

The Double Writing of Agota Kristof and the New Europe

Martha Kuhlman,
Bryant College

At the turn of the 21st century, words such as “transnational,” “border” and “frontier” often appear in the titles of literary conferences: “Comparative Literature and Cultural Transnationalisms: Past and Future,” the American Comparative Literature Association, 1999; “Crossing Borders,” the International Association for Philosophy and Literature, 2000; “‘At the Edge’: Margins, Frontiers, Initiatives in Literature,” the International Comparative Literature Association 2003, not to mention numerous conferences on “globalization” or “world literature.” These conferences pose similar questions as they arise in a variety of different contexts: Does the transnational writer choose the language of the new country, use a translator, or only write for a native audience? How does a non-native speaker’s idiosyncratic use of the adopted language transform the creative possibilities of that language? And what themes does this transnational literature address?

“Transnational” cultural questions seem especially pertinent in the aftermath of the European revolutions of 1989, the formation of the European Union, and the new NATO.¹ In his introduction to an issue of the *Publications of the Modern Language Association* on “Literature and the Idea of Europe” (1993), Timothy Reiss reflects on the cultural implications of an expanded definition of Europe:

How might the lowering of national barriers affect literature and cultural life and, perhaps especially, what role might literature and the other arts play in fundamentally restructuring of what initially will be economic order and political organization? What might 'Europe' be within the broader sociopolitical and cultural boundaries implied?" (14)

An Albanian in Paris (Ismail Kadare), Indian writers in London (Hanif Kureishi, Salman Rushdie), a Croatian in Amsterdam (Dubravka Ugrešić), Algerians in France, or Turkish "Gastarbeiters" in Germany are only a few of the possible cultural combinations. Immigrants and exiles, through choice or necessity, echo the high moderns in some respects (Conrad in England, Joyce in Trieste, Rilke in Paris, Hemingway in Spain), drawing inspiration from new contexts, while venturing in other directions—perhaps more skeptical of universal claims, perhaps more "postmodern."

Agota Kristof, Hungarian born, living in Switzerland and writing in French, is one intriguing example of a "transnational" writer whose fiction embodies the contradictions of living between East and West.² Her trilogy of novels, *Le grand cahier* (The Notebook) (1986), *La preuve* (The Proof) (1988), and *Le troisième mensonge* (The Third Lie) (1991), written during the most tumultuous period in recent European history, has been translated into 15 languages. She won the Prix Adelph in 1986 for *Le grand cahier* and Le prix du livre international in 1992 for *Le troisième mensonge*. Although her novels have been translated into English, *The Notebook* (Grove 1988), *The Proof* (1991), *The Third Lie* (1996), Kristof's most vocal admirers are from France and Switzerland, where she currently resides. In 1991, *Le grand cahier* was placed on the baccalaureate exam in Neuchâtel, a formidable accomplishment for an author who arrived in Switzerland without any knowledge of French (Sarrey-Strack 182). A reviewer compared her to Agatha Christie in one paragraph and "a Marguerite Duras who came in from the cold, from the East" in the next (Bradeau 20). What is it about her prose that strikes a chord in Europe at this particular moment?

Crossing borders between East and West, through the Second World War, the Cold War and the 1989 revolutions, Kristof's novels hauntingly illustrate how the trauma of history is continually written, erased, and rewritten. Public history is read through private stories, one brutally interrupting and altering the course of the other—in French this parallel is quite obvious: *histoire*, a word that encompasses several contradictory meanings. According to *Le Petit Robert*, the first citation for “*histoire*” is equivalent to “*history*” in the sense most familiar to English speakers: a factual account of events on a grand scale, clashes between nations. At this level, “*histoire*” also connotes science and objectivity as in the study of “*natural history*.” But by the third citation, the definition veers off in the opposite direction, synonymous with “*récit*,” or “*conte*:” a story, a tale one would read to a child, or pure fiction as in the exclamation “*Allons, pas d’histoires!*” ‘Don’t tell me any stories!’ There are also “*histoires de famille*” ‘family affairs’ and “*histoires d’amour*” ‘love affairs.’ Kristof adeptly uses all of these connotations, exploring the friction between them to create unexpected and unusual twists in the narrative. I am primarily interested, however, in the intersection of the first two definitions: the slippage between story and history and the “double writing” it creates is the subject of this paper. What this might possibly mean in the context of the “new Europe” is a question to which I will return.

Le grand cahier, set in an unnamed foreign country during WWII, is narrated in an elliptical style stripped of any identifying proper nouns. Not knowing the precise details of geography and history is anxiety provoking, and the reader's natural inclination is to fill in the blanks. Since Kristof was born in Hungary and fled to the West in 1956, many critics conclude that her novels are set in Hungary or Austria.³ One reviewer of *Le troisième mensonge* concluded that Klaus, “must be in Hungary, the author's native country” (Fernandez 72). Another reviewer, reading *Le grand cahier*, drew similar inferences: the book takes place somewhere in the East, “perhaps on the border between Hungary and Austria (like Agota Kristof)” (Schmitt 11). But the novels do not necessarily demand this interpretation, even if they are partially based

on episodes from Kristof's biography.⁴ The absence of specific place designations lends the narrative a wider relevance to a number of countries on opposite sides of the Iron Curtain. In this respect, the trilogy functions in a broader sense as a parable of the division between Eastern and Western Europe.

Just as the time and location are left ambiguous, we do not learn the names of the two protagonists, identical twin brothers Claus and Lucas, until the second book in trilogy. By the third novel, aptly called *Le troisième mensonge*, the identities of the twins are switched, such that the name is continually unmoored from the twin it designates: Lucas, Claus, or Klaus-Lucas? The fact that Lucas and Claus are anagrams of each other serves to heighten this confusion. Every element in the story becomes interchangeable, unstable, and impossible to locate with any certainty, like the chess pieces that Lucas deftly manipulates: names, places, and relationships are signifiers that are reshuffled at will. The reader is left in the unsettling position of negotiating and deciding between conflicting versions of the same event. This gap in signification is what lends Kristof's fiction its force: as soon as you think you have understood everything, you discover that you understood nothing at all.

Le grand cahier, the first movement in this narrative fugue, is recounted in the present first person plural by identical twin brothers. Although the writing sounds deceptively naive, behind its simple sentences lie sophisticated designs.⁵ The reader is quickly thrown into a dizzying *mise-en-abyme* that accounts for the narrative's genesis: the twins keep a notebook of simple assignments that describe their life, assignments that become chapters in the book we are reading. Eliminating all subjective, vague or emotional words from the their writing, the twins limit themselves to "the faithful description of facts:"⁶

Nous écrivons: "Nous mangeons beaucoup de noix" et non pas "Nous aimons les noix," car le mot "aimer" n'est pas un mot sûr, il manque de précision et d'objectivité. (33)

We would write: "We eat lots of walnuts" and not "We love walnuts" because the word "love" isn't a reliable word, it lacks precision and objectivity. (29)

While the twins attempt to create a purely transparent language, their endeavor exposes the impossibility of the task. By alluding to the limitations of representation, the narrative provokes the reader's skepticism, but there is no route outside of the limits of language, no stable point of reference.

Even more disconcerting is the strange use of the first person plural "nous." Do the twins think and speak in unison? Where does one voice end and the other begin?⁷ Freud's essay on the uncanny contains a perceptive discussion of "doubles" that is particularly relevant to Kristof's fiction:

Thus we have characters who are to be considered identical because they look alike. This relation is accentuated by mental processes leaping from one of these characters to the other. Or it is marked by the fact that the subject identifies himself with someone else, so that he is in doubt as to which his self is, or substitutes an extraneous self for his own. In other words, there is doubling, dividing and interchanging of the self. And finally there is the constant recurrence of the same thing—the repetition of the same features or character-traits or vicissitudes, of the same crimes, or even the same names through several consecutive generations. (234)

The trilogy follows, in broad strokes, the relations outlined by Freud: in the first novel, there is no division between the twins in their actions, thoughts or words; in subsequent novels, each twin tells his separate story, invents stories, or attempts to pass as the other. And the stories all hinge on the repetition of a traumatic event: the passage of one twin across the border. Which twin escapes into a Western European country, and which one stays in the East? With each novel in the trilogy, the answer changes as the narration shifts from "nous" to "il" in *La preuve* and finally to "je" in *Le troisième mensonge*. A brief outline of the three books reveals the symmetry of multiple border crossings and shifts in perspective as they develop through the history of the 1989 revolutions:

cause his visa has expired. Just days before he is supposed to cross the border back to the West, he finds his brother, Klaus-Lucas, who is a writer. Klaus-Lucas pretends not to recognize his brother, insisting that he died long ago, and turns him away.

As these schemas visually demonstrate, the reader must contend with conflicting accounts that unfold over time—from WWII to the present—and space, crossing and re-crossing borders from East to West. Which story is accurate? Kristof has cleverly positioned the reader as the historian who must, however provisionally, differentiate between truth and falsehood. This brings us to the second part of Freud's quote—the repetition of “features, traits or crimes”—and to his most famous formulation from the essay on the uncanny. Quoting Schelling, Freud writes: “Unheimlich is the name for everything that ought to have remained . . . secret and hidden but has come to light” (224). These two strains of the uncanny are combined in the replaying of a crime that becomes the central pivot of the trilogy. The elements of the scene are always the same, but their placement and disposition shift: there is one child or two, a border between East and West, and a man who must cross a mine field to escape to the other side. What happens next is subject to interpretation, depending upon which perspective we occupy. In the following passages from *Le grand cahier* and *Le troisième mensonge*, there are three different accounts of the same scene:

Nous nous couchons à plat ventre derrière le grand arbre, nous bouchons nos oreilles avec nos mains, nous ouvrons la bouche. Il y a une explosion.

Nous courons jusqu'aux barbelés avec les deux autres planches et le sac de toile.

Notre Père est couché près de la seconde barrière.

Oui, il y a un moyen de traverser la frontière: c'est de faire passer quelqu'un devant soi.

Prenant le sac de toile, marchant dans les traces de pas, puis sur le corps inerte de notre Père, l'un de nous s'en va dans l'autre pays. (*Le grand cahier*, 191)

We lie face down behind the big tree, we cover our ears with our hands, we open our mouths.

There is an explosion.

We run to the barbed wire with the two other boards and the linen sack.

Father is lying behind the second fence.

Yes, there is a way to get across the frontier: it's to make someone else go first.

Picking up the linen sack, walking in the footprints and then over the inert body of our Father, one of us goes into the other country. (183)

L'homme marche devant, il n'a pas de chance. Près de la deuxième barrière, une mine saute et l'homme avec. Moi, je marche derrière lui, je ne risque rien. (Le troisième mensonge, 63)

The man walks in front and doesn't have a hope. Near the second barrier, a land mine goes off and takes him with it. I walk behind him and risk nothing. (44)

L'enfant traverse la frontière.

L'homme passe devant, l'enfant attend. Une explosion. L'enfant s'approche. L'homme est couché près de la deuxième barrière. Alors, l'enfant s'élançe. Marchant dans les traces de pas, puis sur son corps inerte de l'homme, il arrive de l'autre côté, il se cache derrière les buissons. (Le troisième mensonge, 86)

The child crosses the frontier.

The man goes first; the child waits. There is an explosion. The child approaches. The man is lying near the second barrier. Then the child makes his move. Walking in the man's footsteps, and then on his motionless body, he reaches the other side and hides behind some bushes. (61)

Placed side by side, these episodes are twisted variations on the same theme. How are we to compare these passages? Is the last version the "true" story simply by virtue of being the last? Across the cycle of the three novels, this event takes on the hallucinatory quality of a childhood trauma that returns under different guises, an interpretation that is supported by the fact that the twins have been excused from attending school due to a "psychological trauma" in *Le grand cahier*. And in *La preuve*, the twin Lucas claims that he has suffered a childhood trauma and has "chronic psychological problems" (28). Whether the incident was a case of cold parricide, the sheer opportunistic and cruel use of a stranger, or a story that was completely invented, the memory is too painful to bear.⁸

In *Le troisième mensonge*, Claus explains what he is writing about in his mysterious notebooks:

[J']essaie d'écrire des histoires vraies mais, à un moment donné, l'histoire devient insupportable par sa vérité même, alors je suis obligé de la changer . . . j'essaie de raconter mon histoire mais...je ne le peut pas, je n'en ai pas le courage, elle me fait trop de mal. Alors, j'embellis tout et je décris les choses non comme ils se sont passées, mais comme j'aurais voulu qu'elles se soient passées. (14)

I try to write true stories, but at a given point the story becomes unbearable because of its very truth, and then I have to change it . . . I try to tell my story but all of a sudden I can't—I don't have the courage, it hurts too much. And so I embellish everything and describe things not as they happened but the way I wish they had happened. (5)

The moment the story becomes too painful, the narrative machine stalls, breaks down, restarts.⁹ And if this were not complicated enough, the brothers' autobiographies are mirrored in the obsessive writing of other characters who are simultaneously creating their own fictions. All three novels contain jarring, self-reflexive moments that prevent the reader from becoming too comfortable with any particular story. In *La preuve*, Victor, the alcoholic, is writing a novel about how he cannot write a novel, and Mathias, Lucas' adopted handicapped son, is keeping an optimistic diary that has nothing to do with his real life experience, which is painful and humiliating.

Freud claims that the uncanny "is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and long established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression" (241). When we say that we are hiding a secret, we have the idiom—"keeping a skeleton in the closet"—which translates directly into French as well: "un squelette dans le placard." Kristof cleverly renders this metaphor literal in *Le grand cahier* when the twins, who witness their mother's death with their sister in her arms, undertake the grisly task of cleaning her bones and hiding them in the attic. Whatever is repressed returns to haunt the narrative as familiar details resurface in dif-

ferent contexts, continually evoking the feeling of déjà vu. We readers are left to fend for ourselves, drifting between *songe et mensonge* (Bradeau 20). In the absence of any other frame or orientation, we question whether what we are reading is “true,” since the act of writing and the process of composition is so central to the trilogy. Moreover, the characters’ acts of writing and censoring are replicated on a large scale by the state authorities, who are quietly constructing yet another version of events in the background.

Although it is never explicitly named, it is clear that the novels take place in a former Soviet satellite country. In *Le grand cahier*, we learn that after the “Liberators” come to power, no dissent is permitted, and people are imprisoned or “disappeared” for no reason. At the same time that we must travel through the uncertain terrain between truth and lie in the twins’ stories, the government is constructing its own truth-making machines; Klaus-Lucas, the author in *Le troisième mensonge*, recalls working for a official newspaper:

Ce que nous imprimons dans le journal est en contradiction totale avec la réalité. Nous imprimons tous les jours cent fois la phrase: “Nous sommes libres” mais dans les rues nous voyons partout des soldats d’une armée étrangère, tout le monde sait qu’il y a de nombreux prisonniers politiques, les voyages à l’étranger sont interdits. . . . (175)

What we print in the newspaper completely contradicts reality. A hundred times a day we print the phrase “We are free” but everywhere we see the soldiers of a foreign army, everyone knows that there are many political prisoners, trips abroad are forbidden. . . . (129)

In the two prior novels, Claus and Lucas are constantly finding themselves in trouble with the police because their papers are not “in order.” But the most violent collision between the twins’ narrative and the police occurs at the end of *La preuve*, where an official report states that everything we have just read is the fabrication of one brother, Claus. The entire manuscript is written in the same handwriting and the paper has not aged, placing the composition of the work in the prior six months, or the length of

Claus' stay in the town. If this is "true," then the entire content of *Le grand cahier* is nothing but a fiction within a fiction.

Over the course of the three novels, Claus and Lucas are caught in the process of writing and rewriting their story in a series of interlocking pieces that consume one another. Can the novels only be read in sequence, or do they stand alone? If we assume that each piece fits together like a collapsable telescope, then the last narrative frame presented in *Le troisième mensonge*, the story of the author Klaus-Lucas, accounts for everything that preceded it. What is "true" is contingent upon which novel you happen to be reading, if there is indeed one single truth to decipher: Kristof describes how the third novel distressed her readers "because one does not really discover the truth" (Sarrey-Strack 186). She wrote the novels one by one, without knowing beforehand how the triptych would fit together, at the same time that historical changes were taking place before and after the 1989 European revolutions. Thus it is difficult to accept a strictly linear, progressive reading of the trilogy since she invented the plot as she went along.

I read Kristof's elegant but devastating narrative traps less an exhortation to discover the "truth of the matter" than as a warning of how malleable the past actually is, since reconstructing and/or rewriting history is one of the most urgent problems following the 1989 revolutions. Although François Lyotard is credited with questioning the "metanarratives" of historical truth, one could argue that this "postmodern" problem is all too familiar to Central European countries who must reconstruct their history after decades of Communist subterfuge. Moreover, European countries east and west still argue vehemently about how to memorialize the victims of the Second World War. The outpouring of books on Hitler in the late 1990s, the Daniel Libeskind's Jewish Museum in Berlin, "revisionist" histories of the Holocaust, the Holocaust restitution cases against Swiss banks, trials for former Nazis in France, and even the Oscar for "Best Foreign Film" to Roberto Benigni for *Life is Beautiful* in 1999 are just a few manifestations of these cultural and political struggles.¹⁰ A second wave of historical debate about how to interpret and re-

member the years under Communism is now beginning to reach public awareness ten years after the fact.

One of the eeriest legacies of the Communist era is the vast libraries of files collected by the secret police. In Hungary, Poland, the Czech Republic, and the former East Germany, the police systematically coerced, blackmailed or fabricated files of people's lives in order to intimidate and control them. This was especially prevalent in the 1950s, the time period alluded to, however elliptically, in Kristof's novels. At the height of Stalinist repression in Hungary, the secret police were tracking 1.5 million of Hungary's 10 million population (Jordan 1). Now that these files have been opened (1997 in Hungary and Czech Republic, 1999 in Poland), the former Eastern block countries are facing an identity crisis of multi-national proportions. How should these files, which constitute a kind of phantom double life, be evaluated? They are neither history, since most of them contain false information used to manipulate networks of people, nor mere "stories," since others are real records of surveillance and betrayal even among family and friends (Holley 1). Perhaps because the transition from Communism to post-Communism was peaceful, the backlash against crimes committed pre-1989 has not been particularly vindictive. Even former President Jaruzelski, the foe of Solidarity, is living in comfortable retirement.

Kristof's novels also speak to the changing definition of Europe as a whole. By crossing and recrossing borders between East and West, the twins are an allegory for the division of Europe, which constitute two halves of the same story (Bacholle 110).¹¹ This separation also has a real referent in Kristof's life, given that her brother, Attila Kristof, lives in Hungary and writes detective fiction. Thinking about the changing conception of European culture, Derrida writes:

What is proper to a culture is not to be identical to itself. Not to not have an identity, but not to be able to identify itself, to be able to say "me" or "we;" to be able to take the form of a subject only in the non-identity to itself or, if you prefer, only in the difference with itself. There is no culture or cultural identity without this difference with itself. . . . (90)

A culture cannot define itself in a vacuum, and needs difference and variation in order to exist. Derrida's quote enacts the confusion inherent in the articulation of a fluid, differential subject position. Kristof's fiction performs an analogous feat in the narrative ambiguity between "we," "he," and "I." The West requires the East to maintain its identity intact, until the defining terms within Europe shift and reform into new configurations, a process that it still taking place through the European Union, NATO, and cross-cultural exchange.¹²

Timothy Garton Ash, commentator on European affairs and the author of the seminal essay "Does Central Europe exist?" proclaimed that this question can finally be answered affirmatively. And the admission of the Czech Republic, Poland and Hungary to NATO on March 12, 1999 would lend further credence to that view. All the same, there was an insistent tone in the speeches that day that conveyed some lingering insecurity. The audience in Independence, Missouri attending the NATO signing ceremony must have been perplexed by Polish Prime Minister Jerzy Buzek's triumphant claim that admission to NATO would enable Poland to "overcome the geopolitical curse laid upon us since the 17th century." NATO is as much a symbol, the full implications of which are not yet realized, as it is a military alliance now that the Cold War has lifted. "Hungary has come home," declared Janos Martonyi, the Hungarian foreign minister, "we are back in the family" (Apple). Yes, the former Soviet satellite countries have come home, but there are still skeletons in the closet.

Notes

1. Drawing upon the work of Gayatri Spivak and Lawrence Venuti, Emily Apter states that the term "transnational" "places greater emphasis on the transference of cultural capital from non-Western to non-Western nation, whereas the term 'global' tends to assume a metropolitan circuitry of cultural distribution" (6). Although this paper concerns Europe, the supposed epicenter of metropolitan culture, it is important to acknowledge that even on the continent there are different degrees of "European" identity depending upon whether

a country belongs to the European Union, or is still on the waiting list. As of the writing of this article, thirteen countries have applied for admittance to the EU: Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, Malta, Cyprus, and Turkey. With three exceptions (Romania, Bulgaria, and Turkey), these countries are scheduled to enter the EU in time for the European Parliamentary elections in June 2004. Since it is doubtful that every one of these languages will be adopted as an official language of the EU, these countries are in the "linguistic predicaments of minorities and microminorities" (Apter 6). See Emily Apter's introduction, "Translation in a Global Market," in a special issue she edited for *Public Culture* 13 (2002): 1-12.

2. When asked about her nationality, Kristof hesitates: "[J]e me considère quand même comme Hongroise, en gros parce qu'on ne peut pas nier, mais . . . je ne sais pas . . . Suisse aussi, un peu Française aussi parce que j'écris en français" 'I still think of myself as Hungarian, mostly because one can't deny it, but . . . I don't know . . . Swiss also, and a little French too because I write in French' (Sarrey-Strack 190)

3. Kristof's attitude towards her trajectory from Hungary to Austria, and finally to Switzerland, reveals the essentially arbitrary nature of her itinerary: "Ce n'était pas vraiment un choix, c'était plutôt un hasard. J'étais par hasard en Suisse francophone, sinon j'aurais appris l'allemand . . . j'aurais écrit en allemand" 'It wasn't really a choice, it was just chance. I ended up in French-speaking Switzerland, otherwise I would have learned German . . . I would have written in German' (Zand 21).

4. Kristof explains that the trilogy, especially the first novel, is based upon her own experiences: "Quand j'ai commencé *Le grand cahier*, j'ai pensé à un de mes frères et à moi . . . C'était mes souvenirs d'enfance que je voulais écrire dans *Le grand cahier* . . . Ce n'est pas tout à fait autobiographique, seulement en partie" 'When I began *Le grand cahier*, I was thinking about one of my brothers and myself . . . I wanted to write about my childhood memories . . . It's only partially autobiographical' (Zand 21).

5. For another perspective, see Ruth Mésavage's analysis of the trilogy and Kristof's later novel *Hier* as variations on themes drawn from the Bible and Greek mythology.

6. Kristof's idiosyncratic French, which resembles the beginning exercises of students of the language, is both a conscious stylistic choice and a mark of her own cultural difference, since she did not know the language at all when she immigrated to Switzerland. She transforms what might initially appear to be a handicap into an advantage, since her oddly spare sentences sound like the words of the precocious child characters she is portraying.

7. Kristof's foreign perspective of French aids her in discovering unusual turns of phrase that exploit the inherent strangeness of the language, an effect that is achieved through her unusual and disconcerting use of the first person plural *nous*. Michelle Bacholle points to a key passage in which the brothers are beaten by a policeman when they profess to know nothing about the servant girl's injury: "Notre corps est inondé de sueur, de sang, d'urine, d'excréments" 'Our bodies are covered in sweat, blood, urine and excrement' (qtd. in Bacholle 76). If there were two bodies, it would be idiomatic to state "*nos* corps," rather than the singular "notre." Based upon this ambiguity and other hints, Bacholle argues that the narrative can be explained as one schizophrenic consciousness rather than two (86).

8. Cathy Caruth's account of trauma in narrative is relevant to understanding the uncanny nature of the border crossing, retold twice over: "Is the trauma the encounter with death, or the ongoing experience of having survived it? At the core of these stories, I would suggest, is thus a kind of double telling, the oscillation between a crisis of death and the correlative crisis of life: between the story of the unbearable nature of an event and the story of the unbearable nature of its survival" (7). Her invocation of a "double telling" corresponds not only with the twin narrators, but also with the two versions of the crossing presented in *Le grand cahier* and *Le troisième mensonge*.

9. Kristof also speaks about the difficulty of writing in relation to her own work: "On parle de l'angoisse du papier, mais je l'ai vraiment cette angoisse-là. Il y a des jours où ma machine à l'écrire, je ne veux même pas la voir, il faut vraiment que je me force pour m'asseoir. Et puis, j'ai même de la difficulté à relire ce que j'ai écrit, ça ne me plaît pas du tout, j'ai peur de ça" 'You hear about writer's block, but I really suffer from this anxiety. There are days when I don't even want to see my typewriter, and I really have to force myself to sit down in front of it. And then I even have trouble rereading what I've written—I don't like it at all, I'm afraid of it.' (Sarrey-Strack 188). Writing does not

alleviate her suffering; in fact, the process of writing exacerbates it: "Non, ça ne soulage pas, on se sent plus mal après" 'No, it does not bring relief, I feel even worse afterwards' (Côté C4).

10. The most famous of these books is *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* by Daniel Jonah Goldhagen (NY: Vintage Books, 1997). For an overview of recent books on Hitler, see "Working Toward the Führer" by Gordon Craig in the March 18th 1999 issue of *The New York Review of Books*. Craig reviews *Germans in Nazis*, Peter Fritzsche; *Hitler, 1889-1936: Hubris*, Ian Kershaw; *Hitler's Vienna: A Dictator's Apprenticeship*, Brigitte Hamann; *Where Ghosts Walked: Munich's Road to the Third Reich*, David Clay Large.

11. Kristof's novel *Hier* [Yesterday] (1995) continues the theme of displacement from East to West through the story of an immigrant from an Eastern European country who works in a clock factory in the West.

12. At the NATO meeting in Prague, November 2002, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Slovenia, Slovakia, Bulgaria, and Romania were invited to join the alliance.

Works Cited

- Apple, R. W. "A Joyous End of Long Trek: Joining West Crowns Struggles for Identity." *The New York Times*. 13 Mar. 1999: A1+.
- Apter, Emily. "Translation in a Global Market." *Public Culture* 13 (2001): 1-12.
- Ash, Timothy Garton. "The Puzzle of Central Europe." *The New York Review of Books*. Mar. 18 1999: 18-23.
- Bacholle, Michèle. *Un passé contraignant: Double bind et transculturation*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000. 71-127.
- Braudeau, Michel. "Frontières perdus." *Le Monde*. 27 Sept. 1991: 20.
- Caruth, Cathy. *Unclaimed Experience: Trauma, Narrative and History*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1996. 1-10.
- Côté, Lucie. "Les souvenirs obsédants d'Agota Kristof." *La Presse*, Montréal, Dimanche 15 Sept. 1991: C4.
- Derrida, Jacques. "The Other Heading: Memories, Responses, and

Responsibilities." *Publications of the Modern Language Association: Literature and the Idea of Europe*. (103) 1993: 89-93.

Fernandez, Dominique. "Le silence des jumeaux." *Nouvel Observateur*. 12 Sept. 1991: 76.

Freud, Sigmund. "The Uncanny." *Collected Papers*. Ed. and trans. James Stachey with Anna Freud. Vol. XVII. London: Hogarth Press, 1955. 217-52.

"Histoire." *Le Robert: dictionnaire de la langue française*. Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1993.

Holley, David. "Three Nations Face Evils of Red Past: With NATO membership in the wings, Poles, Hungarians and Czechs attempt to scrub away the stains of the totalitarian era and determine if anyone should still be punished." *The Los Angeles Times*. 18 Feb. 1999: A1+.

Jordon, Michael J. "Spy Files of Communists Still Put Hungary on Edge/Reluctance to release police records on individuals may stunt democratic progress." *Christian Science Monitor*. 13 Nov. 1997: 1.

Kristof, Agota. *Le grand cahier*. Paris: Editions du seuil, 1986.

— . *La preuve*. Paris: Editions du seuil, 1988.

— . *Le troisième mensonge*. Paris: Editions du seuil, 1991.

— . *Hier*. Paris: Editions du seuil, 1995.

— . *The Notebook*. Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Grove Press, 1988.

— . *The Proof*. Trans. David Watson. New York: Grove Press, 1991.

— . *The Third Lie*. Trans. Marc Romano. New York: Grove Press, 1996.

Mésavage, Ruth. "Mythe et mensonge dans Hier d'Agota Kristof." *Francographies*. 6. (1997): 101-10.

Reiss, Timothy. "Introduction: Literature and the Idea of Europe." *PMLA: Literature and the Idea of Europe*. 103: 1 1993: 14-29.

Sarrey-Strack, Colette. "Agota Kristof: écrivain étrangère de langue française." *Lendemain* 19. 75-76 (1994): 182-190.

Zand, Nicole. "Changer de peau." *Le Monde*. 12 Sept. 1991: 21A.