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Kylie Giblett

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Writing the Nazi past as historiographic metafiction

ESV ERICH SCHMIDT VERLAG

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1. No German identity without Auschwitz: Germans as perpetrators, Germans as victims and the disrupting impact of historiographic metafiction

"So viel Hitler war nie"[1]. With this observation, historian Norbert Frei summed up the overwhelming presence of the Nazi past in German public discourse in 2004. His observation can also be applied to the whole period from German unification in 1990 until at least the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 2005 and beyond through to 2010[2]. During this period, the Nazi past was a major feature of German cultural life, from public debates, through historical exhibitions and memorials, to novels, films and television shows. For the cultural industry, engagement with the events of the Third Reich and their extended aftermath was practically unavoidable. The unification of Germany in 1990 set in train a number of dramatic changes in Germany's political, social and cultural landscape which necessitated a reconstitution of German identity, including a reassessment of the newly unified nation's approach to its common Third Reich heritage. At the beginning of this new era, the Germans needed to decide which "version" of their past they wished to tell. They spent the first 20 years of the Berlin Republic engaged in furious cultural debate over this very question.

The widespread discussion of the Nazi past in the two decades following 1990 gave rise to a number of controversies, prompting Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove to comment that "[i]n reunified Germany, the past is thus not so much another country where they do things differently, but a hotly contested territory"[3]. They have described Germany's post-unification

1 Frei, Norbert "Gefühlte Geschichte: Die Erinnerungsschlacht um den 60. Jahrestag des Kriegsendes 1945 hat begonnen. Deutschland steht vor einer Wende im Umgang mit seiner Vergangenheit" *Die Zeit* 21 October 2004.

2 Donahue has also identified this as a period of particularly intense engagement with the Holocaust in German culture, German literature, and German studies, an intensity which has now cooled: Donahue, William Collins "Aber das ist alles Vergangenheitsbewältigung: German Studies' Holocaust Bubble and Its Literary Aftermath" in McGlothlin, Erin and Kapczynski, Jennifer M *Persistent Legacy: The Holocaust and German Studies* Rochester: Camden House, 2016: 80–104.

3 Fuchs, Anne and Cosgrove, Mary "Introduction: Germany's Memory Contests and the Management of the Past" in Fuchs, Anne, Cosgrove, Mary and

discourse about the past as being characterised by "memory contests" in which different groups and individuals in a pluralistic memory culture advance their own identity-forming narratives about the past without any one narrative necessarily gaining the upper hand[4]. Chloe Paver has similarly described the reassessment of German identity during this period as a time of "shifting memories – ongoing social negotiations about the way in which the Third Reich and its crimes are to be remembered"[5]. The fulcrum of many of these "memory contests" about German collective memory[6] and national identity in the post-1990 period was the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. Throughout the period, narratives of the Nazi past in which Germans were depicted as perpetrators and those in which Germans were portrayed as victims competed with each other for dominance in German public discourse. In reality, the categories of "perpetrator" and "victim" are not always clear-cut and both terms encompass grey areas of greater complexity. Not all "perpetrators" are war criminals in the judicial sense, and not all "victims" are on par with the victims of Auschwitz. Perpetrators may also be victims and vice versa. However, the perpetrator/victim dichotomy has provided the flashpoint around which competing versions of the Nazi past have ignited, and it therefore provides a useful key for analysing the German approach to that past in the post-unification period.

Literature has played an essential part in this post-unification reassessment of German identity, both as a reflector of and contributor to the public discourse on the subject of how Germans should remember their Nazi past. It has contributed significantly to the national memory culture and been understood as an important medium of cultural memory[7]. Indeed, Birgit

Grote, George *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* New York: Camden House, 2006: 1–21 at 2.

4 Fuchs, Anne and Cosgrove, Mary "Introduction" *German Life and Letters* 59.2 (2006): 163–168 at 164; Fuchs, Anne and Cosgrove, Mary "Introduction: Germany's Memory Contests and the Management of the Past" 2.

5 Paver, Chloe *Refractions of the Third Reich in German and Austrian Fiction and Film* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 at 1.

6 On collective, cultural and communicative memory, see Assmann, Jan *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* Munich: Verlag CH Beck, 1992 at 34–56; Assmann, Jan "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität" in Assmann, Jan and Hölscher, Tonio *Kultur und Gedächtnis* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988: 9–19.

7 Hardtwig, Wolfgang "Zeitgeschichte in der Literature 1945–2005: Eine Einleitung" in Schütz, Erhard and Hardtwig, Wolfgang *Keiner kommt davon: Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008: 7–25 at 13; 15; Nünning, Ansgar "Beyond the Great Story: Der

Neumann has described literature as a player in the battle for control of cultural memory, fulfilling its central function within memory culture by reintegrating different memory discourses, reviving forgotten or marginalised experiences, critically reflecting on the construction of memory, and through appropriation by the reader[8]. As a player in the "memory contests" which took place after the caesura of 1990, literature promoted positions on the perpetrator/victim dichotomy and fiction authors used it to influence the direction of that cultural debate.

Towards the end of the landmark novel of the period, Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*, the narrator Michael Berg reflects on the story he has just read to the reader and states that: *"Die geschriebene Version wollte geschrieben werden, die vielen anderen wollten es nicht"*[9]. When German fiction authors wrote about their country's Nazi past during the 20 years of hotly debated "memory contests" following 1990, which "version" of the past did they choose to write? One in which Germans are portrayed as perpetrators? Or one which places the emphasis on Germans as victims? In this book, I seek to answer this question by conducting a detailed textual analysis of four novels published in the period 1990–2010 as a key to understanding German literary approaches to the Nazi past during this crucial period in the formation of Germany's post-unification identity: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* by Ulla Hahn[10], *Himmelskörper* by Tanja

postmoderne historische Roman als Medium revisionistischer Geschichtsdarstellung, kultureller Erinnerung und metahistoriographischer Reflexionen" *Anglia* 117.1 (1999): 15–48 at 21. See generally Neumann, Birgit "Literarische Inszenierungen und Interventionen: Mediale Erinnerungskonkurrenz in Guy Vanderhaeghes The Englishman's Boy und Michael Ondaatjes Running in the Family" in Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar *Medien des kollektiven Gedächtnisses: Konstruktivität-Historizität-Kulturspezifität* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004: 195–215; Erll, Astrid "Literatur als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses" in Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft: Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005: 249–276.

8 Neumann, Birgit "Literarische Inszenierungen" 213.

9 Schlink, Bernhard *Der Vorleser* Zurich: Diogenes, 1997 (first published 1995) at 205–206.

10 Hahn, Ulla *Unscharfe Bilder* Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005 (first published 2003).

Dückers[11], and *Flughunde* by Marcel Beyer[12]. All four of these novels approach the Nazi past by incorporating discussions of postmemory and historiography which mark them out as examples of historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction thematises critiques of historiography which suggest that there are many "versions" of the past and that the objective "truth" about the past cannot be known. In doing so, it has the potential to fundamentally disrupt the categories of perpetrator and victim by destabilising the basis on which we judge guilt and innocence. To fully explore the way in which German authors have dealt with the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the crucial period of 1990–2010, this book also analyses *Der Vorleser, Unscharfe Bilder, Himmelskörper,* and *Flughunde* as historiographic metafiction with a view to deepening our understanding of the presentation of the Nazi past in post-1990 German literature and enriching our understanding of the legacy of the Third Reich in contemporary German society.

1.1 Willing executioners? Germans as perpetrators/victims in German culture after 1945

Literary engagement with the "memory contests" of the post-unification period took place within the broader context of a more general cultural reconsideration of the place of the Nazi past in the newly unified German present. The unification of Germany in 1990 intensified the need to establish a common German identity following decades of separation, an important part of which involved integrating attitudes to the most recent common past of East and West, namely the Third Reich. During the course of the two decades after unification, versions of Germany's past which portrayed Germans as perpetrators vied with those which portrayed Germans as victims for the upper hand in German public discourse and the pendulum of public memory swung back and forth between these two poles. The emphasis on Germans as perpetrators can be seen in the controversy surrounding Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, which argued that most ordinary Germans of the Third Reich shared Hitler's fanatical antisemitism, and that this was the primary reason for their involvement in the Holocaust. Although the book was widely criticised on historiographical grounds, many positions taken in the debate surrounding it showed that its portrayal of Germans as

[11] Dückers, Tanja *Himmelskörper* Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005 (first published 2003).

[12] Beyer, Marcel *Flughunde* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996 (first published 1995).

intentional perpetrators resonated with the German public[13]. Another example of the focus on Germans as perpetrators was the exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944* mounted by the Hamburg Institut für Sozialforschung, initially in Hamburg and subsequently in other cities around Germany and Austria from 1995 to 1999[14]. The exhibition aimed to debunk the myth of the *saubere Wehrmacht* by showing (primarily by means of photographic evidence) that not only the SD and the SS, but also ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers had been involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity on the Eastern Front in the Second World War. The exhibition gave rise to a significant debate as to whether *Wehrmacht* soldiers, who made up the majority of German men involved in military action, should be viewed as perpetrators rather than victims. The emphasis on Germans as perpetrators in public discourse was also a feature in the discussion surrounding the 2005 opening of the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* in Berlin. Also known as the *Holocaust Mahnmal*, this site of remembrance places the memory of Germany's guilt and shame right in the heart of its capital, something perhaps unique in the history of any country. As Frei has put it, *"Symbolpolitisch hat es das noch nicht gegeben: dass eine Nation im Zentrum ihrer Hauptstadt ihr größtes geschichtliches Verbrechen bekennt"*[15]. The dominance of this "Germans as perpetrators" narrative in

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13 On the Goldhagen debate generally, see Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* London: Routledge, 2002 at 119–142; Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N *Lexikon der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" in Deutschland: Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009 at 295–297.

14 Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944 Archiv* <http://www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/docs/archiv/archiv.htm> (accessed 8 October 2020); Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941–1944. Begleitbroschüre zur Ausstellung* Hamburg: Hamburg Edition, 2004. See also generally Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* 143–174; Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 288–290. A second version of the exhibition (significantly altered in response to criticism of the original exhibition by historians) toured from 2001 to 2004.

15 Frei, Norbert "Gefühlte Geschichte". Schmitz also comments that "Germany is virtually the only country in the Western world that commemorates the crimes committed in the name of the collective": Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms: The Legacy of National Socialism in Post-1990 German Fiction* Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2004 at 6. For a thorough discussion of the background to the Holocaust Mahnmal, see Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* 194–232. See also Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 290–293.

Germany's public memory culture into the new millennium may be demonstrated by reference to the speeches given by Bundespräsident Joachim Gauck and Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel in January 2015 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In his speech, Gauck highlighted the centrality of the Holocaust for German identity, saying *"Es gibt keine deutsche Identität ohne Auschwitz"*[16]. Similarly, Merkel described the memory of the Holocaust as something which *"prägt unser Selbstverständnis als Nation"* and emphasised the *"immerwährende Verantwortung"* of Germans to keep that memory alive[17].

However, despite this predominance in German public discourse of the cultural memory paradigm in which Germans are seen primarily as perpetrators, the post-1990 period also witnessed a renewed interest in German victimhood, particularly in the period after 2000. This interest centred on the suffering of German civilians during the *Flucht und Vertreibung* of millions of Germans from Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War and during the Allied bombing of German cities such as Dresden, as well as on the suffering of the "ordinary soldier" in the difficult conditions of the Eastern Front and on the rape of German women by Red Army soldiers. The focus on "Germans as victims" was something of a mass media phenomenon, with Guido Knopp's history programmes on ZDF television attracting large audiences[18], and news magazine *Der Spiegel* publishing several special issues on the subject[19]. A number of historical and literary contributions were also influential in turning the public focus towards German victimhood, including Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand*, WG Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur*,

16 Gauck, Joachim *Bundespräsident Joachim Gauck zum Tag des Gedenkens an die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus am 27. Januar 2015 in Berlin* <http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2015/01/150127-Gedenken-Holocaust.pdf;jsessionid=76AA7AA99B9F033A831F907ADED99588.2_cid379?__blob=publicationFile> (accessed 8 October 2020).

17 Merkel, Angela *Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel anlässlich der Gedenkveranstaltung des Internationalen Auschwitzkomitees zum 70. Jahrestag der Befreiung des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz-Birkenau am 26. Januar 2015* <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/suche/rede-von-bundeskanzlerin-merkel-anlaesslich-der-gedenkveranstaltung-des-internationalen-auschwitz-komitees-zum-70-jahrestag-der-befreiung-des-konzentrationslagers-auschwitz-birkenau-am-26-januar-2015-431116> (accessed 8 October 2020).

18 Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 341–344.

19 "Die Flucht der Deutschen: Die Spiegel-Serie über Vertreibung aus dem Osten" *Spiegel special* 2/2002; "Als Feuer vom Himmel fiel: Der Bombenkrieg gegen die Deutschen" *Spiegel special* 1/2003.

and Günter Grass' *Im Krebsgang*[20]. The resurgence of the "Germans as victims" narrative in the post-1990 period challenged the "Germans as perpetrators" paradigm for dominance in German public discourse, leading to concerns amongst some commentators that the new emphasis on German victimhood could lead to a reduced emphasis on German guilt and a relativisation of the suffering of Holocaust victims[21].

Although German interest in the Nazi past and the perpetrator and/or victim roles played by Germans during the Third Reich was particularly intense in the period immediately after unification, the discourse about that past in many ways continued patterns established prior to 1990. Bill Niven has noted that the way in which the newly unified Germans dealt with their past after 1990 was, to an extent, "a continuation and radicalization of a process of coming to terms with the past, rather than its first phase", acknowledging the continuity of certain aspects of post-1990 *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* with what had gone before[22]. Post-1990 debates about the past may have been shaped by the different social and political context brought about by unification, yet they tended to repeat many of the points characteristic of discussions of the Nazi past prior to 1990. In particular, the contest between perpetrator and victim narratives which was the focus for many of the debates about the past in the post-unification period can be seen as constituting the continuation of a pattern which may be observed in Germany's attempts to come to terms with its Nazi past since 1945. An emphasis on Germans as perpetrators and German guilt can, for example, be seen in the war crimes

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20 Friedrich, Jörg *Der Brand: Deutschland im Bombenkrieg 1940–1945* Berlin: List Taschenbuch, 2004; Sebald, WG *Luftkrieg und Literatur* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2001; Grass, Günter *Im Krebsgang* Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009. For overviews of the "Germans as victims" discourse from the late-1990s, see Schmitz, Helmut "Representations of the Nazi past II: German wartime suffering" in Taberner, Stuart *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007 at 142–145; Schmitz, Helmut "Introduction: The Return of Wartime Suffering in Contemporary German Memory Culture, Literature and Film" in Schmitz, Helmut *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007: 1–30.

21 Frei, Norbert "Gefühlte Geschichte"; Welzer, Harald "Zurück zur Opfergesellschaft: Verschiebungen in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 3 April 2002. For an alternative view see Assmann, Aleida "On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory" *German Life and Letters* 59.2 (2006): 187–200 at 197–198.

22 Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* 4.

trials[23], re-education campaigns and denazification procedures[24], and (arguably) the *Kollektivschuldthese*[25] imposed by the Western Allies in the immediate postwar years in West Germany and similar actions taken by the Soviet Union in East Germany during the same period[26]. Some Germans also emphasised general German culpability for Nazi crimes during the postwar years and into the 1950s, including Karl Jaspers in his work *Die Schuldfrage*[27] and Bundespräsident Theodor Heuss in his insistence on German "collective shame"[28]. Other instances in which the characterisation of Germans as perpetrators became the focus of public discourse about the Nazi past after 1945 include the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial of 1963–1965. Both of these trials made the German public more aware of the details of the Holocaust as well as debunking exculpatory myths, such as the idea that the perpetrators were monsters who were unlike the majority of ordinary Germans[29], and the assertion that the perpetrators were forced to take part in crimes due to *Befehlsnotstand*, whereby they were unable to refuse orders[30]. The part played by ordinary Germans in the Holocaust was further cemented in the public imagination by the screening in West Germany in 1978 of the American television series

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23 Although the major war crimes trials at Nuremberg also tended to have the ironic effect of allowing the bulk of the German people to blame their leaders and exonerate themselves: see Fulbrook, Mary *German National Identity after the Holocaust* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999 at 50–51; 55.

24 For a brief discussion of these actions taken by the Western Allies in occupied Germany, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 18–24.

25 The idea that the Allies were imposing a *Kollektivschuldthese* on the German population was widely discussed in the postwar period, but the extent to which it was really practised by the Allies is debatable. See Frei, Norbert *1945 und wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009 at 159–169.

26 Niven describes denazification in East Germany in Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* 41–43.

27 Jaspers, Karl *Die Schuldfrage: Von der politischen Hoffnung Deutschlands* Munich: Piper Verlag, 2012.

28 Herf, Jeffrey *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 at 312–331.

29 Arendt's report on the Eichmann trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in particular emphasised the very ordinariness of one of the Holocaust's prime movers: Arendt, Hannah *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* London: Penguin Classics, 2006.

30 Fulbrook, Mary 73.

Holocaust[31], and examples of the continuing characterisation of Germans as perpetrators may be seen in a revival of interest in the memory of the Holocaust on the part of political dissidents in East Germany in the 1980s[32], as well as in Bundespräsident Richard von Weizsäcker's speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of the Second World War which put remembrance of German victimhood firmly in the context of German perpetration[33].

This recurrent post-1945 narrative in which Germans were characterised as perpetrators faced competition throughout the period from a counter-narrative which understood Germans as the victims of Nazism and the ravages of war[34]. Examples of this "Germans as victims" narrative can be seen in 1980s attempts by conservatives in West Germany to relativise the Holocaust and break free from the burden of the past, such as the visit by Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan to the military cemetery at Bitburg in 1985[35] and various positions put forward in the *Historikerstreit* of 1986[36]. These 1980s controversies constituted something of a return to the understanding of Germans as

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31 For a general overview, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 243–244.

32 Herf, Jeffrey 362.

33 Von Weizsäcker, Richard *Bundespräsident Richard von Weizsäcker bei der Gedenkveranstaltung im Plenarsaal des Deutschen Bundestags zum 40. Jahrestag des Endes des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Europa am 8. Mai 1985 in Bonn* <http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2015/02/150202-RvW-Rede-8-Mai-1985.pdf?__blob=publicationFile> (accessed 8 October 2020). See Beattie, Andrew H "The Victims of Totalitarianism and the Centrality of Nazi Genocide: Continuity and Change in German Commemorative Politics" in Niven, Bill *Germans As Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 147–163 at 154 for the view that von Weizsäcker's speech encapsulated the shift of focus away from German suffering towards German contrition and emphasised the primacy of the Holocaust and extent of Nazi criminality. See also Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 232–235 for a more critical view.

34 Welzer has also pointed to the parallel continuation of German victimhood narratives in private family discourse, even when there was a focus on German perpetration at the public level: Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine und Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005.

35 See Maier, Charles S *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988 at 9–16 and Herf, Jeffrey 351 for further detail.

36 See Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 238–240 for an overview. For more detail, see Maier, Charles.

victims which had dominated discussions about the Nazi past in West Germany in the 1950s, particularly in the political realm. In West Germany in the 1950s, the government under Konrad Adenauer, in large part out of practical necessity and in order to achieve its political goals[37], tended to focus on issues which emphasised German victimhood. These included the return of the remaining German prisoners of war, assisting the families of dead or wounded soldiers, and dealing with the influx of millions of German *Vertriebenen*[38]. When Adenauer asked in 1950 *"ob in der Geschichte jemals mit einer solchen Herzlosigkeit ein Verdikt des Elends und des Unglücks über Millionen von Menschen gefällt worden [sei]"*[39], he was referring, not to the Jews, but to Germans suffering as a result of the continuing detention of German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union. The gradual dismantling of the denazification process and the reintegration into economic and social life of Germans compromised by their involvement with Nazism also encouraged Germans to see themselves as victims of "victor's justice"[40].

The nature of "Germans as victims" narratives in East Germany was different, but such narratives were arguably more pervasive and more foundational in terms of national identity. In East Germany, the early postwar focus on German culpability was soon replaced by the politically motivated narrative of antifascism, which became the dominant mode in which East Germans were directed to view their past. Identifying Nazism with the capitalists in the West, the East German regime established a foundational ideology of "antifascism", under which the "workers and peasants" of their new communist state were encouraged to consider themselves "antifascists", thereby identifying themselves with communists and others who had been "antifascist" victims of Nazism[41]. This idea of antifascist victimhood was

37 Herf, Jeffrey 267; 389.

38 For a brief discussion of some of these issues, see Moeller, Robert G "The Politics of the Past in the 1950s: Rhetorics of Victimisation in East and West Germany" in Niven, Bill *Germans As Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 26–42 at 30–34.

39 Adenauer, Konrad *Erklärung des Bundeskanzlers Adenauer in der 94. Sitzung des Deutschen Bundestages zum Gedenktag für die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen 26 October 1950*
<http://www.konrad-adenauer.de/dokumente/erklarungen/kriegsgefangene> (accessed 8 October 2020).

40 Frei has discussed this process in detail in Frei, Norbert *Adenauer's Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. See also Fulbrook, Mary 51–55; 59–65.

41 Moeller, Robert G "The Politics of the Past in the 1950s" 29. See also Rothe's discussion of antifascism as East Germany's master commemorative

accompanied by official endorsement of the portrayal of East Germans as the victims of British and American bombing campaigns, particularly the bombing of Dresden[42]. The narrative of antifascist victimhood tended to have the effect of suppressing the memory of Jewish suffering in favour of the suffering of the communist opponents of Nazism[43] and remained the dominant public memory paradigm in East Germany until 1989[44].

In the contest between competing versions of Germans as perpetrators or victims since 1945, different perpetrator and victim narratives gained dominance at different times in both East and West Germany[45]. Whilst both East and West Germany emphasised different iterations of the victimhood narrative in the 1950s, its dominance was displaced in West Germany by a Holocaust-centred memory regime which depicted Germans as perpetrators and was the dominant public memory paradigm in the West at the time of unification. However, regardless of the positions of dominance at any given time, the very fact of the continuous coexistence of and competition between perpetrator and victim narratives since 1945 suggests that German debates about the Nazi past have tended to crystallise around the perpetrator/victim dichotomy across the whole period. The discourse surrounding the question of whether Germans should be seen as perpetrators or victims has been central to discussions about German collective memory and identity, not only in the post-1990 debates, but since 1945. The continuing importance of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy for German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* following unification indicates that the oscillation between "Germans as

discourse in Rothe, Anne "Das Dritte Reich als antifaschistischer Mythos im kollektiven Gedächtnis der DDR: Christa Wolfs Kindheitsmuster als Teil- und Gegendiskurs" in Zuckermann, Moshe *Deutsche Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003: 87–111 at 92–102. See also Fulbrook, Mary 55–58.

42 Moeller, Robert G "The Politics of the Past in the 1950s" 29; Niven, Bill "The GDR and Memory of the Bombing of Dresden" in Niven, Bill *Germans As Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 109–129.

43 Rothe notes that the insistence of the East German regime on seeing the Holocaust through a Marxist lens negated the Holocaust as genocide because it viewed the "Jewish question" as subordinate to the class struggle: Rothe. Anne.

44 Herf, Jeffrey 362; 393. See also Beattie, Andrew H 153.

45 Frevert discusses the various portrayals of Germans as perpetrators or victims in both East and West Germany from 1945 through to the 1990s: see the chapters authored by Frevert in Assmann, Aleida and Frevert, Ute *Geschichtsvergessenheit – Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1999.

perpetrators" and "Germans as victims" constitutes a key element in the quest to understand how German attitudes to Third Reich history developed in the decades after 1990 and provides an important frame for the analysis of how these competing "versions" of the Nazi past have been dealt with in post-unification literature.

1.2 Literary reflections of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy

Literature played a significant part in the intensive post-unification reassessment of German identity, both by holding up a mirror to the "memory contests" concerning which "version" of their Nazi past Germans should remember and by providing a direct contribution to the extensive public discourse on that subject. In doing so, literature of the 1990–2010 period in many ways continued a pattern it had been repeating in the decades following 1945. Indeed, literature has been an essential part of the way in which Germans have approached their Nazi past since the end of the Second World War. German authors have often played an active role in the field of memory politics[46], as can be seen in the memory debates inspired by authors such as Martin Walser, WG Sebald, and Günter Grass[47]. Literature is an important contributor

[46] On the subject of German authors as public intellectuals and political figures generally, see Bullivant, Keith *The Future of German Literature* Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994; Brockmann, Stephen *Literature and German Reunification* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. In relation to the position in East Germany specifically, see Bathrick, David *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

[47] On the controversy surrounding Walser's 1998 Friedenspreisrede, his approach to writing about the Nazi past in his 1998 novel *Ein springender Brunnen*, and his subsequent debate with Ignatz Bubis, see Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* 173–193; Schödel, Kathrin "Martin Walser's Ein springender Brunnen (A Gushing Fountain)" in Taberner, Stuart *The Novel in German Since 1990* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011: 108–122. On the discussion of Germans as victims of Allied bombing raids and the lack of representation of this in German literature sparked by Sebald's 1997 lectures on the subject of *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, see Arpaci, Annette Seidel "Lost in Translations? The Discourse of German Suffering and WG Sebald's Luftkrieg und Literatur" in Schmitz, Helmut *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007: 161–179. On Grass' *Im Krebsgang*, which (amongst other things) drew attention to German wartime suffering in the context of flight and expulsion, and the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, see Taberner, Stuart "Literary Representations in Contemporary German Fiction of the Expulsions of Germans from

to and reflector of the formation of German memory culture and national identity, such that an examination of German literature dealing with the Nazi past is vital to any attempt to gauge the state of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* at any particular point in time, including the post-unification period.

As well as being central to the development of German memory culture in general, the perpetrator/victim dichotomy has also formed the focal point of German literary approaches to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* since 1945. German literature of the period 1945–1990 evinces the same kind of competition between narratives portraying Germans as perpetrators and those portraying Germans as victims as is apparent in the overall public memory discourse of that period. Sometimes these portrayals have mirrored developments in the dominant memory culture. Sometimes they have taken on a provocative role, challenging the dominant paradigm. An example of the literary reflection of the dominant narrative in collective memory can be seen in the West German phenomenon of *Väterliteratur*, which reached its peak popularity in the late-1970s and early-1980s. *Väterliteratur* texts emphasise the role of Germans as perpetrators, reflecting the growing contemporary focus on the Holocaust and on the role of ordinary Germans in Nazi crimes. They are also the literary expression of the 1968 student movement's rebellion against parents, teachers and other authority figures and of their desire to condemn and disown these figures for their involvement in the Nazi regime. Questions about the Nazi past of the older generation play a prominent role and are often instrumentalised as part of a wider generational conflict. The *Väterliteratur* genre consists largely of works with an autobiographical base which deal with the Nazi past at a personal, family level and link the Nazi past of the authors' fathers (the *"Täter-Väter"*) with the authors' own search for identity. They are usually aggressive in tone, feature accusations of guilt, and are often accompanied by a need on the part of the author to break away from the first generation members of his or her family. The genre is particularly marked by the theme of generational rupture and rejection of biological parents, with the authors frequently using the Holocaust as an instrument with which to attack the older generation[48]. In their

the East in 1945" in Schmitz, Helmut *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007: 223–246 at 238–242; Schmitz, Helmut "Representations of the Nazi past II" 148–151.

48 For an overview of the topic of *Väterliteratur*, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 193; Barner, Wilfried *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* Munich: Verlag CH Beck, 2006 at 617–620. For a more detailed discussion of these various features of *Väterliteratur*, see Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and*

portrayal of the *Täter-Väter* as perpetrators in the 1970s and 1980s, the *Väterliteratur* novels mirrored the growing acceptance of this view in West German society from the 1960s onwards and in this way provide an example of the reflection in literature of developments in Germany's memory culture.

However, a similar emphasis on Germans as perpetrators in some earlier works highlights the more provocative role literature has played in German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as literary approaches to the past have moved in advance of changes in broader public memory regimes and encouraged a reassessment of German responsibility for Nazi crimes and of the question of how it should be dealt with in contemporary society. During the late-1950s and early-1960s, for example, at a time when West German society was keen to forget the past and enjoy its economic recovery, writers such as Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass highlighted continuities from the unconfronted Nazi past into the postwar period and asked questions about individual responsibility during the Third Reich. Their works resisted suppression of the past and suggested that Nazism was not an overwhelming, external force by which the Germans were enslaved[49], but something arising out of German society and culture, supported by a broad range of ordinary Germans who bore personal responsibility for their actions during that period[50]. East German writers such as Christa Wolf performed a similar, provocative function in the 1970s and 1980s in their questioning of the antifascist myth central to

Discourse: The Politics of Memory Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 at 20–24; Ganeva, Mila "From West-German Väterliteratur to Post-Wall Enkelliteratur: The End of the Generation Conflict in Marcel Beyer's Spione and Tanja Dücker's Himmelskörper" *Seminar* 43.2 (2007): 149–162 at 155; Reidy, Julian *Vergessen, was Eltern sind: Relektüre und literaturgeschichtliche Neusituierung der angeblichen Väterliteratur* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012; Ostheimer, Michael *Ungebetene Hinterlassenschaften: Zur literarischen Imagination über das familiäre Nachleben des Nationalsozialismus* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013 at 159–199; Assmann, Aleida *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung* Munich: Verlag CH Beck, 2007 at 72–74; Schlant, Ernestine *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* New York: Routledge, 1999 at 85–86.

49 As had been suggested by earlier literary approaches to the Nazi past which had viewed Nazism in mythic terms and Germans as victims of an unstoppable evil: Michaels, Jennifer E "Confronting the Nazi Past" in Bullivant, Keith *Beyond 1989: Re-reading German Literature since 1945* Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997: 1–20 at 3–4; see also Ryan, Judith *The Uncompleted Past: Postwar German Novels and the Third Reich* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983 at 14; Hardtwig, Wolfgang 23.

50 Michaels, Jennifer E 7–10; Barner, Wilfried 373–383.

the official version of East Germany's past and the impact of that myth on the present[51]. Rather than endorsing the idea of a "new start" with the creation of the German Democratic Republic, these authors pointed to the continuities between the Nazi past and the socialist present, particularly in the endurance of authoritarian patterns of behaviour, and recognised that the Holocaust did not have the dominant position it should in East German collective memory. The focus in these books shifted from the heroisation of communist resistance fighters to the responsibility of the ordinary German *Mitläufer*[52]. By contrast, other literature in East Germany dealing with the events of the Third Reich tended either to concentrate on "victims" in the form of idealised heroes of the antifascist resistance or on former Nazis and *Mitläufer* who saw the error of their ways and were transformed into good socialists[53]. In its emphasis on antifascist resistance, literature of this type both reflected and supported the development of East Germany's foundational antifascist myth, which tended to both obscure the suffering of the Jewish victims of Nazism in favour of Nazism's political victims and to encourage East German identification with those political, antifascist victims, thereby eliding their role as perpetrators.

In the two decades following unification in 1990, the rise in general interest in the Nazi past was accompanied by a boom in both fiction and nonfiction works dealing either directly with the Third Reich or with its legacy in German society and culture since 1945. These books frequently appeared in the bestseller lists, pointing to the high level of interest amongst the German reading public in depictions of and enquiries into the nation's Nazi past during this period. The popularity of these literary works indicates that they struck a chord with Germans in terms of how they approached their past at the time of publication, and also that the way these works portray the Germans of the Nazi period is likely to have an impact on the formation of German national identity in the future[54]. In view of the important role that literature has played in German memory culture since 1945, the popularity of

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51 For a discussion of Christa Wolf's novel *Kindheitsmuster* as a *Gegendiskurs* to the prevailing East German memory regime of antifascism, see Rothe, Anne 102–107.

52 Emmerich, Wolfgang *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1996 at 318–322; Michaels, Jennifer E 14–17; Barner, Wilfried 717–720.

53 Emmerich, Wolfgang *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* 131–136.

54 On the nexus between literature, memory and identity, see Neumann, Birgit "Literatur, Erinnerung, Identität" in Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft: Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005: 149–178.

literature about the Nazi past in the immediate post-unification period, and the impact of literature on identity and collective memory, the examination of the way in which Germans have dealt with their past in literature following unification which forms the core of this book should promote an understanding of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* during this period generally.

In this book, I explore German attitudes to the Nazi past in the two decades after unification as they have been reflected by and developed in literature by conducting a detailed textual analysis of *Der Vorleser* by Bernhard Schlink, *Unscharfe Bilder* by Ulla Hahn, *Himmelskörper* by Tanja Dückers, and *Flughunde* by Marcel Beyer. These novels represent a diverse range of approaches towards the exploration of the Nazi past in the post-unification era. The publication dates of the four novels span the beginning and end of a period during which public discussion of the Nazi past in Germany swung between viewing Germans primarily as perpetrators (*Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* in 1995) and a concentration on Germans as victims (*Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* in 2003). The novels have been written by representatives of two different generations[55]. Born in 1944 and 1946 respectively, Schlink and Hahn are writers of the second generation, whereas Dückers (born 1968) and Beyer (born 1965) belong to the third. The novels also represent a range of literary approaches towards the theme of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Whereas *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* both focus their thematisation of the past on the relationship between first and second generation characters, the consideration of the Nazi past in *Himmelskörper* involves three generations and is set in the context of a broader coming of age story. *Flughunde* is significantly different from the other three novels, in that it is set primarily during the period of the Third Reich and related chiefly from a first generation perspective. Whereas *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* display a textual openness which allows for a higher degree of reader involvement in the creation of meaning in the text, both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* are relatively closed texts in which reader response is

[55] In this book, I have employed the definition of "generation" widely used in the current discourse about how Germans have dealt with the Nazi past. According to this common usage, the "first generation" refers to those who were adults or came to adulthood during the period of the Third Reich, the "second generation" are their children, the "third generation" are their grandchildren, and so on. For a more detailed discussion of the concept of "generation" in this context, see Assmann, Aleida *Generationsidentitäten und Vorurteilsstrukturen in der neuen deutschen Erinnerungliteratur* Vienna: Picus Verlag, 2006; Assmann, Aleida *Geschichte im Gedächtnis* 31–69; Weigel, Sigrid "Generation as a Symbolic Form: On the Genealogical Discourse of Memory since 1945" *Germanic Review* 77.4 (2002): 264–277.

significantly guided by literary features such as highly functionalised characters and overtly constructed conversations. By analysing relatively dissimilar novels covering a broad spectrum of approaches to dealing with the Nazi past in literature, I aim in this book to allow broader patterns in the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in German literature of the post-1990 period to emerge more clearly.

In the discussion above, I have drawn attention to the way in which the perpetrator/victim dichotomy has frequently functioned as a kind of litmus test for German views about the past, providing a focal point for public discourse and acting as a gauge against which changes in the landscape of Germany's memory culture may be measured. When analysing the novels *Der Vorleser, Unscharfe Bilder, Himmelskörper,* and *Flughunde* in this book, I use the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims as a key to answering questions which seek to uncover the literary expression of German attitudes towards the Nazi past in this crucial period in the formation of Germany's post-unification identity. Does literature of this period portray Germans involved in the Third Reich predominantly as perpetrators, victims, or some combination of the two? Does this portrayal mark a significant departure from previous approaches? Does it mirror the memory contests played out in public discourse during the period? Are there differences in the ways in which authors of different generations approach the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in their writing? Which "version" of the Nazi past have German novelists writing in the two decades following unification chosen to tell? In view of the the nexus between literature, memory and identity in German culture, an exploration of these questions should not only illuminate the way in which Germans approached the Nazi past in literature after 1990, but also provide a contribution to the ongoing debates about the state of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the role of portrayals of Germans as perpetrators or victims in the formation of German collective memory and national identity.

1.3 The version that wanted to be written: postmemory and historiographic metafiction in German literature about the Nazi past

The presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in *Der Vorleser, Unscharfe Bilder, Himmelskörper* and *Flughunde*, and the answer to the question as to which "version" of the Nazi past German authors of the post-unification period have chosen to tell, are significantly affected by the novels' incorporation of ideas about postmemory and critiques of historiography. Despite the differences in their thematic and artistic approach towards

representing the Nazi past, all four of the novels do have this in common: they all reflect to some extent the postmemorial position of their authors, and they can all be read as examples of historiographic metafiction. As will be demonstrated in this book, these factors have a significant potential to disrupt neat notions of the categories of "perpetrator" and "victim" by highlighting the creative, imaginative element inherent in memory and critiques of historiography which suggest that there are many different "versions" of history, and thereby calling into question our ability to make judgements about the people and events of the past. A reading of these novels which recognises them as both postmemorial and as historiographic metafiction therefore provides an essential contribution to an understanding of the way in which they deal with the perpetrator/victim dichotomy and process the Nazi past.

"Postmemory" is a term coined and developed by Marianne Hirsch[56] in the context of her work on the role of family photographs and other images in the memory of the Holocaust maintained by younger generations in the families of Holocaust survivors. Hirsch has defined postmemory as a type of memory that is different to survivor memory. It is the "memory" of subsequent generations which is not connected to its source event through recollection, but through representation, mediation and invention[57]. The descendants of Holocaust survivors have no first-hand memories of the events which have dominated their family narratives, but must form their own "postmemory" using "imaginative investment and creation"[58]. Postmemory is therefore a type of memory available in situations in which knowledge of the past is incomplete because of a traumatic rupture in the transmission of memory, the death of eyewitnesses, loss of records, or the erasure of memorial landscapes. Left with fragments from the past, later generations must combine these remains with their own imagination to create a memorial narrative. This becomes the "postmemory" of children and grandchildren who have grown up dominated by narratives of a trauma that preceded their birth[59]. Although Hirsch developed the idea of postmemory in the context of the families of Holocaust survivors, she has suggested that the concept may have a broader application "to other second-generation memories of cultural

56 Hirsch, Marianne *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997; Hirsch, Marianne "Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory" *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (2001): 5–37; Hirsch, Marianne *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

57 Hirsch, Marianne "Surviving Images" 9.

58 Hirsch, Marianne *Family Frames* 22.

59 Hirsch, Marianne "Surviving Images" 12.

or collective traumatic events and experiences"[60], including those of the perpetrators[61]. The term has often been used in the context of German novels dealing with the Nazi past, and Hirsch has herself explored its application to German perpetrator memory[62]. Because the concept of postmemory highlights the fragmentary nature of sources of information about the past and the impact of present perspectives and identity concerns on the creation of historical narratives, it has the potential to destabilise ideas about the existence of historical "truth" and the basis on which guilt may be attributed.

These ideas about postmemorial constructions of the past can be seen as part of a more fundamental critique of the way in which we construct historical narratives, a critique which is reflected and thematised in the novels analysed here and which raises additional uncertainty about ever ascertaining the "objective truth" about the past and the people who played a part in it. The type of historiographical critique reflected in these novels is most commonly associated with Hayden White. In his major work of 1973, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*[63], White analysed the narrative techniques used by nineteenth century historians and concluded that, by transforming their source material into coherent histories, historians make use of literary narrative patterns, imposing their narrative forms, emplotments and tropes onto the facts, thereby investing the facts with meaning. For White, histories are fictional constructs and all history writing is contingent on the narrative form chosen and events selected by the historian. History can therefore not justify its claim to present historical facts objectively. Taken to its extreme (which White does), there is no difference between history and fiction: "history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation"[64]. All history, like all fiction, is simply "the version that wanted to be written".

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60 Hirsch, Marianne *Family Frames* 22.

61 Hirsch, Marianne "Surviving Images" 9; 11–12.

62 Hirsch, Marianne *The Generation of Postmemory* 41.

63 White, Hayden *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

64 White, Hayden *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978 at 122. For an overview of White's views, see for example Nünning, Ansgar "Verbal Fictions? Kritische Überlegungen und narratologische Alternativen zu Hayden Whites Einebnung des Gegensatzes zwischen Historiographie und Literatur" *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 40 (1999): 351–380 at 354–363; Kansteiner, Wulff "Gefühlte Wahrheit und ästhetischer Relativismus: Über die Annäherung von Holocaust-Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtstheorie" in Frei, Norbert *Den Holocaust erzählen: Historiographie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Empirie und*

White's views are not uncontested, particularly when it comes to his equation of history with fiction[65], however, they have been highly influential, and this influence has been felt, not only in the field of history, but also in that of literature. Novels which thematise critiques of historiography have been commonly categorised as "historiographic metafiction". The term "historiographic metafiction" itself was initially developed by Linda Hutcheon in her work on a poetics of postmodernism[66]. Hutcheon describes historiographic metafiction as comprising postmodern novels which internalise the challenges to historiography found in the work of White and others. These novels address historical material with a high degree of metafictional self-reflexivity combined with the exploration of historiographical critiques. Whilst acknowledging the reality of the past, historiographic metafiction emphasises that it is not accessible to us directly, but via texts. It does this by playing on the truth and lies of the historical record, using its metafictional self-reflexivity to foreground attempts to make narrative order out of a collection of historical facts. This type of fiction also utilises modes of narration which problematise the idea of subjectivity in the historical narrative, such as multiple points of view or an overtly controlling narrator[67].

Whereas Hutcheon has tended to use the terms "historiographic metafiction" and "postmodern literature" interchangeably, Ansgar Nünning has rejected the idea that historiographic metafiction is identical with postmodernism and has called for a more detailed typological differentiation of historiographic metafiction[68]. In his detailed study of the typology of

narrativer Kreativität" Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013: 12–50 at 12–18; Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion: Band I – Theorie, Typologie und Poetik des historischen Romans* Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1995 at 136–140.

65 See for example Nünning, Ansgar "Verbal Fictions?" 364–377; Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* 141–152; Neumann Birgit "Der Beruf der Geschichtstheorie und die Zukunft der Zeitgeschichte" in Frei, Norbert *Den Holocaust erzählen: Historiographie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Empirie und narrativer Kreativität"* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013: 206–212 at 206–210.

66 Hutcheon, Linda "Beginning to theorize postmodernism" *Textual Practice* 1 (1987): 10–31; Hutcheon, Linda *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* London: Routledge, 1988.

67 Hutcheon, Linda *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 105–123; Hutcheon, Linda *The Politics of Postmodernism (2nd edition)* London: Routledge, 2002 at 59–88.

68 Nünning has also criticised the term "historiographic metafiction", preferring instead terms such as "fictional metahistory", "metahistoriographic fiction" or "fictional metahistoriography" because they emphasise the fact that the works use fictional techniques to thematise questions of history (or metahistory or

contemporary historical novels, Nünning has identified works of historiographic metafiction as historical novels which display a dominance of fictional and metafictional elements. These novels clearly mark their fictionality through self-reflexive elements, tend to draw on historiography and history theory as their main sources of text external references, and often have a high degree of explicit reference to the narrative medium. Historiographic metafiction combines a high degree of fictional self-reflexivity with an explicit consideration of historiographical questions. The accent in this type of historical novel is moved from the portrayal of history to the reconstruction of historical connections and the thematisation of problems of history theory, including problems associated with the narrative representation of the past. Historiographic metafiction considers questions of the reconstruction, interpretation and depiction of history, with these themes being either explicitly explored by a character or narrator or applied in the narrative through the structure of the novel[69]. As with the thematisation of postmemory, the exploration of criticisms of historiography characteristic of historiographic metafiction has the potential to unsettle depictions of Germans as perpetrators or victims in novels of that genre dealing with the Nazi past by questioning our ability to know the whole "truth" about that past and by exposing what we consider to be incontrovertible "history" as merely a "version" of the past.

While the concept of postmemory has been applied to the analysis of *Der Vorleser, Unscharfe Bilder, Himmelskörper, Flughunde* and similar novels, there has been little discussion of the use of the concept of historiographic metafiction to analyse novels of this genre. Hutcheon and Nünning have both explored their theories about historiographic metafiction with reference to English language works, but there are very few studies applying these ideas to German language novels[70]. A detailed consideration of the effect of structuring German novels about the Nazi past as historiographic metafiction on the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims remains outstanding[71].

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metahistoriography) theory. However, in view of the widespread use of the term "historiographic metafiction", Nünning has continued to use it in his work: Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* 282–287.

69 Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* 256; 282; 287.

70 The exception being Hauenstein, Robin *Historiographische Metafiktion: Ransmayr, Sebald, Kracht, Beyer* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2014.

71 The following make brief reference to the possibility of linking novels of this genre with historiographic metafiction, but do not go on to analyse such novels

Given the high level of attention the depiction of Germans as perpetrators and/or victims in German literature has received, this lack of a more intensive interest in reading novels of this genre as historiographic metafiction is somewhat surprising. The main feature of historiographic metafiction is that it frequently thematises critiques of history which suggest that there are many "versions" of the past and that the past cannot be known objectively. It emphasises the unreliability of memory and the importance of the motivation of narrators when they retell a story from the past. Historiographic metafiction tends to depict narratives about the past as being subjective, constructed and unreliable. It poses fundamental questions about the possibility of knowing the objective "truth" about history, thus undermining the basis on which we can judge someone's guilt or innocence. The implication that we cannot know what truly happened in the past or reliably ascertain a character's motivations has the potential to significantly affect the reader's perception of whether a particular character is being portrayed as a perpetrator or a victim, creating a tension which has given rise to numerous debates and controversies regarding the perpetrator/victim characterisation in these novels.

The level of controversy arising in response to some of these novels also highlights problems in the application of these historiographical critiques to the history of the Holocaust and to Holocaust literature[72]. Holocaust

in this way: Fischer, Torben, Hammermeister, Philip and Kramer, Sven "Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des ersten Jahrzehnts: Zur Einführung" in Fischer, Torben, Hammermeister, Philipp and Kramer, Sven *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014: 9–25 at 16; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart: Erzählen vom Nationalsozialismus in der deutschen Literatur seit den neunziger Jahren* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010 at 83–86; Gray, Richard T „Fabulation and Metahistory: WG Sebald and Contemporary German Holocaust Fiction" in Zeller, Christoph *Literarische Experimente: Medien, Kunst, Texte seit 1950* Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012: 271–301; Eigler, Friederike *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag 2005 at 61–62.

72 For a discussion of such difficulties, see the reports of symposia in Los Angeles in 1990 and Jena in 2011 which dealt amongst other things with the impact of White's theses on the representation of the Holocaust and which both included contributions from White himself: Friedlander, Saul *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992; Frei, Norbert *Den Holocaust erzählen: Historiographie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Empirie und narrativer Kreativität* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013.

literature has frequently been seen as "scandalous", due to a concern that "to write Holocaust fictions is tantamount to making a fiction of the Holocaust"[73] and to reservations as to the ability to represent an event as horrific as the Holocaust in aesthetic form[74]. As Holocaust survivor Elie Wiesel put it, "A novel about Treblinka is either not a novel or not about Treblinka"[75]. In addition, there is an inherent tension between the tendency of novels to encourage identification, and the position that only those who lived through the Holocaust can understand it, a position which resists identification by others[76]. All of these arguments come down to the perceived importance of authority and authenticity in the context of Holocaust narratives. There is a concern to establish the veracity of even fictional accounts of the Holocaust, and a much higher level of concern about providing an authentic portrayal of the facts than is usual for historical fiction[77]. Given this emphasis on authenticity and truth, the potential for friction in historiographic metafiction attempting to combine a Holocaust thematic with reflections on metahistorical theories which emphasise the inability of any narrative to convey the "truth" is obvious. As Saul Friedlander has commented with regard to the tension between various postmodern ideas and Holocaust discourse, "the

73 Vice, Sue *Holocaust Fiction* London: Routledge, 2000 at 1. For overviews of the controversies concerning Holocaust novels, see also Sicher, Efraim *The Holocaust Novel* New York: Routledge, 2005 at ix–xxiii; McGlothlin, Erin "Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink's The Reader and Martin Amis's Time's Arrow" in Spargo, R Clifton and Ehrenreich, Robert M *After Representation? The Holocaust, Literature and Culture* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009: 210–230 at 210–214.

74 For a discussion of the discourse on the unrepresentability of the Holocaust, see Fulda, Daniel "Ein unmögliches Buch? Christopher Brownings Remembering Survival und die Aporie von Auschwitz" in Frei, Norbert *Den Holocaust erzählen: Historiographie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Empirie und narrativer Kreativität* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013: 126–150. See also Vice, Sue 4–5. See further Eaglestone, Robert *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 at 16–19; Schlant, Ernestine 7–11; Gray, Richard T 274–282.

75 Wiesel, Elie "The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration" in Wiesel, Elie *Dimensions of the Holocaust: Lectures at Northwestern University by Elie Wiesel, Lucy S Dawidowicz, Dorothy Rabinowitz, Robert McAfee Brown* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977: 5–19 at 7.

76 Eaglestone, Robert 132. On the flipside, McGlothlin has discussed the problems posed by the possibility of identification with Holocaust perpetrators in literature and the effect that this has had on perpetrator portrayal: McGlothlin, Erin "Theorizing the Perpetrator" 213–214.

77 Vice, Sue 3–4.

equivocation of postmodernism concerning 'reality' and 'truth' – that is, ultimately, its fundamental relativism – confronts any discourse about Nazism and the Shoah with considerable difficulties"[78]. Whether the novels considered in this book can be categorised as "Holocaust fiction" is a moot point, however, the fact that they do all in some way touch on the Holocaust and other German crimes goes a long way towards explaining the sensitivity associated with the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in these novels and the way in which this is impacted by the status of the novels as historiographic metafiction.

If a history of the past is merely "a form of fiction" or a "version that wanted to be written", how can we trust it as the basis for a judgement of guilt or innocence? Writing and reading a novel as historiographic metafiction has the potential to fundamentally disrupt its portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims. How are the ideas raised by postmemory and critiques of historiography such as White's represented in post-unification novels dealing with the Nazi past? Does a reading of these texts as historiographic metafiction disrupt their portrayals of Germans as perpetrators/victims? To fully understand the way in which German authors have dealt with the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the crucial period 1990–2010 and to consider what this might say about the current state of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and German identity, this book expands its analysis of *Der Vorleser, Unscharfe Bilder, Himmelskörper* and *Flughunde* by reading these works as historiographic metafiction. In doing so, it seeks to explore more deeply how post-unification authors have approached writing the Nazi past in order to identify "the version that wanted to be written".

78 Friedlander, Saul "Introduction" in Friedlander, Saul *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992: 1–21 at 20.

2. If they were all monsters: The SS perpetrator Hanna Schmitz in Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*

Of all the fictional, post-1990 "versions" of Germany's Nazi past, Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* has attracted by far the most domestic and international attention. The novel was a bestseller not only in Germany but also in the United States and has been translated into over 50 languages. It has featured in the German secondary school syllabus, and was turned into an Oscar-nominated film in 2008[79]. The novel which has been the focus of this worldwide interest tells the tale of the legal historian Michael Berg and his relationship with Hanna Schmitz. The novel is in the form of a first-person retrospective narrative told from the point of view of Michael, who is looking back on the events related from a narrative present which coincides approximately with the time of publication of the novel[80]. Michael first meets the much older Hanna by chance when he is 15 years old. She initiates a sexual relationship with him which is characterised by a ritual in which Michael reads aloud to her. The relationship ends abruptly when Hanna leaves town without explanation. Michael next sees Hanna some years later when he is a law student watching the proceedings of one of the trials following on from the main Frankfurt Auschwitz trial of 1963–1965 as part of his studies and Hanna is in the dock accused of committing crimes against humanity whilst working as an SS guard during the Second World War. Hanna's crimes include supervising prisoners at a concentration camp and allowing prisoners to burn alive in a locked church during the course of their forced march from

79 *The Reader*, director Stephen Daldry, writer David Hare and Bernhard Schlink, performers Kate Winslet, David Kross, Ralph Fiennes, produced The Weinstein Company, 9. Babelsberg Film, 2008. On the popularity of the novel see Mahlendorf, Ursula R "Trauma Narrated, Read and (Mis)understood: Bernhard Schlink's The Reader" *Monatshefte* 95.3 (2003): 458–481 at 458–459.

80 The chronology established within the narrative indicates that the time of narration is around the early–mid 1990s. During Hanna's trial, the information as to her date of birth and her age at the time of trial place the trial date at 1965 (DV 91), which would fit in with the date of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. Hanna then remains in prison for 18 years until around 1983 (DV 175), and Michael describes Hanna's death as being 10 years prior to the time of writing (DV 205).

the camp towards the end of the war. At the conclusion of the trial, Hanna is sentenced to a lengthy prison term. During the course of the trial, Michael realises that Hanna is illiterate. He subsequently sends her tapes of himself reading literary classics aloud. With the help of the tapes, Hanna teaches herself to read in prison. However, Michael does not visit Hanna until she is about to be released, after which Hanna commits suicide. In her suicide note, she asks Michael to deliver some money to a survivor of the concentration camp where she had been an SS guard, a commission Michael travels to New York to carry out.

Der Vorleser has given rise to considerable controversy. There has been both high praise for the novel ("a masterly work"[81]) as well as unveiled derision ("postmodern pap", "cultural pornography"[82], "Holo-Kitsch"[83]). So extensive has critical discussion of *Der Vorleser* been that the novel's reception has itself been the subject of academic analysis considering the various "waves" of criticism of the novel[84]. Opinions on *Der Vorleser* have been divided on such matters as the literary quality of the book, differences in the reception of the novel in Germany and in Anglo-American cultures, and the novel's success or otherwise in dealing with the Holocaust thematic. However, the greatest degree of controversy has concerned the question of whether Hanna is portrayed in the novel as a victim or a perpetrator (or both). *Der Vorleser* has attracted a considerable amount of criticism from those who allege that it portrays the Holocaust perpetrator Hanna Schmitz as a victim. William Collins Donahue in particular has been highly critical of the novel for approaching Hanna from a position of empathy, not examining her crimes against humanity in sufficient detail, and using Hanna's illiteracy to render her a victim in such a way as to push the actual victims of the

81 Steiner, George "He was only a boy but he was good in bed. Well, good at reading anyway" *The Observer* 2 November 1997.

82 Adler, Jeremy, "Bernhard Schlink and The Reader" *The Times Literary Supplement* 22 March 2002.

83 Winkler, Willi "Vorlesen, duschen, durcharbeiten" *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 30 March 2002.

84 Hall, Katharina "Text Crimes in the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Case of Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser/The Reader" in Cheesman, Tom *German Text Crimes: Writers Accused from the 1950s to the 2000s* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013: 193–208; Brazaitis, Kristina "On Re-reading The Reader: an exercise in amgibuity" *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language Association* 95 (2001): 75–96; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 110–111.

Holocaust into the background[85]. This view that Hanna's victimhood tends to obscure the suffering of Holocaust victims is shared by a number of commentators, who accuse the novel of being, amongst other things, a historically revisionist whitewash on a level with Nazi apologists and historical revisionists and an attempt to dispense with a politically correct approach to the Nazi past[86]. Some have also seen the portrayal of Hanna as a victim as an indication of a shift in German memory culture, with Harald Welzer seeing the novel as marking a significant break with the accusatory approach previously taken by the second generation towards Nazi perpetrators[87]. However, others argue that Hanna is an accountable agent who has control over her response to her illiteracy and question her characterisation as a victim,

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85 Donahue, William Collins "Illusions of Subtlety: Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser and the Moral Limits of Holocaust Fiction" *German Life and Letters* 54.1 (2001): 60–81; Donahue, William Collins "The Popular Culture Alibi: Bernhard Schlink's Detective Novels and the Culture of Politically Correct Holocaust Literature" *German Quarterly* 77.4 (2004): 462–481; Donahue, William Collins "Revising '68 – Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser, Peter Schneider's Vati, and the Question of History" *Seminar* 40.3 (2004): 293–311; Donahue, William Collins "Der Holocaust als Anlaß der Selbstbemitleidung. Geschichtsschüchternheit in Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser" in Braese, Stephan *Rechenschaften. Juristischer und literarischer Diskurs in der Auseinandersetzung mit den NS-Massenverbrechen* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004: 177–197; Donahue, William Collins *Holocaust as Fiction: Bernhard Schlink's "Nazi" Novels and Their Films* New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.

86 Raphael, Frederic "Judge not?" *Prospect*, March 1998 at 33; Baßler, Moritz *Der deutsche Pop-Roman. Die neuen Archivisten* Munich: CH Beck, 2002 at 71; Hall, Katharina "The Author, The Novel, The Reader and the Perils of Neue Lesbarkeit: A Comparative Analysis of Bernhard Schlink's Selbs Justiz and Der Vorleser" *German Life and Letters* 59.3 (2006): 446–467 at 463–464; Sansom, Ian "Doubts about The Reader" *Salmagundi* 124–125 (1999–2000): 3–16 at 9–12; Moschytz-Ledgley, Miriam *Trauma, Scham und Selbstmitleid. Vererbtes Trauma in Bernhard Schlinks Roman Der Vorleser* Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2009 at 72–73.

87 Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf. Über die Konjunktur der Familien- und Generationenromane" *Mittelweg 36* 13.1 (2004): 53–64 at 55. See also Schödel, Kathrin "Jenseits der political correctness – NS Vergangenheit in Bernhard Schlink Der Vorleser und Martin Walser Ein springender Brunnen" in Parkes, Stuart and Wefelmeyer, Fritz *Seelenarbeit an Deutschland. Martin Walser in Perspective* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004: 307–322 at 314; Crownshaw, Rick "Rereading Der Vorleser, Remembering the Perpetrator" in Taberner, Stuart and Berger, Karina *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic* Rochester: Camden House, 2009: 147–161.

including Bill Niven, who rejects the idea that the novel forms part of the "Germans as victims" trend in the post-1990 period, arguing that, although Hanna is accorded victim status by Michael, the text shows that she is accountable for her responses to her illiteracy[88]. The arguments of these critics suggest that Hanna's illiteracy does not render her innocent of her crimes, meaning that she remains a perpetrator.

The variety and polarity apparent in these interpretations of *Der Vorleser* suggest that there may well be as many "readings" of "The Reader" as there are readers of it. The novel is a very open text which contains many gaps to be filled in by the reader, indicating that the varied interpretations of the text have been significantly influenced by reader response[89]. As Schlink himself has pointed out, each interpretation is determined by *"nicht nur das Werk und nicht nur der Autor, sondern auch den Interpreten"*[90]. However, across the broad range of interpretations of *Der Vorleser*, it is apparent that the focal point of disagreement is the question of whether Hanna is portrayed as a perpetrator or a victim. As with so much of the discussion about dealing with the legacy of the Third Reich that has been a key component of German

88 Niven, Bill "Representations of the Nazi past I: perpetrators" in Taberner, Stuart *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 125–141 at 136; Niven, Bill "Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser and the Problem of Shame" *Modern Language Review* 98.2 (2003): 381–396, particularly at 382–387; see also Niven, Bill "Intertextual References in Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser" in Rasche, Hermann and Schönfeld, Christiane *Denkbilder: Festschrift für Eoin Burke* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004: 277–285 at 278–279. See also Roth, Jeffrey I "Reading and misreading The Reader" *Law and Literature* 16.2 (2004): 163–176, particularly at 170–171; Reynolds, Daniel "A Portrait of Misreading: Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser" *Seminar* 39.3 (2003): 238–256 at 244; Brockmann, Stephen "Virgin Father and Prodigal Son" *Philosophy and Literature* 27.2 (2003): 341–362 at 358.

89 Anton also discusses the role of reader response in producing the text of *Der Vorleser* and the implications for the polarity of the novel's reception: Anton, Christine "Historiography and Memory Politics: The Cultural-Historical Discourse in the Works of Bernhard Schlink" in Anton, Christine and Pilipp, Frank *Beyond Political Correctness: Remapping German Sensibilities in the 21st Century* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010: 51–83 at 72. In relation to reader response theory generally, see Tyson, Lois *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* New York: Routledge, 2006 at 169–207; Iser, Wolfgang *How To Do Theory* Maldon: Blackwell Publishing, 2006 at 57–69; Iser, Wolfgang *The Implied Reader* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974.

90 Schlink, Bernhard *Vergewisserungen: Über Politik, Recht, Schreiben und Glauben* Zurich: Diogenes, 2005 at 308.

identity and culture since 1945, debate about *the* novel about the Nazi past in the post-unification period, *Der Vorleser*, has revolved around the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. Can allegations that the novel portrays Hanna as a victim be justified? Is Hanna in fact better described as a perpetrator? Or something in between? And what is it that has given rise to the intense controversy which has characterised the reception of the novel?

2.1 Take a look at the accused: Hanna as a victim of the justice system

One of the main features of *Der Vorleser* which has lead critics to conclude that the novel portrays Hanna as a victim is Michael's depiction of Hanna as a victim of the justice system. Michael's narrative of Hanna's trial contains repeated suggestions that Hanna has been a victim of legal incompetence, of the machinations of her co-accused, of injustice resulting from the failure of the court to take a whole range of mitigating factors into account, and of fundamental flaws in the justice system arising from the incongruity between law and morality. However, a closer analysis of the text as a whole shows that Michael's attempts to portray Hanna as a victim of the justice system do not stand up to closer scrutiny. This can be demonstrated, for example, by examining Michael's efforts to portray Hanna as a victim of the justice system through a negative depiction of the lawyers involved in her trial which hints that their shortcomings may have lead to an unjust result. According to Michael's account, Hanna is a victim of the ineptitude of her defence lawyer, who is characterised as a young man whose inexperience and enthusiasm lead him to damage Hanna's case (DV 92; 105). Michael criticises the young lawyer for failing to ask Hanna questions which would have revealed the "charitable" motives he (sometimes) believes to be behind her selection of weak and delicate prisoners to be her "readers" (DV 113). Further, Michael depicts Hanna as being at a legal disadvantage due to her treatment by the presiding judge, who is repeatedly described as being *"irritiert"* (DV 92; 93; 104; 107; 154), particularly in response to statements made by Hanna. However, Michael's suggestion that Hanna is a victim of the justice system due to her treatment by the lawyers involved in her trial is undermined by various factors embedded within his own narrative, indicating to the reader that his interpretation of Hanna's position is unreliable. Hanna's supposed disadvantage resulting from her lawyer's inexperience is balanced out in the novel by the rather too extensive experience of the lawyers representing her co-accused. These advocates are described as living examples of the personnel continuities in the West German justice system from the Third Reich to the postwar period, as *"alte Nazis"* whose *"nationalsozialistischen Tiraden"*

(DV 92) damaged their clients' cases just as surely as the ineptitude of Hanna's younger lawyer damaged hers. In addition, Hanna herself is largely responsible for any disadvantage she suffers in the court proceedings. She makes things difficult for her defence lawyer by refusing to confide in him (DV 106), and even if he had asked her questions in court designed to reveal her "humanitarian" motives for her "selections", there is no indication that she would have made the responses Michael wishes for her (DV 113). On the contrary, the account of the court proceedings indicates that it is rather more likely that Hanna would have failed to respond at all, either because she did not understand what she was supposed to have done wrong, or because it would necessarily involve exposure of her illiteracy. Hanna has the power to alleviate her own disadvantage, but chooses not to do so.

Similarly, the presiding judge's "irritation" is caused largely by an inability to understand why Hanna has difficulty with certain aspects of the proceedings which would be simple matters if Hanna were literate, such as making objections to the charges prior to trial or reading the account of one of the survivors of the fire (DV 104). It is entirely conceivable that, had the judge known Hanna was illiterate, his attitude may have been entirely different, and he certainly could not have given Hanna a higher sentence than her co-accused for writing the report on the church fire. The fact that he was not equipped with this information is largely Hanna's fault, meaning that her disadvantage before the judge is self-inflicted[91]. This point is emphasised during the trial when the judge gives Hanna every opportunity to explain her actions on the night of the church fire in a way which would make her appear less culpable. He asks her whether she had been afraid that she would be overpowered by the prisoners, or whether she failed to flee the situation because she was afraid of being imprisoned or shot (DV 122), but Hanna does not take up any of these opportunities to mitigate her guilt. In the same way, when Michael visits the judge in chambers, the judge gives him every opportunity to explain Hanna's conduct by revealing her illiteracy. The judge is described as being *"entspannt"* when out of the courtroom, with *"ein nettes, intelligentes, harmloses Beamtengesicht"*. He is happy to talk to Michael and happy to see him again if he would like to talk further (DV 154–155). Given his failure to raise Hanna's illiteracy with the judge under these circumstances, Michael's motivation in suggesting that Hanna is a victim of the legal system likely derives from a desire to divert attention away from his own involvement in the severity of her sentence.

[91] Tebben makes the same point: Tebben, Karin "Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser. Zur ästhetischen Dimension rechtphilosophischer Fragestellungen" *Euphorion* 104.4 (2010): 455–474 at 462.

Likewise, Michael's suggestions that Hanna has been the victim of the machinations of her co-accused during the trial tend to gloss over any details which might tarnish the image he is trying to present, including matters such as Hanna's responsibility for the predicament in which she finds herself and his own role in this state of affairs. In his account of the trial, Michael uses negative comparisons between Hanna and her co-accused in order to present Hanna in a positive light. Compared with her co-accused, Hanna appears a pitiful, lonely figure who sits silently in her seat during court recess while her co-accused meet with friends and relatives (DV 95). The physical description of the co-accused is uniformly unflattering. As a group, they are depicted as *"sichtbar älter, müder, feiger und bitterer"* (DV 130–131) than Hanna, who is described as *"jung, schön"* (DV 115). Michael also contrasts Hanna's honesty (DV 105; 109; 131) with the attempts of her co-accused to lie in order to avoid any implication of guilt. Where Hanna admits to her actions on the night of the fire, in which prisoners guarded by Hanna and others were burned alive when locked inside a church hit by a bomb, her co-accused try to deny the charges against them altogether by asserting that they were not in a position to open the church (DV 119). They also accuse Hanna of writing a false account in the damning SS report (DV 120–121), an accusation the reader knows is a deliberate lie once Hanna's illiteracy is revealed.

This positive presentation of Hanna garners sympathy for her, and although it should be remembered that having sympathy with someone is not quite the same thing as delivering a "not guilty" verdict, the sympathy for Hanna created by Michael's narrative has the potential to make the reader more receptive to Michael's prompts regarding Hanna's victimhood. However, an acceptance of Michael's sympathetic presentation of Hanna requires the reader to ignore a number of points which undermine his portrayal, including Hanna's deliberate concealment of her illiteracy and Michael's failure to mention the matter to the judge, which allow her co-accused to make her their scapegoat. Again, Hanna's "victimhood" in the face of the justice system is both self-inflicted and augmented by Michael's refusal to take action. Michael also neglects to mention that Hanna's pitiful loneliness during the trial is largely due to their mutual refusal to make contact with each other. An acceptance of Michael's sympathetic view further requires the reader to make assumptions as to Hanna's motives for her "honesty" which are not supported by any information provided by Hanna herself. For Hanna's honesty to be virtuous in this context, it needs to involve a recognition on her part that her involvement in the incidents she is relating is deserving of condemnation, so that her honesty is rendered brave by the fact that she is willing to act in a way that is not to her own advantage in order to provide the testimony requested by the court. However, there is no indication at this point that Hanna accepts or even understands her guilt. Whilst Michael's portrayal

can be seen as promoting sympathy for Hanna in a way which lays the ground for an acceptance of her victimhood, a closer consideration of features that are apparent from the text, but which Michael does not promote in his narrative, reveal the contingency of this sympathetic image.

As well as portraying a positive image of Hanna by suggesting that she has been a victim of the lawyers involved in the trial and of a conspiracy of her co-accused, Michael also implies that Hanna has been the victim of an injustice resulting from the failure of the court to take a whole range of what Michael considers to be mitigating factors into account. Michael speculates during the trial as to various factors for which Hanna was not personally responsible, but which may have contributed both to the deaths and suffering of prisoners in the concentration camp and to the church fire disaster. In relation to Hanna's activities at the concentration camp, Michael notes that Hanna and her co-accused were not in charge of the camp, and makes particular mention of the camp commandant, who absconded and disappeared at the end of the war (DV 102), implying that his disappearance is an indication of his guilt and therefore a mitigation of Hanna's. In relation to the fire in the church, Michael points to just about every other possible agent in the disaster in order to downplay Hanna's responsibility. He describes the evidence of the local villagers at the trial as self-serving, designed to cover up their own failure to rescue the women trapped in the burning church (DV 110). He further suggests that the villagers collaborated with the co-accused in painting a picture of Hanna as the leader of the pack because it suited them to depict the guards as an organised unit, rather than a group of confused women whom they ought to have overpowered in order to release the prisoners (DV 130–131). Michael also puts forward the idea that the disaster was the fault of the Allied pilots who bombed the church and surrounding buildings out of carelessness, either because they missed the intended target, or because they decided to unload some spare bombs with no thought as to where they might fall (DV 103). In presenting this list of mitigating circumstances, Michael implies that the court has failed to take the full range of factors relevant to Hanna's case into account and that Hanna may therefore be innocent, or at least, less guilty. However, as with Michael's suggestions that Hanna has been the victim of her lawyers and her co-accused, his implication that she has been the victim of an unjust assessment of her case is based on suppositions not backed up by evidence. It also elides the crux of Hanna's guilt. Hanna's culpability arises because she failed to open the church doors, thereby condemning her prisoners to be burned alive. Whether others also failed in this way, or what caused the fire in the first place are beside the point. In addition, although Michael's speculations foster the idea that Hanna was not the only one responsible for the suffering of the victims, neither Hanna nor anyone else denies that she acted as alleged. A recognition

of the involvement of other actors in the complex of events that occurred on the night of the church fire is unlikely to have made any difference to Hanna's guilt in relation to the principal charge.

In addition to these incidents in which Michael suggests that Hanna is at a disadvantage or subject to injustice during her trial, the novel contains further, more general criticisms of the justice system which could be seen as promoting the idea that Hanna is a victim of the legal regime. When Michael describes some of the matters discussed in the seminar he attended at university, he recalls a debate about the ban on retrospective punishment in which the young law students questioned the legal basis on which the accused in the Frankfurt Auschwitz trials were charged. Michael's recollections here not only raise questions centred on the concept of retrospectivity, but also doubts as to the legitimacy of Hanna's trial, particularly in view of problems arising from the lack of synchronicity between law, morality and justice: *"Was ist das Recht? Was im Buch steht oder was in der Gesellschaft tatsächlich durchgesetzt und befolgt wird?"* (DV 86). In addition, his attempts to mitigate Hanna's guilt point to the inability of the justice system to take every single factor in each individual case into account, implying the possibility of injustice. These questions about the interaction between law and morality reflect a much broader legal debate which has interested Schlink in other contexts, in which he points out that, whilst good laws aim to reduce the tension between law and morality, they cannot completely eliminate it[92]. However, the raising of such legal critiques in a narrative about a Holocaust trial has the potential to generate considerable controversy. A courtroom setting tends to promote an expectation of black and white answers, of objectivity, of judgment and of condemnation for the guilty. By thematising criticisms of the justice system in the context of a Holocaust trial and raising questions about the ability of the courts to dispense "justice", the novel invites controversy by implying that a "just" result may not be possible.

The legal critique contained in the novel is provocative and may go some way towards explaining the controversy that has surrounded the portrayal of Hanna, but does the novel's criticism of the legal system have the end effect of portraying Hanna as a victim? My contention is that this is not the case.

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92 Schlink has, for example, discussed the law/morality distinction in the context of German anti-terrorist laws in the essay "An der Grenze des Rechts": Schlink, Bernhard *Vergewisserungen* 176. Schlink's criticism of the capacity of the legal system to deal with Holocaust crimes is considered in Dreike, Beate "Was wäre denn Gerechtigkeit? Zur Rechtsskepsis in Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser" *German Life and Letters* 55.1 (2002): 117–129; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 127–128; Morgenroth, Claas *Erinnerungspolitik und Gegenwartsliteratur* Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2014 at 268–276.

The fact that such considerations are not intended to seriously undermine the reader's belief that Hanna and her fellow-accused are justly condemned is shown by the interpolation of other voices in the text which clearly dismiss such a suggestion, thereby guiding the reader to an interpretation contrary to Michael's intention. This can be seen when the law professor leading Michael's seminar about the judicial processing of the Nazi past meets the legal arguments about retrospectivity with the statement: *"Sehen Sie sich die Angeklagten an – Sie werden keinen finden, der wirklich meint, er habe damals morden dürfen"* (DV 87). Likewise, when Hanna asks the judge what he would have done in her situation, he answers: *"Es gibt Sachen, auf die man sich einfach nicht einlassen darf und von denen man sich, wenn es einen nicht Leib und Leben kostet, absetzen muß"* (DV 107). Michael is critical of this response from the judge (DV 107–108), but it does emphasise the idea that, regardless of one's personal situation or the positive laws at the time, there are some things which ought, as a matter of morality, to be avoided[93]. It is also the case that the appropriateness or otherwise of raising the constitutional bar against the retrospective application of laws was a live issue at the time of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial[94], and in this sense, Michael's recollections can be seen as representing a historicisation of contemporary legal debates, rather than a questioning of the correctness of the guilty verdicts reached.

The discussion so far of the portrayal of Hanna as a victim through Michael's narration in *Der Vorleser* indicates that, although Michael is frequently at pains to paint Hanna as a sympathetic person who may not be wholly responsible for her crimes and who is a victim of the legal system, the text as a whole encourages the reader to look behind Michael's gloss to ascertain whether the facts as otherwise presented in the text necessarily bear the meaning he ascribes to them. The necessity of questioning whether the interpretive gaps in the text must be filled in the way Michael suggests are indicated by other voices in the text, such as the law professor and the judge, but also by some aspects of Michael's own narrative. This highlights the importance of keeping the narrative perspective of the novel front of mind when considering the depiction of Hanna as a victim or a perpetrator. The novel is Michael's first person retrospective narrative of events, and, as is already

93 For a similar view, see also Niven, Bill "Representations of the Nazi past I" 138.

94 Schlink has considered the legal problems associated with dealing with the past in the legal system, including retrospectivity and limitation periods in his essay "Die Bewältigung von Vergangenheit durch Recht": Schlink, Bernhard *Vergangenheitsschuld: Beiträge zu einem deutschen Thema* Zurich: Diogenes, 2007 at 80–111.

apparent from the analysis thus far, he is often a biased narrator whose narrative is therefore not necessarily to be trusted[95]. The text encourages the reader to take a critical view of Michael's narrative, indicating that his views ought not to be accepted at face value or, worse, directly imputed to Schlink[96]. By questioning Michael's representation of Hanna as a victim, the text undermines his reliability as narrator, opening up the text and drawing attention to narrative gaps in a way that underscores the metafictional nature of the novel and cautions the reader against accepting Michael's depiction of Hanna as a victim at face value. In what follows, I will examine whether these sorts of considerations also apply to the matter of Hanna's illiteracy, which has formed the main focus for debate about her portrayal as a victim.

2.2 Might she not have gone to night school? Hanna as a victim of illiteracy

Even more so than on Michael's depiction of Hanna as a victim of the justice system, controversy about the portrayal of Hanna as a victim in *Der Vorleser* has centred on her illiteracy. Hanna's illiteracy is the big secret around which much of the tension in the plot is built. In the second part of the novel, whilst walking around Heidelberg on a Sunday after a week of watching Hanna stand trial, Michael has an epiphany when he realises that Hanna cannot read or write (DV 126–128). His epiphany is a result, not of some confession of Hanna's or some definitive proof, but of a long period of subconscious cogitation in which his mind has assembled scraps of evidence. His narrative at this point suggests that Hanna's illiteracy may explain a lot about their prior relationship and about her actions during the war:

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95 The view that Michael is an unreliable narrator is widely accepted, the main exception being Donahue, who strongly criticises this view and sees the novel as a work of conventional realism in which belief in the veracity of Michael's narrative (and therefore his view of Hanna) is encouraged by various elements in the text: Donahue, William Collins "The Popular Culture Alibi" 475–476; Donahue, William Collins "Revising '68" 308; Donahue, William Collins "The Schlink Abides: The Reader Attains the Age of Majority" *Colloquia Germanica* 48.1/2 (2015): 103–123 at 111–116. For a similar view, see Alison, Jane "The Third Victim in Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser" *Germanic Review* 81.2 (2006): 163–178 at 166.

96 Niven criticises the frequent conflation of Michael and Schlink, as do Mahlendorf, Reynolds and Worthington: Niven, Bill "Problem of Shame" 381–382; Mahlendorf, Ursula R 475; Reynolds, Daniel 249–250; Worthington, Kim L "Suturing the Wound: Derrida's On Forgiveness and Schlink's The Reader" *Comparative Literature* 63.2 (2011): 203–224 at 210.

> Nein, habe ich mir gesagt, Hanna hatte sich nicht für das Verbrechen entschieden. Sie hatte sich gegen die Beförderung bei Siemens entschieden und war in die Tätigkeit als Aufseherin hineingeraten. Und nein, sie hatte die Zarten und Schwachen nicht mit dem Transport nach Auschwitz geschickt, weil sie ihr vorgelesen hatten, sondern hatte sie fürs Vorlesen ausgewählt, weil sie ihnen den letzten Monat erträglich machen wollte, ehe sie ohnehin nach Auschwitz mußten. (DV 128)

Here, Michael recommends the view that Hanna is a victim of her illiteracy who "fell into" her role as an SS guard as a means of avoiding the discovery of her shameful inability to read. His implication is that she did not intend to commit her crimes, but rather lacked agency. He also takes a highly positive view of Hanna's motives in selecting her "readers" in the concentration camp.

Many commentators have strongly criticised Michael's use of Hanna's illiteracy as an explanation for her crimes and have also been critical of the way in which the illiteracy theme plays out in the novel generally. Critics have argued that Hanna's illiteracy is unrealistic and problematic because analphabetism was an anomaly[97], and that the concentration on Hanna's illiteracy provides a distraction from the question of the culpability of average Germans[98]. Schlink himself has repeatedly denied that he intended Hanna's illiteracy to act as an excuse for her crimes[99], and pointed out that portraying a perpetrator as a human being was essential in order to understand the

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97 Johnson, Sally and Finlay, Frank "(Il)literacy and (Im)morality in Bernhard Schlink's The Reader" *Written Language and Literacy* 4.2 (2001): 195–214; Wolff, Lynn "The Mare of Majdanek: Intersections of History and Fiction in Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser" *Internationales Archiv fur Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 29.1 (2004): 84–117 at 115–117; Raphael, Frederic "Judge not?" 33; Schödel, Kathrin "Jenseits der political correctness" 314. Interestingly, when criticised at a seminar (which I attended) held at the Goethe Institut in Sydney on 25 August 2009 for structuring his novel around the unrealistic device of the illiteracy of a member of the SS, Schlink stated that he actually knew an illiterate man who had been in the SS, so he did not believe that Hanna's illiteracy was unrealistic.

98 Ozick, Cynthia "The rights of history and the rights of imagination" *Commentary* 107.3 (1999): 22–27 at 26–27.

99 Wachtel, Eleanor "Bernhard Schlink interviewed by Eleanor Wachtel" *Queen's Quarterly* 106.4 (1999): 544–555; Tonkin, Boyd "In the court of history: Bernhard Schlink returns in a non-fiction book to the burdens of a savage past" *The Independent* 19 March 2010; Kilb, Andreas "Herr Schlink, ist Der Vorleser Geschichte?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 20 February 2009.

difficulties his own generation of Germans had when dealing with their parents' Nazi past:

> Wenn es nicht die menschliche Sicht auf die Täter gäbe, hätten wir kein Problem mit ihnen. Erst die menschliche Nähe zu ihnen macht das, was sie getan haben, so furchtbar. Wir hätten doch mit den Tätern schon lange abgeschlossen wenn es wirklich alles Monster wären, ganz fremd, ganz anders, mit denen wir nichts gemeinsam haben.[100]

Regardless of which particular aspect the critics choose to focus on, the primary concern seems to be that Hanna's illiteracy and Michael's explanation of its relationship to her involvement in Holocaust crimes renders her so much of a victim that her victimhood obliterates her perpetration and may serve to render her innocent.

However, the view that Hanna's illiteracy exculpates her and has the effect of transforming her from an SS perpetrator into an innocent victim depends largely on reading certain passages of Michael's narrative in isolation from the rest of the text and without paying sufficient attention to the lacunae in the novel. As was the case with Hanna's "victimisation" at the hands of the legal system, Hanna's "victimhood" said to arise from her illiteracy is undermined by various elements in the text, including gaps and the presence of alternative interpretations. Again, these factors highlight the unreliability of Michael's narration and the openness of the text, pointing to the importance of the metafictional aspects of the novel for identifying its approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy.

Even at the point of Michael's great realisation regarding Hanna's illiteracy and the possibility that it explains her criminal actions, his own narrative suggests that he does not quite believe the positive image he has constructed of Hanna and her motives in the wake of his epiphany. Immediately prior to his assertion that Hanna had a positively humanitarian motivation for selecting her "readers", Michael had canvassed quite a different conclusion: *"Hatte sie deswegen ihre Schützlinge nach Auschwitz geschickt? Um sie, falls sie was gemerkt haben sollten, stumm zu machen? Und hatte sie deswegen die Schwachen zu ihren Schützlingen gemacht?"* (DV 127). He considers this and other explanations for Hanna's behaviour before fixing on his sympathetic conclusion, but he nowhere provides any grounds for choosing one interpretation over the other. Indeed, the phrase *"habe ich mir gesagt"* (DV 128) in this passage rather suggests that he had to talk himself into his positive view against his better judgment. In addition, Michael does not appear to hold this view so strongly that he is not prepared to dispense

[100] Hage, Volker "Ich lebe in Geschichten" *Der Spiegel* 4/2000.

with it when it suits him, as when he is using Hanna's past treatment of him as an excuse not to speak with her and encourage her to reveal her illiteracy to the court:

> Und wer war ich für sie gewesen? Der kleine Vorleser, den sie benutzt, der kleine Beischläfer, mit dem sie ihren Spaß gehabt hatte? Hätte sie mich auch ins Gas geschickt, wenn sie mich nicht hätte verlassen können, aber loswerden wollen? (DV 153)

These points in the text provide a strong indication to the reader as to Michael's bias as a narrator, guiding the reader to question Michael's interpretation of the connection between Hanna's illiteracy and her crimes, and undermining the tendency for Michael's depiction of Hanna as a victim of her illiteracy to overshadow her status as a perpetrator of crimes against humanity.

If Michael's narrative is equivocal about Hanna's illiteracy as either an explanation or an exculpating factor, are there other features of the text which provide more definitive support for the assertion that Hanna's illiteracy is a means of depicting her as a victim? Some critics have identified in the novel a resurrection of the Enlightenment idea that humanity's moral deficiencies can be overcome by education[101]. Hanna's illiteracy is interpreted as a metaphor for her moral illiteracy, which she overcomes by learning to read. According to this view, it was Hanna's lack of education, her inability to read, that prevented her from realising that what she was doing was wrong, something of which she subsequently became aware when she learnt to read in prison. This suggests both that Hanna was a victim of her illiteracy, in that it pushed her towards a criminality she would not have chosen had she been able to recognise it for what it was, and also that she is innocent, as her illiteracy renders her *unmündig*. In this reading, Hanna's victimhood due to her illiteracy has the effect of wiping out her status as a perpetrator.

Schlink himself has lent some support to this interpretation by noting that:

> In Hanna's case, her illiteracy is a kind of metaphor for her moral illiteracy. You might say she really doesn't know the moral alphabet. Now, of course,

[101] Hoffman, Eva "The Uses of Illiteracy" *The New Republic* 23 March 1998 at 35; Moschytz-Ledgley, Miriam 44; Durzak, Manfred "Opfer und Täter im Nationalsozialismus: Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser und Stephen Hermlins Die Kommandeuse" *Literatur für Leser* 23.4 (2000): 203–213 at 207–208. Niven, by contrast, notes that the literature Hanna reads in prison is about the collapse of humanism rather than its triumph: Niven, Bill "Problem of Shame" 389; 393.

> that's not always the case; you can't say that illiterate people are less moral than literate people. But for Hanna, it can be understood as a metaphor related to what we know about her and her story and about what she has done.[102]

This interpretation put forward by Schlink some years after the publication of the novel does appear to be bolstered in the text when Michael specifically references the idea of learning leading to enlightenment and responsibility after receiving a written message from Hanna for the first time:

> Analphabetismus ist Unmündigkeit. Indem Hanna den Mut gehabt hatte, lesen und schreiben zu lernen, hatte sie den Schritt aus der Unmündigkeit zur Mündigkeit getan, einen aufklärerischen Schritt. (DV 178)

As well as referring to enlightenment, Michael's statement here also alludes to the legal idea of *Unmündigkeit*, which could be taken to indicate that Hanna was not capable of responsibility for her crimes. At law, the concept of *Unmündigkeit* means that certain factors (such as minority or insanity) limit the capacity of individuals to be held legally responsible in criminal matters[103]. If Hanna's illiteracy is read as a metaphor for her not knowing her moral alphabet, then this metaphor could be taken as suggesting that it makes her *unmündig*. Like a child, her illiteracy and lack of knowledge render her unable to understand moral issues, and she therefore lacks legal capacity and cannot be held responsible for her crimes. This idea fits in with Michael's conclusion that Hanna's illiteracy gave rise to an absence of agency which caused her to "fall into" her work as an SS guard. Similarly, Hanna's suicide could then be interpreted as the result of her acceptance of guilt and responsibility for her crimes after becoming enlightened by learning to read[104].

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102 Wachtel, Eleanor. However, Schlink has rejected the idea that Hanna's example implies that he supports the Enlightenment idea that education makes us moral: "Reading, education, culture – they do not make us better people or make us moral people. Obviously that is wrong. We have seen plenty of examples; and as a German, I naturally think of the Third Reich, where very cultured, educated people were completely immoral": Wachtel, Eleanor.

103 In the context of German criminal law, see for example §§19–20 StGB, which provide that legal responsibility for criminal acts may not be attributed to persons under the age of 14 years or to persons suffering from mental illness. For an online copy of the German *Strafgesetzbuch*, see <http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stgb/index.html> (accessed 8 October 2020).

104 Those who interpret Hanna's suicide in this way include Durzak, Manfred 207; Hoffmann, Eva 35; Johnson, Sally & Finlay, Frank 210; Sansom, Ian 11; Tabensky, Pedro Alexis "Judging and Understanding" *Law and Literature* 16.2 (2004): 207–228 at 210; Parkes, Stuart "Die Ungnade der späten Geburt?

Once she has become literate, she loses the innocence of *Unmündigkeit* conferred by her illiteracy. She becomes aware of her guilt and executes the appropriate punishment, attempting to atone by bequeathing the money she has saved to the Jewish survivor of the church fire.

Some aspects of the novel would seem to support this interpretation that Hanna's acquisition of literacy in prison leads her to finally understand what is morally right and to accept her own culpability, a development which makes her sympathetic and also suggests that her ability to appreciate moral issues was previously blocked by her inability to read. The prison governor's depiction of Hanna as leading a monastic lifestyle (DV 196–197), for example, seems to suggest that Hanna was penitent, indicating an acceptance of guilt which could point towards her acquisition of a moral compass along with her newfound literacy. A realisation of the enormity of what she has done could also be said to arise from her apparent engagement with Holocaust literature, including works by Holocaust victims Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Tadeusz Borowski, Jean Amery as well as works concerning Holocaust perpetrators Rudolf Höss and Adolf Eichmann (DV 193). Michael certainly promotes this reading of Hanna's state of mind when he says to the Jewish survivor in New York: *"Jedenfalls wußte sie, was sie anderen im Lager und auf dem Marsch angetan hat. Sie hat mir das nicht nur gesagt, sie hat sich in den letzten Jahren im Gefängnis auch intensiv damit beschäftigt"* (DV 202). He interprets Hanna's gift of the money to the Jewish survivor as an indication that her years of imprisonment were not merely an atonement imposed by others, but also something she wanted to invest with her own meaning which she wished to have acknowledged (DV 201).

However, these points in the text do not conclusively support Michael's assertion that Hanna has undertaken a journey from *Unmündigkeit* to *Mündigkeit* and accepted her own guilt. Even Michael acknowledges that his view of what Hanna was trying to achieve with her bequest to the Jewish survivor is simply his own *"Deutung"* (DV 201) of Hanna's intentions. Alternative interpretations of both her "literate" attitude towards her guilt and her suicide are supported by the text. For a start, the seemingly clear indications of Hanna's enlightenment about the Holocaust put forward by Michael

The Theme of National Socialism in Recent Novels by Bernhard Schlink and Klaus Modick" in Schmitz, Helmut *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past: Representations of National Socialism in contemporary Germanic literature* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001: 87–101 at 99; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 76; Conway, Jeremiah P "Compassion and Moral Condemnation: An Analysis of The Reader" *Philosophy and Literature* 23.2 (1999): 284–301 at 298–299; Atzert, Stephan "Zu Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser als Zerstörung von Erinnerung" *Literatur für Leser* 16.2 (2016): 109–121 at 110.

turn out on reflection to be rather less definitive. Hanna's prison reading list, for example, is just that: a reading list. The prison governor specifically notes that she is unable to say what Hanna thought about the books, only that she consumed a large number of texts on the subject of the Holocaust (DV 194). The list itself is revealing. Alongside the works of the victims (Levi, Wiesel, Borokowski and Amery) are Hannah Arendt's report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem and the memoirs of Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss (DV 193), two perpetrators who could never quite see what they were supposed to have done wrong and with whom Hanna may well have had some sympathy. The text provides no information at all as to Hanna's attitude towards what she had read and the parallels she may have drawn with her own situation, meaning that the reader has only Michael's word that Hanna reached the conclusions about her crimes that he says she did as a result of her reading.

Hanna's ultimate acquisition of literacy itself also tends more towards indicating that Hanna is a perpetrator responsible for her actions rather than emphasising the type of helpless victimhood put forward by Michael. Her illiteracy is not like *Unmündigkeit* at law, which refers to categories of disadvantage which excuse a person from legal responsibility because they affect a person's ability to understand right and wrong and because this lack of understanding cannot be overcome. By contrast, Hanna's *Unmündigkeit* flowing from her illiteracy could have been overcome, as Hanna herself demonstrates in prison. Rather than indicating an insurmountable incapacity, any *Unmündigkeit* arising from Hanna's illiteracy is *selbstverschuldet*, an interpretation suggested by the intertextual reference to Immanuel Kant, about whom Michael's philosopher father has written a book (DV 61)[105]. By making the decision in prison to learn how to read, Hanna does indeed take an "*aufklärerischen Schritt*" because she chooses to overcome a disability that was self-inflicted. Hanna may be intensely ashamed of her inability to read, and her shame brings her to the point of choosing to become an SS guard[106], but it was not the only choice open to her. In his criticism of *Der*

[105] In his work *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung* of 1784, Kant describes enlightenment as the leaving of a state of *Unmündigkeit* which is *selbstverschuldet*. For a copy of Kant's original article in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*: <http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/show/kant_aufklaerung_1784> (accessed 8 October 2020). See also Reynolds, Daniel 247.

[106] Niven argues that Schlink's main concern is not with Hanna's illiteracy itself, but with her fear of exposure and her shame: Niven, Bill "Problem of Shame" 382–383. See similarly Swales, Martin "Sex, shame and guilt: reflections on Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser (The Reader) and JM Coetzee's Disgrace"

Vorleser, Raphael asks "might she not have gone to night school?" and questions what precluded her from employment alternative to that as an SS guard, such as "baby-minding"[107]. But that is precisely the point. Even Michael notes that Hanna could have chosen to apply her considerable energies to free herself of her disadvantage: *"Mit der Energie, mit der sie ihre Lebenslüge aufrechterhielt, hätte sie längst lesen und schreiben lernen können"* (DV 132). Hanna is not a victim, but an agent with choices who cares more about seizing any immediately available way of avoiding the exposure of her shame than she does about the lives of others.

Further, the idea that Hanna's suicide should be read as the atonement of an enlightened woman following her acceptance of her guilt is challenged by the alternative interpretation of the prison governor supported by the chronology of the text. The prison governor's various communications with Michael about Hanna's impending release testify to her concern that Hanna may not be able to cope with the world outside the prison walls (DV 182; 190). She interprets Hanna's suicide as being motivated by her fear of returning to that outside world: *"Bringt man sich lieber um, als aus dem Kloster, aus der Einsiedelei wieder in die Welt zurückzukehren?"* (DV 197). She also suspects that Hanna's suicide may have something to do with her relationship with Michael: *"Und Sie sagen nicht, was zwischen Ihnen beiden gewesen ist und vielleicht dazu geführt hat, daß Frau Schmitz sich in der Nacht vor dem Tag umbringt, an dem Sie sie abholen wollten"* (DV 197). The chronology of Hanna's imprisonment lends support to this interpretation[108]. Hanna had been immersing herself in literature concerning the Holocaust for some time

Journal of European Studies 33 (2003): 7–22 at 11–13; Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond: Normalization and the Berlin Republic* Rochester: Camden House, 2006 at 147.

107 Raphael, Frederic "Letter" *Times Literary Supplement* 8 March 2002; Raphael, Frederic "Letter" *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 February 2008.

108 Those who point to these alternative reasons for Hanna's suicide, such as her fear of the outside world and her rejection by Michael, include: Niven, Bill "Problem of Shame" 395 (also Niven, Bill "Representations of the Nazi past I" 136; 139); Weisberg, Richard H "A sympathy that does not condone: Notes in summation on Schlink's The Reader" *Law and Literature* 16.2 (2004): 229–234 at 234; Brockmann, Stephen "Virgin Father and Prodigal Son" 347–348 (although Brockmann also thinks that Hanna's awareness of the horrific nature of her crime may also contribute (at 348)); Paver, Chloe 39. Lackey provides a related but slightly different alternative: Hanna commits suicide because during Michael's visit, she sees that he has become like she was before she learnt to read: Lackey, Michael "The Art of Reading-To and the Post-Holocaust Suicide in Schlink's The Reader" *Philosophy and Literature* 42.1 (2018): 145–164.

prior to her suicide. If her literacy and enlightenment had lead her to the conclusion that she was guilty and that the only appropriate punishment was death, why did she not kill herself sooner? The fact that her death takes place immediately before her scheduled release and after her disappointing reacquaintance with Michael lends weight to the prison governor's interpretation and indicates that Michael's *Deutung* which insists on Hanna's atonement may be motivated by his desire to conceal his own responsibility. In the end, even Michael does not quite believe his own interpretation and sometimes asks himself whether he is responsible for Hanna's death, as the prison governor suggests (DV 205).

This alternative interpretation of Hanna's suicide points to the fact that there is no firm indication in the novel that Hanna's achievement of literacy and her reading of books relating to the Holocaust lead to any "enlightenment" on her part or acceptance of her own guilt. As with the other instances in which Michael attempts to portray Hanna as a victim in the text, the "victimhood" associated with Hanna's illiteracy is an image which does not stand up to closer scrutiny. Again, Schlink's use of alternative voices encourages the reader to question whether gaps in the narrative should be filled in the way Michael suggests, and consistently undermines Michael's view to push the reader to conclude that, to the extent his narrative portrays Hanna as a victim, such a portrayal should be viewed with scepticism.

If Hanna's illiteracy does not exonerate her or make her a victim, what is its purpose? Why has Schlink chosen an unusual illiterate as his protagonist rather than someone more typical of the "ordinary Germans" from all walks of life who took part in the crimes of the Nazi regime? One reason could be to augment the novel's thematisation of critiques of the justice system by suggesting that system's inadequacy when it comes to taking individual characteristics of the accused into account in passing judgment. This can be seen in an analogy with the common law legal maxim which states that "hard cases make bad law"[109]. According to this maxim, cases that have peculiar features or unusual extenuating circumstances make bad law because the findings made in such cases are unable to be generalised and applied to the vast majority of cases in which such quirks do not arise. However, the flipside of the maxim is that hard cases, whilst making bad law, are good for jurisprudence. They raise tough questions about the limits of law, ethics and moral responsibility which the ordinary case does not because it

[109] See for example *Winterbottom v Wright* (1842) 10 M&W 109; *Northern Securities Co v United States* (1904) 193 US 197. See also Dreike, Beate 126; MacKinnon, John E "Law and Tenderness in Bernhard Schlink's The Reader" *Law and Literature* 16.2 (2004): 179–201 at 195; MacKinnon, John E "Crime, Passion and The Reader" *Philosophy and Literature* 27.1 (2003): 1–20 at 15.

is so clear-cut. Hanna's illiteracy makes her a "hard case", and it is precisely the extremity of her case which helps to raise difficult questions, such as whether there are any circumstances in which perpetrators of the type of crimes of which Hanna is accused may be exonerated[110]. The openness of the text gives the reader room for contemplation of this issue, however, the undermining of Michael's prompts towards regarding Hanna's illiteracy as an exculpating factor indicate that the novel does point the reader in the direction of regarding illiteracy as something which helps to explain but does not excuse Hanna's conduct.

2.3 After all, we were responsible for that: Hanna as a perpetrator

As discussed above, the portrayal of Hanna as a victim emanates almost entirely from Michael's account. However, to the extent that Hanna is allowed a voice in the text at all, she does not seek to depict herself in terms of victimhood. Nor does she view herself as a guilty party. During the course of her trial, she repeatedly fails to understand or acknowledge that what she did as an SS guard was wrong. When being interrogated about her participation in selections at the concentration camp, Hanna is asked whether she knew that she was sending prisoners to their deaths, to which she replies: *"Doch, aber die neuen kamen, und die alten mußten Platz machen für die neuen"* (DV 106). Similarly, when the presiding judge invites Hanna to explain her failure to open the church doors by pointing to a possible fear of being overcome by the prisoners, or of being arrested or shot if she let them go, Hanna says:

> . . . wie hätten wir da noch Ordnung reinbringen sollen? Das hätte ein Durcheinander gegeben, mit dem wir nicht fertiggeworden wären . . . Wir hätten sie doch nicht einfach fliehen lassen können! Wir waren doch dafür verantwortlich . . . Ich meine, wir hatten sie doch die ganze Zeit bewacht, im Lager und im Zug, das war doch der Sinn, daß wir sie bewachen und daß sie nicht fliehen. (DV 122)

Here, the portrayal of Hanna strongly recalls the testimony of SS guards at the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. She simply does not see the need for the type of excuses suggested to her by the judge because, in her view, she was just doing her job. Her uncertainty during the trial, as shown by her often hesitant

[110] Schlink has discussed this type of dilemma in several essays: Schlink, Bernhard *Vergewisserungen* 105–107; Schlink, Bernhard *Vergangenheitsschuld* 181–182. However, he does not think that personal factors, such as Hanna's illiteracy, amount to an excuse: Wachtel, Eleanor; Tonkin, Boyd.

speech (DV 107–108), arises not because she does not understand the factual circumstances underpinning the allegations against her, or because she did not know that her actions would result in the deaths of others, but because she does not appreciate that what she did was morally wrong. From Hanna's perspective, her prisoners were little more than logistical problems to be dealt with as efficiently as possible because that was the job which had been assigned to her.

These parallels between Hanna and the SS guards of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial are further emphasised in the episode in which Michael visits the nearby Struthof concentration camp and gets into a conversation with the driver with whom he has hitched a ride about the perpetrators on trial in Frankfurt (DV 145–147). The driver compares these perpetrators to the hangman:

> Der Henker befolgt keine Befehle. Er tut seine Arbeit, haßt die nicht, die er hinrichtet, rächt sich nicht an ihnen, bringt sie nicht um, weil sie ihm im Weg stehen oder ihn bedrohen oder ihn angreifen. Sie sind ihm völlig gleichgültig. (DV 146)

By viewing her prisoners as nothing more than problems to be dealt with in the course of her work, and by apparently lacking any sense of guilt about what she has done, Hanna's attitude is analogous to the detached, bureaucratic perspective of perpetrators such as Eichmann[111] and Auschwitz commandant, Höss[112], both of whom seemed to have difficulty understanding how actions they carried out during the course of their employment could render them guilty of monstrous crimes[113]. Both Hanna's own testimony and the comments of Michael's driver on the way to Struthof find an echo in

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111 This image of Eichmann is drawn from Arendt's account of his trial in Jerusalem in 1961. See also Parry, Ann "The caesura of the Holocaust in Martin Amis' Time's Arrow and Bernhard Schlink's The Reader" *Journal of European Studies* 29 (1999): 249–267 at 263.

112 In his autobiography written in prison in 1947, Höss describes his work at Auschwitz with the same dominant concern for logistics displayed by Hanna in her account at trial: Höss, Rudolf *Commandant of Auschwitz* London: Phoenix Press, 2000. Schlink has also noted this characteristic of Höss' self-depiction (significantly in the context of an interview about *Der Vorleser*): "it reads like the mundane notes of any administrator running a large-scale factory. He managed to completely block out the moral or human dimension of what he was doing. And it is the absence of any understanding of the monstrosity of the act that is so horrifying": Wachtel, Eleanor.

113 Schlink is of the view that Hanna, like Eichmann and Höss, never really understands what she has done: Kilb, Andreas. See also Dreike, Beate 119.

Welzer's study of the motivations of Third Reich perpetrators. According to Welzer, those involved in Holocaust crimes were able to carry out their horrific "tasks" because they could assign them to a particular frame of reference (such as "work" or "war") which allowed them to view what they were doing as something that was independent of them personally. Welzer also concludes that this *Rahmenverschiebung* which allowed ordinary Germans to become mass murderers in the first place also explains the remarkable lack of guilt displayed by many of the perpetrators[114]. Despite the fact that Michael's narrative frequently tries to excuse Hanna's conduct, portrays her in a sympathetic light, and depicts her as a victim, Hanna's own version of her conduct places her in the company of the likes of Eichmann and Höss. It could even be argued that Hanna attempts to transfer her position in the concentration camps into her postwar life in her relationship with Michael. By turning up on her doorstep, Michael provides Hanna with a random opportunity to reinstate the type of abusive power relationship she had with her Jewish prisoners[115]. The text itself leaves no doubt that Hanna committed the crimes of which she is accused at trial, with the exception of writing the report. She herself never denies the charges. Her single discussion with Michael on the subject of what she thinks about the past remains cryptic (DV 187) and he accuses her of trying to wriggle her way out of her guilt (DV 190). She leaves no note explaining her decision to take her own life and to bequeath her savings to the Jewish survivor (DV 195–197). Hanna's silence on these subjects leaves it open to Michael and other characters in the novel, and indeed to the reader, to interpret her final actions.

Michael's attempts to portray Hanna as a sympathetic victim are also undermined by the voice of the Jewish survivor who first appears as a witness at Hanna's trial. She and her mother were inmates at the camp at which Hanna was an SS guard, were taken by Hanna and the other guards on the forced march westwards at the end of the war, and were the only survivors of the church fire. She knew Hanna at the time of the commission of her crimes and is therefore in a good position to provide an account of her actions during the war. She is depicted as a reliable source, with Michael describing her as a dispassionate observer who does not allow herself to be corrupted and who has the ability *"zu registrieren und zu analysieren"* with *"Nüchternheit"* (DV 115). She is characterised by Michael as a person of *"äußerster Sachlichkeit"* (DV 200). Michael's portrayal of the Jewish survivor invites the reader to view her as someone whose testimony can be trusted, unlike the prison governor, whose positive and sympathetic view of

[114] Welzer, Harald *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009 at 13–14; 218.

[115] Niven makes a similar point: Niven, Bill "Problem of Shame" 386.

Hanna is frequently related in a rather hopeful subjunctive. This is significant, because the survivor provides an alternative view of Hanna to that given by Michael at key points in the novel, as for example when, during the course of the trial, testimony concerning Hanna's "selection" of young, weak prisoners to be her "readers" emerges. These prisoners were afforded special privileges while they were reading to Hanna, but would invariably be sent back to Auschwitz for extermination (DV 111–112). Recognising echoes of his previous relationship with Hanna, Michael concludes that Hanna must have had a charitable motivation for making her "selections" of the young and the weak (DV 113). However, his suppositions are countered by the Jewish survivor, who questions whether being chosen as one of Hanna's "readers" really was a better fate (DV 112). This contrast between Michael's view and that of the Jewish survivor occurs once again towards the end of the novel, when Michael visits her in New York to fulfil Hanna's testamentary bequest. During their meeting, Michael puts forward the idea that Hanna's bequest was intended to give her imprisonment a penitential meaning, but the survivor rejects this reading and insists that Hanna was *"brutal"*, not only in her actions in the concentration camp, but also in her abuse of Michael (DV 202). The survivor also rejects any implicit identification by Michael of Hanna as a victim of her illiteracy with the victims of the Holocaust by noting that *"Analphabetismus ist nicht gerade ein jüdisches Problem"* (DV 203)[116].

The Jewish survivor is someone who, as one of Hanna's victims, had personally witnessed her conduct as an SS guard. The contrast between her first-hand knowledge and Michael's belated suppositions is stark, and the depiction of the survivor as a reliable and almost impartial observer of the historical facts provides a strong element of guidance to the reader to prefer her version of events and her portrayal of Hanna. Her voice in the text provides a significant corrective to Michael's obfuscation[117] and casts Hanna as a perpetrator in no uncertain terms. In addition, the presentation of strong alternative perspectives to Michael's attempted portrayal of Hanna as a victim provided by Hanna's own voice and that of the Jewish survivor once again expose Michael's narrative as unreliable and highlight the important

[116] Von Jagow, Bettina "Bernhard Schlink Der Vorleser. Differenzen der Wahrnehmung von Täter- und Opferbewußtsein" in Von Jagow, Bettina and Steger, Florian *Differenzerfahrung und Selbst. Bewußtsein und Wahrnehmung in Literatur und Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003: 245–266 at 259. Schmitz makes similar points: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 75–76.

[117] Similarly Schmitz: Schmitz, Helmut "Malen nach Zahlen? Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser und die Unfähigkeit zu trauern" *German Life and Letters* 55.3 (2002): 296–311 at 309.

role played by the novel's metafictional features, such as an openness to reader response created by lacunae and counter-narratives, in the portrayal of Hanna.

2.4 The fate of my generation: Hanna and *Väterliteratur*

The portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator is also underscored by the revival in the novel of themes and attitudes associated with *Väterliteratur*. Schlink was born in 1944 and belongs to the so-called "second generation" who began questioning the complicity of their parents with Nazism in the 1960s and were the proponents of the wave of *Väterliteratur* published in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, in which the first generation were depicted almost exclusively as perpetrators. Schlink has confirmed that *Der Vorleser* is, in his view, largely concerned with the relationship between the first and second generations: "It's about the generation of Germans who grew up after World War II – what we call the second generation – coping with what our parents' generation did"[118]. Many commentators have identified the novel as a late contribution to the *Väterliteratur* genre, with the usual father/son conflict being transformed by its transposition into the context of a sexual liaison[119]. There has, however, been some disagreement as to whether the novel deviates significantly from the accusatory stance typical of the genre. Some have seen the effect of the love story element of the novel as a change from the usual demonisation of the first generation figure and heralded *Der Vorleser* as a work which turns away from the clear cut condemnation of *Väterliteratur* towards an attitude of moral ambivalence[120], whereas others have seen

[118] Davis, Susan "An Interview with Bernhard Schlink" *Cardozo Life* 1 (2009): 35–39 at 36.

[119] See for example Schmitz, Helmut "Malen nach Zahlen?" 298–299; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 57; Schlant, Ernestine 210; Parkes, Stuart "The Language of the Past: Recent Prose Works by Bernhard Schlink, Marcel Beyer, and Friedrich Christian Delius" in Williams, Arthur, Parkes, Stuart and Preece, Julian *Whose Story? Continuities in contemporary German-language literature* Bern: Peter Lang, 1998: 115–131 at 116; Paver, Chloe 29; McGlothlin, Erin *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* Rochester: Camden House, 2006 at 202–203.

[120] Durzak, Manfred 206; Hall, Katharina "The Author" 460; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 125; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 60; Schmitz, Helmut "The Return of the Past: Post-Unification Representations of National Socialism – Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser and Ulla Berkewicz's Engel sind schwarz und weiss" in Flanagan, Clare and Taberner, Stuart *1949/1989*

the novel as a continuation of the attitudes expressed in traditional *Väterliteratur*[121]. In the following, I will consider whether *Der Vorleser* does represent a deviation from the accusatory stance taken in *Väterliteratur* and the effect the answer to that question may have on the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator or a victim.

Michael's narrative is certainly critical of the actions of his 68er contemporaries and he rejects their wholesale condemnation of their parents and other members of the first generation, criticising their *"Selbstgerechtigkeit"* and suggesting that the students' desire to deal with the Nazi past was less about the exposure of Nazi crimes than an expression of intergenerational conflict (DV 160–163):

> Manchmal denke ich, daß die Auseinandersetzung mit der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit nicht der Grund, sondern nur der Ausdruck des Generationenkonflikts war, der als treibende Kraft der Studentenbewegung zu spüren war. (DV 161)

However, Michael does not translate these criticisms of the attitudes of his peers into a more nuanced approach to the relationship in which he lives out his own intergenerational conflict, namely his relationship with Hanna. Unlike his contemporaries, Michael did not have a perpetrator father whom he could simply dismiss as being a Nazi collaborator, and was therefore denied the chance to work out his intergenerational conflict in the same way as so many of his contemporaries. Michael's father is a philosophy lecturer who lost his university position under the Nazis when he announced that he was giving a lecture on the Jewish philosopher, Spinoza (DV 88), meaning that, rather than being a perpetrator, he could be counted amongst the victims of the Nazi regime. His father's victim status leaves Michael lacking a sense of belonging to his peer group. Although he is sometimes critical of his contemporaries, he also expresses a desire to be a part of their broader movement (DV 89; 163). Unable to satisfy his desire to belong to his peer group by locking horns with his father, Michael finds an outlet for his need for intergenerational conflict in his relationship with Hanna. Hanna is old enough to be Michael's mother, and he identifies his relationship with her as being subject to the same sorts of issues and conflicts his age cohort experienced with their parents. He characterises the suffering and conflict he experiences when the woman he loves turns out to have committed terrible crimes as reflecting

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Cultural Perspectives on Division and Unity in East and West Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000: 259–276 at 260–261; Anton, Christine 56.

121 Parkes, for example, rejects the idea that the novel is about intergenerational reconciliation: Parkes, Stuart "Die Ungnade" 100–101.

"das Schicksal meiner Generation" (DV 163). The imagery used in the first part of the novel in particular codes Hanna as Michael's "mother" figure even as it points to her sexuality, highlighting the oedipal nature of their relationship. When Michael first meets Hanna, she calls him *"Jungchen"* and cares for him when he is sick, but at the same time flusters him with the smell of her sweat and the feel of her breasts against him (DV 6–7). This oedipal imagery continues in Michael's description of his second meeting with Hanna. On this occasion, Hanna ushers Michael into her kitchen, a household space usually associated with the mother, yet the kitchen contains a couch covered by a red velvet throw more evocative of a boudoir. She is engaged in the motherly task of doing the ironing, but Michael becomes embarrassed as he observes her ironing her underwear (DV 13–14). Even Michael's description of his seduction by Hanna has motherly overtones. Prior to having sex with him, Hanna runs Michael a nice warm bath and dries him with a towel (DV 25–26), an experience which recalls memories Michael has of his mother bathing him when he was a small child (DV 28–29). Of course, no matter how hard Michael tries to draw the analogy between his relationship with Hanna and the relationships his peers have with their parents, the sexual nature of his relationship with Hanna clearly sets it apart. However, rather than detracting from the theme of intergenerational friction, the introduction of this oedipal aspect to the novel serves to heighten the conflict, further emphasising the patterns of *Väterliteratur*[122].

In describing his relationship with Hanna, Michael often idealises their love for each other. In the first flush of his love for her, Michael uses a series of intertextual references to Stendahl's *Le rouge et le noir* and Schiller's *Kabale und Liebe* to paint their relationship as a romantic love that crosses age and class boundaries (DV 40; 42–43). He is proud of his newly discovered manhood and sexual confidence (DV 29; 41; 64). However, their relationship quickly degenerates into a *"Machtspiel"* (DV 49) with each party fighting to retain control over the other. In the first part of the novel, it is Hanna who has the upper hand, using sex and affection as means of controlling Michael. She decides how and when they have sex and forces Michael to keep to their bathing and reading ritual, creating a link between reading, sex and power which runs throughout the novel. Hanna's attitude towards

[122] Schmitz has made the same point: Schmitz, Helmut "Malen nach Zahlen?" 298, as has Herrmann: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 125–126. The oedipal nature of the relationship has been frequently remarked upon, see for example: Alison, Jane 164; Lewis, Alison "Das Phantasma des Masochisten und die Liebe zu Hanna: Schuldige Liebe und intergenerationelle Schuld in Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser" *Weimarer Beiträge* 52.4 (2006): 554–573 at 558–559.

his body is *"besitzergreifend"* and he has the feeling that she is simply using him for her own sexual satisfaction (DV 33–34). She uses the withdrawal of sex to get Michael to do what she wants, as when she uses the threat of withdrawal to demand that he work harder at school (DV 37) or that he read to her (DV 43). She also maintains power in the relationship by withholding information and communication from Michael. When Michael asks Hanna for details about her life, she fobs him off with a non-answer (*"Was du alles wissen willst, Jungchen!"* (DV 40)). He does not even know whether Hanna really loves him (DV 37; 67), and they have *"keine gemeinsame Lebenswelt"* outside their ritual of reading aloud, bathing, and sex (DV 75). Obviously, Hanna's desire to conceal information about herself from Michael could be seen as arising from shame about her illiteracy and a wish to hide her SS past in a postwar world. However, her silence also prevents Michael from forming a more intimate relationship with her. As with the withholding of sex, this denial of communication allows Hanna to set the rules for their relationship and prevents Michael from obtaining knowledge which he might use to wrest power away from her.

As their relationship progresses, Michael begins to resent the power Hanna has over him and recognises the extent to which she has him in her thrall:

> Ich hatte nicht nur diesen Streit verloren. Ich hatte nach kurzem Kampf kapituliert, als sie drohte, mich zurückzuweisen, sich mir zu entziehen. In den kommenden Wochen habe ich nicht einmal mehr kurz gekämpft. Wenn sie drohte, habe ich sofort bedingungslos kapituliert. Ich habe alles auf mich genommen. Ich habe Fehler zugegeben, die ich nicht begangen hatte, Absichten eingestanden, die ich nie gehegt hatte . . . so oder so hatte ich keine Wahl. (DV 50)

He begins to refer to their frequent fights and the way in which *"sie mich immer wieder zurückwies und ich mich immer wieder erniedrigte"* (DV 65). At this stage, Hanna retains power in the relationship, but Michael has begun to chafe under her yoke:

> Als auch ich schlecht gelaunt reagierte, wir in Streit gerieten und Hanna mich wie Luft behandelte, kam wieder die Angst, sie zu verlieren, und ich erniedrigte und entschuldigte mich, bis sie mich zu sich nahm. Aber ich war voll Groll. (DV 71)

However, towards the end of part one of the novel, Hanna's control over Michael begins to break down. Michael begins to prefer spending time with his schoolfriends and seeks to shut Hanna out of his life by denying her existence to his peers (DV 70; 72; 78). More importantly, Michael gets a

subconscious glimpse of a way in which he could gain power over Hanna. When Hanna is unable to read the note Michael leaves for her during the course of a cycling tour they take together, her shame, frustration and fear about her illiteracy causes her to lose emotional control (DV 54–55). The loss of control is only momentary, but it results in Michael being able to take possession of her as she has of him (DV 57).

When Michael sees Hanna again at her trial as an adult, he is not at all pleased that she has re-entered his life. He has kept Hanna locked away as a mere memory and is shocked that she has now reappeared in the flesh. He finds himself agreeing with Hanna's imprisonment, not because he thinks it a just punishment for her crimes, but because it ensures that she will be kept *"raus aus meiner Welt, raus aus meinem Leben"* (DV 93), a sentiment which bears an unmistakable resemblance to that of his peers. Michael, too, wants to reject his "parent" figure who is guilty of Nazi crimes. However, when Hanna looks up at him in the courtroom, she controls the situation once again, causing Michael to turn red (DV 112).

Despite Hanna's initial play for control, the tables are turned when Michael realises that Hanna is illiterate[123]. His discovery of her secret and acquisition of the knowledge Hanna has so long denied him transforms Michael from Hanna's victim into a player in the game with the power to act (or fail to act), as he himself realises (DV 131). He knows that if he tells the presiding judge that Hanna is illiterate, it will change the judge's attitude towards her and have a significant effect on the length of her sentence (DV 132). However (and despite advice to the contrary from his father (DV 137–138)), Michael chooses to keep this vital piece of information to himself. Although he appears to consider the problem in a philosophical light[124], it is apparent from his reflections on his actions that the prospect of exacting revenge against Hanna for her abuse and humiliation of him is a prime

[123] See also Brockmann, Stephen "Virgin Father and Prodigal Son" 346. A number of critics have suggested that Hanna's illiteracy creates problems for the intergenerational conflict theme in the novel, in that the presence of the illiteracy excuse takes away Hanna's culpability and therefore the source of the dilemma of loving a perpetrator: Donahue, William Collins "Revising '68" 295; Franklin, Ruth "Immorality Play" *The New Republic* 15 October 2001 at 57; Conway, Jeremiah P 296. However, this issue only arises if one takes the view that Hanna's illiteracy exonerates her.

[124] Knobloch notes the way in which Michael misuses philosophy in order to be free of Hanna: Knobloch, Hans-Jörg "Eine ungewöhnliche Variante in der Täter-Opfer-Literatur. Bernhard Schlinks Roman Der Vorleser" in Fischer, Gerhard and Roberts, David *Schreiben nach der Wende. Ein Jahrzehnt deutscher Literatur. 1989–1999* Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2001: 89–98 at 91.

motivating factor in his failure to reveal what he knows to her and seek to convince her to tell the judge about it: *"Sie hatte mich verlassen, hatte mich getäuscht . . . Und wer war ich für sie gewesen? Der kleine Vorleser, den sie benutzt, der kleine Beischläfer, mit dem sie ihren Spaß gehabt hatte?"* (DV 153). Even his visit to the presiding judge in chambers is, by his own admission, motivated by a desire to control Hanna:

> Aber es ging mir nicht wirklich um Gerechtigkeit. Ich konnte Hanna nicht lassen, wie sie war oder sein wollte. Ich mußte an ihr rummachen, irgendeine Art von Einfluß und Wirkung auf sie haben, wenn nicht direkt, dann indirekt. (DV 153)

In his interactions with the judge, Michael is able to go much further in his rejection of his "parent" than most of his contemporaries. Whereas they have to settle for simply rejecting their parents, Michael is able to have Hanna literally removed from his life by ensuring (via his silence as to her illiteracy) that she is locked away for as long as possible.

Having obtained power over Hanna by uncovering her illiteracy, Michael continues to try and exercise power over her during her imprisonment. He does this by using the same denial of affection and communication that Hanna used to control him during the first stage of their relationship. When he sends Hanna tapes of him reading aloud, he tantalises her with the prospect of a renewal of their bond, but at the same time denies her any real communication by refusing to ask after her or tell her anything about his life in the outside world (DV 176). When Hanna starts writing to him, he does not write back (DV 179), something which the prison governor indicates caused Hanna pain (DV 195). Michael is quite satisfied with this situation in which he is able to have as much contact as he wants with Hanna without her having access to him (DV 181). He enjoys confining her to a *"Nische"* and denying her a place in his life (DV 187). He would like the situation to continue indefinitely, even though he recognises that this is *"bequem und egoistisch"* (DV 181). In many ways, the relationship between Hanna and Michael in part three of the novel is a precise reversal of the dynamic that existed between them in part one, when Hanna was able to determine the circumstances in which Michael could have contact with her and deny him access to other areas of her life. In view of his happiness at having Hanna exactly where he wants her, Michael is not at all pleased when he is informed of her impending release, and puts off visiting her for as long as possible (DV 182–183). When he does finally see her in prison, he does not hide his rejection of her (DV 185), and her recognition that the time of reading aloud is over shows her acceptance of the fact that their relationship cannot go back to the way it was (DV 186). The final act in the power play that has

characterised their relationship is Hanna's suicide, which can be read as her final attempt to regain the upper hand[125]. By removing herself from the world entirely, she forever denies Michael the ability to control her. By leaving him no note (apart from the instructions to deliver her money to the survivor of the fire), she continues the pattern of withholding communication typical of all of their interactions with each other, and Michael interprets her refusal to write him one last note as an attempt to hurt or punish him (DV 196). In writing their story, Michael makes one last attempt to seize control from Hanna and finally rid himself of her, only to find that he is unable to do so: *"Vielleicht habe ich unsere Geschichte doch geschrieben, weil ich sie loswerden will, auch wenn ich es nicht kann"* (DV 206).

All of these elements show that, despite transposing the intergenerational conflict into a sexual relationship, *Der Vorleser* exhibits characteristics similar to *Väterliteratur*. The accusatory, condemnatory attitude typical of *Väterliteratur*, the themes of silence between the generations, the victimisation of the second generation by the first, and involvement in the Holocaust are all present in the novel and are utilised to justify the rejection of the parent by the child. Rather than fostering an atmosphere of love and reconciliation between the generations, Michael's narrative is marked by frequent outbursts of anger against Hanna, and by a strong desire to keep Hanna out of his life as much as possible. The only significant difference between *Der Vorleser* and the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s is not a conciliatory attitude, as some critics suggest, but rather Michael's ultimate failure to detach himself from Hanna. Whereas *Väterliteratur* was characterised by breach[126], Michael's narrative indicates that he has been unable to completely reject Hanna (much as he would like to do so). This position may reflect a recognition in post-unification Germany that walking away from the Nazi past is simply not possible and that engagement with that past will continue indefinitely. The novel certainly does not indicate a change in the condemnatory attitude towards the perpetrators. On the contrary, Schlink's continuation of patterns employed in *Väterliteratur* indicates the continuing characterisation of the first generation as perpetrators already established by the novel's portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator through her own voice and that of the Jewish survivor, and by the text's consistent undermining of Michael's attempts to portray Hanna as a victim. In this way, *Der Vorleser* reflects the image of ordinary Germans as perpetrators dominant in German public discourse at the time of the novel's publication.

[125] See also Mahlendorf, Ursula R 466–470.

[126] Assmann, Aleida *Geschichte im Gedächtnis* 73.

2.5 Beside the version I have written there are many others: *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction

If the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator in *Der Vorleser* is as dominant as I have just suggested, why has the novel engendered so much controversy and so many claims that it promotes an image of Hanna as a victim? What can account for the variety and polarity apparent in the interpretation of *Der Vorleser*? Why are there so many different "readings" of "The Reader"? I have already argued that the novel's reflection of critiques relating to the "justice" of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* may act to unsettle the characterisation of Hanna as a perpetrator by querying whether a just condemnation, and therefore a definitive consignment of a person to the category of "perpetrator", is possible. However, it will be my contention in the following that the main source of destabilisation of the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator arises from the nature of the novel as historiographic metafiction. The openness of the text of *Der Vorleser* caused by elements such as gaps, multiple viewpoints and Michael's unreliable narration already referred to in the foregoing analysis of the portrayal of Hanna are all elements which point to the metafictional nature of the novel. This openness in the text suggests that the novel has been structured or prefigured with lacunae designed to open up the narrative and prompt reader intervention and reflection. This degree of openness has given rise to indeterminacy and uncertainty, as is demonstrated by the widely varying reader response to the novel. These elements suggest, not only that *Der Vorleser* is a work of metafiction, but that it is a work of historiographic metafiction. I have already described historiographic metafiction as a potential disrupter of presentations of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in German novels about the Nazi past. Does *Der Vorleser's* function as historiographic metafiction help explain the controversy that has surrounded it? Does it explain the polarity of interpretations of this most famous of post-1990 German novels? What is its effect on the novel's portrayal of Hanna Schmitz?

Nünning has described historiographic metafiction as combining a high degree of metafictional self-reflexivity and other metafictional elements with an explicit consideration of historiographical questions. Novels fitting into this genre often have a significant level of explicit references to the narrative medium and thematise historiographical problems, including those associated with the narrative representation of the past. They consider questions of the reconstruction and interpretation of history, either explicitly or by way of implication through the structure of the novel[127]. Matters of

[127] Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* 282–291.

historiographical criticism, including the problems inherent in constructing history in narrative form, are explicitly thematised in *Der Vorleser*, particularly by means of Michael's profession as a legal historian (DV 171). Reflecting on his work, Michael rejects the idea that the historian can make observations on past events without being influenced by the concerns of the present:

> Es ist auch nicht so, wie der Außenstehende vielleicht annehmen möchte, daß man die vergangene Lebensfülle nur beobachtet, während man an der gegenwärtigen teilnimmt. Geschichte treiben heißt Brücken zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart schlagen und beide Ufer beobachten und an beiden tätig werden. (DV 172)[128]

Michael notes that this is particularly true when dealing with the history of the Third Reich: *"hier ist besonders augenfällig, wie Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in eine Lebenswirklichkeit zusammenschießen"* (DV 172).

These reflections express scepticism towards the possibility of rendering an objective view of the past untainted by the present perspectives of the historian creating the historical narrative. This scepticism about the ability to reconstruct the past, particularly the Nazi past, independently of the present perspective of the historian is also emphasised by several instances in which Michael reflects on the way in which mediated images of the past can cause those attempting to imagine the past from a present perspective to fill in gaps in their historical knowledge with ideas and images familiar from a variety of media. In Michael's view, this problem is exacerbated in the case of reconstructing the history of the Holocaust. Images and narratives relating to the Holocaust have been repeated in German and international media so frequently that they have become a steady part of Germany's (and the world's) cultural memory and run the risk of degenerating into *"Klischees"* (DV 143). These mediated images are so pervasive that they influence the representation of historical people, places, events, and even eyewitness memory. Michael points out that, when considering the Holocaust from a present perspective, incorporating these well known cultural images is almost unavoidable, and they are frequently used as a basis for an imaginative filling of gaps which the narrator is not otherwise able to close: *"Heute sind so viele Bücher vorhanden, daß die Welt der Lager ein Teil der gemeinsamen vorgestellten Welt ist, die die gemeinsame wirkliche vervollständigt"* (DV

[128] Schlink has made a similar point on the unavoidability of a present perspective on the past in historical fiction in Schlink, Bernhard *Gedanken über das Schreiben* Zurich: Diogenes, 2011 at 7: *"Die Gestalten historischer Romane sind heutige Gestalten in gestrigem Gewand"*.

142)[129]. Michael's reflections here are reminiscent of Hirsch's ideas about the role of imagination in the creation of postmemory from fragments of the past[130]. However, Michael elsewhere expresses doubts about our ability to recreate the past, even with the assistance of media-inspired imagination. When visiting the Struthof concentration camp for the second time at around the time of the narrative present, Michael reflects on his previous visit to the camp several decades earlier at around the time of Hanna's trial. During that earlier visit, he had tried to gain an understanding of the past by imagining what life in the camp must have been like during the Nazi period. However, his imaginative endeavours failed (DV 148–150). Although this failure is partly due to what Michael identifies as a lack of images of the camps in circulation at that particular period in German postwar history (DV 142), when combined with his reflections on the role of media in historical narratives, it leaves the impression that either the past cannot be reached at all, or that it is composed of a pastiche of contemporary tropes.

As well as explicitly thematising historiographical problems by means of Michael the historian's reflections on the construction of history, the novel also contains a variety of metafictional elements, both explicit in the text and implied in the text's structure, which thematise the problems of the narrative reconstruction of the past. The novel is Michael's personal "history" of his relationship with Hanna, and towards the end of the book he comments explicitly and self-reflexively on the process of writing that history:

> Seitdem hat sich unsere Geschichte in meinem Kopf viele Male geschrieben, immer wieder ein bißchen anders, immer wieder mit neuen Bildern, Handlungs- und Gedankenfetzen. So gibt es neben der Version, die ich geschrieben habe, viele andere. Die Gewähr dafür, daß die geschriebene die richtige ist, liegt darin, daß ich sie geschrieben und die anderen Versionen nicht geschrieben habe. Die geschriebene Version wollte geschrieben werden, die vielen anderen wollten es nicht. (DV 205–206)

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129 Schlink has elsewhere expressed similar ideas about the role of iconic Holocaust images and imagination in recreating the past: *"Wenn Sie ein KZ besuchen, erfahren Sie, dass dort eigentlich nichts zu sehen ist – außer Baracken, Bäumen, Zäunen. Und doch ist man hinterher völlig erschöpft. Warum? Weil der eigene Kopf hinzuphantasiert hat, was er aus Büchern, Filmen und natürlich auch aus der Wissenschaft kennt"* (Hage, Volker "Ich lebe in Geschichten"); "[on visiting Auschwitz] You don't see much that looks like the pictures from 1945. It's only by using what you see as a trigger for remembering that makes it an experience – what you have heard, what you have read, what you have seen in the photographs and films" (Wachtel, Eleanor).

130 On this point, see also Anton, Christine 54.

Here, in the quote that forms the interpretive core of the novel, Michael very much reflects ideas about the problems inherent in the construction of history as a narrative. His narrative about the past is one that has been constructed by him, the historian, from different *"Bildern, Handlungs- und Gedankenfetzen"*. The version of the past he has chosen to write down is one that has been selected by him via the inclusion of some events and the exclusion of others, but, as he himself acknowledges, it is not the only version of the past that could have been written. Moreover, his decisions in selecting some facts and omitting others have been motivated by the personal and present concern of dealing with and hopefully obtaining closure on his relationship with Hanna (DV 206). His reflections on this make his bias in constructing his narrative apparent. The idea that Michael's narrative of his past with Hanna is the "right" version because it is the one that has been written down provides a strong parallel to White's theories, in that it recognises that events in the past only become "historical facts" or "history" by means of their narrativisation by historians (involving all of the elements of selection and bias to which Michael alludes). The fact that Michael's historical narrative remains a *Roman* supplies a further allusion to White's conception of history and fiction as verbal artifacts indistinguishable from each other[131].

As well as referring self-reflexively to the process of its own genesis in the form of writing, *Der Vorleser* also makes metafictional reference to the process of reading[132]. The theme of reading running through the novel explicitly underscores the novel's historiographical critiques, which are also further implied by the way in which this theme works itself out in the novel's structure. Michael is not only Hanna's *Vorleser*, he is the reader's *Vorleser* too, and the conjunction of Michael's role as both historian and reader further highlights the narrativity of his historical account. Reading in the novel is often viewed as an activity that is not positive, or even neutral, as when both Michael and Hanna use reading and literacy to block communication and the uncovering of the truth, and as a tool in their power play. The implication of the way in which reading is used here is that narratives can not only enlighten, but can also be used to block access to the truth. The same text can also be read in different ways, as the judge points out at Hanna's trial when

131 White, Hayden *Tropics of Discourse* 83–84; 122.

132 See also Metz, Joseph "Truth is a Woman: Post-Holocaust Narrative, Postmodernism and the Gender of Fascism in Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser" *German Quarterly* 77.3 (2004): 300–323 at 313; Reynolds, Daniel 239; Blasberg, Cornelia "Geschichte als Palimpsest: Schreiben und Lesen über die Kinder der Täter" *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 76.3 (2002): 464–495 at 493–494.

he comments: *"Der Bericht lese sich anders"* (DV 119), indicating that it is possible for different interpretations to arise from the same raw materials.

The theme of reading is, of course, highly self-reflexive, making the reader aware of his or her own activity in reading the book. By drawing attention to the activity of reading and making the reader aware of the different purposes for which reading may be used, the novel creates a *Verfremdungseffekt* which causes the reader to gain distance from the narrative and question both Michael's purpose in "reading" the text to the reader and the reader's own role in interpreting the text in the act of reading. This is significant in the context of the way in which the structure of the novel also thematises historiographical critiques by implication. By creating a narrative history of his relationship with Hanna which is riddled with gaps, blanks, and uncertainties, Michael gives his readers the capacity to participate in the creation of the text by filling the gaps with their own imaginative responses. The openness of the text forces the reader into the role of the historian as outlined by Michael. Confronted with both irreconcilable, conflicting accounts of past events and lacunae in the evidence, the reader is forced to fill in the gaps, thereby stitching together his or her own narrative about the past from the elements presented in the novel and the reader's present-day influences and concerns. The way in which the structure of the novel casts the reader in the role of the historian forces the reader to become aware of the many pitfalls associated with the historiographic endeavour.

The likelihood that the "historiography" in which the reader is engaged may produce a mistaken or incomplete history is shown by analogy with two incidents in the novel in which a situation is "read" incorrectly because the "reader" was not provided with all of the relevant evidence. The first occurs when Michael reads Hanna's sudden departure from his home town and from his teenage life as being due to his failure to acknowledge her at the swimming pool, a false reading arising from the fact that, at this stage, Michael does not yet have any knowledge of Hanna's illiteracy as a motivating factor. Similarly, the court in Hanna's trial reaches the wrong conclusion about her writing of the damning report because it, too, is unaware of her illiteracy. The centrality of Hanna's illiteracy in both of these cases of misreading points to its use as a symbol of the inability to read a situation accurately when key elements of evidence are missing. These incidents heighten the reader's awareness of the danger of producing a false narrative as a result of the absence of vital pieces of evidence, something which plagues history writing due to the lapse in time between the relevant events and the creation of the historical narrative.

The idea that the historian does not necessarily provide an accurate account of historical events and that the "objective truth" about the past cannot be ascertained is emphasised by Michael's status as an unreliable narrator.

Unreliable narration in the novel is a further indication of its metafictional character, in that it promotes a questioning of the narrative itself. At the same time, it also provides an additional illustration of the problems inherent in historiography, in that the narrator of past events may be unreliable for a whole host of reasons, such as selection, bias, and use of unreliable source material. As a second generation narrator, Michael's narration of events which occurred prior to his birth or in his infancy and at which he was not present, such as the crimes of which Hanna is accused, is automatically suspect and involves mediation, supposition, and often imagination. Michael also reflects explicitly on his difficulties in constructing a reliable version of past events, even those forming part of his own eyewitness memory, and particularly highlights the problems for writing about the past posed by the vagaries of the memory process. Writing many years after the events in question, Michael acknowledges the gaps and distortions of memory resulting from the distance in time between the events related and the narrative present. Throughout the text, Michael refers to the difficulty he has in remembering past events with accuracy, or in some cases, remembering what happened at all. This can be seen in the repetition of phrases such as *"ich weiß nicht mehr"* (DV 8; 58; 72; 86; 101; 189) and *"ich erinnere mich nicht"* (DV 13; 58; 78; 125). Michael also suspects that he is prone to invent details, as shown when he notes: *"Das wußte ich damals nicht – wenn ich es denn jetzt weiß und mir nicht nur zusammenreime"* (DV 18). He also recognises that he is capable of "imagining" a version of Hanna that suits him best (DV 153) and is aware of the selectivity of his own memory process: *"Ich frage mich auch, ob die glückliche Erinnerung überhaupt stimmt"* (DV 84).

In addition, Michael shows an awareness that his memories are subject to alteration occasioned by subsequent events. He notes, for example, that his memories of the early stages of his relationship with Hanna were significantly affected by his subsequent knowledge about her past: *"Warum wird uns, was schön war, im Rückblick dadurch brüchig, daß es häßliche Wahrheiten verbarg?"* (DV 38). Further on, Michael points to the way in which his own positive memories of Hanna from the first part of their relationship have been altered, not only by the subsequent events of the trial, but also by his mind's application of Nazi cliches drawn from media and cultural memory to his own pre-existing memories of Hanna (DV 141–142). When considering how to describe the way Hanna looked at the beginning of their relationship, he reflects on this interference of subsequent images of Hanna with his ability to access his memories of her face at an earlier point in time. Past memories are overlaid with more recent ones, such that the original memories are distorted or can no longer be recovered. Instead, such "memories" must be reconstructed (DV 14). These reflections on the problems of using memory as a source material directly call into question the ability of

historical writing based on such sources to provide an accurate view of the past. They highlight the problem of representing the past with any degree of certainty, even when relying on the testimony of an eyewitness, the authenticity of whose recollections often goes unquestioned.

The unreliability of Michael's narrative is also emphasised by the other, conflicting portrayals of Hanna which compete with Michael's depiction for the reader's attention. Just as Michael explicitly refers at the end of the novel to the "other versions" of his relationship with Hanna that he could have written, so too there are present throughout the novel "other versions" of Hanna, most notably those of the Jewish survivor and the prison governor which have already been discussed. In many ways, these accounts are polar opposites, and both accounts mirror different aspects of Michael's own conflicting feelings about Hanna. They also raise a number of issues in the context of the novel's thematisation of historiographical problems. Firstly, they openly question the reliability of Michael's narrative and his ability to present a complete or authentic picture of Hanna and her motivations. If two women who both knew Hanna personally provide such different characterisations, what chance does Michael's portrayal have of being accurate? Their conflicting perspectives point to the impossibility of ever obtaining a clear view of Hanna and her past. Secondly, the way in which the two portrayals mirror aspects of Michael's own account underscores his tendency to vacillate between different conceptions of Hanna and to refuse to make a definitive statement, pointing again to his unreliability. Thirdly, by facing the reader with various conflicting accounts of Hanna, the novel highlights for the reader the position of the historian weighing up irreconcilable versions of past events. Along with Michael, the reader is put in the position of trying to synthesise these conflicting accounts into a cohesive narrative, which will often involve privileging one version over another or selecting some elements and omitting others.

The overwhelming impression left by these historiographical critiques is that a "true" or "objective" view of the past is impossible. Any attempt to provide an account of the past (or a "history") will be confronted by inconsistent testimony and evidentiary gaps, and all such accounts will therefore be, to a certain extent, synthesised or created by the history writer. In writing such histories, the historian is swayed by his or her own personal prejudices, chooses some elements over others, and applies imagination to fill in gaps so as to produce a cohesive narrative that says what the historian wants it to say. Even eyewitness accounts are subject to inaccuracy due to the failures and vagaries of the memory process. Under these circumstances, the truth about the past must be considered irretrievable. This notion of the past as inaccessible is symbolised right at the beginning of the novel by the image of Hanna's house. Hanna's house no longer exists at the time of the narrative

present, having been demolished some years earlier and replaced with a new building (DV 8). It is therefore no longer physically accessible and no longer able to be seen. Michael often dreams of the house, and in his dreams he tries to open the door, but is always prevented from doing so by his awakening (DV 10–11). The fact that waking up impedes his access to the house indicates that it is his present consciousness and perspective that prevents him from ever re-entering the past. Access to the past therefore remains impossible, rendering our accounts of it little more than a dream.

2.6 How to read "The Reader": historiographic metafiction as a cause of controversy

Der Vorleser is a novel which combines explicit consideration of historiographical questions with a high degree of metafictional self-reflexivity and implicit structures which serve to underscore this theme, and as such can be classified as a work of historiographic metafiction. It is my contention that the operation of *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction has been a major cause of the controversy apparent in the novel's reception. This effect arises in a number of ways. Firstly, the openness of the text's structure, which brings out some aspects of the historiographical critique, lends itself to multiple interpretations. The many metafictional elements of the text have spawned almost as many "readings" of *Der Vorleser* as there are readers of it. However, the effect of the novel's function as historiographic metafiction goes deeper than this. By questioning our ability to ascertain and depict the truth about the events of the past and the motivations of the actors in it, the historiographical critique in the book has the effect of destabilising its otherwise strong depiction of Hanna as a perpetrator.

The way in which the thematisation of historiographical criticism undercuts the novel's overall portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator can be seen in the potential effect it has on the testimony of the Jewish survivor. As previously noted, the Jewish survivor is depicted as someone who ought to know the truth about Hanna. She is portrayed as a dispassionate witness and a reliable source, particularly in comparison to Michael, and she functions in the novel as a corrective to his views. By means of the Jewish survivor figure, the text guides the reader in the direction of viewing Hanna as a perpetrator. However, the impression of the unreliability of historical evidence, memory, and historical narratives brought forth by the novel's reflection of criticisms of historiography has the effect of destabilising the Jewish survivor's narrative as well as Michael's, thereby undercutting the otherwise strong indication that Hanna is to be viewed as a perpetrator.

If we cannot know the "truth" about the past or ever hope to truly understand a person's past motivations as the historiographical criticism thematised in *Der Vorleser* suggests, how can we possibly be certain that our designation of Hanna as a perpetrator in line with the text's prefigurement is correct? How can we judge whether someone is a victim or a perpetrator when our knowledge of the past is so contingent and uncertain? The function of the novel as historiographic metafiction stands in a relationship of insoluble tension with its characterisation of Hanna as a perpetrator, which explains why there has been so much confusion amongst readers of the novel as to the way in which Hanna is portrayed. In this way, the elements of historiographic metafiction in the text echo the novel's critique of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by highlighting the impossibility of knowing everything relevant to an attribution of guilt and thus running the same risk of provocation by questioning accepted modes of portraying Holocaust perpetrators.

It is this aspect of *Der Vorleser* which stands at the heart of the controversy surrounding the representation of the Holocaust, particularly a Holocaust perpetrator, in the novel. Much of the discourse on the representation of the Holocaust, including its ability to be represented in fiction, concentrates on the need for truth, authenticity, and definitive attributions of guilt and innocence in any portrayal touching on this terrible event[133]. Against this background, the problems of representing the Holocaust in historiographic metafiction are obvious. In other historical contexts, questioning the ability of narratives about the past to represent the truth of historical events is unlikely to be controversial, however, the very horror of the Holocaust seems to require an ethics of representation over and above what is usually

[133] A number of critics have considered the requirements of Holocaust representation in the context of discussing *Der Vorleser*, including: Parry, Anne 252–253; Reynolds, Daniel 238–240; 254–255 (Reynolds also considers the implications of the novel's metafictional aspects for its Holocaust representation); Wolff, Lynn 86; Worthington, Kim L 220–221; Gray, Richard T 274–285; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 130–133; Blasberg, Cornelia "Zeugenschaft: Metamorphosen eines Diskurses und literarischen Dispositivs" in Beßlich, Barbara, Grätz, Katharina and Hildebrand, Olaf *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006: 21–33 at 24–27; Metz, Joseph 313–316; McGlothlin, Erin "Theorizing the Perpetrator" 210–213; Lüderssen, Klaus "Die Wahrheit des Vorlesers" in Braese, Stephan *Rechenschaften: Juristischer und literarischer Diskurs in der Auseinandersetzung mit den NS-Massenverbrechen* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004: 165–176 at 175–176; Bartov, Omer "Germany as Victim" *New German Critique* 80 (2000): 29–40 at 37. Schlink also considers the demands of writing Holocaust fiction in Schlink Bernhard *Gedanken über das Schreiben* 7–35.

demanded of historiographic metafiction[134]. Metafictional representations of history often involve a textual openness which becomes problematic in relation to the Holocaust, because is gives rise to a risk that the reader will insert whatever Holocaust narrative he or she wishes, thereby compromising the demands of truth and authenticity in Holocaust representation[135]. Historiographic metafiction is even more contentious due to its questioning of our ability to ascertain the truth about historical events. If historical narratives are fiction as White at his most polemic suggests, does this mean that histories of the Holocaust are fiction too? Does it mean that attributions of guilt and the assignment of people like Hanna to the category of perpetrator become impossible? The thematisation of our inability to pin down the historical truth in historiographic metafiction points to the problems of writing in the postmodern period about the event which demands truth, namely the Holocaust. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that many have been unsettled by the effect of historiographic metafiction on the portrayal of a Holocaust perpetrator, and that the reception of *Der Vorleser* has been so controversial.

Der Vorleser portrays Hanna as a perpetrator and in doing so both reflects the image of ordinary Germans as perpetrators dominant in German public discourse at the time of the novel's publication in 1995 and continues patterns previously established in *Väterliteratur*. However, despite this reflection of the dominant public memory paradigm, the portrayal of Hanna in *Der Vorleser* has given rise to considerable controversy. In this chapter, I have argued that this intense debate has arisen as a result of the openness of the text, its incorporation of critiques of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, and most of all as a result of the nature of the novel as historiographic metafiction, which destabilises its portrayal of Hanna. In the next chapter, I will explore some of these ideas further by taking a detailed look at the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in another novel of the 1990–2010 period, Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder*. Like *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* was written by a second generation author, but unlike *Der Vorleser*, it was published at a time when the focus of public discussion about the Nazi past in Germany had shifted towards a portrayal of Germans as victims. Does Hahn's portrayal of her own "ordinary German" character reflect this shift from perpetrator to victim? Has Hahn, unlike Schlink, been able to break away from the patterns of *Väterliteratur*, from her generation's established mode of working through its relationship to the first generation and to

[134] On the problems of historiographical critique, fiction and the Holocaust, see Ozick, Cynthia 23–25.

[135] Donahue has made this criticism of *Der Vorleser*, seeing the novel's postmodern elasticity as a problem: Donahue, William Collins "Illusions" 76.

the Nazi past? And does a reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction have the same disruptive effect as in *Der Vorleser*, or are there other factors in play?

3. Where did all the murderers go? Germans as victims (?) in Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder*

Ulla Hahn's novel *Unscharfe Bilder* was written as a direct response to the exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944* mounted by the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung from 1995 to 1999 and again (in altered form) from 2001 to 2004 (the *"Wehrmachtsausstellung"*). The exhibition was the subject of extensive debate focusing on the perpetrator/victim dichotomy and, specifically, whether "ordinary" *Wehrmacht* soldiers should be viewed as perpetrators or victims. Hahn was inspired to write the novel *Unscharfe Bilder* when she saw the exhibition in Hamburg in 1995 and thought *"was wäre, wenn ich hier als Tochter glaubte, meinen Vater auf einen dieser Fotos erkennen zu können?"*[136]. This idea forms the basis of the plot in *Unscharfe Bilder*, in which Hamburg teacher Katja Wild believes she recognises her father, Hans Musbach, in one of the photographs depicting criminal activities carried out by the *Wehrmacht* shown in an exhibition referred to in the novel under the title *Verbrechen im Osten* (UB 18). This leads her to initiate a dialogue with her father about his war experiences in the hope of uncovering the truth about what she believes she has seen in the photograph. During the course of their discussion, which takes place over a number of days, Musbach describes his life as a Wehrmacht soldier on the Eastern Front.

Unscharfe Bilder is a highly constructed text in which every detail of the text has been functionalised so as to control reader response. For this reason, critics have described the novel as a *"Thesenroman"*[137] marked by a "superficial inventory of current memory contests"[138] and carefully constructed

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136 Deutschlandfunk *Hahn: Die Erinnerung an die Verbrechen wach halten – Interview mit der Schriftstellerin Ulla Hahn* transcript of radio interview on Deutschlandfunk, 29 January 2004 <http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/hahn-die-erinnerung-an-die-verbrechen-wach-halten.694.de.html?dram:article_id=60618> (accessed 8 October 2020).

137 Braun, Michael "Krieg und Literatur – Zu den neuen Romanen von Ulla Hahn, Klaus Modick und Uwe Timm" *Der Deutschunterricht* 56.3 (2004): 84–86 at 85. See also Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 219.

138 Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* 35.

dialogues that lend it *"einen Anstrich von Künstlichkeit"*[139]. The discussion surrounding *Unscharfe Bilder* has been rather less heated than the response to *Der Vorleser*. However, it has been characterised by the same concentration on the perpetrator/victim dichotomy which has been the focus of so much debate about German novels dealing with the Nazi past. Some have criticised the novel for concentrating too extensively on German victimhood, whereas others consider that Hahn has neutralised the risk of casting Germans as victims by setting the novel's victim narratives firmly in the context of German perpetration. As was the case with *Der Vorleser*, the reception of the novel was, to a certain extent, affected by the themes of the public memory discourse taking place at the time of publication. In the case of *Unscharfe Bilder*, the renewed public interest in "Germans as victims" around 2003 gave rise to a tendency to identify the novel as part of the "Germans as victims" wave and to expressions of concern as to the effect this novel and others like it might have on German memory culture and the dominant public memory paradigm which emphasised Germans as perpetrators[140]. Musbach's recollections of life in the *Wehrmacht* have been described as a *"Singsang des Leugnens"*[141], and Hahn has been criticised for promoting the *"Topos einer schuldlosen Schuld"*[142], blurring the line between perpetrators and victims and placing too heavy an emphasis on German victimhood[143]. This concern about the novel's tendency to sympathise too heavily with Musbach as the "ordinary soldier" also arises in the context of discussion of *Unscharfe*

139 Hummel, Christine "Unscharfe Bilder: Die Darstellung des Zweiten Weltkriegs im Osten bei Ulla Hahn, Uwe Timm und Heinrich Böll" *Literatur im Unterricht* 8.3 (2007): 193–213 at 197.

140 See for example Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" 55–58.

141 Heer, Hannes "Die Nazi-Zeit als Familiengeheimnis: Beobachtungen zur zeitgenössischen deutschen Literatur" in Burmeister, Hans-Peter *Literatur und Erinnerung: Dokumentation einer Tagung der Evangelischen Akademie Loccum vom 29. bis 31. Oktober 2004* Rehburg: Loccum, 2004: 9–30 at 21.

142 Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" 56–57.

143 See Braun, Michael "Krieg und Literatur" 86; Hummel, Christine 195; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* 36; Schmitz, Helmut "Reconciliation between the Generations: The Image of the Ordinary Soldier in Dieter Wellershoff's Der Ernstfall and Ulla Hahn's Unscharfe Bilder" in Taberner, Stuart and Cooke, Paul *German Culture, Politics and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization* Rochester: Camden House, 2006: 151–165 at 155; 159–160; Schmitz, Helmut "Historicism, Sentimentality and the Problem of Empathy: Uwe Timm's Am Beispiel meines Bruders in the Context of Recent Representations of German Suffering" in Schmitz, Helmut *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007: 197–222 at 208–209.

Bilder as a late contribution to *Väterliteratur*[144]. It has frequently been suggested that the dialogue between Katja and Musbach in the novel results, not in the breach of classic *Väterliteratur*, but in understanding and reconciliation, and that this alteration rather than continuation of the *Väterliteratur* pattern may result in a blurring of the line between perpetrator and victim by placing too great an emphasis on intergenerational reconciliation[145]. However, not everyone agrees that Hahn's tale of father/daughter dialogue about life on the Eastern Front runs the risk of presenting a "version" of the Nazi past that is too skewed towards German victimhood[146]. Those who think that the novel manages to successfully steer clear of exculpating the perpetrators caution against detaching the sections of the novel dealing with German victimhood from the novel's overall context and emphasise that criticism of the novel has perhaps been influenced by a hypersensitivity to the idea of German victimhood due to the "Germans as victims" wave current at the time of the novel's publication. Further, they point to the way in which the novel thematises the problem of viewing perpetrators as victims, thereby rendering criticism of the novel as an expression of the uncritical "Germans as victims" discourse unjustified.

Does Musbach's self-portrayal in his "eyewitness" narrative of his time as a soldier on the Eastern Front portray him as a perpetrator or a victim? How does his self-portrayal interact with other voices in the novel? Does the portrayal of Musbach reflect the renewed concentration on "Germans as victims" in public discussions at the time of the novel's publication? In this chapter, I aim to provide answers to these questions. I will also compare the

144 Ostheimer, Michael 301–309; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* 21; 33–36; Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* 128; Vees-Gulani, Susanne "Between Reevaluation and Repetition: Ulla Hahn's Unscharfe Bilder and the Lasting Influence of Family Conflicts about the Nazi Past in Current Literature of the 1968 Generation" in Cohen-Pfister, Laurel and Vees-Gulani, Susanne *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture* Rochester: Camden House, 2010: 56–76.

145 Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" 55–57; Schmitz, Helmut "Reconciliation" 154–160; Schmitz, Helmut "Representations of the Nazi past II" 152–154; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* 35–36; Ostheimer, Michael 301–309; Taberner, Stuart "Introduction: The novel in German since 1990" in Taberner, Stuart *The Novel in German Since 1990* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011: 1–18 at 10.

146 Vees-Gulani, Susanne 64; Fischer-Kania, Sabine "Das Medium der Fotografie in Ulla Hahns Roman Unscharfe Bilder" *Seminar* 41.2 (2005): 149–169 at 165; Fischer-Kania, Sabine "Reden und Schweigen zwischen den Generationen: Erinnerungsgespräche in Ulla Hahns Roman Unscharfe Bilder" *Colloquia Germanica* 37.1 (2004): 73–108 at 92; 97; 103.

portrayal of Musbach in *Unscharfe Bilder* with the portrayal of Hanna in *Der Vorleser* in order to elucidate similarities and contrasts between the two works, and identify potential patterns in approaches to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in German literature after unification. Does Hahn take a similar approach to Schlink in her portrayal of first generation Germans? Does she approach the subject of intergenerational conflict in a similar way, continuing the themes and attitudes of *Väterliteratur* into the post-1990 period? Or has the wave of interest in "Germans as victims" at the time of publication of *Unscharfe Bilder* resulted in a different depiction? And, in view of the effect of reading *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction on the portrayal of Hanna, does a similar reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* similarly destabilise the novel's portrayal of Musbach?

3.1 A model pupil of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: Self-portrait of Musbach as an "ordinary soldier"

A large part of the novel *Unscharfe Bilder* is taken up with Musbach's "self-portrait": his "eyewitness" testimony about his experiences during the Second World War. His account of his trials as an "ordinary soldier" on the Eastern Front dominates the book, which may well explain the concerns of some commentators about what they see as the novel's portrayal of Germans as victims. Determining whether these concerns are justified is the main focus of this chapter.

The novel begins with a visit by Katja to her father Musbach, a retired high school teacher who lives in a fairly luxurious retirement home (UB 9; 12). Musbach is introduced as someone who is very well-read, with his book shelves bending under the weight of his library (UB 9). He is a man with an excellent memory (UB 24), who can be relied upon to intervene in a conversation to correct an error or provide balance when the discussion has become too one-sided (UB 15). He is valued by fellow residents for his knack with crosswords (UB 24) and talent with chess (UB 194–195), and is depicted as being a step above most of his neighbours in terms of learning and judgement. He is also presented as a man who has dealt with the legacy of the Nazi past in an exemplary way and whose credentials in relation to talking about the Third Reich appear impeccable. When Katja presents him with the exhibition catalogue for *Verbrechen im Osten*, he notes that he has always accepted German responsibility for the crimes committed during the Nazi period and has stressed this responsibility to younger generations: *"Wir alle kennen doch die Schrecken und die Verbrechen der Nazizeit . . . Es gibt die historische Verantwortung aller Deutschen, dazu habe ich immer gestanden"* (UB 30; also UB 18; 27). As well as continually stressing German

responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich to his students and others, Musbach is a keen reader of literary works relevant to the issue of German culpability, such as Peter Weiss' *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* (UB 70) and Eugen Kogon's *Der SS-Staat* (UB 158). Even his omission of "ordinary Germans" as possible victims of Nazism (*"Juden, politisch Verfolgten, Zigeunern, Homosexuellen, Zeugen Jehovas oder Euthanasieopfern"* (UB 164)) conforms to the prevailing paradigm on how to read the Nazi past.

In all of these instances, Musbach comes across as a veritable *Musterschüler* on the subject of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Combined with his learning and excellent memory, his conformity to the accepted, dominant norms developed in public discourse as to how Germans should approach the past marks him out as an example of a typical German *Bildungsbürger* of the first generation who appears to have learnt from the mistakes of the Nazi past. However, when Musbach is confronted with Katja's implied accusations about his own conduct during the Nazi period and her demands that he explain his personal role in crimes of that era, it quickly becomes apparent that his exemplary attitude to the past and acceptance of German guilt is something which he has applied in the abstract, but has avoided considering in relation to his individual history. When Musbach does come to give his own "version" of his life under Nazism and his experiences as a soldier on the Eastern Front, he attempts to distance himself from the "real" perpetrators, brings forth a whole string of "Germans as victims" tropes, and engages in identification with the victims of Nazism. Although he occasionally refers to instances of German perpetration at a general level (UB 33; 58; 165; 181–182), in his narrative as a whole he aims to deny personal involvement in Nazi crimes and to distance both himself and other *Wehrmacht* soldiers from culpability. His narrative represents a typical first generation response to accusations of personal involvement in the activities of the Third Reich, a response which emphasises German victimhood and seeks to avoid individual responsibility.

When Musbach finally agrees to talk to Katja about his wartime experiences, he is at pains to distance himself from the "Nazis" and the *Mitläufer*, and to align himself with those who disagreed with or actively resisted the regime. He describes his life before the outbreak of war as being characterised by friendships with people who, if not actively, at least passively, resisted Nazism. At home in Berlin, he identifies himself with his friend Hugo and Hugo's bohemian family (UB 33; 183). They seem to live in a hotbed of dissent, with local households receiving regular visits from the SA and the Gestapo (UB 33; 36). They have no love for Hitler or his warmongering (UB 34; 36), and Musbach emphasises how he preferred them and their views to those of his own family, who celebrated every German victory with a bottle of wine (UB 36). He specifically points out that no one in his circle of friends

or acquaintances thought that the persecution of the Jews was a good thing (although he does admit that neither he nor anyone else did anything about it) (UB 58–59)). He lacked any ideological interest in Nazism, even choosing to study ancient languages because they provided a space in which he could escape from Nazi doctrine (UB 157; 216).

This pattern of distancing himself from the "Nazis" is repeated in Musbach's descriptions of life on the Eastern Front. He seems to be friends only with those soldiers who are against the Nazis (Hugo), or with those who are Nazis for "good" reasons, such as the promotion of socialism (Joachim (UB 92–93)), rather than "bad" reasons, such as racist ideology (Mertens (UB 90)). Deserters play a significant part in Musbach's account (Hugo (UB 142–144); Freßfriese (UB 76); Leo (UB 82); Karl (UB 209–210); Musbach himself), indicating a concentration in Musbach's narrative on identifying himself with the rejection of Nazism and of war. Musbach also highlights small acts of "resistance" or insubordination on his part, such as giving Russian children pieces of chocolate when this was *"verboten"* (UB 45) and visiting Russian farmers *"obwohl es nicht gern gesehen war"* (UB 59). These patterns of identification with the "resistance" and distancing from the "real" Nazis are also apparent in Musbach's description of his time with a group of Russian partisans. He once again uses language which distances him from the "Nazis" and from his fellow Germans by his use of terms such as *"dieses Hitlervolk"* and a rejection of his own *"Muttersprache"* (UB 251). Instead, he identifies himself with the resistance, this time in the form of the partisans, by taking on their language and culture (UB 223; 226–227; 236; 248), carefully glossing over the fact that the partisans rejected his identification with them by leaving him behind (UB 250–251).

As well as aligning himself with those in the *Wehrmacht* who did not support Nazism, Musbach also distances the *Wehrmacht* as a whole from the worst of Nazi crimes, instead pushing the blame towards other, more "culpable" organisations. Whenever war crimes, crimes against humanity, or general acts of everyday brutality are referred to in Musbach's narrative, it always appears that "special" groups were responsible, such as the SS, the SD, or the *Einsatzgruppen*. This can be seen when Musbach is challenged by Katja about German actions against the Jews, in relation to which he says: *"Von den Deportationen, den Massenvernichtungen wußten wir an der Front doch damals noch nichts. Nur Gerüchte von den Greueltaten der SS und des SD in den besetzten Gebieten hinter uns. Wir selbst wußten nichts . . . "* (UB 98; simlarly UB 206–207; 211–212; 264–267). The suggestion here is that it was the SS, the SD, and the *Einsatzgruppen* who were responsible for the horrors of the Third Reich, and that the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* did not have anything to do with and knew very little about these actions in general and the Holocaust in particular. Musbach's distancing of the

Wehrmacht from the SS and other special forces, to whom most criminal activity is attributed, implies that ordinary German soldiers such as himself were not perpetrators of Nazi crimes, thereby reinstating the myth of the *"saubere Wehrmacht"*. The distinction Musbach makes between the *Wehrmacht* and the SS, SD and *Einsatzgruppen* is precisely the delineation that the photographic and other evidence presented in the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was intended to break down. In making this distinction, Musbach denies the findings presented in the exhibition, whilst at the same time implying that he was not personally involved in any crimes and had no concrete knowledge about the Holocaust. The inclusion of this material in his narrative exposes Musbach's attitude towards the Nazi past and acceptance of *"die historische Verantwortung aller Deutschen"* as superficial and represents a very standard response of a first generation *Wehrmacht* soldier to questioning about his past.

Musbach also suggests a lack of culpability on the part of himself and other members of the first generation by pointing to the actual or threatened punishments which accompanied any attempt to resist the Nazis. For example, the father of Musbach's childhood friend Hugo is initially open in voicing his opposition to Hitler and the war, but learns to shut his mouth after a visit from the Gestapo (UB 36; for similar incidents see UB 33; 181). Musbach gives this threat of Gestapo retaliation as a reason for at least appearing to toe the party line: *"Wenn schon ein nicht gehobener Arm, ein Witzwort, das falsche Lied, gedankenlos am Morgen auf dem Weg zur Arbeit gepfiffen, dir die Gestapo auf den Hals hetzen konnte, da paßte man sich eben an"* (UB 59). The triviality of the things for which, according to Musbach, one might be arrested by the Gestapo conveys an image of the ordinary German population living in fear of certain personal consequences in the event that they acted on any thoughts of resistance. Musbach's emphasis on the high price of resistance and the fear of himself and his contemporaries of reprisals is continued in his descriptions of life on the Eastern Front. His anecdotes about life in the *Wehrmacht* repeatedly focus on the idea that any acts of disobedience or resistance on the part of *Wehrmacht* soldiers would be met with punishment. Acts of desertion or refusal to obey orders by soldiers resulted in immediate and drastic retaliation by the regime, including certain death if a deserter was caught by his own side (UB 83). When, in tragic circumstances, Musbach's comrade, Sönke Hansen (better known as Freßfriese), deserts to return to his pregnant wife, he is captured, beaten, and executed following a court martial (UB 76–81; for a similar example, see UB 209–211; 213). Musbach also suggests that the soldiers lived under the constant threat of being punished for minor breaches of protocol when he recalls how Freßfriese almost earned himself a court martial when he used a propaganda magazine to make paper hats and ships for the local Russian children (UB 79). At the

lesser end of the punishment spectrum was a failure to be promoted, a consequence suffered by Freßfriese when he failed to follow an order to carry out a military action which would have resulted in unnecessary loss of life (UB 80).

The implication of Musbach's long list of the punishments that awaited those who tried to resist is that resistance was either futile or too dangerous, thereby mitigating the guilt of ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers (including Musbach himself) for their failure to do so. The importance of this exculpatory narrative for Musbach's self-depiction is particularly brought home by his lengthy and emotional description of the fate of Freßfriese. Most of the minor characters in the novel are entirely functional, with the reader being provided with very little biographical information about them and with no real attempt being made to develop them or their relationships with either Katja or Musbach, yet Musbach devotes a considerable amount of time to his description of Freßfriese, fleshing out his character by sketching his views, his background, and his fate. This contrast draws attention to the role of Freßfriese in Musbach's narrative and raises the question of why Musbach accords him so much space in his tale. In the context of an extensive narrative in which he is at pains to make excuses for himself, Musbach uses the figure of Freßfriese as a way of explaining the high price paid by soldiers who took action to break out of their military role, thereby excusing his own lack of action. When Musbach describes the letter he wrote to Freßfriese's wife after his death, he says: *"Nur die Uniform mußte ich ihm ausziehen, den Soldaten wieder zum Menschen machen"* (UB 79). By showing Katja the man under Freßfriese's uniform, Musbach aims to humanise himself by analogy in the hope of engendering her sympathy and warding off her condemnation.

3.2 A prisoner of my own country: Musbach's victimhood tropes

In his description of his experiences on the Eastern Front, Musbach is also at pains to emphasise the victimhood of *Wehrmacht* soldiers such as himself, soldiers who were caught up in war through no fault of their own: *"Und vergiß niemals: Hugo und ich, wir hatten uns nicht freiwillig gemeldet! Ich hatte Hitler nie gewählt! Ich war in Rußland ein Gefangener meines eigenen Landes"* (UB 50). Large sections of Musbach's dominant narrative are devoted to detailed, overwhelmingly emotive descriptions of the trials endured by ordinary German soldiers. Musbach's narrative contains a veritable catalogue of suffering as he describes the everyday lives of the soldiers. He uses the familiar tropes of German suffering, recounting at length the long marches to which the soldiers, heavily laden with packs and equipment, were subjected, as well as the heat, thirst, hunger, dust and lice with which they

had to contend (UB 46; 104–109; 208), not to mention the terrible onset of the Russian winter (UB 49; 105–109). He speaks of the overwhelming fear experienced by the soldiers (UB 51–52), and their close acquaintance with death (UB 104). Musbach also portrays ordinary German soldiers as being victims of continuing psychological trauma consequent upon their war experiences, referring to the way in which horrific images of battle stayed with him and others like him long after the war was over: *"Glaub mir, ich hab es noch oft gesehen. Als längst nicht mehr geschossen wurde. Als der Krieg vorbei war, war er für die meisten längst nicht vorbei. In meinen Träumen, da wurde noch lange geschossen"* (UB 38). These references to psychological trauma not only have the effect of categorising the surviving German soldiers as victims, they also represent an attempt by Musbach to shut down Katja's interrogation by appealing to her sympathy.

Further, Musbach attempts to co-opt the sympathy usually reserved for victims of Nazism such as the Jews by applying language typically used in relation to them to himself and his comrades[147]. For example, he describes himself and other soldiers in terms usually associated with concentration camp victims, using the word *"Sträflingsarbeit"* to refer to the life of the ordinary soldier (UB 106) and referring to himself as *"ein Gefangener meines eigenen Landes"* (UB 107). A letter (written during the war and read in the present narrative time by Katja) from Musbach's childhood sweetheart, Barbara, also underscores this equation when she recounts how she thought he looked like a *"Sträfling"* in his *Wehrmacht* uniform (UB 190). Musbach's identification with the victims reaches a high point in his identification with the Russian partisans, particularly in his love affair with Wera, who turns out to be not merely a partisan, but also a Jew whose family were rounded up and killed by the SD (UB 227). Musbach's inclusion of a detailed, emotive account of his time with Wera and the Russians is so skewed towards identifying him with the victims of the Third Reich that it pushes his testimony towards becoming a parody of a biography of an exemplary *Wehrmacht* soldier inspired by the German memorial culture of the 2000s. In this, it suggests the influence of postwar expectations on eyewitness narratives about the Nazi past.

147 Schmitz also notes this feature: Schmitz, Helmut "Historicism" 203; Schmitz, Helmut "Alternative Gründungserzählungen und andere Legitimationsmuster. Zum Status von Shoah und Nationalsozialismus in der Konstruktion von Erinnerung an 'deutsche' Kriegserfahrungen" in Fischer, Torben, Hammermeister, Philipp and Kramer, Sven *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014: 95–114 at 96.

Overall, Musbach's narrative is steeped in "Germans as victims" tropes and as a result stands in stark contrast to his oft-stated acceptance of German responsibility for Nazi crimes. Although Musbach is first introduced in the text as an example of a first generation *Bildungsbürger* who has learnt from the past and developed an exemplary response to it in his acceptance of German guilt, his "self-portrait" of his time in the *Wehrmacht* tells a different story. Rather than underscoring the culpability of ordinary German soldiers such as himself, he seeks to distance them from the "real" perpetrators, emphasise their trials and tribulations, and identify them with the resistance and with the victims of Nazism. In doing so, he builds up once more precisely the kind of image that the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was designed to destroy, and puts forward a stereotypical eyewitness account of a first generation *Wehrmacht* soldier. Musbach's narrative proves him to be not only a *Musterschüler* in the German art of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but also a master of self-exculpation, whose account of the Nazi past is designed to portray him as a victim and absolve him of personal responsibility.

The main purpose of Musbach's detailed, victim-focused and exculpatory account becomes apparent when he finally comes to address his involvement in what he sees as his "crime" in the "confession" towards which Katja has been prompting him for the entire novel. Throughout the novel, Katja pushes Musbach in the direction of telling her about his involvement in a crime she thinks he has committed based on her misinterpretation of one of the photographs from *Verbrechen im Osten*. As it turns out, Katja discovers that it was chronologically impossible for the man she thought she recognised in the photograph to be her father, meaning that he could not be guilty of the crime of which she has been accusing him. In the end it does not much matter that the crime to which Musbach ends up confessing is not the crime of which Katja initially thinks he is guilty. What is important is that there is a "crime" about which Musbach himself feels guilty, namely the shooting of Russian partisans. In his account of his involvement in the shooting, Musbach strongly suggests that his shot missed, but the point is that he nevertheless counts himself guilty for having pulled the trigger. Like Hugo, who effectively sentences himself to death by frost for killing the enemy in anger rather than self-defence (UB 142–144), Musbach considers himself to have been *"ein Mörder"* (UB 275) because he participated in a firing squad in circumstances in which he thinks he was in a position to have refused to do so. It is Musbach's guilt about this crime which, whether consciously or subconsciously, has motivated his exculpatory victimhood narrative.

The way in which Musbach's lengthy and detailed narrative of his time with the *Wehrmacht* has been constructed so as to lay the groundwork for his confession of his crime and anticipate Katja's reaction to it is exposed by the repetition in his confession of patterns which have already characterised his

previous testimony. In relating his participation in the shooting of the Russian partisans, Musbach follows a similar pattern of distancing the *Wehrmacht* from the SS and excusing ordinary soldiers such as himself by highlighting the likelihood of punishment for resistance and the necessity of following orders that had been a feature of his previous anecdotes. In his account of his involvement in what he sees as his crime, Musbach emphasises that he was called up against his will to be a member of a firing squad charged with executing Russian partisans. Rather than being a "willing executioner", Musbach describes himself as someone who only ended up on the firing squad due to the machinations of the SS officer Katsch and who simply *"tat wie mir befohlen"* (UB 268). Following on as the confession does from Musbach's repeated assertions as to the dangers faced by those who refused to fall in line, his participation appears both understandable and excusable. In his initial version of events, he even makes the threat concrete by stating that Katsch threatened to kill him if he did not comply (UB 268; 272), although he later retracts this part of his statement (UB 275). He further suggests a lack of culpability by implying that the shot he fired may not have hit the partisan he was ordered to execute. Immediately after firing, Musbach has a vision of his friend Hugo and then faints. He does not see whether his shot killed the partisan, although the comment *"Verdammter Idiot"* (UB 269) he hears before losing consciousness suggests that he missed. In the end, Musbach never knows if he killed the man (UB 271–272). Even in the moment of his only admission of personal guilt, Musbach distances himself from responsibility. Continuing the pattern already established in his narrative, he depicts himself as an ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldier who was victimised by the SS officer Katsch, as well as being subject to *Befehlsnotstand*. He even suggests that the crime he admits to may be no crime at all. Like his abstract acceptance of German responsibility and his narrative as a whole, Musbach's "confession" represents an attempt to avoid engagement with his own culpability.

What is the significance of this exposure of Musbach's motive in telling Katja his story in such a way as to highlight the suffering and victimhood of German soldiers and provide excuses for their actions and his own? I argue that the significance of making Musbach's ulterior motive apparent is to call the veracity of his entire account into question, destabilising his characterisation of himself as a victim. In addition, by making the reader aware of the constructed and contingent nature of Musbach's narrative, the novel points the reader towards considering the narrativity of history and particularly towards understanding even eyewitness testimonies as stories told with a particular agenda. A similar, metafictional *Verfremdungseffekt* prompting reflection in the reader is achieved by the typicality of Musbach's account. This typicality may be seen in a comparison of the structure of Musbach's

narrative with the features of first generation German eyewitness testimony observed by Welzer in his study of the cross-generational transfer of information about the Nazi past within the private sphere of German families[148]. In his study, Welzer found that stories about the Nazi past related in the context of intergenerational family conversations tend to contain recurring patterns which he describes as *Tradierungstypen*. Musbach's testimony closely reflects Welzer's findings in relation to first generation eyewitness narratives by incorporating many of the *Tradierungstypen* outlined by Welzer, including *Opferschaft*, *Rechtfertigung*, *Distanzierung* from the "real" Nazis, and recounting minor instances of *Zivilcourage*. Musbach's emotive language also typifies the first generation narrative technique of *Überwältigung*, in which stories from the past (particularly battle experiences) are told with great immediacy and intensity for the purpose of encouraging identification and a lack of critical distance in the listener. Musbach's transfer of images and vocabulary usually associated with the Holocaust to German "victims" in order to co-opt the sympathy usually inspired by such imagery is also typical of the process of *Wechselrahmung* identified by Welzer as being frequently used in first generation narratives. In fact, Musbach's eyewitness account of his experiences at home under Nazism and on the Eastern Front is so overwhelmingly typical of his generation that his narrative can be seen as a parody of this type of testimony. Hutcheon has noted the important role that parody can play in historiographic metafiction and in postmodern criticism generally[149], and by reflecting typical first generation accounts such as those observed by Welzer so closely, *Unscharfe Bilder* again highlights the idea that history is a tale told for a purpose. This points further to the importance a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction is likely to have on the interpretation of the novel's portrayal of Musbach, as will be explored later in this chapter. The way in which Musbach's narrative is carefully structured so as to portray him as a victim, whilst simultaneously undermining this very portrayal is a good example of the novel's operation as a *Thesenroman*, in which reader response is closely managed in order to reach the conclusion that, despite his assertions to the contrary, Musbach is a perpetrator.

3.3 Was that really his whole story? Counter-narratives

To further avoid the possibility that readers may interpret Musbach's self-depiction and the novel as a whole as forming part of the "Germans as

[148] Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* 81–104.

[149] Hutcheon, Linda *A Poetics of Postmodernism* 124–140.

victims" wave current at the time of the novel's publication, *Unscharfe Bilder* contains a number of strong correctives to Musbach's testimony which augment the metafictional questioning of his narrative and are unmistakably placed for the purpose of influencing the reader's response to Musbach's account, guiding the reader towards questioning his version of events and directing the reader back towards German perpetration.

The first of these corrective elements is provided by Musbach's daughter Katja, whose constant questioning of Musbach's version of events functions very much like the Jewish survivor's undermining of Michael's account in *Der Vorleser,* and also frequently recalls the accusatory and interrogatory tone characteristic of *Väterliteratur*. Although Musbach's narrative appears to take a dominant position in the text in terms of volume and emotional impact, it is punctuated throughout by Katja's interjections, whether in the form of direct speech or as thought processes related by the novel's third person narrator. Her interjections constantly draw the reader's attention to the one-sided nature of Musbach's account, and self-reflexively make the reader aware of his or her own response to it.

Katja reacts with incredulity to the way in which Musbach's narrative fails to include any reference to German war crimes and crimes against humanity which were taking place in areas in which he and his comrades were posted (UB 48) and also when his story takes a turn for the unlikely and places him with the partisans (UB 220–221). She critiques Musbach's use of language to distance himself from Nazism and Nazi crimes, noting his use of *"wir"* instead of *"ich"*, his use of euphemisms such as *"größere Unternehmen"* in place of the more direct *"Massenmorde"* (UB 211) and criticising his reference to *"die Fehler beseitigt"* as *"eine Umschreibung für Völkermord"* (UB 90; see UB 53–54, 103 for similar examples). Her criticism of Musbach's language establishes a pattern in the novel in which suggestions by Musbach that the Germans were less than criminal are met with scepticism by Katja. Katja draws attention to the one-sided nature of Musbach's account (*"du redest noch immer nur über eine Seite"* (UB 81)). She points to the apparent inconsistency between his long-stated promotion of the responsibility of all Germans for Nazi crimes and his failure to apply these principles to himself or his friends: *"Du hast doch selbst immer unser aller, also auch deine Verantwortung für dieses Verbrechen betont. Und jetzt, wo ich dich frage: 'Wo warst du, Adam?', da bist du an all dem vorbeimarschiert, singend und blind?"* (UB 48; see also UB 128–129). Katja also suggests that Musbach is carefully constructing his narrative in such a way as to align himself with the victims, thereby questioning both his motivations and his reliability: *"War das wirklich seine ganze Geschichte? Hatte er am Ende alles nur so ausführlich erzählt, damit er mit seinen Erinnerungen selbst auch auf der Seite der Opfer erschien?"* (UB 255).

Katja's interjections encourage the reader to be sceptical about Musbach's version of events and to question his motives for telling the story in the way he does, as well as turning the reader's mind back to viewing Germans as perpetrators. Her voice in the novel has the effect of undercutting Musbach's depiction of himself as a victim and resistance fighter, exposing his tales of trauma as a ploy to avoid facing his involvement in criminal acts. Significantly, whereas Musbach's tale of victimhood mirrors the typical, private, first generation narratives detailed in Welzer's study of conversations about the Nazi past within German families, Katja's response does not. In relation to victimhood narratives in particular, Welzer notes that it was surprising how easily such narratives were accepted by subsequent generations, despite the critical reception one might expect on the basis of their thorough education regarding Germany's Nazi history[150]. By contrast, Katja's constant questioning of Musbach's account is more reflective of public memory discourse and of the patterns of classic *Väterliteratur* than it is of private conversations, something which emphasises her role as a corrective to Musbach[151]. Unlike real private family narratives, with their concentration on German suffering at the expense of the wider context of German responsibility, private family memory in *Unscharfe Bilder* is full of Katja's pointed reminders of German culpability. This lack of congruence between Katja's approach to her father and the "real life" conversations observed by Welzer underscores the idea that the novel is an artificially constructed *Thesenroman,* a closed text designed to set forth a variety of positions expressed in the debate about the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, but to leave the reader in no doubt as to the conclusions Hahn would like the reader to draw about them.

A further example of this can be seen in the way in which Katja's voice specifically pre-empts the reader's likely response to Musbach's emotional narrative by explicitly reflecting on how she herself is responding to his

150 Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* 82.

151 It should be noted that Welzer would not agree with these observations – he is of the view that the novel promotes the kind of blurring of the lines used to avoid moral dilemmas in the private family conversations in his study: Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" 56. He, in turn, is criticised by Steckel for disregarding in his criticism the differences between empirical research and working through experiences in literary texts: Steckel, Gerd "The German Left Post-1989: Toward an Emancipated Reading of German History" in Wright, Will and Kaplan, Steven *The Image of Power in Literature, Media, and Society: Selected Papers, 2006 Conference, Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery March 2006 Colorado Springs, Colorado*, Pueblo: The Society, 2006: 161–165 at 162.

account. She chastises herself for allowing her father to distract her from her main aim of uncovering the truth about his past as a perpetrator: *"Durfte sich nicht mit Ausflüchten abspeisen lassen. Von seinen Geschichten einwickeln oder wortlos umarmen lassen"* (UB 255). In a novel in which Hahn rarely leaves the reader's reaction to chance, she also uses Katja to point directly to the problems inherent in the presentation of Germans as victims in Musbach's extensive narrative, one of which is that his images of victimhood may overwhelm images of German perpetration unless she (and the reader) are able to maintain a critical distance:

> Die Bilder, die sie dem Vater gebracht hatte, waren nun auch in ihr überschattet von den seinen, den blutigen Bildern seiner Erinnerung. Sie durfte das nicht zulassen. Wo waren die Mörder geblieben? Auf diese Frage suchte sie Antwort. Der Vater durfte nicht ausweichen. (UB 43)

Katja also worries that in trying to understand and accommodate her father, she will end up absolving him, a reservation which also reflects broader concerns about the effect of a concentration on "Germans as victims" (UB 174). In this way, Katja's reflections are used to highlight precisely those dangers which critics of the novel have warned may arise from the large amount of space accorded Musbach's victim narrative in the novel. By self-reflexively referring to its own potential effect on the reader, the novel provides the reader with a critical distance which allows the reader to examine his or her own response and makes the reader aware of the potential pitfalls of becoming uncritically absorbed in Musbach's narrative. Katja's questioning prompts the reader to also question Musbach's account, defusing any tendency on the part of the reader to get carried away with Musbach's self-portrayal. In doing so, it also encourages the reader to approach the depiction of Germans as victims in general more critically.

The reader is also firmly pointed in the direction of questioning Musbach's portrayal of himself and other *Wehrmacht* soldiers as victims by the responses given to similar opinions expressed by minor characters in the novel. Most of the minor characters are entirely functional, with the reader being provided with very little biographical information about them and with no real attempt being made to develop them or their relationships with either Katja or Musbach. Examples of functionalised minor characters include Katja's teaching colleagues, Schöneborn and Walter, who appear in the narrative only to provide differing views on *Verbrechen im Osten* (UB 155). Schöneborn is graced with a very brief back story as Katja's potential love interest (UB 245), but the reader is provided with no information at all about Walter, apart from his job description as an intern, which places him as a member of the third generation. Similarly, Katja's friend, Friedel Ganten,

and her new Australian partner appear in the novel only to present the view that Europeans in general and Germans in particular are obsessed with history and should consider taking a leaf out of the "New World" book, closing the door on the past and concentrating on the future. All of these characters function almost solely as vessels for different points of view on the subject of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and/or to direct the reader away from agreeing with Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim[152].

This can be seen in several instances in which Musbach's views are parroted by other characters in the novel and meet with a negative response. For example, Musbach's distinction between the *Wehrmacht* and the SD, SS and *Einsatzgruppen* is also made by the male relatives of Katja's friend Reni. When reminiscing about old times, the men draw a clear line between the ordinary soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* and those of the *Waffen-SS* (UB 125). It was this latter group whom the men accused of being involved behind the lines in "liquidations" and *"Säuberungen"*, rather than the *"normale Soldaten"* of the *Wehrmacht*, who were in the majority (UB 126). However, unlike Musbach, the old men of this group are depicted as being *unverbesserlich* and *Ewiggestrige*, emphasising the idea that, in putting forward these arguments, Musbach is consigning himself to their ranks. Katja's teaching colleague Schöneborn also echoes several of Musbach's points when he asserts his father's unwillingness to participate in the war and upholds the distinction between the *Wehrmacht* and the SS:

> Mein Vater ist in Stalingrad gefallen. Ein Verbrecher? Ein Mörder? Das war Hitler. Mein Vater war Soldat. Er wurde eingezogen. Er wurde nicht gefragt . . . . Mörder? Das waren die von der SS. Die Soldaten von der Wehrmacht waren das nicht. (UB 155)

He describes *Wehrmacht* soldiers like his own father as *tapfer* and *ehrenhaft*, and as *"unschuldigen deutschen Soldaten, deren Leben ein Krieg verschlang, den sie nie gewollt hatten"* (UB 246). However, in both of these instances, Schöneborn's views are dismissed by others, just as Katja undermines the same assertions when they arise in Musbach's narrative. When Schöneborn makes these comments in the context of a heated staffroom discussion, he is challenged by his younger colleague, Walter, who points to the photographic evidence presented in *Verbrechen im Osten* as proof of the

[152] See also Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 219. A similar point can be made about most of the "documents" interpolated in the book (with the exception of the doctor's letter at UB 260–263). These documents do not serve to advance the plot or character development in any way, but function solely as a means of introducing further viewpoints on dealing with the German past (see for example the email from Katja's American friend Jan at UB 191–192).

complicity of the *"ganz normale Männer"* of the *Wehrmacht* (UB 155). When Schöneborn places a notice in the paper in memory of his father containing similar sentiments, it is Musbach himself who criticises him (UB 245), thereby pointing to the tension between his exemplary attitude to the German past in the abstract and his contrasting approach towards his own involvement. The negative responses which meet the reflection of Musbach's views by minor characters in the novel, like Katja's repeated questioning of Musbach's narrative, serve to re-contextualise the talk of German victimhood within the setting of German perpetration and thereby further undermine Musbach's narrative. The fact that these minor characters serve no purpose other than providing a corrective voice to Musbach's self-exculpatory narrative of his wartime experience shows once again the extent to which the novel is a *Thesenroman* which is somewhat artificially structured so as to leave no room for speculation about the novel's overall characterisation of Musbach as a perpetrator.

3.4 Duel between daughter and father: *Väterliteratur* reprise

Another feature of the novel which has the potential to impact the reader's understanding of Musbach as a victim or a perpetrator is its repetition of themes associated with *Väterliteratur*. As with *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* bears many of the hallmarks of this genre, including a confrontation of a father and daughter about the father's activities during the Nazi period, and a consideration of the impact of the father's past on their relationship and the daughter's identity. In several interviews, Hahn has suggested that she intended in the novel to turn away from the aggressive stance of the 68ers towards their parents, thereby seeming to lend support to those critics who see the novel as a move away from the approach to the past taken in pre-1990 *Väterliteratur*:

> Was im Roman abläuft ist ja auch ein Zweikampf zwischen Tochter und Vater, und ich versuche, beide zu verstehen. Es gab in den 60er Jahren schon einmal eine Zeit, in der sich meine Generation intensiv mit ihren Vätern und deren Rolle im Zweiten Weltkrieg beschäftigt hat. Die wurden oft zu schnell pauschal verdammt, da gab es selten wirkliches Bemühen um Verständnis. Von Anfang an stand meist fest: Der Vater ist ein Täter oder zumindest ein Mitläufer, Wegschauer.[153]

[153] Gless, Lydia and Wittmann, Angela, "In jeder Familie sitzt einer, der schweigt" <http://www.brigitte.de/kultur/buecher/ulla-hahn-195404/2.html> (accessed 2016, no longer available on the brigitte.de website).

In certain respects, *Unscharfe Bilder* does mark a change from the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s. The novel accords a large amount of space to Musbach's wartime recollections, meaning that he is allowed a voice that was denied to the first generation father figures in earlier forms of *Väterliteratur*. The concentration on the psychological dynamics of the father/daughter relationship, too, represents a change from earlier works of this genre, as does the move (at least at a superficial level) to a more conciliatory tone between the generations which marks a break from the polemical, moralistic attitude which previously typified *Väterliteratur*. Does the power play which characterises the interaction between Katja and Musbach about the past in the novel really represent a change in approach from the aggression, breach, rejection and instrumentalisation of the past for the purposes of intergenerational conflict typical of classic *Väterliteratur*? Or is it, like *Der Vorleser*, a continuation of those patterns? In the following, I will explore these questions and consider the effect that reading *Unscharfe Bilder* as *Väterliteratur* has on the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the novel.

The father/daughter relationship between Musbach and Katja is unusually close and is marked by oedipal overtones. When Musbach greets Katja, his words are *"wie eine Liebkosung"* (UB 16), and a fellow resident in the retirement home teases him about his closeness to his daughter, saying *"Wenn ich nicht wüßte, daß die junge Dame wirklich Ihr Fräulein Tochter ist . . ."* (UB 138). When they leave the retirement home together, father and daughter sneak out the back door as though they were secret lovers (UB 148), and Katja cannot suppress the hint of an incestuous thought when she feels her father's stubbled cheek against her own (UB 254). The third person narrator underscores the point by noting: *"Von weitem konnte man sie für ein altvertrautes Ehepaar halten"* (UB 253). Katja is jealous of any other woman who has a relationship with her father and repeatedly stresses the primacy and exclusivity of her own relationship with him. In her eyes, the primary relationship in her family was between her and her father, to the exclusion of her mother (UB 22; 153; 187), and she viewed her mother as competition for her father's affections (UB 153–154). When Musbach begins to tell her about his romantic involvements with women as a young man, she experiences feelings of jealousy more appropriate in a cheated wife than a daughter (UB 191). When she embraces her father after finding out about his love for the partisan Wera, she experiences the same emotions she felt when she discovered evidence of her husband's unfaithfulness (UB 242), and the rash she develops when her relationship with Musbach is strained is identical to the symptoms she suffered when she uncovered her husband's adultery (UB 147).

Typically for Hahn's construction of the novel as a remarkably closed text, the reader is not left to draw his or her own conclusions on this score,

with the oedipal nature of Katja's relationship with Musbach being specifically spelled out in the letter from her psychologist interpolated in the text (UB 262). There is no indication in the novel that Musbach shares Katja's view of the special, exclusive nature of their relationship, and to the extent his relationship with his wife is mentioned at all, it appears to have been loving, supportive, and even exclusive of Katja on occasion (UB 64; 66; 153–154; 171). As with the use of a similar constellation in *Der Vorleser*, the oedipal overtones in the relationship between Musbach and Katja serve to heighten the level of tension and conflict in the parent/child relationship, throwing the discussion of the past which becomes the *Zankapfel* between them into stark relief.

The oedipal nature of Katja's relationship with her father meant that she had always idolised him: *"Der Vater war schon immer ihr Held"* (UB 22). Combined with Musbach's apparently exemplary attitude to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Katja's idolisation of her father prevented her from participating in the generational conflict of her peers. Her reservations about becoming involved in the rebellion of the 68ers against their father figures are highlighted in the novel by quotations interpolated from her diary from the *"unruhigen Jahren der Studentenbewegung"* (UB 130), in which she is critical of her own generation's treatment of their elders and their unwillingness to allow those they accused of complicity with Nazism to put their side of the story. Katja's trust in her dominant father figure (UB 262) appears to have prevented her from questioning his authority and uncovering his weakness during her adolescence and early adulthood. However, just as Michael's discovery of Hanna's crimes and her illiteracy allow him to assume a position of power in their oedipal relationship, so too Katja's discovery of Musbach's "crime" in the photograph from *Verbrechen im Osten* gives her the belated opportunity to turn apostate and tear down her idol. Katja shows some inkling of this connection when she determines to turn the tables on her father and complete their unfinished generational business:

> Warum hatte der Vater nie vom Krieg, von seiner Zeit bei den Partisanen erzählt? Daß erst der Katalog einer Ausstellung ihn dazu gebracht hatte! Nun war ihr klar: sie mußte die Rollen umkehren. Sie war eine erwachsene Frau . . . . Warum hatte sie nicht schon damals in ihrer Studentenzeit auf klaren Antworten bestanden? (UB 255)

Katja recognises that her father's culpability has the potential to allow her to gain the upper hand in their relationship and the bulk of the novel is made up of the ensuing *"Zweikampf zwischen Tochter und Vater"*. Katja's bid for power centres on wresting a confession of guilt from her father and Musbach's desire to remain in control relies on the maintenance of his own

blameless image, leading to the instrumentalisation of the categories of perpetrator and victim for the purposes of their intergenerational power play.

The extensive dialogues between Musbach and Katja are sparked when Katja sets down a book on the desk in her father's room (UB 17). The book is the exhibition catalogue from *Verbrechen im Osten*, marking Katja's opening move in her conflict with her father as a reminder of the involvement of ordinary Germans of the *Wehrmacht* in Nazi crimes and signalling her intention to use the Nazi past to confront him. No matter how often Musbach tries to push the catalogue away, Katja always returns the focus to the issues raised by it, as she does in their very first interaction on the subject, in which Musbach attempts to dismiss the findings of the exhibition as "nothing new" and suggests that she should not disturb his peaceful retirement with such matters. Katja remains determined not to let her father get away with failing to explain his part in German crimes on the Eastern Front (UB 18). She pushes the catalogue back towards him, with the hint that he is to be identified with the criminals depicted in its pages (UB 19). Later, when Musbach casually attempts to hide the catalogue beneath a cruise brochure, Katja pulls it out again and tells her father, *"Den habe ich nicht vergessen"* (UB 89). This pattern of attempted avoidance/insistence that involvement in German crimes be addressed is repeated often throughout the novel (UB 30–31; 44–45; 51; 54–56; 61; 71–72; 81; 82–83; 89; 95; 98–99; 115; 206–207; 217; 255; 257; 259)[154].

However, Musbach is not the only one to use silence as a means of avoiding making concessions and of retaining power. The way in which Katja goes about trying to uncover the truth of Musbach's past also demonstrates the use of silence as a weapon in their game-play. Rather than simply telling her father about the photograph she has seen in *Verbrechen im Osten* and asking him to comment on it, Katja opens the dialogue by pushing the exhibition catalogue towards him and saying cryptically, *"Schau dir das Buch bitte an. Dein Bild wirst du da ja nicht drin finden"* (UB 19). Even when her father specifically asks her what was so significant about *"dem Foto, das es in dem Buch nicht gibt"* (UB 152), she remains enigmatic, and it is only at the end of the novel that she makes her accusation directly (UB 264). Musbach uses similar tactics in his own narrative when he insists on telling his story in a drawn out fashion which avoids getting to the point until the very end of the novel. The fact that his account of his involvement in the shooting of the partisans is the only part of his narrative that is not in chronological order underscores his strategy of avoidance. Both Katja's concealed method of

[154] This pattern is also noted by Geier: Geier, Andrea "Bildgedächtnis und Bildkritik in der deutschsprachigen Prosa seit 1945" *Oxford German Studies* 37.2 (2008): 270–291 at 287.

enquiry and Musbach's delay in revealing the full story serve to heighten the suspense in the novel and their use of silence and avoidance therefore performs the important function of promoting continuing reader engagement. However, it is also the case that their use of silence constitutes part of their respective strategies to retain power over the narrative about the past and in their relationship. By withholding key knowledge from her father, Katja attempts to control the conversation in order to move it towards the outcome she desires, namely the confession of her father to his crime (UB 262). Conversely, by maximising the amount of narrative he can devote to the depiction of himself as a victim, Musbach aims to predispose Katja towards forgiving him when he finally comes to speak about his role as a perpetrator.

During the course of the power struggle between them, Musbach not only tries to retain control of the narrative by using an emphasis on victimhood to distract Katja from his culpability, he also attempts to shut Katja's line of enquiry down entirely by questioning her motives and denying her ability to have a valid opinion about the past. His recounting of an intergenerational conflict at a party hosted by a colleague in the 1970s, for example, functions as an implied criticism of Katja. In that incident, the son of his colleague accused his father of being a *"Hitlerheld"* and is in turn accused by one of the guests of being *"ein Vampir"* nourishing himself on the horrific experiences of his parents' generation (UB 65). The implication of the anecdote is that the second generation selfishly used its conflict with the first to feed its own identity, and that Katja's motives for causing Musbach such grief are similarly selfish. In making this criticism, Musbach is attempting to make Katja reconsider her pursuit of him and cease her questioning. He is in fact successful on this occasion, with Katja leaving the room affronted (UB 66). Musbach also tries to deflect Katja's condemnation of him by suggesting that she would have acted in the same way as himself and his contemporaries if she had been threatened as opponents of the Nazis were in the Third Reich:

> Stell dir mal vor, eine brutale Diktatur, eine Regierung, die dich ohne rechtlichen Schutz einsperren, foltern kann, verbietet, bei Türken zu kaufen . . . Proteste werden blutig niedergeschlagen. Ein paar Anführer gehängt. Vor den Geschäften stehen halboffizielle Wachen. Gehst du dann da noch einkaufen? Bei Gefahr für Leib und Leben? Nicht nur deines, vielleicht auch des Lebens deiner Familie? (UB 99)

By putting forward this example, Musbach attempts to level the playing field between himself and Katja and thereby remove her from her superior position of judgement. He also seeks to shut her down by discounting her views on the subject of the Nazi past. He does this by emphasising the primacy of

his own eyewitness experience: *"Kein Schnappschuß kann es wiedergeben, nicht einmal ein Film"* (UB 71). By insisting on the priority of his own first-hand account over the photographs and other secondary sources available to Katja, Musbach suggests that, as she was not an eyewitness to the relevant events, she cannot really know or understand what occurred, and her opinion is therefore invalid. In all of these manoeuvres designed to shut down the conversation about the past, as in his emphasis on his own victimhood and desire to maintain his silence about his own role as a perpetrator, Musbach presents a response typical of his generation.

The tension between father and daughter is highlighted by conversations characterised by the vocabulary of battle and enslavement. When Katja first brings the exhibition catalogue to Musbach, she approaches him *"als wolle sie einen Kampf mit ihm aufnehmen"* (UB 18) and Musbach, surprised at her sudden interest in the past, has trouble understanding the reason for *"diese Jagd auf ihn"* (UB 49). The exhibition catalogue lies between them *"wie eine strittige Urkunde"* (UB 45). When Katja reflects on her discussions with her father, she frequently uses language which suggests that Musbach is trying to trick, trap or simply evade her in order to prevent her from uncovering the secret she believes he is hiding (UB 43; 81; 84; 255). She resents the power this *"dominante Vaterfigur"* (UB 262) has over her: *"Sie wollte sich nicht wieder überrumpeln, gefangennehmen lassen und fühlte sich doch alsbald in seinem Bann, von seiner Gegenwart überwältigt, seiner Stimme bestrickt, genötigt, ihm zu folgen"* (UB 257), and fantasises about using her physical advantage to hurt him (UB 148).

During the course of their discussions about the past, the normally warm relationship between father and daughter cools rapidly, with their hugs *"entfernter als sonst"* (UB 19) and their customary exchanges *"eher höflich, beinahe unbeteiligt"* (UB 30). From the beginning, their discussions are punctuated by Katja's accusations, demands to know the truth about the past, and reminders of German guilt (UB 48; 49; 51; 54; 80; 82; 83; 95; 98; 155; 181; 206; 207; 217; 259). As already discussed, these points in the text prevent the reader from becoming too absorbed in Musbach's victimhood narrative, but they are also markers of Katja's continuing anger at Musbach's failure to confess to the crimes she thinks he has committed. Her tone in these exchanges is far from conciliatory, with the dialogue reading more like the interrogation of an overly enthusiastic public prosecutor aimed at forcing a confession than the enquiry of a loving daughter. In these exchanges, Katja's attitude is variously described as *"auffordernd"* (UB 19), *"beharrlich"* (UB 31), *"unnachgiebig, fast hart"* (UB 44), *"erregt"* (UB 48), *"ungeduldig"* (UB 71), *"bitter"* (UB 80), *"kühl"* (UB 217), and *"drohend"* (UB 221). It could also be described as adolescent, particularly in the way in which she repeatedly responds to difficulty by running away from her father, slamming

the door in his face, and leaving him alone, often in tears (UB 66; 120; 145; 173; 238; 259; 272–273).

There are moments in the conflict between father and daughter when Katja seems to suggest that consensus and conciliation with her father are possible, but such moments turn out to be deceptive. Some critics have suggested that Musbach and Katja are able to achieve a reconciliation, not because of any great change in attitude, but because Musbach turns out not to be guilty[155]. Musbach was not the man Katja saw in the photograph in *Verbrechen im Osten*, and however guilty he may feel about his actions, the basis for Katja's conflict with him therefore turns out to be unfounded. Consequently, the tension between Katja and Musbach disappears, not because they have resolved their differences through discussion and come to a mutual conclusion about a difficult past, but because the whole reason for their dispute has fallen away. However, it does not necessarily follow that the lack of a crime as the basis for the intergenerational conflict between Katja and Musbach must lead to reconciliation because it removes the reason for dispute. Rather, the relative paucity of Musbach's "crime" exposes the confrontation between father and daughter as being in large part about the power relationship between two generations, with the Nazi past being used by Katja as a convenient weapon in her power struggle with Musbach and her attempt to exorcise her intergenerational demons.

Another opportunity for consensus comes when Katja criticises the confrontational approach of her generation towards their parents and their parents' past, suggesting a desire to break with the established modes of *Väterliteratur* and inaugurate a new way of dealing with the past at an intergenerational level:

> Hatten die ihre Väter nicht zu erbarmungslos, voller Vorurteile gefragt? Ihnen keine Chance gegeben, offen zu reden? Hatten sie nicht allzu schnell die eigene Unschuld sichern wollen, indem sie ohne Unterschied eine ganze Generation zu Tätern, Mitläufern, Zuschauern machten, um ja nichts mit ihnen zu tun zu haben? . . . Hatten sie jemals Nachsicht und Mitgefühl empfunden, zu verstehen versucht? (UB 255)

However, these reflections form little more than a series of unanswered questions. They come directly after Katja's realisation that Musbach has aimed his narrative towards putting himself on the side of the victims in order to deflect closer scrutiny and judgment (UB 255), and immediately before she forms her decision to push Musbach to answer her charges about his involvement in Nazi crimes (UB 256), suggesting that she considers an alternative,

[155] Hummel, Christine 198; Geier, Andrea 290.

conciliatory approach to dealing with the Nazi past with her father, but rejects this in favour of continuing conflict. Her musings about the attitude of her contemporaries do nothing to change her own plans to confront her father (UB 256), and her continuation of her accusatory and frequently hostile approach indicates an unwillingness or inability to break away from the established patterns of *Väterliteratur*.

The extent to which Katja shows concern about the detrimental effect her questioning is having on Musbach's physical and mental health follows a similar pattern. Her misgivings about putting her father through the trauma of remembering and her expression of a desire for attentive listening and understanding in intergenerational dialogue are different from the attitudes expressed in earlier forms of *Väterliteratur*. She recognises that she will need to take the time to listen to her father and bear his memories if she wishes to uncover the truth (UB 40), and sometimes regrets taking an aggressive tone with him (UB 45; 49). She considers the possibility of unity between the generations following completed memory work (UB 105) and contemplates the need to understand her father in order to maintain their relationship (UB 174). She also considers the need for the second generation to share the burden of the past (both guilt and suffering) with the first, rather than simply pushing it away:

> Wenn wir die Erben der Verstrickung unserer Väter und Mütter in die Nazijahre sein wollen, wenn wir ehrlich Verantwortung für diese Geschichte mit übernehmen wollen, dann müssen wir auch die Erben der Leiden, der Verletzungen werden, all der zerstörten Lebenspläne der Deutschen dieser Jahre. (UB 145; also 151)

However, as with her thoughts about her generation's approach towards talking to their parents about the past, her thoughts on this score remain just that and are not reflected in her actions. Katja may have some scruples about putting her father through the trauma of reliving the past, but every time she asks herself whether she ought to stop, she answers her own question in the negative (UB 105; 145; 150–151). The many question marks peppering her reflections about the need to listen to and understand the first generation are an indication that these thoughts are speculations, rather than concluded positions, and Katja's actions in confronting her father tell a different story. Despite Musbach's rapidly deteriorating health and increasing signs of mental trauma, Katja is determined to force the issue and refuses to let him rest until she has achieved her desired outcome. Although she allows her father plenty of space in which to tell his story, she is reluctant to let the progression of their dialogue deviate from her intentions for it: *"Er sollte erzählen, was sie hören wollte"* (UB 81). She is impatient to reach her goal, namely her

father's confession to a crime which will expose his fallibility and allow Katja to dispose of him as her idol. In her view, only this confession, which places her in the position of power, will resolve the rift in their relationship.

Ultimately, Katja gets the resolution she desires. Although not guilty of the crime she initially thinks he has committed, Musbach does end up confessing to a different shooting (UB 268–269; 275). His precise involvement in the execution may be unclear, but it is something about which he feels deeply guilty. By coming to Katja for absolution, he is forced to admit both his own failings and her power. Katja's aggressive pursuit of her goal has left Musbach a physically and mentally broken man (UB 178; 269), but this destruction of her idol has allowed her to break free from him and rejoin her own generation by seeking dialogue with her estranged spouse (UB 256; 275). At the conclusion of their conversation, Katja fails to embrace Musbach or look him in the eye, preferring to walk on into a new chapter with her husband[156].

Despite the opportunity given to Musbach to tell his story, the moments of tenderness between father and daughter (UB 146; 170–171; 251), and Katja's musings as to the possibility of a different, more understanding way of dealing with the past, the novel does not break with the model of intergenerational confrontation established in the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s. Rather than exploring the possibilities of the "understanding" approach she contemplates, Katja's attitude to discussing the past remains largely inquisitorial throughout and her reminders of German perpetration constant. Despite Katja's criticism of her fellow 68ers, her confrontation with her father is as aggressive as any which might have taken place in the 1960s or 1970s, and can be seen as a belated version of the same approach. Rather than signalling a revolutionary break with the traditions of *Väterliteratur*, Katja's conduct is very much in keeping with the accusations, power play, and rejection of the first generation typical of classic *Väterliteratur*. The discussion may not end with a complete breach, but it does conclude with Katja leaving her spent and defeated father to rejoin her own generation[157]. By adhering to the patterns and conflicts characteristic of the *Väterliteratur* genre, *Unscharfe Bilder* guides the reader towards interpreting Musbach along the lines of the usual depiction of father figures in the genre, namely as a perpetrator. The instrumentalisation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the intergenerational conflict which becomes apparent through the use of typical *Väterliteratur* themes also has the effect of undermining

156 Vees-Gulani shares this view: Vees-Gulani, Susanne 70.

157 These views as to the failure of the novel to realise the potential of its own set-up and break with the 68er approach are shared by Vees-Gulani, Susanne 66–71; Fischer-Kania, Sabine "Reden" 85–90.

Musbach's narrative by exposing his characterisation of himself as a victim as a part of his power struggle with Katja. By raising questions about the purpose of Musbach's narrative, the reading of the novel as *Väterliteratur*, like Katja's voice and other devices used in the novel to undermine Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim, causes the self-depiction in that narrative to fail, leaving Katja's assertion that he is a perpetrator the dominant view in the novel.

3.5 The final, incontrovertible truth? *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction

In my discussion of *Der Vorleser*, I highlighted the way in which the nature of the novel as historiographic metafiction unsettles the novel's depiction of SS guard Hanna Schmitz as a perpetrator and thereby gives rise to considerable controversy. Like *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* can also be read as a work of historiographic metafiction. Various metafictional elements of the novel point in this direction, with the closed, self-reflexively artificial, tightly constructed nature of the text combining with the novel's explicit thematisation of historiographical criticism to produce a work of historiographic metafiction. In my discussion of the portrayal of Musbach in *Unscharfe Bilder* thus far, I have suggested that, despite his best efforts to depict himself as a victim of Nazism, the novel as a whole has the end result of portraying him as a perpetrator. However, in view of the disruptive effect a reading of *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction has on the portrayal of Hanna, is there a danger that a similar reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* will destabilise the depiction of Musbach as a perpetrator, thereby reconfirming his own sympathetic portrait of himself as a victim? If this is the case, why has *Unscharfe Bilder* not given rise to the same level of heated dispute as *Der Vorleser*? In what follows, I will discuss *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction with a view to elucidating the answers to these questions.

As was the case with *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* expressly thematises criticisms of historiography by means of the profession of a protagonist, in this case Musbach. Like Michael, Musbach works in the field of history, although as an ancient history teacher, rather than a legal historian. His profession provides occasion in the novel for reflection on the ability of historiography to truthfully represent historical events and on the interaction between history writing and fiction. For example, on a family visit to Troy, the debates between Musbach and Katja's archaeologist husband as to whether Troy was a genuine historical location and whether it existed on the site identified by Schliemann expose history as a tale often spun from remarkably little evidence. Their discussion also specifically references the interaction

between fact and fiction and the narrativity of history when they wonder whether Troy really existed or was invented by the poet Homer, and whether *"ein Krieg um Troja Geschichte oder eine Geschichte war"* (UB 22). Further, the way in which Musbach uses history in his role as a history teacher prompts consideration of the influence of present concerns on how we tell stories about the past. When teaching high school students about ancient history, Musbach frequently shaped the narrative of ancient events so as to comment on recent German history, as noted by his fellow retirement home resident, Frau Sippel, mother of one of Musbach's pupils: *"Egal, ob Kaiser Nero, Caesar oder Caligulla, irgendwie . . . kriegt der Musbach den Bogen zu Hitler und ins Dritte Reich"* (UB 24). The idea that history is a narrative shaped for a present purpose is repeated when Musbach tells Katja about a nineteenth century shipping disaster involving a raft called the Medusa with the specific aim of underscoring his own authority as an eyewitness and dismissing Katja's ability to judge him and his contemporaries for what they did during the Nazi period. The incident highlights the idea that the writer of history selects certain elements from the historical record in order to create a narrative for a particular purpose, and that historiography therefore represents more than a mere presentation of "facts". This exposure of bias in historical narratives is most apparent in the contrast between the way Musbach relates the history of the Nazi period as a history teacher and as a former *Wehrmacht* soldier speaking to his daughter. As a history teacher, Musbach frames the facts of the Nazi period so as to emphasise German perpetration, but when it comes to speaking to Katja about his individual involvement, he reframes the events to emphasise German victimhood.

In addition, the novel refers explicitly to critical debates about historiography. When Musbach discusses his conversations about the past with his friend, Barndorff, Barndorff criticises the historian's assertion that the image he or she presents of history constitutes the ultimate "truth" about the past:

> Sie müssen doch nicht glauben, daß es in historischen Fragen nur eine Wahrheit geben kann. Während wir Naturwissenschaftler davon leben, daß alles Wissen nur vorläufig ist, lesen die Historiker leider offenbar zu wenig Popper. Sie gehen nicht davon aus, daß aller Fortschritt darin besteht, bisherige Erkenntnisse als falsch zu entlarven; sie sehen sich nicht als produktives Glied in einer Kette von Irrtümern. Die Historiker heute schauen auf die Geschichte, machen sich ihr Bild und verkünden uns dann ihren jeweiligen Wissensstand allzu oft als letzte, unumstößliche Wahrheit. (UB 135)

The novel also refers to debates about the problems of aestheticising history, particularly the history of traumatic events such as the Holocaust. Musbach criticises the aestheticisation of battle on the basis that it has the effect of

making trauma more palatable and consequently does not represent its true horror (UB 73). Katja also reflects on this problem:

> Und ist nicht jedes ästhetische Heraufbeschwören von Grauen, Schrecken, Schmerz zwangsläufig auch seine Verharmlosung? Wird der Schrecken nicht um so genießbarer, je vollkommener die Wörter ihn heraufbeschwören? Schrecken in Schönheit aufgelöst. (UB 158)

Katja's realisations in this regard have the effect of disrupting her faith in the ability of words to represent the full story about the past: *"Seitdem er zu erzählen begonnen hatte, war sie mißtrauischer geworden gegenüber Wörtern und Sätzen"* (UB 158). In a further, self-reflexive move typical of historiographic metafiction, Katja's train of thought at this point also reflects on Hahn's writing of a novel which may itself have a tendency to aestheticise the past and make it more palatable: *"Trüge nicht auch einer, der von diesen Gesprächen zwischen Vater und Tochter schriebe, dazu bei, das Leiden, den Schmerz, den Krieg selbst, erträglicher zu machen?"* (UB 158–159). This self-reflexive element pre-empts the text's own reception by questioning the purpose of recounting Musbach and Katja's dialogue about the past, demonstrating an awareness of potential criticisms of Musbach's victim-focused narrative as a device which makes a desired reconciliation between the generations more achievable, and prompting reflection on the purpose behind narratives about the past.

As well as referring to these more general points of historiographical criticism, *Unscharfe Bilder* also refers specifically to contemporary debates about the representation, both in history and in fiction, of Third Reich Germans as either victims or perpetrators. The controversies surrounding Grass' novella *Im Krebsgang* (UB 27) and Walser's *Ein springender Brunnen* (UB 100)[158] are referred to in passing, and in both cases the reference not only underscores the theme of the representation of the past, but also points in a metafictional way to the blurring of the line between fact and fiction. However, the main intertextual reference to contemporary controversies about the representation of the role of ordinary Germans in the events of the Nazi period is of course to the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*[159]. A significant aspect of the

[158] Walser, Martin *Ein springender Brunnen* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 2000. The controversy in this case is referred to indirectly when Musbach asks Walser's question as to whether it was possible for a German of his generation to tell his own personal story without having to discuss the Holocaust.

[159] Hahn specifically refers to her use of the exhibition catalogue as a historical source at the end of the text (UB 281).

discussion of the exhibition in the novel is the critique of the accuracy of photography as a historical source. This critique reflects a central element of the controversy about the representation of *Wehrmacht* soldiers in the exhibition, as well as making more general points about the fragmentary nature of historical source material and the openness of such material to misinterpretation.

In its original form, as displayed from 1995–1999, the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* consisted largely of photographic material alleged to depict *Wehrmacht* soldiers committing atrocities against civilians. Following a closer inspection by historians, it was discovered that a number of the photographs in fact depicted crimes of the Soviet secret service (NKWD), rather than the *Wehrmacht*. This led to a loss of confidence in the veracity of the images presented and the withdrawal of the exhibition in its original form[160]. These events raised directly the question of the reliability of photographic evidence in providing an accurate depiction of the past, and this issue is thematised throughout *Unscharfe Bilder*, beginning with the Ludwig Wittgenstein quote in the epigraph: *"Ist eine unscharfe Fotografie überhaupt ein Bild eines Menschen?"* (UB 7). The novel opens with Katja pushing the exhibition catalogue towards Musbach, stating cryptically, *"Dein Bild wirst du ja nicht drin finden"* (UB 19), and from this moment onwards, the novel is concerned with the reliability of and battle for primacy between various sources, particularly the battle between the photographic evidence in the catalogue and Musbach's eyewitness account[161]. Katja initially has a strong belief in the reliability of photographic evidence and thinks that the static nature of photography makes it preferable to more changeable sources:

> Diese Fotos im Katalog sind aber nicht in irgendeinem Kopf, in deinem oder einem anderen, und sie können sich auch im Lauf der Zeit nicht verändern. Niemand kann ihre Ränder in der Erinnerung golden einrahmen. Und sie sind auch keine Kunst, keine wortgewaltige Ästhetisierung des Entsetzens. Sie sind historische Wahrheit. (UB 73)

Musbach critiques this view by pointing out that a photograph captures only a single, decontextualised moment. When considering Katja's question as to whether photographic images are always true, he replies: *"Ja, sicher . . . jedenfalls für den Augenblick, den sie festhalten . . . Aber für jedes Bild gibt es ein Bild dahinter, für jeden Augenblick eine Geschichte, davor und*

[160] Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 288–290.

[161] Geier also describes the novel as being concerned with the media contest between image and text: Geier, Andrea 284; Fischer-Kania also considers the theme of photography in the novel: Fischer-Kania, Sabine "Medium" 149.

danach" (UB 63; see also UB 70; 132). The attitudes displayed by both Katja and Musbach in these discussions about photographs as a historical source underscore the way in which they both use such sources as weapons in their intergenerational power struggle, highlighting both the continuation of the instrumentalisation of the past typical of *Väterliteratur* and the questioning of the biases inherent in the use and interpretation of historical sources often thematised in historiographic metafiction.

The faith that Katja expresses in the veracity of photography at the beginning of the novel is steadily broken down by these sorts of reflections, and particularly by her realisation that she has misinterpreted the photograph in *Verbrechen im Osten* in which she believed she recognised Musbach taking part in a crime. After being challenged by the contrasting images presented by Musbach's testimony and by his comments on the limitations of the photographic medium, Katja revisits the photograph in the exhibition which prompted her dialogue with her father. On this further viewing, it becomes apparent that the photograph may not show what Katja thought it did. The face of the man in the photograph is in shadowy half-profile, making identification a matter of conjecture, and it is impossible to tell from the captured moment whether he had fired his weapon, or whether the killings depicted had been carried out by others (UB 274). Moreover, the date of the photograph definitively excludes the possibility that the man depicted is Musbach (UB 275). Katja's initial conviction that photographs represent an unchangeable historical truth is broken down by the implication arising from her own error, namely that no matter how static the photographic image may be, the eye of the beholder may significantly change its interpretation.

In addition to highlighting the problems associated with using photography as a historical source, the novel also thematises the problems inherent in using memory as a guide to the past. This is particularly significant in view of Musbach's insistence on the primacy and authenticity of his eyewitness testimony. Musbach is keen to attach the label of authenticity to his eyewitness account in order to stake a claim for the primacy of his version of events over the other versions promoted by Katja and thereby shut down her line of questioning. He promotes the idea that the photographs in the exhibition and other sources of information about the past are *"unvollständig ohne meine Bilder"* (UB 73) and that the images of the past presented in the exhibition are not representative of the past as he lived it: *"Siehst du! Von solchen Bildern, von meinen Toten, von meinen Freunden und Kameraden habe ich in deinem Buch kein Bild gesehen. Du hast schon recht, mein Bild, meine Erinnerung kann ich da nicht finden"* (UB 40; see also 31; 39; 49; 109; 120; 135). On a number of occasions, he asserts that only those who experienced the Nazi period and the war can truly know what it was like, implying that the first generation are the only ones who can know the truth about this past:

"nur wer das einmal erlebt hat, weiß überhaupt" (UB 52; see also 105). Musbach's emphasis on the authenticity of his own memories is partly a ploy to gain the ascendancy in his generational power play with Katja, in that it devalues her opinions and removes her ability to judge his actions. Katja recognises her father's strategy, and is concerned that her own view of Germans as perpetrators will be overwhelmed by his images of Germans as victims (UB 43). Yet, although she repeatedly resists his self-depiction by reminding him of his own culpability, to a certain extent she is also forced to agree that Musbach does have an advantage when it comes to commenting on past events, acknowledging the weaknesses of her second generation position: *"Konnte jemand, der nicht dabeigewesen war, jemals den Vater verstehen?"* (UB 174). She is aware that her lack of first-hand experience of the relevant events inhibits her ability to "feel" what the past was like, and that she is entirely reliant on secondary sources for her knowledge of the period (UB 176). No matter how hard she tries to "imagine" the past, the fact that everything she knows about it is mediated means that she is destined to fail (UB 175; 243). Musbach's emphasis on the primacy of his eyewitness testimony based on its authenticity and reliability is also reflected in certain features of the text. Although the story is told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, the commentary provided by the narrator is limited, with most of the novel being given over to direct quotation dialogue, chiefly between Musbach and Katja. The rendering of Musbach's narrative primarily in direct quotation dialogue lends it an air of immediacy and authenticity, and mirrors the oral nature typical of eyewitness testimony. Similarly, Hahn's indication at the end of the text that she used historical source materials such as collections of letters from the Front and interviews with eyewitnesses as the basis for Musbach's account (UB 281)[162] add to impression that Musbach's narrative is "factual".

This air of authenticity surrounding Musbach "eyewitness account" and the idea that such accounts are more reliable than other sources of evidence are, however, counteracted by repeated reference in the novel to the unreliability of memory generally and of Musbach's memories in particular. Musbach may be envied by his neighbours and colleagues for his *"hervorragendes Gedächtnis"* (UB 24), but in his retirement home lecture on the art of memory, he reminds them that forgetting is part of human nature (UB 25).

[162] Hahn's use of this source material has been criticised by Schmitz, who claims that she uses these sources selectively to suit her own agenda: Schmitz, Helmut "Representations of the Nazi past II" 152–153; Schmitz, Helmut "Reconciliation" 157–158. This in fact reflects the selectivity of the use of source material by historians, highlighting some of the similarities between historiography and fiction put forward by White.

Whether an event is remembered or forgotten can depend on a person's interest in remembering or forgetting that particular event, as can be seen when Katja clearly remembers a family outing during her childhood that Musbach has largely forgotten (UB 84–85), and forgetting can also occur subconsciously (*"was unser PC da oben scheinbar ohne Mausklick alles löscht"* (UB 133)). Further, the unreliability of memory is reflected in Musbach's realisation that there are many memories about the past that he has suppressed so successfully that he has made it as though they never happened (UB 40; 95), including the memory of his part in the execution of Russian partisans, which his guilt causes him to retouch so as to obscure his freedom of choice. Musbach may have an excellent memory, but he also realises that, even for an eyewitness, the precise details and emotional impressions of a particular event may not be able to be retrieved (UB 52). Katja also acknowledges the selective nature of memory when she accuses Musbach of seeking some memories in order to avoid others (UB 61). By exposing eyewitness memory as being as partial, inconsistent and contingent as other historical sources, the novel undermines Musbach's insistence on the primacy and reliability of his own testimony and attempts to head off any tendency in the reader to accept Musbach's victimhood narrative as the "authoritative" statement about his Nazi past.

As well as pointing to the unreliability of memory as a historical source, the novel reflects in its own structure the way in which the very process of turning memories into a narrative of historical events necessarily involves selection and distortion. This can be seen in the constructed nature of Musbach's eyewitness testimony, which is apparent from the strict chronological order maintained in his narrative about the past (with the exception of his description of his involvement in a "war crime", which occurs out of order at the end of the novel), as well as his use of the simple past tense and well-constructed sentences. These are features of narrative history which do not reflect real speech and memory patterns[163], but instead point to the nature of Musbach's testimony as a composition. The orderly structure of his account points self-reflexively to its own nature as a constructed product, and the difference between his narrativised, aestheticised version of events and the more chaotic nature of "real life" memory both draws attention to the distorting effects of narrativisation on the representation of the past and raises questions about the reasons behind Musbach's chosen order and his choice of historical events.

The novel's critique of the limitations of both the photographic medium and eyewitness memory in providing an accurate image of the past can be applied to the many other sources of information about the Nazi period

[163] Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 216; 221; Hummel, Christine 197.

present in *Unscharfe Bilder*. The novel refers to a wide variety of sources of information about the past, both public and private, including oral testimony by eyewitnesses, family discussions (UB 24; 64–66; 125–126), school teaching (UB 18; 24), television documentaries (UB 23), photographs, art works (UB 72; 159–160), non-fiction texts (UB 128; 158), literature (UB 27; 71; 195), historical documents and memorial objects (UB 144; 164; 189). The multiplicity of sources and their mutual incompleteness and inconsistencies reflect the postmemorial situation described by Hirsch. Indeed, as Katja points out, the availability of a variety of historical sources may make the past less clear, rather than more so:

> Klärte das, was der Vater hier aus immer tieferen Schichten heraufholte, den Blick auf die Fotos der Ausstellung oder nicht? Machte es die Dinge klarer oder verworrener? Die Bilder schärfer oder unschärfer? Das Begreifen leichter oder schwerer? Noch wußte sie keine Antwort. (UB 105)

The overall impression created by the novel's critique of historical representation is that historical sources are incomplete and unreliable, and that any attempt to provide a narrative of the past involves bias, selectivity, and a significant amount of imagination. Under these circumstances, the prospect of establishing the "truth" about the past fades away, as Musbach suggests when he says: *"Wie viele Seiten hat die Wahrheit? So viele, wie wir Bilder für sie haben. Oder Worte"* (UB 63).

3.5 Is a blurred photograph an image of a person at all? Historiographic metafiction and the portrayal of Musbach

The explicit thematisation of criticisms of historiography in *Unscharfe Bilder*, combined with the novel's consideration of the partial and often contradictory status of historical source material and the biases involved in source interpretation, highlight the nature of the text as historiographic metafiction and raise serious questions about our ability to ascertain the "truth" about the past. What are the implications of this reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction for the novel's portrayal of Musbach? Does the novel's questioning of historical narratives tend to destabilise the portrayal of Musbach as a perpetrator, as was the case with the portrayal of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*, or does it have the effect of strengthening the text's tightly constructed attempt to prefigure the reader's response towards assigning Musbach to the category of perpetrator?

The answer to these questions is tied up with the dominance of Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim in the novel and the presentation of

his account as the stereotypical testimony of a *Zeitzeuge*, complete with tropes emphasising authenticity, primacy and victimhood and many of the *Tradierungstypen* observed by Welzer in first generation German stories about the Nazi past. These features of the portrayal of Musbach have lead to concerns that the novel as a whole re-establishes the narrative authority of the experiencing generation and privileges oral testimony, and that the novel's suggestion that Musbach's experiences are typical and have a representative quality is problematic because it prioritises German victimhood and thus renders all "ordinary Germans" victims[164]. However, it is my contention that, in keeping with the closed nature of the text and its function as a *Thesenroman*, the novel sets up Musbach's eyewitness testimony as a typical first generation narrative precisely for the purposes of undermining it and exposing it as just as incomplete, biased and problematic as the other historical sources and narrative histories questioned by the novel's reflection of historiographical critiques.

The status of Musbach's eyewitness testimony as the dominant narrative about the past in the novel means that questions of historical narratives and historical sources raised for the reader by a reading of the text as historiographic metafiction adhere primarily to Musbach's own account, thereby undermining his portrayal of himself as a victim. The attempt by Musbach to take control of the historical narrative and exclude other versions means that his version is the main one available to be destabilised by the novel's historiographical critique. In this way, the novel's criticisms of historiography and other representations of history, particularly eyewitness testimony, support Katja's questioning of Musbach's account, undermining his attempts to prefigure the listener's (and therefore the reader's) response. The reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction exposes Musbach's eyewitness testimony as an account carefully designed to portray himself as a victim in order to gain sympathy, avoid judgment and retain control of the narrative about the past. In doing so, it turns attention back to precisely what Musbach was trying to avoid, namely his perpetration, and supports the novel's overall characterisation of Musbach as a typical first generation perpetrator who tries to manipulate narratives about his past so as to remove himself from blame. As such, the novel makes for a complex response to the issues raised by the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, in that it not only considers the problems of photographic sources raised by the exhibition, but also takes a critical view of the typical responses of the *Zeitzeugen*. Together with the counter-narratives built into the text and the repetition of themes from classic *Väterliteratur*, the reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction undermines

[164] See for example Schmitz, Helmut "Reconciliation" 156; 159.

Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim and reinforces the characterisation of Musbach and other ordinary Germans as perpetrators.

In maintaining a focus on Germans as perpetrators, *Unscharfe Bilder* takes a remarkably similar position on the perpetrator/victim dichotomy as *Der Vorleser*, despite the fact that Musbach and Hanna are very different characters. Musbach is an ordinary *Bildungsbürger* and conscripted soldier who provides a typical first generation response to accusations of culpability, whereas Hanna is a highly unusual illiterate who volunteers for service with the SS at a concentration camp. Whereas Musbach portrays himself as a victim, Hanna does not see herself as one, with all suggestions as to her potential victimhood emanating from Michael's narrative. However, the way in which the attempted depiction of each of them as victims in both novels is comprehensively undermined and exposed as unreliable, constructed and contingent reinforces the characterisation of first generation Germans such as Musbach and Hanna as perpetrators.

Where *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* differ is the effect a reading of these novels as historiographic metafiction has on the portrayal of Hanna and Musbach. The reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction does give rise to the same type of tensions as such a reading exposes in *Der Vorleser*, in that criticisms of history writing which suggest that it is not possible to know the full, objective truth about the past or to represent it in a way that avoids bias and contingency tend to undercut the basis for assigning someone to the category of perpetrator or victim. However, whereas these tensions operated in *Der Vorleser* to destabilise that novel's designation of Hanna as a perpetrator, in *Unscharfe Bilder* they have the opposite effect. Part of the reason for this difference is the dominance of Musbach's victimhood narrative in the latter text which means that it is primarily his portrayal of himself as a victim which is deconstructed by a reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction. Another reason may be found in the relatively open or closed nature of the respective texts. Whereas *Der Vorleser* is a fairly open text which may therefore be more prone to destabilisation, *Unscharfe Bilder* is a closed *Thesenroman* in which most aspects of the novel's structure, including its function as historiographic metafiction, are carefully constructed so as to leave the reader little room to conclude anything other than that Musbach is a perpetrator.

The continuing emphasis on Germans as perpetrators in both novels is particularly significant in light of the changing memorial landscape between the time of publication of *Der Vorleser* in 1995 and *Unscharfe Bilder* in 2003. During this period, public interest and debate swung from a focus on ordinary Germans as perpetrators to the "Germans as victims" wave which highlighted German suffering. Although Musbach's own testimony, particularly his use of "Germans as victims" tropes, does pick up on themes current

in public discussion in 2003, the text's comprehensive undermining of Musbach's self-portrayal and consequent characterisation of him as a perpetrator does not precisely mirror the state of German memory contests at the time of publication. The fact that the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators in these two novels has remained constant suggests that literature in the post-unification period continued to adhere to the dominant paradigm in Germany's official memorial culture as regards the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, rather than swinging with the pendulum of public interest. The continuation of patterns of *Väterliteratur* and a focus on German guilt by both second generation authors despite changes in the German public discourse further suggests that generational attitudes may be a more important factor than the state of public debate in shaping the portrayal of Germans involved in the Third Reich in novels of the post-1990 period.

An opportunity to test these conclusions further arises in the next chapter, in which I will consider the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims and the role of historiographic metafiction in the novel *Himmelskörper* by Tanja Dückers. *Himmelskörper* was published in the same year as *Unscharfe Bilder,* and like *Unscharfe Bilder,* it deals with the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the context of private family discussions about the Nazi past in which the first generation focuses on portraying themselves as victims. However, *Himmelskörper* was written by a third generation author, and in the following chapter I will pay particular attention to the question of whether this difference may be of significance in terms of how the Nazi past is dealt with in post-1990 German literature.

4. Transformation work: Viewing the Nazi past through the third generation prism in Tanja Dückers' *Himmelskörper*

Himmelskörper and *Unscharfe Bilder* were both published in 2003 at a time of increased public discussion of "Germans as victims", which concentrated on tropes of German suffering such as the Allied bombing of German cities, the horrors faced by "ordinary soldiers" on the Eastern Front, and *Flucht und Vertreibung*[165]. It is this last trope which is central to the plot of *Himmelskörper,* in which intergenerational discussions about the past in the family of the narrator, Freia Sandmann, take the flight of Freia's mother and grandmother from Gotenhafen at the end of the war as their focal point. During their escape, Jo and Renate narrowly avoided becoming passengers on the *Wilhelm Gustloff,* which was sunk by the Soviets in the Baltic Sea on 30 January 1945. Uncovering the truth about this "lucky" escape is a key source of narrative tension in the novel and the main vehicle for Freia's exploration of her family's Nazi past.

The approach taken to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in *Himmelskörper* bears many similarities to that taken in *Unscharfe Bilder*. Both novels examine the Nazi past in the context of family relationships, and particularly through private conversations about family history. As in *Unscharfe Bilder*, the first generation figures in *Himmelskörper*, Freia's maternal grandparents Jo and Mäxchen, are allowed a significant amount of space in which to tell their own stories. As was the case with Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen use this opportunity to portray themselves as victims, concentrating on their own suffering as a way of eliding their complicity with the regime. The presence of themes of German suffering in *Himmelskörper* has given rise to concerns (again as with *Unscharfe Bilder* and also *Der Vorleser*) that the novel promotes an understanding of Germans as victims and therefore represents a shift in the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. This

[165] The theme of German suffering during the Second World War was widely canvassed in mainstream print media during this period, for example in a number of lead stories in *Der Spiegel* (*Die Deutsche Titanic,* 4 February 2002; *Die Flucht*, 25 March 2002; *Als Feuer Vom Himmel Fiel*, 6 January 2003) and on television (for example in the Guido Knopp television series *Der große Flucht* (directed Guido Knopp, Christian Deick, Anja Greulich, ZDF, 2001)). For an overview of the "Germans as victims" discussion, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N 340–355.

reception of the novel as part of the "Germans as victims" wave may be partly explained by the publication in the same year of Günter Grass' novella *Im Krebsgang* (which also features the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*) and a consequent tendency to associate the novels with each other and with an increased focus on German suffering[166]. However, other commentators question whether it is appropriate to position *Himmelskörper* as a "Germans as victims" novel on the basis of its references to *Flucht und Vertreibung* and the *Gustloff* disaster, pointing instead to aspects of the novel which set these references to German victimhood in the context of German crimes[167]. As with both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, critical discussion of the novel has disagreed on the novel's presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. In this chapter, I will take a position in this debate by examining *Himmelskörper*'s portrayal of its first generation figures, Jo and Mäxchen. How do Jo and Mäxchen portray themselves? Is their self-portrayal undermined by other characters or other features in the novel? Is the text closed and functionalised like *Unscharfe Bilder* and what effect does this have on the depiction of Jo and Mäxchen? Does *Himmelskörper* continue the patterns of intergenerational confrontation, powerplay and accusation characteristic of both the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s, and of post-1990 works by second generation authors such as *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*? Or does Dückers, as a third generation author, take a different approach?

The main difference between *Himmelskörper* and both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* is, of course, the fact that it is narrated from the perspective of the third generation. Dückers is a third generation author (born 1968) and

166 The two works have often been discussed together: Emmerich, Wolfgang "Dürfen die Deutschen ihre eigenen Opfer beklagen? Schiffsuntergänge 1945 bei Uwe Johnson, Walter Kempowski, Günter Grass, Tanja Dückers und Stefan Chwin" in Böning, Holger et al *Danzig und der Ostseeraum: Sprache, Literatur, Publizistik* Bremen: edition lumiere, 2005: 293–323; Guarda, Filomena Viana "The Familial and Generational Construction of History: The Gustloff Disaster in Recent Prose Works by Günter Grass and Tanja Dückers" in Silva, Helena Goncalves da *Conflict, Memory Transfers and the Reshaping of Europe* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010: 24–35; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* 45; Jaroszewski, Marek "Das leuchtende Schiff: Der Untergang der Wilhelm Gustloff bei Günter Grass und Tanja Dückers" in Böning, Holger et al *Danzig und der Ostseeraum: Sprache, Literatur, Publizistik* Bremen, edition lumiere, 2005: 277–291.

167 Jaroszewski, Marek 282–283; Stüben, Jens "Erfragte Erinnerung – entsorgte Familiengeschichte: Tanja Dückers Wilhelm-Gustloff Roman Himmelskörper" in Beßlich, Barbara, Grätz, Katharina and Hildebrand, Olaf *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006: 169–189 at 186; 188.

the narrator of *Himmelskörper*, Freia, reflects the author's generational perspective. Freia is in her 30s and pregnant with her first child at the time of narration, which roughly accords with the time of publication of the novel. In the course of her narrative, she describes the childhood and adolescence of herself and her twin brother, Paul, in West Berlin during the 1970s and 1980s[168], including their growing awareness of the role played by their grandparents during the Third Reich. What effect does this change in generational perspective have on the novel's approach to the Nazi past? Does it mark a significant change from patterns established in literature by second generation authors, such as the persistence of the classic *Väterliteratur* format? What effect does the change in perspective have on the portrayal of first generation Germans? For her part, Dückers has suggested that the third generation perspective provides a more balanced view of the Nazi past:

> Meine Generation ist die erste, die einen nüchternen Blick auf dieses Thema wagen kann.[169]
>
> Wir haben mehr historische Distanz, sind nicht so involviert. Haben keine blinden Flecken in der Wahrnehmung. Das gibt uns die Möglichkeit, vieles anzusprechen, couragierter aufzutreten, ohne gleich ein Familiengefüge zu zerstören.[170]

Some critics share Dückers' view that the third generation in this novel does have a more neutral and less judgmental approach towards their grandparents[171]. In this chapter, I consider whether this is the case by looking at the

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168 For a more detailed discussion of the chronology of the novel, see Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 248–249; Giesler, Birte "Der Satz ich erinnere mich nicht könnte zur Ausrede werden: Gender und Gedächtnis in Tanja Dückers' Generationen Roman Himmelskörper" *Freiburger FrauenStudien: Zeitschrift für Interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung* 19 (2006): 171–201 at 172–173; Giesler, Birte "Krieg und Nationalsozialismus als Familientabu in Tanja Dückers Generationenroman Himmelskörper" in Koch, Lars and Vogel, Marianne *Imaginäre Welten im Widerstreit: Krieg und Geschichte in der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1900* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007: 286–303 at 287–288.

169 Partouche, Rebecca "Der nüchterne Blick der Enkel: Wie begegnen junge Autoren der Kriegsgeneration? Ein Gespräch mit Tanja Dückers" *Die Zeit* 30 April 2003.

170 Dückers, Tanja "Mir gefällt mein Geburtsdatum" *die tageszeitung*, 20 March 2006.

171 Ganeva, Mila 160; Eigler, Friederike *Heimat Space Narrative: Towards a Transnational Approach to Flight and Expulsion* Rochester: Camden House,

approach towards the perpetrators and the Nazi past taken by the third generation in *Himmelskörper* and comparing it to second generation attitudes. Does the third generation indeed approach the past in a less accusatory, less emotionally fraught, and more neutral way? Does the third generation see the first generation as perpetrators as the second generation has tended to? Does their allegedly more "neutral" approach indeed allow them to accept "Germans as victims"? And what effect does a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction have on both the portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen and the expression of the third generation perspective in the text?[172]

4.1 Tell us about the war: first generation war stories from Jo and Mäxchen

The discussion of the Nazi past in *Himmelskörper* takes place primarily in the context of multigenerational family conversations about family history, referred to by Freia as *"Erzählt doch mal vom Krieg – Diskussionen"* (HK 98) and *"Wir erzählen euch jetzt mal etwas vom Krieg – Abende"* (HK 124).

2014 at 148; see also Eigler, Friederike "Beyond the Victims Debate: Flight and Expulsion in Recent Novels by Authors from the Second and Third Generation (Christoph Hein, Reinhard Jirgl, Kathrin Schmidt, and Tanja Dückers)" in Cohen-Pfister, Laurel and Vees-Gulani, Susanne *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture* Rochester: Camden House, 2010: 77–94 at 89; Cohen-Pfister, Laurel "An Aesthetics of Memory for Third-Generation Germans: Tanja Dückers Himmelskörper" in Gerstenberger, Katharina and Herminghouse, Patricia *German Literature in a New Century: Trends, Traditions, Transitions, Transformations* New York: Berghahn Books, 2008: 119–134 at 123; Stüben, Jens 171.

172 *Himmelskörper* has been identified as as a self-reflexive, metahistorical generation novel by Ächtler, Norman "Topographie eines Familiengedächtnisses: Polen als Raum des Gegengedächtnisses in Tanja Dückers Roman Himmelskörper" *Seminar* 45.3 (2009): 276–298 at 277; Giesler, Birte "Krieg und Nationalsozialismus" 287; Strancar, Tina "Un(be)greifbare Bilder des Familiengedächtnisses in der deutschen zeitgenössischen Literatur: Tanja Dückers Himmelskörper" *Acta Neophilologica* 46.1–2 (2013): 93–104 at 97; Maldonado-Aleman, Manuel "Geschichte als Narration. Zum Umgang mit der Vergangenheit in Tanja Dückers Roman Himmelskörper" *Revista de Filologia Alemana* 25 (2017): 93–114. For a consideration of the novel as historiographic metafiction, see also Giblett, Kylie "Was ich nicht sehen kann, muss ich erfinden: Third generation narratives of Nazi Herkunft in Tanja Dückers' Himmelskörper and Marcel Beyer's Spione" *Limbus: Australian Yearbook of German Literary and Cultural Studies* 11 (2018): 175–192.

Jo and Mäxchen play the lead role at these events, and the conversations focus on their narratives of German victimhood and suffering during and immediately after the Second World War. Their daughter (and Freia's mother), Renate, performs the role of counter-narrative, questioning her parents' take on events, and Freia and Paul listen and provide occasional prompts to propel the story along. These family conversations about the Nazi past evidence a high degree of construction and artificiality. They are structured like dialogues in a play, and Freia's descriptions of the family discussions about the war regularly include the vocabulary of the theatre (*"Kunstpausen"* (HK 99), *"Repertoire"* (HK 105), *"dramatisch schilderte"* (HK 105)). Freia and Paul's responses to Jo and Mäxchen's stories (*"gespannt"; "gebannt"* (HK 145)) are reminiscent of the reactions that might be expected of children attending a play, and the *"Stichwörter"* used in the family dialogues function like theatrical prompts (HK 133; 144). The novel also repeatedly refers to the family dialogues as being rehearsed like a scripted drama (using language such as *"immer"* (HK 98, 123, 128, 148), *"wiederholt"* (HK 100), *"jedesmal"* (HK 124), and *"stets"* (HK 127, 139)). Jo's contributions are particularly well-rehearsed and marked by a high degree of dramatic over-acting, and Mäxchen takes on the attitude of a storyteller (HK 100–101). The recounting of the family's flight from Gotenhafen in particular is a tale so well-rehearsed that the family knows the story and their roles in it off by heart:

> Die Geschichte ihrer Flucht kannte ich schon auswendig. Wie einen Weg, den man sehr oft abgeschritten ist, kannte ich fast jede Redewendung, jede sprachliche Ausschmückung . . . so wußte ich genau, welche Höhepunkte, Kunstpausen oder retardierenden Momente Jos Fluchtgeschichte kennzeichneten. Und immer wieder gab es an den gleichen Stellen dieselben Streitigkeiten mit meiner Mutter, und immer wieder verstummte meine Mutter irgendwann resigniert und ließ Jo weiterreden. (HK 98)

Dückers has been criticised for the artificiality and overtly constructed nature of these family conversations in the novel[173]. However, as was the case with

[173] Wild, Thomas "Opas Mitgliedsnummer" *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 8 March 2004; Schneider, Wolfgang "Zeitkritische Betulichkeit – Tanja Dückers Roman Himmelskörper" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 17 July 2003; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* 58; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 253. See also Herrmann, Meike "Erinnerungsliteratur ohne sich erinnernde Subjekte oder Wie die Zeitgeschichte in den Roman kommt: Zu Erzähltexten von Katharina Hacker, Thomas Lehr, Tanja Dückers und Marcel Beyer" in Schütz, Erhard and Hardtwig, Wolfgang *Keiner kommt davon: Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008: 251–265 at 261.

the careful construction of intergenerational family discussions in *Unscharfe Bilder*, this artificiality should not necessarily be seen as an indication of the author's inability to craft vivid dialogue. Rather, the artificiality of the family conversations about the past in *Himmelskörper* and the way in which every detail is functionalised suggest that, as with *Unscharfe Bilder*, the reader is dealing with a text that has been carefully constructed to control the reader's response and leave the reader in no doubt as to Dückers' view of the Nazi past and the portrayal of the first generation. It is to that portrayal that I now turn.

The family discussions about the war in *Himmelskörper* are dominated by Jo and Mäxchen's narratives about their experiences during the Nazi period, just as Musbach's account of his time as a soldier dominates his discussions about the past with Katja. Like Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen use these conversations about their life during the Third Reich (whether consciously or subconsciously) as an opportunity to portray themselves as victims. Their narratives touch on many of the tropes of German suffering familiar from the "Germans as victims" discourse. In her accounts of the war years, Jo recalls times of hunger and deprivation (*"Mit Essen spielt man nicht! So was war mal kostbar!"* (HK 53)) and exposure to extreme cold when fleeing ahead of the Red Army:

> Wenn ich daran denke, wie wir damals eine ganze Nacht und einen Morgen bei minus zwanzig Grad im Schnee draußen am Pier gestanden haben! . . . Und viele Leute – uns ging's ja noch gut – waren wochenlang im Winter auf den Treks unterwegs! (HK 99; also HK 127)

Jo's descriptions are reminiscent of Musbach's testimony concerning the arduous nature of his time as a soldier on the Eastern Front and as a deserter on the run with the Russian partisans. These narratives of cold and hunger are augmented in Jo's account by narratives of suffering specific to *Flucht und Vertreibung*. Jo recounts the stress and trauma of having to leave the family home quickly, forced to leave *Heimat* and many treasured possessions behind (HK 132), and details the rape and pillage suffered by those who did not flee swiftly enough:

> Und dann hat die russische Meute sich über mein Königsberg hergemacht. Aus zwei Tagen Plünderei, wie sie angekündigt waren, wurden Monate voller Raub, Vergewaltigung, Mord. Und die Bewohner waren alldem einfach ausgeliefert. (HK 106; also HK 126; 128)

The language Jo uses emphasises her own victimhood status and that of other "ordinary Germans" who experienced *Flucht und Vertreibung*. *"Der Russe"* is clearly identified as the villain of the piece and the references to plain

brutality are piled one on top of the other in quick succession to achieve a cumulative effect. The Germans in Jo's account appear as *"Unschuldige"*, who are powerless and passive in the face of the violence to which they are subjected. Her narrative is thick with tropes of German victimhood, but completely omits any discussion of German crimes.

Although Mäxchen does not talk about his war experiences as frequently as Jo, when he does, he does so in a way that emphasises his own victimhood and suffering as an ordinary German soldier. Like Musbach, Mäxchen describes his battle experiences in technical detail and with a degree of intensity and emotion designed to encourage sympathy and identification in the listener:

> . . . meistens sprach er nur von diesem und jenem U-Boot, dieser und jener Flackabwehr, vertiefte sich in technische Details. Wenn er plötzlich über seine eigenen Erlebnisse sprach, dann nur äußerst gefühlsbetont. Er fluchte und schimpfte, schüttelte den Kopf, bohrte seinen Zeigefinger in die Luft, entwarf wirre Topographien im Wohnzimmer, trommelte auf die Tischplatte. Manchmal standen ihm auch die Tränen in den Augen. (HK 97)

Throughout the family conversations about the past, Jo and Mäxchen consistently depict themselves as helpless victims of overwhelming forces beyond their control who acted bravely in the face of immense suffering.

In the same way that Musbach repeatedly seeks to distance himself from the "Nazis" in his conversations with Katja, Jo and Mäxchen also seek to draw a line between themselves and the Nazi regime in their narratives about the past. Right up until the point when her advancing dementia impacts on her ability to maintain the lie, Jo takes care to distance herself and Mäxchen from the "Nazis" and deny their support of the regime:

> Freia, wir waren keine Nazis. Jede gewalttätige Ausschreitung habe wir abgelehnt. Grob, furchtbar fanden wir das. Vulgär. Diese Horden die da herumzogen. Widerlich. Dieser Krach. Unser Umfeld war treudeutsch, aber nicht nazideutsch. Das war ein großer Unterschied, müßt ihr wissen. (HK 126)

Again like Musbach, Jo also seeks to identify herself with those who resisted the regime by relating an instance of what she sees as *Zivilcourage* in the story Freia describes as *"die berühmte Bananengeschichte"*:

> Jo war Ende der dreißiger Jahre in einem Lebensmittelladen gewesen, als sie bemerkte, daß neben ihr ein kleiner Junge mit Judenstern stand. Er war schlecht gekleidet und sah kränklich aus. Jo hatte Mitleid mit dem Jungen und überlegte nun, ob sie es wagen könnte, dem Jungen eine Banane zu geben,

> aber dann hatte sie zu große Angst, dabei vom Verkäufer beobachtet zu werden, und daher tat sie es nicht. (HK 105)

As with Musbach's story about how he gave chocolate to Russian children even though it was *verboten*, Jo's "*Bananengeschichte*" is designed to both distance her from the "Nazis" by showing that she was not sympathetic towards their racist policies and to identify her with the resistance to Nazism by recording her "rebellious" thoughts.

Another way in which Jo and Mäxchen distance themselves from the "Nazis" is by pushing the bulk of the blame for the events of the Third Reich onto the Nazi leadership. This tactic also has the effect of reinforcing their portrayal of themselves and other "ordinary Germans" as victims, in that it depicts them as suffering abuse and betrayal at the hands of the regime. Jo and Mäxchen depict the Nazi leaders as foolhardy, cowardly and hypocritical, at least as regards their conduct during the final stages of the war (*"Verrückte waren das. Kollektive Idiotie."* (HK 127); *"die Bonzen sind anders weggekommen. Sicherer. Besser. Die standen sich da nicht die Füße in den Bauch und sind halb erfroren"* (HK 144)). The military leaders (including the *Führer*) in particular are blamed by Mäxchen for their faulty strategies (HK 130–131), and he also implies that he and his fellow soldiers were victims of Hitler's misleading conduct and broken promises (*"sie konnten nicht, wie Hitler versprochen hatte, Weihnachten wieder nach Hause"* (HK 87)). Similarly, Jo depicts ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers such as Mäxchen as heroes willing to sacrifice themselves despite being forced by the regime into the futile position of fighting a losing battle:

> Also, wenn jemand ein Held ist, wenn es so etwas wie Helden gibt, dann sind das die Wehrmachtssoldaten für mich, die hinhaltenden Widerstand auf verlorenem Posten geleistet haben, ihr Leben riskiert haben, damit wir Zivilisten noch fliehen konnten. Dabei ahnten sie ja, daß der Russe nicht mehr aufzuhalten und alles nur noch eine Frage der Zeit war und daß sie sich selbst mit jeder weiteren Kampfhandlung in Lebensgefahr brachten. Das sind für mich Helden. (HK 129)

Like Musbach's self-portrayal in *Unscharfe Bilder*, Jo and Mäxchen's self-depiction in *Himmelskörper* is strongly reminiscent of first generation German eyewitness testimonies observed by Welzer in his study of multigenerational conversations about the past within German families[174]. Indeed,

[174] Others have noted the relevance of Welzer's study for an analysis of *Himmelskörper*: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op 251–252; Till, Dietmar "Kontroversen im Familiengedächtnis: Vergangenheitsdiskurse im Generationenroman (Klaus Modick, Uwe Timm, Tanja Dückers)" in Geier, Andrea and

Dückers mentions Welzer's study in a number of her non-fiction works published both before and after *Himmelskörper*, so the similarities between Jo and Mäxchen's first generation narratives and those observed by Welzer is unlikely to be coincidental[175]. Like Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen's self-portrayal displays many of the *Tradierungstypen* occurring in the conversations analysed by Welzer, including *Opferschaft, Rechtfertigung, Distanzierung* from the "real" Nazis, recounting minor instances of *Zivilcourage* and, in the case of Mäxchen's emotive descriptions of his battle experiences, *Überwältigung*. The high degree of similarity between the accounts of Jo and Mäxchen and typical first generation narratives about the Nazi past suggests that they have been carefully constructed so as identify Jo and Mäxchen as typical "ordinary Germans" of the first generation. In fact, Jo and Mäxchen could be seen as being even more typical than Musbach, in that they are not *Bildungsbürger* and do not have Musbach's exemplary attitude to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (at least at an abstract level). As I will explain in what follows, the novel sets Jo and Mäxchen up as typical "ordinary Germans" precisely for the purpose of undermining their self-portrayal and exposing their concentration on their own victimhood and suffering as a means of reducing the scope for accusations of culpability. The "Germans as victims" narrative established by Jo and Mäxchen is undermined in the novel by features apparent in Jo and Mäxchen's own testimony, by the discovery of memorial objects which indicate Jo and Mäxchen's complicity, and by the corrective role played by Renate in family conversations about the past and

Süselbeck, Jan *Konkurrenzen, Konflikte, Kontinuitäten: Generationenfragen in der Literatur seit 1990* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2009: 33–52 at 39–40; 43; Stüben, Jens 175; Schaumann, Caroline "A Third-Generation World War II Narrative: Tanja Dückers *Himmelskörper*" *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook* 4 (2005): 259–280 at 271; Ächtler, Norman 279–281; Strancar, Tina 99–102; Schaumann, Caroline *Memory Matters: Generational Responses to Germany's Nazi Past in Recent Women's Literature* Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008 at 309; Braun, Michael "Wem gehört die Geschichte? Tanja Dückers, Uwe Timm, Günter Grass und der Streit um die Erinnerung in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur" in Schütz, Erhard and Hardtwig, Wolfgang *Keiner kommt davon: Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008: 97–111 at 110; Braun, Michael "Die Wahrheit der Geschichte(n): Zur Erinnerungsliteratur von Tanja Dückers, Günter Grass, Uwe Timm" in Klinger, Judith and Wolf, Gerhard *Gedächtnis und kultureller Wandel: Erinnerndes Schreiben – Perspektiven und Kontroversen* Tübingen: Max Niemayer Verlag, 2009: 97–111 at 106–107.

175 Dückers, Tanja and Carl, Verena *stadt land krieg* Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004 at 8–9; Dückers, Tanja *Morgen nach Utopia* Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2007 at 89.

the way in which this role recalls patterns of *Väterliteratur*. The level of artificiality and functionalisation involved in structuring the novel in this way suggests that, like *Unscharfe Bilder, Himmelskörper* is a closed text which is carefully constructed so as to guide the reader towards a particular conclusion, namely that Jo and Mäxchen are perpetrators.

4.2 Many good memories of this time: counter-narratives to German victimhood

Jo and Mäxchen are at pains in their accounts of their experiences during the Third Reich to portray themselves as "ordinary Germans" as distinct from the "Nazis", as people who suffered terrible hardships during the war, and as victims of the Nazi regime who mislead and betrayed them. However, at the same time it is Jo and Mäxchen themselves who most comprehensively undermine their own "Germans as victims" narrative. Even when attempting to portray her family as victims and distance them from the "Nazis", Jo frequently undercuts her own self-portrayal by accompanying it with statements which unwittingly emphasise her support of the Nazi regime. An example of this can be seen in the following passage from Jo's account, in which she comments on her attitude towards the Nazi *Rassengesetze*:

> Das war damals so eine Mode, aber ich hab das mit diesen Rassengesetzen nie recht verstanden . . . Den Russen mochte ich nicht besonders, aber die Juden waren mir egal. Ich habe nicht begreifen können, wie man Kinder umbringen kann. Ich will doch auch nicht, daß Negerkinder umgebracht werden! Das hat für mich die Nazis endgültig diskreditiert, auch wenn ich viele gute Erinnerungen an diese Zeit habe. (HK 104)

In this passage, Jo attempts to distance herself from the Nazis and to display an exemplary attitude towards their racist ideology. However, her own vocabulary repeatedly undercuts the image she is trying to present. Her downplaying of the *Rassengesetze* as *"eine Mode"* misfires by bordering on the offensive, and her references to *"der Russe"* and *"Negerkinder"* reveal persistent racism in her own views. In addition, she cannot help referring to her *"viele gute Erinnerungen an diese Zeit"*, indicating her maintenance of positive views about her life under the Nazi regime. Jo's narrative is repeatedly marked by these sorts of statements in which her own words undermine the picture of herself that she is trying to present. A further instance of this arises when Jo appears to agree with Renate that the German leadership was substantially to blame for the humanitarian disaster at the end of the war, but goes on to excuse their actions: *"Obwohl das ja alles gebildete Männer*

waren . . . Aber es war eben auch Krieg. Verblendet waren die da oben schon, aber vielleicht haben sie ja doch selbst geglaubt, was sie uns erzählt haben" (HK 127–128). Despite attempting to draw a line between her family and the "Nazis", Jo's pride at being part of the "in crowd" during the Third Reich consistently shines through. She speaks of her happy days in the *Bund Deutscher Mädel*, when the girls believed *"daß alles gut würde, daß die besten Zeiten für dieses Land anbrächen, die es je gesehen hätte"* (HK 63), and of the privileges that she and Mäxchen had as people with *"Verbindungen"* to the Nazi party (HK 126). When recounting the story of their flight from Gotenhafen, Jo refers to the fact that they were amongst the "select" people who were allowed aboard the *Theodor*. Unlike the *Gustloff*, the *Theodor* was not a *"Massenbetrieb"*, but rather a transportation for *"Leute aus unserem Milieu"* (HK 142; see also 147). When telling the story of Mäxchen's flight, which took place a few weeks after Jo, Renate and Tante Lena had left Gotenhafen, Jo notes that Mäxchen was *"kein Niemand"*, and that his privileged position had allowed him to obtain food at a time when most people were going hungry, a comment echoed by Mäxchen's boasts of his *"gute Kontakte"* to the naval hierarchy (HK 139), which gave him advance information about the unsafe state of the *Gustloff*. In all of these instances, Jo and Mäxchen's comments imply that their relationship to the Nazi party was a great deal closer than their "Germans as victims" narrative suggests. Furthermore, the novel does not leave it to the reader to draw this inference. In keeping with the nature of *Himmelskörpe*r as a closed text in which the reader is carefully directed towards certain conclusions, the novel instead makes the point explicit in Freia's reflections towards the end of the novel. As she looks back on the stories her grandparents told about the past, Freia observes that, alongside *"all die distanzierten und ironischen Bemerkungen . . . über die Nazi-Zeit und über Hitler selber"* (HK 262) her grandparents had made over the decades, there had also been *"viele kleine grenzwertige Äußerungen"* (HK 263) which, put together, formed a convincing picture of a commitment to Nazism.

Freia's suspicions about Jo and Mäxchen's involvement with Nazism are confirmed by both Jo and Mäxchen towards the ends of their lives. As both Jo and Mäxchen age and become affected by the onset of illness and dementia, they are increasingly unable to maintain the carefully constructed image of themselves as victims and opponents of Nazism, and it becomes increasingly apparent that their self-portrayal is a lie. When Freia and Paul visit Mäxchen when he is dying of prostate cancer, his discussion of the social structure of the bees he keeps reveals by analogy his adherence to the racist ideology of Nazism. As he shows Freia and Paul the beehives he has inherited from a neighbour, Mäxchen praises the "ordered" society in which the bees live, noting the way in which they need a *"Führer"* and how they expel

the *"Kuckucksbienen"* (HK 182–187). He finally makes the analogy with Nazi ideology explicit:

> Für mich sind die Kuckucksbienen die Juden im Bienenvolk. Sie bereichern sich an den Grundlagen, die andere Völker für sie geschaffen haben. Nutznießerisch. Berechnend. Aber eine starke Bienenkönigin . . . läßt die Kuckucksbienen natürlich verjagen. (HK 187)

The negative connotations of Mäxchen's revelation of his enduring commitment to Nazi ideology is underscored by the images of darkness and decay surrounding it. Mäxchen reveals his dedication to Nazi antisemitism as darkness falls, standing in an apiary with *"dunklen, stinkenden Wänden"* smeared with blackened, decaying honey (HK 186). The episode reveals his postwar assertions of his rejection of Nazism to be nothing but a deception. Similarly, when Freia talks with the dying Jo about the family history in a last effort to find out the truth about the family's flight from Gotenhafen before it is too late, Jo's advanced dementia causes her to retreat into the past and forget to maintain her postwar lies about the degree of her involvement with Nazism. Jo finally admits *"daß wir in der Partei waren"* (HK 219) and what was earlier implied becomes explicit. As with Mäxchen's revelation of the influence of Nazi ideology on his thought, Jo's revelation of their complicity with Nazism is surrounded by images of darkness and decay: rooms darkened by dusty curtains drawn closed and walls covered in mould (HK 251; 268). Her admission makes it undeniable that she and Mäxchen were not the simple victims they had made themselves out to be, but were in fact perpetrators who, as party members, had actively supported the Nazi regime.

The disintegration of the façade of victimhood constructed by Jo and Mäxchen becomes complete when Freia and Renate go through Jo and Mäxchen's belongings as a part of sorting out their estate after their deaths. When clearing out the house, Freia discovers several boxes covered with gold paper. Inside the boxes, carefully preserved, are postcards of Hitler, drafts of a letter to Göring congratulating him on the birth of his child and a map of Europe upon which the progress of the German army had been marked. The boxes also contain a copy of *"Mein Kampf"* and the volumes *"Nordische Schönheit"* and *"Menschenkenntnis und Charakterkunde. Zur Erkennung und Beurteilung der Kopf- und Gesichts-Formen"* (HK 262–264). The value of these items to Jo and Mäxchen is shown not only by the many *"Eselsohren"* (HK 264) in the books on Nazi racist ideology, but by the fact that Jo and Mäxchen chose to pack these volumes on their flight westwards, preferring their treasured Nazi memorabilia to family heirlooms and photo albums (HK 132; 246; 262).

It is the discovery of this physical evidence which, even more than Jo's confession that she had been *"in der Partei"*, causes Freia to re-evaluate her grandparents' self-portrayal in their narratives about the past. Looking back on her grandparents' testimony in a new light, she is finally able to uncover the image that Jo and Mäxchen had tried to conceal, namely that of themselves as Nazi perpetrators:

> Mir fiel plötzlich auf, wie viele kleine grenzwertige Äußerungen ich doch von ihnen kannte, doch nie hatte ich diese bisher zu einem stimmigen Gesamtbild zusammengefügt, nie wäre mir früher in den Sinn gekommen, Mäxchen und Jo als Nazis zu bezeichnen. (HK 262)

Even more so than Jo and Mäxchen's late-life confessions of their support for the Nazi regime, the revelation of the incriminating objects contained in the gold-wrapped boxes makes it extremely difficult for the reader to reach any conclusion other than that Jo and Mäxchen were Nazi perpetrators. The effect of Freia's discovery of these incriminating objects on the possibility of portraying Jo and Mäxchen as victims is in fact reminiscent of the effect similar evidence had on the family image of *Opa* in one of the families observed by Welzer in his study. In most families included in the study, even outright confessions of guilt and commitment to Nazism made by members of the first generation during family discussions were either omitted from the family narrative altogether, or substantially altered by subsequent generations so as to portray the relevant family members in a positive light[176]. The exception to this pattern was the Meier family who, after the death of the family patriarch, discovered a *Chronik* written by him in which he revealed that he had committed crimes during the Nazi period and continued to be an adherent of Nazism. The discovery of the *Chronik* destroyed the favourable image of the patriarch's actions during the Third Reich in the family narrative about the past by putting forward an alternative narrative which was not able to be synthesised with this positive image of *Opa*. The fact that the *Chronik* was in a form which was not able to be modified meant that its image of the patriarch as an unrepentant perpetrator was not negotiable and it therefore caused a fragmentation of the family narrative[177]. In the same way, Freia's discovery of the physical evidence of Jo and Mäxchen's Nazism prevents the development of a narrative that denies a portrayal of them as perpetrators. Jo and Mäxchen's confessions of their support of the Nazi regime

[176] Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* 49–52.

[177] Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* 21; 70–75; 203–204.

could potentially have been explained away and synthesised into a family history which depicted them in a positive light, but as with the Meier family, the items of memorabilia are non-negotiable, providing an image of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators that cannot be destabilised or displaced.

In the same way that Freia's discovery of the incriminating objects destroys her family's ability to recast or rewrite their historical narrative in a way which avoids Jo and Mäxchen's guilt, the inclusion of this incident in the novel severely restricts the reader's ability to choose Jo and Mäxchen's victimhood narratives over the novel's overall portrayal of them as perpetrators. This conclusion is further supported by the structure of the novel as a detective story, in which Freia acts as investigator, determined to uncover the secrets hidden in her own family history. The tension in the plot of the novel is built around the gradual uncovering of the truth about Jo and Mäxchen's support of Nazism, and the discovery of the physical evidence which puts their complicity beyond doubt forms the high point of this particular plotline. By using the "crime novel" structure of the plot to make the reader focus on evidence of Jo and Mäxchen's culpability, *Himmelskörper* leaves the reader in absolutely no doubt as to the conclusions he or she is supposed to draw about them.

4.3 Nazis of the first hour: shadows of *Väterliteratur*

The novel's characterisation of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators is further supported by the role played by Renate in the novel and in particular by the continuation in her interactions with her parents of patterns familiar from *Väterliteratur*[178]. In the family's conversations about the past, Renate acts as a corrective to the self-portrayal presented by Jo and Mäxchen by repeatedly matching their tales of German victimhood with reminders of German crimes. When Jo speaks of the bitterly cold overland route travelled by the German refugees and the terrible fear they had of being caught by the Russians, Renate interjects with a comment which serves to place German victimhood in the context of preceding German aggression and the concurrent failures of the German leadership:

> Ja, aber daß die Russen nicht nett zu uns sein würden, nachdem die Deutschen erst einmal in ihrem Land herumgewütet hatten war wohl keine Überraschung. Die Flucht verlief doch deshalb für viele Millionen Deutsche so katastrophal,

[178] Ganeva also discusses *Himmelskörper* in the context of *Väterliteratur*: Ganeva, Mila 150; 154–158.

> weil unsere teuren Befehlshaber den Leuten einfach viel zu lange verboten hatten zu fliehen. (HK 127)

Similarly, when Jo relates the tale of their flight from Gotenhafen, Renate points to the responsibility of Germans for their own predicament:

> Ihr schimpft über die Russen . . . die wir zuerst angegriffen haben, aber die Verantwortlichen haben die Zivilisten doch genauso umgebracht, indem sie im Volkssturm vollkommen sinnlos an einer längst zusammengebrochenen Front verheizten. Anstatt sie zu retten. (HK 136–137)

By repeatedly expressing scepticism with regard to her parents' "Germans as victims" narrative, thereby encouraging the reader to do the same, Renate performs the same function as that carried out by Katja in *Unscharfe Bilder*. Both second generation characters question the first's claims to victim status and contribute to returning the focus back towards German culpability.

Further, again like *Unscharfe Bilder,* the performance of this role by a member of the second generation forms part of an intergenerational conflict which repeats the patterns established in *Väterliteratur*, and in this way further emphasises the characterisation of the first generation as perpetrators. As with *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, the relationship between the first and second generations in *Himmelskörper* is frequently characterised by conflict and power play, something which can clearly be seen in the family's discussions about the past. During these discussions, Jo and Mäxchen fight with Renate for control of the family narrative as part of a wider battle to maintain control of the family. Jo's tendency to dominate these family conversations reflects the dominant role she plays in the family's overall life. According to Freia, Renate is jealous of Jo's power over her relatives: *"Ich wußte, irgendwo in ihrem Hinterkopf war Renate eifersüchtig auf ihre Mutter. Auf die Macht, die sie über mich, über alle, immer noch, hatte"* (HK 215). Freia suspects her mother of secretly wishing that Jo would one day be reduced to a helpless, infantilised *"Johännchen oder Hannilein"* (HK 217), just as Maximilian was reduced by his war injuries to "Mäxchen". During the course of family conversations, Renate uses discussions about the past as a weapon in her conflict with her parents, particularly her mother. Her contributions to the family dialogues usually contradict Jo's version of events in some way, and in this respect represent an effort to wrest control of the narrative away from Jo. However, Renate's attempts at setting the tone for the narrative are usually unsuccessful, and despite her best efforts, she always ends up being silenced by her mother: *"Und immer wieder gab es an den gleichen Stellen dieselben Streitigkeiten mit meiner Mutter, und immer wieder verstummte meine Mutter irgenwann resigniert und ließ Jo weiterreden"*

(HK 98). Jo uses a variety of techniques to reassert control over the family narrative. One of these is forming a combined front with Mäxchen, despite their disagreements in other areas of life: *"Bei diesen Gesprächen vertrugen sich Jo und Mäxchen recht gut und bildeten eher eine gemeinsame Front gegen Renate"* (HK 125). She also emphasises her authority as a parent and her correspondingly superior place in the family hierarchy by using diminutives such as *"Renätchen", "Natilein"* (HK 105–106) and *"die Kleine"* (HK 211) to put Renate down. Jo further seeks to shut down Renate's alternative versions of the story by pointing to her own authority as an eyewitness, denying the validity of the views of those who came after. She dismisses Renate's interjections by saying *"Was weißt du schon, du warst doch damals ein Kind!"* (HK 128), and similarly dismisses the opinions of Freia and Paul on the basis that they were not born at the time of the relevant events, so are not in a position to judge how they would have reacted:

> Da wir den Krieg nicht selbst miterlebt hatten, wurden wir für unmündig erklärt und alle skeptischen Fragen mit dem Argument 'Na, ihr wißt gar nicht, was ihr damals an unserer Stelle gemacht hättet!' in den Wind geschlagen. (HK 95)

The way in which the conflict between Renate and Jo plays out in their conversations about the Nazi past bears marked similarities to the Katja/Musbach conflict in *Unscharfe Bilder*, with Renate and Jo using similar techniques to Katja and Musbach respectively in their efforts to maintain control of both the family narrative and of power in their relationships[179]. Both Katja and Renate instrumentalise the Nazi past as a weapon in a broader conflict with their parents. What is different between them is that Katja is much more direct, aggressive and personal in the accusations she makes against Musbach. Whereas Katja interrogates Musbach about his personal responsibility, Renate uses abstract facts and figures pointing to general German culpability in her attempts to contradict her parents and gain control of the narrative. The reason for Renate's failure to confront her parents directly about their involvement with Nazism and use her knowledge of their membership of the Nazi party as a weapon against them is her fear of the exposure of her own "guilt" that such a confrontation would likely bring about. The "guilt" in question centres on Renate's role in the family's successful flight from Gotenhafen at the end of the war. As a five year old child, Renate secured her

[179] Giesler also points to the memory contest between the first and second generations as a theme in the novel: Giesler, Birte "Krieg und Nationalsozialismus" 290–291.

family's passage on the *Theodor*, rather than the ill-fated *Gustloff*, by denouncing their neighbours, who were also waiting to board:

> Da rief Natilein plötzlich . . . also plötzlich rief die Kleine richtig laut: 'Die ham gar nich mehr den Gruß gemacht. Schon ganz lange nicht mehr'. Und Nati streckte ihren dünnen kleinen Arm sehr gerade nach vorn . . . Renätchen hat uns das Leben gerettet. (HK 249–250)

The neighbours, including their five year old son, died in the *Gustloff* disaster, and although Jo regards her as a lifesaver, Renate is plagued by feelings of guilt over her role in the deaths of their neighbours and tries to prevent Freia and Paul from hearing about her actions (HK 85; 246). Renate's fear of exposure of her own secret prevents her from making accusations that would uncover Jo and Mäxchen's. The closest Renate comes to making personal accusations against her parents in the way Katja does against Musbach is when she pushes Mäxchen to tell the story of the *"wertvollen Familien"* (HK 102–103), something that he is reluctant to do and deliberately downplays because it hints obliquely at the "privileged" position of his own family as Nazi party members in the evacuation of Gotenhafen. It is not until after both of her parents are dead that Renate is able to openly accuse them of being *"Nazis der ersten Stunde"* and confirm that their postwar assertions were a sham: *"Nachher waren sie alle so schön demokratisch und so weiter, aber ich habs anders im Ohr"* (HK 300).

Although Renate is unable for most of the novel to take the same accusatory tone typical of *Väterliteratur* that Katja does in *Unscharfe Bilder*, the burden of guilt which prevents her from doing so repeats another characteristic of *Väterliteratur*, namely the casting of the second generation as victims of the first. Renate's life is dominated by the guilt she feels about childhood actions which resulted from Nazi indoctrination by her parents. She is surrounded by imagery which suggests that she is weighed down by the burden of the past. At the family home on the edge of West Berlin, she is surrounded by a thick forest of fir trees, identified in the novel as a symbol of the inescapable past (*"die dunklen, scheinbar undurchdringlichen Tannen . . . Sie schienen mir der dunkle Saum der Vergangenheit zu sein; in der Ferne, am Horizont, doch nie verschwunden"* (HK 184)). Renate often stands at the window staring at these trees, absorbed in her guilt (HK 15; 36; 226). Her obsessive hoarding, particularly of memorabilia relating to family members (such as Freia's plaits, her husband Peter's cigarette butts, and Jo's dentures: HK 73; 75; 284) goes well beyond a *"Nachkriegs-Spartik"* (HK 28; 56; 257–259) and symbolises the way in which she is being buried alive by the burden of the past. On numerous occasions, Renate is depicted as being trapped behind glass, looking out on the present world, but unable to get away from her

history (HK 15; 36; 54; 84; 149; 226; 252)[180]. Her pale, blue and grey-garbed appearance (HK 14; 66; 167; 294) is suggestive of the inescapable sadness which surrounds her. Only on those occasions when she escapes to her cousin Kazimierz in Poland is she surrounded by vibrant red imagery (HK 16), as it is only to him that she is able to unburden herself by confessing her guilt and receiving absolution (HK 300–301).

Ultimately, the burden of guilt that Renate feels about her role in the family's escape from the *Gustloff* disaster becomes too much for her and she commits suicide in a final bid to leave the past behind. This interpretation of her suicide is supported by her throwing out of all of her carefully preserved memorabilia prior to her death, and her decision to wear a *"leuchtend roten Kleid"* as her last garment (HK 314). Having lost her Polish cousin Kazimierz, she no longer has anyone to relieve her burden sufficiently to allow her to continue functioning, and even the deaths of her parents do not permit her to leave the past behind. Under these circumstances, her own death appears to be the only way she can see of finally being free of her guilt and breaking her connection with the past.

At the time of her denunciation of the family's Gotenhafen neighbours as no longer being loyal to the *Führer*, Renate was just a child and therefore not responsible for her actions, no matter how guilty she herself feels. It is Jo and Mäxchen who are responsible, in that they as parents so thoroughly indoctrinated her in Nazi ideology that she may well have thought that she was doing the right thing in accusing her neighbours of disloyalty to the *Führer*. Kazimierz makes this clear when he assures Renate: *"Du bist nicht schuld daran, aber deine Eltern. Die haben schon immer den Arm höher gekriegt als alle anderen"* (HK 301). Despite her feelings of guilt, Renate also acknowledges that her parents' Nazism was the cause of her own actions: *"Warum habe ich das wohl gesagt, wer hat denn zu Hause Strichlisten über die Nachbarn geführt . . . "* (HK 251). In keeping with the pattern established in the classic *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s, *Himmelskörper* continues the depiction of the second generation as victims of their perpetrator parents. In the instrumentalisation of the past as a weapon in the intergenerational struggle for power and in the presentation of the second generation as victims of the first, the relationship between the first and second generations in *Himmelskörper* is very similar to that portrayed in *Der Vorleser* and

[180] On the novel's window and other motifs as they apply to Renate, see Kallweit, Sabine "Cirrus Perlucidus und die Einsamkeit zwischen zwei Generationen: Tanja Dückers Roman Himmelskörper als Beitrag zum kulturellen Gedächtnis" in Bartl, Andrea *Verbalträume: Beiträge zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* Augsburg: Wißner–Verlag, 2005: 177–186. See also Stüben, Jens 180–182.

Unscharfe Bilder and continues the established patterns of *Väterliteratur*. As with those works, the novel's maintenance of aspects of a literary format marked by its emphasis on the first generation's complicity with Nazism restates that genre's emphasis on Germans, in this case Jo and Mäxchen, as perpetrators. However, whereas both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* concentrate closely on the relationship between the first and second generations, *Himmelskörper* views these relationships and the Nazi past through the perspective of a third generation narrator. Does the third generation narrator, Freia, view her grandparents as perpetrators, or does she accept Jo and Mäxchen's account of themselves as victims? Is her approach to what she knows about her family history the same or different from that of the second generation? What is the third generation approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy?

4.4 Transformation work: the third generation perspective

In Freia's descriptions of her history lessons at school, the novel presents an image of a third generation which has grown up immersed in a dominant public memory narrative which highlights German perpetration. The emphasis on German guilt begins in primary school when Freia and Paul are exposed in their history lessons to horrific images of German crimes: *"Leichen, ausgemergelt und nackt, in Bergen auf Karren getürmt, in Gruben übereinandergeschichtet"* (HK 92). German suffering is also covered (*"Brennende Häuser, Städte. Flugzeuge, die in Flammen vom Himmel fallen, Knisternde Schwarzweißfilme. Zitternde Menschen, Truppenmanöver. Landschaften, leer und weit. Bombenhagel. Explosionen."* (HK 92)), but by placing these images after those of German crimes when describing her experience of learning about the Nazi period at school, Freia emphasises the idea that, to the extent Germans suffered during the war, this suffering was a direct result of their own actions. The children are required to revisit the history of the Third Reich repeatedly during their school career (HK 95; 104).

Whilst Freia and Paul are exposed at school to horrific images of Nazi crimes and vast quantities of facts concerning the Third Reich, their family memory is dominated by Jo and Mäxchen's tale of German victimhood in the final days of the war. This contrast reflects the distinction made by Welzer in his research into the intergenerational transmission of information about the Nazi past in German families, in which he contrasts information derived from what he terms the *Lexikon* of public sources, such as school, the government and the media, with that derived from the *Album* of private sources, such as family conversations, personal photographs and letters. Whereas the *Lexikon* focuses on Germans as perpetrators, the *Album* tends

to depict Germans as victims. Welzer's finding was that, in order to synthesise these two, often conflicting sources of knowledge, German families tended to form their family narratives so as to exempt family members from the crimes described in the *Lexikon*[181]. How does the third generation narrator, Freia, deal with the conflicting information arising from her *Lexikon* and her family *Album* in *Himmelskörper*? Does she follow the second generation approach typical of *Väterliteratur*? Does she follow the pattern observed by Welzer and form her narrative about her grandparents so as to exempt them from implication in Nazi crimes? How does her third generation perspective affect her approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy?

Unlike the second generation characters of Katja in *Unscharfe Bilder* and Renate in *Himmelskörper*, who consistently meet their parents' victimhood narratives with accusations focusing on Germans as perpetrators, third generation Freia is willing to acknowledge her grandparents' suffering and accept that it forms part of their story. Rather than seeking to cast her grandparents in solely negative terms, she describes with sympathy her grandfather's decline from the strong, masculine, active "Max" (HK 97; 178) to the disabled, emasculated "Mäxchen" who returned from the Eastern Front with an amputated right leg and weakened lungs (HK 48; 97; 217). Freia also observes how her grandmother has been physically marked by her traumatic experiences during the war: *"... hatte die Angst Falten, Rinnen und Furchen in das Gesicht meiner Großmutter gegraben"* (HK 143). Even as his injuries emasculated "Max", the feminine, blonde-plaited "Johanna" was forced by Mäxchen's dependency to transform into the more masculine Jo (HK 48)[182]. Freia admires the tough single-mindedness shown by her grandmother in surviving the war years: *"Meine Großmutter hatte lange Zeit einfach nur ein Ziel vor Augen gehabt, und zwar: lebend durch den Krieg zu kommen"* (HK 215). In these sections of her narrative, Freia demonstrates an acceptance of

[181] See Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* 10–13. Welzer draws an analogy between these categories of *Lexikon* and *Album* and the concepts of cultural memory and communicative memory described by Assmann: Assmann, Jan *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* 34–56; Assmann, Jan "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität" 9–19.

[182] For considerations of the theme of gender in the novel, see: Giesler, Birte "Der Satz ich erinnere mich nicht könnte zur Ausrede werden"; Hill, Alexandra Merley "Motherhood as Performance: (Re)Negotiations of Motherhood in Contemporary German Literature" *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature* 35.1 (2011): 74–94; Mattson, Michelle "The Obligations of Memory? Gender and Historical Responsibility in Tanja Dückers's Himmelskörper and Arno Geiger's Es geht uns gut" *German Quarterly* 86.2 (2013): 198–219.

the suffering of her grandparents and promotes a degree of sympathy for them.

However, Freia's acknowledgement of Jo and Mäxchen's suffering does not mean that she accepts that their portrayal of themselves as victims should be the dominant narrative about their past. Both Freia and Paul consistently view their family history and the Nazi past generally through the prism of their *Lexikon* knowledge which depicts Germans primarily as perpetrators. For example, Freia and Paul respond with sarcasm to the suggestion that the humiliation caused by the Treaty of Versailles constituted a valid reason for the popularity of Nazism:

> Warum jemand, der arbeitslos und durch Landverlust "geknechtet" ist, plötzlich Lust auf Massenerschießungen bekommt, anstatt mit seiner Geliebten in meinetwegen etwas zerschlissener Kleidung spazierenzugehen, erhellte sich Paul und mir nicht . . ." (HK 95)

This rejection of excuses for Nazism shows that Freia and Paul view attempts to excuse German crimes by reference to German suffering with scepticism. Freia is also sceptical about her grandparents' self-portrayal. This can be seen in the way in which she undermines Jo's attempts to place herself on the side of the resistance to Nazism by pointing to the inconsistencies and even ridiculousness of Jo's *"berühmte Bananengeschichte"*, a story Jo tells in response to a question from Freia and Paul *"ob sie denn damals die Juden abgelehnt hätte"* to support her assertion that she was sympathetic towards the Jews and was against the regime:

> Das Absurde an der Bananengeschichte war, daß Jo ihr Abwägen, ihren Wunsch zu helfen, ihre Unsicherheit und Angst jedesmal derart dramatisch schilderte, daß man am Ende fast den Eindruck bekommen konnte, Jo hätte ein KZ befreit. Irgendwie gelang es ihr, das Unterlassen einer Handlung zur Heldentat zu stilisieren. (HK 105)

Importantly, Freia's ridiculing of the *"berühmte Bananengeschichte"* does not provide a new perspective on Jo's account, but rather underscores what would already be clear to many readers. The absurdity of Jo's story is apparent as it stands, with her attempt at styling her actions as an example of exceptional *Zivilcourage* merely serving to highlight her actual failure to do anything to help the Jews. The fact that the novel does not leave the reader to draw these implications on his or her own, but rather has them explicitly spelled out by Freia is an indication both of the closed nature of the text and of the importance Dückers ascribes to ensuring that the reader is not lead astray by Jo's portrayal of herself as a victim and opponent of the Nazi regime.

In addition, once she uncovers her grandparents' membership of the Nazi party, Freia never tries to deny, conceal, or excuse that fact. She does not accept Jo's excuse that she and Mäxchen were *"Kinder unserer Zeit"* (HK 252), but rather is so horrified and disgusted by the truth about her grandparents that she is physically sick (HK 251). What is significant about Freia's reaction to her discovery of Jo and Mäxchen's support of the Nazi regime is the way in which it deviates from the typical response observed in Welzer's study of German family discussions about the Nazi past which Dückers has cited as an influence on her. In his study, Welzer found that first generation stories which revealed family members to have been complicit in Nazi crimes were blotted out of the family history by members of subsequent generations. Despite (or perhaps because of) their high level of general knowledge about the Third Reich, members of the third generation tended to maintain an image of their own family members as victims and were very resistant to correcting this image when confronted with compromising information about their grandparents' activities under Nazism[183]. In family dialogues about the Nazi period, statements from the first generation showing them to be perpetrators did not lead to surprise or upset on the part of their third generation listeners, but rather to nothing at all. Welzer found that it was as though members of subsequent generations did not even hear the statement which implicated their beloved family member, and that such statements were not incorporated into family memory and family narratives about the past[184]. In contrast to these sociological findings, Freia does not try to ignore revelations of her grandparents' complicity with Nazism or resist correcting the image of Jo and Mäxchen as victims which forms a major part of her family's private narrative. Rather, instead of ensuring that the depiction of Jo and Mäxchen in the private family *Album* does not link them with Nazi crimes, Freia acknowledges the fact of Jo and Mäxchen's Nazism and incorporates it into the family narrative. In doing so, she uses her *Lexikon* knowledge to understand the victimhood narratives of her grandparents in the context of their crimes[185]. This deviation from the norm again shows the way in which the novel is constructed so as to confirm German guilt and emphasise the portrayal of the first generation as perpetrators in a way that

183 Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* 31–32; 47.

184 Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* 51–52.

185 Welzer himself has commented on the way in which Dückers' dialogues deviate from the findings of his study: Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" 62. Herrmann also agrees with this viewpoint: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 252. See also Stüben, Jens 181.

is consistent with the trend already observed in relation to *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*. In this sense, the third generation perspective in *Himmelskörper* does not mark a radical change from previously established patterns in German literature dealing with the Nazi past[186].

What is different about the approach of the third generation as described in *Himmelskörper* is not their characterisation of the first generation, but rather what they do with the knowledge that their family members were perpetrators. In *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, the second generation protagonists instrumentalise the Nazi past as a weapon in their conflict with their parent figures and use the first generation's culpability as a means of rejecting them. Interactions between the first and second generations are characterised by conflict, interrogation and accusation, and the second generation exhibits a strong desire to free themselves from their parents and the burden of the Nazi past that accompanies them. A similar pattern may be observed in the relationship between the first and second generations in *Himmelskörper*, with Renate's interactions with Jo and Mäxchen about the past also being marked by conflict. However, Freia takes a different approach to the burden of her family's Nazi history, one which marks a change from the patterns established in literature by second generation authors. Rather than using the Nazi past as a way of carrying out intergenerational conflict and responding to the identification of the first generation as perpetrators by rejecting them, members of the third generation accept the fact of their grandparents' culpability and concentrate on working out what this fact means for their own identity and how to integrate it into their own story.

The move away from conflict towards integration is signalled in the novel by the very different role played by Freia and Paul in their family's multigenerational discussions about the war. Whereas their mother Renate plays an active role in the discussions, repeatedly challenging her parents' version of events, Freia and Paul remain largely passive[187]. Their role is

[186] The emphasis on Germans as perpetrators and concern about turning *Täter* into mere *Zeitzeugen* in *Himmelskörper* is consistent with Dückers' non-fiction writing on this subject: Dückers, Tanja *Morgen nach Utopia* 83; 91–92; 95–100; 101–107; Dückers, Tanja "Alles nur Opfer: Wie mit Hilfe von Filmen wie dem ZDF-Zweiteiler 'Die Gustloff' aus Nazi-Tätern und -Unterstützern wieder 'reine Zeitzeugen' gemacht werden. Ein medialer Geschichtsrevisionismus der neuen Art" *Die Zeit* 6 March 2008. See also the interview with Dückers in: Partouche, Rebecca.

[187] See also Neuschäfer, Markus "Vom doppelten Fortschreiben der Geschichte: Familiengeheimnisse im Generationenroman" in Lauer, Gerhard *Literaturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Generationsforschung* Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010: 164–203 at 180.

mostly limited to providing occasional prompts as part of the ritual of the family narrative (for example at HK 144). Occasionally, Freia and Paul decide to manipulate family discussions of the Nazi past to annoy their parents and grandparents for the sake of their own amusement, as when Paul stays up at night to write a "new" version of the family history *"welches am nächsten Abend den Eklat auslösen sollte"* (HK 87). However, Freia and Paul never use the family's discussions about the past as an occasion to promote serious conflict, and they never openly challenge their grandparents' version of events. When Freia exposes the ridiculousness of Jo's *"berühmte Bananengeschichte"*, for example, it is in the context of her narrative to the reader rather than in the middle of a family conversation. The different approach taken by Freia and Paul towards these family discussions indicates that, for the third generation, the Nazi past is simply not a source of intergenerational conflict or a means of acting it out[188]. The tension between Freia and Paul and their parents in the novel is not caused by the discovery of a parent's involvement in Nazi crimes, but centres rather on the more universal "coming of age" experience of discovering that one's parents are not the people one thought they were, as when Freia becomes aware of her father's infidelities (HK 119)[189]. The way in which the third generation deals with the burden of its family history thus marks a move away from using the tropes of *Väterliteratur*, indicating that the pattern may no longer be readily applicable to the new constellation presented by the third generation. For them, the Nazi past no longer promotes the same kind of personal relationship crisis that it did for their parents.

The fact that members of the third generation have moved away from the second generation approach of instrumentalising the Nazi past for the purposes of intergenerational conflict does not, however, mean that the past no longer has any significance for them. Freia recognises that the family's past, and particularly her grandparents' enthusiastic support of Nazism, forms an important part of her own identity[190]. Her interest in uncovering the truth about her family's Nazi past is awakened by her pregnancy, which causes her to reflect on what the family history might mean, not only for her own identity, but for that of her unborn daughter:

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188 Dückers has made a similar point in an interview *"Ich glaube, dass der Dialog der Großeltern- und der Enkelgeneration auf Grund der historischen und persönlichen Distanz leichter fällt als zwischen Eltern und Kindern, und das ist eine Chance – der nüchterne Blick der nicht unmittelbar Betroffenen"*: Dückers, Tanja "Verdrängte Schuld" *Der Spiegel* 11/2002.

189 Ganeva makes a similar point: Ganeva, Mila 159.

190 On third generation approaches to integrating the Nazi past into their own identity see also Giblett, Kylie "Was ich nicht sehen kann".

> . . . seitdem ich die Nachricht verdaut habe, daß ich schwanger bin . . . seitdem ich also weiß, daß ich selbst Mutter werde, muß ich sehr oft an Renate und auch an Jo denken. Es gibt so viel Ungeklärtes in unserer Familie, das mir plötzlich keine Ruhe mehr läßt. Als hätte mit meiner Schwangerschaft eine Art Wettlauf mit der Zeit begonnen, in der ich noch offene Fragen beantworten kann . . . ich weiß nicht genau, woher meine Unruhe stammt . . . vielleicht ist es ein unbewußter Drang, zu wissen, in was für einen Zusammenhang, in was für ein Nest ich da mein Kind setze . . . (HK 26)

Her pregnancy makes Freia realise the importance of her biological and social connection with the past via her mother and grandmother, and to the future via her daughter:

> Plötzlich war ich Teil einer langen Kette, einer Verbindung, eines Konstrukts, das mir eigentlich immer suspekt gewesen war. (HK 26)

> . . . und ich wieder Angst bekam vor dieser dicken, eingeschweißten Familienkette aus Schweigen, Totschlag und nochmals Schweigen, zu der ich nun für immer gehören würde. Über meinen Tod hinaus. (HK 272)

This continuity with the past is a repeated theme in the novel, expressed particularly through the use of symbols which suggest links and interconnection. One of these is braiding, particularly symbolised by Freia's plaits. The act of braiding itself suggests interconnection, in that it involves intertwining different strands together to form a single cord. In the novel, the act of braiding is linked specifically with the transmission of information about the past. When Freia is young, both her mother and her grandmother take part in the ritual of braiding her hair, during which her grandmother in particular likes to show Freia old photographs in which she herself is wearing plaits, and to reminisce about *"der glücklichsten Zeit ihres Lebens"* (HK 27; 61–64). It is the plaits themselves which seem to Freia to stimulate discussion of the past: *"meine Zöpfe brachten Jo dazu, von früher zu erzählen, ohne daß Paul und ich drängeln mußten"* (HK 62). Looking into the mirror, Freia imagines she can see all of the other women in her family, linked together by their long hair in a chain of continuity from the past into the present (HK 62). Freia tries to escape this connection with the past by cutting off her plaits, but Renate, unable to let the past go, preserves Freia's plaits by pinning them to a board in her room (HK 66–67)[191]. Freia's plaits and the link to the past they represent are almost disposed of when, prior to her suicide, Renate throws them in the rubbish bin along with her other memorabilia (HK 314), but they return once again when Paul salvages them, intending to use them in an

[191] See also Cohen-Pfister, Laurel 129.

artwork about Freia (HK 274). The amber necklaces worn by Jo and her sister Lena perform a similar symbolic function to Freia's plaits. As with the plaits, the amber necklaces are specifically associated with the transmission of the past. When Jo talks to Freia about the past towards the end of her life, she fingers her amber necklace like a rosary (HK 212), and the dying Tante Lena insists on giving her necklace to Freia so that she can know *"daß alles weitergeht"* (HK 214). Freia finds the heavy amber necklace and all that it symbolises a burden to wear around her neck, but she feels unable to dispose of it and ends up carrying it around in her jacket pocket.

The symbols of both the plaits and the amber necklaces reflect Freia's appreciation that the past can be a burden. The chain of family inheritance is a connection about which Freia has mixed feelings, but she nevertheless accepts its existence and tries to work out what the past means for her, and what it will mean for her daughter in the future. The symbols of the plaits and the amber necklaces also indicate that the past cannot simply be rejected, but continues on as a part of each of us, even as Freia's plaits are unable to be disposed of, but become part of Paul's artistic representation of Freia's identity (HK 274). Engagement with the past continues and Freia learns to see herself as part of an unbroken chain and the past as part of her identity. For the third generation, as Paul expresses it at the end of the novel, the past may not be a source of acute conflict, but it is always there in the background:

> Wir sind glücklich, aber trotzdem spüre ich den Sog der Vergangenheit einfach immer . . . Freia, immerfort, jeden Tag, wie – du wirst den Begriff besser kennen als ich – so eine Art 'kosmische Hintergrundstrahlung'. Etwas, das immer da ist. (HK 316–317)

The members of the third generation in *Himmelskörper* not only accept the culpability of their grandparents, but they also realise that they are inextricably linked to the Nazi past by their family ties and that complete rejection of their family history is not possible without denying their own identity. Rather than trying to reject their family and their past as the second generation does, the third generation in *Himmelskörper* instead seeks to integrate the fact of their grandparents' support of Nazism into their own story. The way in which Freia and Paul do this in the novel is by creating *Himmelskörper* as a codification and contextualisation of their family's Nazi history and its meaning for their own identity.

In many ways, this new writing project is a continuation of Freia and Paul's childhood transformation of historical information they have gleaned from their grandparents into fairytales. As a child, Paul processed Jo and Mäxchen's stories of German suffering on both the Eastern Front and the homefront by combining them with his own invented stories about

fantastical beasts (HK 83). However, just as their childhood sense of wonder on hearing their father's fairytales about *"Waldgeister"* (HK 40) gives way to an adult realisation that his stories are a cover for his infidelity, so Freia and Paul's imagination and reinvention of their grandparents' narratives about the past as a source of amusement gives way to the knowledge that this family past is a real part of their own identity. Freia and Paul respond to this realisation by creating a different, grown-up narrative as a means of taking possession of the past and making it part of their own story. Rather than telling another fairytale about fantastical creatures, they tell their own story, in which the history of their grandparents' culpability forms a part.

In a highly metafictional move, the story they tell is the novel *Himmelskörper* itself: *"Ich sehe es jetzt schon vor mir: Ein 6-Uhr-winterblauer Deckel . . . Die Buchstaben 'Himmelskörper' gleiten über . . ."* (HK 318). In the final chapter, the novel points self-reflexively to its own genesis when Freia and Paul decide to write a novel as a means of processing their family past. They had already tried to work through their family history by collaborating on a visual art project following the deaths of their grandparents (HK 55–59). The twins call this collaboration their *"Transformationsarbeit"* (HK 56), a term which reflects the postmemorial nature of their undertaking[192]. As members of the third generation, Freia and Paul have no personal memories of the Nazi past. Instead, they combine fragments of mediated historical information with their own imaginations to form a new, postmemorial product. In undertaking their combined project, Freia hopes to transform the burden of the family past into *"etwas Leichtes, Klares, Transparentes"* (HK 271). However, she becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the project, as she fails to understand Paul's work or to see her own view of the past reflected in his paintings: *"Ich wollte Klarheit gewinnen, nicht ein weiteres Labyrinth aufbauen"* (HK 271). To solve the problems arising in their visual art collaboration, Freia comes up with the idea of writing down what they have uncovered about their family history (HK 272–273). Paul agrees with the idea, seeing the writing project as a means of unburdening themselves of their family past: *"Ich möchte hier in Frieden leben und Jacques nicht immer mit unserer Geschichte belasten, und deshalb müssen wir dieses Buch*

[192] Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" has been widely applied to *Himmelskörper*: Ächtler, Norman 294; Schaumann, Caroline "A Third-Generation World War II Narrative" 262–263; Ganeva, Mila 150–151; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* 47–49; 55; Braun, Michael, "Wem gehört die Geschichte?" 105; 110; Braun, Michael "Die Wahrheit der Geschichte(n)" 101; Strancar, Tina 98; Anastasiadis, Athanasios "Transgenerational Communication of Traumatic Experiences: Narrating the Past from a Postmemorial Position" *Journal of Literary Theory* 6.1 (2012): 1–24.

schreiben, Freia" (HK 318). The twins hope that codifying their family past will help them to deal with what their grandparents' guilt means for them. Rather than pushing the past away, as the second generation did, the third generation makes it part of their own story, integrating the past into their own identity. They take charge of history by writing it into their story, which allows for a certain amount of emancipation. Their contextualisation of the Nazi past as a part, but no more than a part, of present third generation identity also marks a change from the second generation perspective. Whereas their parents' guilt is the focus of personal crises for second generation characters like Michael and Katja, for Freia and Paul the guilt of their grandparents is only one aspect of their identity, a single part of their wider story. The structure of the novel as a "coming of age" story[193] in which the recognition of Jo and Mäxchen's complicity with Nazism is but one element of Freia and Paul's journey to adulthood along with struggles with sexuality and gender, first loves and first heartbreaks, and disenchantment with loved parents, shows the way in which the third generation views their family's Nazi history as one thread in the tapestry of their larger story.

4.5 Silos of history: *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction

The metafictional self-reflexivity of Freia and Paul's *Himmelskörper* project and the way in which the third generation's transformation of the legacy of the Nazi past echoes White's ideas about the narrativity of history suggest that, like *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder, Himmelskörper* may be understood as a work of historiographic metafiction. *Himmelskörper* is a closed text which is carefully constructed, even to the point of artificiality, so as to ensure that the reader identifies Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators. Do the elements of historiographic metafiction in the novel also form part of its careful construction so as to support the novel's points about the Nazi past, as was the case in *Unscharfe Bilder*? Or do they have a destabilising effect, as was the case in *Der Vorleser*? And what is the relationship between a reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction and the expression of the third generation perspective in the novel?

Unlike both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Der Vorleser*, *Himmelskörper* does not address historiographical critiques through a character involved in the history profession, such as Michael or Musbach. Instead, the novel

[193] On the theme of "coming of age" in the novel, see Jaroszewski, Marek 280; Taberner, Stuart "Representations of German Wartime Suffering in Recent Fiction" in Niven, Bill *Germans as Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 164–180 at 180.

thematises its criticisms of historiography most explicitly by reflecting White's levelling of the difference between history and fiction through its questioning of the distinction between art and science. This theme is expressed through the professional work of Freia and Paul, who consciously combine elements of both art and science in their endeavours. Freia is a meteorologist with a particular interest in cloud formations, therefore seeming at first to represent "science", whereas Paul as a painter represents "art". However, throughout the novel, the twins both combine these fields in a way which questions their traditional separation. Freia is influenced in her work by Dr Tuben, an unorthodox meteorologist who rejects the presumed opposition of art and science and proposes a multidisciplinary approach:

> Und er wollte anhand von Cirrus Perlucidus die schwebende Grenze zwischen 'subjektiver' and 'objektiver' Geschichte, zwischen Faktum und Empfindung erörtern, Schriftsteller, Publizisten, Historiker, Politologen und Meteorologen gemeinsam einladen. (HK 307)

Similarly, Paul often incorporates scientific concepts into his visual artworks, such as the temperature markings which he uses as titles for his paintings (HK 24). He also uses science as an artistic inspiration when he "transforms" Freia's talk of her scientific research into visual art works (HK 24).

This questioning of the distinction between art and science is explictly linked in the novel to history, fiction, and the representation of the past by Dr Tuben's understanding of clouds as *"Geschichtsspeicher"*, an invented term which he uses in reference to both *"Geschichte"* and *"Geschichten"* (HK 307). Tuben's idea collapses the barrier between art and science, as well as pointing to the identity between "histories" and "stories", between "fact" and "fiction". A similar point is made through Paul's "transformation" of historical objects linked to the family's Nazi past into paintings. In turning past objects, information and events into new artworks, Paul's painting reflects the process of historiography, in which historical events are turned into a new narrative which is not identical with the past that it represents. The collapsing of the distinction between art and science in the novel and its direct application to the field of history recalls White's criticism of the idea of history as a "science", his description of history as a "fiction", and his emphasis on the use of "artistic" methods, such as literary narrative techniques, in historiography[194], clearly marking *Himmelskörper* as a work of historiographic metafiction.

A similar reference to the blurring of the line between fact and fiction in the weaving of historical "facts" and elements of the writer's imagination

[194] White, Hayden *Tropics of Discourse* 81–100; 121–134.

into a narrative can be seen in the metafictional process Freia and Paul employ as part of their third generation approach towards dealing with the Nazi past. The development of Freia and Paul's postmemorial project from fairytale to visual artwork and finally to the novel *"Himmelskörper"* thematises the narrativity of history. As was the case in *Der Vorleser*, the self-reflexive reference to the writing of the novel points to history as a narrative and the problems this causes for the idea of historical objectivity. In trying to write down a "definitive" version of their family history to prevent their lives being overwhelmed by the flood of information they have received about the past, Freia and Paul reject other versions and elements which do not fit in with their new narrative, just as Michael at a similar point in *Der Vorleser* acknowledged that he had chosen to write down one particular version of the past, ignoring others. By referring to their narrativisation of their family history as *"Transformationsarbeit"*, Freia and Paul reflect the idea that the act of turning historical "events" into a narrative "history" involves changing them, so that they no longer represent a mimesis of the past. The link between history and fairytales in the novel, as well as the fact that Freia and Paul's narrative of their family history is eventually produced in the form of a *Roman*, further alludes to White's ideas about history as fiction, and again displays significant similarities with *Der Vorleser*. This focus on history as a narrative arising from a reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction not only reflects critiques of historiography, it also forms an important part of the way in which the novel expresses the third generation's new approach to dealing with the Nazi past. Freia and Paul do not reject their grandparents or try to deny their Nazism, but rather they accept these aspects of their family history as forming part of their own identity. In a postmemorial fashion, they combine elements from their *Album* and their *Lexikon* with their imagination to form a family history that is also a story in the form of a novel.

This blurring of the lines between fact and fiction apparent in both the nature of the novel as historiographic metafiction and in the third generation's way of dealing with the past through narrativisation exposes history writing as subjective, partial, and frequently arbitrary. As is often the case in historiographic metafiction, this questioning of where the line between historical fact and historical fiction lies raises further questions about our ability to ever know the "truth" about the past and therefore have a basis for judging the perpetrators. Does this reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction therefore destabilise the portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators as it destabilises the depiction of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*? Or is *Himmelskörper* more like *Unscharfe Bilder*, in which the elements of historiographic metafiction undermine Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim?

Himmelskörper is indeed similar to *Unscharfe Bilder* in the way in which it highlights the problems for historiography's claims to objectivity and veracity posed by the fragmentary, contingent, biased and often conflicting nature of the source material with which historians and others investigating the past must work. As with *Unscharfe Bilder*, the novel focuses its questioning of whether we can ever know the "truth" about the past on querying the reliability of eyewitness accounts and photographs. The transmission of information about the Third Reich in *Himmelskörper* takes place in large part via the eyewitness testimony of Jo and Mäxchen given during the course of family discussions. The novel addresses the problems associated with using eyewitness testimony as a historical source by pointing to its basis in inherently unreliable memory and by highlighting the narrativity of eyewitness accounts. The novel highlights the unreliability of memory by emphasising the way in which people remember the same event differently. This becomes apparent to Freia when she is speaking to Renate about the times in Freia's childhood when Renate would plait her long hair. Renate remembers these episodes as times of closeness, when she and Freia spent time chatting to each other, whereas Freia remembers these moments as being characterised by silence. Freia's comment, *"Wie unterschiedlich die Erinnerung doch ist"* (HK 276), is indicative of her realisation that memory is not an objective means of capturing past experiences, but a subjective rendering of events. These reflections on the subject of memory emphasise its partial nature and have obvious implications for eyewitness testimonies which necessarily draw on memory as their major source.

The novel also questions the "authenticity" of eyewitness testimony by pointing to the artificiality and narrativity of such accounts. In the sections of her narrative concerned with family discussions about the war, Freia deliberately prompts the reader to see the artificiality in Jo's stories about the past: *"Sie tat immer so, also müßte sie diesen Satz aus der tiefsten Versenkung ihres Gedächtnisses an die Oberfläche ihres Bewußtseins zerren, dabei konnte sie ihn – und wir derweil auch – natürlich im Schlaf aufsagen"* (HK 99). Combined with the overt typicality of Jo and Mäxchen's first generation recollections, this sense of their eyewitness accounts as well-rehearsed plays presents an image of eyewitness testimonies as tales which have been constructed for a particular purpose. The artificiality of Jo and Mäxchen's accounts exposes them as a carefully constructed narrative of events, and in this way thematises the narrativisation of history[195]. The arrangement of past events into a dramatic format reminds the reader that any narrative of history is necessarily selective and partial, as events are selected because they are

[195] On the functional nature of artificiality in the novel, see Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 253; Stüben, Jens 175–176.

inherently exciting, or altered for dramatic effect, or simply omitted. They are historical narratives, not mimetic representations of the past. Eyewitnesses select or discard information and events in the formation of their historical narratives in accordance with their own interests, as shown by the way Jo's desire to present herself as a victim and conceal her enthusiastic support for Nazism dictates the stories she chooses to tell, those she chooses to omit, and how the stories are framed. Indeed, through the example of Jo the novel demonstrates the way in which "authentic" eyewitness narratives are capable of being outright lies, thereby criticising the tendency to automatically accord weight to eyewitness testimony. By making the constructed nature of the dialogues overt, the novel calls the authenticity and veracity of oral histories narrated by *Zeitzeugen* into question and highlights the bias, selectivity and distorting effect that historiographic narrativisation can have on the representation of historical events. This questioning of eyewitness testimony is particularly significant in view of the heightened interest in the *Zeitzeugen* at the time of the novel's publication. Part of this interest arose because the "Germans as victims" wave was fuelled primarily by private recollections, but interest was further intensified by fact that the lives of the *Zeitzeugen* were rapidly coming to an end. The reflections on eyewitness testimony in *Himmelskörper* undermine such testimony as a historical source, thereby also calling its frequent emphasis on "Germans as victims" into question. The way in which *Himmelskörper* highlights the problems presented by the reliance on memory and the constructed nature of narratives about the past for the claims of eyewitness testimony to "authenticity" and "truth" are strongly reminiscent of similar points made in *Unscharfe Bilder*.

Also highly reminiscent of *Unscharfe Bilder* is *Himmelskörper*'s exposure of the photographic medium as an unreliable historical source. One facet of this unreliability arises from the idea that the interpretation of a photograph is not necessarily static, but can instead be significantly affected by the perspective of the viewer. This is demonstrated when Jo shows Freia a photograph of herself and her sisters as children. Knowing Jo as a strong figure who dominates the family even in old age, Freia at first assumes that Jo is the girl in the photograph *"die mit keckem Blick neugierig den Kopf wendete"*, only to find that she was the one *"das schüchtern die Augen vor dem Fotografen niederschlug"* (HK 62). Her present perspective on Jo's character initially causes her to misinterpret the photograph, recalling Katja's misinterpretation of the photograph in *Verbrechen im Osten* in *Unscharfe Bilder*. Freia's present perspective also acts on several occasions as a block in her attempts to imagine her grandparents in their youth, as they were when various family photographs were taken. At several points, Freia expresses the difficulty she has in trying to reconcile the Jo and Mäxchen she knows as grandparents with the image they present in old photographs:

> Und ich versuchte mir meine Großmutter vorzustellen. Damals. Ich dachte an die vielen Schwarzweißaufnahmen, die ich kannte . . . Ich fand Jo in diesen Bildern nicht, der Blick des Fotografen hatte Jo zu einem Kind gemacht, das sie nicht gewesen sein konnte. Oder doch? Ich hatte an die hundert alte Fotos meiner Großmutter gesehen, und sie war mir mit jedem Blick fremder geworden. (HK 103–104)

> Ich schaute auf das Foto meines Großvaters, ohne Prothese, hoch zu Roß. Mit einem gewinnenden, naiven Lächeln, das ich nur von Schwarzweißfotos an ihm kannte. (HK 251)

Rather than making the past clearer, photographs in this instance serve only to emphasise the lack of comprehension occasioned by distance in time and present perceptions.

Freia also explicitly expresses the problems posed by the fragmentary, decontextualised nature of the photographic medium for the interpretation of the past:

> Aber sind die Momente repräsentativ, die ein Foto einfängt? Man kann ihnen nicht trauen, diesen Schnappschüssen, die festhalten, behaupten und verallgemeinern, wenn doch fast alle unsere Gesten, Mienen und Momente in ein Meer aus Nichts abgetaucht und vergessen sind . . . (HK 250)

Again, these reflections are highly reminiscent of similar views put forward by Musbach in *Unscharfe Bilder* and emphasise the idea that a photograph captures only a single moment but does not contextualise it, providing no information as to what came before or after or any other details that could help to interpret the image. These reflections on the photographic medium highlight the idea that, despite their appearance of presenting an objective, accurate and static image of the past, photographs are little better than oral accounts as a historical source. They are too fragmentary to be relied on for a comprehensive picture and too susceptible to subjective (mis)interpretation on the part of the viewer. Together, the novel's discussion of the problems associated with eyewitness testimony and photographic evidence combine with the thematisation of the narrative representation of history to depict the past as something about which we can only have a limited, often subjective, knowledge.

These points about the limitations of sources of information about and representations of historical events are explored further in *Himmelskörper*'s questioning of the ability of memorial locations to mediate information about the past. A memorial location can be a source of historical information, but the discussion of these locations in *Himmelskörper* focuses on the way in which memorial locations can in fact block understanding of the past. The

disconnect between historiography and the actual events it seeks to represent is explicitly thematised in Freia's discussion of memorial locations, specifically the Warsaw Ghetto and Gdynia (the modern-day Gotenhafen). When Freia takes a trip to Warsaw one school holidays, she visits the Warsaw Ghetto memorial and has trouble trying to visualise the Warsaw of the 1940s beneath the bustle of present-day life:

> Ich versuchte, an die vielen Opfer zu denken und traurig zu sein . . . Doch ich konnte diese Gedanken nicht mit diesem munteren Ort in Verbindung bringen. Das Wissen, hier haben sie gestanden, hier wurden sie abgeholt, blieb für mich gänzlich abstrakt. Ich stand an einem Denkmal, nicht an einem wirklichen Platz . . . das Denkmal ersetzt als Erklärung, als Hinweis, als Zeichen den wirklichen Ort. Ein Denkmal ist geradezu der sichere Beweis dafür, daß hier kein Ort mehr ist. Ein Ort kann nicht gleichzeitig existieren und an derselben Stelle kommentiert werden. (HK 169–170)

According to Freia, the ironic effect of the memorial at the Warsaw Ghetto is to block understanding of and emotional connection with the past by creating a *Verfremdungseffekt* by means of this self-reflexivity. The presence of a memorial makes it impossible to connect with the past because it is a specific reminder that that past is no more, and its nature as an abstraction resists emotional connection. Freia's inability to "relive" the past or to establish an emotional connection with it leaves her with a feeling of *"Beklommenheit"* (HK 172) and a sense of guilt at being unable to feel the "correct" emotions. In a parallel to the experience of Michael in *Der Vorleser* when he visits the Struthof concentration camp, Freia notes: *"Daß ich nichts empfinden konnte, entsetzte mich"* (HK 172). The idea that the past cannot be recaptured, even when standing in the locations in which it occurred, is reinforced during Freia's visit to Gdynia with her mother. When Freia visits Gdynia, she finds it difficult to reconcile the contemporary, relaxed beachside town with the "Gotenhafen" she knows from Jo's stories and from old photographs (HK 295). Rather than acting as an aid to understanding history, memorial locations in the novel highlight the idea that the past can never truly be recaptured and that memorials in particular can actually block the transmission of the past through the *Verfremdungseffekt* caused by their obvious status as representation rather than reality. Like Freia's photograph of cirrus perlucidus, the cloud formation she seeks throughout the novel (HK 11–12; 303) and which symbolises her search for the elusive past[196], the memorial locations in the

[196] Some have seen Freia's sighting of cirrus perlucidus in Gdynia towards the end of the novel as symbolic of her ultimate acquisition of the truth about her family's past, or at least of a resolution of this plotline: Emmerich, Wolfgang "Dürfen die Deutschen" 312; Stüben, Jens 182; Kaminska, Ewelina "Die

novel are a visual representation of something that has disappeared, and Freia's reflections on the effect of memorials underscore the novel's comment on the fundamental difference between actual historical events and their subsequent representation. Combined with the novel's reflections on the narrativity of historical accounts and its thematisation of White's equation of history with fiction, the identification of problems associated with historical sources such as eyewitness accounts, photographs and memorial locations points to the selectivity, fragmentary nature and bias of history. In doing so, it raises serious questions about our ability to ascertain the objective "truth" about the past.

4.6 Opaque pearls: implications of historiographic metafiction for the portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen

Himmelskörper's consideration of matters such as the narrativity of history, the relationship between history and fiction, the lack of identity between historical events and their representation, and the problems for historiography created by incomplete and inconsistent source materials, mark the novel as a work of historiographic metafiction. In raising these historiographical issues, the novel calls into question our ability to gain an objective, comprehensive understanding of the past, and in doing so suggests that the past, like the *"hellbraunen undurchsichtigen Perlen"* (HK 267) of the amber necklaces which symbolise the biological transmission of the past in Freia's family, is far from transparent. Does this exposure of our knowledge of the past as contingent and uncertain mean that we cannot judge whether someone is a victim or a perpetrator? To return to the questions posed earlier in this chapter, does the reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction destabilise the portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators as it destabilises the depiction of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*, in that the thematisation of historiographical criticism in the novel unsettles the basis on which our judgment is made? Or is *Himmelskörper* more like *Unscharfe Bilder*, in which the elements of historiographic metafiction undermine Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim and confirm the depiction of Germans as perpetrators?

It is my contention that the interaction between a reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction and the novel's portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators resembles *Unscharfe Bilder* far more than it does

nötige Distanz der Enkelgeneration: Tanja Dückers' Roman Himmelskörper" in Gansel, Carsten and Zimniak, Paul *Das Prinzip Erinnerung in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur nach 1989* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2010: 149–160 at 155.

Der Vorleser. In particular, the effect the reflection of historiographical critiques has on Jo and Mäxchen's accounts is very similar to the effect it has on Musbach's testimony. In *Unscharfe Bilder*, Musbach repeatedly emphasises the primacy and authenticity of his own eyewitness testimony as a means of preventing Katja from taking control of the narrative about the past. In *Himmelskörper*, Jo takes a similar approach, asserting her own superior ability to state the "truth" about the past by declaring all those who did not experience the Third Reich themselves to be *"unmündig"* (HK 95) and therefore incapable of expressing a valid opinion. However, just as Musbach's assertions of eyewitness authority in *Unscharfe Bilder* are undermined by exposure of the biases and unreliability inherent in his account, so the eyewitness testimony of Jo and Mäxchen is undermined by *Himmelskörper*'s questioning of the reliability of historical sources, particularly eyewitness testimony. In *Unscharfe Bilder*, the reflection of historiographical criticisms undermines Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim because his is the primary historical narrative in the novel, and his narrative is therefore the principal target of the novel's historiographical reflections. Similarly, Jo and Mäxchen's tales of victimhood are the main subject of *Himmelskörper*'s questioning of the reliability of narratives about the past because they are the primary eyewitness testimonies in the novel and therefore the main target of deconstruction via the novel's mirroring of historiographical critiques. This identification of Jo and Mäxchen's self-portrayals as the primary target of the questioning of the "truth" of historical narratives in *Himmelskörper* is further marked by the way in which Freia's characterisation of Jo and Mäxchen's stories as part of a drama carefully constructed so as to present a particular image of themselves is supported by the novel's reflection of White's ideas about the interaction and even identity between history and fiction, in that their "histories" are exposed as being "stories". As with *Unscharfe Bilder*, a reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction supports the novel's careful prefiguring of the reader's response in the direction of seeing Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators, because in both cases, the typical, first generation *Zeitzeugen*, "Germans as victims" narratives have been set up precisely for the purpose of being torn down.

The way the features of historiographic metafiction in both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* fit in with the structure of both novels to support their portrayal of the first generation as perpetrators suggests that the key to the difference between these novels and *Der Vorleser* in terms of the role of historiographic metafiction may be explained by the closed or open nature of the texts. Both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* are examples of closed texts which have been carefully constructed so as to leave the reader in no doubt that Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen are perpetrators. As regards Jo and Mäxchen in particular, their confessions of Nazi party membership and

continuing sympathy with Nazism towards the end of their lives, combined with Freia's discovery of their treasure trove of Nazi memorabilia, all identify them so strongly and so clearly as perpetrators that even the questions about our ability to understand the past raised by historiographic metafiction are simply not enough to allow the reader to find Jo and Mäxchen to be anything other than perpetrators. By contrast, *Der Vorleser* is a much more open text, which to a certain extent allows the reader to fill narrative gaps with his or her own interpretation, resulting in many readings of "The Reader". Whereas Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen have a lot to say about their lives during the Third Reich and all end up confessing in some way to Nazi crimes, Hanna says almost nothing, leaving her actions and motivations to be interpreted by the unreliable Michael. Combined with the emphasis on the problems in determining culpability raised by *Der Vorleser*'s thematisation of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the novel's openness allows the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator to be destabilised by the considerations of historiographic metafiction in a way that closed texts such as *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* do not. By combining an open text which gives the reader some room to contribute to the interpretation of Hanna with the thematisation of historiographical and judicial critiques, *Der Vorleser* runs the risk of unsettling its characterisation of Hanna as a perpetrator. By contrast, both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* reduce this risk by dealing with the Nazi past in closed texts in which every detail is functionalised, so that even the serious questions about judging the first generation raised by the nature of the novels as historiographic metafiction are used to support and confirm the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators in both novels.

Despite Jo and Mäxchen's attempts to distance themselves from the "real Nazis" and portray themselves as victims, using typical tropes of the "Germans as victims" wave current at the time of the novel's publication, overall *Himmelskörper* portrays Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators. In a closed text which leaves the reader little room to develop alternative interpretations, Jo and Mäxchen's victimhood narratives are comprehensively undermined by their own attitudes and confessions, by Freia's discovery of their Nazi memorabilia, and by the questions raised by a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction which break down Jo and Mäxchen's authority as *Zeitzeugen*. *Himmelskörper*'s maintenance of the dominant public memory paradigm in which Germans are portrayed primarily as perpetrators continues the pattern already observed in both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* and indicates a persistence of the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators in the post-unification period. The similarity between *Himmelskörper* and *Unscharfe Bilder* in this regard is particularly significant, as it indicates a tendency even in German novels published during a period of heightened public interest in "Germans as victims" to portray Germans as perpetrators. In the

space they devote to the suffering of "ordinary soldiers" at the Front and the "ordinary Germans" caught up in *Flucht und Vertreibung*, *Himmelskörper* and *Unscharfe Bilder* do in part reflect the "Germans as victims" thematic current at the time of their publication, and in this sense they differ from *Der Vorleser*, which lacks these "Germans as victims" tropes. However, both *Himmelskörper* and *Unscharfe Bilder* set up these typical victimhood narratives precisely for the purpose of undermining them. In this way, they provide not only a riposte to the focus on "Germans as victims" in 2003, but also highlight the constancy of the emphasis on Germans as perpetrators in post-1990 German novels, regardless of the differing "memory contests" occurring across the period and the different generational perspectives of the novels' authors.

However, the move in *Himmelskörper* to a third generation perspective does set it apart from *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* and indicates a new approach to the burden of German history. Although *Himmelskörper* repeats in its descriptions of the conflicts between Renate and her parents some of the patterns of *Väterliteratur* which so marked the intergenerational interactions about the Nazi past in *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, the novel shifts the dominant perspective on the past to Freia and the third generation. Whilst the third generation joins the second in characterising the first as perpetrators, what they do with this knowledge marks a break with the old patterns typified by *Väterliteratur*. Rather than being emotionally dominated by the burden of inherited guilt and conflict with their parents that characterised the second generation, the third generation sees the Nazi past and the role of their grandparents in it as just one part of the mosaic making up their own identity. Rather than using the past as a weapon in an intergenerational conflict and seeking to exclude the perpetrators from their lives, members of the third generation accept the guilt of their family members as part of their own identity and try to take control of the past by integrating it into their own story. *Himmelskörper* self-reflexively embodies this new approach and uses a focus on the narrativity of history characteristic of historiographic metafiction to underscore the third generation's new way of achieving *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by writing their own "history" in which German guilt is not denied, but accepted and integrated.

In order to try and identify whether the third generation approach embodied in *Himmelskörper* constitutes a generational trend, I will in the next chapter examine another novel by a third generation author: *Flughunde* by Marcel Beyer (born 1965). *Flughunde* is a very open, metafictional novel which breaks with the post-1990 literary trope of considering the Nazi past and its implications in the context of the type of postwar, intergenerational relationships central to *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*. Instead, *Flughunde* looks at the Third Reich from the first generation

perspective of a perpetrator. Does this change in perspective result in a more nuanced, sympathetic portrayal of the first generation? Or is the approach taken to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in this novel by a third generation author but told primarily from the perspective of the first generation similar to that taken in the other three novels considered in this book?

5. Every witness is a false witness: Looking through the eyes of a perpetrator in Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde*

Flughunde was, like *Der Vorleser*, published in 1995. However, by contrast with not only *Der Vorleser,* but also *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*, *Flughunde* is not told from the point of view of members of the second and third generations who attempt to uncover the truth about the past of family members or mentors. Rather, it is narrated from the perspective of the first generation who were directly involved in the Third Reich. The plot is set primarily in the last five years of the Nazi period[197] and the novel is comprised chiefly of two intertwining, first person, present tense accounts narrated by the sound technician and researcher, Hermann Karnau, and by Helga Goebbels[198], the eldest child of Hitler's propaganda chief, Joseph

[197] For an analysis of the chronological structure of the novel, see Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 142–144; Georgopoulou, Eleni *Abwesende Anwesenheit: Erinnerung und Medialität in Marcel Beyers Romantrilogie Flughunde, Spione und Kaltenburg* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012 at 32–34.

[198] There has been some debate as to the status of Helga's narrative, with the following possibilities being put forward: Helga's narrative is a tape recording (Baer, Ulrich "Learning to Speak Like a Victim: Media and Authenticity in Marcel Beyer's Flughunde" *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook* 2 (2003): 245–261 at 245, 251; Todtenhaupt, Martin "Perspektiven auf Zeit-Geschichte: Über Flughunde und Morbus Kitahara" in Platen, Edgar *Erinnerte und erfundene Erfahrung. Zur Darstellung von Zeitgeschichte in deutschsprachiger Gegenwartsliteratur* Munich: iudicium, 2000: 162–183 at 165–166; Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* 143), a diary (Schönherr, Ulrich "Topophony of Fascism: on Marcel Beyer's The Karnau Tapes" *Germanic Review* 73.4 (1998): 328–348 at 331), an inner voice of Karnau (Birtsch, Nicole "Strategien des Verdrängens im Prozeß des Erinnerns: Die Stimme eines Täters in Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde" in Gansel, Carsten and Zimniak, Pawel *Reden und Schweigen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur nach 1945* Dresden: Neisse Verlag, 2006: 316–330 at 329), or a creation of the anonymous 1992 narrator (Graf, Guido "Was ist die Luft unserer Luft? Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit in neuen deutschen Romanen" in Freund, Wieland und Freund, Winfried *Der deutsche Roman der Gegenwart* Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2001: 17–28 at 21).

Goebbels[199]. The novel charts Karnau's increasing involvement in the crimes of Nazism, culminating in his participation in experiments on human subjects as part of an SS medical team. It also tells the story of Karnau's relationship with the Goebbels children and investigates the possibility of his involvement in their murder.

In its use of first generation narrators and a Third Reich setting, *Flughunde* is significantly different from the majority of post-unification second and third generation writings about the Nazi past, including *Der Vorleser, Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*. Unlike Hanna, Musbach, or Jo and Mäxchen, who are forced to confront their Nazi past by family members or by the judicial system in postwar Germany, Karnau's participation in Nazi crimes against humanity is told as a kind of internal monologue by the perpetrator himself. By analysing the portrayal of a Nazi perpetrator crafted by a third generation author who dispenses with all the traditional tropes of this genre, such as intergenerational conflict or coming to terms with the past within the context of a family[200], I will test whether my conclusions regarding the portrayal of the perpetrators and the effect of historiographic metafiction on that portrayal in the previous chapters can be applied across a broader range of texts and whether it is therefore possible to establish the emergence of a pattern regarding the portrayal of the perpetrators in post-1990 German novels dealing with the Nazi past.

In this chapter, I will explore the possible implications of the novel's use of the *Täterperspektive*, looking particularly closely at the perpetrator figure of Karnau. Does the portrayal of Karnau via his own, first generation perspective result in a more balanced, nuanced or sympathetic depiction? Is it dominated by the type of "Germans as victims" narratives characteristic of the self-portrayals of Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen? Or is seeing directly inside the mind of a perpetrator far more frightening than the second-hand portrayals of the other novels? Does *Flughunde* manage to use the *Täterperspektive* without allowing the reader to sympathise with a Nazi criminal? And what effect does a reading of the text as historiographic metafiction have on the novel's depiction of Karnau? In answering these questions, I will consider the effect of the novel's unusual first generation perspective and Third Reich setting on the portrayal of Karnau and ascertain whether these features of the

[199] An exception to this dual first person narrative and the chronological focus on the period 1940–1945 occurs when an anonymous third narrator appears briefly to describe a 1992 investigation into remains of the Nazi past (FH 219–225).

[200] Paver also notes this difference between *Flughunde* and other novels of the genre: Paver, Chloe 86; 90. See also Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 126.

text result in substantial differences to the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder*, and *Himmelskörper*.

5.1 The *Täterperspektive*: the portrayal of Karnau

The reception of *Flughunde* has been far less controversial than that of *Der Vorleser*, even though both novels were published in the same year and both focus on main characters, Hanna and Karnau, who are Nazi perpetrators. Whereas the reception of Schlink's work has been marked by controversy regarding the moral implications of its portrayal of Hanna, opinions on Beyer's novel have instead concentrated on a discussion of the literary features of the text. The lack of controversy in relation to *Flughunde* suggests that Beyer's perpetrator fits well into the stereotype of a typical Nazi who is ruthless, callous and lacking in any human compassion. Unlike Hanna, whose conduct is frequently excused by Michael, Karnau is at no point depicted as a victim, which may account for the lower levels of debate about his portrayal among the novel's readers.

Interestingly, the reception of Karnau as a perpetrator seems to contradict various statements by Beyer as to his aims in creating the character. According to Beyer, it was his intention to avoid creating Karnau in the image of the "evil" Nazi:

> Während meiner Arbeit an dem Roman bin ich immer mehr von diesem Klischeebild des Bösen abgekommen. Es hat sich herausgestellt, dass ich dieses Böse gar nicht auf Anhieb erkennen kann. Es ist ja auch sehr beruhigend zu denken: Das Böse ist alles andere als ich selbst. Genau von dieser Selbstgefälligkeit bin ich immer mehr abgekommen.[201]

Instead, he intended to create a character who, on the one hand was involved in terrible crimes, but on the other *"ein ganz normaler Mensch ist, wie ich ihm alltäglich auf der Straße begegnen kann oder wie ich auch einer sein könnte"*[202]. In these comments, Beyer puts forward an image of Karnau as an "ordinary German" who, though a perpetrator, is not a stereotypical Nazi monster, but rather someone just like the rest of us. Although Karnau's direct participation in crimes against humanity sets him apart to a certain extent

[201] Herold, Jasmin "Ich bin vom Klischeebild des Bösen abgekommen" (2003) <http://www.berlinerzimmer.de/eliteratur/marcel_beyer_inteview.htm> (accessed 2016, website no longer available).

[202] Bednarz, Klaus *Von Autoren und Büchern: Gespräche mit Schriftstellern* Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe 1997 at 71.

from "ordinary German" figures such as Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen, Beyer's statements recall Schlink's comments about his desire to portray Hanna as a human rather than a monster and suggest that Karnau could be interpreted in a similar way.

In a number of interviews, Beyer has also stated that, in writing the novel *Flughunde*, he tried to avoid providing any ethical comment or judgment from his position as author with the benefit of hindsight of a later generation (*"da es im ganzen Buch keinen moralischen oder ethischen Kommentar gibt und auch keine Ebene dafür"*[203]; *"etwa, daß es in 'Flughunde' keine übergeordnete, eingreifende Instanz gibt. Es wird konsequent aus der Täterperspektive erzählt"* [204]). Beyer's statements suggest that, in order to tell the story from the *Täterperspektive*, he has attempted to introduce an openness and ambivalence to the novel which aims to immerse the reader in the *Täterperspektive* by avoiding the kind of judgments which adhere to the present perspective. One technique Beyer deploys to achieve this is to leave the novel porous and open to a wide degree of interpretation by its readers. *Flughunde* requires a great deal of what Beyer has described as *"Lesearbeit"*[205] on the part of the reader to grasp the novel's plot. The text is often disorienting, requiring the reader to work to make sense of the narrative. The narrative voice shifts unheralded between Karnau, Helga and an anonymous 1992 narrator, so that it is often unclear who is actually speaking. There are no quotation marks to indicate dialogue, so the reader has to work out when the voice of one character ends and another voice begins. Locations and times are also often not specified, so that the reader must imply the setting of various parts of the novel. Similarly, the novel does not refer to Goebbels by name, but to his role, which changes depending on the circumstances. Goebbels is referred to as *"der Redner"* (FH 12), *"Papa"* (FH 33) and *"Vater"* (FH 46), requiring the reader to determine the identity of this major historical figure through other sources. Karnau's description of his participation in Nazi crimes is also frequently related in a fragmentary and impressionistic manner which, particularly in relation to his participation in experiments on human subjects, requires the reader to complete the narrative by combining hints in the text with a broader general knowledge of crimes against

[203] Biendarra, Anke and Wilke Sabine "Wenn Literatur noch einen Sinn hat, dann den, dass sie ein bevormundungsfreier Raum ist: Interview with Marcel Beyer" *New German Review* 13 (1997): 5–15 at 15.

[204] Deckert, Renatus "Gespräch mit Marcel Beyer" *Sinn und Form* 57.1 (2005):72–85 at 80. For similar comments, see Schomaker, Tim "Spurenlesen: Marcel Beyer über Geschichte, die Sinne und Literatur" *Grauzone* 14 (1998): 12–14 at 14.

[205] Schomaker, Tim 14.

humanity committed by Nazi scientists and medics[206]. In all of these instances, the openness of the novel's text requires the reader to work to complete those parts of the narrative which are implied rather than explicit. The importance of the reader's role in generating meaning in the novel is also emphasised by the novel's high level of intertextuality[207]. Some of these intertextual elements are imported from historical events, such as Helga's quotation and distortion of elements of Goebbels' *Sportpalastrede* of 18 February 1943 (FH 157–158; 161–163; 165–166; 168–170) or the reference to the persecution of the Jews in the children's game of *"spontane Aktion"* (FH 144)[208]. Other intertextual references are to fictional texts, such as the 1896 novel *The Island of Dr Moreau* by HG Wells (FH 172–179)[209] and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Ur-Geräusch* of 1919 (FH 225–227)[210]. In both instances, the

206 Thomas has referred to Beyer's technique of hinting at things rather than naming them explicitly as "indirect lighting": Thomas, Christian "Marcel Beyers Flughunde (1995) als Kommentar zur Gegenwart der Vergangenheit" in Stephan, Inge *NachBilder des Holocaust* Böhlau 2007: 145–169 at 148–149; 161. Simon has also noted this feature and suggested that Karnau's observation that *"Das Märchen beschäftigt sie offensichtlich so sehr, daß die kurzen Andeutungen genügen, um die ganze Geschichte wieder aufzurufen"* (FH 284) can be understood as a direction on how to read the novel: Simon, Ulrich "Assoziation und Authentizität: Warum Marcel Beyers Flughunde auch ein Holocaust-Roman ist" in Rode, Marc-Boris *Auskünfte von und über Marcel Beyer* Bamberg: Wulf Segebrecht, 2000: 124–143 at 126.

207 Blasberg also notes the demands such intertexts place on the reader: Blasberg, Cornelia "Forscher, Heiler, Mörder: NS-Mediziner und ihre Opfer in Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde" in Braese, Stephan and Groß, Dominik *NS-Medizin und Öffentlichkeit: Formen der Aufarbeitung nach 1945* Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2015: 261–283 at 265.

208 On the use of the children's games in the novel to point to the broader historical context see Thomas, Christian 160–163; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 141–142; Simon, Ulrich 127.

209 Simon discusses this intertextual reference in some detail: Simon, Ulrich 133–135. See also Thomas, Christian 157; Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander *Die Poetik des Möglichen: Das Verhältnis von historischer Realität und literarischer Wirklichkeit in Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde* Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2005 at 88–89.

210 This intertext is discussed by (amongst others) Baer, Ulrich 249; Ostermann, Eberhard "Metaphysik des Faschismus: Zu Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde" *Literatur für Leser* 24.1 (2001): 1–13 at 12; Schönherr, Ulrich 343; Stiegler, Bernd "Die Erinnerung der Nachgeborenen: Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser, Marcel Beyers Flughunde und Robert Schindlers Gebürtig im Kontext der Gedächtnistheorien" *Grauzone* 7 (1996): 11–15 at 13; Blasberg, Cornelia "Die

reader's ability to identify the intertextual references and the manner in which the reader applies any references so identified has the potential to affect the reader's understanding of the novel. The level of *Lesearbeit* that both the openness of the text and the plethora of intertextual references require of the reader suggests that the interpretation of the novel and therefore the portrayal of Karnau could be significantly affected by individual reader response.

The metafictional openness of the novel, combined with Beyer's statements about wanting to move away from the portrayal of Nazi perpetrators as a *"Klischeebild des Bösen"* and the need to avoid ethical commentary in order to tell the story *"konsequent aus der Täterperspektive"*, raises the possibility that the shift to the first generation perspective in the novel may allow the reader to sympathise or even identify with a character whom the novel clearly marks as a perpetrator of crimes against humanity during the Third Reich. However, a closer look at the novel shows that it may not necessarily be as open to reader interpretation as Beyer suggests. On the contrary, it strongly prefigures the reader's response towards the conclusion that Karnau is a perpetrator. The guiding hand of the author controlling the direction of the narrative is initially apparent from the careful construction of the text, which is itself a self-reflexive indication of the novel's artificiality[211]. The contrapuntal nature of the narratives of Karnau and Helga provides numerous examples of the overt construction of the text. This can be seen, for instance, from the way in which Karnau and Helga both frequently pick up a word or theme from the other's narrative and weave it into their own. Sometimes, the link occurs by repetition of a word or phrase, as when the words *"Welch ein Panorama"* (FH 115; 119) and the question *"Ist das Herr Karnau, der jetzt zu uns kommt?"* (FH 279; 283) finish one narrative and begin another. At other times, links arise from the echoing of themes or objects from one narrative in the other, as occurs in the juxtaposition of Helga's description of her father's *Sportpalastrede* with Karnau's description of human experiments. In this section, Karnau's concentration on the larynx of his victim (FH 156; 159) is mirrored by Helga's concentration on her father's throat as he speaks (FH 165), and Helga's references to urine and fur when relating

Stimme und ihr Echo: Zur literarischen Inszenierung des Wiederschalls von Herders Sprachursprungs-Theorie bis Marcel Beyers Topophonie des Faschismus" in Wiethölter, Waltraud and Pott, Hans-Georg et al *Stimme und Schrift: Zur Geschichte und Systematik sekundärer Oralität* Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008: 235–249 at 237; Künzig, Bernd "Schreie und Flüstern – Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde" in Erb, Andreas *Baustelle Gegenwartsliteratur. Die neunziger Jahre* Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 1998: 122–153 at 148.

211 Herrmann makes a similar point: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 145.

her visit to see Karnau's friend Moreau's flying foxes (FH 171) also pick up on Karnau's narrative of his experiments on humans (FH 155; 160; 170–171). The extent to which the novel has been very carefully arranged is made overt by these self-reflexive elements and points to the degree of control that Beyer as author has over the novel's structure.

Contrary to Beyer's claim that *"es im ganzen Buch keinen moralischen oder ethischen Kommentar gibt und auch keine Ebene dafür"*, it is my view that the novel is in fact very carefully structured to prefigure the reader's response in the direction of concluding that Karnau is guilty beyond doubt. Despite Beyer's assertions that *"es in Flughunde keine übergeordnete, eingreifende Instanz gibt"*, my analysis in this chapter will show the extent to which the novel restricts the reader's ability to view Karnau in any way other than as a perpetrator of serious crimes. If it was indeed Beyer's intention to leave behind the *"Klischeebild des Bösen"* in his portrayal of Karnau, it is my view that he has been unsuccessful in that aim. In the following analysis of the portrayal of Karnau in *Flughunde*, I will demonstrate Karnau's embodiment of precisely that *"Klischeebild"*.

5.2 Learn to speak like a victim: the gaps in Karnau's account

During the course of *Flughunde*, Karnau describes his participation in some of the worst criminal excesses of the Third Reich, namely in gruesome experiments on human subjects. Karnau's involvement in these "scientific" crimes against humanity begins when he attends a *Sprachhygiene* conference in Dresden during the war and outlines his ideas for a medical solution to the "problem" of the Germanisation of populations in the occupied territories:

> Wenn wir die Menschen in den Ostgebieten . . . auf Linie bringen müssen, so kann sich diese Arbeit nicht darin erschöpfen, bestimmte Sprachregelungen durchzusetzen, die Ausmerzung undeutscher Wörter, so wie im Elsaß . . . Denn nicht allein die Sprache, auch die Stimme, sämtliche menschlichen Geräusche müssen, wenn man schon einmal damit anfängt, auf Linie gebracht werden. Wir müssen jeden einzelnen greifen, wir müssen in das Innere der Menschen vordringen . . . Das Innere greifen, indem wir die Stimme angreifen. Sie zurichten, und in äußersten Fällen selbst nicht vor medizinischen Eingriffen zurückschrecken, vor Modifikationen des artikulatorischen Apparats. (FH 138–139)

Even the SS doctor Stumpfecker is impressed by the *"Radikalität"* (FH 140) of Karnau's suggestion that people in the occupied territories not only be forced to speak German, but be subjected to medical operations to physically alter their larynxes in order to bring them *"auf Linie"*. Karnau's concept

catches the attention of the SS medical team and he is asked to lead a *Sonderforschungsgruppe* to put his ideas into practice, an opportunity he is particularly keen to seize, as it will prevent him from being conscripted to serve on the front line (FH 141–143). Karnau's fragmentary account of his participation in these experiments on human subjects forms the core of the novel (FH 153–157; 158–161; 166–168; 170–171). His involvement in this *"gemeinsamer Forschungsarbeit"* with Stumpfecker is terminated only as a result of the vicissitudes of war, and their "research" reaches a gruesome end when surgical spirit is poured on the *Versuchspersonen* and they are burned alive along with the baracks in which they had been housed (FH 197–198).

In its description of his criminal activities with the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*, the novel leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that Karnau is a perpetrator who participated in some of the worst criminal excesses of the Nazi regime. The extent of Karnau's crimes and the clear identification of him as a perpetrator raise important questions about how the novel deals with the fact that he is seen primarily through his own *Täterperspektive*. Does this perspective humanise Karnau, despite his transgressions? Does it allow for the same sort of presentation of sympathetic or mitigating circumstances and exculpatory motivations that arise in Michael's portrayal of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*? Or is the perspective carefully managed so that the reader is not in any danger of identifying with someone who has committed crimes against humanity?

A strong indication that the novel does not, in fact, allow much scope for the reader to sympathise with Karnau arises as result of a remarkable absence of German victimhood in the narrative. This marks a striking difference between *Flughunde* and the other novels considered in this book. Whereas Musbach in *Unscharfe Bilder* and Jo and Mäxchen in *Himmelskörper* portray themselves as victims in order to both excuse and humanise themselves, and Michael attempts to do the same for Hanna in parts of his narrative in *Der Vorleser*, neither Karnau nor any of the other characters in *Flughunde* try to portray him as a victim. Of the main characters in the novel, only the Goebbels children appear as victims, but they are not "ordinary Germans" and their victimhood arises as a result of their murder at the hands of those they trust rather than from the usual sources of German suffering such as flight and expulsion.

The novel's rejection of a portrayal of Germans as victims is particularly underscored by the suspicion of victimhood and exculpatory narratives expressed in the text. Although Karnau does not portray himself as a victim, he does attempt to avoid the suggestion of culpability by using linguistic

trickery in his narrative to subtly erase himself from the scene of the crime[212]. In his description of his participation in the *Entwelschungskampagne* in Alsace, Karnau makes extensive use of the passive tense, suggesting his lack of agency or active presence in the oppressive activities taking place there. His narrative in this section of the novel contains a marked repetition of the passive construction *"es wird"* (FH 79–81) and a marked preference for the impersonal *"man arbeitet"* as opposed to *"ich arbeite"* (FH 83). This linguistic pattern in Karnau's narrative is continued in his description of his participation in the experiments of the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*, which is characterised by extensive use of the passive tense and the avoidance of first person pronouns (FH 158–161; 166–168; 170–171).

All of these devices suggest that Karnau is trying to conceal his participation in Nazi crimes from the reader. However, his own narrative unmasks his "absence" from the scene of the crime as a charade, thereby undermining his attempts at asserting a lack of culpability. Karnau reveals the narrative trick in his description of himself as *appearing* to be absent from the scene of his human experiments:

> Die Füße ruhen unbeweglich und decken einen kleinen Bereich des gleichmäßigen Musters aus weißen und schwarzen Bodenfliesen ab, die derart blank gebohnert sind, daß um die Füße herum die Fersen, sogar noch die sehnigen Fesseln widerspiegelt werden, als Bildpunkt, der aus dem Karomuster aufscheint und das Raster der rechtwinklig aufeinander treffenden Linien unterbricht, die Flucht der Fugen, welche sich durch den ganzen Raum zieht, her bis zu mir, wo der Boden jedoch stumpf ist, nichts reflektiert wird: Nicht meine Hose, nicht die Strümpfe, noch nicht einmal ein schwacher Widerschein der schwarzen Lederschuhe. (FH 153)

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212 Others who have commented on Karnau's use of grammatical constructions and particular vocabulary to remove himself from the scene of a crime include Thomas, Christian 154–155; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 132–134; Fleishman, Ian Thomas "Invisible Voices: Archiving Sound as Sight in Marcel Beyer's Karnau Tapes" *Mosaic* 42.2 (2009): 19–35 at 30; Schöll, Sandra "Marcel Beyer und der Nouveau Roman: Die Übernahme der Camera-Eye-Technik Robbe-Grillets in Flughunde im Dienste einer Urteilsfindung durch den Leser" in Rode, Marc-Boris *Auskünfte von und über Marcel Beyer* Bamberg: Wulf Segebrecht, 2000: 144–157 at 147; Beßlich, Barbara "Unzuverlässiges Erzählen im Dienst der Erinnerung: Perspektiven auf den Nationalsozialismus bei Maxim Biller, Marcel Beyer und Martin Walser" in Beßlich, Barbara, Grätz, Katharina and Hildebrand, Olaf *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006: 35–51 at 47.

Karnau's description of his apparent absence but actual presence in this scene exposes his own technique of leaving a gap where his own figure should be, thereby making such gaps suspicious, and even suggestive of Karnau's positive involvement. The idea that lacunae in Karnau's narrative are to be filled by his own person is further supported by Karnau's description of himself as a blank:

> Ich bin ein Mensch, über den es nichts zu berichten gibt. So aufmerksam ich auch nach innen horche, ich höre nichts, nur einen dumpfen Widerhall von Nichts . . . Ein Mensch wie ein Stück Blindband, das vor Anfang des beschichteten Tonbandes angeklebt ist: Man könnte sich noch so sehr bemühen, es würde einem doch nicht gelingen, auch nur den unscheinbarsten Ton dort aufzunehmen. (FH 16–17)

This self-portrayal is partly an attempt by Karnau to deflect attention from himself by depicting himself as a person of no interest, however, his description of himself as a blank can also be taken as an indication that gaps in the narrative are to be identified with Karnau.

The suspicious nature of lacunae in Karnau's account and the novel's scepticism about German victimhood narratives are underlined by Stumpfecker's advice to Karnau at the end of the war to learn to speak like a victim:

> Vordringlichste Aufgabe ist es nun, wie ein Opfer sprechen zu lernen. Erinnern Sie sich genau an die Worte, den Satzbau, den Tonfall Ihrer eigenen Versuchspersonen, rufen Sie sich das alles ins Gedächtnis. Imitieren Sie, sprechen Sie nach, erst langsam und im Geiste, dann leise murmelnd, sprechen Sie mit niedergeschlagenen Augen, lassen Sie Pausen im Sprachfluß, als sei Ihnen Grausames widerfahren, dessen Beschreibung Sie nicht über sich bringen – und lassen Sie in ihrer Rede genau dieses vermeintliche grausame Geschehen aus. Verschweigen Sie ihre Tätigkeit der letzten Jahre, indem Sie diese Pausen zögerlich ansteuern in ihrem Bericht. Verstummen Sie dann aber rechtzeitig, um nichts von ihrer Tätigkeit preiszugeben . . . geben Sie vor, über das Grauen, das Ihnen widerfahren sei, berichten zu wollen, es aber leider nicht zu können . . . So wechseln Sie die Seite, so gleiten Sie während des Verhörs unmerklich über die Linie, hinüber zu denen, wegen deren Behandlung man Sie eigentlich anklagen wollte. (FH 215–216)

Stumpfecker's advice can be seen as an interpretive guide to Karnau's narrative[213], pointing to the conclusion that gaps and absences in Karnau's account should be read as attempts at concealment and therefore as positive

[213] Others who see this as a key scene for interpretation of the novel include Graf, Guido 22; Blasberg, Cornelia "Forscher, Heiler, Mörder" 273.

indications of his participation in crime that he is trying to omit and therefore of his culpability. In this way, even the openness of the text, which would seem to give the reader room to move, in fact points to a pattern of gaps used in the descriptions of Karnau's crimes which identify him as a perpetrator. Karnau's attempts to conceal his culpability fail, meaning that the negative portrayal of him remains unrelieved by any hint that he may not be responsible for his crimes. The way the novel also points directly to the possibility of mimicry of the real victims in German postwar narratives about the Nazi past reveals a high level of scepticism about German victimhood narratives in general. The absence of victimhood narratives in the novel, particularly in relation to Karnau, removes an important source of sympathy that is often available to the first generation, and provides a strong indication to the reader that Karnau is to be understood as a perpetrator.

5.3 The only grown up who isn't crazy: a humanised Karnau?

However, despite the novel's identification of Karnau as a participant in the crimes of an SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*, its exposure of Karnau's attempts to deny responsibility for his crimes, and its general suspicion of victimhood narratives, there are aspects of the novel which appear at first glance to humanise Karnau and make him a slightly more sympathetic character. Indeed, some aspects of Karnau's characterisation at first appear to recall elements of Michael's exculpatory presentation of Hanna, in that they suggest that Karnau may possess a degree of humanity and understandable motivations for his crimes. A number of commentators have, for example, described Karnau as a critic of totalitarian culture[214], suggesting that he is an opponent of the Nazi regime, and therefore a potentially sympathetic character. Karnau is described in the novel as someone who, like Hanna, has no particular interest in or understanding of Nazi ideology. Karnau even finds some aspects of Nazism abhorrent, particularly the noise and emphasis on martial masculinity which permeate Nazi culture. Karnau's dislike of the loud, harsh voices of the regime is shown in his account of the party rally he attends as a sound technician at the beginning of the novel (FH 9; 14–15). The placement of Karnau's attitude of disgust towards aspects of Nazism right at the start of the text implies an element of sympathy which may serve to draw the reader in to Karnau's narrative. Karnau also finds the Nazi regime's glorification of the physical and the masculine unpleasant and confronting. Karnau disliked sports lessons as a child (FH 18–19) and has a horror of the regimented world

[214] Schönherr, Ulrich 330–331; Beßlich, Barbara 45; Blasberg, Cornelia "Die Stimme und ihr Echo" 241; Ostermann, Eberhard 2.

set aside for men in Nazi society. He is glad that he grew up before the advent of the Hitler Youth, with its emphasis on the martial and on physicality (FH 28). His primary fear in being conscripted is not the fear of being killed but rather of being forced to participate in Nazism's masculine culture:

> Wenige Tage später traf dann auch noch mein Einberufungsbescheid ein. Das war ein Schock: Nicht die Furcht vor dem Tod, mit der die Fronterfahrung mich auch schon als Zivilist konfrontiert hat, sondern vielmehr der Gedanke daran, unausweichlich in diese Welt der Männerkameradschaft hineingestoßen zu werden, mit Schweiß, mit derben Witzen, mit allen jenen Zügen, die mir schon als Kind den Hals zugeschnürt haben. (FH 130)

Again, the rejection of at least some aspects of Nazism contained in these parts of the novel points to a potentially sympathetic element of Karnau's character and the suggestion that his participation in SS crimes was motivated by his fear of masculinity and desire to avoid military service seems to parallel the kind of "explanation" for Nazi crimes that Michael puts forward in his assertions that Hanna was forced into her criminal actions by her fear of the exposure of her illiteracy.

Similarly, Karnau's relationship with the Goebbels children also introduces an element to his characterisation which initially appears to have a positive, humanising effect. For reasons that are not explained in the novel, Karnau is asked by Goebbels to look after his children while their mother is in hospital following the birth of their youngest sibling. Although he has no experience with looking after children, he tries his best make them feel at home in a strange environment. He introduces the children to his dog (FH 37) and gives very careful thought to what sort of drinks they might like to have with their breakfast whilst they are staying with him (FH 40–41). Later, when he meets the Goebbels children again in Hitler's bunker towards the end of the war, he takes the time to visit them and read them stories (FH 276), and risks the death penalty to help Helga obtain scarce chocolate as a birthday present for her younger sister (FH 265–266).

A particularly positive view of Karnau's relationship with the children emanates from the narrative of Helga Goebbels. Although initially suspicious of Karnau, Helga soon begins to think well of him, and to appreciate the attention he pays her: *"Vielleicht ist Herr Karnau ja gar nicht so seltsam, wie ich am Anfang dachte. Jedenfalls wird er langsam netter und kümmert sich nicht mehr nur um die Kleinen"* (FH 56). When the children are reunited with Karnau in the bunker, Helga describes Karnau as the only adult around them who cares about them and whom she can trust:

> Herr Karnau ist der einzige Erwachsene hier unten, der nicht verrückt ist . . . Er ist der einzige, bei dem man nicht das Gefühl hat, daß er etwas verheimlicht. (FH 265; see also FH 255 and 259 for similar statements)

> Herr Karnau schaut mir in die Augen. Und seine Lider zucken nicht. Was er sagt, darf man glauben. Wenn auch niemand uns mehr helfen würde, dann wäre immer noch Herr Karnau für uns da. (FH 267)

In his interactions with the Goebbels children the novel appears to be creating an opportunity for Karnau to demonstrate his humanity by allowing him to care for them and to feel an obligation to protect them (*"Ganz instinktiv lag mir daran, die Kinder nicht aus den Augen zu lassen"* (FH 286)). They seem to go some way towards humanising Karnau and distancing him from the *"Klischeebild des Bösen"* that Beyer has suggested he was trying to escape.

Indeed, if these elements of the text which make Karnau appear more human and more sympathetic, and which appear to put forward some sort of an explanation for his criminal actions, were more substantial, or if they were not comprehensively countered, then it is possible that the novel would have given rise to the same sort of controversy as *Der Vorleser*. However, the novel repeatedly strips these humanising aspects back in a way that denies Karnau sympathy or exculpation and points the reader back to his crimes. This can be seen, for example, in the way the novel undercuts the implication that Karnau is an ideological opponent of the regime which could otherwise be derived from the novel's references to Karnau's dislike of various aspects of Nazism. On closer inspection, the novel reveals that Karnau's criticisms of the Nazi regime relate neither to totalitarianism nor to any ethical concerns. Rather, his problems with the regime are of an aesthetic kind and revolve around elements that he finds personally displeasing[215]. His "resistance" to Nazism arises from superficial and self-centred motives, rather than from moral concerns. In addition, the fact that he is not a member of the Nazi party or particularly interested in Nazi ideology does not prevent him from using Nazism as a means to achieve his own private ends, particularly in his work on a sound chart project of his own devising. Karnau may know so little about Nazi ideology and practice that he is confused as to the relevance of his ideas about the human voice to the aims of Nazism (FH 142), but he nevertheless agrees to join an SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe* in the pursuit of these aims in order to escape conscription and to further his own private research and his desire for control over the voices of others. Like Hanna

[215] See also Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* 141; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 130.

in *Der Vorleser*, Karnau does not have any particular interest in Nazi ideology. However, both of them utilise the opportunities afforded by Nazism to avoid facing their fears and to realise their desire for power over other people. In doing so, they take part in the most horrific of crimes, and the fact that they did not pursue crime for ideological reasons is insufficient to excuse them from culpability[216]. As will be explored futher in the following, and perhaps despite the author's intentions, *Flughunde* progressively dismisses its brief suggestions as to Karnau's humanity and exposes him as a psychopath with no valid excuse for his criminal actions. In doing so, the novel avoids a potential source of controversy arising out of telling the story from the *Täterperspektive*, in that it avoids reader identification with Karnau and the maintenance of any sympathy for him.

5.4 Research work: Karnau as a mad scientist and psychopath

The novel's undermining of potentially positive aspects of Karnau's character can be seen in the way in which it gives his lack of interest in Nazi ideology a decidedly negative connotation. Rather than indicating that he is a resistance figure, Karnau's lack of interest in Nazism demonstrates his conformity, as least in part, to the stereotype of the Third Reich scientist who uses the opportunities afforded by the radical change in ethics brought about by Nazism to pursue his own research interests[217]. As Beyer has pointed out in relation to Nazi medics:

> Keiner davon wurde von ideologischer Seite aus, etwa vom sogenannten Ahnenerbe, angeregt. Es waren Mediziner, die für ihre vermeintlichen Forschungen eine ideologischer Begründung vorschoben, um an Gelder

[216] Beyer has made a similar point in several interviews about Karnau's utilisation of the opportunities provided by Nazism despite his dislike of it and the fact that he was never a member of the Nazi party: *"Karnau ist jemand, der sich immer weiter verstrickt in den Nationalsozialismus, dabei aber selber meint, er nutze den Nationalsozialismus nur aus für seine private Obsession"* Bednarz, Klaus 67; *"Das ist so jemand, der, wenn man jetzt in dieser Situation von 1992 auf ihn zukommen und ihn fragen würde, was er eigentlich gemacht hat oder woran er beteiligt war, immer wieder sagen wird: 'Ich bin nicht in der Partei gewesen' was er auch nie war. Aber das reicht eben nicht"* Biendarra, Anke and Wilke, Sabina 6.

[217] In this regard, see also Pliske, Roman "Flughunde: Ein Roman über Wissenschaft und Wahnsinn ohne Genie im Dritten Reich" in Rode, Marc-Boris *Auskünfte von und über Marcel Beyer* Bamberg: Wulf Segebrecht, 2000: 108–123 at 121–122; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 140–141.

> heranzukommen und sich so im internationalen Wissenschaftsbetrieb Vorteile zu schaffen.[218]

Prior to his involvement in medical experiments on humans, Karnau had already taken up opportunities to pursue his "scientific" research under the guise of working for the Nazi regime. He takes part in cultural repression in Alsace, not because of any commitment to Germanisation, but because it will further his sound chart project:

> Die Klanglandschaften zu Hause sind ausgekostet. Ich habe einsehen müssen, daß es, um mein Kartenprojekt vorwärtszutreiben, notwendig wäre, auch Stimmen anderer Regionen aufzunehmen. Darum habe ich mich freiwillig gemeldet, hier in Straßburg Entwelschungsdienst zu leisten. (FH 83)

While in Alsace, Karnau is willing to witness the pain of others in order to further his own interests:

> Gewissermaßen als Gegenleistung dafür muß ich unvorstellbare Anblicke über mich ergehen lassen: Verhöre, furchtbar, Prügelstrafe bis aufs Blut. Und Razzien, rücksichtslos: Ich stehe da mit meinen Apparaturen inmitten einer weinenden Kinderschar, deren Vater von den Entwelschern abgeholt wird. (FH 84)

Similarly, Karnau uses his posting as a sound technician at the Front to further his own research, stealing supplies of tape to make recordings of fighting and dying soldiers (FH 112–115; 122–124):

> Ich will diese unerträgliche Angst überwinden, ich will, wie ich es mir vorgenommen habe, mich nicht durch Angst davon abbringen lassen, meine eigenen Arbeit fortzuführen. Auf eigene Gefahr, in einer Feuerpause, will ich Aufzeichnungen machen, wie sie noch keiner gehört hat. Ich will die Laute der Kämpfenden da draußen auf Schallplatte bannen. (FH 112)

Even against the general background of wartime terror and human rights abuses, Karnau's superior finds his exploitation of the dying *"unappetitlich"* (FH 129), and he is dismissed from his post once suspicions about his unauthorised use of tape come to light.

Not only does Karnau's exploitation of the opportunities created by Nazism to pursue his research align him with the stereotype of the Nazi scientist, so too does his failure to produce any results from his "scientific"

[218] Deckert, Renatus 81.

experiments. Karnau's *"gemeinsame Forschungsarbeit"* with Stumpfecker and others is futile, resulting in nothing but the destruction of human beings:

> Da waren wir mit dem Ziel angetreten, die Grundlagen einer radikalen Sprachbehandlung zu erkunden, und hatten schließlich nur noch Stumme Kreaturen vor uns. Anstatt Stimmfehler gezielt zu tilgen, haben wir vollständige Stimmbilder gelöscht . . . (FH 198)

The pointlessness and scientific ineptitude of Karnau's "research work" recall the reality of Nazi medical experiments in concentration camps and again point to Karnau's embodiment of the Nazi scientist stereotype.

The identification of Karnau with the typical Nazi scientist also undermines his own attempts to portray himself as a gifted eccentric whose work is more significant than the scientific ideas of the average Nazi medic. Karnau depicts himself as a freakish natural genius with a special gift for sound (FH 17) and emphasises his acquired technical skills by going into a high level of detail about the steps he takes to make various sound recordings (FH 97–98; 112–113). Karnau believes that his special skills set him above his fellow sound technicians, and he is consistently contemptuous of his colleagues, referring to one scientist who had recent success with an invention as a *"findiger Stubenhocker"* (FH 100), to the lectures of other speakers at the *Sprachhygiene* conference in Dresden as *"Stammtischreden"* (FH 137), and to the standard tasks he has to carry out at work as *"stupide Arbeit"* (FH 20), unworthy of him. He likes to depict himself as someone who enjoys the respect and appreciation of his colleagues (FH 223–224) and sees his work as vital to the success of Goebbels (FH 147–148).

Karnau's self-portrayal would seem to align him with the strange genius characteristic of Johannes Elias in Robert Schneider's *Schlafes Bruder*[219] or that of Grenouille in Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*[220], and has the potential to provide a justification, or at least an explanation, for the lengths he goes to in his pursuit of his ideas[221]. However, Karnau is unable to maintain this

[219] Schneider, Robert *Schlafes Bruder* Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1992.

[220] Süskind, Patrick *Das Parfum* Zürich: Diogenes, 1985.

[221] Pliske, Zilles and Uecker have also pointed to this connection: Pliske, Roman 108ff; Zilles, Sebastian "Zwischen Bewunderung und Horror: Zur Genie-Konzeption in Patrick Süskinds Das Parfum, Robert Schneiders Schlafes Bruder und Marcel Beyers Flughunde" *LiLi Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 166 (2012): 150–167; Uecker, Matthias "Uns allen steckt etwas von damals in den Knochen: Der Nationalsozialismus als Objekt Faszination in den Romanen Marcel Beyers" in Beßlich, Barbara, Grätz, Katharina and Hildebrand, Olaf *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006: 53–68 at 57. See

image of himself as a highly-skilled savant and his narrative is repeatedly punctuated by details of his technical ineptitude. When working with the *Entwelschungsdienst* in Alsace, Karnau manages to erase vital evidence by accidentally pressing the wrong button when attempting to rewind a tape recording (FH 85). This particular error is so egregious that his sound technician colleagues are still laughing about it some time later (FH 101). Similarly, when Karnau is giving his lecture at the Dresden Hygiene Museum, his speech comes to an abrupt end when he accidentally hits the arm of his record player, causing the needle to make an ear-splitting sound (FH 139). Further, his attempts to transfer his collection of sound recordings in the Dresden archive uncovered in 1992 to the latest media of sound technology are substantially unsuccessful (FH 220). These errors on Karnau's part undercut his assertions of genius and their corollary implication that the special importance of his work may provide a sufficient justification or motivation for his crimes.

Even more so than Karnau's technical ineptitude, what ultimately undermines Karnau's depiction of himself as a genius and reveals him to be just another mediocre Nazi "scientist" is the faulty conception and failure of his sound chart project. This "sound chart" is Karnau's magnum opus: *"eine Karte, auf der auch die unscheinbarsten menschlichen Laute verzeichnet werden müssen"* (FH 27). Karnau intends to make a visual record of every sound produced by human beings and uses the pursuit of this goal as the rationale for his involvement in ever-worsening scenes of human degradation. Karnau does not fully realise the futility of his endeavour until after he has played his part in Nazi medical experiments, but the problems inherent in the project are hinted at from the start. At the beginning of the novel, Karnau points to the fact that his project's pretensions to scientific rigour are an illusion when he notes that his sound chart is essentially indecipherable (FH 27). His acknowledgement that his chart will always be incomplete because of his refusal to record certain voices (such as those of the Goebbels children (FH 62–63) and his own (FH 94)), as well as his recognition that no two human voices are the same (FH 164), point to the futility and practical impossibility of the project. A further, even more fundamental problem with Karnau's sound chart is identified by the SS doctor Stumpfecker, namely that a visual representation of his sound collection in the form of a chart necessarily involves distortion and compromise: *"Nur ein Einwand: Haben Sie diese Geschichte mit dem Atlas wirklich durchdacht? Ist Ihre Lautsammlung denn nicht zu einzigartig, um ohne den Verlust wesentlicher Nuancen in Sichtbares übersetzt werden zu können?"* (FH 140). However, it is not

also Strebin, Britta "Wenn die Stimme die Seele (z)ersetzt . . . Marcel Beyer über seinen Roman Flughunde" *Grauzone* 5 (1995): 15.

until his discussion with his friend Moreau about the problems caused for his project by ultrasound that Karnau finally admits that his great scientific cause has been destined to failure from the beginning. When Moreau points out that the human subjects of Karnau's research produce ultrasound which neither they themselves nor Karnau can hear, Karnau realises that the project he has used as a justification for his participation in crimes against humanity is futile:

> Und mit einem Mal zerfällt die Stimmgebungskarte unter meinen Händen, die eingetragenen Linien leiten fehl, haben immer nur fehlgeleitet, plötzlich ist die gesamte Karte wieder weiß und leer . . . alles wird zurückgesaugt in die Stille angesichts jener nie hörbaren Töne in der Welt, die nur die Tiere kennen. (FH 179–180)

Despite the fact that he depicts himself as a scientist, Karnau's project has no scientific method and no real purpose. His pretensions to genius are comprehensively deconstructed. By portraying Karnau as a stereotypical Nazi scientist, the novel highlights the insanity involved in Nazi medical experiments and the way in which the Nazi regime provided the space for banal, mediocre criminals like Karnau to thrive. This portrayal of Karnau as a banal type who was able to take up the opportunities Nazism offered for the mediocre to exercise power reflects Arendt's depiction of Eichmann[222] and also recalls the depiction of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*. The novel's portrayal of Karnau as a stereotypical Nazi scientist clearly marks him out as a perpetrator.

This identification of Karnau as a perpetrator is made even clearer by the novel's portrayal of Karnau as a psychopath. The depiction of Karnau as a psychopathic monster as opposed to a more "ordinary" criminal emanates, not so much from the crimes he commits, but rather from his attitude towards his victims. If there is one thing the Third Reich shows us, it is that psychologically ordinary people are capable of carrying out horrific acts[223]. Yet Karnau's dehumanising approach towards others distances him from this type of "ordinary German" and marks him out as a psychologically abnormal outsider[224].

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222 See also Künzig, Bernd 128; 132; Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander 35.

223 See for example the discussion of the psychology of Third Reich perpetrators in Welzer, Harald *Täter*.

224 See also Uecker, Matthias 57; Zilles, Sebastian 163; Hanuschek, Sven "Jeder Zeuge ist ein falscher Zeuge: Fiktion und Illusion in Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde" in Bobinac, Marijan and Düsing, Wolfgang et al. *Tendenzen im Geschichtsdrama und Geschichtsroman des 20. Jahrhunderts – Zagreber Germanistische Beiträge Beiheft 8* Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 2004: 387–397 at 390–391.

Karnau's psychopathic tendencies can be seen throughout the text in his confusion of humans, animals, and things in a way which suggests that he does not recognise human dignity and has trouble making any emotional connection with other people. These characteristics are particularly apparent in Karnau's descriptions of his participation in "scientific" experiments on humans in which he consistently refers to the subjects of his "research" in a depersonalised, disjointed and dehumanising way. The reader is first introduced to Karnau's victim as nothing more than a set of feet because Karnau views his victim as a set of component parts (FH 153–154). This dehumanising mode of reference continues throughout the section of the novel dealing with human experimentation. By breaking his "subjects" down into parts, Karnau denies them their identity and humanity. Karnau's dehumanising attitude towards others is emphasised in his references to his victim as an object (*"die Figur"* (FH 154); *"die Schallquelle"* (FH 159)) and an animal (*"widerspenstigen Hundefell"* (FH 160); *"verklebt den Pelz"* (FH 160); *"Sie führen ein Tierleben"* (FH 170)). This tendency to view humans in a way that denies their humanity is not something into which Karnau descends as he becomes increasingly involved in Nazi crimes, but rather is something that has always been one of his personality traits. In his very first narrative in the novel, in which he relates his experiences as part of the team of sound technicians at a Nazi rally, he refers to a group of youths as *"Welpen"* (FH 9). He repeatedly objectifies people by referring to them only as sources of sound (*"Schallquellen"* (FH 29; 30; 113; 123); *"Stimmträger"* (FH 99)) and also anthropomorphises objects, as when the needle of his record player *"tastet die Schallplatte ab unter schmerzlicher Berührung"* (FH 24). In all of these instances, Karnau fails to give human dignity its full value.

Karnau's desire to use violence against others is also not something which first arises in the context of his work with the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*, but rather is something that forms part of his character from the beginning of the novel. This can be seen in his aggressive and dehumanising responses to those who disturb his acoustic environment (*"Löschen. Man müßte die Laute solcher Kreaturen löschen können"* (FH 18); *"Nur löschen. Alles löschen"* (FH 23); *"die ein solch widerwärtiges Geräusch erzeugt, daß es mich bis aufs Blut reizt und in mir unversehens der Drang aufsteigt, denjenigen zu erwürgen, der so abstoßend tonlos pfeift"* (FH 27; also 29–30)). His desire to transfer the experiments he has already started carrying out on animals onto human subjects is also foreshadowed early in the novel when he refers with a degree of black humour to exchanging his animal skulls for the Goebbels children: *"Und gestern nacht nun habe ich meinen letzten Schädel so überraschend verschwinden lassen müssen*

und gegen die fünf Kinder eingetauscht" (FH 51)[225]. His participation in brutal acts of oppression in Alsace (FH 84) and his unauthorised recordings of dying soldiers at the Front (FH 112–115) also indicate a willingness to utilise human pain for his own purposes and function as a precursor to his later involvement in experiments on human subjects. Further, the report of the anonymous third narrator in 1992 suggests that Karnau's violent experiments continued long after the end of the Nazi regime (FH 224–225). All of these factors display a continuity in Karnau's dehumanising view of humanity and in his violent reflexes. This continuity indicates that his participation in the crimes against humanity perpetrated by the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe* has little to do with Nazism. Rather, Karnau has always been a psychopath – Nazism merely provides him with an opportunity to play out his desires.

The main source of Karnau's psychopathy may be traced back to a childhood experience in which his hearing the sound of his own recorded voice precipitates an identity crisis from which he never recovers (FH 58–59; 93)[226]. This crisis is caused not only by his inability to reconcile his own voice as he hears it in his head with that emanating from the recording, but also by his conviction that the recording of a voice splits off a part of that voice and transfers it into the possession of another:

> Ist eine Stimmaufnahme, entgegen meiner Vorstellung, nicht allein dazu in der Lage, ans Innerste des Menschen zu greifen, sondern nimmt davon zwangsläufig auch etwas weg, so daß das Abgehorchte, nachdem es auf Platte geschnitten ist, fortan als Klang, als Tonfärbung allein noch auf dieser schwarzen Lackfolie existiert? Wird dem Menschen mit jedem konservierten Laut ein, wenn auch nur geringer, Bruchteil seiner Stimme gestohlen? Darum auch meine instinktive Furcht als Kind, die eigene Stimme aufnehmen zu lassen, das Unbehagen hinterher beim Abhören, als wäre, ohne daß ich vorher auch nur eine Ahnung davon gehabt hätte, ein Teil aus meinem Inneren abgespalten worden, worüber nun ein anderer verfügte. (FH 93)

As a result, Karnau develops a pathological desire to possess the voices of others as a substitute for his own lost fragment of voice and identity:

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225 Ostrowicz makes a similar point: Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander 33.

226 Bekes also identifies this incident as the source of Karnau's obsession: Bekes, Peter "Ab diesem Punkt spricht niemand mehr: Aspekte der Interpretation von Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde im Unterricht" *Der Deutschunterricht* 51.4 (1999): 59–69 at 63; 66. See also Geisenhanslüke, Achim "Geschichte und Abwesenheit im Roman der neunziger Jahre: Anmerkungen zu M Beyers Flughunde und H-U Treichels Der Verlorene" *Literatur im Unterricht* 2 (2002): 177–185 at 181; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 130.

> Kann man das, was man den anderen Stimmen wegnimmt, der eigenen Stimme hinzufügen, als Prägung, als Volumen, so wie ein Kannibale überzeugt ist, er stärke seinen Leib, indem er das Fleisch anderer Menschen genießt? (FH 160)

His entire "scientific" project is motivated by his obsessive need to possess the voices of others and to try and replace what he believes he lost as a child with fragments of other identities. When making recordings of suffering soldiers at the Front, Karnau describes himself as a *"Stimmstehler"* who robs the soldiers of their voices by recording their final sounds:

> Bin zu einem Stimmstehler geworden, habe die Menschen an der Front stimmlos zurückgelassen und verfüge fortan nach eigenem Ermessen über ihre letzten Laute, zeichne auf, nehme von jeder beliebigen Stimme einen Teil fort . . . habe hier auf Band, was einer Stimme abgenommen worden ist . . . (FH 123)

Karnau's obsession with acquiring the voices of others is shown by his frequent repetition of the vocabulary of possession. Various forms of the verb *greifen* are characteristic of his reflections on the human voice and his discussions of his "project", as is the use of the term *Besitz* to describe his ownership of other voices via sound recordings. Frustrated at his inability to get his own larynx *"in den Griff"* (FH 59), Karnau seeks to control the voices of others. The terms *greifen* and *Besitz* both occur in Karnau's description of his recordings of the sounds of dying soldiers at the Front (FH 123), and at the *Sprachhygiene* conference regarding medical experimentation on the human vocal apparatus, Karnau's repetition of forms of the verb *"greifen"* indicates his predatory agenda (FH 139)[227].

Coupled with his idea that a recording of the human voice necessarily involves taking away a part of that voice, Karnau's vocabulary of possession indicates that he is not so much interested in taping human sounds as a method of procuring a record to add to his sound chart, but as a means of gaining ownership of other voices and power over other people. Psychologically disturbed by the recording of his own voice, Karnau wants to be the one to control the *"Schneidstichel"* (FH 94) as a means of taking control of others. Significantly, subjecting others to violence and pain is key in Karnau's quest to possess their innermost identity. As Karnau explains, it is only in the most extreme vocal expressions, *"im Schreien, Krächzen, Wimmern"* (FH 64), that the core of another human can be acquired (*"Aufnahmen*

[227] Further uses of forms of *greifen* and *Besitz* in relation to Karnau's "scientific project" can be found at FH 220 and at FH 142–143 (where Stumpfecker parrots Karnau's language). Schmitz also notes this repeated use of *Griff* and *greifen*: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 130.

solcher Laute greifen an das Innerste der jeweiligen Schallquelle" (FH 64)). It is therefore only by obtaining these *"Leidenslaute"* (FH 65) that Karnau's desire can be satisfied. Indeed, Karnau appears to obtain the most exquisite enjoyment from being able to secure a recording of a person's last breath (*"bis hin zum letzten, intimen Atemzug, da ein Sterbender sein Leben aushaucht"* (FH 123)), perhaps because it allows him to take complete and final possession of the person's inner being. In seeking to procure these precious cries of pain, Karnau is willing to stop at nothing, and his psychopathic ability to divorce a dying person from their own screams allows him to summon up the heartlessness required to make such recordings:

> Der darf selbst die extremsten Äußerungen nicht scheuen, der muß auch dort zur Stelle sein, wo die Gefahren lauern, damit er jeglichen Ton aufzeichnen kann. Der darf auch nicht davor zurückschrecken, daß manche Klänge keineswegs angenehm sind, weder für das Ohr des Hörers noch für denjenigen, der sie hervorbringt. Die Schallquelle, welche in diesem Moment für den Hörer nur genau dies sein darf, Schallquelle, nicht etwa ein Mensch mit Schmerzen, dem es zur Hilfe zu eilen gilt. (FH 29)

The perceived necessity of the use of violence to achieve his goals indicates that participation in crime is not something that Karnau fell into, but something he actively sought to fulfil his desires. It is Karnau's psychopathic desire to possess the voices of others that motivates both his scientific projects and his ultimate participation in Nazi crimes. Indeed, the futility of Karnau's great sound chart project only makes the psychopathic motivations for his crimes more apparent. "Science" and "Nazism" are simply convenient labels to cover over his real aim of possessing the voices of others. In some ways, Karnau's disregard of his victims' humanity is reminiscent of Hanna's callous discarding of her "readers" once she has finished with them and her treatment of her prisoners as little more than logistical problems. However, Karnau goes much further, both in his actions and in his attitudes towards his victims. Hanna at least seeks some sort of relationship with her readers, but Karnau does not even view the subjects of his various experiments as human. This portrayal of Karnau as a psychopath depicts him not simply as a perpetrator, but as the closest of any of the perpetrators considered in this book to the stereotype of the Nazi monster.

The one thing which seems to humanise Karnau in a way which allows him to resemble Beyer's *"ganz normaler Mensch"*, and the only really positive aspect of his characterisation in *Flughunde*, is his relationship with the Goebbels children. Even the discrepancy between the positive descriptions of Karnau's interactions with the children and what the reader knows about his criminal activities could be seen as depicting Karnau as a stereotype of

the Nazi scientist who is a well-loved family member at home and a perpetrator of horrific crimes at "work"[228], which, whilst not entirely positive, could at least alleviate the blackness of Karnau's portrayal by identifying him with more "ordinary" Germans. However, Karnau's interaction with the Goebbels children is not nearly as positive as he and Helga would like to make out. Rather than being typical of the catastrophic disconnect characteristic of the loving family men who nevertheless carried out horrific crimes under Nazism, Karnau's relationship with the Goebbels children instead shows him to be a psychopathic monster in his private life as well as his occupational activities.

There are strong parallels between Karnau's treatment of his victims in the novel and his dealings with the Goebbels children. One of these parallels can be seen in the way in which Karnau attempts in his narrative to omit his own presence from the lives of the Goebbels children at the time of their deaths. This omission mirrors his descriptions of his participation in Nazi crimes, both in the *Entwelschungsdienst* and as part of the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*. As in those instances, Karnau uses his narrative to suggest a lack of agency and to erase his own presence from the scene. Karnau initially seeks to conceal his contact with the Goebbels children at the end of their lives by producing a narrative of his time in Hitler's bunker from which the children are "erased" (FH 194–205; 208–216). When he is forced to acknowledge the presence of the children in the bunker following his discovery of tapes recording the children's final days, Karnau seeks to distance himself from responsibility for both the last recordings of the children's voices and for their deaths. He does this by suggesting that he was absent at the time when the children were murdered:

> Es muß in einem Augenblick geschehen sein, da ihr Mörder sichergehen konnte, daß ich ihn nicht bei seiner Tat überraschen werde, jemand muß den Moment der Tötung auf die Sekunde abgepaßt haben, damit ihm nichts dazwischen kam, denn jede freie Minute, die mir meine Arbeit ließ, führte mich in das Kinderzimmer in der oberen Etage. (FH 286; see also 292)

He also denies being the person who made the recording of the children's voices on the night they died: *"Nein, mit diesen Tondokumenten habe ich nichts zu tun"* (FH 234); *"Hier liegt ein Fehler vor, das habe ich nicht aufgenommen"*; *"Nein, diese Aufnahme habe ich nun wirklich nicht durchgeführt"* (FH 300). Given Karnau's obsession with recording voices and the fact that he had the trust of and direct access to the children, such a denial is

[228] Niven puts forward this view of Karnau: Niven, Bill "Representations of the Nazi past I" 131. See also Blasberg, Cornelia "Forscher, Heiler, Mörder" 282.

unconvincing. That he did not put his signature on the last recording (FH 300) rather reinforces the reader's suspicion that, in keeping with his pattern of asserting his absence at the scene of the crime, Karnau was involved in the children's murder, thereby strengthening the reader's perception of Karnau as a callous and calculating perpetrator.

That Karnau's assertions of absence cannot be trusted is also established through the technique of contrasting narrative. Karnau's omissions and denials are accompanied by Helga's reflections on deceit. His omission of the presence of the Goebbels children in the bunker is interspersed with a series of reflections in Helga's narrative on the lies of the adults around her. She describes her father's creation of propaganda as he broadcasts invented stories of *Werwolf* partisan resistance (FH 191–192) and notes her increasing ability to identify the lies of others (FH 206–208). Similarly, Karnau's initial denial of responsibility for making the recording of the final hours of the Goebbels children is placed directly after his own extensive reflections on the postwar deceptions practised by Germans in order to erase their Nazi past (FH 230–233). By alternating Karnau's denials with the thematisation of lies, the novel sets up a pattern which emphasises the connection between Karnau's crimes and the idea of postwar concealment and points the reader in the direction of recognising Karnau's likely involvement in the murder of the Goebbels children.

This inference is made even stronger through the theme of possession which is prevalent throughout Karnau's discussion of the children's voices. When the children leave him after their stay at his flat, he wanders around seeking *"Spuren der Kinderstimmen"* which might have been left in his keeping, expressing a desire to retain their voices for himself (FH 73). He reflects on the idea that social pressures will make the children lose possession of their own voices (*"irgendwann wird den Kindern aufgehen, daß sie nicht mehr frei über ihre Stimmen verfügen"* (FH 75)), and later on describes his custody of the final tapes of the children's voices in terms of ownership of the voices themselves (*"Die Stimmen der sechs Kinder sind in meinen Besitz übergegangen"* (FH 284)). The same theme of possession is also apparent in Karnau's account of his conflict with Goebbels over Karnau's wish to record the children's voices:

> Er hat mich schon im Vorfeld, bevor die Kleinen überhaupt von meinem Wunsch erfahren konnten, verboten, die Stimmen seiner Kinder aufzuzeichnen. Nicht aufgrund irgendwelcher Zweifel im Hinblick auf die mögliche Verformung ihrer Stimmen . . . sondern er wies mein Anliegen von sich unter Berufung auf den Urheberanspruch: Das Recht auf Verwertung der Stimmen meiner Kinder liegt nicht bei Ihnen, Karnau, sondern es liegt ganz allein bei der Familie, also mir. (FH 147)

The treatment of the children's voices as objects to be possessed exhibits the same sort of dehumanising dissection of people into component parts that marked Karnau's attitude towards his other victims. It also recalls Karnau's psychopathic desire to acquire the voices of others which motivated his participation in Nazi crimes. These parallels strongly imply that Karnau will treat the Goebbels children in the same way he has treated others whose voices he wished to possess.

Indeed, Karnau's approach towards the children is predatory from the beginning. As with his other victims, Karnau views the children primarily as the source of voices he wishes to acquire. A hint of this identity between the Goebbels children and his other victims can be seen in the black humour of Karnau's comment about exchanging the animal skulls on which he has been conducting his "experiments" for the children (FH 51). He initially resolves that he will not record the voices of the Goebbels children for his sound chart project (FH 62–63), but he quickly leaves his resolution behind as he becomes obsessed with the children's voices. No matter what other sounds he plays on his record player, he finds them to be no substitute for the children's voices, which he feels are the only things that will satisfy him (FH 73). He becomes jealous of the idea that other people might be able to obtain the children's voices by acquiring a sound recording of them because he wishes their voices to be his own possession (FH 92–93). The novel leaves no doubt that this desire for the voices of the Goebbels children is pathological. Karnau fantasises about possessing the voice of a child as a means of restoring his own voice to the state of innocence it lost when it was recorded: *"Kann man sich die junge, ungetrübte Stimme eines Kindes verschaffen, indem man einem Kind die Stimme nimmt?"* (FH 160–161). This fantasy is placed in the midst of a macabre scene in which a surgeon exposes the larynx of one of their victims, revealing the lengths Karnau is prepared to go to in order to obtain what he desires. To satisfy his pathological need to possess the voices of the Goebbels children, Karnau decides to conceal a recording device in their room in Hitler's bunker (FH 235).

The parallels between Karnau's attitude towards the children's voices and those of his previous victims point strongly towards Karnau as the children's murderer. This is particularly so in view of the importance Karnau ascribes to sounds obtained by violence and his suggestion that the most complete possession of the human voice is best obtained by recording the last sounds of the dying, as he did at the Front and as part of the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*. The identification of Karnau as the children's murderer is further indicated by the repetition towards the end of the novel of the pattern established in Karnau's other narratives of his crimes in which he omits himself from the scene. In the last section of the novel, Karnau reviews a selection of "evidence" concerning the possible involvement of a number of

different individuals in the deaths of the Goebbels children, only to dismiss each one, leaving himself as the last suspect (FH 287–299). As Helga has already realised, Karnau is someone who *"kann gut Märchen erzählen"* (FH 276). His narrative at this point is littered with references to false witness (*"Jeder Zeuge ist ein falscher Zeuge"* (FH 291); *"falsche Angaben"* (FH 291); *"ein falscher Zeuge unter falschen Zeugen"* (FH 293); *"vollkommen unglaubwürdig"* (FH 296); *"verheimlicht"* (FH 297)), which all turn to point the finger back at him. The suggestive tension in the narrative is heightened still further by the quadruple repetition of Helga's question immediately prior to her death, *"Ist das Herr Karnau, der jetzt zu uns kommt?"* (FH 279, 283, 300 (twice)). Confronted by his own realisation that, as he was the only person who knew about the secret recording device under the mattress he must have been in the children's room to make the recording of their final breaths, Karnau breaks off his narrative (FH 300–301)[229].

[229] Beyer himself has suggested that Karnau's cessation of his narrative at this point indicates his desire to conceal his involvement in the murders (Biendarra, Anke and Wilke, Sabina 7), and Chertenko has compared the novel with Agatha Christie's *The Murder of Roger Ackroyd,* in which the narrator slowly provides the reader with clues which reveal the narrator to be the murderer: Chertenko, Alexander "Re-Actualizing a Cultural Exclusion Zone: Human Experimentation and Intellectual Witness in Friedrich Dürrenmatt's Suspicion and Marcel Beyer's Flying Foxes" *Rivista di estetica* 67.1 (2018): 97–116 at 105. The question of whether Karnau murdered the Goebbels children has been the subject of disagreement. Some hold the view that the matter is unclear: Avanessian, Armen "(Co)Present Tense: Marcel Beyer Reads the Past" *Germanic Review* 88.4 (2013): 363–374 at 371; Jaeger, Stephan "The Atmosphere in the Führerbunker: How to Represent the Last Days of World War II" *Monatshefte* 101.2 (2009): 229–244 at 239; Beßlich, Barbara 46; Parkes, Stuart "The Language of the Past" 122. Others think that the text does suggest Karnau's complicity: Bekes, Peter 67; Beyersdorf, Erik Herman "Telling the Unknown: Imagining a Dubious Past in Marcel Beyer's Flughunde" *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 117 (2012): 83–97 at 90; 94; Lensen, Jan "Perpetrators and Victims: Third-generation Perspectives on the Second World War in Marcel Beyer's Flughunde and Erwin Mortier's Marcel" *Comparative Literature* 65.4 (2013): 450–465 at 464; Ostermann, Eberhard 12; Schönherr, Ulrich 346; Birtsch, Nicole 324; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 142; Paver, Chloe 88; Schmidt, Thomas E "Erlauschte Vergangenheit" in Kraft, Thomas *Aufgerissen: Zur Literatur der 90er* Munich: Piper Verlag, 2000: 141–150 at 150; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* 142; Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* 144; Blasberg, Cornelia "Forscher, Heiler, Mörder" 272; Georgopoulou, Eleni 8; 24. Still others consider that Karnau is not involved: Geisenhanslüke, Achim 181.

The positive relationship between Karnau and the Goebbels children introduced as a stark contrast to his general indifference towards other human beings turns out to be the exact opposite. His relationship with the Goebbels children is nothing more than a continuation and heightening of his psychopathy and his criminal activities. His motivations in his dealings with the children are identical to those in his dealings with his other victims. Karnau's motivations for crime are not ideological or caused primarily by practical concerns such as a fear of conscription, but rather arise out of a deep-seated psychopathology: he is driven by his pathological desire to obtain the voices of others as a compensation for the perceived loss of his own voice. Rather than being a humanising factor, Karnau's dealings with the Goebbels children cement the novel's portrayal of him, not as a perpetrator of the "ordinary German" variety, but as a psychopathic monster who exploits Nazism as a means of satisfying his insane desires. By leaving the reader in no doubt that Karnau is a psychopathic perpetrator who is guilty of inexcusable crimes, *Flughunde* avoids the potential ethical pitfalls of sympathy and/or identification with a perpetrator which could result from the use of the first generation *Täterperspektive*. This may well explain why the novel has not generated any great degree of moral controversy.

5.5 A false witness amongst false witnesses: reading *Flughunde* as historiographic metafiction

Flughunde may be significantly different from *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder*, and *Himmelskörper* in its use of a first generation narrator and Third Reich setting, but its combination of metafictional techniques with the explicit consideration of historiographical issues is a point of similarity with the other works. Indeed, the high degree of openness, intertextuality and self-reflexivity in *Flughunde* mark the novel out as the most metafictional of the four novels. The application of these metafictional techniques to the historical material in *Flughunde* indicates that, as with the other texts analysed here, this novel may also be read as a work of historiographic metafiction, and that this reading may have an effect on the portrayal of Karnau as a perpetrator[230].

As the only one of the four novels considered in this book to be set primarily in the Third Reich, *Flughunde* could be seen as the closest of the four

[230] A reading of Flughunde as historiographic metafiction has been little considered, although brief references to the possibility of identifying metahistoriographic themes in the novel can be found in: Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander 12–19; Georgopoulou, Eleni 28; Jaeger, Stephan 240; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 150; 160–161; 166.

to a traditional "historical novel". However, whereas the classic historical novel aims at a more mimetic representation of history coupled with a concealment of the novel's fictionality and corresponding creation of the illusion of real events designed to draw the reader into the world of the past[231], *Flughunde* uses a wide variety of metafictional techniques to push the reader away from immersion in the past world and towards a critical engagement with the text and an increased awareness of the novel's underlying present perspective. This move away from the mimetic representation of history typical of the classic historical novel helps to defuse potential ethical concerns which could adhere to the novel's use of the *Täterperspektive*.

In addition to the various metafictional elements which serve to disorient the reader and make the reader aware both of the novel's fictionality and of his or her role as reader, the novel also destabilises the narrative by building its plot around a series of highly unlikely scenarios which further underline the novel's fictionality. The first of these is the babysitting scenario which brings Karnau and the Goebbels children together[232]. This is a major feature in the construction of the plot, yet the text itself points to the sheer unlikelihood of such a connection. For a start, the Goebbels children already have a *"Kinderfrau"* (FH 33–36), whose presence would seem to render Karnau's oversight superfluous. In addition, Karnau is described as someone who is barely known to the children's parents, a mere *"Bekannter"* (FH 34–36) unlikely to be entrusted with the care of the children. Helga explicitly makes this point in her narrative: *"Herr Karnau, Herr Karnau. Der kennt nicht mal unsere Eltern"* (FH 52; see also FH 49). As a single man living in a small flat, Karnau is also particularly unsuited to be the babysitter of 5 young children. Helga makes the ludicrous nature of this situation apparent when she comments: *"Ich habe mir diesen Bekannten viel älter vorgestellt, wie soll denn dieser junge Mann auf uns fünf Geschwister aufpassen?"* (FH 36). Karnau himself also points to the absurdity of his position:

> Wie habe ich der Bitte ihres Vaters so unbedacht entsprechen können, die fünf Kinder auf ein Paar Tage in meine Obhut zu nehmen, wenn ihre Mutter niederkommt? Sie sind, als Kinder einer hochgestellten Persönlichkeit, schließlich ganz andere Verhältnisse gewohnt. Und wie ist ihr Vater auf die Idee

[231] Nünning identifies and defines several types of historical novel which combine an avoidance of metafictional self-reflexivity with an attempt to provide the illusion of historical "reality": Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* 259–275.

[232] Herrmann also identifies this unlikely plot element as an indication of fictionality: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 148. See also Paver, Chloe 88.

> verfallen gerade mich darum zu bitten? Wir kennen uns doch auch noch gar nicht lange . . . (FH 46)

This repetition of doubts about the likelihood of a key plot device acts as a point of irritation for the reader. Similarly unlikely is the scenario which brings Karnau into contact with the Goebbels children again in Hitler's bunker at the end of the war. Karnau has been called to the bunker to make recordings of Hitler's voice (FH 195), but his prior history of technical incompetence, such as his unwitting deletion of important evidence during his work with the *Entwelschungsdienst*, make him an unsuitable choice for such an important task.

Unlikely scenarios are the prerogative of fiction and Beyer is by no means obliged to make his plotlines realistic. However, by making key elements of the plot unbelievable and having the main characters reflect on the unlikelihood of the scenes in which they are playing a part, Beyer destabilises the novel's narrative and underscores its fictionality. The artificiality of the plot creates a *Verfremdungseffekt* which prevents the reader from becoming absorbed by the story and makes the reader aware of his or her own role as a reader of narratives, thereby encouraging a more critical view. In a novel dealing with the Nazi past, this *Verfremdungseffekt* has the function of pointing the reader towards questioning the construction of narratives about that past and lays the ground for the novel's explicit thematisation of historiographical problems.

5.6 Our reports must become the truth: blurring the lines between fact and fiction and the problems of historical sources

One of the historiographical issues explicitly thematised in the novel is the interface between fact and fiction in writing about the past[233]. The novel's metafictional self-reflexivity is overtly applied to its historical content and references, particularly in the afterword, in which Beyer asserts that: *"Obwohl einige Charaktere im vorliegenden Text Namen realer Personen tragen, sind sie doch, wie die anderen Figuren, Erfindungen des Autors"* (FH 302). The fact that the text is clearly marked on the front cover as a *Roman* ought to make such assertions of fictionality superfluous. However, this element of self-reflexivity in a text which contains a large number of references to real historical people and real historical events prompts the reader to

[233] Ostrowicz considers the interaction between historical fact and fiction in *Flughunde* in considerable detail: Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander 63–82. See also Blasberg, Cornelia "Zeugenschaft" 29.

question whether he or she has a tendency to read aspects of the novel as history, thereby highlighting the sometimes fine line between fictional accounts of history and the narrative arrangement of historical facts into historiography, as brought to a sharp point in White's contention that "history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation"[234]. This fine line between fact and fiction is also thematised in the novel by the alterations made to historical figures or events in the text in order to "fictionalise" them. For example, the character of Stumpfecker in the novel is based on the historical person of Ludwig Stumpfegger, an SS doctor who was involved in medical experiments in the Ravensbrück concentration camp and later became Hitler's personal physician in his Berlin bunker in the final days of the Third Reich. The novel contains many details that correspond to the biographical details of the historical Stumpfegger, such as the descriptions of his work at Ravensbrück (FH 198) and his death in Berlin (FH 228), but the alteration of his name to "Stumpfecker" indicates the fictionalisation of the historical character. Similarly, the character of Karnau is based on a historical figure, Hermann Karnau, who was a guard in Hitler's bunker in the final days of the war and was the first eyewitness to confirm the death of Hitler to the Western Allies. In creating the character of Karnau, Beyer combines a few of the sparse factual details about the historical Karnau with a more expansive fictional biography in which the guard becomes the implausible sound technician with access to the inner circle of the Nazi regime[235]. In the same way, Helga's reference to Goebbels' *Sportpalastrede* (FH 157–158; 161–163; 165–166; 168–170) contains a number of direct quotations from the transcript of the actual historical speech, but alters it slightly by interpolating fictional sections. This mixture of fact and fiction makes it hard for the reader to tell where in the narrative fact ends and fiction begins, thus highlighting a similar problem present in historiographic narratives in "factual" form. Further, the novel not only points to the way in which fact is transformed into fiction, but also to the way in which fiction is transformed into fact. When Goebbels coordinates radio broadcasts about the fictitious exploits of *Werwolf* partisans, he suggests that, by presenting these fictional stories as factual "news", he will make people believe them and

234 White, Hayden *Tropics of Discourse* 122.

235 Beyer came across the historical figures of Karnau and Stumpfegger in an article in a May 1945 edition of the *Kölner Zeitung*. He discusses the creation of Karnau on the basis of the sparse historical details in: Wichmann, Heiko *Von K. zu Karnau: Marcel Beyer über seine literarische Arbeit* <http://www.thing.de/neid/archiv/sonst/text/beyer.htm> (accessed 8 October 2020); Bednarz, Klaus 66–67; Geisel, Sieglinde "Die Erfindung der Wirklichkeit" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 24 November 2000.

inspire them to turn these fictions into fact by imitating the "bravery" of the *Werwölfe*:

> Begreifst du nicht, daß unsere Meldungen zur Wahrheit werden müssen? Begreifst du nicht, daß wir sie über den Äther senden, damit der Werwolf irgendwo da draußen sie rigoros zur Wahrheit macht? (FH 192)

In blurring the lines between fact and fiction, *Flughunde* points to the way in which the interpretation of the past by the historian presented in an "objective" historiographical format can create historical "truth".

Another theme of historiographical criticism in the novel is the questioning of the nature of historiography as representation. Karnau's sound chart, which is intended to illustrate all human voices, can be seen as a metaphor for all forms of representation. The sound chart transforms the recorded sound into a visual form which can only "represent" the human voice. The whole concept of a chart itself references the idea of representation as opposed to reality and the novel points explicitly to the problems inherent in the transcription of reality into an abstract format when Stumpfecker questions whether the whole process of transcription presents a fundamental problem for Karnau's project (FH 140). Karnau's sound chart also emphasises the idea that a representation is necessarily selective. Sometimes this selectivity reflects the agenda of the creator of the representation. At other times, selectivity is a result of practical concerns, such as the inability to include everything due to the constraints of space and time and the inability to record things we do not know about, as Karnau discovers when Moreau points out that his chart will not be able to include ultrasound (FH 179–180). In the context of a reading of *Flughunde* as historiographic metafiction, Karnau's sound chart can also be interpreted specifically as a metaphor for the problems of historiography as representation. Karnau's attempt to transcribe human sounds onto a piece of paper is reminiscent of the process of historiography whereby historians translate past events, facts and objects into the two-dimensional, abstract format of a written narrative. Karnau's sound chart project displays particular parallels with the representation of oral testimony, which is especially significant in a time of increased interest in the testimony of the *Zeitzeugen* in Germany. By showing the limitations inherent in representation through Karnau's sound chart project, *Flughunde* highlights the limitations of historiographic representation of the past. Combined with the novel's thematisation of the relationship between fact and fiction, the metaphor of Karnau's sound chart points to the lack of complete accuracy and objectivity inherent in historiography and thus questions our ability to know the comprehensive "truth" about the past and the people in it.

Flughunde also questions the reliability of various sources of historical evidence, namely eyewitness testimony, sound recordings, and photography. The novel is explicit in its thematisation of the unreliability of eyewitness testimony[236]. Karnau's narrative directly addresses this matter on a number of occasions when he expresses his view that all witnesses are fundamentally false (*"Jeder Zeuge ist ein falscher Zeuge"* (FH 291); *"ein falscher Zeuge unter falschen Zeugen"* (FH 293)). The novel is particularly explicit in its warnings against an uncritical acceptance of "Germans as victims" narratives. Stumpfecker's advice to Karnau about the necessity of learning to speak like a victim points to the need to exercise caution when faced with "Germans as victims" narratives and to be aware that such narratives may be designed to conceal a history of crime (FH 215–216)[237]. It is a warning against taking the word of the eyewitnesses at face value that is fleshed out in Karnau's reflections on life in postwar Germany in which he notes the speed with which the Germans executed a *"flächendeckende Stimmveränderung"* (FH 231), covering over their Nazi tones with postwar democracy. Karnau notes how the Germans swiftly exchanged their uniforms and medals for postwar rags and *"wie schnell ein Oberlippenbärtchen abrasiert ist"* (FH 230). This swift removal of traces of Nazism is symbolised by Karnau's record player: *"Auf dem Deckel ein aufgerauhter Fleck: Dort ist vor Jahren das Emblem mit einem Küchenmesser weggekratzt worden, der Tonkopf, nein, der Totenkopf"* (FH 233). The way in which the Nazi emblem has been removed from the record player suggests that such attempts are superficial only. Traces of Nazism remain in German society just as the damage caused by the screams of Nazi hysteria remained as scars on the vocal chords of postwar Germans:

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236 Beyer has frequently pointed to the unreliability of eyewitness accounts and is particularly interested in the way in which eyewitnesses can "remember" details of events that did not actually occur, but are rather derived from literary accounts or other fictional media, and also in the way that eyewitnesses can erase information from their memories. See for example Beyer, Marcel "Das wilde Tier im Kopf des Historikers" in Nünning, Ansgar *Historisierte Subjekte – subjektivierte Historie: zur Verfügbarkeit und Unverfügbarkeit von Geschichte*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003: 295–301 at 296; Deckert, Renatus 84. Bednarz, Klaus 72.

237 Beyer derived this idea of perpetrators learning to speak like victims from reading the memoirs of Hans Rosenthal, a Jew who survived the war in Berlin. When he emerged from his hiding place, Rosenthal wore his *Judenstern*, but discovered that it did not provide the protection he thought it would because so many perpetrators had been disguising themselves as victims, causing the Allies to take a sceptical view: Beyer, Marcel "Kommentar – Holocaust: Sprechen" *Text und Kritik* 144 (1999): 18–24 at 19.

> Doch andererseits war jeder von diesen Stimmausbrüchen nun auch geprägt, sie hatten die Kehle aufgerauht und sich in die Stimmbänder eingezeichnet als verhängnisvolle Narbe, die keine noch so fein arbeitende plastische Chirurgie je wieder hätte unkenntlich machen können. (FH 232)

The persistence of the traces of Nazism in postwar Germany and the continuing attempts to cover over those traces is further emphasised by the images of concealment surrounding the discovery of Karnau's sound archive in Dresden in 1992. The outer entrance to the archive is boarded up and *"verborgen"* (FH 219), and a further entrance has *"doppelt gesicherte Zugänge: Gitter und massive Eisentüren"* (FH 220). The archive is located at the end of *"unterirdische Gänge"* (FH 219), beneath the postwar veneer. Behind all of these barriers, however, the voices of Nazism remain archived, not erased. The novel's explicit references to both the persistence of traces of Nazism in postwar Germany and the way in which postwar Germans changed their voices and adopted the sound of the victims to cover over their participation in Nazi crimes constitute a direct warning against being misled by the victimhood narratives which dominate the testimony of many German *Zeitzeugen*. Not only does *Flughunde* refuse to portray "Germans as victims", it specifically points to the possibility that such victim narratives are sometimes mere mimicry used to conceal German crimes.

The reliability of eyewitness narratives is also called into question by the high levels of unreliability in both Karnau's and Helga's narratives. Helga's narrative is unreliable, not because of any attempt at deception, but because her perspective is seriously limited by her youth[238]. The limitations on her narrative are apparent from the restriction of her perspective to the private, family sphere that dominates the consciousness of a child. Although she comes into close contact with the most important people and major events of the Third Reich, she is unable to see these people and events in their wider social, political and historical contexts. This is demonstrated by her description of her father's *Sportpalastrede*, in which she does not connect what her father is saying with the implications of total war for the world around her. Karnau's narrative, by contrast, is unreliable because he does attempt to deceive: his narrative is biased towards denying his own culpability (FH 234–235; 300–301)[239]. The problems surrounding the unreliability of eyewitnesses are further demonstrated by the inconsistencies arising from the novel's multiplicity of conflicting narratives. This can be seen particularly in the account of the final days of the Goebbels children. The reader is

[238] Beßlich also makes this point: Beßlich, Barbara 45.

[239] On Karnau as an unreliable narrator, see also Beßlich, Barbara 44–48; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* 158; 162.

presented with three different versions, firstly by Karnau in chapter VI, secondly by Helga in chapter VIII, and finally by means of fragments of the sound recording of the children conveyed by Karnau in chapter IX. In some cases, these narratives corroborate each other, for example, Karnau's observations regarding pornographic graffiti on the walls of the bunker and an increase in smoking in the bunker following the death of Hitler (FH 214) are confirmed in Helga's narrative (FH 268) and in the sound recordings of the children (FH 292). However, at other times their narratives are wildly divergent. Karnau's narrative in chapter VI completely omits his contact with the Goebbels children during their final days, but Helga's narrative in chapter VIII reveals that Karnau and the children were in the bunker at the same time, as do the sound recordings of the children in chapter IX. These inconsistencies point to the divergent evidence which frequently arises from eyewitness accounts and call the reliability of eyewitness testimony into question.

As well as questioning the reliability of eyewitness accounts as sources of information, *Flughunde* also points to the limitations of various documentary media as historical evidence. The novel's criticism in this regard focuses on the use of sound recordings and photographs to obtain information about past people and events. The inability of photography to capture more than a decontextualised snapshot is demonstrated in Helga's description of her family's holiday photo shoot in the Alps. The static image of the happy family published in the papers is carefully designed to cover over her mother's mental illness and her father's affairs, and fails to record the children's boredom and Helga's disappointment that their mother will not be spending the holiday with them (FH 119–121). The problematic nature of the visual medium as a historical source is also highlighted through Karnau's suspicion of photography: *"Denn Photos kann man schönigen, man kann sie arrangieren: Jetzt lächeln und einander umarmen"* (FH 230). He prefers to place his faith in sound recordings and believes that, unlike the visual medium of photography, sound recordings are able to provide a reliable representation of the past, just as the scars left on vocal chords by past screams are not able to be tampered with (FH 230–231). However, the novel undermines Karnau's confidence in sound recordings by showing that they are in fact open to manipulation by mean of editing, for example by cutting sections of tape (FH 221). Just like photographs, sound recordings represent only the isolated moment in which they were recorded, and are therefore incapable of completely capturing a past event. This becomes apparent when Karnau attempts to piece together the events surrounding the murder of the Goebbels children from his collection of tapes (FH 283–301). Like eyewitness testimonies, photographs and sound recordings do not provide accurate, complete or objective evidence about the past.

The novel hammers its points about the deficiencies of historical source material home by means of two specific demonstrations of a failure to reconstruct the past due to the fragmentary, contradictory and biased nature of the source material. The first of these demonstrations is the experience of the commission sent to investigate a sound archive uncovered beneath the Dresden city orphanage in July 1992. The commission finds that most of the documents relating to the activities that took place in the archive have been destroyed (FH 219), and that the purpose of the many recordings kept there is not clear in the absence of further explanation (FH 222). Karnau is the only witness able to give the commission more detailed information about the hidden sound archive, but the commission quickly realises that Karnau's evidence is unreliable: *"Bei eingehender Untersuchung stellen sich in der Kommission jedoch verschiedene Zweifel an Karnaus Darstellungen ein"* (FH 224; see also FH 225). In any event, Karnau subsequently disappears, preventing the commission from interrogating him further and leaving them with nothing but *"Gerüchte"* (FH 223). Faced with a variety of sources that are incomplete and unreliable, the commission is unable to form a definitive view about the purpose of the archive and what occurred there. This is shown by the anonymous narrator's repeated use of language suggesting uncertainty: *"möglicherweise"*; *"weiß man allerdings nichts"* (FH 219); *"nicht klar"*, *"nicht bis in die Einzelheiten zu klärende"* (FH 222); *"liegt ebenfalls außerhalb der Kenntnis der Untersuchungskommission"*; *"All das läßt sich anhand des vorliegenden Materials jedoch nicht beweisen"* (FH 223). The setting of this demonstration of the problems associated with ascertaining the truth about the past in the post-unification context of 1992 throws particular light on the problems of assessing the Nazi past around the time of the novel's publication and points to the contemporary, postmemorial perspective underlying the novel's *Täterperspektive*. In doing so, it makes the contemporary reader aware of the direct application of these issues to his or her own attempts to understand the past.

Similar problems are explicitly demonstrated by Karnau's attempt to piece together the final hours of the Goebbels children in order to identify their murderer. In the final section of the novel (FH 283–301), Karnau marshalls a variety of source evidence regarding the murder of the Goebbels children, including the sound recordings made in their bedroom, the interrogation evidence of Dr Kunz (FH 287–288; 290–292), the telephone operator Mischa (FH 289; 295), the chauffer Kempka (FH 293; 295), the adjutant Schwägermann (FH 294–295) and anonymous others (FH 295), an anonymous "reconstruction" (FH 296), and Helga's postmortem report, including a photograph of her corpse (FH 297–299). Karnau also interpolates his own eyewitness testimony of the last days in the bunker (FH 283; 286; 289; 292). However, these sources are all exposed as being incomplete, unreliable or

contradictory in some way, something that is underscored by Karnau's use of vocabulary such as *"unerklärlich"* (FH 285; 287) and *"unglaubwürdig"* (FH 296), as well as the large number of question marks scattered throughout the final section of the novel. Except in relation to the file on Helga's autopsy and the accompanying photograph, it is also unclear from the text whether the evidence detailed by Karnau is in documentary form or part of his eyewitness testimony. The evidence given by Kunz, Kempka, and Schwägermann appears to be an interrogation protocol, yet it is interspersed with observations as to their appearance and behaviour which suggest that this information may be part of Karnau's eyewitness account. However, this is never made explicit, and it remains unclear whether Karnau was present at the interrogations detailed or whether he is embellishing a documentary source with his own imagination. The end result of Karnau's investigation into the final hours of the Goebbels children reveals the available materials to be disparate, fragmentary, contradictory, and difficult to form into a conclusive and cohesive account. This uncertainty results in an openness which puts the reader in the position of the detective or the historian trying to make sense of and form a cohesive narrative from the fragmentary evidence available[240]. The reader mimics the work of the historian in trying to create an image of the past from disparate and contradictory sources and in doing so becomes aware of both the role of the historian in creating a historical narrative and the fundamental limitations of historiography.

As with *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*, *Flughunde* uses metafictional techniques to thematise historiographical questions surrounding matters such as source problems, fact/reality versus fiction/representation, and the narrativity of history. This thematisation of historiographical issues exposes historical sources as fragmentary, open to distortion and prone to at least some degree of unreliability, and raises questions as to our ability to identify the "truth" about the past. The metafictional openness of *Flughunde* and the resulting requirement of reader participation in forming the meaning in the text particularly encourages scepticism regarding the creation of historical narratives and destabilises any belief that we may be able to form an accurate and objective view of the past.

The destabilisation of certainty about the past raises the question as to whether a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction also

[240] Beyer himself has drawn this link between the role of the reader in *Flughunde* and the way the assessment of eyewitness testimonies usually proceeds: *"Der Leser muß entscheiden, wem er glaubt, und sich sein eigenes Bild machen . . . Bei Zeugenaussagen herrscht genau dieses Prinzip. Aus fünfzehn verschiedenen Zeugenaussagen versucht man, ein Bild zu bauen"*: Biendarra, Anke and Wilke, Sabina 8.

undermines the portrayal of Karnau as a perpetrator. On the basis of the foregoing analysis, I consider that a reading of *Flughunde* as historiographic metafiction does not have this unsettling effect on the portrayal of Karnau as a perpetrator for substantially the same reason that it does not do so in relation to the portrayal of Musbach as a perpetrator in *Unscharfe Bilder* or Jo and Mäxchen in *Himmelskörper*. The elements of historiographic metafiction in *Flughunde* serve primarily to undermine Karnau's attempts to evade admitting his own culpability. The novel's questioning of historical narratives and sources has the effect of amplifying questions about the reliability of Karnau's narrative about himself. Since the story is told primarily from Karnau's perspective, the suggestion that narratives about the past are unreliable and contingent directly affects his account. By undermining Karnau's own attempts to avoid culpability and reprising the pattern of lacunae which identifies Karnau as complicit, a reading of *Flughunde* as historiographic metafiction confirms the novel's portrayal of Karnau as a perpetrator.

The portrayal of Karnau as a perpetrator in *Flughunde* emphasises the dominance of this approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in German fiction of the 1990–2010 period and confirms its application to a broader range of fiction than that represented by *Generationenromane*. Although *Flughunde* is significantly different from the other novels considered in this book, due to its use of the *Täterperspektive* and the corresponding absence of intergenerational conflict, these differences do not give rise to a change in direction as regards the novel's presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. Rather than using the first generation perspective as an opportunity to present a more nuanced, understanding and sympathetic image, *Flughunde* follows the same pattern as other post-unification German novels about the Nazi past in portraying the first generation figure of Karnau as a perpetrator. Indeed, the difference arising from the first generation perspective in *Flughunde* is not that the perpetrator gains more complexity or depth. Rather, it affirms the trope of Nazi perpetrators as psychopaths. By creating a perpetrator character like Karnau, Beyer is able to avoid the bonds of affection that complicate the portrayal of the perpetrators in *Väterliteratur* and *Generationenromane*. Whereas *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* all deal with the perpetrators in the context of the dilemma of subsequent generations as to whether it is possible to love and yet condemn, *Flughunde* presents a perpetrator whose psychopathy and cruelty prevent any of the sympathy that forms a necessary part of the intergenerational bond in the other novels. It gives scope for a more black and white depiction, unencumbered by the complications and opacity arising out of the emotional nature of family relationships. Rather than simply reinforcing the dominant public memory paradigm of Germans as perpetrators current at the time of

its publication, *Flughunde* portrays Karnau as a psychopathic monster who found that Nazism provided the ideal conditions for him to thrive.

6. The version that wanted to be written: historiographic metafiction and the perpetrator/victim dichotomy

"Die geschriebene Version wollte geschrieben werden, die vielen anderen wollten es nicht" (DV 205–206). Michael's reflections at the end of *Der Vorleser* draw attention to the possibility of many different, possibly conflicting, "versions" of the past, and indeed, all four novels considered in this book highlight the existence of various, often competing, narratives about historical events. When German authors dealt with their nation's Nazi past in novels in the period 1990–2010, which "version" of German history did they choose to tell? Did the changes in the political, social and cultural landscape following unification result in a radical change in the literary presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy which has been so central to German discussions about the Nazi period and its extended afterlife?

The analysis of *Der Vorleser, Unscharfe Bilder, Himmelskörper* and *Flughunde* in this book suggests that, regardless of the trends in German public discourse at the time of publication of the four different novels, the literary style in which they were written, or the generational perspective of author or narrator, German novels about the Nazi past in the post-unification period tend to depict Germans in the main as guilty and hence as perpetrators. Whether they are unusual outsiders who participated in the crimes of the SS like Hanna and Karnau, or Germans from the middle of society who participated in the Third Reich in more minor ways, like Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen, all of them are portrayed in the novels as culpable. This portrayal does not represent a significant departure from the way in which Germans of the Third Reich were portrayed in German literature in the period immediately prior to 1990, as it continues the dominant trend prevalent in genres such as *Väterliteratur*. In this sense, the political, social and cultural changes brought about by unification appear to have had little effect on the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators in literature.

The consistency of the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators across all four novels also indicates that consideration of the Nazi past in German literature in the post-1990 period has mirrored changing trends in public discourse in some aspects, but not in others. *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* were published in 1995, at a time when the emphasis in public discussion of the Nazi past in Germany was on Germans as perpetrators. By the time *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* were published in 2003, the focus of

public debate had shifted to Germans as victims. The renewed interest in Germans as victims by 2003 did not, however, result in any radical change in literary approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, with the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators remaining steady across all four novels regardless of shifts in the focus of public discourse over the period. Nevertheless, the increased interest in Germans as victims in the early 2000s is reflected in the novels published at that time, in the sense that, whereas both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* deal with the tropes of the "Germans as victims" discourse, *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* do not. Published in 1995, at a time when the focus was on Germans as perpetrators, *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* both have first generation characters who do not view themselves as victims. Although Hanna is portrayed as a victim by Michael, it is on the basis of her unusual illiteracy and not because of her wartime suffering. Karnau is similarly not associated with the "Germans as victims" thematic, and the tropes of the discourse are largely absent from both novels. By contrast, *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* both deal with "Germans as victims" tropes, including the wartime suffering of the ordinary German soldier, and *Flucht und Vertreibung*, which reflects the public interest in this theme at the time of publication of both novels. Further, Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen all portray themselves as victims in terms familiar from the "Germans as victims" discourse and common in the accounts of first generation *Zeitzeugen*. However, these self-portrayals are comprehensively undermined in *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*, suggesting that these texts represent literary responses to contemporary memory contests which aim to turn the focus back towards Germans as perpetrators.

To the extent that there is a substantial difference between pre- and post-1990 novels dealing with the Nazi past, that difference is to be found, not in their approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, but in the different approach taken to literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by third generation authors. The prevalence of patterns of *Väterliteratur* in *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* indicates that second generation authors are reluctant to move beyond the confines of the *Väterliteratur* dynamic previously established in novels by their generation. These novels concentrate on the emotionally fraught relationship of the second generation with the first. They are characterised by accusation and the instrumentalisation of the past by the second generation as a means of defeating their parental figures in their intergenerational conflict. Importantly, the way in which the second generation deals with the Nazi past in these novels is marked by a strong desire to reject the first generation and the implications of their guilt for those who come after. By contrast, the novels by third generation authors have moved away from the *Väterliteratur* model. In its description of the relationship between Renate and her parents, *Himmelskörper* identifies patterns familiar from

Väterliteratur as a feature of the second generation's method of dealing with its parents, but its third generation characters take a different approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Rather than dealing with the past through accusation, conflict, and rejection of the perpetrators, the third generation accepts that the guilt of their grandparents is part of their own identity. They take control of this knowledge by taking the postmemorial approach of integrating it as one part of their wider story. *Flughunde* also turns away from the patterns of *Väterliteratur* by telling the story from the perspective of a first generation perpetrator and therefore removing the intergenerational bond entirely, allowing for an even darker portrayal. These differences in generational perspective suggest that, to the extent there were changes in literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in German novels between 1990 and 2010, these changes arose, not as a result of unification or the heated memory contests of the post-unification period, but as a result of the coming of age of the third generation and their entry into the literary marketplace.

In relation to the questions about the role of historiographic metafiction explored in this book, my analysis shows that critiques of historiography such as those of White have been represented in various ways in all four novels. The reading of each of these novels as historiographic metafiction has implications for the portrayal of Hanna, Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen, and Karnau. In *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper,* and *Flughunde*, the way in which a reading of the novels as historiographic metafiction questions the reliability of historical sources, including eye witness testimony, and highlights the narrativity of history tends to strengthen the depiction of the first generation characters as perpetrators. This is principally because the main historical narratives undermined by the reflection of critiques of historiography in the novels are those told by the first generation about their own past. The deconstruction of the victimhood narratives of Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen, and of Karnau's attempts to elide his own culpability by the function of the novels as historiographic metafiction supports the portrayal of those characters as perpetrators. By contrast, the effect of reading *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction destabilises the portrayal of Hanna as a perpertrator. Although elements of historiographic metafiction in the novel contribute to the undermining of Michael's attempts to exculpate Hanna, they similarly question attempts to depict Hanna as a perpetrator. Unlike Musbach, Karnau, and Jo and Mäxchen, Hanna creates no narrative of her own about the past and therefore no stories of exculpation or victimhood to be undercut by the questions of historiographic metafiction. This openness in Hanna's characterisation combines with elements of historiographic metafiction and the novel's critique of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to undermine the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator in the text. The way historiographic metafiction acts to destabilise, rather than confirm,

the depiction of Hanna as a perpetrator may well be a factor contributing to the greater level of controversy generated by *Der Vorleser* in comparison with the other novels. My demonstration of the relevance of historiographic metafiction to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in German novels of this period, and particularly to the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, will hopefully spur others on to further analysis in this area.

Time has now elapsed since the period in which these novels were written. It is no longer the case that *"so viel Hitler war nie"*. The fever pitch of obsessive concern with the Nazi past has passed. Both German literature and the public conversation in Germany are now dominated by other themes, such as globalisation, migration, multiculturalism and climate change. However, in a society as saturated with the past as Germany, attitudes to these new topics are still framed by the culture and identity formed during the period of intense questioning following unification in 1990, a major part of which was a consideration of the place of Germany's Nazi past in the Berlin Republic. Dealing with the Nazi past still forms a core component of contemporary German identity, something that is unlikely to change any time soon. Literature written during the post-unification period when memory of the Nazi past was hotly contested, the literature discussed in this book, is still a key to understanding German attitudes towards the past and the contemporary German identity which frames German approaches to new challenges today. So, which *"Version wollte geschrieben werden"*? Which "version" of the Nazi past have the authors of German novels in the post-unification period chosen to tell? The examination of *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper* and *Flughunde* in this book indicates that the story they have chosen to tell is one in keeping with the dominant pubic memory paradigm in which there is *"keine deutsche Identität ohne Auschwitz"* and expressing the *"immerwährende Verantwortung"* to keep the memory of German guilt alive.

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The unification of Germany in 1990 set in train a number of dramatic changes in Germany's political, social and cultural landscape which gave rise to a series of hotly debated memory contests centred on the newly unified nation's approach to its common Nazi past. As an important medium of cultural memory, literature played a significant part in the controversy and novels dealing with the Nazi past enjoyed widespread popularity and influence in the 20 years following 1990.

But what "version" of the Nazi past did the authors of these novels choose to tell? Using the perpetrator/victim dichotomy around which much of the debate crystallised, this book seeks to answer this question via a close textual analysis of works by Bernhard Schlink, Ulla Hahn, Tanja Dückers, and Marcel Beyer. In particular, this book analyses these novels as historiographic metafiction, a significantly under-explored angle which raises important questions concerning our ability to know the "truth" about the past and destabilises the basis on which we judge guilt or innocence. In providing a deeper understanding of the approach of fiction authors to the Nazi past in the post-1990 period, this book aims to enrich our understanding of its legacy in contemporary German society today.

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