

**East Germany's "Present Past" in Translation:  
Constructing Memory in the United States through Jana Hensel's *Zonenkinder***

Andreas Huyssen's concept of "present past" emphasizes a present reading of past events that is heavily influenced by popular media and culture. The past does not exist independently in memory, but must instead be articulated by the individual in order to become memory and requires that some aspects of past events are recalled, emphasized, and reconstructed, while others are minimized or forgotten. The memoir is an example of such an articulation, which is then further re-articulated and reconstructed through each reading. Just as in the writing a memoir, the translating of a memoir requires that some aspects of past events are emphasized while others are minimized or forgotten, and is a process unique to the translator, publisher, and target audience.

Jana Hensel was born in 1976 in East Germany and was thirteen when the East German government was dissolved. Her 2002 memoir *Zonenkinder* is such an example of how past events are articulated in the present to construct memory. The popular reception of *Zonenkinder* and its wide readership among the former East German population can be attributed to the readership sharing a generally similar historical and cultural experience that encourages the readers to "remember" along with Hensel. At the same time, this remembering requires a personal re-articulation to construct a personalized memory of East Germany.

Due to the specific cultural and historical references in *Zonenkinder*, Jefferson Chase faced important decisions in his translation of the text into English (titled *After the Wall: Confessions from an East German Childhood and the Life that Came Next*.) Such decisions forced him to reflect on how much historical and cultural background information to introduce in his translation, and to what extent he expected the reader to choose whether to pursue this information on his/her own. In examining Chase's translation, I will show how each translation decision must be made carefully because translation is a reconstruction of meaning and has an impact on how the reader him or herself personally re-articulates the original text. Like in every translation, Chase's decisions have led to a

rewriting of Hensel's memoir and will have an impact on the reader's own reading and re-articulation of how the author "remembered" the history of this lost nation-state and her childhood in it.