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I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Jacob Buford entitled "On the Road to Maturity: Families, Rebellion, Relationships, and Gender in Contemporary German "Coming of Age Stories". I have examined the final electronic copy of this thesis for form and content and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts, with a major in German.

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We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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**ON THE ROAD TO MATURITY: FAMILIES, REBELLION, RELATIONSHIPS,
AND GENDER IN CONTEMPORARY GERMAN “COMING OF AGE STORIES”**

A Thesis Presented for the
Master of Arts
Degree
The University of Tennessee, Knoxville

Jacob Chandler Buford
August 2019

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DEDICATION

To my mother
Lydia Reynolds

my faithful canine companion
Holly

and my friends who have helped me along the way.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to extend a special thanks to Dr. Maria Stehle, Dr. Stefani Ohnesorg, and Dr. Kirsten A. Gonzalez for guiding and helping me as I wrote this thesis. I would also like to thank all who have taught, mentored, and helped me on my own journey here at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville.

I would not have gotten to where I am now without the guidance of these wonderful people.

ABSTRACT

Coming-of-age literature is nothing new to the German literary canon. Some more recent works that belong to this genre include *Crazy* (Benjamin Lebert, 1999), *Scherbenpark* (Alina Bronsky, 2008), and *Tschick* (Wolfgang Herrndorf, 2012). These works go against expectations of traditional coming of age novels by taking expected outcomes and twisting them into new, more relatable narratives for modern consumers.

This thesis explores issues, misconceptions, and reworkings of coming-of-age novels in contemporary German literature, with a focus on family, rebellion, and relationships. What does coming-of-age mean, and what problems are posed during this journey? By examining themes of coming-of-age stories (family, rebellion, sexual experience, friendships, and gender) in the three novels, this thesis shows how narratives rework traditional *Bildungsroman* themes, how they create relatable stories and characters, how they contend with gendered expectations, and how and why they become part of the canon of contemporary German literature.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL INFORMATION

What does it mean to grow up, to “come of age,” in contemporary Western cultures? In German society, one is considered to be an adult, or of age, when one becomes 18 years of age. The German *bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (BGB)* states, “[d]ie Volljährigkeit tritt mit der Vollendung des 18. Lebensjahres ein.”¹ Currently, outside of legally defined terms of coming of age in Germany, growing up entails being inundated with young adult coming-of age stories that are targeted at those who are currently experiencing the liminality of childhood and adulthood. This liminal zone one experiences while becoming “an adult” is often filled with experiences in which one is too old for one thing, and yet too young for another. Contemporary German culture has become inundated with these coming of age stories. They are so popular because such stories allow consumers to relate to them, as Melissa Linares states in her article, “Why Are Coming of Age Stories So Compelling?”, readers might “feel that they’ve already gone through that process of self-discovery” or “they are right in the middle of it” but “the uncertainty of the future, new feelings, new experiences, as frightening as they might make us feel, also make us feel alive and connected to others.”² Ebony Daley-Carey defines these coming-of-age stories in “Testing the Limits: Postmodern Adolescent Identities in Contemporary Coming-of-Age Stories” as stories that “have conventionally constructed the development of subjectivity as a linear, cohesive, and

¹ N.a. (n.d.). Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch (BGB)§ 2 Eintritt der Volljährigkeit. Retrieved January 17, 2019, from https://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/bgb/_2.html

² Linares, M. (2017, August 28). Why Are Coming of Age Stories so Compelling? Retrieved January 16, 2019, from <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/coming-age-stories-compelling>

ultimately empowering process.”³ As children and teenagers, there is nothing to gauge *how* one becomes an adult.

One major common assumption about coming-of-age in modern society includes the first sexual experience as a gateway to becoming an adult. This thesis focuses on German coming-of-age novels that break the expectations by leaving an open end to the story in which the main character must still continue their coming-of-age journey and continue to discover their sexuality and desired. It analyzes three novels, *Crazy* (Benjamin Lebert, 1999), *Scherbenpark* (Alina Bronsky, 2008), and *Tschick* (Wolfgang Herrndorf, 2012), that have all been adapted to the screen, published in 1999, 2008, and 2010 by Goldman Verlag, Kiepenheuer & Witsch, and FSC, respectively. Both novel and film adaptations of these narratives show the search for, development, and growth of one’s self through the following: family, rebellion, sexual experience, and friendships.

Playing with and dashing some of the expectations of coming-of-age stories allows *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick* to more closely represent the messy experience most people encounter when going through their teenage years. Though used in different forms, these pillars of coming-of-age stories can be found in the novel and film adaptations for *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick*. There is dysfunction within the family unit, rebellion as an escape from childhood in an act of rebellion, a sexual encounter, and strong interpersonal relationships that are formed in order to fuel and continue the maturing process of the respective main characters.

Together, these three stories contain common themes of contemporary coming-of-age narratives in which the main character starts, but does not finish the journey on the road to maturity. Such an ending allows these novels to make a socio-political statement in which the

³ Daley-Carey, E. (2018). Testing the Limits: Postmodern Adolescent Identities in Contemporary Coming-of-Age Stories. *Children's Literature in Education*, 49(4), 467.

characters go against mainstream ideas about the process of growing up. Statements against traditional expectations about coming of age are tentative ideas these authors have about the society and culture in which they live. The twisting of expectations allows the novels and narratives to explore a coming-of-age process in which the characters, however troubled or fabricated the story may seem, represent the experiences of many of the youth populace in Western cultures.

Coming of age is not a linear process even though it is often thought of as one. In the case of American youth coming of age, there are a select number of ages that feed into such linear thinking. These age markers are the tweens, double digit age; 13, becoming an actual “teenager;” 16, when one can get a driver’s license and the age of consent; 18, when one can legally vote and smoke; and 21, the age at which people can legally consume alcohol. Much like Americans, Germans have a similar view of particular ages when “coming of age.” In Germany, one cannot drive a car at 16, but rather can drink wine and beer. One can begin to drive with supervision at the age of 17. At 18, one can have hard liquor. Such differences in laws show a structured social conception about the age someone is and their maturity. Though age is quite linear, the actual process of coming of age is not. One must go through many different life experiences in order to learn and grow from them; “adulthood” is, thus, largely a legal term.

The experiences that one has while growing up have often been seen as a “journey.” In German literary history, the Bildungsroman (coming-of-age novel) has developed into a genre that describes such journeys. According to Todd Kontje in *The German Bildungsroman: History of a National Genre*:

From [the Bildungsroman’s] beginnings in the late eighteenth century, the history of the genre has been closely tied to the process of canon formation in German literature, a process which in the nineteenth century contributed to the shaping of a national identity. Increasingly the Bildungsroman became identified as the

quintessentially German genre, one that best expressed alleged national characteristics of inwardness and spirituality.⁴

Though the three texts I discuss do not tackle spirituality, they do work with the idea of inwardness and self-development. Having new, fresh perspectives by more authors, the Bildungsroman has changed over time into something that is now known as Erwachsenwerden Geschichten (coming-of-age stories), a descriptor that fits *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick*. Kontje remarks that “German writers for the last two hundred years have created works that both extend and revise the literary tradition.”⁵ The continuing revision and extension of the Bildungsroman genre has led into the concept of the Erwachsenwerden Geschichten. This new Erwachsenwerden Geschichten genre is something more relatable for the readers and provides a pseudo-real-life look at what it is like to be going through the journey of coming-of-age in an unforgiving world.

In the Bildungsroman genre, as stated by Franco Moretti in his book entitled, *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*, “[y]outh is both a necessary and sufficient definition of these heroes.”⁶ Youth is an important factor in the *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick* since all three novels depict rather young, early teenage, characters. Moretti continues that “[y]outh, or rather the European novel’s numerous versions of youth becomes for our modern culture the age which holds the ‘meaning of life’.”⁷ The three novels utilize the idea of youth and the questions about the meaning of life that pose themselves in this time period. Each of the main protagonists must go on a journey in order to discover more about themselves and

⁴ Kontje, T. C. (1993). *The German Bildungsroman: History of a national genre*. Columbia, SC: Camden House.

⁵ Kontje, T. C. (1993). *The German Bildungsroman: History of a national genre*.

⁶ Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. London: Verso, 2000. 4.

⁷ Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. 4.

develop. Skillfully written by the authors, these narratives play into the Bildungsroman genre's youth concept in order to fulfil, to an extent, the protagonists' coming of age story.

A foil character is a “[a] character whose qualities emphasizes another’s (usually the protagonist’s) by providing a sharp contrast.”⁸ Throughout *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick*, foil characters are used by the authors to complicate the characters’ development. The complexity of the characters’ development is not negative, but rather a complication written into the stories by the authors that force the protagonists to learn about themselves and their new surroundings. The foils found in all three narratives provide friendship and support for the protagonists as well, which provides a catalyst that is necessary for their coming-of-age journeys. The authors use the foil characters to write experiences that the protagonists might not have themselves but contend with.

Crazy (novel by Benjamin Lebert, 1999; film adaptation by Hans-Christian Schmid, 2000) follows a young, struggling high school student in the ninth grade, who is growing up with a physical disability. In the beginning, the protagonist’s, Benjamin’s, family seems perfect and ideal in that they are a nuclear heterosexual family, but as the story progresses, the more broken the family becomes. Rebellion is a common theme in *Crazy* because more often than not, Benjamin and his friends are breaking school rules while doing things they should not be doing. In one of the most rebellious scenes, Benjamin has his first sexual encounter while drunk with a classmate, which leads to conversation between him and his roommate, Janosch, about him now being an adult. Janosch himself is portrayed as the foil to Benjamin and motivation behind Benjamin’s coming-of-age story that falls short of the neat ending of a closed ending.

⁸ Auger, P. (2010). *The Anthem dictionary of literary terms and theory*. London: Anthem Press.

Scherbenpark (novel by Alina Bronsky, 2008; film adaptation by Bettina Blümner, 2013) is the coming-of-age story of Sascha Naiman. Sascha has seen her mother killed in front of her before the novel's beginning. Her step-father, Vadim, is in prison for the murder of Sascha's mother, and Sascha now lives with Vadim's cousin, Mascha, in the apartment where she saw her mother get killed. Mascha is the legal guardian of her and her siblings and a constant reminder of what Vadim did to her mother. As rebellion, Sascha runs to the house of a newspaper editor, Volker, whom she only met a few days before. Volker's house is also where Sascha experiences her first sexual encounter with Felix, Volker's son. Felix and Volker are Sascha's foil, who enable her to grow more as a person and further through the duration of *Scherbenpark*. She does not mature completely, though, because she realizes she must continue her journey.

Tschick (novel by Wolfgang Herrndorf, 2012; film adaptation by Fatih Akin, 2016) shows Maik Klingenberg and Andrej "Tschick" Tschichatschow leave home in a stolen car in order to visit Tschick's relatives. The main character, Maik, goes through steps of what can be considered coming of age. His family, at its core, is dysfunctional. His mother is an alcoholic, and his father must often "work late," which is later to be revealed as an affair with female character named Mona. The act of stealing a Lada and attempting to drive it to Tschick's relatives is the main act of rebellion from which Maik must learn about himself to continue his coming of age. Maik goes through what could be considered a sexual awakening, and, at the end of the novel, it can be inferred that he does have his first sexual encounter. He receives a letter from Isa a girl who he meets along his journey with Tschick and who expressed interest in him. Importantly, though, the strong interpersonal relationship that Maik develops in this coming-of-age story is his relationship with Tschick, who acts like Maik's foil because Tschick is so outlandish and careless in comparison to Maik.

I choose these three novels because they present common themes in contemporary German literature: the characters are “growing up” or going on a journey of self-discovery. In consideration were also Alexa Hennig von Lange’s 1998 novel, *Relax: Roman*; Helene Hegemann’s 2010 novel, *Axolotl Roadkill* with a 2017 film adaptation; and Charlotte Roche’s novel, *Feuchtgebiete* with a 2013 film adaptation. Alexa Hennig von Lange’s novel did not have a film adaptation, showing less of a consumer demand. Helene Hegemann’s novel tackles more complexities of coming-of-age than just the aforementioned themes of this sub-genre. Charlotte Roche’s debut novel also deals with more themes such as self-mutilation, recreational drug abuse, and suicide attempts. With this being said, there is room for them to be analyzed in tandem with the works I have chosen. The three novels chosen here, however, compare well in that they contain the same themes of family, rebellion, sexual experience, and friendship, and work to create accessible, popular, and relatable narratives for readers.

In the following, I offer close readings of the three texts with a focus on how they use the previously mentioned themes and foil characters to create contemporary coming-of-age narratives. This illustrates the protagonists’ not-so-traditional coming-of-age journey influenced by their families, rebellion, sexual experiences, and friendships. These themes create the framework for the contemporary coming-of-age narratives that dash expectations, by presenting stories of self-discovery that are not concluded and by choosing to have open endings rather than neat and orderly endings. Following these four pillars, one can see a trend of themes within these novels that create a commonality in German coming-of-age literature. The importance of each narrative’s conclusion lies in the fact that there is no conclusion of the protagonists’ stories. The three stories have open-endings, which allows room for the reader to consider what *might* happen after the “conclusion” of the novels.

CHAPTER TWO

THE CRAZINESS OF *CRAZY*

Benjamin Lebert's debut novel, *Crazy*, is a fictional text about a young protagonist named Benjamin. Inspired by Benjamin Lebert's own experiences, as claimed by Simon Hattenstone in an Interview article, *Crazy* is a novel about a boarding school student's antics and journey throughout the school year.⁹ *Crazy* shows a brief glance into the coming-of-age journey that Benjamin embarks on while there. The novel starts on Benjamin's orientation day, setting up his past experiences and what might be to come for him. The reader quickly learns that Benjamin, who is also the narrator, has trouble with mathematics and has become a serial flunker, who also has a cerebral palsy, which partially paralyzed his left arm and leg. Benjamin previously attended five other schools, at which he failed math and was kicked out. In the novel, he is being introduced to the school and the people there with his mother and father, who up until this point have raised him in a guarded and tight space. Raising Benjamin in such a way means that he has not experienced much outside of what his parents wanted for him, but also that he does not have the social capacity that normally would be developed by a 16-year-old due to the fact that he has been shielded by his parents for most of his life.

After his parents leave him at the boarding school, Benjamin forms bonds with his peers, some of whom are the driving force behind his coming-of-age story in this novel. Benjamin is seemingly often included naturally in the antics of the group of boys, which is key to his development in the novel. Throughout the narrative, Benjamin still struggles in school, but he embarks on his coming-of-age journey with the group of boys and begins to find himself.

⁹ Hattenstone, S. (2000, July 31). Flawed genius. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/culture/2000/jul/31/artsfeatures.fiction>

All the while Benjamin is enjoying his stay at the boarding school and learning many different life-lessons, there is dysfunction and despair within his biological familial unit. His mother and father are shown to have some sort of rift between them at the beginning of the book, but the reader, like Benjamin finds out later that his father is actually cheating on his mother. The parents then go through a divorce, which isn't explicitly shown in the text, but is assumed by the reader. With a new familial structure at home, Benjamin is forced to lean upon the other students, his peers and friends, at the boarding school for a network of support and comradery.

Eventually, Benjamin does fail the math course at the boarding school and is forced to leave. There is an end-of-year party that the boarding school is putting on for the students and families. This can be paralleled to the parties that were previously thrown by the students in secrecy, filled with life and agency. Benjamin states that he has his own plans for his life that do not match up with what his mother wants for him. This final scene in the novel where he states that he has other plans for himself gives him the agency that he has been looking for and attempting to get throughout the entirety of the novel. The ending, much like *Scherbenpark* and *Tschick*, leaves much to be desired in regards of perfect, neat endings wrapped up nicely with a little bow providing closure and a satisfied feeling. It does, however, leave the story open, which allows for Benjamin to continue on his coming-of-age journey in the readers' imagination, allowing them to interact with the story on a much deeper level.

Throughout *Crazy*, Benjamin Lebert embarks upon a coming of age story, that allows him to gain agency throughout the story with the help of those around him. Family, rebellion, sex, and friends all play their part in the narrative to create a complex and multi-layered story in which Benjamin becomes more aware and sure of himself. What happens throughout the story

allows Benjamin and those around him to make decisions on their own and deny the stigmas and expectations placed upon them by society and their superiors.

In the opening scenes of the novel, Benjamin and his parents are meeting the principal of the boarding school he is going to attend. His mother has written a note that she urges Benjamin to give to the principal about his disability. The note reads:

Sehr geehrter Herr Richter!

Mein Sohn Benjamin hat seit seiner Geburt einen Halbseitenspasmus links. Das bedeutet, die Funktion der linken Seite seines Körpers, speziell von Arm und Bein, ist eingeschränkt. Praktisch bedeutet dies, er kann feinmotorische Arbeiten wie Schuhe binden, mit Messer und Gabel umgehen, geometrische Figuren zeichnen, mit der Schere schneiden etc. nicht oder nur eingeschränkt durchführen. Außerdem hat er dadurch Probleme beim Sport, kann nicht Fahrrad fahren und hat bei allen Bewegungen, die den Gleichgewichtssinn betreffen Schwierigkeiten.

Ich hoffe, Sie können ihn dadurch unterstützen, indem Sie diese Dinge berücksichtigen. Vielen Dank[...]¹⁰

(Dear Mr. Richter

My son Benjamin has had a partial paralysis of the left side of the body since birth. This means that the functioning of the left side of his body, particularly the arm and the leg, is limited. In practical terms, this means that he either cannot perform or has difficulty performing fine motor tasks as tying his shoes, using a knife and fork, drawing geometrical figures, using a pair of scissors. In addition, he has problems with sports and cannot ride a bicycle and has difficulty with any movement that involves a sense of balance. I hope you will give him your support by taking note of these things.

Many thanks. Warm Regards.)¹¹

The fact that his mother sees it fit to write a note on Benjamin's behalf asking for special treatment by the faculty due to his disability shows something interesting in the text. Benjamin says, "[w]ie oft habe ich diesen Umschlag in die Hand eines Lehrers gedrückt? Bestimmt schon ein dutzendmal."¹² (How many times have I pushed this envelope into a teacher's hand? A dozen

¹⁰ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. München: Goldmann Verlag. 12-13.

¹¹ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 7.

¹² Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 12.

at least.)¹³ The statement from Benjamin at this moment means that he has done this many times. What is more important in this scene, though, is the fact that his mother is taking it upon herself to provide the information and letter to the teachers instead of Benjamin himself. Here, in this scene, Benjamin is shown without agency because his mother is taking it from him by not allowing him the chance to do this himself or to even make the decision on if he wants to address his disability yet or not.

Following suit with traditional coming-of-age narratives such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, it can be proposed that Benjamin must leave the care of his parents, who strip him of his own agency as a character, in order for him to even start his coming-of-age journey. Benjamin's mother and father have been overly protective parents, which has resulted in him not being able to attempt to try certain things out for himself, which is described by the fact that he has handed all of his teachers letters like the one previously mentioned and by his mother making the statements that he cannot or has difficulties with certain things. Such statements have become commonplace, yet also an annoyance to Benjamin. He has a yearning within himself to grow and not be defined by his disability, but can only be seen that way when he is with his parents. Thus, for him to become someone he wants to be, Benjamin must leave the overly protective nurturing of his parents to gain the agency he is looking for.

Benjamin's parents' views on him continue to be problematic when he finds a letter written to him by his father the morning after his first day at the boarding school. His father writes, "ich weiß, Du machst eine schwierige Zeit durch. Und ich weiß auch, daß Du nun in vielen Dingen auf dich allein gestellt sein wirst. Aber denk bitte daran, es ist das beste für Dich, und bleib tapfer!"¹⁴ (I know this is a tough time for you. And I also know that you'll have to rely

¹³ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 6.

¹⁴ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 19.

on yourself for lots of things. But please remember that it's all for the best, and be brave.)¹⁵ Such statements of “be brave,” especially from parents, become problematic when being said to a 16 year old because they illustrate the fact that the parents still see their child as just that: a child. Benjamin even confirms this to the reader by acknowledging the fact that he is seen as a child and sarcastically commenting that he would keep the note to show his children what a big, stand-up guy their father was.¹⁶ Just like the letter from his mother, this letter from his father further confirms the idea that he is not seen as someone who is quickly becoming an adult in the eyes of the law, but is still greatly hindered in his maturation process by his own parents.

Being left to his own devices at the boarding school without his parents allows and forces Benjamin to explore life on his own, without the restriction brought forth by his parents and himself. The hindrance of maturity in Benjamin's life is explicitly shown in the scene in which he is talking to Janosch before going to visit the girls after curfew hours. Janosch and Benjamin are talking about what it is like to not have a disability. Benjamin finally states that he wants to know who he is, and that everyone else seems to know exactly who they are. He continues, “[e]in Blinder kann sagen, er ist blind; ein Tauber kann sagen, er ist taub; und ein Krüppel kann verdammt noch mal sagen, er ist ein Krüppel. Ich kann das nicht. Ich kann nur sagen, ich bin halbseitengelähmt. Oder ich bin ein Halbseitenspastiker.”¹⁷ ([A] blind man can say he's blind, a deaf man can say he's deaf, and a cripple can damn well say he's a cripple. I can't. All I can say is I'm partially disabled or partially spastic.)¹⁸ Benjamin has not developed much of a personal identity. He has, up until this point in life, not been able to think about who he was because he

¹⁵ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 14.

¹⁶ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 19-20.

¹⁷ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 41.

¹⁸ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 37.

did not need to do so. Benjamin's new desire to find out who he is shows the first spark of agency within him in the narrative.

As Molly Knight notes in her journal article, “[t]his literal incarnation of outsider status forms the essence of [Benjamin]’s appeal as a coming-of-age story protagonist.”¹⁹ Benjamin’s disability creates a sympathy in the reader due to the harsh and scolding words as he is “persecuted in math class by a merciless teacher” because he cannot hold and use a compass and protractor or draw a triangle correctly.²⁰ Early on, the reader is able to connect to Benjamin and engage in his story due to what is learned about Benjamin himself and what he has gone through.

New found desire to find out who he is and the relationship formed between Benjamin and Janosch drive him to search inside (through questioning the world around him) and outside (through the relationships he develops) of himself. Benjamin agrees to go visit the girls in their room after curfew hours where he drinks in excess and experiences his first sexual encounter. A product of both lust and drunkenness, Benjamin loses his virginity in a whirlwind of physical and emotional experiences in which he no longer feels comfortable with who he is. The questioning of self that Benjamin experiences is proposed in Yvonne Vissing’s text in which she asserts, “[a] young person’s first sexual contact, beyond natural and modest sexual exploration, can be a life-altering event for him or her. Once that door is opened, the young person’s view of sex, of self, and of intimate relationships will change.”²¹ What becomes problematic, though, is the common societal assumption and belief in Western cultures that the revelations and automatic maturity experienced after sexual intercourse comes only after heterosexual relations. In a 2010 survey on

¹⁹ Knight, M. (2015). Bodily Harm: Pop Masculinity in Benjamin Lebert’s *Crazy* and *Der Vogel ist ein Rabe*. *German Pop Literature*, 121-141. doi:10.1515/9783110275766-006

²⁰ Knight, M. (2015). Bodily Harm: Pop Masculinity in Benjamin Lebert’s *Crazy* and *Der Vogel ist ein Rabe*.

²¹ Blair, S., & Claster, Patricia Neff. (2018). *Gender, sex, and sexuality among contemporary youth: Generation sex* (First ed., Sociological studies of children and youth ; v. 23).

sexual intercourse in adolescents, “[s]ex was defined for the participant[s] as penile-vaginal sexual intercourse.”²²

What comes into question here is the idea of *othered* sexual intercourse: the twisting of expectations into something completely different. Would these novels carry the same emotional weight if they were based in homosexual relations rather than heterosexual ones? I think not. Homosexual romance and relationships are often hidden from the public eye, which leads to a lack of discussion about such ideas. Though such topics are often disregarded in the general population, homosexual romance and relationships are gaining more traction with an ever-growing corpus of literature. The emotional response, and finally revelations, the characters have in these narratives come from the social stigma and ideology put upon (homo)sexual intercourse.

One of the most important parts in *Crazy* is the fact that Benjamin directly addresses the misconceived notion that sex is the gateway to maturity. Benjamin is drunk at a party and is talking to Marie, another student at his boarding school. Suddenly he is overcome by the urge to use the restroom. While in the bathroom, Marie shows up and an explicit scene ensues.²³ After the sex scene and Marie’s departure from the bathroom, Benjamin states:

“[i]ch will gar nicht Erwachsen werden. Ich will ein ganz normaler Junge bleiben. Meinen Spaß haben. Mich, wenn nötig, bei meinen Eltern verstecken. Und das soll jetzt alles vorbei sein? Nur weil ich meinen Schwanz in das geile Loch von Marie gesteckt habe? Das hat doch sowieso niemand gesehen. Ich werde es auch niemandem erzählen.”²⁴

(I don’t want to become a grown-up; I want to remain a perfectly normal kid. Have fun. Hide behind my parents when I have to. And all that’s over now? Just because I put my cock in Marie’s hot little hole? But nobody saw. And I’m not going to tell anyone.)²⁵

²² Shrier, L., Koren, A., Aneja, S., & Moor, P. (2010). Affect Regulation, Social Context, and Sexual Intercourse in Adolescents. *Archives of Sexual Behavior*, 39(3), 695-705.

²³ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 79-84.

²⁴ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 82.

²⁵ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 80.

The realization of him not wanting to grow up after having sex follows suit with other novels in this study. Having such realizations of wanting to postpone, or slow down the coming-of-age (and aging) process comes throughout adolescence and adulthood. It comes to light that there is a false social construct of what one's "first time" is like and what it means to have had sex for the first time. Benjamin is overcome with such feelings of wanting to stay in the liminal space of being a teenager at this moment due to the societal impression forced upon youth about sex and what sex means. Sex becomes problematic in this scene because he seemingly has an overpowering sense of nostalgia for his childhood and staying a child, or is reverting to a more childlike state due to the fact that he is in a state of panic and confusion.

Being under the influence of alcohol strips Benjamin and Marie of their cognitive ability to consent to sexual relations, and they must come to terms with their actions. As Benjamin processes what has just happened, he realizes that he is not who he thought he was and does not want to "automatically" become an adult after having sexual intercourse with Marie. Such false notions of coming-of-age have been instilled in Benjamin and the realization of such false notions often comes after characters in these coming-of-age stories have their first sexual, or pseudo-sexual encounter, as the following analyses will also demonstrate. The three novels I discuss here all depict protagonists who have a sudden epiphany of not being as mature or not wanting to be as mature after they have new kinds of sexual encounters.

Following Benjamin's sexual experience and realization that he does not want to "become an adult," he and the group of boys plan to run away from the boarding school in an act of rebellion. The idea of running away from the boarding school is a direct way that Benjamin attempts to escape from reality. The idea of escape, though, comes from Troy, one of the students in the group of boys Benjamin is friends with. Troy says, "[w]ir können nach München

fahren. Noch vor dem Essen. Es fährt ein Bus nach Rosenheim. Von dort geht es mit dem Zug weiter' Troys Augen suchen meinen Blick. Traurig und leer schaut er zu mir auf. Er Junge meint es Ernst."²⁶ (We can go to Munich. Before supper. There's a bus to Rosenheim. Then we can go on by train. Troy tries to make eye contact with me. He looks at me with blank sadness. The guy really means it—you can tell).²⁷

Troy, previously the quiet and unassuming member of the group, shows his newfound agency with his idea of running away after they, he and Benjamin, talk about their personal life. Such bonding is an important part in one's youth because relationships developed early in life shape who one becomes.²⁸ The fact that Troy is only now coming out of his shell goes to show that Benjamin is to him like Janosch is to Benjamin: a catalyst in the journey of coming-of-age. The conversation between Troy and Benjamin during the afternoon before their successful run away from the boarding school demonstrates the foil's role of catalyzing experiences of growth. Troy opens up to Benjamin and tells him about his fear for living. Troy states, "Hast du manchmal Angst? ... Angst vor dem Leben."²⁹ (Are you ever afraid? ... [A]fraid of life, you know?).³⁰ Though Benjamin does not want to actually run away in this moment, he continues to listen to Troy, which allows Troy to explore and express his first desires in the text.

Benjamin pulls Janosch out of the bedroom and tells him what he and Troy are planning. Assumably, one would not do this without due consideration since spreading the word about taking part in something against the rules only creates a liability that one might get caught in the act or be told on. Telling Janosch, though, had to be done in the sense of the story because the

²⁶ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 93.

²⁷ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 90.

²⁸ Youniss, J., & Haynie, D. L. (1992). Friendship in adolescence. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*, 13(1), 59-66.

²⁹ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 89.

³⁰ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 87.

relationship between Janosch and Benjamin is what develops Benjamin's character into what it is at the end of *Crazy*. It can also be looked at as if Benjamin is reigning in Janosch for moral support due to the fact that they have become so close, and Benjamin knows that Janosch will be able to drive him to actually want to partake in the escape scene and because Janosch is needed to convince the others to go along.

As they are running away from the boarding school, the group of boys meet the bus driver, an interesting character meant to be a sage in the most stereotypical sense of the word. One of the first things that the bus driver says to the young adults is that he knows they are running away, but also that one cannot hide life experiences or hide from them. He specifically says, “[d]ie unverkennbaren Dinge des Menschendaseins... Das, was man nicht verstecken kann: Trauer, Freude, Wind.”³¹ (The unmistakable facts of human existence... The ones no one can hide. Grief, joy, wind).³² This conversation about life continues throughout this mini-narration, and the group listens and learn from it, showing a more mature development in the group than previously seen in the text.

The final journey of the group leads them into meeting an elderly gentleman by the name of Sambraus. What Benjamin describes about Sambraus, though, can be taken as foreshadowing of the future yet to come for him. Benjamin says, “Sambraus ist in Neuseelen aufs Internat gegangen. Es war für ihn wohl eine schreckliche Zeit. Er fühlte sich eingesperrt, wollte am liebsten wieder nach Hause. Und als er dann wieder zu Hause war, ging gar nichts mehr. Das geplante Leben im Internat hat ihm auf einmal gefehlt.”³³ (Sambraus was at school in Neuseelen. He had an absolutely terrible time there, felt locked in, just wanted to go back home. And then

³¹ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 108.

³² Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 107.

³³ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 146.

when he did get home, nothing worked anymore. He suddenly missed the orderly life of boarding school).³⁴ Having this specifically written in the novel reveals that there is a certain meaning that may not be the face value that the statement provides; the experience that Sambraus had may be the same experience Benjamin has. Learning that life after the boarding school did not seem to work for Sambraus could be foreshadowing what is to come for Benjamin after his time there has come to an end.

Just like Sambraus, Benjamin did not have a good time within the walls of the boarding school. It is only when Benjamin leaves the boarding school and breaks the boundaries that he and the group of young adults appreciate their time there. Applying this comment to what Benjamin has experienced at this school and what is to come in his future, this means that Benjamin may no longer fit in at his home like he so wishes. Not only has Benjamin changed while he was at the boarding school, his whole family dynamic has also changed. Benjamin's mother and father divorced since his father was cheating on her, the daughter harbors great animosity toward both parents, and his father is now dating the young woman he was having an affair with. Coming into such a new family environment after being away, Benjamin may no longer know how to navigate the situation he will soon be thrust into.

As people experience adolescence, relationships are one of the most important parts of life. These relationships that one develops help drive the person to become who they are in adulthood. Within the story of *Crazy* (1999), the relationships Benjamin develops while at boarding school are the driving forces behind his experiences that help him grow and develop as a person. Two people that Benjamin has an unexpected, yet necessary connection with are Janosch, his roommate, and Troy, an older, struggling student. What is seen in the development

³⁴ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 147.

of the relationship between Benjamin and Janosch is the main driver in Benjamin's development emotionally, whereas Troy needed Benjamin in order to grow more as a person. Arguably, Benjamin would not have become who he was at the end of the novel without Janosch being part of the story.

The novel comes to a close and Benjamin is leaving the boarding school for the last time, and he talks about the next school he is supposed to attend. Benjamin calls this school special, but furthermore, he states, "ehrlich gesagt, will ich dort nicht hingehen. Ich möchte nicht immer der Neue sein. Der Neue mit dem Brief unter dem Arm."³⁵ ([T]o tell the truth, I don't want to go. I'm sick of being the new boy all of the time. The new boy carrying the letter).³⁶ This depicts Benjamin as having started to express his own self-interest, meaning that he has developed into a character acting on his own agency at the end of the novel. Self interest in Benjamin's case means that he is starting to show more of his own agency instead of following the path others have laid out for him throughout the entirety of the novel. Moreover, though, this is in juxtaposition to the very beginning of the novel where he complacently does what his mother says and hands the letter over to the principle of the boarding school.

Benjamin finally being able to say that he no longer wants to be the new kid handing over a letter to his teacher, though minuscule, shows what the author has developed within the story of *Crazy*: Benjamin's agency. His journey with Janosch, Troy, and the group allowed him to mature more than would have been possible if he were to have been at home with his family in the novel, and his sexual encounter with Marie left him contemplating what it means to come-of-age. Though Benjamin did mature and embark on a coming-of-age story within the text, there is

³⁵ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 172.

³⁶ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 175.

still much more for him to experience in life, leaving the reader to ponder the future of Benjamin after the novel.

Troy is the last person in the group with whom Benjamin interacts when saying his goodbyes. Benjamin walks over to him to say goodbye, when Troy butts his head onto Benjamin's stomach.³⁷ Troy, who hardly spoke in the novel beforehand has become open and seemingly full of life. Touching someone else, let alone talking, shows great change within Troy himself. The difference in Troy can be traced to the conversation he has with Benjamin near the middle of the novel in which he starts to open up and plans the escape from the boarding school. Benjamin has invoked this change in Troy, all the while learning about himself and attempting to continue along on his own coming-of-age journey. The new character traits and behaviors, acting less like macho men and toxic heroes, between the group of boys has come by each of them going through a journey throughout the novel, growing, and learning along the way.

The last thing anyone says to Benjamin in the story is “[s]chöne Ferien.”³⁸ (Happy vacation).³⁹ This statement leaves the reader with a sense of wonder about what is to come over the course of this vacation that Benjamin is going to be having. Growth, stagnation, and failure are all things one experiences while coming of age, and *Crazy* embodies a more natural maturation of its main character as compared to cookie-cutter stories, lending to the success and reception of this story.

At the end, Benjamin has entered a new part of his life, without the friendships and characters that have driven him to the point of gaining agency and being able to influence the world around him. What is important about this, though, is the fact that his journey is not yet

³⁷ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 174.

³⁸ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*. 175.

³⁹ Lebert, B. (2001). *Crazy*(C. B. Janeway, Trans.). 176.

concluded, lending itself to the idea that coming-of-age and the journey of maturation is not what the general populous believes. Coming-of-age, as many people in Western culture see it, is something linear, but the contrary is true. Identity development models in modern psychology (Helms's "White Racial Identity Development Model" (1984, 1990, 1995) and Epstein's "Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory" (1994, 1998)), provide a scaffolding of experiences and lessons learned in order to define coming-of-age is a fluid process.⁴⁰ One can shift between the different "levels" of maturity like one can flow back and forth or even stop at certain stages of identity development. Helms's "White Racial Identity Development Model" provides six different stages: contact, disintegration, reintegration, pseudoindependence, immersion/emersion, and autonomy.⁴¹ These stages only define experiences and actions. One can go through all stages in a manner than skips some or stops in the middle, providing support to the fluidity of coming of age and the "stages" one experiences on that journey.

⁴⁰ Suthakaran, V. "Integrating Helms's White Racial Identity Development Model with Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory: Implications for Multicultural Education." *Multicultural Learning and Teaching* 7, no. 2 (2012): 26. 3-4.

⁴¹ Suthakaran, V. "Integrating Helms's White Racial Identity Development Model with Cognitive-Experiential Self-Theory: Implications for Multicultural Education." 6-12.

CHAPTER THREE

THE NOT-SO BROKEN *SCHERBENPARK*

Scherbenpark is the debut novel of Alina Bronsky about Sascha Naimann, a 17 year old daughter of a Russian immigrant family. Sascha is a flawed and troubled main character due to the series of unfortunate events that befell her before the start of the novel. Sascha's step-father, Vadim, murdered her mother, Marina, in front of her in a drunken rage. Vadim was an abusive husband and father, making their lives unbearable to the point where Sascha's mother had kicked him out of their apartment and was trying to divorce him. Unable to cope with such feelings, Vadim resorted to violence and killed the mother, effectively stripping her of her identity and agency. The opening scene of the novel sets up the character of Sascha as someone who is deeply hurting and full of angst and rage.

With only one goal in her mind at the beginning of her story, revenging her mother by killing Vadim, the reader sees her go through change and maturation that was only possible with the help of two people she meets in the story: Volker and his son, Felix. Sascha sees a newspaper article that paints Vadim in a positive light, which throws her into a fit of panic and rage. Deciding to go to the printing office, Sascha meets with the author of the article and Volker, who acts as a mediator between her and the author. Volker offers Sascha his business card after she learns that he briefly knew her mother, and he says that if she ever needs anything that she can call him, and the scene in the novel is over. Eventually, Sascha agrees to Volker's offer and stays with him and Felix for a couple of days.

Sascha develops a relationship with Volker and Felix that helps her grow and learn about herself. A realization of her own immaturity provides moments of clarity, which lead to character development that were not able to be achieved before she met Volker and Felix since

they are the driving force behind her development. After a few days at Volker's house, Sascha decides that it is time for her to go back home and apologize to her aunt for what culminated to her leaving in the first place: her overreaction to her aunt's agency and decisions. This return home does not last, though, and she goes back to Volker's house. This relationship triangle that forms between Sascha, Felix, and Volker becomes something like her familial network on which she depends for support throughout the text.

The relationship developed between these characters is one of the most important parts of this narrative due to the fact that Sascha learns that she still has more maturing to go through in her own coming-of-age story, which leads to her final realization that she has to find her biological father. Coming to the understanding that she needs to leave where she grew up and find her father leaves an open ending to the novel that is necessary for her story and others in the coming-of-age genre. Sascha is last shown in the novel closing the door to her apartment to meet her biological father and find out about another part of her life that she had yet to realize in order to continue her coming-of-age story.

The beginning of the novel, Sascha is narrating that she thinks she is "die Einzige in unserem Viertel, die noch vernünftige Träume hat."⁴² ([T]he only one in our neighborhood with any worthwhile dreams).⁴³ For this to be the first statement in the novel, it sets up a rather interesting view that Sascha has on those who live around her. Such thoughts lead to a problematic world-view for Sascha in which she is unable to see others as anything other than beneath her. What becomes more interesting, though, are the dreams that she then goes on to state. Sascha says:

⁴² Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 9.

⁴³ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. New York: Europa Editions. 11.

Ich habe zwei und für keinen brauche ich mich zu schämen. Ich will Vadim töten. Und ich will ein Buch über meine Mutter schreiben. Ich habe auch schon einen Titel: „Die Geschichte einer hirnlosen rothaarigen Frau, die noch leben würde, wenn sie auf ihre kluge älteste Tochter gehört hätte.“⁴⁴

(I have two, and there’s no reason to be ashamed of either one. I want to kill Vadim. And I want to write a book about my mother. I already have a title: The Story of an Idiotic Redheaded Woman Who Would Still Be Alive If Only She Had Listened to Her Smart Oldest Daughter).⁴⁵

Saying she wants to kill her step-father and to write a book about her mother sets up a complexity of her character as both writer, depressive, and filled with rage that is further developed and worked through as the novel and her coming-of-age journey progresses.

Sascha continues her monologue about how the people who live in her neighborhood have no dreams or shouldn’t have any at all. She remarks, “[d]ie meisten Leute, die in unserem Viertel leben, haben gar keine Träume. Ich habe extra gefragt. Und die Träume der wenigen, die welche haben sind so kläglich, dass ich an deren Stelle lieber gar keine hätte.“⁴⁶ (Most of the people who live around here don’t have any dreams at all. I’ve asked. And the dreams of the ones who do have them are so pathetic that if I were in their shoes I’d rather not have any).⁴⁷

Following her stating the aforementioned quotes, Sascha starts to dote on herself. She states, “[a]ußer Deutsch kann ich auch Physik, Chemie, Englisch, Französisch und Latein. Wenn ich mal eine Zwei kriege, kommt der Lehrer zu mir und entschuldigt sich.“⁴⁸ (I also know physics, chemistry, English, French, and Latin. If I get a B on an assignment, the teacher comes over to me and apologizes).⁴⁹

Setting up her character as full of angst, arrogance, and what can be taken as judgement, readers do not automatically identify with Sascha. Sascha is a teenager who has seen and gone

⁴⁴ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 9.

⁴⁵ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 11.

⁴⁶ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 9.

⁴⁷ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 9.

⁴⁸ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 12.

⁴⁹ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 13

through much more than many other people her age, but she is also walled off to the world. As a child who has seen her step-father, who is someone she is supposed to love and trust, both mentally and physically abuse her mother and herself, she has had to come up with coping mechanisms in order to live her life as “normally” as she possibly can. However, “normal” life is something that she can no longer attain. The novel also sets her character up as someone who is confident and smart, which is illustrated by her academic prowess and her unyielding opinions.

Furthering the assessment that Sascha is teenager who is othered, and is forced into something she was not emotionally or physically ready for, is the fact that she must be proxy for Maria, Sascha’s legal guardian and Vadim’s cousin. Sascha describes how she believes Maria is scared of her, and she says:

Ich erkläre ihr die hiesige Welt und begleite sie zu Einkäufen, bei denen ein Dolmetscher notwendig ist. Ich weiß, wie man Sozialhilfe beantragt und wie Kindergeld. Meistens bin ich dabei, wenn das Jugendamt auf Visite geht. Ich lobe Maria immer in den höchsten Tönen. Wenn ich eine Frage an sie übersetzen muss, überlege ich mir auch gleich die Antwort dazu.⁵⁰
(I explain the lay of the land to her and take her shopping where an interpreter comes in very handy. I know how to fill out all the paperwork to apply for welfare and for children’s benefits. I’m usually around when workers from the family services department are scheduled to visit. I always offer her highest praise. When I have to translate a question for her, I always start thinking up the answer to it immediately).⁵¹

Having all of these responsibilities is not typical, but means that she has been thrust into acting as an adult in order to take care of her family unit that now is made up of her younger siblings and Maria after it was torn apart by the murder of her mother. Assuming responsibilities of an adult when she is supposed to be a child has, in some ways, made her much more mature than others her age, but also stunts her own coming-of-age journey at the point when Vadim killed her

⁵⁰ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 30.

⁵¹ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 27.

mother. Unable to escape her othering in her teenage years, she has missed out on opportunities to develop in a more general fashion, which is shown later in the novel.

Later in the novel, Sascha has a guttural reaction to a sympathetic article about Vadim. She remarks, “[w]ieder verdunkelt sich alles bei mir, und diesmal muss ich länger atmen, bis sich die Düsternis lichtet.”⁵² (Everything goes black again. This time I have to take deliberate breaths for much longer before the darkness starts to dissipate).⁵³ Having such a reaction to an article in a paper about her step-father shows just how broken and vulnerable she actually is. Sascha is unable to control her emotions regarding this traumatic event in her life, but this loss of self-control goes against what she believes about herself. She thinks she is one of the most mature persons she knows, but she is, in fact, still a hurt and broken child.

She continues later, “[i]ch fühle mich seit Tagen wie in einem dichten grauen Nebel. Ich kann die Welt um mich herum gut erkennen, aber sie hat keine Farben. Ich habe keine Lust genauer hinzusehen.”⁵⁴ (I’ve felt for days as if I were wandering around in a thick gray fog. I recognize the world around me, but it’s lost all color. I just don’t feel like looking any closer).⁵⁵ This is in juxtaposition to the teenager that is described as taking care of her younger siblings and dealing with bills and government forms for Vadim’s cousin, who is now the legal guardian of Sascha and her siblings. Here, in the novel, the reader realizes the self-development Sascha must experience in order to come of age and become who she wants to be.

Finding the article about Vadim and deciding to speak to the author, Susanne Mahler, is what leads Sascha to start her coming-of-age journey and develop as a character into someone who is more self-aware and relatable to the readers. Sascha goes to the headquarters of the

⁵² Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 50.

⁵³ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 61.

⁵⁴ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 66.

⁵⁵ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 54.

newspaper that printed the article, and it is in this moment the reader sees someone start to penetrate to the core of Sascha in a way that brings out her emotions for one of the first times since her mother's death. She is met at the office by Susanne Mahler, an intern for the newspaper, and her section editor, Volker. The interaction between Sascha and Susanne is rather brief, but that is not the important part of the scene. Volker dismisses Susanne and takes full responsibility for the piece written by Susanne. Offering Sascha his business card, Volker states, "[r]ufen Sie mich an, wenn Ihnen einfällt, was ich für Sie tun kann."⁵⁶ (Call me when you think of something I can do).⁵⁷ Sascha states that she does not know if she can come up with anything, but will keep it in mind, and "Ich fühle mich Ernst genommen."⁵⁸ (It's nice to be taken seriously).⁵⁹

Volker talks to Sascha as a person, seeing through her tough exterior and catering to the emotional necessities of her; not just a person who has experienced such a horrific and scarring event, but rather a completely autonomous person who is not defined by a singular traumatic experience. Sascha seems to not feel as if she has been taken seriously since her mother's death because people have seen her with only pity. Even Maria says, "meinarmeswaisenkindchen," (mein armes Waisenkindchen).⁶⁰ (Mypoororphanchild).⁶¹ Though this is said to Sascha's younger sister, it is a prime example for how others are viewing Sascha and her siblings: as someone to pity. Being unable to be taken seriously is a normal part of coming-of-age because there is a liminal space in which someone sits between childhood and legal adulthood. In this

⁵⁶ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 78.

⁵⁷ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 63.

⁵⁸ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 78.

⁵⁹ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 63.

⁶⁰ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 29.

⁶¹ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 26.

space, one cannot do many things and is not considered to be fully autonomous. In Sascha's case, though, this is pushed to the extreme.

A common theme in *Scherbenpark* is that Sascha often states that she hates men. This hatred of men stems from psychological trauma at a developmental stage in her youth. Laura M. Davidson et al state:

Since stress and PTSD reflect integrated psychobiological disturbances, neurodevelopmental consequences of traumatic exposure may be profound as well. Changes that are adaptive during acute stress do not remain adaptive if they extend beyond the period of danger. Physiological systems may be permanently affected by traumatic experiences and may have profound effects if they occur during critical periods of development.⁶²

With such evidence, Sascha is going to be directly and profoundly affected by her mother's murder by her step-father. Sascha has created a hatred for men in her mind in order to protect herself. Finding a man in her apartment comes as a great wave of emotion that breaks through her barrier of protection. Maria's boyfriend, Grigorij, whom she has been seeing in secrecy is found by Sascha in the apartment with Maria. Sascha arguably views Grigorij being in the apartment as a personal violation and a violation and infringement upon her personal space, which she believed to be safe and untouchable by the outside. Her perception of safety and who she thought she could trust is shattered and she turns to the only other person who has offered her kindness and spoken to her as person more than just someone who lost her mother. Sascha calls Volker after remembering that he gave her his business card.

The interaction between Sascha, Maria, and Grigorij is the moment in which Sascha needs to find her escape from the apartment she lives in with Maria and her half-siblings. Sascha says, "Ich kann nicht zu Hause bleiben, sage ich entschieden... Ich muss hier weg, zumindest für

⁶² Davidson, Laura M., Sabra S. Inslicht, and Andrew Baum. "Traumatic Stress and Posttraumatic Stress Disorder among Children and Adolescents." *Handbook of Developmental Psychopathology*, 2000, 723-37. doi:10.1007/978-1-4615-4163-9_38.

ein paar Tage.”⁶³ (‘I need a place to stay’ I say. ‘I need to get out of here—at least for a few days.’)⁶⁴ Using the opportunity provided to her by Volker, Sascha begins her coming-of-age journey through which she learns about more about herself than she had done in the two years after her mother’s untimely death. As guarded as Sascha is with those who are normally around her, she would not be able to develop since she cannot connect with them. She lacks the emotional availability of some, and does not want to connect with people. This is not the case with Volker and his son Felix, though.

When it is obvious Sascha is leaving the apartment, Maria starts to get emotional and Sascha harshly says, “[m]ach doch bitte kein Theater, Maria... Es ist alles in Ordnung. Ich fahr zu einer Freundin. Ich bin groß genug.”⁶⁵ (Don’t be so dramatic, Maria... Everything’s fine. I’m just going to see a friend. I’m old enough).⁶⁶ It is important to note the original German text says “Freundin,” which specifically denotes a female friend, whereas this would be ambiguous in the English version. Feeling as if she cannot tell Maria the truth shows her inability to completely open up and be able to go through the development more as a character. Maria then asks Sascha, “ist es vielleicht doch eher ein Freund,” to which Sascha replies, “Durchschaut... Es ist ein Freund”⁶⁷ (Maybe it’s actually a boyfriend... You caught me... It’s a boyfriend).⁶⁸ This furthers the fact that Sascha does not believe that she can truly connect with Maria in this moment, and needs to escape to Volker’s house in order to come to terms with herself and what she has experienced.

⁶³ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 90.

⁶⁴ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 72.

⁶⁵ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 93.

⁶⁶ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 74.

⁶⁷ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 94.

⁶⁸ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 75

While staying at Volker's home, Volker Felix and Sascha form an interesting bond, which is somewhat of a love triangle. Through this triangle, though, Sascha is able to start her coming-of-age journey in which she makes salient realizations about herself, like she does after her sexual experience with Felix, which she may have been refusing to acknowledge before these experiences. This refusal to acknowledge can be taken from what she states about Little Red Ridinghood when Alissa calls her. Sascha says, “[v]ielleicht will sie das nicht sehen. Sie hat ja Angst vor dem Wolf. Deswegen tut sie so, als würde sie dem Wolf glauben. Sie belügt sich selbst und denkt, dann tut er ihr nichts.”⁶⁹ (Maybe she doesn't want to see. Maybe she is so afraid of the wolf that she wants the wolf to think she believes him. She's fooling herself, thinking he won't hurt her if she plays along).⁷⁰ Taking this at face value would only read as Sascha telling her little sister a possible reason behind Little Red Ridinghood's actions in the fairy tale. A closer reading, though, could present a more complex understanding of this scene in which Sascha is inadvertently revealing that she is both wolf and child in this instance.

As Sascha stays at Volker's house, Felix begins to reach down through the hard exterior that she uses in order to protect herself. Sascha and Felix have a conversation in his room about having either a boyfriend or a girlfriend and if either of them have had sex, but the interesting part about this conversation is that it is completely electronic even though they are next to each other. This conversation goes:

Hast du eigentlich einen Freund? / Nein... Ich will keinen Freund... Und auch keine Freundin. / Hattest du schon mal? / Was? / Einen Freund. / Ich habe mal einen im Schullandheim geheiratet, als ich 14 war. Zum Spaß. In den letzten zwei Jahren war nichts mehr. / Wegen deiner Mutter? / Meine Mutter hat damit nichts zu tun. / ... / Wen würdest du gern kennen lernen? / Niemanden... Vielleicht jemand Älteres? / Hast du eigentlich schon mal? / Was denn? / Du weißt schon. / Gevögelt? / Ja. / Habe ich doch schon gesagt—nein. / Mit 17 noch nicht?! / Na und? Du doch auch nicht. / Kommst du dir da nicht komisch vor? / Ich komme

⁶⁹ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 102.

⁷⁰ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 80

mir grundsätzlich komisch vor. Aber hättest du nicht Lust, es mal zu probieren? / ... Mit dir oder was? / Warum nicht? / Ich bin doch nicht deine Paz... Auch wenn ich braune Haare habe. / Darum geht es doch nicht... Du bist hübsch. / ... / Hat dein Vater früher auch rote Haare gehabt? / Ja? ... Wieso? / Dann mal los.⁷¹ (Do you have a boyfriend? / No... I don't want a boyfriend... Or a girlfriend. / Have you ever had one? / What? / A boyfriend. / I got "married" at camp once when I was 14. Just for a laugh. But I haven't had one for the last two years. / Because of your mother? / My mother had nothing to do with it. / ... / Who would you like to meet? / Nobody... Maybe somebody older. / Have you ever...? / What? / You know. / Fucked? ... I already told you. No. / What? You're 17 and you haven't yet? / So what? You haven't either. / Don't you think that is weird? / I'm a fundamentally weird person. / But haven't you ever wanted to see what it's like? / ... With you? / Why not? / I'm no Paz... Even if I do have brown hair. / That's got nothing to do with it... You're pretty. / ... / Did your father used to have red hair too? / Yes? ... Why? / Let's do it. / What??).⁷²

The reader sees the awkwardness throughout this conversation, but what is more important is the means through which they are having the conversation. They are typing this back and forth to each other on Felix's computer, a relatable experience for many in the area of social media.

There is also a problematic perception about sex with regards to both Sascha and Felix because they both view it as something they should do in order to just "get it out of the way." Sascha seeming is only having sex with Felix because she is fetishizing having sex with a younger Volker. This is proven by her question of if Volker had hair like Felix when he was younger. This is also supported by the fact that she remarks about the texture of Felix's hair while she is kissing him. Earlier in the novel, Sascha wonders what Volker's hair feels like, and the feeling of Felix's hair during the sex scene is no mere coincidence.⁷³ This scene becomes more problematic when Felix seems to be surprised that Sascha is still a virgin at 17, which shows constructed societal pressures and views of people almost expected to have had sex at a young age being expressed by him in this scene. Moreover, though, this entire scene has an

⁷¹ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 125-128.

⁷² Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 99-100.

⁷³ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 127

underlying idea of both Sascha and Felix feeling as if sex is something that they just need to go ahead and get out of the way; Sascha more so than Felix.

Later in the text, Felix has an allergic reaction to something, and he is unable to breathe, nearly suffocates, and is rushed to the hospital by Volker and Sascha. This experience creates a change in Sascha's character. She seems to revert back to a child when she and Volker return to his house after saying goodbye to Felix in the hospital because she feels the need to be around an adult for comfort. Sascha states, "[i]ch laufe wie angebunden hinter ihm her."⁷⁴ (I walk behind him as if on a leash).⁷⁵ Subconsciously, Sascha feels the need to be with Volker for what can be assumed is comfort. What follows in the text, is the realization by Sascha that she is not who she thinks she is. Sascha remarks, "[i]ch dachte ich wäre schon alt... Ich dachte es gibt keine Unterschiede zwischen mir und Erwachsenen. Zwischen mir und dir zum Beispiel."⁷⁶ (I thought I was already old... I thought there was no difference between me and adults. Between me and you, for instance).⁷⁷ This near tragic experience for Sascha becomes her epiphany moment in which she realizes she is not as mature as she thinks and has much further to go on her coming of age journey.

Near the end of the novel, Sascha is jumped by two people she knows from her apartment complex. Sascha gets quite disoriented and starts to yell someone's name, which turns out to be Volker's. Just like in the experience with Felix being unable to breathe and taken to the hospital, in Sascha's time of need, she turns to Volker as a father figure who can provide comfort and protection for her. After she is "jumped," she calls Volker and talks to him about what had happened, and she starts to open up even more to him. The important detail about Sascha

⁷⁴ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 157.

⁷⁵ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 123.

⁷⁶ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 161.

⁷⁷ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 125.

opening up more to Volker is that she says, “Ich hatte keine Angst. Bis heute abend. Jetzt habe ich wieder Angst. Und habe Angst vor noch mehr Angst.”⁷⁸ (I wasn’t afraid of anything. Before tonight. Now I am afraid again. I am afraid of being afraid).⁷⁹ Sascha is quickly learning more and more about herself, which can only be attributed to her first meeting Volker and Felix, who start these realizations within her.

Sascha starts to act in self-destructive ways, which can be seen when she has sex with a “false” Volker, a younger man with blond hair, who turns out to be a nationalist. She seems to be looking for the feeling of assurance and comfort that she felt around Volker and Felix, so she attempts to find it with a stranger. Sascha states after she and the false Volker have sex, though, that “[e]s fühlt sich schlimmer an als vorher.”⁸⁰ (I feel worse now than beforehand).⁸¹ Unable to find what she was looking for in the false Volker, Sascha leads him to the other Russians and they intimidate him to the point of convulsions from fear. After Sascha leaves the Russians and the false Volker, she skates down the middle of the road, refusing to move as cars speedily pass her by, and she remarks, “[i]ch will etwas spüren. Jetzt.”⁸² (I want to feel something. Right now).⁸³ This statement can either be taken literally or figuratively. In this case, though, it should be said that Sascha is looking to feel something figuratively: she wants to feel emotion. Sascha started to feel this emotion with Volker and Felix, which is why she is so willingly putting herself at risk and taking danger to the extreme.

Sascha does feel something physically in the scene where she is skating in the middle of the road, though. She is hit by a car, which throws her a few yards on her knees until she lands,

⁷⁸ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 198.

⁷⁹ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 154.

⁸⁰ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 230.

⁸¹ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 178.

⁸² Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 237.

⁸³ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 183.

sitting on the sidewalk. Being hit by a car, though explicitly written, should also be taken as her emotions coming to a crux and “hitting” her. This can be proven by the fact that Sascha states, “[i]ch weine ziemlich laut, nicht, weil es irre weh tut, beziehungsweise nicht nur. Sondern keiner da ist, um mich zu trösten.”⁸⁴ (I cry, quite loudly. Not because it hurts so bad—or at least not only because it hurts so bad. I cry because nobody is here to take care of me).⁸⁵ Here, in this scene, is where the reader sees the most vulnerability and relatability of Sascha as a character. She was forced to grow up before her time, and thus had not fully gone through her own coming-of-age journey in which she would have learned to cope with feelings such as these. She cries because she never really had anyone take care of her. She had to protect her younger siblings from the wrath of a drunken father, and then she had to assume the motherly role after her mother was killed.

Beginning her coming-of-age story has opened up these opportunities for her to learn about herself. She is undergoing such reactions to the experiences she is having in the latter half of the novel. The entirety of the novel builds up to Sascha making a decision to go meet her biological father, which is in juxtaposition to what she stated in the middle of the narrative. Sascha states, “[i]ch weiß nichts über ihn. Ich will nichts wissen. Meine Mutter hat ein paarmal versucht, von ihm zu erzählen, aber ich habe sie immer abgewürgt.”⁸⁶ (I don’t know anything about him. I don’t want to know. My mother tried to talk about him a few times, but I always stopped her).⁸⁷ The novel’s conclusion comes with Sascha saying she wants to get to a place where she does not understand anything around her, which can be a further attempt to find the feelings she has lost over the past years. The final sentence in the novel comes in the open-

⁸⁴ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 238.

⁸⁵ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 184.

⁸⁶ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 140-141.

⁸⁷ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 110.

ending form of, “[i]ch werfe mir die Tasche über die Schulter, schiebe den Schirm meiner Kappe in den Nacken, und trete hinaus in die Sonne.”⁸⁸ (I throw my backpack over my shoulder, turn my baseball cap backwards, and head out into the sun).⁸⁹

Such an open ending allows for Sascha to have the rest of her coming-of-age journey ahead of her. Volker and Felix were only able to catalyze her journey to a point of explosive crux. Sascha, though, needs to continue her journey on her own terms after having come to terms with her past. Her future is ahead of her at the conclusion of the novel, which is what makes *Scherbenpark* such a relatable novel in the coming-of-age genre. *Scherbenpark* not only illustrates the main characters struggles, but greatly represents the way in which coming-of-age is anything but a linear experience due to Sascha’s constant step forward for a step backward journey.

⁸⁸ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. 289.

⁸⁹ Bronsky, A., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Broken Glass Park*. 221.

CHAPTER FOUR

TRIPPING WITH *TSCHICK*

Maik Klingenberg, the main character of Wolfgang Herndorf's *Tschick*, is a 14 year old who is the black sheep of his school. *Tschick* is told as a circular narrative, which means that the end, or close to the end, of the story is also where the novel begins. Maik is in the hospital recounting his travel and experiences with Tschick, after he has been involved in the final car crash that brings their journey to an end. After the circular narrative is set up, Maik starts to describe when everything first started. Maik is obsessed with Tatjana, a popular student in his class. He yearns for her attention in the opening scene of the book. Maik is shown as pining over Tatjana and he daydreams about some sort of interaction with her. This scene is cut short, though, by the arrival of Tschick, a new student in their class. Maik first looks down on Tschick due to his appearance and assumes Tschick is from a lower social class since Tschick does not dress like everyone else, is othered by his Russian background, and comes into the class drunk and incoherent.

Maik and Tschick first appear to come from completely different social and economic backgrounds. Tschick is the son of Russian repatriates, who now lives with his brother, and can be considered an alcoholic. Maik comes from an upper middle-class family with a father who cheats on his mother and a mother who is an alcoholic. Tschick continually makes attempts to have meaningful exchange with Maik, and Maik does not want to have these interactions with him due to his preconceived notions. After the failed first attempts, Tschick finally breaks through to Maik. The ensuing relationship that develops between Maik and Tschick only comes after Tschick becomes a driving motivator behind the actions and experiences of Maik.

Tschick steals the car that he and Maik decide to take on a road trip through Eastern Germany. Though apprehensive at first, Maik comes around and agrees to take the trip with him. On their road trip, Tschick and Maik learn about themselves and each other, allowing Maik to embark on a journey that begins his coming-of-age story both literally and figuratively. Together on this journey, they meet many different characters that help develop the relationship between them, but also the characters' own development.

Maik and Tschick's journey comes to an untimely end when they are involved in a car accident with a truck driver hauling pigs. The car they are driving is presumably totaled, there is a blur of lights and pigs, the truck is turned over, and Tschick is moderately injured. Maik does not seem to be too hurt, but is rather concerned about what has just transpired. Tschick walks away from the scene of the wreck because he would also become a repatriate like his parents if he were to be found by the police. The wreck scene is near where the circular narrative picks back up and it becomes closer to the present time in the story. One of the final scenes in the story is Maik being removed from class by the police because they suspect him of having knowledge of a car theft. Maik comes to the conclusion, though, that it was Tschick sending him a message that he was okay and doing well by stealing the car. This is because the cops come to interview Maik about the new stolen Lada, which the author subtly hints at Tschick having stolen it the night prior. With Tschick's inability to communicate with anyone, this allowed him to show Maik that he was okay.

Assuming the circular narrative, *Tschick* begins with Maik at a highway police station being questioned about what led up to him being involved in the car accident. He has experienced a lot leading up to this opening/concluding scene, which has helped him to mature. The concluding scenes of the novel Maik learns that he is criminally responsible for his actions.

This provides a shock and reconsideration in the text that allows him to take responsibility for his actions and attempt to take the blame for Tschick. He becomes ill and passes out and is taken to the hospital. In the hospital, Maik begins to recount the story to the doctor, which leads the reader into the journey he embarks on with Tschick.

Maik begins describing himself and why he has no nickname in the fifth chapter of the novel, and he states that the problem is that “man langweilig ist *und* keine Freunde hat. Und ich fürchte, das ist mein Problem.”⁹⁰ (You could be boring *and* have no friends. And I’m afraid that’s my problem).⁹¹ Maik does say, though, that he had a nickname for a short period of time earlier in school while he was in the sixth grade. The other students called Maik “Psycho” for a while, which sets his character up to be something as outside or different from the normal crowd in the fact that he is othered like Benjamin and Sascha. Jane Pilcher states, “nicknames can be used to ridicule or abuse an individual, thereby connoting an ‘outsider’ status to the nicknamed,” in her article that was published in *Sociology*.⁹² Being called Psycho created a distance between Maik and his peers in which he feels unable to connect with others. Pilcher continues to assert, “[n]icknaming practices that accentuate an aspect of a person’s body mean that the person’s informal name (their nickname) embodies their identity...”⁹³ Maik mentions that his nickname Psycho did not last long and was back to being called Maik within a short period of time.

Much like the narratives following Benjamin and Sascha, Maik has been set up to be a character outside of the norm, which allows him to be a more relatable protagonist. The nickname not sticking does not mean Maik was no longer ostracized from the others, but rather conveys that his peers just had no interest in him, further ostracizing him. Maik fell under the

⁹⁰ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 21.

⁹¹ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. Brunswick, Vic.: Scribe Publications. 15.

⁹² Pilcher, J. (2015). Names, Bodies and Identities. *Sociology*, 50(4), 764-779. doi:10.1177/0038038515582157

⁹³ Pilcher, J. (2015). Names, Bodies and Identities. *Sociology*.

radar of his peers, though, once Andrej “Tschick” Tschichatschow showed up in school. Tschick became the new student who took the attention away from Maik and onto himself, albeit unintentional.

Maik states, “[i]ch konnte Tschick von Anfang an nicht leiden. Keiner konnte ihn leiden. Tschick war ein Asi, und genau so sah er auch aus.”⁹⁴ (Right from the start, Tschick rubbed me the wrong way. I couldn’t stand him. Nobody could stand him. Tschick was trash, and that’s exactly what he looked like).⁹⁵ Tschick became the new outsider in school. Not only was he from Russia, which made him different, he also was from a dysfunctional family (one in which the traditional and stereotypical ideas of heteronormativity fall apart), which lead to his alcohol abuse at an early age. Many of the traits of Maik’s family can be seen in Tschick’s character. With the paralleled character traits in mind, one can consider Tschick to be Maik’s foil, who furthers his coming-of-age story.

In chapter twelve, Maik remarks that the summer break starts the next day, and everyone is waiting on invitations from Tatjana to her birthday party. He finds out that almost everyone has received invitations from Tatjana already and only a select few had not received one, including him. Maik then says, “Die größten Langweiler und Asis waren nicht eingeladen, Russen, Nazis und Idioten. Und ich musste nicht lange überlegen, was ich in Tatjanas Augen wahrscheinlich war. Weil, ich war ja weder Russe noch Nazi.”⁹⁶ (Boring kids and losers weren’t invited—Russians, Nazis, and Idiots. I didn’t have to think for long what Tatjana thought of me. Because I wasn’t a Russian or a Nazi).⁹⁷ Not getting invited to the party confirms for Maik that

⁹⁴ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 41.

⁹⁵ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 35.

⁹⁶ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 60-61.

⁹⁷ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 55.

he is one of the black sheep within his school. He is considered by the majority as someone who is either boring or not worth their time, pushing him to the edge of their social body.

Tschick seems to attach to Maik early on in the novel because he continually tries to interact with Maik. The attachment early on in the novel can be seen when Tschick asks Maik if he is able to buy his jacket from him.⁹⁸ The first interaction Maik and Tschick have that the reader encounters is after the final bell before summer break when everyone is walking home to start vacation. Maik seems to be guarded and not interested in conversation. He states, “[d]as ist leider immer so. Solange die Leute unfreundlich sind, kann ich vor Aufregung kaum laufen. Aber wenn sie auch nur ein bisschen freundlich werden, fang ich immer gleich an, sie zu beleidigen.”⁹⁹ (That’s the way it always is, unfortunately. When someone is hostile to me, I’m so nervous that I can barely keep my knees from buckling. But if they are even the slightest bit friendly, I immediately start insulting them).¹⁰⁰ One can gather that Maik does not have very well developed social skills or is antisocial demonstrated when he says he begins to insult people when they become too friendly when they are talking to him. His lack of social skills can be attributed to the fact that he is cast out from the rest of his peers and does not regularly socialize with them. This could also be the reason why Tschick feels attached to Maik.

Maik rejects all of Tschick’s attempts to interact until he eventually yields to the advances by Tschick. Tschick, riding down the road on a bicycle, comes into the scene in parallel of someone coming to rescue the protagonist after a bad day. He seems happy to see Maik, and is in awe of Maik’s house. Talking and playing video games, both Maik and Tschick seem to enjoy the first real interaction when both parties were invested in communication. The

⁹⁸ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 61.

⁹⁹ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 63.

¹⁰⁰ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 57.

next day, Tschick comes back to Maik's house in a stolen car that he says he is borrowing, and he convinces Maik to ride with him after saying, "[h]ast du nicht gestern gestagt, du willst mal was erleben?"¹⁰¹ (Didn't you say yesterday that you wanted to get out and experience things).¹⁰² Maik shows an interest in being able to experience things in life he has yet been able to undergo.

The car starts to roll backward and Maik makes no move to get out in order to not be forced to go with Tschick. This is the first glimpse of Maik's coming-of-age journey after meeting Tschick. This sets into motion, quite literally, his journey of life experiences and coming-of-age catalyzed entirely by Tschick. In the car, the boys drive around the block, go back to Maik's house for a pit-stop, and then to Tatjana's party. Maik and Tschick only spend a few minutes at Tatjana's party, but in these few minutes, Maik seemingly becomes a completely different person. Before getting there, Maik sank down into the footwell of the car, and began to think, „[w]ährend ich mit mir kämpfte, ob ich endgültig im Fußraum versinken und mir die Jacke über den Kopf ziehen oder zurück auf den Sitz klettern und ein unbeteiligtes Gesicht machen sollte, schoss hinterm rotgeklinkerten Haus eine Rakete in den Himmel explodierte rot und gelb, und fast alle rannten in den Garten zum Feuerwerk.“¹⁰³ (As I was debating whether to remain in the footwell and pull my jacket over my head or to get back into my seat and put an it-wasn't-my-idea look on my face, fireworks started going off behind the redbrick house, exploding red and yellow in the sky, and almost everyone ran into the backyard).¹⁰⁴

The fireworks in this scene can be paralleled to the explosion of emotion that Maik experiences after giving Tatjana the sketch of Beyoncé he drew. At first, Maik is unable to really react to anything or speak as seen by his lack of reaction to Tschick when they were back in the

¹⁰¹ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 83.

¹⁰² Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 77.

¹⁰³ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 92.

¹⁰⁴ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 86.

car. After Tschick asks Maik if he should show him something, Maik says, “[i]ch antwortete nicht. Ich konnte nicht.”¹⁰⁵ (I didn’t answer. I couldn’t).¹⁰⁶ Maik is in shock from what he just did—he took things into his own hands, albeit with prompting by Tschick, and rode into Tatjana’s party in order to become someone who is noticed by others. Quickly, though, Mike explodes with emotion, yells and urges Tschick to drive the car faster and do dangerous things. Maik has a rush of adrenaline from the experience at Tatjana’s party and his new found agency within himself.

The reader sees this agency in Maik develop further as he interacts with Tschick throughout the novel, but he expresses his new found agency the first time when he agrees and plans to drive with Tschick to Wallachia. Maik describes the beginning of the journey with Tschick by saying, “...es war ein ganz anderes Fahren, eine andere Welt. Alles war größer, die Farben satter, die Geräusche Dolby Surround...”¹⁰⁷ (It was a totally different sort of car ride, a totally different world. Everything seemed bigger, the colors brighter, the noises as if they were in surround sound).¹⁰⁸ Maik’s new view on taking the car with Tschick is showcased in the prior quotes, and is only supported later in the novel through his continued enjoyment. Filled with adrenalin, both Maik and Tschick begin their journey to Walachia.

Assuming both the literal and figurative mentor role, Tschick helps Maik on his coming-of-age journey to gather life experiences as the foil to Maik’s character. Maik’s first experience in which he learns a life-skill comes in chapter twenty-two. Tschick teaches Maik how to drive in a meadow. Tschick uses language like that of a mother or father would use when teaching their child how to drive the first time. Tschick also had the patience of someone who is teaching

¹⁰⁵ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 93.

¹⁰⁶ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 87.

¹⁰⁷ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 104.

¹⁰⁸ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 98.

their child how to drive, though he was not in the car with Maik, but rather sun bathing at the edge of the woods. The patience of Tschick is seen when Maik says, “[i]ch übte ein paar Stunden.”¹⁰⁹ (I practiced for a few hours).¹¹⁰ Being able to allow Maik to experience this and practice for hours shows Tschick’s ability to be the figure Maik needs in order to further his coming-of-age journey within this narrative.

A little later in the novel, Tschick and Maik are looking for a supermarket to buy some food because they did not pack enough of the right things to eat during their trip. The boys meet a family that seems abnormal at first, they are completely wholesome and invite them to have lunch with them at the family’s house. Tschick, Maik, and the family eat family-style around a large table, and they see and experience a family meal for the first time in a long time for either of them. This experience sparks honest reactions from both of the boys in which they speak fondly about the family. This was a positive experience both of the boys needed because either of them have yet to have such a positive interaction with family. This allows them to have a respite from their “normal” lives, which they attempting to do while driving to Walachia in the car.

The much needed break of driving comes to a close and Maik and Tschick leave the family after eating lunch with them. Maik and Tschick encounter the town sheriff, who attempts to make contact with them but is met with Tschick driving off into the distance, and Maik stealing his bicycle in order to get away from him. Maik states, “...was ich dann gemacht hab—frag mich nicht. Normal und mit Nachdenken hätte ich das garantiert nicht gemacht. Aber es war ja schon nichts mehr normal, und so dumm war es auch wieder nicht.”¹¹¹ (Don’t ask what I did

¹⁰⁹ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 124.

¹¹⁰ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 108.

¹¹¹ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 137.

next. Normally, with any thought at all, I would not have done it. But nothing was normal anymore, and maybe it wasn't so stupid anyway).¹¹² Stealing a sheriff's bicycle is not something Maik would have done before he met Tschick. Maik is shown he is becoming more apt to do take things into his own hands, which in turn relates to his development of agency throughout the novel.

In chapter twenty-nine, Maik and Tschick meet a character who also becomes influential in the coming-of-age journey Maik is going through. The boys are looking for a hose in a junkyard to siphon gas out of another vehicle in order to continue their trip, and a girl begins to interact with them. The girl, Isa, is of the same age as Maik and Tschick, and she looks like she has been homeless for some time before their meeting. The three take a bath in a lake in the mountains because all of them dirty from the lack of access to hygiene products and need a refreshing break. The next day, though Maik and Isa are alone because Tschick has gone to buy food in the neighboring village. This leads to her coming onto Maik. Isa asks Maik, “[h]ast du schon mal gefickt? [...] Willst du?”¹¹³ (Have you ever had sex? [...] Do you want to).¹¹⁴ Here the reader sees, like in *Crazy* and *Scherbenpark*, the protagonist being put in a situation where they are asked if they have had sex before. Upon being propositioned with the opportunity, Maik does not take it because he has developed the maturity to know he is not mature enough yet. Isa then proposes, “[w]ir könnten ja auch erst mal küssen. Wenn du magst,”¹¹⁵ but this moment is cut short when Tschick comes back with the food. (We could kiss. If you'd like).¹¹⁶

¹¹² Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 130-131.

¹¹³ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 171.

¹¹⁴ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took The Car*. 164.

¹¹⁵ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 172.

¹¹⁶ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 165.

Cutting this scene short disregards the concept of the first sexual experience as a gateway to adulthood, much like the other novels do, except *Tschick* takes it one step further, and completely removes it from the novel all together per the protagonists own volition and agency. There is a significance in this part of *Tschick* because Maik is not falling into desire. He is also not falling into the normative views of coming-of-age and viewing sex as something he either needs to get out of the way or as something that he has to do in order to come of age. He is attracted to Isa, but the fact that he does not use the opportunity he is proposed by Isa reveals development of his character past the point of viewing sex as this figurative gateway he must pass through.

Isa decides to leave the boys in order to get to Prague where she claims her sister lives. She requests thirty Euros from them and goes on her way, saying that she would pay Maik back. Skeptical of her statement, Maik thinks he will not get his money back. Isa's departure puts the boys back on their own adventure and coming-of-age journey completely fueled by the idea of *Tschick*. This leads them to meet an old communist in the woods from whom they learn life lessons. The man says, "ihr schließt einmal die Augen und öffnet sie wieder, und welk hängt das Fleisch in Fetzen. Die Liebe, die Liebe! Carpe diem."¹¹⁷ (One day you close your eyes and the next you open them to find withered flesh hanging in tatters. Love, love! Carpe diem).¹¹⁸ Both Maik and Tschick seem to be uncomfortable while they are with the old man, but listen to him anyway. They are silently partaking in the stories of his past. They appear to take the main statement of the man, carpe diem, to heart, and continue to do that as they have been doing since they began their journey.

¹¹⁷ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 185.

¹¹⁸ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 178.

Maik's and Tschick's journey comes to a close when Tschick is no longer able to drive the car and the boys have their first car wreck. They meet a woman who becomes a caring figure for them, providing a motherly figure they have lacked. The woman drops a fire extinguisher on Tschick's foot, making him unable to drive. This fire extinguisher is symbolic of their journey coming to an end because this heavy object is dropped onto the foot that he uses to drive, effectively incapacitating him. Tschick was the one driving the entire time during their journey, literally driving it forward, and now it has come to a screeching halt. The meaning of the object itself carries a great symbolic weight. It was a fire extinguisher. This is something used to put out fires, and it is putting out the fire of their journey and the fire leading the journey and Maik's coming-of-age story.

The woman who Maik and Tschick meet takes them to the hospital in order to get Tschick's foot examined. She stays with them for hours talking about trivial things and laughing at their stories. The genuine care that the woman develops for them is something that sticks with Maik. Maik states, "[...] sie war die Nettteste von allen."¹¹⁹ ([...] She really was the nicest of all).¹²⁰ Genuine interaction like Maik, Tschick, and the woman had, for however short, allows the boys another respite from reality and negativity that they may experience in their every-day lives. This is in contrast to Maik's family dynamic that is rather negative due to his father's cheating and his mother's alcoholism.

While at the hospital, Maik had to make a call in order to get someone to pick them up at the hospital, but he made a fake call to a random person at four o'clock in the morning. Maik says:

Seit ich klein war, hatte mein Vater mir beigebracht, dass die Welt schlecht ist.
Die Welt ist schlecht, und der Mensch ist auch schlecht. Trau keinem, geh nicht

¹¹⁹ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 201.

¹²⁰ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 195.

mit Fremden und so weiter. Das hatten mir meine Eltern erzählt, das hatten mir meine Lehrer erzählt, und das Fernsehen erzählte es auch. [...] Und vielleicht stimmte das ja auch, und der Mensch war zu 99 Prozent schlecht. Aber das Seltsame war, dass Tschick und ich auf unserer Reise fast ausschließlich dem einem Prozent begegneten, das nicht schlecht war. [...] Darauf sollte man in der Schule vielleicht auch mal hinweisen, damit man nicht völlig davon überrascht wird.¹²¹

(Ever since I was a little boy my father had told me the that the world was a bad place. The world is bad and the people are bad. Don't trust anyone, don't talk to strangers, all of that. My parents drilled that into me, my teachers drilled that into me, even TV drilled that into me—people were bad. [...] And maybe it was true, maybe ninety-nine percent of people were bad. But the strange thing was that on this trip, Tschick and I had run into almost only people from the one percent who weren't bad. [...] Maybe they should tell you about things like that in school too, just so you're not totally surprised by it).¹²²

After being told that the world is a bad place and full of bad people, Maik comes to a realization that there are actually some good people in it, and these people should be talked about more in life. Maik, though, is experiencing the opposite—he believes that there are good people, and that these people should get the same recognition as those who are bad. This shows an idealistic view of the world, but it also shows that Maik is critically thinking about the world around him, which is something he did not do at the beginning of the novel.

As the boys journey is coming to an end, and they have left the hospital, Maik and Tschick have a meaningful conversation in the car. They talk about themselves, which is something they have yet to do throughout up until this point in the novel. Maik talks about his insecurities, and Tschick reassures him that they are something that he should not worry about. The most important part of the conversation, though, is when Tschick tells Maik he is not into girls, effectively coming out to him. Being comfortable enough to tell someone such personal information, which Tschick has not told anyone else, shows how far the boys have come bonded.

¹²¹ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 209.

¹²² Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 203.

For Maik to have no reaction to it other than acceptance also shows how much Maik has developed as a character. He considers what it would be like for himself to also be gay, showing his interaction with the thoughts and Tschick's coming-out.

After Maik and Tschick's bonding scene in the novel and driving for a day, they encounter a pig truck, which wrecks into them, completely totaling the car they were driving and the truck. After this final wreck, Maik is thrust directly back into his life at home. His father is berating him about how much of a screw up he is. Maik's father then physically assaults him multiple times while he was trying to force him to put all the blame of the road trip onto Tschick at court. This does not happen, though. Maik is asked by the judge which of the boys first came up with the idea to take the car and drive to Wallachia. In response to the judge's question, Maik states, "[w]ir hatten die Idee [...] Wir beide [...] Wir wollten einfach ein bisschen rumfahren [...] Urlaub wie normale Leute..."¹²³ (*We had the idea [...] Both of us [...] We just wanted to drive around a little [...] Take a normal vacation, like normal people...*).¹²⁴ In the quote, the reader can see a completely different Maik than the one in the beginning of the novel, leading to his coming-of-age journey he embarked on with Tschick. Taking responsibility in such a consequential moment shows maturity and culpability that is in juxtaposition to the timidity and meekness expressed by Maik at the start of the narrative.

¹²³ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 235.

¹²⁴ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 227.

CHAPTER FIVE

ANALYSIS

Family

In order to discuss depictions of family aspect of these novels, an idea of the “normative” idea of family must be presented. Working with this idea of a normative family, discussion is based on the idea of a nuclear family, one that is idealized in modern Western society. According to *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy*, a nuclear family is “[a] type of family made up only of parents and their children.”¹²⁵ The three novels completely disregard this construct of what a normative family means, and in turn, uses a more liberal view of what it can be, stretching the boundaries of what the idea of families.

The theme of family in *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick* is a prevalent theme in most coming-of-age narratives. The removal of the child from the familial unit is core to their story in traditional conceptions of these coming-of-age stories in both modern *Popliteratur*, coming-of-age, and the Bildungsroman. In *Crazy*, Benjamin’s parents leave him at the boarding school, forcing him to explore, on his own for the first time, himself in his new surroundings. The author of *Scherbenpark* allows Sascha explore life and attempt to find out who she is after her mother is murdered in cold-blood by her step-father. Maik lacks the presence of his parents in *Tschick* and explores developing agency throughout the novel. Samuel Allen and Shawn Mendez, the authors of “Hegemonic Heteronormativity: Toward a New Era of Queer Family Theory,” remark that “[f]amily configurations that run counter to these hegemonic structures—families of choice...

¹²⁵ Nuclear family.(Definition). (2002). *The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, 3rd Ed.*, The New Dictionary of Cultural Literacy, 3rd ed., Annual, 2002.

are considered deviant,” which is a dominant theme in these novels.¹²⁶ The protagonists and those who they chose to keep around them are considered deviant, though the hegemonic heteronormative families these children come from are anything but functional and supportive.

Being forced to explore the world on his own for the first time is what jump-starts Benjamin’s coming-of-age story in the novel. He is unable to use the safety net that is his family (his mother, father, and sister) because he is spatially removed from his familial unit. Benjamin’s family is on the verge of collapse due to his father’s adultery. Benjamin’s own family leaves him at the boarding school, and he goes on this coming-of-age journey with a group of boys who become almost like a second family to him—he goes to school with them, but he also spends all of his time with them, eats with them, sleeps with them, relaxes with them. This secondary family, a substitute and personally selected familial unit is what Benjamin is in need of and what helps him on his journey that he embarks on.

Much like Benjamin in *Crazy*, Sascha in Alina Bronsky’s novel, *Scherbenpark*, is forcibly removed from her family. The murder of her mother is her drive in life and it is the only thing pushing her forward. Sascha and her mother were both abused mentally and physically by Vadim, Sascha’s step-father. The complete removal from her family is the leading cause in the beginning of her coming-of-age journey. Sascha’s revenge-driven life remains the same until she meets Volker and Felix, a father-son duo, who, in complex ways, become her secondary, chosen family. In the end of the novel, though, Sascha is shown as bringing both her German and Russian “families” together in their apartment, which leads up to her leaving it all behind in order to find her biological father.

¹²⁶ Allen, S., & Mendez, S. (2018). Hegemonic Heteronormativity: Toward a New Era of Queer Family Theory. *Journal of Family Theory & Review*, 10(1), 70-86.

Tschick, on the other hand, depicts a young protagonist who is largely neglected by his parents, and the protagonist's friend, Tschick, who lives with his brother because his parents were expatriated. Maik's mother is a heavy alcoholic, and his father is cheating on his mother with an assistant. This, unfortunately, has leached into Maik's life. Maik finds companionship and a brotherly bond with Tschick on their journey together, further propagating the idea that one must be relieved of family bonds, either by choice or by force, in order to develop as a person and learn about oneself in coming-of-age stories.

These characters gain enough agency in Maik's and Tschick's coming-of-age stories in order to choose a secondary familial unit in that provides emotional support and companionship. Such chosen families are a specific and necessary part of many modern and classic coming-of-age novels. This shows a continued thought in German literary works, supporting the idea of a chosen family network that can substitute biological familial networks. According to Sarah Vandegrift Eldridge, "family is a flexible institution rather than an exclusive one, grounded on emotional attachment and open to being reinvested with the meaning over and over as our shared commitments and values evolve."¹²⁷ The idea family is something that is flexible, and can change, is represented within the novels of *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick*, making the nontraditional selected family of queer theory a reality in mainstream media.

Leaving one's family is also a key trope in traditional and stereotypical coming-of-age stories where the protagonist must go on a journey and leave the safety of his or her home and parents to experience some life altering quest, finding companionship along the way, Playing into this traditional theme allows these new texts to become something that contemporary

¹²⁷ Eldridge, S. V. (2016). *Novel affinities: Composing the family in the German novel, 1795-1830*. Rochester, NY: Camden House. viii.

readers are relate to on many levels. This well-known theme is what makes these novels relatable to the reader, while providing fresh, new perspectives on family and chosen family.

Rebellion

Rebellion as a literary theme is common in coming-of-age stories that allows the protagonist to change the world around the protagonists in a way they want, instead of having to listen to those who hold responsibility or guardianship over them. Maria Stehle remarks that “rebellion in the 1980s could mean only to withdraw from political identifications and to concentrate on personal gain, careers, and consumption” when discussing the aftermath of the West German student movement.¹²⁸ The West German student movement set the tone for the generations to come after them. The authors of these novels have characters growing up in this post-rebellion era in which they are rebelling themselves in order to change their own worlds through personal-gain and self-indulgent experiences.

Within the context of coming-of-age in *Crazy*, rebellion plays a large role in the boys’ lives. Two points in the novel provide the main examples of Benjamin’s rebellion against the structure of the boarding school, his family, and the society around him. The first instance occurs when he and the boys go to the girl’s room and drink alcohol after curfew hours. Such acts outside of the rules of the school set the tone for the rest of the novel in a way that Benjamin finds solace in acting against what is expected of him. Secondly, Benjamin and the group of boys decide to run away from the boarding school near the end of the novel, which had not been done before to their knowledge. Their running away allows them to gather knowledge about each other and life as they meet the character Sambraus who shares his life experiences and stories

¹²⁸ Stehle, M. (2010). Two Generations in Motion: Negotiating the Legacies of the West German Student Movement. *Seminar: A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 46(4), 402-418. doi:10.3138/seminar.46.4.402

about his time at the boarding school. Core to this story's development and meaning, rebellion against conformity, order, and societal expectations become essential to Benjamin's coming-of-age journey because Benjamin and the group of boys use their own agency to shape their world for the first times.

Scherbenpark follows the "rebellion" of Sascha, who does not fit into either race-based social group in which she is placed into by both the native German and Russian-German societies in which she lives. Sascha is the daughter of a Russian immigrant who came to Germany when Sascha was still a young child. This means that there is a certain cultural and societal transnationalism Sascha is unable to penetrate due to her own world-views. Not fitting into the Russian social group because she is "too German" and an outsider due to her mother's murder, and not feeling like she belongs in the German society because she is Russian, Sascha eventually decides to rebel against both parts her cultural society and influence her own world.¹²⁹ Sascha decides to run away to a stranger's house, whom she had only met hours before in order to escape her reality and make a new one for herself. What is important is what transpires after; Sascha learns that she does not have to fit in anywhere for her to be true to herself, and decides to take her life into her own hands. This new found agency (not being fueled by revenge and anger) allows Sascha to search for her biological father in her final act of rebellion—leaving her entire life and everyone she knows behind both literally and figuratively when she shuts the door to her apartment when leaving on her quest at the end of the novel.

Much like *Scherbenpark*, the novel *Tschick* revolves almost completely around the rebellion of the protagonist and the experiences that ensue. Deciding to take the trip to Wallachia with Tschick is the rebellion against his family and society, that for Maik, becomes integral to

¹²⁹ Bronsky, A. (2014). *Scherbenpark: Roman*. Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch.

his coming-of-age journey. His mother is at a rehab facility for alcoholism, and his father has left with his mistress on a vacation get-away. As Maik's father is leaving, for his "business meeting," he says, "[u]nd dass du keinen Scheiß machst! Glaub nicht, dass du Scheiß machen kannst."¹³⁰ (And don't you dare get yourself into any stupid shit! Don't think you can misbehave).¹³¹ Acting against his father's orders is what allows Maik to grow more as a person by learning about himself and others. The decision to do so, though, depicts Maik as a character who falls into the trope of this new and continuing coming-of-age novel in a way that allows him to become a character who is able to make decisions and live for himself.

Like the traditional German coming-of-age stories in the Bildungsroman genre such as Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, rebellion against what is expected of one is an important theme. Wilhelm Meister does not become a businessman like his father wants, but rather becomes an artist: a playwright and actor.¹³² Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* "sees youth as the most meaningful part of life," and "marks simultaneously the birth of the Bildungsroman... and of a new hero."¹³³ These three novels, *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick*, follow suit in the coming-of-age novel's traditional rebellion of the youthful protagonist in which they learn about themselves and the world around them. Being able to experience life for themselves and make decisions for themselves is a pivotal theme that creates a coming-of-age story readers can fantasize and relate to in many different ways, leading to the popularity of these narratives.

¹³⁰ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 69.

¹³¹ Herrndorf, W., & Mohr, T. (2014). *Why We Took the Car*. 64.

¹³² Goethe, J. W. (2013). *Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre – Band 3*. N.P.: TREDITION CLASSICS.

¹³³ Moretti, Franco. *The Way of the World: The Bildungsroman in European Culture*. 3.

Sexual Experience

These three novels toy with expectations around sex and a person's "first time." Sex in modern Western society is often thought of as something that is a gateway from adolescence to adulthood. It is often expected from youth that having sex for the first time leads to some great epiphany in which there is a change within the person, leading to a new view on life. This meaning, though is only purported because of what is instilled in the youth of Western society. Jessica Valenti, an American feminist author, states, "[r]eally, the only meaning it had (besides a little bit of pain and a lot of postcoital embarrassment) was the meaning that Josh and I ascribed to it. Or so I thought. I hadn't counted on the meaning my peers, my parents, and society would imbue it with on my behalf."¹³⁴ Benjamin, Sascha, and Maik must all navigate their own notions and perceptions of what it means to have their first sexual encounter, or lack thereof, allowing them to come to realizations that are twisting what it is often considered to be an important experience of coming of age.

Clumsy and awkward like most experiences during the first sexual experience, Benjamin seems to enjoy the physicality and sensuality while he is having sex with Marie, but later this moment marks a change within Benjamin. This change is the realization that he does not want to become an adult and him regretting his actions. This realization dashes expectations of sex as a gateway to maturity and coming-of-age due to the lack of development in becoming automatically more mature in Benjamin. Such contradictions allow for this text to fall into a new and key sub-genre of contemporary coming-of-age stories. Such realization blatantly contradict Western society's view of what it means when a person has their first sexual experience.

¹³⁴ Valenti, J., & ProQuest. (2009). *The Purity Myth : How America's Obsession with Virginity is Hurting Young Women*. Emeryville, Calif.: Seal Press.

Maik on the other hand lacks the new theme of the first sexual encounter in his coming-of-age narratives entirely. When proposed sexual intercourse by Isa, he rejects it entirely, but states that he likes the feeling of her hand on him.¹³⁵ Rejection of Isa's offer shows a level of maturity in Maik (he realizes he is not mature enough for this) that is not seen in the other two protagonists, Benjamin and Sascha. Maik, in this scene, knows what he is not ready to have his first sexual encounter, and taking matters into his own hands, says no. He does attempt to kiss Isa, though, but is cut short by the return of Tschick. This experience reveals a level of development within Maik that had yet to be seen within the novel, and continues to be seen as the novel progress after this moment.

These realizations of what it means to have one's first sexual encounter also perpetrate the new theme of coming-of-age novels in contemporary German literature: a dash in expectations and the misconception of sex as a gateway to adulthood and maturity. Creating a new standard for contemporary coming-of-age novels, these narratives evoke and defy Western societal expectations of the first sexual experience.

Friendship

Friendship in adolescence is very important because it shapes most people into the person they become as an adult. J. Youniss and D. L. Haynie claim that "our position in friendship is fundamental to the development of social maturity," and that "reciprocity, co-construction, and consensual validation originate in friendship rather than in adult-child relationships."¹³⁶ In the cases of these three coming-of-age narratives, Benjamin, Sascha, and Maik all develop bonds

¹³⁵ Herrndorf, W. (2013). *Tschick*. 172.

¹³⁶ Youniss, J., & Haynie, D. L. (1992). Friendship in adolescence. *Journal of Developmental and Behavioral Pediatrics*. 59-66.

with characters who become their friends (and foils). These friend characters drive the coming-of-age journeys the protagonists embark upon, helping them grow into more developed character. Becoming more in-tune with others around them, the protagonists are able to open up and go on a journey of self-discovery.

The group of boys in *Crazy*, according to Molly Knight, “represent a cross-section of adolescent male outsider culture that bands together to self-hate and self-aggrandize, ultimately forming bonds of friendship that help them find confidence and transcend their lonely lot in life.”¹³⁷ The most important bond made between Benjamin and one of the members in the group is Janosch. Able to support and push Benjamin, Janosch provides a safety net into which Benjamin can fall when he needs. This is an important aspect of their friendship because it shows a closeness that Benjamin does not really have with the other boys other than Troy. Janosch also exaggerates the personality traits within Benjamin for him to be able to realize who he is and who he wants to be. Acting as Benjamin’s foil throughout the novel, Janosch forces Benjamin to look critically at himself and the world around him. This allows for Benjamin’s social maturity to develop as well as validating him as a person, which is something Benjamin struggles with since he is disabled and not like the other boys.

Scherbenpark shows Sascha form an odd friendship/love triangle between herself, Volker, and Felix. What is noteworthy, though, is how this relationship shapes her into the character she is at the end of the novel. It becomes apparent to Sascha and the readers that she must leave the place where she has lived since her mother’s murder as she searches for herself, and the bond formed between her, Volker, and Felix only accentuated this fact. They, acting as Sascha’s foil, force her to reevaluate herself and what she thinks she knows about herself. The

¹³⁷ Knight, M. (2015). Bodily Harm: Pop Masculinity in Benjamin Lebert’s *Crazy* and *Der Vogel ist ein Rabe*.

reevaluation leads her to her final decision in which she decides to search for her biological father in hopes of creating a new familial relationship.

Maik is able to develop a bond with Tschick as he goes on the journey with him, in juxtaposition to his original reaction to Tschick in the beginning of the novel. Slowly finding out more about Tschick and his struggles, Maik finds that his own life. Though Maik's life is different, it has certain parallels that allow him to open up to Tschick in a way he is unable to with his parents. Constantly neglected, abused, and left alone by his family, Maik finds in Tschick what he cannot with are his parents: friendship and comfort. Realizations of self by both Maik and Tschick near the end of the novel, lead to an important and emotional conversation in which Tschick reveals to Maik, the first one he ever tells, that he is gay. Such a strong bond shows comfort and a want for a deeper connection between the boys needed in coming-of-age novels. The experiences Maik has with Tschick, mold him into the character he is at the end of the narrative, showing a much more mature character, who must still, though, go through changes and continue his coming-of-age journey.

Friendship, a necessary theme in contemporary coming-of-age novels, is prevalent in these three narratives. It allows the protagonists and secondary characters to explore themselves and those around them in order to become more socially mature: an important part of coming-of-age. As a main theme in these coming-of-age narratives, this theme is developed in such a way that the characters learn and mature through the friends they make along their journey. The idea of foil characters in literature is nothing new, but the authors and their contemporaries utilize foils in such a way that the exaggeration of the protagonists' flaws compliments them through friendship by allowing them to learn and gain life experiences from them.

Gender

Another important topic in these novels is gender identity and how the authors twist the assumed roles of the protagonists. According to the *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*, “[g]ender is one of the most significant identities possessed by humans globally, defining the role, power, and appearance of all people in every society.”¹³⁸ With such weight placed upon gender identity, it still evokes surprise or even resentment when characters or people go against what is considered to be “normal.” These behaviors fall into a binary of gender characteristics that are thought to be: masculine-feminine, active-passive, intellectual-emotional, rational-irrational, cerebral-physical, strong-weak, aggressive-nurturing, disciplined-undisciplined, competitive-collaborative, powerful-powerless, capable-incapable.¹³⁹ *Crazy*, *Scherbenpark*, and *Tschick* all encounter the question of gender, the expected roles to be played, and the dashing of these expectations.

In *Crazy*, Benjamin finds himself in the midst of a group of boys who, on the outside, seem to display characteristics of toxic masculinity. Defined as being “characterized by a drive to dominate and by endorsement of misogynistic and homophobic views,” toxic masculinity drives to control others, both male and female alike.¹⁴⁰ With Janosch and the other boys objectifying the young women at the boarding school, joking about being homosexual, and referring to being heroes, there is an establishment of toxic masculinity early in the text by the author. Throughout the novel, the author develops the characters by having them open up to each other through friendship and the experiences they have with each other. The boys bond on a much deeper level, which goes against the notion of toxic masculinity. This creates a text that

¹³⁸ Gill, Fiona. "Gender Identity." *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*. 617.

¹³⁹ Gill, Fiona. "Gender Identity." *Encyclopedia of Global Studies*. 2012. 619.

¹⁴⁰ Parent, Mike C., Teresa D. Gobble, and Aaron Rochlen. "Social Media Behavior, Toxic Masculinity, and Depression." *Psychology of Men & Masculinity*, 2018, Psychology of Men & Masculinity, 2018.

shows it is okay for young men to form connections with each other contrary to the standard of toxic masculinity.

Alina Bronsky, on the other hand, writes a female character into a male dominated world in her novel, *Scherbenpark*. Out of pure rage, Vadim murdered Sascha's mother. Navigating this traumatic experience has forced Sascha into atypical gender identity roles described above. Sascha herself is not a feminine character, is very active in her own decisions and actions, very aggressive, and strong emotionally. She has created a barrier around herself in which she does not play into the roles ascribed to femininity by society. Sascha is written in contrast to Maria because Sascha thinks she is fine on her own and can do anything she needs to do without a man, but Maria thinks she needs a man to mean something in life, which supports her pursuit of Grigorij. Bronsky's twisting of feminine descriptors of gender identity provides yet another form of literary statements about prescribed gender identities and the roles they are meant to play.

Wolfgang Herrndorf assigns gender identity to Maik and Tschick in his novel, *Tschick*, by setting up toxic masculinities in secondary characters like Maik's father. Tschick plays the role he is expected to play when he first arrives in the novel: the thuggish, othered, male. The role he is playing is just a role, though. Tschick prescribes this role to himself in order to put up a barrier, much like Sascha in *Scherbenpark*. Slowly, Maik and Tschick learn about each other and their lives, which breaks down Tschick's barriers and dashes the idea of traditional toxic masculinity. This twisting of expectations is exaggerated in Maik's general acceptance of Tschick being gay.

Gender identity being tackled in contemporary coming-of-age stories confronts persisting gender stereotypes. These binaries issue problematic instances for youth who are coming of age and experiencing the liminality of their teenage years like the three protagonists, Benjamin,

Sascha, and Maik encounter. Overcoming these prescribed binaries and circumnavigating them allows the authors to write the protagonists into new identities that may not be considered societally “normative,” but allow them to experience life in different roles.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION

Breaking into the coming-of-age genre, these three novels provide modern takes on the traditional Bildungsroman-type genre in which a character embarks upon a self-defining journey. New ideas presented within these narratives that dash the expectations of that form preconceived notions of the Bildungsroman and society in general set these works aside into a new category: coming-of-age for the modern youth stories. They toy with modern interpretations of what family, friendship, and the sexual experience mean.

What has been covered above gives a glimpse into the idea of what the coming-of-age genre has become in contemporary German literature. The themes of coming-of-age, family, rebellion, sexual experience, and friendship, all work together to create a new kind of genre of coming of age story. I find that it would be important, when looking further into the topic of family, rebellion, and relationships in coming of age stories to explore the relationship between the film adaptations and the novels. What exactly changes in the adaptations and why? More specifically, what are the implications of these changes? The representations of relationships within the narratives are changed, but why? They change due to more general public consumption, or Hollywoodizing, in order to satiate the needs of the box office. However, these changes do, in fact, change the narrative and the character developments of these protagonists.

Further explorations of these findings and of the texts' pedagogical use in German schools would be crucial to form a more complete picture of what the coming-of-age narrative means for the contemporary German youth and adult populaces. These consumers of such literature are the ones being shaped by the texts they read and the stories they are told, so

understanding these texts leads to a better understanding of contemporary myths, beliefs, and questions about coming of age and being a teenager in Germany today.

Striking a chord in readers, these novels have become, in their own right, movers and shakers in contemporary German literature. In different way, the readers are able to sympathize and empathize with the protagonists as they embark upon and continue their coming-of-age journeys that lead them to realizations of self. This is because readers themselves are able to relate to these characters through either the realizations or the actions they take during their journeys. Though no two people grow up in the same fashion, similarities, just like those similarities found in these narratives, exist in the modern world. Humanity—its flaws—are what is important in these novels, and it is what helps the authors write these characters to develop into who they are at the end of the narratives.

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VITA

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