1960, the anthology *Hand in Hand. Gedichte und Erzählungen* was publishing the first writing from this demographic. The Italian immigrant population enjoyed weekly Italian-language publications as early as 1956, but the first bilingual publication, *Incontri*, appeared in 1973. The publishing company Ararat began publishing Turkish language authors in 1975. An anthology showcasing Romanian authors, *Wortmeldungen*, or *Written Reports*, appeared in 1972; another Anthology for Czech literature written between 1968 and 1978 was published in 1978; and a number of anthologies for literature written by Spanish language immigrants from Latin America, such as *Erkundungen*, which focused on the writings of Chilean authors, were published during this time as well.\(^{43}\)

A look at this history of publications reveals that attempts at writing began almost as soon as the migrant populations began arriving: the first weekly publication for the Italian migrant population in Germany appeared the year after workers were solicited. But these initial publications were in the language of the immigrant populations. The anthologies of the 70s were largely publications of translations into German, when the texts were not already composed in German. The year of the *Anwerbestopp*, 1973, was the same year the first bilingual (German – Italian) publication appeared. As explained above, Bade identifies this *Anwerbestopp* as the turning point, when *Gastarbeiter* became *Einwanderer*. Could this be the moment when authors began writing in German? When they began identifying with their land of permanent residence?

\(^{43}\) This information was compiled from the extensive bibliographies of “migrant” literature published in Germany since WWII according to cultural minority in Carmine Chiellino’s *Interkulturelle Literatur in Deutschland* and supplemented with library catalogues.
In 1980, Gino Chiellino, Franco Biondi, and Rafik Schami established the literary organization Polynationalen Literatur- und Kunstverein (PoLiKunst – the polynational organization for literature and art). Until it was formally disbanded in 1987, it promoted and unified multinational authors through PR events and literature weeks in a number of cities. They also released three yearbooks dedicated to the literature of debuting authors: Ein Gastarbeiter ist ein Türke (1983), Der Tanz der Fremden (1984), Lachen aus dem Ghetto (1985). This is a unique turn, as prior to this point, the anthologies, publications and publishing houses had focused on the literatures of exclusive minority groups, rather than the groups as a collective voice. As imagined by PoLiKunst, these voices would represent the polynational culture that had started to take root and develop in Germany. By speaking out, they promote tolerance and understanding and the development of a greater sense of community:

»PoLiKunst findet eine Notwendigkeit in den 4,5 Millionen Ausländern, die in der BRD arbeiten und leben. Sie sind Träger einer polynationalen Kultur, die sich Tag für Tag immer mehr ausweitet. PoLiKunst will dieser Kultur zu ihrer Befreiung verhelfen und damit Toleranz und Völkerverständigung auf allen Gebieten des Zusammenlebens schaffen. Mitglied von PoLiKunst kann jeder Kulturschaffende Ausländer werden, der in der BRD tätig ist.« (Chiellino 442)  

The organizers behind PoLiKunst were also instrumental in the creation of the organization, Südwind Gastarbeiterdeutsch (Southwind Guest-worker-German, later Südwind Literatur). Franco

44 “PoLiKunst finds its imperative in the 4.5 million foreigners living and working in the FRG (West Germany). They are the transmitters of a polynational culture that is constantly expanding, day-by-day. PoLiKunst wants to help this culture to liberation, so that tolerance and international understanding are created in all areas of cohabitation. Any foreigner creating art in the FRG can become a member of PoLiKunst.”
Biondi, Yusuf Naoum, Rafik Schami, Suleman Taufiq, issued four anthologies, with the hopes of promoting those voices neglected by publishers until that point:

In der Reihe ‘Südwind Gastarbeiterdeutsch’ wird kontinuierlich die Literatur der Gastarbeiter herausgegeben, was die großen Verlage bisher vernachlässigt haben. Sie ist Ausdruck ihrer Erlebnisse und Erfahrungen, aber auch ihrer Wünsche, ihrer Verzweiflung, ihrer Hoffnung. (Biondi 1980)

Each anthology focused on different perspectives from this conglomerate group of writers. The first two, *Im neuen Land* (1980) and *Zwischen Fabrik und Bahnhof* (1981) highlighted the experiences of guest workers. The third and fourth anthologies, *Annäherungen* (1982) and *Zwischen zwei Giganten* (1983), focused particularly on the growing pains of integrating into a society without losing one’s identity. The final volume, in particular, was dedicated to the voices of second generation guest workers who found themselves between the overwhelming influence of the dominant culture and the expectations of their parents and their parents’ cultures. The first generation of immigrants is challenged by the inability to speak the language to communicate, and they often turned to writing as an outlet for finding that voice. The second generation was not only concerned with finding a voice, but finding identity (Hamm 88).

What began as an initiative to promote the voices of *Gastarbeiter* in Germany helped pave the way for the literature that would follow, namely literature from the second and third generations, and from the waves of asylum seekers and other immigrants. By the end of the 80s, however, both PoLiKunst and Südwind had formally disbanded, Südwind, after changing its name from Südwind Gastarbeiterdeutsch to Südwind Literatur in 1983. The organization eventually disbanded when the

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45 This number is somewhat in dispute. Gino Chiellino cites four anthologies in his *Interkulturell*, but the anthologies themselves mention the production of a fifth.

46 “In the series ‘Südwind Gastarbeiterdeutsch’, the literature of guest workers is published steadily, something the big publishing houses have neglected to this point. This series is the expression of their experiences and impressions, but also of their desires, their discouragement, their hope.”
organizers realized that the prescribed political motivation of the organization was stifling the creative process and impeding the writing more than it supported it. But the legacy of social critique continued, as with the second generation artists of the hiphop group Advanced Chemistry, whose song “Fremd im eigenen Land” was motivated by the increasing hostility towards foreigners in 1992, particularly in Rostock. Their music video begins with a short news clip of a burning residence and angry mobs. The critical eye of this literature extends through to 2016 as well, with Abbas Khider’s Ohrfeige and Saša Stanišić’s Fallensteller. Khider provides an overtly critical glimpse into the life of an asylum seeker in Germany, while Stanišić provides a subtler critique of the life of an immigrant in Germany.

PoLiKunst and Südwind certainly played a role in calling attention to the literature of non-native speakers as a collective voice, but Carmine Chiellino, who was instrumental in the founding of both these groups, calls special attention to the part DaF (German as a foreign language) instructors played in initially recognizing this literature (387). In fact, the Institute for DaF at the Ludwig-Maximilians-University in Munich under the leadership of Harald Weinrich was incredibly instrumental in calling attention to this literature. Weinrich created the institute during the Wintersemester 1978/79. He had spoken and published on the topic “Um eine deutsche Literatur von außen bittend” (In request of a German Literature from Outside) in the early 80s, speaking to the quality of literature written by non-native German speakers as well as to the unfortunate lack of recognition from media and publishers. Another member at the institute, Irmgard Ackermann, edited three anthologies dedicated to the reports, narratives and poetry of Fremder in Deutschland (foreigners in Germany), and authors who In zwei Sprachen leben (live in two languages). Her third anthology, perhaps to address the increased presence of the then salient “Turkish Problem” in the media, was titled Türken deutscher Sprache (German Language Turks).
It was also largely due to the initiative of Harald Weinrich that the Robert-Bosch-Foundation created the Chamisso Literature Prize. As was explained above, this prize initially recognized the literary accomplishments of non-native German speakers writing in German. Since 2012, however, the prize parameters have expanded to integrate all authors whose work is influenced by a change in culture, even those born into the German language. The first prize was awarded in 1985 to Aras Ören, an author whose works were written in Turkish for German translation. It is difficult to evaluate just to what extent the creation of this literary prize has contributed to the overall acceptance and valuation of this literature, but, with over 75 awarded authors, many of whom give readings and writing workshops year round, it is impossible to argue the opposite, that the prize has had little effect. In fact, the prize itself has provided a lens for assessing literature: any literature impressed by a change in culture would fit under the heading “Chamisso Literature”. However, now that the Robert Bosch Foundation has made the decision to discontinue the literary prize, the future of “Chamisso Literature”, or literature written from within the context of migration will prove decidedly more difficult to track, that is, unless the dissolution of the prize proves to be a productive relapse that makes way for an initiative designed to better serve the interests and literature of under-represented authors of German within Germany. After all, the DaF Institute at the University of Munich has once again returned to its role of promoting what it considers “Chamisso Literature” after having redirected its focus under the leadership of a new director in the early 2000s. In 2012, the Robert Bosch Foundation helped create the International Research Center for Chamisso Literature at the University. The research center hosts a poet each year, conducts research, particularly regarding the pedagogic value of this literature in the DaF classroom, and hosts events to increase awareness of the authors, including readings.

In 2016, it was not uncommon to see Chamisso authors’ works among the newest releases in the major German book chain, Hugendubel. In May 2016, Chamisso Prize authors: Rafik Schami’s
Sophia, Abbas Khider’s Ohrfeige, and Saša Stanišić’s Fallensteller all held places on the new release display. Despite Helmut Kohl’s protestations in the 90s, Germany has become a land of immigration. The presence of literature written by three of Germany’s immigrants, all of whom learned German after reaching their teenage years, alongside heritage German authors like Jenny Erpenbeck confirms this. Its very existence and persistence challenges a homogeneous definition of a national literature. Immacolata Amodeo, in describing the recent developments in Italian literature, wrote “Italian literature not only does not exist without its others, it is actually constituted by others” (Amodeo 144). Her words refer not just to the Italian literature written by Italian ex-patriots, but also to the literature written by Italy’s newest immigrants. Also a scholar of German literature, Amodeo references the more established tradition of literature written by non-traditional authors in Germany to justify her prognosis of Italian literature today. Amodeo stressed, in this context, the importance of appreciating the complexity of defining a national literature, in light of mass-migrations and population shifts, particularly the multiplicity of influences written in the national language, but comprising deviations from the norm.

1.c. Research

1.c.i. Scholarly Research on the Literature of (Im)migrant Writers of German

The Chamisso authors, as the name suggests, are not the first authors with multicultural backgrounds to write in German, but their increased prevalence in the last 30 years of German literary history has sparked considerable debate with regards to naming and evaluating this literature. Fueled by authors, scholars, critics, the press, and the public, the debate reveals two things. First, it reveals the complexity of defining a “national” literature, particularly for languages that are not restricted by geographical boundary, and which have become destinations of mass-migrations and
population shifts. Second, it reveals the highly transitory state of literature. The literature written by non-native German speakers or German speakers with multicultural backgrounds is developing so rapidly, it outgrows the definitions created for it almost soon as they are made.

Scholar and Chamisso prize winning author Carmine Chiellino sheds some light on the naming debate that began in earnest in the 1980s (Interkulturalität). Maria Nasarre Lorenzo also provides a critical survey of terms in her article in Theorie und Praxis. One of the first terms used to describe this literary phenomenon of non-native German speakers writing in German was Gastarbeiterliteratur. Already in 1984, when the Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik released a special issue dedicated exclusively to the topic Gastarbeiter Literatur (Guest worker Literature), this term was at the center of debate. In the year prior, the literary organization tasked with promoting literature written by foreigners in Germany, “Südwind Gastarbeiterdeutsch”, changed its name to “Südwind Literatur”. In the introduction to the special edition of LiLi, Helmut Kreuzer explained the challenges presented by the term Gastarbeiter as three: first, the idea of a guest being a worker in the economy was itself a paradox. Further, after the Anwerbestopp, the guest workers were no longer guests, but members of the economy. Finally, particularly since 1972, a sizeable group of asylum seekers and exiles were joining the immigrants who had come to Germany for work. The term Gastarbeiter did not apply to this demographic. However, the beauty of the term lay in its precision: the Gastarbeiter phenomenon was exclusive to Germany and to a certain period of time (Kreuzer 8). Labeling a literature as Gastarbeiterliteratur immediately oriented it geographically and temporally in ways that Ausländer- and Migranten-literatur could not.

Since then, the focus has vacillated between the autobiographical details of the author (Ausländer, (E)Migranten(Innen), Minderheiten, ausländische Autoren, Autoren nicht deutscher Herkunft,
Menschen mit Migrationshintergrund, etc.,\textsuperscript{47} the circumstances that brought about this literature (Migration, Internationalität, Kulturelle Vielfalt),\textsuperscript{48} and the perspective brought by the literature (von außen/innen, Brückenliteratur, nicht nur deutsche Literatur, ausländische Beiträge, Grenzüberschreitende Literatur, Rand-Literatur, Schreiben am Ufer der Fremde, zwischen den Kulturen, Hybridität, cultural alterity, an der Schwelle, margin, writing outside the nation, interkulturell).\textsuperscript{49} While Germanist Elke Sturm-Trigonakis argues for the development of a comprehensive term that takes into account the transareal, translingual and transtemporal nature of the literature, with New World Literature, the term Chamisso Literature brings the perspective back to the German language. As a term, it steps outside these frameworks somewhat by connecting author biography with temporal immediacy of the prize and the perspective that it evaluates. Adelbert von Chamisso was an immigrant to Germany who chose the German culture, as have many authors since, including a number of Chamisso Prize winners. The Chamisso prize parameters at the time of the prize’s dissolution, however, appreciate not the language change, but the perspective brought by authors who have been influenced by multiple cultures. As Kreuzer advocated for the term Gastarbeiter, the term Chamisso Literature would also orient the literature temporally and spatially, and as definitively due to the prize’s dissolution. The term Chamisso Literature would not orient the literature exclusively to Germany, but rather to the German language. Carmine Chiellino argued that the “Ort der Literatur ist die Sprache, in der das Werk entsteht, und nicht die kulturelle Andersartigkeit der Standorte, der Figuren oder der Verfasser/innen” (391), or it is not the geographical location in which a work has been written that orients it spatially, but rather the language.

\textsuperscript{47} Foreigners, emigrants/imigrants (male/female), minorities, foreign authors, authors not of German heritage, people with a background of migration, etc.

\textsuperscript{48} Migration, internationality, cultural diversity.

\textsuperscript{49} From outside/inside, bridge-literature, not just German literature, foreign contributions, literature that crosses borders, literature from the margins, writing on the banks of the foreign, between cultures, hybridity, cultural alterity, on the threshold, margin, writing outside the nation, intercultural.
Chamisso Literature as a term certainly does not serve as an end to the naming debate, but it presents a remarkable deviation from the trend towards hyper-precise descriptions of the literature. Further, the naming debate and, in extension, the developments in the prize's parameters, have revealed a trend towards moving away from the uniqueness of writing in a foreign language to the experience the author brings to that language, to the multicultural perspective. But, just as I have argued above, that the rapid and diverse developments of the literature have presented the challenges in naming the literature, reducing the focus of research to merely the multicultural perspective provided by both literature and author neglects the unique phenomenon that is foreign language writing. There have been some forays into this field of research, as I will detail below, and this dissertation is intended to further address this gap in the research of literature written creatively in a foreign language.

1.c.ii. Research: Foreign Language Writing

Already in 1970, Gilles Deleuze argued the case that an author can achieve a degree of cathartic healing through foreign language. Deleuze’s case focused specifically on the act of translation and what was lost through that translation. In his preface to Louis Wolfson’s *Le Schizo et les langues*, Deleuze explains that Wolfson’s use of translation detoxifies painful utterances from Wolfson’s mother. In the act of translation, Wolfson reduced each word to its consonants and base meaning, which subsequently stripped the word of its connotation, posing no further threat to Wolfson. While there is some danger in drawing comparisons between Wolfson and other second/foreign-language authors of reducing the importance of this technique of transformation to neuroses, nonetheless, Deleuze’s interpretation of the process deserves consideration.

Scholar Yasemin Yildiz also forays into the utility of multilingual writing as Deleuze did before her, this time looking at the German author Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s use of translation. In the
trilogy, *Die Brücke vom goldenen Horn*, in particular, Yildiz argues that Özdamar’s translation of idiom from Turkish to German frees the utterance from the traumatic memory associated with it in the first language. Yildiz explains this as a dislodging of signifying networks, a process that allows the authors to gain some distance to the trauma (164). In an idea-rich chapter, in an already idea-rich book, Yildiz references the importance of establishing distance to trauma and the utility of translation towards detoxifying an utterance, but this process begs further treatment and expansion. Further, Yildiz pinpoints the analysis as revolving around those moments of literal translation of idiomatic phrases. The danger in identifying the initial moment of traumatic processing here, however, is that these phrases are calcified in one’s native tongue and are exactly those phrases which serve to mark their speaker’s (here, writer’s) foreignness in their non-native tongue.

Following Yildiz’s example, Ela Gezen interprets Özdamar’s use of theater as a medium for processing traumatic memory from one context to another. The innovation in this technique is the turn towards the importance of not just words, but the narrative. In her article, “Staging Berlin: Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s *Seltsame Sterne starren zur Erde*”, Gezen extends Yildiz’s conclusions about the role of language in processing trauma to Özdamar’s use of theater and staging techniques within her narrative. It is by staging her memories of trauma, which I interpret as her narrative of her past, on the backdrop of her new home, Berlin, that Özdamar can process the experience. Trauma scholar Cathy Caruth, drawing heavily on Freud’s work, further argues the association between narrative and trauma. In her book, *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*, Caruth talks about the often delayed comprehension of traumatic event as well as the paradoxical need to both escape from and return to the event. Narrative allows an author to return to a traumatic event, fulfilling this escape-return compulsion. Further, Caruth argues that trauma exists in the balance between knowing and not knowing, or the delay between a traumatic event and its comprehension. Because of the incomprehensibility of the event, it must be processed indirectly, in a literary manner,
hence the importance of narrative.

1.c.iii. Addressing a Gap in the Research

There is a definite need to take this research one step further, moving from a focus on the act of translation to the act of creation within a foreign language, from the perspective of inbetween to the location of arrival: the language. This change in perspective allows us to look at authors, not as reagents of encounters with foreign cultures, but as agents of their own writing processes and personal development from within that culture. The important distinction here is that focusing on the language of the arrival allows us to look at authors as self-determining actors, rather than as reactors to a situation. I purposefully wrote foreign language and not German here, because there is a need for this research in all languages experiencing a large-scale influx of non-native speakers writing in the language, outside of the focus of the language-learning classroom. There is ample research dedicated to teaching foreign language writing, as well as research examining academic foreign language writing (Silva). The Journal of Second Language Writing, published by Elsevier, for example, is a quarterly, peer-reviewed academic journal dedicated entirely to the issues central to second and foreign language writing and writing instruction. The research lack I call attention to, however, is difficult to quantify, being necessarily qualitative, examining the relationship between published, creative foreign language writers, the language, and their readership. This dissertation thus conducts a qualitative analysis of two published authors writing in their foreign language, in order to understand the role language plays in the cathartic process of narrative writing after a traumatic encounter. Although I reference authors writing in other foreign languages as well, I have chosen to focus exclusively on two authors within the German language, however. Focusing on the role of German in this process will help build the basis for planned future research comparing foreign language writing in German with other languages, in order to better understand what specifically the
German language offers its authors, and particularly authors writing in their foreign languages as a means for processing trauma. Further, by focusing on the cathartic quality of foreign language writing for non-native authors, I begin to question the reverse action this process has on the language of the writing, that is, the cultural impact of foreign language writing for native speakers. It begs the question what this influx of voices and narratives has and will continue to contribute to the language.

While Yildiz identifies many of the same elements at play that have appealed to me in my preliminary research, I would like to bring these elements together into a narrative of their own. The narrative will begin in Chapter 2 with a discussion literary and psychological research on trauma for a greater understanding of the relationship between trauma, memory and literature. This chapter serves the dual purpose of identifying trauma as both a research method useful for analyzing literature, as well as understanding its effects on memory and perception of both the traumatized as well as the literature they create. Chapter 3 examines the utility of narrative and narration in the recovery process, whether mediated through a therapist or on one’s own initiative. An important part of this discussion includes the power dynamic between trauma and the traumatized that becomes upset during the writing process. In this manner, narration becomes a source of empowerment, and the narrative devices acquired through traumatic experience become tools for narrative creation. After identifying narrative itself as a viable means for addressing trauma and relieving its symptoms, Chapter 4 looks one step further at the role language, and specifically foreign language plays in this process. After examining both texts for evidence of the multilingualism of the protagonists, the discussion moves towards the role of language in establishing perspective distance, in creating identity, and in providing a venue for healing play. The final chapter will serve as a conclusion to the discussions made in this and the following chapters, and pose questions for future research.
These three chapters, moving from the past to the future, take as their context both autobiographical detail as well as the narrative texts of two Chamisso Prize winning authors. María Cecilia Barbetta and Abbas Khider published their debut novels and won the prize in close succession of each other, but they come from very different backgrounds, as will be explained below. The autobiographical detail, as well as explanations regarding their writing processes, were gleaned from author interviews. This information will serve to provide a framework for understanding the processes discussed in each chapter, but the real work will be done with Barbetta’s and Khider’s novels, *Änderrungs Schneider* *Los Milagros*\(^{50}\) and *Der Falsche Inder*\(^{51}\) respectively. Rather than risk reading autobiographical detail into these texts erroneously, each chapter will work with the protagonists of each text and their narratives within the novels, in order to illustrate the presence of trauma, the empowerment provided by writing, and finally the role of language in creating distance, establishing identity and inspiring cathartic play. The important innovation this dissertation brings to the rather limited field of research engaging with foreign language writing is the importance of author agency, something that is facilitated by creation of identity within the adopted language, or the creation of home within the adopted language.

1.d. Introducing the Authors Examined by this Dissertation

There are a number of stories that can be told about the Chamisso Prize winning authors. Quite a few come together in their similarities, Yoko Tawada, Uljana Wolf and Anila Wilms, for example, allow their languages to play side by side across their written pages. Some, like Rafik Schami, Ota Filip and Saša Stanišević opine the loss of their own mother tongues, particularly when too much time is spent in their adopted ones. The story I have chosen for this dissertation, however, is that of

\(^{50}\) This work is not yet translated into English, but the title reads: *Alterations Shop Los Milagros.*

\(^{51}\) *The Village Indian.*
finding freedom in an adopted language to talk about the past. For some, the language of the past is too much associated with traumas experienced in that language. The adopted language, on the other hand, allows some authors the freedom to create, to write, to imagine, but more than this, to redefine identity, to gain distance and perspective, and finally, to ease a return to the traumatic event with the language working as a safety buffer. Of the 77 Chamisso authors, Hussain Al-Mozany, María Cecilia Barbetta, Abbas Khider, Que Du Luu, Libuše Moníková, and Emine Sevgi Özdamar share similar perspectives on language, particularly the freedom found in the language of their arrival. They also share a flight either from their country or language of origin to the German language. Of these six, Barbetta and Khider share the most similarity in their motivations for writing in German. As was mentioned in the introduction, Khider explained that he could not have written his first two books in Arabic, and Barbetta has said the same about her book and the Spanish language. After exploring their texts further, there were even more comparative elements that jumped to the surface, elements this dissertation will explore more in depth in the chapters that follow. It was their similarities that appealed most, but it is their differences that will help to provide better perspective on this topic.

Khider was born 1973 in Iraq and came to live in Germany by chance. He fled Iraq in 1996 after a two-year imprisonment as a political prisoner. Khider’s three-year odyssey towards Sweden was brought to a halt just shy of his goal in Germany, where he was then obligated to apply for asylum as per the Dublin Law established in 1990. He has lived in Germany since 2000 and was granted German citizenship in 2007. In an interview with Der Westdeutsche Allgemeine Zeitung, lead by Michael Kohlstadt, in the wake of Khider’s winning the Nely-Sachs prize for literature in 2013, Khider talks about his motivation for writing in German. Not only did it offer him a more

52 I use the term “language of arrival” here to emphasize the fact that these authors are writing from within the German language and culture, not merely translating from their native languages. Within the term itself is the idea of a completed journey: not arriving, but having arrived.

Barbetta was born 1972 in Buenos Aires. Her childhood was greatly over-shadowed by the political and social unrest of the 1970s and 80s, most profoundly by the Dirty War carried out by General Jorge Rafael Videla. Barbetta’s parents sent her to the German school of Buenos Aires, because they thought she would receive a superior education there, and thus began Barbetta’s love for the German language. In 1996, a scholarship from the DAAD, the German Academic Exchange Service, brought Barbetta to Berlin, where she later began her doctoral studies. Since 2007, she holds both German and Argentine passports. In an interview posted to the DAAD website, Barbetta admits to feeling free in Germany, free to redefine herself: “In Deutschland fühlte ich mich frei. Die neue Stadt und die neue Sprache gaben mir die Möglichkeit, mich völlig neu zu definieren.”

53 “The German language has many beautiful sides. I can say a lot in a few words. In German, I am much more systematic, and not as emotional as in my mother tongue. And I could not have written either of my first novels, in particular, in Arabic. There was so much sadness in the stories, so much Betroffenheit (shock). I don’t like Betroffenheit-literature. In German, I could distance myself to the events.”

54 “I felt free in Germany. The new city, the new language gave me the opportunity to redefine myself completely.”
Khider’s first novel, *Der falsche Inder*, titled *The Village Indian* in its English translation, a heavily auto-biographical work, appeared in 2008. The novel, divided into eight chapters sandwiched between a two-part frame, tells the story of an Iraqi refugee’s journey to Germany. The eight embedded chapters are presented as the memories of Rasul Hamid, written in an Arabic hand and found by the narrator of the frame story. Each of the eight chapters begins in Bagdad and ends with the narrator’s arrival in Germany; the journey is the same in each chapter, but the thematic is different and the content becomes increasingly bleak as each chapter begins again. Hamid’s memories fall, both literally and metaphorically, into the lap of an unnamed frame narrator in the form of a manuscript enclosed in an envelope and titled in Arabic. The frame-narrator exclaims that this Hamid, the narrator of the embedded narrative, has stolen his own narrative… and worse! He’s managed to write it in a format that has eluded him these last five years. The first half of the frame story concludes when the frame-narrator opens the envelope that contains Rasul Hamid’s manuscript; the second half ends when this same narrator closes the envelope on his own reclaimed and newly written manuscript.

Barbetta’s novel, *Änderungsschneiderei Los Milagros* (Alteration Shop Los Milagros), came into print the same year as Khider’s first novel, 2008. Just to what extent its content can be considered autobiographical is more difficult to discern. It follows the story of Mariana Nalo in Buenos Aires in the 80s and early 90s. Mariana is a seamstress; one day, Analía Moran appears in the alteration shop run by Mariana’s Aunt Milagros to have her wedding dress altered. Analía Moran is an anagram of Mariana Nalo, a fact that Mariana reveals in Chapter 31. What unfolds after their initial meeting is a puzzling journey down the rabbit hole of Mariana’s subconscious, as Analía’s life is revealed more and more to be an alternate reality to Mariana’s own.

55 His latest work, *Ohrfeige*, was released February 2016, for which he was awarded the 2017 Chamisso Prize.
As the debate regarding what this literature is and what it represents wends towards resolution, the question why non-native authors of German are gravitating towards the language begs closer attention. German has a history, having been subjected to the rhetorical manipulation of the Third Reich, as well as carrying the weight of responsibility for the Holocaust. Zafer Senocak discusses the residual traumas, which he calls wounds, and feelings of guilt in his book, *Deutschsein*. Why then do authors like Khider and Barbetta, who fled oppression and violence in their own countries, choose to stay in Germany and to write in the German language and to what purpose? These are the questions this dissertation proposes to answer, while simultaneously demonstrating how foreign language writing can serve as a means for working through trauma.
Chapter 2: The Productive Relationship between Trauma, the Author, and the Text

Ruth Klüger, professor of literature, author and Shoah-survivor praised Germany on the seventy-first anniversary of the liberation of Concentration Camp Auschwitz. Once considered the perpetrator of one of the greatest sins of the twentieth century, Germany was now deserving of the world’s acclamation due to its open borders and its welcome politics towards refugees, that is, at least at the moment of Klüger’s address in 2016. She describes herself as one of the many outsiders whose Verwunderung, or confusion, changed to Bewunderung or amazement (“Heute hat Deutschland”).

The very fact that Germany could exonerate its reputation through foreigner-friendly politics invites a second look into Germany’s newest literature. Why is it important to take a look at the trauma narratives written in German by two non-native speakers? English would have expanded their reach to a larger audience. English is also arguably easier to learn than German. This notwithstanding, German politics, again, and the numerous funding institutions made it possible for foreign-born authors to study in Germany, to master the language, and finally, to live from the pen in Germany. Even if economics has played a large role in the authorial coming to fruition of both Khider and Barbetta, as well as many other authors, the writing that has developed out of these favorable conditions deserves closer examination. Both Khider and Barbetta are now proud German citizens; so what does it mean to number among the latest Germans? Further, what is it exactly that the German language has to offer non-native writers of the language?

The goal of this work is to provide some insight into the mechanics of how a foreign language, and specifically the German language as foreign language, can be used by some authors to call up uncomfortable memories of past experiences, to lend them narrative form, and, through this
process, gain greater understanding of the experience and of the self. In interviews with Barbetta and Khider, as well as in the texts they have written in the German language, impressions, experiences, and structures have surfaced that imply a traumatic past for both authors. The following chapters will examine these experiences more closely, but before turning to this, it is important to secure a definition of trauma, to learn something of the history of trauma as both physiological and psychological suffering, and finally, to gain an understanding of trauma as a research paradigm suitable throughout the humanities. After working through these topics, this chapter will turn to Khider’s and to Barbetta’s first works in order to identify the traces of trauma that appear within the structure of the narrative, the plot (or story told by the narrative) and even the language of the texts. This examination reveals trauma as both a motivational element for the writing, as well as a creative force on the formulation of the work.

2.a.i. Theory: Definitions and History from both Psychological and Physiological Perspectives

The term trauma comes from the Greek word for wound. Since the seventeenth century, trauma has described a physical or physiological injury. Historian Ruth Leys, whose research focuses on the history of psychoanalysis, psychiatry and psychology, explains how the understanding of trauma shifted from a predominantly physiological ailment to a psychological one in the nineteenth century. Trauma research originated with John Erichsen in the 1860s and his reports of the lasting physical symptoms of survivors of a train crash (3). The symptoms belied a “wound upon the mind” (Caruth 3). Since the end of the nineteenth century, when Jean-Martin Charcot identified psychological trauma as a cause of hysteria in men, the term has broadly come to describe a cerebral or psychological injury, the traces of which are no longer readily visible. Fellow initial contributors to the study of psychological trauma include his two students, Pierre Janet and Sigmund Freud, Alfred Binet, Morton Prince, and Josef Breuer (Leys 4).
Psychiatrist and Professor of Clinical Psychology, Judith Lewis Herman, explains in *Trauma and Recovery*, that the study of trauma has been closely bound with the contemporary political climate:

Three times over the past century, a particular form of psychological trauma has surfaced into public consciousness. Each time, the investigation of that trauma has flourished in affiliation with a political movement. The first to emerge was hysteria, the archetypal psychological disorder of women. Its study grew out of the republican, anticlerical political movement of the late nineteenth century in France. The second was shell shock or combat neurosis. Its study began in England and the United States after the First World War and reached a peak after the Vietnam War. Its political context was the collapse of the cult of war and the growth of an antiwar movement. The last and most recent trauma to come into public awareness is sexual and domestic violence. Its political context is the feminist movement in Western Europe and North America. Our contemporary understanding of psychological trauma is built upon a synthesis of these three separate lines of investigation.

In accordance with Herman’s argument, that renewed interest in trauma has corresponded with the political environment, Leys concludes in her book, *Trauma*, that the developments in trauma research are not teleological, but genealogical. Rather than building on the research that preceded it, interest in research on trauma waned, only to wax again in the wake of what she identifies as the aftermath of another war. Herman identifies the interest in trauma as being closely related not just to war, but to the political movements of the country in which the research is being conducted (9).

Even though each revival of trauma research developed mostly independent of previous research, the conclusions drawn remained similar.

Although Herman identifies the increased public awareness regarding sexual and domestic violence as the motivation for the most recent wave of trauma studies, Leys argues that the genesis
of trauma as literary theory came in the wake of the Vietnam War, whose aftermath encouraged the American Psychiatric Association to recognize and define PTSD (Post-traumatic Stress Syndrome). Some researchers, like philosopher Ian Hacking or professor of political theory and psychoanalytic approaches to politics C. Fred Alford, for example, criticize the recognition and definition of PTSD, not least because of questionable and politicized applications of the term during legal proceedings. According to PTSD researcher Allan Young, PTSD was not a recognized disease, but rather one that was created by people based on the definition. Notwithstanding this critique, the increased recognition of PTSD medically and societally brought about significant interest in researching trauma in the field of literary theory (Leys 2-8).

The branches of psychology and of literary studies have grown closer together as the field of trauma studies has developed and the need for finding and examining the traces of psychological trauma have become increasingly more important. Freud was one of the first to look to literature to describe what he was observing in the psyche; in his *Jenseits des Lustprinzips* he references Tasso’s *Gerusalemme Liberata* to explain the compulsion felt by those suffering from trauma to repeat their past traumas. Almost a century later, literary scholar Cathy Caruth utilized definitions and explanations from the field of psychology to develop a research paradigm for the literary sciences that took trauma as its focus. She paved the way for the latest wave of trauma theory in the humanities that has burgeoned since the Vietnam War, drawing definitions of trauma from the American Psychiatric Association for her research: “In its most general definition, trauma describes an overwhelming experience of sudden or catastrophic events in which the response to the event occurs in the often delayed, uncontrolled repetitive appearance of hallucinations and other intrusive phenomena” (Caruth 11). Although trauma research predates Freud, and although there is little

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56 Caruth is generally considered an important forerunner in the study of trauma in the broader humanities following the Vietnam War. In her introduction to trauma as a study of memory in
consensus in trauma research, particularly regarding the creation of definitions in order to explain the role of the memory and one’s ability to depict trauma, Leys and Caruth both identify Freud as the main influence on trauma researchers and theoreticians of the twentieth century.  

2.a.i.1. Theory: From a Psychological and a Physiological Perspective: Freud

Freud argued that people were almost exclusively the product of their first years of life; trauma, however, had the ability to elementally affect people long after childhood. Freud was a psychoanalyst who turned to literature to interpret traces of the difficult to decipher inner-lives of people. He based his theories on trauma and on the pleasure principle not just in literature, but in nature as well. There are two opposed forces that govern human beings, according to Freud. The *Ichtrieb* or ego drive demands a return to a state of lifelessness, to death, whereas the *Sexualtrieb* or sex drive pushes for reproduction, or the perpetuation of life. Party to this ego drive is the compulsion to repeat, something closely bound to the compulsive reliving of traumatic experiences as part of the memory process.

As clarification, Freud considers those experiences that manage to break through the *Reizschutz* and through to the malleable parts of a person’s identity as traumatic. The *Reizschutz* is a protective callous that forms through a person’s earliest experiences in life and allows for the personality of a person to stabilize as they continue to pass through events in life.  

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*Theories of Memory*, Anne Whitehead clarifies, that Caruth helped to pioneer the study of trauma in the humanities beyond the context of the Holocaust: “Following Caruth’s volume, the study of trauma quickly extended beyond the Holocaust and became embedded into research in the humanities” (Whitehead 189).  

57 Cathy Caruth, Judith Lewis Herman, and the NET researchers draw heavily on the findings of Freud. Herman and Leys both draw on the works of Freud’s contemporary, Janet as well.  

58 “Solche Erregungen von außen, die stark genug sind, den Reizschutz zu durchbrechen, heißen wir *traumatische*” [Author’s italics] (Freud 26). - “Such experiences from outside that are strong enough to break through the *Reizschutz* we consider to be *traumatic*” [Author’s italics]
more likely to break through the Reizschutz when it takes a person completely by surprise. Freud distinguishes between three types of fear, *Angst* (anxiety) referring to a state of prepared expectation, *Furcht* (fear) demanding a specific object that is feared, and finally *Schreck* (fright) referring to the state of unprepared surprise before an unexpected danger. This last, *Schreck*, is most closely associated with traumatic experiences (9).

According to Freud’s pleasure principle, people are governed by the desire to increase pleasure rather than to diminish it. However, the compulsion to repeat traumatic experiences seems to counter this principle, because it re-releases those feelings of fear and fright first experienced during the trauma. The drive to repeat these experiences is a natural reaction to the suppression of traumatic experiences into the subconscious. In response to the suppression, the memories push into the consciousness. This opposition resolves, however, when the compulsion to repeat leads to the rediscovery of one’s identity.59 In this scenario, the compulsion to repeat past traumas can be understood as a source of pleasure, if one understands identity as being closely tied to control and subjectivity. If the inflicted do not have control of their repetition, the experience will remain traumatizing. If, however, control over the drive to repeat the experience can be regained, the inflicted can achieve a sense of reprieve from the traumatic experience.

Freud explains this process through the example of a child. In his *Lustprinzip*, Freud introduces a child whose repeated game of sending toys on ‘business trips’ he interprets as a controlled repetition of the departures of his own father. The child’s playing represents an active process to convert the experience. By turning departure into a game, the child overcomes the feeling of being a passive object in his own life, with no determination over the presence of his father, by

59 “Es ist sinnfällig, daß die Wiederholung, das Wiederfinden der Identität [des Eindruckes], selbst eine Lustquelle bedeutet.” (*Jenseits* 34) – “It makes sense that the repetition, the rediscovery of the identity [of the expression], should be a source of pleasure.”
becoming the active subject of the game.\textsuperscript{60} Just as in the child's game, the afflicted (Freud uses the term \textit{Kranker}) regains the role of subject in his life and in the repeated experience by taking control of the repetition of the traumatizing experience.

2.a.i.2. Theory: From a Psychological and a Physiological Perspective: Janet

Freud and Pierre Janet were both students of Jean-Martin Charcot, the founder of modern neurology. Although they studied under the same teacher, Freud thought that a person’s reaction to trauma was part of an active process to convert the experience, like the example of the child playing above. Janet, however, interpreted a person’s reaction to trauma as primarily passive, the recovery-process was an active one (Priebe 7). While Janet was not the first to use the term dissociation, his dissertation on the subject and later research on the topic, as well as the numerous references to his works among the research community, make him something of an authority on the subject.\textsuperscript{61}

Dissociation is the result of a \textit{fixed idea}, or new information that defies integration into the set system and challenges an individual’s adaptation to it. This new information may come in the form of a traumatic experience, for example, which leads to an inexplicable loss of control on the part of the traumatized.\textsuperscript{62} An idea or partial-system emancipates itself from the whole as an auto-regulative or passive/subconscious means of working through of the trauma. This idea or partial-system then further develops independently of the whole, taking on its own patterns of behavior and memories. In Janet’s case studies, this partial-system manifested itself as one or more additional personalities of

\textsuperscript{60} Freud also interprets the game as the attempts of the child to exact revenge on his father for the love of his mother.

\textsuperscript{61} According to Priebe, Schmahl and Stiglmayr, the French psychiatrist Jacques Joseph Moreau de Tours coined the phrase in 1845.

\textsuperscript{62} Psychologist at the Free University of Berlin, Lydia Hantke, describes Janet’s dissociation as resulting from the failure of the synthesizing processes, the integration of and adjustment to new information (Hantke 72).
a single person, which either partially or completely overtook control of the person. Janet described this additional personality as another consciousness, one that may express itself in “automatic writing, hallucinations, forced interactions and other hysterical symptoms” (Hantke 73), even if the primary consciousness is unaware of it.

Janet’s term dissociation, which describes a passive processing-response to a traumatic experience, plays an important role in Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts. The main character of either text encounters another character as each story progresses, who shares certain characteristics and experiences with the main character. In Khider’s text, both narrators (the narrator of the frame story and the narrator of the embedded story) meet through the medium of a manuscript. Khider’s narrators share the same hand-writing, and, but for a few details, their past experiences are the same. Barbetta’s main characters, Mariana and Analía meet at the alterations shop in person, but they share not only the same physical dimensions, but also the same sense of style, both live with

63 “Janet understood the partial to complete loss of conscious control over a more or less larger pattern of behavior or memories.” (Priebe 6)
64 “Wie kann es sein, dass einer einfach meine Geschichte aufgeschrieben und in einem Umschlag ausgerechnet neben mir abgelegt hat? Wenn einer meine Geschichte gestohlen hat, wieso hat er sie dann ausgerechnet mir zukommen lassen? Und die vielen Einzelheiten aus meinem Leben, die außer mir niemand kennen kann. Wie ist er dazu gekommen? Sogar die Schrift gleicht meiner bis aufs letzte Pünktchen. So klein und fast unleserlich, und dazu auch noch mit Bleistift. Er hat nur ein paar Namen und Beschreibungen einiger Ereignisse verändert. Das ist aber ohne Bedeutung. Es bleibt meine Geschichte und nur meine. Und dann auch noch die Idee, der Aufbau, die Struktur der Erzählung. Genau mein Stil. Wie hat er das nur aus meinem Kopf gestohlen? Ich habe doch niemandem davon erzählt. Gut, viele haben von meinem Vorhaben gewusst, ein Buch über mein Leben zu schreiben. Aber die genaue Art und Weise war niemandem bekannt gewesen, bis vor Kurzem nicht einmal mir selbst.” (Khider 153-154) - “How can it be, that someone simply wrote up my story and then laid it in an envelope next to me of all people? If someone stole my story, why did he let it come to me of all people? And all the details from my own life, that no one can know except me. How did he come across them? Even the hand-writing compares with my own, right down to the last dot. So small and almost illegible, and in pencil at that. He only changed a few names and descriptions of a few events. But that isn’t important. It remains my story and mine alone. And then the idea as well for the construction of it, the structure of the narrative. It’s exactly my style. How did he steal it from my head? I didn’t tell anyone about it. Sure, lots of people knew about my intention to write a book about my life. But nobody knew exactly how it would be done, not even myself, until recently.”
their mothers, and both have a boyfriend (who share a number of similarities themselves). Mariana does not realize this until later in the story, but Analía Moran is an anagram for her own name. Neither does Khider’s frame narrator recognize the embedded narrator, Rasul Hamid. Because of the similarities they possess with the main characters, because their relative lack of awareness for each other, and because they develop independently from the main character throughout the text, Analía and Rasul Hamid can be interpreted as the dissociated personalities of the main characters that Janet writes about. Further, both of these auxiliary characters, Analía and Rasul Hamid, surface in the narratives after the main characters relive a traumatic episode. In Khider’s text, the frame narrator meets Rasul Hamid through his manuscript in the train directly after experiencing a disorienting flashback on the train platform, during which the sound of African drums replace the sounds of everyday life and the people around him. In Barbeta’s text, Analía surfaces in the text right after Mariana relates the death and infidelity of her father.

Whether or not the authors intentionally introduced these dissociative elements to their texts, the dissociation present serves as a narrative device that builds intrigue into the narrative and emphasizes the gravity of the trauma present within the texts. Further, the presence of dissociation in the texts also explains something about the process of learning a language. On the one hand, language acquisition leads to the development of social identity, or the identity of the individual within the group. On the other hand, however, language acquisition also leads to the further development of one’s own identity and personality, which consists of the collective experiences garnered in that language.

Janet is not only important for trauma research because of his explanation of dissociation. According to Leys, Freud recognized Janet as the originator of the cathartic cure.\footnote{The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis identifies Freud’s colleague Josef Breuer as the originator of the cathartic method, bringing about a release of blocked emotion through hypnosis.} Aristotle
introduced the term catharsis to describe the purification of emotion through the pity and fear experienced by the audience watching a Greek tragedy (Poetics 10). The term in psychology is used to describe a similar release of inhibited emotion. Janet’s process for recovery contained three parts and focused on the acts remembering and telling, with the transformation of traumatic memory at the heart of the exercise.\textsuperscript{66} After the traumatized patient had been stabilized through quiet, isolation and a broad-scale simplification of their life, Janet and the patient then focused on modifying traumatic memories, many of which could only be accessed through hypnosis or automatic writing. Remembering played an important part in integrating memories into the patient’s life story, a process that Janet referred to as the liquidation of the memories (Janet 593). Janet defined the unsuccessful integration of memories into one’s life story as persistent dissociation, which often led to a disruption in the personality development of the traumatized. Janet understood memory to be a social and a linguistic phenomenon, “Memory, like belief, like all psychological phenomena, is an action; essentially, it is the action of telling a story. Almost always we are concerned here with a linguistic operation, quite independent of our attitudes towards the happening” (Janet 661). Putting the experience into words and sharing it is not only important for the historicization of traumatic event, but also for the stabilization of personality after the dissociation caused by trauma. By presenting past events to oneself and to others as narrative history, one creates distance to the events. Language plays an important role in this process, because language is portable, that is, it is not tied to a certain time. In this way, traumatic memories that are relived in the present can be integrated into the past through narration.

Janet’s and Freud’s conclusions serve as the basis for the argument of this work. Freud supported Janet in his argument that the act of remembering can be healing. According to Leys, the two agreed that narratives provide healing, because they enable a form of self-understanding that is independent of empirical evidence (Leys 117). These arguments, that narratives can be healing, that self-understanding is an important part of the recovery process, and that self-understanding can be developed independent of empirical evidence, serve as the basis for the argument of this work. Empirical evidence is understood as what actually happened, as opposed to what was remembered. The healing effect of the act of narration explains the autobiographic elements of both texts as well as the importance of narration within both stories. Self-understanding being an important part of the recovery process explains why the identity-conflict of both main characters is present in both texts as an important motif, but also where the acquisition of a foreign language comes into play in the process. Social identity and personality are important parts of language acquisition and also help to motivate the identity conflict within the texts. Gaining an understanding of self independent of empirical evidence integrates the element of fictionalization into the process of meaning-making. Rather than being established by extensive, factual detail, the understanding of self is built upon interpretation, which also requires a certain amount of narrative creativity. If one acknowledges the role of fictional embellishment in meaning-making, it is easier to understand to which extent both texts can be understood as trauma narratives, and the importance of fictionalization strategies in the process of recovery.

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67 After the act of remembering traumatic events in the context of one’s life story, Janet argued that the recovery of the patient also hinged on their ability to forget the event once more. This forgetting thus resolved the posttraumatic stress of the patient and enabled the reintegration of the dissociative personalities (Janet 661).

68 “Never let the truth get in the way of a good story.” – Peter M. Anderson
Almost one hundred years after Janet and Freud first used narrative as an important part of the recovery process after trauma, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, psychologists Maggie Schauer, Frank Neuner, and Thomas Elbert have continued this recovery process and developed their own theory from it. They called theirs the Narrative Exposition Theory (NET). Following in Janet’s and Freud’s footsteps, the NET researchers help to explore the physiological origins of psychological trauma. Their research sheds light on the workings of the memory and the brain in conjunction with trauma.

Neuner et al, like their other predecessor, Janet, describe the memory as consisting of two parts. In the over-reaching episodic memory, which is responsible for cataloging life events, information corresponding to the event is saved, in part, in what is called the “cold memory” and, in part, in the “hot memory”. Declarative information, including details like location, time and the order of events, is saved in the “cold memory”, which is comparable with Janet’s “narrative memory”. The “hot memory”, which compares with Janet’s “traumatic memory”, stores non-declarative information, including the sensory and perceptive details, or the emotional disposition experienced in reaction to the traumatic event. While the experience of recalling declarative information is akin to remembering, the experience of recalling non-declarative information is as though reliving the event. The details of time and place saved in the “cold memory” distinguish a memory as having occurred at a time that is not the present. However, recalling the details saved by the “hot memory” releases a renewed flood of emotions that resituate the memories as happening in real time.

Although an emotional response typically has an exponentially positive effect on the retention of a memory, as with an inverted u-curve, the effect of emotional response on memory-
retention becomes negative as soon as a certain capacity is exceeded. Further attempts to recall the event, are understood as the brain’s attempts to process the event, which are then further impeded by a renewed onslaught of hormones that then re-trigger fright- or fear-responses. As a result, the declarative details of the event, such as location, time, and order of events, which are helpful for sorting the event into one’s time-line of the past, remain unattached to all memory of the event. The NET researchers further maintain that this inability to process a traumatic event then causes gaps to form in the autobiography of the traumatized, which leads to the development of fissures and insecurities in the identity of the traumatized.

With this turn towards identity, I return again to Janet and Freud and to the identity-conflict within Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts. NET as it pertains to the role narrative plays in the recovery process will be explained in greater detail in the next chapter. The opportunity presented by narrative to resolve identity-conflicts will also be discussed in the following chapter. For this chapter, however, I highlight that trauma-researchers recognize the important role putting trauma into words in a narrative plays in one’s recovery after that trauma. Literature researchers recognize, on the other hand, not the importance of writing on the trauma, but rather the important role that trauma plays in literature.

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60 This capacity presumably varies from person to person. A more extensive explanation of the workings of memory in correspondence to stress can be found in F. Neuner, M. Schauer, and T. Elbert’s chapter, “Narrative Exposition”, in Posttraumatische Belastungsstörungen. F. Neuner et al explain that heightened levels of the stress hormone, kortisol, after mid-range, begin to negatively impact the brain’s ability to retain autobiographical contextual information corresponding with a traumatic event (321).
2.a.ii. Theory: Trauma from a Literary Perspective

According to Robert Eaglestone, trauma theory developed in the second half of the twentieth century as a reaction to deconstruction.\(^{70}\) The devaluation of language to its social systems led to ethical questions about this devaluation. After this realization, it became important to rediscover meaning and reality. Lacan identified in trauma a missed encounter with reality.\(^{71}\) That is, trauma possesses the ability to momentarily strengthen one’s faculties of perception, so that one is made aware of exactly that which exceeded his ability to perceive. Because the twentieth century experienced a great deal of social trauma, including both world wars, the Holocaust and the Vietnam War, there was presumably no lack of opportunity to encounter reality, even if these encounters were doomed to failure. The desire to better understand the reality they have missed most likely plays a definitive role in motivating authors to process their personally experienced traumas.

2.a.ii.1. Theory: Trauma from a Literary Perspective: Forerunner Cathy Caruth

As was already explained above, Caruth played an important role in the development of trauma theory in the 1990s. Eaglestone also acknowledges Shoshana Felman as an important early influence in the development of trauma theory, but because most of the later trauma-theorists primarily concern themselves with Caruth, the following paragraphs will focus exclusively on Caruth’s theses.

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\(^{70}\) Deconstruction is a theory used in literary criticism as well as philosophy developed by Jacques Derrida in the 1960s. The theory questions assumptions about certainty, identity and truth, examining in particular the assumptions, ideas, and provisions that serve as the basis for thought and belief. Because thought and belief were thought to be steered by underlying influences, this realization interrupted the connection between language and meaning. Words from that point on could only be said to refer to other words, and any reports about a text were said to suppress the text’s meaning. Derrida’s critics accused this theory as having caused the downfall of the value of western science and ethics.

\(^{71}\) “The function of [Aristotle’s] *tuché*, of the real as encounter – the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter – first presented itself in the history of psycho-analysis in a form that was in itself already enough to arouse our attention, that of the trauma.” (Lacan 55)
and important anti-theses with regard to trauma. Thanks to both Caruth and Felman, trauma theory developed into a critical-theoretical tool for analysis, which concerned itself with literal and metaphorical human suffering and injury, experienced either personally or socially.\

In her text, *Unclaimed Experience*, Caruth, drawing heavily from her predecessor Freud’s *Moses und Monotheismus* and his *Lustprinzip*, examines the connection between trauma and literature. She identifies an interest in the relationship between *knowing and not knowing* in Freud’s psychoanalytic interpretation of traumatic experiences. The language of literature, according to Caruth, is suspended between the poles of knowing and not-knowing, and this is where it comes into association with psychoanalytic theory. Because of its ability to depict what is not-known, because of its ability to both entice one to and simultaneously deny one understanding, as trauma does, literary language is necessary for writing about trauma. A closer examination of Caruth helps to unravel Lacan’s argument, that the encounter with reality, which is facilitated by trauma, is necessarily a missed one. Lacan’s reality is comparable to Caruth’s *knowing*: although one understands the reality of an event, understanding the enormity of the violence proves impossible. Because abstraction plays an important part in literature, and by this I mean veridical fictions, or fictionalized accounts of true events, literature facilitates a depiction of reality, and traumatic realities in particular, that otherwise defy understanding.

Robert Eaglestone describes trauma theory as “a critical-theoretical way of attending to and addressing the representation of human suffering and ‘wounding’, both literal and metaphorical, both personal and communal” (12).

“If Freud turns to literature to describe traumatic experience, it is because literature, like psychoanalysis, is interested in the complex relation between knowing and not knowing. And it is at the specific point at which knowing and not knowing intersect that the language of literature and the psychoanalytic theory of traumatic experience precisely meet” (Caruth 3).
2.a.ii.2. Theory: Trauma from a Literary Perspective: Recent Criticism from Ruth Leys and Stef Craps

Leys is critical of Caruth’s trauma theory, particularly with regards to her understanding of the presentation of reality. According to Leys, Caruth was unable to reconcile her conflicting theories of mimesis. On the one hand, Caruth argues that someone who has experienced trauma and who has no understanding of this traumatic event, is compelled to “relive” the memory. This “reliving” counts as a representation of the trauma, a process that Caruth understands as mimesis. On the other hand, however, Caruth argues that trauma defies representation, as it originates outside the body and is therefore beyond human comprehension. Because trauma in this second scenario eludes comprehension and representation, Caruth refers to it as an example of anti-mimesis. It is here, between the representability and the unrepresentability of trauma, that Caruth identifies the tension between knowing and not-knowing that is central to the traumatic experience. According to Leys, however, Caruth does not clearly explain how something can be representative and yet simultaneously defy representation.

Further, Leys argues that Caruth fails to distinguish between veridical and literal representations of trauma, something that Leys considers very important. Veridical representations are those that faithfully mirror a trauma without exceeding the limits of representability imposed by that trauma. Included in this type of representation are dreams and flashbacks. While trauma researchers like Herman argue that flashbacks should be treated as “exact reiterations” (Leys 242), particularly when they are experienced by victims of child abuse, PTSD researchers like Fred H. Frankel have confirmed that dreams and flashbacks of trauma are often “processed” representations of the truth. Literal representations are understood as exact copies or repetitions of the trauma, which are outside the realm of representability. If this is true, that only “processed” representations
of trauma are possible, the flexibility of the depicted reality should be acknowledged. Leys also explains that the valuation of such representations as faithful depictions of the truth is misplaced. Rather than for their ability to depict the truth, these memories should be recognized and valued as narratives, and thus as tools of recovery after trauma.

The difference between veridical and literal representations raises some important questions. For example, to what extent can representations of trauma be considered faithful depictions of the truth? And how important is the faithful depiction of reality for the recovery of someone who has been traumatized? Both questions have important repercussions for trauma research that focuses on trauma narratives as authentic survivor testimonies. These questions challenge the credibility and the utilization of trauma narratives as testimony, in court proceedings, for example, which could have some negative repercussions for the traumatized authors of these narratives. If their recovery is indeed dependent upon a sympathetic audience and their belief in the story, such an official questioning of the credibility of these narratives would almost certainly affect the recovery of the traumatized.

These questions do not necessarily spell the end for trauma as theory. Rather, these questions facilitate a better understanding for the human processes of making sense of the world and what happens in it. It is important to recognize this process here as infinite, because trauma theory to this point has tended towards generalization. Literature makes flexible depictions of reality a possibility, or in other words, literature makes it possible to fictionalize reality in a manner that is acceptable to readers, even enjoyable. By fictionalize, I do not mean the act of narrating in the third-person, as Käte Hamburger has come to define fiktionale Erzählen (Prince 30) but rather the interpretation and embellishment of events (Benjamin’s Ereignisse) into a narrative that might be described as a veridical fiction. This begs the question, whether literature makes it possible to depict the unbearable precisely because of its capacity to present reality in abstraction. If a literal
representation of trauma is impossible – whether this be because trauma originates outside of the traumatized, or because the content is unbearable to both the narrator and the listener, as Susan J. Brison explains in her article 74 – a veridical depiction offers the chance to actually process a trauma. The literary treatment of trauma is thus the origin of the self-treatment of the traumatized.

Understood as further critique to Caruth, trauma researcher Stef Craps examines Caruth’s idealistic belief that the power of the universal experience of trauma can unite the world. Caruth identified trauma as a possible bridge between cultures that makes the exchange of stories possible, and which spreads a better understanding of mankind in general. Although the thought itself calls attention to the possible exchange between cultures, Craps understands it as resting upon three problematic assumptions that would hinder such an exchange. First, the traumatic experiences of cultural minorities, or non-Western populations, are either ignored or sidelined in Caruth’s explanations. This is the case, at least, in her treatment of *Hiroshima, mon amour*, a film in which a French woman and a Japanese man come together through their common experience of personal traumas during the second world war. However, in the film and in Caruth’s explanation of it, the experiences of the French protagonist over-shadow those of her Japanese lover. Secondly, Caruth assumes a universal definition of trauma and recovery, but one born out of the experience of Western history. 75 This is problematic because western aid gestures built upon pre-acknowledged

74 In her article, “Trauma Narratives and the Remaking of the Self”, Brison questions the assumption that has been widespread in trauma theory, whether trauma is actually adverse to language. Rather, she makes the claim that the unspeakability of trauma has much more to do with the disposition of the listener: “It is debatable, however, whether that is the case, or whether the problem is simply others’ refusal to hear survivors’ stories, which makes it difficult for survivors to tell them even to themselves” (45-46).

75 Example experiences stemming from Western history include both world wars, the Vietnam War and the Holocaust. Although all three wars lead to the recognition and definition of what is known as the post-traumatic-stress-syndrome, as well as the acceptance of the symptoms of trauma, it was the literature written in the paradigm of the Holocaust that determined how trauma narratives and subsequent trauma literature would be understood. Theodor Adorno recognized the Holocaust as interrupting the natural development of literature in his mandate that to write poetry after Auschwitz...
processes of recovery often interfere with pre-existing processes of recovery in non-western cultures, as the existence of alternate processes of recovery are precluded. For example, treatment focusing on the individual often ignores the conditions that brought about the trauma. These conditions include racism, economic disparity, and political oppression. Craps’ final critique of Caruth’s thesis is the assumed aesthetic of representations of trauma. Craps considers characteristics like fragmentation and aporia to be primarily characteristics of trauma representations originating in western culture that developed from trauma narratives of the Holocaust.

2.a.ii.3. Theory: Trauma from a Literary Perspective: A Look to the Future with Robert Eaglestone

If Caruth can be understood as representing trauma theory’s past, and researchers like Leys and Craps as representing its present, then Robert Eaglestone is a voice that predicts its future. Eaglestone recognizes in trauma, and the people who experience it, a research paradigm that can be applied not only to areas of research like memory and fiction, but widely throughout the humanities. Trauma serves as a research paradigm throughout the humanities in the way that it questions the manner in which humans think and talk about themselves. Trauma as a research paradigm is useful for understanding human existence, particularly with regard to the way a code of ethics is established.

was barbaric. Trauma narratives that arose out the paradigm of the Holocaust were generally marked by fragmentation and aporia, and thus, attributes such as these are those by which trauma literature is recognized and analyzed. 

76 See Michael Rothberg, who also argues the recognition of a heterogeneous trauma experience as opposed to Caruth’s homogeneous one.

77 I understand aporia as describing the practice of placing rhetorical questions in a narrative, especially at the beginning of a text.

78 “If we are to respond to traumatic events, it must be to analyse not only the ways that these atrocities outrage the principles and virtues by which we live, but also the ways that they disrupt even how these principles and virtues come to be understood. Thus, it seems to me that the insights
In his chapter about the future of trauma theory, Eaglestone recognizes three main characteristics of trauma that serve as the basis for research in the humanities. First, trauma serves as both the origin and the interruption of knowledge. Second, trauma influences the way man experiences time. To explain this point, Eaglestone refers to Freud’s definition of *Nachträglichkeit*, which Eaglestone translates as “afterwardness”. According to Freud, life is first apprehended after it has transpired. Third, the questions that trauma poses are fundamentally existential, lifelong, and related to ethics. In consideration of these three characteristics, Eaglestone’s recommended research paradigm seeks out interruptions to and sources of knowledge, in order to better understand which experiences influence human beings. The “afterwardness” of human perception of time also plays a role in his theory. Not only traumatic experiences are perceived after they have transpired. Eaglestone uses the example of the love between Anna and Vronsky in *Anna Karenina*, which was only realized after it had gone, to explain how non-traumatic experiences are also experienced after the fact. But, it is the understanding of trauma that allowed him to recognize this delay in the first place. Eaglestone’s research paradigm, like the experience of trauma that it is based on, should also pose existential, lifelong, and ethics-related questions. According to Eaglestone, trauma not only interrupts the principles and virtues that our lives our based on, but also how we understand these principles and virtues. Because trauma as a research paradigm is based on the human experience of time and simultaneously poses questions of ethics, it lends itself easily to application as a research paradigm in other intellectual areas.

To expand upon Eaglestone’s three remarks about trauma, and to integrate Leys’ critique into his research paradigm, I call attention to the flexibility of truth in (trauma) depictions. Eaglestone bases his conclusions on Aristotle’s *Ethics*, in which Aristotle recognizes the connection of trauma theory need to spread more widely across the humanities, not simply to awaken guilt but to assist in the rethinking of how we tell and think about ourselves.” (Eaglestone 19)
between the stories man tells and his understanding of ethics. The NET researchers recognize similar findings in their research, connecting the act of storytelling with the establishment of understanding of self and the world. Not only does this connection relate to questions of ethics, but also questions of truth and the part people play in the creation of both. Thus, it is important to integrate man’s relationship with the perception of truth and the construction of truth through narration in Eaglestone’s research paradigm, alongside man’s relationship with time, and with the creation of ethics.

2.a.ii.4. Theory: Trauma from a Literary Perspective: The Impact of this Work

The following conclusions and theses presented by this work are grounded in psychological research as well as literary sciences research on trauma. However, my contribution does not deviate far from the afore-mentioned critics: my conclusions and theses are rather informed by their criticism. The following pages of this work will elaborate the nature of the traumas experienced by authors Khider and Barbetta. These traumas are comparable to the traumas experienced by their protagonists. Dominick LaCapra recognizes in his History, Literature, Critical Theory, that literature, and art in general, can be a source of refuge, in which one can explore personal problems and, at least in part, process trauma and its effects. He writes, “More broadly, literature and art might be read in a nonreductive way as providing a relatively safe but at times risky haven for exploring problems such as manifold modulations of acting out (or compulsively repeating) and to some extent working over and through trauma and its symptoms” (27). I treat Khider’s and Barbetta’s debut novels as veridical fiction in this analysis, as well as literature that fulfills a narrative function in the recovery process from trauma. Using their texts as examples demonstrates that narrative functions not just as a
historical or a legal document, but as literature, a text with cultural import.\textsuperscript{79} In order to understand
the following arguments, some precepts must be made: first, literature should be recognized as a
possible source of healing from psychological traumas, and second, that history, especially in the
form of a trauma, influences the way literature develops. Further, trauma narratives allow a certain
amount of control over traumatic experiences to be regained. This control manifests itself in at least
two ways: first, the ability to decide which parts of one’s history will be shared, and second, winning
a new understanding of the experience through the creation of a story about it.

Craps’ critique of Caruth was that her understanding of trauma was necessarily Eurocentric.
In defense of my own treatment of trauma narratives, my definitions were compiled from
conclusions of trauma researchers in psychology as well as in the literary sciences, and not
exclusively from Freud or from literature and research of the Holocaust, as Caruth’s were. There is
the possibility that both Khider and Barbetta fit my definitions of trauma so well, because they both
received post-secondary education in Germany, and because they share a familiarity with and love
for both the German and the Western canons of literature. Through my comparison of both texts,
and against the backdrop of theory as it has been and become, however, recognizable differences
surfaced that distinguish Barbetta’s and Khider’s texts from the western canon, including magical
realism in Barbetta’s text and a cyclical narrative-structure in Khider’s. Further, the NET researchers
have based their prognosis about the importance of sharing narratives of trauma as not only
western, but rather as a primal human practice, through which an understanding of self and the
world was solidified. Even Aristotle, a forefather of western culture, recognized the role narrative
plays in the creation of ethics among social groups. My method of approach thus allows differences

\textsuperscript{79} Because Barbetta’s and Khider’s trauma narratives depict a veridical representation of reality, a
process which in itself requires a certain amount of creativity, I determine both of these texts as
examples of literature. But, this will be further explained in Chapter 3.
to be recognized, rather than dismissed by efforts to homogenize the experience. The differences are rather more strongly emphasized through the comparison.

While trauma narratives are recognized as contributing to the formation of understanding of self and world, what characterizes a text as trauma narrative is more difficult to determine. Khider’s text is identifiable as a trauma narrative because of the first-person narrative perspective and the noticeable incidence of aporia from the first page: “Wo bin ich eigentlich? Was mache ich hier? Wo sind die anderen?” (7). Barbetta’s text, however, is a much different narrative. Only briefly does the main character’s first-person voice break through the narrative construct. But there is a fragmentation within both texts that recalls a traumatic fracturing. Both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts are examples of veridical fictions, narratives that tell of personally experienced traumas, but with a flexible faithfulness to reality. Most importantly, however, the function both these texts serve for the authors mark them as trauma narratives.

Craps also theorized about language in his analysis of the future of trauma theory, and the importance of the German language in the recovery process from trauma remains at the heart of my own work. Informed by his reading of Foucault, Craps made projections about the role of language in meaning-making and about the effect trauma had on language. He suggests that trauma is the cause of a major language-shift in the twentieth century, in which words were reduced to their referentiality of other words, rather than as written representations of real objects. Craps generalizes the changes undergone by language on a broadscale, at least broadly across languages directly affected by the Holocaust. My work here concentrates primarily on the very personal relationship between author and language. Although the traumas experienced by either author were experienced by an entire society, the decision of both authors to replace their native language as narrative tool with German was entirely personal. And while my analysis does not deviate from Craps’ and

80 “Where am I even? What am I doing here? Where are the others?”
Foucault’s, it does supplement it by looking at language, particularly language now post-twentieth century, as a meaningful part of the recovery process. Distinguishing between what part the structure of language and the opportunity to distance oneself from the subject of narrative plays in the recovery process, and on the other hand, what part an interested audience plays, offering financial support and publication opportunities, will be difficult to concretize. However, posing the question here helps to maintain a critical perspective when moving forward, as I argue both texts as trauma narratives.

Finally, this work also tests Caruth’s claim on the work of Khider and Barbetta, to see if trauma serves as a bridge-point between two cultures. The narratives tell of traumas from one culture in the language of another. In this manner, literature offers a bridge-point, realized in part by the German language. Craps’ critique above found the voice of the minority suppressed in Caruth’s analysis: in this study, a solitary voice pushes itself to the front. Only one question remains: whether and to what extent the voice of the majority (the language as a social organ) is allowed to share its own trauma, and whether recovery from trauma is possible for both the solitary figure and the social group.

2.b. Associations between trauma and modernity

The section following this identifies the characteristics of trauma as a catalyst for narrative writing as well as a formative element within the writing process. Many of the characteristics I have identified as traumatic, however, including the treatment of reality and time within both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts, as well as the fragmentation within either text also resonate as characteristics of modernity. Because I compiled these characteristics from a synthesis of trauma research in both psychology and the literary sciences, it begs the question to which extent modernity is itself influenced by trauma, a question confirmed by Anne Whitehead. In her introduction to a selection of readings on trauma in *Theories of Memory*, she unequivocally states that “Trauma, then, has been
inherently linked to modernity” (186), and she turns to Walter Benjamin for an explanation of this association. Indeed, Benjamin’s work on Baudelaire read with Georg Simmel’s “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben” delivers a compelling explanation of the development of a trauma aesthetic in art of the modernity.

In his lecture on the experience of the intellect in big cities, “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben”, Simmel traces the birth of modernity to Goethe and the German Romantic. In response to the sentiments of freedom and equality that spurned revolutions both on the North American continent, but more profoundly for modernity in France, interest in the common experience of man was superseded by interest in the individual, with emphasis on subjective experience. Contextually, Fichte’s Wissenschaftslebre lectures in 1795 traditionally mark the beginning of the Romantic period, six years after the French Revolution and three years after France went to war with the Holy Roman Empire. Many hoped that Napoleon would champion the lost ideals of the French Revolution, which itself had dissolved into chaotic brutality, but these idealistic hopes were dashed as well when Napoleon named himself First Consul in 1799 and occupied the neighboring German principalities. The late Romantic, in response to this existential threat from France, is marked not only by increased nationalism for the nascent German state, which would eventually come into being in 1871, but also an increasing interest in challenges to perception as associated with madness. For example, in Ludwig Tieck’s Runenberg (1805) his hero perceives a beautiful sorceress in the old hag before him; in ETA Hoffmann’s Das öde Haus (1817), his Theodor perceives fantastic peculiarities in an old house in Berlin associated with a woman’s madness; and Joseph von Eichendorff explores the ability of the moon to affect a man’s perception in Das Marmorbild. This obsession with perception, particularly misleading perception, relates directly back to idealism disillusioned by chaos and flagrant ego, and reflects an inner soul-searching as to how this idealism could have been so misguided. Reading the literature of the Romantic in the context of
the turmoil engulfing the European continent at the turn of the eighteenth century into the
nineteenth presents a strong case for an association with trauma and the Romantic. I am not alone
in my conclusion that the Romantic grew out of the shock associated first with the horrors of the
madness perpetuated by Robespierre in the wake of the French Revolution and then the existential
threat posed by Napoleon to the German principality in his wars for control over the continent.
Fritz Breithaupt also connects the Romantic with trauma. However, he argues trauma as a construct
of the Romantic mind seeking to establish selfhood after the cult of genius perpetuated by the *Sturm
und Drang* movement of the 1770s proved an understanding of self as unattainable (78).

Bringing the discussion of modernity from the German Romantic into the Industrial
Revolution of the mid-nineteenth century, Simmel and Walter Benjamin further establish the
connection between modernity and trauma through the example of the rapid growth of cities in the
industrial age. In analyzing the shift from lyric poetry through Baudelaire’s *Les Fleurs du Mal*,
Benjamin identified the Industrial Revolution of the mid-nineteenth century and the growing
interest in *Chockerfahrung* (shock experience) as catalysts for the change (319). Identified by Benjamin
as one of the last lyrical poets, Baudelaire’s address to his readers of *Les Fleurs du mal*, signaled the
transition to a new type of literature for the readers of the future: those lacking in willpower and the
ability to concentrate (313). But what brought about this regression? Simmel pointed to the birth of
cities, urban hotbeds of capitalism. Although Simmel argued that greater personal freedom resulted
from the big-city environment, this freedom was dictated by an overwhelming social conformity, in
that the dictates of natural survival translated into the pecuniary interests of capitalist society.
Accordingly, questions of value, performance, how much and a greater preference for unambiguity
d dictated the social fabric of big-city life. In addition to increased pecuniary interests, and the
commodification of literature to the demands of a buying public (which Benjamin refers to as the
crowd (321)), Simmel argued that the hedonistic city life, “ein maßloses Genußleben” (121), dulled
the senses and generated apathy in human beings, “Blasierheit” (121). Thus, greater stimuli were required to elicit a response. This is where Benjamin's discussion of Freud in conjunction with Baudelaire, whom he described as a “traumatophile” who placed Chockerfahrung “at the very center of his art” (319).

In their discussion of modernity, Benjamin and Simmel both discussed a protective barrier that protected the individual from outside stimuli. Simmel, writing fifteen years before Freud would publish his Jenseits des Lustprinzips, argued that the modern man of the big city reacted to outside stimulus with reason, his most superficial faculty and furthest from the inner-depths of his intellect (117). Benjamin, writing thirty-five years after Simmel, referenced Freud directly used the term “consciousness” to describe a similar protective faculty. In fact, Benjamin traces lyrical poetry’s loss of appeal to the over-active consciousness in the face of constant danger in the city environment. Because of this hyper-vigilance of consciousness to protect the individual from outside stimulus, all input becomes an Erlebnis, a singular memory disconnected from the collective memory (Erfahrung), which is established over time and across generations. In the same way that a newspaper article fails to integrate into the cultural capital of literature, by its very nature meant only to convey information for a brief period of time, Erlebnis-experiences, tempered by the shock of the modern metropolis, fleeting and disjointed in nature, have no hope of integrating into the collective Erfahrung-experience. And because of this disjunction between Erlebnis and Erfahrung, art loses its ability to project its aura. Benjamin explains that the aura is the prehistory that surrounds it, the collective Erfahrung-experience that allows art to “return” the gaze of the observer (338). With the advent of technological reproduction, Benjamin argues, necessarily came the disintegration of the aura: not only because man, accustomed to the constant stimulation, the comforts of modern life, and the immediate gratification of technology gradually lost his capacity for imagination and became increasingly mechanized, but because of the disconnect between shock-Erlebnisse and Erfahrung. The
shock-Erlebnis of the city is thus responsible for the change in perception of the modern cultural-consumer as well as the dynamics that made art a commodity written for the consumer.

Art historian Hal Foster brings the discussion of trauma and modernity into the twentieth century through the primary example of Andy Warhol. Although Roland Barthes argued it as being devoid of meaning, Foster redeems pop art by revealing the political engagement in Warhol’s works. *Ambulance Disaster* (1963), for example, arguably originates from an encounter with trauma. His work not only reproduces traumatic effects, but also produces them through repetition (132). Literature and culture researcher Aleida Assmann explains how the development of trauma as a literary motif in the twentieth century has reset our definition of reality: “In diese Welt hat das Trauma einen neuen/alten Begriff von Realität zurückgebracht, der die Wirklichkeit individueller und historischer Erfahrung sowie von Autorschaft affirmiert” (15).

Foster describes the avant-garde movement at the beginning of the twentieth century as one that turned away from reality, armed with abstraction and surrealism. Late twentieth century art, encompassing both the poetic and the written, on the other hand, seeks out the real, searching for reality in abstraction.

2.c. Trauma within the Texts

Acknowledging the trauma-aesthetic of modern literature, the desire to shock readers with lurid depictions of reality, I choose to focus not on the use of trauma in literature as a marketable narrative device to pique readers’ interest, but rather on trauma as a catalyzing and creative force in the writing process, and trauma-aesthetic as a cathartic tool (in Chapter 3). Although neither author uses the term trauma explicitly, details within either text indicate a firsthand encounter with trauma through the stories of their respective protagonists, as well as through the structure of the narrative and in the word choice.

81 “In this world, trauma has brought back a new/old definition of reality that affirms the reality of individual and historical experience as well as a definition of authorship.”
Khider explains that the content of both his first novels had been too emotionally charged for him to be able to write about them in his native language: “Und besonders meine beiden ersten Romane hätte ich nicht auf Arabisch schreiben können. Da war so viel Traurigkeit in den Geschichten, so viel Betroffenheit” (Nelly). After a difficult and illegal emigration, after a childhood spent in a state of war, and a year in an Iraqi prison, the German police stopped Khider in Germany, where he was forced to apply for asylum. The strong connection he makes between remembering and the subsequent emotional onslaught in association with these memories imply one or a series of traumatic experiences. The particulars of Khider’s journey serve as a creative element in his tale, the reality of which he then narratizes and embellishes.

Barbetta also encounters language-related obstacles when talking about her past. She talks about the necessity of having linguistic camouflage with her, in order to visit the Buenos Aires of her childhood in her memory, which suffered under the violence of the Dirty War under General Jorge Rafael Videla. For Barbetta, German served as linguistic camouflage that allowed her to revisit her past. In interviews, Barbetta also associates the Spanish language with dictatorship. That she would need some sort of protection in the way of language to recall memories from this time also implies uncomfortable, even traumatic experiences. The conditions of dictatorship that marked her childhood also serve as a creative element in her narrative, but the extent to which this does play a role is less clear than in Khider’s text. Her experiences are, right from the first page, hidden “unter dem Gullydeckel” of her text.

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82 “And I couldn’t have written, especially my first two novels, in Arabic. There was so much sadness in the stories, so much consternation.”
83 Refer to Michael Kohlstadt’s interview with Khider for Die Westdeutsche Allgemein Zeitung for more information about Khider’s travels.
84 Her experiences are hidden “underneath the drain covers” of her text. She attests to this connection in my interview with her on May 24th, 2016.
The testimonies of both authors inspired this research project to examine language as a means of healing. Accordingly, I examined both authors’ texts for not only a better understanding of the process of working through trauma, but also how trauma influences the creation of a narrative text. Conducting an autobiographical reading of the texts as trauma narratives of authors Khider and Barbetta proved problematic, however, as it was impossible to say with any certainty to which extent the novels corresponded with actual events, and to which extent those events were fictionalized in the telling. Rather, I looked to the storylines of either text and found there protagonists who undergo traumas similar to their authors, and who serve as narrators to varying degrees. Khider’s text has two first-person narrators, the narrator of the frame narrative (the frame narrator) and the narrator of the embedded narrative (the embedded narrator), distinguished by narrative tense; the frame narrator narrates in the present tense and the embedded narrative in the narrative past. My reading of Barbetta’s text is as the narrative of her protagonist, Mariana, as a good deal of the narrative plays out in Mariana’s head, including imagined spaces and abstracted realities. In fact, further inspection identified both Khider’s and Barbetta’s narratives as trauma narratives, something that will be explained at greater length in Chapter 3. Thus, I was able to extrapolate from narrative-writing processes illustrated in the storyline of either text the mechanisms at work that allowed both Khider and Barbetta to report a sense of (cathartic) release after writing their debut novels. But trauma is not just evident in the narrative plots of either text, but foundationally in the narrative structure, and elementally, in the language of the texts.

2.2.i. Trauma within the Texts: Narrative Structure

If trauma can be understood as a formative narrative element, there is certainly evidence of traumatic influence in the narrative structure of both texts. A characteristic of trauma, according to Freud, is the compulsion to repeat the traumatic experiences, whether in dreams or as flashbacks.
Freud explained this compulsion as being motivated at its core by the internal conflict of needing to confront the incomprehensibility of the event, despite one’s personal aversions to re-experiencing the event, in hopes of understanding it through the replay. The NET researchers harness this compulsion, utilizing it in their therapy as a part of the rehabilitation process. Repetition is a structural imperative of trauma: it defines the experience of trauma and is used as a tool for rehabilitating the traumatized. Interestingly, Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts meaningfully employ repetition within the narrative structure of their texts, but with a twist. Leys critique of Caruth’s argumentation on the representability of trauma brought important research to the fore, demonstrating that flashbacks, or repetitions of traumatic experiences, are in fact modified representations of the original event, leading researchers to conclude that the event is processed through the repetition. Similarly, the structural repetition within the narrative of either text allows for modified representations, as the experience is gradually processed through the repetition.

The mirroring experiences within the narrative structure of Khider’s text are most clearly displayed in Part I and Part II of the frame story enveloping the eight narrative chapters. Both halves of the frame begin on a train platform, Part I at the frame narrator’s departure in Berlin, and Part II at the frame narrator’s arrival in Munich. In addition to the repetition of place, if with slight modification, there are also time signatures present that orient both halves in a similar time sequence. At 14:16, the narrator reaches for the manuscript envelope in both parts of the frame. In Part I, this is the envelope containing Rasul Hamid’s manuscript; in Part II this is the empty envelope that will soon carry his own manuscript. At 14:45, the envelope is opened in Part I as the train is taking off. At the same clock time in Part II, the narrator, having arrived and completed his manuscript, seals the envelope. In addition to the repetitions structuring the frame story, spatial and temporal repetitions as well as plot narratives connect each of the eight chapters contained within the frame story. Each of the chapters begins in Bagdad before the narrator’s journey and ends in
Germany at the end of the journey. Khider’s frame narrator explains the intentionality of this return in every chapter to the beginning of the tale: “Jedes Kapitel ein Anfang und zugleich ein Ende. Jedes eine eigene Einheit und doch unverzichtbarer Teil eines Ganzen” (Khider 154). What distinguishes each chapter is a separate thematic treatment of the same journey; by positioning each chapter once more at the start of the tale, the author preserves the integrity of each thematic treatment. The repetition, however, helps to connect each chapter, not just by their proximity, but by this structural repetition.

Returning to Leys’ critique at the beginning of this section, the unique thematic treatment of each of Khider’s chapters also reveals that the repetitions are not perfect ‘re-livings’ of the experience, but rather processed treatments of the same experience. Each chapter gradually increases in intensity as the chapters move closer and closer to the most emotionally painful experiences. The first chapters focus on his skin-color, which has been a point of contention his entire life, and his writing, which is essential to his existence. The fourth chapter moves to the words written on the prison walls, the fifth takes as its theme the void that engulfs the frame narrator in both halves of the frame, until the taking as a topic haunting, the return of the faces of loved ones and friends who he has lost along the journey to fate or to violence, concluding with his hardest loss and his motivation to write this story. The repetition in these chapters certainly points towards Freud’s traumatic repetition compulsion. And because each chapter attacks the content again and again from a different thematic angle, it is not difficult to see each as a renewed attempt to make sense of the incomprehensible.

The narrative structure of the Khider’s frame story and the narrative flow of the eight chapters of the embedded narrative are circular. Time stamps in either half of the frame narrative

85 “Every chapter a beginning and simultaneously an end. Each a unity of its own and yet an irrereplaceable part of the whole.”
relate either back to each other, demonstrating a full circle in the frame narrative structure. The eight chapters of the embedded narrative are also circular, in that they begin and end in the same geographic location. This same repetition creating a circular narrative structure in Khider’s text is also present in Barbetta’s. Like Khider’s, Barbetta’s narrative is essentially framed by a repeated paragraphs that serve to complete the narrative circle. The first two paragraphs of Chapter 1 and the last paragraphs of the novel, which Barbetta titles “Der Saum” (the lace hem on a skirt), are exact reflections of each other but for one slight modification: “Bevor Tante Milagros ein Wort des Abschieds herausbringen kann, hängt sich Mariana/Analía den Träger der Stofftasche über die linke Schulter und verläßt die Änderungsschneiderei, indem sie die letzten beiden Treppenstufen auf einmal nimmt” (Barbetta 5/334).\(^86\) At the beginning of the novel, Mariana plays the role of the protagonist, but by the final chapter, this figure has become the parallel figure, Analía. Because the words of the initial and final paragraphs are word-for-word the same, the last paragraphs can be read as the new beginning of the text, compelling the reader to reread the text once more from the beginning. But these repetitive elements within the narrative structure border on plot, or the story within the narrative, which brings us to the next segment.

2.c.ii. Trauma within the Texts: Plot

Trauma not only manifests itself within the narrative structure of either text by way of repetition, but it also manifests thematically within the plot. Prince defines plot as the main incidents of a narrative, outlining situations and events (73); Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan distinguishes plot from story by way of causality. Here, I use plot to define the stories told within Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts marked by singular causative events. The surfacing of Rasul Hamid’s manuscript in the train serves as the cause

\(^86\) “Before Aunt Milagros can utter a word of farewell, Mariana/Analía hangs the strap of her cloth bag over her left shoulder and leaves the alterations shop, taking both the last steps at once.”
for action in Khider’s text; in Barbetta’s text, Analía’s surfacing before the doors of the alteration shop serves to propel the action. In Khider’s texts, trauma manifests within character testimonies. Khider’s embedded narrator, Rasul Hamid, explains: “Meinen Geschichten fehlt auch das, was Geschichten zu Geschichten macht: Raum, Zeit und Handlung. Denn ich vergesse nicht nur Namen und Aussehen, auch die Zeiten mischen sich oft in meinem Kopf, und am Ende kann ich das Jahr nur ungefähr schätzen” (Khider 26). Referring to his own writing, presumably predating the narrative he manages to arrange both geographically and temporally, Hamid explains his difficulty with those elements that serve as foundation for a story: location, time, and plot. Further, he explains this difficulty as being aberrant to the norm: his stories are not like other stories. And while this supports the argument that Khider’s narrative is in fact innovative in that it was born out of challenges to traditional narrative elements, it also raises the question as to why Hamid had difficulty with the declarative details of a narrative. I discussed above that location, time, and sequence of events (understood as plot) are all examples of declarative information contained within the cold, or narrative, memory. By nature of the emotional impact of a traumatic event, this declarative information is only imperfectly, if at all, absorbed into the initial impressions of a traumatic event, and that traumatic recall for this reason does not release declarative details about the event, but rather the hormonal response impressed on the memory. Among the many emotionally taxing events shared by both the frame- and the embedded narrators of Khider’s text number a prison sentence of “anderthalb Jahre und genau vier Tage” (29), in an Iraqi prison. The precise account of time spent in the prison, one and a half years and four days exactly, is a clear indication of its impact upon Hamid. Further, his incarceration and subsequent release served as the catalyst for his journey: “Ich wurde aus politischen Gründen inhaftiert und später wieder freigelassen. Danach gab es für

87 “My stories are lacking that which makes stories stories: location, time, and plot. Because I forget not only names and appearances, often, even the times get mixed up in my head, and in the end, I can only roughly guess at the year.”
During this imprisonment, the embedded narrator also talks of being tortured. While Hamid talks about a great nothing regarding opportunities for him after his imprisonment, there are serious connections between this void and the Leer the narrator encounters after his release, further indication of the traumatizing impact of this experience. The NET researchers recognized in their study, that experiences of trauma in areas of war and crisis are rarely singular, but rather experienced in plurality. This is also true for Khider’s narrator; the death of his sister serves as just one of the additional experiences that left a profound and traumatizing mark on his life. The faces of his sister and her three children who died with her revisit the narrator after their death, as do the faces of other individuals he has known, who have died. Although the return of these faces within the narrative is testament to Khider’s skill at bending the bonds of reality, it is also reminiscent of the compulsion to repeat that marks the traumatic experience.

The extent to which any traumas personally experienced by the author, Barbetta, influence her texts is not for this dissertation to explain, but this does not exclude the traumas that befall the protagonist Mariana. In her narrative account, Mariana relates a series of traumatic experiences that deeply affected her. The first of the experiences to happen chronologically with profound effect on the child Mariana is the infidelity of her father, which she is made to witness on regular outings with him. The anguished and suppressed cry of Mariana once she has returned to the safety of her mother’s arms after the outing gives indication of the impact of the event: “Er betrügt dich, er

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88 “I was incarcerated for political reasons and later released. After that, there were no new paths for me in my country, just a great void, and everywhere at that.”

89 “Ende August erreichte mich die Nachricht durch die arabische Onlinepresse: »Karima Hamid, Schwester des irakischen Schriftstellers Rasul Hamid, Frau des irakischen Literaturkritikers Sadiq Hasan, und drei ihrer Kinder, Saber, Basem und Sumeia, wurden durch einen terroristischen Anschlag in Bagdad getötet […]«” (Khider 150). – “At the end of August, the news reached me through the Arabic online presses: ‘Karima Hamid, sister of the Iraqi writer, Rasul Hamid, wife of the Iraqi literary critic, Sadiq Hasan, and her three children, Saber, Basem and Sumeia, were killed in a terrorist attack in Bagdad […].’”

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betrügt dich!” (30).90 Further indication of the impact of the event on the child Mariana is the game she plays after being washed and fed by her mother. In her Blaulicht, or blue-light, game, Mariana plays at arresting and incarcerating, “Sie da! Sie sind vorläufig festgenommen!” (Barbetta 30). I acknowledge this as the amateur foray into psychoanalysis that it is, but nonetheless, there is something in this play immediately after the father’s infidelity that resonates with Freud’s Pleasure Principle. Freud explains, “dass die Kinder alles im Spiele wiederholen, was ihnen im Leben großen Eindruck gemacht hat, daß sie dabei die Stärke des Eindruckes abreakieren und sich sozusagen zu Herren der Situation machen“ (Freud 13).91 This play immediately following the father’s infidelity can be understood as the simulated repetition embodied in children’s play as recognized by Freud. Through her game, Mariana regains control after an incidence of powerlessness. Her play, as Mariana herself explains, presents “eine geregelte Welt [dar], welche sich wohltuend und hunderttausend mal verkleinert in ihren Pupillen reflektierte“ (Barbetta 30).92 Further indication of trauma in the protagonist/narrator’s life includes compulsions manifesting right from the first page. The child Mariana, for example, feels compelled to squash out what she thinks are slugs oozing out of the storm drains, refusing her mother’s calls, who must literally drag her away. Another compulsion is her counting, with which the narrative begins and ends. Mariana the narrator explains her counting as a coping mechanism for managing stressful situations: “beim Zählen, ist es wie weggeblasen, in Luft aufgelöst dieses nichtige Elvira-Nachmittagsärgernis von jenem anderen

90 “He’s cheating on you! He’s cheating on you!”
91 “That in their play children repeat everything that has made a great impression on them in real life, and that in doing so they abreact the strength of the impression and, as one might put it, make themselves master of the situation.” (Strachey 16-17)
92 “Presents a regulated world, which reflected in her pupils in a self-satisfying and a one hundred-thousand times reducted manner.”
dunkelbestimmmbaren Gefühl der Zuversicht, das Marianas Gang so beflügelt” (9). Finally, the
description of the child-Mariana’s reaction to the death of her father evidences further signs of
trauma. The sight of it arrests her in a state of shock, and though her description of it long
afterwards is rather nonchalant, she admits her inability to shake loose of the memory of it: “Nach
dem ersten Schock gestand sich Mariana ein, daß der Anblick des toten Vaters sie nicht wirklich
erschütterte. Er ließ sich andererseits nicht aus ihrer Erinnerung verbannen [...]” (27). The NET
researchers cited above explained that the declarative details of a traumatic experience, such as the
time, place and sequence of the incident, are imperfectly saved in the cold-memory. The death of
her father is thus responsible for the dissociation that occurs in the book with the sudden
appearance of Analía. These experiences are understood as traumatic when read together with this
quote regarding the disorderly conduct of Mariana’s memories of the past, “Klar ist, daß es in
Marianas Vergangenheit dunkle Punkte gibt, die unverarbeitet aus der Reihe tanzen” (Barbetta 90).
The memories dance, unprocessed, to the beat of a different drummer, just as the unprocessed
traumatic memories return uncontrollably.

2.c.iii. Trauma within the Texts: Language

Although there are further points of comparison between Khider and Barbetta (as was mentioned
above in the treatment of trauma), the similarities can be divided into two incidents with respect to
trauma’s influence on the words of either text. Both use the term *mutterseelenallein*, roughly conveying

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93 “When counting, it’s as if it’s blown away, dissipated into the air, this futile Elvira-afternoon-
irritation, blown from that other difficult to discern feeling of confidence that gives wing to
Mariana’s footsteps.”

94 “After the initial shock, Mariana confessed that the sight of dead father hadn’t really shaken her.
On the other hand, the sight would not allow itself to be banished from her memory.”

95 “It’s clear that there were dark spots in Mariana’s past that danced, unprocessed, to the beat of a
differed drummer.”
utter loneliness, conspicuously in places in which the protagonists/narrators undergo a dissociative incident in which they lose a grasp on reality. Second, the protagonists of both narratives seek refuge in nature in moments of high-stress, a similarity that links both texts with the German Romantic. Accordingly, Khider and Barbetta use similar word-compounds in German that either acknowledge or establish the connection between man and nature.

Khider uses the term *mutterseelenallein* exactly three times in his text. 96 The term surfaces twice in the frame narrative, each time as the frame narrator suddenly finds himself surrounded by a great void in which people and sounds fall away. In the text we read, “Alles leer. Für einen Moment das Gefühl, auf diesem Bahnhof mutterseelenallein zu sein. Die Menschen sind verschwunden, oder genauer, niemals da gewesen. Alles leer. Alles hell und sauber. Keine Züge, keine Reisenden, keine Lautsprecher. Nichts, nur ich und der leere Bahnhof Zoo, das große Nichts um mich herum. Wo bin ich eigentlich? Was mache ich hier? Wo sind die anderen? Solche Fragen wirbeln durch meinen Kopf wie Trommeln auf einem afrikanische Fest” (7). 97 But for a change in descriptive details, such as the location, the feeling of isolation and the dissociative state indicated by the existential questions is repeated word-for-word on the second half of the frame narrative. The third use of the word is used to describe the embedded narrator’s similar experience with the void. This experience of ‘feeling as lonely as a mother’s soul’ can most likely be considered the predecessor of the frame narrator’s dissociative interludes, granted one understands the two narrators as the different identities of the same person, not only because it occurs chronologically before the frame narrator experiences his dissociative interlude. While the frame narrator’s experience is without an evaluative

96 An explanation of this term will be revealed in the following analysis. Consult Waltraud Legros’ *Was die Wörter erzählen* for more on the history of this word.
97 “Everything empty. For a moment the feeling of being utterly alone at this train station. The people have disappeared, or more precisely, were never there. Everything empty. Everything bright and clean. No trains, no travelers, no loudspeakers. Nothing, just me and the empty Zoo Train Station, the great nothing all around me. Where am I really? What am I doing here? Where are the others? Such questions reel in my head like drums at an African festival.”
marker, declaring it as either desired or not, the incident in the embedded narrative appears to be a desired state: “Letztlich half es mir, mutterseelenallein in die jordanische Wüste hinauszuwandern und dort laut zu schreien. Schreien ist das beste Heilmittel gegen die Leere, aber leider nur ein sehr kurzlebiges” (75). This state of being alone may help him to essentially reclaim his voice in the desert, at times when he feels most powerless, it is important to note that these journeys into the desert are in response to the oppression of the void that engulfs him just as surely as it does the frame narrator.

Barbetta uses the term mutterseelenallein just once, in the last chapter of her text, on the very last page. In this chapter, Barbetta’s protagonist, Mariana, loses her grip on reality. After laying the finishing touches on Analía’s wedding dress, and completing what she considers to be a trap of threads and zippers, Mariana leaves the alterations shop of her aunt, carrying out conversations in her mind with a character who disappeared almost exactly a year ago to that day. At home, she seeks out the mother’s-soul-aloneness and secrecy of her own home, where a state of timelessness holds sway: “Uns beiden gibt das ewig Zeit” (329). As in Khider’s text, this term marks a decidedly dissociative interlude in Mariana’s mental state, in which clear distinctions of time and place and of narrative sequence dissolve into a desired moment of union with a lost loved one. This dissociative shift, it should be noted, happens after completing a stressful assignment at her work place, preparing the wedding dress of a woman she suspects has stolen her man and her dreams of the future. Coupled with this psychological and emotional stress is the physical stress of completing each detail of the dress to perfection. The physical stress has been so great as to give Mariana a migraine headache in a separate incident prior to this final dissociative slip.

98 “Finally, it helped me to wander out into the Jordan desert, utterly alone, and yell there at the top of my lungs. Yelling was the best medicine against the void, but, unfortunately, only a short-lived one.”
99 “For the both of us, time is endless.”
The dissociative interludes experienced by the narrators of both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts both share a loss of awareness of reality and at least a temporal disorientation. For Khider’s frame narrator, it is almost as if all the people and their accompanying sounds have disappeared from the place, and sounds from his past, the drums of an African celebration push to the fore. Although the character did in fact spend time in the African desert, the connection between this sound and the accompanying dissociative details identifies this drumming as the heart of the frame narrator pounding with the rush of adrenalin released by traumatic memory. To compare this experience with Mariana’s, the sounds and markers of reality fade to the background as well. The dialog with actual characters falls to the side, reflected only in Mariana’s answers: “Ich gehe an die frische Luft, habe ihr was dagegen? Ein Tapetenwechsel würde uns allen gut tun. Ihr macht selber gleich Feierabend, nicht? … Oder soll ich es euch doch noch ein allerletztes Mal vorführen? Wenn sie es abholen kommt, werden wir kaum Zeit dafür haben. Ja, stimmt, besser ist es allemal, daß sie es perfekt drapiert an der Puppe vorfindet und es ihr mit eigenen Händen auszieht” (Barbetta 325).

This one-sided dialogue continues, however, as she steps outside and, presumably, imagines herself in the arms of her missing lover. I say presumably here, because his dialogue is again reported through Mariana’s answers, and because, somewhat disturbingly, Mariana comments on the insects filling his mouth revealed by his smile, “Auch dein Mund ist voller Insekten, wenn du so weit und breit lachst” (326). Is this an indication of his death, the insects those industrious decomposers of deceased flesh? Finally, Mariana’s pounding heart most connects this interlude with the one

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100 “I’m going to get some fresh air, is anyone opposed to that? A change of scene would do us all good. You’re calling it a day soon too, aren’t you? … Or should I inspect it just one last time after all? When she comes to get it, we’ll have hardly any time left for that. Yes, that’s true, it’s certainly best that she finds it perfectly draped on the mannequin and takes it down with her own hands.”

101 “Your mouth is full of insects too, when you laugh so broadly.”
described in Khider’s text: “Nein, ich bin übermüdet, ich bin halbtot, habe rasendes Herzklopfen. Hörst du, wie mein rasendes Herz für dich schlägt?” (327).102

The term *mutterseelenallein* does not just describe the dissociative interludes experienced by the protagonists of either story, rather the word itself also connects the authors to their predecessors, who also fled to Germany from war and violence in their own country. Looking at the history of the word, *mutterseelenallein*, as alone as a mother’s soul, or so lonely as to appeal to a mother’s soul, is the product of the German language’s encounter with religious refugees from France in the seventeenth century (Legros). The Huguenots, not unlike Khider’s protagonist, expressed their loneliness with the cry *moi tout seul*, or myself all alone. What is considered a quintessentially German word is in reality a phonetic translation from the French, *moi tout seul* becoming *mutterseel. Allein* was probably later added in the same way that the word *tea* was added to the word *chai*: to preserve something of the original meaning with the phonetic translation. Khider’s and Barbetta’s use of this term draws parallels between their own and states of loneliness, voicelessness and the desire to relate this experience, with that of language migrants induced to relocate by similar traumas.

Finally, the traces of trauma manifest in further terms used by both Khider and Barbetta, terms which display a close connection between man and nature. Both Khider’s and Barbetta’s protagonists flee to nature in moments of high-stress accompanied by powerlessness. As we saw above, the embedded narrator of Khider’s text flees to the desert in an effort to combat the void and his feelings of voice- and powerlessness. The child Mariana, as well, flees to the magical nature of her grandfather’s garden, when her grandmother begins to yell at her grandfather to take his medicine, stressfully indicating mortality. In the following text and chapters, we’ll be returning to this same anecdote in Barbetta’s text a number of times to better understand the novel in its

102 “No, I’m just overtired, I’m half dead, have a racing heart. Do you hear how my racing heart beats for you?”
complexity. For now, it is helpful to see just the moment of her flight into the garden, “Für Mariana sind diese Schreie wie Wind auf dem Ozean, ein gutes Zeichen, eine Art Segelschiff, das sie hinaus ins Freie treibt.” (150). While Khider uses similar moments in nature to describe the void the besets his frame narrator, “wie eine endlose Wüste, nackte Berge oder klares Wasser” (Khider 7), another description further illustrates the connection between human experience and the natural world around him, “Durch das Fenster des Zugs leuchtet das Flaschengrün der Landschaft in der Sonne” (10). Barbetta relates her characters, and particularly Mariana, to the world of insects, Mariana the bee, for example, is caught in the web spun by her spider-father (28). But more essentially, the connection between man and nature is highlighted by terms like Windeseile and felsenfest, word compounds used by both authors, and which personify the wind and rocks of nature with human conceptions of time, hurry, and sureness, respectively. Khider and Barbetta both use the word Windeseile, what is described in the Duden dictionary as an often emotional hurry, to describe the actions of people, further emphasizing the connection between man and nature. In Khider’s text, the embedded narrator uses this to describe his own hurried escape from a building during an earthquake, “Ich hörte Schreie, packte meine Tasche und stürzte in Windeseile auf die Straße” (127), or the speed with which political dissenters were apprehended in Tunesia (81). Barbetta uses Windeseile to describe the speed with which the word RABBIT comes to Gerardo’s mind, as he ponders the backside of the word bar. As if an indication of the gradual transformation

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103 “For Mariana, these cries are wind on the ocean, a good sign, a type of sailboat that she drives out into the wide open.”
104 “Like an endless desert, an exposed mountain, or clear water”
105 “Through the window of the train, the landscape glows bottle-green in the sun.”
106 It should be noted that both words are commonly used in the German language, and not exclusive to either author. Their conspicuous use of these words in certain situations, however, is what drew my attention to them. When reading them, the surrounding syntax pauses, drawing attention to their use.
107 “I heard cries, grabbed my bag and stumbled into the street with the hurry of the wind.” An English speaker might compare this expression, ‘with the hurry of the wind’, with a similar nature metaphor, ‘with lightning speed’.
that takes place in this chapter, shortly after this word association game, Gerardo becomes more and more like the rabbit in Lewis Caroll’s *Alice in Wonderland*. Khider also uses the term *felsenfest*, as sure as the very rock, to ironically describe the actions of a man who fell into madness, sure beyond a doubt that his director was a spy (Khider 135). Barbetta uses *Naturschönheit*, a manifestation of nature that is considered beautiful according to Duden, to describe the Analía, “Es ist nichts zu machen, sie ist einfach eine Naturschönheit” (48). To end on a slightly humorous note, Khider also turns to nature to describe the beauty of women. In his narrative, the embedded narrator refers to women from southern, equatorial countries as “Kuhschönheiten” (or cow-beauties) and those of the northern countries as “Ziegenschönheiten” (or goat beauties), comparing societal beauty standards with those of animals found in nature, the cow, shapely, and the goat, more ‘aerodynamic’, to phrase it euphemistically (52).

2.d. Trauma as Catalyst for Literary Writing and Creative Force

The next section is concerned with the way trauma acts as a catalyst for literary writing and also as a creative element within the writing itself. In the case of both Khider and Barbetta, writing their first novels was first made possible through acquiring a foreign language. Recognizing this, it may be helpful to think of trauma as the catalyst for the writing, and the chosen language of German as a tool that enables the writing process and subsequent recovery from trauma.109

108 “There’s nothing for it, she’s simply a natural beauty.”
109 I tentatively write recovery here, and have only used the term for the sake of expedience. There is considerable debate arguing whether recovery from trauma is at all possible, or if these practices merely alleviate the symptoms themselves.
2.d.i. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Assmann’s Main Characteristics of Trauma, Supplemented

Literature and culture researcher Aleida Assmann, having focused much of her research on the manifestations of trauma in various art forms, recognizes four main characteristics of trauma in her text *Rendezvous mit dem Realen. Die Spur des Traumas in den Künsten.*\(^{110}\) On her list, Assmann includes the contradiction within descriptions of trauma, describing it as both an excess as well as a void; the complete devaluation of subjectivity; the loss of a clear distinction between the past and the present; and the loss of a clear distinction between the real and the imaginary (Assmann 11-14). Two further characteristics belong on this list: not just the impression of speechlessness felt by the traumatized, but also the sensory and fragmentary characteristics of traumatic memory. Thus supplemented, the main characteristics can then be divided among those that work as a catalyst for the narrative process, and those that play a creative role in the process itself. The ‘motivational’ characteristics include loss of speech, which includes both voice and language, loss of subjectivity, and the productive opposition of excess and void. Those characteristics that formatively or creatively influence the writing process itself include the loss of the clear distinction between past and present, the loss of the clear distinction between reality and the imaginary, and finally, the sensory and fragmentary characteristics of traumatic memory. In the following paragraphs, I will first define and explain the characteristics themselves before illustrating their function with examples from both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts.

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\(^{110}\) *Rendezvous with the Real. The traces of trauma in the arts.*
2.d.ii. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Motivation

2.d.ii.a. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Motivation: Speechlessness

Speechlessness is a catalyzing characteristic of trauma that initiates the writing process. The German term *Sprachlosigkeit* implies not just the loss of speech, but the loss of language, *Sprache*, as well. Both Khider and Barbetta exemplify this duality, as they express an inability not only to speak about the content of their first respective books, the loss of voice, but they associate this inability not with the faculty of speech itself, but the tool of speech, that is language; for either author, this means their respective native languages. Speechlessness has proved to be both a social as well as a psychological phenomenon. According to Janet, memory is created through social interactions, but trauma presents challenges to both sides of the communication. 111 While a person traumatized may be unwilling to talk about a traumatic experience due to its unpleasantness; their listeners may also be as unwilling to hear about these experiences due to their unpleasantness as well. The NET researchers observed this unwillingness in their own traumatized patients, 112 and Susan J. Brison explains in her article, “Trauma Narratives and the remaking of the self”, how having an audience willing to hear the traumatic story is just as important as finding the right words to report about the trauma. 113 Brison further explains that the speechlessness described by many trauma-survivors most probably results from the inability to find a sympathetic audience. While this may have been the case as Brison experienced it, the NET researchers identify physiological reactions to trauma that further

111 Janet found memory to be a predominantly social phenomenon. Ruth Leys explains this in her *Trauma* (Leys 112).
112 “A clinically defined traumatized person cannot report about a traumatic experience. They have not yet emerged from the traumatic scene; no linguistic ex-position has taken place. The person themselves are rather the trauma. A spatial orientation and a temporal ‘historicizing’ hasn’t taken place” (NET 329).
113 Susan J. Brison draws on her own experiences with trauma in her article. She explains, “In order to construct self-narratives we need not only the words with which to tell our stories, but also an audience able and willing to hear us and understand our words as we intend them” (46).
contribute to speechlessness. The flooding of hormones initiated by the initial fear-reaction to trauma in fact hinders the retention of declarative or narrative details. Without these declarative details, memories of the event remain preserved as sensory information in the hot memory. As with each subsequent recall of the event, the remembering reinitiates the flooding of hormones that accompanied the initial experience of trauma. This reliving of hormones associated with fear explains the pounding heart of flashbacks, and the feeling of trauma persisting in the present long after the event has transpired.

Speechlessness represents a loss of control, but the act of narrating the event embodies the first steps towards regaining control. Traumatic events causing speechlessness effectively interrupt personal development, leaving an unbridgeable gap in one’s life story. This is the gap that Janet sought to bridge with this narrative treatment, as it often manifested in dissociative personalities in his patients. The act of reconciling the inexplicable with one’s life story is what helps to resolve the dissociation. The NET researchers would further add, by narrating the event, it acquires the declarative details that tie the traumatic event safely to the past. However, this narrative process does not necessarily require a mediator in the role of a therapist, it can also be self-administrated.\(^{114}\)

Recalling the first chapter of this dissertation, many non-native writers of German indicated speechlessness as the motivation behind their writing. The desire to find one’s voice as a viable motivation to write in a second or foreign language provides further support for the creation of narrative as a means for combating speechlessness. To what extent narration itself serves to overcome the feeling of speechlessness, however, will be further analyzed in Chapter 3. For the purposes of this chapter, which primarily explores the relationship between trauma and authors, it is

\(^{114}\) In her book, *Das Narrativ. Biografisches Erzählen im psychotherapeutischen Prozess* (The Narrative: Biographical narration in the psycho-therapeutic process), Brigitte Boothe explains how narration works as a form of self-healing. The many advantages gained through narration, however, will be more broadly explained in Chapter 3 (Boothe 70-73).
sufficient to analyze the instances of speechlessness in either text, and to recognize them as motivational sources for the writing process.

Speechlessness surfaces in many places in Khider’s text. Institutionally, the dictatorship in Iraq enforces speechlessness through strict censor. The narrator describes the situation in Iraq, if somewhat ironically, “Wir alle waren zu Fantasiekreaturen mutiert. Oder wie hätte es sonst sein können, dass ein Staat das Lesen und Schreiben außerhalb von Schulen und Universitäten in kriminelle Handlungen verwandelte, so dass mein Vater es für angebracht hielt, meine Bücher und alles, was ich bisher geschrieben hatte, zu vernichten“ (28). Speechlessness here translates to the loss of written word and the ability to express inner speech, not to mention the disenfranchisement that accompanied this dictatorship. The loss of the narrator’s writing, seen in this quote through the destructive actions of his father, is carried as a motif through the entire text, until it is finally interrupted by the introduction of technology into the narrator’s life, by way of the personal computer. Returning to the censorship in Iraq for a further example of speechlessness, and this in the regard of loss of language, and not just loss of voice. In reaction to the censorship in Iraq, the narrator develops a symbolic language, “In Bagdad, wo ich geboren und aufgewachsen bin, musste ich alles verbergen. Unter Saddams Herrschaft konnte ein einziges Wort Grund genug sein, das Leben zu verlieren. Deswegen schrieb ich alle mögliche Dinge mit Symbolen auf” (26-27).

However, he forgets this language of symbols over the course of his long journey to Germany, thereby losing sense of his earlier words. This in itself, the loss of his own created language, is a further example of speechlessness in the text, illustrating not just the loss of personal voice, but of

\[115\] “We were all mutated into creatures of fantasy. Or how else could reading and writing outside of schools and universities be transformed into criminal actions, so that my father found it appropriate, to destroy my books and everything that I had written up until then.”

\[116\] “In Baghdad, where I was born and raised, I had to hide everything. Under Saddam’s rule, a single word could be reason enough to lose one’s life. That’s why I wrote everything possible in symbols.”
personal language as well. In addition to the loss of his narratives and his own symbolic language, is his own loss of autonomy. On an illegal flight from Iraq, without valid papers, the narrator travels through countries and situations in which his own self-autonomy completely disappears. He fights this type of ‘speech- or voicelessness’, which can be understood as a loss of control over one's life, in an interesting manner. He flees into the empty expanse of nature and frees himself from this voicelessness through wordless cries.  

In Barbetta’s text, the speechlessness of the narrator is also the result of a type of institutional dictatorship. In her report about a traumatic experience in her childhood, Mariana explains how the power of language failed her. What is certain, is that her father is remembered as having been led astray by the beautiful women of Buenos Aires while an outing with Mariana as a child. Mariana remembers herself as being unable to attract the attention of her father away from the beautiful and treacherous spider-women. Returning home after being neglected on the outing, her dress dirty and bits of bugs in her hair, Mariana tries to tell her mother about her father’s infidelity: “Ich alleine verzweifle und versuche, daß er mir zuhört, mich erhört, er, der plötzlich selber daran zieht und daran zupft, während er dir entgleitet! Wie kannst du so blind sein? Diese Wahrheiten hätte Mariana ihr gerne ins Gesicht geschleudert. Statt dessen schwieg sie, einziges Opfer ihres Sirenen-Singsangs, während sie rot wurde vor Zorn und Angestautem” (30). The speechlessness here is threefold. First, the voice of Mariana as a child goes unheard by her father; second, Mariana experiences her father’s infidelity as her own powerlessness to effect the events of her life, the inability to speak out against what she understands to be wrong. Finally, when she tries to tell her

117 “Letzlich half es mir mutterseelenallein in die jordanische Wüste hinauszuwandern und dort laut zu schreien. Schreien ist das beste Heilmittel gegen die Leere, aber leider nur ein sehr kurzlebiges.” (Khider 75) – “Finally, it helped me to wander out into the Jordan desert, all alone, and to scream loudly. Screaming is the best medicine against the void, but unfortunately, just a short-lived one.”

118 “I alone despair and try to make him to listen to me, to answer me, he, who suddenly pulls and plucks [at the strings of the ensnaring web] himself, while he slips away from you.”
mother about the incident, her own language fails her, and she is left screaming the truth to herself. This threefold speechlessness leads the child-Mariana to her Blue-light game, which has already been mentioned. While playing this game, Mariana simulates the situation again in miniature, using the crossword puzzle for jail cells, and taking the power to administer punishment into her own hands. Mariana calls the shots in the game, deciding who receives punishment.

2.d.ii.b. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Motivation: Loss of Subjectivity

A loss of subjectivity lies central to these incidents of speechlessness that result directly from trauma. In his analysis of the history of the trauma discourse over the greater part of the twentieth century, art historian Hal Foster identifies traces of deconstruction as well as identity politics. On the one hand, the subject loses meaning following the loss of control experienced in the traumatic moment, when the violence of the trauma transforms the traumatized from the subject to the object of their own life’s story. That is, they are no longer the agent of the actions happening in their life, rather the recipients of the actions set into motion by the trauma. At the same time, however, the subject gains greater awareness because of its utter devaluation, and the efforts of the traumatized to regain their subjectivity then becomes central to the research. Assmann refers to this as the plasticity of subjectivity. In both texts, the loss of subjectivity is made particularly clear through theft.

In Khider’s Text, the loss of subjectivity materializes through the relationship of the frame and the embedded narrator. In the last part of the frame narrative, the frame narrator explains that the embedded narrator has stolen his life’s story from him, “Was soll ich sagen? Dass ich ein Manuskript gefunden habe, in dem meine eigene Geschichte zu finden ist, geschrieben von einem

119 “Denn es gibt kein Subjekt des Traumas. Der/Die Traumatisierte verliert periodisch die Verfügungs- und Willengewalt über sein/ihr Bewusstsein und seinen/ihren Willen und gibt damit dem Konzept der Entleerung von Subjektivität eine plastische Gestalt” (Assmann 102) - “Because there is no subject in Trauma. The traumatized periodically loses the power of control of his/her consciousness and his/her will, thereby giving the concept of emptying [above, utter devaluation] of subjectivity a plastic characteristic.”
Fremden namens Rasul Hamid? [...] Wenn einer meine Geschichte gestohlen hat, wieso hat er sie dann ausgerechnet mir zukommen lassen? Und die vielen Einzelheiten aus meinem Leben, die außer mir niemand kennen kann. Wie ist er dazu gekommen?“ (Khider 153). 120 Immediately following this, the frame narrator makes the concept of theft even more explicit, “Wie hat er das nur aus meinem Kopf gestohlen?” (Khider 154). 121 In this anecdote, the loss of subjectivity through the loss of one’s own story is made explicit. The frame narrator, subject of his own history, feels that he has been made the object of the embedded narrator’s manuscript, and thus powerless over the sequence of events and their description. This theft provoked the frame narrator to complete his own story: the frame narrator regains control over his own story by putting that story into his own words (and in the German language as well?). 122

Theft also serves to emphasize the loss of subjectivity of the protagonist-narrator, Mariana, in Barbetta’s text as well. With the appearance of Analía in Mariana’s narrative, the passive disappearance of Mariana’s boyfriend is gradually revealed to be a case of active theft. 123 The last communication she received from her boyfriend Gerardo was over a year ago, when his last of three postcards arrived from his travel in the USA. When Mariana discovers a letter in Analía’s bag, which Analía has mistakenly left in the alterations shop in her hurry, a letter written in Gerardo’s hand and

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120 “What should I say? That I found a manuscript in which my life’s story can be found, written by a stranger called Rasul Hamid? […] If someone has stolen my story, why did he let it come to me of all people? And the many details from my life, which no one could know except for me. How did he manage it?”

121 “How did he even manage to steal it out of my head?”

122 The role of language will be further discussed in Chapter 4; it is important to understand at this point, however, that the entire novel is written in German (even the embedded-narrative), although the frame-narrator explains to the reader that the embedded-narrator’s story, Rasul Hamid’s manuscript, is in fact written in Arabic, by hand. This dissertation makes the assumption that the primary detail that distinguishes the frame-narrator from the embedded narrator is language.

123 While I argue here for sake of simplicity that it is revealed that Mariana’s boyfriend has been stolen from her, one might also argue that, because Mariana has no idea what has happened to him, this explanation might be entirely a fabrication of her own making, thereby not revealing a case of actual theft, but evidence of her rewriting this understanding into a theft.
constructed entirely from sentences Gerardo had written to Mariana in his postcards, a letter that was addressed to Analía, however, the magnitude of this realization is palpable in Mariana’s reaction. Her anger marks the moment in which Gerardo’s disappearance becomes not just a loss, but a theft, an action from outside imposed upon Mariana: “Mariana zittert vor Schrecken. Alles erkennt sie wieder, den Wortschatz, die Sauberkeit, die Größe und die bewunderungswürdige Gleichmäßigkeit seiner Schriftzüge, Gerardo’s tightly bound characters, months later. Er, der in fremden Landen wohl Anzeichen einer Veränderung verspürt hatte [...] war auf der Bank und dann in Miami, Chicago oder New York einer dämonischen Gespielin begegnet, einer von ungefähr dahergerrittenen Analía Moran, welche mit böser Zauberkunst und verderblicher Getränkmixtur [...] ihn schließlich um den Verstand bringen konnte” (285-86).124 Mariana had not interpreted the initial loss of Gerardo as an action imposed upon her. In fact, the inexplicability of the departure probably left a caesura in her mind as to wherefore, as she continued to wait for some sign. The appearance of Analía’s letter, however, provides the explanation that fits in Mariana’s caesura, an explanation that leaves Mariana the victim of an action directed against her. In this way, Mariana’s loss is understood as a direct blow to her role as subject in her own life. A long separation does not signal loss of subjectivity, but a loss confirmed in its finality, and executed through the actions of another does. Mariana had dreamt of marriage and happily-ever-after with Gerardo; the loss or theft of him also signifies the theft of her dream-narrative, that is, the fairy tale ending she had written for herself. Instead of being the subject made whole in matrimonial unity in her own narrative, Mariana has become an objectified victim of theft in Analía’s narrative. But this is not the first time in the text in

124 “Mariana shakes from the shock. She recognizes everything, the vocabulary, the cleanliness, the size and the remarkable uniformity of his writing strokes, Gerardo’s tightly bound characters, months later. He, who probably first sensed the indication of a change […] had been at the bank, then had met a demonic playmate in Miami, Chicago, or New York, one Analía Moran, who had ridden there peradventure, and who with malicious conjuring and ill-intended potion […] had driven him out of his mind.”
which Mariana’s anger signals a precluding loss. Mariana as a child also responds with anger when she is first met with feelings of powerlessness as a result of her father's infidelity. In this case as well, Mariana loses the agency in her own story.\textsuperscript{125}

2.d.ii.e. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Motivation: The Sublime

Assmann describes a paradox in her work on trauma, a paradox that functions as a point of origin for the authorial drive. Reports from traumatized individuals about their trauma reveals simultaneous and contradictory sensations of an excess of feeling and emotion as well as a perceived void, or emptiness, immediately following a trauma. Assmann affixes a few further adjectives to better describe the contradictory sensations, “In der Beschreibung des Traumas (wie auch des Sublimen) tut sich die Kluft des Widerspruchs zwischen zwei gegensätzlichen Qualitäten auf: es wird sowohl als Excess, Überschwemmung und Überwältigung, als auch als Leere, Entzogenheit und Unzugänglichkeit beschrieben” (11),\textsuperscript{126} but for our purposes, I reduce these to excess and void.

Assmann also draws parallels between descriptions of trauma and of the sublime, serving to further emphasize this point that strong oppositional forces, particularly those remembered after the fact, 

\textsuperscript{125} The loss of one’s own subjectivity can also be recognized in Mariana’s relationship with her father, in which she feels powerless in connection with him. Although powerlessness in one use of the word represents a loss of consciousness, in the following use of the word, it is arguable that Barbetta meant rather a loss of power to dictate the events in one’s own life: “Als kleines Mädchen, das mit dem Vater im Park spazieren geht, […] das sich bemüht, den Gang dieses Vaters auf der Straße perfekt zu kopieren, weil es stolz ist, weil es selbst diesem Vater zu ähneln glaubt, in solchen Situationen, die sich im Laufe der Jahre aneinandereinreihen und Mariana wie eine Perlenhalskette zuschnüren, lernte sie das Gefühl der Ohnmacht kennen und es in der Folge mit Gegengift zu behandeln.” (Barbetta 28) – “As a little girl, who goes for walks with her father in the park, […] who tries to copy her father’s gait in the street perfectly, because she is proud, because she believes she resembles this father, in situations like these, which lined up one after the other over the course of the years, and which Mariana beaded like a pearl necklace, she learned the feeling of powerlessness and to treat it subsequently with antidote/a counter-poison.” – This final word is beautifully ambiguous, as it can signify an antidote as well as, in the sense of fighting fire with fire, a poison to counter this loss.

\textsuperscript{126} “In the description of trauma (as well as the sublime) a contradictory rift between two counteractive qualities opens: it is described as excess, flooding and overpowering, as well as emptiness, withdrawal and inaccessibility.”
serve as an important catalyzing force in the writing process. The void describes moments of absence, as we'll see in the examples that follow; the excess describes moments in which one feels overwhelmed. In both Khider’s and Barbetta’s text, their protagonists, Khider’s frame narrator and Barbetta’s Mariana, both experience important episodes of remembered trauma, that are described as simultaneously overpowering as well as defined by an emptiness. For now, let us first look at those incidents within the text that describe this paradox. Afterwards, we will move into an understanding of how this paradox, in conjunction with speechlessness and loss of subjectivity, serve as a catalyst for the writing process.

In Khider’s text, the term *mutterseelenallein* serves as an important indication of moments within the text in which trauma is re-experienced in an onslaught of contradictory and overwhelming sensations. The frame narrator uses the term twice, in either half of the frame narrative, and the embedded narrator, Rasul Hamid, uses it just once. Within these moments, either narrator describes an overpowering sense of emptiness, productive and life-affirming effect “Die Leere in den Wäldern und Bergen dieses Landes [Deutschland] war genauso groß und gewaltig wie die in der Wüste. Ich gebe zu, ich stellte langsam fest, wie groß und mächtig die Leere ist, die man überall antreffen kann. Sie ist so groß und mächtig, dass sie mir die Luft zum Atmen nimmt” (99).

Khider uses nature-metaphor to describe the overpowering emptiness, or void: an endless desert, a naked mountain, or clear water, something that certainly connects him with the love of nature of the German Romantic period. What connects the three, the desert, the mountain and the water, is the void sensed within all three: the endlesness of the desert, the nakedness, and the clarity of the water all share an absence, the desert its end, the mountain any covering, and the water particulate to cloud

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127 For information on this connection between trauma and the sublime, refer to Lyotard.
128 “The emptiness in the forests and mountains of this country [Germany] were just as expansive and vast as that in the desert. I'll admit, I slowly understood how big and powerful the emptiness is, that one can encounter anywhere. It is so big and powerful, that it steals your breath away.”
it. These are all things that limit, define and conceal, functionalities stolen away by the experience of trauma. Following these traumatic recalls, the overpowering sense of emptiness causes the narrator to lose his temporal orientation as well as his ability to perceive the actions of the present happening around him. In an interesting juxtaposition between the frame- and the embedded narrator, the reader experiences this attack of traumatic with the frame narrator as it is happening, as this part of the story is told in the present. With the embedded narrator, however, the traumatic recall is described long after it has transpired, and in the retelling, much of the immediacy of the feeling is lost. Returning to the experience of the frame narrator, the cessation of the sounds of immediate life happening around him, and the loss of the relationship of time represents a momentary hesitation of one’s life forces. The frame narrator describes his fear of losing his mind completely, life as he knows it, and himself as he knows himself. But this cessation is accompanied by what he describes as the pounding of drums in his head, perhaps his interpretation of his pounding heart ringing in his ears, in any case, an immediate and urgent sign of life countering the void. And just as the narrator is seized by the fear of losing himself and his ability to perceive, this moment causes an important appreciation of those things immediately around him. In the narrative immediately following either, for lack of a better word, sublime encounter with trauma recalled or relived, the narrative resumes with descriptions and remarks about the world around the narrator: “Gott sei Dank, die Bahnhofstelle ist noch da und auch die Sprüche an den Wänden: »Mein Spaßvogel ist in seinem Spaß verloren geflogen.« »Simone ist meine Maus.« Auch die Currywurst- und die Hotdogbude sind noch da, die Menschen…” (7-8).  

In Chapter 30 of Barbetta’s text, itself a cloven chapter that begins with Analía’s narrative and suddenly, mid-sentence, switches to Mariana’s narrative, there is a moment marked by

129 “Thank God, the train platform is still there and the writing on the wall too: ‘My jester lost himself in the jest.’ ‘Simone is my sweetheart.’ Even the Currywurst and the Hotdog stands are still there, the people …”
overwhelming emotion and subsequent speechlessness. This moment begins with the cloven sentence, which mirrors the migraine threatening to split open Mariana’s head: “Als nächstes verknüpft Analía Moran einen blauen mit einem roten Faden, Mariana Nalo hat die Arbeit am Brautkleid unterbrechen müssen und ist früher als sonst von der Änderungsschneiderei nach Hause gekommen. Über den langen dunklen Flur erreicht sie den Innenhof und dann ihr Zimmer, wo sie die Gardinen zuzieht und sich ins Bett legt. Die Attacke ist überwältigend, aber Mariana hält sich tapfer und ist für den Kampf gerüstet. [...] Jeder Gedanke ist ein Bild, das sich an das nächste reiht und aufwührende Gefühle weckt” (304).

Perhaps caused by the stress of preparing Analía’s wedding dress, the further completion of which serves to reinforce the absence of Gerardo and the final loss of her dreams, Mariana suffers from an overpowering migraine, which itself unleashes a flood of images and feelings. In addition to the profound absence felt by Mariana, which represents the void, she also retreats to the loneliness of her apartment. There, she dreams of a red-haired woman, who seduces Gerardo from her. Her thoughts are not expressed in words, representing a further absence, that of speech, but rather in images, that allow her mistrust free rein. The story, insofar as it is understood as a clandestine Mariana-narrative, consists here of images, providing explanation as to why Gerardo still has not returned.

2.d.ii.d. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Motivation: The Creative Impulse

These three characteristics, speechlessness, loss of subjectivity, and the contrasting sensations of being both overpowered as well as in a void, are closely bound, and together they inspire a creative impulse within the text. As soon as moments of overpowering emptiness descend upon both

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130 “Next, Analía Moran entwines a blue thread with a red one, Mariana Nalo had to stop her work with the wedding dress and left the alterations shop for home earlier than usual. Across the long dark hall, she reaches [sic] the inner courtyard and then her room, where she pulls the curtains shut and lays herself on the bed. The attack is overpowering, but Mariana remains brave and is armed for the fight. [...] Every thought is an image that lines up with the next and awakens a swirling of emotion.”
Khider’s and Barbetta’s protagonists, moments that are closely bound with the loss of subjectivity or agency here, speechlessness follows. But this speechlessness does not signal an end to communication, rather the protagonist is flooded with images and emotions that demand description. The overpowering of the moment brings about an immediate cessation of word and sensation, or more poetically, a death, which is immediately followed by a flood of images and sensations, the rebirth, to return to the more poetic description. A brief foray into a discussion of the sublime explains how this sensation of privation, the loss of language and life, ultimately inspires an opposite reaction, particularly within the context of art. Moving to examples in the texts from here supports theory with textual evidence, as existential threats in both novels are followed by an overflowing of sensory information.

Returning briefly to Assmann’s definition of trauma, it is important to isolate this moment from which the literary impulse springs. Assmann grounds her observation of the oppositional drives resulting from a traumatic experience, that is, the void or cessation contrasted with an overwhelming flood, in the trope of the sublime, in German, das Erhabene. In his essay linking eighteenth century theories of the sublime as generated by Edmund Burke and Immanuel Kant with the avant-garde artistic movement, Jean-François Lyotard draws heavily on Burke’s description of the sublime. It is a moment of terror linked with privation (204), whether of light, language, or of life. What makes the moment of terror a sublime experience, however, is the privation that is almost, but not quite experienced. Lyotard refers to this almost as a ‘secondary privation’ (205), a privation of the privation. Burke describes the resulting emotion as a feeling of delight, which Lyotard

131 Assmann explains, “It was Jean-François Lyotard who bridged the gap between the philosophical aesthetic theory of the sublime given by Immanuel Kant and Edmund Burke in the tradition of the eighteenth century on the one side, and the new concept of trauma on the other side” (15). Assmann draws this understanding from Lyotard’s “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde”. It is worth noting, that Lyotard does not explicitly refer to the concept of trauma in his essay, but rather the avant-garde art movement, whose task remained “that of undoing the presumption of the mind with respect to time. The sublime feeling is the name of this privation” (211).
normatizes with the term “relief” (205). Turning to Kant’s *Kritik der Urteilskraft* referenced by Lyotard helps to explain the productive quality of the sublime moment itself. The feeling of the sublime is one “welche nur indirecte entspringt, nämlich so, daß sie durch das Gefühl einer augenblicklichen Hemmung der Lebenskräfte und darauf sogleich folgenden desto starkem Ergießung derselben erzeugt wird” (Kant 165). What is important here is the description of the outpouring of life forces immediately following the momentary suspension of the same. Assmann describes the experience of trauma as being a sublime one, one accompanied by feelings of being overwhelmed as well as suspended within a void. But Assmann describes these feelings as occurring simultaneously. It is productive for understanding the writing that arises out of traumatic experience by acknowledging these sensations not as occurring simultaneously, but rather concurrently, in the causative relationship described by Kant.

What supplied the distance necessary for the threat of privation to become a sublime experience, Burke argued, was art. Elaborating on this point, Lyotard explains that the sublime moment captured by art dwells where powers of imagination cease and powers of reason begin. Whereas Burke described terrors as being induced by the privation of light, of others, of language, of objects, and of life, Lyotard narrows these to just three: light, language and life. Reducing this list once more to the privation of language allows us to focus on the threat of speechlessness as it is experienced in trauma, and how speech - I use this as a blanket term here to include language, voice, and self-determination – is regained through the medium of, establishing distance between the trauma and its object. This association between trauma and the sublime is useful for explaining not only why trauma causes speechlessness, but also how the traumatic experience as privation of life and language can be alleviated through literary undertaking. What distinguishes trauma from

132 “Which only springs forth indirectly, namely in such a manner, that it, through the feeling of a momentary suspension of life forces and the subsequent and immediate strong outpouring of the same [life forces] is created by this.” (Kant 165)
Lyotard’s explanation of the sublime, however, is the role of choice. Janet and the NET researchers observed that narrative-writing only proved helpful when the sufferer made the decision towards self-healing, demonstrating the life-affirmational qualities of narrative writing.\footnote{Interestingly, author Abbas Khider explained at his reading in Lüneburg that choosing a humorous approach in matters of trauma was also an act of affirming life.}

Moving from theoretical projections to concrete textual examples further supports the argument that the experience of trauma both causes and is ameliorated by an artistic turn towards literary writing, functioning as both symptom and cure. The NET research explained above demonstrated that the traumatic experience, because of physiological hormone response, is saved primarily as sensory information and feelings. Although the sensory images imply a loss of language on the one hand, often standing in the stead of words in traumatic memory, these images of the main characters in both novels reveal themselves as the first steps towards regaining life forces (including language and subjectivity) in both Khider’s and Barbeta’s novels.

Descriptions and simple remarks about the scene immediately follow the *mutterseelenallein-*incidents in Khider’s text, and Rasul Hamid’s manuscript follows indirectly. The simple remarks in the first part of the frame narrative on the train platform include: “Gott sei Dank, die Bahnhofshalle ist noch da und auch die Sprüche an den Wänden [...]” (7);\footnote{“Thank God, the train station is still there and there writing on the wall as well [...]”} in the second part of this frame narrative, the setting is a café: “Ich schaue mich etwas genauer um. Die Mädchen und Jungen, die Damen und Herren [...]” (155).\footnote{“I look around me somewhat more carefully. The girls and boys, the women and men [...]”} As these quotes briefly demonstrate (the descriptions and simple remarks within the text itself are lengthier), the immediate impulse after the sublime experience of trauma is a literary one, that is, fitting one’s surroundings to words. In addition to these descriptive passages following both trauma flashbacks, the appearance of the manuscript as metaphor more concretely demonstrates the literary impulse following trauma. Interestingly, the frame narrator
admits wanting to write his story for a long time, but that the appropriate narrative structure continued to evade him.\footnote{\textit{Schon lange hegte ich den Wunsch, meine Fahrt auf dem Geisterschiff, meine Odyssee, niederzuschreiben. Nie habe ich es geschafft. Immer wieder, seit mindestens fünf Jahren, versuchte ich einen Anfang. Und immer wieder hörte ich auf, weil ich nicht überzeugt war, weil mir die Erzählstruktur fehlte, weil ich einfach nicht zufrieden war” (Khider 154). – “For a long time now I’ve cherished the desire to write down my journey on the ghost ship, my odyssey. I’ve never done it. Again and again, for at least five years now, I’ve tried to begin. And again and again I’ve stopped, because I wasn’t convinced, because the narrative-structure was missing, because I just wasn’t satisfied.”} It is interesting that this missing structure would come to him only after he had learned German, but this a remark for Chapter 4. Parallel to this incident, the finding of the manuscript, the frame narrator completes his own manuscript after experiencing yet another mutterseelenallein-incident, concluding the narrative with the closing of the manuscript itself.

In Barbetta’s text, as was explained above, Mariana’s shock, whether due to the gripping pain of a migraine headache after working on Analía’s wedding dress or from finding a letter from Gerardo in Analía’s handbag, this shock causes her to slip from reality into the fantasy. It is not made explicit in the text if these interludes into fantasy are to be interpreted as dreams or as her waking state, but it is clear that this slip into fantasy directly correlated with the shock: “Mariana muß sich von dem Schock erholen, die Gegend am Río Luján nahe an dessen Mündung in den Río de la Plata nimmt sie aus einer gewissen Distanz wahr” (305).\footnote{“Mariana has to recover from the shock, she makes out the area surrounding the Río Luján near its outlet into the Río de la Plata from a certain distance.”} The seemless transition from Mariana recovering from a headache in her own home to a river outlet mid-sentence reinforces the causative relationship between shock and slip from reality. But in addition to this, the anecdotal story that follows, illustrating the presumable luring of Gerardo, argues the artistic turn into literary expression following a traumatic interlude.
2.d.iii. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Productive Effect of Trauma on the Text

These characteristics of trauma not only initiate creative writing, but they also serve a formative purpose within the narrative itself. The way each author works with time in their narratives, the flexible relationship with the representation of reality, as well as sensory details within the texts themselves draw convincing parallels with Assmann’s characteristics of trauma. The presence of these characteristics within either narrative illustrates the formative influence traumatic experience has on the creation of narrative. Recognizing this supports Eaglestone’s argument, that trauma can be used as a research paradigm throughout the humanities to understand man’s relationship with time. However, trauma’s influence extends beyond man’s relationship with time, to his relationship with reality, as well as the way he experiences the world.

2.d.iii.a. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Productive Effect of Trauma on the Text: Loss of Clear Distinction between Past and Present

Assmann describes trauma as “die nicht überwindbare Gegenwart eines vergangenen Geschehens” (13). Accordingly, she lists the loss of a clear distinction between the past and the present among her four characteristics of trauma. A traumatic experience, so to speak, asserts itself into the present as an experience relived. Freud explained the subconscious actions of the soul processing trauma as happening outside the influence of and the ordering of time. He described suppressed (for example, traumatic) experiences, as relived instead of remembered. The NET researchers also describe the timelessness of traumatic experiences with regard to the information saved about the event: the

138 Assmann describes trauma as “the insurmountable immediacy of a past event” (13).
139 As we saw above, Freud makes this claim in his Lustprinzip.
140 “Es ist vielmehr genötigt, das Verdrängte als gegenwärtiges Erlebnis zu wiederholen, anstatt es, wie der Arzt es lieber sähe, als ein Stück der Vergangenheit zu erinnern” (Freud 15). - “Rather, it is much more the case that one is coerced to repeat the suppressed as an experience happening in the present, rather than, as doctors would prefer to see it, to remember a piece of the past.”
flood of hormones following a traumatic experience hinders the retention of declarative details, including details concerning the time of occurrence and the sequence of events.

Understanding each narrative as generating out of a traumatic experience reveals a flexible boundary between past and present through the tense of the narrative. In Primo Levi’s *Ist das ein Mensch*, for example, the narrator relates his arrival and imprisonment in the present, as though the reader should experience everything with him at the same time. More to the point, this narrative tense suggests that the narrator himself, much more than relating the experience, relives it in the telling: “Wir steigen aus. Man bringt uns in einen großen, kalten, schwach geheizten Raum“ (Levi 24).141 His memories of this traumatic time push into his present as experiences relived. Khider’s text presents a similar case. The frame narrator reports, that is, when he actually uses time-signifiers like verbs, in the present tense, “Die Menschen sind verschwunden, oder genauer, niemals da gewesen. Alles leer. Alles hell und sauber. Keine Züge, keine Reisenden, keine Lautsprecher. Nichts, nur ich und der leere Bahnhof Zoo, das große nichts um mich herum. Wo bin ich eigentlich? Was mache ich hier? Wo sind die anderen? Solche Fragen wirbeln durch meinen Kopf wie Trommeln auf einem afrikanischen Fest” (7).142 On the other hand, the embedded narrator relates his story in the narrative past.143 Comparing Khider’s narrative with Levi’s, either narrator creates an interesting situation for the reader, as the writing takes place after the narrated event, but is presented in such a manner that the reader processes the event as happening in the present. The use of presence in this frame-

141 “We get off [the train]. Someone brings us into a large, cold, poorly heated room.”
142 As was quoted earlier: “The people have disappeared, or more precisely, were never there. Everything empty. Everything bright and clean. No trains, no travelers, no loudspeakers. Nothing, just me and the empty Zoo Train Station, the great nothing all around me. Where am I really? What am I doing here? Where are the others? Such questions reel in my head like drums at an African festival.”
143 A finished manuscript distinguishes the narrative of the embedded-narrator from that of the frame-narrator. The embedded-narrative tells the story as though the trauma has been processed: that is, ordered within a logical progression of time. The narrative of the frame-narrator, on the other hand, produces the feeling of traumatic memory relived in the present.
narrative represents the suppressed, past traumatic experience pushing its way into the frame narrator’s experience of the present, as explained by Freud and Assmann.

Barbetta’s text is somewhat more complicated. Her main character, Mariana, and Mariana’s doppelganger, Analía, are both referred to as time-keepers, a direct hint at the flexibility with which the narrative transgresses tense. In fact, multiple points of tense-transgression surface within the text, points in which the tense of the narrative switches from the past into the present, or vice versa. The story is sometimes narrated as action of the present and sometimes of the past. The part of the story narrated in the present reports the interactions between Mariana and Analía, those parts of the story told in the past focus on Mariana’s past. A few of the chapters build up the Gerardo character, and focus on his interactions with his friends while dating Mariana. These serve as perspective chapters for understanding something more of the relationship he had with Mariana and why he left. One past-narrative chapter, the chapter that reports the infidelity of Mariana’s father, does momentarily break into a present-tense narrative, as though the voice of Mariana as a child is breaking through the narrative from the past: “Er betrügt dich, er betrügt dich!” (30). Recalling the discussion from above, these words are not spoken, but rather thought by Mariana as a child. After this transgression of the past into the present, the narrative returns to a report of past events. Chapter 12 relates a past meeting of Mariana and Gerardo in the Café ‘Las Violetas’; this encounter is narrated as though having happened in the past in this chapter, but the anecdote resurfaces in Chapter 20, this time as an event happening in the present. In the first mention of the meeting, the

\[144\] Only one additional chapter, a chapter in which Mariana is conspicuously absent, is narrated partially in the present. In Chapter 13, Gerardo, Mariana’s boyfriend, meets a character who matches Analía’s description from Chapter 7 word-for-word, “Ohne lange darüber nach zu denken, hat sie sich am frühen Morgen für ein dezentes Make-up in leisen Tönen entschieden […]” (48/116). A chapter that had begun as past tense narrative transitions to present as Gerardo leaves the bar and his friends, and encounters the mysterious woman. Mariana being conspicuously absent from her own story begs the argument, that this interlude is a fabrication of her own making, an explanation for the Gerardo’s seduction as she imagines it must have been.
memory remains securely in the past: “«Ich will aber mehr», sagte er mit einem Lächeln im Gesicht und streckte die Arme nach Mariana aus [...]” (100). Later, the memory of this meeting forces its way into the present, while Mariana is listening to Analía during a chance encounter at the beauty salon. While Analía tells Mariana of her secret bachelorette party, complete with past amours, Mariana is suddenly seized by the resurrected memory of her meeting with Gerardo: “«ich will aber mehr», sagt Gerardo ernst” (180). Although Mariana is suddenly temporally far away, she continues to sit under the Turbo-hair dryer G96.

2.d.iii.b. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Productive Effect of Trauma on the Text: Loss of Clear Distinction between the Real and the Imagined

Seen in a productive light, trauma is a formative experience that allows one to approach the seam between reality and fantasy. Used as a narrative device within a text, this interweaving of reality with fantasy makes it easier for not only the author, but also the reader to approach the traumatic content of the text. The purpose of literature written from a context of trauma is not necessarily to shock the reader awake with the brutality of the event. Rather, as I interpret it in this chapter, the purpose of literature written in the context of trauma is for an author to win back their own story, not only by completing a narrative about the event, but also through the successful transmission of this story to an audience. To illustrate Barbetta’s and Khider’s flirtation with the boundaries between reality and fantasy, I turn to their integration of the fantastic and the fairy tale into their stories, but particularly in those parts of either narrative in which a traumatic experience surfaces. The traumatic experience

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145 “‘But I want more’, he says with a smile on his face and stretched out his arms towards Mariana […]”
146 “‘But I want more’, says Gerardo in earnest.”
147 I write “imagined” here to accord with Assmann’s use of the term. Fantasy is also used to describe an oppositional state to reality, however the terms “imagined” and “imagination” are used in this dissertation to emphasize a certain autonomy of the imaginer.
related in the narrative performs a causative function. Trauma as a literary device in these texts thus links contemporary literature with a long tradition of fairy tales and legends.

Assmann’s observations of trauma lead us deeper into the theory about trauma in literature. If trauma initiates a loss of the distinction between the real and the fantastic, this observation is most likely based on perceived inability of someone suffering from a trauma to distinguish between the past experience relived and the reality of the present. Assmann establishes her own argument on that of Lacan, that trauma represents a “verpasste Begegnung mit dem Realen” (Assmann 14). Assmann expands upon Lacan’s argument, focusing on the bidirectional intermingling of elements both real and imagined, “Trauma erzeugt einen zirkulären phantasmatischen Zustand, in dem das Reale in das Imaginäre einbricht und das Imaginäre das Reale überschwemmt” (Assmann 14).

Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts must be acknowledged as adaptations (or fictionalizations) of events out of their own biographies. But it isn’t just the mixing of fact with invention in these stories that illustrates the loss of the clear distinction between the real and the imagined in the texts, but rather the threat of insanity that threatens both Khider’s protagonist and Barbetta’s. Further, it can be seen through the use of fairy tale elements in Khider’s text and through rips in reality in Barbetta’s text, as explained below.

The loss of the clear distinction between the real and the imagined is bound with the loss of rationality resulting from the traumatic incident. In Khider’s text, his frame narrator is seized by the

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148 “Missed encounter with the real”
149 “Trauma generates a circular, phantasmatic state, in which the real breaks into the imaginary and the imaginary overflows into the real.” - Leys also writes about the believability of a narrative. What is important is not just the report itself, but also the process of reporting. The next chapter discusses the narrative writing as process at greater length, but fiction here fulfills two roles at once. First, the introduction of fictional elements into a narrative are, in part, an exercise of power by authors over the creation of the narrative. In this scenario, authors extend their creational powers over a traumatic event beyond the rules dictated by reality. At the same time, however, fantasy also works as a buffer between the author and the events, that, when employed in the text, serve to further distance the story itself from the reality of the event.
feeling of having completely lost his orientation, such that he himself alludes to insanity: “Dieses Gefühl dauert ein paar Minuten an, oder waren es mehr als nur ein paar Minuten? Nicht das erste Mal, dass ich die Orientierung verloren habe. Seit einigen Jahren schon erlebe ich ab und zu diesen Wahnsinn” (7).\textsuperscript{150} The madness experienced by the frame narrator is more closely related to the loss of temporal and spatial orientation, as is directly explained by the narrator. In Barbetta’s text, this madness experienced by the protagonist-narrator, Mariana, manifests directly within the text. Those places in which the narrative slips from a clear and rational perspective are accompanied by a telling switch of narrative-perspective. When the narratives switches from the third-person to the first-person, the narrative itself slips into abstraction, into the language of poetry: “Eines Nachts mit klarem Sternenhimmel gebe ich mich: du fängst mich: auf, in der Luft. Entrollte Papierschlange” (293).\textsuperscript{151} Accompanying this broken syntax is Mariana’s own paranoia, particularly in the final chapter, which is narrated entirely in the first-person: “Hat dich jemand beobachtet? Ist dir jemand gefolgt?” (326).\textsuperscript{152}

With Khider, the loss of the distinction between the real and the imagined is particularly emphasized by fairy tale-elements within the text. Particularly when the embedded narrator relates especially tragic developments and events, the narrative takes on fairy tale elements. In the final embedded chapter, for example, titled “Wiederkehr der Gesichter”, or “Return of the Faces”, the narrator explains how the faces of friends and loved ones haunt him after they have died. He also explains the developments that accompanied Saddam Hussein’s presidency. Excluding an agent of the action, the narrator describes the changes as though they were magical apparitions. He explains how images of Saddam appeared in all the houses and schools and in all the streets quite suddenly,

\textsuperscript{150} “This feeling lasts for a few minutes, or was it more than a few minutes? Not the first time I’ve lost my orientation. For a few years now, I’ve experienced this madness, from time to time.”

\textsuperscript{151} “Once upon a clear, starry night, I give myself: you catch me: up, in the air. Unfurled paper snake.”

\textsuperscript{152} “Did someone see you? Did anyone follow you?”
following this with a fantastic creature exacting terror on the population, “Und durch die Straßen spazierte nun das Dämonenweib, das kleine Kinder stiehlt. Obwohl man es nicht sehen konnte, wusste jeder: Es war schon da” (141). This fantastic explanation would have very real consequences for the embedded narrator, however, as both reading and writing became highly restricted practices during Saddam’s presidency, and the narrator would be imprisoned and tortured because of violations to these restrictions. The terror that the presidency unleashed, threatening both life and language, is motivation for a flight into fairy tale fancy. In addition to the parts of the narrative that focus in on the events understood as causing the traumas experienced by the narrators, the beginning of the very first chapter of the embedded narrative takes on a fairy tale quality as well, as the narrator begins his story with an anecdote about the city of his birth, Bagdad, a city of peace forever besieged by strife. I argued above that trauma makes it possible for one to approach the threshold between reality and fantasy, but in the case of Khider’s narrative, the author also uses the fantastic as a tool for turning back towards the reality of the trauma.

While there are certainly fairy tale elements to Barbetta’s text, including freak storms, uncanny and inexplicable coincidences, or magic mirrors, the loss of the clear distinction between the real and the imagined in the context of trauma is most clearly seen in what I have described as rips or fissures in reality. These fissures in reality illustrate the creative force of trauma within the text. One of the more telling fissures was already explained above, the sentence in which the narrative switches from Analía to Mariana mid-sentence, bringing the narrative to the shock-inducing headache and subsequent slip from reality experienced by Mariana. In Chapter 25, Mariana overhears a conversation between Analía and her fiancé, during which Analía draws Gerardo’s eye on a piece of paper. The chapter subtly emphasizes the loss that is driving Mariana to madness by

153 “And then the demon-wife, who steals the little children, strolled the streets. Although no one could see her, everyone knew: She was already there.”
breaking into at least two possible conclusions, both told in the probable future, but neither as concrete indication of the events that will transpire: “Die Mutter wird eine Hand auf die Schulter der Tochter legen, dem Besuch eine Kusshand zuwerfen, noch hat dieser aber Analía’s Zimmer nicht verlassen, alle drei verharren da und unterhalten sich, bis Mariana leise in die Hände klatscht als Zeichen dafür, daß sie nun bereit ist, aufzubrechen. Die Mutter wird als erste [...]” (251). Although the porous borders between reality and fantasy in Khider’s text seem to help his narrator talk about trauma, in Barbetta’s text they appear rather as innovations to the writing style, in which reality breaks apart into imagined possibilities.

2.d.iii.c. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Productive Effect of Trauma on the Text: Sensory and Fragmentary Traumatic Memory

As a final formative characteristic of trauma, we turn to the sensory and fragmentary elements within either narrative. The NET researchers explained that traumatic memories impart primarily non-declarative information, including images, smells, sounds and other details that appeal to the senses and that are bound with emotions experienced in the trauma. Those traumatic memories consisting primarily of images and other sensory information are fragmentary by very nature of the many details coming together to form the traumatic record. Further, the missing declarative details of time, place, and sequence of events, coupled with the subsequent hormonal response when recalling the event, make it difficult to order the event within one’s narrative past, leaving gaps that Janet recognized as the source of dissociative personalities in his trauma patients. Although both

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154 “The mother will lay a hand on the shoulder of the daughter, throw the visitor a hand to kiss, but she had not yet left Analía’s room, all three remain there and converse, until Mariana quietly claps her hands as a sign that she is ready to leave. The mother will go first [...]”

155 See NET 333. I imagine this has much to do with built in survival mechanisms of sentient beings, allowing them to respond more quickly based on intuition in a potentially life-threatening situation, rather than relying on cognitive functions to process the danger and act. This opinion, however, has not been confirmed by scientific experiment.
Khider and Barbetta allude to the autobiographical nature of their narratives in interviews, this grounding in autobiographical content is also detectable through the fragmentary and sensory-oriented elements within their narratives that accompany traumatic recall within the narrative.

Right from the first page, Khider paints a picture for the senses: “Alles leer wie eine endlose Wüste, nackte Berge oder klares Wasser. Aber auch unheimlich wie der Wald nach einem gewaltigen Gewitter” (7). In a gesture that connects him with his predecessors of the romantic, Khider turns to his experience of the sublime in nature to describe his experience of traumatic recall. Although he does use the term mutterseelenallein to explain his isolation during the traumatic recall, he turns to powerful images from nature that inspire a sense of the sublime for his readers, bridging with words, as Lyotard argued, the gap between imagination in reality. If it is not yet clear that the memories of Khider’s narrator have been saved primarily as images from the narrative itself, the embedded narrator expressly states that this is the case: “Dazu kommt noch eine andere Fähigkeit, eine andere Gnade: Wenn doch einmal etwas Fürchterliches am Rand meines Gedächtnisses kleben bleibt, kann ich es ganz und gar verschönern. All der klebrige Schmutz löst sich in Windeseile auf, und es bleiben nur schöne Bilder, oder besser gesagt, die verschönerten Bilder” (26). The sound of African drums echoing in his head adds further sensory detail, as a gesture towards quickening the readers’ pulse, as the images and sounds combine into a simulation of the traumatic experience. The following page turns again to sensory details, but this time to illustrate the return to life after the traumatic recall. After the drumming subsides, the reader is brought back to the train platform, with the commonplace city-sounds of pigeons, “Bak, bak, bak, buk.” and of school children on excursions, “Lukas, komm zurück” (8).

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156 “Everything empty, like an endless desert, naked mountains or clear water. But also uncanny, like the forest after a powerful storm.”

157 “In addition to that is another skill, another grace: If ever something horrible gets stuck on the edges of my memory, I can completely change it for the better. All of the sticky dirt dissolves in the blink of an eye, and all that’s left are beautiful images, or better yet, images made more beautiful.”
In addition to this sensory detail, which extends beyond the first two pages throughout the narrative, there is also a fragmentary quality to certain parts of Khider’s text that serves to distinguish it from other German authors of Arabic heritage like Rafik Schami or Hussain Al-Mozany, and which marks the text’s strong connection with trauma. In many places of Khider’s narrative, but particularly the frame narrative, the narrative thread breaks off and resumes again. In the frame narrative, this interruption is marked by ellipses, “…” (8). There are three interruptions in the first part of the frame narrative alone: “Auch die Currywurst- und die Hotdogbude sind noch da, die Menschen... 12.40 Uhr”, “Lege ein Heft, ein Buch, eine Schachtel Zigaretten und ein Feuerzeug auf den Tisch und zünde mir eine Zigarette an... 13.02 Uhr”, and “Besser ruhig Blut... 14.20 Uhr” (8-9). After each ellipsis, the narrator reaches out to time markers to provide some order to what appears to be fragmented memory following his traumatic recall. The second part of the frame narrative is also fragmented by ellipses and time marker. This suggests, as these ellipses also exist after the manuscript has been read and rewritten, that trauma continues to affect one’s life, even after concentrated efforts to relate the trauma, but that the practice of ordering memory by time and place (the train platform in Part I of the frame narrative, and the café in Part II), structures the memories, allowing for completion of the narrative. But even the narrative itself, Rasul Hamid’s memories, are marked by their fragmentary nature, as each of the eight chapters begins once again at the start of the narrator’s journey in Bagdad, before concluding in Germany.

Barbetta’s text not only appeals to the senses by means of images portrayed by words, but also through actual images and adaptations to text formatting. While itself not a traumatic memory, Mariana and Gerardo’s first encounter is likely a source of emotional excitement when remembered. This anecdote is full of the fantastic description that marks many scenes within Barbetta’s text, but

158 “Even currywurst and the hotdog stands are still there, the people... 12:40 p.m.”, “I lay a notebook, a book, and a package of cigarettes and a lighter on the table and light a cigarette... 1:02 p.m.”, and “Better cool-blooded... 2:20 p.m.”
also with auditory input, communicated not only through description, but through syllabic representation in the text as well. When Gerardo tries to take a picture of the butterfly that has landed next to Mariana, the reader ‘hears’ “»Beweg dich bitte nicht ... Schschschschschsch..., sonst verscheuchst du sie!« Es folgte das Klack ... sssssrrrrrr eines Fotoapparats” (67). Turning to Mariana’s own reaction to the trauma of seeing her father’s asphyxiated body, she describes for the reader the mess she left on the floor of the library, a mixture of lemon biscuits, waffles, strawberry pieces and chocolate milk, the tastes of her childhood become suddenly unenjoyable and unrecognizable (27). In a further moment of emotional agitation, when Mariana’s mother questions Gerardo’s motives, encouraging her daughter to think more critically of his noncommittal behavior, the text itself modifies, to provide additional auditory input and to simulate the emotional stress of Mariana during this conversation. The dialogue breaks into three columns, one for the utterances of the mother, one for those of the daughter and the sounds of her sewing machine, and the third is reserved for the radio droning in the background about the Bermuda triangle.

> Ich schreie doch nicht! Ich sage nur, wie komisch, nicht? Ich denke darüber nach und finde es etwas seltsam, daß Gerardo am Wochenende nie mit uns zu Mittag ist... Warum denn nicht?
> Mutter, das weißt du doch! Samstagmorgen fährt er meistens in die Bibliothek zu lernen, und am Sonntag läßt er normalerweise zu Hause mit seinen Eltern ttttkkkkkkkkkkkkkkkktktktktktktktktktktktkt In jüngster Zeit kommt es mit zunehmender Häufigkeit zu Ereignissen dieser Art, obwohl die Suchaktionen gründlicher und die Berichte und Aufzeichnungen über solche Vorkommnisse genauer sind als in früheren Jahren (218).

159 “‘Don’t move…. schschschschschsch…, otherwise you’ll scare it away!’ The click... sssssrrrr of the camera followed.”

160 “I’m not yelling! I’m just saying, how odd, don’t you think? I’ve been thinking about it, and I find it strange that Gerardo never eats with us on the weekend… Why not? / tttttttttttttttttttt Mother, you already know that! Saturday morning he usually goes to the library to study, and on Sunday he usually eats with his parents tttttttttttttttttttt / Recently, events of this nature have been happening with increasing frequency, although the search operations have become more extensive and the reports and diagrams regarding such events have become more exact than they’ve been in earlier years.”
More than the sensory experience, it is the fragmented nature of the text itself that points to the influence of trauma on the narrative. All encounters between Mariana and Analía are related in the present tense, but these present-tense episodes are interrupted again and again by memories from the past. These interruptions make it difficult for the reader to maintain a clear understanding of the sequence of events. There are *Stoffmuster* (fabric patterns) following each chapter in the form of images, and in one instance, the other half of dialogue missed in a chapter, that serve to round out and complete the chapters. But despite these efforts to round out the narrative, they also serve to interrupt it, as the reader stops to contemplate how a man surrounded by armless mannequins, for example, is relevant to a chapter in which Analía’s measurements are taken in the alterations shop.

2.d.iii.d. Trauma as Catalyst and Creative Force: Productive Effect of Trauma on the Text

The examples above have demonstrated the ways in which trauma infiltrates a text, not just catalyzing the creative moment through the threat of privation of life and language, but also elementally in the fabric of the narrative, whether this be through the treatment of time, of reality, or of scene descriptions. Both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts support the argument that the characteristics of trauma are in the structure of narrative, in the content, and within the very language of the narrative as well. Research into the physiological and psychological experience of trauma demonstrates why declarative details like time, place and sequence of events, details that register an event as having happened in the past, are largely missing from traumatic memory. This scientific explanation was then illustrated with examples in either text, when past experiences pushed into the present-tense narrative of either protagonist. Not only this, the scientific explanation that trauma complicates the clear distinction between what is real and what is imagined, an argument based on the inability of the sufferer of trauma to distinguish between traumatic recall and reality, is further present in the texts. Coming from an Arabic background, Khider is most likely well acquainted with fairy tale form, providing a seemingly logical explanation for the fairy tale elements
within his text. In fact, Mustafa Al-Slaiman argues that the literature written in German by immigrants from the Arabic tradition, with the exception of Adel Karasholi, Suleman Taufig, and Ryad Alabied, can largely be read as fairy tale (237). However, it bears noting here that, barring the THC-induced hallucinations of the protagonist having a “heart-to-heart” with his case worker in *Ohrfeige*, Khider’s last two novels are devoid of this flirtation with fantasy. In fact, these later works are very strictly grounded in reality. Similarly, Barbeta comes from a tradition of magical realism, herself well acquainted with Borges, quoting his love for the German language in an interview.

Rather than re-examining fairy tales and magical realist tales here for origins in traumatic experiences, it is more productive for this argument to focus on the peculiarity of the flights into fantasy taking place in Khider’s and Barbeta’s first novels. Because the borders between the real and the imagined are most flexible, or porous, when the plot of either narrative approaches traumatic memories, these digressions from reality, whether intended or not, should be read in conjunction with the traumatic experiences they accompany. Finally, the very nature of traumatic memory, the highly sensory and fragmentary details, made a strong impression on both Khider’s and Barbeta’s narratives. And while these descriptions within the text speak to the traumatic experiences of the narrators, the narratives themselves also provide readers with a simulation of the experience of trauma, following in the tradition of sublime art (literary or graphic) as argued by Lyotard above.

2.e. Conclusions

Examining trauma in literature is important in order to better understand its ability to both catalyze and influence the literary process. As was explained in the theoretical discussion earlier in this chapter, Eaglestone argued that trauma and the way human beings experience trauma can serve as a productive research paradigm, not only in the fields of memory studies and of fiction, but throughout the humanities. Trauma employed as a research paradigm explores the manner in which humans think and talk about themselves. According to Eaglestone, trauma functions as both the
source of and the destruction of knowledge, and it influences the way man experiences time. Further, the questions provoked by trauma are fundamentally existential, persisting through the course of a life, and very closely tied with questions of ethics. Not only does traumatic experience provoke questions of one’s agency over environment, essentially a question of self-understanding, but trauma also challenges one’s understanding of the world itself, moving from questions of appropriate behavior in society to questioning the existence of God and an understanding of order in the world. Using trauma as a lens for examining literature throughout the humanities accordingly yields information about the systems of personal and social beliefs that provide structure to the human experience through their destruction.

Those parts of the narrative especially influenced by the trauma of the narrator elucidate the dynamic of knowledge in creation by focusing on the protagonists’ developing relationships with time and their struggle to understand the situations in which their subjectivity has been threatened. Further, because the source of the traumas related in the texts traces back to the dictatorships in both Iraq and Argentina during Khider’s and Barbetta’s respective childhood, we gain vital information of how knowledge is linked to power structures within the state. Khider’s narrator explains how reading and writing outside of the university was suddenly prohibited; Barbetta’s text, requires some contextual knowledge in order to understand the violence of the dictatorship veiled by a child’s memories. The deaths of both her grandfather and father, for example, and her boyfriend’s disappearance, with appropriate context, read as relating directly back to the military dictatorship in Argentina. The grandfather throws himself out a window; the father asphyxiates in his office, apparently from the sting of a wasp; and Gerardo disappears into the Bermuda triangle, a reference to the Pyramid structure of the state. However, as Barbetta explains in my interview with her, the explanation for the violence and disappearances remains safely hidden underneath the manhole covers from page one. Reflected in the text in metaphor, we see Mariana assume an
advantage over Analía by gaining more information about her, information she then uses to lay her trap for Analía in the wedding dress.

An examination of the traumatic experience of trauma yields expanded insight into the human experience of self, world and time; it also raises questions regarding the ethics of literature written about traumatic experiences. Both literary scholars and historians critically examine the credibility of trauma narratives. Not only does the traumatic experience influence texts by undermining the border between the real and the imagined, but many authors, learning from this experience, harness the porous border between the real and the imagined to narrative effect. Khider, for example, uses the fantastic figure of the Dämonenweib to describe the terror accompanying the Hussein presidency, and Barbetta’s euphemizes the grandfather’s suicide/murder with an explanation of his wanting to fly. On the one hand, there is the ethical question of the appropriateness of questioning the validity of a trauma narrative. After all, Janet and the NET researchers both argue that being heard and believed by a sympathetic and understanding listener is an important part of the recovery process from trauma. Openly questioning the authenticity of the narrative itself could produce negative repercussions for the traumatized. However, poignantly illustrated in the literature arising from the trauma of the concentration camps of World War II, when trauma narratives represent one of the few sources of information about specific traumas, there is an obligation to critically examine these sources to redefine the borders between the real and the imagined.

One last ethical question bears consideration, however brief, regarding the violence surfacing in both texts. In Khider’s text, this violence is largely self-inflicted, as he tries to burn himself alive with his writings immediately following his release from prison (31). But in Barbetta’s text, we see this violence in the child Mariana’s attempts to stamp out what she thinks are slugs oozing out of the manhole covers (7), or when she plays at incarcerating ‘criminals’ in her Blaulicht Spiel (30), or again,
when she finds the letter in Analía’s handbag and raises her voice with unspoken promises of violence to Analía at the conclusion of their phone call, “Bei Gott, ich will dich strafen für dein Tun: Durch die ganze Stadt sollst du geschleift werden, danach werde ich dich enthaupten, die die Hand abschlagen und dir die Augen aushacken. Mögen alle Leiden der Welt so zahlreich über dich und deinesgleichen kommen!” (287). This final threat serves as evidence that ‘hell hath no fury like the wrath of a woman scorned’, but it also belies the repercussions of experiencing trauma. Personally experiencing the violence of trauma, particularly during the formative years of childhood and adolescence, makes one more prone to responding to stressful situations with violence. The NET researchers briefly explain how persistently addressing aggressive behavior in their therapy sessions helped to regulate their patients’ fascination with violence and to control future acts of violence (346).

Concluding the ethical questions raised by trauma narratives, I transition now from the discussion of trauma and traumatic experience as a catalyst for and a creative force in the writing process, to the writing process itself as a tool for moving towards catharsis after trauma.
Chapter 3: The Healing Relationship between Trauma, the Author and the Text

Bessel A van der Kolk explains in his *The Body Keeps the Score* that, although “the language center of the brain is about as far removed from the center for experiencing one’s self as is geographically possible” (237), writing provides an avenue for gaining access to one’s “inner world of feelings” (238). As was discussed in the previous chapter, trauma causes a very real disconnect between the events one experiences and one’s ability to speak about these events. But this same disconnecting impulse also serves as a catalyzing force for beginning the writing process, then further influencing the text that is created. This next chapter examines writing as both a process as well as a product, and its role in therapeutic application. As in the last chapter, the discussion begins with theory. Trauma theorists in psychology as well as in the literary sciences identify the process of writing traumatic experiences as a means for bringing about an alleviation of the symptoms of trauma. Janet and Freud even argued that the narrative process had the potential to heal trauma (Leys 105). The process of narrating brings about the possibility of officially reporting a trauma, of expressing the truth. It itself is an important part of recovery, as is the feeling of being heard. Active listening creates an opportunity for renegotiating one’s understanding of the world and of the self in conjunction with this understanding, conditions auspicious for the development of identity. Finally, the narrative process, and particularly the product of the narrative process, present an opportunity for the creation of distance between the narrator and the past traumatic experience. From this theoretical discussion, this chapter turns to the research conducted by the creators of the Narrative Exposition Theory, in order to gain an understanding for the therapeutic application of the narrative process. The final section of this chapter then turns to Khider’s and Barbeta’s texts in order to explain why both texts read as narratives and what both narrators gain through the narration, or
narrative process, before concluding with important ethical questions that arise in conjunction with trauma narratives.

3.a. Theory: Why narrative words heal

The NET researchers describe storytelling as an age-old practice that has allowed humans to not only transfer their histories to subsequent generations, but also to establish the cultural fundament upon which communities are built (328). One of the oldest recorded stories, *Gilgamesh*, demonstrably tells of trauma and loss, as the titular character mourns the loss of his dear friend, Enkidu, and undertakes a journey to make meaning of his death. In addition to the cultural value of storytelling, in unifying a cultural group, there are important personal benefits to the storytelling process as well. In the research that follows, I make the case for three main functions of the narrative-writing process that lead to personally-experienced benefits to the narrator of a personally-experienced trauma. Not only does the narrative process provide an important context from which to present the truth about a traumatic experience, but it also establishes an important dynamic of listening that both facilitates and validates the telling. Finally, the dynamic of the narrative process works to establish distance between the narrator and the narrated content, which initially facilitates the transmission of the story, and ultimately affords the narrator a sense of recovery from the symptoms of trauma.

Barbetta explained in my interview with her that she began writing at a time when she had nothing left to lose. Barbetta countered this existential threat of being unemployed and penniless in a foreign country with a counter-impulse, one towards creation and life. The indicator of traumatic return is represented in both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts by the term *mutterseelenallein*, a moment

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161 The term *mutterseelenallein* was introduced and explained in the last chapter. The literal translation is along the lines of ‘a mother’s lonely soul’, and is used colloquially in German to describe a state of
that exists at the intersection of two oppositional impulses. For Barbetta, and for the protagonists of both Khider’s and Barbetta’s works, this is represented by the existential threat and the opposed impulse to create life in story form. In his *Archive Fever*, Derrida identified these oppositional forces as “the place of originary and structural breakdown of […] memory” (11). While Derrida here was referring more specifically to the creation of the archive, that is, the physical and also metaphorical repository of memory, this explanation lends itself well to the creational moment of the autobiographical trauma narrative as an archive of traumatic memory. Connecting this discussion with Freud’s explanation of the death drive and its oppositional drive for life, Derrida explains the threat of forgetting as the natural progression towards death and eradication. The counter impulse to this, the oppositional force, then, is represented by the effort made to counter the eradication of memory, which Derrida refers to as the creation of archive as a preserver of memory.

Drawing parallels between Derrida’s explanation of the generation of archive and that of the trauma narrative (as a type of archive) helps reveal the generational process of writing at hand. Whereas the death drive for Derrida’s archive was represented by the eradication of memory, as was discussed in the last chapter with trauma as an experience of the sublime, the death drive with regards to trauma is represented by a similar lack of knowledge, the threat to light, language, and life.\(^\text{162}\) On the one hand, the return to the time of a life-threatening trauma represents Freud’s death drive. The return to the trauma initiates a repetition of the experience, something that may be initially understood as a counter to the pleasure principle. On the other hand, evidence of Freud’s life-drive arises from this intersection simultaneously, in the form of the desire to create. Uniquely, in both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts, this dynamic plays out in the lives of their protagonists, the utter loneliness, a ‘lonely soul’ in English. Historically, the term is a relic from religious refugees in Germany, the Huguenots, whose French plaintive ‘moi tout seule’, myself all alone, was integrated phonetically into the German as ‘mutterseel’.

\(^\text{162}\) See Lyotard, “The Sublime and the Avant-Garde”, pp. 204.
frame narrator and Mariana, respectively. Both protagonists are met with traumas that pose an existential threat to them by challenging their sanity, as was discussed in the last chapter. Counter to this threat, either protagonist displays a drive to create that results in the texts, which themselves can be understood as narratives.

3. a.i. Presenting the truth

Trauma narratives come into existence out of a traumatic experience or a series of traumatic experiences, something discussed in the last chapter. Closely bound with trauma is the feeling of speechlessness, a term I defined in the last chapter as encompassing not just the loss of language but the loss of personal voice as well. This feeling has a few contributing factors, including the hormonal response to trauma, and its repercussions for memory. Although a moderate hormonal response is actually favorable to memory retention, a (traumatic) experience that elicits too great a hormonal response hinders the retention of declarative details about the event, details of time and place that are closely linked with language. The re-release of hormones when remembering the trauma further prevents the development and retention of these declarative details in association with the event. Social factors also contribute to the speechlessness felt by victims of trauma. Susan J. Brison associates her experience of speechlessness following a trauma with the aversion of listeners to hearing stories of trauma, including the aversion of the self as listener. Accordingly, the process of

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163 In their chapter, “Narrative Exposition”, in Posttraumatische Belastungsstörungen, authors F. Neuner, M. Schauer, and T. Elbert explain that levels of the stress hormone, kortisol, exceeding the mid-range, negatively impact the brain’s ability to retain autobiographical contextual information, that is, the declarative details corresponding to time, place and sequence of events (331).

164 “It is debatable, however, whether that is the case, or whether the problem is simply others’ refusal to hear survivors’ stories, which makes it difficult for survivors to tell them even to themselves.” (Brison 45-46)
writing a trauma narrative ameliorates this constriction, giving testimony of the events to oneself and leaving a concrete legacy for others to read.

Therapy, such as that proposed by Narrative Exposition Theory, and practiced by Janet and Freud, seeks to generate the missing declarative information that transforms event into narrative history. Janet explains that normal memory is an action, the process of telling a story. In order to successfully integrate an event into one’s own timeline, which Janet refers to as liquidation, event must become story, it must be externalized through action and internalized through words: “A situation has not been satisfactorily liquidated […] until we have achieved, not merely an outward reaction through our movements, but also an inward reaction through the words we address to ourselves, through the organization of the recital of the event to others and to ourselves, and through the putting of this recital in its place as one of the chapters in our personal history” (662).

In agreement with Janet, trauma scholar Judith Lewis Herman emphasizes the importance of integrating traumatic memory rather than expunging it, “The goal of recounting the trauma story is integration, not exorcism. In the process of reconstruction, the trauma does undergo a transformation, but only in the sense of becoming more present and more real. The fundamental premise of the psychotherapeutic work is a belief in the restorative power of truth-telling” (181).

The trauma narrative then provides the appropriate medium and context for this restorative truth-telling; the medium being the narrative itself, the context the social dynamic that facilitates the creation of narrative.

While Janet and Herman grounded their arguments in the context of psychoanalytic therapy, psychoanalysis researcher Brigitte Boothe examined the creation of trauma narratives outside of the context of therapy, into the context of self-healing. This latter context relates more closely to Khider and Barbetta and their respective narrator-protagonists, whose narratives arose out of an encounter with trauma to cathartic effect. The narrative process in general, but specifically a self-induced
narrative process, gives weight to experiences; it represents the transformation of memory into history. Narration brings heretofore unknown, even intentionally concealed, information to the surface. The narrative process requires a narrator, an audience, and content for the narrative. But the narrative as a healing process itself is contingent upon the successful transmission of traumatic life-experiences. What Boothe describes as the creation of history, however, literary scholars of trauma and loss in poetry, Achim Aurnhammer and Thorsten Fitzon, describe as transformation. Central to both their understandings of the healing effect of narrative after trauma and loss is social transference of the story.

3.a.ii. Constructing identity through the narrator-audience dynamic

The interpersonal dynamics that facilitate the writing of trauma narratives, whether actual as in therapeutic proceedings, or assumed as they are in self-directed trauma narratives, bring about both physiological as well as important psychological developments. Psychologist Bessel A. van der Kolk explains that communication generates a beneficial physiological response, “Feeling listened to and understood changes our physiology; being able to articulate a complex feeling, and having our feelings recognized, lights up our limbic brain and creates an ’aha moment‘. In contrast, being met by silence and incomprehension kills the spirit” (232). In addition to this physiological response, the dynamic that develops between the narrator and his audience establishes a context that allows for the negotiation and development of one’s understanding of the world and of the self within that understanding of the world. Regaining control over one’s life story through the narrative process, and of redefining the role of the self within a newly developed understanding of the world, establishes potential for conceptualizing new identity and realizing this identity, as we see in Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts, through the creation of a doppelganger. This psychological component of communication addresses the considerable gaps in the autobiography that NET researchers argue
cause breaks and uncertainties in the development of identity (NET 333). Creating narrative allows for the gaps in one’s autobiography caused by trauma to be bridged, subsequently leading to the recreation of identity. This recreation of identity is what led Freud to reconcile the compulsion to repeat traumatic memories with his concept of the pleasure principle, that man’s actions are governed by his direct relation to pleasure and pain (34). The recovery of lost or challenged identity is deemed pleasurable.

In her book *Cultured Violence*, Rosemary Jolly examines the social implications of the narrative process. In apartheid South Africa, narratives were invited into the courtroom in an effort to repair social fissures. In agreement with my arguments above, Jolly identifies two poles to the narrative processes taking place within the courtrooms to therapeutic effect. On the one hand, listening, which Jolly refers to as, “ubuntu”, describes “the social, ethical and imaginative concept that locates reciprocity as the defining aspect of one’s identity” (26). On the other hand, the process of telling narrative is of itself therapeutic, not necessarily requiring social confirmation.

The researchers of the Narrative Exposition Theory argue similar findings of the social implications of public narrative practices. In their research, they found that the narration of traumatic events had a corrective impact on the traumatized’s relationship experience, allowing for old wounds to be healed and powers of self-healing to be activated (345). Further, being heard signaled one’s arrival in that social group. The first chapter of this dissertation conducted a historical survey of literature written in the context of migration, identifying the motivations of those Chamisso Prize-winning authors who write in German as a foreign language. One of the most prevalent motivations was the desire to be heard in their new social group. According to the NET researchers, this dual process of narrating and listening is vitally instrumental in (re)negotiating one’s

165 “Dem Lustprinzip wird dabei nicht widersprochen; es ist sinnfällig, daß die Wiederholung, das Wiederfinden der Identität, selbst eine Lustquelle bedeutet.” (Freud 34)
understanding of the world, and of oneself within that context (328). "Der Austausch mit anderen Menschen über die Ereignisse ist dann eine wichtige Strategie, um die Bedeutung des Ereignisses verstehen zu können, und um die eigenen Überzeugungen, das Selbstbild und das Weltbild an die Geschehnisse anpassen zu können" (329).

Reorienting one’s understanding of self and of the world is essential for identity development after a traumatic occurrence. Like the NET researchers argued above, the act of narration should be understood as an important part of the establishment of identity. Freud argued in his *Lustprinzip* that the recovery of identity after a trauma had disrupted it was the key aspect that reconciled the compulsion to repeat unpleasant memories of trauma with his pleasure principle. Among a number of benefits of narration in addition to the recovery of identity, Boothe includes the ability to create a personal world, to give value to the experience, to transform what transpired, to share one’s burden with others, to instill belief, to create a narrative form, and finally to influence the narrative plot (70). Not only does the act of narration establish events of importance, transforming memory into history, but rather, narration also allows for the people affected by the event to be personalized. The personalization takes place when the traumatized overcome objectification, by becoming the subjects of their own stories.

The traumas of Khider and Barbetta are, whether explicitly stated or implied, fact. Their protagonists, at least in the case of Khider, experience traumas within a fictionalized reality, a reality augmented by *Dämonenweiber* and white rabbits. The credibility of a narrative is thus put into question, because it does, in fact, present an interpretation of and abstraction of reality. When constructing a narrative, the author must decide which events to include and which relations of causality to recognize, thus interpreting reality; the inclusion of fantastic elements to aid the

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166 "The exchange with other people about these events is then an important strategy for being able to make sense of the event, and in order to orient one’s convictions, their understanding of self and of the world, to what transpired.”
narration is representative of an abstracted reality. (For lack of a better term, I will use the term fictionization to refer to the process of interpreting and abstracting reality.) But, Ruth Leys argues that the ability of trauma narrative to reveal self-truth is not so important as the opportunity for self-discovery: “Viewed in this perspective, Janet’s well-known disagreement with Freud over the sexual content of psychoanalysis seems less significant than their agreement that, if narration cures, it does so not because it infallibly gives the patient access to a primordially personal truth but because it makes possible a form of self-understanding even in the absence of empirical verification” (117). While loss of credibility may seem a high price to pay for creative license when writing a trauma narrative, as will be discussed at greater length in the final section assessing the ethical questions posed by trauma narratives, there is an important purpose for the fictionization strategies of the authors of these narratives. Fictionalization of traumatic events allows authors the opportunity to come to a better understanding of self. This begs the question, whether literature in fact makes it possible to represent the unbearable precisely because of its capacity to represent abstracted reality.

3.a.iii. Establishing distance

In her book, Trauma, Leys explains how narration helps to establish distance between the narrator and the narrated event. “For Janet in this mode, memory proper was more than dramatic repetition or miming: it involved the capacity to distance oneself from oneself by representing one’s experiences to oneself and others in the form of narrated history” (11). The NET researchers describe a similar process, “Die Erzählung wird vollständiger, die Distanz zum Damals größer” (340), or, the more complete a trauma narrative becomes, the greater the distance becomes between the traumatized and their trauma. This distance is represented by a complex combination of psychological perspectives, as the trauma is simultaneously relegated to past memory, safely housed within language and further contained, or bound, in written form on the narrative page. Boothe
explains this creation of distance as being based on time and existence. With regards to time, the narrative establishes a direct line between the past catastrophe and the present. By doing so, one’s existence is stabilized in the present. Meanwhile, the trauma is removed from the present and transferred to the past.

Whereas the scholars above argue that distance is primarily established through the transference of the traumatic event into words and narrative form, I argue that the integration of fantastic detail into their narratives plays an important part in the establishment of distance to the trauma as well. This integration allows for the content of a narrative to be distanced from reality, to the benefit of both the author and the reader. Because the nature of traumatic events makes them unpalatable to both author and reader, the introduction of the fantastic provides relief by distancing the trauma from reality, from concrete actuality, and housing it within an abstracted form of reality. Through the abstraction, reality is subjuncted into what might happen. The fantasy thus, by allowing a narrator and a reader their disbelief, nonetheless shares the experience as something that might have happened. The story is shared, and the permissibility of disbelief paradoxically facilitates the process of believing. While the presence of fantasy in both their first novels classify Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts as modern-fairy tale or a magical-realist novel, respectively, the work these fictionalization strategies do in conjunction with trauma provides compelling support for their as reception as trauma narratives.

Dominick LaCapra also discusses distancing techniques within literature, specifically of authors J. M. Coetzee and W. G. Sebald, in his *Narrative of Trauma*. Using Coetzee’s and Sebald’s novels as examples, LaCapra explains how literary writing about traumatic events can establish sufficient distance to the content in order for the trauma to be processed. Sebald and Coetzee are both heirs to profound social traumas within their countries, experiences they strongly associate with their respective native languages. For these two authors, it was enough to establish a geographic
distance between themselves and the location of the social traumas in order to be able to write about their experiences in their respective native tongues. Like Sebald and Coetzee, Khider and Barbetta closely associate the social traumas of their countries of origin with their native languages (“Nelly”) (Gruber). However, unlike Sebald and Coetzee, who write/wrote in their native languages though living abroad in a self-imposed exile, Khider and Barbetta found the geographic distance insufficient for tackling the traumatic content of their narratives. Khider and Barbetta both made the decision to write their respective narratives in German as a foreign language, reporting that German provided them with sufficient protection to the traumatic content of their narratives through the linguistic and emotional distance to the content of their narratives it afforded.

3.b. Better understanding the process through NET research

Why do words heal? Particularly since the early twentieth century, researchers have examined narratives to better understand how people make meaning of their lives. The researchers of the Narrative Exposition Theory intentionally set narrative creation as the main tool of their therapy, as narratives provide a framework for recalling, organizing and making meaning of traumatic experiences.

3.b.i. Narrative Exposition Theory

NET makes use of narrative as therapy in order to help rehabilitate trauma-survivors and to alleviate their symptoms. This therapy was originally developed for use in crisis and war zones, conditions in which traumatic stress is commonplace, occurring frequently, if not on a permanent basis (334). The researchers have since put their therapy to good use with Germany’s growing population of refugees.
Turning events into stories and histories is an age-old tradition readily evidenced by *The Bible* as well as the *Gilgamesh* legend. The practice of narrating and sharing a story, as was argued before, presents narrators and listeners with the opportunity to realign their understanding of self and the world with the information they receive through the stories they have told or heard and subsequent reaction to these stories. It is in these moments that cultural norms are also established, challenged or confirmed. However, NET researchers argue that a person who has been traumatized in a clinical sense is unable to report about a traumatic experience (329). The trauma is still too real for the traumatized, they argue. To address this inability, NET therapy guides the reconstruction of autobiographical memory after a traumatic event, or a series of traumatic events, within the context of the life story of the traumatized (329). Returning briefly to explanations from Chapter 2, the episodic memory is divided into two parts. The cold memory retains declarative details, like time, place and the sequence of events, whereas the hot memory retains sensory-perceptual details. Resulting from the traumatic event, the overwhelming hormone response of fright during the trauma hinders the retention of declarative details,\(^ {167}\) details that mark an event as happening in the past. Because of this hindrance, memories of the trauma remain firmly housed within the present and unleash a renewed hormonal response. Within the narrative exposition therapy, the therapists endeavor to help their traumatized patients organize retained sensory-perceptual details of a trauma,

\(^{167}\) Freud makes the distinction between three types of fear in *Lustprinzip*: “Angst bezeichnet einen gewissen Zustand wie Erwartung der Gefahr und Vorbereitung auf dieselbe, mag sie auch eine unbekannte sein; Furcht verlangt ein bestimmtes Objekt, vor dem man sich fürchtet; Schreck aber bekennt den Zustand, in den man great, wenn man in Gefahr kommt, ohne auf sie vorbereitet zu sein, betont das Moment der Überraschung” (9). Whereas *Angst* might be understood as the anxiety that precedes an expected fear, *Furcht* describes the fear one feels for a certain object. *Schreck*, however, which might be associated with fright in English, is an unexpected fear that comes upon a person as a surprise. Accordingly, I have used the term ‘fright’ to describe the unexpected fear caused by a traumatic event.
or series of traumas, into a framework of constructed explicit details and facts. The success of this exercise then orders traumatic experience into memory of the past.\textsuperscript{168}

The therapy itself is carried out over a series of sessions in which individual moments of a traumatic experience, or a series of traumatic experiences, are brought into chronological order, preparing them for integration into the traumatized patient’s autobiography. With every meeting, the timeline is reviewed, edited and expanded. The therapists provide their patients with small objects, like rocks or flowers, to facilitate the construction of the timeline. The patient chooses a rock or flower to represent a detail in the timeline, a concretization of memory that allows the patient to order painful events with greater ease. This is reflective of the emotional distance argued above created by the housing of traumatic event within language. Assmann, whose work served as the basis for creating a definition of trauma in this dissertation, also references the work of trauma therapists who make use of the dimension of the symbolic in their therapy with trauma-patients. Although she does not refer to the work done by the NET researchers directly, her explanations resound deeply with this use of small objects in the NET therapy (Assmann 14). Assmann refers to the work of transforming fractured memory into consciousness and then processing this either through words or pictures in order to create a narrative, the process of which then integrates the experience as a whole into memory. This mixture of words and images, or of words and small objects, as is the case in the NET therapy, identifies an important dynamic within the therapy: the power of symbolic language to help distance the traumatized from their traumatic experiences.

At every sitting, the NET therapist records further developments of the trauma narrative; as the story grows, so does the distance between the traumatized and their trauma (NET 340). As was explained above, this therapy was first intended for war zones and areas of crisis, places in which

\textsuperscript{168} “Strictly speaking, then, one who retains a fixed idea of a happening cannot be said to have a ‘memory’ of the happening. It is only for convenience that we speak of it as a ‘traumatic memory’” (Janet 663).
abuses to human rights are more frequent, in order to document these abuses for use in enforcing justice. As soon as the narratives created over the course of the therapy sessions are complete, the therapists make it a point of signing the completed document with witnesses, thus giving the document weight as official testimony. Their self-described intention with this ceremonial conclusion of the therapy is both the official validation of the person who gave the testimony as well as the official acknowledgment and acceptance of the traumatized of these events within their life story (346).

3.b.ii. How does the therapy work?

The various studies examining the impact of narrative exposition therapy report predominantly positive results. Typically, there is a marked reduction in PTSD, or post-traumatic-stress symptoms, as well as an improvement of mourning symptoms and depression. Some studies even reported improvement from physical complaints (NET 343). Many patients reported reaching a feeling of catharsis at the end of their therapy.

The therapy works in a number of different ways. According to the NET researchers, and in congruence with my arguments about the effects of trauma narrative writing on trauma symptoms, the act of declaring the truth appears to play a deciding role. The interpersonal component of having an audience is also important and helps with the reestablishment of one’s understanding of the world and of the self. Finally, the reconstruction of one’s own autobiography remains the central task of the therapy, which itself effects a number of positive outcomes. Seen as a whole, the narrative exposition therapy makes it possible for the reformulation of one’s own identity after trauma, as will be explained in the sections that follow.
3.b.ii.a. Declaring the truth/Validation

The therapy resolves with the official signing of the autobiography of the traumatized as a report and witness statement. Initially, NET therapy was developed in war and crisis zones to address the PTSD of people suffering from chronic stress. By signing the document, the traumatic event, or events, are confirmed as having actually happened to the traumatized patient. The officiality of the document also has the power to initiate legal proceedings, for example, in order to identify and prosecute cases of human rights abuse, particularly in war zones. Jolly discusses the use of narrative in legal proceedings conducted by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in South Africa following the violence of Apartheid. She explains narrative analysis itself in official employment as being potentially cathartic, not just for the individual sufferer of a trauma, but also for the social group that has suffered under the trauma as well. She writes: “Narrative analysis can enable us to understand harm done that exceeds the limitation of the verifiable in legal terms and the limitation of the accountable in terms of that which is socially sanctioned. Further, narrative has the potential to accommodate a dynamic of reciprocity that frames stories of wrongdoing as offering possibilities, for their narrators and listeners, of complicity and of transformation” (5).

3.b.ii.b. The interpersonal component

The interpersonal component of the therapy works in conjunction with the creation of the narrative report of the traumatized. Similar to the way a formal report serves to help others understand and validate another’s traumatic experience, the process of creating that report helps the narrator to understand the event itself, and as something that has happened in the past (the establishment of temporal distance). Part of this understanding includes reconciling the traumatic experience with one’s understanding of the world and of the self within that world understanding. The NET researchers explain that the exchange with others about an event is an important strategy for
understanding not just traumatic events, and for adjusting one’s convictions and understanding of 
self and the world in alignment with the events (329).

Both the NET researchers and Brison argue the importance of the interpersonal component 
in recovering from trauma in their respective articles. The NET therapy presents traumatized 
patients with the chance to order their memories, to give voice to them, and, through the exchange 
with another person, to make sense of them. Effective communication, together with an 
understanding and impartial ear, makes it possible for the traumatized to gain corrective relationship 
experience, thus restoring trust in one’s fellow man. Whereas a traumatic event inflicted by another 
person negatively impacts the ability of a traumatized person to trust others, the positive interaction 
with a therapist validating feelings of shock and outrage over poor-treatment provides the 
opportunity, post-trauma, to reestablish trust-relationships with other people. This subsequently 
leads to the rehabilitation of the patient’s understanding of the world and the self, paving the way 
for self-healing (NET 345). Physical violence, particularly violence unprovoked, disrupts one’s 
understanding of the world and their expectations for how they will be treated within this 
understanding. The NET therapy constructs an environment, in which these experiences can not 
only be brought to light, but also discussed. It is not enough to merely report the event itself, but 
rather, the NET patients are encouraged to explore their personal feelings and experiences in 
conjunction with the explicit details about the event. Through this exploration, the traumatized 
come to understand and forgive themselves for their inability to prevent the trauma, gaining a 
renewed understanding of self, as well as developing a new understanding for the world which 
accounts for the occurrence of trauma.

3.b.ii.c. Constructing an autobiography

As was already briefly discussed above and in the previous chapter, memories of traumatic 
experiences lack temporal and spatial moorings within the episodic memory, as well as information
corresponding to the sequence of events.\textsuperscript{169} According to NET researchers, the goal of narrative exposition is reconstructing the autobiographic memory of the traumatic experience within the context of one’s life story (329). This reconstruction is accompanied by a number of effects that together comprise what many patients of NET therapy describe as catharsis. Included among these effects are the establishment of distance between the traumatized and the traumatic content through the creation of narrative; an alleviation of the reaction to remembered traumas, especially through the act of controlled repetition (habituation); as well as the interruption or reformation of fear-networks through the establishment of declarative details in association with the traumatic event.

The NET researchers observed in their treatments that the distance between their patients and those patients’ remembered traumas grew as their narratives became more complete (340). What is important to recognize here are the active steps taken by patients of the therapy as narrators of their own life stories to order frequently-relived traumas into their memories and into the past. Because of the effect traumatic experience has on the creation of memory through hormone response, and because unprocessed traumatic experiences re-release the hormone response to trauma, subsequent automatic efforts (Freud’s compulsion to repeat) to integrate the event into the memory are unsuccessful. The creation of the narrative within the framework of a timeline, and particularly with the help of symbolic placeholders like the stones and flowers used in the NET therapy, helps the narrator to distance themselves from the traumatic content by actively affixing declarative information to the emotional memory, such as time, place and sequence of events. The completion of the narrative reflects the transfer of the traumatic memory, as isolated experience,

\textsuperscript{169} Here, temporal and spatial refer to the lack of declarative details about the traumatic event, ordering it with linguistic markers in time and space.
from the hot to the cold memory, or the location of episodic memory within the brain, thereby removing the experience from the present and placing it in the past.\(^{170}\)

Another important part of the creation of a trauma narrative is controlled repetition. At every NET therapy session, the incomplete report is reviewed in entirety and further developed. Recalling the discussion of trauma in Chapter 2, Freud explains that the repression of unpleasant (traumatic) experiences into the subconscious leads to the unexpected, and thereby uncontrollable resurfacing of those memories. Freud used the example of a child’s game to illustrate the desire to regain autonomy over an event in which one has felt helplessly stripped of subjectivity through the controlled repetition in the context of a game. The little boy in Freud’s example thus sent his toys away on business trips in an effort to regain control over the unexpected arrivals of his father, which Freud determined had threatened the boy’s relationship with his mother. Careful not to equate the NET therapy with children’s games, I focus instead on the act of repetition. Not only does repetition help to habituate the reaction to trauma, building up one’s tolerance to the release of fright-hormones associated with the trauma, but repetition also allows the traumatized to practice exercising control over the events of their lives by actively restructuring their timelines repeatedly throughout the narrative construction process. Whereas uncontrolled repetition in the form of persistent and unexpected traumatic recall presents a renewed threat to the self-determination of the traumatized, the controlled repetition in the context of NET therapy facilitates the reclamation of self-determination, which is akin to re-becoming the subject of one’s life after trauma has thrown them in the position of object.

\(^{170}\) In the German language, a linguistic distinction is made between individual memories of particular events, \emph{Erinnerungen}, and the site within the brain in which memory is housed, \emph{das Gedächtnis}. This is a difficult distinction to make in English, but typically the plural form distinguishes the individual memories themselves, whereas the singular form of the word refers to the location within the brain.
One further part of controlled repetition is the amelioration of the reaction to traumatic recall. According to Brison, the controlled repetition of a story, telling it over and over again, results in one’s acclimatization to the story and the hormonal response it triggers. While acclimating the patient to the emotional response of traumatic recall is an important part of the NET therapy process, which the researchers refer to as the habituation of fear, there is also the important reconditioning of the fear-network response to remembered traumas enabled by controlled repetition. By gradually taking control, patients of the therapy can essentially retrain the brain’s response to trauma, curbing the hormonal response networks. The researchers explain that the activation of the hot memory through cold representation of the “hot spot”, or the memory that unleashes the hormonal response, causes healing (345). In order to structure one’s autobiography, the traumatized must recall the traumatic experience from their hot memory and negotiate the subsequent hormonal response before ordering the event in their life story. Important details, such as time and place, but also an understanding for the event, such as how it fits into their understanding of the world and their understanding of self, are part of this process of giving structure to the autobiography. In this way, an event is carried over from emotions and sensory information into language and integrated into the cold memory. Subsequent recollections of the event are thus linked to the created narrative, which helps to reestablish the trauma as a memory of the past.

3.b.ii.d. Reconstructing identity

Considerable gaps in the autobiography of the traumatized, caused by the inability to integrate traumatic experiences into their life story, lead to interruptions in their identity. The NET researchers base this conclusion on the fact that people have always narrated their experiences into stories and drawn meaning from this process (344). The difficulty with traumatic experiences is that the person who has experienced the trauma often has difficulty speaking about it, not only because
uncomfortable emotional reactions are called up through the act of remembering, but others also have difficulty hearing about the same experiences due to the difficult nature of the content. The NET therapy works to counteract these difficulties with an auxiliary symbolic language of small objects, the structure of a timeline, and a sympathetic and encouraging ear. The successful completion of the therapy should then integrate traumatic memory into the autobiography, and over the course of this process, lead to the reconstruction and further development of the identity of the individual who has suffered the trauma.

3.b.iii. Conclusions regarding the effectiveness of NET therapy

A sympathetic and validating listener plays an important role in the NET therapy. As was cited above, the NET researchers argue that an exchange with others about traumatic events is an important strategy for making sense of the events and giving them meaning. This process in its entirety has a direct influence on the continued development of one’s understanding of the world and of the self (329). What begs further examination, however, is the role of the sympathetic listener when a trauma narrative is not facilitated by a therapist, but as a solo operation of the narrator.

Although the language the NET therapy is conducted in, whether this be German as a foreign language or in the native language of the patient, does not play a large role in the NET researchers’ interpretation of the therapy and its results, language plays a very important part in the narrative process of both Khider and Barbetta. Both authors report about past traumas experienced in their respective native languages, whether personally or socially experienced, but through the medium of their mutual adopted language. Further, the experiences they relate have no direct correlation with the greater majority of speakers of their adopted language. In an interview I conducted with Barbetta, she reported that she wrote for herself, not having an intended audience in
mind. However, she writes in German with the intention of publishing her texts within the German speaking area. Khider, on the other hand, at least for his latest two works, *Ohrfeige* and *Brief in die Auberginenrepublik*, self-admittedly writes for a German audience. The question persists, however, of who plays the role of the compassionate listener that is so important for the therapy proceedings. Is this role filled by a German-speaking public receptive of such narratives, such that the publishing industry in the German-speaking corners of the world actively publishes these works? Or is the intended listener better understood as the authorial identity created within this adopted language of German?

Further, there is an additional dynamic of trauma narrative construction that goes relatively unaddressed by the NET research, that of control. The process of intentionally integrating past traumas into one’s life story requires a certain degree of control. In the previous chapter, the process of narrating a story is described as an active one, in which control is wrested back from the traumatic experience that has left one feeling objectified. This loss of control is implicit in the term “traumatized”, or a person affected by trauma. The traumatized narrator regains control through the narrative process by assuming the role of decision maker. The construction of narrative requires decisions be made governing which parts of the story will be shared, in which order, and with which interpretation. More important than these executive decisions, however, is the control authors win over their own memory (*Gedächtnis*) through this process. Once the unprocessed past is finally integrated into memory and autobiography, conscious control over this memory replaces the persistent and uncontrolled recall of the traumatic memory. Herman confirms the importance of regaining control as a goal of the therapy in her *Trauma and Recovery*. In her survey of trauma and therapies that address trauma, Herman explains how trauma is experienced, but more importantly, how one can address its symptoms. Herman confirms the role of control, which she calls authority,

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171 The transcripts for this interview can be found in Appendix C.
through psychologist Mary Harvey’s seven criteria of trauma resolution. The third of these seven criteria is exercising authority over one’s memories and making a conscious decision to remember or not, “Third, the person has authority over her memories: she can elect both to remember the trauma and to put memory aside” (213). As one final confirmation of the importance of regaining control through narrative therapy, I turn to Khider’s reading in Lüneburg in June 2016. Here he said that writing makes it possible for him to open and, more importantly, close doors to the past.

3.c. Characteristics distinguishing Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts as trauma narratives

Having examined the effectiveness of trauma narratives from both a theoretical perspective as well a practical perspective, assessing their use in therapy, it is time to establish a precise definition of what a trauma narrative entails. This definition establishes a framework for understanding Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts as trauma narratives. Those characteristics that distinguish literary texts as trauma narratives give insight into the relationship between author and text, particularly within the context of trauma.

The NET researchers define narrations (a term that focuses on the process of narrating rather than the result of the narration) as image-saturated, vivid, emotion-packed narratives that reproduce the inner correlations of the sequence of events (328). In order to create a trauma narration during the therapy process, therapists work with their patients not only to construct concrete information regarding time and location, but to integrate this information with the corresponding, non-concrete details, such as the emotional and psychological state of the traumatized during the event, or sensory details, such as sounds, smells, etc. The narrations created throughout the therapeutic process are thus image-saturated, vivid and emotion-packed, precisely because of the initial sensory-perceptual impressions following a trauma from which the declarative details are later constructed.
In the forward to their essay collection, *Lyrische Traurnarrative, or Lyrical Narratives of Mourning*, Aurnhammer and Fitzon offer a comprehensive definition for understanding narratives that resonates with the definitions provided by the NET researchers. Aurnhammer and Fitzon’s essay collection analyzes the work of authors, whose mourning is initiated by the loss of a child, and who process this mourning through the creation of narrative as a self-administered therapeutic process. The description of the authors contained within this collection draws a number of parallels, with regards to the conditions and the results of mourning narrative writing, with the backgrounds of Khider and Barbetta. Although trauma narratives are not necessarily mourning narratives, mourning narratives are trauma narratives in that the loss of a child as an unexpected traumatic event similarly robs the narrators of these mourning narratives of autonomous control over their lives. Aurnhammer and Fitzon define narratives by their mediality, or the transmission of narrative perspective, as well as being structured by sequentiality, or by an inner or an outer change of state with the passing of time. Their emphasis on narrative perspective and on the formulation of narrative around the events of trauma connect Aurnhammer and Fitzon with the NET researchers, whose therapeutic processes focus on returning voice to the traumatized through the act of structuring traumatic event(s) into a coherent narrative to integrate into the life story of the traumatized. Narrative as a term, however, describes more than just the act of narration, as it also describes the process of transforming isolated event, what Benjamin distinguished as *Ereignis* in his essay on Baudelaire, into narrative history, Benjamin’s *Gedächtnis*.172 Aurnhammer and Fitzon use the

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172 “Unter ‘Narrativ’ verstehen wir in Anlehnung an die übliche Minimaldefinition von Erzählen eine Transformation von Geschehen in Geschichte, welcher das abstrakte Konzept einer Sinnliche zugrunde liegt (Simmel 1922). Ein Narrativ ist definiert durch temporale *Sequentialität* - eine innere oder äußere Zustandsänderung in der Zeit - und perspektivische Vermittlung (*Medialität*) - das ist die Erzählinstanz, der klassische Erzähler (Hahn 2002; Hahn und Schöner 2007). So lassen sich auch elaborierte Gedichte, in denen Verlusterfahrungen aus der Sicht eines Sprecher-Ichs erzählerisch repräsentiert sind, mit narratologischen Methoden analysieren” (9). - “Under the term ‘narrative’ we understand, borrowing from the usual minimal-definition of narration, a transformation of event
term *Transformation* in the German, introducing an element of the fantastic into their definition of narrative, as it describes a process whose agents and processes are difficult to concretize. Expanding upon this idea, Aurnhammer and Fitzon recognize abstraction and a conspicuous amount of sensory detail in the narratives they examined, calling upon the term *Autofiktion* to describe these elements. What distinguishes mourning (and by extension trauma) narratives from narratives not associated with a personal trauma, however, is medial and sequential variability, in the form of multiple voices within narrative and transgressions from temporal sequencing.

Before moving to a more in-depth description of the characteristics of narrative, it is important to clarify the distinction between “narration” and “narrative” as the terms are used in this analysis. Author of the *Dictionary of Narratology*, Gerald Prince, provides three definitions for “narration”: as a synonym for narrative, the production of a narrative, and the act of telling (58). “Narrative”, he defines as “the representation (as product and process, object and act, structure and structuration) of one or more real or fictive EVENTS communicated by one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATORS to one, two, or several (more or less overt) NARRATEES (58)”. Although Prince recognizes that “narrative” and “narration” can be used interchangeably, his definitions underline a distinction between the process and the product of that process; “narration” is the process that produces the “narrative”. In accordance with this distinction, NET researchers use the term “narration”, just as Janet and Freud did before them, to describe the therapeutic process of constructing a narrative. Aurnhammer and Fitzon, as well as Brison, prefer the term “narrative”, as they analyze not the process, but the result of it. In keeping with the distinction made into history, whose abstract concept is grounded in the sensory (Simmel 1922). A narrative is defined through temporal sequentiality – an inner or outer change of state over time – a transmission of perspective (mediality) – that is the narrative instance, the classic narrator (Hahn 2002; Hahn und Schöner 2007). And thus, elaborate poems, in which experiences of loss are narratively represented from the first-person perspective, can be analyzed through narratological methods.”
by the scholars above, I use “narration” to refer to the process and “narrative” when referring to the product of the process.

LaCapra, in his History, Literature, Critical Theory, recognizes that literature and art in general can offer reprieve from trauma, as it presents a medium for examining problems and their repercussions (27). Although I read Khider’s and Barbetta’s first novels as trauma narratives, it is important to acknowledge that these texts do not belong exclusively to the genre of trauma narrative. Just as Khider wrote, both his first novels are a combination of “Roman, Kurzgeschichte, Biografie und Märchen” (154), “alles in einem Werk vereint” (154).173 On the one hand, because Khider’s and Barbetta’s narratives are fictionalized representations of auto-biographical detail, recalling Aurnhammer and Fitzon’s Autofiktion, either text is, first and foremost, a piece of literature. However, because either novel acts as a medium for processing actual social and personal traumas, the texts carry out the role of trauma narrative for a number of reasons. First, the narratives fulfill the role of an autobiography, being marked by the narrative characteristics of sequentiality and mediality. Further, the narratives assume an interpersonal dynamic reminiscent of the dynamic created in therapy, between a narrator of trauma and a sympathetic and interested listener. In addition, despite the fictionalization strategies (interpretation of reality and abstraction through the fantastic) used by Khider and Barbetta to dramatize social and personal traumas they may have experienced, the production of the narrative text fulfills the important role of truth-telling, bringing to light historical developments that might have otherwise passed without record. Finally, Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts contain abstract and sensory detail as well as dissociative elements that further mark them as trauma narratives. What now follows is an explanation of each of these characteristics of trauma narratives followed by examples from both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts.

173 “Novel, short story, biography and fairytale” (154), “everything united into one work” (154).
3.c.i. Autobiography: Sequentiality and mediality

Trauma narratives fulfill an autobiographic function by providing a framework around which narrators can structure and process personally experienced formative traumatic events and from which they can exercise their voices after trauma. Aurnhammer and Fitzon define sequentiality as a change in state reflected either within or without the narrator over a period of time; while narratives follow a chronological progression of events from before, during and after, an interrupted sequence of events characterizes trauma narratives. Drawing from the theoretical and practical research surrounding narrative exposition therapy, situating the disordered sensory-perceptual information into a functional timeline was important not only for the NET researchers, but for Janet as well. Liquidation, as argued by Janet, was the integration of traumatic memory into the traumatized patient’s autobiography. Self-initiated narrative therapy, which Khider and Barbetta appear to be doing with their first novels, also focuses on the task of structuring traumatic events into a timeline. The deviations in either narrative from strictly chronological plot progression distinguish Khider’s and Barbetta’s narratives from traditional narrative sequencing, serving to further highlight the challenging task of sequencing traumatic events. Returning to Aurnhammer and Fitzon’s definition of sequentiality before turning for a more in depth look at the texts, it is important to understand the sequentiality central to either text as an important change of state of the narrator, simultaneously pinpointing the trauma that brought about this change of state.

In order to identify the point at which a change of state occurred in either text, it was important to return to the first appearance of the auxiliary identity, the doppelganger of each of the narrators. In Khider’s text, the frame narrator encounters Rasul Hamid through Hamid’s manuscript in the train following the frame narrator’s disorienting attack of solitariness on the train platform just moments before. As was explained in the last chapter, the disorienting attacks the frame
narrator suffers from are instances of traumatic return into the frame narrator’s consciousness. Digging through Rasul Hamid’s manuscript for clues as to the cause of these attacks, brought me to Khider’s fifth chapter, “Rette mich aus der Leere” (Save me from the void), in which the narrator explains that “it” all began with the onset of war in Iraq in the 1980s. While “it” is left ambiguous within the text, the contextual information surrounding “it” identifies it as the instance that caused the narrator to first encounter the void he needs rescuing from. This war was then followed by another war in 1991, after which time the narrator began visiting a Mosque, not to pray, but simply to witness the relief that came to the women praying at the mosque and to watch the many pigeons that nested there. Pigeons and birds are an important theme of freedom in Khider’s text, as they are unhindered by the political boundaries between countries. However, the point at which the void becomes commonplace in the narrator’s life is following his incarceration, “Ich wurde aus politischen Gründen inhaftiert und später wieder freigelassen. Danach gab es für mich keine neuen Wege mehr in meinem Land, nur ein großes Nichts, und das überall” (71). The narrator flees Iraq after this event and makes his way to Germany after a long journey extending across many years. All the events of the narrative revolve around and find their order in conjunction with this core event, the incarceration and beating of Rasul Hamid.

Identifying the first appearance of Mariana’s alternate identity or doppelganger in Barbetta’s text similarly brings us closer to the event that brought about a change in state for Mariana. Analía, Mariana’s doppelganger, appears before the steps of the alterations shop in Chapter 4: “Analía trägt eine große Tasche mit verdecktem Zweiwegereißverschluß, ihr dichtes, dunkles Haar trägt sie zu einem Pferdeschwanz gebunden, zwei eigenwillige Strähnen fallen ihr beim Laufen ins Gesicht”

174 In her Seltsame Sterne, a narrative written about her years in both sides of a still divided Berlin, Emine Sevgi Özdamar also comments on the ease at which birds (and influenza) cross the political borders established, which limit the free movement of human beings (18).
175 “I was incarcerated for political reasons and was later released. After that, there were no new avenues for me in my own country, just a great void, and it was everywhere.”
In the chapters immediately preceding this appearance, we learn of the tragic death of Mariana’s father, “Just in diesem Moment, in dem ein verklärter Herr Dr. rer.nat. offensiv, da von allen anderen unbeobachtet, mit dem Ruhm kokettierte, kamen unangekündigt die Atemnot und das verzweifelte Ringen nach Luft, eine halbe Stunde später kamen Mariana und die Mutter” (22). The Stoffmuster (cloth patterns) immediately following this chapter, a newspaper clipping reporting the death of a man by asphyxiation after being stung in the ear by a stinging wasp, an aculeate, leads the reader to conclude that Mariana’s father was the man reported in the article. He died just before making a big discovery about authors and their motives. Her father also observes bugs, spiders and praying mantises, in particular, insects that ensnare and eat their mates. Whether the buggy explanation for death’s visit to the Nalo’s is the whole story, or whether the scientific language used to describe the world of insects is a cover for the brutal deeds of the dictatorship in power at that time in Argentina, is for the next chapter. Here, it is important to recognize that Analía appears in the story after the father’s death is related in Chapter 3 and after his infidelity prior to his death is related in Chapter 4, “Er betrügt dich, er betrügt dich!” (30). These are the formative events in Mariana’s life that bring about a change in her state. The events that follow then relate back to these memories that stay with Mariana like a ‘stubborn noodle’ (27) stuck to the back of her throat.

Another crucial part of an autobiography is the perspective from which it is told. Aurnhammer and Fitzon define this narrative instance as Medialität, or mediality. A narrative is traditionally transmitted by a Sprecher-Ich (the speaking I), however mourning (also trauma) narratives are marked by a polyphony, that is, a plurality of narrative voices. The narrator both assumes the

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176 “Analía carries a large bag with a hidden two-way zipper, she wears her thick, dark hair in a ponytail, two stubborn strands fall into her face as she walks.”
177 “Right at this moment, when the enlightened Dr. rer.nat. was flirting with fame on the offensive, because no one else was watching, an unexpected breathlessness came upon him and a hopeless struggle for air. Mariana and her mother came home a half hour later.”
178 “He’s deceiving you, he’s deceiving you!”
role of the person experiencing the event as well the person narrating the experience about themself. In keeping with this definition of narrative as autobiographical instance, Khider’s trauma narrative is told predominantly from the first-person perspective. Whereas Barbetta’s trauma narrative is told predominantly from the third-person, but both texts entertain a moment in which the subject is spoken about in the third-person for Khider and the first-person for Barbetta. It is important to recognize the dual-functionality of the one who has suffered the trauma in the story, because it explains an important modality shift in relation to the trauma. In the experience of trauma, as was explored in the previous chapter, a person typically feels as though they have lost the subjective-agency in their life, because the event springs unexpectedly and uncontrollably upon the person. The loss of subjectivity is often incomprehensible and causes the victim to revisit the moment until the incomprehension can be resolved. The role of telling the narrative restores subjective-agency to the traumatized by putting them back in control of the story, and, by extension, in control of their life. Whereas, in the traumatic event, the event embodies the role of subject acting upon the traumatized as object, in the role of narrator, the roles are reversed, to empowering and cathartic effect. In this way, the dual-functionality of the protagonist in the texts as a first-person narrator and the third-person object of narration, demonstrates the before and after identity of trauma.

The role of the Sprecher-Ich is fairly obvious in Khider’s text. The frame narrator explains, “Ich deponiere meine Zeitung und den Kaffee-zum-Mitnehmen auf der Bank” (7). From that first page, he guides the reader through both halves of the frame story, in which he finds a manuscript written in his own hand, but by Rasul Hamid, and finally writes his own version of the manuscript. The manuscript nestled within either half of the frame story is also narrated from the first-person perspective, this time by the frame narrator’s doppelganger, Rasul Hamid.

179 “I deposit my newspaper and my coffee-to-go on the bench.”
Whereas losing the subjective-agency over one’s life can be traumatizing when it is imposed upon that person, regaining that subjective-agency to write about the self in the third-person appears to serve as an important distancing technique in trauma narratives. As will be discussed in the next chapter, language played a distinctive role for both authors in creating distance between themselves and the content of their narratives. Writing these events into the past appears to be another distancing technique, as argued by the NET researchers. This shift, however, to talking about the self in the third person provides another source of distance. Khider’s frame narrator sets up the narration nestled within the frame story by talking about the narrator in the third person. While the two narrators (the frame- and the embedded narrator, Rasul Hamid) are arguably one and the same, talking about the narrator who narrates the trauma itself in the third person integrates further perspective-distance. The events thus do not happen to the narrator, but rather to an identity distinguished as separate from the narrator at that time.

The same distancing technique is arguably at work in Barbetta’s text as well. The majority of the narrative is told from the third-person perspective, but by a narrator who has intimate knowledge about the area, the culture, and access to Mariana’s hidden life of thoughts and emotions. With much of the story being told in the present, seemingly as it is happening, the reader gains the impression of a person narrating their life to themselves, the inner monolog one leads in their mind as they go about their day. As was explained in the last chapter, the narrative time is then divided into the past when narrating past events, the present for narrating the interactions between Mariana and Analía, and sometimes even projections about the future, when the narrator is uncertain how a scene will unfold, such as the encounter between Analía, her mother and Mariana. However, this third-person narration is interrupted by isolated incidents of first-person narration, when Mariana’s cognitive stress is greatest. The first incident is in the fourth chapter of Barbetta’s text, when a young Mariana suppresses the urge to alert her mother to her father’s infidelity “Er betrügt dich! 
[…] ich alleine verzweifle und versuche, daß er mich zuhört” (30). While there may be the urge to explain away this shift to the first-person as simply dialog outside of the quotation marks, it is inconsistent with the other incidents of reported speech throughout the narrative. The narrative-perspective does not shift to the first-person again until Chapter 29, when Mariana is standing in front of the bank where Analía’s fiancé works, who Mariana suspects to be none other than her own missing boyfriend. “Wenn du mich nicht hältst, falle ich, hörst du?” (293), the first-person narrator cries out to the building face she presumes is enclosing Gerardo. Finally, the last chapter is told exclusively in the first-person.

In our interview together, Barbetta explained that the shift to first-person narrative is meant to signal and illustrate that Mariana’s going mad. The chapter begins with Mariana’s one-sided dialogue to her aunt and the twins at the alterations shop before Mariana rushes home to rendezvous with Gerard in the recesses of her crazed mind, “Kein Morgen ist angebrochen, ohne daß ich nicht in der Nacht davor jede einzelne Perle des Rosenkranzes in ein Gebet umgewandelt hätte! Unzählige raffinierte Details sind in den letzten Wochen dazugekommen, so daß ich euch gesagt habe, wir sind zum Leiden geboren, wißt ihr noch?” (325). But the ending was also meant to be ambiguous, so as to entertain multiple readings. This interpretation of Barbetta’s text is understandably a hard sell, but there is meaning to be gleaned from this text, when it is read as a trauma narrative. The question why a narrative is told from the third-person brings increased focus to the content and serves to further highlight the episodes of first-person narration within the text. This switch in narrative perspective, as was argued above with Khider’s text, is a distancing technique used to facilitate the telling of the story. Again, by telling the story about someone, Khider

180 “He’s cheating you! […] I’m alone in my despair and try to get him to listen to me.”
181 “If you don’t hold me, I’ll fall, do you hear me?”
182 “Not a single day has yet broken without that I would not have spent the night before turning every single pearl of the rosary in prayer! Innumerable subtle details in the last weeks have led me to tell you that we are born to suffer, do you all know this still?”
“reading” Rasul Hamid’s manuscript, or Mariana’s story being narrated predominantly from the third-person perspective, the events related are not personally experienced, and can be more easily written on the page.

3.c.ii. Interpersonal: Narration, but for whom?

A narrative requires not just a narrator, but also a ‘listener’, the purpose of narration being to share a story, even if the intended audience is merely the narrator themself. Particularly in NET therapy, the therapist, in the role of listener of the narrative produced through the therapeutic sessions, helps the narrator to create and complete the narrative. Compassionate listening facilitates the narrative-process, and because of this, a compassionate listener can be understood as giving the narrator the courage to tell his (or her) tale. The question of listener (or audience) is complicated with either author, particularly because their books are largely consumed by a “foreign” audience, that is, an audience socially, geographically and linguistically removed from the social, geographic and linguistic setting of either narrative. And why? There is an important interpersonal component in both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts, in which both authors address a certain audience. This intended audience is an idealized, sympathetic “listener” (here reader), who is not only interested in the story, but also the respective cultures from which they come.

Barbetta integrates a page from the fashion catalogue, *La Femme – La Mode Pour Moi!* into the narrative. Over eighteen lines of French text describe the new (albeit six months old) spring collection. A reader with some knowledge of French should have no problem at all parsing the sentences, but should the reader have no knowledge of French, they share Mariana’s ignorance of the specifics printed across the page. After all, the narrator explains, “Mariana spricht kein einziges
Wort Französisch” (98). Although Mariana is unable to grasp the linguistic input here, she is able to win an understanding through the sensory details: “Aber die großzügigen ganzseitigen Farbfotos (nicht halbseitig oder viertelseitig wie in den argentinischen Modezeitschriften üblich) und das außergewöhnliche Papier reichen ihr aus, um die Anleitungen dechiffrieren und sich den Rest vorstellen zu können” (98). This anecdote with the fashion magazine represents in miniature what Barbetta’s text does on a broader scale. A notoriously difficult text to read, Barbetta also makes use of full-page, color images within her text, to help impart meaning to her reader beyond the encoded linguistic signs.

In addition to the language of images, the narrator in Barbetta’s text also includes translations from the Spanish, to reveal the imagery hidden behind the foreign words:

Diejenigen, die es weiter brachten, machten in jener 1536 vom spanischen Eroberer Pedro de Mendoza gegründeten und nach Neutra Señora del Buen Ayre, der Heiligen Maria der Guten Lüfte, benannten Stadt bescheidene Lebensmittelgeschäfte auf, Bäckereien, Kantinen, Bars, die im festen Glauben auf vielversprechende Namen wie La Providencia (die göttliche Vorsehung), El Porvenir (die Zukunft) oder La Esperanza (die Hoffnung) feierlich getauft wurden. (13)

Judging from these details, the translations from the Spanish, as well as the extended quotations of French without the expectation that the reader understand, Barbetta is arguably writing for a

183 “Mariana doesn’t speak a word of French.”
184 “But the generous, full-page color photos (not half-page or quarter-page photos like you find in the Argentine fashion magazines) and the exceptional paper are sufficient enough for her to be able to decode the instructions and imagine the rest for herself.”
185 See the reader reviews posted to amazon.com.
186 “Those who managed to prevail opened modest grocery stores, bakeries, cook houses, bars in the city that was founded in 1536 by the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Mendoza and named after Neutra Señora del Buen Ayre, the Holy Mary of Favorable Winds. These stores were opened in keeping with the faith, and ceremoniously baptized with promising names like La Providencia (Godly providence), El Porvenir (the future) or La Esperanza (hope).”
monolingual reader, or at least a reader without knowledge of the romance languages. Barbetta’s reader shares with Mariana an interest in the content of the text, Mariana for fashion, the reader for the world that Barbetta can show them. What Mariana and the reader must also share in order to make it through this text is an interest in linguistically encoded texts. As I write linguistically-encoded here, I am thinking of the use of metaphor within the narration process in NET therapy that allows difficult subjects to be broached. They write of encouraging their patients to open and close the cupboard doors on their traumatic memories (336).

Khider’s Text was also arguably written for a reader with knowledge of neither the Arabic language nor culture. The embedded narrator, Rasul Hamid, explains right from the first page of his narrative the meaning of his birth-city’s name: the caliph Al-Mansur gave his city “den Namen Madinat-A’Salam – Stadt des Friedens, die man heute als Bagdad kennt. Seitdem erlebte die Stadt des Friedens keinen Frieden mehr” (13).187 The narrator explains not just words and expressions from Arabic within the text, but also customs and practices within the Arabic culture. With his interpretation of the story of Babel, Rasul Hamid explains that people write in order to communicate with one another, among other reasons: “Wenn die Leute viele Sprachen haben, dann schreiben sie, um ihre Sprache zu schützen und auch, um miteinander zu kommunizieren” (58).188 These examples and the numerous additional cultural explanations identify Khider’s ideal reader as one similar to Barbetta’s, that is, someone from outside of his birth-culture and language, but who shares an interest in this culture and its history. In the case of Khider’s text, his idealized reader is also someone with the power to affect change. This expectation of responsibility can be seen in his veiled critique of a culture expected to operate on higher moral ground: “Ich konnte nicht glauben,

187 “The name Madinat-A’Salam – the City of Peace, which is known today as Bagdad. Since [its naming], the City of Peace has not experienced peace again.”
188 “When people have many languages, they write them in order to protect their language and also to communicate with one another.”
This important interpersonal component in either text, in which the author conceptualizes a sympathetic audience for their writing, ultimately encourages the writing process and influences how certain stories will be communicated and how they will fit within one’s understanding of self and of the world. For example, Khider is obviously writing for an audience with similar standards of human treatment, in that he deems police brutality to be outside normal behavior, and that this sort of behavior has no place in a Europe imagined on the moral high ground. It is not clear whether the narrator came to this understanding after conceptualizing the narrative, but this statement does clarify that the author deems this treatment as unacceptable for himself. The question of audience then leads to further questions, such as, whether the willingness of both Khider and Barbetta to write in German explains something about the German culture itself, or about the opportunity presented by the encounter with the other to idealize that other. The idealization of the other lends meaning to the proverbial ‘grass is always greener’. Can these narratives be read as proof of the sympathetic interest the German culture has for the other (in contrast to itself)?

Foundations for authors in German; a population that reads and values books; publishing houses interested in authors who do not write in German as their first language: do all of these components play a role in the construction of a trauma narrative in Germany?

189 “I couldn’t believe that people were also kicked and beaten by the police without cause in Europe.”

190 I refer to Zafer Senocak’s Deutschsein here, in which he discusses the self-loathing inherent within German culture still to this day, built upon feelings of guilt over WWII and the Holocaust. He explains that part of Germany’s interest in the world abroad is due to its fear of its past. “Man möchte weltoffen sein in diesem Land, jedoch nicht, weil man eine weltoffene Grundhaltung hat. Die Weltoffenheit wird als Schutz vor der eigenen Geschichte verstanden” (116). – One would like to be open to the world in this country, but not because of a fundamental stance of being open to the world. Rather, openness to the world is understood as protection from one’s own history” (116).
Es gibt etwas in Deutschland, das es in Argentinien gar nicht gibt, und in anderen Ländern auch nicht. Es gibt einen sogenannten Literaturbetrieb. Das ist eine gut funktionierende Maschine, wie eine Firma, mit sehr vielen Stipendien (Geldstipendien oder Aufenthaltstipendien). Ich habe das Schreiben an meinem ersten Buch durch Stipendien finanziert (Interview mit Barbetta)\(^{191}\)

Is it the conditions in Germany that facilitate writing from the context of migration that also psychologically enable Khider and Barbetta to write their trauma narratives? Or is it the late-acquisition of the German language, particularly after the trauma was experienced, and, in the case of Khider and Barbetta, a social trauma they closely associate with their native languages, that enables this writing? In addition to this, the late-acquisition of German allows them to create an idealized concept-of self in the new language in conjunction with an idealized conception of the world through the lens of this newly acquired language and culture. Is a dichotomy established in which the birth-culture and mother tongue represent the problematic side of the scale of conflict, and the adopted culture and language, in their idealized state, represent the opposite? This explains why the “intended” audience in both texts is an idealized one.

3.c.iii. Truth-telling and experiences transformed into history

Aurnhammer and Fitzon use the term *Transformation* to describe the process of turning events into history on both a personal level as well as on a greater social level. On a level experienced personally by the author, this transformation refers to the process of integrating a traumatic experience or traumatic experiences into one’s autobiography. The discussion in the last chapter concerning the

\(^{191}\) “There is something in Germany that cannot be found at all in Argentina or in other countries. There is a so-called literary scene. It is a well-functioning machine, like a company, with lots of fellowships (monetary or residency fellowships). I financed the writing of my first book with fellowships.”
effects of trauma on the memory explained how the emotional response to a traumatic event modifies the way that event is remembered, namely by hindering all but the emotional response and the sensory details in conjunction with it. The work of NET therapy focuses on integrating these sensory and emotional details with constructed declarative details of time, place, and sequence of events, and then integrating this narrative into the patient’s biography. The self-guided creation of a trauma narrative works to the same effect, requiring the structured ordering of traumatic events into the timeline of the text. On the greater social level, the trauma that was experienced personally is declared as truth, and the narrative document itself serves as testimony. Crafting personal experiences of social events into narratives, however, allows for narratives to transcend their task of initiating cathartic healing after a narrative event, by becoming a part of history. They enrich the understanding of the human experience (his story). Looking at this more precisely, the historicization in and of itself can be understood as a simultaneously temporal and spatial organization of the traumatic experience.

Khider’s and Barbetta’s first works, in particular, present the historicization of socially as well as personally experienced traumas. The facts are presented, however, in a fictionalized manner. Particularly in these two cases, the introduction of fiction into the narratives appears to fulfill the intended purpose of establishing distance to the trauma related within the texts. Interviews with either author confirm the influence of their own autobiography in the texts they’ve written. In Khider’s text, his own flight out of Iraq greatly informs Rasul Hamid’s journey. The autobiographical details also help to decipher the highly metaphorized frame narrative within Khider’s text. The frame narrator’s girlfriend, Sophie, who meets him at the train station upon his

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192 In German, history has more than one meaning. On the one hand, it can be understood as a story, real or imagined, on the other, it can be understood as a report concerning human events.  
193 Transcriptions of my interviews with Khider and Barbetta can be found in the appendix of this work.
arrival in Munich, for example, is a metaphor for Khider’s own philosophy studies at the university there. And, as Sophie the character supports and encourages the frame narrator to finish his autobiography, so too did Khider’s time at the university provide the resources and supportive environment needed to write his own autobiography. To what extent the narrative, Der falsche Inder, can be understood as an autobiography, however, remains the secret of the author himself.

The socially and personally experienced traumas reported in Barbetta’s text are hidden “unter den Gullydeckeln” (under the storm covers) right from the first page. Barbetta explained in our interview together that the Argentine dictatorship during the 70s lurked beneath the surface of her text. The Argentina represented is also one from her memories in the 80s and 90s, after the dissolution of the dictatorship. To what extent the Mariana-Analia story can be read autobiographically also remains a mystery.

The experiences Khider and Barbetta write about in their narratives are not widely known in their particularities. Interest in the plight of the refugee has only increased in the last two to three years, as media coverage has turned its focus to the Mediterranean. The particulars of the refugee’s journey has, by extension, become more interesting to mass media, but Khider presented his story some time before this. Barbetta explained that the brutal disciplinary actions of the dictatorship took place beneath the surface of everyday life in Argentina, underground and hidden in buildings throughout the city. Because the events of this socially experienced trauma in Argentina are also confined beneath the surface of Barbetta’s narrative, investigating trauma narratives as testimonial to social traumas provides the focus that allows these events to be brought to the surface.

3.c.iv. Abstract and sensory details

The last three sections detailed the functionalities of a text that designate it as a trauma narrative. Focusing on the role of the narrator as subject and object within a text, identifying the intended
reader, and finally examining the text as testimony that historifies the traumatic events yielded fruitful questions regarding the authors themselves, the audiences they write for, and their contribution to social history. Now we turn to the formative elements of a text that help to distinguish it as a trauma narrative. Focusing on the utility of abstraction and sensory detail in facilitating the narration of trauma, as well as the dissociative qualities polyvocality and temporal disruption distinguishes the interaction between trauma and literature as a potentially productive one.

Turning to Aurnhammer and Fitzon’s discussion of *Autofiktion* (a cross between autobiography and fiction) facilitates an understanding of the role abstraction and sensory detail play in trauma narratives. They explain, “Autofiktion liegt unseres Erachtens dann vor, wenn ein subjektiv erfahernes Geschehen mit Fiktionalisierungsstrategien gestaltet und im Medium der Kunst objektiviert wird” (9), or *Autofiktion* comes about when a subjectively experienced event is recreated with fictionalization strategies and objectified through the medium of art. It is an aesthetic category that describes works in which a referential and non-referential ambivalence is central, that is, they both refer to actual events, and have been fictionalized in a way that distances them from the event. Aurnhammer and Fitzon argue that the auto-fictional category is not necessarily linked to any one genre. The application of abstract, even fantastic elements within a text not only eases the return into the past, but also allows the author to regain control of the remembered traumatic event. The authors’ application of fictionalization strategies enables them to alleviate the authenticity of the event by distancing themselves and their narrative from it. Once removed from the event, the authors may then return to the events to describe them more objectively. Trauma means a loss of subjectivity to the traumatized, this process of fictionalization reverses the roles of agency from the
The use of fictionalization strategies appears to be fairly common in texts that deal with personal and social traumas. LaCapra noticed as much in the novels of W.G. Sebald and J.M. Coetzee. While none of the texts of either author were restricted to bearing witness or giving testimony, they are very much referential of actual traumas. Termed abstraction, this distancing technique is also encouraged by NET researchers in the way of metaphor. Metaphor provides the NET patients with a tool for talking about events through the distancing of abstraction.

Sensory detail can also be used as a distancing strategy, which allows an author to return to the narrative after the trauma, as they are the details that turn a cold description of facts into the human experience of them. Remember here the example pulled from Barbetta’s text, when Mariana recalls the tastes and smells in conjunction with the death of her father,

> Einmalig blieb nur der Krampf, den sie im Magen verspürte, dann folgte Bekanntes und Erlebtes, eine übelriechende Mischung aus Zitronenbiskuits, Waffeln, Erdbeerstückchen und Schokoladenmilch auf dem Holzfußboden der Bibliothek, ein ungenießbar gewordenes und bis zur Unkenntlichkeit entstelltes Paradies aus Kindheitsgeschmäckern. (27)

This example demonstrates how the reality of the event, Mariana’s retching after finding her lifeless father in his study, is both distanced and made milder through the fictionalized sensory detail. Whereas Barbetta’s text is full of smells and tastes, Khider’s notices. Again, recall the examples used to illustrate this in the last chapter, in which Khider’s frame narrator returns to the narrative after the

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194 LaCapra discusses the importance of modified depictions of reality in Sebald’s and Coetzee’s texts, which integrate social traumas into the narrative. “The writing of neither is restricted to bearing witness and giving testimony, but they are nonetheless compellingly called and even hauntingly caught by the insistence of the real […]” (Chapter 3, 57)

195 “Only the cramp she felt in her stomach remained unique, then things known and experienced followed, a foul-smelling mixture of lemon biscuits, waffles, pieces of strawberry and chocolate milk on the hard wood floor in the library, a paradise of childhood tastes made unenjoyable and distorted to unrecognizability.”
pregnant ellipses: “12.40 Uhr. Noch einmal ein Blick über den Bahnhof, aber diesmal ohne Begleitung einer afrikanischen Trommel” (8).

Why sensory detail would have a place in trauma narratives is best explained through the NET research. It is closely bound with the manner in which trauma is ordered in the memory and later remembered. Memory of trauma is predominantly sensory, including the emotional and sensory impressions awakened in the traumatic event. The emotional response hinders the saving of concrete details regarding time, sequence of event, and location. These must then be recalled or worked out and then associated with the traumatic memory through narrative reconstruction efforts. It is thus understandable that the details most closely associated with trauma will also appear in the narratives that report them.

The presence of abstracting and sensory detail in either text was discussed at length in Chapter 2 as evidence of trauma’s impact on literature. The difference between this chapter’s discussion and the last’s is the intention behind the fictionalizing elements. In the last chapter, the discussion revolved around the agency of trauma to distort a traumatized person’s perception of reality. While it is difficult to say absolutely whether or not the authors intentionally used fictionalization strategies as defined by Aurnhammer and Fitzon in their texts, the examples presented demonstrate the seemingly unconscious transition of either author’s narrator into the fantastic. Mariana, for example, breaks into abstract descriptions of the behaviors of insects, or imagined scenes of infidelity, whereas Rasul Hamid’s most tense chapters contextually dissolve into fairy tale. The discussion in this chapter, however, looks at the intentional use of fictionalization strategies by the narrators in each text, a skill they have presumably acquired through coping with trauma. Khider provides a clue that the use of fictionalization strategies is indeed intentional in the

196 “12:40pm. One more look across the train station, but this time without the accompaniment of an African drum.”
texts. In his second chapter, *Schreiben und Verlieren*, or Writing and Losing, Rasul Hamid explains the changes the Iraqi people experienced when Saddam Hussein came to power.

Wir alle waren zu Fantasiekreaturen mutiert. Oder wie hätte es sonst sein können, dass ein Staat das Lesen und Schreiben außerhalb von Schulen und Universitäten in kriminelle Handlungen verwandelte, so dass mein Vater es für angebracht hielt, meine Bücher und alles, was ich bisher geschrieben hatte, zu vernichten. (28)

While the quote certainly has an ironic quality to it, that there is no other logical conclusion to explain the actions of the Iraqi dictator than the onset of an abstracted reality, bound with it is the intentionality of the author in turning to the fantastic to alleviate the brutal reality of an emotionally taxing experience, the Iraqi dictatorship in his case. Barbetta’s narrator, Mariana, a secret-narrator because her role as narrator only becomes apparent in the final chapters of the text, also turns to fictionalization strategies to describe those events marked by emotional distress. She does this intentionally, particularly in Chapter 17. Here she talks about her memories of visiting her grandparents as a child, before her grandfather committed suicide, and before her father died. The memory is narrated in the present, which signals one of two things: either that the memories are associated with some sort of trauma and that this narration in the present represents a “reliving” rather than a “remembering”, or the events are being recalled and actively modified to facilitate the recalling. When her grandmother begins to berate her grandfather for not taking his medicine, Mariana flees to the garden that has become a magical place of discovery through her grandfather.

Für Mariana sind diese Schreie wie Wind auf dem Ozean, ein gutes Zeichen, eine Art Segelschiff, das sie hinaus ins Freie treibt. Sie steht vom Tisch auf, nähert sich der Tür zum Garten, passiert gleich die Schwelle, sie macht einen Riesensprung, der nächste noch weiter,

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197 “We were all mutated into fantasy creatures. Or how else could it have been, that a state could transform all reading and writing outside of schools and universities into criminal actions, so that my father found it appropriate to destroy my books and everything I had written up to that point.”
die Kraft des Windes hilft ihr voran. Mariana ist ein Papierdrachen, schon erhebt er sich, schon fliegt sie hinaus in den Garten [...] (150).\textsuperscript{198} 

Here we see the use of metaphor to create an abstracted reality removed from a high-stress situation, as her grandmother’s outburst becomes the wind that fills the sails of a young Mariana-sailing ship.

As a caveat to this argument, Khider and Barbetta are products of their national literatures. Khider comes from the secular fairy tale tradition of \textit{1001 Nights} and the religious mysticism of Arabic poetry, and Barbetta from a legacy of magical realism. The characteristic abstraction and sensory detail of Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts can also be argued as characteristics of these literary traditions, and yet they are slightly different than the literature from their fellow countrymen writing in German. Mustafa Al-Slaiman, who surveyed non-native German writers from an Arabic background, argues that these authors work almost exclusively with the fairy tale narrative form.\textsuperscript{199}

\textsuperscript{198} “For Mariana, these cries are wind on the ocean, a good omen, a type of sailing ship that drives her out into open. She stands up from the table, approaches the door to the garden, is over the threshold in a moment, she makes a great leap, the next even further, the power of the wind helps her forward. Mariana is a paper kite, already lifting up into the air, she’s already flying out into the garden […].”

\textsuperscript{199} “Abgesehen von Adel Karasholi, Suleman Taufig und Ryad Alabied, haben sich die arabischen Autoren fast ausschließlich dem Märchenschreiben gewidmet. In der arabischen Tradition dient die Kunst des Märchenzählens der Unterhaltung, ist ein Mittel der Sozialisation und Erziehung, vermittelt kulturelle Werte, weist auf die sozialen Normen hin und ist ein Bestandteil der Geschichte jedes arabischen Landes. Die Frau eroberte sich mit dieser Erzählkunst den Bereich der Familie und der Nachbarschaft. Die Männer, v.a. die alten, blieben im öffentlichen Alltag z.B. im Männerdiwan dominant. Gegenstand dieser Erzählkunst ist der Kampf zwischen Gut und Böse, Liebe und Haß, Großzügigkeit und Geiz, Mut und Feigheit, Zusammenhalt und Opferbereitschaft. Schon früh wurde diese Erzählkunst von den Reisenden der arabischen Welt und den Orientalisten entdeckt und im Westen bekannt gemacht” (Al-Slaiman 237). “Except for Adel Karasholi, Suleman Taufig and Ryad Alabied, Arabic authors have devoted themselves almost entirely to fairytale-writing. In the Arabic tradition, the art of telling fairytales serves to entertain, is a means for socialization and education, transmits cultural value, points to social norms, and is a component of the history of every Arabic country. The woman dominates the family and neighborhood realms with this narrative art. The men, especially the old, remain dominant in the public sphere, for example, in the mandivan. Tools of this trade include the fight between good and evil, love and hate, generosity and miserliness, courage and cowardice, staying together and willingness to sacrifice self. This narrative art was discovered early on by travelers to the Arabic world and orientalists, and made known in the West” (Al-Slaiman 237).
However, although Hussain Al-Mozany refers to Bagdad as the fairy tale city, his own debut novel, *Der Marschländer*, lacks the abstraction of Khider’s text. The most noticeable difference is Khider’s mystification of ordinary objects, like car tires, counterfeit documents, rain, and New Year’s. He attributes his survival to these and more in his sixth chapter, “Die Wunder”. Al-Mozany came to Germany in 1980 and this first novel details his flight from Iraq to Germany, but he does not share Khider’s experience of incarceration and torture, and he experienced the wars in Iraq from the safety of Germany. For Barbetta, however, there is no Chamisso Prize winning author from South America who serves as a comparison. But, Chilean exile, Carlos Cerda, who wrote about the Pinochet regime through its aftermath, in Spanish, while living in East-Berlin, does provide a significant reference. His *An Empty House* carries a number of (arguably neo-Romantic) similarities with Barbetta’s, including truth-telling dreams, the use of “as if”, seeing as trope, mirrors, and the integration of an anthropomorphized nature in his text, among others. His is also a narrative about social traumas and their repercussions on a post trauma society.

3.c.v. Dissociation: Multilinguality and temporal transgressions

In conjunction with the intentional use of abstraction and sensory detail to facilitate the return to the past and to reduce its emotional effect, dissociation as a narrative trope helps to identify tensions within the text that stem out of the traumatic event. This tension serves to propel the narrative. Returning to Aurnhammer and Fitzon’s discussion of autofictional mourning narratives helps pinpoint some of the tensions within the text. They highlight the tension between narratives propelled by the actions of the figures within the text as opposed to actions propelled by the narrator. They also highlight the tension between past and present within the texts. Using Aurnhammer and Fitzon’s explanation as a guide, this dissociation, this tension, manifests itself most clearly in the texts of Barbetta and Khider in the conflict between the doppelganger figures.
Because these figures are closely related to temporal narratives, the conflict present in both texts is with regard to time.

Recalling from the last chapter, dissociation results from the failed integration of and adaptation to new information (such as through a traumatic event). It manifests itself as a loss of control in the form of independent consciousnesses coming into existence and developing independently of each other, while residing within the same person. The dissociative tension of personality is present in both texts in the form of the doppelganger. Freud identifies the creation of a *Doppelgänger* as “ursprünglich eine Versicherung gegen den Untergang des Ichs”, or initially as insurance against the demise of the ego in *Das Unheimliche* (258). In accordance with this definition, both Khider’s and Barbetta’s doppelganger-characters serve a self-preservation function. Their doppelgangers seemingly inhabit the same bodies and the same histories in both texts, entertaining autonomy independently of each other at certain points in the narrative, and not always cognizant of each other. After all, Mariana realizes late in the narrative that Analía Moran is an anagram for her own name, Mariana Nalo; and the frame narrator of Khider’s text may recognize the handwriting as his own, but he does not recognize the character, Rasul Hamid, neither does he recall writing the manuscript he finds. Further, the first appearance of the doppelganger in either text is concurrent with the traumatic event, which leads one to conclude that the main characters undergo a dissociative personality split as a result of the trauma. Khider’s frame narrator first encounters his doppelganger through the medium of a manuscript on the train, after having a disorienting episode on the train platform; in Barbetta’s text, Analía surfaces in the story after Mariana’s voice from the past resurfaces to confront her mother with her father’s infidelity, and after Mariana’s reaction to finding her father dead in his study.

The tension that erupts from the encounter of these two doppelganger-pairs ultimately serves to propel the narrative forward to its resolution. It was argued above, that both of these texts
have been written and published as literary novels, but that they serve multiple functions. Both of these texts have at their core a trauma narrative that has nonetheless been developed into an autofictional novel. The tension that develops between the characters allows for the integration of plot that makes a trauma narrative interesting to an outside reader, and pulls them through to the end of the text with the interest of finding resolution to this tension. In Khider’s text, the frame narrator finds a mysterious envelope written in his hand by someone he does not know. The second part of the frame further exacerbates the tension: how was Rasul Hamid able to steal not only the memories, but also the planned narrative structure from the frame narrator? In Barbetta’s text, the tension revolves around the fairy tale ending Mariana has written for herself, but which Analía has usurped the role of. Mariana dreamt of wedding bells with her boyfriend Gerardo, but ends up altering the wedding dress Analía will wear to her wedding instead. The tension resolves by the end of both Khider’s and Barbetta’s narratives with the reclamation of manuscript and dream, respectively, and an act that reunites the dissociated personalities. In the case of Khider’s text, the act that reunites the two transpires when the frame narrator seals the envelope of the manuscript, an act Rasul Hamid would have to have taken to be able to leave the manuscript on the train. In Barbetta’s text, the shared action is reflected in the first and last paragraphs of the novel, as first Mariana and later Analía rush down the stairs of the alteration’s shop headed towards Mariana’s home. Ultimately, Mariana and Analía merge into one being.

In addition to the conflict between the doppelganger identities is the conflict between the temporal signatures of the narratives. Although the centralizing text within each work is essentially a trauma narrative about past traumas, both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts spend a significant amount of time narrating actions of the present, and in the case of Barbetta’s text, in particular, sometimes events of the past are reactivated into present-tense narratives. In Khider’s text, the line between past and present is pretty clearly divided between the frame narrative and the embedded narrative:
the frame is told in the present, seemingly as it is happening, whereas the embedded narrative is told predominantly in the past. Only in the final line does Rasul Hamid state his desire to write his story, essentially completing the circle of narrative, to begin again in the hands of the frame narrator. In Barbetta’s text, the distinction between past and present is not so clear. Those events that are relegated to the past are from Mariana’s childhood through to Gerardo’s departure; those moments told in the present, are those immediately preceding Analía’s appearance in the text until the completion of the wedding dress. This conflict is further exacerbated, however, with the activation of past events reactivated into the present. In the chapter in which Mariana visits her grandparents, what begins as a journey into the past becomes a relived moment, as Mariana escapes the stressful nagging of her grandmother to the magic of the garden outside. Interestingly, both texts end in the present, demonstrating the cathartic return to the present after past traumas have been properly ordered into the past.

Finally, there is a conflict of narrative perspective in both texts. Khider’s text is narrated primarily in the first-person, Barbetta’s primarily in the third-person, but both narratives make forays into the other perspective. Khider’s text essentially has two first-person narrators, as both the frame narrator as well as Rasul Hamid narrate the story from the first-person. However, Rasul Hamid also makes an appearance as a figure in the narrative, being talked about in the third-person by the frame narrator. Barbetta’s text is a little harder to decipher, as there are instances in the narrative itself when Mariana’s voice interrupts the third-person narrative, unannounced by quotation marks. While further examination reveals that the three incidents of Mariana’s seemingly first-person narrative are in fact one-sided, internalized dialogues that she conducts with first her mother and later Gerardo, turning to Judith Butler’s arguments of autobiography helps explain the facilitating role of an objective perspective of self in the writing process. Butler argues the impossibility of writing an autobiography without being able to view the self as the other (24). The distanced perspective to the
self is necessary for understanding. And, thus, it is productive to understand Mariana’s one-sided dialogues as forays into first-person narrative in order to distinguish the predominantly third-person narrative of the text as a means for establishing perspective distance to self. With regards to these texts, it is helpful to think of the narrative perspective of talking about the main characters within the texts as a distancing strategy that allows the author to distance the self from the events of the narrative as having happened to an “other”, not necessarily the self.

3.d. The impact of trauma narratives

What do these narratives make possible? They provide a context in which past can be processed by way of the formal relationship between reader and writer. Further, they allow for distance to be established between the author and the event through the objectification of the event, and also the assertion of the subjectivity of the author through a fictionalized representation. The act of objectifying traumatic event further reveals the power dynamic at play that ultimately leads to the creation of the narrative and of identity. Finally, narratives provide authors with a chance to bring the social context of trauma to the fore, but not without ethical implication.

The context of writing a work for publication and subsequent distribution assumes the pre-established norm of a formal relationship between a writer and his or her reader. Brison helped explain that one of the biggest hindrances to the transmission of trauma narratives is not the author’s personal reluctance to talk about the event so much as the reluctance of listeners to hear stories of trauma. The context of writing, however, assumes an idealized, interested reader who will read the story without interjecting or interrupting the author’s narration. Whether or not the actual reader actually does this is irrelevant, as it is the idealized, not-yet materialized reader, who facilitates the writing itself. The author can fall back on this traditional writer-reader dynamic to help facilitate his own return into the past, the stuff of the trauma narrative. One of the strongest indications of
this assumed dynamic when writing a trauma narrative is the narrative perspective used to transmit
the tale.

Many narratives written after trauma are written from the first-person perspective, like
Primo Levi’s *Survival in Auschwitz* or Ruth Kluger’s *Still Alive*, for example. A broad reader of what he
himself refers to as *Betroffenheitsliteratur*, Khider’s first novel is also written from the first-person
perspective. But there is an important difference between these three narratives, and arguably
Barbetta’s text as well, which is the introduction of the self as other. Which leads us to the next
argument: the creation of text allows for distance between author of the event and the past.

Butler wrote that there could be no autobiography without the “othering” of the self for the
self-awareness that only comes from an outside perspective, a fact that happily facilitates the
creation of perspective distance. Khider’s text can be understood as a concrete example of Butler’s
“othering”, as his objective self, Rasul Hamid, first enters the narrative as a third-person “he”.
Barbetta’s text is more difficult to parse, however, particularly because there is no clear indication as
to how much of the text may be read as autobiography of her own life, and how much as
autobiography of her country during the turbulence of the military dictatorship. If one interprets
Mariana as the narrator of the trauma narrative within the text, whose narrative is interrupted with
greater frequency by internal, one-sided dialogues with first her mother and later her lost lover,
Gerardo, the Mariana of the text can be read as the ‘other’ of Mariana the narrator. Further, the
formalities of writing a story, organizing events and processing their impact, creates further distance
between the writer and the subject matter, as it leaves the mind to inhabit the page. This is an
extension of the “othering” Butler writes about. The subjective experience of trauma is then
objectified as it is written. The additional fictionalization that Aurnhammer and Fitzon recognized in
their *Trauernarratives*, and which I have also argued is present in many trauma narratives, is a further
distancing technique. Fictionalizing events helps one to distance themselves from the harsh reality of
the trauma by moving the event closer to fantasy. Fantasy dwelling in the realm of imagination, there is arguably greater tolerance for the incredible, as the limits of reality and strict social codes do not necessarily apply. The introduction of fictionalizing elements as well as the concretized “othering” in both Khider’s and Barbetta’s narratives brings us to the next point, that of control.

While the process of writing trauma narrative into a fictionalized and entertaining novel can be understood as a necessary manipulation by the author to attract readers to their novels in order to successfully transmit the narratives of their traumas, it is also an important strategy for regaining control over the traumatizing events themselves. The narrator not only objectifies the event in order to narrate it, but assuming the role of narrator itself allows one the freedom to dictate the particulars of the event, to decide what about that event will be shared, and how they themselves and their readers by extension will make meaning of that event. Khider’s text helps to illustrate how events change based on the narrative intent behind them. Each of the eight chapters of the Rasul-Hamid-embedded narrative narrates the protagonist’s journey from Iraq to Germany from a different thematic perspective. While none of the facts seem to conflict with each other from chapter to chapter, the journey told is nonetheless very different by way of each different thematic approach.

As was argued above, the process of regaining control over one’s life through the process of (creatively) writing about trauma is reflected within either text. In Khider’s text, the frame narrator regains control by the end of the narrative by ‘reclaiming’ the story of his life from the embedded narrator. Remember, the embedded narrator is arguably the frame narrator’s doppelganger, and has been accused by the same of stealing not just the story but the planned narrative structure. In Barbetta’s story, the act of reclaiming is not necessarily executed by writing, but by a similarly creative process. Mariana reclaims her future, and by extension frees herself from the control of the past, by altering Analía’s wedding dress with hidden zippers and buttons and her own monogram,
essentially building a cocoon for herself, to later emerge as an Analía free from the memories of the past that have since haunted and limited her.

The creative act returns control to the hands of the creator, not just in order to write the narrative of past traumas, but also to reestablish identity in conjunction with the event. The role of identity is highlighted by either author’s treatment of names within the narrative. In Khider’s text, the right name can be the ticket to a border crossing and freedom, as the narrator takes on many different names and passports to be able to complete the many legs of his journey. However, assigning a name to the self as other, that of Rasul Hamid, also makes it easier to talk about the past. In Barbetta’s, the same letters rearranged open the door to a parallel existence, as Mariana Nalo reveals that the letters of her own name rearranged make up the name of her doppelganger, Analía Moran. Khider’s frame narrator and Barbetta’s Mariana both complain of theft in the narratives, and identify their doppelgangers as perpetrator of the crime. A line from Gottfried Benn’s poem, “Nur zwei Dinge”, which graces the title page of Rasul Hamid’s manuscript within Khider’s novel clarifies the development of identity through literary creation. The line quoted is this: “die Leere und das gezeichnete ich”, or the void and the written self. Khider’s narrator describes die Leere, or the void, as the emptiness that engulfs the narrator periodically, and most tellingly in times of high-stress throughout Rasul Hamid’s embedded narrative. The manifestation of the ‘gezeichnete ich’ in the text is not explicitly clarified, but reveals itself through the embedded narrator, Rasul Hamid, who is only present in the frame narrative through the words of his manuscript. When the void is interpreted as a state initiated by traumatic recall, the written self manifests itself as a dissociative identity, either consciously or subconsciously “written” into being by the author. Particularly in the narratives examined in this text, the context of the written narrative allows for the active creation of an identity dissociated from the self, which facilitates the writing of that identity. That the written identities (Rasul Hamid and Analía) in either text are then dissolved or reintegrated with the main
narrators (frame narrator and Mariana) by the end of either narrative is further indication of the cathartic impact of the writing and the utility of created identity in facilitating this process.

Finally, the context of the narrative allows for the opportunity to bring not-extensively known human rights abuses to the forefront of public knowledge. While Amnesty International miraculously plays a role in winning Rasul Hamid asylum in Germany, his name having been documented by the organization during a visit to Iraqi prisons, it is the narrative that gives the fact, a name on a registry, context and a means for understanding it. Instead of a name, the narrative provides a story for understanding the reasons for incarceration, the experience of incarceration, and the after effects of incarceration for the incarcerated. With Barbetta’s text, the traumas personally experienced by the young Mariana and her family provide the backdrop for the sinister and often clandestine actions of the dictatorship during her childhood. The death of her father by asphyxiation, the cousin found decapitated in the bushes outside the house, the black tar oozing from the storm drains, the absconded lover, the mental anxiety of the grandfather and his eventual suicide, Mariana’s childhood game of playing the incarcerator before bed, all of these clues point at ulterior forces at work beneath the surface of the narrative. Is it in fact the sting of a wasp that kills her father, for example? This final point of bringing light to personal and societal traumas brings us to the final section of this chapter, that is, the questions raised by fictionalized trauma narratives.

3.e. Important questions raised by trauma narratives

The examination of the connection between trauma and its narratives raises a few important questions. In the previous chapter, which covered trauma, Robert Eaglestone brought awareness to the negotiability of truth in his prognostication about the future of trauma as a unit of analysis in the humanities. This raises the question of the suitability of trauma narratives as official testimonies of human rights abuse cases, in which no other evidence shedding light on the event is available.
Experiencing trauma also profoundly affects one’s personal ethics, particularly with regard to violence towards others. Further, trauma narratives written at cultural intersections, like Khider’s and Barbetta’s, raise questions of how national literatures have been and will continue to be influenced by these accounts. Due in no small part to the impact of these texts on audience, these literatures have a globalizing effect.

If, as Eaglestone claims, truth is negotiated, there are serious implications for texts that influence the development of national and world histories with their accounts of social traumas. The last two sections have explored the importance of the interpersonal connection between a narrator and a listener in negotiating not just the shape of the narrative, but also how one should react to the behavior associated with the events as well. Leys also highlighted this sticky area, emphasizing the fact that trauma narratives heal not because they tell the truth, but because they bring about self-awareness (117). The negotiability of truth may not be important on a personal level, as the intention of narrative is to help individuals heal after trauma. However, if these narratives are then to be used as testimony of personally experienced abuses, whether through domestic or greater social violence, acknowledgment must be made of the narratized depiction of reality. This is further challenged by fictionalized narratives of actual traumas, as is the case with Khider’s and Barbetta’s narratives. With constructed representations of reality (Assmann 44), and particularly of traumas, it is difficult to acknowledge the border between fact and fiction. Distinguishing between fact and fiction becomes much harder when one acknowledges that a symptom of trauma is the loss of the clear distinction between reality and fiction. An eyewitness and testifier becomes problematic when the nature of the trauma experienced challenges their ability to identify the facts from the fiction surrounding it.

The greater propensity towards violence experienced by a victim of trauma is an undercurrent in the NET research, but it is also present in both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts. The NET researchers recognize a fascination with violence among their patients, which they
systematically address with their therapy. But this fascination with violence cannot be exclusive to the NET patients, in fact, there is a distinct fascination with violence in Barbetta’s text. There is the woman who was brutally murdered in the hedge of the Nalo’s home, whose decapitation echoes the later decapitation of Mariana’s grandmother’s chickens. Mariana further plots to ensnare Analia, as punishment for her theft. Khider’s narrator seems to be aware of his greater propensity for violence, coaching himself to calm his blood, when a stranger approaches, whose very appearance sparks a heated reaction. In a text that inspires empathy from its readers as a reaction to the trauma experienced by the narrator, there is a danger of justifying violent behavior as an acceptable reaction to trauma, thus normalizing violence and aggression in society.

While the question of personal ethics effects the readers of these trauma narratives, there is also the question of the effect trauma narratives written at cultural intersections have on the national literatures on either side of the cultural divide. Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts are both written in the German language, but narrate events that transpired in Iraq and Argentina, respectively. On the one hand, because the traumas were personally experienced by the authors and because neither author felt capable of writing the story of that trauma in the language it occurred in, writing the story by any means possible and in a literary climate that ensured the story’s transmission through publication and distribution brings the story, at the very least, to the light of day. However, this process

200 “Durch das systematische Eingehen auf aggressives Verhalten kann NET helfen die Faszination an Gewalt zu regulieren und künftige Gewaltausübung zu kontrollieren. Das beim Erzählprozess entstehende Dokument, das »Testimony«, der Augenzeugen bericht des Überlebenden, zielt auf Würdigung der Person und Akzeptanz ihres Lebens.” (NET 346) - “Through the systematic engagement with aggressive behavior, NET can help to regulate the fascination with violence and control future acts of violence. The document created by the narrative-process, the ‘testimony’, the eye-witness statement of the survivor, aims at valuation of the person and acceptance of their life.”


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essentially robs the country in which the events transpired of important dialogue about the event, discussions in which the ethics of the social group implicated are negotiated. In a certain sense, the sins kept strictly secret in the mother country are confessed in the *Vaterland*, as Germany traditionally refers to itself. The record of these events then remains abroad. What degree of responsibility does the adopted land then carry? How should foreign stories, written in one’s own language and in one’s own country, be treated? How do these stories influence the creation of any subsequent stories in that country? The language carries these stories; it remains the medium used to transmit them. This has not only domestic implications, but it raises questions of responsibility for ensuring the ethical treatment of human beings internationally. This literature activates, in this manner, a sense of global responsibility. But what is the role of language in transmitting stories that awake a sense of global responsibility? And what does the German language, in particular, bring to this process?
Chapter 4: The Healing Relationship between Author and German as a Foreign Language

“Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” - Wordsworth

The preceding chapters have explored the relationship between trauma and the author (Chapter 2) and writing as both an artifact of and a source for finding catharsis after trauma (Chapter 3). But there is more to this story, particularly with regards to authors like María Cecilia Barbetta and Abbas Khider, who have both explained in interviews that their first novels could not have been written in their native tongues. Khider stated in an interview with Die Westdeutsche Allgemein Zeitung in 2013, “Und besonders meine beiden ersten Romane hätte ich nicht auf Arabisch schreiben können” (Khider, „Nelly-Sachs-Preis“); Barbetta explained in various interviews that she associates Spanish with the military dictatorship that governed Argentina in the latter half of the twentieth century. There is considerable reason to believe that the relationship that develops between an author and German as a foreign language does, in fact, have the propensity to be a healing one.

The timing of this dissertation is apt: as I turn to this final chapter, The New Yorker has run an article on writing in a non-native tongue. Yiyun Li talks about making an active decision to abandon her native Chinese to adopt English as her predominant language. In “To Speak is to Blunder”, Li highlights a number of issues that have surfaced in my own preceding chapters, some of which will be explained at greater length below. Entailed within this adoption of language is distance – whereas I have interpreted this as an emotional distance to the subject matter, Li focuses rather on the distance between herself and the language, a fact left unreconciled with her explanation.  

202 “And both my first novels, in particular, I couldn’t have written them in Arabic.”

of English as her private language. The adopted language remains neutral. In fact, it is in what she calls her personal language, the language she uses to communicate with herself, that she feels she is exactly as she wants to be.

Barbetta and Khider are not innovating literature by writing predominantly in a foreign language. Vladimir Nabokov and Joseph Conrad are more widely-known predecessors writing in English, and Nobel Prize winner Herta Müller and Elias Canetti, as well as world explorer Adelbert von Chamisso have drawn considerable attention to foreign language writing in German. Including Müller in my analysis of Khider and Barbetta would certainly have been fruitful, considering the autobiographical nature of her writings, but what sets Khider and Barbetta apart is their personal conviction that they could not have written their stories in their respective native languages of Arabic and Spanish. What is more, reflective of their own convictions, the protagonist of their respective work also engages in language-migration, if more ambiguously in Barbetta’s narrative. What both Khider and Barbetta bring to the literature discussion is precisely their preoccupation with writing in German as a foreign language in order to revisit the traumatic past, and, with the help of language as therapeutic tool, to reach a state of cathartic healing.

In this chapter, I will be elaborating on the role language plays in both Khider’s and Barbetta’s narratives, by focusing on language as a characteristic that distinguishes the protagonists of either text from their respective doppelgangers. Turning from the author testimonies to the texts themselves, as has been the practice throughout this dissertation, shows through example how the authors experienced the relationship between trauma, self and language, through the medium of their protagonists and stories. Although I was certainly primed to perceive linguistic differences within the text because of author testimony, it was using trauma as a research lens that helped to reveal the linguistic-migrations taking place in both Khider’s and Barbetta’s novels, whether thematically, as part of the plot, or structurally, as part of the narrative structure itself. While
circumstance seems to have brought about the linguistic differences between the protagonists and their doppelgangers, multilinguality within the texts not only enables geographic and social mobility, but emotional mobility as well. By this I mean that the characters are able to exceed the reaches of their trauma emotionally with the help of an additional language.

Through this examination of the relationship between trauma, the characters, and language, I have drawn the conclusion that, while writing a narrative provides a framework for processing trauma, writing in a foreign language provides perspective distance to the event, a venue for reinventing identity after trauma, and an avenue for healing play. But beyond this, the German language itself seems to provide a comforting stability through the grammatical structures of sentence syntax, verb conjugation, adjective endings, and word-compounds that facilitate the writing of trauma narratives.

4.a. Examples from the Text: Language as a characteristic distinguishing the doppelganger protagonists from one another, as well as distinguishing traumatic recall within the texts.

While there are a number of parallels between Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts, including the language and time in which they were written, the author motivations, and the content, the texts themselves share a peculiar further connection, in that both stories revolve around the encounter between a doppelganger pair. In Khider’s text, the frame narrator and his counterpart, Rasul Hamid, the embedded narrator, masquerade as doppelgangers. In Barbetta’s text, the doppelganger pair consists of Mariana Nalo and Analía Moran. Khider’s doppelgangers share the same handwriting, the same preference for writing in pencil, and the same past experiences; Barbetta’s characters share the same body measurements, the same sense of style (bags, skirts, etc.), the same letters in their names, and lead seemingly parallel lives in Buenos Aires. While drawing comparisons was helpful in previous chapters of this dissertation for understanding these characters as dissociative identities of just one
being, uncovering what distinguishes the characters from each other reveals important differences helpful in understanding the dynamic of language in the writing of narratives about trauma. Of each pair, one entertains greater social mobility, which is arguably linked to linguistic advantage over the other pair. Reflected in this is the argument that acquiring a new language is advantageous, supportive of both Khider’s and Barbetta’s decisions to acquire German as a foreign language.

Moving from this to thematic language migration within either text, however, brings us closer to the relationship between trauma and language, and particularly to the decision to migrate to a new language. These thematic examples of language migration extend then to the structural language migrations present within the narrative text itself. In fact, there are linguistic shifts taking place within both Khider’s and Barbetta’s narratives that are closely linked with encounters with trauma within the plot.

Before turning to this discussion of linguistic shifts taking place within the narrative, I return to the doppelganger pairs that served to identify these shifts. What distinguishes Khider’s characters from each other is their relative freedom of movement. The eight chapters of the embedded narrative of Rasul Hamid serve as testament to the difficulty of traveling without valid documents, as Rasul Hamid bounces from country to country, until finally making his way north from Italy, only to be stopped in Germany. The ease with which the frame narrator awaits and boards his train, and later the ease with which he arrives at his destination, with someone waiting for him, stand in strong contrast to not only Rasul Hamid’s tale, but the struggles imparted by the protagonist of Khider’s Ohrfeige as well. Whereas Rasul Hamid is constantly turned away, the frame narrator encounters just one unfavorable interaction, which itself cannot be attributed to his not belonging. After all, the woman who tosses the manuscript into his lap decides to sit next to him on the long train ride from Berlin to Munich, rather than questioning his right to be on the train.
But more than freedom of movement and opportunity, what distinguishes Khider’s characters from one another is, in fact, language. As each chapter retraces his footsteps from Iraq to Germany, there are a number of sometimes humorous exchanges, from which it is clear that Rasul Hamid learns German only after spending some time in Germany. There is an anecdote in a plane right after 9/11 related by Rasul Hamid, in which he converses with a Bavarian woman about his heritage, much to her chagrin (22). While the narrative details suggest that Rasul Hamid has learned German since that point, further details also suggest that the manuscript he loses, and which the frame narrator finds in the train is, in fact, written in Arabic, Arabic being the language of those experiences. But the frame narrator, despite his ability to read Arabic, exists exclusively in German within the text and presumably (re)writes his narrative not in Arabic, the language of Rasul Hamid, but in German.

Although the reader is meant to feel as though they are reading Rasul Hamid’s narrative in the Arabic, instances of translation within the text imply that the text was, in fact, written in German for a German-speaking audience. For example, Rasul Hamid provides a literal translation of his city of birth, “Madinat-A'Salam - Stadt des Friedens, die man heute als Bagdad kennt” (13), and of the part of the city where he was born, “Das Viertel Madinat-A'Thaura – Stadt der Revolution” (28). In an anecdote about Libya regarding the relations between men and women, Rasul Hamid explains that, if the Libyan government would only allow it, the Libyan men would only too gladly drape their women with signs: “Harram – Anfassan verboten! Lebensgefahr!” (43). There are also cultural explanations, such as the origin of his own personal prayer, “Gott, rette mich aus der Leere!” (72), which he took from the writings of Ali A'Sadschad, “Der sich Niederwerfende” (72), or the self-prostrating, the fourth great Imam of the Shiites. After reading the final page of the frame-narrative, which concludes with the frame narrator closing the envelope on his own manuscript, one might logically conclude that the narrative the reader has just read is actually the account of the frame
narrator, this time constructed within the German language. And here it is important to emphasize that the story itself is not translated, although there are instances of translation within the text, but rather rewritten. These acts of translation within the text serve to emphasize this argument: there would have been no need for explanatory translations in the original text.

When Barbetta’s characters are contrasted with each other, Analía’s comparatively greater opportunity and social mobility becomes apparent. Mariana, like Rasul Hamid, is weighted down by the traumatic experiences of her past and relies on compulsive counting to help her combat stress and anxiety throughout her day.\(^{203}\) Whereas loss mars Mariana’s life; her father, her grandfather, and her boyfriend have all permanently left her, whether through death or otherwise; Analía’s life seems a great success. Not only does she work as a math teacher, a position that requires a degree of education, but she is also engaged to an employee at a bank with his own opportunities for upward advancement. Further, she inherits a fine wedding dress from her mother, also implying a higher social status. Mariana, on the other hand, works for her aunt as a seamstress, her only independence in an otherwise well-controlled life. There is no mention of her last-completed level of education, and her clothes are a testament to her own skill with the needle rather than her ability to purchase them.

While Analía shares with Khider’s frame narrator the same upward mobility and freedom of movement, it is more difficult to argue a linguistic distinction from her doppelganger Mariana. Both Mariana and Analía apparently speak fairly exclusively Spanish. There are even indications in the text

\(^{203}\) Mariana thinks to “herself, “beim Zählen, ist es wie weggeblasen, in Luft aufgelöst dieses nichtige Elvira-Nachmittagsärgernis von jenem anderen dunkelbestimmbaren Gefühl der Zuversicht, das Marianas Gang so beflügelt.” (9) - “when counting, it’s as if blown away, dissipated into the air, this futile, Elvira-afternoon-irritation, from that other feeling of assurance that is difficult to discern, that gives flight to Mariana’s footsteps.” It would appear that the character Mariana here uses compulsive counting of steps, stones in the pavement, buttons, etc. to combat the anxiety caused through her interactions with others.
that point to Mariana’s linguistic limitation: she does not understand a word of French: “Mariana spricht kein einziges Wort Französisch” (Barbetta 98). But, if we are to read the novel as Mariana’s narration of her trauma (and here I would like to emphasize the process of narrating rather than the product), parallels between her narration and Rasul Hamid’s begin to surface. For example, there are instances of cultural and linguistic translation within Barbetta’s text, as in the ‘Rasul-Hamid-Manuscript’, which demonstrate the multilinguality of the narrative’s creator. The following example was used in Chapter 3 to help illustrate the implied monolingual, mono-cultural reader, but it also fits here to argue the multilinguality of Mariana’s narrative:

Diejenigen, die es weiter brachten, machten in jener 1536 vom spanischen Eroberer Pedro de Mendoza gegründeten und nach Neutra Señora del Buen Ayre, der Heiligen María der Guten Lüfte, benannten Stadt bescheidene Lebensmittelgeschäfte auf, Bäckereien, Kantinen, Bars, die im festen Glauben auf vielversprechende Namen wie La Providencia (die göttliche Vorsehung), El Porvenir (die Zukunft) oder La Esperanza (die Hoffnung) feierlich getauft wurden. (13)²⁰⁴

And while Mariana’s narrative reveals her as multilingual in a manner that facilitates the writing of her narrative and distinguishes her from Analía, Analía appears to be distinguished from Mariana as well through her own exclusive knowledge of a network of signs. Whereas Mariana crunches numbers to calm her nerves and take measurements for alterations, Analía exercises a great enough command of mathematics to teach the beginnings of geometry to students. Mariana, after all, finds students’ assignments in Analía’s handbag explaining the mathematic particulars of the triangle (283).

²⁰⁴ “Those who managed to prevail opened modest grocery stores, bakeries, cook houses, bars in the city that was founded in 1536 by the Spanish conqueror Pedro de Mendoza and named after Neutra Señora del Buen Ayre, the Holy Mary of Favorable Winds. These stores were opened in keeping with the faith, and ceremoniously baptized with promising names like La Providencia (Godly providence), El Porvenir (the future) or La Esperanza (hope).”
Moving from character distinctions linked with linguistic advantage, it is useful to identify thematic instances of language ‘migration’ within either narrative before extending this analysis to structural language ‘migrations’ within the language of the narrative itself. I write ‘migration’ here, to emphasize the autonomous act of deciding to move from one language to another, to imply a motivation for the move, as well as to allude to the cultural implications of moving from one language system to another. Starting with Khider, I examine Rasul Hamid’s self-invented network of signs and its subsequent dissolution in favor of another network of signs. In Barbetta’s text, the clues to unraveling Mariana’s linguistic migrations are found in the writing of Mariana’s father.

In the second chapter, titled “Schreiben und Verlieren”, Khider’s Rasul Hamid talks about his relationship with writing, with his memories, but most importantly, his relationship with language as a personal and as a social construct. Beginning the chapter, Hamid explains how he came to write, saying that he was able to know himself better through the mode of writing. He explains that just one thing has up to this point hindered his writing his life’s story, his memory. He calls this forgetfulness his “Gnade” or grace (26), making the claim that it is responsible for his still being alive, “Kaum auszudenken, wenn ich mich an alles genau erinnerte. Ich hätte meinem Leben längst ein Ende gesetzt” (26).\(^{205}\) His valuation of the ability to forget the past, as well as the difficulties he finds in ordering his memories by “Raum, Zeit und Handlung” (26), or place, time and plot, all imply past traumatic interludes, as was argued in Chapter 2 of this dissertation, but the real point of interest for this dissertation chapter is his relationship with signs. First, growing up under a dictatorship that persecuted critical opinions of the government, then later with the precarious existence of a refugee crossing state borders, secrecy was necessary to convey truths, facts, histories, emotions, and most importantly, expressions of free speech. In his own words, Hamid explains that

\(^{205}\) “It’s hardly conceivable, when I remember everything exactly. I would have ended my life long ago.”
he “entwickelte ein eigenes Alphabet, aus lateinischen und arabischen Buchstaben, Mustern und Zahlen, was außer [ihm] kein Mensch entschlüsseln konnte” (27). This trauma-induced, ‘language migration’ represents the creation of and migration to a self-created linguistic network outside of the greater social linguistic network that impeded his ability to write. In the parameters of the embedded story, Rasul Hamid creates this linguistic network of signs in order to record the truth about the atrocities around him and his experience of them.

This anecdote contains within it the key to understanding the mechanics at work in acquiring a new network of signs to commit the past to the page and combat the tyranny of traumatic memory. Rasul Hamid explains that the tyranny of the past, specifically the fascist government of Suddam Hussein in Iraq and varying degrees of fascist rule throughout the Arabic states, forced him to find an alternative for voicing atrocities shrowded in silence. Specifically, Hamid uses his network of signs to list “die Namen von Präsidenten, ihre Grausamkeiten, ihre Schlächtereien, aber auch unbekannte Widerstandsaktionen” (27). Dictatorship constricts access to language in much the same way that traumatic memory seems to restrict memory; Rasul Hamid was unable to write in Arabic for fear of incarceration or execution, and a similar fear of loss of life hinders the written documentation of personally experienced trauma.

The self-created language, which allows Rasul Hamid to document the political and social violence around him, first in Iraq and later during his journey, is eventually forgotten, lost through the cracks of his memory, apparently. He has forgotten this self-invented linguistic network of signs, however, because it has been gradually replaced by a better-established linguistic network, one that allows him to join a social group unassociated with his own personally-experienced social traumas.

206 “Developed [his] own alphabet, using Latin and Arabic letters, patterns and numbers, which, besides himself, no one could decipher.”
207 “The names of presidents, their atrocities, their slaughters, but also unknown acts of rebellion” (27).
Over the course of the eight chapters of his manuscript, the reader discovers bits and pieces of his journey to the German language. His first interactions with German border control upon arriving, “»Passport!« Ich: »No!«” (21), his need for a translator while his petition for asylum is reviewed (21), his first flight in Germany post-9/11 (22), etc., these anecdotes outline, albeit non-chronologically, Rasul Hamid’s gradual migration to the German language.

The parallels that connect Hamid’s experience of trauma and dictatorship extend beyond the perpetrator-victim paradigm. His trauma may have been the product of fascist repression of free-speech, but the control trauma has on the mind and the memory also suggests parallels to the grip dictatorship has on society, exacting punishment unexpectedly and seemingly undeservedly, confusing one’s understanding of reality and one’s conception of the progression of time. In the madness of dictatorship, one feels frighteningly out of control. Testimonies of trauma survivors report the same: the loss of subjectivity. Because of these parallels between the trauma of fascism on society with the fascist rule of terror on the mind, the act of writing testimony of the crimes of fascism as well as moments of solidarity against it lends itself well to the paradigm of narrative writing to similarly testify against the fascism of the mind and the moments of successful revolt against it, of reclaiming subjectivity.

Parallel with this gradual language migration is his subsequent forgetting of his own self-invention. This subsequent forgetting argues the importance of audience in writing, and the need for a sympathetic listener when communicating trauma narratives. The ambition behind these first writings is presumably his desire to change the world: in this same chapter, he explains his first motivation for writing to express his “Gefühle in Worte” (25), his final motivation was to better understand himself, but the phase of writing in between this was the desire to change the world with words. Hamid’s forgetting his personal linguistic code that allowed him to document his reality and

208 “Feelings in words.”
his thoughts, implies that coming to Germany and joining a network of signs outside of the Iraqi dictatorship, and better yet, a network of signs that was eagerly read by others who shared the same network of signs better fulfilled the need that caused this self-created language to exist in the first place.

As was said above, thematic language migration within Barbeta’s text is more covert. Nonetheless, there is significant evidence of language migration within the context of writing. Mariana’s father, a doctor in natural sciences, is described as secretive and withdrawn from his family, spending instead hours perusing novels.

Lesend war er eine untreue, unersättliche Seele, die nicht anders konnte, als drei oder vier Bücher gleichzeitig zu verschlingen, in erster Linie davon bessessen, geheime Verbindungen zwischen Thematiken und Autoren aufzudecken, eine Persönlichkeit, die insgeheim und unbarmherzig jedes Buch der Promiskuität verdächtigte, der strafbaren, unsittsamen Lust an ungeregelten Verwandtschaftsbeziehungen zu fremden Bänden. Ausgerechnet an seinem letzten Lebenstag würden sich ihm die Lösungen einiger wissenschaftlicher Rätsel wie ein Sesam-öffne-dich auftun. (21)

Yet, when his last journal finally surfaces in the narrative in Chapter 32, titled ‘the last entries of Dr. rer. nat. Nicolás Nalo’s red protocol notebook’, we see not the discussion of literature as we were led to expect in Chapter 3, but rather the mating practices of praying mantises. In a tidy, bulleted list, Nicolás explains how he came to keep a growing number of praying mantises to study, “Eine vollständige Beobachtung ihrer Lebensweise ist an freilebenden Tieren nicht durchzuführen. Man

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209 “Reading, he was an unfaithful, insatiable soul, who couldn’t help but devour three or four books at a time. First and foremost, he was obsessed with uncovering covert associations between thematics and authors; a personality who, secretly and unforgivingly suspected every book of promiscuity, the punishable, uncultured desire for unregulated familial relations to foreign tomes. On his last day of life, of all days, the solutions to a few scientific riddles would have revealed themselves to him” (21).
muß sie unbedingt im Käfig halten” (321). Throughout the bullets, he explains how the population lived peacefully together until it was time for the females to mate. With passive wonder, he describes the cannibalistic tendencies of the females against each other and, with casual bemusement, at the greed of some of the females in ‘consuming’ their partners, “Mich reizte es zu erfahren, wie ein zweites Männchen von dem eben befruchteten Weibchen empfangen würde. Das Ergebnis meiner Untersuchung ist aufsehenerregend. Im Verlaufe weniger Wochen sah ich ein und dasselbe Weibchen bis zu siebenmal hintereinander immer neue Liebhaber annehmen und dann verspeisen” (322).

Not until the second-to-last bullet does Nicolás admit any sort of emotion concerning his observations, and this upon a female eating her mate from within its embrace: “Ich habe es gesehen, mit meinem eigenen Augen gesehen, und mich noch immer nicht von meiner Überraschung erholt!” (322).

At the very least, this anecdote reveals a distancing technique through the register of language, that is, the objective observations of a scientific report. In keeping with this register, Nicolás documents his experiment in the structure of an observational list. Although his emotions and philosophical musings creep into the final bullets of his report, his emotions are written with the same amount of gusto as his explanation for caging the creatures in the first place. Only a solitary exclamation point stands out to describe his shock. Further, he uses scientific curiosity as justification for his repeated sacrificing of male specimens to his greedy female specimens, ‘mich reizte’. I wrote ‘at the very least’ at the beginning of this paragraph, because I suspect that the father’s observations of praying mantises are themselves a cover for his observations of similar

210 “A complete observation of their living habits as free animals cannot be carried out. They must be held in cages.”
211 “I was curious to know if a second male-specimen would be received by the recently fertilized female-specimen. The result of my experiment is startling. Over the course of a few weeks, I saw one and the same female, up to seven times in a row, receive and then eat her subsequent suitors.”
212 “I saw it, I saw it with my own eyes, and I still haven’t recovered from my surprise!”
transgressions in the human world. In support of this argument, Mariana herself retreats into the linguistic refuge of her father, the register of an entomologist observing the insect-world around her in Chapter 4, as she struggles to communicate her frustrations at observing her father’s infidelity with attractive young women on their father-daughter outings,

Mit dem Finger hatte er darauf gezeigt, auf die Wunde hingewiesen, *Universalexikon der Naturwissenschaften*, letztes Drittel der zweiten Spalte: Bei ihren gemeinsamen Ausflügen hob Nicolás eine *Araeis daiadematus* [vulgaris = Kreuzspinne], bestimmte Lauffäden auf, auf denen er ungefährdet über sein Netz laufen konnte, fixierte beim Gehen, eins, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, Frauen, die ihm entgegenkamen, erweckte den Eindruck, dabei seine Ohren mit Wachs verschließen zu können gegen Marianas Gesang und Marianas Rufe und Marianas Schreie unmittelbar an seiner Seite […] (28-29). 213

As a further indication of the linguistic shift that transpires around the moment of high emotional stress, Mariana introduces another Latin term into the narrative in order to describe the horrific image of an otherwise quiet and reserved man. Mariana describes her father’s corpse as “eine einzige Coincidentia Oppositorum” (23). It is also worth noting, that this scientific language appears only in writing: the father uses this register in his red protocol notebook, and Mariana uses it exclusively to narrate past traumas during her written narration process.

These linguistic shifts are thematic, because they are closely interwoven with the development of the plot immediately associated with the protagonist, Mariana. There is further evidence of linguistic migration isolated in moments of cognitive stress that are largely structural,

213 “With his finger he had pointed at it, at the wound, *Universal Lexicon of Natural Science*, the last third of the second column: During their outings together, Nicolás, an *Araeis daiadematus* [vulgaris = cross spider], suspended certain lead-lines, upon which he could run across his web unscathed, secured on the go, one, two, three, four, five, women, whom he came across raised the suspicion that he could seal his ears with wax to keep out Mariana’s song and Mariana’s calls and Mariana’s cries, right by his side […]”
influencing the fabric of the narrative itself, and not necessarily important for the development of plot. The scientific, impersonal, observational language demonstrated thematically by Mariana’s father, also has a structural function in allowing the narrator to describe the indescribable. More simply put, this language migration by way of register shift enables both Mariana and her father to provide testimony for or to witness (as an active verb, implying the obligatory telling or narrative practice of telling about) events that shock and surprise them, and, particularly in the case of Mariana, exceed her capacity to communicate with anyone else about them, but through writing. Reading Barbetta’s novel as Mariana’s trauma narrative provides a framework for understanding this language migration into the scientific register as a resource for continuing the narrative structure when it threatens to dissolve under the emotional weight of the narrative content.

Because both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts can be considered as both novels as well as trauma narratives, the lines between thematic and structural language migrations within the text are difficult to distinguish. In Khider’s work, for example, although the shift in language from the frame narrative to the embedded narrative is further evidence of the thematic language migration that has transpired between the frame narrator and the embedded narrator, this same contrast demonstrates a structural language migration as well. Certainly, as was argued above, the reader is initially led to believe that the embedded narrative is written in Arabic and by a character other than the frame narrator. Only after the embedded narrative is understood as the frame narrator’s story does the shift from Arabic, the language of Rasul Hamid, to the German of the frame narrator become apparent. The thematic language migration, which helps to motivate the plot of the narrative, that of a journey of arrival into a new language, into a new country, and more poignantly, arrival into the time of the present, helps uncover the structural language migrations within the narrative fabric itself. Arabic within the text not only functions as the language of Rasul Hamid, but also the language of the past. Rasul Hamid narrates the events of his past, presumably in Arabic, but
definitely in the narrative past. The frame narrative, however, relates events as they are happening in the present tense, and presumably in German, as the reader can read the writing on the wall in German with the frame narrator. Although some might argue that “reading” the embedded narrative in Arabic is proof that the author could only have written this novel in his native language and then translated it, it is more productive to understand the events themselves as having happened to the Arabic identity of the narrator, Rasul Hamid, and that developing an identity for himself in the German language, that of the frame narrator, allows the narrator to revisit his past as a distanced observer rather than re-experiencing the events directly.

There is further evidence of structural language migration within Rasul Hamid’s narrative as well, which has been argued above as characteristics of trauma manifesting itself in the text. For example, exclusively Rasul Hamid’s narrative is marked by storytelling details, such as the origination story of Bagdad, “Als Kalif Al-Mansur im Jahr 762 auf der Suche nach Ruhe und Erholung durch die unendlichen Weiten des Orients zog, erblickte er plötzlich vor sich eine idyllische an zwei Flüssen liegende Landschaft” (13),214 or the introduction of the figure of the Dämonenweib, the demon’s wife, to explain the disappearance of young boys from around the neighborhood (142). The embedded narrative begins with the origination story of Bagdad, signaling two things: first, that the events that transpire within the narrative, the narrative itself, is to be understood as a fairy tale, which may or may not be based upon true events, and that the introduction of the fantastic into language is an important distancing technique. Secondly, Kalif Al-Mansur can be understood as a metaphor for the frame narrator, as this is also a figure in search of peace and recovery after a long journey. In any case, both details help to elaborate the distinct shift from an otherwise authentic and real-time language of the frame narrative.

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214 “When Caliph Al-Mansur, in the year 762, in search of peace and recovery, traveled across the endless expanse of the Orient, he suddenly saw an idyllic landscape before him, lying on two rivers.”
Structural language migrations in Barbetta’s text are a little more difficult to identify without the clear distinction between two narratives divided not just by language and tense, but by intent as well, as they are in Khider’s text. The structural language migrations within Barbetta’s text are difficult to distinguish from the thematic language migrations happening within the narrative language. As does Khider’s frame narrator, Mariana switches into the fantastic register in her narrative, as I have argued before. Here as well, this shift allows the narrator to create distance between the self and the reality of the event, as well as the reality of the depiction of the event, thus establishing an emotional buffer. The uncontrollable repetition of traumatic recall is to blame for the psychological and physiological trauma symptoms’ persistence long after the event, thus, the creation of an emotional buffer through narrative distancing techniques can be incredibly helpful in addressing the symptoms of trauma. Returning to the episode in the grandparents’ backyard, in which Mariana as narrator activates past memory into present narration helps to pinpoint parts of the narrative which contain emotionally provocative content, as well as the devices used to distance them: “Jene magische Vergangenheit richtete sich nach einer individuellen Zeitrechnung, die alles, was mit ihr in Kontakt trat, in eine karamelartige Knetmasse verwandelte, in eine klare, bonbon-farbene Gegenwart” (148).215

This chapter, in which Mariana remembers the joy of childhood experienced at her grandparent’s house, scarcely conceals her grandparents’ anxiety at the time. While the grandmother expresses her anxiety by hounding the grandfather to take his medicine, the grandfather is left muttering in his garden that they are all driving him mad. This begs the question, however, who or what is causing this anxiety. Recalling my conversation with Barbetta and her acknowledgment of the dictatorship in Argentina being very present beneath the surface of her text, I question whether

215 “That magical past complied with an individualized keeping of time that transformed everything it came into contact with into caramel-like putty, into a clear, candy-colored present.”
the dictatorship was complicit in the grandfather’s “flight” out of the hospital window and in Mariana’s father’s death. Furthermore, this chapter documenting the joys of childhood at an otherwise sinister time immediately follows the chapter discussing cockroach extermination in the Nalo household, a pest infestation that had quite suddenly descended upon the Argentines. Not only the cockroaches were thirsty for blood and ensnared within the pyramid structure. In a further connection, Mariana surmises Gerardo to have disappeared into the Bermuda triangle-like shape formed by the three cities of his American journey.

Returning to the anecdote in the garden, and the shift in narrative tense demonstrated within it, is the introduction of the magic within nature as well as the suspension of realistic limitations imposed upon human form and motion. While this at first appears to be an example of positive memories from the past revisiting Mariana in her present and painting themselves in a golden light, the events alluded to within the chapter hint at more nefarious events, and concludes with, “Eines Nachts mit klarem Sternenhimmel hatte ihr Großvater beschlossen, es nicht länger auszuhalten, dieses Leben, hatte entschieden, am eigenen Leib auszuprobieren, wie es ist, sich totzustellen” (153). When Mariana first learned of her grandfather’s death, she imagined he jumped out of the hospital window wanting to know what it was like to fly; later she presumed it was all the bugs in his garden that has driven him to madness, and to escape by death, “Sie treiben mich in den Wahnsinn… Sie machen alles kaputt… Es hört nie auf…” (152); later still, she realized the people around him must have driven him to madness and his airy escape. How the story will continue to develop as Mariana learns more about the world around her might very well be a question answered by Barbetta’s next novel, which, as of 2016, was fast approaching conclusion.

216 “One night, under a clear, starry sky, her grandfather decided not to hold out any longer, this life, had decided to try out on his own body how it would be to make himself dead.”
217 “They’re driving me crazy… they ruin everything… It never stops…”

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But this shift into the fantastic register has already been argued as a characteristic of traumatic experience, being an indicator of the loss of distinction between reality and fantasy, as well as a narrative device that allows an author to establish distance for themselves and for their reader from the narrated trauma. Metaphorically, the shift to fantastic, abstract language reflects a parallel language-shift within Barbetta’s text to the language of entomological scientific observation. Stated more clearly, in isolated moments of traumatic recall within Barbetta’s text, within Mariana’s trauma narrative as it is being created, the narrative language shifts to the objective observations of an entomological researcher, studying the habits of spiders and praying mantises. Returning to the metaphor of the garden, and the child-Mariana’s naïve assumption that the slugs in the garden must have driven her grandfather to leap out the window, or to the anecdote within the first chapter of child-Mariana in her manic pursuit to squash out what she believes are slugs emitting from the manhole covers, or again to the episode of her father’s infidelity, Mariana’s narrative breaks into descriptions of the natural world of bugs around her whenever her cognitive stress is greatest. And while this evasion functions as an emotional buffer much in the same way that the fantastic language helps Mariana distance herself from the painful events she’s either experiencing in real time, or reliving through traumatic recall, this linguistic evasion also helps to mask the story of social violence lurking beneath the surface of her narrative.

An example of abstracted metaphor used within the narrative, and not for thematic purpose, but rather structural purposes, is most clearly seen in the otherwise inconspicuous Chapter 16, in which Mariana and her mother discuss the newest pest control methods for cockroaches. Mariana’s mother reminds her of her first encounter with a cockroach, when one fell out of the sky and into the pool of blood and juices formed on her steak while eating outside with her parents one summer:

»Weißt du noch diesen Grillabend im Innenhof, als du sechs oder sieben warst? Du hast die ganze Zeit geplappert und mit deinem Vater Quatsch gemacht. Auf deinem Teller hat das
kalt gewordene Steak und ringsherum der Salat gelegen.« Mariana erinnerte sich bildlich
daran. Auch, daß sich auf dem Steak eine Saftdelle gebildet hatte. Und daß sie, bevor sie ins
Bett mußte, einwandte: »Ein ekliger blutiger See!« Eine halbe Stunde davor war die Landung
erfolgt. Die Kakerlake, die – solange sie aus dem heiteren Himmel geflogen kam – von den
drei Anwesenden nicht als solche identifiziert werden konnte, dieses schwarze Mini-UFO,
stürzte kopfüber in den See hinein. […] Es war grauenvoll mitanzusehen. Eine mörderische,
ja selbstmörderische Kamikaze-Kakerlake. Da Familie Nalo ohnehin draußen saß, konnte
Carmen – um der Horrorvision der Tochter ein Ende zu setzen – nichts tun, außer die
Kakerlake mitsamt Grillteller hineinzutragen. Seitdem verband die Tochter dieses Detail mit
dem Einzug der Küchenschaben in die Gemäuer des Conventillos […] Seitdem wurde die
Mutter stillschweigend dazu verurteilt, Gift zu streuen und Gift zu sprühen, um die Plage zu
bekämpfen. (140-41)

Mariana associates the arrival of this one cockroach with the beginning of the infestation in her
house, but covertly, this anecdote corresponds with what was transpiring historically around the
young Mariana. The military dictatorship, which Barbetta explains as playing a very large, if very
covert role in the text, compares with the invasion of the cockroaches. What is more, the infestation
directly effects Argentines in two very important places, their grilling and in their kitchens. Outdoor
grilling is strongly associated with national identity in Argentina,, not in small part, due to the
importance of cattle ranching to the economy. As Mariana and her mother discuss the best methods
for ridding the ‘kitchen’ (read here Argentina) of the pests, Mariana brings up the issue of control
and violence, a further allusion to the social unrest in Argentina at the time: “Die [the manufacturers
of the advertized pest control] haben das nicht unter Kontrolle, Mutter. Und übrigens werden sie
Having identified the role language plays within the texts, first as a characteristic distinguishing the doppelganger pairs from one another and also indicating social advantage and greater mobility, then examining language migrations within either text as thematic elements to further the plot as well as structural elements that make up the narrative fabric of either text, it is time to examine language migrations more closely. Examining the relationship between the characters, the text, and language gleans some important insight into the advantages of writing in a “foreign” language.

4.b. The Advantages of Foreign Language Writing

Khider’s frame narrator exclaims in outrage that Rasul Hamid has stolen his narrative, and not only that, the narrative structure he had been searching for. The frame narrator explains that he himself had wanted to write his story for a long time, but that the appropriate narrative structure had evaded him in the five years he had been planning to write: “Schon lange hegte ich den Wunsch, meine Fahrt auf dem Geisterschiff, meine Odyssee, niederzuschreiben. Nie habe ich es geschafft. Immer wieder, seit mindestens fünf Jahren, versuchte ich einen Anfang. Und immer wieder hörte ich auf, weil ich nicht überzeugt war, weil mir die Erzählstruktur fehlte, weil ich einfach nicht zufrieden war” (Khider 154). This begs the question why he is suddenly able to ‘stumble across’ his narrative with the appropriate narrative structure. What has transpired in the last five years, from the death of the narrator’s sister and her children leading up to the conclusion of the frame narrator’s manuscript?

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218 “They don’t have it under control, Mother. And, by the way, they aren’t killed with this. They stay alive and are only driven away.”

219 “For a long time now I’ve cherished the desire to write down my journey on the ghost ship, my odyssey. I’ve never done it. Again and again, for at least five years now, I’ve tried to begin. And again and again I’ve stopped, because I wasn’t convinced, because the narrative-structure was missing, because I just wasn’t satisfied” (Khider 154)
Clues within the text reveal this as the narrator “arriving” in the German language. I write “arriving” here to allude to the metaphor of the train station. Khider’s frame narrator, as I have argued above, seemingly comes into existence as he walks onto the Berlin Zoo train platform. Boarding the train, he finds the manuscript of his past and finishes reading it as his train arrives in Munich. After “arriving” in Munich (where Khider began his studies at the university – and thus presumably arriving in the language itself), Khider’s frame narrator is finally able to write the manuscript of his own story as we read it, in German. The frame narrator’s learning German thus allowed him to overcome the challenges he faced in writing his narrative: the narrative structure and sufficient perspective for writing a convincing story.

After researching the chapters that preceded this in the dissertation, on literature written in the context of migration, on trauma as a catalyst and formative element for the writing process, the writing process as a therapeutic resource for treating the symptoms of trauma, and finally the role of language, but particularly language migration within either text, the same conclusions keep coming home. Writing in a foreign language, but particularly writing trauma narratives in a foreign language, provides the context needed for establishing distance, both social and personal, to the traumatic content. This personal distance can be broken apart into emotional, semantic, and perspective distance. Further, foreign language learning provides a venue for the (re)creation of identity after trauma, which is an important part of the recovery process from trauma. And this identity creation can be similarly broken into a social as well as a personal identity. Finally, the foreign language offers an avenue for creative play, which itself is a forward-looking activity important in moving on from the traumatic experiences of the past. While these three advantages to foreign language learning might be similarly argued of any foreign language, I conclude this chapter with speculation about characteristics of the German language that make it particularly suitable as a resource for treating trauma.
4.b.i. Distance

In his interview with Kohlstadt of the *Westdeutsche*, Khider explained that German allowed him to create distance between himself and the events of the past. Léda Forgó, another Chamisso author introduced in Chapter 1, explained the distance as being between her and the language. Barbetta also felt a certain distance made possible through the German language to the Argentina in her past, something she considers to be healthy, “Der Sprachwechsel ist überhaupt die Chance, mich Argentinien wieder anzunähern, und zwar vorsichtig, aus einer gewissen Distanz, die ich für gesund halte” (Gruber). Within the conception of distance used to describe the relationship between authors and their foreign language are a number of different applications: Identifying moments of high-agitation within Barbetta’s text as traumatic, in that they leave a lasting impression of lost control in the psyche of the narrator Mariana, allowed for code-switching within the text to surface. At least two kinds of code-switching are present within the narrative, that of distancing self from reality through excursions into the fantastic, and at other times, the switch into the objective safety of scientific observation. These anecdotes, but particularly the latter of the two help build an understanding of the relationship between author and foreign language that allows an author to narrate past traumas. The shift into the fantastic illustrates the freedom from social convention by nature of the linguistic group, which the father of modern linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure, would refer to as the *langue*. The fantastic utterance is an example of the author’s *parole* that shifts away from conventional application of the *langue*, that is, standards regarding language use and one’s

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220 “Außerdem habe ich eine durch meine Nicht-Abstammung erzwungene Distanz zum Deutschen. Dieses Laster ist jetzt mein Profit, es hilft mir pathosfrei zu bleiben, mich selbst durch die fremde Sprache von Außen zu betrachten und ohne großartige Suche einen eigenen Ton zu besitzen.” – “Besides, I have an imposed distance from German because of my not-nativeness. This burden is now my boon, as it helps me to remain unemotional, to see myself from outside through the foreign language, and to have a tone of my own without really having to search for it.”

221 “The language change is the ultimate chance to re-approach Argentina, albeit carefully, from a certain distance, which I consider to be healthy.”
understanding of reality. The second type of code-switching within Barbetta’s novel was represented by the shift into scientific observation within Barbetta’s text in particular, however, this shift illustrates the emotional, subjective distance gained from an outside stance. But not just this: it also hints at something unique to the German language, something about the cognitive process required to produce the German language that allows an author to retreat from the emotionality of the experience to the safety of grammatical structures. But before turning to the structural appeal of the German language, I turn to a discussion of the types of distance provided by language: emotional, semantic and perspective distance.

4.b.i.a. Social experience

Acquiring a new language for Khider and Barbetta meant joining a new linguistic group, and, luckily for Khider and Barbetta, a linguistic group with a sufficient number of sympathetic listeners to make receiving funding to write and later publish their narratives possible. Not only is an interested demographic of readers necessary for economic success as a writer, but it also fulfills the social component as necessitated by narrative exposition therapy.

Both Khider and Barbetta were born outside of the German *langue*, that is, the greater, overarching language system that governs individual utterances. Their language skills and cognitive processes were established long before they learned German. Furthermore, the implicit semantic weight of words is arguably less-defined for either Khider or Barbetta, because they explicitly learned German rather than implicitly, as a child learns their first language. Just as words like patriot, hero, and freedom carry a certain connotation in American English, words like Heimat and Führer and Nationalstolz carry a much different weight in the German language. It is precisely this connotation associated with words that caused Emine Sevgi Özdamar to exclaim that her native language of Turkish had become sick.

On the other hand, Barbeta recognizes the weight carried by the German language, which she refers to as a trauma of its own, but, this weight does not affect her:

Deutsch ist eine besetzte Sprache, in der ein Trauma sich birgt. Ich erinnere mich daran, dass es so ist. Auf der anderen Seite hat die Sprache für mich dieses Komponent nicht, nicht wirklich. Klar, wenn ich mich hinsetze und darüber reflektiere, weiß ich es sofort und ganz genau, aber für mich hat es für sich nicht wirklich. (Personal interview) (223)

By writing in the German language, Barbeta and Khider thus gain access to a linguistic system, but one that does not carry the same emotional weight by association as their native tongues. In addition to context, but in the similar vein of standardization through social use of language, the social group determines what can and cannot be said in a language. How many times have non-native speakers of any language, but German in particular, proudly come up with a grammatically correct statement of their own creation only to be told by a native speaker that it just cannot be said the way they imagined?

Returning to Khider and Barbeta, by joining a new socio-linguistic group, they are given the chance to establish distance from their native linguistic groups dominated by dictatorship that hindered their writing processes. Barbeta is adamant in her refusal to write in Spanish, a language

222 “I am unhappy in my language. For years, we only say sentences like: They will hang them. Where were their heads? No one knows where her grave is. The police didn’t release the body! The words are sick. My words need a sanatorium, like sick mussels.”

223 “German is an occupied language, in which a trauma is hiding. I remember that it is so. On the other hand, the language doesn’t have this component for me, not really. Sure, when I sit down and reflect on it, I know right away and exactly, but it doesn’t really have that effect for me.”
she associates with the military dictatorship of the last quarter of the twentieth century in Argentina. Whereas Barbetta’s inability to write in Spanish manifests as more of a psychological hindrance, Khider’s hindrance was, at least initially, social. While not calling Arabic the language of dictatorship explicitly, as Barbetta does, Khider covertly demonstrates how the dictatorships throughout the Arabic world limited his freedom of expression, forcing him to develop a symbolic language of his own before his learning German eliminated the necessity for a private symbolic language. But the distance Khider and Barbetta establish by moving away from a linguistically restrictive environment represents only one side. There is also the distance between both authors and the linguistic groups they arrive in.

In addition to entertaining freedom from linguistic associations in their mutual adopted language with social traumas of the linguistic group, Khider and Barbetta stand to gain an important perspective stance through the acquisition of an additional linguistic system. By nature of their late acquisition of German, either author can essentially stand on the threshold of both their native and adopted language. Through the experience of the native language, they can observe their adopted language from ‘outside’ the network of associations. Both authors have been able to turn this perspective stance around, however, observing in the opposite direction their respective native languages and (traumatic) experiences acquired therein. In her article on foreignness as an aesthetic principle, Barbara Alms explains that, being in the foreign language is about understanding oneself and one’s history, but through the medium of the foreign: “In der fremden Sprache geht es um das Verstehen des Eigenen, der eigenen Geschichte, aber über den Umweg der Fremde” (140).

In her anthology, *Verbotene Worte*, Tzveta Sofronieva elaborates on the distance between the *parole* of a non-native speaker of a language from the established *langue* of the majority group of

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224 “In the foreign language, it’s all about understanding oneself, one’s own story, but by way of the foreign.”
native speakers with her discussion of the term *Heimat*, or homeland. Wanting to translate the title of her poem from Bulgarian with the German *Heimat*, Sofronieva met with resistance from native speakers of German who explained to her the connotations the word carried with it, Barbetta’s acknowledged “traumas”. Sofronieva marks this conversation as her birth into the German language, as she began to take the language more seriously from her initial, light-hearted forays into it (88).

4.b.i.b. Individual experience

4.b.i.b.i. Establishing emotional distance through language

In the previous chapter, I introduced LaCapra’s interpretation of two self-imposed exile writers, Coetzee and Sebald, who LaCapra argues needed the geographic distance from the social traumas they inherited to be able to write about them in their native languages. Khider and Barbetta, like Coetzee and Sebald, have also inherited social traumas. However, they diverge from the comparison in that Khider and Barbetta, having personally experienced these social traumas, felt the need to distance themselves from the language in which the trauma transpired as well. Their mutual adopted language of German is taken on as a protective layer, from which they (re)turn to the past to write about it. Khider describes the protection he feels in the German language as *Mutterschutz* (a mother’s protection) and Barbetta herself uses the term *Tarnkappe*. Ultimately, this protection boils down to a protective barrier between the authors and their emotional response associated with trauma.

The distinction between languages functions both as a barrier to emotional content from the past, but it also provides the tool needed to negotiate or facilitate the crossing of that barrier.

Barbetta explains:

> Es ist interessant, dass sowohl Abbas [Khider] als auch ich, eine Fremdsprache benutzen; wir sprechen mit diesem Schmerz in einer Fremdsprache. Dieser Schmerz ist in meinem Fall urargentinisch. Ich kann über geringen oder normalen argentinischen Schmerz in meiner
Muttersprache reden, aber über einen tiefen Schmerz in meiner Muttersprache zu reden wäre für mich sehr sehr schwierig. (Personal interview)

Although the traumas personally experienced by Khider and Barbetta were social ones, that is, living under and with the repercussions of dictatorships in their respective countries, the decision to replace their respective native languages as the main tool of writing with the German was very much a personal decision. And while narrative writing has been shown to work to cathartic effect after a traumatic experience, it is finally time to question what role foreign language plays in this process of healing after trauma.

Robert Eaglestone, whose critical eye helped to develop trauma as a future research paradigm for the humanities from Cathy Caruth’s pioneering efforts, argued that the trauma of the twentieth century was responsible for changes in language meaning and sensibility. “The hyperbolic suggestion, then, is that the change in language and acts of culture is itself a response to trauma and that what’s called ‘trauma theory’ is the place where this change has been responded to most clearly” (Eaglestone 19).

Eaglestone grounds this remark about language change in Michel Foucault’s The Order of Things, but particularly his section on the “Being of Language”, which more closely examines the relationship between man, language as sign, and the things language describes. In the section, Foucault explains that the arrangement of signs moved from a tertiary, which acknowledged both significant, signified as well as the conjunction, to a more stable binary. But this binary stripped language of its power to generate association, and I am reminded here of the Golem that was brought to life by the word inscribed on his chest. The power of the word is what brought the Golem to life, and

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225 “It is interesting that both Abbas and I use a foreign language; we speak with this pain in a foreign language. This pain, in my case, is fundamentally Argentine. I can talk about limited or normal Argentine pain in my mother tongue, but to talk about a deep pain in my mother tongue would be very very difficult for me.”
later returned him to dust. The stabilizing shift to a binary in the advent of the Renaissance, however, restricted language “to the general organization of representative signs” (Foucault 42).

What Foucault and Eaglestone recognized on a macro-level is also apparent on a micro-level, but the correlations are different. Khider and Barbetta arguably move from a tertiary arrangement of signs, that is, an arrangement of significant, the word, the signified, what the word describes, but also the “conjuncture”, the power of the word itself beyond representative sign to affect change in the world around it. In Der Golem, the word has the power to bring the clay creature to life; for Khider and Barbetta, and arguably for Özdamar as well, who complained that her native Turkish had become sick with negative associations, the word in their respective native languages exceeded its role as general organizer of representative signs, having the power to effect emotional response in the authors themselves. While trauma within the language caused the opposite reaction to what Foucault and Eaglestone describe, a binary system becoming a tertiary system through trauma; trauma can be seen as indirect motivator of the shift from the unstable tertiary arrangement to a more stable binary. This ultimately motivates Khider, Barbetta, and Özdamar to turn to the German language, which, for them is a strictly binary system of significant and signified.

In her book, Beyond the Mother Tongue, Yasemin Yildiz elaborates on the direct translation of Turkish idiom within Emine Sevgi Özdamar’s work. Yildiz interprets this act of translation as the author’s attempt to not only survive the traumas experienced in her native language but also to ‘rehabilitate’ her native language. While I cannot attest for Özdamar’s personal experience of trauma, what I did gather from her text is that, similar to Barbetta, she associated the social traumas suffered under a military coup in Turkey directly with her experience of them in the Turkish language. In her Seltsame Sterne, an auto-biographical, first-person narrative, the protagonist laments that her native language of Turkish had become sick because it had been forced to report so many deaths and injustices (23).
On the one hand, as the carriers of greatest – that is, ‘most literal’ – literality, the passages rendering Turkish idiomatic expressions in German words record exactly the combination of literal recall and amnesia. In other words, they attest to a traumatic structure. On the other hand, translation into a new linguistic context necessarily dislocates the words and images from their usual signifying networks and produces entirely new associations, addressed to a new audience. (Yildiz 164)

The process of translation thus interrupts the connection between signifier and signified, which Özdamar had described as sick. However, it is not clear how “cleansing” idiomatic expressions by translating them word for word into German extends to the less idiomatic, but more frequently used phrases that have become toxic through misuse.

In a similar case of translation to detoxify utterances in one’s native language, Gilles Deleuze introduces a native speaker of American-English, Louis Wolfson, who not only wrote the story of his life in French as a foreign language, but used translation in his everyday life as a coping mechanism. Deleuze explains the mechanics behind Wolfson’s micro-translations, of breaking utterances apart into their consonant parts and then sending them through one of the five languages he knew, only to bring the utterance back into English, free of the emotional sting. He used translation as a means of defense against the voice of his mother, “Les moyens de defense sont complexes, puisqu’il doit se protéger de toutes les façons possibles à la fois contre la voix de la mère” (11).226

Yildiz and Deleuze examine the mechanical process of translation in the context of trauma, an example of explicit language creation focused more on form than on content. My focus here is also explicit language creation, but not necessarily within the context of translation. Because

226 “The means of defense are complex, since he must protect himself in every way possible all at once against the voice of the mother.”
traumatic memory consists not of words, but rather sensory content, the memories themselves are as much “translated” into speech as they are narrated. More than this, the narratives themselves are evidence of linguistic creation.

Like Wolfson, who developed his own linguistic network with which to translate emotionally charged content, thereby stripping it of its emotional charge, Khider’s embedded narrator develops his own code of symbols in order to communicate, in this scenario, politically charged content. What connects the two in these explicit linguistic processes, is that the agents of the processes (Wolfson and the embedded narrator) are the direct beneficiaries of the process, and that the process itself was motivated by a need for emotional reprieve. Wolfson wanted relief from his mother; the embedded narrator, relief from the silence imposed by dictatorship, "Unter Saddams Herrschaft konnte ein einziges Wort Grund genug sein, das Leben zu verlieren. Deswegen schrieb ich alle möglichen Dinge mit Symbolen auf [...] So konnte ich die Namen von Präsidenten, ihre Grausamkeiten, ihre Schlächtereien, aber auch unbekannte Widerstandsaktionen notieren, ohne dass irgendeiner auch nur das Geringste hätte ahnen können " (26-27).227

Knowing this about Khider’s texts helps bring the conspicuous occurrence of symbolic language within Barbetta’s novel to the fore. For example, the pyramid within Barbetta’s text represents a structure of death, one for entombing ancient Egyptian kings, for exterminating pestilence, as a place of disappearance from Gerardo, and it persists throughout the text. Barbetta reveals in an interview that this symbol is an indirect reference to the military dictatorship in Argentina during the 70’s. Begging the question if the appearance of the pyramid throughout the text is not a covert indication of the perpetrator, or some illustration of life under the dictatorship.

227 “Under Saddam’s rule, a single word could be reason enough to lose your life. That’s why I wrote everything possible in symbols [...] That’s how I could make note of the names of presidents, their atrocities, their slaughters, but also unacknowledged acts of resistance without anyone have the slightest idea about it.”
4.b.i.b.ii. Approximation: Establishing semantic distance:

There are anecdotes within both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts in which semantic distance is established between what is explicitly said, and what is implied. The narrative, in this way, reveals itself as multi-layered. By extension, this semantic distance between what is explicitly said and what is implied demonstrates the distance between what is said in a trauma narrative and what it describes. Barbetta talks of the necessity to approximate in the German language, not being a native speaker, she often struggles to say exactly what she wants to say. But German allows her the room to continue approximating. Meanwhile, the act of approximation preserves the distance between her as author and the content she narrates. Lacan might describe this as the transference of the trauma, not a repetition, but an abstraction from the point of origin. And as he argues through the medium of dreams, fantasy enables the telling and simultaneously preserves or protects the real (41).

In Chapter 14 of Barbetta’s narrative, on a particularly tense day in the alterations shop, a praying mantis appears, signaling the beginning of the jealous competition that develops between Mariana and Analía, particularly after Mariana finds a letter written in Gerardo’s hand in Analía’s handbag. In this scene, as Mariana catches and removes the creature to the outside, Barbetta uses a series of subscripts to ‘alter’ the banal scene of pest removal and setting of the tea table into a religious ceremony.

Teekanne ein zellenartiges Gefäß mit Wabenstruktur, ein vererbtes Kultgerät wohldufternder Opfergabe. Der glühend heiße Inhalt wird in Marianas leere Tasse eingeschenkt, sobald diese die Ministrantin, zurückgekehrt, sich dem kleinen Kreis der Eingeweihten und Einzuweihenden wieder anschließt. (Barbetta 126)

While the surface story is that of women sitting down to tea after ushering a bug outside, the subtext introduces a mystical layer, transforming the banal into a religious ceremony. And yet still there are further layers of meaning locked within. The appearance of this praying mantis is finally explained in the penultimate chapter, with the Mariana’s father’s red protocol notebook. In it, he explains that female praying mantises live peacefully together until it is time to mate. Then they become antagonistic of each other and cannibalistic. Without explicitly stating the violent competition Mariana will feel towards Analía when she finds Gerardo’s letter to Analía in the following chapter, Barbetta nonetheless provides the clues that allow a reader to bridge the (semantic) distance between what is written, and what is meant.

Barbetta is not alone in her act of establishing semantic distance between content and expression. Reminiscent of the symbolic language he used to document the names of presidents, atrocities and rebellions, Khider similarly documents facts in an indirect manner. For example, “Ihre Familie hatte in den Vierzigerjahren Palästina verlassen müssen, als Israel begann, auf der Weltkarte zu existieren” (41).228 Here, Khider refers to the creation of the State of Israel in the 1940s without referring to the actors involved or why families would have had to move as a result. While this creation of semantic distance, between what is said and what is implied, namely a critique of nation-building and forced migration, has a decidedly political bent, Khider treats the subject matter of his incarceration in much the same way, with a light approach in each chapter, mentioning details only peripherally related to the horrors he experienced: “Um die Angst meines Vaters noch zu schüren, tauchte eines Tages der irakische Geheimdienst bei uns zu Hause auf. Anderthalb Jahre und genau

228 “Her family had to leave Palestine in the 40s when Israel began to exist on the map.”
four days of my life, from that point onwards, that's how long I spent in prison.”

4.b.i.b.iii. The Sublime: Establishing perspective distance

In his analysis of Burke's description of the sublime, Lyotard argues that art supplies the distance necessary to provide relief from the intensity of the sublime experience; Burke explains this relief as a source of delight. Whereas the soul is confronted with cessation - here Lyotard specifies the cessation of light, language, and life - in the sublime moment, embodied in the poetic turn of phrase, *die Leer*, or the void, a source of terror that life will cease happening, the safe distance provided by

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229 “In order to further stoke my father’s fear, the Iraqi secret service showed up at our house one day. One and a half years and exactly four days of my life, from that point onwards, that's how long I spent in prison.”
art, according to Burke, reduces the immediacy of the event, allowing for life to proceed. Lyotard explains that this sublime moment captured by art dwells where powers of imagination cease and powers of reason begin. One who has never personally experienced the eruption of a volcano may not be able to imagine it, but may nonetheless recognize the power from written report illustrated in the graphic depiction of the eruption, as in a painting for example. What the intermediary of art provides is perspective distance, something recognized by Kant in his reaction to Burke. The experience of the sublime is enabled by the Schwelle, or threshold, that serves as a border between the perceived world and the world within the observer. As this relates to poetry, however, the perspective distance is apparently afforded by the passing of time, as is imparted by Wordsworth in the preface to his *Lyrical Ballads*: “Poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feelings: it takes its origin from emotion recollected in tranquility.” As the tale goes, Wordsworth summited Mont Blanc without threat of the sublime, too encumbered with the exertion of the climb. However, recollecting in tranquility, and with the passing of time, he was able to convey the sublimity of the experience in his “Mont Blanc.” Much like poems of the Romantik, or ETA Hoffmann’s short stories that harped on psychological terrors of his time, the novels of Barbeta and Khider are dramatizations of autobiographical events recollected “in tranquility”. The passing of time and the medium of writing provide distance, but not enough for either author. The terror of the sublime experience of their trauma is too closely bound with their native language. Emine Seygi Özdamar explains something of the dynamic in her *Seltsame Sterne*. What does one do with a language made sick by reports of violence? Like Özdamar, Barbeta and Khider turned to the German language, because it lacked the association with the language of their own trauma. Moving to the new language establishes the perspective distance argued by Burke, Lyotard, and Kant, that is necessary for redeeming a creative moment out of traumatic experience.
The acquisition of language provides further perspective distance. The traumatic experience becomes sublime through the distance provided by the artistic depiction of it. Equally as essential is the temporal distance implicit within the initial event and its creative depiction. As both Khider and Barbetta learned German later in their lives, after the trauma was experienced, this late-language acquisition serves to provide the temporal marker needed to distinguish events of the past from the experience of the present.

4.b.ii. (Re)creating Identity

The question of language and identity is a challenging one, yet there is some evidence to support the claim that learning a language can provide a context for (re)creating identity, particularly after situations in which a speaker’s identity and subjectivity have been threatened. In the context of his fairy tale Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte, written in the heat of the conflict with Napoleon in Germany, in the summer of 1813, Chamisso writes of an outsider who is overwhelmingly met with fear and even contempt when people discover he has no shadow. Unable to find a place for himself in society, Peter Schlemihl flees to nature and, with the help of magical seven-league boots, becomes a scientist, collecting specimens and making observations of the world around him. While this reinvention of self makes for a happy fairy tale ending, what is unique about this character-development is that the same Chamisso, who reportedly spoke with a heavy French accent all his life, a peculiarity which would have made him as conspicuous as his shadowless Peter Schlemihl, became a renowned natural explorer after writing his tale, circumnavigating the globe with Cpt. Otto v. Kotzebue on his russian Pacific and Antarktisexpedition from 1815 to 1818. He essentially became the transformed Peter Schlemihl he created in the context of his writing.

The curious appearance of doppelganger characters in both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts, arguably a manifestation within the text of the dissociation resulting from trauma, allows parallels to be drawn with Chamisso’s Schlemihl. Investigating the doppelganger-scenarios in either text further,
however, reveals the creation of identity within either text as more intentional than I initially surmised. Reflective of either author’s experience of coming into the German language, accordingly one of the doppelganger pairs enjoys more privilege than the other, something I have argued above. In as much as we as readers approach each text as a completed narrative, it is important to understand either text, nonetheless, as narration, that is, narrative in progress, to understand the developments happening throughout the text, that initially caused these dissociative splits, and which lead to the resolving of identity towards the end of the narration.

The research in “Your Morals Depend On Your Language” reports evidence, “that people tend to make systematically different judgments when they face a moral dilemma in a foreign language than in their native language” (Costa 1). The Chamisso authors themselves, particularly those writing in German as a later-learned, second language, report feeling as though the newly acquired language allowed them to redefine themselves, to create a new identity for themselves. Marjana Gaponenko, for example, who stutters in her native Ukrainian, is almost completely free of stutter in German. In an interview with the Neue Westfälische Zeitung, Gaponenko explained “Ich konnte mit der deutschen Sprache mein Wesen verändern.” Barbetta has admitted having a similar feeling in German, explaining in an interview, “Die neue Stadt und die neue Sprache gaben mir die Möglichkeit, mich völlig neu zu definieren” (DAAD). And we see this reflected within Barbetta’s text, as Mariana describes different identities of herself, Mariana-Zeitverwalterin (5), Mariana-Nacktschneckenjägerin (7), Mariana-Biene (28).

230 “Ich stottere in meiner Muttersprache. Das hört man auch im Deutschen noch ein bisschen, aber ich bin die Stotterei zu 99 Prozent losgeworden in der deutschen Sprache, weil ich sie mir erkämpft habe.” - “I stutter in my mother tongue. You can still hear it a bit in my German as well, but I’m about 99 percent free of the stutter in the German language, because of my hard work.”
231 “I could change my entire being with the German language.”
232 “Mariana – the time keeper (5), Mariana – the slug-hunter (7), Mariana – the bee (28).”
If my readers will allow me an autobiographical interpretation of Khider’s text, details from the life of the author help to explain the details of the frame narrator’s life as allegorical. But more importantly, these details support the argument that personality in one language is distinct from another. Here is a quick summary of the frame narrator’s context within the text: He walks onto a train platform in Berlin with a coffee and a newspaper in hand, waiting for the train. His narrative, told in the first-person and in the present, identifies the frame narrative, understood as trauma narrative, as his own. The narrative of his past comes back to him as if written by another while on the train headed towards Munich, where he is met by his girlfriend, Sophie. There, with her support, he puts his story in his own words, sealing the envelope and concluding the narrative itself with the conclusion of the second half of the frame story.

If we read this as an allegory for Khider’s life, it is important to know that, after gaining permission to study, Khider attended a one-year language academy in Berlin, at which he was to gain sufficient knowledge of the German language to be able to begin his studies in Philosophy, Modern German Literature, and Comparative Literature at the university where he had been granted permission to study. At his reading in Lüneburg, Khider explains that studying philosophy and searching fruitlessly for philosophical terms like *Dreifaltigkeit des Grauens* in his German-Arabic dictionary, having to write term papers in German, and being surrounded by German friends and colleagues facilitated his shift into thinking and reading in the German language. He began writing non-academically in German at the behest of friends in his philosophy classes, who were eager to read his stories.

Connecting these autobiographical details to their allegorical signifiers in Khider’s *Der falsche Inder*, I start in Berlin. This is where the narrative itself begins and where the frame narrator, seemingly without back-story, newspaper and coffee in tow, enters the train station. Seen as allegory, the sudden appearance of the frame narrator in Berlin, with the tools of a writer’s trade (coffee and
words), can be said to represent the development of Khider’s own German-identity, which would have developed during Khider’s stay in Berlin at the language school coming into fluency. Above, I wrote seemingly without back-story, because the reader does not know where the frame narrator was before his appearance on the train platform, neither is the reader aware of his purpose in Berlin, particularly when later details of the narrative suggest that his everyday life is carried out in Munich. The only indication that this personage does in fact have a history is illustrated in the moment of disorientation he experiences right on the first page, which represents the return of the character’s trauma in an unmediated flashback. The frame narrator explains that this incident of disorientation has happened before, “Nicht das erste Mal, dass ich die Orientierung verloren habe. Seit einigen Jahren schon erlebe ich ab und zu diesen Wahnsinn” (7). Taken as an allegorical flashback, one representing the presence of trauma in the frame narrator’s life, the unexplained appearance of the manuscript on the train further extends the allegory in relation to this. Trauma causes a cessation of life and order, of words and story; the oppositional force of life in response to trauma is thus represented in the story Khider’s frame narrator finds. It is important to recognize here that Khider’s frame narrator finds the manuscript containing his story in a train, a beloved metaphor among immigrants symbolizing the existence in between departure and arrival. Having “rediscovered” his past, which is allegorized through the finding of the physical copy of the manuscript, he can take into his own hands. Thus, the frame narrator frees himself from the past, and ‘arrives’ at his destination.

The frame narrator then, story in hand and, through details of the story, able to understand the German language, is received by the character Sophie. In his reading in Lüneburg, Khider referred to his relationship with language as though to a woman: the more he wanted, the less she

233 “Not the first time that I’ve lost my bearings. For a few years now, I’ve experienced this madness from time to time.”
gave, and when he quit trying, she allowed him to come closer. It is not a far cry, then, explaining the character of Sophie not just as an allegory for girlfriends Khider had over the course of his stay in Germany, but rather much more as an allegory for the studies he was able to carry out while in Munich: the study of philosophy, the love of wisdom. And just as the character-Sophie helps him to rise and continue each day, his studies in Munich helped him on his way to becoming a writer of German.

Returning to the text now, this time without the help of an autobiographical interpretation of the frame narrative, I look to a quote that helps explain the dual-identities of one protagonist within Khider’s novel. On the title page of Rasul Hamid’s ‘Erinnerungen’, the final lines of German poet Gottfried Benn’s ‘Nur zwei Dinge’ are quoted: “Es gibt nur zwei Dinge: die Leere und das gezeichnete Ich.” (11). 234 This quote reveals something of the creation of identity within the text, and its association with trauma. Benn introduces the word Leere in the final lines of his poem, identifying a nihilist worldview correlative to the question: was für was (for what purpose). But this is not the first time the word Leere appears in Khider’s text. Rather, the Leere is the not-so-inconspicuous elephant in the room, right from the very first page of the narrative. An overwhelming feeling of emptiness, or void, plagues both Khider’s narrators throughout the narrative. This void, which I have identified as the persistence of trauma in the narrators’ lives, is a productive one. Its production is twofold: first, it causes a threat to the frame narrator’s existence by causing the world to disappear around him, “Alles leer. Alles hell und sauber. Keine Züge, keine Reisenden, keine Lautsprecher. Nichts, nur ich und der leere Bahnhof Zoo, das große Nichts um mich herum” (7). 235 Reflective of Benn’s poem, which paired the void with the productive sketching of self, this void in the lives of Khider’s narrators subsequently unleashes a productive force with regards to the creation of identity, to

234 “Only two things remain: the void and the scribèd self.”
235 “Everything empty. Everything bright and clean. No trains, no travelers, no loudspeakers. Nothing, just me and the empty Zoo Train Station, the big nothing all around me.”
defining self through the written word. Whereas the void is reminiscent of the finality of death, the impulse to redefine self through writing after experiencing this void is an affirmation of life. One of Khider’s narrators is, thus, a construct of the other, but which narrator is the constructed identity of the other is beyond me to say. Reading the embedded narrator, Rasul Hamid, as having created the identity of the frame narrator, an idealized version of himself with the greater mobility afforded him by his acquisition of the German language, reveals this frame narrator as a construct that shares the history of the embedded narrator, but not the traumatic experience itself, who can carry on in the future. Reading Rasul Hamid as the construct of the frame narrator, however, adds an interesting dynamic of creating an identity to whom the trauma has happened, thus removing trauma’s grip from the narrator’s own life and facilitating the writing of the trauma. Rather than writing about the self, the narrator can retreat to the safety of writing about someone else, even if this someone else is merely a former/alternate identity of himself.

Barbetta’s text similarly suggests that identity is created by the word out of moments of the void. In my reading of Barbetta’s text, I understand Analía as an identity created by Mariana, which she can later assume (or consume – like the cannibalistic praying mantis documented by her father?) to move out of the past and realize her future. And yet, beyond this reading, it is actually through anecdotes associated with Mariana’s mother that the association between the void, language and identity becomes clear within Barbetta’s text. Mariana’s father dies when Mariana is 15, three years before she meets Gerardo Botta. In Chapter 22, a chapter dedicated to Carmen Nalo, Mariana’s mother, we see how the mother grapples with the void left by the death of Mariana’s father. I say Mariana’s father, because this is how Carmen refers to him and not as her husband. Carmen seeks to fill this void by expanding and redefining herself, taking on the role of the father. Unable to further protect her child from outside influence, or to be the father she loses, Carmen turns to the power of words to protect Mariana from the appearance of the workkarg, or uncommunicative, Gerardo (208),
“DAS WORT, benennt nicht nur, es vollzieht” (207). With “Horror vacui” (204), or fear of the void left by the loss of Mariana’s father, Carmen works to fill the void with words, in a last-ditch effort to mold her as yet still impressionable daughter. As if to emphasize the power of the word, this chapter is also full of incredibly long word compounds, such as “eine alleingelassene, alleinerziehende, alleinmitsichzurechtkommenmüssende Carmen Nalo” (204), and “Dreifaltigkeitssonntagsfeierlichkeiten” (207).

4.b.iii. Healing Play

Some research has been done regarding the language learning of children and of adult learners of language. Particularly within the context of Lev Vygotsky’s Sociocultural Theory, as interpreted by James P. Lantolf, researchers have identified language play as an important part of the learning process. Playful speech, also known as ludic speech, in contrast to the private, rehearsed speech used to practice forms and structures, is characterized by, “smiles or laughter, shift in voice quality and pitch (for example, falsetto, bass voice, song), evidence that the learner has already mastered the feature produced (on the assumption that what is already mastered does not require rehearsal), reference to a fictional world, and whether or not the performance is directed at an audience” (Lantolf 191). Of these five identifiers of ludic speech, at least three resonate with Khider’s and Barbetta’s novels. For example, the shift in voice quality and pitch might be understood as the speaker’s assumption of different voices and play-personalities. This is not a far cry from the identity development taking place in Khider’s and Barbetta’s. Further, polyvocality was explained as a

236 “THE WORD, doesn’t just name, it fulfills.”
237 “A left-alone, raising-alone, looking-out-for-oneself-alone Carmen Nalo” and “Holy-Trinity-Sunday-festivities.” Reading this chapter as part of Mariana’s narrative of her mother’s difficulties, reveals these musings as the interpretation of the daughter from the perspective of the future, as this chapter is narrated in the past.
characteristic of trauma narratives in Chapter 3. But drawing from the research in language learning as I do in this section shows that language learning as an adult also provides a venue for developing and assuming different voices and identities. Further, the reference to a fictional world presents a further resonance with the characteristics of trauma narratives, as does the role of an audience, whether direct or assumed in the performance. Play, compared with work as a psychological process, primes children to learn by pushing them beyond their present capabilities. In the context of trauma narratives, language play and narrative play establish a framework through which authors like Khider and Barbetta can also push themselves beyond their present capabilities to constructively examine events from their past, for example. Although Lantolf concludes that, “because of their history with authoritative language, adults are less likely, even in private, to be as playful with language as are children” (204), the literary process itself is one that requires a greater amount of creativity, something that puts adult author learners of language on the far side of the spectrum leaning towards more playful. As confirmation of this suspicion, Barbetta remarked at her own childlike wonder in the German language, “Ich glaube, dass Fremdsprachler häufig der Welt mit kindlichen Augen begegnen. Da kommt es her: die Entdeckerfreude, das Innehalten, der Respekt, das Staunen über eine andere Seite der Wirklichkeit” (Gruber).238

Lantolf refers to social conventions as inhibiting the will to play among adults, and it is precisely this fact that allows Khider and Barbetta to experience greater freedom in their non-native language of German. Li, whose article in The New Yorker was referenced in the introduction to this chapter, argued English as her private language, the language she used to speak to herself, free of outside influence. Like Li, Khider and Barbetta were born outside of their chosen linguistic groups, and are thus further removed from the social conventions that deter play among more established

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238 “I believe that non-native speakers often approach the world with childlike eyes. That’s where it comes from: the delight in discovery, the pause, the respect, the wonder at another side of reality.”
speakers within the group. To confirm this suspicion, Barbeta explained in my interview with her, “Also eine Leichtigkeit kommt aus dem Spiel mit der fremden Sprache, nicht mit meinem eigenen Thema, weil diese Sprache für mich so schön ist und immer noch unentdeckt”. Language to Barbeta is full of untapped potential, rather than a static system.

A further characteristic of ludic, or playful, speech, is the introduction of fantasy and creativity. I have already argued the presence of fantasy elements within Khider’s and Barbeta’s texts as evidence of trauma’s influence on the text itself through the experience of the author. I have also argued fantasy as a tool for exercising authority over the events as well as a tool for establishing distance from the emotionally painful reality of traumatic recall. Lantolf explains that fantasy is an important part of the learning process, because it indicates that the imagination is involved. And when the imagination is involved, a student, in the context of language learning, is more primed to come out of their comfort zone and learn. Fantasy and imagination applied to the task of trauma narratives argues a similar priming to exceed one’s comfort zone. In fact, Barbeta explains her own use of the fantastic, the talismanic, and the Romantic within her writing as a means for organizing threat into a comfortable structure, “Ich denke an den Begriff der Romantik, den Alltag aus zu romantisieren. Das ist eine Möglichkeit, die Angst nicht in den Fordergrund gelangen zu lassen, und dafür ist die deutsche Sprache sehr gut” (Personal interview).

The last of the three characteristics of ludic speech is the interpersonal component of performing for an audience. These final examples from both Khider’s and Barbeta’s text demonstrate their playfulness with the German language to me, as a fellow non-native speaker of German. Khider plays with word associations and idiom in his first novel in particular, concluding

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239 “And so a light-heartedness comes out of the play with the foreign language, not with my own topic, because this language is so beautiful to me and as yet undiscovered.”
240 “I’m thinking of the term der Romantik, to romanticize the every day. That is a chance to not let fear push into the foreground, and the German language is very good for that.”
his chapter titled “Auf den Flügeln des Raben”, or “On the wings of the raven”, with a joke about birds. Rasul Hamid explains to a friend why tuition was suddenly introduced to German universities, “Das ist alles wegen meines Vogels.”, and here he means the bad-luck-bird he feels he is, seemingly bringing political unrest and misfortune to every country he passes through. “Vogel? Du hast wohl einen! Bist du jetzt ganz durchgedreht oder was?” (Khider 130). And his friend replies, Bird? You’ve got one, meaning, ‘you’re crazy!’ Barbetta plays with word associations as well, counting on the first page and playing with the duality of the word for eight in German, acht. “Auf der Gascón Ecke Potosí setzt sie ein, zwei, drei, vier, fünf, an dem Kiosk vorbei, sechs, sieben, sie gibt acht auf das Zählen ihrer Schritte und auf die Zeit, die sie dabei verfliegen läßt” (Barbetta 5).\textsuperscript{241} The word acht simultaneously rounds out the count and signals Mariana’s paying attention to her feet, but then extending the counting of footsteps to the passing of time as well. This is only the first of many such delights throughout Barbetta’s novel.

Through my discussions with both authors, it has become clear that lightheartedness and play is a choice that must be made, particularly in the face of the traumatic content of Barbetta’s and Khider’s novels. Khider explains his decision to approach his past with humor as the decision to life, the only other alternative being to succumb to the experience and death. And Barbetta argues along the same lines:

\begin{quote}
Es ist mir wichtig bei allen Schwierigkeiten, die man hat, oder bei allen Zweifeln, die man hat, und bei der schwierigen Kulisse, die ich mir ausgesucht habe, trotzdem eine Geschichte zu erzählen, die von Hoffnung handelt, oder von einer gewissen Leichtigkeit, weil es diese
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{241} “On the corner of Gascón and Potosí, she takes one, two, three, four, five, past the kiosk, six, seven, paying heed/eight to count her steps and the time she allows to fly by.”
Hoffnung und Leichtigkeit auch bei den schlimmsten, vor allem in den schlimmsten Zeiten, gibt. Man muss zusehen, dass man das schöne am eigenen Leben erkennt.\footnote{\textit{It is important to me that, with any difficulty one faces, or any moment of doubt one has, and with the difficult setting I’ve chosen for myself, one treats it with hope or a certain levity, because this hope and levity is present even during, especially during the worst of times. You have to make sure you recognize the beauty in your own life.”}}

And, after all, is not laughter in itself an act of rebellion?

4.c. Specifics of German

Arguably any foreign language has the capacity to provide the perspective distance needed to approach a traumatic experience from ‘outside’, however, Khider and Barbetta identify specific characteristics of the German language that distinguish it as particularly suited to the purpose of trauma narrative writing. The German language itself seems to provide a comforting stability through the grammatical structures of sentence syntax, verb conjugations, adjective endings, and word-compounds that facilitate the writing of trauma narratives.

In our interview together, Khider explained that the German language lent itself to writing prose, being a language in which one could easily create word-compounds, a language with concision. According to Barbetta, the German language brings with it a playful levity to the process of writing about the past (Gruber). It is not just this levity, however, but rather the structure of the language that was a source of comfort to Barbetta as a school girl, and is a further source of comfort to her as a German-language author:

Wenn du Deutsch schreibst, und du eine Fremdsprachlerin bist, musst du auch diese Sätze bauen, wie ein Architekt, mit einer bestimmten Struktur, und die Struktur ist fest. Wenn ich mich daran erinnere, was mich damals als Schülerin gefallen hat, war es genau diese. Ich hatte als Kind in der Schule den Eindruck, diese deutsche Sprache ist eine sehr gute Sprache, eine sehr dankbare Sprache, denn, wenn ich die paar Regeln verstanden habe, wenn ich diese

\footnote{\textit{It is important to me that, with any difficulty one faces, or any moment of doubt one has, and with the difficult setting I’ve chosen for myself, one treats it with hope or a certain levity, because this hope and levity is present even during, especially during the worst of times. You have to make sure you recognize the beauty in your own life.”}}
Regeln beherrsche und meine Sätze so baue, bin ich auf nunmehr sicher. Ich mache keinen Fehler. (Interview mit Barbetta)\(^{243}\)

While Barbetta did not go into specifics about the structures within the language that most appealed to her, the very long sentences and word compounds within her text are testament of her admiration for the German language. For example:

Seitdem Nicolás Nalo ohne Absprache nicht mehr unter den Lebenden weilte, tat eine alleingelassene, alleinerziehende, alleinmitsichzurechtkommenmüßende Carmen Nalo das Allermenschlichste, absolut alles, was in ihrer Muttermacht stand, um das gestörte familiäre Gleichgewicht wieder auszugleichen. (204)\(^{244}\) [My italics]

And one sentence in the first chapter spans as many as sixteen lines of text (6).

From the controlling structures of trauma (and dictatorship), it may seem paradoxical to argue that it is precisely the concrete grammatical structures of the German language that appeal most to, particularly non-native, German authors faced with the desire of narrating personal traumas. And yet, the regularity of verb conjugations and the strict order of dependent clauses appear to provide precisely that. Constructing sentences in German, juggling case, gender and mode, is a predominantly cerebral task that lends comforting distraction from emotional content. I have already referenced Khider’s words a few times in this dissertation, regarding the less-emotional quality of German when compared with his native Arabic. But Barbetta, in our interview together, spoke even more explicitly about the comfort German grammar provided her,

\(^{243}\) “When you write German, and you are a non-native speaker, you must also build these sentences like an architect, with a specific structure, and the structure is set. If I were to recall what I’d liked as a young student, it was exactly this. As a kid in school, I got the impression that this German language was a very good language, a very gracious language, because, once I understood a few rules, once I was in command of these rules, and built my sentences in that manner, then I could be forever certain: I wouldn’t make any mistakes.”

\(^{244}\) “Since then Nicolás Nalo had ceased to while among the living, without any notice, left-alone, raising-alone, making-out-for-herself-alone Carmen Nalo did everything in her power, absolutely everything in her power as a mother to restore the disrupted family-balance.”

The difference between the controlling structures of a dictatorship of society and of the mind (trauma) vs. the comforting controlling structures of language is a matter of choice. The former is imposed; the latter is a construct in which one can exercise control.

Wendy Lesser’s The Genius of Language is a collection of essays from bi-/multi-lingual authors specifically regarding their relationship with their native languages as opposed to the languages they write in. Similar to the arguments made above, these authors, who all share English as a common language, explain that their multilinguality allows them freedom to develop identity, as well as a buffer to the past. In Lesser’s essay collection, Dutch born Bert Keizer explains that the English language worked as a buffer to his experience of WWII as a boy, “I forgot to mention an all-pervasive and therefore hardly noticeable aspect of all this: the fact that a Dutch boy in the second half of the twentieth century should build up a considerable part of his bulwark against the world using English bricks. Allied bricks” (51). Bharati Mukherjee explained that a second language, the English language they learned in school, was necessary to liberate their minds from their bodies and themselves from their communities. Mukherjee was writing this in the context of a society in which literate women were considered unsuitable for marriage. And Josef Skvorecky, a Czech author who

245 “The world out there is so threatening, from the perspective of Mariana, of course more threatening from the perspective of the young. So threatening that one has to fit it within some sort of structure, by counting, by coming up with things, by turning a coin into a good luck charm. I’m thinking of the term der Romantik, to romanticize the every day. That is a chance to not let fear push into the foreground, and the German language is very good for that.”
developed English as his personal language explained the appeal of a second, private language, in helping one to develop an identity for themselves separate from the identity generated in their native language, “The joy, as it were, of being an additional human being, because writing in an additional tongue” (46). Not one of these authors talked about the comforting structure of the English language, however. M. J. Fitzgerald, writing about her relationship with both the Italian and English languages found beauty in the simplicity of Italian, but the wild exaggeration of English appealed to her teenage sensibilities:

I loved the accumulation of adjectives that a language so rich in words could indulge in, instead of the nuances in the repetition of the same adjective that gives Italian its power. I loved the exaggeration of English, the curlicues of language, its baroque quality. Many of the churches, much of the painting, and people’s gesturing in Italy are baroque. But the language itself is severe: its beauty lies in elegant simplicity and the hypnotic power of its sound. And when it is distorted by the wrong rhetoric in an attempt to “enrich it,” it becomes impenetrable without gaining in power. English has to work to be elegant and simple, because its sounds are rarely if ever as spellbinding as Italian, and so much of its nature is tortuous. (Lesser 139)

But again, there is nothing of the structure here, and nothing to suggest that one language is better suited to discuss the issues of the past.

As I move towards the conclusion of this chapter and dissertation, I find myself eager to continue researching the specifics of the German language that appeal to writers, and particularly writers of trauma narratives. But how to quantify and measure such things are questions for the future.
Chapter 5: Concluding Remarks

This dissertation was born out of a perplexing question, one I had experienced personally and professionally. Why do authors find writing in German as a foreign language preferable to writing in their native languages? Through my investigation, further questions arose: What about our relationship to foreign language in general, but the German language in particular, frees us from the past? How does trauma function as a research paradigm in analyzing literature? What are the ethical implications of foreign language writing on the culture of arrival?

The idea for this dissertation came from an experience I had teaching fourth semester German to students at Penn State. To improve their fluency, I assigned my students weekly journals, allowing them to decide what they wrote about, merely setting the parameters on length and sometimes grammatical structures to practice. One student, studying on the GI Bill, took to the assignment in particular, submitting intricate and detailed short fiction pieces written in German with the request that I help him with the grammar. Months after the course had finished, this student sought me out to thank me for the exercise, because it had allowed him to process things that had been weighing on him that he had not been able to think about in English, like his experience as a soldier or his relationship with his father. Needless to say, the experience left an impression upon me. Here was something that needed exploring.

Around the same time, I attended a workshop and author interview with Maria Cecilia Barbetta, at which she explained similar associations with regards to language. To her, her native Spanish was the language of dictatorship, whereas German, she felt, gave her the freedom she needed to write creatively about events in her past.

A few months later, I came across an excerpt from Abbas Khider’s Falsche Inder. Here was another writer who felt more at ease writing in German as a foreign language than his own native tongue, in this case Arabic. And thus this dissertation project was born of the elementary question:
why? Why did some authors feel it was easier to write about past traumas in German as a foreign
language rather than their native languages?

The preceding chapters dealt directly with this question. The first chapter gave a general
overview of the dynamics in Germany that have brought about a growing demographic of non-
native writers. Chapter 2 explored the connection between trauma and the author, and the
correlation between traumatic experience and the impulse to write; Chapter 3 looked at the role of
narrative as tool for rehabilitation; and Chapter 4 finally looked at the relationship between authors
and their adopted language, to understand why not just writing, but writing in a foreign language,
affords a sense of release from the grips of traumatic recall.

Although many authors today balk at being lumped together in the niche market of
“migrant” or “Chamisso” authors, my research in preparation of Chapter 1 lead me to believe that
this very distinction was instrumental in encouraging broad recognition of non-native writers of
German. The birth of the Chamisso Prize in 1985 helped to bring awareness to this demographic of
writing (which itself only really began to take off in the late 70s/early 80s), and the persistence of the
prize helped to establish non-native writers as figural members of the writing community. The
foundation responsible for funding and awarding the prize decided to retire it, arguing that the initial
goal of the prize in bringing attention to and acknowledging the value of non-native authors of
German had been accomplished.

In moving from the historical background of migration, to Germany and developments
within the publishing industry, then to an in-depth study of the Chamisso award winning authors
themselves, as well as their predecessor and namesake Chamisso, not only the diversity of the
authors became apparent, but also their special relationship with the German language. Only after
researching all seventy-seven authors was I able to confirm and proceed with my comparison of
Khider and Barbetta. As I wrote in the introduction, there are many stories that can be told about
writing in German as a foreign language, but it was Khider’s and Barbetta’s stories, and these stories’ intersections that appealed to me most.

Chapter 2 proved to be the most challenging of the four chapters and the most time-consuming. It is with thanks to Dr. Herrmann that this chapter developed in complexity from personal opinion supported by author testimony, to a conversation with trauma theory today. Further, it was in this chapter that I was able to reconcile the growing rift between my theoretical research and the important text analysis that would identify my work as part of German studies.

After learning about the field and its developments over time, I concluded my study of trauma theory with Robert Eaglestone who, looking to the future, argues that trauma can be used as a research paradigm for exploring the human experience of time and ethics broadly throughout the humanities.

Conducting my own research with this understanding of trauma as a formative element of writing allowed me to delve deeper into both texts using trauma as a framework to guide my study. I discovered that trauma works not only as a catalyzing force in inspiring the writing, but also as a constitutional force within the writing itself, affecting narrative structure, plot and language within the texts. A survey of research examining the influence of trauma on individuals and on literature explained that trauma challenged the subjectivity of an individual, their understanding of time and of reality. Further, traumatic memory, being far from language, is predominantly sensory. All of these elements had a strong presence in either text, demonstrating trauma’s effect on the writing process.

Approaching Chapter 3, I again used a theoretical approach to guide my research, but this time to understand how writing itself acts as a tool towards healing after trauma. I turned to psychology for support of the cathartic effect of writing, and to literary theory to help generate a working definition of trauma narrative. This process of first creating a definition and then testing the definition’s suitability with my own texts proved incredibly fruitful. I argued that trauma narratives
were marked by an interpersonal component of a sympathetic listener. They provided an opportunity for truth-telling. They were further marked by challenges to traditional treatments of time and reality, but this time as devices of the authors themselves, rather than repercussion of the trauma. Finally, my definition of trauma narratives identified multilinguality, that is, a plurality of narrative voices as one final characteristic.

This definition of trauma narrative again provided a framework for analyzing the texts that allowed me to read deeper and understand either text not just as the product of a traumatic experience, but the source of cathartic healing as well. Through my study, questions arose that challenged me to deepen my analysis of both Khider’s and Barbetta’s texts, including the question of intended audience. Although both Khider and Barbetta had responded to the question of audience in my interviews with them, analyzing the texts themselves for the implied reader helped clarify Khider’s answer, and proved contradictory to Barbetta’s. In her interview, Barbetta insisted that she wrote for no one other than herself, and yet my analysis of her text proved an implied reader with no knowledge of Spanish, but an interest in the Argentine culture. Further, the multilinguality and temporal transgressions helped to reconcile the doppelganger pairs in either text as distinct identities of the same individual.

The truth-telling aspect of the trauma narrative lead to ethical questions, as Eaglestone suggested. But also challenging questions regarding the implications for both Khider’s and Barbetta’s countries of origin as well as their country of arrival, Germany. The former is bereft of important dialogue about its past and repercussions into the present and negotiations about the future, whereas the latter is met with questions of moral obligation regarding its position as a member of the global community. These questions are of import for the current refugee crisis in Europe today.

Chapter 4’s analysis of the role of language in narrative writing began not in historical contextualization, nor in theoretical discussion, but rather at the point of intersection between both
texts: the central doppelganger pair. My analysis of these pairs begs the question of which came first, the chicken or the egg, my noticing the doppelgangers as autonomous identity-manifestations of the same characters or my being informed by trauma as a research paradigm. Nonetheless, examining these characters, and comparing and contrasting them revealed linguistic differences between the two. Moving from the characters to the narratives themselves then revealed linguistic shifts within either narrative that take place around moments of traumatic recall within either text. Khider’s narrator first develops a language of signs that eventually falls into disuse, presumably concurrently with that character’s learning German. Barbetta’s narrator flees into the objective stance of scientific etymological observation in related incidents of high emotional agitation. These “linguistic” migrations reflect the authors’ actual linguistic migrations, from their respective native languages to the German language. In analyzing the texts, authorial testimony, as well as the research of the proceeding chapters, I argued the benefits of linguistic migration being first and foremost the benefit of perspective, linguistic and emotional distance, a venue for reinventing identity after trauma, and an avenue for healing play. Distance, identity and play are all linked to the idea of freedom: freedom from past traumas, from socially-defined and restrictive identities, and controlled signifiers and signifieds.

After writing this dissertation, I must acknowledge at least two biases. The first being that my interpretation of this phenomenon is firmly espoused within the Romantic tradition. I focus on the experience of the individual, interpret the narration of the traumatic experience as an encounter with the sublime, and highlight either author’s love of and flight into nature over the palpable social critique within their narratives. For example, Khider critiques the idealized humanitarian posturing of Europe with evidence of police brutality and incongruities, such as refusing to help a refugee while he is alive, but providing him with a suit to be buried in. Barbetta’s social critique is more veiled, but her text itself illustrates the residual effects of social dictatorship, as families struggle with
brutal death and loss. Being an essential Romantic myself, it came as no surprise when my advisor called out my methods of interpretation. However, my second bias was only apparent after reading Saussure, and the case he made for developing the research method of semiology to vie with and take the place of systems examining the historical and what Jonathan Culler refers to as a casual explanation, but which I have interpreted as causal, that is, examining a text by way of cause and effect. While my first chapter examines the historical context, my second and third move into the correlative association between trauma catalyzing the narrative moment, and the narrative moment orchestrating healing from the trauma. It was not until my fourth and final content chapter that I moved to the language itself to explore, as Saussure advised, the interpersonal systems that make texts written in the context of trauma by non-native speakers of the language of writing unique.

Indirectly, however, questions complicit with the examination of this phenomenon came to fore. For example, Cathy Caruth asked about the functionality of a narrative, and its ability to bridge cultures through a shared experience of trauma. The idea of a literature that globalizes through its ability to awaken feelings of ethic responsibility beyond the borders of nation was broached in Chapter 3. As Germany negotiates its refugee crisis, it is important to look at literature written from within the context of migration to help humanize the migrant and the refugee in light of political and social unrest, challenging both the idealized and the villainized generalizations that have polarized debates about the issue.
APPENDIX A

IRB Approval Letter
EXEMPTION DETERMINATION

Date: February 19, 2016

From: Courtney Whetzel, IRB Analyst

To: Katherine Anderson

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Submission:</th>
<th>Initial Study</th>
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<tr>
<td>Title of Study:</td>
<td>Author interviews in conjunction with the dissertation titled: “Foreign Writing Agency: About the symbiotic relationship between the German language and her adopted sons and daughters distinguished by the Chamisso Prize in literature.”</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Principal Investigator: | Katherine Anderson |

| Study ID: | STUDY00004333 |
| Submission ID: | STUDY00004333 |

| Funding: | Liberal Arts Administration Office (UNIVERSITY PARK) |

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<th>Documents Approved:</th>
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<tr>
<td>• Foreign Writing Agency Interview Questions German.docx (10 February 2016), Category: Other</td>
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<tr>
<td>• HRP-591 Protocol (17 February 2016), Category: IRB Protocol</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Foreign Writing Agency Interview Questions English.docx (10 February 2016), Category: Other</td>
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The Office for Research Protections determined that the proposed activity, as described in the above-referenced submission, does not require formal IRB review because the research met the criteria for exempt research according to the policies of this institution and the provisions of applicable federal regulations.
Continuing Progress Reports are not required for exempt research. Record of this research determined to be exempt will be maintained for five years from the date of this notification. If your research will continue beyond five years, please contact the Office for Research Protections closer to the determination end date.

Changes to exempt research only need to be submitted to the Office for Research Protections in limited circumstances described in the below-referenced Investigator Manual. If changes are being considered and there are questions about whether IRB review is needed, please contact the Office for Research Protections.

Penn State researchers are required to follow the requirements listed in the Investigator Manual (HRP-103), which can be found by navigating to the IRB Library within CATS IRB (http://irb.psu.edu).

This correspondence should be maintained with your records.
APPENDIX B

Informed Consent Form:
CONSENT FOR RESEARCH
The Pennsylvania State University

Title of Project: Author interviews in conjunction with the dissertation titled: “Foreign Writing Agency: About the symbiotic relationship between the German language and her adopted sons and daughters distinguished by the Chamisso Prize in literature.”

Principal Investigator: Katherine Anderson

Address: Steenbeker Weg 4, 24106 Kiel, Germany

Telephone Number: +49 17669441018

Advisor: Dr. Tom O. Beebee

Advisor Telephone Number: tob@psu.edu

Subject’s Printed Name: ____________________________

We are asking you to be in an interview. This form gives you information about the interview.

Whether or not you take part is up to you. You can choose not to take part. You can agree to take part and later change your mind. Your decision will not be held against you.

Please ask questions about anything that is unclear to you and take your time to make your choice.

1. Why is this interview being conducted?

You were selected for this interview to inform the research of the interviewer with regard to your writing and your writing process.

2. What will happen in this interview?

Today I will be asking you questions about your writing process, your relationship with the German language and also further, more specific questions about your novel Strange Stars.

The interview will be recorded with an audio-recorder and typed into a script in the week following. The interview text will then be sent to you for a final approval that all your responses have been correctly recorded. This will also allow you the chance to identify which
information, should there be any such information, that you would not like to be used in the
dissertation of the interviewer.

You can, of course, decide during the interview as well, whether certain information is to be used or not. You are in no way required to answer these questions, and you can also choose not to answer any questions during the interview.

3. **What are the risks and possible discomforts from being part of this interview?**

There is a risk of loss of confidentiality if your information is obtained by someone other than the interviewer, but precautions will be taken to prevent this from happening. The confidentiality of your electronic data will be maintained to the degree permitted by the technology used. Absolute confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

4. **What are the possible benefits from being in this interview?**

4a. **What are the possible benefits to you?**

(Clause for Özdamar’s Consent Form: Dr. Özdamar, you are already widely known as an author of the German language; however...) Preparatory dissertation work and presentations at conferences abroad have already brought your names into German studies circles in Germany, Europe and the USA. It is the intention of these interviews, that the resulting dissertation and subsequent publications will continue to contribute to your visibility in these circles.

Our conversation will also help me to further develop arguments in my dissertation about the relationship between an author and their self-chosen, and late-acquired languages.

4b. **What are the possible benefits to others?**

This dissertation undertakes the task of shining some light on the process of writing in a language that has been acquired late (not considered one’s native language). A better understanding of this process, and particularly the effect German has on this process, if any, will continue to be of importance with regard to continued immigration to Germany in the coming years.

6. **How long will you take part in this interview?**

If you agree to this interview, it will only take the next 1-2 hours of your time to complete, and then the time it will take to review the interview script in the week following.

7. **How will your privacy and confidentiality be protected if you decide to take part in this interview?**
Efforts will be made to limit the use and sharing of your personal research information to the interviewer.

- The audio recording and the interview script will be saved on the interviewer’s external hard drive, and protected from theft through normal measures.
- Neither recording nor interview will be intentionally deleted, unless the author should request this be done.

Any personally identifiable information included in the resulting dissertation, or related articles will be approved by subject/interviewee.

9. Will you be paid to take part in this interview?

Please accept a small gift as token of my appreciation for your time and candor.

10. Who is paying for this interview?

The travel and equipment costs of this interview were financed through a grant from the RGSO Dissertation Support Grant from Penn State University.

11. What are your rights if you take part in this interview?

Taking part in this research study is voluntary.

- You do not have to be in this research.
- If you choose to be in this research, you have the right to stop at any time.
- If you decide not to be in this research or if you decide to stop at a later date, there will be no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are entitled.

12. If you have questions or concerns about this interview, whom should you call?

You have the right to ask questions about this interview and about your rights in relation to it. Please call the Interviewer, <<Katherine Anderson>> at <<+0176 6944 1018>> if you:

- Have questions, complaints or concerns about the research.

You may also contact the Office for Research Protections at (814) 865-1775, ORProtections@psu.edu if you:

- Have questions regarding your rights as a person being interviewed.
- Have concerns or general questions about the interview.
- You may also call this number if you cannot reach the interviewer or wish to offer input or to talk to someone else about any concerns related to this interview.

INFORMED CONSENT TO TAKE PART IN INTERVIEW

Signature of Interviewer
Your signature below means that you have explained the interview to the interviewee and have answered any questions he/she has about the interview.

______________________________  ___________  __________________
Signature of interviewer        Date               Printed Name
(Only approved investigators for this research may explain the research and obtain informed consent.)

**Signature of Interviewee**

Before making the decision about being interviewed you should have:
- Discussed this interview with the interviewer,
- Read the information in this form, and
- Had the opportunity to ask any questions you may have.

Your signature below means that you have received this information, have asked the questions you currently have about the interview and those questions have been answered. You will receive a copy of the signed and dated form to keep for future reference.

**Signature of Interviewee**

By signing this consent form, you indicate that you voluntarily choose to be in this interview and agree to allow your information to be used and shared as described above.

___________________________  ___________  ______________
Signature of Subject          Date               Printed Name

**Signature of Interviewee after reading interview script**

By signing below, you indicate that you have read through the interview script and can guarantee its accuracy and have indicated whether and which information should be excluded from the related dissertation and subsequent publications.

____________________________  ___________  __________________
Signature of Subject          Date               Printed Name
Interview Transcripts

I sat down with authors Barbetta and Khider on May 24th, 2016 and September 3rd, 2016, respectively, expecting no more than a brief, thirty-minute Q & A, and they both surprised me with an extensive explanation of their writing, works and processes, and their understanding of the connection between literature, the author, and the world. The transcripts that follow below were created from the audio recordings I took during our interviews. The transcript to Khider’s interview, in particular, appears to begin somewhat in media res due to the seemless transition from introductions into interview. The transition was so seemless, in fact, that I missed it and could only start my recorder mid-sentence.

My interview with Barbetta provided a good deal of insight for my discussion of trauma in Chapter 2 as well as my discussion of language in Chapter 4. In the transcript below, she explains how her need to approximate in German, due to lacking vocabulary, for example, is what also allowed her to approach this difficult content of her first book. Writing in a foreign language for her becomes then a journey in either direction: on the one hand, a journey to discover what it is she feels compelled to say, and then, on the other hand, finding the words in a foreign language to say that. In her own words, she explains that this process leaves things open – open to interpretation, but also open to herself.

Her discussion of language also reveals that the relationship between non-native speakers and a language has the potential to be a dynamic one. Although Barbetta has since acknowledged that she will continue to make mistakes in the language, she will nonetheless actively work towards discovering the language. To Barbetta, the German language is very much alive, providing her with new challenges, as is her own personal language, as she continues to develop her voice in the German language. When we discussed the influence of the German language and culture on a
narrative set in Buenos Aires, more than the counting and bureaucratic systems established within Aunt Milagros’ receiving room, Barbetta pointed to the German Romantik as a strong influence in the text. Although structure certainly plays a role, Barbetta identified the tendency of the Romantik to “romanticize” the everyday as a coping mechanism against existential threats. This admission is reflected in Chapter 3 of my dissertation, in my discussion of fictionalization strategies.

Her acknowledgment of the Literaturbetrieb (the literary scene in Germany) as a system that makes it possible to live by the pen in Germany also informed my first chapter, and helped me to observe the Chamisso Prize and the literary market with a better-trained eye, a more critical one. Finally, her final words about writing a story that conveyed a message of hope, despite the difficult subject matter, resonated with me, and drew parallels with author Abbas Khider.

What struck me most about my interview with Khider, was the playful relationship he entertained with the German language. The joy in self-invention in the language. But he cautioned against the danger of becoming too comprehensible, a danger that threatened the appeal of language. Literature, after all, is not meant to be entirely comprehensible, rather to convey something aesthetically. Although, neither is complete incomprehensibility desirable – and this is the heart of Khider’s critique about the German literary scene.

Describing his own work, Khider highlights the importance of both language/content and form in his novels. In another parallel with Barbetta, he also reveals the influence of the Romantik on his work. But Khider’s interview also presented challenges. For example, he challenged me to think less concretely about identity, as something that constantly fluctuates, and something that eludes ready description. From his response, it became clear, that a distinction would need to be made between personal identity, that is the construct of the inner voice, and social identity, or the (many) group associations that either befall us or we take on ourselves. Although the term Persönlichkeit
(personality) ultimately initiated the conversation I wanted to have, *personality* in English did not convey quite what I wanted to, and I retained the term *identity* in the analysis above.
Barbetta Interview Transcript:

B: Es steht nicht drin oder es steht drin über so kleine Szenen oder Metaphern vielleicht. Es gibt diese kleine Szene ganz am Anfang, wo Mariana auf dem Bürgersteig eine Gullideckel entdeckt, und sie glaubt, die Wölbungen auf der Deckel sind kleine Nacktschnecken, die sie dann tötet. Insofern kämpft sie den Krieg auf dem Bürgersteig; aber sie kann diesen Krieg nicht zu Ende kämpfen, weil sie in den Bus einsteigen muss. Erst viel später habe ich im Gespräch mit einer Journalisten über diese kleine Szene nachgedacht, den Krieg kämpfen, oder den Krieg zu Ende kämpfen, und an das Bild dieser Gullideckel, die die Tür zu einer anderen Welt ist, die unter der Erde liegt. Es gibt diese Oberfläche des Romans: eine weitere Geschichte in einer Änderungsschneiderei mit bunten Farben. Das ist das erste Bild im Roman, das eine Einladung darstellt, in die Tiefe des Textes, die Textur des Textes zu gehen, und nach unten zu gehen, wo die Welt liegt, in der die Traumata sich befinden. Und es gibt in dem Roman sonst keinen anderen Hinweis, aber wenn man bedenkt, wann diese Geschichte spielt, Anfang der achtziger Jahre, dann weiß man, dass diese Hauptfiguren, Mariana oder Analía, aufgewachsen sind oder auf die Welt gekommen sind, in der Militärdiktatur. Das heißt, die Geschichte erzählt die Vergangenheit, als die unmittelbare Vergangenheit, Mariana hat einen Freund, Analía hat einen Verlobten usw. Aber die Vergangenheit dieser Geschichte, dieser Figuren, ist eine, die sicherlich in die Tiefe der argentinischen Geschichte führt.

K: Und die Szene, in der Mariana als Mädchen das blaue Licht Spiel spielt?

B: An diese Stelle habe ich nicht gedacht. Mein zweites Buch spielt - war die Militärdiktatur, der Anfang war 76, 76 bis 83, - also mit 83, das war das Aufkommen der Demokratie, und das zweite Buch spielt unmittelbar vor der Militärdiktatur. Also in den Jahren 74, 75, wo die Kämpfe schon da sind, ja, die Guerra Sucia, der 70er, der, also das, was 76 gemacht wird, mit dem Verschwinden von den Leuten, was in Argentinien in den Geheimgelager passiert ist, immer unten, in den Kellern der Geschichte, und was ist mit der Traumata passiert in den Kellern der Geschichte, in Argentina hat das eine es war versteckt, diese Folter wurde versteckt. Auf der anderen Seite waren diese geheimen Folterzentren mitten in der Stadt, überall in der Stadt. Die waren da, nicht irgendwo außerhalb, sondern mitten drin.

K: Und immer unter der Erde?

B: Nein, es waren unterschiedliche Locations, aber natürlich immer versteckt, weil es nicht entdeckt werden sollte. Es waren unterschiedliche Plätze, zum Teil Autowerkstätten, zum Teil dort wo die Militär sich versammelt haben, natürlich auch unterkellert. Und in der Zeit, in der mein Roman spielt, also unmittelbar vor der Militärdiktatur, gab es schon eine paramilitärische Terrororganisation, die auch Leute umgebracht hat, aus der linken Bewegung und die hatten ein Basislager: das Ministerium für Wohlfahrt. Also, oben - wenn du dir vorstellst, das Ministerium für Wohlfahrt, und unten, die Keller dieses Ministeriums mit den Waffen, mit den…. Deswegen… also ich rede jetzt über meinen zweiten Roman, weil dieses Thema sicherlich in dem ersten Buch, in einer mini kleinen Szene schon angelegt ist. Aber das ist etwas, was man, wenn man die Geschichte Argentiniens nicht kennt,

K: Ich habe in Interviews mit dir gelesen, dass die spanische Sprache die Diktatur für dich darstellt.
B: Ja, ich bin selber 1972 geboren, aber ich habe selber keine Erinnerungen an die Militärdiktatur. Es gibt aber eine Art zu sein: als kleines Kind oder als Mädchen ist man wie ein Schwamm. Man nimmt alles auf, sowohl ein Mädchen, auch viel von diesen Dingen, die da passiert sind, einfach so mitkriegt, über, ich sag jetzt, über Osmose, die Dinge sind einfach da.

Meine Eltern waren auch nicht politisch, sondern haben das gemacht, was die meisten bei uns gemacht haben. D.h. sich nicht engagieren, keine Fragen stellen, wegschauen. Das war auch das große Problem der ganzen Gesellschaft. Man spricht in diesem Fall nicht von Schuld, aber von einer Verantwortung, die man nicht übernommen hat. Aber es hat natürlich auch mit diesem Terrorregime zu tun, das institutionalisiert war. Die haben wirklich gewollt, dass diese riesige Angst herrscht, die die ganze Gesellschaft paralysiert.


K: Wenn man die Verbindung zwischen Autor und Sprache betrachtet, ist es nicht nur was ein Autor davon bekommt. Ein Autor hat die Möglichkeit Distanz zur Vergangenheit zu etablieren. Du hast das Wort Tarnkappe dafür verwendet, also Sprache als Tarnkappe. Was hat die Sprache von dieser Verbindung, von dieser Beziehung zwischen Autor und Sprache? Die deutsche Sprache hat letztendlich auch Traumata erlitten. Was bekommt die Sprache, wenn sie auch Nichtmuttersprachler als Autoren bekommt? Wie wird die Sprache dadurch weiter beeinflusst?

Genazino schrieb in einem Essay: Literatur ist eine Versuch mit einem Schmerz zu sprechen. Es ist interessant, dass sowohl Abbas [Khider] als auch ich, eine Fremdsprache benutzen; wir sprechen mit diesem Schmerz in einer Fremdsprache. Dieser Schmerz ist in meinem Fall urargentinisch. Ich kann über geringen oder normalen argentinischen Schmerz in meiner Muttersprache reden, aber, über einen tiefen Schmerz in meiner Muttersprache zu reden wäre für mich sehr sehr schwierig. Das schreiben in der Fremdsprache ist auch ein schwieriges Unterfangen. Was mir aber dabei gefällt ist, dass ich mit dieser Fremdsprache Dinge nicht einfach so sagen kann, weil mir die Wörter fehlen. Ich möchte etwas beschreiben; was ich beschreiben möchte, ist mir auch nicht so richtig klar, aber ich möchte es beschreiben. Ich kann es mit der fremden Sprache nicht auf dem Punkt bringen, weil ich Fremdsprachlerin bin, weil mir das Wort fehlt, und die deutsche Sprache erlaubt mir das, was ich beschreiben möchte, zu umkreisen. Selbst das trifft den Punkt nicht, also mache ich eine neue
Annäherung, einen neuen Versuch, um das zu beschreiben, was ich beschreiben möchte. Und es gelingt mir nicht, also schreib ich noch drei Kapitel, aus einer ganz anderen Perspektive, eine neue Annäherung. Es sind lauter Annäherungen. Dieser Punkt wird nie getroffen, und das birgt für mich ein enormes Potential. Weil es immer unbeschrieben bleibt, bleibt es immer ein bisschen offen, und das erlaubt wiederum, dem Leser das auch zu Ende zu denken, zumindest für sich selbst.


Also eine Leichtigkeit kommt aus dem Spiel mit der fremden Sprache, nicht mit meinem eigenen Thema, weil diese Sprache für mich so schön ist und immer noch unentdeckt. Ich habe auch sehr lange gelitten, weil ich die Vollkommenheit in der deutschen Sprache nicht erreichen konnte. Das war für mich ein harter Kampf, und immer wieder wurde ich sehr traurig, weil ich immer wieder Fehler gemacht habe. Irgendwann habe ich verstanden, es ist so und es wird auch so bleiben, egal was ich mache. Ich kann mich auf den Kopf stellen, ich kann weiter üben, aber es wird immer eine Fremdsprache sein, und das ist gut so. Das heißt, es ist etwas, was immer im Entstehen ist, meine Sprache, meine deutsche Sprache ist immer im Entstehen, und es hält mich auf Trab, es hält mich lebendig, es ist eine lebendige Sprache. Man ist ständig auf der Suche nach etwas, was man nicht bekommt, aber trotzdem nähert man sich an.

Ich mag Bücher, die ich nicht verstehe. Natürlich muss der Rahmen so sein, dass ich auch mitspielen kann, dass ich mitlesen kann und im Kopf mitschreiben kann. Ich mag kein Chaos. Aber ich mag es, wenn ich das Ende nicht genau weiß. Das mag ich sehr. Vielleicht ist es auch so angelegt, dass es nicht klar sein soll, aber dann kann jeder für sich entscheiden. Also, du kannst als Leserin sagen, das ist eine realistische Geschichte, die hier erzählt wird: eines der letzten Kapitel, wenn nicht der letzte, ist aus der Perspektive, in der Ich-Form, das einzige Kapitel, was aus der Ich-Form geschrieben wurde, völlig aus Marianas Perspektive, also könnte man sagen, Mariana ist am Ende so verrückt geworden aus Liebe. Es gibt Mariana und es gibt eine andere Figur; es sind zwei. Die andere Figur, die Kundin, hat etwas berührt, was bei Mariana dazu geführt hat, dass ihre psychische Welt durcheinander gekommen ist. Das wäre vielleicht die realistische Lesart; auf der anderen Seite, ist es auch so angelegt, mit sogar Beweise dafür im Text, dass jemand anders, der anders liest, der eine andere Leserfahrung mit anderen Büchern gemacht hat, jeder Zeit sagen kann, ‚nein, das ist eine phantastische Geschichte’. Es ist eine Doppelbene-Geschichte, vielleicht gibt es nur noch die eine Frau oder, indem das Kleid verwandelt wurde, entsteht so eine Seelenverwandtschaft zwischen den zwei und so am Ende steckt Mariana in dem Kleid von Analía.

Ob es zwei Frauen gab, oder nur eine Frau, keine Ahnung. Sie haben die gleiche Körpergröße, und wenn man der Sprache glaubt, das, was die Sprache verspricht, wenn man daran glaubt, dann steht es auch geschrieben, auf diesem Schild ‚Änderung von Damen’ ohne Bindestrich. Kinder- und Herrenbekleidung. Nicht Änderungen von Damenbekleidung, sondern es fehlt da der Bindestrich. Ich glaube, das ist Stoffmuster zwei oder Stoffmuster drei. Es heißt: eine Dame geht hier rein und es wird nicht nur die Klamotten geändert, sondern auch die Dame. Ich glaube an die Macht der Sprache. Analía verwandelt sich und ist dann nicht mehr Analía sondern Mariana. Der Leser kann sich jederzeit entscheiden und sagen, ‚ich mag das unentschiedene, ich mag daran denken, dass beide Lesarten, eine realistische und eine fantastische, nebeneinander existieren, so widersprüchlich wie sie sind’, und das mag ich am meisten. Zwei Dinge, die sich widersprechen, realistische Lesart,
fantastische Lesart, beide gleichwertig, nebeneinander, zur gleichen Zeit. Ich glaube, dass unser Leben genau so ist, genau so reich, genau so widersprüchlich.

K: Ich wollte aber noch eine Frage stellen: wegen der deutschen Kultur, weil das Buch in Buenos Aires abläuft, aber in der deutschen Sprache geschrieben ist, gibt es auch Teile von der deutschen Kultur in dem Buch?

B: Die Sprache!

K: Nur die Sprache?


K: Mit dem Zählen, zum Beispiel.

B: Jetzt, wo du das sagst, weiß ich, ok, weißt du was, ich bin total ein Kontrollfreak. Meine Freunde sagen, ich bin mittlerweile deutscher als die Deutschen. Ja, ich bin nicht pünktlich, ich bin überpünktlich. Es macht mir gar nichts aus, auf dich zu warten, aber ich möchte nicht, dass du auf mich wartest. Ich bin total pünktlich, unglaublich penibel. Und so ist auch dieser ganze Text - hässliches Wort, aber - konstruiert.

K: Ich fand es eher die Versuche Mariana, Kontrolle auf ihre Umgebung auszuüben. Auch Frau Milagros, die Tante, ihr Vorangehen, die alles so bürokratisch gestaltet wird: erstmal hier, einen Kaffee bekommt man erst nachdem so was gemacht wird, sobald man zählt, da kommen die Türe auf, und dann kann man weiter gehen. Der Prozess ist schön bürokratisch.


Ich hatte als Kind in der Schule immer Angst, Prüfungen nicht zu bestehen. Ich hatte immer die besten Noten, ich war unglaublich fleißig, und habe sehr viel gelernt, aber ich hatte Angst. Die deutsche Sprache war mir Balsam.


K: Und dadurch wird die Geschichte noch stärker, also durch diesen Pyramidenbau, dieses Dreieck?

B: Diese Pyramiden werden eine Rolle spielen, das Dreieck wird eine Rolle spielen, denn die paramilitärische Organisation in dieser Zeit, die von dem Minister für Wohlfahrt erfunden wurde, als Pyramide aufgebaut wurde. Der Minister war ein durchgeknallter Typ, eine Hexe, ein Esoteriker vor dem Herrn, und er hat sich diese Organisation als Pyramide vorgestellt. Das Dreieck wird auch sehr wichtig für den Roman sein, auch das Triptychon im Katholizismus, die drei Bilder.

K: Kann man das schaffen, in Deutschland, als Autor zu leben?


[...] 

K: Ich hab noch eine Frage, schreibst du für einen bestimmten Leser?


Es ist mir wichtig bei allen Schwierigkeiten, die man hat, oder bei allen Zweifeln, die man hat, und bei der schwierigen Kulisse, die ich mir ausgesucht habe, trotzdem eine Geschichte zu erzählen, die von Hoffnung handelt, oder von einer gewissen Leichtigkeit, weil es diese Hoffnung und Leichtigkeit auch bei den schlimmsten, vor allem in den schlimmsten Zeiten, gibt. Man muss zusehen, dass man das Schöne an eigenen Leben erkennt.


B: Mate Tee... das ist Heimat.
Khider Interview Transcript:

A: Wo waren wir? ...

K: Ich wollte mehr über deine Beziehung mit der deutschen Sprache erfahren. In Lüneburg hast du gesagt, dass es Studienkollegen waren, die dich aufmuntert haben, etwas zu schreiben. Was hat dich denn weiter motiviert, auf Deutsch zu schreiben, nach dem ersten Versuch?


[…]


K: Es ist schön wie du die Sprache personalisierst.


K: Du bist sehr innovativ mit der Form deiner Bücher.

K: Meinst du, das hat auch etwas mit der deutschen Sprache zu tun? Wärst du auch zu Hause in der französischen oder der englischen Sprache?


K: Ich habe irgendwo gelesen, dass die Innovation in der deutschen Literatur tatsächlich aus den Migranten Autoren stammt.

mit Bikini und Minirock gesehen werden müssen, alles andere ist nicht erlaubt. Man darf nur eine deutsche Staatsbürgerschaft, alles andere ist nicht erlaubt, und genauso in der Literatur: auch nur eine bestimmte Art.

K: *Was war das letzte wirklich bewegende Buch, dass du gelesen hast?*


K: *Wie steht's mit Jenny Erpenbeck?*


A: Eigentlich in allen Büchern, oder?

K: *Ich musste ein bisschen nachforschen, da ich dachte, das ist dein Wort.*

A: Nein, das ist ein deutsches Wort.

K: *Nein!*

A: Sondern?

K: *Es stammte von anderen Flüchtlingen nach Deutschland.*

A: Wann?


A: Das vergessen die Deutschen immer, dass sie eine lange Fluchtgeschichte in ihrer eigenen Geschichte haben! Die deutsche Grenze hat sich unendlich verändert, immer hin und her. Und das zeigt, dass die deutsche Geschichte teilweise eine Fluchtgeschichte ist. Wenn man die Deutschen verstehen will, dann muss man ihre Fluchtgeschichte verstehen.
K: Was bedeutet dir dieses Wort?

A: Die Betonung spielt dabei eine große Rolle. Das Wort *Mutter* hat immer was mit Geborgenheit, mit Wärme zu tun. Das Wort hat auch einen unheimlichen Klang. Es ist lang, aber die Betonung ist so stark, um zu zeigen wie viele Emotionen auch drinnen stecken. Ich muss zugeben: ich mag das Wort sehr, denn es beschreibt auch viel in einem. Und das kommt auch in der deutschen Sprache sehr oft vor. *Seelenverwundete* zum Beispiel. Dieses ist ein altes Wort, aus dem Mittelalter. Wörter wie diese beschreiben nicht nur, sondern auch behalten viel in einem. Das hängt zusammen mit der Knappheit: man kann viel sagen, mit einem Wort. Deswegen, für viele Leute, die über Einsamkeit schreiben, ist dieser Begriff ziemlich zentral. Es ist nicht nur die Einsamkeit, sondern auch die Leere, die daraus entsteht, die Leere des Lebens, die [? des Seins, dass es nicht um dich herum gibt, dass man sich nirgendwo befindet, nicht was gefühlt ist, nicht was ergreifbar ist. Diese Begriffe helfen bei der Arbeit, um die Sprache irgendwie nicht nur knapper zu gestalten, sondern auch genauer.

K: Du hast auch im ersten Buch Gottfried Benn zitiert: „Die Leere und das gezeichnete ich“. Ich wollte noch ein Thema mit dir besprechen, und zwar die Identität, und wie Sprache den Aufbau der Identität ermöglicht.

K: Ich sehe, dass meine Frage nicht spezifisch genug war.


K: Diese Frage entstand eigentlich aus dem ersten Buch, weil es sich zwei Erzähler über ein Manuskript treffen. Der Rasul Hamid, und der, wie ich ihn nenne, der Rahmenerzähler. Das war die Frage, weil sie eine Geschichte teilen, aber ihre Sprachen sind anders. Die eine Geschichte ist auf Arabisch geschrieben, und die andere, die eben geschrieben wird, während man sie liest, ist auf Deutsch geschrieben. Ich wollte wissen, inwiefern man eine andere Persönlichkeit entwickeln kann, anhand einer Sprache, durch eine andere Sprache. Inwiefern entwickelt sich der Rahmenerzähler ab dem Punkt, an dem er eine neue Sprache erworben hatte. Dann ist er in Berlin, und er fährt nach München, und findet das Manuskript und schreibt die Geschichte neu, aber ist nicht mit der anderen Persönlichkeit zu vergleichen. Sie sind zwei...


K: Ist es nur die Ferne, die die Zeit macht, oder ist es auch eine örtliche Entfernung?


K: Und wenn die Vergangenheit, zum Beispiel, nicht so sehnsuchtswert ist, sondern das Gegenteil?

A: Trotzdem, wenn die Gegenwart immer noch nicht anders als die Vergangenheit, egal was man erlebt hat, Krieg oder irgendetwas, wenn man abgelehnt ist, und sich früher als abgelehnt gefühlt hat, und heute in der Gegenwart auch abgelehnt ist, das ist kein großer Unterschied.

K: Die meisten Trauma-Forscher meinen, dass die Vergangenheit in Stresssituationen in die Gegenwart vordrängt, eben weil es so stressig ist. Da kommen die Erinnerungen durch. Aber, wenn es nicht nur ein traumatisches Erlebnis ist, einfach tief einprägende Erlebnisse, auch glückliche, dass die auch vordringen, das wäre auch interessant zu sehen.

eine Frau oder ein Mann uns entgegen kommen, und lächeln, und wir lächeln nicht, wir können nicht weiterhin verlangen, dass sie uns später zulächeln. Wenn wir auch zurück lächeln, und vielleicht gibt es irgendwann ein Gespräch und kennenlernen, wird er sich vielleicht wohl mit uns fühlen. usw. Aber wenn wir nicht lächeln und drehen die Köpfe um, er bleibt ein Fremder hier, egal was wir sonst machen.

K: Gilt das Wort Abweisend hier?


A: Ich weiß, es spielt eine große Rolle, aber ich kann behaupten, Politiker wie Honecker kommen und machen ihre neuen Sicherheitsmaßnahmen und sie machen alles kaputt, was du aufgebaut hast.

[...]


Ich glaube, dass das, was wir mit der Literatur machen, parallel mit Politik auch stattfinden würde, würden wir wirklich viele Probleme schnell lösen und eine bessere Zukunft finden.

[...]


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