

**Writing the Self: An Examination of Self-narration and Identity Construction in
Alina Bronsky's *Scherbenpark* and Julia Rabinowich's *Spaltkopf***

**Schreiben über das Selbst: eine Untersuchung von Selbsterzählung und
Identitätskonstruktionen in Alina Bronskys *Scherbenpark* und Julia Rabinowichs
*Spaltkopf***

by

Taylor Antoniazzi

A thesis
presented to the University of Waterloo
and the Universität Mannheim
in fulfillment of the
thesis requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts
in
Intercultural German Studies

Waterloo, Ontario, Canada / Mannheim, Germany, 2016
© Taylor Antoniazzi 2016

Author's Declaration

I hereby declare that I am the sole author of this thesis. This is a true copy of the thesis, including any required final revisions, as accepted by my examiners.

I understand that my thesis may be made electronically available to the public.

Abstract

Through a close reading of Alina Bronsky's *Scherbenpark* (2008) and Julya Rabinowich's *Spaltkopf* (2008), this thesis examines the process of identity building as it is articulated and produced in self-narration. The goal of this discussion is to demonstrate the potential for the young, female protagonists in these texts to reclaim a sense of agency by taking command over the story of the self and constructing transcultural identities across the span of a life that transcends dislocation, trauma and loss. Telling their identities offers the protagonists an opportunity to recover the autonomy they felt they had lost in the context of migration, of the family or of adolescent development. When these narrators negotiate their identities, they resist binary identifications based on country or language of origin and explode singular and universal understandings of migration experience and gender. Instead they write identities that are performative, diverse, and multiple.

The first chapter outlines the research questions this thesis seeks to address: What subject positions do the protagonists of these texts negotiate for themselves in the processes of traveling and telling? What role does gender play in the formation of identity? And to what extent may strategies of self-narration be deployed to produce a particular subjectivity? The second chapter analyzes the existing body of scholarship surrounding these texts. In a departure from previous studies, I pry apart the constellation of author and narrator and demonstrate what we can learn by disassociating the texts from authorial biography. In order to establish a theoretical and methodological foundation, the third chapter draws on the work of Paul Jay on transnationalism in literary studies, Michael Bamberg on identity and narration and Judith Butler's theory of gender performativity. The fourth chapter examines the role played by narrative manipulation strategies and gender performativity in *Scherbenpark*. By appropriating codes of masculinity, the

protagonist signals her refusal to conform to traditional femininity and be a passive victim who is written or controlled by someone else. From here, I turn to an analysis of *Spaltpopf* in chapter five. Through literary strategies like fragmentation, focalization, intertextuality and the use of myth, the protagonist moves freely between fixed identifications, reconstructing and reinterpreting her experiences and drawing lessons from them, which she uses to build a transcultural sense of being that revels in unhomeliness and uprootedness. Finally, in the concluding chapter, I suggest that these texts may productively be read as emancipatory and exploratory sites at the boundary between becoming and being, in which the protagonists are engaged in perpetual travel in-between locations, languages, cultures and identity positions.

Acknowledgements

I would like to sincerely thank Dr. Michael Boehringer for encouraging me to pursue my interests with this topic, helping me strike a balance between stress, pressure and motivation and being willing to act as my supervisor in such a long-distance project as this one where patience was necessary to organize and meet via Skype sessions that were not always of the highest quality. I am grateful for the opportunity to work with Dr. Boehringer and will always admire and be astounded by his uncanny ability to inspire moments of insight and clarity by simply making one comment or suggestion or even just posing the right question. I would also like to thank the examiners for this thesis, Dr. Kuzniar and Dr. Rasmussen, whose questions were thorough and thought-provoking.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents for supporting me and believing in my abilities, my partner André for motivating me, listening to my complaints and putting up with me during particularly stressful periods of the writing process, and Kendrick Lamar for dropping untitled unmastered when I needed it the most.

Table of Contents

Author's Declaration	ii
Abstract	iii
Acknowledgements	v
Table of Contents	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Chapter 2: The Texts and their Contexts	7
Chapter 3: Theory and Methodology	22
Chapter 4: <i>Scherbenpark</i>	37
4.1: Author and Narrator	37
4.2: Narrative Voice	40
4.3: Narrative Manipulation as a Strategy to Overcome Trauma	43
4.4: Performing Gender	47
4.5: The Last Words	60
Chapter 5: <i>Spaltkopf</i>	63
5.1: Author and Narrator	63
5.2: The Traveling Subject	68
5.3: Reclaiming Control	78
5.4: The Role of Myths and Fairy Tales	85
5.5: The Spaltkopf	90
Chapter 6: Conclusion	97
Bibliography	103

Chapter 1: Introduction

In 2000, Salman Rushdie forcefully proclaimed that “a new novel is emerging, a post-colonial novel, a de-centered, transnational, interlingual, cross-cultural novel” (57). The study of this developing field of literature is particularly valuable in the German studies context as it documents the multiple ways in which writers, who are at home in more than one culture and language, are identifying with Germany or Germanness and challenging the concept of a coherent and rigid category of “national literature” (Kraenzle 256). Prior to the transnational turn in literature, the terms *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, *Ausländerliteratur*, *Betroffenheitsliteratur*, *Immigrantenliteratur* and *interkulturelle Literatur* were all widely used at different points over the last several years to describe the writing of authors of non-German descent (Kraenzle 1), though such inappropriate terms as well as labels like *Autoren nicht-deutscher Herkunft* and *nicht-deutscher Muttersprache* have been long abandoned (Kraenzle 18). Instead German-language studies have employed the label *MigrantInnenliteratur*, while English-language studies have utilized *transnational literature* as terms to categorize a conceptual field which concentrates on movement between boundaries of nation, culture, language and literary tradition (Kraenzle 18). While recent studies have moved away from concepts such as *Betroffenheitsliteratur* and *Gastarbeiterliteratur*, they often retain the universalizing association of migration with upheaval, financial hardship, loss and deprivation (Kraenzle 256). Many authors with migration backgrounds, however, have insisted that their texts must not be circumscribed by such a restrictive and reductive form of classification since they articulate their protagonists’ fears and losses as well as moments of hope and success. The recent turn towards transnational literature has moved away from the precepts of sameness and universality that dominated early definitions of migration literature towards a model of difference and

particularity, subsequently opening a space for a consideration of texts that depict migration as an empowering and exploratory project celebrated for its liberating and diversifying potential in an increasingly globalizing world. In this dissertation, I enter the current discussion surrounding the transnationalizing of literature and reimagine a definition of migration that incorporates difference. My analysis will investigate the ways in which self-narration provides the disenfranchised female protagonists in two recent transnational texts, Alina Bronsky's *Scherbenpark* (2008) and Julia Rabinowich's *Spaltkopf* (2008)¹, with an opportunity to reclaim agency after experiencing a loss of control in migration by writing identities that are characterized by the freedom to travel between identifications rather than displacement and dislocation. I will also examine the narrative strategies these protagonists deploy in self-narration in order to exercise control over the process of identity construction.

The female protagonists in these texts, Sascha and Mischka, are not limited to or solely defined by their migration status, rather as subjects in perpetual motion they are constantly taking on new forms of meaning along the lines of gender, generation, sexual orientation, education, social and familial relations and religious or political affiliation. In his discussion of the transnational subject, journalist and author Zafer Şenocak insists on the importance “not only of roots, i.e. ancestral origins, but routes, i.e. the movement between multiple locations of identity, and negates models of identity founded on territory and nation” (cited in Kraenzle 5). In his model, “linguistic, national and cultural allegiances are not locatable on the map, i.e. in any one location, but in numerous metaphorical borderlands, suggesting that identity is neither fixed nor discretely bounded, but it is instead continuously contested in movement and encounter” (Kraenzle 5). I propose that the narrators in *Scherbenpark* and *Spaltkopf* produce their identities

¹ In the interest of brevity all in-text citations referring to Bronsky's novel *Scherbenpark* (2008) and Rabinowich's *Spaltkopf* (2008) will be written respectively as *Scherbenpark* and *Spaltkopf* followed by the page number.

precisely in such moments of metaphysical border-crossing as well as in translation, interaction and encounter. My research intends to demonstrate the ways in which the medium of self-narration enables these female protagonists to transcend singular notions of nation and origin and map out another kind of supraterritorial identity. These narratives act as extra-territorial spaces where the protagonists form their identities in transitional movement between boundaries and take authoritative command over the project of self-construction. Moreover, the experiences of first love, family trauma and growing up that Sascha and Mischka record in their narratives are not only familiar or relatable to migrants. In fact, Bosnian writer Dževad Karahasan, who fled from his hometown Sarajevo in 1993, has claimed that migration is an inevitable process of life and to that extent,

[w]ir alle seien MigrantInnen. Wer den Lebensweg von der Geburt zum Tode nicht als permanente Emigration sehe, habe weder die Abgründigkeiten noch die Chancen menschlicher Existenz verstanden. Wer in seinem Leben einmal oder mehrere Male ein Land verlassen und in ein anderes – oft mit einer anderen Kultur und einer anderen Sprache - ziehen musste, ist nur gezwungen, den Prozess der ständigen Entfremdung und Einverleibung, der das Leben ausmacht, umfassender und bewusster, schneller und radikaler durchzuführen. (cited in Muaremi 5-6)

Sascha and Mischka thus provide alternative models for living their identities in the world and frameworks for imagining mobility and displacement, opting to experience and engage with all forms of real and imaginative border-crossing and representing such transitory boundary sites as the locations where identities are formed. With this in mind, my study seeks to address the following questions: What modes of subjectivity are open to the mobile, transcultural individual? What subject positions do the protagonists of these texts negotiate for themselves in the processes of traveling and telling? What role does gender play in the formation of identity? And to what extent may strategies of self-narration be deployed to produce a particular subjectivity?

In the analyzed texts, rather than revealing one's identity in narration, identity is

constructed through the act of telling. This thesis examines the self as dramatic or performative and looks at the ways in which the protagonists present and write the self in order to convince others that they are who they “appear” to be. Therefore, my analysis will necessarily investigate the interstices of self-narration, identity performance, mobility and gender. In many ways these concepts interact and overlap in the texts. Mobility, in particular, facilitates the extent to which subjects are able to move easily between different cultures, national boundaries and provisional identities. Arianna Dagnino emphasizes the importance of moving beyond one’s country and culture of origin as well as overcoming or “unlearning” ways of identity formation that rely heavily on nationality, culture or geographical location (4). However, she points out that to defamiliarize or outgrow a sense of belonging to one’s home culture does not imply disowning or ignoring its foundational role. She suggests rather that transcultural subjects should not feel limited by their primary culture (Dagnino 4). Iain Chambers adds,

None of us can simply choose another language, as though we could completely abandon our previous history and freely opt for another one. Our previous sense of knowledge, language and identity, our peculiar inheritance, cannot be simply rubbed out of the story, cancelled. What we have inherited - as culture, as history, as language, as tradition, as a sense of identity - is not destroyed but taken apart, opened up to questioning, rewriting and re-routing. (24)

Certain literary genres frequently found in young adult literature, such as autobiography, autobiographical fiction, the *Bildungsroman* and the coming-of-age story, provide fruitful platforms for the representations of travel and mobility intrinsic to the migrant experience and lend themselves particularly well to the self-reflexivity and strategies of self-invention that narrators employ when they engage in exploring identity positions and writing and rewriting the story of the self (Fachinger 14). As Chambers suggests, a central aspect of identity construction is “rewriting and re-routing” (24). In both novels the ability to move back and forth between geographical locations, historical periods, identity positions, phases in life or the pages in a book

facilitates the characters' self-fashioning. Chambers further explains that the act of writing itself opens up a space that invites movement, migration and a journey (10). He clarifies, "[...] to write is, of course, to travel. It is to enter a space, a zone, a territory, sometimes sign-posted by generic indicators (travel writing, autobiography, anthropology, history...), but everywhere characterized by movement: the passage of words, the caravan of thought, the flux of the imaginary, the slippage of the metaphor [...]" (Chambers 10). Writing, like the formation of identity, involves an emotional and intellectual journey, constant transitions between languages as well as between event and narration, repression and representation, past and present, powerlessness and power, and becoming and being (Chambers 11). My thesis concerns itself primarily with analyzing the literary text itself as a transitive site upon which narrators negotiate new interpretations of identity and explore the space in-between fixed identifications and boundaries.

Until quite recently female migrants have been overlooked in most studies about migration (Pilar and Borrego 76). When they were taken into account at all, they were considered merely as wives or mothers who followed their partners or sons in migration. Nevertheless, a growing number of works have deconstructed their passive role in the migration process and underscored their role as matriarchs, instrumental in maintaining and furthering the familial heritage and lineage (Pilar and Borrego 76). This perspective both empowers and restores agency to women. In their own self-narratives many of these women convey their complex histories and establish a sense of autonomy and empowerment rooted in the migration experience, rather than writing an uncomplicated account of upheaval, hardship and loss. Furthermore, their cultural production as artists and writers, for example, reveals their active role as cultural agents contributing to the host culture. I will argue that gender is continuously negotiated and reconstituted in migration and consider the ways in which gender as a fluid aspect of identity allows young, female

protagonists to interpret and perform the self by either resisting or adopting different gender codes and roles, achieving a measure of agency over their changing bodies as well as gaining a sense of control over the instability, insecurity and uncertainty in other areas of their turbulent lives.

I will begin by situating *Scherbenpark* and *Spaltkopf* within a body of existing literature. Though there has been significant previous scholarship on migration literature in general, few authors have critically engaged with the texts that I plan on focusing on in this thesis. A consideration of these texts will thus fill a crucial gap in the existing scholarship surrounding so-called migration literature. From here, I will turn to an outline of my theoretical and methodological framework, drawing on the work of Paul Jay, whose primary concern is with reorienting literary studies towards transnationalism in light of rapid cultural globalization over the past two decades. The former guiding principle of literary studies, which proposed that the literature we ought to study was unified by its treatment of common human experiences and universal truths that transcended historical contexts, is being replaced, according to Jay, by a model emphasizing texts dealing with differences in the experiences and identities of transnational as well as other minority subjectivities. Taking Jay's work as my starting point, I will illustrate how this paradigm shift influences my own study, which carefully navigates the particular experiences of migrant women and understands difference and diversity as emblematic of transnational literature and transnational identities more generally. I will also introduce and expand upon theories of identity and narration and gender performativity. My reading of *Scherbenpark* and *Spaltkopf* instantiates a shift from the traditional considerations of identity founded upon nation and territory in favour of an understanding that identity is multiple, moving and changing, in order to critically reexamine the role and constitution of the subject as well as to

elucidate how precisely self-narration may provide a privileged site for exploring and performing an identity that is constantly changing over time and transcending traditional boundaries.

Chapter 2: The Texts and their Contexts

Before undertaking a close reading of Bronsky's *Scherbenpark* and Rabinowich's *Spaltkopf*, it is necessary to contextualize these texts within the existing scholarship. After an introduction and discussion of the key themes addressed in these studies, I will attempt to situate my own work within the scholarly discourse. In view of its success and subsequent adaptation into a film, *Scherbenpark* has been the focus of relatively few literary studies: Anke Biendarra's "Cultural Dichotomies and Lived Transnationalism in Recent Russian-German Narratives" (2015), Barbara Mennel's essay "Alina Bronsky, *Scherbenpark*: Global Ghetto Girl" (2011), and Weertje Willms' "Die 'Newcomerin' Alina Bronsky im Kontext der russisch-deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur und ihre Rezeption im deutschen Feuilleton" (2008). Each of these analyses posits *Scherbenpark* as a transnational text and examines the extent to which it has been successful in undoing generic conventions. In "Cultural Dichotomies and Lived Transnationalism in Recent Russian-German Narratives," Biendarra identifies a transnational turn in recent German-language literature. She defines transnational literature as "texts dealing with characters, movements and forces that cross national boundaries, translate identities and cultures, and complicate the political, social and cultural fabric of nations and people" (Biendarra 209) and proposes that such literature is increasingly growing in popularity and garnering critical attention in Germany, Austria and Switzerland. Whereas previously "hyphenated authors, that is, migrant, minority and non-ethnic German-language writers" (Biendarra 210) were solely responsible for wielding the pen of transnational writing, literary critics have recently turned

their attention towards non-minority writers who also experience and write transnationally (cf. also Taberner, “Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Fiction”). Biendarra suggests that these writers and texts may also “transcend national, ethnic, and cultural boundaries, imaginaries, and identities” (210). This refusal to limit transnational texts to those dealing with upheaval and displacement makes it possible to redefine the genre. By tracing the history of transnational writing from *Gastarbeiterliteratur* to *Secondo-Literatur*, *interkulturelle Literature* and *Chamisso-Literatur*, it becomes apparent that transnational literature has reimagined the German literary canon (Biendarra 210). Biendarra maintains that “a continuously changing canon will handle the addition of more openly hybrid texts dealing with displacement, war, mobility, identity issues, a globalized world [...]” (210) as well as open a space for texts depicting multicultural realities and experiences that are not limited to the effects of deterritorialization. With this in mind, Biendarra proposes to introduce a new category of “lived transnationalism,” which demonstrates “the permutations of transnationalism as a workaday phenomenon in autobiographically inspired, realistically narrated texts” (210). In her investigation of this literature, Biendarra looks specifically at the oppositions between Russian and German cultures as a central theme in such texts and the extent to which fluid mobility between the two cultures is a possibility for characters. She is particularly interested in the ways in which cultural dichotomies between the German mainstream and the Russian minority are constructed and negotiated by narrators and uses *Scherbenpark* as a means to uncover whether migratory protagonists are prone to portray themselves and the host culture as innately oppositional. Biendarra argues that cultural stereotyping is a textual strategy often manipulated by these characters and one which hinders “the process of social integration and establishing a meaningful and contended existence in the new home” (210). She compares *Scherbenpark* with

Lena Gorelik's *Meine weißen Nächte* (2004) and Olga Grjasnowa's *Der Russe ist einer, der Birken liebt* (2012) and identifies features common to all three texts: "the characters in the respective novels share the burden of negotiating memories of their culture of origin, which are tainted by discrimination, loss, even war; of coming to terms with the trauma of displacement, and adapting to the culture of arrival" (Biendarra 222). Biendarra examines the extent to which the characters in these texts are able to transgress notions of origin and national belonging and construct identities that resist binary placement in categories of hybrid and pure, migratory and settled and sameness and difference. She concludes that *Scherbenpark* is not so successful as a transnational text since it presents the migrant individual and host culture as dichotomous and openly perpetuates cultural stereotypes: "In Sascha Naimann's estimation [...] Russian culture has no positive attributes whatsoever - all Russian men are violent drunks and Russian women are at fault for living with them. While German culture is characterized as exclusionary toward immigrants, it also exhibits a strongly Western, almost American, notion of the pursuit of happiness that suits Sascha's character" (Biendarra 223).

Mennel begins her essay "Alina Bronsky, *Scherbenpark*: Global Ghetto Girl," with the claim that literature is critical to a nation's culture (162). She argues that as a contemporary literary account of migration from Russia to Germany, "*Scherbenpark* refracts and revises Germanness" (Mennel 162). Its protagonist Sascha, she explains, "signals a reconfiguration of national literature both in terms of gender, youth and an ethnic understanding of Germanness" (Mennel 163). She suggests that the novel participates in a current trend in literature surrounding the figure of the "global ghetto girl." This literature is defined by young, female protagonists who fashion their subjecthood in the context of the ghetto where they often live as a result of migration. Since the ghetto is primarily a space of male criminality, the global ghetto girl often

appropriates codes of masculinity (Mennel 164). Mennel suggests that the independent, irreverent, aggressive and outspoken narrator of *Scherbenpark*, Sascha, attempts to cope with trauma, negotiate her gender and to an extent, mask her femininity and vulnerability precisely by appropriating such codes of masculinity as “physical action and verbal jousting” (172). Furthermore, a common feature of minority literature is the coming-of-age narrative, which portrays the process of identity formation alongside questions of awakening sexuality and assimilation. Traditionally, the protagonist in such a coming-of-age story in German literature is male, however it is precisely the introduction of a young woman who appropriates certain codes of masculinity that enables a reimagining of textual conventions in national literature. Mennel writes, “*Scherbenpark* endows the literary figure of the global ghetto girl with a forceful subjectivity that appropriates popular textual conventions to open up traditional depictions of gender and intervene in transnational and national discourses about gender and immigration” (175). However, while Mennel presents key ideas about assimilation, writing oneself into nationhood and negotiating gender in the context of German and transnational literature that will indeed inform my own analysis, she also describes “*Scherbenpark*’s textual construction of its main character Sascha Naimann [...]” (164) and swiftly denies the “global ghetto girl” any agency in interpreting her own gender, controlling the narrative and constructing her identity.

Willms’ essay “Die ‘Newcomerin’ Alina Bronsky im Kontext der russisch-deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur und ihre Rezeption im deutschen Feuilleton” compares Bronsky’s debut novel *Scherbenpark* and her second novel *Die schärfsten Gerichte der tatarischen Küche* (2010) to seven German texts by authors of Russian origin, including Rabinowich’s *Spaltkopf*. In order to assess whether similar narrative processes and themes of family, identity, migration and origin play a critical role in Bronsky’s novel as they do in literature by other Russian-German authors,

Willms investigates four issues that emerge in all texts. The first characteristic is that all of the texts in her analysis deal with family and migration histories as a key theme (Willms 69). The second characteristic identified by Willms is that the novels draw heavily from the autobiographies of their authors (70). This may take the form of episodic memories such as childhood experiences, which are then processed in the novel as in Gorelik's *Meine weißen Nächte* or in the form of almost complete descriptions of the protagonist's life found in Vladimir Vertlib's *Zwischenstationen* (1999) (Willms 70). With the exception of Vertlib, these quasi-autobiographical texts are narrated by first-person, often female, narrators (Willms 70). Finally, the fourth commonality cited by Willms is that childhood memories and early development are invariably shaped by the migration experience and central to the text (70). Willms, then, seeks to position Bronsky's novel within this body of literature. With its first-person narrator and female protagonist, *Scherbenpark* seems to share similar characteristics and fit well within the confines of this corpus of transnational literature. The most crucial difference, however, is that Bronsky's novel is a fictional text with a certain poetics and textual autonomy and thereby eschews any autobiographical reference (Willms 70-71). Like many other texts, the construction of Sascha's identity is at the centre of the story. However, from Willms' perspective, the protagonist's migrant background does not motivate a search for national and cultural identity, explicitly (74). While she is indeed influenced by her experience of migration, she must also build her identity in the context of adolescence, the traumatic experience of her mother's murder and growing up without a fatherly figure in the house to protect her family. Such questions of national and cultural identity, which are the focal point of the other texts in Willms' comparison, are peripheral in *Scherbenpark*, distinguishing it from other works of transnational literature and emphasizing that the experience of migration is merely one axis of the identity of immigrants. In

spite of this, Willms comments that the migration background of the author Bronsky and narrator Sascha is emphasized by German literary critics and used as a strategy to arouse the interest of potential audiences (77). Willms concludes her essay by stating that to an extent, such writing by authors of non-German origin has been successful perhaps because these texts promise to expose rather than engage with an exotic “Other” culture. Biendarra suggested the potential of the dynamic genre of transnational literature to move beyond reductive representations of the migrant experience as invariably connected to displacement and deterritorialization. However, like Biendarra, Willms notes that *Scherbenpark* relies heavily on cultural stereotyping and binary oppositions. In the portrayal of the ghetto where Sascha lives with other Russian immigrants, for example, stereotypes of “gewalttätige und Drogen konsumierende Jungen und dumme, geschmacklos gekleidete und auf die rettende Hochzeit mit einem Märchenprinzen wartende Mädchen in der jungen Generation, Alkoholiker und perspektivlos in vermüllten Wohnungen dahinvegetierende Arbeitslose ohne Deutschkenntnisse in der Eltern- und Großelterngeneration” (Willms 79-80) are reaffirmed rather than deconstructed or analyzed in any depth. In contrast to Biendarra and Willms, I intend to demonstrate the ways in which Sascha’s cultural stereotyping may be read as a quality of the narrator’s voice and a consequence of focalization from the perspective of a pubescent protagonist. I will show that it is precisely the split between Bronsky, the author of the text, and Sascha, the narrator of the text, which subverts the category of “autobiographically inspired, realistically narrated texts” (210) proposed by Biendarra and presents a protagonist who does not perpetuate stereotypes but rather engages with them. Through her first-person interactions with both Russian and German characters, she constructs an identity that is able to travel in the world uninhibited by her migration status and move beyond “fixed” identifications based on country or language of origin.

From here I turn to a discussion of the secondary literature surrounding Rabinowich's *Spalkopf*, specifically the role of fairy tale and fantasy elements in the text. Silke Schwaiger, Andrea Reiter, Jeta Muaremi and Christina Guenther have all noted that Rabinowich's protagonist Mischka employs fairy tales and myths as a literary strategy to speak about her traumatic childhood and migration experience and to construct a cross-cultural identity in her new surroundings. Guenther remarks that "Mischka negotiates her cultural and linguistic border crossings and ensuing family tensions by regularly taking a 'Seitenschritt aus dem Realen' [...] by crossing into a land of magic fantasy that she constructs out of numerous cross-cultural fictions and fairy tales" (n. pag.). A notable example is the Spalkopf figure, who lends the novel its title. The Spalkopf is a vampire who sustains his own life by feeding on family secrets and haunts those who are trying to forget or repress memories by threatening to reveal their secrets: "*Sie will vergessen und nicht verzeihen. Ich vergesse nichts und verzeihe nichts*" (*Spalkopf* 20). Schwaiger, in "Baba Yaga, Schneewittchen und Spalkopf: Märchenhafte und fantastische Elemente als literarische Stilmittel in Julya Rabinowichs Roman *Spalkopf*" (2013), classifies Rabinowich's writing under the genre of magic realism and attempts to show how intercultural myths and fairy tale figures invented by the author herself, such as the Spalkopf, allow Mischka to access her family history and explore questions of identity and belonging. Schwaiger attributes Rabinowich's reliance on fantastic elements largely to the author's intimate relationship with fairy tales and fantasy novels. Rabinowich stated that she took her first literary footsteps with "phantastische[n] Geschichten, Märchen und Phantasieromane[n]" (cited in Schwaiger 149). In an interview with the Austrian daily *Der Standard* Rabinowich explains that she first learned German from reading old books and names her three favourite novels:

Michail Bulgakovs *Der Meister und Margarita*, Arkadi und Boris Strugazkis *Picknick am Wegesrand* und Paulus Hochgatterers *Das Matratzenhaus*. So wie die Gebrüder Grimm

gabs in Russland die Gebrüder Strugatzki. Die hat in Russland jeder Teenie, jeder Erwachsene gekannt. Sie haben eine Reihe sehr spannender Science Fiction-Geschichten geschrieben, die sich stark unterschieden haben von denen, die damals im Westen üblich waren. Es war weniger technisch, es war mehr fantastisch auf eine Art und es war gefühlvoller. (cited in Schwaiger 149)

With this in mind it is little surprise that fairy tale motifs influence her work so heavily.

Schwaiger points out that

[a]us dem deutschsprachigen Raum finden sich in *Spalkopf* Märchen wie etwa “Schneewittchen,” “Hans im Glück” und “Rotkäppchen” der Gebrüder Grimm oder von Wilhelm Hauff die Erzählung “Das kalte Herz.” Aus dem russischen Umfeld entlehnt sie Märchenfiguren und mytische Gestalten wie die Hexe Baba Yaga, die in einem Häuschen auf Hühnerbeinen lebt, das Schneemädchen Snegurotschka, die Herrin des Kupferbergs oder den unsterblichen Koschtschei. (150)

Schwaiger maintains that though the fairy tale subplot may initially seem childish or supplementary, it takes on greater significance throughout the text and becomes a model by which the reader can understand the unfolding events as well as the effects of the migration experience on its protagonist and her family (152). Schwaiger’s analysis relies on references to Rabinowich’s biography and she suggests that when Rabinowich portrays the main character Mischka’s difficulties growing up in Austria, alienated from her family and Russian background, she draws largely from her own background. This account also imagines an identity outside of the text controlling the narrative and fails to ascribe agency to the protagonist.

Reiter, in her article “The Appropriation of Myth as a ‘Language’ in Julya Rabinowich’s ‘Jewish Novels’” (2014), points out that myth is a distinguishing feature of the recent fiction of Jewish writers in Austria in general, who have embraced the use of myth in their “autobiographically-inflected work” (267) as a means of tracing their Jewish identity. Reiter highlights several Jewish authors in Austria who have employed the use of myth in their writing, such as Eva Messase, whose stories impart the memory of an older generation and allow the younger generation of children and grandchildren to lay claim to a contemporary Jewish identity

derived from their forebears' experience and the persecution they suffered as Jews (268). The qualities of timelessness and immutability make myth particularly useful as a textual strategy in works exploring themes of transcultural identity. "Whatever our ignorance of language and the culture of the people where it originated," Reiter explains, "a myth is still felt as a myth by any reader anywhere in the world" (268). Myth also provides access to remote historical times and far away places, "facilitating the disembodied mobility through time and space" (Reiter 285). Furthermore, Reiter claims that the "deployment of myth in texts connects memory with a construction of the self" (268) and provides authors like Rabinowich an opportunity to explore their personal and familial past as they engage in the incessant project of interpreting themselves as subjects in the present. In particular, Reiter suggests that Rabinowich and Mischka manipulate myth to construct Jewishness as an aspect of identity that is "uncannily familiar and yet impossible to express" (269). Unfortunately, Reiter often conflates narrator and author, emphasizing the "autofictional character of the text" (285) and suggesting the myth of the Spalkopf simultaneously guides both Rabinowich's and Mischka's search for identity. She claims that given its symbolism, it is no surprise that Rabinowich seemingly invented the Spalkopf figure herself (Reiter 274). Reiter points to Rabinowich's website which displays several of her own paintings bearing the name of the Spalkopf in their title and showing highly stylized heads that look similar to her own as well as a picture that Rabinowich contributed to an exhibition showcasing her father's artwork at the Vienna Jewish Museum in 2013 that shows a photograph of herself at the age of seven emerging behind the image of the Spalkopf (274-275). In my analysis the Spalkopf is not an artistic trope invented by the author that predates the text, rather the figure is an independent narratorial agent competing with the protagonist for narratorial authority in the text and threatening her self-narration with his own subversive

subplot. Throughout the text Mischka also identifies with the witch Baba Yaga, who lives in the woods in a house on chicken legs and preys on children. Baba Yaga serves as a female figure by which Mischka fashions her own identity. Through the language of myth, Reiter argues that she is able to explore and construct her identity as one that is not only inflected by migration experience, but Jewishness and gender as well (286). The myriad intertextual references to fairy tales and modern classics of fantasy literature, like Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, preclude a clear, comprehensible reading of the text and communicate feelings of destabilization internalized by the narrator (Reiter 274). However, through narrative strategies such as the deployment of familiar myths, Mischka is able to gain control over her own storytelling as well as "an identity that has not been allowed to stabilize in any way and that is trapped by conditions and forces beyond the individual's control" (Reiter 284). Being unexpectedly uprooted by her family at a young age and forced to start anew in a foreign city and culture certainly contributed to a loss of a sense of control as well as identity for the protagonist. However, I maintain that through the process of telling her identity across a life and confronting the Spaltkopf as well as her uncertainties and insecurities about her own identity at the end of the novel, Mischka is able to reclaim control over the story and the self.

In addition to identity building, Reiter points out other functions of fairy tales in the novel. Mischka's difficult transition from adolescence to adulthood is not only complicated by having to adjust to new cultural and linguistic surroundings, which she perceives as surreal, but also by significant changes in her family structure such as the birth of her sister, the sudden death of her father as well as the discovery of her grandmother's denied life story (Reiter 271). "Straddling two cultures and languages, in addition to having to find a place in a world split between inside the family and the outside world, is exacerbated by her maternal grandmother's

suppressed Jewish ancestry, which comes to haunt not only the ageing woman but also her granddaughter” (Reiter 271). In order to piece together her grandmother’s past and make sense of her persecution and suffering, Reiter maintains that Mischka uses the familiar features of fairy tales from her childhood to travel back to Leningrad during wartime and process her grandmother’s traumatic experiences. For instance, the tale of Rumpelstiltskin spinning straw into gold in exchange for the princess’ first child allows her to imagine her grandmother’s escape with her young son (cf. Reiter 275):

Rundum Gedränge und Geschrei, während ihr kleiner Sohn auf dem Deck des Schiffes zwischen ihren Habseligkeiten mit seinem Holzpferdchen spielt. Sie weiß, dass sie sich und ihr Kind gerettet hat. Sie ist ruhig. Sie hat keinen Grund, unruhig zu sein, denn ich bin bei ihr. Sie hat mir im Austausch dafür ihr erstes Kind versprochen, und ich habe zugestimmt. Die Kammer ist voll mit falschem Gold, das ich gesponnen habe, bald wird sie zum zweiten Mal geehelicht werden. (Spaltkopf 152)

Reiter explains that “the fairy tale in this example substitutes for a psychological explanation of the later estrangement between the grandmother and her son, the narrator’s uncle” (275). By translating the story into a familiar fairy tale, the Spaltkopf helps Mischka understand why her uncle cannot forgive his mother for leaving his father to advance her career and resents his half-sister for the attention she receives from her own father, the grandmother’s new husband. Myth and fairy tale thus function to allow mobility across temporal and spatial borders and provide a familiar frame through which to understand an unspeakable history.

In her *Diplomarbeit* “Erinnern und Erzählen in ‘Spaltkopf’ von Julya Rabinowich” (2013), Muaremi rejects the pernicious classification of *Spaltkopf* as migration literature based solely on the origin of its author. Muaremi declares that the genre of a work should indicate its content rather than the biographical background of its author (3). Migration literature, Muaremi argues, is traditionally characterized by such themes as nation, assimilation and identification. While these issues arise in *Spaltkopf*, they are not the only issues addressed. The experience of

migration touches on many different thematic fields and areas of life and for this reason, the novel also engages with much broader themes of first love, drug abuse, body image, familial conflict and political upheaval among other issues that cannot be reduced or solely attributed to the experience of migration. Furthermore, the feelings of alienation, anxiety, loneliness and loss that are discussed in the work are not only emotions experienced by migrants (Muaremi 5). From this perspective, the story told in *Spaltkopf* is not only representative of a Jewish family uprooted from the Soviet Union in the 1970s. The characters' silence, secrecy and repression of memories may largely be attributed to historical circumstances, however they may also be read as an expression of familial conflict in general. *Spaltkopf* is also a text about coming-of-age, intergenerational relations, family secrets and the role of repression and remembrance (Muaremi 4). Ultimately, Muaremi writes, "Es wäre kurzsichtig, *Spaltkopf* nur der Kategorie der Migrationsliteratur oder einer der vielen anderen, einzig auf die Herkunft der AutorInnen Bezug nehmenden Bezeichnungen zuzuordnen" (3).

Muaremi also undertakes a close reading of the text in order to investigate the link between collective memory and narration, particularly the ways in which myths and magical elements like the *Spaltkopf* serve as a means to access and express trauma and repressed cultural memories.

Muaremi explains,

[m]an kann letztlich festhalten, dass die Nachträglichkeit beim Trauma auch für Gedächtnis gilt, weshalb sich was wir erinnern, nicht nach dem, was eigentlich gewesen ist, sondern danach, wovon wir später eine Geschichte erzählen können (und wollen). Was aus der Vergangenheit erinnert wird und was nicht, hängt deshalb nicht zuletzt davon ab, von wem und wozu diese Geschichte in welcher Situation gebraucht wird. (25)

The models outlined by Jan and Aleida Assmann and Maurice Halbwachs provide the theoretical underpinning of Muaremi's analysis. According to Aleida Assmann, memories are not precise recollections of events from the past, rather new reconstructions of memories of events are always forming and adapting to our current self-image (Muaremi 18). Autobiographical memory,

in particular, is subject to significant changes depending on our shifting perspectives, emotions and needs. The malleable character of memory thus lends itself well to the imaginary, dream-like world of fairy tales. Muaremi proposes that fairy tales and myths as an aspect of one's cultural memory and heritage heavily influence the identity construction of the narrator Mischka, who uses such fantastic narrative streams to access and cope with an unreal past and produce her identity in the present within a cross-cultural context. Such identity formation, however, may be inhibited when critical memories are repressed (Muaremi 19). In the novel this theme is represented by the character of the grandmother, who has suppressed a traumatic experience from her past. The fictional fairy tale figure Spaltkopf is borne out of the fears and traumatic memories of the grandmother and passed down through generations. Muaremi writes, "Spaltkopf wäre dann die emotional-literarische Produktion eines kollektiven Gedächtnisses, das aufgrund eines traumatischen Erlebnisses geschaffen wurde, und in welchem verdrängte Emotionen über Generationen hinweg ausgelagert werden" (80).

This emphasis on intercultural myths and fairy tales as well as memory as an essential link to establishing a transcultural sense of self in Rabinowich's work, has necessarily provoked responses from literary critics who aim to shift the focus and advance a new reading of the literature. In her presentation "Rabinowich's Transnational Poetics: Remembering Border-Crossing in Narrative and Theatre" (2015), Guenther demonstrates a keen awareness of the existing scholarly discourse and explains, "[t]he studies by Silke Schwaiger, Jeta Muaremi and Andrea Reiter probe how magic realism and her uniquely stylized myth-making allow Rabinowich's protagonists to interweave what Jan Assmann has called cultural and communicative memory practices, both essential to exploring agency within a community whose boundaries are ever more fluid and always being redefined" (n. pag.). Guenther aligns herself

with these scholars who have suggested that myths serve as models that allow Mischka to access and cope with her traumatic childhood experiences. However, she asserts that “the novel does not simply dwell on Mischka’s traumatic experience of transmigration” (n. pag.). Taking these key notions as a starting point, Guenther enters the discussion surrounding the negotiation of identity in Rabinowich’s novels by elaborating on what she terms the author’s “transnational poetics” (n. pag.). Her intervention seeks to connect Rabinowich’s appropriation of cross-cultural myths, exploration of cultural and collective memory processes and activism on behalf of migrants who are often marginalized as a result of transnational movement, such as women and children. She argues that giving a voice to individuals caught up in migration, or “Verschwiegenes sichtbar zu machen” (Guenther n. pag.), is the foundation of Rabinowich’s literary project or artistic drive. In order to unravel Rabinowich’s transnational poetics, Guenther examines three elements in *Spalkopf*: narration from the perspective of a powerless protagonist, exploration of the traumatic effects of migration on all generations and the interconnectedness of transnational and transgenerational memory (n. pag.). She concludes that in contrast to Rabinowich’s other works, *Spalkopf* provides an optimistic outlook on the migration experience as its protagonist Mischka successfully “[carves] out a space for herself in which to explore and create a transgenerational and transnational memory community” (Guenther n. pag.). As my thesis will argue, the protagonist produces an autonomous identity through the telling of the “I” within this space.

The studies outlined above provide a valuable point of departure for my own reading of the text. The construction of an identity that is built upon myth, memory-making and cross-cultural movement is a major theme in transnational literature and has been addressed by numerous literary critics. Gender as an aspect of identity, however, has been largely ignored.

While Mennel offers a close reading of *Scherbenpark* with specific emphasis on the emerging figure of the “global ghetto girl,” Reiter, Muaremi and Guenther each briefly explore how through the language of myth, particularly identification with the witch Baba Yaga, Mischka is able to negotiate a strong, autonomous and self-reliant feminine identity. My engagement with the texts will expand upon the notion of gender and investigate how narrators write a gendered identity, rather than a universal migrant identity. In the next section I will demonstrate that the migrant identity is always in flux. The transnational subject does not exist before movement, rather the “I” is formed and reformed through travel in the world just like Judith Butler’s gendered subject which is neither fixed nor stable, but engaged in a daily process of actively interpreting a range of received gender norms and cultural possibilities. An analysis of the narrators’ choices to either mask their femininity and vulnerability by appropriating codes of masculinity, or embrace traditional feminine wile and deploy their sexuality, will illuminate the ways in which powerless protagonists are able to achieve agency by controlling their bodies and writing their identities. Through their interpretation of gender, the protagonists may define themselves against male violence and patriarchal structures or, in some cases, against traditional female roles.

Finally, the body of existing literature tends to conflate the experience of the protagonist with the biography of the author. My thesis aims to pry apart the constellations of autobiography and fiction, author and narrator. I will instead argue that the protagonist gains control through the telling of the fictionalized autobiographical self and that self-narration offers a space for the female migrant protagonist contained within the text to produce a particular subjectivity. At a supraterritorial level, self-narration gives the female protagonists an opportunity to control the writing of their own identities. Removed from any locatedness, they are no longer determined by

a country or language of origin. In this open space they can tell themselves performatively and are thus able to achieve a measure of autonomy that was stripped from them in migration. At once first-person narrators and experiencing characters, the protagonists of these texts resist being positioned by anyone else either as outsiders, victims, too young or not feminine enough based on their cultural background, family history, living situation, accent or appearance. By transcending the boundaries of culture, nation, language and location and negotiating a readable identity for themselves, I will show how the supraterritorial space of the page imparts agency to female narrators as they actively shape their subjectivities.

Chapter 3: Theory and Methodology

This section will introduce three key ideas that I intend to expand upon in my close reading of Rabinowich's and Bronsky's novels. Since both may be situated firmly within the field of transnational literature, I will firstly discuss the emergence of a transnational turn in literature, drawing heavily on Jay's *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies* (2010) and attempting to position his work within a German-language context. Jay provides a detailed account of the shift in focus of literary studies that he traces to intersecting forces both within and outside the university. The "transnationalizing" of literature instantiated a move away from sameness, singularity and universalism towards difference and particularity and gave rise to an awareness of a range of multiple, diverse and changing subject positions. Azade Seyhan provides us with a succinct definition of transnational literature as:

a genre of writing that operates outside the national canon, addresses issues facing deterritorialized cultures, and speaks for those in what I call "paranational" communities and alliances. These are communities that exist within national borders or alongside the citizens of the host country but remain culturally or linguistically distanced from them and, in some instances, are estranged from both the home and the host culture. (10)

Transnational texts thus provide the terrain for their characters to employ strategies of self-narration, explore and test out novel identities and perform identities that are always in flux, constantly taking on new forms of cultural, political, historical and gendered meaning. In order to chart this relatively unexplored terrain, I address the potential for identity formation through self-narration. My analysis will utilize elements of narrative theory to discuss the effects of narrative manipulation strategies such as analepsis and prolepsis (or flashback and flash forward) as well as the function of multiple narrators and focalization in the texts. Linguistic or narrative strategies present in transnational writing have often been read for their oppositional potential because they can undermine fixity and promote fragmentation and difference, expose intertextuality, transgress traditional genre categories, subvert dominant discourses and rewrite cultural stereotypes, national canons or patriarchal myths. This study chooses to look specifically at female characters' narrative strategies of selfhood and elaborate on the ways in which they conceptualize the practice of fashioning and refashioning the self and identity in terms of geography, gender and generation. I will take narratology as a starting point from which to examine how the narrators in my texts are not only able to position themselves as agentive actors, but to explore and negotiate their own subjectivities and critically reflect on their own process of "becoming" an identity over time through self-narration. Finally, as my analysis will consider gender as a critical facet of the identity that female migrants adopt in self-narration, I will employ Butler's concept of gender as performatively produced and her contention that class, race, ethnicity and gender all constitute "identity," simultaneously subverting notions of a singular "feminine" or "migrant" identity, which she articulates in "Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir's *Second Sex*" (1986), *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (1990) and *Undoing Gender* (2004).

Jay argues that since the introduction of critical theory in the 1970s, nothing has shaped literary studies more than the rise of transnationalism (1). This change, ushered in by the forces of globalization, had a profound effect on the study of English-language literature, especially due to the dramatic increase in the production of English texts outside of the United States and Great Britain. Operating within an English language and literature context, Jay's work explores how social rights movements contributed to demographic changes inside universities, leading to the rise of minority, multicultural and postcolonial studies as well as developments in the field of literary theory and criticism. The shared interest of the new student population and professoriate in "the differences locations, ethnicities, genders, race, and sexualities make in the production of identities [...] laid the groundwork for the transnational turn in literary studies" (6). Jay suggests that what Doris Sommer once called our "romantic enchantment" (cited in Jay 16) with the nation as a unified banner for one language and one canon of literature has been displaced by a new engagement with transnational spaces, hybrid identities and subjectivities grounded in differences related to race, class, gender and sexual orientation. While Jay maintains that the transnational turn in literary studies can indeed be traced in part to the process of economic and cultural globalization, he does not believe that the emergence of transnationalism in literary studies can be explained merely as a response to globalization (17). Rather, he urges an understanding that accounts for myriad interlocking factors taking place within and outside U.S. universities in the late 1960s. The first factor that must be addressed is the dissolution of the late 19th century "Arnoldian model" of literary studies "grounded in an aestheticized, ahistorical, liberal-humanist set of assumptions about the nature and value of literature and culture" (Jay 17). The Arnoldian model was firmly built upon notions of sameness and universality. In this model, students and professors were directed to study "the best that had been said and thought" (Jay 17)

and the “best” literature was defined as ahistorical, universal and able “to transcend the local, historical circumstances of its production and come to embody universal truths about reality and what it means to be human” (Jay 17). Since the “universal validity” of these literary texts had the capacity to transcend categories of difference, the canon comprised works that were essentially linked by sameness (Jay 17). It was thought, then, that the best criticism should come from a position of disinterest in that it should aim to suspend subjective differences, interests and biases and focus on the “fundamentally human,” or what we all had in common (Jay 17). Jay explodes the Arnoldian model, however, asserting that “Arnold’s was a radically dehistoricizing, idealizing, and aestheticizing approach that provided cover for a masculine, interested, politicized conception of literary study masking its particular interests by calling them universal” (17). In spite of this, the Arnoldian model operated until the 1960s, which witnessed a shift in focus from sameness to difference. The academic interest in difference was initially influenced by structuralist theory and later, the work of Jacques Derrida and Michel Foucault. Structuralism showed that meaning was not produced through sameness, rather it was the product of a play of differences and derived from its position in binary relationships. Deconstructionism insisted that the structuralist system of meaning was too simplistic and “deceptively self-contained” (Jay 18) and that language needed to play a more central role in the structuralist scheme. For many scholars this emphasis on the formal and linguistic features of literary texts neglected the ways in which such texts reflected the experiences and identities shaped by forces of gender, class, race, sexual orientation and migration across national borders (Jay 20). The literary critics who believed deconstructionism was too narrowly focused on textual and linguistic play turned towards the theory of Foucault, which focused more on social than textual elements and offered a different framework for conceptualizing meaning. For example, for Foucault, the concept of

sexuality is not ahistorical, rather it has been discursively constructed and regulated across specific cultures at specific times. Foucault's conceptualization of a genealogy of sexuality can also be applied to literature, race and gender, the meanings of which are not inherent, stable or universal, but derived from difference and embedded firmly within historically-specific discourses that provide constraining norms as well as points of resistance and reinterpretation. Thus "Foucault employs a deconstructive theoretical framework that shifts our attention from so-called inherent qualities of sameness to the productive role of difference in a critical landscape more engaged with social, cultural, and political forms than was early deconstruction" (Jay 19).

Jay explains that in the context of U.S. and Anglo-American literature, political and social rights movements that began in the streets, including the anti-Vietnam War movement, the civil rights movement, the women's movement and the gay rights movement, paved the way for the development of theoretical and critical practices within the university such as feminist and gender studies as well as studies surrounding race, class and sexuality that were dominated by a critical attention to difference and paid particular attention to minority, multicultural and postcolonial literature (Jay 17). By the late 1970s, these movements had also transformed the demographic composition of the student body as well as the professoriate (Jay 19). Dramatic demographic changes contributed to an increasing number of migrant, women and openly gay faculty members with a new agenda, primarily to introduce more representative texts reflecting the particular experiences of disruption, displacement and mobility (Jay 20). Indeed, Jay writes, "it is the intersection of these demographic changes with theoretical innovations in our understanding of the key role difference makes in the production and regulation of meaning that set the stage for the transnationalizing of literary studies" (19). In order to situate my own study,

it is necessary to imagine the turn away from universalism towards particularity and difference intrinsic to transnationalism taking place within a German-language framework.

Christina Kraenzle writes that the wealth of contemporary German-language transnational literature investigates German identity, hyphenated identities as well as the categories of subjectivity and subject formation. This body of writing explodes the notion of identity as “fixed” and founded upon territory or nation in favour of an understanding of identity that emphasizes mobility and a self that is multiple, moving and changing (Kraenzle 4). It is therefore not only its resistance to conformity with national literature, but its rejection of territorially-defined models of identity that Kraenzle suggests makes the field of transnational literature worthy of critical attention in Germanic studies (4). Much of the literary criticism focused on minority writing has equated displacement (geographical, linguistic and cultural) with loss and posited transnational subjects as the “Other” in opposition to stable identities based on fixed categories of nation or territory. Kraenzle points out that narrowly focusing on the experience of the mobile subject as one defined by deprivation and crisis, and ignoring alternative representations of movement, identity and German culture that may be found in the literary production of transnational writers, fails to recognize the degree to which mobility has the potential to offer “the sense of liberation or movement between subject positions and identities coveted by the traveling subject” (13).

Prior to the transnational turn in literature, German-language literature by authors of non-German descent was commonly characterized as *Literatur der Betroffenheit*, leading to nearly a decade of studies beginning in the 1980s that equated the transnational subject with the migrant labourer and transnational literature with an expression of the debilitating experience of migration and effects of displacement such as financial hardship, deprivation and loss (Kraenzle

21). The early reception of this literature and critics' emphasis on notions of displacement and dislocation privileged a particular notion of identity as "naturally and properly static, stable and coherent" (Kraenzle 26). Rather than taking the transnational subject as a starting point from which to critically re-examine traditional "fixed" notions of subjectivity, critics simply set the transnational subject in opposition to an essential, singular German identity (Kraenzle 26). The gathering, marketing and dissemination of texts written by members of ethnic minority groups in the 1980s spurred scholarship that focused on analyzing the texts for what they revealed about the cultural "Other" and evaluated texts based on the social and political realities brought to light by this literature. Critics also praised the fact that writers from migrant and minority communities were able to "bear witness" or "find a voice" (Kraenzle 32). Such scholarship paid almost exclusive attention to the work's presumed authenticity or the author's biographical background, while the fictionality and literariness of transnational texts were downplayed or ignored (Kraenzle 24). Kraenzle comments, "[m]any critics even went so far as to assume a unity of narrator and author" (24). Consequently, critics often neglected the range of formal experimentation, narrative or linguistic strategies and poetics present in transnational writing. If the early and mid-1980s were characterized by the association of transnational writing with expressions of the negative consequences of migrancy, the late 1980s and 1990s were marked by an increased debate surrounding the appropriateness or effectiveness of the paradigm that had thus far been employed for reading and studying the genre (Kraenzle 33). Within the framework of analysis that guided the early reception of transnational literature, mobility was not interpreted as an act of agency, but rather a necessary and undesirable reaction to economic hardship, political upheaval or a lack of opportunities in one's country of origin (Kraenzle 68). However, more and more studies began pointing out the limitations of constructing transnational writing as

Gastarbeiterliteratur, as few authors were in fact migrant labourers (Kraenzle 34). Significantly, recent studies have recognized that mobility is symptomatic of the type of transnational existences lived by many individuals in an increasingly globalized world. According to Kraenzle, representations of mobility are not limited to loss, but can “celebrate the cosmopolitan thrill of moving through and between places, cultures and languages” (52). “Identities formed in motion between locations may in fact offer models of cultural identity that are not aberrations,” she explains, “but characteristic of the norm in an increasingly globalized society” (Kraenzle 40). In this paradigm, mobility is posited in contradistinction to fixity and serves as a means to explore multiple subject positions across national, cultural, linguistic or even literary borders (Kraenzle 69). The transnational narrative becomes a site where protagonists can recognize and reinvent themselves in the process of perpetual travel between various subject positions and negotiate “the liberating and alienating effects of being out of place” (Kraenzle 52).

The ahistorical and universalizing paradigm for literary studies was thus replaced by a sustained effort to understand literature as a “multicultural object of knowledge full of social and cultural information and expressive of a whole range of different experiences and identities” (Jay 20-21). Jay writes, “the imperative to historicize the texts we study, to pay attention to the material circumstances of both their production and consumption, and to recognize the differences historical and material circumstances make in what we think of as literature and how we engage with it as students and scholars, became central to the enterprise of literary studies” (20). Jay outlines a paradigm shift - from an older model of literary studies oriented around sameness, universality and totality to the emergence of a new model emphasizing difference and particularity. This new framework guides the way I approach the texts in my study, which values the particular experiences of migrant women and understands such notions of difference and

diversity as essential to exploring agency in a literary landscape in which boundaries are more fluid and always being redefined.

In order to examine how identities inflected by gender and movement are constructed through self-narration in transnational texts, I draw from an entry on identity and narration found in the *Living Handbook of Narratology* (HoN), an online open access publication maintained by the Universität Hamburg. Narration provides a particularly productive space for identity construction because it enables narrators to disassociate the self who “tells” from the self who “performs” and to reflect critically on the self as a character (cf. Bamberg para. 3). The ability to take such a reflective stance has been elaborated as one of the key distinctions between author, narrator and character (Bamberg para. 4). Though the reflective process takes place in the present, it considers past or fictitious events deemed worthy of reliving or retelling. According to Michael Bamberg writing in the HoN: “It is against this backdrop that narrating in recent decades has established itself as a privileged site for identity analysis – a new territory for inquiry” (para. 4).

The act of creating characters in imaginative “timespace” has the potential to open a space for “exploring identity, reaching beyond traditional boundaries, and testing out novel identities” (Bamberg para. 6). Within this space, identities are constructed, performed and change over time. Bamberg outlines three quintessential aspects to consider in the emergence of identity. The narrating subject must be perceived:

- (a) as neither locked into stability nor drifting through constant change, but rather as something that is multiple, contradictory, and distributed over time and place, held together contextually and locally;
- (b) in terms of membership positions vis-à-vis others that help to trace the narrator’s identity within the context of social relationships, groups, and institutions; and
- (c) as the active and agentic locus of control, though simultaneously attributing agency to outside forces that are situated in a broader socio-historical context. (Bamberg para. 6)

This perspective proposes that identity is always open to change and transformation and able to adapt to increasing cultural multiplicities in globalizing environments (Bamberg para. 6).

In the process of self-narration a distinction is marked between the self as an agent/undergoer and the self as a character/actor - what Bamberg terms the “narrating self” and “narrated self” (Bamberg para. 11). The agentive self that is able to self-reflect and self-augment can construct and narrate identity across the span of a life through the presentation of events, though traumatic experiences may cause disruptions to the continuity and coherence of building identity across a life and pose challenges to the development of a sense of self as well as agency (Bamberg para. 11). Critical encounters and events deemed worthy of retelling may be filtered through the narrator’s perspective in the present or through the perspective of the narrator as a developing character in the plot. Bamberg explains, “[a] teller accounts for how s/he (a) has emerged (as character) over time, (b) as different from others (but same), and simultaneously (c) how s/he views her-/himself as a (responsible) agent” (para. 17). According to Bamberg, “[m]anaging these three dilemmas in concert is taken to establish what is essential to identity” (para. 17). As such, autobiographical writing as well as autobiographical fiction are considered ideal genres for writing the self.

The close link between narration and identity has resulted in a blurring of the boundary between author and narrator and has often led critics to mistakenly connect a narrator’s process of telling identity with an author’s biographic details. While literary critics have drawn a distinction between narrators and authors, many have argued that there must necessarily be some agency or inferred authorial presence “behind” the narrative voice. The notion of the implied author, a narrative agent neither identical with the narrator nor the author, emerged as a response to these claims (O’Neill 66). This concept locates authority within the text. Lacking the implied

author, Patrick O'Neill explains, we would have to look for authority either in the authorial intention of the real author outside the text or in the figure of the narrator within the text. O'Neill writes that "[a]ll narrative, of course, purely as narrative, purely as a discursive system of presentation, is in principle fictional to begin with. Nothing within a narrative, in other words, is sufficient to allow that narrative's extra-textual, referential fictionality or non-fictionality to be determined" (14-15). The analytic concept of the implied author is useful for the analysis of Bronsky's *Scherbenpark* and Rabinowich's *Spaltkopf* as neither can be reduced to the autobiographies of their authors, as many literary critics have insisted, nor can the protagonists of these narratives be equated with their authors. *Scherbenpark* and *Spaltkopf* are primarily literary texts.

Studying the process of self-narration in texts allows for an examination of how protagonists position themselves as agents in comparison to how they are positioned by other characters and external factors such as age and cultural, linguistic or economic background. A close reading of the ways in which protagonists narrate the self also allows us to trace how these characters conceive of and construct the culture and society surrounding them. Such a contextualized approach to identity construction emphasizes identity as a process that is both dialogical and relational, fashioned and refashioned in engagement across cultures and interaction with other characters in imagined time and space. The aim of reading narratives from this perspective is to investigate not only how tellers construct their sense of self, but also how they want to be understood. Furthermore, "the use of narrative methods in the exploration of hybrid or hyphenated identities constitutes an interesting new development in recent trends of social science research in a turn to questions of citizenship, cultural exclusion, imagined

communities, symbolic representations of belonging, and even general processes of globalization” (Bamberg para. 25).

As the protagonists of both texts in my analysis are female, this thesis is particularly interested in the process of constructing a gendered identity. Butler begins *Undoing Gender* with the assertion that gender must be understood as multiple and moving through time and place (10). She immediately clarifies that gender is a kind of doing or becoming - an incessant activity performed. Butler fundamentally rejects the notion that every person is born with inherent male or female anatomy and possesses “proper” masculine or feminine attributes, respectively, that can either be owned or disowned, appropriated or expropriated (*Undoing Gender* 10). She explains that “the sex/gender distinction suggests a radical discontinuity between sexed bodies and culturally constructed genders” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 10). Instead she asserts that terms such as “masculine” and “feminine” are changeable: “there are social histories for each term; their meanings change radically depending upon geopolitical boundaries and cultural constraints on who is imagining whom, and for what purpose” (Butler, *Undoing Gender* 11). According to Butler, performing gender is one way that the body carries cultural meaning. Gender, then, as a historical category, must be understood as culturally embedded and a project that subjects undertake “to renew one’s cultural history in one’s own terms” (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 40).

Simone de Beauvoir proclaimed that “One is not born, but rather becomes, a woman” (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 35). In this view gender is a continuous project - “a daily act of reconstitution and interpretation” (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 40). For de Beauvoir, such a project requires an agent who somehow takes on or appropriates a gender and could, in principle, take on some other gender. In “Sex and Gender,” Butler builds on this image, distinguishing sex from gender and suggesting that gender is an unnatural aspect of identity that is gradually acquired

(35). “If gender is the variable and cultural interpretation of sex,” she writes, “then it lacks fixity and closure characteristic of simple identity” (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 36). This notion that being a given sex does not necessitate being a given gender undermines the presumed existence of a link or relationship between sex and gender. Rather, to be a gender is to be engaged in an ongoing process of cultural configuration and interpretation of the body. To return to de Beauvoir’s statement, “becoming” a gender denotes much more than simply acquiescing to a fixed ontological status that is determined at birth, rather it implies an active engagement in the process of appropriating, interpreting, embodying or realizing cultural possibilities within a highly rigid regulatory framework of deeply engrained norms and sanctions and repeatedly stylizing the body or giving it cultural form. Butler clarifies that gender, in de Beauvoir’s account, is not imposed on identity. Instead gender ought to be viewed as a purposive process or project of constructing the self. From de Beauvoir’s perspective, gender is a self-reflexive and voluntaristic “project,” and to some extent, a choice. Although individuals “become” their genders, this process is non-linear. In Butler’s theory, it is impossible to trace gender to a discrete originary position because being a gender is an incessant act of interpreting the body as it is positioned within a field of cultural possibilities – that is to say it neither originates nor ends (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 39). Therefore, “we do not become our genders from a place prior to culture or to embodied life, but essentially within their terms” (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 39).

Rather than a radical act of creation, Butler describes becoming a gender as a mindful process of situating oneself in a reality saturated with cultural prescriptions and taboos (“Sex and Gender” 39). However, certain constraining norms work to restrict the exercise of gender freedom. Butler points out that “the social constraints upon gender compliance and deviation are so great that most people feel deeply wounded if they are told that they are not really manly or

womanly, that they have failed to execute their manhood or womanhood properly” (“Sex and Gender” 41). Butler theorizes that if all existence is gendered, failing to adhere to or operate within the boundaries of established or recognized gender calls one’s existence and identity into question (“Sex and Gender” 41-42). She writes that “the anguish and terror of leaving a prescribed gender or of trespassing upon another gender territory testifies to the social constraints upon gender interpretation as well as to the necessity that there be an interpretation” (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 42). Though it is common to conceive of gender as passively produced and determined, the potential for reinterpreting and undoing social constraints and norms may be seen as a “concrete and accessible way of politicizing personal life” (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 45).

Finally, it is crucial to my analysis to consider the argument that Butler raises in *Gender Trouble*. She suggests that the common assumption that the term “women” encompasses a universal identity is a gross oversimplification and reproduces the subjugation of women within patriarchal structures and institutions and phallogocentric language (Butler, *Gender Trouble* 6-7). Butler writes that “the insistence upon the coherence and unity of the category of women has effectively refused the multiplicity of cultural, social, and political intersections in which the concrete array of ‘women’ are constructed and articulate separate identities” (*Gender Trouble* 19-20). “If one is a woman,” Butler asserts, “that is surely not all one is” (*Gender Trouble* 6). The term indeed fails to represent the complexity of gender as it intersects and interacts with different axes of power as well as political, racial, cultural, social, sexual, ethnic, economic and regional modalities of identity. Butler concludes by proposing “a radical rethinking of the ontological constructions of identity” (*Gender Trouble* 8).

Working within the framework outlined above, this thesis examines the construction of a migrant, specifically female-gendered identity in two transnational texts and proposes that such an identity is processual, always in flux, continuously contested and negotiated in motion and encounters. The transnational, multilingual subject does not exist before movement, rather the “I” is formed and reformed in migration (Chambers 25). Similarly, Butler’s gendered subject does not pre-exist performances or cultural inscription, rather the body and identity only come into existence through their discursive construction within regulative norms and engagement in an ongoing process of actively interpreting a range of cultural possibilities. In both of these images of identity, the self is in perpetual motion between multiple subjectivities, there is no initial identity position or “final destination” (Chambers 25). For the purposes of this thesis, it is important to read the body as a locus of cultural interpretations that takes on different aspects of identity through mobility and interactions within varying social contexts. If gender is one aspect of identity that is enacted, culture and nationality can be read as similarly flexible facets of identity that are actively interpreted and constructed. Taking on or realizing gender as well as cultural and national identity must be understood as an ongoing process of interpreting the body and giving it cultural form. This rejection of a fixed or stable initial identity is similar to the transnational migrant identity discussed earlier which is constantly multiple, moving and changing, rather than “originated at some point in time after which it is fixed in form” (Butler, “Sex and Gender” 39). Self narration illustrates precisely this process of identity construction over time and across borders and therefore provides a valuable point of departure for my analysis of transnational narratives as liberatory and exploratory spaces where female protagonists fashion their identities.

Chapter 4: Scherbenpark

4.1: Author and Narrator

Scherbenpark tells the story of seventeen-year-old Sascha Naimann, the daughter of Russian immigrants who lives in a complex called “Solitär” that is primarily populated by other immigrants on the outskirts of Frankfurt am Main. Two years before the beginning of the novel, Vadim - her mother’s second husband and the father of Sascha’s younger siblings Anton and Alissa - had shot and killed her mother and her mother’s German boyfriend, Harry. Sascha resolves to revenge her mother’s death and kill Vadim, revealing her fantasy to readers in the opening paragraph: “Ich will Vadim töten. Und ich will ein Buch über meine Mutter schreiben Ich habe auch schon einen Titel: ‘Die Geschichte einer hirnlosen rothaarigen Frau, die noch leben würde, wenn sie auf ihre kluge älteste Tochter gehört hätte’” (*Scherbenpark* 9). After the tragedy, the children continue to live in the apartment and attempt to rebuild a sense of family with the help of Vadim’s estranged cousin Maria from Novosibirsk. When Sascha reads a newspaper interview with a repentant Vadim that sympathetically portrays his life in prison, she seeks out the article’s author, Susanne Mahler, at the newspaper’s offices in Frankfurt where the editor, Volker Trebur, apologizes for his intern and extends an offer to Sascha to reach out to him if she needs help. Sascha requests to stay with him for a few nights and quickly begins to develop feelings for Volker, though she has sex with his sixteen-year-old son Felix. Volker also makes sexual advances towards Sascha, but quickly realizes the inappropriateness of his actions and apologizes. While Volker and Felix are on vacation, Sascha meets a boy, also named Volker, who she discovers to be a right-wing extremist. After she has sex with him, she takes him to the Russian ghetto “Broken Glass Park,” which lends the novel its title, where a group of young Russians led by her nemesis and neighbour, Peter, torment him. Sascha skates around town in a

“self-destructive daze” (Mennel 162) until she is hit by a taxi. When the newspaper reveals that Vadim has committed suicide in jail, Sascha takes out her frustration in a fight with her neighbors, whose retaliation severely injures her. Volker and Felix bring her home from the hospital and meet Maria, Anton and Alissa. Sasha recognizes the moment of harmony as an opportunity to leave home and travel to Prague.

Scherbenpark was nominated for both the Ingeborg Bachmann Prize in 2008 and later adapted into a play and a film. It was translated to English in 2010 under the title *Broken Glass Park*. The novel received critical acclaim, particularly as a “sozialkritische [...] Studie zur aktuellen europäischen Wirklichkeit von Menschen mit [...] Migrationshintergrund” (Becker 31) and for providing a “detailgetreue Darstellung der Aussiedler- und Hartz-IV-Welt” (Willms 79). Bronsky herself has said in interviews that the novel is written “for the Western European readers who barely know the parallel world of immigrants” (cited in Wagner n. pag.). Her work has come under attack for playing with clichés such as the “violent immigrant or emasculated but privileged, liberal German” (Mennel 173). However, *Scherbenpark* does not offer an uncomplicated representation of the experience of migration and its writing is often ironic and self-reflexive. The novel shows migration as merely one axis of identity instead of reducing its characters to subjects who are defined by their origin or status as immigrants. Furthermore, the representations of characters are not irresponsible reproductions of stereotypes, rather they reflect the experiences and encounters of the novel’s adolescent narrator in her search for the self. As Kraenzle observes, “[t]he knowing ‘I’ is as much a fiction as the constructed other. [...] The subject is not bounded or discrete, it does not go out into the world to discover the other; rather the self is formed and reformed through motion and encounter” (169).

Born in Sverdlovsk (now Yekaterinburg) in 1978, Bronsky spent her childhood “at the foot

of the Ural Mountains in Central Russia” (“About” n. pag.) and moved to Germany when she was thirteen. Her family came to Germany because her father received a position as a physicist at the Universität Marburg and due to several contract extensions, the family decided to remain in Germany. After graduation she began studying medicine but dropped out and worked as a copywriter for an advertising agency. Today she has three children and lives in Darmstadt. Since *Scherbenpark* she has written three novels. Bronsky’s second novel *Die schärfesten Gerichte der tartarischen Küche* was nominated for the longlist of the *Deutscher Buchpreis* in 2010 and translated into English in 2011. Her third novel *Nenn mich einfach Superheld* was published in 2013 and appeared in English in 2014. 2015 saw the release of her most recent novel *Baba Dunjas letzte Liebe*, which was also nominated for the longlist of the *Deutscher Buchpreis*. The name Alina Bronsky is a pseudonym that the author adopted prior to the release of her first novel *Scherbenpark* because she anticipated controversy surrounding the text and wanted to separate her private life from her public activity as a writer (Willms 67). For this reason, Bronsky has revealed little about herself beyond the basic facts in interviews, though she has commented on intentionally choosing a pseudonym that would hint at her Russian background: “Mein Pseudonym sollte schön klingen. Und es sollte deutlich machen, dass ich eine Autorin mit Migrationshintergrund bin” (cited in Schmidt 15). Building on this image of the author, Mennel clarifies, “[t]he pseudonym Alina Bronsky names an emerging, yet successful, author whose novel can be explicated comprehensively only in a multilayered and multidimensional framework of transnational and intermediate intertextuality” (162). Though they may share many biographical details, the pseudonym warns readers not to carelessly fuse author and narrator. This is where the concept of the implied author becomes particularly useful, as it refers to the author-image evoked by the text rather than the author’s true personality, while still locating

authority within the text. Narration is not always a straightforward process in which the narrator maintains absolute control. Rather, the representation of the story and the narrator who presents it can be attributed to the implied author (Schmid para. 6). Therefore, the notion of an implied author is necessary, but for the purposes of this analysis, the protagonist's narration is of primary interest.

4.2: Narrative Voice

Several critics have read *Scherbenpark* as a classic coming-of-age story, though the traditional *Bildungsroman* depicts the formative years of a young man's spiritual and psychological development. The genre has recently been hijacked by female and migrant writers who have used the fundamental principles of the genre as a starting point from which to craft their own coming-of-age narratives. Over the last few decades, as Petra Fachinger points out, women writers have been rewriting phallogocentric fairy tales, mythologies, canonical and other cultural texts from a female perspective (17). In the case of the coming-of-age narrative, the restructuring of a traditionally male genre and feminist re-writing of stories that deal with the male experience of coming to terms with oneself and one's place in society may be read as a counter-discursive strategy - one that forces a critical re-evaluation of the process of development within patriarchal society and places new emphasis on gender as a choice and cultural interpretation of the body within a field of possibilities.

With respect to *Scherbenpark*, wit, irony, irreverence, arrogance and defiance set the tone and clearly mark the novel's narrating voice as that of a rebellious teenager. Some critics have gone so far as to call pubescent protagonist Sascha Naimann an "obnoxious, know-it-all adolescent" (Powers 61). The simple language used in the text, which has garnered some negative attention from literary critics, contributes to the authenticity of Sascha's narration. One

reviewer remarks that *Scherbenpark*'s "Ich-Erzählerin berichtet jugendlich respektlos, voller Wut und Witz, klug, kühl und erhitzt zugleich" ("Nominierungen 2009" n. pag.). In one of the first introductions to Sascha, the narrator/protagonist explains that there are plenty of reasons to be in awe of her and claims to speak German ten times better than all the other Russian-Germans in her complex put together (*Scherbenpark* 12). "Manchmal fühle ich mich wie die einzige Alphabetin im Solitär," she writes. "Alle anderen tragen halb leere Flaschen in den Taschen ausgebeulter Trainingshosen, wickeln den Räucherfisch in bunte Zeitungen mit den Überschriften 'Wem gehört der abgetrennte Kopf?' oder 'Ministerium vertuscht schon wieder eine Ufo-Landung' und blicken misstrauisch, wenn sie auf Deutsch angesprochen werden" (*Scherbenpark* 58-59). Sascha's initial self-presentation sets her up as a somewhat unlikeable character. More than that, however, it functions as a performance and narration of a certain kind of persona or identity. Sascha uses her narrative to embellish her toughness over traditional feminine-coded traits such as weakness, vulnerability and passivity. When her father first left, she emphatically stresses that she was not a nervous wreck as many children her age would be. Rather, she claims she was "ein Knäuel Hass" (*Scherbenpark* 37). Like any adolescent, Sascha harbours an enormous anger towards authority figures and men, in particular. Sascha's seemingly bratty behaviour can be seen as a consequence of the traumatic experience of the double murder of her mother and her mother's boyfriend. When she visits the deceased Harry's parents, his mother Ingrid comments on the likelihood of psychological problems resulting from trauma. Sascha refuses to believe she has incurred any psychological damage from her mother's murder and recalls a Russian children's poem in which it is written: "Meine Nerven sind aus Stahl, nee, ich hab eigentlich gar keine. Das ist über mich," she explains coolly, "Ich habe keine" (*Scherbenpark* 40). Instead Sascha enjoys evoking fear in both her peers and adults and

expresses satisfaction when reporters, her guardian Maria and the other tenants in her building appear to be afraid of her.

A characteristic quality of Sascha's speech in the text is her wry wit. Mennel identifies Sascha's self-protective irony as a technique "to ward off her psychological injury, capturing the complex positions that young women have to negotiate in defining their roles in a web of desires and social expectations of femininity that implies vulnerability. But the irreverent tone, intended to cover over Sascha's vulnerability, paradoxically reveals her pain" (171). The protagonist's forceful language oscillates between blind rage, biting sarcasm and searing pain. In a flashback, Sascha addresses her mother:

Du wirst nie erfahren, warum ich jahrelang immer nur vollständig angezogen mein Zimmer verlassen habe, niemals im Schlafanzug oder Bademantel, warum ich nachts immer meine Tür abschlieÙe, warum ich erst seit diesem Sommer kurze Ärmel trage und Sachen, die auch etwas weiter ausgeschnitten sind. Du hast mich immer "zugeknöpft" genannt, auch mal, "körperfeindlich," du hast es als meine Eigenart akzeptiert, ich habe niemals angedeutet, dass etwas anderes dahinterstecken könnte. Ich dachte, dass es dir wehtun würde, dass du das nicht verkraften würdest, dass du an Entsetzen und Schuldgefühlen zerbrechen könntest. Das bedeutet, dass ich dich darin unterstützt habe, ihm gegenüber blind zu sein. (*Scherbenpark* 55)

Her words reveal that Sascha is evading certain emotions such as guilt for allowing her mother to remain blind to the extent of Vadim's abuse. In the brief moments in which Sascha puts down her protective shield, it becomes clear that her hardened persona is merely a cover for the feelings of guilt, longing, sadness and sympathy that she denies or refuses to acknowledge.

Erving Goffman, in his seminal work *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, explains identity as a theatrical performance, in which the actor conveys the self to a target audience. When an individual plays a part, they implicitly ask others to believe that the character presented to them possesses the qualities he or she appears to possess, and more generally, that they are who they appear to be (Goffman 28). However, while the performer can be completely immersed in their

own act and sincerely believe in its authenticity, the performer may also be cynical, not convinced by his own performance and aware that the image of their identity that is being presented is merely an act (Goffman 28). Sascha is both critical and self-reflexive of the persona that she projects. When she enters Harry's home and looks at the photos on the wall she thinks to herself

Wenn ich hier aufgewachsen wäre, wäre ich eine ganz andere geworden, denke ich. Ich würde mich nicht prügeln, und ich würde wahrscheinlich auch weniger gnadenlos büffeln, selbst die Sachen, die mich überhaupt nicht interessieren, die Geschichte des Mittelalters, zum Beispiel. Ich wäre zum Siegen geboren und müsste mich nicht so verzweifelt abstrampeln, um allen zu beweisen, dass ich auch wer bin. (*Scherbenpark* 41-42)

The meditation provoked by the photos in Harry's house demonstrates that Sasha is acutely aware she must prove to others that she is the person who she claims to be. She must fight for a place in life because she does not have the privilege of growing up in Harry's surroundings with a supportive, loving family. In terms of social background and education Sascha stands between two worlds. Willms clarifies, "[o]n the one hand she is an outsider among her classmates at the elite Catholic high school she attends, and on the other hand she lives in the Russian ghetto where she also does not belong" (72). According to Sascha, the combative attitude she appropriates is necessary. Unlike Anton, when she finds herself losing concentration in her classes, "[h]abe ich keine große Schwester, die mich dann zurück ins Leben holt. Ich bin mir selber die große Schwester" (*Scherbenpark* 67).

4.3: Narrative Manipulation as a Strategy to Overcome Trauma

The murder of her mother and Harry is a crucial plot point on the narrative arc of Sascha's life story, though it is an event that takes place before the beginning of the primary narrative that she relates in *Scherbenpark*. Indeed, it is not until halfway through the novel that Sascha

unravels the grisly course of events surrounding the death of Maria and Harry, which up until this point readers are forced to reconstruct themselves. The way in which she shapes the story is significant. As the two are lying in bed about to fall asleep, Sascha asks Felix if he wants to hear a story, but warns him that it does not have a happy ending. She tells a thinly veiled fairy tale about a beautiful woman and her prince who are shot dead in their home in front of their children by the woman's abusive ex-husband:

Es war mal eine Frau. [...] Eine schöne Frau, die auf ihre Art und Weise klug war. Aber auf andere Art schon wieder ganz dumm. Sie konnte sich nicht richtig schützen. Irgendwann wurde sie verhext und davon ein bisschen blind. Sie heiratete einen Mann und bekam mit ihm zwei Kinder. Und sie hatte noch eine andere große Tochter von einem anderen Mann. [...].

Eines Tages lernte die Frau einen Prinzen kennen. Er war verzaubert, und vor ihr hat keiner erkannt, dass er eigentlich ein Prinz ist. Und dann war die Frau einige Zeit sehr glücklich, und ihre Kinder auch. Denn der Prinz war wirklich ein richtiger. Wenn er da war, war alles gut.

Nicht glücklich war allerdings der Ex-Mann. Er merkte, wie gut es seiner früheren Familie ohne ihn ging. Und er merkte auch, dass seine Ex-Kinder den Prinzen auch liebten. Er hatte Angst, dass auch sie erkenne würden, was für ein Arschloch ihr Vater eigentlich ist. Er wollte das verhindern, er wollte etwas unternehmen, und da hatte er eine ganz tolle Idee.

Er kaufte Schokolade für die Kinder. Er besuchte seine frühere Familie, und keiner wusste, dass er an diesem Tag unter seiner Jacke eine Pistole hatte. Er gab den Kindern die Schokolade. Die Frau war auch zu Hause, und der Prinz ebenso. Und der Mann begann, die beiden zu beschimpfen, sodass sie ihn baten zu gehen.

Er ging auch. Aber nicht weit. Irgendwann drehte er wieder um. Er klingelte an der Tür. Die Frau ließ ihn wieder rein. Ihre große Tochter kam dazu.

“Was willst du denn noch?” fragte die Frau. “Komm erst wieder, wenn du dich beruhigt hast.”

Da hob er die Pistole und schoß. Einmal, zweimal, dreimal, viermal.

Die große Tochter begann zu schreien. Sie schrie so laut, dass die Fensterscheiben rausflogen. Sie versuchte, ihre Mutter aufzurichten, aber die war zu schwer und schlaff und lag in einem Meer von Blut. Dann sprang die Tochter den Mann an, der die Pistole in der Hand hielt, und drosch mit den Fäusten auf ihn ein und brach ihm dabei übrigens die Nase.

Sie weiß bis heute nicht, warum er sie nicht auch erschossen hat.

Er warf sie herunter und knurrte: “Wo ist er?” Er meinte den Prinzen, der mit den jüngeren Kindern gerade in der Küche saß. Dann kam auch er heraus und zitterte vor Entsetzen und Angst. Die Kinder rannten raus, sahen ihre Mutter und begannen zu schreien. Der Mann hob wieder die Pistole, und der Prinz versuchte sich zu retten, indem er ins Schlafzimmer rannte. Er warf die Tür zu, aber der Mann schoss durch die Tür.

Die große Tochter rannte mit den beiden Kleinen raus und klingelte bei den Nachbarn. Aus dem Treppenhaus hörte sie noch zwei Schüsse. Die Nachbarn zerrten sie mit den Kindern rein und knallten die Tür zu.

Danach kam der Mann mit der Pistole heraus und klingelte ebenfalls bei den Nachbarn. Aber sie wollten ihn nicht reinlassen. Er sagte, sie sollen die Polizei rufen. Auf diese Idee kamen sie auch gerade.

Er wartete im Treppenhaus auf den Stufen, bis er festgenommen wurde. Er gab ohne Widerrede die Pistole ab und legte ein Geständnis ab. Vor Gericht sagte er, seine Frau habe ihn genervt, schon die ganze Zeit. (*Scherbenpark* 137-140)

Though the characters are never explicitly named, readers immediately understand that Sascha is the older daughter in the story and that her account is based on true events rather than the creative invention of a fictitious fairy tale.

In *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory*, O'Neill explains that the order in which events are recounted by the narrative discourse, or storytelling, often contrasts the real chronological order in which the events of the story took place (42). Gérard Genette names a number of deviations from the neutral mirroring of the chronological order such as analepsis, which recalls external events that occurred before the beginning of the main narrative (O'Neill 42). Analepsis is an example of overt narrative manipulation. As Mieke Bal points out, "the world of the story is fundamentally unstable, for its entire construction can be changed by a single word on the part of the narrator who discourses it" (149). Thus the world of the story, as he puts it, or what really happened, can only be accessed through the discourse that describes it (O'Neill 34). Through the use of such strategies as analepsis, narrators are able to construct or frame events in particular ways, allowing them the potential to subvert the story and achieve a degree of control over events, particularly those in which they play a role. Additionally, the employment of such strategies signifies to readers that the event has been elided or distorted and is likely significant to the narrator for any number of reasons. Sascha's strategy of anachrony, and more particularly her use of a fairy tale to frame the story of her mother's murder, reveals

her attempt to cope with trauma by asserting control and narratorial authority over an event in which she was powerless and helpless.

Post-traumatic stress disorder is generally defined as “a response, sometimes delayed, to an overwhelming event or events, which takes the form of repeated, intrusive hallucinations, dreams, thoughts or behaviours stemming from the event, along with numbing that may have begun during or after the experience, and possibly also increased arousal to (and avoidance of) stimuli recalling the event” (Caruth 4). To be traumatized is to be captured by an image or event and repeatedly suffer its consequences. The traumatized, Cathy Caruth claims, “carry an impossible history with them” (5). It is not only the moment of the event itself but the passing out of it that may cause a crisis for survivors (Caruth 9). Caruth argues that “a means of passing out of the isolation imposed by the event [...] can only take place through the listening of another” (Caruth 10). However, the ability to recover the past and put it to words is closely connected with the ability to have access to it. If the event is not fully comprehended or catalogued as it occurs, it cannot become a “narrative memory” that is integrated into a completed story of the past (Caruth 153). For survivors of trauma like Sascha, “the truth of the event may reside not only in its brutal facts, but also in the way that their occurrence defies simple comprehension” (Caruth 153). Integration into one’s knowledge of the past is mandatory in order for the traumatized to embrace the curative effects of testimony. The transformation of the trauma into a narrative memory allows the story to be verbalized. As Caruth explains, when the story is communicated to another, it loses “the precision and force” (153) of traumatic recall. However, Caruth notes that as survivors of trauma have the capacity to remember, they also possess the ability to invent, delete and distort (154). This manipulation of events subverts the dominant discourse. Sascha’s technique of delay until midway through the novel achieves

tension, surprise and disorientation in the reader. Furthermore, the disturbing juxtaposition of a young girl's voice telling a bedtime story about male violence and murder conveys to readers the impact of a harrowing experience that shaped the protagonist's childhood, influenced her images of femininity and masculinity and contributed to her construction of a combative, "angry at the world" attitude, which she uses as a cover as she struggles to make sense of her mother's murder and survive the event. Not only is her narration an attempt to pass out of the trauma by communicating her crisis to Felix, but to shift the events into a narrative format that allows her enough distance to be able to speak about them. As much as she performs her identity through telling, she cannot retell the actual traumatic event surrounding her mother's death unless it is slightly shifted to the side. By using the controlled narrative form of the fairy tale, the inconceivable become tellable and can be integrated into a story of the self, rather than something traumatic that remains repressed and hidden.

4.4: Performing Gender

In our very first introduction to Sascha, she confidently asserts "Ich heiÙe Sascha Naimann. Ich bin kein Kerl, auch wenn das hierzulande jeder denkt, der meinen Namen hrt. Ich habe aufgehrt zu zhlen, wie oft ich das den Leuten schon erklrt haben" (*Scherbenpark* 11). By playfully drawing attention to the masculinity of her name, Sascha prepares readers for a performance of gender that is neither clear cut nor conventional. Mennel describes Sascha as a global ghetto girl, a figure "endowed with dynamic rebellion against tradition and convention, particularly as they are expressed as prohibitions for young women" (167). Throughout the novel Sascha attempts to negotiate her gender within the masculine-coded community site of the ethnic ghetto, which is not an easy task given that Sascha's social exclusion is twofold. On the one

hand, Sascha's migratory status separates her from her German peers at the private Catholic school she attends, but on the other hand, she is clearly separated from the other young Russian-Germans in her complex who use drugs, loiter in the nearby Broken Glass Park and are represented by the narrator as violent and uneducated. The other people in her complex also choose to distance themselves from Sascha and her family since the tragedy that took place in their apartment. Different limitations are thus imposed on the narrator/protagonist throughout the course of the novel due to her immigration status, social affiliation, economic and linguistic background, family history, education and age, but also because of her gender. For this reason, the ability to interpret her gender as one inflected by culturally-coded masculine features such as strength, indifference, independence and audacity, allows her to claim control over an aspect of her identity that is more flexible than her migration status or family background.

In spite of the hard as nails persona that she projects, Sascha demonstrates compassion towards her two younger siblings Anton and Alissa and assumes a protective role over them after their mother's death. Although Vadim's cousin Maria is appointed to be the caretaker of the children, in order to provide a chance for "*die traumatisierten Kinder, wieder eine Familie zu werden*" [emphasis in original] (*Scherbenpark* 24), Sascha also feels compelled to act as a parental figure. While Maria assumes the role of the mother, Sascha is much more akin to the father. She even calls her siblings "meine Kinder" (*Scherbenpark* 48) and when Volker offers to pick her up after Peter's attack, she refuses explaining, "[i]Ich kann meine Kinder hier nicht allein lassen" (*Scherbenpark* 197). Her brother Anton, who sustained severe psychological trauma after his mother's murder, is a basket case who freezes any time the word "Mama" is mentioned in his vicinity. "Um Anton nicht zu quälen, haue ich jedem, der in seiner Gegenwart absichtlich das Word 'Mama' sagt, eine runter. Erwachsenen natürlich nicht, die schreie ich

einfach nur an. Das wirkt immer ganz gut. Das ist das wenigste, was ich für meinen Bruder tun kann” (*Scherbenpark* 21). This violent behaviour is perhaps an iterative performance or personal way of interpreting the norms of masculinity that she received from Vadim as a child. More a parent than an older sister, Sascha is deeply concerned about her sibling’s education. She enforces reading to Alissa as a mandatory part of Maria’s schedule and draws up a handbook to make sure that Maria will continue to follow her instructions for raising the children after Sascha is put in prison for (hypothetically) murdering her stepfather Vadim (*Scherbenpark* 64). Exercising control over the children as well as Maria and refusing to accept any contradiction from them is one of the ways in which she asserts her position as head of the family, effectively inhabiting the role as patriarch.

Sascha’s regressive image of family is centred around an obedient mother, who takes care of the children, and a violent and abusive father figure, who asserts absolute authority over the family. Therefore, when she assumes the role of the patriarch, Sascha also acts heavy-handed towards her guardian Maria. Though she accepts Maria as a caring woman whose maternal qualities are good for Alissa and Anton, the lack of respect Sascha shows Maria derives largely from her evocation of a docile and submissive image of femininity. Sascha explains that since Maria’s German is limited “[sie] kriegt jedes Mal Panik, und ich muss sie vorher und hinterher lange trösten, dass sie ihre Sache gut macht und nicht zurück an ihre Kantine muss” (*Scherbenpark* 27) every time they are visited by workers from the department of family services. In addition to praising her before and after these visits, Sascha also takes Maria shopping and helps her fill out paperwork to apply for welfare and children’s benefits. In a further bid to exercise control over Maria, Sascha prohibits Maria from having contact with their neighbour Grigorij, whom she meets up with when the children are away at school to stave off

feelings of isolation and loneliness. When Sascha comes home one day to discover Grigorij's shoes at the door and Grigorij himself in the kitchen, she is furious and disgusted. She yells at Maria: "Wie lange geht das schon, Maria? [...] Und wo sind eigentlich meine Geschwister? [...] Du schickst sie weg und vögelst hier rum!" (*Scherbenpark* 84). Ashamed, Maria quickly grabs Grigorij's shoes and lays them subserviently at his feet - a move that further incites Sascha's rage. "Zieh sie ihm doch an," says Sascha. "Wenn schon, denn schon" (*Scherbenpark* 82). Momentarily, she feels a gnawing sense of pity for Grigorij, who seems so pathetic tying his shoes and shuffling towards the door. "Das fehlt mir noch, denke ich. *Ihre* Gene. Zur absolut falschen Zeit" [emphasis in original] (*Scherbenpark* 82). Sascha despises the quality when she recognizes it in herself because she associates it with her mother, whose empathy for pathetic men like Vadim led to her death. When Grigorij leaves, Sascha asks Maria "Was findet ihr alle bloß daran? Warum könnt ihr nicht in Ruhe leben, ohne euch von irgendwelchen schrumpeligen Schwänzen [...] na ja, du weißt, was ich meine. Ich habe dir doch vertraut. Ich habe gedacht, wir sind deine Familie" (*Scherbenpark* 86). Maria objects but Sascha quickly scolds her, saying that she did not come to Germany for them, but to find a better man than she could in Novosibirsk. "Was planst du jetzt?" she asks. "Willst du ihn heiraten und hier ausziehen? Oder soll er hier einziehen? Oder kommt er nur kurz zum Ficken rüber, und du musst ihm dann dafür auch die Hemden waschen" (*Scherbenpark* 86). Sascha's irrational reaction reveals her dysfunctional notions about family structure as well as maternal and paternal roles. It also perhaps alludes to her affection for Maria, whom she wants to protect from pitiful men. When she is alone she considers to herself "Mein Gott, Weiber, geht es nicht ohne? Warum könnt ihr euch nicht selber genug sein? Warum wollt ihr von einem wie Grigorij oder Vadim angefasst werden? Was ist das für ein Masochismus auf dem X-Chromosom?" (*Scherbenpark* 88). Feeling repulsed, Sascha

reaches out to Volker and requests to stay with him for a few nights. As she is leaving, she attempts to assert her authority over Maria once more, instructing her: “Pass du auf die Kleinen auf. Lass sie nicht zu viel fernsehen, lies vor, kontrollier die Hausaufgaben, auch wenn du sie nicht verstehst, und lass die Kinder auch mal Obst essen” (*Scherbenpark* 94). She adds “Dass Grigorij nur dann kommt, wenn die Kinder nicht da sind, finde ich sehr gut, kapiert?” (*Scherbenpark* 94). Sascha feels she has to fight for herself and her siblings in the absence of patriarchal protection.

To some extent Sascha also demonstrates a maternal instinct that may be read as an organic reaction to the loss of her mother. Due to the constraining norms that work to subdue the exercise of gender freedom in society, it could be argued that Sascha feels compelled to undertake a nurturing role. In Sascha’s case, however, she is able to transcend such narrowly defined gender models. Motherhood often implies the sacrifice of autonomy as well as the pursuit of higher education or career goals. It is also tied to domesticity, docility, submissiveness and passivity. Sascha overturns this image through her non-traditional notion of caring for her siblings. For example, though she shows compassion towards her sister, one of the ways in which she communicates this is by urging Alissa to read. Adopting a caretaker role towards her siblings does not confine her to the domestic sphere and does not necessitate that she negotiates her own femininity in the same way as the other women in her life. Mennel suggests that Sascha refuses to embrace normative notions of femininity precisely because both her mother and Maria represent victimization - the former of violence and the latter of domesticity (174). Therefore, when Maria tells her that she will be just like her mother, Sascha is enraged and her heated reaction is to hit Maria, reenacting the patterns of domestic violence that she learned from Vadim. However, Sascha holds back from hitting Maria and chooses to break these patterns. She

slams her fist into a window and starts crying instead.

Sascha's relationship to her mother is complicated. On the one hand, her mother was a good woman whom she admired. Her affection for her mother is apparent when she describes old photographs and when she fondly recalls lessons and sayings her mother taught her, stories she told, or her habits like her love of reading or helping other immigrants through her column in the newspaper. Her husband, however, never appreciated these qualities. In contrast, he was often jealous and spiteful, calling her

[e]ine nutzlose Ehefrau, die weder in der Lage ist, den Haushalt zu führen, noch anständig Geld zu verdienen, falls man dieses hektische Gerenne von einem bescheuerten Job zum nächsten überhaupt Arbeit nennen kann. [...] Und eine Schlampe, die sich an einem Ring so hemmungslos freuen kann, als wäre es eine Fleischwurst, die abends ins Kinso geht, und zwar ohne den Ehemann, die ihr Haar offen trägt und aufreizend färbt [...]. (*Scherbenpark* 53-54)

Therefore, on the other hand, Sascha holds resentment towards her mother and believes that her "mitleidige[] Seele" (*Scherbenpark* 61) made her vulnerable to men like Vadim. "Mathe, Physik, Chemie, das konnte sie nie. Ebenso wenig wie erkennen, wann es Zeit ist, einen Mann vor die Tür zu setzen" (*Scherbenpark* 13). Sascha reproaches her mother for silently accepting this abuse and resolves to be a different person - an iron-willed and independent woman. She recalls one time when her mother was tying her father's tie and he constantly berated her: "'Jetzt zerr doch nicht so an mir rum, du dumme Nuss,' und 'Kannst du das Scheißding nicht endlich fertig kriegen?' und 'Du bist die unfähigste Frau, die mir jemals begegnet ist'" (*Scherbenpark* 50). Sascha imagines how she would respond in such a situation:

Und ich machte in dieser Zeit meine Hausaufgaben am Küchentisch, das heißt, ich machte sie eigentlich gerade nicht, weil ich nur in hilfloser Wut die Faust um meinen Füller ballte. Ich war gar nicht auf Vadim wütend, sondern auf meine Mutter, ein Zustand, in dem ich mich damals oft befand.

Wenn mir einer so käme, dachte ich, dann würde ich diese blöde Krawatte einfach so fest zuziehen, bis er röchelt, und dann würde ich in die Küche gehen und den Wasserkocher anstellen. Und bevor sich der Typ aus der Schlinge befreit, würde ich das

eben aufgekochte Wasser über seinem Kopf auskippen, das ist das Mindeste, was einer verdient, der es wagt, so mit mir zu reden.

Und was machst du, dachte ich und kritzelte zornige Zacken in mein Arbeitsheft. Du antwortest überhaupt nicht. Du lässt dich wegstoßen und lächelst zu deinen eigenen Gedanken. Du hilfst ihm erneut, wenn er dich wieder dazu auffordert, und du hilfst ihm auch dann, wenn er dich dabei übel beschimpft. (*Scherbenpark* 50)

This statement is significant in that it sheds light on the origin of Sascha's interpretation of normative gender roles. Although she is trying to invent herself in the novel, she maintains a fixed understanding of gender roles - one which invariably associates men with strength and women with weakness. Sascha explains that in such situations as the one outlined above, her anger was directed at her mother for accepting the abuse, rather than Vadim for enacting it. As a child she found herself in a position of helpless rage and regrets that at the time the most action she took was threatening to call the police around Vadim, though he knew she would never do anything that would hurt her mother. "Es ist eine alte weibliche Masche: Ich will dir nicht wehtun, also lasse ich es zu, dass du umgebracht wirst. Ich gehe dann doch nie zur Polizei, weil sich Vadim in meiner Gegenwart zusammenreißt und vor allem weil ich weiß, du würdest es nur im absoluten Ernstfall billigen" (*Scherbenpark* 54-55). The fact that she identifies fragility and empathy to the point of self-destruction as perennial women's mistakes suggests that her image of femininity is predominantly negative. In her view, women are invariably dominated and oppressed by men and for this reason, she iterates her mother's words: "Ich bin mir selber ein Mann. Wobei sie das zwar gesagt, sich aber nie daran gehalten hat" (*Scherbenpark* 19). Denying her femininity, then, also functions as a protective shield against men, who she ultimately holds responsible for stripping women like her mother of their autonomy. Sascha is determined to be different than her mother. In negotiating her own gender, she protests the traditional codes of femininity that she equates with all women like weakness, helplessness and passivity. By attempting to access and integrate notions of masculinity, such as strength and control, Sascha

shows not only that she does not see herself as a woman like her mother, but that the dominant gender discourses of hegemonic masculinity still influence her. In addition to strength and control, her image of masculinity is tied to violence and aggression based on the behaviour she witnessed from Vadim. Sascha's plan to pour a kettle of boiling water over Vadim's head is vicious and an indication of the combative and destructive masculine behaviour that she appropriates after he is sent to prison and she attempts to fill the fatherly role in the family.

The male figures in her life influence her contorted image of masculinity. She frequently and forcefully asserts that she hates men - all of them except Anton. At the beginning of the novel she shares her view that good men simply do not exist:

Anna sagt, dass es auch gute Männer gibt. Nette, freundliche, die kochen und sauber machen und Geld verdienen und Kinder wollen und Geschenke machen und Urlaub buchen und saubere Kleidung tragen und nicht saufen und vielleicht sogar gut aussehen. Wo gibt es die, frage ich da, auf dem Mond? Anna behauptet, dass es solche Männer gibt, wenn nicht in unserer Stadt, dann vielleicht in Frankfurt. Aber sie selber kennt persönlich auch keinen, höchstens aus dem Fernsehen. (*Scherbenpark* 19)

Although she looks fondly on her mother's German boyfriend Harry, who conforms to much of what she is looking for in a "good man," she also says "[sie] könnte mit so einem nicht ins Bett gehen" (*Scherbenpark* 35). "Früher hätte ich nie geglaubt, dass ein deutscher Mann so sein kann. So mild, so hilflos and selbstlos. Ohne Geld, aber großzügig. Ohne Führerschein, aber mit einem klapprigen Damenfahrrad" (*Scherbenpark* 36). Though Sascha herself struggles to escape the confinements of conventional femininity, she maintains a view of masculinity that conforms to gender norms. According to this view, Harry does not perform his manliness adequately because he does not earn money and therefore, is not a provider. "Welche Frau hätte sich schon bei klarem Verstand und vollem Bewusstsein mit diesem Ausbund an Hilflosigkeit eingelassen? Meine Mutter, sonst keine. Ich konnte mir jedenfalls so einen an meiner Seite nicht vorstellen" (*Scherbenpark* 37). The same qualities of meekness and helplessness that she disdains in women

are equally unappealing in a man or potential sexual partner. She does not accept Harry as a proper man and therefore, does not view him as a sexual subject. Inasmuch as she inverts gender roles by inhabiting a patriarchal position with respect to her own family, the framework she operates within is not subversive. Rather, she upholds a family model that is built upon very traditional views towards role division and gender roles in the household.

When she first meets Volker Trebur at the newspaper office, Sascha repeats her assertion “Ich hasse Männer,” before reconsidering and musing absentmindedly “Hasse ich Männer?” (*Scherbenpark* 70). Volker is a white, middle-aged, heterosexual male who is successful, owns a home and provides for his family. Volker fulfills her notion of ideal masculinity and allows her to complete her image of the nuclear family, in which he is the man and she is the woman (though a woman unlike her mother). In spite of her rebel yell, Sascha strives for very normative gender relations. She has her first sexual experience with Volker’s sixteen-year-old son Felix. Perhaps in an attempt to act out the dyadic male- and femaleness she desires, Sascha asks Felix if his father used to have red hair like him when he was younger and when Felix confirms this, she spontaneously declares “Dann mal los” (*Scherbenpark* 127). Having sex with Felix allows her to pursue the feelings she has towards the older man but cannot act on, rather than repressing her feelings and remaining passive. For Sascha, losing her virginity is more about asserting her agency than it is a symbol of “becoming” a woman or associated with the typical feelings of anticipation, nervousness, falling in love or regret as is common in coming-of-age stories, in which the sexual awakening of the protagonist is a particularly important moment. In an inversion of genre conventions, she does not negotiate her femaleness in the framework of sexual relationships. Rather, she interprets her gender in response and in contrast to her mother, Maria and the other girls in her complex, whose only aspiration is to marry rich. In one excerpt Sascha

becomes disgusted with herself for waiting to receive a postcard from Volker and Felix while they are on vacation. “Niemals wollte ich auf so etwas warten - eine Karte, eine SMS, eine Rückruf. Ich bin doch nicht eines dieser blöden Hühner. Für mich bricht doch die Welt nicht zusammen, wenn sich so ein Arsch bei mir nicht meldet. Wenn er es nicht tut, ist er selber schuld. [...] Sascha wartet nicht. Doch, sie wartet. Ich beginne, mich dafür zu hassen”

(*Scherbenpark* 214). She does not want to fall into the same submissive female role as her mother and therefore, she decides to take action. It is in this state of helplessness and self-hatred that she meets a boy her age named Volker. Instead of allowing the older Volker to have control over her and her emotions, when she meets the young man by the same name, she recognizes it as an opportunity to combat her feelings of helplessness and passivity and to exercise control (over him). Rather than waiting passively to receive a postcard, she deploys her sexuality in order to establish a sense of agency and to break out of the “dichten grauen Nebel”

(*Scherbenpark* 66) of unwanted emotions that she experiences while waiting to hear from Volker and Felix. She writes, “[i]ch würde jetzt mit jedem gehen, der mich anspricht, und ich würde alles machen, je schlimmer, desto besser. Wenn ich mich wieder richtig ärgern kann, dann geht es mir schon besser” (*Scherbenpark* 217). Upon discovering that Volker is an ardent German nationalist, she provokes him, asking his opinion on the amount of foreign goods in Germany to which Volker responds vehemently, “[w]ir ersticken darin” (*Scherbenpark* 227). When she asks Volker to clarify who he means by ‘we’ he says, “[w]ir Deutschen natürlich. Du und ich. Wir verlieren alles - unsere Wirtschaft, unsere Sprache, unsere Gene” (*Scherbenpark* 227). This prompts Sascha to probe further: “Die Russen sind schlimmer als die Chinesen, oder?”

(*Scherbenpark* 228). Volker replies: “Die Russen? Pah. Die waren mal schlimm. Jetzt kann man die vergessen. Die saufen sich zu Tode. Die sind degeneriert” (*Scherbenpark* 228). After she has

sex with Volker she decides that she does not feel any better as a result and indeed “[e]s fühlt sich schlimmer an als vorher” (*Scherbenpark* 230). Through the encounter she has put herself in the position of the victim, rather than moving out of this role and reclaiming agency as she had hoped. Afterwards Sascha takes Volker to the Russian ghetto Broken Glass Park where she leaves him to be tortured and tormented by the other teenagers. Though his supremacist views offend her, Sascha is more disgusted by herself. Since having sex with Volker did not help her gain control over her emotions or break out of the fog encompassing her, she is still in search of a way to punish herself for allowing her feelings to have such a strong hold over her. She attempts to deploy her sexuality as a means to achieve agency and upon realizing that she has not been able to use Volker either to break out of the fog or the victim role, she has no further use for him or interest in him. For this reason, she does not directly attack him herself. Exasperated and desperate to feel something, Sascha simply abandons Volker in the ghetto and skates through the streets in a “self-destructive daze” (Mennel 162) until she is hit by a car. Rather than emphasizing the female body in relation to sexuality, the novel focuses on Sascha’s active body when she runs, rollerskates and bikes (Mennel 173). During their date Volker tells Sascha that he likes her dress, nearly losing his balance on his rollerblades as he compliments her. Sascha, who is clearly the more confident and skilled at skating of the two, thinks, “[i]ch finde Kleider nicht schön, ich trage sie eigentlich nie. Aber manchmal sind sie eben praktisch” (*Scherbenpark* 220). Pointing out the benefit of wearing a dress in order to be able to have sex quickly in the park not only emphasizes Sascha’s act as a calculated effort to escape her unwanted emotions, but downplays her sexuality and sexed body at the same time. During her flirtation with Volker, he comments that he finds her attractive and asks her how she stays so thin. She thinks to herself, “[i]ndem ich vergesse zu essen, denke ich verärgert. Nicht etwa, um dir zu gefallen, du

verbranntes Bleichgesicht, du. Sondern weil ich meistens andere Dinge im Kopf habe” (*Scherbenpark* 223). Sascha’s choice to have sex with Volker proves to be less about her desire for male attention or simply to have sex, but a means to free herself from the thick grey fog closing in around her that she constantly tries to banish in the book. Throughout the novel Sascha copes with trauma through “physical action and verbal jousting” (Mennel 172) such as at the conclusion when she learns that Vadim has hung himself in his cell and reacts by throwing stones at the windows and tenants of her complex. Mennel suggests that *Scherbenpark* “[fashions] the female body as a vehicle of aggressive acting out in relation to a traumatic past [and] differs strongly from the German memory discourse that privileges working through as an internalized process” (172).

The narrator performs a warding off of emotions in an attempt to distance herself from traditional femininity. Throughout the novel Sascha construes herself as a hateful and explosive subject, willing and able to take on a male predator twice her size. Mennel, however, points out that this strategy in turn highlights the gap between the narrator’s femaleness and access to formations of masculinity (172). She argues that for girls, the possibility of appropriating signs of masculinity is ultimately circumscribed and underscores the constructed status of Sascha’s gutsy performance. Therefore, the novel portrays Sascha’s necessity to fight physically to defend herself and her family, but also emphasizes the limitations of her ability to do so (Mennel 173). This is especially exemplified in one scene in which Sascha’s neighbour Peter is so infuriated by her audacity and defiant attitude that he threatens her with rape: “Solche wie dich [...] muss man einfach schlagen. Und solche wie deine Mutter. Ich finde es rasend blöd, dass du überhaupt keine Angst hast. Ich glaube, das müssen wir ändern” (*Scherbenpark* 194). “Lass mich durch, du Affenarsch” (*Scherbenpark* 195), she counters, in an attempt to protect herself and assert her

strength and fearlessness. Sascha tries to slash his face with a bottle but misjudges it and the bottle flies out of her hand. When Peter lunges at her, she realizes that she is in trouble and begins to scream for Volker. Sascha escapes but the incident with Peter causes her to finally admit her fear: “Früher. Ich hatte keine Angst. Bis heute Abend. Jetzt habe ich wieder Angst. Und habe Angst vor noch mehr Angst” (*Scherbenpark* 198). The episode betrays a momentary lapse in her performance and exposes the extent to which her narration is a project to convince readers (and herself) to believe the invincible identity she presents. Furthermore, her fear demonstrates that the illusion she creates of aggressiveness and having everything under control is precisely that - an act. How much Sascha actually suffers is clear when her carefully constructed façade gradually breaks down. Sascha expresses from time to time that the necessity of producing this particular identity is largely borne out of the bitterness of being abandoned by her mother. After she is hit by a car she cries for her mother: “Ich weine ziemlich laut, nicht, weil es irre wehtut, beziehungsweise nicht nur. Sondern weil keiner da ist, um mich zu trösten. [...] ‘Marina!’ rufe ich. ‘Nie bist du da, wenn man dich braucht!’” (*Scherbenpark* 238). In spite of her attempts to act like an adult, Sascha is still a vulnerable adolescent girl grappling with post-traumatic stress disorder, which is complicated by puberty and her status of social exclusion. Readers, much like the characters surrounding Sascha in the text, suspect that her hard shell is a means to shield herself from susceptibility to her emotions. When she loses her temper over a trivial incident in the weeks following her mother's death, figures from the department of family services find comfort in her outburst: “Ich erinnere mich noch an den Blick, den mir eine der Frauen zuwarf, als ich schreiend auf den Boden fiel. [...] In diesem Blick lag Erleichterung. Sie hatten mich tagelang vollgebrummt, ich bräuchte jetzt nicht zu funktionieren. Ich könnte meinen Gefühlen freien Lauf lassen. Ich müsste es sogar” (*Scherbenpark* 24). Sascha asserts that she

does not listen to their advice. She resumes her interpretation of an identity that she believes masks her femininity and childishness, only occasionally exposing her frailty in the moments when forces beyond her control disrupt her performance.

4.5: The Last Words

The novel's concluding paragraphs point in a positive direction but refuse a traditional romantic or happy ending (Mennel 174). Instead Sascha is able to come to terms with the loss of her mother as well as her loss of control over Vadim's death and to move forward with her life.

Addressing a photo of her mother and Harry, she announces with a sense of relief:

Unsere Wohnung ist gerade voll mit Menschen, die essen, reden und lachen. Es sind zwei neue dabei, die ich niemals hier haben wollte, aber sie sind trotzdem gekommen. Und es sieht so aus, als wären sie gerade gern hier. Ich kann mir vorstellen, dass es nicht das letzte Mal sein wird. [...] Anton zeigt Felix gerade seinen Gameboy, und ich glaube, sie verstehen sich wirklich. Felix würde sich nicht so gut verstellen können. Er genießt es, angehimmelt zu werden, und Anton ist sowieso hin und weg - so ein großer Junge beschäftigt sich gerade mit ihm!

Alissa zeigt Volker, wie man seinen Namen kyrillisch buchstabiert. Er ist beeindruckt, dass sie so schlau ist. Sie ist auch extrem süß und frech, und wahrscheinlich ist er einer dieser Männer, die schon immer eine kleine Tochter wollten und sie nie bekommen haben. Es ist richtig idyllisch, und alles riecht nach Zimt. Außerdem streut Maria immer Vanillezucker in die Schlagsahne, und deswegen riecht auch alles nach Vanille.

Ich habe hier nichts mehr zu tun. Ich habe das Gefühl, sie kommen jetzt auch ohne mich zurecht. (*Scherbenpark* 285-286)

Sascha's departure is enabled by her coming to terms with her care for her family. Throughout the first part of the novel Sascha inhabits a patriarchal role. However, her role becomes superfluous at the end of the novel when Volker is present in the apartment with Maria and her siblings and can take over the position of protector. Rather than fulfilling a romantic function, Volker acts as a substitute father figure for her family. With Maria occupying the female caretaker role and Volker assuming the masculine protector role, the heteronormative family

structure takes shape. The “false” patriarch is no longer needed and Sasha does not need to perform the role of the father. Liberated from the burden of the role that she felt she needed to take on, Sascha can now go out into the world. In a reversal of both generic and gender stereotypes, Sascha leaves her home on a journey, while Volker and his son Felix are assigned to the domestic sphere that commonly confines women. Mennel also notes that rather than Sascha’s forced assimilation into Germany, her departure is enabled by Volker’s and Felix’s entry into the space of the ghetto (175). Thinking about her mother’s journeys and following in her footsteps, Sascha decides to travel to Prague. The open ending continues Sascha’s process of moving, looking into the future with a newly perceived power to deal with the past rather than be shackled by the memory of it. The novel concludes and Sascha has the last words: “Ich werfe mir die Tasche über die Schulter, schiebe den Schirm meiner Kappe in den Nacken und trete hinaus in die Sonne” (*Scherbenpark* 289). Marion Wyce writes that “she reclaims her own narrative by ending this one, by cutting us off as readers. She doesn't want anything from us, not our absolution or our empathy. She simply departs” (217).

Whereas the novel leaves the ending open and gives us space for interpretation about her future, a subsequent film adaptation, based on a screenplay also written by Bronsky, concludes by sending Sascha off in search of her father. In the novel Sascha remarks that she does not know anything about her father and does not even want to know his name. Her mother’s death closes off any opportunity she has to ask questions about him. With a clear goal in mind, the search for her father provides a more definite conclusion than the ambiguous ending of the novel, in which Sascha simply leaves without a word to her family. In this new medium, Sascha says goodbye to Maria and even hands her a towel, explaining that it is for Grigorij when he takes

showers at their house. This gesture symbolizes that she is effectively relinquishing her patriarchal role and consequently, her control over Maria as well.

Sascha's exploratory, coming-of-age narrative traces the formative years of her identity building. Self-narration offers her an opportunity not only to produce a particular subjectivity, but to gain control over her story of the self, whether it be through the narrative voice or format through which she tells events. As discussed, the identity that Sascha convincingly performs and narrates is one inflected by masculine-coded characteristics such as strength, power, violence, independence and arrogance. By appropriating such signs of masculinity, Sascha actively and independently invents her own identity on the page, refusing to be a passive protagonist who is written or controlled by someone else as her mother was victimized by Vadim. In the absence of her father, Sascha takes up the paternal role in her family. However, when Volker assumes this role at the end of the text, Sascha is released from the sense of responsibility that compels her to protect her siblings and Maria. Just as the fairy tale told to Felix was an attempt to process and integrate a traumatic event from her past into the completed narrative of the self, so is her self-narration in *Scherbenpark* an attempt to recount, reflect on and cope with private humiliations and hardships by asserting control and narratorial authority over the story of her past. The open ending in the novel, which is arguably more effective than its filmic counterpart, suggests that though Sascha's narrative has come to a conclusion, her process of identity construction has only just begun. From this ending it is clear that the fixity and stability that being at home ought to provide, much like the fixity of identity, does not exist. Rather, the construction of identity is fluid and ongoing and intrinsically bound up with movement between multiple dwellings and identity positions that the protagonist will occupy in her life. When she leaves, Sascha positions

herself as a subject in the present and ensures the continuity of her process of becoming, building her identity and finding her place in life as she travels throughout the world.

Chapter 5: Spaltkopf

5.1: Author and Narrator

Rabinowich was born into a Russian-Jewish family in St. Petersburg in 1970 and emigrated to Vienna with her parents and grandmother in 1977. Both parents, as well as her grandmother, were artists. About their emigration to the West, Rabinowich explains:

Mein Vater hat dann als Erster in der Verwandtschaft beschlossen, auszuwandern. Er war ursprünglich Designer, wollte aber freischaffender Künstler und Maler sein. In diesem Sinn hat er sich einer Gruppe angeschlossen, deren Mitglieder sich Nonkonformisten genannt haben. Schon durch den Namen war klar, dass die Gruppe bald Probleme haben würde, und 1974 durfte sie keine Ausstellungen mehr machen. ("Die Schriftstellerin in mir wird nun wohl in dieser Wohnung nach Schätzen graben" 17)

Rabinowich studied translation as well as writing and painting at the *Akademie für Angewandte Kunst*. Following in her family's footsteps, she is also an active artist. Rabinowich made her entrance on the Austrian literary scene as recently as 2008 with her first novel *Spaltkopf*. Tess Lewis later translated the novel into English under the title *Split Head*. Since then, Rabinowich has published the novella *Herznovelle* (2011) and another novel *Die Erdfresserin* (2012) and *Krötenliebe* (2016). In 2009 she was awarded the *Rauriser Literaturpreis* for her debut novel *Spaltkopf*, recognizing her novel as the best prose publication in German of that year and situating her among a prestigious group of authors (Reiter 269). In addition to three novels, she has written numerous plays that have been staged primarily at the *Wiener Volkstheater*, in the *Rabenhof* and *Schauspielhaus*. Similar to her novels, Rabinowich's six plays reflect her intimate knowledge of the difficulties associated with the process of migration. Rabinowich's other

writing has been featured in anthologies, most recently in *How I fucked Jamal* (2010), a collection of short stories surrounding migration, love and desire. She also writes the weekly column “Geschüttelt, nicht gerührt” for the newspaper *Der Standard*. Rabinowich received training in psychological counseling at the *Integrationshaus Wien* and the *Diakonie Flüchtlingsdienst* and has worked for many years as a professional interpreter for Russian-speaking refugee women. Drawing on her experience as an interpreter for refugees, Rabinowich’s writing often engages with issues of seeking refuge and asylum and testifies to her commitment to make visible the migration experience of women and children, whose plight is often undocumented or underrepresented (Guenther n. pag.). She has successfully established herself as a critical voice in the Austrian media landscape and in December 2014 the Viennese city council awarded Rabinowich the *Wiener Frauenpreis* for her efforts to combat xenophobia, racism and violence towards migrants with her literature and art (Guenther n. pag.).

In 1997 the publisher *edition exile* inaugurated the “Literaturwettbewerb zur Förderung der Literatur von AutorInnen mit Migrationshintergrund und von Angehörigen ethnischer Minderheiten in Österreich” (“Literaturpreise” n. pag.). Authors who had immigrated to Austria and been living in the country for at least six months were invited to submit their German texts concerned with issues of integration, identity or life between cultures. Though she was awarded this prize for *Spaltkopf*, Rabinowich forcefully rejects reductive labels that classify her work as “migration literature.” Instead she maintains that genres should be used to give an impression of the content of a novel and not merely to highlight the biography of the author. An emphasis on the content of a work over the background of its author would eliminate the “exoticized” status of writers contributing to a foreign literary landscape. If we accept that Rabinowich does not want her work to be classified as migration literature, then we must endeavor to read her texts

differently than they have been read before. Within the field of migration literature, where Rabinowich's writing has been positioned by previous studies, dichotomies exist between the hybrid and the pure, the migratory and the settled, movement and stillness, rootlessness and rootedness, difference and sameness and becoming and being (Moslund 14). Clearly, the transitory, transnational identity that first-person narrator Mischka constructs in *Spalkkopf* cannot be conceptualized within such a binaristic framework that leaves little to no interpretive room for movement between these polarities. By contrast, the "self" in *Spalkkopf* is articulated in the margins and borderline spaces and in moments of translation, negotiation, interaction and encounter. The transnational novel exalts such constant in-betweenness and cultural fragmentation as liberatory processes (Moslund 4). My analysis sees *Spalkkopf* as an emancipatory and exploratory space, in which the transitory protagonist is engaged in a process of perpetual "becoming" as she explores and tries on novel identities. As discussed earlier, the recent transnational turn in literature moves away from sameness, singularity and universalism towards difference and particularity. Transnational texts, therefore, often employ techniques that undermine unity and promote difference such as juxtaposition, fragmentation and intertextuality as well as the transgression and hybridization of genres and the rewriting of classical works or literary conventions (Fachinger 14-15). Reading *Spalkkopf* as a transnational text rather than migration literature provides a productive lens from which to analyze Mischka's narrative strategies of multiplicity, fragmentation and interweaving as a means by which she not only portrays her individualized experience of migration, but also exposes the constructedness of identity and asserts narratorial authority over the text. Critics of *Spalkkopf* have "found coping with its structure (or the lack of it) 'demanding' and the use of language 'exhausting.' At the very least they perceived the text as enigmatic, leaving the reader guessing about who is

speaking, from which perspective and above all, about what is actually being said” (Reiter 270). However, the narrator’s calculated counter-discursive strategies are meant to disrupt the category of “migration literature,” expressing to readers that migration and identity building are neither linear processes nor universal experiences and cannot be conceptualized as such. The strategies she deploys in her self-narration destabilize binary notions of home and away, departure and arrival and familiar and foreign and force readers to perform precisely the “splits” at which Mischka, a migrant perpetually caught between either end of the spectrum, claims not to be very good (Reiter 275): “Mich spreizt es immer bedenklicher. Die Kontinentaltafeln, auf denen ich mit je einem Bein stehe, driften auseinander und ich stelle bedauernd fest, keine Meisterin des Spagats zu sein” (*Spalkopf* 71).

The plot of *Spalkopf* cannot be told as sequentially as *Scherbenpark* for there are two first-person narrators competing to tell the story of the protagonist Mischka’s migration. At the age of seven, Mischka emigrates from St. Petersburg to Vienna with her parents and grandmother due to the intolerable living conditions for the family of Russian-Jewish artists in the Soviet Union. The novel explores how the protagonist processes the traumatic childhood experience of being abruptly and unexpectedly transplanted into an unfamiliar setting and her subsequent attempts to establish a sense of belonging and a sense of self in the Austrian capital. Initially, it takes only a Barbie doll to convince Mischka of the promises of her new home, however as she straddles the boundary between adolescence and adulthood, Mischka finds herself feeling torn in half and not really belonging anywhere. While her early migration experience is a central theme in the novel and a cornerstone of her identity, Mischka also negotiates numerous other conflicts in her construction of identity such as the trials of adolescence, the birth of her sister, her father’s death, a failed marriage and the discovery and knowledge of her family’s suppressed secrets. Next to

the protagonist and main narrator Mischka, there is the mythic figure of the Spalkopf - a mysterious fairy tale monster who feeds on the fears, anxieties and repressed memories of his victims and reflects Mischka's split mind and world. The Spalkopf persistently interrupts Mischka's conversational narrative of coming-of-age in Austria. "He and Mischka share the story-telling; his patch is the family's dark past in Russia while Mischka relates the tribulations of her family's new life in Vienna, their heads 'split' between East and West, past and present," writes one reviewer Peggy Graham, who locates *Spalkopf* "somewhere between genres like Jewish and exile literature, it's a disturbing fairy-tale one minute, with a touch of slightly off-the-wall chick-lit the next" (n. pag.). As a child, Mischka grew up wondering what constituted Jewishness at all. It is only as her grandmother lies dying in the hospital that Mischka begins to uncover her grandmother's hidden Jewish identity and traumatic history of anti-Semitic persecution and loss. The Spalkopf accompanies Mischka as a child, a teenager and even a young woman, on her nomadic, at times, bumpy and uncertain journey through life. For this reason, the novel has also been called a "Geschichte eines Zusammenwachsens einer Persönlichkeit" (Guenther n. pag.) that follows the life of its ruthlessly honest first-person narrator. In many ways Mischka resembles the author herself. Mischka and Julya were both born into artists' families in Leningrad, later St. Petersburg, and arrive in Austria as young girls. Mischka's family, like Rabinowich's, left Leningrad with their seven-year-old daughter because they sought to escape the oppressive cultural climate in the Soviet Union and the persecution they suffered as Jews. Graham explains, "Mischka comes from an elegant, intellectual, Jewish family - three central reasons for their desperate bid to flee the tristesse of communist oppression" (n. pag.). These details about Mischka's youth contribute to the autofictional character of the text (Reiter 271), however it should be noted again that this analysis refuses to

equate Mischka, the protagonist, with Rabinowich, the author, and concerns itself primarily with the protagonist's process of identity building in self-narration. Mischka tells the story of her family's flight to Vienna and their attempts to reconcile their loss of home and establish a new one in the Austrian capital, while the menacing and uncanny Spaltkopf character hovers over her and provides his own cold commentary on Mischka's family members, exposing their hidden fears and harrowing memories. The other characters remain shackled to their past, whereas Mischka struggles to move forward and compose her identity across a life. "Seit über fünfzehn Jahren habe ich Russland gemieden, ignoriert" (*Spaltkopf* 144), she writes, but at the end of the novel Mischka finally seeks to abolish the Spaltkopf and remove his hold over her by taking a trip back to her birthplace. When she confronts the Spaltkopf at the conclusion of the novel, Mischka effectively takes back control over her narrative from him and is able to establish her identity. Transnational texts such as *Spaltkopf* provide the opportunity for characters "to reflect on new ways of being and dwelling in a culturally complex and diverse globalised world of objects and people in motion, documenting not only various migrations and arrivals, but recording the forging of new communities and identities allied to multiple geographies, languages and cultural traditions" (Kraenzle 256). Within this framework, Mischka is an agent able to self-reflect and self-augment her identity as it emerges and transforms in the perpetual cycle of coming and going from birth to death that constitutes a life. Furthermore, self-narration provides her with the format to articulate this process in a way that imitates her own internal state of uprootedness and uncertainty.

5.2: The Traveling Subject

In much of the fiction that is written by women surrounding the migration experience, the

female protagonist's process of development and psychological adjustment to living in a new country and culture is often closely associated with her volatile position on the threshold of womanhood. Like Sascha's story told in *Scherbenpark*, Mischka's tale can also be read as a form of *Bildungsroman* because readers accompany her through puberty and on her way to adulthood, becoming an artist, writer and woman and fostering a firmer sense of her identity. As part of the journey that she embarks on in search of the self, she undergoes several pivotal phases, pitfalls and turning points including bingeing, depression, drug abuse, pregnancy, a failed marriage and of course, dislocation and an unexpected loss of coordinates as a result of migration. The novel is divided into three parts. The first part, a prologue titled "Abgebissen, nicht abgerissen," is structured into four key *Lektionen* or lessons that Mischka derives from these coming-of-age experiences. Muaremi illustrates the ways in which each of the lessons functions as a metaphorical migration or border-crossing from adolescence to adulthood. Mischka also elaborates on the relationship between migration and maturation in her writing: "So wie mich zuvor das Heimat- und das Immigrationsland zum Balanceakt zwangen, begehe ich nun eine Gratwanderung zwischen den Welten der Erwachsenen und der Jugend" (*Spaltkopf* 74). This second experience of migration places Mischka at the boundary between adolescence and adulthood, where she must relinquish her youthful innocence and the simplicity of her childhood. As Homi Bhabha articulates, a boundary, whether tangible or allegorical, "is not that at which something stops but [...] the boundary is that from which something begins its presencing" (1). Bhabha stresses that it is necessary to think beyond narratives of originary and initial subjectivities and to focus instead on this "transitory boundary space" (1). According to Bhabha

we find ourselves in the moment of transit where space and time cross to produce complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion. For there is a sense of disorientation, a disturbance of direction, in the "beyond"; and exploratory, restless movement caught so well in the French rendition of

the words au-delà - here and there, on all sides, fort/da, hither and thither, back and forth.
(1)

The lessons in Mischka's life, and particularly their ordering, reflect this sense of "restless movement" (1) and disorientation described by Bhabha. The hither and thither, back and forth movement prevents migratory subjectivities from settling into fixed identity positions at either end of the spectrum. Mischka's passage between the phases of life, such as her transition from youth to adulthood, also facilitates her passage between such constellations as migratory and settled, movement and stillness, rootlessness and rootedness and becoming and being. The capacity for movement between fixed identifications allows her to revisit and work through her traumatic childhood experience of migration and displacement and draw lessons from it, rather than repressing it and carrying the weight of its burden in the form of the Spaltkopf figure hovering over her for the rest of her life as her grandmother does. The lessons are not ordered chronologically but begin with lesson three, continue with lessons one and two and finally, conclude with lesson four. This section may be read as a prolepsis to the actual narrative in that it provides an accelerated look at the many lessons Mischka has taken from her life that overlap and go beyond the story-time. The prologue also allows Mischka the narrator to disassociate and reflect on Mischka as a performing character. Her reflective process considers critical interactions of time, community, culture and experience that she believes have contributed to shaping her identity in the present and are therefore, worthy of revisiting.

A recurrent theme in all four lessons is travel. As Bhabha poignantly writes, "[i]n the world in which I travel, I am endlessly creating myself" (8). The figure of the migrant, or the traveler, is "in a state of uprooted, nomadic, transnational and transcultural fluidity" (Bhabha 320). Like the dogs of Ostia, the dogs of Jewish émigrées that accompanied their owners without any legal rights or entitlements towards their uncertain future and roamed around the streets of Vienna in

search of food once their owners were forced to abandon them, Mischka describes herself as a “Promenadenmischung” (*Spaltkopf* 69), disempowered in migration and wandering in search of an identity within her host culture. The first lesson introduces the idea of taking a trip and serves as a metaphor for Mischka’s nomadic journey that takes her to many different places of dwelling and initiates the uprootedness that becomes a cornerstone of her identity. Mischka’s trip to Scotland is only mentioned in this opening sequence and exemplifies the myriad trips - including emotional, geographical, temporal and poetic leaps - that she is yet to experience after her emigration: “Ich mache wieder einmal einen Sprung, mein Spiel ist das Tempelhüpfen von Land zu Land” (*Spaltkopf* 7). The memories of her trips tend to blur together, she notes that she “eigentlich nie angekommen [ist], weder bei meiner ersten noch nach der zweiten [Reise]” (*Spaltkopf* 7). This feeling of being abruptly cut off from her home and former life and forced into an unsettled state of limbo, in-betweenness and uncertainty is expressed in her narration: “Abgebissen fühle ich mich auch, denn das Land, aus dem ich kam, hängt nicht an mir und ich nicht an ihm. Keine Fasern verbinden mich mehr damit” (*Spaltkopf* 7). This passage reveals that in many ways the experience of migration severed the ties connecting Mischka not only to her place of birth, her past and her system of cultural values and beliefs, but also alienated her from her Russian-Jewish background and her family: “Nach unserer Ausreise in den Westen weigere ich mich konsequent, zu irgendjemandem aus der Verwandtschaft Kontakt zu halten. [...] Die Emigration reißt Menschen auseinander” (*Spaltkopf* 84). In spite of a sense of rootlessness, Mischka’s determination to recover the agency and empowerment that she lost in migration drives forward her search for identity. Muaremi suggests that in this lesson Mischka’s daughter who “die ersten Schritte in meinem Bauch setzt” and “hat bereits eine Reise angetreten” (*Spaltkopf* 8), brings the process of traveling full circle (29). The circle closes with Mischka’s

journey back to her homeland: “Die Erfahrung der Geburt wird sie letztlich sogar zurück in ihre Heimat führen – eine Reise in ihre Vergangenheit” (Muaremi 29). However, Mischka does not find the sense of warmth, belonging or “home” that she expected to encounter upon returning to St. Petersburg many years later and this time she is able to leave on her own terms, swearing “weiß ich, dass ich diesen Ort nie wieder betreten werde” (*Spaltkopf* 184). Chambers claims that this is not necessarily even an account of travel,

[f]or to travel implies movement between fixed positions, a site of departure, a point of arrival, the knowledge of an itinerary. It also intimates an eventual return, a potential homecoming. Migrancy, on the contrary, involves a movement in which neither the points of departure nor those of arrival are immutable or certain. It calls for a dwelling in language, in histories, in identities that are constantly subject to mutation. Always in transit, the promise of a homecoming - completing the story, domesticating the detour - becomes an impossibility. (5)

Therefore, Mischka is unable to reconcile with her former existence because “homecoming” is an impossibility for her. After years of absence she has become a much different person and now, as a new mother, she must continue to negotiate her identity - one that will indeed always be inflected by her early experience of migration, but will certainly take on new meaning as she continues to travel in the world and provide a sense of stability and home for her daughter that eludes her.

The next lesson details Mischka’s youthful impressions of arrival in Vienna. “Mein Vater und ich bekommen einen Nervenzusammenbruch, weil er mir im Laufe eines einzigen Abends drei Jahre Kommunismussozialisation austreiben will und ich es nicht fassen kann, dass Lenin, der Freund aller Kinder [...] ein Arschloch sein soll” (*Spaltkopf* 8), she writes. Though her father’s arguments may have failed, Mischka is quick to allow such Western luxuries as exclusive yoghurt brands and Barbie dolls into her “weit geöffnete Seele” (*Spaltkopf* 48). “Engrossed in dressing her new doll and gorging on fruit yoghurts she could only have dreamed

of in Russia, Mischka seems quick to adapt to her new life in Vienna” (n. pag.), Graham comments. Mischka strives to overcome her outsider status in school and to close the cultural gap between herself and her peers. Her grandmother’s denial of her heritage coupled with Mischka’s juvenile impression of the Jews as a cultural “Other,” who have a strange way of singing and dancing and slanted eyes (*Spalkopf* 53-54), does not provide her with a positive point of identification from which she can make sense of and claim her own Russian-Jewish identity. In contrast, as a child in Vienna, she invests in assimilating by learning German in record time, familiarizing herself with all the art museums in Vienna and befriending an Austrian girl. In an attempt to be like her friend, Mischka writes, “[i]m Versuch, es ihr gleichzutun, quetsche ich mich verzweifelt in entsetzliche Jeansmodelle. Sie darf Lipgloss verwenden. Sie ummalt meine grünen Augen schwarz bis ich aussehe wie ein Pandabär. Bevor ich heimgehe, muss alles wieder entfernt werden. Wir kämpfen mit wasserfester Wimperntusche und fusseligen Wattebäuschen. [...] Meine Freundin betrifft das alles nicht” (*Spalkopf* 77). This passage bespeaks Mischka’s desperate bid to blend in by concealing, and indeed forcefully rejecting, her migration background and “Otherness,” and reveals her insecurities stemming from uncertainty and negative perceptions about her identity. As a girl she fashions her identity based on those around her and what she perceives as “proper” and stable. Looking to model her own identity after her Austrian peer, she complains to her parents that everyone in Austria is very blonde and physically, the polar opposite of her. “Adoptiert werden will ich,” she confesses. “Endlich Teil dieses Landes sein. Die richtigen Dinge tragen, tun und sagen. Das künstlich erblondete Haar über eine knochige Schulter werfen” (*Spalkopf* 76). Roxane Riegler notes that this feeling of exclusivity is largely caused by an Austrian society reluctant to welcome migrants (202). In an attempt to belong and to distinguish herself from other migrants, she begins to harbour a bitter

resentment towards minorities. Aware of her paradoxical position, Mischka explains, “Ich will meine Verachtung mir selbst gegenüber möglichst billig an andere abstoßen” (*Spaltkopf* 65). For the duration of this transitional phase, she is dominated by a longing for roots and belonging that she seeks to satisfy through various relations and membership in groups - notable examples being her time in the punk scene and her sexually unrequited relationship with Franz. Mischka writes, “[i]ch werde meine Heimat später hartnäckig suchen, wie ein blöder Hund, den man kilometerweit abtransportiert hat und der beharrlich in die falsche Richtung zurücklaufen möchte” (*Spaltkopf* 23). Muaremi adds, “Mischka versucht ihren Ort zu finden, sich einen Platz im Leben zu suchen – weder in Russland noch in Österreich” (83). Riegler reads this as evidence that during this transitory period “the ideal of the hybrid or transcultural identity, the fluid transition between self and the foreign persistently elude her” (202-203). As a child Mischka longs for the simplistic life that her Austrian counterpart takes for granted, however Mischka the adult provides insight into a future where her friend has become a model, “todunglücklich, verwelkt und einsam” (*Spaltkopf* 77). This prolepsis implies that Mischka’s idealization of the Austrian girl is temporary, superficial and indicative of an adolescence plagued by self-hatred, self-awareness and a desperate desire for inclusion.

The confusion, fear and insecurity that originate in her early migration experience carry over and characterize the second lesson which focuses on the death of her father:

Mein Vater tritt eine finale Reise an und hinterlässt mir als Mitbringsel lähmende Angst vor Ausflügen aller Art. Ich mutiere kurzfristig zu einer Gemischtwarenhandlung sämtlicher Neurosen: Meines Bewegungsradius beraubt, beginne ich mir eigene Spiralen zurechtzulegen: Ich bin oft krank. Ich schreibe. Ich führe endlos komplizierte Liebschaften. Ihre Wege sind so verschlungen wie die, die mir versagt sind. (*Spaltkopf* 9)

Her language in this excerpt expresses entrapment within an endless carousel of confusion, fear, sickness and longing and reflects her inner self, which has not been able to stabilize in any way.

This lesson also coincides with her awakening sexuality, which Mischka identifies as a metaphorical migration: “Der Duft erwachender Sexualität weht schwach in meine Gefilde. Diese zweite Immigration trete ich lieber gar nicht erst an” (*Spaltkopf* 74). Just as the migration that cut her off from her homeland and childhood was imposed on her by forces beyond her control, Mischka again feels that she is disenfranchised, unready and unwilling to embark on this second migration, but has no voice or authority in the matter. Now, aware that the tribulations of pubescent development are encroaching upon her, she longs for “d[ie] schöne[] alte[] Zeit” (*Spaltkopf* 10), in which she believed she was heading on a family vacation to the Baltic states and was “geschützt vor all den Plagen, die den Rest der Familie beschäftigen” (*Spaltkopf* 43) as they boarded the plane to Vienna. After her father’s death, Mischka struggles to overcome drug abuse as well as an unhealthy body image and relationship. During this turbulent phase, travel once again functions as an important theme. After the fall of the Iron Curtain she travels to Prague with her boyfriend Franz and when he heads home, she takes up residence as a squatter in a shared apartment in East Berlin. “Ich habe die Heimreise verweigert,” she explains, “ich bin noch auf der Suche” (*Spaltkopf* 131). Travel thus symbolizes the process of developing a transnational identity that is formed in motion between locations as well as movement between subject positions.

The fourth and final subsection, titled “fast forward,” offers an insight into Mischka’s future: “Ich stehe auf einem Bergvorsprung und sehe in die Tiefe: zu meinen Füßen schlängelt sich die Rhône. Links ist Frankreich, rechts der Abgrund” (*Spaltkopf* 10). In this prolepsis, we find the narrator in France, however she is still not mentally or emotionally “home.” Her final words, “[i]ch bin müde. Ich bin nicht daheim. Ich bin angekommen” (*Spaltkopf* 10), express an exhausted traveler who embodies a culture of in-between. By transcending locatedness, Mischka

moves away from the singularity of primary conceptual categories like country or language of origin. The final lesson suggests, even before the narrative proper begins, that she is a disrupted subject, constantly negotiating the space in-between unfamiliar and insecure spaces. Such spaces destabilize the notion that identities ought to be static and coherent and facilitate the appropriation of new aspects of identity that arise as a result of displacement and dislocation and are assumed along lines of individual understandings of belonging based on gender, age, sexual orientation, religion, family history, economic background, education, personal values, aspirations, anxieties and social or political affiliation (cf. Bhabha 1). In this final lesson, Mischka's statement "[d]ie Wasser meines Flusses sind träge. Gelb und gallig wälzen sie sich dahin" (*Spaltkopf* 10) presents a protagonist who is uneasy but nevertheless seems comfortable with being unsettled. Muaremi contends that this lesson alludes to Mischka's unbalanced state during pregnancy because she received little to no tenderness or affection from Franz (31). The couple eventually decides to file for divorce but their lives, like yellow and bilious water in the river, both go on, albeit in different directions (Muaremi 32). From this experience, Mischka draws the most important lessons in life: celebrate uprootedness, play with the freedom and openness to negotiate identity constructions and recognize the emancipatory effects of accepting a hybrid and complex subjectivity. Migration need not be exclusively associated with destabilization, upheaval and loss. Indeed, its effects may be alienating, however being "out of place" and not tied to any one discrete location has the potential to offer mobile subjects a sense of liberation as they travel between fixed positions with the freedom to interpret their identities as they go. The identity of the traveling subject in perpetual motion, such as the one that Mischka establishes in her narrative, enables her to access a subjectivity that is increasingly celebrated in the globalized world rather than negatively associated with rootlessness or vagrancy, as before.

In doing so, she is able to achieve a measure of autonomy that was she was initially denied in the process of migration.

If the lessons are re-organized chronologically, lesson one tells about her immigration to Austria and adaptation to life in her new surroundings. The fears and insecurities that arise during puberty and lead to an unhealthy body image, drug abuse and complicated relationship are described in lesson two. In lesson three Mischka is on a trip between Glasgow and Amsterdam when she realizes that her unborn child has already embarked on a journey and begins to worry about providing a sense of origin, home and stability for her daughter. In lesson four we fast forward, as the title suggests, to accompany Mischka in France with a clearer picture of who she wants to be: “Wenn ich die Wahl zwischen zwei Stühlen habe, nehme ich das Nagelbrett” (*Spalkopf* 10). Thus travel is a unifying theme in all four lessons as well as in the narrative that unfolds in the following chapters. As noted at the beginning, this brief prologue provides a prolepsis to the actual narrative. Muaremi argues that the position of the lessons at the beginning of the novel, rather than the conclusion, foregrounds the symbolism of remembering and its significance in the story (33). The four lessons are fragments of the protagonist’s memory and her incentive to tell the story. In contrast to Muaremi, I maintain that the fragmentation and circularity of the lessons may be read as an oppositional textual strategy intended to represent that identity building in a transnational context is neither fixed from any originary position nor progressive towards an ending or final destination. Although individuals “become” their identities and tell their identities across a life, this process is non-linear. Instead, the interpretation and constitution of identity is an endless act, in which individual agents take up the project of exploring and inventing their own subjectivities. My reading takes this notion a step further and contends that the representation of this continuous process of “becoming” an identity

over time in a narrative grants ultimate authority to the narrators who are the primary actors in their texts and have command over the presentation of their story of the self.

5.3: Reclaiming Control

Mischka's coming-of-age is a centrifugal force in the novel. Throughout the text she struggles with feelings of powerlessness and a lack of control over the events surrounding her as well as her own person, beginning with her arrival in Austria and heightening when she hits puberty. The unexpected loss of geographic, cultural and linguistic coordinates triggers trauma associated with a loss of firm ground and control. To emphasize this fear, Mischka explains that when she is traveling "[i]ch vermeide es, länger als zwei Wochen unterwegs zu sein. Nach dem fünften Tag jeder Reise quält mich Verlustangst, die jeden Urlaub zur Hölle geraten lässt. [...]. Noch schlimmer: Flüge. Die Angst, der Willkür anderer ausgeliefert zu sein, wird nur übertrumpft von meiner Angst vor der Herzlungenmaschine" (*Spaltkopf* 129). In order to cope with loss and a loss of control, specifically, Mischka responds in different ways. Firstly, she explains her willingness to spend double her income on clothes and put herself in debt in order to replace any emotions of emptiness and loss with material goods: "Ein Verlust ist sofort – instant – wieder gut zu machen. Die Leere darf nicht einen wahrnehmbaren Moment lang aufklaffen. Ich kaufe ein, als mein Vater stirbt. Ich kaufe ein, als ich mich von meinem ersten Freund trenne" (*Spaltkopf* 9). This is the most immediate way Mischka is able to establish control. It also allows her to adapt her image to her changing identity and to give a convincing performance, in which she presents the self to other people and asks them to believe that she is who she appears to be. In addition to the loss she experiences in migration, Mischka's budding femininity disturbs her father, who reacts by asserting his authority over her: "Alle Freiheiten, die mir bisher gewährt wurden, werden von meiner Periode hinweggeschwemmt" (*Spaltkopf* 71). This further loss of

freedom and control causes Mischka to feel helpless and trapped - emotions which are explicitly expressed in her increasingly cynical and aggressive writing style: "Rapunzel hatte es besser als ich" (*Spaltkopf* 71). Mischka observes the physical changes of puberty - from the hair that is sprouting under her arms to the revolting mounds rudely blossoming on her chest - with disgust (*Spaltkopf* 72). In an attempt to regain control over her changing body, any "feminine" attributes are suppressed: she cuts her hair short and binges. Mischka writes, "habe ich mich schon lange in den Wald meines Übergewichts verdrückt" (*Spaltkopf* 78). As Butler points out,

[t]he body becomes a peculiar nexus of culture and choice, and "existing" one's body becomes a personal way of taking up and reinterpreting received gender norms. To the extent that gender norms function under the aegis of social constraints, the reinterpretation of those norms through the proliferation and variation of corporeal styles becomes a very concrete and accessible way of politicizing personal life. ("Sex and Gender" 45)

In this view gender is a way of situating oneself with respect to cultural norms and a way of living one's body in the world. Put more simply, to take on or become a gender grants in a sense "the possibility of autonomy within corporeal life" (Butler, "Sex and Gender" 48). By refusing traditional feminine-coded characteristics associated with the body such as long hair and a thin frame, Mischka uses her body as a means to resist gender norms and exercise control. She chooses to appropriate a "masculine" gender identity and enacts this partially by masking her feminine physical attributes, but also by aligning herself with the father. She writes that the birth of her sister divides the family in two camps. While her mother favours her sister, who satisfies her need for nurturing and closeness, Mischka's father favours her: "Wir haben einen gemeinsamen Feind, wir verbünden uns gegen die Mutterkindsyade. Was kümmert uns zartes Verschmelzen. Männer haben nichts übrig für solchen Kinderkram. Uns verbindet sie Suche nach der Wahrheit in der Kunst, und quälende Eifersucht" (*Spaltkopf* 99). However, her interpretation of gender shifts many more times throughout the novel. Mischka's tendency to

reinterpret her image by changing her hair and clothing is one of the ways in which she tries on provisional gender identities. Her father's death, in particular, incites her to explore new relationships and affiliate with different communities which in turn affects the way she performs her gender, presents herself and wants to be understood. This ability to fashion and refashion her gender is one of the core ways in which she reclaims control throughout the text.

At the beginning of the final chapter Mischka's father stands at the front door with his suitcase. Although she feels that he will not come back and she will never see him again, she refuses to say goodbye or accompany him to the train station. Instead, she denies her frailty and presents readers with a tenuous image of strength and superiority: "Ich demonstriere meine neue Überlegenheit. Die Stärke einer Frau, die ihren Vater nicht mehr braucht und auch keine Angst hat, allein dem Leben entgegenzutreten. Ich behaupte, völlig ruhig zu sein. Ich verzichte auf unser Ritual. Ich besitze nun neue. Mein schöner Freund wartet auf mich" (*Spaltkopf* 117). Nonetheless, the loss of her father triggers anxiety that she attempts to displace with drugs, alcohol and parties with Franz. Mischka paints a vivid picture of her life during this stage of identity exploration:

Ich will mir die alte Haut abziehen, eine Maske, hinter der mein parentief reines Gesicht auf mich wartet. Ich mache mich auf in die Welt hinter dem Spiegel. Ich bin mir selbst das weiße Karnickel, folge den Pfaden ins Dunkel des Baus und schlage manchmal ängstlich Haken. Wie bei Alice führt der Weg eine lange Zeit steil abwärts. Eine Kopfhälfte kahlrasiert, die andere gefärbt, Hals, Hände, Gedanken befleckt, streife ich ungestraft durch die Wiener Nacht. Wenn ich schlafen möchte, wage ich nicht, dem Dunkel draußen zu begegnen. (*Spaltkopf* 125)

The *Spaltkopf*, who can see into her mind and heart, betrays her innermost thoughts and weaknesses: "Ich sauge den Geruch ihrer Einsamkeit in mir auf. Sie will störrisch scheinen und ist verstört" (*Spaltkopf* 126). These excerpts reveal that Mischka is aware of her identity as a performance and that the mask she wears – the one which she previously wore to hide her

femininity and wears now in the form of rebellious hairstyle and combative attitude – disguises her internal disruption and loneliness and acts as a shield that prevents anyone from seeing her “reines Gesicht” (*Spaltkopf* 125). The only way she can assert control in the face of overwhelming loss and claim narratorial authority over the *Spaltkopf* in the telling of her identity is by maintaining her carefully constructed performance, by taking off the mask, keeping it on or trading it in for a new one. Mischka’s phase of teenage rebellion takes place at the boundary between childhood and adulthood. It is precisely as she dwells in this space between two plateaus that she abandons the longing for assimilation she felt as a child in Vienna and seeks out a sense of belonging in a punk scene that accommodates her self-understanding as an outsider. This in-between space, which Bhabha calls an innovative locus of collaboration and contestation, operates as a transitive site in which Mischka has the potential to initiate a new interpretation of identity and strategy of selfhood (1-2). Her cultural engagement within this space, whether antagonistic or affiliative, is nonetheless performative (Bhabha 2). While Mischka is aware that the identity she presents is an act, she also believes that her background and appearance code her as an outsider in Viennese society. Therefore, when she produces herself performatively as an outsider, she indicates not only that she wants to be understood as such by others, but also that that is how she perceives herself – as an outsider, a vagrant, a mutt.

The birth of her sister coupled with her father’s final departure forces Mischka to cope with irreconcilable changes to the family structure and ousts her from the comforts of childhood. From here, Mischka must develop her identity as an artist, a migrant and a woman primarily through symbolic interaction with her absent father. Mischka claims that she has always been aware that her beautiful boyfriend Franz is probably more attracted to her father than to her and has simply started a relationship with her to please his mother. However, she also manipulates

Franz, calling him her victim and using him as someone equally uncertain about his identity over whom she can finally assert control. In this way, much like Sascha, Mischka utilizes the sexuality she once denied as a means to establish agency. Similar to Sascha, losing her virginity carries a symbolic connotation of control that is more exhilarating for her than the act itself or the typical emotions of anticipation, nervousness or infatuation. After her father's departure she writes, "[i]ch nütze die Abwesenheit und habe erstmals Sex in meinem Zimmer. Seltsam unberührt hinterlässt [Franz] mich. Das Symbolische hatte mich mehr gereizt" (*Spaltkopf* 119). The *Spaltkopf* comments on the stuffed toys that have been recently thrown into a box as well as the murals of elves, faeries and other fairy tale figures that decorate her wall and hang over her bed during this scene, signifying her father's departure and her first sexual encounter as the final phases in her border-crossing from child to young adult. After his death, Mischka inherits her father's studio. This enables her to explore her identity as an artist, symbolically interacting with her deceased father through his artwork and possessions. She writes, "[i]ch verkaufe die gewaltige Druckerpresse meines Vaters, die die Mitte des Zimmers einnahm, mit dem Gefühl des vollendeten Judas. Mit einer mütterlichen Freundin entsorge ich Unmengen Papier, Karton, Bücher, Stofffetzen, Zeitungen. Das Matriarchat hat gesiegt" (*Spaltkopf* 129-130). Her father's death also draws attention to the notable absence of male characters in the novel - both her grandfathers are no longer alive and her father's brothers are hardly ever present. In her father's absence, Mischka constructs an image of the family as it ought to be, that is, comprised of strong and self-reliant women capable of being self-sufficient without men (Reiter 286). Mischka's narrative explodes the traditional family model and stresses instead the continuation of a female tradition as a counterbalance to patriarchy: "Aus Adas werden Rahels, aus Müttern Witwen und aus Witwen neue, selbstbewusstere Damen" (*Spaltkopf* 160). Jewish status, which is represented

here by the name Rahel, is conferred through matrilineality. The tradition that people born of a Jewish mother are themselves Jewish becomes significant when Mischka's grandmother Ada's Jewish identity is exposed and the continuation of a female genealogy becomes not only an opposition to patriarchy, but a passing down of Jewish heritage as well.

Her other family members either remain shackled to the past (i.e. her grandmother) or are consumed by repressed memories and nostalgia for their homeland (i.e. her father). Mischka comments that “[u]nsere Wohnung wirkt wie aus St. Petersburg geschnitten, und meine Familie besteht stolz darauf, all ihre russischen Eigenheiten zu bewahren” (*Spaltkopf* 71). She, on the other hand, is concentrated on moving forward and furthering the female lineage. Another way in which she reclaims authority over uncontrollable factors in her life is by building a family of her own. With the birth of her daughter especially, Mischka takes on a new identity outside of existing family relationships and defined by her role as a mother. “Zum ersten Mal empfinde ich das Kind in mir als selbstständiges Wesen, das etwas will und in Gang setzen kann. Wir wissen, dass ein großes Stück Arbeit vor uns liegt, die wir am besten im Team bewältigen werden” (*Spaltkopf* 142). Whereas Mischka's narrative of self-discovery could previously be called narcissistic, the shift from “I” to “we” here demonstrates that her identity is constantly changing and must account for the arrival of her daughter and her new maternal role. Initially her pregnancy elicits memories of her unanticipated and reluctant emigration:

Fröhliche Mütter freuen sich auf ihre ungeborenen Kinder. Ich fühle mich erdrückt. Es gibt keinen Weg zurück. Das Flugzeug hat abgehoben, und wir fliegen nicht nach Litauen. [...] Meine Gebärmutter macht einen Satz. Ich verstehe ihn nicht. Sie drückt sich nicht deutlich genug aus. Dann geht mein Herz mit, und als nach und nach weitere Körperteile folgen, beginne ich zu begreifen, dass die Geburt meines Kindes begonnen hat. (*Spaltkopf* 141-142)

The birth of her daughter also incites a return to her linguistic roots: “Ich träume auf Russisch neuerdings. Ich spüre, wie sich die sperrige Sprache in meinem Mund verkeilt wie Treibholz [...]

Das alte Ich erwacht. Beendet seinen Winterschlaf” (*Spalkkopf* 144). Any feelings of uneasiness and uncertainty, however, turn to tranquility as she begins to perceive the birth of her daughter as her own rebirth and a chance to start over equipped with a new perspective on life and the lessons drawn from her own experiences that she can pass on to her daughter. The second wedding of her ex-husband marks the precise occasion when Mischka experiences renewed hope for her and her daughter to grow in a new country. She watches her daughter dancing, blissfully happy, and takes credit for her sure step: “Ich habe ihr den Boden unter den Füßen geschenkt. Die Wurzeln, die mir nicht sprießen wollen” (*Spalkkopf* 164). After the birth of her daughter her own sense of placelessness is no longer a priority for her. Rather, she chooses to embrace it: “Meine Geschichte blutet sich aus mir heraus. Wo ich gestern zu Hause war, ist morgen verändert, und übermorgen vergangen. Es stört mich nicht mehr” (*Spalkkopf* 165). At this point, she becomes more concerned with providing a sense of home and stability for her daughter and in order to do this successfully, she feels that she must take a trip back to St. Petersburg to confront her past and consequently, the Spalkkopf. When Mischka finally perceives the Spalkkopf’s shape in a window, it is clear that the spectre of the past has lost its hold over her, as her mother had explained to her as a child: “Wenn du ihn sehen kannst, hat er keine Macht mehr über dich” (*Spalkkopf* 19). As Riegler writes, “we sense that she has at last found her place in the world” (203). However, Mischka realizes that for her, that “place” is an unsettling, transitory, in-between space, in which her identity is constituted and changes over time. To reiterate Chambers, migrancy involves a movement in which neither points of departure nor arrival are stable (5). The migrant subject, in this case Mischka, is always in transit. The ideal of homecoming or completing the story, to put it in Chambers’ terms, is impossible (5). In order to facilitate the motion between multiple, mutable identities, Mischka uses myths and fairy tales as

a means to move between her home and host culture as well as time and space. The salient characteristics of myth, such as its timelessness and elasticity, make it a productive narrative tool for exploring and constructing a transcultural identity inflected by migration experience, gender and Jewishness. The next section will analyze how the imaginative “timespace” of myth has the potential to open up such a space for transgressing traditionally inflexible boundaries in order to switch between subject positions, revisiting old and testing out new identities.

5.4: The Role of Myths and Fairy Tales

In the beginning of the novel Mischka’s narration is characterized by cheeky comments, unfiltered word choice as well as playful descriptions and observations of her environment. With puberty her perspective becomes impatient, ironic, distanced and more aggressive. Similar to *Scherbenpark*, such distinctive changes in the narrative voice capture the authenticity of the protagonists’ self-narration, indicating the ways in which the narrators’ attitudes and perspectives alternate with age and experience and allowing them to claim the story as their own by telling it in their own voice. Throughout the novel Mischka’s narrative style is consistently shaped by the stories that she grew up with and accompanied her “Abend für Abend in die Zukunft” (*Spaltkopf* 22), especially fairy tales and fables. The novel is heavily influenced by intercultural fairy tales as well as ancient mythologies and anecdotes. For the intellectual family of artists, books represent a cultural heritage. Indeed, the opening paragraph of the first chapter establishes their enthusiasm for fantasy and myth:

Als meine Mutter mit mir schwanger war, saß sie oft vor ihrem Schminktischchen, sah lange in den Spiegel und stellte sich ihr Kind vor. Vor ihr lag ein Buch. Ein abgegriffener Stoff, darauf eingestanzt in goldenen Lettern “Russische Märchen.” Ihre Hand, klein und elegant, ruht auf einer aufgeschlagenen Seite unterhalb der Überschrift “Herrin des Kupferbergs.” Es gibt viele Geschichten von ihr, alle eröffnet mit feierlich großen Schnörkelbuchstaben. Kyrillisch. Auf den anderen Seite eine Illustration hinter einem knisternden Blatt Schonpapier. [...] Das Bild zeigt eine Frau mit langem schwarzem

Zopf, die sich an eine Malachitwand lehnt. Ihr Kleid, ihre Augen, die aufmerksam und streng wirken, der gemaserte Stein, das Malachitkollier um den blassen Hals: Alles ist farbig. [...] Meine Mutter blickt sie an und wünscht sich ein Mädchen, mit einer Haut so weiß wie Schnee und einem Mund rot wie Blut. (*Spaltkopf* 13)

This memory elucidates Mischka's intimate relationship to Russian fairy tales and the well from which she draws the many direct and indirect allusions and allegories to Russian literature in her narration. When she is still living in St. Petersburg, Mischka describes her close environment and family members as the setting and characters in a fantasy world, which can partly be attributed to her age, but also her love for fairy tales. For example, the farewell dinner with her whole family before she immigrates to Austria functions as a "modernen Märchenbild" (Muaremi 63).

Mischka herself describes the circumstances and characters with a playfulness that is characteristic of a child:

Ich bin eine Prinzessin! König und Königin sind auf meiner Seite, mir kann nichts geschehen. [...] [Der Tisch] ist so voll gestellt. [...] Da gibt es Hering im Pelz, dessen strahlend weiße Sauerrahmhülle nach innen hin ein zartes Rosa entwickelt, dort, wo sich die purpurnen Scheiben der roten Rüben und der daruntergeschichteten Kartoffeln mit dem eingelegten Fisch berühren. Mit Zwiebelringen verziert, eine Winterlandschaft, hin und da mit einem grünen Zweiglein Petersilie geschmückt. (*Spaltkopf* 14)

This scene contains all the necessary components of a fairy tale: a princess, her parents, a king and queen, a table overflowing with food for a great feast and visiting relatives. Just as a classic fairy tale character, Mischka is about to embark on a life-changing journey, the full extent of which she is not yet aware herself (Muaremi 64). Mischka also describes the experience of emigration in magical language: "Der Emigrant bricht auf, als Hans im Glück in die Welt zu ziehen, und landet in einem ganz anderen Märchen. Oft verlangt am Beginn russischer Märchen der mächtige böse Kotscheij, dass ihm ein Wunsch erfüllt werde" (*Spaltkopf* 39). As Mischka tells her tale of emigration with a focus on her childhood, the perspective changes several times in one paragraph between Mischka's adult memories and reflections and her infantile fairy tale

depictions of reality. For example, she recalls playing with her grandmother as a child and writes that they acted out the roles of figures from Russian fairy tales as well as classic literature (*Spalkopf* 40). Though this childhood memory is ostensibly told from the outlook of a younger Mischka, the flashback is actually narrated from the perspective of the adult narrator, who would have been more familiar with which works could be classified as classic Russian literature. When she attends a performance by her father's theatre group, she writes about what she wants to be when she grows up, but also identifies the classical opera being staged as Christoph Willibald Gluck's *The Reformed Drunkard* - knowledge which Mischka the child would not likely have possessed. Such instances pervade the novel and thus any attempt to read the story lineally is disrupted by Mischka's memories and the shifting point of view from which the story is told (Muaremi 64). O'Neill attributes this persistent switching of perspectives to focalization, a narratological term that describes a divergence between the narrating voice and the perceiving eye - the former corresponding to the narrator and the latter to the focalizer. According to O'Neill, the focalizer in a narrative is neither a person, nor an agent in the same way that the narrator or implied author is a narrative agent, but rather a point from which the narrative is mediated or presented at a given moment (86). Focalization, indeed, as Bal writes, is "the most important, most penetrating, and most subtle means of manipulation available to the narrative text, whether literary or otherwise" (116). Shlomith Rimmon-Kenan makes a distinction between fixed focalization, where the same focalizer is maintained throughout the entire narrative, variable focalization, which may involve two different focalizers, and multiple focalization, which employs several different types of internal and external focalization (76-77). In every narrative, the world-creating narrative agent is chiefly responsible for all focalizations within that particular narrative world. Though *Spalkopf* is told primarily from the perspective of first-person

narrator Mischka, the focalization fluctuates between Mischka, the carefree child, and Mischka, the cynical adult. The sudden switch in focalization from an adult to a child's perspective reflects the instability and destabilization that the narrator, and indeed the migrant subject, embodies. This narrative strategy evokes a sense of fragmentation and disruption that mirrors Mischka's search for identity. However, this double focus also has another function. In self-narration there is a distinction between the narrating self as an agent and the narrated self as a character. Therefore, critical moments and/or childhood memories, for example, can be filtered through either the narrator's perspective in the present (Mischka the adult) or through the perspective of the narrator as a developing character in the plot (Mischka the child). This technique of interweaving renews the past, "prefiguring it as a contingent in-between space that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present" (Bhabha 7). The ability to transcend temporal and spatial boundaries and to move back and forth between identity positions provides narrators an opportunity to interpret and understand their experiences and memories and is therefore essential to Mischka's ability to establish a transcultural sense of self. It is during this process of making sense of and giving meaning to her experiences that identity construction occurs. Silvia Pilar and Castro Borrego explain that in and through such experiences, "we learn to define and reshape our values and our commitments and we give texture and form to our collective futures" (5). When narrators engage in the writing and rewriting of their identities, they become the owners of their story of the self and take command over how the story unfolds, which events are elided or highlighted, and how the story points towards the future. However, it must be noted that the Spaltkopf, who will be discussed in more detail in the next section, is another narrator focalizer in the text. As a narrating agent, he threatens to undermine Mischka's control over the narrative and therefore, she must confront him at the end of the novel in order to reclaim narratorial

authority.

In addition to fragmentation, another oppositional strategy characteristic of transnational texts is the rewriting of myths from one's cultural background into the language of the host country. Women have also been rewriting fairy tales and mythologies from their own point of view (Fachinger 17). The Baba Yaga fairy tale character is one of the most popular figures from the Russian fairy tale tradition (Muaremi 69). According to myth, Baba Yaga is a witch who lives in the woods in a house on chicken legs and preys on children. Reiter claims that this figure feminizes the gender-neutral myth of the Spalkopf (275). Baba Yaga is used as a metaphor for Mischka's phase of budding sexuality and youthful rebellion. Mischka's boyfriend Franz calls her Baba Yaga girl, but she also identifies with the fairy tale figure herself, particularly after her father's death when the feeling of loss intensifies and she struggles to cope with changes over which she has no control: "Ich werfe alles durcheinander und in einen bodenlosen Topf: Sexualität, Trieb, Angst, alles köchelt vor sich hin, während ich als Baba Yaga in meinem Kessel rühre. Ich bin mir selbst eine Hütte auf Hühnerbeinen, die sich dreht und wendet, wenn man sie ruft" (*Spalkopf* 118). Baba Yaga is often portrayed as a strong, helpful character, but is also capable of being violent and malignant. Mischka illustrates this when she writes, "[i]ch würde den schönen Franz gerne töten. [...] Eine Baba Yaga darf das. Man kann es sogar von ihr erwarten" (*Spalkopf* 165). This picture paints Mischka the Baba Yaga as a magical and destructive force that leaves no room for male figures (Muaremi 73). Although the mythical figure Baba Yaga is said to have had children, she never had a husband. After divorcing Franz, Mischka returns to her family, reuniting the female members. Muaremi maintains that this unification of the female characters "ist der Inbegriff der Baba Yaga als Zustand eines Matriarchats" (73). Myth therefore serves as a vehicle to access and construct identity across

cultural and historical borders and as such, provides the protagonist Mischka an opportunity to explore and meditate on her personal and familial past as she continuously crafts her cultural and gender identity in the present.

5.5: The Spaltkopf

Throughout her narration, Mischka recalls two mythic figures from her childhood - the witch Baba Yaga and the Spaltkopf, “an unembodied vampire who absorbs human emotions and thoughts and feeds on family lies and repressed memories” (Guenther n. pag.). More specifically, Mischka calls the Spaltkopf “unangenehm Persönliches, ein privates Ungeheuer, auf meine Familie angesetzt” (*Spaltkopf* 22). In contrast to the Baba Yaga, who is primarily benevolent and helpful, the Spaltkopf is a purely evil mythical creature used by adults as a disciplinary tool to frighten children. If they do not behave, so the myth goes, he will eat their thoughts and suck out their souls. The only way to destroy the Spaltkopf is to see him and “[w]er lange nicht hinsehen möchte, bezahlt dafür” (*Spaltkopf* 156), explains the Spaltkopf. The Spaltkopf does not simply reveal or magically recapture the past, rather he operates by means of mysterious incantations. His third-person narration takes the form of italicized passages persistently interrupting Mischka’s own storytelling. In a text multiple narrators may follow one another sequentially or a subsidiary account may be embedded within the “main” narrative, as is the case with Spaltkopf whose nested narrative adds to the larger story. O’Neill explains “the reader’s understanding of the narrative grows only gradually out of his efforts to compare and contrast a series of partially conflicting accounts by [...] separate narrators” (64). The Spaltkopf’s disruptions not only obstruct the coherence of Mischka’s story, but also inhibit her ability to construct her identity through the act of telling and to present the self in such a way as to convince readers that she is

the character who she claims to be. Unlike Mischka, who is an experiencing character in the plot, as an external narrator the figure of the Spaltkopf is both omniscient and omnipotent. “His narrative vision is both panchronic and ubiquitous, he can see into the future as easily as into the past or present [...] and he can see into the minds and hearts of characters far better than they themselves ever can; moreover, he will never forget, never can be confused or in error, never lie, and never twist his narrative to suit his own ends” (O’Neill 62). Therefore, any potential subversion of the story by Mischka is thwarted by the Spaltkopf’s narration, which threatens to undermine her narratorial authority. As a competing narrating agent in the text, the Spaltkopf poses a challenge to Mischka’s project of achieving agency through self-narration.

In his parallel narrative the Spaltkopf unravels the secret history of Mischka’s grandmother, Ada Igorowna or Rahel Israilowna. The novel’s magical elements ultimately facilitate the recovery of the family’s repressed roots and allow the protagonist to trace her Jewish identity by helping her to make sense of surreal political circumstances. Because of the oppressive anti-Jewish climate that prevailed in post-revolutionary Russian, and also because this atmosphere would have severely restricted Mischka’s grandmother’s designs for career advancement, “*ändert [sie] den Namen ihres Vaters, der sie verraten hätte, von Israil in Igor. Sie nennt sich Ada. Nicht Rahel. Sie hängt sich ein Kreuz um. Sie ist blauäugig und blond, sie ist unauffällig. Ada Igorowna. Die zukünftige Professorin*” (Spaltkopf 156). After witnessing her father’s murder by Soviet soldiers in a pogrom, Ada adopted her non-Jewish stepfather’s name in order to conceal her Jewish origin. As her grandmother lies dying in the hospital, Mischka discovers a passport in her handbag revealing Ada’s true name, Rahel Israilowna, which provokes her to probe her grandmother’s traumatic history of anti-Semitic persecution and loss, shrouded in silence and resulting in repression, regret and alienation from her son. In spite of the

grandmother's efforts to change her name and conceal her Jewish identity, her secret dominates her thinking and the Spaltkopf embodies her threat of discovery. In the first entry, the Spaltkopf reveals himself to be a watchful spectre, whose role is to uncover this familial trauma: "*Sie will vergessen und nicht verzeihen. Ich vergesse nichts und verzeihe nichts. Igor. Nicht Israil. Die Zahl und das Wort und das Wissen*" (Spaltkopf 20). This cryptic incantation, which punctuates the narrative in several places, summarizes the Spaltkopf's identity, origin and intention, that is, to feed on the grandmother's guilt and fear of discovery and haunt her with the threat of betraying her buried secret. As the Spaltkopf proclaims in one of his final entries: "Wer vergisst, dass er mal ein Opfer war, wird leichter zum Täter. Wer lange nicht hinsehen möchte, bezahlt dafür [...] mit einsetzender Erblindung" (Spaltkopf 156). Therefore, his obligation to record repressed memories and haunt those who refuse to recognize their past also fulfills a crucial moral and ethical obligation (Guenther n. pag.).

The novel thus brings to the surface the suppressed trauma and hidden history of Mischka's family. Many artists and scholars have drawn on the concept of the uncanny to deconstruct or destabilize notions of family and home as safe, familiar, comfortable and banal. Kraenzle comments, however, that invoking the uncanny involves more than a reversal of the terms home and away or familiar and foreign. Indeed, it necessitates an interrogation of "the very ambivalence contained in the idea of home itself" (Kraenzle 177). Taking as his starting point Freud's discussion of the ambivalence and ambiguity of the terms *heimlich/unheimlich*, in which he writes that the uncanny is "that class of frightening which leads back to what is known of old and long familiar" (cited in Morley 220), David Morley considers how the uncanny may be employed to defamiliarize notions of the family home as a place of privacy and shelter and to expose the private sphere to public view. In the context of "growing up in a place where the

language spoken within the confines of the home is not understood outside and where the concepts of culture held by parents and teenage daughter not only clash on aesthetic but also on ideological grounds” (Reiter 285), society invariably enters into the home and family affairs, disrupting the safety and stability supposedly provided by the private sphere. Building on the image, Bhabha explains that “the private and the public become part of each other, forcing upon us a vision that is as divided as it is disorienting” (9). Morley points out how the terms *heimlich/unheimlich* are not simply opposites, but “are better seen as inverted replications” (80). The term *heimlich*, which signifies the home as a site that is familiar, comforting and friendly but also a space inhabited by hidden and concealed family secrets, always already contains its opposite meaning. It is the uncanny process that exposes that which should remain hidden and destabilizes the sense of security, nostalgia and reassuring stability that being at home surrounded by one’s family ought to provide (cf. Kraenzle 179-180). Riegler argues that the *Spaltkopf* is an uncanny literary device because throughout his narrative, the figure destabilizes readers’ sense of safety, nostalgia and stability associated with the private sphere by exposing the family’s hidden secrets and revealing the home as a site of suppressed trauma. The notion of the home as a stable, familiar, banal space is also deconstructed in the migration process. One’s homeland or country of origin was traditionally perceived of as the place where an essential identity, built upon the assumed “fixity” of nation and language, was established. The experience of migration, then, was equated with displacement and a devastating loss of geographic, linguistic and cultural coordinates. However, if as in transnational texts like *Spaltkopf* the home and family are no longer imagined or represented as the stable and secure originary locations of identity, traditional territorially-defined models of identity are undermined. This process of deconstructing the familiar “estranges any immediate access to an originary identity or a

‘received’ tradition” (Bhabha 2). As discussed above, the turn away from the universalizing principle that a “proper” identity is stable, static and coherent, has resulted in an emergence of subject positions that produce themselves performatively by appropriating aspects of identity like gender, sexuality or appearance as opposed to location, language or nationality. In this new paradigm, in which the home and family are no longer conceived of as the primary loci of identity construction, migration may be read as an emancipatory and empowering process that confers freedom and agency upon individuals engaged in the perpetual project of crafting their identities in motion. By decoding the home as a familiar space, it becomes possible for the protagonist within the text to establish an identity that is at home in the space in-between multiple geographic, cultural, linguistic and literary locations.

The construction of the Spaltkopf myth may also be read as a metaphor for Mischka’s insecurity about her identity. The invented mythical figure borne in her adolescent imagination accompanies her as she attempts to overcome this uncertainty and build an identity across her life. Reiter suggests that the Spaltkopf “simultaneously gestures towards the migrant’s split sense of self and expresses the desire to replace the fractured identity with a unified one” (277). Throughout the novel the mirror appears as a recurring motif and serves as an instrument aiding Mischka in her lifelong search for identity, though she expresses her suspicion that there is a pair of eyes behind the mirror belonging to the Spaltkopf that has fixed its gaze upon her in quiet concentration. Reiter argues that Mischka’s preoccupation with mirrors is a declaration of her desire for self-recognition (276):

Um mein Gesicht nicht ständig zu verlieren, blicke ich in meinen Taschenspiegel. Manchmal bis zu dreißig Mal am Tag. Überall und immer blicke ich in den Spiegel. Und immer verfolgt mich das Gefühl, dahinter noch ein Augenpaar zu erkennen, das seinen Blick in ruhiger Konzentration auf mich gerichtet hat. [...] Ich blicke in den Spiegel in den Pupillen meiner Liebhaber, ich blicke in die Zeitungen, ich suche mich in den Werken in Kunstmuseen, in den Fotos meiner Verwandten, im Spiegel der Glasfläche der

Bar. Wie schade, dass ich dabei weder den Liebhaber noch die Kunstwerke, die Verwandtschaft oder die Bar wahrnehme, obwohl ich mich nicht in ihnen finde.
(*Spaltkopf* 161)

Reiter also contends that the imagery of Mischka searching for the self and her reflection in the mirror illustrates her longing for childlike innocence connected to the place where she became conscious of herself as an individual, where – in terms of Lacan’s “mirror stage” and the entry into language – she first recognized herself in the mirror (286). After her daughter is born and she has found an apartment for them to move into, Mischka hopes to achieve a degree of stabilization and “meine Spiegelsucht einzudämmen, wenn ich durch den großen Spiegel meiner Kindheit gehe” (*Spaltkopf* 167). Mischka was not able to attend her father’s funeral in St. Petersburg after his death, but several years later she writes, “[i]ch spüre, dass diese Reise sein muss, obwohl sie mir zutiefst zuwider ist. Etwas in mir befindet, dass der Zeitpunkt gekommen ist, das Grab meines Vaters zu sehen” (*Spaltkopf* 167). When she finally visits her father’s grave, her cousin forces her to give up the mirror that she clings to as a measure of security. Reiter likens the violence involved in exorcising Mischka of the mirror to Alice shaking the Red Queen in Carroll’s classic fantasy novel *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* (277). Both sequences have the similar effect of returning the protagonist to reality. In Mischka’s case, sacrificing her mirror enables her to break the *Spaltkopf*’s spell. Upon returning to her childhood home, she is finally able to face her fears surrounding her identity and the *Spaltkopf*: “Aus dem spiegelnden Fensterglas blickt mich ein seltsames Gesicht an. Halslos, gasförmig, flächig und viel größer als mein eigenes, das ich durch es hindurchscheinen sehe. Ich erkenne ihn sofort. Den *Spaltkopf*” (*Spaltkopf* 185). Not only is she able to see the *Spaltkopf*, but to step behind the mirror of her childhood and look through her reflection in the window pane into the back courtyards of St. Petersburg: “Ich näherte mich ihm vorsichtig, bis Nase und Stirn die kühle Scheibe berühren und

ich durch ihn in die St. Petersburger Hinterhöfe tauche und nur noch die Häuser ringsum zu sehen sind” (*Spaltkopf* 185). It is Mischka’s acceptance of the self and her place in the world that frees her from the Spaltkopf at the conclusion of the novel. Guenther suggests that in this final scene the Spaltkopf is revealed as Mischka’s alter-ego (n. pag.). In that event, it would mean that rather than a dissonant narrative voice competing with her for authority in the text, the Spaltkopf was a literary device controlled by Mischka all along. If we choose to follow this line of reasoning, the Spaltkopf can be seen as a counter-discursive strategy deployed by the protagonist, promoting fragmentation, multiplicity, interweaving, the deconstruction of home and family and symbolizing her search for identity. In a departure from these interpretations, however, I argue that the Spaltkopf is an independent narrating agent in the text, indicating Mischka’s lack of complete control over the narrative, which she must recover in order to assert her authority. It is only when she returns to her place of birth that Mischka is finally able to gain control over her life and reclaim her narrative by recognizing the Spaltkopf as well as her own reflection in the mirror. Her recognition of the monster not only removes his power over her and influence over her narrative, but allows Mischka to transcend the homesickness that haunted her father to the end of his life as well as the regret and repression that bound her grandmother to a traumatic past, resulting in self-hatred and alienation from her children, and to embrace a transcultural identity that is performative, indeterminant and multiple. By the end of the developmental process presented in the novel, Mischka has established herself as an agentive actor and the primary narrator in the text and through self-narration, she has documented her process of critically reflecting on the constructedness of identity as well as her own process of “becoming” an identity over time. This self-reflexivity has brought her to terms with the idea that as a transcultural subject with the ability to transcend traditional “fixed” borders, she will

continue to form and reform her identity in motion as well as cultural encounters, endlessly creating the self as she travels in the world.

Chapter 6: Conclusion

Sascha and Mischka employ several poetic strategies as they reconstruct critical events and traumatic experiences in their lives and reflect on their own processes of “becoming” over time. I have identified the crucial ability to manipulate the presentation of events as one of the ways in which self-narration opens up a supraterritorial space for writers where they can traverse traditional temporal and spatial boundaries and build an identity across the span of a life. Throughout their lives both protagonists have been positioned by others as outsiders, victims, too young or not feminine enough based on their migration status, family history, social class or physical appearance. When these narrators actively engage in writing and rewriting their identities on the page and embrace the empowering potential of authorship, they resist identification assumed along the lines of country or language of origin and explode singular and universal understandings of migration experience and gender. Instead they negotiate for themselves transcultural identities that are performative, diverse, multiple and increasingly privileged in the context of economic and social globalization. Through narrative voice, narrative manipulation of the chronology of events and other literary strategies like fragmentation, intertextuality and the use of myth, narrators are able to conceptualize their own stories of the self, figuring as agentive actors as well as the world-creating writers of their own identities.

In *Scherbenpark*, Sascha’s ironic, irreverent, cheeky and combative narrative voice is a protective strategy to distance herself from the traits of traditional femininity that she disdains in other women such as weakness and vulnerability and to strengthen the performance of her tough

as nails persona. Sascha also utilizes literary techniques like analepsis and fairy tales to frame her narration of particular events, for example, the story of her mother's murder. The way in which she discourses this story allows her to cope with her trauma and exercise control over an event in which she felt futile by translating the inconceivable into a familiar format and integrating it into a comprehensible, completed story of the self. In *Spaltkopf*, Mischka employs similar strategies of self-narration such as multiplicity, fragmentation, circularity and interweaving. For instance, the four lessons that Mischka depicts at the beginning of the text are presented out of order. The refracted chronology may be read as her attempt to express that the process of identity building does not preexist cultural encounter and is not linear - beginning from a fixed site of departure and progressing towards a point of arrival that carries with it the promise of homecoming or reaching a final destination. Rather, in Mischka's narrative, she reassembles herself again and again. The medium of self-narration allows her to move freely between fixed identifications, reconstructing and reinterpreting her experiences and drawing lessons from them, which she uses to build a transcultural sense of being that revels in unhomeliness and uprootedness. Mischka also utilizes focalization as a technique to wander between the worlds of childhood and adulthood. The sudden switch in the point of view from which the story is being told evokes destabilization and disruption as a reflection of the unsettled, transitory state of her identity. Focalization also enables Mischka to travel fluidly between identity positions, finding new meaning in her memories and experiences as she explores novel identities and shapes her current self-image. Finally, Mischka uses intertextual references to fictive myths and fairy tales in order to facilitate her mobility between multiple identities and to move back and forth in time and place. Just as in *Scherbenpark*, shifting events into the familiar, though strange and fantastic fairy tale form helps Mischka make sense of her family's traumatic history of persecution and

suffering. The potential to cross cultural and historic boundaries allows Mischka to construct an identity in the present that takes into account and attempts to reconcile with her background. While her grandmother is haunted by her demons until her death, Mischka refuses to let the spectre of her own past derail her narrative or undermine her discursive authority. At the end of the novel she returns to her place of birth in order to confront the Spaltkopf as well as uncertainties about her own identity and ultimately succeeds in taking back control over her text and resisting pejorative connotations surrounding migrancy by proudly claiming an unsettled identity.

I have also investigated the ways in which the protagonists Sascha and Mischka write gendered identities, rather than universal migrant identities, and how the ability to appropriate this aspect of identity provides them with a means to exercise control over their bodies, which are often subject to changes beyond their control. Building upon a foundation laid by de Beauvoir and Butler, I have shown that gender is a changeable aspect of identity that lacks fixity and closure and cannot be traced to an originary position. From this perspective, being a gender is a continuous project of constructing the self that implies agency. This rejection of a stable, coherent or “proper” gender identity is similar to migratory subjectivities which are also multiple, moving and changing, rather than originated at some point (or place) in time after which they are fixed in form.

Sascha’s choice to appropriate codes of masculinity rather than femininity signals her opposition to traditional femininity, which she equates with weakness, helplessness and passivity. The female figures in her life - her mother and Maria - are victims of violence and submissive domesticity, respectively. In her view, women are fragile, empathetic to the point of self-destruction and invariably dominated and oppressed by men. Sascha is determined to

negotiate a different identity for herself. Therefore, she appropriates male qualities such as strength, dominance, assertiveness and aggression. Sascha also feels compelled to act as a paternal figure to her siblings and takes command over her family in the absence of male protection. Exercising control over the children as well as their guardian Maria and refusing to accept any contradiction from them is one of the ways in which she asserts her dominant role in the household as patriarch. However, Sascha also deploys her female sexuality in the novel. As she does not want to fall into the same category of female passivity as her mother, she has sex with Felix and later Volker as a means to establish a sense of agency and suppress her unwanted emotions and desires. Much like Sascha, Mischka struggles with feelings of powerlessness and a loss of control over the changes in her life as well as the changes taking place in her own body. Mischka's migration initiates these feelings which then heighten when she hits puberty. Just as the unexpected upheaval that severed ties to her homeland and childhood was abruptly imposed on her by external forces, Mischka likens her awakening sexuality to a second experience of migration, in which she again has no choice or control. By refusing traditional feminine-coded features associated with the body such as long hair and a thin frame, Mischka uses her body as a means to rebel against this unwanted "migration" or passage and to reassert a sense of control over her life. This ability to fashion and refashion her gender and appearance is one of the ways in which she signals how she understands herself and also how she wants to be read by others throughout the text.

I have analyzed how the protagonists in *Scherbenpark* and *Spaltkopf* use self-narration to trace their individual processes of "becoming" transcultural subjects and take command over the story of the self. Telling their identities offers Sascha and Mischka an opportunity to recover a sense of autonomy that they felt they had lost either in the context of migration, the family or

adolescent development. Through transcending limitations imposed on them by (dis)location, language, trauma and gender regulations, I have shown how the potential to imagine, interpret and write their own identities imparts agency to female narrators. By appropriating codes of masculinity, Sascha independently invents her own identity on the page, signaling her refusal to play the role of a passive victim who is written or controlled by someone else as her mother was. At the end of the text when Volker performs the role of paternal protector, Sascha is liberated from her duty to her family and able to leave the confines of her home in the ghetto. Despite the fact that the character's fate remains open, the text suggests that she can continue her exploration of the different locations and identity positions that she will inhabit in her life. At the conclusion of *Spalkopf* Mischka's recognition of the monster as well as her own identity allows her to establish herself as a performing actor as well as the primary narrator in the text. By coming to terms with her nomadic subjectivity, she can embrace the emancipatory effects of in-betweenness. In these two transnational texts, migration is no longer negatively associated with destabilization and loss. Instead the narratives become liberating, imaginative sites where the "displaced" protagonists are granted the freedom to endlessly create themselves in perpetual travel in-between places, cultures and languages and transcend traditional "fixed" boundaries as they continue to form their identities in cross-cultural motion and encounter. As a result, these migrant subjects become citizens of the world "able to move comfortably within multiple and diverse communication while resisting the temptation to search for a purer and less complex identity" (Pilar and Borrego 8). My analysis sees *Scherbenpark* and *Spalkopf* as transitory sites at the boundary between becoming and being, in which the protagonists of the texts engage in a project of self-discovery, constantly negotiating the space in-between.

I have located in recent transnational writing two exemplary cases of avowing

and acknowledging difference. However, both of the texts related to my discussion are narrated from the similar perspective of young, female protagonists. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding which realizes the multiple, diverse experiences of migration and imagines the possibility of plurality, it is important to account for both male and female experiencing characters as well as those who are illiterate or not yet proficient in the language of their host country and therefore incapable of documenting their story of migration in the form of self-narration, otherwise their histories will be ignored and erased. Furthermore, an all-encompassing approach will take into consideration those who do not “arrive” and accept a hybrid identity and for this reason, cannot successfully look back and evaluate the past. Such stories of border-crossing will also vary greatly depending on an individual’s country of origin and arrival, though transnational writers resist being limited by such binary placement. Nevertheless, the framework I have outlined in this thesis, which looks at identity as a process and disassociates the analyzed texts from authorial biography, provides a valuable point of departure for future studies concentrated on any transcultural context. Finally, other forms of artistic self-expression beyond prose, such as poetry, dramas, films and paintings, may be fruitfully studied as well. There are clearly many possible approaches to examining how disenfranchised subjects explore and embrace uprooted, unsettled subjectivities through self-narration, which will hopefully be undertaken in the future. I will conclude by suggesting that this thesis alone cannot be comprehensive or instantiate a transformation of the category of literature that concerns itself with the experience of migration. My reading, however, recognizes and engages with new forms of imagining and writing about the transnational self and opens a space for further studies, which will continue to raise consciousness about marginalized subject groups and carefully navigate the issues of mobility and memory, history and identity.

Bibliography

- “About.” *Alina Bronsky: Author of Broken Glass Park and The Hottest Dishes of the Tartar Cuisine*. Alina Bronsky. n.d. Web. 18 Mar 2016.
- Bal, Mieke. *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*. 1980. Trans. Christine van Boheemen. Toronto: UP Toronto, 1985. Print.
- Bamberg, Michael. “Identity and Narration.” *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Ed. Peter Hühn, et al., Hamburg: Hamburg UP. n.d. Web. 18 Mar 2016.
- Becker, Barbara von. “Überdosis Realität. Alina Bronsky, gewitzt, über ein russisches Auswanderermädchen.” *Frankfurter Rundschau*. Frankfurter Rundschau. September 2008. Web. 18 Mar 2016.
- Bhabha, Homi. *The Location of Culture*. New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Biendarra, Anke. “Cultural Dichotomies and Lived Transnationalism in Recent Russian-German Narratives.” *Transnationalism in Contemporary German-Language Literature*. Ed. Elisabeth Hermann, Carrie Smith-Prei, and Stuart Taberner. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2015. 209-227. Print.
- Bronsky, Alina. *Scherbenpark*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2008. Print.
- Butler, Judith. “Sex and Gender in Simone de Beauvoir’s *Second Sex*.” *Yale French Studies* 27 (1986): 35-49. Print.
- . *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990. Print.
- . *Undoing Gender*. New York: Routledge, 2004. Print.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Trauma: Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1995. Print.
- Chambers, Iain. *Migrancy, Culture, Identity*. London; New York: Routledge, 1994. Print.
- Dagnino, Arianna. *Transcultural Writers and Novels in the Age of Global Mobility*. West Lafayette: Purdue UP, 2015. Print.
- Fachinger, Petra. *Counter-discursive Strategies in First-World Migrant Writing*. Diss. University of British Columbia, 1993. Web.
- Goffman, Erving. *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*. Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1959. Print.
- Graham, Peggy. “Book review: Autobiographical ‘*Splithead*’ depicts East-West divide.” *DW*.

- Deutsche Welle. November 2011. Web. 18 Mar 2016.
- Guenther, Christina. "Julya Rabinowich's Transnational Poetics: Remembering Border-Crossings in Narrative and Theater." University of Waterloo. Waterloo, ON. 30 October 2015. Keynote Address.
- Jay, Paul. *Global Matters: The Transnational Turn in Literary Studies*. Cornell UP, 2010. Print.
- Kraenzle, Christina. *Mobility, Space and Subjectivity: Yoko Tawada and German-language Transnational Literature*. Diss. University of Toronto, 2004. Print.
- "Literaturpreise." *zentrum exil*. zentrum exil. n.d. Web. 18 Mar 2016.
- Mennel, Barbara. "Alina Bronsky, Scherbenpark: Global Ghetto Girl." *Emerging German-Language Novelists of the Twenty-First Century*. Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2011. 162-178. Web.
- Morley, David. *Home Territories: Media, Mobility and Identity*. London and New York: Routledge, 2000. Print.
- Moslund, Sten Pultz. *Migration Literature and Hybridity: The Different Speeds of Transcultural Change*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.
- Muaremi, Jeta. "Erinnern und Erzählen in 'Spaltkopf' von Julya Rabinowich." Diplomarbeit Universität Wien, 2013. Print.
- "Nominierungen 2009: Jugendbuch." *Deutscher Jugendliteraturpreis*. Arbeitskreis für Jugendliteratur e.V. 2009. Web. 18 Mar 2016.
- O'Neill, Patrick. *Fictions of Discourse: Reading Narrative Theory*. UP Toronto, 1996. Print.
- Pilar, Silvia and Castro Borrego. *Cultural Migrations and Gendered Subjects: Colonial and Postcolonial Representations of the Female Body*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Pub., 2011. Print.
- Powers, Elizabeth. Rev. of *Scherbenpark* by Alina Bronsky. *World Literature Today* 83.3 (2009): 60-61. Web.
- Rabinowich, Julya. "Die Schriftstellerin in mir wird nun wohl in dieser Wohnung nach Schätzen graben." *Wortbrücken: Anthologie; das Buch zum Literaturpreis Schreiben zwischen den Kulturen 2003*. Ed. Christa Stippinger. Wien: Ed. Exil, 2003. 15-29. Web.
- . *Spaltkopf*. Wien: edition exil, 2008. Print.
- Reiter, Andrea. "The Appropriation of Myth as a 'Language' in Julya Rabinowich's 'Jewish' Novels." *Leo Baeck Institute* 59 (2014): 267-286. Web.

- Riegler, Roxane. Rev. of *Splithead* by Julya Rabinowich. *Journal of Austrian Studies* 45 (2012): 201-203. Web.
- Rimmon-Kenan, Shlomith. *Narrative Fiction: Contemporary Poetics*. London: Methuen, 1983. Print.
- Rushdie, Salman. "In Defence of the Novel, Yet Again." *Step Across This Line. Collected Non-Fiction 1992-2002*. New York: Random House, 2002. 406-442. Print.
- Schmid, Wolf. "Implied Author." *The Living Handbook of Narratology*. Ed. Peter Hühn, et al., Hamburg: Hamburg UP. n.d. Web. 18 Mar 2016.
- Schmidt, Sabine. "Erfahrungen mit einem anderen Land." *buchjournal* 4 (2010): 12-15. Web.
- Schwaiger, Silke. "Baba Yaga, Schneewittchen und Spaltkopf: Märchenhafte und fantastische Elemente als literarische Stilmittel in Julya Rabinowichs Roman *Spaltkopf*." *Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 2 (2013): 147-163. Web.
- Seyhan, Azade. Introduction. *Minorities in German Culture*. Ed. Russell A. Berman, Azade Seyhan, and Arlene Akiko Teraoka. Special issue of *New German Critique* 46 (1989): 3-9. Web.
- Taberner, Stuart. "Transnationalism in Contemporary German-language Fiction by Nonminority Writers." *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies* 47.5 (2011): 624-645. Web.
- Wagner, Irma. "Aber die Leser mögen sie trotz ihres Gezickes November." *koelner*. Kölner Illustrierte. November 2008. Web. 18 Mar 2016.
- Willms, Weertje. "Die 'Newcomerin' Alina Bronsky im Kontext der russisch-deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur und ihre Rezeption im deutschen Feuilleton." *Studien zur deutschen Sprache und Literatur* 1 (2013): 65-84. Web.
- Wyce, Marion. "Alina Bronsky: The Hottest Dishes of the Tartar Cuisine." *The Literary Review* 54 (2011): 211. Web.