
ARTICLE – RETHINKING MINOR LITERATURES

Not So Little Literatures: Reading Barbara Honigmann With (and Against) Deleuze and Guattari

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Although a number of critics have applied the term ‘minor literature’ to the German Jewish writer Barbara Honigmann, this article proceeds on the assumption that the last word may not have been spoken on how it might be possible and desirable to apply Deleuze and Guattari to that author. In it, I extend the discourse established by Deleuze and Guattari beyond the colonial context and apply it to Barbara Honigmann in her capacity as a Jewish writer. This also involves reading what Honigmann writes about three other Jewish women writers both in the light of, and as a critique of, that Deleuze-Guattarian discourse, occasionally going back to Kafka in the process. And the conclusion is that, while Deleuze and Guattari can prove useful in drawing attention to certain traits of literatures produced by members of minorities writing as such, the dangers involved in trying to reclaim pejorative sobriquets remain incalculable, and that terms such as ‘minor literature’ are therefore probably best avoided when discussing major authors like Barbara Honigmann.

Tweetable Abstract: In what sense can Jewish women writers be called ‘minor’? Robert Gillett explores this question with reference to Barbara Honigmann, a justly celebrated contemporary German Jewish woman writer, and in sometimes lively debate with Deleuze and Guattari on Kafka.

I

Of all the authors who have ever written in the German language, none can with less justification be said to be ‘minor’ than Franz Kafka. Almost uniquely, his place in the problematical canon of ‘world literature’ is absolutely secure. And seen in terms of the proportion of primary to secondary literature over time, the Kafka industry continues to dwarf all others. So when Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari give their contribution to that industry the title ‘pour une littérature mineure’, they are either being ironic or perverse (Deleuze & Guattari 1975). By and large, however, literary critics and theorists have not been much interested in finding out which, and why. Instead, they tend to sever all links between ‘minor literature’ and Kafka and seek to establish whether particular literatures, texts or their authors fulfil the definitions

and criteria provided by Deleuze and Guattari (Chin 2016; Paranjape 2011; Robertson 2010; Sarnou 2014; Schaefer 2016).

For those who care about Kafka, though, this is a highly problematic procedure. For them, the inapplicability of a theory to the person it was meant to explain is not a venial accident, but grounds for disqualification (Jamison 2003, 31). Rony Klein is particularly scathing in this regard. 'Cette théorie', he says, 'manque de rigueur dans sa définition même'.¹ The problem begins at the level of language. It is not just that Deleuze and Guattari are wrong about Kafka's German. Their translation of Kafka's 'kleine Literaturen' (literally 'small literatures') as 'une littérature mineure' ('a minor literature'), makes it possible for them to include in the term precisely what is excluded from the German – namely minority contributions, like those of Heine, say, or Kafka himself, to a great literature (Casanova 1999, 200). The constitutive sleight of hand whereby what in Kafka pertained to Yiddish and Czech gets spectacularly misapplied to German has the paradoxical effect of erasing the former almost completely. And tellingly, what in Kafka had been a passing remark expressing something like envy for literatures that do not boast giants like Goethe and therefore appear less hierarchical while escaping the anxiety of influence, becomes in Deleuze and Guattari an untenable generalisation about the inability of minor literatures to bring forth major talents (Kafka 1990, 313–14; Deleuze & Guattari 1975, 31). So when, in an extraordinary aside, Prague German literature and African American literature are seen as comparably 'propres à d'étranges usages mineurs', 'appropriate for strange [...] minor usages' (Deleuze & Guattari 1975, 30; 1986, 17) this raises serious questions about what Deleuze and Guattari are actually doing with the word 'mineur' and the extent to which they are overturning or reinforcing its hegemonic implications.

By their own admission, what interests Deleuze and Guattari – to which they will indeed attach the sobriquet 'minor' – is the revolutionary potential in all literature (Deleuze & Guattari 1975, 48f.). This makes it at least possible to read the title of their Kafka book as a plea for a radical reconsideration of what literature is and does, and their invocation of the unimpeachably canonical Czech German for the purpose as perverse in a specific, strategic sense. In this reading, the use of the word 'étrange' in the phrase quoted above would be the equivalent of 'queer', meaning left of field, surprising, disruptive. This would entail reclaiming the word 'minor' and adumbrating a reverse discourse of power in a way that is familiar from queer and African American studies. At the same time, just as those who seek to reclaim and validate the words 'queer' and 'nigger' are still very far from eradicating the homophobia and the racism that are written into majority culture at its deepest level, so the self-serving hierarchisation implicit in the word 'minor' remains frighteningly potent in literary studies. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the postcolonial context. As a result of colonialism, the literatures of the main colonial languages have been enriched by writing that comes not from the mainstream and the motherland, but from the (formerly) oppressed margins. The position of those producing this literature is very particular, and generally far from comfortable. Moreover, their work is often ignored by the guardians of the colonising culture and confined to a niche regarded as of interest only, precisely, to a minority. It remains one of the enduring scandals of our time that the same applies to what women write when it is confined to the ghetto of 'women's writing'. And I use the word 'ghetto' advisedly, because the paradigm for this kind of marginalisation and what it can lead to is precisely the treatment of Jews. Not surprisingly, those who find themselves in categories thus labelled 'minor' respond with special acuity to Deleuze and Guattari. Which is why, in an era of global post- and neocolonialism, so many critics are inclined to invoke those two resonant names in their discussions of 'minor literature'.

¹ 'This theory lacks rigour in its very definition' (Klein 2018, 78. Unless otherwise stated, all translations are my own.).

Barbara Honigmann is one such critic. The lecture she gave on 12 May 2000 in the context of the fifth anniversary of the Tübingen Guest Lectureship on Poetics bears the title ‘Eine “ganze kleine Literatur” des Anvertrauens’.² The quotation marks in this title have the effect both of acknowledging its filiation and of allowing a doubt to arise about the validity of the term used. In later versions of the text, Honigmann duly references both Kafka and Deleuze and Guattari. The manner in which she does so, however, differs significantly between the publication of the lecture in *Sinn und Form* and the version included in *Das Gesicht wiederfinden* six years later.³ In the former she writes – speaking of the ‘Blüte der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur’ ‘flowering of German-Jewish literature’:

Einer ihrer berühmtesten Vertreter – Franz Kafka – hat den Begriff der ‘kleinen Literatur’ geprägt. Deleuze und Guattari haben diesen Begriff in die Literaturwissenschaft eingeführt, mit dem sie im Sinne Kafkas die Unmöglichkeit vom Schreiben einer Minderheit in der Sprache der Mehrheit charakterisieren und darlegen, wie daraus eine ‘nicht etablierte’ Schreibweise, eine ‘marginale’ Literatur entstehen kann.⁴

The later version is not only syntactically more demanding, it has also moved a fatal step away from Kafka and towards Deleuze and Guattari:

Einer ihrer berühmtesten Vertreter hat den Begriff der ‘kleinen Literatur’ für sich in Anspruch genommen, den Deleuze und Guattari dann in die Literaturwissenschaft eingeführt haben. Im Sinne Kafkas charakterisieren sie mit diesem Begriff die mehrfache Unmöglichkeit des Schreibens einer Minderheit in der Mehrheitsprache und wie daraus eine ‘nicht etablierte’, eine ‘marginale’ eben eine ‘kleine’ Literatur hervorgehen kann.⁵

The retranslation of the word ‘mineur’ in this last sentence makes unequivocally clear, in case we were in any doubt, that Honigmann’s frame of reference here is indeed Deleuze and Guattari. Yet the very first gesture of her text – a gesture repeated immediately after the passage just quoted – has the effect of pointing up a blind spot that the Frenchmen share with countless other scholars and critics, but which again marks their text out as majoritarian. The first sentence in both versions of Honigmann’s lecture reads: ‘Merkwürdigerweise stehen am Anfang und am Ende der deutsch-jüdischen Literatur die Lebenszeugnisse zweier Frauen.’⁶ From the very outset, then, Honigmann draws attention to, and announces her intention to redress, two constitutive silences in her influential intertext: gender and Jewishness. The position from which she does so is that of a Jewish woman. So the process of identification, which she had been misled by Deleuze and Guattari into attributing to Kafka, is indeed one she applies to herself. Her penultimate paragraph begins: ‘und ich, jetzt, “wo alles vorbei ist”

² ‘Ganz klein’ means literally ‘quite small’, but ‘klein’ is also the word used in the German translation for Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘mineur’. ‘Anvertrauen’ has both ‘trust’ and ‘entrust’ in it.

³ In what is presumably a verbatim transcript of the original lecture (Honigmann 2000), no mention is made either of Kafka or of Deleuze and Guattari.

⁴ ‘One of the most celebrated instances of this – Franz Kafka – coined the term “minor literature”. Deleuze and Guattari introduced the term into literary scholarship, using it in Kafka’s sense to characterise the impossibility for a minority to write in the language of the majority and to show how in the process an “unofficial” way of writing, a “marginal” literature can come into being’ (Honigmann 2000a, 831).

⁵ ‘One of the most celebrated instances of this applied the term “minor literature” to himself, which Deleuze and Guattari then introduced into literary scholarship. They use the term in Kafka’s sense to characterise the multifarious impossibility for a minority to write in the language of the majority and in order to show how in the process an “unofficial”, a “marginal” – i.e. precisely a “minor” literature can come into being’ (Honigmann 2006a, 10).

⁶ ‘Curiously both at the beginning and at the end of German-Jewish literature we have the autobiographical testimonies of two women’ (Honigmann 2000a, 830; 2006a, 7).

[and I, now, “when it is all over”] (Honigmann 2006a, 28). In this essay, then, Honigmann is explicitly inviting us to read her work with, and against, Deleuze and Guattari.

It is an invitation that the secondary literature has not been slow to take up. Christina Guenther, for example, writes as follows:

Placing herself in the tradition of Glückel von Hameln, Rahel Varnhagen and Anne Frank, Honigmann thus affirms the presence of a deterritorialized minority literature (Deleuze and Guattari) written on the margins of two dominant cultures, German and Jewish. (2003, 219).

Susanne Düwell adds:

Honigmann versteht hier das Konzept der kleinen jüdischen Literatur mit einem geschlechtsspezifischen Index, wenn sie die Literatur von jüdischen Frauen in Anlehnung an Deleuze/Guattari als eine kleine Literatur innerhalb einer kleinen Literatur bezeichnet.⁷

And in her very last paragraph, Pietra Fiero explicitly asks about the extent to which Honigmann actually matches one of the criteria set out by Deleuze and Guattari:

Wenn wir Deleuze und Guattaris dritten Punkt betrachten, in kleinen Literaturen bestehe die Tendenz, dass allen Äußerungen kollektiver Wert zukomme, muss man allerdings feststellen, dass Honigmann mit Sicherheit nicht für die Mehrheit der heutzutage auf Deutsch schreibenden Juden spricht, da ihre Perspektive durch ihre Rückkehr ins gelebte Judentum geprägt ist, die nur wenige mit ihr teilen.⁸

This last passage, though, is not without its problems. It is not clear, for example, what is meant by ‘collective’ here, nor how and to what extent Jews writing in German might be said to constitute such a collective. The difference of degree between having collective value and taking on the role of spokesperson means that it is certainly not necessary to do the latter in order to achieve the former. And surely someone who has been exposed in childhood to Jewish culture, even if they do not practise the Jewish religion, has by that fact a great deal more in common, and is thus better able to establish commonality, with a practising Jew, than with someone whose culture is Christian or Muslim, irrespective of their religious practice. Furthermore, despite the reference to perspective, it is clear that the level on which these remarks operate is that of brute biography rather than literary practice, while the word ‘Äußerungen’ deliberately equivocates between the two. This suggests that the last word may not have been spoken on how it might be possible and desirable to apply Deleuze and Guattari to Barbara Honigmann.

In what follows, I shall be taking up this gauntlet. This will entail extending the discourse established by Deleuze and Guattari beyond the colonial context and applying it to Barbara Honigmann in her capacity as a Jewish writer. It will also involve reading what Honigmann

⁷ ‘Honigmann gives the concept of a minor Jewish literature a gender-specific slant when, following Deleuze and Guattari, she describes the literature of Jewish women as a minor literature within a minor literature’ (Düwell 2008, 231 [note 47]).

⁸ ‘If we consider Deleuze and Guattari’s third point, whereby everything said in a minor literature tends to take on collective value, we would admittedly have to conclude that Honigmann definitely does not speak for the majority of Jews writing in German today, since her perspective is coloured by her return to practising Judaism, which is something only a few share with her’ (Fiero 2008, 198).

writes about three other Jewish women writers both in the light of, and as a critique of, that Deleuze-Guattarian discourse, occasionally going back to Kafka in the process. The conclusion is that, while Deleuze and Guattari can prove useful in drawing attention to certain traits of literatures produced by members of minorities writing as such, the dangers involved in trying to reclaim pejorative sobriquets remain incalculable, and that terms such as 'minor literature' are therefore probably best avoided when discussing major authors like Barbara Honigmann.

II

In what ways, and under what circumstances, then, might a body of literature be said to take on a necessarily collective dimension? The question is perhaps best answered by the analogy of coming out: namely when that body of literature publicly enacts membership of a particular minority. This act presupposes the potential for consequential rejection, even persecution, on the part of the ambient majority. Otherwise it is meaningless. And it instantly interpellates all those who, secretly or otherwise, willingly or not, can envisage themselves as belonging to that same minority. For this to be possible, the minority must be in some sense recognised – it must, in however subterranean a fashion, be established. That is to say, it must have a shared past, however buried. And it helps if there is a community of others that have already expressed their allegiance to that minority – even if that expression was restricted to a handful of likeminded people.

On the cover of *Damals, dann und danach* there is a picture, by Honigmann, of just such a group of likeminded people.⁹ Called 'Mes amies et moi' [My friends and I], it depicts Honigmann herself in the company of four other women. Each of them has in front of her a bilingual text whereby one of the languages depicted, smaller in quantity but larger in print and hence more prominent than the mass of other material around it, is Hebrew. Straddling the middle of the book is a kind of commentary on this picture, in which each of the four women, and the texts in front of them, are given a name and a backstory, and in which both the relationship of the narrator to the group and that of the group to the wider context is discussed (Honigmann 1999, 63–81). The title, 'Meine sephardischen Freundinnen' [My Sephardic friends], is only fully comprehensible to those who are familiar with the fraught cultural history of the Sephardim and the Ashkenazim. But the stories the friends tell each other prominently feature a shared history of persecution. And the meetings of the group need to be carved out of time spent as citizens and mothers.

The second text of this collection bears the title 'Selbstporträt als Jüdin' [Self Portrait as a Jewish Woman] – a title that, like the picture, makes of the whole book an outward acknowledgement of a minority identity. In it the autobiographical narrator explains why such an acknowledgement is necessary:

Fragte man mich, ob ich deutsch oder jüdisch sei, würde ich schon deshalb jüdisch sagen, um mich von den Deutschen abzugrenzen. Das deutsche Volk steht ja nicht in Frage, der Begriff vom jüdischen Volk aber bleibt doch immer im Vagen und Ungewissen. [...] Schon deshalb mußte ich meine Zugehörigkeit zum jüdischen Volk herausstellen.¹⁰

Especially in Germany, though, the process is fraught with difficulty:

⁹ Morris and Remmler (2002, 13) translate the title as *Back then, then and after*.

¹⁰ 'If asked whether I was German or Jewish, I would say Jewish if for no other reason than to set myself apart from the Germans. The German people is not in question, the concept of the Jewish people remains even now vague and uncertain. For that reason alone I had to stress my affiliation to the Jewish people' (Honigmann 1999, 17).

Obwohl ich selbst das Jüdische thematisiere und auf meinem jüdischen Leben insisiere, [...] spüre [ich] die Unmöglichkeit, in Deutschland über die 'jüdischen Dinge' unbelastet, unverkrampft zu sprechen.¹¹

And of course it is precisely this difficulty, which is never merely personal, that makes the affirmation of Jewishness a necessarily collective utterance.

In this context, it is notable how insistently Honigmann thematises collective experience in her work. As Emily Jeremiah puts it: 'What emerges is the construction of a collective Jewishness' (Jeremiah 2012, 180). In Honigmann's first book of prose there is a passage – a passage so important that the author published it separately in a periodical (Honigmann 1988 [1983]) – in which the first-person narrator pays a visit to a synagogue. The community she finds there is small, but it is a community, and it makes her feel welcome. What that community is doing on the evening when our protagonist happens to join it is commemorating its past – specifically the Exodus. The miracle at the heart of that journey, when the Red Sea opened to allow easy passage and closed again to cut off pursuit, is one which the protagonist experiences in her own person on that evening. Through it, she does indeed become part of a collective experience – the history of the Jews (Honigmann 2001 [1986], 23–8).

The final story of the collection – and with it the whole book – ends with a similar entry into a collective (Honigmann 2001 [1986], 111–17). The text in question begins with a paragraph in which the protagonist, in an anguish of self-doubt, asks herself a series of rhetorical questions: 'wo bin ich, was tue ich hier, [...] so weit weg, warum?' [where am I, what am I doing here, so far away, why?] (Honigmann 2001 [1986], 111). So it is hard not to read the final arrival among friends – the same friends, structurally at least, as are presented again in *Damals, dann und danach* – as an answer to these questions, and the journey that makes up the story as a re-enactment of the path to this tenuous but existentially effective belonging. Along the way, the protagonist attends a circumcision ceremony, comes out as a Jew to a group of Arabs who have not heard of the Holocaust or do not understand its implications, and explains how, because she is in mourning for her father, she is excluded from much of the collective life of the Jews of Strasbourg. That this collective life was one of the reasons for moving to Strasbourg in the first place is made explicit in 'Hinter der Grande Schul' [Behind the Grande Schul] from *Damals, dann und danach* (Honigmann 1999, 57–61). And the loss of a comparable community in Berlin is noted both in *Roman von einem Kinde* and in *Damals, dann und danach* (Honigmann 2001 [1986], 115; Honigmann 1999, 58–9).¹²

One of the salient features of the city of New York, of course, is the large number of Jews who live there. In *Das überirdische Licht*, Honigmann duly notes: 'In New York gibt es sehr viele Juden' [In New York there are very many Jews] (Honigmann 2008, 30). A distinctive feature of her book on the city is precisely its emphasis on various Jewish communities. She is linked to some of these by relations of blood: the orthodox Jew she visits in Far Rockaway is her cousin Daniel. With others it is her Germanness that secures her an invitation. Her access to yet others, though, is presented in exemplary fashion at the beginning of the section 'East Side Renaissance': 'Jonathan, whom we met at the Kiddush in the Synagogue on 6th street, invited me to Schabbes: "join us to another, more "funky" little shul, that we usually go to."¹³

¹¹ 'Even though I myself thematise Jewishness and insist on my Jewish lifestyle, [...] I am aware of the impossibility of speaking in Germany about "Jewish things" without strain or awkwardness' (Honigmann 1999, 16).

¹² The title of the first of these is translated in Morris and Remmler (2002, 13) as *Novel of a Child*.

¹³ Honigmann 2008, 109. The section in italics is printed that way in the original, where the language is indeed the unidiomatic English given here – though I suspect that 'that' may be a misprint for 'than'. The German text reads: 'Von Jonathan, den wir beim Kiddush in der Synagoge an der 6th Street getroffen haben, habe ich eine Einladung zum Schabbes erhalten.'

Together these depictions say a great deal both about the diaspora and about Jewishness as a community, a network, a collective.

That this collective is constantly threatened is also a theme that runs through the book. Cousin Daniel wonders how long the current state of things can last, and the narrator has no answer because she shares his uncertainty (Honigmann 2008, 57). In the United States, moreover, places of worship can change their denomination very easily (Honigmann 2008, 90). And while there are success stories – it is not for nothing that Honigmann uses the word ‘Renaissance’ in referring to the shul on the Lower East Side – there are also signs of terminal decay. The section of the book called ‘Washington Heights’ begins as follows:

Wer aber das Ende der deutsch-jüdischen Symbiose, oder was immer es denn gewesen ist, sehen will, der muß nach Washington Heights fahren. Dort hofft niemand mehr auf eine Renaissance. Da gibt es nur noch das Ende und nicht einmal einen Abschied.¹⁴

The sense of irrecoverable loss conveyed by this text has emotional parallels in two texts from the first collection which engage in the business of mourning. The first is devoted to the death of the influential Jewish intellectual Gershom Sholem, whose double grave is a lasting reminder of the broken history of Berlin Jewry (Honigmann 2001 [1986], 87–97). The second is an account of a visit by Peter to the Jewish community of Marina Roža, in Moscow (Honigmann 2001 [1986], 99–108). The story includes an episode in which the community needs to take special measures in order not to fall foul of the police, and it ends with an account of the destruction and dispersal of that community at the hands of the Soviet authorities.

This epilogue has the effect of accusing communist Russia of murderous anti-Semitism, and is thus unequivocally political. By the same token, when explaining her need to affirm her allegiance to the Jewish people, Honigmann notes how the East German authorities likewise refused to acknowledge the existence of such a people (Honigmann 1999, 17). Equally, one of the protagonists in *Alles, alles Liebe!* is thrown into crisis by the condemnation of Israel by the GDR (Honigmann 2003 [2000], 73–4), while another identifies with the State of Israel precisely because of this condemnation: ‘jedesmal, wenn sie wieder Hexe zu mir sagen, werde ich noch ein bißchen stolzer und hochmütiger, und genau darin, nur darin, erkenne ich mich im Staat Israel wieder, wie sie alle auf ihm herumhacken und ihn gerne wieder von der Landkarte weghaben wollen.’¹⁵ As it happens, neither of the women concerned is a writer – one is a theatre director and the other an actress. Yet by including the episode in her book, Honigmann neatly illustrates how and why allegiance to a minority position makes literature necessarily political. Writing as a Jew inescapably entails condemning all anti-Semitism, including and perhaps especially official or officially sanctioned anti-Semitism.

The treatment of Jews is by no means the only aspect of the politics of the GDR and the Soviet Union that Honigmann condemns. In *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, Litzy Honigmann’s daughter angrily relays details picked up during a period spent among dissidents in Moscow, both to her parents and to the reader:

¹⁴ ‘Anyone who wants to glimpse the end of the German-Jewish symbiosis, or whatever it was, should go to Washington Heights. There nobody hopes for a Renaissance any more. All that’s left there is the end, without so much as a goodbye’ (Honigmann 2008, 119).

¹⁵ ‘Every time they call me a witch, I become another little bit prouder and more arrogant, and precisely in this, indeed only in this, do I recognise myself in the state of Israel, because everybody is always picking on Israel and would like to see the country wiped off the map’ (Honigmann 2003 [2000], 146).

Ich ersparte ihnen auch nicht den Bericht über meine Begegnung mit der jungen Frau, die, kaum älter als ich, gerade aus einer psychiatrischen Anstalt entlassen worden war, in die man sie wegen 'Verbreitung illegaler Schriften' gesteckt hatte und mit jeder nur denkbaren Art psychiatrischer Behandlung gefoltert hatte, und die, als ich sie in Mischkas Küche traf, ganz ruhig ihren Tee trank und weiter illegale Schriften verbreitete.¹⁶

In telling us that she did not charge her parents, who were part of the cultural elite of the GDR, with complicity in these crimes, she is effectively accusing them, and their state, of just such complicity. Nor, of course, was it merely complicity. In *Georg*, for instance, Georg Honigmann's daughter almost incidentally tells the story of one of her father's former colleagues:

Während der Säuberungen in den fünfziger Jahren war der Kritiker, inzwischen Professor für Marxistische Philosophie, in einem Schauprozess zu zehn Jahren Haft verurteilt worden, aus der er nach sieben Jahren durch eine Amnestie entlassen wurde.¹⁷

In detailing the difficulties her father himself had with the East German authorities, Honigmann sketches out a strongly critical history of that state, its Eastern Bloc allies and their cultural politics, including the relative liberalisation of 1963, the 'Kahlschlag' reversal of 1965, and the crushing of the Prague Spring in 1968 (Honigmann 2019, 144–6). In *Alles, alles Liebe!*, she presents the frustrated attempts of the next generation to develop as artists in the face of the chicaneries of the state and the operations of the Staatssicherheit (Stasi) in the period of stagnation immediately preceding the effective expulsion of Wolf Biermann from the GDR. In so doing, Honigmann makes abundantly clear her political disaffection with the country of her birth.

In this respect it is surely not insignificant that *Alles, alles Liebe!* starts in the year in which Deleuze and Guattari published their book on Kafka. What the protagonists of Honigmann's text are seeking to realise, with their production of *The House of Bernarda Alba* and the *Album der Freunde* [*Friends' Album*] is a minor literature or a minor dramaturgy that is comparable to that adumbrated by the Frenchmen. Informed by an unspecific and/or unfulfilled desire and operating on the margins of, and in opposition to, an ambient culture that is presented as stuck in a self-serving rut, this demonstrates exactly the point made by Deleuze and Guattari that revolutionary potential is only ever to be found in a minor literature. The fact that in this case the revolution does not exceed the bounds of a private living room at once underlines the point and reveals the gulf that separates Honigmann from her slightly older, Western contemporaries. Yet conversely, the fact that one of the protagonists misses this event because she is literally deterritorialised – having undertaken a hurried trip to Moscow after the fiasco of her failed production in Prenzlau – both presages the expatriation of Biermann and the wave of emigration, including Honigmann's, that would follow it, and resonates with Deleuze and Guattari's first criterion for a minor literature.

¹⁶ 'Nor did I spare them the report of my meeting with the young woman who, barely older than I was, had just been released from a psychiatric institution, to which she had been confined for "disseminating illegal writings" and where she had been tortured using every imaginable kind of psychiatric treatment, and who, when I met her in Mischka's kitchen, quietly drank her tea and continued to disseminate illegal writings' (Honigmann 2006 [2004], 73).

¹⁷ 'During the purges of the 1950s the critic, who had in the meanwhile been made Professor of Marxist Philosophy, had in a show trial been sentenced to ten years' imprisonment, from which he was released after seven years under an amnesty' (Honigmann 2019, 139).

It is thus tempting to associate the theme of displacement in Honigmann with Deleuze and Guattari's 'déterritorialisation'. What Anna experiences in Prenzlau is precisely the coincidence of being uprooted – away from the capital and the circle of friends she knew there – and of social ostracism attendant both upon her Jewishness and her failure to assert her place in the prevalent structures of power. By the same token, the narrator-protagonist of *Eine Liebe aus nichts* [A Love Made Out of Nothing] explores with great acuity the experience of leaving one territory and seeking to occupy another. That this is not just about space is emphasised in the constellation of three different men who are implicated in the process: the congenitally deterritorialised father, whose position in *Georg* is presented as being between the two stools of a Jewish heritage and Enlightenment assimilation, and who only ever inserts himself partially and temporarily into the lifeworlds of his wives; the theatre director Alfried, who is the first of the group of East German intellectuals to put into practice the Rilkean meditation on 'fortgehen',¹⁸ and who materialises 'das Ungewisse' by never leaving an address;¹⁹ and Jean-Marc, who finishes his studies and returns home to the United States. As we have seen, the journey described in the last story of *Roman von einem Kinde* can also be read as taking the protagonist from the anguished uncertainty of deracination to the precarious but triumphant reassertion of identity, to reterritorialisation. To that extent, it is not as far removed as one might think from the experience of Ilana in *Alles, alles Liebe!*, who leaves Soviet Riga for Israel. And this in turn is part of a pattern whereby, for example, Georg, while he is in the National Library ostensibly researching a book about press censorship, actually spends significant amounts of time doing research on his Jewish grandfather. Similarly Litzky, the communist who was married to a spy and may well have been one herself, ends her days as a member of the Jewish community in Vienna.

In Honigmann, then, Jewishness is also associated with a particular kind of reterritorialisation. And it is precisely for this reason that Kafka too occasionally sought to reconnect with his Jewish roots. In Kafka, though, minor literatures are emphatically not associated with a literal loss of territory. On the contrary, as Pascale Casanova demonstrates with impressive clarity, the context in which Kafka coined the term was that of emerging national identities within the Habsburg Empire – that is not one of displacement, but of anticolonial rebellious rootedness. Given that Deleuze and Guattari speak in their Kafka book of 'un fort coefficient de déterritorialisation' [a high coefficient of deterritorialisation], it is clear that they must be using the term in a less than literal sense too, since uprootedness does not admit of gradation (1975, 29, 1986, 16). What they might actually mean by it, though, is anybody's guess, since in their usage across a number of different texts the word takes on all the properties of a portmanteau. In their Kafka book, they write of 'le sentiment d'une distance irréductible avec la territorialité primitive tchèque' and of 'la déterritorialisation de la population allemande elle-même, minorité oppressive qui parle une langue coupée des masses' (1975, 30). The formulations are not felicitous, as Polan helps to emphasise in the way she renders them. When she speaks of 'the feeling of an irreducible distance from their primitive Czech territoriality' (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, 16), the effect is to exaggerate the pejorative overtones of a word that in French retains more of the sense of 'original' or even 'foundational' – not least because Polan's possessive makes no sense if what is being stressed is native ownership of the Czech lands. And when she speaks of 'the deterritorialization of the German population itself, an oppressive minority that speaks a language cut off from the masses' (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, 16), the simple transliteration of the problematic term leaves us none the wiser. Yet the idea of a group of Jews occupying a precarious and alienated position as part of an unpopular and arguably

¹⁸ For Rilke, 'fortgehen' is both to leave the house and to take one's leave, both to seek solitude and/or new horizons and to absent oneself from others.

¹⁹ At times Rilke imagines 'das Ungewisse', that which is uncertain or ill determined, almost as a place.

oppressive elite is also applicable, *mutatis mutandis*, to Honigmann's depictions of her parents and their circle. In the case of her father, as in Deleuze and Guattari's account of Kafka, this kind of deterritorialisation also applies to his writing. His daughter finds his books inauthentic and chronically dull because in her view he is not at home in them. And in *Alles, alles Liebe!* she presents several examples of the sort of official German that he must have been continually confronted with. It is indeed what Deleuze and Guattari call a "langage de papier" ou d'artifice' [a "paper language" or an artificial language] (Deleuze & Guattari 1975, 30, 1986, 16).

Kafka's, by contrast, is not. It is true that he uses the syntax and modal particles of German to disorientate the reader. And one of the most distinctive features of his writing is the way in which he uses language to convey the metaphysical lostness of modern and modernist man. But his Prague German is not peculiar, unnatural or especially bureaucratic. The same is true of Honigmann's German. Enriched with snatches of Berlin dialect and occasionally inflected with elements from both French and Hebrew, it is understated rather than luxuriant. She can manipulate syntax brilliantly in order to convey an impression of awkwardness. But that awkwardness is not intrinsic to the language itself. On the contrary, the language Honigmann writes in is indeed the language of the giant Goethe, so the literature her work forms part of is the opposite of a 'little literature'. As a writer, then, Honigmann is no more deterritorialised than Kafka. Her place, like Kafka's, is at the heart of German literature.

III

The same cannot be said in quite the same way of the three writers who form the subject of 'Eine "ganz kleine Literatur" des Anvertrauens'. None of the three, as Honigmann notes, wrote in standard classical German (Honigmann 2006a, 10). Glückel von Hameln wrote her *Memoirs* in a form of Yiddish; Anne Frank wrote in Dutch; and Rahel Varnhagen's German is idiosyncratic to the point of occasional incomprehensibility because for her it was a language she learned late. In all three cases this linguistic marginality is bound up with minority status. Glückel lives and writes at the edge of the German-speaking world to such an extent that she can ignore the confessional conflict which tore that world apart. The Dutch that Anne Frank may have used as a secret code to shield her thoughts from her parents is the language of a small nation. And the peculiarities of Rahel's German are inextricably bound up with what for her is the 'Schande' that set her apart from her fellow Germans.²⁰ Glückel's language thus directly parallels that of Jizchak Löwy and Anne Frank's that of the Czechs, and the literatures they represent are 'kleine Literaturen' in Kafka's sense. Rahel's German, by contrast, is deterritorialised language to the bone. Yet the co-ordinates of that language are quite different from those the Frenchmen attribute to Kafka. It is not that of an uncomfortable colonial elite but of a would-be assimilee. So far from 'setting up a minor practice of major language from within', as Dana Polan has it (Deleuze & Guattari 1986, 18), it is using the major language to mitigate the stigma of minority.

In the case of Anne Frank, forced to leave her native Frankfurt at the age of five, but established in the Netherlands and the Dutch language for eight years at the time she began to write, it is possible to see a different, more literal form of displacement. This too operates, according to Honigmann, at the level of language. Noting how Otto Frank allegedly had the diaries checked by a native speaker of Dutch before publishing them, she insists:

Man macht sich bei der Lektüre des *Tagebuchs* vielleicht nicht immer die paradoxe Situation klar, daß sich im Achterhuis deutsche Juden versteckten, die krampfhaft ein

²⁰ The word is cognate with 'scandal', something shockingly inappropriate and socially unacceptable. It also denotes the feelings of one embroiled in such a scandal or associated with it.

fehlerhaftes Niederländisch sprachen, um bei stärkeren Emotionen dann doch in die deutsche Muttersprache zurückzufallen. In diesem Sinne scheint es mir erlaubt, Anne Franks *Tagebuch* als ein Stück deutsch-jüdischer Literatur anzusehen.²¹

Perhaps there is no more powerful index for deterritorialisation than when a text needs to be translated before it can be understood.

That the same is true of Glückel's text, though, is due to a different set of circumstances and a different kind of distance. For there is nothing in Honigmann's account of Glückel that suggests a sense of not being at home. On the contrary:

Sie lebte mit unumstößlicher Selbstverständlichkeit in der jüdischen Welt, in einem 'jüdischen Deutschland' [...] ein[em] noch einheitliche[n] Ashkenas, in dem sie reist, in dem sie an all diesen Orten 'ihre Leute' trifft und in dem man ihre Sprache spricht.²²

Here it is again, the sense of a community, a network, a collective which provides a ready-made sounding-board and audience for the utterances of a minor literature. It is not for nothing that, in a passage quoted by Honigmann, Glückel uses the phrase 'unsere Tora' [our Torah] and thus underlines the commonality between author and reader. For Rahel Varnhagen, on the other side of the Enlightenment, this narrow sense of community was no longer possible. As Honigmann puts it: "Wie unsere Weisen geschrieben haben und was in unserer Tora steht" hat sie vergessen, vielleicht gar nicht mehr wirklich kennengelernt, in jedem Falle bietet es ihr nichts mehr, liegt völlig außerhalb ihres Interesses.²³ Instead, her salon was to constitute a collective of a different kind, an 'Ort des freien Austauschs von Gedanken, des Umgangs über Standes- und Religionsgrenzen hinweg und unkonventioneller Begegnungen in Freundschaft und Liebe' [a place for the free exchange of ideas, of social interaction across class and religious divides and of unconventional encounters in friendship and love] (Honigmann 2006a, 21–2). Indeed it is possible to argue, though Honigmann in fact does not do so, that in this sense Rahel's texts constitute a kind of literary realisation and continuation of her salon.

With Anne Frank, the situation is different again. Here what constitutes the collective is neither a narrow community of faith nor the universal humanism of unfettered intellectual exchange, but rather a shared act of commemoration and mourning. In this sense Anne Frank, for all her eccentricities, becomes an exemplary victim, with a name, a face, a personality and a style. Because we cannot not know of her fate, reading her diaries becomes a necessarily political act – an act of solidarity with someone, and hence with all those, who died in Bergen-Belsen. In that sense too it matters, and makes perfect sense, that for Barbara Honigmann Anne Frank's *Diary* marks the end of German-Jewish literature. And because, in their own time, and on their own scale, Rahel and Glückel also bear witness to pogroms and the destruction of Jewish culture, what they write necessarily becomes political too.

²¹ 'When reading the *Diary*, one is perhaps not always fully aware of the paradoxical situation whereby the people hiding in the Achterhuis were German Jews who insisted desperately on speaking faulty Dutch, but who, when their emotions got the better of them, couldn't help falling back into their German mother tongue. In this sense it seems to me to be allowable to regard Anne Frank's *Diary* as a piece of German-Jewish literature' (Honigmann 2006a, 25).

²² 'The world she lived in was unshakeably and unequivocally Jewish, a 'Jewish Germany' [...], a still unified Ashkenas in which she travels around meeting 'her people' in all sorts of different places, and in which everybody speaks her language' (Honigmann 2006a, 14).

²³ "What our sages have written and what it says in the Torah" she has forgotten, perhaps not even properly learned any more, at all events it no longer has anything to offer her and is a matter of complete indifference to her' (Honigmann 2006a, 21).

IV

As with Honigmann herself, then, the three Jewish women writers she chooses to write on in her essay can be said to fulfil at least those aspects of a minor literature that Deleuze and Guattari took over from Kafka. Yet for Honigmann they also constitute 'minor literature' in quite a different sense. 'Glückels Memoiren, Rahel Varnhagens Briefe und Anne Franks Tagebücher', she writes, in a paragraph whose programmatic nature is evident from the echo of her title,

erscheinen mir als gute Beispiele für eine Literatur, bei der man sich gar nicht erst fragt, ob das nun 'richtige' Literatur ist oder nicht. Wahrscheinlich sind sie keine 'richtige' Literatur. Es sind Werke, in denen uns Frauen Geschichten, Begebenheiten, Gedanken und Träume erzählen, die von ihrem Leben als Angehörige einer kleinen Minderheit in einer großen Kultur handeln, unter starker innerer und äußerer Anspannung geschrieben und deshalb von so unvergleichbarer Intimität und Intensität. Eine 'ganz kleine' Literatur des Anvertrauens, in der uns die Autorinnen durch die Geschichte hindurch anzublicken scheinen.²⁴

Here the notion of a 'kleine Literatur' is finally divorced from the outward socio-political conditions of its making and restored to the sphere of literary criticism. The opposite of 'minor literature' is no longer 'major literature' but 'proper' literature. In invoking the judgmental category of 'proper' literature, of course, and especially by putting it in inverted commas, Honigmann is implicitly asking the all-important question of who gets to decide what belongs there. The answer is not stated as such, but arrived at by an ineluctable logic: if the literature for which the question is irrelevant is women's literature, that implies that the hegemonic category that is thus sidestepped is one invented and policed by men. Now the counterintuitive and counterfactual notion that only men are capable of producing 'proper' literature has been used to disqualify women's writing since about the beginning of time. In order to scuttle under the portcullis thus resoundingly let down to bar their entrance, if not to the literary marketplace, then at least to Parnassus, women claimed as their own those literary genres that men of genius regarded as beneath their dignity. Not coincidentally, these turned out to be those with the highest coefficient of domesticity about them: letters, diaries, personal anecdotes. That way, if the patriarchal thought police came knocking, women could pretend they were merely engaged in the legitimate task of educating their offspring. ('Diese *Denkwürdigkeiten*', writes Honigmann, 'hat Glückel [...] für ihre Kinder zu schreiben begonnen' [it was for her children (...) that Glückel began to write these *Memoirs*] (Honigmann 2006a, 15)). These genres required the very careful construction of a narrative persona, one that appeared to be natural and spontaneous and might on no account be seen to be competing with the gentlemen in the pursuit of higher forms or truths. ('[Rahel ist] zu einer berühmten Schriftstellerin geworden', writes Honigmann, 'die ein zehnbändiges Werk hinterlassen hat, in dem es keinen Roman, keine Novelle, kein Theaterstück und kein Gedicht gibt, nur Briefe, Traumnotate, Tagebücher' [Rahel became a famous writer, whose literary estate, which ran to ten volumes, contained no novels, no novellas, no plays and no poems, just letters, dream transcriptions, diaries] (Honigmann 2006a, 20)). The form of communication that is

²⁴ 'Glückel's memoirs, Rahel Varnhagen's letters and Anne Frank's Diaries seem to me to be good examples of a kind of literature where you don't even think of asking whether it is "proper" literature or not. Probably they are not "proper" literature. They are works in which women tell us their stories, anecdotes, thoughts and dreams, which are concerned with their lives as members of a small minority in a great culture, written under enormous inner and outer pressure and hence having a quality of incomparable intimacy and intensity. A "truly minor" confessional literature in which the female authors seem to look us in the eye down the annals of history' (Honigmann 2006a, 26–7).

appropriate to that persona is direct and intimate, creating the impression of authentic, personal autobiography, or, as Honigmann puts it, '[a]n incomparable intimacy and intensity [...] whereby the female authors seem to look us in the eye down the annals of history' (2006a, 26–7).

This, then, is what Honigmann refers to as 'eine "ganz kleine Literatur" des Anvertrauens', as exemplified by Glückel von Hameln, Rahel Varnhagen and Anne Frank. As Hella Ehlers puts it: 'Subjektivität, Intimität und Kommunikation von Tagebuch, Brief oder Erinnerungstext werden als von der Tradition eingeräumte *und tatsächlich praktizierte* weibliche Ausdrucksformen dargestellt.'²⁵ It is a literature that cannot – which is not allowed to – become canonical. Even the diary of Anne Frank, writes Honigmann, was less self-evidently part of her education than seven dead white men plucked more or less at random from the canon of French, German and Russian literature. The women she had actively – even secretly and shamefacedly – to seek out. And this she does in an attempt to find out who she is as a writer and what she has in common with the trio from the margins. The programmatic nature of the following passage too is evident from the echo of the essay's title:

Ich möchte nämlich wissen, ob wir noch etwas gemeinsam haben, ob mir diese Frauen und ihr Schreiben ähnlich sind, ob ich vielleicht auch zu dieser 'ganz kleinen Literatur' des Randes, der unkomfortablen Randposition gehöre, weil mein Schreiben ja auch nur so etwas wie ein autobiographisches Schreiben zwischen Enthüllen und Verstecken ist.²⁶

Here, though, the title has undergone a significant variation, whereby literal discomfiture has taken the place of 'Anvertrauen'. The source of the discomfiture is easily identified, thanks to the overdetermined accumulation of 'ja auch nur so etwas wie' [indeed also only something like]. There comes a moment when the inverted commas begin to lose their power, and the question becomes acute as to whether the value judgments of the men might not, after all, have some validity. All the more urgent, then, is the obligation on the literary critic to answer that question.

It is thus vital to remember that in one important respect Barbara Honigmann is different from Glückel von Hameln, or Rahel Varnhagen, or Anne Frank. Unlike them, she has not only written in the minor genres. On the contrary, her first successes were in a field which, because of its demonstrably public character, was regarded as particularly unsuitable for women: the theatre. It is even possible to argue that her success there was dependent precisely on the extent to which the concerns of her own life were excluded (see Honigmann, 2006a). Her first book was a volume of 'Erzählungen', of which the title story, with its frame and its episodes, its careful thematisation of womanhood, Germanness and Jewishness and its virtuoso handling of time, has every right to be called a 'novella'. *Soharas Reise* [*Zohara's Journey*], from 1996, is a novel whose relationship to Honigmann's own life is at best symbolic and thus factitious. *Alles, alles Liebe!* is a multi-person epistolary novel and therefore carefully calculated to convey the experiences not of an individual, but of a group and hence even of a generation.

²⁵ 'Subjectivity, intimacy, and communication of diary, letter or memoir are presented as forms of female expression that are sanctioned by tradition and *actually practised*' (Ehlers 2009, 128, n. 9, emphasis in original).

²⁶ 'For I would like to know whether we still have something in common, whether these women and their writing resemble me and mine, whether I too perhaps am part of this "truly minor literature" of the margins, occupying the uncomfortable position of the marginal, because my writing is indeed also only something like an autobiographical writing between disclosure and concealment' (Honigmann 2006a, 27–8).

And while Honigmann is not known as a poet, it is not only the prose of Anna Achmatova that she translated, but the verse (Achmatova 1988).

The claim, then, that Honigmann's writing is merely more or less autobiographical is simply untrue. And to suggest otherwise is not only to buy into the transparently self-serving value judgments of patriarchy, but also to ignore the formal qualities of those texts to which Honigmann did not assign to a conventional genre. The first of these, *Eine Liebe aus Nichts* from 1991, is compared on its paperback cover to a rondo – that is to a musical form featuring repetition and variation which takes its title from the circle (Honigmann 1993 [1991]). And the term is apt to describe not only the structure of that particular text, but also Honigmann's wider autobiographical project. In *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, the 'love' of the title applies to at least two people and thus gives the text at least two, closely related but significantly varied themes, geographies and timeframes. The macro-structure is made up of three journeys – from the GDR to France, from France to the GDR and from thence back to France, whereby the second is a reversal of the first but the third is not a repetition of it. As the blurb also rightly reminds us, the book also mixes up different tonalities and rhythms, takes us into distant worlds and brings us back into the present of the narrating protagonist. And it includes, precisely and programmatically, the three forms attributed in the essay to Anne and Rahel and Glückel: the diary, the letter and the first-person chronicle.

The father whose death initiated the journey back to Weimar in *Eine Liebe aus nichts* is the eponymous hero of Honigmann's most recent book, *Georg*. He appears as an intermittent leitmotif in other works too, putting in a perhaps unexpected appearance, for instance, in *Das überirdische Licht* (Honigmann 2008, 60–4). *Georg* for its part is clearly the pendant to *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, which is devoted as it were to the other parent, and in which the eponymous episode of the marriage of Litzzy Honigmann to Kim Philby, because it is never recounted, moves out of Litzzy's life and into that of her daughter. The book thus thematises the relationship between biography and autobiography, fact and feeling, memory and research, while also raising explicit questions about reader expectations and writerly practice, about 'Enthüllen' and 'Verstecken', 'disclosure' and 'concealment'. It thus constitutes an unusually clear-eyed contribution not only to the genre of, but also to the discussion about, life-writing.

The figure of the mother likewise features as an intermittent leitmotif in Honigmann's work. It is she who provides one of the most striking of the *Bilder von A.* [*Pictures of A.*] and thereby illustrates how carefully Honigmann has thought about the depiction of depiction itself in that book: 'Was für ein blonder, blauäugiger Gewittergoy, so ein richtiger Germane, Teutone, Ostgote und auch noch Preuße, rief meine Mutter entsetzt aus, als sie A. kennengelernt hatte' (Honigmann 2013 [2011], 36).²⁷ The relationship between portraiture and life-writing has become something of a commonplace in the secondary literature (see for example Lionnet 1989 or Saunders 2016) – but here the iconography of A. by an author who is also a painter is used not only to sketch out the complex relationship between the protagonist and the eponymous A., but also to put it into the contexts of German-Jewish relations on the one hand and the GDR and the West on the other. Similarly, the complicated procedure whereby the narrator is introduced to works by prominent women poets and then quotes these as a possible means of exploring her own feelings says a great deal about the relationship between intertextuality, identification and autobiography. Thus even the most intimate details of a person's emotional life reflect and are reflected in and through political and cultural history. As Honigmann puts it in her essay about minor literature:

²⁷ Emily Jeremiah (2012, 196) translates as: 'What a blond, blue-eyed storm Goy (*Gewittergoy*), a real German Teuton, Ostrogoth, and a Prussian too, my mother exclaimed in horror on meeting A.'

Glückel, Rahel und Anne Frank erzählen Bagatellen und Geschichten des Tages, von denen sich später herausstellen wird, daß sie die große Geschichte ausmachten. In ihren Aufzeichnungen sieht uns, anders als in den Beschreibungen und Untersuchungen von Historikern, die Geschichte direkt an. Direkt ins Gesicht.²⁸

In this respect, the title of *Chronik meiner Straße* [*Chronicle of My Street*] and its designation as a novel are absolutely precise. For it is through the telling of apparently unimportant anecdotes by a narrator who is neither reliable nor objective that the rhythm of events affecting the history of Strasbourg and the world can be most effectively conveyed.

Within Honigmann's oeuvre, *Chronik meiner Straße* is prefigured in a book from 1998 entitled *Am Sonntag spielt der Rabbi Fußball*.²⁹ This book carries the generic designation 'Kleine Prosa', which of course resonates with the 'kleine Literatur'.³⁰ It begins with a passage which is placed and dated in Strasbourg on Christmas Eve in order to underline the multicultural nature of the Alsatian town. In that passage, Honigmann tells us that these texts were originally published in the *Basler Zeitung*. She also introduces the people who will be the protagonists of these texts: 'Mein Mann heißt Peter, meine Söhne heißen Jo und Ru, und unsere Katze heißt Atze, Fräulein Atze' [My husband is called Peter, my sons are called Jo and Ru and our cat is called Atze, Fräulein Atze] (Honigmann 1998, 5). What is remarkable about this, and the collection as a whole, is the carefully calibrated quality of the address. Thus the text 'Gruß aus New York' [Greetings from New York] begins: 'Lieber Leser! Nun kannst Du Dich wundern. Jetzt bin ich gerade in New York, und zwar zum ersten Mal in meinem Leben' [Dear Reader. Here's a surprise for you. I happen to be in New York at the moment, and for the first time in my life] (Honigmann 1998, 49). The echoes of a figure like Johann Peter Hebel's 'Rheinländischer Hausfreund' [family friend from the Rhineland] are unmistakable. And they remind us that what Honigmann saw in Glückel, Rahel and Anne Frank was not just a minor literature but 'eine "ganz kleine Literatur" des Anvertrauens' (my emphasis). By 'Anvertrauen' she means precisely this: the very particular quality of address, of taking someone into one's confidence, of entrusting intimate information to the page and a possible audience at the same time, which necessarily entails the construction of a persona like a 'family friend'. In her newspaper columns, Honigmann does this explicitly and deliberately. In the rest of her work, especially those texts that are not assigned to a particular genre, she does it no less carefully, but in a manner which is so pervasive that you scarcely notice it – in rhythm and idiolect, syntax and repetition – and of course in the deployment of the letter, the diary and the personal chronicle.

In German, though, the verb 'anvertrauen' is used not only for confiding secrets but also for depositing important things for safekeeping. Had it not been for Glückel's *Denkwürdigkeiten*, crucial aspects of German-Jewish life in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries would have been lost to us. Without Rahel, the psycho-cultural situation of German Jews a century or so later would have been harder to grasp. And without Anne Frank, the human history of the Holocaust would have lacked something vital. In the same way, Honigmann has found a means of address that enables her to preserve for us in all their terribly conflicted complexity the vestiges of German-Jewish history in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. One of the strategies she has adopted for the purpose is that of writing in modes that have long been denigrated because of their association with women. In other words, she is quite

²⁸ 'Glückel, Rahel and Anne Frank tell us ephemeral stories about trivial things, and it transpires that they actually constituted the stuff of the larger history. Their accounts differ from the descriptions and investigations of historians because in them history looks directly at us. It looks us in the face' (Honigmann 2006a, 12).

²⁹ Morris and Remmler (2002, 13) translate the title as 'On Sunday the Rabbi plays soccer'.

³⁰ 'Prosa' is prose.

deliberately connecting up with a literature that has been called 'minor'. That literature, like Honigmann's, shares certain features with those other minor literatures invoked by Kafka on the one hand and by Deleuze and Guattari on the other. It is political, it is communitarian, it is revolutionary. It manages to negotiate a space for itself among the erratic blocks of the male canon. In the process it demonstrates a command of form and address which is all the more impressive for being deliberately undemonstrative. But it also does something that neither Kafka, nor Deleuze, nor Guattari ever came close to achieving. It constitutes a 'ganze große Literatur des Anvertrauens', a truly great literature that takes us into its confidence and tells us stories of minority experience – stories that even now are often overlooked and that might otherwise have been forgotten.

Because literature can do this (and a lot of literature does not), there are times after all when a queer feminist might feel the need to express a preference – and a willingness to fight – 'pour une littérature "mineure"'. Yet the essence of the preference, and the core of the struggle, is not the term put into circulation by Deleuze and Guattari, but the inverted commas surrounding it. For the fact of the matter is that when the two Frenchmen took Kafka's 'kleine Literaturen' and reduced them to one minor literature, they were doing something dangerously stupid. It may be a productive solecism, and the perverse irony of applying it to Kafka himself may, in part at least, be deliberate. But the corrosive effects remain. To look for common denominators in non-canonical literatures, rather than celebrating their diversity, is a patronising, hegemonic and unacceptable thing to do. To pretend that it is impossible for the members of a group defined as minoritarian to write in the language of the majority is patent nonsense. And it is precisely to this nonsense that we owe the persistent neglect of women's writing and the constituent failure to understand that the vast majority of great literature is not written by straight men. Among the indispensable lessons we have learned from postcolonial literary studies is the realisation that the literature of the margins is not in any sense a marginal literature. This is a realisation that Barbara Honigmann, both in her literary criticism and in the rest of her work, endorses and exemplifies. And that is why it is so vitally important to read Barbara Honigmann with – and against – Deleuze and Guattari.

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