

UWP Instructor Application 2008-09

Sample Student Draft

Directions: Imagine that you are teaching a class in academic writing for first-year college students. In your class, drafts are not graded. Instead, you give students feedback and allow them to revise their essays before submitting them for grades. In response to your first essay assignment (given below), you have received the following draft from Joe X., one of your students. Write a brief end comment (250 words max.) in which you offer advice to Joe about how he might revise his essay. You do not need to submit a marked version of the sample student paper itself. We will be considering only your end comment.

Assignment: Write a 1500-2000 word essay in which you use Marianne Hirsch and Leo Spitzer's essay "We Would Not Have Come Without You: Generations of Nostalgia" to interpret a specific experience of your own.

Joe X.
University Writing

Heimat: A Home Away From Home

[T]hese remarks suggest some of the complex factors that motivate the exile-refugee's return to the place that was once home. They blend affirmation, sorrow, and curiosity with the desire to pass on a sense of Heimat to a daughter born and raised elsewhere, in emigration.

-Hirsch and Spitzer

The English language has no equivalent for the German word Heimat. The simplest translation of Heimat into English would be "home," but "home" cannot encompass the plethora of connotations that Heimat carries. Peter Bickle, associate professor of German at Western Michigan University, wrote that "in Heimat we find, paradoxically, an individualization that is based on a disindividualization, a regression, an idealization of space. The idea of Heimat answers to the longing for a sense of belonging that seems to come without a price" (Bickle 6). In this definition, Bickle never once refers to Heimat as a physical location. Along those same lines, the parents of Marianne Hirsch return to their childhood home of Czernowitz to regain their sense of Heimat, a sense of belonging and comfort that comes from an idealization and

familiarization of space. During this journey, Marianne documents the progression of her parents' nostalgia while at the same time recognizing that she, too, was starting to realize her own nostalgia for a place that she had never seen. Even if it was only a temporary, fleeting moment, Marianne's encounter with a newly found Heimat and my own personal experiences show that it is possible to achieve a feeling of Heimat, not dependent on any past experiences but only on a sincere atmosphere of belonging.

In the context of Hirsch and Spitzer's essay, "'We Would Not Have Come Without You': Generations of Nostalgia," Heimat is primarily used to refer to Czernowitz. Although it is true that Heimat can be used to simply identify one's birthplace, Carl's use of the word certainly implies more significant meanings of the word. When Carl asks Lotte, "Is Czernowitz our Heimat?" he obviously has no doubt that Czernowitz is where he was born. But when he asks that question, he is wondering whether or not the Czernowitz of today will still remind him of the Czernowitz of his childhood, filled with happy memories. Will today's Czernowitz evoke a sense of belonging for Carl? This second meaning of Heimat beings to explain how Marianne, who had never stepped foot into Czernowitz, could momentarily feel a sense of "home" for a place she only heard of through her parents' memories. Heimat is not dependent on a birthplace or the amount of time spent in some country. Personally, I have only visited South Korea, but my experiences allow me to share an understanding of what Heimat meant to Marianne during her first visit to Czernowitz.

The patriotic, collective atmosphere that engulfed me while I was in South Korea for the 2002 World Cup dramatically affected my prior certainties of my identity in terms of race and nationality. Unprecedented in national history, the South Korean soccer team made a glorious breakthrough by reaching the semifinals in the World Cup tournament, endlessly supported by

their hometown fans, the South Korean red devils. National holidays were declared on each day that the Korea team played so that every citizen in South Korea had the opportunity to join hundreds of thousands of their fellow Koreans in the streets of major cities to watch the games on large television screens. During that summer of 2002, I was one of those hundreds of thousands, dressed head to toe in red attire, screaming and shouting songs and chants that shook adjacent buildings and skyscrapers. When I lifted my head above the crowd, I felt that if I were to fall, I would inescapably drown in the sea of red that stretched as far as my eyes could see. In those moments when a commonality was established between me and other Koreans around me, native or non-native, I felt a sense of belonging as if I had grown up in that culture and environment my entire life.

Finding that common ground with people or a place is a quintessential aspect of *Heimat*. Having a means to connect emotionally or personally to a culture is comforting, which in turn invites that sense of belonging. For Marianne, her connection to Czernowitz was her parents. The stories that she heard and the memories that she grew up with became a reality as she walked along the streets of the city. Although she had never been to the Czernowitz, “the streets, buildings, and natural surroundings of Czernowitz—its theaters, restaurants, parks, rivers, and domestic settings... —figured more strongly in her childhood memories and imagination than the sites and scenes of Timisoara in Romania, where she was born, or Bucharest, where she had spent her childhood” (Hirsch and Spitzer 262). The common thread that I can identify through my experiences in Korea was the pervasive, undying loyalty to support our Korean national soccer team. I felt a strange familial-type connection toward people that I shared moments of laughter, elation, and even discouragement.

But where exactly did the sense of Heimat come from? Was it the people? Was it the vivid atmosphere of national pride? Although these aspects are undoubtedly parts of discovering a sense of Heimat, one must have grown up with at least a minimal amount of exposure to the culture in interest. If I had not grown up learning the Korean language, eating Korean food, or basically identifying myself as a Korean-American, my trip to Korea certainly would not have had the same significance in terms of feeling a strong sense of belonging through commonalities. In a sense, this certain notion of Heimat can be illustrated as a bridge connecting two riverbanks. One side of the river represents a person's conceptualization of their family's originating country, city, or town based upon a parent's transferal of cultural values to a child. On the other side are actual experiences of visiting a homeland that can be bridged back and connected to those earlier conceptualizations of "home." That bridge is Heimat. It connects the impersonal past to personalized events of the present to give greater significance to cultural values that inevitably lose significance outside of their native country. It bridges generations together through an understanding of culture or what Marianne would describe as "a point of intersection between time and space, personal and cultural recollection" (Hirsch and Spitzer 274).

Though my experiences in Korea differ markedly from those of Marianne in Czernowitz, I find it important to note that in both circumstances, a realization of Heimat was preceded by a series of fairly emotional incidents. An argument can then be made that these feelings of Heimat are fleeting, only driven by a surge of passionate emotions. These emotional experiences function similarly to the concept of activation energy in chemistry. For most chemical reactions to occur, a certain amount of energy must be inserted into the system or extracted from the environment in order for changes to take place. Highly emotional experiences provide that necessary boost in energy to make a strong connection between the past and the present. This is a

plausible explanation of how a person can feel a sense of belonging in a place that he/she has never seen or visited. With a cornucopia of emotions rushing through the senses, a Heimat can be adopted, although temporarily, supported and sustained by the strength behind those vivid emotions.

The significance of even a short-lived sense of Heimat, however, should certainly not be undermined. For Marianne and I, children of immigrant families, Heimat means having a home away from home. We can look back at a borrowed past, the past of our parents, and identify with those stories and memories with deeper understanding based on first-hand experiences. But more importantly, Heimat for children of immigrant families reconciles two cultures with each other: Korea with America and Czernowitz with Romania. Common notions of cultural incompatibility often unnecessarily preclude the possibility of identifying strongly with two different backgrounds. Is it possible for two sets of conflicting traditions and ideologies to coalesce in one community, one family, or one individual? I have tried walking a tightrope between two cultures, but any imbalance creates ostensibly precarious anxieties underneath a façade of composure. Instead, a lifestyle that actively acknowledges and embraces inherent discontinuities between cultures while at the same time never devaluing the significances of either culture achieves somewhat of a stable equilibrium between two worlds. For a child of an immigrant family, Heimat is the other home that is often neither apparent in a physical nor an emotional sense. But for that child, one home cannot exist without the other. Finding one's Heimat is the realization and understanding of identity, an identity that is inextricably linked to two cultures, two countries, and two worlds.

Work Cited

Hirsch, Marianne, and Leo Spitzer. "‘We Would Not Have Come Without You’: Generations of Nostalgia." *American Imago*, Vol. 59, No. 3 (2002): 253-274.

