



5-2023

“Vom Verstehen rede ich vorsichtshalber nicht”: Discourses of Memory and German-Jewish Literature in Selected Literary Award Speeches by Barbara Honigmann

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To the Graduate Council:

I am submitting herewith a thesis written by Achim Schmid entitled "'Vom Verstehen rede ich vorsichtshalber nicht": Discourses of Memory and German-Jewish Literature in Selected Literary Award Speeches by Barbara Honigmann." 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.

Daniel H. Magilow, Major Professor

We have read this thesis and recommend its acceptance:

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(Original signatures are on file with official student records.)

**“Vom Verstehen rede ich vorsichtshalber nicht”:
Discourses of Memory and German-Jewish Literature in Selected Literary Award
Speeches by Barbara Honigmann**

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

Achim Schmid
May 2023

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First and foremost, I would like to thank my major professor, Dr. Daniel H. Magilow. He provided support throughout the writing of this thesis. Working with him was a wonderful experience and I enjoyed discussing my thoughts with him over a cup of coffee or two, and how he helped me revising my thesis. Thank you to my other committee members, Dr. Sarah Vandegrift Eldridge and Dr. Maria Stehle for their useful ideas. I would also like to thank my colleagues, fellow graduate students and friends at the University of Tennessee Knoxville who cheered me on along the way.

ABSTRACT

The literary prize speeches of German-Jewish author Barbara Honigmann make up only a small part of her mainly narrative oeuvre, yet they are relevant to her writing. On the one hand, they provide insights into the difficulties of being a German-Jewish author in the twenty-first century, on the other hand, they are also politically significant. In them, Honigmann recalls the crimes of the National Socialists against the Jewish population during the Third Reich, as well as the suffering under the socialist dictatorship of the German Democratic Republic.

Analyzing three of her speeches that were delivered between 2001 and 2015 in the second chapter, I will argue in this thesis that Honigmann's literary award speeches reflect different formations of memory. Honigmann herself communicates personal, individual memories in them, but she also reflects about collective memories, for example, in the environment of her family or with friends and work colleagues in the GDR. In her speeches, however, Honigmann also conveys political memories, questions them critically, and ultimately also addresses cultural memories that have influenced her as an author. For a better understanding of her speeches, this thesis offers excursions on coming to terms with the past in divided Germany and on the controversial concept of "inner emigration."

Besides examining the discourses of memory, I will point out Honigmann's discourses about what it means to her to be a German-Jewish author in the third chapter. Three aspects are of relevance here. First, the function of literature for Honigmann is to establish a connection between reader and author and to provide insights into unknown realities. Second, the significance of exile for Honigmann's life and writing, and third, what it means for her to be a good artist. For Honigmann, it is important that good artists must distinguish themselves not only through their work, but also through their moral actions. The last chapter then summarizes the main findings of this thesis.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

On October 14, 2000, Barbara Honigmann received the Kleist Prize for her novel *Alles, Alles Liebe*, but this resulted in a difficult situation for her: on the one hand, as a German-language writer, she was awarded one of the most renowned awards in the German literary field. On the other hand, as a practicing Jew, this date coincided with the Sabbath. Honigmann's reaction: although she was present at the award ceremony, she spoke without a microphone and lectured the audience about the conflicted situation in which she found herself.

This short anecdote, described by Petra S. Fiero,¹ illustrates two important points: On the one hand, it provides insight into the difficulties of being a German-Jewish author in the twenty-first century. On the other, it draws attention to a set of Honigmann's literary texts that have remained largely unstudied. Although Honigmann's speeches only comprise a small part of her mostly narrative oeuvre, they matter because of their political content and performative implications: As I will show in this thesis by examining selected literary prize speeches, Honigmann recalls the crimes of the National Socialists against the Jewish population as well as the suffering under the socialist dictatorship in the German Democratic Republic (GDR). That makes them important in the context of remembrance and coming to terms with the past. Contrary to commonly held expectations of contemporary Jewish literature, and even though Honigmann's parents spent the time of Nazi rule in exile, these historically important aspects of Jewish life in twentieth-century Europe are not the dominant components of Honigmann's literary work and her Jewish identity. Instead, religious observations and reflections on the contemporary community play a far greater role in Honigmann's Jewishness, as it can be seen in the introductory anecdote.² Because Honigmann, in delivering and publishing her speeches, also addresses what it means for her to be a contemporary German-Jewish author and to write German-Jewish

¹ Fiero, *Zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken*, 120.

² Killian, "And You Shall Tell Your Children," 35.

literature, I aim to advance the ongoing scholarly discussion of memory, identity, belonging, and literature and to highlight Honigmann's work in this context.

A related and frequently discussed topic in literary studies has been the role Honigmann plays in the context of the so-called second generation,³ to which scholars also count writers such as Esther Dischereit, Gila Lustiger, and Maxim Biller.⁴ This can be seen, for example, in the large number of contributions in Sander L. Gilman and Hartmut Steinecke's edited volume on the generation after the Shoah that deal with Honigmann.⁵ Honigmann was born in East Berlin in 1949, the daughter of Jewish emigrants who survived the Nazi era in British exile and moved to the East German capital in 1947. Her parents were both devoted communists, and her father served the GDR regime as a cultural official.⁶

Growing up as a Jewish child in East Germany in the 1950s, Honigmann would seem to fall squarely within the "second generation" of post-Holocaust writers. However, contemporary scholars have debated how, precisely to define "second generation," in ways that transcend the author's year of birth. Stephan Braese argues that the second generation

³ An alternative term used by Thomas Nolden is also that of the "post-born generation," see Nolden, *Junge jüdische Literatur*, 15. In his analysis, Nolden examines works by second- and third-generation authors with regard to their confrontation with the Nazis' mass murder of European Jews and contextualizes this in terms of literary history.

⁴ Literary scholars agree that works such as Honigmann's *Roman von einem Kinde* (1986), Dischereit's *Joëmis Tisch* (1988), and Rafael Seligmann's *Rubensteins Versteigerung* (1989) marked the beginning of a new, particularly productive phase of German-Jewish literature, whose authors identified themselves with Judaism in their writing and in interviews (Steinecke, "Introduction," 9; Killian, "And You Shall Tell Your Children," 12). Honigmann, who was one of the first to establish this literary movement and who has now been publishing successfully for over 30 years, is therefore particularly relevant in this context.

⁵ Of particular relevance here is Dagmar C. G. Lorenz's contribution "Erinnerung um die Jahrtausendwende," Andreas B. Kilcher's "Exterritorialitäten," as well as Helene Schruff's *Wechselwirkungen*.

⁶ Hartmut Steinecke, "'Geht jetzt wieder alles von vorne los?'," 169. For more detailed biographies, see Fiero, *Zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken*, 7-14. For an overview of Honigmann's work, see Michael Braun and Ulrike Pohl's entry on Honigmann in *Kritisches Lexikon der Deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*, as well as their online entry "Barbara Honigmann."

includes “Jews born sometime between 1945 and the beginning of the 1950s who lack any personal recollection of the war years.”⁷ In contrast to Braese, who focuses his definition on the time of birth of the authors, Katja Garloff and Agnes Mueller claim that these writers are the children of the generation that “personally experienced exile, internment, and/or loss of relatives in the camps.”⁸ Furthermore, they define the second generation in terms of content as those who “confronted the long silence surrounding the Holocaust, especially in perpetrator countries.”⁹ Leonhard Herrmann and Silke Horstkotte support the criterion of *Stille* or *Schweigen* that both translate as “silence,” and argue that second-generation texts are characterized by the fact that they generally speak of the silence. Moreover, as Herrmann and Horstkotte explain, the texts offer only fragmentary references to the parents and the children’s difficulties in filling these gaps in the face of a non-Jewish environment that does not want to know about these memories.¹⁰ In contrast, Erin McGlothlin’s definition is distinguished by the perspective of texts that “are written by the children of Holocaust perpetrators or survivors, or . . . are written from the perspective of these children.”¹¹

One of the first comprehensive studies of Honigmann’s prose work is Petra S. Fiero’s *Zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken*, which argues that the titular formulation—revealing and hiding—runs as a leitmotif throughout her prose work, manifesting itself in the genre choice and structure of her works, the language, and her characterization of her figures.¹² Petra Renneke also focuses on the theme of language in Honigmann’s prose work *Im Schatten des Verstehens: Denken und Nicht-Wissen*. Renneke examines the author’s movement between the cultural and linguistic spaces of Germany and France and explores the question of what the characteristics of Honigmann’s prose language are within the context of Jewish literature of the last three decades.¹³ Amir Eshel and Yfaat Weiss’s edited

⁷ Braese, “Writing against Reconciliation,” 25.

⁸ Garloff and Mueller, “Introduction,” 7.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 2.

¹⁰ Leonhard and Horstkotte, *Gegenwartsliteratur*, 85.

¹¹ McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature*, 8.

¹² Fiero, *Zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken*, 3-4.

¹³ Renneke, *Im Schatten des Verstehens*, 8

volume *Kurz hinter der Wahrheit und dicht neben der Lüge* examines Honigmann's texts from various perspectives as well: Lilla Balint, for example, explores the epistemology of memory in works by Barbara Honigmann,¹⁴ Bettina Bannasch analyzes the significance of the Jewishness in Honigmann's work,¹⁵ and Thomas Nolden reads Honigmann's work in a European context, arguing that there were beginnings of a European literature by young Jewish writers in the mid-1980s.¹⁶ More recently, in *Generation und Strategie*, Yannick Gnipep-oo Pembouong explores how Honigmann's narrative work became an authoritative voice of Holocaust memory in contemporary German-Jewish literature. Besides narrative techniques and themes, he also reveals Honigmann's strategies of self-presentation as an author, basing his findings on an analysis of many of Honigmann's published works between 1986 and 2015.¹⁷ In summary, a key theme of research on Honigmann addresses her search for a German-Jewish identity, her coming to terms with the past of her parent's generation, and her strategies of memory in her prose work.

The research object: literary award speeches

Nevertheless, Honigmann's literary prize speeches have remained largely unstudied, but they make up an important part of her oeuvre. They are relevant precisely because in them, the author, who lives in exile in Strasbourg, speaks out personally and—in the three speeches I examine in this thesis—she also addresses a German-speaking audience. The three speeches, delivered in 2001, 2012 and 2015, which contain important comments on her literary work, also include statements about Honigmann's own memories, political and social criticism, and reflect influences of the namesakes of the prizes on Honigmann. These speeches allow us to reconstruct the author's self-image as a German-Jewish author. Before detailing the functions of literary prize speeches, however, a bit of background about the sociology of literary prizes is necessary.

¹⁴ Balint, "Weder Fakt noch Fiktion."

¹⁵ Bannasch, "'Wegen der Auferstehung der Toten.'"

¹⁶ Nolden, "Barbara Honigmann im europäischen Kontext."

¹⁷ Pembouong, *Generation und Strategie*.

In general, literary prizes represent a form of author promotion, which is considered a decisive way to establish an author's position within the literary field.¹⁸ Otto Lorenz defines literary prizes as awards that public institutions, associations, foundations, or companies give to writers in solemn recognition of their work, usually accompanied by a sum of money.¹⁹ Prizes focus attention on a specific work (e.g., the German Book Prize) or the entirety of a writer's work (e.g., the Georg Büchner Prize). Lorenz argues that, besides this publicity effect, other functions are also associated with literary prizes, such as the promotion of certain literary trends, genres, and extra-literary commitment. In addition, they contribute to the formation of the literary canon and the patronage of young authors or support already established authors. Carolin Amlinger observes that the estimated 800 literary prizes in the German-speaking world have in common a ritualized sequence of staging practices that can take the form of a competition in addition to a ceremonial award.²⁰ Burckhard Dücker summarizes the ritualized sequences of an award ceremonies from a marked beginning (welcoming) to a consequent marked conclusion (farewell) as follows: "Zu Beginn nimmt ein designierter Preisträger in der ersten Reihe Platz, nach Begrüßung, Laudatio, Überreichung der Insignien, Dankrede auf der Bühne als Zeichen des neuen Status, womöglich weiteren Ansprachen und Verabschiedung verlässt ein konsekrierter Preisträger die Stätte" (At the beginning, a designated laureate takes a seat in the front row; after a welcome, laudation, presentation of the insignia, speech of thanks on stage as a sign of the new status, possibly further speeches, and farewell, a consecrated laureate leaves the site).²¹ Dücker states that these individual components are communicatively complementary with the minimal segments of an appreciation of an individual, expressed by a laudation on the author, and the acceptance of this award by the honored, expressed by an acceptance speech.²² Furthermore, a literary award ceremony is also followed by the inclusion of acceptance speeches in anthologies or other publications.²³

¹⁸ Jürgensen, "Würdige Popularität?."

¹⁹ Lorenz, "Literaturpreis," 468.

²⁰ Amlinger, *Schreiben*, 427.

²¹ Dücker, "Literaturpreise," 58.

²² *Ibid.*, 59.

²³ *Ibid.*, 67.

The organization awarding the prize expects the winning author, according to Thomas Wegmann, to deliver a longer, well-composed acceptance speech that accords with several unwritten protocols. First, it is formulated and read aloud. Second, it relates the honoree's work to the award's namesake, and third, it is often still quoted years later in the feuilletonistic and academic environments.²⁴ The publication of the acceptance speeches online as a text, video recording or in printed form follows the literary prize ceremony.²⁵ As "epitexts"²⁶ acceptance speeches belong to an author's oeuvre and therefore become important for literary studies as well. Since they complement, or comment on "main texts," they offer information relevant to the interpretation of other texts.²⁷ Furthermore, the authors position themselves with the acceptance speeches in the literary field claiming a public, aesthetic and poetological, sometimes also political and moral attitude. According to Thomas Wegmann, this self-positioning corresponds with the functions and the diversity of literary prizes per se which are normally described in the statutes of the awarding organization.²⁸

As one can see from the quotation above about the nature of acceptance speeches, literary prize speeches also possess a performative dimension. Following John L. Austin's basic description of performative speech acts—by "saying these words we are *doing* something"²⁹—the authors also "do" something when they deliver their speeches: they accept

²⁴ Wegmann, "Epitexte als ritualisiertes Ereignis," 108.

²⁵ Ibid., 106-107.

²⁶ Thomas Wegmann notes in this regard: "Wie Autoreninterviews oder Poetik-Vorlesungen fungieren auch Dankesreden für Literaturpreise als Epitexte, die in der Regel durch den sogenannten Literaturbetrieb initiiert wurden. Es handelt sich also in allen drei Fällen um Auftragsprosa, um Texte, die am anderen Ende der genieästhetischen Skala stehen, weil sie nicht dem Inneren des Künstlers, sondern einem äußeren Impuls zuzurechnen sind, in diesem Fall dem Literaturbetrieb" (Like author interviews or poetics lectures, acceptance speeches for literary prizes also function as epitexts, usually initiated by the so-called literary establishment. In all three cases, then, they are commissioned prose, texts that stand at the other end of the genius-aesthetic scale because they are not attributable to the artist's inner self but to an external impulse, in this case the literary establishment; Wegmann "Epitexte als ritualisierte Ereignis," 110)

²⁷ Ibid., 107.

²⁸ Ibid., 110.

²⁹ Austin, *How to do things with words*, 13.

the prize, offer thanks for it, or remember the prize's namesakes. Each performance commemorates the prize's establishment and previous awards and laureates, and it concurrently hints at possibilities for future awards.³⁰ Conversely, remembering is always performative: "It is an activity, something that happens in time and place, and that on every occasion when we come together to do the work of remembrance, the story we fashion is different from those that have come before."³¹

Why is this relevant to Honigmann's literary prize speeches? They have been largely unexplored to date, because besides her essay collection *Das Gesicht wiederfinden: Über Schreiben, Schriftsteller und Judentum* (2006), many of her speeches have only become available recently in the anthology *Unverschämt jüdisch* (2021).³² Some have not yet been published at all. Texts from the former are occasionally cited as commentaries on Honigmann's work, but their performative moment or the context of the speeches are rarely considered here.³³ Instead, it is noticeable that there is often only mention of *Aufsätze* (essays) as distinct from more narrative texts—but it is above all the poetics lectures given in

³⁰ Dücker, "Literaturpreise," 61. Similar reflections on performative remembering can be found, for example, in Popescu and Schult, "Performative Holocaust commemoration in the 21st century."

³¹ Tilmans, van Vree and Winter, "Preface", 7; see also Plate and Smelik, "Performative Memory in Art and Popular Culture."

³² In his review of *Unverschämt Jüdisch*, Fabian Wolff praises Honigmann's speeches as "lohnende Fußnoten" (worthwhile footnotes) on her autobiographical oeuvre (Wolff, "Die Jahre der Anpassung").

³³ Exceptions are, for example, Petra S. Fiero's monograph, in which she discusses Honigmann's speeches at the awarding of the Kleist Prize and the Jeanette Schocken Prize in more detail, but, nevertheless, focuses largely on her narrative work (Fiero, *Zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken*). In the context of the writing of female German-Jewish authors of the second generation, Eva Lezzi argues in her essay "In den Körper verbrachte Erinnerung," that their writings are also performative acts. The texts do not only offer space for reflections on historical experiences of the parents' generation and the author's individual biographies. They are performative acts precisely because they constitute a German-Jewish identity and, in doing so, have an impact on the extra-textual "reality" (Lezzi, "In den Körper verbrachte Erinnerung," 149).

Tübingen in 2000³⁴ and in Zurich in 2002³⁵ that are included in scholarly debates on Honigmann's prose work.³⁶

In this thesis, I will argue that Honigmann's literary award speeches reflect different formations of memory: (1) Honigmann herself communicates personal, individual memories in them, but she also tells (2) of collective memories—for example, in the environment of her family or with friends and work colleagues in the GDR. In her speeches, however, Honigmann also conveys (3) political memories, questions them critically, and ultimately also addresses (4) cultural memories that have influenced her as an author. Besides examining the discourses of memory, I will, ultimately, point out Honigmann's discourses about what it means to her to be a German-Jewish author. Three aspects are of relevance here. First, the function of literature for Honigmann is to establish a connection between reader and author and to provide insights into unknown realities. Second, the significance of exile for Honigmann's life and writing, and third, what it means for her to be a good artist. For Honigmann, it is important that a artists must distinguish themselves not only through their work, but also through their moral actions. Accordingly, she criticizes poets who place themselves in the service of political regimes and appeals for preserving one's artistic and moral freedom. For this thesis, I have selected the following three speeches: "Das Gesicht wiederfinden" ("Rediscovering Face," 2001), the speech she delivered for the Jeanette Schocken Prize; "Jüdisches Schicksal?" ("Jewish Destiny?," 2012) in the context of the

³⁴ Honigmann, "Eine 'ganz kleine Literatur' des Anvertrauens – Glückel von Hameln, Rahel von Varnhagen, Anne Frank."

³⁵ The Zurich Poetics Lecture includes three texts by Honigmann: "Wenn mir die Leute vorwerfen, daß ich zuviel von mir spreche, so werfe ich ihnen vor, daß sie überhaupt nicht über sich selber nachdenken" (October 31, 2002), "Des vielen Büchermachens ist kein Ende – Über Schöpfung und Schreibebn" (November 7, 2002), and "Ein Buch, das ich nicht geschrieben habe – Über biografisches Schreiben" (November 14, 2002). All three texts were published in Honigmann, *Das Gesicht wiederfinden*, 31-112.

³⁶ Central concepts here are the "kleine Literatur" (*small literature*), see e.g., Lilla Balint's article, in which she states with regard to Honigmann's short narrative style depicting everyday occurrences: "Anregungen für diese Art des Erzählens dürfte sie bei Glückel von Hameln, Rahel Varnhagen und Anne Frank geholt haben" (*She may have drawn inspiration for this style of storytelling from Glückel von Hameln, Rahel Varnhagen, and Anne Frank*; Balin, "Laßt und doch mal wieder einen 'Nazi' verspeisen," 84).

Elisabeth Langgässer Prize; and “Wie viel Charakter braucht der Künstler?” (“How Much Character Does the Artist Need?,” 2015) on the occasion of the awarding of the Ricarda Huch Prize.³⁷

In the second chapter, I survey the implications of Memory Studies for German Studies. Then, I will present the theoretical framework with which I will examine the discourses of memory in Honigmann’s literary prize speeches mentioned in my argument above. I base this analysis on Aleida Assmann’s four formations of memory: (1) *individual memory*, which is a person’s individual and biographical memory; (2) *collective* or *social memories* of different groups, which are shaped by social interactions of individuals and their shared memories, (3) *political* or *national memory*, which, in contrast to collective memories, influences personality “from above,” and (4) *cultural memory* which is established by mediums of memory such as books, works of art, monuments.³⁸ To better understand the third formation—the political or national memory—this chapter ends with an excursus on memory politics in the German Democratic Republic (GDR), where Barbara Honigmann was born, and the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG).

The third chapter is structured into three subchapters, each dedicated to one of her speeches. Each subchapter provides a short introduction of the function of the literary award and former award winners, and then analyzes the representation of the four dimensions of memory in the speeches. However, since the controversial concept of the “inner emigration” is especially relevant to better understand Honigmann’s speech on the awarding with the Langgässer prize, another excursus on this topic is provided there. In the analysis, I will provide my own translation of Honigmann’s quotes that follow the German quotes. In the fourth chapter, I will examine Honigmann’s selected literary award speeches in terms of their discourses of a German-Jewish literature. The last chapter then summarizes the main findings of this thesis.

³⁷ When I quote from Honigmann’s speeches, I indicate the respective page references in the main text.

³⁸ Aleida Assmann develops the four formations of memory in Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma*.

CHAPTER TWO

THEORIES OF MEMORY

The establishment of Memory Studies is closely linked to the experiences and the work of coming to terms with the Holocaust, because, as Aleida Assmann notes, “if the Holocaust represents a historic turning point in the extremity of violence in mass killing, this change also poses entirely new challenges to individual remembering and collective memory.”³⁹ However, the topic of “remembrance” is also central due to the socio-political debates about how to come to terms with the Holocaust, both in Germany and internationally—but also, for example, the denial of the same by right-wing populists—and the dwindling of the generation that experienced the Holocaust or the Second World War itself.⁴⁰ Moreover, changes in media technologies and the impact of the media also play a role, as does the accessibility—improved by digitization – to forms of representation.⁴¹ In the German-speaking cultural arena, Memory Studies also takes on a dimension of intellectual and scientific history when the practice of memory is critically accompanied, discussed, and reflected upon: The discourse of memory in Cultural Studies takes on an important task here of reflective observation and therapeutic accompaniment of social and political processes.⁴² Regarding the analysis of literature and media, Memory Studies’ instruments and categories of analysis for literary and media analysis have developed continuously over the past decades. However, besides literature and cinematic works, German Studies, with its focus on Memory Studies, also examines phenomena such as (great-)grandparents’ autobiographical memories of the Nazi era, the (great-)grandchildren’s perceptions of this period, memorials such as Peter Eisenmann’s field of stelae in Berlin, or local initiatives such

³⁹ Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma*, 4.

⁴⁰ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, 3.

⁴¹ For example, reference can be made here to the project “Lernen mit digitalen Zeugnissen” at the Ludwig-Maximilians-Universität in Munich, which recorded witness interviews with the support of hologram techniques (see Federl, “Hologramme gegen das Vergessen”).

⁴² Assmann, “Gedächtnis als Leitbegriff der Kulturwissenschaft,” 45.

as Gunter Demnig's *Stolpersteine*.⁴³ In the next subchapter, I will introduce the four formations of memory serving as categories of analysis for my third chapter.

Theoretical framework: the four formations of memory

In the context of Memory Studies, Jan and Aleida Assmann's model of "communicative memory" and "cultural memory" in particular has established itself as an important approach. Communicative memory emerges through everyday interactions. It has the historical experiences of contemporaries as its content, and therefore always refers only to a limited time horizon of about eighty to one hundred years.⁴⁴ Its contents are characterized by their mutability and by the fact that they do not experience a fixed attribution of meaning.⁴⁵ In contrast, according to Jan Assmann, "cultural memory" is a highly ritualized memory tied to fixed objectifications, and present primarily in the cultural time dimension of the festival.⁴⁶ In terms of content, it includes mythical events of a distant past that are interpreted as foundational for the community, and for its continuation and interpretation specialists are trained.⁴⁷ Specifically, Jan Assmann insists: "The concept of cultural memory comprises that body of reusable texts, images, and rituals specific to each society in each epoch, whose 'cultivation' serves to stabilize and convey that society's self-image."⁴⁸ In other words, in his conception "cultural memory" describes objects with a certain function.

Aleida Assmann's recent conception has broadened the subject area of "cultural memory," because it includes all objectifications of a given culture preserved by society. This includes not only the central reuse texts, images, and rites, but also, for example, documents stored in the archive, long-forgotten works of art, or little-noticed buildings.⁴⁹

⁴³ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, 5.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 25; see also, Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 125-127.

⁴⁵ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, 109; see also, Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, 48-56.

⁴⁶ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, 25; see also, Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 129.

⁴⁷ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, 109.

⁴⁸ Assmann, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," 132.

⁴⁹ Erll, *Kollektives Gedächtnis und Erinnerungskulturen*, 29.

In *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit: Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (*Shadows of Trauma: Memory and the Politics of Postwar Identity*, 2006; translated into English in 2015), Aleida Assmann expands her corpus of sources to include the multitude of memory-cultural material, taking into account not only literature and art but also autobiographical testimonies, political statements, or documents from television.⁵⁰

In this monograph, Aleida Assmann concretizes the juxtaposition of individual and collective memory “by introducing four memory formations, each of which can be differentiated according to their brevity and their stability.”⁵¹ These formations are: (1) *individual memory*, which is a person’s individual and biographical memory; (2) *collective* or *social memories* of different groups, which are shaped by social interactions of individuals and their shared memories, (3) *political* or *national memory*, which, in contrast to collective memories, influences personality “from above,” and (4) *cultural memory*, which is established by mediums of memory such as, for example, books, works of art, and monuments. In contrast to collective memory, the latter is—at least theoretically—not bound by time. This conception differs from the earlier idea of communicative and cultural memory developed by Jan Assmann and described above: it provides finer categories of analysis and shows that the individual memory of a person and a society is always also embedded in a network of collective, political, and cultural memories. This division of memory into four formations will also serve as the framework for the analysis of Honigmann’s literary prize speeches in the following and will therefore be explained in more detail here.

Individual memory

Aleida Assmann’s model builds on the assumption that every individual has the capacity to remember and thus possesses his or her own individual memory. She argues that we “could not construct a self without memory, nor could we communicate with others as individual people.”⁵² Assmann qualifies biographical memories as indispensable, because “they are the material out of which experiences, relationships, and above all the sense

⁵⁰ Ibid., 113.

⁵¹ Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma*, 11.

⁵² Ibid., 12.

of one's own identity are constituted."⁵³ However, individual memory is not only an important component of personal identity, but it also interacts with collective and cultural memory through communication and objectivations of memories.⁵⁴

Collective or social memories

This individual memory described above, however, is by no means independent and private, but is shaped by social interactions and shared experiences. Assmann points out that, "what we may term *communicative memory* arises within a milieu characterized by spatial proximity, regular interaction, collective forms of life, and shared experience."⁵⁵ As a consequence, an individual's memory must be also seen and analyzed in connection with others' individual and collective memories. Personal memory, though, exists not only within different social groups – families, religious communities, certain social milieus – but also within a certain temporal horizon, roughly three generations or eighty to one hundred years. As Aleida Assmann argues, the alternation of generations, which constantly contributes a process of renewal of the memory, determines the dynamics of a society's memories. But the memory of a society is shaped not only by interactions between individuals and collectives, but also by the third formation, political memory.

Political or national memory

A very particular form of collective memory is political or national memory, which differs from social memory in its unity and direction of action. As Assmann notes, social memory acts "from below" and it dissipates over the years as generations die off. By contrast, she adds, national memory is a more unifying construction that acts "from above." It is encoded into political and social institutions and by design lasts longer.⁵⁶ Political memory relies frequently on so-called foundational myths. As Assmann explains, the myth is a foundational story with enduring significance that "keeps the past alive in contemporary society and gives that society an orientation for the future."⁵⁷

⁵³ Ibid., 12.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 19.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 23.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 26.

This formation of memory is particularly relevant in the discussion of the history of memory culture in the divided Germany, which Honigmann frequently addresses in her speeches. Both the FRG and the GDR had different “founding myths” that affected how the two states historically dealt with the Holocaust. This thesis therefore offers an excursus at the end of this chapter on memory politics in the GDR and FRG.

Cultural memory

Unlike collective or social memories, then, cultural memory is not primarily transmitted—and thereby established—through communication, but rather through specific bearers of a society’s memory: “In both oral and literate cultures, different kinds of media are invented to ensure the preservation and transmission of knowledge considered indispensable for the expression and continued existence of a society’s cultural identity.”⁵⁸ As Assmann explains, preservation of memory is the task of specific institutions: “Museums and archives as well as research libraries are cultural sites in which a society preserves the remains and traces of its past, long after these have lost their living references and contexts.”⁵⁹ Alongside with objects, Assmann also enumerates “books, letters, and written testimonials, as well as pictures, photographs, and other carriers of information.”⁶⁰

Regarding the difference between collective memory and cultural memory, Assmann further states: “Whereas what is reconstructed as social memory does not have a permanent or stable form, but rather unfolds in times as a dynamic process of negotiations and engagement, the media of cultural memory possess the stability and duration that are secured through institutions.”⁶¹ In contrast to social memory, cultural memory is not only limited to the span of a lifetime but is theoretically unlimited.⁶² Decisive for cultural memory is the materialization of memory: “While social memory is a *coordination of individual memories* brought about through collective life, conversation, and other forms of discourse, collective and cultural memory relies on a pool of experience and knowledge

⁵⁸ Ibid., 36.

⁵⁹ Ibid., 38. See also, Fisher, “Local Meanings and Portable Objects.”

⁶⁰ Ibid., 38. See also, Fisher, “Local Meanings and Portable Objects.”

⁶¹ Assmann, *Shadows of Trauma*, 19.

⁶² Ibid., 21.

that has been released from its living carriers and *passes over into material media*.”⁶³ Assmann emphasizes that “cultural symbols and signs are more durable,”⁶⁴ which is why “memory that is generated at the level of culture—and that relies on external media like text, images, monuments, and rituals—is temporally limitless: it has a long-term temporal horizon that can potentially stretch over centuries.”⁶⁵ So what do these four formations of memory mean for the analysis of literary award speeches in this thesis?

Honigmann’s literary award speeches reflect these four formations in different ways: (1) Honigmann herself communicates personal, individual memories in them, but she also tells (2) of social memories—for example, in the environment of her family or with friends and work colleagues in the GDR. In her speeches, however, Honigmann also conveys (3) political memories, questions them critically, and ultimately also addresses (4) cultural memories that have influenced her as an author. At the same time, by being printed, published, and thus made accessible to a larger audience, her speeches undergo a process of materialization, whereby they themselves pass into cultural memory and become objects for literary studies. To better understand Honigmann’s comments about the heavily ideologically conditioned politics of memory in the GDR, where she grew up, and in the FRG, which—especially after reunification in 1990—is her main audience, the following excursus, drawing mainly on Jeffrey Herf’s *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in Two Germanys*, gives an overview on how the two Germanys dealt with the Holocaust.

Excursus: Memory Politics in the GDR and FRG

From a political perspective, the memory cultures in the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the German Democratic Republic (GDR) could hardly be more different. Although the Soviet zone and later the German Democratic Republic (GDR) identified themselves as explicitly anti-fascist, more explicit attempts to come to terms with the past were evident, according to Jeffrey Herf, in the Western zones that later became the Federal Republic of Germany (FRG). Albeit with a certain time delay, in the capitalist and liberal

⁶³ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁴ Ibid., 21.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 21.

West, the issues of Antisemitism and the Holocaust took a central place in the public discourse of national political leaders. Moreover, it was the West German government that offered financial reparations to Jewish survivors of the Holocaust and established close relations with the state of Israel. In this way, the FRG gave the Holocaust a successively more prominent place in national political memory, and to this day holds trials against alleged perpetrators of crimes committed during the Nazi era.⁶⁶

In the years immediately after 1945, the occupying powers attempted to institutionalize the handling of German crimes by, for example, publicizing the atrocities in the concentration camps through the press.⁶⁷ In this way, they attempted to make Germans aware of their moral guilt for having voted for and supported Hitler. Contrary to what was hoped, however, this approach backfired and inverted the perpetrator-victim relationship, with the result that Germans saw themselves as victims. They avoided the question of the origins of Nazi rule, and it did not find its way into the communicative memory, and the Allies' educational work just ricocheted off the Germans. In 1949, as the occupation period ended, the "Law on the Granting of Immunity from Punishment" granted a far-reaching amnesty to Nazi offenders. Along with this amnesty, efforts to prosecute perpetrators of Nazi crimes also diminished.⁶⁸

In the 1950s, the political focus in West Germany was on the confrontation with communism in the GDR and the resulting system conflict.⁶⁹ With regard to the confrontation with Nazi crimes, there was a "communicative silence." Hermann Lübke coined this term to describe the social consensus that the involvement of most Germans in the Nazi regime should not be publicly discussed to integrate the majority of the West German people into the democratic state. This phase of "communicative silence" lasted until the 1960s.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 3.

⁶⁷ Brink, *Ikonen der Vernichtung*, 36.

⁶⁸ Echternkamp, *Nach dem Krieg*, 167.

⁶⁹ Meuschel, "Legitimationsstrategien in der DDR und in der Bundesrepublik," 125.

⁷⁰ Lübke, *Vom Parteigenossen zum Bundesbürger*.

It was then in the 1960s that a turn in the culture of remembrance took place: This turn was initiated by the judicial processing of the Nazi era, particularly by Adolf Eichmann's trial in Jerusalem in 1960 and 1961 and his eventual execution. This trial, which attracted worldwide attention, marked the beginning of a new collective coming to terms with Nazi crimes. In addition, the Auschwitz Trials of 1963-1965 further catalyzed this movement to come to terms with the past.⁷¹

In 1968, the student demonstrations challenged the social self-image of the period. The young generation confronted their parents' generation with the lack of a historical policy and the concealment of Nazi crimes and the suppression of the Holocaust. Likewise, a new historical-political reorientation began to emerge in the 1970s. Since the young generation turned its attention to its own families, this marked the beginning of a more robust culture of remembrance in the FRG that now turned its attention to the Holocaust and the experiences in its own families. As an important political event, Helga Hirsch highlights Willy Brandt's genuflection in front of the Warsaw memorial for those killed in the ghetto uprising in 1943 is particularly noteworthy. He was thus one of the first chancellors to publicly show repentance with such a historic gesture.⁷²

In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the broadcast of the U.S. television miniseries *Holocaust: The Story of the Family Weiss* marked the beginning of a new examination of the past. The mass media cast a new perspective on the Nazi past and cultural memory that led many Germans to deal with the suffering inflicted on the Jews for the first time.⁷³ Because of *Holocaust*, historical and literary studies also developed a special interest in the Nazi past and focused on the role of the victims.⁷⁴

In the 1980s, a new phase in German-Jewish literature also began at the same time as socio-political debates—such as those surrounding the visit of U.S. President Ronald Reagan and German Chancellor Helmut Kohl to a cemetery in Bitburg, where members of

⁷¹ Frei, "Der Frankfurter Auschwitz-Prozeß und die deutsche Zeitgeschichtsforschung," 138.

⁷² Hirsch, "Kollektive Erinnerung im Wandel."

⁷³ Magilow and Silverman, *Holocaust Representations in History*, 93-100.

⁷⁴ Assmann, *Das neue Unbehagen an der Erinnerungskultur*, 55.

the Waffen SS were also buried—and the so-called “Historikerstreit” (“Historian’s debate”). Once again, the question is raised as to what image of history the now revitalized Germany can base itself on. In contrast to the Bitburg scandal, Richard von Weizsäcker’s speech marking the 40th anniversary of May 8 was of political importance: The Federal President called for conscious remembrance and recognition of individual guilt.⁷⁵

The GDR was characterized in its political stance by a fundamental anti-fascist attitude: “Official memories of the Nazi dictatorship became crucial to consolidating the Communist dictatorship, immunizing it from criticism, and placing its critics on the defensive.”⁷⁶ What should be emphasized here, however, is that in the GDR hardly any space was created for an explicitly Jewish memory; on the contrary, Jews in the GDR had to assimilate much more strongly in order to maintain socialist unity. Hence, as Herf writes, “the presence of Jews in the East German government on terms of assimilation more restrictive than those in pre-Nazi Germany did not lead to the inclusion of the Jewish question in East German memory of the Nazi past.”⁷⁷

This can be seen, for example, in the fact that the two Nazi concentration camps located on GDR territory, Buchenwald and Sachsenhausen, were declared monuments to the victims of fascism around 1960. “Solidarity with the Jews had no part in these ceremonies of remembrance,”⁷⁸ and as noted above, “the East German government had consistently refused to make any financial restitution to the Jewish survivors of the Holocaust.”⁷⁹ On the contrary, the GDR even condemned the reparation payments of the FRG:

Far from expressing defensiveness over the absence of East German restitution payments, Ulbricht cast aspersions on the motives behind the West German payments and offered an explanation for the prominence of the Jewish dimension of the Nazi past in the Federal Republic. As he saw it, the West Germans were not making a genuine effort to face the Nazi past; the “real” purpose of making restitution to

⁷⁵ Assmann and Frevert, *Geschichtsvergessenheit und Geschichtsversessenheit*, 146.

⁷⁶ Herf, *Divided Memory*, 163.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 175.

⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 179-180.

⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 180.

Jewish survivors and of close relations with Israel was “camouflaging and concealing the (Nazi) perpetrators.”⁸⁰

This culture of remembrance, which supported the GDR’s self-image, persisted into the 1980s and led to a noticeable emigration of Jews: in the period after 1945, the Jewish communities in the GDR initially numbered about 3,000; but by 1989, due to ongoing migration, only about 350 people remained.

Further changes affected German-Jewish culture and literature after 1989. The fall of the Iron Curtain led to a migration of Jews from the territories of the former Soviet Union to Germany. But German reunification also brought about a change in East German memory policy: as Dietrich Mühlberg writes, East Germans were even encouraged to erase the greater part of their experiences from memory and to adapt to and internalize the communicative and cultural memory of West German society.⁸¹

From the perspective of memory policy, two events are worth highlighting: The introduction of January 27 as a day of remembrance for the victims of National Socialism and the Memorial of the Murdered Jews of Europe inaugurated in 2005.⁸² However, there are ongoing controversies about how the Holocaust should be remembered in Germany nowadays. In the discussion about the Holocaust memorial in Berlin, Daniel H. Magilow and Lisa Silverman point out that “the controversy surrounding the memorial shows that there is no single way of commemorating the Holocaust that will satisfy every need. Other complementary memorials will always be necessary.”⁸³ I agree that an ongoing debate about the forms and functions of memorials in Germany is necessary, but I, with my thesis, also want to highlight other forms of remembering and coming to terms with the past.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 194.

⁸¹ Mühlberg, “Vom langsamen Wandel der Erinnerung an die DDR,” 217.

⁸² Magilow and Silverman, *Holocaust Representations in History*, 163-171.

⁸³ Ibid., 170.

CHAPTER THREE

ANALYSIS OF SELECTED LITERARY AWARD SPEECHES

The third chapter examines individual speeches Honigmann has given over the last twenty-five years regarding the various formations of memory. All three speeches were delivered in Germany and primarily to German audiences in the twenty-first century. They bear on the broader contemporary debates about how German society should deal with the Nazi past.

“Die Kunst besteht darin, das Gesicht wiederzufinden”: Barbara Honigmann’s speech on the awarding of the Jeanette Schocken Prize (May 6, 2001)

The Bremerhaven Citizens’ Prize for Literature, which also bears the name “Jeanette Schocken Prize,” has been awarded every two years since 1991 by the City of Bremerhaven and the Jeanette Schocken Association. According to the founders, the prize, which is endowed at 10,000 euros, seeks to set an example against injustice and violence, as well as against hate and intolerance.⁸⁴ It is associated with a double remembrance. On the one hand, the date of the award ceremony, May 6, commemorates the burning of books on the marketplace in Bremerhaven in 1933; on the other hand, the prize commemorates its namesake, Jeanette Schocken, the widow of Bremerhaven department store owner Julius Schocken, who gave shelter to Jewish fellow citizens after the Reich pogrom night in 1938 and helped them to leave the country. She remained in Germany with her critically ill daughter and was deported to Minsk in November 1941, where she was presumably murdered in the Maly Trostenets concentration camp.

Right at the beginning of the speech, Honigmann expresses her own feelings about receiving the prize, reflecting on her own memory. Usually, she claims, literary prizes are linked with positive expectations and “mit dem Namen eines Dichters und eines Werkes, das an diesen Namen geknüpft ist und ihn bei jeder neuen Lektüre wieder zum Leben erweckt, um nicht zu sagen: unsterblich zu machen” (with the name of a poet and a work that is attached to this name and brings it back to life with every new reading, not to say

⁸⁴ N.N., “Jeanette-Schocken-Preis.”

makes it immortal; “Das Gesicht wiederfinden,” 133). It is a different situation with the Jeanette Schocken Prize, one of whose characteristics is that it is not pure joy for Honigmann to receive it. She emphasizes that, on the one hand, the prize commemorates the burning of books, which one wishes had never taken place. On the other hand, the prize reminds Honigmann of the numerous crimes and sufferings that spread across Europe from 1933 onwards, from which posterity would still not have recovered (*ibid.*). In other words, the acceptance of the prize is linked to the memory of the crimes of National Socialism, but also to the collective memory of those born after the Holocaust.

With her typical style of insinuation, Honigmann also critically examines the reappraisal of the crimes of National Socialism. She addresses the way people deal with the impossibility of undoing history, and the historicization of the past. As a consequence, Honigmann argues, many Germans have become accustomed to accepting the German-originated persecution of the Jews in the 1930s and their systematic murder in the 1940s as a historical fact. By this Honigmann means that people no longer raise the question of why the Holocaust happened but resign themselves to the assertion that it did. “Seitdem ‘es’ vorüber ist, bleibt offensichtlich nichts anderes übrig, als Zeugnisse zusammenzutragen, sie zu beglaubigen oder in Frage zu stellen, zu zählen, zu beschreiben, zu vergleichen, zu urteilen” (Since “it” is over, there is obviously nothing left to do but to gather testimonies, to authenticate or to question them, to count, to describe, to compare, to judge; *ibid.* 133-134). What is striking about the printed version of her speech is that in the printed text Honigmann highlights and paraphrases the crimes with the word “es” placed in quotation marks, in other words, she does not call them by name. In doing so she also alludes to the society’s failure to address the past while remaining silent about it. According to the author, although there is an archiving of memory in the sense of Aleida Assmann, at the same time there is also an increasingly strong distancing. This distancing is reflected in the type of verbs Honigmann uses in the quote above, which, while documentary in nature, are mainly acts of counting rather than qualitatively researching or critically questioning. As a consequence, the “products” of the collection of testimonies, as Honigmann sees it, are also of a more quantitative nature:

Sammlungen und Dokumentationen, Analysen und Forschungsergebnisse häufen sich, sie legen die Ereignisse, die einmal Gegenwart waren, sozusagen in der Geschichte ab oder stellen ihre Zeugnisse in Museen und Memorials aus, die extra dafür eingerichtet werden, und schaffen damit eine Distanz, wie sie auf natürliche Weise auch die zeitliche Entfernung von diesen Jahren schafft (ibid., 134).

Collections and documentations, analyses and research results accumulate, they deposit the events that were once present in history, so to speak, or exhibit their testimonies in museums and memorials that are set up especially for this purpose, thus creating a distance in the same way that the temporal distance from these years also creates in a natural way.

In other words, the testimonies are made available to a wider public, but their very quantity prevents a deeper engagement with them. It should also be emphasized here how Honigmann addresses the collective process of coming to terms with the past: “Vom Verstehen rede ich vorsichtshalber nicht” (To be on the safe side, I don’t talk about understanding; ibid., 133)— this short sentence leaves much unsaid, but at the same time makes clear a critique of not understanding and not wanting to understand, which Theodor W. Adorno addressed in his 1959 essay “Was bedeutet Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit?” (“The Meaning of Working through the Past”):

The question “What does working through the past mean?” requires explication. It follows from a formulation, a modish slogan that has become highly suspect during the last years. In this usage, “working through the past” does not mean seriously working upon the past, that is, through a lucid consciousness breaking its power to fascinate. On the contrary, its intention is to close the books of the past and, if possible, even remove it from memory. The attitude that everything should be forgotten and forgiven, which would be proper for those who suffered injustice, is practiced by those party supporters who committed the injustice.⁸⁵

The reproach that coming to terms with and understanding the past has not yet taken place to the necessary extent is thus virtually potentiated by Honigmann’s non-thematization. I understand this passage as meaning that Honigmann does not yet feel ready to speak explicitly about the past, because she still sees too great gaps in knowledge on the part of her German audience. At the same time, Honigmann only superficially addresses political

⁸⁵ Adorno, “The Meaning of Working through the Past,” 3.

memory in this speech: there are indeed memorials that are politically initiated.⁸⁶ But here again an accusation is hidden in the concept of ambiguous – natural and temporal— “distance”: the testimonies only replace what is missing and irretrievably lost—the memory of those who witnessed the atrocities and could have spoken first-hand about them and, above all, with the perpetrators.

In Honigmann’s speech, Schocken appears both as the literature prize’s namesake and as a single individual who represents six million individual fates of the murdered Jews. In Honigmann’s words: “Ein normales jüdisches Schicksal ihrer Zeit” (a normal Jewish fate of their time; *ibid.*, 133). Through her reference to the double commemoration – also mentioned in the statute of the founders⁸⁷—of the book burning (date of the award) and of the name giver (Jeanette Schocken), a manifestation of the memory of Jeanette Schocken from the short-term collective memory of her contemporaries into the longer-term cultural memory has taken place.

In addition, Honigmann draws comparisons with other German-Jewish figures who have found their way into cultural memory: Anne Frank through her diaries written in Amsterdam, Etty Hillesum who interpreted her suffering religiously and mystified it, and the painter Charlotte Salomon, about whom Honigmann writes: “Erst seit kurzer Zeit ist

⁸⁶ As opposed to artistic forms of memory or collective approaches “from below,” an example of such a political commemoration is, in my view, the hour of remembrance in the German Bundestag on the occasion of January 27 as a day of remembrance for the victims of National Socialism. In 2023, Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Federal President Frank-Walter Steinmeier and other political representatives laid wreaths at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe in Berlin. This was followed in the Bundestag by speeches by Bundestag President Bärbel Bas and Holocaust survivor Inge Auerbach and the President of the Israeli Knesset Mickey Levy (N.N., “Gedenken an die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus”). The criticism of commemorative days such as January 27 or on the occasion of the November pogroms is that they make commemoration an “exception” among other everyday occurrences. In view of the recent historical revisionist statements by party politicians of the Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) or the continuing broad desire in German society to, metaphorically speaking, “draw a line under Nazi history,” it remains debatable to what extent this political commemoration can really lead to the successful constitution of a culture of remembrance in the democratic FRG (see e.g., Schuster, “Was bedeutet euch noch die Erinnerung an die Shoah?”).

⁸⁷ N.N., “Jeanette-Schocken.Preis.”

diesem Werk der gebührende Platz in der Kunstgeschichte eingeräumt worden, indem es 1998 in der Royal Academy of Arts in London zum erstenmal außerhalb eines rein jüdischen Kontextes gezeigt wurde” (Only recently has this work been given its due place in art history, being shown for the first time outside a purely Jewish context at the Royal Academy of Arts in London in 1998; *ibid.*, 134). All three, then, are internationally known figures who created significant works. Fiero notes in this regard that Honigmann cites literary documents from the persecution of the Jews that particularly touched her, and she thus indirectly invites us to engage with their work.⁸⁸ In contrast, the only surviving testimony of Jeanette Schocken is a photograph “auf dem sie uns ansieht und wir ihr ins Gesicht sehen müssen” (in which she looks at us and we have to look her in the face; *ibid.*). This face, she argues, elicits shock and “Verzweiflung, die aus der Konfrontation mit der völligen Sinnlosigkeit entsteht, der Sinnlosigkeit des Bösen” (despair arising from the confrontation with utter senselessness, the senselessness of murder and manslaughter, the senselessness of evil; *ibid.*, 135).

Honigmann concludes her speech by critically addressing the statement “die Werke der Literatur und der schönen Kunst könnten nichts ausrichten gegen Unrecht und Gewalt, Haß und Intoleranz, und sie hätten alle nichts genutzt” (the works of literature and fine art could do nothing against injustice and violence, hatred and intolerance, and they would all have been of no use; *ibid.*, 139). She argues that people can certainly distinguish “zwischen Gut und Böse, zwischen Recht und Unrecht” (between good and evil, between right and wrong; *ibid.*), as long as no

Ideen, „die zur materiellen Gewalt werden, wenn sie die Massen ergreifen“, sowie andere Bewegungen und Erhebungen völkischer, nationaler und religiöser Art, in denen er (der Mensch, AS) seine Individualität verliert, haben ihm diese Fähigkeit abzugewöhnen versucht (*ibid.*, 139).

ideas ‘which become material violence when they seize the masses,’ as well as other movements and uprisings of a folk, national, and religious nature in which he (the human being, AS) loses his individuality, have tried to wrest this ability from him.

⁸⁸ Fiero, *Zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken*, 185-186.

What is striking about Honigmann's critique is the quotation from Karl Marx's "Zur Kritik der Hegelschen Rechtsphilosophie," again highlighted by quotation marks in the printed version. The German-Jewish author thus explicitly addresses not only the fascist form of totalitarianism, but also the communist form of a de-individualizing ideology, such as Honigmann herself may have experienced in the GDR.

"Der Begriff des 'inneren Exils' ist mir schwer nachvollziehbar, denn wo 'innen' soll es denn ein Exil geben?": Barbara Honigmann's speech on the awarding of the Elisabeth Langgässer Prize (February 25, 2012)

The Rhine-Hessian city of Alzey awards its literature prize every three years in honor of the writer Elisabeth Langgässer, who was born there in 1899. The prize is endowed with 7,500 euros and is awarded to German-language authors whose work, according to the founders, is a worthy successor to Elisabeth Langgässer in terms of linguistic expression.⁸⁹ Previous winners include Rolf Hochhuth (1991), Christa Wolf (1999) and most recently Daniel Kehlmann (2022).⁹⁰

Honigmann published her acceptance speech under the title "Jüdisches Schicksal?" ("Jewish Fate?"). In it, she takes a critical look at the author Elisabeth Langgässer. Langgässer, daughter of a Jewish government building officer, worked as a writer from 1931. The racist Nuremberg Laws classified her as "Halbjüdin" (half-Jewish) and in 1936, the Reichsschriftumskammer (Reich Chamber of Literature) excluded her from membership, making her subject to a publication ban. From 1942 on, Langgässer had to do forced labor, while the daughter she bore while still unmarried in 1929, Cordelia Edvardson (née Langgässer), was deported to Theresienstadt and then to Auschwitz in 1944 but survived the concentration camp. Langgässer's biography is unique in that, although she was persecuted and discriminated against as a half-Jew, she neither retreated voluntarily nor sought the path of exile. As Cathy Gelbin states, Langgässer nevertheless claimed "inner emigration" after the end of the Second World War and leaned herself to the frequent self-con-

⁸⁹ N.N., "Elisabeth-Langgässer-Literaturpreis der Stadt Alzey."

⁹⁰ N.N., "Preisträger des Elisabeth-Langgässer-Literaturpreises der Stadt Alzey."

struction of postwar Germans as Nazi victims. But this self-attribution of “inner emigration” is problematic, as Gelbin argues, because it overshadows the various extents of non-fascist writing and euphemizes forms of co-optation.⁹¹ Today, the concept of “inner exile,” also known as “inner emigration,” is as controversial as it was then. Therefore, this subchapter offers a short excursus on Langgässer and the question of “inner emigration.”

Excursus: Elisabeth Langgässer and the question of “inner emigration”

The term “inner emigration” came into use after the end of the Second World War to describe the mindset of those writers and artists who had not gone into exile after Adolf Hitler’s takeover of power. The term suggests, according to Neil H. Donahue, “that these writers had in fact ‘emigrated’ in spirit, if not in body, by turning inward, away from the enforced or coerced beliefs of National Socialist ideology that surrounded them, in order to survive oppression and war with their own humane values intact.”⁹² However, this concept is controversial precisely because it raises questions about whether it was possible to publish works at all under the Nazi regime that represented aesthetic resistance to fascism, or whether it was possible to remain in Germany and avoid collaborating with Nazi ideology. At the same time, the term consists of two contradictory parts. According to Stephen Brockmann, “emigration,” refers to the departure from the German writers’ homeland, Germany, while the term “inner” means staying “inside” Germany. That raises the question, how the writers can “leave” a country while staying in it.⁹³ This “inner emigration” is only possible under the assumption “that it was possible to ‘emigrate’ from the evil, Nazi Germany spiritually while remaining inside it physically.”⁹⁴ What might such an ‘inner migration’ have looked like between 1933 and 1945?

In his book *Cultures in Dark Times: Nazi Fascism, Inner Emigration, and Exile*, Jost Hermand examines and contrasts the three literary groups and their associated individuals and art forms – literature, theater, radio, film, music, painting, and others. He concludes that the artists of the “inner emigration” must have been only a small group with a

⁹¹ Gelbin, “Elisabeth Langgässer and the question of inner emigration.”

⁹² Donahue, “Introduction,” 1.

⁹³ Brockmann, “*Inner Emigration*,” 14.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

limited reach. Hermand argues that if we are to speak of an art “specific to inner emigration” or even the possibility of genuine critical or oppositional attitudes, then “we can only do so to a very limited extent.”⁹⁵ Regarding the concerns of the writers of the “inner emigration,” Hermand emphasizes that they were not concerned with prestige or financial gain, but with carefully trying to warn their fellow citizens about the new regime. They could not achieve this goal through open criticism, but only through a symbolic or coded style or the transposition of plots into a past.⁹⁶ However, since only a well-educated readership could receive and understand this symbolic or coded art, Hermand argues that the artists of the “inner emigration” did not have much influence. He describes it as a “marginal phenomenon” that played only a little if any role in cultural politics.⁹⁷ Moreover, Nazi censors always subjected literary works to additional scrutiny.⁹⁸ Hence, Hermand concludes that the works, if anything, influenced those middle-class citizens who distanced themselves from the Third Reich anyway and were sophisticated enough to identify the underlying meaning of the messages in the works.⁹⁹

The 1945 debate between exiled writer Thomas Mann and novelist Frank Thieß coined the term. Thieß “staked out a clear but untenable position, claiming the moral superiority of writers in *inner emigration*, who had experienced the German tragedy on location, rather than as spectators from the balcony seats of exile, as he phrased it.”¹⁰⁰ These remarks were preceded by Walter von Molo’s open letter inviting Thomas Mann to help Germany in its reconstruction. In their open correspondence, von Molo implied that Mann would not hate the Germans as his own people and that nothing would stand in the way of his return. Moreover, in his opinion, the German people were not guilty of the hatred propagated by the Nazis and the evil of the Third Reich.¹⁰¹ However, von Molo did not consider that exiled writers had also suffered physically, psychologically, and spiritually. On the

⁹⁵ Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times*, 144.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 145.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, 146.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰ Donahue, “Introduction,” 2.

¹⁰¹ Brockmann, “*Inner Emigration*,” 12.

contrary, for von Molo, the only victims of National Socialism who really suffered were the Germans who remained in Germany while the others escaped this suffering in exile.¹⁰² The novelist Frank Thieß even goes a step further in his reply, claiming “that the second, idealistic ‘emigration’ was more honest and patriotic than the first, purely physical kind,”¹⁰³ and ignores “the real suffering of German emigrants: loss of family, property, prestige, homeland, and all too frequently life itself; financial danger; homesickness; difficulties with foreign languages, foreign customs, and foreign state authorities.”¹⁰⁴ Their attitude correspond to the prevailing opinion after the war described above. Many of the German intellectuals saw themselves as victims of National Socialism and could use the idea of “inner emigration” to reject the accusation of a collective guilt.¹⁰⁵ What exactly does this imply for Elisabeth Langgässer as a writer?

First, it is unclear if Langgässer considered herself part of the “inner emigration” during the National Socialist era. For Cathy S. Gelbin, Langgässer’s political support for the Nazi regime, which she even voted for in 1933, and her literary work speak against this attribution. She does not consider Langgässer’s writing as nonconformist or politically resisting until her expulsion from the Reichsschrifttumskammer (The Reich Chamber of Letters) in 1936.¹⁰⁶ Instead, Gelbin argues that Langgässer may have had a more ambivalent relationship to National Socialism: “The uneasy relationship between Langgässer’s criticism of certain modes of Nazi literature and her simultaneous adoption of some its motifs may indicate her own ambivalent stance toward the Third Reich, i.e., her willingness to adapt to the new political system, her partial agreement with aspects of its ideology, and her simultaneous attempt to subvert some of its premises.”¹⁰⁷

Likewise, Jost Hermand shows the difficulty of clearly assigning Elisabeth Langgässer’s work to the group of “inner migration,” who worked with religious motifs in

¹⁰² Ibid., 13.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 15.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 18.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid., 16.

¹⁰⁶ Gelbin, “Elisabeth Langgässer and the Question of *Inner Emigration*,” 270.

¹⁰⁷ Ibid., 272.

her works.¹⁰⁸ He suggests that Langgässer tried to work her way through the early years of Nazi rule in Berlin as a writer of short stories and radio features, adapting to the regime. After the publication of her novel *Gang durch das Ried* (*The Path Through the Marsh*) in 1936, the Nazis prohibited her from publishing.¹⁰⁹ That literary scholars today discuss her as a writer of “inner emigration,” is tied to her novel *Das unauslöschliche Siegel* (*The Indelible Seal*), written between 1936 and 1945 and published in 1946. Despite its inner contradictions, Hermand interprets the novel “as offering hope for a religious transformation and thus as a work of resistance against satanic Nazi fascism.”¹¹⁰ Through these religious echoes, Hermand counts Langgässer, at least to some extent, among the religious writers that were part of the literature of the “inner emigration.” These controversies must be taken into account to better understand Honigmann’s literary award speech.

Honigmann herself explicitly affirmed at the award ceremony that she is Jewish and that the Langgässer Prize presented her with a “gewisse Herausforderung” (certain challenge; “Jüdisches Schicksal,” 31) and that she finds “das Werk Elisabeth Langgässers, ihre Person, ihre Lebensgeschichte . . . schwierig und problematisch” (the work of Elisabeth Langgässer, her person, her life story . . . difficult and problematic; *ibid.*). Honigmann’s first encounter with Langgässer, which she describes in her speech, was in Cordelia Edvardson’s (Langgässer’s daughter) autobiographical novel *Gebranntes Kind sucht das Feuer* (*Burned Child Seeks the Fire*, 1986), while also being a form of cultural memory. In the context of the Langgässer award ceremony, it stands out that Honigmann, addressing her individual memory, did not get to know Langgässer through one of Langgässer’s literary works. In contrary, Honigmann learned about Langgässer in a novel written by someone else. What was striking for Honigmann in Edvardson’s novel was the difficult relationship between mother and daughter and their confrontation with the Holocaust, which

¹⁰⁸ Hermand, *Culture in Dark Times*, 153. Hermand includes in this group writers such as Werner Bergengruen, Albrecht Goes, Jochen Klepper, Gertrud von Le Fort, Luise Rinser, Reinhold Schneider, and Ernst Wiechert, who “whether they were Catholic or Protestant, they wanted to keep their consciences pure” (*ibid.*).

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*

could hardly have been more different. Criticizing Langgässer's style as religiously overloaded, Honigmann states that, about forty years after Langgässer's death, Edvardson "stellt richtig, was die Mutter aus ihrer Perspektive nur angedeutet hat. Sie schildert, in deutlicher Sprache und ohne metaphysische Überfrachtung, ihre Deportation und ihr Überleben in Auschwitz, dem Ort, der viel dunkler war, als jedes mystische Erleben es sein kann" (corrects what her mother had only hinted at from her perspective. She describes, in clear language and without metaphysical overload, her deportation and survival in Auschwitz, the place that was much darker than any mystical experience can be; "Jüdisches Schicksal," 33). What is also noteworthy here is that Honigmann emphasizes the special historical and literary constellation: It is Cordelia Edvardson, Langgässer's daughter, born in 1929, who – in contrast to Honigmann, who was born 20 years later – experienced and survived the Holocaust and concurrently breaks her mother's silence. Honigmann criticizes not only Langgässer's silence, but also, the trivializing way Langgässer asks her daughter for real perspectives of Auschwitz (ibid., 33): "Alles in mir sträubt sich, wenn ich diese Zeilen lese, es bringt mich auf, ich empfinde es nicht nur als gefühllos, sondern eigentlich als unanständig" (Everything in me bristles when I read these lines, it upsets me, I find it not only callous but actually indecent; ibid., 34).

Even more embarrassing for Honigmann is Langgässer's relationship to the Nazi regime. She cannot understand how Langgässer, who was baptized Catholic but born half-Jewish and accordingly affected by a ban on publication from 1936, begs to be readmitted to the Reichsschrifttumskammer.¹¹¹ Regarding Langgässer's argumentation why she should be readmitted, Honigmann presents three arguments. First, Langgässer claimed that her artistic talent was based solely on the purely Aryan line of her maternal descents, second, that she was married to an Aryan, and third, that Jewish publishers, at this time, all boycotted her (ibid., 34). Honigmann does show minor understanding for this attitude toward the Nazi dictatorship: "Es ist eine schwere Zeit, sie möchte sich als Schriftstellerin

¹¹¹ With regard to the printed version of Honigmann's literary prize speech, it can be assumed that this is a spelling error: The Nuremberg Race Laws were established in 1935.

behaupten, ihre Position ist unsicher und gefährdet und wird noch viel unsicherer und gefährlicher werden” (It is a difficult time, she wants to establish herself as a writer, her position is insecure and endangered and will become even more insecure and endangered; *ibid.*).

However, she condemns Langgässer’s efforts to reverse the publication ban and the fact that Langgässer seeks “inner exile” only “als ihr kein anderer Weg mehr offensteht. Die Idee, auszuwandern, scheint ihr nie in den Sinn gekommen zu sein, obwohl Kollegen, enge Freunde und Bekannte, einer nach dem anderen das Land verließen” (when no other path is open to her. The idea of emigrating never seems to have crossed her mind, although colleagues, close friends, and acquaintances, one by one, left the country; *ibid.*, 36). In another passage, Honigmann expresses even more clearly her rejection of the concept of Langgässer’s “inner emigration” or “inner exile,” because it seems to her a way to create a parallel world and to ignore the real problems with a Christian mysticism. It is therefore even worse for Honigmann that Langgässer remains untouched by the facts that “ihre Tochter den gelben Stern trägt und auf Berlin . . . Bomben fallen und drei Straßen weiter vom Bahnhof Grunewald die Deportationszüge losfahren” (her daughter wears the yellow star and bombs fall on Berlin . . . and three streets away from Grunewald station the deportations trains set off; *ibid.* 36).

Honigmann considers Langgässer’s biography and work as an example of a group of writers during the Nazi era and their collective memory who found a wrong way to deal with Nazi crimes and to come to terms with the past. She notes that nature poetry and in particular the Christian novel were literary forms for Langgässer to provide herself with a spiritual retreat as one of the so-called “Stillen im Land” (silent ones in the country; *ibid.* 37). Rather than openly opposing the Nazi regime, this group of writers retreated into social seclusion and prayer. Therefore, in her speech, Honigmann criticizes the term “inner exile” precisely because it is unclear to her when in totalitarian systems—which include not only Nazi Germany but also the GDR regime, which Honigmann herself experienced—adaption turns into collaboration:

Der Begriff des „inneren Exils“ ist mir (Honigmann, AS) schwer nachvollziehbar, denn wo „innen“ soll es denn ein Exil geben? Ist es nicht vielmehr ein Euphemismus für wegsehen, sich in andere Zeiten träumen und auf bessere Zeiten hoffen? Macht man sich damit nicht doch zu einem Werkzeug oder wenigstens einer Schraube im System, vor dem man glaubt, so flüchten zu können? . . . Und kann sich das System nicht so lange aufrechterhalten, wie es von allen mitgetragen wird? Die Frage danach, wie sehr sich der Einzelne an dem totalitären System mitschuldig macht, ist schmerzhaft, und er wird es vorziehen, sich lieber als Opfer zu fühlen (ibid., 38).

The term “inner exile” is difficult for me to understand, because where “inside” is there supposed to be an exile? Is it not rather a euphemism for looking away, dreaming oneself into other times and hoping for better times? Doesn’t one thereby make oneself a tool or at least a screw in the system, from which one believes to be able to flee in this way? . . . And can’t the system maintain itself as long as it is supported by everyone? The question of how much the individual is complicit in the totalitarian system is painful, and he will prefer to feel victimized.

Thus, Honigmann not only condemns Langgässer’s personal behavior, but also points to the collective problematic in dealing with National Socialism, that is, collective memory: instead of admitting one’s own, collective guilt, there was a trend after the end of the Second World War to portray oneself as a victim. It fits into this context that Honigmann also refers to Frank Thieß, already mentioned in the excursus above, when she refers to Langgässer’s remarks about the exiled writer Anna Seghers: “Nach dem Krieg wird Elisabeth Langgässer über Anna Seghers, die über viele Stationen des Exils schließlich in Mexiko die Nazizeit überlebte, schreiben, sie sei aus ‘naturhaften Landstrichen zurückgekehrt’” (After the war, Elisabeth Langgässer will write about Anna Seghers, who finally survived the Nazi era in Mexico through many stations of exile, that she had returned from ‘nature-like landscapes’; ibid. 38).¹¹² Honigmann interprets this saying in reference to Frank Thieß’s quote mentioned above that those returning from the countries of exile had watched the German tragedy from comfortable box seats (ibid.). in doing so, she expresses that the writers of the “inner exile” were both ignorant of the political events in Germany and not empathetic to the exiled writers. Her comment on Thieß, “den nun wirklich keiner mehr

¹¹² Honigmann does not indicate the source for her quotation at this point, but it probably comes from the collected letters.

kennt” (whom no one really knows anymore; *ibid.*) makes it clear that for Honigmann it is no loss that Thieß, as a synonym for a group that did not sufficiently resist the Nazi regime, no longer belongs to the canon of German-language literature. In sum, Honigmann’s speech on the occasion of the awarding of the Langgässer Prize thus not only reflects her own relationship to Langgässer. It also critically examines the collective memory of the writers of the “inner emigration.” In contrast to other speeches, political memory does not play a significant role in “Jüdisches Schicksal?” but Honigmann’s speech is revealing with respect to the cultural dimension of memory.

As a manifestation of cultural memory, Cordelia Edvardson’s novel forms the beginning of Honigmann’s coming to terms with Langgässer. However, Honigmann also refers to other writers and their letters, essays, and literary works that convey their individual memories: For example, Honigmann compares Langgässer to Edith Stein, a Jewish intellectual born in 1891 who converted to Catholicism in 1922 and entered the Carmelite convent in Cologne in 1933. Drawing on her autobiography, *Aus dem Leben einer jüdischen Familie* (From the Life of a Jewish Family), Honigmann refers to the fact that in 1933 Stein addressed a letter to Pope Pius XII calling on him to break his silence. (*ibid.* 35). Moreover, Honigmann emphasizes that Stein who emigrated from Cologne to the Netherlands is said to have encouraged her convent sister when they were taken for deportation by saying “Komm, wir gehen für unser Volk” (Come, we go for our people; *ibid.*). At this passage, Honigmann highlights Stein’s “Zugehörigkeitsgefühl zum jüdischen Volk” (sense of belonging to the Jewish people, *ibid.*) that could not be more different from Langgässer’s.

As another example for a writer who sought the path to exile, Honigmann names the French writer George Bernanos. Although he was very conservative, the representative of the *Renouveau catholique* Bernanos drew the consequences and went into exile. There, he found “deutliche Worte in seiner Ablehnung, ja Abrechnung sowohl mit dem faschistischen Franco-Regime als auch dem französischen Vichy-Regime” (clear words in his rejection of, indeed reckoning with, both the fascist Franco regime and the French Vichy regime; *ibid.*, 36). Bernanos emigrated in 1938 first to Paraguay and then to Brazil, from where he criticized the Franco regime, Nazi Germany, and the subservience of the Vichy regime and resisted in this way. Honigmann’s strategy, in other words, is to contrast

Langgässer with other writers and their works who lived at the same time and brought with them similar living conditions. On the one hand, Stein was half-Jewish like Langgässer and committed herself to the murdered Jews. On the other hand, Bernanos was a conservative Catholic writer who nevertheless took exile and criticized the fascist regimes in Europe.

Honigmann also cites Bertolt Brecht and his poem “An die Nachgeborenen,”¹¹³ and contrasts it with Langgässer. What is remarkable about this poem is that it is not only a reflection on Brecht’s biography and his time in exile. Shortly before the outbreak of the Second World War, it also represents an important testimony of history, but also reflects on the dark political times in Europe. Honigmann concludes that the difference between Brecht and Langgässer is not only that he went into exile, and she stayed in Berlin, but also the presumably different perceptions of the political and historical events of the two poets (ibid., 37). Summarized, the examples and representations of cultural memory that Honigmann cites thus make it clear that there would have been other opportunities—especially by going into exile—to resist the Nazi regime in Germany and to mobilize against the persecution of Jews in Europe. Honigmann strongly criticizes in her awarding speech the fact that Elisabeth Langgässer never took this path.

“denn es war ein Künstlerleben zwischen Konsens und Konflikt”: Barbara Honigmann’s Speech on the awarding of the Ricarda Huch Prize (October 3, 2015)

The city of Darmstadt has given the Ricarda Huch Prize, which is endowed with 10.000 euro, every three years since 1978 in memory of the German writer. According to the founders, the prize is intended to honor a personality from the arts or literature, science or politics, whose work is determined to a high degree by independent thinking and courageous action. A further criterion for the award is an unqualified commitment to those inalienable humane, emancipatory and liberal principles that arise from European history. The laureate should thus promote the ideals of humanity and international understanding as

¹¹³ Brecht, “An die Nachgeborenen,” 143. Regarding Brecht’s poetry and his political exile, see Speirs, “Introduction,” Karen Leeder’s essay “Those born later read Brecht,” as well as Vrijdaghs, “Ein Gespräch über Bäume.”

values of the historical-cultural identity of European societies. Previous laureates have included Marcel Reich-Ranicki (1981), Siegfried Unseld (1984), Herta Müller (1987), Martin Walser (1990), Ignatz Bubis (1999), and Ferdinand von Schirach (2018).¹¹⁴

Honigmann's literary prize speech for the Ricarda Huch Prize, published as "Wie viel Charakter braucht der Künstler?" ("How much character does the artist need?"), not only follows her speech for the Elisabeth Langgässer Prize in her collection of texts *Unverschämt Jüdisch* (2021). It is also characterized by thematic parallels. As in the other speech, Honigmann also deals here with Huch's personality and reflects on her behavior during the period of National Socialism and later in the Soviet occupation zone. In this way, the author makes connections between her individual memory and the cultural memory inscribed in works such as those of Ricarda Huch and other writers.

Honigmann opens her speech by emphasizing the importance of freedom for Huch ("Wie viel Charakter braucht der Künstler?", 51) and by examining various stages of the writer's life since the 1920s. These include that in 1926 Huch was reluctant to accept her appointment to the Prussian Academy of Arts, because she feared interference with her freedom of thought (*ibid.*). In 1933, Huch followed Heinrich Mann's withdrawal and Alfred Döblin's expulsion, clearly distancing herself from National Socialism.¹¹⁵ John Klappper describes that in her letter of resignation to the president of the Prussian Academy of Arts, the composer Max von Schillings, Huch strongly criticized the new regime. Its national ethos did not correspond to Huch's conception of Germanness. Moreover, she felt that the Nazi regime's use of coercion and brutality, its persecution of dissenters, and its boastful self-importance were "un-German" and a disaster for Germany.¹¹⁶

Because Huch did not choose the path of exile during the Nazi period, literary scholars often treat her in the context of "inner emigration," but it must be noted about her that, unlike other writers who largely retreated from public life into seclusion, Huch made no attempt to hide her convictions during the Third Reich. For instance, she published in

¹¹⁴ N.N., "Ricarda-Huch-Preis." On the motivation for the prize, see also: N.N., "Ricarda-Huch-Preis 2015 an Barbara Honigmann verliehen."

¹¹⁵ Koepcke, *Ricarda Huch*, 248-249; Grimm, "In the Thicket of *Inner Emigration*," 33.

¹¹⁶ Klappper, *Nonconformist Writing in Nazi Germany*, 61.

Swiss publishing houses and secretly collected material on the resistance movement under National Socialism. In contrast to, for example, Langgässer's attitude mentioned above, Huch's attitude is thus not characterized by ambiguities.¹¹⁷

Honigmann emphasizes regarding Huch that she had to endure the "schwierige Situation zwischen Konsens und Konflikt" (difficult situation between consensus and conflict; *ibid.* 57-58). This must have been particularly difficult given the National Socialists' attempts to use Huch for their own purposes and national cultural prestige. These become visible, for example, when Hitler and Goebbels sent her greetings on the occasion of the award of the Raabe Prize of the city of Braunschweig in 1944.¹¹⁸

After the end of the war, Soviet occupation forces in Thuringia made similar attempts to exploit Huch who was then over 80 years old. Cordelia Koepcke notes that the Russians did not lack courtesy and in fact, they even brought food and heating material. There is only one thing they do not want to allow, just like the Americans: that this old woman leaves for the American zone with her daughter and domestic companion, so that the family can reunite.¹¹⁹ After the war, Huch took part in the reconstruction of Germany

¹¹⁷ Grimm, "In the Thicket of *Inner Emigration*," 33.

¹¹⁸ Koepcke, *Ricarda Huch*, 267-268. Koepcke describes the situation surrounding the award ceremony as follows: "Der nächste Tag (der 19. Juli 1944, AS) wird verbracht mit der zu lösenden Aufgabe, auf ein Glückwunschtelegramm Hitlers zu antworten unter Vermeidung der fatalen Formulierungen ‚Mein Führer‘ und ‚Heil Hitler‘. Es gehört zu den Spielarten der Diktatur, daß dem Glückwunsch des mächtigsten Mannes die Anweisung des Reichsministers für Volksaufklärung und Propaganda an die Presse gegenübersteht, des achtzigsten Geburtstages von Ricarda Huch nicht zu gedenken" (*The next day is spent with the task of responding to a congratulatory telegram from Hitler, avoiding the fatal phrases 'Mein Führer' and 'Heil Hitler' It is one of the varieties of dictatorship that the congratulations of the most powerful man are countered by the instruction of the Reich Minister for Popular Enlightenment and Propaganda to the press not to commemorate Ricarda Huch's eightieth birthday; ibid., 268*). John Klapper notes that her critical publications "confirmed her 'undesirable' status in the eyes of the regime, but the authorities were still keen to tolerate most of her publications owing to the propaganda capital to be had from allowing an internationally respected figure to continue to publish" (Klapper, *Nonconformist Writing in Nazi Germany*, 61).

¹¹⁹ Koepcke, *Ricarda Huch*, 274. American troops in Thuringia, where Huch lived after the war ended, were replaced by Soviet occupation forces in July 1945.

as a publicist and collected information for her book on resistance under National Socialism. At the same time, however, she attracted the disapproval of the Soviet military authorities with, for example, a contribution to the commemorative publication of the opening of the university. In 1947, two years before Honigmann's birth, Huch prepared to escape from the Soviet occupation zone during the First German Writers' Congress in Berlin from October 4-8. She succeeded in escaping, but in a severely weakened condition, and she died on November 17, 1947.

In her award speech, Honigmann shares her individual memories of the GDR period, highlighting the difficulties of the relationship between political consensus and conflict, artistic style, character, and propaganda. For her as an artist, this debate was not only of a theoretical nature, but of a practical one, with the constant danger of coming into conflict with the regime.¹²⁰ This balancing act between complete conformity and conflict cost Honigmann considerable energy (ibid. 55). Furthermore, referring to a phrase from Huch's literary-historical work in two volumes, *Die Romantik* (1899, 1901),¹²¹ she describes her clique of young, orientation-seeking artists in the GDR as a "kleinen furchtlosen Trupp" (small fearless troop; ibid. 57). Regarding the works that she and her friends received, Honigmann emphasizes the reading of the early Romantics and paintings of Caspar David Friedrich and Philip Otto Runge. Honigmann insists that what they had in common was the "Gefühl der Unzugehörigkeit zur Gesellschaft, der Isolation in ihr, der vorsichtigen Opposition zu ihr" (feeling of not belonging to society, of isolation in it, of cautious opposition to it; ibid.). The similarity, in other words, is that just as the early Romantics sought

¹²⁰ In her literary award speech at the awarding ceremony of the above-mentioned Kleist Prize, published under the title "Das Schiefe, das Ungraziöse, das Unmögliche, das Unstimmige" in *Das Gesicht wiederfinden* (151-165), Honigmann gives a more concrete account of how the GDR regime influenced her work as a playwright. For example, the production of a double staging of Kleist's *Prinz von Homburg* and *Der zerbrochene Krug*, titled "Abend für Heinrich von Kleist – Dichter in Preußen," was canceled after a single performance because the production and Kleist's critique of the Prussian Empire alluded in too many ways to conditions in the GDR. Using the euphemistic language of the GDR regime, Honigmann therefore writes that the production was not banned, but it was cancelled and affected Honigmann's professional career to the extent that she was not fired, but only never rehired (Honigmann, *Das Gesicht wiederfinden*, 157).

¹²¹ Huch, "Die Romantik;" Koepcke, *Ricarda Huch*, 116-121.

to break with earlier ideals and forms of art, Honigmann also sought to resist art idealized in the GDR.

Honigmann takes up the phrase “small fearless troop” several times in her speech constructing three levels of time in which artists distinguished themselves through nonconformity: first, the early Romantics, who opposed the ideals of Weimar Classicism; second, Huch, who opposed the Nazi regime and later the Soviet occupiers; and third, Honigmann herself, who opposed the ideals in the GDR: “Die klassischen Ideale, diesmal des Marxismus, waren längst in sich zusammengefallen, und wir (Honigmann und ihre Clique, AS) konnten bei Texten von Lenin vor Lachen ebenso unter den Stühlen liegen, wie die Frühromantiker bei Schillers ‘Glocke’” (The classical ideals, this time of Marxism, had long since collapsed, and we could lie under our chairs laughing at text by Lenin as much as the early Romantics could at Schiller’s ‘The Bell;’ *ibid.*). Honigmann reveals that she saw through the artificially maintained values in the GDR and found the government’s efforts ridiculous. Laughing at texts by Lenin must have been an extraordinary provocation at the time.

Honigmann’s experiences and those of her circle of artists are, in terms of memory, at the interface of a social or collective memory, since several individuals share them, and they were certainly formative for their identity. However, the author also draws further parallels between the ways Nazi rule and the socialist regime in the GDR affected artists. Many of them would have left this country, “das auch noch in jedem Detail des täglichen Lebens von Ideologie beherrscht war” (which was also still dominated by ideology in every detail of daily life; *ibid.*, 55). Honigmann also recognizes another similarity in the treatment of the artists who remained in the GDR: Parallel to the mutual lack of understanding between the intellectuals who remained in Germany during the Nazi era, who claimed for themselves a state of “inner emigration,” and those who went into exile and returned after the war, there was also a mutual lack of understanding after reunification. Both sides accused each other of not having found the right way to deal with the socialist regime in the GDR (*ibid.*, 55). Thus, Honigmann again refers to the theme of “inner emigration,” which she also critically questions in the Langgässer Prize speech analyzed above.

and commits you to loyal cooperation in the national and cultural tasks assigned to the Academy according to its statutes in the sense of the changed historical situation
Yes – No (please cross out where not applicable)

Name: _____ City and date _____

Honigmann continues that this was not Benn's only ingratiation with the Nazi regime, but rather one of several. She ironically describes Benn as a "moderner Dichter" (modern poet; *ibid.*, 52) and—without explicitly identifying the sources—presents more of Benn's writings that reflect his commitment to the Nazi regime. Honigmann criticizes that Benn understands National Socialism as historically determined, justifies its victims, and later even propagates chastisements of the white race. Moreover, Benn would have adapted even more to the new regime when he publicly denounced the emigrants, calling them cowardly for evading the establishment of the Third Reich (*ibid.*, 52). Benn's statements quoted in Honigmann's speech and his commitment to National Socialism make it even less comprehensible to Honigmann that, after all, Benn wrote ten years after the end of the Second World War, "Man muß als Künstler nicht nur Talent, sondern auch Charakter haben, tapfer sein" (As an artist you must have not only talent but also character, be brave; *ibid.*, 53). Honigmann interprets Benn's statement as meaning that it takes artistic courage not to write in a pleasing way. In practice, this means breaking conventions and thus exposing oneself to the incomprehension of the audience. However, Honigmann strongly doubts that the courage to write unconventional art automatically leads to bravery in life. On the contrary, she sees the courage to break conventions in art as something that must be distinguished from an artist's real life and political actions (*ibid.*).

As another example of an artist devoted to a political regime, Honigmann cites the poet Johannes R. Becher. He was a member of the KPD and became chairman of the *Bund Proletarisch-Revolutionärer Schriftsteller* in 1928. In 1933, Becher went into exile first to France, then to the Soviet Union. After returning to Germany in 1945, Becher became an SED politician, Minister of Culture, and the first president of the *Kulturbund* of the GDR: Parallel to the likewise expressionist poet Benn, Honigmann sees Becher's artistic nadir in the period when he produced the most propaganda art (*ibid.*, 54). Honigmann claims that,

especially during his time in Moscow and later as a politician in the GDR, Becher put himself most at the service of a totalitarian ideology.

Honigmann contrasts the two Expressionists with Ricarda Huch as a nonconformist writer and literary role model: Not only did Huch, refuse to sign Benn's declaration of loyalty, and resign from the Prussian Academy in the same year. She also expressed solidarity with Jews who had to leave Germany, calls their decision right and criticizes the Nazi regime.

In summary, Honigmann describes in her speech essential works, but also stations and events in Ricarda Huch's life, remembering an extraordinary writer. However, she also takes Huch as an opportunity to describe in her own experiences what it meant for her to be an artist in the GDR. On the other hand, Honigmann criticizes in her speech that autocratic regimes try to use artists, but also artists like Gottfried Benn and Johannes R. Becher, who voluntarily put themselves in the service of totalitarian regimes.

CHAPTER FOUR

BARBARA HONIGMANN AS A GERMAN-JEWISH WRITER

In her literary prize speeches, Honigmann expresses her own self-image as a German-Jewish author who lives a “double life,” so to speak, between her German and Jewish identities. She points out literary influences, but also gives insights into how she herself found Jewishness. In this chapter, therefore, I will examine Honigmann’s selected literary award speeches in terms of their discourses of a German-Jewish literature.

Honigmann concludes her speech on the awarding of the Jeanette Schocken Prize by critically addressing the common sense that the works of literature could do nothing against injustice and violence. Despite the objections of skeptics, she is certain of one thing, and that is that we as humans can distinguish between right and wrong. Honigmann concludes her speech by saying that art does allow us to identify with the characters and stories it invents, and citing Emanuel Levinas: “Die Kunst besteht darin, das Gesicht wiederzufinden.” Fiero argues that Honigmann’s visual comparison of what art can do contains an important component of dialogicity: writers do not write for themselves, but for a reader, and the literary world invites them, as writers, to make indirect or direct contact with readers through literature.¹²³ Conversely, readers can also connect with the writer. The special potential, as I conclude, of Honigmann’s German-Jewish literature consequently consists in gaining insights into her life experiences as a German-Jewish author.

In Honigmann’s literary award speech “Jüdisches Schicksal?” for the Elisabeth Langgässer Prize, it is striking that she conspicuously speaks of her Jewishness. In doing so, she opposes herself against Langgässer, who was of Jewish descent but did not

¹²³ Fiero, *Zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken*, 186-188. The theme of dialogicity between author and reader was famously reflected in Paul Celan’s Büchner Prize speech “The Meridian” (1960). However, a comparison of Celan’s and Honigmann’s concept of poetics has yet to be undertaken

acknowledge her Jewish ancestry. Moreover, another biographical difference between Honigmann and Langgässer is that Honigmann left the GDR in 1984 and sought self-imposed exile in Strasbourg. “Distinctive to her construction of Jewish German identity is the literary exploration of her particular exile experience,”¹²⁴ as Christina Guenther notes, especially regarding Honigmann’s autofictional work. For Honigmann, the exile “provides the separation, isolation, and ‘inbetweenness’ necessary to establish the fertile ground of difference, the place for self-interpretation and artistic self-representation, the space for exploring her Jewishness.”¹²⁵

Therefore, Honigmann’s life in Strasburg contrasts sharply with her earlier life in the GDR, whose political treatment of Jews and lack of coming to terms with the past were discussed in more detail above. Christina Guenther notes about the GDR that there were no good conditions for practicing Jews to establish Jewish communities there in the long term. Jews had to subordinate themselves to the state doctrine that demanded homogeneity and were forced to lead a dual existence between Jewry and socialism. Consequently, Jews could not practice their religion publicly, but only in private, making Jewry in the GDR invisible, according to Guenther.¹²⁶

Honigmann’s speech also provides further insights into what it means for Honigmann to be Jewish herself: a central point of reference for Honigmann—as well as for many Jews in the Diaspora, as she elaborates—is the importance of the “Lehre” (teaching; “Jüdisches Schicksal,” 40) and the establishment of connections between the contents of the Torah and the Talmud and the present. In this she sees a sense of belonging to the Jewish community. It is a widespread belief that Judaism is primarily based on memory. However, Honigmann disagrees on this, arguing that only learning and knowledge, as the only traditions, can really provide a sense of Jewish belonging. For her, it is important to

¹²⁴ Guenther, “Exile and the construction of identity in Barbara Honigmann’s Trilogy of Diaspora,” 215. Guenther examines in her essay the three works *Roman von einem Kinde* (A Child’s Novel, 1986), *Eine Liebe aus nichts* (A Love Made out of Nothing, 1991), and *Damals, dann und danach* (At that Time, Then, and Afterwards, 1999).

¹²⁵ Ibid., 218. See also, Remmler, “Engendering Bodies of Memory.”

¹²⁶ Guenther, “Exile and the construction of identity in Barbara Honigmann’s Trilogy of Diaspora,” 221. See also Robin Ostow’s “Becoming Strangers.”

emphasize that Judaism lives in the present to which the faith texts refer. Otherwise, Honigmann argues, for all the effort put into culture, rituals, and kosher cooking, it would only be a “Jüdisches Museum” (Jewish museum; *ibid.*, 40). In other words, for Honigmann, Judaism matters primarily in its present.

In a reference to Gershom Scholem, Honigmann criticizes the process of assimilation that went on for several generations before her. In her speech, she states in this regard that several generations of German Jews wasted their energies trying to adapt or assimilate to the German majority society. Historically, however, the Germans were rather indifferent to less than benevolent toward their efforts. Therefore, according to Honigmann, an actual fusion or symbiosis would never have been possible. Gerschom Scholem, whom she quotes in her speech, had also come to this conclusion in his work *Von Berlin nach Jerusalem*. In it, he writes that the capacity for self-deception would have been one of the most central aspects of German-Jewish relations.¹²⁷ The self-deception here refers to the false assumption that it would have been possible to build a society in which Jews could have lived together positively with Germans (*ibid.*, 42-43). Honigmann further elaborates that this assimilation process would not have led to a “jüdische Wiedergeburt” (Jewish rebirth; *ibid.* 47) in Germany in the twentieth century. According to Honigmann, the assimilation efforts of the Jews in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth century could not succeed in Germany. She justifies this with the simultaneous preparation of the Nazi rule, which was accompanied by the political idea of eradicating Jewish identity in Europe. The persecution of Jews by the Nazis did not differentiate between categories such as political orientation, religion, gender, or age. Honigmann considers assimilation a failure because it could not prevent the Holocaust (*ibid.* 47-48).

Honigmann, who was born in 1949, shortly after the end of the Second World War, belongs to a new generation trying to find—outside of Germany—its Jewish identity. She

¹²⁷ The theme of assimilation is also raised in the short story “Doppeltes Grab” (*Double Grave*) from *Roman von einem Kinde*, in which Honigmann describes an encounter with Gershom and Fania Scholem in early 1980s East Berlin (Guenther, “Exile and the construction of identity,” 220-221).

describes in her speech that the Jewish rebirth did not take place in Germany, but in countries like Israel, the United States of America and France. According to Honigmann, the identity of Jews born after the Holocaust is characterized especially by the search for Jewish identity, but also by the innovative ways of these younger generations to live their faith (*ibid.*, 48).¹²⁸

In summary, Honigmann's self-image as a German-Jewish writer can be described as follows: her Jewishness is, on the one hand, strongly oriented toward the present.¹²⁹ In her examination of Jewish texts, she makes references to the present, which are also reflected in the fact that Honigmann repeatedly traces meanings of Hebrew texts in her speeches. On the other hand, Honigmann speaks out strongly against an assimilated Judaism. She not only criticizes Elisabeth Langgässer's path into "inner exile," as explained above, but also uses her own biography to show how necessary the path into exile can be in order to escape and resist a totalitarian regime.¹³⁰ Ultimately, her literary prize speech is also an affirmation of Judaism, when Honigmann—here the titular question of the speech is revealed—says that she is Jewish or elaborates: "Natürlich weiß ich auch nicht genau,

¹²⁸ Guenther states regarding Honigmann's exile in France: "Honigmann's engagement with Judaism intensifies her feeling of spiritual exile or alienation and undermines any possibility of assimilation within the GDR of the 1980s. . . . Her exile ends, in effect, with her commitment to an authentic Jewish existence, defined not in terms of where it is lived, i.e., Germany or even Israel, but as a place of spiritual depth and community" (*ibid.*, 222).

¹²⁹ This orientation towards the present is worth emphasizing precisely because it cannot be taken for granted. In contrast to other Jewish authors, Doria Beth Killian, for example, refers to Dischereit and Lustiger, Honigmann's understanding of Jewishness does not derive from her Jewish ancestors. As Honigmann describes in autobiographical texts as "Damals, dann und danach" or "Von meinem Urgroßvater, meinem Großvater, meinem Vater und von mir," her ancestors had virtually turned away from their Jewishness in their efforts to assimilate to the German society. Instead, Honigmann constantly recreates her identity detached from the past (Killian, "And You Shall Tell Your Children," 73, 184).

¹³⁰ Guenther makes a similar observation about Honigmann's prose, which she analyzes: "Literary self-representation undoubtedly signifies for Honigmann the act of bearing witness, whereby she affirms her connection with Jewish survivor literature. Her autobiographical prose can certainly be read in the tradition of literary resistance to Jewish cultural obliteration, to the National Socialist's attempt to murder all Jews and erase all memory of them" (Guenther, "Exile and the construction of identity," 225). It should be added to this list that Honigmann's literature also offers resistance to the GDR regime and the memory of the lack of coming to terms with the past in East Germany.

was ‘jüdisches Schicksal’ ist, aber ich denke, es wäre eines, in dem man seine Zugehörigkeit zum jüdischen Volk annimmt, notfalls auch verteidigt” (Of course, I do not know exactly what “Jewish destiny” is either, but I think it would be one in which one accepts one’s belonging to the Jewish people, defends it if necessary; *ibid.*, 48).

The remarks on Gottfried Benn’s understanding of art expressed in 1955 bring Honigmann to the titular question “Wie viel Charakter braucht der Künstler?” (How much character does the artist need?; *ibid.* 53) of the third speech, I analyzed in this thesis. Honigmann answers this question for herself by arguing that a good artist must be good not only artistically but also morally. Of great writers, whom Honigmann admires for their works and who play an important role in her life, it is important that they not be failures or villains as individuals either. She doubts that an artist who serves a criminal political system can be a truly great artist. Honigmann sees an example of the incongruity of art and political orientation in the biography and work of Gottfried Benn. Regarding his poems, which she describes as cold and cynical, she states that an inhumanity, which is a prerequisite for Antisemitism, can be identified from them (*ibid.*, 53). Honigmann expresses a strong lack of understanding for the fact that “Schriftsteller und Künstler . . . sich tyrannischen Systemen an den Hals werfen” (writers and artists . . . throw themselves at tyrannic systems; *ibid.*, 54), and asks why those who “die Hymnen auf Hitler und Oden an Stalin verfassen” (write hymns to Hitler and odes to Stalin; *ibid.*) do so. In her speech, she poses the rhetorical question of whether it is genuine identification with political ideas, the desire to participate in a “great cause,” or the convenience of not always critically engaging with a system. Honigmann’s reasons in this regard make it clear that there is really no legitimate reason for her to be in the service of a regime of violence (*ibid.*).

In contrast, Honigmann describes Ricarda Huch’s life and work as exemplary, as she always tried to preserve a freedom. She concludes her speech by affirming that it is also important for her today not to allow herself to be politically appropriated. Regarding being a writer in the twenty-first century, Honigmann maintains that it is still difficult not to be politically appropriated. These attempts, she says, have taken different forms than in

the dictatorships of the previous century. Instead of state organizations promoting or restricting publication, Honigmann says the forms today are more innocuous and subtle. Honigmann does not elaborate on what exactly these forms are, but conceivable ones might include political alignments and reading circles of publishers, work grants from or invitations to private organizations, or interpretations that read a particular political interpretation into texts. Therefore, according to Honigmann, “es erfordert noch immer Mut, sich zwischen Konsens und Konflikt das eigenständige Denken und die innere und nicht zuletzt auch die äußere Freiheit zu bewahren” (it still required courage to maintain independent thought and inner, not to mention outer, freedom between consensus and conflict;” *ibid.* 60-61). According to Honigmann, German-Jewish literature must also escape this political appropriation by pointing out and openly addressing political and ideological abuses.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

One of the central concerns of this thesis was to examine a hitherto largely unexplored text type in the work of the German-Jewish author Barbara Honigmann: literary award speeches. I have argued that these have an important significance in Honigmann's oeuvre. As I showed in my introduction, literary prize speeches are not only a ritualized part of literary award ceremonies, but they also have performative functions such as acknowledging or remembering namesakes. In her speeches, Honigmann shares individual memories, but also reflects on social and political issues. In addition, she also discusses her own understanding of German-Jewish literature.

As a framework for analysis, I introduced the four formations of individual, collective, political, and cultural memory in the second chapter and traced the reappraisal of the past in Germany since 1945 for a better understanding. In all three speeches I analyzed in the third chapter, Honigmann provides insights into her individual memory and describes biographical experiences. She also refers to formations of cultural memory, for example, when she refers to works by other authors who are the prizes' namesakes or of importance for Honigmann. On the one hand, the formation of collective memory became particularly clear in Honigmann's accounts of her clique of artists in the GDR. On the other hand, this formation also emerged when she speaks about collective ways of coming to terms with the past, such as the trend of several German intellectuals to consider themselves as victims rather than collaborators after the Second World War and to refer to an "inner exile." The formation of political memory became particularly visible in the thematization of political violence and the imposition of totalitarian ideologies. Methodologically, the analyses have shown that the Aleida Assmann's four formations of memory offer a useful framework for analyzing Honigmann's literary award speeches, though the formations may be represented to different extents in the texts. speeches.

In the fourth chapter, I examined Honigmann's literary award speeches in terms of their discourses of a German-Jewish literature. Honigmann makes the function that literature should have clear in her speech "Das Gesicht wiederfinden." This function is to establish a connection between the reader and the author and to provide insights into unknown

realities. Honigmann emphasizes the significance of exile for her as a German-Jewish author in her speech on the Langgässer prize “Jüdisches Schicksal?” and distances herself from the namesake. Despite her Jewish ancestors, Langgässer spent the Nazi era in Germany, claiming an “inner emigration,” while her daughter barely survived the Holocaust. Honigmann criticizes the process of assimilation of Jews in Germany, which spans several generations before her, and at the same times clarifies that her Jewishness exists in relation to the present. In her speech “Wie viel Charakter braucht der Künstler?” Honigmann finally comes to the assessment that good artists must distinguish themselves not only through their work, but also through moral values. She criticizes poets who place themselves in the service of political regimes and appeals for preserving one’s artistic and moral freedom.

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