

Copying Kafka's Signature: Martin Walser's *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*

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In their initial reactions to Martin Walser's novel *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*, many critics emphasized the continuity in Walser's works. Consequently, these critics stressed the psychological similarities of Walser's protagonists.¹ Those critics who interpreted Walser's novel in terms of the author's position toward German unification were either disappointed or had to concede that historical events remained in the background.² After Martin Walser had almost singlehandedly and vociferously promoted German unity, it seemed only natural for certain critics to focus on the novel's historical dimension and its significance for Germany's contemporary political situation (see for example Martin Lüdke). The fact that *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* intimately portrays East-West relations during the Cold War period made such a reading even more plausible. There is, however, a danger of overlooking other thematic aspects if one concentrates exclusively on the socio-political dimension, as some of the reactions prove.³ Walser has always been interested in society's impact on the individual's psyche rather than a mere rendering of society itself. The deformed individuals at the center of his novels reflect society's condition. And in this respect they closely resemble the protagonists of Franz Kafka's fiction. For in *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* Walser has imbued his protagonist Alfred Dorn with many Kafka allusions, knitting a tight net of thematic references that discloses the similar psycho-social framework for many Kafka- and Walser-figures.

When Martin Walser began his literary career in 1955, critics welcomed his debut—a collection of short stories entitled *Ein Flugzeug über dem Haus und andere Geschichten*—and described the twenty-eight-year-old author as a Kafka epigone.⁴ Subsequently, Walser heeded critics' admonitions to free himself from Kafka's influence and find his own style. After thirty-five years of a prolific and illustrious career, however, Walser completed a novel of considerable magnitude in which he is not afraid to pay an open tribute to his

literary mentor. Both thematically and structurally, *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* resembles Walser's early work to such an extent that critics' descriptive comments about Walser's early work are also applicable to his latest novel.

Kafka's influence on Walser's concept of irony has been well documented in the secondary literature on his novels from the 1970s and 80s. By that time the author, after his initial effort to distance himself from his literary mentor, had become more confident in utilizing Kafka for his own literary purposes.⁵ Yet never before in Walser's career has Kafka figured as prominently as in *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*. Walser draws extensively on Kafka's works and on the author himself, his biography, and his relationship to art. It is certainly no coincidence when the narrator informs the reader in a crucial passage about the main character's fascination with Kafka's handwriting: "In der Buchhandlung hatte die auf dem Prospect faksimilierte Unterschrift Franz Kafkas angezogen. Zu Hause fing er an, diese Unterschrift zu üben. . . . Er füllte viele Seiten mit Unterschriftsübungen. Morgen würde er sehen, ob seine Hand ein einziges Mal in die Bewegung des Originals hineingefunden habe" (516). Thus Walser's openly stated tribute to Kafka reveals *in nuce* Walser's own literary impulses. In this paper I will examine the thematic, structural, and poetological analogies between Kafka and Walser within the context of their fictionalized psycho-social kinship to demonstrate their significance for Walser's own aesthetic point of view. To support my analysis, I will refer to Gilles Deleuze's and Felix Guattari's famous Kafka study entitled *Toward a Minor Literature* as well as to Walser's own theoretical statements on Kafka and Thomas Mann, from his essay collection *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen*.⁶

For Deleuze and Guattari, Kafka's texts are prime examples of a minor literature, that is, literature, "which a minority constructs within a major language."⁷ Unlike Kafka, Walser's protagonist does not belong to a

linguistic minority, but to a cultural minority, both as a homosexual and social underdog or parvenu. This minority status translates into an inferiority status and causes a certain pattern of neurotic reactions that Walser's and Kafka's protagonists share. The psycho-social kinship of both Kafka's and Walser's figures is also determined and intensified by the oedipal family constellation in which they are portrayed, and which produces their neurotic personalities. Deleuze's and Guattari's study is therefore applicable to *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*:

In [the oedipal family constellation], the father appears as the man who had to renounce his own desire and his own faith, if only to leave the "rural ghetto" where he was born; he appears as the man who demands only that the son submit because he himself is in submission to a dominant order in a situation from which there is no way out.⁸

This particular constellation causes the main character's internal split that informs the structure of the entire novel. Because the fathers act as the unsuccessful representatives of the dominant order the sons attempt to do better and avoid their fathers' mistakes. But when they are trying to surpass their fathers, they have to realize that in their attempt to succeed where their fathers failed they have to deny their own selves. They must submit to the very dominant order that victimized their fathers. The dilemma is insoluble because in avoiding their fathers' fate, the sons act like their fathers, who had also renounced *their* desires and *their* own faiths in pursuit of a better life. In view of this scenario where the father is not only the perpetrator but also the victim of the dominant order, Deleuze and Guattari write "the hypothesis of a common innocence, of a distress shared by father and son, is thus the worst of all hypotheses" because the sons have to follow in their fathers' footsteps no matter whether they rebel or conform.⁹ In their attempt to escape their fathers' influence the protagonists vacillate between these two irreconcilable poles and invent increasingly neurotic strategies. What Deleuze and Guattari explain as Kafka's "oedipalization of the universe" in which the image "of the father, expanded beyond all bounds, will be projected onto the geographic, historical, and political *map* of the world" can be observed in Walser's case.¹⁰ Thus his protagonist views the world in terms of the mother-father dichotomy that reflects his own internal split, flight and conformity, between deterritorialization (escape) and reterritorialization (conformity/dissimulation), between art and life, between east and west, Romanticism and Enlightenment, etc. Like Kafka's father who is imbued with the "ambiguity of the Jews, who have left their rural Czech milieu," Walser's protagonist provides his own father with all the cultural traits of the ambitious parvenu representing protestant virtues, the descendant of Luther and Kant torn between his in-

ner desire for freedom and society's demands to conform and obey.¹¹ According to Deleuze and Guattari this "triangle of transformation" is universal: "All children can understand this; they all have a political and geographic map with diffuse and moving contours if only because of their nursemaids, servants, employees of the father, and so on." In my paper, I will explore a net of structural and thematic motifs that reveal Walser's protagonist's traces of escape on this map marked by vacillation between the mother's and the father's worlds. The parallels to Kafka are striking because Walser outlines the strategies of deterritorialization (escape) or reterritorialization (conformity/dissimulation) in a manner that betrays a conscious employment of Kafka's ambiguous imagery.¹² Before I turn to my intertextual investigation of specific motifs, I will outline the biographical and psycho-social similarities that characterize both Walser's and Kafka's protagonists as comrades in suffering. I will demonstrate how Walser in *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* establishes a psycho-social kinship between the biographies of his protagonist, Alfred Dorn, and Kafka in order to provide an example of *Kleinbürger* mentality within the historical context of postwar Germany. Thus Alfred Dorn's biography serves the author as a mouthpiece and link between fact and fiction, between a version of his own life and the life of his spiritual mentor Kafka.

A part from the numerous thematic similarities, allusions in imagery, and narrative perspective, it is above all the protagonist, Alfred Dorn, who could be described as "der ganz durchschnittliche Mensch von subalternen, meist kleinbürgerlicher Herkunft, der Mensch in betont gesellschaftlich-beruflicher Bestimmung,"¹³ whose neurotic anxieties remind one of the typical Walser-protagonist from earlier novels. The protagonist's feelings of self-doubt and inadequacy result from the personal defeats and losses that he suffers in his daily struggle against what he perceives as an overwhelming, antagonistic conspiracy, an ubiquitous power over which he has no control. In his attempt to defend his personal identity and integrity against these inimical societal forces, he overcompensates and unknowingly succumbs to the all-permeating powers of social convention. Like Alfred Dorn, all of Walser's protagonists are socially inept recluses with little self-esteem. Their upstart mentality contributes to their inferiority feelings and results in neurotic behavior: "Sie gehorchen . . . der Dialektik des technischen Prozesses, dem sie begegnen wollen: sie beginnen ihrerseits zu sammeln, zu formieren, zu registrieren—und sterben an dem vermeintlich heilsamen Gegengift."¹⁴ These descriptions of the typical Walser-protagonist, written by Hans-Egon Holthusen and Walter Geis in 1955, still accurately fit Walser's latest anti-hero.

Alfred Dorn shares with his predecessors a rather uneventful life. It is quickly told: Born in 1929 in Dresden as the only child of the dentist Gustav Dorn and his wife Martha, he completes the humanist *Gymnasium* in 1948 as the best student of his class. From 1948 to 1952 he studies law at Leipzig University but does not graduate because he fails his final exam twice for political reasons, as he explains in his curriculum vitae. He completes his university education in West Berlin in 1956. In 1958 Alfred decides to put up his sick mother in his one-bedroom apartment in West Berlin because deteriorating East-West relations have made GDR visits increasingly difficult. In 1960 he obtains a license to practice law, just a few days before his mother passes away. For the following seven years he works as an attorney at a state agency that decides on war reparations. In 1967 he moves to Wiesbaden, where he works as an attorney at a different state agency that preserves public landmarks until he dies at the age of fifty-eight from an overdose of sleeping pills. What distinguishes Alfred Dorn from his neurotic predecessors is that the story of his life is based on a real biography. Walser explained in an interview in *Die Zeit* that he became interested in this rather inconspicuous life because he felt very close to his hero and recognized in him a comrade in suffering.¹⁵ In other words, he discovered a psycho-social kinship to him.

When Walser has Alfred Dorn copy Kafka's signature at the end of the novel, he emphasizes the biographical similarities that both he and Kafka share with their protagonists. Copying Kafka's signature means appropriating Kafka's biography into one's own, just as Walser himself appropriated Alfred's biography. The author of *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* is making a poetological statement when he has Alfred's closest friend, the Vize-Oma, give her opinion on novels that are based on biographies of real people: "Also eine Art Übereinstimmung des Autors mit der wirklich gewordenen Person sei die Bedingung. Sei die nicht gegeben, triumphiere die Manier des Autors über die historische Sache. Dann soll er sie aber doch lieber gleich lassen, die historische Sache, und sich, wie gewohnt, selber in Szene setzen" (220). Just as Kafka transforms his own life into art, Walser can use both Kafka's and Alfred's biography to write about himself because he identifies with both of them. Consequently, Walser, in referring interchangeably to both the biographical Kafka and his fiction, does not distinguish between the author and his protagonist. Alfred Dorn's appropriation of Kafka's life is equated with and subsumed under Walser's appropriation of Dorn's life.

Walser carefully depicts the social background of his protagonist to show how it shapes Alfred Dorn's frame of mind. And Walser shares the experience of belonging to the *Kleinbürgertum* with both Kafka and his protagonist. As typical representatives of the *petit bourgeoisie*, Kafka's and Alfred's fathers are ambitious op-

portunists who compensate for their own inadequate social status by totally conforming to the demands of society.¹⁶ They also instill their fear of anomaly in their children. Both Kafka and Alfred succumb to their fathers' influence by choosing a secure, practical profession, in which they have little interest. They cannot live up to their fathers' expectations because they fail to establish a family, the bourgeois tool for gaining wealth and power. As a result they are plagued with feelings of guilt and shame for their identification with the patriarchal order and for their failure to succeed. Paralyzed by the overpowering patriarchy, the sons accept their inferiority. Documented in Kafka's *Brief an den Vater* and fictionalized in *Die Verwandlung* and Walser's *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*, these psycho-social conditions lead either to a neurotic regression or artistic sublimation in defense of the last remnants of the protagonists' infantile freedom. Their feelings of inferiority are not restricted to the personal relationship with the father but are transferred to all social relationships. Their wish to be socially accepted is in permanent conflict with the need to preserve the remainder of their regressive individuality. Once the patriarchal order has been internalized, the sons' struggle for self-preservation becomes increasingly difficult because they act as their own executioners and punish themselves with guilt for any transgressions. The sons' intensifying endeavor to conform is accompanied by an attempt to conceal any deviations from society's expectations. A growing fear of rejection induces in them a hypersensitivity that stifles social interaction and results in a paranoid distortion of perception. In order to escape society's relentless scrutiny they become increasingly reclusive. The dynamics of this process lead to a faltering personality and ultimately to the destruction of the self. In addition to a certain psychological disposition that distinguishes them as typical members of the *Kleinbürgertum*, the author and Alfred Dorn share a similar relationship to their parents, according to Walser: "Mein Vater hat sich zwar nicht wegen einer Geliebten von meiner Mutter getrennt. Aber er ist früh gestorben. Jedenfalls war er nicht da. So waren meine Mutter und ich ein ähnliches Paar wie Alfred und seine Mutter."¹⁷

Both Kafka and Alfred Dorn lived in a typical oedipal family configuration, in which son and mother develop a love relationship and the father is regarded as the son's rival. Both in Kafka's literature and in Walser's latest novel the father represents the social, economic, and moral standards of society. The importance of the family configuration for Alfred Dorn's psychological development is laid out in the novel's very first sentence. When Alfred is leaving Dresden for West Berlin to complete his education there, the father admonishes his wife at the train station: "Halte mir den Jungen nicht von der Arbeit ab."¹⁸ The father's concern about the son's professional future seems understandable in view of the

fact that Alfred did not succeed in obtaining a law degree from the University of Leipzig. Yet Alfred's father implicitly blames the mother for the son's educational stagnation. The novel's first sentence, cited above, presents in a nutshell the oedipal configuration of the Dorn family: mother and son are allies in their attempt to undermine the father's expectations, which are tantamount to society's expectations. In talking to Alfred's mother as one talks to a child, the father not only acts as the head of the family but also as the representative of the adult world.

In portraying the demands of bourgeois society as a threat to Alfred's artistic self-fulfillment as a musician, the author refers to Thomas Mann's *Bürger-Künstler* dichotomy, which informs the construction of the entire novel.¹⁹ In analogy to Tonio Kröger's parents, who symbolize Tonio's conflict between the bourgeois and bohemian life style, Alfred Dorn's parents represent the two opposing sides of his internal division. Their separation not only signifies the conflict between east and west, but also, in analogy to Tonio Kröger, a conflict between north and south, the northern paternal Prussian capital and the maternal *Elbflorenz*, between reason and emotion, life and art, success and love, adulthood and childhood, future and past, Enlightenment and Romanticism, masculinity and femininity. Yet Walser uses this construct to distance himself from Thomas Mann's artistic position. Whereas the *Kleinbürger* Kafka serves Walser as a model, the *Großbürger* Mann serves the author as a contrasting figure. Mann's Tonio Kröger manages to escape bourgeois mediocrity because he belongs to a different class than *Kleinbürger* Alfred Dorn, who remains caught in a mundane struggle for survival.

What are the specific reasons that Walser presents for Alfred's confusion? What detains him from overcoming his petit bourgeois background and fulfilling his desire to become famous? To answer these questions I must return to the socio-psychological motivation for Alfred's stagnation. Alfred's father Gustav, an ambitious dentist without a doctorate, who "obwohl er geradezu legendär fleißig war, die Familie nie wie für immer aus den ererbten kleinen Verhältnissen herausführen konnte" (18), passes on his unfulfilled expectations to his son. Alfred readily adopts his father's ambitions and as a "Feind aller Gewöhnlichkeit" (18) tries to escape mediocrity by excelling in high school and becoming the best student in his class. It is only after his parents' separation and the ensuing initial failure as a law student that Alfred begins to have doubts about his professional success in the future.

Before the parents' separation "Vater UND Mutter" (103) were convinced that Alfred was an intellectually and artistically gifted child and therefore fostered his

ambition. After the father leaves the mother for a younger woman, Alfred's internal split, the pain of which he sometimes kills by taking *Spalt-Tabletten*, comes to the surface (52). Although Alfred sides with his mother in the ensuing marital dispute, he cannot escape the influence of the patriarchal order that spurs his professional ambition and at the same time informs his sense of order and fear of standing out. Walser takes great care to motivate the father's opportunism and ambition as the result of his petit bourgeois social background. Success, money, order, and punctuality are the qualities that the father advocates. For example, the first present that he brings his son after he has left the GDR is a wristwatch. Gustav Dorn is portrayed as a degraded descendant of the bourgeois protestant tradition from Luther to Kant, who advocates the "freie innere Entscheidung" (25) only as long as it does not conflict with the dominant ideology. As a representative of the Enlightenment he capitalizes on intellectual maturity and personal independence, but for him this actually means submission to conformity.²⁰

Although Alfred recognizes his father's constant admonitions to grow up as "Werde-ein-Mann-Propaganda" (70, 100) and does not fulfill his father's expectation that he marry, he shares many character traits with the older Dorn. Just as Kafka's literature, as explained in his *Brief an den Vater*, is about the son's attempt to escape the omnipresent patriarchal influence, it also describes the son's failure to escape his paternal persecutor: "In it, the father appears as the tormentor who had to renounce his own desire and his own faith . . . ; he appears as the man who demands only that the son submit, because he himself is in submission to a dominant order in a situation from which there is no way out. . . ." ²¹ Beneath this impasse is the son's discovery that he is like his father, that he has the father in himself. According to Deleuze and Guattari, the son has to identify with the father "because in his childhood, the father already confronted some of the diabolical powers even if it meant being beaten by them."²² The son must also learn to confront such powers. Nevertheless, when little Alfred's classmates make fun of his father because as a dentist he does not hold a doctorate, the young boy first notices the father's weakness, which accounts for his remaining ambivalent feelings toward the older Dorn (234). Alfred strives to obtain a doctorate for himself so that he can become more respected than his father. Yet in order to achieve this goal, he has to agree with the opinion of his classmate-tormentors, which means that he must turn against his own father and thus against his own self. The fact that Alfred as an adult makes sure that his own dentist has an academic degree proves that he has accepted the position of his tormentors.²³ It also shows that he has internalized the self-hatred that spurs his ambition to rise above his inherited social status. In his attempt to escape his father's fate, he nevertheless

has to discover his father within himself, for he shares his father's ambition.

This impossibility to escape the father's influence and destiny, which is both inside and outside, the self and its tormentor, is captured in the Graf Brühl-allegory. Alfred is fascinated by this historical figure's biography, which—similar to both his father's and his own—exemplifies in the tradition of the *Fürstenspiegel* the fate of a man who became the victim of his ambition:

Über sich hinaus wollte er auch. Eben dazu, daß er über sich hinaus komme, sollte ihm das Brühl-Projekt dienen. Da er, wie jeder, der über sich hinaus will die traurigen und lächerlichen Abstürze seiner Vorgänger genau kannte, würde er nicht abstürzen. Natürlich hatte er Angst, daß er genau durch seine Art, den Absturz zu vermeiden, seine Art abzustürzen präpariere. (213)

Brühl's own fall is preceded by the fall of his tailor, who is punished by the Graf for his presumptuous effort to rise above his social class. In the story of the tailor's punishment, Alfred finds himself in the same position as in the event of his classmates' ridicule of his father. He recognizes himself in both the figures of the humiliated tailor and his tormentor (101). Alfred is particularly intrigued by the controversy surrounding Graf Brühl, "ob der Graf ein durch die Machtausübung im absolutistischen Staat verdorbener Zyniker oder doch ein Menschenfreund und ein guter, lediglich an preußischer Raffgier scheiternder Politiker gewesen sei" (212), but Alfred does not feel the necessity to take sides. For him the two positions are not mutually exclusive because he can identify with both victim and perpetrator. Yet as much as Alfred identifies with Graf Brühl, he has to distance himself from him in order to avoid his mistakes. This same impulse caused him to turn against his own father. Graf Brühl's humiliation induces him to turn away from his hero and seek new ways to escape punishment where the father figure has not found any.

When Alfred decides to embellish on the fall of Graf Brühl by adding Homer's story of the rise and decline of the Greek hero Bellerophon, "einen sozusagen ewigen Sturz aus der Antike" (214), he implicitly acknowledges what he would like to deny, namely, ". . . daß aufsteigen stürzen heißt" (216). In contrast to the Graf Brühl story that depicts the violator's transgression, the Greek story omits Bellerophon's frivolous attempt to conquer the heavens. Just as in Kafka's *Prozeß*, the readers are told only that the protagonist was guilty; they are not told *why* he was condemned. The story implies that it is not even necessary actually to commit a transgression. Even the desire to rise above one's destiny results in punishment. Thus the Brühl and Bellerophon episodes illustrate what Alfred has already demonstrated through his behavior: that upward mobility is inevitably connected to self-denial.

Alfred's dilemma is unsolvable because he is guilty both for his attempt to rise above his destiny as well as for his refusal to do so. Just like his son, Alfred's father has internalized society's expectations and shares with his son the need to fit in. Like Alfred, he holds on to the bourgeois belief that there is a way to escape the punishment of self-denial by only outwardly conforming to society's demands. When the older Dorn starts corresponding with Alfred after he has left the GDR, he signs his letter to his son with the code name "Bison" because he fears the consequences that his son's illegal GDR emigration might have on his professional career. Like his father, Alfred has no problem with writing bogus letters to protect himself (and his mother) from prosecution for illegal emigration. This ability to dissimulate also manifests itself in Alfred's skill in forging the signatures of his classmates' parents. He acquired the ability to deceive others as a child to protect himself from punishment. Just like his father, Alfred accepts the ability to pretend as a necessary prerequisite to mastering life when he assumes "es genüge, wenn man wisse, wie Erwachsene in der und der Situation handelten. Aber dazu mußte man nicht selber ein Erwachsener sein" (157).

Yet his belief that he can escape punishment by only outwardly fulfilling society's expectations is illusory. He already internalized these expectations in early childhood and automatically punishes himself for any violation. The narrator illustrates this process of internalization from an episode of Alfred's childhood in which he pretends to be asleep so that his parents will not notice that he has masturbated. Afterwards, he is plagued with guilt feelings and suspects that his parents may have noticed anyway. Alfred is aware of this self-surveillance of moral transgressions that has become innate since the time when God replaced his parents as the eternal judge: "Die Beobachtungsstelle war jetzt als Auge in einem selbst eingebaut. Damit war man geliefert. Ein für alle Male. Grausamer konnte nichts sein" (176). In spite of his psychological insight, he realizes that he cannot escape the "Unschuldstheater," and during the final weeks before his law exams he decides to behave, "daß der allerhöchste Kindergärtner im Himmel ihm nichts vorzuwerfen hatte." The internalized fear of punishment and rejection that causes Alfred to overcompensate and love his tormentors becomes obvious in his eagerness to emulate his teachers and to please his parents. Like Kafka's protagonists, Alfred still attempts to find new strategies to evade this mechanism, although he sometimes suspects that he cannot liberate himself from it. I would therefore maintain for Alfred what has been assumed for Kafka's protagonists, namely that "the problem isn't that of liberty, but of escape."²⁴

The wish to escape his father's destiny turns into open rebellion against the older Dorn. After his father has left his wife for a younger woman, Alfred becomes the father's rival, "der im Dornschen Ehekrieg an der Seite

der Mutter focht" (18). However, it is only after the father has moved out and after Alfred becomes aware of the impossibility of reconciling his father's and his mother's expectations that he rebels, by refusing to imitate his father's political opportunism and conformity to socialism. From now on, the father functions as Kant's starry heaven above and the mother as the moral law within. Significantly, the father's logo is *meistern*, and the mother's favorite expression is: "Ich komme ja doch hinter alles" (13). By the time Alfred chooses the mother as a possible ally to help him escape the father's influence, it is already too late because whenever he fails to fulfill society's expectations, and whenever he fails to preserve his personal autonomy, he has to recognize his father in himself. His struggle to protect his self is also his father's struggle. The mother-father dichotomy is not only Walser's but also Alfred's construct, which he sustains to escape the father's influence. However, it proves deceptive because Alfred's mother functions as the internalized voice of the father, as the mother's favorite expression indicates. Alfred's intention to pursue his artistic career as a piano player is purely hypothetical. By postponing his artistic plans until after he has obtained a financially secure position, he in effect agrees with his father that economic success is more important than personal satisfaction. His artistic inclinations can achieve the status of hobby, at best.

The parallel to Kafka's *Verwandlung* is easy to draw. Gregor's plan to save enough money so that he can pay for his sister's education as a musician cannot come true because he has already turned into an insect and is unable to go back to work. But just as Gregor holds on to his plans and invents new strategies to escape his destiny, Alfred also looks for ways to avoid his predicament by regressing. In order to reverse the process of increasing alienation, both protagonists attempt to go back to a point that they presume lies before such a development began. Ironically, by regressing they affirm the very process of transformation that they would like to reverse. In their search for a sanctuary they retreat more and more, always spinning new strategies of escape. Yet they fail to acknowledge that all the exits have been staked out by the father. Alfred's love for his mother is above all just another attempt to evade the father's influence: "Alfred war in diesem Moment seiner Mutter wirklich treu, nicht nur aus Angst vor Entdeckung" (9). After the parents' separation, the mother's home in Dresden becomes his refuge: "Nur bei ihr war eine Bleibe. Seine Bleibe. Sie war seine Bleibe" (166). As the father's adversary and victim she offers to Alfred the only sanctuary that appears to be off limits to the father. Alfred needs to identify with her because he too has considered himself a victim of the patriarchal (adult) world ever since his setbacks as a law student. Yet, like Georg Bendemann's Russian friend, Alfred's

mother cannot protect him from the father's influence, for she also acts as his agent.

Whereas the father attempts to escape his tormentors by denying his past, Alfred identifies with the father's victims of the past. Consequently, it is easy for him to identify with the fate of the Jews, whom he recognizes as the victims of the father's cowardice. Yet he does not condemn his father for a lack of courage during the Nazi period because he remembers how easy it was to become a victim of Nazi propaganda. And he recalls an episode where he himself became a victim of such propaganda: "In dieser Sekunde war die Propaganda des Nationalsozialismus in ihm Herr geworden. In dieser Sekunde ist er ein Nazi gewesen" (308). What unites him with his father is guilt. What separates him from his father is his way of dealing with the guilt. Whereas his father, like most perpetrators, suppresses his guilt by denying his past, Alfred attempts to ignore the present. Yet by retreating into the past Alfred has to recognize that victim and perpetrator are both guilty and therefore identical. Alfred cannot completely reject his father because he knows that the father, like himself, is a victim of society's expectations. Again the experience of being both the victim and the perpetrator makes it impossible for him to escape his father's influence. The perpetrator attempts to deny his guilt by constantly changing, but the victim represses his feelings of culpability by attempting to evade responsibility and therefore remains infantile. As descendants of the *Kleinbürgertum* Alfred and his father are both victims and perpetrators, and as such they are "guilty by birth." If they attempt to rise above their social class they are guilty of self-denial; if they attempt to stay the same, they are guilty of self-indulgence. This is the reason that even before the action sets in, the father has already spoken the verdict over his son: "Deine Verweichlichung wird dich immer um den Erfolg bringen" (10). Just like Georg Bendemann in Kafka's *Das Urteil*, Alfred cannot avert his father's predicament. "Alfred war schwach gegen Prophezeiungen. Prophezeiungen lähmten ihn" (11).

Alfred undergoes an aging process and develops callosities, warts, ulcers in his mouth, starts losing hair and has problems with his teeth and feet: "Knickplattspreizfuß hatte es der Arzt genannt" (207). Whenever he confronts his own aging process Alfred assumes a spectator's perspective:

Je heißer es wurde, desto heftiger erlebte er seine Hinfälligkeit. Man könnte fast meinen, er habe sie lusthaft erlebt. Aus der täglichen Summierung seiner Leiden und seiner Ängste wurde eine alles andere übertreffende Empfindung, ein so leidenschaftliches Gefühl, daß man als Zuschauer seines Daseins hofft, er habe diesen Zustand auch genießen können. (237)

The discrepancy between outward objective appearance and subjective internal perception reflects a dualism between the real and the ideal and accounts for the novel's

irony. In his unsuccessful attempt to reconcile the objective with the subjective, Alfred vacillates between these two poles. Thus Alfred's distanced observation of his own physical degeneration is counteracted by the illusion of remaining eternally young. As time goes on, the gap between the real and ideal widens, and to counteract the advance of reality, he retreats further into the illusions of past.

At the beginning of *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*, Alfred's mother supports his regression because she herself is desperately holding on to the past, to the time before her husband left her. Alfred fails to acknowledge, however, that she also acts as the agent of the patriarchal world. She too expects Alfred to complete his law education quickly and to find himself a financially secure job, which then would enable mother and son to live happily ever after: "Jetzt also Endspurt. Jetzt liegt es nur noch an Alfred, ob das Glück endgültig einziehe bei ihnen" (50). By helping Alfred to maintain close ties to the past but simultaneously pushing his career, she contributes to Alfred's increasingly insoluble dilemma and assumes a similar position to that of Gregor's mother in the parallel story of *Die Verwandlung*. When the mother and sister remove Gregor's furniture from his room in order to make it easier for him to crawl around, they affirm his animal existence. The mother herself begins to wonder, "ob man dadurch nicht zeige, daß man 'jede Hoffnung auf Besserung' aufgabe, ob es nicht richtiger wäre, alles so zu erhalten, 'damit Gregor, wenn er wieder zu uns zurückkommt, alles unverändert findet und um so leichter die Zwischenzeit vergessen kann'."²⁵ Gregor's alienation has already progressed considerably and cannot be reversed because "jede gut gemeinte Aktion der Familie [wird] zu einer Steigerung der Entfremdung."²⁶

Alfred views his mother's support, intended to clear the way for his professional future, as a sign of encouragement to assert his inner self by reverting to his childhood past. In his lecture on Kafka's use of irony, Walser himself refers to Gregor's unwillingness to have his furniture removed as an attempt to preserve his identity.²⁷ Just as Gregor starts defending his furniture as the only proof of his human existence, Alfred is becoming more and more obsessed with his past, and he starts collecting memorabilia from his Dresden childhood. The memorabilia document his artistic and intellectual potential as a *Wunderkind*, which he still hopes to fulfill at a later point in life. The activity of collecting can be viewed as a regression into childhood, as Walter Benjamin described it:

Ich sage nicht zuviel: für den wahren Sammler ist die Erwerbung eines alten Buches dessen Wiedergeburt. Und eben darin liegt das Kindhafte, das im Sammler sich mit dem Greisenhaften durchdringt. . . . Dort, bei den Kindern, ist das Sammeln nur ein Verfahren der Erneuerung, ein anderes ist das Bemalen

der Gegenstände, wieder eines das Ausschneiden, noch eines das Abziehen und so die ganze Skala kindlicher Aneignungsarten vom Anfassen bis hinauf zum Benennen.²⁸

For Alfred, collecting promises renewal and therefore an escape from the unsatisfying present. Alfred's collection is rather indiscriminate. He accumulates everything from pictures, written documents, and old furniture to his mother's underwear: "[Alfred] kam es auf nichts als auf das Faktum an" (14). His obsession and concern with the past reveals both a desperate attempt to understand the outer world through recollection and a quest to preserve his identity by recovering and possessing all the things that are connected to his personal life. Thus Alfred's outwardly directed nature and his egocentricity are but two sides of the same coin. Vacillating between Dresden and Berlin, between the self and its tormentor, between mother and father, between the fulfillment of his personal and professional needs, Alfred becomes caught in a vicious circle. In the text this process of becoming bogged down is captured in a reference to Kafka's *Landarzt*. Just as the country doctor gets stuck in a wintry "desert"²⁹ after following a false alarm, Alfred begins to sink while wandering aimlessly through the deep snow on a winter's night in Dresden just after his mother died.

His confusion is exacerbated when he finds out that his closest friend and the only witness of his Dresden past who is left after his mother's death, the Vize-Oma, has burnt all his personal letters. When she reveals that she destroyed the evidence of his private self in order to protect his privacy, Alfred has to realize that his only ally acts as an agent of the father by blocking off a possible retreat into the past. This strikes him as a death sentence: "Er suchte nach Tritten anderer, um nicht bei jedem Schritt im Tiefschnee zu versinken. Er weinte. Ziemlich heftig sogar. Es schüttelte ihn richtig. Er konnte gar nicht mehr durchatmen" (359). As the metaphor suggests, in order to save his life, he has to follow in his father's footsteps.

The protagonist's aimless wandering in the snow is connected to the Bellerophon-motif: "Bellerophon sei nach seinem Sturz nur noch trübsinnig auf dem Aleischen Feld umhergeirrt" (214). A closer look at the contextual references to *Ein Landarzt* provides further indication that this motif figures as a symbol for Alfred's failure to find himself. Just like Alfred, Kafka's country doctor is caught in the dilemma of pursuing either his domestic or professional responsibilities. While following his professional calling, he fails to protect his housekeeper [Rosa] from being molested by a horse groom. After having seen the patient, he realizes that he has embarked on an unsuccessful mission because the patient is incurable. Unable to return home because he is stuck in the snow, he regrets having answered a false alarm: "Betrogen, Betrogen! Einmal dem Fehlläuten der Nacht-

glocke gefolgt—es ist niemals gutzumachen.”³⁰ Walter Sokel’s interpretation of *Ein Landarzt*, which regards the confrontation of doctor and patient as “Gegenüberstellung mit dem eigenen, kranken Kindheits-Ich,” is also applicable to Walser’s text:

The two houses pictorialize the two poles of the doctor’s existence. In his own house, the house of the self, the doctor abandoned the possibility of erotic fulfillment; in the other house, the house of the patient, he is to dedicate himself to his art, which is the confrontation with the congenital wound of mortality. The hero’s ambivalence is such that he cannot be content at either pole. At home he sacrifices the girl to his mission; but at his destination he regrets the price he has paid and wants to return. His split existence, his inability to choose, becomes pure image in the doctor’s final condition. He is shown riding aimlessly between the houses; the distance between them has become infinite, and he cannot stay at either place.³¹

Alfred shares with Kafka’s country doctor the sacrifice of a sexual relationship in exchange for a regressive journey that takes him back to his childhood. For both Kafka’s and Walser’s protagonists such a sacrifice has been motivated by homoerotic inclinations.³²

In both texts heterosexuality is represented by the image of fur. In the Kafka text the country doctor takes off his fur coat at the patient’s home. When he leaves the patient’s house in a hurry to make it safely home, he raps up his bundle of clothes and throws them on the horse cart. He flings his fur coat too far, so that on his trip back it remains hanging, dangling in the snow: “. . . der Pelz flog zu weit, nur mit einem Ärmel hielt er sich an einem Haken fest. Gut genug. Ich schwang mich aufs Pferd. Die Riemen lose schleifend, ein Pferd kaum mit dem anderen verbunden, der Wagen irrend hinterher, den Pelz als letzter im Schnee.”³³

Fur is also a sexual motif in Kafka’s *Verwandlung*. When Gregor Samsa, upon the removal of his furniture, starts to defend his personal belongings and “alles was ihm lieb war,” he clings to the picture of a woman in a fur that he once had cut out from a magazine and hung on the wall: “[Gregor] preßte sich an das Glas, das ihn festhielt und seinem heißen Bauch wohltat.”³⁴ As soon as the mother sees Gregor in this position she faints. After Gregor manages to free his body from the glass to which it was glued, the door is shut upon him, and he has to realize: “. . . er war nun von der Mutter abgeschlossen.”³⁵

When one first meets Alfred’s father he is wearing a coat, “der in der Familie Paletot hieß und ehrwürdig war durch einen breiten Pelzkragen” (11). The description not only informs the reader that Alfred’s father—just like son—pays attention to his outward appearance in a desire to rise above his social status, but it also promises to reveal some of the connotations with regard to the protagonist’s sexual orientation. Therefore, the fur motif has to be considered within the con-

texts of the above-mentioned intertextual references. Alfred’s father is described as a ladies’ man, who constantly puts pressure on his son to grow up and engage in sexual intercourse (25). The fur motif recurs later when Alfred has to write a report as a law student in West Berlin in which he has to solve his first court case, a significant and very detailed part in the narrative. In it a certain person named *Ritter* loaned his friend *Fuß* a fur coat. However, the fur is lost after *Fuß* leaves it in the cloakroom of the theater. *Fuß* is embarrassed that he cannot return the fur coat to *Ritter* and would like to keep the matter a secret. The combination of *Ritter* and *Fuß* is reminiscent of Gregor Samsa’s animal physique—*Ritter* being the shield to protect him. Pursuing this line of interpretation, *Ritter* and *Fuß* can be identified as the two main traits of Alfred’s character: dissimulation (through the protective shield) and flight. Alfred at the time is troubled by the same fear as Gregor Samsa, “von seiner Mutter abgeschnitten zu sein” (34). Evidence of sexual imagery is also provided by the narrator: “Es waren feuchtheiße Juni-Tage. . . . Und dann einem verlorenen Pelz die Rechtslage konstruieren!” (34) Alfred has a difficult time solving the case and can get to the bottom of the problem only after his fellow students provide him with the clue. “. . . daß das Wichtigste an diesem Fall die Ansprüche seien” (31).

In all three texts the fur is used as an erotic image that signifies the female sex. It refers to the protagonists’ relinquished potential to establish a heterosexual relationship. By equating Alfred’s inability to fulfill the father’s expectations [“Ansprüche”] to a lost property case in *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*, Walser points to Alfred’s guilt for his failure to grow up and begin a family. Thus the context in which the fur is used not only refers to Alfred’s inability to fulfill his father’s expectations in terms of engaging in a heterosexual relationship, but also to the financial and social gain in status that such a relationship promises. In view of his numerous affairs throughout his married life, the father has also failed to establish a lasting relationship. Thus his actual behavior disclaims the validity of his fervent assertion: “Alfred, Mädels sind keine Ware” (13), which he uses to admonish Alfred to grow up and establish a family. In *Die Verwandlung* and *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* the fear of losing the mother is brought to the reader’s attention as a factor that prevents the protagonists from establishing an adult relationship and simultaneously boosts the alternative process of regression. Alfred’s obsessive relationship to his mother can be interpreted as an attempt to avoid the father’s shortcomings. By wooing his own mother, Alfred is taking advantage of the opportunity to succeed where his father has failed. However, in loving the mother, Alfred cannot really escape the father because replacing the mother with other women is simply an attempt to do better than his father. Although Alfred is becoming

aware of the absurdity of his "Mutter-Kult," he is unaware that his mother could not provide an escape from the father. He is unaware that by being the link to the past she is also the link to the father. When at the end of his life he comes to the conclusion, "Gegen den Vater sein ist leicht. Gegen die Mutter kann man nicht sein. Das ist der Fluch" (511), he realizes that it is easy to antagonize the perpetrator but it is impossible to reject his victim. Yet he is still unable to notice that, by identifying with the father's victim, he also takes on his father's guilt. Nor does he understand that he thereby replaces the father with the mother. The fact that the mother-father dichotomy represents only two parts of the same personality becomes even more obvious if one examines Alfred's artistic inclinations.

Alfred's regression is accompanied by a set of motives that are directly related to the aforementioned Kafka texts. Alfred's obsession for collecting, although less prominent in *Die Verwandlung*, has its equivalent in Gregor's infantile activity of cutting out magazine covers and fretworking. Both Gregor's and Alfred's hobbies reflect the protagonists' thwarted need for artistic self-expression. Yet at the same time these very same activities indicate how much the process of alienation has penetrated the protagonists' individuality and therefore limited their artistic creativity. Alfred is not aware of the reasons that prevent him from being artistically creative. If one is to believe the narrator's words, his initial interest in the past is purely factual: "Was er dann mit dem Faktum anfangt ist dem gesunden Menschenverstand nicht begreiflich zu machen" (14). Paradoxically enough, it is the same petit bourgeois need for security that caused Alfred as a young man to postpone artistic plans of becoming a concert pianist (until after he had obtained a secure position as a lawyer) that prevents him now from completing his Pergamon project. He realizes only a short time before his death that his preparatory work has taken up so much time and energy that his Pergamon project will possibly never materialize and hopes "die soviel Kraft beanspruchende Vorbereitung sei schon das, was sie vorbereiten sollte: die Verteidigung der Kindheit gegen das Leben" (511). Both Gregor Samsa's and Alfred's creativity are limited to the gathering and rearranging of prefabricated material. Imitation is the only artistic technique they have at their disposal because their bourgeois family philosophy is based on conformity, a goal reached by copying others. By the time Alfred has become a university student, his skill in imitating others has become second nature. Alfred's ingrained desire to conform is obvious in his eagerness to please both his parents and emulate his teachers, but it is also revealed through a compulsive habit of taking notes during lectures and writing indiscriminately everything down that his professors say. Although Alfred realizes a short time before his death that his attempt to defend his child-

hood was futile and self-deceptive, he also knows that it is too late to change this habit: "Sein briefeschreibende, paketversendende, Vergangenheit zusammenkratzen Emsigkeit kam ihm lächerlich vor. Er betrog sich über seine Einsamkeit hinweg" (512).

Yet both Alfred's Graf-Brühl project and his collection of memorabilia betray an interest in history that is intensely personal and therefore potentially artistic. Whereas his obsession for collecting has to be attributed to the father's side, his need for subjective self-expression has been associated with his mother. Alfred's problem, however, is that he cannot combine the factual with the subjective. His Pergamon project fails because he gets bogged down in the preparatory task of collecting memorabilia, but his drawings fall short of being artistic because they are merely infantile self-representations. Alfred's habit of portraying himself in the shape of an animal can be compared to Gregor's metamorphosis into a vermin. For both Gregor and Alfred the animal body serves as a means of self-representation and self-protection. In contrast to Gregor, who is trapped in the body of a despicable looking insect, Alfred likes to portray himself in the shape of animals that are likely to evoke sympathy or even pity. Whereas Gregor's ugliness is a reflection of his guilt, Alfred stresses his innocence when he draws himself in the shape of a rabbit or a little mouse. Yet for both Gregor and Alfred, becoming an animal offers "the possibility of an escape, a line of escape."³⁶ It illustrates the protagonists' wish to regress to a form of existence that cannot be held responsible for their character and is therefore safe from the "inhumaness of the 'diabolical powers' " of self-doubt and guilt.³⁷

Yet drawing must also be viewed as an attempt to find a form of self-expression that has not been occupied by the father. As Deleuze and Guattari point out, Kafka thought in terms of visual imagery rather than in linguistic terms, "the languages of masters" because "the making of his own language" again promises "a line of escape."³⁸ The figure Alfred illustrates such an interpretation of Kafka. Alfred's reluctance to express himself within the limits of conventional narrative discourse implies an attempt to avoid yielding to the very paternal forces that caused his alienation. He at first rejects psychoanalysis, not only because he feels threatened in his effort to deny his homosexual preference, but also because he has doubts about a rational explanation of the irrational:

Ihm kam diese Lehre [Psychoanalyse] vor wie eine Baukasten aus Wörtern. Man kann damit spielen. Aber innen in einem geht es weniger hell und viereckig zu. Er konnte auf jeden Fall nichts davon auf sich anwenden. Diese Hauptwörter gab es doch gar nicht. Nicht in seinem innern, wo, in andauernder Bewegung, alles in alles übergang. Diese Vokabularisten glaubten an das Vorhandensein des Bezeichneten wie früher Menschen an das durchs Götterbild Gefaßte. (336)

Alfred turns the tables when he argues that the rational itself has become a religion in its attempt to dominate the irrational. Although one should think that Alfred would be interested in psychoanalysis because of its concern with the individual's past, he cannot accept it because it would be an intrusion of the rational into the refuge of his childhood past. Consequently, psychoanalysis threatens to shatter his artistic illusions and means the possible erosion of his creative potential. His attempts to preserve the past in words remain sketchy for the same reasons. He cannot use language to express himself artistically because he faces the same problems that feminist and gay writers express today: as a homosexual he does not have his own language. Instead, he avoids the rational narrative discourse of the adult word and focuses on visual arts and music.

After his mother's death Alfred creates a monument that is supposed to testify to their mutual bond of love. Yet the monument involuntarily turns out to be a rather narcissistic self-portrait. Alfred chooses the image of a lamb as the center of the monument because in its symbolic nature and position, it serves an intention to eternalize his identity:

Das Lamm ist zwar nicht beim ersten Aufstehversuch dargestellt, aber alle vier Beine sind fast in munterer Bewegung; besonders das rechts vordere, das Alfred sofort an seinen angehobenen rechten Fuß vor der Pension Edelweiß erinnerte: die sixtinische Geste; bei diesem Lamm fällt dieses Abheben wollen besonders auf, weil die Bewegung umgeben ist von einem weiten Dornenkranz. (382)

His sense of drama and self-stylization is well documented throughout the novel: "Er war immer auf der Suche nach Wörtern und Bildern, in denen er die Mutter und sich in komisch-pathetischem Überschwang feiern konnte" (21). On Alfred's monument, the wish to escape his life of suffering is emphasized by the elevated position of his right front leg, which in reminiscence of Alfred's favorite picture, the "Sixtinische Madonna," serves to illustrate the otherworldliness of his love relationship to his mother. The irony that renders Alfred more than a tragi-comic figure is captured in an epitaph that he found on his search for the adequate monument: "Das Lamm, welches geopfert wurde, weil es selbst wollte" (382). In stylizing himself both as the sacrificial lamb and prodigal son, he exaggerates his role as the victim and involuntarily turns the expression of suffering into one of self-pity. The irony of Alfred's life is not only that he agrees to his own death sentence, but that he relishes in his execution with grand gesture. Yet the monument also captures Alfred's internal conflict. Alfred is both the innocent victim and the Christ figure who had to atone for the sins of the world by giving his life. Alfred has taken on his father's guilt by sympathizing with his victims, and in turn, by identifying with the father's victims, has become guilty of self-denial. This

vicious circle is symbolized by the all-surrounding crown of thorns, which prevents Alfred from escaping his suffering as the innocent sacrificial lamb. In one of the rare instances where the narrator is permitted to distance himself, one cannot fail to notice the ironic description of "the almost lively legs," which satirizes Alfred's half-hearted attempt to get his artistic projects off the ground.

The image is reminiscent of the leg motif in *Die Verwandlung*. There, the movement of the legs illustrates Gregor's ambivalent reaction to the metamorphosis. As in *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit*, the legs are indicative of the protagonist's vitality. When Gregor is beginning to adapt to his new animal existence, his personal satisfaction with his new life is expressed by the movement of his legs: ". . . die Beinchen hatten festen Boden unter sich, sie gehorchten vollkommen, wie er zu seiner Freude merkte; strebten sogar danach ihn fortzutragen, wohin er wollte; und schon glaubte er, die endgültige Besserung seines Leidens stehe unmittelbar bevor."³⁹ At this point, when Gregor is endorsing his metamorphosis by learning to move like an insect, he feels confident enough to get close to his mother. But the mother misunderstands his human plea for love and turns to the father to help her chase Gregor away and lock him up. When Gregor retreats quickly into his room, the position of his legs reflects his anxiety and confusion: ". . . bald steckte er fest und hätte sich allein nicht mehr rühren können, die Beinchen auf der einen Seite hingen zitternd oben in der Luft, die auf den anderen waren schmerzhaft zu Boden gedrückt. . . ."⁴⁰ The imagery that illustrates Gregor's, the country doctor's, and Alfred's insoluble dilemma demonstrates their immobility. In *Die Verwandlung* Gregor is glued to the glass of his favorite picture, the country doctor cannot move because he has sunk in the deep snow, and in *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* Alfred's favorite picture portrays him standing on only one leg, holding the other one in the air, as if he wanted to run away. Both in the Kafka stories and Walser's novel, the protagonists are confused because the very same powers that caused regression are suddenly punishing the protagonists for doing so. Just like Gregor, Alfred also turns to his mother, expecting that she would approve of his infantile attempt to preserve his artistic potential. But he is deeply disappointed and confused when he realizes that, instead of protecting him from the father, she conspires with the father.

Only after his mother's death does Alfred remember that both parents contributed to the formation of his identity as a *Wunderkind* and then prevented him from living by pressuring him to grow up and conform to the adult world: "Bei der Mutter hatte das tägliche Rasieren die Rolle gespielt, die beim Vater die Pünktlichkeit

spielte. Und wie abhängig sind von einander Rasur und Pünktlichkeit. Bewundernswert die Einmütigkeit so getrennter Eltern" (346). Although Alfred begins to understand the deceptive role that his mother played, he refuses to admit to himself that she only used him in her post-marital fight against the father. Instead he nourishes an idealized picture of the past. In contrast to Gregor, who has to confront the ugliness of his present appearance, Alfred tends to ignore his aging process by reveling in an idealized self-image of the past. Whereas in Kafka's *Verwandlung* one of Gregor's legs "schleppte reglos nach" after it was damaged during the father's punishing attack, the idealized version of Alfred's regression presents one leg in an elevated position.⁴¹

The position of the lamb's leg resembles "zwei anderen Schwebeerscheinungen, die Sixtinische (Madonna), und die Schaukelnde," which was a picture of his mother on a swing. "Schweben" in this context means the ideal possibility of Alfred's life, namely to hover above reality and its compromising alternatives. It is the position that Tonio Kröger was able to take on his trip to the far north, contemplating his bourgeois past from the elevated position as an artist. "Schweben" means "Ironie als eine feine Methode des Über-allem-Stehens: as it occurs "bei Tonio Kröger, bei Thomas Mann."⁴²

The difference between Tonio's and Alfred's perspective becomes obvious in an open reference to *Tonio Kröger*. There Alfred expresses his bewilderment about Thomas Mann's ability, "der Gewöhnlichkeit Wonnen abzugewinnen" (19). Unlike his classmate, Detlev Krumpholz, "der in ihrer Freundschaft die Literatur vertrat wie Alfred die Musik [und] sich bei jeder Gelegenheit über die *alte Akademikerfamilie*, der er entstammte, lustig machte," Alfred cannot make fun of his bourgeois past because he does not have enough of it ["er hatte zu wenig davon"] (19). In contrast to Thomas Mann's protagonist, who is able to maintain his individuality by becoming an artist and transcending the confining limits of the bourgeois life, Walser's protagonist is disoriented and unable to reconcile the opposing forces within himself and remains trapped in a bourgeois existence. Unlike Mann's upper middle-class protagonists, the *Kleinbürger* Alfred neither dares to abandon the pursuit of a bourgeois career, nor can he distance himself from his daily setbacks or defeats. By the time Krumpholz teaches Alfred, "daß das Gewöhnliche einen suchens- oder gar produzierenswerten Reiz habe (19)," it is, in the narrator's own words, too late. At this point Alfred has already absorbed the petit bourgeois desire to be special and become "ein Feind aller Gewöhnlichkeit" (18). He therefore never obtains the reflective vantage point that would permit him to analyze his own situation and become artistically productive: "Alfred Dorn wäre nie auf den Gedanken gekommen, daß Kunst da einspringen könne" (14).

In his essay on *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie*, Walser explains the difference between his own petit bourgeois protagonists such as Alfred and the representatives of the *Großbürgertum* in Thomas Mann's literature, who manage to transcend the limitations of their bourgeois existence by reflecting on it and transforming it into art. As mentioned above, Walser's and Kafka's protagonists define themselves according to society's oppressive standards. They become grotesque, perhaps even humorous, by endorsing their oppressor's point of view. In contrast to Mann's protagonists, however, they are not ironic themselves.⁴³ Irony presupposes an independence of thought that Walser's and Kafka's heroes do not possess precisely because they cannot distance themselves from the alienating standards of society. The option of becoming an independent artist, which is possible for the *Großbürger* Tonio Kröger, remains illusory for the *Kleinbürger* Alfred Dorn. If the *Großbürger* à la Mann was still capable of expressing his inner struggle with grand gesture as a conflict between art and life, for the *Kleinbürger* Alfred Dorn such a quest to achieve individual autonomy appears grotesque, as the narrator suggests: "Alfred sah seiner Mutter gleich, hatte den Wuchs seines Vaters und, nach seinem eigenen Urteil, das Profil einer Daumierkarikatur" (39).⁴⁴

By telling the story from the protagonist's perspective, Walser's narrator imitates Kafka's narrator. Walser argues in his collection of essays *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie* in favor of Kafka's irony, which cannot question, ridicule, or criticize reality, but has to agree or even praise the unbearable status quo.⁴⁵ Unlike Mann's protagonists, Walser's protagonist Alfred cannot distance himself from society's expectations, for he has internalized them. Even when Alfred himself as a middle-aged man begins to realize that Thomas Mann's *Künstlernovelle* is nothing but a "Großbürgermär," this knowledge does not help him because as a *Kleinbürger* he cannot develop an autonomous personality that would allow him to distance himself from those who judge him (221). Alfred instead takes the patriarchal order for granted and, as a victim of this order, begins to endorse it. For Walser, the victim's grotesque attempt to love the oppressor is ironic because it points to the insufficiencies of the actual conditions and negates the status quo.

In *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie* Walser distinguishes basically two forms of irony: the *kleinbürgerliche* irony of the Fichte-Hegel-Kierkegaard-Robert Walser-Kafka tradition and the *großbürgerliche* irony of the Friedrich Schlegel-Adam Müller-Thomas Mann tradition. How extensively the novel draws on Walser's concept of irony that he developed in the 1970s becomes obvious when one compares the examples that Walser uses to explain irony in the context of bourgeois emancipation at the turn of the nineteenth century. Walser uses Adam Müller's biography (1779-1829) just as he uses Alfred

Dorn's biography in *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* in order to illuminate the difference between Thomas Mann's concept of irony and Kafka's irony. Dorn's and Müller's biographies reveal striking similarities.⁴⁶ Just as Kafka's and Walser's protagonists get caught in their oscillation between two mutually exclusive concepts of life, Müller's plan to reconcile these two opposing lifestyles by transcending them also failed: "Er wurzelte ein . . . und starb nach vielen weiteren Balance-Illusionen."⁴⁷ By using actual biographies, Walser manages to locate his irony concept within a historical context. He explains the emergence of bourgeois irony in the late eighteenth century as "Emanzipationleistung des kleinbürgerlichen Ichs, das draußen nur zu wenig Anlaß und Möglichkeit zur Selbstbewußtseins-Gründung hatte."⁴⁸ Thus in Walser's view, the romantic idealization of life is the desperate attempt of a generation with no future to overcome socially stifling and discriminating conditions, both in the Metternich era and in the 1950s.⁴⁹ Walser's achievement is to present his longstanding personal concern, the bourgeois struggle for self-determination, in the context of the last two hundred years of German intellectual and cultural history while reacting to recent political and social developments in German society. By presenting Dorn's biography within a concrete socio-historical context and constructing the analogy to the Metternich era, Walser points to the deceptiveness of the bourgeois notion of personal freedom and self-fulfillment. Dorn's and Müller's biographies are determined by the social and historical conditions of their day and age. The fact that Alfred's obsession for collecting is motivated by the loss of his home during the allied forces' bombing of Dresden situates Alfred's biography in the postwar era. Germany's geographical and political division both reflects and exacerbates Alfred's ensuing internal split. The wounds on Alfred's corpse represent at the same time Germany's wound ("die Wunde Deutschlands"), which for Walser was unacceptable long before German unification.⁵⁰

Walser historicizes Kafka by appropriating Kafka's own biography into his protagonist's biography. Consequently, Alfred's "wunde . . . Stellen in der Leiste," through their position and contextual reference, also resemble the country doctor's wound:⁵¹ "In seiner rechten Seite, in der Hüftengegend hat sich eine handtellergroße Wunde aufgetan. . . . Würmer . . . winden sich, im Innern der Wunde festgehalten, mit weißen Köpfchen, mit vielen Beinchen ans Licht."⁵² The leg movements of the little worms inside the lethal wound are reminiscent of the leg movements of the lamb. Both the worms' and the lamb's fledgling attempts to escape their ill-fated destiny point to the protagonists' grotesquely helpless efforts to preserve their self-determination. The repeated failure in a hypothetical quest for self-fulfillment, and a paralysis between two non-existent alternatives unite both Kafka's and Walser's heroes and distin-

guish them from the ironic superiority of Mann's figures. Walser's fictionalized version of Alfred Dorn's biography explains the author's personal interest in Kafka. Using Alfred Dorn as his mouthpiece, Walser is able to present the alienation of the *Kleinbürger* within the historical context of postwar Germany.

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NOTES

1. Michael Braun, "Deutsch-deutsche Widersprüche," *Aachener Nachrichten* (3 August 1991): "Der 'neue Walser' kehrt zu den 'alten Anfängen' zurück." Joseph von Westphalen, "Ein deutsches Mutter-söhnchen," *Der Spiegel* (12 August 1991): 171: "Wieder einmal haben wir eine der vielen überempfindlichen Walser-Gestalten vor uns. . . ."
2. Martin Lüdke, "Eine vom Leben zerriebene Geschichte," *Frankfurter Rundschau* (10 August 1991): ". . . die Geschichtsschreibung des Alltags versickert mehr und mehr in der Psychopathologie des Alltagslebens." Michael Braun, "Die Sucht nach Vergangenheit," *Nürnberger Nachrichten* (10 August 1991): "Zeitgeschichtliche Ereignisse bleiben . . . eher im Hintergrund."
3. Joseph von Westphalen warns the reader "*Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* nicht ausschließlich als einen deutschen Roman [zu] lesen." von Westphalen, *Der Spiegel*, 174.
4. Hans Egon Holthusen, "Ein Kafka Schüler kämpft sich frei," *Süddeutsche Zeitung* (31 December 1955); Paul Noack, "Ein Kafka-Epigone," *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* (23 March 1956); Walter Geis, "Vögel ohne Flügel," *Stadtanzeiger für Baden-Württemberg* (14 March 1956).
5. Karlheinz Fingerhut, "Drei erwachsene Söhne Kafkas. Zur produktiven Kafka-Rezeption bei Martin Walser, Peter Weiss und Peter Handke," *Wirkendes Wort* 3 (1980): 384-403; Heike Doane, "Martin Walsers Ironiebegriff: Definition und Spiegelung in drei späteren Prosawerken," *Monatshefte* 2 (1985): 195-212; Dieter Liewerscheidt, "Die Anstrengung, ja zu sagen: Martin Walsers Ironie-Konzept und die Romane von 'Jenseits der Liebe' bis 'Brief an Lord Liszt,'" *Literatur für Leser* (1986): 74-88; Frank Pilipp, "Zum letzten Mal Kafka? Martin Walsers Roman *Das Schwanenhaus* im ironischen Lichte der *Verwandlung*," *Colloquia Germanica* 22 (1989): 282-95.
6. Martin Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1981).
7. Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1986) 16.
8. Deleuze and Guattari 10.
9. Deleuze and Guattari 10.
10. Deleuze and Guattari 10.
11. Deleuze and Guattari 12.
12. An example would be "acts of becoming-animal," as in *Die Verwandlung*, which can be viewed as an attempt to flee human existence or deterritorialization when it is connected to the moving-leg-motif. As soon as this animal image becomes staged and imbued with meaning, it turns into an act of reterritorialization or a calculated attempt of dissimulation, which is aimed at the protection of these human qualities in the animal's body.
13. Holthusen, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*.
14. Geis, *Stadtanzeiger für Baden-Württemberg*.
15. Martin Walser, "Kindheit nach dem Tode," *Die Zeit* (9 August 1991): "Die Alfred-Dorn-Geschichte wurde mir von zwei Frauen gebracht, die ein paar hundert Kilometer gefahren waren, um mir eine Handvoll Briefe und Karten zu geben. Der Empfänger sei tot. Es seien noch ein paar Kartons voll mit Briefen, Zeitungartikeln, Photos da. Man müsse das verbrennen, falls sich nicht ein Schriftsteller dafür interessiere."
16. See Peter U. Beicken, *Franz Kafka. Eine kritische Einführung in die Forschung* (Frankfurt/Main: Athenäum, 1974) 202-12.

17. Walser, *Die Zeit*.
18. Walser, *Die Verteidigung der Kindheit* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1991) 9. All subsequent references to this novel will appear in parentheses in the text.
19. In *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie* Walser explicitly refers to Mann's *Bürger-Künstler*-dichotomy and draws up a list of opposites that fit these two categories, 83.
20. The father is portrayed as the voice of reason who has always looked ahead, never dwelling on the past, and therefore, unlike Alfred, always knowing which way the wind is blowing. During the Third Reich he dismissed a Jewish employee and then became a member of the National Socialists "um sich besser wehren zu können" (152). After the war he immediately joined the SPD "und hatte 1946, als die SPD in der SED aufgeben mußte, nicht zu denen gehört, die durch ihren Austritt protestiert hatten" (10). He is a sycophant who uses political convictions only for his own personal gain and gladly takes advantage of the privilege of shopping in the West.
21. Deleuze and Guattari 10.
22. Deleuze and Guattari 12.
23. Deleuze and Guattari 10. "The question of the father isn't how to become free with relation to him (an Oedipal question) but how to find a path there where he didn't find any."
24. Deleuze and Guattari 10.
25. Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* 164.
26. Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* 164.
27. Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* 164-65: "Der Verlust seiner Möbel bedeutet für ihn jetzt auch ein schnelles, gänzlich »Vergessen seiner menschlichen Vergangenheit . . . « Er wehrt sich also ganz entschieden. Er ist ein Mensch. Platz zum Kriechen ist nicht das, was er braucht. . . . wenn die Möbel ihn hinderten, das sinnlose Herumkriechen zu betreiben, so war das kein Schaden, sondern ein großer Vorteil.« Diese Möbel waren »alles was ihm lieb war«. An diesem Schreibtisch hatte er als Schüler seine Aufgaben gemacht. Das sind konstitutive Teile seiner Identität, die ihm da in bester Absicht weggenommen werden."
28. Walter Benjamin, "Ich packe meine Bibliothek aus," *Schriften* 2 (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1955) 110.
29. Beicken refers to Karl-Heinz Fingerhut's interpretation of *Ein Landarzt* when he explains the country doctor's "Scheitern in der Eiswüste" as the result of pursuing the wrong career: "Weil er einem 'Fehlhläuten', also einem falschen Ruf gefolgt ist, der seine bürgerliche Lebensbasis zerstört hat." Beicken, *Kafka* 299.
30. Franz Kafka, *Erzählungen* (Frankfurt/Main: Fischer, 1986) 117.
31. Walter Sokel, *Franz Kafka* (New York: Columbia UP, 1971) 7-8.
32. B. Busacca: "A Country Doctor," *Franz Kafka Today*, eds. Angel Flores and Homer Swander (Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1962) 52: "The so-called doctor is roused by homosexual desire."
33. Kafka, *Erzählungen* 116-17.
34. Kafka 86.
35. Kafka 87.
36. Deleuze and Guattari 12.
37. Deleuze and Guattari 12.
38. Deleuze and Guattari 26.
39. Kafka 71.
40. Kafka 73.
41. Kafka 73.
42. Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* 82.
43. Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie* 178: "Diese Helden sagen Ja zu dem Nein, das die Verhältnisse zu ihnen sagen. Dieser Versuch der durchgeführten Selbstverneinung produziert den ironischen Stil, während die andere Literatur es zu ironischen Helden bringt, zu Ironikern, die diese Ironie benutzen zur Legitimierung ihres bürgerlichen Lebensprivilegs. Als Literatur kann das realistische Literatur sein, humoristische. Aber die Sprache, die Prosa, der Stil ist nicht ironisch."
44. The difference between Walser and Mann is also reflected in the narrative technique. In contrast to Mann's novels, Walser's narrator does not assume the role of the ironic commentator and is only occasionally permitted to distance himself from the protagonist: "Wenn man zu schnell Zeuge wird, wie diese Mutter und dieser Sohn mit einander umgingen, stellen sich gleich die diensttuenden Vokabulare ein. Alfred und seine Mutter kriegen ihr Wörtchen um den Hals gehängt, und alles ist klar. Es muß versucht werden, die sich wissenschaftlich aufführenden Vokabulare so lang wie möglich draußen zu halten. Lieber sei nicht alles klar. Oder auch gar nichts. Könnte man nicht auch etwas verstehen, was nicht klar ist?" (38) The narrator gives up his superior position and confronts the reader with Alfred's inner loss of direction.
45. Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie* 195: "Die andere, die Kierkegaardsche, die Robert Walsersche, die Kafkasche Ironie kann nicht herrschen; das würde ihr sozusagen nicht liegen. Sie läßt eben, wie Hegel das formuliert hat, sie läßt gelten, was gilt, als gelte es. Aber eben dadurch, daß sie so verzweifelt versucht, dieses Bestehende gutzuheißen, weist sie auf den Mangel im Bestehenden hin."
46. Martin Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* 69-70: "Der Sohn eines preußischen Hofbeamten [Müller] sucht zwischen Adel und Bürgertum, zwischen Protestantismus und Katholizismus (er konvertierte früh und hielt das zuerst geheim), zwischen Berlin und Wien, zwischen Hardenberg und Metternich Positionen, die es nicht gab. . . . Im Jahr 1809 wollte er die preußische Regierung dazu überreden, ihn gleichzeitig zwei Zeitungen gründen und herausgeben zu lassen; eine sollte offizielles Regierungsblatt sein, die andere ein populäres Oppositionsblatt. Das hielt er per Drüber-schweben für möglich."
47. Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* 70.
48. Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* 62.
49. Müller's description elicits even more historical parallels to Dorn's biography. The Austro-Prussian dualism contributed to Müller's personal conflict just as the superpower dualism during the Post World War II era widened Alfred's internal division: "Auf der einen Seite »Ausschweifungen der Macht«, auf der anderen »charakterlose, undeutliche Gefühle für Menschenwert, Menschenwohl, Menschenrechte und unzählige andre . . . Laster.«" Walser, *Selbstbewußtsein und Ironie. Frankfurter Vorlesungen* 69.
50. Martin Walser, *Wer ist ein Schriftsteller? Aufsätze und Reden* (Frankfurt/Main: Suhrkamp, 1979) 101. In a public speech held on August 30th, 1977 in Bergen-Enkheim, Walser used this metaphor to point out the unacceptability of Germany's division: "Wir dürften, sage ich vor Kühnheit zitternd, die BRD so wenig anerkennen wie die DDR. Wir müssen die Wunde Deutschland offen halten."
51. My assumption presupposes the identity of doctor and patient, as it has been pointed out by Walter Sokel in footnote 31. Sokel 7.
52. Kafka 115.

REVIEWS

Theodore Ziolkowski,
**German Romanticism and
 Its Institutions.**
 Princeton: Princeton UP, 1990. Pp.440.

The attempt to define an appropriate approach to Romanticism in any context excites strong allegiances and antipathies among scholars. There are ideological tensions among literary historians and literary theorists—those who access extralinguistic means (history, politics, biography, etc.) to explain literature, and those who focus on literary language in pursuit of textual meaning. In the “Preface” to his book, Ziolkowski makes clear his own enabling institutional affiliation and his preference for an historical approach (ix). The author focuses on five social institutions—the mine, the law, the madhouse, the university, and the museum—to account for the production of literature and literary meaning in the German Romantic period. Each, he argues, is constitutive of German Romanticism and distinguishes it from its French and English counterparts.

Ziolkowski’s is a new approach to the literature and institutions of the period, and it is presented in highly readable form. Satisfied with existing literary-historical narratives (the author cites studies by Rudolf Haym, Gerhard Schulz, and Gert Ueding [ix] and discusses each briefly [5, 220]), he sets out “to demonstrate the interaction between the Romantic writers and a constellation of related social institutions . . .” (xi). His goal is explicit: “This book is based on the premise that all the cultural products of a given period are colored by the assumptions of certain shared institutions that transcend such arbitrary classifications as Classicism and Romanticism” (6). The author studies the impact of institutions on the images, thought, and language of the Romantic

generation, many members of which, as Ziolkowski points out, had practical as well as poetic experiences and combined professional activity with writing. The pursuit toward a fuller understanding of these crossovers motivates the approach of the study before us.

In Chapter One, “The Institutional Approach,” Ziolkowski distinguishes his method from both the Anglo-American tradition and the European, primarily German, “institutional” approach to literature. It is his aim “to deal neither with literature (or the literary establishment) as an institution nor, at the most general level, with the function of art as a commodity in bourgeois society but, rather, with the interaction between the literary work and society . . .” (10–11). He reminds the reader of the role of individuals in founding, reforming, and transforming institutions, but he also invokes the more neutral definition of the institution as occupying a space between the individual and the society as a whole. “Thus,” Ziolkowski writes, “to anticipate the present enterprise, we can say that society’s need for justice organizes itself in the institution of law, the need for education in the institution of the university, the need for health in the institution of the mental hospital, the need for culture in the institution of the museum, and the need for raw material in the institution of the mine” (12). In each chapter, he presents extensive research into institutional history, then locates specific authors—for biographical reasons—and texts—for their thematic references to institutions—in their specific institutional context. The organizational principle operates on the assumption that the development of institutions can exert considerable influence over literary meaning.

Chapter Two, “The Mine: Image of the Soul,” is a convincing account of this industry’s impact on the literary productions of writers such as Tieck, Novalis,

and Brentano. Ziolkowski persuades the reader of the mine’s centrality to an understanding of Romantic literature and its relation to history, religion, and sexuality. Yet, whereas the material is compelling and the individual readings judicious, this chapter treats the literary texts in too cursory a way for those interested specifically in the language of Romanticism. The representational status of the text is occasionally obscured or literalized by the reliance on reference to institutions external to literature. One example occurs in a subsection of this chapter, where Ziolkowski cites the end of Kleist’s *Penthesilea* as a particularly powerful example of mine imagery. Penthesilea “wills herself to death in an extended metaphor that is stunning in its rigor” (49). The final lines themselves seem to require no further analysis, as they exemplify a point already made. Whereas the author acknowledges its figural status, the mining image at the end of *Penthesilea* is part of the interplay between literal and figural language throughout the work, the reading of which exceeds this approach.

The strengths of the institutional approach hinge upon the depth, breadth, and facility of Ziolkowski’s research. What emerges as a constant is the Romantic drive toward totalization, of an imperative to correlate theory with reality, the concept with the concrete. This compulsion is clear in Chapter Three, “The Law: Text of Society,” in which texts as diverse as Goethe’s *Faust*, Kleist’s *Michael Kohlhaas*, and Hoffmann’s “Das Fräulein von Scuderi” can be read in the same context, as each revolves around legal issues; the authors, as well, share formal legal training or significant interest in legal controversies. Ziolkowski synthesizes information from a wide variety of sources into an illuminating narrative. After rehearsing the historical details of the legal study in Germany and the tensions involved in defining German law at