

SHADOWS THAT BEGET:  
AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION, MEMORY AND  
FRAGMENTATION OF THE SELF IN “MUTTERSTERBEN” AND  
“SCHATTENFROH”

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**Abstract:** This paper examines the convergence of autobiographical fiction, memory, and the fragmented self in Michael Lentz’s *Muttersterben* (2025) and *Schattenfroh* (2025); works that radically and fundamentally metamorphosed as well as challenged the boundaries of self-representation and narrative structure, especially in contemporary literature. Positioned within a postmodern macrocosm, predominantly marked by ontological instability and futility, Lentz’s works inhabit a liminal space between autobiography and fiction, oscillating between personal confession and literary performance. *Muttersterben* is a reflection of the protagonist and Lentz’s intimate confrontation with maternal and individual loss, while *Schattenfroh* expounds this devastation into an expansively surreal metafictional exploration in which Niemand is imprisoned to inscribe his “brainfluid” into existence. In both of these works, Lentz deconstructs the “autobiographical pact”, transforming writing into an act of remembrance as well as mourning, that simultaneously constructs and negates the self. Drawing on the theoretical frameworks of the ethics of self-insertion/narration (Butler, Derrida), Postmemory (Hirsh), and Melancholia (Kristeva), this research situates Lentz’s writings into archives of grief, dispersed into language, form, and narrative performance. The focus would be on showcasing the paradoxical nature of loss as both an impetus of grief and expression, and the very force that disrupts coherence, leading to a rupture of discontinuity despite verbal excess, since giving an account of oneself, however thickly or thinly veiled, is constitutive of absence, belatedness, and lack. This paper contends that the aforementioned works resist closure, challenge fidelity of representation, and posit writing in loss. By relying on grief, individual as well as collective, and using it as an act of aesthetic, narrative, and linguistic invention, Lentz tries to reconstruct memory and self from ruins.

**Keywords:** autobiographical fiction, memory, fragmentation, narratology, metafiction, self

## INTRODUCTION

In the final exhalations of the twentieth and the twenty-first century postmodernism, there have been numerous metamorphoses, especially for creativity, resistance, and the ontological crisis that exists at the recess of being. This conjunction led to the act of writing serving as an outlet for expression. There is a liminal space between testimony and invention, memory and imagination, self and other. This liminality, this third space, is where autobiographical fiction resides, as an integral part of contemporary expression.

This research paper aims to explore the aforementioned convergence of self-narratology, memory, and the fragmentation of the self, most prominent in Michael Lentz's sprawling magnum opus, *Schattenfrob* (2018), in which Niemand (Nobody) is forced to write his "gehirnwasser" (brain fluid) into existence by his captor, the eponymous *Schattenfrob*. This meta-narrative was thematically preceded by *Muttersterben* (2025), which is a fixation on death and loss, predominantly the death and loss of a mother. Both works are deeply self-reflexive, blurring the lines between reality and fiction, along with pushing the boundaries of narratology itself.

Ricocheting between autobiography and fiction, akin to the oscillation of a pendulum, Lentz's writing makes the reader question the reliability of memory as well as self-representation, whether accidental or deliberate, conscious or unconscious, especially from an ethical perspective. When he writes, it is not just a mere recount or reminisce, but a lingual performance, with trauma at its very centre, which Cathy Caruth terms "the unclaimed experience", which recurs through its belatedness, especially through language, and a compulsion to convey and express (Caruth 2016, 4). *Muttersterben* chronicles the death of the protagonist's mother, written shortly after the death of Lentz's own mother, revolving around an individual's loss, while *Schattenfrob*, on the other hand, extends that loss into an abstract, intertextual and referential explorative meditation on identity, shadow, survival, and articulation through the act of writing. "One calls this writing"

(Lentz 2025, 19, 1001), reads the first and last sentence of this behemoth of a novel, and this jarringly ceaseless articulation can only be explored through Julia Kristeva's "black sun" of melancholia, where language is one of the primary substitutes for the object of loss: "Naming suffering, exalting it, dissecting it into its smallest components—that is doubtless a way to curb mourning" (Kristeva 1989, 97). Both narratives uncover the manner in which mourning, especially through lingual experimentation, serves as a mediator for bereavement, fragmentation, repetition, and discontinuity, mirroring the cracks that appear in the metaphorical vinyl of our being, as a result of loss.

This paper contends that the self-reflexive and self-referential authorship, if situated within the contemporary theoretical frameworks of postmodern autobiography, mourning, loss, and trauma, becomes an aesthetic practice and a space for self-fragmentation as well as self-invention, curating archives of emotions and narratives that insist on the performative nature of loss and resist closure, deconstructing and reconstructing memory and self from ruins.

## SIGNIFICANCE

This paper constructs a triad of three crucial critical frameworks: autobiography, memory, and trauma. Paired with contemporary German literature, Lentz's work, which holds a distinct and prestigious place, bridges personal voice with literary experimentation. While writing in a manner that resists the stable and coherent structure of autobiography, this paper explores the fragmented and self-referential form of autobiographical fiction, where the author is an inextricable part of the work. Although autobiography hinges on an intrinsic pact between the author, narrator, and reader (Lejeune 1989, 14), Lentz subverts this contract by offering a simultaneous affirmation and destabilisation of his "I",

where it does not exist as a singularity, since it is constantly being written and rewritten through verbal and narrative instability.

Writing is an arcane form of expression, especially when it is reconfigured through autobiography as an act of mourning. In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Judith Butler emphasises the inability of the self to account for itself, since relation and recognition are how we always constitute identity (Butler 2005, 21). Lentz's narrators embody this inability, since their attempts to articulate and convey their loss showcase the impossibility and inability to complete a self-account. When it comes to trauma, it is not only a psychological event, but it extends to culture too, in the form of art, performance, and narratives, that are preserved for the self as well as for others (Cvetkovich 2003, 7). Additionally, memory and narratives written about and through it serve as archives, and they may take shape or form in accordance with the emotional tone. Lentz's works, through textual performance, reshape the suffering of one singularity into the suffering of a whole, intentionally and unintentionally stitching grief into the thread of every word and silence. The resulting "postmemory" (Hirsch 2012, 22) is not shaped by direct experiences, but by reconstruction through imagination, and an affective transmission.

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The central objective is to explore the manner in which Michael Lentz's *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfrob* serve as manifestations of the intersectional overlap of autobiography, memory, and fragmentation, leading to a fictional autobiography. The primary objectives are as follows:

- Analyse the narrative and lingual strategies used by Lentz (fragmentation, repetition, experimentation, metafiction, and ekphrasis), and the expression of trauma and mourning.

- Probe the boundaries between truth and fiction, personal loss and collective loss, selfhood and other, from the perspective of autobiographical fiction.
- Contribute to an understanding of the relationship between narratology and memory through the lens of fragmentation, performance, and loss, in terms of self-writing.

### RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This paper will revolve around the following questions:

- How does Lentz use fiction as a form of autobiography as a mediator for his experience and expression?
- In what ways do narrative fragmentation, intertextuality, and self-referential insertions portray loss, memory, and identity?
- How do *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* create autobiographical fiction, reconfiguring the representation and presence of the author in their works?

The aforementioned questions will frame this paper in a triad with writing, memory, and trauma, placing great emphasis on the text's engagement with the self and the collective.

### RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper will employ a qualitative methodology, based on textual analysis, after a close reading of the works. Drawing on theoretical frameworks that converge complementary domains, this research uses *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* to explore fiction as a form of autobiography, negotiating trauma and loss through narratology and language, using fiction as autobiography. Since the primary methodology involves a close reading of the text, the focus would

be on the narrative structure, forms of syntax, literal and thematic repetitions, intertextuality and ekphrasis, lingual deliberation, and overall experimentation. To strengthen this approach, suitable and applicable secondary sources will be used, theorising Lentz's writing in terms of multiple dynamic processes of loss and subsequent substitution. This will provide fertile ground to critically engage with Lentz's self-referential, self-construction, and self-erasure forms of narratology to conjure and dissolve his being.

### THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

The theoretical frameworks for this paper involve an integration of narratology, postmodernism, trauma, and memory in order to curate a multifaceted understanding of Lentz's autobiographical fiction. In the context of this paper, the focus will be on writing, which serves as a repository as well as "archives of experiences" and feelings, as well as trauma (Cvetkovich 2003, 7). The writings of Michael Lentz, especially in *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh*, are the personification of this grief into a textual archive, using various literary and linguistic devices to convey it. After loss, we feel a compulsion to express, and this expression can take numerous forms. In *Writing History, Writing Trauma*, Dominick LaCapra provides a distinction between a compulsion to repeat trauma, in order to "work through" it, which can either lead to paralysis or catharsis (LaCapra 2014, 144). This is extended further into the theorisation of memory into its transmission across generations (Hirsch 2012, 22), which is a nod to Lentz's maternal and paternal loss, simultaneously inheriting and losing structures of memory, whether individual or collective.

After these respective deaths, Lentz, instead of dwelling or lamenting, turns this lost object into an exploration of his self, whether emotional, metaphorical, or linguistic, and transforms the works into testimony as well as coffins for his parents. This aligns with Kristeva's contention that melancholy turns the lost object inwards and gives a linguistic shape to mourning (Kristeva 1989, 12).

Derrida, in contrast, reframes this mourning into an encounter with alteration from the perspective of ethics. He posits that the other, what resides within, can never truly be externalised, and exists as an impossibility (2003, 44). Despite this acknowledgement, Lentz's prose performs a relentless effort to portray his loss as an absence which is both generative and looming. The motif of shadow, which can be derived from the title of *Schattenfroh*, literalises this spectre, which stands at the periphery as well as the centre of his writing.

"De-facement", which is a notion given by Paul de Man, and "fragmented self-portraiture", which is a notion given by Roland Barthes, traverse the unity and disjunction of the autobiographical self and subject, which mirrors Lentz's usage of a disjointed narrative voice in both works, and the subsequent failure to convey. Even though Lejeune provides the integral relation between author and reader (Lejeune 1989, 14), Lentz undermines it to a great extent, but this aligns with the conceptualisation of writing as an act of performance, where identity is constructed within dogmas and cultural systems (Smith and Watson 2010, 16), providing a hybrid and holistic understanding of Lentz's textual and literal selves, which exist in the social dimensions of memory, constructed through self-personhood (Halbwachs 1992, 38), elevated by the usage of irony, metafiction, and intertextuality, making the selves into the subject and object of representation.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

The convergence of autobiographical fiction, memory, and the fragmented self-cultivates a narratology that is defined by its position within postmodern and post-postmodern contexts. In continuation of these contexts, Michael Lentz's writing stands dreadfully distinct, pushing the boundaries and limits of linguistics and conceptuality of what a novel constitutes. Both *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* are daring experiments in the expression of form and emotion, especially grief, destabilising the voice of the author, and

dissolving the boundaries between fiction and nonfiction. These texts, therefore, inhabit a space of liminality between confession from the recess of the soul and invention that is meant to be read and wept, becoming the manifestation of what contemporary critics may refer to as a performative, discontinuous, broken-down, and desolate landscape that is fraught with the inevitable shadow of the creator. In order to further contextualise and situate these works, especially from a critical perspective, this literature review synthesises relevant holistic scholarship on autobiography, narratology, self-representation, trauma, and memory, amplifying Lentz's place amongst such works.

Akin to all roads that lead to Rome, the conversation regarding autobiographical fiction must begin with Philippe Lejeune's concept of the autobiographical pact, which orbits around the perceived identity between the author and the readers, allowing them to distinguish between reality and fiction based on factors that are external to the text (Lejeune 1989, 9). The primary limitations of this pact, being the presumption of objectivity, a sense of coherence, and the fidelity of representation, have led to a fracture in this model. Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson have observed that modern forms of autobiographical writing and narratives go beyond, and foreground this inherent textual constructedness, and acknowledge the innate instability of selfhood, since it is not fixed or rooted to a singularity, thereby resisting the need to write with transparency, completeness, and factuality (Smith and Watson 2010, 18). In accordance with this defiance, Lentz's works contribute to it with full rigour. In *Muttersterben*, the autobiographical elements are reflected through the linguistic inarticulation and fragmentation, resulting from emotional intensity and loss, which further complicates the conventional form of expectation that an autobiography is supposed to reveal the self of the author. *Schattenfroh*, on the other hand, dismantles the pact in its entirety, and the very presence of Niemand ushers the erasure of identity, rather than its assertion, foregrounding the foundational impossibility for self-representation.

This aforementioned deconstructive approach, which is an amalgam of autobiography and fiction, can be categorised as autofiction, enabling writers to explore emotional truth while not being overly occupied with factual accuracy. Ever since Serge Dubrovsky coined the term, scholars have pointed out the tendency of autofiction authors to merge the contexts of their traumas with their internal crises, particularly regarding identity. Lentz's oscillation between personal confession and surreal journeys resonates and complements this framework, and similar to historical and contemporary writers like Marcel Proust, James Joyce, Karl Ove Knausgård, Annie Ernaux, and others, his work showcases usage of distortion, fragmentation, experiments with the narrative form, and divergence from conventional writing.

When it comes to self-representation, Paul de Man's concept of "de-facement" contends that autobiographical modes of writing inevitably and inherently erase the very self that they were aiming to portray and paint in the first place, resulting in the presentation of a constructed identity. Similarly, Roland Barthes describes this modality of writing as a "fragmented self-portrait", rather than an integrated whole. Both of these terminologies and notions further exemplify how both *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfroh* present identity as a perpetually dissolving series of fragments laden with narrative attempts that continue to fail consolidation, instead of a stable and fixed picture.

Like most works of writing, Lentz's autobiographical fictions cannot be parted from trauma. Cathy Caruth, one of the most notable names in trauma studies, argues that trauma is characterised and defined by its belatedness and recurrence, since it is "the unclaimed experience" that returns to haunt, insistently adamant to be processed through, but refusing to assimilate (Caruth 2016, 5). The nonlinear and recursive nature of *Muttersterben* embodies this broken temporality and results in a narrative that is plagued with repetitions and sensory fragmentation, all presented in a non-chronological form. Here, trauma's resistance to assimilation becomes the formative theme that governs and moulds the writing.

When paired with Julia Kristeva's conclusions in *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), the understanding of mourning extends beyond mere psychological scars to a lack of the tongue. For Kristeva, the production of melancholia occurs when the initial object of loss cannot be emotionally and symbolically substituted; language, then, becomes the sole means of survival, and by clinging to it, a misshapen form takes place in the void that is created by loss (Kristeva 1989, 19). The protagonists in both of Lentz's works suffer from and enact this loss, as observed through their dialogue and the dense, experimental, fragmented, and repetitive prose. Here, these linguistic and narrative forms do not function solely as stylistic and aesthetic choices or indulgences, but as symbols of mourning, thinly veiled attempts to convey and put into words the grief that substitutes for the lost maternal as well as paternal presence(s).

In that same vein, Dominick LaCapra proposes two distinctions of behaviour when dealing with trauma, namely "acting out" and "working through", both of which permeate the oeuvre of Lentz. The former refers to the meticulous and compulsive repetition of trauma, which leads to the entrapment of the subject, and the latter, to an acceptance and mourning that empowers the subject to process, understand, engage with, and integrate the trauma into their consciousness (LaCapra 2014, 5). In *Schattenfrob*, Niemand's subjugation to forced writing of *Schattenfrob* through his "brain fluid" results in a forcefully compelled reiteration, since he is trapped within the very narrative that he is creating. Thus, for Lentz, trauma works as imprisonment as well as the force of creation.

The writings of Lentz, therefore, serve as an "archive of feelings", a notion put forth by Ann Cvetkovich, extending trauma beyond the psyche, and stressing the manner in which emotional responses and experiences are the primary underpinnings of artistic forms and creations (Cvetkovich 2003, 50). Lentz's repositories of personal grief, and their subsequent transformation into fragmented and experimental narratives, where language, structure, and form embody as well as carry their remnants and aftereffects. The death of his mother, and then his father, the collapse of familial memory

and collective loss, all are not merely present in the narratives, but woven into the very fabric and texture of the writing itself.

Loss itself is a relic of the past, but emotionally, it defies temporality. Marianne Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" describes this crucial notion that may be transmitted from one generation to another, while being shaped by their subjective experiences and lives, resulting in an imaginative reconstruction of something that may or may not have happened (Hirsch 2012, 37). While *Muttersterben* is a direct account and/or recount of maternal loss, it is not merely personal, since it exceeds the gravity of the loss into inherited stories, scripts of cultures, and reverberations of language, engaging with an understanding of familial loss and emotional rupture. *Schattenfroh* is a requiem to death and to the shadow of fathers that persists in white light too, while being mediated through historical and cultural artefacts and intertextuality.

To complement "postmemory", Maurice Halbwachs' theory of collective trauma acts as the ideal arbitrator. Trauma, even when individual and private, is dependent on recall and narration within shared emotional, social, and cultural frameworks (Halbwachs 1992, 38). Lentz's writing accentuates this dynamic as the protagonists' memories are reformed and shaped by various rituals of mourning, lingual articulations that have been inherited, and the intertextual allusions that further place those memories, as well as experiences from a microcosm to a macrocosm of cultural, historical, and emotional labyrinth. Notably in *Schattenfroh*, where Niemand's suffering takes place within mythic, historical, literary, and metaphorical traditions and understandings of shadowed existence and identities.

Lentz's postmodern forms of writing, brimming with narratological and experimental narratives, usage of dissonance, recursion, cyclicity, and fragmentation, are means to probe identity as well as ideology, since his writing is ontological in its concern with being itself, and the immanent dissolution, and multiplication within language. Metafiction, naturally, is central to *Schattenfroh*. Linda Hutcheon defines metafiction as follows:

(...) issues such as those of narrative form, of intertextuality, of strategies of representation, of the role of language, of the relation between historical fact and experiential event, and, in general, of the epistemological and ontological consequences of the act of rendering problematic that which was once taken for granted by historiography—and literature (Hutcheon 2003, 5).

Here, fiction foregrounds its own constructedness to covertly or overtly talk about the processes of meaning-making, aiding in the exploration of ethics, and the impossibility of writing the self. The looped opening and closing lines — “One calls this writing”— serve as the overarching metanarrative, fixating on the compulsive failure of writing.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself* (2005), Judith Butler explores this aforementioned dimension from an ethical perspective, arguing that the self can never fully narrate itself, because it is always constituted in relation to Others and social structures (2005, 21). Lentz’s narrators, marked by this incompleteness, exemplify it through their attempts to articulate grief, thereby exposing the fundamental lack of self-knowledge. Similarly, Jacques Derrida, in *The Work of Mourning* (2003), extends this notion, contending that mourning itself is structured around an internalised Other who can never be fully externalised or realised (2003, 81). Writing, then, becomes a trace of this absence—the shadow outlining the centre of identity. The very title of *Schattenfroh* (shadow-glad), encapsulates this paradox: the shadow is a manifestation of absence and loss, yet it sublimates into artistic creation.

Fragmentation, therefore, whether lingual or ontological, works as something far greater than a stylistic signature; it becomes the architecture that stands at the very core of Lentz’s autofictional vision. By placing emphasis on multiplicity, discontinuity, and a decentered sense of subjectivity, Lentz amplifies the rupture to the point where voices dissolve, memories fracture, and identities blur into a residue that leaves neither colour nor taste. The protagonists, and by extension, Lentz, become liminal figures, caught between presence and absence, memory and forgetting, self and shadow. Neither factual nor invented, neither memoir nor fiction, neither

written nor unwritten, neither constructed nor deconstructed, caught in a curve of their own making.

## ANALYSIS

Michael Lentz's *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfrob* are at the forefront of the most demanding, self-invigorating, and experimental works in contemporary literature. Even though there are tonal, narrative, and scalar differences in both works, there is a mutually converging engagement with autobiographical fiction, the fragmentation of memory, and the fracture of the speaking "I." Throughout both of these works, Lentz is able to curate a literary space that is not a coherent source of narrative authority or totalitarianism, but a scarred, broken, and porous rhizomatic assemblage formed through loss, grief, repetition, and coercion. This analysis argues that *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfrob* constitute complementary explorations of the fragmentation of the self and, by extension, whether intentional or unintentional, conscious or unconscious, the autobiographical subject, and the performative staging of the self as something that is perpetually produced and undone in the shadow of itself. By conjunction, they form a diptych in which grief, mourning, melancholy, trauma, and language subvert the boundary between what is lived and what is not, eventually, revealing autofiction as a medium which exposes, rather than resolves, the crisis of selfhood.

## AUTOBIOGRAPHICAL FICTION AS EXPOSURE AND UNDOING

Traditionally, autobiographical fiction ricochets between self-revelation and self-production. This tension is further radicalised and fuelled by Lentz with his assertion that no autobiographical "self" exists prior to being narrated or made part of the work;

instead, it is through emotions, particularly those of grief, loss, and linguistic associations amongst them and the rupture that produces a subject that is able to speak, but not precisely what it wants. In *Muttersterben*, the protagonist constantly tries to recount the death of his mother, which ends up becoming an act of disintegration, rather than consolidation. The prose showcases the matter-of-fact reaction of the protagonist upon hearing about his mother's death: "On the twenty-first of August, nineteen-ninety-eight, at around eight-thirty-three, Father called to make the announcement: 'Mother died at around eleven-fifty last night.' I went back to bed and continued my reading of the duck comic that'd been interrupted the previous night. Mother's disappearance had been expected for a long time" (Lentz 2025, 37). This inability to process or grieve, and the immediacy with which the protagonist tries to distract himself, mirrors the reaction of Camus' protagonist in *The Stranger* (1942), and the compulsive syntactic structures. The book performs bereavement not as a mere event or universal happening, but as a structural wound that severs the very capacity of the narrator to articulate his loss.

In contrast, *Schattenfroh* pushes autobiographical fiction into the realm of allegory as well as grotesque historical accounts and satire. The protagonist, Niemand, finds himself trapped and bound to a device by his captor, Schattenfroh, who is a part of the bureaucratic, quasi-religious Frightbearing Society. Here, the autobiographical impulse, or the artistic impulse, becomes distorted into a system of forced inscription, with a singular judge, jury, and executioner. Niemand is forced to record his thoughts, visions, and sensations, all of which are a part of his "brainfluid", into a book that ends up being *Schattenfroh*, the work, which is a literal extraction from his body, making autobiographical fiction into autofictional extraction. The emerging narrative defies categorisation into genres and provides a parodic and unsettling portrait of Niemand, whose identity is written by him as well as for him.

Both of these texts, then, provide a dramatised version of reality, creating autofiction, but that too not as a means of self-unification, but rather, as a process that brings to the surface the impossibility of a stable identity. Since Lentz's narrators do not recount a self, instead, they demonstrate the manner in which their self-disintegrates when dwelled upon, or faced with mourning and an account that they are forced to narrate. These generative losses, these "shadows that beget", may be trauma, loss, lack, or inability that bring forth the factored spectral forms of subjectivity.

#### MEMORY AS WOUND, MEMORY AS CONSTRUCTION

Memory, as discussed earlier, is not just a simple recollection from the past. It is an extremely volatile, often unstable, and at times a violent process that folds and unfolds the present, even leading to disruptions. In *Muttersterben*, memory cannot be separated from mourning; every time the narrator tries to recall the life of his mother, he brings her back from the dead. "Now that she's dead, she's a stranger. How is it that when someone dies, they become a stranger? Now, when someone dies, they become a stranger. Where, then, is that when. Is her life a remembrance that's become other, that remnant now left to wonder" (Lentz 2025, 30). Recounting the sporadic scenes of caregiving, dying, and bodily deterioration in a non-chronological movement leads to a recursion that manifests a temporal discontinuity.

This dynamic is formalised through fragmentation of the self, memory and language. Scenes are narrated and left unfinished, repetition is scattered throughout, and being ceases to be.

That was nineteen ninety-four. That was the end of the meal. Even today, seriously ill sounds like the end of a life. So as not to say *is already in the process of dying*. Eight cold treasures. No more food. I ate no more after nineteen ninety-four (Lentz 2025, 53).

Here, the instability of memory is at its strongest, where it does not act as a transparent window into the life and mind of the character, but as a broken mirror, reflecting the grief and loss-stricken consciousness of the protagonist. In that regard, *Muttersterben* becomes “postmemory”: through the mediation of memory, its active and passive reconstruction, and continual reshaping by affect rather than objective recall, leading to an intrapsychically formulated memory, inherited, revised, and experienced cyclically through the affective change caused by mourning.

*Schattenfroh*, on the other hand, shows an explicit, blatant, and coercive form of memory. The Frightbearing Society functions as an introduction to the bureaucratic archive of revelations, rituals, and dictations. Memory is forced to be institutionalised and transcribed into scripts, narratives, coded litanies, rituals, and indecipherable proceedings. Memory does not remain individual or private, and becomes manipulated and overwritten.

I am my own memory and deciphering apparatus, I inflict upon myself and make use of myself, yet am not my own ultimate consumer. Perhaps I’m merely a signal processor, the data of which sometimes appears as an image and sometimes as a word—or as both together (Lentz 2025, 29).

Here, we see Derrida’s “Archive Fever”, wherein the archive serves a dual purpose: a repository, and a relentless force that regulates what can be remembered in any way or form. *Schattenfroh* uses this archive not as a mere metaphor, but as a literal apparatus that erases, moulds, and restructures the mind of Niemand, along with his perception. Identity becomes mediated and reliant on various forms of technology (masks, boxes, spectacles) that constantly frame his vision(s) and regulate his inner narrative.

The contrast between the two is clear: *Muttersterben* is an account of memory as an inner wound, while *Schattenfroh* is a grand spectacle of memory as an external object, but regardless, both converge in the portrayal of memory as unstable, fragmentary, and identity-

constituting/consuming, with the presence being not preservation of the self, but the very reason for its fracture.

#### THE FRAGMENTATION OF SELF: STYLISTIC AND ONTOLOGICAL BREAKDOWN

Fragmentation, whether of self, memory, or otherwise, is the central ontological principle and thematic fluid that governs the texts. In *Muttersterben*, the source of fragmentation is an organic form of grief; Lentz recounts the mother's death through stylistic and syntactical fragmentation, abrupt shifts and recursions of time, and rhythmic prose.

Now, you can no longer call and ask for Mother, I concluded. And you never went to the movies with Mother and never went to the theatre with Mother, I concluded. In fact, you never went anywhere with her ever. There are so many last looks that I can't remember at all when I last saw her (Lentz 2025, 41).

Here, Kristeva's melancholia can be observed: when the lost object, especially when the lost object is a mother, is not completely or fully mournable, language begins to loop in on itself, leading to dissolution. The voice of the narrator mirrors a trembling structure, barely held together, word and world, nearing collapse under the weight of maternal loss.

Additionally, there are various repetitions and recursions of phrases, of events, and of memories that oscillate between meticulous and clinical detail, along with lyrical afterthoughts and reflections, where language seems to fall on its knees, buckling under the weight of emotions. The narrator, after the death of his mother, often returns to the bedside, to the very same hospital, to the corridors, to relive the sensory and visual details of the breathing machines and medications, the flow of the noise, and the entrapment of this liminal space between life and death; identity

becomes a threshold that is indeterminate, suspended between before and after.

Whereas in *Schattenfrob*, this fragmentation is systemic, rather than emotional. The self of the narrator negates itself, but not because he experiences grief and loss, but because of the pressure put forth by an authority, namely, *Schattenfrob*, along with the Frightbearing Society's assertions, rituals, reforms, dictations, impositions, and devices placed on Niemand's body. "My mission is to write everything down from the beginning. I said it can't be done. I don't know when the beginning is, and I don't know what everything is. They've suddenly changed something" (Lentz 2025, 19). Here, writing is not a form of voluntary self-expression, but a ritualised and forced extraction of "brainfluid." Consequently, there is a shift of voices based on expectations, and due to unpredictability, the "I" becomes pluralised into multiplicities, displaced by voices that either speak through, over, or in his stead. This fragmentation mirrors Foucault's notions of disciplinary power, since the narrator's body becomes an instrument and medium; his words, thoughts, actions, and his very being become codified and examined. The self is displaced by the dominance of society, instead of just an isolated fracture. Fragmentation is not a symptom of domination, but its product. The novelist's juxtaposition reveals two modalities through which the author dissolves in the narrative: the result of organic, intimate grief, and through authoritative control.

#### THE BODY AS ARCHIVE, THE BODY AS SITE OF WRITING

Both works engage deeply with the body as an archive as well as a site for memory. In *Muttersterben*, the protagonist narrates various observations and physical transformations: breathlessness, fragility, deterioration, medical interventions, made devastating through a prose that mirrors that deterioration and fragmentation.

Well, I'm slowly getting old, she suddenly said once, years ago. She sits at home on the sofa. Something on the tip of her tongue, it won't come. She remembers very clearly that she can't think of a name. Oh gosh, she says, I can truly feel I've grown old. It just won't come to her (Lentz 2025, 44).

Here, the body grows into an archive of pain, a canvas upon which pain is inscribed and carved, but still tries to live for as long as it can. Exhaustion, trembling, somatic and psychosomatic reactions blur the distinction between the suffering of the mother and the suffering of the protagonist, diverged by their respective bodies.

In *Schattenfrob*, dominion over one's own body is completely lost.

I am writing into my brain fluid. I must write that I am here voluntarily. And so I write: I am here voluntarily. And, as I am here voluntarily, I have voluntarily subjected myself to the confines of this society. I write: As I am here voluntarily, I have voluntarily subjected myself to the confines of this society. Society demands amusement (Lentz 2025, 19).

The grotesque imagery of writing into his "brainfluid", that too, involuntarily, collapses the distinction between the self and the word, the text and the flesh. Writing, therefore, becomes an invasive, compulsive, controlled, and derivative act, rather than an organic and innate urge to create. The body does not just remember and keep score; it is written upon. Similar to Butler's idea, the self that constitutes itself demands an account; it wants to be remembered, it wants to exist. In *Schattenfrob*, this demand becomes brutally literal, since the narrator's account is forced, extracted, and inscribed onto, into, and from him by external forces.

Both of these selected texts, therefore, utilise the body as both an active and a passive archive, where memory, loss, and identity are recorded. However, each work fixates on the instability of that archive, with it being fragile and susceptible to distortions in *Muttersterben*, and controlled and moulded in *Schattenfrob*.

## LANGUAGE AS RUPTURE, LANGUAGE AS RUIN

Instability of language is an inherent feature of postmodern

writing, and in that same vein, Lentz's experimental stylistics foregrounds that very instability. In *Muttersterben*, language breaks down and fails, as the narrator is forced to confront the inherent limitations of what can be said and what must be passed over in silence. The death of his mother marks the death of linguistic stability and coherence too, but despite that, he still tries to narrate her life and talk about her, anything that allows him to cling to her and to keep her alive.

In the decomposition chamber. In the graveyard. In the diffusion distance. Was removed from our midst. Wherever that could be. Take note. Baitlanguage. To speak of Mother as something unedited. Fragment, marginal gloss. Priming, crack and lettering. Form and break, swathe and stroke. A sickness is always a sickness of consciousness (Lentz 2025, 51).

Barthes, in *Mourning Diary* (2010), reflects upon how grief, no matter how minute, leads to a crisis in language, which manifests as an inability to put loss into words (2010, 183). This is readily apparent, as we observe the narrator constantly repeat and revise and restart his sentences, but still not being able to convey what he wishes to, leading to a fragmentary discord, showcasing grief as a psychological as well as physiological event.

In *Schattenfrob*, on the other hand, language does not break down; instead, it becomes totalising. The Frightbearing Society's mystic and cultic jargon, ritualistic terminologies, and philological manifestos create a dominion in which language does not work as a source of expression, but is metamorphosed into a rigid, oppressive, and brutal tool of control.

Our language is a hard, polished peale; our words know no rust that makes the people carp and cavil. We have realised that new words create a new world, thus we have created new words. Our language is crystal clear. It is to be used absolutely for understanding between humans (Lentz 2025, 35).

As conveyed here, the linguistic crisis in *Schattenfrob* is systemic: language becomes the decaying corpse that compulsively and fervently perseveres and is rewritten endlessly, ad nauseam and

ad infinitum. Here, these ruins of language become the sole legibility of the wreckage and, in turn, reveal the moral decadence and decay of society, culture, structure, self, and all. Both works, thus, use language as a site, however preserved, for rupture, domination, loss, and control.

#### COMPARATIVE SYNTHESIS: SHADOWS THAT BEGET

Lentz's writing, across both, *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfrob*, reveals the manner in which autobiographical fiction comes to life not from a singularity or unified subject, but from the broken and fractured experiences of memory, grief, loss, and control. The shadows that beget the self are both intimate, and brutal. In *Muttersterben*, the shadow is grief: the death of the mother cast a darkness which reshaped memory, language, and expression. In *Schattenfrob*, the shadow is domination: the Society's literal and abstract control of the self. Despite these divergences in the origin of the shadows, there is a commonality in the form of forged rupture. Hence, autofiction becomes a medium that reveals the damage that precedes, accompanies, and follows self-referential narration, existing in zones of liminality, and between memory and erasure, autonomy and coercion, language and its breakdown.

Both of these texts also refuse to offer catharsis, closure, and consolation. *Muttersterben* refuses to process or resolve the grief into the narrative; *Schattenfrob* refuses to restore the individuality or agency of Niemand. Instead, Lentz constructs work in which lack is not a presence but a modality of acknowledging the complexity of lived experiences in the face of loss. Therefore, autobiographical fiction is not a singularity but a constellation of ruptures rendering memory unstable, and transmuting it into a site of struggle and archive, marked by tenderness as well as violence. Lentz's works demonstrate that the self is not just haunted by shadows, but produced by them.

## CONCLUSION

Michael Lentz's *Muttersterben* and *Schattenfrob* offer an exegesis through profound, innovative, inventive, and recessive meditations on autobiographical fiction, memory, and fragmentation of the self. Through divergent but complementary approaches, the instability and transience of the autobiographical subject, along with the accompanying tensions that are an inherent part of the narrated lived experience, reveal themselves. Whether that be the intimate, the melancholic, or the grotesque, Lentz portrays the breakdown of language, coercion through apparatus, the role of writing, and a self that is perpetually being produced and erased, negated and given birth by shadows, shadows of grief, trauma, domination, and instability.

In summation, these works redefine autobiographical fiction not as a mode of self-narration and discovery, but self-exposure. They show that the self is not necessarily something that is remembered but written, rewritten, fractured, stitched together, and never made whole, all across time. The “shadows that beget” are manifestations that structure experience, unsettle identity, and shed light on the unspeakable.

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