

“... ein Unglück hatte zugeschlagen ...”:
Views on the past in Hungarian-German literature
of the 20th century

The Hungarian-German minority is one of the oldest minorities in Hungary, but its social and political significance as well as its size have undergone great fluctuations in the course of history. German culture was also very influential and played an important role in Hungarian culture, especially during the first half of the 19th century. Additionally, a number of renowned writers originating from Hungary were of German descent and sometimes even published both in Hungarian and German, for example Nikolaus Lenau, Franz Molnár, or Sándor Márai. However, these are not the writers that come to mind when thinking of Hungarian-German literature, even though the Hungarian-German cultural centre in Pécs was named after the Austro-Hungarian writer Nikolaus Lenau. It was only at the beginning of the 20th century when this minority first developed something resembling a sense of community. The first Hungarian-German writers started publishing their works during the Interwar Period. However, several strokes of fate awaited the Hungarian-German minority in the following decades, disrupting the Hungarian-German literary scene. It was not until 1973 that the Hungarian-German newspaper *Neue Zeitung* promoted a literary competition entitled *Greift zur Feder!* to revive Hungarian-German literature. Since then there has been a steady production of German-language Hungarian-German minority literature. These works have attracted only limited attention outside the minority context, but also within the Hungarian-German minority context itself – mostly because comparably few members of the Hungarian-German minority know German well enough to read let alone produce literature in German (Regner 2004, Erb 2010). This is problematic since the significance of minority literature exceeds the literary context by far, especially when it comes to questions of identity formation, collective memory, and

coming to terms with the past. While all three aspects are worth an in-depth analysis, this paper focuses on the third aspect by taking a closer look at the ways in which the past is dealt with in selected texts by Hungarian-German authors of different generations. By doing this, I aim to show not only how different approaches to the Hungarian-German past are among the several generations but also what significance coming to terms with the past itself has among them.

The Development of Hungarian-German Identity in the Mirror of Historical Developments

When discussing the Hungarian-German past, it is crucial to familiarize oneself with the most important aspects of the minority's history. It is also essential to note that Germans in Hungary have never formed a homogeneous group with a distinct collective identity during their long history – not even today. Historically speaking, the settlement of the Germans was a multi-phase process: the first accounts of Germans in Hungary date to the late 10th century. After the first German knights and clerics, as well as their peasant subjects, had come to Hungary, miners and craftsmen followed during the 13th and 14th centuries. In the 17th century, after the Ottoman rule, a great number of German peasants was brought to Hungary to help the revitalization of agriculture. The German community was not only socially heterogeneous, but also in terms of origins: the settlers came from different regions like Bavaria, Alsatia, Hanover, Prussia, Saxony, Swabia, Switzerland, and the hereditary lands of the Habsburg empire – to name just a few. As a result of several waves of colonization originating from different regions, both dispersed and very compact German settlements emerged in several regions of Hungary. However, these regions were quite far from each other and there was no urbanized German centre (Pável 2006: 47). Consequently, a political sense of unity could not evolve among Germans living in Hungary. Until the 19th century, the Hungarian-Germans' sense of solidarity focussed on local and/or family communities. No efforts were made to form a general German community, nor were there interactions between the scattered settlements or organizations to unify the German groups (Fischer 2004: 12). Eventually, following industrialization, urbanization, and the subsequent

development of a German bourgeoisie, the Hungarian-Germans showed very little resistance to a steadily increasing assimilation to Hungarian society. The change came at around 1900, when a turn to ethno-cultural and politico-national unity became more important. However, at first this turn was limited to the respective local communities, as the German bourgeoisie of the bigger cities such as Budapest or Pécs could not form a community of interests with the German peasants. After World War I, the political climate in Hungary became increasingly nationalistic due to the loss of two thirds of the former Kingdom of Hungary's territory. A great number of Hungarians found themselves living outside the borders of Hungary after the peace treaty of Trianon, but also important German centres like Burgenland, Spiš/Zips, and Transylvania/Siebenbürgen were now separated from Hungary. During the interwar period, the influence of Germany and Austria rose due to German and Hungarian revisionist policies that ultimately led to Hungary's alliance with Germany in World War II. At the same time, the first minority politicians rose to prominence and promoted the concept of ethnic identities within the minorities. In the early 1930s, when the economic situation of the Hungarian-German peasants worsened, the Hungarian-Germans started to present themselves and organize themselves as an ethnic minority. They used the German word *Volksgruppe* to identify themselves. There was also a so-called *Völkischer Flügel* under the direction of Franz Basch named *Volksbund*, which promised to secure social and economic survival as a group in opposition to the dominating Hungarian majority society (Seewann 2004: 6). The political and national awakening of the Hungarian-German minority faced its members with a choice: they could either assimilate and hold on to an individual ethnic identity in private without group membership, or support the increasingly nationalistic ideology of the *Volksbund* as well as efforts to evolve from an isolated minority to a German ethnic group striving for autonomy from the Hungarian state and bonding with the German "motherlands" (Gerner 2004: 56). Consequently, when Hungary joined World War II as an ally of Germany, there were Hungarian-Germans who voluntarily joined Hitler's army. After World War II, this new collective identity of the Germans was systematically destroyed without consideration for those who had not been politically active in the *Volksbund*. The deprivation of rights, the expropriations and

expulsions during the coalition years until 1949 and the first years of the Stalinist regime of Mátyás Rákosi returned Hungarian-Germans to a situation comparable to the time of the first settlements: "Without possession, bereft of the solidarity of the ethnic group, which as such was outlawed, each family had to start all over again completely on its own" (Seewann 1992: 149)¹. These developments had devastating effects on German settlements, for example in Budapest: the counties of Pest and Nógrád were the most important settlement areas for the Hungarian-Germans at the beginning of the 20th century up until 1945. Approximately 140,000 Germans lived in this region. After World War II, the situation changed drastically:

Communism almost sounded the death knell for the Germans. The new political elite, especially the communist powers, wanted to gain ground primarily in Budapest and set up their own business in the houses and with the assets of the Germans. After World War II, the German cultural life in former "German" Budapest was almost severed. (Lauer 1999: 162)

According to the numbers of the 1941 and 1949 population censuses, the events during and after World War II caused a population decline of 99 % among the Hungarian-Germans on a national level: while in 1941 a total of 302,198 people identified as members of the German minority, the number fell to 2,617 people in 1949 (Bindorffer 2007: 10–11).

From the Hungarian-German minority, which in 1941 comprised almost half a million, 50,000 were conscripted – mostly by force – to the SS, 60,000 were 'evacuated' to Germany or Austria by the end of the war, and 15,000 fled. Of these, approximately 50,000 came back, 11,000 died, and 64,000 remained abroad. Another 64,000 were deported by Soviet troops of which only 48,000 managed to return. Finally, around 170,000 'Swabians' were expelled from Hungary in the framework of the 'resettlement policy' made possible by the Treaty of Potsdam. (Klimó 2006: 172)

Those few who stayed in Hungary tried to blend in with the majority society. An obvious sign of this effort was the changing of family names right after World War II. Between 1945 and 1948, a total of 46,000 peo-

¹ Translations from German- and Hungarian-language sources are my own.

ple, half of them belonging to the German minority, changed their family names. Most of the unwanted names were German or German-sounding and were replaced with Hungarian names (Klimó 2006: 171–172). Not only had German names disappeared from the public, but so had the German language, which was now only – if at all – spoken at home. This retreat of the minority into the private sphere was fostered by the non-existing minority policy of socialist Hungary that followed the “concept of collective guilt” applied during the coalition years. After expulsions had led to the diminution of the minority, the remaining German settlements became even more scattered due to socialist collective farming, forced industrialization, and – in some cases forced – internal migration. However, these were effects of general socialist politics, not specific measures aimed at the German minority – or any other minority living in Hungary. Until 1969, there was no explicit minority policy, as the so-called “automatism thesis” claimed that all inner contradictions, such as issues concerning the ethnic minorities, would resolve automatically within a socialist society (Gerner 2004: 56). This form of disregard for the minorities had a destructive effect on the identity formation of the Hungarian-Germans. The German minority witnessed a serious disruption of their identity after 1945 and the socialist period entailed an extensive loss of their identity (Seewann 2004: 7). After the revolution of 1956, the protection of minority rights became an issue in Hungary, although at first the focus was on Hungarian minorities outside of Hungary. During the term of János Kádár as General Secretary of the Hungarian Socialist Workers’ Party (MSZMP) from 1956 to 1988, the socialist minority policy was revised. As a result, the Germans – and other minorities within Hungary – were granted the status of a recognized minority and supported by the socialist state in 1969 (Gerner 2004: 56). This status allowed the Hungarian-Germans to found ethnic organizations that could publish minority newspapers and minority literature, establish cultural institutions and clubs for the members of the minority, and launch several minority education programmes on different levels, from kindergarten to higher education. In the 1970s, the first ethnic commissions were established in selected Hungarian counties; in the 1980s, a centre for minority research was established in Pécs (Klimó 2006: 176–178).

The period of stabilization of the Hungarian socialist regime that started in the 1970s had its positive effects on the Hungarian-German minority. The main goal of the minority policy was to integrate the minorities into the socialist society without them losing their language, culture, or ethnic identity. Consequently, the henceforth contented minorities were supposed to function as bridge builders and contribute to the Hungarian state and its cross-national relations. This progressive treatment of the minorities within Hungary was meant to serve as an example for the minority policy of the neighbouring socialist countries in order to improve the situation of the Hungarian minorities in Czechoslovakia, Ukraine, Romania, and Yugoslavia (Pável 2006: 91). All these developments did not change the fact that minority organizations and representatives were still subject to the party's whims concerning individual concrete issues, but they did, however, lead to a significant growth of the minority. While in 1949 only 2,617 Hungarian-Germans were counted in Hungary, their number increased to 8,640 in 1960, to 11,310 in 1980, and finally to 30,824 in 1990. In the 2001 census, a total of 62,105 people identified as members of the Hungarian-German minority (Bindorffer 2007: 10–11).

Today, Hungarian-Germans live in several settlement areas in Hungary, three of them being considered "German centres": the western region of Hungary comprising the cities of Sopron (Ödenburg) and Szombathely (Steinamanger), the Hungarian low mountain range between Lake Balaton and the Danube bend containing the cities of Veszprém (Wesprim), Székesfehérvár (Stuhlweißenburg) and Budapest, a region in the south of Hungary, also referred to as *Schwäbische Türkei* ('Swabian Turkey') in German due to the settlement of German peasants after the Ottoman siege, comprising the counties of Somogy (Schomodei), Baranya (Branau) and Tolna (Tolnau), as well as the city of Pécs (Fünfkirchen).

According to research conducted since the change of the Hungarian minority law in 1993 (1993: LXXVII "A nemzeti és etnikai kisebbségek jogairól"), the Hungarian-Germans do not have a distinct national identity or specific awareness of their minority existence. Seewann (1992: 150) states that most Hungarian-Germans have no interest in presenting themselves as an ethnically defined social group and even less interest in

getting involved politically to revive the minority's group consciousness or national identity and culture. The consequent diffuse sense of Hungarian-German identity hinders the minority's politico-social creative power (Seewann 1992: 152). Spannenberger (2004: 81) doubts that the Hungarian-German minority considers itself a community of interests and of common destiny. The elected representatives of the regional minority self-governments focus only on the cultural sphere by supporting local minority choirs or folk-dance groups. Bindorffer (2007: 8) also emphasizes that it is provenance or family history which forms the main basis of minority awareness among the Hungarian-Germans. It manifests only in the upholding of their specific culture through folk dance or traditional costumes. However, in Spannenberger's eyes this cultural engagement is not enough to strengthen the ethnic and national identity of the Hungarian-Germans (2004: 82), and Aschauer even doubts the existence of a socially or ethnically definable group of Hungarian-Germans due to the lack of a sense of community among them (Aschauer 1992: 236–237). As Gerner (2004: 57) shows, although the Hungarian-Germans are increasingly interested in organizing themselves along ethnic categories in order to access economic resources afforded by German and Austrian international initiatives for German minorities abroad, this form of engagement is still mostly limited to the preservation of the folkloristic heritage and cannot be equated with a real sense of community within the minority. This is due to the high level of artificiality and the choreographing of these cultural manifestations, as the traditional elements of the minority culture are no longer a part of everyday life but survive only within a festive context – mostly on the stages of village festivals, regional minority meetings, and galas with folk dance programmes (Bindorffer 2007: 8–9). In this context, one must keep in mind that folk dances, folk songs, and traditional costumes are generally characterized by regionalism, so that the cultivation of the respective traditions may even encourage a differentiation rather than a sense of community among the different Hungarian-German communities in Hungary. In his novel *Téli bárány*, Hungarian-German author Márton Kalász impressively describes how the inhabitants of two neighbouring Hungarian-German villages live in constant mutual hostility because of the differences between their traditional costumes and customs.

The significance of literature for the Hungarian-German minority must be viewed through the lens of this situation. In fact, literature can play a crucial role within the process of identity formation and community building – even if the circumstances in which it is written are challenging, as is the case for contemporary Hungarian-German literature.

Literature and Identity Formation

In connection with the concept of collective identity, Jan Assmann emphasizes the need for an explicit commitment of the individuals to the group they belong to. He argues that collective identity or we-identity is essentially a picture that a group constructs of itself and with which the members of the group can identify. At its core, collective identity depends on the extent to which the individuals are willing to be part of a group and identify with it. Consequently, collective identity can only be as strong or weak as it is alive within the minds of the group members and as much as it is able to motivate their thinking and actions in everyday life (Assmann 2002: 132). Bearing Assmann's thoughts in mind, it becomes evident why literature plays such an important role in this context:

By talking about mutual memories, life stories and customs, groups envision those aspects of their past that characterize them as that specific group and therefore must not be forgotten. Through the active participation of individual protagonists in such a collective memory they are not only provided with group-specific memories, but also perceptions schemes that frame the individual's self-understanding. The practice of shared interpretation of the past is also linked to the emergence of new collective horizons within meaning and identity construction. The collective identity of a group is the result of the shared interpretation of the past. (Neumann 2003: 52–53)

Literary texts of all genres function as media for the collective memory (Erl 2011: 173). In fact, literary works cannot only be considered as a form of communicating mutual memories and life stories, but there are also a number of intersections between literature and memory. In our memory, complex past events are represented in a condensed form by specific topoi. Pierre Nora (2005) described this phenomenon with his

concept of the *lieux de mémoire*, which explains how collective memories become manifest in certain things such as places, real or mythical personalities, customs, symbols, rituals, etc. Consequently, these things become conceptual topoi, but as such they are not necessarily shared or interpreted in the same way by all individuals of a group. Such a condensed view is also a typical attribute of literature, where the combination and overlapping of different semantic spheres in a small space becomes possible. How these verbal images are interpreted or decoded is thus highly dependent on the individual reception process.

Another important parallel between memory and literature is the act of narration. Behind the creation or even construction and formulation of every text, as well as every memory, lies narration – and narration means selection: during the process of constructing a coherent story, only certain elements worthy of being remembered or told are selected from a whole host of possible elements to be integrated into the story. Narrative strategies enable the coherent construction of history – from the ancient myth to contemporary history – and its interpretation, just like in literature (Erl 2011: 174).

Thus, literary works may give insights into past constructions of reality and collective memory and identity, but the potential of literature is not limited to the affirmation of existing self-perceptions and collective ideas and values, but also includes the direct opposite, namely their critical reflection or even the accentuation and dissemination of subversive counter-memories that enable the development of alternative models of identity (Neumann 2003: 57). Through literature, events forgotten by society can be brought back to mind, the cosmos of fictional memories can be fanned out to numerous different co-existing interpretations of the past. Texts narrated from or focussing on multiple perspectives show different perspectives of memory and reveal similarities or differences between the interpretations of the shared past. The level of divergence shows how homogeneous or heterogeneous a given community sharing a common past is (Neumann 2003: 70). Literature can, for example, be exploited for the constitution of one dominating perspective on the past and thus for the support of the self-understanding and social or political dominance of a group derived from that particular perspective.

In this context, fictionality is a crucial asset of literature, which becomes an experimenting ground for cultural experiences. Existing versions of memory can be expanded by forgotten or fictional elements and thus produce new or alternative versions of memory, which then again restructure the experienced reality through imagination. Socially established elements of the collective memory and identity can be questioned and new perspectives on the collective past can be brought up, which can ultimately influence the extra-literary reality (Neumann 2003: 71). This specific potential of literature becomes even more important in the context of collective memory and identity formation. According to Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, minority literature is by default created from a specific position or point of view resp. point of discourse (Kreuzmair 2010). Consequently the individual space becomes public within the tightness of the minority. This entails the tendency of all literary expression to bear collective meaning (Deleuze & Guattari 1976), which leads to the strong political character of minority literature.

Therefore, analysing the approach to the past in Hungarian-German literature shows how differently the writers of the minority deal with historic events that severely impacted their lives and the development of the minority itself, and provides an insightful perspective on identity construction within the minority today.

Dealing with the past in the literary work of four generations

The first generation

Traditionally, Hungarian-German writers are divided into three generations in scholarly literature, although the model has today been extended to a fourth generation. The first generation comprises writers such as Georg Fath (1910–1999) or Franz Zeltner (1911–1992), the founding fathers of what is considered contemporary Hungarian-German literature. Typical works of their era were writings for peasants, appearing in the forms of vernacular poetry, calendar stories and/or short stories. The authors of this generation engaged in writing for their own pleasure, but the main motive of their writing was a cultural commitment to educate the community. They wanted to produce “practical literature” and keep

the dialects of their respective home communities alive in order to serve the collective memory of the minority. Poetically, their works were modelled on the traditional forms of 19th century emotional poetry, occasional verse, and folk songs. They had no intention of producing high-quality literature, partly because they considered themselves amateur writers who were only autodidacts in literature incapable of achieving literary virtuosity, and partly because they believed that their audience would not be able to understand them if they would try to meet higher standards in their writing (Propst 1998). Their poems mostly evolve around the topics of home – either the land of the ancestors or their own Hungarian-German village milieu – and heritage as well as longing for the past using motives such as wild animals, nature, trees, branches and roots, etc., which became typical for Hungarian-German literature as will be shown below. The tone of their writings about the past is rather melancholic when they reflect on the time before the war or the war itself. However, past traumas are often mentioned but instead of re-evaluating these issues, the authors mostly just touch upon them. Some of their poems written in dialect present a humorous approach to the past by evoking enjoyable situations of everyday life, presenting literary snapshots of the amusements of small village communities. Franz Zeltner's poem *Brennberg* (written in 1952), which deals with the closing of the mine in Brennberg in Western Hungary, shows a combination of both elements typical of this generation's writings:

Was sich hier alles zugetragen, an Freude und an grossem Leid, /
in guten und in schlechten Tagen, als Armut grösser war als heut. /
Doch gab es auch recht schöne Feste, wo man den Kummer leicht vergaß, /
zum Kirtag kamen viele Gäste, und alles froh beisammen saß.

Da floßen Wein und Bier in Strömen, zu essen gab es auch recht viel, /
di Musi jauchzt in kecken Tönen, für Kinder gabs das Ringelspiel. /
Dann kamen Zeiten voller Klagen, mit Lachen wars vorbei und aus, /
ein Unglück hatte zugeschlagen, und Trauer herrscht in jedem Haus.

It is striking how Zeltner refers to several traumatic events in the past without naming them explicitly – the reader can only guess what he alludes to when talking about great pain, disaster, or grievance. However, the primary intention of writers like Zeltner was to write for an audience

he knew, an audience that probably lived in the same region, spoke the same dialect, and hence knew what past events he was referring to. Quite similarly, Georg Fath refers to the traumatic period after World War II in his poem *Abschied* which was written in 1947 and had “In der Fremde” marked as the place of writing. Without explicitly stating the reason for his departure, the lyrical self makes it clear that it is a painful and involuntary farewell, which can either be read as a swan song dedicated to the old traditional Hungarian-German village way of life in the light of industrialization and urbanization, or as an allusion to resettlements and expulsions of Hungarian-Germans that took place after 1945 while the rest of Hungary was relieved by the end of the war:

Die Welt so grün, der Himmel blau, / der Frühling war erwacht. /
Die Wiese lag im Morgentau / noch von der letzten Nacht. [...] /
Ich nur fand alles öd und leer, / obgleich es duft' und blüht. /
Der Frühling selbst erfreut nicht mehr / mein tief betrübt's Gemüt.

Vom Turm hör ich den Glockenschall / auch nur so dumpf und schwer. /
Mir war's, als hört ich aus dem Tal / auch sie vielleicht nicht mehr.

So ging ich aus mein' Dorfe fort, / mit tränenfeuchtem Blick. /
Ich sucht, doch fand kein Abschiedswort, / blieb' nur so gern zurück...
(Bechtel & Szendi 2014)

Years later, there is a turnaround: Fath's – though not explicitly denouncing – farewell is followed by the request: “Forget!”. Fath's poem *Vergiß'* appeared in the anthology *Jahresringe* (1st ed. 1982, 2nd ed. 1985).

Wozu mein Herz das bange Schlagen, / was ist's, was du so schwer vergißt, /
du hast nicht nur allein zu tragen, / vergiß', was nicht zu ändern ist.

Noch muß einst alles anders werden, / im Lenz wird alles wieder grün, /
wenn alles keimt und blüht auf Erden, / wird auch das Weh vorüberziehn.
(Bechtel & Szendi 2014)

As described above, the political situation in Hungary in the 1970s and 1980s was completely different for the Hungarian-Germans than that immediately after World War II. At a time when the Hungarian-German minority was slowly coming back to life and its value to the Hungarian majority society as a bridge builder was being discovered, it seemed fitting that “old woes” should pass and be forgotten so as not to hinder the

positive developments: “everything becoming different” and the return of “spring”. Forgetting the past was meant to serve a new bonding and reconciliation with the homeland, which was thus in line with the first generation’s typical original writing intention, originating from a commitment to the community.

The second generation

The second generation of Hungarian-German authors comprises writers such as Erika Áts (1934–2020), Ludwig Fischer (1929–2012), Josef Mikonya (1928–2006), Engelbert Rittinger (1929–2000), Franz Sziebert (1929–2012), and Georg Wittmann (1930–1991). They all grew up in the countryside surrounded by their respective German dialects. As children or young adults, they were traumatized by World War II and the ensuing discrimination and silencing of the German minority. When the political climate allowed for the revival of the Hungarian-German literary scene, these authors felt like they could finally verbalize all the pain and suffering they had gone through during the past decades. They also dealt with the Hungarian-German past in their works but do so in more explicit ways than representatives of the first generation. They focus on other topics such as the conservation and transmission of the traditional, rural way of life and the different dialects (Pável 2006: 108). The first task for these Hungarian-German authors was to contribute to the preservation of the German language itself – both the standard language and the dialects – which was also meant to promote a sense of national identity. The addressees of their literature can be divided into two groups. For the older readers, their literature was about self-expression, the representation of their past traditional life and its preservation, and simply about recognizing themselves. For the younger readers, the aspect of gaining a sense of identity and knowledge of their roots, i.e., finding or rediscovering a cultural tradition, played a dominant role (Seifert 1989: 126). As a consequence, the writings of this generation reflect on historical events the Hungarian-Germans faced, but topics like the authors’ relationships with nature and their immediate surroundings, the preservation of customs, traditions, and their mother tongue, as well as recalling the socially recognized qualities of Hungarian-Germans seem to predominate. Additionally, this generation also addressed contemporary problems of the

minority, like their relations to the Hungarian state and society as well as the changes taking place in it. However, issues of language and identity loss, which had their roots in the events of the first half of the 20th century, took centre stage. They had become a central subject for the intellectual elite of the minority. An outstanding example for this is the work of Erika Áts, who in her poetry dealt with issues of her time and questions concerning world politics and thus managed to rise above the mere (sometimes uncritical) self-representation of the Hungarian-German minority both in terms of content and aesthetics (Pável 2006: 110).

While a great number of works by the authors of this generation seem to rather focus on moving forward and, in accordance with the political expectations of the late socialist regime under János Kádár, on rediscovering the minority identity via exercising the language, customs, traditions, and folklore, other writings deal quite explicitly with the past traumas.

Ich nahm die Feder in die Hand / und wollte mal probieren /
Ob noch geeignet der Verstand / zum schwäbischen Studieren.

Ach, mühsam bring' ich Worte her / sie wollen sich nicht fügen /
Der Sack der Wörter ist fast leer / man müßte es bloß üben. [...]

Reichen wir brüderlich die Hand / und singen uns're Lieder! /
Zur Arbeit ruft das Vaterland / da sind wir alle Brüder. (Markus 2009: 5)

The poem *Ich nahm die Feder...* by Engelbert Rittinger written in 1973 is one of the most important poems of Hungarian-German literature, as it marks the starting point of the revival of the Hungarian-German literary scene. It is striking how Rittinger manages to write a poem about the issue of language loss without even touching upon its historical and political reasons. Not only does he give the impression that the language loss was self-inflicted, he also ends the poem with a schematic picture of socialist work ethic *par excellence*, in which all people are united as brothers through working for the socialist fatherland, which undoubtedly is Hungary. Quite similarly, in Nikolaus Márnai's poem *Wuhin kehscht tu?* (Where are you going?), written in dialectal German, the primary goal appears to be to help reform the Hungarian-German identity in accordance with the political expectations of the time, namely the integration of

the minorities into the socialist majority society. In this way, the poem emphasizes the reconstruction of the socialist country in which everybody is involved. It suggests historical continuity, and therefore neglects the disruption of the minority's history due to the wars and the repressions, deportations, and expulsions (Propszat 2005). The pain and injustice are mentioned but declared as already overcome within the same sentence. The Germans shall only look to the future so that the pain of the past can be forgotten, as Márnai puts it.

Es gab Leid, Freit un a Ungerechtigkeit / Awer heint hen mer iwerwunde ti
Verkangenheit. // Nach farne muß a jeder Schwowe schau / Nar so
verschwindet s Schlechti in ti Verkessenheit. (Szende 1984: 51)

A conscious confrontation with the traumatic past can be found in Josef Mikonya's work, for example in his volume of stories and poems, *Krähen auf dem Essigbaum* (1994). Mikonya focuses on the historical everyday life of Hungarian-Germans in the past. His point of reference is the village; the large-scale events of the "great, merciless history" are reflected in the individual fates of the war and post-war period that are in the foreground in his work. For example, in his story *Fuhrmann der Armen*, he addresses the pressure to assimilate during the interwar period, which was reflected in numerous name changes among the Hungarian-Germans, while his story *Intermezzo anno 1944* deals with the partly forced recruitment of young Hungarian-Germans to the fascist SS. In *Menschen in der Tiefe*, a young German miner boy informs his colleagues about the atrocities committed by the approaching Russian army, which was looting German settlements and killing innocent villagers, while in *Die Komteß*, Mikonya writes about the expulsion of the Germans that began in 1946.

However, what is striking here as in the case of other Hungarian-German writers of this and later generations is the introduction of a so-called "discourse of fate" – or rather, the discursive position of the "fated", in which the discourse of fate reconstructs the wartime and post-war history of Germans in Hungary. For the writers of the second generation in particular, this discourse serves as some kind of compromise between the discourse of loyalty, which legitimates writing, and the hitherto taboo but vitally important discourse of history. They try to reconcile both into

a discourse of identity, which, at that time, was fundamentally determined and constrained by the compulsive emphasis on loyalty to the established social order. In this context, it was only permissible to present wartime and post-war experiences as strokes of fate. This discourse and the victim identity that it constructs as a pattern for processing traumatic events are highly problematic from a social psychological point of view since they absolve the reader of responsibility and do not serve to confront the readers with themselves (Propsz 2005: 379). The discourse of victimhood, in which the 'fated' constructs the identity of the Germans in Hungary, is still dominant even in the writings of the third or fourth generation and is hardly questioned by alternating discursive positions, as will be shown in the following.

The third generation

The third generation of Hungarian-German writers differs from the first two insofar as most of the writers belonging to that group – among them Valéria Koch (1949–1998), Robert Hecker (*1963), Claus Klotz (1947–1990), Béla Bayer (*1951), and Josef Michaelis (*1955) – enjoyed higher education and mostly wrote and still write in Standard German, although they grew up with dialects. Another very important difference from the first two generations is that these writers deliberately chose to “be Hungarian-German” at a time when there was almost nothing left of a minority community which they could have naturally grown into. Hence, belonging to the minority is a deliberate intellectual decision for them that reflects upon their work (Propsz 1998).

Like the preceding generation, they deal with issues of the past, but also with the issues of language and identity loss, which became even more prominent in their world. And just like the preceding generation, the processes of language and identity loss are only linked to the period of the repressions and expulsions in the rarest of cases – partly also for political reasons, at least prior to the system change in 1989. The problem of language and identity loss is pressing for them, but its reasons and implications are not seen in a political or historical context, but rather in the social and even the personal one. The focus of these writers has mostly shifted away from the community and the collective to the individual and the personal life experience. The writers of this generation are still

connected to the traditional Hungarian-German way of life – the traditions and the idyllic, idealized, shared rural past before the great traumas of the 20th century are still an important point of reference. While their view is rather nostalgic the past is concerned, it is critical and pessimistic when it comes to the present or the future. The historical and political dimension of the difficult situation of the minority is still mostly factored out or only hinted at in their works. Instead, the young generation is fighting proxy wars against urbanization, industrialization, and the early beginnings of the ethno-business. The reader is mostly confronted with a rather lost and melancholic lyrical self that desperately tries to find its way back home into the real, authentic, traditional, long-gone Hungarian-German world of the ancestors in order to rebuild the Hungarian-German identity. It is a pessimistic self that believes to be the witness of the Hungarian-Germans' extinction. A famous example is the poem *Ungarndeutsch* by Valéria Koch, one of the best-known Hungarian-German writers who published a great number of literary works both in German and Hungarian: "**Ungarndeutsch** / Ist das Maß / des tüchtigen Aussterbens" (Bechtel & Szendi 2014). The poem *Ahnerls Lied* by Claus Klotz, another well-known Hungarian-German poet, points in a similar direction, as can be seen in this verse: "Schlaf, Kindchen, schlaf / bleib fleißig und schön brav, // Zum Häusle bauen, Auto kaufen / wirst du meine Sprach nicht brauchen // Schlaf, Kindchen, schlaf" (Bechtel & Szendi 2014). Klotz evokes the traditional notion of the diligent and well-behaved, plain Germans originating from the impression of the early German settlers and puts it into a contemporary context. Interestingly, the extinction of the German minority almost seems to be self-inflicted in his eyes, provoked by the Germans' tendency to be too diligent, too well-behaved – too willing to assimilate. In Klotz's eyes, the Hungarian-German traditions, which are so vigorously kept alive by his fellow writers, have become obsolete in the new socialist era, and the German virtues are only exploited for the new regime (Brantsch 2000: 7).

While Klotz's poetry is decidedly critical of the Hungarian-Germans' present, the poetry of Josef Michaelis, who has celebrated great success as a writer of children's books, is quite explicit and critical, even with regard to the recent past. Michaelis brings up the traumas of the 20th

century and connects them to the highly critical situation of the minority of his day, as can be seen in his poem *Agonie*, written in 1993:

Nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg
 wurden wir als Faschisten verschrien
 dann in die weite Welt vertrieben...
 Bald wurden die Vereine
 der Hierbleibenden aufgelöst
 dann unsere Namen geändert
 dann unsere Häuser weggenommen
 dann unsere Schulen gesperrt
 dann unsere Priester zum Schweigen gebracht
 dann unsere Bräuche verboten
 dann sangen unsere Mütter keine Wiegenlieder
 dann sprachen wir untereinander nicht mehr Deutsch
 dann radebrechten wir unsere Muttersprache
 dann ließen wir unsere Friedhöfe
 verwildern
 dann...
 zuletzt gaben wir
 unseren Glauben auf
 HEUTE HABEN WIR SCHON
 EIN MINDERHEITENGESETZ
 Jetzt bedeuten wir dem Westen nur billige Arbeitskraft
 jetzt werden wir als Touristenattraktion gezeigt
 jetzt werden sich die
 Gegensätze mit der Mehrheitsnation zuspitzen
 jetzt säen wir wieder Uneinigkeit unter uns
 jetzt verschneiden unsere
 noch deutsch sprechende Großeltern
 jetzt vermodern unsere Stammbäume
 jetzt wird die allerletzte Wurzel herausgerissen
 von uns selbst
 jetzt vergeuden wir
 die zurückgelegten Kreuzer unseres Erbes
 jetzt verkaufen wir unsere
 noch auffindbaren Volkstrachten
 jetzt stehen wir splitternackt da
 jetzt drehen sich unsere Ahnen im Grabe um
 jetzt schnitzen wir unsere eigenen Grabhölzer
 jetzt bekommen wir die letzte Ölung
 Jetzt...
 Jetzt atmen wir noch
 Jetzt möchte ich doch hoffen...
 HEUTE LERNEN UNSERE NACHKOMMEN

IM KINDERGARTEN
ALS MUTTERSPRACHE
EINE FREMDSPRACHE
Most magyarul folytassam?
(Soll ich jetzt ungarisch fortsetzen?)
(Bechtel & Szendi 2014)

Michaelis' poem recounts the death struggle of the Hungarian-German minority beginning with the traumatic events after the Second World War up until the present in which efforts are made to keep the minority alive by means of a minority law. But, in his framing, the minority has already lost its connection to itself, has lost its identity – by selling its national costumes, by acting as tourist attractions in order to capitalize on its status – and has lost its language. What stands out in this poem is that the members of the minority are held responsible for their own extinction: *our mothers* stopped singing German lullabies, *we* stopped talking German, *we* left our graveyards to rot, *we* are divisive, *we* rip out our last roots and waste our inheritance. He does not elaborate on the actual cause of this development – the past events mentioned at the beginning of the poem – but rather leaves the realization to the reader. The poem reads like an accusation that the minority has given up, that it has not managed to hold on to its language and its identity despite the atrocities of the wartime and the early Stalinist years in Hungary. Still, the agony ends with a tone of hope, although it seems tainted: *we* are still breathing ... but the language change has been completed: *Do I have to continue in Hungarian?* – a question that has become crucial for the Hungarian-German minority and its literature today. Research shows that the functional first language of the Hungarian-Germans is indeed Hungarian which they not only know best but use the most in the public and private spheres alike (Erb 2010: 137).

While Michaelis writes a series of texts and poems in which he openly and critically deals with the Hungarian-German past and relates it to the present, this third generation of writers is also dominated by the strategies of coming to terms with the past already known from previous generations: the effort to make peace, to look forward instead of backward, the invocation of community and the call for solidarity as a minority. Valéria Koch's poem *Gedenkzeilen über die Vertreibung* written in

1996 serves as an exemplary text for this – the last two verses are cited below:

Wir feiern mit leisen, versöhnenden Tönen, / gedenken des Schicksals von Vätern und Söhnen, / von mißbrauchten Kindern, die wir damals waren, / wir wollen der Zukunft jeden Haß ersparen. // Nie wieder Verirren im Dschungel der Gewalt, / vergebet dem Nächsten, der Unheil gestiftet, / stoppt schon den kleinsten Haß und sagt rechtzeitig Halt, / lebt friedlich; bei Gott wird der Feind streng gerichtet. (Bechtel & Szendi 2014)

The fourth generation

Younger writers such as Christina Arnold (*1977), Andrea Czövek (*1979), Laura Kolbach (*1974), Angela Korb (*1982), Mónika Szeifert (*1977), or Koloman Brenner (*1968) can be considered the fourth generation of Hungarian-German writers. Regarding their very high level of assimilation, taking up the role as Hungarian-German writers is even more of an intellectual decision than it was for the authors of the previous generation. These writers were mostly born into an urban environment, enjoyed higher education – some of them even studying *German as minority language and literature* at the universities of Budapest or Pécs – but most of them also write regularly in Hungarian. For them, Hungarian-German traditions are mostly part of distant memories of their childhood (e.g., time spent with their grandparents living in the countryside) and folkloristic reproductions (e.g., being a member of a choir or dance group) or serve as an intellectual framework or discursive reference point for their literary work. Their work is dominated by poetry based on personal experience, reflective poetry, and short prose narrations. The main topics are general life experiences like partings, separations, or (un)happy romantic relationships on the one hand, and specific Hungarian-German topics such as language loss and identity loss – or rather, identity building – on the other. This happens through dealing with the well-known topoi of Hungarian-German literature from previous generations, namely nature and village life, the “simple” and authentic life of the ancestors in the countryside, that are sometimes complemented by the grandparental experiences of war captivity and labour camps embedded within the context of their childhood memories or family histories. This narrative strategy yet again supports the above-mentioned discourse of

fate, which does not aim to deny or forget the traumas of the past but neither does it initiate a more critical examination of what happened, a deeper coming to terms with the past and its significance for the present of the minority. On the one hand, it seems these younger writers try to meet the challenge of embracing the implications of a modern heterogeneous minority society of individuals with multiple, split and/or fractured identities and its impact on their own personality or standing in the world. On the other hand, they are desperately trying to keep alive a long-gone, idealized version of the Hungarian-German past from which their identities are supposed to derive – a version of the past and a lost place of longing we also find in all previous generations. The reason for the loss is sometimes more or less explicitly named, but when its naming is finally possible after the initial silence, in most cases it is a 'blow of fate' whose victims are the Hungarian-Germans, while the offenders mostly remain veiled behind passive sentence constructions. Therefore, the youngest Hungarian-German writers also seem to shy away from a more differentiated approach to the Hungarian-German past, although they would have the means that the generations before them lacked. They could not only consider different perspectives on the past that became available for them after 1989, but also profit from their higher education and exploit the manifold possibilities of literature in an experimental, even playful, way to reflect upon the past from a contemporary point of view. The opportunity to contribute to the formation of identity within the Hungarian-German minority by rewriting, reassessing, questioning, or supplementing the shared narrative of the past remains largely unused. Instead, they seem to want to build on the familiar, hoping to strengthen a version of Hungarian-German identity that the generation before them has already considered lost. Consequently, when Bindorffer (2007) states that the primary basis for minority-awareness among the Hungarian-Germans today is their geographic origin – which is represented towards the outside world through the practice of folk dance and folkloristic dressing at most – a great part of contemporary Hungarian-German literature appears to be the literary equivalent to that. Even the writers of the fourth generation keep reaching back to the same motives, perspectives and melancholic or at least nostalgic and schematic tone of voice when dealing with the past, as the first generations of Hungarian-German writers

did. (A notable exception here are the Hungarian-language works of Hungarian-German authors, who do not even belong to the youngest generation of authors – prominent examples would be the novels *Téli bárány* by Márton Kalász and *Sváb evangéliom* by Robert Balogh.)

The following example illustrates the above: in Christina Arnold's short prose entitled *Der Marillenbaum*, the narrator tells the story of an apricot tree that stood in the garden of the parental home. The tree and its fruits evoke the narrator's childhood memories and family history. The latter is linked to the tree through countless memories letting the tree itself become a symbol of the family and its traditions.

Die Marille in unserem Garten war ein ganz besonderer Baum, mein Großvater hat sie wohl mal gepflanzt. Solche Bäume werden immer von Großvätern gesetzt. Wenn man das so sieht, war dieser Baum wohl auch ein Sohn eines vorherigen Großvaterbaumes. [...] Nun hing es vom Hausherrn ab, ob er taugt zum nächsten Großvater, der den nächsten Marillenbaum setzt, ob er mit der Familie in der Zukunft darunter tanzen möchte. Unser Marillenbaum ist gestorben, ein neuer wurde noch nicht gepflanzt. (Arnold 2010: 3)

The story becomes symbolically loaded when put into the context of the traditional motifs of Hungarian-German literature: especially the older generations of Hungarian-German writers made extensive use of motifs such as trees or roots to symbolize home and heritage (Balogh 2002: 246). Several Hungarian-German anthologies with typical titles such as "Deep roots", "Annual Rings", "The little branch" or "Confessions of a birch tree" refer to the usage of such typical motifs. In this context, Arnold is using the motif of the tree in a picture-book kind of way: the tree symbolizes the commitment to the Hungarian-German minority which has weakened over the generations and which needs to be kept alive by the decision of the patriarch. In this world view it is the father, who one day becomes a grandfather, who has to plant a new apricot tree after the old one had died. Arnold is referring to the necessity of a new, deliberate decision to belong to and identify with the minority, to contribute to keeping the minority alive. There is no explanation in the text why "the tree has died before", just like in many other poems referring to the past via nature metaphors. Nature in particular can also be a fateful force in people's lives and serves as a proxy for the familiar discourse of fate from

previous generations. Hence, the past trauma is yet again hinted at in familiar ways but not articulated, questioned, or reappraised. However, the tone of the narration leaves doubts as to whether that deliberate decision to plant the next tree and to keep the Hungarian-German traditions alive will eventually be made. This makes for a critical, thought-provoking ending. It is, indeed, a valid question, considering that most members of the minority no longer grow up in the rural environment that is evoked in its literature.

Conclusion

The Hungarian-German minority suffered a series of traumas over the course of the 20th century, which had a significant impact on the development of the minority in terms of its continued existence, collective identity, and command of language. In German-language Hungarian-German minority literature, there are different ways of addressing the past, with two narrative strategies predominating. On the one hand, the focus is on the present or the future, whereby the past is addressed but not dealt with in depth, questioned or reflected upon. On the other hand, the traumatic events of the recent past are addressed explicitly, but predominantly presented as strokes of fate, whereby a so-called discourse of fate has established itself over generations. This stands in the way of a deeper reappraisal and more differentiated and also innovative, updated narrative of the shared past. It stands out that up until today these strategies are prevalent among representatives of both the earlier and the later generations of Hungarian-German writers, even though they worked under completely different creative conditions – on the one hand in terms of their possibilities of expressing themselves regarding content and style, given the political circumstances, and on the other hand in terms of their personal level of education. Hungarian-Germans are a minority that has been struggling with the consequences of identity and language loss over the last decades while trying to survive in a modern society of individuals with multiple identities. By offering new and alternative perspectives on the Hungarian-German past and identity, literature could serve this minority as a platform to help identity building, attempting to remain relevant and connectable especially for the younger generations.

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