

Eva-Maria Trinkaus

“It Was Ugly and Shriveled, With One End Nibbled Off”

The *Knackwurst* as a Metonymy in Lore Segal’s Story

“Wir aßen stumm. Auf dem Kindertransport”

ABSTRACT 

“Wir aßen stumm. Auf dem Kindertransport” is a short story by the US-Austrian author Lore Segal, narrating her escape from the Nazis and her separation from her Jewish parents in Austria on an involuntary and uncertain journey to a safe place, accompanied by other children and a bag of treats. On the day of her departure from the Austrian town of Fischamend, fleeing the Nazis as a Jewish child, young Lore asks her mother for a “Knackwurst” – a typical Austrian kind of sausage meant as provisions for her ‘journey’ that eventually becomes much more than a meal in Segal’s narration. In an already hasty and dangerous attempt to fulfil her daughter’s last wish before she has to leave, Lore’s mother gives in to buying her a sausage as a meal that would keep her from being hungry on the train. Instead of simply fulfilling the purpose of nourishment, the sausage eventually opens up a space within the narration that allows Segal as the narrator to express young Lore’s grief and the fear of uncertainty. Instead of simply eating the sausage as her mother had intended for her to do, Lore saves the food for later. By keeping the sausage, it becomes a replacement for her feelings. The further away young Lore gets from home, the more the sausage decays, begins to smell, and finally becomes inedible. From being unappetizing to slowly starting to rot, the sausage takes up an essential part of the narration in place of young Lore’s feelings. At the same time, the sausage becomes an indicator of how far away from home – spatially and emotionally – young Lore has already gotten on her journey. Besides the fact that the ‘Knackwurst’ is not kosher food, it is also not what she really wants on her departure – it just buys her more time with her family. The more it starts to smell on her journey, however, the further Lore gets away from her Fischamend home, and the harder it becomes to hide the stinking sausage from everybody else until it is finally found, which embarrasses the girl and finally allows her to express her sadness openly and in front of everybody else.

Segal’s story is an example of what happens when food becomes more than a simple product, or a basic necessity, and exceeds the means of nourishment. In Segal’s story, a twofold purpose of the foodstuff can be analyzed. On the one

hand, it opens up a space within the narration that represents the distance Lore experiences. On the other hand, the sausage and its maturation past its expiration date allows Segal to utilize the ‘Knackwurst’ as a narrative tool to make her experience more palpable, and to use narrative elements for a historical account, very much in the sense of writing ‘history’ through ‘story’ (cf. Segal 2019a) as she claims to be relevant for herself as a writer.

„Sie war unappetitlich, verschrumpelt und an einem Ende angenagt“. Die Knackwurst als Metonymie in Lore Segals Kurzgeschichte „Wir aßen stumm. Auf dem Kindertransport“

„Wir aßen stumm. Auf dem Kindertransport“ ist eine Kurzgeschichte der amerikanisch-österreichischen Autorin Lore Segal, die von ihrer Flucht vor den Nazis und der Trennung von ihren jüdischen Eltern in Österreich auf einer unfreiwilligen und ungewissen Reise an einen sicheren Ort erzählt, begleitet von anderen Kindern und einer Tüte Süßigkeiten. Am Tag ihrer Abreise aus dem österreichischen Ort Fischamend, wo sie als jüdisches Kind vor den Nazis flieht, bittet die junge Lore ihre Mutter um eine Knackwurst – eine typisch österreichische Wurstsorte, die als Proviant für ihre „Reise“ dienen soll, in Segals Erzählung aber viel mehr als nur zur Mahlzeit wird. In einem bereits übereilten und gefährlichen Versuch, den letzten Wunsch ihrer Tochter vor der Abreise zu erfüllen, gibt Lores Mutter nach und kauft ihr eine Wurst als Mahlzeit, die sie im Zug satt machen würde. Die Wurst erfüllt nicht nur den Zweck der Ernährung, sondern eröffnet schließlich einen Raum innerhalb der Erzählung, der es Segal als Erzählerin erlaubt, die Trauer der jungen Lore und die Angst vor der Ungewissheit auszudrücken. Anstatt die Wurst einfach zu essen, wie es ihre Mutter vorgesehen hatte, hebt Lore das Essen für später auf. Indem sie die Wurst aufbewahrt, wird sie zu einem Ersatz für ihre Gefühle. Je weiter sich die junge Lore von zu Hause entfernt, desto mehr verfällt die Wurst, beginnt zu stinken und wird schließlich ungenießbar. Von der Unappetitlichkeit bis zur langsamen Fäulnis nimmt die Wurst als Ersatz für die Gefühle der jungen Lore einen wesentlichen Teil der Erzählung ein. Gleichzeitig wird die Wurst zum Indikator dafür, wie weit sich die junge Lore auf ihrer Reise bereits von zu Hause entfernt hat – räumlich und emotional. Abgesehen davon, dass die Knackwurst kein koscheres Essen ist, ist sie auch nicht das, was sie bei der Abreise wirklich will – sie verschafft ihr nur mehr Zeit mit ihrer Familie. Je mehr sie jedoch auf ihrer Reise zu stinken beginnt, desto weiter entfernt sich Lore von ihrem Zuhause in Fischamend, und desto schwieriger wird es, die stinkende Wurst vor allen anderen zu verstecken, bis sie schließlich gefunden wird, was das Mädchen in Verlegenheit bringt und ihr schließlich erlaubt, ihre Traurigkeit offen und vor allen anderen auszudrücken.

Segals Geschichte ist ein Beispiel dafür, was passiert, wenn Essen nicht mehr nur ein einfaches Produkt oder eine grundlegende Notwendigkeit ist, sondern über Er-

nahrung hinausgeht. In Segals Geschichte lässt das Lebensmittel zweierlei Analysen zu. Einerseits eröffnet es einen Raum innerhalb der Erzählung, der die Distanz der Erfahrungen darstellt. Andererseits erlaubt die Wurst und ihr Verfall Segal, die Knackwurst als erzählerisches Mittel zu nutzen, um die Erfahrung der Protagonistin greifbarer zu machen und narrative Elemente für eine historische Darstellung zu verwenden, ganz im Sinne des Schreibens von „Geschichte“ durch „Geschichten“ (vgl. Segal 2019a), wie sie es für sich als Schriftstellerin beansprucht.

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1 Introduction

In his book *The Holocaust and the Literary Imagination*, Lawrence L. Langer writes that

“the extermination of children during the Holocaust remains a unique atrocity, one which more than any other offends the sensibilities and the imagination of men who consider themselves civilized. If man’s fight in war is to die, and woman’s to mourn, a child’s fate – as always – is to live and rejoice in his youth and innocence while they last” (Langer 1977, 124).

After the assaults on Austrian Jews and their properties during the Pogroms in 1938, the *Kindertransport*, organized by the British State Department and Jewish organizations, supported the rescue of Jewish children from the war and a gruesome death in Nazi concentration camps. Jennifer Craig-Norton writes in the Prologue to her book on the *Kindertransport* that it was the “first dependency upon [...] relief organizations” for the families who were involved in the refugee plan to save the children, and that “for some of the children, this dependency played an ongoing and vital role in their lives for many years to come” (Craig-Norton 2019, 4). One of the children who survived the war through this rescue mission is the Austrian born author Lore Segal, who, among various novels, short stories, and essays, wrote a piece of fiction in which she narrates her escape from Austria via the *Kindertransport* and her separation from her parents as she heads into an uncertain future. In this narration, a piece of food becomes the center of attention. The *Knackwurst*, a typical Austrian kind of sausage, joins the child on her refugee journey to England, and becomes a metonymy for her emotions. Instead of experiencing grief, the distance from her parents, and the anxiety that the girl suffers from, it is the sausage that goes through a transformation process in the story, rotting away. Only when the sausage disappears from the child’s journey, the emotional state is expressed through the girl’s own feelings, and the metonymic shift is inverted.

“Wir aßen stumm. Auf dem Kindertransport” [Engl. “We ate silently. On the *Kindertransport*”] is a short story published in *Küche der Erinnerung* ([Engl. *Kitchen of Memory*] 2018) by Ursula Seeber and Veronika Zwerger. The text is a slightly altered version of the chapter “The Children’s Transport” in Lore Segal’s 1964 novel *Other People’s Houses*, sometimes described as a fictional memoir. Seeber and Zwerger very relevantly claim that Segal’s story, like

many others, is a story of a person who was “ripped from the center of their life, threatened in their existence, and forced into emigration,” (Zwerger/Seeber 2018, 7; own translation), and that food plays an essential role in survival. Unlike many other stories and memoirs in Seeber’s and Zwerger’s edited collection, this one, however, is not a story of food-related nostalgia or of longing for a food connected to a place of home that no longer exists. Segal’s story allows insight into the process of fleeing the Nazis through the metaphorical meaning of a piece of food – a sausage that becomes the emotional placeholder for a young girl’s experience of being left alone, being separated from her family, and coping in a new place. The girl in the story is the protagonist Lore, named after the author, who is her fictional alter ego. The sausage opens up a space in Segal’s text that allows her to express young Lore’s grief and emotions on her journey without ascribing them to herself initially, allowing for the intricacies of the narration to unfold through the way the child treats the stinking sausage. Segal’s story is an example of what happens when food becomes more than a simple product, or a basic necessity, and exceeds the means of nourishment.

Food that exceeds the means of nourishment

In Segal’s story, a twofold purpose of the foodstuff can be analyzed. On the one hand, it opens up a space within the narration that represents the distance Lore experiences which I call the “literary foodscape” in my dissertation (Trinkaus 2022). Starting from the point where Lore receives the sausage from her mother, it carries meaning beyond a simple foodstuff as her mother went through the danger of being arrested on the way of buying it. On the other hand, the sausage and its maturation past its expiration date allows Segal to utilize the *Knackwurst* as a metonymy to make her experience more palpable. Instead of narrating the story of a grieving child separated from her parents, Segal uses the sausage as a narrative tool to allow the reader to gain insight into what happens to the child on her journey emotionally. By utilizing the sausage, Segal very much narrates her personal history as a fictionalized composition, in the sense of writing ‘history’ through ‘story’ (cf. Segal 2019a) as she claims to be relevant for herself as a writer.

This article will first look at the historical event of the *Kindertransport* through Segal’s fictionalized narration of it. In the following passages, the literary representation of food – in the form of the *Knackwurst* – will be looked at in order to explain the relevance of the sausage beyond being

foodstuff in Segal’s narration. Lastly, the focus will be on the literary space the sausage opens up, which allows the reader to get a better understanding of Segal’s traumatic flight from Austria without having to immerse themselves into a child’s grief that would potentially go beyond the imaginable.

2 (Hi)Story in the context of the Kindertransport

Despite often referred to as a memoir, “Wir aßen stumm. Auf dem Kindertransport” is a fictional story narrating the young protagonist’s escape from the Nazis and her separation from her Jewish parents in Austria on an involuntary and uncertain journey to a safe place, accompanied by other children and a bag of treats. The text was adapted for publication in the anthology *Küche der Erinnerung*, putting on display narrations by exiled Austrians who experience their lives through foods, foodways, and food practices in order to recreate a sense of home. The book was published in the context of an exhibition celebrating 25 years of the *Österreichische Exilbibliothek*, the Austrian Archive for Exile Studies. Seeber and Zwerger, the curators and authors of the edited collection claim that “cooking and the kitchen, food and meals play a role in survival in the context at hand” (Zwerger/Seeber 2018, 7; own translation). Despite the claim of harboring autobiographical traits, the novel as well as the story are fictional with the intention of narrating an experience rather than being historically accurate.

A fictional story with the intention of narrating an experience rather than being historically accurate

In an interview for the book *Into the Arms of Strangers*, which was published by Deborah Oppenheimer and Mark J. Harris and documents personal stories of *Kindertransport* refugees and Holocaust survivors, Segal recalls the events leading up to her flight. After Segal’s father, a high ranking bank employee, loses his job, her uncle gets expelled from his medical studies at the University of Vienna, and her family’s home and small store in the Austrian town of Fischamend become a target of Nazi violence and vandalism, Segal’s parents come to the realization that their daughter’s life, and potentially also their own, can only be saved by sending their daughter away and into an unpredictable future via the *Kindertransport* (cf. Harris/Oppenheimer 2000). The following paragraph is Segal’s personal memory

of what caused her parents to make the decision to send her away on her own. It is a part of her memory that she did not add to the short story, and only partially deals with in her novel.

“From then on [when Segal’s family’s house got invaded by the Nazis], things were rough. My bed had been pushed away over to the wall side of the room because they kept throwing stones through the windows and every single window on the top floor was broken. At one point, they [Nazis] backed a truck up against the front door of the store, opened it, and took out everything inside. Then they made my grandfather sign a form declaring that he had given it to charity. You have to understand, this was a small village where everybody knew everybody else. These were people who had bought from my grandfather. These were people who had been my uncle’s and my mother’s schoolmates at the village school. They were village folk.” (Harris/Oppenheimer 2000, 48–49)

Whereas the novel *Other Peoples’ Houses* is a fictional account of Segal’s emigration as a refugee child to the UK, her short story only covers a short period of time between Vienna and England and is a fictional (travel) memoir and narration of young Lore’s flight from Vienna, the life or death decision of her parents, and the tragic breakup of a family. The memory of the destruction of their property, as Segal remembers it, follows her birthday in March 1938 and coincides with the ‘annexation’ of Austria. The *Kindertransport*, however, took place after the “mass arrests and destruction of Jewish religious and commercial property known as *Kristallnacht*, which was launched on November 9, 1938” (Craig-Norton 2019, 5), when “British government officials agreed to a plan proposed by a group of Anglo-Jewish and Christian leaders to bring unaccompanied Jewish and ‘non-Aryan Christian’ children under the age of seventeen out of the Reich” (Craig-Norton 2019, 5). In her interview for *Into the Arms of Strangers* (2000), Segal remembers the following:

“In November 1938, concentration camps were not the death camps we now know them to be. At that time they were used more for harassment than slave labour, although the system was already under way. I don’t think the Nazis knew yet what they were capable of. They themselves had to learn their own brutality by degrees. Even that doesn’t come naturally: you have to learn how to torture.” (Harris/Oppenheimer 2000, 59)

However, considering the way her parents acted and decided to send her off to Great Britain all on her own, the sense of danger was clearly present

at the time already. Segal’s mother, who was also interviewed for *Into the Arms of Strangers*, recalls her own grief of sending her daughter away but also emphasizes the necessity of saving her life: “My husband was much cleverer than I. He saw there was a possibility to save Lore’s life, and he decided to send her to England on the *Kindertransport*. [...] He just arranged everything for her, and I had to give in,” (Harris/Oppenheimer 2000, 81) Franz Groszman, Lore Segal’s mother, recalls.

In 2019, Holocaust studies scholar Jennifer Craig-Norton published a monograph on her archival research she conducted on the memoirs of *Kindertransport* children in order to shed light on the divergence between the archival records and the narratives of the ‘kinder’ who became refugees during this period in history. The memory of survivors, according to her, needs to be investigated more critically in order to avoid the binaries of either discrediting memoirs as too anecdotal and unreliable, or too historical and factual. Recent memory studies, Craig-Norton claims, have already contributed to valuing these narrations and placing them in a historical and a personal context. Especially misremembering as a form of knowing history from sources other than personal memories and accounts leads to certain divergences in memoirs of the Holocaust (cf. Craig-Norton 2019, 22–25).

Memory is not congruent with the actual historical events.

In this context, Lore Segal’s narrative is particularly interesting as she fictionalizes her memoir on purpose in order to do her own memory justice. As she herself states, “if you ask me in the court of fact when I ‘really’ left Vienna I will confess that my memory is in error” (Segal 2018a, 280), she hints at the spatial and temporal distance between her journey and her writing, and the fact that she experienced her flight as a child with a vivid imagination, recalling a succession of events that is much quicker in her memory than in actual history. The narrations show, and she does not fail to point out regularly, that her memory is not congruent with the actual historical events.

Segal, in the afterword to *Other People’s Houses*, eventually claims that “[t]he truth is that the novelist’s truth makes a truer story” (Segal 2018a, 280) and that she wants to “show how fiction works when memory is its subject” (Segal 2019a, 343), which she writes about in her essay “Memory: The Problems of Imagining the Past.” In contrast to other Jewish child refugees who have been interviewed for their testimonies, Lore Segal’s

background plays a significant role in the way she remembers her trauma. As Craig-Norton writes, “relatively few *Kindertransportees* were given the opportunity to pursue further schooling or training after the age of fifteen or sixteen,” (Craig-Norton 2019, 46) which makes Segal an exception that becomes extremely relevant for her narrative legacy. As a writer and scholar of literature, she deliberately seeks to fictionalize her story in order to counter the petulance of her own memory. In the analysis of her literature, the fictionalization of her memory provides a way of looking at the person rather than the event’s temporal progression, and puts the subject into the foreground rather than focusing on the accuracy of the historical account of the *Kindertransport* and her flight and emigration. Her fictionalized story, thus, focuses less on the role of remembering events and rather highlights the way she experienced her flight as a young child.

3 Food and its literary representation

On her departure day from the Austrian town of Fischamend, fleeing the Nazis as a Jewish child, the story’s protagonist, young Lore, asks her mother for a *Knackwurst* – a typical Austrian kind of sausage that should become provisions for her ‘journey’ but eventually becomes much more than a meal in Segal’s narration. In her literary account of her flight from Vienna, Segal does not only tell her own story, but utilizes a piece of food in order to narrate the flight.

Utilizing a piece of food in order to narrate the flight

The foodstuff that accompanies Lore Segal’s flight and journey is, among other traditional Austrian treats such as candy and Sacher cake, this *Knackwurst* which young Lore asks for of her mother upon departure even though she seems to not actually know what it is; it just seems so profoundly Austrian to her. In an already hasty and dangerous attempt to fulfil her daughter’s last wish before departure, buying them more time with each other, Lore’s mother gives in to getting her a sausage as a meal that would keep her from being hungry on the train. Risking a late departure to the train station by running to the butcher, her mother goes and buys Lore a *Knackwurst* to eat on her way to England, which she never does. Instead, it starts to rot in her luggage. The awful smell of the sausage accompanying the *Kindertransportees*’ journey even prompts them to accuse each other of

having wet their beds, but instead of throwing the sausage out, Lore plays along and does not give away that she is the source responsible for the horrifying odor. The smell becomes a replacement for Lore’s expression of emotions and follows her until she can throw the sausage away and is finally able to cry.

Lore’s story begins with a conversation between her nervous parents, arguing whether her mother should run to get a sausage for Lore even though they are already late. The father tries to convince the mother not to leave the house anymore in order not to risk getting arrested, and the mother tries to desperately fulfill her daughter’s wish. “Eigentlich will ich eh keine Knackwurst,”¹ Lore tries to convince her parents after she has already gotten them riled up and shouting at each other. Luckily, the mother makes it to the butcher and back home unnoticed by Nazi officials, bringing back a sausage wrapped in paper. “Nichts war passiert, keiner hatte sie gesehen. Sie hatte eine ganze Knackwurst gekauft und sie in ein Papiersackerl packen lassen”² (Segal 2018b, 75).

In a way, the *Knackwurst* already has two purposes at this point. It allows the mother to do something nice for Lore when she is feeling terrible about sending her away, and it also buys them time that Lore can spend at home before leaving for good.

When the story continues with Lore already being on the train and the children eating their breakfasts, Lore finds no use for her *Knackwurst* and prefers a candied pear, three pieces of chocolate and a large slice of Sacher cake, also ignoring the sandwiches in her luggage that she considers too inconvenient to eat: “Ich hatte keinen Gusto auf meine *Knackwurst*, und die belegten Brote kamen mir umständlich vor. Also nahm ich mir eine kandierte Birne und drei Katzensungen und ein Stück Sachertorte,”³ (Segal 2018b, 75) Segal writes. She lists those elements meticulously, allowing the reader to follow what she eats and thereby giving the sausage even more significance. Only as a side remark, while they have breakfast, she is made aware by an older girl that they have already left Austria and crossed into Germany over night, not giving away much about her emotional state other than disbelief as the landscape has not drastically changed to the young girl’s observation and according to her, they might as well still be in Austria. The morning is a joyful one; playing games on the train and finding other children to talk to until they get called back into their compartments for lunch, which they eat silently. When she takes a bite from her sausage, Lore finds that she does not like the taste of it at all and decides to keep it for the evening. Instead, she is again eating sweets, again glossing over the

1 ‘I actually do not even want a Knackwurst’ [own translation].

2 ‘Nothing happened, nobody had seen her. She had bought a whole Knackwurst and had it wrapped in a paper bag’ [own translation].

3 ‘I did not feel like having a Knackwurst and eating open sandwiches also felt like it would be too much of a hassle. So I took a piece of a candied pear and three Katzensungen and a piece of Sacher cake’ [own translation].

fact that she has already made it into a different country without her parents by giving an in-depth description of her lunchtime meal. Her encounter with an English steward on the ferry to the island is narrated through their conversation about hot tea, which gives Lore the possibility to show off her knowledge of conversational English. The situation in which the tea is brought up on the train also shows the first instance of difference. As much as Lore wants to impress the man by showing him that she knows English, she asks him whether the coffee was for her when he is serving her tea with milk, a combination that seems very foreign to the young girl. Lore wakes up the following day already at the ‘other side of the Channel,’ as she calls it, waiting for their arrival in the UK to be processed. While waiting together with the other children, they all finish leftovers from their lunch packages and Lore must regretfully throw out her sandwiches that have become crusty and inedible, again giving a very detailed account of the food. The *Knackwurst* sausage, however, she keeps even though it has already started to develop a little smell. Remembering her grandmother who used to tell her that she could always throw things out later, she decides to keep it in her bag.

“Die vertrockneten belegten Brote mußte ich in den Mistkübel schmeißen, sie hatten sich an den Ecken aufgerollt. Aber als ich auf die Knackwurst stieß, die komisch zu muffeln angefangen hatte, fiel mir meine Großmutter ein, die oft gesagt hatte, wegschmeißen kann man’s später auch noch. Und so packte ich die Wurst wieder weg”⁴ (Segal 2018b, 77).

The smelly sausage, a physical remnant of her Austrian home, follows Lore all the way to the camp in England that becomes the children’s first ‘home’ in England. Upon moving into their little cottage, the older girls start to smell the sausage and make comments about it, prompting Lore to play along by pretending not to know where the bad smell comes from. The first time someone else smells the sausage also coincides with Lore’s first expression of a strong emotion. “Es tat so gut, auf jemanden böse zu sein, daß ich beinahe vergaß, daß ja ich es war, auf die wir schimpften”⁵ (Segal 2018b, 77) is the first confession of anger and how good it feels to be angry at someone, even if it was the smell that her own lunch was causing. Being angry at the sausage allows her to express anger about the situation she is in, but at the same time, creates a feeling of belonging with the other girls she is traveling with.

Instead of going to eat in the dining hall with everyone else that evening, Lore claims that she is not hungry and remains in the cottage by herself,

⁴ ‘I had to throw the dried-up sandwiches into the trash, they had started roll up at the ends. But when I found the *Knackwurst* that had started to stink, I remembered my grandmother who used say that you can always throw things out later. So I packed the sausage away again’ [own translation].

⁵ ‘Finally, openly being mad at someone felt so comforting that I almost forgot that it was me who we were ranting about’ [own translation].

trying to hide her sausage that has already developed quite a smell at that point. Instead of saying that she was looking for a place where nobody could find it, however, she claims that she was looking for a place where nobody could smell it, alluding to how impossible her mission was. The sausage remains a metaphor for her feelings that seem to follow her around despite her trying to find other things to do and suppress her feelings. Distracted by the wish to write her parents a letter and lost in her thoughts and loneliness, she briefly forgets the sausage, only to hear steps in the corridor of the others already coming back into the room. “Die Tür ging auf. Ich lag zwischen den Bettüchern, atmete schwer und hatte die Knackwurst gerade noch unters Bett bugsieren können”⁶ (Segal 2018b, 78). The thoughts about her parents, the confrontation with her loneliness, and the potential letter all get pushed under the bed together with the smelly sausage, foreshadowing that instead of making the situation better, simply avoiding the confrontation rather than ridding herself of it would only make it worse. The crucial moment in the narration happens during breakfast when Lore tries to focus on her most immediate physical remainder of home, a stinking sausage under her bed, which becomes more and more unbearable and harder to focus on. It only leaves her with a bad conscience.

*“Bei diesem ersten Frühstück kreisten meine Gedanken um die Wurst. Ich mußte sie beseitigen, ohne sie zu beseitigen. Es war schwierig, sich auf das Problem zu konzentrieren. Ich vergaß immer wieder, daran zu denken, doch die ganze Zeit blieb der Flecken, wo die Wurst auf dem Boden an der Wand unter meinem Bett lag, eine wunde Stelle in meinem Bewußtsein, das Kernstück meines schlechten Gewissens”*⁷ (Segal 2018b, 78).

⁶ ‘The door opened. I was lying there between the sheets, breathing heavily and was just barely able to maneuver the sausage back under the bed’ [own translation].

⁷ ‘During this first breakfast, my thoughts were revolving around the sausage. I needed to rid myself of it without getting rid of it. It was difficult to focus on the problem. I kept forgetting about it but the whole time that the sausage was under my bed against the wall, there was a spot that remained there just like a wound spot in my consciousness – the core of my bad conscience’ [own translation].

Lore’s plan is to ‘get rid of the sausage without getting rid of it,’ she writes, leaving her with a ‘sore spot’ in her conscience – an allusion to focusing on the things that are going on around her in the children’s camp, while at the same time having a bad conscience for not thinking about home but always having it in the back of her mind.

The thought about finally throwing the sausage away leaves her with an even worse conscience, as it would mean to throw out the last piece of food her mother has given her when she had to leave and the only piece of food that is not ‘fake and foreign’ (“dem übrigen falschen und fremden Essen” [Segal 2018b, 78]). The thought of having to throw the sausage into the trash leaves her with an unimaginable pain, finally allowing her to cry on her way back from the breakfast hall to their cottage, although she blames

her crying on not being in any of the photos that photographers took of all the children at the camp. She even accuses herself of not crying properly as nobody seems to be paying her the attention she wanted to receive. But after having been able to cry, regardless of how ridiculous it seemed to her, she also feels confident enough to take the sausage out into the cold and bury it in the snow. However, she fails to do so in the hard and frozen soil and gets distracted again by a bed of roses in the garden, which inspires her to write a letter to her family. When she falls asleep that night, she is tortured by nightmares about the sausage and the thought that she is unable to save her parents. The fear of someone finding her stinking sausage becomes juxtaposed with her parents’ ability to leave the country and the panic it causes her becomes the same, symbolizing the pain the separation from her family causes her. When the sausage is finally found, it is “unappetitlich, verschrumpelt und an einem Ende angenagt” – ‘ugly and shriveled, with one end nibbled off’ – (Segal 2018b, 81) and causes everyone in the room to sniff the moldy smell it has started to emanate. The woman who finds the sausage asks Lore to throw it out. She is mortified and grieving, but finally able to let go of the last meal from home, which also coincides with a true expression of her feelings – crying – as she allows herself to feel the pain of being all by herself.

The foul taste of distance from home and family

What does not become apparent in the adapted text for *Küche der Erinnerung*, but is addressed in the novel, is that her mother does not know and never learns that Lore never eats the sausage, instead letting it rot in her luggage until it begins to stink and becomes a burden on her conscience and all other children’s sensual experience; sharing a little bit of the foul taste of distance from her home and family with everyone she is traveling with. Ironically, the mother prepares a *Knackwurst* for her upon their reunion, which Lore eats in silence without complaining about her dislike of it.

4 The sausage as a metonymy

Instead of simply fulfilling the purpose of nourishment, the *Knackwurst* sausage eventually opens up a space within the narration that allows Segal as the narrator to express young Lore’s grief and the fear of uncertainty. Instead of eating the sausage as her mother had intended for her to do,

Lore saves the food for later, keeping a piece of home – the typical Austrian food – which bought her extra time with her parents before leaving, with her on her way into a strange future and unknown land.

By keeping the sausage, it becomes a metonymy for Lore’s suppressed emotions. The further away young Lore gets from home, the more the sausage decays, begins to smell, and finally becomes inedible. From being unappetizing to slowly starting to rot, the sausage takes up an essential part of the narration in place of young Lore’s feelings. At the same time, the sausage becomes an indicator of how far away from home – spatially and emotionally – Lore has already gotten on her journey. Besides the fact that the *Knackwurst* is not kosher food, which some of the girls are not afraid to express openly when the stinky sausage is found, it is also not what she really wants on her departure. Her mother running out of the house to buy it for her daughter only buys her more time with her family, with the mother risking being caught and arrested in the process. The more the sausage starts to smell on her journey, however, the further Lore gets away from her Fischamend home, and the harder it becomes to hide the stinking sausage from everybody else until it is finally found, which embarrasses the girl and allows her to express her sadness openly and in front of everybody else.

A relationship between one human and one inanimate object

The relationship between the sausage and the girl is an “extrinsic one” (Bredin 1984, 52), as Hugh Bredin articulates it. It is a relationship between ‘things’; one human and one inanimate object. In the sense of Bredin, the metonymy comes into existence as there is a “substitution of one verbal expression for another” (Bredin 1984, 49) in which the girl is replaced by the sausage with these expressions being, as Bredin explains the metonymic character, “related to one another within a web of connotative associations” (Bredin 1984, 49). The connotative associations are the sausage’s smell and the girl’s grief that is shifted onto the sausage. With its decay, the experience of grief is constantly expressed through the sausage’s odor, whereas the transposition of the girl’s feelings onto the sausage’s smell comes to an immediate halt when it is detected and thrown away.

In both versions of Segal’s texts, the chapter in the novel as well as the short story, food does not only fulfill the purpose of being eaten but allows for a more in-depth analysis of the literary text by opening up a literary space

that would not exist without the food reference for the sausage as a metonymy. On the one hand, the sausage allows for the discussion of emotions and follows Lore’s journey. On the other hand, it also appears again when Lore is reunited with her mother in England and is served *Knackwurst* by her mother in order to make the girl feel comfortable and ‘at home.’ Despite its decay and Lore’s dislike of it, the sausage allows her to feel connected to home, both during and after her journey.

The sausage allows to narrate grief without having to narrate grief directly.

In addition to that, the sausage also allows Segal to narrate grief without having to narrate her own grief directly, letting the sausage ‘speak’ for her. By following a smell, or rather being followed by a smell, we can connect to a sensual experience as readers that allows us to make sense of what happens to the girl, rather than having to imagine what happens to the young Jew having to escape the Holocaust. Alan L. Berger writes that “she [Segal] directs the reader’s attention to a group about which too little is known” (Berger 1992, 83) by writing about the child refugees from Austria. However, I would argue that she does not only draw attention to the event, but through fictionalizing her story, utilizing food as an element to which her readers can relate, she also brings a part of history closer to us that “represent the inexpressibly inhuman suffering of the victims, without doing injustice to that suffering” (Langer 1977, 1). And while memoirs are “subject to the power relationships between the narrator and interviewer, to issues of control, agency, ownership, trauma, and silences” (Craig-Norton 2019, 20), literature, as an overtly fictional account, does not need to pay attention to these pitfalls and can narrate an experience the way the writer seeks to express it. The fictional character of Segal’s ‘memory’ that places food in the foreground thus allows for a better understanding of and more space to narrate grief. Finally, by creating the perspective of a rotting object, the story allows enough distance for the reader to imagine what remains unimaginable, rather than attempting to imagine the unimaginable.

5 Conclusion

Segal’s story is not only a semi-fictional historical account of the *Kindertransport*, but also allows the reader to follow the tragic story of a young girl

into her uncertain freedom. Following young Lore and her sausage – and learning that it is the last piece of food she receives from her mother when leaving Vienna – the reader gets to imagine what it means for the girl to have to throw away a piece of food that is loaded with meaning and emotions, and a sense of home. Lore, having to leave her parents and family behind without knowing if and when she would see them again, becomes more and more bothered by the smell of the sausage that comes to signify her own emotions, the grief caused by the distance from home, the strange new surroundings she finds herself in, and the lack of familiarity of the new foods she gets to eat. By utilizing food as a metonymic element, the story is presented to the reader in a way that shifts the focus away from the person and onto the food, taking away some of the tragedy and almost narrating Segal’s escape in a comical manner when the sausage seems to become the focus. The comical element, however subversively present it may be, does not ever surface based on the tragic historical events the story is embedded in. The young girl’s journey becomes accessible to the reader via the representation of food, and the unimaginable historical event is made more palpable through the relation of food. However, despite the seemingly naïve account, using food as a focus allows Segal to write the story from the perspective of her younger self, expressing her grief, loss, and loneliness not through her own but the sausage’s story, opening up the possibility for her readers to follow her on her journey rather than confronting them with the tragedy that her personal history entails.

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