Hans-Ulrich Treichel’s Frankfurt Poetikvorlesungen offer fascinating insight into the literary strategies which he employs in his creative writing. The lectures supply a literary topography which consists of three points of psychological, rather than political, orientation: Ostwestfalen, Berlin and Italy. This article seeks to introduce readers to Treichel’s prose and poetry by reference to these fixed points. What emerges is that Treichel’s landscape is very much that of a generation of young West Germans; that it is rooted in a specifically Western experience, and that the GDR, where it appears at all in Treichel’s fiction, is viewed very much from an outsider’s perspective. The article traces his development from his earliest poetic experiments, by way of short prose sketches, to the acclaimed story Der Verlorene (1998) and the latest novel Tristanakkord (2000). Drawing both on Treichel’s published work and on unpublished earlier versions of the Poetikvorlesungen, the article concludes that Treichel’s fiction is characterised by a masterly portrayal of embarrassment, vulnerability, even trauma. His apparent retreat into the personal and private does not betoken a refusal to ask fundamental social and political questions, so much as an indirect method of addressing precisely those questions.

On his own admission Hans-Ulrich Treichel’s writing appears at first sight to embody a disjunction between political realities and literary identity. While literary and political commentators find it difficult to resist the temptation to conflate momentous historical turning-points and shifts in literary or artistic style, and hence remain convinced that the ‘Wende’ must in some way mark a clear caesura in German literature, Treichel is at pains to deny any significant impact of political change on his personal experience. For him, the personal and psychological clearly outweigh the historical and political: ‘Westberlin war ewig, mußte ewig sein, solange Westdeutschland ewig war und der panische Leerraum meiner Kindheit’.¹

In delineating the main features of Treichel’s work to date, I shall seek to tease out the unstated implications of this quotation. It suggests, on the one hand, that Treichel’s peculiarly West German cultural identity is a personal psychological necessity; on the other, that this identity is by no means untypical of his generation. In resolving this apparent paradox, we shall see that politics and history are by no means absent from his writing.

¹ Hans-Ulrich Treichel, Der Entwurf des Autors. Frankfurter Poetikvorlesungen, Frankfurt a.M. 2000, p. 38. Subsequent references to the text refer to this edition; page references are given in brackets after quotations. I am grateful to Hans-Ulrich Treichel for a copy of an earlier draft of his Poetikvorlesungen; this version differs in minor ways from the published work.

© Blackwell Publishers Ltd 2002. Published by Blackwell Publishers, 108 Cowley Road, Oxford OX4 1JF, UK and 350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148, USA.
but that they impinge on his literary strategies is a curiously indirect and subtle fashion.

An invitation to present the Frankfurt Poetikvorlesungen is an unambiguous signal that a German writer has achieved the status and dignity of a canonical figure. Treichel’s invitation might appear, at first sight, a surprising one: his literary breakthrough came relatively late in his career, in 1998, when at the age of forty-six he published Der Verlorene to international acclaim. His biographical details may be swiftly sketched. Born in 1952 in Versmold in Westphalia into a refugee family which had fled from East Prussia in the last months of the war, Treichel himself sought refuge from the stultifying atmosphere of Versmold to study Germanistik at the Free University in West Berlin. Here, under the supervision of Klaus Scherpe, he completed a doctorate on the work of Wolfgang Koeppen, and subsequently co-edited Koeppen’s six-volume Gesammelte Werke. In the course of his burgeoning academic career he spent a number of years as a German language assistant in Italy, first at the University of Salerno and subsequently at the Scuola Normale Superiore in Pisa. His first literary efforts were as a lyric poet: in 1979 a slim volume entitled Ein Restposten Zukunft appeared and three years later, in 1982, the collection Tarantella. In 1984 his oratorio entitled Aus der Zeit des Schweigens. Neun Lieder für Arthur Rimbaud was premièred at the Musikhochschule in Cologne. There followed three volumes of poetry published by Suhrkamp: Liebe Not (1986), Seit Tagen kein Wunder (1990) and Der einzige Gast (1994), publications which seemed to presage a modest success as a poet. As his account in the Poetikvorlesungen informs us, he took his first tentative steps as a prose writer during his stay at the Villa Massimo in Rome, producing several short prose pieces which later appeared in the collection Von Leib und Seele in 1992. A second volume of prose, Heimatkunde oder Alles ist heiter und edel, appeared in 1996, and Der Verlorene was published in 1998. Treichel’s first novel proper, Tristanakkord, appeared in 2000; unlike Der Verlorene, it received only luke-warm critical notices. In 1995 Treichel was appointed to a professorship in creative writing at the Deutsches Literaturinstitut in the University of Leipzig, the successor institution to the Johannes R. Becher Institute. He remains in this academic post. From this brief biographical sketch three points of particular interest emerge: first, the major success of Der Verlorene, which is frequently compared to Bernhard Schlink’s Der Vorleser in its re-evaluation of German war guilt, its indirect presentation of the German perpetrators as themselves victims; secondly, Treichel’s relatively late discovery of prose; and thirdly the close connection between his academic and creative activity. All three points will be considered at greater length later in this article.

Treichel’s Frankfurt lectures offer a literary topography which consists of three points of psychological, rather than political, orientation: Ostwestfalen, Berlin and Italy. Ostwestfalen, whose geographical components ‘Ost’ and ‘West’ seem almost to cancel one another out and to produce a mythical place ‘Falen’, represents the empty, bleak landscape.
of childhood, which Treichel associates with the silence of his parents about their traumatic war-time experiences and the compensatory industriousness of the years of the ‘Wirtschaftswunder’. Treichel evokes ‘die sogenannte Landschaft, die in Wahrheit gar keine Landschaft war, sondern ein leerer Raum, der aus Wiesen, Weiden und einer Kläranlage bestand’ (p. 19). The empty landscape is a projection of an inner psychological emptiness, which the adult writer retrospectively diagnoses as his parents’ ‘Unfähigkeit zu trauern’, while the ‘Kläranlage’ simultaneously undermines any expectation of a rural idyll, and hints darkly at a cleaning-up process, a symbolic removal of the detritus of the past. The parental trauma, the mother abducted and raped by Russian soldiers, the father wounded and wearing an artificial arm, the elder brother lost as a baby during the cataclysmic events of the trek westwards, is pervasive but almost unspoken. As Treichel writes in the Poetikvorlesungen:

Mich zu erinnern gehört nicht zu den Dingen, die ich gelernt habe. Die Erinnerung ist kein Familienerbe, obwohl sie beinahe das einzige ist, was die aus dem Osten vertriebenen Eltern hätten bei sich haben können, als sie sich in Westfalen niederließen . . . Die Eltern, die ich kennengelernt hatte, waren Eltern ohne Vergangenheit. Und das hieß für mich zuallererst Eltern ohne Eltern. Wenn die Eltern kein Imperfekt haben, dann haben ihre Kinder kein Plusquamperfekt. Beides aber braucht man, um erzählen zu können. (p. 21)

Here Treichel offers us a framework for an understanding of Der Verlorene. It was not until 1991, a few weeks before his mother’s death, that he learned of the existence of an elder brother and the horrendous circumstances of his disappearance, at a time, therefore, in which he was embarking on his first experimentation with the prose form. For the first time, he learned that his parents had begun a systematic search for his lost brother as late as 1959, a quest of which he had been oblivious as a child, but which he re-works fictionally as a conscious experience. He highlights as symptomatic his parents’ formal deposition in 1959: ‘Die Situationen, in die wir dann kamen, lassen sich im einzelnen kaum schildern’ (p. 25). His parents’ unwillingness, or inability, to articulate their traumatic experiences comes to stand for the evasiveness of a whole war-time generation; the silence, the unspoken words of his childhood produce an emptiness which characterises his formative years in the 1950s and which are projected onto the landscape. Psychologically, Treichel explains the atmosphere which prevailed in his home as marked by an ever-present sense of guilt and embarrassment, for which he could, as a child, find no rational justification: ‘Allerdings wußten die Eltern, wofür sie sich schämten und woran sie sich schuldig fühlten. Ich wußte es nicht. Ich spürte ebenfalls eine Schuld und eine Scham, doch waren diese Empfindungen objektlos’ (p. 28). However private and personal this experience was, Treichel represents it as typical of a generation. The ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ becomes a characteristic West German avoidance strategy, an inability
to confront the realities of the past, an unspoken sense of guilt which pollutes and distorts the present. As he puts it in *Der Verlorene*:

> Je mehr sich die Mutter im Haus zu schaffen machte, um so weniger konnten die Scham und die Schuld sich ihrer bemächtigen. Und in Wahrheit tat die Mutter zumeist nichts anderes, als sich im Haus zu schaffen zu machen. Ebenso wie der Vater nichts anderes tat, als sich um die Geschäfte zu kümmern. Der Vater, der anfangs eine Leihbücherei, später ein Lebensmittelgeschäft und danach einen Fleisch- und Wurstgroßhandel betrieben hatte, erleichterte sich ganz offensichtlich durch die Arbeit.²

While this interpretation of the ‘Wirtschaftswunder’ as a compensatory suppression of the past is not particularly original, it acquires in Treichel’s fiction a peculiar poignancy. Ostwestfalen, then, is not a geographical place so much as a psychological condition of exposure to a sense of guilt that has no specific cause. The younger son bears neither guilt nor responsibility for the loss of his elder brother, but he senses an atmosphere of ‘Schuld und Scham’ – the phrase occurs on numerous occasions – which pervades and distorts his upbringing. His parents’ unexpressed feelings of guilt are palpable in the sheer absence of the lost brother. This sense of emptiness, of absence, projects itself into the landscape of childhood, creating the vacuum which Treichel will seek, as a writer, to fill. His Proustian search for lost time, his attempt to articulate and explain, to give content to the emptiness of Ostwestfalen, embodies his literary strategy.

Two sections of the volume *Von Leib und Seele*, and five of the twelve sections of *Heimatkunde*, feature Treichel’s complex relationship to Ostwestfalen. Norbert Mecklenburg has in various studies³ focussed on the provinciality of the German novel; in Treichel’s work this provinciality emerges in a particularly negative light. But what marks his portrayal of that bleak upbringing is its irony. The tragedy inherent in his parental world is depicted with a subtlety and a playful humour which, paradoxically, heighten the horror of that experience. The narrative perspective in *Der Verlorene*, for example, is that of the younger brother, whose desperate efforts to compete with the missing Arnold relativise the genuine suffering and guilt of his parents. The sensitive child understands more than he admits, but at the same time the adult reader is vouchsafed insights and offered explanations which are denied to the young narrator. The result is a curious mixture of intimacy and distance. The longed-for Arnold acquires in the text, both for the parents and the reader, a more powerful presence than the first-person narrator: ‘Während mein Bruder Arnold schon zu Säuglingszeiten nicht nur wie ein glücklicher, sondern auch wie ein bedeutender Mensch aussah, war ich auf den meisten Photos meiner Kindheit zumeist nur teilweise und manchmal auch so gut wie überhaupt

Who, the reader is entitled to ask, is the real ‘Verlorene’?\textsuperscript{5}

In Treichel’s literary topography West Berlin offers a counterpoint to Ostwestfalen: it represents ‘keine Heimat . . . Aber es war – alles in allem – die vorerst beste Heimatlosigkeit, die ich mir vorstellen konnte’ (p. 32). Here too Treichel’s experience is not untypical of a generation of West German students who found in West Berlin not only a way of avoiding conscription to military service, but also access to the student movement and the alternative scene. For Treichel there was another important motive, namely the fact ‘daß Westberlin von einer Mauer und einem sich daran anschließenden Korridor, genannt DDR, umgeben war, der mich vor Ostwestfalen und vor meiner Kindheit schützte. Die Mauer war mein antiwestfälischer Schutzwall’ (p. 36). In his \textit{Poetikvorlesungen} Treichel emphasises that the unique political status of Berlin played a subsidiary, yet paradoxically significant, role in his personal development:

Ich lebte in historischer Indifferenz und war doch historisch bedeutsam. Die spezielle Westberliner Situation erlaubte es einem melancholischen, geschichts- und beinahe ichlosen Ostwestfalen, sich lebendig und zeitgeschichtlich präsent zu fühlen. Ein hoher Preis, ließe sich einwenden: Ein ganzes Land einschließlich Hauptstadt zu halbieren und ein halbes Volk einzusperren, nur damit ein verstockter Ostwestfale ein Geschichtsgefühl hat. (p. 23)

His Berlin experience also inspired Treichel to begin a diary and to take his first tentative literary steps through poetry: ‘Man kann mit Gedichten keine Welt erschaffen. Aber man kann der Welt einige Splitter entnehmen und diesen Bedeutung verleihen. Das Schreiben eines Gedichts läßt sich darum auch negativ definieren: als Arbeit des Ausblendens, Verschweigens und Nicht-Sehens’ (p. 41).\textsuperscript{6} The ‘Nichtsehen’ that poetry permitted him also marked Treichel’s relationship to East Berlin and the GDR. He puts off visiting East Berlin because he knows that he will always be able to do it at some later date; he deliberately avoids filling the ‘Korridor’ and the ‘Zone’ with lived experience, only to discover later, when the Wall comes down, that experience cannot be indefinitely postponed:

Die Öffnung der Mauer hat in gewisser Weise mein System von Wahrnehmung und Nichtwahrnehmung zum Einsturz gebracht. . . . Ich hatte bisher zuwenig von der Welt wahrgenommen und erwachte aus diesem Wirklichkeitsdefizit, aus dieser negativen Wirklichkeitstrunkenheit mit einer migränenhaften Verstimmung und Melancholie. (pp. 44–5)

\textsuperscript{4} \textit{Der Verlorene}, pp. 8–9.
\textsuperscript{6} The draft typescript has a slightly different formulation: ‘Aber man kann der zerfallenen Welt einige Splitter und Bruchstücke entnehmen.’

Treichel’s adoption of the narrative form, and his recourse to the subject-matter of displacement from East Prussia, coincide with the fall of the Wall: ‘Ich habe den Verlust Westberlins, wenn ich die Wiedervereinigung einmal so nennen darf, in gewisser Weise verschoben verarbeitet, in dem sich mir plötzlich der Verlust meines ältesten Bruders im Jahr 1945 aufdrängte’ (p. 46). Strikingly, the end of the cold war is presented as a loss of psychological security, an exposure to a new uncertainty. In Treichel’s shorter prose West Berlin is depicted as the setting for his early poetry, for his encounters with psychoanalysis and other therapies (which are wittily evoked in two chapters of Von Leib und Seele and in the story ‘Der Hypochonder’ in Heimatkunde) and for his academic work, which he depicts as a kind of apprenticeship for his own literary activity. Academic life, with its backbiting, competitiveness and questionable significance and its rich potential for satirical treatment, features in the eighth chapter of Von Leib und Seele and, in the original typescript version (though, interestingly, not in the final published version), in the closing paragraphs of the Poetikvorlesungen.

Treichel’s relationship to West Berlin is, as I have indicated, not uncharacteristic of his generation of West Germans. For many of the post-war generation the GDR was simply not particularly interesting; there were other more attractive forms of socialism, in Czechoslovakia, in South East Asia, in South and Central America, other more attractive landscapes in the Mediterranean: the South of France, Greece, and Italy. Treichel is ever willing to concede that there is a post-war German ‘Sehnsucht nach dem Norden’ and, ever the Germanist, to adduce evidence for it in the work of Alfred Andersch and Hans Magnus Enzensberger. He depicts himself in this period as drawn to the south, first to Provence, then to Greece, and finally to Italy. ‘Ich sehnte mich nach Griechenland und flog mit der kompletten Schöneberger Wohngemeinschaft nach Kreta, denn zufälligerweise sehnten sich genau in der Phase, in der ich mich nach Griechenland sehnte, auch meine Mitbewohner nach Griechenland’ (p. 67). Italy supplied the setting for his next phase. Inspired once more by contemporary literary antecedents, his reading of Alfred Andersch’s Die Rote and Peter Schneider’s Lenz, Treichel signs up for Italian language courses at university and attends a seminar in the politics department on the history of the Italian Communist Party: ‘Ich habe mich damals . . . auf durch und durch spontane und vollkommen authentische Weise nach Italien gesehn, auch wenn ich feststellen mußte, daß sich in diesem Wintersemester, es war um 1975 herum, komplette germanistische Grundkurse nach Italien zu sehn begannen’ (p. 73). The repetition of the epithet ‘komplett’ in these last two passages relativises the individual significance of these foreign excursions. Literary inspiration once more, this time supplied by Wolfgang Koeppen’s Tod in Rom and Rolf Dieter Brinkmann’s Rom, Blüche, colours the account that Treichel gives of his year at the Villa Massimo in Rome in 1988. This period marked his transition to prose writing and his rediscovery in a Roman setting of the childhood melan-
chory and emptiness of Ostwestfalen. The sheer isolation of his daily life in the Villa Massimo rekindled his childhood memories and prompted a period of autobiographical introspection: ‘Wohl kann ich deshalb meine Genese als Prosaautor in Rom ansiedeln – aber ich kann und muß sie zugleich auch in den Leerräumen der Kindheit verorten, denen ich in Rom auf besondere Weise wiederbegegnet bin’ (p. 104). It was in Rome that the prose pieces entitled ‘Berichte’ from the collection *Von Leib und Seele* were produced, material which Treichel freely conceded embodies ‘die eigene Erfahrung und das eigene Ich’. Shortly before this turning-point in his career Treichel had collaborated with Heinz Werner Henze, producing opera libretti for the composer, who lived near Rome in Castelli Romani. After the completion of *Das verratene Meer*, a variety of other collaborative projects were considered: a text on Phaedra, reworking of Hemingway’s *Death in the Afternoon*, and a Minotaur libretto. In the event all that came to fruition was a libretto for the opera *Venus und Adonis*, but the collaboration with Henze was later to leave its mark on Treichel’s novel *Tristanakkord* (2000). Here the Berlin Ph.D student and lyric poet Georg Zimmer (who bears an uncanny resemblance to Treichel himself) is appointed by a world-famous composer to edit the latter’s memoirs. The sheer productivity and, let it be said, the vanity of Zimmer’s host both fire his own literary ambitions and, simultaneously, alienate him. The encounter with Henze, then, proved to be highly productive, though in quite different ways from what was originally intended.

Treichel concludes his *Poetikvorlesungen* with the illuminating remark that he considers it to be a peculiar privilege


In addition to offering the usual warning against the biographical school of criticism, Treichel isolates here a dual creative transformation: potentially traumatic experiences may be rendered less destructive with wit, humour and irony; at the same time, however, the apparently secure routines of day-to-day existence may suddenly collapse, opening up a sudden unnerving sense of meaninglessness and emptiness. The ghosts of Ostwestfalen are never wholly banished. This duality supplies the delightful tension of Treichel’s prose writing. In the interview which he gave during his visit to the Centre for Contemporary German Literature at Swansea in 1999 he went out of his way to emphasise the positive aspect, the liberating function of humour: ‘wenn man nicht ironisch wäre, müßte
man den ganzen Tag schreien oder weinen. Die Subjektlast bedient sich
der Ironie, um sich ein bißchen zu erleichtern.7

It is, of course, a brave or foolhardy critic who would attempt to add to
the secondary literature on a writer who himself displays such a mastery
of academic writing. Treichel’s ‘Habilitationsschrift’ was published in 1995
under the title *Auslösungsverfahren. Exemplarische Untersuchungen zur Lite-
ratur und Poetik der Moderne*. It contains sympathetic analyses of the work
of, among others, Robert Walser, Kafka, Thomas Bernhard, Ernst Jünger,
Alfred Andersch, Peter Weiss and Peter Handke, all of whom figure in
Treichel’s personal Pantheon. In 2000, his collection of essays *Über die
Schrift hinaus* was published by Suhrkamp. Here again he is drawn back
to the writers listed above, with the addition of Wolfgang Koeppen, Hans
Magnus Enzensberger, Arno Schmidt and Botho Strauß. Treichel clearly
has a not unproblematic relationship with the academic profession in
which he has served his apprenticeship. The typescript version of his *Poe-
tikvorlesungen*, though not the published version, concludes with a series
of reflections on Germanistik:

Wer Sekundärliteratur schreibt, der befindet sich auf verlorenem Posten.
Darum ist es so erstaunlicher, wie unablässig Sekundäres geschrieben und
auch gedruckt werden könnte. Der verlorene Posten ist ein hart umkämpfter
Ort. Germanistische Fachzeitschriften können sich vor Einsendungen nicht
retten. Um den Platz in einem Sammelband werden Intrigen gesponnen
und Schlachten geschlagen. Fragt man einen Germanisten, was er gerade
tue, wird er sagen, daß er an einem Aufsatz schreibe. Warum er es tut, wissen
wir nicht. Es sei denn, er tut es aus bewerbungstrategischen Gründen. Ich
kenne jedoch massenhaft festangestellte Germanisten, die Aufsätze
schreiben, ohne sich noch irgendwo bewerben zu müssen. Die ihre freie
Zeit, ihre Wochenenden opfern und ihr Familienleben gefährden, um einen
Aufsatz zu schreiben. Ist der Aufsatz beendet, wird ein neuer Aufsatz
begonnen. Ich kenne Germanisten, die haben Dutzende, ja Hunderte Auf-
sätze geschrieben – und auch davon weiß im Grunde niemand. Der He-
roismus des aufsatzschreibenden Germanisten harrt noch der Würdigung.8

A dark hint here of the terrors that daily lie in wait for the Germanist.
But Treichel himself as an academic and a teacher of creative writing is
uniquely placed to combine the primary and the secondary. Fortunate the
author who has a regular university income, and fortunate the Germanist
who can make a serious contribution to primary as well as secondary litera-
ture.

Although Treichel’s personal experience is also that of a generation,
the direct impact of German history on his work is slight. The ‘Wende’
has left only a few indirect traces on his writing. One might expect some-
one who commutes between Leipzig and the former West Berlin to be in

---

8 Unpublished typescript, pp. 72–3.

an excellent position to document the shifting social and cultural trends after unification, but Treichel’s work since 1990 makes scant reference to political events. The new ‘Bundesländer’ do not feature in any significant way in his writing. And on the rare occasions when the politics of unification is alluded to, the tone is unmistakably that of the unreconstructed West German. The poem ‘Umland’ from the collection Der einzige Gast (1994) offers a splendidly ironic perspective on the new travel possibilities that have opened up for West Berliners:

Umland
Aufs Rad! In die Bahn!
Alle Grenzen offen,
Überall Gewässer.
Kormorane massenhaft,
Auf jedem Pfahl ein Reiher.
Und dieser Verfall.
Phantastisch.
Potsdam zum Beispiel,
Von Brandenburg
Gar nicht zu reden.
Nichts wie hin, Freunde.
Immer flach geatmet
Und durch!  

While it might be tempting to interpret the poem as a satire on West Berlin prejudice, the short story ‘Alles ist heiter und edel’ suggests that Treichel’s view of the GDR is itself a typical West German one. The writer and his companion visit Stendal: the train takes them through Rathenow, which ‘aus einer Unzahl von kleinen Feriensiedlungen besteht, die allerdings in einem erbschmalzigen Zustand sind’. When they arrive in Stendal they are confronted with ‘dem beißenden Braunkohlenaroma’ (p. 106), the ‘Kohlendioxydschwaden der bewohnten Vorstadt’ (p. 107), and ‘den baufälligen und darum auch leerstehenden Häusern der Altstadt’ (p. 106). Here all the West German clichés about the former GDR are wheeled out. To raise their downcast spirits they quote from the work of Stendhal, the French writer whose name suggests his origins in this unlikely place: ‘Alles ist heiter und edel, nichts flößt Schrecken ein’ (p. 107). In the Winckelmann Museum, the main cultural attraction of the town, the curator, ‘bei dem es sich um einen abgewickelten und darum arbeitslosen Kunsthistoriker handelt’ (p. 108), offers them a splendid allegorical interpretation of a copy of the Laocoön statue:

Die beiden Riesenschlangen seien, so der Kustode, die Vergangenheit und die Zukunft. Wobei er mit der Vergangenheit den Sozialismus einschließlich der Staatssicherheit meine und mit der Zukunft den Kapitalismus einschließ-

lich der Treuhandgesellschaft. Der Priester Laokoon aber und seine beiden Söhne verkörpert, wenn nicht die Menschheit insgesamt, so doch die betrogene und erniedrigte Bevölkerung der sogenannten neuen Bundesländer, die sowohl dem Wurzgegriff einer nach wie vor mächtigen und mörderischen Vergangenheit wie auch dem einer erbarmungslosen und menschenfresserischen Zukunft ausgesetzt sei. (p. 109)

As for the arrival of capitalism in Stendal, it is embodied in the three elderly gentlemen who form the string trio who provide appropriately Viennese musical accompaniment for the customers of the Viennese Coffee House chain, the latest Western innovation. It might be too much to expect a profound analysis of social change in the former GDR from an author who confesses to living ‘in historischer Indifferenz’, but what we are offered is a highly amusing collection of sharp observations, a series of ironic insights which illuminate social experience as effectively as any political treatise.

Treichel’s fiction is characterised by a masterly portrayal of embarrassment and vulnerability. Examples abound; from the excruciating embarrassment felt by the narrator of Der Verlorene as he and his mother witness harmless scenes of intimacy on television, to the medical examination which he undergoes:

> Je länger der Professor tastete, desto mehr Höcker und Erhebungen hatte mein Kopf, und je länger er tastete, desto mehr schämte ich mich für diese Höcker und Erhebungen. Und ganz wie am Vormittag . . . begann ich vor Scham und Verlegenheit zu glühen und zu schwitzen. Und je mehr ich auf dem Kopf schwitzte, um so mehr schämte ich mich dafür, daß der Professor meinen nassen und verschwitzten Kopf unter seinen Händen hatte. (p. 115)

Georg Zimmer in Tristanakkord exists in a permanent state of acute embarrassment prompted by the discrepancy between his own fragile sense of his artistic talents and his employer’s insouciant and overweening confidence in his. Treichel’s retreat into detail, into the private, cannot be equated with the new subjectivity of the 1970s. It springs from his awareness that literature is a crude and ineffective tool for coming to grips with major social and political realities, but that, as Der Verlorene illustrates, by concentrating on the private, on the sharply observed personal detail, literature can indeed inch its way towards some of these major themes. The private and the subjective can lay bare wider social pressures indirectly, by depicting the deformations which these pressures cause on the inner lives of his narrators and protagonists. Embarrassment, a category of social experience in the depiction of which Treichel displays consummate skill, arises through the imbalances between social expectation and personal authenticity. His retreat into the private does not betoken a refusal to ask fundamental socio-political questions, so much as a sensitive and highly indirect way of addressing precisely these issues. The ‘Schuld und Scham’ which mark the narrator’s upbringing in Der Verlorene
are intensely personal, yet they illuminate the complex relationship of post-war German experience to the past. Embarrassment and discomfiture are the hallmarks of Treichel's literary identity; irony and humour the effective strategy by which he seeks to keep them at bay.