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**ARTICLE****Foreword**

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Writing about the family is a tradition as enduring as storytelling itself, with the origins of Germanic family stories traceable to ‘Götter- und Heldensagen der Antike, den Erzählungen der Bibel, den Liedern der altisländischen Edda oder der epischen Dichtung des Mittelalters’ (Neuschäfer 11). Representations of the family in literature persist throughout the modern era as well: in the ‘Liebes-, Heimat-, und Familienroman[e]’ of the nineteenth century (Neuschäfer 12), and in some of the most noteworthy texts of the twentieth, such as Mann’s *Buddenbrooks*, Roth’s *Radetzky*, or von Doderer’s *Die Merowinger oder Die totale Familie*, a novel that Sigrid Löffler characterizes as ‘der ultimative Familienroman’ (18). Families are expansive sources of material for literary imaginings through the ages, but it proves difficult to classify them all within a single genre, considering the breadth of works that can be characterised as ‘family stories’. In German-language literature, the categories *Erinnerungsliteratur*, *Familienroman*, *Generationenroman*, *Familienchronik* and *Familiensaga* are often used interchangeably (Neuschäfer 13) – something that is perhaps problematic, as differences exist among them all. Nevertheless, these genre categories reveal much about the thematic underpinnings of family stories, which are wrapped up in processes of memory, intergenerational transmission and the ways in which families chronicle personal and collective histories alike.

The present study is certainly not the first to consider various aspects of the family novel, which raises the question: if the *Familienroman* is both inherently and inevitably personal but also so inclusive that it encompasses nearly all works of literature to some degree, why do we categorize some stories as *Familienromane* and return again and always to this genre? Löffler points to the flexibility of the family novel, which is ‘bequem wie ein abgetragener Pullover, und wie ein solcher ist er flexibel und dehnbar und hält die Lesenseele warm’ (18). Writing about families is, as she puts it, a way to couch ‘gegenwartskritische, ethnische oder sozialpolitische Fragestellungen’ in something ‘familiar’ (18). These contexts – political, cultural, historical – provide a backdrop for the *Familienroman*, giving the families within it something to react to and against. Consequently, these stories can tell us as much about families as they do about history, and vice versa: the family is a reflection of the moment in which it exists. Relatedly, the problem with establishing a stable category for family novels may have to do with the corresponding myriad iterations of family itself, an idea that Neuschäfer terms the ‘Unschärfe des Familienbegriffs’ (15). Not only have contemporary notions of family evolved in response to more inclusive models of parents and parenting, historical conceptions of the family were also often in flux, exemplified, for instance, in the rise of the bourgeoisie in Europe, which transformed the ways that parents related to their children and each other:

Während das lateinische 'familia' sich ursprünglich auf eine häusliche Gemeinschaft bezog, bildete sich seit dem 17. Jahrhundert das Leitbild der bürgerlichen Familie als Lebensgemeinschaft von Eltern und Kindern heraus. In Anpassung an die sozialen, kulturellen und wirtschaftlichen Rahmenbedingungen definierte sich diese Familienform durch eine geschlechtsspezifische Arbeits- und Rollenteilung, bevor sie unter dem Einfluss der Romantik mit einem Anspruch auf Intimisierung und Emotionalisierung verbunden wurde, welcher sich im bürgerlichen Familienbild bis heute erhalten hat. (Neuschäfer 15)

*Familienromane* can give us a way to understand changes in the world: the family distills shifting sociocultural and historical realities to a granular domestic level, rendering them accessible, resonant, intimate.

In the study *Die interkulturelle Familie: Literatur- und sozialwissenschaftliche Perspektiven* (2012), Michaela Holdenried asks, 'Kann eine literarische Gattung deutsch sein?', indicating a particularly German(ic) interest in family novels and the reflections that they encourage (13). Indeed, the 2011 article 'Und wieder ein Familienroman' reports that several authors of German-language family novels have been honoured with the prestigious *Deutscher Buchpreis*. Half of the German Book Prize winners since 2005 have been authors of family novels: Julia Franck (German; one of the interviewees in this project), Eugen Ruge (German; raised in East Germany), Arno Geiger (Austrian), Uwe Tellkamp (German; raised in East Germany) and Melinda Nadj Abonji (Serbian-Swiss). While the respective histories of Germany and Austria in the twentieth century are certainly not identical, in the very broadest terms, they can – at the very least – both be described as cataclysmic, and these novels all employ the family as a medium by which postwar historical and mnemonic caesurae are explored. German-language writers access these ruptured histories as they draw from the past to create new stories for the present: 'Die Autoren blicken zurück, ein Trend, der sich auch insgesamt auf dem deutschen Buchmarkt abzeichnet' ('Familienroman'). The great literary critic Marcel Reich-Ranicki perhaps best described the state of the German family novel in a commentary he delivered in 2005 at the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Thomas Mann's death: 'Der noch unlängst von manchen Kritikern verspottete Familien- und Generationenroman ist wieder modern [...] Die alte Familiensaga, einst von Thomas Mann aus dem neunzehnten Jahrhundert ins zwanzigste hinübergerettet und kräftig modernisiert, lebt auch noch im einundzwanzigsten Jahrhundert, in Deutschland zumal und in Österreich' (qtd. in Niedermeier 3). These German-language *Familienromane* help explain the instabilities and transformations of the previous century, and the renewal of the genre evidences popular desires to engage in conversations about families and the revelatory potential of the memories that they possess.

This special edition, 'Reading Between the Bloodlines: Reflections on the German-Language Family Story', takes a new look at these family novels that are currently experiencing renewed interest in public and academic discussions alike. Existing scholarship has considered the family story as a genre,<sup>1</sup> or examined one of its aspects, such as the

<sup>1</sup> Some examples of texts that consider generational transmission of family stories: Ariane Eichenberg. *Familie – Ich – Nation: Narrative Analysen zeitgenössischer Generationenromane*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009; Anna Rutka. *Erinnern und Geschlecht in zeitgenössischen deutschen Familien- und Generationenromanen*. Lublin: Wydawnictwo KUL, 2011; Carmen Simon. *Der österreichische Familien- und Generationenroman nach 2000*. Diplomarbeit, Universität Wien, 2011; Markus Neuschäfer. *Das bedingte Selbst. Familie, Identität und Geschichte im zeitgenössischen Generationenroman*. Berlin: Epubli, 2013; Julian Reidy. *Rekonstruktion und Enteroisierung: Paradigmen des 'Generationenromans' in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur*. Bielefeld: Aisthesis Verlag, 2013; Thomas Martinec and Claudia Nitschke, eds. *Familie und Identität in der deutschen Literatur*. Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2009.

relationship between fathers and daughters,<sup>2</sup> the experience of motherhood,<sup>3</sup> the role of families during a single period,<sup>4</sup> or the ways in which specific authors have contributed to the genre.<sup>5</sup> This project, on the other hand, reconstitutes the intimacy of the family story via a series of interviews with authors of *Familienromane*. In 2014, an article in the *New Yorker* magazine highlighted the longstanding public fascination with author-interviews, suggesting that these kinds of conversations scratch away at the surface of a story as they seek profound, difficult meaning:

[Interviewers are interested in exploring] how one evaluates a life, the getting of wisdom, facing death, the meaning of love, whether a book ever changed the course of history [...] we read or listen to author interviews for the same reason we read novels: to find out how to live. But where novels are often opaque in their wisdom, declining to tell us how to live as plainly as we might like, the interview offers clarity.

Similarly, as the author-scholar dialogues in this project have come to show, family is a subject that leads to open and fruitful self-reflection alongside meditations on the larger issues of German and Austrian histories, culture and recent literature. Conversing about one's own, someone else's, or a fictional family means almost always sharing 'familiar' stories. Our identities are shaped by family – its structure, absence, security, dysfunction – and correspondingly, reading and writing about ourselves is a de facto exploration of how families make us who we are.

For this project, we interviewed contemporary German and Austrian writers to find out why and how they write family novels. Each interview corresponds to an academic essay and all contributions reflect on the historical, cultural and intellectual backdrops against which the topic of 'family' has developed over the last century. The result is an imaginative exchange between authors and scholars, in which compelling questions are discussed: What makes family novels popular among German-language readers? Why do so many (German-language) authors write about family-related topics, and to what extent are their works autobiographical? How do these works reflect changes in cultural and political realities of the postwar era? What is the family's place in contemporary German literature and culture?

The popularity of the German-language family story means that there are many from which to choose for a project of this nature. Consequently, each essay in this collection was selected to represent a distinct theme that is frequently considered in German-language literature (though the list of themes considered in these analyses is not exhaustive). The result is a sampling of current discussions vis-à-vis identity and historical reckoning that reveals how German-language authors attempt to come to terms with familiar pasts. Simone Costagli's essay 'Die kollektive Autobiografie. Familienerinnerung und Familienromane' first provides a comprehensive survey of the *Familienroman* genre

<sup>2</sup> Ingrid Walsoe-Engel. *Fathers and Daughters. Patterns of Seduction in Tragedies by Gryphius, Lessing, Hebbel and Kretz*. Columbia: Camden House, 1993.

<sup>3</sup> Alexandra Hill. *Playing House. Motherhood, Intimacy and Domestic Spaces in Julia Franck's Fiction*. Bern: Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag Der Wis, 2012.

<sup>4</sup> Elisabeth Wågghäll Nivre. *Women and Family Life in Early Modern German Literature*. Rochester: Camden House, 2003. Dr Simone Costagli, one of the contributors to this project, co-edited the 2010 collection *Deutsche Familienromane. Literarische Genealogien und Internationaler Kontext*, which discusses changing patterns and themes in German-language family novels since 2000 and assesses how the family performs in aesthetic terms.

<sup>5</sup> Elizabeth Snyder Hook. *Family Secrets and the Contemporary German Novel. Literary Explorations in the Aftermath of the Third Reich*. Rochester: Camden House, 2001.

while paying attention to three popular family novels of the last decade: Julia Franck's *Die Mittagsfrau* (2007), Jenny Erpenbeck's *Heimsuchung* (2007) and Eugen Ruge's *Im Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011).<sup>6</sup> The interview with Julia Franck explores family memory in *Die Mittagsfrau* and the degree to which Franck's writings are inspired by her own autobiography. Next, Sandra Kohler's "'Prägende Bindungen'" in Tanja Dückers' Novels: Family Memory and Contemporary Culture' investigates the intergenerational transmission of family stories from grandparents to the *dritte Generation* of their grandchildren. Through a close reading of Dückers' *Spielzone* (1999), *Himmelskörper* (2002) and *Der längste Tag des Jahres* (2006), Kohler considers the transmission of family stories and how unresolved memories persist to become reanimated in subsequent generations. In her interview, Dückers speaks about the changing image of family in the twenty-first century and discusses Kohler's titular notion of 'prägende Bindungen' in the conveyance of transgenerational memory. The essay 'Writing as Return: A Commentary on Doron Rabinovici's "Nach Wilna"' by Hillary Hope Herzog and Todd Herzog meditates on Rabinovici's Jewish-Austrian identity and how his family's placelessness during and after the Second World War corresponds to an incomplete understanding of its collective story. The interview with Rabinovici similarly reflects on how his Jewish-Austrian identity influences his work as an author and academic historian. Further, his text 'Nach Wilna', which was presented in conjunction with the 2014 theatrical production *Die letzten Zeugen* in Vienna's Burgtheater, is also printed in full in this collection. Next, Anna Souchuk's essay 'Skeletons in the Basement? Family (and) Politics in Josef Haslinger's *Das Vaterspiel*' examines the family story in *Das Vaterspiel* (2000) as a metaphor for shifting political realities in 1980s and 1990s Austria, an issue that Haslinger tackled many times over in his essay collections *Politik der Gefühle* (1987) and *Klasse Burschen* (2001). Souchuk's interview with Haslinger asks him to consider the father-son relationship in *Das Vaterspiel* and how the third generation in Austria should relate and respond to issues of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. And finally, Julia Gruber's essay "'Ich bin die Mischung.'" Performing Family Identity, Memory, and Hybridity in the Works of Eva Menasse' examines the construction of family identity through storytelling in Vienna (2005) and considers how evolving family narratives in Menasse's novel inform the self-construction and -performance of her female protagonist. In her analysis of Menasse's later novel *Quasikristalle* (2013), Gruber discusses the differences between German and Austrian identities, suggesting that protagonist Xane Molin's familial Jewish-Austrian identity both compels her move to Germany, where in Berlin she experiences a sense of liberation and self-exploration vis-à-vis the Austrian past, but ultimately also calls her back to Vienna as an older woman at the conclusion of the novel (a move that, Gruber asserts, was Menasse's way of convincing herself that 'Vienna might not be so bad after all'). Gruber's interview with Menasse reveals the intersections of family (hi-)story and place – specifically the places of Vienna and Berlin – and explores Menasse's relationship to her own hybrid identity as an Austrian living in Germany.

The German journalist and author Sabine Bode summarized the collective experience of the *dritte Generation* in Germany and Austria: 'From the outside, the third generation has had it all – prosperity, access to education, peace and stability [...] Yet they grew up with a lot of unspoken secrets, felt the silent burdens in their families' ('Sins'). Indeed, the authors considered in this study all write about this third generation, and their protagonists are motivated – through the discovery of a family artefact such as a letter, photo, even a human

<sup>6</sup> Franck and Ruge won the German Book Prize for the novels that Costagli considers in his essay.

being, stashed in the hidden places of the attic or basement – to investigate their families in the hope of learning more about personal and collective histories. Further, the interviews contained in this collection highlight these writers' own political and social engagements, which are filtered through the literary families they create, rendering them accessible to a broad audience. The family stories featured here, together with the interviews and essays that analyse them, position the family as a transmittive medium with dual potentials: families can provide revelations about a forgotten past, but they can also thwart resolution in the present by holding tight to their secrets. Memories accumulate within the family like a residue, and through these authors' fictional explorations, the myriad ways for negotiating the past are revealed. For better or worse, our families, whatever their shape, bring us into the world. Reading about the family moves us to reflection, compels us to ask about the stories that our own families possess, and shows us the extent to which present experience is shaped by familiar pasts.

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Interview with Tanja Dückers: conducted in March 2014 by Julia Gruber via e-mail; questions provided by Sandra Kohler.

Interview with Julia Franck: conducted in March 2014 by Julia Gruber in Berlin at the Zimt & Zucker Kaffeehaus; questions provided by Simone Costagli.

Interviews with Josef Haslinger: conducted in December 2012 and January 2013 by Anna Souchuk via e-mail.

Interviews with Eva Menasse: conducted in July 2012 by Julia Gruber in Vienna at Café Ansari, and in September 2015 via written correspondence.

Interview with Doron Rabinovici: conducted in July 2012 by Julia Gruber in Vienna at Café Korb.

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