

THE CREATIVITY OF DISPLACEMENT: ERNESTO VOLKENING  
AS ESSAYIST AND CULTURAL TRANSLATOR

IN COLOMBIA, 1934-1983

By

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For my Parents,

For Pablo

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## INTRODUCTION

### THE CREATIVITY OF DISPLACEMENT

There are not only the borders between states and nations, set by international treaties or by force. Also the pen that scribbles each day, as Svevo says, delineates, moves, dissolves, and reconstructs borders; it is like the spear of Achilles that wounds and heals. Literature is in itself a border and an expedition in search of new borders; it shifts them and defines them. Every literary expression, every form is a threshold, a zone to contain innumerable diverse elements, tensions and movements, a shifting of semantic boundaries and of syntactic structures, a continuous dismantling and reassembling of the world, of its settings and its images, like in a film studio where the scenes and the perspectives on reality are incessantly rearranged. Every writer, whether he knows it and wants it or not, is a man of the border, he moves along borders, he dissects, negates, and proposes values and meanings, he articulates an understanding of the world with restless motion, with a continuing sliding of borders.<sup>1</sup>

Fiction and facts emerge from the moment of enunciation. A writer's words delineate meaning and value: by drawing the line, by distinguishing between the one and the other, the identity of people, events, and objects is established. As Claudio Magris argues in his 1993 essay, "Dall'altra parte. Considerazioni di frontiera" (On the other

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<sup>1</sup> "No esistono solo i confini tra gli stati e le nazioni, stabiliti dai trattati internazionali ovvero dalla forza. Anche la penna che scribacchia giornalmente, come dice Svevo, traccia, sposta, dissolve e ricostruisce confini; è come la lancia de Achille, che ferisce e guarisce. La letteratura è per se stessa una frontera ed una spedizione alla ricerca di nuove frontiere, un loro spostamento e una loro definizione. Ogni espressione letteraria, ogni forma è una soglia, una zona sul limitare di innumerevoli elementi, tensioni e movimenti diversi, uno spostamento dei confini semantici e delle strutture sintattiche, un continuo smontaggio e rimontaggio del mondo, delle sue cornici e delle sue immagini, come in un teatro di posa in cui incesantemente si riassettino le scene e le prospettive della realtà. Ogni scrittore, lo sappia e lo voglia o no, è un uomo de frontera, si muove lungo de essa; disfa, nega e propone valori e significati, articola e disarticola il senso del mondo con un movimento senza sosta che è un continuo slittamento di frontiere." Claudio Magris, "Dall'altra parte. Considerazioni di frontiera," in his *Utopia e disincanto: saggi (1974-1998)* (Milan: Garzanti, 1999), 51-65, here: 62. Italo Svevo (Aron Ettore Schmitz), to whom Claudio Magris refers in this passage, is an Italian writer from Trieste best known for his 1923 novel *La Coscienza di Zeno* (*Confessions of Zeno*, or *Zeno's Conscience*) which is influenced by Sigmund Freud's theories about psychoanalysis.

All translations are mine except when indicated otherwise.

side. Reflections about borders), a writer creates worlds in which possible and actual realities are being discussed, subverted, reinstated, or torn down.

Literature takes the pulse of humanity. It notes transition, interlocking, and permeability of ethical, social, political, and cultural borders and is involved in their continuous renegotiation. Literature changes the way we perceive ourselves and the world around us. Literature, Magris contends, “teaches how to go beyond limits. At the same time, it is about drawing boundaries without which the tension to overcome them, to reach something higher and more human, cannot exist.”<sup>2</sup> Literature facilitates the overcoming of limits by allowing us to test life practices through fiction before translating them into action. As Ottmar Ette argues in his essay “Literature as Knowledge for Living, Literary Studies as Science for Living,” it expands our individual knowledge about living together in a society.<sup>3</sup> “Fictionality,” according to Ette, “creates a space of experimentation in which readers, in serious playfulness, can test out different life situations.”<sup>4</sup> The learning experience is real, yet this journey proceeds in stages; new demarcation lines are needed to spur future development of thought and understanding. Literature is both experimental playground and means of learning. The writer, Magris’s *Grenzgänger* (he who walks along and across borders), becomes a surveyor of ethical, social, and cultural norms and conditions. His pen passes judgment and initiates changes, which find entrance into our realities through a self-referential and self-reflexive reading process. Literary criticism, the meta-level of literature and a special form of writing, is

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<sup>2</sup> “[‘La letteratura’] insegna a varvare i limiti, ma consiste nel tracciare dei limiti, senza i quali no può esistere nemmeno la tensione a superarli per raggiungere qualcosa di più alto e di più umano.” Magris, 63.

<sup>3</sup> Ottmar Ette, “Literature as Knowledge for Living, Literary Studies as Science for Living,” edited, translated and with an introduction by Vera M. Kutzinski, *PMLA* 125:4 (2010): 977-993.

<sup>4</sup> Ette, 987.



thus not only an intellectual pastime but also a most serious engagement with evaluating the possibilities of human existence and accumulating and dispersing “knowledge for the purpose or benefit of living.”<sup>5</sup>

Ernesto Volkening, a German and a lawyer by training, lived as a writer, literary critic, and cultural translator for more than four decades in his adoptive home in exile, Bogotá, Colombia. His essays are characterized by continuously crossing, shifting, creating, and breaking down borders and boundaries. He was a writer and *Grenzgänger* between cultures, languages, and literatures. His experience of exile, of an existence in the interstitial space between different cultures, gave rise to his life-long role as a cultural mediator and translator. Volkening’s passion for literature was founded on the conviction that “culture is like a vision of the world; like a personal and substantive choice regarding the facts.”<sup>6</sup> For Volkening, literature became “a form of existence that implies ethics in which the essential is not an accessory, but in which it is impossible in any way to make compromises about either one.”<sup>7</sup>

Ernesto Volkening was born in 1908 in Antwerp, Belgium, the city that he would later transform into an idealized *Heimat* (home) revived in some of his writings. In the midst of World War I, he moved as an eight-year-old to Germany, where he spent his formative years in Worms, Düsseldorf, Hamburg and in several German university cities. Volkening was a socialist, and at the end of 1933, right after successfully defending his

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<sup>5</sup> Ette, 986.

<sup>6</sup> “[E]s la cultura, como visión del mundo; como opción personal, y sustantiva [*sic*], sobre los hechos.” Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, “Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes,” in *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975), 323-326, here: 323.

<sup>7</sup> “[F]orma de existencia que implica una ética, en donde lo esencial no es lo accesorio, pero en donde no es posible, de ningún modo, hacer concesiones sobre lo uno, ni sobre lo otro.” Cobo Borda, 323.

dissertation at the University of Erlangen, he fled the Nazi regime for fear of political persecution. One year later, he arrived in Bogotá with his Austrian fiancé Gertrudis. Both would end up spending the rest of their lives there, initially in forced, then in self-chosen exile. From the moment of leaving Europe, Volkening began writing about German and European literature, culture, and thought — as if to recreate what became increasingly elusive and inaccessible in daily life. He perfected his Spanish and made considerable inroads into literary and intellectual circles. In 1947, Álvaro Mutis encouraged his first Spanish-language publication, an essay on Hermann Hesse, which launched his career as a literary critic.<sup>8</sup> For eleven years, from 1954 to 1965, Volkening aired a weekly show about cinema on Colombia's national radio station, thereby becoming the first film critic holding this prominent position. By then, he wrote not only on German, but also on Colombian literature. In 1968, Gabriel García Márquez refers to him as “the only critic who exerted influence over me.”<sup>9</sup> Other accolades followed. In sum, Volkening established himself in his host country as an esteemed literary critic and humanist. As Oscar Torres Duque notes in 1993, “nobody could deny the immense importance of Volkening's humanistic opus in Colombia.”<sup>10</sup> Although Volkening published his essays in various cultural and literary magazines, most of his work can be found in *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Echo: Magazine of occidental culture). The German immigrant Karl Buchholz, owner of the *Librería Buchholz*, a bookstore with an art

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<sup>8</sup> Ernesto Volkening, “Retrato de Hermann Hesse,” *Vida* 9 (Jun., 1947): 2-4.

<sup>9</sup> “[Volkening es] el único crítico que ha tenido influencia sobre mí.” Gabriel García Márquez quoted as in Santiago Mutis Durán, “Cien y una noches de soledad,” prolog to *Gabriel García Márquez: “Un triunfo sobre el olvido,”* by Ernesto Volkening, ed. Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998), 11-20, here: 16.

<sup>10</sup> “Nadie podría negar sin disparate la inmensa importancia de la obra humanística de Volkening en Colombia.” Oscar Torres Duque, “Encuentros y tradiciones de las literaturas alemana y colombiana,” in *Kolumbien: Presencias alemanas en Colombia*, edited by Giorgio Antei, 101-119 (Bogotá: Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia and Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 1998), 108.

gallery in Bogotá, had founded the magazine of which 272 issues appeared between 1960 and 1984. Highly regarded, *Eco* was distributed in most Spanish-speaking countries of Latin America. This enabled Volkening to be instrumental in shaping the image of German culture in Colombia and beyond its borders. Taking over as main editor of *Eco* in 1971 and 1972, he started to accompany his articles on German literature with his own translations of the discussed works. Often this was the only way for his readers to gain a firsthand experience of the literature he discussed. The Colombian poet Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda praised Volkening for having made German authors such as Heinrich von Kleist and Georg Büchner theirs.<sup>11</sup> Volkening was also among the first writers in Colombia to publish fragments of his diaries during his lifetime.<sup>12</sup> In addition, he published his essays in three collected volumes,<sup>13</sup> and several of his essays have been reprinted in other places, including in three collected volumes of Volkening's notes and essays published after his death in 1983.<sup>14</sup> In 1974, he published his first essay collection, *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Lodovico's travels), which centered on an autobiographical essay about his 1968 visit to the city of his childhood, Antwerp, in addition to related essays and prose sketches. In 1975 and 1976 respectively, Volkening published the essay collections for which he is best known apart from his critical essays on García Márquez:

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<sup>11</sup> Cobo Borda, "Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes," 326.

<sup>12</sup> Volkening published from 1980 until his death in 1983 several fragments from his diaries that were written between 1952 and 1977. — 1977 is the year of his wife's death, which was a crucial moment in Volkening's life after which he claimed to have discontinued his diaries.

<sup>13</sup> Volkening, *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Monterrey, Mexico: Librería Cosmos, 1974); —, *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975); and —, *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976)

<sup>14</sup> Volkening, *Evocación de una sombra*, no editor named (Bogotá: Editorial Ariel, 1998); —, *Gabriel García Márquez, "Un triunfo sobre el olvido,"* ed. Santiago Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998), a second edition of which was reprinted by Fondo de Cultura Económica in Bogotá in 2010; and his *En causa propia. Ernesto Volkening*, ed. Oscar Jairo González Hernández (Colombia: Imprenta Universidad de Antioquia, 2004).

*Ensayos I: Destellos criollos* (Essays I: Creole sparkles) and *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo* (Essays II: European dusk). In these two volumes, he focused on the young generation of contemporary Colombian writers such as Gabriel García Márquez, Oscar Collazos, and Jairo Mercado Romero and on German and European writers of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, such as Heinrich Heine, Karoline von Günderrode, Büchner, Proust, and Kafka. Volkening's work as a cultural translator and his influence on the perception of German literature and culture in his host country remains unequalled. He lived, professionally and privately, in the words of Salman Rushdie, as a "translated man."<sup>15</sup> The contact zone between the world of his youth and the world of exile became his ideational home. Without being subsumed by either, he actively participated in both, so that his specific life circumstances inspired his work as a cultural translator.

Crossing cultural borders and intellectual boundaries, Volkening contributed seminally to the introduction and dissemination of German literature in Colombia. Through his representations of his culture of origin, he opened interstitial spaces between the giving and receiving spheres of his cultural translations. In these spaces, for which Homi K. Bhabha coined the term "Third Space," Volkening discussed German culture, transformed it through his distinct manner of representation, and brought it to a new life within a foreign context. The demarcation lines between one's own and the other, between the familiar and the foreign, between regions, languages, and cultures determined his life. To cross them, shift them, break them down, and construct them

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<sup>15</sup> Salman Rushdie in his essay "Imaginary Homelands," in his essay collection *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), 9-21, here: 17.

anew, as Magris has it, is the task of the writer. Even more so, this was Volkening's task as an essayist, literary critic, and cultural translator.

The engagement with borders is central to my study of Ernesto Volkening's life and work in Colombian exile. My dissertation is the first comprehensive study of his intellectual biography as well as of his essays on German literature and culture in any language. While Volkening's essays on Gabriel García Márquez met with lasting attention and some of his critiques of other Latin American authors have equally found their way into scholarly discourse, the vast and essential part of his opus, his writings about German and European literature, remained unstudied until now. One reason might have been that German NS-exiles in Colombia never swayed academia by finding positions in German studies programs and by initiating extensive scholarship on German exile, as it was the case in the United States, or in other Latin American countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico. Volkening himself never held an academic position either. Another reason could have been that he switched languages: writing in Spanish for a Colombian and Latin American audience, Volkening might have become virtually invisible to literary scholars of English- and German-speaking regions in Europe and the United States where traditionally most scholarship in German Studies has evolved. Furthermore, apart from some attention that Erich Arendt's stay in the country received, Colombia has not yet been in the focus of German Exile Studies. Tellingly, Guy Stern still felt compelled to encourage his colleagues as late as in 1993 to research Latin America as a region of exile beyond merely studying its significance in respect to the most prominent writers in exile, such as Anna Seghers, Stefan Zweig, and Bodo Uhse.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> See Guy Stern's keynote address, "Anregungen und Ausblicke zur Erforschung der lateinamerikanischen Exilliteratur," at the symposium "Mexiko — das wohltemperierte Exil," organized by the Instituto de

As my dissertation shows, foundational research on NS-exile is a still open chapter in German Exile Studies. It might now be the time to discover the works of German exiles in Latin America who were not yet established when they emigrated. More recent interest in figures like Egon Schwarz and Bernhard Blume would suggest so.<sup>17</sup> Moreover, as a field, we also need to reflect on exiles like Volkening who wrote in the language of their host countries as so many intercultural migrant writers from Yoko Tawada and Emine Özdamar to José F. A. Oliver and Abbas Khider do today. Through these studies, we explore aspects of cultural translation, hybridization, and the genres of “exilic” writing. We also learn about the dichotomy of *Heimat* and exile, which we encounter in the work of exile writers like the different colors of a prism that refracts the same light into manifold, unique expressions. Finally, the study of exile is necessarily a study of cultural mediation. People in exile transport their culture of origin, and studying Volkening’s œuvre will be fruitful under the lens of cultural exchange and cultural translation, which addresses another one of Stern’s desiderata.<sup>18</sup>

This dissertation hopes to enter into a dialog with German Exile Studies, particularly in Latin America, but also with Translation Studies, with scholarship on the

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Investigaciones Interculturales Germano-Mexicanas under the direction of Renata von Hanffstengel in Mexico City, November 8-15, 1993. Stern’s speech is published in *Literarische Kultur im Exil. Literature and Culture in Exile*, ed. Guy Stern (Dresden; Munich: Dresden UP, 1998), 24-38.

<sup>17</sup> See, for example, the recent article by Linda Maeding, “Zur Autobiographik von Germanisten im Exil: Selbstbestimmung und Selbstreflexivität bei Bernhard Blume und Egon Schwarz,” *The German Quarterly* 83:4 (2010): 485-502.

<sup>18</sup> Stern criticizes that until then (1993), the contributions of writers in exile as translators would not yet have been adequately examined: “How often do we find in the catalogues of works by exiles, for instance in Kürschner, the abbreviation ‘Ü’ as ‘Übersetzer’ (translator)! But exactly this culture-mediating activity of writers in exile has only been appreciated very sporadically and marginally.” The original German version reads: “Wie oft finden wir in Werkverzeichnissen der Exilanten, etwa im Kürschner, die Abkürzung ‘Ü’ als Übersetzer! Gerade aber diese kulturvermittelnde Tätigkeit der Exilschriftsteller/Innen ist nur ganz sporadisch und am Rande gewürdigt worden.” Stern, 26.

essay, with fundamental questions of contemporary intercultural literature, and with research on self-narration. It is a pioneering study that discovers a person, a cultural mediator and translator, a literary critic and writer. It is also an original contribution that strives to put Colombia on the map of countries that received German exiles who, as demonstrated through Volkening's case, came to play a decisive role in the dissemination of German literature and in shaping an image of German culture abroad.

The body of research on exile in Latin America has grown considerably during the past three decades. Taking up the impetus from works such as the 1979 book *Die Deutschen in Lateinamerika: Schicksal und Leistung* (Germans in Latin America: Fate and accomplishment), edited by Hartmut Fröschle,<sup>19</sup> and Wolfgang Kießling's monograph *Exil in Lateinamerika*, published in 1980,<sup>20</sup> several individual studies emerged investigating aspects of exile in Latin America in relation to select writers, groups of people, or countries. Scholarship by Karl Kohut and Patrik von zur Mühlen deserves distinction for the breadth of topics it encompasses and for having pointed the way for other research projects.<sup>21</sup> The *Jahrbücher* (Yearbooks) of the Gesellschaft für Exilforschung (Society for Exile Studies), published since 1983, have since its beginnings been an important forum for research on exile in Latin America, despite the fact that no yearbook has yet exclusively dealt with that region.

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<sup>19</sup> Hartmut Fröschle, ed., *Die Deutschen in Lateinamerika: Schicksal und Leistung* (Tübingen: Erdmann, 1979).

<sup>20</sup> Wolfgang Kießling, *Kunst und Literatur im antifaschistischen Exil, 1933-1945*, vol. 4, *Exil in Lateinamerika* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1980).

<sup>21</sup> Karl Kohut, ed., *Deutsche in Lateinamerika — Lateinamerika in Deutschland* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vervuert, 1996). Karl Kohut and Patrik von zur Mühlen, eds., *Alternative Lateinamerika: das deutsche Exil in der Zeit des Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt a. M.: Vervuert, 1994). Patrik von zur Mühlen, *Fluchtziel Lateinamerika: die deutsche Emigration 1933-1945: politische Aktivitäten und soziokulturelle Integration* (Bonn: Verlag Neue Gesellschaft, 1988).

For understandable reasons, scholars have gravitated toward studying German exile in those Latin American countries that received most immigrants. About ninety percent of all German Nazi-refugees who immigrated to Latin America settled in the ABC-countries Argentina, Brazil, and Chile, but also in Uruguay and Paraguay.<sup>22</sup> Mexico, however, attracted scholarly attention despite the low number of German immigrants since several eminent writers and political figures turned Mexico City into a pivotal center for NS-exile. For example, Ludwig Renn and Edgar Erwin Kisch co-founded the magazine *Freies Deutschland* (Free Germany), and Anna Seghers who, besides her involvement with *Freies Deutschland*, chaired the anti-fascist “Heinrich-Heine-Klub” in Mexico City, finished there her novel *Das siebte Kreuz* (*The Seventh Cross*), and published it in the Mexican exile press “El libro libre” (The free book).

In contrast, the focus on studying Colombia as a receiving country of German exiles between 1933 and 1945 has been marginal. Not by accident, we discover in the *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration 1933-1945* (Handbook of German-speaking emigration) that the country is subsumed under the only ten-page long entry “Lateinamerika, übriges” (Latin America, remaining) by von zur Mühlen,<sup>23</sup> while sections of comparable length or even longer deal with Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and

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<sup>22</sup> Von zur Mühlen established the following numbers of registered immigrants to Latin American countries from 1933 to 1945 (although he advises us to read the difficult to determine numbers as an indicator for a quantitative hierarchy of receiving countries, and not as absolute):

Argentina	35,000	Bolivia	6,000	Dominican Rep.	2,000
Brazil	16,000	Cuba	4,000	Mexico	1,200
Chile	12,000	Colombia	2,700		
Uruguay	7,000	Ecuador	2,500		

Von zur Mühlen, “Deutsches Exil in Lateinamerika,” in *Die Erfahrung der Fremde*, ed. Manfred Briegel and Wolfgang Frühwald (Weinheim: VCH, 1988), 33-44, here: 37.

<sup>23</sup> Von zur Mühlen, “Lateinamerika, übriges,” in *Handbuch der deutschsprachigen Emigration 1933-1945*, ed. Claus-Dieter Krohn, Patrik von zur Mühlen, Gerhard Paul and Lutz Winckler (Darmstadt: Primus, 1998), 297-307.



Mexico, as well as Ecuador and Uruguay. In Fröschle's *Die Deutschen in Lateinamerika*, Dieter Allgaier represents Colombia with his essay "Die Deutschen in Kolumbien" (Germans in Colombia).<sup>24</sup> Enrique Biermann Stolle, literary scholar and son of German immigrants to Colombia, presented recently the first book-long study on German exile in the Andean country. In 2001, he published his groundbreaking monograph in Spanish as well as in German translation, entitled *Distantes y distintos: los emigrantes alemanes en Colombia 1939-1945* and *Fern und fremd: die deutschen Emigranten in Kolumbien 1939-1945*, respectively (Distant and different: German emigrants in Colombia 1939-1945).<sup>25</sup> Biermann Stolle provides an overview of the situation in which the German immigrant population found itself at the time of arrival in Colombia, which he contextualizes with a discussion of the persecution these groups faced in Germany and of the society, the legal hurdles, and the general living conditions they encountered in Colombia in the 1930s and early 1940s. Further, Biermann Stolle illuminates the challenges and dependencies with which Colombia was confronted and relates his observations to the policies toward German immigrants at the time. For example, he discusses the *listas negras* (black lists) that led to the internment of a considerable number of Germans in Colombia who were suspected of harboring sympathies for the Nazi regime. His book ends with a chapter on the acculturation of German immigrants. As it stands, his study is an invaluable starting point for further research. The first one to seize that opportunity was a young Colombian filmmaker, Rolando Vargas, who

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<sup>24</sup> Dieter Allgaier, "Die Deutschen in Kolumbien," in *Die Deutschen in Lateinamerika*, ed. Hartmut Fröschle (Tübingen: Erdmann, 1979), 433-474.

<sup>25</sup> Enrique Biermann Stolle, *Distantes y distintos: los emigrantes alemanes en Colombia 1939-1945* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2001); —, *Fern und fremd: die deutschen Emigranten in Kolumbien 1939-1945*, trans. Laura Martignon (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2001).

produced a documentary, “Exiliados en Exilio” (Exiled in Exile) in 2002, about blacklisted German prisoners at the Hotel Sabaneta in Fusagasugá near Bogotá.<sup>26</sup> The Hotel Sabaneta was used, in compliance with US-American requests, to detain German as well as Italian and Japanese immigrants from 1941 until the summer of 1946. Biermann Stolle’s and Vargas’s works seem to express a new interest among the Colombian public in the fate of German immigrants to the country before and during World War II. The acclaimed novel, *Los informantes* (*The Informers*), published by Juan Gabriel Vásquez in 2004, deals with the many Colombian citizens who became accomplices in the persecution of their immigrant neighbors. As the novel suggests (and as also has been proven<sup>27</sup>), “informers” contributed often to the detention of a suspect not so much because of indications about that person’s Nazi sympathies or illegal activities, but for personal and economic motives.<sup>28</sup> As Vásquez was quoted by US-American media, he sees his work as an attempt to realize Balzac’s maxim that “novels are the private histories of nations.”<sup>29</sup> He thereby puts the spotlight on an uncomfortable chapter of history that involves all three countries, Colombia, Germany, and the United States.

Further literature on German NS-exile in Colombia is scarce, although there are a number of studies about the Latin America’s, respectively Colombia’s, alleged Nazi-

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<sup>26</sup> Rolando Vargas, director, *Exiliados en exilio*, DVD (Colombia: Ministerio de Cultura, Embajada de Francia, Roerik Video, 2002). Available at <http://homepage.mac.com/exiliados/video.html> (accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>27</sup> For example by Max Paul Friedman in his study *Nazis and Good Neighbors. The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

<sup>28</sup> Juan Gabriel Vásquez, *Los informantes* (Bogotá: Alfaguara, 2004). In English: —, *The Informers*, trans. Anne McLean (New York: Riverhead Books, 2009).

<sup>29</sup> Larry Rohter, “In 1940s Colombia, Blacklists and ‘Enemy Aliens,’” *New York Times*, section “Books of the Times” (August 2, 2009). Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2009/08/03/books/03rohter.html> (accessed June 20, 2011).

infiltration during the 1930s and 1940s. In 1966, Heinz Sanke published a pioneering essay collection by East German scholars, *Der deutsche Faschismus in Lateinamerika, 1933-1943* (German Fascism in Latin America, 1933-1943),<sup>30</sup> and Max Paul Friedmann contributed the most thorough and comprehensive study to date with his 2003 monograph *Nazis and Good Neighbors. The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II*.<sup>31</sup> William Howell Leedom focuses in his 1971 dissertation “The Nazi Threat in Colombia 1938-1941” on the dangers of possible and actual Nazi activities in Colombia and concludes that the United States needed to intervene in Colombia’s affairs to prevent a likely insurgence of the so-called “fifth column” of National Socialist minded Germans in the country.<sup>32</sup> Contrary to Leedom, Luis Eduardo Bosemberg assesses the political, economic, and ideological influence of Nazi-Germany in Colombia during about the same period in his essay “Alemania y Colombia, 1933-1939” (Germany and Colombia, 1933-1939)<sup>33</sup> and concludes, “Colombia was, within the Latin American context, a country of intermediate importance for the Germans and Germany did not have great opportunities there.”<sup>34</sup> Of particular interest is von zur Mühlen’s essay about “Der ‘Gegenführer’ im Exil. Die Otto-Strasser-Bewegung in

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<sup>30</sup> Heinz Sanke, *Der deutsche Faschismus in Lateinamerika, 1933-1945* (Berlin: Humboldt University, 1966).

<sup>31</sup> Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors. The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003).

<sup>32</sup> William Howell Leedom, “The Nazi Threat in Colombia 1938-1941” (PhD Diss., University of Delaware, 1971).

<sup>33</sup> Luis Eduardo Bosemberg, “Alemania y Colombia, 1933-1939,” *Iberoamericana. América Latina, España, Portugal. Ensayos sobre letras, historia y sociedad. Notas. Reseñas iberoamericanas* (Berlin: Ibero-Amerikanische Institut Preußischer Kulturbesitz) 21 (2006): 25-44. Available at <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/oaiart?codigo=1700867> (accessed November 12, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> “Colombia era, en el contexto latinoamericano, un país de una importancia intermedia para los alemanes y Alemania no tenía grandes posibilidades allí. Bosemberg, 42.

Lateinamerika” (The ‘anti-*Führer*’ in exile. The Otto-Strasser-movement in Latin America), which centers on the German politician Otto Strasser who fled Nazi-Germany for political reasons, however, not because Strasser would have minded anti-Semitic politics or disagreed with National Socialism’s larger goals, but because he envisioned a different way of putting the ideology into praxis.<sup>35</sup> Yet, Strasser’s “Frei-Deutschland-Bewegung” (Free-Germany-movement) remained relatively uninfluential and did not gain traction in Colombia.

Further, I would like to mention publications that inquire into the presence of Germans in Colombia without demonstrating a particular focus on National Socialism or exile. This is the case with Silvio Villegas’s 1966 article “Los Alemanes en Colombia” (Germans in Colombia),<sup>36</sup> a publication by the former German ambassador to Bogotá, Reinhard Wolff, in 1974, entitled *100 Jahre deutsch-kolumbianische Beziehungen 1845-1945* (100 years of German-Colombian relations),<sup>37</sup> and also with *Presencia alemana en Colombia* (German presence in Colombia), edited by Claudia Tapias Ospina. *Presencia alemana en Colombia* traces in seventeen essays German influences in Colombia from the early sixteenth century to the middle decades of the twentieth century.<sup>38</sup> The volume of essays sheds light on a variety of topics from the Bavarian brewery “Bavaria” in Bogotá and the role German companies played for aviation in Colombia to the German

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<sup>35</sup> Von zur Mühlen, “Der ‘Gegenführer’ im Exil. Die Otto-Strasser-Bewegung in Lateinamerika,” in *Exilforschung. Ein internationales Jahrbuch 3. Gedanken an Deutschland im Exil und andere Themen*, ed. Thomas Koebner, Wulf Köpke, and Joachim Radkau (Munich: Edition text + kritik, 1985), 143-157.

<sup>36</sup> Silvio Villegas, “Los Alemanes en Colombia,” *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfica* (Bogotá) 9 (1966): 1289-1299.

<sup>37</sup> Reinhard Wolff, *100 Jahre deutsch-kolumbianische Beziehungen 1845-1945* (Bogotá: Italgraf, 1974).

<sup>38</sup> Claudia Tapias Ospina, ed. *Presencia alemana en Colombia* (Bogotá: Mayr & Cabal / Editorial Nomos, 1993).

impact on the educational system and the work of the Goethe Institute in the country. Furthermore, Giorgio Antei edited *Kolumbien: Presencias alemanas en Colombia* (Colombia: German presences in Colombia), which focuses on the cultural, philosophical, literary, and artistic influence of German writers, artists, and thinkers in Colombia.<sup>39</sup> Oscar Torres Duque's contribution to this volume, "Encuentros y tradiciones de las literaturas alemana y colombiana" (Encounters and traditions of German and Colombian literatures), an essay on literature, focuses in a two-page passage on Ernesto Volkening's work. Torres Duque describes Volkening as a cultural mediator, as "an intellectual of rare penetration, as a critic of exquisite taste and above all as a humanist between two worlds, for him both equally rich."<sup>40</sup> Besides, he discusses Karl Buchholz's magazine *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente*, which was instrumental in disseminating German literature in Colombia and beyond its borders. — Volkening published his essays in *Eco* from 1961 on until his death in 1983, and was editor of the magazine in 1971 and 1972.

Since the late 1990s, Ernesto Volkening's work has experienced a renaissance. Three volumes of select essays have been published, of which one has just been reprinted: in 1998, Santiago Mutis Durán published a collection of Volkening's pioneering essays on Gabriel García Márquez, entitled *Gabriel García Márquez, "Un triunfo sobre el olvido"* (Gabriel García Márquez: "A triumph over oblivion"), which

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<sup>39</sup> Oscar Torres Duque, "Encuentros y tradiciones de las literaturas alemana y colombiana," in *Kolumbien: Presencias alemanas en Colombia*, ed. Giorgio Antei, 101-119 (Bogotá: Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia and Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango, 1998).

<sup>40</sup> "[U]n intelectual de rara penetración, como crítico de exquisito gusto y sobre todo como un humanista entre dos mundos para él igualmente ricos." Torres Duque, 108.

saw a second edition in 2010.<sup>41</sup> Also in 1998, the “Editorial Ariel” press in Bogotá published a selection of Volkening’s essays on European and Latin American literature as well as some excerpts of his diaries under the title *Evocación de una sombra* (Evocation of a shadow).<sup>42</sup> In 2004, Oscar Jairo González Hernández edited *En causa propia* (In his own cause), a volume with excerpts of Volkening’s diaries, written between 1952 and 1977 and first printed in *Eco* between 1980 and 1983.<sup>43</sup> It is noteworthy that Volkening’s writing is also discussed in several online publications, including blogs of people interested in literature. For example, in an article from January 2011 by Ricardo Rodríguez Morales, “Personaje / Un Habitante Del Reino Intermedio” (Persons / A habitant of the intermediary realm) in the cultural section of the online version of the Colombian newspaper *El Tiempo*,<sup>44</sup> or in a blog entry at the Colombian online forum País.com, where Cesar Hernando Bustamante Huertas published in April 2011 notes about Volkening under the title “Ernesto Volkening, ensayista memorable” (Ernesto Volkening, memorable essayist).<sup>45</sup> Young intellectuals seem to be interested in rediscovering Volkening: in 2010, Carlos-Roberto Peña-Barrera published his essay “Amberes-Bogotá: interpretaciones de lo domestico en Ernesto Volkening (Antwerp-

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<sup>41</sup> Volkening, *Gabriel García Márquez, “Un triunfo sobre el olvido,”* ed. Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998). Reprinted in Bogotá at Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010.

<sup>42</sup> Volkening, *Evocación de una sombra*, no editor named (Bogotá: Editorial Ariel, 1998).

<sup>43</sup> Volkening, *En causa propia*, ed. Oscar Jairo González Hernández (Colombia: Imprenta Universidad de Antioquia, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Ricardo Rodríguez Morales, “Personaje / Un Habitante Del Reino Intermedio,” *eltiempo.com*, section “Lecturas fin de semana” (Jan. 21, 2011). Available at <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-8793347> (accessed June 15, 2011).

<sup>45</sup> Hernando Bustamante Huertas, “Ernesto Volkening, ensayista memorable,” blog on País.com under the section “Literatura y otras temas” (Literature and other topics). Available at <http://lacomunidad.elpais.com/cesarhernando-bustamante/2011/4/25/ernesto-volkening-ensayista-memorable> (accessed May 15, 2011).

Bogotá: interpretations of domesticity in Ernesto Volkening) in *dearq | Revista de la Arquitectura de la Universidad de los Andes*, an academic journal on architecture.<sup>46</sup> Engaging with the realm of the domestic in Volkening's writing, Peña-Barrera argues that for Volkening home would have been not the private family home, but the public space of the city (which might resonate, although with a different emphasis, in the third chapter of this dissertation). Santiago Spinosa, a young graduate of Philosophy and Literature from the University of the Andes in Bogotá mentions Volkening in his blog entry "Santa Fé & Bogotá" from May 19, 2011.<sup>47</sup>

Ernesto Volkening has also been the subject of several articles written in memory of his death in July of 1983. For example, in Policarpo Varón's homage to his friend, "Ernesto Volkening: exilio y pasión por Colombia" (Ernesto Volkening: Exile and passion for Colombia),<sup>48</sup> and Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda's essay, "Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario" (Ernesto Volkening, literary critic) that was included in the issue of *Eco* of October 1983 dedicated to Volkening.<sup>49</sup> In 1995, Juan Guillermo Gómez García provided an overview and commentary of Volkening's essayistic work in his article "Los pasos perdidos de Ernesto Volkening" (The lost steps of Ernesto Volkening), which was published in the cultural magazine *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* (Cultural and

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<sup>46</sup> Carlos-Roberto Peña-Barrera, "Amberes-Bogotá: interpretaciones de lo domestico en Ernesto Volkening," *dearq | Revista de la Arquitectura de la Universidad de los Andes* (Bogotá) 9 (Dec., 2010): 144-151. Available at <http://dearq.uniandes.edu.co> (accessed June 20, 2011).

<sup>47</sup> Santiago Spinosa, "Santa Fé & Bogotá," on "Blog/ Santiago Spinosa." Available at <http://www.hojablanca.net/botellas-de-naufrago/santa-fe-bogota/> (accessed June 2, 2011).

<sup>48</sup> Policarpo Varón, "Ernesto Volkening: exilio y pasión por Colombia," *Nueva Frontera* 447 (Aug. 29, 1983), 21-22.

<sup>49</sup> Cobo Borda, "Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario," *Eco* 53:262 (Oct., 1983): 337-343.

bibliographical bulletin).<sup>50</sup> This article differs in its general tone and assessment from most commentaries on Volkening's work with which I am familiar. It is, for instance, only in Gómez García's essay that we encounter comments such as Volkening would have been, even after living for decades in the country, "in reality, a literary explorer who just got off the boot."<sup>51</sup> Therefore, Gómez García suggests, Volkening would have been unfamiliar with the Colombia's literature and had interpreted García Márquez's work rather naïvely. Five years later, in 2000, Elkin Gómez published a detailed review of the 1998 collection of Volkening's essays, *Gabriel García Márquez, "Un triunfo sobre el olvido"* in the same magazine, the *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico*.<sup>52</sup> He praised Volkening's conceptual clarity and authority in writing about García Márquez.<sup>53</sup>

In 1978, still during Volkening's lifetime, the literary scholar and critic Jorge Rufinelli published in *Eco* a review of his two essay volumes, *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos* and *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo*.<sup>54</sup> These essay collections, as well as Volkening's *Los pasos de Lodovico*, and the posthumously edited volumes *Gabriel García Márquez: "Un triunfo sobre el ovido," Evocación de una sombra*, and *En causa propia* contain prefaces and epilogs with insightful commentaries of Volkening's work. These prefaces and epilogs were written by Darío Achury Valenzuela, Juan Gustavo

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<sup>50</sup> Juan Guillermo Gómez García, "Los pasos perdidos de Ernesto Volkening," *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 32:40 (1995): 51-73.

<sup>51</sup> "[Fue Volkening'], en realidad, un explorador literario recién desempacado." Gómez García, 61.

<sup>52</sup> Elkin Gómez, "El primer crítico de García Márquez," *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 37: 54 (2000): 114-117.

<sup>53</sup> Gómez, 116.

<sup>54</sup> Jorge Rufinelli, "Ensayos I y II de Ernesto Volkening," *Eco* 33:204 (Oct., 1978): 1217-1221.



Cobo Borda, Oscar Jairo González Hernández, Álvaro Mutis, and Santiago Mutis Durán.<sup>55</sup>

I trace Volkening's biography, his childhood and formative years in Europe, and his life as an essayist and cultural mediator in Colombia. Through his essays, I explore the ways in which the conceptualization of *Heimat* changed for the author during decades in exile. Furthermore, I critically engage his preferred genre, the essay, as a vehicle for cultural transfer in exile. Finally, I present Volkening's approach to cultural translation through his work as editor and essayist. To illustrate this point, I discuss a special issue of the magazine *Eco* that Volkening designed on occasion of the 200th anniversary of Friedrich Hölderlin's death in 1970. Volkening edited this issue and wrote several essays and translations for it, so that it provides an excellent opportunity to study in detail his portrayal of a German writer for a Colombian audience.

In Chapter I, "Ernesto Volkening: The 'Psycho-Geography' of a Life," I reconstruct Volkening's life from his childhood in Antwerp until he left Europe in 1934. Focusing on the narrative he created about his life in his autobiographical essays and published excerpts of his diaries, I listen critically to the author's own voice. Volkening, who referred to his biography as a "psycho-geography," was convinced that not only his personal life but his professional one as well was distinctly shaped by his changing

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<sup>55</sup> Darío Achury Valenzuela, "Prologo," preface to *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976): 11-31; Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, "Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes," epilog to *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975): 323-326; Oscar Jairo González Hernández, "La mirada del grafólogo," preface to *En causa propia*, by Ernesto Volkening, ed. Oscar Jairo González Hernández (Colombia: Imprenta Universidad de Antioquia, 2004): xi-xxi; Álvaro Mutis, "Ernesto Volkening," preface to *Los paseos de Lodovico*, by Ernesto Volkening (Monterrey, Mexico: Librería Cosmos, 1974): vii-viii; —, Preface to *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975): 11-15; Santiago Mutis Durán, "Cien y una noches de soledad," preface to *Gabriel García Márquez, "Un triunfo sobre el olvido"*, by Ernesto Volkening, ed. Santiago Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998): 11-20. Reprinted in the second edition of this volume (Bogotá at Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2010), 9-17.

abodes. Antwerp, where he lived from 1908 until 1916, was for him an identity-constituting reference point, his *Heimat*. Most significant for Volkening in that regard were the presence of a large Jewish community and the linguistic and ethnic diversity that gave distinct flavor to the port city as well as his childhood memories about the German occupation of Antwerp during World War I. Volkening grew up in a multi-lingual household. Early on, he developed an affinity for Latin America that his father, who had lived in Bolivia and Peru, infused during hours of storytelling in the “savage room” of their home. Volkening’s own cultural hybridity, I argue, first originated from his upbringing in Antwerp. From Antwerp, I turn to Worms where Volkening spent most of his boyhood from 1908 on. The city, steeped in history and central for the cultural self-understanding of the German nation, became pivotal for his formation of a concept of German culture; one that would later influence his writing in exile. Worms figures prominently as a *Nibelungenstadt* (a city central in the *Song of the Nibelungs*). It is also of eminent importance for the religious identity of Lutheran Christians. For Volkening, it was the place where he witnessed the life at the home front during World War I, and where he saw the defeated German army return from the Western front in 1918. In 1927, Volkening’s father emigrated to Colombia. Volkening’s memories of their farewell, which turned out to be a final one, give not only testimony of one of the most decisive moments in his life, but allow us to better understand the marked recourse to paternal imagery in his essays. Volkening’s university years from 1927 to 1933 lead up to his emigration. He studied Law at different German universities where he experienced spreading anti-Semitism and the country’s turn to National Socialism; he graduated from the University of Erlangen in 1933, just months after students had organized a book

burning and Jewish professors had been dismissed. Identifying as a Marxist and an *homme engagé*, Volkening found himself with “one foot in the concentration camp and [with] the other bordering the frontier.”<sup>56</sup> By the summer of 1934, he boarded the “Odenwald” passenger ship heading to Colombia.

Chapter II, “A Life on the ‘Sixth Continent,’” continues to critically retrace Volkening’s journey into exile from his arrival in Bogotá to the circles of writers, editors, and intellectuals of Colombia’s capital city. Upon his arrival, Volkening faced multiple challenges of adapting to his new environment: to the foreign place, its culture, and not the least, the Spanish language. A discussion of Bogotá in the 1930s and 1940s provides the necessary context: Volkening met with a society in flux that strove toward modernity and urbanization. Europe and the United States were considered role models and exerted considerable influence in Colombia; in particular, the country’s policies toward German immigrants changed with the onset of World War II under pressure from the United States. Germans soon aroused suspicion of being Nazis, and from July 1941 on, “*listas negras*” (black lists) were introduced to detain and expropriate suspect individuals. Volkening kept a low political profile, and worked as a merchant and translator. Since leaving Germany, he had begun to write short sketches and essays about the culture and literature of his homeland. In an attempt to reassure himself of his continued belonging to the world he left behind, I argue that he transferred and rebuilt his lost home through writing in Bogotá. Volkening switched languages; from 1947 on and upon invitation of Álvaro Mutis, he began to publish essays on German literature, culture, and philosophy in *Vida: Revista de arte y cultura* and other cultural and literary magazines. From 1954 to

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<sup>56</sup> “[C]on un pie en el campo de concentración, y con el otro allende en la frontera.” Achury Valenzuela, “Prologo,” 12.

1965, Volkening hosted his own radio show about film. The show was aired first under the title “Crítica del cine” (Criticism of cinema) and from 1957 as “El cine y sus problemas” (Cinema and its problems) at Colombia’s national radio station, Radiodifusora Nacional. From 1961 on, Volkening began writing for the magazine *Eco* that Karl Buchholz had founded a year earlier. I look at Volkening’s involvement with *Eco* and the significance of the *Librería Buchholz*, the bookstore Buchholz owned, as a meeting point for intellectuals, writers, and artists. It was through the *Librería Buchholz* and *Eco* that Volkening came to collaborate and form friendships with writers and intellectuals like Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, Gabriel García Márquez, Nicolás Suescún, and Nicolás Gómez Dávila. In particular, I focus on Volkening’s first encounter with García Márquez in 1967. García Márquez wanted Volkening to translate his novel *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) into German: “to translate, to recreate my literature in his mother tongue.”<sup>57</sup> The chapter ends with an examination of how Volkening perceived his life in exile, which he anchored in the hybrid space between Europe and Latin America: his “sixth continent.”<sup>58</sup>

Chapter III, “*Heimat* and Identity: Memories, Totems and a Souvenir,” centers around the interpretation of a seminal essay in Volkening works, entitled “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro” (Antwerp, reencounter with a city and a face). There, Volkening self-reflexively described his visit to Antwerp in 1968, after thirty-four

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<sup>57</sup> “Ernesto Volkening [‘debe ser el primero capaz de’] traducir, recrear mi literatura en su lengua materna.” Curt Meyer-Clason, “Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez,” in *Para que mis amigos me quieran más...: Homenaje a Gabriel García Márquez*, ed. Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 1992), 34-36, here: 34.

<sup>58</sup> “En la terminología de mi “sico-geografía” particular, esa cosa inmaterial, cosida [*sic*] con hilos de ensueño y telarañas podría llamarse el “sexto continente.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” *Eco* 36:221 (Mar., 1980): 449-468, here: 466.

years in exile, and the accompanying hopes, enjoyments, and disappointments during his search for the *Heimat* of his childhood. Interestingly, the essay is not a straightforward travel report but a fictionalized account that creates a reflexive distance between the author and this decisive event in his life. Instead of Volkening, we meet Lodovico, a fictional character as protagonist of the essay; Lodovico could be read as Volkening's double, or in the words of Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda as "the best of his incarnations."<sup>59</sup> Employing a fictional character and a quasi-auctorial narrator, Volkening senses out the meaning of *Heimat* for him, of a place that, as the essay suggests, he encountered (not) during his visit to Antwerp. In his essay, Volkening gave literary form to his experience of estrangement from his *Heimat* and probed narrative strategies to re-appropriate the place of his childhood and with it an integral part of his personality. After a discussion of the concept of *Heimat* (home), I offer a close reading of how Volkening came to conceptualize *Heimat* and his identity by eventually accepting the constructedness of both of them. Reflecting on his walks through the streets of Antwerp, which elicited vivid, topographically bound memories, Volkening's protagonist Lodovico develops the concept of a "figurative memory." Using the actual city as a mnemonic device, I argue, the fictional character reconstructs a vision of *Heimat* as an ideational space to which the author, Volkening, gave permanence in his writing.

In Chapter IV, "Exile, Essay, Flânerie: Ernesto Volkening as Cultural Mediator," I explore the essay as Volkening's vehicle for cultural transfer in exile. The form of the essay emulated the author's life experience in exile, and allowed for a unique, non-authoritative way of introducing "cultural goods," as Volkening called it, to a Colombian

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<sup>59</sup> "[L]a mejor de sus encarnaciones." Cobo Borda, "Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario," 340.

audience. In Bogotá, Volkening became an “indefatigable *flâneur* on the streets of a city that he made his own, day after day.”<sup>60</sup> The *flâneur*’s mode of perceiving his surroundings differs from that of the average passer-by in that he does not rely on preconceived notions of meaning. For him, the world is to be discovered and its meaning cannot be taken for granted but has to be negotiated. In that respect, a *flâneur* is like an exile who lives, as Vilém Flusser has it, “without the fluffy blanket of habit.”<sup>61</sup> One cannot take recourse to habitual responses but has to contend for understanding the foreign behavioral, cultural, and linguistic codes. Volkening’s essays express his experience of exile: an essay meanders; like a *flâneur*, it pursues seemingly erratic paths of thought and strives for arriving at an understanding of its subject matter. In the essay, however, understanding is always provisional. Permeated by skepticism and aware of its own limitations, the essay strives for it but refrains from establishing any authoritative truth. As Georg Lukács asserts, it is “the process of judging” that determines the essay’s value.<sup>62</sup> This allows, and even requires its reader to continue the thought process after the last line. Examining the *flâneur* under the aspect of being an observer, a stray and chased figure, a signifier that rehearses meaning, a player, and a stranger provides insights that can be fruitfully applied to reach a better understanding of the *modus vivendi* of the

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<sup>60</sup> “*Flâneur* infatigable por las calles de una ciudad que ha hecho suya, día tras día.” Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, “Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes,” 324.

<sup>61</sup> Vilém Flusser, “Exile and Creativity,” in his *The Freedom of the Migrant*, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg, ed. and with an introduction by Anke K. Finger (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 81-87, here: 82.

<sup>62</sup> “The essay is a judgment, but the essential, the value-determining thing about it is not the verdict (as is the case with the system) but the process of judging.” Georg Lukács, “On the Nature and Form of the Essay” in his *Soul & Form*, ed. John T. Sanders and Katie Terezakis, trans. Anna Bostock, with an introduction by Judith Butler (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), 16-34, here: 34. In the original German version: “Der Essay ist ein Gericht, doch nicht das Urteil ist das Wesentliche und Wertentscheidende an ihm (wie im System) sondern der Prozeß des Richtens.” Lukács, “Über Wesen und Form des Essays: Ein Brief an Leo Popper,” in his *Die Seele und die Formen: Essays* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1911), 3-39, here: 38.

exiled person. Likewise, it illuminates the essayist's way of thinking and presenting ideas. I show how the creative moments of essayistic writing, exile, and *flânerie* — that Volkening used as means for cultural transfer — opened spaces for the negotiation and transformation of the translated object. The genre of Volkening's writings, I hold, equally derived from and amplified the creative potential of displacement.

Chapter V, "Cultural Translation, Hybridization, Third Spaces," explores the parameters of Volkening's cultural translations. The relatively recent "translational turn" in the humanities expands our understanding of translation as a linguistic exercise to include actions in a multifaceted, intercultural space characterized by a myriad of personal, material, and intellectual acts of transfer. Translation becomes cultural action. For Volkening, translations became indispensable for his social survival in exile. His work, too, was an act of complex translation. As I show that, in Volkening's case, culture reveals itself in the performative act of being translated as manipulative and unmonolithic, bespeaking thereby not only its translator's but also its own hybridity. Although Volkening strove to reassert his cultural identity through writing, his writing had also a destabilizing effect: it opened interstitial spaces in which the nature of the translated "goods" was brought into question. These are Third Spaces of cultural transformation. I further discuss the interests Volkening pursued as an essayist and the context in which he presented his work. A close reading of "'La metamorfosis' de Kafka, prelude de una tragedia espiritual" ("The Metamorphosis" by Kafka, prelude to a spiritual tragedy)<sup>63</sup> illustrates his particular style of introducing German literature to his Colombian readers. Focusing on Volkening, the chapter aims to enrich our understanding

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<sup>63</sup> Volkening, "'La metamorfosis' de Kafka, prelude de una tragedia espiritual," *Revista de las Indias* 32:102 (Mar.-May, 1948): 465-475.

of cultural transfer in exile and to conceptualize translation, in all its forms, as a hybrid and hybridizing Third Space.

Chapter VI, the final chapter entitled “*Traduire c’est trahir*: Ernesto Volkening as Editor of *Eco*,” builds on the insights of the preceding chapter to engage with Volkening’s work as a writer for *Eco*, and in particular as its editor. At the center of this chapter stands a special issue of *Eco* that Volkening designed to commemorate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Friedrich Hölderlin: “*In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos*” (In memoriam of Friedrich Hölderlin. Poems — Prose — Essays).<sup>64</sup> This issue intended to introduce Hölderlin to a Colombian audience with very limited knowledge of the poet’s life and work. Volkening chose some of Hölderlin’s most known poems that he presented in German and in translation, some excerpts of Hölderlin’s prose work in translation, as well as critical essays by different authors to discuss various aspects of Hölderlin’s biography and his work. It is noteworthy that it was only Volkening who wrote essays specifically for this issue; all other included articles are translated reprints of earlier publications by Hölderlin scholars like Maurice Delorme, Norbert von Hellingrath, Dominique Janicaud, and Robert Minder, as well as a reprint of the poem “Hölderlin’s Old Age” by Stephen Spender. Two of Volkening’s essays in this issue stand out in respect to his self-aware approach to representing German culture abroad: “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor” (Three versions of a poem or the headaches of the translator)<sup>65</sup> and “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin” (two profile of

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<sup>64</sup> *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente. In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos* (Bogotá) 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970).

<sup>65</sup> Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 293-300.



Hölderlin).<sup>66</sup> Both essays discuss questions of how to translate without betraying the original neither in form nor in spirit. While “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor” addresses Volkening’s approach to literal (and literary) translations by discussing different Spanish translations of Hölderlin’s poem “Hälfte des Lebens” (“Half of Life”), “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin” is revelatory in respect to Volkening’s approach to cultural translation as exemplified by his representation of Hölderlin to a foreign audience. As my reading of these essays suggests, Volkening was cognizant of being also always a creative artist, a *Kulturschaffender*, who shapes and brings to life what he portrays. As a conclusion to the chapter, I discuss Volkening’s choices as an editor as illustrated through the *Eco* issue on Hölderlin.

My Conclusion reflects on Ernesto Volkening’s work as essayist, cultural mediator, and editor at the moment of his greatest recognition in his adoptive country. In 1971, when he was named editor of *Eco*, Volkening wrote a programmatic essay in which he discussed the scope and relevance of his work in Bogotá by conceptualizing the place of European versus Latin American literature and culture.

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<sup>66</sup> Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 404-410.

## CHAPTER I

### ERNESTO VOLKENING: THE “PSYCHO-GEOGRAPHY” OF A LIFE

#### 1. Introduction

Reconstructing Ernesto Volkening’s life is like ordering the loose pages of a travel diary. His biography reads like a journey between cities, countries, and continents. It was a journey between homes in Europe, be it in Belgium or Germany, and his home in exile, in Bogotá, Colombia. It was also a journey back to an estranged homeland and a cognizant return into the foreign space, the familiar *Fremde*. A third space became his final residence. In his diary, he calls it an “intermediary realm” shaped by different societies, cultures, and languages:

The intermediary realm, understood in its literal sense as a space that came to grow with me, inside and outside myself, since the moment when I left Antwerp on July 26, 1934, on the day of my father’s death, it moved gradually between the Old World from where I came and the so-called New World where I went, and it belongs to both without being identical with either one of the two.<sup>67</sup>

This passage is taken from Volkening’s diary entry of November 21, 1976. He published this and other excerpts of his journal toward the end of his life, between 1980 and 1983, in *Eco*, a German exile-magazine in Bogotá. *Eco* dedicated itself to topics related to occidental culture for a Hispanic readership, as its full name, *Eco: Revista de la Cultura del Occidente*, and the fact that it is published in Spanish illustrate. By then,

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<sup>67</sup> “El reino intermedio, concebido en su sentido literal como un espacio que desde cuando partí de Amberes el 26 de Julio de 1934, día del fallecimiento de mi padre, venía creciendo conmigo, dentro y fuera de mí, paulatinamente se me intercalaba entre el Viejo Mundo de donde vine y el llamado Nuevo Mundo a donde fui, y pertenece a ambos sin ser idéntico con ninguno de los dos.” Ernesto Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Bogotá) 36:221 (1980): 449-468, here: 465.

All translations are mine except when indicated otherwise.

Volkening had established himself in his host country as a prominent critic of German and Colombian literature. Proposing the idea of living in an intermediary realm between Europe and the Americas to served him thus, too, to emphasize his particular vantage in discussing various literatures and cultures from his unique in- and outside perspective. Volkening stresses the coalescence of geographic and spiritual qualities in the intermediary realm in which he sees his adult life evolving. So, he believes that this third space conditioned his professional life, which he defines as “my own role as a mediator, my literary activity from the first notes (in 1934) until now.”<sup>68</sup> In the same entry, he equates the conditions of this space, which he now calls a “sixth continent,” and the conditions of his life in exile:

In the terminology of my particular “psycho-geography,” this immaterial thing, the little thing with dreamlike threads and spider webs could call itself the “sixth continent,” if it would not have so much of an archipelago, up to the amphibian condition in which both hemispheres participate to equal parts —and the sea, friends, the sea!<sup>69</sup>

Volkening emphasizes his own role as a cultural mediator by comparing the intermediary realm, this ideational place of his life, with dispersed islands, the intermediators between ocean and land. As this image reveals, he perceives of himself as deeply connected to European and Latin American cultures. While he participates in both, he belongs to neither exclusively. His life on the amphibian “sixth continent” evolves in a space that emerges from the encounter of two different elements but exceeds the sum of its components by developing a distinct character of its own.

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<sup>68</sup> “[M]i propio papel de mediador, mi actividad literaria, de los primeros apuntes (en 1934) para acá [1980].” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 467-468.

<sup>69</sup> “En la terminología de mi “sico-geografía” particular, esa cosa inmaterial, cosida [*sic*] con hilos de ensueño y telarañas podría llamarse el “sexto continente,” si no tuviera tanto de archipiélago, hasta de condición anfibia en la que por partes iguales participan ambos hemisferios — y el mar, amigos, el mar!” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 467-468.

He strongly accentuates the role of the sea, the medium that continually shapes the land of his “sixth continent” and questions its stability. It is a symbol of transformation and fluidity. The sea poses the risk of losing firm ground, in existential terms, the risk of losing the safety of unwavering thought, knowledge, and truth. This might have closely resonated with Volkening’s experience as an exile who spent his life in constant contact and exchange with a foreign culture. His adult life unfolded in the destabilizing tension of coexistent foreignness and familiarity of places and cultures; his professional activity of mediating between the foreign and the familiar strove to solidify and translate knowledge of the other through its representation in a new cultural sphere. Like the sea that shapes the land, Volkening affected thereby the culture of origin and the receiving culture. Cultural translations require us to question and define the meaning of cultural elements and lead to a culture’s transformation and recreation. By referring to the sea, Volkening also evokes the Nietzschean idea of the sea, which reinforces my line of interpretation. The sea, as Nietzsche describes it in his aphorisms in *Morgenröte* (*Daybreak*), is as a place of solitude, transformation, and emergence of new understanding; a place that allows one to rise above oneself to create a life according to self-chosen values and ideals.<sup>70</sup> As such, the sea is exhilarating and terrifying, as the experience of the exile who needs to recreate himself in a new setting. Or, as the experience of the cultural mediator who sees himself recreating the object he attempts to represent for somebody else. Through his cultural translations, Volkening shaped the purportedly stable image of cultures. His work as a literary critic guided the reception of

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<sup>70</sup> See, for instance, Friedrich Nietzsche, “Significance of Madness in the History of Morality,” book 1, sec. 14 in his *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, ed. Maudemarie Clark and Brian Leiter, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997), 13-14; and his “In the Great Silence,” book V, sec. 423 in his *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, 181.

German culture in Colombia for decades. His personal development and professional career were intractably linked to his changing abodes. The resulting shift in perspective allowed Volkening to look at different societies and cultures from the inside, and at the same time from a distance which benefits the critic. Yet, this and other benefits such as the proverbial creativity of exile came at the cost of a certain physical and emotional distance from his origins and his residence.<sup>71</sup> He was a figure at the margins, an observer, commentator, and mediator. Volkening frequently felt alienated from his surroundings and later in life developed an excruciating desire to determine his belonging. It was this desire that decisively spurred his work as a literary critic, cultural translator, and essayist.

The present chapter pieces together Volkening's life in Europe, starting with his childhood in pre-World War I Antwerp. His teenage years in Worms and his education in Hamburg and Erlangen became decisive for shaping his perception of German history and culture. I shed light on Volkening's intellectual development, his rejection of German politics in the early 1930s, and his turn to Marxism, which motivated his emigration in 1933.

Volkening's own publications provide the source material, among them excerpts of his diaries written between 1953 and 1977,<sup>72</sup> a fictionalized travel report about his

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<sup>71</sup> See Susan Rubin Suleiman, ed., *Exile and Creativity: Signposts, Travelers, Outsiders, Backward Glances* (Durham: Duke UP, 1998).

<sup>72</sup> Volkening published in *Eco* during the last three years of his life (1980-1983) excerpts of his diaries written between 1953 and 1977. Those are in chronological order: Volkening, "Spengler hoy," *Eco* 36:219 (1980): 313-317. —, "De mis cuadernos I," *Eco* 36:220 (1980): 337-351. —, "De mis cuadernos II," *Eco* 36:221 (1980): 449-468. —, "Emile Verhaeren y Max Elskamp: de mis cuadernos," *Eco* 37:223 (1980): 73-82. —, "Voces alemanas," *Eco* 38:230 (1980): 113-143. —, "En causa propia I," *Eco* 38:232 (1981): 337-359. —, "Res publica," *Eco* 45:241 (1981): 61-103. —, "En causa propia II," *Eco* 48:244 (1982): 361-400. —, "Sondeos (de mis cuadernos)," *Eco* 53:262 (1983): 344-377. —, "El oficio de escribir: de mis cuadernos," *Eco* 53:264 (1983): 579-620.

journey to Antwerp, his city of birth, written in 1968/69,<sup>73</sup> and several autobiographical essays. Through an examination of these autobiographical texts, I seek an understanding of Volkening's life story from his personal perspective. As a result, we will encounter omissions of periods and events. Autobiographical writing is a means of re-designing one's own persona. Conscious or unconscious distortion of events, omissions, retrospective interpretations that differ from the individual's reasoning in the lived moment, and a fictionalization of one's past life are to be expected. As Paul de Man has it in his groundbreaking essay "Autobiography as De-facement," "the distinction between fiction and autobiography is not an either/or polarity but [...] is undecidable."<sup>74</sup> According to de Man, autobiography, as much as it might be revealing, is so by veiling its author who speaks as if it were through a mask, whereby "the illusion of reference" between the textual self and its author is created.<sup>75</sup> He identifies *prosopopeia* as the central trope of autobiography to emphasize that it "confer[s] a mask or a face" on its author,<sup>76</sup> by which, I would like to add, the author first becomes visible even if it is in disguise. The actual autobiographic quality of a text resides rather in the act of reading.<sup>77</sup>

The historical person and the inscribed self are connected through a relationship of approximation, resemblance, mimesis. Autobiographical writing and fiction can and often do intertwine for various reasons like deficient memory, considerations to protect

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<sup>73</sup> Volkening, "Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro I," *Eco* 19:110 (1969): 113-157. —, "Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro II," *Eco* 19:111 (1969): 234-281. Volkening published the two installments of his essay on Antwerp together with several other autobiographical texts also in his *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Monterrey, Mexico: Librería Cosmos, 1974).

<sup>74</sup> Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-facement," *MLN* 94 :5 (Dec., 1979): 919-930, here: 921.

<sup>75</sup> De Man, 920.

<sup>76</sup> De Man, 926.

<sup>77</sup> "Autobiography, then, is not a genre or mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding." De Man, 921.

other people, self-styling, and self-justification. What we read in autobiographical texts is hence never the actual experience of a past event in the author's life, but the product of a temporally remote process of recollection, valuation, and interpretation of the past. This process is concurrent with the act of writing, and we may suspect that the representation of the same event in the author's life would change if it were narrated at a different time, under different circumstances. However, fictive elements per se do not violate the genre limits of autobiography. Nor do they deplete the worth of autobiographical texts for retracing a life. Carolyn Barros argues in *Autobiography. Narrative of Transformation* that the narrative of an autobiography distinguishes itself from narratives in other fictive genres thus mostly in the nature of the act of telling: "unlike fictive discourse, in which the narrating situation—the act of telling—is simulated, with autobiography the narrating situation is actual."<sup>78</sup> Autobiography intends to reveal something about its author, even if it does so erratically, in a somewhat unreliable manner. If we read Volkening's autobiographical texts with these caveats in place, they prove invaluable sources for reconstructing the formative moments of his life.

Volkening's essays and diary excerpts are written in Spanish and were published in Colombia and Mexico, from where they found distribution in most Latin American countries. Volkening studied Spanish at German universities, and was only twenty-six years old when he moved in 1934 to a Spanish-speaking country. Apart from his dissertation, written in German, he started his career as a writer only after having spent several years in Bogotá, Colombia. In addition, contrary to already established writers in exile, as most prominently Thomas Mann and Bertolt Brecht, who tended to continue

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<sup>78</sup> Carolyn A. Barros, "Narratives of Transformation," in her *Autobiography. Narrative of Transformation* (Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press, 1998), 1-18, here: 12.

writing in their native tongue, Volkening was part of a younger generation. His contemporaries, intellectuals such as Klaus Mann (born 1906), Hannah Arendt (born 1906), or Stefan Heym (born 1913), were more prone to adopt a new language and were willing to engage their audiences through literature written in the language of their respective host countries. Very likely, the decisive reason for Volkening's decision to write in Spanish was the desire to reach readers in his host country beyond the circles and communities of German immigrants who lived dispersed in the coastal area and in Colombia's larger cities.

## **2. Childhood in Antwerp (1908-1916)**

Ernesto Adam Carl Volkening was born on September 13, 1908, in Antwerp as the only child of Ernst and Hildegard Volkening, née Mach. His parents came from the Rhineland, an area in Germany that borders on France, Belgium, Luxembourg, and the Netherlands. His father, Ernst Volkening, was a merchant who had in the past repeatedly traveled South America for business, and had lived in Bolivia and Peru. His son would call that period of his father's life the "long years in the tropics."<sup>79</sup> He insinuates without explanation that they would have influenced his father, who later left the family to return to Latin America, in a similar fashion in which the heat of the tropics would have conditioned the ways of living of the Buendías in Macondo.<sup>80</sup> Ernst Volkening was said to have felt an unshakeable love for the people in Latin America whom, "as every real lover does, [...] he accepted without conditions and reservations, with their virtues, their

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<sup>79</sup> "[L]argos años en el trópico." Volkening, "Amberes I," 116.

<sup>80</sup> In a fictional interview between himself and his alter ego Lodovico, Volkening compares his family members to the Buendías, the fictive family around which Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) revolves. Volkening, *Los paseos de Lodovico*, 130.



shortcomings, in body and soul.”<sup>81</sup> Volkening claims, that his father had later instilled this same love for Latin America and its population in him too.<sup>82</sup> Naming the newborn Ernesto, the Spanish equivalent of the father’s name Ernst, is one marked sign of the father’s affinity to Latin American cultures. Later in life, Ernesto Volkening recalls the hours he spent in the “savage room” of his parent’s house; there he became first entangled in suspense and desire to learn through his father’s adventures about the far-away, exotic world. In this room, the father, whom Volkening jovially refers to as the “old South-American,” kept treasures from his overseas travels. “The smell of sea salt, iodine and algae that came out of the glass of Capstan Navy Cut where the shells were kept,” he writes, added to the room’s distinctiveness.<sup>83</sup> Capstan Navy Cut was at the time a fashionable brand of Virginian tobacco produced and distributed overseas by the newly founded British American Tobacco company. Smoking his Capstan-filled pipe, the father told his son fascinating stories about his adventures at the Beni River in the rain forests of Northern Bolivia.<sup>84</sup> Eagerly listening, the child felt a sensation “as if the feet of an insect were scuttling over the spine,” when he learnt about ships flying a “yellow banner [...] to indicate that there was a sick person on board who was suspected of having contracted

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<sup>81</sup> “[C]omo todo verdadero amante [...] aceptaba sin condiciones ni reservas, con sus virtudes, sus flaquezas, en cuerpo y alma.” Cited as in Santiago Mutis Durán, “Cien y una noches de soledad,” preface to *Gabriel García Márquez, “Un triunfo sobre el olvido,”* by Ernesto Volkening, ed. Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998), 11-20, here: 13.

<sup>82</sup> Mutis Durán, 13.

<sup>83</sup> “El olor de sal marina, yodo y algas que salía del tarro de Capstan Navycut en donde se guardaban las conchas.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 467.

<sup>84</sup> Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 467.

cholera or even the bubonic plague, the most disastrous of the many pestilences that the infantile mind was able to imagine.”<sup>85</sup>

The setting of these memories and of Volkening’s earliest childhood was an apartment in a petit-bourgeois neighborhood of Berchem, a district at the periphery of Antwerp. Living in the port and trade city was likely a great economic advantage since the Antwerp was a center of international commerce with seeming abundant opportunities for a merchant like Volkening’s father. It was then, as it is today, Europe’s largest seaport after Rotterdam. Furthermore, the Antwerp stock exchange, worldwide the first of its kind, attracted businessmen who greatly added to the city’s wealth. The lucrative trading of diamonds was also firmly established in the city. Moreover, Antwerp’s Jewish community contributed for centuries significantly to the economic florescence and added to the heterogeneous composition of the cosmopolitan place.

In an essay written in 1968/69, Volkening describes the house in which he was born, the family’s residence in Rue Stanley No. 12. in Berchem, as

[A] solid apartment building, narrow-chested like all the stately homes in outmoded residential neighborhoods that owe their construction to the urbanizing fever of the end of the century. Three floors, on the second a bay with pointed nose, the façade of yellow-colored brick stone, the entrance door with its lintel out of sawn stone, a little underneath the roof a kind of garland formed out of plaster that went all the way to the cornice.<sup>86</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> “[A]sí como unas patas de insecto deslizándose sobre la espina dorsal [...] gallardete amarillo [...] para indicar que había a bordo un enfermo sospechoso de haber contraído el cólera morbo o hasta la peste bubónica, la más siniestra de cuantas plagas se pudo imaginar la mente infantil.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 114.

<sup>86</sup> “[U]n sólido edificio de apartamentos, angosto de pecho como todas las mansiones en unos barrios residenciales pasados de moda, cuya edificación se debía a la fiebre urbanizadora del fin de siglo. Tres pisos, en el segundo un mirador de nariz puntiaguda, la fachada en ladrillos vidriados de color amarillo, la puerta de entrada con su dintel de piedra labrada, algo más abajo del techo una especie de guirnalda moldeada en yeso que hace las veces de cornisa.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 148.



Fig. 1: Rue Stanley, No. 12 (in 2008)

Volkening's birthplace is located in immediate vicinity to the railroad station, close to the outskirts of the city. As he suggests, this house might have been built in an effort to expand the quarter at the end of the nineteenth century when this area accommodated a large influx of Eastern European Jews who settled in Berchem. It strongly resembles other buildings in Rue Stanley and near-by streets, which appear to be from the same period. It was in this house where the following occurred:

[T]his world of strange and disquieting sounds that the little child heard during the long winter nights, from behind the bedrails, the hallow roaring of the trains, the squeaking of iron, the ratatan, ratatan, ratatan of the wheels, the languishing

hissings of a locomotive that bit by bit faded away in the distance and made the heart tense up as it was sweetly tormented by voluptuousness and anguish.<sup>87</sup>

The passage, narrated from an outsider's perspective in the third person, conjures the familiar and frightening sounds of Volkening's childhood. The clatter of the locomotive, the vehicle of expedite transportation and tangible, as well as well-audible, manifestation of progress and modernity broke into Volkening's childhood realm and filled his bedroom with excitement and fear. The locomotive heralded what Volkening calls the *fuga temporum* at the end of the long nineteenth century,<sup>88</sup> which marks the passing of the Belle Époque in which he felt at home, as I will discuss in Chapter III. Unbeknown to the child at the time, it heralded also the dawning of industrial warfare during the First World War, which would bring his childhood in Antwerp to an abrupt ending.

When Volkening was three years old, the family moved to a less noisy neighborhood in the easternmost part of Berchem. As Volkening explains in 1968 in hindsight, they moved because “Mama did not endure the tremendous noise of the trains, for me so familiar, the atmosphere laden with coal dust and other phenomena that today, in the era of the electric locomotive, are not felt any longer.”<sup>89</sup> In 1911, the family took residence in the Avenue de la Chapelle, or Capellelei as it was called in Flemish.<sup>90</sup> When

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<sup>87</sup> “[E]so mundo de extraños e inquietantes ruidos que en las largas noches de invierno escuchaba el pequeño desde las rejas de su cama, el sordo tronar de los trenes, un crujir de fierros, el ratatán, ratatán, ratatán de las ruedas, los lánguidos silbidos de una locomotora que, poco a poco se iban perdiendo en lontananza y hacían que se crispaba el corazón dulcemente atormentado por la voluptuosidad y la angustia.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 147.

<sup>88</sup> Volkening, “Amberes I,” 140.

<sup>89</sup> “[M]amá no aguantaba el ruido tremendo, para mí tan familiar, de los trenes, la atmósfera cargada de polvo de carbón y otros fenómenos que hoy, en la época de la locomoción electrificada, han dejado de hacerse sentir.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 149.

<sup>90</sup> Volkening uses in his writing both, the French and Dutch names of the streets and districts in Antwerp.

Volkening visited the city in 1968, he was however unable to identify the exact house. He explains, “it would be difficult to say which was the house where we lived because I do not remember its number and the houses of the Capellelei with their faces of widows on the eve of their remarriage resembles each other like twins.”<sup>91</sup> Still, Volkening remembers that it was close to a convent, a memory that accentuates the catholic influence that must have been perceptible, too, in the foremost Jewish quarter of Berchem.

It was in that house in the Avenue de la Chapelle where the family would find themselves exposed to a very different kind of noise, caused by the fighting of 1914. The Volkenings must have witnessed there the invasion of the German army into Belgium, and in particular, the siege of Antwerp in September and October of 1914. Thinking of his childhood home, Volkening seems to remember inevitably the First World War. Without addressing reasons and consequences of the war, or mentioning specific scenes he had witnessed as a child, Volkening evokes the memory of warfare by recalling different sensual impressions: the noises of “glaring muzzle flashes,” the vision of “a sea of red flames, blue ones,” and the “sulfor that once inhaled would not leave the lungs until one asphyxiated crying for salvation.”<sup>92</sup>

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<sup>91</sup> “[M]e sería difícil decir cuál fuera la casa en que vivíamos porque no recuerdo el número, y las casas de la Capellelei con sus caras de viuda en víspera de segundas nupcias se parecen como mellizas.” Volkening, “Amberes II,” 237.

<sup>92</sup> “[F]ongonazo deslumbrante, un mar de llamas rojas, azules, sulfúreas que se lo hubiera tragado entero de no haber salido de sus pulmones a punto de ahogarse el alarido salvador.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 148.

## 2.1. *Joods Antwerpen*

First mentioned in 1261, Antwerpian Jews experienced until the French Revolution repeated harassment, but lived since then freely in the city. In addition to the old-established Jewish community tracing back to this first group, others arrived from the Spanish peninsular in the early sixteenth century, finding in the city a refuge from pogroms and persecution. The late nineteenth century saw then an immigration wave of Eastern European Jews who left their homes in Southern Russia in the aftermath of the pogroms between 1881 and 1884, or fell victim to the expulsions of Jews from Kiev in 1886 and most notably from Moscow in 1891. Consequently, the number of Jews in Antwerp rose from 151 in 1829 to 8,000 in 1900, further to 25,000 in 1913, and amounted to approximately 55,000 in 1939.<sup>93</sup> These Eastern European Jews, many of whom ultra-orthodox Haredi, settled around Antwerp's central railroad station in Berchem, the area of the town in which the Volkenings lived. Berchem was thus commonly referred to as *Joods Antwerpen* (Jewish Antwerp).

As mentioned above, members of the Jewish population came to run enterprises that accounted for an important part of the local economy; in particular, many Jewish merchants engaged in the lucrative diamond trade, for which Antwerp was internationally renowned. As an adult, Volkening associated Antwerp's Jewry of the early twentieth century with great wealth, piety, and the skills for elaborate artisanship. In his 1969 essay, "Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro" (Antwerp, reencounter with a city and a face), about his journey to Antwerp in the previous year, he addressed the

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<sup>93</sup> Cecil Roth, *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 3 (Jerusalem: Keter, 1972), 167.

absence of familiar shops and people in Berchem by evoking once more his childhood memories:

[There were] the little shops in whose windows once the venerable biblical texts were displayed, the profiles of rabbies and of pale Torah-students were absorbed in thoughts, some of them with the long beard of a prophet, some with a goatee beard and vivid eyes as the ones of *Radek*. So many bent backs, so many vigilant faces of artisans who have learnt their craft in the east, being absorbed in their occupation as diamond cutters and traders, the noble art of working with jewels.<sup>94</sup>

Volkening wrote these lines in 1968/69, at a time of student protests when coming to terms with the Nazi past was a central topic in Germany. By describing his home, for which he yearned with nostalgia, through memories of Jewish shops and the presence of learned Jews as well as a reference to the Jewish communist activist Karl Radek, Volkening positions himself ethnically and politically. Radek was active in the Social Democratic Party in Germany, and became instrumental in the Russian Revolution of 1917; afterwards, he turned into an international communist leader and Party functionary in Russia.<sup>95</sup> The image Volkening seems to identify with by evoking this context stresses his sympathies with the political left and emphasizes his ideological opposition to the National Socialist movement, which he fled in 1933/34.

There is one other, contrapuntal instant in the same essay in which Volkening refers to Berchem's Jewish population, this time by remembering his Jewish childhood friend Alphonse Meyer. The passage stands out by contrasting the earlier image of

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<sup>94</sup> “[Existían] las pequeñas tiendas en cuyas ventanas se destacaban antaño venerables testas bíblicas, perfiles de ensimismados rabinos y pálidos estudiantes de la Thora, unos de luengas barbas de profeta, otros con barba de chivo y ojillos vivaces como los de *Radek*, tantas espaldas corvas, tantos desvelados rostros de judíos del Este hechos artesanos, absortos en su oficio de diamanteros, el nobilísimo arte de la pedrería.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 142.

<sup>95</sup> Karl Radek was later expelled from the Communist Party, and accused of treason in the Great Purge of the 1930s. In 1939, he was killed by the Russian secret police, the NKVD, while serving a 10-year penalty in a Russian labor camp. See, for instance, Warren Lerner, *Karl Radek, the Last Internationalist* (Stanford: Stanford UP, 1970).

modernity, social activism, and politics with the image of a mystical old Jewish woman whose eyes mesmerize Volkening as a young boy and, as if directed by supernatural powers, tempt him to taste unknown dishes. He writes:

That one afternoon in little Alphonse's house was for me an adventure full of mystery and so very exciting, all these things they served us at such occasion, slices of blackish cured meat and chocolate pudding in saffron, instead of the tasteless small and hard biscotti. To speak the truth, I would never in my dreams have agreed to eat in my own home this viscous dish of yellow color of which the devil might know [what it was]. However, when I was at the Meyer's house, in the presence of this old woman with her prophetic bird-eyes that fascinated me, I ate the saffron sweets, the venerable culinary relics, conserved by the Jewish cuisine since the times in which the spices that were traded from Ceylon and from the coast of Malabar were worth a fortune.<sup>96</sup>

Volkening precedes this passage by reporting of his friendship with the Jewish boy, Alphonse Meyer, and with Manfred Schröder, described as a red-headed German. One summer, he reports, the three of them were engaged in transforming part of the Volkening's backyard into an underground cave. Although, "as so many grand projects, the admirable work of subterranean engineering" ultimately failed, as the author candidly admits, the children's friendship became more intimate. As Volkening says, "to the point that we invited each other for snacks."<sup>97</sup> The above-quoted event took place during that summer when Alphonse invited his playmates to his house. From the distance of sixty years, and with the judgment of an adult, Volkening narrates his first tasting of meat and sweets prepared according to traditional Jewish recipes. The dishes exert an irresistible

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<sup>96</sup> "Esa tarde en la casa de Alfonsito fue para mí una aventura llena de misterio y tanto más excitante, cuanto en vez de los insulsos bizcochitos de rigor en tales ocasiones nos sirvieron tajadas de negruzca carne ahumada y pudín de chocolate en azafrán. A decir verdad, ni por soñación hubiera accedido a ingerir en mi propio hogar esa sala espesa de color amarillo que sabía a demonio, pero donde los Meyer y en presencia de aquella anciana con sus ojos de ave profética me fascinaba hasta el dulce azafranado, venerable reliquia culinaria, conservado por la cocina judía desde los tiempos en que valían un potosí las especias traídas de Ceilán y de la costa de Malabar." Volkening, "Amberes I," 146.

<sup>97</sup> "[C]omo tantos grandes proyectos, esa admirable obra de ingeniería subterránea," and "hasta tal punto que nos invitábamos mutuamente a merienda." Volkening, "Amberes I," 146.



attraction on him due to their unfamiliarity. The cured meat and chocolate pudding in saffron represent for the young child an almost unimaginable variation to the hard crackers he was used to eat at his home, and his first reaction is mixed with repulsion. The presence of Alphonse grandmother, painted in mythical terms as a prophetic old woman, prompts Volkening then to overcome his hesitations and to eat the food over which she watches with her mystifying eyes. This early encounter with a foreign culture lingered in Volkening's memories throughout his life. We may consider it a key experience of Volkening who would spend most of his life in close proximity to foreign cultures. As we know, in Colombian exile, mediating between his culture of origin and the culture of his surrounding became his passion and profession.

The passage illustrates furthermore a seminal characteristic of all of Volkening's autobiographical texts: a merging of the child's experience with the adult's interpretation. The present speaker is thus on several levels — regarding, for instance, his historical knowledge, the awareness of speaking for an audience, and the faculty of reflection, not identically with the experiencing subject of the past. Yet, this passage contains essential information not only about Volkening's childhood, but also about himself later in life. For instance, we perceive of his pride, at the time of writing, in his early partaking in an unfamiliar culture, which is underlined by the prominent placing of the passage within the travel report. Moments like this allow us to gain a very different understanding of Volkening's personality and life from the one to which a mere focus on year dates and numbers of publications would lead us. However, they also represent a means through which Volkening created his public image. Some "editing" of his life in form of hardly discernable alterations of his recollections and retrospect interpretation of their

significance might have occurred, whether consciously or on an unconscious level. I do not consider such potential and hardly verifiable unreliability of Volkening's writing insignificant. However, I believe that even if he idealized his childhood through alternating the representation of his recollections, and if he set the accent marks in these passages consciously (as we may assume he did), the resulting narratives still illuminate Volkening's persona. Autobiographical moments emerge in his writing when it touches upon identity-constitutive events.<sup>98</sup> As Michaela Holdenried argues, fiction helps the autobiographer to sound out key areas of his identity and to bring them to consciousness.<sup>99</sup> From this perspective, we may suggest that if any fictive "contamination" of Volkening's recollections occurred, it might have contributed to bringing out the decisive aspects for understanding his life and personality.

Certainly, as above passage vividly conveys, Volkening grew up among a variety of cultures, religions, nationalities, and languages in Antwerp. His own family was steeped in the Lutheran-Protestant faith. They were multilingual: besides German, they spoke French and Flemish. The father, like Volkening himself later, spoke also fluent Spanish.

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<sup>98</sup> Not only seems a close reading of Volkening's work suggest so. I also subscribe to Barros's postulate that transformation is a fundamental quality of autobiographic writings; for her it is key that, "as a text of a life, autobiography presents the 'before' and 'after' of individuals who have undergone transformations of some kind." Barros, 1.

<sup>99</sup> Michaela Holdenried, *Autobiographie* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2000), 41.

## 2.2. Linguistic Hierarchies, Fruitful Hybridity

The Kingdom of Belgium has been historically bilingual, with additional German-language enclaves in the French and Flemish-speaking areas.<sup>100</sup> At the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, however, as Volkening also indicates, languages revealed the social class of their speakers:

During the Leopoldean era until well into the twentieth century, everything Flemish was synonymous with the plebeian, and those who did not speak anything but their native tongue [...] demonstrated for this very fact their class inferiority, likewise inversely, everything Frenchified was, in the understanding of the locals, the bourgeois by antonomasia.<sup>101</sup>

Volkening refers here to King Leopold II's reign between 1865 and 1909, which was for Belgium on the one side a period of brutal colonialization of the present-day Democratic Republic of the Congo; on the other, it brought social reforms, promoted the arts through private and public commissions and the foundation of museums, and saw an unprecedented flourishing of international trading opportunities resulting in an economic boom. Two World's Fairs were held in short succession in Belgium: in 1894 in Antwerp, and three years later in Brussels. The French-speaking, increasingly wealthy bourgeoisie sought further distinction from lower classes, which resulted in an intensification of the language conflict between French and Flemish speakers, and among others, in the construction of a new district of fashionable fin-de-siècle style townhouses that translated class- and language-demarcations into Antwerp's cityscape. The district, called

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<sup>100</sup> As late as 1970, German became the third constitutionally recognized language besides the long-established French (since the country's independence in 1830) and Flemish, which was recognized as a constitutional language in 1967.

<sup>101</sup> "En la era leopoldina [1865 – 1909], hasta bien entrado el siglo veinte, lo flamenco fue sinónimo de lo plebeyo, y los que no hablaban sino su lengua nativa [...] por eso mismo demostraban su inferioridad de clase, como a la inversa, el afrancesado era, al entender de los autóctonos, el burgués por antonomasia." Volkening, "Amberes I," 153.

Zurenborg, borders on the eastern part of the so-called *Joods Antwerpen*, close to where the Volkenings lived after moving from Rue Stanley to the Avenue de la Chapelle. Reading Jeroen Dewulf's article on the German-speaking community in Belgium, we might think of these stately houses when he cites a common saying of the time. Attesting to the rigid, linguistically reinforced social hierarchy that Volkening notes, too, it postulates "French in the parlor, Flemish dialect in the kitchen."<sup>102</sup> Despite being considered little prestigious, Flemish became in 1866 an administrative language in Volkening's hometown, which made Antwerp the first city in Belgium taking this step.<sup>103</sup> The prestige of German rose only after France's defeat by German troops in 1870 and the proclamation of the German Empire in 1871 when the status of French was unhinged. "Bierhallen" (beer halls) and "Weinstuben" (wine taverns) became celebrated localities in Belgian cities. Dewulf describes how French, formerly representing progress and social refinement, came to be considered outmoded and even decadent.<sup>104</sup> Volkening says about his own linguistic belongings, "I spoke the vernacular with the same effortlessness as my mother tongue."<sup>105</sup> As a child, he learnt Flemish from his nanny Lisa, a motherly figure

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<sup>102</sup> Jeroen Dewulf, "*O liebes Land, o Belgiens Erde: The Development of the German-Speaking Community in Belgium Reflected in the Light of the Flemish Struggle for Autonomy*," *German Studies Review* 32:1 (2009): 65-81, here: 68.

<sup>103</sup> Dewulf, 69-70. Flemish is the national variety of Dutch spoken in Belgium.

<sup>104</sup> Dewulf, 68-69.

<sup>105</sup> "Yo [que] hablaba vernáculo con las misma facilidad que la lengua de mi madre." Volkening, "Extramuros," *Eco* 22:131-132 (1971): 531-535, here: 533. The essay "Extramuros" is an extended monolog by a character called Lodovico who talks about his childhood, using thereby the first person singular. Lodovico's monolog is only interrupted by a few, brief remarks of an auctorial narrator. Volkening speaks through the figure like a ventriloquist, and comments simultaneously on his own narrative through the voice of the auctorial narrator. The fictional character Lodovico is an alter ego figure that appears in several of Volkening's essays such as in the essay about Antwerp that renders Volkening's trip to his city of birth, and in the essay collection *Los paseos de Lodovico*. The Colombian writer and Volkening's close friend Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda notes that the Lodovico's character presents one of Volkening's best literary incarnations. Cobo Borda, "Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario," *Eco* 53:262 (1983): 337-343, here: 341.

who cared for him, which likens the status of Flemish to that of a second mother tongue.<sup>106</sup> He remembers learning Flemish, his partaking in an unfamiliar culture, the same way he remembered his encounter with Antwerpian Jewry. It is in connection with a dear person and some traditional food:

[The] old Lisa, my guardian angel with raucous voice, taught me her language [...] and she made me try my first plate of boiled mussels in dill sauce that she prepared herself according to her own very old recipe.<sup>107</sup>

When Volkening was seven years old, he began to formally study French and Flemish in his German elementary school, the *Allgemeine Deutsche Schule*, in Antwerp. We also know that he took up studying Spanish between 1927 and 1933, while living in Germany and working on his university degree in Law.

Volkening thought of languages as essential for Antwerp's fertile cultural hybridism that emerged during the decades after Belgium's independence in 1830. With quasi-patriotic pride, Volkening refers to the Belgium Revolution that took place in that year in Brussels, leading to the secession of the Netherland's southern provinces and the foundation of the Kingdom of Belgium, a constitutional monarchy, as the "triumph of the fathers."<sup>108</sup> It found its expression in the following decades in Art Nouveau architecture of the European Belle Époque, which private investors as well as Leopold II, known as the "Builder King," advanced in Brussels, Antwerp, and Ostend. A well-known example of it in Antwerp, besides the Zurenborg district, is the central railroad station. Volkening, spending extensive time in that area of the city, argues that the architecture attracted him

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<sup>106</sup> Volkening, "Amberes I," 151-152.

<sup>107</sup> "[La] vieja Lisa, mi ángel tutelar de ronca voz, me enseñó su lengua [...] y me hizo probar el primer plato de almejas del Escalda en salsa de eneldo preparada por ella misma, según su propia antiquísima receta." Volkening, "Amberes I," 152.

<sup>108</sup> Volkening, "Amberes I," 151.

not only because it evoked these past days of childhood but also because of being a true expression of that short-lived albeit well-exuberant hybridism whose language was French spoken with Flemish accent and of which I cannot think without experiencing anew the rare fascination that the signs at streets and places exerted on the boy.<sup>109</sup>

Antwerp's cultural height, this "short-lived albeit well-exuberant hybridism" during the Belle Époque was the world in which Volkening was rooted. The dates he uses to define the period exceed the conventional periodization of the Belle Époque from 1870 to 1914. Volkening rather considers the entire first century after Belgium's independence as a period of cultural flourishing without accounting for the First World War as the original catastrophe in European history. The end of the period, as defined by Volkening, is marked by the death of King Albert I in 1934 and the beginning of the Third Reich in the neighboring Germany in 1933.<sup>110</sup> Volkening associates it with "this fascinating cultural symbiosis" in which different tongues and cultures of "Burgundians, Spaniards, [and] Frenchmen" co-existed in relative peace even though, in his words, "most often not very comfortably, comparable to badly married couples but thus it was not any less fertile."<sup>111</sup> Antwerp's linguistic, cultural, religious, and ethnic diversity proved to be a fertile ground for developing a cosmopolitan mindset.

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<sup>109</sup> "[N]o sólo porque evocaba los días idas de la infancia, sino también por ser fiel expresión de aquel hibridismo de breve, si bien exuberante florecimiento cuyo idioma era el francés hablado con acento flamenco y de lo cual no puedo acordarme sin experimentar de nuevo la rara fascinación que sobre el niño ejercían hasta los letreros de calles y plazas." Volkening, "Amberes I," 151.

<sup>110</sup> Volkening, "Amberes I," 151-152.

<sup>111</sup> "[E]sa fascinante simbiosis cultural [...] borgoñones, españoles y franceses [...] las más de las veces poco grata, como entre malcasados, pero no por eso menos fecunda." Volkening, "Amberes I," 152.

### 2.3. The Onset of the First World War

The socio-political dynamics of Antwerp changed dramatically with the German invasion that marked the beginning of the First World War. On August 4, 1914, the German army, following the Schlieffen Plan, invaded the neutral Belgium in an attempt to open a passage into France. While Volkening speculates in retrospect “my countrymen held so naïvely on to their idea that they could win the sympathies of the Flemish in the war of fourteen,” the actual situation turned out to be far different.<sup>112</sup> As he continues in his essay of 1969, “there was nothing of this kind; the complete opposite, these die-hard Flemings, far from doing what the Germans had imagined, fought bravely for the case of their beloved King Albert.”<sup>113</sup> Belgium’s army was unable to stop the invader and withdrew on August 20, 1914, to the so-called “Fort of Antwerp,” a number of fortifications and defense positions around the city. Soon, the Belgian army, avoiding encirclement, had to retreat once more leaving the city under siege to its fate. On October 10, Antwerp capitulated and remained for the rest of the war under German occupation. As Larry Zuckerman recently argued, German troops committed war crimes throughout eastern and central Belgium between August and September of 1914. Zuckerman terms in this period as “The Rape of Belgium,” using a phrase that was first coined by British war propaganda. It has been substantiated that the former propaganda phrase encapsulates

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<sup>112</sup> “[M]is paisanos [fueron] tan candorosamente aferrados a su idea de poder ganarse las simpatías de los flamencos en la guerra del catorce.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 154.

<sup>113</sup> “No hubo tal; todo lo contrario, esos flamencos de dura testa, lejos de hacerles caso se batieron bravamente por la causa de su querido rey Alberto.” Literally, “lejos de hacerles caso” means “far from following their [the Germans’] guidelines,” which I rendered as “far from doing what the Germans had imagined.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 154.

indeed the actual violence, rape and plundering that the Belgian civil population suffered through German soldiers.<sup>114</sup>

It was from then on that the country's population was divided into oppressors and oppressed. Likely, German families such as the Volkenings encountered hostilities from their Belgian neighbors. Volkening narrates the events in his 1969-essay on Antwerp through two distinct, but interwoven memories. Indicating tensions among the residents, Volkening recalls the image of one of his teachers at the *Allgemeine deutsche Schule* in Berchem's Quellin Straat. The memory of that Belgian teacher, he claims, has stayed in his mind for her air of silent suffering. Volkening believes that "the red-haired and fine Mademoiselle van den Brand," as he refers to her, "bore tacitly the pain of having to teach the sons of the invader."<sup>115</sup> His retrospective interpretation of the teacher's melancholic appearance as suffering acknowledges the anguish among Belgian citizens during the German occupation. He expresses empathy for her and by proxy for the occupied country. Together with this recollection, another, contrapuntal memory about his German teacher surfaces: Volkening recalls that Fräulein Coupette mistakenly held him responsible when the classroom was once in great disorder. He remembers, "Fräulein *Coupette* mistook me for the culprit and gave me a slap in my face in the best Prussian style."<sup>116</sup> Regardless of the teacher's actual nationality, it is noteworthy that Volkening links the unjust physical punishment he receives from her to being not only typical

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<sup>114</sup> See Larry Zuckerman, *The Rape of Belgium: The Untold Story of World War I* (New York: New York UP, 2004).

<sup>115</sup> "La pelirroja y fina Mademoiselle van den Brand, rumiando en silencio la pena de tener que enseñar a los hijos del invasor." Volkening, "Amberes I," 131.

<sup>116</sup> "Fräulein *Coupette* equivocándose de culpable al propinarme un bofetón de la mejor factura prusiana." Volkening, "Amberes I," 131.



German, but moreover Prussian. Since the founding of the first German Empire in 1871, Prussia has been leading in the organization of the German military. The reader might thus associate Fräulein Coupette's pedagogical style with military drill and the so-called Prussian virtues including strict discipline and obedience, but also interpret the passage as a statement concerning Belgium's occupation by German military. Volkening's juxtaposition of this memory with the one of his French teacher could be interpreted as an implicit judgment of the German invasion into Belgium as an act of unjustified violence against a peaceful nation.

The Volkenings left Antwerp two years after the outbreak of the First World War when Ernst Volkening was drafted, at the age of forty-one, to serve in the German army. Then, in 1916, German military needed to compensate for the high losses suffered during the Battle of Verdun and the Battle of the Somme by enlisting men like Volkening's father who were initially not required to fight due to age, their marital status, or for residing outside Germany. Hildegard Volkening moved in the same year with her son to Worms where they stayed with her parents. Volkening does not comment on the reasons for this decision, but possible motives include economic considerations, or that the Volkenings might have considered it safer for Ernesto and his mother to live with family members in Germany, relatively remote from military movements, instead of remaining alone in the occupied city. The move of the eight-year-old Volkening to Worms on the Rhine River was the first of many more to come. Of his hometown Antwerp, he created later, during years of exile in Colombia, an idealized image. Volkening cherished Antwerp as the city of his childhood and as what he regarded to be his irretrievably lost *Heimat* (home).

### 3. Appropriating German Culture: Boyhood and Education (1916-1927)

From 1916 on, Volkening spent the following seventeen years in Germany. Diary entries written during the last three decades of his life, in particular between 1953 and 1977, suggest that Volkening considered these years crucial for forming a concept about Germany and its culture. As I will show, it was the places and people he knew then he would remember in exile. His perception of German history and culture was shaped by his critical engagement with contemporary and classical German literature. As a student at different German universities, he became involved identifying with the political left. He considered himself an *homme engagé* “in the sense the political left uses to attribute to the term.”<sup>117</sup> By the end of 1933, Volkening left Germany to escape persecution due to his opposition to the rise of Hitler’s Nazi regime.

While Volkening’s father fought in the German army, the eight-year-old boy stayed with his mother in the house of his grandparents Mach at the outskirts of Worms. There, starting in fall of 1916, he finished the first two years at high school, in German called the *Gymnasium*. He developed a deep attachment to Worms, which, as one of the oldest cities in Germany, is replete with history. Looking back, the thought of its recent history evoke in him, so he writes, the same “old, lasting sadness that felt the boy of twelve years.”<sup>118</sup> These words, noted in his diary on April 8, 1960, open a passage in which Volkening recalls several destructive events that occurred in Worms. He emphasizes in particular the fire of Worms instigated by the French General Mélac in 1689, the destruction of the oldest existing synagogue in Germany, the Rashi Synagogue,

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<sup>117</sup> “[Fui homme engagé] en el sentido que la izquierda suele atribuir al término.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 463.

<sup>118</sup> “[La] vieja, perenne tristeza que sentía el muchacho de doce años.” Volkening, “Res publica,” 70.

during the November Pogrom of 1938, and the bombardment of Worms in February of 1945 through the British Royal Air Force, during which most of the historic inner city was lost to conflagration. Volkening claims that his reflections of the events and the accompanying sadness as well as “hours of insomnia” and “tremor in hellish depths” were set off by “reading the commentary of Friedrich Maria Illert to a beautiful book of photographs of Worms that Mama gave me for my birthday.”<sup>119</sup> Leafing through this illustrated book by the archivist and historian Illert made him “think of so much beauty and so many rarities that, in the course of centuries, went to the devil in this strange and unfortunate city.”<sup>120</sup> To better understand this obscure statement, I will engage some of the physical and figurative places of remembrance associate with Worms. Those historical and cultural *Erinnerungsorte*, in the sense in which Étienne François coined the term, are the Jewish community of Worms, the Imperial Cathedral, the Diet of Worms in 1521 and the Luther Memorial of 1868, Worms as a *Nibelungenstadt*, and the devastation of the city during the Second World War.<sup>121</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> “[H]oras de insomnia,” “un temblor en aquerónicas profundidades,” “[Acabo de] leer el comentario de Friedrich [sic] M. Illert al hermoso libro de fotografías de Worms que me regaló mamá con ocasión de mi cumpleaños.” Volkening, *Res publica*, 70.

Friedrich M. Illert, the head of the Worms city museum and archive, published from 1922 to his death in 1966 a number of books about the city, its cathedral, and the legends about Worms, of which several were reprinted posthumously. To which of these books Volkening refers cannot be substantiated, nor is it clear to which birthday Volkening received it as a gift from his mother. Given that it must have been published before April 1960, the date of Volkening’s diary entry, and that it contained photographs, I assume that it was a copy of one of the following two works: Friedrich Maria Illert, *Worms am Rhein: Führer durch die Geschichte und Sehenswürdigkeiten der Stadt. Offizieller Führer des Verkehrsvereins, Worms e. V.* (Worms: Norberg, 1956); or —, *Worms im wechselnden Spiel der Jahrtausende. Mit Planskizzen und 96 Abbildungen, aufgenommen von Curt Füller* (Worms: Norberg, 1957).

<sup>120</sup> “[P]ensaba en tanta hermosura y tanta rareza que al correr de los siglos se fue al diablo en esa extraña e infortunada urbe.” Volkening, “Res publica,” 71.

<sup>121</sup> Surprisingly, only one entry in Étienne François and Hagen Schulze’s three volume edition of *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, first published in 2001 (Munich: C. H. Beck), relates to above mentioned *Erinnerungsorte* in Worms, namely “Das Nibelungenlied” by Peter Wapnewki in volume 1.

### 3.1. Worms: *Erinnerungsorte* and Memories

Since the Middle Ages, Worms had a considerable Jewish community that greatly shaped the town's economic and social life. The religious service of the entire Rhineland was then regulated by a powerful "Bishop of the Jews" in Worms, a title and position that existed as such uniquely in that region and in some parts of England. Around 1100, Emperor Henry IV. granted special protection and privileges to the Jewish community including independence from royal and Episcopal jurisdiction and favorable tax regulations. While Jews already lived in a separate quarters, they enjoyed relative safety in comparison to later times. An attack by the first crusaders in 1096 seemed to have been the first recorded violence against Worms Jewry and resulted in about 800 deaths. A latent, or not so latent, anti-Semitism, as part of Western culture, spurred the aggressions. The Rashi Synagogue, first erected in 1034, was four times during its history almost completely destroyed: in 1096 through crusaders and a rampaging mob, in 1615 through a campaign of the city magistracy under Dr. Chemnitz, in 1698 through an incendiary attack by the French General M elac, and in the November Pogrom of 1938 through Nazis. Likewise, it came to pogroms in 1349, in the wake of the plague, and in 1615 when Jews were forced to leave the city and their cemetery and synagogue were demolished. In 1698, the troops of Louis XIV, led by General M elac set first the *Judengasse* in Worms on fire,<sup>122</sup> before burning down most of the remaining city. Volkening describes this latter event in his diary with the euphemism of "the disgrace of 1689."<sup>123</sup> He argues that "the blame of all this lay with the French under the commando

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<sup>122</sup> "Judengasse," in English "Jewish lane," is a common street name in German-speaking areas referring to the streets' first inhabitants as members of the Jewish faith.

<sup>123</sup> Volkening, "Res publica," 71.

of the execrable Mélac.” Notably, however, Volkening modified his initial judgment by explaining that “[Mélac], in the end, had not done anything more than to obey orders, like a good soldier.”<sup>124</sup> Volkening does not address anti-Semitism in his writing, nor does he discuss the circumstances that led to Mélac’s attack during the War of the Palatine Succession between France and the so-called Grand Alliance of European powers. On the contrary, he depicts Germans, here the citizens of Worms, as the victims of French aggression, and shares for the most part the great silence about German anti-Semitism. As far as the history of Worms’s Jewry is concerned, it is significant to note that despite recurring anti-Semitic flare-ups, in 1848, Ferdinand Eberstadt, a Jewish citizen and leader of the liberal movement was elected Mayor, which made him the first Jewish person holding the mayoralty in Germany. About two decades later, the constitution of the newly formed German Empire formally eliminated discrimination against Jewish citizens regarding marriage, occupation (except for exclusion from positions in the government), residency, and property ownership. However, in the Weimar Republic, after a lost war, anti-Semitic feelings aggravated once more. With the Nazis in power, Worms’s Jewish community would be nearly exterminated over the course of twelve years. During the so-called “*Kristallnacht*” (Night of Broken Glass) in November 1938, the Rashi Synagogue was burned down, Jewish citizens were publicly humiliated and suffered physical violence, their possessions were destroyed, businesses and apartments devastated, several

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<sup>124</sup> “[L]a culpa de todo la tendrían los franceses bajo el mando del execrable Mélac que, al fin y al cabo, no ha hecho más que obedecer órdenes, como buen soldado.” Volkening, “Res publica,” 71.

were arrested and deported to the concentration camp Buchenwald, and the residents of a Jewish nursing home were “gravely tormented.”<sup>125</sup> Volkening comments:

It might be childish but it is the pure truth: I still have not stomached all this infamy, even less what was about to come in 1938, no more: The destruction of the romantic Old Synagogue through the Nazis. Who did not conform to putting it on fire (like the French) but brought the demolishing fury to the extreme of destroying the walls red sandstone with oil-hydraulic presses. Thoroughgoing, the boars. Finalmente, el 22 de marzo de 1945, el punto sobre la i: las bombas rompedoras de los ingleses. “Worms, a new target, was heavily bombed to-day [sic] bi [sic] the Royal Airs [sic] Force”, dijo la BBC de Londres. Nunca lo olvidaré [...].<sup>126</sup>



Fig. 2: Burning Rashi Synagogue on November 10, 1938

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<sup>125</sup> “[S]chwer drangsalirt.” Gerold Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” in *Geschichte der Stadt Worms*, ed. Gerold Bönner (Stuttgart: Theiss, 2005), 545-606, here: 600.

<sup>126</sup> “Quizás sea infantil, pero es la pura verdad: toda vía [sic] no me he tragado toda esa infamia, ni lo que aun habría de sobrevenir en 1938, no más: la destrucción de la antigua sinagoga romántica por los nazis. Que no se conforman con quemarla (como los franceses), sino llevaron la furia demoledora al extremo de reventar las paredes de arenisca roja con prensas oleohidráulicas. Metódicos, los verracos. Finalmente, el 22 de marzo de 1945, el punto sobre la i: las bombas rompedoras de los ingleses. ‘Worms, a new target, was heavily bombed to-day [sic] bi [sic] the Royal Airs [sic] Force’, dijo la BBC de Londres. Nunca lo olvidaré.” Volkening, “Res publica,” 71.



Fig. 3: View of the destroyed city of Worms and its Cathedral of St. Peter (July 6, 1945)

Volkening thinks about the architectural damage done to the city and laments from this perspective the seemingly irretrievable damage to the synagogue through the Nazis.<sup>127</sup> Underlining the meticulousness with which the destruction was executed, Volkening points at the use of hydraulic pumps to demolish the parts of the synagogue that survived the fire. In stark contrast to the attention to the mechanical detail regarding the destruction of a building, the human suffering caused by the Nazis remains, at least in

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<sup>127</sup> The destroyed Rashi Synagogue was rebuilt between 1958 and 1961, whereby its original stones were used as much as it was possible.

this specific record, unmentioned. The date of the British air raid that he then cites is actually incorrect. Worms has been bombed by the Royal Air Force on February 21, 1945, and on March 18 of that year. It seems likely that the first air strike, which was also the more destructive, was the one that Volkening refers to since he remembers it obviously as an event that was not only very disturbing to him, but had also seemed virtually unimaginable until that day. The attack destroyed large residential areas, and “nearly all cultural monuments and numerous churches,” killing 239 people and leaving thousands homeless.<sup>128</sup> As Volkening likely knew, by the end of the war, two thirds of Worms lay in ruins.<sup>129</sup>

Volkening’s limited focus on the architectural damage rather avoids an engagement with the Shoah and the Third Reich. By mourning Worms’s destroyed buildings, he eschews engaging with the human toll of the events, and circumvents the question of German guilt. Referring to the destruction of buildings as the great “infamy,” and moreover, to the destruction of the historical inner city through the Royal Air Force as the purported height of it, exonerates the Germans by implication. It casts the German population as victims instead of shedding light on their role as the perpetrators of genocide and the aggressors of a world war. Of the more than 1,100 Jews living in Worms in 1932,<sup>130</sup> only 316 remained in the city until May of 1939.<sup>131</sup> About 170 known

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<sup>128</sup> Gerold Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 605.

<sup>129</sup> Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 605.

<sup>130</sup> Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 598.

<sup>131</sup> Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 599.



members of the Worms's Jewish community were deported on September 27 – 30, 1942, “in front of everybody and in broad daylight,” as Gerold Bönner writes.<sup>132</sup> Finally, from 1942 to 1945, 186 Jews who still lived in so-called “mixed marriages” in Worms were deported and all but six of them brutally killed in the Shoah.<sup>133</sup> We may assume that most of them perished during the Shoah. Evaluating this passage and its omissions, we should bear in mind that Volkering writes these lines in 1960: before the Eichmann-trial in Jerusalem (1961-1962), before the Auschwitz-trials in Frankfurt (1963-1968), and before *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (coming to terms with the past) has become a central issue of the politics of the day in Germany. — Margarete and Alexander Mitscherlich's 1967 publication of *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, and the 1968 student protest movement being just two instances that mark a slowly changing attitude in public discourse in the years to come.<sup>134</sup> At the time, in 1960, Volkering did not stand isolated by choosing silence over naming and engaging with the atrocities in German history, the attempted extermination of European Jews and the Second World War. Still, he refrained in his writing from any direct discussion of these topics and does not address the complicity of Germans with Nazi crimes for reasons that he, to the best of my knowledge, never discusses.

Another seminal Worms *Erinnerungsort*, which was also subject to the air raids, is the city's *Kaiserdom*, the Imperial Cathedral of St. Peter. It was mostly constructed between 1130 and 1181, a period marked by great prosperity. Over the centuries, the

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<sup>132</sup> “[V]or aller Augen und am helllichten Tag.” Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 600.

<sup>133</sup> Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 601.

<sup>134</sup> Alexander Mitscherlich and Margarete Mitscherlich, *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern. Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* (Munich: Piper, 1967). In 1975, the book was first published in English as *The Inability to Mourn: Principles of Collective Behavior* by the Grove Press in New York.

cathedral saw innumerable renovations, additions, and changes in its interior. These were frequently effected in the aftermath of belligerent attacks that brought destruction to the cathedral as during the War of the Palatine Succession (1688-1697) when French troops ravaged in Worms and burnt down the complete interior of the cathedral, and the incursion of French revolutionary troops in 1792. Toward the end of the Second World War, the cathedral was set afire in the same British air raid that destroyed the synagogue. Volkening, referring to Illert's text, points out that "by a hair [...], they would have demolished the cathedral."<sup>135</sup> Again, he notes the destruction of the building without mentioning of context, causes, and consequences. Moreover, Volkening divides through his formulation the different parties into a "they" and an unspoken "we," falling thereby into a polarization typical for highly emotional and polemic speech. He refrains from further discussing the topic and allows thus for the view that the Royal Air Force, not the Germans, would have been the (only) ones who acted in an ethically questionable manner.

Other events decisive in German history are also remembered today when one thinks of the *Kaiserdom* in Worms. There, Leo IX. was elected Pope in 1048 — being the only pontiff elected in the area of present-day Germany. The Concordat of Worms in 1122 resolved the Investiture Controversy. Furthermore, Worms carries special meaning for Lutheran Protestants who came to present historically the largest religious group in Germany. In 1521, Martin Luther appeared before the Diet of Worms and was ousted from the secular and cleric community, marking the beginning of the schism between

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<sup>135</sup> "Por un pelo [...], hubieron demolido hasta la catedral." Volkening, "Res publica," 71.

Catholic and Protestant churches. Consequently, the cathedral and Catholicism in the Worms region declined in their importance.

A Luther monument was erected in the city in 1868, constituting an influential, identity-constituting *Erinnurungsort* of the German nation. The statue of Luther framed by figures of the most important people for the German Reformation is worldwide the largest of its kind. Following François, monuments like this one intended to bestow the term *Kulturnation* (cultural nation) with concrete form and meaning. This specific monument, designed by Ernst Rietschel, was seen as a manifestation of the pursuit of national unification that would find its realization three years later in the proclamation of a German nation state. The monument's location near the Rhine River, historically considered a natural border to France, indicated real and potential conflicts with the neighboring nation. Thomas Nipperdey contended that the statue of a "free man on the free German Rhine" became a "Protestant-Prussian and in addition to that a monarchical endowed monument."<sup>136</sup>

I would like to conclude the portrayal of the *Erinnerungsorte* of Volkening's second hometown by looking at Worms's significance as a *Nibelungenstadt*, a city central in the *Song of the Nibelungs*.<sup>137</sup> The *Song of the Nibelungs*, the primordial tale of German nationalism, was an identity-establishing artwork from the time of oppression through Napoleon's despotism on, and then with special emphasis also during the time of

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<sup>136</sup> "Aus dem Standbild eines 'freien Mannes am freien deutschen Rhein' wurde 'ein protestantisch-preußisches und zudem monarchisch gestiftetes Denkmal' (Thomas Nipperdey)." Gérald Chaix, "Die Reformation," in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, vol. 2, ed. Étienne François and Hagen Schulze (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001), 9-19, here: 16.

<sup>137</sup> Parts of the discussion of the *Song of the Nibelungs* is informed by Peter Wapnewki, "Das Nibelungenlied," in *Deutsche Erinnerungsorte*, vol. 1, ed. Étienne François and Hagen Schulze (Munich: C. H. Beck, 2001): 159-169.

the First World War, and later as a means of National Socialist propaganda. It was seen as the first testimony of a genuine Germanic literary tradition. Insight in at least one of the various aspects that suited nationalistic ends gives the concept of *Nibelungentugenden* (virtues of the Nibelungs). Joachim Heinzel describes in his study of the text's reception during the nineteenth and twentieth century the content and implicated nationalistic effect on the reader:

Virtues that appear even more brilliant and manifold by being entangled with the wild features and the sinister forces of revenge, wrath, fierceness, rage and cruel appetite for death, and that leave us, albeit mourning and lamenting also comforted and strengthened, that fill us with surrender in face of the inevitable yet at the same time with courage to speak and act, with pride and trust in the fatherland and the people, with hope for some day's return of German glory and worldwide grandeur.<sup>138</sup>

Playing on the assumption of these *Nibelungentugenden* as typical for the character of the German people, the *Song of the Nibelungs* became a found rankle for nationalistic and National Socialist propaganda. Proverbial became also the *Nibelungentreue*, the unconditional loyalty of the Nibelungs until death. Its weight for constituting German national identity is markedly demonstrated by Chancellor Prince von Bülow's speech in 1909 with which he formally ended the Bosnian Crisis (1908-1909). In this speech, he proclaimed Germany would hold the "*Nibelungentreue*" to the Austro-Hungarian dual monarchy. During the Second World War, the *Nibelungentreue* turned then into a key concept for Nazi-propaganda, and the *Song of the Nibelungs* would be

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<sup>138</sup> "Tugenden, die in der Verschlingung mit den wilden Eigenschaften und düsteren Gewalten der Rache, des Zornes, des Grimmes, der Wuth [*sic*], und der grausen Todeslust, nur noch glänzender und mannigfaltiger erscheinen und uns, zwar trauernd und klagend, doch auch getröstet und gestärkt zurücklassen, uns mit Ergebung in das Unabwendliche, doch zugleich mit Muth [*sic*] zu Wort und That [*sic*], mit Stolz und Vertrauen auf Vaterland und Volk, mit Hoffnung auf dereinstige Wiederkehr Deutscher Glorie und Weltherrlichkeit erfüllen." Joachim Heinzel and Anneliese Waldschmidt, *Das Nibelungenlied. Ein deutscher Wahn, ein deutscher Alptraum. Studien und Dokumente zur Rezeption des Nibelungenstoffs im 19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 141-142.

labeled, among others, as the “Krongut völkischer Erziehung” (crown estate of *völkisch* education), the “Deutsches Tagebuch” (German diary) and the “Hohelied deutscher Heldentreue” (song of German heroic loyalty), attesting to its successful appropriation to nationalistic ends.<sup>139</sup>

One of the key scenes in the *Song of the Nibelungs* is associated with Worms, and is commonly referred to as the *Königinnenstreit*, the argument of the queens. In this scene, the two female protagonists, the queens Brunhild and Kriemhild, fight in front of the cathedral’s portal about the right to enter first, which was dependant upon the contested ranks of their husbands. Volkening includes on November 21, 1968, a brief description and commentary of the passage in his diary. Thereby he identifies the scene in front of Worms’s cathedral as the quintessence of the *Song of the Nibelungs*:

The *punctum saliens and primum movens* of the tragedy of the Nibelungs, one of the kind like our heroic epic of the 12<sup>th</sup> century evokes, has to be about a detail that generations of diligent and prudish German pedagogues feel obliged to obscure to their students (or they did not even make them aware of it for motives of moral inhibition). Here it is: acting on behalf of King Gunther, Siegfried defeated Brunhild, not only in the well-known sports competition but also by possessing her. He enjoyed what was not his own, and thus he became two times guilty. When cuckolding his ruler, it happened, as if that would count only little, in betrayal. (Talking in terms of criminal law: clear case of ideal concurrence). It has to be assumed that under considerations of the regnant relationships of the vassals in the *Song of the Nibelungs*, the second offence weighted heavier than the first one. That is that Kriemhild, the naïve goof, made such a volatile success public in the [course of] the famous argument of the [queens] in front of the door of the cathedral of Worms (in the tone of “what a man, the stud who is my husband!”), which was the last straw.<sup>140</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Wapnewski, 164.

The word “Hohelied” denotes more than song, it is the “song of songs” and is used in the German title of the biblical text “The Song of Solomon.”

<sup>140</sup> Volkening, “Voces alemanes,” *Eco* 38:230 (1980): 118: “El *punctum saliens y primum movens* de la tragedia de los Nibelungos, tal como evoca nuestra gran epopeya del siglo XII, ha de verse en un detalle que generaciones de diligentes y pudibundos pedagogos alemanes se empeñaron en ocultar a sus discípulos (o por motivos de inhibición moral ni siquiera advertían) Hélo aquí: Actuando por encargo y en lugar del rey Gunter, Sigfrido venció a Brunhilda, so sólo en el consabido certamen deportivo, sino también poseyéndola. Disfrutó de lo que no era suyo, y así se hizo dos veces culpable. Al ponerle cuernos a su señor

Volkening chose this account of a key scene of the *Song of the Nibelungs* for publication in the magazine *Eco* in 1980 as part of a palimpsest piece titled “Voces alemanes” (German voices). He draws thereby from the text, which has been central in the constitution of German identity for centuries, as Johann Wolfgang von Goethe expresses famously by postulating that “knowledge of this poem is part of a certain education of the nation. Everybody should read it so that he receives its effect to the extent of his capability.”<sup>141</sup> Volkening’s choice of including a discussion of this primordial tale in his “Voces alemanes” shows that he too subscribed to this tradition. Furthermore, focusing on the *Königinnenstreit*, he puts Worms at the center stage, underlining once more the essential place this city held for him in defining German culture.

### 3.2. Politics

An overview of the principal political tendencies in Worms at the time will further depict the setting in which Volkening lived for several years. The dominant political sentiments might also have rubbed off on the families Volkening and Mach and exerted, to some extent, influence beyond the period that Volkening actually spent there.

In 1914, Worms counted 49,100 inhabitants,<sup>142</sup> and it was, according to the research of

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incurrió, como si fuera poco, en felonía. (Hablando en términos de derecho penal: caso claro de concurso ideal). Cabe suponer que bajo el punto de vista de las relaciones de vasallaje imperantes en la Canción de los Nibelungos, el segundo delito pesaba más que el primero. El que Crimhilda, la insigne boba, diera publicidad a tan picante suceso en la famosa pelea de comadres delante de la puerta de la catedral de Worms (al tono de ‘[i]tan macho el verraco de mi marido!’) fue la gota que hizo rebosar el cántaro.”

<sup>141</sup> “Die Kenntnis dieses Gedichts gehört zu einer Bildungsstufe der Nation. Jedermann sollte es lesen, damit er nach dem Maaß [*sic*] seines Vermögens die Wirkung davon empfangen.” Quoted as in Wapnewski, 169.

<sup>142</sup> Gerold Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 547.

Gerold Bönnen well-known for its nationalist leanings.<sup>143</sup> He argued that since 1871, the creation of the German Empire as a semi-constitutional monarchy under the Hohenzollern Wilhelm I, until some time after WWI that marked its end, a national-liberal and increasingly to the right tending political climate dominated the city. In this context, the most influential local figure and also a member of the *Reichstag*, the German parliament, was the industrialist Cornelius Wilhelm von Heyl zu Herrnsheim. Heyl's political engagement from about 1890 to the end of World War I bestowed upon the area the reputation of being home to a group of overtly *kaisertreu* nationalists, which the seemingly un-political term *Wormser Ecke*, the Corner of Worms, implied.<sup>144</sup> The residence of the family Mach was in vicinity to the house of von Heyl, in the municipality of Herrnsheim where Volkening's grandfather was the last official village scribe.<sup>145</sup> Any political, professional, or private ties between the families are not documented. Also, I have no substantive evidence as to the political standing of Volkening's grandparents and parents.

As an adult, Volkening would distance himself clearly from right-wing politics but show also attraction to the past German monarchy. With some hesitation, he remembers in his diary the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the last German emperor. This note, written on January 27, 1975, is illustrative of Volkening's ambivalence:

Today, he [Wilhelm II] would celebrate his 100<sup>th</sup> birthday...with the years, there came a more human, serene and gentle notion to our relationship, however, it would be a big step to call him Emperor; a step that I will not make. Republican

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<sup>143</sup> Bönnen, "Geschichte der Stadt Worms." Available at [http://www.worms.de/downloads/Kurzueberbl\\_Stadtgesch.pdf](http://www.worms.de/downloads/Kurzueberbl_Stadtgesch.pdf) (accessed August 27, 2009). This online publication is not identical with Bönnen's above cited 2005 edited volume with the same title.

<sup>144</sup> Bönnen, "Geschichte der Stadt Worms" (online publication).

<sup>145</sup> Volkening, "Curriculum Vitae," in *Los paseos de Lodovico*, IX.

modesty? —Nothing of that kind. My reserved attitude, or, differently put, adapted courtesy, is to be explained simply by the fact that neither the foundation of the Second Reich, nor Wilhelm of Prussia's proclamation to Emperor in Versailles were convincing to me.<sup>146</sup>

After having lived for more than forty in Colombia, and almost sixty years after Wilhelm II abdicated, Volkening remembers the 100<sup>th</sup> birthday of the last German emperor. He neither identifies with him, nor does he seem to resent him; on the contrary, he describes the manner in which he came to relate to Wilhelm II as “more human, serene and gentle,” indicating resolved tensions of the past. As a Marxist in his youth and a left-leaning intellectual later in life, Volkening disagreed fundamentally with the institution of the monarchy and his highest representative, but not with the individual. To the private person of Wilhelm II, he pays due respect, but Volkening clarifies that he would not show him the deference to address him by his former title of Emperor. He disagrees with the so-called Second Reich from 1871 to 1918 for reasons he does not further discuss beyond commenting that the foundational acts were not convincing to him. It is noteworthy that this passage is included in his publication of multiple diary excerpts organized under the unifying theme and title, “Res publica” (“public affair” or, more to the point, a “matter concerning the public and/or the state”) and published in *Eco*. Did Volkening pay tribute to an older generation among some of his readers in the German emigrant community in Colombia, people who indeed might have felt nostalgia for the former Emperor Wilhelm II? *Eco* never addressed politics in its articles, nor did Volkening; hence, the brief reference to the past German monarchy remains a curious

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<sup>146</sup> Volkening, “Res publica,” *Eco* 45:241 (1981): 70: “Hoy cumpliría 100 años...con los años han venido tomando nuestras relaciones un cariz más humano, sereno y apacible, pero de ahí a llamarlo Emperador hay un gran paso que no voy a dar. ¿Pudor republicano? —Nada de eso. Mi actitud de reserve o, pongámoslo así, de cortesía atemperada, se explica, simplemente, por el hecho de que ni la fundación del Segundo Reich, ni Guillermo de Prusia proclamado Emperador en Versalles me convencen.”



detail somewhat out of context, in the midst of commentaries on literature. Volkening's personal memories of the German Empire were likely too liminal, given that he was only ten when Wilhelm II was forced to abdicate, to entirely account for his commemoration of the specific date. Yet, this passage is revelatory in respect to Volkening's general approach to historical and political matters. With keen interest, he wrote on topics of European history predating the two world wars. We find among his essays texts dealing with historic figures like the Emperor Wilhelm II, Emperor Karl V (Charles I of Spain), or King Philip II of Spain. However, discussions of more recent history such as the Third Reich and the Shoah and of the politics in Germany or Colombia are almost entirely absent.<sup>147</sup> Parallel to this observation concerning Volkening's engagement with history holds also true for his work as a literary critic: his reference points in German and European literature pre-date in their majority the First World War. A melancholic desire for the old Europe of the nineteenth century, the Belle Époque, seems to direct many of his choices. By writing about literature and the arts of that particular period, as well as by recording his childhood memories, Volkening made this otherwise passed time anew accessible for himself and his readers.

### **3.3. The Home Front**

Living in Worms, Volkening spent the remaining two years of war relatively sheltered from immediate fighting. Yet, the civilian population suffered also as the war continued. A neologism of the time, the term *Heimatfront* (home front) creates a forceful metaphor for the unprecedented economic and human efforts to maintain the first fully

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<sup>147</sup>One of the few exceptions is for instance Volkening's diary entry of January 18, 1974, in which he speaks of Adolf Hitler (Volkening, "Res publica," 91).

industrialized war. About 750,000 people died between 1914 and 1918 from hunger and from diseases caused by severe malnourishment.<sup>148</sup> During the so-called *Hungerwinter* of 1916/17, food riots broke out in major German cities, and army units were needed to maintain order.<sup>149</sup> In Berlin, as a common saying has it, “more people died from hunger during World War I than from bombs in World War II.”<sup>150</sup> The situation in Worms was similarly dire. Already in 1915, a commission was put in charge of supervising food supply. A year later, the first hunger riots and lootings were reported; when local police forces proved unable to control the revolting crowd, the military was needed to intervene and continued for weeks to patrol the city for restoring and maintaining order. Food shortages led to widespread malnourishment and due to a general lack of coal and other heating material schools had to be closed temporarily. The condition continued to affect the city until the early 1920s; the last hunger riots happened as late as June 1920. The Heyl-family supported the community in essential ways, for instance, by founding a milk co-op, offering parts of the company site for growing vegetables, and building a recreation home for the workers of their leather factory. In addition, the family gave repeatedly generous donations to charities. Between 1921 and 1924, American Quakers

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<sup>148</sup> During the First World War, more than 750,000 people died in Germany from hunger and diseases caused by malnutrition. N.a., “1914-18. Lebensmittelversorgung,” in *Lebendiges virtuelles Museum Online (LeMo)*, by Stiftung Deutsches Historisches Museum (Berlin). Available at <http://www.dhm.de/lemo/html/wk1/wirtschaft/versorgung/index.html> (accessed October 15, 2009).

<sup>149</sup> Deutsche Historische Museum in Berlin, Lebendige Geschichte Projekt.

<sup>150</sup> “Im Ersten Weltkrieg starben mehr Berliner an Hunger als im Zweiten Weltkrieg durch Bomben.” See the article under this title in *Berliner Zeitung*, December 1, 2005; according to the article, the official daily food allowance for an adult was 270g bread, 35g meat (including bones), 25g sugar and a quarter of an egg. See also Gerhard Hirschfeld, Gerd Krumeich and Irina Renz, eds., *Enzyklopädie Erster Weltkrieg (Paderborn, Munich, Vienna, Zurich: Ferdinand Schöningh, 2003)*, 616.

organized regular relief supplies to Worms, including free school meals for children in need.<sup>151</sup>

Worms's industry was visibly affected by the war: the production was redirected toward war supply like hand grenades and so-called "war leather," sturdy soles and leather overgarments for soldiers; the production of luxury goods was soon to be outlawed. Because of the drafting of a considerable part of the male work force, the chemical and timber industries, vital for the local economy, were forced to employ teenage and a large number of female workers. These employees were often poorly trained and suffered from malnutrition and anemia; the number of occupational injuries rose considerably.<sup>152</sup>

Another reminder of war must have been several military hospitals for the wounded from the nearby western front. Besides seeing and tending to the wounded German soldiers, the people of Worms were in direct contact with a detention center for prisoners of war. It was established at the Hochheimer Höhe, a hill in Pfifferling, in the suburbs of the city, and held several thousand inmates. 2,084 Russian, British, Italian, and Rumanian inmates died there, and were subsequently buried in nearby in mass graves.<sup>153</sup> The chronicle of the city reports also a singular incidence of bombardment on July 7, 1917, around 2 in the morning: "enemy planes [appear] over Worms and drop

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<sup>151</sup> The description of the food shortages in Worms during WWI is informed by Bönner, "Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945)," 548-550, and 556.

<sup>152</sup> Bönner, "Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945)," 549-550.

<sup>153</sup> Stadtverwaltung Worms, "Friedhof Hochheimer Höhe." Available at [www.worms.de/stadtteile/hochheim/friedhof\\_hochheimer-hoehe.php?navid=17](http://www.worms.de/stadtteile/hochheim/friedhof_hochheimer-hoehe.php?navid=17) (accessed October 15, 2009).

about twenty bombs, the majority of which stroke at free land.”<sup>154</sup> After the war ended on November 11, 1918, Worms saw the retreat of the defeated German army. Eighty-seven officers and 2,878 men of the city’s infantry regiment, the “4. Großherzoglich-Hessische Infanterieregiment,” had been killed, and 176 officers and 7, 558 men were wounded.<sup>155</sup> The larger region, the Rhineland, became, as constituted in the Treaty of Versailles in 1919, demilitarized and stayed under French occupation.

Telling of the impact those years had on Volkening’s personal development and sense of belonging, is his aforementioned reaction to reading Illert’s illustrated book about Worms decades later in Colombian exile. Haunting memories overcome him, culminating in his reliving of the moment in which he learnt through a BBC-announcement of the destruction of Worms in the spring of 1945. This shows the acuity with which Worms and its history were engraved in Volkening’s memory and became constitutive of his identity. The awareness and melancholy of the adult about what he interprets as the past splendor and more recent demise of the city of his youth confound with memories from his boyhood and create a vision of the past that speaks not only about Worms’s history, but reveals the author’s key choices in locating his cultural home. The autobiographical aspects of multiple essays contribute considerably to solidifying Volkening’s public persona as a German literary critic and exile in Bogotá. The landscape around Worms, the city, its history and culture, and the education Volkening

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<sup>154</sup> “1917 Juli 6./7.: Gegen 2 Uhr in der Nacht erscheinen feindliche Flieger über Worms und werfen ungefähr zwanzig Bomben ab, von denen die Mehrzahl auf freiem Feld aufschlägt.” Margit Rinker-Olbrisch, “Daten zur Geschichte der Stadt Worms,” ed. Stadtarchiv Worms. Available at <http://www.worms.de/downloads/Chronik.pdf> (accessed October 15, 2009). See also Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 605.

<sup>155</sup> Bönner, “Von der Blüte in den Abgrund: Worms vom Ersten bis zum Zweiten Weltkrieg (1914-1945),” 547. The “4. Großherzoglich-Hessische Infanterieregiment (Prinz Carl) Nr. 118” counted in 1918 377 officers and 224,991 men (so-called “Mannschaften”). Ibid.

received there define what he considers his German roots and cultural heritage. This he confirms explicitly by identifying himself as “a German from Rhineland-Palatinate root” in a biographical sketch in 1974.<sup>156</sup>

### 3.4. The Father’s Farewell

At the end of the war, Volkening’s father Ernst reunited with his family. In 1919, they moved to Düsseldorf, the capital of today’s federal state of North Rhine-Westphalia. Volkening attended in Düsseldorf the *Hindenburg Schule* (Hindenburg school) where he finished his third year of high school. After this one year, he chose the *Realgymnasium*-branch within the same school, which allowed him to pursue an education with special focus on sciences.”<sup>157</sup> In late summer of 1922, the family changed locations once more by moving to Hamburg. Volkening continued his higher education at the *Realgymnasium* of the *Johanneum*, a prestigious school established in 1529. On February 28, 1927, he received his high school diploma after passing his final exams, the *Reifeprüfung*.

That same year, his father embarked on a journey toward a new life in Colombia. Unknown to both, the father’s departure date of August 27, 1927, should mark the last time they see each other. Five decades later, Volkening notes in his diary:

Today, 50 years have past since the day on which I saw my father for the last time in the port of Hamburg, on board of the ship that was about to leave for Colombia. There, he died seven years later very lonely. I have forgotten the man on the ship; however, I do remember that Spartan man who never did have a moment of weakness [but] who cried at the hour of farewell.

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<sup>156</sup> Volkening described himself as “a German from Rhineland-Palatinate root” in “Datos biográficos,” in *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975), 7.

<sup>157</sup> Volkening, “Lebenslauf,” in Volkening’s student/dissertation file (Promotionsakte UAE: C2/3 Nr. 7196) at today’s Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg.

“Realgymnasium” refers to a type of secondary education with particular emphasis on sciences.

And, today, after a half-century, I feel the same deep sadness [...] that encroached upon me on that grey and foggy August-afternoon. Is not the return of the grief strange, —and is it not like a mark that is imprinted on my life?<sup>158</sup>

As it also becomes clear from this source, Volkening considered his grief over the father's absence a determining factor of his life. His loss influenced his writing in which father-images recurrently emerge. Volkening's autobiographical texts lend rich emphasis to the absent father and to his ultimately unfulfilled wish of becoming a father himself. In his essays, "Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro," Volkening dedicates extensive room to reflections about his late father, and introduces the concept of "padrehijo" (fatherson), suggesting thereby a merging of the two figures into one at a certain point of a son's life.<sup>159</sup> In his diary, he notes the one remaining distinction between the two: "He fathered a child, I do not have a child," and Volkening explains, "not to be a father" would mean for him "an existential flaw."<sup>160</sup>

It is in line with these observations about his fixation on his father, but nevertheless remarkable that Volkening recalls in detail his father's departure from the port in Hamburg but stays silent about the whereabouts of his mother. Whether she accompanied her husband is unclear. Volkening's emphasis on his father's solitude

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<sup>158</sup> "Han pasado hoy cincuenta años desde el día en que vi por última vez mi padre en el puerto de Hamburgo, a bordo del barco que había de llevarlo a Colombia. Allí murió muy solo, siete años mas tarde. El nombre del barco se me olvidó, pero sí recuerdo que ese hombre espartano que nunca había tenido momentos de debilidad, lloraba a la hora de la despedida. // Y hoy, al cabo de medio siglo, siento la misma honda tristeza [...] que me invadía en aquella tarde gris y brumosa de agosto. ¿No es extraño el retorno de la pesadumbre —y no es como es sello que lleva impreso de mi vida?" Volkening, "En causa propia II," 399-400.

<sup>159</sup> See Chapter III, section "5.1. Fatherson: *El Padrehijo*."

<sup>160</sup> "El engendró un hijo, yo no tengo hijo." "[N]o ser padre [determina lo que considero] una tacha existencial." Diary entry of December 19./20., 1968. Volkening, "En causa propia I," 359. I translated "hijo" here as "child"; however, the Spanish Word means both "son" and "child." I believe that this corresponds to what Volkening, who had neither a daughter nor a son, wanted to express (as underlined by him saying "no ser padre" – "not to be a father" without referring to the gender of a possible child); furthermore, he could not have used a gender-neutral alternative to "hijo" in Spanish corresponding to the term "child" in English.

during the last years of his life suggests to me however that Hildegard Volkening, who outlived her husband, did not join him on his trip to Colombia. As we know from Volkening's diaries, while living in Bogotá himself, he learnt about his mother's death on August 26, 1966, only three days later through a note from his aunt Hermine.<sup>161</sup> A possible explanation is that Hildegard Volkening had stayed in Germany in relative vicinity to her sister Hermine who, living in the town of Landshut, learnt about her death immediately.

#### **4. Student Years and Politicization: The Path into Exile (1927-1934)**

##### **4.1. Hamburg, Frankfurt am Main, Berlin, Heidelberg, Erlangen**

A few weeks after his father's departure, Volkening enrolled at the University of Hamburg. There he studied economics during the summer semester of 1927 before switching in the winter semester of 1927/28 to law. For reasons unknown to me, but also in line with common practice at the time, he spent the following seven semesters at various universities. He studied at the Frankfurt University in summer of 1928, he spent winter of 1928/29 at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin, then summer of 1929 at the oldest German university, the Ruprecht Karl University of Heidelberg, before returning to the University of Hamburg for the winter semester of 1929/30. Volkening finished his studies at the Friedrich Alexander University of Erlangen where he was matriculated from November 1930 to July of 1931. From July of 1931 to November of 1933, Volkening worked on his thesis *Das interne Asyl in unserer Zeit* (the internal exile in our time) with Prof. Dr. August Köhler as his advisor.

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<sup>161</sup>Volkening, "En causa propia I," 353.

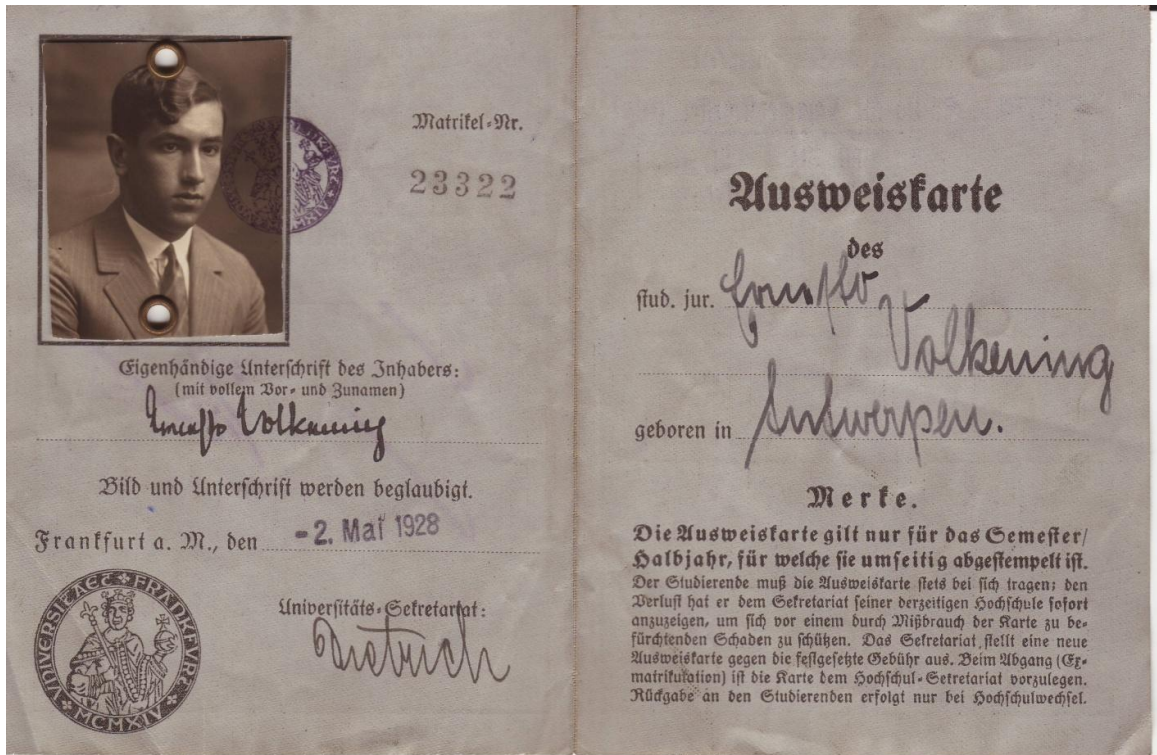


Fig. 4: Ernesto Volkening's student identity card, Frankfurt University (1928)

Universität <b>Anmeldekarte</b> Frankfurt a. M.		
Familienname: <i>Volkening Volkening</i>		R
Vorname: <i>Ernesto, Maria, Karl</i>		
Geburtsjahr u. -tag: <i>13/19. 08</i>		Reserviert für
Geburtsort: <i>Aachen</i>		
Provinz, Land: <i>Aachen, Belgien</i>		
Staats-(Landes-)angehörigkeit: <i>Preußen</i>		Religion/ Konfession: <i>ev.</i>
Familienstand: <i>ledig, verheiratet, verwitwet, geschieden.</i>		
Stand des Vaters: <i>Kaufmann</i>		
Wohnort der Eltern: <i>Bogota in Kolumbien</i>		
-Strasse Nr.		
Schulbildung: <i>Reifezeugnis d. Gymn. — Realgymn. — Oberschule Deutscher Oberschule — Oberlyzeum mit/ohne Lehr- befähigung für Lyzeen — Lehrersemin. mit/ohne Ergän- zungsprüf. nach § 5, Reifeprüf. n. § 4 der Verord. v. 19. Sept. 19 (Lehrstudium) — Kommission für die Ersatzreifeprüfung (W. u. S. Fak.)</i>		
zu <i>Kaehler</i>		
ausgestellt <i>Ostern/Herbst 1927</i>		
Name der Schule: <i>Realgymnasium d. Johanneum (B. B. Kober- Karl-Schule)</i>		
Berufstätigkeit vor Beginn des Studiums: <i>Jahre / Monate</i>		
Hiesige (Semester-) Wohnung: <i>Grün</i>		
Haus-Nr. <i>40</i> Vermieter: <i>Sifaguro</i>		
(Bitte wenden!)		
Gesamtzahl d. bisher. Universitäts- u. Hochschulsemester: <i>2</i>		
Bei Studienwechsel: Früheres Studienfach?		
Zahl der Semester auf dem <b>jetzigen</b> Studiengebiet: <i>2</i>		
Jetziges Studium: <i>Kaufmannschaft</i>		
nur für Philos. u. Natw. Fak. { a) <b>Hauptfächer:</b> b) <b>sämtliche Nebenfächer:</b>		
(Freilassen)		
<b>StW.</b>		
Welcher <b>Abschlussprüfung</b> (nicht Doktorprüfung) streben Sie zu? <i>Kaufmannschaft</i>		
Erstrebtber Lebensberuf: <i>Jurist</i>		
(Nach Ihrem heutigem besten Entschlusse)		
<b>Bestandene Zwischenprüfungen:</b>		
<i>Zutreffendes unterstreichen.</i>		
Ärztliche/zahnärztliche/pharmazeutische Vorprüfung		
Chemische Verbandsprüfung.		
Prüfung für praktische Kaufleute.		
Kaufmännische Diplomprüfung n. alter Ordnung, d. h. mit 4 Semestern.		
Diplomprüfung für Verwaltungs- und Sozialbeamte.		
Diplomprüfung für Versicherungsverständige.		
Wann <b>vollständig</b> bestanden? Im Jahre 192... , im Monat		
E. 4 Schl. 4 + 27. 600		
Nicht ausfüllen!		
WoWe		
BV Bol. u. S. 28		
Tag der Anmeldung	Matrikel-Nr.	Abgangszeugnis
<i>-2. Mai 1928</i>	<i>23322</i>	<i>30. Juli 1928</i>

Fig. 5: Ernesto Volkening's matriculation form, Frankfurt University (1928)



As Volkening notes in his curriculum vitae, he took on diverse jobs while being a university student: “In 1927, when I dreamt of architecture, I worked as a bricklaying apprentice, and in 1929 I took up journalism in the daily paper of Freiburg im Breisgau, and a little later I tried to sell ventilators for stables to the farmers in the region.”<sup>162</sup> These projects were short-lived.

#### **4.2. Writing on the Wall: Book Burnings and “Brown” Universities**

The choices of the different universities Volkening attended are remarkable as far as the universities of Hamburg and Frankfurt were rather new: urban, liberal, progressive. While Heidelberg, later discredited as a leading “brown university,” and Erlangen were more conservative and increasingly leaning toward the political right. Already in the Weimar Republic, Volkening chose the latter one as his alma mater. I want to shed some light on the atmosphere at this university that is representative for many.<sup>163</sup> During the Weimar Republic, the university was already known for its nationalistic orientation, and it was there that the *Nationalsozialistische Deutsche Studentenbund* (National Socialist German Students’ League) gained in 1929 for the first time ever at a German university a majority at the General Student’s Board. On May 12, 1933, the *Studentenbund* organized, supported by the President of the university, Prof. Dr. Jur. Eugen Locher, a book burning at Erlangen’s *Schloßplatz*. This public space is located in front of the former margrave palace, which has been used by the university since 1825. A pillar with names of

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<sup>162</sup> “En 1927, cuando aún soñaba con la arquitectura, trabajé con obras como aprendiz de albañilería, en 1929 me inicié en el periodismo en un diario de Friburgo en Brisgovia, y más tarde traté de venderles ventiladores para establos a los campesinos de la comarca.” Volkening, “Curriculum Vitae,” in *Los paseos de Lodovico*, viii-ix, here: ix.

<sup>163</sup> See, for instance, Werner Tress, *Wider den undeutschen Geist: Bücherverbrennung 1933* (Berlin: Parthas, 2003).

deprecatd professors was erected on the close-by university campus. From 1933 on, professors were dismissed on grounds of political dissent or for anti-Semitic reasons. Volkening must have known of, possibly even witnessed, the book burning that occurred a few months prior to his graduation. Though generally reluctant to write about his political views, Volkening mentioned later in exile his early opposition to National Socialism, which might have resulted from observing these and other acts of Nazi-aggression.

Köhler, Volkening's dissertation advisor, was Professor of Criminal Law and Proceedings, and expert for International Law. He was one of the eminent figures in Erlangen and had been Dean in 1928/29. He was seemingly an uncontroversial professor. After the Nazi take-over, he continued teaching, and was noticed neither as a fervent supporter nor as adversary of the regime. Being a Protestant, Köhler was not subject to any religious and fascist persecution. Köhler became a Professor Emeritus in 1938 when he reached the common retiring age of sixty-five.<sup>164</sup> Volkening's thesis on international asylum was approved on November 24, 1933. In the preface, we read about its objective:

When in the following the so-called law of nations' granting of asylum will be treated [...] the author will not be satisfied with the description of the particular manifestations of asylum but he will attempt to determine on the one hand its legal character by employing the scholarship on the law of nations and on the other hand [he will attempt to] answer the question of its justification in light of the specific circumstances of our time.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>164</sup> From 1925 to 1938, Franz Friedrich Gerhard August Köhler (1873-1939) was a Professor of Criminal Law and Proceedings, as well as of International Law, besides having been an encyclopedic law expert at the Erlangen University School of Law. In the academic year of 1928/29, Köhler served as Dean of the School of Law, and as a member of the administration board. Köhler received the emeritus status on March 31, 1938; however, he still kept the position of Interim Chair until the position was reassigned in the year of his death, in 1939. Renate Wittern. "Köhler, Franz Friedrich Gerhard August," in *Die Professoren und Dozenten der Friedrich Alexander-Universität Erlangen 1743-1960*, ed. Renate Wittern (Erlangen: Universitätsbund Erlangen-Nürnberg e.V., 1993), 135. Furthermore, Clemens Wachter, university archivist at the Friedrich Alexander University Erlangen-Nürnberg, e-mail message to author, October 26, 2007.

<sup>165</sup> "Wenn im folgenden die sog. [*sic*] völkerrechtliche Asylgewährung behandelt wird [...] wird der Verfasser sich nicht mit der Beschreibung der einzelnen Erscheinungsformen des Asyls zu begnügen,

The conditions Volkening tacitly referred to were the seizing of power by the National Socialists, the proceeding loss of civil rights, the trampling over traditional values and mores, and the violence in treating political dissidents and Jewish citizens. It is telling that he wrote about the topic of asylum at a time when he grew alienated from the spread of National Socialist politics in his immediate environment and feared persecution for himself. According to a retrospective account, his political convictions influenced his actions at the time: “I was a *homme engagé* when I was twenty-six years old, in the sense that the left is used to attribute to the term.”<sup>166</sup> In Germany, in order to lawfully obtain one’s doctorate, the doctoral thesis needed to be published, which Volkening did in the Bernhard Sporn Press in Zeulenroda. Hence, it became a publicly accessible document making its author potentially vulnerable to attacks by the Nazis. Volkening, anticipating physical persecution through the Gestapo, the German secret police, would thus describe his situation by the end of 1933 as “[having] already one foot in the concentration camp and the other bordering the frontier.”<sup>167</sup> Within a month after his graduation, Volkening left for Paris where he spent a few months. To the best of my knowledge, his writings contain no references as to the particular circumstances of his stay there. Afterwards, in the summer of 1934, he continued his journey via Antwerp to

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sondern [wird] versuchen die Frage nach seiner Berechtigung angesichts der besonderen Gegebenheiten unserer Zeit zu beantworten.” Volkening, preface to his *Das interne Asyl in unserer Zeit* (Zeulenroda i. Th.: Bernhard Sporn Buchdruckerei und Verlagsanstalt, 1933/34), 12.

<sup>166</sup> “Cuando tenía veintiséis, fui *homme engagé* en el sentido que la izquierda suele atribuir al termino.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 463.

<sup>167</sup> “A finales de 1933, ‘ya con un pie en el campo de concentración, y con el otro allende en la frontera,’ se gradúa en la Universidad de Erlangen y presenta como tesis un trabajo sobre el derecho de asilo.” Darío Achury Valenzuela, “Prologo,” preface to *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976), 11-31, here: 12.

Hamburg from where he planned to travel by sea to Colombia. Volkening planned to join there, in the capital city of Bogotá, his father and to start a new life.

#### **4.3. Volkening's Farewell to his Friends: "Bites that are not easily stomached"**

For reconstructing Volkening's journey, I use his diaries and autobiographical essays. Due to this choice of sources and a limited availability of others, my knowledge is limited. So far, I have not found a feasible way to verify some of the dates that Volkening recorded decades after the events had taken place. For example, the date he gives for his departure from Antwerp to Hamburg must be inaccurate. In 1976, Volkening writes, "I left Antwerp on July 26, 1934, on the day of my father's death."<sup>168</sup> While the date of his father's death is correct, he must have left Antwerp earlier since he is listed among the Hamburg passengers departing for Colombia on July 25.<sup>169</sup> Besides, he most likely spent the eve of his departure already in Hamburg, and, as he claims, together with his friend Walter Herberg. Volkening dates this event to July 24, 1934,<sup>170</sup> which corresponds with the information about his departure recorded by the "Hamburg-Amerika-Linie Abteilung Personenverkehr" (Hamburg-America-Line Subdivision Passenger Services). Before leaving Europe, Volkening had, as far as I could reconstruct his journey, first gone from Paris to Antwerp to spend a few days in the city of his childhood. From there, he traveled to Hamburg and boarded a ship with the Colombian port Buenaventura as its destination.

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<sup>168</sup> "[P]artí de Amberes el 26 de Julio de 1934, día del fallecimiento de mi padre." Volkening, "De mis cuadernos II," 465.

<sup>169</sup> Hamburg-Amerika-Linie Abteilung Personenverkehr, *Register zu den Ausw.Listen*, VIII A2, vol. 178 (Staatsarchiv Hamburg).

<sup>170</sup> Volkening, "En causa propia II," 376.

Also, Volkening mentions in a diary entry from March 14, 1972, the farewell meeting with three of his friends. Only one, Kurt Hillesheim was missing, whom he describes as “the fourth one of our clique and a man of an intellectual capacity superior to all the people that I remember having known during my life.”<sup>171</sup> Volkening associates the last gathering with his friends with the inescapable force of death but also with the strong bonds of friendship that he still felt decades after their last encounter. As he writes,

We met at the terrace of the *Alsterpavillon*, he [“my old friend and study companion Walter Herberg”], Werner Rehm and I. Although we had not seen each other in a while, we agreed in our way of assessing the situation: Terrible things had happened; things even more terrible were immanent. To none of the three it would have occurred to make any shady arrangements, to make peace with the “enthroned” regime. Not in their dreams. Total rejection. There was a noble aspect in the attitude of my friends and a certain distanced frigidness in the consideration of the events: something strange during these days of delirium and galloping opportunism.<sup>172</sup>

According to Volkening’s retrospective portrayal, the young men showed acute awareness of the dangers inherent in the political takeover through the National Socialists. Also, he holds that they understood the measurements implemented within the first few months as warning signals for an even greater loss of civil liberties and human rights, and maybe even an impending war. There is no way to verify the correctness of these claims. In fact, Volkening speaks only of a general consciousness of his friends about “terrible things” taking place. Maybe from a stance that tended to idealize them as

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<sup>171</sup> “[K]urt Hillesheim, el cuarto de nuestra pandilla, [y] hombre de una potencia intelectual superior a cuanto recuerde haber conocido en mi vida.” Volkening, “En causa propia II,” 376. In the text, Hildesheim’s first name is obviously misprinted as “Hurt.”

<sup>172</sup> “En la terraza del *Alsterpavillon* estábamos reunidos [‘mi viejo amigo y compañero de estudios Walter Herberg’], Werner Rehm y yo. Aunque no nos habíamos visto durante algún tiempo, estuvimos de acuerdo en nuestra manera de apreciar la situación: Cosas terribles habían sucedido, cosas aún más terribles estaban por suceder. A ninguno de los tres se le hubiera ocurrido ir a componendas, hacer las paces con el régimen [e]ntronizado. Ni por soñación. Rechazo total. Había nobleza en la actitud de mis amigos y cierta frialdad distanciada en la ponderación de los eventos: algo insólito en esos días de delirio y del oportunismo galopante.” Volkening, “En causa propia II,” 376.

early opponents of the Nazi regime, he stresses their inner resistance to cooperating with the Nazis. Of their actual choices, he knew little, if anything at all. There is no evidence that they stayed in touch after his emigration, and it seems that it was not until 1972 that Volkening learnt about his friends' lots. As he mentions in his diary, all three of them had fought in the German army during the Second World War. Hillesheim had been sent to the eastern front where he was killed by a mortar shell in 1941, Rehm died in 1942 in the Battle of Stalingrad, and Herberg was taken captive by American troops in 1945 while already retreating from the western front. According to Volkening's report, Herberg remained a prisoner of war for two years.<sup>173</sup> This Volkening found out in a letter that he received "through strange ways": Herberg had read by chance an essay about Latin American literature in which Volkening's name was mentioned; after contacting the author of that essay, Herberg learnt about Volkening's affiliation with *Eco* and sent a letter to the *Librería Buchholz* (Bookstore Buchholz) in Bogotá, where the magazine was published. There, Volkening received this letter on March 13, 1972.<sup>174</sup> Pained by the sudden knowledge about the death of two of his dearest friends, Volkening concludes the diary entry in disconsolation. Ominously, he writes, "bites that are not easily stomached."<sup>175</sup>

Neither we, nor Volkening, could know how his friends' attitude toward National Socialism might have changed, what they thought about the deportation of their Jewish neighbors or the Second World War, whether they were resistant to Nazi politics, followers, or merely concerned with their own survival. Volkening mourns his friends, of

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<sup>173</sup> Volkening, "En Causa propia II," 376.

<sup>174</sup> "[P]or raros caminos." Volkening, "En causa propia II," 376.

<sup>175</sup> "Bocados que no se tragan fácilmente." Volkening, "En Causa propia II," 376.

whom he had not heard anything for decades, until Herberg's letter reaches him. With this note, the war he escaped by immigrating to Colombia in 1934 caught up with him. The question of what his actions would have been, if he would have stayed in Germany at the time, might have been at the core of those "bites that are not easily stomached."



Fig. 6: Poster of the Hamburg-Amerika-Linie





—last night— at last the penny dropped that this doctrine, if one does not abandon it in time comes to an erosion, a complete mental and spiritual impoverishment. No other philosophy, no other theory (except Freud's) exudes an equally fatal spirit, or such a gelid wind. In Marxism —so seductive, especially for privileged minds, for the richly gifted natures of the type of Pierre F. who crossed the day before yesterday my way— it is sterility that is sketched out the most clearly. Wherever this mildew grows, this spiritual scabies, the grass stops growing. It inhibits to develop an idea, to let a thought mature, to bring the train of thought to its end because it makes us rotate perpetually around the same axis. Until, together with it, they bury us. [...]

Among the plethora of intelligent observations of this prodigy youngster [Pierre F.], the following stands out: it appears to me worthwhile to think about those, he said, who are precisely the great frustrated ones of the 1930s —he mentioned Bloch, Benjamin, Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Korsch— who mean so much for me and my generation.<sup>176</sup>

Reading this passage, we should bear in mind that Volkening, despite claiming permanence in his engagement with Marxism, was not any longer the young university student from the early 1930s. At the time of writing it, he was sixty-one. We may assume that he further developed and refined his thinking through the years. Central to his reflections on his engagement with Marxism here is the encounter with Pierre F., a representative of a younger generation. Through the conversation with him, Volkening's attention is being directed toward the limitations of Marxism. The passage suggests that he contemplated whether Marxism for him became a rigid lens that predetermined the ways in which events are seen and interpreted, and thus precluded originality of vision.

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<sup>176</sup> “Tuve che llegar a los sesenta años y fue preciso que, desde la época en que comenzara a dedicarme seriamente al marxismo, transcurrieran más de cuarenta, hasta caer —anoche— en la cuenta de que esa doctrina, si uno no la abandona a tiempo, lleva a la erosión, al total empobrecimiento síquico [*sic*] y espiritual. De ninguna otra filosofía, ninguna otra teoría (salvo la de Freud) sale un hálito igualmente mortífero, ni viento más helado. En el marxismo —tan tentador, justamente, para las mentes privilegiadas, las naturalezas ricamente dotadas de la especie del simpático Pierre F. que anteayer cruzó mi camino— lo que más nítido se perfila es la esterilidad. Dondequiera que caiga ese mildiu, esa roña del espíritu, cesa de crecer la hierba. Impide desarrollar una idea, madurar un pensamiento, llevar el hilo de la reflexión a su fin, porque nos hace girar perpetuamente en torno del mismo eje. Hasta que, con él, nos entierren. [...] // Entre la plétora de observaciones inteligentes que hizo ese niño prodigio [Pierre F.] descuella la siguiente: me parece digno de ponderación, dijo, que son, precisamente, los grandes frustrados de los años treinta —mencionó a Bloch, Benjamín, Adorno, Herbert Marcuse, Korsch— los que tanto significan para mí y mi generación.” Volkening, “Res publica,” 75-76.

Pierre F., who appears to be well versed in Marxist philosophy, obviously introduces Volkening to a new perspective, which seems to require a reevaluation of his earlier convictions. Given the time of their encounter, we may speculate whether Pierre F. introduced Volkening to ideas of Colombian and Latin American vanguard revolutionaries who had formed trans-nationally around unifying figures like Ernesto “Che” Guevara and inspired the student movements in Germany and other countries. During the so-called “days of May” in 1957, the student movement in Colombia had been first instrumental in overthrowing the dictatorship of General Rojas Pinilla’s and had since remained an active force. Its members, a new generation of Marxist intellectuals concerned with politics and social reformation, became guerilla fighters and part of radicalized political movements, but also writers and editors for literary magazines and student publications as well as committed journalists. Referring to the Marxist thinkers, the models for Volkening’s generation, as the “great frustrated ones,” might indicate that Pierre F. prompted Volkening to reflect on possibilities of a different engagement with Marxism; possibilities that would potentially avoid the presumed frustration of his generation over not having effected any tangible social change. Pierre F. might have advanced ideas about translating ideology into social action, a move that these thinkers had attempted to chalk out but not realized. Volkening, acknowledging that the conversation led him to new insights, stops short from a deeper engagement, and refrains, at least here, from articulating what his revised position might have entailed.<sup>177</sup>

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<sup>177</sup> Volkening identifies with the critical thinking of the Frankfurt School and its precursors Karl Marx and Friedrich Nietzsche (who is not mentioned in this entry but in several other instances). The German Student Movement of the 1960s found its intellectual home in the very same school. In its goals and methods of protest, it was comparable to student protest movements in the US, France, or Czechoslovakia, and had at the time of Volkening writing just seen its zenith. Karl Korsch is arguably one of the most important Marxist philosophers, and co-founded the Institute of Social Research, institutional home to the thinkers of the Frankfurt School. Ernst Bloch is another Marxist philosopher who looked openly in favor at the Student

Volkening might have felt called upon by the student movements in his home and host countries as well as by the constant violence in Colombia to reassess the foundation of his political views. The conversation with Pierre F., whose identity I am unable to verify, might have spurred this very process. In Bogotá, Volkening witnessed kidnappings, bombings, and murders in his immediate surroundings. He lived through *El Bogotazó* (the violent riots following the assassination of the liberal presidential candidate Jorge Eliéer Gaitán in Bogotá on April 9, 1948). He experienced the ensuing civil war that became known as *La Violencia* (the violence) and lasted for about a decade before morphing into a more covert but not any less violent conflict. Considering this historical context, a reassessment of his philosophical and political views might have resulted in a profound transformation and could explain the notion of urgency with which the passage is saturated.

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Movement, which was not the case with many others as, for instance, Theodor Adorno who opposed the actions of his and other students. He rather felt unjustly appropriated by the movement and thought of his philosophical work as being misused by the protesters who referred to it as part of their intellectual grounding. Bloch developed in the 1970s close ties with Rudi Dutschke, one of leaders of the movement and in 1968 an early victim of an attempted assassination. All had in common that they propagated Marxist ideas through their writing, not on the streets.

## CHAPTER II

### A LIFE ON THE “SIXTH CONTINENT”

#### 1. Introduction

On August 20, 1934, Ernesto Volkening arrived on board of the passenger liner “Odenwald” at the Colombian Pacific coast. The “Odenwald” put into harbor at the port city Buenaventura, whose name hails “good luck” to incomers. The widespread and predominantly rural town is situated 50 miles from Cali, the capital of the department Valle de Cauca. Despite their geographical vicinity, Buenaventura is disconnected from Cali and the interior country by the Andes, a mountain range that crosses through the northeastern part of Colombia. Furthermore, it is situated in one of the rainiest areas worldwide, and historically of strategic importance for the export of coffee and but also for contraband trade. There Volkening set foot into Colombia and into a life that needed to be built from scratch. In what follows, I describe Volkening’s arrival to Bogotá in the context of the situation in the country in the 1930s and 1940s and the particular challenges German immigrants faced. I also discuss Volkening’s ensuing professional life and accomplishments as a writer within the intellectual world of Bogotá. At the same time, I depict how he perceived his life evolving in a third space, or on a “sixth continent” between Europe and the Americas.



Fig. 8: Map of Colombia

## 2. The Challenges of Being German in a Society in Flux

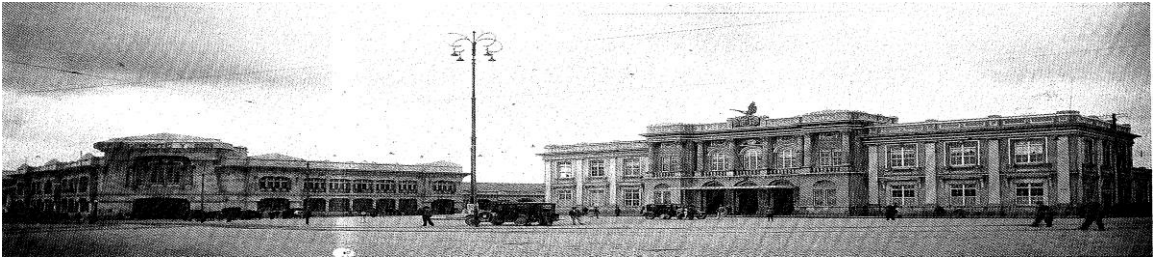


Fig. 9: Sabana Train Station in Bogotá

Volkening's arrival in South America was marked by apprehension and sadness.

Forty-two years later, he recalls:

On that morning of August 20 in 1934, when the “Odenwald” approached Buenaventura, the anxiety, yet aggravated by the recent notice of my father's death, prevailed over the emotion that usually precedes the arrival at a *terra incognita*. It was a radiating morning, and a breeze came blowing from the coast carrying the sweet and inebriating aroma of tropical fruits; but it was as if there rose a wall of darkness in front of me and, behind it, the land of nemesis, the land of the dead. [It was] something strange, very strange, most strange because I started in this moment to become fully aware that, there, the dear old man, of course, was not waiting for me. The sensation of strangeness became for me still more obvious upon my arrival to Bogotá: a grey sky, and the outskirts of the Sabana train station being poor, dull.<sup>178</sup>

Volkening arrived at Colombian shores filled with anxiety. His situation was in personal, professional, and also political regard quite unsteady. Unfamiliarity with his surroundings, still a *terra incognita* for him, evoked feelings of strangeness. The recent passing of “the dear old man,” his father, the only familiar face he had expected to meet,

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<sup>178</sup> “En aquella mañana del 20 de agosto de 1934, cuando la ‘Odenwald’ se acercaba a Buenaventura, la angustia, aún agravada por la reciente noticia de la muerte de mi padre, primaba sobre la emoción que suele preceder el arribo a una *terra incognita*. Era una mañana radiante, y de la costa venía soplando una brisa preñada del dulce y embriagante aroma de frutas del Trópico; pero fue como si delante de mí se alzara una pared de tiniebla y, detrás de ella, se extendiera la tierra del ocaso, tierra de los muertos. Algo extraño, muy extraño, más extraño porque en ese momento empecé a darme cabal cuenta de que por allá ya no me estaba esperando el querido viejo. La sensación de extrañeza se me hizo todavía más patente a mi llegada a Bogotá: un cielo gris, los alrededores de la Estación de la Sabana pobres, deslucidos.” Ernesto Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Bogotá) 36:221 (1980): 449-468, here: 466-7.

All translations are mine except when indicated otherwise.

aggravated that. Bereavement engulfed him, figuratively, in absolute darkness. In his memory, the country appeared to be his nemesis, epitomizing an end of the life he knew without any hope for a pleasant and gratifying future. It seemed to be haunted by ghosts of his late father, his former friends, his lost native tongue, and his cut off roots in European culture and lifestyle. From Buenaventura, he traveled further inland to Bogotá. Three days later, on August 23, 1934,<sup>179</sup> he arrived there at the Sabana train station, whose surrounding offered him a disheartening welcome. In 1934, Volkening did not anticipate staying permanently in Colombia, and it was difficult to decide whether it would be advantageous for him to settle down or to pitch up tents whose stakes could be easily pulled up again.

However, he was not all alone. His fiancée Gertrudis (sometimes referred to as Gertrud) accompanied him into exile,<sup>180</sup> and in the following year, in 1935, they married. Later Volkening would write about his wife, that she was “a descendant from the disappeared Austro-Hungarian monarchy and was, well, a daughter of the *ancient regime* with whom I shared the passion for things that have patina and for the *recherche du temps perdu*.”<sup>181</sup> We know little about Gertrudis, since Volkening mentioned her only

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<sup>179</sup> Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 463.

<sup>180</sup> Despite having contacted various administrative offices in Bogotá, I was not yet able to obtain any further information about Gertrudis Volkening from official sources; the only exception is her date of death, recorded at Bogotá’s German cemetery as October 22, 1977. This date is raised to question by one of Volkening’s diary entries. On December 10, 1977, Volkening writes that “F.” (Volkening uses the cipher whenever he refers in his notes to his wife Gertrudis) would have died on October 23, 1977. She seemed to have died from the consequences of a fit of apoplexy. Her birthday was according to another entry in Volkening’s diary, July 4. Volkening, “En causa propia II,” *Eco* 48:244 (1982): 361-400, here: 400 and 399 respectively. See about her likely cause of death: Ricardo Rodríguez Morales, “Personaje / Un Habitante Del Reino Intermedio,” *eltiempo.com*, section “Lecturas fin de semana” (Jan. 21, 2011). Available at <http://www.eltiempo.com/archivo/documento/CMS-8793347> (accessed June 15, 2011).

<sup>181</sup> “[O]riunda de la desaparecida monarquía austro-húngara e hija, pues, del *ancient regime* con quien comparto la pasión por las cosas que tienen patina y la *recherche du temps perdu*.” Volkening, “Curriculum Vitae,” in *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Monterrey, Mexico: Librería Cosmos, 1974), viii-ix, here: ix.

rarely in his writing. Yet there are some traces: In 1974, he dedicated his first essay collection, *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Lodovico’s travels), to her with the words, “*para Gertrudis.*”<sup>182</sup> A year later, on occasion of the forthcoming publication of *Ensayos II: Destellos criollos* (Essays II: Creole sparkles), he was asked to provide a biographical sketch, where we simply read: “I have lived since 1934 with my wife, of Austrian origin, in Bogotá.”<sup>183</sup> Finally, in 1981, he dedicated the Spanish translation of his doctoral thesis “A mis padres. A mi esposa” (To my parents. To my wife”).<sup>184</sup> In addition, we discover in Volkening’s autobiographical texts some dispersed references that characterize Gertrudis as witty, intellectual, and strong-willed, and indicate that she was well-read and shared Volkening’s passion for literature. As his writing reveals, they had, obviously against their wish, no children. Volkening notes in a diary entry of the night from the 19<sup>th</sup> to the 20<sup>th</sup> of December 1968, “as a matter of fact, not to be a father determines what I consider an existential flaw: a certain lack of human warmth, the problematic relationship with the world, the incapacity to create bridges — and the sadness that I feel about it.”<sup>185</sup>

In hindsight, and, as if it were with a smile, Volkening softened his initial response to Colombia. He declares in the same passage in which he described his arrival to the country in bleak colors, “only half a year later I had to discover the discreet charms

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<sup>182</sup> Volkening, *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Monterrey, Mexico: Librería Cosmos, 1974), xi.

<sup>183</sup> “[D]esde 1934 vivo con mi esposa, de origen austriaco, en Bogotá.” Volkening, “Datos biográficos,” in his *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975), 7.

<sup>184</sup> Volkening, *El asilo interno en nuestro tiempo*, translated by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Editorial Temis, 1981), ix. This was a translation by the author of his dissertation thesis *Das interne Asyl in unserer Zeit* (Zeulenroda i. Th.: Bernhard Sporn Buchdruckerei und Verlagsanstalt, 1933/34). His German dissertation was dedicated to “Meinen Eltern” (ibid., 3).

<sup>185</sup> “En efecto, no ser padre determina lo que considero una tacha existencial: cierta falta de calor humano, la problemática relación con el mundo, la incapacidad de tener puentes — y la tristeza que siento por eso.” Volkening, “En causa propia I,” *Eco* 38:232 (1981): 337-359, here: 359.



of the city [...] Bogotá had conquered me.”<sup>186</sup> It was Bogotá, the city in the Andes, located almost 8700 ft above sea level, that reconciled him with the country. Bogotá became his adoptive home that he cherished deeply; he even was said to having expressed himself in a Spanish that contained words and idioms typical for the local *bogotanos*. — What brought about his change of attitude? What was Bogotá like the mid-1930s?

### **2.1. Bogotá in the 1930s: Imported Modernity and *La Formación del Ciudadano***

The capital since the declaration of independence in 1810,<sup>187</sup> Bogotá enjoyed an elevated status as the political and cultural center. Frequently, it was referred to as the “Athens of America.”<sup>188</sup> However, the high number of illiterate people in the country challenged this reputation. For instance, as late as in 1938, 44 percent of all persons age fifteen and above were still illiterate.<sup>189</sup> Nevertheless, Colombia was undergoing rapid changes as the onset of the twentieth century had brought a phase of accelerated growth and transformation to the whole country and found its strongest expression in its capital city. The widespread education of the country’s elite in France, Great Britain, and Germany opened the way for European concepts of Enlightenment and modernity to

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<sup>186</sup> “Sólo medio año después habría de descubrir los discretos encantos de la ciudad [...] Bogotá me había conquistado.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 467.

<sup>187</sup> Santafé de Bogotá, founded as a European settlement in 1538, was a pivotal, political center during colonial times, the period of the *Nuevo Reino de Granada*, and later during the times of Simón Bolívar’s *Gran Colombia* (1819-1831). From the declaration of Colombia’s independence from Spain in 1810 (recognized in 1819) on, Bogotá has been capital of the Republic of Colombia.

<sup>188</sup> “Athens of America” (in Spanish “Atenas de América”) has been an honorary title that, according to some, Alexander von Humboldt coined while visiting Bogotá between 1800 and 1804. According to others, the Argentine writer Miguel Cané coined the phrase in 1883.

<sup>189</sup> 2,223,400 out of 5,044,100 people age 15 and above were illiterate which corresponds to 44.1 percent of the people in this age group. DANE (Departamento Administrativo Nacional de Estadística), *50 Años de estadísticas educativas* (Bogotá: DANE, 1985): 112.

exert influence on a generation of intellectual and political leaders and their work.<sup>190</sup> Aspiring modernization as postulated by European Enlightenment comprised, among others, a zeal for secularization, empiricism, science, technical inventions, medicine hygiene, education, and the creation and consolidation of the nation state. Many, Europeans and South Americans alike, considered South America as being late in a development whose course was allegedly already laid out by European and North American countries. In this vein, Pedro Santana Rodríguez suggests in an article written in the 1990s, that Colombia were “a typical example of late modernization.”<sup>191</sup>

With some exaggeration and in comparison with North America, Santana Rodríguez points to the obstacles his country faced on its path to modernity:

Northern Americans are born with modernity and religious reform, we, on the contrary, are born with counter-reformation and neo-scholasticism, which means, [being born] in opposition to the modern world.<sup>192</sup>

He then adds in explanation,

In Latin America we neither have had a cultural revolution nor a political, democratic one. The first ideas of the Enlightenment and modernity entered our countries with the revolutions of independence. The models that inspired the Latin American revolutionaries were the revolutions of France and the United States. But that what was done in good faith in all parts was rather a copying of the institutions and of empty ideas than a real appropriation of the contents. All our revolutions of independence failed in their proposition to establish democratic structures and in modernizing the society in economic and social regard.<sup>193</sup>

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<sup>190</sup> Santiago Castro-Gómez, *Pensar el siglo XIX: cultura, biopolítica y modernidad en Colombia* (Pittsburgh, Biblioteca de América, 2004): 293.

<sup>191</sup> “[U]n típico ejemplo de modernización tardía.” Pedro Santana, “Modernidad y democracia,” in *Modernismo sin modernidad: modelos de desarrollo en Colombia*, ed. Consuelo , 1990): 254.

<sup>192</sup> “Los norteamericanos nacieron con la modernidad y con la reforma religiosa, en cambio, nosotros nacimos con la contrarreforma y la neoescolástica, es decir, contra el mundo moderno.” Santana, 251.

<sup>193</sup> “En América Latina no tuvimos ni una revolución cultural ni una revolución política democrática. Las primeras ideas de la Ilustración y de la modernidad ingresan a nuestros países en las revoluciones de independencia. Los modelos que inspiraron a los revolucionarios latinoamericanos fueron las revoluciones de Francia y de los Estados Unidos. Pero lo que se hizo de buena fe en todas partes fue más bien una copia

Santana Rodríguez continues in pointing at perceived flaws in Colombia's development,

The advance of capitalism was weak and relatively belated, the scientific-academic system stood isolated during a good part of the nineteenth and during a significant part of the twentieth century, the political structure maintains characteristics that are astonishingly authoritarian and the State has sustained until very recently a declared religious adherence [“confessionalism”] to its own Political Constitution.<sup>194</sup>

One might doubt that European models are or ever were appropriate means for solving South America's particular political and social problems. Yet, in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, Europe functioned as a certain role model in the imagination of the Colombian elite whose members attempted to improve the economic, political, cultural, and general living conditions in their country.

In the 1930s, when Volkening arrived in Colombia, the country was still sparsely populated and mostly rural with only about 6.3 percent of its population living in the three major cities.<sup>195</sup> However, it had one of the highest rates of urbanization in South America, and at the end of the 1930s, nearly a third of all Colombians lived in cities.<sup>196</sup>

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de instituciones y de ideas vacías, que una verdadera apropiación de los contenidos. Todas nuestras revoluciones de independencia fracasaron en su propósito de establecer unas estructuras democráticas, y en modernizar la sociedad desde el punto de vista económico y social.” Santana, 251.

<sup>194</sup> “El desarrollo del capitalismo fue débil y relativamente demorado, el sistema científico-académico se mantuvo aislado durante buena parte del siglo XIX y durante una parte significativa del siglo XX, la estructura política mantiene rasgos extraordinariamente autoritarios y el Estado mantuvo hasta años muy recientes un confesionalismo declarado en su propia Constitución Política.” Santana, 254.

<sup>195</sup> In 1928, only about 6.3 % of Colombia's population lived in its three major cities: Bogotá had 235,000 inhabitants, Barranquilla 140,000, and Medellín 120,000; totaling 495,000 city dwellers. The majority of Colombia's citizens still lived in the Andean and Caribbean coastal areas due to reasons of climate, transport facilities, and a relative freedom of diseases. Colombia's total population in 1928 was nearly 7.9 million. Leslie Bethell, *Cambridge History of Latin America*. (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1995): 665. —, *Latin America since 1930* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1991): 588.

<sup>196</sup> Dennis M. Hanratty and Sandra W. Meditz, “Urbanization, Migration, and Immigration,” in *Colombia: A Country Study* (Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988). Available online at <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/36.htm> (accessed August 25, 2009).

Bogotá's number of inhabitants has sky-rocketed from the beginning of the twentieth century on without a definite end in sight: in 1905, Bogotá's population counted 100,000 people, in 1938, it was 356,000, and in the mid-1950s, the population crossed the mark of 1 million.<sup>197</sup> In 1938, Colombia's fast-growing population counted 8,697,000 people, compared to less than 6 million in 1918, and about 17.5 million in the mid-1960s.<sup>198</sup> *La formación del ciudadano*, the formation of the city-dweller, the over-comer of all perceived backwardness and of whatever had come off badly, was the characteristic phenomenon of the first decades of the twentieth century.<sup>199</sup> Luz Gabriela Arango describes the public sentiment of the time as the belief that

With order, there is *progress*, the true indicator of success in the formation of the *ciudadano*. Progress is dynamics, an ordered movement, rational and constant, whose motivation is the unattainable: perfection. Like a quantifiable category, progress is better health, increased longevity, more work, more profit, higher velocity, the maximal intensity, light, clarity, chromatic harmony, lightness, amplitude, and wealth.<sup>200</sup>

The desire for a teleological progress toward an ultimately unattainable perfection became, as Arango argues, the driving force behind all aspirations of the *ciudadano* and

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<sup>197</sup> Bogotá's demographic development illustrates an intra-national migration from the countryside to the cities: in 1905, Bogotá's population counted 100,000 people, in 1938, it was 356,000, and in the mid-1950s, the population crossed the mark of 1 million. The city's population has continued to soar, growing in 1990 to over 5 millions. See Alan Gilbert, "Santa Fé de Bogotá: A Latin-American Special Case?" in *The mega-city in Latin America*, ed. Alan Gilbert (Tokyo; New York; Paris: United Nations University Press, 1996), 241-269, here: 243.

<sup>198</sup> The census of 1918 counted 5.855.077 habitants, the 1938-census counted a population of 8,697,041, there were 17.484.508 habitants counted in 1964, and 27.837.932 in 1985. Banco de la República, "Población de Bogotá," in "Algunos datos históricos," available at <http://www.banrepultural.org/node/45127> (accessed February 21, 2011).

<sup>199</sup> Luz Gabriela Arango, Gabriel Restrepo and Jaime Jaramillo, *Cultura, política y modernidad* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 1998), 162.

<sup>200</sup> "Con orden hay *progreso*, verdadero indicador del éxito en la formación del ciudadano. El progreso es una dinámica, un movimiento ordenado, racional y constante, cuyo móvil es lo inalcanzable: la perfección. Como categoría cuantificable, el progreso es más salud, más longevidad, más trabajo, más rendimiento, más velocidad, mayores intensidad, luz, claridad, armonía cromática, ligereza, amplitud y riqueza." Arango, Restrepo and Jaramillo, 163.

the measurement of success. Progress was thereby closely linked to the notion of order, which Arango defines in this context as the perceived proper “distribution of time and use of space [...] the control exerted upon one’s body: [an] order of passions, of diet, or sleeping and working, of objects, of dressing oneself and exercising and order in relationships.”<sup>201</sup> The desire for progress became thus a life-transforming force for entire groups of the population. Oriented at the paradigm of the *ciudadano*, new social classes emerged in Medellín, Barranquilla, and Bogotá, constituting a progressive electorate that asked for social reforms. It was this group that was decisive in bringing in 1930 Enrique Olaya Herrera, the first liberal Colombian president of the twentieth century, to power. The years between 1930 and 1945 are frequently referred to as the Reformist Period during which a surge of industrialization countered the effects of the world economic crisis of 1929. When Olaya Herrera was elected, the country was experiencing a rapid decline in the export of its agricultural products with coffee prices down at a third of the price of the preceding year.<sup>202</sup> Despite dire conditions, from 1930 to 1945, state protectionism, an extension of labor unions’ rights, and progressive income taxes combined with a reformed social welfare system significantly improved the lives of many Colombians and resulted in a time of relative stability. In the major cities of the country, considerable efforts were made to keep up with an increasing demand for basic services

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<sup>201</sup> [D]istribución del tiempo y uso del espacio [...] el control ejercido sobre el cuerpo: orden de las pasiones, de la dieta, del dormir y trabajar, de los objetos, del vestir y ejercitarse y de las relaciones.” Arango, Restrepo and Jaramillo, 163.

<sup>202</sup> Hanratty and Meditz, “The Reformist Period, 1930-45,” in *Colombia: A Country Study*. Available at <http://countrystudies.us/colombia/36.htm> (accessed August 25, 2009).

and structural necessities<sup>203</sup> as well as for a broad scope of cultural activities and entertainment. Theaters, cinemas, public parks and places, cultural centers, libraries, and schools emerged in the city next to bars, dance clubs, and brothels spreading the ambiguous flavor of a crescent metropolis. As Alberto Saldarriaga Roa discusses in his study on the self-imagination of *bogotanos* during the 1930s, the alternating reign of day and night brought out antithetical if isotopic morals. According to him, the mornings in Bogotá passed with religious and traditional activities, the later hours of the day with business and work, and dusk initiated the cosmopolitan and social time, followed by “transgressions of bacchanal inebriation and prostitution” at night.<sup>204</sup> Parallel to the day-night-dichotomy, a polarity emerged between village life, *lo aldeano*, and cosmopolitanism, *lo cosmopolita*. The *ciudadano* did not only identify with the latter, but also felt a need to dissociate her- or himself from *lo adelano* that denoted the other of their ambitions. Traditions were seen in opposition to modernity and associated with the backwardness one dreaded. Narratives of the time expressed the hope that the city would develop to an even greater center of cosmopolitanism. The opposite of what was deemed progressive was perceived as a leftover from the past; it was looked at with melancholy in anticipation of its imminent demise but also with apprehension, for fear it might catch up with one’s “modern” lifestyle.<sup>205</sup> Another characteristic of the time was that the

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<sup>203</sup> That in 1938, only 14% of urban buildings had running water, electricity, and a sewer system indicates the extent to which these services needed to be implemented. Marco Palacios, *Entre la legitimidad y la violencia. Colombia: 1875-1994* (Bogotá: Editorial Norma, 1995), 87 and 89.

<sup>204</sup> Alberto Saldarriaga Roa, Ricardo Rivadeneira, and Samuel Jaramillo, *Bogotá a través de las imágenes y las palabras* (Bogotá: Observatorio de Cultura Urbana, TM Editores, 1998), 152.

<sup>205</sup> Saldarriaga Roa, , and Jaramillo, 151.

influence of the Catholic Church was challenged.<sup>206</sup> Most visibly, the Church's authority was undermined by President Eduardo Santos successful removal of the Church's control on education in 1942.



Fig. 10: Bogotá, panorama of the Plaza Bolívar (1940-1950)

## 2.2. German = Nazi?

From the mid-nineteenth century on, German communities had formed in the country, foremost in Bogotá and in the department of Santander, in the central northern part of Colombia. Since World War I and with higher intensity immediately before and during World War II, Colombia saw a new wave of German immigration predominantly directed to its cities Bogotá and Barranquilla where immigrants settled down to work as

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<sup>206</sup> Saldarriaga Roa, \_\_\_\_\_, and Jaramillo, 152.

merchants or technicians.<sup>207</sup> Colombia became the destination of German Jews, artists, writers, and leftist politicians, and intellectuals fleeing from the Third Reich. According to Enrique Biermann Stolle, Jews presented the largest group and accounted for about 70 percent of all German immigrants of the period.<sup>208</sup> However, immigration was strictly controlled by the State, and especially Jews faced increasing difficulties due to laws restricting immigration on racial and ethnical grounds stemming from the 1920s.<sup>209</sup> In addition, several decrees were enacted during the 1930s amounting to an anti-Semitic immigration policy. As a result, it was nearly impossible for Jews to immigrate to Colombia from 1939 on until the end of World War II. *El Tiempo* (The Time), one of Colombia's most influential daily papers, reports on July 21, 1940, that 5.000 German émigrés would live in Colombia, and hence constitute ten percent of all foreigners.<sup>210</sup> In general, it is difficult to find exact numbers regarding the German presence in Colombia. Available data is contradictory and at times from non-reliable sources.<sup>211</sup> One reason accounting for some of the differences in number is the definition of what is considered

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<sup>207</sup> German communities in Santander and Bogotá held significant influence in economics, industry, education, sciences, and the arts during the first half of the twentieth century. Enrique Biermann Stolle, *Distantes y distintos: los emigrantes alemanes en Colombia, 1939-1945* (Bogotá: Universidad Nacional de Colombia, 2001), 72 and 80.

<sup>208</sup> Biermann Stolle, 73.

<sup>209</sup> Law 48, issued in 1920, and Law 111, issued in 1922, were designed to limit immigration to Colombia to foreigners of, as the law called it, "questionable personal or racial backgrounds" who were suspected of exerting a destructive influence upon the social order. In article 11 of Law 111, undesirable foreigners are defined as those who "due to their ethnic, organic or racial conditions would be inconvenient for the nationality and for the better development of the race" ("por sus condiciones étnicas, orgánicas o raciales sean inconvenientes para la nacionalidad y para el mejor desarrollo de la raza"). Colombia – Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, *Memoria del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores 1938* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1938), xii-xiii.

<sup>210</sup> N.a., *El Tiempo* (Bogotá; Jul. 21, 1940): 18.

<sup>211</sup> According to the best of my knowledge, exact numbers of Germans living in Colombia during the first decades of the twentieth century are neither available through DANE, the Colombian Office for Statistics, nor through the Auswärtige Amt, the German Foreign Office.



German. “Being German” denoted frequently all German-speaking people without regard to their nationalities, yet in some cases it was limited to people from Germany (not including German Jews). The Nurnberg Laws of 1935 deprived German Jews of their citizenship, and for instance people who fled Germany for political reasons were frequently stripped of their German citizenship, too, which further contributes to the difficulties in obtaining correct numbers about “German” immigrants to Colombia. Hence, Wolfgang Kießling, who conducted pioneering research on German exile in Latin America, doubts the accurateness of the numbers he was able to gather. He argues that 2,000 Germans came to Colombia between 1933 and 1945 about.<sup>212</sup> Only a small percentage of German migrants became politically active in their host country. For example, the “Anti-Nazi-Freiheitsbewegung” (Anti-Nazi-Freedom-Movement) counted at its peak 250 members. The organization was affiliated with the Argentine “Das Andere Deutschland” (The Other Germany) that originated around a newspaper of the same name in 1937. As Max Paul Friedman states in his study *Nazis and Good Neighbors*, between 2,000 and 5,000 copies of the paper of “Das Andere Deutschland” found regular distribution in the two countries.<sup>213</sup> Approximately the same number of Germans joined Colombia’s NSDAP that counted about 300 members at its peak.<sup>214</sup> Acknowledging the difficulties in obtaining accurate numbers, Friedman estimates that three to nine percent of all Germans in Latin America were members of the NSDAP, about 8,000 people in

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<sup>212</sup> Wolfgang Kießling, *Exil in Lateinamerika* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1980), 51.

<sup>213</sup> Max Paul Friedman, *Nazis and Good Neighbors. The United States Campaign against the Germans of Latin America in World War II* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003), 26.

<sup>214</sup> Friedman, 26.

total.<sup>215</sup> In Colombia, self-proclaimed, suspected, or people denounced as Nazis were not immediately persecuted. Also, Colombia hesitated to declare war to Nazi-Germany. The United States government exerted the necessary political pressure before the Colombia began taking measures against individuals and companies that allegedly had links to Nazi-Germany and began persecuting citizens of the Axis Powers.<sup>216</sup> After the attack on Pearl Harbor, the Colombian government under President Santos felt bound by the Havana Conference of 1940 to break off its diplomatic relations with Italy, Japan, and Germany, to which Santos referred in a speech on December 10, 1941, as a necessary step, demanded by “the laws of logic.”<sup>217</sup> It seems telling that Colombian senators agreed to break off relations with Italy and Japan on that very day, but needed another nine days to force themselves to the same action concerning Germany. On December 19, 1941, Colombia interrupted its diplomatic relations with the Third Reich.<sup>218</sup> After the destruction of a Colombian schooner through a German submarine, Colombia declared then a “status of belligerence” against Nazi-Germany on November 26, 1943.

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<sup>215</sup> Friedman, 26-27.

<sup>216</sup> Silvia Galvis and Alberto Donadio, *Colombia Nazi. 1939-1945. Espionaje alemán, La cacería del FBI, Santos López y los pactos secretos* (Bogotá: Planeta, 1986), 105-109.

<sup>217</sup> William Howell Leedom, “The Nazi Threat in Colombia 1938-1941” (PhD Diss., University of Delaware, 1971), 154-155.

<sup>218</sup> “RUPTURA DE RELACIONES: Como consecuencia de la declaración de guerra de Alemania a los Estados Unidos de América, y en virtud de los compromisos de solidaridad continental contraídos por la República, el Gobierno Nacional resolvió romper sus relaciones diplomáticas y consulares con el Reich Alemán, y así lo ratificó al señor Ministro de Alemania en la mañana del 19 de diciembre de 1941.” Translation: “RUPTURE OF RELATIONS: As a consequence of Germany’s war declaration against the United States of America, and in virtue of compromises of continental solidarity implemented by the Republic [of Colombia], the National Government resolved to break its diplomatic and consular relations with the German Reich, and likewise the Minister of Germany ratified this in the morning of December 19<sup>th</sup>, 1941.” Colombia – Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores, “Alemania,” in its *Memoria del Ministro de Relaciones Exteriores 1942* (Bogotá: Imprenta Nacional, 1942), 217-224, here: 217.

### 2.3. US Influence in Colombia: *Lista Negra* and Detentions

Colombia found itself at the time to some degree economically dependent from the United States, while vice-versa a strong bond between the countries was desired to safeguard US-American interests at the Panama Canal. Several international treaties and in particular the Monroe Doctrine from 1823 further prepared the ground for extensive collaboration. Colombia granted in the late 1930s and early 1940s extensive privileges to the United States, some of them secretly. For example, a letter from June 9, 1942 written by the US Secretary of War Henry Lewis Stimson to the US Secretary of State Cordell Hull illustrates one of these so-called “gentlemen’s agreements.” Stimson writes,

[A]ctually a “gentlemen’s agreement” exists between the United States and Colombia. The significance of this agreement consists therein that land, sea, and air forces of the US Military and the Marine possess ample authorization to operate in or over Colombian territory and in or over Colombian maritime territory without prior special permission.<sup>219</sup>

One could consider agreements like this one (about which the Colombian parliament never was consulted) a significant infringement of Colombian sovereignty. As Silvia Galvis and Alberto Donadio’s book *Colombia Nazi* as well as Friedman’s work demonstrate, these agreements followed years of US observation of potential Nazi-infiltration in Colombia and ongoing attempts on the part of the United States to influence Colombian politics.<sup>220</sup> — Even before declaring war against Germany, the

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<sup>219</sup> “[A]ctualmente existe un “acuerdo de caballeros” entre los Estados Unidos y Colombia. El significado de este acuerdo consiste en que las fuerzas terrestres, navales y aéreas del Ejército y de la Marina de los Estados Unidos poseen amplia autorización para operar en o sobre territorio colombiano y en o sobre aguas territoriales colombianas sin previo permiso especial.” Galvis and Donadio, 347-348. Although the letter’s original language is English, Galvis and Donadio printed it in Spanish translation, which I translated back into English.

<sup>220</sup> See on this topic also Leedom’s dissertation “The Nazi Threat in Colombia 1938-1941,” and Luis Eduardo Bosemberg’s article “Alemania y Colombia, 1933-1939,” *Iberoamericana. América Latina, España, Portugal. Ensayos sobre letras, historia y sociedad. Notas. Reseñas iberoamericanas* (Berlin: Ibero-Amerikanische Institut Preußischer Kulturbesitz) 21 (2006): 25-44. Available at <http://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/oaiart?codigo=1700867> (accessed November 12, 2010).

United States had approached Colombia with several requests to control and eliminate potential Nazi activities in Latin America. Of major concern were German pilots and mechanics working for the US airline Pan Am and particularly for SCADTA (Sociedad Colombo-Alemana de Transportes Aéreos / Society of Colombian-German Air Transportation) that operated within the range of the strategically important Panama Canal. Despite the dismay of President Santos and at the cost of disrupting services, the US government effected the firing of all German SCADTA personnel on June 10, 1940.<sup>221</sup> Further, the United States requested Colombia, as most other Latin American countries, to detain a certain number of foreign nationals, mostly Germans but also some Italian and Japanese citizens suspected of supporting the Axis Powers. The names of these people were stated on a so-called “*lista negra*” (black list), officially known as “The Proclaimed List of Certain Blocked Nationals.” On July 18, 1941, notably before the United States entered the Second World War, Colombia accepted the first *lista negra*, which was from then on regularly updated. The *lista negra* was announced in major national newspapers like *El Liberal* (The Liberal):

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<sup>221</sup> Friedman, 106-107.



the United States” spent their days chatting, and playing cards.<sup>223</sup> They even enjoyed the privilege of receiving guests and it was not unheard of that, by leaving a “security deposit,” inmates obtained permission to spend some time outside the Hotel Sabaneta with friends and families.<sup>224</sup> The blacklisted persons were not necessarily Nazi sympathizers or activists. For instance, Emil Wilhelm Krueger, a member of the German Social Democratic Party, was deported although there were “no documents in the file indicating why Krueger was removed”; so was Gustav Adolph Kill, an avowed anti-Nazi who was for unclear reasons judged “inimical to Axis aims” by the US Office of Naval Intelligence.<sup>225</sup> There are other cases without evidence of Nazi sympathies of the persecuted like the ones of Carl Specht who later volunteered for the US Army to fight Nazi Germany, and Paul Emil Schirrmeister who was denounced by his scheming ex-mistress.<sup>226</sup>

Volkening who left Germany for his political convictions was reluctant to act upon them in his host society. He thought of himself as an *homme engagé* “in the sense the political left uses to attribute to the term.”<sup>227</sup> However, gaining political visibility might have been sufficient for raising suspicion and coming under surveillance. Him

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<sup>223</sup> Friedman, 149.

<sup>224</sup> Friedman, 149.

Besides Friedman’s and Biermann’s discussion of the camp, “Exiliados en exilio,” a 2002 film documentary by Rolando Vargas investigates the conditions in which prisoners were kept at the Hotel Sabaneta, and illuminates in interviews with former detainees as well as with their children the social, economic, and personal consequences. Rolando Vargas, director, *Exiliados en exilio*. DVD. Colombia: Ministerio de Cultura, Embajada de Francia, Roerik Video, 2002. Available at <http://homepage.mac.com/exiliados/video.html> (accessed May 24, 2011).

<sup>225</sup> Friedman, 114.

<sup>226</sup> Friedman, 114-115.

<sup>227</sup> “[Fui *homme engagé*] en el sentido que la izquierda suele atribuir al término.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 463.

keeping a low profile politically has to be seen in this context. It is in Volkening's seemingly apolitical writings that we discover hints as to his worldview and political standing: for instance, through an account of his childhood friendship with a Jewish boy, his self-association with the Communist leader Karl Radek, and his explicit empathy with groups suffering from Germany's warfare, as represented by his teacher Mademoiselle van den Brand.<sup>228</sup>

### 3. "Bogotá had conquered me": Building a New Life

As it turned out, Bogotá became Volkening's permanent residence from 1934 until his death in 1983. Despite his initial response upon his arrival in Colombia of perceiving an encompassing "wall of darkness" and the presence of loss and death, he grew soon thereafter fond of the place.<sup>229</sup> In retrospect, Volkening notes in his diary the crucial moment in which he experienced for the first time the exhilarating sentiment of discovering that, much to his own surprise, he indeed enjoyed being in Bogotá. He remembers on November 21, 1976 that evening that occurred more than forty years earlier:

Only half a year later, I discovered the discreet charm of the city. [It was] a *belle de nuit*, when I got plastered together with Jesús Antonio Uribe in one of the old taverns of Calle 13. We left past midnight, and I saw how the light and the shadows conspired mysteriously on the wall in front of us: Bogotá had conquered me.<sup>230</sup>

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<sup>228</sup> See Chapter I.

<sup>229</sup> Policarpo Varón, "Ernesto Volkening: exilio y pasión por Colombia," *Nueva Frontera* (Aug. 29, 1983), 21-22.

<sup>230</sup> "Sólo medio año después [la llegada] habría de descubrir los discretos encantos de la ciudad, una *belle de nuit*, cuando, luego de empinar el codo con Jesús Antonio Uribe en una de las viejas tabernas de la Calle 13, salimos pasada la media noche, y ví cómo conspiraban misteriosamente la luz y las sombras en la pared de enfrente: Bogotá me había conquistado." Volkening, "De mis cuadernos II," 467.

It must have been January or February of 1935, when Volkening enjoyed that rather boozy night with his friend Jesús Antonio Uribe. I was unable to determine who Uribe was, but he is mentioned in Volkening's diary as a dear friend. We also learn that they used to spend late nights in conversation, sometimes accompanied by a certain Dr. Barbosa Manrique, in the Café Valencia and the Café del Atrio in Bogotá.<sup>231</sup> During that night, it was a detail, the interplay of light and shadow, which made Volkening realize that he became emotionally more and more attached to the city, its life, and his own newly established existence. The alienation he had felt when entering the country had dissipated and suddenly gave room to a feeling of joyous wellbeing. As Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda later said with a smile, Volkening became a *bogotano* yet without ever casting off his cultural distinctive Germanness.<sup>232</sup>

### 3.1 Making Ends Meet: Volkening as Merchant and Translator

When Volkening first came to Bogotá, he was not yet the writer and literary critic as whom he is still remembered today in Colombia and other Latin American countries. He was a recent law school graduate in dire need of making a living. His father had left him a small business that Volkening reopened on September 1, 1935. I have not been able to find out what goods he traded, nor for how long he continued his somewhat

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<sup>231</sup> Volkening notes further in his diary that Uribe, "the oldest and most unforgettable friends of mine," died on July 5, 1967. Volkening, "De mis cuadernos II," 450.

Jesús Antonio Uribe [Prada] might have been the very person who had in 1905 been promoted within the Ministry of Foreign Relations to the office of "[el] calígrafo de la Secretaría general de la Presidencia de la República" (the Handwriting Expert of the General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic). See "Decreto Numero 580 de 1905 (8 de Junio)," in *Codificación de los decretos de carácter permanente dictados por el poder ejecutivo del 7 de agosto de 1904 a diciembre de 1905*, by the Colombian State (Colombia: Imprenta Nacional, 1905), 239. Original from Harvard University. Digitized August 27, 2007.

<sup>232</sup> Cobo Borda, "Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario," *Eco* 53:262 (1983): 337-343.



unsuccessful endeavor. Looking back on September 1, 1959, Volkening writes with self-irony:

Today is the twenty-fifth anniversary of me reopening my late father's office and of me beginning what you could call euphemistically my life as a merchant: one of the most surprising examples of congenital economic imbecility of which the annals of a city in which the mercantile talents are omnipresent and everyone spins his yarn at the stock market report.<sup>233</sup>

Besides his occupation as a merchant, Volkening worked throughout his life as a translator of Spanish and German. Translating foremost judicial works was, so it seems, his actual bread-and-butter-job.<sup>234</sup> In the Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia, several of his translations can be found on the theory of law; the last of them was published in the year of his death, in 1983, which attest to his continuing interest in legal matters.<sup>235</sup> Why Volkening did not pursue a career in the field of law is unclear. As a German national and graduate of a German university, he would have been entitled to practice law in Colombia before, during, and after World War II. Colombian Supreme Court Justice Jorge Iván Palacios declared upon inquiry that Volkening could have taken up a judicial profession in Colombia in the 1930s, and in the following years alike without needing

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<sup>233</sup> “Hoy [‘1° de septiembre de 1959’] hace veinticinco años reabrí la oficina de mi finado padre e inicié lo que, con un eufemismo, se podría llamar mi vida de comerciante: uno de los ejemplos más asombrosos de congénita imbecilidad económica de que cuentan los anales de una ciudad donde se dan silvestres los talentos mercantiles y las mentes de bursátil inventiva.” Volkening, “En causa propia I,” 349.

<sup>234</sup> Varón, 21.

<sup>235</sup> Some of Volkening's last finished translations attest to his continued engagement with legal matters until the end of his life: Hans Kelsen Institut, *Teoría pura del Derecho y teoría marxista del Derecho*, trans. Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Temis, 1984); Otto Tschadek, *La prueba: estudio sobre los medios de prueba y la apreciación de la prueba*, trans. Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Temis, 1982); and Robert Walter, *La estructura del orden jurídico: disertación jurídico-teórica basada en la teoría pura del derecho*, trans. Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Temis, 1984). These works are published by the same press as the 1981 Spanish translation of Volkening's dissertation: *El asilo interno en nuestro tiempo*, translated by Ernesto Volkening. Bogotá: Editorial Temis, 1981.

any further studies, but under the condition that he passed the bar exam in Colombia.<sup>236</sup> So far, the information available to me does not permit any speculations why Volkening did not choose this path. However, he mentioned that he entertained already in 1928/29 the idea of becoming a journalist after finishing law school.<sup>237</sup>

In a biographical sketch included in his 1974 collection of autobiographical essays, *Los paseos de Lodovico*, Volkening mentions other jobs he took on while living in Bogotá: “I was a private secretary of an industrialist, a secretary of a psychiatric clinic, and despite being a (a bad one, for sure), the editor of a Catholic magazine.”<sup>238</sup>

### **3.2. “You lack knowledge, education, and culture”**

Jupp Ziegellaub, one of Volkening’s university friends, enjoyed the reputation of being a talented graphologist. One day, Volkening approached him to find out whether he would have talent to become a writer, or as he phrased it, to “know whether I had the wood of a journalist.”<sup>239</sup> — Would he be cut out for the profession? Ziegellaub’s analysis of a writing sample resulted in the disheartening advice “to give up a project whose realization would require very specific qualities that I, judged by my writing, did not

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<sup>236</sup> Jorge Iván Palacios, Justice at the Colombian Constitutional Court (since March 2009), phone interview with Margarita L. J. Zuluaga Tóbon, February 7, 2008. Zuluaga Tóbon is a former magistrate of the Superior Tribunal of Medellín, Colombia (1981-1982).

<sup>237</sup> Volkening, “En causa propia II,” 378.

<sup>238</sup> “[En Bogotá] fui comerciante, secretario privado de un industrial, secretario en una clínica de siquiatria y, a pesar de ser protestante (mal protestante, por cierto), redactor de una revista católica.” Volkening, “Curriculum Vitae,” ix.

<sup>239</sup> “[S]aber si tenía madera de periodista.” Volkening, “En causa propia II,” 378.

possess [...] temperament, agility, punch, curiosity...”<sup>240</sup> He remembers also his own reaction:

I was depressed and nearly irritated, even despite of the excellent opinion that — barely having completed twenty years— he had of my merits, although I felt little secure of myself. At that age, who bears to see destroyed in a blow —and even would it be falsely in an excellent manner— the idea that one had formed about his own personality! As culmination of all unpleasantness, I knew that my horizon was still pretty limited, or how Jupp said, correctly and unambiguously: “Ernesto, putting it in a nutshell, you lack knowledge, education, and culture.”<sup>241</sup>

The strength of his consternation must have been equal to his later efforts to make up for his alleged shortcomings and to pursue his goal in spite of discouragement. Indeed, Volkening would from 1934 on, write notes on literature, and criticism of philosophical and psychological trends.<sup>242</sup> Years passed before his friends, writers and editors, became aware of his writing, and encouraged him to publish his essays. The Colombian poet Álvaro Mutis, who had read some of Volkening’s unpublished essays, invited him to publish in the magazine *Vida: Revista de arte y literatura* (life: magazine of art and literature) whose editor he was since 1942. The insurance company Compañía Colombiana de Seguros founded *Vida* in 1936. Short articles on a wide range of popular topics were mixed with advertisement and news about the company. Although the magazine continued to publicize the company’s accomplishments and products, from 1946 on, the magazine chose a new, culturally-oriented direction. At the time when

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<sup>240</sup> “[D]esistir de un proyecto cuya realización requería cualidades muy específicas que yo, a juzgar por mi letra, no poseía [...] temperamento, agilidad, chispa, curiosidad...” Volkening, “En causa propia II,” 378.

<sup>241</sup> “[E]staba deprimido antes que irritado, pues no obstante la excelente opinión que —apenas cumplidos los veinte años— tenía de mis valores, aún me sentía poco seguro de mí mismo. A esa edad, ¡quién soporta ver destruida de golpe —y así fuese requetefalsa— la idea que uno se haya formado de su propia personalidad! Para colmo de males, supe que mi horizonte estaba todavía bastante limitado, o como dijo Jupp, acertadamente y sin ambagues [*sic*]: ‘Ernesto, por ponerlo en cáscara de nuez, te hacen falta conocimientos, ilustración, cultura.’” Volkening, “En causa propia II,” 378-379.

<sup>242</sup> Volkening: “De mis cuadernos II,” 467-68.

Volkening started to publish in *Vida*, the mission of the magazine was “to serve culture and to contribute to the divulgation of ideas that are of real benefit for everybody.”<sup>243</sup> He made his debut as writer and literary critic in 1947 with an essay on Hermann Hesse, entitled “Retrato de Hermann Hesse” (portrait of Hermann Hesse). Hesse had gained international prominence with his 1927 novel *Der Steppenwolf*, which however was translated into Spanish only in 1951.<sup>244</sup> In 1946, he was awarded the Nobel Prize of Literature for his novel *Das Glasperlenspiel* (*The Glass Bead Game*).<sup>245</sup> Volkening, realizing that Hesse was still relatively little known in Bogotá, discussed the significance of him receiving the Nobel Prize, and what a Latin American readership would benefit from reading the German author. Volkening’s debut was well-received, and he became a regular contributor of *Vida*. Then, as throughout his literary career, he wrote for Spanish language media and used the language of the country.

The poet and intellectual Nicolás Suescún notes in an interview about his friend: “Volkening was a very cultured person [...]. He wrote Spanish that seemed to be more *bogotano* than that of native writers, full of localisms.”<sup>246</sup> In the same tone, the writer

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<sup>243</sup> “[P]restar un servicio a la cultura y de contribuir a la divulgación de ideas de real beneficio para todos.” N.a., “De mes a mes” (editorial), *Vida: Revista de arte y literatura* (Bogotá) 1 (Aug. 1946): 1. — *Vida* was published from January 1936 to May 1944; after a brief suspension, the magazine was reestablished in August of 1946 with its numbering starting once more at 1.

<sup>244</sup> The first Spanish translation of *Der Steppenwolf*, entitled *El lobo estepario*, was published in Mexico in 1951 by the Compañía Nacional de Ediciones.

<sup>245</sup> Volkening, “Retrato de Hermann Hesse,” *Vida* 9 (1947): 2-4. Volkening’s Hesse-article, as most of his publications in Latin America, was written in Spanish. To the best of my knowledge, Volkening published in German in Latin America only in *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien* and Bogotá’s *Kolumbien-Post. Deutsche Monatszeitschrift für Kultur und Wirtschaft in Kolumbien*. Besides, Volkening published in Germany his dissertation, *Das interne Asyl in unserer Zeit*, and he translated Michael de Ferdinandy, *Ahnen und Schicksal: Geschichtsforschung und Genotropismus* (Munich: Karpathia, 1955).

<sup>246</sup> Colombian poet, translator, journalist, and bookseller Nicolás Suescún said about his friend: “Volkening era una persona muy culta [...]. Escribía un español que parecía más bogotano que el de los escritores nativos, lleno de localismos.” In: Álvaro Castillo-Granada, “Encuentro con Nicolás Suescún,” *Revista*

Darío Achury Valenzuela comments on Volkening's work: "When we read him in Spanish, one that is admirable because of its fluidity, terseness, and clarity, we suppose that a way of thinking, ideation, and imagination precedes its expression; one that mentally, and in the first instance is German."<sup>247</sup> Volkening's successful code switching attests to his increasing cultural and linguistic hybridism, which would seminally shape his work as a cultural mediator and translator. He wrote almost exclusively in Spanish, his published essays and diaries alike. Being only twenty-six years old when he went into exile was certainly a key factor why. Volkening had studied Spanish already at German universities before coming to Colombia, and he perfected it in the years to come. Volkening, as many of the younger generation of German writers and philosophers who went into exile at the beginning of their career, was open to immersing himself into his environment, and adopting the language of the host culture. Others, who had established themselves as writers, were neither willing nor capable of working in any other language. Thomas Mann, for example, who had received the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1929 for his novel *Buddenbrooks* (published in 1901), never considered such a step when he moved to the United States in 1938. Instead, he continued writing in German, and socialized with other German émigrés. He rejected the attempted Nazi-usurpation of what was considered "German culture" by affirming prominently "Where I am, there is Germany. I carry my German culture in me,"<sup>248</sup> and enjoyed in exile, too, his celebrity

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*Aleph*, ed. Carlos-Enrique Ruiz (Manizales, Colombia, without date). Available at [www.revistaaleph.com.co/article.php3?id\\_article=20](http://www.revistaaleph.com.co/article.php3?id_article=20) (accessed January 20, 2009).

<sup>247</sup> "Cuando le leemos en un castellano, admirable por su claridad, tersura y fluidez, suponemos que a su expresión antecede un pensar, un idear, un imaginar, que mentalmente, y en primera instancia se expresan en alemán." Achury Valenzuela, 14.

<sup>248</sup> Thomas Mann was asked upon arriving to the United States on February 21, 1938, whether he would find exile a difficult burden. His answer contained the famous statement, "Where I am, there is Germany. I

status as “Dichturfürst” (prince among poets).<sup>249</sup> Renouncing the German language would have been a professional suicide for Mann; for Volkening it was the key to building a career as a writer. Writing in Spanish about German literature, culture, and philosophy allowed him to reach a broad audience and presumably to reconstruct his cultural home in Bogotá.

### 3.3. Film Criticism at the Radiodifusora Nacional

For eleven years, Volkening worked as a film critic at the Radiodifusora Nacional de Colombia, the country’s first radio channel. Since its founding in 1940, the channel’s objective has been to transmit foremost educational and cultural programs. From then on, the Radiodifusora Nacional has been the work place and stepping-stone for many intellectuals.<sup>250</sup> An accompanying radio and TV-guide, *Boletín de programas*, provides an overview of the daily broadcasts of both media. It also publishes articles dealing with events, people, and topics featured on air. In March 1954, the *Boletín de programas* introduced Volkening as the host of a new show, called “Critica del cine” (criticism of cinema).<sup>251</sup> The show was first aired the previous month, on February 8, 1954; it was scheduled from then on for fifteen minutes each Monday at 9.00 pm, and was repeated Tuesday mornings at 9.15 am. From 1954 until 1965, Volkening reported thus weekly on

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carry my German culture in me. I have contact with the world and I do not consider myself fallen.” Cited as in N.a., “Mann Finds U.S. Sole Peace Hope,” *The New York Times* (New York, The New York Times Company, February 22, 1938): 13.

<sup>249</sup> Hermann Broch coined the term “Dichturfürst” to refer to Thomas Mann. See Paul Michael Lützel, *Freundschaft im Exil: Thomas Mann and Hermann Broch* (Frankfurt am Main: Klostermann, 2004). “Dichturfürst” translates into English as “Prince of poets” or “Prince among poets.”

<sup>250</sup> Varón, 21.

<sup>251</sup> N.a., “Critica del cine,” *Boletín de programas* (Bogotá) 1:13 (Mar. 1954): 10.

cinematic developments and film premiers. His show was the first of its kind, and Volkening can be considered one of the Colombia's first professional film commentators. He discussed European, Latin- and US-American films on air, and published regularly complementary essays in the *Boletín de programas*.<sup>252</sup> It is noteworthy that Volkening's engagement at the Radiodifusora Nacional coincided with a period of heightened interest in film among the Colombian public. Due to new production models that allowed competing with US-imported color and sound films and the creativity of a young generation of experimental filmmakers, Colombian cinema saw in the mid-1950s a revival with films like the 1954 surrealist short *La langosta azul* (the blue lobster), which was produced by Gabriel García Márquez in collaboration with the filmmakers Álvaro Cepeda Samudio and Luis Vicens, and the painter Enrique Grau.<sup>253</sup> Moreover, on June 13, 1954, the first Colombian TV-station was inaugurated, opening new avenues for the dispersion of visual media and drawing further attention to film and related matters like Volkening's radio show. His show continued to be aired until 1965 with a brief interruption from April to July 1957 when it was temporarily replaced by "Cosas del Cine" (matters regarding movies) by Elsa de Pereira. During these years, there was, as far as apparent from the TV-guide, one more show on Radiodifusora Nacional dedicated to film, namely "Música para el cine" (music for the movie theater) by an unnamed host. From August 1957 on, Volkening's show came back on air under a new name, "El cine y

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<sup>252</sup> For example: Volkening, "El nacimiento del cine," *Boletín de programas* 15:13 (Mar. 1956): 13-15 and 56. —, "El nacimiento del cine II," *Boletín de programas* 15:13 (May 1956): 44-47. —, "El nacimiento del cine III, cine sonoro en Alemania (1929-1933)," *Boletín de programas* 15:13 (Oct. 1956): 41-44; and —, "El cine parlante en los Estados Unidos (1927-1940)," *Boletín de programas* 15:13 (Sept. 1956): 8-12.

<sup>253</sup> Álvaro Cepeda Samudio, Gabriel García Márquez, Enrique Grau Araújo, and Luis Vicens, directors, *La langosta azul* (Colombia, 1954).

sus problemas” (cinema and its problems). In 1965, it was discontinued,<sup>254</sup> as was “Música para el cine,” without replacement in kind.<sup>255</sup>

During those eleven years, Volkening continued working as a translator and contributor to the magazine *Vida*. As a result, editors of some of Bogotá’s cultural magazines invited Volkening to also write for *Crítica*, *Ahora*, *Revista de las Indias*, and *Testimonio*. However, no long-lasting relations were established and until the early 1960s, *Vida* remained the most important forum for the publication of Volkening’s essays.<sup>256</sup>

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<sup>254</sup> I was unable to learn about the date of Volkening’s last show, although it must have been in July or August of the year. The issues of the *Boletín de programas* for this period were not available in the Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia in Bogotá at the time of my research (Jan.-Feb., 2008).

<sup>255</sup> When I conducted research in Bogotá in 2008, I was unable to access the sound recordings from 1954-1965 (the period Volkening broadcast his show) at the archive of the Instituto Nacional de Radio y Televisión because the archive was in the progress of reconstruction and the still un-catalogued material from that time could not be located. I intend to continue my research once the archive grants access to the material.

<sup>256</sup> Volkening writes in 1975, “numerous articles, essays, reviews, and commentaries on cinema, written in the years between 1947 and 1961, got dispersed in the *Bogotano* press.” In the original Spanish versión, the passage reads: “Numerosos artículos, ensayos, reseñas y comentarios de cine, escritos en los años de 1947 a 1961, se hallan dispersos en la prensa bogotana.” Volkening, “Datos biográficos,” 7.



### 3.4. The Librería Buchholz and *Eco*



Fig. 12: Librería Buchholz, Avenida Jiménez de Quesada 8-40 in Bogotá (1970s)

A new period in Volkening's life began when the German book dealer Karl Buchholz established himself in Bogotá in 1951.<sup>257</sup> In the 1920s, Buchholz had opened his first bookstore in Berlin, and expanded it in 1934 to a book and art shop with gallery space. Soon, intellectuals, writers, and artists were part of the regulars who would drop

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<sup>257</sup> Karl Buchholz's career has been subject of several publications: his daughter Godula Buchholz wrote the book *Karl Buchholz. Buch- und Kunsthändler im 20. Jahrhundert* (Köln: DuMont, 2005). Volkening wrote an essay about Buchholz's work as editor: "Carlos Buchholz. Perfil de un editor," *Eco* 41:252 (Oct. 1982): 668-670; and Buchholz himself spoke in 1983 about the bookstores he founded in Berlin, New York, Bucharest, Lisbon, Madrid, and Bogotá; a recording of his talk was published in 2000: Karl Buchholz, "Mis librerías," sound recording from 1983 on *Voces: HJCK 50 años: 1950-2000*, Audiobook on 5 CDs (Bogotá: Emisora H. J. C. K. and Zetta Comunicadores, 2000): CD 1, track 24.

in, at times only for a conversation or for reading instead of buying a book. In Berlin, Buchholz exhibited works by modern artists like Max Beckmann, Karl Schmidt-Rottluff, Käthe Kollwitz, Georg Kolbe, and Gerhard Marcks. During the Third Reich, he kept blacklisted books and paintings in his shop making them available to trustworthy customers. Moreover, he managed to sell openly, on behalf of the Nazis, many works of what the regime classified as “*entartete Kunst*” (degenerated art) to foreign collectors. Buchholz rescued many paintings that otherwise might have likely been destroyed. At the same time, he profited from collaborating and deceiving the regime. He opened several international bookstores with galleries for modern art: in New York in 1937, in Bucharest in 1940, in Lisbon in 1943, in Madrid in 1945, and in Bogotá in 1951. As his daughter, Godula Buchholz, explains, the family losing a considerable part of their possessions during the Second World War and the Russian occupation in Berlin, decided to have a fresh start in Madrid after the war.<sup>258</sup> However, the Madrid bookstore was not profitable and the Buchholz family toyed with the idea of moving again. Returning to Germany? The Cold War fanned the parent’s fear of ending up once more in a kind of war zone if they would return.<sup>259</sup> Another reason against a return to Germany might have been actual or anticipated difficulties in obtaining a business license from the occupying forces in Germany because of Buchholz’s collaboration of sorts with the former Nazi regime. So, it happened that South America was considered. The decision for Bogotá was almost accidental, as Godula Buchholz reports. In 1950, Karl Buchholz traveled to Brazil where he went to Ríó de Janeiro and Saõ Paulo. Both cities did not pose viable options for

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<sup>258</sup> Godula Buchholz, 166-177.

<sup>259</sup> Godula Buchholz, 184.

establishing a bookstore due to unexpected expensive rent and discouragingly high interest rates.<sup>260</sup> Thinking about alternatives, Buchholz met in São Paulo with the Colombian Honorary Consul to Brazil, a Herr Landmann. During their conversation, Landmann suggested Bogotá for Buchholz' plans, and encouraged him to visit the Colombian capital. The economic conditions turned out to be advantageous and during Buchholz' first visit to Bogotá in 1950, he discovered on a hike the place where he envisioned building his family home.<sup>261</sup> He found an associate, Dr. Antonio Bergmann, and a space in a popular business area on the main East-West-Avenue of the city. The new Librería Buchholz was opened on November 27, 1951, in Avenida Jiménez de Quesada 8-40. The invitation for the opening event was accompanied by an exhibition of graphics by Georges Henri Rouault out of the series "Miserer et Guerre." Lithographs by Pablo Picasso, works by Paul Klee, and recent aquarelles by Guillermo (Wilhelm Egon) Wiedemann were announced for the same season, which reflects Buchholz's commitment to create, as Godula Buchholz stresses, "something unprecedented."<sup>262</sup> For example, his Picasso-exhibit was the first in Colombia.<sup>263</sup> Suescún wrote in 1992, "Buchholz was a miracle in Bogotá. No book store of this kind has ever existed, or should ever emerge."<sup>264</sup> On four floors, later expanded to eight, Buchholz sold books in Spanish, French, Italian, English, and German. His customers were Colombians and Europeans who lived in the

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<sup>260</sup> Godula Buchholz, 178.

<sup>261</sup> Godula Buchholz, 179.

<sup>262</sup> Godula Buchholz, 191.

<sup>263</sup> Godula Buchholz, 197.

<sup>264</sup> "Buchholz war ein Wunder in Bogotá. Keine gleichartige Buchhandlung hatte je existiert oder sollte je existieren." Nicolás Suescún, "Buchholz war ein Wunder," in *Karl Buchholz. Buch- und Kunsthändler im 20. Jahrhundert*, Godula Buchholz, 213-217, here: 215.

city. University students could buy their books for the courses at the three major universities in the city, and books that were generally considered difficult to obtain could be ordered. Such was the setting in which readers, writers, journalists, and art enthusiasts met for conversations and formed friendships.

A similar circle of people supported Buchholz as the publisher of the magazine *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Echo: Magazine of occidental culture) between 1960 and 1984. The mission of the magazine was, as its name already suggests, the promotion of occidental thought, literature, and the visual arts for a Spanish-speaking readership:

The magazine [...] considered as one of its tasks “to make known these German language writers and thinkers who could expect being of interest in a Spanish-speaking world and whose texts were then in our language [Spanish] not or only with difficulties available.”<sup>265</sup>

Thus, special editions were dedicated to Friedrich Hölderlin, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Bertolt Brecht. Walter Benjamin’s 1936 essay “Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit” (“The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction”) was published unabridged in Spanish translation.<sup>266</sup> Its longtime editor, the Colombian writer Cobo Borda,<sup>267</sup> described *Eco*’s groundbreaking role:

*Eco* carried out an educational pioneering feat. For instance with the critical revision of Marxism or through articles of the Frankfurt School, through

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<sup>265</sup> “Die Zeitschrift [...] sah es als eine ihrer Aufgaben, ‘jene deutschsprachigen Schriftsteller und Denker bekannt zu machen, die in der Spanisch sprechenden Welt auf Interesse stossen konnten und deren Texte zur damaligen Zeit in unserer Sprache [Spanisch] nur schwer oder gar nicht zu haben waren.’” Cobo Borda, “Eco 1960 – 1984, 272 Ausgaben,” in *Karl Buchholz. Buch- und Kunsthändler im 20. Jahrhundert*, Godula Buchholz, 210-213, here: 210-211.

<sup>266</sup> Cobo Borda, “Eco 1960 – 1984, 272 Ausgaben,” 211.

<sup>267</sup> Cobo Borda was *Eco*’s main editor from 1973 to 1984 (the magazine was discontinued afterwards). As such, he succeeded Volkering who held the position in 1971 and 1972.

[publicizing] new concepts in the fields of natural sciences, philosophy, psychoanalysis, sociology, music, and also of media and urbanity.<sup>268</sup>

*Eco*'s pioneer status and success gained the attention of the West Germany's government that began buying regularly a fixed contingent for distribution through its consulates in Spanish-speaking countries. J. E. Jaramillo Zuluaga published in 1989 an essay, entitled "ECO: revista de la Cultura de Occidente (1960-1984)," in which he discussed the changes of *Eco*'s thematic focus under different editors, including Volkening.<sup>269</sup> In 2005, Kate Jenckes traced the development of the magazine over the time of its existence, from 1960 to 1984, and discussed *Eco*'s understanding of (occidental) culture in her essay, "Heavy Beasts and the Garden of Culture: Remembering Eco: Revista de la cultura de occidente."<sup>270</sup> — From the 1960s until his death in 1983, Volkening worked closely with *Eco*, and conduced to the success of the magazine as one of its most productive contributors and from March 1971 to December of 1972 also as its main editor. It was in *Eco* where he published most of his work from 1962 until 1983/84.<sup>271</sup> Volkenings essays are next to translations of published work as well as original contributions by Maurice Blanchot, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida,

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<sup>268</sup> "Eco leistete in Hispanoamerika aufklärerische Pionierarbeit. Zum Beispiel mit der kritischen Revision des Marxismus oder durch die Beiträge der Frankfurter Schule, durch die neuen Entwürfe in den Bereichen der Naturwissenschaften, der Philosophie, der Psychoanalyse, der Soziologie, der Musik, auch der Medien und der Urbanität." Cobo Borda, "Eco 1960 – 1984, 272 Ausgaben," 211.

<sup>269</sup> J. E. Jaramillo Zuluaga, "ECO: revista de la Cultura de Occidente," *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* (Bogotá) 26:18 (1989): 3-17.

<sup>270</sup> Kate Jenckes, "Heavy Beasts and the Garden of Culture: Remembering Eco: Revista de la cultura de occidente," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 5:2 (Fall 2005): 151-169.

<sup>271</sup> Three of Volkening's essays were published after his death on July 22, 1983: Volkening, "Sondeos de mis cuadernos," *Eco* 53:262 (Aug., 1983): 344-377; his "El oficio de escribir: de mis cuadernos" *Eco* 53:264 (Oct., 1983): 579-620; and his "Apología de la anécdota y otras herejías," *Eco* 54:267 (Jan., 1984): 224-225.

Roland Barthes, Marta Traba, Álvaro Mutis, Dario Achury, Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, Golo Mann, Herbert Marcuse, Hannah Arendt, Edmund Husserl, and Elias Canetti.

### **3.5. Volkenings Involvement with *Eco***

In his essays, Volkening discussed a wide range of foremost German literature. Thus, he revisited canonized figures such as Georg Büchner and Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,<sup>272</sup> and he dealt with writers who were just about to be discovered. Such was the case with Caroline von Günderode who was popularly referred to as the “Sappho of Romanticism.” This comparison is based on either woman’s alleged transgression of the socially expected demeanor of her sex and of the limits of decency in the choice of subjects by female writers; in addition their suicides were considered reactions to unrequited love. When Volkening wrote about her, Günderode was being rediscovered by the women’s movement. As this example shows, Volkening was aware of new developments in the German literary scene and responded to them despite his geographical distance.<sup>273</sup> In a similar way, Volkening drew attention to Robert Walser who, after having engaged a generation of intellectuals like Franz Kafka, Walter Benjamin, and Robert Musil, had been largely forgotten. He wrote about Robert Walser before the Walser-mania of the 1970s set fully in and inspired the generation of writers of which Elfriede Jelinek, W. G. Sebald, Peter Handke, and Martin Walser are probably the most prominent ones.<sup>274</sup> The contemporary relevance of the writers that inspired

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<sup>272</sup> Volkening, “Reivindicación de Johann Peter Eckermann,” *Eco* 23:136 (Aug., 1971): 337-342 (about Goethe’s conversations with Eckermann); and “Georg Büchner, el desconocido,” *Eco* 6:6 (Apr., 1963): 578-597.

<sup>273</sup> Volkening, “Muerte y supervivencia de Carolina,” *Eco* 25:151 (1972): 68-78.

<sup>274</sup> Volkening, “Robert Walser,” *Eco* 19:112 (1969): 346-352.

Volkening can be discovered in most of his literary criticism. For instance, Peter Härtling was awarded the Gerhart Hauptmann Prize in 1971, which Volkening used subsequently as an opportunity to introduce him to Colombian readers.<sup>275</sup> Frequently, the works of writers and intellectuals who were introduced in *Eco* were at that time not available or hard to get in Spanish translation. Volkening would thus accompany an essay about an author with a translation of a sample of her work.<sup>276</sup> A good example for *Eco* promoting a German writer who was over decades not available in Spanish except for those of her texts that were published in *Eco* is Marie Luise Kaschnitz. It took until 2007 when Kaschnitz was published in Spanish and distributed in Colombia with *Lugares: apuntes* (places: notes), a collection of self-reflective, lyrical notes.<sup>277</sup> Yet, some of her work was published already in the second issue of *Eco* in December of 1960,<sup>278</sup> followed by several other texts by her in translation until the mid-1970s.<sup>279</sup> Volkening translated only one of these texts, “Prosa menuda” (negligible prose), in 1974. However, he was the only *Eco*-translator who accompanied his translation also with an essay about Kaschnitz’s life and work.<sup>280</sup> Sometimes, the authors whose work Volkening chose to interpret had been

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<sup>275</sup> Volkening, “Huyendo del tiempo irrecuperable: apuntes sobre la novelística de Peter Hartling [*sic*],” *Eco* 24:140 (1971): 54-89.

<sup>276</sup> Varón, 21.

<sup>277</sup> Marie Luise Kaschnitz, *Lugares: apuntes*, trans. Fruela Fernández (Valencia: Pre-textos, 2007). This is a translation of Kaschnitz’s *Orte: Aufzeichnungen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel, 1973). There is no English translation of it to date.

<sup>278</sup> Kaschnitz, “Un mediodía, a mediados de junio,” unknown translator, *Eco* 2:2 (Dec. 1960): 149-157. This is the translation of her short story “Eines Mittags, Mitte Juni” (A midday, in mid-June) and not to be confused with her 1983 essay collection that carries the same title (published by Claassen in Düsseldorf).

<sup>279</sup> Kaschnitz, “Genazzano,” trans. Antonio de Zubiaurre, *Eco* 8:44 (1963): 178-179; —, “No dicho,” trans. Rodolfo E. Modern, *Eco* 29:175 (1975): 75; —, “Prosa menuda,” trans. Ernesto Volkening, *Eco* 28:170 (1974): 166-171; and her “Yo viví,” trans. Antonio de Zubiaurre, *Eco* 5:25 (1962): 8-21;

<sup>280</sup> Volkening, “Marie Luise Kaschnitz 1901-1974: final sin esperanza,” *Eco* 28:170 (1974): 173-177.

translated into Spanish but were barely known. For example: In 1965, the writer and historian Golo Mann published *Recuerdos de mi padre*, the translation of his book of the same year about his memories of his father Thomas Mann, *Erinnerungen an meinen Vater (Memories of My Father)*.<sup>281</sup> Since the National Library acquired it, it is safe to assume that *Recuerdos de mi padre* also circulated in Colombia. Golo Mann further increased his public presence, at least in Germany, by succeeding a few years later, in 1974, the journalist Günter Gaus in hosting his own TV talk show, “Golo Mann im Gespräch mit ...” (Golo Mann in conversation with ...). Maybe in reaction to the attention Golo Mann received at the time in Germany, Volkening introduced him in 1974 to Colombian readers with by translating one of his essays, “Reflexiones sobre historiografía” (reflections on historiography), which he accompanied it with an essay of his own, “A propósito de un ensayo sobre historiografía” (regarding an essay on historiography).<sup>282</sup> This pattern of “stimulus – translation – commentary” was characteristic for Volkening’s choices regarding his work as a literary critic. Also, he dealt with historical events and people, German art, philosophy, and psychoanalysis as his articles on Sigmund Freud, Carl Gustav Jung, and Ernst Bloch exemplify.<sup>283</sup> Besides, a considerable number of Volkening’s essays disclose an ongoing interest in the works

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<sup>281</sup> Golo Mann, *Thomas Mann: recuerdos de mi padre* (Bonn: Inter Naciones, 1965). The book was published by Inter Naciones in 1965 in several languages: in German (*Erinnerungen an meinen Vater*), English (*Memories of My Father*), French (*Mes souvenirs sur mon père*), Portuguese (*Recordações de meu pai*), and in the mentioned Spanish language version.

<sup>282</sup> Golo Mann, “Reflexiones sobre historiografía,” trans. Volkening, *Eco* 28:164 (1974): 113-137; and Volkening, “A propósito de un ensayo sobre historiografía,” *Eco* 28:164 (1974): 138-141.

<sup>283</sup> The following essays are illustrative of the various categories: Volkening, “El Carlos V de Michael de Ferdinandy: historia y metahistoria,” *Eco* 20:120 (1970): 520-560; —, “Fundamentos de la personalidad,” *Vida* 29 (1949): 14-17; —, “El pintor Wiedemann,” *Vida* 53 (1952): 8-15; —, “C. G. Jung: su vida y su obra,” *Revista de las Indias* 36:113 (1950): 155-184; and his “Papeles viejos y las herejías de Ernst Bloch,” *Eco* 23:138-139 (Oct.-Nov., 1971): 719-725.



and lives of other exiles.<sup>284</sup> Volkening himself published also select excerpts of his diaries in *Eco*,<sup>285</sup> as well as an intimate travel report about his visit to Antwerp, the city of his childhood.<sup>286</sup> Yet, as his friend Policarpo Varón notes, “the beautiful was without question his interest for Colombia, for its people, for its cities, for its writers. Volkening felt passion for Colombia.”<sup>287</sup> Openness and curiosity for the culture and literature of his host country, and friendships with writers motivated Volkening to publish several essays on Colombian literature,<sup>288</sup> proving himself astoundingly well grounded.<sup>289</sup> He contributed pioneering essays on the celebrated writer and controversial politician José

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<sup>284</sup> For example critique of Joseph Conrad’s novella *Heart of Darkness*: Volkening, “Evocación de una sombra,” *Eco* 6:34 (1963): 358-275.

<sup>285</sup> Volkening published in *Eco* during the last three years of his life (1980-1983) excerpts of his diaries written between 1953 and 1977. Those are in chronological order: Volkening, “Spengler hoy,” *Eco* 36:219 (1980): 313-317. —, “De mis cuadernos I,” *Eco* 36:220 (1980): 337-351. —, “De mis cuadernos II,” *Eco* 36:221 (1980): 449-468. —, “Emile Verhaeren y Max Elskamp: de mis cuadernos,” *Eco* 37:223 (1980): 73-82. —, “Voces alemanas,” *Eco* 38:230 (1980): 113-143. —, “En causa propia I,” *Eco* 38:232 (1981): 337-359. —, “Res publica,” *Eco* 45:241 (1981): 61-103. —, “En causa propia II,” *Eco* 48:244 (1982): 361-400. —, “Sondeos (de mis cuadernos),” *Eco* 53:262 (1983): 344-377. —, “El oficio de escribir: de mis cuadernos,” *Eco* 53:264 (1983): 579-620.

In 2004, Oscar Jairo González Hernández a collection of most of these texts: Ernesto Volkening, *En causa propia*, ed. Oscar Jairo González Hernández (Colombia: Imprenta Universidad de Antioquia, 2004). However, González Hernández organized the text, contrary to the *Eco*-publications, according to strict chronology, to the result that although he uses the same titles as have been used in *Eco*, the content found under these titles does not always correspond to the *Eco*-publications; González Hernández accounts for these alterations in his preface “La mirada del grafólogo,” *ibid.*, xi-xxi.

<sup>286</sup> Published in two installments in 1969, the year after Volkening’s trip to Antwerp: Volkening, “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro I,” *Eco* 19:110 (1969): 113-157. —, “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro II,” *Eco* 19:2 (1969): 234-281.

<sup>287</sup> ““Lo maravilloso, sin embargo, era su interés por Colombia, por su gente, por sus ciudades, por Bogotá, por sus escritores. Volkening era un apasionado [*sic*] de Colombia.” Varón, 22.

<sup>288</sup> Some exemplary titles include Volkening, “A propósito de José Antonio Osorio Lizarazo (1953),” *Eco* 35:214 (1979): 442-443. —, “Aire de tango de Manuel Mejía Vallejo, epitafio a las cosas ídas,” *Eco* 27:157 (1973): 90-106. —, “La metáfora y el mundo de los arquetipos: sobre un libro de Graciela Maturo,” *Eco* 25:150 (1978): 645-660. —, “Anotado al margen de ‘el reaccionario’ de Nicolás Gómez Dávila,” *Eco* 34:205 (1978): 95-99.

<sup>289</sup> Varón, 22.

Antonio Osorio Lizarazo<sup>290</sup> and on Álvaro Mutis about whom he comments, “If I were asked to praise Álvaro Mutis’s poetry, I would say that the heart of the world throbs in it.”<sup>291</sup> Volkening discussed also lesser-known writers such as Jairo Mercado Romero, the “*cuentista*” (storyteller) as he is often called.<sup>292</sup> Furthermore, his essays on García Márquez’s early works gained Volkening accolades and attention. These essays were also published in *Eco*, which began to include articles on Colombian literature and culture in addition to its focus on European literature. Cobo Borda comments on this development:

The magazine did not only serve as a one-way bridge on which writings in German reached Bogotá, Colombia. It developed with astonishing success into a Colombian, Latin American institution as well without losing for that reason standard or character, and [the magazine] provided in its issues room for the literature that emerged suddenly, as out of an explosion, [literature] of those novelists who should initiate the “Boom” of the new Latin American novel. They entrusted *Eco* with texts out of their first publications that were beyond any doubt.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>290</sup> The Colombian writer José Antonio Osorio Lizarazo was born in Bogotá in 1900 and died there in 1964. He ran the two magazines *La Prensa* and *El Herald*, and was head of the Marxist-Gaitanista newspaper *Jornada*. Notably, the Gaitanista-movement took its name from the late politician and leader of a populist movement Jorge Eliécer Gaitan. At different times, Gaitan was appointed mayor of Bogotá, Education Minister, Labor Minister, and, since 1947, chief of the Colombian Liberal Party. Gaitan was considered a likely candidate in the presidential election of 1948, when he was assassinated on April 9, 1948. Ironically, the assassination of Gaitan who was a leading opponent of the use of violence gave cause to the violent uprising in Bogotá known as *El Bogotazo* and ignited *La Violencia*, a decade of violent, political unrest in Colombia’s history.

Osorio Lizarazo was contested on grounds of his collaboration with Argentine dictator Juan Domingo Perón and the Dominican dictator Rafael Leonidas Trujillo.

<sup>291</sup> “Si me fuera dado hacer el encomio de la poesía de Álvaro Mutis, diría en ella late el corazón del mundo. No más.” Volkening, “El mundo ancho y ajeno de Álvaro Mutis,” in his *Evocación de una sombra*, no editor named (Bogotá: Editorial Ariel, 1998), 148-155, here: 152. This essay was first published in *Eco* 41:237 (Jul., 1981): 259-265.

<sup>292</sup> The writer Jairo Mercado Romero was born in Naranjal, Ecuador, in 1941 and died in Bogotá in 2003. He is best known for his Caribbean tales many of which he rendered from oral tradition into writing, as, for instance, with the anthology *Literatura Oral del Caribe Colombiano: Narrativa* (Bogotá: Fondo de Publicaciones Universidad Francisco José de Caldas, 1995). Volkening wrote about Mercado Romero’s work in the essay “Jairo Mercado Romero, un cuentista de verdad,” *Eco* 23:136 (1971): 437-445.

<sup>293</sup>“Die Zeitschrift diente nicht nur in einer Richtung als Brücke, über die auf deutsch Geschriebenes nach Bogotá, nach Kolumbien gelangte. Sie wurde mit bemerkenswertem Erfolg auch eine kolumbianische, eine lateinamerikanische Institution, ohne darum an Niveau oder Charakter zu verlieren, und gab in ihren Heften der explosionsartig aufkommenden Literatur jener Erzähler Raum, die den ‚Boom‘ des neuen

*Eco* took pride in its achievements and was able to extend the circle of interested readers significantly by promoting the avant-garde that would put Colombian literature internationally on the map. For instance, it was there that García Márquez published a preprint of one chapter of his 1967 novel *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*).<sup>294</sup> Volkening actively supported the new trend; several of his essays, particularly those written in the 1960s and 1970s, deal with Colombian literature.

### 3.6. “A Brotherly Soul”: Friendship with Gabriel García Márquez

It was in the Librería Buchholz that Volkening met several of his future friends: Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, Nicolás Suescún, Álvaro Mutis, Nicolás Gómez Dávila, and Gabriel García Márquez, as well as artists like Guillermo Wiedemann. These encounters often led to collaborations, as it was the case with Volkening, Cobo Borda, and Suescún in their work for the magazine *Eco*. Also, those meetings proved stimulating for Volkening’s writing, as his essays on Wiedemann,<sup>295</sup> Mutis,<sup>296</sup> and Gómez Dávila<sup>297</sup> demonstrate.

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lateinamerikanischen Roman auslösen sollten. Sie vertrauten *Eco* Texte aus über jeden Zweifel erhabenen Erstlingen an.” Cobo Borda, “Eco 1960 – 1984, 272 Ausgaben,” 212.

<sup>294</sup> Gabriel García Márquez, “*Cien años de soledad*: fragment,” *Eco* 14:82 (1967): 342-366.

<sup>295</sup> Volkening, “El pintor Wiedemann” *Vida* 53 (Sept.-Oct., 1952): 8-15. Volkening wrote this essay on occasion of an exhibit of Wiedemann’s paintings in the gallery space that belonged to the *Librería Buchholz*; it was published in 1952 in *Vida* (*Eco* did not yet exist).

<sup>296</sup> Volkening, “El mundo ancho y ajeno de Álvaro Mutis,” *Eco* 41:237 (1981): 259-265. This essay has been included in several editions of Mutis’s *Summa de Maqroll el Gaviero* (*Treatise on Maqroll, the Lookout*). Most recently, in *Summa de Maqroll el Gaviero. Álvaro Mutis*, ed. Jansen Maarten (Mexico City: Fondo de Cultura Económica, 2002): 11-17.

The Colombian writer and poet Álvaro Mutis Jaramillo was born on August 25, 1923, in Bogotá. His father, the diplomat Santiago Mutis Dávila, moved with the family to Brussels, Belgium, where they stayed until the father’s death in 1933. As Volkening, Mutis Jaramillo cherished memories of his time in Belgium that are intricately linked to his late father, and stylized them in his writings as in his 1989-book “Un bel morir” (published in English under the same Latin title that translates as “A beautiful dying”). For Mutis

However, the encounter with García Márquez in 1967 was somewhat different. Before they ever met personally, Volkening was familiar with García Márquez's early publications.<sup>298</sup> Moreover, he had already published three critical essays about García Márquez's work in *Eco*: "Gabriel García Márquez o el trópico desembrujado" (Gabriel García Márquez or the unbewitched tropic) in 1963, "A propósito de *La mala hora*" (Regarding *The Evil Hour*) in 1963, and "Anotado al margen de *Cien años de soledad*" (Notes on the margin of *One Hundred Years of Solitude*) in 1967,<sup>299</sup> the same year in which *Eco* published also the preprint of a chapter of *Cien años de soledad*.<sup>300</sup> It was at that time, on October 25, 1967, that Volkening came together with the rising star of the soon to-be-called "Boom generation." The following day, Volkening notes in his diary:

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Jaramillo, as for Volkening, Antwerp turned into a lost paradise. See in that regard most prominently Volkening's aforementioned essay about Antwerp.

When talking about the several critics of his work, Mutis Jaramillo distinguished Volkening: "There is a group of critics who have accompanied my work, and have been accurate, and have treated my poetry with a truthfulness, with a closeness that seems to me very valid [...] [a group of critics] who, I believe, have treated my work with truthfulness and a good judgment [...] For expressing it in some way, of course, since my youth, Ernesto Volkening wrote in Colombia excellent notes about my first books." The original passage reads: "Hay un grupo de críticos que han acompañado mi obra y que han acertado y que han tratado a mi poesía con una certeza, con una cercanía que me parece muy válida...que considero han tratado mi obra con certeza y con buen juicio [...] Para decirlo en alguna forma, desde luego en mi juventud Ernesto Volkening escribió en Colombia excelentes notas sobre mis primeros libros." Quoted as in Miguel Ángel Zapata, "Álvaro Mutis: escribir es un continuo corregir," *Jornal de Poesia, Banda Hispânica*; available at [www.secrel.com.br/jpoesia/bh6mutis.htm](http://www.secrel.com.br/jpoesia/bh6mutis.htm) (accessed January 20, 2009).

<sup>297</sup> Volkening, "Anotado al margen de 'El reaccionario' de Nicolás Gómez Dávila," *Eco* 34:205 (Nov., 1978): 95-99.

<sup>298</sup> Prominently among them: *La hojarasca* (*Leafstorm*) in 1955, *El coronel no tiene quién le escriba* (*No One Writes to the Colonel*) in 1961, *Los funerales de la Mamá Grande* (*Big Mama's Funeral*) and *La mala hora* (*In Evil Hour*) in 1962, and *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*) in 1967.

<sup>299</sup> Volkening, "Gabriel García Márquez o el trópico desembrujado," *Eco* 7:40 (1963): 275-293. —, "A propósito de *La mala hora*," *Eco* 7:40 (1963): 294-304. —, "Anotado al margen de *Cien años de soledad*," *Eco* 15:87 (1967): 259-303.

<sup>300</sup> Before the novel *Cien años de soledad* was released, García Márquez published a preprint of one of its chapter in the magazine *Eco*: "*Cien años de soledad*: fragment," *Eco* 14:82 (1967): 342-366. García Márquez published the novel later in the same year, however not in Colombia but in Argentina with the Editorial Sudamericana press in Buenos Aires.

The first encounter with Gabriel García Márquez. Yesterday, he gave me a call, and we agreed on meeting in Buchholz' bookstore. Afterwards we went for lunch.

Gabriel is a man who carries himself in an unostentatious and natural way, without pretensions. He shows his sympathies in a discreet manner. His fame as an author should have intimidated me, that is what usually happens to me in the presence of important people. However, on the contrary, it was he who gave the impression to feel inhibited. Strange. It seems as if he considers me a mine of wisdom. However, there was immediately an ambiance of mutual understanding; moreover, I felt with him this sensation of deep familiarity, one I also feel with the characters of his books [...] It was as if I had suddenly come across a brotherly soul. Naturally, we talked extensively about "One Hundred Years of Solitude," but also, as we Germans would have it, about God and the world."<sup>301</sup>

The two men stayed in touch, and Volkening was asked to have his essay "Gabriel García Márquez o el trópico desembrujado" included in the 1967 edition of García Márquez's novella *Isabel viendo llover en Macondo* (*Monologue of Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo*).<sup>302</sup> García Márquez's esteem concerning Volkening was no secret among their friends as Gustavo Ibarra Merlano affirms: "Ernesto Volkening wrote an essay on the stories of García Márquez that he regarded as one of the best that had been written on his work, to the point that he expressed he has been the only critic that has influenced him."<sup>303</sup> The essay being the very same that was published with *Isabel*

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<sup>301</sup> "El primer encuentro con Gabriel García Márquez. Ayer llamó por teléfono, y nos dimos cita en la librería de Buchholz. Después fuimos a almorzar. Gabriel es hombre de porte sencillo y natural, sin pretensiones. Tiene una manera discreta de mostrar sus simpatías. Su fama de autor debiera haberme intimidado, pues así me suele suceder en presencia de gente de peso. Pero al contrario, fue él que dio la impresión de sentirse un sí es no es [*sic*] inhibido. Curioso. Parece que me tiene por un pozo de sabiduría. Sin embargo, se creó al instante un ambiente de mutuo entendimiento, más aún, experimenté en el trato de él, igual que para con los personajes de sus libros, esa sensación de honda familiaridad [...] Fue como si de golpe me hubiera topado con una alma hermana. Claro está que charlábamos a lo ancho y largo sobre 'Cien años de soledad,' pero también, como decimos los alemanes, hablábamos 'de Dios y el mundo.'" Volkening, "De mis cuadernos I," *Eco* 36:220 (1980), 340.

<sup>302</sup> "Gabriel García Márquez o el trópico desembrujado" was published in *Isabel viendo llover en Macondo*, by Gabriel García Márquez (Buenos Aires: Estuario, 1967), 22-44, and several of its reprints. Some of these editions of García Márquez's novella render its title as *Monólogo de Isabel viendo llover en Macondo* (*Monolog of Isabel Watching It Rain in Macondo*).

<sup>303</sup> "Él [Ernesto Volkening] escribió un ensayo sobre los cuentos de García Márquez que éste considera uno de los mejores que se han hecho sobre su obra, hasta el punto de expresar que ha sido el único crítico que ha tenido influencia sobre él." Gustavo Ibarra Merlano as quoted in Álvaro Suescón Toledo, "Gustavo Ibarra Merlano y la poesía," *Revista Casa Silva* 16 (2003); available at

*viendo llover en Macondo*. Besides that, we know that García Márquez wanted his friend and esteemed critic Volkening to translate *Cien años de soledad* into German, which was, however, never realized. In a conversation in Paris in 1968 with Curt Meyer-Clason, the future translator of the novel into German, García Márquez is reported of having said: “Ernesto Volkening is the man who as the first of all in Bogotá, called attention to my books. A man who speaks and writes Spanish like we Colombians, therefore he must be the first who is capable to translate, to recreate my literature in his mother tongue.”<sup>304</sup> Meyer-Clason disagreed with him, insisting that “To translate is to live together!”<sup>305</sup> and that Volkening’s translation of the first chapter of the novel would show “that the translator has lost the experiencing, existential, intimate contact with his language.”<sup>306</sup> So it was held against Volkening that he would lack the necessary immersion in the German language after having lived for more than thirty years in Colombia, which might or might not have been the case. Yet, Meyer-Clason, who made such claim, did not only profit from Volkening’s alleged incapability, but he conspicuously mentions in the same account in which he reports said conversation with García Márquez, “With Gabriel

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[www.verseria.com/homenaje%20gim/en%20revista%20y%20periodicos/alvaro%20suescun%20revista%20de%20poesia%20silva%2016%202003.htm](http://www.verseria.com/homenaje%20gim/en%20revista%20y%20periodicos/alvaro%20suescun%20revista%20de%20poesia%20silva%2016%202003.htm) (accessed January 20, 2009).

The same statement, “[Volkening es] el único crítico que ha tenido influencia sobre mí,” is cited by Santiago Mutis Durán in his “Cien y una noches de soledad,” preface to *Gabriel García Márquez, “Un triunfo sobre el olvido,”* by Ernesto Volkening, ed. Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998), 11-20, here: 16.

<sup>304</sup> “Ernesto Volkening es el hombre que primero que todos en Bogotá, llamó la atención sobre mis libros. Un hombre que habla y escribe español como nosotros colombianos, por tanto, debe ser el primero capaz de traducir, recrear mi literatura en su lengua materna.” Curt Meyer-Clason, “Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez,” in *Para que mis amigos me quieran más...: Homenaje a Gabriel García Márquez*, ed. Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda (Bogotá: Siglo del Hombre Editores, 1992), 34-36, here: 34.

<sup>305</sup> Meyer-Clason, “Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez,” 35.

<sup>306</sup> Meyer-Clason, “Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez,” 34.

García Márquez, I learnt the art to exaggerate.”<sup>307</sup> — So far, I have not yet been able to verify any of the claims independently or to research the circumstances that lead to the rejection of García Márquez’s wish. However, Meyer-Clason’s allegation that Volkening would have been out of touch with German culture and his native language requires further engagement. It might shed light not only on the reasons why he was rejected as a translator of García Márquez’s work, but also why his work as a literary critic has not been acknowledged in academia and among literary critics in German-speaking regions.

In 1998, fifteen years after Volkening’s death, a collection of Volkening’s writings on García Márquez was published under the title *Gabriel García Márquez: un triunfo sobre el olvido* (Gabriel García Márquez: a triumph over oblivion).<sup>308</sup> Elkin Gómez, who reviewed the essay collection, described Volkening as “the first critic of García Márquez.”<sup>309</sup> Cobo Borda pointed out as well that Volkening was arguably the first critic of García Márquez but also one of the few who moved on to other fields instead of craving for the public attention that García Márquez’s name soon attracted:

*Before*, when no one talked about García Márquez, he was the first doing so, with a still relevant presentiment. *Later*, when all world repeats, badly, that what Volkening said, he prefers to revive Tacitus.<sup>310</sup>

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<sup>307</sup> “Aprendí con Gabriel García Márquez el arte de exagerar.” Meyer-Clason, “Conversaciones con Gabriel García Márquez,” 35.

<sup>308</sup> Volkening, *Gabriel García Márquez: “Un triunfo sobre el olvido,”* ed. Santiago Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998). In 2010, a second edition was issued, printed by Fondo de Cultura Económica in Bogotá.

<sup>309</sup> Elkin Gómez, “El primer crítico de García Márquez,” *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* (Bogotá) 37:54 (2000): 114-117.

<sup>310</sup> “*Antes*, cuando nadie hablaba de García Márquez, él fue el primero en hacerlo, con una premonición aún vigente. *Después*, cuando todo el mundo repite, mal, lo que Volkening dijo, éste prefiere resucitar a Tácito.” Cobo Borda, “Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario,” 340. Cobo Borda refers here to the early 1970s when García Márquez became the shooting star of Colombia’s “Boom” literature. Notably, Volkening’s last essay about García Márquez’s work, “Anotado al margen de *Cien años de soledad*,” was first published in 1967.

#### 4. Conclusion: Living on the “Sixth Continent”

Volkening experienced his life in exile as a marginalized figure. In spite of adopting the language, of successfully establishing himself as translator and essayist (and less successfully so as a merchant), and in spite of cultivating friendships, he saw himself as partaking of a culture and society different from where he came from but without belonging entirely to it. The same held true vice versa: his European, Belgian-German origins shaped his self-perception, yet his personality was not subsumed by it. In his imagination, Volkening created a third space, corresponding to his understanding of himself as standing between two worlds, the one of origin and the one of exile (where he ultimately chose to stay). Thus, he separated his physical presence in Bogotá from his ideational existence that he located in what he calls an “intermediary realm.” He articulates this experience of continued alienation and incomplete belonging, known to many exiles, in his diary on November 21, 1976:

The intermediary realm, conceived in its literal meaning as a space that has followed me since July 26, 1934, the day I left Antwerp, the day of my father’s passing, has come to grow with me, inside and outside myself, and gradually interposed itself for me between the Old World from where I came and the so-called New World where I went, and it belongs to both without being identical with either one of the two.<sup>311</sup>

Volkening links the genesis of the “intermediary realm” to two coinciding, profound experiences: his departure from Antwerp, where he spent some days to take farewell from the city of his childhood before traveling to Hamburg from where he would leave Europe, the “Old World,” and the death of his father, the person he expected to

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<sup>311</sup> “El reino intermedio, concebido en su sentido literal como un espacio que desde cuando partí de Amberes el 26 de Julio de 1934, día del fallecimiento de mi padre, venía creciendo conmigo, dentro y fuera de mí, paulatinamente se me intercalaba entre el Viejo Mundo de donde vine y el llamado Nuevo Mundo a donde fui, y pertenece a ambos sin ser idéntico con ninguno de los dos.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 465.



meet in the “so-called New World.” As discussed in Chapter I, Volkening must have left Antwerp, his *Vaterstadt* (“hometown,” or literarily “father city”),<sup>312</sup> earlier than he claims here because he had departed from Hamburg on board of the passenger ship “Odenwald” already on July 25, 1934. However, that these two events merge in his memory is remarkable and emphasizes their emotional interconnectedness. Leaving Europe, and in particular Germany, was motivated by fear of persecution through the Nazis; immigrating to Colombia though, instead of seeking refuge elsewhere, appears a choice influenced by the wish to reunite with his father. However, since his father, Ernst Volkening, died suddenly, at the age of fifty-nine, Volkening’s journey to Colombia could not serve any longer this purpose. Instead, Volkening finds himself in a new space that grows with him to become his imaginary home in between the places from where he came and where he intended to go. He continues:

One would need to think of this intermediary realm, on the one hand, as something existing (with its own history) from my first voyage until today, and on the other hand, as something *in statu nascendi*, a process that [...] will have to be considered to be my role as a mediator, my literary activity from the first notes (in 1934) until now.<sup>313</sup>

The “intermediary realm” is a dynamic space; it is in the process of becoming, “*in statu nascendi*.” Exposing Volkening to both worlds, the “intermediary realm” requires from him an ongoing intellectual involvement. This involvement, which is characteristic of the “intermediary realm,” so the text suggests, becomes Volkening’s proper role as a cultural mediator. Having transgressed the boundaries of one culture and entered another,

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<sup>312</sup> In Chapter III, I discuss among others the significance of Antwerp as a *Vaterstadt*, as the place that Volkening intrinsically connects to the memory of his late father.

<sup>313</sup> “Habría que contemplar ese reino intermedio, por una parte como algo existente (con historia propia) desde mi primer viaje hasta hoy, por otra como algo *in statu nascendi*, un proceso que [...] habrá de considerarse mi propio papel de mediador, mi actividad literaria, de los primeros apuntes (en 1934) para acá.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 467-468.

self-consciousness became cultural reflexivity. Anchoring his identity in the “intermediary realm,” we may speculate, generated for Volkening the need to mediate his experience of looking at either culture from his singular standpoint that is both, within and outside. It is noteworthy that being a mediator between two cultures was for him intrinsically tied to literary activity. He started writing in the very year of his arrival in Bogotá and continued writing and publishing until his death. As the “intermediary realm” was for him *in statu nascendi*, his writing was a never-ending process seemingly necessary to keep up with his experience.

Volkening was a tightrope walker between two continents, cultures, and languages. Who he was is to be grasped on neither side’s fastening of the rope but in the middle. The fragility of his existence seemed to have originated in the experience of exile, which challenged the parameters of Volkening’s presumably stable life and self-image. He died on July 22, 1983, without having suffered from any known prior illness. His burial took place on Saturday, July 23, at 11 a.m. at the German Cemetery in Bogotá, Calle 26 No. 22-43, and was announced in the national newspaper *El Tiempo* on the same day.<sup>314</sup> As to the cause of his death, I cite Varón who knew Volkening in person and wrote in a homage to his late friend, “Ernesto Volkening: exilio y pasión por Colombia” (Ernesto Volkening: exile and passion for Colombia), in August 1983:

Ernesto Volkening died a few days ago in Bogotá. He died discreetly as he had lived. I am told that he was a little tired of living. This does not diminish his passionate attention for us, his elegant preoccupation with Colombia...<sup>315</sup>

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<sup>314</sup> N.a., “Obituarios,” *El Tiempo* (Bogotá; Jul. 23, 1983): Última D.

<sup>315</sup> “Ernesto Volkening murió hace unos días en Bogotá. Murió discretamente como vivió. Me dicen que estaba un poco cansado de vivir. Eso no disminuye su apasionada atención a nosotros, su elegante preocupación por Colombia...” Varón, 21-22.

A few personal friends, the families von Wahlert, Gómez Dávila, and Monroy, and representatives of the presses Temis and Editorial ABC, the editorial staff of *Eco* and the Librería Buchholz, and the law firm Pedro Castillo Pineda & Associates had taken out obituaries in *El Tiempo*, and invited for the obsequies.<sup>316</sup> Volkening died without any relatives in the country; he had outlived his wife Gertrudis who had passed away after long illness six years earlier, on October 22, 1977.<sup>317</sup> That year's October issue of *Eco* was dedicated to Volkening.

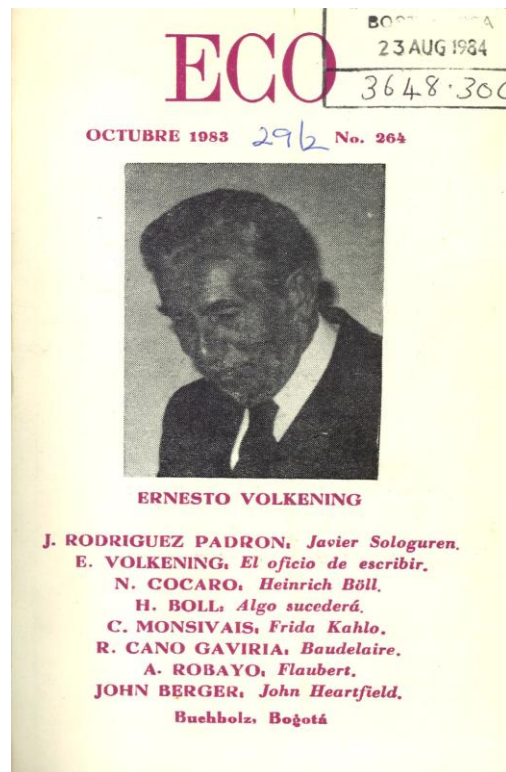


Fig. 13: Title page of *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Bogotá) 53:264 (Oct., 1983)

<sup>316</sup> N.a., "Obituarios," *El Tiempo* (Bogotá; Jul. 23, 1983): Ultima D.

<sup>317</sup> As mentioned before in footnote 180, Gertrudis Volkening died, according to the records of the administration of Bogotá's German cemetery, on October 22, 1977. However, this date is raised to question by one of Volkening's diary entries. On December 10, 1977, Volkening writes that "F." (Volkening uses the cipher whenever he refers in his notes to his wife Gertrudis) would have died on October 23, 1977. Volkening, "En causa propia II," 400.

**Exportaciones de combustibles.** En octubre, las exportaciones de petróleo crudo y derivados por el puerto de Guayaquil alcanzaron los 200 millones de dólares, un aumento del 20 por ciento. Este incremento representa los mejores resultados de octubre.

**Almacén.** El almacén nacional total del petróleo crudo y derivados en Guayaquil a las 23 horas del 22 de octubre fue de 1,2 millones de barriles.

**Producción.** Durante el primer semestre del presente año la producción de petróleo crudo en Guayaquil fue de 1,2 millones de barriles, un aumento del 20 por ciento.

**Situación cambiaria.** Las operaciones cambiarias en Guayaquil durante el primer semestre del presente año fueron de 1,2 millones de dólares, un aumento del 20 por ciento.

**Tráfico.** Los registros por exportación de petróleo crudo en Guayaquil durante el primer semestre del presente año fueron de 1,2 millones de barriles, un aumento del 20 por ciento.

**El doctor Ernesto Volkening**  
 Invita a las exequias del Doctor  
**ERNESTO VOLKENING**  
 Que se celebrarán hoy sábado 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**El doctor Ernesto Volkening**  
 Invita a las exequias del Doctor  
**ERNESTO VOLKENING**  
 Que se celebrarán hoy sábado 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**El doctor Ernesto Volkening**  
 Invita a las exequias del Doctor  
**ERNESTO VOLKENING**  
 Que se celebrarán hoy sábado 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

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**El doctor Ernesto Volkening**  
 Invita a las exequias del Doctor  
**ERNESTO VOLKENING**  
 Que se celebrarán hoy sábado 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**LA BENEFICIA**  
 De la Señora  
**Fabiola Vda. de Franco**  
 DESCANSED EN LA PAZ DEL SEÑOR.  
 Su Señoría Fabiola Vda. de Franco falleció en Guayaquil el día 11 de julio de 1983 a las 11:00 a.m. en el Hospital General de Guayaquil. Sus exequias se celebrarán el día 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**EL SEÑOR**  
**BAYARDO TELLEZ MELO**  
 DESCANSED EN LA PAZ DEL SEÑOR.  
 Su Señoría Bayardo Tellez Melo falleció en Guayaquil el día 11 de julio de 1983 a las 11:00 a.m. en el Hospital General de Guayaquil. Sus exequias se celebrarán el día 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**EL SEÑOR**  
**BAYARDO TELLEZ MELO**  
 DESCANSED EN LA PAZ DEL SEÑOR.  
 Su Señoría Bayardo Tellez Melo falleció en Guayaquil el día 11 de julio de 1983 a las 11:00 a.m. en el Hospital General de Guayaquil. Sus exequias se celebrarán el día 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**EL SEÑOR**  
**BAYARDO TELLEZ MELO**  
 DESCANSED EN LA PAZ DEL SEÑOR.  
 Su Señoría Bayardo Tellez Melo falleció en Guayaquil el día 11 de julio de 1983 a las 11:00 a.m. en el Hospital General de Guayaquil. Sus exequias se celebrarán el día 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**EL SEÑOR**  
**BAYARDO TELLEZ MELO**  
 DESCANSED EN LA PAZ DEL SEÑOR.  
 Su Señoría Bayardo Tellez Melo falleció en Guayaquil el día 11 de julio de 1983 a las 11:00 a.m. en el Hospital General de Guayaquil. Sus exequias se celebrarán el día 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**EL SEÑOR**  
**BAYARDO TELLEZ MELO**  
 DESCANSED EN LA PAZ DEL SEÑOR.  
 Su Señoría Bayardo Tellez Melo falleció en Guayaquil el día 11 de julio de 1983 a las 11:00 a.m. en el Hospital General de Guayaquil. Sus exequias se celebrarán el día 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**EDICIONAL AÑO**  
 Invita a las exequias del Doctor  
**ERNESTO VOLKENING**  
 Que se celebrarán hoy sábado 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**EL SEÑOR**  
**BAYARDO TELLEZ MELO**  
 DESCANSED EN LA PAZ DEL SEÑOR.  
 Su Señoría Bayardo Tellez Melo falleció en Guayaquil el día 11 de julio de 1983 a las 11:00 a.m. en el Hospital General de Guayaquil. Sus exequias se celebrarán el día 23 de julio a las 11:00 a.m. en el Cementerio Alemán Calle 28 No. 20-42.

**EL SEÑOR**  
**BAYARDO TELLEZ MELO**  
 DESCANSED EN LA PAZ DEL SEÑOR.  
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**EL SEÑOR**  
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Fig. 14: Ernesto Volkening's obituaries in *El Tiempo* (July 23, 1983)

## CHAPTER III

### **HEIMAT AND IDENTITY: MEMORIES, TOTEMS, AND A SOUVENIR**

#### **1. Introduction**

*And basically,  
I do not anything more than to follow the course of my inclinations  
that are the ones of a man anxious to localize in his vision the landscape of childhood  
with all its features of pathetic ugliness and suspect poetry.*<sup>318</sup>

Ernesto Volkening returned after 34 years in Bogotá to Antwerp, the city of his early childhood. The trip evoked memories of a different time and a different place. In the course of his visit, he came to acknowledge that the city of 1968 had undergone considerable changes since he last saw it before leaving Europe in 1934.<sup>319</sup> However, wherever he lived, the ultimate lieu of comparison for him was always Antwerp of the early twentieth century, where he had spent the first eight years of his life, from 1908 to 1916.<sup>320</sup> That Antwerp was by 1968 a city of his recollections and his imagination, a city

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<sup>318</sup> “Y en el fondo, no hago más que seguir la pendiente de mis inclinaciones que son las de un hombre ansioso de localizar en su visión del mundo el paisaje de la infancia con todos sus rasgos de patética fealdad y poesía sospechosa.” Ernesto Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Bogotá) 36:221 (1980): 449-468, here: 466.

All translations are mine except when indicated otherwise.

<sup>319</sup> Volkening leaves Germany by the end of 1933, appalled by the National Socialists’ rise to power, by book burnings, anti-Semitism, and a spread of public violence. At this time, Volkening who identifies with the political left and considers himself a Marxist, describes his situation as him being “with one foot on the threshold of the concentration camp and [with] the other beyond the border.” (Volkening, “Curriculum vitae,” in his *Los paseos de Lodovico*, viii-ix (Monterrey, Mexico: Librería Cosmos), viii-ix, here: ix: “ya con un pie en el umbral del campo de concentración y con el otro allende la frontera.”) After spending several months in Paris and a short time in Antwerp, Volkening returns in the summer of 1934 to Germany to embark in Hamburg on a passenger liner heading for Colombia.

<sup>320</sup> As described in Chapter I, Volkening left Antwerp in 1916 at the age of eight together with his mother, and moved with her to his maternal grandparents to the city of Worms. At the same time, his father was drafted to fight in the German military. We might assume that the family considered it safer for mother and

that had long turned into an *urbs abscondida*, an absent city. Nevertheless, he hoped to discover its hidden traces. Volkening travelled to Antwerp to “localize in his vision the landscape of childhood,” and beyond, I want to suggest, to localize and reconnect with an earlier version of his self. Volkening felt a profound rupture between his childhood years and his later life; a rupture exacerbated by his experience of exile that presumably constituted the final layer of separation from the place and time of his childhood. More than anything, the present-day Antwerp served Volkening as a mnemonic device. As it turned out, Antwerp in 1968 was not the *Heimat* (home) he has hoped to find, but walking through its streets, dispersed images of his idealized, past *Heimat* and of his past self resurfaced. He experienced the “exultation of a renewed friendship, this intimate satisfaction and something puerile of the one who discovers in the things the continuity of his own life, his own identity,” as well as moments of nostalgia and sadness because, as he writes, this feeling “was mixed with the premonition that such great miracle could not last.”<sup>321</sup> I am interested in examining the ways in which Volkening narrates this very experience, one characterized by a temporal and spatial synthesis of his past and presence, and further, how he attempts to transform its fleeting moments into lasting, identity-constitutive elements of his life.

At the center of my argument is an essay titled “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro” (Antwerp, reencounter with a city and a face), in which Volkening

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child to join their relatives in Germany instead of remaining by themselves in the occupied city, a possible military flashpoint.

<sup>321</sup> “[A]lborozo de la amistad renovada, [...] esa satisfacción íntima y algo pueril del que descubre en las cosas la continuidad de su propia vida, su identidad misma, se mezclaba el presentimiento de que tamaño milagro no podía durar [...]” (The literal translation of the quote would be “...something puerile of the one who...” instead of “...something puerile that the one feels who...”). Volkening, “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro II,” *Eco* 19:111 (1969): 234-281, here: 245.

self-reflexively describes his visit to Antwerp and his accompanying hopes, enjoyments, and disappointments. In 1969, he published this essay in two installments in *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente*,<sup>322</sup> the magazine which Karl Buchholz founded in Bogotá in 1960.<sup>323</sup> Most notably, the essay is not a straightforward travel report but a fictionalized account of the author's experience. Volkening appears in it in the guise of the main character Lodovico<sup>324</sup> who relates his experience of visiting Antwerp in letters to an unnamed friend. Lodovico also figures as an auctorial narrator and commentator. Blending Lodovico's perspective with the narrator's creates an elaborate weave of different viewpoints of the depicted events, and introduces complementing as well as colliding interpretations approaches for interpreting ultimately the author's, Volkening's, impressions. Fiction and reality intertwine to a creation that André Breton would refer to as "enlarged reality,"<sup>325</sup> and Mario Vargas Llosa would call "the truth of lies,"<sup>326</sup> I

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<sup>322</sup> The essay was published in two installments: Volkening, "Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro I," *Eco* 19:110 (1969): 113-157; and his "Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro II," *Eco* 19:111 (1969): 234-281. In the following, I quote Volkening's essay from *Eco*. — The essay was reprinted without any changes (except that it does not any longer show its initial divide into two installments) in Volkening's collection of autobiographical essays and sketches *Los paseos de Lodovico*: Volkening, "Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro" in *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Monterrey, Mexico: Librería Cosmos, 1974), 1-71.

<sup>323</sup> Karl Buchholz founded the magazine *Eco* in 1960 to introduce foremost German and European literature, philosophy, and culture to a Colombian and Latin American audience. However, *Eco* soon expanded its focus to include Colombian and Latin American literature.

<sup>324</sup> The Colombian poet and Volkening's close friend, Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, refers to the character Lodovico as "the best of his [Volkening's] incarnations." "[L]a mejor de sus encarnaciones." Cobo Borda, "Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario," *Eco* 43:262 (Aug. 1983), 337-343, here: 340.

<sup>325</sup> André Breton, "Le Surréalisme et La Peinture," 1928, in *Le Surréalisme et La Peinture, 1928-1965* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 1-48.

<sup>326</sup> Mario Vargas Llosa, "La verdad de las mentiras," in his *La verdad de las Mentiras. Ensayos sobre literatura* (Barcelona: Editorial Seix Barral, 1990), 5-20; and his "El viaje a la ficción" (lecture given in Salzburg on Aug. 08, 2007), *Letras Libres* (Feb. 2008). Available at <http://www.letraslibres.com/index.php?art=12669> (accessed Jan. 10, 2010).

propose considering it “*erschriebende Identität*,” identity created through the act of writing.

Let us start with a discussion of the German term *Heimat*. Turning my attention to Volkening’s essay “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro,” I compare *Heimat* with *Vaterstadt* (father city), the term that Volkening actually uses in his writing to refer to his hometown Antwerp. Then, I critically follow the protagonist’s steps into the past: I interpret his reactions when he walks through the neighborhood in which he has once lived, and passes places that carry emotional meaning for him. In these instances, I argue that Volkening, speaking like a ventriloquist through the protagonist and the narrator of the story, negotiates his belonging to the place and time of his childhood. Wandering through places and times, the protagonist seems to discover his own person in a painting in Antwerp’s Royal Museum of Fine Arts. Volkening constructs in the essay a lineage from the figure portrayed by Henri de Braekeleer in the painting “De man en de stoel” over his father to the protagonist, respectively to himself. The interpretation of the painting turns thus increasingly into a reflection on his own existence. Further, the protagonist Lodovico, respectively Volkening, recalls throughout the essay memories of the time and place from which thirty-four years of exile have separated him. He reflects on the role of memories that he comes to understand as a thread from his childhood to the present and which function, arguably, as a delineation of his life and identity. Concluding my investigation, I discuss the ways in which Volkening attempts to incorporate his cherished memories lastingly into his sense of selfhood. I suggest that his essay is a prolongation of his stay in Antwerp, a form of souvenir in which he preserves his otherwise fleeting memories. In a final note, I comment on Volkening’s



preoccupation with the possibility that these memories might fade away despite all his efforts, and I discuss how he arguably reconciles himself to this prospect.

In my interpretation of Volkening's narration of memories and his concept of a "figurative memory" that becomes constitutive of one's identity, I draw from Zygmunt Bauman's writings on synchronic selfhood. For developing an understanding of the nature and function of congealed but vivid memories (Bauman's "symbolic tokens") as personal souvenirs, I am indebted to the literary scholar and poet Susan Stewart. Finally, it will be through Breton's writings on surrealism that I illuminate Volkening's reconciliation with the possibility of failure in making the memories that resurfaced during his stay in Antwerp permanent.

## 2. *Heimat?*

*Heimat* exceeds the mere existence of a locale. It comprehends our feelings toward the place of our origin that make it incomparable to any other abode. Describing what *Heimat* means and why, without getting lost in cryptic allusion, is challenging. Encountering Antwerp after thirty-four years in exile, Volkening — speaking through the fictional character Lodovico — contrasts his *Heimat* with the mere locale, and creates, *ex negativo*, a sense of what *Heimat* means for him:

—Nothing. Antwerp may be what it is, and it is not a small matter: The second largest port of the Continent [*sic*], after Rotterdam, with shipyards, renowned factories and stock exchange of finances and products, the center of the worldwide commerce of diamonds, a city where one eats well and drinks an excellent beer, the waiters know their job and have good manners, the drivers (like the ones of the rest of Belgium) move on broad and narrow streets at stunning velocities and kill many pedestrians, [it is in Antwerp] where the mailmen look like brigade generals and the vegetable sellers, when they pass on Sundays in boats to *Roepelmonde* to drink coffee on the terrace overlooking the Escalda River, appear as cheerful and good-looking as at the times of Charles V.

All this can be certain, even comforting (as much as the vegetable sellers are concerned): Only that, in a city that is reduced in such a way to the mere present dimension, I feel a little out of place, like an old cat that, having returned home after a long absence, does not find the stove, nor its refuge behind the stove, nor the warmth that invited to purring.<sup>327</sup>

Antwerp is “not a small matter” — *no poca cosa*, as Volkening says in Spanish. Indeed, Antwerp in 1968 is a center of business and finance, it has culture, and it offers to the visitor picturesque images of vegetable sellers on the Exscalda River, so that one *could* feel rather comfortable... but, we are warned, only “as much as the vegetable sellers are concerned.” Volkening does not share in the idyll. When Volkening visits the city of his childhood, he feels “out of place.” He finds the city, but not his *Heimat*. Nothing beyond the “mere present dimension” of Antwerp seems to exist outside Volkening’s memory. For the returning exile, there is no stove, no refuge, and no warmth; there is no place to feel secure and snug. Volkening’s *Heimat* has survived, if at all, as a construct of his imagination — while the reality of it seems dissolved.

## 2.1. A Lasting Preoccupation with Loss

The discourse around the migrant’s *Heimat* is one of continuing political and social acuteness. The most recent statistics about the world migrant stock published in 2005 by the UN Department of Economic and Social Affairs are indicative. In 2005,

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<sup>327</sup> “¿Entonces, qué?—Nada. Amberes sería lo que es, y no es poca cosa: El segundo puerto más grade del Continente, después de Róterdam, con astilleros, fábricas de renombre y bolsa de valores y productos, centro del comercio mundial de diamantes, ciudad donde se come bien y se toma una cerveza excelente, los meseros entienden de su oficio y tienen modales, los automovilistas (como las de toda Bélgica) corren por calles anchas y angostas a pasmosas velocidades y matan mucho peatón, donde los carteros parecen generales de brigada y las verduleras cuando se pasean, los domingos, en barco hasta Roepelmonde, a tomar el café en la terraza que da a Escalda, se ven tan alegres y tan buenas mozas como en los tiempos de Carlos Quintos. Todo eso puede ser cierto, hasta consolador (en cuanto las verduleras se refiere): Sólo que yo, en una ciudad de tal modo reducida a la dimensión del puro presente, me sentiría un poco fuera de lugar, como un viejo gato que, vuelto a la casa tras larga ausencia, no encuentra la estufa, ni su refugio detrás de la estufa, ni el calor que invitaba al ronroneo.” Volkening, “Amberes II,” 242-243.

international migrants accounted for 3 percent of the world's population, corresponding to the estimated number of 190,633,564 persons.<sup>328</sup> The nomenclature for these migrants ranges widely,<sup>329</sup> and indicates various degrees of freedom of choice regarding destination, time, and mode of migration as well as differences in legal status and rights. Yet, they all left behind their *Heimat*.

The social, cultural, and psychological consequences of migration are of concern for, among many others, politicians, social workers, and various aid organizations. Scholars in the fields of anthropology, history, and literature study the many facets of individual and collective experiences of displacement. Edward Said formulated one of the key questions shaping this ever-growing body of research: How do you manage to live elsewhere when your home becomes inaccessible to you?<sup>330</sup> In the field of German literary studies, scholars such as Wolfgang Kießling, Alexander Stephan, Guy Stern, and Joseph Strelka initiated the study of exile.<sup>331</sup> Outside academia, innumerable writers of

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<sup>328</sup> Population Division of the Department of Economic and Social Affairs of the United Nations Secretariat, "Trends in Total Migrant Stock: The 2005 Revision." Available at <http://esa.un.org/migration> (accessed Jul. 08, 2009).

<sup>329</sup> Examples of this nomenclature include exile, émigré, expatriate, refugee, absentee, deportee, emigrant and immigrant, alien, foreigner, stranger, and non-citizen.

<sup>330</sup> This question and various attempts at answering it constitute a major aspect of Edward Said's work as can be seen in his *Reflections on Exile and Other Essays* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 2000).

<sup>331</sup> Some of the pioneering work of these scholars on the topic of exile include: Wolfgang Kießling, *Exil in Lateinamerika* (Leipzig: Reclam, 1980); —, *Texte und Dokumente zur Geschichte des antifaschistischen Exils 1941–46* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1974); Alexander Stephan, *Exil: Literatur und die Künste nach 1933* (Bonn: Bouvier, 1990); Alexander Stephan and Hans Wagener, *Schreiben im Exil: zur Ästhetik der deutschen Exilliteratur 1933-1945* (Bonn: Grundmann, 1985); Guy Stern and Julia Schöll, *Gender, Exil, Schreiben* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2002); Guy Stern et. al., *Exile Studies* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Guy Stern, *Literarische Kultur im Exil: Gesammelte Beiträge zur Exilforschung 1989-1997 = Literature and Culture in Exile* (Dresden; Munich: Dresden UP, 1998); —, *Literatur im Exil: Gesammelte Aufsätze 1959-1989* (Ismaning: Hueber, 1989); Joseph Strelka, *Exil, Gegenxil und Pseudoexil in der Literatur* (Tübingen: Francke, 2003); —, *Exilliteratur: Grundprobleme der Theorie, Aspekte der Geschichte und Kritik* (Bern; New York: Peter Lang, 1983); —, *Protest-Form-Tradition: Essays on German Exile Literature* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1979).

fiction, often exiles themselves, have been writing about the separation from one's *Heimat*. The Nigerian novelist, poet, and critic Chinua Achebe, the Nobelist V. S. Naipaul of Indo-Trinidadian origin, and the British-Indian novelist and essayist Salman Rushdie come to mind as some of the most prominent international representatives of exilic writer. In German literature, writers from Heinrich Heine to Stefan Zweig have been addressing their experiences of exile. All of them remind us through their work of the necessity for a persistent engagement with exile and its reverse: *Heimat*.

## 2.2. The Meaning of *Heimat*

Before engaging Volkening's essay on his *Heimat* Antwerp, I consider it necessary to address the meaning of the German word *Heimat*. I will keep using the German term because nearly all translations of it into other languages, including English, do not fully preserve its complexity.<sup>332</sup> Admittedly, there are some instances in which

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Besides the impetus given by the work of these scholars, the Gesellschaft für Exilforschung and its North American counterpart, the North American Society for Exile Studies, have promoted pioneering work in the field. Central has been the publication of the *Jahrbuch der Gesellschaft für Exilforschung* since 1983. The *Jahrbuch* has been edited by Claus-Dieter Crohn, Thomas Koebner, Wulf Köpke, Joachim Radkau, Erwin Rotermund, Sigrid Schneider, Lutz Winckler, and Irmtrud Wojak.

<sup>332</sup> The various translations of the German word *Heimat* into other languages remain contested and sometimes the term has been considered untranslatable. It seems that the connotations of the word *Heimat* cannot be rendered in most Indo-Germanic languages without paraphrasing. Such is the case with English (*home*, *homeland*, or *native land*), French (*lieu d'origine*, *patrie*, or *pays natal*), or Latin (*patria*). In Spanish, not *país natal* yet *terruño*, the "native soil," approximates the *Heimat* in several regards because it emphasizes the strong bond with the actual land and refers to a relatively limited terrain that the one whose *terruño* the terrain is knows well through lived experience. In Polish, the term *ojczyzna prywatna*, meaning "private fatherland," stands for *Heimat* and alludes to the difference between the originally rather apolitical term *Heimat* and its politically charged counterpart in German: *Vaterland* (fatherland). Peter Blickle refers to the proximity in meaning of *Heimat* and the Czech word *domov*. The Czech word, derived from *dům* meaning "house," points to the central idea of having a physical house, a "*Heim*," in one's *Heimat*, which is one central feature of the German idea of *Heimat*. The same holds for the term *dòmovina* used by Slovenians, Croatians, and Serbs (Peter Blickle, *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland* (Rochester: Camden House, 2002), 11). As Blickle suggests, the argument of the philosopher Vilém Flusser regarding the near congruency of meaning between *domov/dòmovina* and *Heimat* seems convincing. Flusser ascribes it to century-long pressure that the German language exerted on these languages through the geographical proximity and coexistence of their respective speakers (*ibid.*).

“home,” “homeland,” or “native land” can successfully substitute for the German word *Heimat* — *within a specific context*, yet many connotations of *Heimat* are intrinsically intertwined with the culture and history of German speaking regions, and would need to be supplied through laborious, qualifying remarks.

*Heimat* exceeds the merely topological because it stands to a far greater degree for a worldview and life-style associated with one’s place of origin. *Heimat* is charged with emotions. Memories of one’s earliest childhood, of one’s family of origin and of the first people who led us in our earliest personal development are closely connected with it. *Heimat* also frequently represents a community forged by religion, customs, and traditions, by belonging to a region and identifying with its landscape, and by sharing the regional dialect, respectively the language, one’s mother tongue.<sup>333</sup>

The decisiveness of language in relation to *Heimat* has been central to Martin Heidegger’s notion of *Heimat* as a philosophical concept.<sup>334</sup> According to Heidegger, it is only through language that one can get close to experiencing *Heimat*, and *Heimat*’s purest expression is achieved through its regional dialects.<sup>335</sup> Language reflects for him the environment, the people, and the landscape: the entire *Lebenswelt* (the world in which

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<sup>333</sup> A linguistic community that is not an so much an Andersonian *imagined community* but a community primarily rooted in personal, everyday interaction with other speakers of the same dialect or at least of the same language.

<sup>334</sup> As laid out, for instance, in “Sprache und Heimat,” a lecture Heidegger gave in 1960. In it, Heidegger contends that it is only with language that *Heimat* comes into its own. Therefore he closes the essay by changing its title from “Sprache und Heimat” (“Language and Heimat”) to “Sprache als Heimat” (“Language als Heimat”). See Martin Heidegger, “Sprache und Heimat,” 1960, in his *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens, 1910-1976*, ed. Hermann Heidegger (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1983), 155-180; his “Die Sprache Johann Peter Hebels,” 1955, in his *Aus der Erfahrung des Denkens*, 123-125; as well as his 1944 “Heimkunft/An die Verwandten,” in his *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlin’s Dichtung*, ed. Hermann von Friedrich-Wilhelm (Frankfurt a. M.: Klostermann, 1996), 9–32.

<sup>335</sup> However, Heidegger concedes that standard language can at times echo the *Mundart* (dialect) and thus be used in a comparable manner and to the same end as dialects. Johann Peter Hebel’s “Schatzkästlein des Rheinischen Hausfreundes” is, according to Heidegger, exemplary in echoing the Alemannic dialect in high German. Heidegger, “Die Sprache Johann Peter Hebels,” 125.

one's life evolves) to which *Heimat* amounts and to which one feels attached. Importantly, Heidegger's notion of *Heimat* presupposes its irretrievable loss: "The nature of *Heimat* only begins to shine in exile ['in der Fremde']. Everything that the great poets sing and say is viewed from the perspective of nostalgia ['aus dem Heimweh'] and is summoned into language by this pain."<sup>336</sup> He argues that only when one is excluded from *Heimat*, it becomes possible to gain a proper view of it. It is through melancholic remembrance of *Heimat* as a lost aspect of our lives that we can approximate it once more through language, more to the point, through poetic language.<sup>337</sup> However, language is not only central in Heidegger's philosophy. Scholarship on *Heimat* advances the position that our concept of *Heimat* presumes it to be a space of shared linguistic and behavioral codes in which mutual understanding — verbal and non-verbal — is ensured from the start. Agnes Heller expresses this idea in her essay "Where we are at home" by arguing that it is only in the *Heimat* where "one can speak to the other without providing background information. No footnotes are needed, from few words much is understood. And we can remain silent."<sup>338</sup> *Heimat* is here a space of almost intuitive communication; even in silence, one is understood.

Modern, or post-modern, Westerners, have long tended to stylize *Heimat* to a world before the Fall of Man, which can be seen as the first "misunderstanding" in the history of humanity. *Heimat* carries a religious notion: Christianity, for instance, declares

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<sup>336</sup> "Das Wesen der Heimat gelangt erst in der Fremde zum Leuchten. Alles, was die großen Dichter singen und sagen, ist aus dem Heimweh erblickt und durch diesen Schmerz ins Wort gerufen." Heidegger, "Die Sprache Johann Peter Hebels," 123-124.

<sup>337</sup> See also Heidegger's "Heimkunft/An die Verwandten." Heidegger contends that exclusively poets are able to express such melancholic longing for *Heimat* through their songs, and thereby, possibly, one might be able to catch a glimpse of it and prepare for a possible future *Heimkunft* (return home).

<sup>338</sup> Agnes Heller, "Where we are at home," *Thesis Eleven* 41 (1995): 1-18, here: 6.

man's true home to lie in the afterlife while it considers the world a place of exile. Religious and secular imagination anchors *Heimat* in a realm prior to self-awareness. Religions equal *Heimat* with "paradise," and many secular accounts merge *Heimat* with the time of one's childhood. Hence, the desire for *Heimat* is not only a desire for a *there* but, too, for a *then*. Like childhood, *Heimat* is traditionally characterized as being a sphere free of conflicts, free of differences, free of competition. *Heimat* offers belonging to a community based on a fixed system of values, moral standards, and laws governing the life of its members. The antithesis of *Heimat* is individualism with its extreme forms of solipsism and exile.

In mythological accounts, in literature, and in art in which *Heimat* is being thematized, self-awareness and the wish for self-realization are frequently depicted as destructive forces leading to alienation, isolation, and demise. It is prominently through literature and art that the picture of *Heimat* as a utopia of harmony is kept alive. The mentioned features have served as a paradigm for *Heimatkunst* (regional art), *Heimatroman* (*Heimat* novels), *Dorfgeschichte* (narrations whose setting is a village, often stylized as an idyllic world), and *Heimatfilm* (sentimental film in an idealized regional setting).<sup>339</sup> These genres emphasize the value of a life spent in a small community on rural, often alpine, native land, or in small towns where shared social, professional and moral standards and traditions passed on through generations are observed. In *Heimat* literature and film, following one's individual desires and crafting a life according to self-set standards, remote from either one's geographical *Heimat* (like

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<sup>339</sup> Representative of the various celebrations of *Heimat* in the arts are, among others, the following people: Regarding *Heimatkunst*, Wilhelm von Polenz, Adolf Bartels, and Gustav Frenssen; regarding *Heimatroman*, Ludwig Ganghofer; regarding *Dorfgeschichte*, Albrecht von Haller, Clemens Bretano, Heinrich von Kleist, Berthold Auerbach, Annette von Droste-Hülshoff, Gottfried Keller, Theodor Storm, and Wilhelm Raabe; and regarding *Heimatfilm*, Luis Trenker, Harald Reinl, Edgar Reitz, and Paul May.

Tonio Feuersinger in Luis Trenker's *The Prodigal Son*) or estranged from one's *Heimat* and its people (like Hauke Haien in Theodor Storm's *The Dykemaster*) lead to a catastrophe whose only remedy is, as the narratives suggest, returning to the fold.

*Heimat* describes a life-style: It offers identification and assigns purpose to one's life within a community. Thereby, one's life is being subordinated to a "collective individuality," as Peter Blickle suggests.<sup>340</sup> *Heimat* tends to define its members and the surrounding world in relation to the group, and to itself. *Heimat* functions as a reference point for describing space and time: A distance is being oftentimes compared to the distance between one's home and a locally well-known reference point like a church or a lake, or an event's occurrence is remembered by referring to its coincidence with another event that would be known to locals, like the passing away of a prominent person among them, or the outbreak of a destructive fire. Thereby, the shared understanding of these references reiterates and reinforces the bondage among the members of the community, and underlines the exclusions of the other, the ones who do not understand. Notably, *Heimat* structures time anachronistically. It aspires for independence from historical changes, and tends to replace linear with cyclic movements for temporal orientation. Examples are the division of time by natural recurrences like day and night or seasons and by dates that demand a quasi-natural authority like religious holidays. *Heimat* influences also the modes of perception and memorization. As Blickle argues, experience linked to *Heimat* tends to be remembered as unmediated and as having taken place in an ideal space like in nature, as well as in an ideal, pre-reflexive time like childhood.<sup>341</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Blickle, 69-70.

<sup>341</sup> Blickle, 41.



The idea of *Heimat* as a political, cultural, religious, and moral homogeneity, and as resistant to historical change and progress seems to exist in opposition to modernity, industrialization, urbanization, and secularization as well as ideals of the Enlightenment like the quest for knowledge. Based on these observations, Wendy Wheeler convincingly describes the yearning for *Heimat* as a manifestation of a “postmodern nostalgia” for the other of Enlightenment reason.<sup>342</sup> There, one could feel secure and snug, or in Blickle’s words, “[*Heimat*] is an antidote against irony, against the alienation of having a self-conscious, reflexive, and rational self: *Heimat* is a secular irrationalization of a joyful self. The differentiated, bureaucratically and economically crystallized purposive rationality has been nullified by a process of reenchancement.”<sup>343</sup> — *Heimat* symbolizes a refuge from separation and alienation (*Entfremdung*; *Entzweiung*): It is taken as a space free of the ambiguity of irony and safe from sudden exclusions. *Heimat* means a re-enchancement of the world, a return to innocence, childhood, or so-to-speak, paradise.

### **2.3. Tainted Love: *Heimat* and the Swastika**

During the Third Reich, the concept of *Heimat* became a treasure trove for national socialist propaganda. Behavioral and mental mores linked to *Heimat* were exploited for the homogenization, the *Gleichschaltung*, of German society. *Heimat*’s deep-rooted rejection of foreign influences, its insistence on the aforementioned

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<sup>342</sup> Wendy Wheeler, “Nostalgia isn’t nasty,” in *Altered States: Postmodernism, Politics, Culture*, ed. Mark Perryman (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1994), 94-109.

<sup>343</sup> Blickle, 42. See also the section “*Heimat*: A Space Free from Irony” in his *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, 40-42. Blickle uses Peter Uwe Hohendahl’s definition of irony as being based on “the insight into the discrepancy between [one’s] own desire for a meaningful life and the alienated reality” (ibid., 40). Hohendahl discusses the concept of irony in his *Reappraisals: Shifting Alignments in Postwar Critical Theory* (Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1991).

“collective individuality,” on homogeneity regarding life-choices, political views, mores, and language, lent itself easily to fascist ends. Its insistence on regional belonging gave traction to ethnic exclusion and racial politics. National Socialism politicized the concept through its Blood and Soil – propaganda during the 1930s and during World War II. *Heimat* became conflated with the idea of *Vaterland* (fatherland), for which German soldiers and civilians alike sacrificed, fought, and died. After the Third Reich collapsed, *Heimat* became one of the taboo-words in the Bundesrepublik. However, over the last decades, as historian Rudy Koshar points out, a new interest in a discourse identifying *Heimat* with racism and Nazism emerged.<sup>344</sup> Through National Socialism, *Heimat* metamorphosed into a political and nationalistic concept, seemingly without ever regaining its lost innocence.<sup>345</sup> It could be speculated that *Heimat* as an expression of a postmodern nostalgia for the other of Enlightenment is also very much an expression of a persistent post-war nostalgia that feeds into a political *Heimat* fantasy about the apoliticalness of a concept that cannot shed its political implications.

After World War II, the word *Heimat* was discredited, tainted by its Nazi-past, and highly ambivalent in its meaning. What the term *Heimat* signified has since been of fundamental concern for intellectuals, philosophers, social and political activists and for displaced and exiled Germans. Some of them who lost their *Heimat* have since demanded financial or territorial compensation, as it happened for instance at *Vertriebenentreffen*

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<sup>344</sup> Rudy Koshar, “The Antinomies of Heimat: Homeland, History, Nazism,” in *Heimat, Nation, Fatherland*, ed. Jost Hermand and James Steakley (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 113-136.

<sup>345</sup> See, for instance, Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman, *Heimat — A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890–1990* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000).

(meetings of forcibly displaced persons).<sup>346</sup> However, even when given the chance to return to the region where they had once lived, people who had suffered persecution and were forced to emigrate during the Third Reich were often incapable to recognize in either post-war East- or West-Germany their former *Heimat*.

After 1945, the new legislative, judicative and executive authorities and the economy of prominently West Germany maintained links to the former Third Reich through personal continuities in positions of power. This provoked a younger, post-war generation to rebel against the generation of their parents. As just one consequence, the identification with *Heimat* became a contested topic for the New Left that emerged during the 1960s in West Germany. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, the movement identified with the views of the West-German student protesters that became the *Außerparlamentarische Opposition* (Extrparliamentary Opposition; in Germany commonly abbreviated as *APO*). The *Rote Armee Fraktion* (Red Army Faction; *RAF*) emerged from the same nourishing ground and turned later into a violent militant group. The New Left, *APO*, and *RAF* found their theoretical framework in the neo-Marxist critical theory of the Frankfurt School as represented by Theodor W. Adorno and Max Horkheimer.<sup>347</sup> Notably, no member of the Frankfurt School personally instigated or approved any violent actions. On the contrary, like Adorno, they considered their work being misinterpreted to destructive ends. Adorno and Horkheimer along with Jürgen

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<sup>346</sup> See, for instance, William Rollins, "Heimat, Modernity, and Nation in the Early Heimatschutz Movement," in *Heimat, Nation, Fatherland*, ed. Jost Hermand and James Steakley (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 87-112.

<sup>347</sup> The most influential books in this context were Theodor W. Adorno's *Minima Moralia: Reflexionen aus dem beschädigten Leben* (*Minima Moralia: Reflections from a damaged life*), written between 1944 and 1949 in exile in the United States, published in 1951 (Berlin; Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp), and *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (*Dialectics of the Enlightenment*) co-authored by Adorno and Max Horkheimer and published in 1944 (Amsterdam: Querido).

Habermas and other members of the Frankfurt School problematized the social implications of *Heimat* and rejected in their writings, among others, Martin Heidegger's mythologizing concept of *Heimat*.<sup>348</sup>

*Heimat* had turned from a household word into a political and philosophical hot potato, and many Germans felt in the post-war era rather uncomfortable talking in an unqualifiedly positive manner about their German *Heimat*.<sup>349</sup> Frequently, people have avoided the nationalistic overtones implicit in calling Germany their *Heimat* by emphasizing on their town or region of origin as their *Heimat*. Another complication of the Germans' relation to their *Heimat* stems from Germany's post-war division into the *Deutsche Demokratische Republik* (German Democratic Republic; *DDR*) and the *Bundesrepublik Deutschland* (Federal Republic of Germany; *BRD*), which was perceived by Germans at both sides as a split-up of their former *Heimat*. However, the reunification after four decades (which Volkening did not live to see) was not unanimously welcomed either. The experience of separation remains deep-seated. Poll numbers from the eve of the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall speak eloquently of the challenges faced by a reunited yet not fully unified country: in 2010, twelve percent of all German citizens would have wished the Wall back.<sup>350</sup> Scholars and writers such as Elizabeth Boa,

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<sup>348</sup> See, for instance, Karla Schultz, "Todtnauberg and Armorbach: Heimat as Name and Orientation," in *Heimat, Nation, Fatherland*, ed. Jost Hermand and James Steakley (New York: Peter Lang, 1996), 161-186.

<sup>349</sup> A recent turn in Germany toward embracing a newly found national self-confidence and pride might eventually sound the death bell to the nation's uneasy attitude to *Heimat* and allow for more positive associations with the term. See, for instance, Nicholas Kulish, "German Identity, Long Dormant, Reasserts Itself," *The New York Times*, Sept. 10, 2010. Available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/09/11/world/europe/11germany.html> (accessed Sept. 10, 2010).

<sup>350</sup> "Umfrage: Jeder achte will die Mauer zurück," *Der Spiegel* (Nov. 08, 2009). Available at <http://www.spiegel.de/politik/deutschland/0,1518,660034,00.html> (accessed Sept. 4, 2010). Yet, the 2009-polls demonstrate a remarkable change from the twenty-one percent of all Germans wishing the Berlin Wall back according to a *forsa* study conducted in 2004. See Frauke Hunfeld et. al., "Deutsche Einheit:

Rachel Palfreyman, Günter de Bruyn, Christa Wolf, Thomas Brussig, and Andres Veiel investigate the influences of post-war separation and reunification in 1989/90 on the ways in which Germans conceptualize their *Heimat*.<sup>351</sup>

In the decades after Volkening's death, two other major factors shaped the current understanding of *Heimat*. The first factor is Germany's membership in the European Union. Europe has welcomed migration and multi-ethnicity during the past decades — although not without protests as for example the rightwing *Nationaldemokratische Partei Deutschlands* (national democratic party of Germany), Italy's *Lega Nord* (north league), the *Front National* in France, the *British National Party*, the *Schweizerische Volkspartei* (Swiss Peoples' Party), and the “flemish interest” party, *Vlaams Belang*, in Belgium. Germany has become the host country for many EU-immigrants: for example, in 2008, the twenty-seven countries of the European Union accommodated 30,798,059 foreigners, of whom 7,255,395 lived in Germany.<sup>352</sup> Migration policies have promoted the issuing of work permits and the granting of asylum, and many asylum seekers will stay permanently, become citizens, and significantly enrich German culture and society. Examining the impact that these immigrant groups exert on the meaning of *Heimat* remains an important task for social and literary scholars. The second key factor currently

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Jeder fünfte will die Mauer zurück,” *Stern*, Sept., 9, 2004. Available at <http://www.stern.de/politik/deutschland/deutsche-einheit-jeder-fuenfte-will-die-mauer-zurueck-529441.html> (accessed Sept. 4, 2010).

<sup>351</sup> See Elizabeth Boa and Rachel Palfreyman, *Heimat — A German Dream: Regional Loyalties and National Identity in German Culture 1890–1990* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2000); Günter de Bruyn, *Deutsche Zustände: Über Erinnerungen und Tatsachen, Heimat und Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1999); and his *Jubelschreie, Trauergesänge. Deutsche Befindlichkeiten* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1991).

<sup>352</sup> Statistics provided by Eurostat, the Statistical Office of the European Commission, “Migration and Asylum,” subsection “Population by Citizenship—Foreigners.” Available at <http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00157&plugin=1> (accessed Feb. 10, 2010).

shaping the understanding of *Heimat* is the widespread use of technology. From approximately the early 1990s on, mass media and present-day communication technologies like satellite, cable, and internet have contributed to a rapidly proceeding globalization. As a result, spatial and temporal distances are being reduced and in some cases nullified, and hence pose a challenge to the conventional understandings of *Heimat* as a spatial concept.

Against this backdrop, I will explore Volkening's encounter with his place of origin. Notably, visiting his *Heimat* did not lead the Volkening to Germany from where he fled in 1933. Instead, it brings him back to the Belgian city of Antwerp, where he was born in 1908, and had spent the first eight years of his life. Volkening's *Heimat* vision is therefore predominantly shaped by memories of his childhood, including memories of the first two years of World War I when the Volkenings lived in the city that came to be occupied by their German compatriots. In 1968, Volkening was looking for his *Heimat*, not for Germany, but he saw himself still confronted with German history, which becomes apparent when he addresses the decisive impact World War II and the Shoah had on the demographics of the city. Moreover, he came to the Belgian city as a person with a clear sense of belonging to a German cultural community, which is shown in a discourse about the German word *Vaterstadt* at the opening of Volkening's essay. On a side note, although the year is 1968, the student unrests seem to happen in a different world: Volkening's stay in Antwerp and his conceptualization of *Heimat* remain apparently unaffected by the then most recent German *Heimat*-political events.<sup>353</sup>

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<sup>353</sup> To the best of my knowledge, Volkening does not discuss the students protest movement in any of his publications. This seems in line with a certain, deliberately chosen distance from topics related to the politics of the day, which is characteristic of Volkening's writings.

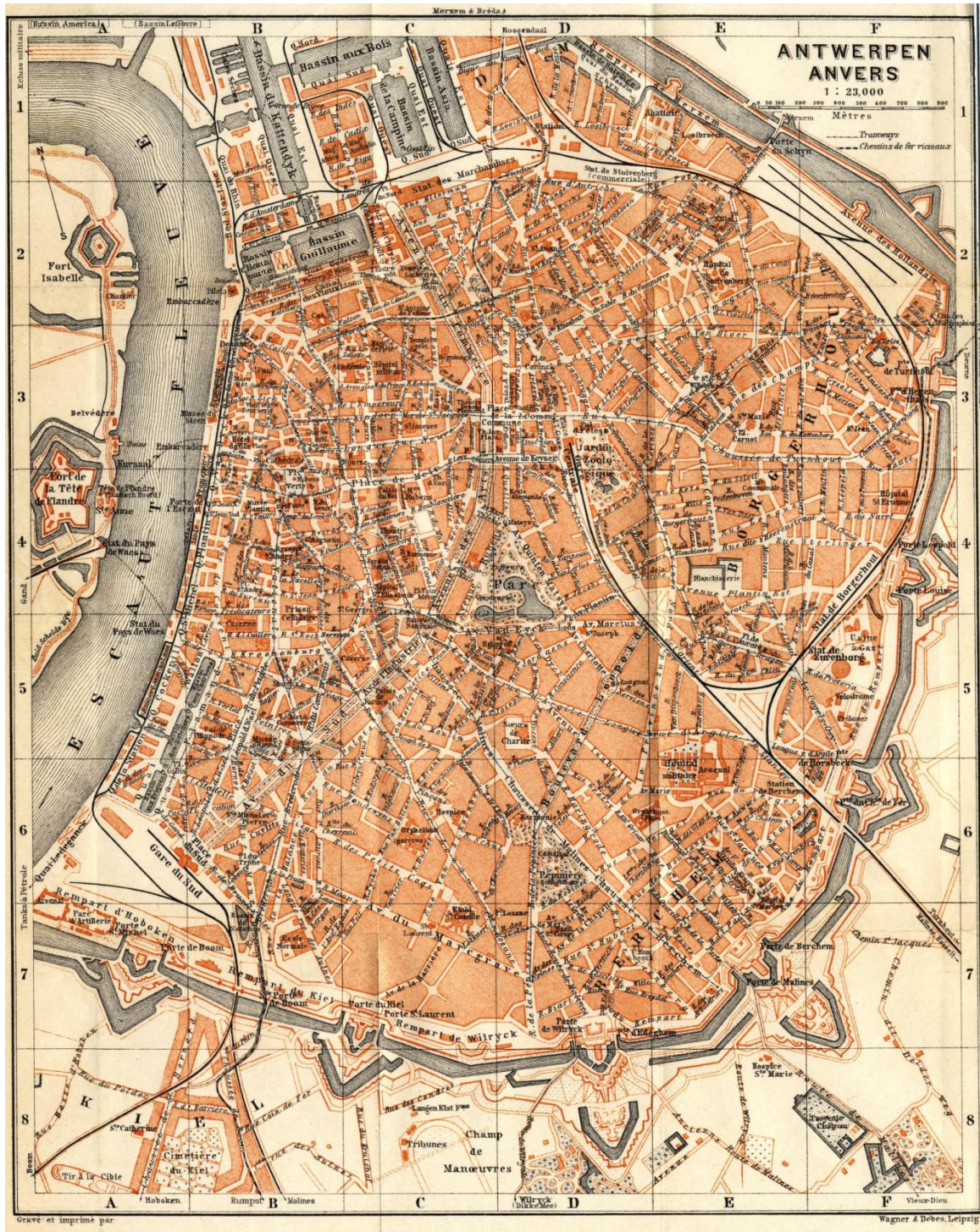


Fig. 15: Antwerp city map (printed in 1910)

### 3. Quite Different, or the Same? — *Heimat* and *Vaterstadt*

Volkening's essay "Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro" opens with the voice of an auctorial narrator who shows surprise at the still unnamed, apparently German protagonist who calls his city of birth "Vaterstadt."<sup>354</sup> *Vaterstadt* is a common term in German for referring to one's city of origin and means literally "father city." The term *Vaterstadt* ascribes parental, male qualities to the city and, simultaneously, it casts the person to whom the *Vaterstadt* is attributed as a child. The German language masculinizes, or, as the narrator suggests, "in the 'paternalization' of the city," *fatherizes* the city and links it fundamentally to patriarchal authority.<sup>355</sup> Later in the text, Antwerp's paternal quality is reiterated and reinforced through the narrator's explanation that visiting Antwerp were for the protagonist "another way of meeting with his [late] father, or to put it more exactly, to return to the encounter with himself, since at his age father and son as distinct persons have ceased to exist, they were fused one into the other."<sup>356</sup> Yet, according to the narrator, the term *Vaterstadt* disregards the female characteristics of a city that he considers the dominant ones.<sup>357</sup> To illustrate the city's feminine gender, Volkening points at the city walls that comprise the population, and their gates that allow passage. The image alludes to the maternal womb and to sexual penetration, thereby

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<sup>354</sup> Volkening uses in his essay once the German term *Vaterstadt* and describes it subsequently in Spanish through the voice of the narrator. He did not attempt to introduce the term *Heimat*, and the Spanish language would not have offered a well-matching translation that Volkening could have used instead (except for possibly *terruño* as explained in footnote 332).

<sup>355</sup> "[E]n la 'paternalización' de la urbe." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 113.

<sup>356</sup> "Otra manera de encontrarse con su padre, o por decirlo más exactamente, de volver al encuentro de sí mismo, pues a su edad habían dejado de ser padre, e hijo dos personas distintas, estaban fundidos uno en el otro" (Volkening, "Antwerp I," 114). I discuss the merging of father and son in Volkening's writing in the section "5.1. Affirming the Meaning of Life: *El padrehijo*, the Fatherson."

<sup>357</sup> Volkening, "Antwerp I," 113.



evoking the tropes of the nourishing *woman as mother* and the erotic *woman as lover*.<sup>358</sup> The narrator restates his belief in the city's femininity by emphasizing its maternal traits, matriarchal authority, and the ability to give birth: "[The city], however, is a female ("hembra"!), a matron."<sup>359</sup> In support of his claim, he cites several languages that express a city's femininity through the word's grammatical gender like French (*la cité*), Greek (*polis*), and Latin (*urbs*).<sup>360</sup> The reader will add to this group "ciudad," the word that Volkening, writing in Spanish, uses in his essay. Concluding his observations, the narrator insinuates that the linguistic particularity of the German language would reflect some secret, not further defined convolutions of the German character, hinting subtly at the protagonist's ambivalent relationship to the place: "likely it hides one of the secrets of the language, moreover of the German psyche, so difficult to analyze in its labyrinth-like gaits."<sup>361</sup>

The opening passage suggests that two different languages and cultures, German and Romance, left their mark on the protagonist. The protagonist's name Lodovico, who is introduced at this point, is Spanish — not German, thus emphasizing his immersion in Hispanic culture besides his already mentioned German background.<sup>362</sup> The narrator sketches the protagonist as a natural child of the hermaphrodite city. Visiting his

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<sup>358</sup> Blickle wrote exemplarily on the topic of genderized *Heimat*. See the section "Heimat and the Feminine" in his *Heimat: A Critical Theory of the German Idea of Homeland*, 60-80.

<sup>359</sup> "[La urbe], sin embargo, es hembra, matrona [...]" (Volkening, "Antwerp I," 113). It is striking that Volkening used the word "hembra" that is foremost used to denote "female" with an emphasis on the biological and zoological instead of using the more common noun "mujer" for "woman" or the adjective "feminina" ("feminine") to express the idea of the city's femininity.

<sup>360</sup> Volkening, "Antwerp I," 113.

<sup>361</sup> "[Q]uizás se esconda uno de los arcanos de la lengua, más aún del alma tudesca, tan difícil de escudriñar en sus laberínticos andares." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 114.

<sup>362</sup> The German name corresponding to the Spanish name *Lodovico* is *Ludwig*.

Antwerpian *Heimat*, one could suspect, Lodovico is about to encounter father, mother, and lover in one. Lodovico's desire to enter the *female* city compares to an oedipal act of returning to his biological origin (*woman as mother*) while it expresses the hope of finding *her*, the city, also in a form in which he can now, as an adult, repossess her (*woman as lover*). The mother and the lover, her substitute in adulthood, mark two temporally remote moments in Lodovico's life. The city corresponds to both of them, and offers itself as a bridge (re)connecting the protagonist's childhood with his present life as an adult. Thinking of one's *Heimat* as a bridge, a connection that gives continuity to one's biography and identity, presupposes a divide, a form of rupture having occurred in one's life. The protagonist has evidently been living away from Antwerp and thematizes repeatedly throughout the essay his painful feelings of alienation. In his diaries, the author, Volkening, acknowledges a similar form of estrangement and expresses his desire for overcoming the gap between him and the city that he considers a part of himself (and vice versa). He seems to believe that Antwerp could teach him about his own *Dasein*. Volkening writes in his diary, months after his visit to Antwerp:

Yes, it is true; I cannot look at a map of the city of 1900 [...] without the opening up, in front of me, of this yawning abyss and font of endless sadness, the spring of lost and irrecoverable time! Something tells me that this city contains the secret key to my life [...]<sup>363</sup>

This passage states the, or at least one reason for Volkening's visit to Antwerp: learning about himself. Volkening's diaries and biographical sketches as well as statements by his friends about him suggest that his protagonist Lodovico and he himself

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<sup>363</sup> “¡Si es que ya no puedo mirar ni una mapa de la ciudad de 1900 [...] sin que se abra, delante de mí, cual abismo bostezante y fuente de tristeza sin fin, el pozo del tiempo perdido e irrecuperable! ¡Algo me dice que esa ciudad alberga el secreto clave de mi vida [...]!” Volkening, “8 de noviembre [de 1968],” in his “En causa propia I,” *Eco* 38:232 (1981): 357.

largely overlap. As Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda writes, “the best of his incarnations [is] the one that responds to the name of Lodovico.”<sup>364</sup> His friend’s statement further underscores an understanding of Volkening’s, respectively Lodovico’s motivation to visit Antwerp: finding in the city this secret key to his life. Yet, the sadness he mentions indicates that he might not have succeeded in discovering it while he was there.

Let us return to Volkening’s essay and Cobo Borda’s observation about the protagonist Lodovico being an incarnation of the author. The essay about Antwerp is not a first-person report about Lodovico’s trip. Rather, the author fictionalizes the story. He identifies with Lodovico and also distances his own persona from the protagonist by using various voices. The multitude of speakers allows Volkening to weave together several, sometimes even colliding perspectives into a narrative about his experience. Ultimately, the different voices give shape to a self-reflexive soliloquy by Volkening. They render the ambivalence that the author would have felt when trying to comprehend (and to write about) his visit to Antwerp. The central voice is that of Lodovico. He represents the native who visits his *Heimat* after an absence so long that his identity and belonging in respect to his place of origin have become unsure. As Volkening notes, stressing the figure’s suspension between being foreign to the place and belonging to it: “LODOVICO [is] a foreigner from beyond the seas, but Antwerpian in the end.”<sup>365</sup> Further, Volkening introduces an auctorial, omniscient, third-person narrator as a friend of Lodovico who is said to live in Bogotá. The narrator claims to know about Lodovico’s *paseos*, his strolling through the city of his childhood, through letters in which the

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<sup>364</sup> “[L]a mejor de sus encarnaciones, la que responde al nombre de Lodovico.” Cobo Borda, “Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario,” 340.

<sup>365</sup> “LODOVICO, un forastero de allende los mares, pero amberense en fin.” Volkening, *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Monterrey, Mexico: Librería Cosmos, 1974), 116.

protagonist rendered truthfully his “personal and immediate experience” in Antwerp.<sup>366</sup> According to the auctorial narrator, Lodovico tries “to catch hold of the fleeting event and to conserve the freshness of an impression caught in flight.”<sup>367</sup> In interplay of excerpts of letters and narrator’s commentary, the narrative mode changes between a third and a first person. The narrator appears to have privileged insight into the protagonist’s personality, into his feelings, and into the motivation of his actions, and speaks with an air exuding trust in the reliability of his judgment. In doing so, he manipulates the reader’s experience. For instance, through comments like the remarks on the *Vaterstadt*, the narrator steers the judgment of the reader: he anchors the protagonist in German cultural grounds and indicates at the same time links to a Romance, Hispanic world that later turns out to be Colombia. Another “voice” speaks through recurring father images. The motif of the father surfaces throughout the essay. Besides the paternal qualities of the city, and at some point the figurative merging Lodovico with his father, we meet several other paternal agents in the text who stand in for the protagonist, and thus, for the author. For example, there is the portrayed man in de Braekeleer’s painting “De man en de stoel.” Also, Lodovico hides his thoughts at times behind the imagined utterances of a friend who acts like a scoffing alter ego whose sarcasm camouflages self-ironic criticism.

Since the events are constantly reported through the specific lenses of fictional characters, the reader is confronted with an excess in perspectives and left without final orientation regarding the meaning of the narrated events. This allows two choices: On the

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<sup>366</sup> “La experiencia personal e inmediata.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 120.

<sup>367</sup> “Echar mano de la fugaz ocurrencia y conservar la frescura de una impresión cogida al vuelo.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 120.

one hand, distilling a meaningful essence from all pieces of information available to form a master narrative, or, on the other, to reaffirm the contradictions and connect the various elements to a dynamic, non-teleological system, sensible but without the claim to absolute authority. I attempt the latter.

#### 4. Topographical Memories

*The journey into exile is “The Journey of no return.”  
Who sets forth on it [...] may return [...].  
But he never returns home.<sup>368</sup>*

In Antwerp, the fictional character Lodovico attempts to reassure himself of his belonging to the city. He does so by strolling around and visiting places that he knows from childhood, hoping to reencounter traces of his past self. The locations evoke and revive some memories. Yet, it seems difficult for him to create a sense of belonging. In 1968, Lodovico walks through a city very different from the one in which he was born in 1908. The discrepancies are disconcerting. His memories clash with what Volkening calls “the mere present dimension” of the city.<sup>369</sup> Becoming aware of his disappointment, he gains better insight into his own desire: his wish of finding an absent city. If Lodovico cannot assure himself of his special bondage with the place, does he have a *Heimat*?

##### 4.1. My Neighborhood, ¡Mi barrio natal!

Shortly after Lodovico arrives in Antwerp, he decides to explore Berchem, a foremost Jewish district in which he had spent, just like Volkening, his earliest childhood.

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<sup>368</sup> “Die Fahrt ins Exil ist ‘The Journey of no return.’ Wer sie antritt [...] mag wiederkehren. [...] Aber er kehrt niemals heim.” Carl Zuckmayer, *Als wär’s ein Stück von mir. Horen der Freundschaft* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 1997): 539.

<sup>369</sup> “[L]a dimensión del puro presente.” Volkening, “Amberes II,” 243.

His first destination is his birthplace, house number 12 in Rue Stanley. While on his way, Lodovico begins tying his person to the locale by appropriating the area linguistically as “*mi barrio natal*,” “*my neighborhood of birth*.”<sup>370</sup> Getting physically closer, he notices major changes in his surroundings. He comments unfavorably on the evident disappearance of familiar businesses like the workshops of diamond cutters and the bookshop where rabbis and students had found biblical texts and Hebrew literature.<sup>371</sup> Turning into Pelikan Straat, the northern prolongation of Rue Stanley, he claims to have “suffered the first disappointment of those that this clouded June morning had reserved for me.”<sup>372</sup> Refusing to accept the reality of various changes, Lodovico starts to inspect nameplates on doorbells in a fruitless attempt to find familiar ones. Indignantly, he protests, “this cannot be; as the tags in the entries of the buildings indicate, there are none of them.”<sup>373</sup> All of “them,” referring here specifically to Antwerp’s once famous Jewish diamond cutters and artisans, seem to have gone. But what is surprising about it? Was Lodovico ignorant of the so-called “Antwerp pogrom,” which took place on April 14, 1941, and of the deportation of thousands of Jewish inhabitants of Berchem and greater Antwerp between 1941 and 1942?<sup>374</sup> — Not at all, as a letter Lodovico’s to the narrator,

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<sup>370</sup> Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 142; my italics.

<sup>371</sup> Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 142.

<sup>372</sup> “Sufrí el primer desengaño de los que me tenía reservados esa nublada mañana de junio.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 142.

<sup>373</sup> “No puede ser; como lo indican las placas en las entradas de los edificios, no hay tal.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 142.

<sup>374</sup> On April 14, 1941, the so-called “Antwerp pogrom” took place being the only pogrom in the country during the Second World War (it was also only in Antwerp the case that the Belgium police participated in raids on Jews). In September 1943, the city was proclaimed “judenfrei” (“free of Jews”) by Eric Holm, the head of the GeStaPo in Antwerp, despite the awareness that many Jews were hiding in the city and the surrounding area. See Mordecai Paldiel, “Belgium,” in his *Churches and the Holocaust: Unholy Teaching, Good Samaritans, and Reconciliation* (New Jersey: Ktav Publishing House, 2006), 130-163, here: 132.

his Bogotano friend, shows. There, Lodovico explains what in the very moment of him standing in the street and not finding the once familiar setting seems to be inexplicable:

Many of those who I saw in 1934 have died, some of mere old age, in Auschwitz most of them, but others, above all the young ones, left their fathers' and grandfather's trade for motives that I ignore, and they went in masses away from the workshops at the street.<sup>375</sup>

Lodovico's desire to find his childhood-*Heimat* collides with his historical knowledge and the actual appearance of the place. Before the Second World War, approximately 35,000 Jews had lived in Antwerp, compared to only about 15,000 who survived the Shoah in 1945,<sup>376</sup> which obviously had a fundamental impact on the demographics of the city. He feels betrayed by Antwerp itself for having changed during his absence. Lodovico laments the many "signs of rupture in the very heart of the city" that cause him anxiety and fear.<sup>377</sup> However, he does not link these "signs of rupture" to human agents, but ascribes them to the anthropomorphic city. These complaints can be regarded as the protagonist's first move toward accepting the inconsistency between his mental *Heimat* image and the concrete city. Venting his disappointment, for which Lodovico uncompromisingly blames the city (and not the people in it, or the German military that bombed Antwerp),<sup>378</sup> and acknowledging the distressing nature of this situation are first steps toward changing his *Heimat* vision from being founded in the belief of *Heimat* as a tangible place to *Heimat* as an ideational space.

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<sup>375</sup> "De los que vi en 1934, muchos habrán muerto, unos de pura vejez, en Auschwitz los más, pero otros, los jóvenes sobre todo, dejaron el oficio de sus padres y abuelos por motivos que ignoro, y se largaron en masa del taller a la calle." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 143.

<sup>376</sup> See Mordecai Paldiel.

<sup>377</sup> "Indicios de ruptura in el propio corazón de la urbe." Volkening, "Antwerp II," 242.

<sup>378</sup> Many of the architectural changes that Lodovico notices in Berchem and larger Antwerp resulted from German military attacks during World War I and World War II. Especially during World War II, Berchem was severely bombed by German military (1940 and 1944).

Heinrich Böll was one of the first to point at the dilemma of our often idealized visions of *Heimat*, so-called “*Heimat-Assoziationen*” (home associations), in face of a dissonant reality. What Böll calls *Heimat-Assoziationen* corresponds to Lodovico’s memories of “his city,” the Antwerp of his childhood. When confronted with the reality of the actual location in 1968, an embarrassing incongruence, in Böll’s words a “*peinliche Differenz zwischen Erinnerung und Sentimentalität*” (embarrassing incongruence between memories and sentiment) comes into view. In his 1965-essay “*Heimat und keine*” (*Heimat* and none), Böll explains:

Home associations are ineradicable like innumerable others; I do not need to live at the place in order to find them again; on the contrary: With the square of the distance their intensity increases; as they approach one another the embarrassing incongruence between memory and sentimentality emerges, viewed closely everything becomes vapid and embarrassing [...] everything ceases to be as it once was.<sup>379</sup>

The longer the distance between one’s *Heimat* and one’s actual whereabouts, the more vivid the vision of *Heimat* arguably becomes, and as Böll further suggests, the more remote from reality. One’s *Heimat* undergoes changes during one’s absence, as does, too, the experiencing subject. Upon returning, she will see her *Heimat* through different eyes and embarrassed, she will have to conclude that her *Heimat* has turned into a product of imagination. Playing on the same idea, the Russian poet Marina Tsvetaeva writes that in

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<sup>379</sup> “*Heimat-Assoziationen sind unauslöschlich wie unzählige andere; ich brauchte nicht am Ort zu wohnen, um sie wiederzufinden; im Gegenteil: Mit dem Quadrat der Entfernung wächst ihre Intensität; bei gegenseitiger Annäherung ergibt sich die peinliche Differenz zwischen Erinnerung und Sentimentalität; nah besehen, wird das alles schal und peinlich [...] hört alles auf, so zu sein, wie ‘es einmal war’.*” Heinrich Böll, “*Heimat und keine*,” in his *Essayistische Schriften und Reden 2. 1964-1972*, ed. Bernd Balzer (Köln: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1979), 113-116, here: 114.



exile one's *Heimat* does not stay "a geographical convention but [becomes] an insistence of memory."<sup>380</sup>

Lodovico finds himself in Antwerp at the point of discovering that his *Heimat-Assoziationen*, which he treasured during more than three decades in exile, diverge from the actual city. Realizing it, he perceives this divergence as a betrayal of the city against him. Lodovico is devastated to the point that he reacts with categorical denial of the obvious: "This cannot be."<sup>381</sup> Notably, Lodovico's immediate reaction is to suppress his knowledge about the persecution, deportation, and killing of Jewish residents during World War II, and he turns his anger toward the city. The realization occurs notably when he studies the nameplates on houses. These nameplates mark a threshold between the actual, material city as represented by the buildings, and their human inhabitants, the individuals carrying the names written on the plates. Prosopopoeia is the rhetorical figure the author Volkening uses here and throughout his essay to approach and also to avoid the direct exchange between Lodovico and other people: inanimate objects carry messages, the city itself becomes personified, later the protagonist would have a conversation of sorts with the figure in de Braekeleer's painting. Moreover, Lodovico's communication with the narrator, his key human interlocutor, is mediated too: through inanimate objects, his letters, he reaches his absent addressee.

Despite all evidence to the contrary, Lodovico's desire to find a reflection of his past, of what he associates with his *Heimat*, in the face of present-day Antwerp is of such acuity that he continues his search.

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<sup>380</sup> Marina Tsvetaeva, "An Insistence of Memory," in *Altogether Elsewhere. Writers on Exile*, ed. Marc Robinson (San Diego; New York; London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1994), 99.

<sup>381</sup> "No puede ser." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 142.

#### 4.2. Searching for Vineta: “The Idealized Image of Today’s City”

*Cities, like dreams, are made of desires and fears, even if the thread of their discourse is secret, their rules are absurd, their perspectives deceitful, and everything conceals something else.*<sup>382</sup>

The essay indicates that the protagonist Lodovico realizes early on during his stay in Antwerp that he is driven by the futile desire of finding his past. Lodovico sets out to explain his recognition of his own, unconscious motives with the words “*ahora* comprendo,” “*now* I understand,” marking a turning point in the narrative:

Now I understand the nature of the hidden discomfort that has been continuously increasing since my arrival [...] in order to culminate, finally, in the acute pain, and being already completely conscious of what I was feeling [...]. In reality that what infuriates me [is] the fruitlessness of my effort to reconstruct the piece of my past that she [the city] hides from me.<sup>383</sup>

Lodovico realizes that his attempts at resurrecting his past are in vain. Yet, he does not let go of his belief that the city contained a part of his life and hence a part of his own identity. Embracing the irrationality of his undertaking, the protagonist holds steadfast on to this *idée fixe*, he remains determined to discover what seems to be nothing more but a phantom of his imagination. Lodovico cannot let go of his *idée fixe*, as, we might speculate, Volkening could neither. Despite disappointment, and despite an apparent acknowledgment of the failure of all efforts, Volkening’s double, Lodovico, keeps strolling through the city. He continues to search for remnants of his childhood, which increasingly becomes one with a search for the past city. Lodovico harbors the

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<sup>382</sup> “Le città come i sogni sono costruite di desideri e di paure, anche se il filo de loro discorso è secreto, le loro regole absurde, le prospettive ingannevoli, e ogni cosa ne nasconde un’altra.” Italo Calvino, *Le Città Invisibili* (Turin: Einaudi, 1972), 49. The English translation is by William Weaver in Italo Calvino, *Invisible Cities*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego, New York, London: Harcourt Brace & Company, 1974), 44.

<sup>383</sup> “Ahora comprendo la naturaleza del recóndito malestar que desde mi llegada fue creciendo y creciendo [...] para culminar, por fin, en el dolor agudo y ya plenamente consciente que sentí [...]. En realidad lo que me exaspera [es] la infructuosidad de mi esfuerzo por reconstruir el trozo de mi pasado que ella [la ciudad] me esconde.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 130.

hope that the past, allegedly more authentic Antwerp — belonging to the world of the long nineteenth century, a period he still experienced during his childhood — would disclose him his ardently desired “secret key to his life.” He explains:

The Antwerp that I am looking for is not this more or less successful historical compound [...] of old and new neighborhoods [but] the phenomenon par excellence Antwerpian, [the city's] most intimate truth. And its secreta figure. However, even more than this *urbs abscondida* or *anima amberense* it is the idealized image of today's city [...] which appears to me on rare occasions in my dreams [...] The one that has to be mysteriously present in all parts [...] in thousand fragments dispersed all over.<sup>384</sup>

Insisting on the existence of a mysterious *anima amberense* (an Antwerpian soul), and an *urbs abscondida* (an absent city) next to, or moreover, interwoven in the actual city, the “more or less successful historical compound” of various districts, Lodovico steps on the threshold between two worlds. The one representing the reality of the one-dimensional city (the city reduced to “the mere present dimension,” as Volkening describes it in his diaries),<sup>385</sup> and the other world an alternative realm in which the existence of the *urbs abscondida*, the Antwerp of the past, and the *anima amberense* are considered not a product of encroaching imagination, but real. (The essay does not detail how the *anima amberense* can be understood, except for stating that it would be the idealized image of today's city, “the Antwerpian phenomenon par excellence, its most intimate truth. And its secreta figure,”<sup>386</sup> and for linking it to the *urbs abscondida* and the

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<sup>384</sup> “El Amberes que busco no está en este conjunto más o menos logrado, historico [...] de barrios antiguos y modernos [...] el fenómeno por excelencia amberense, su más íntima verdad. Y su figura secreta. Mas esta *urbs abscondida* o *anima amberense* tampoco es la imagen idealizada de la ciudad de hoy [...] que, en raras ocasiones se me aparece en sueños [...] La cual [...] debe estar misteriosamente presente en todas partes [...] en mil fragmentos dispersos por doquier [...]” (Volkening, “Amberes I,” 141). The translation of the two Latin phrases is “absent city” for “*urbs abscondida*” and “Antwerpian soul” or “Antwerpian spirit” for “*anima amberense*.”

<sup>385</sup> “[L]a dimensión del puro presente.” Volkening, “Amberes II,” 243.

<sup>386</sup> “[E]l fenómeno por excelencia amberense, su más íntima verdad. Y su figura secreta.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 141.

protagonist's childhood experiences; later too, to Braekeleer's painting, which has been created in 1875, during the *Belle Époque*, for which the author Volkening as well as the protagonist Lodovico seem to long.) Although we have already been reading Lodovico as a fictional character, he finds himself here — judged by the logic of the narrative — on the threshold to fiction. In fiction, we accept a world following principles frequently not only different from, but outright contradicting the ones that we rely on in daily life. But could this, too, be reality? The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines “reality” as the quality or state of being real. And “real” is, according to the OED, everything that is not derived from anything else, or imagined, or desired, but what has an unconditioned, actual existence.<sup>387</sup> From this perspective, the material, present city of Antwerp is real. Yet, Lodovico suggests by calling this city reduced to one dimension that, for him, there are more dimensions conceivable with equal status of reality.<sup>388</sup>

Volkening, a reader of C. G. Jung,<sup>389</sup> was familiar with a Jungian concept of reality, and it might likely have influenced his writing. For understanding the notion of two complementary or possibly contradicting realities shaping Lodovico's experience in Antwerp, I will thus draw from Jung's theory about how people come to an understanding of reality as laid out in his *Psychological Types*.<sup>390</sup> According to Jung, a

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<sup>387</sup> “Reality: The quality or state of being real. 1. Real existence; what is real rather than imagined or desired; the aggregate of real things or existences; that which underlies and is the truth of appearances or phenomena. 2. a. The quality of being real or having an actual existence. 2. b. Correspondence to fact; truth.” *Oxford English Dictionary*, 3<sup>rd</sup> edition, latest additions Dec. 2009.

<sup>388</sup> See Volkening, “Amberes II,” 242-243.

<sup>389</sup> Volkening was interested in psychoanalysis, and particularly in C. G. Jung's work; the following publications demonstrate his interest: Volkening, “C. G. Jung su vida y su obra,” *Revista de las Indias* 36:113 (Apr.-Jun., 1950): 155-184; —, “La evolución del psicoanálisis,” *Vida* 25 (Feb., 1949): 2-5; —, “Una teoría sorprendente en la psiquiatría moderna.” *Vida* 3 (Jul.-Aug., 1955): 15-19.

<sup>390</sup> *Psychological Types* by C. G. Jung was first published in German under the title *Psychologische Typen* (Zurich: Rascher Verlag, 1921).

person makes sense of the world by combining information derived from *Empfindung* (sensing) and *Ahnung* (intuition) as well as from *Denken* (thinking) and *Fühlen* (feeling).<sup>391</sup> The four areas are of different significance to each person and will be weighted accordingly in determining one's *reality* depending on the respective person's personality. In Jung's view, the OED's definition of *reality* would represent only the data derived from sensing, while he argues for a more flexible understanding. Jungian *reality* is a combination of what affects an individual. As the German language marks through the shared morpheme "wirk" in the German words for "reality" (*Wirklichkeit*) and for "to affect" (*wirken*): reality is what affects us — *Wirklichkeit ist was auf uns wirkt*. In that regard, the *urbs abscondida* is certainly real for Lodovico and arguably, too, for Volkening.

The author appears to address self-consciously the very collision of the contradicting realities of the material and the imagined city. A passage of Lodovico's letters to his friend, the narrator, describes how he, respectively the author, had anticipated such predicament:

The night before my departure, I said to V. that the return to Antwerp was an experiment for finding out what would emerge from the clash of two realities: [a clash] between the enigma of a city from which I am separated by more than thirty years of absence and the familiar silhouette of Vineta resting in the submarine tomb of childhood.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> According to Jung, we arrive at an understanding of reality in several stages: First, sensing allows us to perceive facts, and the positively given, while intuition stands for the ability to perceive the contained but (still) unrealized possibilities. Then, we process the data by ordering the information mentally based on rational and logical thinking and through feeling. If we attribute meaning through thinking, Jung argues, such meaning is not a feature of the object in question but of us, expressive of our specific inner organization. The faculty of feeling allows us, according to Jung, an emotional assessment of an object but may not be understood as an outpour of mere emotions or affects; it is rather a manifestation of our ability to react in an emotional manner.

<sup>392</sup> "En vísperas de mi partida le dije a V. que el retorno a Amberes era un experimento para averiguar qué resultase del choque de dos realidades: Entre la incógnita de una ciudad de la cual me separaban más de treinta años de ausencia y la familiar silueta de Vineta reposando en la tumba submarina de la infancia"

Notably, the image Lodovico chooses for alluding to his imagined and idealized *Heimat* is the city of Vineta resting in the submarine tomb of childhood. As legend has it, Vineta was a marvelous city at the coast of the Baltic Sea. Supposedly, it sunk during the twelfth century as a punishment for the pride and extravagance of its inhabitants. The only remaining, if dubious proof of its existence is the sound of its bells. At least that is how legend has it. The existence of the legendary city is a matter of faith. According to the laws of logic, Vineta is as inaccessible as the *urbs abscondida*. The one rests in the tomb of Lodovico's memories of his Antwerpian childhood, the other in the submarine tomb of the Baltic Sea. Their existence cannot be verified by visiting the respective geographical places. For believing in these cities, we have to believe in fictitious constructs: Narratives, legends, and memories. For believing in his own belonging to Antwerp, or moreover to the *urbs abscondida*, the protagonist Lodovico needs to hold on to what by many accounts would be considered fiction.

#### **4.3. Reminiscent Pieces**

While Lodovico initially seems unable to recognize the *urbs abscondida* and his own past in the present city, there are also moments that suggest otherwise. Repeatedly, Lodovico ends up at places that figured prominently in his childhood. Although these places, like the entire city, have undergone significant changes, their mere existence is sufficient to evoke colorful scenes from his childhood. Yet, as I will show, their recollection is accompanied by an acute awareness of the difference between then and now.

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(Volkening, "Antwerp I:" 133). V. stands here supposedly for an unnamed friend Lodovico's. In his diaries, Volkening used "V." as a cipher referring to his wife, Gertrudis Volkening.

One day during his stay in Antwerp, Lodovico sets out looking for his old German elementary school, the *Allgemeine deutsche Schule*. The actual building, partly decayed, brings forth a spate of vivid memories:

[O]f the building in which, more than half a century ago, I was taught [...] nothing but the façade was left now and behind the façade [a] void [...]. A handful of memories, some cruel like the one of little Albert, the son of the innkeeper, who was bullied by the well-off kids during the quarter-hours of the study breaks, or the one of the drunken day laborer vomiting, among roars in vernacular [in Flemish], the Saturday afternoon bender, while his wife, a skinny little woman with her eyes full of fear, kneeled down to pick up the round bread that rolled down the gutter.<sup>393</sup>

One might expect that Lodovico would rejoice in finding a concrete link to his past: the tangible remains of his former school building have triggered memories of his childhood. We might assume he would feel more confident about his belonging to the place. Should it not be a positive experience? Lodovico quickly disabuses us of the idea, noting about his memories: “Sentimental most of them, just good enough for making me feel a little more intensely the sadness of the fleeting and the intangible.”<sup>394</sup> In his judgment, the location and the evoked memories were just good enough to make him feel miserable since they rekindle his unsatisfiable desire of making his past part of the presence. Thus they would increase his pain about his irretrievable loss — of his past, and possibly also of his *Heimat*. At this point in the narrative, the auctorial narrator has already instructed the reader on how to interpret the episode. He called it Lodovico’s “big

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<sup>393</sup> “Del edificio en donde, más de medio siglo ha, me enseñaron [...] ya no quedaba sino la fachada, y detrás de la fachada el vacío [...]. Un puñado de reminiscencias, algunas crueles como la de Albertico, el hijo del tabernero, acosado en los cuartos de hora de recreo por los niños bien, o aquella del jornalero borracho vomitando, entre rugidos en vernáculo, la borrachera de la tarde del sábado, mientras su esposa, mujercita flacucha con los ojos llenos de pavor, se agachaba a recoger el pan redondo que rodaba por el arroyo.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 131.

<sup>394</sup> “Sentimentales las más, apenas buenas para hacerme sentir un poco más intensamente la tristeza de lo huidizo e inasible.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 131.

mistake” to “have believed in the possibility to reconstruct, like a *puzzle*, the image of an intact world.”<sup>395</sup> One wonders whether the narrator’s rejection of Lodovico’s wish as unrealistic and irrational might not provoke protest instead of consent in the reader. Through comments like that, the reader might indeed be lead to side with the protagonist and his maybe naïve but comprehensible desire for *Heimat* and belonging. Must Lodovico be mistaken? Or could Vineta be found? The tension between Lodovico’s steadfast belief in finding his Vineta and the narrator’s derision about his alleged naïveté might be expressive of the author’s ambivalence regarding the possibility of reconnecting with the remote world of one’s childhood and one’s earlier self.

#### 4.4. Reappearance of the Past

*An exquisite pleasure had invaded my senses,  
something isolated, detached, with no suggestion of its origin.*<sup>396</sup>

Lodovico indeed continues his search for his childhood and for the Antwerp of the past. As he writes to his friend in Bogotá, he does so under “the little less than absurd pretense to tear out the secret of one’s soul preserved behind gray stones.”<sup>397</sup> However, the protagonist is about to discover additional fragments of his childhood, which allows him to experience the rare synchronicity and unity of his past and present life. This time, reality in its broad, Jungian sense determines his perception. As the following example illustrates, Lodovico’s discovery of his childhood city, respectively his childhood self in

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<sup>395</sup> “[El] magno error [...] creía en la posibilidad de reconstruir, como en un puzzle, la imagen de un mundo intacto.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 120.

<sup>396</sup> Marcel Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. Charles Kenneth Scott-Moncrieff (New York: Vintage Books, 1982), 22.

<sup>397</sup> “La pretensión poco menos que absurda de arrancar a una antigua ciudad el secreto de su alma parapetada detrás de grisáceas piedras [...]” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 133.



the city, has little to do with seeing the actual place: rather it is a rediscovery of a long submerged memory. The material present-day city takes thereby the role of a mnemonic device. Such is the case when Lodovico strolls away from Berchem's noisy main streets and walks along a small, curvy path leading to an open, park-like space. As he gets closer, he recognizes what he believes to be "the bucolic character of what was, about hundred years ago, the village [of Berchem]." <sup>398</sup> Among trees, Lodovico discovers a nineteenth century pavilion, and by looking at it, past and present seem to converge:

That pavilion of the beginning of the past century that I had forgotten since the day on which I, a very young boy, took part in a competition of balloons at this place. Mine was a beauty of transparent red and it exuded a tender smell of rubber and had attached a tag with my address. I followed full of nostalgia with ecstatic eyes its trajectory on the pale blue of a firmament that had not a single cloud—the skies of childhood are this way—while it veered away within a multicolored myriad of balloons until it, finally, disappeared in the celestial immensity. <sup>399</sup>

Lodovico remembers being the young boy who once participated in a balloon competition at the same place where he stands now. His memories take on bright colors; smells come back to him: he senses his past. Secluded from the noisy streets, the partition between his childhood and the present dissolves. When he gets in touch with his childhood, Lodovico enters the realm of his *Heimat*. That the scene happens in a natural park resonates with the rural connotations of the *Heimat* concept. Moreover, the balloon, the object from his past that seemingly materialized itself in the present, symbolizes par

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<sup>398</sup> "El genio bucólico de la que, hace cosa de cien años, fue la aldea de Berghem." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 157. — Volkening uses here the "Berghem," the Flemish name for the neighborhood Berchem ("Berchem" is its French name).

<sup>399</sup> "Aquel pabellón [...] de los comienzos del siglo pasado con sus paredes pintadas de ocre y su gracioso peristilo clasicista del cual me había olvidado desde el día en que, muy niño, tomé parte allí en un concurso de globos. El mío era una maravilla de rojo transparente que despedía un suave olor a goma y llevaba un rótulo con mis señas. Lleno de nostalgia, con ojos extasiados seguí su trayectoria por el azul pálido de un firmamento en que no había ni una nube—los cielos de la infancia son así—mientras se iba alejando entre la multicolor turba de globos hasta hundirse, por fin, en la inmensidad celeste." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 157.

excellence his being at home in the city: The red rubber balloon carries a tag with his name and Antwerpian home address. Sensing the presence of his past, his eyes follow the trajectory of the balloon that is factually non-existent. With nostalgia, Lodovico becomes aware that he is vividly experiencing what is otherwise beyond his reach. For a fleeting moment, he perceives the synchronicity of his past and present self and surrounding, marking the imaginary junction of times that he had yearned for. He is amazed by the intensity of the experience, and the narrator explains what Lodovico seemingly cannot clothe in words: he had found, against all odds, what he had been looking for. Mocking Lodovico's earlier doubts and frustrations, the narrator points at "the perplexity of the surprised man about a constellation of that what did neither rhyme with his experience nor with the little that his wing-down imagination had resigned itself to expect."<sup>400</sup>

Lodovico's account reminds us of Marcel Proust's narrator in his *À la recherche du temps perdu* (*In Search of Lost Time*) who experiences tides of memory evoked by the small stimulus of tasting a Madeleine cookie dipped in tea. Volkening, as an author, might have modeled his writing on the famous scene. His thoughts about the possibility of bridging the temporal gap between childhood and presence provide clues for an interpretation of above passage. It is in his essay "El paisaje mítico de la infancia" (The mythical landscape of childhood), which Volkening wrote about Proust's novel, where he meditates about the nature of childhood and discusses moments that led us back into the past. Those moments would permit

to jump across the abyss of the years and to enter into contact with the living substance of the past [...] until [they] culminate in a holistic image of childhood,

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<sup>400</sup> "La perplejidad del hombre sorprendido por una constelación de esas que no rimen con su experiencia ni con lo poco que su alicaída imaginación se había resignado a esperar." Volkening, "Antwerp II," 234.

in a synthesis of highest beauty and indissoluble psychical-spiritual unity. We experience, in other words, the recovery of a separated part of our personality.<sup>401</sup>

For Volkening, these moments give access to what he characterizes in his essay on Proust as the “irrecuperable happiness” of childhood.<sup>402</sup> Because of the unexpected vehemence with which these moments would resurface, Volkening argues for childhood’s special status in comparison to adolescence, maturity, and old age.<sup>403</sup> Still writing about Proust, Volkening reasons that the period of childhood became for an adult apart from those felicitous moments absolutely inaccessible. It would be a time *sui generis* that revolved around its own axis and followed its own laws. Its development could not be rationally calculated or foreseen, nor could an adult revive her childhood through sheer will power. What sets childhood further apart, he stresses, were that it did not end by a “process of slow development,” but unpredictably, as if in a traumatizing “catastrophic event.”<sup>404</sup> Because of the irrationality of the event and the defenselessness with which we were exposed to it, most adults would struggle throughout their lives with a desire to mend their disrupted sense of identity through connecting once more with their past. Lodovico’s experience of such a moment in which past and presence seem to have converged gives him fresh impetus to continue the search for the “thousand fragments dispersed allover” of his past, his *Heimat*, the *urbs abscondida*, and not least of

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<sup>401</sup> “[S]altar al abismo de los años y entrar en contacto con la sustancia viva del pasado [...] hasta culminar en la imagen integral del paisaje de la niñez, en una síntesis de suma belleza e indisoluble unidad síquico-espiritual. Presenciamos, en otras palabras, la recuperación de una parte escindida de la personalidad.” Volkening, “El paisaje mítico de la infancia (recordando a Proust),” in his *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976), 33-48, here: 40. This essay was first published in *Eco* 23:133-134 (1971): 194-213.

<sup>402</sup> “[F]elicidad irrecuperable.” Volkening, “El paisaje mítico de la infancia (recordando a Proust),” 44.

<sup>403</sup> Volkening, “El paisaje mítico de la infancia (recordando a Proust),” 35.

<sup>404</sup> “La terminación de la infancia no es el resultado de un proceso de desarrollo paulatino; es un evento catastrófico.” Volkening, “El paisaje mítico de la infancia (recordando a Proust),” 43.

himself.<sup>405</sup> Lodovico's next stop is a place dedicated to the very conservation of earlier times: the museum.

**5. A Myriad of Identifications: Henri de Braekeleer's "De man en de stoel"**



Fig. 16: Henri de Braekeleer, "De man en de stoel"

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<sup>405</sup> "[E]n mil fragmentos dispersos por doquier." Volkening, "Amberes I," 141.

*I will not discover this terra incognita  
by trudging through streets and places  
but on a museum's wall.*<sup>406</sup>

As Theodor W. Adorno points out, “museum” and “mausoleum” share more than a phonetic similarity. Like a mausoleum, the museum holds “objects to which the observer no longer has a vital relationship and which are in the progress of dying.”<sup>407</sup> As we will see, Lodovico, attempting to recover the past, searches in the museum for a representation of his late father and attempts to understand their common genealogy. He visits Antwerp’s Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten, the royal museum of fine arts, because of his desire to see one specific painting, the “De man en de stoel” (man in a chair) by Henri de Braekeleer. The artist, a Flemish nineteenth century painter, lithographer, and etcher, was primarily interested in capturing scenes of quotidian life in Antwerp. His realistic renditions of light are the hallmark of his painting style: warm shades, sober composition, and objects of tactual appearance are characteristic for his art in general as well as for the “De man en de stoel.” Painted in 1875, “De man en de stoel” is considered one of de Braekeleer’s masterpieces, and is today still on permanent exhibit in the same Koninklijk Museum voor Schone Kunsten. The painting’s original title “Zaal in het Brouwerhuis,” literally “parlour in the brewhouse,” suggests that the portrayed man was an Antwerpian brewer. Volkening may or may not have known about this; however, he neither seizes the idea in the essay he wrote about his stay in Antwerp, nor in his diaries where he also repeatedly mentions de Braekeleer’s painting.

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<sup>406</sup> “Algo me dice que no descubriré esa terra incognita recorriendo calles y plazas, sino en una pared de museo.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 140.

<sup>407</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, “Valéry Proust Museum” in his *Prisms*, trans. Samuel and Shierry Weber (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1981), 175-185, here: 175.

In this essay, “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro,” the fictional character Lodovico identifies features of his late father in the face of the figure in Braekeleer’s painting, thus creating an intimate relationship between himself and the portrayed man. Notably, Lodovico has returned home to his so-called “Vaterstadt,” his *father city*, to reconnect with his origins, one could say with his father whom he is to encounter through the painting. It is no accident that the narrator refreshes our memory at this point of the story: since childhood, he emphasizes, it would have been for Lodovico “the most normal thing in the world to associate the father’s image with the image of Antwerp; to such a degree that the trip that he thought to undertake seemed to him to be another way of meeting with his father.”<sup>408</sup> Lodovico himself confirms this assumption later. He suggests cautiously that seeing de Braekeleer’s painting in which he believes to visually encounter his father might have been the decisive reason for his entire trip.<sup>409</sup> By seeing and arriving at an understanding of this painting, Lodovico hopes to understand his father, and at the same time, to encounter and understand himself because, as the narrator contends, “at his age father and son have ceased to be two distinct persons.”<sup>410</sup> Lodovico, the protagonist of Volkening’s essay looks at the old man in the painting and he sees his father; he looks at his father and sees himself; and the author, Volkening, looks at all of them who seem to be set up as reflections of his own personality. Consequently, whatever Lodovico extrapolates from the painting could be read as a

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<sup>408</sup> “[L]a cosa más natural del mundo asociar la imagen paterna a la de Amberes; tanto así que el viaje que pensaba emprender le pareció otra manera de encontrarse con su padre.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 116.

<sup>409</sup> Lodovico does so by citing one of his friends teasing him: “It seems as if the only thing that you are looking for in Antwerp is ‘The Man in [a] chair!’” The original Spanish version reads: “¡Parece que lo único que buscas en Amberes es ‘el hombre de la silla!’” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 140.

<sup>410</sup> “[P]ues a su edad habían dejado de ser padre e hijo dos personas distintas.” Volkening, “Amberes I,” 116.

statement about himself — about Volkening: If he could decode the painting, we can speculate, he (as well as Volkening) would hold the key to understanding his own life in hands. In a way, Lodovico's interpretation of the painting is Volkening's attempt-in-writing to work through his emotional responses concerning his encounter with Antwerp. The sense of urgency, palpable in the passages of Volkening's essay that are dedicated to the discussion of the "De man en de stoel," would hence reflect the acuteness of existential concerns that the author holds and for which he hopes to find possibly an answer through de Braekeleer's painting. As Lodovico's anxiousness to properly decode the painting suggests, the interpretation of the "De man en de stoel" is of great importance for him:

Who knows how far away this investigation will carry me, maybe to the very source of a [certain] sadness [...]. And even if an attempt of interpretation, foreign to the nature of the undecipherable mysteries as [it is also the case with] a coded writing, might, ultimately, fail, at least I will have understood one thing: For finding access to the essence of this work, I have to focus on the pure phenomenology, on that what the painting willingly reveals, without being forced.<sup>411</sup>

Edmund Husserl's argument that phenomena can only be studied subjectively, through intuitive and reflective scrutiny, resonates in the appeal to focus on the pure phenomenology. When Lodovico begins to get to the core of the painting, to discover and unveil layer by layer the work à clef, as we will see, he projects his own emotions, experience, and family history upon it.

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<sup>411</sup> "¡Quién sabe cuán lejos me llevará el tanteo, quizá al propio origen de una tristeza [...]. Y aun cuando fracase una tentativa de interpretación ajena a la naturaleza de los misterios que no se descifran, al fin y al cabo, como una escritura clave, por lo menos habré aprendido una cosa: Para hallar acceso a la esencia de esa obra [...] debo concentrarme en la fenomenología pura, en lo que el cuadro de buena gana, sin que se le haga fuerza, revelar [*sic*]." Volkening, "Antwerp II," 248. Literally, "tanteo" means "testing," or "trying" (I translated here with "investigation").

A detailed treatment of all of Lodovico's many observations and trains of thought triggered by de Braekeleer's painting would go beyond the scope of this chapter. In the following, my discussion centers on Lodovico's construction of a relationship between the painting, his memories, and his own identity. I focus first on Lodovico's reflections about the mysterious presence of his father in the painting, and second on the constellation of objects in the picture, respectively in a museum (which is a matter of major concern for the protagonist). Finally, I examine how this fits into the construction of identity through memory and imagination.

### **5.1. Affirming the Meaning of Life: *El padrehijo*, the Fatherson**

For Lodovico, de Braekeleer's work "De man en de stoel" is charged with a symbolism presenting a reality beyond the one readily accessible to other beholders. For him, it is his father whom he sees when looking at the old man in the painting. Looking at the painted man in the chair contains such immense personal quality for him that he even claims that somebody who did not know about the likeness of the portrayed man and his father "in his moments of irritable temper" would not be able to interpret the painting.<sup>412</sup> Lodovico emphasizes that he immediately sensed his father's eyes looking at him through the eyes of the sitting man in the painting: "when I found myself the first time face to face with the original, with the same unsettling old man who has intrigued me so much since I saw him *in effigie*."<sup>413</sup> — Underscoring this statement, the text of the print version

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<sup>412</sup> "En sus momentos de humor atrabiliario." Volkening, "Antwerp II," here: 249; see also: *ibid.*, 248-249.

<sup>413</sup> "Cuando por primera vez me encontré cara a cara con el original, con el mismo desconcertante anciano que tan intrigado me tiene desde que lo vi *in effigie*." Volkening, "Antwerp II," 249.



of Volkening's essay in *Eco* is here interrupted to accommodate a black and white reproduction of the figure portrayed in de Braekeleer's painting.<sup>414</sup>

Lodovico's ensuing interpretation of the work resembles a narrative about the presumed life and imagined circumstances of the portrayed man. Contrary to the idea that the figure was an affluent brewer, Lodovico believes him to be a Flemish peasant who had come to town for some business, and had decided to visit afterwards a museum. Lodovico's reading of the painting "De man en de stoel" suggests that the figure, tired from walking all day, came to sit down in the chair, in which he is portrayed, without realizing that it was a piece on exhibition. However, Lodovico warns immediately that it would be wrong to ridicule the peasant for his ignorance, or to consider him a coarse person. Instead, he argues, the look on the man's face reveals a pensive, melancholic, serious, and even wise character:

Actually, contrary to the deceptive appearance of simplicity, this absorbed look [with] its expression of dejectedness, of resigned carelessness, or to put it in a paradox, of serene despair reveals a frame of mind similar to the sad and skeptic sageness of Ecclesiastes.<sup>415</sup>

The biblical figure of Ecclesiastes was allegedly a sage who knew of the limits to human knowledge, and who believed that all worldly pleasure and endeavor would end in an inescapable void. Vanity, momentariness, and futility lay, so Ecclesiastes, at the core of all existence. Oscillating between orthodoxy and blasphemy, between Euclidean zest for life and stark nihilism, Ecclesiastes, causing much distress to theologians, was

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<sup>414</sup> See Volkening, "Antwerp II," 249. The black-white picture shows only the man in the chair, not the entire painting of Henri de Braekeleer's "De man in de stoel."

<sup>415</sup> "En efecto, contrasta con las engañosas apariencias de simpleza esa mirada absorta cuya expresión de abandono, de dejadez resignada o, por decirlo en una paradoja, de sereno desespero revela un estadio de ánimo afín a la triste y escéptica sabiduría del Eclesiastés." Volkening, "Antwerp II," 250-251. Literally, "engañosas apariencias" is "deceptive appearances" (plural instead of singular as I translated it into English).

ultimately unable to ascribe lasting meaning to the existence of man. Reinforcing the Ecclesiastical trait of the figure in “De man en de stoel,” Lodovico cites an air of dejectedness, resignation, and despair. The Ecclesiastical dilemma, limitations of human understanding, looming nihilism, despair (and maybe also the ability for feeling an ardent desire for life?), seems to be captured in the face of the figure with whom Lodovico identifies his father and implicitly himself. The narrator describes the common features of the portrayed man and Lodovico’s father, and tells the reader about the father’s periods of melancholy and depression during which he supposedly appeared like the “De man en de stoel.”<sup>416</sup> He adds that Lodovico had not known about this when he was still a little boy living in Antwerp but found out about his father’s condition later when the family had moved to Hamburg,<sup>417</sup> and, importantly, when he fell in the grip of the same overwhelming sadness.<sup>418</sup> The narrator describes Lodovico’s father, to whom he refers as “Don Pedro” (Mr. Pedro), during his periods of depression:

That what he himself used to call “the poor beast” seized then Don Pedro, [it was] a fate of vague, inaccessible and irremediable sadness that, bit by bit, invaded his whole being. Half sunken down into his arm chair, the look fixed at the waving shadows of the *nowhere* and the *nevermore*, this man, usually very agile and entrepreneurial, gave the impression of having paralyzed in a posture that

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<sup>416</sup> Volkening, “Amberes I,” 117-118; and his “Antwerp II,” 249.

<sup>417</sup> Volkening’s family lived in Antwerp until 1916 (Volkening was then eight years old); they moved to Hamburg in 1922 when he was fourteen. In between, Volkening lived in Worms (1916-1919) and Düsseldorf (1919-1922).

<sup>418</sup> Volkening, “Amberes I,” 116. Diary entries from the 1950s to the 1970s suggest that Volkening suffered from recurring periods of depressions. Exemplary might be an excerpt from his diary entry of December 10, 1977, where he notes: “There exists not a single day on which someone would not believe having touched the ground of despair. However, the following day teaches you that despair does not know any ground.” The original Spanish text reads: “Ni un solo día en que uno no crea haber tocado el fondo de la desesperanza. Pero el día siguiente enseña que la desesperación no tiene fondo.” Volkening cited this diary entry in his “En causa propia II,” *Eco* 48:244 (1982): 400.

distinguished itself from complete immobility only by the nervous movement of his hand occupied with examining a tooth with a toothpick.<sup>419</sup>

Through the meditations to which the painting gives rise, a genesis of the protagonist's family is cast: continuing the depiction of "the poor beast" that is said of tormenting Lodovico and his father likewise, the narrator argues that melancholy and depression, the so-called "beast," would be the origin of their lineage. He tells us about Lodovico: "That what he has never been able to find out was the origin of the 'poor beast,' or putting it this way, his genealogical tree."<sup>420</sup> Remarkably, although these periods of depression are attributed to a "hereditary disposition,"<sup>421</sup> it is explicitly not by birth that this disposition is being passed on. Instead, it is said to be passed on in the moment in which the son would drop the allegedly ill-conceived idea that the "image of the father [would] form part of the outer world and [would] represent something separate from his own person."<sup>422</sup> Hence, it is through accepting one's father as a living part of oneself that one comes to share the suffering that runs through the family; in this way, so the narrative suggests, the son becomes fully part of his family and becomes the person he was supposed to be all along. The narrator explains that in that mythical moment of fusion, Lodovico would have taken on "this new personality of *fatherson*,"<sup>423</sup> and ever

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<sup>419</sup> "Adueñóse entonces de don Pedro [...] lo que él mismo solía llamar "la pobre bestia", suerte de tristeza vaga, inasible e irremediable que, poco a poco, iba invadiendo todo su ser. Medio hundido en su poltrona, la mirada clavada en las ondulantes sombras del nowhere y del nevermore, ese hombre, de ordinario tan ágil y emprendedor, daba la impresión de haberse paralizado en una postura que de la inmovilidad completa se distinguía solamente por el nervioso movimiento de la mano ocupada en sondear una muela con el mondadientes." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 115.

<sup>420</sup> "Lo que nunca logró adivinar fue el origen de la 'pobre bestia', o por decirlo así su árbol genealógico." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 116.

<sup>421</sup> "[D]isposición hereditaria." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 116.

<sup>422</sup> "[D]ejado la imagen paterna de formar parte del mundo de afuera y de representar algo separado de su propio ser." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 116-117.

<sup>423</sup> "[E]sa nueva personalidad de padrehijo." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 117; my italics.

since, he has suffered, like his father, attacks by “the poor beast.” In his times of melancholia and depression, we learn, Lodovico questions the meaning of life: “And all this, what for? [...]—Meditating, writing, creating, living, what for? [...] What the hell am I doing here?”<sup>424</sup> And, the narrator suggests, “the same words, pronounced between teeth and maybe inaudible for the whole world [...] one reads on the small lips of the man in “De man en de stoel.”<sup>425</sup> With this central statement, an arch is drawn from Lodovico to his father and to the figure in de Braekeleer’s painting. The three characters coalesce: Lodovico looking at the painting on the museum wall is looking at his father and at himself. In this moment, he indeed has discovered a piece of himself hidden in the city. Lodovico’s wish for finding the key to his life turns out to be the wish to find meaning in his life in order to fight his moments of despair. Pivotal for him is the interpretation of the painting. The logic of the narrative suggests that, if Lodovico could discover in the painting an affirmation of the meaningfulness of life, he too would be able to gain the upper hand when “the poor beast” attacks him in the future.

Instead of following this path of thought to reflect further on the existential questions that de Braekeleer’s “De man en de stoel” evokes, Lodovico digresses and focuses on aspects that bear a relation to the work but not a strong one to the prompted, existential questions that lay at the center of the discussion of de Braekeleer’s painting in Volkening’s essay. For instance, an extended passage deals with Antwerp’s Belle Époque, the period in which de Braekeleer created the painting. Thereby, the narrative intertwines historical references with personal memories as Lodovico’s memory of his

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<sup>424</sup> “¿Y todo esto para qué? [...]—Meditar, escribir, crear, vivir, ¿para qué? [...] ¿Qué diablos estoy haciendo aquí?” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 117.

<sup>425</sup> Las mismas palabras, pronunciadas entre dientes o quizás inaudibles para todo el mundo [...] se leen en los apretados labios del ‘hombre de la silla.’” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 117. “

mother's dentist who, having worked only for his private pleasure, is depicted as representative for the upper escalade of society of that time. Also, de Braekeleer's art in general is being discussed and compared with the work of other artists. Lodovico elaborates on de Braekeleer's characteristic treatment of light and shadow. This he translates, in a Nietzschean manner, into the eternal battle of Apollonian light against Dionysian deities, interplay of creation and heroism and destruction and terror.<sup>426</sup> Then, he reflects on the museums pedagogical zeal, its *furor pedagogic*, and turns his attention toward different attitudes he observes with museum visitors in front of the exhibited art. Their behavior would range, so Lodovico notes, from an eagerness to learn mixed with "undertones of healthy boredom" to being plainly "neurotic" in their haste to look at as many artworks as possible.<sup>427</sup> Most of these sideways give fascinating insights into Antwerp's past during the nineteenth and at the beginning of the twentieth century, the period of the protagonist Lodovico's as well as the author's childhood.

However, let us turn to Lodovico's desire to learn whether the figure in "De man en de stoel" can instruct him about the meaning of human existence. Does his encounter in the museum give him the figurative "key of his life"? Contemplating once more the face of the portrayed man, Lodovico alludes to a possible answer: he focuses on the figure's eyes and recalls his feeling of identification. Despite having appropriated the figure as a quasi family member, the use of the universalizing pronoun "we" in the next passage suggests that Lodovico regards his interpretation as relatively objective:

In this pensive, lost in thought, and absorbed look that, penetrating one, is searching for who knows what chimerical land [...]. It is as if a window would

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<sup>426</sup> See Volkening, "Antwerp II," 255.

<sup>427</sup> "[M]atices de sano aburrimiento" and "neurotic." Volkening, "Antwerp II," 269.

open into the immensity of space, and by identifying with the taciturn man of the chair, we sense a dimension that transcends the picture. It transcends it, beyond doubt. It is strength then to admit that in the emptiness that is reflected by those eyes of the old man, which see and do not see, emerges, at least for an evanescent moment, the transcendental plan whose existence has recently still escaped me.”<sup>428</sup>

A transcendental, Platonic plan can be glimpsed at? The plan to resolve the riddle of human existence? The character Lodovico appears convinced of having discovered traces of a “transcendental plan” about life by contemplating the portrayed man in “De man en de stoel.” Although the plan itself eludes the beholder, its traces attest to its existence. If the question is whether there is meaning in life, this is sufficient to give an affirmative answer. Consequently, this moment of insight is of major consolation to Lodovico regardless of the fact that he is unable to perceive its full meaning: “I am surer about it than ever that, during all my crossings, the one thing that I was really looking for was nothing else but this ultimate, occult reality.”<sup>429</sup> Reaching out for the transcendental plan of his life, he reaches out for something inaccessible by nature. The meaning of life remains concealed for him, yet, absorbed in the face of the portrayed figure, he arrives at the conclusion that life has a meaning.

Lodovico’s, respectively Volkening’s meditation’s about the painting are charged with a personal quest for knowledge about life, and the wish to reconnect with his past — his childhood-self, his father, and “his” city. The painting is a projection of Lodovico’s

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<sup>428</sup> “En esa mirada pensativa, ensimismada, absorta que, atravesándole a uno, busca no sé qué quimérica tierra [...]. Es como si se abriera una ventana a la inmensidad del espacio, e identificándonos con el taciturno hombre de la silla, vislumbramos una dimensión que trascendiese la del cuadro. La trasciende, no cabe duda. Fuerza es admitir entonces, que en el vacío reflejado por esos ojos de anciano que ven y no ven, se dibuja, siquiera por un infinitesimal instante, el plano trascendente cuya existencia aún hace poco se me escapa.” Volkening, “Antwerp II,” 262.

<sup>429</sup> “[E]stoy más seguro que nunca de que en todas mis travesías lo que realmente buscaba no fue otra cosa distinta de esa última realidad oculta.” Volkening, “Amberes II,” 263.

inner life. In the essay, Volkening's extended treatment of de Braekeleer's painting "De man en de stoel" is ultimately not meant as a critique of the artwork. The painting's function is rather to provide the impetus for engaging in philosophical observations.

## 5.2. Constellations

While Lodovico attempts to interpret "De man en de stoel," his identification could also be read as a way of negotiating and redesigning his own identity. He internalizes what is outside himself and assigns new meaning to it with regard to his own life, and one could assume, with the objective of incorporating what was exterior and unrelated into the conglomerate unity that constitutes his identity. Something similar happens when a curator arranges an exhibit in a museum: relatively unrelated objects are arranged in relation to each other to create a new whole. Lodovico discovers the same principle in the composition of de Braekeleer's painting whose setting he believes to be also a museum.

Several objects from unrelated, remote realms surround the pensive figure of the "De man en de stoel." There are, as Lodovico points out, "the armchair [from] a chancellery from the era of Philip II [of Spain]" with a velvet cushion on which the figure's feet rest, a statuette of a bishop mounted on the wall taken from "the Gothic semidarkness of a church that nobody remembers," a magnificent Gobelin tapestry, and a small oil painting "[from] the private gallery of a rich merchant and admirer of Peter Paul Rubens" that shows "the newts and Nereids of a mythological scene."<sup>430</sup> A harmonious

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<sup>430</sup> "[E]l sillón en una cancillería de la época de Felipe Segundo;" "la gótica penumbra de una iglesia de la que nadie se acuerda;" "[en] la galería privada de un rico mercader y admirador de Pedro Pablo Rubens," "los tritones y nereidas de la escena mitológica." Volkening, "Amberes II," 280. I changed in my English translation the Spanish "en," meaning "in," to "from."

constellation unites these objects despite their different origins. An array of warm colors flowing through the painting and a realistic play of light and shadows contribute further to the appearance of oneness. Moreover, the painted space, according to Lodovico's earlier interpretation, is a room in a museum — the space par excellence for the custody of unrelated objects. Pieces from different eras and locations find a second life in the museum after their first life as artifacts, decorations, articles of daily use, or objects of sacral rites and religion ended. Newly arranged, they come to adopt a mosaic-like unity. In Lodovico's eyes, their second life lacks only one aspect: vividness.<sup>431</sup> Their afterlife is artificial. The care of a museum curator or private collector sustains the objects without assigning them a purpose beyond speaking of a past of which visitors should, so enlightened pedagogy admonishes, be mindful. Only sometimes, they take on significance beyond their deaths as for a beholder like Lodovico, or presumably, too, for Volkening.

I would like to pursue an analogy between, on the one hand, pieces of an exhibit and their relation to the museum space, and on the other hand, memories and their relation to identity: in each case, initially unrelated elements are chosen (over others) to create a new whole. Yet, for having an impact on daily life, and for preserving or regaining their liveliness, they require attention. First, I try to understand how identity is composed of memories — of one's neighborhood, an elementary school, a balloon competition, a city of the past, or a painting in which one imagines his father and himself.

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<sup>431</sup> “In the sphere of the museum, this tendency is symptomatic: The drive to disintegrate organic totalities and reintegrate afterwards their fragments into a type of mosaic, similar to the original in everything but in the absence of any traces of life.” In the original Spanish: “En la esfera museal es sintomático de esa tendencia el afán de desintegrar orgánicas totalidades y reintegrar después sus fragmentos en una especie de mosaico, parecido al original en todo, menos en la ausencia de vestigios de vida.” Volkening, “Amberes II,” 281.



## 6. *Identitätsstiftende Erinnerungen*

In Antwerp, Volkening's fictional character Lodovico is wandering amid memories, and he has some success in rediscovering himself in the city. Most obviously so in front of de Braekeleer's "De man en de stoel," which is charged with personal symbolism. Through identifying with "the enigmatic old man painted by de Braekeleer,"<sup>432</sup> Lodovico internalizes the figure respectively the painting that he considers an "obra clave," a work à clef, for his self-understanding.<sup>433</sup> Watching the trajectory of the red balloon on the blue firmament, Lodovico experiences the synchronicity of his past and presence and is reaffirmed of his belonging to Antwerp. These central encounters become *identitätsstiftende Erinnerungen*, memories that create and define his identity. Yet, as Lodovico's experience in Antwerp also illustrates, memories are intrinsically elusive. For using a particular memory as an identity-constitutive element, would he not need to safeguard it from oblivion? As I will argue, Volkening addresses through the narration of Lodovico's experience the link between memory and one's sense of self, the dynamic process of identity construction and preservation.

### 6.1. Self-Perception and the Pearls of Memories

Volkening elaborates in his essay on the function of memory in relation to one's identity. He avails himself of various voices, seminally the ones of the auctorial narrator and of the protagonist Lodovico. They all seem to share a premise that Volkening

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<sup>432</sup> "[E]l enigmático anciano pintado por de Braekeleer." Volkening, "Antwerp I," 140.

<sup>433</sup> Volkening, "Antwerp I," 140.

introduced first in his meditations about Proust's *À la recherche du temps perdu*: Life being a concatenation of different stages of which each transitions into the next with the exception of the first stage of life, one's childhood, which would stand freely without any natural link to the following period. Many unable to "overcome the trauma of the lost childhood," he argues there, would "consume and outspend themselves being engaged in restoring the myth of the Golden Age."<sup>434</sup> Volkening counts himself among them,<sup>435</sup> and it seems that Lodovico, the protagonist in Volkening's autobiographic essay on Antwerp, belongs to this group as well. Lodovico is searching for the fleeting moments that would reconnect him with the world of his childhood and his younger self. For the fictional character Lodovico, as for Volkening, the rupture between their early childhoods and later lives is marked by the family's relocation: eight years old, they left Antwerp that since then became the very epitome of the "irrecoverable happiness" of childhood and *Heimat*. The experience of exile later in life could be read as a reinforcement and aggravation of the earlier trauma. Reviving childhood memories and reintegrating them into one's adult identity seems to be a way in which the double experience of exile could possibly be mended.

In Antwerp, the protagonist Lodovico is overcome by memories. Many of them have lain dormant for decades and the acuity of their sudden emergence takes him by surprise. Let us see how Lodovico's perceives of their nature. Observing their heightened

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<sup>434</sup> "[S]e consumen y se desviven empeñadas en restaurar el mito de la edad de oro." Volkening, "El paisaje mítico de la infancia (recordando a Proust)," 46.

<sup>435</sup> Volkening, "El paisaje mítico de la infancia (recordando a Proust)," 48, among other passages, indicates that Volkening considers himself one of these people who cannot overcome the trauma of having lost their childhood.

vividness in comparison with many other, even more recent memories, Lodovico becomes convinced that his childhood memories must stem from a different source:

Such was the vividness of these images and so strong, given the years that had passed, the freshness of its colors that it does not seem conceivable to attribute its origin to the free exercise of the recording faculty that reproduces information, dates, and signs with the precision and indifference of a photographic plate. They have to be fruits of another memory, one of the senses [...] more profound, closer at the grounds of being [...] but also dependant [...] upon the peculiarity of the conditions of location and time. [...] the *figurative memory* [...] paints visions on the canvas of our inner world... a long series of images threaded like pearls on a strand that leads us, maybe, back to our origins [...].<sup>436</sup>

Lodovico introduces the concept of a “figurative memory” to account for the intensity with which these memories surface. The memories in question belong to the realm of his childhood, which his author considers as an alien, cut-off part of one’s self. Reclaimed and brought into chronological order, they could like pearls on a strand, so the passage suggests, create a continuum between the protagonist’s earliest childhood and the presence. The “figurative memory,” being tapped by the mnemonic qualities of the city, could thus be considered a source of raw material for the creation of a reparative vision of his own self and of his *Heimat*. The actual contact with the city is decisive. Only because Lodovico is in Antwerp, he is exposed to stimuli that make his childhood memories resurface. In this way, I argue, he recreates an image of himself as an Antwerpian and successfully restores his sense of uninterrupted, diachronic selfhood. Upon his return to Bogotá, however, it seems likely that his Antwerp-bound memories will lose their

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<sup>436</sup> “Tal es la plasticidad de esas imágenes y tal, a pesar de los años que se fueron, la frescura de sus colores, que no parece concebible atribuir su origen al libre ejercicio de la facultad recordativa que reproduce datos, fechas, señas con la precisión e indiferencia de una placa fotográfica. Han de ser frutos de otra memoria, la de los sentidos [...] más profunda, más cerca de la raíces del ser [...] pero también dependiente [...] de la peculiaridad de las condiciones de lugar y el tiempo. [...] la memoria figurativa [...] pinta visiones en la tela de nuestro mundo interior [...] una larga serie de imágenes ensartada como perlas en un hilo que nos lleva, quizás, hasta nuestro origen.” Volkening, “Antwerp I,” 132; my italics.

plasticity and ultimately fade away. Can Lodovico take any precautions against such a development? Can he control the cycle of remembering and forgetting?

## **6.2. Totems: Constructing Identity through Selective Associations**

Selecting memories in order to make them part of one's identity is like erecting one's private totems. Historically, totems are based on physical analogies that determined the belonging of the members of a kinship group to each other, although totems can be considered in a broader sense to be agents with whom one identifies. These agents can be, for instance, objects, people, events, habits, and feelings as well as our recollections of them. The fictional character Lodovico discovers in Antwerp various such agents with which he closely identifies. This occurs when he recalls scenes from his schooldays, the balloon competition in the park, or his encounter with the figure in "De man en de stoel." His identity changes with the internalization of each of those memories. Thereby, these agents, his memories, become identity-constituting for the protagonist of Volkening's essay; they become totems. I wish to remark briefly on their nature. The sociologist Zygmunt Bauman discusses identity in similar terms, and I am indebted to him in the advancing of my thought process.<sup>437</sup>

Identity, according to Bauman, is fictive. It consists of successive trials and errors in our attempt to attribute meaning to the world around us and to ourselves. Meaning and teleology, the definition of who we are, can only be decided in retrospect by interpreting

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<sup>437</sup> For a detailed discussion of postmodernity and identity, see Zygmunt Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity* (London; New York: Routledge, 1992); his 1995 essay "Making and Unmaking of Strangers," *Thesis Eleven* 43:1 (1995): 1-16; his *Postmodernity and Its Discontents* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1997); and his 1998 essay "Parvenu and Pariah: Heroes and Victims of Modernity," in *The Politics of Modernity*, ed. James Good and Irving Velody (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998), 23-35.

our memories of our experiences and emotions.<sup>438</sup> It is an incessant, non-linear process of changing identifications: thereby, we would choose to associate ourselves with a certain set of agents, with “symbolic tokens” of belonging. Our “freedom of choice,” so Bauman, “is limited solely by the availability and accessibility of such tokens.”<sup>439</sup> Any set of “symbolic tokens,” however, is subject to incessant change due to one’s continuous exposure to new experience, which affects the accessibility of existent ones.<sup>440</sup> The “symbolic tokens” that determine our perception of who we are have to be at the forefront of our thinking and consciousness, and those associated with more recent experiences would thus tend to supersede older ones. I do subscribe to Bauman’s notion of identity, yet, I decided to use a different terminology — “totems” versus “symbolic tokens” since I do not subscribe to Bauman’s premise that identity construction based on “symbolic tokens” would be a strictly postmodern phenomenon.<sup>441</sup>

Although identity, constituted by totems is an irrepressibly dynamic force, I hold that it can be to some extent consciously shaped through selective exposure to certain types of experiences and conceivably through mental training like meditation.

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<sup>438</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 195.

<sup>439</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 195.

<sup>440</sup> Bauman, *Intimations of Postmodernity*, 195.

<sup>441</sup> It appears reasonable to me to assume that Bauman’s concept of identity might equally hold for earlier times, and a postmodern life-style might have merely accelerated the pace in which new impressions occur and thus led to a faster pace of changes in one’s perception of identity. Further, Bauman firmly roots postmodernity in the fall of communism, while I would argue that it could be also seen as a form of personal mindset. Such a postmodern mindset might be disconnect, or even opposed to the *Zeitgeist*, why I prefer not to bind the concept of postmodernity to one single historical period. I consider Volkening’s essay about his stay in Antwerp (written in 1968/1969) in several respects a product of a postmodern mind as, for instance, the notion of pathological homelessness and the protagonist’s incessant desire for arrival, moreover an arrival at home (despite knowing about its impossibility) indicates. In the essay, the desire for arrival is visible in the protagonist’s wish to “complete” his identity despite a nagging awareness of the likely futility of such undertaking. This resonates with another key element in Bauman’s definition of postmodernity since, as he argues, “The postmodern mind is reconciled to the idea that the messiness of the human predicament is here to stay.” Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), 245.

Considering the possibility of influencing the formation of one's set of identity-constituting totems, I will conclude my interpretation of the essay about the fictional character Lodovico's stay in Antwerp by dissolving the somewhat artificial boundary between the autobiographical text and its author. I suggest that Volkening writes his essay partly in order to fixate his Antwerpian totems in an *ad libitum* accessible document. This process might not have been a conscious one, but the essay sufficiently demonstrates Volkening's personal investment in the matter. According to my reading, the highly autobiographical text, written in the months after Volkening's trip to Antwerp in the summer of 1968, documents Volkening's struggle to reconnect with his *Heimat* and childhood in Antwerp after having lived in Bogotá for thirty-four years.

Let us now examine the protagonist's, respectively the author's concrete possibilities of fixating his identity-constituting totems that are related to his visit in Antwerp.

### **6.3. Souvenir**

Identity-constituting totems need to be continuously refreshed for remaining part of the changing sets that delineate a person's identity. How does Lodovico hold on to his Antwerpian totems *after* leaving the city to which they are intimately bound? The actual text of Volkening's essay does not suggest a solution but I argue that the very existence of the essay points to an answer. It might not be wrong to assume that Volkening's autobiographical essay was written in hindsight — possibly by using notes taken during the stay in Antwerp, and that Volkening designed the protagonist Lodovico consciously as his double, or as Cobo Borda points out, that the fictive character became “the best of

his incarnations.”<sup>442</sup> Moreover, the essay evidences an ongoing struggle to assign meaning to his experience and to argue for the protagonist’s belonging to the city. We may consider it thus a narrative characterized by Volkening’s desire to stay connected to Antwerp, to the time he spent there as a child and as an adult, and to his accompanying experiences. The essay captures the author’s Antwerpian totems through their careful reconstruction and fixation in writing — totems that would otherwise likely have fallen into oblivion. Although Volkening’s Antwerpian totems do not possess a naturally occurring availability in his daily life in Bogotá, they remain readily accessible in writing. Thus, I consider the essay a souvenir of Volkening’s trip into his childhood and *Heimat*.

Susan Stewart discusses the souvenir that she defines as an article authenticating its possessor’s otherwise remote and unrepeatable experience.<sup>443</sup> According to her, a souvenir discredits the apparent present identity of the possessor by including in it what is seemingly beyond reach. By holding on to his souvenir, which demonstrates to himself and to others his ties to his childhood and *Heimat* in Antwerp, Volkening reinforced his condition of exile in Bogotá. He, who spoke Spanish like a *bogotano*,<sup>444</sup> and had adopted the city as his second home, narrated in this essay his identity for his Colombian readers. The essay puts forth the author’s interpretation of decisive moments of his life story and functions as a means of resistance against being assimilated to the sphere of the others.

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<sup>442</sup> “[L]a mejor de sus encarnaciones.” Cobo Borda, “Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario,” 340.

<sup>443</sup> Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1984), 148.

<sup>444</sup> Gonzalo Aguasaco, interviewed on December 4, 2009 at the German cemetery in Bogotá, where Mr. Aguasaco has been an administrator since 1967.

This souvenir of his *Heimat* and childhood is Volkening's key for asking to be recognized as who he believes to be. As an Antwerpian at heart: ¡amberense... eso sí!<sup>445</sup>

## 7. ...And if He Should Fail in the End?

Volkening's essay oscillates between confidence of finding the secret key to his life and moments of despair, in which the protagonist seems to consider all his efforts futile. The ambivalence that pervades the text indicates that Volkening was not sure whether the preservation of his memories in writing would be sufficient to fight off his *Heimweh*, the nostalgia for another time and place. At the very end of the essay, Volkening writes about the moment in which the protagonist Lodovico leaves the museum that houses de Braekeleer's "De man en de stoel." We encounter Lodovico in a melancholic mood but with determination to enjoy the pulsating life around him: "I left Antwerp's royal museum of fine arts [to be at] the street, avid to indulge in some of the 'a thousand authentic enchantments' announced by André Breton."<sup>446</sup> I regard these concluding words of the essay key to Volkening's résumé about his experience in Antwerp. A résumé that acknowledges the possibility that despite his efforts, including the writing of the essay, he might not have fully succeeded in regaining access to the memories, his earlier self, and the "secret key of his life," which he he believes to be present in the city and for which his protagonist has searched in the museum.

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<sup>445</sup> In analogy to a statement about Lodovico and his friend V. (and thus indirectly a statement about Volkening himself) about whom it is said, that they were "Antwerpian, both of them, this is sure!" ("¡[A]mberenses los dos, eso sí." Volkening, "Antwerp II," 259).

<sup>446</sup> "Salí de Real Museo de Bellas Artes de Amberes a la calle, ávido de enfrascarme en algunos de los 'mil auténticos encantamientos' anunciados por André Breton." Volkening, "Antwerp II," 281.



The phrase “thousand authentic enchantments” refer to Breton’s constitutive text on the nature of surrealism, *Le Surréalisme et La Peinture (Surrealism and Painting)*.<sup>447</sup> There Breton, praising the power of visual impressions over that of music, declares that after passing “like a madman through the slippery halls of museums,”<sup>448</sup> he would be tired from the strictness of forms and genres and turn away from the charms of the paintings to the more alive and “more real” enchantments of the street.<sup>449</sup> Volkening joins in Breton’s relish of the unpredictable vivacity of life. He sends his protagonist away from the museum’s entombed exhibits onto the street, ending thereby Lodovico’s and his own contemplation of conserved, but lifeless treasures of memories — of “De man en de stoel” and the essay. After describing a nearly obsessive preoccupation with the past (in which each, Lodovico and Volkening, engaged — *like a madman?*), the essay ends with an affirmation of the presence. I would like to argue that Volkening implied hereby that, as valuable as one’s search for selfhood, for one’s past and for the perfection of one’s self-understanding may be (why otherwise is he writing about it?), it will not be all-satisfying. Thus, the author’s reference to “a thousand authentic enchantments” that Breton announced could be read as a caveat against going nap for the kind of self-analysis, in which he has just engaged.

Searching for “a thousand authentic enchantments” is of course also an expression of a form of neo-romanticism; besides the surrealist qualities, there is a distinct notion of utopian hope present. The embedding of the Breton-reference within the essay might

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<sup>447</sup> André Breton, “Le Surréalisme et La Peinture,” 1928, in *Le Surréalisme et La Peinture*, revised edition 1928-1965 (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), 1-48.

<sup>448</sup> “[J’ai passé] comme un fou dans les salles glissantes des musées.” Breton, 3.

<sup>449</sup> “Dehors la rue disposait pour moi de mille plus vrais enchantements.” In English: “Outside, the street arranged for me a thousand more real enchantments.” Breton, 3.

suggest a reconciliation with one's possible failure in finding utmost fulfillment — without abandoning the effort to reach it. This interpretation echoes Bauman's understanding of the postmodern condition. In *Postmodern Ethics*, Bauman explains the effect of postmodernity on the subject as a reconciliation of the postmodern mind “to the idea that the messiness of the human predicament is here to stay,” and notes that “this is in the broadest outlines, what can be called postmodern wisdom.”<sup>450</sup> Returning to a new romanticism, to new enchantments, can be considered the gain of postmodernity — though in awareness of the struggles, uncertainties and fears it brought to the subject as well. We, Bauman suggests, do not believe any longer in this new romanticism in the way we did when we encountered its earlier incarnation. Instead, we would, like Volkening, recognize its final failure and embrace its surrealist quality and pleasure. The moment of enchantment remains nevertheless. As Breton writes in *Le Surrealisme et La Peinture*: as long as there is potential for absorbing life with all senses and with all creativity (in the surrealist meaning of the word), *reality* is not all there is. Breton explains:

When I will have lost all hope of enlarging reality, until now quite limited (according to my approach), to stupefying proportions, *when my imagination retiring within itself will do nothing but coincide with my memory*, I will allow myself, like the others, with pleasure some relative satisfactions. I will have forgiven them. But not before!<sup>451</sup>

Ultimately, Volkening is free to believe whatever he wishes. Even if memories should fail him, and even if life should turn out to offer less than a thousand authentic

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<sup>450</sup> Bauman, *Postmodern Ethics*, 245.

<sup>451</sup> “Quand j’aurai perdu tout espoir d’accroître dans des proportions stupéfiantes le champ réel, jusqu’ici parfaitement limité, de mes démarches, quand mon imagination, en se repliant sur elle, ne fera plus que coïncider avec ma mémoire, je m’accorderai volontiers, comme les autres, quelques satisfactions relatives. Je me rangerai alors au nombre des brodeurs. Je leur aurai pardonné. Mais pas avant!” Breton, 3-4; my italics.

enchantments, he will be able to compensate it with his creative mind and with his imagination that give rise to an enlarged, powerful reality of his own making — as his essay demonstrates.

## CHAPTER IV

### EXILE, ESSAY, FLÂNERIE: ERNESTO VOLKENING AS CULTURAL MEDIATOR

#### 1. Indefatigable *Flâneur* on the Streets of Bogotá

Who is then this kind gentleman, always with trench coat and scarf, who talks enthusiastically about his discovery of a restaurant in the outskirts of the city; or who asks, seriously interested, whether an apprentice of poetry learns through reading? The indefatigable *flâneur* on the streets of a city that he made his own, day after day.<sup>452</sup>

The poet Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda wrote these lines about his friend and intellectual companion Ernesto Volkening. Most striking is Cobo Borda's emphasis on Volkening's close attention to things that others might not notice, or might not consider worthwhile to think about, or to mention. Volkening was a listener. As we know from his diaries, in which he recorded conversations with poets, artists and intellectuals, among them Gabriel García Márquez, Nicolás Gómez Dávila, Álvaro Mutis, Nicolás Súescun, Guillermo (Egon Wilhelm) Wiedemann, and Jesús Antonio Uribe Prada, Volkening shared hours in the *Librería Buchholz* or in one of Bogotá's cafés talking, as we Germans would have it, "about God and the world."<sup>453</sup> Some of his friends, so Volkening claims,

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<sup>452</sup> "¿Quién es, entonces, este afable caballero, de gabardina y bufanda siempre, que comunica entusiasmado su descubrimiento de un restaurante, en los extramuros; o pregunta, sinceramente interesado, por las lecturas adelanta un aprendiz de poeta? *Flâneur* infatigable por las calles de una ciudad que ha hecho suya, día tras día." Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, "Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes," epilog to *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975), 323-326, here: 324.

All translations are mine except when indicated otherwise.

<sup>453</sup> "[H]ablábamos 'de Dios y el mundo.'" Ernesto Volkening, "De mis cuadernos I," *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Bogotá) 36:220 (1980), 337-351, here: 340. This quote is taken from a passage in which Volkening narrates his first encounter with Gabriel García Márquez on October 25, 1967.

would have “spent, during these afternoons of drinking coffee, sufficient material for a European writer to live a year.”<sup>454</sup> Volkening listened, watched, walked, reflected, and wrote. He walked the streets of Bogotá to get under the skin of the city and its people, to make it his own, always expecting and discovering things that he had not noticed before. Flânerie seems an appropriate strategy for an exiled person to become acquainted with a foreign space. Volkening became familiar with Bogotá’s neighborhoods, its architecture, and its streets. He shared the experience of *El Bogotazo*, the “ninth of April” — a watershed in Colombian history. On that day, April 9, 1948, the presidential candidate of the liberal party, Jorge Eliécer Gaitán, was assassinated, which ignited a riot later known as “*El Bogotazo*.” By the break of dawn of the next day, about 2,000 people had lost their lives and hundreds of buildings, mostly in the center of Bogotá, were destroyed or stood in flames.<sup>455</sup> Volkening observed the changes in the city, the passing of things and people and the violence for almost five decades. He absorbed the city in which he chose to live; he tried it, tasted it, and sensed it. In his words:

Letting myself fall into the surges of the stream, I hear the pulse of this vast urban organism throb most perceptibly, and, in ecstasy, I listen to the bubbling of the blood that, obeying the alternating rhythms of systole and diastole, circulates through its veins, day and night.<sup>456</sup>

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<sup>454</sup> “Aquellos desperdiciaban [durante ‘tardes de café’] material suficiente para que un escritor europeo viviera un año.” Policarpo Varón, “Ernesto Volkening: exilio y pasión por Colombia,” *Nueva Frontera* (Aug. 29, 1983): 21-22, here: 21.

<sup>455</sup> The days following *El Bogotazo*, anarchy reigned in nearly all Colombian cities, setting off a decade of bloodshed and violence, known as “*La Violencia*.” The civil war-like conflict would cost the lives of about 200,000 people. Vitor Gomes Pinto, *Guerra en los Andes* (Quito: Ediciones Abya-Yala, 2005), 176.

<sup>456</sup> “[A]bandonarme a los vaivenes de la corriente oigo latir más perceptiblemente el pulso de ese vasto organismo urbano, y escucho extasiado el borboteo de la sangre que, obedeciendo a rítmicas alternaciones de sistole y diástole, circula por sus venas, día y noche.” Ernesto Volkening, “Extramuros,” *Eco* 22:131-132 (Mar.-Apr., 1971): 531-535, here: 534.

Volkening surrendered himself to the pulsating life around him. Attracted by the city's energy, he is filled with joy and excitement, Volkening experienced and observed its nature. He listened to its on-rushing bloodstream, the very symbol of uncontrollable life and incessant motion. He felt the same passion for Bogotá, for its life and for its people, as he did for the literature that he read and critically engaged.<sup>457</sup> His passions heightened his curiosity, and vice versa. Characteristic for Volkening was, as Cobo Borda notes, his steady "creative participation" in the world around him.<sup>458</sup> However, he did not pass judgment in a state of heedless frenzy, but balanced his enthusiasm with periods of reflection from which his essays emerged. As a result, Volkening's observations were astute and well-conceived. According to Santiago Mutis Durán, they morphed into something more than essays on the work of other writers:

Don Ernesto Volkening, and his whole work are a lesson of grand virtues, against irony, cynicism, tedium, disdain, lack of refinement, arbitrariness [...] he made of his life a coherent and dignified work, dedicated to understand the world in which he had chosen to live and the world that he had left for good. In other words, Colombia and the learned Europe of his youth.<sup>459</sup>

An immigrant with Volkening's curiosity seems almost predestined to become an observer, a flâneur. Flânerie is a way of discovering, assessing, and appropriating one's surroundings, which is what one who lives in (self-chosen) exile arguably needs most:

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<sup>457</sup> Volkening's passion for literature can also be discovered in a peculiarity of his diaries: there, he often writes about characters of a work of fiction in the same manner and with the same vivacity as he does about his daily encounters with real people of flesh and blood.

<sup>458</sup> "[P]articipación creativa." Cobo Borda, "Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario," *Eco* 43:262 (Aug. 1983): 337-343, here: 339.

<sup>459</sup> "Don Ernesto Volkening, y su obra toda, son una lección de grandes virtudes, contra la ironía, el cinismo, el hastío, el desdén, la falta de nobleza, la arbitrariedad. hizo de su vida una obra coherente y digna, dedicada a entender el mundo que escogió para vivir y el mundo que dejó para siempre. Es decir, Colombia y la Europa culta de su juventud." Santiago Mutis Durán, "Cien y una noches de soledad," in *Gabriel García Márquez: "Un triunfo sobre el olvido,"* ed. Santiago Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998), 11-20, here: 13-14.

facing and attempting to overcome his foreignness. For Volkening, his geographic displacement became a life-long source for creativity. Interestingly, he began to write about “the learned Europe of his youth” in Bogotá, and introduced thereby German and other European writers to a Colombian audience. The genre of his choice was the essay. Apart from his dissertation, Volkening did not write books; his other book-length publications were collections of essays and short prose sketches: *Los paseos de Lodovico* (Lodovico’s Travels; 1974), *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos* (Essays I: Creole sparkles; 1975), and *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo* (Essays II: European dusk; 1976).<sup>460</sup>

What made the essay so attractive for him? — The essay, being literally an “attempt,” lends itself to embark on a journey of discoveries. The essay puts forward hypotheses, follows intellectual detours, and moves by association rather than by the dictates of logic. Bearing these characteristics in mind, the Uruguayan critic Jorge Rufinelli claimed, “if the essayist is an explorer in a complex jungle of ideas, Volkening embodies this very image most perfectly.”<sup>461</sup>

For comprehending the full message of a text, it is essential to consider the author’s choice regarding the form in which he presents his thoughts. Or, in the words of Niklas Luhmann: “Form and content are guides or instructions, appearing within meaning itself, for a progressive grasping of meaning.”<sup>462</sup> I would like to suggest that the writer in exile who chooses, as did Volkening, the essay as his medium to write about literature,

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<sup>460</sup> Volkening, *Los Paseos de Lodovico* (Monterrey, Mexico: Ediciones Sierra Madre, 1974); —, *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975); and his *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976).

<sup>461</sup> Jorge Rufinelli, “Ensayos I y II de Ernesto Volkening,” *Eco* 33:204 (Oct. 1978): 1217-1221, here: 1220.

<sup>462</sup> Niklas Luhmann, “Meaning as Sociology’s Basic Concept,” in his *Essays on Self-Reference*, (New York; Oxford: Columbia UP, 1990), 21-79, here: 49.

philosophy, and culture of his homeland, makes a choice that reveals a skeptical attitude toward the subject. Through essayistic writing, he reiterates intellectually the experience of physical exile. The exilic essay as a vehicle of cultural translation between homeland and exile emulates the exile's *modus vivendi* of directing his life energy toward the one place that became inaccessible. Despite being cognizant of the impossibility of his return, the exile's movements remain largely oriented toward a past home.<sup>463</sup> Hence, he finds himself caught in a limbo of approximation. Similarly, the essayist, in elucidating an issue, seems to sense and translate into his writing the impossibility to arriving at a final judgment. His chosen art form is a development of thoughts on paper, a process that, in the end, suspends its verdict. Or, in the words of Georg Lukács, "the essay is a judgment, but the essential, the value-determining thing about it is not the verdict (as is the case with the system) but the process of judging."<sup>464</sup> Unchained from the possibility and the necessity of arrival, however not from the longing for it, the exile and the essayist share a great freedom to meander, to explore novel ground, and to test new perspectives on political, social, cultural, or existential questions. The figure of the flâneur, with which I started out, seems to embody the manner in which an essayist develops his thoughts. The flâneur shares a similar hesitation to consider his observations, and the meanings that he assigned to them, valid beyond doubt. Several other features of the flâneur appear to me

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<sup>463</sup> An exile who stops desiring his return home ceases to be an exile; thus, an exile is, to borrow the words of Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's, someone "who is obliged to stay away." Spivak, "The Post-colonial Critic," in his *The Post-colonial Critic: Interviews, Strategies*, ed. Sarah Harasym (New York: Routledge, 1990), 67-74, here: 68.

<sup>464</sup> Compare Georg Lukács, "Über Wesen und Form des Essays: Ein Brief an Leo Popper," in his *Die Seele und die Formen: Essays* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1911), 3-39, here: 38: "Der Essay ist ein Gericht, doch nicht das Urteil ist das Wesentliche und Wertentscheidende an ihm (wie im System) sondern der Prozeß des Richtens." English translation from Lukács, "On the Nature and Form of the Essay" in his *Soul & Form*, ed. John T. Sanders and Katie Terezakis, trans. Anna Bostock, with an introduction by Judith Butler (New York: Columbia UP, 2010), 16-34, here: 34.



equally enlightening for creating a more complex image of the essayist and his work. Among other aspects, the flâneur essayist or essay-writing flâneur share an essential characteristic with an exiled person. Both share the experience of estrangement, which prepares the ground for any type of (cultural) translation. Through studying Volkening's essayistic writing in exile, I aim to elaborate on the creative moments of essayistic writing, exile, and flânerie in the service of cultural transfer that is open to negotiation and transformation of the translated object, and hence, open to changing the meaning of the "original."

## 2. The Essay, a Tabula Rasa of Illusions?

As an art form, the essay has proven resistant to formal categorization ever since Michel de Montaigne laid the foundation for modern essayistic writing with the publication of his *Essais* in 1580. Christian Schärf's advice to refrain from squeezing the essay into an "overly tight genre corset"<sup>465</sup> might be helpful for approaching our discussion of the "methodologically unmethodological" method of writing as ultimately a means for cultural translation.<sup>466</sup> Instead of adding to the existing cascade of categorizations of the essay, I decided to focus on the mode and motivation of essayistic writing.<sup>467</sup>

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<sup>465</sup> "Verzicht auf ein allzu enges Gattungskorsett." Christian Schärf, *Geschichte des Essays. Von Montaigne bis Adorno* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999), 8.

<sup>466</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," in his *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1974), 9-49, here: 21.

<sup>467</sup> An extensive and excellent body of scholarship on the essay and its categorization exists already. The following works might be considered most influential in shaping our understanding of the essay in the field of German Literary Studies: Theodor W. Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," in his *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1958), 9-49. Max Bense, "Über den Essay und seine Prosa," in his *Plakatwelt* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1952), 23-37. Bruno Berger, *Der Essay. Form und Geschichte* (Bern: Francke Verlag, 1964). Gerhard Haas, *Studien zur Form des Essays und zu seinen Vorformen im Roman*

Montaigne, the originator of the modern essay, uses the word *essai* metaphorically in the phrase “samplings of my mind.”<sup>468</sup> The essayist puts his ideas so to speak on the scales for the reader’s judgment. The essay is also a highly personal form of writing. It involves a renunciation of objectivity and authority, and avoids subscribing to a single truth. The essay is ambivalent because it is based on subjective insights from the essayist’s *vita contemplativa et activa* and not on incontrovertible facts. It tells an open-ended story. It chooses to remain fragmentary; it skeptically resists a conclusion and instead asks its reader to further contemplate a suggested train of thought. What prompts the essay’s hesitation to settle an issue? What gives rise to this lingering distrust in certainty and truth? Taking up insights from intellectuals and writers such as George Lukács, Robert Musil, Gerhard Haas, Geoffrey Hartmann, and Theodor W. Adorno, j’essaye de arracher ce secret aux *essais*, — the secret to which its very name alludes.

Lukács contends in “Über Wesen und Form des Essays: Ein Brief an Leo Popper” (“On the Nature and Form of the Essay”) that an essay concerns itself with questions that lay beyond the limits of human knowledge; questions about life itself, about man, about

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(Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1966). —, *Essay* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1969). Georg Lukács, “Über Wesen und Form des Essays: Ein Brief an Leo Popper,” in his *Die Seele und die Formen: Essays* (Berlin: Egon Fleischel, 1911), 3-39. Fritz Martini, “Essay,” in *Reallexikon der deutschen Literaturgeschichte*, vol. 1, ed. Werner Kohlschmidt and Wolfgang Mohr (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1958), 408-410. John A. McCarthy, *Crossing Boundaries: A Theory and History of Essay Writing in German, 1680-1815* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1989). Robert Musil, “Auch die Erde, namentlich aber Ulrich, huldigt der Utopie des Essayismus,” in his *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften*, ed. Adolf Frisé (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt Taschenbuch Verlag, 1987), 247-257. Ludwig Rohner, *Der deutsche Essay: Materialien zur Geschichte und Ästhetik einer Gattung* (Neuwied; Berlin: Luchterhand, 1966). —, *Deutsche Essays: Prosa aus zwei Jahrhunderten*, selected, introduced and with commentary by Ludwig Rohner (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1974). Christian Schärf, *Geschichte des Essays: Von Montaigne bis Adorno* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1999). Heinz Schlaffer, “Essay,” in *Reallexikon der Deutschen Literaturwissenschaft*, vol. 1, ed. Klaus Weimar et al. (Berlin; New York: Walter de Gruyter, 1997), 522-525. Besides, a work that goes beyond the national confines of the essay: Tracy Chevalier, *Encyclopedia of the Essay* (London; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997).

<sup>468</sup> “Kostproben meines Geistes.” Cited from Schlaffer, 522.

fate.<sup>469</sup> They, he continues, are triggered by experience that seeks expression, but by a type of experience that does not have a gesture by which it could be adequately conveyed.<sup>470</sup> The essay, according to Lukács, is an attempt to express the inexpressible and the essay's ultimate refrain from providing universally valid answers corresponds to this elusive moment inherent in its subject matter. Only meditations without solutions can be given.<sup>471</sup> It might be for this reason that an essay seemingly rambles. It moves by association, rejects linear progress of thought, and lives a fragmentary life of incessant interpolations. In respect to Volkening's work, Cobo Borda highlights this essayistic circuitousness not only as intrinsic to the genre but as one of the greatest merits:

The essay, in his case, is lined with interpolations; it ramifies and diverts, by means of a prose *sui-generis* that encompasses, in each new stage, wider horizons, suggestive allusions, references almost secret. [...] In the end, we understand that all this was necessary. That the multiple facets constitute the prism, and this never abandons its topic.<sup>472</sup>

Volkening's essays brought out the inherent qualities of the genre to most effectively promote the purpose of his writing: the careful investigation and evaluation of the topic. His essays reflect on the various facets of his topics with an air of lightness, with *gentilezza*, with humor and often with elegant irony. As Lukács points out, the discussion of the "last questions of life" is conducted in an ironic tone that might suggest that the essay would be indeed just about books and pictures, about the unsubstantial and

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<sup>469</sup> Lukács, "Über Wesen und Form des Essays: Ein Brief an Leo Popper," 15.

<sup>470</sup> Lukács, 15.

<sup>471</sup> Lukács, 15.

<sup>472</sup> "El ensayo, en el caso suyo, está surcado de interpolaciones; se ramifica y bifurca, mediante una prosa *sui-generis*, que abarca, en cada nueva estancia, horizontes más amplios, alusiones sugestivas, referencias casi secretas. [...] Al concluir, comprendemos que todo era necesario. Que las múltiples facetas integran el prisma, y este nunca abandona su tema." Cobo Borda, "Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes," 324.

pretty ornaments of life.<sup>473</sup> Due to the nature of the questions in which it engages, Lukács argues that an essay would always be an individual interpretation expressive of a worldview and, hence, never contradict any other essay written on the same topic: Each essay creates its own, non-identical world, and remains ultimately confined to it.<sup>474</sup>

In 1930, Robert Musil published the first part of his *Der Mann ohne Eigenschaften* (*The Man without Qualities*), of which one chapter is dedicated to the “utopia of essayism.” Using the protagonist Ulrich as his mouthpiece, Musil distinguishes possible contents of the essay: *Lebenslehren*, lessons life has taught an individual, versus their generalizing counterpart, *Lebenswissen*, knowledge about life per se. He warns readers against the fallacy of equating an author’s personal experience and the conclusions he has drawn from it (and which an essay presents) with an absolute knowledge about life. In this context, Musil’s protagonist Ulrich contemplates the dilemma of — so the text suggests — the role of the essayist:

A man who wants the truth becomes a scholar; a man who wants to give free play to his subjectivity may become a writer; but what should a man do who wants something in between?<sup>475</sup>

The essayist finds his place in the in-between of the scholar’s preoccupation with empirical truth and the boundlessness of fiction. He engages in questions that are similar to the ones the scholar asks and to the ones with which the writer of fiction deals. Yet, their nature is such that neither a scholar nor a fiction writer could provide satisfying

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<sup>473</sup> Lukács, 20.

<sup>474</sup> Lukács, 17, 24, and 25.

<sup>475</sup> “Ein Mann, der die Wahrheit will, wird Gelehrter; ein Mann, der seine Subjektivität spielen lassen will, wird vielleicht Schriftsteller; aber was will ein Mann tun, der etwas will, was dazwischen liegt?” Musil, “Auch die Erde, namentlich aber Ulrich, huldigt der Utopie des Essayismus,” 254. English translation from Musil, “The earth too, but especially Ulrich, pays homage to the utopia of essayism,” in his *The Man without Qualities*, ed. Burton Pike, trans. Sophie Wilkins (New York: A. A. Knopf, distributed by Random House, 1995), 267-277, here: 274.

answers. The essayist attempts to answer these questions as objectively as possible, like a scholar would do, but he does not use traditional scholarly sources for doing so. Instead, he draws from his life experience, an approach that borders on the realm of fiction (if we understand fiction as a product of a writer's experiences, emotions, fantasies, and thoughts). Because of this dependency upon subjective data, the essayist can put forward lessons learnt from personal life experience but no universally applicable knowledge about life per se.

This limitation of personal knowledge is central in Gerhard Haas's work on the essay. He understands the essay essentially as a *Möglichkeitserwägung* — an exercise in contemplating possibilities.<sup>476</sup> In this sense, it allows for and invites the coexistence of various, even contradicting worldviews; indeed, it presumes them. Although every essayist attempts to approach a solution, to find answers, to get closer to and probe the objective value of what he considers being his own subjective truth, “the essay contains,” according to Haas, “never a [‘dogmatic or ideological *single*’] truth [...]. The essay circles a possible, a likely truth.”<sup>477</sup>

Driven by a desire for an impossible arrival, the essayist tends to explore novel paths on which thinking continues after the last sentence. The essay is a space for free-roaming, revolutionary thought, for transvaluations, for utopias. In the essay, as Geoffrey Hartmann notes, “the notion of transgression (of limits) and indeterminacy (of endlessly approaching the limit we call a meaning) seem to merge.”<sup>478</sup> The authority of long passed

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<sup>476</sup> Haas, *Essay*, 8.

<sup>477</sup> “Der Essay hat nie [‘dogmatische oder ideologische *eine*’] Wahrheit [...]. Der Essay umkreist eine mögliche, eine wahrscheinliche Wahrheit.” Haas, *Essay*, 25.

<sup>478</sup> Geoffrey Hartmann, “Crossing over: Literary Commentary as Literature,” *Comparative Literature* 28:3 (1976): 257-276, here: 270.

on and uncritically reiterated dogmas, modes of behavior, values, and worldviews starts to crumble; their self-righteous demand of obedience encounters the essayist's skeptical abstinence. As Theodor W. Adorno points out in his essay "Der Essay als Form" ("The Essay as Form"), the essay is steeped in consciousness of its own limitations: the inevitable non-identity of presentation and presented material ("Darstellung und Sache").<sup>479</sup> Skeptically to the extreme, the essay tends to liquidate opinions, including the one it introduces. Adorno argues this would be because of the genre's awareness of its own insurmountable imperfections, thus making the essay a critical form par excellence.<sup>480</sup> The essay breaks loose from illusions of a simple, logical world, and becomes a weapon against the delusion of ideologies. It is in this non-conformist attitude, Adorno contends, that the essay's revolutionary, utopian potential resides.<sup>481</sup> It originates in the insight that things could be different:

The essay allows for the consciousness of nonidentity, without expressing it directly; it is radical in its non-radicalism, in refraining from any reduction to a principle, in its accentuation of the partial against the total, in its fragmentary character.<sup>482</sup>

The essay's self-consciousness of the non-identity of its own presentation and the presented material creates an air of skepticism; the essay inherently doubts that the

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<sup>479</sup> Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," 26.

<sup>480</sup> Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," 27.

<sup>481</sup> Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," 23.

<sup>482</sup> "[Der Essay] trägt dem Bewußtsein der Nichtidentität Rechnung, ohne es auch nur auszusprechen; radikal im Nichtradikalismus, in der Enthaltung von aller Reduktion auf ein Prinzip, im Akzentuieren des Partiellen gegenüber der Totale, im Stückhaften." Adorno, "Der Essay als Form," 17. English translation from Adorno, "The Essay as Form," in his *Notes to Literature*, vol. I, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Colombia UP, 1991), 3-23, here: 9.

affirmation of the fragment would amount — as Nietzsche has it — to an affirmation of the totality, or as Adorno concludes, “the *essay*’s innermost formal law is *heresy*.”<sup>483</sup>

An essayist enjoys the license to tear down existing worlds and to experiment with new ones. His position is at times aporetic, heretic, utopian. He deconstructs seemingly firmly established systems of beliefs in order to replace them with skepticism and the contemplation of mere possibilities. The incendiary character of the genre results from the essayist’s critical and open-minded attitude toward the material of his writing: from his skepticism, from numerous attempts at testing possible meanings, from the suspension of a final decision. The essay, lined with its author’s awareness of uncertainty and crisis, has oftentimes a disquieting effect on the reader.

To the essayist in exile, the notion of uncertainty is omnipresent. Volkening was, as his friend Varón suggested, “a German unearthed in Colombia.”<sup>484</sup> His essayistic writing seems to emulate in its form his experience of living as a foreigner in Bogotá. And the accompanying uncertainties of such life. He needed to orient himself anew in a foreign place, a foreign language, and a foreign culture, which he did by listening, observing, and avoiding hasty judgment. In his essays, too, Volkening did not take things for granted. He carefully reflected on a subject various angles before drawing a conclusion, whereby he combined insights from fields such as history, sociology, aesthetics, psychology, and linguistics.<sup>485</sup> His essays present his complex thoughts clearly and well structured, but they never become predictable. Instead, they speak of his

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<sup>483</sup> “Darum ist das innerste Formgesetz des Essays die Ketzerei.” Adorno, “Der Essay als Form,” 33. English translation from Adorno, “The Essay as Form,” 21.

<sup>484</sup> “[U]n alemán desterrado en Colombia.” Varón, 21.

<sup>485</sup> Darío Achury Valenzuela, “Prolog,” in *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976), 11-31, here: 16.

capacity for “so many astounding ways of thinking, of seeing men, facts, things, to judge and weigh the events of history and culture.”<sup>486</sup> Volkening’s essays are exactly this: an invitation to weigh one’s own preconceived opinions and to approach topics anew, from an unfamiliar, foreign angle. From the perspective of exile.

### 3. Challenging Reading

Especially in times of personal and public crises, the essay has been used as a (de)constructive means of questioning the foundations of one’s self, one’s life, and one’s society. Its advantage: the essay allows introducing “meaning on probation” into chaotic, unsettling, and seemingly unmanageable situations. A look at Montaigne illustrates the point: having witnessed decades of religious civil wars, he wrote his *Essais* out of a sentiment of disorientation and skepticism as his famous motto, *Que sais-je?* (What do I know?), underlines. As has been noted, Montaigne’s motto encapsulates his “interrogative practice of extreme doubt,”<sup>487</sup> which characterizes all forms of essayistic writing. Tellingly, Adorno, whose thinking and life was deeply shaped by the catastrophes of the Shoah and the Second World War II, but also imbued with an astute awareness of the alleged phoniness of a consumer-driven culture (*Kulturbetrieb*), considered the essay as one of the last resorts for individual emancipation and ethically responsible action.

The essayist’s call for responsible, *mündige* action translates into a demand on the reader to continue the pursuit of an ultimately unreachable solution (of finding some

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<sup>486</sup> “[T]antos y tan desconcertantes modos de pensar, de ver los hombres, los hechos, los cosas, de juzgar y sopesar los fenómenos de la historia y de la cultura.” Achury Valenzuela, 31.

<sup>487</sup> Richard Scholar, “A Certain Something: Montaigne,” In, *The Je-Ne-Sais-Quoi in Early Modern Europe: Encounters with a Certain Something* (Oxford; New York: Oxford UP, 2005), 249.



truth). Bearing Lukács's caveats in mind, such truth or solution does most likely not even exist (or might be inaccessible to human understanding as he might prefer to put it); nevertheless, the questions arise and require a response. As the essayist experiments with possible answers, the indeterminate and fragmentary character of the essay asks the reader for a response of her own. An ideal reader would in this situation not respond by uncritically accepting the essayist's suggestions. Instead, invaded by the essayist's doubt's and concerns, she would emulate the essayist's critical approach and continue the discussion. Elaborating on the specific relationship the essay creates between its writer and its reader and the consequences thereof, John McCarthy argues that the "quality of *purposeful* consciousness raising" is key to essayistic writing.<sup>488</sup>

With reference to Jürgen Habermas's "*Theorie des kommunikativen Handelns*" (theory of communicative action), he outlines a reader response theory at the center of which we encounter a decisive intellectual imperative:

The style of essayistic thinking is the lesson to be learned by the reader; or put more objectively: the encoded text is "properly" understood if it causes self-reflective motion and reassessment in the decoder.<sup>489</sup>

The essay's fragmentary, open-ended form corresponds to the distinctively "non-directive attitude of the writer toward his subject and audience,"<sup>490</sup> which presses the reader to take a stand. It invites the reader to participate in the essayistic thinking process that is ultimately informed by Enlightenment moral standards, but enjoys the freedom to unfold in an associative, non-linear manner that reminds us that logic is only one

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<sup>488</sup> McCarthy, 43. See section "Toward a Communicative Theory of the Essay" (ibid., 44-57) for a detailed discussion of the response of the (ideal) reader to an essay.

<sup>489</sup> McCarthy, 55.

<sup>490</sup> McCarthy, 41.

possibility of critical thinking. Although an essay often seems at first appearance to deal with the “ornaments of life,” reading an essay is essentially a moral exercise.<sup>491</sup> — For example, in his essay “Acerca de la muerte de un escritor” (with regard to the death of a writer), Volkening uses the suicide of the French writer Henry de Montherlant to discuss the ethical discourse justification of taking one’s own life.<sup>492</sup> Volkening speaks of level of despair and suffering to cause one to commit suicide. Then he presents opposing views: by a Christian and an atheist. He concludes that de Montherlant must have been an atheist, but does not ethically sanction de Montherlant’s action. Finally, Volkening proposes the doctrine of “living well and dying well,” and addresses circumstances that justified suicide for Greek and Roman civilizations, or had even led to the perception of suicide as a noble act and expression of a strong character. Citing a last example in which suicide in the form of starving to death would have been permitted to men from noble lineage who could not bear arms any longer, Volkening leaves his reader with the ambiguous final comment: “Something that would also require stoicism and guts.”<sup>493</sup> The reader, whom Volkening engaged with various, contradicting positions, is now left to herself to formulate her own position about the ethical permissibility of suicide.

#### **4. Literary Flânerie: The Movements of the Essay/ist**

The essay is a highly dynamic form of writing. With ingrained skepticism against final answers and all-encompassing explanations, the essayist demonstrates conceptual

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<sup>491</sup> Lukács, 20.

<sup>492</sup> Volkening, “Acerca de la muerte de un escritor,” *Eco* 25:147 (Jul., 1972): 323-325.

<sup>493</sup> “Algo que también requería estoicismo y buen temple.” Volkening, “Acerca de la muerte de un escritor,” 325.

mobility in approaching a subject and considering it from various points of view. He walks toward the core of the subject in a non-linear fashion, by detours, by association, by drawing from personal own life experience. The movement lies in the essayist's mode of thinking that flows into the essay, and remains clearly visible within the text. As we saw illustrated through Volkening's essay "Acerca de la muerte de un escritor," this movement then transcends the medium and carries with it the questions at hand for the reader to continue the thought experiment.

The metaphor of an essay being like a leisurely walk aptly describes this movement of the essayist, of the essay, and of the reader. Montaigne compares the mode of thinking that guided the writing of his *Essais* to an act of his judgment walking with a subject, ...*je le (le jugement) promène à un sujet*: "If it is a subject I do not understand, I try my judgment upon it for that very reason [...] it rambles over a subject."<sup>494</sup> The leisurely walk symbolizes the essayist's free process of thinking and simultaneously points at his skeptical questioning of all conclusions as Haas has also pointed out.<sup>495</sup> It further underscores the absence of intention and hence the experimental character of the essay. A flâneur who walks without obvious purpose is free to follow sideways. An essayist who thinks without obvious purpose is free to commit herself fully to the process of developing his thoughts without reaching a specific destination. The essayist, a writing

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<sup>494</sup> "Si c'est un sujet que je n'entende point, à cela meme je léssaye [...] je le ['le jugement'] promène à un sujet." Michel de Montaigne, "De Democritus et Heraclitus," in his *Essais de Michel de Montaigne*, vol. I, ed. André Tournon (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1998), 474-478 (Montaigne, *Essais*, book I, chapter L), 474. Montaigne narrates how his judgement approaches topics, which he describes literally as his judgment taking a subject on a walk ("promène à un sujet"; *ibid.*, 474), with the intention of "choosing the road that seems best, and of a thousand paths it points to this or that as being the best chosen" ("élire la route qui lui semble la meilleure, et, de mille sentiers, il dit que cettui-ci ou celui-là, a été le mieux, choisi"; *ibid.*). The English translation (in the text and in this footnote) is from Michel de Montaigne, "Of Democritus and Heraclitus," in his *The essays of Montaigne*, vol. I, trans. E. J. Trechmann (New York; London: Oxford UP, 1946), 293-296, here: 293-294.

<sup>495</sup> Haas, 47.

flâneur, invites the reader to come along on a novel, unpredictable path; she shares her thoughts, and allows the reader to take them further in whatever direction it might please.

For Volkening, his essays were also a form of instigating conversations in writing. He actively sought the intellectual exchange. As he notes in his diary, he soon discovered that for this purpose “the café where they serve ‘tinto’ [a typical Colombian, strong black coffee] is for the *bogotanos* what for the Romans was the *forum*.”<sup>496</sup> It was there that Volkening first probed his judgment about a subject, that he would “promène à un sujet.” His many conversations with his friends in Bogotá’s coffeehouses were the lived counterpart of his essays in which he emulated the associative, eclectic, at times erratic, and open-ended movement of these stimulating encounters. Volkening’s essays were formed, we could say, according to the movements of such conversational, intellectual flânerie.

Discussing the figure of the flâneur as a paradigm for the essayist, I propose, contributes to a better understanding of both figures. I will now consider the flâneur in his relation to the motifs, pertinent to the essay, of “*Möglichkeitserwägung*” (Gerhard Haas) and non-identity (Theodor W. Adorno), and I investigate the possibility of the flâneur’s moral agency through responsible, “*mündige*” action. Using Volkening’s story, I merge the essayist and the flâneur into one figure; one that I will refer to as the flânering essayist or essay-writing flâneur — or, for brevity’s sake, as the flâneur. In my discussion

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<sup>496</sup> “[E]l café donde dan tinto es para los bogotanos lo que para los romanos fuera el *forum*.” This quote is from Volkening’s diary entry of February 12, 1967. Volkening, *En causa propia*, ed. Oscar Jairo González Hernández (Medellín: Editorial de la Universidad de Antioquia, 2004), 35.

of such flâneur, I further draw from Zygmunt Bauman's sociological analysis of the flâneur as a figure emerging in late modernity.<sup>497</sup>

## 5. What flâneur? Whose flâneur?

*We walk with our legs, we say, and think with our head.  
We could, however, also say we walk with our mind.*<sup>498</sup>

Volkening, the “indefatigable *flâneur* on the streets of a city that he made his own,”<sup>499</sup> went out to the cafés to weigh his thoughts; he strolled through Bogotá sensing the city's secrets, listening to “the pulse of this vast urban organism.”<sup>500</sup> He took up what Thomas Bernhard suggests in his novella *Gehen (Walking)*, he walked with his mind. Most notably so, Volkening incorporated the motif of flânerie as the key element in advancing the narrative in his essay “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro” (Antwerp, reencounter with a city and a face).<sup>501</sup> There the protagonist Lodovico walks

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<sup>497</sup> Zygmunt Bauman's texts about and related to the figure of the flâneur as a figure of modernity have been mostly written in the early to mid-1990s, the time when post-modernity came into full swing. Since then, we have also seen, according to Bauman, the onset of “liquid modernity.” Notably, despite continuous changes in our societies, we have not yet left the paradigms of “modernity.” Bauman's texts I choose to engage with seem today thus as relevant as they were when they were first published, and I consider them useful tools for understanding Volkening's experience as an immigrant (or exile) and an “indefatigable flâneur” (Cobo Borda, “Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes,” 324) in Colombia in the mid-twentieth century.

<sup>498</sup> “Wir gehen mit unseren Beinen, sagen wir, und denken mit unserem Kopf. Wir könnten aber auch sagen, wir gehen mit unserem Kopf.”

Thomas Bernhard, *Gehen* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1971), 88. English translation from Bernhard, *Walking*, trans. Kenneth J. Northcott, in Thomas Bernhard, *Three Novels*, trans. Peter K. Jansen and Kenneth J. Northcott (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 111-174, here: 166.

<sup>499</sup> “*Flâneur* infatigable por las calles de una ciudad que ha hecho suya.” Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, “Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes” 324.

<sup>500</sup> “[O]jigo [...] el pulso de ese vasto organismo urbano.” Volkening, “Extramuros,” 534.

<sup>501</sup> Volkening, “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro I,” *Eco* 19:110 (1969): 113-157; and his “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro II,” *Eco* 19:111 (1969): 234-281.

the streets of Antwerp in search of his *Heimat* that he ultimately discovers in his own memories, in his mind.<sup>502</sup>

The flâneur has become a prominent figure in literature from about the mid-nineteenth century on. This phenomenon, to which I will refer as literary flânerie,<sup>503</sup> reached its acme with the sauntering dandy of the fin-de-siècle before its popularity seemingly receded during the mid-twentieth century. Since, it has seen a revival starting in the 1970s.<sup>504</sup> During nearly two hundred years of literary flânerie, a myriad of different flâneurs have emerged, which impedes an indisputable characterization and challenges the idea of the very existence of *the* flâneur per se. I will investigate the flâneur as a paradigm for the essayist. But who is this flâneur? Whose flâneur is he?

Edgar Allan Poe's detective and passerby, Charles Baudelaire's "gentleman stroller of city streets," Walter Benjamin's detective and/or criminal or his "man of letters [who] puts himself on the market," Franz Hessel's suspicious saunterer, and Rainer Maria Rilke's fearful semi-outcast who has no place to call home are some of the best known flâneurs. Further, we find flâneurs in the works of E. T. A. Hoffmann, Robert Walser,

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<sup>502</sup> See Chapter III.

<sup>503</sup> Literary flânerie, as I define it in this chapter, includes elements of "flânering perception" ("flânierender Wahrnehmung") as it has been used in scholarship since the 1970s (in reaction to the revival of flânerie in texts by Rolf Dieter Brinkmann and others), and it includes elements of "flânering thinking" ("flânierendes Denken") a term coined by Eckhardt Köhn in reference to Walter Benjamin in his *Straßenrausch. Flânerie und kleine Form. Versuch zur Literaturgeschichte des Flâneurs von 1830 bis 1933* (Berlin: Das Arsenal, 1989). Contrary to Matthias Keidel who defines literary flâneurs as "literary men roaming the metropolis" ("durch die Großstadt schweifende Literaten," see Keidel, 12) and defines thus literary flânerie as dependant upon physical movements and the metropolis, I use literary flânerie as a gesture of writing that emerges not only from the movement of one's feet but even more so from the movement of one's thoughts directed by a free interplay of perception and reflection of objects, situations, and abstracta. Keidel laid out his concept of literary flânerie in his *Die Wiederkehr der Flâneure. Literarische Flânerie und flânierendes Denken zwischen Wahrnehmung und Reflexion* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2006).

<sup>504</sup> See Keidel for a discussion of the development of the flâneur as a figure in literature from the 1820s to 1990s, and also Harald Neumeyer who examines the flâneur as a figure in literature between the early nineteenth century and the end of the Weimar Republic in his *Der Flâneur. Konzeption der Moderne* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann 1999).

Arthur Eloesser, and Siegfried Kracauer, or — if we prefer a younger generation of writers — Rolf Dieter Brinkmann, Botho Strauß, and Peter Handke. Georg Simmel and Zygmunt Bauman, among others, provide theoretical analyses of the figure.

Which flâneur can be read as a paradigm for the essayist? Which flâneur embodies best this mode of thinking linking flâneurs and essayists? By extending and modifying existent concepts of the flâneur, I think of the flânering essayist, or essay-writing flâneur, as a figure emerging out of the flâneur tradition but at the same time transcending it.<sup>505</sup> By examining the flâneur as a model for thought development, I argue that flânering thinking combines the fruits of strangeness with mental detours that lead to unexpected observations and to meaning can create and destroy worlds and worldviews (in the sense of preconceived systems of meaning). Yet, despite the seriousness of his project, the flâneur is eventually just playfully strolling around. Like the essayist, he is predestined to end his walk without having reached a destination. He is aware of such premise, and acts out of a desire for approximation. Not having to reach a final destination allows for unlimited new beginnings. The streets on which he saunters are those of culture, philosophy, society, politics, and the arts. This flâneur combines features of the observer, the stray and chased, the signifier, and the player. He possesses extraordinary qualities for cultural transfer.

Volkening's flânerie in writing, his essays on German culture, literature, and philosophy, is aimed at cultural transfer, at introducing his home culture to a Colombian audience. With these essays he crossed the boundaries between his European origin and

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<sup>505</sup> I will refer to the flâneur in the following as masculine since flânerie is traditionally a thoroughly gendered activity attributed to men (as demonstrated by most of the fictional flâneur literature, and most of the scholarship on the flâneur until the present with rare exceptions by, e.g., Kelli D. Barbour, Thea C. Bowering, Matthew D. Embley, and Deborah L. Parsons).

his life in Latin America, and inscribed himself into the literary discourse of his host country.

### 5.1. The Observer

Edgar Allan Poe 1840's "The Man of the Crowd" presents an elaborate and instructive narrative about the flâneur, a newly emerging urban figure.<sup>506</sup> The story evolves on the streets of London, then one of the largest cities in the world with nearly two million inhabitants.<sup>507</sup> Fleeting images of people fill the scene. The stimuli of the metropolis exceed any conceivable human capacity for processing them entirely. It becomes essential to intentionally narrow one's focus, to zero in on a small fraction of all available input. The story starts with the narrator observing from a "large bow-window of the D— Coffee-House in London"<sup>508</sup> the pulsating life around him:

At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance. [...] They were undoubtedly noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesman, stock-jobbers—the Eupatrids and the common-places of society—men of leisure and men actively engaged in affairs of their own—conducting business upon its own responsibility. They did not greatly excite my attention. [...]

I was thus occupied in scrutinizing the mob, when suddenly there came into view a countenance (that of a decrepit old man, some sixty-five or seventy years of age)—a countenance which at once arrested and absorbed my whole attention, on account of the absolute idiosyncrasy of its expression. [...] I felt singularly aroused, startled, fascinated. "How wild a history," I said to myself, "is

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<sup>506</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, "The Man of the Crowd," in his *Complete Stories and Poems of Edgar Allan Poe*, editor not named (Garden City; New York: Doubleday & Company, 1966).

<sup>507</sup> The 1841 census counts a population of 1,948,417 according to London Online, "Historical Overview of London Population." Available at <http://www.londononline.co.uk/factfile/historical/> (accessed July 10, 2010).

<sup>508</sup> Poe, 215.



written within that bosom!” Then came a craving desire to keep the man in view—to know more of him. [...]

I resolved to follow the stranger whithersoever he should go.<sup>509</sup>

After indiscriminately watching the throng, the narrator straitens his focus to a specific set of features in the appearance of the passerby. Their face is one of the features he scans. The narrator tries himself as a physiognomist; he classifies people according to their assumed professions, and draws further conclusions about their lives. Whether his assumptions are accurate or not, he seems satisfied with his capacity of reading the crowd. The narrator feels in control of his environment because he believes to understand it. Then, a sudden observation unsettles him. When he spots a man whose face seems to be significantly different from that of the average passerby, the narrator is captivated and starts concentrating exclusively on this individual because he *cannot* read him. The “decrepit old man” in front of the narrator’s eyes resists his zeal for classification and interpretation of the humanity around him. Thus, the narrator decides to observe this person closely until he would disclose his secret. Consequently, the narrator takes pains to remain unnoticed while following the mysterious figure on an apparently erratic path through the city. He is rather thrilled by not knowing where he might be lead. Indeed, would he know, he would likely not feel the same ardent desire to get there.

Flânerie begins when the narrator encounters something that he cannot immediately understand *and* that he cannot dismiss as irrelevant or uninteresting either. It reminds us of Volkening’s protagonist Lodovico who walks through Antwerp, from which he feels alienated and excluded, driven by the *idée fixe* to find in the city the “secret key to his life.” The flâneur’s desire to discover the essence of what is

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<sup>509</sup> Poe, 216, 218, and 219.

inaccessible, what resists interpretation, initiates his flânerie. Thereby, the flâneur's chief concern is to remain unnoticed. His object of interest is supposed to stay unconscious of his presence, and deprived of the chance to react to the observer, to reveal the most. Michel Foucault would conclude the flâneur is in control because he sees without being seen.<sup>510</sup> However, the flâneur also consciously refrains from being in control over the unfolding events.

## 5.2. The Stray and the Chased

...*there is no place to stand still on.*<sup>511</sup>

The flâneur gives up controlling his movements by means of rational decision-making, pursuit of a linear progression of way and thought, and determination of his destination. Instead, he strays around led by his curiosity and by sudden sensual or mental lures. His guideposts are the odd details in a presumably familiar setting, details that the person walking with a premeditated purpose might overlook. Such oddities vary broadly: The stimulus to flâneer physically or in one's mind, as Thomas Bernhard put it, can arise from sources as different as seeing a decrepit old man (Poe, "The Man of the Crowd"), reflecting on the conversable book store culture (Franz Hessel, "Zeitungs Viertel" in *Spazieren in Berlin*), or remembering a replica of a mine inside a crystalline cube (Walter Benjamin, "Steglitzer Ecke Genthiner" in *Berliner Kindheit um Neunzehnhundert*). Poe's narrator wants to disclose the secret of the "man of the crowd" whom he suspects to be a criminal. Hessel's narrator is discussing with an experienced

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<sup>510</sup> Michel Foucault, "Panopticism," in his *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, transl. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 195-228. See also Zygmunt Bauman, "Desert spectacular," in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 138-157, here: 141.

<sup>511</sup> Bauman, "Desert spectacular," 138.

book dealer how and why the attitude of the Berliners toward bookstores has changed, and Benjamin's narrator is moved by the memory of a decorative object representing the lost world of his childhood. These three representative flâneur figures discover in their presumably familiar surroundings traces of past and passing lives. The oddities that catch their attention bear testimony to what has just been lost, what is in the process of disappearing, or what is undergoing a radical change. From this viewpoint, the flâneur can be regarded as a figure of crisis.

The flâneur gains prominence in crises for these are moments in history or psychological states characterized by the dissolution of presumably established meaning, which arouses the flâneur's curiosity and thus brings him to the scene. The flâneur's motivation is the desire to understand objects, situations, and intellectual, political, ethical, cultural, or other questions that have become problematic to answer. Volkening walks the streets of Bogotá to make them, as Cobo Borda suggests, "his own, day after day,"<sup>512</sup> his literary double, Lodovico, walks the streets of Antwerp to regain a sense of belonging, of feeling at home. The flâneur's appearance is preceded by a rupture in the conventional, direct, and uncontested assignment of meaning to an object or a situation. His movements are guided by a fundamental skepticism against uncritical acceptance of meanings, and by a fervent desire to make sense of his observations. However, because of his incessant skepticism, the flâneur is doomed not to arrive at any understanding that would lastingly satisfy him: Like the essayist, the flâneur cannot stipulate certainties and provide universal answers. For the flâneur "there is no place to stand still on," as Bauman maintains, because of an ever-present possibility to learn more. An expectation of

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<sup>512</sup> "[Hacer] suya, día tras día." Cobo Borda, "Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes," 324.

improved insight in the future keeps the flâneur in restless motion. When he stops, it is to pause, not to arrive. Speaking with Ernst Bloch, Bauman argues in this context for the fleetingness of the “now,” which I consider helpful for understanding the flâneur’s restlessness. Bauman claims that the fleetingness of each present moment pre-empts modern man’s — the flâneur’s — chance of arrival.<sup>513</sup> Only in the “now,” an arrival in the sense of an ending of the quest for meaning would be conceivable. But “now” is by nature elusive. Each “now” vanishes before it can be fully absorbed and understood. Each “now” evaporates before it can become a solidified ground to stand and stay on. And each future “now” is pregnant with additions to the presently available insights. The modern man, with whom Bauman identifies the flâneur, lives according to him with a constant “impulse of expectation,” which is brought about not by choice, but by inescapable fate.<sup>514</sup> Since “you cannot be sure of form, content, meaning” of any “now,” Bauman contends, the best strategy is “learning to appreciate ‘multiple realities.’”<sup>515</sup> His advice for the flâneur is to accept being chased by a rapid sequence of “nows” that continually prevent him from gaining absolute understanding: his insights will remain contingent and incomplete, since they constitute at any time only one out of many possible realities. By embracing this premise, the flâneur is able to unchain his movements mentally and/or physically from the need of final arrivals. He is free to stroll around playfully. His movements become autotelic. Volkening demonstrated this

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<sup>513</sup> Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 138-140.

<sup>514</sup> Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 138. The phrase “impulse of expectation” is a translation of a phrase that Bauman borrows from Ernst Bloch: “Impuls der Erwartung” used by Bloch in his *Man on His Own: Essays in the Philosophy of Religion*, trans. E. B. Aston, foreword by Harvey Cox (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970), 10.

<sup>515</sup> Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 139. Bauman refers here to Maurice Stein and Arthur Vidich, ed. *Sociology on Trial* (Englewood Cliffs, N. J.: Prentice-Hall, 1963).

playfulness in particular in his choice of topics for his essays. He did not cater to the trends on the literary market, but wrote about the topics about which he felt passionate. For example, Volkening, who gained the reputation of Gabriel García Márquez's first critic,<sup>516</sup> did not write any longer about the shooting star of the Latin American Boom literature when it had become fashionable to do so. Instead, he wrote about Tacitus.<sup>517</sup>

### 5.3. The Signifier

*To flâneur, is to rehearse contingency of meaning.*<sup>518</sup>

The sequence of “nows” presents fragments of meaning on end. At times, these fragments fit harmoniously together, at other times, they clash: without losing their right to co-exist. Each “now” presents a perfectly possible and plausible interpretation of an object or a situation that the flâneur observes. Like a detective, the flâneur investigates a case and probes different meanings. The meanings that suggest themselves emerge from the rambling of his feet and thoughts: undirected walking, associative thinking. Importantly, wherever the flâneur might go, and in whatever way he might interpret his observations, it does not touch the essence of the observed. The flâneur imposes meaning on his surroundings, but it is a thoroughly subjective and, furthermore, reversible act. As Bauman puts it, the flâneur merely “rehearse[s] the contingency of meaning.”<sup>519</sup> By his idiosyncratic assignment of meaning, the flâneur appropriates spheres previously unknown to him. The flâneur domesticates the unknown. Rob Shields describes this as

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<sup>516</sup> Elkin Gómez, “El primer crítico de García Márquez,” *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 37 (54): 114-117.

<sup>517</sup> Cobo Borda, “Ernesto Volkening, crítico literario,” 340.

<sup>518</sup> Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 142.

<sup>519</sup> Bauman, “Desert Spectacular,” 142.

“the *flâneur* [‘mimicking’] the action of the explorer who not only maps but also describes, designates and claims territory.”<sup>520</sup> Seen from this angle, *flânerie* nears consumerism. Contrary, however, to Shields’s concept of an imperialistic *flâneur*, the *flânering* essayist or essay-writing *flâneur* consumes his surroundings in an un-materialistic way. Mentally, he takes possession of the observed by designating what or who they are supposed to be. Volkening does so implicitly, when Lodovico, the *flânering* protagonist of his autobiographical essay on Antwerp, projects on a figure in a painting his own family psycho-history, or when he appropriates the city by interpreting it as his *Heimat* (home) through making it meaningful in relation to himself and his childhood. Poe’s narrator does so when he declares the passing humanity to be “noblemen, merchants, attorneys, tradesman, [and] stock-jobbers.”<sup>521</sup> He does so again when he claims toward the end of narrative that the “decrepit old man” was “the type and genius of deep crime.”<sup>522</sup> His statements, based on mere observations and force of imagination, could easily be contested, and ultimately even Poe’s narrator concedes his limitations. Adding that it would “be in vain to follow” the man any longer, “for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds,”<sup>523</sup> the narrator ends a one night and one day long futile quest for drawing the secret of “the man of the crowd.” Tellingly, he stops his movements at the exact place where he had set out the evening before, at “the street of the D—

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<sup>520</sup> Rob Shields, “Fancy Footwork: Walter Benjamin’s notes on *flânerie*” in *The Flâneur*, ed. Keith Tester (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 61-80, here: 74. Especially in the section of his text “On Empire” (*ibid.*, 74-76), Shields links the idea and practice of the *flâneur* to imperialism and to a new spatialization of social and economic relations. Though I find his argument convincing — in the context of his project, I apply here the concept of appropriating one’s world through *flânerie* exclusively metaphorically.

<sup>521</sup> Poe, 216.

<sup>522</sup> Poe, 221.

<sup>523</sup> Poe, 221.

Hotel.”<sup>524</sup> Since his departure , he has not gained any decisive knowledge about the man he observed. Not only this, he “arrives” physically at the beginning. Given the narrator’s continuing lack of understanding, he could start anytime a new attempt at discovering the man’s secret, — or somebody else could have an autonomous try at it. Like the essayist’s reasoning, the flâneur’s actions are non-authoritative.

Yet, for a fleeting moment, the flâneur established order in an otherwise chaotic world. He defines an object of his interest for the duration of a “now.” Thereby, he creates a new world out of the elements he discovers. His imagination gives rise to an ordered, manageable world. He creates his own distinct version of reality — one out of a plethora of all conceivable realities. *Now*, the flâneur is in exclusive control of his world. His version of the world, his reality, is going to keep up until self-doubts and inevitably occurring new observations will eventually undermine his present understanding out of which it had been created. It will then disintegrate not through outside forces but through the flâneur’s own agency.

Since the flâneur does not engage in any direct conversation, he can never be directly contradicted or challenged about the way he interprets his observations. He moves through the masses of passerby on the streets and the masses of readers and other writers alike upon “a tacit agreement to treat each other as if everyone was alone in the desert.”<sup>525</sup> Flânerie is solitude. The literary flâneur writes about his observations and presents to the reader the meanings he rehearsed while trying to get to the essence of the object that caught his interest. Yet, his text is not a conversation; it is a *one-way*

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<sup>524</sup> Poe, 221.

<sup>525</sup> Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 141.

communication. Even if the reader forms a different opinion about the object in question, he cannot directly confront the author and ask him for a response or for revisions. A reader's differing opinion constitutes just another reality — one out of a plethora of all conceivable ones. The flâneur signifies meaning but does so *with a self-conceded non-universal validity of his judgment*. His contribution lies not in determining how something should be understood once and for all, but in problematizing seemingly self-evident matters. He questions the order of the day whereby his ultimate non-determinacy is not a deficiency but the proper response to a complex and multi-faceted world. Like the essayist, a flâneur who withholds final judgment demonstrates his moral agency. As such, the flâneur is an avant-garde figure. Volkening was aware of the ethical responsibility that the critical engagement with literature requires. As Cobo Borda notes, he considered “literature [being] a form of existence that implies ethics in which the essential is not the accessory, but in which it is impossible to make in any way concessions about either one.”<sup>526</sup> This conviction underlies all his writing.

#### **5.4. The Player**

*To flâner means to play the game of playing.*<sup>527</sup>

One of the emerging themes regarding the flâneur is the role of playing. In light of the flâneur's moral agency, the question of play arises. Can moral value be added to his actions? The line between play and superficiality appears thin. The player does not wish to get involved: he observes and opinionates, but he frequently refrains from acting upon

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<sup>526</sup> “La literatura, forma de existencia que implica una ética, en donde lo esencial no es lo accesorio, pero en donde no es posible, de ningún modo, hacer concesiones sobre lo uno, ni sobre lo otro.” Cobo Borda, “Del Anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes,” 323.

<sup>527</sup> Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 146.



his insights (at least as long as he plays, though he might apply them later). His game of meaning-imposition is disconnected from the *vita activa*. Even so, he who truly plays is engaged in a most serious activity. The flâneur cares about the world around him, and he observes it *because* he cares. He reflects upon its meaning because it is relevant to him. Speaking with Friedrich Schiller, through playful engagement with the world he realizes his full potential: “[man] is only wholly man where he is playing.”<sup>528</sup>

The flâneur interprets the world around him playfully. His play is, so Bauman, “to make others play, to see others as players, to make the world a play.”<sup>529</sup> The flâneur’s non-involvedness is his *modus vivendi*. Flânerie is rewarding for the flâneur because of a mutual estrangement between the observer and the observed (the “tacit agreement to treat each other as if everyone was alone in the desert”<sup>530</sup>), because of an absence of responsibility, and because of an assurance that no lasting obligations will burden the viewer. Bauman infers that the flâneur would be “flat” and “superficial.”<sup>531</sup> I reject the notions of flatness and superficiality. There are spheres of life where the flâneur’s temporary probing of different meanings can advance a more tolerant and open-minded society. For example, when a flâneur, or more to the point, a flânering writer introduces a new perspective that carries the potential for a transformation of existent mores and values. Here, we may remember also Ottmar Ette’s concept of literature as “Knowledge

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<sup>528</sup> “[Der Mensch] ist nur da ganz Mensch, wo er spielt.” Friedrich von Schiller, *Über die ästhetische Erziehung des Menschen, in einer Reihe von Briefen*, ed. Wolfgang Dörsing (Munich: Hanser, 1981), 198. English translation from Friedrich von Schiller, *On the Aesthetic Education of Man*, trans. Reginald Snell (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), 80.

<sup>529</sup> Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 145.

<sup>530</sup> Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 141.

<sup>531</sup> Bauman, “The Stranger Revisited — and Revisiting,” in his *Essays in Postmodern Morality* (Oxford; Cambridge: Blackwell, 1995), 126-138, here: 133.

for Living” (*Lebenswissen*).<sup>532</sup> And there are spheres of life where the flâneur’s temporary probing of different meanings brings distraction and pleasure without any obvious use-value except for arguably a momentary escape from everyday life. And there are spheres of life that are incompatible with flânerie; situations that require immediate reaction and engagement. Flânerie requires self-consciousness. It needs to be aware of its nature and its place. However, the existence of spheres in which flânerie is inappropriate, and hence *would* indicate a moral impoverishment of the actor, does not make the flâneur a priori a superficial and flat creature.

Flânerie is playful because the flâneur assigns meaning is an experiment the outcome of which is likely short-lived. A new “now” will quickly emerge. In doing so, he creates temporarily an ordered, understandable world. New insights or fits of fancy, however, are sufficient to let the order he created collapse like a house of cards. And, the flâneur is not going to be surprised either. Bauman argues that flânerie is a meta-play exactly because it possesses knowledge of itself as a play.<sup>533</sup> Since it is such meta-play, it allows and asks for moral agency and *mündige* action.

The essay-writing flâneur is engaged in this play of rehearsing meanings and contemplating possibilities.<sup>534</sup> The writing of an essay, even on existential questions, is a play of possibilities, not of dogmatic declarations. The essayist is a flâneur who creates temporary worlds that he treats most seriously, as all players do; yet, he does not consider

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<sup>532</sup> Ottmar Ette, “Literature as Knowledge for Living, Literary Studies as Science for Living,” edited, translated and with an introduction by Vera M. Kutzinski, *PMLA* 125:4 (2010): 977-993. Compare also the Introduction of this dissertation.

<sup>533</sup> See Bauman, “Desert spectacular,” 146.

<sup>534</sup> Compare Haas’s argument about the essay as an exercise of “*Möglichkeitserwägung*” (contemplation of possibilities) in his *Essay*, 8.

them superior to competing realities. His freedom to play, to draw a different world in his writing, is a form of anarchy. Both the essay and flânerie can be equally subversive for established power structures. They carry the potential of civil disobedience, of transgressions, and of sowing doubt in the minds of those who come in touch with them. The freedom of the essayist and the flâneur comes at a cost: because they are aware of the existence of different realities, they have no place to stand still on; they are never fully at home, at ease, safe from doubt. They are outsiders and strangers. The world around them is concomitantly distant and near, foreign and known. Speaking with Georg Simmel, the flâneur — the stranger — experiences a synthesis of closeness and remoteness.<sup>535</sup> Volkening wrote his exilic essays in Bogotá in a state of foreignness interwoven with the familiarity of the place, the people, and the language with which he would live for nearly five decades. In his diaries, he describes his life in exile as evolving in an ideational, intermediary realm between the Europe of his youth and Latin America.<sup>536</sup> Volkening was a stranger. His unique perspective from within and outside, the experience of simultaneous belonging and alienation seminally shaped his work as an essayist and cultural mediator. Surprisingly, Cobo Borda even indicated that it was this perspective that allowed Volkening to understand his host society probably better than many Colombians would have been able to understand it. He notes about Volkening: “It was

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<sup>535</sup> Georg Simmel, “Exkurs über den Fremden,” in his *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung* (Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 1968), 509-512, here: 510.

<sup>536</sup> Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 465.

evident that he who sees what is ours so well came from afar. [...] these are other eyes, both native and foreign; kindred, but not compliant.”<sup>537</sup>

## 5.5. The Stranger

*Strangers are always suggesting novelties to strangers.*<sup>538</sup>

By law, Plato wanted to strictly regulate and minimize the contact of Athenians with citizens of other *poleis*. The contact with with strangers, he foresaw to “create a confusion of manners,” which Plato believed to lead to “the greatest possible injury” in a well-governed *polis*.<sup>539</sup> According to Plato, strangers could stir emotions that the natives had learnt to control for the larger good and lasting stability of their community. And, he does not stand alone with this view. The eruption of strangers spreading subversive ideas within a relatively self-contained system of natives has been an ever-alarming matter for many political and cultural legislators. Not surprisingly, the figure of the stranger personified both by the foreigner “who arrives today and stays tomorrow” as Simmel describes him,<sup>540</sup> but also by intellectuals and poets became a chimera for absolute forms of government.<sup>541</sup>

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<sup>537</sup> “Quien vio tan bien lo nuestro, era evidente que venía de lejos. [...] son otros ojos, propios y a la vez ajenos; afines, pero no condescendientes.” Cobo Borda, “Del anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes,” 325.

<sup>538</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 12:950. I am using the translation by Benjamin Jowett.

<sup>539</sup> Plato, *Laws*, 12:950.

<sup>540</sup> Georg Simmel understood the stranger in his “Exkurs über den Fremden” (“The Stranger”) as somebody who penetrates a community and stays without being able to shed off his stranger-ness to become one of its members: “The stranger will thus not be considered here in the usual sense of the term, as the wanderer who comes and stays tomorrow—the potential wanderer, so to speak, who, although he has gone no further, has not quite got over the freedom of coming and going.” Simmel, “The Stranger,” in his *On Individuality and Social Forms; selected writings*, ed., partly translated and with an introduction by Donald N. Levine, further transl. Richard P. Albares, Roberta Ash, and others (Chicago; London: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 143-149, here: 143. In the German original: “Es ist hier also der Fremde nicht in dem bisher vielfach berührten Sinn gemeint, als der Wandernde, der heute kommt und morgen geht, sondern als

The flâneur belongs to the same group. Since he is relieved of duty, he is estranged from the purpose-driven masses: the flâneur is a native stranger. He is free to examine an object at leisure and with rather uninvested interest, which might give rise to situations in which an object comes to mean for him something quite different from what it means for most other people. And who is to predict what might catch his attention? How he might interpret his next object of interest and spread his ideas? Estranged from his surroundings, meaning is for him not, as it is for the native, part of a pre-established reference system on which he would habitually rely. Borrowing from Simmel, the flâneur is compared to the native therefore “the freer man, practically and theoretically; he examines conditions with less prejudice; [because] he assesses them against standards that are more general and more objective; and his actions are not confined by custom, piety or precedent.”<sup>542</sup> While the flâneur might have the better odds to reach a differentiated understanding of an object or situation, he risks more by constructing hypotheses (instead of sticking with the conventional interpretation). Despite his efforts, he will not be able establishing any meaning beyond doubt. Regardless how close he gets to the object, elements ever escaping his understanding (or even his attention) will keep him at an inexpugnable distance. He will remain a stranger facing an unpredictable world. Moreover, the native who believes to know an object can absorb it into a

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der, der heute kommt und morgen bleibt — sozusagen der potentiell Wandernde, der, obgleich er nicht weitergezogen ist, die Gelöstheit des Kommens und Gehens nicht ganz überwunden hat.” Simmel, “Exkurs über den Fremden,” 509.

<sup>541</sup> Tellingly, there are conspicuous parallels between the treatment of strangers in Plato’s *Laws* and of the treatment of poets, another subversive species, in the Socratic dialogues of Plato’s *The Republic*.

<sup>542</sup> Simmel, “The Stranger,” 146. In the German original: “[Der Fremde ist] der Freiere, praktisch und theoretisch, [denn] er übersieht die Verhältnisse vorurteilsloser, misst sie an allgemeineren, objektiveren Idealen und ist in seiner Aktion nicht durch Gewöhnung, Pietät, Antezedentien gebunden.” Simmel, “Exkurs über den Fremden,” 510-511.

*permanently* understandable world (in which he feels “at home”). The flâneur who knows not to know the object cannot lastingly create and stay in a similarly neat world. However, if he shares his insights, he might challenge the beliefs of others, and destabilize their world. He becomes a potential incendiary exposing the seemingly stable, ordered, and predictable world of the native as a utopia. He shows how things could be seen differently. Turning the spotlight on the native’s certainties and exposing their frailty, the flâneur introduces the fleetingness of the “now” into the nearly static realm of the native. He, who emerges during moments of crisis, becomes its disseminator.

## **6. His “Proper” Place**

Traditionally, the stranger has been kept at bay — territorially, temporally, and functionally. His are the docks, railroad stations and airports, transit camps, hostels for asylum-seekers, hotels, international congresses, or trading centers, ante-rooms and government-run institutions — all locations where his otherness can be extensively regulated by the ones who had already been there before his arrival and will stay after his departure. Following Bauman’s suggestion, a stranger’s role in a society is correspondingly marginal,<sup>543</sup> for instance by functioning as a mediator of sorts between the foreign and the local: being a translator, a reporter, a diplomat, or a commercial salesperson. Thereby, “exchange with such strangers is set aside from daily routine and normal interaction as a function of a special category of people and a special occasion for

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<sup>543</sup> The imperative is based on the consideration of what the members of a society likely consider necessary to ensure the stability of their society. Seen from this position, strangers have to be controlled because they pose a threat to established political system, their moral values, or religious practices.

the rest,” which turns their existence as strangers virtually irrelevant.<sup>544</sup> Most often, strangers are not invited to stay permanently since transgression of their temporal confines, possibly accompanied by territorial and functional ones, poses a threat to the permanence of the existent structures. The stranger in Simmel’s sense as “the man who comes today and stays tomorrow” infringes on the order of a society because his refusal to go away defies these very categories of segregation.<sup>545</sup> We might consider an exile the epitome of Simmel’s stranger because, different from other strangers, his return home, at least as much as the near future is concerned, is impossible.

An exile, like Volkening, seems to be singularly well equipped to act as a mediator between his home and host culture, or one could say, between the culture of his home of origin and his adoptive home later in life. Volkening embodies the border that divides these cultures, but he also shows this border to be a contact zone and site of exchange, which makes manifest their cultural similarities and differences. Because the exile presents the *other within one’s own*, he demonstrates and interconnectedness of cultures.

Volkening was a *Grenzgänger* between the cultural traditions of his home and the cultural setting he found in exile. Volkening translated German culture onto Colombian ground. That translation occurred on two levels. First, linguistically, since he wrote about German authors in Spanish and translated German literature, second, on a metaphoric level since he mediated German culture for a Colombian audience.

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<sup>544</sup> Bauman, “*Strangers: The Social Construction of Universality and Particularity*,” *Telos* 78 (Winter 1988-89): 7-42, here: 8.

<sup>545</sup> Bauman, “*Strangers: The Social Construction of Universality and Particularity*,” 9.

I will end with a discussion of the unique potential arising from the merging of the three figures — the essayist, the flâneur and the exile — into one person. More specifically, I will show the exceptional aptitude of this person to act as a cultural mediator by returning to Volkening and his specific situation.

## 7. Creative Displacement: Cultural Transfer in Exile

*If he is not to perish, the expellee must be creative.*<sup>546</sup>

Trained as a lawyer, Volkening turned quite unexpectedly to writing about German literature and culture in the very same year of his emigration to Colombia. Soon he switched languages. He wrote in Spanish, for him a foreign language that he came to master to an astonishing degree. Nonetheless, the critic Darío Achury Valenzuela notes in Volkening's writing what he considers the distinct German quality of Volkening's thought: "when we read him in Spanish, one that is admirable for its clarity, smoothness, and fluidity, we suppose that a way of thinking, ideation, and imagination precedes its expression; one that mentally, and in the first instance is German."<sup>547</sup> Among Volkening's first publications in Spanish were essays on Hermann Hesse, Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, Carl Gustav Jung, Gustav Meyrink, Franz Kafka, and Geo von Lengerke. The latter was a legendary German landowner who settled in the Colombian department of Santander in the 1850s after fleeing justice in his homeland for having

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<sup>546</sup> Vilém Flusser, "Exile and Creativity," in his *The Freedom of the Migrant*, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg, ed. and with an introduction by Anke K. Finger (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 81-87, here: 81. Flusser specifically refers to "expellees," which he considers a more comprehensive term than "refugees" or "emigrants." Furthermore, Flusser argues that "we are living in a period of expulsion" (ibid., 82).

<sup>547</sup> "Cuando le leemos en un castellano, admirable por su claridad, tersura y fluidez, suponemos que a su expresión antecede un pensar, un idear, un imaginar, que mentalmente, y en primera instancia, se expresan en alemán." Achury Valenzuela, 14.



killed his rival in a duel. It seems as if Volkening's first sketches and his later elaborate essays served a private purpose: assuring himself of belonging to his cultural home 5,600 miles distant. An Alexandrian émigré in New York, the writer André Aciman, describes the peculiarity of becoming — like Volkening — a writer in exile: “having chosen careers in writing,” so he claims, “each uses the written word as a way of fashioning a new home elsewhere, of revisiting, transposing, or perpetuating the old one on paper.”<sup>548</sup> And he points to the most pernicious aspect of exile: “the impossibility of ever *not* being away.”<sup>549</sup> Aciman refers to the impossibility of returning home, but also to the impossibility of ever not thinking about it. His statement exposes exile as a force whose impact goes far beyond geography. In that respect, Volkening describes in hindsight “my own role as a mediator, my literary activity, from the first notes (in 1934) until the present”<sup>550</sup> as a consequence of his experience of displacement. Revisiting, transposing and perpetuating his home through writing allowed him to reiterate who he was. He accessed his culture of origin for himself, and at the same time, Volkening — writing in Spanish — made it visible and accessible for the society in which he lived.

Vilém Flusser argues in his “Exile and Creativity” that *an exile must be creative* to survive in an environment in which he cannot recourse to the same habitual responses that would have served him in his own, familiar cultural setting.<sup>551</sup> Certainly, exile — like *flânerie* — requires novel reactions, negotiations of meanings, and discoveries,

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<sup>548</sup> André Aciman, “Permanent Transients,” preface to *Letters of Transit. Reflections on Exile, Identity, Language, and Loss*, ed. André Aciman (New York: New Press, 1999), 10.

<sup>549</sup> Aciman, 10.

<sup>550</sup> “[M]i propio papel de mediador, mi actividad literaria, de los primeros apuntes (en 1934) para acá.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” *Eco* 34:221 (Mar., 1980): 467-468.

<sup>551</sup> Flusser, “Exile and Creativity,” in his *The Freedom of the Migrant*, trans. Kenneth Kronenberg, ed. and with an introduction by Anke K. Finger (Urbana; Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 81-87.

which incessantly reminds the exiled person of his foreignness. At the same time, it is a liberating experience: exile opens a space for acting free from the dictate of prewritten codes of conduct. In this regard, the exile acts for all practical purposes like a flâneur or an essayist who aporetically rejects habit. Flusser describes the condition in which an exiled person would live as one without the “fluffy blanket” of habit.<sup>552</sup> Habit, he argues, screens out perceptions because it allows us to function in a familiar environment without paying close attention to detail. Resultantly, we would feel confident and comfortable. However, if our “fluffy blanket” were to be pulled away, things would become “unusual,” “monstrous,” and “unsettling,” and — on a more positive note — “discovery [would] begin.”<sup>553</sup> The exiled person lives by definition in an unfamiliar environment in which nothing can be taken for granted, nothing can be anticipated. In order to successfully navigate the new space, the exiled person is required to pay, like a flâneur, heightened attention to details and to question continuously the meaning of what he discovers around him as well as the appropriateness of his respective responses. As the epigraph by Flusser suggests, “if he is not to perish,” the exile has to be skeptical, curious, and creative! Extending Flusser’s argument, one can argue that an exile must evaluate not only the unknown but also reevaluate the known, the fragments of his *Heimat* to which he holds on. Thereby, the new, unfamiliar perspective from which one looks back alters the memory. Ironically, the attempt to get closer to them gives rise to a moment of alienation. The act of (cultural) translation presupposes some distance between the translator and the translated. For translating the familiar, its meaning has to

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<sup>552</sup> Flusser, 82.

<sup>553</sup> Flusser, 82.

be carefully reassessed from the perspective of exile, which can turn into a disquieting and revolutionary process. Homi K. Bhabha reminds us that act of translating culture reveals its originary, holistic, organic identity as an illusion and reveals culture malleable:

[T]ranslation is also a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense — imitating an original in such a way that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on: the “original” is never finished or complete in itself. The “originary” is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a totalised prior moment of being or meaning — an essence.<sup>554</sup>

Bhabha extrapolates that the act of cultural translation displays the lacking essentialism of a culture and the very possibility of cultural translation showed “that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.”<sup>555</sup> A culture that is in a lasting state of hybridity eliminates the notion of belonging to an “imagined community” facing the Mecca of an undisputed center. In this sense, Volkening, as a cultural mediator, infused something new into the Colombian *and* into the German culture. His writing about German culture could be recognized as a way of changing it. Cultural translation empowers each actor to change the whole by renegotiating the content, meaning, and mode of representation of one culture in the face of the other. Volkening’s essays about German culture are singular pieces of representation, which change authors and their works due to the particular way in which Volkening invested them with meaning.

Yet, the belief in an “imagined community” is needed for one to talk about one’s cultural home and to transfer cultural artifacts, or a notion thereof, from one community

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<sup>554</sup> Homi K. Bhabha in Jonathan Rutherford, “Interview with Homi Bhabha. *The Third Space*,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishard, 1990), 210.

<sup>555</sup> Bhabha in “Interview with Homi Bhabha. *The Third Space*,” 211.

into another. Stewart Hall debunked the idea of the nation as a unified cultural identity;<sup>556</sup> Bhabha did away with the very idea of a unified identity of culture (not only in post-colonial settings); and still, both affirmed the continuation of the myth of a national-cultural unity in spite of its blurry fringes and interior contradictions. For Volkening's work as a cultural mediator, his particular view of German literature and culture was decisive.

A quick glance at Volkening's publications from 1934 until 1983 illustrates his references for writing about German culture. There are articles about Georg Büchner, the author of the revolutionary *Hessische Landbote* who was at one point charged with high treason,<sup>557</sup> about Heinrich Heine, the francophone Jew whose books were burnt by German National Socialists (and who had written so clairvoyantly about the burning of books...),<sup>558</sup> about the philosopher Walter Benjamin who took his life while attempting to escape the Nazis, and about the leftist intellectual Heinrich Böll who resisted joining the Hitler Youth in the 1930s and advocated the presumption of innocence for members of the Red Army Faction in the 1970s.<sup>559</sup> Although far from giving a comprehensive

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<sup>556</sup> For example, Stuart Hall, "Cultural Identity and Diaspora," in *Identity. Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishard, 1990): 222-237.

Stuart Hall's contention that cultural identity, "far from being eternally fixed in some essentialized past, [is] subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power"

<sup>557</sup> The *Hessische Landbote* (Hessian courier) is a pamphlet that Georg Büchner wrote in 1834 to publicize social injustices and to call the Hessian rural population for revolution under the slogan "Friede den Hütten! Krieg den Palästen!" (Peace to the shacks! Wage war on the palaces!).

<sup>558</sup> Heine wrote in his 1821/22 tragedy *Almansor* the famous lines that today can be read on the monument to the May 10, 1933 book burning at the Bebelplatz in Berlin: "Das war ein Vorspiel nur, dort wo man Bücher verbrennt, verbrennt man am Ende auch Menschen" ("That was only a prelude; where they burn books, they ultimately, too, burn people").

<sup>559</sup> See Heinrich Böll, "Will Ulrike Meinhof Gnade oder freies Geleit?" *Der Spiegel* (Jan. 1, 1972).

overview of Volkening's manifold interests and topics of writing,<sup>560</sup> this indicates his liberal orientation. To locate Volkening's position as a literary critic, we need to consider his way of thinking and writing. As I have argued earlier, both *flânerie* as a mode of thinking and essayism as a writing genre are rather incongruous with the advancement of dogmatic views because of their inherent resistance to any *reductio ad principium* and the rigidity of thought that ideological subservience would require.

Volkening's cultural translations not only tolerated but also invited the hybridity and hybridization of their culture of origin. Thereby, he opened spaces of encounter. Volkening, as a mediator, introduced his cultural home into a "Third Space," which is shared with the Other.<sup>561</sup> In interstitial spaces like that, the identities of cultures are, as Bhabha has it, "represented by virtue of the processes of iteration and translation through which their meanings are very vicariously addressed to — *through* — an Other."<sup>562</sup> The Third Space is the space of knowledge production and creativity. There, Volkening reassessed the meaning of his own culture and passed it on to his readers for their further

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<sup>560</sup> An overview of most of Volkening's publications can be found in the Appendix A.

<sup>561</sup> Bhabha, to whom I am indebted for developing my thoughts, implants the concept of the Third Space into the experience of post-coloniality. Nevertheless, his arguments about the hybridity of cultures and the third space hold also steady independent from a post-colonialist power discourse, from questions of race, sexuality, and subordination. Still, one noteworthy distinction between the third spaces that emerge between cultures/nations whose fates are forged together through a history of colonialism, and third spaces between other cultures/nations is that the latter do not have to face the "moment of panic" (Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), 296) that is experienced when a (formerly) dominating side has to recognize the enemy in itself, or in Bhabha's words, when "hybridity represents that ambivalent 'turn' of the discriminated subject into the terrifying, exorbitant object of paranoid classification — a disturbing questioning of the images and presences of authority" (ibid., 162). — Volkening finds himself in the fortunate situation of not having to confront violent eruptions of a colonialist past. The relations between Colombia and Germany have been so far rather peaceful: no history of colonialism, no past or present confrontations about territories or about religious views, no belligerent encounters, apart from the singular event of the sinking of a Colombian schooner through a German submarine during World War II (Colombia did break diplomatic relations with Germany on December 19, 1941, and declared a "state of belligerency" on November 26, 1943, but the militaries of the two countries never fought each other).

<sup>562</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 83.

evaluation, modification, and unrestricted usage. In the act of translation, the process of hybridity in which cultures exist becomes tangible. Each culture's interior differences become known and differences between cultures emerge from the contact with the respective other. The act of conscious cultural translation through writing means to expose one's culture to transformations and to observe what is happening (of course, these transformations take continuously place, too, when we don't watch).

Reflecting on Volkening's praxis of cultural translation illustrates his work as a cultural mediator by focusing on a special issue of *Eco* that he conceived and edited in 1970 on the occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Friedrich Hölderlin's birthday.<sup>563</sup>

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<sup>563</sup> Volkening, ed. *Eco. In memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin: Poemas – Prosa – Ensayos* 21:123-124. In 1961, Volkening started a close collaboration with the magazine *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente*, published in Bogotá by the German book and art dealer Karl Buchholz. The magazine was one of these Third Spaces in which culture is renegotiated and hybridized (see also Chapter V). During the last two decades of his life, Volkening published almost exclusively in this magazine, and became its chief editor from March 1971 to December 1972. Since it was distributed in most Spanish-speaking countries in Latin America and Europe, Volkening's publications in *Eco* became more widely known than his earlier work that was mostly dispersed in Bogotá's local press.

## CHAPTER V

### CULTURAL TRANSLATION, HYBRIDIZATION, THIRD SPACES

“Pallaksch. Pallaksch.”  
(Hölderlin. Celan.)

#### 1. Introduction: Translation as Cultural Action

Most recently, the humanities have witnessed the emergence of a “translational turn.” The idea of such turn had steadily gained ground since Lawrence Venuti first pointed at the potential of translation for the study of cultures in the late 1990s.<sup>564</sup> Doris Bachmann-Medick suggested in 1996, in the wake of the publication of Homi K. Bhabha’s *The Location of Culture*, that we might see Clifford Geertz’s notion of “culture as text”<sup>565</sup> substituted by a new paradigm: “Culture as translation.”<sup>566</sup> Her 2007 book *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Cultural Turns: a New Orientation in Cultural Studies) continues to explore and expedite the phenomenon of translation as a new paradigm in social and cultural sciences.<sup>567</sup> Research by linguists and translation theorists, literary scholars, and philosophers like Jürgen Habermas, Nikos Papastergiadis, André Lefevere, and Susan Bassnett have further expanded our

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<sup>564</sup> See Lawrence Venuti, *The Scandals of Translation: Toward an Ethics of Difference* (London: Routledge, 1998).

<sup>565</sup> See Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York, Basic Books, 1973).

<sup>566</sup> Doris Bachmann-Medick, “Cultural Misunderstandings in Translation: Multicultural Coexistence and Multicultural Conceptions of World Literature,” *Erfurt Electronic Studies in English [EESE]* 7 (1996): 1-15, here: 11. Available at [http://webdoc.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic96/bachmann/7\\_96.html](http://webdoc.gwdg.de/edoc/ia/eese/artic96/bachmann/7_96.html) (accessed April 12, 2011)

<sup>567</sup> See Doris Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften* (Reinbek bei Hamburg: Rowohlt, 2007), especially the chapter entitled “Translational Turn.” *Ibid.*, 238-283.

theoretical understanding of translation and its practical application.<sup>568</sup> Translation, once putatively a mere linguistic and textual paradigm, became a “*Leitperspektive*” (dominant or guiding perspective) for understanding actions in a complex, intercultural space characterized by a myriad of personal, material, and intellectual acts of transfer.<sup>569</sup> Translation became cultural action. Eventually, it became a turn by making the conceptual leap from the field of linguistics to becoming a methodologically reflected analytical category and a transdisciplinary tool of gaining knowledge.<sup>570</sup>

Volkening’s œuvre was decisively influenced by his experience of exile and was, at its essence, an act of complex translation. Through writing about his culture of origin, Volkening reasserted his cultural identity in his host country. Paradoxically, his writing had also a destabilizing effect: it opened interstitial spaces in which the nature of the translated “goods,” as he called it, was called into question. Culture reveals itself in the performative act of being translated as manipulative and unmonolithic, bespeaking thereby not only its translator’s but also its own hybridity. Special consideration is given to the particular ways in which Volkening introduced German culture to a Colombian audience, to the exilic sensibility for the interrelatedness of the foreign and the familiar,

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<sup>568</sup> See Mona Baker, *Translation and Conflict. A Narrative Account* (London: Routledge, 2006); Susan Bassnett, “The Translation Turn in Cultural Studies,” in *Constructing Cultures. Essays on Literary Translation*, ed. Susan Bassnett and André Lefevere (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 1998), 123-140; Jürgen Habermas, “Religion in the Public Sphere,” *European Journal of Philosophy* 14:1 (2006): 1-25; Nikos Papastergiadis, *The Turbulence of Migration. Globalization, Deterritorialization and Hybridity* (Cambridge: Polity, 2000); Joachim Renn, *Übersetzungsverhältnisse. Perspektiven einer pragmatistischen Gesellschaftstheorie* (Weilerswist: Velbrück, 2006); and Mary Snell-Hornby, *The Turns of Translation Studies* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2006).

<sup>569</sup> Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns*, 239.

<sup>570</sup> Bachmann-Medick suggests the following three steps as key indicators for a trend to become a “turn” in the humanities: (1) Expansion of the object or thematic field, (2) metaphorization, and (3) methodological refinement, provoking a conceptual leap and transdisciplinary application. Bachmann-Medick, “Introduction: The Translational Turn,” trans. Kate Sturge, *Translation Studies* 2:1 (2009): 2-16, here: 4.



and to the necessity of translation as cultural practice for social survival. Such experience, I argue, informed Volkening's professional work. Its investigation — I hope — enriches our understanding of the nature of cultural transfer in exile. I begin the chapter by considering translation as living in translation, as a hybrid (and hybridizing) third space, and as the fiction of unity as purported precondition for translations.

Volkening's life generated a continuous need for various acts of linguistic and cultural translation. A "translated man," he moved from the practice of self-translation to translating his ideational home into his exile by writing about German literature and culture for a Colombian audience. This leads us to questions about hybridity and hybridization resulting from translational acts. Examining traces hybridization in Volkening's writing, they appear to correspond to his own increasing hybrid subjectivity. As a cultural *Grenzgänger* (somebody who walks along and across borders), Volkening saw his existence evolving in a hybrid and hybridizing space: an ideational realm that he himself compared to a "sixth continent." Volkening describes it in his diaries as "the intermediary realm, conceived in its literal meaning as a space [...] between the Old World from where I came and the so-called New World where I went."<sup>571</sup> According to Bhabha, hybridity, the fuzzy zone in-between cultures — that we discover in Volkening's work for instance when he introduces Kafka to a Colombian audience by emphasizing the resistance Kafka's work would pose to "*verstehen*" — *to understand* (for which

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<sup>571</sup> "El reino intermedio, concebido en su sentido literal como un espacio [...] entre el Viejo Mundo de donde vine y el llamado Nuevo Mundo a donde fui." Ernesto Volkening, "De mis cuadernos II," *Eco* 36:221 (Mar. 1980): 449-468, here: 465.

All translations are mine except when indicated otherwise.

Volkening consciously employs the German concept despite writing in Spanish)<sup>572</sup> — is a Third Space of enunciation. It shapes cultures and allows other positions to emerge. The transformative nature of a Third Space, which affects all cultures in the moment of confrontation with another (the foreign within or outside themselves), suggests a non-essentialist concept of culture. Identity and meaning, not any longer to be established beyond doubt, become contingent variables. A cultural unity and stability, however, seems an integral part of all translations. Therefore, their continuity, though *fictitious*, becomes an indispensable prerequisite for translation.

Following the discussion of translation, I focus on the representation of German literature in Colombia. Volkening's seminal role as a mediator of German literature, culture, and thought in his host country is being analyzed in regard to his work as a literary critic and as an editor of the magazine *Eco*. In terms of the topics he chose to write about and in terms of the methods he used for his interpretations of Goethe, Kafka, and others, it becomes visible that Volkening considered culture as a vision of the world. Moreover, he considered his own *métier* of literary criticism an ethical endeavor to explore conditions of human existence. A noticeable absence of engagement with socio-political issues in his writing, despite his acute awareness of the relevance of literature as a body of knowledge about our lives and times, might thus come as a surprise. Following Theodor W. Adorno, we may ask whether the apoliticalness of his work and a tendency toward the ahistorical realms of aestheticism and mythology might be seen as a reaction to modernity and to the history of the twentieth century, and as a tool of exploring and coping with it.

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<sup>572</sup> Volkening, “‘La metamorfosis’ de Kafka, prelude de una tragedia spiritual,” *Revista de las Indias* 32:102 (Mar.-May, 1948): 465-475, here: 466.

Chapter VI, “*Traducire c’est trahir*: Ernesto Volkening as Editor of *Eco*,” should be read as a continuation and complementation of the questions I pursue in this chapter. Therefore, I would like to briefly foreshadow the trajectory: there, I will scrutinize Volkening’s approach to translation through a close reading of his essay “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor” (Three versions of a poem or the headaches of the translator) where he develops his guiding principles about the creation of literal translations. Most decisively, we will notice, Volkening always strives to preserve the foreignness of the translated object in the context of the receiving language and culture. After considering the problem of translating texts, I will turn to cultural translations and inquire how Volkening represented larger elements of his home culture — like an idea or an author — to a Colombian audience. My focus will be Volkening’s essay “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin” (Two profiles of Hölderlin), in which he addresses the power of cultural representations as manifest in the history of the reception of Friedrich Hölderlin’s works and in the way in which he has been perceived as a poet and person. By bringing the manipulative nature of representations to the fore of the readers mind, the essay consciously creates yet another representation of Hölderlin. However, in recognition of his own manipulating role as mediator and translator, Volkening encourages his reader to explore questions raised in his essays for themselves and to form independent opinions. This attitude toward promoting critical engagement informs all of Volkening’s writing. It might be best seen in his work as editor of *Eco*. While he designed the magazine as a whole, Volkening was able to implement the principles that guided him throughout his professional life and that determined the nature of his translations on a larger scale. Thus, a focus on one of *Eco*’s issues that Volkening designed on occasion of Hölderlin’s 200<sup>th</sup>

anniversary of his birthday is to conclude that chapter as well as my larger discussion of Volkening as a translator.

## 2. Three Notes on Translation(s)

Translation is transformative. Each translation aims at representing something or somebody, detached from the original context, in a new conceptual, cultural, linguistic, or geographic system.<sup>573</sup> To preserve most facets of the *original's* meaning, a mere literal transfer seems insufficient.<sup>574</sup> Successful translations, as Walter Benjamin notes in 1923 in “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” (“The Task of the Translator”), recreate meaning, not form.<sup>575</sup> Citing the German writer Rudolf Pannwitz, Benjamin criticizes that too often translations are based on the assumption of hoping to appropriate and internalize, to Germanize (“verdeutschen”), the other through the translating act.<sup>576</sup> Yet, Benjamin argues, a translation should strive to reproduce the echo of the original in the receiving language instead of trying to assimilate the original and to thereby strip it of its foreignness. He postulates, “a translation, instead of resembling the meaning of the original, must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original’s mode of signification.”<sup>577</sup>

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<sup>573</sup> I include here migration processes as forms of geographic translations, which reflects a trend within Translation Studies instigated prominently by the mentioned work of Nikos Papastergiadis (*The Turbulence of Migration*, 2000) and by Salman Rushdie in his essay “Imaginary Homelands,” in his *Imaginary Homelands: Essays and Criticism 1981-1991* (London: Granta, 1991), 9-21, as well as through the fictional thematization of translation in his novel *The Ground Beneath Her Feet* (New York: Henry Holt, 1999).

<sup>574</sup> The intricacy of the concept of an “original” cultural unit, which might evoke associations of essentiality, purity, and characteristics definable beyond ambiguity, will be addressed below.

<sup>575</sup> Walter Benjamin’s essay “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” was first published as a prolog to *Charles Baudelaire: Tableaux Parisiens: deutsche Übertragung* (Heidelberg: Richard Weissbach, 1923).

<sup>576</sup> Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” introduction to *Tableaux Parisien*, by Charles Baudelaire (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), 5-24, here: 22.

<sup>577</sup> Benjamin, “The Task of the Translator,” in his *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Fontana, 1992): 70-82, here 79. In German: “[S]o muß, anstatt dem Sinn des Originals sich ähnlich zu machen, die

The receiving language would need to be expanded and deepened through the introduction and representation of the other: As Benjamin puts it, instead of Germanizing Indian (*sic*), Greek, or English, the German language should be Indianized, Graecized, or Anglicized. To this end, translations should become less literal and more cognizant of the associations the representation of the translated object evokes in different contexts. A translation that seeks to recreate the original faithfully thus transforms the translated object, and simultaneously violently moves and changes (“gewaltig bewegt”) the receiving language or culture.<sup>578</sup> This holds true for the translation of languages, cultures, and people.

## 2.1. Living in Translation

Volkening lived in the words of Salman Rushdie as a “translated man.”<sup>579</sup> In 1934, the year of his arrival in Bogotá, he was translated, or “carried-over,” from his cultural, linguistic, and geographic home to a new, an unfamiliar world. From then on, further acts of translation ensued. Translating and being translated became pivotal for mastering the tasks of everyday life as well as for interacting successfully with his new surroundings. An “existential process,” it became the underlying principle of Volkening’s life in exile.<sup>580</sup> Speaking with Rushdie, the migrant’s translation “across the world” does not only imply that “something always gets lost,” but that “something can also be

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Übersetzung liebend vielmehr und bis ins einzelne hinein dessen Art des Meinens in der eigenen Sprache sich an bilden.” Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” 19.

<sup>578</sup> Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” 22.

<sup>579</sup> Rushdie coined this term in his essay “Imaginary Homelands.” *Ibid.*, 17.

<sup>580</sup> Martin Fuchs, “Übersetzen und Übersetzt-Werden. Plädoyer für eine interaktionsanalytische Reflexion,” in *Übersetzung als Repräsentation fremder Kulturen*, ed. Doris Bachmann-Medick (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1997), 308-328, here: 315.

gained.”<sup>581</sup> Bachmann-Medick too points at the creative potential of all migration movements: People who are translated from one into another culture develop in response to this experience various forms of self-translation (“Handlungsformen des Sich-selbst-Übersetzens”). This could be said for Volkening’s work as a cultural mediator.<sup>582</sup>

A first decisive step toward self-translation and incipient acculturation was Volkening’s decision to switch to Spanish as his first language of communication: whether it was for daily conversations that he carried on with a heavy *bogotano* accent,<sup>583</sup> for his publications, or even his diaries. Having studied Spanish during his university years in Germany, he further improved his language skills after immigrating to Colombia. Within a few years, he reached a level of proficiency that allowed him to work as a writer and translator. But not only was his professional life characterized by translation. Living in exile requires a continuous adjustment of his language and his figures of thought to a foreign reference system. It seems that this experience instigated in Volkening introspection and a self-reflexive reiteration of his cultural identity. In 1934, the year of his cultural, linguistic, and geographic deracination — of his “translation” from Germany to Colombia, Volkening drafted his first sketches about the literature, culture, and intellectual life of his home country. Writing about the voices of his *Heimat* (home), about Goethe, Kafka, Karoline von Günderrode, Robert Musil, and Peter Härtling, Volkening might have hoped to re-stabilize his self-image that had become inadvertently

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<sup>581</sup> “Having been borne across the world, we [migrants] are translated men. It is normally supposed that something always gets lost in translation; I cling, obstinately, to the notion that something can also be gained.” Rushdie, “Imaginary Homelands,” 17.

<sup>582</sup> Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns*, 270.

<sup>583</sup> Gonzalo Aguasaco, interviewed on December 4, 2009 at the German cemetery in Bogotá, where Mr. Aguasaco has been an administrator since 1967.

fluid and ambivalent through the disconcerting experience of exile; an experience that, as Erich Kleinschmidt and others have argued, amounts frequently to an “existential caesura.”<sup>584</sup> Or, as Volkening puts it, an experience of displacement that deeply affected all aspects of his life and personality and led to his own hybridization: “my particular “psycho-geography,” [...] in which to equal parts both hemispheres participate.”<sup>585</sup>

Soon, Volkening’s private pursuit turned into a public attempt to represent and reconstruct his cultural home in exile. In 1938, he apparently made his debut as a literary critic with an article on the dramatist Georg Büchner that he published in Bogotá’s *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien* (German Magazine for Colombia).<sup>586</sup> Volkening might have continued publishing in this magazine which published contributions in German and in Spanish; however, these essays have not been catalogued and the *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien* is not available in Colombia’s National Library, nor is it being held to the best of my knowledge in any other location. I have knowledge of Volkening’s article on Büchner because the J. León Helguera Collection at Vanderbilt University contains the single issue of the magazine, in which the article has been published. This is also the only place in the United States sawhere any issue of this magazine is accessible. In respect to this article as well as to possible additional publications in *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien*, Volkening’s readers were among the

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<sup>584</sup> Erich Kleinschmidt, “‘Sprache, die meine Wohnung war.’ Exil und Sprachidee bei Peter Weiss,” in *Exilforschung. Ein internationales Jahrbuch 3. Gedanken an Deutschland im Exil und andere Themen*, ed. Thomas Koebner, Wulf Köpke and Joachim Radkau (Munich: Edition text + kritik, 1985), 215-224, here: 222.

<sup>585</sup> “[M]i “sico-geografía” particular, [...] en la que por partes iguales participan ambos hemisferios.” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 467-468.

<sup>586</sup> Volkening, “Georg Büchner (Schluss),” *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien* (Bogotá: Editorial Centro) 8 (Apr., 1938): 148-1149. The addition of the word “*Schluss*” (ending) in the title indicates that the preceding number(s) must have contained the beginning of Volkening’s essay of Büchner.

German-speaking immigrants in Colombia, while he would later write for a much larger audience.

Almost a decade passed before Volkening felt confident to publish in Spanish, which marked an explicit moment in his progressing acculturation. From 1947 on, Volkening addressed specifically a Colombian and Latin American readership. His first Spanish language publication, “Retrato de Hermann Hesse” (Portrait of Hermann Hesse), appeared in the magazine *Vida: Revista de arte y literatura* (Life: Magazine of art and literature) upon invitation of the poet Álvaro Mutis. The fact that Mutis had become a friend and taken interest in his writings attests to the significant inroads Volkening made into the intellectual community of the place where he would end up staying for good. Translation and acculturation processes were apparent in several areas of his life, affecting his linguistic, social, professional and artistic, and not least cultural identity. Let us briefly recall the main stages of his professional life as a cultural mediator, commentator, and translator.

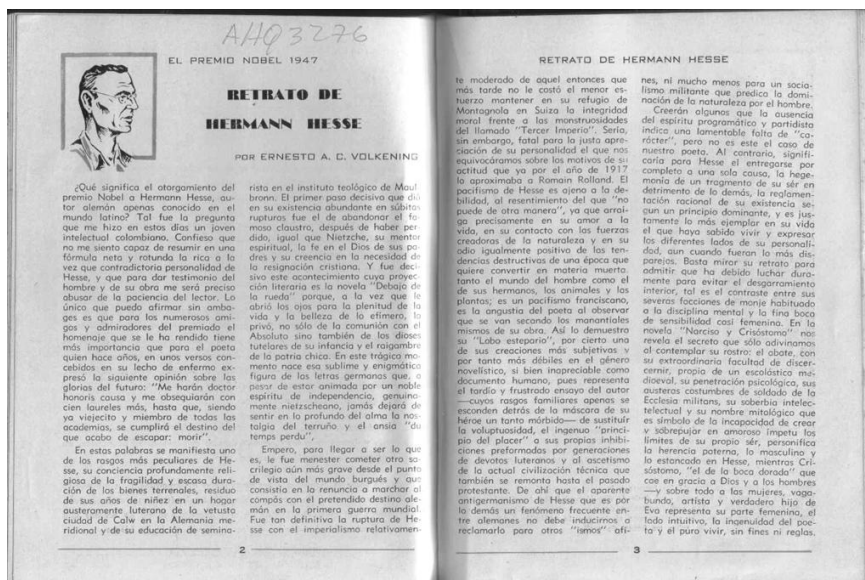


Fig. 17: Ernesto Volkening’s first publication in Spanish: “Retrato de Hermann Hesse” (*Vida*, 1947)



Volkening's career as a literary critic and essayist began to prosper in the late 1940s through his collaborations with *Vida*.<sup>587</sup> Within six years, from 1947 to 1953, he published there twenty-four essays on literature, arts, and psychoanalysis. *Vida*, as well as other magazines in which Volkening published, did not aspire to the rigid standards of academic, peer-reviewed journals. As Santiago Mutis Durán notes, Volkening kept always a productive distance from the so-called "intellectual life," the academic curriculum, the world of conferences and literary congresses — and of academic publishing.<sup>588</sup> Magazines like *Vida* are part of the longstanding tradition of Latin American intellectuals to publish their work in non-academic outlets like feuilletons of national newspapers as well as in popular literary and cultural magazines. Not surprisingly, we see Volkening's essays in these magazines next to essays written by internationally renowned critics like Marta Traba and Ángel Rama.

At the time, Volkening also wrote occasionally for the *Revista de las Indias* (Magazine of the Indies), a *bildungs*-magazine founded in 1936 by the Colombian Ministry of Education in collaboration with the Escuela Normal Superior in Bogotá and the Casa de España in Mexico City. Intellectuals and pedagogues, often refugees from Spain who had fled the civil war and Franco's subsequent dictatorship and European exiles who had escaped from Nazi persecution in their home countries, contributed to the magazine. Six of Volkening's essays on philosophical and literary topics such as on the

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<sup>587</sup> The magazine *Vida: Revista de arte y cultura* was published by the insurance company Compañía Colombiana de Seguros in Bogotá. Besides company announcements and some advertisements, it contained articles on a variety of cultural topics. *Vida* was first published in January of 1936, and reached 53 numbers until May of 1944 when it was temporarily discontinued. In August of 1946, a second edition of the magazine was initiated, starting its numeration again at number 1. This second edition ended in November-December of 1954 with number 64. Thereafter, the magazine was discontinued permanently.

<sup>588</sup> Mutis Durán, "Cien y una noches de soledad," preface to *Gabriel García Márquez, "Un triunfo sobre el olvido,"* by Ernesto Volkening, ed. Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998), 11-20, here: 15.

works of Goethe, and Kafka, and C. G. Jung appeared in the *Revista de las Indias* before the magazine was discontinued in 1951.<sup>589</sup>

In the following decade, from 1954 to 1965, Volkening explored yet another area of professional engagement: he hosted a weekly radio show about cinema and film at the radio station Radiodifusora Nacional de Colombia, which gained him countrywide prominence. His show was aired first under the title “Critica del cine” (Criticism of cinema) and from 1957 as “El cine y sus problemas” (Cinema and its problems). Although the popularity of his show, which was the first of its kind on Colombian radio, is difficult to gauge in hindsight, we may assume that Volkening’s broadcast resonated with the public’s vivid interest in film spurred by the inauguration of television in the country in June of 1954. Volkening’s weekly, 15-minute show aired on Monday evenings was repeated later the week in the morning program, indicating its appeal to a relatively broad audience. During that time, he wrote several film-related articles for the *Boletín de Programmas*, a TV and radio program guide that reserved considerable space for a variety of educational and cultural contributions. Among the topics he dealt with are the origins of cinema, early German sound film and sound film in the United States, and interestingly because unrelated to film, he wrote also about Ernst Jünger.<sup>590</sup> The following illustration shows the first two pages of one of his essay, carrying the same title as his show, “El cine y sus problemas”:

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<sup>589</sup> The magazine *Revista de las Indias* was published by the Colombian Ministry of Education from July of 1936 until March of 1951. Initially, it appeared irregularly, but from December of 1938 on in monthly intervals. Volkening published his essays between 1947 and 1950. The respective bibliographical references can be found in Appendix A. For further information about the *Revista de las Indias* see Manuel Restrepo, “Revista de las Indias, un proyecto de ampliación de fronteras,” *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* (Bogotá) 27:23 (1990): 25-41.

<sup>590</sup> Volkening, “Perfiles de Ernst Jünger,” *Boletín de Programmas* 18:182 (Sept., 1959): 66-72. See Appendix A for an overview of Volkening’s publications.

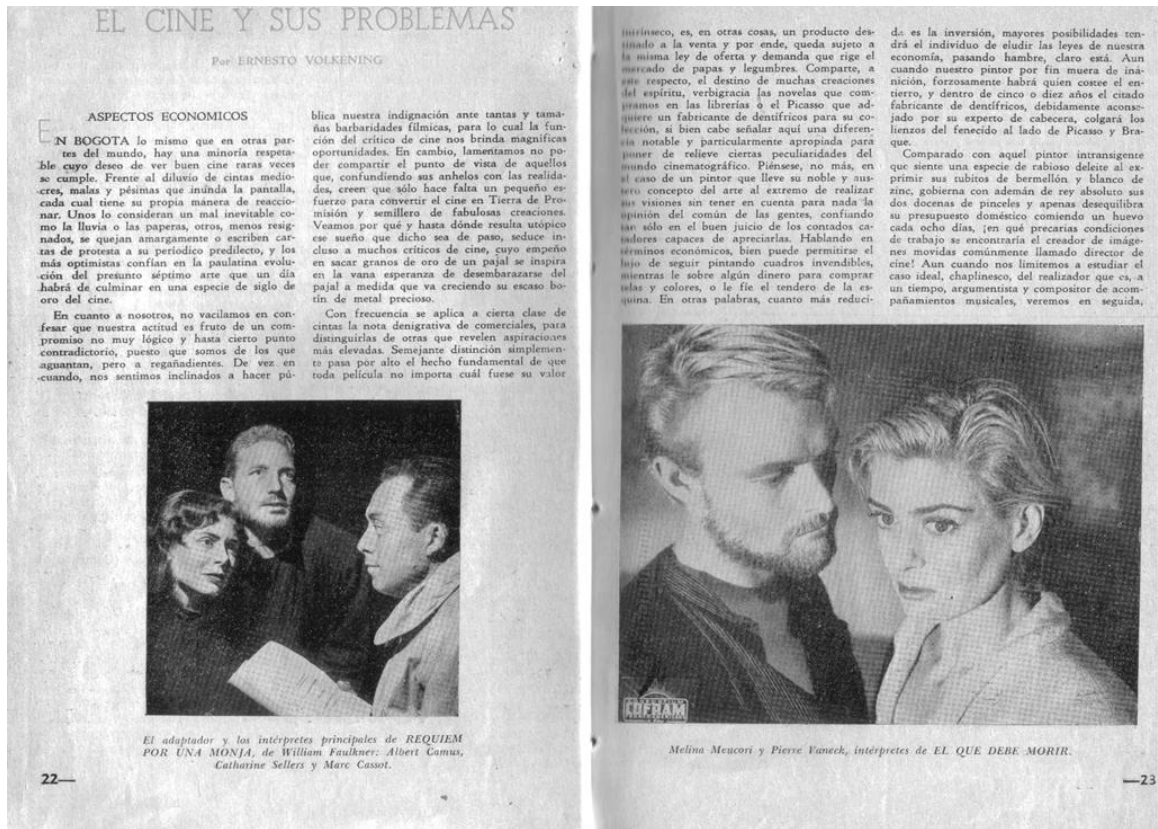


Fig. 18: Ernesto Volkening, 'El cine y sus problemas' (*Boletín de Programas*, 1958)

In 1961, Volkening began a close collaboration with the magazine *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Echo: Magazine of occidental culture), published by Karl Buchholz. Supported by the West-German government, *Eco* was available in most Latin American countries, and it was primarily through this widely distributed magazine that Volkening advanced the diffusion of German literature in Colombia and beyond its borders. From 1962 on, he published sixty-one translations of German prose and poetry as well as 101 essays, three of which appeared after his death in July of 1983. His *Eco*-essays deal not exclusively with topics pertinent to German culture but include critiques of Latin-American literature as well. Most remarkably, Volkening published commentaries on Gabriel García Márquez's work that became groundbreaking for the

early reception of the author, and have also proven of lasting interest as the posthumous publication of Volkening's collected essays on García Márquez's work, entitled *Gabriel García Márquez: "Un triunfo sobre el olvido"* (Gabriel García Márquez: "A triumph over oblivion"), in 1998 demonstrates.<sup>591</sup>

From March 1971 to December 1972 Volkening was appointed the position of editor of *Eco*, which gave him extra latitude to shape the magazine as a whole. Through changes that he effected then, he set a propitious course for his continued work as a mediator of German literature and culture. As an editor, he chose the articles of each *Eco*-issue so that the individual contributions speak to each other and create a harmonious unity, and he began to add to each issue an elaborate editorial "in which he defined the course to follow with an agate's precision."<sup>592</sup> His editorials and the thematic interrelation of articles strengthened the magazine regarding the variety of viewpoints offered to its readers. Through Volkening's innovation, it became possible for readers to familiarize themselves with different and at times colliding positions regarding one overarching topic. Thus, Volkening created a space that allowed his readers to develop an informed and critical understanding of a subject. Another of his innovations equally promoted readers' independence from the respective interpretations of foreign literature by the magazine's contributors. For the first time, he juxtaposed essays on writers and intellectuals like Franz Hellens and Peter Härtling with a translation of an excerpt of their

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<sup>591</sup> The collection was first published in 1998: Volkening, *Gabriel García Márquez: "Un triunfo sobre el olvido,"* ed. Santiago Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998); in 2010, a second edition was issued, printed by Fondo de Cultura Económica in Bogotá.

<sup>592</sup> Darío Achury Valenzuela, "Prologo," preface to *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976), 11-31, here: 13.

works.<sup>593</sup> He would also complement translated excerpts of their works with reflections on a related note as in the case of Georg Reinbeck by whom Volkening published the translation “Sobre el arte de escribir cuentos” (On the art of writing stories) together with his own essay, “Sobre la interpretación de creaciones literarias” (On the interpretation of literary creations).<sup>594</sup> In some cases, however, Volkening publishes translations without commentary as Hugo von Hoffmannsthal’s “Brief des Lord Chandos” (“The Letter of Lord Chandos”), entitled, “Una carta” (a letter).<sup>595</sup> Over the next decade, Volkening continued this approach for many of the *Eco* issues. Thereby, he allowed *Eco*’s readers to gain firsthand knowledge of authors whose writing they might not yet have encountered before. In some cases, Volkening’s translations constituted the only Spanish language translation of an author’s work at the time or of that specific excerpt of her *œuvre*.

A person in exile, even when, like Volkening, reasonably well adjusted, acculturated, and engaged in intercultural exchange and mediation, continually perceives the clashes of foreign and his own figures of thoughts and culturally conditioned patterns of action. Admittedly, though, the attribution of “foreign” and “own” might become ambivalent over time and depend much on the context of each particular inter-cultural encounter of the *translated person*. Perceiving the inter-cultural differences and one’s own acculturation can be seen as equally threatening and enriching for the lives and

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<sup>593</sup> For example: Peter Härtling, “Burlesca — Air,” trans. Ernesto Volkening, *Eco* 24:140 (Dec., 1971): 50-53; and Volkening, “Huyendo del tiempo irrecuperable: apuntes sobre la novelística de Peter Hartling [sic],” *Eco* 24:140 (Dec., 1971): 54-89. Hellens, Franz. “A la sombra de la catedral,” trans. Ernesto Volkening. *Eco* 24:143-144 (Mar.-Apr., 1972): 409-419; and Volkening, “En torno de una novela de Franz Hellens,” *Eco* 24:143-144 (Mar.-Apr., 1972): 422-457.

<sup>594</sup> Georg von Reinbeck, “Sobre el arte de escribir cuentos,” trans. Ernesto Volkening. *Eco* 23:138-139 (Oct.-Nov., 1971): 575-579; and Volkening, “Sobre la interpretación de creaciones literarias,” *Eco* 23:138-139 (Oct.-Nov., 1971): 561-573.

<sup>595</sup> Hugo von Hofmannsthal, “Una carta,” trans. Ernesto Volkening. *Eco* 25:149 (Sept., 1972): 510-524.

identities of “translated men.” As a cultural mediator, Volkening benefitted from the double, or as Edward Said called it, “contrapuntal” perspective of exile that allowed him to look at his home culture, and at the culture of his host country, simultaneously as an insider and an outsider. Since such situation is inherently inimical to stability and the perception of definite meaning in regard to oneself and one’s surrounding, it carries rather some potential for a doubling or quasi-schizophrenic split of one’s personality.<sup>596</sup> The “contrapuntal” perspective of exile in itself could be conceived of as a hybrid interstitial space or a Third Space, constituting a key element in the process of cultural translation.

## 2.2. Hybridity and Third Spaces

Third Spaces are discursive spaces in which cultural differences are translated and negotiated. They exude instability and ambivalence. Yet, cultural translation has emerged from a context that presumed the existence of distinguishable, relatively stable and unified, and geographically locatable national cultures.<sup>597</sup> Like others, Michel Espagne and Michael Werner insist in their study of French-German cultural transfer on the respective unity of the culture of origin and the receiving culture as the very prerequisite of inter-cultural translation.<sup>598</sup> Homi K. Bhabha, on the other hand,

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<sup>596</sup> Elisabeth Bronfen, “Vorwort,” preface to *Die Verortung der Kultur*, by Homi K. Bhabha, trans. Michael Schiffmann and Jürgen Freudl (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2000), ix-xv, here: xiii.

<sup>597</sup> See, for instance, Michaela Wolf’s discussion of the concept of culture (“Kulturbegriff”) in her essay “‘Cultures’ do not hold still for their portraits” *Kultureller Transfer als ‘Übersetzen zwischen Kulturen,’* in *Ver-rückte Kulturen: Zur Dynamik kultureller Transfers*, ed. Federico Celestini and Helga Mitterbauer (Tübingen: Stauffenburg, 2000), 85-98, here: 90-91.

<sup>598</sup> Michel Espagne and Michael Werner, “Deutsch-französischer Kulturtransfer als Forschungsgegenstand. Eine Problemskizze,” in their *Transfers. Les relations interculturelles dans l’espace franco-allemand (XVIIe et XIXe siècle)* (Paris: Edition Recherches sur les Civilisations, 1988), 11-34, here: 13.

considers “hybrid cultures” a tautology. Cultures, according to Bhabha, cannot be defined based on their putative essence, but only through performative moments of difference: through Third Spaces. If we, like Bhabha, understand cultures as intrinsically hybrid, we can move beyond concepts of national cultures, and replace the idea of pure, authentic cultures (or “*Kulturessentialismus*” as it is referred to in German)<sup>599</sup> with an understanding of culture that is based on the assumption of cultures being in a continuous process of becoming through their incessant questioning and negotiating of their meaning in Third Spaces. Individual acts of negotiation are thereby triggered by inter- and intra-cultural contacts that query the meaning of cultural elements.<sup>600</sup> Third Spaces arise in this moment — or put differently, these discursive acts indeed *are* the Third Spaces. In these geographically not-locatable Third Spaces, the meanings of cultures are discussed and defined. In exile, inter-cultural encounters dictate the rhythm of life. As a cultural mediator, Volkening created Third Spaces and promoted cultural hybridity.

In 1975 and 1976, Volkening published his collected essays, *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos* (Essays I: Creole sparkles) and *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo* (Essays II: European dusk).<sup>601</sup> Whereas *Destellos criollos* is a collection of essays about Latin America and its writers with a special emphasis on Colombian literature, *Atardecer europeo* focuses on German and European writers and intellectuals. The imagery of light

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<sup>599</sup> Wolf, “‘Cultures’ do not hold still for their portraits” *Kultureller Transfer als ‘Übersetzen zwischen Kulturen,’*” 91.

<sup>600</sup> Intra-cultural contacts that require a continuous reevaluation of cultural elements include, among others, contacts between different social classes and clashes of so-called low versus high culture.

<sup>601</sup> Volkening, *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1975) and his *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo* (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976).

in both titles echoes Spengler's cultural pessimism in regard to Europe whose cultural achievements seemed to be of the past; the select authors belong mostly to the nineteenth and early twentieth century: Heine, Karoline von Günderrode, Oskar Goldberg, Georg Büchner, Hoffmannsthal, Proust, also Kafka, Gottfried Benn, and Ernst Jünger. In apparent contrast to the receding light of Europe's contemporary literature, we find the "Creole sparkles" Volkening discovered in Latin American literature. In that essay volume, he comments on the work of a generation of young, rising authors, between their thirties and fifties, like García Márquez, Oscar Collazos, Jairo Mercado Romero, Manuel Mejía Vallejo, and Elisa Mújica who lastingly changed the Colombian literary landscape. As the Uruguayan scholar Jorge Rufinelli points out, the original title of these volumes, "Los dos rostros de Jano" (The two faces of Janus), would have been an apt metaphor for Volkening's intimate bond with both cultures.<sup>602</sup> While retaining a strong affinity to his European roots, Volkening unequivocally embraced the place where he chose to live. Tellingly, not only the choice of topics he wrote about, but also his distinct diction indicates the cultural hybridity he acquired in exile. Leaving his Benjaminian mark as a translator of words and ideas, Volkening infused the Spanish language with Germanisms in vocabulary and syntax.<sup>603</sup> As the critic Achury Valenzuela remarks, Volkening's admirable command of Spanish still revealed "a way of thinking, ideation, and imagination [that preceded] its expression; one that mentally, and in the first instance is

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<sup>602</sup> Jorge Rufinelli, "Ensayos I y II de Ernesto Volkening," *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Bogotá) 33: 204 (Oct. 1978): 1217-1221, here: 1221.

<sup>603</sup> Achury Valenzuela, 14-15; Rufinelli, 1218.



German.”<sup>604</sup> Following a German proverb, Volkening would for instance write that he spoke with Gabriel García Márquez “de Dios y el mundo” (about God and the world) to indicate that their conversations covered a broad range of topics.<sup>605</sup> However seldom, Volkening would even smuggle entire German phrases into his Spanish prose. He did so for instance when he referred to Goethe’s *Faust* and its protagonist’s famous exclamation “Ah, linger on, thou art so fair” with the German words “Verweile doch, du bist so schön” without providing a translation.<sup>606</sup> These are two of the more obvious examples besides numerous other instances in which Volkening recurses to his native tongue by introducing German phrases, select words, or concepts into his writing. Code switching and a blending of German and Spanish manifests itself in Volkening’s writing through direct transfer of words, through translation of foreign idioms into the receiving language, and most often, as Achury Valenzuela notes, through the more subtle translation of patterns of thought. For example, when Volkening opens his Antwerp essay about the fictional character Lodovico’s return to his city of birth with a reflection of the term “*Vaterstadt*” (father city), which is being used by speakers of German to refer to their home town.<sup>607</sup> The resulting hybridization of the Spanish language, but also of the German language that was transformed in order to become representable in a new context, is not a synthesis of Hispanic influences and Volkening’s presumed German-ness. His particular hybrid style is a manifestation of something original and new. It can

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<sup>604</sup> “[Cuando le leemos en castellano, admirable por su claridad, tersura y fluidez, suponemos que a su expresión] antecede un pensar, un idear, un imaginar, que mentalmente, y en primera instancia, se expresan en alemán.” Achury Valenzuela, 14.

<sup>605</sup> Volkening, “De mis cuadernos I,” *Eco* 36:220 (1980): 337-351, here: 340.

<sup>606</sup> Volkening, “A propósito de Gottfried Benn,” in his *Ensayos II*, 165-170, here: 168.

<sup>607</sup> Volkening, “Amberes, reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro I,” *Eco* 19:110 (1969): 113-157, here: 113-114.

be understood, as Papastergiadis suggests as “the energy that comes from conjunction and juxtaposition” — and not from adding two elements, or of their conflict.<sup>608</sup>

Hybridity, according to Bhabha, is a Third Space that allows other positions to emerge.<sup>609</sup> Elements from both languages and cultures may still be discernible, but their new configurations and the dynamics created through their juxtaposition shape their meaning. Volkening’s diction, resulting from his inter-cultural experience cannot be subsumed under the labels “German” and “European” or “Spanish” and “Colombian” or “Latin American.” Rather its hybrid presence underlines that such labels do not stand for authenticity, and the alleged purity or essence of a language and culture in the first place.<sup>610</sup> Volkening’s diction articulates difference and creativity. It evinces the process of hybridity, to which all cultures are subjected by being exposed to each other.<sup>611</sup> The unfolding hybridity in the style of Volkening’s writing gives rise to what Bhabha calls a “new area of negotiation of meaning and representation.”<sup>612</sup> Volkening’s way of

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<sup>608</sup> Papastergiadis, *The turbulence of Migration*, 143.

<sup>609</sup> Homi K. Bhabha in Jonathan Rutherford, “Interview with Homi Bhabha. *The Third Space*,” in *Identity, Community, Culture, Difference*, ed. J. Rutherford (London: Lawrence & Wishard, 1990), 207-221, here: 211.

<sup>610</sup> What we see here with regard to language holds also true for cultures: As Bhabha points out, the very possibility of translating culture reveals its originary, holistic, organic identity as an illusion and shows that culture is subject to continuous changes. He writes, “translation is also a way of imitating, but in a mischievous, displacing sense — imitating an original in such a fact that the priority of the original is not reinforced but by the very fact that it *can* be simulated, copied, transferred, transformed, made into a simulacrum and so on: the ‘original’ is never finished or complete in itself. The ‘originary’ is always open to translation so that it can never be said to have a totalised [*sic*] prior moment of being or meaning — an essence.” Bhabha in Rutherford, “Interview with Homi Bhabha. *The Third Space*,” 210.

<sup>611</sup> See Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994), and Edward W. Said, *Culture and Imperialism* (New York: Knopf, 1993), xxv: “All cultures are involved in one another; none is single and pure, all are hybrid, heterogeneous, extraordinarily differentiated, and unmonolithic.”

<sup>612</sup> Bhabha in Rutherford, “Interview with Homi Bhabha. *The Third Space*,” 211. Bhabha further extrapolates that the act of cultural translation, which is what Volkening does in his writing, displays the lacking essentialism of a culture, and the very possibility of cultural translation would demonstrate “that all forms of culture are continually in a process of hybridity.” *Ibid.*

expressing himself in Spanish brought certainly something new to the language, while the need to formulate his thoughts in a foreign language likely affected the very development of his thinking, which marks in both cases an enriching but also a destabilizing process. Bhabha refers to these kinds of “borderline affects and identifications” as “peculiar types of culture-sympathy and culture-clash.” Volkening’s hybridization of the Spanish and German language would represent for Bhabha “the contaminated yet connective tissue between cultures—at once the impossibility of culture’s containedness and the boundary between.” It is “indeed something like culture’s ‘in-between,’ bafflingly both alike and different.”<sup>613</sup> Such hybridity characterizes not only style and diction, but also the content of Volkening’s writing. There, we can see how the author’s specific representations of German culture are shaped by the border experience. Furthermore, the hybridity in Volkening’s work appears to be intrinsically related to his life as a “translated man.” In exile, he perceived his existence as unfolding in a liminal, one could say third space that he referred to as an “intermediary realm.” As Volkening writes in his diary on November 21, 1976:

The intermediary realm, understood in its literal sense as a space that came to grow with me, inside and outside myself [...] moved gradually between the Old World from where I came and the so-called New World where I went, and it belongs to both without being identical with either one of the two.<sup>614</sup>

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<sup>613</sup> Bhabha, “Culture’s in between.” *Artforum International* 32.1 (1993): 167-214. Available at *Academic OneFile*. [http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A14580143&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=tel\\_a\\_vanderbilt&version=1.0](http://find.galegroup.com.proxy.library.vanderbilt.edu/gtx/infomark.do?&contentSet=IAC-Documents&type=retrieve&tabID=T002&prodId=AONE&docId=A14580143&source=gale&srcprod=AONE&userGroupName=tel_a_vanderbilt&version=1.0) (accessed April 8, 2011).

Tellingly, Bhabha evokes in this essay the Freudian concept of the Uncanny (in German, “Das Unheimliche,” which denotes also “unhomely”) to describe these phenomena.

<sup>614</sup> “El reino intermedio, concebido en su sentido literal como un espacio que [...] venía creciendo conmigo, dentro y fuera de mí, paulatinamente se me intercalaba entre el Viejo Mundo de donde vine y el llamado Nuevo Mundo a donde fui, y pertenece a ambos sin ser idéntico con ninguno de los dos.” Ernesto Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” *Eco* 36:221 (1980): 449-468, here: 465.

Volkening conceded that he was never able to completely shed his foreignness in Colombia. Since he had left Europe, so he wrote in his diary, he had been living in a third space that had been opening up and growing with him as an “intermediary realm” in-between “the Old World from where [he] came and the so-called New World where [he] went.” His existence in an ideational borderland enabled Volkening to participate in the cultural and intellectual life of both sides. He was firmly convinced that his personal development and his professional career were determined by his geographical relocation from Europe to South America. Volkening captured his perceived existence in-between these two cultural worlds with the image of an island-like “sixth continent,” that was located in-between the two realms that sustained him personally and professionally. Interestingly, by comparing the sixth continent with an archipelago, Volkening acknowledged a certain fuzziness of its borders. This fuzziness suggests the sphere of hybridity in which the demarcation lines between one’s own and the other are being dissolved. Referring to his immigration to Colombia, he wrote:

In the terminology of my particular “psycho-geography,” this immaterial thing, [this] little thing with dreamlike threads and spider webs could call itself the “sixth continent,” if it would not have so much [characteristics] of an archipelago, up to the amphibian condition in which to equal parts both hemispheres participate.<sup>615</sup>

Volkening fruitfully employed the permeability of the boundary between his own and the other. The double perspective of exile, as Paul Michael Lützeler calls it, enabled

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<sup>615</sup> “En la terminología de mi “sico-geografía” particular, esa cosa inmaterial, cosida [*sic*] con hilos de ensueño y telarañas podría llamarse el “sexto continente,” si no tuviera tanto de archipiélago, hasta de condición anfílica [*sic*] en la que por partes iguales participan ambos hemisferios” Volkening, “De mis cuadernos II,” 467-468.

Volkening to engage with his own culture simultaneously as an insider and outsider.<sup>616</sup> For him, the *Grenzgänger*, who lives between cultures, and continuously crosses their respective boundaries, self-consciousness became cultural reflexivity: to define who he was, Volkening could not but to reflect, too, on his cultural roots. We may suspect that it was through writing about the literature of his homeland that Volkening attempted to hold on to his cultural identity: translating cultural “goods” allowed him to reconstruct a vision of his home.

The perspective, which informed Volkening’s essays about German literature and culture, tended to blur the own and the other as, for instance, Rufinelli notes: in his works (written in Spanish), “the German language and some particular syntactic features pulsate.”<sup>617</sup> In sum, acts of cultural translation challenge the very nature of the translated objects. As Michaela Wolf and Georg Pichler argue in their essay “Übersetzte Fremdheit und Exil—Grenzgänge eines hybriden Subjekts” (Translated foreignness and exile—border walks of a hybrid subject), the question of identity that results from the search for the self and the other and the corresponding discursive practices possess a highly manipulative character. Therefore, identity would reveal itself as a construct devoid of every claim to authenticity. It is fundamentally anti-essentialistic.<sup>618</sup> This anti-

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<sup>616</sup> “Doppelperspektive der Innen- und Außensicht.” Paul Michael Lützel, “Exilforschung: Interdisziplinäre und interkulturelle Aspekte,” in his *Klio oder Kalliope? Literature und Geschichte: Sondierung, Analyse, Interpretation* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1997), 77-81, here: 80.

<sup>617</sup> “[E]n los [‘los trabajos’] que late el idioma alemán y algunos rasgos de su peculiar sintaxis.” Rufinelli, 1218.

<sup>618</sup> Compare the German text: “Da sich die Frage nach Identität jeweils aus der Suche des Eigenen und des Anderen nach Repräsentation ergibt und die daraus resultierenden diskursiven Praktiken, gerade aufgrund der asymmetrischen Austauschverhältnisse, in die sie eingebunden sind, höchst manipulativen Charakter haben, stellt sich Identität als Konstrukt da, das jeden Anspruch auf Authentizität entbehrt und grundlegend anti-essenzialistisch ist.” Georg Pichler and Michaela Wolf, “Übersetzte Fremdheit und Exil,” in *Exilforschung. Ein internationales Jahrbuch 25. Übersetzung als transkultureller Prozess*, ed. Claus-Dieter

essentialistic understanding of individual identity and notably of culture informs the present reflections on translation. Identity and meaning are to be considered contingent upon the context in which acts of enunciation occur. They are historic, unmonolithic, and fluid. How to translate then cultures that are in permanent change and gain their meaning only in the process of negotiation? Bachmann-Medick points out that translation is more than a one-way transfer process. She sees it as a complex sociological and relational concept that “opens up translation to reciprocity and mutual transformation.”<sup>619</sup> Moreover, it is by being brought into contact with the other and by being translated that cultures (that are otherwise rather defined through absence)<sup>620</sup> become visible, tangible, and to some extent definable. Bhabha encapsulates the crux of conceptualizing culture that lacks any a priori meaning by defining it as “both transnational and translational.”<sup>621</sup> Although translation seems to ask for a boundary between the own and the other, this understanding of cultures is at odds with a binary translation model. Even the idea of hybridity does not presuppose pristine cultures that become hybrid, but is based on the assumption of always already hybrid cultures.

How can something be translated that does not have a clear shape?

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Krohn, Erwin Rotermund, Lutz Winckler and Wulf Köpke (Munich: Edition text + kritik, 2007), 7-29, here: 11.

<sup>619</sup> Bahmann-Medick, “Introduction: The Translational Turn,” 7.

<sup>620</sup> Sigmund Freud describes the remoteness of culture in his *Das Unbehagen in der Kultur* (1930). Peter Weibel argues in his essay “Kultur als Exil” that culture would be a medium of absence that requires active engagement with its symbolic potential (an engagement that, according to Weibel, can only be perceived as a form of exile). See Peter Weibel, “Kultur als Exil,” in *Benjamin und das Exil*, ed. Bernhard Witte, 124-129 (Würzburg: Königshausen und Neumann, 2006).

<sup>621</sup> Bhabha, *The Location of Culture*, 247.

### 2.3. The Fiction of Unity

The translational turn in the humanities strives to overcome the conceptualization of translation in binary terms.<sup>622</sup> The identity of cultures and the (cultural) identity of individuals living in intercultural settings like in exile however relies on the assumption of a distinguishable self and other. Geo-cultural belonging and the essence of culture has turned out to be ambivalent and elusive. Yet to engage in cultural translation, and to perceive of cultural identity in the first place, the fiction of stability and unity is essential. Stephen Greenblatt extrapolates from the phrase “a given culture” the following instructive reflections:

But what does the phrase “a given culture” mean? Who gives it? What is the origin of the boundaries that enable us to speak of “within” and “without”? Cultures are inherently unstable, mediatory modes of fashioning experience. Only as a result of the social imposition of an imaginary order of exclusion—through the operation of what [...] I will call “blockage—can culture be invoked as a stable entity within which there are characteristic representations that are ordered, exported, accommodated. Such blockage occurs constantly—an infinite, unrestricted, undifferentiated circulation would lead to the collapse of cultural identity altogether—but it is never absolute.<sup>623</sup>

The imaginary order of exclusion leading to an imaginary stable entity is prerequisite to conceptualizing culture and to distinguishing cultural elements that can be taken out of the context of the “original” culture and be represented elsewhere. This imaginary order is the *sine qua non* of cultural translation. Greenblatt further argues that the treatment of culture as a stable entity is necessary for “fashioning experience,” for acting, interacting, and decoding the meanings of actions in the public sphere. Seen from this angle, cultural entity is both inevitable and fictitious. Building on such dynamic

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<sup>622</sup> See Bachmann-Medick, *Cultural Turns: Neuorientierung in den Kulturwissenschaften*, 256.

<sup>623</sup> Stephen Jay Greenblatt, *Marvelous Possessions: The Wonder of the New World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 121. My italics.

understanding of culture, Helga Mitterbauer points to the productivity of internal differences and the multiple coding of personal and collective identity. She concludes from her observations that “culture, like nation, is ascribed to an ‘imaginary community’ and defined as a ‘fictional construct’ with real effects.”<sup>624</sup> These “real effects” will be investigated below: Volkening’s literary and cultural translations in Colombia.

For discussing Volkening’s work as a cultural mediator, we have to consider that hybrid cultures as well as hybrid subjects need symbolic fiction around the location of a nation or community that allows for the identification *of* a culture, and creates consequently the possibility of personal identification *with* it.<sup>625</sup> A mediator creates then a link between at least two “distinct” cultures and strives for a representation of a culture of origin in the context of the receiving culture. While it appears that mediation, transfer, and translation of cultural units reinscribe the fictitious unity of culture by representing it as the other to another culture, these acts also deconstruct the symbolic fiction of their own and their mediator’s identity. Mediation is, as Mitterbauer observes, “a genuine part of a permanent transformation process that transforms both the concerned cultures and the mediating agent.”<sup>626</sup> This observation is foundational.

Volkening’s written representations of his cultural home hybridized their very subject matter, most obviously, by employing a foreign cultural and linguistic code to

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<sup>624</sup> “Kultur wird ebenso wie die Nation einer ‘imaginären Gesellschaft’ zugeordnet, und als ‘fiktionales Konstrukt’ definiert, das reale Auswirkungen hat.” Helga Mitterbauer, “‘Acting in the Third Space’: Vermittlung im Spannungsfeld kulturwissenschaftlicher Theorien,” in *Ver-rückte Kulturen: Zur Dynamik kultureller Transfers*, 3-66, here: 56.

<sup>625</sup> Compare Bronfen, “Vorwort,” xiii. Bronfen argues that the appropriate response to the awareness of the fictitiousness of such fiction would be ironic distance toward the symbolic invocation made by one’s own, plural identities.

<sup>626</sup> “Vermittlung ist genuiner Bestandteil eines permanenten Transformationsprozesses, der sowohl die beteiligten Kulturen als auch die Vermittlerinstanz selbst umwandelt.” Mitterbauer, 63.



portray it. But for Volkening writing was also always an act of multiple translations. He translated his thoughts into a foreign language;<sup>627</sup> he translated the content of his essays into a new cultural sphere; and he often drafted a literary translation of poetry or prose by a German writer.<sup>628</sup> Volkening's cultural translations took place in a Third Space and, in turn, created Third Spaces. Scholars like Wolf and Pichler have argued for the exceptionality of this kind of cultural transfer in exile:

It can be assumed that exiles practice a specific form of translation, given that they constantly rely on the activity of translating — here in a metaphorical sense — in their search for an identifying location [“identitärer Verortung”]. This process of identity construction is of course intensified through the translation that is frequently performed in real life, and furthermore “redeployed by the author directly into the creative process.”<sup>629</sup>

Wolf and Pichler further describe the Third Spaces in which translation occurs as cultural playgrounds on which exiled subjects search to position themselves anew.<sup>630</sup> Volkening clearly made good use of these “cultural playgrounds.” They served him to redefine his cultural identity, and to discuss and represent his culture of origin. Not surprisingly, the resulting representations of German culture are intrinsically linked to his

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<sup>627</sup> Compare, for instance, the autobiographical essay “Translated by the author. My life in between languages” by the Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o; published in *Translation Studies* 2:1 (2009): 17-20.

<sup>628</sup> Volkening worked as a professional translator for most of his life. However, he created these kind of translations with which he accompanied some of his essay about German writers only for *Eco*-publications from 1971 on (when he became editor of the magazine).

<sup>629</sup> “Es kann davon ausgegangen werden, dass Exilierte eine spezifische Form des Übersetzens ausüben, sind sie doch auf ihrer steten Suche nach identitärer Verortung auf die Tätigkeit des Übersetzens — hier im metaphorischen Sinn — permanent angewiesen. Dieser Prozess der Identitätskonstruktion wird freilich durch die oftmals in der Praxis geübte Übersetzung verstärkt und zusätzlich ‘vom Autor (oder der Autorin) unmittelbar in den Schaffensprozess verlagert.’” Pichler and Wolf, “Übersetzte Fremdheit und Exil,” 13.

<sup>630</sup> The referred passage reads: “Steht der ‘Dritte Raum’ jedoch für den vorliegenden Kontext des Exils heuristisch als ‘kultureller Spielraum’, der zwischen konkreten Exilerfahrungen und historisch-kulturellen Diskursen vermittelt, so stellt er sich als jener Bereich dar, aus dem heraus die Exilierten potenziell operieren: Lebensweltlich in einem Da-Zwischen situiert, sprachlich konfliktuellen Ambivalenzen ausgeliefert, sind viele von ihnen als hybride Subjekte auf der Suche nach Neupositionierung.” Pichler and Wolf, “Übersetzte Fremdheit und Exil,” 14.

personal experience. Therefore, they are inherently unrepresentative representations. Themselves cultural artifacts, they contribute to the incessant creation of a geopolitically hybrid culture.

### **3. Unrepresentative Representations: German Literature in Colombia**

Over a period of nearly four decades, Volkening published a significant number of translations and essays on German culture, thought, and literature. While he was able to publish in magazines that found wide distribution within and, in the case of *Eco*, even beyond Colombia's borders, we have to keep in mind that German literature in Colombia was (and continues to be) far less present and represented than in many other Latin American countries. In Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Mexico, for instance, we find a vibrant and expansive network of political and cultural institutions such as German-language theaters and magazines, daily newspapers, and well-organized interest groups that emerged from large German immigrant communities. The German immigrant community in Colombia had neither a comparable size nor influence in the public sphere, nor was it in any significant ways organized. This makes Volkening's work and the attention he attracted with it all the more remarkable. Volkening was indeed one of very few German cultural mediators in his adoptive country, and certainly the one who contributed to the introduction and dispersion of German literature most consistently. As Nicolás Jorge Dornheim suggests in *Deutsche in Lateinamerika — Lateinamerika in Deutschland* (Germans in Latin America — Latin America in Germany), Volkening may be considered the

most important mediator in Colombia.<sup>631</sup> Equally, Cobo Borda refers to the “enormous task” Volkening had taken on as a translator as unique (“de modo incomparable”). He points out that Volkening’s “innate capacity to express in a foreign language nuances and minute variations” was “of essential significance,” so that his cultural and literary translations decisively enriched the meaning of the original.<sup>632</sup> Moreover, it would be thanks to Volkening’s translations that canonical pieces of German literature became virtually Colombian:

I do not know German, and for that reason, I cannot talk about Hugo von Hofmannsthal; but I can say with certainty that “Die Wege und die Begegnungen” [Paths and encounters] or his “Brief des Lord Chandos” [“The Letter of Lord Chandos”] are capital pieces, because of, also, the translation that Volkening made of them. Or Kleist, or Büchner...: It seems as if they were now ours.<sup>633</sup>

Who were the authors that Volkening chose to represent German literary culture abroad? As Cobo Borda and also other Colombian intellectuals like Policarpo Varón suggest, one of Volkening’s major contributions was his introduction of several German authors not yet translated into Spanish and thus in effect unknown to most of his readers.<sup>634</sup> It was through Volkening’s work that Colombian readers encountered for the first time writers like Karoline von Günderrode, Marieluise Fleißer, and Peter Handke.

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<sup>631</sup> Nicolás Jorge Dornheim, “Die Rezeption der deutschen Literatur in Lateinamerika,” in *Deutsche in Lateinamerika — Lateinamerika in Deutschland*, ed. Karl Kohut, Dietrich Briesemeister, Gustav Siebenmann (Frankfurt a. M.: Vervuert, 1996), 139-156, here: 142.

<sup>632</sup> Compare the full passage from which the quotes are taken in the Spanish original: “[...] la vasta tarea que Volkening ha adelantado como traductor, de modo incomparable. Su innata capacidad para verter en otra lengua matices, variaciones de grado; el significado es esencial, enriqueciéndolo.” Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda, “Del Anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes,” epilog to *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos*, Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976), 323-326, here: 326.

<sup>633</sup> “No sé alemán, y por lo tanto no puedo referirme a Hugo von Hofmannsthal; pero sí puedo afirmar, con certeza, que “Los caminos y el encuentro” o su “Carta a Lord Chandos” son piezas capitales, debido, además, a la traducción que hizo Volkening de ellas. O Kleist, o Büchner...: parcelas que ya son nuestras.” Cobo Borda, “Del Anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes,” 326.

<sup>634</sup> Policarpo Varón, “Ernesto Volkening: exilio y pasión por Colombia,” *Nueva Frontera* 447 (Aug. 29, 1983): 21-22, here: 21.

Some German writers, like Heinrich von Kleist and Georg Büchner, were in part already available in Spanish translations, although those translations had frequently been published in Argentina or Spain and found from there distribution in other Latin American countries, too. Still, Volkening's essays accomplished much in drawing further attention to these authors in Colombia. Sometimes, *Eco* had already introduced a writer whom Volkening would decide to write about or whose work he would translate. This was the case with Ingeborg Bachmann whose poetry was first presented to a Colombian audience in *Eco* in 1960 in the translation of the Spanish critic and philosopher Antonio de Zubiaurre.<sup>635</sup> Fourteen years later, just a few months after Bachmann's death, Volkening published in *Eco* a translation of her short story "Ihr glücklichen Augen" ("Eyes to wonder") from 1969. His translation constitutes, so it seems, the only Bachmann-translation *produced and published* in Colombia to date. While some of Bachmann's work has since been translated into Spanish, those translations have been produced and published in Spain and Argentina and it is hard to tell when and how many of them found their way to Colombian readers.<sup>636</sup> It may be assumed that the work of many other German authors Volkening discussed was, like Bachmann's work, similarly

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<sup>635</sup> Ingeborg Bachmann, "Invocación de la osa mayor," "Cae," "Corazón," "Reclamo," trans. Antonio de Zubiaurre. *Eco* 1:2 (Jun., 1960): 125, 127, 129, 131. These poems were selected from Bachmann's lyric collection *Anrufung des großen Bären (Invocation of the Great Bear)*, first published in 1956 (Munich: R. Piper).

<sup>636</sup> Bachmann's 1961 collection of short stories, *Das dreißigste Jahr*, was fully translated and published in Spanish as soon as in 1963: *A los treinta años*, trans. Margarita Fontseré (Barcelona, Editorial Seix Barral, 1963). In surprising contrast, a Spanish translation of her only novel *Malina* (1971) was published with a considerable time delay, fifteen years after it first came out: *Malina*, trans. Juan José del Solar (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1986), and the translation of *Simultan* (1972) was equally late realized as *Tres senderos hacia el lago*, trans. Juan José del Solar (Madrid: Alfaguara, 1987). Besides these publications, some of Bachmann's poems were available in Spanish translation through an anthology of contemporary German poetry: Klaus Dieter Vervuert, ed. *Poesía alemana de hoy: 1945-1966*, trans. Rodolfo Alonso (Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1967). — Notably, only the anthology of German poetry and Volkening's translation of Bachmann's "Ihr glücklichen Augen" was *produced and published* in Latin America: "Ojos dichosos," transl. Ernesto Volkening, *Eco* 27:159 (Jan., 1974): 263-278.

(un)available in the country. Based on this assumption, we may hence infer the fundamental contribution Volkening made to the dissemination of German literature in Colombia. Of course, Volkening also wrote about well known German authors like Johann Wolfgang von Goethe or Friedrich Hölderlin. Their work was available in Spanish translation, and most educated Colombian readers would have been familiar with it. The specific impetus that motivated Volkening to write about these literary celebrities was often an anniversary. Volkening's essay "Goethe demonólogo" (Goethe, the demonologist) was written for a special issue of the *Revista de las Indias* in 1949 to celebrate the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Goethe's birth,<sup>637</sup> and Volkening wrote several essays about Hölderlin and his work for a special issue of *Eco* he designed in 1970 also on occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the poet.<sup>638</sup>

To contextualize Volkening's efforts as cultural mediator, it is important to know that German literature was well received in Latin America. From about 1890 onward, German literature enjoyed a renewed and lasting interest among educated circles (substituting a principally francophone literary "modernism" trend).<sup>639</sup> In the twentieth century, Goethe, Heine, Rainer Maria Rilke, Kafka, and Thomas Mann were among the best known and most translated German authors in the Hispanic world.<sup>640</sup> The nineteenth century poets Adelbert von Chamisso, Friedrich Hölderlin, Gottfried Keller, Heinrich von Kleist, and Friedrich von Schiller, and the twentieth century writers Gottfried Benn,

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<sup>637</sup> Volkening, "Goethe demonólogo," *Revista de las Indias* 35:110 (Jul., Aug., Sept., 1949): 239-251.

<sup>638</sup> *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente. In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos* (Bogotá) 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970).

<sup>639</sup> Dornheim, 141.

<sup>640</sup> Dornheim, 146.

Heinrich Böll, Bertolt Brecht, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Günter Grass, Hermann Hesse, and Walter Benjamin closely followed in popularity.<sup>641</sup>

Volkening, on a related note, writes in an essay about the appropriation of European culture in Latin America that a foreigner who would move with open eyes among Colombians would be surprised by their preeminent intellectual curiosity (as well as by a certain preference for foreign over national literature).<sup>642</sup> He explains:

One may say without exaggerations, that from the existential philosophy of Heidegger's or Sartre's kind to the revival of Kafka, from the latest variations of abstract painting to the newest tendencies in cinematography, and from Ionesco's and Beckett's plays to the *roman-vérité*, there is no movement nor event in Europe's arts and literatures that had not been caught on the fly, been passionately discussed and taken apart to its pure bones in the intellectual circles of the country.<sup>643</sup>

Illustrating Colombians' apparently ardent reception of German literature, Volkening added that one would hear "very sagacious and ingenious comments about Bert Brecht's epic theater [...] and among others about a novel that is so specifically Austrian in its execution as Robert Musil's 'Man without Qualities.'" <sup>644</sup> This interest of Colombian intellectuals and, we may suspect, of a broader public, too, for "cultural goods

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<sup>641</sup> Dornheim, 149.

<sup>642</sup> Volkening argues elsewhere that a foreignism ("extranjersimo") — a preference for literature from abroad — percolated Colombia's literary sphere during the nineteenth and the first decades of the twentieth century. He speculates that the influx of ideas from abroad during that period served to expand the horizons of a country that found itself threatened to "fall into a certain provincial narrowness." Volkening, "Problemas de integración cultural en la América Latina," in his *Ensayos II*, 37-53, here: 42.

<sup>643</sup> "[S]e puede decir sin caer en exageraciones, que de la filosofía existencialista de cuño heideggeriano o sartriano al renacimiento de Kafka, desde las últimas variantes de la pintura abstracta hasta las nuevas tendencias en la cinematografía, y desde los dramas de Ionescu [*sic*] y Beckett hasta el *roman-vérité*, no hubo en las artes y letras de Europa ningún movimiento ni acontecimiento alguno que no hubieran sido cogidos al vuelo, discutidos apasionadamente y desmembrados hasta los puros huesos en los círculos intelectuales del país." Volkening, "Aspectos contradictorios de la apropiación de bienes culturales de raíz ajena," *Eco* 13:76 (Aug., 1966): 419-438, here: 424.

<sup>644</sup> "[C]omentarios muy sagaces e ingeniosos sobre el teatro épico de Bert Brecht [...] e incluso sobre una novela de factura tan específicamente austríaca como 'El hombre sin cualidades' de Robert Musil." Volkening, "Aspectos contradictorios de la apropiación de bienes culturales de raíz ajena," 425.

from foreign roots” as Volkening called it, prepared the ground for his success as a cultural mediator — although he seemed to have wished at times for more “positive resistance.”<sup>645</sup>

In addition to literature, Volkening also wrote on a variety of other topics such as psychoanalysis, historiography, Roman civilization, cinema, and other visual arts like architecture and painting. Besides discussing Thomas Bernhard, Ernst Bloch, Stefan George, Marie Luise Kaschnitz, and Robert Musil, he was interested in Cervantes, Proust, and in particular in Belgian writers like Max Elskamp, Franz Hellens, and Emile Verhaeren. Furthermore, Volkening was well versed in Latin American literary and intellectual history. Engaging in a critical dialog with the literature of his host country, Volkening discussed the works of José Félix Fuenmayor, Álvaro Mutis, and Jairo Mercado Romero, among many others. A number of essays on Gabriel García Márquez’s early prose gained him lasting recognition as “García Márquez’s first critic”<sup>646</sup> as well as the distinction of having been called by García Márquez “the only critic who has influenced [him].”<sup>647</sup> In 1998, Santiago Mutis Durán, responding to the continuing interest in Volkening’s work, collected his essays on García Márquez, which had been

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<sup>645</sup> Volkening was suspicious that an exceeding interest in European culture might have hindered, or corrupted, the independent creation and advancement of cultural goods in Latin America. Among others, for a supposed lack of original creativity and organic (non-imported) progress in technology as much as in regard to the arts, he considered Latin America (contrary to Europe) still on its way to maturity — a view that was shared, unfortunately, by many a European and Latin American intellectuals at the time. See on that topic Volkening’s above mentioned essays “Aspectos contradictorios de la apropiación de bienes culturales de raíz ajena” / “Problemas de integración cultural en la América Latina;” as well as his “Dos mundos,” *Revista de las Indias* 35:109 (May-Jun., 1949): 73-89; his “La América Latina y el Mundo Occidental,” *Eco* 17:4 (Aug., 1968): 370-392; and his essay “La capacidad asimiladora de América Latina — Ensayo sobre la asimilación creativa” in *Ensayos I: Destellos criollos*, 55-67.

<sup>646</sup> Elkin Gómez, “El primer crítico de García Márquez,” *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 37: 54 (2000): 114-117.

<sup>647</sup> “[Volkening es] el único crítico que ha tenido influencia sobre mí.” Mutis Durán quotes García Márquez as having said so in 1968. Mutis Durán, “Cien y una noches de soledad,” 16.

first published in *Eco* between 1963 and 1976, in the volume *Gabriel García Márquez: Un triunfo sobre el olvido*. This collection was reprinted in 2010.<sup>648</sup> Further, Volkening's autobiographical essays and excerpts from his diaries have been republished. For instance, his essay on Antwerp discussed in Chapter Three was again published in 1974 together with several prose sketches in Volkening's *Los Paseos de Lodovico* (Lodovico's Travels),<sup>649</sup> *Evocación de una sombra* (Evocation of a shadow), published posthumously in 1998, contains a selection of Volkening's essays on European writers, essays on Colombian writers, and finally, in a third part excerpts from Volkening's diaries and Volkening's reflections on writing and on Austrian, English, and French literature. Like a shadow that characterizes Volkening, so the metaphor of the title suggests, the selections in this collected volume aim to evoke the breadth and significance of the author's work. Volkening's diary excerpts from 1953 to 1977 had been published in *Eco* during the last years of his life, and were posthumously republished in the edited volume *En causa propia* (In his own cause; 2004).<sup>650</sup> The selected diary entries deal mostly with literary themes, but contain also aphorisms, and personal accounts as for instance references to the sickness and death of his wife Gertrudis (to whom he refers with the cipher "F.").

Rounding off this brief illustration of the variety of subjects of Volkening's writing over nearly four decades, an overview of most of his publications can be found in the Appendix A.

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<sup>648</sup> Volkening, *Gabriel García Márquez: "Un triunfo sobre el olvido,"* ed. Santiago Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998). The second edition was printed by Fondo de Cultura Económica in Bogotá, 2010.

<sup>649</sup> Volkening, *Los Paseos de Lodovico* (Monterrey, Mexico: Ediciones Sierra Madre, 1974).

<sup>650</sup> Volkening, *Evocación de una sombra*, no editor named (Bogotá: Editorial Ariel, 1998); and his *En causa propia*, ed. Oscar Jairo González Hernández (Medellín: Editorial Universidad de Antioquia, 2004).



I have suggested that the themes Volkening chose to create an image of German literary culture were contingent on his needs as an exile. That literal and cultural translation became the principle governing much of his social and professional life, and that he used it as a means to evoke the place from which he had been translated away. While I do not wish to reduce the range of authors discussed by Volkening to any one literary trend or era, there are detectable, telling constants in Volkening's approach to literary criticism worth noting.

Volkening, who had seen his *Heimat* being destroyed by the catastrophes of the twentieth century, by war and the Shoah, largely refrained from commenting on historical and political events. He addressed neither the National Socialist regime from which he had escaped, nor the ongoing civil war he witnessed for decades in Colombia. Following Rufinelli's observation about Volkening's stance toward Latin America in his writing, we could say about most of his work, "there is no social and political perspective present in his essays."<sup>651</sup> At least not on the forefront. Volkening focused on ethics. Engaging with the works of Proust, Kafka, Gottfried Benn, and others, he elaborated on existential questions. He thematized mystic moments of experience and identified and discussed archetypal motives and constellations. He employed thereby the arsenal of C. G. Jung's psychoanalytical school, Friedrich Nietzsche's philosophy, and frequent references to Roman and Greek civilizations and their mythologies.<sup>652</sup> He drew for his analyses from Johann J. Bachofen, the author of *Das Mutterrecht* (*Mother Right*), who wrote also about myths and religion, from the German classical philologist Walter F. Otto who

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<sup>651</sup> "No hay en sus ensayos una perspectiva social y política," Rufinelli notes about Volkening's essays on Latin America, which holds true for nearly all of Volkening's writings. Rufinelli, 1219.

<sup>652</sup> See Rufinelli, 1219.

investigated the legacy of Greek religion and mythology, and from Mircea Eliade, a philosopher, writer and historian of religion at the University of Chicago whose research dealt with myth and rituals.<sup>653</sup> According to Volkening's own account, the influence of these thinkers allowed him, via "ways little trodden by literature, to explore certain undercurrents and to contribute, within the limits of [his] abilities, to a kind of 'secret history' of the occidental soul."<sup>654</sup> Notwithstanding Volkening's undeniable affinity to the spiritual, timeless and archetypal, he typically strove for a historical perspective to locate a literary author or a specific topic. Volkening focuses for instance in his essay about Goethe and his *Gespräche mit Eckermann (Conversations with Eckermann)* on Goethe's understanding and use of the daemonic, a rather mystic phenomenon. He embeds this discussion in an elaborate depiction of the historical conceptualization of what in Greek antiquity was referred to as a *daimon*, a benevolent supernatural being, and what under the influence of Christianity became a *demon*, a malignant spirit. Thereby, he refers to the Kabbalah and the Bible and to Socrates and C. G. Jung with equal ease. As this case, among many others, indicates, Volkening's affinity toward the seemingly ahistorical was coupled with an acute awareness of intellectual, cultural, and political history. We may hypothesize whether he might have turned toward the autarchic realms of aesthetics, myth, and psychology to counteract an oppressive presence of history like the exilic ruptures inflicted upon his personal life, and the destructive forces of unprecedented violence he witnessed unfolding in Germany/Europe and in Colombia.

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<sup>653</sup> See Juan Guillermo Gómez García, "Los pasos perdidos de Ernesto Volkening," *Boletín Cultural y Bibliográfico* 32:40 (1995): 51-73, here: 61; and Jorge Raúl Laforgue, ed., *Nueva novela latinoamericana I* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Paidós, 1969), 306-307.

<sup>654</sup> "[...] caminos poco hollados de la literatura, explorar ciertas corrientes subterráneas y contribuir, en la medida de mis posibilidades, a una especie de 'historia secreta' del alma occidental." Laforgue, 306.

Simon Jander suggests that such a turn to supposedly organic, traditional entities like religion, myths, *volk*, life, or art has served many cultural critics, especially in exile, as a defense strategy to fight off tendencies that are perceived as disruptive (“zerstörende”) in other areas of life.<sup>655</sup> Jander argues further that the essay would be a dominant medium aiming at cultural unity:

Hence, the general thesis conveys here that the essay of Modernity functions to create ‘so to speak in an experimental laboratory a ‘unity of culture’ and could therefore be considered a dominant medium [“*Leitmedium*”] of conservative cultural criticism.

According to Jander, we could consequently read Volkening’s choice of this genre as a subtle sign of a conservativist approach.<sup>656</sup>

Although Volkening’s aestheticism appears to have prevented him from engaging in discussions of the socio-political relevance of literature, applying aesthetic criteria and focusing on the always similar though, speaking with Nietzsche, not identical aspects of human experience, he unearthed literature’s moral relevance. Cobo Borda points out that Volkening regarded culture as a manifestation of the world in which he lived, and that consequently, ethics and aesthetics were intrinsically intertwined in his engagement with all literary texts:

The conviction behind his judgments is a fundamental one: It is culture, as a vision of the world; [it is] like a personal and substantive choice regarding the facts. Literature, a form of existence that implies ethics in which the essential is

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<sup>655</sup> Compare Simon Jander’s discussion of conservatism in cultural criticism. He argues that “organic or traditional ‘entities,’ for example, religion, myths, life or art, are set against tendencies that are being considered corrosive.” The original German passage reads: “[Den] Tendenzen, die als zersetzend empfunden werden, [werden oftmals] organische bzw. traditionelle ‘Einheiten’ entgegengesetzt, z.B. Religion, Mythos, Volk, Leben oder auch Kunst.” Simon Jander, “II. 1. 4 Kulturkritik, Kulturkonservatismus und der Essay,” in his *Die Poetisierung des Essays: Rudolf Kassner, Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Gottfried Benn* (Heidelberg: Winter, 2008), 89-94, here: 90.

<sup>656</sup> “Die generelle These besagt hier also, dass der Essay der Moderne die Funktion übernimmt, ‘gewissermaßen im Versuchslabor eine ‘Einheit der Kultur’ herzustellen und damit als Leitmedium der konservativen Kulturkritik angesehen werden kann.” Jander, 93.

not the accessory, but in which it is impossible to make in any way concessions about either one.<sup>657</sup>

### 3.1. Reading Kafka

Volkening's criticism of Kafka's "Die Verwandlung" ("The Metamorphosis") illustrates his interest in myths and metaphysical questions, as well as the ethical undercurrent of his literary criticism. Its title is telling: "'La metamorfosis' de Kafka, prelude de una tragedia espiritual" ("The Metamorphosis" by Kafka, prelude to a spiritual tragedy).<sup>658</sup> Volkening focuses in his discussion on metaphysical motives and ties the frequently criticized inaccessibility of Kafka's prose to Kafka's presumed intention to "express the infinite through means of the finite," namely "a nucleus of intimate experiences of religious nature."<sup>659</sup> Hence, in Volkening's view, a reader lacking awareness of the religious problematic in Kafka's work would perceive events that the author describes as "insignificant, hollow, and trite" while they actually expressed deep metaphysical doubt.<sup>660</sup> Therefore, he explores the links between Kafka's work, spiritual state, and the *zeitgeist* of his epoch. Volkening concludes that "The Metamorphosis" would be reflective of "a prereligious state" in Kafka's life, which would be why the story, though tragic in character, would not yet show "the distinct sign of the

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<sup>657</sup> "[L]a convicción que respalda sus juicios, resulten [*sic*] básica: es la cultura, como visión del mundo; como opción personal, y sustantiva [*sic*], sobre los hechos. La literatura, forma de existencia que implica una ética, en donde lo esencial no es lo accesorio, pero en donde no es posible, de ningún modo, hacer concesiones sobre lo uno, ni sobre lo otro." Cobo Borda, "Del Anacronismo considerado como una de las bellas artes," 323.

<sup>658</sup> Volkening, "'La metamorfosis' de Kafka, prelude de una tragedia espiritual," *Revista de las Indias* 32:102 (Mar., Apr., May, 1948): 465-475.

<sup>659</sup> "[E]xpresar lo infinito por medio de lo finite" and "un núcleo de experiencias íntimas de índole religiosa." Volkening, "'La metamorfosis' de Kafka, prelude de una tragedia espiritual," 466.

<sup>660</sup> "[I]nsignificante, hueco y trillado." Volkening, "'La metamorfosis' de Kafka, prelude de una tragedia espiritual," 466-467.

transcendental.”<sup>661</sup> Volkening illustrates his argument by addressing various aspects of the story and characteristics of its protagonist Gregor Samsa. For instance, he portrays the transformation of Gregor Samsa into a beetle, into “the most inhuman one is able to imagine,” as a form of personal liberation from familiar and social constraints.<sup>662</sup> Assuming that Gregor Samsa was accountable for his metamorphosis, Volkening attributes the tragic failure of the attempted self-liberation to the irresponsible nature of the allegedly ill-conceived act that “implies a regression against the structure of our being, in the most spiritual sense of the word [from being human to becoming an animal].”<sup>663</sup> Volkening further discusses the parallels between the protagonist’s father who causes the beetle’s fatal wound with the mythological figure of the by today’s moral standards cruel Titan Cronus, and points at the “abomination,” “cowardly hypocrisy,” and “coldheartedness” of some of Kafka’s characters. Explicitly refusing to interpret Kafka’s story as an indictment of a ruling class deprived of virtues, and as an appeal for social reform, Volkening understands it, with reference to Nietzsche, as an affirmation of the righteous prevalence of the order of nature, or life itself, over the being that crossed the boundaries of its species.<sup>664</sup> He concludes that Kafka’s supreme efforts in exploring the limits of what is human, the depiction of “the frigid isolation of the individual in the midst of an absurd and inhuman existence” and of “despair not without the serenity that

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<sup>661</sup> “[U]n estado prereligioso” and “el sello inconfundible de lo transcendental.” Volkening, “‘La metamorfosis’ de Kafka, preludio de una tragedia espiritual,” 469.

<sup>662</sup> “[E]l más infrahumano que es dable imaginar.” Volkening, “‘La metamorfosis’ de Kafka, preludio de una tragedia espiritual,” 472.

<sup>663</sup> “[I]mplica una regresión contraria a la estructura de nuestro sér, en el sentido más espiritual de la palabra.” Volkening, “‘La metamorfosis’ de Kafka, preludio de una tragedia espiritual,” 472.

<sup>664</sup> “Por fin, la vida sigue su marcha implacable dejando a un lado cual símbolo del frustrado intento de sustraerse a sus leyes, la cáscara vacía del escarabajo.” In English: “At last, life continues its relentless march, laying aside that symbol of a failed attempt to evade its laws, the empty shell of the beetle.” Volkening, “‘La metamorfosis’ de Kafka, preludio de una tragedia espiritual,” 474.

emerges from a hopeless situation” constitute the magic and brilliance of the “marvelous narrative.”<sup>665</sup> Coming back to his initial preoccupation with the spiritual significance of the work, Volkening emphasizes that this would open the doors for “a genuine Kierkegaardian religiosity.”<sup>666</sup>

### 3.2. “Pallaksch. Pallaksch.”

Maybe we could see Volkening’s apolitical approach to literature and the arts as one of the most honest forms of historical contemplation left to his generation. A close reading of Theodor Adorno’s essays on music and literature would suggest so.<sup>667</sup> For example, Paul Celan’s withdrawal into the realm of art and the mortified silence of his poetry in face of incomprehensible suffering and the absurdities of history demonstrate such attitude.<sup>668</sup> Both the turn toward aestheticism and the struggle for expression are sensible in Celan’s poem “Tübingen, Jänner,” which ends with a repetition of Hölderlin’s alleged “*Lieblingswort*,” the “favorite expression,” of his old age: “Pallaksch. Pallaksch.”<sup>669</sup> The nonsense word of the mentally deranged poet obtains meaning in

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<sup>665</sup> “El glacial aislamiento del individuo en medio de una existencia absurda y deshumanizada, la desesperación no exenta de la serenidad que nace de una situación irremediable [...] “maravilloso cuento.” Volkening, ““La metamorfosis’ de Kafka, preludio de una tragedia espiritual,” 475.

<sup>666</sup> “[U]na religiosidad genuinamente kierkegaardiana.” Volkening, ““La metamorfosis’ de Kafka, preludio de una tragedia espiritual,” 475.

<sup>667</sup> Compare Agnes Müller, “Adorno, Theodor W.” in *Encyclopedia of the Essay*, ed. Tracy Chevalier (London; Chicago: Fitzroy Dearborn Publishers, 1997), 4-6, here: 6.

<sup>668</sup> Compare the referred passage in German: “[Celans] Lyrik ist durchdrungen von der Scham der Kunst angesichts des wie der Erfahrung so der Sublimierung sich entziehenden Leids. Celans Gedichte wollen das äußerste Entsetzen durch Verschweigen sagen.” Theodor W. Adorno, *Ästhetische Theorie*, ed. Gretel Adorno and Rolf Tiedemann (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1977), 477.

<sup>669</sup> Paul Celan, “Tübingen, Jänner” (1961):

Celan's poem as the only adequate, and maybe ethically most appropriate, reaction to historical circumstances in face of which reason capitulates. Aesthetization of life becomes a means of coping with it, too, in its adversity and resistance to being comprehended.

I chose "Pallaksch. Pallaksch." as an epigraph of this chapter that deals not only with cultural translation and representations of the linguistically and at times semantically incomprehensible, but leads also over to Chapter VI that will focus on Volkening's representation of the poet Friedrich Hölderlin (himself a translator) to a foreign culture. "Pallaksch. Pallaksch." symbolizes the breakthrough from incomprehensibility, as Hölderlin's use of the word suggests, to meaning that the expression gains in Celan's poem (where, admittedly, as part of its meaning, it seems to negate meaning). In this regard, it becomes a metaphor for translations. Volkening's manifold translations are at their core a celebration of the mind, of art and culture and an attempt to make human experience, the subject of all literature, accessible to understanding. His use of mythology, too, although remote from the socio-political, can be illuminating for a

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"Zur Blindheit über- / redete Augen. / Ihre — 'ein Rätsel ist Rein- / entsprungenes' —, ihre / Erinnerung an / schwimmende Hölderlintürme, Möwen- / umschwirrt. // Besuche ertrunkener Schreiner bei / diesen / tauchenden Worten: // Käme, / käme ein Mensch, / käme ein Mensch zur Welt, heute, mit / dem Lichtbart der / Patriarchen: er dürfte, / spräch er von dieser / Zeit, er / dürfte / nur lallen und lallen, / immer-, immer- / zuzu. // ('Pallaksch. Pallaksch.')" Taken from his *Die Niemandrose*, ed. Heino Schmull (1996), 37, in Paul Celan's *Werke*, Tübinger Ausgabe, ed. Jürgen Wertheimer (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1999).

In English: "To blindness per- / suaded eyes. / Their — 'a mystery is what purely / springs forth' —, their / remembrance of / swimming Hölderlin towers, seagull- / circumwhirred. // Visits of drowned carpenters to / those / diving words: // If there came, / if there came a man, / if there came a man to the world, today, with / the lightbeard of the / patriarchs: he / might, / if he spoke of this / time, he / might / only babble and babble, / ever-, ever- / moremore. // ('Pallaksch. Pallaksch.')

Translated by Silke-Maria Weineck in her "Logos and Pallaksch. The Loss of Madness and the Survival of Poetry in Paul Celan's 'Tübingen, Jänner,'" *Orbis Litterarum* 54 (1999): 262-275, here: 273.

"Pallaksch," was according to Hölderlin's friend and regular visitor Christoph Theodor Schwab a favorite expression of the poet during the years in which he suffered from mental disorder. See Weineck, 264, 273.

discussion of modernity and the life-experience of the twentieth century. In “Wagner’s Aktualität” (“Wagner’s relevance for today”), Adorno elaborated how prehistory and mythology become powerful tools to confront a historical reality that eventually cannot retreat into timelessness.<sup>670</sup> Whether Volkening’s critical approach was coincidentally oriented toward the ahistorical or a conscious reaction to the violence around him and to the loss of his physical *Heimat* is difficult to determine. It was, however, Volkening’s way of presenting, in an unrepresentative manner, German and European culture to a Colombian and Latin American audience.

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<sup>670</sup> Adorno, “Wagners Aktualität,” in his *Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. 17, *Musikalische Schriften IV: Moments musicaux. Neu gedruckte Aufsätze 1928-1962* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1982), 74-108.



CHAPTER VI

*TRADUIRE C'EST TRAHIR: ERNESTO VOLKENING AS EDITOR OF ECO*

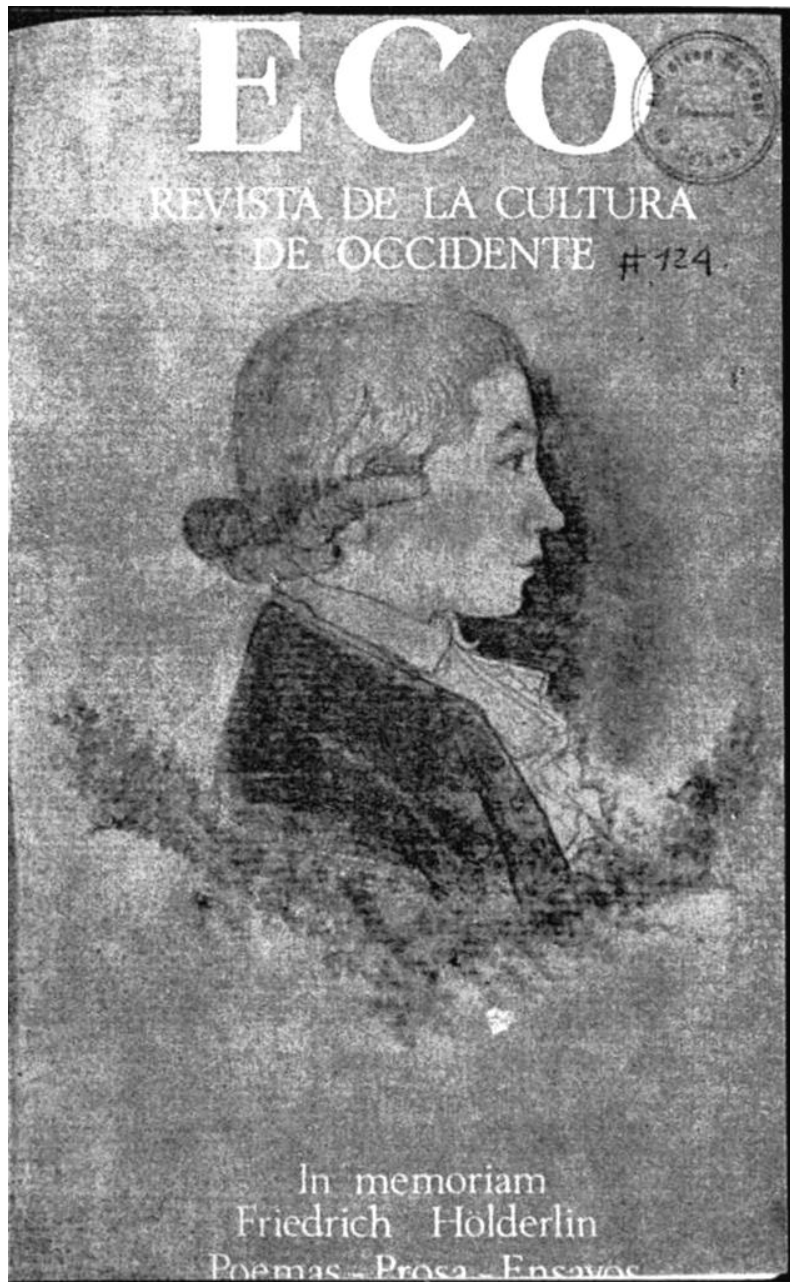


Fig. 19: Title page of *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos* (Bogotá) 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970).

## 1. *Traduire c'est trahir*

Volkening's representations of German culture in Colombia enabled his readers, in the words of Jorge Rufinelli, to "enjoy a universe that otherwise would have remained inaccessible."<sup>671</sup> The metaphorical universe Volkening opened up through his work as an essayist and cultural mediator constituted, however, just one possible vision of a decentralized German culture in the ongoing process of hybridization. Volkening, as a cultural mediator, brought something new into the Colombian *and* into the German culture. His writing about culture created its very object through the negotiation of its content and meaning. Volkening was aware of the manipulative character of cultural translations. He addressed the challenges in two essays that he published in the special issue of *Eco* in memory of Friedrich Hölderlin in 1970 that Volkening designed and edited: "*In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos*" (In memoriam of Friedrich Hölderlin. Poems — Prose — Essays):<sup>672</sup> "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor" (Three versions of a poem or the headaches of the translator)<sup>673</sup> and "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin" (two profile of Hölderlin).<sup>674</sup> Whereas the first of these essays addresses the intricacies of literal translations, the second discusses the power of representations and speaks of cultural translation (a variety of cultural representation) and its power to transform and re-create its object. I will conclude the chapter with a brief

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<sup>671</sup> Jorge Rufinelli, "Ensayos I y II de Ernesto Volkening," *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Bogotá) 33: 204 (Oct. 1978): 1217-1221, here: 1221.

<sup>672</sup> *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente. In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos* (Bogotá) 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970).

<sup>673</sup> Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 293-300.

<sup>674</sup> Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 404-410.

depiction of Volkening's representation of a German poet to his Colombian audience by looking at the *Eco* issue on Hölderlin as a whole.

### 1.1. Literal Translations: Friedrich Hölderlin's "Hälfte des Lebens"

#### "Hälfte des Lebens"

Mit gelben Birnen hängen  
Und voll mit wilden Rosen  
Das Land in den See,  
Ihr holden Schwäne,  
Und trunken von Küssen  
Tunkt ihr das Haupt  
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm ich, wenn  
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo  
Den Sonnenschein,  
Und Schatten der Erde?  
Die Mauern stehn  
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde  
Klirren die Fahnen.

Friedrich Hölderlin<sup>675</sup>

#### "Half of Life"

With its yellow pears  
And wild roses everywhere  
The shore hangs in the lake,  
O gracious swans,  
And drunk with kisses  
You dip your heads  
In the sobering holy water.

Ah, where will I find  
Flowers, come winter,  
And where the sunshine  
And shade of the earth?  
Walls stand cold  
And speechless, in the wind  
The weathervanes creak.

(Translated by R. Sieburth)

The Italian punning canard *traduttore, traditore* (translator, traitor) encapsulates the accusation brought against many allegedly manipulating modes of mediation. How to translate without betraying the original in form or in spirit? The cultural mediator as well as the translator is in control of creating a representation of an "original," albeit understood as a fictitious construct, in a new cultural and/or linguistic sphere. Volkening, conscious of his influence upon the nature of the translated object, problematized the difficulties of translating in his essay "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del

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<sup>675</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, "Hälfte des Lebens," *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 289; and Hölderlin, "Half of Life," in his *Hymns and Fragments by Friedrich Hölderlin*, edited, translated, and introduced by Richard Sieburth, 47 (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1984).

traductor.” The essay is concerned with three different Spanish translations of Hölderlin’s 1812 poem “Hälfte des Lebens” (“Half of Life,” also “The Middle of Life”). The poem whose title is typically rendered into Spanish as “Mitad de la vida” is likely not only be the best-known Hölderlin poem, but also the most translated one. In 1996, Jorge Dornheim attested to the circulation of “at least” fifteen translations of it in Spanish-speaking Latin America by the mid-twentieth century, calling the incident a “remarkable chapter of the, despite all distance, nevertheless rich reception of German poetry.”<sup>676</sup> In the same breath, Dornheim points to a recurring mistake. Several translators, whom he names, erred in translating “Fahne” (“flag”) in the last line of the poem with the Spanish word “bandera,” which refers to a flag made out of textiles, instead of choosing “veleta,” the word for the metal weathervane that Hölderlin had in mind. Sticking points like this one are part of the difficulties that Volkening addresses. By means of comparing various translations, he elaborates on different principles informing the task of the translator and brings forth his own maxim for a successful translation.

Whereas the essayist Volkening “walks with his mind,” the translator Volkening attempts to “write with his feet.” Volkening seemed like every translator, so Ette, “to write with his feet, since it is him who frequently pursues [‘nachgehen’] in the most careful manner the paths of ‘his’ author and follows them through re-creations [‘nachsöpferisch’].”<sup>677</sup> Volkening’s central interest is to recognize and preserve the

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<sup>676</sup> “[B]emerkenswerte[s] Kapitel der trotz aller Entfernung doch reichen Rezeption der deutschsprachigen Lyrik.” Nicolás Jorge Dornheim, “Die Rezeption der deutschen Literatur in Lateinamerika,” in *Deutsche in Lateinamerika — Lateinamerika in Deutschland*, ed. Karl Kohut, Dietrich Briesemeister, Gustav Siebenmann (Frankfurt a. M.: Vervuert, 1996), 139-156, here: 143.

<sup>677</sup> “[D]er Übersetzer aber mit den Füßen zu schreiben scheint, ist er es doch, der oft am sorgfältigsten den Wegen ‘seines’ Autors nachgeht und ihnen nachschöpferisch folgt.” Ottmar Ette, *ZwischenWeltenSchreiben. Literaturen ohne festen Wohnsitz (ÜberLebenswissen II)* (Berlin: Kadmos, 2005), 104.

spiritual quality of Hölderlin's poetry in translation. Thus, he begins his essay "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor" by recalling his emotional reactions to reading "Hälfte des Lebens" for the first time thirty, forty years ago as well as to rereading it later in life. In his view, it took a century before one could hear again kindred voices that evoked similar responses, namely the ones of the "pioneers of expressionism": Georg Trakl, Ernst Stadler, and Georg Heym.<sup>678</sup> To illustrate the "spiritual affinity" he sees in the work of these poets, Volkening compares Hölderlin's "Das Angenehme dieser Welt" ("I have enjoyed the pleasant things of this world"), with Trakl's "Rondel" ("Flown away is the gold of the days"), the beginning of Stadler's "Winteranfang" ("Beginning of winter"), and the third stanza of Heym's poem "November. Blinde stehen im Weg" ("November. The blind stand in the way").<sup>679</sup> Volkening professes that finding these spiritual affinities in texts by different poets from different eras "[was] decisive in the plan, not to say the audacity, to attempt a translation of "Hälfte des Lebens."<sup>680</sup> Reading this expressionist poetry, "we are able," so Volkening, "to hear every now and then distinct Hölderlinean accents."<sup>681</sup> This observation inspired him to first try a translation with the hope of evoking an authentic echo of Hölderlinean sentiment and of the poet's words regardless of temporal and linguistic remoteness. Volkening then draws attention to the text of the German original and introduces not only his own, but also two other Spanish translations of "Hälfte des

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<sup>678</sup> Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 293-294.

<sup>679</sup> Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 294-296. The full text of these four poems can be found in Appendix B (in German).

<sup>680</sup> "Mucho influyeron [tales hallazgos] en el propósito, por no decir osadía de intentar la traducción de "Hälfte des Lebens." Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 296.

<sup>681</sup> "[N]os es dable escuchar de vez en cuando inconfundibles acentos hoelderlinianos." Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 295.

Lebens.” The Colombian poet, professional translator, and journalist, as well as *Eco*’s main editor at the time, Nicolás Suescún, wrote one of the Spanish translations, while the other one is by Antonio de Zubiaurre. It was first published in *Eco* in 1966 together with other Hölderlin poems in translation.<sup>682</sup> For reference, *Eco*’s reader finds the original and these three translations in the same magazine on the pages preceding Volkening’s essay.<sup>683</sup>

Volkening who states that he does not wish to pretend having penetrated “more profoundly than others into the substance of the poem”<sup>684</sup> admits candidly: “the result of my poetic labors [...] does not seem very convincing to me.”<sup>685</sup> Inviting his bilingual readers to compare the original and the various translations at hand, he concedes that one might disagree with his choices. In particular, Volkening points at two contestable passages: having rendered Hölderlin’s “ins heilignüchterne Wasser” (“In the sobering holy water”) with “en el casto frescor de las olas,” which can be translated into English as “in the chaste freshness of the waves,” is one of them. His translation renders the German compound verb “heilignüchterne,” consisting of “holy” and “sober,” as “chaste,” which evokes a notion of purity linked to virginity rather than holiness and sobriety. In addition, he translates “Wasser” with “olas,” which means “waves,” instead of employing its literal

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<sup>682</sup> Antonio de Zubiaurre translated then eight Hölderlin poems, which were published alongside the German originals: Friedrich Hölderlin, “Ocho poemas,” transl. Antonio de Zubiaurre *Eco* 12:71 (Mar., 1966): 469-487.

<sup>683</sup> The poem and the three mentioned translations can be found in Appendix B together with an English translation of Hölderlin’s “Hälfte des Lebens.” Whenever I quote the poem in English, I follow Sieburth’s translation.

<sup>684</sup> “[M]ás profundamente que otros en la sustancia del poema.” Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” 297.

<sup>685</sup> “El resultado de mis poéticos desvelos, lo confieso, no me parece muy convincente.” Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” 296.

counterpart “agua” (“water”).<sup>686</sup> The second passage, about which Volkening feels uneasy, is “gualdas peras,” with which he translated the phrase “gelben Birnen” (“yellow pears”). While there is no ambiguity concerning the noun “peras” (“pears”), the adjective “gualdo” (used in the inflected form “gualdas”) is not the literal counterpart of “gelb” (“yellow”), which would be “Amarillo.” Instead, “gualdo” denotes specifically the yellow color of the “gualda”-plant (“dyer’s rocket,” or in Latin “reseda luteola”), whose blossom buds have been used since antiquity to produce yellow dye.<sup>687</sup> Volkening justifies his choices by explaining that he used “peras gualdas” to maintain the meter of the original poem, and that he strove for a lyrical interpretation that relied on “*topoi*, convoluted twists and inversions of old-fashioned flavor” when deciding for “en el casto frescor de las olas.”<sup>688</sup> Explicitly inviting criticism, Volkening claims that only if he were to be criticized for excessive lyricism, it would be most worrisome and hurtful to him.<sup>689</sup> Using lyricism and old-fashioned expressions, Volkening hoped to translate in a way that would not distort the original poem into a product of the twentieth century, but he intended instead to alienate the receiving time and culture in order to retain the original’s foreign flavor, and to preserve and bring to sound the “distinct Hölderlinean accents.”

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<sup>686</sup> Suescún translates this passage as “en el agua sobria y santa,” which is a literal rendition of the German except for the addition of an “and” in order to translate the two adjectives that constitute the German compound adjective “heilignüchterne”: “in the sober and holy water.” In contrast, de Zubiaurre translates the passage with “en la serena agua sagrada,” which corresponds in English to “in the serene water [that is] sacred.” De Zubiaurre takes thus more liberties than Suescún but his version still seems to be closer to the original text than Volkening’s translation.

<sup>687</sup> Suescún translated “gelben Birnen” with “peras doradas,” which literally means not “yellow pears” but “golden pears,” and de Zubiaurre translates this phrase, in the most literal way, with “peras amarillas.”

<sup>688</sup> “[*T*] *topoi*, giros alambicados e inversiones de sabor anticuado.” Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” 296.

<sup>689</sup> Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” 296.

Volkening did not let the matter rest at this point. Beyond pointing out the passages of his translation that he considers most contestable, and asking his reader to judge for herself, he also presents concrete criticism from his friend Suescún. As we learn, Suescún disapproved of exactly the arguably excessive use of lyricism in Volkening's translation, which he believed to weaken the entire work because "the traditional poetic vocabulary, because it has been overused, has lost all meaning and it became distractive."<sup>690</sup> Not only shares Suescún his criticism, but he also provided an alternative translation: one characterized by sober simplicity, linguistic austerity, and a strict abstinence from ornate words and phrases. Volkening discovers in Suescún's version under the appearance of Apollonian serenity, as he writes, a "certain Dionysian exuberance, the felicity of a soul drunken by smells and colors, an ecstatic vision" that he admires. Yet, Volkening takes issue with it: "the more vigorously [this vision] cries out to be captured in all its fullness, the more vividly it contrasts with the ineffable sadness of the finale."<sup>691</sup> In Volkening's view, Suescún could have done more to bring out the full contrast and force of the poem. What is in Suescún's version sensible, but remains heavily constrained by the translator's self-imposed asceticism is the "flavor of ripe fruit, the heat, the sweetness, and the tinge of autumn-like melancholy; typical of the first

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<sup>690</sup> "[E]l vocabulario tradicionalmente poético ha perdido todo de lo requetéusado que ha sido, y tiende a distraer." Volkening quotes here Suescún's words. Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 296.

<sup>691</sup> "[C]ierta exuberancia dionisíaca, la felicidad de un alma ebria de armas y colores, una visión extática que tanto más enérgicamente clama por ser captada en toda su plenitud, cuanto más vivamente contrata con la tristeza indecible del final." Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 297.



stanza.”<sup>692</sup> Those were the precise notions Volkening attempted to evoke through a more baroque language.

While Volkening stands by his translation that clearly takes more liberties than Suescún’s, he considers the competing rendition as neither qualitatively better or worse, but recognizes in it a fundamentally different approach toward translating: “in reality, two equally justifiable (or equally mistaken) conceptions about the way of pouring poetry into the molds of another language are opposing each other.”<sup>693</sup> Suescún acts on the maxim that the translator needed to comply with the spirit of his epoch, with his language (the receiving language) and his style. As Volkening observes, translators who choose to adhere to such principle need to avoid everything that would result in a product incompatible with the contemporary, sober fashion of speaking, and of feeling, too.<sup>694</sup> However, what if the value of the work of art, as Benjamin suggests in “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers” (“The Task of the Translator”) would reside exactly in the associations it evokes, the feelings it creates, and might be in that regard quite at odds with the present *zeitgeist* or the receiving culture? Benjamin reminds us that, seen from this angle, German “Brot,” although referring to the same object, is not at all the same as French “pain.”<sup>695</sup> Benjamin’s concerns reverberate in Volkening’s description of his own maxim for translating well:

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<sup>692</sup> “[S]abor de la fruta madura, el calor, la dulzura y el dejo de melancolía otoña; propios de la primera estrofa.” Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” 297.

<sup>693</sup> “[E]n realidad, se oponen dos concepciones igualmente justificables (o igualmente erradas) sobre la manera de verter poesía en los moldes de otro idioma.” Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” 297.

<sup>694</sup> Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” 297.

<sup>695</sup> Walter Benjamin, “Die Aufgabe des Übersetzers,” introduction to *Tableaux Parisien*, by Charles Baudelaire (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), 5-24, here: 13-14.

As far as I am concerned, [...] I have to adhere better not so much to the letter than to the spirit of the poem, which in the case at hand implies the intent to capture the musicality, the melody, the richness of the specifically Hölderlinean language.<sup>696</sup>

While Volkening stated conscientiously why he disagrees with translations like Suescún's and why he translates the way he does, he stresses that no matter how much one would exert oneself to create a satisfying translation, the old saying "*traduire c'est trahir*" would always hold true. Invariably, one could not fulfill both of what Volkening believes to be equally justified demands imposed by the poet and by the era, respectively the broader receiving sphere.<sup>697</sup>

Thereafter, Volkening briefly addresses de Zuibaurre's translation from 1966 that he decided to reprint when discovering it, as he claims, just after having completed his own translation of "Hälfte des Lebens." Volkening hoped that the reader would benefit by reading the version of "one of the finest interpreters of German poetry and prose" next to the other two translations of the poem.<sup>698</sup> Comparing versions by three "authors" (!), so Volkening is convinced, "the reader can form her own concept of the multifarious interpretative possibilities that a poem encloses when it is seen through different temperaments and different means of expression."<sup>699</sup> This statement encapsulates Volkening's continuous striving for transparency, and for the opening of spaces for

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<sup>696</sup> "Para mí tengo que [...] más vale ceñirse, no tanto a la letra cuanto al espíritu del poema, lo que en el caso contemplado implica el intento de captar la musicalidad, la melodía, la riqueza del lenguaje específicamente hoelderliniano." Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 297-298.

<sup>697</sup> Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 298.

<sup>698</sup> "[U]no de los más finos intérpretes de poesía y prosa alemanas." Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 298.

<sup>699</sup> "[S]e podrá formar el lector su propio concepto de las variadísimas posibilidades interpretativas que encierra un poema visto a través de distintos temperamentos y diferentes medios expresivos." Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 298.

further criticism as to best enable his readers to develop their opinions independently from the position he advances. In this regard, Volkening's essay on the work of the translator exemplifies not only his approach to translating but to writing itself.

Volkening alerts the reader to notice that de Zubiaurre's version would contain one inconsistency notwithstanding its overall excellence: de Zubiaurre translated "Fahnen" with "banderas," which, although grammatically correct, would contradict the meaning of the poem. As the combination of "Fahnen" with the verb "klirren" ("creak," "jungle") unambiguously stated, so Volkening, Hölderlin referred to weathervanes, "veletas," and not to flags out of textiles, "banderas." This criticism of de Zubiaurre's translation is indeed the only moment in which Volkening rejects somebody else's translation as misguided. Characteristic of Volkening's tone here as elsewhere in his writing is a natural generosity and respectful attitude toward the intellectual work of others; even when he disagrees, he does so without attacking or discrediting others.<sup>700</sup> In conclusion, Volkening adds why he chose in his translation of the very line that proved problematic for de Zubiaurre ("klirren die Fahnen" / "The weathervanes creak") the Spanish verb "chirrián" ("squeak") for "klirren" instead of following Suescún's suggestion to use the nearly synonymous "crujen." Suescún, we learn, had rejected "chirrián" because it would underline the unpleasantness of the creaking sound of the metal, while he, Volkening, had used it "precisely because it is so ugly and dissonant."<sup>701</sup>

Truthful to his own standards, he hoped once more to capture thereby the spirit of the

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<sup>700</sup> Exemptions apply, to the best of my knowledge, only in rare instances when Volkening recurses to polemic to reject approaches seemingly informed by totalitarian ideology. See as an example the discussion of Volkening's dismissal of Martin Heidegger's interpretation of Hölderlin's poetry as discussed in the next section of this chapter.

<sup>701</sup> "Precisament, por ser tan feo y disonante." Volkening, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor," 299.

poem, to “approach, as much as possible, the desolate mood in which the poet must have found himself in that moment.”<sup>702</sup>

A final apostil contains a notification that Otto de Greiff had recently published a translation of “Hälfte des Lebens” in “El Tiempo,” the most influential national daily in Colombia, and that there were others available as in an anthology entitled *Hölderlin, Poemas* (Hölderlin, Poems) by José Vicente Alvarez.<sup>703</sup> Besides attesting to Volkening’s great care, the apostil speaks also of the exceptional interest that Hölderlin’s poetry arouse in Spanish-speaking regions.

Quite strikingly, Volkening frequently uses the words “interpreter” and even “author” in this essay when he refers to the translator. Also, he writes about translations as “interpretations” and “variations” on the original theme. For Volkening, translating was a creative process in which the translator became an author who produces something original in its own right, something that reverberates with the source but has, inevitably, a distinct life and shape of its own. Dependant on the translator’s intention and, of course, knowledge and talent, so Volkening argues, the translation will interpret, negotiate, and recreate the original source in very specific ways. — Ette pushes the subject further, directing our attention toward the implications of Volkening’s statement. He writes about the translator as a hybrid figure: being partly an author and partly a copyist. A “good translation,” Ette argues, “is neither betrayal nor deception, but paradoxically a lie that

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<sup>702</sup> “[A] cercarme, hasta donde fuese posible, al desolado estado de ánimo en que debía encontrarse el poeta en aquel instante.” Volkening, “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” 299-300.

<sup>703</sup> Friedrich Hölderlin, *Hölderlin, Poemas*, ed. José Vicente Alvarez (Cordoba, Spain: Editorial Assandri, 1955).

brings out other truths or the truths of others.”<sup>704</sup> Ette’s “lie” is the moment of creation, albeit not of a free creation since the translator remains accountable to the original. The translator recreates the object of his translation within a foreign space and as foreign; this is where the transformative potential of translations resides. Translation itself

proves to be again an as-well-as [‘ein Sowohl-Als-Auch’] that is paradoxically linked to a neither-nor [‘einem Weder-Noch’], an oscillating figure of thought that had already marked the professional position of the translator as an author *and* copyist and also at the same time neither as an author nor as a copyist.<sup>705</sup>

In “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor,” Volkening had illustrated his own stance toward translating works of other writers and the principles that would guide him in doing so for decades. Complementing our understanding of Volkening’s approach to the task of the translator, I turn now to the second essay, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” which sheds light on Volkening’s perspective on translation as cultural mediation, or *Kulturvermittlung*.

## 1.2. Cultural Translations: “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin”

When a German remembers Hölderlin — which already does not happen often — inevitably emerges in front of his eyes the image of the young [poet] as the most famous of his portraits shows him: with blond hair falling over his shoulders, in the style of the *Sturm und Drang*, the gaze of his eyes of unparalleled beauty profound and luminous, rather than being overwhelming, the mouth with noble features and an almost feminine sweetness.<sup>706</sup>

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<sup>704</sup> “Die gute Übersetzung ist weder Verrat noch Täuschung, sondern paradoxerweise eine Lüge, die andere Wahrheiten beziehungsweise die Wahrheiten der Anderen zum Vorschein bringt.” Ette, 111.

<sup>705</sup> “[Übersetzung] erweist sich von neuem als ein Sowohl-Als-Auch, das paradox mit einem Weder-Noch verbunden ist, eine oszillierende Denkfigur, die schon die berufliche Position des Übersetzers als Autor *und* Kopist sowie zugleich weder als Autor noch als Kopist markiert hatte.” Ette, 111.

<sup>706</sup> “Cuando un alemán se acuerda de Hölderlin — cosa que ya no sucede con frecuencia — inevitablemente surgiría ante sus ojos la efigie del joven tal como nos lo muestra el más conocido de sus retratos: con el cabello rubio cayéndole sobre los hombros, a la moda del *Sturm und Drang*, la mirada profunda y luminosa, antes bien que fulgurante, de los ojos de sin par hermosura, la boca de nobles trazas y casi femenina dulzura. Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 404.

At the beginning of “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” Volkening describes the manner in which the German poet is, in his view, most often visualized: as Franz Karl Hiemer painted him in pastel colors in 1792. He reflects upon the harmonious, even features of Hölderlin’s portrait that would strike most onlookers as beautiful. Furthermore, Volkening comments on the general tendency to consider the aesthetically pleasing appearance of the young poet as indicative of innocence, naïveté, truthfulness and moral integrity. He contends that the imagination of most German readers, including his own, would attribute these specific traits to the poet because of the overwhelming power this famous visual representation exerted. However, this and other pieces Volkening wrote on Hölderlin demonstrate that his vision of the historical Hölderlin goes beyond the mere associations evoked by Hiemer’s portrait. Initially though, Volkening focuses on arguments to reify Hiemer’s representation. Alluding to the villains in Friedrich Schiller’s drama *Die Räuber* (*The Robbers*), Volkening depicts Hölderlin as incapable of recognizing that “a Franz Moor, a Spiegelberg, a Schufterle, far from being merely monstrous creations of the poetic imagination, are beings of flesh and bone.”<sup>707</sup> Presuming extraordinary naïveté, he further asserts that Hölderlin’s very “purity of the soul palpable in every verse” would have made for the exceptionality of Hölderlin’s poetry,<sup>708</sup> but would have also prohibited the poet from ever fully adjusting to the reality around him. By implication, he leads the reader to believe in a causal relationship between Hölderlin’s alleged naïveté and the mental decline from which he suffered for decades. Stressing the accurateness of the presumed correlation of the poet’s historic

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<sup>707</sup> “[U]n Franz Moor, un Spiegelberg, un Schufterle, lejos de ser meros engendros de la imaginación poética, son seres de carne y hueso.” Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 405.

<sup>708</sup> “[P]ureza del alma palpable en cada verso.” Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 405.

persona and the associations evoked by Hiemer's representation, Volkening claims that the generated image had seemingly become resistant to ever being distorted, or corrected, by contradicting influences. His argument culminates in the claim that because Hölderlin has been seen (and his poetry read) foremost through the lens of Hiemer's painting, "neither while he lived nor afterwards, was there a person who talked scornful or with maliciousness of Friedrich Hölderlin."<sup>709</sup> Volkening adds that "the mere idea of mocking the innocence or to doubt the integrity of our *puer eternus* [*sic*] and arch-poet of the German language" would seem like "the height of ignominy, moreover inconceivable."<sup>710</sup> For Volkening, Hölderlin enjoys an exceptional rank among German poets for the quality of his poetry as well as for the supposed unblemished goodness of his being. And he characterizes the poet for his readers accordingly, raising not the slightest doubt about Hölderlin's integrity and exceptionality. It is problematic to discern whether Hiemer's representation had directed Volkening's thinking to such end, or whether his own, independent assessment of the historical figure coincidentally corresponded with what he considers, figuratively and literally, the dominant image of Hölderlin. In this essay, Volkening attempts the balancing act between perpetuating what he regards the truthful message of Hiemer's Hölderlin representation and critically challenging the power of representations in which he remains partly entangled.

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<sup>709</sup> "[N]i mientras vivía, ni después, hubo quien hablara en tono de burla o con malicia de Friedrich Hölderlin." Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 405.

<sup>710</sup> "El colmo de la ignominia, más aun inconcebible nos parecería la sola idea de mofarnos del candor o dudar de la integridad de nuestro *puer eternus* [*sic*] y archipoeta de lengua tudesca." Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 406. The word order of the English translation diverges from the one of the Spanish text.

Panning the spotlight on Hölderlin's ideological usurpation "during times of national inebriation,"<sup>711</sup> Volkening complains about the misguided portrayal of Hölderlin during the Third Reich and the ensuing one-dimensional reception of his patriotic poetry. Turning the enthusiastic supporter of the French Revolution and, as Volkening observed in the introductory essay of this *Eco* edition, somebody who, "without ceasing to be German, [was] what Nietzsche would call a "European incident"" into a "national, not to say provincial phenomenon, of the dimensions of an arch-German poet from the attic room," appeared to him an abhorrent act.<sup>712</sup> — Then, in 1943, coinciding with the capitulation of the Sixth Army at Stalingrad, the Hölderlingesellschaft (Hölderlin Society) had been founded under the patronage of Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels. Goebbel's and the Society's explicit objective was to present an "undistorted picture" of Hölderlin to the German people and to help the poet in exerting a "pure influence upon our time."<sup>713</sup> The 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of the poet who wrote, among others, the ill-fated, patriotic ode "Der Tod fürs Vaterland" ("Death for the Fatherland"), was celebrated in the same year. Not surprisingly, it turned into a gigantic political campaign. Hölderlin was used to infuse enthusiasm into the war-weary Germans at home, and to remind foreign countries in spite of contradicting evidence that Germany

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<sup>711</sup> "[E]n épocas de borrachera nacional." Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 406.

<sup>712</sup> "[Hölderlin, empero, fue] sin dejar alemán, lo que llamara Nietzsche un 'acontecimiento europeo.'" And, "[convertir al hombre y su obra] en un fenómeno nacional, por no decir provinciano, de las dimensiones de un archigermano poeta de buhardilla." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843," *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 225-242, here: 239.

<sup>713</sup> Quoted as in Robert Ian Savage, *Hölderlin after the Catastrophe: Heidegger – Adorno – Brecht* (Rochester: Camden House, 2008), 5. See also Paul Kluckhohn, "Bericht über die Veranstaltungen," in *Iduna: Jahrbuch der Hölderlin-Gesellschaft*, ed. Friedrich Beißner and Paul Kluckhohn (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1944), 14.



was a cultural nation (“Kulturnation”).<sup>714</sup> As Robert Savage pointed out in *Hölderlin after the Catastrophe*, the Nazis did not capitalize on Hölderlin as a proto-fascist (as they did with Nietzsche), but Hölderlin proved most effective to the war effort because he offered an inner sanctuary and solace at a period of material privation, physical danger, and an evident lack of freedom. Whereas Heinrich von Kleist and Friedrich Schiller had been the poets of Germany’s military success, Hölderlin became “the poet of German defeat.”<sup>715</sup> — All this taken into account, the fact that the Nazis were able to instrumentalize Hölderlin nevertheless, so Volkening, would not say much about him. Moreover, so he notes, even Nazis who fabricated for themselves an idol that distorted the historical picture would have encountered Hölderlin with respect and admiration, which Volkening interprets as an indication of the awe-inspiring, natural greatness of the poet.<sup>716</sup>

Volkening’s argumentation acknowledges that representations allow by nature for a distortion of the original since they inevitably choose and attribute meaning. Thereby, representations have the power to become what they are supposed to represent, which makes the assumption of an essence of the “original” problematic. Sometimes differences lie in minute shifts in how to accentuate various pertinent aspects. For instance when we see Volkening suggesting that Hiemer’s painting, depicting the “pure man and inspired poet,” adequately represented Hölderlin, while National Socialists who attributed to the

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<sup>714</sup> See the excellent essay about Hölderlin’s wartime reception by Claudia Albert, “‘Dient Kulturarbeit dem Sieg?’ — Hölderlin-Rezeption von 1933-1945,” in *Hölderlin und die Moderne: eine Bestandsaufnahme*, ed. Gerhard Kurz, Valérie Lawitschka, and Jürgen Wertheimer (Tübingen: Attempto, 1995): 153-173, here: 155.

<sup>715</sup> Savage, 7. See also Albert, *Deutsche Klassiker im Nationalsozialismus: Schiller, Kleist, Hölderlin* (Stuttgart: J. B. Metzler, 1994), 191.

<sup>716</sup> Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 406.

poet similar characteristics, especially an inviolable purity, would have been misguided, since they exploited him for ideological ends.<sup>717</sup> To be precise, they exploited him for backing a worldview that run counter to the values and political position held by Volkening and by the historical Hölderlin. — If we may judge the latter by his enthusiasm for the French Revolution and for a democratic society as, among others, passages of his unfinished tragedy *Der Tod des Empedokles* (*The Death of Empedocles*) suggest.<sup>718</sup> Volkening is here far less candid about his role as a mediator and translator of a Hölderlin-image into a new cultural group than he was when he discussed his choices as a translator of Hölderlin's poetry.

How does Volkening translate “Hölderlin,” a representative of German culture, for his Colombian audience? How does he present the poet? While bringing the manipulative force of representations to the fore of the reader's mind, Volkening is deeply engaged in creating yet another representation of Hölderlin and of the poet's work through *Eco's* special edition, which he designed. The same holds true in respect to the essay at hand, for “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin.” His choices about what to communicate and in what manner steer his readers' perception of Hölderlin as a person and poet, and delimit the field of their possible disagreement. As a cultural translator, Volkening creates a new image that, so we may expect, decisively shaped the Hölderlin-image in Colombia, and due to *Eco's* international distribution, beyond its borders. Recognizing

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<sup>717</sup> “[E]l hombre puro e inspirado vate.” “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 406. Notably, not only fascists politicized Hölderlin. Exiled leaders of the German Communist Party in Moscow argued, too, that Hölderlin would be the spiritual leader of the true German people. See Savage, 8.

<sup>718</sup> See, for instance, *Der Tod des Empedokles*, 1<sup>st</sup> version, 2<sup>nd</sup> act, 4<sup>th</sup> scene: Agrigentinean citizen, wishing for the return of the exiled Empedokles, offer to crown him king, which he refuses, tellingly, by pointing out that the time of kings would have passed (“Dies ist die Zeit der Könige nicht mehr”). Instead, he admonishes, the citizens would need to take on responsibility and rule themselves. Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 4, ed. Friedrich Beißner (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1962), 66-67.

his responsibility, Volkening does not leave his readers solely with a picture of Hölderlin that he calls “the image of the classic hero surrounded by a halo of perennial youth,” although he has so far substantiated this very vision.<sup>719</sup> It has to be noted that Volkening conjures the visual representations of Hölderlin through words only; the essay itself does not contain any images. However, the title page of the *Eco* issue displays a pencil drawing of Hölderlin in 1786, during his student years in the convent school Maulbronn.<sup>720</sup> This single visual representation of the poet in the entire issue on Hölderlin likely influences the imagination of the reader toward picturing the poet as a rather young, child-like person. But Volkening feels responsible to not only portray and pass on what he believes to be the dominant image of Hölderlin. He contrasts and complements it with a lesser-known representation of the old poet. Let me illustrate the pronounced differences between the two visual representations:

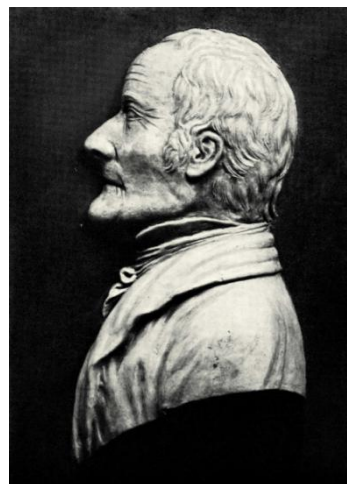


Fig. 20: Wilhelm Paul Neubert, “Friedrich Hölderlin” (ca. 1840)

Fig. 21: Franz Karl Hiemer, “Der greise Hölderlin” (Hölderlin in his old age; 1872)

<sup>719</sup> “[L]a imagen del tradicional héroe rodeado de un halo de perenne juventud.” Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 406.

<sup>720</sup> The 1786 pencil drawing is by an unknown painter who signed the original with “Troy fecit.” It is kept in the Schiller-Nationalmuseum at Marbach. See Adolf Beck and Paul Raabe, *Hölderlin: eine Chronik in Text und Bild* (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel Verlag, 1970), 130 and 344.

As the actual images underscore, in juxtaposing in his essay the depictions of the young and old poet (through words only), Volkening renders the claim of either one to fully encapsulate Hölderlin's persona ambivalent. Balancing the earlier impression, Volkening turns to the wax relief by Wilhelm Paul Neubert, which he refers to as a "more somber and not little frightening" image of Hölderlin.<sup>721</sup> Using Jungian terminology, we could also say that Volkening, a reader C. G. Jung's, confronts the archetypal image of the god-like *puer aeternus*, with which he started out his essay "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin" with its shadow, the *senex*, the old man. The *senex* is associated with the god Apollo, the Greek god associated with order, truth, discipline, rationality, but also the arts. Volkening characterizes this depiction of Hölderlin as "that of the face of a nutcracker, coarse and as if carved in wood, although oddly similar [to the image of the youthful Hölderlin], and to a death mask, too."<sup>722</sup> The baseline of his description oscillates around an existence in-between the lifeless imitation of a living being as symbolized by the figure of a nutcracker and actual death, which is present, but ill-timed since the "death mask" represents a person still alive. Hölderlin was about seventy years old when Neubert modeled his head. From 1806 until his death in 1843, Hölderlin lived with the carpenter Ernst Zimmer and his family who tended to him in their house, in a tower that was part of the old Tübingen city wall and overlooked the Neckar River. During these years, he suffered from a mental disease whose nature has never been established beyond doubt. Some researchers, most prominently the French Germanist Pierre Bertaux, have argued from an anti-psychiatric perspective that the poet's madness,

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<sup>721</sup> "[M]ás sombría y no poco aterradora." Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 406.

<sup>722</sup> "[L]a de un rostro de cascanueces, tosco y como tallado en madera, si bien extrañamente parecido, también, a una mascarilla de muerto que un artista olvidado — W. Neubert — hubiese tomado del que aún vivía, para modelarla en cera." Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 406.

or schizophrenia, would have been a “mask” to choose a life that resisted the straitjacket of bourgeois norms.<sup>723</sup> Largely, the thesis that Hölderlin’s mental disease would have been a pretense to escape the constraints of a bourgeois life has been rejected. Speculations that are more recent, like Alan M. Olson’s, purport that Hölderlin might have suffered from Alzheimer disease.<sup>724</sup> Volkening interprets Neubert’s wax image, which he considers a “cadaverous portrayal of the *old* Hölderlin,” as testimony to the last fragile fibers of life that the poet allegedly saved from the catastrophic irruption of his mental decline. Keeping up with “desperate efforts” an already listless façade, Hölderlin would have created a wall of courtesy and ceremoniousness around his person to preserve his dignity, and to protect himself against “his occasional visitors, mediocre poets, and curious tourists.”<sup>725</sup> As Volkening is convinced, nobody would have been in the position to tell what occurred behind that impenetrable armor. Thus, he claims, Hölderlin had given to future generations the “most splendid gift with his madness,” which would have allowed for any, including the most inappropriate, interpretations.<sup>726</sup> Above all, he criticizes Martin Heidegger for inverting the poet’s mental disease into a mythological moment.<sup>727</sup> Heidegger saw Hölderlin, as “the poet’s poet,” a founder of being, as somebody who sung mournfully of the departure of the gods, the lost Golden Age, and

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<sup>723</sup> Pierre Bertaux, *Friedrich Hölderlin* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1978), 134.

<sup>724</sup> Alan M. Olson, *Hegel and the Spirit* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1992), 86.

<sup>725</sup> Compare the referred passage in Spanish: “Tal el cadavérico retrato del *viejo* Hölderlin, del alienado quien, haciendo desesperados esfuerzos por conservar intactos los últimos frágiles restos de vida que había salvado del cataclismo, ha levantado en torno de su persona una muralla de cortesía chapada a la antigua, y ceremoniosamente, cual si fueran príncipes de sangre, recibe a sus ocasionales visitantes, modestos poetas y turistas curiosas.” Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 406-407.

<sup>726</sup> “[L]es había hecho con su locura el más espléndido obsequio.” Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 407.

<sup>727</sup> Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 407.

who heralded the arrival of a god to come.<sup>728</sup> The philosopher, who dedicated himself extensively to the study of Hölderlin's work, further held that a poet would be an interlocutor between the gods and people, somebody who interprets the divine, and proclaims and founts truth. "Exposed to the god's lightning flashes," Hölderlin would have been struck by madness because of his dangerous proximity to and involvedness in the essence of things.<sup>729</sup> Volkening abstained from commenting in detail on the controversial ways in which Heidegger's reading of Hölderlin steered the reception of the poet, and especially, how Hölderlin, as Walter Dietze put it trenchantly, "[kam] zu Heidegger, und über die Heideggerei auf den braunen Hund" ("[Hölderlin] came to Heidegger, and by means of Heideggerness, he went to *the brown pot*").<sup>730</sup> Others, above all Adorno with his keynote address at the 1963 convention of the Hölderlin society, shunned no effort in pointing out the connections they saw between Heidegger's mysticism and ontologism and totalitarianism.<sup>731</sup> Having branded Heidegger's philosophy on other occasion as "fascist to the innermost cell," Adorno postulated an absolute "refusal of communication" with Heidegger as "his condition *sine qua non* for communicating on Hölderlin."<sup>732</sup> He elaborated on this aspect extensively and polemically which resulted not only in the supporters of Heidegger quitting the

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<sup>728</sup> See Martin Heidegger, "Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry," in his *Elucidations of Hölderlin's Poetry*, trans. Keith Hoeller (Amherst: Humanity Books, 2000), 51-65, here: 52.

<sup>729</sup> Heidegger, 61.

<sup>730</sup> Walter Dietze, *Rede zum zweihundertsten Geburtstag Friedrich Hölderlins* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1970), 3. My italics.

<sup>731</sup> Adorno's speech, "Parataxis: Zur philosophischen Interpretation der späten Lyrik Hölderlins" (Parataxis on Hölderlin's late poetry) was later revised and published under the title "Parataxis: Zur späten Lyrik Hölderlins" (Parataxis on Hölderlin's late poetry) in Adorno's *Noten zur Literatur* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1965), 156-209.

<sup>732</sup> Savage, 117 and 97.

convention in protest, but also in the public comment by the Swiss Germanist Emil Staiger that “Adorno had to be rapped over the knuckles.”<sup>733</sup> Volkening, slightly less wrought-up, gives credit to Walter Muschg for presumably having been the first to lash out against Heidegger in his *Tragische Literaturgeschichte* (*A Tragic History of Literature*), published in 1948, in order to rescue Hölderlin from the clutches of the Freiburg philosopher. Apart from that, Volkening contents himself with emphasizing contemptuously, “the failed Heideggerian interpretation of Hölderlin demonstrates that of his actual tragedy the philosopher does not understand a bit.”<sup>734</sup> Turning his attention once more to Neubert’s representation of Hölderlin, Volkening argues that the tragedy it conveyed would precisely reside “in the absence of what we could qualify as tragic.”<sup>735</sup> There would be no inner struggle, no visible trace of genius, merely “the waste, the barrenness, the silence of an extinct volcano.”<sup>736</sup> Only in very rare moments, some “traces of light” would make it to the surface and manifest itself in late poems like in “Das Angenehme dieser Welt” that, while pervaded by a longing for death, would still remind us of the exceptionality of Hölderlin’s poetic gift.<sup>737</sup> Then, again silence. And nothing thereafter.

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<sup>733</sup> Savage, 98 and 97. Emil Staiger made this comment in an interview in 1975, indicating his lasting, ferocious anger about Adorno’s speech that broke in the opinion of many the hold of the existentialist Hölderlin reading Heidegger had promoted. Heidegger himself, who was not present during Adorno’s speech, quit his membership in the Hölderlin Society livid because the Society had granted “that man” (as he referred to Adorno) the possibility to speak out against him. — Savage offers a detailed discussion of Adorno’s speech and the reactions it provoked, next to a discussion of Heidegger’s Hölderlin reception, in his monograph *Hölderlin after the Catastrophe*.

<sup>734</sup> “[L]a malogrado interpretación heideggeriana de Hölderlin demuestra que de su verdadera tragedia no entiende el filósofo ni pizca.” Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 407.

<sup>735</sup> “[E]n la ausencia de cuanto fuese calificable de trágico.” Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 407.

<sup>736</sup> “[E]l yermo, la aridez, el silencio de un cráter apagado.” Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 407.

<sup>737</sup> Volkening, “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin,” 409. The text of Hölderlin’s poem “Das Angenehme dieser Welt” can be found in Appendix B.

While Volkening rejects to recognize Hölderlin's madness as a sign of genius, or as one with the sources of the poet's creativity, he still links the disease to the poet's giftedness. Mythos would be often cited in vain, he claims, however, when discussing the life of someone like Hölderlin who called himself "flagellated by Apollo," it would be helpful in elucidating the state in which that person found himself. Volkening contends that the poet would have suffered from the hand of "an exterminating god who scorches with his rays the minds of whom he loved the most."<sup>738</sup> Referring to the thunderbolt throwing Apollo, Volkening elevates Hölderlin's suffering during the last decades of his life to the likes of Tantalus's pain. He dates its onset back to the early summer of 1802, the year in which Hölderlin returned from his position as private tutor in France possibly because of the fatal illness of Susette Gontard. Hölderlin and Gontard, the wife of a Frankfurt banker, had been united through a crossed love affair, while he worked from 1796 to 1798 as the private tutor of her children and lived in her house; she became his model for Diotima in the epistolary novel *Hyperion*. Gontard's death has been considered an event that might have caused or decisively contributed to Hölderlin's mental decline. Hölderlin himself acknowledged his precarious state of mind at the end of that fateful year, however without mentioning Gontard. In a letter to the poet Casimir Ulrich Boehlendorff, he writes instead about having witnessed the disturbing hardships of people in the French Vendée region. Hölderlin had travelled through that area when French revolutionary troops fought the rebelling Vendée people in whose attitude and appearance the poet believed to recognize the exemplary nobility and virtue of ancient Greeks. The experience deeply stirred Hölderlin so that he claimed afterwards, "as one

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<sup>738</sup> The Spanish original of the quoted passage reads: "[U]n dios exterminador que con sus rayos les quema los sesos a quienes más ama." Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 409.



says of heroes, I can well say of myself that Apollo has struck me.”<sup>739</sup> Here, a keen sensitivity is seen as prerequisite for expressing the essential of human experience in condensed, poetic language. Hence, metaphorically speaking, that gift and punishment of the Olympian patron. In Heidegger’s view, we should consider this as the poet’s exceptional ability to perceive the truth of human existence, to divine its origin and the origin of things and to name their meaning. Through language, a poet mediates between the divine gods and ordinary people and thus becomes a founder of being. He, the poet, brings things into existence and into history, what, according to Heidegger, constitutes the quintessence of poetry.<sup>740</sup>

Volkening disagrees. He evokes the images of being a favorite of the gods and of the mythological suffering’s of Tantalus to describe *ex negativo* the ardent sparkle of life and creativity that is missing in the look of the old Hölderlin and the tremendous discipline needed to keep up a dignified appearance. Where Heidegger writes that “excessive brightness drove the poet into darkness,”<sup>741</sup> and ties the tragedy of the poet’s existence in a purportedly stringent causal relationship of Hölderlin’s poetic achievements and his mental decline (aggrandizing thus ultimately the poet’s existence into an enunciation of the divine), Volkening stresses the absence of such grandeur. It is not for having once lived in the vicinity of the essence of things (for a poetic existence in Heidegger’s sense), that Volkening considers Hölderlin’s fate tragic, but for the poet’s

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<sup>739</sup> “[W]ie man Helden nachspricht, kann ich wohl sagen, daß mich Apollo geschlagen.” Hölderlin, “An Casimir Ulrich Böhlendorff. Nürtingen, im Herbst 1802,” in his *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 3, ed. Jochen Schmidt (Frankfurt a. M.: Deutscher Klassiker Verlag, 1992), 466-468, here: 466.

<sup>740</sup> Heidegger, 59. See also, Heidegger’s further explanation of the nature of founding as a linguistic act: “poetry is a founding: a naming of being and of the essence of all things.” *Ibid.*, 60.

<sup>741</sup> Heidegger, 62.

undoubtedly great, though not divine, talent to extinguish slowly while he, worst of all, would still have been cognizant of his own demise.<sup>742</sup> Hölderlin's awareness of his bleak existence found, according to Volkening, expression in some of his late poetry that would reflect "the very last red glows of a disappearing light."<sup>743</sup>

Volkening closes his essay on the two contradicting but eventually complementing profiles of Hölderlin, Hiemer's portrait of the seemingly eternally young, gifted Hölderlin and Neubert's wax relief of the old poet who suffered from mental decline, with a quote. After briefly comparing Hölderlin to Vincent van Gogh, whom he regarded equally "flagellated by Apollo," Volkening cites the fragment "Neue Welt" ("New World") taken from the third version, third act of Hölderlin's unfinished drama *Tod des Empedokles*. Without further interpretation, he presents it first in Spanish translation, and then in the original German (here juxtaposed with the English translation by David Farrell Krell):

... und es hängt, ein ehern Gewölbe der Himmel  
über uns, es lähmt Fluch die Glieder der Menschen,  
und  
die erfreuenden Gaben der Erde sind, wie Spreu, es  
spottet unser, mit ihren Geschenken die Mutter und  
alles ist Schein— ...<sup>744</sup>

... and it looms, a brazen vault  
The sky above us, curse lames  
The limbs of humankind, and the nourishing, gladdening  
Gifts of earth are like chaff, she  
Mocks us with her presents, our mother  
And all is semblance— ...<sup>745</sup>

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<sup>742</sup> Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 406.

<sup>743</sup> "[L]os postreros resplandores rojizos de una luz que se apaga." Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 409.

<sup>744</sup> Volkening, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," 410.

This excerpt illustrates Hölderlin's gift but expresses also his awareness of his dwindling sanity. Thus it conjures in the reader's mind once more the impression that the poet's existence during the long years of his mental decline might have been nothing but a pale semblance of what it means to be alive and creative. The final words, "everything is semblance" with their emphasis on "Schein" ("semblance" or "appearance") and not on "Sein" (German for actual "existence" and "being"), seem to be an eerily appropriate ending to Volkening's essay, which deals not only with specific representations of Hölderlin but with the power of representations as such. Representations with the power to create not only semblances of an original, but to substitute it, and eventually to become the thing itself.

Eventually, Volkening suggests in "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin" to his reader a specific, twofold image of Hölderlin: a patchwork of what in his view is linked to Hiemer's portrayal and what he associates with Neubert's lesser-known Hölderlin representation. He comments on both and rejects various other representations, most prominently Heidegger's and the National Socialist Hölderlin reception. Thus, Volkening translates the Hölderlin images originating from a German cultural sphere into a Latin American context, and changes it through his own transformative interpretation and re-contextualization. His efforts to construct a double-faced image of the poet that would do justice to the times of Hölderlin's youth and his later years deconstruct at the same time any claim to absolute authority. Volkening demonstrates that even the most accurate representations are only valid within their context. He argues that even what he considers a truthful representation, as Hiemer's, may only be regarded as representative of

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1. <sup>745</sup> Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles: A Mourning-Play*, trans. David Farrell Krell (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2008), 188.

Hölderlin if it is contextualized (here by being juxtaposed with a depiction of the seemingly listless, old poet). The ambivalent ending of Volkening's essay with an excerpt of the "Neue Welt" poem encapsulates once more the two aspects that Volkening considers key to reaching an understanding of Hölderlin: the genial poet who wrote the lines and the one "flagellated by Apollo" who was familiar with the air of doom that the fragment effuses ("...es lähmt Fluch / die Glieder der Menschen..."). As the continuation of the fragment, which Volkening chose not to include, would reveal, the only hope for salvation laid in the emergence, or return, of the living spirit ("den lebendigen Geist"), what for Hölderlin never materialized.<sup>746</sup>

## 2. Volkening as Editor

Volkening wrote the essays, "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor" and "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin" for a special edition of *Eco* that he designed on occasion of the 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Hölderlin's birthday and which was published as the *Eco* issue for July through August of 1970: *In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos*.<sup>747</sup> Looking at the structure of this special issue gives us insight into Volkening's work as an editor. At the time, Nicolás Suescún was *Eco*'s official editor, but the Hölderlin issue was created under Volkening's direction as the

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<sup>746</sup> The not-included last lines of the "Neue Welt" fragment read: "O wann, wann / Schon öffnet sie sich / die Flut über die Dürre. / Aber wo ist er? / Daß er beschwöre den lebendigen Geist." Hölderlin, *Der Tod des Empedokles*, 148. In English: "Oh, when, when, will it open up / the flood across the barren plain. // But where is he? / That he conjure the living spirit." Hölderlin, *The Death of Empedocles: A Mourning-Play*, 188.

<sup>747</sup> *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente. In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos* (Bogotá) 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970).

editorial notice explicitly states.<sup>748</sup> Later, from March 1971 to December 1972, he became *Eco*'s permanent editor. The issue on Hölderlin might serve as an illustration how he employed the same principles that guided his essayistic writing and his approach to translations to create a larger, unified publication. As a cultural mediator, a *Kulturvermittler*, Volkening was cognizant of being also always a creative artist, a *Kulturschaffender*, who shapes and brings to life what he portrays. This particular issue was intended to introduce Hölderlin to a Colombian audience with a relatively limited knowledge of the poet's life and work. Volkening chose a variety of poems, prose, and critical essays to cover diverse aspects of Hölderlin's life and different stages of his work. In addition, Volkening sought to consider as much as possible long and complicated history of Hölderlin's reception in Germany.

As the table of contents included below shows,<sup>749</sup> Volkening opens the issue with an eighteen page long introductory essay on Friedrich Hölderlin.<sup>750</sup> Contrary to a biographical sketch that we might expect from the title "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843," this essay begins by presenting different stages in the public perception of the poet and his work. Volkening strives to discern in the various Hölderlin images the difference between "the image of this individual that his contemporaries and later generations modeled for themselves" and "certain qualities or inherent tendencies that are inherent to the person and sufficiently distinctive to allow for the emergence of his very own

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<sup>748</sup> "Ernesto Volkening was in charge of the editorial work of this number" ("La redacción de este número estuvo a cargo de Ernesto Volkening"). *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): ii.

<sup>749</sup> See "Sumario" on page 285.

<sup>750</sup> Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843" *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug. 1970): 225-242, here: 225.

picture.”<sup>751</sup> Referring to the work of Walter F. Otto, Karl Kéreny, Friedrich Creuzer, John J. Bachofen, and C. G. Jung as decisive influences for achieving this goal, he emphasizes that the recognition of archetypes and mythological constellations would be most illuminating in understanding of Hölderlin’s opus and personality. Moreover, Volkening insists on the imperative to see Hölderlin as

son of his century, son of such parents and such region, as schoolboy, [university] student, individual trained in the austere disciplines of humanism and the Lutheran theology of no less strict observance, as friend, lover, aficionado of a particular philosophical current, as *homo politicus* whose fervent and never repudiated adherence to the maxims of the French Revolution must have caused so much headaches to those who, in 1914 and 1933, called his ghost into line in defense of who knows what nightmarish pan-German utopia, and [...] as a poor devil condemned to perform, to the brink of insanity, the duties of a tutor of wealthy children.<sup>752</sup>

Finally, Volkening emphasizes, “the *via regia* that leads us to the poet runs still [...] through his work”<sup>753</sup> At this point, the essay morphs into an editorial that sets off to discuss in great detail, or in the words of Darío Achury Valenzuela, “with an agate’s precision,” the choices of different poems, prose texts, and accompanying essays the issue contains.<sup>754</sup> All of them, it becomes clear, have been selected or written with the

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<sup>751</sup> “[L]a imagen que de ese individuo se hayan modelado sus contemporáneos y las generaciones posteriores,” and “ciertas cualidades o tendencias inherentes al personaje y los suficientemente bien perfiladas para permitir que se cristalice esa misma efigie.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843,” 227.

<sup>752</sup> “[H]ijo de su siglo, hijo de tales padres y tal comarca, como alumno, estudiante, individuo formado en las austeras disciplinas del humanismo y la teología luterana de no menos severa observancia, como amigo, amante, aficionado a determinada corriente filosófica, como *homo politicus* cuya ferviente y nunca repudiada adhesión a las máximas de la Revolución Francesa tanto dolor de cabeza ha debido causarles a quienes, en 1914 y en 1933, llamaron sus manes a filas en defensa de quién sabe qué fantasmal utopía pangermanista, y [...] como pobre diablo condenado a desempeñar, hasta el umbral de la locura, cargos de preceptor de niños bien.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843,” 232-233.

<sup>753</sup> “[L]a *via regia* que nos lleva al poeta pasa todavía [...] por su obra.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843,” 233.

<sup>754</sup> Darío Achury Valenzuela, “Prologo,” preface to *Ensayos II: Atardecer europeo*, by Ernesto Volkening (Bogotá: Instituto Colombiano de Cultura, 1976), 11-31, here: 13.

intention to reach exactly the objectives that Volkening has just postulated: to gain an understanding of Hölderlin as a poet and as a historical person through reading his work and reflecting about it and the circumstances of its production.

The “*sumario*” (table of contents) illustrates Volkening’s organization of the 1970

*Eco* issue on Hölderlin:

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<sup>755</sup> *Eco*: *Revista de la Cultura de Occidente. In Memoriam Friedrich Hölderlin. Poemas — Prosa — Ensayos* (Bogotá) 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 415-416.

*Eco's* issue on Hölderlin consists of about 190 pages. About fifty pages are reserved for a bilingual sequence of poetry and close to thirty additional pages for translations of Hölderlin's prose. Following the editorial, the reader encounters thirteen poems by Hölderlin that belong mostly to the poet's late work, created in the years before his mental decline became disabling. Four of them are in praise of Hölderlin's muse Diotima, attesting to a short but extraordinarily prolific time in Hölderlin's life, in which, so Volkening, "calm grandeur, austral clarity and majestic harmonies would have predominated."<sup>756</sup> The poetry would be the "alpha and omega of Hölderlin's opus, and invite the reader to further exploration."<sup>757</sup> Notably, if we assume a linear reading of the issue, the reader experiences Hölderlin's poetry here firsthand without any prior influencing of her response and judgment. Subsequently, she will read a translation of Hölderlin's prose hymn "In lieblicher Bläue" ("In Lovely Blue" / "Azul apacible"), which is accompanied by a brief text by Volkening, entitled "A propósito de 'Azul apacible,'" ("About 'In Lovely Blue'"). Here Volkening discusses the controversial origin of the text and suggests that, although "In lieblicher Bläue" is, in his view, with considerable likelihood not Hölderlin's but his close friend's, Wilhelm Waiblinger's creation, it would contain the echo "of the Hölderlinean voice, his peculiar accent, and the distinct rhythm" during the last decades of the poet's life.<sup>758</sup> "In lieblicher Bläue," Volkening notes as an aside, would date back like the brief poem "Das Angenehme dieser Welt" (that he included as a reference in "Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas

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<sup>756</sup> "[P]redominaban la serena grandeza, la claridad meridional y los majestuosos acordes." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843," 235.

<sup>757</sup> "[E]l alfa y omega de la obra hoelderliniana." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843," 233.

<sup>758</sup> "[D]e la voz hoelderliniana, su peculiar acento y la cadencia inconfundible." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843," 233.



del traductor”) to the poet’s “years of madness.”<sup>759</sup> Both would therefore have been for decades rigorously excluded from anthologies. The next section of the issue on Hölderlin is entitled “Genio y locura” (Genius and madness). There, two brief texts are being presented to illuminate the period of Hölderlin’s mental decline: “Der kranke Hölderlin” (The sick Hölderlin) by Waiblinger and “Geniale Menschen” (Brilliant people) by Ernst Kretschmer,<sup>760</sup> both of which Volkening translated into Spanish.<sup>760</sup> At this point in the magazine, corresponding to the middle section of the table of contents, we find “Hälfte des Lebens” together with the three Spanish translations, and followed by Volkening’s essay “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor.” Volkening concludes the first part, foremost dedicated to Hölderlin’s poetry, with a text by Norbert von Hellingrath, “Los poemas tardías” (The late poems), written as preface to the fourth volume of his edition of Hölderlin’s collected works.<sup>761</sup> Volkening stresses in his editorial essay Hellingrath’s groundbreaking discovery of the poems of 1800 to 1806 and, points out that Hellingrath had by “sorting through mountains of paper, collating variants, deciphering illegible scrawling, reconstructed [this poetry] line by line.”<sup>762</sup> In case the

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<sup>759</sup> “[A]ños de locura.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843,” 234. Volkening translated “Das Angenehme dieser Welt” and included it in translation in his essay “Tres versiones de un poema o las cuitas del traductor.”

<sup>760</sup> Volkening’s sources for the translation of both of these texts were: Wilhelm Waiblinger, *Der kranke Hölderlin*, ed. Paul Friedrich (Leipzig: Xenien, 1913); and Ernst Kretschmer, *Geniale Menschen: mit einer Portraitsammlung*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (Berlin: Springer, 1931).

<sup>761</sup> In 1908, Norbert von Hellingrath discovered Hölderlin’s late hymns and translations of Pindar. He planned a six-volume critical edition of Hölderlin’s collected work, of which he edited the fourth and fifth volume before he was killed in the First World War in 1916. Friedrich Seebaß and Ludwig von Pegenot continued his work and completed what became the first edition of Hölderlin’s collected works.

Volkening used the following edition: Friedrich Hölderlin, *Sämtliche Werke: historisch-kritische Ausgabe*, vol. 4, *Gedichte: 1800-1806*, ed. by Norbert von Hellingrath, Friedrich Seebaß und Ludwig v. Pigenot (Berlin: Propyläen Verlag, 1923).

<sup>762</sup> “[O]rdenando chimborazos de papeles, cotejando variantes, descifrando ilegibles garabatos, la reconstruyó verso por verso.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843,” 241.

reader would find the tone of Hellingrath's essay too effusive, Volkening reminds her that the otherwise very sober and monkish philologist expressed "a sincere feeling, the genuine enthusiasm of the discoverer of treasures buried underneath the debris of an existence."<sup>763</sup>

The second half of the *Eco* edition, reserved for Hölderlin's prose and critical essays, allows once more for an immediate encounter with the words of the poet (aside, of course, from the mediating interference of the translator) before the reader finds commentaries by literary critics and scholars. To represent Hölderlin's prose, Volkening chose three excerpts from the epistolary novel *Hyperion oder Der Eremit in Griechenland* (*Hyperion or The Hermit in Greece*) that he translated into Spanish. Those excerpts, so he writes, illustrate that "Hölderlin was essentially a lyrical poet, and he did not stop being one when he tried himself in the narrative genre."<sup>764</sup> Even more, Hölderlin would have used this genre principally to express his ideas, and "to attest to his enthusiastic adherence to the cause of Liberty."<sup>765</sup> Thus, underneath its "philhellenism," *Hyperion* would be a testimony of the firm but vain hope of the Republican Hölderlin for a French-style political reform on his native soil.

The content of the selected texts allow for Volkening's desired, if necessarily limited cross-section of what is taken to be Hölderlin's autobiographically informed writing about spiritual life, love, friendship, and revolutionary fervor. Yet, the first text,

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<sup>763</sup> "[U]n sentimiento sincero, el genuino entusiasmo del descubridor de tesoros sepultados bajo los escombros de una existencia." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843," 242.

<sup>764</sup> "Hölderlin era esencialmente poeta lírico, y no dejó de serlo ni cuando se ensayaba en el género narrativo." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843," 235-236.

<sup>765</sup> "[P]ara dar testimonio de su entusiasta adhesión a la causa de la Libertad." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843," 236. (The capitalization of "Libertad" / "Liberty" is part of the original text.)

called “Carta a Diotima” (Letter to Diotima), turns out not to be part of *Hyperion*, and is actually a translation of one of Hölderlin’s letter’s to Susette Gontard, the model for Diotima.<sup>766</sup> Volkening correctly interprets the letter as a reflection of Hölderlin’s affection for Gontard. However, he considers the remarks about the “sacred fire” that would have seized, according to Hölderlin, all great men in history, but would have left him like a small fluorescent light (“ein glimmend Lämpchen”)<sup>767</sup> as a metaphor for the ill-fated love between Hölderlin and Gontard that the poet attempted to sublimate through his writing. Here, one could argue that Hölderlin addresses instead a “spiritual fire,” as the letter has it, that without being exclusive to the realm of lovers “nourishes the soul” of kindred people who share similar ideas and ideals. As Hölderlin’s life showed, Volkening adds, the “salvation of the man through the mere power of the inspired word [would have been] that what was tragically impossible.”<sup>768</sup> The second prose text is called “El relato de Alabanda” (Alabanda’s story), and it is taken from *Hyperion*, second volume, second book.<sup>769</sup> This letter of the protagonist Hyperion to his friend Bellarmin deals with a double inner conflict: the choice between loyalty with one’s fellow conspirators or with a friend, and between love and friendship. Volkening reveals that the character Alabanda

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<sup>766</sup> See Hölderlin, “An Susette Gontard. Vermutlich Ende Juni 1799. Entwurf,” in his *Sämtliche Werke und Briefe*, vol. 3, 365-366. The draft of this letter consists of two parts; Volkening included only the first part in *Eco*. The section he selected ends in the quoted German edition on page 366, with line 5 (lines 6 to 19 are excluded).

<sup>767</sup> Hölderlin, “An Susette Gontard. Vermutlich Ende Juni 1799. Entwurf,” 365. Volkening translated this phrase as “lamparita de poca luz” (“a little lamp with little light”). Hölderlin, “Carta a Diotima,” trans. Ernesto Volkening, *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 314-315, here: 314.

<sup>768</sup> “[La] salvación del hombre por la sola fuerza de la palabra inspirada, lo trágicamente imposible.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843,” 236-237.

<sup>769</sup> See Hölderlin, *Hyperion oder Der Eremit in Griechenland*, in his *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 4, ed. Friedrich Beißner (Stuttgart: Cotta, 1958), 143-145.

finally “confesses that he would be able to even abandon a friend for Diotima’s love.”<sup>770</sup> This conflict is being compared to Hölderlin’s life by indicating the likelihood of tensions between the poet’s friendship with Isaac von Sinclair, and his spiritual affinities to Adam Weishaupt, the founder of the secret society of the Illuminati. The last prose text that Volkening included in this issue, referred to as “Hiperion a Belarmino” (Hyperion to Bellarmin), is an excerpt from the first volume, second book of *Hyperion*.<sup>771</sup> Its subject is an excursion to the hills of Athens that Hyperion undertook in company of Diotima and some friends. Volkening considers this passage of “transcendental importance,” since it is composed of “aesthetics and elements of a philosophy of history that are still worthy of evaluation.”<sup>772</sup> In it, we may suspect, Volkening sees literature in what he might have considered the perfect balance between aesthetic pleasure and means of mediating knowledge about human life and nature. An essay by the Heideggarian philosopher Dominique Janicaud provides the interpretation of Hyperion’s philosophical premises, which Volkening considers key to an understanding of the poet and his work.

Volkening chose Janicaud’s 1967 article “Hölderlin y la filosofía en Hiperion” (Hölderlin and philosophy in Hyperion) because of its supposed excellent discussion of Hölderlin’s philosophy.<sup>773</sup> It would distill the essence of Hölderlin’s philosophical meditations and situate his thought within the Western philosophical tradition stemming from Plato and the Presocratics. Furthermore, it reflects on the relation of Hölderlin’s

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<sup>770</sup> “[C]onfiesa que por el amor de Diotima también sería capaz de abandonar al amigo.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843,” 237.

<sup>771</sup> See Hölderlin, *Hyperion oder Der Eremit in Griechenland*, 80-95.

<sup>772</sup> “[T]ranscendental importancia” and “de estética y los elementos de una filosofía de la historia aún merecedora de ponderación.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1770-1843,” 238.

<sup>773</sup> This article was first published in *Critique* (Aug.-Sep., 1967): 243-244. According to the information in “Anotaciones,” *Eco* 21:123-124 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 412-414, here: 412.

thought to German Idealism of philosophers such as Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Janicaud's essay would allow his readers, so Volkening, to avoid the fatal mistake of trying to comprehend Hölderlin's philosophy isolated from its seminal influences, which would easily lead to a distorted view.<sup>774</sup>

Volkening laments the many times in which Hölderlin's work had been distorted and reduced to a one-dimensional image. He thinks especially of the George-Kreis, the circle of young men and writers around the poet Stefan George, to portray Hölderlin as a *poeta vate*, the poet as a seer, as well as of the several attempts to press Hölderlin into the mold of a nationalistic poet. Notably, though Hellingrath was part of this circle, Volkening exempts him from his criticism by characterizing him as "disciple, albeit no unconditional follower of Stefan George."<sup>775</sup> — "For correcting such limited focus," Volkening writes, he chose an essay by Robert Minder who would present in an excellent manner "Hölderlin's image as it is seen by his neighbors from across the Rhine River."<sup>776</sup> The French Germanist, whose scholarship is characterized by a comparative perspective and who distinguished himself through his efforts to promote a new understanding between France and Germany in the post-war era,<sup>777</sup> contributes an essay titled

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<sup>774</sup> Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1743-1870," 238.

<sup>775</sup> "[D]iscípulo, ya que no seguidor incondicional de Stefan George." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1743-1870," 241.

<sup>776</sup> "Para corregir tan limitado enfoque," and "la efigie de Hölderlin vista por sus vecinos de allende el Rhin." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1743-1870," 239.

<sup>777</sup> Robert Minder became in 1948 founding member of the *Comité français de relations avec l'Allemagne nouvelle* in Paris. For his scholarship, but also especially for his political and cultural work, Minder received a number of awards and honors from governments and institutions of both states; among them, the Große Bundesverdienstkreuz (Order of Merit of the Federal Republic of Germany; 1962) and the Ordre des Palmes Académiques (Order of Academic Palms; 1967) from the French government.

“Hölderlin entre los alemanes” (Hölderlin among the Germans).<sup>778</sup> Minder’s essay, so Volkening, would achieve to paint “a complete picture of Hölderlin and his epoch, [one] rich in nuances and stratified with mastery.”<sup>779</sup> He praises Minder for having created a sensitive and knowledgeable portrait of the poet and of depicting “the intermittently faint and powerful resonance,” his work found in Germany from the end of the eighteenth to the mid-twentieth century.<sup>780</sup>

Following Minder is the Germanist and poet Maurice Delorme who analyses and contextualizes Hölderlin’s Jacobinism and his adherence to the ideals of the French Revolution. Delorme’s article, an excerpt of this 1959 book “*Hölderlin et La Révolution Française*” (Hölderlin and the French Revolution), attempts a political profiling of the poet through his poetry. In his essay “Los poemas de Hölderlin a Diotima” (Hölderlin’s poems to Diotima), Delorme stresses that the poet’s humanism would have exerted an equally strong influence on his worldview as did his political convictions.<sup>781</sup> Volkening emphasizes the merit of Delorme’s “astute analysis” for its ability to perceive of the historical figure in a larger context, a feature that seems to have been a decisive criterion in his selection of the various contributors.<sup>782</sup>

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<sup>778</sup> Minder’s essay for *Eco* has been taken from his essay collection “*Hölderlin unter den Deutschen*” und andere Aufsätze zur deutschen Literatur (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1968).

<sup>779</sup> “[U]n cuadro completo, rico en matices y estratificado con maestría, de Hölderlin y su época.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1743-1870,” 240.

<sup>780</sup> “[L]a resonancia intermitentemente débil y poderosa.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1743-1870,” 240.

<sup>781</sup> Maurice Delorme’s essay “Los poemas de Hölderlin a Diotima” is a translation of an excerpt of his book *Hölderlin et La Révolution Française* (Monaco: Éditions du Rocher, 1959), according to the information in “Anotaciones,” 412. Delorme’s book had been published posthumously, one year after his death from a grave illness.

<sup>782</sup> “[S]agaz análisis.” Volkening, “Friedrich Hölderlin, 1743-1870,” 238.

Volkening's own essay, "Dos perfiles de Hölderlin," concludes the special issue about the poet. Volkening informs the reader of his editorial with markedly few words about his intention to evoke there the tragedy of the poet's existence. Incongruent with the actual order of essays, Volkening mentions only in the very last sentence his essay "Tres versiones de una poema o las cuitas del traductor." About it, he notes, "lastly, we intended to trace in 'Tres versiones de una poema o las cuitas del traductor' the imprints that his poetry left on that of some of the moderns."<sup>783</sup> Volkening remains here silent about the essay's concern with the challenges of translations, although its title indicates that this would be the main topic: in English, "Three versions of a poem or the headaches of a translator." What he fails to mention is that the issue concludes with a poem by the British poet Stephen Spender, translated into Spanish by Nicolás Suescún. Spender, one of the so-called "Oxford Poets" in the 1930s, was an admirer and translator of Hölderlin. In 1939, he had first published the poem "Hölderlin's Old Age" (here: "La vejez de Hölderlin").<sup>784</sup> As the annotations of the magazine show, Volkening discovered this poem in Dierk Rodewald's 1969 anthology with the title "An Friedrich Hölderlin: Gedichte aus 180 Jahren deutsch- und fremdsprachiger Autoren" (To Friedrich Hölderlin: Poetry from 180 years by German and foreign-language authors).<sup>785</sup>

With this brief overview of the *Eco* issue that Volkening designed in the summer of 1970 in memory of Friedrich Hölderlin, I hence attempted to give insight into

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<sup>783</sup> "Por último, hemos intentado trazar en 'Tres versiones de una poema o las cuitas del traductor' las huellas que su poesía dejó en la de alguno modernos." Volkening, "Friedrich Hölderlin, 1743-1870," 242.

<sup>784</sup> The English version of the poem can be found in Appendix B. It has been taken from Stephen Spender, *The Still Centre* (London: Faber and Faber, 1939), 37.

<sup>785</sup> Dierk Rodewald, "An Friedrich Hölderlin: Gedichte aus 180 Jahren deutsch- und fremdsprachiger Autoren" (Frankfurt a. M.: Insel Verlag, 1969).

Volkening's editorial work. From March of 1971 to December of 1972, he took over as *Eco's* chief editor, and the issues of the magazine during that period are organized in a similar fashion. As we could see, Volkening aimed at combining articles that, while valuable to be read separately, illuminate different aspects of one or a couple of related themes. To further diversify the reading, and to present different and divergent opinions, he chose trans-national and trans-disciplinary contributions that covered aesthetics, politics, and philosophy, and provided historical as well as biographical context. Furthermore, Volkening hoped to educate his readers about the reception of Hölderlin's works and to give, with Spender's poem, at least a glimpse of what it had inspired. Volkening crossed the boundaries of national literatures by presenting Hölderlin as a transnational figure, as what Nietzsche called a "European incident." Moreover, Volkening's representation of Hölderlin in this issue of *Eco* evokes the Goethean concept of "*Weltliteratur*" (world literature), not only for the great care he paid to the various literal and cultural translations, which Goethe considered seminal to promote understanding between nations, but also in the selection of its content. In that respect, the national is not to be deconstructed or negated, but transcended. In which Volkening succeeds with his work as a mediator. *Weltliteratur* strives for making what is its own resound in the other, or as Goethe writes about poetry: "Poetry is cosmopolitan, and the more interesting, the more it shows its nationality."<sup>786</sup>

It is noteworthy that Volkening was, to the best of my knowledge, the only editor during the twenty-four years in which *Eco* was published who steered his readers' attention with elaborate editorial essays. Finally, through the inclusion of a considerable

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<sup>786</sup> Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Essays on Art and Literature*, ed. John Gearey, in *Goethe's Collected Works*, vol. 3 (New York: Suhrkamp, 1986), 227.



number of poems, essays, and excerpts of prose texts in Spanish translation, Volkening hoped, I believe, to have provided his readers with the tools to test the commentaries and the views he and others advanced, and to form their own opinion.



Fig. 22: Ernesto Volkening in his library

## CONCLUSION

Ernesto Volkening was a seminal figure in Colombian intellectual circles and a prolific advocate of German literature during the second half of the twentieth century in this Andean country. He was instrumental in shaping the image of German culture and literature in Colombia for decades. In the spring of 1971, he seemed to have reached the height of his public recognition when he was named editor of Karl Buchholz's magazine *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Echo: Magazine of occidental culture). I like to conclude my study by visiting Volkening at this crucial moment in his life as a public intellectual in Bogotá.

By 1971, Volkening had finally arrived in Bogotá. The city, which he explored as a flâneur and essayist, had become his home. He was integrated in a circle of eminent intellectuals, editors, and writers. Among them were Nicolás Gómez Dávila, Gabriel García Márquez, Álvaro Mutis, Nicolás Suescún, Karl Buchholz, and Juan Gustavo Cobo Borda. Most of them were regulars at the *Librería Buchholz*, where they would circulate new ideas about the cultural and political matters of the day and discuss joint projects. Volkening, by now an established authority as a literary critic, looked back at more than three decades since his first publication in German, and at more than two decades of publishing commentaries on European and Latin American literature, philosophy, and art in Spanish for a Colombian audience. During the late 1960s and early 1970s, his essays were already widely distributed through the *Revista de las Indias*, *Vida*, *Eco*, and other cultural magazines. In addition, he had worked for eleven years, from 1954 to 1965, as commentator on film and cinema at the Radio Nacional in Bogotá and had written many

essays for the *Boletín de Programmas*. Volkening had made a mark on the cultural sphere of his adoptive country. His voice was heard by the aspiring, young writers of the Latin American Boom, among them García Márquez. It was Volkening whom García Márquez wanted to translate *Cien años de soledad (One Hundred Years of Solitude)* into German. With the appointment as editor of *Eco*, he gained even more visibility and influence among Colombian intellectuals and writers.

For his first issue as editor of *Eco*, he wrote a programmatic essay that was both a positioning of the magazine and of his own work as literary critic and cultural mediator. At the age of sixty-three and after having lived for thirty-seven years in Bogotá, he had spent more time in Colombia than he ever did in Europe, which he had left as a young man of twenty-six. The editorial essay was a moment of reflection and introspection. Entitled “A dónde vamos” (Where are we going), Volkening outlines his understanding of cultural transfer from Europe to Latin America and of writing in Bogotá, one of the cultural centers of Latin America.

1971, when Volkening wrote this essay, was a time of political and cultural upheavals worldwide: student movements in Latin America, in the United States, and in Europe, the Vietnam War, the aftermaths of the Prague Spring and of the Tlatelolco massacre of students and workers in Mexico City, the African-American Civil Rights Movement in the United States, the ongoing civil rights struggle in Ireland, and the formation and strengthening of leftist guerilla groups involved in terror attacks, kidnappings, and assassinations all contributed to a sense of cataclysm and crisis. In Germany, the process of coming to terms with its National Socialist past and the Shoah was at the center of public discourse. Initially peaceful grassroots movements and student

protests turned violent. The Rote Armee Fraktion (Red Army Faction, also known as the Baader-Meinhof Group) was founded in 1970 and garnered support from a broad public. Literature became openly political. An entire generation discovered Latin American literature and felt stimulated by the ideas it transmitted. The poet and political activist Pablo Neruda became a cult figure; Kiepenheuer & Witsch published a German translation of Gabriel García Márquez's novel *Cien años de soledad* (in 1971); writers like Julio Cortázar, Juan Carlos Onetti, and Octavio Paz started to inspire and influence German writers. In 1976, the Frankfurt Book Fair chose Latin America as its unifying theme. Suhrkamp, Germany's leading publishing house in the postwar period, presented seventeen recently translated Latin American authors such as the Peruvian author Mario Vargas Llosa, the Mexican writers Octavio Paz and Carlos Fuentes, the Argentinean Julio Cortázar, and Alejo Carpentier from Cuba.<sup>787</sup>

In the West, Latin America surged as an obligatory cultural reference point, and was regarded by many as the up-and-coming center of cultural and artistic creativity that would be leading the way for Europe and its northern neighbors. In this period of cultural reorientation, seething revolutionary ideas, democratization waves with civil rights movements and women's emancipation as well as an incremental acceptance of alternative life concepts, Latin American countries pushed for modernization and saw the emergence of a new self-awareness. In Colombia, and more precisely in the capital city of Bogotá, Volkening wrote not only in the context of these transnational trends but also in the shaky aftermath of *La Violencia*, the decade(s)-long civil war that only according

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<sup>787</sup> Suhrkamp introduced at the 1976 Frankfurt Book Fair also the by now canonical text, *Materialien zur lateinamerikanischen Literatur* (Materials on Latin American Literature), edited by Mechthild Strausfeld. Published as paperback, it became the essential introductory text for German students interested in Latin American literature. Mechthild Strausfeld, ed., *Materialien zur lateinamerikanischen Literatur* (Suhrkamp: Frankfurt a. M., 1976).

to some came to an end around 1958. He worked in the presence of emerging groups of guerilla fighters like the M-19 (Movimiento 19 de Abril / Movement April 19), which appeared in April of 1970 in reaction to alleged fraud in Colombia's presidential elections. The FARC (Fuerzas Armadas Revolucionarias de Colombia / Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia), the ELN (Ejército de Liberación Nacional / National Liberation Army), and the EPL (Ejército Popular de Liberación / Popular Liberation Army) were equally active and contributed to the country's instability. The atmosphere was charged with brutal violence but also with hope for reformation and lasting political change.

Volkening's editorial essay is permeated by a strong sense of crisis; as he notes, he is writing in volatile times: "in eras like ours, there is no firm ground to stand on, nor a thing resistant to change."<sup>788</sup> With this in mind, Volkening expressed a need to position oneself as an individual but also as a member of a community and a region. Not by chance, he cites a passage from one of Johannes Urzidiel's stories about a journalist with a peculiar habit:

He decided to get involved, not because he was commissioned to do so by his newspaper but on his own. Why? Since such disgrace had first occurred, he felt insecure about his own profile. The system of coordinates that determined his personality before had begun to tumble and warp. He made an effort to reestablish the outlines of his life: in the end, he was an honorable man.<sup>789</sup>

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<sup>788</sup> "[E]n épocas como la nuestra en que no hay terreno firme en donde sentar el pie ni cosa inmune al cambio." Ernesto Volkening, "A dónde vamos," *Eco* 22:131-132 (Mar.-Apr., 1971): 453-476, here: 453.

<sup>789</sup> "Resolvió tomar cartas en el asunto, no por encargo de su periódico, sino por su propia cuenta. ¿Por qué? Desde que había acaecido aquella desgracia, se sentía inseguro de su propio perfil, el sistema de coordenadas que antes determinaba su personalidad había empezado a tambalear y alabearse; hizo un esfuerzo por restablecer los contornos de su vida: en fin, era hombre honrado." Volkening, "A dónde vamos," 463.

Volkening feels “solidarity” with this man who in times of crisis turns to finding and defining himself through writing.<sup>790</sup> Who, after a profound but not further described moment of crisis (“such disgrace”), feels the need to reassure himself of the very outlines of his life and self. Who decides to get involved and shape the course of the events — instead of simply reporting them — disregarding personal disadvantages. The protagonist of Urzidil’s story jumps into the muddle not so much to address the needs of others, but instead to deal with his own, existential need for self-interpretation.

The quoted passage closely relates to Volkening’s understanding of the function of his own writing and of the mission of *Eco*. For Volkening, some coordinates are unambiguous: he writes in Latin America for a Latin American audience, and so does *Eco*. Volkening’s presence is firmly anchored in Bogotá. The crisis he addresses in this essay is perceived as a profound crisis of Western culture itself. And, as the reader soon learns, it is Latin America’s autonomous cultural identity that is at stake.

Informed by the critical theory of the Frankfurt School, Volkening argues that the late capitalist society of the West, including Europe as well as the two Americas, had to be considered “a sick patient in full crisis.”<sup>791</sup> His political and cultural views prove here to be of remarkable continuity, since already as a young student in Germany, he identified with the political left. In his essay, Volkening explains the nature of the crisis from a historic-philosophical perspective, by considering economic aspects, and finally by examining the crisis as a cultural phenomenon. First, he discusses from the viewpoint of “the cultural sociology of Marxist observance” the prevalent conditions of the late

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<sup>790</sup> “[N]os sentimos [...] solidarios” (literally, using the inclusive first person plural: “we feel solidary”). Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 463.

<sup>791</sup> “[‘La Cultura occidental es’] una enferma en plena crisis.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 456.

phase of capitalist economy and consumer society, as well as their connectedness to cultural phenomena.<sup>792</sup> However, Volkening rejects what he interprets as an overly optimistic Marxist hope for cultural rejuvenation, for “a new Golden Age” of occidental culture.<sup>793</sup> He considers such hope utopian since the cultural ills were not exclusively bound to economic systems, as the situation in countries that abolished private capitalism would demonstrate. Hence, a reformation of the social and economic system, if at all possible, would not lead to cultural rebirth. Second, Volkening discusses the idea of “the morphology of cultures outlined by Oswald Spengler in *The Decline of the West*,” which he understands as the opposite position one could take in regard to the crisis of Western culture.<sup>794</sup> Noting that Spengler would not leave any room for cultural rebirth after the inevitable decline, Volkening objects that history teaches us differently. From the core of moribund cultures, new ones could develop, and they could even successfully adopt elements of the mother civilization (“civilización matriz”), as the survival of Antiquity in the Middle Ages shows.<sup>795</sup> — His third argument, which Volkening describes as sharing in the “critical sharpness of Marxism and the pessimism of Spengler” while “exceeding both in radicalism,”<sup>796</sup> seems somewhat unexpected: Volkening turns his attention to his own métier, to literature, by pointing to the work of the Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard. He argues that instead of divining the precise origins of the crisis, the deeply

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<sup>792</sup> “[L]a sociología cultural de observancia marxista.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 456.

<sup>793</sup> “[U]na nueva edad de oro.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 457.

<sup>794</sup> “[L]a morfología de las culturas esbozada por Oswald Spengler en *El ocaso del Occidente*.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 456.

<sup>795</sup> Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 458.

<sup>796</sup> “[C]omparte la agudez crítica del marxismo y el pesimismo de Spengler, pero los supera a ambos por el radicalismo del enfoque.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 458-459.

pessimistic work of Bernhard shows that this crisis “reach[es] already down to the vital roots of the human condition.”<sup>797</sup> Volkening, who lived and worked in Bogotá at a considerable distance from the German-speaking literary scene, proved his keen sense for avant-garde literature by picking Thomas Bernhard.<sup>798</sup> Bernhard’s work, Volkening emphasizes, would be “a diagnosis, or to put it bluntly, an *autopsy in vivo*, practiced without any hope of recovery, which allows us to better appreciate the crisis of Western culture.”<sup>799</sup> However, the act of dissection opens room for hope through new insights. Western culture derives itself from Europe, which Volkening presents as being in decline beyond recovery. Yet Latin American culture, ontologically linked to Europe, is portrayed as an emerging culture with abundant creativity. Volkening regards Latin American culture as in the becoming, as about to be born out of its European “mother” culture to become a great literature, a world literature, in its own right. Latin America, so Volkening’s argument goes, is a world “in gestation and in search of itself.”<sup>800</sup> One that is “anxious to seize its identity, and with it its full cultural autonomy.”<sup>801</sup>

Volkening considered his own work as a literary critic, cultural mediator, and editor of *Eco* to be supporting the process of cultural awakening in Colombia. Through his writing, he hoped to contribute to Latin America’s self-recognition and cultural

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<sup>797</sup> “[L]egan ya hasta las propias raíces vitales de la condición vitales de la condición humana.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 459.

<sup>798</sup> Thomas Bernhard was not translated into Spanish until a decade later, in 1981, when his novel *Ja* was published in Barcelona — notably, not in a Latin American country: Thomas Bernhard, *Sí* (Barcelona: Editorial Anagrama, 1981).

<sup>799</sup> “[U]n diagnóstico o, por decirlo a secas, una *autopsia in vivo*, practicada sin esperanza de curación, nos permite apreciar mejor la crisis de la cultura de Occidente.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 460.

<sup>800</sup> “[U]n mundo en gestación y en busca de sí mismo.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 466.

<sup>801</sup> “[‘Un continente’] ansioso de conquistar su identidad, y con ella su plena autonomía cultural.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 469.



autonomy, for which he considered the confrontation with its European legacy imperative.

Indeed, Volkening had arrived not only in Colombia, but more generally in Latin America. He voted unwaveringly for a strengthening of the continent, which had become his adoptive home. Living in Bogotá, he had turned from an emigrant to an immigrant who participated in the cultural life around him, and eagerly hoped to contribute to its rise. Through his knowledge and passion for literature, he partook in the development of this new Latin American self-consciousness and its emancipation from the hegemony of European culture. Volkening was convinced that he, and *Eco*, could do so “within the means of our possibilities, which are certainly limited, and at the risk of committing a thousand mistakes, to such attempt of Latin American self-interpretation.”<sup>802</sup> Unassuming, yet confident, Volkening argues that a critical engagement with literature would lead “both, individuals and communities, [to] come to understand their own nature more profoundly.”<sup>803</sup> By writing not only about German and European but also about Latin American literature, he hoped to contribute in a “vertical” direction to the self-understanding of the continent’s and specifically of Colombia’s roots. He located these roots in the mystic fog that García Márquez, like a “paleontologist of the spirit of his people and necromancer,” would evoke in his *Cien años de soledad* (*One Hundred Years of Solitude*),<sup>804</sup> and in the writings of the Cuban novelist Alejo Carpentier who was one of the first Latin American writer to explore culture and history through means of magical

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<sup>802</sup> “[‘Contribuir’], en la medida de nuestras posibilidades, por cierto, limitadas y a riesgo de incurrir en mil errores, a semejante tentativa de autointerpretación latinoamericana.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 470.

<sup>803</sup> “[T]anto los individuos como los pueblos llegan a comprender más profundamente su propia naturaleza.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 469-470.

<sup>804</sup> “[P]aleontólogo del alma de su gente y nigromante.” Volkening, “A dónde vamos,” 472.

realism. However, with the recovery of its archaic links, Latin America would also have to fully integrate its European legacy on a “horizontal” level, for which Volkening chooses the quite graphic metaphor of physical digestion. The foreign needs to be assimilated through “laborious digestive processes” to become “substance of one’s own being.” Volkening promoted this idea through projects like his Hölderlin-issue of 1970, with essays about Hölderlin, Kafka, Goethe, or Karoline von Günderode as well as translations of poetry and prose by Marieluise Fleißer, Ingeborg Bachmann, or Peter Härtling. His commitment to this task is reflected by the articles he selected for the first issue of *Eco* he edited in 1971. Volkening included contributions by poets and thinkers from different Latin American countries such as by Nicolás Suescún from Colombia, Hernan Lavín Cerda from Chile, Mario Vargas Llosa from Peru (who wrote an essay about Gabriel García Márquez), Guillermo Sucre from Venezuela, and the literary scholar Federica Colavita from Argentina (with an essay about Alejo Carpentier).

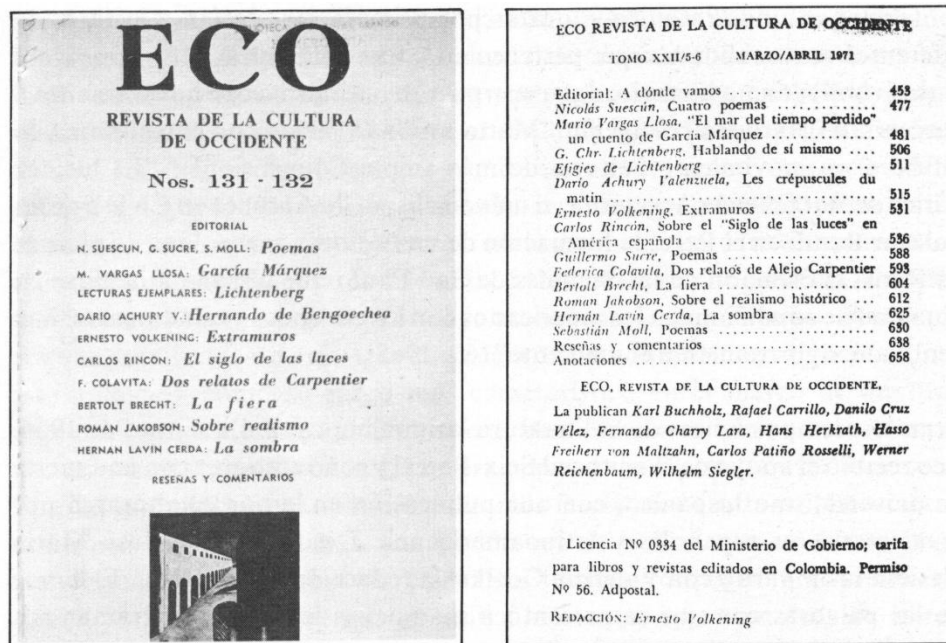


Fig. 23: Title page and table of contents of the first *Eco*-issue Volkening designed as the magazine’s main editor (March-April 1971)

These articles were complemented with European voices in translation. There was a short story by Bertolt Brecht carrying the title “La fiera” (The beast). A text by Georg Christoph Lichtenberg entitled “Hablando de sí mismo” (Speaking of oneself), which Volkening accompanied with some of his reflections under the title “Efigies de Lichtenberg” (Portraits of Lichtenberg), also appear. There were an essay entitled “Sobre el realismo histórico” (On historic realism) by the Russian theorist Roman Jakobson, one by Carlos Rincón about the Enlightenment in Spain, poems by Sebastián Moll, and an essay by Volkening, entitled “Extramuros” (“Outskirts”), containing childhood memories about life in Antwerp at the beginning of the twentieth century.

It should not come as a surprise that we witness today a renaissance of Ernesto Volkening’s work in Colombia. His influence as a cultural mediator and literary critic who introduced German literature and culture by writing in Spanish has to my knowledge remained unparalleled in the Andean country, and seemingly still resonates in literary and intellectual circles as well as among the reading public. Volkening is remembered as a humanist and authority on German and European literature but also as a keen commentator of works by Colombian authors. Certainly so because of his pioneering writing on Gabriel García Márquez’s early work — as the posthumous collection of Volkening’s essays on Marquez published in 1998 (with a second edition in 2010) demonstrates.<sup>805</sup> Another reason might be that Volkening’s work as an essayist is considered an *autopsy in vivo* of a decisive moment in Colombia’s literary and

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<sup>805</sup> Volkening, *Gabriel García Márquez: “Un triunfo sobre el olvido,”* ed. Santiago Mutis Durán (Bogotá: Arango Editores, 1998); in 2010, a second edition was issued, printed by Fondo de Cultura Económica in Bogotá.

intellectual history that documents, in inspiring and transforming ways, the stimulating convergence of cosmopolitan ideas in his adoptive home, in Bogotá.

## APPENDIX A:

### BOOKS, ESSAYS, AND TRANSLATIONS BY ERNESTO VOLKENING

#### PUBLICATIONS ON VOLKENING

In compiling the publications by Ernesto Volkening and on Volkening, I strove for completion. However, I am aware that some of Volkening's early publications (in the magazines *Ahora*, *Crítica*, *Testimonio*) are missing and others such as the list of his publications in *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien* and *Boletín de Programmas* might be incomplete. Also, I decided to leave out informal online publications that discuss Volkening's work.

#### Overview:

1. *Boletín de las Programmas* (Program guide)
2. *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien* (German magazine for Colombia)
3. *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Echo: Magazine of occidental cultura)
4. Volkening's translations for *Eco*
5. *Revista de las Indias* (Magazine of the Indies)
6. *Vida: Revista de arte y literatura* (Life: Magazine of art and literature)
7. Volkening's major translations (book length)
8. Collected volumes (in life and posthumously)
9. Dissertation
10. Publications on Volkening

### **1. *Boletín de las Programas***

- Volkening, Ernesto. "Cine sonoro en Alemania." *Boletín de Programas* (Bogotá: Radio Nacional de Colombia) 15:147 (Oct., 1956): 41-44.
- . "El cine parlante en los Estados Unidos (1927-1940)." *Boletín de Programas* 17:158 (Sept., 1957): 8-12.
- . "El cine y sus problemas." *Boletín de Programas* 17:163 (Feb., 1958): 22-24, 49, 72.
- . "El nacimiento del cine." *Boletín de Programas* 15:142 (May, 1956): no page numbers.
- . "El nacimiento del cine." *Boletín de Programas* 16:151 (Feb., 1957): 9-11.
- . "Perfiles de Ernst Jünger." *Boletín de Programas* 18:182 (Sept., 1959): 66-72.

### **2. *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien***

- Volkening, Ernesto. "Georg Büchner (Schluss)." *Deutsche Zeitschrift fuer Kolumbien* (Bogotá: Editorial Centro) 8 (Apr., 1938): 148-1149.

### **3. *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente***

- Volkening, Ernesto. "Acerca de la muerte de un escritor." *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* (Bogotá: Buchholz) 25:147 (Jul., 1972): 323-325.
- . "A dónde vamos." *Eco* 22:131-132 (Mar.-Apr., 1971): 453-476.
- . "Aire de tango." *Eco* 27:1 (Nov. 1973): 90-106.
- . "Amberes: Reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro (I)." *Eco* 19:110 (Jun., 1969): 113-157.
- . "Amberes: Reencuentro con una ciudad y un rostro (II)." *Eco* 19:111 (Jul., 1969): 234-281.
- . "Anotado al margen de 'Cien años de soledad' de Gabriel García Márquez." *Eco* 15:87 (Jul., 1967): 259-303.
- . "Anotado al margen de 'El reaccionario' de Nicolás Gómez Dávila." *Eco* 34:205 (Nov., 1978): 95-99.
- . "Apología de la anécdota y otras herejías." *Eco* 54:267 (Jan., 1984): 224-225.

- “A propósito de ‘Azul apacible’ (a la manera de Hölderlin).” *Eco* 23:138-139 (Oct.-Nov., 1971): 755-757.
- “A propósito de Eco y Narciso de Calderón.” *Eco* 23:138-139 (Oct.-Nov., 1971): 755-757.
- “A propósito de Gottfried Benn.” *Eco* 17:1 (May, 1968): 61-68.
- “A propósito de José Antonio Osorio Lizarazo.” *Eco* 25:214 (Aug., 1979): 442-443.
- “A propósito de ‘La mala hora.’” *Eco* 7:4 (Aug. 1963): 294-304.
- “A propósito de Salustro.” *Eco* 33:203 (Sept., 1978): 1181-1185.
- “A propósito de un ensayo sobre historiografía.” *Eco* 28:164 (Jun., 1974): 138-141.
- “Arte gráfico alemán contemporáneo en la Biblioteca Luis Ángel Arango.” *Eco* 19:4 (Aug., 1969): 444-447.
- “Aspectos contradictorios de la apropiación de bienes culturales de raíz ajena.” *Eco* 13:76 (Aug., 1966): 419-438.
- “Aspectos de una teoría examinada por Ralf Dahrendorf en ‘Homo sociologicus,’” *Eco* 26:155 (Sept., 1973): 249-259.
- “Boceto para un retrato de Felipe Segundo, de Miguel de Ferdinandy.” *Eco* 22:131-132 (Mar.-Apr., 1971): 643-647.
- “Carlos Buchholz. Perfil de un editor.” *Eco* 41:252 (Oct. 1982): 668-670.
- “Casi un prólogo.” *Eco*: 16:4 (Feb., 1968): 337-343.
- “Charles Wilson: Los países bajos y la cultura en el siglo xvii.” *Eco* 21:122 (Jun., 1970): 213-216.
- “¿Como leer a Brecht?” *Eco* 25:146 (Jun. 1972): 113-116.
- “Conciencia histórica y pasión historiográfica.” *Eco* 23:137 (Sept., 1971): 449-464.
- “Crónica de una lectura ‘Lex deux etandards’ de Lucien Rebatet.” *Eco* 32-33:198,199, 200 (Apr.-Jun., 1978): 576-596.
- “David Herskovitz: El expresionismo reditivo.” *Eco* 28:171 (Jan., 1975): 324-326.
- “De mis cuadernos (I).” *Eco* 36:220 (Feb., 1980): 337-351.
- “De mis cuadernos II.” *Eco* 36:221 (Mar., 1980): 449-468.
- “Describá de un dibujo.” *Eco* 43:239 (Sept., 1981): 553-558.

- “Digresión sobre los presagios.” *Eco* 25:150 (Oct., 1972): 667-669.
- “Don Quijote rojo y negro.” *Eco* 34:206 (Dec., 1978): 138-145.
- “Don Quijote rompe una lanza por Heine.” *Eco* 26:152 (Dec., 1972): 113-129.
- “Dos figuras de la Edad Media.” *Eco* 4:3 (Jan. 1962): 320-323.
- “Dos perfiles de Hölderlin.” *Eco* 21:3-4 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 404-410.
- “Efigies de Lichtenberg.” *Eco* 22:131-132 (Mar.-Apr., 1971): 511-514.
- “El actor y su papel.” *Eco* 25:145 (May, 1972): 107-108.
- “El arte narrativo de José Félix Fuenmayor.” *Eco* 20:5 (Mar., 1970): 485-489.
- “El Carlos V de Michael de Ferdinandy: Historia y metahistoria.” *Eco* 20:6 (Apr., 1970): 520-560.
- “El hombre que vino de muy lejos: Proyecciones sudamericanas en un cuento de Wilhelm Raabe.” *Eco* 35:213 (Jul., 1979): 259-266.
- “El manierismo: Arte de un mundo en crisis, arte problemático de Arnold Hauser.” *Eco* 26:151 (Nov., 1972): 101-110.
- “El mitólogo Oscar Goldberg.” *Eco* 28:169 (Nov., 1974): 24-31.
- “El mundo ancho y ajeno de Álvaro Mutis.” *Eco* 41:237 (Jul., 1981): 259-265.
- “El oficio de escribir: de mis cuadernos.” *Eco* 53:264 (Oct., 1983): 579-620.
- “El paisaje mítico de la infancia: Recordando a Proust.” *Eco* 23:133-134 (May-Jun., 1971): 194-213.
- “El patriarca no tiene quien lo mate.” *Eco* 29:178 (Aug., 1975): 337-387.
- “Emile Verhaeren y Max Elskamp: de mis cuadernos.” *Eco* 37:223 (May, 1980): 73-82.
- “En causa propia (I).” *Eco* 38:232 (Feb., 1981): 337-359.
- “En causa Propia (II).” *Eco* 48:244 (Feb., 1982): 361-400.
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## APPENDIX B:

### POEMS

Listed in order of their appearance in Chapter VI:

1. Hölderlin, Friedrich. "Das Angenehme dieser Welt." In his *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 2, edited by Friedrich Beißner, 276. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 1953.
2. Trakl, Georg. "Rondel." In his *die Dichtungen*, edited by Wolfgang Schneditz, 49. Salzburg: Müller, 1948.
3. Stadler, Ernst. "Winteranfang." In his *Der Aufbruch*, 42. Leipzig: Verlag der Weissen Bücher, 1914.
4. Heym, Georg. "November. Blinde stehen im Weg." In his *Gedichte und Schriften, Band 1: Lyrik*, edited by Karl Ludwig Schneider, 445. Hamburg: Ellermann, 1964.
5. Hölderlin. "Hälfte des Lebens." *Eco: Revista de la Cultura de Occidente* 21:3-4 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 289.
6. Hölderlin. "Mitad de la vida." Translation of "Hälfte des Lebens" by Nicolás Suescún. *Eco* 21:3-4 (Jul.-Aug., 1970): 290.
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**1. Hölderlin, “Das Angenehme dieser Welt”**

Das Angenehme dieser Welt hab ich genossen.  
Die Jugendstunden sind, wie lang! wie lang! Verflossen.  
April und Mai und Junius sind ferne.  
Ich bin nichts mehr. Ich lebe nicht mehr gerne!

**2. Trakl, “Rondel”**

Verflossen ist das Gold der Tage  
Des Abends braun und blaue Farben:  
Des Hirten sanfte Flöten starben  
Des Abends braun und blaue Farben  
Verflossen ist das Gold der Tage.

**3. Stadler, “Winteranfang”**

Die Platanen sind schon entlaubt. Nebel fließen. Wenn die Sonne einmal durch  
den Panzer grauer Wolken sticht,  
Spiegeln ihr die tausend Pfützen ein gebleichtes runzliges Gesicht.  
Alle Geräusche sind schärfer. Den ganzen Tag über hört man in den Fabriken die  
Maschinen gehn —  
So tönt durch die Ebenen der langen Stunden mein Herz und mag nicht stille  
stehn  
Und treibt die Gedanken wie surrender Räder hin und her,  
Und ist wie eine Mühle mit windgedrehten Flügeln, aber ihre Kammern sind leer:  
Sie redet irre Worte in den Abend und schlägt das Kreuz. Schon schlafen die  
Winde ein. Bald wird es schnei'n,  
Dann fällt wie Sternenregen weißer Friede aus den Wolken und wickelt alles ein.

**4. Heym, “November. Blinde stehen im Weg”**

Blinde stehen im Weg. Ihre großen Lider  
Sind wie kleine Felle heruntergehängt,  
Eine Sonntagsglocke hinten, die über den Feldern  
In der Turmspitze sanft sich schaukelt und schwenkt.

Manchmal ein Leierkasten irgendwo ferne.  
Manchmal ein Ton, den der Wind verzehrt.  
Und das Herz gibt der Trauer sich gerne,  
Unter Wolken, da Sommer so ferne gekehrt.

Oben gehen noch einige Leute

Hoch und Schwarz, und ihr Mantel fliegt,  
Und die Pappeln sausen über die Himmel,  
Braun mit den Köpfen, die Wind verbiegt.

Wer über die Höhen geht, spiegelt sich ferne  
In der winzigen Sonne, lichtlos und tot,  
Und über den bergigen Schluchten kühle  
Löschet ein gelbes Abendrot.

**5. Hölderlin, “Hälfte des Lebens”**

Mit gelben Birnen hänget  
Und voll mit wilden Rosen  
Das Land in den See,  
Ihr holden Schwäne,  
Und trunken von Küssen  
Tunkt ihr das Haupt  
Ins heilignüchterne Wasser.

Weh mir, wo nehm ich, wenn  
Es Winter ist, die Blumen, und wo  
Den Sonnenschein,  
Und Schatten der Erde?  
Die Mauern stehn  
Sprachlos und kalt, im Winde  
Klirren die Fahnen.

**6. Hölderlin, “Mitad de la vida,” trans. Nicolás Suescún**

Con peras doradas  
y llena de rosas silvestres  
la tierra cuelga sobre el lago,  
oh, dulces cisnes,  
que ebrios de tanto beso,  
bañais vustras cabezas  
en el agua sobria y santa.

Ay de mí, dónde encontraré  
flores, cuando llegue el invierno,  
y la luz del sol  
y las sombras de la tierra?  
Los muros se alzan mudos  
y helados, y las veletas  
crujen en el viento.

**7. Hölderlin, “Mitad de la vida,” trans. Antonio de Zubiaurre**

Colgantes peras amarillas,  
plentitud de rosas silvestres,  
pende la tierra sobre el lago;  
vosotros, dulces cisnes,  
en ebriedad de besos,  
suergis la cabeza  
en la serena agua sagrada.

Ay de mí, dónde hallar  
Siendo invierno las flores,  
Dóne el brillo del sol,  
La sombra de la tierra?  
Los muros se levantan  
mudos, fríos; al viento  
restallan las vaderas.

**8. Hölderlin, “Mitad de la vida,” trans. Ernesto Volkening**

Con su carga de gualdas peras  
y de rosas silvestres plena  
cuelga la tierra sobre el lago,  
oh cisnes amables que  
de besos embriagados  
sumergis las testas  
en el casto frescor de las olas.

Ay de mí, cuano el invierno viene,  
dónde encuentro las flores, y dónde  
del sol los cálidos rayos,  
y la sombra acogedora?  
Mudos y fríos se yerguen  
los muros, y en el viento  
chirrían las veletas.

**9. Hölderlin, “Half of Life” by Richard Sieburth**

With its yellow pears  
And wild roses everywhere  
The shore hangs in the lake,  
O gracious swans,  
And drunk with kisses  
You dip your heads

In the sobering holy water.

Ah, where will I find  
Flowers, come winter,  
And where the sunshine  
And shade of the earth?  
Walls stand cold  
And speechless, in the wind  
The weathervanes creak.

**10. Stephen Spender, "Hölderlin's Old Age"**

When I was young I woke gladly in the morning  
With the dew I grieved towards the close of day.  
Now when I rise I curse the white cascade  
That refreshes all roots, and I wish my eyelids  
Were dead shutters pushed down by the endless weight  
Of a mineral world. How strange it is that at evening  
When prolonged shadows lie down like cut hay  
In my age I rejoice and my soul sings  
Burning vividly in the centre of a cold sky.

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