“DEAR CHILDREN, JACOB AND AMALIE”: A RHETORICAL ANALYSIS OF LETTERS FROM RUSSIA TO A VOLGA GERMAN IMMIGRANT COUPLE IN THE AMERICAN MIDWEST

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"Dear Children, Jacob and Amalie": a Rhetorical Analysis of Letters from Russia to a Volga German Immigrant Couple in the American Midwest

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ABSTRACT

This dissertation analyzes a collection of personal letters sent to German-speaking migrants from Russia in the American Midwest by their relatives in southern Russia. The letters can be divided into two groups: the first one includes the ones written in 1913-1914, soon after the couple's immigration to the United States, while the second one consists of the letters from the 1920s and the 1930s.

The main purpose of this study is to analyze the letters from a rhetorical perspective, while the grounded theory and my personal and cultural knowledge about the ethnic Germans in Russia provided an additional help with analyzing the letters and filling in contextual "gaps." After coding the letters, I examine the ways their rhetoric was influenced by the rhetorical situation, and also the ways various dominant "themes" were communicated by the letter-writers. Also, because some of the letters were sent during a famine that affected the region and the community they came from, many letters included pleas for help from America. I am interested in how these requests for help were rhetorically represented and, therefore, focus on analyzing the theme of "crisis" in these texts.

My analysis contributes to a deeper understanding of the letter-writing genre and cultural rhetorics by offering a detailed discussion about the letters as rhetorical texts, the people, who produced them, and the constraints that influenced the letter-writers. By using grounded theory to guide my coding process, I was able tailor this qualitative research method for the needs of my project. By using rhetorical theory as a vehicle, I analyze the stories told through the letters and explore how these historical artifacts go beyond simply fulfilling the function of maintaining personal communication between the writers and readers and provide a rare "unofficial" insight into a tumultuous period of Russian history in the early 20th century. Furthermore, my

dissertation informs the discussion about the value of archival research and the use of archival artifacts in studying rhetoric and composition.

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DEDICATION

To my people

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This project began as an accident. And yet it has never been one. Only recently have I come to realize that even though I discovered the letters I am analyzing by "accident," everything else in my research career that had transpired before that serendipitous day when I was first shown them and what I had been doing for many years, had been a preparation for this project to develop into a full-fledged academic study. Things fell into place at the right time and at the right place, and my being a researcher from Russia who is interested in archives and also in my people's history helped form this project and carry it forward.

For over a decade now I have been researching the history of my family as a semi-hobby. Whether in Germany or during my regular trips to Russia, I have visited local and regional archives, made copies of old photographs and personal documents when visiting my extended family and friends, and interviewed our community elders. In part, all of this time-consuming yet exciting work has been done to quench my thirst for knowing more about my people and my family's past, and also, to some extent, it was done in my quest for re-shaping my identity following my family's immigration from Russia to Germany when I was a teenager.

Having invested a lot of time and energy into this research work, I nonetheless kept it separate from my academic life. For the longest time, my personal interests in archival research and working with historic documents did not cross over into my academic studies, but existed parallel to them. I did not think this history was appropriate for sharing with a larger audience, beyond those who are personally connected or interested in the history of my people, the Germans from Russia. But then, a discovery of some hundred-year-old letters gave me a chance to bring the two worlds together.

1.1. Discovering a 100-year-old Letter: Taking a "Chance" to Bring Two Worlds Together

In the fall of 2014 I was attending a panel consisting of several prominent scholars of rhetoric and composition during the Thomas R. Watson conference at the University of Louisville. During her part of the presentation, Dr. Amy Devitt of University of Kansas asked the attending audience about the personal stories behind their research. She also shared a story about how she once was asked the same question and how it made her aware of personal connections she had to her own research and their influence on what we do as scholars. Afterwards, in a small roundtable, attendees were asked to exchange their experiences and thoughts about the personal interests that informed their research and reflect on how these experiences influenced them as scholars and individuals.

Dr. Devitt's question, together with the discussion that followed after her presentation, made me think about a personal story that initiated my current research project and how a serendipitous moment led me to it, and about how there was much more than just one definite moment that triggered the questions that formed themselves into my goals for the project. The story that motivated my current research was told through some hundred-year-old letters from Russia found in a friend's private archive in suburban Minnesota. Working with these letters has also been the perfect tool to release the feelings of fear and curiosity, the feelings that for the last decade have fed my personal research but also obstructed it from being shared with a larger audience.

For the last decade I have been researching the history of my ethnic group, the Germans from Russia, by conducting interviews with family members, friends, and community elders, working in the state and with private archives, helping out others, and actively engaging with the

work of a historical society promoting the preservation of my people's history and heritage.[1] Inspired by the passing of my grandmother, who was the first in a long line of storytellers I have had the privilege to listen to, and by nostalgia for my Russian homeland I left as a teenager, I began to mold a new identity for myself in a new country while being conscious of my roots and my family's past. I was trying to define a present identity for myself by the collective experience and the memories of my heritage past. To make it clear, I classify my ethnic group as an ethnic minority group of Russian, formerly Soviet Russian, citizens of Germanic heritage. Although differing in many ways, e.g., by the time period, the kind of migration—individual, professional, or mass migration—and the geographical location in the former Russian Empire in which their European immigrant ancestors settled, all German Russians can be commonly identified as being descendants of European immigrants, who came to live in the Russian Empire starting from the 16th century. My own family belongs to the group of Volga Germans, who are descendants of German-speaking European immigrants who settled the Lower Volga Valley in southeastern Russia through mass migration starting in the 1760s.

As I said before, for a long time, I kept this private research separate from my academic interests. While my academic research interests cover historical and sociolinguistics, composition, and writing studies, I have also been pursuing research focused on the ethnic group I belong to and its culture, history, and language. However, without purposefully bringing the two worlds together, I have continuously—and without actually meaning to do so—prepared myself for the time when they would finally merge into one entity with equally vital experiences that complement each other and support my research project. Focusing on historical and social study of language in my scholastic career, I have developed a good rapport with historical

[1] "Front page." *www.ahsgr.org*. American Historical Society of Germans from Russia. 2016.

documents while translating various official and private texts from German or Russian into English. While conducting my private historical research, I have also practiced reaching out for different sources when trying to supplement archival text-based research with oral history.

Unaware of the "archive fever" Jacques Derrida spoke about when theorizing archival research in his work, I contracted the nearly obsessive longing for getting my hands on historical documents that could provide me with the answers I was looking for.[2] This "fever" largely developed for two reasons. First, I was trying to use archival documents such as church records to verify or supplement the information received through first-hand oral history accounts. Second, and perhaps more importantly, I was using archival research as a tool to strengthen my ethos as a young researcher. In retrospect, I also see these first steps to develop my own methods to conduct serious archival research as an attempt to legitimize my position as a member of the community I was researching, demonstrating my willingness to explore our past to save the memories about it for the future.

After co-existing in two worlds of research interests that seemed only rarely to overlap for several years, I happened upon an unexpected letter that brought the two worlds together. One snowy February evening two years ago, I was visiting Emmanuel "Manuel" Jerger, a good friend whom I met after coming to the United States for my graduate studies, and our discussion turned to our family ties in Russia as it had so often before. Although Manuel was born in the United States, his parents were first-generation Americans and were originally from the same area in southern Russia as my family. Just like his ancestors, mine had also been among the German-speaking Europeans who settled the Lower Volga area in the late 18th century following the invitation of Catherine the Great. In the fall of 1912, his parents, Jacob Jerger and Amalie

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[2] Derrida, Jacques. *Archive Fever.* 1996.

Krug left their Russian homeland merely several months after their wedding.[3] After a long and weary journey that took them across Europe, the Atlantic, and Canada, they finally reached the United States and settled in Scottsbluff, Nebraska, an area once heavily populated by Germans from Russia where they were awaited by relatives, who had immigrated to America some years before. A trail of letters from their relatives in Russia followed them into the new country and across the American Midwest as they moved from state to state.

That winter evening my friend showed me a massive binder from his family archive with somewhat carefully and somewhat randomly stacked old letters, documents, and other tidbits. While these were not the first letters from Russia to America I had seen, there was something about them that immediately grabbed my attention. First, there was the personal aspect. All of the letters came from just a couple of miles from the place my family lived until 1941. Because my family, having gone through deportation, dispersion, and re-location during and after WWII, did not preserve any personal letters or documents—some did not even have their original birth certificates—the chance to read personal letters from the 1910s and 1920s that came from the neighboring villages was the closest I felt I can get to the first-person narrative accounts of what happened during these decades in the area where my family was living. Then, there was the astonishing good quality of most of the letters, and their number was what I had visualized as a perfect sample for academic research.

While all of the letters were in German, several of the better preserved ones were in a beautiful handwritten script and on a stationary of good quality with an official letterhead in Russian bearing the name of my friend's grandfather. Heinrich Krug ran a cloth-making factory before the Soviets came to power, and, at a first glance, the letters looked just as any other well-

[3] Jerger, Manuel. Personal Interview. February 2013.

kept historical piece of writing. One of the letters, however, was dated from February 23, 1913, and would be turning a hundred years old a few days after I first saw it. That first look at a nearly hundred-year-old letter was the moment that inspired my new interest in researching the letters sent to Russian-German immigrants in the United States.

This was my serendipitous moment, the moment that triggered a strong wish to turn this personal interest in letters from Russia into the main focus of my current scholastic research. It was the moment I knew I had found the bridge to help me connect my theoretical studies with what I had been passionately pursuing about for a long time—the history of my people. While providing me with a case study to focus on, this project has also given me a tool to explore my own family's experience through someone else's eyes. It gave me the opportunity to explore the traumatic events of two decades, during which these letters were written, through first-hand written accounts of other families living in the area. Though less immediate than my own family's experiences, the letters nevertheless told the stories my relatives could have told if any of the letters they had written had been preserved. Finally, these letters, which embed personal, "unofficial histories," can be woven into the large-scale fabric of "official" history.[4] This makes them an example of a trend favoring archival research in the study of rhetoric and writing.

1.2. The Archival "Turn" in Rhetoric and Composition

In the past few decades, the humanities and social sciences have seen a new research movement appear that has expanded more traditional notions of the archive by focusing on archival materials that had previously not been deemed worthy of academic and historical research. The work of researchers supporting this "archival turn" is said to contribute to

[4] The term "unofficial histories" is borrowed from the title of an interdisciplinary conference hosted by the International Institute of Social History in Amsterdam, the Netherlands, in June 2015.

understanding the value of local, regional, and family history as sources for research and the production of knowledge on social and cultural history. In their introduction to *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, a collection of articles about interdisciplinary research projects using local, family, and personal archives, the editors Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan explain the value of working with seemingly mundane archival materials: "Personal archives, relatives' scrapbooks, and papers discovered under a grandmother's bed or in the attic led [the researchers represented in this book] to see their own relatives as actors shaping and shaped by a larger history, History with a capital *H*, while they learn more about their own histories" (3, emphasis in the original).

During my research on the history and culture of Germans from Russia I have come across letters and postcards sent from Soviet Union to the United States in the 20th century. Having helped to translate some of those letters from German into English, I have gotten to know the letters written during two different historical time periods. While some of them were written in the 1960s and 1970s, the vast majority of the letters from the Soviet Union I have seen were from the 1920s, a difficult period in the country's history. During the few previous years Russia had gone through a difficult transformation process: from the powerful Russian Empire, which covered one-sixth of the globe at the beginning of WWI in 1914, to a young Soviet Russia affected by the chaos of two revolutions and a bloody Civil War. In 1921-1922, the area in southern Russia where the majority of ethnic Germans lived, experienced a serious famine that spread throughout the region. The letters sent from the area to the United States during that time were full of desperate pleas for food, clothing, and anything else to help ease the situation.

The collection of letters I was shown at my friend's home was somewhat different. While some of them were written during the famine period of the early 1920s, there were others that

had been written in the 1910s, including the hundred-year-old letter previously mentioned. These earlier letters differ in their physical appearance and content from later letters. Written on a stationary of good quality, they make quite an impression even nearly a century after they were written. Together with the letters of the later period that were also authored by various close relatives of Jacob and Amalie, they make up a comprehensive collection of about two dozen personal letters that span over a decade, from 1913 through 1925. These factors make this collection an ideal sample for doing academic research on the letter-writing practices and also for uncovering the socio-historical and cultural contexts of these historical documents written during a tumultuous period of Russian history in the early 20th century.

Yet while my project is an example of how serendipity plays a role in defining and shaping the research in our field, there is more to this. Defining the frame for their book, Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan borrowed two terms from a lecture by Louis Pasteur: "'chance' as serendipity and 'prepared mind' as the kinds of work a researcher needs to have done in order to recognize a serendipitous discovery."[5] For me, the combination of these two terms is as crucial for a research project as the perfect timing for planting seeds during the spring season. In this regard, I envision the "ground" of a scholar's mind prepared by the years of research experience to adopt the "seeds" of research questions, chance encounters, stories shared in order to develop a research project that would bloom on its own. Having bloomed, ripened, and cast their own seeds, such projects can ultimately help continue the lifecycle of our research.

What makes this project especially dear to me is that I can not only read the academic aspect of this study but also the personal one. Not only do I know the family, who has kept these letters through the last few decades, even after the individuals, to whom they were addressed,

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[5] Goggin, Maureen Daly, and Peter N. Goggin. "Call for Chapter Proposals."

have passed away, but I also have been to the geographical locations from which these letters were sent. I have walked the streets the letters' writers walked and I have talked to individuals, whose families have been neighbors to the writers' families and witnesses to the events discussed in the letters.

The opportunity to combine my personal research interests with my academic ones has not always been attractive to me. The discussion about serendipity and personal interests in one's research made me rethink my motivation behind my research and the value of personal histories and oral history storytelling that feed into it. I realized that despite having drawn a distinct line between my personal and academic interests, my involvement with the former indubitably prepared me for what has become the most challenging, deep, and personal project of my scholastic career. The most involved kind of research takes root in the stories that motivate us, stories that move us, stories that touch us—our personal stories.

I think you will better understand my research if you imagine a woven piece of tapestry, a tapestry of storytelling. This metaphorical tapestry is made of different memories, stories, and voices woven together. There they are the individual "threads" that make up a distinctive pattern: intersecting each other and communicating with each other to create one whole piece showcasing the living experience of a group of people. Any piece of written or oral history can also be visualized as a tapestry, a sturdy fabric of voices woven together. They all are different—of various colors, shapes, and yarns—yet all these ideas combined produce a unique example of human thought. It seems especially fitting to use this image knowing that one of the letter-writers, my friend's grandfather, owned a fabric weaving factory and that my great-grandmother, who lived in a neighboring village, would occasionally sell the cotton fabric she had woven to the factory to make some extra money. In the same way, I want to contribute my writing to the

larger piece of fabric, the tapestry of these peoples' lives. Before setting out with my exploration of the project's inquiry, let me briefly outline the individual chapters and discuss the content they cover.

Chapter Two introduces my dissertation by discussing my interest in the study of the letters from Russia and also provides the historical and cultural context of my study and how it came into being. At the end of this chapter, I outline my goals for the study. I then proceed to discuss archival research in the field of rhetoric and composition in Chapter Three. This chapter consists of two parts. While the first part focuses on the scholarly discussion about the advantages and disadvantages of archival research, the second part elaborates on my method of analyzing the documents in the letter collection I use for this project. Specifically, I talk about using the method of coding to analyze the letters for common topics or "themes." Using this method will prepare my primary sources for rhetorical analysis made in the later chapters.

In Chapters Four and Five, I analyze the results of my coding of the study's primary sources from a rhetorical perspective. For this purpose, I devote Chapter four to applying the theoretical discussion about the rhetorical situation to analyze the letters' texts. Furthermore, I explore the different "constraints," a concept proposed by Lloyd Bitzer that I talk about in the beginning of the chapter that influenced the letters' rhetoric. In chapter five, I discuss the rhetoric of famine crisis in the letters that were sent from Russia to America in the 1920s. The final chapter, which concludes this dissertation, summarizes the results of my rhetorical analysis of the letters and discusses the ways this study informs the discussion about the value of archival research in the field of rhetoric and composition. Before starting the analysis, let me discuss the historical and cultural context of my study in greater depth and how it came into being.

CHAPTER 2. CONTEXTUALIZING THE STUDY

Although I have already briefly discussed how this project emerged, it is important, before discussing my choice for methodological framework for this project, to explain in more detail my study's historical context: how it came into being and why I am so interested in studying these letters.

This project is essentially a story of three tales. The first is the story of the people who wrote the letters, the second is the story of the people who received them, and the third tale is my own story as the researcher who enters into the stories as an analyst and weaver. In the first tale, we have a young couple—Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr.—leaving their native country for the New World to chase the American Dream, which in their interpretation was a dryland farm in the Midwest large enough to sustain their growing family. In the second, we have their close relatives, who stayed behind in Russia. Jacob and Amalie's story has been told to me through the memories of their son, who preserved the letters, and what he knows of their life in Russia, while the other story has been told through the voices in the personal letters sent to Jacob and Amalie by their family during a period of approximately twenty years. Even though the second part of this communication exchange, the letters sent by Jacob and Amalie from America to Russia, is missing in this conversation, the oral history account of their son about his parents receiving the letters adds to my analysis by providing useful context for the letters and the life experiences of their recipients.

Amalie Krug and Jacob Jerger Jr married in May of 1912 and spent the summer months living with his parents before embarking on a life-changing trip to distant America halfway across the globe (Jerger May 2015). They grew up in two neighboring German-speaking villages in the Lower Volga River Valley in rural southern Russia, close to the city of Saratov. In 1912,

the village of Kratzke, where Amalie's family was from, had a population of 2,497, while Dittel, where Jacob Jerger was from, had a population of 6,569 (Stumpp 69, 72). In comparison, the village of Frank, which was the county seat, had a population of 11,577 (Stumpp 69). By the mid-1920s, when many of the letters were sent, the number of residents had shrunk dramatically due to immigration and the effects of the First World War, the Bolshevik revolution, a civil war, and the famine of the early 1920s. Thus, by 1926, the population in Kratzke had plummeted to 1,282 residents, while the number of Dittel residents went down by a half and was recorded as being 3,016 that same year (Stumpp 69, 72).

Both villages were officially founded in 1767, along with many others in the area, when they were first settled by Germanic immigrants from Europe who sought religious freedom and new economic and social opportunities in the eastward-expanding Russian Empire. Russian Empress Catherine II., herself a German princess before her marriage to the heir to the Russian throne, invited the European settlers to populate the newly acquired lands alongside the Volga River, where indigenous nomadic peoples had recently been forced out of this territory.

Although European foreigners, including those originating from what is now Germany, had settled in Russia before, this was the first en-masse immigration stream into Russia prompted by the need to settle the newly acquired lands on what was then the southern border of this vast empire. In a 1763 Manifesto, followed by a couple of others, Catherine the Great, as she is commonly referred to, invited foreigners to settle in Russia by promising freedom of religion, financial support for building housing and purchasing cattle and tools for farming, long-term tax breaks, and exemption from compulsory military service (Stumpp 14-17). The majority of the Germanic settlers who came to the Volga River area arrived in the years 1764 through 1767 (Pleve 11).

Granting a generous package of privileges to the foreign newcomers, Catherine the Great enabled a development of a prosperous class of people, who in many ways were far more privileged compared to common Russian peasants. The self-called Volga Germans, formerly known as the "German colonists" because of their settlements being referred to as colonies in official Russian documentation, prospered and flourished, and went on to establish more "colonies" alongside the River Volga in the 19th century.

However, the late 19th century brought many changes that would alter the old way of life among the Volga Germans. Alexander II., a great-grandson of Catherine's, nicknamed the Liberator because he is best known for abolishing serfdom for peasants in Russia, revoked many of the privileges. An increase in population and the need for more new land to farm forced many to look outside of the Volga German area. Therefore, while many Volga Germans left their native villages to settle elsewhere in the Russian Empire—including going to its southern and eastern provinces—many turned their eyes to the New World in North and South Americas.

The second tale is about Jacob and Amalie's immigration to the United States. At the time of Jacob and Amalie's departure from their homeland, leaving Russia for other countries was not an unusual thing. The United States had had a steady appeal for economic immigrants from Europe, and German Russian settlements sprang up all over "the endless prairies of the northern Great Plains, North and South Dakota, Nebraska, Kansas and Eastern Colorado" (Sallet 5). So, when Jacob and Amalie set off for distant America, they were not going to a completely unknown territory. By the time of their arrival, the American Midwest—most notably Nebraska, Kansas, and Colorado—had been populated by the German-speaking immigrants from different parts of Russia, including by the Volga German diaspora from the Lower Volga River Valley where they had been living.

For Jacob, this was also not the first trip across the Atlantic. In 1907, he went to America with his parents and younger brother following his four older sisters emigrating there with their husbands and families. However, after only four years in the Midwest, his father, who was the sole-reigning patriarch of a large family, decided to go back to the German Volga area (Jerger 2015).

Once in Russia, Jacob allegedly helped his father to build a new house. However, his vision remained on America and to complete that vision, he wanted to have a companion, a spouse willing to emigrate with him. As Manuel Jerger recalls his parents' meeting for the first time, "While in a *Beerstube* [pub] once, my father met Heinrich Krug, a young man of the similar age from [the neighboring village of] Kratzke, my future uncle. They probably started talking about life and my father's plans to go to America again, so Uncle Henry said that his sister Amalie wanted to go to America" (Jerger 2016).

Marriage arrangements were made soon after this serendipitous meeting and Amalie Krug married Jacob Jerger in May 1912 in the Lutheran parish church in Dietel. As was customary, the new bride moved in with her newlywed husband and his parents, and the couple spent the summer months living in his parents' house in the village of Dietel, a few miles away from her native village, before embarking on the trip to America in the fall of 1912 (Jerger 2015).

Having reached their final destination in Nebraska after a strenuous journey via Nova Scotia and Vermont, they joined the workforce of fellow Volga German immigrants by working in the sugar beet fields around Gering and Scottsbluff during the beet season and a local sugar beet factory during the winter. For the next twenty-five years, Jacob Jerger Jr. moved his family several times in search of a better place for farming, with the goal of eventually having a dryland

farm that would not need any irrigation (Jerger 2016). During these years, Jacob and Amalie experienced many losses, both economic and personal. For instance, when they lived on the edge of the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation in South Dakota in the 1930s, they reportedly did not have any crops from which to make profit from for seven years (Jerger 2016). Also, several of their fifteen children passed away. Throughout these first few decades, Jacob and Amalie no doubt depended on the support of their close-knit community of relatives and countrymen in the United States, and also maintained a connection with their close relatives who decided not to immigrate (both sets of parents and also the siblings on Amalie's side).

This fragile connection maintained through a letter exchange no doubt helped to keep the link to the homeland and the dear ones whom the couple had left behind. Yet, while probably being affected by the many times Jacob and Amalie moved across the United States, this connection was also affected by the events in Russia. Having left in late 1912, Jacob and Amalie missed World War I in Russia followed by two revolutions and a bloody Civil War that plunged the former Russian Empire into the dark years of violence and political and economic instability. These tumultuous times were followed by two famines that greatly affected the region Jacob and Amalie's families lived in. Some of these events are referenced in the letters, and the news about them, coupled with the uncertainty about their relatives' fate in Russia, must have been a heavy burden on the young family trying to make a living in the new country. By the mid-1930s the letters stopped as the new Soviet State closed off from the West. Any connection between Soviet citizens and the West, even for maintaining a personal relationship with relatives, would have brought suspicion and dangerous attention from the Soviet authorities.

Jacob Jerger Jr. passed away in 1950 on his farm in rural Minnesota, only ten years after moving his family there. Meanwhile, Amalie lived to be over ninety years old and passed away

in the 1980s having spent the last decades of her life living with different children of theirs (Jerger 2015). The letters sent to her and her husband by the relatives in Russia have been preserved by son Manuel, who, after retiring from farming, was able to devote more time to his family history research, including attending genealogy research-related events, connecting to distant relatives, who were descendants of the individuals who penned the letters to his parents, and even eventually meeting some of them during a trip to Germany in the 1990s. Some of the letters were translated by Marianne Hauser of Minneapolis, MN, now deceased, and a family friend in Germany (Jerger 2016). Then, for the next couple of decades the letters were carefully preserved until a serendipitous moment on February 22, 2013, provided me with an opportunity to see them and learn about their history.

The third tale begins on a snowy afternoon in late February 2013 when I was visiting Manuel Jerger's home in Moorhead, MN. He and his wife Glenis had moved to town a few years earlier after living on the family farm, just a few miles away, that Manuel took over after his father's passing. I first met the Jergers the weekend I arrived in Fargo for my graduate program in August 2010, and we have been friends since then. That February afternoon was not much different than many other days before when I visited Manuel and Glenis: we talked, we had dinner, we exchanged family stories. As usual, the focus of our conversation turned to Russia and the memories about family stories. That's when the subject of a letter exchange between his parents and the close relatives, who stayed back in Russia and never emigrated, came up. Soon enough, Glenis went into another room and brought back a cloth bag with a huge binder filled with a mix of family history memorabilia: copies of Manuel's parents' naturalization documents, old photos, letters to and from relatives on genealogy research, and also dozens of yellow pages in protective plastic sheets that turned out to be personal letters from Manuel's parents' relatives

in Russia, mostly from his mother's immediate family members. One of the first letters I read bore the date "February 23, 1913" so the very next day it would turn a hundred years old.

At that moment, an archive opened for me and, as I stepped in, I brought along my own story, that of my own family who was from Russia, too. I see parallels between Jacob and Amalie's story and my family's story because my family came from a village barely a couple of miles away from the ones they were originally from, and because, just like the letter-writers, my immediate family chose not to emigrate from Russia, although they too had family members who went abroad. These relatives of ours have also farmed in the Midwest and they too exchanged letters with relatives in Russia. As far as I know, this communication was interrupted in the 1930s, too; it was only a decade after World War II, a couple of years after Joseph Stalin's death, that the communication between my great-grandmother and her brother in Colorado would resume. Besides the personal parallels to the letters' story, I am interested in the letters because they tell a first-hand story about the events in the region I grew up that I have not known about much before. Not only does the studying of these narrative accounts inform my personal understanding of my country's history, but it also strengthens my ethos as a German from Russia and as researcher of German Russian history.

I was born and grew up in southern Russia, in an ethnic German family; because of the specific region we are from, we identify ourselves as the Volga Germans. For various reasons, most Russian citizens of German descent, including my family, left the former Soviet Union for Germany in the 1990s. And though I permanently live far away from my home country, I keep returning to Russia on summer visits to reconnect with friends, family, and the place itself. Over the course of the past ten years these visits often included visiting the places connected to the history of my ethnic group, and also members of our community, who stayed behind and decided

against leaving Russia. My experiences visiting them, working with the Russian archives, talking about the past to make sense of our group's and country's history in the 20th century, has greatly influenced and inspired my academic research interests.

When I go back, I am often confronted with memories about the Russia's past, specifically, our country's history in the 20th century. With a couple of milestone anniversaries of historic events happening over the last few years, I have noticed a great emphasis on keeping alive the memories about the Great Patriotic War—as World War II is commonly referred to in the former Soviet Union. There are the striped red-and-orange ribbons, huge mural or advertisement boards with World War II commemorative imagery on building walls, the increasing public popularity of Joseph Stalin and the praise of his allegedly successful leadership during the war (all while his role in the political repressions of the 1920s through the 1950s is often played down).

In contrast, other events that have etched deep marks on our country's past and its people's history in the last century seem to fade away from the popular display of public memory over time. Of course, there are efforts to keep the memory of these events alive—through the work of state-sponsored and non-profit organizations—but often I feel as if the memories of these events are just too difficult for the general public to deal with: too painful to remember, too messy to work through, and too uncomfortable to be included in today's public discourse about our country's history in the 20th century. I am talking about the memories about the repressions against the well-to-do farmers with the onset of the collectivization in the late 1920s, the religious persecution of all confessions in the 1920s and the 1930s, the Great Terror of the late 1930s, and the ethnic repressions of the 1940s through the 1950s. Although there is a state museum on Gulag history in Moscow that has just moved into a bigger building, and a national

Day of Remembrance for the victims of Stalinism takes place every October, yet public memory about the historic events of the 20th century remains a contested terrain in Russia. Having lived through the early 1990's when many state archives opened to the general public, I feel that the access to archives is becoming one of the tools to shape public memory. Before discussing my experience with archives in Russia and archival research as a theoretical and methodological framework, let me conclude this chapter by listing my main goals in studying the Jerger family letters.

2.1. Goals for the Study

The main goal of this study is to analyze a set of personal letters from a rhetorical perspective. Specifically, I am interested in analyzing the ways the letters' rhetoric was influenced by the rhetorical situation, in which the writing took place. Furthermore, I am interested in analyzing the rhetorical representation of various dominant "themes" discussed in the texts that were revealed through the process of coding. Because some of the letters were sent during a famine that affected the region and the community in which they were written, I also look at the theme of "crisis" in my analysis. Specifically, I am interested in the following questions: How was the experience of an economic (personal, humanitarian, political) crisis dealt with in the letters' narratives? How was the trauma of the famine in the region where the letters have come from dealt with in writing? How did the writers report on it? Also, considering that many letters included pleas for help from the relatives in America, I am interested in how these requests for help were formulated. Finally, I am interested in looking at the concept of archive and how theories, methods, and practice of archival research in rhetoric and composition have informed my project. For this purpose, I will look at archival research and its value for our field in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 3. ARCHIVAL RESEARCH IN RHETORIC AND COMPOSITION AND RESEARCH METHODS FOR MY STUDY

The archive has been an exciting place for many rhetoric and composition researchers, myself included, who have only recently discovered its seemingly endless potential for academic inquiry. What particularly lures me to the stacks of files on a library or an archive shelf or a family album full of memorabilia, are the stories connected to them. These are stories of trials and tribulations of individuals, families, communities, but there is also much more to them. These are also stories of public memory and the process of remembrance that help us—researchers and members of specific communities—learn about our shared past and also connect us to our present and future.

The third chapter of my dissertation focuses on methods and methodology of working with the archive and consists of two parts. The first part discusses the methodology of archival research and its relevance for my dissertation project. The chapter begins with a brief overview of archival research in the field of rhetoric and composition studies. Then, I proceed to discuss the value of archival research for the study of public memory and also my interest in this methodological approach and the reasons for using it is as a framework for my study. The second part of the chapter elaborates on the research method I used for analyzing my study's primary sources, the texts of about two dozen personal letters. Specifically, I talk about using the method of coding and grounded theory to analyze the letters for common topics or "themes." Using this method has prepared my primary sources for rhetorical analysis discussed in the later chapters.

3.1. Archival Research in Rhetoric and Composition

Recent research in the field of rhetoric and composition has focused on examining specific practices or re-evaluating past events. There has also been considerable push to discuss

the research practices that enable scholars to work with and in the archives. While the archive as a place of historical research has been theorized in Jacques Derrida's *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Robert Connors' 1992 article "Dreams and Play: Historical Method and Methodology," was among the first publications to lay out concrete steps for researchers to follow when investing themselves in a project focused on historical academic inquiry.

While advising the researcher—whom he alternatively refers to as "the historical researcher," "the historian of composition" or "the composition historian"—about methods to follow when taking on a project focused on historical research, Connors also raises important issues with connection to archival research that have since been explored by others (16-17). For instance, he addresses the important question of ethics in historical or archival research and urges the researchers to be mindful of "his or her own prejudices [because] no person exists without prejudice" while also connecting his statement to Kenneth Burke's discussion of "*terministic screens*" that inevitably affect any research project (Connors 19, emphasis in the original). Connors emphasizes this issue: "Our entire life experience functions to predispose us favorably toward some ideas or practices and less favorably toward others" (19).

While Connors helps to initiate the discussion about concrete methods and methodology for archival research, other scholars follow up with a more in-depth discussion of these points. For instance, Gesa Kirsch and Patricia Sullivan have edited a collection on the subject that seeks to address the "methodological diversity" in composition research and offer more practical tips for historical research on writing (1). Later on, Kirsch gives more valuable insight into the research process when she and Joy S. Ritchie theorize a politics of location for rhet/comp researchers in their 1995 article "Beyond the Personal: Theorizing a Politics of Location in Composition Research." Later on, this discussion if further strengthened by Barbara

L'Eplattenier's appeal for more concrete discussion and practical tips on methodology and methods in archival research for rhetoric and composition scholars in her essay, "An Argument for Archival Research Methods: Thinking Beyond Methodology."

In the recent years, the publications that have further discussed important issues with regard to archival research have included Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan's edited collection *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, then *Working in the Archives: Practical Research Methods for Rhetoric and Composition* edited by Alexis Ramsey, Wendy Sharer, Barbara L'Eplattenier, and Lisa Mastrangelo, and a volume of *Landmark Essays on Archival Research* edited by Lynée Lewis Gaillet, Helen Diana Eidson, and Don Gammil, Jr. Further insight into the theoretical and practical sides of archival research in rhetoric and composition has been offered by several researchers including Jacqueline Jones Royster, David Gold, Jennifer Clary-Lemon, Kelly Ritter, Michelle Ballif, Lori Ostergaard, Henrietta Rix Wood, Jessica Enoch, Pamela VanHaitsma, K.J. Rawson, Charles Morris, and many others.

Furthermore, archival research methods and methodologies have become a regular subject of discussions and presentations at the national academic conferences. Katherine Tirabassi has chaired a half-day-long workshop focused on archival research and its implications for teaching in the field of rhetoric and composition at the Conference on College Composition and Communication Annual Convention for the past few years, while one of the "supersessions" at the 2016 Rhetorical Society of America Conference was titled "The Archive as Rhetoric." In 2017, the RSA Summer Institute includes a workshop and a seminar explicitly focused on archival research in its program, and the University of Maryland's graduate student chapter of the Rhetoric Society of America is offering the first archival symposium for graduate students "with an interest in archival research" (Chelona RSA).

All these voices contribute to the discussion on the theory, methods, and methodology that shape archival research in rhetoric and composition. Whether discussing the concept of serendipity or the personal interests in archival research, these voices contribute to an increasing awareness of what Lucille Schultz talks about in her brief foreword to Kirsch and Rohan's collection of essays. Schultz argues that each of the essays in the collection offers its own story that highlights the role of the personal in archival research and shows research as a "lived process." My personality as researcher, my expectations of the research project, my research questions connected to it, the archive as a setting, the documents I work with and their availability—these all are just some of the factors contributing to shaping my research and directing it. I actively contribute to the process of developing a research project and, therefore, enable historical artifacts and the histories they contain to "live" through me. I can see the following passage in Arlette Farge's book supporting this approach and also offering an outlook into the future of archival research:

> The archive's allure, nonetheless, lives on. The taste for the archives is not a fashion that will go out of style as quickly as it came in . . . The goal is not for the cleverest, most driven researcher to unearth some buried treasure, but for the historian to use the archives as a vantage point from which she can bring to light new forms of knowledge that would otherwise have remained shrouded in obscurity. (54)

The majority of other researchers theorizing the work with the archives primarily see the positive sides of such work. Their voices range from overly positive ones, who—like, for example, Arlette Farge—are infatuated with the promise of surprising discoveries while exploring the past by working with archival artifacts, to others, who see the archive as a place of new possibilities for academic inquiry and its connections to the present. For instance, Kate

Eichhorn, who discusses feminist and queer archives, calls the archive "a site and practice integral to knowledge making, cultural production, and activism. The archive is where academic and activist work frequently converge… Rather than a destination for knowledge already produced or a place to recover histories and ideas placed under erasure, the making of archives is frequently where knowledge production begins" (Eichhorn 3). She sees real potential for researchers working with the archives to bring about a change in the situation of particular, often marginalized, groups by using the archives as a tool for gaining more power and agency (Eichhorn 4).

Eichhorn's idea that the archive is a place "where knowledge production begins" is further supported by other researchers. Ann Laura Stoler, for example, works with colonial archives and sees them as sites of "contested knowledge" that can develop new lines of inquiry within postcolonial and subaltern studies. This is also reflected in the introduction to an edited collection of essays by Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan who speak about the newly discovered potential of the archival material that has long been deemed as less "worthy of academic study" (3). Specifically, Kirsch and Rohan argue that the use of family, regional, or other "unofficial" archives in the research on rhetoric and writing can expand the "traditional notions of history and culture" and "[help] us understand and explore the fissures of historical narratives, the places at the margins where voices have been suppressed, silenced, or ignored" (3). While these important theoretical perspectives help inform our discussion about the limits of the archive, its potential and power, they also help shape the research that can come from the archives.

Besides the discussion theorizing the work with the archive, there is also an ongoing discussion about the practical research methods and methodology that can help shape archival research. In the early 1990s, this topic was broadly discussed in the aforementioned article by

Robert Connors, who outlines the steps of historical research—from gathering initial data to "painstaking research" for a project in an archive. He says:

The Archive must be explored, analyzed, cross-checked, deconstructed, reconstructed, made meaning of, stripped, checked, and polished. Here, for the composition historian, is the world of the written word, the printed word, the picture, the table, the diagram, the voice on the tape. The Archive is where storage meets dreams, and the result is history. (Connors 17)

Personally, I am attracted to archival research for several reasons. First, I am attracted to historical artifacts because studying them enables me to make meaning of the past events as learned through other sources. Second, working in the archives enables me to understand the process of archiving historical artifacts and processing, curating, and making them accessible to users. This is helpful if I want to compile an archive of mine own. Third, working with the artifacts produced by individuals who belonged to the same ethnic group as my family and came from the same region, empowers me as a member of this particular ethnic group and as someone who has devoted her time to studying her people's history. The knowledge gained through working with the documents produced by my people gives me the power to talk about them, their life experiences, their language—a dialect of German that is slowly becoming obsolete—and their perspective on events they witnessed. They talk through me, and I learn about my people's past through these letters.

Finally, this project helped me to bridge two major interests of mine: my interest in archives and their role in academic research and working with archival documents to recover my people's past. Essentially, I see this project fulfilling three important tasks connected to historical research: tracing artifacts with important stories to be told, recovering voices locked in the stories, and giving meaning to their content. Thus, I see this research as a form of activism

because I use my knowledge to analyze historical artifacts about the people of whom I see myself as a representative—in both academic and non-academic worlds. By investing my knowledge to extract new knowledge, I contribute to the process of making knowledge about this group of people. Furthermore, my research contributes to a better understanding of culturally-situated rhetoric and writing practices that in turn contributes new insights to the research of rhetoric and composition in general. For instance, working with and in the archives informs our study of other subjects I see closely connected to archival research, such as the research on public memory.

3.2. Public Memory and Archival Research

As members of social or ethnic groups, we commemorate the events important to our identity by remembering the past historic events, people, and places, even if some of us—like the younger generation—have never been there or known these people. As far as my ethnic group is concerned, while I had not been in the place my family was originally from in Russia until I was in my mid-20s; I have "remembered" the place through the memories of my family's older generation. I "remember" the landscape, the layout of the village, and the names of the people, who lived there before they were forced to leave the place soon after Nazi Germany's invasion of the Soviet Union. Thus, when I finally visited the place where my family's home used to be—all the houses were long gone and their remains had been bulldozed over—I was able to find myself pretty well in that space because of the memories passed down to me by my family who had real memories of this place when it was still lived in.

This example can also illustrate how the concept of memory works in regard to the study of public memory. Public memory is understood as a process of preserving a public's memories of certain events and people because of the public's stress on the importance of maintaining

these memories. Nowadays, not only does memory play a great role in aiding the public process of remembrance—as in the sense of classical rhetoric—but it also is used as a genre of public history. For instance, memorials and museums are places of public and collective memories because they are constructed to preserve the public's memories of a certain event and, at the same time, they are sites where new memories are created when members of public visit them.

The dual role of memorials and museums as "memory places" is thoroughly discussed in the introduction to *Places of Public Memory* by Carole Blair, Greg Dickinson, and Brian L. Ott who explain that "[p]articular places are more closely associated with public memory that others, for example, museums, preservation sites, battlefields, memorials, and so forth. These 'memory places'. . . enjoy a significance seemingly unmatched by other material supports of public memory" (24). A few paragraphs later, the authors explain why this is so when they say that "[In] dealing with memory places, the signifier assumes a special importance. The signifier—the place—is itself an object of attention and desire . . . [It] commands attention, because it announces itself as a marker of collective identity. It is an object of desire because of its claim to represent, inspire, instruct, remind, admonish, exemplify, and/or offer the opportunity for affiliation and public identification" (Blair et. al. 25-26).

The memory places these and other scholars discuss in their works include a great variety—from historical museums to preservation sites to cemeteries. Archives are as much examples of public and collective history as museums or memorial sites because they too are public places, are rhetorical, and depend on a social group to use them as systems or tools for remembering. However, some researchers in the humanities have cautioned against giving in to the attraction of the archive.

In his 1995 book *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida warns us not to fall victims to the charm of the archive and our desire as researchers to go back to connect to the past we think we will find by working within an archive's setting. Derrida calls this desire a "fever," a "sickness," which he diagnoses in the following passage: "It is to have a compulsive, repetitive, and nostalgic desire for the archive, an irrepressible desire to return to the origin, a homesickness, a nostalgia for the return to the most archaic place of absolute commencement" (91).

Derrida warns researchers to not project their nostalgia for the past onto the documents and artifacts they encounter in the archives. And he is not alone. Carolyn Steedman and Barbara Biesecker also warn researchers of the danger of falling way too quickly to the appeal of the archives as a research site. Biesecker identifies the archive as a place of invention by a researcher who wants to see the archive "as material proof of the past" (124). She explains that, "Whatever else the archive may be—say, an historical space, a political space, or a sacred space; a site of preservation, interpretation, or commemoration—it always already is the provisionally settled scene of our collective invention, of our collective invention of us and of it" (Biesecker 124).

What Biesecker points out can be connected directly to the Derrida's warning for researchers not to fall under the spell of the archive. His discussion about the desires and nostalgia of researchers wanting to touch the archaic past by literally touching the artifacts that carry the memories of the past for these researchers connects to Biesecker's discussion about how researchers invent the archive through these desires. The invention happens because researchers fail to see that what they see and touch in the archives is not necessarily a truthful representation of the past. Carolyn Steedman goes a step further in her discussion theorizing the archive by calling the beliefs about the past "dust": "Dust is the immutable, obdurate set of beliefs about the material world, past and present, inherited from the nineteenth century, with

which modern history-writing attempts to grapple; Dust is also the narrative principle of that writing; and Dust is the joke" (Steedman ix). Steedman's further discussion connects to Derrida's discussion of the archive fever, and she argues that the fever is not only about the dangers of failing to see that the archive cannot adequately represent the past, but also about failing to see how the archive can influence the balance of power. She explains that, "The fever, or sickness of the archive is to do with its very establishment, which is at one and the same time, the establishment of state power and authority. And then there is the feverish desire—a kind of sickness unto death—that Derrida indicated, *for* the archive: the fever not so much to enter it and use it, as to *have it*, or just for it to be there, in the first place" (Steedman 1-2, emphasis in the original). Together, these three theorists warn researchers about the dangers of inadequate preparation and process of working with the archives as well as our possibly naive and unrealistic expectations about what archives are and are not.

The warnings offered by these three scholars are particularly poignant for someone, like myself, whose family and community have been declared as enemy of the state in their own country and treated as second-class citizens for decades. Nevertheless, I am enamored with the archives and their potential to shed the light on some of the darkest moments of Russian history in the 20th century, especially when it comes to the records about persecution and repressions during the Soviet regime against individuals and whole groups based on their economic, social, ethnic, or religious background.

For me personally, the archive is not only a place of memory but also a place that verifies the "realness" of human experience, which may otherwise be known only through oral history accounts. There is something about a piece of paper that gives a different dimension to historical events and the ways they impacted everyday life of regular people, and this perceived value of

archival or officially-issued documents has been no doubt instilled by my own culture. There is a popular saying in Russian that comes from a 1930's song ridiculing the Soviet bureaucracy machine and exposing its obsessive reliance on documents as a proof of human life experience. The song features the following verse: "Без бумажки ты букашка, а с бумажкой - человек!" It essentially means that "without an official document a person is nothing but an insect" (Bez bumazhki). This is a degrading statement yet one that points to the main reason to why official documents in general are highly valued in Russian society—its bureaucracy. And if a *bumazhka*, a piece of paper, can shed light on the history of your people, on your own family's past, then it becomes even more desirable to look for, uncover, and hold on to.

In the early 1990s, the tailwind of *glasnost* opened many state archives, which until then were strictly off limits for regular Soviet citizens. Individuals, who had either become victims of political persecutions or knew someone who had, were finally given access to valuable information when archival files documenting the experience were opened. Just like many other German Russians, my family wanted to get a copy of a document verifying an event that happened in the fall of 1941. For this purpose, my mother traveled to the outskirts of Volgograd, the city where we lived at the time, in search of the storage facility that housed the archive of the state's Ministry of Internal Affairs. Following a long walk on the side of the road in search of a nameless street, she came to the territory of a former military base, that "looked as if it has been bombed out," where, after an almost failed search, she was able to locate the archive in a nameless building. Although she was unable to have a look at original documents, she was given a plain document that listed her mother's family at the moment of their forced "resettlement" to Siberia in 1941. The deportation was a part of the Soviet Russian government's plan to prevent an allegedly certain collaboration between the Volga Germans and the Nazi German occupants.

From the document, my mother found out the correct name of her maternal grandfather and the year of birth of her oldest maternal aunt, who had changed it to prevent being taken to a labor camp in Siberia. Essentially, this document not only became the most treasured piece of my family's history but also a documented proof of my family's and our entire people's life experience during World War II. It also became a token of cultural and collective memory of an event that has greatly affected my people. Thus, documents uncovered through archival research that shed light on my family's and country's past are appealing to me because they provide evidence validating memories, statements, events, and human experiences.

Similarly, archival documents from official and private archives appeal so much to me because they document the past and provide another dimension to what oral history and public memory might have passed down to my generation. The documented past validates human life experiences, and for me personally, being from Russia, a country with a complex bureaucratic system that places a lot of value in official documentation, it also validates human existence. By wanting to access the archives, I might be running the error of seeing the archived past contained within a state archive building as a gateway to accessing the historic past. Yet, the unique value of personal, family, and local history informing a better understanding of the "bigger picture" history is still worth pursuing. This is why the promise of archival research and the discoveries made through it have such a strong pull on many researchers.

In her foreword to *Beyond the Archives: Research as a Lived Process*, Lucille Schultz argues that the volume "marks the change from reading an archive not just as a source but also as a subject" (vii). Together with her later comments about archival research, this statement feeds into the discussion about how the view of archives among scholars has recently changed: from a mere repository of knowledge to sites of knowledge production and places of memory. The

archive is seen as a place of new possibilities for academic inquiry and its connections to the present. For instance, Kate Eichhorn, who discusses feminist and queer archives, calls the archive "a site and practice integral to knowledge making, cultural production, and activism. The archive is where academic and activist work frequently converge… Rather than a destination for knowledges already produced or a place to recover histories and ideas placed under erasure, the making of archives is frequently where knowledge production begins" (Eichhorn 3). She sees real potential for researchers working with the archives to bring about a change in the situation of particular, often marginalized, groups by using the archives as a tool for gaining more power and agency (Eichhorn 4).

Eichhorn's idea that the archive is a place "where knowledge production begins" is further supported by other researchers. Ann Laura Stoler, for example, works with colonial archives and sees them as sites of "contested knowledge" that can develop new lines of inquiry within postcolonial and subaltern studies. This is also reflected in the introduction to an edited collection of essays by Gesa Kirsch and Liz Rohan who speak about the newly discovered potential of the archival material that has long been deemed as less "worthy of academic study" (3). Namely, Kirsch and Rohan argue that the use of family, regional, or other "unofficial" archives in the research on rhetoric and writing can expand the "traditional notions of history and culture" and "[help] us understand and explore the fissures of historical narratives, the places at the margins where voices have been suppressed, silenced, or ignored" (3). While these important theoretical perspectives help inform our discussion about the limits of the archive, its potential and power, they also help shape the research that can come from the archives and our discussion on the archive as a place of remembrance, public memory, and memory making.

Using archival research as one of the methodological frames for this project provided me with an opportunity to build my own archive, specifically tailored for the needs of the study. Besides collecting the secondary sources on archival research theory and case studies of research in rhetoric and composition that used archival documents, I was able to put together a list of primary sources that has helped me with my inquiry about the letters from Russia. This list included both written and also oral sources, with the former consisting of not only the letters sent to Amalie and Jacob Jerger but also similar letters that arrived in the USA from the same region during the same period of time. The oral sources included lengthy conversations I was able to have with the couple's son Manuel Jerger in the privacy of his home in Moorhead, MN, to learn about his parents' experiences in the United States and also what they told him about their life and family back in Russia.

3.3. Describing the Letter Collection

Before proceeding to analyze the results of my coding of the Jerger Family Letters Collection, it is important to first discuss the individual writers whose letters are presented in this collection and also the timeline of the letters. As previously discussed, I have set out my project by transcribing and translating twenty-five full and partial letters from German into English. Following the translation stage, I was able to determine that the collection includes a total of twenty-three full letters and partial letter fragments. Two of these twenty-three letters consist of a letter authored by two authors—a father and his daughter—or a letter that features two different notes by two different writers on the different sides of one single paper page. The latter is represented by a note that Jacob Jerger Jr. sent to post-war Germany with a relief package. The note, dated from March 1947, asks the receiver of the package to return the paper slip thereby notifying Jerger it was received: "I would like to know whether the things that we sent were

taken by German hands" (L22). It is returned with a message from a woman in Germany who wrote back to thank Jerger for helping her family "through a great misery that [was] affecting the people" (L23). Because these two notes are not related to the rest of the letters in the collection by content or the time period in which they were written, I have excluded both of them from my analysis. Therefore, the letters used for the purpose of my analysis are twenty-one full and partial letters written by a friend and close family members of Jacob Jerger Jr. and his wife Amalie, née Krug.

Before discussing more details about the letters, I want to explain my usage of the term *letter-writers*. This term can be applied both to the individuals in Russia, the authors of the surviving letters, and to their audience in America, who also wrote letters and thus were a part of this communication. However, for the purpose of this study, I use the term *letter-writers* exclusively to refer to the authors of the letters that have been preserved. Because the absolute majority of them are the letters that came from Russia and none of the letters sent from America are known to have survived, I use the term to *letter-writers* refer to Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr.'s relatives, who penned the letters contained in the Jerger Family Letters Collection.

As far as the letter-writers are concerned, there are the following individuals that I have clearly identified as having authored the letters in the Jerger Family Letters collection: Heinrich Krug, father of Amalie Jerger, née Krug; Heinrich Krug, her brother, Nathalie Schroeder née Krug, her oldest sister; Emilie Braun née Krug, her younger sister; Jacob Jerger and his wife, parents of Jacob Jerger and in-laws of Amalie Jerger; and Christian Mill, an apparent family friend. Because the Jerger in-laws and the family friend each have a very low number of letters included in the collection—two and one, respectively—the main focus of my analysis is on the four members of Amalie's immediate family, the Krugs (her father, brother, and two sisters),

because of the higher number of letters that was written by them and can be clearly attributed to them.

The most letters were written by Amalie's father Heinrich Krug, whom I refer as Heinrich Sr., in order to tell him apart from his son Heinrich, whom I refer to as Heinrich Jr. Heinrich Krug Sr. Heinrich Sr. was a businessman who owned a factory producing a variety of cotton fabrics, commonly known in the local area as *sarpinka*, before the Russian Revolution (Jerger 2016). I can only speculate about the reasons why Heinrich Sr.'s letters are the ones that have been preserved the most in the collection. On one hand, he could have sent most of the personal letters Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr. received from home in Russia. On the other hand, his letters might have contained the information viewed as the most valuable by the letters' recipients, and, therefore, as the most valuable to be preserved.

3.4. Coding the Letters for Dominant Themes

Before applying rhetorical theory to analyze the letters, I prepared them by first translating the original texts from German into English and then coding them for specific markers, or the dominant "themes" in the letters' discourse. Initially, I set off to analyze the English translations of twenty-one letters and letter fragments that represent my primary data sample by focusing on only three "themes" I felt adequately represented the dominant subjects of the majority of these letters. Namely, I came up with the "themes" of the Personal, the Familial, and the Communal to reflect the most common subjects discussed by the letter-writers in the texts. However, after several months of initial coding, when I returned to drafting the current chapter, I was no longer satisfied with using this approach to analyzing the letters. After re-reading the letters yet again, I found the three categories of "themes" I initially came up with as too broad and too limiting at the same time.

So I shifted the focus of my analysis to reading the letters and then trying to figure out the most dominant "themes." This way, I let the content to navigate my process of analyzing the texts for dominant "themes" rather than coming into my analysis with a predetermined notion about what is most likely included in them. This approach to data-gathering was inspired by Kathy Charmaz' work on using grounded theory in conducting qualitative research. She specifically identified this theory as having more potential for studying "archival records and written narratives" than other similar approaches (Charmaz 39).

By going through the letters again, I was able to see certain commonalities and "patterns" in the subjects discussed by different authors in different letters. Based on the results of my most recent coding process, these are the most dominant "themes" in the letters:

1. Questions about America, including those regarding
    - Job
    - Living situation
    - Health
    - Family and communal connections
    - Plans
    - Daily routine
2. News about family and community members back home in Russia
3. Personal information or questions and advice that reinforce family ties
4. Genre specific information
5. Culturally or linguistically specific information

Based on the results of my coding, I was able to group certain information into "themes," of which there were three major ones: questions about the couple's life in America, reports on

family and community members back home in Russia, and discussions of personal information or giving advice. The last theme was specifically present in the letters written by either Amalie's father Heinrich Krug Sr. or by her in-laws, her husband Jacob Jr.' parents. Because of my background knowledge about the cultural norms of the group who produced these narratives, I believe this theme is featured in the letters by parents because they saw themselves as authoritative enough to give advice. Therefore, the theme of advice-giving served the purpose of reinforcing ties between the older generation of "parents" and the younger generation of "children," thus also functioning to reinforce cultural norms and beliefs. I will discuss this dynamic in more length in the next chapter when I analyze the results of my coding from the rhetorical perspective.

Furthermore, I decided to group certain information I found in the letters that can be related to the letter writing genre and cultural and/or linguistic data into themes of "genre specific information" and "culturally or linguistically specific information." Finally, my analysis will show that a distinct difference in the focus of the letters' content depends on the person writing to the couple in the US. While all the writers focus on reporting news from home, it is only Amalie's father, Heinrich Krug Sr., who consistently fills his letters with questions about the couple's life in America. The subjects of his questions range from inquiries about their living situation and job prospects to their future plans and whether or not they had visited their relatives living in the American Midwest. Therefore, the first theme listed above is based almost exclusively on my analysis of his letters.

In contrast to their father's letters, Amalie's three siblings, who all were corresponding with her, do not seem to focus that much on asking questions about the couple's life in America. Of course, there are obligatory questions about the couple's health and well wishes for the health

to be “as good as ours” in the beginning of each letter that I assume were rather dictated by cultural and generic conventions of letter writing at that time. Yet the father remains the only participant of this family letter exchange who consistently and persistently inquires about his daughter and son-in-law’s living situation in America. This can certainly be explained by him feeling protective and fatherly, but also can be explained with the letters’ rhetoric being used to reinforce cultural values shared by the letter-writer and his audience. More analysis of the letters’ rhetoric is provided in the next chapter.

CHAPTER 4. ANALYZING THE LETTERS' RHETORIC

The Jerger Family Letters Collection presents a mosaic of storytelling reflecting two decades of Russian history in the early 20th century. This mosaic is made of stories reflecting a whole range of pure human emotions: love, longing, fear, and desperation. Because the letters represent only one direction of the letter exchange between the letter-writers in Russia and the letter-readers in America, it is difficult to present a complete, truthful portrait of the communication exchange. However, for the purpose of this dissertation, I believe the current sample of letters is enough to prepare an adequate analysis of the one side of this conversation. Furthermore, while each of the personal letters analyzed here can be viewed as an individual text of a written narrative, or an example of one singular storytelling event, the discourse spread out over all the letters combined, merges and intersects with each other to create one story, one large conversation. All these individual "threads" of conversation create one large overarching story. My goal for this chapter is to analyze the rhetorical means used in composing and transmitting this story through the letters' narrative.

Therefore, in this chapter, I analyze the rhetoric of the letters and the ways the dominant themes and subjects are discussed in them. Specifically, I look at the stories told in the letters and the rhetorical means used to tell them. I explore the way changing rhetorical situations influenced the focus of the letters and their content, and I look at how the conventions of letter writing interact with the rhetorical functions of the conversation in the letters that go beyond the function of maintaining a personal relationship between the letter-writers in the Soviet Union and their audience in distant America. How does this knowledge help to inform our understanding of these letters, the process of letter writing, and their purpose and function? It is this larger question that this chapter tries to respond to through analyzing the letters' rhetoric.

To analyze the letters from the standpoint of rhetorical theory, I want to look at their content and explore the construction of rhetorical discourse and the connections between the rhetors and the letters' contexts. The ongoing discussion about the rhetorical situation can be helpful in creating a framework for my analysis of the dominant themes and plotlines in the letters. For this purpose, I first want to look at the different sides of the argument concerning the theoretical understanding of the rhetorical situation and then continue with applying the theoretical filter to examine evidence of it in the letters.

In the discussion of rhetorical situation, two of the most prominent positions have been represented by Lloyd Bitzer and Richard Vatz. It is not accidental that these two voices are among the most cited ones, because, while both make sound suggestions about how to approach the subject of this discussion, they stand on the opposite sides of the spectrum. Because of his opposition to Bitzer, Vatz helps to better understand this theoretical frame. Therefore, it is essential to look at both positions when theorizing about the construction of the rhetorical situation within a discourse.

In his 1968 essay titled "The Rhetorical Situation," Lloyd F. Bitzer famously proposes that "rhetoric is situational" (301). While he establishes a firm connection between "a situation" and "the discourse," Bitzer maintains that not any given situation in which rhetorical or persuasive discourse takes place "in a setting which involves interaction of speaker, audience, subject, and communicative purpose" would qualify as a rhetorical situation as he envisions it (302). Therefore, he proposes the following definition for the rhetorical situation: "Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the

significant modification of the exigence" (304). According to Bitzer, "rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change" (302).

To unpack the complexity of the rhetorical situation, Bitzer explains that "[p]rior to the creation and presentation of discourse, there are three constituents of any rhetorical situation: the first is the *exigence*; the second and third are elements of the complex, namely the *audience* to be constrained in decision and action, and the *constraints* which influence the rhetor and can be brought to bear upon the audience" (304, emphasis in the source).

Bitzer's claim that rhetoric is "situational" is central to his argument that scholars of rhetorical theory have routinely ignored the rhetorical situation in their discussions. Instead, he claims, they tend to focus on a different set of questions: "Typically the questions which trigger theories of rhetoric focus upon the orator's method or upon the discourse itself, rather than upon the situation which invites the orator's application of his method and the creation of discourse" (Bitzer 301). Furthermore, Bitzer states that, "It seems clear that rhetoric is situational" and goes on to clarify that he does not mean that "understanding a speech hinges upon understanding the context of meaning in which the speech is located. Virtually no utterance is fully intelligible unless meaning-context and utterance are understood" (301).

While I agree with Bitzer's notion that "[the] presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of a rhetorical situation," I question the importance he places on the determining power of the rhetorical situation in contrast to the rhetor's role (300). I want to probe his statements by asking the following questions: Is it really that clear that the rhetorical

situation determines rhetorical discourse? Or, do the rhetors have more power and control over the discourse than Bitzer believes they do? Specifically, I disagree with his statement that we should not “assume that a rhetorical address gives existence to the situation; on the contrary, it is the situation which calls the discourse into existence” (301).

The main point of Bitzer’s theoretical approach with which I agree is the idea that the rhetoric provides a dynamic environment that enables for rhetorical discourse to thrive and evolve. Bitzer states that “[...] rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by creation of discourse which changes reality through the mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse of such a character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change. In this sense rhetoric is always persuasive” (302). Later on, Bitzer provides his definition of the concept of the rhetorical situation in the following passage: “Rhetorical situation may be defined as a complex of persons, events, objects, and relations presenting an actual or potential exigence which can be completely or partially removed if discourse, introduced into the situation, can so constrain human decision or action as to bring about the significant modification of the exigence” (304).

Providing an effective starting place for discussing the rhetorical situation, Bitzer’s perspective can guide anyone who plans to explore the ways exigence, audience, and constraints can influence rhetorical discourse—whether verbal or nonverbal. “[I]t is the situation which calls the discourse into existence,” states Bitzer (301). However, when analyzing the letters’ rhetoric, I see that rhetors and the situation mutually influence each other. Although the rhetorical situation does indeed influence the discourse, there is no size-fits-all scenario. A discourse pattern of storytelling is influenced by the situation inasmuch as it is by the relationship of the rhetors to

their intended audience and the function of the writing. In my case, the letter-writers and their readers are people who know each other and who write to each other by constructing a carefully woven fabric of conversation carried over from their face-to-face interaction onto the paper. It is clear that the lack of intimacy and the genre conventions of letters have influenced the way they talk about certain things, but it seems likely that the topics discussed are similar to what they might have chosen had this conversation continued to be face-to-face. The potential of the rhetor to influence rhetorical discourse is the subject of a different theoretical approach, one that stands in opposition to Bitzer's perspective.

In his 1973 response to Bitzer's article, Richard Vatz contradicts the "myth" of the rhetorical situation. Although Vatz' perspective intersects with that of Bitzer because he too focuses on the dynamic relationship between the rhetorical situation and the rhetor that determines and defines the rhetorical discourse, he stands on at the opposite end of this discussion's spectrum. Specifically, Vatz disagrees with Bitzer's statement that rhetoric is 'situational' and ultimately determines the response of a rhetor-participant to it. Instead, he argues that when rhetors describe a situation, their statements "only inform us as to the phenomenological perspective of the speaker" yet do not "tell us about the qualities within the situation" (Vatz 154). He goes on to define his main point of contention with Bitzer's view: "No situation can have a nature independent of the perception of its interpreter or independent of the rhetoric with which he chooses to characterize it" (Vatz 154). Furthermore, Vatz doubts that the "positive modification," that is, the purpose to respond to what Bitzer refers to as "exigence," is that clear (156). He dismantles the "myth" of the rhetorical situation by focusing on the rhetor as the defining force shaping meaning within rhetorical discourse (156).

Furthermore, Vatz contradicts Bitzer's view about meaning residing in the rhetorical situation by arguing that "meaning is not intrinsic in events, facts, people, or 'situations' nor are facts 'publicly observable'" (156). He goes on to explain his position by stating, "Except for those situations which directly confront our own empirical reality, we learn of facts and events through someone's communicating them to us. This involves a two-part process. First, there is a choice of events to communicate" (156). He continues, "The facts or events communicated to us are *choices*, by our sources of information" (156, emphasis in the original) and goes on to add that "The second step of communication 'situations' is the translation of the chosen information into meaning. This is an act of creativity. It is an interpretative act. It is a rhetorical act of transcendence" (157). The main point of his counter-argument to Bitzer's perspective is explained in the following sentence: "To the audience, events become meaningful only through their linguistic depiction [...] Therefore, meaning is not discovered in situations, but *created* by rhetors" (157, emphasis in source). Vatz explains his disagreement with Bitzer's perspective in the following passage:

> If one accepts Bitzer's position that 'the presence of rhetorical discourse obviously indicates the presence of a rhetorical situation,' then we ascribe little responsibility to the rhetor with respect to what he has chosen to give salience. On the other hand, if we view the communication of an event as a choice, interpretation, and translation, the rhetor's responsibility is of supreme concern [...] the choices [made by the rhetor] will be seen as purposeful acts for discernible reasons. They are *decisions* to make salient or not to make salient these situations. (158, emphasis in the source)

When it comes to my research, I find myself on the same spectrum of Bitzer and Vatz, leaning slightly closer to Bitzer's position. However, there are some significant points discussed by Vatz that I also want to incorporate into my work. To make a connection to my analysis, it is easy to use Vatz' approach when looking at the themes discussed in the individual letters and the plot lines that follow through the narrative of multiple letters by the same or different authors. The letter-writers are clearly going through a process of making certain topics they discuss in the letters salient, whether consciously or not. For instance, this is evident in the re-occurring theme of reporting on family affairs, weather, and fellow village residents back home, or asking questions about family friends in America and the couple's life in the new country. Even these mundane requests make certain subjects salient. It is evident that whether the writers intended to do this consciously or not, these topics carry a social and cultural importance and they are important enough to be discussed again and again. What differs from letter-writer to letter-writer is that some of them choose to report on news back home and some specifically ask questions about the couple's life in America. Whether this is an indication of a closer relationship prior to the letter correspondence or just general curiosity of the letter-writer posing the latter is hard to say without having letters by Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr. written in response that I can analyze.

While I agree with Vatz that rhetors essentially create the rhetorical situation and their response to it, I also see how Bitzer's vision would work when taking in account the strictly pre-determined context of a letter written to a close relative and with regard to certain cultural norms and generic expectations. When creating the discourse within the limits of a letter, each of the letter-writers I analyze uses rhetoric to create a "fitting" response. A fitting response, according to Bitzer, is one that is expected from them as members of their family, their culture, and their ethnic group.

For example, all of the letter writers follow standard predetermined social norms by addressing the couple, who is their audience, in a way that reflects their social and cultural values. For instance, all writers address Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr. in a way that reflects their relation status. This is evident when Amalie's siblings repeatedly refer to her and her husband by "dear brother-in-law and sister" rather than by their first name, which might have been easier for the writers or more usual had the conversation happen face-to-face. Furthermore, the norms and values the writers and their audience must have adhered to are reflected in the topics discussed in the letters. For instance, in his letters to the couple in America, Amalie's father inquires about her health (L05) and the couple's future plans regarding work and life situation (L05, L08), gives marriage advice (L04 2), and urges them to visit various relatives also living in the United States, presumably to strengthen familial and communal ties (L11 3-4).

The cultural norm of a person from an older generation, whose opinion should be respected and followed, giving advice is also evident in a letter from Jacob Jerger Jr.'s parents addressed to several of their children living in America. In the letter, the parents reprimand the children for failing to write letters to them on a regular basis and advise a son against a plan to move away from an older sibling: "And you, dear child Heinrich, have forgotten already what you promised to us [...] Look, dear children, we have let you go to America together because I did not want you to get apart, and now you start [making plans to move away] as the first one" (L12 6).

So, let us review where we are in discussing Bitzer's concept of the rhetorical situation. As mentioned earlier Bitzer says, "rhetoric is a mode of altering reality, not by the direct application of energy to objects, but by the creation of discourse which changes reality through mediation of thought and action. The rhetor alters reality by bringing into existence a discourse

of such character that the audience, in thought and action, is so engaged that it becomes mediator of change" (302). And, "Rhetorical discourse is called into existence by situation; the situation which the rhetor perceives amounts to an invitation and present discourse" (306). He goes on to state that, "Although rhetorical situation invites response, it obviously does not invite just any response. Thus the second characteristic of rhetorical situation is that it invites a *fitting* response, a response that fits the situation" (307, emphasis in the source). I agree with this statement and can clearly see how the "fitting" response is visible in the letters I have analyzed. However, what makes the responses in the letters appropriate and right for the situation they respond to are the constraints that also influence the discourse. These include genre and cultural constraints that I will discuss later in this chapter. But before discussing these constraints, I turn first to a discussion of Bitzer's understanding of exigence.

4.1. Applying Bitzer's Concept of Exigence to the Letters' Rhetoric

When discussing his definition of the rhetorical situation, Bitzer names three components as included in this concept: exigence, audience, and constraints (304). He defines the first component as follows: "Any *exigence* is an imperfection marked by urgency; it is a defect, an obstacle, something waiting to be done, a thing which is other than it should be. In almost any sort of context, there will be numerous exigences" (Bitzer 304, emphasis in the original). Through my analysis of the letters, I have found several dominant subjects and issues discussed in the texts. However, not every one of them fits Bitzer's standard for an exigence in a truly rhetorical sense. This is because he makes a clear distinction between the kinds of exigence that can be assigned with the property of being "rhetorical" and those that cannot. While looking to further define the concept of exigence, Bitzer argues that:

> An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical; thus, whatever comes about of necessity and cannot be changed—death, winter, and some natural disasters, for instance—are exigences to be sure, but they are not rhetorical. Further, an exigence which can be modified only by means other than discourse is not rhetorical; thus, an exigence is not rhetorical when its modification requires merely one's own action or the application of a tool, but neither requires not invites the assistance of discourse. An exigence is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse. (Bitzer 304)

When it comes to applying the concept of Bitzer's rhetorical exigence to analyze the letters, the first and the most obvious example is when the letter-writers ask their audience for a physical response to their letter. Here, the exigence—or the issue to be changed by the letter's rhetoric—is the fulfillment of a task, an expectation that by sending their message to their relatives abroad, the letter-writers will give them a reason to respond with a letter of their own, thus supporting an ongoing epistolary communication between the two parties. This mutual understanding of an effective communication built on reciprocity is implied every time when the rhetors make a note in their writing about having received a letter from America or asking for a letter in return to the one they are composing.

Specifically, many of the letters finish with the letter-writers asking for a response from the couple in America. Although its phrasing might be different from writer to writer, the meaning and the purpose of the request stays the same. Amalie's father and her older sister are the ones who used the following phrase most often: "Looking forward to a quick reply" (L12 4), he writes, while Nathalie signs off a 1914 letter with, "From your loving sister Nathalie, looking

forward to a quick reply!" (L13 4). Furthermore, in his letters to the couple in America, Heinrich Krug Sr. voices his expectation for a response to his letters more explicitly than other writers. He regularly asks the couple to respond to specific questions he discusses in his letters and urges them to do so in great detail. In a 1913 letter, which the couple received after arriving in the Scottsbluff area in Nebraska, he spends two paragraphs asking the couple various questions about their daily life and plans for the near future: whether they have acquired any domestic animals and have enough time to look after them, about access to doctors in the rural area where they live, about their accommodation, and also their plans to work in the beet fields (L05). "Dear children, please respond to each of my questions and don't leave any question unanswered," he urges them in the end (L05). The same tone of urgency can also be heard in a December 1921 letter, which must have been among the first letters arriving in America after a long break due to WWI and political turmoil in Russia. In this letter, his longest, Heinrich Krug Sr. asks his daughter and son-in-law in America for a detailed response: "Well, dear children, do not be so lazy and please answer properly to everything I have asked you about in this letter. And I wanted the same; you will probably want to hear more about everything. So, you can ask me about anything in a letter, and I will answer everything for you" (L14 6).

Another way of communicating the exigence of maintaining a steady connection through the letters is evident when the letter-writers explicitly lament the irregularity of the correspondence received from the couple. In a letter by Heinrich Krug Sr sent in the spring 1914, he updates them about Amalie's siblings' correspondence: "[Emilie] will also write to you in the next few days. And Heinrich is upset: he wrote a letter to you a long time ago but has not gotten any answer yet" (L12 4). Amalie's brother Heinrich seems to be particularly sensitive to any prolonged time period without letters from America that are sent to him directly or ask about

him. In his letter dated from April 18, 1913, he voices his dissatisfaction with the couple's lack of correspondence. "Brother-in-law," Heinrich addresses Jacob Jerger Jr., "at first I didn't want to write at all until you had written to me. As my sister Amalie wrote her letter, she didn't even send any greetings to me. That letter of yours was the first one in which you mentioned me" (L06 1). On the next page, he continues: "After that, I was set to write to you immediately. I said to my wife, 'If they mention me just once, I will write them back right away!' I would have written to you a long time ago, but I still haven't because of that" (L06 2). Krug Jr then continues his letter by sharing the news of his infant daughter starting to walk and talk, so he appears to get back to the standard way of writing a letter by reporting on the news about family and home in Russian in general.

Nonetheless, this outburst over the couple's failure to "send any greetings" to Krug Jr or write a letter to him directly shows the importance that the letter correspondence must have had for its participants, or at least some of them. This could have stemmed from social and cultural expectations of having to maintain a close relationship with family members, even if it was done by the way of sending letters from abroad. These expectations most probably reflect the expectations for a face-to-face interaction with the couple if they had stayed in Russia. In any case, maintaining a close personal relationship to family members, even if you were divided by geography, seemed to be a priority among the cultural values shared by the members of this community.

Another example of an exigence I found in the letters is the recurring practice of giving advice. There are several instances when a letter-writer—usually, a parent (or parents)—gives advice to the young relatives in America on what to do and how to treat each other in crucial situations. For instance, in an undated letter by Jacob Jerger Jr's parents to him and some of his

siblings, they share their strong opposition to Jacob's younger brother Heinrich's moving away from the older brother. Heinrich had immigrated to America together with his brother and his new wife Amalie in late 1912. While the letter does not provide any specifics on this decision (two pages are missing), young Heinrich Jerger's decision clearly does not sit well with his parents in distant Russia. The letter urges him to reflect on the promises he had made to them before the departure to America: "And you, dear child Heinrich, have forgotten already what you promised to us. But you, dear child, when you do it, we wish you no harm. But you will also have no good luck when you leave your father and mother, and your brother. Look, dear children, we have let you go to America *together* just because I did not want you to go apart, and now you start as the first one" (L11 6, emphasis mine). In this case, the exigence is rooted in a socially and culturally constructed parent-child relationship defined through a specific kind of behavior expected from its participants—parents give advice that should be followed by their children.

Similar examples of the "parental advice" exigence can be found in the letters by Amalie's father. In a letter dated from February 1913, he appeals to the couple through the morals of religious faith and humor, but the following paragraph reveals complex cultural structure based on mutually understood beliefs and values. His words seem to stretch a protective, caring hand over his daughter and her newlywed husband in a faraway country. He writes:

> Further, dear children, please, get along with and love each other the way it is supposed to be for Christian people. And keep your money together and behave yourselves well. [...] Have you had any letter from [Amalia] and August? Have you written them yet? Do not forget to write and please write more often to us.

> And you, dearest [Amalie], get going and write to us yourself; it does not matter how it turns out. Please, write whether your Jacob already has bought you many nice clothes or whether you still have to run around in your old dresses, though I do not think he is not proud of you. (L03 2)

In a letter a few months later, dated November 2, 1913, Heinrich Krug Sr reflects on the possibility of the young couple coming back to Russia and gives his parental advice about what they should focus on instead while in America. He explains:

> Dear child, you should not think that I do not want you to come back to Russia. Dear son-in-law, it is just that I think that it would be better for you both if you kept your money together and would buy a piece a land of land in America. This way you would not need to be under those strangers and would be a boss to yourself. There have been so many people happy in America who would buy land for themselves; at first, only a little but then would go on to become quite wealthy. It is always better to be a small boss than a big servant. Isn't it true, dear son-in-law? (L10 2)

In a different letter five months later, Heinrich Krug Sr. asks his son-in-law about some advice the young man had received from his own parents and quizzes him about his future plans while also making a careful suggestion of his own. "I have heard that your parents wrote to you," Krug Sr. says, "after your father had gotten ill, that you should come back home. But whom will it help? You will be drafted into the [Russian] Army as soon as you come back home, right? Dear children, I think it would be the best if you stay where you are now. In this case, [Jacob Jerger] would not be drafted into the Army and can still earn money. You need it to not suffer any need" (L12 2).

Finally, yet another exigence in the letters is manifested in the re-occurring theme of memory and remembering, which is a dominant theme that continuously runs through the entire timeline of the letters. For instance, in an undated letter by Jacob Jerger Jr.'s parents that must have been written to the couple in the United States within the first few years after his and Amalie's move to the United States, they share extensively about feeling upset. Although the reasons behind it are not quite clear, they must have included dissatisfaction with the lack of regularity in letters coming from America. "I, your mother, have thought so much about you and believe me, it is so difficult that the three of you have left me.[6] Dear children, I could not rest day or night after you left, and now you do not even write letters! Heinrich and you dear child have promised me so much. You probably do not even think about it anymore. And you, dear child Amalie, you squeezed my hands with love so often, and yet you have forgotten me, too. My children, I never would have imagined you can forget me like this" (L11 1). Interestingly here, the writers link their expectations for their children to the latter's apparent failure to remember the promises they had made to their elders before leaving for the New World. While the parents appear to use this exigence to maintain a close relationship with their children despite the distance, they also seem to use it for the purpose of influencing their children's decisions, which is probably a continuation of what the relationship was like when all of them lived closer to each other.

Using the emotional charged reminders to maintain a close personal connection is also evident in the letters by Amalie's close relatives. In a 1913 letter by Amalie's younger sister Emilie, who was thirteen-years-old when her sister left for North America, wrote a letter to Amalie. Unlike the authoritative sounding Jerger parents-in-law, young Emilie appeals to

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[6] This is probably a reference to Amalie, her husband Jacob Jerger Jr and his younger brother Heinrich leaving home together in the fall 1912.

Amalie's emotions as a beloved and loving sister and channels her appeal to remember their strong bond through a short poem about "a beautiful little flower in our green meadow," fittingly ending with the word *Vergissmeinnicht*, or "forget-me-not" (L04 2). Her older sister Nathalie also wrote a letter to tell her sister in America that she remembers her and that she regrets the distance between them. In a letter dated April 13, 1914, just several months after giving birth to twin boys, Nathalie writes: "Dear sister, you wrote once to [our father] that you were sorry to be so far away in the world. You can imagine how often I think of you. [My older son] Heinrich thinks about you [...] If only I could go visit you with my boys!" (L13 2-3). Regretting the distance between them that prevents her from introducing her young sons, who have been the subject of the letters by other family members, Nathalie asks Amalie's husband Jacob Jerger to send money so that she would have a photo of her children taken to send to America (L13 3).

Amalie's father Heinrich Krug Sr. also uses reminders as a tool to strengthen family ties across the distance. In a previously mentioned letter dated from February 1913 letter, he asks Amalie to not forget to write letters to Russia on a more regular basis (L03). In a letter written in April 1914, he devotes a paragraph explaining his frustration at his daughter's attitude and tries to convince her that she is constantly on her parents' mind. "Dear Amalie," he writes, "you offend us, namely myself and Mama, greatly if you think that we your parents do not think of you. You are mistaken because we think more of you than you think of us, especially since we have learned about and read in the paper about the dangerous weather you had in America because we know how afraid you are of such weather. You can imagine that we have talked and thought about you" (L05).

The exigence of the need to remember in order to maintain the personal connections between the letter-writers and their readers, the relatives in America, becomes even more

important against the backdrop of the famine crisis in Russia in the 1920s and the 1930s. By this time the family in Russia and the couple in America had not had any face-to-face contact for over a decade and, therefore, appeals to the memories of the time before the separation and the strong family bond helps the writers to convey their urgent pleas for help.

Several of the letters from this time period were written in 1925. Although by this time the acute danger of famine had decreased, the crisis was still affecting the local population and determined the focus of the letters. In a letter dated from March 26 and addressed to their daughter in America, Jacob Jerger's parents urge their children and grandchildren to "not forget" them. The failure of remembering is probably perceived through a lack of regular correspondence from America, thus making the family in Russia believe that their American relatives no longer cared about them and their dire life situation. The Jergers appeal to their grandchildren: "Do you still think of your grandparents? Do you still remember [us]? Be nice and share something with us in this great need and remind your parents of it, if they do not think about it" (L19 2). In a different letter written in March 1925, Amalie's brother Heinrich also pleads for help urging the couple "not to forget" him during the difficult time (L18 4).

Although Bitzer's discussion of exigence in his theory of the rhetorical situation proves useful in analysis of the letters, his insistence that a rhetorical exigence is an urgent issue that can be changed through the means of rhetorical discourse unjustifiably denies rhetorical status to many requests for help in the letters. Specifically, he notes that "An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical; thus, whatever comes about of necessity and cannot be changed—death, winter, and some natural disasters, for instance—are exigences to be sure, but they are not rhetorical" (Bitzer 304). He goes on to further define the nature of a truly rhetorical exigence by arguing that "An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical" and that an " . . . exigence

is rhetorical when it is capable of positive modification and when positive modification requires discourse or can be assisted by discourse" (Bitzer 304). So, according to Bitzer's argument, a rhetorical exigence can only be positively changed or modified through rhetorical action, not through the physical one.

If I were following his definition strictly, there are only a few examples of rhetorical exigences in the letters. However, they are substantial enough to define the whole nature and the purpose of the discourse carried through the letters. For instance, it is true that the letters' audience could not have been able to significantly change the horrific impact of the famine crisis on the letter-writers through the means of rhetorical discourse, however, even professing a good intention through writing a letter to Russia would have been seen as a positive sign of an intact connection between the family members in the America and their relatives in Russia.

Another point of Bitzer's approach I would like to challenge is his take on the role of a rhetor's audience within the rhetorical situation. I think that the audience should not be a stand-alone category but instead be listed as one of the constraints that define the rhetorical situation.

4.2. Analyzing the Letters' Audience

When discussing his definition of the rhetorical situation, Lloyd Bitzer names audience as its second component (305). He goes on to make the following statement to explain his position:

> Since rhetorical discourse produces change by influencing the decision and action of persons who function as mediators of change, it follows that rhetoric always requires an audience--even in those cases when a person engages himself or ideal mind as audience. It is clear also that a rhetorical audience must be distinguished from a body of mere hearers or readers: properly speaking, a rhetorical audience

consists only of those persons who are capable of being influenced by discourse and of being mediators of change. (Bitzer 305)

Generally, I see two examples illustrating the ways these letters were shaped by their audience. First, even before I completed a thorough analysis, it was clear that the letters' audience had a great role in shaping the letters' content because it influenced the subjects the writers discussed and also the ways they were discussed. Namely, by writing *to their audience*, who were exclusively people they knew and with whom they had had a close personal face-to-face relationship prior to the letter correspondence, the letter-writers seemed to continue to address their counterparts as they had before. Specifically, they chose to stick to a limited range of topics that they would have talked about face-to-face: news about the family and community members, weather, and the harvest progress. Since these were the most relevant bits of news for them and their audience, these were also the dominant subjects discussed in the letters texts. The only major adjustment made when taking the personal relationship from a face-to-face to a written conversation through letters was the necessity for the letter-writers to adhere to specific conventions of the letter genre they must have been exposed to. Yet in general, based on the topics they wrote about and the way they addressed their audience, their written correspondence seems to have greatly mirrored their face-to-face interaction. I view it as a dialogic nature of a conversation that has shifted from one perspective into another, without having lost the intimacy and the closeness between the parties involved.

One of the examples of how the feeling of close personal relationship was translated from a face-to-face interaction into the written conversation can be seen in the way the letter-writers address multiple people as their intended audience in the original letters. This is evident in the use of the second person pronoun "you" by the writers, as if speaking to multiple people at once.

Although it is difficult to see in English, the use of the German second personal plural pronoun "Euch" in the original letters indicates that the writers used the collective "you" was to address both Amalie and her husband Jacob at once. Similarly, Amalie's parents-in-law addressed multiple people through their letters. For example, in an undated letter written a couple of years after the young couple's immigration to the US, the Jerger parents address multiple readers through their text. Although the six-page long letter presents one single text, it features individual passages that are addressed to either one or two specific individuals. On page 1, Jacob Jerger's mother refers to him and his brother by saying: "Dear children, I could not rest day or night after you left, and now you do not even write letters! Heinrich and you dear child [Jacob] have promised me so much [...] And you, dear child Amalie, you squeezed my hands with love so often [...]" (L11 01). She goes on to address her daughter Eva Elisabeth on page 2 before another writer, presumably her husband Jacob Jerger Sr., takes over to write another four pages of this letter. On page 6, this second writer again addresses one person individually with "dear child Heinrich" before proceeding to address multiple people with "dear children" (L11 6). Whether by necessity (to save time and resources by writing one letter addressed to multiple relatives living in close proximity to each other) or by habit, these letters illustrate a particular tradition of conversing with one's audience by addressing multiple individuals at once.

Another example of how the letters resemble personal face-to-face interaction can be seen in the letters by Heinrich Krug Sr., Amalie's father, who often asked many questions about different topics, ranging from their work plans to accommodation and social life. Through these questions, he urges the couple to engage in maintaining a close personal relationship with him and the rest of the family back home in Russia inviting his daughter and son-in-law to enter into dialogue. This is evident when he insistently asks Amalie to start writing letters herself and also

when he responds to questions that had evidently been asked in the letters arriving from America: “And dear son-in-law, you wrote that it is a shame that we are not visiting each other [...] Furthermore, you asked about how our harvest has turned out. [...] You wrote that you are planning to move into town to work in the sugar factory” (L08).

My point of contention with Bitzer on the subject of audience is his statement that “the rhetorical situation must be capable of serving as mediator of the change which the discourse functions to produce” (305). Although I agree with him, I do not think there is a need to make the audience a category separate from the other constraints he names that influence rhetorical discourse. Just as the rhetors shape the discourse, so does the audience they address. In the case of the letters I have analyzed, the audience and its expectations have had a similar influence on the written texts as did the writers.

4.3. Analyzing the Constraints in the Letters

The third important component of the rhetorical situation, as defined in Lloyd Bitzer’s “The Rhetorical Situation,” is the observation that rhetorical discourse is shaped by “constraints.” This is one of the most appealing parts of Bitzer’s theory for me because it helps explain certain aspects of the letters’ rhetoric. Specifically, my analysis has shown the letters to include the following kinds of constraints: geographical constraints, contextual constraints, genre expectations, cultural expectations, and the time constraints.

The geographical distance between the letter-writers and their audience is perhaps the most obvious constraint affecting the rhetorical discourse. As previously noted, the writers try to simulate the continuation of the close personal interaction with their audience by continuing to talk to each other as if they were facing one another in person. However, this kind of rhetorical

discourse is difficult to sustain over lengthy period of time and, thus, the later letters show signs that the writers are less confident that their message has been understood by their audience.

The contextual constraints are most evident in the way different writers address their audience based on who they are and who exactly they are talking to. These contextual constraints reflect cultural expectations. Thus, Amalie's father insists that the couple keep up the social connections with their fellow countrymen and relatives living in America, asking whether they have yet made the trip to Walla-Walla, WA, or Russell, KS.

The constraint of time is particularly visible in the later letters, the ones that were written after 1920. Starting with a letter by Heinrich Krug Sr. dated from December 1921, these letters re-established the communication between the couple in America and their relatives in Russia after a six-year gap due to World War I and its aftermath in Russia. The six-year gap must have put a strain on the relationship between the letter-writers and their audience. The gap influenced their perception of each other because they have not been a part of each other's lives that much since 1912, and the lack of correspondence during 6 difficult years no doubt changed their perception and expectations of each other. Now the expectations of contact were different, because the years had changed the way they saw each other. Later letters seemingly lack the strong personal connection implied by the letter-writers in the earlier letter. Instead, the later letters almost entirely focus on describing the dire situation of the letter-writers at that time.

However, after the extended gap when the correspondence totally broke down, the letters, which now come through very infrequently, show that the writers are not sure if the couple are even still alive. Their messages very much seem like a metaphorical message in a bottle cast off the shore of an island. In these letters, we see the writers stranded and cut off by famine crisis. They just want to make contact, just want to see whether they would be able to reach their

audience, whether there was any help out there. Because the letters are thought of as a chance to get help— provided they reached their intended audience in America—the rhetors break cultural genre expectations in the later letters and focus only on their problems, without asking the letter-readers about their life.

Although genre constraints were abandoned in the famine letters, in the early letters genre constraints implied by the rhetorical situation, influenced the writers because they used certain generic conventions to convey their message in the form appropriate for the letter-writing genre, as they knew it. Here, I see a strong connection to Bitzer's discussion about the rhetorical situation needing an appropriate "response." According to Bitzer, "If it makes sense to say that [rhetorical] situation invites a 'fitting' response, then situation must somehow prescribe the response which fits. To say that a rhetorical response fits a situation is to say that it meets the requirements established by the situation. A situation which is strong and clear dictates the purpose, theme, matter, and style of the response" (307). This situational constraint, normally referred to as genre, can be illustrated by analyzing conventional moves used as rhetorical strategies in the letters.

4.4. Conventional Moves as Rhetorical Strategies in the Letters

In general, the letters follow an almost formulaic structure. While some letters did have a date above the very first line and some did not, all of them would usually start with a generic greeting addressing the letter's recipients. Because most of the letters in this collection were written to Amalie and Jacob Jerger, they address them in a form of the family/blood relation in which the letter writer is connected to the couple. For example, Amalie's father would always address the couple with "Dear children Jacob and Amalie," while Amalie's brother would refer to the couple with "Dear brother-in-law and sister." Amalie's older sister Nathalie Schroeder

would also address the couple with “Dear brother-in-law and sister” in her letters. Perhaps not surprisingly, the majority of letters addressed to the couple place Jacob Jerger, the patriarch of the family, in the front of the greeting as the first recipient. His wife is usually the second addressee, except for one letter. In a 1913 letter written by Amalie’s younger sister Emilie starts with “Dear sister and brother-in-law.” That letter is different from the rest because it is written by a teenaged sister of Amalie who seems to be addressing the letter more to her rather than to both Amalie and her husband. In the letter, young Emilie repeatedly addresses her older sister with “dearest sister” and “Schwesterchen” while also using “Dear sister and brother-in-law.”

The first paragraph after the greeting usually includes a statement saying that writers are in good health and stating whether or not they had received a letter from the couple in America. The topic of health, specifically being in “good health” and wishing the same to the letter’s recipients, seems to have been an important question. In most of letters’ introductory paragraphs, the writers ask the couple about their health or wish them the same health they themselves are enjoying.

The first paragraph also often contains a confirmation that the last letter from the American couple had been received or a lament that no letters had arrived. For instance, in a letter from April 1913, just over 6-7 months after the couple immigrated, Heinrich Krug Sr. expresses his frustration at the seemingly slow pace of the letters arriving from America by mail. One reason that the letters were anxiously awaited was that the family back home was hoping to read news about the couple’s lives. Krug Sr. writes, “we wanted to hear something else in that letter, namely, about a baby son or daughter. Now we will probably have to wait for the next letter and it will not come for a while. The letters from America generally take too long to arrive. They should take only 8 days so that we would hear from you more often and faster” (L03).

After the introductory paragraph inquiring about the couple's health and updating them on the last received letter, the letter writers usually would proceed with an update on family or community relations: who had died, married, or given birth. For instance, in her 1913 letter, Emilie Krug says, "*Maluschchen* has had a baby son. His name is *Frizchen* [sic] and he is my *Petter*. Our Emmachen can already walk; she jumps out of every corner. Dearest sister and brother-in-law, I have received the photo. I was so glad when I held it in my hands, as if I were looking at both of you. Amalie, Uncle *Heiborn's* aunt [=wife?] *Marilis* has passed away." (Letter 7). In a letter from the roughly same time period, Amalie's brother Heinrich focuses his entire first paragraph on the following information: "The old *Vetter Jergerrig/Jergenmig Maiher* and *die Wes Gramelsen*[7] have passed away here in Krazke. Dear sister, *Grossmama* [grandmother] is in [the village of] Merkel and so is *Manehl* [Manuel]. They are all in good health and our grandmother wants to get married there. She wants to marry *den Sels/Hels Vetter Johann Jacob*. *Die Wes Liss* has died; you have probably have heard about it." Evidently, sharing these updates was a necessary way to weave the fabric of the communication together.

The rest of letters usually go into more detail about the writer's daily life, although there was a considerable shift in themes covered during the 1913-1914 years compared to those in the early 1920's, when the letters were full with descriptions of economic crises individuals, their family, and the community in Russia were going through. Each letter susually conclude with the writers collectively greeting the couple in America and encouraging a quick response from them.

The purpose of these generic conventions was to guide the reader through the content of each letter. The letter-writers have largely followed these "guidelines" while constructing their

[7] "Vetter" and "Wes" means 'uncle' and 'aunt' in Volga German dialect. While they can refer to biological uncles and aunts, they are also often used as a respectful form of addressing older members of one's community or friends of older age. Therefore, these uncle and aunt might not be related to the Krug family.

messages, with some deviations that were largely due to the historical context in which the letters were written or by differences in the letters' function. However, despite the generic conventions the letters were following, the personalities of their writers were still visible and coming through the writing. In the next part of this chapter, I will analyze the personae of the letter-writers based on the rhetoric in their letters.

4.5. Rhetorical Functions of the Letters

To expand the previous discussion about the genre of these letters and what purpose they might have had that went beyond of the obvious one—to maintain the personal connection between the letter-writers and their audience—it is necessary to consider the rhetorical functions of the letters. Based on my evaluation of the dominant themes in the letters, here are the functions these letters fulfilled as examples of their genre.

1. Letter writing as a social practice of maintaining a personal connection

According to David Barton and Nigel Hall's introduction to a study of letter writing as a social practice, "the most revealing way of investigating letter writing is to view it as a social practice, examining the texts, the participants, the activities and the artefacts in the social contexts. The aim is to understand more about the phenomenon of letter writing and, more broadly, about the role of literate activity in society" (Barton and Hall 1). This view is directly in tune with the definition proposed by the scholars of rhetorical genre studies discussed earlier. While regarding the practice and genre of letter writing as a social activity, it is necessary to also approach the discussion with the view that this activity is as much cultural as it is social. Thus, I find it interesting to explore the way these personal letters are examples of a cultural practice.

2. Observing implicit rules of conversation (the "other" letters)

Earlier I noted that one of the conventional moves in the letters were to report on the last correspondence received. Although I have only one side of the exchange, it is possible to reconstruct the letters from America using the content of the surviving letters. One question that I asked myself relatively late in my research process was the question about the “other” side of the letter exchange form which my primary research materials stem. The “other” side is the letters sent by Amalie and Jacob Krug from America to their relatives in the Russian Empire and, later, the new Soviet state. Although the letters to Amalie and Jacob that I have are a large enough sample for the purposes of my analysis, I do wonder about the other letters, the ones they must have sent home during their first few years in America and then later, once the correspondence picked up again in the early 1920s, after the war years have passed in Russia and their own family in America has grown by children they had had.

Although the exact content of those letters will remain unknown, I can speculate about the way the letters would have talked about. Based on the way the letters from Russia look like and my assumption that this was the way this family was used/learned to writing personal letters to each other, I think that they would have each had a similar beginning as the letters sent to them. There would have been an elaborate beginning with greetings to the family and questions asked about their health and wellbeing. Jacob and Amalie would have reported on theirs and, undoubtedly, there would have been some particular focus on the young bride’s health as she was pregnant. There would have been some heavy news to be shared when the first two children she gave birth to passed away shortly after the birth and then the joyous news of the happy arrival of the couple’s first son, Alec. And there would have been reports on more children in the later years until the correspondence broke down in the 1930s. There would have been news about

the changes in the couple's family life, their ways of earning the income, the jobs they both have held and the hopes they had.

The discussion of the job situation would have been particularly steady. There would have been reports about the difficult conditions on one of the earlier employments they have had, working in the fields of Nebraskan sugar beet country. I think this particular subject was prominently discussed in the letters because of the content of one of the letters written by Amalie's father. In the letter from 1913, Heinrich Krug inquires if there was any other work available besides the one in the beet fields. This letter must have been written in response to Amalie and Jacob's stories about the reality of working in America, about having to do the work which is probably the most widely used one by the newly arrived immigrants, who had not had yet acquired the experience and the language skills to be able to seek less back-breaking employment. The couple would have no doubt talked about the difficult working conditions, payment, and other particularities about this first job assignment. Manuel Jerger's recollection of his parents' memories of working in the beet fields in Nebraska.

As the couple settled in into their new life, they probably talked about establishing connections with a widespread network of family and friends, those who had immigrated to the United States before them. At least, this seems to have been an expectation. In a different letter, Heinrich Sr. asks his "children" about the family relations in Kansas and Washington state. The wording of the letter suggests that visiting the relatives was not a question but an expectation, a culturally constructed sign of respect and goodwill, presumably based on the idea that close communal and family networks within the German Russia diaspora need to be kept up even when living overseas.

Although the first place where Jacob and Amalie and Jacob's younger brother Heinrich Jerger would live in the United States would have been known in advance, there would have been still information about the country the young people now called home that those, who stayed behind would have want to know about. For instance, Heinrich Krug, who has never been in this country, asked about geographical locations and topography of the Midwest. In his letter from 1913, asks about the major rivers by where the couple resides and talks about the map that he has at home. He says he would look up the river on the map he has at home.

The last letter Jacob and Amalie received from home must have arrived in the mid-1930s. The evidence of it is in one of the letter I have analyzed but also in a short note I found in the Jerger family archive. In the note, Amalie included the information on her siblings' names, their years of birth, and the year she last had heard from her family in Russia—1935 (Jerger "Note" 1). Together with her sister's last letter—the "youngest" letter in the collection—that I have identified as the last among the ones that have been preserved, I think that the letter exchange between the Jerger couple and their family members in their home country did stop around the mid-1930s. This assumption is supported by my knowledge of this time period being the time period of when the Iron Curtain has closed on the Soviet Russian state separating the people in America from their relatives and friends.

Through anecdotal knowledge, I know of at least one family, whose members paid a very heavy price for having maintained the personal connection to the relatives, who had immigrated from Russia to the West. A resident of the village of Seewald, merely couple of miles away both Dittel and Kratzke, the two villages the letters to Amalie and Jacob had come from, was arrested on charges of anti-Soviet propaganda at the height of the Great Purge in the 1930s. The charges stemmed from his receiving (and probably writing) letters to his daughter, who had immigrated

to Colorado, another midwestern state heavily populated by the Volga Germans, with her husband before World War I.

While the purpose of the letters was to maintain a personal communication between the individuals, who had gone to America, and their relatives, who lived in Russia, there was a deeper meaning to this letter exchange spanning across half of the world. Namely, there were several important social functions this communication fulfilled. First, it reinforced shared cultural values by stressing the importance of maintaining familial ties and close communal connections between individual members of the social group the letter-writers and their audience belonged to. This is particularly evident in the letters that ask the couple in America whether or not they had visited other relatives and family friends living there. Also, the importance is evident in the letter-writers providing news updates on friends and family back home in Russia and life there in general. This regular theme dominates every letter, however short it might be. It is also possible that it is given priority space in the beginning of a letter because of this subject's importance in maintaining the connections.

Another way of reinforcing shared cultural values between all the participants of this letter communication can be illustrated by looking at the ways the letter-writers addressed their audience. Specifically, the letters written by Amalie's father or her in-laws provide a good example of how the culturally enforced tradition of intergenerational interaction influenced even the written ways of communication. Here, the letters in which Amalie's father inquires about her health or gives his advice on how the couple should go about making some decisions about their future suggests that the weight that the mutually shared culture assigned to his position as a father and a father-in-law extended over geographical distance and thus gave him the authority to asks particular questions and give parental advice. The weight of a person's authority based on

them being a parent and/or a member of the older generation is also evident in the ways Amalie's in-laws are communicating with their children in their letters. They protest, they demand, they reprimand their children and children-in-law in these texts and the only way I can explain the tone and style of their communication to the younger generations of their family in America is by looking at the cultural perception of parental ethos as assigning their words and opinion with a particularly strong ethos of authority to demand and reprimand.

Yet another example of a social function of this communication through letters can be seen in the letter-writers making specific requests to their relatives in distant America. Surely, urging Amalie and Jacob to write more often or send a photograph to their family in Russia can be seen as one example for making requests. This one would have been used to help the relatives in Russia with their feelings of missing the young couple. However, a much graver need drove the letter-writers in Russia to make numerous requests for urgent help in their later letters. In the next chapter I analyze the letter-writers' personae and also examples of requests made in the letters sent in the 1920s and the 1930s during the time of a famine. Because of their specific nature, the dominant themes in those letters' rhetoric need to be addressed separately.

CHAPTER 5. RHETORIC OF FAMINE CRISIS IN THE LETTERS

In this chapter, I analyze the rhetoric of famine crisis in the letters from Russia. To provide a theoretical frame for my analysis of the rhetoric reflecting this dominant theme in the letters, I first discuss some points from the earlier introduced theory by Lloyd Bitzer and Richard Vatz. Then, I proceed to illustrate the concept of rhetorical exigence in the letters and explore the ways the dominant theme of famine crisis was rhetorically represented in these texts.

The primary sources for my analysis in this chapter are the letters sent to Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr. from the Soviet Union in the 1920s and the 1930s. I have decided to focus on these letters in a separate chapter because the rhetoric of their contents was influenced by the historical context of the time period during which they were written. Namely, the letters were written and sent to the United States during a famine that greatly affected the life of the region and drew the attention of the entire world as the dramatic crisis was unfolding.

Although the exact number of letters that arrived from the Soviet Union during that time period is unknown, there is a total of eight letters that have been preserved in the Jerger Family Letters Collection. Most of the letters were sent to Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr by Amalie's family members living in the village of Kratzke, Russia: her father Heinrich Krug Sr (three letters), her older sister Nathalie Schroeder (two letters), her younger sister Emilie Braun (one letter), and her brother Heinrich Krug Jr (one letter). The only letter that can be clearly identified as having been written to a different audience is a two-page-long letter by Jacob Jerger Jr.'s parents marked March 26, 1925. This letter was sent from their home in Dietel, a neighboring village to Kratzke, to the elder Jerger's two daughters living in America. The letter is split into two parts with the first page addressed to Christian and Katrin [Schmidt,] a daughter and son-in-law who lived in Nebraska, while the second page is addressed to "Dear son-in-law Jakob

Lackmann and Sophie," another daughter and son-in-law in Nebraska (Jerger 2016). Both parts of the letter include a "special greeting" to the children of each couple who were the writers' grandchildren (L19). While I have no information for the exact reason why this letter ended up with the letters to Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr, one explanation could be that letters from the relatives in Russia that safely arrived in the United States in the 1920s and afterward were circulated among the extended family to ensure that all family members in America had the latest update on the news about their loved ones in the Soviet Union.

Another possibility could be that this letter was sent to Amalie and Jacob to inform them about Jacob's parents' difficult life conditions against the backdrop of an ongoing crisis in the Soviet Russia. Something that can speak for this theory are the descriptions of the dramatic economic situation in the region illustrated in the letters. It is possible that the letters describing the difficult economic situation of the relatives back home in the Lower Volga region of Russia were passed around the extended family to make relatives living in America aware of the catastrophic conditions in the homeland and to solicit help -- whether through financial or food draft support. All of these letters, with the exception of one by Emilie Braun written sometime in the early 1930s, were written in the early to mid-1920s. Because of the time frame these letters were written and their context, which was heavily influenced by the economic crisis in the Soviet Russia, they focus on illustrating their authors'' first-hand experience living in a region engulfed in an economic crisis. Therefore, I have decided to group these eight letters together in one study sample.

To start off my analysis of the rhetoric of crisis in the letters, I would like to discuss some theoretical groundwork that has helped to frame my analysis of the dominant themes in this letter sample. Specifically, I want to compare Lloyd Bitzer's perspective on rhetorical exigence to that

of Richard Vatz and discuss how both perspectives have informed my analysis. While I value Bitzer's theoretical approach to studying the factors influencing rhetorical discourse, my main point of contention with his view is that he insists on making a distinction between an exigence that is rhetorical and one that is not. Bitzer argues that "An exigence which cannot be modified is not rhetorical; thus, whatever comes about of necessity and cannot be changed—death, winter, and some natural disasters, for instance—are exigences to be sure, but they are not rhetorical (Bitzer 304).

While I understand the difference Bitzer sees in the two categories of exigence affecting rhetorical discourse—the ones that can be "modified" or changed through rhetoric and those that supposedly cannot—I cannot help but disagree with him. Although an exigence such as a natural, political, or economic disaster, which cannot be modified by a rhetor's action as a singular individual, they still may and do affect the rhetors who imbed this influence in their message. Because of this action, any subject that is given a constant presence in the discourse by the rhetor is inevitably rhetorical. For example, the theme of famine crisis that becomes omnipresent in the letters sent from the Soviet Union in the 1920s and the 1930s reflects the real-life social "disaster" affecting the rhetors' lives. It's visible/palpable in their writing, their word choices, even the physical matter of the paper these letters were written on. It clearly affected the way the rhetors constructed their messages and what they chose to speak about. Although the letter-readers would have limited ways to change the writers' life situation through rhetoric, this theme should still be considered rhetorical, even if Bitzer would not see eye to eye with me on it. The exigence of famine is rhetorical because it affects the rhetors and the rhetoric of their letters written during the crisis.

One of the remarkable changes that can be traced through the letters in the Jerger Family Letters Collection is the introduction of the theme of crisis. It makes a dramatic entrance in the letters written in the 1920s and the 1930s and gains a constant presence in the narrative of the letters written during this period. Moreover, the theme of famine crisis defines these letters and makes them that much different from the letters written before. In this chapter I will discuss the rhetoric of famine and crisis in the letters and the first-hand personal experiences of their writers communicated through these texts. Specifically, there are descriptions about the individual first-hand experience, pleas for help, instructions on how to provide help from America, and the ongoing famine relief efforts in Russia.

Although the exact number of the letters that was sent to Amalie and her husband Jacob Jerger Jr. from their relatives in Russia and did reach America is unknown, there is currently a total of eight letters that have been preserved by the couple's son and his family. The eight letters cover a time period of about twelve years—from 1921 to 1932-33—and were penned by the following individuals: Heinrich Krug Sr. (1 letter), Heinrich Krug Jr. (3 letters), Nathalie Schroeder (2 letters), Emilie Braun (1 letter), and the Jerger in-laws (1 letter). The majority of the surviving letters were written and sent in the 1920s, while the one by Amalie Jerger's youngest sister Emilie is the only one that has been identified as dating to the early 1930s. This letter also must have been among the last ones to arrive in America from the Soviet Union.

This later batch of letters was written during a tumultuous time period of Russian history in the early 20th century: several major events changing the life and society of the country including WWI followed by the Russian Revolution and a bloody civil war that saw the country going through a remarkable and challenging transformation—from a vast Empire covering one sixth of the world and stretching from the Baltic Sea in the West to the shores of Pacific in the

Far East. The letters written during this time period are remarkably different from the ones written earlier, in the 1910s shortly before the outbreak of WWI. While both sets of letters—the earlier and the later ones—address the same audience and generally strive for the same purpose—to maintain a personal relationship between the letter-writers in Russia and the letter-readers in America, they are drastically different in the tone of their language and the topics on which the writers focused.

These letters reflect the character of the time during which they were written and tell the stories—often painful and tragic—of their authors' personal first-hand experiences during this tumultuous time period of the Russian history. They tell the story of suffering through the famine, coping with constant food shortage, malnutrition, and overall dire life situation. They also talk about their attempts to change their life situation, e.g. through attempts to leave the famine-stricken area. Furthermore, the letters are full of pleas for help from the relatives abroad and they also discuss the ways this help can get to them in a safe way, e.g. by sending food and clothing drafts/packages through the channels overseen by the American Relief Administration. There are also some topics that the letters do not touch upon, and I have to wonder whether these topics were not discussed on purpose—because the letter-writers were afraid of possible censorship through officials—or whether the political turmoil the country was going through during the aftermath of WWI and the Russian Revolution was not as a pressing issue they wanted to report on than the hunger and the physical and emotional distress that had arrived at their doorstep and affected every family home in the area.

On a personal, individual level, the letters are also quite different from the ones before WWI. The last letters to arrive before the lengthy break include news updates about family members, babies being born, and members of the community who had died or married. The pre-

WWI letters by Heinrich Krug Sr. were filled with questions about the couple's new life in America, and their plans for the future, while letters by other family members discussed seemingly mundane "news from home" as a strategy to keep the personal connection spun over half of the globe strong. The letters written during the 1920s have quite a different tone. While of different lengths, they seem to focus on the same register of topics, reporting strictly on the closest family and leaving the fate of the rest of the village community and society in general in a blur of half-sentences and second-guesses based on the periphery of the discussion frame. Amalie's brother lacks his pre-WWI humor and instead fills the pages of his letters with dramatic accounts of loss and failed attempts to escape the miserable situation in the Lower Volga region by going West or moving away from the native village. Amalie's sisters still talk about their own families yet the tone of their narratives is drastically different: they speak of their dire life situation, lack of food, troubled relationship within the family, and, as mothers and caregivers to young children, voice their strong concern for their children's current and future livelihood.

Furthermore, all family members writing during this time seem to question their personal ties to the couple in America. The political and economic crisis seems to have put to a test not only their immediate physical and emotional connections to those around them but also to the couple in distant America. Several letters abandon the usual, generic courtesies in the beginning paragraphs that was a standard feature in the pre-WWI letters. Instead, the letter-writers pose direct questions asking Amalie and Jacob whether they still remembered their relatives in Russia. Among the reasons for their questioning of the existing personal connection is the lengthy time period that had passed since the couple left their Russian homeland for the New World in 1912. The strong family ties, that were only maintained through the letter communication during that

time, had been put to test, as was the personal attachment. In the next chapter, I will look at the personae of the letter-writers.

5.1. Letter-Writers and their Personae in the Letters

While analyzing the rhetoric of these letters, it is important to look at the individual authors—at the way the letter-writers represent themselves in the letters, the way they create their persona and construct their messages. What can image of the writer(s) can we construct from details in the letters? I will discuss each of the four writers in turn.

1. Heinrich Krug Sr. (11 letters/fragments)

By far the most numerous letters preserved in the collection were written by Heinrich Krug Sr., Amalie Jerger's father. There are eleven full letters or letter fragments that can be attributed to him without any doubt: eight of them were sent before World War I, while the other three came in the 1920s, after the communication has been restored. While I do not know the exact reasons for Krug Sr.'s letters representing the largest number of letters in the collection, there is probably a combination of them. First, he might have been the one relative of the couple who wrote the most. Second, his letters were very informative which might have made them interesting for other readers, besides the couple they were intended for. And third, his letters might have presented the biggest sentimental value for Amalie, who has kept them through the years and later passed them onto one of her sons.

What stands out from Heinrich Krug Sr.'s letters are the multiple personas that can be seen in the letters' narrative, from a doting father to a businessman with a strategic, inquiring mind, who cherishes family ties and communal networks. His letters being the longest and the most detailed of all the letters, they also paint a good picture of the concerns and issues the newly arrived immigrants would discuss with their relatives abroad; this picture can be reconstructed through

the questions Krug Sr. asks his daughter and son-in-law or to recurrent themes in his letters. One of the strongest themes of discussion in Krug Sr.'s letters are his questions about the couple's new life in America. Most of his questions are about their living situation, healthcare opportunities in rural Nebraska, and their future plans regarding work or living situation. He strongly comes across as a doting father yet detail-focused businessman with an inquiring mind and a strong penchant for cherishing familial ties and communal networks.

2. Heinrich Krug Jr. (5 letters)

In contrast, his son—and Amalie's brother—Heinrich Krug Jr. comes across as less interested in the specific of his sister and brother's-in-law new life in America. In general, he comes across as a family man eager to report on his infant daughter's progress learning to speak—even talk "some Russian" and walk (L06, L07). Just like the other members of Amalie's family in Russia, he politely inquires about the couple's health and hopes they are doing well; he reports on their relatives and mutual friends, and he praises the latest harvest (L10). In three of his letters, Krug Jr. talks about visiting with Jacob Jerger's parents in the neighboring village of Dittel and reports on their health. Yet, as an earlier letter indicates, the visits might have been considered an obligation because of the newly formed family ties to the Jerger family after Amalie's marriage to Jacob Jerger, rather than because of Krug's friendship to Jerger. "I go to Dittel almost every day, but to visit [Jacob Jerger's parents] every day is not nice. And I do not really like to visit, because your father always curses so much, which is not good for my stomach," he states before adding, "Today I am going to Dittel and will stop by to see him" (L07).

Despite the carefully constructed persona of a caring brother and father, there are some "cracks" in the carefully constructed facade that let this man's other personal traits come

through. For instance, in his earliest surviving letter he is upset with the couple's apparent negligence to mention him explicitly in their previous letters. He spends over a page of this letter talking about the reason that prompted him to write it. Apparently, Jacob Jerger had mistaken a different relative's handwriting for Heinrich's and the latter now felt compelled to correct his brother-in-law. He says: "[T]hat wasn't my handwriting but your sister-in-law Nathalia's. This is my handwriting now. Brother-in-law, at first I didn't want to write at all until you had written to me. As my sister Amalie wrote her letter, she didn't even send any greetings for me. You too have already written yet you haven't sent any greetings to me. That letter of yours was the first one in which you mentioned me." (L06).

Even though he shares his hurt feelings over not being explicitly mentioned in the letters to the other relatives, Heinrich Krug Jr's attitude toward the couple shows a great deal of fondness and closeness. He seems to be especially friendly with his brother-in-law, whom he evidently misses when going out. In a letter written in July 1913, during the first year after the couple's departure for America, Heinrich Jr. tells a story of thinking about Jacob Jerger during a recent outing to the neighboring village of Dittel, where Jacob was originally from. Krug Jr. writes: "[...] I was just in Dittel and had a glass of beer. At that time, I had not received your letter yet, so I could not even toast for you, but it did not matter, so I will now toast for you more often. I was afraid that if I drank for my brother-in-law, he would get a headache that he would be unable to get rid of" (L07). The humor with which he jokingly tells this little story gives some intimate strokes to an otherwise formal personal letter. It also shows an evidently close bond between the two young men, who, both being of the roughly same age and the same stage in their married family life, could well be best friends, if it were not for the several thousand miles separating them. With the communication being forced into an involuntary break in

correspondence during the years of WWI and the Civil War in post-revolutionary Russia, it is interesting to shift the focus to the last letter in the Jerger Family Letters Collection penned by Krug Jr.

After the letter exchange between the couple in America and their relatives in Russia resumes in the early 1920s, the circumstances have changed dramatically. Although no longer an empire, Russia is still the largest country in the world yet going through a traumatic transformation into the newly established Soviet Union. The political turmoil the country and its citizens went through probably would have been reflected in letters, if any of them were exchanged. In the early 1920s, the family was affected by a famine in their part of Russia. The economic crisis, the dire life circumstances, and the uncertainty about the stability of the newly re-connected letter-writers and their audience frame the perspective of the last letter written by Heinrich Krug Jr to his sister and her husband in America written on March 17, 1925. He starts his message by lamenting the lack of letters from them: “It has been a whole year that we have not received a word from you in writing [...] I have already sent two letters to you, but without a response. I do not know whether you are still alive or you are dead” (L19). Despite the uncertainty about this new letter making it to America, Krug Jr takes time to narrate the events of the last few years in a four-page text, his longest surviving letter. Possibly because he thinks his previous letters might not have reached the Jerger family in America, he fills his letter with details about his personal life and also their mutual relatives. Adding to the dire life circumstances is his insecurity about the reason behind the lack of written response from the relatives in America. “Dearest brother-in-law,” Krug Jr quizzes, “I do not know why you would not write to me once. Have I offended you or something? I cannot understand this. Or, maybe, someone has said bad things?” (L19). Feeling regretful over the lack of letters from America, he

concludes that he is powerless to defend his position: “One can write a lot but not make anyone believe” (L19).

Besides reflecting on the lack of the news from Amalie and Jacob, Krug Jr. devotes much of his letter to asking for help. In fact, this is the strongest theme of all the letters in this collection that were written in the 1920s; therefore, not surprisingly, this last surviving letter by Amalie’s brother also attests to the critical life situation he is in as he writes this letter. Throughout two pages of his letter, Krug Jr. describes his dire life situation by stating, “I have no cows, no horses, nothing at all” before proceeding to ask the couple for help. Besides asking for money to help him purchase “a horse and a cow,” he suggests a possibility of getting out of Russia altogether and asks for assistance with the documents needed to make the move (L19). He further asks his sister to contact another close relative living in the US to inform her about his life circumstances and concludes that the relative “should help [him] a little is she wants” (L19). He ends this letter with repeating his plea for short-term and long-term help: “I am asking you again to help me and not to forget me [...] in this world. And if you want to send anything, do it as soon as possible, because I do not have any bread to eat today” (L19). This letter of his is the last surviving in the present collection.

3. Nathalie Schroeder (3 letters)

The next sibling who maintained a letter exchange with Amalie and Jacob Jerger was her older sister Natalie Schroeder, née Krug. Based on extra-textual information, I know quite a lot about this woman, although her fate after 1935, when the communication with Russia reportedly broke down, remains unknown (Jerger 2016). She was the oldest child of Heinrich Krug Sr. and his first wife, who passed away in 1900-1902, after the birth of her fifth child, who also passed away shortly after she did (Jerger 2016). At the time when Amalie and Jacob Jerger left for

America, Natalie had been married for several years and had at least one child. Her husband never contributed to her letters, at least to the three surviving ones in the Jerger Family Letters Collection, although he is usually briefly mentioned in the letters from other relatives—Natalie, Heinrich Krug Sr. and Heinrich Krug Jr.

Three letters by Nathalie have been preserved: the first one is from April 13, 1914, while the two others are dating from the 1920s. Just like her brother, she focuses on reporting about her family in her letters, perhaps even more so because as of the traditional role of child-rearing and care women in pre-Soviet Russia would be obliged to fulfill. In fact, her first surviving letter reports on a remarkable event in her personal and family life—the birth of her twin sons in September 1913. In her letter to the couple in America dated from April 13, 1914, she apologizes for a lack of recent messages by announcing the twin birth. "[...] Dear Lord bestowed us with two baby sons. You can imagine how little time I have had to write to you," she explains (L14 2). She then responds to a statement made by Amalie in her letter to their father about her regrets about the move across the world. "Dear sister," Nathalie writes, "you wrote once to Papa that you were sorry to be so far away in the world. You can imagine how often I think of you. [My oldest son Heinrich] thinks about you [...] If only I could go visit you with my boys!" (L14/1914 2-3). Because the possibility of a face-to-face meeting was very slim, Nathalie proceeds to ask her sister for a couple of dollars to be able to have photos of her three sons taken to be send to America. She states: "[...] I would still like for you to see the children because it is such a fortune!" (L14 3).

In her next surviving letter dated March 12, 1922, we encounter Nathalie under different life circumstances. Judging by the date on this letter, it must have been sent shortly after the letter communication with America was restored after several years of forced silence. Nathalie is

writing from within an epicenter of a region-wide crisis. Therefore, not surprisingly, there are no usual courtesies in her writing such as asking the letter-readers about their health or how they are doing. Instead, her four-page-long letter focuses on reporting on the crisis and pleading with her relatives in America for help.

The instability of the situation and Nathalie's insecurity about whether the letter will indeed find its intended audience is seen in the letter's very first paragraph. She writes: "This is already the third letter I am writing to you—one after another—without getting any response. We should not wait for you because you are probably not worried about us; we are bothering you with our letters. I do not know whether you are alive or not" (L16 1). Despite a lack of assurance that letter will be read, Nathalie continues with detailing the life circumstances of her family and loved ones. And just like her brother in his letter from the early 1920s during the famine, she pointedly sums up the situation with only one word—"bad." She then goes on to provide a detailed account of their brother Heinrich Krug Jr.'s journey to Poland in an attempt to get to western Europe:

> They left from here last November and went to Polish border. After having spent two months there, they had to pay a lot of money to cross the border. And once they were in Poland, they were send back. Yes, they had to go over the border by foot. My dear Lord, they had to go through so much! What a pain that they had to go back [to Russia]; the Polish have treated them terribly rough [...] they had to go back home, and from their dear children, they lost the younger one [...] they were on the road for 3 months in this terrible world. (L16 1-2)

This letter culminates in an emotional plea to "dear brother-in-law and sister" to "send something" to Nathalie and the rest of the family in Russia. She provides instructions on how to

send a food package through American Relief Administration, for which she includes an address in New York City and a detailed list of products the couple in America would be able to provide for the relatives in Russia if they were to send money through the organization. Nathalie urges to act soon as she asks the couple: “[...] if you want to send [help] to us, then send as quickly as possible.” A caring sibling, she ends this dramatic letter with “heartfelt greetings and kisses” to her relatives in distant America and asks Amalie to kiss her “little ones” for her (L16 4).

The final surviving letter by Nathalie Schroeder was written on March 28, 1925. Although this letter also reports on the on-going crisis and poverty, it is not as detailed as the 1922 letter. There is no detailed account on the crisis and the writer does not provide a lengthy update on the rest of the family in Russia. On the contrary, Schroeder only briefly mentions her two other younger siblings.

It is evident that the on-going crisis in Russia has affected not only the physical well-being of individuals but also the inner-group relationships. This 1925 letter documents the aftermath of several years of crisis and the toll it has taken on herself personally. It is interesting that Schroeder seems to be communicating the real drama of her life situation through the connections to her next of kin. Just as her previous letter, she begins this one by directly addressing her sister and brother-in-law in America. There are no usual questions about their health. Instead, she questions their loyalty to her in the time of need. “I would like to ask you now why you have not responded to me even once. This letter now is already the fourth one I am writing to you, and you do not even respond to me. [...] I am probably too poor for you. But I cannot do anything because the poverty is so very great that nothing has grown in several years, and there has not been any income” (L21 1).

Later in the letter Schroeder seems to examine and evaluate all the family ties; the result is that they appear to be either broken or not function as they traditionally should have. She first laments the inability of getting help from Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr. before discussing the other important family relationships:

Dear brother-in-law and sister, I have wished so many times: if I could only be with you and could eat what you have left. As long as my Daddy lived, I used to go to him, and would get something from time to time, when he had something. But now I am all alone. Heinrich does not care about me and from Emilie I have gotten only one letter. (L21 2)

There seems to be a clear parallel in the way she discusses the economic crisis and the seemingly failed safety net of family ties in helping her to overcome the effects that the famine crisis has taken on her life. A "lack of" seems to be a key word in her description of the situation. The gravity of the situation increases because of the seemingly broken family ties and the failure of the protective system of the close-knit family connections to support her through this difficult time. This sentiment is reflected in her statement of being "all alone," her father being gone, her brother's lack of care about her, and the communication silence from the couple in America.

Despite her feeling insecure about her relatives in America taking an interest in her life situation, Schroeder does ask for a favor, "[I]f you would open up your charitable hand, and God would touch your hearts, and you would send me some money." This plea, however, is not for her but for her son. Apparently, the ongoing crisis has not only affected the people physically but it has also affected them socially, by preventing them from partaking in important social and cultural traditions that mark a rite of passage in their group. Schroeder pleads for help for her teenaged son, who has been unable to get confirmed in the Lutheran church: "Dear sister, my Heinrich is already in his 14th year of life, yet has not received the Sacrament. He asked his

[godmother Amalie Jerger] to be good and that she should send something to him, so that he can go at the Pentecost when the children receive the Sacrament. If you want to send something, do not wait very long" (L21 2).

4. Emilie Braun (2 letters)

As far as Amalie Jerger's youngest sibling, Emilie Braun née Krug, is concerned, there are only two letters remaining that can be attributed to her without any doubt. They were written twenty years apart—the first one in 1913 and the second one sometime in the early 1930s—and they could not have been more different with regard to their content. Both letters respond to a similar rhetorical situation—a woman writing to her older sister abroad—yet because of the differences in their historical context, they almost appear to have been penned by two different individuals.

In the first letter, we encounter a young teenaged girl, the baby of the family with a touch of romanticism to her young personality, writing to her older sister. In 1912, the year before the letter was composed, the relationship between the two sisters was put to a serious test when Amalie left home twice: first, when she got married in May 1912 and moved to her newlywed husband's parents' house in a different village a few miles away, and then when she left for the second time with her spouse to immigrate to America just a few months after their wedding. No doubt, as she wrote the letter, she reflected on the events that had changed the sisters' lives in the previous twelve months—events that had put a great strain on the young girl. Just a year before, Amalie was not married and still living in her family; the two sisters must have been very close, as they were the only unmarried siblings still living in their parents' house.

Understandably, this letter, which arrives just several months after the older sister's departure from her native Russia, is filled with feelings of longing and sadness. Emilie writes:

Dearest sister, can you please write to me sometime? It does not matter how it will turn out. I think of you so often, dearest sister! Whenever I come to [your husband's native village], I cry because you both are not there" (L04).

Her letters continue to include a mix of a life update and news on relatives and family friends, before she ends with an emotional confession: "Dearest sister, I am feeling so sorry, you cannot even imagine! If only you would be here!" (L04).

After concluding the main part of her letter with the usual "heartfelt greetings and kisses" and wishing for the couple to "stay healthy," Emilie ends with the following poem on the second page of her letter presumably addressed to her sister:

There blooms a beautiful little flower

In our green meadow.

Your eyes are as bright and blue as the sky.

They do not say much and when they do,

It is always the same—it is only

'Forget-me-not.' (L04)

Despite its brevity, this letter clearly shows a great attachment of its teenaged writer, who professes her feelings to her sister on paper. It is a testimonial to sisterly love and to the close bond of the younger sister to her older sister abroad. The inclusion of a poem adds a particularly loving touch to the overall emotional makeup of this letter.

Fast forward twenty years later to the second letter that documents a dramatic transition Emilie. We find her as a mother of four young children with an alcoholic husband, who abandons his family in an unfamiliar city while the area is engulfed in a famine crisis. Emilie's second letter is quite different from the first one. The life circumstances she describes have

changed dramatically from her life twenty years earlier. While the writer still follows commonly used conventions used in other letters in the collection, her painting a vivid picture of a real life human tragedy eclipses the usual obligatory courtesies.

The letter starts with the usual formal address of the recipients as “dear brother-in-law and sister,” yet the very next paragraph takes a dramatic turn from the usual carefully crafted report on the letter-writer’s life back home by revealing her troubled marriage with a partner, who is apparently a heavy drinker. She then goes on to describe the last move to a new place in a different town where her husband abandoned her with their four children. Left without any means for survival and apparently with no food to fend for her children, Emilie made the decision to go back to her family town. What follows is a distressing account of a dramatic journey back home:

> Then, I took my little children by their hands and walked to Kratzke. I walked 35 verst; I had my bundle on my back, my youngest child, who is three years old, sitting in the [...] and the others were walking beside me [...] I walked for two days with no food to fill a mouth. Then I arrived at my dear sister Nathalie’s, but she too had no food to share with me, so we had to wait till the next day to get something to eat. (L21)

This second letter documents a dramatic transition Emilie had undergone since the 1913 letter. The young teenaged girl, who includes poems in her letter to show her sister that she misses her, is gone. Instead, we find a young woman, a mother, who pleads for her own survival and for the survival of her four young children. Although the second letter does start with the conventional greeting, the rest of the text is filled with Emilie’s palpable desperation over the dire life circumstances. The letter’s purpose is to report on what has happened and to plea for help. The emotional appeal must have had a dramatic effect on its readers in America.

This emotional letter might have been the very last letter Amalie and Jacob Jerger Jr. received from their relatives in Soviet Russia. The ongoing economic crisis no doubt made it difficult for the relatives to be able to sustain the letter exchange. A few of their previous letters speak of difficulties in mail coming through. With the political climate in the Soviet Union worsening in the 1930s and the Iron Curtain slowly falling to shut the country off from the West, private communication between rural Russia and the United States was increasingly difficult.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Although my dissertation began with a rather serendipitous find of some old personal letters in a friend's family archive that I, at first, was more interested in for personal reasons, it has since developed into a project that is also valuable for the scholarly study of rhetoric and composition. My analysis of the letters contributes to a broader historical and cultural understanding of the letter-writing genre and cultural rhetorics by offering a discussion about the letters as rhetorical texts, the people, who produced them, and the constraints that influenced the letter-writers. Moreover, my dissertation provides an excellent illustration for the ways methodological tools can shape and guide the research process. For the purpose of my project, I used a combination of different theoretical applications to analyze my primary sources. By using grounded theory to code the letters' texts, I was able tailor this qualitative research method for the needs of my project and build my analytical lens from the ground surface up, I used the dominant subjects in the letters' texts to provide me with the "themes" suggestions that I later used for coding the letters. I use rhetorical theory as a vehicle to tell about the stories told through the letters. Furthermore, this project helped to bridge two major interests of mine: my interest in using archival research methods and methodologies in studying rhetoric and composition and my work with archival documents aimed at recovering the voices of individuals, who belonged to the same social group as I. Essentially, I used the process situated around this project to carry out three tasks I identify as the most important ones in archival research. These include the tasks of finding traces, recovering voices, and giving meaning.

By "finding traces" I understand the process of searching for archival documents and collection of data helpful in one's academic inquiry. In the case of my project, this process has included not only discovering the personal letters at a friend's house but also actively collecting

additional primary sources to use in my work: conducting oral interviews about the history of the letters, the individuals who penned them, and also the events the letters refer to, traveling to locations the letters have come from and interviewing local community elders, who belong to the same ethnic group and have shared the experiences with the letter-writers, as well as searching for similar letters sent to North America from the same region of southern Russia during the same time period. Although many of these additional sources are actively featured in the dissertation, they have inspired the ways I analyzed the data and mapped out my project. In a way, the process of gathering these materials resembles what Robert Connors has referred to as an “August mushroom hunt” (17), or as I understand it, a process of letting your research interests guide your way in collecting more data for research and building your study frame from the ground up, based on what the sources you have collected tell you about the focus of your research.

By “recovering voices” I understand the process of active engagement with the data collected during the previous step through analyzing primary and secondary sources, as well as translating, systemizing, and evaluating the data. In the case of my project, this process included translating the primary sources into English, transcribing the oral interviews, coding and evaluating the translations and transcriptions, but also reviewing secondary literature and reading similar letters sent from German Russians in Soviet Union to US. The goal of this step was to evaluate the “archive” of primary and secondary data I have accumulated.

By “giving meaning” I understand the process of putting together the results of one’s research to be later shared with a larger audience. In my case, this step includes completing my project and turning it into a full-length dissertation, but also sharing the results of my analysis of these letters with audiences other than the academic one. Specifically, the first of these audiences

includes the descendants of the letter-writers and the letter-readers I personally know. They are Emmanuel "Manuel" Jerger and his family who have generously provided me with copies of the original letters but also other textual and visual documents from their private family archive. Manuel has also provided me with a lot of additional background information through oral interviews. Many of the additional primary sources— photographs of locations in Russia and copies of historical documents pertaining to the history of Amalie and Jacob's relatives—I found along the way throughout this project were shared only with this family. Furthermore, I would like to be able to share some results of this study with fellow German Russians—in Russia, Germany, and other countries—who are equally interested in the history of our people in the 20th century.

When it comes to the scholarly side of this study, I intentionally kept my research questions broad when beginning with this project. The main goal of this study was to analyze a set of personal letters from a rhetorical perspective. Yet I have not settled on a particular choice of theoretical frame for my analysis until very late into the process. Before deciding on a concrete angle for my rhetorical analysis, I wanted to have time to translate the letters and research additional information to "fill in" the gaps in their contents. Having translated the letters' texts into English, I moved on to analyze the different factors that might have affected the rhetorical discourse of the letters. By using the theoretical frame discussed in the work of Lloyd Bitzer and Richard Vatz, I was able to analyze the ways the rhetorical situation and the letter-writers have influenced the letters' rhetoric. Specifically, my analysis has shown that the factors affecting the rhetoric included contextual, cultural, and time constraints, as well as generic conventions the letter-writers used to convey their messages in writing. Particularly important was seeing the difference in the ways different family members addressed their audience in

America. Despite a carefully crafted epistolary rhetoric, the writers' personalities were quite visible. Furthermore, my analysis has shown that the rhetoric of the letters served as a valuable and potent tool to transfer cultural knowledge. For instance, it is visible in the way the letter-writers address their audience (who they name first and how exactly they address the letter-readers), the topics they chose to discuss etc. Some of the knowledge was "invisible" for me at first because I come from largely the cultural background and thus did not "see" the instances at first that illustrated various ways of how the letters served the function of transmitting cultural values, e.g. supporting family ties etc.

As far as future research on this subject is concerned, I see several possibilities that enable a more detailed analysis of the letters' narratives or a more thorough discussion of the value of archival research in the study of rhetoric and composition. First, it would be interesting to discuss the process of assembling an archive for a specific research project. Second, it would be interesting to zero in on examples of rhetorical silencing or self-censorship in personal letters from Russia during the 1920s and the 1930s. Third, a more thorough comparison of letters over a longer period of time would provide more valuable insight into the dynamic of such letter-based communications. Here, I specifically think about the topic of "reconnection," or picking up the communication again after a lengthy involuntary break, as mentioned in Chapter Three. How do people talk to each other in letters after a considerable break in correspondence? Looking at letter sample that involved a particularly long-term letter exchange would be highly intriguing. Finally, it would be interesting to use the object-based analysis approach to examine the material rhetoric of the letters. Provided, one has access to original copies of the letters, it would be interesting to look at the physical substances of paper and ink as physical evidence of an epistolary communication.

Overall, my analysis of the letters contributes to a broader understanding of the letters, the people who produced them, and the rhetorical situation that shaped the letters' rhetorical discourse. By using a combination of grounded theory, my cultural and historical knowledge of the group the letter-writers belonged to, and a rhetorical analysis of the letters as the framework for my analysis of the letters' texts, I have contributed to the study of rhetoric and also to the history of this particular period in the Russian history of the early 20th century.

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"L03: Letter by Heinrich Krug Sr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 23 Feb. 1913." *JFLC*. Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L04: Letter by Emilie Krug to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger, with added content by Heinrich Krug Sr." *JFLC*. Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016. [This letter was the second part of the previous letter and must have been mailed at the same time].

"L05: Letter by Heinrich Krug Sr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 11 Apr. 1913." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L06: Letter by Heinrich Krug Sr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 18 Apr. 1913." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L07: Letter by Heinrich Krug Jr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 31 Jul. 1913." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L08: Letter by Heinrich Krug Sr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 1913." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L09: Letter by Heinrich Krug Jr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 3 Oct. 1913." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L10: Letter by Heinrich Krug Sr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 2 Nov. 1913." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L11: Letter by Jacob Jerger Sr. and his wife to multiple children in America." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L12: Letter by Heinrich Krug Sr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 3 Apr. 1914." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L13: Letter by Nathalie Schroeder to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 13 Apr. 1914." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L14: Letter by Heinrich Krug Sr. to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 23 Dec. 1921." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

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"L19: Letter by Jacob Jerger Sr. and his wife to multiple children in America. 26 Mar. 1925." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L20: Letter by Nathalie Schroeder to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger. 28 Mar." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L21: Letter by Emilie Braun to Jacob Jr. and Amalie Jerger." *JFLC.* Translated by Tatjana Schell, 2016.

"L22: Letter by Jacob Jerger Jr. to an unknown recipient in Germany. Barnesville, MN, 10 Mar.

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