“Pencil-Regions”
The Pencil and Paper of Robert Walser’s Micrography

By Shoshana Schwebel

Department of Languages, Literatures, and Cultures,
German Studies
McGill University, Montreal

A thesis submitted to McGill University in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of MASTER OF ARTS

Submitted August 2014

“Pencil-Regions”
The Pencil and Paper of Robert Walser’s Micrography

Shoshana Schwebel
Department of Languages, Literatures and Cultures
McGill University

Abstract

This Master’s thesis examines the writing materials of Robert Walser’s micrography, his pencil and papers, with respect to both their physical qualities and their figurative significance within the scope of Walser’s prose. As the first full-length study of Walser’s pencil and paper, my thesis aims to show that an understanding of Walser’s relationship to his writing materials is crucial in order to approach his middle to late writings. Crucial, because Walser’s switch to writing microscopically hinged on his change in writing materials, from the pen to the pencil, and gradually, from blank sheets of paper to tiny, pre-used scraps. I argue that these changes in Walser’s materials were first, a manifestation of his changing attitudes towards the ‘public’ (the industry of publishing as well as his readership); and second, a reflection of his long-term affinity with that which is small, peripheral, and overlooked.

The thesis proceeds in three chapters. The first chapter exposes the material and metaphoric significance of Walser’s pencil and paper, while the second and third chapters search for the fictional presence of paper and pencil in Walser’s middle to late prose.

* * *

Cette thèse examine la matière des « microgrammes » de Robert Walser, à savoir ses crayons et papiers, en se concentrant particulièrement sur leur caractère matériel, ainsi que sur leur signification métaphorique dans la prose de Walser. En tant que première étude complète des crayons et des papiers, ma thèse cherche à démontrer que la compréhension du rapport qu'entretient Walser avec son matériel d'écriture est indispensable à l'étude de ses textes de milieu et de fin de carrière. Indispensable, puisque le mouvement de Walser vers l'écriture microscopique découle directement de la transformation de son matériel d'écriture, c'est-à-dire du stylo au crayon de plomb, et plus graduellement, des feuilles de papier vierge à de petits bouts de papier déjà utilisés. Mon projet soutient ainsi que cette transformation se révèle d'abord comme la manifestation d'un certain changement d'attitude envers le « public » (tant le milieu de l'édition que son lectorat), et ensuite, comme le reflet d'un attachement de longue date à ce qui est petit, périphérique et négligé.

Cette thèse contient trois chapitres. Le premier s'attache à étudier les réseaux de significations matérielles et métaphoriques des crayons et papiers de Walser, tandis que les deuxième et troisième chapitres cherchent à repérer les marques de la présence fictive du papier et du crayon dans le contexte de sa prose tardive.

Translated by Laure Henri-Garand

Acknowledgments

This work owes its completion to several people and parties. The most fundamental help has been the financial support that enabled me to see my degree to completion. I have been lucky to receive support from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council, with a Joseph-Armand Bombardier Canada Graduate Scholarship for 2012-2013. I have also received funding from my department at McGill University, and for this I would like to thank my department chair Karin Bauer for awarding me with a Kunz Fellowship in the Humanities, and my supervisor Andrew Piper for providing me with a stipend this past year.

Of course, my supervisor has provided me with much more than money throughout the process of my thesis. I am extremely grateful to Andrew Piper for his edits and suggestions at every stage of the work, and more broadly, for helping to make my academic journey inspiring, challenging, and fun. Without his fascinating classes and conversations, I would have been lost. In those moments when I *did* come close to being lost, however, Andrew gave me the tools to find my way out. I am also thankful to his family, Tinka, Echo, and Eliot, for making Montreal such a hospitable city. Alongside Professor Piper, the faculty in my small department (German Studies) is wonderful, and in my experience, unparalleled at McGill. I would like to thank the following professors in particular: Professor Paul Peters, who has nurtured my interest in small and unnoticed things, and urges me to read them as signs of the highest meaning. Professor Karin Bauer has offered help and encouragement on several occasions throughout this degree and before. I am glad for the opportunity to have taken a class this past year with Professor Tove Holmes, who is an inspiring professor and scholar.

With regard to the final form of the thesis, thank you to September Cowley from McGill's tutoring services for helping to edit my second chapter. And for many years, I have benefitted from Lynda Bastien's help in administrative matters. Laure Henri-Garand translated my abstract on short notice, a favour for which I am very grateful.

For their help with the day-to-day struggle of balancing composition with composure, or writing with sanity, I am obliged to many friends and family members. Aviv Milgram, Laure Henri-Garand, Andrea Garland, Nasrin Himada, Matthew Dallman, Sebastian Berry, Fransisco Laucirica, Kathrin Spiller, and Katrina Sark: from short pep talks to breaking down my writer's blocks, I am thankful to each of you. Laure and Sebastian, the friends who keep me interested in reading and writing, I owe you each special thanks. My dear and brilliant siblings, Josh, Paula, Aaron, and Chava Schwebel, I have benefitted greatly from your advice. In the double role this year of roommate and brother, Josh has been of particular help by teaching me how to work calmly and—even more importantly—how to relax afterwards. My mother Ruth has generously proofread many pages of this thesis, and her tireless support in the final stage was invaluable. To my father Carl, I am thankful for our daily conversations, which have played a tremendous role in guiding this work. The most pure motivation is your enthusiasm.

Table of Contents

Illustrations

Introduction

The Pencil in 'the Age of Typescript'[1]

In early 1922, well into the "century of the typewriter,"[2] Alfred Polgar writes that "Bleistift und Feder sind totes Material."[3] Polgar, who inserts this statement into a long tribute to the typewriter, is commenting first of all on the lacklustre materiality of the pencil and the pen compared to the 'living' machine that is the typewriter. The pencil and pen, he notes, demand much more time and effort from the writer: not only does the writer need to hold the instrument and guide its movements over the paper, but every letter still needs to be formed ('forced,' in Polgar's language) by the hand of the writer. The typewriter, in contrast, eliminates each of these manual steps from the process of writing. As a result, the writer is free to fantasize. Thus the typewriter makes the work of writing fast and easy, for both the physical and creative tasks: "Sie nimmt dem Dichter gut fünfzig Prozent schöpferischen Schweißes ab" (Giuriato 9).

---

[1] This phrase is borrowed from Volume 2 of the book series *Zur Genealogie des Schreibens*, which is titled *Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*. See *"Schreibkugel ist ein Ding gleich mir, vom Eisen": Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*, ed. Davide Giuriato, Martin Stingelin, and Sandro Zanetti (München: Fink Verlag, 2005).

[2] This is the name given to the twentieth century by Wilfred A. Beeching, in his history of the typewriter, *Century of the Typewriter* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974).

[3] Excerpts from Polgar's text appear in Davide Giuriato's introduction to *Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*. See Giuriato, "Mechanisiertes Schreiben, Einleitung," pp. 7-20, here 9.

[2] This is the name given to the twentieth century by Wilfred A. Beeching, in his history of the typewriter, *Century of the Typewriter* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1974).

[3] Excerpts from Polgar's text appear in Davide Giuriato's introduction to *Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*. See Giuriato, "Mechanisiertes Schreiben, Einleitung," pp. 7-20, here 9.

The second, implicit meaning of Polgar's comment on the pencil and pen is that by 1922 they no longer deserved a place in the world of writing instruments. They were 'dead,' out-dated and replaced. This sentiment was not unique to Polgar. Darren Wershler, in the opening of his book *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting*, writes that in the early parts of the twentieth century, "[n]o *real* writer could possibly continue to make use of a pencil when a typewriter was available."[4] Wershler is being tongue-in-cheek, reflecting on the belief that the typewriter could produce superior writing because its vibrating mechanics were thought to impart inspiration to the writer. However, Wershler's introduction makes one thing clear about this time period: set against the typewriter, the pencil and pen become significant media at the moment that they are devalued. Before, as the unquestioned norm, the use of pen or pencil merited no special consideration. Now, with the typewriter, the pencil and pen become a *choice*, and their 'dead materiality' accordingly becomes a noteworthy contrast.

This choice between a typewriter and a pen or pencil (but especially a pencil) was fraught with social coding. Typewriters were expensive. Pencils were not. The roots of this coding go deeper than just money: in the 'discourse network' of 1900, as Friedrich Kittler outlines it, and as Polgar confirms, pencils were trash, debris.[5] From the banks of literature that Kittler considers, the pencil in the 1900s (if important enough to even mention) has its place only in the hands of children and madmen. For example, the child Malte Laurids Brigge fumbles for his colouring pencil under the table, and then

---

[4] Darren Wershler-Henry, *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007), 5.

[5] "The pencil . . . [p]recisely the fact that it is "old," if not a piece of debris, makes it significant" See Friedrich Kittler, *Discourse Networks 1800/1900,* trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1990), 322.

rediscovers this gesture—as a grown man in need of psychiatric treatment—in the restless hands of an old woman fiddling with a pencil. Kittler notes that the "child's vanished pencil" is the very same medium with which Brigge records his observations, in the eponymous notebooks that comprise Rilke's text (Kittler 1990, 324). Not only does the writing instrument of his childhood return but the type of writing with which Brigge fills his notebooks carries associations with a schoolboy's writing exercises, by way of their "uncorrected rough form" (333) that recalls the 'free essay'—essays that were, moreover, written using pencils (330). Yet Kittler does not go further into the significance of the pencil as the instrument that, by his own account, loops the note-taking madman back to the figure of the child. There is a history of the pencil's symbolic place in twentieth century literature that is waiting to be written, and it seems to be in line with the history of the abject. "The writer takes pleasure in making use of discarded material" (328), Kittler writes, referring to Brigge's fascination with ruined buildings or people with maladies, but the pencil in this context is no less a discarded material, of which the writer makes use. One could say that the pencil is the instrument of the 'rag picker,' to re-contextualize Walter Benjamin's program of writing.[6]

Nietzsche, Kittler's model for the twentieth century user of writing technology, also bears mentioning in the interwoven history of the pencil and the typewriter. Nietzsche was the first famous philosopher-writer to use the typewriter.[7] Because of Nietzsche's partial blindness, he much preferred the tactile writing method made possible

[6] For one example of this concept, see Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999), 460.

[7] Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 1999), 200.

by the typewriter to the traditional method that relied on sight (Kittler 1999, 200 ff.). For Kittler, Nietzsche is an especially important figure for understanding the changing relationship between writing and its medium (between content and form) in the era of the typewriter, because Nietzsche actually theorized the typewriter as he wrote with it: "Our writing tools are also working on our thoughts," he typed in a letter in 1882 (200). Yet Nietzsche, despite needing the typewriter to kick off a century in which his aphoristic and dithyrambic writing style would reign,[8] was in a very different place a few years later. In the clinic in Jena, where he was being treated for nervous diseases, Nietzsche wrote that he was "'happy and in his element' as long as he had pencils" (Kittler 1990, 182). What he wrote, filling "countless notebooks," were "writing exercises" (182), which Kittler places in the context of the schoolboy's essay—the same form used by the fictional Brigge. Kittler, however, does not explore the significance of the *pencil* in Nietzsche's return to schoolboyish writing during this period of psychological instability. For someone like Nietzsche who was so aware of his writing tools, the specific cry for pencils cannot have been an accident.

From the examples of Nietzsche and Rilke's Malte Laurids Brigge, there emerges a constellation whereby madness, childhood, and the pencil are connected. At the start of the twentieth century, the pencil represents not just an older instrument but also a type of writing that is *unofficial*. As the instrument designated for children and madmen—at least, in the famous examples that we are aware of—it is tied to a class of society that is peripheral and abject. The pencil did not just allow for a pause in the neat and automatic

[8] Kittler describes the change in Nietzsche's writing style after he switched to a typewriter, "from arguments to aphorisms" (Kittler 1999, 203), and goes on to connect this aphoristic style with the surrealist practice of *écriture automatique* (204-205).

writing of the age of the typewriter, it also seems to have provided a means for the direct countering of these values, with writing that could be private, unaccepted, and even subversive. The pencil is the instrument of the scribble: writing that can fill up notebooks and never expect to be read or published. The pencil is not a "dead material," as Polgar writes, but a disregarded material, with a literary history and symbolism that have yet to be theorized. My thesis hopes to address this gap, at least partly. My work is about the writer Robert Walser, who returned to the child's pencil as a grown man in the early decades of the twentieth century, and, like Nietzsche and Brigge, filled up a mass of private pages with his pencil writings, which were thought for years to be the incomprehensible scribbles of a mad man. This work explores how and why Walser used the pencil, and ultimately what his use of the pencil can tell us about the position of the fringe writer in the early twentieth century.

Robert Walser's "Pencil Method"

For Robert Walser, the fact that the pencil is disregarded in the arena of official writing, and is furthermore "an instrument for children,"[9] are critical factors in his decision to use the pencil exclusively to compose his later writings. Walser's method was curious: he used a pencil to painstakingly create his 'microscripts' or 'micrographs,' which are the thousands of sketches and poems composed in a tiny, old-fashioned *Kurrent* script on small strips of paper. This was his system for creating first drafts, and none of the pencil writings were seen by anyone during his lifetime. The most likely scenario of their

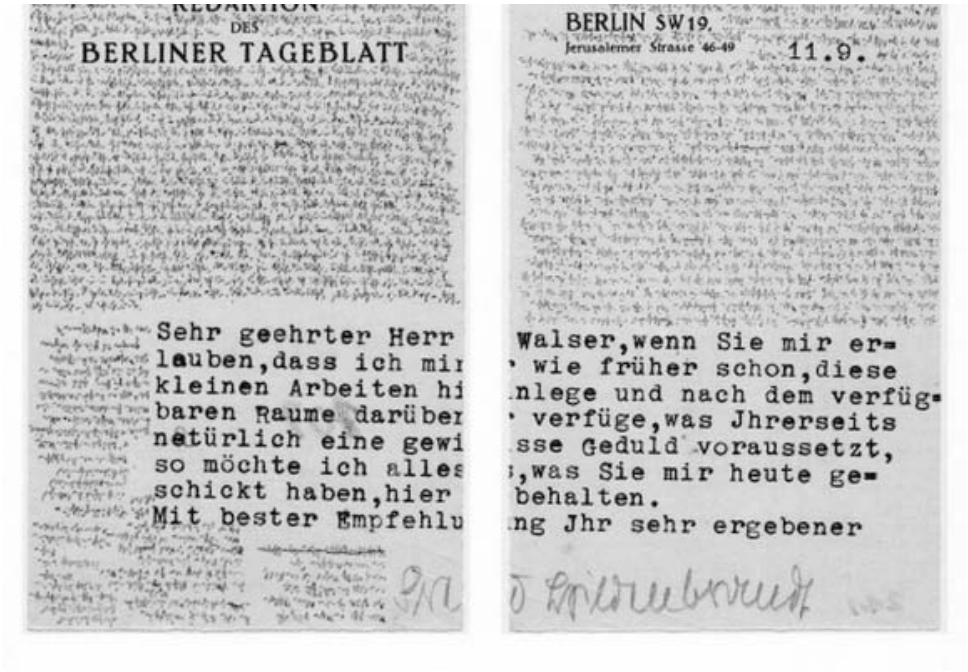
[9] Susan Bernofsky describes Walser's instrument as "the lowly pencil, an instrument for children." See Susan Bernofsky, introduction, *Microscripts*, by Robert Walser, trans. Bernofsky (New York: New Directions, 2010), 13.

discovery, according to Bernhard Echte, who transcribed Walser's microscripts with Werner Morlang, was that a worker at the Herisau asylum where Walser spent the last years of his life gave a shoebox of these marked-up papers to Walser's literary executor and guardian Carl Seelig.[10] Though the microscript drafts remained private, Walser did continue to publish versions of some texts, though not nearly as many were published as were written. When he wanted to prepare the texts for publishing, Walser would copy out the tiny pencil script into a legible document written in ink. The pencil and the small script were reserved for the unseen versions.

In the earliest collected examples of his pencil writing (from 1924), Walser's script was two to three millimetres high and scrawled in straight lines on blank artist's paper. A few years later, however, the script had shrunk to a millimetre, and the texts were entirely on pre-circulated, cut-up bits of paper, which ranged from the cut-off margins of journals (the same journals in which Walser's feuilleton pieces would be published less and less frequently), to typed correspondences, and even business cards. The script, which earlier had been mainly horizontal, could now be found moving in every direction around the page, overtop and in-between pre-existing type, and with small poems tucked in gaps to 'fill in space,' as Echte reasons (*AdB* 6, 705). Increasingly with the later texts, Walser's writing can be understood to resist all legibility and accessibility. Even though these were private texts to begin with, whose microscopic script already precludes an easy reading, their changing appearance to tinier and more crowded pages

[10] Bernhard Echte, "Editorischer Bericht," in *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* Bd. 6, by Robert Walser (Frankfurt Am Main: Suhrkamp, 2000), 709. For future references to the six volumes of *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* (1985-2000), I will use the abbreviation *AdB*, followed by volume and page numbers.

suggests that Walser was acting out a strong aversion to being seen, and to being read. With so many overlaid areas of text, Walser does not let the eye penetrate or focus on any one place. His tiny lines of writing, when they co-exist with large type from someone else's original document, appear to be on a plane *under* rather than on, but no eye was intended to access this underneath space. The surface of writing looks to be guarded by its own palimpsests.



My study of Robert Walser's pencil method will survey both the materials of his writing and their content, in order to ask the following questions: how does the pencil take on a thematic presence in Walser's work? Is the pencil connected to the other material aspects of his work, such as the scraps of paper and the near-illegibility of the

handwriting? And finally, in what ways do signs of the abject come to be expressed through the metaphorics of the pencil? What is new about my project is the material standpoint from which I begin.[11] In Chapter One, I examine Walser's relationship to the pencil as well as the physical form of the microscripts (the selection and appearance of the pages). In Chapters Two and Three, I use the conclusions drawn from the significance of these materials to approach Walser's prose. The themes that emerge from my examination of Walser's materials are the periphery and the detour, privacy and hiding, and protection through covering. With these ideas in hand, I interpret several short works

---

[11] Recent studies on Walser are oriented mostly around themes in his work or his unique writing style, but not strictly around his writing materials, as my study is. Some major examples of this are: Valerie Heffernan's *Provocation from the Periphery: Robert Walser Re-examined* (Würzberg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007), which focuses on power dynamics related to gender and class, and the way that these resurface in Walser's writing; Samuel Frederick's *Narrative's Unsettled: Digression in Robert Walser, Thomas Bernhard, and Adalbert Stifter (*Evanstan, Ill: Northwestern UP, 2012), which is a consideration of Walser's anti-linear narrative style; and Tamara S. Evans' *Robert Walsers Moderne* (Berne: Francke, 1989), which argues for Walser's work to be studied in the context of modernism.

Most recent scholars examine, at least briefly, Walser's June, 1927 letter to Max Rychner, in which Walser explains his 'pencil method.' In this way, scholars agree about the importance of his material, even if this importance is not studied at greater length. Some scholars, including the following, devote sections of their studies to Walser's writing instruments:

Kristen Scheffler addresses the thematic importance of the pencil in one section of her book, "Blei und der Bleistift," *Mikropoetik. Robert Walsers Bieler Prosa* (Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010), 434-437. Scheffler also discusses the appearance of Walser's pages—aspects such as their palimpsestic nature, the columns of text, and the illegibility of the script—throughout her book.

Elke Siegel analyzes Walser's pencil method at great length, but not with a focus on the pencil per se. Elke Siegel, *Aufträge aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001).

Peter Utz devotes a chapter of his study to Walser's nervousness, which is caused by the pen. See Peter Utz, ""Nervös" – ein Zeitdiskurs zittert durch Walsers Werk," *Tanz auf den Rändern* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 53-79.

Among his many writings on Walser, Wolfram Groddeck studies Walser's relationship to the typewriter. The text in question is "Robert Walsers "Schreibmaschinenbedenklichkeit,"" in *Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*, 169-182.

of Walser's in an effort to connect the subject matter of his writing with its material origination.

Due to Walser's highly private habits, Walser scholars are uncertain as to when his pencil method began. Walser himself gives contradicting dates, and so a certain amount of guesswork must be taken into account. Walser writes that his pencil method 'began in Berlin,' where he lived between 1905 and 1913.[12] However, in this very same letter (from 1927), he also says that he started writing in this way 'ten years before,' which would place the beginnings in 1917, much later than his time in Berlin. Yet the earliest microscripts in the volumes from Echte and Morlang date from 1924, leaving a period between 1917 and 1924 that is unaccounted for. On the other end of the timeline, Susan Bernofsky argues that Walser's micrography began as early as 1902, using letters from Walser to his sisters as evidence of his tiny writing, small cut-up paper, and attention to spatial organization in these very early years.[13] My own work treats Walser's micrography as an ongoing project, one whose themes were always present but hit a fever pitch during the years following 1913. I reason that Walser's move from Berlin to his hometown Biel corresponds to the logic of shrinking and of social insulation that the microscripts set forth. On these grounds I have not limited the scope of my project to the texts contained within Echte and Morlang's *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet*. In those chapters where I turn to the content of Walser's work to support my findings about the

[12] Robert Walser, *Briefe* (Genf: H. Kossodo, 1975), 301.

[13] Bernofsky informs the reader that Walser's letters to his sisters Fanny and Lisa from 1902 are written in "strikingly small handwriting on pieces of paper either cut or torn to size." One letter has the small block of text (only 2 inches tall) neatly in the paper's centre, suggesting a spatial awareness consistent with the later *Mikrogramme*. See Bernofsky 16.

significance of pencil and paper (Chapters Two and Three), I look primarily at prose pieces from the *Bieler* period of Walser's writing (1914-1918) when he would have likely been finalizing his switch to the pencil method. It is my belief that the *Bieler* pieces, still very coherent and story-like, yet also containing clues about Walser's changing practise, are ideal texts by which to decode the puzzle of Walser's undertaking.

Though Walser kept the smallness of his script and the pages themselves a secret, he did share his ideas about the pencil. In a much-cited letter to the editor Max Rychner, the same aforementioned letter in which Walser mixes up his dates, Walser lauds the instrument that helped create this new system of writing. He writes:

> Für mich jedoch hat die Bleistifterei eine Bedeutung. Für den Schreiber dieser Zeilen gab es nämlich einen Zeitpunkt, wo er die Feder schrecklich, fürchterlich haßte, . . . und um sich von diesem Schreibfederüberdruß zu befreien, fing er an, zu bleistifteln, zu zeichnelen, zu gfätterlen. Für mich ließ es sich mit Hülfe des Bleistiftes wieder besser spielen, dichten; es schien mir, die Schriftstellerlust lebe dadurch von neuem auf. . . . Es gab also für mich eine Zeit der Zerrüttung, die sich gleichsam in der Handschrift, im Auflösen derselben, abspiegelte und beim Abschreiben aus dem Bleistiftauftrag lernte ich knabenhaft wieder – schreiben. (Briefe 301)

Given the central position that this letter holds in scholarship devoted to rediscovering Walser, it is surprising that there is as yet no in-depth study of Walser's pencil. Though there is much to look at in this letter—and I read it closely in Chapter One—for the purposes of this introduction I would like to point out the peculiar language that Walser uses to skirt around his method. Walser gives many names to his new practise, such as his

"Bleistifterei," "Bleistiftsystem," "Bleistiftweg," and most famously, his "Bleistiftgebiet." The title of my thesis borrows this last name, the "Bleistiftgebiet" or "pencil-region"—which is also the title that Echte and Morlang chose when collecting Walser's microscripts in the six-volume publication, *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet*—because it speaks to the spatiality that pervades Walser's new system. As these names suggest, the pencil stood for much more than a writing instrument; it tapped into an uncharted space for Walser, from the depths of which he could produce this mass of secret, unofficial writings. For Walser to delimit and shape his writing method as a *Gebiet* opens many questions, the simplest of which is, what is the link between the writing and the idea of an 'enframed' area? Throughout this thesis, I consider Walser's pencil method as a "pencil-region," as a unit beyond script or text. The "pencil-region" is both pencil and paper at once, both the need to write and the need to be in a new space. It is the notion of the text as artefact—content together with form.

My topic follows in the footsteps of recent attention to the materiality of literature. Though it is largely missing from Walser scholarship, studies on the impact of a text's materials on the way that an author shapes his/her text, and on the way that the reader interacts with the text, have a growing place in literary studies. This field arguably begins with Kittler, who examines how the media of production—he focuses on the gramophone, film, and the typewriter—have informed the modern author's experience of 'written' exchanges. "Media determine our situation," he writes, indicating that intermediation is inscribed *in* rather than responsive *to* our situation (Kittler 1999, xxxix). More recently, the series on writing called *Zur Genealogie des Schreibens,* edited by Davide Giuriato, Martin Stingelin, and Sandro Zanetti, contextualizes the changing

material categories of writing, for example, the progression from manuscript to typescript, with regard to depicted scenes of writing from these eras.[14] One study from this collection is from Walser scholar Wolfram Groddeck, who situates Walser's late writing—the materiality as well as the content—as a response to Walser's anti-typewriter sentiments.[15] My own work, in contrast to Groddeck's, bypasses Walser's relationship to the typewriter and considers instead Walser's pen, pencil, and paper. As a final example of this type of literature, Andrew Piper studies the history of the book from the perspective of changing ways with which we interact with reading. Different forms and materialities of the book, from codex to digital text, have shaped the behaviours of our culture of reading, behaviours such as holding the pages, taking notes, and reading together.[16] In light of this scholarship, my thesis aims to further situate Walser amongst authors whose writing tools cannot be ignored in a study of their work. Walser, too, is a product of the impact that technology had on the act of writing and on the identity of the writer. The way that his pencil interacted with the paper forms the contours of his *Mikrogramme,* which mark a small but important place in the intersection between materiality and content.

---

[14] Notes 1, 3, and 11 refer to Volume 2 of this series, *Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*. For the series as a whole, see Davide Giuriato, Martin Stingelin, and Sandro Zanetti, eds., *Zur Genealogie des Schreibens* (Paderborn; Munich: Fink, 2004-).

[15] Groddeck, "Robert Walsers "Schreibmaschinenbedenklichkeit,"" in *Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*, 169-182.

[16] Andrew Piper, *Book Was There. Reading in Electronic Times* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012). See also Piper's previous book, *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Information in the Romantic Age* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

Chapter 1: What, and Where, is the *Bleistiftgebiet*? A Closer Look at Walser's Use of Pencil and Paper

In 1957, when a page showing Walser's micro-script was printed in the literary magazine *du*, Carl Seelig, Walser's guardian and literary executor, added the following words as a caption: "Die selbsterfundene, nicht entzifferbare Geheimschrift . . . muß wohl als scheue Flucht vor den Augen der Oeffentlichkeit und als kalligraphisch bezauberndes Tarnungsmittel, um seine Gedanken vor ihr zu verbergen, gedeutet werden."[17] Seelig was wrong about the decipherability of Walser's script; Jochen Greven saw the image in *du* and was able to recognize a (very compressed) *Sütterlin* script in Walser's tiny dots and dashes.[18] Greven named this script *Mikrogramm*, because Walser's systematic miniaturization reminded him of stenography (*Stenogramm)*, although it is a much more radical imagining of "shorthand" (Siegel 12).

When Bernhard Echte and Werner Morlang took over the task of deciphering Walser's writing, they disputed the name *Mikrogramm*.[19] Instead, Echte gave the manuscripts the title *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet*, a name that points to the curious materiality of Walser's writing method—Walser's dependence on the pencil—and uses Walser's

[17] Elke Siegel, *Aufträge aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001), 12.

[18] Jochen Greven writes that he was able to recognize the script in part because his generation still learned *Kurrentschrift* (of which *Sütterlin* is an offshoot) at school. See Jochen Greven, *Robert Walser, ein Außenseiter wird zum Klassiker: Abenteuer einer Wiederentdeckung* (Lengwil: Libelle, 2003), 150.

[19] Echte and Morlang began transcribing the Mikrogramme after Carl Seelig's death in 1962, since Seelig had previously withheld the manuscripts. See Greven, 24.

own phrasing.[20] The problem with *Mikrogramm(e)*, for Echte and Morlang, is the implication of speed. The two refute Greven's assumption that Walser wrote quickly, using the appearance of Walser's pages as evidence: "So klein und dabei so sauber in geraden Zeilen und in ordentlichen, auf machen Blättern auch noch vertrackt verschachelten Kolumnen zu schreiben, müsse Walser besondere Mühe gekostet haben" (Greven 156). As it would turn out, Walser's own account describes the writing process as excruciatingly slow and laborious (*Briefe,* 301). In his retelling of the events, Greven admits that today he would not compare Walser's method to stenography (Greven 157).

I prefer Echte's name, though there is value as well to Greven's original title. When referring to a single Walser text or cluster of texts, it is far simpler to use *Mikrogramm(e). Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* does not allow for reference to a single piece. Yet the fact that Echte's name recognizes the indivisibility of Walser's late writings is part of what makes *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* such a thoughtful name. These writings are much more than a cramped and abbreviated script; they comprise an entirely new region (*Gebiet*) of writing, a region that required the pencil in order to be accessed. *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* not only places the pencil first, but it acknowledges the extent to which this is a project about uncovering a space in which to write.

Though Seelig was wrong about the decipherability of Walser's script, the rest of his comment, that Walser's writing hid from the public eye, cannot be so easily discounted. When examining the pages from the *Bleistiftgebiet*, Walser's blocks of text truly appear to be placed in hiding spots, either underneath pages with published or public writing on them (such as magazines, novel covers, and business cards), tucked

[20] Walser's June, 1927 letter to Max Rychner, which I will examine throughout this section, includes the phrase "aus dem Bleistiftgebiet." See *Briefe*, 301.

away in a corner of a page, or just protected by the invisibility of the letters. Once we *read* the texts, however, (something we were never meant to do with the pencil drafts that belong to the *Bleistiftgebiet*) it becomes clear that Walser's choice to place his writings on a microscopic plane of vision is deliberate rather than cowardly. Seelig refers to Walser's method as a 'shy flight' ("*scheue Flucht"*), but he did not have the means to decode the content of these texts. Now that the texts have been deciphered and transcribed, the reader can see that while the small letters hide, it seems to be not out of fear but out of mischievous dissent.

The project of this chapter is to observe the ways in which the materials of Walser's writing, the pencil and the choices of paper, help to create the area that Walser named his "Bleistiftgebiet." The first half of this chapter will address the pencil, and the various means by which Walser connects its type of script (more instinctual, non-final) to the idea of a space that lies *underneath* and *at the margins of* the public sphere. In Walser's own hands or in the hands of his characters, the pencil represents a move away from the pressures of mainstream publishing—which is in turn represented by the pen. The pencil, as the customary instrument of the first draft, is already associated with writing that is less precise and less polished—and therefore excluded from the possibility of publication. But Walser's accounts of his pencil method, coupled with scenes of writing from his prose, exaggerate this marginalisation of the pencil because he uses spatial terms to describe his method. The first, pencilled draft takes on the meaning of a layer of writing *underneath* the legible and accessible draft. Its sphere of writing is private and uncharted. The act of using a pencil, moreover, is described in Walser's accounts in terms of taking a detour along the periphery, an action that returns in

Walser's prose as the means by which his characters solve writing blocks. In the second half of this chapter, I will be examining a few pieces of Walser's micrograph paper in light of the spatial themes tied to the pencil's writing. Walser's pages are laid out deliberately, with blocks of his pencil script in the margins or on the undersides of previously circulated text. In studying the appearance of the text on these pages, as well as the text itself, I explore Walser's motivation to gravitate towards modest and less visible spaces. Overall, this chapter unpacks the literal meaning of the "Bleistiftgebiet": what does it mean for the pencil to be tied to ideas of spatiality? And how do the form and content of the texts maintain this spatial significance?

This chapter is divided into pencil and paper, but these two are not so easily separated when it comes to studying the *Bleistiftgebiet*. As will become clear when I examine specific pages, the paper often determined what Walser wrote, and how he wrote it. Especially with the later pieces, when Walser repurposed paper that had already been circulated, the previous content and form of these pages emerge and maintain relevance in remarkable ways. One of the most striking examples, which I will look at more closely, is the sketch that Walser wrote on the back of a cheap novel cover, whose illustration becomes the basis for Walser's text (see **Fig. 5** on page 45 of this chapter). In cases such as this, it is not only the general inspiration which comes through in Walser's re-writing, but also the spacing of Walser's block of text on the area of the page (vast in comparison), and how it interacts with the original page, that are worth considering.

On a more elemental level, Walser's use of the pencil in combination with the cheap, pre-used paper actually caused a fusion of his tiny markings and the grain of the

paper.[21] The paper and pencil become materially inseparable. Just as one influences the other with regard to the spatial arrangement or the content, so too in this most microscopic way do the paper and pencil determine one another. In deciphering his script, Echte and Morlang used thread counters (*AdB* 2, 585), a detail that offers poetic credence to the fact that Walser's letters truly became woven into the paper, and that the paper, in turn, became like a protective covering for his letters. With one of the papers that I will be closely studying in this chapter, the reader can detect Walser's text through the flimsy page of the magazine (on the back of which Walser wrote his story) (**Fig.2**).[22] Though he wrote with a pencil, the instrument that leaves the most barely-there mark, in cases such as these Walser could be said to be engraving, 'burying' his blocks of text *in* the surface. For these reasons, it is impossible to speak about the pencil without also speaking about the paper.

[21] In his editorial comments on the *Bleistiftgebiet*, Echte describes how the low-grade magazine paper would cause Walser's dull pencil marks to be even less legible. The small dots over certain letters lost any distinction from the texture of the paper: "Was Punkte über dem Mittelband (i, ie, ei, u, eu, mm) signalisieren sollen, ist – sofern sie sich überhaupt von kleinen Holzeinsprengseln des schlechten Papiers unterscheiden lassen – in positivistischem Sinn nicht zu entscheiden" (*AdB* 6, 704). In a nice turn of phrase, Walser scholar Dieter Borchmeyer writes: "Die Entzifferer mussten sich ungewöhnlicher Methoden bedienen, so eines im Textilgewerbe verwendeten Fadenzählers, um die Strukturmerkmale des Papiers berücksichtigen zu können, dessen Maserung Walsers Schrift nicht unwesentlich beeinflusste." From Dieter Borchmeyer, "Robert Walsers Schreibtisch privat; zum Abschluss der sechsbändigen Mikrogramm-Ausgabe." *Zeit Online*, 18 Jan. 2001. Web. 18 Nov. 2013.

[22] As to this phenomenon of penetrating the paper, Echte writes that "für jene Blätter besserer Qualität, die der Zeitschrift "Sport im Bild" . . . entstammen, . . . der härtere Bleistift dringt hier starker ins Papier ein" (*AdB* 6, 703). See Figure 2.

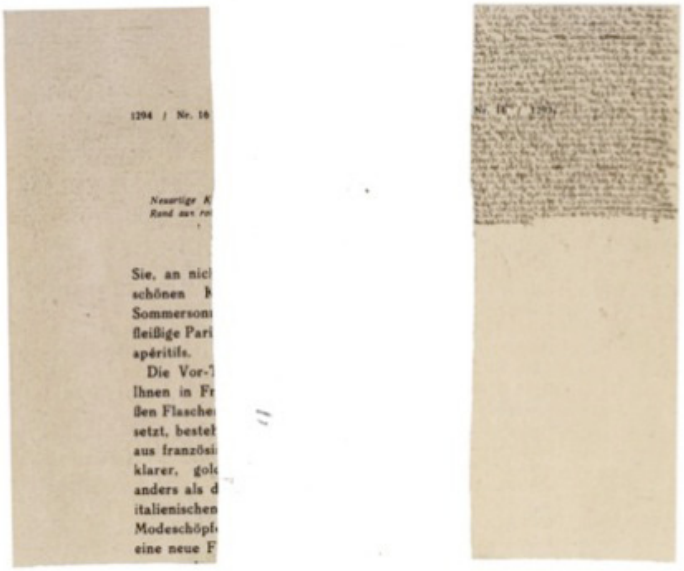


Figure 2: Blatt-Nr. 50, from the magazine "Sport im Bild," with Walser's markings visible through the front of the paper (see Note 16). Image from Bernofsky, *Microscripts*, 63-4.

1. Pencil

The most thorough account of Walser's pencil method is found in his June 1927 letter to Max Rychner. Walser does not reference the visible elements of his method, such as the tininess of his script or the strips of paper on which he wrote. Rather, his explanation focuses on the tool that saved him from his writer's block: the pencil.

> . . . ich vor ungefähr zehn Jahren anfing, alles, was ich produziere, zuerst scheu und andächtig mit Bleistift hinzuskizzieren, wodurch der Prozeß der Schriftstellerei naturgemäß eine beinahe in's Kolossale gehende, schleppende Langsamkeit erfuhr. Ich verdanke dem Bleistiftsystem, das mit einem folgerichtigen, büreauhaften Abschreibesystem verquickt ist, wahre Qualen,

> aber diese Qual lehrte mich Geduld, derart, daß ich im Geduldhaben ein Künstler geworden bin.
>
> . . . Für mich jedoch hat die Bleistifterei eine Bedeutung. Für den Schreiber dieser Zeilen gab es nämlich einen Zeitpunkt, wo er die Feder schrecklich, fürchterlich haßte, wo er ihrer müde war, wie ich es Ihnen kaum zu schildern imstand bin, wo er ganz dumm wurde, so wie er sich ihrer nun ein bißchen zu bedienen begann, und um sich von diesem Schreibfederüberdruß zu befreien, fing er an, zu bleistifteln, zu zeichnelen, zu gfätterlen.[23] Für mich ließ es sich mit Hülfe des Bleistiftes wieder besser spielen, dichten; es schien mir, die Schriftstellerlust lebe dadurch von neuem auf. Ich darf Sie versichern, daß ich (es begann dies schon in Berlin) mit der Feder einen wahren Zusammenbruch meiner Hand erlebte, eine Art Krampf, aus dessen Klammern ich mich auf dem Bleistiftweg mühsam, langsam befreite. Eine Ohnmacht, ein Krampf, eine Dumpfheit sind immer etwas körperliches und zugleich seelisches. Es gab also für mich eine Zeit der Zerrüttung, die sich gleichsam in der Handschrift, im Auflösen derselben, abspiegelte und beim Abschreiben aus dem Bleistiftauftrag lernte ich knabenhaft wieder – schreiben. (*Briefe* 301)

This one letter presents many of the clues about Walser's method, and I will be referring to it throughout the chapter to guide my study. As a first point, it is difficult to discern the

[23] The Swiss-German word "gfätterlen" has been translated by Susan Bernofsky as "fiddle about" (See Bernofsky, 12), but its meaning pertains specifically to children's games. See "gevatterkuchen *bis* gevatterpfennig." *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen and Trier Center for Digital Humanities, 1998-2013. Web. 30 Nov. 2013.

specifics of Walser's pencil use from these lines. The reader has no idea how his script changed, for instance, or which aspects of the pencil Walser appreciated, and which aspects of the pen he found intolerable. Rather, Walser describes the psychological effects that the pen and pencil each had on his ability to write. His system with the pencil at first presented "wahre Qualen," but these 'torments' also led him to slow down and become patient with his writing. Before the pencil, the pen caused a breakdown of Walser's hand and of his entire writing practise—"Zusammenbruch meiner Hand . . . eine Zeit der Zerrüttung, die sich gleichsame in der Handschrift, im Auflösen derselben, abgespiegelte." The pen held Walser in what he describes as "Klammern," a feeling of constraint that he acknowledges was both physical and psychological ("etwas körperliches und zugleich seelisches"). With the pencil, however, Walser could escape these "Klammern" and begin a different writing system, 'sketching' out drafts in a playful manner, and thereby rediscovering his joy for writing. The pencil initiated a new era for Walser as a writer, and he indicates that this revival was like learning to write all over again: "beim Abschreiben aus dem Bleistiftauftrag lernte ich knabenhaft wieder – schreiben."

Despite the pencil being at the centre of Walser's new method, in this letter he seems to continually undermine its material importance. One can notice that Walser barely allows the word "Bleistift" to stand on its own. "Bleistift" is almost always a prefix: "Bleistiftsystem," "Bleistiftmethode," "Bleistiftweg," "Bleistiftauftrag," and outside of the quoted excerpt, "Bleistiftgebiet." On a linguistic level, Walser is being evasive. While it is true that Walser is using the pencil in an unexpectedly systematic way (creating tiny, neat texts that look to be very different from a usual rough draft)—and

hence these compound terms are revealing—it is possible that his language is also deliberately ambiguous here in order to preserve the privacy with which he guarded his pencil method. Perhaps in this letter to Rychner, Walser does not want to expose and isolate the pencil. The pen, in contrast, is named many times by Walser without an accompanying term, and as a result, the pen seems to take on the entire onus of Walser's breakdown. Judging by this letter, the pencil is not given the same amount of responsibility. Yet it might be the form of the letter that is causing Walser's evasiveness, rather than the instrument itself. In two other letters, Walser exhibits a similar shyness regarding the pencil. First, from his fiction: Walser's pencil-scripted hero *der Räuber* writes a greeting to his beloved Edith but laments the "Unart" with which he jotted "nur so mit Bleistift einen kurzen Gruß" (*AdB* 3, 127). In a 1939 letter to Carl Seelig, many years after Walser would have been exclusively writing with a pencil, Walser writes "Entschuldigen Sie beiläufig die bequeme Bleistiftschrift" (Scheffler 435). In all three letters, and especially these last two, Walser assigns a degree of naughtiness and unseemliness to the use of the pencil. Publicly, in the realm of correspondence, Walser excuses and downgrades the pencil, relegating it to a childish comfort. It is therefore likely that the pencil has a meaning for Walser that is subverted somewhat in the letter to Rychner.

There is one line in this letter, however, where Walser is more specific about his use of the pencil. Near the opening of the letter he writes that he began "alles, was ich produziere, zuerst scheu und andächtig mit Bleistift hinzuskizzieren." This line is also one of the only places in the letter where Walser does use the word "Bleistift" without appended nouns (the one other instance has the pencil enfolded by the genitive—"des

Bleistiftes"), a detail that is probably not accidental, since this is also the place where he assigns an unequivocal function to the pencil. Throughout the letter, Walser praises the pencil negatively by presenting its value as being *not* the pen. This leaves the reader uncertain as to the material advantage of the pencil, other than it being simply a different instrument. Here, however, Walser is clearly stating that he used the pencil to *begin writing* everything that he produced. The pencil is in other words being used for the first draft, which is the pencil's customary use. Yet once again, Walser's phrasing should be scrutinized. As before, he adds imprecision to his language, possibly in order to dull the transparency of his project. In the words of Jens Hobus, "Walser im Zusammenhang mit dem Bleistift nirgends vom Schreiben spricht, sondern vielmehr erwähnt, dass er 'skizziert', 'gfätterlt', 'zeichnelt', oder 'bleistiftelt.'"[24] Walser's undertaking, as he describes it, is not quite 'writing' but something much less official. The action of drafting could be construed as an alternative project to writing. In light of Walser's dependence on the pencil for the first draft, it is worth exploring the differences between Walser's motivation for this use of the pencil, and the customary reasons for the pencil to be used as a drafting tool.

Historically, there are two main reasons for the pencil to be the standard instrument of the first or rough draft. The first is that the pencil is faster and more portable than quill and ink. Due to the fact that the pencil needs no preliminary steps to its use, other than a (relatively) rare sharpening, it is ideal for creating an *immediate* impression, a sketch. A guide to learning to draw with the lead pencil, from 1834, praises

[24] Jens Hobus, *Poetik der Umschreibung: Figurationen der Liebe im Werk Robert Walsers* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011), 54.

the pencil as the ideal medium for creating "so faithful a transcript of Nature."[25] A similar understanding of the pencil as the dependable artist's tool (actually a descendant of the brush) is behind the name of the first photography book, "pencil of nature."[26] The pencil requires less maintenance and less equipment; it can produce consistent results *without a desk*. Without the need for an inkwell, the pencil can travel with the writer or artist. There still needs to be the stiff support of paper for a hard mark to appear, but often, for sketches and outlines, a barely-there line is preferable.

The second reason for our use of the pencil in first drafts is the most distinguishing feature of the instrument: its mark is erasable. From the earliest known use of graphite, which was to mark sheep (said to have been around 1565), one can see the practicality of graphite's impermanence (Petroski 45). The sheep could probably have been identified just as well had they been marked with clay or ash, but another early use of graphite has no better alternative to this day: pre-marking where the cuts will be made in a piece of wood. Before graphite, carpenters and joiners made shallow grooves to serve as markers, but, just as barely penetrating the surface remains the benefit of the pencil over a pen, so too did the carpenters prefer the light mark of a graphite stick, wrapped in string to be comfortable and smudge-proof (47). Erasing with rubber, once this became commonplace in the late 1700s (Petroski 177), caused a change in the appearance of the wood—ironically, the eraser changes the surface more permanently than the pencil—so carpenters continue to lightly sand the pencil-marks away, if needed, and this is why

---

[25] James Duffield Harding, *Elementary Art; or, the use of the lead pencil advocated and explained* (London: Charles Tilt, 1834), 3. *Google Book Search*. Web. 24 Sep. 2013.

[26] Henry Petroski, *The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance* (New York: Knopf, 2012), 45.

carpenter pencils have no erasers on their ends.[27] In the hands of woodworkers and joiners, the pencil developed its wooden case, and its appearance has not changed very much since (Petroski 60).

Walser, however, did not use the pencil for its clear advantages of portability, speed, and erasability.[28] He wrote at a desk, slowly, and did not erase. Far from erasing, his *Bleistiftgebiet* manuscripts include occasional cross-outs, and often, the narrator will incorporate a correction right into the storyline. In one example, the narrator of a *Mikrogramm* is describing a government building, "in seinen Räumen, in denen ich übrigens noch nie war." Before the sentence ends, the narrator adds "aber was behaupte ich da, was nicht wahr ist? Ich wohnte doch eines Tages einer Sitzung unserer Bundesversammlung als Zuhörer still bei" (*AdB* 1, 12). Despite not implementing these material advantages of the pencil, the *association* of the pencil with the first draft is nevertheless present for Walser, and assumes a metaphorical significance rather than a material necessity. From various examples, such as the microscripted "Bleistiftskizze," and the earlier reflection essay on his novel *Geschwister Tanner*, the first draft can be determined to hold a liberating power for Walser. He does not always specify the pencil as the instrument of choice for the first draft (he does not mention it in early, published examples), but the details of Walser's descriptions of the first draft reveal such a close correspondence to his 'pencil method' that this similarity is worth pursuing.

---

[27] Dennis Baron covers the pencil's use in marking wood, see Dennis Baron, *A Better Pencil: Readers, Writers, and the Digital Revolution* (New York: Oxford UP, 2009), 40.

[28] Petroski writes that it was not customary in Europe to have an eraser attached to the pencil, even well into the twentieth century (Petroski 180).

In "Bleistiftskizz*e*," an unpublished sketch from 1926-7, Walser reiterates his panic concerning the pen, as he outlined it in the letter to Rychner. In this more private piece of writing, however, he contrasts the two writing instruments somewhat differently. Here, he describes the writing process more concretely, and his description points to the associations that lie behind his fear of the pen and his relief when using the pencil.

> Falls ich nun noch von mir selbst etwas vorbringen darf, so berichte ich, wie mir einfiel, meine Prosa jeweilen zuerst mit Bleistift aufs Papier zu tragen, bevor ich sie mit der Feder so sauber wie möglich in die Bestimmtheit hineinschrieb. Ich fand nämlich eines Tages, daß es mich nervös mache, sogleich mit der Feder vorzugehen;[29]

According to this account, Walser used the pencil to begin his writing, before copying it out 'as cleanly as possible' with the pen. The pencil is crucial for beginning the writing, because beginning with the pen made Walser nervous. What this sketch expresses—which the letter to Rychner touches on—is that the pen's associations with a neat final draft made it impossible to write. The pencil, however, allows for a layer of writing before and underneath the pen. It creates an area that is untouched by nervousness and irreversibility. Valerie Heffernan pinpoints that it is especially the phrase "in die Bestimmtheit" which implies that "Walser associates the pen with irrevocability and fixity, while his 'Bleistiftgebiet' liberates him from this commitment" (Heffernan 17). In Walser's phrasing, "die Bestimmtheit" seems to become its own region. Whereas the

[29] Robert Walser, "Bleistiftskizze," in *Das Gesamtwerk IX*: *Maskerade: Prosa aus der Berner Zeit (II) 1927-1928*, ed. Jochen Greven (Genf; Hamburg: Helmut Kossodo, 1968), 126. From here on, the volumes of the *Gesamtwerk* (1966-75) will be abbreviated as *GW*, followed by volume and page numbers.

pen-area is definite and controlled, as well as 'as clean as possible,' the pencil-area is, in contrast, indefinite, unformed, and forgiving of mess. At least, the pencil-area represents the *possibility* for these contrasts, since, to look at Walser's neat blocks of pencil text, his script was not messier with a pencil than it was with a pen (less ornamental and calligraphic, but not messy). The type of indefiniteness that this sketch points to seems to be rather a psychological release from the constraints of control and finality—the same "Klammern" that Walser describes in the letter to Rychner.

The first, unguarded attempt at writing appears to have held a liberating power for Walser for many years before "Bleistiftskizze." In his 1914 depiction of writing his first novel, *Geschwister Tanner,* Walser writes that he began

> die Niederschrift des Buches mit einem hoffnungslosen Wortgetändel, mit allerlei gedankenlosem Zeichnen und Kritzeln . . . Ich hoffte nie, daß ich je etwas Ernstes, Schönes, und Gutes fertigstellen könnte. – Der bessere Gedanke und damit verbunden der Schaffensmut tauchte nur langsam. (*GW* II, 129)

The description of a 'thoughtless sketching and scribbling' here is curiously similar to Walser's words in the letter to Rychner. Again, Walser does not describe his composition process in terms of 'writing.' Instead he uses language that conveys roughness and playfulness. In particular, the expression, 'a hopeless flirting with words,' suggests the type of circling around and dallying ("tändeln") that is opposite to the "Bestimmtheit" of the pen. While, in this passage, the phrases surrounding the *Niederschrift* depict an unofficial writing practise, the expressions that Walser uses to imagine the impossible final version are once more indicative of rigidness. The final product is conceived as

'something serious, beautiful, and good,' descriptors whose transformation into nouns underscores their untouchable magnitude, while simultaneously avoiding designating the piece as 'writing.' But it is the verb "fertigstellen" that signals the irreversibility of this imagined final product. To complete a definitive piece of writing—this is beyond Walser's hopes. In light of Walser's paralysis at the idea of the final draft, it seems that it was only by *not* hoping for 'something serious, beautiful, and good,' and by starting with the opposite of these expectations, that Walser was able to start writing at all.

The courage to create ("Schaffensmut") that the space of the first draft inspired in Walser emerged 'only slowly.' Though Walser's first drafts are 'sketches,' he repeats that they are far from being hastily written. Walser continually brings up the slowness and patience that his pencil writing required in combination with the freedom of sketching and scribbling. While the associations of the first draft evidently relaxed Walser psychologically (he could 'play' and be 'thoughtless'), the slowness of his pencil writing seems to have been the physical antidote to the cramp caused by the pen. When it made Walser nervous to begin right away with a pen ("es [machte] mich nervös [...], sogleich mit der Feder [vorgehen]"), writing slowly with a pencil might have calmed his nerves.

As "Bleistiftskizze" continues, Walser describes the time and effort that the pencil-method cost him. The pencil-method is "einen Umweg, eine erhöhte Mühe." Yet the extra effort is "ein Vergnügen," with which, Walser writes, "ich würde dabei gesund." The reader can again see a spatial awareness in Walser's description, this time coupled with temporal significance: the pencil draft is a 'detour'; Walser moves perhaps to the periphery, 'circles around' the defined (*bestimmt*) area of the pen. One might imagine from the spatial analogy of a detour that the *Bleistiftgebiet* is like a country road,

along which one trudges with a "schleppende Langsamkeit," while the clean and polished area of the pen is the main road, meant for fast-paced walkers and cars.[30] Taking the circuitous, longer route when writing—by producing this slow, preliminary draft—is a 'pleasure,' and will improve health, Walser adds, something that is again applicable to his habit of walking. In a similar formulation to the 'Umweg,' Walser wrote to Rychner that it was by going slowly along the "Bleistiftweg" that he was released from the "Klammern" of his pen-cramp. When using a pen is the direct route to publication, and hence, to the public, the pencil allows a respite from this presumably demanding pressure.

One likely manifestation of the cramp, as it would seem from elsewhere in Walser's writings, is an uncontrollable shaking in Walser's hand. An example comes from Walser's early (1908) novel *Der Gehülfe*. Protagonist Joseph Marti is a copy clerk (a job that Walser himself served many times, and that he compares to the pencil method in the letter to Rychner), and hence there are frequent scenes of writing in the novel. One such scene unfolds in the following way: After a strict rebuking from his boss's wife, during which she dismisses Joseph as incapable of independent thought and denounces his "äußerer Ehre," Joseph leaves to walk around the perimeter of the house ("Er ging um das Haus herum").[31] When he returns, he is calm and 'comforted,' but Frau Tobler appears a short while later to apologize and, as a result, Joseph "zitterte heftig. Es war

[30] The influence for this analogy stems from Walser's definitive work on walking, *Der Spaziergang*, wherein one can detect similar views on country versus city roads.

[31] Robert Walser, *Der Gehülfe* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1982), 164.

ihm eine Unmöglichkeit, die Feder in der Hand zu halten" (*Der Gehülfe*, 165). Joseph has to leave his desk again, this time to go swimming.

In this scene, it is noticeable that Frau Tobler's criticisms are misapplied to someone in the position of copy clerk. 'Independent thought' and 'outward honour' are not the tasks of an employee whose work is entirely behind-the-scenes. Joseph is an amanuensis, and what the public sees of his writing is a reflection of his boss, not of him. Frau Tobler's criticisms would better apply to a writer of prose than to a copy clerk. This speech seems to target the writer behind Joseph's persona, namely Walser himself, whom the reader knows is distressed by matters such as public opinion.[32] Presuming that this speech has undercurrents of Walser's own fears, it is fascinating that a walk around the 'perimeter' calms Joseph, given the previous consideration of the detour and periphery as a healing space.

Joseph's nerves are rattled again by the appearance and apology of Frau Tobler, and as the passage goes on, Walser describes the swim Joseph takes in order to appease the trembling in his hand. What Joseph accomplishes while swimming could double as a description of writing effortlessly and successfully with a pen: The body of water, already dark and fluid like ink, is "ruhig" and "fest," two more traits of the pen's writing (165). The lake "ließ den nackten Körper sich kräftiger und lebhafter bewegen," and Joseph "fürchtete nicht im geringsten, den Gliederkrampf zu bekommen." Quite the opposite of getting a cramp in his limbs, "[e]r zerteilte und zerschnitt mit weiten Armbewegungen die

[32] Valerie Heffernan recounts Walser's ambiguous relationship to the literary sphere and to his readership. Heffernan describes Walsers's frustration, evidenced in several of his *Mikrogramme,* at being "utterly dependent on the whims of a fickle reading public," and at the mercy of publishers who "first embraced, then rejected his unusual style of writing." See Heffernan, 76.

nasse, schöne Bahn." In this remarkable allusion, Walser reimagines a scene of thwarted writing and a physical cramp as the immersion of the writer into his medium, with brisk and unrestricted strokes. The solution here is not the pencil, but Joseph is nonetheless stricken by, and later released from, the "Klammern" of the pen cramp. His release manifests as the freedom to move unhindered and unobserved through a new region, in which he can fantasize about the creation of his own path or course ("Bahn"). Joseph carves this path by way of dividing and cutting ("zerteilte und zerschnitt"), verbs that have unmistakable relevance in relation to Walser's cut-up strips of paper. The omission of any mention of the pencil leads to the interpretation that his discovery of a new area, i.e., the first draft using the pencil method, is as important as the discovery of a new instrument.

A second example of the cramp comes from the microscripted text "Meine Bemühungen" (1928-9). Walser mentions his hand problem again, but neither the pen nor the pencil is mentioned. Here, the remedy is *shrinking* his texts:

> Ich ging seinerzeit vom Bücherverfassen aufs Prosastückschreiben über, weil mich weitläufige epische Zusammenhänge sozusagen zu irritieren begonnen hatten. Meine Hand entwickelte sich zu einer Art Dienstverweigerin. Um sie zu begütigen, mutete ich ihr gern nur noch geringere Tüchtigkeitsbeweisablegungen zu, und siehe, mit derartiger Rücksichtnahme gewann ich sie mir allmählich wieder. (*GW* X, 430-31)

When the irritation caused his hand to stop 'serving' him, Walser had to shrink the scope of his texts. It is not necessarily that he was writing for extended periods of time, but that forming and maintaining connections across such a vast span of pages bothered Walser.

Better to condense the text. As with the earlier example from *Der Gehülfe*, the pencil is not mentioned, even though this sketch belongs to the pencil era. Again, it is the idea of creating a different area, here, that is Walser's solution. This new area is notable for its smallness.

Walser's characters, far from being given less attention after his switch to short prose, flourish by virtue of their constant iteration. Each text, as Walser famously said elsewhere (in a passage reminiscent of Joseph's swimming scene), "bleibt immer derselbe [Roman]" and is just a fragmented addition to his "mannigfaltig zerschnittenes oder zertrenntes Ich-Buch."[33] To consider examples of such 'cut-up' paper, the reader will notice that the texts not only form connections with previous and later versions of themselves, but with the physical pages of what we can imagine as the Ich-Buch. The distance between connections in these instances can be measured in millimetres.

None of these examples offer a single definitive reason for the 'breakdown of the hand.' Instead, these far-apart mentions highlight possible solutions or ways 'around' the problem (*Umwege*). First, there is Walser's clear admission in the letter to Rychner that the pencil, as well as the slowness that it demands, helped to ease the cramp caused by the pen. Though written years earlier, Walser's clerk-character from *Der Gehülfe* experiences shame at the hands of his boss's wife, which results in losing control of his own hand. Joseph's solution is first to leave the desk to go for a walk, and second, to experience (or imagine) his body as unrestricted and free of any cramping. Returning to the period of the *Bleistiftgebiet*, Walser's "Meine Bemühungen" posits the switch to shorter, more condensed prose writing as the response to his hand's refusal to write. To

[33] This passage is from "Für die Katz" (*GW* X, 432).

patch together the different solutions from across years of Walser's writing, the reader arrives at various key elements of the *Bleistiftgebiet*: the texts are written in pencil, written slowly, written as a rough (unpublished) draft, and comprised of short, condensed blocks of text. With these aspects in mind, the *Bleistiftgebiet* seems to be the cumulative solution to a problem that had been present for years.

To conclude, Walser uses the pencil for his first and most private draft of writing. Based on the details that Walser has documented about his pencil method, and based as well on a few similar scenes of writing throughout Walser's prose, I have aimed to show that the significance of the pencil reaches far deeper than a casual change of medium. The pencil stands for a space of freedom, privacy, and marginality; it facilitates a recess from the public, both in the spatial meaning of the word (a layer of writing underneath), and the temporal meaning (a time to slow down before publishing).

2. Paper

To create his *Mikrogramme*, Walser used a pencil and special pieces of paper. 'Special' here does not mean valuable; Walser wrote over top and on the back of paper that would normally be thrown out: old postcards, business cards, a torn-off novel cover, and old detached calendar pages. Earlier on in the creation of the *Mikrogramme*, he used drawing paper that he would cut to size before writing. Walser's small paper is usually called 'scraps,' because there is no other word for a mismatched collection of pages. In size, they are scraps, but the careful arrangement of text, and the forethought of cutting the pages shows that these are hardly materials that Walser carelessly threw aside. Refuse for

the rest of the world, perhaps (especially those already written-on), but Walser gives them new life.

The idea of small or cut-up paper extends beyond a material concern when approaching Walser's later writings. By his own account, the fragments of paper are a metaphor for his process as a writer. In the previously mentioned "Ich-Buch" passage, Walser says the following: "Der Roman, woran ich weiter und weiter schreibe, bleibt immer derselbe und dürfte als ein mannigfaltig zerschnittenes oder zertrenntes Ich-Buch bezeichnet werden können" (*GW* X, 432). This statement could apply to the content of the writing, since Walser's characters are evidently versions of himself, but more intriguingly, it could apply to the texts as material objects: both in the sense that the papers are overlaid with multiple texts, and because they are cut-up.

One scene in *Geschwister Tanner* has Walser's protagonist, Simon, cutting up paper in preparation for writing: "so schrieb er jetzt ganz wie absichtslos von selber und zwar auf kleine Papierstreifen" (*GW* IV, 115). It is notable, in light of the effects of the *Bleistiftgebiet*, that Simon is "behag[lich], and that writing in this thoughtless way reminds him of his childhood ("er dachte zurück an seine Kindheit"). Yet Walser's characters cut paper not only to write, but also to *read*. For example, in the early (1914) *Helblings Geschichte*, Helbling confides to the reader that he brings, "was auch nicht statthaft ist, kleine Bücher ins Bureau," where he "sie aufschneide[t] und l[i]es[t]" (*GW* II, 63). Though uncut pages are simply an outcome of the manner of printing, Walser's inclusion of page cutting as a provision to *reading secretly* is revealing in light of his similar practice when writing. There is something protective in the act of cutting the pages. When the reader cuts open the pages, it makes the content of the book his/hers

alone. When Walser cuts his pages before writing, it changes the meaning of the original words and letters, and, arguably, also opens up the space of the page to *him alone*. Cutting the pages is one more way in which Walser creates a private space (the *Bleistiftgebiet)* on the periphery of otherwise public surfaces.

Many of Walser's later *Mikrogramme* share a surface with scrawled or crudely typed notes from newspaper offices and editors, addressed to 'Herr Walser' and containing updates on the publication of his writings. Sometimes, the notes are rejection letters.[34] Walser's texts crowd the pages, written over-top and to all sides of the otherwise succinct messages. Yet because of the size of Walser's blocks of writing, they seem far off in the background, underneath the notes from the editors. The contrast in size points to a more general polarity of public and private: the forms and letters belong to the realm of social communication, and moreover to the foremost arena of public writing, the publishing offices of newspapers. Walser's manuscripts, meanwhile, are kept private; he told no one about their existence, and those who saw them after his death denied their legibility. Despite belonging to two opposite realms, Walser adopts certain aspects of the newspaper in creating his *Bleistiftgebiet*. As in many cases where Walser engages with the original text or layout of the pages, his engagement is ironic and only exaggerates the difference between the source material and Walser's additions. It is worthwhile to consider how the newspaper lies (incongruously) in the *foreground* of these *Mikrogramme*.

[34] Christopher Middleton, *Speaking to the Rose*, by Robert Walser, trans. Middleton (Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005), vii.

Formally, there are several ways in which Walser's *Mikrogramme* evoke the newspaper. Most noticeably, the blocks of text on Walser's papers are columnar. From the reproductions available, the reader can see that the text is nearly always divided into neat sections reminiscent of newspaper columns, an observation that Susan Bernofsky remarks on as well, pronouncing Walser's pages to be like "a blurry or distant view of the neatly and monotonously printed columns of text on a newspaper page" (Bernofsky 15).[35] Like newspaper columns, the length of Walser's texts is predetermined, dictated by the physical dimensions of his paper. Aside from the arrangement of Walser's blocks of text, the markings themselves are reminiscent of a newspaper: the grey writing of Walser's pencil matches the smudgy ink of the daily printed paper. Despite the newspaper's industrial use of ink and printing press, newsprint ink rubs off on the hands as one reads, and hence, might as well be erasable.

Walser's echoing of the form of the newspaper is at once fitting and highly ironic. Fitting, because these texts *were* intended for the newspaper. When Walser switched irrevocably to his 'pencil method' in the early nineteen-twenties, the various *Tageblätter* and *Zeitschriften* were the primary publishers of his short prose. Many pieces from among the microscripted first drafts would be copied out legibly for publication—although a significant portion were never recopied.

The irony of the parallels between the newspaper and Walser's *Mikrogramme* lies in the fact that, again, one is distinctly public and visible, while the other is private and nearly invisible. The scale of writing and readership is completely opposite: we go from

[35] Kirsten Scheffler points out that even Walser's earlier writings share this column-like layout. Referring to a manuscript from 1914, she writes, "In diesem Konvolut zeigen sich zum ersten Mal auch jene Kolumnen, wie sie in den Mikrogrammen zu sehen sein werden." See Scheffler 227.

superlative dissemination (circulation) to the shrinking writings of a socially insulated man, from the most penetrable, digestible writing, to a "secret" and "indecipherable" script. The varying dimensions of type on a page of newspaper displays an eagerness for visibility—headlines allow for reading at a glance—whereas the dimensions of Walser's script push out any possibility of reading. Not only are titles not offset in a larger hand or a separate line, but Walser's *Mikrogramme* have no titles at all. The form of the column, the most newspaper-like feature of the *Mikrogramme*, highlights this opposition as well: the columns in the newspaper facilitate a quick and inattentive read of the contents, while Walser's columns were far from being easily scanned and parsed.

A large number of *Mikrogramme* are written on the pages of a 1926 calendar. The entire fourth volume of the *Bleistiftgebiet* is comprised of these texts, written on the underside ("Rückseite") of the pages (*AdB* 4, 462). On at least one page, however, the reader can see typed letters mingled with Walser's own (See **Fig. 3** on page 38). The calendar pages measure 17.4 by 8 centimeters, a width that, on its own, is similar to newspaper columns (462). Yet from the facsimiles included in the volume, one can see that Walser frequently divides the already small pages into even smaller columns and sections, often turning the text direction on its head.

Like the newspaper, the pages of a calendar turn days into ephemera. At the end of the day the printed newspaper is disposable, as is the calendar page, which becomes useless once the day that it marks has passed. In this case, passed (past) time becomes meaningless. By re-using this space for his writing, Walser is, as always, paying attention to what the rest of the world might treat as detritus, and simultaneously re-covering these blocks of time.

In writing mostly on the *back* of the calendar pages, Walser could be said to be 'overturning,' 'subverting,' or 'undermining' the social grip that these blocks of time represent. As the newspaper crystallizes and unifies the events of the day, maybe the 'contents' of the day, the schedule does so for the 'form' of the day. Many of Walser's texts from these calendar pages begin by including these daily markings: "gestern Nachmittag," "Gestern," "einen Abend," "Eines Tages," "vier Stunden," "heute," to name the most conspicuous. Yet Walser takes these fixed and unmoveable markers of time, and goes for a walk with them, so to speak. His writing is anything but a linear progression of events. Though he may begin at the established block of 'yesterday afternoon,' or 'one evening,' his texts ramble, his narrator is indecisive, and his characters do not stay put long enough for the reader to remember them. This is likely the most defining feature of Walser's work. Samuel Frederick, who writes on exactly this digressive quality of Walser's writing, remarks that "[the] normative context, in the process of being undermined, begins not so much to collapse as to multiply, and in multiplying unsettles the singular dynamic that such a context typically provides" (Frederick 28). In cases such as these calendar pages, the context of an hour or a day is immediately undermined, and its original purpose of *orientation* is thwarted as Walser builds up his disorienting prose. One can alternatively call to mind Walter Benjamin's words that Walser's delicate yet zigzagging sentences are "Sprachgirlanden, die ihn zu Fall bringen"—though Benjamin was not aware of Walser's *Bleistiftgebiet*.[36]

To take one example from the calendar pages, the prose piece that begins "»Heute bin ich sehr fügsam«," would seem to be about the events of a day, a fixed, temporal

[36] Walter Benjamin, "Robert Walser," *Gesammelte Schriften Bd. II: 1*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991), 326.

marker. But it continues in a breathless description of 'other times,' with the description flitting around a room, a reader, and all kinds of further details:

> »Heute bin ich sehr fügsam«, erzählte sie mir, die ich nicht nenne, »aber es hat Zeiten gegeben, wo ich beispielsweise einmal in einem ganz in Gelb gehüllten Sammetsalon, der sich gleichsam befiedert ausnahm, da er von fremdländischen schöngeschwänzten Liedersängern teils bloß in Tapetenform, teils sich tatsächlich in zierlichen Häuserchen, die man Käfige nennt, Aufhaltenden bevölkert war, einem mich Liebenden, der nicht die Energie aufbrachte, mich zu beherrschen, ein Buch, worin er still las, mit den Worten aus der Hand nahm: (*AdB* 4, 121)

The sentence does not end here, but goes on to recount the words that the man reads. Though we start with the point of time, Walser quickly switches the focus to the confusing physical features of the space, whose multiple degrees of enclosure seem to echo and decorate the small strip of a page Walser is writing within. Just in these few lines, there are several mentions of material and corresponding actions that swathe and protect a space: velvet, draping, feathers, and wallpaper. Walser also calls attention to 'little houses' or 'cages.' If one is to interpret this room and its elements as a reflection of the writing material, Walser is turning the small, worthless page of the calendar into a well-sequestered (underneath all the layers of fabric) and garishly decorated salon. The isolation, and insulation, matches Walser's choice to place the block of text in an undiscoverable half-page, but the physical embellishments are a laughable distortion of Walser's tiny, grey text. The allusions to features of both imprisonment and protection in the content of this sketch, and their mirroring in the physical placement of Walser's text, are present throughout Walser's *Bleistiftgebiet*.

Of the facsimiles included in the fourth volume of the *Bleistiftgebiet*, the one aforementioned page with typeset letters is evidently the right side of a double-faced page (**Fig. 3**). The reader therefore sees the tail end of sentences (actually quotations from Virgil, Propertius, and Seneca), and in little boxes, the dates for the last half of the week. For Walser and for the eventual readers of his *Bleistiftgebiet*, this page stands on its own, cut-off (truly) from its other half that, if still attached, would make the words and sentences legible. But to be legible, to be read by the public and proliferated like one of the quotations by Virgil, Propertius, or Seneca, is what Walser's texts seem to shrink from.

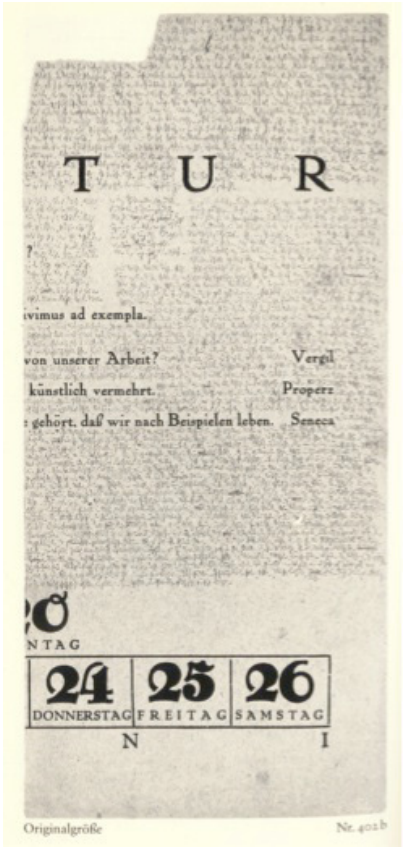


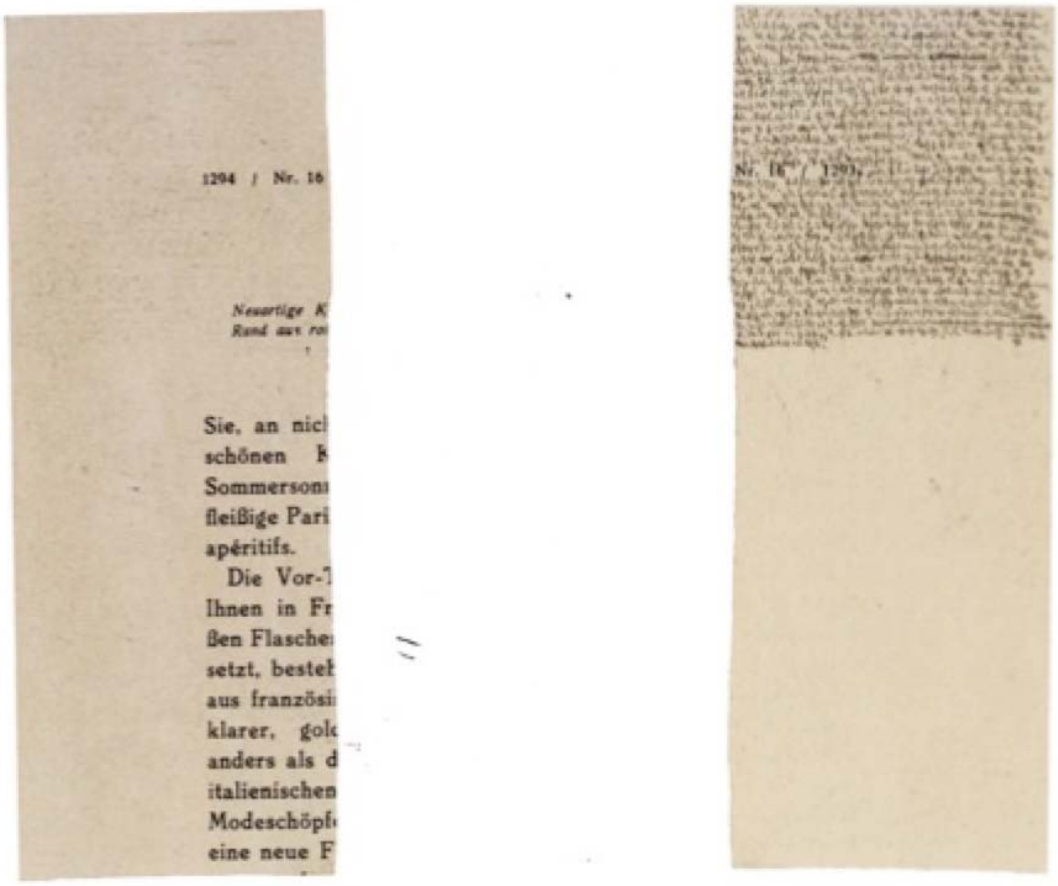
Figure 3: Blatt-Nr. 402b, from *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet* Bd. 4, Plate 4.

Regardless of the often-unrealized goal of recopying for publication, from the outset, Walser's tiny letters resist the public eye. The curves and strokes that ordinarily distinguish letters from each other were drastically reduced in Walser's script; for example, n's resemble e's, "indistinguishable vertical ticks or scratches" (Bernofsky 13). Walser rejects even the fixed representations of letters; he creates his own system whereby the letters cling to one another, and the line or row becomes the smallest visible unit of the text. On this page, we can add the typed half-words to the sphere of letters that are divorced from their established meanings. The most noticeable letters on this half-page are the 'T,' 'U,' and 'R' that are spaced evenly in the upper third. The reader knows that these letters cannot be the entire word, but in this context of redefining legibility, it is more effective that this half-word be given new meaning through its detachment.

Tür means 'door,' and these vast letters do look to be guarding—or blocking—Walser's text. Despite the fact that Walser added his writing to the existing type, and therefore his microscript is technically superimposed on the larger letters, because of its size Walser's text looks to be *behind* the typed letters. The smallness creates the illusion of a great distance. With the letters 'T U R' stretching across the text, this impression of distance takes on new meaning: One must go past the door, through the door, and wander *into* Walser's text. Where the feet of the typed letters are, Walser has ended this piece, and he leaves a sizeable blank space before beginning the next one. This blank line becomes the light peeking out from under the door, or, to take the page as a whole, the horizon in this stratified landscape.

One *Mikrogramm* from a few years later (1930-33) is written on the back of a page from the German weekly magazine *Sport im Bild*, a magazine that had previously

published Walser's writings.[37] The page has been cut, and as a result the reader sees mostly a blank margin, with one, maybe two, words from the original article per line (**Fig. 4**). Of the visible words, the most remarkable is *Rand*, in smaller, offset italics, presumably part of the article's subtitle. *Rand* means margin, periphery: a word that is particularly applicable to Walser's method.[38]



[illegible]

[illegible]

[37] *Sport im Bild* published more than a dozen of Walser's prose pieces between 1929-32.

[38] In later chapters, I will explore how the idea of the margin also defines Walser's prose and characters.

On the page in question, *Rand* stands out first of all because Walser has cut the paper so that it *has* become mostly margin. In Walser's new version of the page, the word becomes a beacon for his method and materiality. Just above *Rand* is *Neuartige*. Though we know that *Neuartige* began the first sentence of the subtitle, in this cut-off column, the stacked words read like a new sentence: "*Neuartige Rand aus*" (*aus* being the last full word visible in the subtitle). All of these words fit well with Walser's re-invented page. Ignoring the wrong declension on *Neuartige*, the 'title' is now: "unprecedented margin from —." From what, or out of where? One cannot say, since Walser's enforced 'edge' of the page (the *Rand*) stops the next word from its completion. Its first two letters, however, are '*ro*,' and the reader can just detect the vertical line beginning the next letter. In this new system of words and space, this *Rand* comes from him, from *Ro*-bert. Intentionally or not, Walser has marked off an area in preparation for his tiny writing, a blank space just in the corner of a popular publication, and manipulated its words so that its title draws attention to the idea of periphery.

There is only one *Mikrogramm* on this page, and it is on the back of the page. Between Walser's block of text and the edges of the back of the page there is no discernable margin. The entire front of the page acts as the margin, then, the boundary or *Rand* between the public writing and Walser's writing. Yet as pressed-up to the sides as this block of text is, the writing stops right below where the words "*Rand aus ro-*" are located on the front. Similar to what I discussed with the text behind 'T U R,' the legible, printed words that come as though from another world, another sphere, mark the horizon in this page (yet another *Rand)*. Walser's writing does not descend past the abridged

subtitle to the region where the larger typed words lie; it remains on the underside of the corner, where the smaller letters define the region as all periphery, all *Rand*.

The idea of the corner as an uncharted, protective space is not to be overlooked. As the part of the page that the reader would fold down or 'turn over,' the upper corner is the ideal hiding space: it *covers*. In covering, this bit of page is also suggestive of the blanket—which is similarly folded down or turned over, by the parent for the child. Walser's tiny text is wrapped up in layers of potential folding. Gaston Bachelard, who writes on the intimate meaning of spaces such as the corner, says that the corner is "a negation of the Universe," "a haven."[39] The corner is perfect for the hiding child, or the child in need of solitude (Andrew Piper calls it the space of the "time out" (Piper 2012, 113)). The regions that might afford protection for the child in the interior of the home (Bachelard's starting point), *Walser recreates in the space of the page*. The surface of the paper, in Walser's hands, becomes three-dimensional, no longer just surface but a space with depth, folds, and edges that separate the large, public world from the small, private one that Walser is creating.[40]

While these letters appear, as Carl Seelig might say, 'shy,' the content of the short sketch reveals their playful subversion. This text is called, "*Ich habe es hier mit einem Sieger zu tun*," and everywhere the reader sees Walser toying with the scale of great and small. A victor, especially in a sports magazine, conjures images of a celebrated national

[39] Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, trans. Maria Jolas (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), 136-7.

[40] It is worth adding that Bachelard points to an example (from Milosz) of a man in a corner holding "a book with uncut pages." The significance of cutting pages (see page 32 in this chapter) corresponds well with Bachelard's analysis of the corner as a symbol of privacy and solitude. See Bachelard 140.

figure. Walser even claims that this is a "gewaltige Handlung und große Angelegenheit" (*AdB* 5, 292). Yet Walser places this character in the most uncelebrated, unmighty space, a space that is moreover 'cut-off' from any public recognition. Setting up the location within the narrative, Walser writes equally ironic descriptions on the growth of the town: "War sie toll, daß sie glaubte, sie dürfe blühen . . . ? Sichtbar schien in der Tat ihr Wille zur Vergrößerung oder Erweiterung zu sein" (292). The town that sprouted on this page *is* mad to think that it can grow and enlarge, when Walser's undertaking here involves not just microscopic text, but the explicit narrowing of the surface's borders and displacement from the surrounding public (legible, communicable) context. It is hard to tell whether there is not also a kernel of envy or resentment in this type of naïve will to grow, which would seem to go against Walser's will to make everything smaller.

By the middle of the sketch, the irony collapses and our 'victor' begins to fall. The heroic figure, who is revealed to be a count, decides to become "frecher," and what happens to him as the story unfolds is perfectly suited to the appearance of the text. His 'cheekiness' leads to social ostracism; this is his fate: "Vom Adel verwünscht, von der Stadt schicklichkeitshalber fallen gelassen, hüllte er sich in seinen Mantel, verbarg das Gesicht in den Händen und schämte sich. . . . Nie wurde er von irgend jemand wieder gesehen" (293). Just as this story wraps itself in the protective and concealing *interior* of the page, and resides in the least noticed area of the public magazine (its margin, its corner), so does this hero shrink his body (burying his head in his hands) and hide beneath material protection (his jacket) following his social ostracism. As a result of his cheekiness, the hero regresses to a childlike smallness, and eventually shrinks to the point of invisibility, again matching the material letters of this text.

The jacket, moreover, is a recurring image in Walser's prose. It gives protection specifically to the writer. For example: "Sonst zieh' ich immer erst einen Prosastückkittel, also eine Art Schriftstellerjacke an, ehe ich mich an die Niederschrift heranwage; aber ich bin in Eile, und überdies ist's nur ein ganz kleines Stück" (*AdB* 1, 65). The jacket is the external layer that most obviously protects from the exterior. Here Walser reveals that it also symbolically protects his under-draft, his *Niederschrift* or *Bleistiftgebiet*. In the case as well of the fallen victor, folding and wrapping his body exhibits remarkable parallels to the material text of the *Niederschrift*.

The final *Mikrogramm* page that I will discuss is likely the best visual example of Walser setting up a space underneath the public, legible, sphere: his sketch on the reverse of a cheap novel cover (**Fig. 5**). The cover has been detached, though not with scissors (the reader can see the uneven edge). From a clue in the text as to the 'neglected' contents of the book, it is likely that Walser found this cover torn off, and did not tear it himself. The lone *Mikrogramm* on the back takes up very little of the page; it lies in the corner, turned on its side, and reaches just about halfway across the page. Compared to the colourful front cover, where the figures and title fill the page, Walser's small block of text appears modest, even humble. Yet once we begin reading, it becomes possible that this modesty conceals derision for widely-read books.

Figure 5: Blatt-Nr. 54, front (L) and back (R), from Bernofsky, *Microscripts*, 49-50.

The first words of the sketch are, "*Da war wieder ein Buch*" (*AdB* 5, 185). This declaration could imply that only once the cover is flipped to reveal Walser's text, then does the 'book' begin. Or, it could be just that Walser started by referring to the object he was writing in, mindful that his story is an echo of the other book. Whether Walser's first words include a criticism or not, one can see that the material presence of the book foregrounds Walser's act of writing, and moreover, that he includes an awareness of the physical space, the surface, of his writing. 'Here' ("Da"), is where we begin reading, despite the fact that the 'here,' the *inside* of a cover, is never where one would expect a book to begin. By placing his story well before the novel would have text, Walser does seem to be undercutting the legitimacy of the original contents. Rather than have the entire front page act as a protective door (*Tür*) or border (*Rand*) before reaching Walser's text, in this case Walser's block of text seems to be protecting the hypothetical reader

from entering the realm of the cheap novel. His little block of text stands at the threshold between outside and inside, the cover and contents of the book. Besides, the novel is no longer attached to its contents, so the reader truly could not move past Walser's text. When there are no more pages, Walser's story does indeed replace the body of the book.

His block of text is turned on its side, another possible disputation of the original novel. When his text is a stumbling block before the pages of the novel, it is even more disruptive that the entire book be *turned* in order to be read. Walser often writes his *Mikrogramme* in all directions, but when Walser's is the only block of text apart from the cover, there is an opposition set up between the two, a choice to be made. If one attempts to read Walser's text, the words on the cover are no longer legible. Walser is, as mentioned, creating a new system of legibility, whereby any words that previously exist on his pages exist in a different dimension.

The words on the cover, however, are not antithetical to Walser's. The genre or collection heading this specific novel is simply "le petit livre." Perhaps Walser felt a kinship with the professed smallness of this book, and, in placing his text inside the cover, is slipping his own meaning of a 'small book' amongst the other, less profound claims of smallness. With his shrunken text, Walser is delivering what the cover promises, yet he is also radicalizing the notion that this cheap novel is *small reading*. The genre announces itself to be less important, a type of serial book whose instalments are likely formulaic and replaceable. The book is not promoting itself as a great classic, for instance. The 'small book' indicates humility, and awareness of its limited value. Walser seems to be answering this call for smallness and modesty, with characteristic irony that exaggerates the connotations of the 'small book.'

Once the reader enters Walser's text, we can see the degree to which he is rewriting this novel. Walser's sketch is mostly about a woman, to whom the narrator, presumably Walser, is introduced by reading. We are given hints that this woman was formerly a character in a book, and Walser is rescuing her from her previous oppressed ("unterdrückt") fate: "Schon manche [Frauen] lernte ich auf dem Weg des Lesens kennen . . . heben sich Buchfiguren besser . . . voneinander ab als lebende . . .. Die mich hier beschäftigt, sah sich als Gemahlin eines Händlers" (185). She was abused by her husband, Walser tells us. In reusing the ripped, cheap novel cover for his own text, Walser is rewriting the fate of the material novel as well as its personification of the previously neglected woman. Walser frees the woman by having her escape and set out in search of adventure. She leaves the confines of her earlier life, and, as the reader knows from the first lines, meets the first-person narrator.

As the text goes on, the woman meets other men who admire her: a dancer, an unnamed man, and finally, a lawyer. Like the lady pictured on the cover, this woman is brought to trial, but the text ends happily when she is acquitted and united with the lawyer. Remarkably, Walser's block of text is exactly on the back of where the man's body is drawn on the cover, who is wearing the black robes of a court member. The robed man's face might as well be Walser's own, since his only distinct features are a moustache and brown hair. In placing his text behind the man's body, Walser is replacing the forecasted plot of the cheap novel with his own courtroom story, and possibly, situating himself as the man who wins the woman's affections.

Unlike the earlier example of the *Sieger*, this text is unique since the protagonist is able to move beyond her confines—which Walser hints are originally the pages of a

book. Before Walser rescues her, she is "unterdrückt"—held down literally by the pressures of publishing. The title of the original novel is *Après la Tourmente*, and with this in mind, I do not think it is an accident that Walser frees this character, whereas his *Sieger* ends up rejected and isolated. If we recall Walser's words to Rychner about his pencil method: writing cost him "wahre Qualen, aber diese Qual lehrte mich Geduld." This woman exists in an era or a space that comes '*after* the torment' or the 'Qual,' which, in the context of Walser's pencil method, is manifested as the liberation from "Klammern." Both this text and the *Sieger* text are from the same years, 1930-33, so the release and adventure of the one, as opposed to the isolation and downfall of the other, cannot be attributed to a shift in time alone. It might simply be a difference in starting materials: Walser saw an image of a woman in chains and thought to free her, but drew a hero from the pages of a sports magazine and decided to have him shunned by the public.

The idea of confining space permeates the *Bleistiftgebiet*, yet it is unclear whether confinement is restricting or comforting. While Walser struggled to escape from certain rigidities, he continued to enforce others. The pen represented too much exactitude, while the pencil allowed for flexibility. He switched to the more liberating instrument, but in creating his pages, Walser added limits by cutting his pages, shrinking his area of writing, and by maintaining precise borders between his columns of text. He even seems to indicate that these borders are physical and psychological obstacles. One *Mikrogramm* (**Fig. 6**)—which is especially overlaid with blocks of text, and which, from the start, alludes to its overwhelming layout ("nackten, hohen . . . Felsen eingerahmt" (*AdB* 5, 221))—includes the following: "Wo er vorwärts gehen wollte, stemmte sich ihm zunächst

ein Hindernis entgegen" (222). And later: "nach wie vor bleib er der, der aus den Sorgen nicht herauskam."

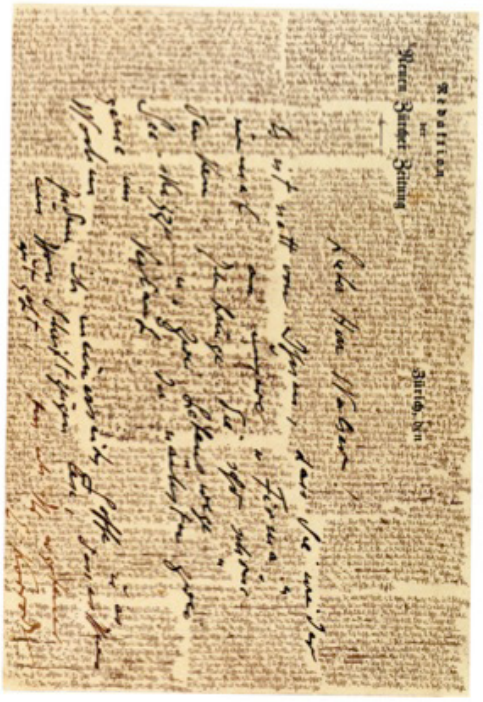


Figure 6: Blatt-Nr. 9a, from Bernofsky, *Microscripts*, 30.

Certain borders, such as the *Rand* and *Tür*, can be seen to be comforting and protecting; others, however, represent a barrier. Similarly, imprisonment is both sought after, in the severe isolation and secrecy of his texts, and seen as a punishment (as in "»Heute bin ich sehr fügsam«," or "*Ich habe es hier mit einem Sieger zu tun*"). Walser's method presents a paradox, as even his most private texts are protected by irony and contradiction.

In this chapter I have tried to examine the material fragments of Walser's *Bleistiftgebiet*, in order to arrive at a more thorough appreciation of his writing system. Walser's distinct arrangement of texts can immediately be understood to be more than content: these pages are artefacts before anything else, laboured over and carefully crafted. In reading the *Bleistiftgebiet* materially as well as textually, one can conclude

that these blocks of text exist in a realm that is deliberately outside of legibility and transmissibility. It seems that residing in marginal spaces is at one and the same time an endeavour to hide, seek protection, and create distance in order to undermine and subvert, or just ironize those more public writings.

Walser's entire body of work could be said to be an exploration of marginality and the protection that it offers. In the next chapter, I will continue to look at the idea of spatial isolation by concentrating on the interior spaces that permeate Walser's prose; spaces that are similarly protective recesses in the surface—no longer of the page but surfaces in the home and landscape.

Chapter 2: The Evolution of Shrinking Space in Walser's Middle (1914-18) Prose: The House and the Attic as Prototypes of the Microscript Page

In the previous chapter, an examination of Walser's *Bleistiftgebiet* as primarily material artefacts revealed the correlation between a sense of seclusion or privacy and a sense of calm while writing. In the context of writing, 'private' can be understood as a direct opposite to that which will be published and therefore publicly visible. Although Walser continued to publish certain of his short prose pieces until 1933,[41] all of his original drafts from around 1917 onward[42] were composed in a system of writing so microscopic that they were illegible and therefore private from the outset. Walser also kept the existence of the *Mikrogramme* private; he did not talk about his peculiar method, and would apparently hide his papers from view should anyone be nearby.[43] As surveyed in the previous chapter, Walser used his writing instrument and materials symbolically to add to the privacy of his writing in various ways: first, the 'rough' pencil draft, or *Niederschrift*, was not immediately publishable and truly stood for a layer 'underneath,' delaying and even protecting his writing from reaching the public; second, Walser would cut his

[41] Biographies of Walser put 1933 as the end of his writing practice, due in part to the new regime in Germany blocking publication and to Walser's forced relocation to the asylum in Herisau.

[42] As discussed in the introduction, the exact year of Walser's switch to the microscript is not known. 1917, however, is the later of two dates that Walser suggests when delineating his timeline to Max Rychner.

[43] W. G. Sebald relates that an orderly from the Herisau asylum describes Walser as being "always quick to conceal these scraps of paper if he thought anyone was watching, as if he had been caught in the act of doing something wrong, or even shameful." See W. G. Sebald, "Foreword," in *A Place in the Country: On Gottfried Keller, Johann Peter Hebel, Robert Walser and Others*, trans. Jo Catling (London, England: Hamish Hamilton, 2013), 2-3.

(oftentimes pre-circulated) pages into narrow strips, thereby creating a smaller and necessarily non-public area on which to write; third, Walser would place his texts in deliberately peripheral areas of the page (the margins, the corners, and the underside), turning the texts themselves into metaphorically marginal works. The layout and method of Walser's *Bleistiftgebiet* thus confirms that when the public (in any permutation) was an option, Walser instead sought out the private—the peripheral, overlooked, small, and hidden spaces.

In this chapter, I will argue that Walser's gravitation towards private, unseen space is not a unique feature of the *Bleistiftgebiet* manuscripts but can be read throughout his body of work. His characters, most evidently in the short sketches and poems of the *Bieler* period, 1913-21, consistently seek enclosure and privacy in what seems to be an effort to avoid the public. My project in this chapter is ultimately to align the enclosed spaces that emerge from the middle period of Walser's writing with the similarly enclosed and delimited surfaces (or '*Gebiete'*) of Walser's microscripts. I have chosen to work primarily with one such category of enclosed space, the house, for a number of reasons: first, it is present across all periods of Walser's writing, even if the narrative perspective is from one room only; second, it is on its own an emblematic space of interiority, privacy, and smallness; third, it is divided within itself and thus leads to other, more enclosed spaces, such as various rooms, the attic, and even certain furniture; and finally, due to its consistent presence in Walser's writing, and its multi-valence as a represented space, the house is a setting that frames different degrees of seclusion across the eras of Walser's writing. I will be focussing on two degrees or stages of interiority provided by the house, the first being from the perspective of a run-away child in

Walser's 1917 story "Das Ende der Welt," and the second from the perspective of Walser's recurring figure of the poet.

For the child, the *entire* home is a distinctly small and isolated space. In the case of the child in this story, other people are not depicted as harmful and the 'public' is not configured in terms of other people. Rather, it is the vastness of undifferentiated space that is harmful. The relative smallness and enclosure of the home (a micro universe hidden within the macro) is hence extraordinarily welcoming. The poet, however, is situated in a small attic-room that is specifically valued for its distance from other people, particularly from a reading public. Though both figures, child and poet, stem from the same period of Walser's writing (I have specified 1914-1918 from within the Biel years due to the publication dates of the stories I am primarily referencing), there is an increase in the smallness and isolation of the 'home' when one moves from child to poet, and this increase hinges entirely on privacy. The child actually solicits contact with other people, arguably due to a longing for a family, while the writer expresses an outright rejection of the public. The shift in narrative perspective from the whole house to the small room thus signals a corresponding shift in the importance of smallness: for the writer, smallness, coupled with privacy, is a prerequisite for writing. The analogous small world of the child in Walser's prose becomes as small and as secluded as possible to accommodate the poet.

It is not as simple, however, as declaring a divide between child and poet. The two figures are intertwined throughout Walser's writing—his children are often writing in journals or diaries, and his writers are repeatedly described as childlike or schoolboyish. The process of writing the microscripts, after all, was reminiscent of

'learning, like a child, to write' ("lernte ich knabenhaft wider – schreiben"[44]). The child is therefore a figure of consequence in the subject of the *Bleistiftgebiet*. The way that smallness evolves and intensifies as one proceeds from child to actual writer is likewise revealing. Privacy and secrecy emerge from their juxtaposition as the key factor necessary for the poet in order to write, thus shedding light on how much deeper the micrology of the *Bleistiftgebiet* is than a simple smallness of the script. The narrative representations of the house, again, are helpful in order to frame the differences between the overlapping figures of child and poet, and I devote part of this chapter to a discussion of the designated furniture of both child and poet (the bed and the writing desk, respectively) as a means of clarifying the shift to private space. Whereas the child's bed invites visibility and contact from the parental figures of the story, the drawers of Walser's writing desk, as seen in his 1914 reflection on writing *Geschwister Tanner*, are accessible only to the writer. The spatial comparison that I undertake in this chapter thus offers two versions of the house as a small space, and in so doing, broadens my investigation of smallness as evidenced by the *Bleistiftgebiet*.

To mention the historical backdrop of this chapter's focus, the concept of 'shrinking spaces' relates to two important details in the chronology of Walser's writing. First, Walser moved from Berlin to Biel at the start of the writing period in question, a detail that roots the entire period in the movement to smaller and less public space. Biel is a much smaller city, but it is also Walser's hometown, to which he returned because he felt himself to have been unsuccessful as a writer in Berlin (Bernofsky 16). The transition to smaller space can thus also be understood as a sort of 'return to childhood,' but a

[44] This quotation is from Walser's 1927 letter to Max Rychner, excerpted on pages 17-18 of the previous chapter.

return that is highly ironized and in fact corresponds to a certain social defeat. The figure of the wandering child becomes perhaps more crucial in the context of Walser's return home, and the example of "Das Ende der Welt" becomes more fitting for its analogous combination of a journey to the family or childhood home, and a resulting social marginalization as the child changes to a maid in the story's end. To add a further layer of symbolism to Biel, scholars have noted the similarity of the town's name to '*Blei*,' the essence of '*Bleistift,*'[45] a nuance that is especially compelling since it was during his years in Biel that Walser is believed to have begun using his pencil method in earnest. His '*Bleistiftmethode,*' which again was reminiscent of his days as a schoolboy (in Biel), thus in an allegorical sense, overshadows Walser's return to Biel. The second detail that demonstrates a more general evidence of 'shrinking space' in Walser's writing practise is the fact that Walser stopped writing novels after he left Berlin. His writing, from Biel onwards, is entirely comprised of 'sketches,' poetry, and the very rare novella. The shrinking dimensions of Walser's texts (in length) were another way in which they gradually became less marketable (less suited to a public). Though circulated in journals and newspapers, Walser's short sketches were written less and less for a readership.[46] Thus, overall, this chapter posits privacy—a distance from the public and likewise from

[45] This is noted by Kirsten Scheffler and Elke Siegel. See Scheffler, 436, and Siegel, 145-6. As Scheffler references, in addition to the allusion to 'Bleistift,' the Austrian writer and critic Franz Blei is also relevant in this wordplay. He was a friend of Walser's, and was a key figure in Walser's early introduction to the German literary scene.

[46] Heffernan discusses Walser's "bitterness that his penchant for short prose had reduced him to the status of a "Zeitschriftenlieferant,"" as he put it in a letter to Christian Morgenstern. From this time period and onwards, Walser's texts reflect his resentment of the reading public, a hostility that Heffernan describes as "his venom regarding the narrow-mindedness of a social elite who have such power in dictating the limits of what is accepted as 'high' culture." See Heffernan, 78.

the demands of publishing—as a fundamental motivating factor in the extreme smallness of Walser's *Bleistiftgebiet*.

1. Home – "Das Ende der Welt"

From the outset of Walser's writing, the space of the home is double-sided. On the one hand, the houses that populate his novels and early stories are owned by generally wealthy families. The homes are presented as aspirational, since Walser's protagonists do not belong to these homes but are always a step removed from them—these are the homes of a boss, a friend, a school principal, or a sibling. Often, the protagonists, who are poor and solitary figures, articulate a longing for the home and presumably for the wealth and families that go along with the space. Critics have pointed to a line from Simon Tanner—"Ich hatte ein Bedürfnis darnach, zärtlich behandelt zu werden, und es geschah nie" (*GW* IV, 116)—in order to establish the echoes of Walser's unstable childhood in this first (1906), overtly biographical novel.[47] A similar lament is made explicitly spatial (the lament for a *home*) in the 1909 poem, "Seht Ihr": "Ich habe Sehnsucht nach dem Heim, / dem Heim, noch nie von mir erreicht, / und auch von einer Hoffnung nicht / berührt, daß ich es jemals kann" (*GW* XI, 26). The home is an archetype of care and protection that can never be reached and has never been present. The other side to the homes in Walser's writing, however, is that they invariably become, half way or so through the novels, spaces of financial ruin, divorce, and death. Walser thereby ironizes the house: it is ultimately not the space of stability, love, and family that it ought to be. This double-sidedness of the home, I find, only becomes more acute in Walser's shorter

[47] Mark Harman, Introduction, *Robert Walser Rediscovered: Stories, Fairy-Tale Plays, and Critical Responses* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 1985), 2.

stories, conceivably because the collapse of the ideal happens across the span of no more than a few pages and is therefore much more striking.

In Walser's novels, the reader's perspective on the houses is also much more vast. We hear about the environs of the house, neighbouring towns, woods, and cities. The homes seem huge. In contrast, when the home is a destination in Walser's later short sketches, it is the smallest place and the only enclosure in the midst of an endless expanse of space and time. This is true of the main prose piece that I will look at, "Das Ende der Welt," but other sketches from the *Bieler* period reiterate the identical formula of a journey towards progressively smaller and more remote space, but with an island or a crypt as the endpoint.[48] These radically anti-social iterations of the home in Walser's middle prose underline the fact that although the home (including the home in "Das Ende der Welt") is relatively social, belonging usually to a family, as a fantasy space in Walser's *Bieler Zeit* it is indicative foremost of spatial seclusion.

To begin with "Das Ende der Welt," here is a brief synopsis: a nameless child sets off from an unidentified place to find the end of the world. The reader is told that the child has nothing and no one, and does not need to pack anything. Walser spends most of the story stretching out the child's journey: it lasts sixteen years without stop. Every so often the child asks a bystander where the end of the world is (the catch: it is also the name of a farmhouse), and receives an answer that continues to stretch out the space interminably—it is another half hour, then another ten minutes, but these intervals are exhausting to the child. Finally, the child arrives at the farmhouse, collapses, and wakes

[48] The two sketches in question are "Die Insel" (1914) (*GW* II, 18) and "Brentano (I)" (1913) (*GW* 1, 319-324). The crypt in "Brentano (I)" is revealed at the very end to be a church.

up in a nice bed surrounded by the farm owners. The child asks to stay, and here Walser reveals that the child is female. She is allowed to stay on as a maid.

One might notice, first of all, that the protagonist still does not belong to the home. Though she has been treated with care, the social distancing of character to home has not changed; she is accepted as an inferior and her lodging depends on the kindness of her hosts. The farmers even say that she could be 'like' ("wie") a daughter to them, a phrasing that, by attempting the natural alignment of parent to child, does much more to highlight the gap that has not been successfully overcome: "Wir können eine schaffige Magd wohl brauchen, und wenn du brav bist, so wollen wir dich halten wie unsere Tochter" (*GW* II, 248). The difference between this story and the novels, and the reason why this fantasy is an exception to Walser's otherwise lost or aimless characters, is that the child reaches her goal. The longing for a home has been fulfilled. What is it that makes the character stop, finally, at this home? The answer seems to lies in the fact that the home represents a small, remote, and permanent space—a permanence that opposes the continuous wandering and rented rooms of many of Walser's other characters from this period.

Since the child begins the action by running off, it might seem that she is looking for an expansion of the world; wherever she had been before could not contain her. But it is evident that the expansion of space that occurs as she travels—going on and on for sixteen years, and still the last ten minutes are agonizing—is not what she is after. There

is a purpose to her travels, and it is to discover finitude; a fixed limit that *stops* space rather than expanding it. She is searching for the 'end of the world.'[49]

In addition to the implications of the title, Walser's narrative techniques provide a straightforward means of interpreting the child's goal of finitude. There is not exactly a plot in this short work; it relates little more than a character attempting to travel from point 'a' to point 'b.' The story unfolds mostly through its action-less, repetitive narration, which is where Walser has hidden much of the story's gravity. Based on the evolution of Walser's narration, one can discern the very clear divide between the home and the outside world. In what follows, I will look closely at two narrative patterns: first the repetition of phrases, and second, the levels of description as the story changes.

The space that the child starts out from is already gigantic, but as she travels, the space actually seems to grow bigger. Once the child has a locatable destination (when the farmer directs her to 'end of the world'), however, the space begins to shrink. During the period of endless travelling, Walser repeats full phrases, refrain-like, that have the effect of adding layers to the space like concentric rings. Here is one example of many: "Fort und fort lief es, an vielen Erscheinungen vorbei, aber es achtete auf keine Erscheinungen. Fort und fort lief es, an vielen Leuten vorbei, aber es achtete auf keinen Menschen. Fort und fort lief es, bis es Nacht wurde, aber das Kind achtete nicht auf die Nacht" (*GW* II,

[49] Eric Santner, who uses this story alongside Kafka's "The Top" as a means of introducing his book on Freud and Rosenzweig, describes the child's goal as "seek[ing] out the limits of the macrocosm" (as opposed to Kafka's microcosm), and searching for a "beyond." I would argue that the child is not interested in either the 'beyond' or the macrocosm, but instead in precisely the sort of microcosm suggested by the image of Kafka's spinning top. The 'End of the World' in this story manifests as the elusive and microcosmic centre of a spiral that continues to unravel as the child wanders. See Santner, *On the Psychotheology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), pp. 13-14.

245-6). The rhythm of the sentences serves to intensify the unchanging and interminable qualities of the space. Each time the perceived subject changes, it is as though the space grows by one more orbit; or, as though the child is circling the same route only to have the center change with each revolution.

Regarding the language in this passage, Walser's frequent use of "vorbei" is singled out by Samuel Frederick in his discussion of *Der Spaziergang* (Frederick 49-50). Frederick raises the point that this construction (" . . . vorbei") turns the surrounding world in *Der Spaziergang* into one long narrative digression, adding nothing to the plot. In *Der Spaziergang*, however, this constant stream of passing-by *is* the 'goal' of the narrator's journey. Digression (both spatial and linguistic) is what drives the narrator of *Der Spaziergang* onwards and into new territory. Here, on the other hand, the child has the intention of stopping. She is not on a perambulatory journey but a homing mission. Every repetition of "vorbei" here appears to demonstrate that the child has not made progress but has instead returned to her starting point, with nothing notable occurring in between. The listed aspects that change with each rotation are vague categories rather than specific objects—"Erscheinungen," "Menschen"—and the child pays no attention to them. The emergence of these phenomena is not a spectacle or a chance to stop and observe, and thus the narrator does not dwell on them. Instead, the narrator dwells on the motion of moving and passing by without respite: "Fort und fort . . . an . . . vorbei . . . Fort und fort . . . an . . . vorbei." Rather than render the landscape more "real," as Frederick concludes in the case of *Der Spaziergang*, Walser's repetition here drastically undermines the presence of the world passing by. Outside space has as yet no contours, only dizzying motion.

Another detail to notice from the above passage is that time and space are treated equally by Walser. Night can be ignored in the same way as people or objects. The time is just another part of the landscape. As Tamara Evans puts it in her cross-study of Paul Klee and Walser, Walser "is turning time into circles, into patterns geometrically conceived on the plane."[50] Throughout "Das Ende der Welt," time and space are co-dependent. The features that distinguish the farmhouse from the rest of the world are smallness and permanence (one spatial, the other temporal), which go hand-in-hand. For example, the child is at her most childlike when in the smallest space (the bed within the house, as I will discuss below), and it is here that the permanence of the house is promised. In other words, as space shrinks in this story, so does time. To borrow another phrase from Evans, "time can be gathered up and stretched out at will" in Walser's world (Evans 37). In this story, both time and space are indeed stretched out as the child traverses the outside world, and then gathered up again as she nears the house. The house, and the bed within, becomes the vanishing point of both time and space.

When the child's wandering finally has a terminus, the same technique of repeating phrases is used to have the opposite effect—this time shrinking the space. The child asks for directions from a farmer, who instructs her to continue for half an hour. Then she asks a farm boy, who tells her ten more minutes. The exchanges are nearly identical, but the micro changes function to diminish the time, and thereby the space, of the journey:

> Da fragte es einen Bauer, der am Weg stand, ob er wisse, wo das Ende der Welt liege. "Ende der Welt" hiess ein Bauernhaus in der Nähe, und daher

[50] Tamara S. Evans, ""A Paul Klee in Prose": Design, Space, and Time in the Work of Robert Walser," *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 57 No.1 (1984): pp. 27-41, here 37.

> sagte der Bauer: “Noch eine halbe Stunde weit liegt es.” Das liess sich das Kind gesagt sein, dankte dem Manne für die gute Auskunft und ging weiter. Als ihm aber die halbe Stunde schier ewig lang wurde, fragte es einen Burschen, der des Weges daherkam, wie weit es noch bis zum Ende der Welt sei. “Noch zehn Minuten”, sagte der Bursche. Das Kind dankte ihm für die gute Auskunft und ging weiter. Fast am Ende seiner Kräfte war es angelangt, und nur noch mühsam bewegte es sich vorwärts. (247)

The story is winding down from this point on, and the representations of space only continue to shrink as the child comes nearer to the house. As in the manner above, representations of time are shrinking too: the first bystander is a farmer, but the second is a younger farm boy. We are coming closer to the space of childhood. One can furthermore observe from this passage that space not only matches time, but it also matches the character’s gradual progression and Walser’s writing style. After such an exhaustive description, wherein the long phrases are nearly word-for-word repeated, the child is, appropriately, also exhausted. Every element of this story (style, character, narrator, space, time) is intertwined.

A second narrative shift comes from the descriptions of the space themselves. For the majority of “Das Ende der Welt,” the child is passing by unnamed space. The reader receives no details about the landscape, and features such as mountains and seas are equally unremarkable: “Sechzehn Jahre lang irrte das Kind herum, über Meere, Ebenen und Berge.” The landscape is ceaseless; such gigantic features blend together and do not captivate the child. Yet, when the child begins to come near the home, every detail is recorded:

> Endlich erblickte es mitten in einer behaglich fetten Wiese ein schönes grosses Bauernhaus, eine wahre Pracht von einem Haus, so warm, ungezwungen und freundlich, so stolz, hübsch und ehrbar. Rund herum standen prächtige Obstbäume, Hühner spazierten ums Haus herum, ein leiser Wind wehte durch das Korn, der Garten war voll Gemüse, am Abhang stand ein Bienenhäuschen, das ordentlich nach Honig schmeckte, ein Stall voll Kühe war wohl auch vorhanden, und alle Bäume waren voll Kirschen, Birnen, Äpfel, und das Ganze sah so wohlhabend, fein und frei aus, dass das Kind sogleich dachte, das müsse das Ende der Welt sein. Gross war seine Freude. Im Hause wurde scheinbar gerade gekocht, denn ein zarter, artiger Rauch räuchelte und lächelte zum Kamin heraus, und stahl sich wie ein Schelm fort. (247)

The house has individual smells and sounds, multiple species of fruit trees, and different places within the overall area, all of which capture the child's interest. The many adjectives in this paragraph fill every corner of the writing—while a phrase such as "blosse reine Luft" from the previous paragraph (applying to the child's aimless fantasies of what the 'end of the world' might be) evokes merely emptiness. The only interesting space, or the space worth stopping for—both for the narrator's description and for the child's action—is the home. The rest of the world is ungraspable and far too vast, and hence it is only *passed by*, but the home is unique; it opens up like a niche in the gigantic space for the child to enter.

Aside from being at the farthest limits of space, this particular house is encircled by idyllic elements that anchor it to the land (orchards, gardens, an apiary). As the

narrative refrains helped to build up the expanding spiral of space, so do these physical layers help to enclose the home and mark it as the centre or the endpoint of the topography. As though to visualize this house as the target of her journey, Walser incorporates words such as 'herum,' 'um,' 'rund,' and 'mitten.' Especially since the child has started out with nothing and no one, essentially naked in the face of the gigantic world, the manifold layers of land and plants and animals can be interpreted to be physically protective and comforting.

The child, too, undergoes a change in description once she enters the home. As with the landscape, the reader receives very little information about the child in the first stretch of the story. She has neither name nor gender, and we are told that she has no family or possessions either. It is only within the home that she takes on positive (rather than negatively described) characteristics, and is given an identity. Her name is still not known, but she has parental figures, a place that is not going anywhere, and the role of daughter-like maid. During the travelling narrative, her growth is hardly remarked on (certainly Walser does not explain why her title of 'child' does not change); it is as though during those years she is simply part of the endless landscape, moving without changing. As a result, she remains a child until the end, despite being much older, perhaps so that she can experience the nurturing aspects of the home—the bed and the good hands of the parents—as a child would.

The permanence of the home is cemented, and in fact only realized, once the child finds herself tucked into bed. The question of whether she may stay only arises at this point, and thus the possibility of her stable childhood grows out of the security and comfort especially inherent in the space of the bed—along with the gesture of being

placed there. The layers of orchards and gardens that surround the house, distinguishing it from the sixteen years of uninterrupted landscape, are ultimately condensed and mirrored in the wrapping of the body that takes place in the bed. When the house is the centre or 'end of the world,' the bed is in turn the centre of the house for the child; it is a shelter and an anchor just for the body. Within the bed, the world becomes as small and secure as possible for the child, and this is decidedly comforting, since she can finally stop moving and stop running away.

The bed in this context—as the locus of the parental gesture and the microcosm of the home—can be compared to the nest, which is one of the images that Gaston Bachelard takes up in his examination of childhood spaces in literature. The associations of the nest are familiar, and can be applied equally to the bed in this story: within both, fundamental parental care and protection are demonstrated. The child is tucked in to the bed, while the baby bird in the nest is covered by the parent's body. The shared material of feathers covering the child amplifies the parallels. In this regard, the bed mimics the nest. For Bachelard, the nest is the idealized miniature home. The parent bird builds the nest by pressing its body continually against the accumulated twigs, until the inside of the nest is smooth and close-packed (Bachelard 100-101). Thus the bird's nest is an extension of the breast of the parent bird, making it, as a symbol, even more appropriate for parental (or simply maternal) care. The nest stands for a world that has shrunk to fit only the child and the parent, and, as demonstrated by our language, we are nostalgic for this small, womb-like space. We 'leave the nest' and we long to 'return to the nest' (99). When we look for relationships outside the family, we reintroduce the nest as an idiom: Bachelard refers to the phrase, 'a lover's nest' (93). The longing for the nest or bed as a

fundamental space of love and family is thus not uncommon, especially in cases of nostalgia (as "Das Ende der Welt" could be considered) but also in the context of a wish for intimacy.

Finally, the child's gender and switch to servitude must not be overlooked. Given the child's anonymity throughout, gender is one of the only means of assessing her identity.[51] Walser reveals her gender at the same moment as he reveals that her role has shifted from just 'child' to 'maid.' She wakes up in the bed, which is the locus of her domestic stability and permanence, and is suddenly equipped with these traits. Thus, as the story launches her back into an idealized childhood, this childhood is also made perverse by the reader's awareness of a social demotion. The switch that takes place in the bed (from child to maid, from child to girl, from homeless to home) also exhibits the double-sidedness of small space. As seen in the previous chapter with Walser's paper choices, narrow and confining space evidently brings comfort to Walser, perhaps even a comfort reminiscent of childhood, but it can be imprisoning as well. Her gender intensifies the imprisoning attributes of the small space, which was paradisiacal only a moment before. The house can be double-edged for the female; its enclosure can become oppressive. The layers of protective space and bedding now carry parallels with a woman's rigid coverings and the expectations of physical diminishment through the same means (folding, shrouding, and becoming imperceptible). Rather than being freed in the bed, through the newfound parental care, the child can equally be seen as immobilized

[51] Valerie Heffernan has a fascinating reading of the significance of gender in Walser's pencil method and *Mikrogramme*. She notes that in the letter to Rychner, Walser writes that when he recopies his pencil draft for publication, it becomes "vermännlicht." Heffernan attempts to read the "inherent femininity" of Walser's *Mikrogramme*. See Heffernan, 141-172.

and marginalized. Undoubtedly, the bed on its own has the potential to be oppressive for the female, but this does not seem to be an idea that Walser pursues.

The duplicity of smallness is exactly where Walser's irony can most clearly be seen. Though this story exhibits a longing for the home, and for the stability and love which it brings, the ideal home cannot be perfectly mapped onto Walser's characters. I am reminded of Walser's very early poem, first published in 1899, "Beiseit": "Ich mache meinen Gang, / der führt ein Stückchen weit / und heim; dann ohne Klang / und Wort bin ich beiseit" (*GW* XI, 22). There is a marginalization implicit in all of his figures (a literal moving to the sides), and it seems that a certain distance is always a part of Walser's plan. Social isolation and servitude—the fates that bookend this story—are not necessarily misfortunes; in his life, Walser experienced and even sought out both.[52] But what is unique about "Das Ende der Welt," and where it becomes a clue in the study of the *Bleistiftgebiet*, is that while its resolution manifests as a shrinking of space, it is precisely when the resolution occurs that the character becomes marginalized. Thus small space and social detachment go hand-in-hand; together, they conclude the journeys of many of Walser's characters from this period. Small and marginalized space seems to be the true home of Walser's characters; this is the space to which they belong. The combination of smallness and marginalization that was previously seen in the layout and appearance of the *Bleistiftgebiet* is therefore supported and clarified by this sketch from Walser's earlier prose.

[52] Walser took a year-long course for becoming a servant and then served as 'Monsieur Robert' at a castle in Upper Silesia, an experience that formed the basis for the 1908 *Jakob von Gunten*. See Harman, 4.

2. Attic-Room

und ich bin noch im Zimmer / wie immer (*GW* XI, 14)

2. 1 Desk

The attic-room or garret is the space most often assigned to Walser's poets, but the seclusion offered by the attic is found as well in the home's smaller chambers. Divisions inside of the home—including the room and, further inside the room, the desk, and, further still, its drawers—fit overall into what I will categorize as the 'attic-room.' These areas represent folds within the already-enclosed home; enclaves that can be secretly opened onto. They are suited to Walser's childlike writers, who seek enclosure much in the same way as the child in "Das Ende der Welt." The writers, however, have a greater stake in privacy, since anyone is in a position to judge their writing. Thus the gradual movement of the child towards small and confined space is intensified in the case of the writer; the featured spaces are as enclosed as possible, right from the outset. Throughout the examples of writers' rooms that I will look at in this section, the determined confinement of the space is implied to be an outright rejection of the public or of visibility. I will begin with the following sentences from Walser's 1914 reflection on writing his first novel, *Geschwister Tanner* (the reflection-essay has the same name as the novel), from which one can see that the space of his brother's Berlin apartment, and particularly the space of his writing desk, is as thrilling to him as the farmhouse is to the child in "Das Ende der Welt":

> Ich in der Wohnung meines Bruders. Ich werde diese schlichte Dreizimmerwohnung nie vergessen. Es war mir immer, als sei ein Himmel in dieser Wohnung, mit Sternen, Mond, und Wolken. . . . es war, als bedürfe ich

> keines Schlafes mehr, als sei das Denken, Dichten, und Wachen mein holder, kräftigender Schlaf, als sei das stundenlang Schreiben am Schreibtisch meine Welt, mein Genuß, Erholung und Ruhe. Der dunkelfarbige Schreibtisch so altertümlich, als sei er ein alter Zauberer. Wenn ich seine feingearbeiteten, kleinen Schubladen aufzog, sprangen, so bildete ich mir ein, Sätze, Worte, und Sprüche daraus hervor. (*GW* II, 127-9)

The apartment is an entire universe, with 'stars, moon, and clouds,' but the centre of this universe is the writing desk. The desk opens up to become a fantasy realm. Instead of beginning from a gigantic space and slowly moving towards a small one—as in "Das Ende der Welt"—here Walser begins within his enclosed 'world' and discovers the further worlds that can be unfurled from even the smallest openings. One would not normally need to pull out the drawers from a desk in order to write, but in his memory of writing, Walser makes it clear that this gesture is a vital part of the process. Bachelard, again, helps to understand the important role of small drawers in literature: "Wardrobes with their shelves, desks with their drawers, and chests with their false bottoms are the veritable organs of the secret psychological life" (Bachelard 78). And later: "These complex pieces . . . are evident witnesses of the need for secrecy, of an intuitive sense of hiding places" (81). The drawer, normally kept closed, contains the possibility of secrets. The space within is alluring to one who likes to hide. It is fascinating that what is hidden in this scenario is the writing itself; its sentences and phrases leap out only for Walser. From this sketch comes the implication that Walser's writing belongs in an unseen, small space; a space that only he can access.

The writing is moreover part of the room; its syntactical components are enumerated like the items of furniture. The room and the writing, it would seem, are inseparable. Writing is given a spatial essence, and space is comparably given a role in the writing process. The room, desk, and drawers create progressively remote and isolating zones around the fragments of writing, similar to the manner in which the house surrounded the child in "Das Ende der Welt", and in which Walser's pre-used paper 'covered' his inscrutable writing (as looked at in the previous chapter). Walser makes it clear in the second half of this sketch that he was working to compose a first draft, in light of which, the etymology of 'drawer' is compelling: 'draft' and 'draw', and by extension 'drawer', are the same word.[53] Walser's writing (the draft or even the 'sketch') is literally treated in the same way as the drawers. Both are *drawn* out. The writing process can likewise be something that flows, or something that needs to be pulled—both of which are applications of 'draw' or 'draft' (a draft of air or liquid on the one hand, and a draft horse, trousers or drawers, a drawer, or a *tiroir* on the other). Writing, and explicitly the writing that occurs at this desk, is thus an activity that is closely connected to the extension of a normally closed space.

The scene of writing in "*Geschwister Tanner*" is helpful in order to see how spatially contingent the act of writing is, yet it also helps to envision a bridge between the child of "Das Ende der Welt" and the figure of the writer. Both figures are presented as isolated to begin with, yet they seek further isolation in enclosed spaces. The correlation between the spatially-rendered 'worlds' of child and writer indicates a certain mirroring

[53] See, for instance, the entry for 'draft': "draft." *Merriam-Webster*. Encyclopedia Britannica Company. Web. 27 Jan. 2014.

between the two. In this case, the bed of the child is easily transposed onto the desk of the writer. At night, instead of being in bed, Walser tells the reader that he is sitting at this desk. And writing *is* his sleep, "[s]ein holder, kräftigender Schlaf."[54] Walser's recollection of writing his first novel came three years before "Das Ende der Welt," so this is not a question of a progression between bed and desk. Rather, the two pieces of furniture present an imperfect homology, which highlights a notable difference between the two figures of child and writer. While covering the body within, the bed opens up to the room around it. The drawers of the desk volunteer no such exposure. Lacking a family, the child is appropriately placed where her body will still be receptive to parental attention. But it is also within the bed that the child's worth is determined—visibility and judgment thus go hand-in-hand. The small gap of visibility and susceptibility that Walser left open for the child—in the form of the new parents' gaze, and in the still-exposed space of the bed—is prudently closed for the writer and his vulnerable fragments of writing. In fact, the only other item of furniture mentioned in this sketch is the liquor cabinet—another enclosed place for a secret, somewhat shameful activity, according to Walser here. To consider that the trajectory of Walser's writing project is driven towards imperceptibility and absolute secrecy, the inclusion of small and closed-off spaces—

[54] Stephan Kammer writes on the theme of sleep and nighttime in Walser's writings, and concludes that nighttime presents a space for composition and thinking. "[Die Nacht] öffnet damit einen Raum der Wahrnehmung und des Denkens mit fließenden Konturen." Sleep similarly becomes its own "metaphorische[s] Feld," that facilitates production such as writing. The "Entgegensetzungen" of sleep, "wie beispielweise Bewußtsein – Unbewußtes oder Lesen – Schreiben begrenzt, aber nicht bestimmt wird und in dem jene Produktionsmetaphern ihren Spielraum finden." See Stephan Kammer, *Figurationen und Gesten des Schreibens* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2003), 141-151, here 142; 149; 150.

Similarly, Tamara Evans writes on the dialectics of sleep, as a "Zwischenreich," and a space of dream-scenes that double as poetic scenes. See Tamara S. Evans, *Robert Walsers Moderne* (Bern: Francke, 1989), 24-45.

instead of open spaces such as the bed—is likely not an arbitrary addition to this memory of writing. Their inclusion is especially noteworthy at this midway point in Walser's writing, since, although the Biel years are suspected to be within the era of Walser's pencil method, there are no surviving pencil drafts from this time. Scenes of writing such as this one, from 1914, help to map a relatively early attraction to smallness, secrecy, and enclosure when it comes to writing.

Links between Walser's children and writer characters are prominent throughout his prose, and the relationship is acknowledged as well in Walser scholarship. Aside from the fact that Walser's children often double as writers (Fritz Kocher left behind essays, and Jakob von Gunten's story unfolds via journal entries), writers and children seem to be cast from the same mold when it comes to their social position. For instance, they share an aura of irrelevance that is often remarked on by the 'respectable' characters in Walser's prose, and in their marginality, the writers and children are linked also with a third recurring figure of Walser's, the servant. Christopher Middleton points out this triangle when he writes that Fritz Kocher, as Walser's "schoolboy soliloquist," becomes "the *Kommis*, or clerk, as underdog."[55] Middleton is speaking of Walser's recurring copy clerk character (a job Walser held as well as a young writer), but the schoolboy could equally be said to morph into Walser's other writers: the poets and short prose writers.

One of the more interesting analyses of Walser's children, for my purpose of connecting children and writers, comes from Davide Giuriato's essay, "Robert Walsers

[55] Christopher Middleton, postscript, *Selected Stories,* by Robert Walser, trans. Middleton (Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1982), 193.

Kinder."[56] Giuriato sums up Walser's children as an "ich-loses Etwas" (Giuriato 132), who are conflated with small animals and all that is uncivilized in Walser's prose. The children do not demonstrate a finalized growth, but are instead examples of a distilled period of indeterminacy, of being on-the-way—as can be seen literally in "Das Ende der Welt." Due to the fact that Walser's children are usually without speech (131), and often unnamed, Giuriato draws the conclusion that their indeterminacy manifests most explicitly in a lack of language: "Das Kind ist, mit anderen Worten, der Sprache nicht einfach äußerlich und vorgängig, sondern es befindet sich auf dem Weg zur Sprache, es bewegt sich auf sie zu" (131). To combine Giuriato's observations and my own, children can be seen as pre-poet figures in Walser's prose. Since the children are 'on their way' to language, their overlap with poets would address the child's stunted linguistic capacity. Giuriato does not posit an evolution between the child and the poet, but I find his analysis of children to be interesting, nonetheless, for the potential of a linguistic progression between the two figures.

In conclusion, I have included the desk in order to represent an intermediary space connecting the figures of child and writer. The desk, specifically the above example of Walser's writing desk in "*Geschwister Tanner*," comprises aspects of both the fantasy childhood home (especially its bed) seen in "Das Ende der Welt," and, of course, aspects of the writer's room—which I will continue to discuss below.

[56] Davide Giuriato, "Robert Walsers Kinder," in *Robert Walsers "Ferne Nähe": Neue Beiträge zur Forschung,* ed. Wolfram Groddeck et al (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007), pp. 125-132.

2.2 Attic

The attic is the room most often designated for Walser's poets. In nearly every instance of its mention, the details of the room remain the same: it is small, dusty, and cold, but with a view. In what follows, I will argue that the features of the attic—both the spatial features of any attic, and the fictionalized features of Walser's poet's attics—create a space that is remarkably detached from the public, and is therefore safe in its privacy. The examples that I have gathered here are from all across Walser's writing, and their progression creates a sense of increasing aversion to being seen. The most helpful examples (and those which I will focus on) are from the *Bieler* period. I will quickly survey these examples before delving into each point. Possibly the earliest mention of a poet living in an attic-room is the young poet Sebastian from Walser's first novel *Geschwister Tanner,* who lives "in einer hochgelegenen, verstaubten Kammer" (*GW* IV 78). In telling the reader about his lodgings, Walser also establishes that Sebastian is impoverished and scorned by his family. Sebastian's status as a marginalized, solitary character is therefore linked to his life in the attic-room. Much later, in the microscripted "Bin ich anspruchsvoll?" (1925), Walser writes this line for a writer seeking a room to rent: "Selbstverständlich bleibe ich nach wie vor für Mansarden interessiert" (*GW* VII, 159). In his search, this writer finds a small room with a tiny window, affording a nice view across the countryside. The room is a "Zimmerchen" that cannot be heated. The character ultimately gives up the room because he writes so much that the table is 'too small' for him. Another example, and the most straightforward explication of Walser's interest in attics, comes from "Plauderei (I)"[57] (1917):

[57] This sketch was originally published under the title "Dichter".

> In was für Wohnungen wohnen im allgemeinen Herren Verfasser?
>
> Hierauf darf und kann folgendes geantwortet werden: Es gefällt ihnen unter Umständen in hocherhobenen aussichtsreichen Dachstuben am besten, denn von da aus genießen dramatische sowohl wie epische und lyrische Dichter den freiesten und reichsten Blick über die Welt. Den fälligen Mietzins bezahlen sie doch wohl hoffentlich jeweilen so pünktlich wie möglich. (*GW* II, 233)

One of the first things to notice from these aggregated examples is an inversion of perspective between "Das Ende der Welt" and the attic. The horizon of narrative perspective does not progress from gigantic to miniature, but from miniature to gigantic. Or, in other terms, we are not moving from out to in, but from in to out. Walser's poets are situated in small rooms, looking out through small windows onto a vast, panoramic landscape. The attic-room thereby affords a controlled openness within a very enclosed interior. Most importantly in this scenario, the writer is not seen. Though he has complete vision, the poet is at a crucial distance from the outside. It is as though the entire room of the attic is a telescope shaft, with the poet situated at the front end, or at the most narrow and enclosed perspective. The chain of seeing that comes out of these examples—going from poet, to tiny room with tiny window, to landscape—can be applied to an analogous chain of enlargement as one moves outwards: the poet is the smallest figure in the room, then the room is only large enough to hold him, and finally, the outside world is comparatively vast.

The inversion of perspective that occurs in the attic functions on the vertical level as well as that of the horizontal. The writer is not only distanced by smallness, but of

course by height as well. The attic becomes a panopticon, and even more so since the poets are such solitary figures. The addition of height intensifies Walser's voyeurism in these passages—though I am hesitant to describe his gaze as truly voyeuristic, because he is looking out at countryside rather than people. Nevertheless, there is a power in Walser's one-way vision that comes largely from the height afforded by an attic. There is no one above him, and thus he cannot be seen and judged, but he is free to look upon whatever lies below him. In contrast, the child lying supine in the bed was looked down upon (in both senses). When judgment comes from above, symbolically, there is no safer place than the attic.

Being spatially high up allows for an authorial perspective that is undoubtedly advantageous to a writer. As Walser puts it in "Plauderei (I)," the attic gives "den freiesten und reichsten Blick über die Welt." However, this statement is somewhat misleading, and I would like to argue that for Walser's poets, the attic is not advantageous for the outlook itself, but instead for the way in which the immensity and visibility of the outside world offsets the smallness and seclusion of the writer in the room. In other words, the attic seems to be much more useful for keeping the poet *invisible from* the public, than for keeping the public *visible to* the poet. In the above-cited sketches, the focus of Walser's description is almost entirely on the interior of the rooms, and the reader hears very little about the outside (exactly like the description in "Das Ende der Welt"). The details that the reader receives of the interior are all in accordance with the project of covering up the poet. For example, exactly in the middle of "Plauderei (I)," Walser tells a story of yet another poet who lived in a lady's bathroom and decorated the tiny space with rags, old coats, and bits of carpet. The microcosmic

room, matching remarkably to the centre of this prose piece, folds up closely around the poet with a patchwork array of material fragments (another possible image of the nest, here). The space of the small interior thus yields an endless succession of smaller and more enclosed rooms, whose material details serve to conceal the person within.

In two additional sketches from the *Bieler* period, Walser declares concealment to be the feature of the writer's room for which he is most grateful. The earlier sketch is the 1914 "Der Dichter," in which Walser describes the poet's 'dream' room as entirely devoid of people. But within the room, Walser can look up and out onto nature, which instead provides him with companionship—the stars are his 'comrades'; nature is his 'beloved.' He closes the sketch with a clear message: "Ich tat niemand weh, und auch mir tat niemand weh. I war so hübsch, so schön beiseit" (*GW* II 85). People can be dangerous, and thus situating oneself at a distance (again '*beiseit*') is preferred. The second sketch, "Frau Wilke" (first published in 1915), introduces yet another poet renting a small room, who says this about the space: "'Dieser bildhübsche Raum', . . . 'besitzt ohne Frage einen hohen Vorzug: es ist sehr abgelegen. Still ist es hier wie eine Höhle. In der Tat: hier kann ich mich verborgen fühlen" (*GW* III, 99). Neither room is specified to be an attic, but the cave alluded to in "Frau Wilke" provides the same extreme separation from the occupied world. For the writer in "Frau Wilke," spatial isolation is the room's most valuable feature. And isolation is coupled with the equally comforting attributes of silence (further marks of social remoteness and secrecy), and an explicit concealment of the poet's body. Thus it is *the room* that protects the writer by keeping him *in*, hidden and distant from other people.

The dust that appears in most descriptions of these attic-rooms is similar in meaning to the poet's rags and old coats, due to the fact that it provides a discardable 'layer.' Dust deserves specific attention for its function in keeping away a *reading* public. As an embodiment also of smallness, fragmentation, and irrelevance, dust is an interesting symbol in the context of Walser's micrography. The poets in these sketches draw distinct comfort from the dust, from the absence of stuff or the presence of nothingness—a comfort so unlike that of the 'pretty little bed' that attracted the child in "Das Ende der Welt." At the end of "Plauderei (I)," Walser sheds light on the irrelevance, specifically, that is indicated by dust:

> Staub bevorzugt jeder echte Dichter. Liegen doch, wie jedermann weiß, im Staub und mithin in der schönsten Vergessenheit gerade die größten Dichter, nämlich die Klassiker, am liebsten begraben, die wie feine alte Flaschenweine bekanntlich nur bei ganz besonders passenden, feierlichen Anlässen aus dem Staub hervor und damit zu Ehren gezogen sein wollen. (*GW* II, 236)

Generally, the presence of dust significantly lowers the appeal of a space or an object. It indicates dirt and disintegration, features that are repugnant to the bourgeois homeowner. Yet Walser reveals an affinity for dust, and writes that it is not just his poets who like dust, but also the 'greatest' poets. There is something that dust adds, then, that is of surplus value to poets. Walser indicates that dust provides 'oblivion': the dusty objects are blessed with anonymity, and with this comes a rarified public. A thick build-up of dust signifies that the objects are not used every day, but are instead for special occasions. Following the logic of this passage, it is much more valuable to be neglected by most, but appreciated and exalted by few.

A comparison between the attic and Walser's writing method can now be made in light of the attic's much broader significance. The first part of "Plauderei (I)" explicitly codes the *success*, *popularity,* and *method* of writers in terms of the space in which they live. And there are only two options for writers, according to Walser: either they are poor and struggling, and live accordingly in the dusty, unheated attic-rooms, or they are successful, and live in country mansions. The method of the successful writers resounds in its precise opposition to Walser's own method. The description of the wealthy writers is as follows: they have profitable side businesses, and write only at night, not out of necessity but presumably as a leisurely hobby. They often dictate their ideas to their wives or to "einem hübschen Schreibmaschinenfräulein," which results in "säuberlich niederschreiben." Following this effortless but perfect production, their ideas quickly become books (they are immediately publishable) and dominate the market. What can be gleaned from this description of the wealthy writer is a clear dichotomy between Walser's own slow, laborious, two-step writing process (micro-pencil to legible pen)—which results in very short, unfashionable feuilleton pieces and sketches—and the above fantasy of an easy, pleasurable writing hobby. And in "Plauderei (I)," this entire dichotomy is projected via the space of the home: the popular, mainstream writer lives in the country (they have the means to be geographically isolated without a corresponding social ostracism), and in a mansion with a wife, land, and cattle. There is an echo of the fantasy home of "Das Ende der Welt" in the wealthy writer's country mansion; a conjured image of the ideal spatial conditions, that the poet, perhaps from his attic window, looks out upon and dreams about. However, these wealthy writers have marketable mass appeal, a type of consumability that Walser has disdain for—indicating

that it is not possible to be both wealthy and a true ("*echte*") poet. This spatialized coding of a writer's success reveals parallels between the attic, the poet, and the writing (as small and neglected), but more broadly, the opening of "Plauderei (I)" situates the attic within Walser's writing method in order to emphasize that Walser is not like other writers. In the era following his return from Berlin, Walser no longer has mass appeal, immediately publishable writing, or a fast and easy writing process. The attic, from this sketch, is yet another element framing Walser's alienation as a writer.

In addition to connecting the space of the attic to his slow and laborious writing method, Walser's descriptions of the attic rooms bear a strong resemblance to the appearance of the *Mikrogramme* pages. One of the features of these attic scenes is their proportionate, nested smallness in relation to the outside world. The poets are depicted as very small, often hunched over their writing desks; the rooms are bigger than the poet, but still very small and narrow; finally, the visible, outside world is panoramic in its vastness. These proportions are familiar and mimic the papers of the *Mikrogramme*: the individual words are illegible, the columns of writing are almost invisible, and the strips of paper are still tiny. Everything else, however—the previous writing, or the public and circulating systems that the papers refer to—is huge. In this parallel, the figure of the poet evokes the invisible writing, and the poet's room is like the strips of paper. In the above example of "Plauderei (I)"—where the poet breaks off in exactly the middle of the sketch to tell of another poet who lives in a bathroom decorated with old rags and coats—the room becomes even more strongly suggestive of Walser's paper. The enclosing room, with its accumulation of scraps, is directly comparable to the scraps of paper in Walser's *Bleistiftgebiet*. The poet within becomes a fragment of writing, surrounded by material

that adds to his isolation (see also the poetic significance of the jacket, page 43 in Chapter One). Finally, the dust that covers the rooms as well as the books of poetry in these attic scenes offers another opportunity for comparison with the pages of the *Mikrogramme*, considering the resemblance of the microscopic, pencil-grey words to sprinkles of dust. Both the minuteness of the pencil-script on the page, and the presence of dust in the room obscure the surface, keeping away an unwanted public. Dust is another covering, another layer surrounding the poet, ensuring less accessibility, and ultimately, less legibility.

It should come as no surprise that the attic-room served as Walser's own lodgings during the period of writing in question. Scenes of Walser writing in the attic-room of the Hotel zum Blauen Kreuz, in Biel, appear in W. G. Sebald's essay on Walser, "Le promeneur solitaire: A remembrance of Robert Walser."[58] Sebald is exceptionally sensitive to the details that reverberate throughout Walser's prose, and in his retelling of Walser's life and writings, he (Sebald) often suspends the structure of his narrative in order to allow threads from Walser's own prose to enter. These borrowed details are often spatial in nature. For example, Sebald breaks off from relating an exchange between Carl Seelig and Walser and notes their exact location, "on the outskirts of a hamlet of Baglach" (Sebald 127), thereby allowing the theme of the periphery to slip into the reader's attention and return as a notable detail in the context of Sebald's retelling. Walser's attic-room in the Hotel zum Blauen Kreuz is another case where this technique of Sebald's leads the reader to be especially attentive to spatial details. Sebald's refraction of Walser's attic-writer offers a persuasive lens through which to view the

[58] The name of Sebald's essay, with its nod to Rousseau's "Les Rêveries du promeneur solitaire," provides an immediate image of Walser as a writer who resides symbolically on an island, spatially isolated from the world. W. G. Sebald, "Le promeneur solitaire: A remembrance of Robert Walser," *A Place in the Country*, 118-54.

significance of the attic for Walser's writing method, and thus to close this section, I would like to turn now to Sebald's description.

Early on in Sebald's essay, when the attic room is established to be Walser's lodgings, Sebald is in the middle of introducing Walser as an author without any permanence. Walser's prose, stylistically, is said to be drifting and ephemeral, and the writer himself is described as similarly ghost-like, acquiring nearly no possessions and maintaining no lasting relationships (ghost-like is not an exaggeration, since Sebald frequently considers Walser to have influenced him "from the other side"). Sebald points out the absent women in Walser's life—women who, it is suggested, were only approached through literary fantasy—and first on the list are the chambermaids, "whom he [Walser] used to watch through a peephole he had bored in the wall of his attic lodgings" (120). Though it might seem to be a casual addition, or an addition that paints Walser negatively, the peephole adds immense meaning and sympathy to this description of Walser's room. The inclusion of a peephole turns Walser's room into a hideout; a space so secluded from the rest of the world that its only means of communication is this tiny, imperceptible—and at once hugely furtive and shameful—lookout. It is not actually 'communication' but, again, one-way looking, by way of which the outside world becomes myopic and distorted. The rest of the hotel, already a space intended for transitory and distinctly un-homelike stay, is now, from the monocular perspective of Walser, an unreachable and foreign world. Rather than attempting to access this world, Walser is blatantly outside of it, seeming to greatly prefer *not being seen*.

In conclusion, there is a sense of absolute detachment that emerges from the attic-room. Details such as the creation of a peephole, from which to watch the 'outside'

world, exhibit this detachment quite forcefully in the form of a distorted one-way viewing. But details that come strictly from within Walser's prose show no less an attraction, on the part of writers or poets, to the smallness and privacy that the attic provides. Each feature of the attic, as Walser represents it, seems to carefully shield the writer—and by extension his writing—from an external public. The smallness and the height of the rooms themselves initially serve to insulate and isolate the writer, but Walser adds details such as layers of dust, rooms-within-rooms, rags, and old coats that intensify the physical segregation of the poet from visibility and from the public. To examine the attic helps to understand the similar shrinking, isolation, and overall detachment from the public that is present in the *Bleistiftgebiet*. More so than the home generally, the attic is a fitting parallel for the small pages of the *Bleistiftgebiet*, and accordingly offers the figure of the poet inside as a counterpart to the tiny rectangles of text.

Chapter 3: The Pencil and the Question of Worth: "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen"

According to Walser's references to his 'pencil method,' his use of the pencil provided an antidote to a nervous reaction that he experienced with the pen. It was not so much by virtue of the pencil's physical qualities that it provided this calm to Walser, but more because of the type of writing that the pencil necessarily produces: a first ('rough') draft. Since the pencil's writing is not immediately fit for publication, the pencil draft (truly the '*Bleistiftgebiet'*) represents a private sphere that I have understood in previous chapters to be connected with the small dimensions of the texts,[59] the slower speed with which Walser wrote,[60] and, more metaphorically, with Walser's marginal status as an author.[61] The pencil has previously been looked at as a stand-in only, vastly significant for the effects that it produced on Walser's writing, but not significant as a *thing* with noteworthy physical characteristics. There are, however, points in Walser's prose where the pencil does appear, not as the writing instrument of one of his clerk characters (such as was mentioned in my first chapter), but actually as a character itself. For the pencil to be one of Walser's characters—for it to count among the neglected and isolated men of Walser's creation—strengthens the likelihood that the pencil was not just a counterpoint to the pen, but was in fact an object that Walser identified with personally.

---

[59] See page 29, pages 31-32 and pages 37-49 of Chapter One.

[60] See page 26 of Chapter One.

[61] Chapter Two develops the argument that Walser's preference for small, imperceptible spaces (such as the physical pages of the *Bleistiftgebiet*) is linked to a desire to be separate from the public or mainstream literary sphere.

In this chapter, I develop the claim that Walser's fictional depiction of the pencil, as a sympathetic character, reveals a new set of images that can then be carried over to the realm of the pencil as writing instrument. This chapter will be devoted to the sketch, "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen" (*GW* VI, 321-3), in which the pencil emerges as a representative of the oppressed worker (or simply the servant), who is only considered in terms of the use that he can provide. As a result of its treatment at the hands of its human user, Walser explains, the pencil diminishes in size and is eventually worthless. In order to use the pencil, the writer whittles away at its 'body,' and once the pencil is too small for the writer's comfort (it has become "unbrauchbar"), the writer throws it away ("[wirft] auf die Seite"). The pencil is established to be valuable only insofar as it provides a service to others; when it physically shrinks, its recognizable worth disappears. But Walser's narrator, who is interested in those objects that lie overlooked 'at the sides,' is able to follow the pencil to the margins and continue its story, noticing the (personified) qualities that make it worth considering, instead of the physical qualities that give it consumable value.

The chain of consequence wherein diminishment leads to social marginalisation is familiar; Walser's shrinking writing practise (both in terms of script and length of the texts) yielded a very similar outcome of alienation from the literary world. Yet Walser's 'shrinking' from public evaluation has seemed so far to be mostly intentional—he maintained a sharp criticism of mainstream 'successful' literature and its readership.[62] Is

[62] Valerie Heffernan details Walser's ambivalent relationship to the literary sphere and to the idea of successful literature on pages 76-83 of *Provocation from the Periphery*. Heffernan writes that Walser criticized success as "the capacity of a work to fit in with the public's expectations," a framework that for Walser is a "gloomy prospect indeed." See Heffernan, 81.

the pencil's diminishment and resulting uselessness also a positive consequence, escaping an obligation to an unsympathetic public? I will argue that, yes, the pencil's release from usefulness through physical diminishment is actually a liberating moment, and Walser's narrator finds the *most* worth and the most poetic value in the pencil's useless remains. My understanding of this story (that perceived worthlessness is actually of the utmost worth to Walser) is based largely on its ironic content. The story could be taken at face value, and understood instead to be an essay pointing out the worthlessness of certain everyday objects. However, knowing the context of Walser's fascination with what is miniature and marginal, and following the clues from Walser's ironic narrator, I believe that this story presents a definition of 'worth' that is counter to a customary understanding of the term. Ultimately, Walser's defense of these minor objects (which each have their place, symbolically or truly, in the writing method) points to their consonance with Walser's 'minor method'[63] of writing: like Walser's shrinking texts, these objects are in a much better position to avoid the consuming public when they are imperceptible and exist only on the sidelines.

With a new understanding of the pencil as an object that will shrink and become devalued alongside Walser's writing, I aim to show that adding this story to a study of Walser's pencil method clarifies the ambiguous role of the pencil. Walser's infrequent explanations of the pencil's importance to his method—consisting predominantly of his much-cited letter to Max Rychner (in June 1927), and his 1926-27 "Bleistiftskizze"—are

---

[63] My phrase 'minor method' is a play on Alfred Polgar's "minor genre," which is how Walter Benjamin describes Walser's prose (without knowledge of the microscripts). See Benjamin, "Robert Walser," in *Walter Benjamin: Selected Writings*, ed. Michael W. Jennings et al., Vol. 2, part 1 (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2005), 257.

still cryptic; the reader can understand that the pencil is a liberating tool, for sketching and for creating rough drafts, but there is no overt link between the pencil and smallness, or between the pencil and marginalization (which is the other meaning of smallness: insignificance). The letter to Rychner mentions smallness only indirectly, by comparing the pencil method to a child's method of learning to write: "beim Abschreiben aus dem Bleistiftauftrag lernte ich knabenhaft wieder – schreiben" (*Briefe*, 301). Based on my understanding of this passage, however, Walser's reference to childhood does not imply small letters (and in fact, schoolchildren are traditionally taught to write with larger, rounder letters[64]), but is instead a reference to the repetitive, two-step process of copying from first draft to final draft, which is reminiscent of learning by rote as a child. "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen" thus offers what is likely the only explicit connection between the pencil and smallness (in the sense both of material diminishment and triviality). While "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift, und Zündhölzchen" is included often in studies of Walser, the attention given to the story either moves quickly through each titular object,[65] or disregards the material context of Walser's pencil-method.[66] My study hopes

[64] Dennis Baron writes about the dominance of a "big round hand" in the nineteenth century (Baron 55-7).

[65] Marianne Schuller, whose essay on this sketch I find to be otherwise illuminating, does not go beyond the content of the sketch to larger questions about the meaning that these objects might have in the context of Walser's unique writing method. See Marianne Schuller, "Robert Walsers Poetik des Winzigen. Ein Versuch," in *Robert Walsers 'Ferne Nähe'. Neue Betrachtung zur Forschung,* ed. Wolfram Groddeck et al. (München: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2007), pp. 75-81.

[66] Samuel Frederick offers a very thorough study of this sketch, especially focusing on Walser's narrative methods. The link that Frederick establishes between this sketch and Walser's micrography hinges primarily on the thematic interest in triviality. See Frederick, pp. 87-97.

to situate "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen" at one of the most puzzling and critical junctures of Walser's legacy, which is the intersection of writing and smallness.

Since the exact start date of Walser's micrography is unknown, it is open to question whether this text, "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen," was drafted as a microscript. The piece was published in 1915, placing it two years before one possible start date of 1917, but several years after another possible start date of 1905.[67] Samuel Frederick makes a strong case for "Ashe, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen" counting among the micrographs, based on the fact that the text is devoted to small, unnoticed objects, including the instrument of the *Bleistiftgebiet*, the pencil. Frederick compares the image of ash, which opens the story, to the "micrographic scribbles" of the *Bleistiftgebiet* (Frederick 197). In other words, the miniature, near-invisible subjects of the text mirror the appearance of the microscripts, while the inclusion of the pencil addresses their medium. In his defense for the status of this text as micrograph, Frederick moreover acknowledges Susan Bernofsky's attestation that Walser began experimenting with miniature script as early as 1902 (3 years earlier than the earliest date suggested by Walser). Frederick thus believes that this text must have been drafted in Walser's reduced, pencilled script ("It seems to me hard to believe that this text would not have been drafted in the form of a microscript" (197)). While I am hesitant to say that this text *is* (or first was) a microscript, it undeniably contains thematic allusions to the *Bleistiftgebiet,* and stems from the period of time in which Walser transitioned to his pencil method (the exact year notwithstanding).

[67] These dates come from the contradictory information Walser gives in his June 1927 letter to Max Rychner (see introduction). In the letter, Walser writes that the pencil method began ten years before (1917), but also that it began when he lived in Berlin (1905-1913).

In the pages that follow, I will be closely interpreting "Ashe, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen." I follow the progression of objects, from ash to needle to pencil to matchstick, and focus on how Walser characterizes these objects in a way that is counter to what the reader would expect. Walser's language, narrative style, and formal choices all contribute to the sense that these objects derive their poetic worth from smallness and imminent disintegration. The pencil as an object of debris, which Walser can be seen to rescue in this story, ultimately points the reader to appreciate Walser's writing instrument as both materially valuable (to him alone) and metaphorically key. I consider each object's section in this text, rather than only the lines devoted to the pencil, because the cluster of objects in this sketch seems to be far from arbitrary. Each object can be interpreted to have a place in Walser's writing method. Walser's discussions of the other three objects not only help to draw attention to the importance of the pencil's physical diminishment, they also illuminates the constellation of smallness, physicality, and (social) value.

1. Ash and the Ironizing of Worth

The power of this story lies in its irony and play on words, which arise from a disjunction between the content of the story and the narrator's framing. The apparent purpose of Walser's observations is a search for objects that are 'worthy' of attention. Yet none of the objects of his study—except for the needle, which is an important outlier due to its metal body—exhibits a lasting worth. Ash, Walser declares frequently in the first section, has no worth at all. It is not even an object but the *remains* of an object. His projected goal of pursuing worthy objects quickly falls flat: with each new object (again, except for

the needle), Walser can only find attributes that make it worth*less*. Ash is blown about, stepped on, nothingness embodied; the pencil is worn away and tossed out; and the last object, the matchstick, is only good for self-annihilation. In anticipating the death of the little matchstick, Walser ends the sketch the same way that it began, with a detailed examination of what he calls nothingness, and with the dissolution of objecthood itself. Since the sketch presents mostly nothingness, and fixates so methodically on the worthlessness of its depicted objects, Walser's professed search for objects with worth must accordingly be called into question.

The form of the sketch supplies a simple means to see through Walser's outward declarations of worthlessness regarding these objects. Most conspicuously, the length of each object's section is completely at odds with the object's professed worthlessness. Ash has the longest section, and the most discussed attributes. Walser has much to say about its supposed irrelevance and insignificance. The section on the matchstick is very close in length to the section on ash (the ash section is longer by only two words). Walser seems to similarly find the idea of imminent disintegration a compelling writing topic. The needle has the smallest section—not even a section per se but a sentence folded into the same paragraph as the pencil—though it is the object with the most recognizable worth, as Walser tells the reader. It would seem from the form of the writing that the needle is included only as a segue to the pencil, or as a counterpoint to the pencil and to the other disintegrating objects.

The pencil, as the object that is neither in ruins (like ash and matchstick) nor in a state of enduring worth (like the needle), but is rather somewhere between the two poles, comes appropriately in the middle of this text. It is on its way, slowly, to a state

resembling ash, but is for the moment more comparable to the needle. As scholars have noted, the text forms a chain or a circle, whereby the ash could easily be interpreted to be the result of the pencil and the lit matchstick coming into contact—Sebald calls this Walser's "personal auto-da-fé" (Sebald 138). Christian Benne writes that

> Walser thematisiert Schreibinstrumente und den Akt der Produktion von Kunst von ihrer Vernichtung her. . . Der Abschnitt zum Streichholz scheint allegorisch eine Literatur zu meinen, die im Augenblick ihrer Entstehung schon wieder vergeht – womit sich der Kreis zu Asche schließt. Asche ist . . . Index eines gewesenen Feuers.[68]

Marcel Atze, who includes this sketch in his study on the figure of the manuscript-destroying author, situates the text within the history of burning manuscripts for political safety.[69] Ash begins the text, and thus it plausibly ends the text as well. Positioned between the two representatives of disintegration—of physical worthlessness—the pencil is a pivotal object. Its centrality leads to one possible conclusion that the text is, at its heart, about a writing process (as Benne indicates) where the act of writing is embedded in material fragmentation. As another, contrasting inscriptive instrument, the needle could be interpreted in this vein as a writing instrument—perhaps as the pen—which is *not* tied to such an annihilation. After all, the pen ink, like the physical needle, is made to last. The possible interpretation of this story as an allegory for a writing process will be

[68] Christian Benne, "„Schrieb je ein Schriftsteller so aufs Geratewohl?": der surrealistische Robert Walser," in *Surrealismus in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*, ed. Friederike Reents and Anika Meier (Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2009), 56.

[69] Marcel Atze, "„ . . . und kaum blieb etwas verschont" Reale und fiktive Autoren als Zerstörer eigener Texte" in *Verbergen, überschreiben, zerreissen; Formen der Bücherzerstörung in Literatur, Kunst und Religion*, ed. Mona Körte and Cornelia Örtlieb (Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2007), 100.

discussed further in a later section, but it is important to note that if the ash stands for the remains of pencil and matchstick, then the relationship of ash to pencil becomes much more crucial. The ash would be, in this scenario, a metaphor for the writing itself, as the enduring *trace* of the writing instrument.

The potential for ash to represent something enduring comes, again, much more from the form of the story than from its content. The first point the narrator makes about ash is its tendency to go flying with any wind, and later says explicitly that ash is the most spineless or anchorless ('haltlos'), and the most compliant ('nachgiebig') thing in existence. Certainly these attributes suggest that, as an object, ash has no resilience. But as a *subject*, ash is the most lasting in this story. Not only does ash make up the longest section of the sketch, but its domain as a subject of Walser's prose exceeds the scope of the story. Walser begins the sketch by telling the reader that he once wrote an essay on ash: "Ich schrieb einmal eine Abhandlung über Asche, die mir nicht geringen Beifall eintrug" (*GW* VI, 321). His previous 'essay' is, unsurprisingly, fictional; Walser never wrote such an essay and accordingly never received praise for it. Yet by beginning in this way, Walser extends the discourse on ash and makes it immeasurable. Walser's writing on ash, as he presents it here, stretches an unknown number of years, going backwards into his previous writing history. Since the other 'worthless' objects in the story are framed by a certain shelf-life—the pencil will soon be useless, the matchstick even sooner—the fictional reappearance of ash in this opening sentence undercuts the idea that the worth of the objects will expire along with their physical selves, and undercuts as well the idea that their worth is even tied to their physical presence (or lack of presence, as is

the case for ash). To Walser, the writer of their fates, the most physically worthless object (ash) is actually the most enduring as a subject.

In telling the reader that he has just written an acclaimed essay on ash, Walser is also turning the most invisible and most miniature 'object' into the most prestigious and important. Not only is the ash made vast and enduring through Walser's extradiegetic framing of its subjecthood, but it is also elevated in terms of status. The double meaning of ash—as (according to most of the content in this section) tiny and worthless, and yet simultaneously, (according to the subtle narrative framework) as immeasurable and critically interesting—cements it as an ironic subject. And since the section on ash opens the sketch, the irony that is set up even in this opening sentence goes on to frame the entire story: Walser's comments on the worthlessness of the other objects can be similarly overturned, or simply read through a double lens.

Walser's use of double negatives to describe ash provides a linguistic image for this irony.[70] Still within the first sentence of the story, Walser writes that his previous (fictional) essay on ash received "nicht geringen Beifall," or, *not a small amount* of

[70] My understanding of irony as two paradoxical yet synthesized meanings comes via Friedrich Schlegel and, secondarily, Paul de Man's critical writings on irony. The image that I am here adapting from Schlegel is expressed succinctly in Athenaeum Fragment 121: "An idea is a concept perfected to the point of irony, an absolute synthesis of absolute antitheses, the continual self-creating interchange of two conflicting thoughts." See Friedrich von Schlegel, *Friedrich Schlegel's Lucinde and the Fragments*, trans. Peter Firchow (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971), 176.

Based on Schlegel's articulations of irony, De Man comes to the conclusion that "irony interrupts, disrupts" the coherence of narrative; "one could say that any theory of irony is the undoing, the necessary undoing, of any theory of narrative." See Paul de Man, "The Concept of Irony," in *Aesthetic Ideology* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996), 179.

The parallel double meanings that Walser has inserted into this sketch work well with this combined concept of irony, especially as visualized by a double negative, which holds two opposite meanings in tandem as one (self-contradictory) synthesized meaning. The narrative of the text is ruptured, able to be interpreted in two ways.

acclaim. Samuel Frederick translates this second clause as "no modicum of praise" (Frederick 88; 177). Frederick reasons that this story is illustrative of Walser's obsession with the miniature and unremarkable, and thus his (Frederick's) translational interpretation (using 'modicum') would align the ash very well with Walser's micro writing, and would furthermore assert the text (along with the subject matter of ash) as wrongfully overlooked. Frederick's translation, however, is the opposite of the German meaning. The double negative, rather than disrupting Frederick's intended alignment—between, on the one hand, the miniature and overlooked nature of Walser's writing, and on the other, the ash—allows the alignment to be present ironically. The formulation of 'nicht geringen Beifall' seems intentionally imprecise: the adjective of 'gering-' is central, but Walser has distanced his piece of writing—and thereby its subject, the ash—so as to allow both associations (miniature/minor *and* not small) to exist at once. The ash is small, but at the same time, deserving of attention. In structuring his sentence in this way, Walser does not eliminate the smallness or undermine it; rather, he surrounds smallness with marks of respect ('Beifall').

This interpretation is strengthened when one considers that Walser uses both another double negative and 'gering' again to describe the particles of ash in the following sentence:

> In der Tat läßt sich über diesen scheinbar so uninteressanten Gegenstand bei nur einigermaßen tieferem Eindringen manches sagen, was durchaus *nicht uninteressant* ist, wie z.B. das: Wird Asche angeblasen, so ist nicht *das Geringste* an ihr, das sich weigert, augenblicklich auseinanderzufliegen (*GW* VI, 321; emphasis mine)

Rather than referring to the small bit of ash using a customary noun (such as, in English, a word like 'particle' or 'fragment') Walser transforms the descriptor of smallness into the noun itself. The ash *is* smallness. Yet its smallness does not take away from the fact that it has interesting qualities (or 'not uninteresting'); rather, its smallness results in a long list of interesting factors, the first of which is its capacity to fly apart ('auseinanderfliegen'), which is in other words to become *even smaller* and more ungraspable. Yet again, Walser's use of a double negative allows the ash to remain trivial; Walser does not negate the minor qualities in order to make a positive statement about ash.[71] As an object, the ash is never elevated to 'interesting,' and instead the double negative confirms a certain stratification in Walser's perspective: in order to discover things to say about ash, the narrator delves even deeper than the base level of 'uninteresting.' He tells the reader at the start of this sentence that ash *seems* like an uninteresting subject ("*scheinbar* so uninteressanten Gegenstand" (emphasis mine)), but in order to move past this surface appearance, the observer only has to 'penetrate more deeply' to find what to say. Walser's explicit use of the word 'Eindringen' invites this impression of a two-level text, which is reaffirmed by the split structure of a double negative. With the narrator's action of moving deeper, it seems that he is shifting his perspective down to a level where such an inconsiderable object might be found—and he actually goes on, in the midst of this section, to point to the ash under one's feet. It seems

[71] Though I am coming to this idea from the double negative, Walser's respect for smallness is a point that Frederick argues for as well: "Walser insists that we take the trivial seriously, but not by elevating it into the realm of the megalographic. To take the trivial seriously is to experience it *as* the trivial, neither to ignore it not to subject it to transvaluation." (Frederick 87)

that in order to observe in a more substantial way, one must move past the surface (the 'Schein'), and only then will the 'not uninteresting' details emerge.

The humour of this mandate to penetrate the surface of ash arises from the fact that materially, ash *is* only surface. With ash being so small, the naked eye could not possibly detect more than an insubstantial flake. Walser seemingly alludes to this in the next sentence, when he writes that "Asche ist . . . die Wertlosigkeit selber, und was das Schönste ist: sie ist selbst durchdrungen von dem Glauben, daß sie zu nichts taugt (*GW* VI, 321)" His use of 'durchdrungen' immediately after 'Eindringen' suggests that for all of the reader's and narrator's penetrative observing, the ash will still be thoroughly valueless. The program here is therefore not one of restoring physical value to the ash, but of simply noticing the ash in its current state of nothingness.

One final image of a split or double perspective on the ash comes from the full section's framing, or the first and last sentences looked at together. In the first sentence, Walser sets off the idea that his narration is one of perceiving 'more deeply.' And in the last sentence of the section, after he has pointed out many iterations of ash-as-worthlessness, Walser repeats a similar warning to the reader to look more deeply or carefully in order to properly 'see' objects worth considering:

> Ja, ja, so ist es, und ich glaube nicht, daß ich mich sehr stark irre, wenn ich der Überzeugung zu sein wage, daß man nur die Augen aufzutun und recht aufmerksam um sich herum zu schauen braucht, um Dinge zu sehen, die wert sind, daß man sie mit einiger Innigkeit und Sorgfalt betrachtet. (*GW* VI, 321-2)

From here Walser moves on to needle, which he immediately declares to have worth. Though it would seem that this closing sentence is pushing the reader to switch focus to the needle, as an example of such an object with worth, this is not the case. As I will continue to discuss below, the needle 'is aware of its worth,' but is not actually 'worth considering.' The ash, which is barely visible, and should therefore not belong in the group of 'things to look at' ("Dinge zu sehen")—as the passage implies—is evidently the object that the narrator has just carefully considered, even if the results of that consideration were to declare that ash is worthlessness, humility, nothingness, and so on. The way that the content of this section is framed by the message to look attentively ("recht aufmerksam . . . zu schauen") and to go past the surface ("Eindringen") suggests that in order to consider the ash as more than its physical worthlessness, the reader should go back over the section just ended, and consider it, too, with due intimacy and care. This could mean that the reader ought to discern the irony in the narrator's declarations, and see the quiet, small-scale worth that lies underneath more superficial markers of worth. Since ash is so imperceptible, it is all the more imperative to see *differently*. The ash needs a closer look, or a second look, in order to distinguish it as *not* nothing, or *not* uninteresting. From the way that Walser has cocooned the section on ash with reminders to see with care, the reader can understand that behind Walser's remarks on the utter worthlessness and nothingness of ash, lies an agenda to nurture this smallness.

2. Needle, Pencil, and Alternate Worth

Before moving forward into an analysis of the remaining three objects, it is worth stepping back to consider the grouping of needle, pencil, and matchstick. Especially with

objects such as these, it is extraordinary that Walser has made them characters. Needle, pencil, and matchstick can all be classified as tools, and are therefore primarily valuable for their unobtrusiveness, or for what Heidegger termed 'Zuhandenheit.' To borrow another famous idea, these objects can be visualized as 'extensions of the body'[72]—in their design, they simulate fingers; their 'thingness' is not particularly noticeable during use. These objects have no 'content' to impart, and are defined purely by their utilitarian value. They are not objects that one expects to be personified or eulogized in literature. It is particularly rare to find a literary ode to the pencil, despite its ubiquitous use in the process of writing. Henry Petroski makes note of the vast gap between pen and pencil when it comes to each object's literary presence (Petroski 324-327). The writer's pen is immortalized and frequently serenaded in poetry or prose, but the pencil has only very sparse acknowledgement. The forgotten pencil is such a common occurrence that Petroski opens his history of the pencil with the anecdote that even Henry David Thoreau, who made his own pencils and grew up in the pencil-making industry, failed to mention the pencil in his list of essential objects to take into the woods (Petroski 3-4). Either he forgot to note the instrument with which he composed the list, or its inclusion as a packing essential seemed so obvious that it did not need noting. Whatever the reason actually was, one conclusion is evident: even to a writer, and even to a maker of pencils, the pencil as an object fades into the background of one's consciousness. The omission of all three of these objects in literature is not surprising: needles, pencils, and matchsticks are neither unique nor memorable, and they are certainly not beautiful or expensive. These objects fall on the other end of the material spectrum; they are built to be

[72] I am referring to Marshall McLuhan's *Understanding Media: the extensions of man* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1964).

utilitarian, replaceable, and forgettable. Walser, who nearly always writes from the perspective of those who are marginal and overlooked, is again devoting a story to objects (turned subjects) that have very little grandeur.

Of the four objects, the needle is the one that least belongs in this story. Not because it is not small, or not trivial, but because its smallness and triviality never mark it as unusable in this world of objects. The needle is set up to contrast primarily with the pencil, since the two share a paragraph (ash and matchstick, in comparison, each have their own paragraph), yet much of the needle's dissimilarity can be seen as a result of the pattern that the other objects form as a group. Thus the needle will be considered here for its differences not only in relation to the pencil, but also in relation to ash, whose section leads into that of the needle. Walser writes that the needle is first of all "bekanntlich ebenso spitz wie nützlich" (*GW* VI, 322). So far, the same could be said of the pencil. But Walser goes on to write that along with being pointy and useful, the needle is an object "die nicht duldet, daß man sie grob behandelt, weil sie, so winzig sie ist, doch ihres Wertes bewußt zu sein scheint." (322). This statement of being aware of its worth is in especially stark contrast with the ash that Walser has just finished describing as a matter that is "die Wertlosigkeit selber" and that is furthermore "selbst durchdrungen von dem Glauben, daß sie zu nichts taugt" (321). There is a certain visuality to Walser's method of ascribing worth: one can picture the absolute nothingness and uselessness of the ash causing it to drift away, having nothing more to offer. In comparison, the needle is aware of its worth seemingly because its design includes its own self-defence; its point protects it from being roughly handled, and unlike the ash, its sturdy metal body will not disintegrate upon touch. Yet both ash and needle are defined in this sketch by their

smallness, and so the reader can appreciate two versions of smallness. The tininess of the needle determines its usefulness, whereas the tininess of ash indicates that the object it once was is beyond any usefulness or value. The needle is tiny by design; it has not chosen tininess and is certainly not denigrated because of it. The ash and the stub of the pencil (as the reader will soon see) continue their existence apart from the sphere of usefulness, *despite* being 'thrown away' and 'stepped on' as a result of their smallness. Smallness for the ash and pencil is a defiant state, one that marks their survival as uncertain. Not so for the needle: as Walser implies here, smallness ensures the needle's continuing, undisturbed and unendangered existence within the bounds of usefulness.

This single sentence on the needle is all that is allotted to it, and Walser immediately moves on to consider the pencil. It seems as though, after declaring the needle to be aware of its worth, Walser finds no other qualities in need of mentioning. Based on the very different way that Walser treats the needle compared to the other objects, one can interpret that Walser's writing bestows an *alternate* worth upon the socially worthless objects, which the needle does not warrant. Although Walser sets out at the end of the ash paragraph to find objects that are worthy of his narrator's attention, the needle is evidently not such an object—if it were, the narrator would have more to say about its features. Thus there is a difference between the worth that he is looking for as a writer—i.e., objects that are 'worth consideration,' that until now have maybe not been considered with proper narrative attention, like the ash—and objects that 'have worth' in and of themselves, like the needle. To read the last sentence of the ash paragraph again in light of the needle's declared self-worth, it is evident that there are two parallel meanings of worth in this text, and the one in need of the narrator's (and

reader's) attention is not the worth that comes from a durable utility, but worth that is imperceptible save for careful and curious observation:

> Ja, ja, so ist es, und ich glaube nicht, daß ich mich sehr stark irre, wenn ich der Überzeugung zu sein wage, daß man nur die Augen aufzutun und recht aufmerksam um sich herum zu schauen braucht, um Dinge zu sehen, die wert sind, daß man sie mit einiger Innigkeit und Sorgfalt betrachtet. (321-22)

One can recall that the features of ash were heralded from the beginning as curious, interesting and deserving of acclaim. Yet the features themselves, when looked at, turned out to be simply variations on worthlessness and nothingness. The interest with which one observes an object can thereby be at complete odds with the object's ascribed value—and actually *should* be at odds, if we follow the train of the narrator's 'careful' observation. The material can have no physical substance, and no social value, but to the right eye it will become compelling and praiseworthy (writing) material.

To look briefly outside of this sketch to the context of Walser's writing method, it is possible that the side-by-side placement of needle and pencil here alludes to Walser's preference in terms of writing instruments. The needle is conceivably pen-like: it represents permanent consumability in this story, whereas the pencil is shown to have a temporary worth. The needle is inscriptive, violent; like the pen, its mark will alter a surface. The pencil, on the other hand, embodies non-permanence: its mark, barely there in the first place, can be easily erased or smudged, and, as Walser emphasizes in the upcoming section, the pencil's wooden body will not last. In Christian Benne's words: "Nadel und Bleistift stehen für die beiden Möglichkeiten des Schreibens, des Ritzens und des Auftragens" (Benne 56). The needle and the pen belong also to the same circle of

words: a needle is also a quill (zoologically), which can of course also be a pen (a *Feder*). Pen, or feather, comes from the Latin *penna*,[73] which may or may not be connected to *pinna*: pin or sharp point.[74] Whether or not Walser had the pen in mind when he wrote this story, whether his cursory sentence on the needle was meant to subtly reinforce his alliance with the pencil, is unclear. Why explicitly name the pencil but not the pen—if the pen *is* what he was aiming to represent?

Even if the needle is not meant to be representative of the pen, the object has certain associations with textual cohesion and linearity that are nonetheless incompatible with this current sketch. To speak in idioms, the needle is for stitching a narrative, or sustaining a thread in the fabric/textile/texture of the text. As Marianne Schuller writes, "so gehört sie [die Nadel] in der Doppelheit von Stich/Wunde und Vernähen/Verknüpfen dem Bereich des Gewebes, der Textur und damit dem Bereich des Textes zu" (Schuller 77). *This* text, however, along with most writings by Walser, is not a single, cohesive unit, and the stitching that the needle might provide, metaphorically, to the text seems to be unwanted here. For example, the sketch ends by looping back to its beginning (as I will discuss further below), but the beginning, too, is pointing outside of itself to a previous, fictional essay. Structurally, this text denies what Samuel Frederick terms "narrative closure" (Frederick 86). Like most of Walser's texts, this is not a plot-centred narrative (Frederick 86-7), and accordingly its unfolding occurs in a non-linear and labyrinthine manner. The idea of a single narrative 'thread' is incongruous. Stylistically,

---

[73] See entry for "Feder." *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. Akademie der Wissenschaften zu Göttingen and Trier Center for Digital Humanities, 1998-2013. Web. 16 May. 2014.

[74] See entry for "pen (n.1)." *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Douglas Harper. Web. 16 May. 2014.

too, the sketch is a loose combination of genres, perspectives, and tenses; it is far from being neatly stitched together. Sometimes Walser uses a style indicative of an essay, and other times that of a story. Frederick notes that the first line of the sketch shows an immediate overlapping of both styles ("Ich schrieb einmal eine Abhandlung über Asche"), with the first three words implying a story, a recounting, but the next word "Abhandlung" changing the course of the sketch to be about an essay (Frederick 88). In terms of perspective, sometimes his narrator is relatively omniscient (telling the reader about the beliefs of ash or the joys of the matchstick, albeit ironically), but sometimes he expresses doubt as to his version of the story—an uncertainty to which I will return. Overall, it appears that Walser has composed this sketch to be intentionally ambiguous, resisting classification and straightforwardness. In the line of thinking wherein the needle might represent a sequential organization of text, Walser bypasses this option.

To return to this sketch, when Walser switches focus to the pencil, it becomes clear that unlike the needle, this is a subject with which the narrator empathizes:

> Was den kleinen Bleistift betrifft, so ist dieser insofern beachtenswert, als man ja zur Genüge wissen muß, wie er gespitzt und gespitzt wird, bis es nichts mehr an ihm zu spitzen gibt, worauf man ihn, unbrauchbar wie er durch unbarmherzigen Gebrauch geworden ist, auf die Seite wirft, wobei es niemandem nur von Ferne einfällt, ihm für die vielfachen Dienstleistungen ein Wörtchen der Anerkennung und des Dankes zu sagen.

One of the first things that one might notice is that the pencil is "beachtenswert." In line with what I discussed above, the pencil is not included in this study because it is aware of its worth, like the needle, but because it is worthy *of attention*. We give the pencil its

worth, the narrator and the reader together, by observing it. And this second worth is assigned to it right before the narrator imagines its gradual decline into physical worthlessness and uselessness: "wie er gespitzt und gespitzt wird, bis es nichts mehr an ihm zu spitzen gibt." Presumably not by accident, the same quality that gives the needle its use (its point, "Spitz") is here turned into the means by which the pencil loses its usefulness ("gespitzt wird"). The contrast between the two objects is emphasized, and the pencil's passive, helpless position—as a subject who is not in control of its worth, and whose most useful asset does not work in its favour—is hereby established. But by turning our attention to the pencil before chronicling the event of its sharpening, the narrator stalls the pencil's depletion, inserting a pause into its diminishment in order to reinforce the pencil's worthwhile place in this story. To think of Walser's irony again, this pause is a sort of interruption in the straightforward narrative, folding the idea of 'worth' in two. At a first reading, the section is about pencil's uselessness, but the narrator's placement of "beachtenswert" distorts the trajectory and the expected approach of the story, creating a branching storyline wherein the pencil's alternative worth comes directly from being worthless. Similar to the use of double negatives in the paragraph on ash, Walser is here surrounding the description of the pencil's uselessness with reminders of its non-consumable worth; the narrator guarantees his interest in the pencil, thus directly countering its imminent state of neglect, wherein nobody thinks to say "ein Wörtchen der Anerkennung und des Dankes" to the pencil.

Yet there is one small clause placed between the narrator's encouragement of alternate, non-violent worth, and his recounting of the pencil's physical decline: the pencil is worthy of consideration insofar as—"*als man ja zur Genüge wissen muß*"—it is

sharpened and sharpened. The connotation of this middle phrase is ambiguous, and could situate the perspective on either side of the action: is Walser implying that the narrator is well acquainted with the role of writer, who has to be continually sharpening the pencil, or acquainted instead with the position of the pencil, who has to endure this deterioration of his self at the hands of someone more powerful? By placing this acknowledgement of empathy as a hinge between the actions of considering and sharpening—of bestowing and taking away worth—it seems that Walser is allowing both perspectives to exist simultaneously, thereby aligning his narrator with the figures of both writer and pencil. While the narrator is a writer (he wrote the essay on ash), he is evidently not the type of writer who uses the pencil "mercilessly" and does not give it any further attention; his attention not only predates the pencil's use, but continues well after the pencil is declared to be useless. Ultimately, the narrator's status as distinct from the merciless and ungrateful writers leads the reader to question Walser's own status as a writer who famously uses pencils. What is the difference between Walser and the described figure who sharpens and throws away the unusable pencil stub? Is Walser not such a writer? The available evidence actually suggests the reverse: Walser is known to have written with a dull and short pencil[75]—and though this seems counterintuitive for someone

[75] In his editorial comments on the *Bleistiftgebiet*, Echte repeatedly refers to the dullness of Walser's pencil, since the varying degrees of dullness made deciphering the texts much more difficult. For instance, Echte writes that because of the quality of Walser's repurposed paper, "ließ es sich nur mit einem weichen Bleistift schreiben, der naturgemäß rasch abstumpfte" (*AdB* 6, 703).

With regard to the size of the pencil, various depictions of Walser represent the pencil as a stub. W. G. Sebald writes for instance that Walser "would always carry with him in his waistcoat pocket a pencil stub and a few scraps of paper" (a description that Sebald recounts by way of Joseph Wehle, an orderly in the Herisau Asylum). See Sebald, "Foreword," 2. As well, Jan Peter Tripp's portrait of Walser (on the cover of Jochen Greven's *Robert Walser – ein Außenseiter wird zum Klassiker*) shows a short, eraser-less

writing microscopically, his letters are not detailed or delicate but simple dashes and dots. Perhaps Walser really did 'rescue' the unwanted pencil stubs in this way from their fate, as a real-life parallel to the way in which the narrator prevents the pencil from being overlooked in this story.

Though the inclusion of "als man ja zur Genüge wissen muß" implies a narrative position that is partly external to the pencil, the perspective of the human is much less relevant here than the perspective of the pencil. The human actions of sharpening and throwing aside are established, but with a passive voice that allows the pencil to remain as the focus of the action: the pencil is sharpened; the pencil is thrown aside. Walser's use of 'man' to describe each human action further contributes to the minimal weight of the human user within the narrative: the reader is not privy to information as to who is using the pencil or for what purposes. It does not matter whether the user is a writer or an artist, only their "unbarmherzig" action of throwing the pencil aside (once they used it to the point of unusability) is of note, and only then for the way in which it alters the story of the pencil—the true character being followed and narrated here. In the same way that the ash was never reimagined as the object it used to be, but instead described *as* trivial, on the ground under one's feet, so too is the pencil useless from the start of the section, and only important to the narrator as such. The narrator has access to the pencil where it has landed 'off to the side,' a perspective that the writer or artist is said not to be able to see. Nobody 'von Ferne' will notice the pencil, Walser writes, and from this the reader knows that the narrator is observing very closely, with the abilities not of the powerful

---

pencil tucked behind the author's ear. Information found at the back of Greven's book says that the portrait is titled "erselbst," from the year 2000, and was a gift from the artist for the winner of an 'interpretation contest' at the Robert Walser-Gesellschaft.

user but of someone empathetic; he has come down to the level of the marginalised pencil in order to reveal its perspective for the reader. The narrator therefore cannot be one of the human users of the pencil, at least not of the sort that Walser describes, because if he were, he would not be inclined or able to see the cast-aside pencil.

As a character, the pencil belongs to one of the recurring roles in Walser's writing: the servant. The pencil's duty is called "Dienstleistungen." The matchstick, in the next section, is also described in terms of a servant, with duties and obligations. One of the interesting features of the servants who appear in Walser's writing is that the better a servant is, the more his/her body shrinks. In a term well suited to this trope, Dieter Borchmeyer calls the modest persona of Walser's servants their "Kleinsein."[76] Kraus from *Jakob von Gunten* is hailed as the ideal servant, and he is as a result "zwerghaft zerdrückt . . . in einen unansehnlichen, geringen, unschönen Körper" (*GW* IV, 408). This account of Kraus the perfect servant could serve just as well for the ash or pencil in the present sketch. The whole group of pupils at the school is repeatedly described to be, for instance, "klein bis hinunter zur Nichtswürdigkeit" (336). Using very similar words, Jakob tells himself the following as encouragement, in a moment of uncertainty about his future success as a servant: "Ich bin ja etwas so Kleines. Daran, daran halte ich ungebunden fest, daran daß ich klein, klein und nichtswürdig bin" (469). To consider an

[76] In his study of the Herr/Knecht relationship in Walser's novels, Borchmeyer makes many connections between Walser's fondness for servant characters and his 'minor genre' of writing. For instance, Borchmeyer writes that "Walsers Selbsteinschätzung all seines 'minderen' Dichters, dessen Stigma der Erfolglosigkeit ist, schlägt bisweilen freilich – ähnlich wie die Dieneridee – in einen paradoxen Stolz um, der eben aus dem Gefühl des Scheiterns, aus der Demut des Künstlers resultiert." And later: "Wie sehr die Idee des Kleinseins auch Walsers Poetik prägt, dafür lassen sich eine Fülle von Belegen finden." See Dieter Borchmeyer, *Dienst und Herrschaft. Ein Versuch über Robert Walser* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1980), 81; 83.

example from Walser's later writing, the microscripted character of *der Räuber* undergoes similar diminishment when he takes on (inexplicably) the role of maidservant. He becomes girlish (as quite a few of Walser's servant characters are), and becomes in turn "das Räuberchen, das so unglaublich zarte" (AdB Bd. 3, 109). Though his servant figures are usually delighted to be serving (especially serving older women), Walser makes it clear that the rest of society looks down on these characters as subordinate. In the episode of the Robber's transformation to maidservant, for example, Walser writes that "Wer sich als sein Freund auswies, machte sich gesellschaftlich unmöglich" (108). Thus servitude, even if it is a chosen path or a happy path for the characters, is nevertheless closely associated with social exclusion and marginalisation. In being a servant, the pencil not only confirms its place within the core character group of Walser's oeuvre, but also helps to underscore the synonymity between smallness and social insignificance (even subjugation) in Walser's writings. When one's role is to be used by a more powerful person, the unavoidable result is diminishment, both physical and social—as the reader has learned from the remarks of Walser's servant-characters.

In the context of Walser's micrography, which is the key link that I would like to establish with regard to the pencil section in this sketch, smallness appears similarly to be Walser's reaction to his increasing separation from the literary scene and his reading public. Yet what "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen" suggests, more so than the other stories of servitude, is the unexpected liberation and alternate success that comes with diminishment. The pencil is thrown "auf die Seite"; he is marginalised in the full sense of the word. But it is also here, on the sides, that he becomes unnoticeable to all except for narrator. To those who are only looking for objects to use (or objects with

'worth'), the pencil will be invisible. But to those—such as the narrator and, if insightful, the readers of this sketch as well—the pencil remains entirely deserving of consideration even after being thrown to the side; the narrator follows the pencil stub to the 'sides' and continues the story. In fact, after the reader hears of the pencil's having been tossed, the pencil's story becomes much more personal and personified: "Bleistifts Bruder heißt Blaustift, und wie da und dort schon erzählt worden ist, lieben die beiden bedauernswerten Stifte einander brüderlich, indem sie eine zarte und innige Freundschaft für das ganze Leben miteinander geschlossen haben" (*GW* VI, 322).

This is the sentence in the sketch that so far reads most like a *story*, rather than simply a compassionate description of objects at-hand. This line suggests that only after the pencil becomes irrelevant and useless, does it make a good character. The narrative interest in the pencil expands to create a family for the pencil—a brother—and to present the very human qualities that the two share, such as brotherliness and friendship. Marianne Schuller has pointed out the plausible parallel between these two brothers and the close relationship of Walser to his brother Karl, the artist. The *Blaustift*, according to Schuller, represents Karl the artist, while the *Bleistift* represents Walser the writer (and especially because of Walser's 'Bleistiftmethode') (Schuller 77). No matter what Walser means with *Blaustift*, the fact that he has played with the word *Bleistift* to come up with this name for the brother further attests to the surprising personification of the pencil: to see the two names together, it appears that *Bleistift* has been a proper name all along, rather than just a noun denoting material components. By rearranging its letters, Walser takes the word *Bleistift* out of the realm of straightforward signifier and turns it instead into a character's name that is subject to change at the author's will.

Even more significantly, the discarded pencil's story is not one that goes untold: the tale of the pencil and his brother is "da und dort schon erzählt worden." Like the essay on the ash that received much acclaim, the story of the pencil stub and his brother is interesting and popular—to a fantasy audience. There is an entire alternate literary world within this sketch, one that is humorous for its obvious fabrication, wherein readers and critics are interested only in the most peripheral and worn out material. One can notice as well the recurring re-contextualization of 'Wert': here the pair is 'bedauernswert.' Walser reminds the reader of the idea of worth, but once again within the different context of an observer's (reader's or narrator's) attention. The reader should not be looking for the worth of the pencil in the same way as the writer did above, namely to use it relentlessly, but for the worth that it displays as a sympathetic character (and a very human character). As a final point, the story of the pencil and his brother is given a very long span: Walser writes that the two live in this brotherly way for "das ganze Leben." Quite the opposite from the described short life of the physical pencil, the fictional life of the pencil is long—immortalized even, with this fairy tale ending. Exactly as the ash was given an immeasurable scope as a subject through Walser's introductory sentence—the admission that ash was already a well-received subject of his writing—so too is the unwanted bit of pencil reimagined by Walser to have a full and happy life, not unloved or useless but instead surrounded by friendship and family.

3. Matchstick and the Disintegration of the Text

The alternate value (the narrative value) seems to be consistently assigned to the objects in the moment that they have no utilitarian worth. This is the case as well with the

matchstick, who is designated as 'worthless' while lying unlit in the carton—"Solange Zündhölzchen in der Schachtel ruht . . . besitzt es ohne Frage *noch keinen sonderlichen Wert*" (*GW* VI, 322) (my emphasis)—but full of worth in the brief moment of being lit: "wo es erwacht aus der Trägheit, Untätigkeit und Nutzlosigkeit, *wo es zeigt, was es wert ist*, wo es im Eifer erglüht, zu dienen und seine Pflicht und Schuldigkeit zu tun" (323) (my emphasis). Accordingly, it is when the matchstick is still intact and 'worthless' in the carton that Walser highlights its narrative value and describes it as a character rather than simply an object:

> Was sagt der Leser erst zu Zünd- oder Streichhölzchen, das ein ebenso liebenswürdiges wie zierliches, niedliches und eigentümliches Persönchen ist, welches in der Streichholzschachtel neben zahlreichen Genossinnen geduldig, manierlich und artig liegt, wo es zu träumen oder zu schlafen scheint. (322)

Like the story of pencil with his brother, this description of the matchstick is highly personified, even gendered (her peers are 'Genossinnen'). The recurring diminutives add to the delicacy that the matchstick seems to exude. In her carton, she even dreams, suggesting a sleeping child. Furthermore, the reader can notice again the inclusion of a variation on 'worthy' in her description; this time 'liebenswürdig.' Walser's word choice leads, as before, to the interpretation that though she has as yet no utilitarian worth, the matchstick is a character (a 'Persönchen') worthy of gentle attention. Yet 'liebenswürdig' is even gentler than 'beachtenswert' or 'betrachtenswert,' which were the alternate forms of worth designated to pencil and ash. The matchstick is not only worthy of attention or regard, but *love*, too. It is possible that Walser is attending to the non-utilitarian worth of the objects in an inverse proportion to how violently they are consumed. In other words,

the more violent and abusive their use, the more sympathetic Walser's attention becomes. The use of each tool has so far demanded grossly violent acts, according to Walser's descriptions: the pencil is sharpened and sharpened until it is thrown away, and even the needle has to fight for its worth using its sharp point. But the fulfillment of matchstick's functional worth is the most violent, and in turn, Walser's description is the most sympathetic: first, her 'little head' ("Köpfchen") is struck against the tinder, and then her entire body is instantly destroyed. As she is being burned, the narrator interjects: "Ist das nicht rührend? Streichhölzchen muß elendiglich verbrennen, jämmerlich zugrunde gehen, wo es seinen lieblichen Nutzen dartut" (323).

In line with the matchstick's remarkable personification, Marianne Schuller interprets the matchstick to be a girl envisioning her sexual 'awakening.' Schuller's argument hangs on the ambiguous meaning of the word 'Schachtel,' as well as Walser's implementation of a neutral gender (due to the diminutives):

> Wie die 'Schachtel' ein alter Topos ist, der—über das Grab und die Wiege—emblematisch auf Geburt und Tod, Anfang und Ende des Lebens verweist, so bedeutet 'Schachtel' auch 'Weiblichkeit' und Sexualität. Die verschiedenen Bedeutungen fügen sich, wenn auch nur schwach, zu einem Motiv: Das aufgrund des Diminutivs als Neutrum auftauchende Persönchen namens Streichhölzchen ist als Kind figuriert, das dem sexuellen Erwachen entgegen träumt. (Schuller 78)

According to this reading, the matchstick is a young child. This would explain the narrator's more gentle, loving approach. In terms of the trajectory of the matchstick in this story, the metaphor of a young girl experiencing or imagining a sexual event is apt

(albeit reflective of unfortunate societal coding): the moment that matchstick fulfills her worth or 'duty' ("Pflicht") is correspondingly the moment of her ruination, the loss of her socially perceivable value. Adding to the plausibility of Schuller's interpretation, Walser even writes that in lighting on fire, matchstick is fulfilling a "Liebesdienst." And in the carton, she has "as yet" no particular worth ("noch keinen sonderlichen Wert"), suggesting that her worth is latent or undeveloped. But when the day comes that she is taken from her carton ("Eines Tages aber und so nimmt man es heraus"), all the potential worth of matchstick's body is consumed and destroyed in one stroke. Though her burning marks the end of her recognizable, consumable worth, Walser's narrator is not done with the matchstick yet. Not only does he spend many lines describing the event of her demise, but presumably, the burning of the matchstick (and whatever was lit along with it) produces ash, the same ash that is held in high esteem by the fictional critics at the start of this story. When this is the case, the matchstick is not really destroyed, but just made much smaller and no longer consumable. Her worth as a subject of Walser's attention becomes in turn more lasting.

Before the matchstick transforms into ash, however, the text ends. And it seems that in order for the story to figuratively re-emerge or restart as an essay on ash, the text itself needs to disintegrate alongside the matchstick. Thus as the matchstick heads toward its dissolution, the distinctions between essay and story, and between object and character, which have been separated in previous sections by a switch in narrative tone, begin to blur together rapidly. Even in introducing this final section, the narrator seems to hint at the upcoming joint destruction of matchstick and story. To recall the beginning line: "Was sagt der Leser erst zu Zünd- oder Streichhölzchen . . ." (*GW* VI, 322). Right

away the matchstick is hovering between two descriptors, 'Zündhölzchen,' and 'Streichhölzchen'—and throughout the section Walser uses both terms to refer to it. The splintering of matchstick's name is an early piece of evidence that its identity as a character will also be soon forgotten, along with its physical self. The doubling of its name also leads the reader to wonder, is there only one matchstick? Or is Walser switching between names as an indication of the rate at which these matchsticks are being used? As Walser writes next, the matchstick lies in its tin with countless other matchsticks ("zahlreichen Genossinnen"): its identity is defined by being replaceable and indistinguishable; its individuality is precarious. Though the matchstick is said to be "eigentümlich," its objecthood is nonetheless foregrounded in the notion of multiplicity. One can imagine that in the time it takes the narrator to point to the matchstick, it might already have been burnt and replaced by a new one. The hyphenation used here to indicate the prefix status of 'Zünd' (Zünd- oder Streichhölzchen) further helps to speed up the effect of a combusted and quickly replaced identity, on a stylistic level; the selfhood of each match is not given linguistic space or time to emerge as a complete entity. Thus from the start, the character of the matchstick is instilled with a sense of instability.

Yet with this introduction to the section, the state of Walser's language, or the cohesion of *this essay*, is also splintering. The words are visibly breaking apart from one another with the placement of the hyphen. And when the narrator depicts the act of striking the match, the same linguistic uncertainty takes place: "drückt es gegen die Reib- oder die Streichfläche." In this next critical moment signalling matchstick's destruction, Walser is once again showing the text, and the narration, to be fragmenting. As a result,

the story is less believable; the falter inserted between words betrays a narrative doubt—perhaps, as Schuller implies, this entire event is actually the content of matchstick's dream (see cited passage above). Until this section, Walser's language has been mostly unconditional and authoritative. In the paragraph on ash, the statements are (misleadingly) direct—ash *is* such and such—and he frequently includes phrases such as "in der Tat" or "eigentlich," which seem to support the reality of the narrator's assertions (though these qualifiers only add to the irony behind these assertions). The wordplay with pencil's brother, 'Blaustift,' is one of the earlier moments where, on the level of naming, language is revealed to be less straightforward. Yet Walser's inclusion of *Blaustift* has the opposite effect to the bisecting tale of the matchstick: rather than splitting the individuality of the object, the introduction of *Bleistift*'s brother *Blaustift* expanded the identity of the pencil; his story went from being about one to being about two. The matchstick, on the other hand, is not even certainly about one character, let alone two. With his narrator's indecisiveness regarding the matchstick, Walser is here allowing the linguistic surface to give way for the first time in the sketch.

The simultaneous dissolution of the subject matter and the language points to the culminating meta-meaning of this sketch. As Christian Benne writes, in this sketch "Poetik und Metapoetik sind eins, weil Literatur und ihre Entstehungsgeschichte identisch werden" (Benne 56), but the opposite is also true here: literature and the instruments of its undoing fold into one another. It is feasible that the text itself is part of the tinder that ignites with the matchstick. Perhaps the previous essay on ash that begins the story was actually intended to be about needle, pencil, and matchstick as well, but upon reaching the component on the matchstick, it too had been burned and thus reduced

to ash. The idea of failure, or non-completion, is built into the structure of the text. Samuel Frederick, who, as noted, tackles the uncertain classification of this sketch, writes convincingly that the looping structure of writing here "appears to collapse in on itself" and that the "narrator has forgotten his task (to tell *about* his having written this work) and has slipped into a discursive mode that essentially doubles the text of this essay" (Frederick 89). The fact that this sketch contains so many overlapping layers of writing—a made-up essay, leading into an essay-like fictional narrative, characterizing a writing instrument and its demise—suggests that this sketch stages its own structural explosion. The next step would be to fictively reduce the inner subject of the writing (which is a previous piece of writing) as well as the current attempt at rewriting, to ash—a conclusion that is seemingly on a loop. The entire first section can now be read as a mounting pile of drafts, all of which resist completion and therefore release into the public sphere.

In light of the self-reflexive conclusion of the sketch, the irony of the narrator's description of ash is now even more profound: to the normal eye, ash (or, it is safe to now say, a fragment of Walser's writing) exhibits no resistance, is unnoticeable, and is so powerless and weak that it will tolerate any kind of treatment, as Walser writes. But to the careful reader, it is evident that the worst kind of treatment comes when one is bigger, more noticeable, and consumable. To be ash, to be absolute tininess and triviality, is actually to *escape* harsh treatment by resisting detection. One of the first qualities of ash that Walser lists is that it instantly flies all over the place ("augenblicklich [auseinanderfliegen]"), which can now be read as a thematization of resistance. Ash is ungraspable: even trying to contain it as a subject within the bounds of its original essay

was unsuccessful, since it blew into this current essay. Or, another quality: step on ash, Walser tells the reader, and you will hardly notice that you have stepped on anything ("Setze deinen Fuß auf Asche, und du wirst kaum spüren, daß du auf irgend etwas getreten bist" (*GW* VI, 321)). 'You' will not notice the ash, but 'you' will also not see the pencil stub lying 'on the side,' or the delicacy of each individual matchstick in the carton—the ash, the pencil, and the matchstick will be observed only by the very rare figure who is not looking to consume. As the final form of the protagonists of this sketch (the pencil and the matchstick), and arguably as the final form of the metaphorical drafts of the text, the ash showcases the freedom and privacy that come with absolute smallness.

"Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen" ultimately suggests an agenda of avoiding consumption through the expedient of smallness. The text evades its own completion by breaking down linguistically and structurally, while the objects within live out their final days in inconspicuous smallness. "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen" points ahead to the *Bleistiftgebiet* (when it is not already a part of it) by taking the residue of consumption as its starting point. Walser, like the objects in the sketch, who cycle through torturous use and eventually flourish in their uselessness, had by this time already been both praised and rejected by his reading public, and in response, seems to have established a writing practise that precluded public consumption. The idea of a second life away from the public eye, which the narrator affords these objects in their smallness and unusability, is directly comparable to Walser's statement about his pencil method: "Für mich ließ es sich mit Hülfe des Bleistiftes wieder besser spielen, dichten; es schien mir, die Schriftstellerlust lebe dadurch von neuem auf" (Briefe 301). The pencil reinvigorates Walser as a writer, as it does as well for the narrator in this sketch, who

begins to tell a story once he turns to consider the pencil. However, it is not the pencil's role as a writing instrument that inspires the narrator here, but instead its later position as a discarded object 'at the sides.' Thus what this sketch suggests is that Walser considers the pencil not only as a writing instrument, and not even foremost as a writing instrument, but as an object that is thematically in line with his project of shrinking and writing from the margins. Walser, like his narrator, implicitly picks up the pencil where it has been discarded and left forgotten.

One can come to the conclusion that Walser approached his project of writing with an acute empathy for that which has been tossed aside. Coupled with his preference for second-hand scraps of paper, Walser's reimagining of the pencil confirms that the selection of material for his microscripts was not an issue of utility. Rather, the paper and pencil together seem to form what Walser called his "Ich-Buch": a continually fragmenting, self-destroying collection of text—"Der Roman . . . bleibt immer derselbe . . . ein mannigfaltig zerschnittenes oder zertrenntes Ich-Buch" (*GW* XII, 323). There is only a hyphen standing between Walser and his writing materials, a hinge that—one can imagine—allows both self and text to remain at the margins, fragmenting in tandem. As such, it is not an exaggeration to say that Walser put himself in the place of his writing materials, choosing the pencil over the pen because he understood the feeling of diminishment, neglect, and temporary worth, and likewise, choosing small scraps of paper because he increasingly preferred to be enclosed, unseen, and cut-off from the public.

Conclusion

This thesis set out to evaluate the role of Walser's writing materials, his pencil and scraps of paper, as they relate to his late writing method (his 'micrography'), as well as to his overall body of work. In a time when the pencil was coded as 'debris,' my thesis asks, what was the significance of Walser's choice to switch from a pen to a pencil? Additionally, how was this switch to the pencil connected to his habit of cutting up strips of pre-used paper to serve as the surfaces for his blocks of text?

In Chapter One, I demonstrate that Walser switched to the pencil primarily because of its symbolic value, its status as the instrument of the first draft. The associations of the pencil with a type of writing that is unrestricted evidently attracted Walser. He was terrified at the pen, because of its opposite associations with finality. The pencil, however, offered him an opportunity to write without fear. In Walser's formulations, the pencil draft becomes an entirely new region, a sphere of privacy that could exist beneath the public realm and beyond the reach of the publishing industry. Crucially, Walser writes about the draft as a private and liberating space long before the acknowledged beginning of his 'pencil method.' Examples of Walser resolving his characters' writing blocks by means of the draft—and its designated symbolic parallel, the circling walk—go at least as far back as 1908. Together with the pencil, I understand the *space of the draft* to be the long-nascent "Bleistiftgebiet."

Walser developed his 'pencil method' in concert with his habit of writing on cut-up strips of paper. Over time, Walser chose types of paper with overtly public and systematic overtones, paper on which there already existed circulated material, such as letters from newspaper offices, magazines, a novel cover, and pages from a calendar. By

cutting these pages up, writing overtop, underneath, and in the margins, Walser subverts their highly communicative function. In close readings of the material, form, and content of several of these *Mikrogramme* papers, I show that Walser's concept of the "Bleistiftgebiet," as a figurative space of privacy and marginality, extends as well to his writing surface.

Walser's focus on and identification with small and private space is the subject of Chapter Two, wherein I seek to trace the emergence and evolution of this affinity. The house is an exemplary and rich region for studying Walser's treatment of space. Shrinking space, along with increasingly isolated space, are necessary for Walser's characters to identify with a space as *home*. As an even smaller and more remote region, the attic offers the most secure respite. Attic rooms are lodgings for Walser's poet figures, and in this context the space emphasizes the desire of his writers to be away from public judgement and visibility. Ultimately, Walser's descriptions of his characters interacting with spaces such as the home and the attic show strong similarities to the way that he interacted with his papers: searching for the smallest or least noticeable place, while simultaneously undermining the larger, more public areas from the privacy of his microscopic text.

I return to the question of the pencil's material and symbolic significance in Chapter Three, in connection with Walser's story "Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen." The aim of this chapter is to show the link between the pencil and the theme of smallness. Walser is especially concerned with the pencil's imminent abandonment, since it is mercilessly sharpened until its body can no longer be used. Together with the title's other small objects, the pencil exposes the fragility of Walser's

envisioned writing project, as one that is in a continual process of fragmentation and diminishment.

Throughout this work, I have aimed to show that Walser's micrography encompasses a system far more complex than just writing tiny letters. The elements of Walser's method were deliberately chosen, arranged, and guarded. Overall, the pencil represented a means of accessing a peripheral region—the first draft—that was a free and private space from which to begin writing. The pencil is more than a symbolic writing instrument, however. It is a personified object and subject both, to which Walser entrusted his project of escaping servitude to an ungrateful public. This escape was achieved by means of shrinking: the plane of his text, his letters, his writing instrument, and his papers, to fit the status Walser ultimately assigned to himself.

Bibliography

Primary Literature

Robert Walser, *Aus dem Bleistiftgebiet. Mikrogramme aus den Jahren 1924-1932*, transcribed and ed. by Bernhard Echte and Werner Morlang, 6 volumes (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985-2000).

---, *Briefe*, ed. by Jörg Schäfer, (Geneva: Kossodo, 1975).

---, *Das Gesamtwerk in 12 Bänden*, ed. by Jochen Greven, (Zurich; Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1978).

---, *Der Gehülfe*, (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1983).

Secondary Literature

Atze, Marcel. "„ . . . und kaum blieb etwas verschont" Reale und fictive Autoren als Zerstörer eigener Texte." *Verbergen, überschreiben, zerreisen: Formen der Bücherzerstörung in Literatur, Kunst und Religion*. Ed. Mona Körte and Cornelia Örtlieb. Berlin: E. Schmidt, 2007. 91-105.

Bernofsky, Susan. Introduction. *Microscripts*. By Robert Walser. Trans. Bernofsky. New York: New Directions Publishing, 2010. 9-18.

Benjamin, Walter. "Robert Walser." *Selected Writings*. Ed. Michael W. Jennings et al. Vol. 2, part 1. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2005. 257-261.

---. "Robert Walser." *Gesammelte Schriften*. Ed. Rolf Tiedemann and Hermann Schweppenhäuser. Vol. 2, part 1. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1991, 324-328.

Benne, Christian. "„Schrieb je ein Schriftsteller so aufs Geratewohl?" : der surrealistische Robert Walser." *Surrealismus in der deutschsprachigen Literatur*. Ed. Friederike Reents and Anike Meier. Berlin: W. de Gruyter, 2009. 49-70.

Borchmeyer, Dieter. *Dienst und Herrschaft. Ein Versuch über Robert Walser*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1980.

Evans, Tamara S. ""A Paul Klee in Prose": Design, Space, and Time in the Work of Robert Walser." *The German Quarterly*. Vol. 56.1 (1984): 27-41. Web. 1 April 2014.

---. *Robert Walsers Moderne*. Bern: Francke, 1989.

Giuriato, Davide. "Robert Walsers Kinder." Robert Walsers *‚Ferne Nähe': Neue Beiträge zur Forschung*. Ed. Wolfram Groddeck, Reto Sorg, Peter Utz, and Karl Wagner. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007. 125-132.

Greven, Jochen. *Robert Walser – ein Außenseiter wird zum Klassiker: Abenteuer einer Wiederentdeckung*. Lengwil: Libelle, 2003.

Groddeck, Wolfram. "Robert Walsers „Schreibmaschinenbedenklichkeit."" *Schreibkugel ist ein Ding gleich mir, vom Eisen": Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte*. Ed. Davide Giuriato, Martin Stingelin, and Sandro Zanetti. Munich: Fink Verlag, 2005. 169-182.

Harman, Mark. Introduction. *Robert Walser Rediscovered: Short Stories, Fairy tale Plays, and Critical Responses*. Ed. Harman. Hanover: New England UP, 1985. 1-14.

Heffernan, Valerie. *Provocation from the Periphery: Robert Walser Re-examined*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007.

Hobus, Jens. *Poetik der Umschreibung: Figurationen der Liebe im Werk Robert Walsers*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2011.

Kammer, Stephan. *Figurationen und Gesten des Schreibens: Zur Ästhetik der Produktion in Robert Walsers Prosa der Berner Zeit*. Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 2003.

Middleton, Christopher. Postscript. *Selected Stories*. By Robert Walser. Trans. Middleton. Manchester: Carcanet New Press, 1982. 191-194.

---. Preface. *Speaking to the Rose*. By Robert Walser. Trans. Middleton. Lincoln, NE: University of Nebraska Press, 2005. vii-x.

Santner, Eric. *On the Psychopathology of Everyday Life: Reflections on Freud and Rosenzweig*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001.

Scheffler, Kirsten. *Mikropoetic. Robert Walsers Bieler Prosa. Spuren in ein "Bleistiftgebiet" avant la lettre*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2010.

Schuller, Marianne. "Robert Walsers Poetik des Winzigen. Ein Versuch." *Robert Walsers ‚Ferne Nähe': Neue Beiträge zur Forschung*. Ed. Wolfram Groddeck, Reto Sorg, Peter Utz, and Karl Wagner. Munich: Wilhelm Fink, 2007. 75-81.

Sebald, W. G. *A Place in the Country*: *On Gottfried Keller, Johann Peter Hebel, Robert Walser and Others*. Trans. Jo Catling. London: Hamish Hamilton, 2013.

Siegel, Elke. *Aufträge aus dem Bleistiftgebiet. Zur Dichtung Robert Walsers,* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2001.

Utz, Peter. *Tanz auf den Rändern. Robert Walsers "Jetztzeitstil."* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998.

Other Literature

Bachelard, Gaston. *The Poetics of Space*. Trans. Maria Jolas. Boston: Beacon Press, 1994.

Baron, Dennis. *A Better Pencil: Readers, Writers, and the Digital Revolution*. New York: Oxford UP, 2009.

Beeching, Wilfred A. *Century of the Typewriter*. New York: St. Martins Press, 1974.

Benjamin, Walter. *The Arcades Project*. Trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin. Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999.

de Man, Paul. "The Concept of Irony." *Aesthetic Ideology*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996.

Harding, James Duffield. *Elementary Art; or, the use of the lead pencil advocated and explained*. London: Charles Tilt, 1834. Web. 24 September 2013.

Kittler, Friedrich. *Discourse Networks 1800/1900*. Trans. Michael Metteer and Chris Cullens. Stanford, Calif: Stanford UP, 1990.

---. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford, Calif: Stanford UP, 1999.

Giuriato, Davide. "Mechanisiertes Schreiben, Einleitung." "*Schreibkugel ist ein Ding gleich mir, vom Eisen": Schreibszenen im Zeitalter der Typoskripte. Zur Genealogie des Schreibens*. Ed. Davide Giuriato, Martin Stingelin, and Sandro Zanetti. Munich: Fink Verlag, 2005. 7-20.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: the Extensions of Man*. New York: McGraw Hill, 1964.

Petroski, Henry. *The Pencil: A History of Design and Circumstance*. New York: Knopf, 2012.

Piper, Andrew. *Book Was There: Reading in Electronic Times*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012.

---. *Dreaming in Books: The Making of the Bibliographic Imagination in the Romantic Age*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009.

Schlegel, Friedrich. *Lucinde and the Fragments*. Trans. Peter Firchow. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1971.

Wershler, Darren, *The Iron Whim: A Fragmented History of Typewriting*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Dictionaries

"draft." *Merriam-Webster*. Web. 27 January 2014.

"Feder." *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. Web. 16 May 2014

"gevatterkuchen *bis* gevatterpfennig." *Deutsches Wörterbuch von Jakob Grimm und Wilhelm Grimm*. Web. 30 November 2013

"Pen (n.1)" *Online Etymology Dictionary*. Web. 16 May 2014