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I, Birgit Weeks, hereby submit this original work as part of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Germanic Languages & Literature.

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Does Trümmerliteratur have a feminine side?

Student's name: **Birgit Weeks**

This work and its defense approved by:

Committee chair: Valerie Weinstein, Ph.D.

Committee member: Tanja Nusser, Ph.D.

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Does *Trümmerliteratur* have a feminine side*?*

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Birgit Weeks

B.A. Middle Tennessee State University

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Committee Chair: Valerie A. Weinstein, Ph.D.

Abstract

Germany's postwar authors strove for an authentic depiction of reality in the rubble. This was not only a form of protest, but also their attempt at returning to a life of normality. It was important to these authors to create a clean start removing themselves from the language and the writing style of WWII. This radical cleansing (*kahlschlag;* hence *Kahlschlagsliteratur)* was labeled *Trümmerliteratur,* The narratives were written mainly by men, who after WWII returned from war battles or captivity, arguing that they were the ones who had the real experiences to write about. But what about the women? After World War II, women struggled to survive and keep their families alive. They played a very important role in the rebuilding of the German cities. They expressed hope and aspects of moving forward. Their recollections of the war focused on events that affected their lives: bombing raids, homelessness, evacuation, and widowhood.

This thesis focuses on the representation of strong women in *Trümmerliteratur.* I analyze Käte's behavior in the short story *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* by Heinrich Böll, and the mother's behavior in Luise Rinser's short story "Die rote Katze." Despite both women taking the second position behind the protagonists, they are the strong characters who influence and determine the outcome of the stories. I conclude the thesis with a comparison between the two works in regard to the portrayal of women.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

World War II ended on May 8, 1945, with almost eight million Germans recorded as either dead or missing, this being over 10 per cent of the population. Germany's key cities were in ruins (McGregor 493). The citizens were confronted with so many different problems. Not only were they dealing with the grief of losing loved ones and belongings, but also they were faced with the shame and guilt of having started the war and of having persecuted millions of citizens. Emotionally burdened, they also had to cope with the chaos and devastation in the cities. "Die Stadt is außen und innen ganz kaputt, das heißt, die Menschen sind es auch" (Siebenpfeiffer 123). Cities were faced with devastation, and it was now up to the citizens to gather the pieces and rebuild not only their cities, but also their lives. The following sentence gives a good picture of the confused situation people were faced with: "The dust and dirt of the ruined cities accompanied them throughout the initial postwar years, and at night the silence of these austere times was punctuated with the noise of collapsing buildings. Entropy ruled" (Reid Bekenntnis 36).

The magnitude of the destruction can be better understood with the help of some statistics regarding the city Hamburg, as an example. This desolate city counted 1,110,539 inhabitants during the month of May 1945; as a comparison Hamburg counted 1,712,000 inhabitants during the month of May 1939. During WWII, approximately 45,000 people had been casualties of war, and 63,000 natives of the city were missing in action, not to mention the roughly 50,000 people that died in the concentration camp Neuengamme (Grobecker 38). Of the 563,533 documented apartments in 1939, only 21% remained undamaged, also considering that 69% of the citizens had lost their homes partially or entirely. Furthermore, roughly 160 schools, 100 churches, hospitals, and various administrative and cultural facilities had been destroyed.

Hamburg had lost 80% of the port's functionality (Grobecker 39). This severe devastation shown in the example of Hamburg, affected many other cities around Germany. As the historian Jeffrey Diefendorf states, "The destruction was so great that in some cases authorities proposed abandoning the bombed cities entirely and building new cities […]" (11).

With so many cities either partially or entirely destroyed, countless people were left homeless. People whose apartments had been destroyed were forced to find a roof to put over their heads, even if just temporarily. Despite the fact that many houses had lost roofs and garrets, even outside walls, families occupied the lower stories and found ways to make their new living quarters livable. People were squatting in apartments originally owned by inhabitants who had not returned to claim their property because of persecution. Reasons for this varied from the occupants being forced into fleeing or being arrested and in the worst case, murdered. Postwar, hundreds of thousands of people, whether they were released prisoners of war, refugees, evacuees or survivors, were looking for some type of accommodation (Grobecker 46).

The desolate state that Germany was faced with is portrayed realistically in the post-war movie *Die Mörder sind unter uns,* directed by Wolfgang Staudte. The East German movie, which was the first post WWII German movie and the first *Trümmerfilm,* was filmed in the ruins of Berlin in 1945, giving the viewer a detailed and accurate portrayal of Berlin's rubble and ruins after WWII had ended. It also depicts the desperate living circumstances with which the German citizens were faced. The movie begins with a scene showing two graves with loosely piled mounds of dirt side by side. One grave has a soldier's helmet placed on top and a self-made cross out of wood with a branch of a dying plant. The graves are in the foreground. The background portrays debris and rubble covering the ground. There are rows of dilapidated buildings along a dirt path. As the camera moves away from the graves, it focuses on Dr.

Mertens, a former military surgeon, walking slowly down a narrow path that used to be a road. After a scene cut, the following scene shows a freight train filled with people standing and sitting in every possible space entering a station. An exhausted looking woman, Susanne Wallner, a Nazi concentration camp survivor, has disembarked and is seen walking through rubble, passing by skeletons of remaining buildings. This woman, seemingly disoriented amongst the ruins and rubble, eventually steers toward a door, finally climbing the stairs to her apartment that was in her possession before she was picked up by the Nazis and taken to a concentration camp. Decisively entering by the front door, she seems surprised to find a man occupying her rooms. In the next scene, it becomes evident that Mertens refuses to leave Wallner's apartment. Together they work out a deal enabling both of them to live together in the apartment. Within the first five minutes the setting of this movie gives the viewer a realistic portrayal of the city and people's lives broken by the war.

In another example of the ruins that people faced post WWII, Helene Karwentel, a postwar witness and *Trümmerfrau*,[1] considers herself lucky when she finds her apartment in Berlin in good condition. As she states, fortunately, it was in fairly good shape only missing windows and doors. But as author Gabriele Jenk states, "sie hatte ein Dach über dem Kopf und wußte, wo sie schlafen konnte" (12). As in the movie *Die Mörder sind unter uns*, Karwentel was faced with a similar issue of sharing her apartment with a stranger, when one day a woman with a baby on her hip holding a young child by the hand stood at the front door of Karwentel's apartment asking for a place to stay. According to Karwentel, she offered the woman and her children shelter (Jenk 17).

[1] *Trümmerfrau* (rubble woman), is the German name for women, who, in the aftermath of WWII helped clear and rebuild the bombed cities of Germany and Austria. With hundreds of cities having suffered significant bombing and firestorm damage through aerial attacks, and with many men dead or prisoners of war, this huge task fell to a large degree on women.

While the lack of housing created much desperation for the German citizens, they were faced with the question of what was to happen next. There was no longer a fear of being killed. Instead, there was now a different fear. It was a fear of how to survive. Karwentel talks about "die tödliche Ruhe,"with which the German citizens were faced (Jenk 11). This deathly stillness forced the disoriented civilians to regain enough confidence and energy to survive by rebuilding their cities and their lives. Despite the depressing picture surrounding them, people were motivated to rebuild and move forward.

This feeling of moving forward was emphasized in the words of Konrad Adenauer. The mayor of Cologne (later the first postwar Chancellor of West Germany) spoke before the first postwar meeting of the Cologne City Council appointed by the British Military government on October 1, 1945, saying: "So wollen wir gemeinsam ans Werk gehen, gebeugt, tief gebeugt, aber - meine Damen und Herren - nicht gebrochen" (Adenauer).

Despite the emotional turmoil of the German citizens, who had lost so much and were forced to live in a country in ruins, it was a new beginning. Directly after WWII, Wolfgang Borchert, together with other renowned writers, such as Heinrich Böll, Günther Eich, Wolfdietrich Schnurre, Erich Kästner, Arno Schmidt and Wolfgang Weyrauch, captured these sentiments in their works. This viewpoint in German literature was labeled *Trümmerliteratur.* During this time period, Germans were used to speaking of *Trümmer* [rubble]*,* "an age of rubble, life amidst the rubble, rubble mountains" and "rubble literature," all testifying to the despair and to a subtle optimism with which some Germans viewed their world (Diefendorf 13). The German author, Heinrich Böll, describes *Trümmerliteratur* as follows:

> Die ersten schriftstellerischen Versuche unserer Generation nach 1945 hat man als Trümmerliteratur bezeichnet, man hat sie damit

> abzutun versucht. Wir haben uns gegen diese Bezeichnung nicht gewehrt, weil sie zu Recht bestand: tatsächlich, die Menschen, von denen wir schrieben, lebten in Trümmern, sie kamen aus dem Kriege, Männer und Frauen in gleichem Maße verletzt, auch Kinder. (Friedrich 5)

The postwar authors strove for an authentic depiction of reality in the rubble. This was not only a form of protest, but also their attempt at returning to a life of normality. While these authors did not necessarily want to be identified with *Trümmerliteratur* (Hu 13), they were radically rejecting the past war, as they were searching for "Menschlichkeit in den Ruinen," a term taken from Wolfgang Borchert's short story "Nachts schlafen die Ratten doch." It was important to the postwar authors to create a "new, fresh humanistic literature. This involved for most a rejection of lofty themes and preciousness of expression in favor of directness, simplicity, and everyday aspects of individual experience" (Turner 114).

Wolfgang Weyrauch claimed that because of the abuse of German language by the Nazis, German literature had to experience a radical cleansing, a "*Kahlschlag,*"[2] also labeling the era of *Trümmerliteratur Kahlschlagsliteratur.* It was important to return to honesty of language, based on popular non-literary usage, and to honesty of theme, based on personal experience (Metzler 492). It is said that during the twelve years of National Socialism, the language in German literature "war durch nationalsozialistische Emphase, durch rhetorisches Pathos, durch propagandistischen Bombast verbraucht, also unglaublich geworden" (Metzler 494). In the stanzas "zerschlagt eure Lieder/verbrennt eure Verse/sagt nackt/was ihr müßt," Wolfdietrich

[2] Wolfgang Weyrauch used this term for the first time in the epilog of his short story "Tausend Gramm" (1949). Since then this term represents the literature of the "Junge Generation," mostly defining a generation removed from the generation of their fathers, who supported fascism.

Schnurre is vocal about a new beginning (Metzler 495). The authors of *Trümmerliteratur* were consciously removing themselves from the "umfangreichen, pathethischen und ideologisch aufgeladenen Werken der nationalsozialistischen Literatur […]" (Meid 492), calling for a literary *"Stunde Null,"* according to the German author Alfred Andersch (Meid 492).

This so-called *Kahlschlagsliteratur* or *Trümmerliteratur* not only stressed the removal of any National Socialist traits, but it was also the beginning of a new writing style. In *Trümmerliteratur* there was an emphasis on describing only the most important issues within a text. This literary condensing of recorded descriptions was the introduction to the German short story. While Germans had already been introduced to short stories at the beginning of the 20th century, these were entertaining stories written according to the American style. The new postwar genre of short stories was described as a simplifying of materials. As Borchert said in his text, "Das ist unser Manifest:"[3]

> Wir brauchen keine Dichter mit guter Grammatik. Zu guter Grammatik
> fehlt uns Geduld. Wir brauchen die mit dem heiser geschluchzten Gefühl.
> Die zu Baum Baum und zu Weib Weib sagen und ja sagen und nein
> sagen: laut und deutlich und dreifach und ohne Konjunktiv. (113)

Heinrich Böll agreed with Borchert, saying topics needed to be said and described exactly as they were. Literature was about keeping it simple, in his words, it was about "das Einfachwerden" (Meid 441). As Borchert also said "[D]ie Hoffnung gehört uns ganz allein" (Meid 440). This statement, as did the previous one by Böll, referred to the German people as a whole, men and women. Yet, this was not sufficiently evidenced in narratives by emerging

[3] "Das ist unser Manifest," a short essay written in 1946, which contained manifestations. Borchert made himself the voice of the "Junge Generation."

authors making a fresh start as a new generation and choosing to move forward. The short stories were predominantly about men thinking back on traumatic experiences during the war

In preparation for this thesis, as I looked for suitable texts to analyze, of the twenty-six short stories that I read, fourteen were clearly written with a male protagonist and a male experience in the foreground. These were stories such as "Das mit dem Mais" by Bruno Hampel. Of the remaining twelve stories only three short stories were written with female protagonists portraying them as carriers of hope and an attitude of moving forward. Why then were there so few stories written about the tribulations and sufferings of women?

After World War II, women were in a tough position. Not only were they encouraged to abandon their new-found roles and highly skilled jobs in the wartime production industries (Hu 4) to return to the home, but it was mostly up to them to find suitable living quarters, food, and to make life manageable for their families and themselves. In many cases, women were working in low paying and low-skilled jobs, doing whatever it took to survive. Women had to be resourceful, constantly coming up with ways to put food on the table. "Sie fuhren 'hamstern' aufs Land, brachten ihr Hab und Gut auf den Schwarzmarkt oder auf Tauschbörsen" (Meiners 53).

These were the women who struggled to survive and keep their families alive, and who played a very important role in the rebuilding of the German cities. All over Germany, women were involved in helping to remove the rubble. This group of women came to be known as *Trümmerfrauen*, rubble women. To understand the achievements of the *Trümmerfrauen,* it is important to understand the amount of rubble and debris that was removed, in order to even begin the rebuilding of German cities. According to Diefendorf, "In Hamburg it was observed that if that city's rubble were to be loaded into normal freight railroad cars, the train would reach

around the earth" (Diefendorf 15). *Trümmerfrauen* "sorted through the bricks and debris, separating the broken bricks from the ones still in good condition. The bricks, fit to be reused for rebuilding purposes, were placed in wheelbarrows that were rolled to train carts, which were then pushed manually along the existing railroad tracks to a collection site" (Grobecker 46).

Trümmerfrauen have received recognition in various ways (monuments, poems and songs dedicated to them)[4]. They, too, have received criticism. The historian, Leonie Treber, [5] states that "diese Frauen können nicht in den Trümmern gearbeitet haben; diese Frauen sind in die Trümmer gestellt worden" (Adick *WDR*). Treber states that "die Vielzahl der Bilder vermittelt den falschen Eindruck von dem tatsächlichen Ausmaß der Aufräumarbeiten, die die Frauen geleistet haben." In her opinion, the rubble women were NSDAP members who were forced into this work as a form of repentance-*Sühne* (Adick *WDR*). Furthermore, she states that women carried out the jobs in order to either earn money or ration cards. It was said that the harder the physical labor, the higher the food rations were. Treber also says that this does not take away from the fact that women were in desperate times faced with desperate measures to survive.

Despite opinions trying to tarnish the reputation of the rubble women, women must be appreciated for the grit and discipline it took for them to face the clearing and the removing. It is not of great importance whether the occupiers commanded women to rebuild, or whether the incentive was to earn 2.200cal/day instead of the regular 1.200 cal/day (MacGregor 500). As MacGregor states, thanks to women's attitudes, Germany's cities were rebuilt in record time. "It

[4] For example, Katharina Singer's *"Trümmerfrau"* in the Volkspark in Berlin, or Max Lachnit's sculpture in Dresden, or "Trummerfrauen" sung by Sturmwehr." Günther Grass dedicated a poem "Die große Trümmerfrau spricht." Many west German cities had monuments erected.

[5] Leonie Treber began researching Germany's Trümmerfrauen in 2005, and wrote her doctorate at Duisburg-Essen University on the subject - uncharted territory until then. Now, she's published a book on her findings, with the title: "Mythos der Trümmerfrauen."

was people - largely women – who made the miracle" (493). In a testimonial documented by a *Trümmerfrau* (no name), it is stated,

> Ich war damals 14 Jahre alt und habe mitgeschaufelt. Alle Frauen und Kinder haben mitgeschaufelt, und wir mussten den Weg für die russischen LKWs frei machen. Der Russe, der meiner Mama den Arbeitsauftrag gegeben hatte, ging dann zu ihr und hat ihr ein Busserl auf die Stirn gegeben und sich auf diese Weise sogar bei ihr bedankt. (Meiners 93)

Another *Trümmerfrau* (no name) continues to say, "Andere Frauen schufteten mit Hausfraueneifer, ja verbissen. 'Getan muss die Arbeit doch werden,' sagte eine tief überzeugt. Zu viert schoben wir die vollen Loren an den Graben heran" (Meiners 94). It was the emotional and physical strength that "put the country back on its feet" (MacGregor 495). For this reason, the fact that there are very few narratives portraying women in *Trümmerliteratur* cannot be ignored. Despite women clearly proving themselves as strong agents of hope and progress, their strength has not sufficiently been recognized in German post-war literature.

Despite the fact that women dominated the rebuilding of the cities, "women were working under conditions and within structures that [were] patriarchal" (Hu 6). "Gender is also a fundamental category in writing itself, […] because patriarchal societies place women differently in all spheres of life" (Weedon 6). Chris Weedon states that "[t]he sex of the author is almost always a decisive factor in the way in which male literary criticism evaluates writing. It is used to define the boundaries of women's writing as a category of exclusion" (6). Without a doubt, there are many narratives with female characters; however, it is noticeable that women are not presented in the foreground or as protagonists, as often as males are. Weedon claims that women

centered criticism "argues that women's writing is different from writing by men precisely because women themselves and their experience of life are different" (12).

As Böll explains, "Wir schrieben also vom Krieg, von der Heimkehr und dem, was wir im Krieg gesehen hatten und bei der Heimkehr vorfanden: von Trümmern; das ergab drei Schlagwörter, die der jungen Literatur angehängt wurden: Kriegs-,Heimkehrer- und Trümmerliteratur" (Friedrich 5). The representative authors of *Trümmerliteratur*, such as Böll and Borchert, as already mentioned, but also Eich, Schnurre, Schmidt and Weyrauch, were involved in the battles of WWII in different capacities. Böll was in the *Wehrmacht* and later on in an American POW camp. Schmidt and Borchert were also in the *Wehrmacht*. Weyrauch was in the *Luftwaffe,* and later on in a Soviet POW camp. Eich and Schnurre were soldiers.

The fact that the authors Böll, Borchert, Eich, Schmidt, Schnurre and Weyrauch fought in WWII and survived, enforced the accuracy of the statement Böll made regarding the topics they chose in their works as authors of *Trümmerliteratur.* It explains why they wrote about experiences made during the war, the feelings soldiers had returning to their homes, and the ruins they were faced with. These authors used male protagonists predominantly in their stories, because they were the ones experiencing life away from home, and returning to their homes. As Irmgard Hunt states in her review, "[d]as Kriegsthema ist ein heikles, diffiziles, "männliches" (Hunt 217).

Playwright and short-story writer, Wolfgang Borchert, gave voice to the postwar anguish and the bitter losses felt by the citizens of his hometown Hamburg, Germany. This author, who served as a young German soldier on the Eastern front, returned to Hamburg a sick and disillusioned man. Like many soldiers who fought in the war, he was devastated when he came home to find his hometown destroyed and covered in rubble. In his famous play *Draussen vor*

der Tür [*The Man Outside*], which was written in 1946 and made its debut on German radio on February 13, 1947, Borchert presents a wounded, returning German soldier's attempt to find a reason to keep on living. The protagonist, Beckmann, comes back to Hamburg to discover that he has lost his wife to another man; his home and his parents are gone; his desires and beliefs are obliterated. He is a shattered man. Even when he jumps into the Elbe River, it rejects his attempted suicide by spitting him back out onto its banks. The hopelessness felt by the returning soldier, combined with the depressing picture of the remaining rubble of the once so impressive city, creates a rather morbid postwar picture in Borchert's play.

While Borchert and Böll were considered *Trümmerliteratur* authors, there were many German writers who did not necessarily consider themselves writers of this genre, despite writing about "rubble" experiences. Böll mainly used male protagonist figures in his works. He and many other male German writers used their stories to work through the scars that the war had left behind. For example, Werner Stelly, a soldier and prisoner of war, depicts the hardship of three young men escaping a cold winter by hiding in a carriage of a train, in the short story "Der Weg ins Leben," (1946) (Friedrich 169). In another example, Günther Eich describes in the short story "Züge im Nebel" (1947) how differently two brothers live through the postwar period. The future-oriented Gustav, a station policeman, catches his brother, Emil, stealing belongings on a train. Emil can only focus on surviving the moment. Eich served in the army and was held as a war prisoner in an American internment camp (Friedrich 165).

On the other hand, as one of the few postwar female writers, Elizabeth Langgässer used her stories to talk about the tragedies that hit women during the war. Giving postwar literature more of a female touch, Langgässer placed many of her stories in Berlin as she states that "[…] auch in den Kurzgeschichten war Berlin dominant 'weiblich'" (Siebenpfeiffer 138). The war

invaded the hometown and family life, the areas that traditionally belonged to the woman's responsibility. She continues to say, "Der Krieg in der Stadt bildet in den Kurzgeschichten gewissermaßen eine weibliche Seite des Krieges […]" (Siebenpfeiffer 138).

Trümmerliteratur was written mainly by men, who after WWII returned from war battles or captivity and were ready to have a new start in life; it dealt with the many issues of post-war Germany, such as the destruction of the cities, ruins, the guilt of fascism, the shame and effects of captivity, death and hardship, as Böll stated (Friedrich 5). It also addressed the rebuilding of broken families; however, it did not stress the strong position that women had in this rebuilding. Langgässer said about her collection of short stories *Torso* (1947), "alles drin ist der Schrecken, das Entsetzen, der Wahnsinn und die Groteske" (Siebenpfeiffer 124), proving that women writers were able to write about experiences during the war, even if from a different perspective.

Women silently struggled and survived in the background. Their recollections of the war focused on events that affected their lives: bombing raids, homelessness, evacuation, and widowhood. As Elizabeth Heinemann states,

> Night after night, women woke to the sound of sirens, dressed their children, grabbed their belongings, and ran to the nearest cellar or bunker. After the "all clear" was sounded, and if no damage had been done, they returned home to soothe their children to sleep and salvage what was left of the night for themselves. Germany's city women, even if they and their homes were untouched by bombs, lived the second half of the war with little sleep and shattered nerves. (Heinemann 362)

Women had many stories to share. However, most of these women did not have a loud enough voice. In the 1980s young German filmmakers were using film as a medium to document Germany's past. The German movie *Deutschland bleiche Mutter,* written and directed by Helma

Sanders-Brahms in 1980, was one such movie.[6] It depicts the silence women experienced. Lene, the leading character, survives her house being bombed, raising her child alone and being raped without any support from family. Lene remains a strong woman until her husband, Hans, returns after the war ends. He is a changed man and has become abusive. Lene carries many psychological wounds and after Hans' return she retreats more and more into silence. She later suffers from depression and a mysterious case of facial paralysis, which causes her to want to end her life. Sanders-Brahms depicts the untold feminine stories that she says were "quite typical for that time" (Roschy).

All over Germany, women were actively involved in putting the pieces back together again, whether within the ruins of German cities or in their homes. Regardless of whether a German woman was removing debris and bricks from the city streets, making necessary repairs on her home to make the living quarters livable, all these German women should be considered rubble women (Dörr 87). These women struggled to survive and keep their families alive, and they played a very important role in the restoring of the German cities. They expressed hope and aspects of moving forward.

In this thesis, I will analyze the voices of two women who represent all the women that were not recognized enough. I will show that despite the postwar patriarchal dominance in German society, women had many stories to tell. In the following two chapters, I will analyze Käte's behavior in the short story *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* by Heinrich Böll, and the mother's behavior in Luise Rinser's short story "Die rote Katze." Despite both women taking the second position behind the protagonists, they are the strong characters who influence and

[6] The title originates in the poem *O Deutschland bleiche Mutter* by Bertolt Brecht (1933). In his poem, Brecht addresses the shame that each person carries for him/herself.

determine the outcome of the stories. I will conclude the thesis with a comparison between the two works in regard to the portrayal of women.

Chapter 2: *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* by Heinrich Böll

As presented in the introduction, research shows that there are only a few postwar stories incorporating women as protagonists; the "institutionalized forgetting of women writers" (Weedon 26) is obvious. Böll stated, it was the men who had the real-life war experiences, because they were the ones representing the struggles of *Trümmerliteratur*. The reasoning that "this type of realism was too depressing" (Vickrey) was meant to explain why there were not many stories with female protagonists. It was typical for post WWII authors to use male characters as the protagonists, and Böll followed this approach, for example, in the majority of his short stories collected in *Wanderer, kommst du nach Spa…* His short novel *Und sagte kein einziges Wort*, written in 1953, follows this pattern by portraying Fred Bogner as the protagonist. However, in this story, Böll shows Käte to be the real hero, the individual who stands most true to the image of the *Trümmerfrauen,* the one who keeps her family together, who rebuilds her own faith, and who is very much a part of the rebuilding of Germany. While Böll does not give Käte the dominant role in the story, he certainly portrays her as a strong character giving her recognition.

Looking more closely at the thirteen chapters of the book, Fred and Käte simultaneously articulate their thoughts in monologues throughout these chapters. The author starts and ends the story with observations and monologues made by Fred. All in all, there are seven chapters, 92 pages, presenting Fred's experiences and views. In contrast, there are six chapters, 74 pages, portraying Käte's struggles and thoughts. Allowing Fred more pages for us to recognize his weaknesses, however, does not make him more likeable.

In this novel, Böll gives Fred and Käte a voice in which they take turns in directing the incidents they see as worth mentioning. Böll alternates by giving Fred an opportunity to talk

about subjects that are on his mind in every other chapter. Not only does the reader receive an insight into Fred and Käte's thoughts in the form of a monologue, but also a playback on conversations. The story changes back and forth between the two characters as the author depicts the loneliness that each one of them is experiencing in their marriage (Roets 40). The fact that Fred is depicted in more chapters than Käte, shows his greater isolation.

Before I describe and analyze the female character in Böll's story, it is necessary to understand the setting of the story and the portrait of the male character. Fred and Käte, a married couple with three young children, lost their home and all their belongings during the war, "Als der Krieg ausbrach, hatten wir gerade eine richtige Wohnung [...]: vier Zimmer, ein Bad und Sauberkeit, Clemens hatte ein Zimmer mit Max-und-Moritz-Tapete […]" (102). It is not clear how long they had lived in the apartment before losing all of their household belongings in an air raid (103). They were able to rent a room in a house owned by Mr. and Mrs. Franke. Böll portrays Fred as a man who could not live in a close space without feeling stifled and becoming aggressive. Fred moved out of their one-room apartment, leaving his wife and their three children. However, he does continue to support his family with the money he earns as a telephone operator at the local Catholic Church. And the couple continues to meet on an irregular basis whenever Fred is able to borrow enough money for a hotel room. The entire story takes place within a time-span of two days.

Böll revolves the story around Fred and the effects that his manner and especially his weaknesses have on the family, ultimately determining the life that the family leads. Fred is portrayed as a damaged and apathetic person giving into his unsteady habits, as he loses himself in restlessness, music and alcohol, creating an escape from reality and a possible reunion with his family (17). He constantly borrows small amounts of money from friends and colleagues, either

specifically visiting friends to ask for money, or simply asking when in the company of colleagues or acquaintances. There are times when he silently rebukes himself for not taking advantage of a situation and asking for money; in one case, he even felt that he should have asked a servant of the house where he tutors a boy. He was even tempted to go back. "[…] und ich dachte, daß ich sie hätte um Geld fragen können […]" (12). In most cases, however, he asks friends or colleagues who are able to simply hand out DM 5 at a time forgiving him and his request as a part of the hard postwar times and not expecting to ever be paid back. In one incident, a school friend had to decline his request due to this friend's growing family and the "Raten fürs Radio, für den Kühlschrank, für die Couch und von einem Wintermantel für seine Frau" (15), all items coming from the economic miracle, which so many benefitted from. This depiction shows that Fred is less successful, suggesting that the standard of living for his family should have grown from before the war.

Looking more carefully at Fred's background, it is apparent that Fred did not fight in the war. Instead, Fred worked as a switchboard operator connecting calls to high-ranking officers. "Du glaubst nicht, wie langweilig der Krieg war" (128). He talks about becoming an alcoholic due to his boredom. While Fred talks about the war being boring, it is necessary to emphasize that despite being a telephone operator, the telephone calls were mainly accounts of death. Understandably, this experience could be seen as traumatic, if dealt with continuously without a break year after year. Nowadays, this mental suffering might be labeled as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

As Böll reveals Fred's character more closely, it is clear that the boredom Fred describes is not a feeling that came up during his service in the war. Seemingly, this was something he had dealt with before the war, as a young man trying out different career paths. Fred says,

"Gleichgültig war ich gegen die verschiedensten Berufe, in denen ich mich versuchte. Ich konnte den Ernst nicht aufbringen, den man zu einem richtigen Beruf braucht" (99). His indifference toward life along with its responsibilities is a feature shown to have existed before the war began. As a young man this may not have been an issue of concern, but since he has a family, this attitude is worrisome.

By leaving home, Fred escapes his responsibilities as a husband and a father. According to J. H. Reid, Böll talks about the "Unwillen eine sichere sogenannte Existenz aufzubauen." This statement applies to Fred, as he passively moves through life. Böll continues to say that once the war was over, a person only played a role in day-to-day life, as if to say that a man would not, therefore, involve himself and participate in life (Reid "Mein Eigentliches…" 2). C.E. Roets talks about the "existentielle Sinnlosigkeit" (38) referring to the difficulties with which soldiers were presented after returning to their hometowns after the war ended. This statement also applies to soldier Beckmann in Wolfgang Borchert's play *Draussen vor der Tür*. Borchert presents Beckmann's attempt to find a reason to keep on living. In Beckmann's case, he is overcome with an existential senselessness no longer wanting to participate in life. In Fred's case, the existential doubts also involve his irresponsible behavior and a lack of determination to build a better life for his family. Referring to his attitude toward life before the war, Fred does not see the importance of being a successful and financially independent individual. Instead, he meanders through life shirking his responsibilities and blaming his aimless behavior on the war (27).

While Böll gives the reader a picture of the damaged male protagonist, he depicts the female character, Käte, as a determined character with strong features. At the beginning of the story she is described as a "magere Frau, die sich der Bitternis des Lebens bewußt geworden ist"

(40). She suffers from significant traumatic experiences such as giving birth in the cellar, as grenades were passing over their heads and losing her twin babies to a lice and bedbug plague. Their deaths were due to being medically inadequately treated, while "das wirksame Mittel zurückgehalten wurde" (43). She also describes the terrible living conditions that she and the children live in, saying "es kommen mir die Putzstücke entgegengebröckelt" (42), and constantly having to fight the dirt that seemingly never leaves the sanctuary of their home. She is constantly removing pieces of wall, or debris, just like rubble women were doing in the streets, as they were clearing debris and rubble. During a moment of great despair, she says, "Ich fühle die Verzweifelung wie einen körperlichen Schmerz, im Halse einen Wulst von Angst, den ich herunterzuschlucken versuche" (42). With these words Käte expresses great frustration, in which she feels that she will never get a break from life and its tribulations. Reid sums this feeling up in the following sentence, "der Krieg, [der] niemals zu Ende sein würde, niemals solange noch irgendwo eine Wunde blutete" (91). Although this statement refers to returning soldiers after the war, here, it is applicable to the situation of Käte, who can not move forward, as long as she holds on to her memories. These memories, in particular, involve the death of her twins.

Despite the fact that Käte does not get a break from the daily hardship, Böll portrays her as a person who keeps on working and never gives up. She is a survivor, and the sense of unspoken hope keeps her going. She herself says, "ich gebe den Kampf nicht auf, den zu beginnen sie mir abraten" (40). While Fred steps away from life and his responsibilities, his wife, Käte, takes on the responsibility for the comfort and wellbeing of their three children. She frugally manages the money that Fred sends her, this being the only responsibility that Fred is committed to. She alone carries the burden of worrying about feeding the children and keeping

them quiet in the stifling home. In addition to taking care of the children's needs, she is available for Fred when he calls and asks to see her after coming up with enough money to spend the night with her. There is no doubt that she loves him, however, he does bring his instability into her daily life, which creates even more anxiety for her as she puts great effort into maintaining the stability and peace of a home for her children.

Käte also finds comfort in prayer, and the feeling of being close to God gives her life balance and meaning. David Horrocks quotes Böll describing Käte as someone who "identifies with the silence of Christ in his suffering, as expressed in the words of the negro spiritual[7] '…and he never said a mumbaling [sic] word…und er sagte kein einziges Wort…', from which the novel takes its name" (45). Käte identifies her suffering and silence with that of a foreign culture and that of a slave with her own peaceful devotion carrying her far: "Zu Zeiten, in denen kein Gottesdienst mehr stattfindet, und ich empfinde den unendlichen Frieden, der von der Gegenwart Gottes ausströmt" (Horrocks 27). This sense of God's presence is shown on another occasion. As she is being served coffee at the "Imbissstube" (91), she looks into the eyes of the young girl serving her coffee, when she senses a spiritual connection. We find out that the young girl spends as much time as possible in church in prayer. Käte is touched by the girl's presence, as she says, "Ihr Lächeln fiel wie ein Zauber über mich" (86). This girl appeared to Käte as "a type of angel, a messenger of hope" (Horrocks 30). Not only did this spiritual encounter uplift Käte's spirits, but it also symbolizes the strength that women gained from each other.

On another occasion, when Käte is called to the phone, the landlady observes her talking to Fred. After hanging up, the landlady invites Käte to have a strong drink saying "[e]s gibt

[7] I have chosen to use the original quote, despite issues of political correctness.

keine Medizin gegen die Armut" (64). Recognizing her sickly demeanor and the pregnant state she is in, she suggests Käte put on some lipstick to give her face a bit of color. The landlady ends up giving her the lipstick, an expensive item for that time. This support and kindness amongst the women was another form of rebuilding as seen amongst individuals. On the one hand Käte feels abandoned by Fred, but on the other hand she receives encouragement and support from women around her. This feeling of being a part of a female community was an important issue amongst the *Trümmerfrauen.*

While this narrative portrays the male protagonist as a traumatized and damaged character, the female figure is portrayed as a suffering character also; however, in her case she is depicted as someone who does not walk out on her family. She is portrayed as a meek and quiet woman, who does not speak up for herself. In one of her monologues, she talks about lying on the couch one night and crying (78), but then, on the next morning, she finds enough energy to get up and begin a new day for herself and the kids. She finds strength and purpose in prayer and her children. Käte is mindful of their feelings, and she makes an effort to come up with distractions to make moments in her children's lives less poor and depressing, even if only for a short while. As an example, on one occasion, she overhears her neighbors (the walls were so thin) talking about going out. As soon as she hears the neighbors leave, she tells the children they can play in the hallway (78). This was a special moment, as it meant that the children could be noisy without having to consider the neighbors.

Käte is represented as someone who goes along with the way things are until she finally takes a stand for herself and her children. The family has lived in cramped circumstances for eight years. On the night that she spends with Fred in the hotel room, they talk about their feelings. In this particular chapter, Fred is reflecting on a conversation they had. Käte makes

Fred understand that he must either move back home to live with the family or she will not see him again. The beautiful part of this statement is that she says it lovingly and not aggressively nor in a resentful manner (135). Fred reflects on these words saying, "sie hatte noch nie so mit mir gesprochen" (135). This lets the reader know that in the past she has just gone along with whatever Fred had decided to do, and she then adapted her and her children's way of life accordingly. It also shows that she is not continuing this silence and passiveness, but instead she is ready to take a stand recognizing that it is time to communicate her feelings towards her husband. This "Unvermögen der Kommunikation" (Roets 38) had added to the problems that Fred and Käte have in their marriage. When they spend the night together, and Käte is being honest about her thoughts and feelings, Fred, too, makes attempts to be more open and says, "[...] ich fand nie Worte" (145). However, he does not say enough. Finally, as she is leaving early the next morning to return to their children, Fred stops her and says, "Ich muß mit dir sprechen" (152). Käte cannot give in to this request, and responds by saying that he had all night to do this. She leaves.

After spending the night with Fred, according to C. E. Roets, Käte reflects a change; "sie ist wie eine Verwandelte" (40). She wakes up with a feeling of great wellbeing (147) and freedom. Later, after Fred and Käte had said their good-byes, Fred by chance sees Käte walking into stores and looking at clothes. He sees her buying some beautiful flowers "große, gelbe Margueriten, auch weiße" (166), knowing that she wants her children to be surrounded by these flowers that normally grow in meadows, which her children have never experienced. Fred comments on having the feeling that he no longer knows her despite them being married for fifteen years (168). There is a certain strength about Käte that he has never before seen, which intimidates him. Fred feels lost in his apathy, "[…] träge dahinschwimmend in einem

unendlichen Strom" (167), and all he can think of is Käte. By making a decision to protect herself and her children, Käte has indirectly forced Fred into choosing. Her confident and decisive approach has given Fred a push out of his lethargy. In this chapter Fred leads the monologue; however, it portrays Käte as the stronger person, who is prepared to walk out on her marriage. It is left to Fred to decide whether to return home (170).

Käte's character depicts precisely what *Trümmerfrauen* symbolized, suitable as a role model and protagonist. During the postwar years, determination, grit, and persistence were needed in order to survive the struggles and hardships of day-to-day life. In my research, I did not read anything stating that Böll recognized women for their strength and determination. Nevertheless, Böll states that women did sensible and obvious things (Wintzen 46). By portraying Käte as a woman who was able to survive the struggles of postwar difficulties, he acknowledges women. In an interview with the French journalist, René Wintzen, Böll responds to the question whether he specifically thinks of the novels and their characters. "Wenn ich daran denke, denke ich an das Ungesagte im Zusammenhang mit einer bestimmten Situation" (Wintzen 71). While he may be thinking of women as strong individuals, perhaps, even stronger than men, he leaves this unsaid. He also does not mention the fact that Fred never comes by to help his wife clean the house, or to take the kids out for some fun. Within this context, as a response to a different question, Böll admits that the independence of women was not a subject he would write about, "das Thema Unabhängigkeit der Frau [auch] noch nicht richtig angepackt worden ist" (Wintzen 70). Nevertheless, this is precisely what is happening to Käte, as the story ends. She is claiming her independence; she is realizing that she has survived without Fred's presence, maybe not financially, but emotionally, and physically. She now feels strong enough to do it all the way.

Men came home as returning soldiers, many times wanting to reclaim their dominant role in the household and moving back into the way things were before they left to fight in the war. In many cases this was no longer possible, as women had learned to survive the suffering amongst the debris and ruins of post WWII. And they developed skills to help their families and themselves through the rough years. Helene Karwentel, one of the five rubble women documented in *Steine gegen Brot*, describes these emotions in a testimony 1945-1947, as she talks about her husband returning after WWII. "Nach den ersten Tagen legt sich bei Helene die Begeisterung und Zufriedenheit über die Rückkehr ihres Mannes. Bald half er nicht mehr auf der Baustelle, er saß nur noch zu Hause herum und wartete auf ihre Rückkehr" (Jenk 46). She continues to talk about no longer having to justify any of her actions and being able to make decisions independently. However, her husband is not happy with this new development, "[A]ber Hermann – Helenes Mann – pochte auf seine Rechte. Er, der noch zu Hause krank saß, spürte sehr bald, daß Helene ohne ihn sehr gut zurechtkam" (Jenk 46). In Helene's case, as with Käte, she also reached a point where she had to say to her husband that either he found himself a job, or he had to move out. Within two weeks he had found a job.

In this chapter, I have focused on Käte portrayed by Heinrich Böll, as expressing characteristics true to the *Trümmerfrauen* during the post WWII period. In contrast, I will use the following chapter to analyze the portrayal of a female character in a short story by Luise Rinser, a female writer.

Chapter 3: "Die rote Katze" by Luise Rinser

In the prior chapter, I analyzed how Heinrich Böll, a male writer, portrayed the strength of Käte, a female character. In this chapter, I continue to focus on the role of women in *Trümmerliteratur* with the difference that the narrative I have chosen is written by a female writer. It is my intention to consider whether male writers portrayed women characters differently compared to female writers, and, if so, then what were the differences. Luise Rinser, the author of "Die rote Katze," the short story that I am focusing on, is one of the few female writers representing the period of *Trümmerliteratur.* According to Marianne Konzag, Rinser started writing successfully during WWII, publishing her first book *Die gläsernen Ringe* in 1941, despite, as Rinser says, it being an "Anti-Buch" (Schwab 26). Her writing style was defined as not necessarily having a new beginning, "[…] es gab für sie keinen Kahlschlag, keinen Nullpunkt […]," continuing the style of writing and the subjects that she chose to write about during WWII (Falkenstein 32). Rinser and her husband distanced themselves from National Socialism, eventually leading to an employment ban for Rinser as a teacher in 1939 (Schwab 25). In 1946 her book *Gefängnistagebuch* was published, which she wrote in prison after having been accused of treason in October 1944. This was one of the first books by a German writer to appear in postwar Germany (Rinser *A woman's* vii).

After WWII ended, the ban on Rinser publishing any further works was lifted, and she proceeded with her writing, as did many other authors. The ban had also included the reading of unpopular German and international authors, which now meant that Rinser was able to look more closely at other authors, including Hemingway (Falkenstein 33). She was fascinated with

Hemingway's style of writing short stories (Frederiksen 193).[8] This is when she learned to focus on presenting the facts and "[…] das unausgesprochene Gefühl, das um so stärker hervortritt, je weniger es direkt erwähnt wird" (Falkenstein 33). It was during this time that her short story "Die rote Katze" (1948) was published. Rinser remained an outsider amongst the group of upcoming postwar German writers (Falkenstein 32). As Hans Bender states, "Sie zählte nicht zu denen, die mitbestimmten, was Literatur sei und was nicht. Sie war eine Einzelgängerin. Ohne Clique, ohne Gruppe, ohne Mäzen, ohne protegierenden Liebhaber" (Schwab 117). This also made it more difficult for her to be accepted into the mostly male *Gruppe 47*. Chris Weedon states that Rinser's short story "Die rote Katze" was dismissed as mere kitsch at the first and only reading to *Gruppe 47* (Weedon 43). Years later, according to Werner Bellmann, Ludwig Rohner praised the same short story in his book *Theorie der Kurzgeschichte* by saying it was a "Modellbeispiel der Kurzgeschichte" (65).

"Die rote Katze" is an important example of German women getting themselves and their families through the tough times of the postwar period, and contributing to the restoring of Germany to the strong country that it became. In my analysis of this story, I will continue to focus on the depiction of women in *Trümmerliteratur* arguing that women's experiences were not sufficiently depicted in German narratives in relation to what they endured and accomplished during the postwar era.

In "Die rote Katze" a first-person narrator describes an incident in its past, in the immediate postwar period, in which its family adopted a red cat. Before focusing on significant details in the story, it is necessary to address the "genderlessness" of the narrator in this story.

[8] At this point, Rinser had already published her first stories (*Erzählungen*) in the journal *Herdfeuer* between 1934-1937. *Herdfeuer* was a German magazine leaning toward National Socialism.

While the gender of the two younger children is mentioned, the gender of the narrator is never defined. According to some male critics, it could be assumed that the narrator was a boy based on the way the thirteen-year-old is dressed and certain mannerisms about the child (Schwab 157, Ester 3). It seems that the comments the critics make could refer to the child's language, as the child says "Himmeldonnerwetter" and 'Dummkopf" at different times in the story. The child being a boy could also be inferred by the rough treatment of the cat, when it is pulled out from under the sofa and thrown out of the window (92), or when the child throws a stone at the cat (91). On another occasion, the child goes fishing with a stick and nails, something that perhaps the critics think a boy would do more typically than a girl would. The cursing, the tough behavior, and the fishing need not necessarily only refer to a thirteen-year-old boy. I argue that this type of conduct could also come from a thirteen-year-old girl placed in a similar situation after having lived through a war.

To understand the "genderlessness" in this story, it is important to mention that traditional relationships between men and women, husbands and wives, changed dramatically post WWII (Weedon 29). Some husbands were returning to their homes assuming they would retake their positions as head of the family. Other men felt displaced and sometimes even useless as they readjusted to the struggles of fitting in and finding jobs. By this time, the women and wives had learned to survive great hardships, adjusting to dire situations in order to pull their families through the rough times. Women were regarded as strong and determined, as they had made important decisions on a daily basis in the absence of the men. By leaving the narrator's gender identity ambiguous, Rinser is referring to the fact that during this postwar period, gender roles were no longer clearly defined. According to Elke Frederiksen, Rinser was concerned about the emancipation of women and for the "Neu-Wertung im Bewußtsein der bisherigen

patriarchalischen Gesellschaft" (Schwab 133). In that same article Frederiksen quotes Rinser as saying, "Mann und Frau müssen sich entschließen, ihre Männchen- und Weibchenrollen aufzugeben und gemeinsam die Menschenrolle, die Partnerschaftsrolle zu lernen" (Schwab 131). Despite the author choosing to leave the narrator without gender, I have chosen this story because of the strength of the mother.

While there is neither a correct nor incorrect way of reading this story, in regard to the narrator's "genderlessness," Rinser is relinquishing the control to the reader and giving the reader the opportunity to think for him/herself. During the years of National Socialism, many German citizens conformed to this particular ideology. This narrative is giving the reader an opportunity to break out of that mold and to think for him/herself. Rinser wants the reader to involve him/herself in the reading of the short story. She is telling the reader, "Now it is your turn!" Despite the author presenting the protagonist without gender, I will follow my first instinct when initially reading the story, and interpret the child as a girl. There are two examples, in particular, that lead to my assumption. First, at the beginning of the short story, the child talks about her siblings in a motherly manner when she says "die zwei Kleinen" (92). Second, the fact that the thirteen year-old-child is so concerned about sharing every morsel of bread with her family is, to me, a sign of motherly concern. Additionally, reading the narrator as a girl allows me to interpret this story differently from prior critics.

The time of the story is post WWII, more precisely at the end of 1946, as the girl talks about the terribly bitter winter of 1946/1947. Historically, these were hard times, and people were barely surviving on the small amount of food that was available. In his book *...mehr als ein Haufen Steine,* Kurt Grobecker talks about the "Kamp gegen den Hunger" (74). This, too, was a period in which millions of Germans from former eastern territories of Germany were

forced to relocate to Germany.[9] These poor people who had also suffered so greatly were arriving by the thousands in the already devastated towns and cities. The German inhabitants in these areas themselves were struggling to survive, and barely able to feed their families. Therefore, it was hard to imagine that, additionally, thousands of newcomers or outsiders had to be fed and accommodated.

The short story "Die rote Katze" deals with a similar conflict, as mother and daughter individually deal with the sudden presence of a stray and hungry cat. The story depicts the emotional turmoil that the mother and daughter face individually in regard to the needs of the red cat, as it slowly moves into the family's home and life. The story begins in the present, as the first person narrator, the girl, thinks back on an incident and questions her actions by saying, "Ich muß immer an diesen roten Teufel von einer Katze denken, und ich weiß nicht, ob das richtig war, was ich getan habe" (91). This statement expresses her anger, as she talks about the red cat being the red devil. The girl is referring to the unforgettable act of killing the red cat. Seemingly, she has not come to terms with her action, still carrying guilt after all this time. The closing sentence of this story is similar, "Und jetzt weiß ich nicht, ob es richtig war, daß ich das rote Biest umgebracht hab." However, she adds, "Eigentlich frißt so'n Tier doch gar nicht viel" (96). Having the same sentence repeated at the end of the short story gives the story a frame. Within this frame, the girl thinks back on some key experiences, helping her as an older person to understand why her mother might have wanted to welcome and care for the cat. At that time, the young girl was in a moral dilemma. She was constantly faced with the emotional predicament of whether to share the food and home, meant for the family, with the stray cat

[9] The Potsdam Conference (July 17-August 2, 1945) was the last of the World War II meetings held. The leaders of USA, Great Britain and the Soviet Union determined the future of Germany including the expulsion of Germans from the former eastern territories of Germany (Poland, Czechoslovakia, Hungary), which were annexed by Poland and the Soviet Union after the end of WWII.

while they themselves were struggling and battling to survive, or whether to ignore the needy and helpless cat and get rid of it. Looking back as an older person, she has come to recognize and understand the importance of the mother's decision to look after the helpless and homeless cat, despite the difficult times.

As the older girl ends her reminiscing with the comment, "Eigentlich frißt so'n Tier doch garnicht viel," she has realized that it was not necessary to kill the cat, in order for the family to survive. By looking back on certain events, the girl seems to have worked through these issues. As she brings the mother into the story, she recognizes that thanks to the mother she and the siblings survived the terrible times. Due to her mother's strong character, the daughter was able to move forward. The retelling of the incidents almost seems therapeutic for her, and she has seemingly dealt with the issue. The family still had enough food, and it was still able to overcome the struggles, whether the cat was around or not. Regardless, their lives did go on. Because she has aged and matured, she recognizes the senselessness of her cruel act.

Rinser introduces the narrator, as she is sitting on a pile of stones beside a bomb crater. In a monologue, the girl describes how the family's home has been split in two, making it possible to only live in the smaller remaining part of the house. The larger part of the house is described as being a pile of rubble. It is obvious that the family is very poor and barely has enough food to survive. The children, including Leni, a nine-year-old girl, and Peter, a younger boy, are growing up as *Trümmerkinder*. They are described as not attending school, and, when possible, stealing potatoes and coal, like most children of their age during that time. The father is not present, and it is not clear what has happened to him.

In this story, Rinser gives the mother a calm voice of reason, as she functions predominantly in the background. Despite the girl being the protagonist, and seemingly the more

active and concerned figure, the mother unobtrusively guides the direction of the story, a strength the daughter acknowledges in the first paragraph, when the girl refers to her mother as the wise adult who claims that it is healthier to eat stale bread than fresh bread (91). The girl adds that the mother must mean that by chewing longer on a stale piece of bread, a person feels a sense of fullness more quickly than if chewing on a fresh piece of bread. This statement insinuates that the author has placed the mother in the role of a wise and authoritative figure, as the oldest daughter heeds the mother's words.

Despite the girl's efforts to imitate the mother's behavior in many ways, she is not able to fully express kind and loving thoughts or gestures toward the cat. The mother, as do the two younger siblings, expresses a sense of sharing, as she welcomes the cat. As the story develops, the cat has nestled into the family's home, and the younger children regularly share morsels of their bread or droplets of milk with the cat. The mother is equally fond of the cat, and, at one point, drops a piece of sausage thinking the oldest child did not see her do this. However, the girl clearly saw the mother do this. The girl comments, only for the reader to hear, that the children would have appreciated spreading it on some bread. The mother also, without saying a word, sacrifices the milk for her coffee for the cat.

Despite the hardship this family is going through, the mother will not let the cat go without. Here it is important to add that she is not taking food or milk away from her children, instead, she is taking less for herself, in order to feed the cat. In this case, the author is making a reference to the situation that Germany faced as they were placed in the position of sharing their food rations with the incoming relocated Germans from the East. The citizens of Germany had no choice but to survive on the food that they had trusting they would survive the difficult times.

Despite the scarcity of food and accommodation already exciting in Germany, the citizens of Germany would survive the arrival of the additional people.

While the mother is clearly modeling virtuous characteristics, the girl has picked up on this behavior of sharing food with her siblings and her mother. It is important that her siblings are fed, and she makes many efforts to find food. For example, on one occasion, the girl was given a sandwich by an American woman, as a gesture of gratitude after receiving directions from the girl in English. The girl immediately runs home to share this reward with her family, and cuts the sandwich equally into four pieces, placing the mother's share, because she is absent, in the cupboard. This considerate gesture not only speaks positively of the girl, but it reflects back on the mother.

Nevertheless, the girl cannot extend this same generous feeling of sharing with the cat. While the girl mirrors much of the responsible and hard-working behavior that the mother models, the adoption of this cat by the other members of the family creates the moral conflict of this story. The girl is clearly able to share any morsel she finds with her family, however, the resentment toward the cat, in her eyes the enemy, will not allow the girl to share their food with it. In this particular case, the oldest daughter is not able to follow the lead of the caring and selfless mother in accepting and welcoming the cat into their home. The girl cannot see beyond the idea that the cat is taking needed food away from the family. She cannot accept the pleasure of having a pet as being worth the loss of food. She cannot even recognize the example of the mother, who shows compassion and kindness toward this helpless animal.

The text does not give an explanation why the girl hates the cat so much. This gives the reader an opportunity to reflect on how the country also had mixed feelings of taking care of the refugees from the East. While the daughter is focused on looking after the needs of the family,

she hesitates to share their home and food with the stray cat. The mother experiences no such dilemma. It is clear for the mother that she must share home and food equally with family and outsiders, regardless of how much is available. As the mother is able to see the bigger picture, she trusts that there is enough for her family while at the same time caring for others. Considering women during the postwar period, this was a similar moral dilemma, whether to share belongings and food with outsiders and the even less fortunate, while having to worry about the wellbeing of their families.

As the girl struggles with this moral dilemma, there is a significant scene in which the girl enters the living quarters, finding the mother alone with the cat in her lap. The child's initial reaction is to get angry, saying "ist das Biest schon wieder da?" (93). The mother immediately defends the cat and responds by saying, "'Red doch nicht so grob,' […] 'das ist eine herrenlose Katze, und wer weiss, wie lange sie nix mehr gefressen hat. Schau nur, wie mager sie ist'" (93). Here the mother protects and defends the helpless cat. This is a significant scene, in which the girl clearly expresses her anger when she is faced with the lazy cat, which gets the mother's attention and affection. Rinser portrays the mother as being sensitive toward the needs of the starving and homeless cat (93), again, making a reference to the relocated Germans and showing how the country could, and did, grow strong again, even while caring for so many. It is important to understand that Germany got through the struggles of the postwar years, eventually experiencing the *Währungsreform* in 1948 and then the *Wirtschaftswunder* in the early 1950s.

It is necessary to recognize that the mother's attention for the red cat also symbolizes an escape, both for the mother and the two younger siblings, from the daily struggle, the harsh reality, which offers little comfort and warmth. The cat functions as a welcoming distraction and a means of sharing their love and kindness. This scene also portrays the human side of this

strong woman. This mother allows herself some moments to enjoy the presence of the cat. It is understandable that the mother has to keep a balance in her life in order to remain energized and reasonable as she continues to fight for the survival of the family. The cat helps give the mother the comfort and strength to move forward.

In another significant scene, the author shows the mother's reaction toward her daughter's resentment for the cat. The mother's reaction shows the disapproval of the daughter's hateful attitude toward the stray and helpless cat. The girl is infuriated by the presence of the cat. She storms off on her bike and rides to a pond on the outskirts of the city. With the help of a stick and nails, she stabs at the fish in the pond. When the girl catches two fish, she immediately rides home, proudly presenting them on a plate and placing it on the kitchen table, as it is more food to share. The girl runs downstairs excitedly to tell the mother, who is busy with the laundry. As the girl reenters the kitchen with her mother, there is only one fish on the plate. She detects the cat sitting on the windowsill enjoying the last bite of the fish. Furiously, the girl grabs a piece of wood, and throws it at the cat, who then falls out of the window on to the ground with a heavy thump. The perpetrator responds by saying, "So, die hat genug" (94). The mother, pale as a sheet, reacts by slapping her oldest daughter across the face and exclaiming "Tierquäler" (94).

The mother refuses to accept the intolerant behavior toward the homeless and helpless cat by immediately responding with a slap, and, therefore, stopping the daughter's inconsiderate behavior. While the girl is startled at the mother's physical reaction, she also sees the mother as choosing the cat's wellbeing over her own wellbeing, disregarding the fact that the cat ate part of the food meant for the family. The daughter is unable to look beyond their home and family and extend her generous and selfless behavior toward the cat as the outsider. Desperate for some

acknowledgement or praise from her mother, the girl does not understand the feelings that the cat brings out in the mother and the two younger siblings. She simply sees the cat as not only taking away the share of food from the family, but also as getting the attention from the mother that she so badly wants. The girl does not see that the cat gives the mother and the siblings a sense of purpose that because they are able to feed it and give it comfort and warmth, it makes them smile and feel some happiness. In return, the cat thanks them with trust and love. The cat helps remind the mother of a more human side to life than she is experiencing during the harsh and cold times. It gives her and the other children a sense of home and togetherness. Manfred Durzak comments on this by saying, "[…] wie sehr ihm und seinen Geschwistern das verlorengegangen ist, was man als Geborgenheit, als Nestwärme bezeichnet" (Durzak 328).

As Germans were struggling to make a home in the country that was supposed to support them with food and means of living, so is the girl unable to come to terms with the feeling that the mother is choosing the wellbeing of the cat over her own wellbeing. When the girl reacts by throwing a piece of wood at the red cat meaning to hurt and disregard its needs, the mother is upset and puts her daughter in her place. The mother wants to awaken her daughter to the fact that she is being cruel and not acting correctly. She is making her daughter aware that this is not the type of behavior she will tolerate in her home. Here, the author portrays the mother as the strong head of the family. Reminiscing, the woman states that the family still ate fish salad, implying that they had enough and life continued, regardless (94). This is also a good depiction of the mother working with what ever she had in order to make sure the family survived. Even though the cat ate one fish, there was still enough food for the family.

After the incident with the stolen fish, assuming that with passing time the girl has learned a lesson, the mother is faced with yet another outburst from her daughter. One day the

girl says to the mother, “Jetzt schlachten wir das Vieh” (95). The mother is appalled and cannot believe she is hearing this, and she responds by saying, “Daß du so’n böses Herz hast, hab ich nicht geglaubt” (95). The short statement that the mother makes, illustrates how tired and worn down she is. She does not have the strength to correct her daughter and to try and put a stop to this way of thinking, not imagining that this emotional statement could lead to worse behavior. Clearly, the desperation and constant worry of not being able to feed the family sufficiently had a harsh effect on the emotions of many people.

With the story reaching its climax, the family, except the oldest girl, has accepted the cat as a member in their home. As on many occasions, the mother and the children are out looking for coal. Rinser uses this observation to depict the mother’s diligent and steady character continuing with the daily routine to survive. They had survived so far, and they would survive this winter, too. It was the mother’s custom to move forward, despite the lack of food and the hunger. One day, in desperation, the girl, who is alone at home with the cat, addresses it saying, “Ich kann das nicht mehr ansehen,”[…]”es geht nicht, daß meine Geschwister hungern, und du bist fett, ich kann das einfach nicht mehr mit ansehen” (95). The cat looks at the girl and with little concern turns around on the stove to get into a more comfortable position. The girl’s emotions have reached a peak, as she grabs the cat and takes it to the river where she ends up killing it. Upon returning home, the mother is worried when she sees her daughter’s pale face and the blood on her jacket.

This is the first time in the story that we see the mother expressing such obvious concern and understanding toward one of her children. Despite the girl having committed a brutal act, the mother forgives her child’s behavior saying, “Ich versteh dich schon. Denk nimmer dran” (96). Here the reader sees the mother adjust to the given circumstances, while, at the same time

ignoring the cruel act that her daughter committed. The mother demonstrates to others, her children in this case, how to live with the hardest decisions in life, meanwhile moving on. This act of moving past a cruel deed that her daughter committed can also be read as the fact that millions of innocent people, including the millions of Jews, were killed during WWII leaving many German and global citizens seemingly ignoring it and moving on with their lives.

Previously in Chapter 1, I mentioned the movie *Deutschland, bleiche Mutter.* Here again, I would like to refer to the movie, stressing how many German citizens preserved their lives by staying silent throughout the war. Earlier in the film, Lene and her sister watch a Jewish family being taken away by the SS. They debate whether to intervene, but then decide to go back to bed. In Rinser's story, similarly, the mother chooses ignorance as a survival skill

Otherwise, the mother is presented as a balanced and steady character. Her usual calm and collected demeanor, as she masters the struggles of post WWII, stands in contrast to her daughter's emotional behavior. Being able to recognize the big picture and trust that life will take its course for the better, Rinser portrays the mother as an example of a strong and diligent person. The mother's struggle and worry of keeping herself and her children alive, does not defeat her. The mother has learned to survive the daily struggle by mostly controlling her emotions. As Durzak states, "[…] die Forderungen, die das nackte Überleben an den einzelnen stellt, lassen keinen Platz für Gefühle" (Durzak 328). The daughter, on the other hand, is young and has not yet mastered being able to look forward with hope and still keeping her emotions under control. Later, as an older person, the daughter reflects on her behavior as a young girl, understanding that the mother was right in trusting they would survive the hardships, despite another mouth to feed. Her family, and Germany, survived. They did so by working hard, caring for all, and never giving in to their worst fears.

In conclusion, despite the mother functioning more in the background of this story, she is more important and influential than the protagonist. The mother of this story contributes immensely to the family's survival. She has an obtrusive influence on the daughter, who models after her mother's behavior, hereby acknowledging her mother's strength as she looks back as an older person narrating the story. The young girl, who at a young age is learning to deal with great hardship, has her mother by her side correcting her behavior when necessary. The mother, who has had enough stamina and trust to get herself and her family through WWII, has proven that she is able to see the big picture trusting that they will continue to survive and overcome the desperate times. The mother is able to share the little bit of food they have with the outsider, the stray cat, understanding the importance of respecting the human side of life and considering the needy despite the already desperate situation they are in. The girl, who is not able to look beyond the immediate moment, cannot understand the mother's calm disposition toward the cat. She can only understand that the cat is taking food away from them. The mother, on the other hand, also lives for the present but she understands that life will get better, and while they are living in that moment, it is important to reach out to the fellow neighbor.

The mother's incredible strength and hope is what symbolizes the women of postwar Germany. These are the women that rebuilt their lives after so much of Germany, and, ultimately, of their personal lives was damaged. As the woman in this story, so, too, were the women in German silently rebuilding their ruined lives and their destroyed cities. In the final chapter I will compare the depiction of the leading women in *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* and "Die rote Katze." I will also compare how differently or similarly Heinrich Böll and Luise Rinser portrayed the leading women in their stories.

Chapter 4: Conclusion

During WWII many women had become accustomed to filling men's positions either in factories or offices, but once the husbands returned, many of these women were again "reconsign[ed] to domesticity" (Gerhard 161). In many cases the women had no choice, because they had not learned a specific trade. When the men returned from the battlefields or the POW camps able to work, they reclaimed their jobs. Often, when husbands returned home from the war, there were many domestic conflicts. Men and women had experienced war on such different levels (Dörr 36). Women had learned to be independent and to make decisions for themselves and their families. Men had fought and experienced another side of the war while women had suffered through bombings, rationing and occupation. Some men returned to their homes thinking they would step right back into the position as the patriarch in the home, falling back into leading roles, and making decisions. There were also men who did not return, or who returned as sick and injured men. For these families it meant that women had to continue to take responsibility for the survival and the wellbeing of their family. Because of all this, women had changed.

At the beginning of my research I discovered that of the many short stories that I had read, it was difficult to find stories portraying experiences women had during the postwar years. Stories were focusing much more on male than on female experiences. In addition, there was more literary criticism on the male authors than on the very few female authors of that time. I was missing more specific depictions of the women and their struggles during the postwar period. I focused on two stories that were not typical for the narratives of the postwar period. These stories depicted women as strong figures placing them in important roles during postwar Germany. They functioned as positive representatives for the period *Trümmerliteratur*.

Trümmerliteratur mainly addresses the experiences that soldiers, male citizens and men, in general, had during the last years of war, but also after the war ended and men were adjusting to peace amongst the ruins. There are not many stories depicting the hardships of women during the struggles of post WWII and there are not many stories written by female writers, besides Luise Rinser, and Elizabeth Langgässer or Ingeborg Bachmann and Ilse Aichinger, who were Austrian. The postwar period, being largely male dominated, often made it difficult for female writers to ignore their familial obligations to be able to follow their literary passions.

In both Heinrich Böll's novel *Und sagte kein einziges Wort* and Luise Rinser's short story "Die rote Katze," women have a strong presentation in their important roles. These main female characters are portrayed as agents of hope and strength, regardless of whether the author is male or female. Although the main female characters in these works, Käte in Böll's novel and the unnamed mother in Rinser's story, are the silent ones, unobtrusively guiding and making decisions for the wellbeing of their families, they do, on occasion, voice their opinions, steering the families' development in a positive direction. In Böll's portrayal of Käte, she is depicted as soft-spoken, at first. As the story develops, she is revealed to be a strong woman, able to take a stand by threatening to end the relationship with her husband. Rinser portrays the mother also as having a quiet demeanor, managing the family in the background. She, too, is acknowledged as being a strong woman, displaying survival skills as she helps her children through life's challenges.

In both stories it is evident that the mothers are mainly concerned about their children. They make an effort to offer them another view of the future besides the postwar devastation with which they are continuously surrounded. Käte wants her children to enjoy life whenever they can. This is displayed when she allows them to play in the hallway of the house they live

in, or when she brings color and beauty into their home, by buying flowers. The mother in Rinser's story also shows her children another side of life by inviting the cat into their home. They share love and warmth with the cat. In both cases, the women are looking beyond the material needs of the family for the sake of being reminded that there is something else other than debris, rubble and ruins. It is important to these strong women to make their children aware of this, too. They sense the hope for better times in the future.

Böll presents a male figure as the central figure of the narrative, and Rinser portrays a narrator without gender as the protagonist of her story. These principal characters do not take away from the importance that the female characters, Käte and the mother, have in the stories. Instead, they act as the foil in bringing out the strengths of the mothers. Böll portrays Fred as a passive man not ambitious enough to strive for success and the benefits of the economic miracle of the early fifties. By doing so, Böll deflects from the stereotype of the male figure having to be of a strong character, referring to a quote that Böll used when he talked about males, "Lächerlichkeit der Männlichkeit," (Reid 92). Böll questions the typical characteristics that a male ideally was expected to represent. As the postwar years were changing, the gender roles, too, were shifting and were being newly defined. It is this same uncertainty regarding gender that is an important issue in "Die rote Katze." The reader never finds out what the gender of the narrator is, but regardless of whether it is a female or male, this person allows the mother in this story to show her strengths. For the sake of my analysis, I chose to identify the narrator as a young girl.

It is important to mention that Rinser brings another aspect of *Trümmerliteratur* into her short story that is worth acknowledging. By inviting a stray cat into their home, the mother introduces a softer and more humane side to the postwar period, as she teaches her children to

share food and their home with the stray cat. Rinser makes a strong statement through the mother's actions that it is important to be tolerant and accepting of outsiders, regardless of how desperate one's own situation is. This is also where Rinser uses characteristics such as hope and trust to manifest the mother's strength, quite like *Trümmerfrauen* were depicted.

Portraying strength, diligence and hope, makes these two women positive representatives for the *Trümmerfrauen.* They symbolize the women and their efforts to rebuild and put their families' lives back together again. Whether women were really working amongst the debris and rubble did not necessarily matter. Every woman who shoveled debris or repaired things in her home to make life more livable should be considered a rubble woman.

In the stories Rinser and Böll equally give women more attention, which reflects on the issues that *Trümmerfrauen* dealt with. There were issues such as in Käte's case, in which the husband did not strive to move with the times and work at re-establishing a normalcy in the day-to-day routine. The issue addressed in the unnamed mother's case was the struggle she faced to find food and coal, not only during the tough winter, but directly after the war ended; this was tough for a woman with three young children and without the help of a husband. These were real-life struggles that the women of the rubble fought daily, month after month.

In conclusion, my response to the original question of my thesis on whether there is a feminine side of *Trümmerliteratur,* I must clearly answer affirmatively. A feminine side of *Trümmerliteratur* does not only refer to whether women have been depicted sufficiently in rubble literature, or whether there are female German writers from that period. It also does not only refer to the warm and comforting side that most people think of as a woman's or mother's role. The feminine side of *Trümmerliteratur* also refers to the depiction of women surviving the desolated living circumstances, of showing strength and helping to manage the daily struggles

and acknowledging the comforting relationships they found with other women. Therefore, I argue that though these views are shown, they just have not been shown enough to a more realistic accounting of what women really helped to accomplish during these hard times.

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