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LOVE AND WAR:
GERMAN-SLAVIC WARTIME RELATIONSHIPS IN
POST-WORLD WAR II LITERATURE

BY

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A THESIS SUBMITTED
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

Love and War: German-Slavic Wartime Relationships in Post-World War II Literature

by

John Jamison Ronald

The glorification of war and the thoughtless use of national stereotypes characteristic of 19th Century literature broke down in the later 20th Century after World War II and the end of the Cold War in 1991. German-speaking authors from various parts of Europe participated in this dismantling through their creation of engaging fictions related to the war experience which contain critical reexaminations of relationships between the Germans and Slavs at an individual, existential level. Here I examine Siegfried von Vegesack's *Tanja: Eine Erzählung aus dem Kaukasus*, Heinrich Böll's *Der Zug war pünktlich* and *Gruppenbild mit Dame*, Max Frisch's *Als der Krieg zu Ende war*, Herbert Eisenreich's *Tiere von ganz natürlicher Grausamkeit*, and Christa Wolf's *Moskauer Novelle*, for questions about the Slavic "other" are not limited to authors inside the borders of former West Germany.
Acknowledgments

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# Table of Contents

Abstract...........................................................................................................i

Acknowledgments..........................................................................................ii

Dedication.........................................................................................................iii

Introduction......................................................................................................1

Chapter 1: Aus dem Baltikum - Siegfried von Vegesack..............................8

Chapter 2: West Germany - the early Heinrich Böll.................................33

Chapter 3: West Germany - the late Heinrich Böll..................................48

Chapter 4: The Swiss perspective - Max Frisch..........................................64

Chapter 5: Aus Österreich - Herbert Eisenreich........................................74

Chapter 6: In der DDR, 1961 - the early Christa Wolf.............................80

Conclusion......................................................................................................89

Bibliography..................................................................................................102
This Master's Thesis is dedicated to the memory of Billy Robins
(1939-1997)
Introduction

In contrast to artistic literature of the 19th Century, which glorified war, extolled nationalism, and readily accepted "national" stereotypes without question, literature of the 20th Century, particularly after the horrific catastrophe of the First World War, almost always delivers a powerful anti-war message, criticizes blindly nationalistic ideologies, and calls old stereotypes into question. It is a literature that engages its readers at the level of the individual, of the Self and its relation to real and specific Others, and of the Self against the impersonal forces of History, Realpolitik, War, "Fate", etc. European Literature since the end of World War II has often sought an activist, oppositional and provocative role for itself, critically questioning popular society. It undermines prejudices and stereotypes, advocates broad social changes, and offers hypothetical representations of new and alternate realities. This has been especially the case in the literature of German-speaking Europe since 1945.

When examining German literary works from this period, one must consider a number of issues. The impact and aftermath of the Second World War is the most obvious, but the politics and growing East-West tensions of the Cold War are of almost equal importance. The shortcomings of the de-nazification programs, the imposition of communism in the eastern half of Germany and the restoration of capitalism in the western half of Germany by the Allied military governments all had profound effects on the development of post-war German culture. More disturbing was the revival of some of the pre-war stereotypes and prejudices that unwittingly served the interests of American cultural and military imperialism. Much of the American ideology and cultural
imperialism was accepted wholesale by Germans in the Federal Republic. The impact of American popular culture, particularly through the linguistic medium of American English, was far greater in West Germany than the cultural influence of the Russians in the German Democratic Republic whose impact was at best superficial. As West German filmmaker Wim Wenders noted:

The need to forget 20 years created a hole, and people tried to cover this...in both senses...by assimilating American culture: much more than French or Italian or British people did...the fact that U.S. imperialism was so effective over here was highly favored by the Germans' own difficulties with their past. One way of forgetting it, and one way of regression, was to accept the American imperialism.

The point, however, is to remember. In the words of Milan Kundera, "The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." It is precisely this moral imperative that drove many creative authors in German-speaking Europe to confront those wartime experiences in their literature, no matter how painful. They were disturbed by the willingness and desire of their countrymen to simply forget and resolved to keep the memory of the horrors of war and Nazism in the public consciousness through their artistic endeavors.

One of the negative myths kept alive by West German cultural conservatives, Allied political interests, and American popular culture was the portrayal of the Slav as a culturally inferior "weisser Neger". The cultural differences between Slavs, the ambiguous relationship of non-Russian Slavs with the disproportionately powerful Russians, and the cultural links between Germans and Western Slavs as fellow Central

1Wim Wenders as quoted in The New German Cinema by John Sandford (Barnes & Noble Books 1980) 104.

Europeans were suppressed, swept under and hidden behind the tyrannical, misleading, and all-embracing Soviet "Iron Curtain".

In addressing what to many seemed an obvious evasion of the question of wartime guilt and the past sins of extreme nationalism, some writers, including writers in the GDR like Christa Wolf, responded with works that confronted these stereotypes directly and sought to induce thought and debate, providing German society a conception of the Slav that flew in the face of American characterizations and centuries-old German prejudices against the Slavs.

Heinrich Böll's novel *Gruppenbild mit Dame* (1971), Christa Wolf's *Moskauer Novelle* (1961) and Max Frisch's drama *Als der Krieg zu Ende war* (1949) deal provocatively with love affairs between German women civilians and Russian male soldiers of the Red Army. Siegfried von Vegesack's *Tanja: Eine Erzählung aus dem Kaukasus* (1959) details the tragic love story between a male German intelligence officer and his female Russian interpreter, and Heinrich Böll's *Der Zug war pünktlich* (1953) deals with the brief and tragic love between a young German soldier and a Polish prostitute who works as an informant for the resistance. Herbert Eisenreich tells the story of an unusual, spiritual encounter between an Austrian soldier serving in the Wehrmacht and an old Russian grandmother in his *Tiere von ganz näurlicher Grausamkeit*.

Beyond their writing of artistic literature, Heinrich Böll and Siegfried von Vegesack both lent their support as committed artists and intellectuals to Willi Brandt's "Ostpolitik" and campaigned against American cultural, economic and geo-political
imperialism. In the words of Vegesack, "Rußland liegt uns näher, ist uns viel verwandter als Amerika."³

Rooted in all of these works are questions about the notions of personal and cultural identity, and questions about the irrationality of war. They seek to fully explore the personal, moral responsibilities of individual human beings in war and peace. What do human beings do when a hated, faceless, amorphous "enemy" is replaced by a real human face with a real and multifaceted personality and identity? What should they do?

The authors mentioned above have all attempted to answer these difficult questions. They have shown us how the horrors of war strip away an individual's humanity to its basic components. The actions of their fictional characters are all courageous acts of individual resistance and protest. The authors themselves expose the injustices of war and the sins of racism and cultural chauvinism. These works share a common effort to overturn the perverse Nazi racial divisions of "Übermensch" and "Untermensch" and pose the simplest question possible: was ist es, ein Mensch zu sein?

What is confronted is more than just the Nazi ideology, however. Each of these authors is, in their own way, and with their own strategies and agendas, undermining "national" stereotypes that stretch back into the 19th century and well beyond, back to antiquity and the division between "civilization" and "barbarians", with varying degrees of success and failure. This is an important investigation, for when we examine the etymological roots of all such adjectives as "deutsch" or "russkij", we find that in their earliest form they all mean the same thing: "person, people, people who speak my

language." In their own ways, each author in this study investigates the controversy of "Lebensraum" and the "Drang nach Osten", and the question of homeland for the Slavs as well as Germans. Siegfried von Vegesack was particularly sensitive to the Russians' right to their own land and deplored the attempts by the Nazi leadership to turn Russia into a "deutsche Kolonie". Having lost his family's own estate in the Baltic region as a result of the Nazi-Soviet pact, he felt enormous sympathy for anyone trying to hold on to their traditional "Heimat". Christa Wolf lost her homeland—not once but twice. She was born in what is now western Poland, but her family fled the onslaught of the Red Army and went to Mecklenburg. Her second homeland, the GDR, ceased to exist after German reunification in 1991. In all of their works examined here, Frisch, Böll, Eisenreich, Wolf and Vegesack are in search of deeply rooted universal human values at the fundamentally existential level.

With the apparent end of the Cold War, it is altogether fitting and proper that works such as these should be re-examined and their transcendent humanist message be thrust forward once more now that the rigidly ideological division of Europe between East and West seems to have broken down.

Not all of these wartime stories end happily—indeed, some are painful tragedies—but the beauty, purity and intensity of the love shared by the characters are transcendent. Readers would do well to remember that many of literature's greatest love stories, from Tristan und Isolde to Romeo and Juliet are also tragedies. What matters most in these stories is the truth, the humanity, the love and the hope they contain and the examples of individual courage in the face of overwhelming forces that they portray.
The works discussed here share important symbolic and structural similarities that must be examined in a careful work-by-work analysis. I have decided to sample works from all the major German-speaking areas of Europe, from West Germany (Böll), East Germany (Wolf), Switzerland (Frisch), Austria (Eisenreich), and the lands of the former German minorities in the Baltic Region (Vegesack). My rationale for the ordering of the chapters is based on a rough chronological timetable derived from the various plots of the stories and the order of publication of the various works, with the notable exception of Heinrich Böll's *Gruppenbild mit Dame*, which I included directly after the discussion of Böll's *Der Zug war pünktlich* so as to keep all the material on Böll in the same place. Vegesack's *Tanja* is placed where it is because of its complex internal structure and the important light it sheds on all the other works that follow in this study.

I shall examine the problem of language in each of the narratives, the psychological motivations for the attraction and desires of the leading characters and the seemingly metaphysical dimensions expressed in the forces of nature and the suggestion of a dream-, or meta-language that attempts to bridge gaps in ordinary communication by attempting to connect on a "higher" level, via music, poetry, etc. Moreover, I shall show how the savagery of war takes its toll on the human psyche, blurring cultural, ethnic and national differences in times of great distress and how, under the proper circumstances, love can flourish. It can erode ideological convictions and distinctions, leaving nothing but a basic humanistic impulse to flee with one's lover, to survive. This love and this desire to flee into an idyllic paradise with one's lover is an act of individual defiance and a protest against war, however futile. Allusions to the biblical narratives of Adam and Eve and the Holy Family of Mary, Joseph and Jesus as well as of the star-crossed lovers in
Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet are a constant in these works. What remains is the plea for humanity, love and peace. It is ultimately irrelevant if the fictional stories end tragically or happily.
Aus dem Baltikum - Siegfried von Vegesack

Siegfried von Vegesack's surprising novella *Tanja: Eine Erzählung aus dem Kaukasus* tells the story of a tragic love affair set in the Caucasus during the early stages of the Second World War (1942-1943), between a young German officer and a female Russian.

It is a masterful work of psychological fiction, frustratingly complex and enigmatic, much like Russia herself. A knowledge of Russian intellectual and social history, especially of the revolutionary period and later Stalinist era, is helpful for a full understanding and appreciation of the work.

The author demonstrates throughout his writings a profound understanding of, and fascination for the Russian people and their complex history. He was himself a Baltic German of aristocratic origin from the Riga area and studied in Russian schools as a youth before attending university in Berlin. Like his fictional protagonist in *Tanja*, he served briefly in the German Wehrmacht as a Russian language interpreter and translator, facilitating communication between the local population and the *Armee Wirtschaftsführung* charged with harnessing the natural resources of captured territory for use by the German Reich and its war-machine. While serving in Russia, Vegesack recorded his experiences with a camera and in a written journal. These he combined with official wartime documents he had composed, and published all of these materials in one concise, hardbound book titled *Als Dolmetscher im Osten*. Thus *Tanja* is semi-autobiographical, and a careful reading of *Als Dolmetscher im Osten* reveals some of the historical persons
and events that were artistically recombined into the unified fictional narrative of the novella.

It is impossible after just one reading to give a fair and proper evaluation of the work, for I noticed that my own interpretation of Tanja underwent considerable changes from the first reading to the second, to the third, and to subsequent readings. The novella shares many features of the popular genre known in Germany as the Kriminalroman, or "crime story". This particular story suffers a bit from excessive sentimentality and its outcome is a bit predictable, but to experience the work in all of its dazzling paradoxes and contradictions, the work requires numerous readings and a careful evaluation of one's own state of mind when reading it.

It seems intellectually dishonest, to me at least, to go into a lengthy discussion of the various psychological profiles and motivations of the characters involved without first acknowledging the psychology of the most important player in all of these works—myself, as an active reader and willing participant in the fictions. I found that as I read Vegesack's novella for a third and forth time, with the story's main surprise—that Tatjana herself is really an NKVD spy—known to me from the beginning and thus losing its force as a narrative device, my sympathies and interpretations changed. My perspective became clearer, colder, and more sharply analytical. As one begins to shift from naive to more mature and experienced readings, perspective also shifts and one begins to see the story not from the point of view of the relatively innocent and naive narrator, but from the more sober perspective of the older German officers, Colonel F. and his staff, and still later, Tanja herself. Once one realizes that the mysterious figures who are following Tatjana and causing the dramatic action to close in around Tatjana like an invisible noose
are not from the NKVD but are instead traitorous Russian agents of German military counterintelligence, one begins to view Tatjana in a different light. She ceases to be an innocent Russian civilian and victim of circumstance, and her darker side as a coldly manipulative Russian *femme fatale* comes into focus much earlier, and what seems at first to be an innocent comment becomes one of the most bitterly ironic lines in the whole novella when Tatjana tells the narrator: "Sie ahnen nicht, mit welchen raffinierten Methode diese Spitzel der NKWD arbeiten [!]"\(^1\). What methods indeed! At first it seems as if it is the German narrator who seduces Tatjana; later readings begin to suggest it is Tatjana, rather, who seduces the narrator. However, if one examines even closer, one sees that this is not a satisfactory explanation either, for if Tatjana intended to use seduction as merely a means to an end, namely espionage, if she were, in fact, a convinced, cold-blooded party ideologist, why does she hold back so long? Why does she so often push him away? It has to be because she is trying to avoid intimate emotional involvement with the narrator and thereby also protect the narrator from the dangers of getting tangled up in her spying activities. Tanja clearly begins to realize that the narrator is not like the other Germans in Pjatigorsk. She sees that he is sensitive, romantic, and a bit naive, a bit out of place. He is the only German in Pjatigorsk who understands the Russian language, and through this knowledge, the only German who can really begin to understand her. She wants to protect the narrator from the dangerous consequences of her espionage activities, but has a very real fear of becoming emotionally attached to him. She does manipulate both the narrator and his "Nebenbuhler", the

Oberleutnant in order to spy on the German military and to protect herself. One should perhaps not judge Tatjana’s actions too harshly, since she is, after all, acting in defense of her "Rodina" ("Motherland") against a hostile invader. Tatjana is a patriotic Russian and a free-spirited woman at home in the Caucasus. Curiously, the narrator’s feelings about Germany and his own German identity are not discussed. They seem almost unimportant to the narrator, who near the end seems willing to sacrifice all of that just to be with Tatjana.

Vegesack himself, like many Baltic Germans, strongly asserted his German identity against the policy of "russification" in his Riga-centered Baltic homeland. Vegesack was certainly no Nazi, though, and after moving to Bavaria he worked on anti-Nazi publications denouncing "die braune Pest" and even ran into trouble with the authorities after 1933 and did live briefly in exile in Sweden and South America. But he was never really denounced or persecuted like many other German intellectuals. Perhaps Vegesack’s aristocratic origins coupled with his being a member of a German ethnic minority whose homeland (like the Sudeten Germans) lay outside the pre-war boundaries of the Reich afforded him special protection. However disdainful Siegfried von Vegesack was of the NSDAP, he was nevertheless decidedly anti-Communist, and for this reason he volunteered for service on the Eastern Front as a Russian-language interpreter and translator. Since Vegesack had lost an eye in his student years in Riga while engaged in a fencing duel—Vegesack was a member of a nationalistic German Studenten-Verbindung, "Livonia"—and had other health problems, he was unfit for regular military service.
Siegfried von Vegesack drew a sharp distinction between the German Armed Forces and the state apparatus of the ruling Nazi Party, which he did denounce often, but referred to euphemistically in his journal and reports simply as "die Civilverwaltung" [sic]. Indeed, in stark contrast to the wartime fictions of Heinrich Böll and Max Frisch, one of the disturbing weaknesses of the novella Tanja is the inexplicable absence of ardent Nazis among Vegesack's German characters, and the lack of any references to the SS, Jews, pogroms or concentration camps whatsoever. My main concern is that stories like Tanja might preserve the myth that the regular Wehrmacht kept itself pure and clean in the East and that only the SS and the Nazi Party back in Germany engaged in atrocities—a myth that is not at all borne out by the historical facts.

Vegesack, in any case, chose to view the war in the East and his active participation in it as "die Befreiung Rußlands von dem Bolschewismus". It is from this "Weltanschauung" that Tanja and Vegesack's other stories dealing with the war are written. To his credit, Vegesack was appalled by Nazi "Rassenpolitik", particularly the racist classification of Slavs and Jews as "Untermenschen". Indeed, in an important report Vegesack filed in July of 1944 for the Chef des Wirtschaftstabes Ost, General Stapf, entitled Die Behandlung der Bevölkerung in den besetzten Ostgebieten, Vegesack railed against Nazi ideology for undermining the war effort and turning populations that had initially greeted the German army as liberators against them back into the arms of the Soviet government. The dissolution of the Kolkhoz-system and other attempted reforms were too little, too late. Moreover, any attempt at honest, beneficial reform in Russia by the more conscientious German officials seeking to better the lot of ordinary Russians and thus win the "hearts and minds" of the Russian people were hopelessly undermined by
Nazi exhortations for German soldiers to act with ruthless brutality in treating all Slavs as "Untermenschen." Instead of setting up a newly independent non-communist Russia, the "Civilverwaltung" was attempting to turn Russia into a "deutsche Kolonie," exactly in accordance with Hitler's aims as laid out in Mein Kampf. Vegesack understood the absurdity of this policy and wrote in his report to General Stapf:

Bei der Aussicht aber, die eine Gewaltherrschaft [der Bolschewiken] nur durch eine andere [die deutsche] zu vertauschen, zu einer deutschen Kolonie herabzusinken und als >weiße Neger< und >Untermenschen< für den deutschen Herrn zu schuften, war es kein Wunder, daß auch die deutschfreundlichen Elemente, die uns mit Begeisterung als Befreier begrüßt hatten, in kurzer Zeit alle Sympathien für uns verloren und wieder dem Bolschewismus zugetrieben wurden...Nicht Stalin, sondern wir selbst haben letzten Endes durch unsere verfehlte Ostpolitik, die aus Rußland eine deutsche Kolonie machen wollte und daher das russische Nationalbewu bstsein verletzte, die Partisanen zu einer >vaterländischen< Bewegung großgezogen...2

Only later did Vegesack learn that General Stapf was part of the conspiracy to kill Hitler on the 20th of July 1944. Upon reading Vegesack's report, Stapf wrote back in a tone of caution and warning: "Wissen Sie, was Sie da geschrieben haben? Eine furchtbare Anklage!"3 Had the assassination succeeded, Vegesack's report was to have been published immediately throughout the Reich by the conspirators. Fortunately for Vegesack, General Stapf was warned and avoided meeting fellow conspirator Graf Yorck von Wartenburg, who was arrested and later executed for his involvement in the July 20th assassination attempt. Thus Vegesack's "furchtbare Anklage" did not fall into the hands of the Gestapo, and in October of 1944 Vegesack terminated his military service.

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3 Ibid, 116.
The novella Tanja continually emphasizes the enigmatic nature of Russia and the Russians, embodied primarily and symbolically in the character of Tatjana. The "true" Russian identity remains elusive, unstable and unknowable, full of disharmonious extremes and contradictions. Nikolai Berdyaev, one of Russia's leading thinkers and intellectuals, once commented:

The Russians are a people in the highest degree polarized: they are a conglomeration of contradictions. One can be charmed by them, one can be disillusioned. The unexpected is always to be expected from them. They are as a people capable in the highest degree of inspiring both intense love and violent hatred. As a people the Russians have a disturbing effect on the peoples of the West...  

Bearing this in mind, we must examine not only the psychological profile of the title character of Vegesack's novella, but also the mixed reactions to Tatjana by the narrator, the lustful Oberleutnant, and the other staff officers in Pjatigorsk. The narrator is charmed, while Oberst F. and the Oberleutnant are disillusioned. The narrator begins to understand, wants to understand Tatjana, and through her, Russia. The Oberleutnant's interests are purely sexual. He wants to conquer Tatjana, to invade her, rape her, like the German Army has invaded and raped Russia. He complains bitterly how much easier things were for him back in France:

...Dann kam der Oberleutnant wieder auf seine Pariser Liebschaften zu sprechen: ein unerschöpfliches Thema. Die Mädchen dort [in Frankreich] wären doch etwas ganz anderes als diese hier [in Rußland], die einen nur verrückt machen, ohne daß etwas dabei heraus käme. Und überhaupt: dieser ganze primitive Osten gefalle ihm nicht. Ein unheimliches Land und unbegreifliche Menschen...  

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5 Siegfried von Vegesack, Tanja, 94.
Berdyaev is well aware of this bewilderment that Russia produces in Western
observers and explains further that:

The inconsistency and complexity of the Russian soul may be due to the
fact that in Russia two streams of world history—East and West—jostle and
influence one another. The Russian people is not purely European and it is
not purely Asiatic. Russia is a complete section of the world, a colossal
East-West. It unites two worlds, and within the Russian soul two
principles are always engaged in strife—the Eastern and the Western.\(^6\)

It is also important to know the legendary Russian story of the "Potemkin Village"
and its repeated use as a metaphor throughout history for the Russian condition. When
Empress Catherine the Great took a grand tour of her realm with the King of Poland and
the Emperor of Austria, a certain Prince Gregory Potemkin arranged that decorative
façades be put up along the Empress's route to hide the real conditions of poverty among
the peasantry. The real peasants were hidden while actors in decorative costumes were
presented to the Empress as the "real" peasantry. It is a legend that has come to hold
great meaning in Russian cultural history, namely the problem of appearances versus
reality—a tradition that continued from Catherine's Russia through the Soviet period to the
present day. The paradox that the "Potemkin Village" presents to us is how to decide
what is real and substantive and what is superficial. The "true" Russia is, we presume,
hiding just underneath the Soviet façade, but what do we make of the façade itself? Is it
not also, itself, a part of the real reality even as it tries to falsely set itself up exclusively
as the only objective reality? Do we not then err if we attempt to disregard the façade
altogether? The author of *Tanya* makes numerous allusions to this Russian paradox and

\(^6\) Nikolai Berdyaev, 20.
confirms Berdyaev's postulations about the Russian people in his physical descriptions of Tatjana:

Es war, als hätte Tatjana zwei Gesichter oder als trüge sie eine Maske, hinter der sich ihr eigentliches Anlitz verbarg, das nur manchmal zum Vorschein kam. Denn auch der Ausdruck, ja selbst die Farbe ihrer Augen war seltsam wandlungsfähig: gewöhnlich leuchtend hell, mit dem warmen, strahlenden Blick eines Kindes, konnten sie jäh verfinstern und einen fremden, bösen Ausdruck annehmen, der kalt und scharf wie ein Messer war. Doch nur selten und nur für kurze Augenblicke kam dieses andere, zweite Gesicht zum Vorschein, das sich dann gleich wieder hinter dem unschuldigen Mädchenanlitz mit den langen Wimpern, dem kindlich lächelnden Mund verbarg.  

Tatjana's "two faces", as described by the narrator, is very telling about her character and about Vegesack's keen perception as an author of Russia's own internal divisions, for as Anna A. Tavis informs us:

Throughout its history, the Russian national identity had been split between two opposing poles—pagan Kiev and Christian Byzantium, Orthodox Moscow and Muslim Kazan, indigenous Moscow and cosmopolitan Petersburg—forcing into the open the question of divided Russian nationhood.

Thus the gulf of understanding between Germans and Russians in Vegesack's world is compounded by the fact that the Russians, divided as they are themselves between the Europhiles who advocate a "Westernization" of Russia, as first set in motion by Tsar Peter the Great, and the opposing nativist "Slavophile" tradition. Russians are thus divided between Europe and Asia, and cannot decide themselves what the vastness of Russia encompasses, what Russia "really is". To quote the famous Russian romantic poet Tyutchev: "Russia is not to be understood by intellectual processes. You cannot

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7 Siegfried von Vegesack, 18.
take her measurements with a common yardstick, she has a stature and form of her own: you can only believe in Russia.\textsuperscript{9} Vegesack is obviously aware of this Russian paradox and uses his character Tatjana and the fictional world he creates from his own memories and experiences as a vehicle to express and attempt to grasp this mystery. It is this enigmatic part of Tatjana's character that forms the basis for the narrator's attraction to Tatjana. In this respect, Vegesack's Tatjana is reminiscent of other "mysterious, exotic" Russian female characters found elsewhere in German literature, such as Lisaweta Iwanowna in Thomas Mann's \textit{Tonio Kröger} and Madame Chauchat in \textit{Der Zauberberg}. Tatjana challenges and undermines the Germanic conception of feminine beauty, hinting at that semi-Asiatic, "barbaric" side of the Russian soul, which we see in the narrator's physical description of Tatjana:

Eine Schönheit war Tatjana keineswegs: die Backen waren derb, die etwas geschlitzten Augen standen seltsam weit auseinander, das stumpfe Näschen war eigentlich recht gewöhnlich, saß aber so keck in dem breiten Gesicht, daß gerade diese herausfordernde Nasenspitze besonders reizvoll wirkte. Die Stirn war nicht hoch, aber breit und kräftig gewölbt, der Mund mit der etwas hoch gezogenen Oberlippe zwar noch kindlich, aber zuweilen, besonders wenn sie lächelte, von einer plötzlich hervorbrechenden Sinnlichkeit, die ihrem unschuldigen Wesen völlig widersprach.\textsuperscript{10}

This wilder, Asian side lends to Russia so much of its exotic nature, separating Russia from other European nations, and Russians from other Slavs. Tatjana's "etwas geschlitzten Augen" remind the careful reader of the famous poem \textit{The Scythians} by Aleksandr Blok, which Vegesack would almost certainly have been familiar with, with its

\textsuperscript{9} Theodore Tyuichev as quoted in \textit{The Russian Idea} by Nikolai Berdyaev, 19.

\textsuperscript{10} Siegfried von Vegesack, 17.
bold declaration: "Yes, we are Scythians! Yes, Asiatics, with greedy eyes slanting!"\textsuperscript{11}

Tatjana becomes almost the living embodiment of this poem by Blok. We know that Vegesack was familiar with this problem of Russian identity, for he reflects upon it in his memoirs:

\begin{quote}
Ist dieses Land wirklich eine Hölle, in der man das graue Elend bekommt und sich aus lauter Verzweiflung besaufen muß,—oder ein Paradies, in dem alles wächst und nach dem man sich immer wieder zurücksehnt? Oder ist Rußland so groß, daß Hölle und Himmel darin Platz haben? Was für ein ungeheurer Raum,—schon dieses europäische Rußland! ...wenn man genauer hinschaut, gehört auch dieses europäische Rußland...mehr zu Asien als zu Europa...in Wirklichkeit sind weder Uralgebirge noch Uralfluß gültige Grenzen, und zwischen diesesseitigem und jenseitigem Rußland ist kein wesentlicher Unterschied. Zwar ist Sibirien vom Europäischen Rußland kolonisiert und besiedelt worden, aber vorher hat Asien das Europäische Rußland unterworfen und ihm seinen Geist aufgedrückt. Und immer ist dieser ungeheure Raum, den der Asiatische Kontinent in den Europäischen hineinstößt, das Aufmarschgebiet aller der wilden Horden...Wohin gehört Rußland: zu Asien,—oder zu Europa? Gorki hat einmal gesagt, der Russe habe zwei Seelen: eine europäische und eine asiatische...\textsuperscript{12}
\end{quote}

Vegesack often ponders the almost metaphysical nature of the vast, open Russian countryside—especially the Caucasus region—not only in his memoirs but also in his fictional works. After giving a beautifully detailed description of the scene outside his window, the narrator senses a divine presence in this land:

\begin{quote}
Jeden Morgen wurde ich immer wieder von diesem Anblick überwältigt...der Allgewaltige war da, auch wenn er sich verbarg. Ich fühlte seine Nähe, spürte seinen Atem, besonders morgens und abends...\textsuperscript{13}
\end{quote}


\textsuperscript{13} Siegfried von Vegesack, \textit{Tanja}, 15.
Vegesack begins more and more to associate Tatjana symbolically with the Russian land itself, her sense of belonging to the land. Shortly after the novella's dramatic climax, namely the first and only sexual union between the narrator and Tatjana, the view of the twin peaks of Mt. Elbrus reminds the narrator of Tatjana's breasts:

Tanja hatte mir einmal erklärt, daß der Name Elbrus die "Brüste der Jungfrau" bedeute -- und wirklich wölbten sich die beiden Kuppen in ihrer makellosen Rundung mit den rosa Spitzen unberührt wie jungfräuliche Brüste in den grünen Morgenhimmel.¹⁴

Tatjana is a natural on horseback, having grown up in the Caucasus, and teases the narrator gently, "'Ihr Deutschen,' erklärte sie mir einmal, 'bleibt auch auf dem Pferde immer noch ernsthafe Fußgänger, Zweifüßler. Aber der richtige Reiter muß mit seinem Pferde völlig zusammenwachsen, muß mit ihm zum Kentauer werden."¹⁵ Here Blok's The Scythians once more comes to mind, with the image of the Russian transformed into a Mongol warrior on horseback. Vegesack ponders the wide Russian sky, agreeing with Berdyaev about its correspondence to the vastness of the Russian soul. He records in his memoirs that Germans who have gotten used to this scenery find Germany too small and confining once they return. Vegesack feels that the Russian is deeper, more contemplative than the German. In various other places Vegesack allows Tatjana to offer ironic commentary about the opposition of the German and the Russian.


¹⁴ Ibid, 83-84.
¹⁵ Ibid, 43-44.
¹⁶ Ibid, 12.
We know from the very beginning of the novella, through the impersonal editor who introduces the story to us as a collection of the narrator’s "Aufzeichnungen aus dem Kaukasus," that the narrator sought death in battle at the front lines. We also know from the narrator’s introduction that something must have happened to Tatjana, but precisely what did happen is not completely clear. The narrative does begin to offer clues, however, foreshadowing Tatjana’s impending death. The first foreshadowing of death is to be found in the words of the rustic and romantic old Russian gardener, caring for a garden of a former aristocrat. The old man draws a symbolic connection between the fragile flowers that he cares for and the now dead baroness, a victim of the Revolution, commenting: "Aber gerade die Schönsten blühen nur einen Tag...Das Schöne muß immer früh sterben. Auch die Fürstin war jung und schön...und mußte doch sterben!" 17

This is an indirect reference, as well, to the poetry and ideas of Friedrich Schiller, which Vegesack, growing up in the German tradition, would most certainly have been familiar with.

Tatjana, however, angrily rejects these ideas as naively romantic when the narrator mentions them in connection with the young Russian poet Mikhail Lermontov who died young in a duel here in the Caucasus and whose memorial is found nearby. These words and the poet Lermontov will come back to haunt Tatjana later in the narrative, however. Tatjana’s black dress that she wears to the second “Verbrüderungsfest” is also a symbolic foreshadowing of her own death, and a symbol of the dark ambiguity that makes up her whole personality and feelings towards the narrator and her position in life. The colors alluded to throughout the novella are symbolically important. The narrator asks Tatjana
why she has chosen the black dress, and Tatjana points to the blood-red rose she is wearing and says: "Damit das Rot besser zur Geltung kommt!"\textsuperscript{18} And why red, the narrator asks. "Weil Rot meine Farbe ist!"\textsuperscript{19} This is a crucial passage in the novella, for it reveals a double meaning. Red is of course the color of socialism, the color of the Soviet flag, but it is also, especially in connection with the rose, the color of love. Combined with the black dress, the red roses are also tied up with death. Roses also feature prominently in the narrators disturbing dream, where he imagines having run through the entire dance hall with bundle of roses, searching for Tatjana. When he finally finds her in this dream, she is in the Stabsgebäude, the roses have mysteriously become a pistol, which she holds under her nose like a flower. When the narrator awakens from this dream with an involuntary shout, Tatjana is in fact standing over him with roses in her hand. Later, they cannot agree who should take the roses from whom, or what the roses in the narrator's dream actually mean. In a fit of jealousy, the narrator tells Tatjana that if the roses aren't going to leave his room, neither is she. She struggles, but cannot overpower him. Her resistance slowly weakens and she surrenders. The roses have fallen to the floor and have been stepped on during the struggle. After their first and only sexual encounter, after Tatjana has left and after being reminded of Tatjana's body by Mt. Elbrus in the morning light, the narrator tries to put the roses in his water-pitcher, but decides they are beyond saving and throws them out onto the foot-path, which Tatjana has taken to leave the compound, with the casual remark: "dort sollten sie sterben."\textsuperscript{20} This, too, is a crucial symbolic moment of the novella, for it is on this exact spot, where the narrator

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid, 42.  
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid, 59.  
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid, 59.  
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid, 59.
throws the roses out the window, where the roses die on the ground below, that Tatjana will later die herself. Trying to flee the German soldiers who have come to arrest her, she jumps from this very same window, breaking a leg upon landing. Warning shots are fired, but before anyone can reach Tatjana and stop her, she puts the narrator's pistol in her mouth and pulls the trigger, dying instantly and symbolically on the same spot as the roses—dort sollte sie sterben.

The war and the weather also play a symbolic role in driving the action to its final conclusion. The story opens in an idyllic, Tsarist-era Villa in Pjatigorsk, where the staff of the "Arme-Wirtschafts-Führung" is located. The front lines are far away, and only very rarely does a stray shell or rocket land near the area to remind the narrator and other German officers that there is, in fact, a war going on. After the first "Russian Evening" in the Casino, the narrator offers to walk Tatjana home. This is his first fateful time alone with her, the first time he tries to kiss her, and the first time he becomes aware of his growing love for Tatjana. A drenching rain falls in Pyatigorsk the next day. As Tatjana and the narrator circle each other, drawing ever closer to each other, so too does the war make its unwelcome presence felt, more and more, until the narrator is sent to the front lines with the Oberleutnant in Tatjana's place to inspect a power plant. The narrator is deeply concerned about all the rumors of spying and secret activities, and engages in rationalizations, trying to convince not only the Oberleutnant but also himself that Tatjana is somehow not involved, that the strange events are nothing but exaggerations. At this dramatic moment, a grenade explodes near the Oberleutnant and the narrator: "Es war, als hätte sie [die Granate] sich an unserer Unterhaltung beteiligen und mich eines

\[20\] Ibid, 84.
Besser belehren wollen."\(^{21}\) The end is near for Tatjana and the narrator. All of their hopes, their fragile love are destroyed.

Throughout the course of the novella, Tatjana essentially undergoes a complete psychological collapse. Tatjana sets up impossible standards for herself to live by, harshly declaring: "man muß die Gefühle beherrschen; der Kopf darf weder von Liebe noch von Haß getrübt werden. Man soll das Richtige erkennen, das Zweckmäßige wollen und dadurch handeln. Alles andere is Romantik und Selbstbetrug."\(^{22}\) She ridicules the notion of love as a decadent, overly sentimental (bourgeois?) term to describe a purely physiological process. But her actions and facial expressions, her own undeniable sensuality, contradict her own cold, scientific theories and explanations. She suppresses her true feelings and emotions into the dark recesses of her subconscious mind, even denying their existence. As a spy, she is forced to live a lie, but Tatjana is a passionate Russian patriot first and a communist revolutionary only second, though she would sincerely wish this were reversed. What arises in Tatjana is a profound and unstable split, as the narrator informs us: "Sie konnte weder ihre Abstammung -- sie war die Tochter eines zaristischen Offiziers -- noch die bolschwistische Umgebung verleugnen, in der sie aufgewachsen war. Intelligent, belesen, mit allen Wassern einer strengen marxistischen Lehre gewaschen und getränkt[...]doch das Erbe ihres von den Bolschewiken ermordeten Vaters, die natürlichen Anlagen, waren stärker als die Lehren, mit denen man ihren Kopf vollgetrichtert hatte."\(^{23}\) Tatjana rejects the old world but does not fully break with it.

\(^{21}\) Ibid., 93.
\(^{22}\) Ibid., 18.
\(^{23}\) Ibid., 7-8.
Only after the revolution, after the death of her father does she seek to find support for herself in the revolution, but she is unable to merge with it totally.

The narrator's increasing intimacy with Tatjana erodes his naive and overly simplistic understanding of the living Russian reality, but so too does Tatjana's increasing intimacy with the narrator erode her faith in the cause of the socialist revolution and its ultimate aims. Where the narrator is too sentimental and overly romantic, Tatjana is too cold, too cynical and tries to order her life too mechanically. Her suppression of romantic feelings, her lack of moderation will prove fatal for her.

In a moment of gushing sentimentality, the narrator speaks glowingly of the first evening performance at the Casino: "Man möchte nur wünschen, daß Deutsche und Russen sich immer so gut verstünden -- dann wäre es nie zu diesem wahnsinnigen Kriege gekommen!" But Tatjana understands the superficiality of the occasion. No real understanding has taken place, no genuine feelings have been expressed. She begins to unravel the world of lies when she dispels the artistic illusion of the "Potemkin Village" erected by the Russian provincial performers in Pjatigorsk and makes it undeniably clear to the narrator that this is all "Klischee, ein verstaubtes Rußland aus der Mottenkiste, nicht lebendige Gegenwart..." Tatjana is unwilling to let the narrator go on believing such naive sentiments and reminds the narrator that the Germans, are, after all, the enemy of the Russian people. And yet she works for the Germans, for her enemy, the narrator points out to Tatjana. "Ich arbeite, weil ich muß: weil ich sonst verhungern würde...Aber ich mach euch nichts vor, ich verleugne nicht meine Gesinnung!" But here Tatjana is

25 Ibid, 23.
not telling the whole truth. She is deceiving the Germans—she's spying on them. As to her convictions, it is unclear what she means. Socialism? Russia? So long as the distinction between the two is not challenged, Tatjana is safe. The narrator asks if he and Tatjana, individually, are enemies. Yes, both of us, too, she replies. And does she hate the Germans, does hate him, the narrator wants to know. "Immer hassen -- oder lieben!? Warum diese Gefühle? Warum -- hassen? Warum -- lieben? Was ich fühle, braucht niemand zu wissen. Vielleicht weiß ich es auch selbst nicht. Das ist alles doch nicht so wichtig..."27 Here Tatjana has returned to emotional repression and denial. The narrator asks what is important for Tatjana, to which she replies, mirroring the classic rhetoric of a Bolshevik: "Daß man seiner Überzeugung treu bleibt, sich durch nichts -- auch nicht durch Gefühle -- von seinem Ziel abdrängen läßt!"28 And what is this goal? Tatjana's answer is only negatively defined at this point. Still, one must pause to consider if a true party ideologue would bother to dispel the illusion of the artists. This is not likely—an ideologue would be utterly indifferent, or would see the pure utility of such a deception and remain silent. No, something else is driving Tatjana to speak. That something is the truth. The narrator asks Tatjana again if she hates him. She shakes her head. But how, then, can she resolve this paradox? How can she identify the narrator as "the enemy", yet deny hating him?

As noted before, Tatjana reacts sharply to the narrator's comment about Mikhail Lermontov and denounces all such romantic ideas as outmoded, foolish and eccentric. The narrator, however, challenges Tatjana and introduced doubt into her mind by asking if the times have really improved since Lermontov's day. Now millions are dying for

ideas that in the future might also seem just as outmoded, foolish and eccentric as Lermontov's, whereupon Tatjana answers angrily: "Nein, die Ideen, um die heute gekämpft wird und für die heute Millionen fallen, werden niemals verschroben und romantisch sein, weil sie nicht die Marotte eines lebensmüden Dichters, sondern das Ziel aller zukunftsgläubigen Menschen sind."29 Once again Tatjana speaks of this abstract "Ziel", her "goal"--and what is this goal, the narrator asks again. "Eine gerechte Weltordnung -- eine glückliche Menschheit!"30 Tatjana spits out impatiently, her answer lifted straight from the pages of Pravda. The Russians are a people of the future, but have trouble living in and accepting the present, the here-and-now. Tatjana's mechanistic descriptions of humankind, borrowed from Soviet ideology, contradict her own natural personality, and her absolute denial of emotion denies her hypothetical "Menschheit" any true "Menschlichkeit". How can one possibly achieve a happier humanity if one refuses to allow one's "head to be moved by emotions"? Tatjana begins from this point forward to have doubts about this exalted "goal", begins to understand the absurdity of her position. Many Russian communists viewed the Great Patriotic War as the final showdown between Communism and (in their theories) the ultimate form of late Capitalism, namely Fascism. Victory in the war and the unconditional surrender of Nazi Germany would be the final confirmation of the correctness and justice of the Soviet system. However, Tatjana begins to be honest with herself and her emotions, openly questioning the whole point of the war: "Warum müssen die Männer einander tot

29 Ibid, 45.
30 Ibid, 45.
schießen?...Warum dieser Wahnsinn? Nur weil ein paar Verrückte [Hitler und Stalin] die Welt erobern wollen, müssen Millionen sterben.\textsuperscript{31}

The narrator, through his developing relationship with Tatjana, begins to realize how naive his earlier beliefs were and begins to examine the world around him more critically. He sees through the illusion of the performers at the next, larger celebration and grasps the absurdity and superficiality of the occasion:

Was hatten diese tanzenden Kosaken mit dem wirklichen, gegenwärtigen Russland zu tun? Das sah anders aus: unheimlich, unbegreiflich und unergründlich. Und gerade dieses andere, rätselhafte Russland, das uns hier böse und feindlich von allen Seiten umlauerte, spürte ich an diesem Abende so stark...Hier auf die Bühne feierte man mit großer Begeisterung so etwas wie eine deutsch-russische Verbrüderung, während nur ein paar Kilometer entfernt, am Baksan, erbittert gekämpft und mitten unter uns heimtückisch spioniert wurde.\textsuperscript{32}

Through their interaction, both Tatjana and the narrator have begun to critically examine and modify some of their preconceived ideas. Both begin to question the insanity of the war, both develop the idea to “flee off into the mountains together”, to some Edenic paradise, where neither the German Army nor the Soviet government can find them. It is an unrealistic fantasy, but a very understandable, very human psychological reaction to their extraordinary circumstances, and one hesitates to use the label "irrational". The narrator comes to realize that true understanding between Germans and Russians must begin at the level of the individual, not in superficial mass gatherings. Tatjana understands that she cannot be totally free of her emotions, and that if she herself cannot enjoy life and be happy with the man she loves, all talk of a "gerechte

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid, 74, 76.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid, 59.
Weltordnung" and "eine glückliche Menschheit" are just empty words with no meaning.

Nikolai Berdyaev tells us:

The theme of clash between personality and world harmony is very Russian. [Russian philosopher] Belinsky says of himself that he is a terrible person when some mystical absurdity gets into his head. There are a great many Russians who would say that of themselves. After he went through his crisis, Belinsky expressed his new thoughts in the form of a reaction against Hegel, a revolt against him in the name of personality, on behalf of the living man...'To the devil with all your higher strivings and purposes...', writes Belinsky, '...The fate of the subject, of the individual, of the person, is more important than the fate of the whole world.' ...The feeling of a person who will not acquiesce in being a mere pin in the world mechanism, a part of the whole, a means to the end of establishing world harmony, is brought to the point of madness.\(^{33}\)

It is this madness, and Tatjana's "Alles oder Nichts!" extremism that ultimately is her undoing. "The Russians have not been given to moderation and they have readily gone to extremes."\(^{34}\) writes Berdyaev. Tatjana gets to the heart of the matter, pointing to a problem on the purely linguistic level by telling the German officers: "Ich glaube, auch eure Liebe und unser ljubow< ist nicht das gleiche...Für Liebe hat man Zeit, oder man hat sie nicht. Aber ljubow< fragt nicht nach Zeit. Sie fragt überhaupt nach nichts. Sie nimmt -- ohne zu fragen..."\(^{35}\) Tatjana is referred to constantly as "ein Rätsel." Here again the careful reader associates her with Aleksandr Blok's poem:

Russia is a Sphinx. Grieving, jubilant, and covering herself with blood she looks, she looks, she looks at you--her slant eyes lit with hatred and with love.

\(^{31}\) Nikolai Berdyaev, 93, 95.

\(^{34}\) Ibid, 20.

\(^{35}\) Siegfried von Vegesack, Tanja, 12.
Yes--love. For centuries you have not known
such love as sets our hot blood churning.
You have forgotten that the world has shown
Love can devastate with its burning!

We love the flesh, its colour and its taste,
its suffocating mortal odour...
Are we to blame if your rib-cages burst
beneath our paws' impulsive ardour?\(^{36}\)

This poetic image is especially evocative when Tatjana forcefully kisses the
narrator and bites his lips in the process, causing them to bleed. "Sie nimmt, ohne zu
fragen": Tatjana's prophetic words come true when she impulsively suggests to the
narrator that they flee into the mountains, right at that moment. In this section of the
novella, near the end, the two have ridden off together back to the ruined aristocratic
residence. There they create their own idyllic but temporary and fragile imaginary world.
away from the horrors of the world around them, pretending to be the young aristocratic
couple from the Tsarist times. Tatjana is seized by the moment, as if hit by a bolt of
lightning, seems ready to throw away her spying career and ride off with the narrator into
the mountains and presses her mouth to his. Then, as quickly as it came, the feeling goes,
and Tatjana condemns the whole plan as "Unsinn." In an attempt to explain away her
lapse into emotionalism, she offers an obvious rationalization that does, however, contain
quite a few grains of truth and is actually very revealing:

"Das war natürlich alles nur Spaß, was ich Ihnen vorschlug. Manchmal
überschmückt mich auf einmal diese Lust, Theater zu spielen, nicht auf der
Bühne, sondern in Wirklichkeit. Das ist viel aufregender und
interessanter. Glaubten Sie tatsächlich im Ernst daß ich mit Ihnen
irgendwo in die Wälder reiten würde? Nein, solche romantischen

\(^{36}\) Alexandr Blok, *The Twelve and Other Poems*, 162-163.
Abenteuer liegen mir nicht. Ich wollte nur wissen, was Sie dazu sagen würden. Und Sie sind wirklich darauf hereingefallen. Hab ich nicht gut gespielt?"

..."So gut, daß mir die Lippen bluteten..."

Tania war ganz entsetzt und betupfte die Wundmale mit ihrem Taschentuch. "Und war das -- nur ein Spiel?" fragte ich entäuscht. "Wer weiß es?" gab sie lächelnd zur Antwort..."Sie wollten ja selbst nur das Spiel -- und fürchten den Ernst."³⁷

In many places Tatjana sounds as if she is trying to convince herself of what she is saying as much as the narrator. One should note also that Tatjana, overcome by emotion, addresses the narrator with the familiar "du", but when she "recovers," she switches to the distant and formal "Sie" in the above passage. In the Russian language such a transition would be even more extreme and dramatic. As a woman of aristocratic origins who was clever enough to survive the Stalinist purges of the 1930s, Tatjana must have become very adept at "playing Theater in real life". Being able to join and work for the NKVD makes this absolutely necessary. Tatjana has been "playing Theater" since the beginning of the novel, right up to her ironic warning to the narrator about the "cunning methods of NKVD agents" a few pages before! Her emotional lapse was, if anything, a breakdown of the theatrical illusion, a shining moment of "living in truth". Czeslaw Milosz, indirectly, is able to offer us an important insight into what exactly is going on with Tatjana:

Officially, contradictions do not exist in the minds of the citizens of the peoples' democracies. Nobody dares to reveal them publicly. And yet the question of how to deal with them is posed in real life. More than others, the members of the intellectual elite are aware of this problem. They solve it by becoming actors. It is hard to define the type of relationship that prevails between people in the East otherwise than acting, with the exception that one does not perform on a theater stage but in the street, office, factory, meeting hall, or even the room one lives in...conscious acting, if one practices long enough [causes one to] grow into [one's role]

³⁷ Siegfried von Vegesack. 76-77.
so closely that [a man] can no longer differentiate his true self from the self he simulates. [italics mine] 38

Tatjana’s strict categories about herself, her relationship to the narrator and her role in Soviet society and the war are beginning to break down. She can no longer find her “true” self; she is no longer sure of her true convictions or goal. Milosz’s book offers further possible insights into Tatjana’s psychology:

A constant and universal masquerade creates an aura that is hard to bear, yet it grants the performers certain...satisfactions. To say something is white when one thinks it is black, to smile inwardly when one is outwardly solemn, to hate when one manifests love, to know when one pretends not to know, and thus to play one’s adversary for a fool (even as he is playing you for one)—these actions lead one to prize one’s own cunning above all else. Success becomes a source of satisfaction. Simultaneously, that which we protect from prying eyes takes on a special value because it is never clearly formulated in words and hence has the irrational charm of things purely emotional. 39

It is precisely this “irrational charm of things purely emotional” that is at the heart of the relationship between the narrator and Tatjana. Indeed, Vegesack demonstrates in numerous places throughout his novella where language itself is inadequate to express the truth or the power of an emotion:

Aber noch während [Tanja] das sagte, spielte um ihre beweglichen Lippen, den halbgeöffneten Mund ein so betörendes Lächeln, daß alle ihre Worte und klugen Theorien von diesem selben Mund Lügen gestraft wurden...Ich glaubte ihrem Mund, nicht ihren Worten. 40

The final step in Tatjana’s psychological collapse is taken when she recites her single favorite poem by Lermontov. She is overcome with emotion and breaks out into uncontrollable sobbing and crying. She curses herself for being foolish, and admits

39 Ibid, 57.
40 Vegesack, Siegfried von Vegesack, Tanja, 18-19.
having the uncomfortable feeling that these Lermontov verses also apply to her. This poem of Lermontov's was actually written in Pjatigorsk, shortly before his death in a duel, and Tatjana fears that she, too, will die soon, and she is correct. "Vielleicht ist mir gerade deswegen alles Sentimentale und Romantische so verhaßt, weil ich selbst noch nicht ganz frei davon bin," 41 confesses Tatjana.

After this, the story follows the familiar pattern of *Romeo and Juliet*, the two tragic, star-crossed lovers who cannot be together because their families (in this case, Germany and the Soviet Union) are at war, and are only united in death through a somewhat melodramatic suicide on Tatjana's part, while the narrator, unable to live without Tatjana and consumed by guilt at having "betrayed" Tatjana (and perhaps feeling betrayed by her), seeks death on the battlefield to end his "quäelende Gedanken" once and for all. One leaves the story feeling that one has witnessed the death of two human beings crushed by the cold, inhuman machine that is the war. Stereotypes, like war and rigid ideologies, behave mechanically, seeking to prevent the individual from forming his own opinions and judgements. If there were no war, then Tatjana and the narrator could live happily together, but paradoxically, it was the war that brought them together in the first place and without which they would never have met. Functioning like other tragic love stories, Vegesack's *Tanja* stands as a quiet voice of individual protest against the mechanistic onslaught of a senseless war.

41 Ibid, 81-82
West Germany - the early Heinrich Böll

Heinrich Böll's novella *Der Zug war pünktlich* explores the existential terror -- and wonder -- of life and death in wartime. Like Siegfried von Vegesack's novella *Tanja*, Böll's novella is drawn in part from his own wartime experiences, though in many respects it is less obviously autobiographical and possesses a more artificially constructed, stylized "fictionality" than Vegesack's novella. Unlike Vegesack's novella, which is told in first person after a brief introduction by an anonymous, neutral editor, Böll's narrative is presented to us in third person. Nevertheless, Böll's style of writing in *Der Zug war pünktlich* retains a highly subjective perspective and is most often told "over the shoulder" of the main protagonist, Andreas, whose very name is significant, since "Andreas" means "Man" in Greek. The world we see is Andreas' subjective view of it. The reader is allowed to know Andreas' innermost thoughts and fantasies, and much of the action takes place inside his head. The minds of all the other characters except for Olina, the Polish female protagonist, remain rather opaque and mostly closed to us; we can only guess at their psychological state with the help of the limited physical descriptions given, which reflect Andreas' limited perspective, and their verbal utterances. Like Andreas' name, Olina's name is significant since "Olina" (or Alina, as the name actually is in Polish) is a very common name for a woman in Poland, and therefore she is intended to represent "the Polish woman" in general.

We know then that the third person narrator is not omniscient but limited to the innermost minds of Andreas and Olina, and their subjective views of the fictional world.
In this regard, Böll's *Der Zug war pünktlich* is even more of a work of psychological fiction than Vegesack's *Tanja*.

"The Train was on Time", the title of the work in its English translation, loses much of the significance of the original German title, because the German title implies deeper connotations surrounding the word "Der Zug". "Der Zug" is directly related to the verb ziehen ("to pull"). In German dramas, an act of a play is sometimes known as an "Aufzug". An "Aufzug" also means or lift. More so than the English word, "Zug" implies some sort of enclosed mechanism that pulls objects or human beings along without their having any direct control over it, be it a train, an elevator, or the next act of a dramatic stage play. Thus, the train can be a metaphor pregnant with meaning, and has been used as such to describe other works of German fiction as well. Scholar Hanna Hickman described Rober Musil's epic novel *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* in very similar terms:

The whole work, but especially Book I, is to be seen as a portrait of a society moving inexorably towards war, like the passengers fast asleep in the train on a course for collision. This inevitable outcome casts a shadow of irony over the entire narrative, as the various characters...pursue their own concerns and seek their own salvation. Only Ulrich...is clear-sighted enough to perceive the sickness at the heart of civilization...he undertakes a personal attempt to find a way of life devoted only to the 'other' dimension of human beings, to a life of imagination, feeling and mysticism...also destined to fail.

Correspondingly, an air of claustrophobia is pervasive throughout Böll's novella, as is a feeling of doomed inevitability. As a whole, it requires of its readers a willing suspension of disbelief, for it eschews realistic principles in favor of the mystical and

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1 Hanna Hickman, *Robert Musil & The Culture of Vienna* (La Salle, IL: Open Court Publishing Co.1984) 133.
angst-ridden existentialist mode of discourse. Andreas is hardly a "mature" protagonist, so we must question his reliability as a spectator and semi-narrator. This has lead a number of critics to complain that the novella handles events ahistorically, leaving the true root causes of the war unexamined rather than critically engaged, but this is nonetheless wholly consistent with the life and outlook of the youthful, male protagonist, Andreas. The whole novella has a mechanical, constructed feel to it. We are compelled by Böll's fiction to accept the belief that events are set in motion by certain magical words and move things forward as if by some grand celestial (or demonic) design. When Andreas yells out the train window to his friend Paul, a pastor: "Ich will nicht sterben, aber das Schreckliche ist, daß ich sterben werde...bald!"², events are set in motion and move forward to their seemingly unavoidable conclusion, in the manner of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Böll writes:

Manches Wort, das scheinbar gleichgültig ausgesprochen wird, gewinnt plötzlich etwas Kabbalistisches...Aus dem leichtfertigen Geplätscher unbedachter Rede, meist jenen furchtbar schweren und matten Worten beim Abschied an Zügen, die in den Tod führen, fällt es wie eine bleierne Welle zurück auf den Sprechenden, der plötzlich die erschreckende und zugleich berauschende Gewalt alles Schicksalhaften kennenlernt...und denen, die von der kosmischen Gewalt des Lebens erfüllt sind, wird manchmal unversehens diese Kraft gegeben, mit einer plötzlichen Erleuchtung werden sie beschenkt und belastet...und das Wort sinkt; sinkt in sie hinein...das Wort bald [fiel] in [Andreas] hinein wie ein Geschoß.³

With this passage, Böll constructs the mystical and existential framework of his novella and builds the rest of the narrative around it. Andreas is suddenly aware that he will indeed die "soon." He tries to pin down in his mind the exact nature of this "soon",

² Heinrich Böll, Der Zug war pünktlich (Frankfurt: Verlag Ullstein 1958) 6.
³ Ibid, 6-7.
the exact point in the flow of time that it refers to, but the ambiguity of the term defies any fixed point. It is not time, but the names of places and geography that become significant for Andreas' alleged clairvoyant insights into his own fate. The names of the Polish towns on Willi's map, the words themselves begin, for Andreas at least, to take on an eerie, sensual quality:

Irgendwo ist da auch Wolhynien, alles dunkle, düstere Namen, die nach Pogrom riechen...Galizien, ein dunkles Wort, ein schreckliches Wort, und doch ein schönes Wort. Es ist etwas von einem schneidenden Messer darin...Galizien...Diese Namen sind wie unbekannte Getränke. Bukowina, das klingt nach einem handfesten Pflaumenschnaps, und Wolhynien, das ist wie ein sehr dickes, fast sumpfiges Bier, wie das Bier, das er einmal in Budapest getrunken hat, richtiges Suppenbier.⁴

War is viewed by Böll (and his protagonist Andreas) as a cold, calculating system, practically a smoothly running machine. Trains are on time precisely because they are part of a unified system that coordinates all trains in a given system. The image of a smoothly running machine exists at many levels in Böll's novella, from the "sonorous voices" to the repeated image of "the knife", also an integral part of the mechanism. Andreas associates the name of Galacia with "einem schneidenden Messer" and also speaks of the border between Poland and Germany (which he crossed over while sleeping on the train) in similar terms:

Jede Grenze hat eine furchtbare Endgültigkeit. Da ist ein Strich und Schluss. Und der Zug fährt darüber weg, wie er ebenso gut über eine Leiche fahren würde, oder über einen Lebenden. Und die Hoffnung ist tot...ganz tot, vollkommen abgeschnitten...Die Grenze hat vieles zerschnitten...Wir haben keine Sicherheit...nichts...⁵

⁴ ibid., 29, 36.
⁵ ibid., 47, 48.
Once Andreas has somehow intuited that he will die in Stryi, the terrifying knife-image confronts him directly:

Stryi...Stryi...dieser schreckliche Name, der wie ein Strich ist, ein blutiger Strich an meinem Hals! In Stryi werde ich ermordet. Jeder Tod ist ein Mord, jeder Tod im Kriege ist ein Mord, für den irgendeiner verantwortlich ist. In Stryi!^6

When the novella ends and Andreas, Olina and the others are killed in a surprise attack by Polish partisans, presumably using some sort of rocket-propelled grenades, Böll continues to use a poetic mode of description rather than a realistic one when he once again makes use of the knife-image in describing the final attack:

Und dann wird der Wagen zersägt, von zwei rasenden Messern, die knirschen vor wildem Haß, eins rast von vorne und das andere von hinten in den metallenen Leib, der sich aufbäumt und dreht, erfüllt vom Angstgeschrei seiner Insassen...in der folgenden Stille ist nichts mehr zu hören als das inbrünstige Fressen der Flammen.^7

The mechanical control over man is also expressed in the novella by certain passages which are repeated almost verbatim, adding a dull rhythm to the printed page, like the rhythm of a train in motion on its tracks. The phrase "Zwischen Lemberg und Czernowitz" is repeated constantly, as are sardonic, critical references to the naively foolish, nameless soldier in the train who comments: "praktisch haben wir den Krieg schon gewonnen!"^8 The older, more mature soldiers who know better can only shake their heads and remain silent in response to these absurdly naive and brash sentiments, as Böll indicates when he twice echoes the following passage monotonously, almost word

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^6 Ibid, 119.

^7 Ibid, 152.

^8 Ibid, 20.
for word: "Aber das Schweigen derer, die nichts, gar nichts sagen, ist furchtbar. Es ist das Schweigen derer, die wissen, daß sie alle verloren sind."\textsuperscript{9}

The "sonorous voices" of the different train stations announcing the different arrivals and departures of the trains over the loudspeaker deeply haunt Andreas and seem to lend an almost ethereal and quasi-divine nature to the mechanism of war. These voices, at least in Andreas' paranoid imagination, take on an almost metaphysical presence and power:

Alles Unglück kommt von diesen sonoren Stimmen; diese sonoren Stimmen haben den Krieg angefangen, und diese sonoren Stimmen regeln den schlimmsten Krieg, den Krieg auf den Bahnhöfen. Zum Teufel mit allen sonoren Stimmen!\textsuperscript{10}

Andreas is thankful for the stations without sonorous voices. "Gott segne die Bahnhöfe ohne sonore Stimmen"\textsuperscript{11}. Andreas thinks to himself. He is bitter, sardonic, and angry because the sonorous voices are cold and impersonal, sending young men to their deaths without any remorse:

"Radebeul", sagt eine sächsisch-sonore Stimme. Eine brave Stimme, eine gute Stimme, eine deutsche Stimme, die ebensogut sagen würde: "Die nächsten zehntausend ins Schlachthaus, bitte..."\textsuperscript{12}

Ironically, however, even Andreas' own prayers are of a mechanical nature, following a rhythmic cycle; they are completely passionless, lacking in any real personal devotion, merely a ritual to be followed out of a somewhat guilty conscience:

...die Zeit ist gesprungen, immer springt die Zeit, und jetzt sitze ich schon vierundzwanzig Stunden davor. Wenn man weiß, daß man stirbt, da hat man doch allerei zu regeln, zu bereuen und zu beten, viel zu beten, und ich

\textsuperscript{9} Ibid, 22.
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 15.
\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 21.
\textsuperscript{12} Ibid, 23.

The mystical, cabbalistic, existential terror embodied in the word "bald"

("soon...") haunts Andreas from beginning to end. Böll eloquently describes this existential terror in the following passages that are meant to convey Andreas' innermost thoughts:


"There are no dreams anymore...", says Andreas, and yet he dreams quite a lot, in fact. He is very much a dreamer. Dreams and fantasies occupy much of Andreas' thoughts, and compose much of the stuff of the novella itself. It is very much a delaying tactic, and a wistful, temporary escape from the brutal realities of life. There is a seemingly universal desire to escape into some sort of eternal, idyllic paradise that both Böll's Der Zug war pünktlich and Vegesack's Tanja share. Both protagonists at some point select a particular moment in time, always that of intently observing a beautiful female, with emphasis laid on the pleasureable, existential sensuality of the moment, and

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13 Ibid, 78.  
14 Ibid, 9-11.
deeply desire that that moment should continue forever. A comparison of the following passages demonstrates this parallel. First, from Böll's novella:

...stundenlang möchte ich mir Kaffee eingießen lassen; wenn doch der Becher ein Loch hatte, sie müßte gießen, gießen, ich würde ihre sanften Augen und diesen reizenden Nacken sehen, und die sonore Stimmen müßte schweigen.15

Then from Vegesack's:

Nach all dem Stimmengewirr, dem von dicken Rauschschwaden und Alkoholdünsten erfüllten Kasino tat mir dir Stille und die wunderbare aromatische Luft der warmen Sommernacht wohl—am liebsten wäre ich noch stundenlang so neben Tanja weitergewandert.16

And:

An der Stelle, wo die Akazienallee auf den Weg mündete, schlug Tanja vor, den Maschuk auf der anderen Seite zu umreiten; es sei kein großer Umweg, meinte sie, aber langweilig, auf dem gleichen Weg heimzukehren. Mir war es recht. Am liebsten wäre ich die ganze Nacht neben Tanja hergeritten. So auf dem Pferderücken, in der gut sitzenden Reithose, gefiel sie mir besonders, und immer wieder mußte ich ihre anmutig-gelöste und doch beherrschte Haltung bewundern.17

Similarly, Andreas is haunted by the eyes of some nameless French girl he saw for only a split second before being wounded, and prior to meeting Olina, she is the only woman he feels he has ever truly loved. All of these are examples of an escape into fantasy, dreams, and memories. We know Andreas was born on February 15, which on the Zodiac makes him an Aquarius, and Böll accurately attributes to Andreas all the personality traits associated with Aquarians: dreamy, otherworldly, detached, etc.

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15 Ibid, 15.
16 Siegfried von Vegesack, Tanja: Eine Erzählung aus dem Kaukasus (Heilbronn: Eugen Salzer-Verlag 1959) 22.
17 Ibid, 43.
The card game on the train has two symbolic meanings. First, it is, like Andreas' flights into fantasy, yet another juvenile delaying tactic, as is wiring the door shut and consuming huge quantities of alcohol; even Willi's fresh shave and haircut are only temporary measures at best. All are futile attempts to forstall the inevitable. At another, higher level, however, the card game symbolizes the randomness and existential arbitrariness of the game of life itself.

The only thing that seems to effectively disrupt the cold, brutal certainties of the German war machine are the Polish partisans. Partisans are irregular, mysterious and hidden. They are able to force the train to stop and disrupt the German time-table. With the introduction of this random, Polish element, the novella enters into its most interesting phase. It is particularly ironic that as the three soldiers move closer and closer to the Russian front, the mood, atmosphere and general surroundings of the soldiers get merrier and more and more lighthearted. Where Dortmund is gray and dreary, Lemberg is bright and jovial. The novella moves from the nominally real to the surreal. Even Lemberg is not really an escape for the three. We know that Willi and the blonde soldier have resolved to die, and Andreas feels his impending death is inevitable. Tellingly, Andreas repeatedly describes his impressions of being in Lemberg as "...wie ein Traum...":

...da steht ein Auto an der Ecke, ein sehr wackeliges Personenauto, und es ist wie ein Traum, daß Willi den Fahrer kennt. Er ruft "Stani", und es ist wieder wie ein Traum, daß sich ein verschlafener, schmutziger alter Pole aus dem Führerstand erhebt und grinsend Willi erkennt...es ist wie ein Traum: ganz Lemberg scheint Willi zu gehören...und da ist ein Restaurant mit weichen Klubsesseln und schöngedeckten Tischen mit Blumen. Herbstblumen, denkt Andreas, wie man sie auf Gräber setzt, und er denkt,
das wird meine Henkersmahlzeit...und da sind wieder Sessel und ein schön
gedeckter Tisch, und alles ist wie ein Traum. [italics mine]¹⁸

All the celebrations in Lemberg, then, are not really an escape for Andreas and the
other characters, but more like a preparation for a funeral: Their fresh baths, haircuts and
shaves in Lemberg are like preparing corpses for burial. The whole celebration is
symbolically like a Catholic wake before that funeral. Still, in those brief and fleeting
existential moments, Andreas discovers to his amazement that life is beautiful:

Zwölf Stunden vor meinem Tode muß ich einsehen, daß das Leben schön
ist, das ist zu spät. Ich bin undankbar gewesen, ich habe geleugnet, daß es
eine menschliche Freude gibt. Und das Leben war schön. [Andreas] wird
rot vor Verlegenheit, rot vor Angst, rot vor Reue...Ich habe ein
unglückliches Leben gehabt...und zwölf Stunden oder elf Stunden vor
meinem Tode muß ich einsehen, daß das Leben schön war.¹⁹

The three then head for a Polish bordello. Andreas hears the music of Schubert on
the radio and is overcome by emotion. Unlike Willi, Andreas doesn't really want a
prostitute, but he asks the old hag who runs the bordello if he can "buy some Music?"
The old woman finds Andreas' request unusual, but, eager to do business, she sends Olina
to him, who is nicknamed "the opera-singer" because she once studied music.

Andreas' encounter with Olina is by far the most important section of the novella.
Here the German and Polish elements of the novella meet and intertwine. We discover
that Olina was born February 12th, only two days before Andreas. She, too, is an
Aquarius. Before the war, both of them studied music and learned to play the piano, and
in both their cases, the war forever disrupted and destroyed their young artistic efforts.
They realize, to their surprise, how very much alike they both are, and how the war has

¹⁸ Heinrich Böll. Der Zug war pünktlich, 88, 89.
¹⁹ Ibid. 93-94.
ruined both of their young lives. Olina remarks that she could practically be Andreas' sister. Olina's personal hatred of the Germans loses its force when she is exposed to Andreas' pure innocence. She knows, almost instinctively, that he is a virgin. Initially, she wants to seduce him sexually, but Andreas wants only to talk and to hear music from the piano. The two begin to communicate on a higher plane, through the meta-language of music, to reach a higher understanding of each other. Andreas decides to tell Olina everything; everything about his premonitions of death, the girl in France, his childhood and his abusive, alcoholic uncle. Olina is horrified by Andreas' premonitions of death, but he manages to calm her. Unlike Tatjana in Vegesack's novella, Olina openly admits to Andreas that she works for the Polish resistance as a spy. Like Tatjana, Olina finds German men to be overly sentimental romantics, and thus easily spied upon. Olina realizes, however, that her espionage results, ultimately, in the deaths of innocent young men like Andreas, a man who could practically be her brother. Olina begins to see that Andreas is trapped in the German war machine and is not a willing participant. Slowly, she looks at herself and realizes that she, too, is caught up in a mechanism—the Polish resistance. Whereas Vegesack emphasizes the critical, irreconcilable differences between Germans and Russians and in Tatjana's divided "Russian soul", Böll emphasizes the common ground between Andreas and Olina.

From a structural standpoint, it is important to the novella that Olina is a Pole, for she, too, is killed in the surprise attack by the partisans. Through these two facts, we know that Olina did not set up Andreas and his comrades. Perhaps Olina was betrayed by the old woman who runs the bordello because Olina chooses to stay the night with
Andreas instead of sleeping with the visiting German general and using the sexual encounter to pry valuable information from him.

It is only in Olina's presence that Andreas is able to feel real emotions and actually cry. Olina cries as well. Andreas had asked God earlier to let him finally cry, and at the end of the novella, after seeing that Olina has been killed, he dies crying.

Böll's ending is ambiguous and problematic, but reveals certain ironies as well. The Polish partisan activity that halted the train headed for Lemberg, throwing the German time-table off-schedule, rather than disrupting the overall mechanism of war, actually plays an integral, ironic role in sealing Andreas' fate. Andreas' decision to avoid leaving Lemberg by train and go by automobile instead is a fatal mistake, as is his insistence on taking his two other comrades with him. The two systems, the German war-machine and the Polish resistance, far from destroying each other, instead compliment each other, albeit each in their own unique way, to mercilessly snuff out the lives of innocent young Poles and Germans alike.

In the bordello, Olina plays a somewhat sentimental popular song "Ich tanze mit dir in den Himmel hinein, in den siebenten Himmel der Liebe" on the piano. This song provokes tears from Andreas and Olina both. It also serves a forshadowing of their own deaths, much like the function of the dying roses in Vegesack's novella. Andreas doesn't want to die and is convinced that if he boards the train, he will be killed when the partisans attack. Olina decides they will flee together, and escape from everything. Olina hatches a plan that is eerily similar to Tatjana's in Siegfried von Vegesack's novella:


Both female protagonists (from Tanja and Der Zug war pünktlich) share this desire, this plan to vaguely escape somewhere "off in the mountains", where "no one will find us". Compare the following passages from Tanja with Böll's passage above:


In Böll's novella it is Andreas who becomes inflexible, insisting to Olina that he cannot flee without his comrades. She tries to convince him this is madness, but he refuses to listen:

Olina reluctantly agrees to Andreas' conditions, and this seals their fates. As the net closes in around Tatjana, she returns to her idea of fleeing with the narrator of

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20 Ibid, 146.
21 Siegfried von Vegesack, Tanja, 75-76.
22 Heinrich Böll, Der Zug war pünktlich, 147.
Vegesack's novella "off into the mountains". Olina's motives are more pure and less ambiguous. It is difficult to assess how much Tatjana is acting out of love and how much she is acting out of self-interest. Perhaps if they had fled together earlier, they would have made it, but it is far too late now. Tatjana speaks in extremely utopian terms:


"Wenn man mal drin ist, dann kann man nicht so leicht hinaus." These prophetic words apply equally well to Olina and Andreas as to Tatjana and the nameless narrator of Vegesack's novella. The word "drin" in both contexts has a double meaning -- it refers not only to being in "the system", a cog in the war-machine, but also to being hopelessly and irrationally in love.

The mysterious driver at the end of Böll's novella is much like Charon, leading the doomed characters to the land of the dead, across the river Styx. Although in Polish the name "Stryi" has nothing to do with the Greek legend (its root ties it to the word for "maternal uncle"), this is still the association that Böll intended for his German readers. The only real hope in Böll's novella lies in Böll's own Catholicism and the hint and hope for an afterlife, implied in Olina's playing "Ich tanze mit dir in den Himmel hinein, in den siebenten Himmel der Liebe," and her insistent, heartfelt promise to Andreas: "Aber vergiß nicht, was ich dir gesagt habe: wohin ich dich auch führen werde, es wird das

²³ Vegesack, 99, 100.
Leben sein. Ja?24 which she keeps repeating until the next to the last page. Moreover, Böll's Catholicism shines through when he describes the events of Andreas' death and his friend Paul, the Catholic chaplain, saying mass at the back in Andreas' home, the German Rheinland, as occuring simultaneously. It helps to remember that the word Utopia, in its original meaning, literally meant "no - place": The place of hope and escape for Andreas and Olina has become at one in the same with their place of death. They cannot escape: Der Zug war pünktlich...in Stryi!

Böll's ending is problematic, and it is difficult to say whether or not Olina and Andreas could have done better than they did. If nothing else, one must ultimately condemn the whole project of war in toto, especially for the way it constructs such devious machinery that conspires on all sides to crush so many innocent lives. There are no winners, only victims. Perhaps God will put things right in the end, but that is beyond our human ability to know or comprehend with any certainty.

24 Böll, 6.
West Germany - the late Heinrich Böll

Thusfar we have examined German fiction dealing with the early and middle stages of the Second World War, with the German male characters, as the soldiers of a conquering German army, serving in the symbolic role of the aggressor. Specifically, we know that all the action in Siegfried von Vegesack's Tanja takes place before the late summer of 1942, whilst the action in Böll's Der Zug war pünktlich is set in the fall of 1943.

In both novellas, the German soldiers are humanized and come to reject the war and embrace love and life through carefully constructed liaisons with a female, ethnic Slav civilian, confronting face to face a figure vilified by Nazi-propaganda as an "Untermensch" or sub-human, and falling in love. Unfortunately, these Slavic females are also serving their own countries as spies, and they are torn between love for their country and love for an enemy soldier who is naive and boyishly romantic, and in a special way, somehow "different" than all the other Germans. Both lovers resolve to transcend their differences, leave their own people behind and flee the war together, but as members of two opposing factions at war, they are crushed and destroyed by the cold machinery of the war itself. From both sides, the problematic biblical theme of "Love thy enemy" is thus explored.

As we shift this theme in narrative fiction symbolically from 1942 and 1943 to 1944 and 1945, we find there are important role-reversals. The Soviet Union is winning the war and preparing to march victoriously into a defeated Germany. It is this time frame, late in the war, that encloses the most important sections of Heinrich Böll's novel
Gruppenbild mit Dame and Max Frisch's minor drama Als der Krieg zu Ende war (also the title of a short story by Böll!), which, unlike Böll's extensive panoramic novel, is set entirely in Russian-occupied Berlin in 1945. In their own way, both authors deal with the highly controversial subject of relations between German female civilians and Russian officers and men of the Red Army. Some of the story structure remains unchanged: it again is the male character who symbolizes the aggressive force and the female who symbolizes the country that has been occupied by that aggressive force. The main contrast between Frisch and Böll is that Böll's Russian protagonist is a prisoner of the Germans and with Frisch, the female German protagonist is ostensibly a prisoner of the Russian officer Stepan Iwanow.

It is important to bear in mind how the final days of German resistance against the Soviet Union were often, in the postwar period, romanticized and used as a propaganda tool, attempting dubiously to link the last dying gasp of the Nazi Reich with the aims of the American-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization in the Cold War. Where previously Nazi rhetoric spoke of a holy war against "Judeo-Bolshevism", the same sentiments were reformulated into more "politically correct" terms of a war against "Asiatic barbarism and communism." While it cannot be denied that advancing Soviet troops did commit atrocities in their capture and occupation of German territory, their actions pale in comparison to the rape of the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries by the armed forces of the Nazi regime. Ruthless dictatorships were set up and kept in power by the Soviet Union, but none of these regimes engaged in systematic genocide, nor did they practice any sort of racial "purification" policies.
German and Swiss literary intellectuals like Vegesack, Böll and Frisch became increasingly disturbed at the developing politics of the Cold War and the survival and rehabilitation of old Nazis and their discredited nationalist myths in the Federal Republic of Germany, nurtured unwittingly by Allied strategic interests. The bitter memory of drunken, disheveled Soviet troops raping and pillaging at the end of the Second World War was transformed into a convenient, pervasive propaganda tool and dehumanizing stereotype attributed to all Russians during the Cold War. If one compares pre-war anti-Communist propaganda of the Weimar Republic and Nazi regime with the emerging anti-Communist propaganda and rhetoric of the 1950s, disturbing similarities emerge.

It was in order to confront these trends in postwar German society that Vegesack, Böll and Frisch created their provocative fiction. All of these authors are seeking to confront German ignorance about Russian society and undermine stereotypes about Russians derived from wartime propaganda and the tensions of the Cold War that kept these prejudices alive and "socially acceptable". In this task as authors, Böll, Vegesack and Frisch create fictive worlds where they can give truly human faces to their Russian characters and thereby hopefully change attitudes in society at large. It is worth noting that outside of the purely literary realm, both Böll and Vegesack lent their strong moral support as public figures to Willi Brandt's "Ostpolitik" and the aims of the peace-movement in Germany.

Among the most provocative of the works confronting Cold War issues through a re-examination of the Second World War is Heinrich Böll's *Gruppenbild mit Dame*. The novel is properly understood as a cultural product of the late 1960s, for it is a story that glorifies the social non-conformist and the proverbial underdog while protesting what
Böll, as a sort of Christian-humanistic socialist reformer, feels to be the injustices of contemporary Western capitalist society--themes common to the rebellious "Spirit of 1968". Though the story is told by an anonymous narrator who is not biographically identical with Heinrich Böll, Böll does leave his personal stamp on the narrator as a character in the novel. The narrator moves from being a detached and dispassionate observer to a sympathetic participant in the action at the end of the novel.

In brief, the novel chronicles the history of a few families in Germany from the end of World War I, through the Weimar Republic, the pre-war Nazi years, World War II and its aftermath, all the way up to Böll's own contemporary Germany, with heaviest emphasis laid upon the years of the Second World War, especially 1944-1945. The narrative is a huge mosaic constructed out of various fragments, mostly in the form of recollections of the various persons still living in the late 1960s, all obtained by the narrator's interviews and investigations, with the narrator's own personal comments and observations inserted in various places for various reasons. It is from these varied subjective accounts that the reader must construct for himself what actually happened.

At the center of this "Gruppenbild" ("Group Portrait") is the angelic female character, Leni. She shares similarities with some noble female characters from Böll's earlier fiction, like the Polish woman Olina from Der Zug war pünktlich, but unlike Olina, Leni is definitely the central character and not merely a supporting cast member. It is the first time in Böll's fiction that he chooses a female central character--a stylistic choice he will return to in his later fiction.

The most controversial section of Gruppenbild mit Dame and the key event of the novel is the love-affair between the Soviet prisoner-of-war Boris Lvovitch Koltovsky and
the innocent Leni. It is not Boris who approaches Leni, but Leni who approaches Boris. While others project their spiteful prejudices onto Boris, Leni sees Boris as he is, as a human being. In the famous "coffee scene" of *Gruppenbild mit Dame* we have, among other things, a modernized re-telling of the biblical tale of Jesus and the Samaritan woman at the well found in the Gospel according to John. Böll is trying to demonstrate symbolically how Russians and Germans should make peace by learning from the reconciliation between Samaritans and Jews that the biblical story demonstrates. Leni's act is profoundly human and also subversively political, but it is doubtful that Leni is either aware of or concerned with the political implications of her act of kindness to Boris. It is through the mouth of the character Grundtsch that Böll provides us with the interpretation of the event that is closest to his own personal sentiments and gives us the clearest picture of what he was seeking to achieve as an author through this scene:

> Niemand konnte das, was sie tat, anders auslegen: als reine naive Menschlichkeit, und die war zwar Untermenschen gegenüber verboten, und doch, wissen Sie: das sah ja sogar ein Kerl wie der Kremp, daß Boris ein Mensch war: er hatte ja Nase und zwei Beine und sogar ne Brille auf der Nase, und er war sensibler als die ganze Mischpocke da zusammen. Der Boris wurde einfach durch Lenis mutige Tat zum Menschen gemacht, zum Menschen erklärt -- und damit hatte es sich, trotz all der miesen Dinge, die da noch kommen sollten.¹

Grundtsch's use of the Yiddish term *Mischpoke* is especially interesting in this context. The word is a derogatory term for "disorganized family", and since he is referring in particular to the crotchety old Nazis at the workshop, using this Jewish word to describe them is particularly ironic, provocative and interesting.

One must remember that Böll's religious imagery is multi-layered and free-floating; characters often assume more than one biblical role and there is a free exchange
of these allusions. Leni is the Virgin Mary, while her friend Margret is Mary Magdalene. Boris plays the Christ-like role in the events surrounding the coffee-scene, for he is shown to be a very pure, very innocent and gentle person. Symbolically, like Jesus, he is bringing a message of "new faith" to these German civilians. At a certain level, this "new faith" is implied to be the communist message, since Boris does hum and sing Marxist-inspired Soviet hymns on the tram in the mornings, on his way to work. Actually, however, the new faith, surprisingly, turns out to be Boris' Russian-Orthodox Christianity. It is the simple Russian Boris, from the "barbaric land of Bolshevik atheism", who teaches Leni how to pray. In fact, to Russian readers of Böll's novel, Boris' Christianity is very reminiscent of the attitudes and activism espoused by that towering figure of Russian literature, Count Leo Tolstoy. Russian critics of Böll's novel have been generally approving of his characterization of Boris. For example:

D. Zatonskij, vormals Leiter der Abteilung für ausländische Literatur am Moskauer Gorkij-Institut, meinte, daß Boris zwar respekt- und liebevoll dargestellt sei, daß aber gleichzeitig "dem Mythos des geheimnisvollen und unergründlichen Rußland gehuldigt wird." - ein Einwand, der in irgendeindeiner Form von fast allen Kritikern vorgebracht wurde.²

This view of Boris by Zatonskij could also apply equally to Vegesack's main character Tatjana as well as Frisch's Stepan Iwanow. Other Russian opinions regarding Böll's novel lend important insights into the novel's interpretation and should not be ignored:

In ihrem Nachwort zur Novyj-mir-Ausgabe von 'Gruppenbild' stellte Tamara Motyleva im Hinblick auf vorhandene Elemente von Satire, Humor, Komik, Groteske und aufgrund einer gewissen Ironie und Parodie

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¹ Heinrich Böll, *Gruppenbild mit Dame* (Köln: Verlag Kiepenheuer & Witsch 1971) 196.
des Stils eine Ähnlichkeit mit Gogol fest. Auch für sie ist Boris Koltovskij eine widersprüchliche Figur da er "...offensichtlich literarischen Ursprungs ist; er steht Fürst Myskin oder Alesa Karamozov weitaus näher als der Generation der Oktoberrevolution. Und dennoch weist Boris wahren menschlichen Adel auf -- er scheint einen speziellen, moralischen Glanz auszustrahlen und verkörpert die hohe geistige und intellektuelle Kultur jenes Volkes, das einen Tolstoj und einen Dostojewskij hervorgebracht hat."3

In summarizing Tamara Motyleva's opinion of Böll's novel, Peter Bruhn notes that despite her specific problems with the work,

Im großen und ganzen bewertete die Literaturwissenschaftlerin und Kritikerin den Roman jedoch ausgesprochen positiv, da er Bölls leidenschaftlichen Aufruf zum Frieden, zum gegenseitigen Verständnis und zur Freundschaft zwischen Russen und Deutschen zum Haupthema habe.4

Western critics have also taken interest in the Russian character Boris Koltovsky and the function he serves in the narrative. In his lengthy study of Böll-criticism and reception, Reinhard K. Zachau informs us that:

Edgar Bracht was the first to interpret the image of the Russian prisoner of war in Group Portrait. Bracht points to the striking German elements in the education of Boris Koltowski (the POW, Leni's lover). Unlike typical Russians at that time, he does not know much about his own culture, especially the proletarian literature of the 1930s -- instead, his interests center on German early-twentieth-century literature from Trakl to Kafka...Bracht concludes that Böll had political intentions in describing Boris's [sic] education, since Scholsdorff, the German in Böll's novel, is an avid reader of Russian literature; Böll was obviously trying to give an example of cooperation between the nations at a time when Brandt's Ostpolitik was getting started.5

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1 Ibid. 48-49.
2 Ibid. 49.
3 Reinhard K. Zachau, Heinrich Böll: Forty Years of Criticism (Camden House 1994) 122.
Boris also takes on the role of Joseph if we view Leni as the Virgin Mary and their son Lev as the Christ-child. Interestingly, placing Boris in this context means that he is called upon to play male Jewish roles, and Böll ruefully drops hints and suggestions as to why this is altogether fitting and appropriate. Through a curious twist of fate, Boris, unlike his fellow Russian prisoners, is circumcised. Through an interview with the former POW Bogakov, the narrator learns the details of how this came to be:

Als winziger Bengel von zwei, drei Jahren, während des Bürgerkrieges, hat ihn [Boris] seine Mutter in einem Dorf in Galizien versteckt, bei einer alten Freundin, und diese Freundin hat ne jüdische Großmutter, die hat den Jungen übernommen, als die Freundin erschossen wurde, und da ist er wohl ein, zwei Jahre mit den jüdischen Kindern im Dorf rumgekrochen, dann ist auch diese Oma gestorben und irgend ne andere Oma hat den Jungen übernommen, von dem keiner mehr genau wußte, wo er hergekommen war. Und eines Tages entdeckt diese Oma, daß der kleine Boris noch nicht beschnitten ist, und sie denkt natürlich, das hat die verstorben Oma versäumt und läßt es einfach nachholen --- nun war er beschnitten.6

Böll casually mixes Russian and Jewish motifs in the character of Boris, and uses Boris, a citizen of the officially atheist Soviet Union, as the surprising bearer of a renewing Christian message. Besides Boris' unusual circumcision, Robert C. Conrad has also observed that:

Following orthodox Jewish practice, Boris refrains from sexual intercourse with Leni from the sixth month of her pregnancy until the third month after her delivery. And like Joseph in the New Testament, Boris plays a minor role in the accounts of the life of the Holy Family.7

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This harmonizing by Böll of Judaic elements with Boris' Russian ethnicity and the Christ-like messianic role he plays for Leni can be somewhat justified and substantiated by the writings of Nikolai Berdyaev, who notes in his famous book, *The Russian Idea*:

The Russians are a people in the highest degree polarized: they are a conglomerate of contradictions...the unexpected is always to be expected from them...In respect of this polarization and inconsistency the Russian people can be paralleled only by the Jews [italics mine]: and it is not only a matter of chance that in precisely these two peoples there exists a vigorous messianic consciousness.⁸

Böll gives very human faces to all the other Russian characters in his novel as well. Only one of the Russian prisoners, Viktor Genrikhovich, is a dedicated Stalinist and virulent anti-Semite. The rest of them are ambivalent, and many, like Bogakov, have decided that they do not want to return to the Soviet Union after the war is over, for they have fallen in love with Germany. Indeed, among the Russian characters besides Boris, former Soviet citizen Pyotr Petrovich Bogakov is one of the most sympathetic, human characters of the whole novel. He has left a wife, Larissa, and a son, Lavrik, behind back in the Soviet Union and feels a great deal of guilt for having committed adultery. Given his circumstances, however, and the ravages of war he has endured and the violence and cruelty he has borne silent witness to, it is hard not to feel pity for Bogakov; in this light his impulsive sexual encounter with a German woman in a barn can only be seen as all too human. Bogakov ridicules the pompous, overzealous stalinist, Viktor Genrikhovich, and has little interest in sentimental, nostalgic celebrations and reminders of the "Great Patriotic War" that other Russians in the novel cling to. He sometimes thinks of going back to Russia in order to die there, but he also cannot tear himself away from Germany

and his newfound freedom. As readers it pleases us to see the long-suffering Bogakov find happiness, ultimately, with the German female socialist Lotte Hoyser.

Bokagov's sexual encounter shares structural parallels with the hapless men and women copulating in the bomb shelters during the intense bombing raids over Germany. As he tried to show in *Der Zug war pünktlich*, Böll once again shows us how the ravages of war reduce human beings to their most basic forms and strip away the outer shell of national identity, which becomes irrelevant. The human beings are confronted with death and respond with the most basic impulse of procreation. They cling to life, specifically the creation of new life, in the face of immanent death all around them.

Heinrich Böll revels in shocking his audience. He will often take situations and structures and turn them completely upside down on their heads. It is part of Böll's concept of humor, which he defines in his *Frankfurter Vorlesungen* as "the representation in its majesty of that which society regards as refuse." Böll wishes to humble that which society holds in high regard and exalt that which society holds in low regard. The great will be brought low and the lowly made great, or in biblical terms "The first will be the last and the last first."-- the pain and humiliation of the crucifixion is overturned by the glorious resurrection. Robert C. Conrad explains:

...this theory of humane reversal...works throughout the novel. The "Au.'s" narrative objectivity...deteriorates to subjective involvement. The arch-opportunistic Pelzer develops into a decent human being. The foreign sanitation workers become knights-errant in garbage trucks saving Leni from the clutches of the dragon Otto Hoyser...War has the ironic effect of making lovers of the German Leni and the Russian Boris, and war's end, which should bring Leni and Boris together, separates them forever. The bombing raids that cause misery and death provide Leni and Boris with

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9 Robert C. Conrad, 102.
happiness and life...Leni, called a "communist whore", reveals herself to be not only a Madonna but also a new Eve when she plunges her hand into a stopped toilet and removes an offending apple core. With this gesture she symbolically restores Eden, showing how the lost paradise in the form of an alternative world can still be realized in opposition to the alienation and repression caused by society...the entire novel is pervaded by Böll's concept of humor, demonstrated by a radical reversal of values.\textsuperscript{10}

Thus Böll's choice of Soviet Russian Boris as Leni's lover was an artistic move fully made for its shock-effect. It would have been relatively safe, even ultimately socially acceptable for Leni to have an American lover. This sort of thing actually happened often enough. German girls would sleep with American soldiers in order to get bread, cigare:tes, and other material goods. They would marry American soldiers for a much better material life in the USA and send things back to relatives in Germany. But for Leni to marry a Russian soldier is shocking. The Russians had nothing themselves; devastated by the war, the average citizen of the Soviet Union was even worse off materially than the average German. There was absolutely no material advantage to be gained for Leni by marrying Boris. Her love for Boris is pure, untainted by material considerations or by plans for the future. It is a purely spiritual matter. Leni is unconcerned about material possessions. Werner Hoyser calls her an Unmensch (non-human) because she is indifferent to what he calls a "healthy sense of profit and desire for possessions"\textsuperscript{1}. Böll's satire on capitalist thinking, especially American-style capitalism, is especially sharp.

Leni's having a child by Boris is utterly shocking to most of the members of German society in which Leni lives. To them, she is sleeping with the arch-enemy,

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid, 102-104.

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid, 111.
betraying all the principles and values of Western Civilization to "Asiatic Barbarism". They cannot accept it. They denounce her, calling her a "communist whore" and "red-sweetie" and derisively call the wartime shelter of Leni and Boris "The Soviet Love-Paradise".

The so-called "Soviet Love Paradise" offers three associations: (1) The Garden of Eden, with Boris and Leni as Adam and Eve, (2) the early Christian community hiding in the Roman catacombs, and, of course, (3) the Nativity scene with the Holy Family.12 Lev's birth is given a miraculous quality by Böll, further encouraging the Christ-child allusion. We know earlier that Leni, lying on her back as a young woman, experienced a spontaneous orgasm in which she felt "taken" and remarked that she would be not at all surprised if she had a virgin birth. Moreover, there is a gap in the narration between Lev's birth and his young adult life in the year 1970, much like the gap in narration found in all of the Gospels of the New Testament in their telling of the story of the life of Jesus. Lev goes on to preach the secular gospel of Leistungsverweigerung ("deliberate underachievement"). He uses his skills at organization to ease the workload of his fellow employees but refuses to use his skills to help management get more out of their workers. It is worth noting that Lev shares his name in Russian with Count Tolstoy, whose socially active Christian ethics illuminate the lives of Boris and Leni alike.

Incidentally, Böll reveals in an interview with Dieter Wellershoff that he had originally thought of making Leni's lover simply a Jew, but then changed his mind, feeling that this subject was already overdone in the literary realm and therefore that such

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a choice would already be in danger of being reduced to a mere cliche. Thus he chose the Soviet Russian character Boris instead, though Boris' accidental circumcision show that Böll liked the idea enough not to let go of it entirely. Instead, however, he redirected this Jewish theme by making the nun and religious mystic, Sister Rahel, a convert from Judaism to Catholicism—a conversion which did not matter to the Nazis and meant she had to go into hiding anyway. In the novel Leni puts herself at great risk by staying in contact with the old nun who is slowly wasting away in her hiding place at the convent. Rahel is the only one of the nuns who truly understands Leni and appreciates her naturalness, sensuality and spirituality. Böll even breaks briefly from literary realism to attribute mystical powers to Rahel, namely the curious Rose-miracle that keeps occurring at Rahel's burial place. Böll is sharply critical of the official Catholic Church throughout Gruppenbild mit Dame, particularly in his expression of moral outrage at the humiliating treatment of Rahel by the other nuns and her undignified, slow death from neglect and hunger which Böll argues is scarcely better than her fate at the hands of the Nazis would have been. The vehemence with which the official church tries to stamp out the miracle of roses is meant by Böll as a satirical critique of how the official church so often kills off genuine religious experience and wonder. The fictional author's seduction of the nun Klementia, though criticized by some as an needless detour from the main plot, is intended as a further provocation and criticism of Catholic officialdom.

Leni's religious experiences are immediate, uninhibited, sensual and direct. At Catholic school she works herself up into an almost orgasmic frenzy in her preparation to receive communion. This is shocking to the church officials, who declare her unfit to

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13 Renate Matthaei, *Die subversive Madonna: Ein Schlüssel zum Werk Heinrich Bölls* (Köln: Verlag
receive communion. Leni is utterly free-spirited, unbound by societal inhibitions. To her the spiritual and the sensual are bound up harmoniously together, inseparable. Her sort of religiosity is spontaneous and subversive, not subject to control or institutionalization by the official church. Her love affair with Boris is scandalous because the ideas at work here are so explosive. For anyone to understand Leni’s behavior, one has to think like her and drop all stereotypes. Only then, only as "The Holy Family" can German society begin to understand and accept Leni.

Böll never forgave the Catholic Church for its collaborations with the Nazi Regime and for its role in restoring capitalism in the post-war period and supporting the re-arming of Germany. Böll intensely felt that after the devastation of the Second World War, Germany had the chance, the potential to return to the kind of society found in the early Christian church but ultimately missed that opportunity. He is trying to demonstrate through his characterization of Leni and her private world in Gruppenbild mit Dame what such a society could look like if put into practice. For him, only someone like Leni can be said to be living the true Christian life. She is put forward to us as the new Virgin Mary, and indeed in that regard the whole novel can be read much like a document in the beatification process for a saint in the Catholic Church, prepared in meticulous detail by the fictional author serving in the role of an Advocatus Dei.

Böll attempts to show us how Leni’s life took one path, while post-war German society took another. Leni’s later love affair with the muslim Turk Mehmet at the end of the novel shows us that Leni continues to live in opposition to society’s prejudices even in modern Germany, showing us the novel’s continuing relevance to us today. Moreover,
while the rest of society moves forward, by choosing a Muslim lover, she has symbolically moved backwards in time, choosing the Muslim "infidel", the enemy of the Crusades, as her lover. It is one final example of Leni's living in her own world, set apart from the rest of contemporary German society. The symbolic circle of the three major religions of the Middle East, namely Christianity, Judaism, and Islam is now complete and all three are mystically unified through Leni's existential position in Böll's novel. Through her, all things seem possible. Robert C. Conrad concludes:

Ultimately, therefore, Böll's Group Portrait is a revolutionary book...[Leni] is the harbinger of a harmonious ideal, a necessary revolutionary figure in a patriarchal world of reason. Böll [has] said of the counterculture of the sixties: it is too easily explained as a "quasi-mythical reaction to an over-rationalized world...I do not believe that the rational and irrational exclude one another. In philosophical and sociological circles they are seen as antithetical. Basically -- and I believe it is an important task for literature to show this -- the two do not exist separately, but in various combinations...in general we are taught to think dualistically, and I think that is dangerous. There is a trinitarian possibility...and this combination of the rational and the irrational is what I would call 'the third way'". It is along this "third way" that Group Portrait tries to go.  

With reunification, Germany had another opportunity to choose a new path for itself, with much renewed debate about the "third way", trying to combine the very best of both the former GDR and the Federal Republic--a way that seems now to be rapidly vanishing--but this fact plus the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union make Böll's novel all the more painfully relevant to readers and observers today.

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The Swiss perspective - Max Frisch

It may seem at first odd to bring into our discussion the writings of a non-combatant, namely a neutral Swiss German like Max Frisch, but since the Swiss are an inseparable part of the German intellectual tradition, their unique perspective should be considered for the reasons that follow. While Germany in 1945 and the immediate post-war years lay in ruins, with an uncertain future and so horrifying a recent past, Switzerland could stand back from the abyss and observe events with a greater sense of detachment. Many Swiss intellectuals, Max Frisch among them, had the uneasy feeling that Swiss independence had been preserved in the face of this Europe-wide catastrophe purely by chance and geography and certainly not by any higher moral or political superiority. The Swiss, especially in the German-speaking cantons, struggled with the problem of fascism. They found they could not in good conscience dismiss fascism simply as a non-phenomena restricted to Germany, Italy and Spain but had to confront it as a disease having deep roots in all of European culture, calling the whole cultural foundation of Europe into question. As Max Frisch himself so provocatively asked:

Wenn Menschen, die gleiche Worte sprechen wie ich und eine gleiche Musik lieben wie ich, keineswegs gesichert sind, Unmensen zu werden, woher beziehe ich fortan meine Zuversicht, daß ich davor gesichert sei?!

By the same token, however, Frisch wished to avoid side-stepping the consequences of the recent German catastrophe through broad, and ultimately meaningless, generalizations. He wished to shake the complacency of his fellow Swiss in what, to Frisch, was their naive belief that "it couldn't have happened here." Most
importantly, Frisch was hesitant of hasty judgments on any side and sincerely hoped with humane compassion for a new start in Europe based on mutual respect and a willingness to learn from past errors. Frisch traveled throughout Western and Eastern Europe in the immediate post-war years and became increasingly disturbed by the inclination on all sides to simply forget the immediate past, and he condemned what he saw as a refusal to confront the uncomfortable truth of individual and collective moral failure, cowardice and shameless opportunism that had ravaged Europe. The convenient amnesia of his fellow Swiss regarding their early sympathy for Hitler in the 1930s, and the countless Jewish refugees turned away at the border by Swiss authorities, condemning them to an all too obvious fate--these things disturbed Frisch most of all. Michael Butler informs us that the post-war work of Max Frisch "...constitutes a harsh dissection of abject failure, both in Switzerland and abroad, to defend and develop humanist ideals."\(^2\)

From Swiss complacency to National Socialist myths about "Blut und Boden" to overzealous Russian concepts of "Rodina" ("Motherland"), even to Heinrich Böll's patriotic Rheinland provincialism, Max Frisch turns a critical eye. As Michael Butler explains:

...despite all the benefits that a strong sense of place and belonging can bring to an individual, they are useless in Frisch's view if they do not lead to the insight that ultimately 'home' is more than a geographical concept: 'Heimat ist unerläßlich, aber sie ist nicht an Ländereien gebunden. Heimat ist der Mensch'...this ringing assertion in the *Sketchbook 1946-1949* has proved a leitmotiv in Frisch's subsequent work...Frisch's message [is] that peace can only be achieved in a society which is mature enough to dispense with scapegoats and the need for enemy images to bolster its self-confidence...It is a measure of his indefatigable humanism that he has kept

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1 Max Frisch, as quoted in *The Plays of Max Frisch* by Michael Butler (The MacMillan Press Ltd. 1985)
so tenaciously to his self-imposed task of arguing for reason against prejudice, truth against propaganda, tolerance against narrow-mindedness.\(^3\)

The tension in the work of Frisch is characterized by an uncomfortable, recurring sense of paradox. Although Max Frisch is a moralist indebted to the Enlightenment tradition, sharing with Böll a profound concern for the uniqueness and worth of the individual, he is also deeply aware that he cannot escape that sense of philosophical crisis in the twentieth century that undermines the very foundation of Enlightenment thought—that perhaps reason and language are no longer able to fully grasp or adequately express individual experience in a given social reality. "Kultur" could not longer be counted on as a guarantee against social and individual disintegration, and was certainly no alibi either. "Kultur", for Frisch and other intellectuals like Theodor W. Adorno, had declined into a soulless, empty aestheticism. Nazi death camp commanders could weep at a piece of music or a poem by Goethe one minute and coolly condemn hundreds of innocent people to their deaths the next. Hence, the traditional "special role" of the "Dichter" in German-speaking society no longer seemed at all convincing. Adorno claimed that lyric poetry was now unthinkable after Auschwitz. Frisch thus found himself in the paradoxical situation of struggling against a perversion of humanism in the name of humanism, beset at the same time by a deep, uncomfortable uncertainty about his own role as a critical writer and intellectual in post-war European society.

Finding it increasingly difficult to portray social reality directly, Frisch decided to fall back on the indirect approach offered by the parable. but unlike the traditional parables in the Age of Enlightenment, used as moralizing, didactic weapons against the

\(^3\) Ibid, 5.
forces of bigotry, aristocratic decadence, superstition, etc., the parable of the twentieth century had to confront the loss of confidence in the rational certainties of the Enlightenment. The only exception to this general rule was Bertolt Brecht, who used the iron laws of his Marxist ideology to create parables in the Enlightenment tradition.

Frisch, however, remained unconvinced by Marxist analysis; it offered him no solutions, nor did it seem to match his experience of himself or his world. All that remained for Frisch was a vigilant, individual skepticism. It is this permanent skepticism and ambiguity that induces the basic paradoxes of Frisch's parables.

We turn now to an early play by Frisch from the immediate post-war period, entitled Als der Krieg zu Ende war. Though Frisch himself has identified this as a work belonging to the genre of historical plays, most critics have reached a consensus that the work is most clearly understood as a parable play. The play is based on a true story that Frisch heard about during his first visit to Berlin in 1947 and scribbled down in his sketchbook. To Frisch, the devastation he saw in Berlin underlined the transient nature of human existence and the need for a radically new start. Moreover, as the Cold War set in and became an ever more depressing reality, it seemed to mock the tremendous human suffering and sacrifice of the war years and threatened to render them futile. With the 1948 Communist putsch in Czechoslovakia and the recent Berlin Airlift in response to Soviet attempts to starve the western sections of Berlin into submission, it became all too easy for Germans to forget their immediate past and project onto the "Red Enemy" their own complex guilt feelings and self-loathing. At a time of increasing propaganda on both sides of the Iron Curtain, the historically true story of a German female civilian falling in love with a Russian colonel in 1945 Berlin without the bridge of a common language
between them could not help but stir Frisch's imagination as a playwright and lead him to the spontaneous moral protest that *Als der Krieg zu Ende war* represents.

The main action of the drama centers on the developing relationship between the German female civilian, Agnes Anders, and the Russian Colonel, Stepan Iwanow. Unlike Vegesack's male German narrator-protagonist and his female Russian partner Tatjana, who were both equally fluent in German and Russian, and unlike Leni and Boris, who shared a linguistic bond through the German language, and especially through Boris' education and interest in modern German literature, Stepan and Agnes have no common language whatsoever. She speaks no Russian, and Stepan can hardly understand a single word of German. At the purely linguistic level, their only means of communication is through Stepan's orderly and interpreter, the Polish Jew, Jehuda Karp, rescued in Warsaw by the Red Army, who has Yiddish and Polish as his native languages. Yiddish is "close enough" to German and Polish "close enough" to Russian for mutual understanding in both directions, but it is, by deliberate design, an imperfect connection. Jehuda Karp provides some comic relief, but also must bring a tone of moral seriousness to the play, for he is also a survivor of the slaughter of the Jews in the Warsaw Ghetto by the Nazis--an atrocity in which, as we learn later, Agnes' now invalid husband, Horst, perhaps took part in while serving as an officer in the German Army. Horst tries to dodge the accusation by blaming the SS and pointing out that he was in the regular Army, but as the audience knows, the regular Army also committed its own share of atrocities in the East. One danger that any director of this play must avoid is allowing any of the characters to descend into precisely the "typical"-national stereotype that Frisch is at pains to avoid. Frisch is at times skating on thin ice with characters like Jehuda and the drunk, resentful
Russian junior officers Mihail, Piotr and Ossip. These three younger Russians cannot let go of their hatred and prejudices, and neither can the German officer Horst, Agnes' husband, after his experience of being a POW in Russia. True to form, while Frisch confronts us with the atrocities in Warsaw committed by the Germans, he also presents us with Agnes' female friend Gitta, who was gang-raped by Russian soldiers then raped again by the soldiers' commanding officer when she reports it. Gitta also tells us of their mutual friend Günther, who is himself perhaps a communist, and rushes out to greet the Soviet soldiers as liberators, only to be killed callously by a drunken Russian who smashes his rifle butt into Günther's head.

Structurally, the play emphasizes the differences between the world of lies and prejudices "Unten im Keller" and "draußen" and the world of love and honesty between Stepan and Agnes, "Oben", and in the living room that is symbolically placed at a higher level, not unlike the paradise "irgendwo in den Bergen" found in Siegfried von Vegesack's Tanja or Heinrich Böll's Der Zug war pünktlich.

Like Leni looking at Boris in Heinrich Böll's Gruppenbild mit Dame, Agnes sees Stepan not as an officer of the occupying Red Army, but as a human being. Moreover, like Leni, who throughout the text is associated with the Virgin Mary, Max Frisch himself reminds us in his Nachwort to the play that: "Agnes heißt Unschuld, Reinheit."4 Ulrich Ramer explains further:

Als der Krieg zu Ende war ist die Geschichte einer Ausnahme -- daher auch der Name "Anders" -, sie rechtfertigt Frischs Standpunkt, das Leben vollziehe oder verfehle sich am einzelnen Ich und nicht am Engagement für die Politik eines Volkes. Frisch trifft nur eine Unterscheidung

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4 Max Frisch, Stücke 1; Nachwort zu Als der Krieg zu Ende war (Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt 1972) 352.
zwischen Mensch und Unmensch, seine Anliegen sind Konflikte einzelner Individuen untereinander.\textsuperscript{5}

Stepan, for his part, tries to maintain discipline among his men, conducting himself as an officer and a gentleman. Stepan begins to reach similar conclusions about Agnes that she has reached about him, and admits that he is horrified by the way the war has turned many of his fellow Russians into monsters as well:

STEPAN:[trans.]...Dich verstehe ich. Ich verstehe nicht die Deutschen, sie sind nicht ehrlich zu uns. Und unsere eigenen Genossen verstehe ich nicht. Der Krieg hat sie zu Tieren gemacht.\textsuperscript{6}

It would be easy to classify the play as a simple protest against the politics of the Cold War, but Max Frisch was aiming for higher moral ground and, paradoxical as it may seem, a more universal message. Max Frisch warns us, in his Nachwort to the play, against

...das Mißverständnis...das in diesem Stück irgendwie eine Auseinandersetzung zwischen Ost und West erkennen will. Als gäbe es keine andere Unterscheidung mehr! Es gibt aber eine, die sittlich-sinnvoller ist: die Unterscheidung nach Mensch und Unmensch, womit allerdings bei keiner Partei, die es auf der Erde gibt, Beifall zu holen ist, und doch müßte diese Unterscheidung, wie ich glaube, unsere Tendenz sein, auch wenn das Forum, das sich dafür finden läßt, immer schmaler wird.\textsuperscript{7}

The key element that makes \textit{Als der Krieg zu Ende war} a parable play is the fact that it is trying to demonstrate a moral truth, namely that encompassed by the second commandment. "thou shall not make a graven image of God." As Frisch explains it in his Nachwort to the play,

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Das Gebot, man solle sich kein Bildnis machen von Gott, verliert wohl seinen Sinn nicht wenn wir Gott begreifen als das Lebendige in jedem Menschen, das Unfaßbare, das Unnennbare, das wir als solches nur ertragen, wo wir lieben; sonst machen wir uns immer ein Bildnis; nicht bereit, nicht willig und nicht fähig, einem einzelnen Gesicht gegenüberzustehen, stempeln wir ganze Völker ab und können ihnen nichts anderes zugestehen als die Fratze unseres Vorurteils, das immer eine Versündigung bedeutet.  

In other words, we should not approach another human beings with our own preconceived stereotypes, as we are all children of God, so to speak. It is therefore morally wrong to force people we meet into the solid molds of our own mental constructions. We must be flexible enough to allow them to shape those mental constructions with their own unique individuality.

Frisch is also suspicious of language itself and how it has been distorted by the war, by propaganda, and totalitarian politics. He attempts to demonstrate with this play what he terms "das ungeheure Paradoxon, daß man sich ohne Sprache näherkommt."  

Heinz Gockel explains that:

Die Sprachlosigkeit der Liebenden ist ihr Vorteil. Denn die Sprache ist durch Naziherrschaft und Krieg zur Barriere geworden. Sie hat Schablonen aufgenommen und weitergegeben, ist eine Sprache der Parteien und Doktrinen geworden, ist keine Sprache der Menschen mehr...Max Frisch hat diese Art Sprache selbst diagnostiziert: "Sprache als Gefühl des Vorurteils! Sie, die uns verbinden könnte, ist zum Gegenteil geworden, zur tödlichen Trennung durch Vorurteil. Sprache und Lüge"...So wird die Sprache in Als der Krieg zu Ende war selbst zum Paradox. Sie sagt nicht mehr aus, was gemeint ist...die beiden

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7 Max Frisch, Stücke I; Nachwort zu Als der Krieg zu Ende war (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp Verlag 1972) 352-353.

8 Ibid, 351-352.

9 Max Frisch, as quoted in The Plays of Max Frisch by Michael Butler, 65.
Sprachlosen verstehen sich. Agnes und Horst entfernen sich, je mehr sie miteinander sprechen.¹⁰

Heinrich Böll, for his part, also is aware of the linguistic problem that Frisch is wrestling with when he has Andreas comment on the "sonorous voices" in Der Zug war pünktlich, especially with the biting irony of the following passage: "...'Radebeul' sagt eine sächsisch-sonore Stimme. Eine brave Stimme, eine gute Stimme, eine deutsche Stimme, die ebensogut sagen würde: 'die nächsten zehntausend ins Schlachthaus, bitte...'."¹¹ Tatjana in Siegfried von Vegesack's novella Tanja offers her own interesting reflections on the differences between the German and Russian languages and their corresponding mentalities. It is perhaps a weakness, then, that all of the characters in Heinrich Böll's Gruppenbild mit Dame all speak the same, uniform kind of colloquial German, without much variation. Frisch's unique drama, however, is not without its own flaws.

Though Frisch can be commended for his artistic creativity in writing this drama and for his courage in beginning to explore new, experimental techniques in the staging and production of Als der Krieg zu Ende war, the play ultimately cannot live up to the mission that Frisch has assigned to it. In the opinion of Michael Butler:

The didactic thrust of the play -- two people coming to understand each other without the medium of language -- is simply not realisable in the form which Frisch has chosen. Quite apart from Brecht's criticism of the way the political dimension is subordinated, the growth of a 'speechless' love affair over three weeks -- a difficult enough task in the novel! -- is hardly demonstrable in the terms of conventional theatre...Perhaps only the employment of other 'languages', for example, music, dance or mime,


¹¹ Heinrich Böll, Der Zug war pünktlich (Frankfurt: Ullstein Verlag GmbH 1958) 23.
could have surmounted this problem...Frisch has simply not succeeded here either in 'purifying' the language or in creating a 'Gestik' which could dispense with words altogether and still convey his didactic intention...Despite the play's humanist and idealist sentiments, *When the War Was Over* centres ultimately on a negative critique of language...and points to an irrationalism which undermines the very basis of the parable form which is located in the writer's confidence that the message he wishes to convey and the parable he invents for this purpose are linguistically congruent.\(^\text{12}\)

While I am inclined to agree with Michael Butler's assessments by in large, I would point out that the play *does* contain moments of understanding at a higher, "metalinguistic" level that should not be overlooked. There is a hint of deep human sympathy when Stepan Iwanow realizes after Agnes faints that she is physically weak from hunger—a symptom many Russians knew all too well. Also, when Stepan Iwanow cuts himself, Agnes rushes to him and shows real concern that he is wounded. Still, none of these intimate moments contain the force and power of the old woman's blessing in Herbert Eisenreich's *Tiere von ganz natürlicher Grausamkeit* or Böll's "coffee-scene" in *Gruppenbild mit Dame* or the connection through music between Olina and Andreas in *Der Zug war pünktlich*. Though the play, on the whole, must ultimately be regarded as an artistic failure, at least its moral content is praiseworthy. It was provocative enough to produce a small fist-fight in the foyer on its opening night, and Frisch showed much courage in attempting to tackle such complex and challenging issues so early on in his artistic career. It is true that Max Frisch had not yet found his own unique style when he wrote *Al\^s der Krieg zu Ende war*, but the play was an important step for him on the creative path to his best plays and novels that were yet to come.

Aus Österreich - Herbert Eisenreich

In the context of our discussion, we have examined German writers from the Baltic (Vegesack), from West Germany (Böll), and from Switzerland (Frisch). We turn now to Austrian writer Herbert Eisenreich and his poignant short story *Tiere von ganz natürlicher Grausamkeit* found in his collection of stories entitled *Böse Schöne Welt*, a title inspired by and meant to comment upon the British anti-utopian novel of A. Huxley, *Brave New World*. Of all the works we have examined thus far dealing with relations between German-speaking peoples and Slavs, this story probably comes the closest to brutally honest reality. Although we know that Frisch's *Als der Krieg zu Ende* war is based on a true account related anecdotally to Frisch during his 1947 visit to Berlin, his dramatic adaptation of the story is in many ways too forced, too mechanical and too melodramatic.

Eisenreich's leitmotiv is the constant, debilitating effects of hunger and slow starvation and how all of that can reduce the civilized men from the allegedly culturally "superior" lands of Western Europe to the level of common animals--ruthless, brutalized, without conscience--hence the title of the story. Whereas Böll, and even Vegesack, to a degree, use rather elegant and dramatic poetic language to describe the war and its effects on human beings, Eisenreich's prose lacks any such embellishments, sticking instead to a simple, concrete, gritty realism that definitely has a hard, unforgiving edge to it, not unlike the realistic, graphically descriptive language of Erich Maria Remarque in *Im Westen Nichts Neues*:
Zwar wurde vorne manchmal geschossen, aber bis wir an den Kampfplatz kamen, hatten die Panzer schon alles erledigt, und wir sahn die zerschossenen Panzer mit den verschobenen oder gelüfteten Drehtürmen und mit den geborstenen Rohren, wenn sie gesprengt worden waren, und andere Panzer, deren Umriß man nicht erkennen konnte, weil sie brannten, und wir sahn auch ausgebrannte Autos und umgestürzte Geschütze ohne Verschluß, und hier und dort eine Leiche, über der die Fliegen summten...¹

The reader can almost smell the smoke of the burning tanks and the stench of the corpses and taste the dust in the soldier’s mouths. The soldiers in Eisenreich’s story, slowly being driven mad from hunger, begin to argue and quarrel among themselves over the most banal and trivial things, such as who killed the most Russians in their last engagement, etc. Some of the soldiers possess a grudging respect for their Russian foe, while others curse the Russians and declare that all of these "verdammte Rußki" should starve to death. All of them have learned to speak some Russian. As Eisenreich’s narrator puts it: "Damals konnte ich schon so viel Russisch, als man eben brauchte, um sich verständlich zu machen; meine Bedürfnisse waren nicht größer als mein Sprachsschatz."²

After a long forced march the Austrian soldiers reach a poor Russian village that has itself been plundered by the Red Army for supplies. The only inhabitants left are women and little children. The narrator encounters an old Russian babushka, whom he refers to simply as "die Alte". She shakes her head when the narrator, with gestures, inquires if there is any food they can give to the soldiers, but she does bring him water to wash his dirty, tired feet. He washes his feet, then the rest of his body. The old woman stirs about behind him, but the narrator is mostly indifferent to her--he knows he can reach his rifle quickly enough.

¹ Herbert Eisenreich, *Böse Schöne Welt* (Stuttgart: Scherz & Goverts Verlag 1957) 9.
Surprisingly, the old woman brings the narrator a bowl of food, specifically millet-gruel, but makes him promise not to reveal the existence of her food to the other soldiers. In the meantime, the cruel and pompous Hartleben has demanded food from other Russians in the village and when he receives no response, burns down two huts and is immediately arrested by the German military police. We learn through the narrator that later Hartleben is shot while trying to desert from the punishment-detail he has been sentenced to. The narrator thinks about his promise and thinks about the small Russian child for whom the food is intended and who will die without it, but also thinks about his own comrades and their hunger that is just as maddening as his own. He breaks his promise and tells his comrades, who descend upon the old woman's hut like locusts. One of the soldiers is so exhausted he drowns while bathing himself, and the narrator justifies his betrayal of the old woman by telling himself that he could just as easily have been the one who would have drowned without the old woman's food. As he re-enters the hut, however, and sees how the old woman is staring off into space, looking through the soldiers at some distant, ethereal thing beyond them, he is overcome with guilt and mixed emotions. He tries to think up excuses, denials, explanations but can only manage a useless "Nitschewo" ("Nichts", "It's nothing") which the woman blithely ignores. He tries to think of other things, such as whether or not the drowned soldier has been buried yet, but he cannot escape his feelings of guilt and mixed emotion. A young, starving cat appears and is a welcome distraction for the narrator and the other soldiers. The soldiers suggest eating the cat, but then decide it is too scrawny to be worth butchering. They notice the cat is carrying a mouse in its mouth, still alive. They take gruesome pleasure in

\[2\] Ibid, 16.
watching the cat play with the mouse. The cat is too weak to kill the mouse, and the mouse is too weak and slow to escape from the cat. Their deadly game becomes an allegory for the war around them between Germany and the Soviet Union, both sides tearing into each other with no real progress on either side. Both sides are starving and the war has reduced men on all sides to brutal animals that the cat and mouse come to symbolize in Eisenreich's story. The soldiers decide not to interfere in the hopeless struggle between cat and mouse and only watch as gruesome spectators. Soon the millet-gruel is cooked and the starving soldiers eat, no longer interested in the cat and mouse. The narrator, wracked with guilt, turns around to sit where he does not have to look at the Russians in the room. But after the meal, as the Austrian soldiers go to their various huts for the night, the narrator cannot escape his turbulent, useless thoughts. Though he is exhausted he cannot sleep. What happens next the narrator describes as "unforgettable":

Ich glaubte, die Augen geschlossen zu haben, aber das mußte ein Irrtum gewesen sein, denn ich sah ganz genau, daß sich die Alte erhob und an mein Lager herantrat. Eine fürchterliche Angst überkam mich, zugleich mit einer grausamen Ohnmacht; laut in der Stille des Schreckens hörte ich die langsamen, gleichmäßigen Atemzüge meiner schon schlafenden Kameraden. Ich wollte die Augen vor dem Herannahenden verschließen, aber die Lider gehörchten mir nicht mehr ganz. Und da war die Alte schon neben mir niedergeknielt, sie beugte sich über mich; sie streckte ihre Hand nach mir aus, und ihre Finger bekreuzigten meine Stirn.³

The narrator is stunned. Half-asleep, he watches as the old woman approaches him. Having just witnessed the cat and mouse struggle, he feels himself to be like the helpless mouse, fearing for his life, fearing that the old woman is closing in to kill him. To those familiar with Russian peasant folklore, Eisenreich's allusion to that most terrible of old hags, the evil witch Baba Yaga, is unmistakable.

³Ibid, 34.
The old woman does not kill him, however, but instead makes the sign of the cross and blesses him. The narrator and we, the readers, are shocked and humbled by the old woman's gesture of radiant Christian kindness and humanity, in a manner most exemplified in the Russian tradition by the life, convictions and literary works of Count Leo Tolstoy. In the face of all that has come to pass, the old woman shows that she has not let go of her basic humanity, has not allowed herself to descend to the level of the animal. Her simple but profound gesture is a bright, shining spot, a tiny flicker of hope on an otherwise dark and dreary canvas of life that Eisenreich has painted for us with his words. It points to a bond between human beings that transcends all nations and cultures and languages. Her act of blessing has more profound impact and is so much more real and true to life than anything found in the works by Böll that we have examined. What for Böll takes an entire novel to express in *Gruppenbild mit Dame*, Eisenreich delivers more convincingly and with more profound power in just twenty-eight short pages! *Tiere von ganz natürlicher Grausamkeit* is not in any way didactic. It does not seek to beat a political message into our heads as Böll does. It simply describes a scene, completely uncoerced and entirely believable.

To underscore the irony and guilt of the narrator's story, Eisenreich informs us that the Austrian soldiers are re-supplied by air the very next day and thus their plunder of the last of the Russian's food supply, and the burning of the two huts by Hartleben are shown to have been utterly senseless and unnecessary. The guilt remains with the narrator to the present day when he alludes indirectly to the woman's act of blessing in his introduction:

Den Hunger, den man hatte, vergißt man, sowie man sich sattgegessen hat,
und auch die Gaunereien, die man begangen hat, vergißt man, wenn man
sich weit genug von ihnen entfernt hat, und alle Probleme, die man gelöst
hat, hören auf, und sogar die Probleme, die man nicht gelöst hat, hören
einmal auf, Probleme zu sein, und man vergißt sie. *Es gibt aber Dinge,
die man nicht vergißt* [italics mine], und wenn man sich an solche Dinge
erinnert, fällt einem alles andre mit ein, was damit verknüpft war; auch der
Hunger, und auch die Gaunereien.\(^4\)

The woman leaves the narrator alone with his misery and guilt. He knows that the
woman has shown him a kind of mercy, humility and humanity that he himself and his
fellow soldiers have lost. Overcome by shame, he comments: "...Und ich wußte von
diesem Moment an: selbst wenn wir siegen würden bis Wladiwostok und rund um den
Erdball --: für mich war dieser Krieg verloren, und mehr als der Krieg."\(^5\) More has been
lost than just the war; the narrator realizes that he has lost that which he should hold
most dear: his own humanity.

\(^4\) Ibid, 7.

\(^5\) Ibid, 35.
In der DDR, 1961 - the early Christa Wolf

Christa Wolf’s semi-autobiographical *Moskauer Novelle*, of all the works we have examined thus far, is furthest removed from the actual events of the Second World War. Christa Wolf was born in 1929, and like her protagonist Vera, Wolf was only a 16-year old female civilian in 1945 and thus not a member of the same older generation to which Heinrich Böll, Siegfried von Vegesack, and Max Frisch belong.

The novella does contain important elements of the common theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, or coming to terms with the past, but lacks the maturity and balance of a Siegfried von Vegesack or Heinrich Böll. We must not forget that Wolf was still a very young writer in 1961, unsure of herself and trying to find her literary voice. *Moskauer Novelle* was Wolf’s very first work of creative fiction. Hence the work as a whole seems a little over-eager and impulsive, focusing too much on overriding political concerns and not nearly enough on character development or aesthetic quality.

Without a doubt, the work was intended for a GDR audience, particularly the party functionaries of the emerging literary establishment, and when *Moskauer Novelle* first appeared it was, for rather obvious reasons, utterly ignored outside the borders of the GDR. Inside the GDR, the work won praise from a number of establishment critics, but even Wolf herself in her later, more mature years has distanced herself from this early work and, to her credit, is amazed and appalled at herself that she was capable of writing such an utterly dogmatic text. *Moskauer Novelle*, unlike Wolf’s later fiction, was never picked up and published in the West during the Cold War, and as yet no publisher has expressed an interest in re-printing the novella, even after the reunification of Germany in
1991. Perhaps it might be included in a future anthology, but given Wolf's own feelings about *Moskauer Novelle* today, it may in time vanish altogether from the literary landscape of Germany. Original copies of the work are, naturally, quite difficult to come by, though it is available on microfilm from a limited number of sources. Secondary literature on the work, understandably, is also quite difficult to come by, and this is not likely to change in the next century as the GDR and USSR begin to fade from the consciousness of post-Cold War Europe. Unlike *Gruppenbild mit Dame*, for example, *Moskauer Novelle* has not really staked out a permanent place for itself on the European literary scene. When the novella is not forgotten and ignored completely, then it is almost always reviewed by Western critics as a transitional work, almost just a footnote, in Christa Wolf's development as an author. If anything, Wolf's novella suffers from much the same youthful failings of Max Frisch's *Als der Krieg zu Ende war*--failings that Wolf and Frisch both would overcome in their later development as creative writers, though interestingly, neither Frisch nor Wolf would ever again revisit the precise topic of German-Russian relationships.

*Moskauer Novelle* is, ultimately, an outmoded relic of the Cold War and is a perfect example of what can be termed "socialist realism". Moreover, *Moskauer Novelle* all too often descends to the level of kitsch and is also completely overshadowed by the much more mature and complex structures of Wolf's next major work, the 1963 novel *Der geteilte Himmel*. Still, Wolf's earliest novella does allow us to round out our study of German and Slavic relationships in the literature of German-speaking Europe by incorporating a work of fiction by a famous author from the GDR.
Christa Wolf's novella tells the story of an East German female doctor, Vera, who travels to a medical conference in the Soviet Union in 1959. To her surprise, she meets the very same Russian man, Pavel Koshkin, whom she had first met when Pavel was a Lieutenant in the Red Army in 1945 and she was but a 16-year old girl. Now they are both married, with children and careers of their own. They are tempted to rekindle their relationship, and much of the novel is devoted to their flirtations, but ultimately they show a rather stylized, "classical" restraint and go their separate ways. Wolf sets up the drama for us by having the old German communist Walter shake hands with Pavel, whom Vera has told him about:

Er [Walter] streckte Pawel ruhig die Hand hin, als sei nichts dabei, daß man -- Deutsche und Russe -- sich in einem gottverlassenen Dorf im hintersten Winkel Mecklenburgs trennt und nach fünfzehn Jahren in Moskau wieder aufeinanderstößt.¹

Wolf is, of course, being consciously ironic. It is a major event that Vera is meeting the very same Pavel these many years later, but, the narrative strategies dictated to Wolf by the narrow confines of socialist realism ultimately serve to undermine the very problematic drama of German-Slavic relationships.

To Wolf's credit, perhaps, it can be said that Moskauer Novelle, more than any of the other works in our study, confronts with recent Nazi past most directly, though often Wolf is guilty of "overkill". We are told that the hospital on the outskirts of Moscow to which the GDR doctors are invited marks the furthest point of advance by the German Wehrmacht on their drive to take Moscow during the Second World War. The old German communist Walter provides a link to the past through his membership in the Spartakisten, and thereby an indirect reference to Rosa Luxemburg. Also, we are
reminded more than once that Walter spent much of the war in a KZ (concentration camp). The most prominent demonstration of Wolf's attempt at Vergangenheitsbewältigung in the novella is the party scene at the hospital where the hospital director calls a nurse over to him and shocks his guests, Germans and Russians alike, by saying calmly: "Deutsche Faschisten haben ihren Vater erhängt." The young Russian nurse bursts into tears and leaves the room hurriedly. The director offers a toast with the wish that such things will never happen again, and the others drink to this, wishing to get past the tension of the moment. But Vera, whose father served on the Russian front during the war as a soldier in the German Wehrmacht, is consumed with guilt:


This is Vera's most intimate confrontation with the German nation's past, but it runs the risk of becoming too melodramatic. Vera also feels guilt and responsibility for the barn fire that wounded Lieutenant Pavel because she did not denounce the two bandits in 1945 that ended up starting this fire. Because Pavel sustained an eye-injury, he could not follow his dream of becoming a doctor, and resigned himself to becoming a translator of German medical documents for the Soviet Union. When Vera tries to confess her guilt

¹ Christa Wolf, Moskauer Novelle (Halle: Mitteldeutscher Verlag 1961) 9.
to him, he is dismissive. He already knew what actually happened, even back in 1945, and bears no resentment towards Vera. Using Vera as a focus for dealing with German war guilt is highly problematic, however, in that as a female civilian teenager she really had nothing directly to do with the events unfolding around her in 1945. Vera’s guilt is focused on the life of her father, which haunts her:

In jenen Tagen wurde Vera vom Gesicht ihres Vaters verfolgt. Im Traum sah sie es nachts: von seinen vielen Gesichtern immer nur das eine, das des Sterbenden. Vera hatte ihren Vater immer geliebt. Sie war ihm ähnlich, schon als Kind. Er war ein schweigsamer Mensch gewesen, und als der Faschismus kam, gewöhnte er sich ganz das Reden ab. Später warf er es sich vor, daß er seine Tochter so hatte aufwachsen lassen, ohne ein Wort, welches ihr vor den anderen hätte helfen können…zuletzt nahm er selbst das Gewehr und zog nach Rußland. Als er, alt geworden, aus der Gefangenschaft kam, wußte er, daß er falsch gelebt hatte. Er sagte es Vera, kurz bevor er starb, und vorzeitig verbraucht. Das schlimme war, daß sie ihm recht geben mußte, obwohl sie heftig den Kopf schüttelte. Sie war damals schon in der Partei und hatte angefangen zu studieren.  

For Wolf, Vera’s Vater can be viewed as synonymous with Wolf’s own Vaterland, and her confrontation as a young woman writer with the legacy of Germany as ihr deutsches Vaterland. Despite this clever allegorical parallel, however, Wolf’s confrontation with the past simply lacks the full power and conviction of authors like Heinrich Böll or Siegfried von Vegesack, who experienced the events of the war in Russia firsthand as soldiers. Hence, a significant feature of Moskauer Novelle is that it is filled with a pervasive sense of over-anxiousness on the part of the then still young and inexperienced writer Christa Wolf.

The central problem of the novella is the discussion of reality, or reality as Wolf claims to be depicting it. Moscow is presented to us as an idyllic, international

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metropolis where exotic peoples of all nations meet for the purpose of trade and cultural interaction. No mention is made of very real Russian social problems like alcoholism or the particularly chronic housing shortage in Moscow and other major Soviet cities. The Moscow that Wolf presents to us through Vera's eyes is the Moscow of May Day and Victory Day celebrations, but Wolf strives to convince us that this propagandistic façade is synonymous with everyday reality. Those of us who know the old Russian legend of the "Potemkin Village" are immediately suspicious. Moskauer Novelle is a literary "Potemkin Village"—we see the bright, beautiful surfaces of the world of appearances but are not allowed to examine the cold, miserable reality and substance behind them. It is a vision that is simply too good to be true. Vegesack was aware of the problem of the "Potemkin Village" and exposes the deception in Tanja, but Wolf plays along with the deception and never wavers from the pre-set path. The larger questions of guilt surrounding the Second World War in Moskauer Novelle, are, for the most part, treated quickly—with much melodrama, it is true—but ultimately dismissively. Moreover, not a word is mentioned of the 1953 uprisings in East Germany or the 1956 uprising in Hungary ultimately put down by armed Soviet intervention, though perhaps it is expecting too much to fault the young Christa Wolf for this lapse, since the topic would have been officially taboo, even if put in a "positive" light, namely "saving" the GDR from "counter-revolutionary" forces. Wolf instead chooses to remain silent on these topics.

Whereas the beauty of the Caucasus region in Siegfried von Vegesack's Tanja: Eine Erzählung aus dem Kaukasus is believable, supported by the link to the intense and romantic poetry of the native Russian Mikhail Lermontov, who, like many Russian poets
and writers, was himself overwhelmed by the beauty of the Caucasus in contrast to the rest of Russia, Wolf's idyllic descriptions of Moscow, Kiev, and the Kolkhoz (collective farm) just outside Kiev, are simply too fabricated and artificial to be believed. Christa Wolf, although she herself had been to the Soviet Union before the writing of Moskauer Novelle, faced so many problems of having to fabricate the "correct" vision of "reality" to such an exaggerated extent that afterwards she ultimately gave up on topics having anything directly to do with Russia or Russians and instead restricted her later artistic efforts to her native Germany and specific, existing problems of life in socialist society as experienced in the GDR. Moskauer Novelle only begins to scratch the surface when examining facets like the problem of language. It is only briefly mentioned that "Vera" means "Faith" in Russian, and that this is irritating to Wolf's protagonist, but no deeper implications are really drawn out in the text directly. Vera and Pavel speak Russian to each other in the morning and German during the rest of the day. Professor Worochinowa can understand German when it is spoken to her, but can't speak it very well herself. It is of mild interest that Christa Wolf imitates Russian linguistic rules in her German when she uses the masculine form to identify Worochinowa as "Professor" rather than "Professorin", probably because the Russian feminine form "Professornitsa" means "the professor's wife", and not "female professor". Ultimately, though, it seems that Christa Wolf concluded for herself that examining the problems of German and Slavic relationships had become for her an artistic and creative Sackgasse, or dead-end street.

The most frustrating aspect of Moskauer Novelle is that while it strives to tear down the old stereotypes about the Russians as "barbarians", it simultaneously and
thoughtlessly erects new stereotypes in their place, namely of the overly idealized view of
the Russians as the saviors of all humanity. During the celebrations at the collective farm
outside Kiev, German and Russian culture and tradition are harmoniously integrated at
the sentimental, folkloric level. All the old resentments and suspicions are neatly paved
over and forgotten by the overpowering communist message, with the only shadow on the
horizon being the capitalist West, alluded to indirectly in the conversation about the
Zukunftsmensch on the train to Kiev. The whole joyous scene at the Kolchoz is uncannily
reminiscent of the "Deutsch-Russische Verbrüderungsfest" described in Siegfried von
Vegesack's Tanja. Tatjana's critical words are worth repeating here, for they could easily
be leveled in criticism of Wolf's naive, idyllic scene:

"Ich fürchte", kam [Tanjas] Stimme nach einer Weile aus dem Dunkel,
"daß Sie alle heute in einem doppelten Irrtum verfallen sind: jeder sah den
anderen so, wie er ihn sehen, und gab sich so, wie er von ihm gesehen sein
wollte..."5

Vera's inner "conflict" is all too easily resolved by her awakening and greater
awareness of her socialist "mission" in life. She learns the truth about Pavel and his wife.
He does love his wife very much but is reluctant to leave Moscow and travel with his
wife to the Russian Far East, to Siberia, where his wife, a biologist, has earned a
prestigious assignment. Vera realizes that "the cause" of "building socialism" is greater
than any of them individually, greater than their personal desires and emotions for each
other, and thus she urges Pavel not to be afraid of change in his life and to go eastward
with his wife and accept the position as a German instructor in Siberia. Vera heads back

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5 Siegfried von Vegesack, *Tanja: Eine Erzählung aus dem Kaukasus* (Heilbronn: Eugen-Salzer Verlag
1959) 24-25.
west, called by her duty as a doctor. Thus they set off in symbolically opposite directions, East and West, setting out to humanize the rest of the world; she as a doctor, he as a teacher of German in the Russian Far East. Their symbolic movement in opposite directions on the globe are meant to convey the "weltumfassend" nature of the Socialist message. Again, one tends to view this final parting scene skeptically as "too good to be true". The psychological explorations of Vera and Pavel's relationship are ultimately shallow, cut short by Wolf's propagandistic agenda. Unlike in Vegesack's Tanja there is no distinction, no difference allowed to be made between "Soviet" and "Russian", and, in the utopian Zukunftsmensch, between German and Russian. Ultimately, though, this proposed "solution" must be rejected. In an age where Germany has been reunified and is still coming to terms with "Ossi" and "Wessi" differences, the naiveté of the "solution" proposed by Moskauer Novelle is laughable and cannot now be taken seriously, if indeed, it ever could have been. Differences, however, should be accepted openly and celebrated when possible, not glossed over, suppressed and ignored, for in so doing we crush the fragile identity of the individual and exalt the faceless collective over him or her.
Conclusion

All of these stories share the meeting of two different worlds, and the meeting of two genders, male and female, examined in the microcosmic world of two distinct individuals in direct interaction with each other set against a dramatic backdrop of wartime horror, hatred and destruction. Broad cultural stereotypes are examined, challenged, and sometimes overturned. The overarching theme that all of these German-language authors are attempting to wrestle with is that of post-war Vergangenheitsbewältigung, a process of coming to terms with the past, and not just the Nazi past, but a broader examination of the sinister effects of European nationalism and "national" stereotypes extending back into the 19th century and beyond. For one must remember that it is not just the Nazi ideology that these authors are opposing. The Nazi ideology was, after all, so extreme and absurd that after the war it was utterly bankrupt and discredited as a mode of political discourse. What did remain, however, was the deeper "national" stereotypes, the mythical division of Europe into East and West. Libuše Monikova, a Czech novelist and essayist living in exile in Berlin since 1971 offers an eloquent analysis of this problem and a cry for change in the post-Cold War world in her 1992 collection of essays Prager Fenster.

The "Feindbild" construction as a threat to the "Civilized West" goes back at least as far as Attila the Hun, and to the first Celtic and Germanic barbarians who threatened the Roman Empire. The Germans in the modern age who would call the Russians "barbarians" need only be reminded that they themselves were once the "uncivilized barbarians" in the eyes of the Roman Empire. With the end of the Cold War there simply is no more "Feindbild" left. The healing of a unified Europe, the dismantling of the "East-West" bipolar opposition, so long dreamed of by these authors, can at last begin.

The Second World War and its aftermath, plus the legacy of the Cold War, all hardened the stereotypical image of the Russian in Western Europe more than any other occurrence in this century, and this is why I have used the Second World War as a common link to explore a more general theme. The authors examined here are confronting the guilt and responsibility for not only the Second World War but also World War I. They realize the need for the breakdown of stereotypes and the imperative to look at people as individuals. Much of this breakdown has been accomplished in Western Europe, between (West) Germany and Great Britain, and between (West) Germany and France, through school exchanges, and an active intervention on the part of the United States to instill a spirit of forgiveness and forcibly halt the punitive spirit of British and French foreign policy that embodied the Treaty of Versailles at the end of the

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First World War. However, all of these German-speaking authors realized that the true
test of this new healing, this new peace, this new humanism, would be the German
relationship with the Slavic lands to the East, especially with Russia—a task hindered by
pragmatic Allied strategic interests and the problematic status of the German Democratic
Republic. Thus these authors set out to explore first in fiction what could only be
distantly hoped for in reality.

Sometimes the gulf between the characters in these stories is just too wide, the
differences remaining irreconcilable, and tragedy ensues, as in Siegfried von Vegesack’s
_Tanja: Eine Erzählung aus dem Kaukasus_, or the cold machinery of war crushes the two
courageous individuals who have bridged the gulf and declared their own separate peace,
as in Heinrich Böll’s _Der Zug war pünktlich_.

It cannot be denied that most of these authors have their own agenda that they
wish to advance through their literature, especially Christa Wolf, who is preaching the
message of "socialist realism" as she understands it, and Heinrich Böll, whose personal
Catholicism and profound sense of Christian-humanist duty and activism illuminates all
of his writings. Böll is ambivalent on the question of "socialism", and thus former East
German and Soviet critics were ambivalent in their writings on him. Böll shares a deep
political affinity with Czech playwright and thinker Vaclav Havel. For example, what
Havel advocates as "personal existential revolution", Böll’s heroine Leni of _Gruppenbild
mit Dame_ actually tries to put into practice.

Siegfried von Vegesack’s writings seem less an attempt to preach a message or
argue a point and are more in the nature of personal confessions. Vegesack’s life is the
story of one man’s subjective reaction to Russian individuals whom he has come to know,
admire and respect. Having spent his most formative years among Slavs, Vegesack has finally learned to appreciate them for what they are. He is awestruck by the beauty of the Caucasus region and the naturalness and simple beauty of the lives lead by Russians and other native peoples of the Soviet Union in contrast to the stuffy formality of Western Europe and specifically, Germany. Forced out of his Baltic homeland and "re-patriated" into a "Deutsches Reich" that was never really his home, Vegesack writes painfully about the loss of his Riga-centered "Heimat" in his series of novels Die Baltische Tragödie, which chronicles the decline and fall of the German-speaking minority community of the Baltic. When Vegesack returned to his childhood home as a volunteer translator and officer of the German Army he saw that his old family house was now being used as a field hospital. He realized at last that his old home was gone forever and that he could never return. It is perhaps this own understanding of the loss of one's home that led Vegesack to treat his Russian characters with such sympathy, especially his lead female protagonist Tatjana. Vegesack sympathizes with the Russians who have lost their homes as a result of the German invasion because he too knows what it is like to lose one's homeland to an occupying Army. Vegesack's portrayal of Russians is positive not only in Tanja but in other short works of fiction such as Die Männer im Feuerofen where the main Russian character, an elderly mystic of the Orthodox sect of "Old Believers", Starez Pimnen, tells the visiting Germans solemnly that we are all children of God, regardless of what language we speak or to which nation we belong. Vegesack has on many levels bought into such broad cultural and socio-historic notions as the "Russian Soul". A central weakness of Tanja is the fact that the title character is placed deliberately by Vegesack in a position of responsibility close to sensitive military information, which is
rather implausible and done only to allow Tanja to suffer her crisis of divided loyalties. While Vegesack tries to justify Tanja's crisis on the basis of anti-communism by virtue of her aristocratic origins, it is not all that believable or convincing. Had Tatjana been portrayed as a catholic, Western Ukrainian peasant girl whose family had starved as a direct result of Stalin's forced collectivization in the 1930s, for example, her motivations would be much more believable. By the late summer of 1942, however, the Tsar had been long dead and the aristocratic, reactionary Whites defeated in the Civil War. General apathy and indifference towards the Soviet regime was more the rule than the exception, and it is doubtful that Tatjana's ties to the old Regime of Tsarist times would have held the kind of motivating psychological force for Tatjana as Vegesack tries to make us believe. Still, a careful reading of The Captive Mind by Polish poet Czeslaw Milosz reveals how real this problem of loyalties can be and how such a psychological breakdown can occur. Tatjana cannot unify her love for Russia and her devotion to the party. As much as she would wish for these two impulses to be one in the same, they cannot be. Her hatred for the Germans is the glue that holds Tatjana's psyche together, and this unifying glue is dissolved by her love for the German narrator, which overpowers her and throws her whole world into confusion and discord. Before she can be captured she shoots herself with the narrators pistol and dies, we can suppose, as yet another posthumous "Hero of the Soviet Union". In typical romantic fashion, the narrator is overcome by this loss and seeks death on the battlefield shortly thereafter, bringing the prevailing Romeo and Juliet theme of the entire novella to its ultimate, required conclusion.
Heinrich Böll's *Der Zug war pünktlich* is a novella of existential "Angst", and it is not without its own poetic beauty, but the content is a bit predictable, particularly the role of Olina as the "saintly prostitute". The novella's strongest point is its chilling portrayal of the cold, impersonal machinery of war that crushes lives ruthlessly and relentlessly on all sides. Regardless whether the killing is done by German soldiers or Polish partisans, the outcome is the same: innocent young people die.

Böll's longest novel, *Gruppenbild mit Dame* centers, albeit indirectly, on the life of a German woman named Leni from the end of World War I, through the Weimar Republic and the Second World War into modern Germany of the late 1960s, with heaviest emphasis laid upon the years of the Second World War and Leni's illicit love affair with a Soviet prisoner of War, the young Russian Boris Koltovsky. The novel is a broad panorama of German life in the 20th century. The narrator himself moves from being an impersonal reporter to active participant in the drama. The whole work is saturated with Christian symbolism and other iconographic imagery, and is at the heart of Böll's political agenda and societal critique, namely that Germany had the chance, in the ruins and aftermath of the Second World War, to return to a more spiritual society like the one of the *Urgemeinde* of the earliest Christians. This opportunity was missed by the rest of Germany but followed by Leni and her closest friends. Böll uses this story of Leni's life to criticize modern German society and condemn the restoration of capitalism in Western Germany and the careless, wholesale absorption of the worst values of American consumerism and materialism by a disturbingly significant segment of West German society. Social critic Martin J. Matuštik, in his recent work *Postnational Identity*
could well have been describing Leni or her son Lev and his "secular Gospel" of

Leistungsverweigerung when, in a chapter discussing Kierkegaard, he writes:

How easily offended are human groupings when one does not woo them by taking part in their gossip and self-importance. "The offense under discussion here is one of which anyone ...can be the object if...the single individual seems to be unwilling to subject or subordinate himself to the established order." How offended advertisers and the public are that one is neither interested in becoming number one, nor runs with the latest intellectual fashions, nor is moved to increase profit! How offended are the churches when one does not leap sideways by pledging allegiance to the flags hanging at the altar! Kierkegaard calls these offenses of wanting to be an individual. "[P]eople are offended at...him [or her], even though he [or she] really is only making God God and himself [or herself] a human being."²

On the issue of stereotypes, Böll presents the critic with a problem. Is Böll really overturning stereotypes in Gruppenbild mit Dame? More likely, he is using these stereotypes and simply reversing them completely, standing "normal" circumstances upside down for maximum shock-effect in order to drive his own political agenda and Christian-humanistic message home. For American readers to fully appreciate the scandalous nature of Leni's relations with Boris, one should imagine, for sake of comparison, the scandal that would ensue in the American South if a prominent white woman, the daughter of a plantation owner, say, had an illicit love affair with a black man. Gruppenbild mit Dame, in essence, serves the same function in print for Germany what the famous film "Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?" did for American audiences. Böll repeats this theme after the character Boris dies by having Leni take a Turkish "Gastarbeiter" as a lover, continuing his ongoing critique of West German society into the modern age and striving once more for maximum shock effect. The whole novel is very

much in the rebellious spirit of the late 1960s, and Böll felt an inner sense of solidarity with the student protests in Germany and France.

To his credit, Böll's efforts with *Gruppenbild mit Dame* did attract international attention, and won him the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1972. Moreover, Böll did make a number of trips to the Soviet Union and befriended the leading Soviet critic, Lev Kopelev, who was so influential in introducing Böll to the Soviet public and literary establishment. Ironically, Soviet critics on the whole gave Böll a much warmer critical reception than did critics from East Germany. Böll became something of an unofficial cultural ambassador for Germany in the Soviet Union, and his works remain among the most widely recognized and read works of German literature in the former Soviet Union today.

In 1981 an important book was published entitled *Warum haben wir aufeinander geschossen?* In addition to documentary material and essays, the book contains two very important interviews featuring Heinrich Böll and Lev Kopelev, who, guided by an interviewer's questions, attempted to wrestle with the problem of the Second World War, stereotypes in Germany and the Soviet Union, and the relationship between Germany and Russia through the ages to the present day. In these interviews, Böll gives an explanation as to his motivation for writing that could well apply to all of the other authors we have studied:

Ich glaube an die Wirkung des Wortes. Ich hab ja die Wirkung der Worte anderer an mir selbst erfahren, in allen Ausdrucksformen, die das Wort hat, im Journalismus, in der Poesie, in der Prosa. Ich erfahre selber die Wirkung, die ich möglicherweise habe, sowohl positiv wie negativ, also in der Gegnerschaft, das ist eine wichtige Wirkung, man muß ja wissen, wo man lebt...Ich würde einfach weiterschreiben. Das ist für mich ein
lebenswichtiger Prozeß, schreiben. Und solange ich noch Kraft und Mut habe...werde ich weiter auf das Wort vertrauen.  

For his part, Lev Kopelev feels that much of the hatred in Russia for the Germans has subsided, especially in the younger generation.

Max Frisch's perspective from neutral Switzerland is unique and interesting, filled with an uneasy tension that Switzerland has been spared the ravages of war not by fate or any superior quality of the Swiss nation but by pure and arbitrary chance. He desires, like Böll, to shock his audience into thinking about these uncomfortable and controversial topics. Although his play *Alsd er Krieg zu Ende war* is one of his weakest works, Frisch should be commended for his bravery in taking on so huge a task, even if, ultimately, the form of a conventional drama was insufficient to successfully and coherently convey Frisch's message and warning. Frisch desires that we should recognize God as that indefinable, transcendent spirit found in all human beings, and on this basis he feels Europe can and must rebuild its humanistic traditions.

The least pretentious of all of these authors is Herbert Eisenreich, whose short story *Tiere von ganz natürlicher Grausamkeit* is the shortest of all the works we have examined, yet contains the most powerful demonstration of human goodness to be found among these various works. This Austrian author shows, in a gritty, realistic manner, the way in which the life of a platoon of Austrian soldiers in Russia is reduced to the most animalistic levels by hunger and then starvation. The narrator betrays an old Russian woman's secret cache of food to his comrades, who descend on the old woman's house and like a plague of locusts, devouring the food. When the narrator has settled in to

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sleep, he sees the old woman approach him, and expects her to kill him, but, at the fateful moment when she bends over him, she makes the sign of the cross and blesses him. This memory is so profound that the narrator reports he cannot forget it, even many years after the war, nor can we, as readers of this poignant story.

Christa Wolf's _Moskauer Novelle_ was her first major attempt at literature, and is seldom reviewed in literary criticism today. When it is reviewed at all, it is considered by critics to be merely a "transitional" work in Wolf's development as an author, which is similar to the way most critics view Max Frisch's early drama _Alsd er Krieg zu Ende war_. The novella tells the story of a young woman doctor named Vera, from the GDR, who comes to Moscow to attend a medical conference and there unexpectedly encounters a gentleman whom she once knew as a young Red Army lieutenant in Russian-occupied Mecklenburg, her first "puppy-love." Pawel Koshkin is now older and works as a German interpreter for the Soviet government. They are both married, with children and careers of their own, but the old emotions are stirred and they consider rekindling their old love. Vera personally confronts questions of Nazi war guilt, mostly through the lens of her father's life, and feels responsible for Pavel's eye injury that prevented him from becoming a surgeon in the Soviet Union after the war. The novella starts out with high ambitions, and has some potential, but this potential is ultimately strangled by the rigid form of socialist realism that Wolf felt obligated to obey as a young, and at that time, unpublished author in the GDR. The main characters show "classical" restraint and do not consummate their relationship but rather head back to their separate careers, subordinating themselves totally to the grander mission of "building socialism". The
vision Wolf presents to us in Moskauer Novelle is, as a result, ultimately not believable and "too good to be true." Wolf and Frisch would never again return to the topic of German and Slavic relationships, the creative potential of this area being utterly exhausted for the both of them. Wolf and Frisch would instead turn inward, upon conditions in their own respective lands for future inspiration in their later, more successful and mature works.

All of these stories, with the notable exception of Moskauer Novelle, really challenge and provoke us as modern readers and beg the question if we ourselves possess the courage, as Vaclav Havel says, to "live in truth"; that is, to refuse to accept stereotypes and view people as autonomous individuals and accept our moral responsibility for the other. If the project of understanding between Germany and Russia has been frustratingly slow and difficult, in part this is a product of the historical isolation of Russia from the rest of Europe and the Russians' own ambivalence about their own identity, for in many respects Russians exploit the "Asiatic barbarian" stereotype to uphold their own nationalist ideals and paranoid xenophobia. Much of the misunderstanding between Germans and Russians stems from lack of knowledge about Russia on the part of Germans, but part of why Russia remains mysterious to Western observers is because of an active intention on the part of Russians to be viewed in that manner.

Moreover, the Russians have been heavy-handed in their relations with other Slavs and have attempted over the centuries to blot out important cultural differences between themselves and other Slavs such as the Poles and the Czechs. In the post-Cold War age, then, we must listen to critics and thinkers from precisely these countries who
have been so long dominated first by German-speaking Europe, then by Imperial Russia and still later, the Soviet Union. Perhaps they can provide a bridge of understanding between the great historic powers of Germany and Russia. Germany, until 1918, felt itself somehow different, somehow set apart from the rest of Western Europe, namely France and Great Britain. Such attitudes were common among the German intellectual elite, including the early Thomas Mann, whose ideals in *Betrachtungen eines Unpolitischen* remind us of the later Solzhenitsyn in the Soviet Union. With the rebuilding after the Second World War, under the guardianship of the United States, and with the reunification of Germany in 1991, Germany is now firmly anchored to the liberal, democratic traditions of Western Europe. Czech and Polish critics argue, with good reason, that there is only one Europe, and they make an important point. Perhaps someday Russia, like Germany, long alienated from the liberal, democratic traditions of Western Europe, will find itself at home in the company of an undivided Europe.

Any such grand project must start small, with the individual, and that is the moral that each of these stories, in its own unique way, attempt to convey. We must have the courage to resist, to refuse to give into hatred, mindless clichés, and stereotypes and to oppose war and its dehumanizing effects wherever possible, even if we risk our own deaths by doing so. We must, as Havel theorizes, take responsibility for our responsibility to the other.

Siegfried von Vegesack, who had long hoped to see a non-communist Russia once more in his lifetime, ultimately abandoned such hopes as utopian. At the present time, in 1997, Russia has been ruled by a non-communist government since 1991, but the awaited utopia did not come. Vegesack would not have been surprised, and would probably today
simply repeat what, with an ironic attitude so common to both Germans and Slavs, he said when he received the East German Prize for Literature in 1963:

Ich glaube, daß Dummheit, Bornierheit, Bosheit, Niedertracht und Bestialität dem Menschen wie eine unaustilgbare Krankheit anhaftet, daß aber auch diese Seuchen und Giftstoffe im Plan der Schöpfung mit einkalkuliert sind, damit der Mensch am Widerstande gegen das Böse sich bewähre. Denn in einer vortrefflichen Welt mit lauter vortrefflichen Menschen -- welchen Wert hätte da noch das Gute? Und ohne den unerschöpflichen Stoff menschlicher Torheit -- worüber könnte man da noch lachen? Wie unausdenkbar trostlos, öde und stinklangweilig wäre eine Welt, in der es nichts mehr zum Lachen gäbe! Nein, ein goldenes Zeitalter der Perfektion, des allgemeinen Wohlbehagens wäre das letzte, was ich mir wünschen würde!¹

There cannot nor will there ever be a perfect world, but if we all do our part, and uphold the sanctity of the individual, we can at least strive to make this world a better one in the 21st century and beyond.

Bibliography


