

Entre la France et l'Allemagne: René Schickele und 'geistiges Elsässertum'

Introduction:

Alsatian bilingual writer René Schickele's origins had a profound and lasting influence on his life and his works. Born in Oberehnheim (Obernai), Alsace under imperial German rule on 4 August 1883 of an Alsatian father and French mother, he grew up speaking French and the Alsatian dialect at home before learning German at school. Throughout his career, he wrote predominantly in the German language and was particularly associated with German Expressionism and the pacifist literary journal *Die Weissen Blätter*, which he edited during World War I and until 1920 in Switzerland. After the war, Schickele automatically received French citizenship on Alsace's return to France but moved across the border from Alsace to Badenweiler in the Black Forest, where he continued to publish in German and enjoyed literary success throughout the interwar years. However, with the rise of Nazism, Schickele, as a French citizen whose national loyalties were regarded as ambivalent, decided in 1932 it would be prudent to leave Germany. He moved to the south of France where he lived in self-imposed exile until his death on 31 January 1940, when France and Germany were once again at war and Alsace was under Nazi German control. Schickele's bilingual and bicultural heritage in a region caught between Franco-German rivalries, and his promotion of Alsace and its people as potential mediators between its neighbours, meant that he was at odds with the dominant nationalist discourses of the time.

Throughout his literary career, Schickele developed his ideas on the potential of a special mediating role for his native Alsace between France and Germany. This 'Vermittlerrolle des Elsaß', or to use the term Schickele coined, 'geistiges Elsässertum',¹ was a progressive vision aiming to overcome boundaries both physical and psychological in Alsace and to redefine its place within the triangular constellation it formed with France and Germany. Until the early 1930s, and the emergence of the Nazi dictatorship, Schickele was committed to this mission of 'geistiges Elsässertum', which was a recurrent leitmotif in his writings. His belief in a special mediating role for his native Alsace was influenced by the conviction that lasting peace in Europe in the twentieth century could only be achieved if France and Germany learned to set aside their nationalist rivalries, which were particularly intense during Schickele's lifetime. Such polemics had an impact on Alsace, regarded as an intrinsic part of the identity of both of its mutually hostile neighbours, but also on the development of the region's own political and cultural identity.

¹ Finck, Adrien. 'René Schickele und das "Geistige Elsässertum"' in Finck, Adrien and Maryse Staiber (eds), *Elsässer, Europäer, Pazifist. Studien zu René Schickele*. Salde / Morstadt Verlag: Kehl, Strasbourg, Basel, 1984, p. 25.

Schickele's wartime drama *Hans im Schnakenloch* (1915) addresses such issues of politics and identity on a fictional level. It serves as a literary vehicle for his proposition of 'geistiges Elsässertum' and is also a plea against the real possibility of war between France and Germany when Alsace was an annexed territory (*Reichsland*) under direct Prussian rule within the Second German Empire. This article will focus mainly on *Hans im Schnakenloch* as a key example of this fictional treatment of his mission of 'geistiges Elsässertum' before concluding with some briefer commentary on Schickele's interwar trilogy of novels *Das Erbe am Rhein* (1925-1931) to highlight how he broadens his idea of 'geistiges Elsässertum' to promote Alsace as a cultural mediator, not just between France and Germany but as a keystone for harmonious relations in Europe.² The border mentality so widespread in the particularly turbulent times Schickele lived through had to be overcome, he believed, if Europe were to achieve lasting peace.³

Hans im Schnakenloch.

Schickele's controversial wartime play *Hans im Schnakenloch*, fittingly described as 'das Drama der Grenzmenschen'⁴ is an excellent example of how much of his writing is centred on his homeland and relations with its two powerful neighbours. Schickele asserts that he wrote the play in just eight days in October 1914⁵ and, according to Schickele scholar, Joachim Storck, 'Schickeles *Hans im Schnakenloch* war das erste Kriegsdrama aus der Zeit des Ersten Weltkriegs überhaupt.'⁶ The play first appeared in book form in 1915, when it was published by *Verlag der Weißen Bücher*. However, as Julie Meyer highlights, Schickele seems to have wished this to be a private publication and was unaware that some copies were sold.⁷ It was then published in the January 1916 edition of *Die Weißen Blätter* journal, edited by Schickele and subsequently by S. Fischer Verlag in 1917. An abridged version of the play, with a preface by Schickele, was published also in 1927 by Kurt Wolff publishers.⁸ Quotations here will be taken from the *Die Weißen Blätter* publication.

² See McGillicuddy, Áine, *René Schickele and Alsace. Cultural Identity between the Borders*. Peter Lang: Oxford, Bern, 2011 for a detailed discussion of a selection of Schickele's works, including the play and trilogy, as well as a comprehensive overview of their political contexts.

³ For further discussion on Schickele's promotion of Alsace as a European space, see Luckscheiter, Christian. 'You do not become a European by choice but by necessity': The Alsace Border Region and its Opening up to Europe in the Writings of Otto Flake, René Schickele and Hermann Wendel.' *Journal of European Studies*, 51, 3-4, November 2021, pp.252-261.

⁴ Bab, Julius. 'René Schickele als Dramatiker.' *Die Schaubühne*, 12, 2, 40, 3rd October 1916, pp.311-315. Here, p. 313.

⁵ Schickele states this in his *Vorrede von 1927*, in the 1927 edition of *Hans im Schnakenloch*. See Kesten, Hermann (ed.) *Werke in Drei Bänden*. Kiepenheuer & Witsch: Cologne, Berlin, 1959. Volume III, page 10. Each volume will be referred to as *Werke I, II, III*, respectively throughout this article.

⁶ Storck, Joachim. 'Rebellenblut in den Adern. René Schickele als politischer Schriftsteller.' *Recherches Germaniques*, 9, 1979, pp.278-307. Here, p. 290

⁷ Meyer, Julie. *Vom elsässischen Kunstfrühling zur utopischen Civitas Hominum. Jugendstil und Expressionismus bei René Schickele (1900-1920)*. Munich: Fink Verlag, 1981, p. 221.

⁸ Schickele, René. *Hans im Schnakenloch. Schauspiel in vier Aufzügen*. Munich: Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1927.

The play's title is clearly influenced by the title of a popular Alsatian folk song, *D'r Hans im Schnockeloch*. Hans, according to the original folk song, was an 18th century innkeeper whose inn was located in the flat terrain of the Schnakenloch district, just outside Strasbourg city. It was a marshy area, which attracted mosquitoes, inspiring the placename - *Schnakenloch*. Generally, Hans's inn enjoyed an excellent reputation. However, on one occasion, some of his guests were apparently unhappy with the inn's service and this is how the satirical folk song originated, with the following chorus:

D'r Hàns im Schnockeloch het àlles, wàs mir will.

Un wàs mir will, diss het 'r nit.

Un was 'r het, diss will mir nit.

D'r Hàns im Schnockeloch het àlles, wàs mir will.⁹

The Alsatian lyricist Adolphe Stöber (1810-1892) composed the version that is best-known today, where he transforms Hans the innkeeper into a prosperous but disgruntled farmer. Stöber's version highlights 'Hans's (or the stereotypical Alsatian's) inherent dissatisfaction with his situation in life. He is restless and never completely happy with who he is or what he has. In titling his play *Hans im Schnakenloch*, Schickele influences the depiction of Hans Boulanger, the main character, particularly as the song is sung in his presence a few times in the play. Therefore, Hans in the folk song becomes associated in the spectator's mind with that of Schickele's protagonist Hans Boulanger. Furthermore, the title signals to the spectator that Schickele's play is strongly rooted in the region of Alsace. The specific location of 'Schnakenloch', a mosquito-ridden marshland, alludes to a stagnant place engendering a sense of entrapment. It suggests too a sense of persecution, of being plagued by mosquitos on all sides, which can be regarded as symbolising the restlessness of Hans in the play who cannot find peace in his homeland. Alsace is presented, therefore, as a problematic region, a politically disputed territory suffering on all sides from the bitter rivalry of its neighbours.

Although Schickele's *Hans im Schnakenloch* is set in Alsace and was clearly inspired by Stöber's version of the folk song, the characters' dialogue is not written in Alsatian dialect. This differentiates it from the plays of contemporary Alsatian playwrights, written and performed under the auspices of the *Elsässisches Theater*.¹⁰ *Hans im Schnakenloch* reached a wider audience throughout the Second German Empire, as well as in Austria, due to Schickele's choice of High

⁹ *Encyclopédies d'Alsace*, Strasbourg: Editions Publitotal, 1982-1986, Volume 6, pp.3728-3732. Here, p. 3732.

¹⁰ Playwright Gustav Stoskopf (1869-1944) founded the *Elsässisches Theater* in 1898. Plays written and performed for the *Elsässisches Theater* used Alsatian dialect and focussed on local, regional themes.

German and also because he had gained some renown as a literary figure in German society by the time the play was staged. The play's broader appeal also stems from the fact that it is not simply an adaptation of a local folk song but is a powerful drama that addresses controversial questions, such as the ambivalent loyalties in Alsace at the outbreak of World War I. However, it was also a play with great potential to be misconstrued and it provoked debate when it appeared on stage whilst Germany and France were at war.

Hans im Schnakenloch was first performed in Frankfurt in December 1916 and completed ninety-eight performances in cities such as Berlin, Cologne, Munich as well as in Vienna before being banned on its ninety-ninth performance in 1918 by the Austro-Hungarian authorities. Germany soon followed suit.¹¹ With the outbreak of the short-lived socialist revolution in November 1918, just as the war ended, censorship was officially abolished and Georg Altmann, the play's director hoped to once again stage *Hans im Schnakenloch*. However, it was banned anew, this time by the *Berliner-Arbeiter und Soldatenrat*, who denounced it as 'ein französisch gesinntes Propagandastück'¹² which could demoralise comrades returning home from the Western front.¹³ Ironically, in France the play was criticized for its pro-German stance.¹⁴ Such polemics concerning Schickele's play, both during and after World War I, highlight its controversial content and ambivalence, a trait embodied by its main character, the eponymous Hans.

In its portrayal of the microcosmic world of the Boulanger family, *Hans im Schnakenloch* provides keen insights into the Alsatian psyche on the eve of World War I and addresses the question of Alsatian loyalties in the context of the relations between France, Germany and Alsace at that turbulent time in history. For some Alsatian characters in the play, exclusive allegiance to either one or the other powerful, neighbouring nation is depicted as particularly problematic. Given that the Others (France and Germany) through which they define themselves and are an integral part of their identity formation are unwilling to allow them to identify themselves as anything other than wholly French or German results in such characters adopting a more ambiguous stance.

¹¹ For further discussion on the censorship and banning of the play, see McGillicuddy, Áine, 'Controversy and Censorship: The Debate on René Schickele's *Hans im Schnakenloch*.' *German Life and Letters*, 60, I, January 2007, pp. 59-74.

¹² Source: *Hamburger Nachrichten*. Evening edition, 28 November 1918.

¹³ Schickele, René. 'Vorrede von 1927.' In: *Werke III*. 'Der Rote Soldatenrat befahl die sofortige Absetzung des Stückes, weil – weil es "geeignet sei, das Empfinden der von der Westfront heimkehrenden Kameraden zu verletzen."' p. 12.

¹⁴ See for example the negative review by Maurice Muret, 'Un Drame Pseudo-Alsacien. *Hans im Schnakenloch*', *Feuilleton du Journal des Débats*, 2 July 1920, pp. 1-2.

Within the context of the *Kultur-Zivilisation* debate,¹⁵ which intensified in the years shortly preceding the outbreak of World War I, the play deploys regional, national and gender stereotypes of Alsatian, French and German characters, both male and female. Schickele's creation of these characters of assorted nationalities and political outlooks would indicate that he is more interested in creating types of character to represent diverse viewpoints on the question of Alsace. However, Schickele also plays with such stereotypes, undermining the spectators' initial perceptions and preconceived ideas of particular characters and their respective national or regional identities. An analysis then of a selection of these characters and their relations provides us with insights into the question of Alsatian cultural identity at that particular time. This will be examined first with reference to Hans, the protagonist, and his relationship with his brother, Balthasar.

Hans is the elder of the two brothers in the Boulanger family, whose father fought and died for France in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871). Both the father's sacrifice and surname indicate that this family has a strong attachment to France. The family's name would seem to allude to General George Boulanger (1837-1891), a French nationalist and reactionary, who stirred up anti-German sentiment in France following the Franco-Prussian War. However, Hans's first name highlights both the Germanic component of his cultural heritage and, as aforementioned, his identification with the *Hans im Schnakenloch* of the folk song, personifying the Alsatian who is restive and unsettled. Already in this Franco-German name, therefore, it is suggested that the protagonist Hans Boulanger embodies both a double cultural heritage and ambiguous, restless nature.

Balthasar, the younger brother, is temperamentally quite different to Hans, which is a source of underlying tension in their relationship. Hans, being the eldest, is the inheritor of the family estate, Schnakenloch. However, he shirks his duties and prefers to spend long periods travelling abroad, rather than remain in Schnakenloch to take care of the estate. Balthasar seems more steadfast and rooted to the family land. He is the dutiful brother who leads a quiet life, overseeing the running of the estate, and is 'immer auf dem Posten' (Act I, vi, p.14), while the pleasure-seeking Hans, whom Schickele presents as the 'hero' of this play, often strays far from home. Thus, in a manner comparable to the construction of stereotypical polarisations found in *Heimatkunst*, Hans's rootlessness is juxtaposed against his younger brother's rootedness. However, Schickele undermines this constellation of stereotypes, so that Hans's and Balthasar's characters cannot be easily categorised

¹⁵ The terms 'civilisation' and 'Kultur' were politicised by France and the Second German Empire during an era of intense rivalry, particularly following France's defeat in the Franco-Prussian War (1870-1871) and up to the outbreak of the First World War. Despite the intrinsically neutral meaning of these two terms, both nations deployed them in a highly partial and widespread manner, for example in the press and in political manifestos. The propagandistic aims were two-fold: either to promote their own nation's culture and identity (French *civilisation* or German *Kultur*) in a positive light or to denigrate their rival by means of negative stereotyping. See for example, Georg Bollenbeck's "'Kultur" und "civilisation" – eine deutsch-französische Geschichte.' In: Viehoff, Reinhold and Rien T. Segers (eds) *Kultur, Identität Europa. Über die Schwierigkeiten und Möglichkeiten einer Konstruktion*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1999, p. 291.

into simplistic oppositions such as good and bad, hero and anti-hero. Thus, even if Balthasar acts as the foil to the 'hero' Hans, he is portrayed in a more positive light.

In fact, Balthasar would appear to be more similar in temperament to Klär, his German sister-in-law and Hans's wife, who also has a deep sense of duty. His alignment with Klär is further underscored when Balthasar tells her in Act I that he has become a lieutenant in the German imperial army. His demonstration of loyalty to Germany in this manner is a deliberate choice. Given the political tensions at that time, Balthasar is also cognisant of the fact that such a choice symbolises a rejection of France and his French cultural heritage – a component of his Alsatian identity. Balthasar's choice could be interpreted as an attempt to resolve an inner identity crisis living in this disputed territory and further highlights the complexity of Alsatian allegiances and cultural identity in this particular context.

Hans, unlike Balthasar, has no such illusions about attempting to resolve inner conflicts. It is impossible for him to choose in his allegiance to France and Germany, suggesting that, in contrast to Balthasar, he is true, both to himself and his Alsatian heritage. Nevertheless, this apparently positive trait in Hans is not without ambivalence. The inner tensions he experiences living between two cultures that are hostile towards one another are at the root of his restlessness and inability to commit to one fixed national identity – or indeed, on an allegorical level, to his marriage with his German wife. Yet, a protagonist who leaves his younger brother to assume all the responsibilities of managing the family's estate and is frequently unfaithful to his wife is hardly an admirable 'hero'. Nonetheless, it is obvious that Hans, despite his unreliability, charms those around him with his flamboyant personality, while Balthasar is frequently overlooked in the shadow of his presence: Balthasar (zu Klär): Blick doch *einmal*, nur eine Sekunde, von Hans auf mich. Die Welt ist doch nicht nur ein Abglanz von ihm. (Act III, ii, p.57).

These indications of sibling rivalry between the brothers can be interpreted as a representation of the inherent tensions of the Alsatian temperament. It gives rise also to an allegory of Franco-German rivalries and the aforementioned *Kultur/Zivilisation* polarisations. As Hans is associated with more Gallic traits, he could be aligned with *Zivilisation* stereotypes, which include unreliability but also a sense of cultural superiority, dominating Balthasar who, with his more Germanic tendencies, is more closely related with *Kultur* values (dutifulness and a strong work ethic) and admits that he is sometimes envious of his brother. In light of this allegory, Hans and Balthasar can be considered to mutually define each other. On the one hand, Hans can be carefree and enjoy travelling because he knows he can rely on Balthasar to look after the estate in his frequent absences. On the other hand, it is due to Hans's irresponsible attitude and incompetent management of the family estate that Balthasar has been forced into the role of the dutiful and reserved brother whose 'Erlebnisse sind nicht Gemeingut der Familie' (Act I, ii, p.9). Such juxtapositions are reflected in the dialogue between the

brothers, which is often brusque. Hans is at times dismissive of Balthasar, who is often truculent when conversing with his older brother, possibly due to jealousy that Hans can attract so much positive attention. However, Hans acknowledges Balthasar's capable manner of taking care of the estate, and it is evident that despite their fraternal tensions, he recognises him as the true master of Schnakenloch, as is apparent in his remark to Klär: 'Er ist heute schon der Herr im Schnakenloch.' (Act I, vi, p.14). This acknowledgement gives rise to further allegories concerning the fraternal relationship, however, where Balthasar (Germany) is the real master in Schnakenloch (Alsace) benefitting from Hans' (France's/Alsace's) renunciation of what he (France/Alsace) once possessed.

The differences between the two brothers are further emphasized in their contrasting reactions to the news of the outbreak of war between France and Germany towards the end of the play. The idea of war creates a feeling of anguish for Hans, as he fears he will be forced to choose sides. Due to his particular sense of cultural identity and pacifist outlook, this war is a tragedy, regardless of which side emerges victorious. Hans is a shrewd observer and commentator on the tense political atmosphere leading up to the war, eloquently expressing his opinions on deteriorating Franco-German relations and on the question of Alsace. Declaring that Germany will never cede its control of Alsace peacefully, he predicts that the next war between France and Germany would be on an unprecedented, catastrophic level. In the scenes comprising dialogue with visiting French politicians to a neighbouring estate in Act II, Hans's clear and thoughtful reflections on the consequences of war for Alsace and the complex situation it creates for many Alsatians transform our view of him in a positive manner. His description of the Alsatian dilemma in being caught between the region's powerful rival neighbours is both graphic and powerful: 'Spannen Sie einen Menschen mit Armen und Beinen zwischen zwei Pferde, jagen Sie die Pferde in entgegengesetzter Richtung davon, und Sie haben genau das erhabene Schauspiel der elsässischen Treue.' (Act II, i, p.30). This violent image of the self being ripped apart and destroyed conveys the sheer impossibility for him to choose between France and Germany. For Hans, Alsace is the self, whose existence is predicated on a double, dialectical relationship with these two neighbouring countries. When Alsace is either compelled or forces itself to align with only one of those it defines as its two Others, a crisis in Alsatian identity is provoked, as both are necessary for the formation of a complete identity.

Unlike Hans, Balthasar is euphoric when he learns of the outbreak of war and appears untroubled by thoughts of the potential consequences of his choice to fight for Germany. Indeed, he seems relieved to have a clear cause to fight for and demonstrate where his allegiances lie. Balthasar's reaction to news of the war can be viewed as an attempt to escape the dilemma of being Alsatian in that time of bitter Franco-German hostilities. Although Hans does not share his brother's euphoria, his probing question, 'Bist du einig mit dir?' (Act III, xi, p.78) suggests that he suspects that Balthasar's eagerness

for war may stem from an attempt to settle an inner conflict. In choosing Germany, Balthasar may also be trying to align himself more closely with his sister-in-law Klär, whom he loves. Although Hans and Balthasar have contrasting reactions with regard to the prospect of war, neither one can evade the complex ambiguities of their Alsatian heritage. Hans feels he faces an impossible choice between Germany and France, symbolised by his violent image of the self torn apart. By trying to define himself solely in terms of his German cultural heritage, Balthasar makes an attempt to overcome the ambivalence of his identity, but at the cost of denying the importance of his French cultural heritage.

So far, I have concentrated on the differences in temperament and tensions in the relationship between Hans and Balthasar. However, when a repentant Hans returns to Schnakenloch and to his German wife after ending a three-month affair with his latest mistress, Frenchwoman Louise Cavrel, he vows to resolve his differences with Balthasar and improve their relationship for the sake of family harmony and the estate. 'Hans: Wir sind Brüder und müssen zusammenhalten.' (Act III, iii, p.67). After the outbreak of war, when Balthasar, in his German uniform, is hunted by French soldiers on the Schnakenloch estate, Hans demonstrates his love for his brother most clearly by compromising his pacifist ideals and promising to fight in the French army in return for Balthasar's life. Ironically, Hans's sacrifice to rescue Balthasar, who on his escape re-joins the German army, means that they are now enemies in this war, symbolising the potential for fratricide. The previously harmless tensions between them are now politicised by this conflict and their fraternal rivalry is distorted and inflated to a tragic level.

Hans's inner conflict on a political level is reiterated on a personal level also in his relationships with Klär, Hans's German wife, and Louise, his French mistress. In Schickele's depictions of these female characters' national identities, he again plays with *Kultur-Zivilisation* polarisations, given that the character traits of both Klär and Louise appear to draw on national clichés. In Hans's relationship with Klär, her role as his wife is clearly aligned with stereotypical *Kultur* characteristics such as sincerity of feeling, a strong sense of duty and morality, whereas in Hans's affair with Louise, her behaviour adheres to certain *Zivilisation* stereotypes, which highlight her sensuality and superficiality. Like the fraternal relationship, therefore, these characters can be read as extended metaphors for the political messages in the play. The personal themes of the play, then, find a corresponding resonance in the political theme.

Klär and Louise appeal to different aspects of Hans's nature, with the result that he finds himself unable to choose one in favour of the other. Due to the dichotomous nature of his affections, he hovers, indecisive, unable to make the expected commitment to either of these women who both wish to claim him to the exclusion of the other. This highlights an alternation between literal representations of Louise and Klär with more allegorical representations of them and their

relationships with Hans at particular times throughout the play. Hans's desire to remain married to Klär, ('Aber ich habe die Frau und behalte sie.' Act I, vi, p.16) yet incapacity to stay faithful to her, can be interpreted as Alsace's ambivalent stance with regard to its union with the Second German Empire. In resisting full assimilation by Germany, Alsace reveals its unwillingness to renege entirely on its nostalgic or emotional attachment to France rather than a desire to rupture its ties with Germany. Observing how Hans's marital infidelity afflicts Klär, Balthasar vows to defend her against Louise when she insinuates to him that Hans plans to leave his wife for her ('Ich werde Klär verteidigen bis zum letzten.' Act II, V, iii, p.40). This allegiance to Klär underlines again Balthasar's more Germanic sympathies, the ideal Alsatian for the ruling Germans. By contrast, Hans's more Gallic behaviour and attitude, intimating ambivalent loyalties are, from a German stance, cause for suspicion. Yet it is Hans, not Balthasar, whom Klär loves. Klär's and Hans's marriage, representing the union of two different but complementing personalities, can be regarded, on an allegorical level, as an aspiration for harmonious relations between Germany and an Alsace that is true to its dual cultural heritage. Likewise, in Hans's and Balthasar's attitude to Klär, can be seen the balancing components of the character 'Hans im Schnakenloch' in the folk song, in so far as Hans does not (always) desire what he has and Balthasar cannot have what he desires.

However, due to the inherent ambivalence of his identity, Hans is drawn also to women who are very different to his wife in character and temperament. Hans's mistress, Louise, appears to be cast as the *femme fatale* in the play. Both her name and her character suggest her close affinity to another of Schickele's *femme fatale* characters, Lo, the protagonist of an earlier work, entitled *Meine Freundin Lo*.¹⁶ It is clear that in their relationship, Louise is more self-assured than Hans. On a political level, this would suggest that France feels sure that, given the chance, Alsace would not hesitate to be reunited with the French nation. However, for Hans (Alsace), a relationship with Louise (France) that is anything more than a light dalliance is not optional, if dangerous consequences are to be avoided. Therefore, regardless of Louise's attractions, Hans cannot bring himself to end his union with Klär.

Louise first appears in Act II flirting with Hans at a party in his neighbour's, the Countess Sulz's garden. Their relationship is one driven by passion rather than duty. However, our initial impressions of Louise as a *femme fatale* are undermined later in this act to some extent. Although fully aware of her power to captivate men, she reveals to Hans that she has never been unfaithful to her husband and has little interest in conducting a short-lived affair. Indeed, it becomes apparent that Louise is determined to compel Hans to leave Klär so that he belongs exclusively to her. In undermining the clichéd perception of Louise as *femme fatale*, Schickele appears to be more intent on using political allegories to discuss Alsace's relations with France and Germany than in deploying gender-based

¹⁶ Schickele, René. *Meine Freundin Lo. Romane und Erzählungen*. Volume I. Kiepenheuer & Witsch: Cologne, 1983, pp.15-98.

stereotypes. Thus, Louise's desire to covet Hans for herself can be interpreted as France's wish to claim Alsace for itself, forcing it to renege on its attachment to Germany.

Hans vacillates in his desire for Louise and sense of dutiful love towards Klär, fully aware that he cannot choose both women. When, during the Countess Sulz's soirée, Hans realises that it is time to decide to either embark on a love affair with Louise or stay in Schnakenloch with his wife, his indecision is so apparent that his friends mockingly sing 'Hans im Schnakenloch'. This reference to the folk song is a reminder that Hans embodies the quintessential Alsatian's predicament, never fully happy with what they have or certain of what they want.

Although the relationship between Hans and Louise is in one sense used to represent political and national allegories, their relationship is also convincing on a literal level, even if Schickele plays with the spectator's expectation of Louise as the play's *femme fatale*. Hans, however, appears to expect Louise to conform to this stereotype. She appeals to the more epicurean and hedonistic aspect of his nature (again, an allusion to *civilisation* stereotypes) but he assumes she understands that theirs will necessarily be a brief affair before he resumes his duties and returns to his wife and Schnakenloch. Louise's greater expectations from their relationship unsettle Hans therefore, since it is impossible for him to give her all she desires: 'Liebe, ich komme mir sehr hinterhältig vor. Als ob ich Sie mit falschen Versprechungen überlistet hätte.' (Act II, iii, p.36). Louise's hopes and love for Hans turn bitter, souring their relationship. When Hans eventually returns to Klär and the Schnakenloch estate he feels apprehensive about Louise's continuing obsession with him. The image of a scorned Louise, combined with political and military undertones of an allegorical relationship between France and Alsace, emphasises the instability of Alsace's situation: "Ich werde die Frau nicht los...Ich bin eine Festung, die der Feind unter immerwährenden Sturm gesetzt hat, wie unter eine Brandung Waffen." (Act III, iii, p.65-66). However, although Hans chooses to return to Schnakenloch and save his marriage, this latest infidelity and the outbreak of war alienate Klär from him. She no longer feels she can trust Hans, just as Germany cannot depend upon Alsace's complete loyalty. Ignorant of Hans's honourable intentions, in joining the French army to save his brother, she releases all her suppressed feelings of hurt and anger over this latest disloyalty. The war tears their relationship apart and she cannot forgive Hans's his betrayal of her, both as his wife and as a German.

Turning now to other minor characters in the play and their diverse opinions on Alsace and war, three of Hans's friends, Dimpfel, Starkfuß and Abbé Schmitt, clearly represent a cross-section of Alsatian society, through the emblematic figures of teacher, soldier and priest. Dimpfel, a German teacher, who is excused from active military service when war breaks out, is a philosophical-minded, peaceable person. By contrast, Starkfuß, a Prussian soldier, quartered in a nearby military barracks, predictably adheres to more warlike views. During the annexation, the German imperial army was based in garrisons throughout Alsace, in order to deter any local irredentist aims for autonomy or

collaboration with France. The name, 'Starkfuß' alludes in caricatural fashion to the power of the occupying military but also, in a more negative manner, to their oppressive presence in a region where the controversial Saverne affair had occurred shortly before Schickele penned the play.¹⁷ However, although the choice of Starkfuß's name is clearly a satirical one, positive aspects of his character and his friendship with Hans subvert to some degree the initial negative impressions associated with his name. Abbé Schmitt, as an Alsatian Catholic priest, also regards himself as a soldier of a kind, in defending God and his faith. The verbal exchanges between Abbé Schmitt and Starkfuß, are at times reminiscent of the challenging attitude of some of the Alsatian Catholic clergy during the annexation who were strongly opposed to a Protestant Prussia governing Alsace directly. Until the outbreak of war, these three gather together with Hans at his home where lively discussions ensue on their views on Alsatian society, armed conflict and religion. Their friendship and good-humoured tolerance of one another's viewpoints, despite their different backgrounds and opinions, can be regarded as a positive alternative to war, which leaves no room for peaceful debate. Such interactions further underscore Schickele's mission of 'geistiges Elsässertum', echoed in the scenes in Act II where Hans meets some visiting French dignitaries at Countess Sulz's estate.

Hans's ease of manner in his interactions with the French guests prompts the Countess to exclaim: 'Sie können versichert sein, mein junger Freund, wenn ich Sie nicht von Kindsbeinen gekannt hätte, so wie wir Sie unter uns sehen, würde ich Sie gewiß für einen unserer jungen Franzosen halten.' (Act II, i, p.33). Hans's fluid communication with both French and Germans can be interpreted as the typical Alsatian's intrinsic understanding of both cultures, despite not wholly identifying with either nation. Indeed, the main discussion in Act II centres around the controversial subject of Alsace's relations with both France and Germany. As Countess Sulz muses: 'Die ewigen Dinge drehen sich alle um das Elsaß.' (Act II, i, p.29). This idea of the political and cultural significance of the region of Alsace is at the core of Schickele's pacifist message. Discussions too on Franco-German relations and the escalating threat of war feature heavily in these scenes. Schickele highlights here, through Hans's dialogue, the disastrous consequences for Alsace, if, rather than being a means of breaking down the bastions of national-chauvinism, which were being aggravated by the vitriolic diatribes of ultra-nationalist agitators in both countries, it was to become a bone of contention between its warring neighbours. Apart from creating the context for Hans's and Louise's encounter before they embark on their affair, this act, where characters of different nationalities discuss their different political viewpoints peacefully, demonstrates a last flicker of optimism that war might yet be avoided before news of its outbreak occurs in Act IV. The polemics and misinterpretations engendered by Act II, were of course inevitable, given when the play was written and performed, and with so much of its

¹⁷ For Schickele's commentary on the Saverne affair, 1913, see Schickele, René. 'Stille Betrachtungen nach den Zaberner Tagen.' In: *Cahiers Alsaciens*, 13. Strasbourg, 1917, pp.19-23.

dialogue focussed on controversial topics such as Franco-German relations, Alsace and war. This is borne out by the increasingly stringent censorship and eventual banning of *Hans im Schnakenloch* in Austria-Hungary and Germany.

As Julie Meyer points out, in this second act, two of the characters Cavrel and Simon are based on real French political leaders of that era, namely the French Socialist politician, Jean Jaurès (1859-1914) and the Radical-Socialist minister Aristide Briand (1862-1932). Briand makes an appearance again as Maxime-Simon in *Der Wolf in der Hürde*, the third novel of Schickele's trilogy *Das Erbe am Rhein*:

Hans Boulanger provoziert im zweiten Aufzug die französischen Parlamentarier Cavrel, in dem Schickele den am Vorabend des Krieges ermordeten Sozialistenführer Jean Jaurès porträtiert und Simon, der nach dem politischen Porträt des Pragmatikers Aristide Briand gezeichnet ist.¹⁸

Schickele gained a thorough understanding of French politics when he worked in Paris as a political correspondent for the German language newspapers *Nord und Süd* and the *Straßburger Neue Zeitung* between 1909 and 1913. As Brummert informs us, it was during those years that he learned about Jean Jaurès's pacifist brand of socialism, a socialism that was not restricted to blind observance of Marxism dogma, which Schickele found appealing.¹⁹ What in particular must have won Schickele's support for Jaurès was how he campaigned tirelessly to retain peace in a Europe hurtling towards war and that he grasped the crucial importance of maintaining harmonious relations between France and Germany, if a full-scale war were to be avoided. For both, the prospect of a war in Europe was appalling and they shared the same desire to promote intercultural exchange to build trust between nations.²⁰ Given Schickele's great admiration for Jaurès and his political stance, it is hardly a surprise then to find him appearing in the play, under the guise of French deputy Cavrel, animatedly discussing political events of the time concerning Franco-German relations, Alsace and war.²¹ Cavrel's origins ('Ich stamme aus dem Süden.' Act II, i, p.30) underscore Cavrel's similarity to Jaurès, as Jaurès was born in the South, in the Occitan

¹⁸ Meyer, Julie. *Vom elsässischen Kunstfrühling zur utopischen Civitas Hominum*, p. 224.

¹⁹ 'Jaurès (hat) Schickele gelehrt, daß Sozialismustheorie auch ohne doktrinäres Festhalten an Marxistischer Lehre möglich ist.' Brummert, Ulrike. 'Aufhebung von Grenzen. Zur deutsch-französischen Vermittlerrolle von René Schickele und Jean Jaurès.' Finck, Adrien; Alexandre Ritter and Maryse Staiber (eds). *René Schickele aus neuer Sicht. Beiträge zur deutsch-französischen Kultur*. Olms Presse: Hildesheim, Zürich, New York, 1991, p. 54.

²⁰ 'Beide sind Verfechter eines interkulturellen Austauschs über die nationalen Staatsgrenzen hinaus.' Brummert, Ulrike. 'Aufhebung von Grenzen', p. 45.

²¹ In her essay on Schickele and Jaurès, Ulrike Brummert writes: 'Jaurès hat für die Figur des Cavrel Pate gestanden.' *Ibid.*, p. 55.

region and remained in close contact with his native region. The South of France or *Midi* has its own distinct identity, for example, in the use of Occitan, a Provençal language. Thus, Jaurès had been brought up in an environment where having an affinity with more than one language or culture was regarded as natural. The analogies between the fictitious Cavrel and Jean Jaurès are further cemented by their wives sharing the same name, i.e. Louise.

In Cavrel's exclamation about the German people: 'Ich bewundere dieses Volk! Ja, ich kann sagen, daß ich es liebe.' (Act II, i, p.31), Schickele highlights Jaurès's openness to Germany, which put him at odds with the more usual belligerent discourse and negative stereotypes propagated by both nations in an increasingly aggressive manner leading up to the war. Indeed, from 1905 onwards, Jaurès emphasised the importance of better diplomatic links between France and Germany.²² Cavrel echoes this necessity of strengthening diplomatic bonds with Germany in the play. Such a proposal to maintain political stability in Europe was greeted with little enthusiasm by the majority of French politicians. Even many of Jaurès's fellow Socialists were sceptical of his pacifist ideals and Germanophile politics.²³ However, reaction in right-wing political circles was much more extreme, with some ultra-nationalists publishing incendiary articles calling for his assassination as a traitor to France. It was established during his trial that such articles had influenced Raoul Villain (1885-1936) who was later controversially acquitted for having assassinated Jaurès in Paris on 31 July 1914. His assassination, just days before World War I broke out, is also emblematic of how a final hope that war might yet be avoided, is quenched.

Later in the play, Hans learns of Cavrel's similar fate to Jaurès's in Paris. However, Schickele embellishes the facts surrounding Jaurès's assassination in a shocking description of Cavrel's death, which depicts him more emphatically as a martyr figure, sacrificed for his attempts to retain peace with Germany. Brummert develops this point further when she comments on Schickele's choice of name 'Cavrel' for his character in *Hans im Schnakenloch*. 'Nomen est omen: cavre, cabra heißt auf okzitanisch das Zicklein'.²⁴ This choice would indicate that Jaurès is the scapegoat for those vehemently opposed to any pacifist initiatives to improve relations with Germany. Furthermore, the fact that the name Cavrel is derived from the Occitan 'cavre' indicates once again how Schickele draws on Jaurès's biographical details as the inspiration for Cavrel's character. Clearly, his admiration for Jaurès is an important influence in the play in conveying his message of 'geistiges Elsässertum'.

²² Rabaut, Jean. *Jean Jaurès*. Librairie Académique Perrin: Paris, 1971, p. 179.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 207.

²⁴ Brummert, Ulrike. 'Aufhebung von Grenzen', p. 55.

The argument that Aristide Briand is the inspiration behind the character Simon, whom we also meet in Act II, is borne out by many similarities between the real political figure and Schickele's character. Briand engaged with a range of political ideologies before finally becoming minister for religion and education in 1906 in a radical (Centre/Left) government. However, this led to a deep rift with the Socialist party, of which he was once Secretary General, and to disagreement with Jaurès, who had strongly opposed Briand's choice to accept a minister's portfolio, as he believed that Briand would undermine the unity of the Socialist party.²⁵ In Schickele's play the dialogue between Cavrel and Simon is sharp at times, reflecting these tensions between Jaurès and Briand, as Briand became increasingly distanced from left-wing politics.

Contrasts between Briand and Jaurès are also represented by Simon's and Cavrel's differing temperaments, as well as in their conflicting opinions concerning Germany, even if both are opposed to war. Simon is portrayed as a detached and coolly ironic personality. In contrast to the effusive Cavrel, he is a man of few words and gives the impression of being calm and controlled and of someone who prefers to listen patiently, rather than reveal his own thoughts. This would correspond with descriptions of Briand's character. Suarez, in his biography of Briand, informs us that he was a man who possessed 'une longue patience [...] et l'habitude de voir loin, bien au-delà de l'horizon proche'.²⁶

The lively debates between Hans, Cavrel and Simon on contemporaneous political issues and war in this act provided audiences throughout Germany with an exceptional chance to learn of the perspectives of *non-revanchiste* French political figures, as well as the viewpoint of an Alsatian regarding France and Germany. These discussions also showcase Schickele's desire for Alsace to be a 'Mittelland' whose unique cultural heritage and location should be used to mediate between its hostile neighbours, rather than serve as a source of dispute.

Hans im Schnakenloch is predominantly a tragic play in which Schickele very effectively transmits a strongly pacifist message, drawing on his intuitive understanding of Alsatian identity and keen political awareness concerning Franco-German relations. In his depiction of the Boulanger family and their friends being torn apart, ultra-nationalist bellicosity and the First World War are portrayed as having particularly catastrophic consequences for Alsace, foreshadowing the same Alsatian dilemma, which finds expression again in his writings in the inter-war era.

²⁵ Auclair, Marcel, *La Vie de Jaurès ou la France d'avant 1914*, Editions du Seuil: Paris, 1954, p.460.

²⁶ Suarez, Georges. *Briand, sa vie, son oeuvre. Avec son journal et des nombreux documents inédites*. Plon: Paris, 1938 – 1952. Volume I, p. 8.

Das Erbe am Rhein

Combined with Schickele's ongoing concern with Franco-German rapprochement after World War I and his conviction that Alsace's double cultural heritage must be safeguarded this time under French rule, is his development and promotion of 'geistiges Elsässertum'. Indeed, as Robertson points out, 'geistiges Elsässertum' 'became Schickele's personal mission in the years from 1922 until 1932'.²⁷ In Schickele's trilogy of novels, *Das Erbe am Rhein*,²⁸ praised by Thomas Mann as a 'Standardwerk elsässischer Landschaft und elsässischer Seelenlage',²⁹ concerns about Alsace's cultural identity and tensions under French rule as well as its situation in post-World War I Europe are core issues. The fusion of fact and fiction in *Das Erbe am Rhein* is reminiscent of *Hans im Schnakenloch*. Indeed, many critics of Schickele's work have remarked on the thematic similarities between the trilogy and play.³⁰ Both works focus on the fortunes of one Alsatian family and on a protagonist representative of the perennial Alsatian dilemma. Moreover, the publication of *Blick auf die Vogesen*, which is the second volume of *Das Erbe am Rhein*, corresponded with that of the 'verbesserte und endgültige Ausgabe' of *Hans im Schnakenloch* in 1927,³¹ refocusing attention on the play in the context of Schickele's expansion on Alsace-related themes in his novels. Schickele's belief in the importance of his wartime drama long after war had ended is recorded in his diary in the mid-1930s, where he reflects, 'Noch immer kommt jedem ehrlichen Elsässer sein Dasein fragwürdig vor. Die Zeit, für die mein Schauspiel ein Dokument sein soll, ist noch lange nicht begraben. Das Vorzeichen allein ist geändert.'³²

Das Erbe am Rhein, the title of the trilogy of novels, alluding both to Alsace's location along the Rhine as well as to the region's dual cultural heritage, foregrounds Schickele's promotion of Alsace, the *Grenzland*, as a natural mediator between France and Germany in these three

²⁷ Robertson, Eric. *Writing Between the Lines. René Schickele, Citoyen français, deutscher Dichter (1883-1940)*. Rodopi: Amsterdam, Atlanta, GA, 1995, p. 105.

²⁸ The trilogy comprises the volumes *Maria Capponi* (originally the two-volume *Ein Erbe am Rhein*), *Blick auf die Vogesen* and *Der Wolf in der Hürde*, published between 1925 and 1931. Any quotations from these volumes will be indicated in the article by their respective title abbreviations, MC, BV and WH and refer to the 1983 Fischer editions of *Maria Capponi* and *Blick auf die Vogesen* and the 1931 Fischer edition of *Der Wolf in der Hürde*.

²⁹ 'Zur französischen Ausgabe von René Schickeles "Witwe Bosca".' *Reden und Aufsätze* 2, Mann, Thomas. *Gesammelte Werke in zwölf Bänden*. Volume X. S. Fischer Verlag: Frankfurt am Main, 1960, pp. 761-766. Here, p. 762.

³⁰ Brummert comments for example that '*Hans im Schnakenloch*, in den ersten Kriegswochen abgefaßt, thematisiert die Tragik des Elsaß, die tatsächliche Zerrissenheit der elsässischen Menschen in der historisch gegebenen Situation [...] Die Konstellationen des *Erbe am Rhein* werden präfiguriert.' Brummert, Ulrike. 'Aufhebung von Grenzen. Zur deutsch-französischen Vermittlerrolle von René Schickele und Jean Jaurès', *René Schickele aus Neuer Sicht*, pp. 45-64. Here, p. 55. Also Wagener states that 'Thematisch ist der Roman [...] mit dem Drama *Hans im Schnakenloch* verwandt.' Wagener, Hans. *Europäer in Neun Monaten*. Gerlingen: Bleicher, 2000, p. 154.

³¹ Schickele, René. 'Vorrede von 1927', *Werke* III, p. 12.

³² Diary entry, 6/7 May 1934, *Ibid.*, p. 1104.

interconnected novels. However, *Das Erbe am Rhein* highlights the problematic of Alsatian identity in a new political context where Alsace is now under French rule. Furthermore, although relations between France, Germany and Alsace are here again the focus of attention as in *Hans im Schnakenloch*, such issues are contextualised in the trilogy within a broader European dimension. Alsace is depicted here not just as a potential mediator between its two mutually hostile neighbours but also as a broker of peace in Europe. As indicated by the title of the last volume in the trilogy, *Der Wolf in der Hürde*, the concept of a more autonomous or enclosed region between either partly or fully closed borders is also considered. Such a concept is clearly a reference to Alsace's autonomist movement, which gained momentum in the region particularly from the mid-1920s onwards, as a reaction to French centralist rule, perceived by many as a real threat to Alsace's cultural and linguistic identity. Autonomism in interwar Alsace comprised a broad spectrum of cultural and political aims within the region. These ranged from regionalists (who opposed French secularisation of the Alsatian education system and aimed to attain limited political autonomy to protect traditions, such as the right to speak their dialect and German) to particularists (who called for a greater degree of political autonomy within the French nation than the regionalists, e.g. to establish a local parliament in Alsace) to separatists (who sought to break away from the French nation-state).³³ Autonomism reached its apogee in the late 1920s before support declined in the 1930s as the more radical separatist elements became aligned with Nazism. It is clear from Schickele's writings of the interwar period that he was not in favour of Alsace's autonomist aims, even if he supported the vindication of the region's double cultural heritage under French rule.³⁴

It would seem that, as with *Hans im Schnakenloch*, Schickele was again inspired by the name of a well-known song for the title of his trilogy. However, rather than referencing a local Alsatian folk song, *Das Erbe am Rhein* alludes to the German patriotic song *Die Wacht am Rhein*³⁵ It is likely that Schickele deliberately played on the two titles' similarity in order to subvert the nationalist sentiment expressed in *Die Wacht am Rhein* which was a popular military song during the Franco-Prussian war. The trilogy's supra-national message of Franco-German harmony along the Rhine is in direct contrast to the song's repeated refrain to guard and maintain the Rhine as a symbol of division between the two nations ('Lieb' Vaterland magst ruhig sein / Fest steht und treu die Wacht am Rhein!').³⁶

³³ See Fischer, Christopher, J. *Alsace to the Alsatians? Visions and Divisions of Alsatian Regionalism, 1870-1939*. New York, Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2010, particularly Chapters 5-7, for in-depth discussion on the Autonomist movement in Alsace.

³⁴ Schickele, René, 'Das ewige Elsaß', *Werke*, III, p.618.

³⁵ The poem *Die Wacht am Rhein* was composed in 1840 by Max Schneckenburger and was set to music in 1854 by Karl Wilhelm.

³⁶ Wilhelm, Karl. *Die Wacht am Rhein*. Handwritten manuscript. Darmstadt, 1870.

Schickele began writing the trilogy in his home in Badenweiler in the Black Forest, across the newly-re-established Rhine border not far from his native Alsace, in the mid-1920s. Previously known for more avant-garde forms of writing, especially Expressionism, *Das Erbe am Rhein* indicates Schickele's experiment with a more traditional genre, that of the nineteenth century French social novel, a genre he wished to introduce to the Weimar Republic.³⁷ He finally finished it in the early 1930s, soon before his self-imposed exile in South France. In a letter to author Adolf von Hatzfeld (1892-1957), Schickele succinctly outlines the key ideas in each volume of what he considered his *magnum opus*:

Der Aufbau der Trilogie? *Maria Capponi*: Liebe, du und ich, "und sonst gar nichts". *Blick auf die Vogesen*: Vom Individualismus zur Gemeinschaft, Heimat, Familie. *Der Wolf in der Hürde*: Auflösung der bisherigen Gemeinschaft durch soziale Umstände, hauptsächlich aber durch die Angst – die Tragödie der Angst.³⁸

It is through the protagonist Claus von Breuschheim that our perceptions of Alsace during the inter-war years under French rule are most influenced. As the main character, Claus assumes the role of narrator in the first volume, *Maria Capponi* and third volume *Wolf in der Hürde*, even if in the latter the stories of other characters are foregrounded.³⁹ However, even in the second volume, *Blick auf die Vogesen*, which is narrated in the third person, the narration is, as Woltersdorff argues, identifiable to a certain extent with Claus, 'Zwar wird der Ich-Erzähler des ersten Teils nun durch einen Er-Erzähler abgelöst, doch der "Nullpunkt" aus dem erzählt wird [...] ist auch weiterhin teilweise identisch mit Claus Breuschheim'.⁴⁰ The trilogy's narrative begins with a letter written by Claus to the eponymous Maria Capponi in the spring of 1922. The act of writing triggers Claus's memories, and he feels he must continue with his story until some kind of conclusion is reached:

Ich versuche, mich aus den Trümmern einer Welt herauszuarbeiten, mit nichts als einer kleinen Feder. Die Arbeit begann, als ich zu meiner eigenen Überraschung hinsetzte, um an Maria zu schreiben, und jetzt muß ich fortfahren – bis zu irgendeinem Ende' (MC 66).

This personal narrative, comprising the first volume and spanning a century of the von Breuschheim family history from the Napoleonic period to Alsace in the inter-war era, is set both in Alsace and

³⁷ Schickele, René, 'Die Grenze', *Werke III*, p.647.

³⁸ René Schickele to Adolf von Hatzfeld. Letter dated 3 January 1932, *Werke III*, pp. 1161-2. Here, p. 1162.

³⁹ '[S]tellt sich Claus als Chronist der Ereignisse vor, der dann freilich, fast auktorial erzählend, überall hinter der Handlung verschwindet, um in einigen Kapiteln, in denen er handelnde Person ist, als Ich-Erzähler hervorzutreten'. Holtz, Günter. 'Das Erbe am Rhein. Mythos, Glaube und europäische Vision im Werk René Schickeles.' *Recherches Germaniques*, 21, 1991, p. 166, footnote 20.

⁴⁰ Woltersdorff. *Chronik einer Traumlandschaft. Elsaßmodelle in Prosatexten von René Schickele (1899-1932)*, Bern: Peter Lang, 2000, p. 363.

beyond its borders in different European countries. It focuses in particular on Claus's memories from adolescence to young adulthood.

The narrative continues in a more linear method in the next volume. As the title *Blick auf die Vogesen* indicates, the narrative here centres around Alsace and spans approximately three years, beginning in 1922 and concentrating on the region under its new French rulers. It commences with Claus's return with his young son Jacquot to the family estate after a two-year absence in Römerbad over the border in Germany. As a widower, bereft of his young German wife Doris, who had tragically died in an accident, he undergoes a period of isolation, before returning to his homeland.⁴¹ Given the temporal context of *Blick auf die Vogesen*, and the fact it was published in 1927, the very year when the autonomist crisis in Alsace had reached its apogee, it is perhaps not surprising that Schickele distances himself here from his protagonist's vocal criticism of French rule in the region, by using third-person narration in this volume.⁴² Claus then adopts his role as first person narrator again, although as a distant one, in the following volume, *Der Wolf in der Hürde*. Here, rather, it is his antagonist Silvio Wolf who comments critically on the turbulent political situation in Alsace during the period 1927 to 1928 and who is identified with the more extreme elements of the autonomist movement. Although Claus is not very present in *Der Wolf in der Hürde*, he and his more cosmopolitan views serve as a foil to the opportunistic Silvio Wolf, positing Alsace as a *Mittelland* in the heart of Europe rather than as a closed, insular space, i.e. *die Hürde* which promotes a narrow-minded provincialism.

In *Das Erbe am Rhein*, as in *Hans im Schnakenloch*, we witness how even within the family circle in this much-disputed region it is difficult to avoid politics. It is clear that here again, Schickele draws on disparities in the diverse personalities and allegiances of members of the von Breuschheim family to symbolise the double cultural heritage of Alsatian identity. This is most evident in the tense relationship between Claus and his older adopted brother Ernst, an echo of Hans's and Balthasar's fraternal relations in the play, again due to their differing temperaments and political outlook concerning Alsace, France and Germany.

Unlike the play, however, which restricts itself to the triangular constellation of Alsace, France and Germany as its framework, *Das Erbe am Rhein* balances its focus on the Alsatian context with more cosmopolitan perspectives and seeks to undermine narrow nationalist and provincial aims. Claus appears to feel equally at home abroad as he is in Alsace and his broader experiences of diverse

⁴¹ 'Seit dem Tod meiner Frau bin ich immer allein gewesen [...] Es war Winter, Sommer und wiederum Winter. Dann sollte es Frühling werden' (MC 9). This indicates that Claus lived in Römerbad from the winter of 1920 to spring 1922.

⁴² Comparisons between Schickele and Claus von Breuschheim and the importance of biographical influences on *Das Erbe am Rhein* have been observed in Finck's *Introduction à l'oeuvre de René Schickele*, Kehl, Strasbourg: Morstadt Verlag, 1982, p. 85.

cultures aid him in more clearly understanding his own identity as well as critically discerning both the negative and positive qualities of his homeland. Furthermore, Schickele situates Alsace in a wider European context, which is no longer simply predicated on relations both east and west of its borders but also north and south. Much of the narrative of the first volume of the trilogy, for example, is set in Mediterranean lands such as Italy and the south of France. Therefore, the descriptions of quite different landscapes in the trilogy help promote Alsace as a 'Mittelland', at the heart of Europe and Schickele's idea of 'geistiges Elsässertum'. Claus's son, Jacquot's comment on Alsace being a central rather than a peripheral region supports this argument, '[D]as Elsaß ist der Mittelpunkt der Erde. Darum dreht sich alles andere' (BV 64). It is reminiscent also of the aforementioned comment on the centrality and significance of Alsace made by Countess Sulz in *Hans im Schnakenloch*.

By the end of *Das Erbe am Rhein*, Claus fully understands that it is now up to him alone to preserve and pass on the von Breuschheim legacy, including an Alsatian cultural heritage, which is both proud of its regional roots but also of its European cosmopolitanism. 'Vor mir geht keiner mehr' (WH 551). This would suggest that in passing on this Alsatian legacy to the next generation there is hope for the future of Europe. However, the trilogy does not conclude on an optimistic note. Jacquot, Claus's only son and thus the inheritor of the von Breuschheim estate, has moved abroad to escape the tense, political atmosphere of Alsace in the inter-war years. Likewise, Schickele's device of starting and ending the trilogy with the same sentence, is, as he suggests himself, symbolic of his generation's fate to repeat in cyclical fashion the same political errors, 'Und was unsere Generation anlangt, so ist sie verurteilt, im Kreise zu gehn...Deshalb hat der *Wolf in der Hürde*, hat die Trilogie auch kein "Ende", sondern der *Wolf* schließt wörtlich mit dem Satz, mit dem *Maria Capponi* begann.'⁴³ However, this resignation in terms of Alsace's mediator role is tempered by the fact that Alsace remains connected as a region to a wider Europe, "Schickele erteilte der geistigen Vermittlerrolle des Elsass am Ende seiner elsässischen Roman-Trilogie eine resignierte Absage, aber die Verbindung von Elsass und Europa tastete er nicht an."⁴⁴ Schickele regarded fear as the biggest barrier to breaking free from the destructive cycles of narrow provincialism, bellicose nationalism and conflict. Using Claus as a mouthpiece, Schickele challenges his readers at the end of the trilogy not to give up the dream of creating a new order in Europe, convinced that 'uns fehlt ja nur eins: Mut!' (WH 553).

⁴³ Letter from René Schickele to Adolf von Hatzfeld, 3 January 1932, *Werke* III, pp.1161-1162. Here, p. 1162.

⁴⁴ Kwaschik, Anne, 'An der Grenze der Nationen: Europa-Konzepte und regionale Selbstverwertung im Elsass', *Studies in Contemporary History*, 9, 2012, pp. 387-408

Conclusion:

In *Hans im Schnakenloch* and *Das Erbe am Rhein*, both time and place shape the Boulanger and von Breuschheim family destinies where we see how the problematic nature of their double cultural heritage in particular political contexts complicates relationships in both families. In the play, for example, we see how in the lead-up to World War I, the impact of Franco-German hostilities splits the family apart, when Alsace is a *Reichsland* in the Second German Empire. Hans and Balthasar, representative of their generation in this much-disputed region, are swept up in the war between France and Germany and forced to choose sides. In the trilogy, where the focus switches to another landed family, the von Breuschheims and the context of the inter-war era, similar mistakes are repeated with expectations of unequivocal allegiance, this time to France. Here again, as in the play, Schickele's view of Alsace as mediator and bearer of not only a French but also German tradition is not a political argument but a cultural one. Thus, the trilogy reinforces the play's arguments in favour of Schickele's mission of 'geistiges Elsässertum'.

As Storck points out, Schickele himself epitomises the image of the Alsatian as ideal mediator, having grown up in a bilingual environment, inheritor of a double cultural heritage and promoter of a peaceful Europe, 'Als "Sohn Frankreichs" wird der Elsässer ausdrücklich bezeichnet, der zugleich aber, als ein Dichter deutscher Zunge, zum Mittler zwischen beiden Kulturen und Nationen legitimiert wird.'⁴⁵ Through his works, his in-depth knowledge and innate understanding of both Germany and France is much in evidence as well as his unflagging interest in the contemporaneous events unfolding in his native Alsace. Although his disillusion about the future of European harmony, discernible at the end of *Das Erbe am Rhein* was soon to be validated by political developments in Germany and by the outbreak of World War II, his hope for a more harmonious, open European space was to be fulfilled some decades after his death. Alsace's capital Strasbourg too enjoys a symbolic role as a city of international significance where both the Council of Europe and European Parliament are located. France and Germany are at the heart of this union, which Schickele regarded as a necessity for lasting peace in Europe.

⁴⁵Storck, Joachim, 'Ein alemannischer Rebell. Zum hundersten Geburtstag von René Schickele am 4.8.1983', *Das Markgräflerland*, 1, 1984, pp.3-18. Here, p. 6.

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