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BARBARA HONIGMANN'S  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING IN

*DAMALS, DANN UND DANACH, EINE LIEBE AUS NICHTS, AND ROMAN VON*

*EINEM KINDE:*

BRIDGING THE PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

By

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This work is dedicated to my family, who have loved and supported me always,  
and to Darin, for his neverending love and understanding.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper will examine the autobiographical writings of German-Jewish author Barbara Honigmann. Honigmann was born in East Berlin in 1949. She studied theater arts and worked in the theater in Berlin until 1975, when she became a free-lance writer and artist. She moved to Strasburg, France in 1984 in order to live in a community more accepting towards Jews. Since this time, she has written several novels, which many scholars have characterized as “autobiographical fictions.” The main themes of her novels center around Judaism in Germany and identity as a German Jew.

Autobiographical writings are very different from fictional writing, since the main character or characters in the writings are reflections of the author’s experiences. Considering the characteristics of autobiographical writing as an avenue for literary analysis is important, since central themes in Honigmann’s writings treat her identity as a German Jew after the Holocaust. The autobiographical aspect of Honigmann’s writing, as seen in her novels *Damals, dann und danach*, *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, and *Roman von einem Kinde*, is extensively examined in this paper. Parallels among the books are drawn to demonstrate the autobiographical content of her writing. After a brief discussion concerning Jews in Germany after 1945, with a concentration of Jews in East Germany, the discussion of the autobiographical content in Honigmann’s novel *Damals, dann und danach* turns to her reflections on Judaism and her German Jewish identity.

## INTRODUCTION

This thesis examines the novels *Damals, dann und danach*, *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, and *Roman von einem Kinde* by Barbara Honigmann. It explores these texts as autobiographical writings that relate to her search for personal identity as a Jew and a German. This discussion also focuses on Barbara Honigmann's "return" to Judaism and delves into why such a return to Judaism is so important to her. Through literary analysis the autobiographical content of her works is revealed. Underlying most of her writing one finds her discussion of identity as a woman, as a Jew, and as a writer who records life as it is happening in her world. Her literature discloses some of the deep-rooted emotional, cultural, and religious struggles of a second generation German-Jew in post Holocaust Germany.

In order to best expose these primary discussions within Honigmann's writings, first an overview of Barbara Honigmann's biography is necessary to begin. Next is a brief theoretical discussion of autobiographical writing to discuss its importance as a mode of literary analysis. An examination of autobiographical elements within *Damals, dann und danach*, *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, and *Roman von einem Kinde*, as well as the arguments of other scholars supporting this theme will follow. The discussion will then turn to background information concerning Jews in Germany after the Holocaust. Finally, a literary analysis of Judaism and how Honigmann expresses her German-Jewish identity, as it is found in Honigmann's *Damals, dann und danach*, including supporting arguments of Honigmann scholars will conclude the discussion.

Although Honigmann's novels *Damals, dann und danach*, *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, and *Roman von einem Kinde* are considered autobiographical novels, it is also important to realize that, as with all autobiographical writing, the author is ultimately the person who chooses what shall be included and how she will "re-tell" her life. Therefore, it is

imperative to keep this thought in mind while reading and interpreting any autobiographical writing. The interpretations and explanations in this paper are based upon factual information known about Honigmann, as this information is compared to what she reveals about her life and her experiences in her novels.



# CHAPTER 1

## HONIGMANN'S BIOGRAPHY

Barbara Honigmann was born in 1949 in East Berlin, East Germany. Although her parents had met and married during their exile in England from Nazi Germans, they moved back to East Berlin after World War II in 1946. Honigmann grew up in East Berlin and later attended Humboldt-Universität to study theater arts. She worked for three years in theater production in Brandenburg and at the Deutsches Theater in Berlin, and in 1975 she became an independent artist and writer. Honigmann had her first son out of wedlock, but married in 1981. She left Berlin in 1984 with her husband, Peter, and two sons to emigrate to Strasburg, France. 1984 is also the year of her father's death. Since her move to France, she has written and published seven books, and as a result of her writing she has received eight awards for her works, including the Kleist Preis in 2000. In addition to her writing, Honigmann has become a celebrated artist. Her paintings are a part of a permanent exhibition at the Hasenclever Gallery in Munich.<sup>1</sup>

Out of the three books examined in this paper, Honigmann's *Damals, dann und danach*<sup>2</sup> will serve as the main point of reference, because it is the most autobiographical.<sup>3</sup> Her novels *Eine Liebe aus nichts*<sup>4</sup> and *Roman von einem Kinde*<sup>5</sup> will be used to draw parallels among the three books in order to support the argument of autobiographical writing. Honigmann's autobiographical writing centers around the different themes of her life; she addresses issues such as her relationship to her parents, her identity as German and Jew, her experience as a Jew in Berlin and Strasburg, and her identity as a woman, as a mother, and as a professional artist. These issues are most obviously observed in *Damals*. *Damals* does not tell continuous story, but rather the reader is introduced to important details of Barbara Honigmann's life. Her writing leaves

one with the impression that Honigmann works through personal issues while writing. This is evident in the way she lays out factual information about her life, presents the names and professions of her parents and grandparents, gives their stories, provides descriptions of her friends and her relationship to them, and offers multiple details about her family.

In *Damals*, *Liebe*, and *Roman*, one perceives a clear correlation between Honigmann's writing and her life story. Honigmann uses historical events, such as WWII, the Holocaust, life in East Germany, exile in France and the separation and reunification of Germany and relates all these stations of her life to her search for identity as a German Jew. She contemplates the personal experience of her family, such as the escape of her Jewish mother and father, who fled from the Nazis and sought exile in England during the Second World War, as well as their return to East Germany after the war to rebuild a new democratic state. She reflects upon her own personal experience of growing up in East Germany and moving to France. All the while she uses historical events, family, and personal experiences to create the characters and settings of her stories.

An autobiographical examination of Honigmann's novels seems important and promises to reveal the voice of the narrator as Honigmann's own voice. Honigmann uses her writing as a tool to understanding her personal identity and to come to terms with her difficult past. Although Barbara Honigmann herself has so far not issued a public statement that her books are autobiographical writings, all of her novels use the first person, her style of writing seems similar to that of writing personal journals and the information revealed points to events in her own life. This results in the effect that Honigmann uses her audience to sort out feelings of frustration with her identity as an East German, a post World War II Jew, a child of survivors, and a young woman whose place of childhood has disappeared.

The next chapter will focus on autobiographical writing and how it is important to understanding the voice of the author and the situations and circumstances under which the autobiographical author writes. Recognizing key discussions surrounding autobiography will bring light to understanding the autobiographical writings of Barbara Honigmann.

## CHAPTER 2

### THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY

In recent years, scholars have focused on the nature and the significance of autobiographical writing. According to Donald Winslow, autobiography is “the writing of one’s own history; the story of one’s own life written by him – or herself. The autobiography is such that it encompasses the truths about a person’s life as they see it, telling particular events as they see relevant to telling about these ‘truths’”(2-3). Paul John Eakin furthers this idea; he claims that through narrative accounts, the authors offer particular individual events and experiences to create identity and to show their place in society (100-101).

What is it about autobiographical and narrative accounts that interests readers? Perhaps the most compelling answer to this question is the reader’s desire to understand another person’s struggle with life. Autobiographies tell the tale of life, love, happiness, sadness, struggle, and the overcoming of seemingly impossible situations. In this they offer inspiration to others and provide an example or role model for ways to live one’s own life. Public figures often present their autobiographies to defend or justify certain actions taken in the past. Some autobiographies present life experiences in a certain sequence of events, like former President Bill Clinton in his personal memoirs entitled *My Life*. Others offer less sequenced accounts, intended to review or make sense out of a complicated past, such as Barbara Honigmann, taking only the most significant events to apply the effects of these events to themes, such as love, parenthood, and self-identity (Sjoberg and Kuhn 311-12).

Concerning the nature of autobiographical literature works, Hayden White states that the “factual and the fictive” join in the historical narrative as “a fiction of factual

representation... facts do not speak for themselves, [therefore the] historian speaks on their behalf, and fashions the fragments of the past into a whole whose integrity is – in its RE-presentation – a purely discursive one” (25). Sidonie Smith continues White’s description of the autobiographical narrative by pointing out that the autobiographer is the “self historian,” seeking to reflect upon the past or recreate the past through the process of memory or what Smith calls “storytelling.” The memory only leaves a “trace of the experience” which is later turned into a story by the autobiographical author (Smith 145).

Many autobiographical authors argue that the male and female autobiographies are both similar in that they tell the story of one’s own life, and different in the way each chooses to tell the story. Estelle Jelinek states that her research on female autobiographies has shown that women tend to focus more on the personal events in their lives, rather than the professional aspects, on which men tend to focus. She also argues that although men tend to write in a “self-confident, one-dimensional self image,” women tend to write in a “multidimensional, fragmented self image colored by a sense of inadequacy and alienation” (preface xiii). Perhaps it is due to this fragmentation and sense of “otherness” that is conveyed in her writing that female autobiographies are more likely to expose emotions surrounding traumatic events, in the hope that the reader understands some of what she has experienced. Research by Gideon Sjoberg and Kathryn Kuhn supports Jelinek’s assertion and argues that male autobiography tends to tell the story of achievement, or survival and promotes a sense of rising above a difficult situation or past experience. An example of such male writing can be found in German-Jewish Paul Spiegel’s *Wieder zu Hause*. In this book he discusses his memories of life in post World War II Germany, after he and his parents return. He also discusses his optimistic view concerning moving on in Germany after 1945 as an active Jew. Caren Kaplan discusses in her article “Deterritorializations: The Rewriting of Home and Exile in Western Feminist Discourse,” how women have historically written in the discourse of males, but also how “minority men and women who move between the cultures, languages...develop the ability to read and write culture on multiple levels” (187). She continues this argument with the notion that being on the outside, not officially in one culture or language, causes a sense of marginality, which can develop

into a feeling of isolation and estrangement, or can lead to the advancement of “critical innovation and particular strengths” (187).<sup>6</sup>

Autobiographies tell the “true” story of an individual and reveal how the individual perceives personal events. When the autobiography is put in the context of personal life, the narrative begins to center around a central theme or themes. The focus may be less on the chronological events of life, but rather the emotions and feelings surrounding a particular event (Kristeva 191-2). Many women write their autobiographies in this style of a novel. Smith acknowledges that the autobiographical novel style is a growing genre, but it is the blurring of these lines between what is considered strict factual autobiographical information and fictional novelesque representation of these events that causes confusion in the study of this genre (14). Hence it is important to keep in mind that the representations of events in autobiography are representations of an author and part of a made up character in a fictional environment.

Female autobiographies in particular have taken on a special importance in western culture in recent years. A long tradition of patriarchy has conventionally resulted in a subordinating position of women in society. This subordination also brings about a silencing effect, which left many female voices and their female perspective unheard and unnoticed. With the influence of the women’s movement in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in most of Europe and the United States, as well as the feminist movement in the 1970’s, the female voice has become increasingly more prevalent to society, gaining more and more respect. As a result, the perception of the woman in our culture has become more important. This is not only seen in literature, but in more everyday areas of life such as television, advertising, and cinema. Women find roles in the spotlight, rather than in the background. They are now writers and artists, as well as successful professionals in government and business, writers, and artists, in addition to their more traditional roles as mothers and wives.

When a woman writes an autobiography, she hopes that her voice will be heard and that her life story will be recorded into history. Through this act of writing, her voice is able to tell her perspective on her culture and her society. It allows her to reveal how she perceives her individual role through her own eyes (Peterson 165-66).

Autobiographies present varying perspectives that may range from a historical view to her role in her family. Linda Peterson asserts that the female autobiographer is concerned with the “duplicity” of her life; that is, the “doubling” of her story lines (165), and hence insists on her own perspective. The narrator, for instance, may recall a particular event through the eyes of her child self, and then reflect on the significance through her adult eyes. This idea also expresses the identity of the female as it is seen in the public/professional and private/domestic spheres (Peterson 176).

Honigmann’s writings, as well as those from other female writers, such as Katja Behrens and Laura Waco, have been “characterized as unflinching essays and exercises to reopen the wounds of their scarred biographies in an attempt to clarify, if not cleanse, their deeply muddled emotions” (Lubich 6). Zafer Senocak posits that autobiographical fictional writing is comparable to a myth which runs through the mind and soul of the author. The author’s experiences create these myths and intertwine them with the common experiences of others, such as the “collective memory of the Holocaust” (Rapaport 18), or merely “childhood memories....or a tension between personal experience and linguistic imagination... The writer is related to archaeology...maybe he stumbles onto stones that no longer fit but then uses these stones to reconstruct and build anew” (Senocak 78). Whatever it may be, while reading these autobiographical pieces, the question of how closely and how particularly one should read comes to mind. If one agrees with Senocak that all works of this sort are a form of myth or a creation of experience and fiction, it is helpful to compare autobiographies with factual history and social circumstance to gain a more comprehensive perspective on the themes discussed, i.e. the narrative, which in Honigmann’s case is Jews in Germany after the Holocaust.

While the preceding brief theoretical discussion explores the nature of autobiography as a method of conveying the human experience, the focus in the next chapter turns to Honigmann’s autobiographical accounts and their themes of the Holocaust and the Jews in Germany. After the Holocaust, some Jews returned or remained in Germany. Honigmann, like Paul Spiegel, recorded this phenomenon in her novels. In light of the Holocaust, her writing joins the public discourse in Germany which Victoria Stewart refers to as a tradition of “unrepresentability” (4-5) and has been concealed in the minds and actions of many with the desire to forget. Honigmann

becomes a voice of this German-Jewish experience, while above all presenting a voice about herself.

## **CHAPTER 3**

### **HONIGMANN AND HER AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL WRITING**

Jews who returned to Germany after World War II, belonged to a minority – most settled in Israel or remained in their exile countries. There were mixed reactions by surviving Jews to the Nazi persecutions. Some wrote or talked about their experiences, like Elie Wiesel, Primo Levi, and Ruth Klüger, others could not. Some focused on the future and avoided reflections about the recent events of the Holocaust. In contrast to the relative silence in the years directly following World War II, in recent years published accounts of the children of those survivors of the Holocaust and Nazi persecutions has steadily increased. Lea Fleischmann, Jane Gilbert, Esther Dischereit, and Irene Dische are the women who write about their experiences like Barbara Honigmann (Chedin, Herzog, Remmler). Not all of these accounts are purely autobiographical, yet many were inspired by the challenges Jews faced as they lived in Germany and grappled with the German past in the years to follow. Jeffery Peck argues that in her novels, Honigmann’s “life is intimately connected...to the characters, settings and historical moments of her stories... she speaks through the narrators she creates” (559).

#### **The Novels**

A close reading of Honigmann’s novels reveals her primary concerns. She explores themes of her relationship with her parents, her new life in Strasburg, Judaism,



and her identity. *Damals* offers the broadest perspective on how Honigmann sees her life and the way that she understands herself in the context of the above stated themes. All of these themes as they appear in her novels contain autobiographical elements, however her discussions about family, her move to France and her work as an artist and writer will be the themes discussed within this analysis. Her concerns as they focus on Judaism and her identity as German and Jew will be discussed in Chapter 5.

*Damals* is an autobiography which does not narrate linearly, but presents life fragmented and multidimensional as suggested by Jelenek and others who write about female autobiography. Caren Kaplan terms this type of writing as postmodern, and claims that autobiographical writers, such as Honigmann, are not able to write in such a linear fashion, starting from one definite point and working “towards a substantial present” (189). Honigmann’s autobiography certainly reflects this postmodern-female style of writing; she centers her discussion around the various themes most important to her experiences in life. Whether or not these events are actual re-telling of events, or reflections of feelings towards her parents, her friends, Judaism, Germany or a combination of stories and reflections is up to the autobiographical author herself. These stories are everyday occurrences. They are not political writings; Stern points out that although she does not support the Communism, under which she grew up in the GDR, she does not outright criticize it, but merely comments how “skepticism vis-à-vis an oppressive and dysfunctional system emerges from her snapshots of everyday life” (332).

Honigmann’s writings have been categorized by many scholars as fictional autobiographies. In his article, “Barbara Honigmann: A Preliminary Assessment,” Guy Stern, for instance, makes a comparison between the fictional narrators in her works to Honigmann’s life. He writes, “Both novels [*Roman* and *Liebe*], as observed, are autobiographical”(332). Some of the similarities he points out between Honigmann and the narrators in the novels include the likeness in age, how they grew up in the GDR, they have careers in the theater, they are writers and painters, and above all they move out of Berlin to France in order to finally realize who they are in the context of Judaism (332). There are, of course, differences as well, mostly recognized in *Liebe*.

In *Liebe*, Honigmann discusses in great detail her life as she moved away from East Berlin and the death of her father. Honigmann mentions in *Damals* that she earlier

wrote a book about her father after his death, “Nach dem Tod meines Vaters habe ich ein Buch geschrieben, über ihn und über mich und unsere verfehlte Liebe, seine vielfachen Ehen und die Orte und Stationen seines Lebens” (33). She does not mention in *Damals* the title of the book, but the first paragraph and all throughout *Liebe*, one finds references to her father, the relationship, or rather the nonexistent relationship she had with him. The “factual” information, his occupation as journalist in Paris and London, and his list of marriages, the first to a woman in Paris, then Honigmann’s mother, then the actress in Berlin and finally the museum curator in Weimar, and the type of relationship she had with him, all seems to coincide with the information she gives about her father in *Damals*. However, the differences between the two books are notable. In *Damals* Honigmann seems to discuss her thoughts about the various elements of her life, Judaism, Germany, her mother and her life in Strasburg, whereas in *Liebe*, she seems to organize her thoughts about her father and their relationship.

*Roman* was published in 1986. This collection of stories is Honigmann’s first publication. In *Damals*, Honigmann explains that *Roman* is not a novel, despite the title, but refers to the work as her effort to focus on a new perspective, from the beginning, like a child. This book consists of a series of stories that take her through her life as a young adult, the birth of her first son, her experiences in the theater, traveling with friends, some of her early associations with Judaism and finally her move to Strasburg. Petra Fiero, Marilyn Fries, Christina Guenther, and Guy Stern all assert that these stories are autobiographical accounts of Honigmann’s life. *Roman* was not published until after her move to Strasburg. In this way the idea of a fresh start with new words in a new land and new life, reveals a theme that repeats itself in many of her books.

In Fries’ examination of *Roman*, she observes how Honigmann’s first work of prose, *Roman*, moves away from third person writing to explore her own voice, presenting a “direct confrontation” of her own life (181). Fries points out that the six stories in the novel are connected, with the first story starting from the beginning in Berlin and the last wrapping up in Strasburg, after the move (181-2). This gives Honigmann’s novel an interesting autobiographical text which comes full circle.

The following analysis will focus on various aspects of the autobiographical elements found within *Damals*, *Liebe*, and *Roman*, such as how Honigmann sees herself,

her move to Strasburg, the way she understands her relationship with her parents, and her attempt to reconnect with her lost past. Through the process of examining these elements of Honigmann's life, one can then apply these experiences as they relate to her discussion on Judaism within *Damals*, which will be discussed separately in Chapter 5.

### **Barbara Honigmann as She Writes Herself**

In order to best understand the autobiographical writing of Barbara Honigmann, one should first understand how Honigmann writes about herself. In the final chapter of *Damals*, "Ein seltsamer Tag," Honigmann is at home for one week alone, without her husband or children. She goes through the day, talking about her thoughts and feelings of having the house to herself, and finally she takes the reader through her thoughts as she paints a self-portrait. This self-portrait is something that she has created throughout the entire book, bringing the reader to places inside the workings of her mind, her memories and experiences with her mother, her father, Berlin, the theater and her new life in Strasburg. Christina Guenther explores this idea of Honigmann's self portrait, and agrees that this is something Honigmann does throughout the entire text (225). Interestingly, Honigmann "paints" this portrait not only in *Damals*, but in *Liebe* and *Roman* as well. Through the lens of a self portrait her writing examines her life simultaneously as a painter and as a writer. Honigmann's novels present personal identity through the medium of autobiographical text and self portrait.

Her novel *Liebe* paints yet another picture for Honigmann's life as she moves to Paris. *Liebe* focuses on two major themes: the death of the narrator's father and her move from East Berlin to Paris. *Liebe* is a frame story; it begins with the death of the narrator's father and the narrator already in Paris. The story jumps back and forth in time, from her apartment in Paris, then back to Berlin at different points in time. The plot finally returns again to Paris as she hears of the death of her father and how she deals with his death. It is important to consider the chronology of the story, since it seems she

uses the story to reflect upon her doubts and remorse for leaving Berlin. She looks back on the different stages of her decision to start a new life, but she is many times doubtful.

The first place the reader observes this doubt occurs when she first arrives at the train station in Paris "...und ich bin noch durch hundert Eingänge und Ausgänge wieder herein- und wieder herausgehetzt, es war, als ob wirklich kein Zugang in diese Stadt hinein zu finden wäre" (*Liebe* 13). She has just arrived in the train station, yet she cannot find a way out into the city. This can also be an analogy to her desire to find an entrance into her new life, her new start, since she has just commented on how she is not sure why she has made this move. Revealing her doubt she states:

Es fiel mir schwer, das neue Leben zu beginnen, und ich dachte viel mehr an alles, was hinter mir lag, an meinen Vater, vor dem ich weggelaufen war, weil er mein ganzes Leben lang zuviel von mir verlangt hatte, an meine Freunde, derer ich überdrüssig geworden war, und an das <Berliner Theater>, an dem ich nicht länger hatte arbeiten wollen. (*Liebe* 17)

She goes on to discuss how she writes postcards to her father, her friends in Berlin, and to her colleagues at the Berliner Theater, and how this helps her feel closer to them. She also talks about things that she does or books she reads that remind her of her old life in Berlin, which all seem to bring on feelings of doubt as she searches for a place to call home. She then starts to realize that her decision to move in order to start a new life was perhaps a good idea, because she was:

...oft hin und her gerissen zwischen einem Wohlgefühl der Fremde, dem Stolz, daß ich die Kraft gehabt hatte, mich von meinem alten Leben zu trennen, und einer Art Heimweh, das gar kein richtiger Schmerz war, sondern nur darin bestand, daß ich fast immer an eine andere Zeit dachte, eine früher [Zeit]. (*Liebe* 19)

This wavering of confidence and doubt in her decision to move is a theme that she expresses in one way or another throughout most of the book.

At the beginning of the next chapter the narrator receives her belongings from her apartment in Berlin. She talks about how the items in the boxes from her new apartment do not really look like her belongings as they now sit in her new apartment:

Kisten und Kartons standen sperrangelweit offen, das Unterste lag zuoberst, Strippen und Schnüre hingen sinnlos herunter und bildeten Knoten, die unauflöslich waren, manches konnte ich gar nicht wieder finden, war ich ganz sicher eingepackt hatte, und einiges war hinzugekommen, das nie dagewesen war und mir gar nicht gehörte. (*Liebe* 21)

Within all of those boxes to a certain extent are her material belongings, but they are also her memories. She reflects on how she took the greatest care in packing, looking at each individual item, remembering its story and assessing its importance, deciding whether or not she should bring it with her. As she unpacks these boxes full of her memories, she is able to look at her belongings differently. All of those boxes are her life, the ropes tied in knots are those memories and issues she must work harder to open up and understand in order to bring peace to herself. Because she is in a new place, she can examine her life in a new light, with different eyes.

She clearly wanted to make a new start, but for what reason she does not fully explain, “Es war so eine Idee gewesen, daß man immer wieder in ein neues Land, eine neue Heimat aufbrechen müsse, auch wenn es wieder nur eine Provinz wäre” (*Liebe* 38). The most logical explanation for this new start is the desire to get away from the Berlin Theater. She does not mention Judaism as a factor nor her life in Berlin outside of the Theater, only that she is tired of going there and talking about leaving, she wants to really leave. She feels that she can be nothing more than a theater assistant in Berlin, and the same anywhere else, so she decides with her change in location she will make a change in her life work, “Ich wollte auswandern, am liebsten nach Paris, eine neue Sprache lernen und etwas ganz neues anfangen...” (*Liebe* 48). She definitely decided to start something new, but at the same time she was searching for some continuity from her past in order to also make her past a part of her future. Todd Herzog in his examination of *Liebe* points out how the first person narrator retraces the steps of her parents, although she has gone to Paris to forget her past (8). Her inescapability of her parents’ past is an important concept to the story, claims Herzog, since the entire plot revolves around her finding her present identity through the steps of her parents.

In *Liebe* Honigmann talks about how she decided one day to stop looking for positions with publishers, theaters and bookstores, all things that she would have done in

Berlin as well, and decided to take up painting. She states, “Statt die Welle von neuem Leben einfach nur über mich hinwegrollen und mich von ihr erschöpfen oder gar zu Boden werfen zu lassen, wollte ich ihre Bewegung nutzen und selbst meinen Platz wechseln” (*Liebe* 52). The frequent mention in *Liebe* about the narrator’s position as a theater assistant at the Berliner Theater is consistent with information that is known about Honigmann’s life. There is, however, no reference in her biographies that she continued to work in the theater after she moved to Strasburg. The change that she decided to make about breaking away from theater work seems to indicate real changes she made in her life after she moved to Strasburg.

Continuing on with the theme of new beginnings, in *Damals*, Honigmann states that her intention for her first novel, *Roman*, was to start from the beginning, therefore she herself refers to it as the beginning of her life as she sees it. At this point of her life she is finally able to see her own development from a different geographic location immersed in a different spirituality. The style of writing in *Roman*, namely the form of a letter, later changes to more of a journal entry and is a style of personal reflection and is similar to the writing found in *Damals* and *Liebe*.

*Roman* consists of six “Erzählungen.” As Fries states in her article, “Text as Locus, Inscription as Identity,” many scholars claim that the stories in *Roman* may or may not be a continuous sketch of Honigmann’s experiences (182). Individually the six different stories all concern themselves with different experiences or events, and except for the narrator, the characters change in each story. Most of the narratives are told in the first person and seem to share similar themes, like young adulthood, search for identity and a conceptualization of Judaism. It is not clear with a preliminary reading of *Roman* to determine whether or not these stories are an actual account of Honigmann’s life, however with further reading and a better understanding of her biography, it becomes clear that this is arguably the case. The book describes a full circle and the six stories suggest Honigmann’s various experiences. She begins by recalling moments through the innocent eyes of a child, then reflects on their significance in shaping her adult life, and she addresses her own person as going through a significant change and reintroduction to life through a new perspective.

“Roman von einem Kinde” is the first story in *Roman* and is written in the format of a letter to “Josef,” who Fries argues to be the father of Honigmann’s first born son (182). In this letter she talks about the broken relationship with Josef and how upset she is regarding losing contact with him. She writes to Josef to recall a few different memories, which he was not there for, such as the birth of her son (13-20), the night of a Seder evening (23-4), and others. Fries compares the birth to Honigmann’s own birth into her new life of Judaism and into France.

The doubt she experiences from the move to France in *Liebe* is in contrast to the last story in *Roman*, “Bonsoir, Madame Benhamou.” It treats Honigmann’s move to Strasburg, her new life in a foreign country, and how her entry into the Jewish community there begins. This story seems to be very factual and autobiographical. She talks about her move from Berlin to Strasburg, France, and how she now studies the Torah at the house of Madame Benhamou with four other women, all of whom have children like she. This story also seems to be directly related to “Meine sefardischen Freundinnen” in *Damals*. Strasburg is where Honigmann actually wrote the book, so her experiences as she describes them in this last chapter indicate her thoughts and feelings of settling into a new environment and how she is just beginning to adjust to being a foreigner in Strasburg. Life in Strasburg is different from Berlin; she observes how there are so many Jews, just like Berlin before Hitler. This seems to be her first impression of Strasburg, different but good, and she places herself into this new land, with a new start, and a new life, with Judaism at the center (*Roman* 115). As the book concludes, one is left with the sense that the stories have come full circle, and that the narrator has come from a lost place, to a place of understanding of where she belongs in the world as she sees it.

## Honigmann's Relationship with Her Parents, Lizzy and Georg Honigmann

One of the reasons for Honigmann's focus on herself can be found in the first sentence of the chapter "Selbstporträt als Jüdin." She writes, "Mein Vater und Mutter sind tot" (*Damals* 11). Here she reveals her momentary loneliness and memory of the details of her life as they relate to growing up in communist East Germany as a person of Jewish faith. Upon reading her biographical information, along with reading *Damals*, it becomes clear that the author has issues with her past, and her most direct link to the past is through her parents. Because of the Anti-Semitism in East Germany in the 1950's, many Jews who chose to live in East Germany to create a socialist democracy had to give up their Jewish identities in order to actively participate in the rebuilding of the broken country. Barbara Honigmann's parents were no exception. She later mentions that directly after the war her parents registered with the "Jüdische Gemeinde" in Berlin, but left the "Gemeinde" in the 1950's. She never says directly that she is bitter with her parents for not holding on to the Jewish faith. However, because it is a part of her past and their past, she does mention time and time again, within the text of *Damals*, the lack of communication between her divorced parents, as well as the lack of communication between herself and her parents, especially with her mother. Honigmann writes in both *Damals* and in *Liebe* that her parents were divorced and how she spent more time with her mother than her father as a child. As a result of this she had a stronger relationship with her mother than with her father. She also mentions that her father was married four times in both novels, with her mother as the second wife.

While Honigmann spent more time with her mother, it is interesting that her father is a major theme in *Liebe* and is without a doubt the main autobiographical element as she describes her struggle with her identity and subsequent move to Paris. None of her biographers mention any stay in Paris or a move to Paris from Berlin, yet her mention of Paris in *Liebe* still parallels her move to Strasburg, both cities in France. In *Damals* she mentions how the Jewish community in Strasburg is smaller than that in Paris (59). She also discusses how both of her parents lived in Paris before they fled to England. Perhaps this is why she chose Paris as the setting of her story. Within the story she says that she



picked Paris because she had always wanted to go there (*Liebe* 12). There is also the possibility that, because this book was written after the death of her father, perhaps she was using the writing of this book as a way to feel closer to him, since she did not have a substantial relationship with him during his life. She mentions in *Liebe* that she would write letters to her friend Alfried after he left Berlin, although she did not have an address to send the letters. She just writes the letters to feel closer to him and then throws them away (*Liebe* 43). It is a possibility that she is using this same concept of feeling closer to her father by writing this book about him, when it is otherwise impossible since he has passed away.

The issues the narrator works through after she moves to Paris from Berlin could possibly translate to the real doubts, fears and excitement she experienced as she moved from Berlin to Strasburg. As previously mentioned, it is known that Honigmann relocated to Strasburg in 1984, and she did state in *Damals* that she wrote a book about her father, who died also in 1984. Since the time period of moving to Strasburg and the death of her father happened at the same time, these two aspects, her relocation to France and her father's death in *Liebe* can translate to a very autobiographical account of her life during this period.

In *Liebe* the narrator wants to develop a relationship with her father because her mother has passed away. However, her father seems unwilling to rekindle this relationship. The narrator is left to reflect on her relationship with her father, especially after he passes away (*Liebe* 82-88). After the death of her father, she sorts through his belongings. She finds a journal that he started to write in London, as he was about to move back to Berlin. It was made for the year 1944, but instead he entered experiences of the year 1946. She takes the time to read through this journal in order to understand the kind of person her father was, especially since she did not really know or understand him during his life. There were only eight entries in the journal, dating from May 31 to June 10, but at the end of what he has written, she picks up writing in the journal, putting in the current year. She does this because she “den Kalender nicht einfach als ein Erinnerungsstück mit nach Paris nehmen wollte und weil so viele Seiten leer geblieben waren...” (*Liebe* 99). Perhaps this was her final attempt to become closer to her father. Guy Stern describes the daughter's writing in the journal as a “symbolic homecoming.”

since her father started the journal at the end of his exile, and she continues the journal at the beginning of her “exile” (330).

She only briefly mentions the narrator’s mother in *Liebe*, found mostly on pages 31-34. There are only a few other occasions where her mother is a supplement or footnote to the story of *Liebe*. This is in stark contrast to the discussion about Honigmann’s mother in *Damals*. It is interesting in this context that Honigmann changes the factual information about her mother in *Liebe*. Her mother in *Liebe* does not speak German natively nor does she come from Vienna, like her mother in *Damals*. The mother in *Liebe* is from Bulgaria. Perhaps it is with this information that she isolates the discussion about her father, since the story is to focus on him, as she mentions in the later book *Damals*. Another reason why she may have left her mother out of the discussion is because at the time of the writing of *Liebe*, her mother was still alive. She did not pass away until after *Liebe* was written; she had already passed on by the time Honigmann wrote *Damals*.

In *Damals*, Honigmann talks about how the things that she remembers about her mother and her mother’s life may not be the most informative details about her past, but they do tell of the memories of her mother. For example, she recalls a grapefruit knife that her mother brought back to Berlin after the war from England. She says that it did not get used until twenty years after the war, since there were no grapefruits to be eaten at this time, “1946, ins zerbombte Berlin, ein Grapefruitmesser! ... Die Vergangenheit und die Erinnerungen meiner Mutter lagen in solchen Details” (*Damals* 116).

In *Damals*, Honigmann reveals that her mother, Lizzy Kohlmann, was born in Vienna in 1910 and died there in 1991. She lived there until the age of 28 and after Barbara moved to Strasburg in 1984, she moved back to Vienna, living the last seven years of her life in her hometown. She married her first husband at 18, but then divorced him as he leaned politically more towards Zionism and she joined the communist party in the early 1930’s. She shortly thereafter married an English student who lived in the apartment Lizzy’s parents rented out; he was also a communist. Immediately after their marriage on February 12, 1934, they left Austria for Paris due to the political pressure of the Nazis in Germany. A few years later they relocated to London, and Lizzy’s parents

followed in March of 1939 (*Damals* 113). She divorced the Englishman after he was arrested in London and she met Georg Honigmann, who would be her last husband.

Barbara Honigmann often searched for details of her parents past in order to find her place in life as it relates to Germany and Judaism and how she can continue her parents' story. This proved to be an impossible wish, since she did not have much of a relationship with her father and her mother refused to relay this information. For example, Barbara asks her mother if she has ever revisited her old house in Vienna from before the war. Her mother simply replies, "Nein, wozu?" (*Damals* 98) Barbara of course knows the answer and also knows that her mother will not discuss anything surrounding the subject, since it is something that lies in the past. However, Honigmann relates this reaction to the way she feels her mother led her life, "Ich denke nur an den heutigen Tag, hat sie oft gesagt, ich lebe nicht in der Erinnerung. Und tatsächlich hat sie ja nie etwas gesammelt, aufgehoben oder aufbewahrt" (*Damals* 101). With this silence, her mother adds to her daughter's sense of discontinuity, since the daughter was born ten years after her maternal grandfather dies and seven years after her maternal grandmother. Barbara Honigmann also makes no mention of close relatives, whom she can ask about her family history. Her mother represents a hole or discontinuation in the line of her own history; her family, her faith, and her upbringing are left unexplained. The past in these texts is presented as her "lost memories" and Barbara is left to wonder about the many gaps in her own life that she is unable to fill:

Meine Mutter ist genau in dem Schweigen gestorben, in dem sie, jedenfalls mit mir, auch gelebt hatte, aus dem ich sie manchmal herauszwingen wollte und es nicht konnte und erst jetzt weiß ich, daß es sinnlos war, wenn ich immer an ihr herumwünschte und herumdeutete und drängte. (*Damals* 117)

Honigmann's mother was not willing to provide the missing link to the past. As Barbara Honigmann describes the life and actions of her mother, it seems that there exists a mysterious inability to pass on certain information about this family and any personal history. The chapter "Gräber in London" in *Damals* sheds some more light on this phenomenon.

## Barbara Honigmann's Search to Reconnect with her Past

The title "Gräber in London" refers to the graves of her grandparents, the parents of Lizzy Honigmann. Barbara Honigmann's grandparents were originally from Hungary. They lived in Vienna until 1939, when they had to escape to London with their daughter Lizzy, who at the time was married to an Englishman. Both of Honigmann's grandparents died and were buried in London, even though her mother Lizzy relocated to Berlin with her new husband, Georg Honigmann after the war. Although her parents lived as exiles in London, Lizzy Honigmann had shared with her daughter that London was the best time in her whole life. She often referred to the English as a very civilized people, as opposed to the Germans and Germany (*Damals* 22-3). Yet despite the fact that her mother had only good things to say about England, she never returned.

Her mother never visited the graves of her parents in London, never spoke about her life as she was growing up, and never held on to anything in her past. This is a fact that may be important in understanding a puzzle left by Honigmann's mother after she died. Upon Lizzy Honigmann's death, she left to her daughter one letter written in Hungarian to Lizzy from her mother. The envelope included two cards, which listed the cemetery plots where her grandparents were buried in London. Since these were the only items which Honigmann's mother left behind, no furniture, no pictures, and no clothing, she thought that it was important to go back to the cemetery where her grandparents were laid to rest (*Damals* 34-5, 37). Yet a visit to the cemetery reveals that there is nothing marking the graves of her grandparents, giving the appearance of two empty plots, "Hier ist der Platz, wo die Großeltern begraben sind, da unter der nackten Erde liegen sie, das gibt es gar keinen Zweifel, liegen begraben wie Hunde, ohne Grabstein und ohne Namen" (*Damals* 37).

Despite the request of her grandmother in the Hungarian letter to purchase gravestones and cement slabs to cover and mark the sites, Honigmann's mother had never returned or fulfilled her own parents' last wishes. The narrative does not further explain why the graves were left unmarked, but when Honigmann sees the unmarked graves, she understands why her mother left the letter and the cemetery plot cards to her, "Jetzt

verstehe ich den ungarischen Brief und die graugrünen Karten und warum sie meine Mutter 45 Jahre aufgehoben und mir hinterlassen hat” (*Damals* 37). Perhaps it was this guilt of not honoring her parents’ wishes for the graves after their death, including a Jewish ceremony and Hebrew scripture upon the gravestones, which caused Honigmann’s mother to remain silent about her parents and their past. Her mother’s turn away from Judaism may have had something to do with her neglect of her parent’s wishes, and her turning away from her duty to her parents may have had to do with her never returning to England. Perhaps the return trip to England was a trip that her mother could never make, since it was too painful a reminder of the war, of her time spent fleeing from Germany and from the persecution of the religion which defined her identity for the Nazis, but not for herself.

For Honigmann, the break with the past that was facilitated by her mother causes a major problem in her search for family history and personal identity. Honigmann’s novels reveal her attempt to find a link to the past. As an artist and writer, she works through describing the world as she sees it happening around her. Whether this is reported by purely fictional or factual means, or even a mixture of the two, this is ultimately up to the author or artist. In the case of the survivors of the Holocaust and their children, their voices have given hope to future generations by providing their stories as a source of inspiration of survival. Their stories to show the time and place of their lives, the challenges they worked through, and above all, the lives they lived.

One theme that emerges in the autobiographical literature of the Jews in Germany is the concept of being the other. The children of the Holocaust survivors grew up more often than not in a world where Germans were always the enemy. Honigmann was a child of two survivors of the Nazi persecutions. She writes about how she struggles with the silence of her parents’ past and about their Jewish identity. She expresses her anger towards the Germans for inflicting so much suffering on the Jews. Fries mentions that the release of *Roman* was accepted positively in West Germany and viewed as a move towards better understanding of the Jewish experience in Germany after the Holocaust, but in East Germany critics saw her writings as a perpetuation of the marginalization of Jews and encouragement to the continuation of the situation of those Jews who feel they have no place in German society (184). However, Honigmann does express a

combination of these two criticisms in *Roman*: the absence of a feeling of home and a sense of not belonging in Germany. The perception of this perpetuation is exactly why Honigmann chose to leave Germany, and why her literature concerns itself with this topic of not belonging. Fries continues by stating, “Honigmann discovers no significance in GDR society, when she seeks her identity via the text of Judaism, her alienation is complete” (175). The next chapter will discuss the general situation of the Jews in Germany after 1945, then it will move into addressing the specific history of Jews in East Germany until the reunification of both German states.

## **CHAPTER 4**

### **JEWS IN GERMANY**

Before World War II, there was a large Jewish population in Germany. During the first three decades of the twentieth century Berlin thrived as a center for Jewish life and culture. However, since the emancipation of the Jews in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, many German-Jews, such as Honigmann's grandparents and parents, identified themselves simply as Germans and had little contact with religious life. Before the persecutions by the Nazis, the Jewish population in Berlin numbered over 172,000 individuals, with more than 100 synagogues in Berlin alone. By the time Hitler came to power in 1933, the Jewish population in Berlin had already decreased by approximately 12,000 members, down to just over 160,000. By the time of the first deportations out of Berlin in 1941, that number dropped to around 65,000 and by the time the Allies reached Berlin in 1945, only 7,000 Jews were found still living in Berlin (Ostow 1).

After the war, some German Jewish families returned to Germany. Although they spent time in other countries and cultures during World War II, they came back to Germany, willing to put the past behind to rebuild and reunite with the new German culture. The Jews in Germany also learned to conceal their true feelings towards others, especially those negative feelings harbored towards Germans and German authority figures due to the events surrounding the Holocaust (Cohn 43). In addition, newer traditions began to form after the war. The remaining German Jews had to find a way to set up a German and Jewish value system in a way that the majority of the German Jewish community, from conservative to reformed, would agree and take the newer traditions as their own (Cohn 43).

Before World War II many German Jews considered themselves part of the German culture, identifying more with the German culture than the Jewish (Cohn 48). After 1945, the act of assimilating into the German culture and becoming once more a part of that culture was sometimes difficult for returning German Jews, especially for those whose parents or relatives were driven out of Germany, and in many cases, murdered by the Nazis. For these people, the memories of the past were still very fresh in their minds and finding their place in society proved sometimes problematic (Cohn 43). It would mean to forget what happened to their parents, grandparents, sisters, brothers, aunts and uncles. For many it is much too soon to forget. Those Jews who had survived in Germany mostly stayed in Refugee camps in Germany and Austria. From there they decided whether or not to leave the country to immigrate to the United States, Israel or elsewhere. Some, like Paul Spiegel's parents, resettled in their old hometowns. Others, like Honigmann's parents returned from exile to help rebuild a new Germany in the East.

The Jewish Community in Berlin was officially re-established on July 15, 1945, with support of the Jewish population of Berlin, the American Joint Distribution Committee (AJDC), as well as the Allied forces (United States, England, and France). "The community tried to preserve a neutral attitude and maintain the community as a non-political organization above and beyond any party struggle" (Ostow 3). Immediately after the war, the main focus of the *Gemeinde* was to give basic care to those Jews who survived the war, providing food, shelter, clothing, and medical care. They also opened new Synagogues and other Jewish institutions, and promoted the movement to have all Jewish property returned and to have the Jewish Community officially recognized by the governing body (Ostow 3). The Allied forces assisted by taking measures to ensure that Germans would welcome Jews and Jewish religious organizations in Germany after the war. Many laws and regulations were written into the new constitution of Germany (written May 23, 1949) to insure anti-Semitic and Nazi beliefs would not prevail in the renewed land (Ostow 3). The first article of the German constitution is a fine example of this, as it ensures the protection and respect of every human being.

The Jewish State of Israel was established on May 15, 1948, and along with this reestablishment of Israel developed an interesting phenomenon in the minds of many



German Jews. Of course Israel represents the homeland for the Jews, but it also serves as a sense of security in the backs of the minds of many Jews today. During the Holocaust many Jews fled Germany to surrounding European countries, many of which were also invaded by the Nazis. Some also fled to the United States, where many immigrated and eventually became citizens, but there was a time from 1939 to 1941 where no more refugees were allowed into America. As a result of the combination of the Holocaust, the Nazi invasion of neighboring countries of refuge, and the United States closing its borders to refugees, there is still a feeling of fear among those Jews who lived during this time of no where to turn to in times of trouble. At least with the existence of Israel these scarred Jews will always feel that they have a place to go, if worse comes to worse (Cohn 48).

Although the existence of Israel created a security for Jews all over the world, some German-Jews still felt strongly about rebuilding Germany and participating in the reconstruction, and since the Jewish Community had already been reestablished in Berlin, this offered encouragement for those Jews who decided to stay in Germany. When it was clear that Germany would stay divided into two states, East and West, some Jews decided to settle in the East. Marxism had been a popular belief among some Jewish intellectuals since the early twentieth century and was often seen as the “solution” to the troubles between the Jews and Anti-Semites. Communism eliminated religion from its party program – hence this gave Jews the opportunity to be seen as “Germans.” The German Democratic Republic (GDR) was established in 1948 by the Soviet forces. Many Jews decided to contribute their efforts to the rebuilding of the German Democratic State in the east.

In addition to those who made a conscious decision about living in East or West Germany, there were those Jews who were forced into East or West Berlin after the closing of the border in Berlin in 1961. Life was different for many East German Jews, since the government strongly discouraged religious activity, as this activity could interfere with the ideas of the communist party, which could divide the whole of the nation into smaller religious groups. The fear of the communist party was that these religious groups could identify with one another through religious beliefs, rather than identify with the one and only communist party as true believers in the Communist system. As a result, many Jewish traditions were not practiced and soon forgotten, in an

attempt to adhere to the wishes of the people in power and to not draw attention to the identity of the Jews in East Germany (Ostow 3-4).

After a very short time, many Jews realized that Stalin's idea of Marxism soon turned into the more extreme governing body of communism. Accusations were made by the Communist Party leaders in the GDR against Jews in positions of power. The Communist Party stated that these Jewish leaders put the agenda of their religion and cultural community before the interest of the Communist Party, therefore they had to be "purged" from their positions of power. These leaders had to sign statements which "denounced the AJDC as an organization of American agents, equated Zionism with Fascism, protested the death sentence passed on the Rosenberg's<sup>7</sup>, and condemned the campaign for restitution payments as exploitation of the German people" (Ostow 4).

Stalin's policies severely curtailed the practice of the Jewish religion and culture within the Eastern Bloc, and since 90% of the 6 million Jews killed in the Holocaust lived in the countries taken over by the USSR after the war, the "communal revival" of Judaism in this region of the world, including East Germany, became virtually impossible (Ostow 4). Although many Jews hoped to participate in the reconstruction of the new Germany, they were cast out of high political and academic positions within East Germany. By this time Israel had been established and the movement for the mass migration of all Jews to Israel had been set in motion. Many of the Jews advocating the importance of this return to Israel, shunned those German Jews who decided not to go, especially those in East Germany who were rapidly losing their rights to religious freedoms. Since numerous Jews who stayed in East Germany had already publicly denounced their religion due to the pressures of the government, this discrimination by the Israeli Jews caused further separation from their religion and culture. As a result of the withdrawn outside support of Judaism in East Germany and the government pressure to relinquish all ties to the Jewish faith, many second generation Jews in East Germany had no or very little knowledge of the Jewish faith, culture, history, and above all no knowledge of the Holocaust (Ostow 5). There was also a major lack of understanding of the past and recovering this past, as there was never any public discussion about German involvement in the Holocaust in East Germany. However, East German officials did remind the citizens of East Germany that communists were victims of the Nazis.

By early 1953 many Jews decided to flee the GDR to the west, however by mid 1953, after many had fled and after the death of Stalin, the condition of the Jews remaining in the east had improved. The discrimination against the Jews had ended and the reconstruction of their communities, institutions and synagogues resumed with the help of governmental aid (Ostow 5). By the spring of 1956 most of the Jews who were purged from their positions three years earlier, were restored to their previous positions, but with one exception; they were all no longer members of the Jewish community, but rather communists who “settled in the Soviet Zone” (Ostow 6).

After the fall of the wall in 1989, many former East German Jews sought to redefine themselves as believers and followers of the Jewish faith, culture and values. Not only were they given no choice but to conceal their religious and cultural identities in order to completely assimilate into the communistic ideal, many realized once the communistic experiment failed that they were disillusioned and angry with the Anti-Semitic treatment of Jews in the DDR (Ostow 6).

The German Jewish community in the re-united Germany is rather different than the community in Germany before the rise of the Nazi Party in 1933. Until the 1990's, there were fewer people and Jewish life was less vibrant. Since the fall of the wall, this is slowly changing, especially because many of the Jews in Germany today are Russian Jews who are emigrating to the West. Approximately 80,000 Jews live in Germany today; however most of these Jews live in what was formerly West Germany. By the end of the East German state, about 1,200 Jews in eight different cities or regions were registered with the state, whom most of were elderly (Ostow 2). There were most likely more Jews in East Germany who were not registered as such, but lived like Honigmann's family with a silenced Jewish identity. Jews in Germany today are organized at the local city and *Bundesländer* levels, with the central organization or *Zentralrat* as the “national umbrella organization” in Germany (Rapaport 30). This community or *Gemeinde* has developed under the influences of the survival of the Holocaust, the experiences of the DDR, West German Capitalism, and the reestablishment of the state of Israel. As Michael Cohn explains in *The Jews in Germany, 1945-1993*, today most definitions of Jewish identity are rather broad, because of all of these influences.

The Jews who live in Germany, both today and after the war, were able to show the Germans that, despite the best efforts of the Nazi party, the Jewish population was still a presence, and, although many were murdered or driven into exile, there were still Jews in Germany and there would always be Jews in Germany. Those Jews who decided to stay had confidence in rebuilding a new democratic Germany. The next chapter will focus on a discussion of how Honigmann discusses Judaism in her writings, especially those found in her novel *Damals*. This novel provides extended discussions about her experience as a Jew in Germany, and reveals how after the Holocaust Jews like Honigmann, who grew up with their parents' and nation's suppressed silence about their own past grapple with such issues as religion, Judaism, and her German identity.

## CHAPTER 5

### HONIGMANN AND HER SEARCH FOR JUDAISM

Through the writing of *Damals*, Honigmann expresses some of her deepest concerns about being a Jewish German. She leaves many situations open-ended, claiming a newfound understanding for herself, but also leaves room for her own uncertainties and continuous search to define herself. Her search for a Jewish identity in *Damals* includes discussions and explanations which focus mostly on her mother, but also briefly address her father. She works through her childhood in East Germany as a “DDR Kind,” and contemplates her family's struggle to be accepted as Germans without prejudice to their religion. All the while, Honigmann reveals her own struggle to find a peaceful balance between her identity as a Jew and as a German.

#### **The Silent Jewish Upbringing**

A major theme which emerges in Honigmann's autobiographical writing is her search for her Jewish past. Honigmann's link to this past was broken by her parents' silence. Yet beyond her parents' silence one also has to recognize the traumatic experience of the Holocaust which caused a major rift between Germans and German-Jews. Barbara Honigmann was born after World War II and after the atrocities of the Holocaust. However, her writing searches for a way to live as a Jew with a German past. In *Damals* Honigmann discusses how as a child, she noticed her family never really spoke of Judaism or their family history, but rather tried their best to hide it. When others spoke

about these topics, her parents remained silent, “Sie sprachen zu Hause nur >>davon<<, und draussen allerdings sprachen sie >>davon<< nie” (48). In another instance, she ponders a question posed by her husband concerning her lack of knowledge about her family’s history, “Er sagte, warum hast du deine Eltern nicht gefragt, ich sagte, du weißt nicht was ein Tabu ist” (31). Honigmann is caught here not only in a discussion where the silence of her parents rendered Judaism a taboo subject in her home, but also raises her own unfamiliarity with Judaism. She realizes that this silence is largely responsible for her disconnection with Judaism. The silence is further complicated by the fact that traditionally Judaism is not only a religion, but a culture and way of life. Judaism is one of the three major world religions and it has survived thousands of years of persecution, ridicule, and discrimination. Yet in order to continue the Jewish traditions and spirituality, it cannot be covered with silence, but needs active members to pass on the traditions of their religion and their family history.

Her parents decided on going back to Germany after the war, but decided to move into the Russian zone, the DDR. As she was growing up, she asked herself:

Warum sprecht ihr nicht von den Gräbern eurer Eltern, warum sprecht ihr überhaupt so wenig von euren Eltern? Was wolltet ihr um Himmels willen in der DDR? War es mehr als der Parteauftrag? War es nur der Parteauftrag? Warum habt ihr euch unterworfen? (*Damals* 12)

Stern points out that Honigmann addresses the question of why her father chose to live in the GDR after 1945 in *Liebe* as well. In both *Liebe* and *Damals*, she expresses how it was impossible for her to comprehend the answers to these questions as she was growing up, and she did not understand these questions until later in life when she began to put together all of the individual pieces of her parents’ past. Later in *Damals* Honigmann mentions how her mother followed her father back to Berlin after World War II, “Ihr Enthusiasmus für den Kommunismus füllte scheinbar alles aus: Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Zukunft, Erklärungen waren überflüssig” (*Damals* 23). Her mother only shrugged her shoulders at the question of why they chose to live in East Germany, but her father had a credo:

Ich bin ein Urenkel der Aufklärung, und ich habe an Vernunft und an die Idee der Gleichheit und Brüderlichkeit geglaubt. Nicht die Juden von Shtetl waren

>>unsere Leut<<, sondern die Männer der kommunistischen Idee waren es.  
Außerdem bin ich ein deutscher Jude, ein jüdischer Deutscher, die wollten mich aus Deutschland weg haben, aber ich bin wiedergekommen, das gibt mir Genugtuung. Ich gehöre hierher, auch wenn es mir hier kühl und leer ums Herz ist. (*Damals* 14)

This outward expression of support for Communism from Honigmann's father came from the belief that Marxism, and later Communism, was the answer to ending Anti-Semitism in Germany. For Jews, this political orientation did away with divisions among the people by class, race and religion, and concentrated more on the common good of mankind. Unfortunately with the establishment of Communism in East Germany, Anti-Semitism did not stop, and only by completely abandoning all religious affiliations could East German Jews participate as equal citizens in the government. The Jews who in the 1950's walked away from the Jewish faith in order to become more accepted into the German culture were, however, still not fully accepted. In *Damals*, Honigmann asserts that the Jews now sat "zwischen den Stühlen;" they were now neither Jewish or German (14).

This idea is discussed further in the chapter "Von meinem Urgroßvater, meinem Großvater, meinem Vater und von mir," as Honigmann painstakingly tries to excavate information about her family's past to reflect on what it is that her family has done occupationally, from her great grandfather to herself (*Damals*). All of her forefathers were, in some form or another, writers of books. She comments on how writing is her "family business," a trade she is following, "Mein Urgroßvater, mein Großvater und mein Vater hatten also alle schon deutsche Bücher verfaßt, und ich stehe nun da und mache es ihnen nach, als ob nichts geschehen wäre" (*Damals* 50). This is an important way for Honigmann to bring together her past and future; it is her missing link especially in light of her parents' silence about the past.

Her great grandfather, David Honigmann, worked for the railroad in Silesia, but also worked his whole life towards the emancipation of the Jews in Prussia. He was also a writer; he wrote novels and novellas. He wanted above all to integrate himself into the German culture and to be accepted as a German. Her grandfather, Georg Gabriel Honigmann, as a result, completely shut Judaism out of his life, having completely

integrated himself into the German culture. He was the founder of the “Lehrstuhl für Medizingeschichte” at the Universität Gießen. Her father, Georg Friedrich Wolfgang Honigmann, with all German names and none Jewish, “hat das Judentum nicht mehr verlassen müssen, es war ihm sowieso schon ganz entrückt und entfremdet” (*Damals* 43). She goes on to explain that her own father, with all of his German names and the complete separation from his Jewish heritage, truly believed that he was utterly German and fully assimilated. It was of course after the religious persecution by the Nazis that this belief was destroyed, “In Abwandlung der von der jüdischen Haskala ausgegeben Parole, zu Hause Jude und auf der Straße Mensch zu sein, hat sich mein Vater dann selbst ironisiert: >>Zu Hause Mensch und auf der Straße Jude<<” (*Damals* 44).

Reaching all the way back to her great grandfather, David Honigmann, her family is part of an emancipated Jewish family who wanted to be part of the German culture. They hoped to feel at home and not different because of their religious beliefs. The family made attempts to become a part of the German culture, they moved away from their Jewish heritage, changed their Jewish names to more traditional German names, and contributed to the creation of a better Germany by way of military service, science, or rebuilding efforts after WWII. Yet through the eyes of Barbara Honigmann, Jews in Germany were still not seen as German. It is maybe all of these factors working together, bubbling under the surface to manifest into a form of protest that allows her still to consider herself still German. German was the culture in which she grew up and the language in which she thinks, speaks, and writes. It is, however, this same culture, which pushed her mother, her father, and all of his fathers before him, by way of Communism, the assimilation of the Jews before World War II and the Jewish Emancipation in the nineteenth century, to lay down their religious identities out of the desire to become a part of and to please this larger culture. It is perhaps out of this protest that she can only bring herself to live three blocks away from the German border, and no closer, “Ich zog nach Strasburg, da wohne ich am Rande der Innenstadt, drei Straßen hinter der Grenze, als ob mein Mut nicht weiter gereicht hätte” (*Damals* 45).

It is from Honigmann’s expression of her inability to live in Germany that many scholars address the theme of exile in her writing. “Deterritorialization” is a term Caren Kaplan uses to describe the “displacement of identities, persons, and meanings that is



endemic to the postmodern world”(187). This word, as it is defined, applies directly to exile and people of exile. Kaplan relates her definition of the word to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari’s use in describing literature and language in “What is minor Literature?” (188).<sup>8</sup> If deterritorialization is not only used to describe people in their physical positions, but their works as well, Honigmann’s writings in a sense reflect this idea of deterritorialization. Kaplan also suggests that a person may choose whether or not they want a deterritorialized life, or “deterritorialization may choose” the person. With this she implies that a person can make their own decision to leave their home and language, while others may be cast out, or forced into exile (191). Honigmann has elected for herself a life of self-imposed exile in France. This theme of exile is something that almost every scholar (Stern, Guenther, Peck, Fries, to name a few) who has analyzed Honigmann’s writings observed as central to her novels. These scholars go on to argue that Honigmann’s move to France (i.e. her exile) was actually what allowed her to begin writing. This is a point which Honigmann addresses in the chapter “My Great Grandfather, My Grandfather, My Father and Me,” where she discusses how she was able to start from the beginning, in a new land and language (*Damals* 51-52).

### **Barbara Honigmann’s Return to Judaism and the German – Jewish Conflict**

Once Honigmann was old enough to make her own decisions, she decided to reconnect with her Jewish heritage. In the 1970’s, while still living in East Berlin, she joined the same Jewish Community that her parents belonged to before they were indirectly forced out by the government (*Damals* 14). As she joined, she found that she was not the only one of her age to do this. It seems in the 1970’s there was a movement, especially in Germany, of young Jews who wanted to get back to understanding their past and their faith (*Damals* 14, 26). This return to Judaism is a decision that affects the rest of her life. It is through this “Zurückkehr” that she meets her husband, she raises her children with the Jewish faith as the center of their lives, and above all she leaves East Germany to live in a community more friendly to the Jewish religion. Because of the restrictions on

religious freedoms in the GDR, it was not common for people, especially those who were Jewish, to talk about their religious practices outside the home. For Barbara Honigmann, this was hardly a subject that was brought up even inside the home, “Vom Judentum wurde auch nicht gesprochen, nur eben daß wir >>die Juden<< und die anderen >>die Deutschen<< waren...” (*Damals* 23).

After she made the decision to turn back to Judaism and her Jewish roots, she realizes that her faith is part of her identity. Within Honigmann’s self analysis of German or “Jewishness,” she desires to identify herself as being more Jewish, only because she wants to disconnect herself from her German associations, “Fragte man mich, ob ich deutsch oder jüdisch sei, würde ich schon deshalb jüdisch sagen, um mich von den Deutschen abzugrenzen” (*Damals* 17). Unfortunately, she realizes that a complete separation from her German identity is not possible. She is not able to separate herself from Judaism any more that she is able to separate herself from being German. Honigmann cannot say that she is more German or Jewish, since her religion and her culture are both significant parts of her identity as a living and breathing person. Part of understanding has to do with the fact that she is a writer. Christina Guenther also addresses the issue of Honigmann’s inability to fully separate herself from the German culture and language and agrees that because she is a writer, there will always be an ever present connection to Germany (219). In being a writer, what she expresses with a pen and paper comes from her experiences in a day, in a week, and all throughout her life. She grew up in East Germany, speaking the language and living in the culture. Separating herself from the language and culture in which she grew up is not possible, since language and culture make up her identity and contribute to her self-expression:

Ich denke aber, der Schriftsteller ist das, was er schreibt, und er ist vor allem die Sprache, in der er schreibt. Ich schreibe nicht nur auf deutsch, sondern die Literatur, die mich geformt und gebildet hat, ist die deutsche Literatur, und ich beziehe mich auf sie, in allem was ich schreibe... (*Damals* 18)

She also reasoned that she needed to get out of East Germany in order to have a fresh start with her writing:

Bevor ich >>richtig<< zu schreiben anfang,...hatte ich mich aus dem Osten und aus Deutschland abgesetzt, nach Frankreich, obwohl Frankreich für mich ein

fremdes Land war... ...wurde Frankreich dann doch das Land der Freiheit für mich. (52)

Petra Fiero examined *Roman* and *Liebe* in her article “Identitätsfindung und Verhältnis zur deutschen Sprache bei Chaim Noll und Barbara Honigmann.” Fiero explores Honigmann’s identity search as it is seen in her move to France, but points out how her relationship to Germany cannot be severed due to her close connection to the German language – the language in which she writes (63-4).

People often state that it is easier to understand a situation after one has been removed from it. Honigmann may also be following this way of thinking. Creating a fresh start was a way to understand her situation as a Jewish German and her development into a writer of novels rather than theater pieces. However she relates her relationship to Germany once again to her writing. She cannot live in Germany, but she still expresses herself through the German language and the cultural expressions. She cannot make a fresh start with her writing in Germany, but she can write about her experiences in Germany and reflect upon her life as a Jewish German. She cannot be in Germany to live or to work, she does not want to call herself a German, but she still uses German words:

Das war also schon wieder eine Rückkehr, kaum, daß ich abgereist war. Vielleicht war das Schreiben aber auch so etwas wie Heimweh und eine Versicherung, daß wir doch zusammengehörten, Deutschland und ich, daß wir, wie man so sagt, nicht auseinanderkommen können, gerade jetzt nicht, nach allem was geschehen war. (*Damals* 46)

Honigmann now lives in Strasburg France, just beyond the border of Germany - she has learned to speak French and has assimilated into the French way of life. She has found, as well as created, her own place in the Jewish Community in Strasburg. However, when she creates her novels, she does so in the German language. She writes about her experiences growing up in Germany, the difficulties in recovering her Jewish identity in a place hostile towards religious practices, especially Judaism, and life as an adult who has tried her best to remove herself from a situation in order to better understand it, “Als Jüdin bin ich aus Deutschland weggegangen, aber in meiner Arbeit, in

einer sehr starken Bindung, an die deutsche Sprache, kehre ich immer wieder zurück”  
(*Damals* 18).

## **Honigmann’s Search for a German-Jewish Identity**

When one reads *Damals*, as well as *Liebe* and *Roman*, Honigmann’s underlying themes are Judaism and her search for a German Jewish identity. The discussion of identity in Honigmann’s works suggests a search for her own place as an individual among others, who share the same or similar beliefs and have the same physical characteristics as herself. For Zafer Senocak, identity and culture are intertwined and inseparable, he argues that culture is something that starts with the self, the individual. It is through a progression of comparing and contrasting to others near the individual, who have similar values and beliefs, that a collective culture can and will develop. This culture is the basis of defining the individual’s identity, within the common cultural group or elsewhere. Without this comparing and contrasting, the collective culture becomes a virtual impossibility to develop (Senocak 43).

A good example where the collective Judaic culture was unable to develop freely was in East Germany, starting from the purge of Jewish society and culture in the early 1950’s until after the fall of the wall in 1989. Maintaining a Jewish identity after the war and in the Eastern Communistic Block was a very difficult task, since religion of any kind was strongly discouraged during these years, especially Judaism. When those who grew up in and around the Jewish culture laid their religion and way of life aside, the continuation of everything encompassing Judaism was in danger of becoming lost. Only a very small number of individuals in East Germany held onto their Jewish heritage or rediscovered their roots in their search for explanations to fill in the empty spaces of their pasts. Barbara Honigmann was one of these individuals. She did not know much, but she knew enough to create the desire to know more about her past and her family’s Jewish past, in turn developing her own identity.

Petra Günther points out that this “Identitätssuche” is something that presents itself in Honigmann’s *Roman* as well (123). She compares the text “Doppeltes Grab” in *Roman* to Honigmann’s visitation of her father’s grave in *Liebe* and the two cemetery visits Honigmann discusses in *Damals* – the graves of her grandparents in London, as well as the visit she pays to her mother’s grave in Vienna (125). Günther argues that Honigmann’s “Doppeltes Grab” explores Jews living in Germany after the Holocaust, and treats the lost identity of those Jews in East Germany (136).

Christina Guenther agrees that Honigmann’s autobiographical writings center around the theme of identity. In her article “Exile and the Construction of Identity in Barbara Honigmann’s Trilogy of Diaspora,” Guenther explores *Roman*, *Liebe*, and *Damals* as a “map [of] the coordinates in her lifelong process of claiming, and indeed reinventing, a particular Jewish German identity” (215). Guenther focuses on the element of exile in Honigmann’s writings, particularly as found in *Roman*. She feels that Honigmann uses her relocation to France, her exile, as a means to explore and ultimately discover her Jewish identity. Guenther argues it is the distance from Germany that provides this opportunity for Honigmann (218).

The move to Strasburg, France, is an interesting aspect to examine about Honigmann in the context of identity. In *Damals*, she briefly mentions that she only lives three streets away from the German border within the limits of Strasburg, France. A few paragraphs later she revisits this theme, as almost to reiterate how she cannot believe that she only lives three blocks away from Germany, but still lives in France. In *Damals*, she does not cite any specific reasoning behind her decision to live and work in France; however, her attitude concerning her way of life in France can offer some explanation, “Hier, in Frankreich, geht mich alles viel weniger an, ich bin nur ein Zuschauer, ein Gast, eine Fremde” (*Damals* 17).

Guenther, Fries, and Stern all discuss in their articles how the last story “Bonsoir, Madame Benhamou” in *Roman* portrays Honigmann’s move from East Germany to Strasburg, France.<sup>9</sup> Stern adds that with this story Honigmann ends the book with “the narrator’s search for self-realization though new identity,” expressing how the narrator has moved from France to Strasburg, immersing herself into the community and Judaism (331). Fries furthers this argument by pointing out that the “dreifache Todessprung ohne

Netz: vom Osten in den Westen, von Deutschland nach Frankreich und aus der Assimilation mitten in das Thora-Judentum hinein” (*Roman* 111) presents to Honigmann the chance for “the redefinition of self” (182). Honigmann’s move to Strasburg and her immersion into the Jewish Community there proved to be an integral part of her identity as a Jew. This theme finds itself in the chapters “Hinter der Grande Schul” and “Meine Sefardische Freundinnen” in *Damals*.

The chapter called “Hinter der Grande Schul” is a play on sounds and spelling, since “Grande Schul” is actually a French Synagogue in Strasburg named “Grande Choule.” She describes the Jewish Community in Strasburg, where the Jewish kindergarten, sport clubs, restaurants, and stores are located. She tells of the size of the community and how compared to Berlin there are enough Jews in Strasburg to be like a Jerusalem, “Ostberlin war eine jammervolle Diaspora, und Strasburg mit seinen 15 oder 20,000 Juden, keiner weiß die Zahl so genau, war ein Jerusalem” (*Damals* 58).

She also describes the type of Jewish Community in Strasburg. Within Judaism there are different categories of how the religion is practiced. Honigmann chooses an Orthodox community in Strasburg, “Es gibt in Strasburg eine starke und intakte Orthodoxie, aber wie überall befindet sich auch hier die Mehrheit der Leute in der Mitte, und ich befinde mich eher am Rande dieser Mitte” (*Damals* 61). It is of course in this Jewish Community in Strasburg that Honigmann is finally able to “locate” her Jewish identity. Her identity is finally made clear in Strasburg, where she finds others who are like her, who have similar values and beliefs.

She meets with four other Jewish women in Strasburg once a week to study the Torah. They have been doing so for the past ten years. Others in town have learned of their little group and asked to join, but they like to keep their group small and exclusive. In the chapter “Meine sefardischen Freundinnen” she compares the different background of the four women to her own. The differences Honigmann specifically observes include the fact that she does not speak perfect French, she is an artist, which is a profession they cannot completely understand and relate to, and she comes from East Germany, a place they would never visit. She also mentions that the group of four women already had an established friendship by the time she came into it. Hence, she feels farther outside of the

circle. She is aware of the differences. However, she continues by discussing how she feels that she belongs in this group:

Zwei von uns sind aschkenasisch und drei sind sefardisch. Die Länder unserer Herkunft sind Frankreich, Libyen, Algerien, Marokko und Deutschland. Wir haben alle studiert, wir haben alle einen Beruf, wir sind alle verheiratet. (*Damals* 67-8)

In this quote Honigmann describes her friends and the different Jewish and national backgrounds among her friends, as well as the cultures within their religious practices. The Sephardic friends, Mischou, Sophie and Liliana, come from Morocco, Algeria and Libya, respectively, and her other friend, Danielle comes from France. Honigmann, of course, is from Germany. Danielle and Barbara are both Ashkenazi Jews. Understanding the cultural differences gives insight to Honigmann's mention of the difference in the practices among her friends<sup>10</sup>.

Honigmann wraps up the above statement by pointing out that the similarities of all the women lie in the fact that all are educated, have jobs, and are married. On the surface, their appearances, their biographical information, and religion are all the same. Honigmann realizes that these similarities are what most closely bond the relationship of the five women, which overrides any doubt or alienation she may feel, despite her German background. This is a particular aspect of Jewish identity, since traditionally Jews can come from many different cultures, but are joined in one religion, identifying within one another not through nation, but through religion. The comfort she finds in the similarities makes the differences that she notices in their relationship, such as their religious practices within Judaism and the different places from which they come, not weigh on her as much. Guenther also discusses the relationship of the five women as they study the Torah. She agrees that this process brings the women together, and although they come from different countries, cultures and originally speak different languages, they are able to put these differences aside for the study of the Torah – their spirituality and religion ultimately unites them (228).

Honigmann knows that the most important thing is that she is able to be a woman, be a Jew, and to be comfortable among friends as she learns about her religion, “Es gibt eine Verbundenheit zwischen uns, die ich schwer erklären kann, gerade weil sie so

offensichtlich ist. Sie kommt aus der physischen Ähnlichkeit, die ich unter meinen Freundinnen gefunden habe...” (*Damals* 75). When one examines this quote with the definition of identity in mind, it becomes easy to understand why Honigmann would feel comforted and at ease with her friends, although she does perceive the differences. The understanding of this comfort is even greater when one remembers her struggle with bringing her past and future together by identifying with her religion. During one of the weekly meetings with her friends, Honigmann reads an excerpt from an essay by Georges Perec about Ellis Island. This excerpt included what Perec thought about coming to a new place to be a Jew meant to him and the ideas and concepts that he relates to the word “Jew” in this context:

...die Reise, die Erwartung, die Hoffnung, die Unsicherheit, der Unterschied, die Erinnerung, und diese beiden schwer zu fassenden, unsteten und flüchtigen Begriffe, die sich unaufhörlich gegenseitig in ihrem flackernden Licht spiegeln, und die heißen, Land der Geburt und Gelobtes Land. (*Damals* 81)



## CONCLUSION

Barbara Honigmann uses autobiographical writing as a means to work through her problems of identity and to reconcile with a silent German-Jewish past. Her writings are fragmented and multidimensional; although she is examining her life and the significant events of her life, she does not chronologically order them, but rather centers her discussions around these events. Because she does not focus on linear, chronological writing, she is able to delve further into how she perceives her identity, how she understands her past, what she has made of her life during the present, and where this merging of life and identity as Jew with a German past will take her in the future. She truly reflects that which is categorized as the female autobiographical writing genre.

When examining Honigmann's works *Roman*, *Liebe*, and *Damals*, it is possible to see a cycle of personal innovation, in the sense of advancement, estrangement, and then a return to innovation.<sup>11</sup> It seems that in her first work, *Roman*, Honigmann realized that emigration to France was an improvement in her life, which is evident by the end of the novel. She used the relocation to France as a means to reflect upon her life as a Jewish German, and wrote about her experiences. *Liebe* carries a tone of an estrangement. Her feelings of doubt and inability to find her place in Paris echo of isolation and separation from all that she is familiar with. However, in *Damals* she returns to the critical writing of her perceptions of her German and Jewish identity, and included more specific details of her experiences in life, using names and relating those names to her father, her mother, her grandparents and her husband.

Authors who belong to a certain group of oppressed or discriminated people tend in their writings to become a representative for the whole group, whether it is with the actual content of the writing or the characters found within a particular work (Peck 558). Critics note that Honigmann's novels "rewrite" her own story, as well as that of many

Jews after the Holocaust, who still search for their home, their identity and a sense of belonging (Peck 560). Despite her parents' silence, Honigmann hopes to reestablish her family's links to the religion and the history of her forefathers. The silence had caused so much of her struggle for a sensible identity, a fact which is illuminated in her autobiographical writing.

Every individual searches for his or her identity; it can be personal, as in identifying with family, friends, colleagues, or public with a larger entity, such as nationality, religion, or politics. In Honigmann's novels, there is a sense of struggle with identity in the public and private spheres. Her literature focuses on her struggle with self identity within the larger concerns of nation and religion and develops a sense of identity through her autobiographical writing. She is able to go through the process of comparing and contrasting herself to others who are like herself. This is notable, since Honigmann grew up in a nation that silenced the Jewish past. Not even the Holocaust was seen as a major event in East German history, but rather treated the Holocaust as a tragedy in which many different people from many different lands were murdered with no one group singled out above all others (Fox 22).

The German-Jewish experience is represented in her family through the Jewish Emancipation, which affected most directly her great-grandparents, the Holocaust, which affected her parents, and East Germany, which affected Honigmann herself. From witnessing the "in between" state of "not quite German" and "not quite Jewish" identity of her parents and her knowledge of the efforts of her great grandfather and grandfather, Honigmann decided as that she wanted to have a place for Judaism in her life. This decision to return to Judaism makes her question the motives of her parents to turn their backs on their religion. Because they cut themselves off from their religion and their religious history and past, they in turn cut this off from their daughter. Honigmann's autobiographical writing is her personal reworking through her own past to find a very unique and exclusive German and Jewish identity.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Fries, 176-7, Koret Foundation, [lyrikwelt.de](http://lyrikwelt.de), [deutscheautoren.de](http://deutscheautoren.de), [br-online.de](http://br-online.de), [hanser.de](http://hanser.de). A complete listing of Honigmann's published works is as follows: *Roman von einem Kinde*, Novel (1986). *Eine Liebe aus nichts*, Novel (1991). *Soharas Reise*, Novel (1996). *Am Sonntag spielt der Rabbi Fußball*, Novel (1998). *Damals, dann und danach*, (1999). *Alles, alles Liebe!*, Letter Novel (2000). *Ein Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, Novel (2004). Provided by [lyrikwelt.de](http://lyrikwelt.de). A complete listing of awards she has received is as follows: aspekte-Literaturpreis (1986). Preis der Autorenstiftung (1986). Kester-Haeusler-Ehrengabe. Stefan-Andres-Preis (1992). Nicolas-Born-Preis (1994). Ehrengabe der Schiller-Stiftung (1996). Hörspielpreis der Kriegsblinden. Kleist-Preis, Berlin (2000). Jeanette-Schocken-Preis, Bremerhaven (2001). Koret Jewish Book Award (2004 – together with Ahron Megged). Solothurner Literaturpreis (2004) Provided by [lyrikwelt.de](http://lyrikwelt.de).

<sup>2</sup> From this point, this book will be referred to as *Damals*.

<sup>3</sup> In the book *Kapitel aus meinem Leben*, published in late 2004 and released in early 2005, Honigmann continues her autobiographical writing. Due to the publication date, this last novel could not be included for literary analysis in this thesis. Hence this thesis focuses mostly on *Damals* to explore Honigmann's autobiographical writing.

<sup>4</sup> From this point, this book will be referred to as *Liebe*.

<sup>5</sup> From this point, this book will be referred to as *Roman*.

<sup>6</sup> See note 10

<sup>7</sup> Ethel and Julius Rosenberg were politically affiliated with the communist party in the USA. In 1951, at the height of the "red scare," they were convicted of allegedly conspiring to steal plans of atomic weapons from the United States Government. The Rosenbergs were sentenced to death by the electric chair. Their sentence was carried out in June 19, 1953.

<sup>8</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, page 17.

<sup>9</sup> Cristina Guenther, page 220, Marilyn Fries, page 181.

<sup>10</sup> The Hebrew word Ashkenazim originally referred to Germanic lands. Today the term Ashkenazi refers to Jews of Europe, Russia, Latin America, the United States, and many Jews in Israel. Sephardic Jews are those Jews who descended from the Jews who escaped Spain after their expulsion in 1492, fleeing to the nations surrounding the Mediterranean. These Jews adapted to the Mediterranean lifestyle, with some Arab and Middle Eastern influences (Dosick 59, Falcon and Blatner 12).

<sup>11</sup> This refers to Caren Kaplans article "Deterritorializations", the information found on page 187 containing "critical innovation and particular strengths."

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## **BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH**

I was born in Melbourne, Florida, and grew up in a small community along the east coast of central Florida. After completing high school, I participated in the Congress-Bundestag Cultural Youth Exchange to Germany (1998-1999). During this year, I lived with a host family in a small town in the outskirts of Heidelberg. I attended the International Gymnasium Heidelberg during the fall of 1998, and in January through May of 1999, I worked as a “Praktikantin” at Siemens in Bruchsal. Upon my return to the United States, I attended Florida State University, graduating magna cum laude in the spring of 2003 with my Bachelors of Arts in German and Anthropology. I made the decision to continue my education in German during my final semester as an undergraduate, returning to Florida State University the following fall not only as a graduate student, but also a teaching assistant. After obtaining my Master of Arts degree in the spring of 2005, I plan to move to Hoboken, New Jersey, in order to live near and work in one of the nation’s largest cultural melting pots – New York City.