What follows is sample #5 from a five-part series of opening sections of *Turkeyfoot*; for more information, contact:

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Happy Reading!
“Now Fatherland, Fatherland, show us the sign
Your children have waited to see
The morning will come
When the world is mine
Tomorrow belongs to me
Tomorrow belongs to me
Tomorrow belongs to me
Tomorrow belongs to me.”

— John Kander, *Cabaret*

**Entire Worlds in a Schnapsglas**

The late ‘90s found me living in Berlin, in what the Germans already then were calling their “New-Old Capital” on the Spree. ’Twas a heady time in freshly-reunited Germany—and I loved it!
My partner, Andres, had been raised in what had been West Berlin, but his mother had family in the former East. Her aunt, Tante Herta, resided in Satow, an archetypical Prussian village a hundred miles northwest of the bustling city. It might as well have been a day or even a planet away, for the erection of the Berlin Wall in August 1961 had cut the surrounding countryside from not only the big city, but the world at large. A hamlet of less than a hundred families, its railway line had long been truncated, its people pressured by lack of opportunity to drift off.

![a period postcard of a typical Prussian village, showing: (top) Hans Böge’s “Restaurant of the Sun”; “church and parsonage;” “Greetings from Satow” and “Main Street”](image)
When the *alte Dame* died, she was in her 90s, frail yet sharp-of-mind. I had never met her, but when I trekked to Satow with Andres and his father, Achim—who’d been a West Berlin cop despite having been also a hippie sympathizer and later a Green Party activist—I felt as if I had. We rifled through her musty apartment—a large room with a couple of alcoves carved off a larger thatched-roof farmhouse, like in a Teutonic version of a scene from *Dr. Zhivago*. Her half-century old, thread-bare dresses, pre-war furnishings and myriad other relics chronicled almost a century of modern German history. As I helped sort through the earthly remains of a long life in the rushed course of a short morning, I could literally see not only a seamless flow of historical evolution, but astonishingly-well-preserved watermarks of shifting systems over time.

Herta Karras had spent her entire life in a tiny village, yet lived that life under serial systems. From sticking drawers and long-forgotten jars on back shelves, we dug out seven currencies:

1) During the *Kaiser’s* era, imperial Prussia’s booming economy demanded potent potato *Schnaps* from backwaters newly opened by the spreading *Reichsbahn* lines that tied the swelling capital to its provinces. As we later explored the ruins of the *Schnapsbrennerei*, the distillery decaying across from the rail line that once carried its high-octane brew to Berlin, we marveled at how a single industry could dominate the lives of those around it. Its workers had loyally served the *Brennerei’s* owners, Herta’s *Vater* Wilhelm and—until the firm fell victim to the times—her heir self, who in turn took over local acts of charity.

2) The unexpected (and by most imperial-era Germans unwanted) arrival of the wobbly *Weimarer Republik* ushered in a new currency, along with newfangled ways of living and working. Although never stable, that experiment in democracy midwifed modernity, for it severed the Germans from Hohenzollern rule that stretched back for centuries. In the ensuing vacuum, *Tante* Herta’s family and neighbors scrambled to cope as the village’s largest economic engine, the *Schnapsbrennerei*, hit hard times. Then, darkness fell.

3) Overnight, the Nazi-imposed “Third Reich” recast the area’s economy again, this time pushing all production to support Hitler’s insatiable appetite for armed expansion. In the process, it forced the realignment of Satow’s values and social structures. Yes, *Schnaps* might embolden lagging troops in their slogging conquest of Europe, but foodstuffs once fermented into booze became more critical to the system in edible, not drinkable forms. Yes, during war full employment reigned, but many of the jobs sowed death, not life.

4) Post-war Russian occupation brought an interim social order that mirrored both martial rule and centrally-planned, Soviet-style economics. Strong-armed into swallowing a new order imposed from outside and above, *Tante* Herta’s life changed forever. Like so many yoked into an artificially-driven economy, she took a token job in a token post. Paid enough to survive but not to thrive, she found the scope of her daily world shrank and stank. As the fates of the “Hertas” of the Soviet-occupied east sank, despair spread.
5) The introduction of the (so-called) German Democratic Republic’s *Ost-Mark* in 1949 embodied the social ideals of the ruling dictatorship proclaimed that same year. Old capitalistic ventures like the *Schnapsbrennerei* were seized and subjugated to central planning; their very existence depended on their ability to erase their roots and morph into inflexible units of production that soon began to entropy and later turn moribund. Workers were assigned and reassigned, based not on skills or passions, but head counts.

6) The fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 saw a “Wild-East” fever erupt among West-German speculators. Economic as well as political opportunists cannibalized what remained of the GDR’s collective farms and state-held factories, which disappeared quickly, leaving both rural and urban workers not only unemployed, but socially shell-shocked. Yes, *Tante* Herta’s purse briefly boasted the much-touted Federal Republic’s *Mark*, but she reeled under new economic conditions she could neither control nor cope with. It was in this disorienting fog of yet another systemic shift that Herta Karras lived her last days.

7) The European Union’s much-heralded new currency, the chic *Euro*, was adopted by most EU countries on New Year’s Day in 1999. By now feeble and sick, *Tante* Herta nonetheless knew that beyond the door of her large room within a larger thatched-roof farmhouse, the people of her village had weathered seven systems in order to see this momentous day. While hers was drawing to a quiet end, their lives would never be the same. Since the emperor’s reign, she’d witnessed systems rise and then fall. Except for brief spells, she had had little say in those systems—and had mutely accepted that.

*Tante* Herta never moved once from her *hinterland* home, yet several markedly different systems came to her. Each time a new system replaced a currency, existing ways of living and working, spending free time and experiencing *Kultur*, as well as forms of being governed totally changed overnight. In that moment, staring at ruins of a defunct Prussian *Schnapsbrennerei*, I realized no system is inevitable, *none* lasts eternally, and *all* can be changed—*IF* an ensnared people wills it.

* To order *Turkeyfoot* as a paperback, contact: staff@TRACES.org
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  For more information go to: www.TRACES.org
about this book:

An eccentric gay-Quaker historian living in Germany decides on a quixotic whim—for deeply idealistic and quasi-spiritual reasons—to run for the US Senate in his native Iowa. To his consternation, he soon finds himself hip-deep in the moral quicksand of Midwestern Trumpism. Unexpectedly, he discovers that his Trump-drunk relatives embody the very electorate he has to woo. This story tells how this onetime farmboy got into this swamp, how he escaped, and how other residents of Trump Nation—if they truly care about our country and the larger world—might punch their way out of political paper bags as well. This book—two tomes woven into one, each uniquely pertinent to this historical moment—provides all Americans (as well as other mortals beyond our shores) a way out. Book One explores the cynical, two-party electoral system that both feeds and embodies the social-political deadlock our country faces; Book Two concludes with fifteen strategies for how to bridge the chasms that currently divide us. Combined, they outline how to rediscover compassion for each other at a juncture in our national and global history when either we find each other again or we all will be lost, together, forever.

about its author:

Michael Luick-Thrams (Ph.D. in 1997, Humboldt Universität in Berlin) directs two non-profit educational organizations, the TRACES Center for History and Culture in Iowa (founded 2001; www.TRACES.org) and Spuren in Germany (2011). Single, he divides his time between Iowa and Germany, where his two Hausmates consist of a goofy Swabian professor of religious history and a stuffed-toy Spaniel, Sparky.

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