

Matrilineal Narrative and the Feminist Family Romance

Valerie Heffernan

Recent years have seen the publication in Germany of a vast number and array of multigenerational family narratives that look back to the turbulent history of the twentieth century. They look in particular to the family stories that are passed on from one generation to the next as a way of understanding and representing the past, and they also explore those that are kept secret or hidden from view and yet contribute to shaping the present. These narratives use the family as a prism through which to explore the residual impact of the historical events of the twentieth century, and in particular what Anne Fuchs has called the “agitated legacy” of the Second World War, as well as the concerns of contemporary society.¹ The fact that many such family novels have achieved commercial as well as critical success suggests that this genre is one that has secured its place on the German literary scene.

A particular concern with contemporary German family narratives is that they tend to be written from the point of view of the third post-war generation, a generation that has no firsthand experience of the war and is therefore inevitably dependent on the accounts of others for knowledge and understanding. Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall have pointed to the discrepancies that can often emerge between what they term the “Lexikon” of objective, public knowledge about the National Socialist past and the subjective, private “Album” of stories and memories that are passed down through the family; this generation’s understanding of past events is often based on secondhand knowledge gleaned from a number of different and often contradictory sources.²

The difficulties involved in piecing together the fragments of the family narrative, as well as the broader historical narrative, are often thematized in these texts themselves. Friederike Eigler points to the prevalence in contemporary German literature of generational novels, which she defines as “Romane, in denen Familiengeschichte erforscht oder mühsam rekonstruiert wird” (novels in which family history is examined or carefully reconstructed).³ These generational novels do not confine themselves to merely telling the stories of various generations of a family but rather emphasize the constructive element that is an inevitable

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part of the process of reconstruction. Eigler's approach brings to the fore the difficult processes of remembering and reconstructing family history, and thus it also incorporates an examination of the formal practices of retelling:

Viele der neueren Generationenromane sind durch zwei gegenläufige Tendenzen geprägt: In den Blick kommen zum einen die Brüche, Widersprüche und Diskontinuitäten familiärer Genealogien, die in den meisten Fällen direkt mit der deutschen Geschichte im 20. Jahrhundert verknüpft sind. Zum anderen sind diese Generationenromane von dem Bestreben geprägt, durch den Schreib- und Erinnerungsprozess, neue Verbindungen und Zusammenhänge, und in diesem Sinne Kontinuitäten herzustellen.

[Many of the new generational novels are influenced by two opposing tendencies: On the one hand, they bring to light the fractures, contradictions, and discontinuities of familial genealogies, which are in most cases directly associated with German history of the twentieth century. On the other, these generational novels are characterized by an endeavor to create new connections and associations through the writing and remembering process, and in so doing to produce continuities.]⁴

While the multigenerational narrative represents a significant tendency in German literature today, contemporary women writers often look at this question of family history from the point of view of a particularly female lineage; they explore how the family stories are communicated between and among women across generational lines. In exploring the relationships between female family members, and mothers and daughters in particular, they question the way in which the family narrative is interrupted, distorted, or skewed in the retelling.

In this chapter I consider three family narratives by contemporary female authors and examine the particular contribution of women writers to debates about representing German history through family history in twenty-first-century literature. I begin by questioning the extent to which the family stories they present offer an alternative vision of history that may be linked to a specifically female perspective, centered here on the figure of the mother. In focusing then on the way in which motherhood is engendered and envisioned in these novels, I also explore the way these writers speak to contemporary debates about the family in Germany. Finally, I will also investigate the particular narrative strategies employed by

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women writers to give voice to the maternal perspective, which has all too often been neglected in literary texts.

The three novels that are the focus of this chapter depict the family history of several generations of women through the twentieth century. Katharina Hagen's *Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen* (2008; published in English as *The Taste of Apple Seeds*, 2013) tells the story of the first-person narrator Iris's attempts to come to terms with her tragic family story and make peace with the female family members she has lost, as well as those she is left with; Anja Jonuleit's *Herbstvergessene* (Forgotten Ones of Autumn, 2010) uses the frame of a murder mystery to delve into the past and uncover the forgotten history of the Nazi *Lebensborn* homes; and Annette Pehnt's *Chronik der Nähe* (Chronicle of Closeness, 2012) considers the complex relationships between grandmother, mother, and daughter against a backdrop of wartime trauma and postwar hardship. Significantly, in all three novels the concept of motherhood is used as a prism through which to explore questions of a specifically female lineage, traits passed from one generation to the next, stories told from mother to daughter—and of some hidden by mothers and daughters—as well as the influence of the past on subsequent generations.

“Historia matris” of the Second World War

All three novels under analysis here begin with the death or impending death of a female family relative: Hagen's narrative opens with the funeral of the narrator's maternal grandmother, an event that obliges the narrator to return to her birthplace and confront her painful past. In Jonuleit's novel, it is the sudden death, ostensibly by suicide, of the narrator's mother that provokes her to delve into history as a way of understanding the circumstances of her mother's birth. Pehnt's novel is in some respects an account of what might have been and probably never will be, as a daughter sits at the bedside of her unconscious mother and sifts through the details of their shared past. All three narratives thus begin with the loss of a central maternal figure, an event that provides both the circumstances and the motive for a quest to understand the past.

Significantly, the narrators of the novels perceive the passing of their female relatives not only in terms of the immediate loss of the person who played such a central role in their lives but also as a rupture in the personal and family narrative. They feel a sense of sadness and disappointment that they no longer have access to the past through the stories of their

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mothers and grandmothers. Jonuleit's protagonist, Maja Starnberg, describes the "atemberaubende Wut" (breathtaking anger) that she feels toward her mother for failing to pass on her grandmother's story before her death, even as she acknowledges that her anger stems from her own regret that she was not closer to her mother during her lifetime.⁵ The first-person narrator of Pehnt's novel expresses in very forceful terms her frustration that her comatose mother can no longer communicate with her:

Ich wollte deine Lippen auseinanderzerren und die Augenlider hochstemmen, einfach nichts zu sagen, das geht in unserer Familie nicht, vieles geht, aber nicht sprechen: nicht. Großmutter Mutter Kind: wortgewaltig, Lästermäuler, nicht auf den Mund gefallen, Quasselstrippen, Plaudertaschen, Zwitschermaschinen, redselig. Plötzlich schweigen gilt nicht.⁶

[I wanted to pull your lips apart and prop up your eyelids; to say nothing at all, that's not allowed in our family, a lot of things are allowed, but not talking is not. Grandmother mother child: chatterboxes, gossips, can't keep their mouths shut, windbags, blabbermouths, talkative, big mouths. To suddenly fall silent is unacceptable.]

The irony of this situation is that it is only through the loss of the maternal figure that each protagonist finally comes to appreciate the value of those stories and to recognize the part that they play in her understanding of her personal and family history as well as her present-day identity; Jonuleit's Maja describes this loss as an overwhelming feeling "dass ich etwas versäumt hatte, etwas Entscheidendes" (that I had missed out on something, something decisive).⁷ Thus the three novels underline the importance of intergenerational storytelling in the reconstruction of history and the construction of identity, and they explore the problems that can arise when the family narrative is interrupted or severed in the retelling. In their focus on the family and the domestic arena, all three novels present a very different perspective on the Second World War from that which is usually the subject of historical enquiry. The Mexican microhistorian Luis González has coined the term "historia matria" to describe this trend in contemporary historiography: where conventional historical accounts tend to focus their attention on great wars, great battles, and the great heroes that emerge triumphant from them—in other words, the history of the "patria" or fatherland—"historia matria" concerns itself with "the small, weak, feminine, sentimental world of the mother; that is to say, the family, the native soil, that which has until now been called the *patria chica*

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(home town or region).”⁸ “Historia matris” contributes to the broader historical narrative by offering a view of historical events from the point of view of the mothers, sisters, daughters, and children who are also part of history but whose stories are seldom retold. Novels such as those that are the focus of this chapter could be seen as contributing in a similar way to our understanding of historical events, since they also offer an insight into the impact of those events on individuals and families. In telling the stories of grandmothers, mothers, and daughters, we might see the three writers as engaging in a type of maternal history or “historia matris” of the Second World War.

Hagen’s *Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen* tells the story of three generations of the Lünschen family, all of whom were born and grew up in the fictional northern German town of Bootshaven. The narrative begins with the funeral of Bertha, an event that obliges her remaining family members to reunite in Bootshaven and compels them to rake over the ashes of the past. Bertha’s death and in particular her legacy to her granddaughter Iris—the old stone house where she spent her childhood—provoke Iris to think back to days spent playing in the garden with her cousin Rosmarie or sitting at the heavy wooden kitchen table, listening to her grandmother’s stories of her childhood and adolescence in Bootshaven. In sorting through her grandmother’s belongings, however, Iris comes to the realization that there is a lot she does not know about her family history. Her efforts to piece together the events of the past and to understand the complex relationships between her family members meet with resistance, as her mother and aunts are unwilling to confront the painful memories of their shared past. A further complication is the fact that in the latter years of her life Bertha suffered from dementia and gradually retreated from the family into her memories, eventually falling silent. As Iris remarks, “Das Vergessen lag bei uns in der Familie” (Forgetting was a family trait).⁹

Since Iris no longer has access to her grandmother’s stories and memories, she must look elsewhere for access to the past. It is her decision to accept the inheritance of the family house in Bootshaven that helps to her to fill some of the gaps in the family narrative. While tidying the overgrown garden, she is surprised to come across graffiti; someone had sprayed “Nazi” in red paint on the hen-house. This discovery causes Iris to question her grandfather Dr. Hinnerk Lünschen’s wartime activities, and her questions are answered only in part when she also comes across Hinnerk’s notebooks and the poems he wrote during the war years. Initially, Iris is surprised that her grandfather’s poetry does not allude to his experiences of

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war or of his time spent in a denazification camp, but deals instead with the sights, sounds and smells of the countryside of his childhood:

In Hinnerks grauem Buch war kein einziges Gedicht über den Krieg. Und auch keines, das darauf schließen ließ, dass die Verse in einem Lager geschrieben worden waren, das eigens dazu diente, die Insassen ihre eigenen und andere grauenvolle Taten der vergangenen Jahre ins Gedächtnis zu rufen. (170–71)

[There wasn't a single poem in Hinnerk's grey book about the war. Nor were there any that suggested they had been written in a camp. In a camp whose purpose was to make the inmates recall gruesome deeds from recent years: their own and those of others. (157)]

However, Iris comes to recognize that her grandfather's traumatic experiences are expressed perhaps even more deeply in his silence on these subjects: "Ich stellte fest, das nicht nur das Vergessen eine Form des Erinnerns war, sondern das Erinnern eine Form des Vergessens" (171; I realized that not only was forgetting a form of remembering, but remembering was a form of forgetting, too, 157).

Iris also comes to an understanding of the impact of the war on the wives and mothers left at home, and a candid conversation with her grandmother's elderly neighbor, Carsten Lexow, causes her to look very differently on the grandmother she thought she knew so well. Through Lexow, Iris learns that her grandmother was not always the dutiful housewife that she had assumed she was; in fact, Bertha had a brief affair with this man during the war that raised questions about the paternity of her second daughter, Iris's beautiful aunt Inga. Iris is shaken by this new story that casts her grandmother in an entirely different light, and she ponders the manner in which it changes everything she understood about her family history: "So wurde Carsten Lexows Geschichte Teil meiner eigenen Geschichte und Teil meiner Geschichte über die Geschichte von meiner Großmutter" (72; Thus Carsten Lexow's story became part of my own story and part of my story about the story of my grandmother, 62).

Like Hagera's novel, Jonuleit's *Herbstvergessene* also recounts the tale of three generations of women: its main protagonist, Maja, discovers a secret about her grandmother that causes her to call into question everything she has taken for granted about her mother's and her own origin. The novel begins with a phone call from mother to daughter, when Maja's mother, Lilli, calls her daughter in London to ask her to come home, as she has

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something to tell her. However, when Maja arrives in Vienna, she discovers that her mother ostensibly committed suicide that morning. Among her mother's papers, Maja finds a photo of her grandmother Charlotte with a very young baby, and an inscription on the back of the photo indicates that it was taken two months before Lilli's birth. The strange circumstances of her mother's death, coupled with the incongruity of the photo, provoke Maja to embark on a search for the history of this photograph and of her mother's origins. This quest takes her on a journey to Northern Germany and back to the war years.

In describing Maja's exploration of her grandmother's past, Jonuleit's novel touches on one of the lesser-known aspects of German wartime history, namely the *Lebensborn* homes for unmarried mothers. *Lebensborn* was an SS agency established by Heinrich Himmler in 1935 with the aim of providing maternity care and assistance to unwed mothers who were pregnant with Aryan children, as long as the mothers could prove the racial purity of their children.¹⁰ In *Herbstvergeessene*, Maja gains insight into the past through the discovery of a memoir written by her grandmother, and she is shocked to discover that her grandmother, then called Emmi, had entered a *Lebensborn* home called Hohehorst in 1943 and given birth to a son, Paul, in March 1944. In order to gain entry to the home, she had given evidence that her baby's father was her sister Ingeborg's husband, a German soldier; in fact, the child's father was her sister Leni's husband Paul, whose Jewish grandmother made him racially impure by National Socialist standards. After losing her son and her best friend Hanna to typhoid, Emmi steals Hanna's identification papers, takes Hanna's daughter, and runs away from Hohehorst. Thus Emmi becomes Hanna Charlotte Starnberg and brings up Hanna's daughter Lilli as her own. This newfound information leads Maja to the realization that the woman she had always believed to be her grandmother was in fact not a blood relative, and that her mother's origins were connected to one of the more secretive aspects of Nazi racial policy.

Where Jonuleit offers a "historia matris" of a very specific aspect of German wartime history, Pehnt's novel offers a broader insight into the struggles of women and children during this difficult time in German history. *Chronik der Nähe* again depicts three generations of women, and it uses the complex and difficult relationships between grandmother, mother, and daughter to point to the long-term impact of the Second World War on the third postwar generation. The novel shifts between two narrative perspectives: an unnamed first-person narrator tells her own story and describes her vain attempts to reach out

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to her mother in an effort to understand her, while a separate narrative recounts the experiences of Annie, her mother, in the third person. A third maternal figure is Annie's mother, the unnamed grandmother of the trio, who is presented from two different perspectives in these separate and at times contradictory narratives. It is clear from the outset, though, that Annie, as the only named character in the novel, is the central figure of the piece, and that she, as both daughter and mother, is the conduit between grandmother and daughter and between past and present.

Annie embodies in a very literal sense the traumatic aftereffects of the Second World War. Her experience of the final years of the war and the immediate postwar period is characterized by fear, insecurity, and solitariness. Her mother's frequent absences, sometimes for days on end, leave the child anxious and confused. Literally paralyzed by fear when the air raid sirens go off, she is forced to spend every night sleeping alone in a neighbor's cellar in case of an air raid, as her mother cannot carry her as far as the air raid shelters. More than anything else, Annie learns at an early age that she cannot rely on her mother to help her through her trauma; rather it is her responsibility to help her mother through the difficult years of shortage and instability by taking responsibility for the house and yard in her absence. Despite her mother's insistence that children were not affected by the war, since they do not remember things, the effects of the traumatic experience of war on Annie are evident throughout the narrative. Her acute fear of bells or sirens stays with her all her life; even the ring of the telephone causes her to stiffen with dread. She also suffers from intense and debilitating headaches, which she refuses to admit to, as though these were a failing on her part.

Through the account of the first-person narrator of the novel, Annie's daughter, we also find evidence that the traumatic legacy of the Second World War is passed on to the third generation. This daughter also grows up a very anxious child, an anxiety that necessitates psychological counseling at an early age. Annie, who has obviously been hardened by the difficulties she endured as a child, refuses to accept that there is any validity to her child's anxiety. She berates her daughter: "Woher hast du das bloß, also von mir hast du es nicht, ich hatte nie Angst, das durfte ich gar nicht. Im Krieg Angst haben, das ging nicht" (Where did you get that from, certainly not from me, I was never afraid, I wasn't allowed to be. To be afraid during the war, that just wasn't allowed).¹¹ Yet the distance

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between mother and daughter is obvious, as is its connection to the trauma that Annie went through as a child.

All three novels thus focus their attention on various aspects of female and maternal experience of the Second World War, a “*historia matria*” that serves as a useful counterfoil to more conventional historical accounts of the period. Hagen’s and Pehnt’s novels paint an alternative picture of wartime suffering by focusing on the experiences of the women and children working on the home front, whereas Jonuleit’s focuses on a particular aspect of wartime maternal history often overlooked in the grand narrative of German history. In depicting the difficulties in the relationships of mothers and daughters within this context, the novels also touch upon the longer-term legacy of the Second World War.

Mothering and Motherhood

Women’s writing often tends to focus its attention on the mother-daughter relationship, and women’s writing in German is no exception.¹² At least since the 1970s, German-language novels by women have featured complex and oftentimes highly problematic relationships between mothers and daughters. These narratives, which almost always tend to be written from the perspective of the daughter, present mothers as caricatures, *Rabenmütter* who treat their daughters with disdain, neglect, and even violence.¹³ Contemporary mother-daughter narratives offer what might be considered a more nuanced view of this complex relationship. The novels under scrutiny here make for a particularly fruitful examination of mother-daughter relationships, since they all feature three generations of women, thus mothers who are also daughters, daughters who are also mothers, and a multiplicity of female family relations. One might also argue that the relationships among the women are the driving force of the novels.

All three novels explore motherhood in an intergenerational context. While all three authors depict these relationships against the backdrop of the Second World War, their concern with motherhood, maternity, and practices of mothering has a very real relevance for current debates about the perceived crisis of motherhood in contemporary German society. The low birth rate in the country since at least the early 1990s has caused researchers and politicians alike to question the reasons behind current demographic trends and to try to counter them with new legislation intended to encourage German couples to produce more children. These debates have not been confined to the political arena, however; some more

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sensationalist media outlets have used the falling birth rate as evidence of the imminent demise of the German population.¹⁴ The preoccupation in contemporary German literature, particularly in literature by women, with motherhood in all its forms is an indication of the centrality of this issue in contemporary German culture.

Hagena, Jonuleit, and Pehnt seek to explore motherhood within the context of Germany's wartime past and as part of Germany's intergenerational legacy. In this, it is noteworthy that all three novels present strong, determined female characters; all the female protagonists are compelled by family or historical circumstances to bring up their children alone, without the help of their children's fathers—and they do so admirably. At the same time, there is also a sense that each generation suffers the consequences of the mistakes of the previous generation; moreover, there is a tendency to repeat their mistakes. The novels thus present daughters as the image of their mothers, even as they fight against this.

In Hagena's *Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen* we encounter a number of mothers and daughters in a variety of constellations; in particular, the novel considers Bertha in her role of mother to her three daughters—Christa, Inga, and Harriet—and looks at Christa's and Harriet's mothering of their respective daughters, Iris (the narrator) and her cousin Rosmarie. Fathers play only a minor role in this female family romance; they are presented as emotionally distant, uninvolved, or entirely absent from their daughters' lives. Yet despite this fact, the mother-daughter relationships in the novel are depicted as anything but simple. Both Iris and Rosmarie favor their aunt Inga's company over that of their own mothers; while they pay little attention to their mothers, they are happy to sit at the kitchen table, accompanied by their friend Mira, and listen attentively to their grandmother's stories of the past. Iris's love for her grandmother is reflected in her fondness for the old house in Bootshaven, where Bertha grew up and where Iris spent many days during her childhood. Moreover, the fact that Bertha opts to leave her house to Iris, rather than one of her own daughters, indicates that her affection was appreciated and reciprocated.

The novel also explores questions of a particularly female legacy in the way that the daughters in the novel seem destined to repeat the mistakes of the previous generation. Rosmarie's death at fifteen after a fall in the garden harks back to the untimely death of her great-aunt Anna, Bertha's sister, at the age of sixteen. When Bertha begins to lose track of the present, this manifests itself in her confusing her daughters with each other:

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Bertha vergaß ihre Töchter der Reihe nach. Die älteste zuerst. . . . Sie nannte sie erst Inga, später Harriet. Inga war noch eine ganze Zeit Inga, dann wurde auch sie Harriet. Harriet blieb sehr lange Harriet, aber irgendwann, viel später, war selbst Harriet eine Fremde. (185)

[Bertha forgot her daughters one by one. The eldest first. . . . First she called her Inga, then Harriet. Inga was still Inga for a while, then she became Harriet too. Harriet remained Harriet for ages, but one day, much later, even Harriet was a stranger. (171)]

In a poignant *volte-face*, by the end of the novel Christa is already beginning to show the first signs of the dementia that plagued her mother, suggesting that certain aspects of female legacy are unavoidable.

Jonuleit's narrative takes as its point of departure the ostensible suicide of Maja's mother, Lilli, with whom Maja had a very problematic relationship throughout her life. Lilli was a successful interpreter who traveled widely with her work, and she had little time or space in her life for her daughter. Maja spent the summer holidays with her grandmother, Charlotte, who did all she could to make up for Lilli's shortcomings as a mother. Maja initially studied for a career in interpreting and translating, but she disappointed and angered her mother by giving up her studies and moving to England to take up an apprenticeship as an interior decorator. Maja believes that Lilli took her daughter's decision as a personal affront:

Meine Mutter hat mir nie verziehen, dass ich nicht die gleichen Träume habe, die gleichen Vorstellungen davon, was im Leben erstrebenswert ist. Sie hat mir nie verziehen, dass ich nicht wie sie bin.¹⁵

[My mother never forgave me for not having the same dreams as her, the same idea of what is worth striving for in life. She never forgave me for not being like her.]

Before the phone call from her mother asking her to come to Vienna to visit her, Maja and Lilli had not spoken for almost ten years. However, Maja's hopes of reconciling with her mother are thwarted by her untimely death. Thus Maja's yearning to understand the past is in part motivated by a need to understand and reconnect with her mother.

Lilli's non-normative mothering has played a large part in Maja's own reluctance to become a mother. She never really understood why her boyfriend Wolf was so keen to have

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children, since she has never really known a family beyond her mother and her grandmother. However, it is only after losing her own mother and searching for her familial origins that she begins to appreciate the importance of family:

Auf einmal erschien mir Wolfs Familie mit größerer Deutlichkeit und schärferen Konturen. . . . Ich hatte mich in ihrer Mitte immer entspannt, fast schon geborgen gefühlt. Doch seit Mutters Tod war eine andere Nuance hinzugekommen, eine Art Dankbarkeit, so kam es mir vor. Ich, das verlorene, elternlose Einzelkind, fühlte mich aufgehoben im Schoß einer anderen Familie. (163)

[Suddenly I saw Wolf's family with greater clarity and in sharper focus. . . . I had always felt relaxed, almost safe in their midst. But since Mother's death, it had taken on another nuance, a sort of gratefulness, it seemed to me. I, the lost, orphaned child, felt protected in the bosom of another family.]

Maja's reaction to this realization is decisive: she takes her packet of contraceptive pills and throws them one by one into the toilet.

Peht's *Chronik der Nähe* is in part a chronicle of the first-person narrator's attempts to be close to her mother, Annie, but it also reveals much about the ambivalent relationship between Annie and her own mother and the impact that this has had on Annie's mothering. Initially, it is the child who seeks comfort from her mother, but the neglect and abandonment she experiences provoke an unwillingness or inability to trust others as an adult. When Annie reaches her teens, her mother repeatedly attempts to reconnect with her daughter, but her efforts come too late, as Annie has already distanced herself emotionally. Moreover, the ways in which her mother reaches out to Annie are awkward and have questionable outcomes. For example, her way of teaching Annie what it means to be a woman is to encourage her to go out to the park after dark and make use of her womanly wiles with the boys that hang around there. Although Annie soon becomes very popular with the local boys, this does not bring her lasting happiness and moreover causes her to be labeled a prostitute in the local area. Annie escapes from her mother through focusing on her education and gaining the college place that will ultimately allow her to move to another city.

The inadequate and inappropriate mothering that Annie received engenders a mistrust of others that ultimately drives a wedge between her and her own daughter. She is adamant that she does not want to have children and tries to convince her husband—referred to in the

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narrative only as “der Richtige” (Mr. Right)—that they do not need to have children to be happy. Her pregnancy and the birth of her daughter are thus not greeted as happy events, and the stories she tells her child of her early days of motherhood make it clear that she did not enjoy the experience: “Ich war, hast du immer wieder erzählt, ich war so ein anstrengendes Kind, so, so anstrengend, immer nur geschrien, ganz steif war ich vom vielen Schreien” (10; I was, you told me again and again, I was such a demanding baby, so, so demanding, all I did was cry, I was quite stiff from all the crying). Indeed, Annie is so traumatized by her memories of when her daughter was an infant that she cannot cope with looking after her granddaughter: when her daughter returns from the hairdresser, having left Annie to watch the baby for an hour, she finds the baby screaming and her mother nervously smoking in the next room.

It might be argued that in depicting a search for meaning in the past, each novel also narrates the very personal story of how the main female protagonist manages to move beyond the negative or inadequate mothering she received and make the transition to a new understanding of motherhood. In this respect, it is significant that all three narrators have had or are about to have children by the end of the novels, indicating that each protagonist’s anxiety about becoming a mother has been overcome in the course of the narrative. In the epilogue of Hagena’s *Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen*, we learn that Iris has accepted Bertha’s legacy: we find her living in the house in Bootshaven with her husband and son. Maja, having pieced together the fragments of her grandmother’s wartime past and come to terms with her mother’s origin, is safely ensconced in her grandmother’s holiday home in Italy and pregnant with her first child. Pehnt’s *Chronik der Nähe* goes a step further in that it indicates that the “historia matris” will also be passed on to the next generation; by the end of her narrative, the first-person narrator has given up work to devote herself to bringing up her two daughters, “diese Weiber, eine Weiberfamilie” (132; these women, a family of women). Coming to terms with the past of their own mothers and grandmothers enables the protagonists of all three novels to take a step forward into the future as mothers.

Matrilineal Narrative Forms

In her seminal work, *The Mother/Daughter Plot*, Marianne Hirsch surveys a vast array of literary texts from Western Europe and North America since the beginning of the nineteenth century and focuses in particular on their depiction of mother-daughter relationships. While

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Hirsch observes the gradual emancipation of daughters in the course of the twentieth century, she remarks that with few exceptions, the maternal perspective is almost entirely disregarded. She finds it particularly problematic that most mother-daughter narratives tend to be written from the perspective of daughters, which means that mothers have traditionally been denied a voice, even in narratives in which they feature strongly. For women's writing to represent women in the fullest and most meaningful way, Hirsch argues, mothers must be allowed a voice in discourse, must be allowed to speak for themselves as subjects:

The story of female development, both in fiction and theory, needs to be written in the voice of mothers as well as in that of daughters. . . . Only in combining both voices, in finding a double voice that would yield a multiple female consciousness, can we begin to envision ways to "live afresh."¹⁶

For Hirsch, it is not enough merely to present mothers in the literary text; rather, the text should give voice to the maternal perspective. Hirsch thus imagines "a feminist family romance of mothers *and* daughters, both subjects, speaking to each other and living in familial and communal contexts which enable the subjectivity of each member" (163).

Hagena, Jonuleit, and Pehnt employ various different formal strategies in an attempt to give voice to the maternal perspective on the German past. Through intergenerational storytelling, shifting narrative perspectives, and blending the voices of mothers and daughters, the novels analyzed in this chapter explore to varying degrees the potential for writing the maternal voice into the fabric of the literary text.

First, intergenerational storytelling is highlighted in all three of these narratives as crucial to the reconstruction of the family narrative and to the transmission of family history. In *Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen*, Iris comes to appreciate the stories passed down to her from her grandmother as a way of understanding her own position within the family line. In *Herbstvergessene*, Maja is thrilled to gain access to Emmi/Charlotte's memoir of her days in Hohehorst, an account that finally fills the gaps in her knowledge of her mother's origins. The daughter's entreaties to her mother Annie in *Chronik der Nähe* to tell her the stories of her childhood, and her repeated requests for her to record them in print or on tape, emphasize the value of storytelling both to the reconstruction of family history on the one hand and the reconstruction of broken relationships on the other. Moreover, the frequent references to "du" in the first-person narrative of Pehnt's novel indicates clearly that it should be understood as

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a story told from daughter to mother about their shared past as well as her hopes for a shared future.

Contemporary narratives such as those under analysis here emphasize the collaborative work done by generations of women in constructing and reconstructing the shared narratives of family and history. In *Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen* Hagena's Iris ponders the contribution of her various family members to the creation of their family story:

Ich saß am Küchentisch in Berthas Haus und sah meine Großmutter als Kind und meine Großtante Anna, die nie anders dreinblickte als auf dieser Fotografie. Ich erinnerte mich bei einem Becher lauwarmer H-Milch an Dinge, die Bertha meiner Mutter und diese mir erzählt hatte, die Tante Harriet Rosmarie und Rosmarie Mira und mir erzählt hatte, an Dinge, die wir uns ausgedacht oder zumindest ausgemalt hatten. (64)

[I was sitting at the kitchen table in Bertha's house, seeing my grandmother and great-aunt as children, although in my mind Anna never looked any different from how she did in the photograph. Sipping a mug of lukewarm UHT milk I recalled things that Bertha had told my mother and my mother had told me, or that Aunt Harriet had told Rosmarie and Rosmarie had told Mira and me, and things we had made up or at least imagined. (54)]

Through collaborative storytelling and imaginative investment, contemporary family narratives by women produce a rich tapestry of German maternal history that interrogates questions of familial legacy and offers new perspectives on the heritage of Germany's wartime past.

Jonuleit's and Pehnt's novels take this idea a step further by reflecting the collaborative efforts of the female family members in the formal structure of their narratives: both novels use multiple narrative perspectives to give voice to different members of the family and thereby emphasize the diversity of perspectives on the past. Throughout *Herbstvergessene*, the third-person account of Maja's search for the secrets of her family story are interspersed with chapters from Emmi's memoir of her days in Hohehorst; it is only when Maja pieces together the sequence of events that the reader realizes that Emmi is Charlotte, the woman that Maja has always believed to be her grandmother. However, the continuous passing of narrative authority back and forth between Maja and Emmi/ Charlotte means that no one perspective is given precedence over the other. Moreover, given that

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Emmi's account is of her pregnancy and the birth of her son, a significant feature is that the maternal story is told from the point of view of the mother. In giving voice to the maternal subject in this way, Jonuleit's novel answers Hirsch's call for "the story of female development . . . to be written in the voice of mothers as well as in that of daughters."¹⁷

The shifting narrative perspective is arguably used to even greater effect in Pehnt's novel, which plays with the separation and fusion of narrative voices in interesting ways. Unlike Jonuleit's novel, Pehnt's *Chronik der Nähe* does not differentiate clearly between the maternal and filial perspectives; in fact, each of the two narrators, Annie and the unnamed first-person narrator, is both daughter and mother, and they speak simultaneously from both standpoints. Moreover, at times it is difficult to separate the two narrative voices in order to ascertain who is speaking: mother's and daughter's voices seem at times to blend into one another. As the past merges with the present, underlining the idea that the past is very much part of the present, the third-person story of Annie seems to echo the first-person narrative of her daughter; thus the novel emphasizes the similarities and parallels between their perspectives.

The perspectives of mother and daughter meet at the point where their experience overlaps, namely at the birth of Annie's daughter, the narrator: at this decisive moment, the third-person narrator discloses, ". . . ihre Tochter ist geboren, das bin ich" (211; . . . her daughter is born, that's me). This is an interesting narrative dénouement, since it reveals the intricate involvement of the daughter in the maternal narrative; now that her mother has fallen silent, it is left to the daughter to pick up the threads of her mother's story. Crucially though, Annie's voice is in no way subsumed by her daughter's; rather, the maternal and filial perspectives go hand in hand and are presented as two sides of the same coin. One might even go so far as to argue that the dual voice of mother and daughter that runs the length of this narrative comes close to Hirsch's vision of a "double voice that would yield a multiple female consciousness" and that would seem to offer a way forward for contemporary renditions of the maternal perspective.¹⁸

Conclusion

On the threshold of the twenty-first century, contemporary writing in German is concerned with making sense of the past of the Second World War and its residual effects on the present, and this analysis of three contemporary novels by female authors demonstrates that

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women's writing has a particular part to play in this endeavor. Women writers often tend to write from a female perspective, to give voice to the experiences of the mothers, daughters, sisters, and wives, whose memory of the war is quite different from that of their male counterparts; the family stories that they tell narrate an alternative vision of the wartime past, one that tends to be neglected in the dominant historical narrative but nonetheless contributes to a fuller understanding of past events. In their work, these women writers give voice to "the small, weak, feminine, sentimental world of the mother," as González has defined "historia matria," but they move beyond essentializing discourses to call attention to the role of the marginal and the powerless in the broader narrative of history.¹⁹ Family novels by women, such as those analyzed here, offer a more inclusive, multigenerational, and multiperspectival account of the history of the Second World War, and they indicate quite clearly the particular contribution of contemporary writing by women to ongoing questions and debates about the literary engagement with Germany's wartime past.

Furthermore, as this analysis has shown, the distinct formal and aesthetic strategies that contemporary women writers employ in their texts make possible the emergence of new voices, new literary forms, and new narrative structures. The particular strategies that Hagen, Jonuleit, and Pehnt employ to give voice to the maternal perspective in their writing certainly distinguish them from their male counterparts, but they also set them apart from their literary foremothers. Although German women writers of the twentieth century such as Elfriede Jelinek, Helga Novak, and Anna Mitgutsch depicted mother-daughter relationships in their work, Marianne Hirsch's observation that the stories of mothers are all too often told from the point of view of their daughters certainly rings true for their texts. Contemporary writers such as those featured in this chapter move beyond this to allow for a multiplicity of voices and subject positions in their narratives. Their emphasis on the collaborative work of intergenerational storytelling and their use of multilayered narrative perspectives could be seen as answering Marianne Hirsch's call for "a feminist family romance of mothers *and* daughters, both subjects, speaking to each other and living in familial and communal contexts which enable the subjectivity of each member."²⁰ What emerges in Hagen's, Jonuleit's and Pehnt's matrilineal narratives is a dialogue of equals, an interchange of narrative agency between mothers and daughters, and a blending of their voices in innovative and creative ways.

Notes

¹ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse*, New Perspectives in German Political Studies (Basingstoke, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010),

1.

² Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall, *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2002).

³ Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2005), 24–25. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.

⁴ Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte*, 26.

⁵ Anja Jonuleit, *Herbstvergessene* (Munich: DTV, 2010), 219.

⁶ Annette Pehnt, *Chronik der Nähe* (Munich: Piper, 2012), 7.

⁷ Jonuleit, *Herbstvergessene*, 26.

⁸ Luis González y González, "El arte de la microhistoria," *Invitación a la microhistoria* (Mexico: Edición Clío, 1997), 16. On "historia patria" see also Katherine Stone's essay in this volume.

⁹ Katharina Hagen, *Der Geschmack von Apfelkernen* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2008), 113. In English, *The Taste of Apple Seeds*, trans. Jamie Bulloch (London: Atlantic, 2013), 103.

¹⁰ For a comprehensive guide to the *Lebensborn* Association, see Georg Lilienthal, *Der "Lebensborn e. V.": Ein Instrument nationalsozialistischer Rassenpolitik* (Stuttgart: Fischer, 1985).

¹¹ Pehnt, *Chronik der Nähe*, 14.

¹² Norgard Klages, *Look Back in Anger: Mother-Daughter and Father-Daughter Relationships in Women's Autobiographical Writings of the 1970s and 1980s* (New York: Peter Lang, 1995), 14.

¹³ Some of the more prominent examples of this type of literature are Helga M. Novak's *Die Eishiligen* (Frost Saints, 1979); Elfriede Jelinek's *Die Klavierspielerin* (1983; *The Pianist*, published in English as *The Piano Teacher*, 1988); and Waltraud Anna Mitgutsch's *Die Züchtigung* (1985; *The Chastisement*; published in English as *Three Daughters*, 1987). For a comparative analysis of these three novels, see Ricarda Schmidt, "Die böse Mutter: Zur

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Ästhetik sadomasochistischer Mutter-Tochter-Beziehungen in literarischen Texten aus dem Kontext der Frauenbewegung,” in *Mutter und Mütterlichkeit: Wandel und Wirksamkeit einer Phantasie in der deutschen Literatur*, ed. Irmgard Roebing and Wolfram Mauser (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1996), 347–58. For a broader analysis of the depiction of mothers and motherhood in German women’s writing of the 1970s and 1980s, see Emily Jeremiah, *Troubling Maternity: Mothering, Agency, and Ethics in Women’s Writing in German of the 1970s and 1980s* (London: Maney, 2003).

¹⁴ For example, the German tabloid *Bild-Zeitung* ran the headline, “Baby shock: We Germans are dying out!” on 15 March 2006.

¹⁵ Jonuleit, *Herbstvergessene*, 17–18.

¹⁶ Marianne Hirsch, *The Mother/Daughter Plot: Narrative, Psychoanalysis, Feminism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989), 161.

¹⁷ Hirsch, *Mother/Daughter Plot*, 161.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ González, “El arte de la microhistoria,” 16.

²⁰ Hirsch, *Mother/Daughter Plot*, 161. Italics in original.