“Connected but not Congruent”

W.G. Sebald and Writing of his Generation

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Abstract

W.G. Sebald is widely perceived as a literary phenomenon, and critics assert the uniqueness of his prose fiction, and its position in the context of post-war German literature. In this study, I challenge the widely-held view that the narrative prose of W.G. Sebald is aloof from that of his generation, and demonstrate that his writing reveals not only significant thematic connections with that of his generation, but an intensification of the resentment and ambivalence that mark the earlier writing of his generation.

My study is a comprehensive comparative reading of Sebald’s narrative prose and the writing of the German “second” generation, and builds on a small body of work by Morgan, Taberner, Davies and others. Exploration of Sebald’s prose fiction within a generational paradigm reveals significant connections between his writing and the literary, social, and political preoccupations that define the earlier, ambivalent writing of his generation. My study challenges the widespread perception of Sebald’s uniqueness, as well as the tendency to mystification that exists in critical appreciation of Sebald’s writing. Situating Sebald in a generational context has significant implications for our reading of his work: it allows us to identify his narrative prose as a belated, intensified, and elaborately figurative confrontation with the inheritance that troubled his second-generation cohort. My readings show that Sebald’s narrative prose continues to reflect the ambivalence towards national identity and recent traumatic history that marks the conflicted writing of his generation, born during or shortly after the war, and expressed in the anti-authoritarian writing of the 1960s, the intergenerational conflicts of the Väterliteratur, and the neo-Romantic writing of the 1980s. Placing Sebald in a generational context exposes the incongruity of his position in relation to the trajectory followed by many writers of his generation: while their concerns change over time to reveal a more empathetic approach to the National Socialist past and the imbrication of the parent generation in it, Sebald continues to express the discourse of loss and resentment that characterizes the earlier writing of this generation.
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Above all, I thank my husband, Mark Selikowitz, for love, encouragement and support. This study is dedicated to Mark.
“The work of Sebald and other writers and intellectuals continues to remind us that the dates of history and the dates of consciousness are connected but not congruent.”

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction and Literature Review

Introduction

Fourteen years after Sebald’s death, the “virtual explosion of secondary literature” on his work continues,¹ with critics asserting the uniqueness of Sebald’s narrative prose and style, and its position in the context of post-war German literature. In this wide-ranging comparative study, I challenge the pervasive view that the narrative prose of W.G. Sebald is aloof from that of his generation, and in doing so, address a significant deficit in Sebald research. It is the burden of my study to demonstrate that Sebald’s narrative prose reveals undisclosed and underestimated affinities with the earlier writing of his generation, confirming Morgan’s observation that Sebald’s texts are a belated manifestation of the inheritance that troubled his cohort. My readings suggest that Sebald’s narrative prose continues to reflect the ambivalence towards national identity and recent traumatic history that marks the conflicted writing of his generation, born during or shortly after the war, and expressed in the anti-authoritarian writing of the 1960s protest movement, the intergenerational conflicts of the Väterliteratur, and the neo-Romantic writing of the 1980s. Examination of his prose texts in relation to those of his generation indicate that Sebald’s belated response reveals not only thematic connections with these genres, but in many respects, an intensification of the ambivalence and resentment that mark the earlier writing of his generation.

My study contributes to a broader understanding of Sebald’s work by restoring him, as a second-generation writer, to his German context, and a shared generational experience of war, damaged childhood, and generational conflict. I build on a small

body of work by Morgan, Taberner, Davies and others who examine Sebald’s prose writing from a generational perspective, and contribute to their work by comparing and interrogating Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to a comprehensive range of second-generation genres and texts. I seek to demonstrate that, despite his efforts to distance himself from his generation, Sebald shares thematic concerns with radically anti-authoritarian writers like Achternbusch and Brinkmann; while Sebald’s muted and allusive narrative prose would appear to have little in common with the obscenity of Fichte or the confrontational tenor of Meckel and Schwaiger, his stylistic subtlety disguises a conflicted approach to genealogy and identity that aligns his narrative prose with protest writing and Väterliteratur. Sebald’s narrative texts reflect a nostalgia for the lost past, a longing for transcendence, and a reconfiguration of the Romantic Kunstmärchen and suffering artist evident in the neo-Romantic writing of contemporaries such as Strauß and Handke.

Examining Sebald’s prose in a generational context exposes also significant differences between his writing and that of his generation: belated by several decades, he proves more categorical in his repudiation of certain authoritarian structures than they were; the trope of affiliation with Jewish identity, tokenistic in Väterliteratur, becomes in Sebald’s writing an elaborate and ethically problematical means of achieving a more desirable alternative identity. Sebald’s neo-Romanticism does not offer the redemptive promise it holds in the writing of his second-generation cohort; while Sebald reconfigures the Romantic Kunstmärchen as a structural device, the Gegenwelt he constructs lacks the utopian dimension it presents in the writing of Handke and Strauß. Such differences do not, however, obscure the significant connections between Sebald’s prose fiction and the earlier writing of his generation. Sebald’s writing is imbued with second-generation concerns: in his narrative prose, the legacy of National Socialism is a continuing burden, and Vergangenheitsbewältigung remains an ongoing process. As Morgan observes:

[Sebald’s] texts are not statements of self-understanding in the declining stage of life, but gestures of inability to resolve the problems of individual identity and history which Sebald’s generation inherited. His accents may
be less strident than those of his contemporaries, but they carry the same message.²

Situating Sebald in a generational context has significant implications for our reading of his work: it allows us to identify his narrative prose as a belated confrontation with second-generation issues, disguised by an intricately figurative style, and informed by Sebald’s familiarity with transgeneration- and trauma theory. Comparison of Sebald’s narrative texts with the earlier writing of his generation throws new light on his epochal melancholy and incapacitating pessimism, and helps us to read these as late expressions of the unresolved resentment of the German second generation, and to understand his Endzeitigkeit as a belated manifestation of the post-revolutionary melancholy of his 1960s generation.³ Relocating Sebald in the context of his generation allows us to discern in his writing the often paralysing awareness of authorial inauthenticity and epistemological inadequacy that mark the writing of his generation. Comparison of Sebald’s allusive prose and archaic intonation with the confrontational tenor of the protest texts and Väterliteratur of his generation draws attention to the self-conscious artifice of Sebald’s narrative style; his tendency to view the world sub specie aeternitatis raises troubling questions relating to the avoidance of historical specificity and the universalization of suffering and trauma in literature that deals with the National Socialist past. A generational reading of Sebald throws into relief his refusal to acknowledge the cultural and political shifts in German consciousness with which his contemporaries engage, and exposes the incongruity of

² Morgan 2005, 92.
³ Describing the melancholic symptoms of the second generation, Schneider notes “a depressive self-obsession, a negative narcissism which manifests itself in the form of chronic suffering of one’s own self … an existential feeling that something is missing – a sense of disappointment over something which was never received.” Michael Schneider, “Fathers and Sons Retrospectively: The Damaged Relationship between Two Generations,” New German Critique 31 (1984), 43. Lepenies observes the pervasive melancholy that, with the demise of communism, afflicted the post-Marxist European intelligentsia: “Hier liegt der Grund dafür, daß ein Hamlet der Gegenwart von seinem Schloß aus wieder einen melancholischen Kontinent erblicken würde.” Wolf Lepenies, Melancholie und Gesellschaft (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), xxvi.
Sebald’s position in relation to the path followed by many writers of his generation: while their concerns change over time to reveal a more reconciliatory approach to the National Socialist past and the implication of the parent generation in it,\(^4\) Sebald remains focused on the damaging impact of National Socialism on identity and belonging.

In the vigorous and expanding field of Sebald research, critical interest in Sebald’s narrative writing in the context of his German generation remains an area of deficit. Sebald scholarship focuses on diverse aspects of his work, including his poetics of memory, the themes of *Heimat* and exile in his writing, and the significance of intertextuality and intermediality in his work. Critics are turning their attention to the minutiae of Sebald’s marginalia, to his personal library, and to recently discovered essays and poems.\(^5\) He is the subject of numerous international conferences, exhibitions, and online-blogs; a previously unpublished book of Sebald poems, “Across the Land and the Water: Selected Poems 1964-2000” appeared in 2012. In 2011, BBC Radio 3 broadcast “Looking and Looking Away”, a series of five audio essays from individuals who knew Sebald, including his translator, Anthea Bell, poet George Szirtes, and writer, Christopher Bigsby. A recent film, *Patience: After Sebald*,\(^6\) is an impressionistic reflection on Sebald’s writing, and a re-enactment of the narrator’s walks around Suffolk in *Die Ringe des Saturn*. Critical interest is overwhelmingly positive, leading Simon to question the “stereotypes, fast schon hagiographisches Autorbild von Sebald”\(^7\), and Schley to comment caustically on the


display of “Devotionalen des Autors” at a Stuttgart exhibition. Sebald’s influence on contemporary literature is the subject of growing critical awareness. Recent additions to Sebald scholarship cover such multifarious issues as memory, homosexuality, Sebald’s self-construction as an author, and the transnational dimension to Sebald’s prose fiction. A comprehensive collection of visual and critical material on Sebald’s life and works is presented by Catling and Hibbitt. In this wide and varied field of scholarship, the relation of Sebald’s prose narratives to the writing of his generation occupies a relatively insignificant position.

A small, but growing number of scholars engage with Sebald’s academic and critical writing in the context of his German generation, and identify hidden connections between his work and the preoccupations of the generation of German writers, the Kriegskinder, born during or shortly after the war. Indeed, Sheppard describes Sebald’s conceptual world as a “long-distance contribution” to the student revolts of

12 Schley, 2012.
the late 1960s. Critics, for example, Simon (2005) and Schütte, detect in the polemical nature of his critical writing a latent affinity with the 1968 protest generation; essays in the 2011 edition of *Journal of European Studies Special Issue: W.G. Sebald*, explore Sebald’s connections with his socio-political context; among these, Hutchinson observes in Sebald’s critical writing the ideology of the Frankfurt School, fundamental to the protest movement. Critics concur on the unusually polemical nature of Sebald’s literary essays, academic work, and reviews. The confrontational style of Sebald’s critical work is noted by Durzak, who compares the aggression of Sebald’s attacks on Sternheim and Andersch to another “literarischer Amokläufer der deutschen Literatur,” the critic Eckhard Henscheid. Daviau is critical of Sebald’s “direct attack on literary critics, his arrogant, aggressive tone, his many doubtful generalizations, and his doctrinaire, jargonistic style.” Sebald’s admiration for a number of controversial 1960s writers, evident in critical essays on

Achternbusch,20 Handke,21 Bernhard,22 and Fichte,23 indicates his interest in the radicalism of his contemporaries.

In a rare comparative study of Sebald’s prose fiction and the protest literature of his generation, Davies24 speculates on the reluctance of critics to see connections between Sebald’s narrative prose and the protest writing of his generation. Among the factors she identifies are a perception of Sebald’s highly literary style as inimical to the pragmatic realism of protest literature, association of his oeuvre with contemporary theories of history and memory, and Sebald’s avowed indifference to the political events of that time. Beyond protest writing, critics are reluctant to connect Sebald’s narrative prose with the inclination to neo-Romanticism that follows the socio-political turmoil of the 1960s. This may be due to the contested nature of German Romanticism, its putative irrationalism, and association with National Socialism. A tendency exists to view Sebald as detached from his generational context. Sebald’s perception of Germany as “ein zurückgebliebenes, zerstörtes, irgendwie extraterritoriales Land”25 would seem to confirm this view, revealing little consciousness of the cultural-historical shifts that have shaped contemporary Germany. His self-imposed “exile” in

25 W.G. Sebald, Die Ausgewanderten (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2006), 270.
England has contributed to his outsider status, and has problematized interpretation of his work, as Taberner points out:

Thus a consensus appears to exist, particularly among American and British scholars, that the conventions of reception that shape their sceptical approach to German texts dealing with Nazism do not apply. As such, Sebald’s literary output is framed as being in some way removed from the social and political debates within which contemporary German literature is typically contextualized and interrogated.26

In relation to his German literary context, Wolff’s observations exemplify Sebald’s special status: “Sebald [is] a phenomenon of postwar German literature. Though often dealing with Germany’s recent past, the belatedness of his prose works sets them apart from the literature of Vergangenheitsbewältigung.”27 His oblique focus on the Holocaust distinguishes him from other post-war German writers, indeed, Franklin sees him as “unique among German writers in his understanding of the catastrophe that befell the European Jews.”28

Critics tend to ascribe to Sebald a uniqueness, and to extract him, through the “Image eines menschenscheuen, schüchternen und erlesenen Anachoreten der Literatur”29, from a shared generational and literary context. This tendency is exemplified by Schwartz, who notes Sebald’s “sudden appearance, fully formed, as if out of nowhere.”30 McCulloh observes: “Most who encountered the late-blooming writer in

27 Wolff 2007, 79.
30 Schwartz 2007, 18.
Germany and subsequently in the English-speaking world were in agreement regarding the uniqueness of Sebald’s prose.”

Huyssen describes Sebald’s “unique style of memory narrative, located at the breaking point between documentary and fiction” while Lewis observes that “[Sebald] has effectively created a new genre by combining travelogue, biography, memoir, speculation, literary criticism, and erudite detail into an elaborate structure founded on the restless sensibility of a melancholic aesthete.”

In her fulsome review of Sebald’s _The Emigrants_, Sontag describes the text as being like “nothing I’ve ever read…” For Schwartz, Sebald’s uniqueness lies in his creation of “a new form of prose writing that makes tangible the contemporary blurring of borders between fiction and nonfiction.”

The elusive nature of Sebald’s writing is reflected in descriptions that suggest its indeterminate quality, “like water, finding its own level everywhere.” Descriptions of Sebald’s uniqueness reflect what Sheppard castigates as a tendency to mystification in the critical approach to Sebald’s writing, evident in a desire to “veil Sebald’s texts from mortal gaze within

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35 Schwartz 2007, 15.
a mystery accessible only to a priestly elite…” 38 Wood’s observations exemplify this approach:

Sebald’s prose belongs, mysteriously, nowhere. The enigmatic patience of the sentences, the pedantic syntax, the peculiar antiquity of the diction, the strange recessed distance of the writing, in which everything seems milky and sub-aqueous, just beyond reach - all of this gives Sebald a particular flavour, so that sometimes it seems that we are reading not a particular writer but an emanation of literature. 39

Acknowledging the unique fascination that Sebald holds for academics and readers, Zisselsberger admits: “It seems that when it comes to explaining what Scott Denham has called the ‘Sebald phenomenon’, an appeal to themes and style will only take us so far and at some point must, strangely enough, give way to wonder and a certain speechlessness.” 40

The perception of Sebald’s uniqueness can be traced to the universalism of his writerly perspective, the epochal European worldview reflected in his writing, the thematic focus, unusual in post-war German writing, on the Holocaust and Jewish fate, and to the generic hybridity of his narrative prose. For Merkin, “Sebald’s mining of a primal existential despair … goes beyond the merely personal to suggest something endemic about the condition of being human.” 41 Semprun describes Die Ausgewanderten as “Une mémoire européene”, 42 while Gabriel describes the work as a tomb for a lost

Europe. 43 For Anderson, Sebald’s writing is concerned with the *longue durée* of European modernity. 44 To this can be added Sebald’s often contradictory and ambivalent observations about his generation, his tendency to dissociate himself in interviews from his politically engaged 1960s cohort, 45 and his self-perception as an outsider, “from the edges”, 46 all of which contribute to the perception of his uniqueness. Critics who attempt to place Sebald in a literary context tend to emphasize his debt to writers and writing temporally or geographically removed: to Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard, another literary outsider (McCulloh 47), and to nineteenth century German Romantic writers such as Stifter (Sheppard 48 and Chandler 49). Sebald’s debt to Adorno and Horkheimer is explored by Öhlschläger 50 and Hutchinson (2011), among others; his kinship with Barthes, Calvino, and Eco is examined by Blackler, 51 and his affiliation

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with Austro- and German-Jewish writers of the post-war period is considered by Cosgrove, who detects a tendency on the part of Sebald to dissociate himself from post-war non-Jewish German writers, such as Andersch and Grass, while affiliating with Jewish-German writing of the post-war period.\textsuperscript{52} Sebald’s engagement with the writing of his own Austro-German generation is limited, and reflected in essays on Handke, Bernhard, Roth, and Achternbusch.

Given the tendency to extract Sebald’s prose writing from the context that shapes the writing of his generation, the body of critical work on the relation of Sebald’s narrative prose to the writing of his generation is relatively small. In this under-explored area, a number of critical texts stand out. Morgan’s 2005 article, “The Sign of Saturn: Melancholy, Homelessness and Apocalypse in W.G. Sebald’s Prose Narratives” remains a landmark in Sebald research, offering a significant analysis of Sebald’s narrative prose in generational and historical context. Morgan identifies Sebald as “a traumatised member of his generation”,\textsuperscript{53} whose narrative prose continues to thematize the legacy of National Socialism, and a conflicted approach to national identity, consistent with the writing of his 1960s generation. Davies (2011) contributes to the placement of Sebald’s prose fiction in a generational context by pointing to unexplored similarities between Sebald’s writing and that of the protest generation. Finch’s close reading of Sebald’s narrative prose within a generational paradigm, “Meine Mir Unbekannte Herkunft: German Identity and History in the Works of W.G. Sebald, Botho Strauß and Peter Handke”\textsuperscript{54}, uncovers thematic and structural similarities to work by dissident writers of his generation. Her study includes comparative analysis of Sebald’s neo-Romanticism in relation to that of his contemporaries, Handke and Strauß. A dissident strain in Sebald’s prose fiction is examined by Long who explores

\textsuperscript{52} Mary Cosgrove, “The Anxiety of German Influence: Affiliation, Rejection, and Jewish Identity in W.G. Sebald’s Work”, in German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990, eds. Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (New York: Camden House, 2006), 229-252.

\textsuperscript{53} Morgan 2005, 91.

the resistance implicit in Sebald’s depiction of institutions devoted to the control of knowledge and behaviour.\textsuperscript{55} A small number of critics perceive in Sebald’s narrative prose writing the influence of Adorno and the Frankfurt School, thus connecting Sebald, on an ideological level, with the protest movement, for whom the Frankfurt School provides a philosophical basis. Hutchinson (2009, 2011) detects in Sebald’s narrative prose style the negative dialectic of Adorno; Cosgrove\textsuperscript{56} argues for an historical reading of Sebald’s melancholy as a manifestation of ideas derived from the Frankfurt School. She reads Sebald’s melancholy as manifesting a modern consciousness of the relationship between global capitalism and ecological destruction that implicitly aligns his thinking with Benjamin and the Frankfurt School. Sebald’s debt to the Frankfurt School is examined also by Öhlschläger (2006), who detects affinities between Sebald’s \textit{Fortschrittskritik} and Adorno’s negative dialectic of progress and dissolution. I build on the work of these writers, and strive to deepen our understanding of Sebald’s narrative prose by pointing out the intensely anti-authoritarian dimension to his writing, at times more repudiative than that of his most radical contemporaries of the 1960s.

Critical work on Sebald’s connection to \textit{Väterliteratur} is extremely limited. Sebald’s writing does not appear to have much in common with this confrontational and largely autobiographical genre, and his narrative prose lacks the explicit engagement with the father, and the family as a site of conflict that are the hallmarks of \textit{Väterliteratur}. Davies 2011 study stands out as a rare comparative analysis of Sebald’s narrative work and the \textit{Väterliteratur} of his generation, specifically, Vesper’s \textit{Die Reise} (1977). Davies identifies connections between Sebald’s “Il ritorno in patria” (\textit{Schwindel.Gefühle}) and Vesper’s book, including the theme of childhood fraught by mysterious menace and dark secrets, and that of the journey that fails to redeem the protagonist from the past, or from the conflicts of German identity. My reading of Sebald’s narrative prose suggests that he continues to articulate the resentment that, in


the 1970s, resulted in the confrontational body of *Väterliteratur*. In Sebald’s writing, ambivalence towards genealogy, the desire for alternative affiliation, and a sense of victimhood in relation to the parent generation continue to be thematized. Sebald’s treatment of the *Väterliteratur* trope of alternative affiliation is examined by Cosgrove\(^57\) in relation to *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*. I expand on her study, and seek to trace, in Sebald’s construction of Jewish-German relationships, the reconfiguration of the *Väterliteratur* trope of alternative affiliation that has its origin in the resentment of the second generation towards their parents.

Regressive tendencies in Sebald’s writing are not confined to his affinities with the politically engaged writing of the 1960s generation, or the generational conflicts of *Väterliteratur*. For Sebald, as it does for other significant writers of his generation, neo-Romanticism emerges as an alternative to the politically engaged realism of the 1960s. For these writers, Romanticism offers a compensatory response to a reality perceived as deficient. Sebald’s Romantic tendencies have been described by a limited number of critics, among them, Chandler, Finch, and Pakendorff. In the philosophical and structural dimensions to Sebald’s writing, Chandler (2003) sees evidence of a Romantic afterlife; Finch (2007a) offers a sustained engagement with Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to the neo-Romantic writing of his generation, exemplified by Handke and Botho Strauß. In Finch’s view, neo-Romantic poetics, and the *Bildungsroman* in particular, play an important role in Sebald’s interrogation of identity, origin, tradition and *Heimat*. For Pakendorff, the pervasive trope of *Wanderschaft* in Sebald’s writing, and Sebald’s melancholy and subjective *Ich-* narrator are congruent with German Romanticism.\(^58\)

This thesis builds on, and contributes to the limited body of work in which Sebald’s narrative prose is examined in relation to the protest writing of the 1960s, the *Väterliteratur*, and the neo-Romanticism of his generation. I compare Sebald’s work with radically experimental writers, such as Achternbusch, Fichte, Bernhard, and Brinkmann, and analyse his narrative prose in relation to an extensive range of

\(^{57}\) Cosgrove, 2006.

texts, including works by Henisch, Gauch, Seuren, Meckel, Härtling, Rehmann, Plessen, and Schwaiger. Neo-Romantic tendencies in Sebald’s narrative prose are examined in relation to texts by Handke, Roth, and Strauß, with particular focus on the reconfiguration of the enchanted realm (“Das Märchenhafte”), and the Romantic artist, and their meaning in terms of Sebald’s belated second-generation perspective. In its scope and depth, this study contributes to a more comprehensive picture of Sebald’s narrative prose, and to the demystification of Sebald’s prose fiction by acknowledging his connections with the writing of his generation. I argue that, despite Sebald’s outsider status as a German writer in England, the generic ambiguity of his style, and the universalism of his writerly gaze, Sebald continues to thematize topoi consistent with the earlier Vergangenheitsbewältigung of his generation. My study exposes significant differences between Sebald’s writing and the earlier work of his generation, and reveals problematic dimensions to his belated second-generation perspective. Relocating Sebald in a generational context allows us to detect, behind his elaborately figurative style and erudite allusiveness, the continuity of second-generation anxieties, informed by transgeneration- and trauma theory, and a thwarted desire for an uncontaminated past.

For Sebald’s generation of Kriegskinder, imaginative writing posits a mode of dealing with inherited trauma and guilt in relation to the National Socialist past, and of transcending the experiential and epistemological deficit of a generation distanced by “die Gnade der späten Geburt” from the origin of trauma. For Sebald, writing in the final decade of the twentieth century, the National Socialist past cannot be assimilated into post-war German normality, and a newly sanitized Germany disguises, but cannot erase for him, the stain of genocide. Sebald’s narrative prose is pervaded by themes fundamental to the writing of the second generation: identity conflict, the dialectic between rupture and continuity, rejection of genealogy, and the desire for alternative affiliation. His writing thematizes the protest of his generation against the contamination of German identity by the implication of their parents in National Socialism, against authoritarian institutions, and against modernity in the light of

59 The phrase was used by Helmut Kohl in an effort to emphasise his untainted position as a German chancellor, born too late to be implicated in Nazism. Address to the Israeli Parliament, January 24, 1984.
industrialized genocide. Marooned in the past, Sebald continues to reflect this generation’s “starren Blick auf das Trauma des Nationalsozialismus.”

Thesis outline

In five chapters, I trace evidence that connects Sebald’s narrative prose to the writing of his generation. In the first chapter, I review the literature on Sebald to discern the consensus position with regard to Sebald’s writing in relation to his generation. In the second chapter, the concept of generation and its significance to the post-war German context is explored, with particular focus on generation as a temporal paradigm, and the hierarchy of implication this implies. The psychology and thematic focus of the so-called second generation are investigated, including the resentment and loss that are central to the writing of the generation to which Sebald belongs: resentment at the burden of transgenerational guilt, and loss of a positive national identity. Such responses are evident in the self-pity and impotence that can be discerned in their writing, and in the dialectic of rupture and continuity that reflects the conflicted desire for, and rejection of, affiliation with their parents.

In chapter three I explore Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to the literature of protest of the 1960s and 1970s, and seek to draw connections between Sebald’s critique of institutionalized authority and the anti-authoritarian ideology manifest in the writing of the protest generation. To this end, I engage in textual analysis of a wide range of anti-authoritarian texts, including work by Fichte, Achternbusch, Vesper, Bernhard and Brinkmann. I seek connections between Sebald’s Fortschrittskritik and the philosophy of the Frankfurt School, in particular, Adorno’s negative dialectic of progress and regression. The influence of the Frankfurt School can be discerned also in Sebald’s interest in documentary material, affinity with literature outside the mainstream, and valorization of the outsider position and forms of expression. Sebald’s connections with Väterliteratur are the subject of chapter four. Here, I engage in close textual analysis of Die Ausgewanderten to reveal that, while Sebald’s prose writing does not deal explicitly with the family as the site of conflict, many of the topoi

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60 Heinz Bude, *Bilanz der Nachfolge: Die Bundesrepublik und der Nationalsozialismus* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 89.
of Väterliteratur, such as the quest for the father, identity conflict, the dialectic between rupture and affiliation, and the desire for alternative affiliation, are implicit in his writing. My textual analysis reveals the intensification of such notions in Sebald’s narrative prose, and exposes his regressive position in relation to other writers of his generation.

The fifth and final chapter of my study is an exploration of Sebald’s neo-Romanticism in relation to neo-Romantic texts by Handke, Strauß and Roth. Building on a limited body of work by Finch, Chandler and others, I demonstrate significant thematic connections between Sebald’s narrative prose and the neo-Romantic writing of his generation. Like theirs, Sebald’s prose fiction reveals a debt to the Romantic Kunstmärchen and a Romantic perception of the artist that sees suffering and itinerancy as intrinsic to the creation of art. Comparative analysis reveals a significant disparity between the writing of Sebald and that of his neo-Romantic generation: the redemptive dimension evident in the neo-Romantic writing of Handke and Strauß is absent in Sebald’s narrative prose, which, like Roth’s, subverts the transformative potential of the Kunstmärchen, offering instead, visions of post-apocalyptic dystopia and evocations of unresolved exile.

**Literature review: Sebald and his generation**

Given the intense critical interest in Sebald’s writing, the paucity of work on Sebald’s narrative prose in the context of his generation is a serious omission. While Sebald’s literary criticism and academic works are increasingly examined in relation to his 1960s generation, critics remain reluctant to analyse his narrative prose from a generational perspective. Companions to his work, such as those by Long and Whitehead, Niehaus and Öhlschläger, Martin and Wintermeyer, and Denham and

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McCulloh\textsuperscript{64} present a wide and varied field of Sebald research that encompasses poetics, Holocaust, memory, intertextuality, narratology, and intermediality, but do not offer sustained analysis of Sebald’s prose fiction in a generational context. Interviews in Loquai\textsuperscript{65} and Schwartz (2007) hint at intergenerational experiences Sebald shares with his 1960s cohort, but the implications for his narrative prose remain largely obscure.

A number of comprehensive works treat the question of generation in the German context from a variety of perspectives, while acknowledging the specific importance of generation to a culture characterized by dramatic rupture and generational conflict. Jureit and Wildt \textsuperscript{66} and Roseman\textsuperscript{67} provide comprehensive approaches to generation in the German context, focusing on sociological, cultural, historical, and psychological perspectives. Bude’s contribution\textsuperscript{68} in the former collection is valuable as an exploration of the ambiguous relationship of time and consciousness in the formation of generational identity, focusing on Sebald’s notion of “Zeitheimat” as a form of pre-conscious perception of generational origin. Krejci’s psychoanalytical analysis\textsuperscript{69} of the impact of National Socialism on Sebald’s generation of \textit{Kriegskinder} provides a background to the psychological symptoms experienced by the second generation, and confirms the psychiatric findings of Eckstaedt.\textsuperscript{70} Eckstaedt’s case studies on the German second generation are revealing in terms of this generation’s relationship with

\textsuperscript{64} Scott Denham and Mark McCulloh eds., \textit{W.G. Sebald. History-Memory-Trauma} (New York: Walter de Gruyter, 2006).


\textsuperscript{68} Hans Bude, “‘Generation’ im Kontext. Von den Kriegs- zu den Wohlfahrtsstaatsgenerationen”, in Jureit and Wildt 2005, 28-44.


their parents, and belated engagement with their parents’ past. Her work sheds light on post-Nazi family relationships, and the tendency of the children to see themselves as victims of their fathers, and to somatise repressed psychological symptoms. Cohen-Pfister and Vees-Gulani\(^71\) offer a generational reading of post-war German literature; their work is useful for explorations of generation as a way of ordering the post-war German world in which the Nazi legacy and German-Jewish relations continue to be troubling issues. Vees-Gulani’s contribution, “Between Rerevaluation 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”, provides a valuable comparison of recent family novels with the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s, and indirectly exposes regressive tendencies in Sebald’s prose fiction. In a similar vein, Rinner’s contribution, “From Student Movement to the Generation of 1968: Generational Conflicts in German Novels from the 1970s and 1990s”, reflects changes in generational approach that implicitly reveal Sebald’s connections with the earlier writing of his generation.

The study by Berger\(^72\) is representative of research that appears from the late 1990s onwards, examining the second generation from both the survivor and perpetrator perspectives, and pointing to characteristics shared by the two groups: both groups respond to the silence of the parent generation on the subject of the Nazi past, share a sense of exclusion from the past of their parents, and a need to discover their own identities through discovering those of their parents’. There are fundamental differences relating to legacy, for the children of survivors, a life-affirming issue, for the children of perpetrators, a burden of guilt that is manifest in genealogical rejection. McGlothlin examines the writing of survivor and perpetrator groups, pointing to commonalities and differences between them. Her discussion of later family novels as nuanced reimaginings of *Väterliteratur* implicitly underscores Sebald’s regressive

\(^71\) Laurel Cohen-Pfister and Susanne Vees-Gulani eds., *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture* (Rochester: Camden House, 2010).

position in relation to the changing response of the second generation to the Nazi past.\textsuperscript{73}

Generation in the German context is largely defined by caesura. Weigel provides a theoretical framework for the generational concept that, after the rupture of 1945, divides the German understanding of generation into a hierarchy of experience, and assigns to Sebald the status of “second generation” in relation to that fateful year.\textsuperscript{74} In \textit{1945 und Wir}, Frei examines the impact of the passing of the perpetrator and eyewitness cohort on the generational relationship between the second generation and their parents, and on the growing desire of the former for reconciliation and closure that implicitly exposes Sebald’s incongruent position in relation to the writing of his generation.\textsuperscript{75} A number of general works provide a background to the political and social upheavals that engaged Sebald’s contemporaries in the 1960s, and from which he sought to extricate himself by moving to England. These general works seek to reevaluate the significance of 1968 in the light of a reunified Germany, and the changing role of the “sixty-eight” generation, now in positions of leadership. There is general consensus that, while 1968 was a political failure, it was profoundly important in generational and cultural terms. Kraushaar\textsuperscript{76} offers a comprehensive account of the 1968 German protest movement, its origins, aims, and significance, and implicitly, its significance to Sebald’s writing, but does not engage directly with the literature of the protest movement. In his study of German writing between 1968 and 1985, Mayer covers the background to the protest movement, and its failure in political terms. His discussion of protest writers, such as Fichte, Bernhard, and Handke, is useful in terms


\textsuperscript{75} Norbert Frei, \textit{1945 und Wir. Das dritte Reich im Bewuβtsein der Deutschen} (Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009).

of interpreting tropes of resistance in Sebald’s narrative prose.77 Briegleb and Weigel offer a broad response to German literature from 1968, and provide comprehensive discussion of the many strategies by means of which the second generation sought to come to terms with the Nazi past and the deficiencies of the new Germany.78

Bude examines the youth revolt in its specifically German context;79 he is critical of the redemptive role ascribed to the “sixty-eighers” in relation to the Nazi legacy, the putative transformation of West German culture, and the Westernization of Germany. In this, his thinking is congruent with what Vees-Gulani and Cohen-Pfister describe as a more critical approach to the “sixty-eighers” from the 1990s onwards. In their 2010 text, the authors examine a shift in the writing of the protest generation towards a more self-reflective and reconciliatory approach in relation to the intergenerational struggle of the 1960s. Their discussion is useful in exposing Sebald’s maintenance of a “sixty-eigher” perspective in the face of significant political and cultural change.

Critical debate on Väterliteratur centres on the question of homogeneity. There is a tendency among critics, exemplified by Schlant (1999), to see Väterliteratur as largely undifferentiated. Indeed, in her treatment of the genre in *The Language of Silence*,80 she dismisses it as essentially formulaic, and offers an abbreviated but acute treatment of Väterliteratur, including texts by Plessen, Henisch, Rehmann, and Vesper. Assmann presents a polarising perspective on Väterliteratur and later family novels of the 1990s, describing the former as typified by rupture, confrontation, and by an internal moral polarity represented by the children on the one hand, and the morally compromised fathers on the other, and contrasts this with the tendency to continuity

and empathy evident in later family novels.\textsuperscript{81} Moser presents a detailed analysis of the central themes of \textit{Väterliteratur}.\textsuperscript{82} In his examination of Meckel’s \textit{Suchbild. Über meinen Vater}, he describes the son’s hatred and resentment of the father, the construction of the father as cold and unfeeling, and the accusatory perspective of the son as paradigmatic of \textit{Väterliteratur}. Critical opinion on \textit{Väterliteratur} tends to focus on the deleterious impact of National Socialism on family life from psychological and literary-thematic perspectives. Mayer’s analysis of \textit{Väterliteratur} texts (Mayer, 1989) is typical of the approach to \textit{Väterliteratur} that sees it as a conflation of the personal and political, and motivated by generational conflict centred on the younger generation’s sense of injury and implication.

As early as 1982, Grimm argues for a more differentiated view of the autobiographical writing of the 1970s, citing anomalies of birthplace, nationality, and social background, and pointing to nonconformist writers like Bernhard and Enzensberger to challenge what he sees as the tendency of critics towards polarization and oversimplification.\textsuperscript{83} A second-generation writer himself, Schneider\textsuperscript{84} offers a subjective and differentiated view of \textit{Väterliteratur}, and detects in the writing of Meckel, Härtling, and Gauch evidence of empathy and identification with fathers in the face of incontestable evidence of Nazi complicity. Sichrovsky exposes attitudes and symptoms common to the German second generation; his findings indicate a variety of responses, including ambivalence towards fathers, and a defensive desire to

\textsuperscript{81} Aleida Assmann, \textit{Generationsidentitäten und Vorurteilsstrukturen in der neuen Erinnerungsliteratur} (Vienna: Picus, 2006b).
\textsuperscript{82} Tilmann Moser, \textit{Romane als Krankengeschichten. Über Handke, Meckel und Martin Walser} (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985).
exculpate Nazi fathers. Morgan’s exploration of Peter Schneider’s *Vati* contradicts the perception of *Väterliteratur* as undifferentiated, and is indirectly significant to an understanding of Sebald’s relative regressiveness as a second-generation writer who continues to articulate the generational conflicts that troubled his cohort decades earlier. Sebald’s continued thematization of *Väterliteratur* tropes exposes his incongruent stance in relation to his generation.

Current explorations of *Väterliteratur* in relation to later family novels are exemplified by Mauelshagen and Eichenberg, who argue for a more nuanced approach to the genre. Eigler compares the position of moral superiority held by *Väterliteratur* narrators towards fathers with more empathetic approaches to the perpetrator past in later family novels. Schaumann too, sees later family novels as more self-reflective and diverse in their approach to the perpetrator past. Cameron (2012) traces a trajectory from *Väterliteratur* to later, more self-reflexive *Generationenromane*, and argues that the former genre presents a more ambivalent approach to fathers than is generally acknowledged. This approach is supported by Kraft’s contribution to the debate, in which he observes that the writers of *Väterliteratur* in many instances attempt, through documents, letters, and dialogue, to give the father a “voice”.

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91 Andreas Kraft, “Über Väter und Grossväter: Die Lehre der Ambivalenztoleranz in der deutschen ‘Generationenliteratur’ nach 1945, in *Mütterliche Macht und*
McGlothlin (2006) argues that *Väterliteratur* does not end in the 1980s, but continues in the form of family novels thematizing the Nazi past in a more nuanced way than the *Väterliteratur* texts of the 1970s. Cohen-Pfister and Wienroeder-Skinner approach the changing response of the second generation to the Nazi past with reference to its narrative prose, specifically, the family novels that thematize the perpetrator past and the quest for personal identity. Their research suggests that the polarising approach evident in *Väterliteratur* has yielded to a sense of generational continuity and a desire for reconciliation between children and their perpetrator parents.

The desire for reconciliation goes hand in hand with the problematic question of transgenerational trauma. As the inherited memory of unlived traumatic experience, transgenerational trauma is described in the writing of the second generation; it is implicit in Sebald’s narrative prose and personal observations that reflect his internalisation of painful memories belonging more correctly to the generation of his parents. The phenomenon is described by Hirsch, and relates to the transgenerational transmission of traumatic knowledge through familial or more distant, affiliative connection. Transgenerational trauma is the subject of work by Caruth, LaCapra, Bar On, Hoffmann, and McGlothlin (2006), among others. The problematic nature

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of transgenerational trauma is addressed by Weigel (2002), who sees in it the potential to distort genealogical order. Critics, including Long,98 Bauer,99 Schmitz100 and Kühner101 explore the ethical implications of transgenerationally inherited trauma, focusing their concerns on the potential for appropriating the experiences of others. For Prager, the moral basis of Sebald’s authorial position is compromised by the ethically dubious nature of the identification of his narrator with Jewish subjects.102 Schley echoes Prager’s concerns, but goes a step further, interpreting Sebald’s postmemorial identification with the Jewish protagonists of his prose fiction as part of his self-construction as a writer. By contrast, Huyssen (2004) argues for a positive reading of the mimetic relationship between Sebald’s narrator and Jewish subjects, and views it as integral to Sebald’s literary project, to compensate, through narrative mimesis, for a German deficit of memory. Transgenerational inheritance by the German second generation remains an area of conflict, with critics such as Hoffman insisting that the German second generation is unable to inherit the memory of traumatic experience, but merely an illusion of it.103

Sebald’s attitude to the 1960s youth rebellion tends to be ambivalent, and his narrative prose seldom engages explicitly with it. His disengaged attitude to the rebellion of

103 Hoffman 2004, 66.
1968 is articulated in interviews with Angier, Kunisch, Jaggi, and Cuomo. Critics, such as Schütte (2009) and Schley (2012) identify resistant elements in Sebald’s critical writing that connect his work with the dissident writing of his generation. To Schütte, Robertson, and Finch (2013), Sebald’s interest in the writing of marginalized groups such as schizophrenics, implicitly aligns him with the ideology of the protest generation, for whom such forms of writing offer enhanced creative potential. His avowed indifference to political engagement, and reluctance to explicitly acknowledge political events in his narrative prose means that the body of critical work on his prose fiction in relation to the protest movement is limited. Long (2007) examines Sebald’s resistance to institutions of power and discipline, expanding on ideas formulated in his 2006 article, and identifying in Sebald’s narrative prose an inherent resistance to discipline. Blackler (2007) offers an idiosyncratic perspective on Sebald’s narrative prose, and detects in his prose fiction strategies that encourage reader resistance.

A number of critics perceive in Sebald’s narrative prose the influence of Adorno and the Frankfurt School, thus connecting Sebald, on an ideological level, with the protest

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movement, for whom the Frankfurt School provides a philosophical basis. Hutchinson$^{112}$ examines marginalia in Sebald’s private library to construct an interpretation of his narrative prose style as informed by the thinking of the Frankfurt School, principally, Adorno and Benjamin. In his 2011 study, Hutchinson expands on these ideas, and offers a further probing of the influence of the Frankfurt School on Sebald’s prose fiction. Like Hutchinson, Finch identifies in Sebald’s prose fiction a rebellious dimension and a receptiveness to the thinking of the Frankfurt School that he shares with his 1968 cohort. In a recent work, Finch (2013) presents a study of homosexuality as a form of resistance to oppressive structures in Sebald’s poetics. Finch’s book develops ideas put forward in her unpublished Ph.D thesis (2007a), in which she identifies Sebald as a member of the “sixty-eight” generation, and in which her close reading of Sebald’s narrative prose within a generational paradigm uncovers similarities to work by other dissident second-generation writers, Strauß and Handke. Sebald’s debt to Benjamin is examined by Öhlschlager (2006), who detects affinities between the Fortschrittskritik and negative dialectic of progress and dissolution articulated in Sebald’s narrative prose, and Benjamin’s Passagenwerk. She interprets Sebald’s “Bastelei” or self-described mode of writing as a form of negative dialectic between creation and destruction that aligns his prose narratives with the philosophy of the Frankfurt School.

Sebald’s notion of melancholy as resistance is explored by Löffler$^{113}$ who examines the meaning of melancholy implicit in his observation, “Melancholie … ist eine Form des Widerstands.”$^{114}$ To Löffler, Sebald’s resistance to German Wiederaufbau-Optimismus, evident in the pervasive critique of industrialization and capitalism in his prose writing, aligns his writing with the dialectic of progress and regression associated with the Frankfurt School. Cosgrove (2007) argues for an historical reading


of Sebald’s melancholy as a critique of capitalism, and as manifesting a modern consciousness of the relationship between global capitalism and ecological destruction that reflects the influence of Benjamin and the Frankfurt School. Critics, such as Anderson115 and Wolff (2007) engage with Sebald’s documentary fiction as a strategy of resistance, and as a means of problematizing the writing process by exposing its capacity for falsification.

Sebald’s writing does not, on the surface, appear to have much in common with the confrontational texts of Väterliteratur. My research for this chapter is informed largely by works that relate indirectly to Sebald and Väterliteratur, and includes secondary literature that focuses on aspects of Sebald’s narrative prose congruent with Väterliteratur, while not specifically relating his work to this genre. Articles and interviews in Loquai116 reflect Sebald’s affinity with his 1960s generation, and indirectly, with Väterliteratur: Ozick’s interview with Sebald117 reveals a life determined by the generational conflicts arising from his identity as a Kriegskind, and implicitly aligns his writing with Väterliteratur in which such conflicts are thematized. Similarly, Sebald’s interview with Angier118 reflects his antipathy to post-war Germany, and indirectly, to the generation of his father. Interviews in Schwartz (2007) provide insights into Sebald’s consciousness of generational conflict and the Nazi legacy, central preoccupations of Väterliteratur. Wachtel elicits from Sebald negative observations on Germany and on his generational identity that resemble the repudiative themes of Väterliteratur.119

Research on Sebald’s affinities with Väterliteratur is extremely limited, and Davies’ 2011 study represents the clearest engagement with Sebald’s work in this context. She demonstrates that, despite his protestations, apparent political neutrality and political detachment, there is evidence that aligns Sebald’s narrative prose thematically with

the protest writing of his generation, specifically, the \textit{Väterliteratur}. Her study offers a discussion of Sebald and Vesper as members of the 1960s protest generation, and suggests affinities between their writing in spite of differences of style, political involvement, and tone. While Vesper’s novel reflects his polemical style and overtly left-wing political sensibilities, Sebald’s more muted and allusive style does not disguise, for Davies, his affinities with \textit{Väterliteratur} in the form of first-person narrator subjectivity, the negative depiction of the father-figure, thematization of secrets relating to the father’s past, and a post-war childhood blighted by an undefined perception of menace.

The final chapter of my study is informed by a number of general works on Romanticism and neo-Romanticism that elucidate the definitional problems associated with these concepts, and include texts by Wellek and Warren,\textsuperscript{120} Schmitz-Emans,\textsuperscript{121} Eldridge,\textsuperscript{122} Ziolkowski,\textsuperscript{123} and Sondrup (2005). Explorations of German Romanticism by Pikulik\textsuperscript{124} and Safranski\textsuperscript{125} focus on issues germane to Sebald’s reconfiguring of Romantic themes, structure and imagery: the former examines the Romantic antipathy to normality and the desire to create alternative realities, while the latter explores Romanticism in the German context, and engages with its more

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{120} Rene Wellek, and Austin Warren eds., \textit{Theory of Literature: The First Two Hundred Years} (London: Jonathan Cape, 1949).


\textsuperscript{125} Rüdiger Safranski, \textit{Romantik. Eine deutsche Affäre} (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2013).
\end{flushright}
controversial aspects, such as its appropriation by Nazism. A number of works elucidate Romantic motifs and tropes: Loquai\textsuperscript{126} provides a comprehensive discussion of tropes and motifs pertaining to the Romantic artist; this wide-ranging text is complemented by Cusack\textsuperscript{127} and Krell\textsuperscript{128} who examine the Romantic wanderer and the valorization of suffering and disease respectively. Nassar\textsuperscript{129} and Ireton\textsuperscript{130} explore the Romantic perception of man and nature, while Fitzell\textsuperscript{131} examines the notion of Romantic outsiderliness. Such works provide a background against which Sebald’s restitution of the Romantic artist figure can be evaluated. Hagen offers an analysis of Romanticism as an intertextual source for German literature of the 1980s and 1990s.\textsuperscript{132} Her text complements those of Fuß\textsuperscript{133} and Gottwald\textsuperscript{134} which analyse the neo-Romantic inclinations of Strauß and Handke, in relation to whose writing Sebald’s neo-Romantic tendencies are evaluated. A small number of critics, including Finch, Chandler, and Pakendorff, see in Sebald’s narrative prose affinities with Romanticism.

\textsuperscript{126} Franz Loquai, \textit{Künstler und Melancholie in der Romantik} (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984).
\textsuperscript{127} Andrew Cusack, \textit{The Wanderer in German Literature} (Rochester: Camden House, 2008).
\textsuperscript{128} David Farrell Krell, \textit{Contagion. Sexuality, Disease and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
\textsuperscript{129} Dalia Nassar, \textit{The Relevance of Romanticism} (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
\textsuperscript{130} Sean Ireton and Caroline Schaumann, \textit{Heights of Reflection. Mountains in the German Imagination from the Middle Ages to the Twenty-First Century} (Rochester: Camden House, 2012).
\textsuperscript{131} John Fitzell, \textit{The Hermit in German Literature. From Lessing to Eichendorff} (AMS Press, 1966).
\textsuperscript{132} Anja Hagen, \textit{Gedächtnisort Romantik. Intertextuelle Verfahren in der Prosa der 80er und 90er Jahre} (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2003).
\textsuperscript{134} Herwig Gottwald, \textit{Mythos und Mythisches in der Gegenwartsliteratur. Studien zu Christoph Ransmayr, Peter Handke, Botho Strauß, George Steiner, Patrick Roth und Robert Schneider} (Stuttgart: Hans-Dieter Heinz, 1996).

The Romantic trait of melancholy is central to Sebald’s narrative prose, and interpretations of its meaning in Sebald’s work are diverse. Ilsemann examines a topographical dimension to Sebald’s melancholy, while Maier looks at the implications of the suffering body as a metaphor for loss in Sebald’s writing. Critics are divided over the question of redemption from suffering in Sebald’s writing. Santner argues for “a weak messianic power” implicit in Sebald’s notion of “neighbour-love,” while Sill, by contrast, offers a negative reading of the question of redemption in Sebald’s prose, and sees the metaphorical significance of Kafka’s “Jäger

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Gracchus” motif in Sebald’s writing as implying redemption only in death.139 Finch140 compares Sebald’s refusal of redemption with Handke’s utopian solutions in Die Wiederholung, thus drawing attention to the divergent function of Romantic tropes in the work of these writers. Martin141 adopts a less negative approach to the question of redemption in Sebald’s prose, and interprets the “Jäger Gracchus”/butterfly hunter motif as emblematic of Sebald’s own restitutive literary project. Kilbourn142 and Darby143 interpret the trope of wandering in Sebald’s prose as embodying the potential for redemption, if not its reality. By contrast, Bauer144 sees Austerlitz’s endless wandering as a refutation of the messianic redemption of the past.

A number of conflicting articles in W.G. Sebald-A Critical Companion, explore the implicitly Romantic trope of wandering in Sebald’s prose writing: Leone sees travel as the thematic centre of Sebald’s writing, and its principal structuring device,145 while Zilcosky examines Sebald’s subversion of the Romantic trope of redemptive return by postulating the impossibility of getting lost.146 For Klüger, Sebald’s wanderers manifest the vexed theme of Heimat in his work, and the notion that redemption is

only possible through the literary project. The notion of art as redemptive is disputed by Klebes, for whom Sebald’s metaphor of the infinite journey is a metanarrative device to demonstrate the unreliability of literature as a form of representation.

Critics are divided on the extent to which Sebald’s prose reveals a Romantic perception of nature and humankind’s place in it. To Maier (2006), Sebald’s apocalyptic view of nature posits a desolate world devoid of humanity or nature, while Fuchs sees in Sebald’s writing a conflicted perception of nature as both exploited and destroyed, and a Romantic awareness of nature as an aesthetic ideal, but one which is adumbrated by the awareness that nature can no longer exist independently of the history of its destruction. Friedrichsmeyer argues for a more Romantic reading of Sebald’s ideal of harmony with nature, while Riordan sees in Sebald’s writing a modern ecological awareness of the destruction of nature by industrialization.

Critical interest in Sebald’s work is intense, ongoing, and multi-perspectival. My readings indicate an anomalous deficit in Sebald research on the subject of Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to the earlier literary manifestations of his generation, the protest writing and Väterliteratur of the 1960s and 1970s, and the neo-Romantic writing that followed. My study is motivated by awareness of a gap in Sebald research, and constitutes an attempt to address this deficit. Research into generation as a concept with particular pertinence to the German context contributes to establishing Sebald’s generational identity as a member of the German “second generation”, with whom he shares a legacy of resentment and guilt in relation to the Nazi past and the role of the


parent generation in it. Exploration of literature on the engagement of Sebald’s
generation in the political protests of the 1960s elucidates themes in Sebald’s writing
that connect it with the protest and Väterliteratur of his generation. My research into
Romanticism and its reconfiguration in the neo-Romantic writing of the second
generation reveals a substantial connection between Sebald’s writing and this literary
manifestation of his generation.
Chapter 2

Sebald in generational context

Introduction

My study engages with Sebald as a member of the German second generation, exploring his prose fiction within the paradigm of generational identity. The focus of my research is based on the premise that Sebald’s narrative prose reveals undisclosed and underestimated affinities with the concerns of his generation, expressed decades earlier in the writing of the 1960s student movement, the intergenerational conflicts of the *Väterliteratur*, and the neo-Romantic writing of the early 1980s. My examination of Sebald’s prose fiction within a generational paradigm challenges the widespread critical perception of Sebald’s uniqueness as a post-war German writer, and his putative aloofness to the literary, social and political contingencies that define the writing of his generation.

In this chapter I explore the notion of generation as the basis for a comparative reading of Sebald’s prose narratives in relation to those of other German writers, born during or shortly after the war. In the post-war German context, the concept of generational placement is crucial in apportioning implication and guilt. My review of the German generation discourse since 1945 reveals the fantasy of an untainted new beginning that underlies the post-war German engagement with generation. Implicit in this is the trauma of the war that, for Sebald’s generation, is a source of resentment and anguish, manifest in the generational conflict that fuels the protest literature of 1960s, and the confrontational *Väterliteratur*. Generational tension is implicit still in the neo-Romantic writing that follows, sublimated as the longing for an alternative reality. The problematic nature of generation in the German context is intensified by the post-war concept of transgenerational trauma that has destabilised the idea of generational order based on chronology and relative distance from 1945. Sebald’s perception of traumatic

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152 In an interview with Wachtel, Sebald describes his writing as “a form of prose fiction.” Wachtel 2007, 37.
memories relating to pre-conscious childhood years in post-war Germany suggests his internalisation of memories that are not his own, but inherited as part of a parental legacy of guilt and trauma. The ethical implications of transgenerational trauma are serious for second-generation writing that posits an affiliation with Jewish identity, and that implies the inheritance of a Jewish legacy of suffering. In this regard, Sebald’s narrative prose is the subject of critical concern.

The concept of generation as a paradigm for interpreting literature is not without its critics. Kansteiner draws attention to the reductive and normative potential of generational readings that place individuals within diachronic or synchronic networks of generational association, and to the tendency to oversimplification that arises from the imposition of a generational logic where this is not necessarily compatible. Jureit raises similar objections to the notion of generational reading, pointing to the “problematische Annahme einer Konformität von Einstellungen … die sich allein auf der schlichten Tatsache gründet, daß eine bestimmte Alterskohorte in etwa dem gleichen Zeitraum geboren und sozialisiert wurde.” By contrast, proponents of generational readings note the multiplicity of perspectives that such a reading can provide. As Vees-Gulani and Cohen-Pfister observe, “German post-war literature reflects this multi-layering of time, and interacts with the coexistence and tension of the differing experiences and memories of multiple groups. It is because it can deal with this layering of horizons and viewpoints within a society that the generational approach is so attractive and popular.” The value of a generational reading in a specifically German context is confirmed by Assmann, for whom generational change is important to the processing of traumatic or shameful experience.

The National Socialist past, the contested subject that continues to colour German self-perception, is dominated by generational conflict. It is central to the anti-authoritarian writing of the 1960s, and the generational tension between the children of the

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perpetrator generation and their parents, expressed in the *Väterliteratur* of Sebald’s cohort. A generational reading provides a framework within which a hierarchy of experience and implication can be established in relation to the caesura of 1945. After 1989, the generational conflicts of the post-war era re-emerge in family novels by Sebald’s generation; these reveal a more empathetic and nuanced engagement with the National Socialist past, and reflect a shift in the discourse from genealogical rupture to continuity. Here, a generational reading exposes Sebald’s regressive tendencies in relation to other writers of his generation.

My study is motivated by the conviction that a generational reading of Sebald’s narrative prose contributes to a deeper understanding of a writer widely perceived as impervious to the “common location”157 or “verwandte Lagerung” that informs the post-war writing of his cohort. Such a reading reveals that Sebald’s prose fiction reflects the preoccupations and conflicts that earlier exercised his cohort, and reintegrates him in the continuum of post-war German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. A generational reading of Sebald is undertaken, not to homogenize a writer anomalous in many ways, but to confirm his writing as a belated response to the post-traumatic scenario of the post-war era. Sebald’s writing retains, as its central focus, the question of German wartime guilt, and the desire for a different reality, themes that are characteristic of the earlier writing of his contemporaries. Like theirs, Sebald’s texts reflect intense ambivalence between genealogical rupture and continuity, between the desire to dissociate from the implicated Tätergeneration, and unresolved longing for an untainted idea of family, heritage, and identity.

My generational reading of Sebald’s work draws attention to the contrast between his writing and the more reconciliatory tone that marks the thematisation of generational conflict in German family novels by Sebald’s contemporaries in the 1990s. Work by Eichenberg (2009), Mauelshagen (1995), Brunner (2008) and Cameron (2012) indicate that many of Sebald’s contemporaries develop from confrontational explorations of German wartime experience to a more reconciliatory and empathetic approach to the parent generation. In novels by Timm, Hahn, and Treichel, the themes of guilt and confrontation of the 1970s and 1980s are reformulated to reflect a growing

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desire for generational continuity. In her exploration of family narratives from the 1990s, Fuchs observes that, while these continue to thematise the dialectic of rupture and continuity central to the earlier generational novels, the *Vaterliteratur*, they tend to greater self-reflexivity, and a postmemorial engagement with the past. As Schmitz observes, in these works, “the generational model thus appears to imply a reconciliation with history through the medium of the family, and an end to the ‘discourse of guilt and contrition.’” To Assmann, “Es geht dabei weniger um Verstrickung als um Verkettung.” She notes:

> Die künstlerische Arbeiten drehen sich um diese Kette, um die Voraussetzungen und Nachwirkungen des NS in den Familien und setzen sich zum Ziel, eine unbewusste und belastende Erbschaft durch historische Rekonstruktion und imaginatives Nacherleben in ein bewusstes Verhältnis und eine positive Form der Tradierung zu übersetzen.

While Sebald’s generation has followed a trajectory that has taken them from resentment and rejection in relation to the parent generation, to greater empathy, as Cameron (2012) has demonstrated, Sebald continues to articulate a regressive discourse of bitterness and blame. My study calls attention to the fundamental incongruity of Sebald’s position as a second-generation writer, whose work reflects the attitudes and conflicts that mark the earlier writing of his generation. The task of examining Sebald’s writing in a generational context involves the consideration of essential questions: What is implied by the term, “generation”? What is the special meaning of generation in the German context? What are the implications of the term,

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160 Schmitz 2009, 71.
“second generation”, typically applied to Sebald? How does Sebald’s perception of transgenerational trauma affect his generational status?

**Generation: etymology, definition, and theories**

Discussion of Sebald’s work in the context of his generation hinges on a secure understanding of generation, its etymology, and competing theoretical understandings. As an analytical tool, generation remains an ambiguous and contested concept that, in contemporary discourse, encompasses sociological, psychoanalytic, temporal, and historical understandings of the term. Theories of generation, and the specific issue of transgenerational trauma in a German context, are examined, to provide a conceptual basis for Sebald’s generational position. This study is informed by the research of Weigel and Bude on the question of generation in the German context, and by the work of Morgan, Finch and Fuchs for its relevance to Sebald’s work. Roseman observes, “Like most labels for social phenomena, [generation G.S.] leads a double life as a term in common parlance and an instrument of historical and social analysis.”

The *Oxford English Dictionary* defines generation as:

> The act or process of generating or begetting; procreation; propagation of species. Manner of descent; genealogy; The whole body of individuals born about the same period; also, the time covered by the lives of these.

The term, “generation” is derived from the Greek *genesis* and the Latin *generatio*, both meaning “origin” and “(pro)creation”, connoting genealogy, reproduction, lineage, and the historical continuity of a people. To Weigel, the term implies a nexus between nature and culture:

> Insofern verbirgt sich im Begriff der Generation immer schon ein komplexes Zusammenspiel von Natur und Kultur, markiert die Generation doch die Schwelle zwischen Entstehung und Fortgang,

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zwischen Abstammung und Erbschaft, zwischen Prokreation und Tradition, zwischen Herkunft und Gedächtnis.\textsuperscript{164}

Among many interpretations of the term, it is used to describe a subgroup defined by age, as a marker for identity, and, in the German context, as an aid to constructing cultural memory by ordering the post-war passage of time in Germany. The term is used to explain what unites or divides groups; it indicates collective belonging, kinship descent, the life stage of an individual or an historical period. As a social phenomenon, the term “generation” is used to represent related age groups who base their collective identity on the experience of shared sociohistorical experience. In its modern application, Bude\textsuperscript{165} describes it as a concept that encompasses caesura, secession, and “Durchsetzung”, the latter describing the socio-cultural innovations of the young.

The concept of generation in Germany, designated by Bude as “das Land der Generationen”\textsuperscript{166} touches on questions of guilt and identity in a nation still coming to terms with the Nazi past. The significance of generation to German self-understanding derives from specificities of German history, principally, the lack of historical consolidation, and a generational discourse marked by a pattern of rupture and continuity. As Bude notes:

Der “verspäteten Nation” fehlt ein “goldenes Zeitalter”, das einen traditionsstiftenden Bezugspunkt ihres Selbstverständnisses abgeben könnte … Wo keine Tradition lebendig ist, muß man sich auf die vergehende Zeit selbst beziehen. Deshalb sind die Deutschen zum Volk der Geschichte geworden, wo das “historische Bewußtsein” erfunden worden ist, und deshalb periodisiert es seine Geschichte weniger nach


\textsuperscript{165} Heinz Bude, “‘Generation’ im Kontext. Von den Kriegs -zu den Wohlfahrtsstaatsgenerationen,” in Jureit and Wildt 2005, 34.

\textsuperscript{166} Bude 2005, 31.
Pointing to what he identifies as the German tradition of youthful revolt, and the discontinuities that characterize German history, Roseman notes: “Few other national histories offer such obvious potential for dividing one cohort from another and rendering them unable to communicate across the gulf between their respective socialisations and experiences.” Roseman sees the overlapping of family and national experience as intrinsic to the German concept of generation. This is particularly evident in the student protests of 1968, motivated in large part by unresolved tensions between the children of perpetrators and their parents, and the emotional burdening of the former as a result of their parents’ failure to deal with the “unheimliche Erbschaft” of the Nazi past.

Since 1945, generation has been of central significance to German attempts to come to terms with the past. Generational position is seen to define the individual’s relation to the past, proximity to which underlies the hierarchical categorization of generations. The notion of legacy is central to generation in the post-war German context: as Frei points out, the legacy of the Nazi past is transmitted to later generations in the form of inherited trauma and a residual awareness of “eine gelernte Zeitgenossenschaft”:

> Was wir jetzt sagen können, ist, daß die Kinder der Zeitzeugen die Erinnerung ihrer Eltern weitertragen, und im Blick auf die Verbrechen des Nationalsozialismus hat diese Erinnerung auch in der zweiten und dritten Generation nicht selten traumatischen Charakter.

Such a “gelernte Zeitgenossenschaft” crosses chronological boundaries, and indicates a transgenerational dimension to generation in the German context, one that displaces memory outside of the individual life history. For the “sixty-eight” generation, the response of parents and grandparents to the Nazi era is dominated by a repressive silence, and generational conflict is largely motivated by the desire of the second

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167 Bude 2005, 36
168 Roseman 1995, 2.
170 Frei 2009, 77.
generation to break this complicit Beschweigen. As a member of this generation, breaking the “conspiracy of silence” remains fundamental to Sebald’s literary project. Three decades after the discontents of the 1960s and the generational conflicts enacted in the Väterliteratur, he observes to Wachtel: “Well, you know, the conspiracy of silence still lasts. It is something which people in other countries can scarcely imagine … But I think that conspiracy of silence … was just a taboo zone which you didn’t enter.” A generational reading of Sebald’s work confirms the belatedness of his position in relation to other writers of his generation, many of whom have moved beyond this perspective.

While the etymology of the term, ‘generation’, implies its genealogical/biological meaning, this interpretation of generation was challenged in the late nineteenth century by a paradigm shift away from genealogy towards theories that attempt to account for the interplay of nature and culture in the formation of generation. Such theories understand generation as the unity of an age-specific group or cohort, determined and defined in relation to other generations, by simultaneous and similar shared social experience. Pinder’s polyphonic theory of generation conceives of generation as built up of its own “entelechies” or inborn way of experiencing the world, while Dilthey bases his notion of generational unity on the determining experience of intellectual and social influences. He defines generation as “ein engerer Kreis von Individuen, welche durch Abhängigkeit von denselben großen Tatsachen und Veränderungen, wie sie in dem Zeitalter ihrer Empfänglichkeit auftraten, trotz der Verschiedenheit hinzutretender anderer Faktoren zu einem homogenen Ganzen verbunden sind.”

Dilthey emphasizes the synchronic aspect of generation:

Generation ist alsdann eine Bezeichnung für ein Verhältnis der Gleichzeitigkeit von Individuen … Hieraus ergibt sich dann die Verknüpfung solcher Personen durch ein tieferes Verhältnis. Diejenigen,

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171 Wachtel 2007, 44.
welche in den Jahren der Empfänglichkeit dieselben leitenden Einwirkungen erfahren, machen zusammen eine Generation aus. ¹⁷⁴

The synchronic concept of generation is evident in the continued and pervasive social classification of generations in terms of identity and lifestyle, such as ‘Generation Golf’, the ‘Berlin Generation’, ‘Generation X’, and reflects a discourse of generation based on identity politics. ¹⁷⁵ Generation conflict is thus reformulated: no longer between parents and children, it arises from the needs of groups closer in age to distinguish themselves from each other on the grounds of attitudes and way of life.

The influence of Halbwachs’ theory of the sociological contingencies related to memory is significant to an understanding of generational relationships in a German context, in which memory of the National Socialist past remains a conflicted subject. The implications of Halbwachs’ theory for generation in a German context become clear in his emphasis on the family as central to the individual’s sense of collective identity. According to Halbwachs, in no other social group

\[ \text{bzw.} \quad \text{wo man sich in seinen Urteilen über seine Nächsten am wenigsten durch die Regeln und Meinungen der Gesellschaft beherrschen und leiten lässt … wo man vor allem fast ausschließlich ihre persönlichen Qualitäten in Betracht zieht und nicht das, was sie für die anderen Gruppen, die die Familie umgeben … sind oder sein könnten.} \] ¹⁷⁶

In the post-war German memory discourse, the conflict between family memory, transformed and complicated by loyalty and a desire to retain a sense of the moral worth of the parent generation, and cultural memory of the National Socialist past, remains a focus of tension between the perpetrator generation, and second and successive generations.

¹⁷⁴ Dilthey 1982, 36.
¹⁷⁵ Florian Illies, Generation Golf (Munich: Blessing, 2000).
¹⁷⁶ Maurice Halbwachs, Das Gedächtnis und seine sozialen Bedingungen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 224.
In current generation discourse, Mannheim’s sociological theory of generation still dominates discussion. According to Mannheim’s concept of generation as “social location” (“verwandte Lagerung”), the fact of belonging to the same generation “endows individuals … with a common location in the social and historical process, and thereby limits them to a specific range of potential experience, predisposing them for a certain characteristic mode of thought and experience, and a characteristic type of historically relevant action.” Mannheim’s concept of generation builds on the biological theory of generation, but subordinates this to sociological considerations: “The sociological phenomenon of generations is ultimately based on the biological rhythms of birth and death … The sociological problem of generations therefore begins at that point where the sociological relevance of these biological factors is discovered.” With its double connotation of generation as both a measurement of time and group, Mannheim’s synchronic sociological concept of generation diminishes the importance of origins, along with that of nature, as determinants of generational identity. Weigel traces the acceptance of Mannheim’s model of generation as a social unit to its context, arising in the period after WWI as an attempt to unify the experiences of the “lost generation” of returned soldiers. Fuchs (2008) discusses the contamination of this concept by the proto-fascist notion of Schicksalsgemeinschaft, and the subsequent de-emphasis on generation as a means of analysing cultural and historical change. The dominance of a synchronic theory of generation in the twentieth century is attributed by Bude to the disruptions of war, revolution, and inflation, which have resulted in radical ideological transformation within generations, and institutionalized genealogical solidarity between generations:

Auf der einen Seite reduziert sich das Verständnis der Abstammung, indem die Folge der Geschlechter durch die Generationenfolge einer Familie ersetzt wird … Auf der anderen Seite intensiviert sich damit das Verständnis von Abstammung, indem der Gegensatz von jung und alt und darin der Gegensatz der Familienpositionen von Mann und Frau das Geschehen beherrschen.

177 Mannheim 1952, 289.
178 Mannheim 1952, 290-291.
Following the catastrophic break of 1945, the synchronic notion of generation has been challenged by a return to a diachronic conception of generation, dominated by notions of *Herkunft* and *Erbe* that reflect the desire of younger Germans to distance themselves from complicity in Nazism, and to replace a tainted genealogy with a purer one. The counting of generations institutionalizes the notion of guilt as relative to the “Stunde Null” of 1945, the fiction of a new beginning that expresses the longing for genealogical purity.

Post-1945, a temporal paradigm of generation implicitly apportions culpability and epistemological privilege according to proximity to the catastrophic events of the war. On the basis of this generational model, post-war German history is counted in generations, starting with the calamitous collapse of 1945, designated the site of origin or *Stunde Null*. The chronological counting of generations divides collective memory after 1945 into particular time periods, and establishes a hierarchy of memory and experience. Weigel (2002) discusses the problem of dividing collective memory post-1945 into discrete time periods, and of legitimizing historical narratives on the basis of their point of origin. Thus the so-called first generation claims a hegemonic, “lived” experience of history, a claim that both legitimizes this generation as eyewitnesses to history, and implicates them in the catastrophic events remembered. The “second” generation are their children, the *Kriegskinder*, born during or shortly after the war, exculpated by virtue of a late birth, and whose relationship with the first or *Täter-Generation* is intensely conflicted. There are biblical connotations inherent in the counting of generations, as Weigel points out: the “Stunde Null” of 1945 resembles God’s creation of the world from nothing in *Genesis*, and implies a “clean slate”, and a new beginning. As a narrative of descent based on a tradition of memory, it evokes the covenant between the Jews and God (Deuteronomy 6:8), and the command to eternally remember,\(^\text{180}\) such memory arises from traumatic historical caesura, in the Bible, Jewish exile, in German post-war generation theory, from total defeat. The biblical idea of *Erbsünde* is intrinsic to the temporal model of generation in which guilt is transmitted through kinship, and finds expression in the concept of transgenerational trauma.

\(^{180}\) “Thou shall bind them for a sign upon thy hand, and they shall be for frontlets between thine eyes.” Deuteronomy 6:8.
Weigel draws attention to the weakness of this concept of dividing collective memory into discrete time periods: the notion of originating *ex nihilo* implies a cataclysmic break in historical continuum, and has the disturbing potential to dehistoricize the Nazi period. Furthermore, the strict counting of generations after 1945, with the aim of apportioning guilt and responsibility, fails to accommodate anomalies in generational order. Thus, the position of the “hidden” first generation, socalled because the position of “first” generation is occupied by those considered adults during the war, remains ambiguous: comprising the *Flakhelfer* and *Hitler Jugend*, the young, generally adolescent participants in the war are designated “a generation without blemish but not without experience”, and occupy a privileged position as the source of first-hand knowledge without guilt. Broszat makes the following claim:

> As a member of this generation one was lucky *not yet* or only marginally having been dragged into the political business and responsibility, but one was old enough to be affected emotionally and mentally to a great degree by the morally confusing suggestive power that the NS-Regime had, at least in the area of educating the youth …

Here, a distortion of the temporal paradigm permits exculpation of the founding generation of the new Germany, on the grounds of anomalous age. The writing of this generation reflects a longing for innocence, reflected in imagery of rebirth and renewal, and exemplified by Andersch’s description of the birth of his generation: “Der auf die äußerste Spitze getriebenen Vernichtung entsprang, wie einst dem Haupt

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181 The notion of originating *ex nihilo* is alluded to by Sloterdijk: “We have nothing but the indescribable behind our backs, and we are tattooed by unconditional horror.” Peter Sloterdijk, *Zur Welt kommen – Zur Sprache kommen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 47-48.


des Jupiter die Athene, ein neuer, jugendfrischer, jungfräulich-athenischer Geist.”\(^{184}\)

Implicit in this image of an immaculate, originless generation is the immunity of this generation from guilt in relation to the Nazi past, and the legitimization of their refusal of responsibility for this past. Assmann offers an alternative model of generation that seeks to accommodate such an “inter-generation.” In her categorization of generation, she distinguishes seven generations and two “inter-generations”: the third generation in her model constitutes the Flakhelfer generation, described by Broszat (above), that lays claim to experience without guilt;\(^{185}\) the Kriegskinder are categorized by Assmann as an “intergeneration”, as are their younger siblings, whose difficulties with establishing a sense of distinctiveness has resulted in their identification by Reinhard Mohr as Zaungäste.\(^{186}\)

The “second generation”

“In den Bruch hineingeboren”,\(^{187}\) Sebald, born 1944, belongs, chronologically, to the so-called second generation, children of the perpetrators, for whom the National Socialist era constitutes a rupture in genealogical continuity, and whose sense of being marked by an “unlived narrative” resembles that of the survivor second generation, with whom they share certain psychological symptoms, and in relation to whom they exist in a troubled “negative symbiosis.”\(^{188}\) The children of perpetrators inherit the history of their parents’ unacknowledged crimes, whose effects are felt as “a stain upon

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\(^{186}\) Reinhard Mohr, \textit{Zaungäste: Die Generation, die nach der Revolte kam} (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 1992).


their souls.” As Bude observes: “Den Kindern wird aufgebürdet, was die Eltern weder tragen noch von sich weisen können. Mit diesen inneren Last gingen die Kriegs- und Nachkriegskinder in die geschlossenen 50er und die sich öffnenden 60er Jahre.”

For this generation, the Holocaust becomes the focus of generational conflict played out in the family, and thematized in the Väterliteratur of the 1970s.

Sebald’s work thematizes the intense ambivalence about origins, and the conflicted longing for affiliation that typifies the earlier writing of the second generation: the protest literature of the 1960s, in which unresolved resentment towards the parent generation emerges in the form of anti-authoritarianism, and the accusatory Väterliteratur of the 1970s and 1980s, aimed at the fathers as emblematic of the perpetrator generation. Beyond generational confrontation, Sebald’s writing reflects the longing for an alternative reality that characterizes the neo-Romantic tendencies of his generation, exemplified by Handke and Botho Strauß. Exculpated by late birth, these “second-generation” writers remain burdened by the legacy of the Third Reich, and the massive disturbance of German self-perception that followed it. Sebald is connected to these writers through commonality of birth date, and through exposure to the “verwandte Lagerung” of a traumatised post-war Germany, and the damaged family scenario that haunts the children of the perpetrator generation:


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190 Heinz Bude, Bilanz der Nachfolge: Die Bundesrepublik und der Nationalsozialismus (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), 88.
191 Krejci 2005, 106.
Schneider describes the impact of such experiences on the writing of the *Kriegskinder*:

Beschädigte oder zerbrochene Väterbilder, in den Brunnen gefallenen Kindheiten und ein daraus resultierendes defizitäres Lebensgefühl - das ist der gemeinsame melancholische Nenner, auf den sich die hier erwähnten Bücher, so verschieden auch immer ihre Machart, Erzählweise und Inhalt sind, bringen lassen.\(^{192}\)

Psychoanalytical case studies of the *Kriegskinder* generation (Eckstaedt 1989) shed considerable light on the continuing impact of the Nazi era on the psychological disposition of the children of the perpetrators, and manifest in somatic disorders. Common traits include the sense of bearing a burden of unknown origin, and of experiencing pervasive and debilitating melancholy. The relationship of this generation towards the perpetrator generation is marked by intense resentment at their refusal to acknowledge their complicity in the Nazi regime. This is expressed at times in apocalyptic fantasies of destruction. Sichrovsky (1988) exposes attitudes and symptoms common to the German second generation. His findings indicate a number of shared responses that include a deep ambivalence towards fathers, evident in a defensive tendency to exculpate them even in the face of indisputable evidence of their implication in Nazism, and a tendency for the second generation to see themselves as the victims of a mentality that fostered a “fascist” attitude in the home. Many interviewees describe the “conspiracy of silence” to which Sebald refers,\(^{193}\) and a need to discover the role of their fathers in the Nazi period; many describe a legacy of guilt, and a desire to dissociate from their parents in order to develop a sense of self-worth. Such responses form the substance of *Väterliteratur*, and are thematized in Sebald’s narrative prose, as I demonstrate in chapters three and four.

While research on the second generation has primarily focused on the children of the survivors, my readings on the second generation reveal an increasing number of studies that examine the second generation in relation to the children of perpetrators. To Schlant, “the Holocaust is as much a permanent part of German history as it is of

\(^{192}\) Schneider 1981, 53.

\(^{193}\) Wachtel 2007, 44.
Jewish history.”¹⁹⁴ Kühner notes that the identity and collective memory of the perpetrator second generation is influenced by the same traumatic experience as that which defines the victim generation.¹⁹⁵ Reichel observes: “The inability of both groups of parents to speak about the past - one because of pain, the other because of guilt - caused similar symptoms for their offspring.”¹⁹⁶ There is a fundamental difference relating to legacy, for the children of survivors, a life-affirming influence, for the children of perpetrators, a “dark legacy”¹⁹⁷ of guilt that is manifest in rejection of genealogy. Such research is pertinent to Sebald as a second-generation writer, whose writing reveals a painful awareness of his father’s complicity in the war, and who shares with other second-generation Germans a sense of exclusion from the past of his parents, and a need to discover his own identity through discovering theirs. Sebald’s writing thematizes awareness of the “dark legacy” of guilt that Berger ascribes to the children of perpetrators, and the perception of being marked by violence that has not been personally experienced.¹⁹⁸

In psychology discourse, the term “second generation” derives from research on the children of survivors or victims of the Holocaust. This generation is the focus of work by Caruth (1995), LaCapra (1998), and Bar On (1995), among others. For this generation, the Nazi past cannot be disguised by a sanitized German landscape, and indeed, the trope of a renovated Germany as morally obfuscating is pervasive in the narrative prose of Sebald and his generation: “Bauwerke, Straßen und Plätze lassen sich nach dem Krieg kaum spuren erkennen noch erwecken sie Erinnerungen an ihr faschistisches Szenarium … Doch in den Seelen der Menschen ist sie nicht ausgelöscht. Dieser gewaltsame Umgang mit Vergangenheit hinterließ Folgen.”¹⁹⁹

¹⁹⁵ Angela Kühner, *Trauma und Kollektives Gedächtnis* (Gießen: Psychosozial Verlag, 2008).
¹⁹⁸ This is described by McGlothlin, 2006, 5-56.
¹⁹⁹ Anita Messing, “Auswirkungen anhaltender nationalsozialistischer Weltanschauungen in Familienschicksalen,” in *Das kollektive Schweigen*, eds. Barbara
The perception, by the second generation, of bearing the imprint of a history they did not personally experience, of being “marked by an unlived past”, challenges generational theories based on neat genealogical succession. As McGlothlin notes, “the event that has marked the second generation … is inaccessible, yet the mark of that experience remains and continues to haunt its bearer.” For these writers, literature becomes a way of exploring what they have not personally experienced, and of bridging the distance from the traumatic event. This points to the issue of transgenerational trauma, and the role of postmemory as a response of the second generation to the repressed trauma of the first.

The biblical notion of Erbsünde implicit in the counting of generations raises the issue of transgenerational inheritance of guilt and trauma. The discourse of transgeneration and postmemory reflects the changing nature of Holocaust studies as the eyewitness generation passes away, and mediated versions of the past become more important. It is based on the theory that historical experience is by its nature traumatic, and rests on the problematic assumption that descendants of survivors or perpetrators of traumatic events can identify deeply enough with the repressed memories of the previous generation as to perceive such identification as constituting memory; and furthermore, that memory can be transmitted from one generation to another. Transgenerational trauma, a concept initially attributed to Holocaust victims or survivors and their descendants, is increasingly applied to the descendants of the perpetrator collective. Described by Hoffman as the “contrapuntal generation,” they constitute a generation for whom the Nazi past is inscribed into the present as a trace that cannot be assimilated. The term implies that the “legacy” of the Holocaust, in the form of trauma repressed by the parent generation, is transmitted to later generations within the “primal scene of socialization”, the postwar family.

Heimannsberg and Christoph. J. Schmidt (Heidelberg: Roland Asanger Verlag, 1988), 95.

200 McGlothlin 2006, 10.

201 This is described by Berger 2001, and McGlothlin, 2006.

202 Hoffman 2004, 118.

203 Eric L. Santner, Stranded Objects: Mourning, Memory and Film in Postwar Germany (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 35.
Sebald’s perception of his generational position is complicated by his awareness of a legacy of trauma and guilt that has been transgenerationally transmitted to him:

Bei Kriegsende war ich gerade ein Jahr alt und kann also schwerlich auf realen Ereignisse beruhende Eindrücke aus jener Zeit der Zerstörung bewahrt haben. Dennoch ist es mir bis heute, wenn ich Photographien oder dokumentarische Filme aus dem Krieg sehe, als stammte ich, sozusagen, von ihm ab und als fiele von dorther … ein Schatten auf mich, unter dem ich nie ganz herauskommen werde. 204

While Bude interprets this passage as expressing a Mannheimian understanding of generation as the “Lebensfond” that Sebald shares with his cohort, it reflects also the phenomenon of postmemory, whereby the second generation experiences, and absorbs, the trauma of the previous generation through narratives, pictures, and through the behaviour of those with whom they grew up, so deeply that these seem to constitute personal memories. In this passage, Sebald describes the postmemorial intrajection of memories belonging to the generation of his parents, and that represent his legacy of resentment and suffering. Hirsch describes the transgenerational trauma that constitutes postmemory:

To grow up with such overwhelming inherited memories, to be dominated by narratives that preceded one’s birth or one’s consciousness … is to be shaped, however indirectly, by traumatic events that still defy narrative reconstruction and exceed comprehension. 205

To Hirsch, “postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by a deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory precisely because its connection to its object is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.” 206

Schwab’s notion of “haunting memories” echoes Hirsch’s concept of postmemory: “What I call “haunting legacies” are things hard to recount or even to remember, the

204 W.G. Sebald, Luftkrieg und Literatur, 77-78.
results of a violence that holds an unrelenting grip on memory yet is deemed unspeakable … The legacies of violence not only haunt the actual victims but also are passed on through the generations.” To Schwab, affected children receive not only their parents’ lived memories, but also their somatic memories, manifest in the children as psychic deformations. Such deformations are evident in Sebald’s thematization of the suffering body, and his reconfiguration of the Romantic artist as an afflicted individual.

There are potential problems with postmemory as the transmission of traumatic memories across generational boundaries. In her discussion of postmemory, Hirsch distinguishes between familial and “affiliative” postmemory, the former describing the intergenerational, vertical identification of child and parent occurring within the family, the latter, the more questionable, intra-generational horizontal identification that makes the child’s position more broadly available to other contemporaries. Hirsch acknowledges the problems associated with affiliative postmemory:

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\text{Does it not risk occluding a public historical context and responsibility, blurring significant differences – national difference, for example, or differences among the descendants of victims, perpetrators and bystanders? Constructing the processes of transmission, and the postgeneration itself, in familial terms is as engaging as it is troubling.}^{208}
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Postmemory thus has potential problems for Sebald, whose narrative prose thematizes a double legacy of trauma: that of his parents’ repressed guilt, and, through the identification of his German narrator with Jewish subjects, the legacy of Jewish suffering and victimhood. The ethical implications of the latter are the subject of critical concern that focuses on Sebald’s putative appropriation of Jewish legacy through distortion of “affiliative” postmemory.

There are problems inherent to the notion of transgenerational trauma and postmemory in the German context. Weigel points to the potential of transgenerational trauma to distort genealogy by violating boundaries between the individual life story, and the

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temporal measurement of a generation. Through this process of “telescopage”,
generations are “rammed together”, distorting generational order and compromising
the validity of a temporal concept of generation.\textsuperscript{209} Van Alphen objects to the term on
semiotic grounds, asserting that trauma cannot be transmitted between generations:

\begin{quote}
The normal trajectory of memory is fundamentally indexical … In the
case of the children of survivors, the indexical relationship that defines
memory has never existed. Their relationship to the past events is based
on fundamentally different semiotic principles.\textsuperscript{210}
\end{quote}

To Weigel, transgenerational trauma reveals the inadequacy of a temporal system of
generational grouping to accommodate the distortion of generational order that
transgenerationally transferred legacy implies. As she points out, the temporal system
of generational grouping overlooks the interlinking of age-groups that are co-
terminous, but whose implication in National Socialism varies. There are moreover,
ethical problems associated with transgenerational trauma theory, such as its potential
to subsume the incompatible positions of victim and perpetrator into a universal
concept of trauma, as Weigel observes:

\begin{quote}
Whereas the concept of second and third generation already
produces an indifference with respect to the incompatible position of
victims and perpetrators – that is, between the descendants of
survivors and those responsible for their suffering – then moreover
the specific events, war activities, as well as the policy of the Final
Solution become incorporated into a universal and even
anthropologically defined concept of trauma.\textsuperscript{211}
\end{quote}

Likewise, Fuchs (2006) is critical of the universalizing view of history as trauma
implicit in transgeneration theory, and cautions against reducing the Holocaust to
merely another calamitous event, while also drawing attention to the fictionalizing
aspect of transgenerational trauma, and the potential for historical revisionism that

\textsuperscript{209} Weigel 2008, 271.
\textsuperscript{210} Ernst Van Alphen, 2006, “Second Generation Testimony, the Transmission of
Trauma, and Postmemory”, \textit{Poetics Today} 27, 473-488.
\textsuperscript{211} Weigel 2002, 270.
such a subjective perspective offers. Transgenerational inheritance by the German second generation remains an area of conflict, with critics such as Hoffman insisting that the German second generation can inherit “not experience, but its shadows.”

To Schmitz (2009), the view of history as trauma has the troubling potential to de-historicize the Holocaust, and to blur the boundaries between victims and perpetrators. Likewise, Kühner (2002) is cautious about applying the notion of transgenerational trauma to the German second generation, noting the potential to equalize victim and perpetrator situations. In relation to transgeneration theory in a German context, Schmitz (2009) also points to the problem of integrating the transmission of both a negative legacy of perpetration, and an empathetic awareness of a legacy of suffering and trauma. This is particularly relevant to Sebald’s thematization of a double inheritance of shame and trauma.

Critics are divided on the concept of transgenerational trauma and postmemory in relation to Sebald’s work. The implications of the distortion of genealogy for Sebald’s work lie in the implicit blurring of victim/perpetrator status that he achieves through his German narrator-Jewish protagonist relationships. Bauer describes the mimetic relationship that Sebald creates between German narrator and Jewish protagonist in Austerlitz, as “problematic.”

Sebald himself is aware of the risks implicit in postmemory, observing that “diese ganze Sache mit der Usurpation eines anderen Lebens beunruhigt mich.” Prager argues however that Sebald’s awareness is based on epistemological rather than ethical considerations, noting that “the moral basis of his authorial position is troubled by his choice to narrate from the standpoint of the empathetic German; the overall project of dialogic analysis and critical exchange may ultimately be undermined by the close connection Sebald pursues between his works’ narrators and their subjects.”

Schley reiterates Prager’s concerns, but goes a step further, interpreting Sebald’s postmemorial identification with the Jewish protagonists of his prose fiction as a conscious part of his self-construction as a writer and a “moralischer Zeuge”:

212 Hoffman 2004, 66.
213 Bauer 2006, 238.
214 Angier 1997, 49.
215 Prager 2005, 82.
Denn die “symbiotische Verflochtenheit des persönlichen Schicksals dieses Autors mit dem der Juden und der Deutschen”\textsuperscript{216} liegt schwer übersehbar auch Sebalds Autorschaftsfiguration zugrunde, die die geerbte Schuldlast der Täternachkommen mit der aufgezeigten habituellen Identifikation mit den Opfern (Aufklärungsfuror, Melancholie, Selbstexilierung, Koinzidenzen, Erinnerungsschleifen etc.) doppelstrategisch verbindet und in seiner Literatur homolog positioniert.\textsuperscript{217}

Schley is critical of the postmemorial connection between Sebald’s narrator and his Jewish protagonists, a connection that conflates his transgenerational inheritance of war memories with theirs, and from which he derives symbolic cudos: “Wenn Sebald berichtet, daß Visionen des Kriegsschreckens ihn im Alltag heimsuchen, gehen damit hohe symbolische Renditeaussichten einher.”\textsuperscript{218} By contrast, Huyssen argues for a positive reading of the mimetic relationship between Sebald’s narrator and Jewish subjects, and views it as part of Sebald’s literary project, “to compensate for an undeniable German deficit of memory and experience by practising a kind of narrative mimesis of the victims of Nazism. Such mimesis requires “a gray zone of identification and transference that allows for a reciprocal mimetic approximation without blurring the distinction between German narrator and Jewish protagonist.”\textsuperscript{219} The question of affiliative postmemory as expressed in Sebald’s narrative prose is problematical, and contributes to the complexity of his generational identity.

Sebald’s understanding of his own generational position is complex and contradictory: he reveals a fatalistic acceptance of genealogy as destiny, coupled with a Mannheimian understanding of generation as “shared location” that is contradicted, at times, by a strong disinclination to identify with his cohort, and an inclination to construct himself as an outsider. Sebald’s perception of his generational position is complicated by his consciousness of a genealogically incongruent legacy of transgenerational trauma. Transgenerational trauma theory provides a theoretical underpinning to Sebald’s


\textsuperscript{217} Schley 2012, 421.

\textsuperscript{218} Schley 2012, 473.

\textsuperscript{219} Huyssen 2004, 972.
perception of a life overshadowed by the war and by the inherited memory of trauma not personally experienced. Sebald exemplifies the problem that Schmitz (2009) points out in relation to the German second generation: as a member of this generation, Sebald’s transgenerational legacy of repressed parental trauma, guilt, and shame relating to Nazism is compounded by resentment at having to bear the burden of memory that the parent generation failed to process. Sebald’s understanding of his own generational position encompasses genealogical, synchronic and transgenerational notions. Sebald’s genealogical view of generational destiny is evident in an interview with Angier:


Examples of Sebald’s identification with his generation are rare: his description of being confronted, as a schoolboy, with the Nazi past, reveals a Mannheimian identification with the experience of his cohort: “Mir passierte was den meisten Leuten meiner Generation passiert ist: irgendwann im Geschichtsunterricht, so mit siebzehn oder achtzehn, wurden einem diese Leichen auf die Schulbank geschoben, wie Achternbusch sagt.”221 In an interview with Wachtel, he refers to the Auschwitz and Treblinka trials of the 1960s, noting that “the problem for the first time for my generation became a very public one. It was in the newspapers every day, and there were lengthy reports about court proceedings and so on. And so you had to contend with this.”222 In interviews with Wachtel (2007) and Cuomo (2007), his second-generation origins are made clear through references to his university years in Germany. In general, Sebald tends to dissociate himself from his own generation: in an interview with Kunisch, he claims that he did not feel that he was a “68er”223 and

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220 Angier 1997, 47.
222 Wachtel 2007, 48.
dismisses the student protest movement of the 1960s as “ideologischer Kram.” 224 To Jaggi, he distances himself from the student rebellion by his contemporaries, referring to it vaguely as “an uprising of the next generation.” 225 Sebald’s ambivalence about his generational identity is implicit in his habitus as an Einzelgänger: “I do like to be on the margins if possible.” 226 To Poltronieri, he admits to feeling like an outsider: “Der Zaungast sieht immer mehr als die Leute, die auf der Party sind. Einerseits gehöre ich dazu, durch die Sprache, durch die Herkunft … aber andererseits laufe ich herum als irgendwie Hereingeschneiter.” 227

Sebald’s sense of generational destiny as determined by a postmemorial legacy of guilt is suggested in an interview with Bigsby: “In one sense it would be much better if one didn’t have to constantly walk around with a particular package that one has inherited…” 228 It is implicit in his guarded admission,

I do think that a lot of people do not perceive the patterns of the past but if you have a certain educational background, a certain knowledge of what happened in the earlier part of this century … then you increasingly, the more you understand it, feel that this is a programme that you don’t even have internalized but that is part of your make-up and that is going to determine where you will end up or where we will all end up. 229

Transgenerational guilt is implied in an interview with Jaggi: “If you know in the generation before you that your parents, your uncles and aunts were tacit accomplices,

226 Wachtel 2007, 50.
it’s difficult to say you haven’t anything to do with it.” In an interview with Wachtel, Sebald reflects a fatalistic consciousness of transgenerationally inheriting an inescapable legacy of guilt and trauma: “But because of its peculiar history and the bad dive that history took in this century … I feel you can’t simply abdicate and say, well, it’s got nothing to do with me. I have inherited that backpack and I have to carry it whether I like it or not.” In Luftkrieg und Literatur, Sebald reflects on the meaning evoked by the word, “Heimatlandschaft”:

Lese ich diesen Satz, so verschwimmen vor meinen Augen Bilder von Feldwegen, Flußauen und Bergwiesen mit den Bildern der Zerstörung, und es sind die letzteren, perverserweise, und nicht die ganz irreal gewordenen frühkindlichen Idyllen, die so etwas wie ein Heimatgefühl in mir heraufrufen, vielleicht weil sie die mächtigere, übergeordnete Wirklichkeit meiner ersten Lebensjahre repräsentieren.

The idea of originating in a time not congruent with his birth position evokes the “Zeitheimat” to which he refers in an interview with Hage. Here, he claims to experience “den Eindruck in zunehmendem Maß, daß ich aus dieser Zeit stamme. Wenn man von Zeitheimat sprechen könnte, dann sind es für mich die Jahre zwischen 1944-1950 die mich am meisten interessieren.” Sebald’s “Zeitheimat” encompasses a Mannheimian understanding of generation as a sense of identification with his cohort. His feeling of generational identification as the experience of a “shared location” situated in the ruined landscape of post-war Germany, is compounded with an awareness of transgenerational trauma, of having absorbed, as a very young child, powerful, pre-conscious memories of destruction.

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231 Wachtel 2007, 51.
232 Sebald, Luftkrieg und Literatur, 78.
In summation

My generational reading of Sebald’s work contributes to a broader understanding of Sebald as a member of the second generation, with whom he shares an ambivalence towards origins, evident in the longing for, and repudiation of, kinship with the parent-generation. My readings on generation reveal the complexity of the concept, and its particular relevance to the post-war German context in which Sebald’s writing is interrogated. Sebald’s generational identity is complicated by the nature of this context, characterized by competing theories of generation, including Mannheim’s synchronous notion of generation, the fantasy of a new beginning that determines the temporal counting of generations after 1945, and the problematical concept of transgenerational trauma that distorts linear generational order and has ethical implications for second-generation German writers.

What then, are the implications of a generational reading for an understanding of Sebald’s work? This study accepts the validity of the temporal paradigm of generation that designates Sebald a member of the “second generation”, the progeny of the “first” or perpetrator generation. His writing reflects a Mannheimian notion of generation as defined by “common location” that for Sebald and his generation, implies the shared psycho-social experience of a childhood overshadowed by post-catastrophic misery and repression, damaged familial relationships, and a post-war landscape dominated by ruin. Consistent with his second-generation status, Sebald’s perception of his generational position is complicated by his consciousness of a transgenerationally inherited legacy of guilt and trauma that remains central to his literary project and is thematized in rejection of identity, Heimat, and all manifestations of Germanness. A generational reading of his work reveals that for Sebald, as a second-generation German writer, this is a problematic double legacy, comprising repressed shame and guilt inherited from the generation of his parents, and an affiliative legacy of Jewish suffering, evident in the identification of Sebald’s second-generation German narrator with Jewish victimhood. Analysis of Sebald’s generational position exposes this ethically controversial aspect of his narrative prose.
Chapter 3

Sebald’s narrative prose and the literature of the 1968 generation

Introduction

Sebald’s narrative prose does not, at first glance, betray affinities with the ideologically charged anti-authoritarian writing of his 1968 generation. By comparison with their confrontational texts, and with his own, often savagely polemical essayistic writing, Sebald’s narrative prose is characterized by a ruminative narratorial tone, and an authorial perspective that subsumes the fate of all creatures sub specie aeternitatis. The world of Sebald’s narrative prose reveals little acknowledgment of contemporary life, or the major political events that have changed the course of German post-war history, and would seem to confirm the perception of his prose fiction as aloof to national and parochial contingencies. My close examination of Sebald’s narrative prose works has nevertheless uncovered significant connections with the ideology and literary manifestations of the 1960s protest movement, suggesting that Sebald continues to be troubled by key issues that engaged his 1960s generation. Beyond the connections that align Sebald’s narrative texts with the work of protest writers, my comparative reading of his work reveals a dissidence at times more radical than theirs.

In this chapter, I build on, and contribute to, the relatively limited, but growing body of work that examines Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to the protest writing of the 1960s. As a sustained investigation of Sebald’s affinities with the writing of the “sixty-eighthers”, I contribute to Sebald scholarship by exploring previously unexamined connections between Sebald’s prose fiction, and that of more aggressively dissident writers of his generation, such as Brinkmann, Achternbusch, Fichte, Handke and Strauß, and demonstrate that Sebald’s resistance to institutionalized authority is at times, more repudiative than theirs. Sebald shares with his 1960s generation an oppressive consciousness of the National Socialist past, a sense of national identity as impermissible, a tendency to pessimism, and an Adornian perception of literature as incommensurate to the task of representing the past. Like his “sixty-eight” generation, Sebald thematizes the detached outsider position as a pure and critical perspective on
society. While his mode of expression is far removed from the strident tone and accusatory style of his cohort, his narrative prose, like theirs, is deeply critical of social institutions: the family, education, justice, and the state. His condemnation of the German university system is explicit, and cognate with the concerns of the protest generation. My comparative analysis of Sebald’s prose fiction and 1960s protest writing reveals that Sebald’s allusive and metaphorical style conceals a critical stance that is, at times, more radical than that of his protest generation.

This chapter provides an exploration of 1968 in the German context, and the implications of the student rebellion as a second-generation phenomenon through which the Kriegskinder confront the parent generation and the legacy of the National Socialist past. Tropes and imagery of protest writing are discussed in relation to the prose fiction of Sebald’s “sixty-eight” generation: Vesper, Brinkmann, Achternbusch, Bernhard, Handke, Strauß and Fichte. Focusing predominantly on Die Ringe des Saturn and Austerlitz, I draw connections between Sebald’s narrative prose and the writing of the protest generation to reveal correspondence of theme and imagery.

Sebald first came to public attention as a polemical writer, through his academic work, critical essays, and literary reviews. His confrontational attack on post-war German writers in Luftkrieg und Literatur established his combative persona, indeed, he has been described as a Provocateur. Sebald’s literary criticism, and theses on Sternheim and Döblin, are increasingly analysed within the context of the 1960s protest movement. Critics such as Schütte (2009, 2011), Anderson (2008) and Hutchinson (2009, 2011) see in Sebald’s polemical essays and reviews affinities with the thought and writing of the protest movement: its preoccupation with National Socialist continuities in West German society, anti-authoritarianism, concern with marginalized groups and forms of expression, and its susceptibility to the influence of Adorno, Marcuse, and the Frankfurt School.

As Anderson observes, critics consistently overlook the political dimension to Sebald’s literary writing, concentrating instead on issues of memory, trauma, identity, and “the ‘postmodern’ epistemological uncertainties of his fictions.” By contrast,
the connection between Sebald’s prose fiction and the broader socio-political phenomenon of the student rebellion remains a relatively under-explored aspect of his writing, and limited to key works that trace resistant elements in Sebald’s prose fiction. Morgan (2005) identifies Sebald as a “West-German intellectual of the student generation”, and his writing as a “late manifestation of the left-wing melancholy of postwar West-Germany.”

To Morgan, Sebald’s thematization of exile and Heimat in his narrative prose arises from attitudes he shares with his 1960s generation: an inability to come to terms with the legacy of National Socialism, an aversion to manifestations of Germanness, and a disavowal of positive national identity. While Sebald’s style and tone differ markedly from that of his generation, Morgan’s analysis of Sebald’s prose fiction uncovers a message similar to that articulated by his generation in the 1960s. Long (2007) examines Sebald’s resistance to institutions of power devoted to physical and intellectual control of the individual, expanding on ideas formulated in his 2006 article, “Disziplin und Geständnis. Ansätze zu einer Foucaultschen Sebald-Lektüre”, and identifying in Sebald’s narrative prose an implicit resistance to discipline, evident in depictions of oppressive institutionalised power. Summarising her findings on the analogies between Vesper’s Die Reise and Sebald’s “Il ritorno in patria”, Davies observes:

> The startling resonances between the two texts under discussion allow us to understand Sebald not (only) as a timeless old master, but also as a contemporary writer who was acutely sensitive to, and in some ways, albeit paradoxically and ambiguously, highly representative of the symbolic, philosophical and representational world of the ‘red decade’.

A small number of critics perceive in Sebald’s narrative prose writing the influence of Adorno and the Frankfurt School, thus connecting Sebald, on an ideological level, with the protest movement, for whom the Frankfurt School provides a philosophical basis. Hutchinson (2009) examines marginalia in Sebald’s private library held at Marbach to construct an interpretation of his narrative prose style as informed by the thinking of the Frankfurt School, principally, Adorno and Benjamin. His close reading of Sebald’s

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236 Morgan 2005, 80, 77.

237 Davies 2011, 298.
syntax and structure uncovers a negative dialectic and *Fortschrittspessimismus* that owes a debt to Adorno. In his 2011 article, Hutchinson extrapolates from Sebald’s receptivity to the philosophy of the Frankfurt School a resistance to affirmative culture that implicitly identifies him with the thinking of the protest movement. Löffler (2003) examines the meaning of melancholy in Sebald’s narrative prose, inherent in his observation, “Melancholie ... ist eine Form des Widerstands.” She interprets Sebald’s resistance to German *Wiederaufbau-Optimismus* as aligning his writing with the dialectic of progress and regression associated with the philosophy of the Frankfurt School. Similarly, Cosgrove (2006) argues for an historical reading of Sebald’s melancholy as manifest in his narrative prose; she interprets Sebald’s melancholy as a critique of capitalism, and as manifesting a modern consciousness of the relationship between global capitalism and ecological destruction. Sebald’s debt to Benjamin is examined by Öhlschläger (2006), who detects affinities between the *Fortschrittskritik* and negative dialectic of progress and dissolution articulated in Sebald’s narrative prose, and Benjamin’s *Passagenwerk*, specifically, the fragmentary “Der Saturnring oder Etwas vom Eisenbau.” She interprets Sebald’s “Bastelei” or self-described mode of writing, as a form of negative dialectic, “eine Technik des fortwährenden Umbaus, in der sich Konstruktion und Destruktion miteinander verbindet,” that aligns his prose narratives on a deep level with the Frankfurt School. Finch too, identifies in Sebald’s prose fiction a rebellious dimension and a receptiveness to the thinking of the Frankfurt School that he shares with his 1968 cohort. In her 2013 text, she presents a study of homosexuality as a form of resistance to oppressive structures in Sebald’s poetics. In the structure and fragmentary quality of Sebald’s prose fiction, she identifies a “queer revolutionary potential”, and sees Sebald’s emphasis on homosexual alliances as a form of resistance to bourgeois incorporation and patriarchy. Finch’s book expands on ideas put forward in her 2007 Ph.D thesis, in which her close reading of Sebald’s narrative prose within a generational paradigm uncovers thematic

240 Öhlschläger 2006, 196.
241 Finch 2013, 9.
and structural similarities to work by other dissident writers of his generation, Strauß and Handke.

The documentary dimension to Sebald’s prose fiction is the subject of a number of articles that explore it as a strategy of resistance. Anderson (2008) connects Sebald’s narrative prose to the protest movement through Sebald’s use of documentary realism, favoured by protest writers. In an earlier article, Anderson (2003) identifies in Sebald’s narrative prose “clear, albeit subterranean connections between Sebald’s work and the preoccupations of the entire generation of German writers and artists born near the end of the war who came of age during the period of student protest and social unrest in the 1960s.” Anderson notes Sebald’s metanarrative scepticism in relation to documentary realism, his consciousness of the epistemological instability of the medium itself, and its capacity for manipulation. This interpretation is shared by Wolff (2009), who discusses Sebald’s interpolation of documentary material in his narrative prose, and argues, like Anderson, that its function goes beyond authentication, to problematizing the writing process and exposing its capacity for falsification.

The protest movement of 1968

The complexity of defining and evaluating the significance of the student rebellion of 1968 is encapsulated by Kraushaar: “Diese eruptionsartig ausgebrochene Bewegung läßt sich kaum auf einen Nenner bringen. Alle Versuche, ihr historisch, analytisch oder psychologisierend auf die Schliche zu kommen, sind bislang gescheitert.” The youth protests of 1968 have been described variously as “eine entscheidende Zäsur,” “den groben Einschnitt in der Geschichte der Bundesrepublik Deutschland, folglich in der deutschen Geschichte” “a ‘soft caesura’ in the longer narrative of West ... and also

243 Kraushaar 2000, 50.
244 Bude 1997, 20.

In the context of post-war Germany, the protest movement of the 1960s has been described as “alles in einem: Generationsrevolte, ideologischer Konflikt, Abrechnung in fast allen Einzelfällen mit der eigenen Kindheit und Pubertät.” Bude notes the particular significance of 1968 as a caesura in Germany, and points to the generational significance of the 1968 protest movement, constituted by the Kriegskinder generation, subject to the Mannheimian “verwandte Lagerung” of a childhood haunted by war, ruination and the transgenerational burden of their parents’ trauma and guilt. Describing the generation-specific background against which the protest movement of the 1960s should be evaluated, Schneider observes the unresolved problem of the Nazi legacy as the catalyst for youth revolt, and central to its anti-authoritarian stance:

These radicalized sons and daughters of the bourgeoisie who took to the streets with flags unfurled, clenched fists, and political demands, were simultaneously protesting against something else which could not be conceptualized in political or economic terms – namely, the emotional

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247 Macedo, Steven ed., Reassessing the Sixtiess: Debating the Political and Cultural Legacy (New York: W.W.Norton, 1997)
249 Mayer 1989, 129.
deficits from which they were suffering because of childhoods wasted in restrictive living conditions and numb joylessness.250

The response of the German protest generation is shaped by factors unique to the German context, as Kraushaar observes: “Im Unterschied zu anderen vergleichbaren Ländern hatte die Studentenbewegung in der Bundesrepublik derartig starke, im Grunde unangemessene Auswirkungen, weil sie einen Resonanzboden besaß, den es in keinem anderen Land geben konnte – die NS-Vergangenheit.”251 The student movement of the 1960s constitutes a radical protest against perceived continuities with the Nazi past in West German society, evident in its institutions of education, justice, bureaucracy, and law enforcement, power structures rejected as “fascist”, “imperialist”, and “capitalist.” Intrinsic to this anti-authoritarianism is the desire of the second generation to expunge the Nazi legacy still perceived to permeate post-war German society. German universities, viewed as “historisch sedimentierte Institutionen”252, are the focus of protest: “Die Zielscheibe der Protestaktion waren unmißverständlich die Ordinarien, denen gegenüber der Vorwurf erhoben wurde, daß sich unter ihren Traditionsgewändern der Ungeist des Nationalsozialismus verberge.”253 In the writing of the “sixty-eigheters”, the Nazi past is not overcome, but displaced through various strategies, among these, the anarchic Umsturzphantasien of Brinkmann, Achternbusch, and Fichte, in which social norms and institutions are attacked and literature itself traduced, and the reconfiguration of the Nullpunkt-consciousness that pervaded German writing of the immediate post-war period. In relation to the former, the experimental nature of protest writing is evident in the provocations of Sebald’s generation: the “Auskotzbefreiung” of Brinkmann,254 the radical negativity of Bernhard, anarchic nonconformity of Achternbusch, and the

251 Kraushaar 2000, 38.
253 Kraushaar 2000, 196.
254 Briegleb and Weigel 2008, 68.
fantastical allegories of Handke and Strauß. The innovative lexicon of Fichte aims at renewal of the German language, compromised by National Socialism.\textsuperscript{255} The re-emergence of a \textit{Nullpunkt}-consciousness is implicit in writing that projects National-Socialism as “eine böse, märchenhaft verzerrte Kindheitserinnerung, in mythischen Vorzeiten angesiedelt und aus aller Geschichte herausgefallen.”\textsuperscript{256}

The influence of the Frankfurt School, its critique of the Enlightenment and the notion of progress in the light of industrialised genocide, is central to the ideology of the protest movement. Horkheimer and Adorno’s \textit{Dialektik der Aufklärung}\textsuperscript{257} becomes an “ideologisches Programm … für weite Kreise der Studentenbewegung.”\textsuperscript{258} Adorno’s emphasis on the material contingencies of human existence, on documentary realism, and the psycho-social structure of the German family\textsuperscript{259} exerts a profound influence on protest writing, and is evident in Sebald’s concern with the biographical details of individual lives. Protest writing is paradoxically characterized by a “Rhetorik der Ohnmacht”\textsuperscript{260}, evident as a sense of authorial inadequacy encapsulated by Adorno’s

\textsuperscript{255} In relation to Fichte’s language experimentation, Briegleb observes: “Fiches Hamburgerbücher nehmen ihre Sonderstellung in der NS-Reflexiven Literatur nicht zuletzt deshalb ein, weil sie das Deutsche Wörterbuch nach 1945 erweitern, indem sie konkret regenerative Sprachgeschichte schreiben ... Im Beat-Vokablen werden ... mit Jäckis Bewuβtheit Wörter wieder heimisch, die in der Hochsprache der Restauration keine Chance mehr hatten, nachdem sie von den Nazis vernichtet worden sind.” Briegleb and Weigel 1992, 98.

\textsuperscript{256} Frank Schirrmacher, “Abschied von der Literatur der Bundesrepublik.” \textit{FAZ, Literaturbeilage} (October 2 1990).

\textsuperscript{257} Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, \textit{Dialektik der Aufklärung: Philosophische Fragmente} (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1969).

\textsuperscript{258} Mayer 1989, 125.

\textsuperscript{259} In \textit{Studien zum autoritären Charakter} (1950), Adorno examines the psychological propensity of Germans to fascism, manifest as blind obedience to authority, love of order, subservient behaviour, and contempt for outsiders.

\textsuperscript{260} Briegleb and Weigel 2008, 62.

Sebald’s narrative prose is imbued with scepticism about the ability of literature to represent, and his narrator suffers from an incapacitating consciousness of authorial inadequacy. The imprint of Adorno and the Frankfurt School is evident in the tendency to hybrid mixtures of documentary and fictional components, such as Vesper’s Die Reise, in which diary entries, photographs, programmes, tickets, and lists alternate with the author’s autobiographical recollections. Sebald’s mixture of photographs and other interpolated documentary material resembles the Mischformen his generation produced in the 1960s. Like theirs, his recourse to documentary realism reflects loss of confidence in the representational potential of literature; as Anderson (2008) and Wolff (2009) point out, it is also a metanarrative interrogation of the writing process and its capacity for falsification.

Fascination with non-traditional forms of expression is a characteristic of protest literature, and evident in a tendency to valorize the writing of the marginalized, the workers, the non-canonical, the criminal, and the mentally disturbed. Writers such as Achternbusch, Der Tag wird kommen (1973), and Handke, Die Angst des Tormanns beim Elfmeter (1970), explore the thought-forms and expression associated with schizophrenia; both writers are positively reviewed by Sebald for the creative potential this offers.

Social marginalization is thematized through outsider-figures who provide a mouthpiece for the writer’s Gesellschaftskritik, evident in Brinkmann’s

Keiner weiß mehr (1968), Strauß’s Der junge Mann (1987), and Fichte’s Die Palette. The function of the outsider is often satirical: the anarchic existence of Achternbusch’s Happy is a parody of social norms.\textsuperscript{264} Außenseiterexistenz is a pervasive theme in Sebald’s writing, evident in the biographies of numerous marginalized artist figures, such as Austerlitz, Aurach, Hamburger, Swinburne, and Herbeck; on a poetological level, Sebald sees the transgressiveness of the outsider figure, and the notion of marginalization itself, as holding the potential for a deepened creative response. In an essay on the schizophrenic poet Herbeck, Sebald observes:

Gerade in ihrer Offenheit gegenüber anscheinend sinnlosen Interjektionen erinnern seine Gedichte daran, daß die Idee prästabilierter Harmonie nur am Schein des vollendeten Werks einen Zeugen hat und daß die Dissoziation des Sinns für authentische Kreativität ebenso wichtig ist wie seine Konstruktion.\textsuperscript{265}

As my analysis will show, Sebald’s valorization of the marginalized position, anti-authoritarian tendencies and Fortschrittskritik, align his prose fiction with the protest writing of the “sixty-eight” generation. Like theirs, Sebald’s writing reflects also the disappointment at the failure of the protest movement, expressed in pervasive melancholy, pessimism, and a tendency to apocalypticism.

While the protest movement of the 1960s remains a determining event in post-war German experience, its political and social significance is the subject of debate. To Weizsäcker, former president of the Federal Republic, the generation of 1968 re-integrated Germany as a Western and democratic nation: “Die Jugendrevolte der sechziger Jahre trug allen Verwundungen zum Trotz zu einer Vertiefung des demokratischen Engagements der Gesellschaft bei.”\textsuperscript{266} By contrast, Kraushaar captures the ambiguous significance of the student rebellion in his designation of 1968

\textsuperscript{264} Herbert Achternbusch, Der Tag wird kommen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1975).


as “Zeit der Entscheidung und das Geständnis der Niederlage zugleich.” To Kraushaar, 1968 was a political failure: the hoped-for transformation to a socialist democracy failed to eventuate, the universities were not radically reformed, the manipulatory role of the media, such as Axel-Springer-Verlag, was not curbed, and the Vietnam war was not brought to an end. Knoch criticizes the inclination of the protest generation to instrumentalize the Holocaust as a manifestation of capitalist power abuse. In Deutsche Ängste, Schneider is critical of the tendency of protesters to appropriate for themselves the role of victims, and to thus displace the historical victims of Nazism.

Among West German intellectuals, the failure of the student revolt is reflected in a sense of disappointment and melancholy, evident in the conviction, “Daß es keinen Weltgeist gibt, daß wir die Gesetze der Geschichte nicht kennen … daß die gesellschaftliche wie die natürliche Evolution kein Subjekt kennt und daß sie deshalb unvorhersehbar ist.” Enzensberger sees the tendency to apocalypticism as an extreme manifestation of German post-1968 pessimism: “Die Apokalypse gehört zu unserem ideologischen Handgepäck. Sie ist ein Aphrodisiakum. Sie ist ein Angsttraum … Sie ist allgegenwärtig, aber nicht ‘wirklich’: eine zweite Realität, ein Bild, das wir uns machen, eine unaufhörliche Produktion unserer Phantasie, die Katastrophe im Kopf.”

The tendency to apocalypticism reflects the concern of the post-“sixty-eight” generation with ecological destruction caused by industrial and technological progress associated with capitalism. Behind the post-1968 malaise of the West German intellectual is a lingering ambivalence towards national identity that continues to trouble the second generation:

267 Kraushaar 2000, 19.
271 Enzensberger 1978, 1.
The concept of national identity was a threatening conduit for a generation which had determined and defined itself in terms of the rejection of the fathers and what they stood for, namely Nazism. To rethink the past in terms of national identity would allow the “Stunde Null” of the post-war generation to be reset in terms of the continuity of a fatal German history.272

In his case studies of Martin Walser, Werner Herzog, and Monika Maron, Morgan identifies divergent strategies by means of which the “sixty-eight” generation attempts to come to terms with the failure of the student revolts, the loss of the Marxist utopia as a focus of group-identification, and to protect themselves from a sense of personal annihilation in confronting Nazi atrocities. While he does not deal directly with Sebald’s writing, Morgan’s examination of strategies for coming to terms with the Nazi past in the writing of post-1968 intellectuals helps to position Sebald as a disappointed post-1968 intellectual, caught in “the downward spiral from national disgrace to personal abnegation.”273

Sebald’s relationship with the protest movement that engaged his generation is conflicted. In an interview with Kunisch,274 Sebald portrays himself as politically disengaged, and his attitude to the youth rebellion tends to be dismissive: indeed, he eschewed studying at the radically left-wing University of Frankfurt, and left the University of Freiburg to study in Switzerland as the rebellion was getting underway. Comments on his student years in Germany (Jaggi, 2001) reflect a disinclination to identify with the protest movement. Nevertheless, Sebald made certain observations that imply a paradoxical affinity with the thinking of the protest movement, confessing to Cuomo: “Nobody mentioned it, but there was a very deeply ingrained authoritarianism, and I have, I think, somewhere an anarchist streak in me, I couldn’t really put up with [the authoritarianism of German university life G.S.].”275 Sebald’s sympathy with the thinking of the protest generation is reflected in observations on his

student years in the early 1960s. Commenting on his time at Freiburg University, he describes his academic teachers there as “glühende Anhänger des Regimes”, and notes caustically: “Aus den Lehrern dort konnte ich nichts herauskriegen. Das war völlig unmöglich, weil sie alle zu der Generation gehörten. Alle hatten sie ihren Doktor in den dreißiger und vierziger Jahren gemacht.”\textsuperscript{276} Such observations are almost exactly mirrored in \textit{Austerlitz}, in which the German narrator’s reference to his university years in Germany makes note of the “dort amtierenden, größtenteils in den dreißiger und vierziger Jahren in ihrer akademischen Laufbahn vorangerückten und immer noch in ihren Machtphantasien befangenen Geisteswissenschaftlern…” (A, 51).

I read Sebald’s ambivalence towards the protest movement that engaged his generation in the 1960s as part of a broader denial of his German identity, consistent with the repudiative attitudes of his 1960s generation, and the persistence of such attitudes in his writing. Sebald’s disavowal of generational affinity is betrayed by clear connections between his writing and that of his generation, explored below.

\textbf{Sebald’s prose fiction and the protest writing of his generation: Brinkmann, Fichte, Bernhard, and Achternbusch}

German literature of the 1960s is pervaded by topoi that reflect the nature and aims of the protest movement, motivated by the political objective of bringing about socio-cultural change to a society perceived as contaminated by National Socialism. Consciousness of Nazi continuity is a dominant theme in the writing of the protest generation, manifest in negative depictions of Germany and Germans, rejection of the model of masculinity associated with Nazism, and ambivalence towards the notion of genealogical continuity. Protest writing thematizes anti-authoritarian critique of institutions of power, and subversion often takes the form of \textit{Umsturzphantasien}, aimed at the family, the state, justice, and education. The post-war consumer society is a focus of discontent. The influence of Adorno and the Frankfurt School is evident in the pervasive \textit{Fortschrittskritik}, valorization of marginality, and intermedial nature of protest literature. The continuing presence of a former Nazi elite in the state

\textsuperscript{276} Angier 2005, 45.
apparatus, industry, culture, and universities, is an ongoing provocation to the student movement, and articulated in Bude’s lament:

Wie sollte sich in Westdeutschland eine stabile Demokratie herausgebildet haben, wenn sein Führungspersonal mit demjenigen der NS-Diktatur so weitgehend identisch war und große Teile der politischen, wirtschaftlichen, militärischen und sozialen Eliten des Nationalsozialismus, vor denen bis 1945 fast ganz Europa gezittert hatte, dort unbehelligt herumliefen?  

The continuity of National Socialism in post-war German society is a pervasive theme in protest literature, which reveals a compulsion to expose the Nazi past in protest against the “Gespinst der Nachkriegszeit ... dem Nebel von Verdrängung der NS-Vergangenheit und deren Kompensation im Konsumrausch.”  

Bude observes that Kriegskinder have a “starren Blick auf das Trauma des NS” that makes them impervious to changing historical events. This tendency is evident in Sebald’s writing, with its obsessive focus on the past, and indifference to events of contemporary historical significance, such as German reunification. Literary responses to Nazi-continuity in post-war Germany include negative depictions of Germany as Tatort, criticism of post-war German spiritual vacuity and materialism, hostility to manifestations of Germanness, and construction of alternative models of masculinity. My analysis of Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to paradigmatic protest texts reveals evidence of such themes and the imagery through which they are conveyed.

277 Ulrich Herbert, “Deutsche Eliten nach Hitler,” in Mittelweg 36: 8 (June/July 1999), 66-82 (66). This resonates with Sebald’s assertions regarding his reasons for leaving Germany in the 1960s, as expressed in an interview with Wachtel, 2007.
278 Kraushaar 2000, 213, 37.
279 Bude 1992, 89.
Repudiation of Germany and Germans

In the literature of protest, negative descriptions of a renovated post-war Germany are consistent with the abstract coldness Bohrer\textsuperscript{280} detects in representations of Germany. According to Bohrer, the predominant images in relation to Germany are “Leere”, “abstrakte Verlorenheit”, and “verlorene Identität.” Sebald’s writing, like protest literature, reveals the repudiation of a post-war Germany perceived to be still tainted by Nazism. The desire for alternative locations can be seen in the restless wandering and failed returns of Sebald’s characters. In Sebald’s narrative prose, the image of Germany as “ein zurückgebliebenes, zerstörtes, irgendwie etwa extra-territoriales Land” (DA, 270) reflects Bude’s description of the “fixed gaze” of the second generation, symbolic of the inability of this generation to see beyond the trauma of the past. Imagery of emptiness and of physical and spiritual vacuity pervades Brinkmann’s \textit{Keiner weiß mehr}: “Die Leere nahm zu, der Raum ein Loch ... es ist nichts, ganz einfach, nichts” (\textit{Keiner weiß mehr}, 7), and is implicit in the protagonist’s observation, “Hier war die Stadt, nächtlich, leer, die Straße, die sie zurückgingen, nächtlich, leer, mit den Reihen stumpf verstaubter Fenster” (\textit{Keiner weiß mehr}, 138). In Strauß’s \textit{Rumor}, Germany is constructed as lifeless, the \textit{Bürostadt} as “vollenmen menschenleer, mausetot…” (\textit{Rumor}, 119). Spatial emptiness reflects the moral-spiritual vacuity of the \textit{Konsumgesellschaft}, constructed on a covered-up past: “Eine Glocke bäumelt Alarm in der Turm spitze, doch leer ist sie und ohne Klöppel, gibt keinen Laut über Land...” (\textit{Rumor}, 34). Paraphrasing Goethe, Sebald uses a similar image in \textit{Die Ausgewanderten} to suggest the moral emptiness and the loss of \textit{Erbe} that characterize post-war Germany: “Unsere Welt ist eine Glocke, die einen Riß hat und nicht mehr klingt” (DA, 330).\textsuperscript{281} Fichte’s post-war Hamburg is characterized by emptiness and absence, perceived through the perspective of Jäcki, the child protagonist: “Es gab die Lessingstatue nicht mehr ... auch vom Hitlerplatz war er enttäuscht. Adolf Hitler fehlte” (\textit{Die Palette}, 10).


The tirade of Fichte’s protagonist against Germany identifies the rotten core beneath its cultured, pacified exterior: “Es stinkt nach Blut in den Schreberkolonien und beim Ballett” (Die Palette, 133). To the protagonist of Strauß’s Rumor, West Germany is an Unterwelt, a Höhle, “ein ganz gewöhnliches KZ” (Rumor, 21). He satirizes his own inherited propensity to fascism: “Den Kopf nur noch gehoben nach Gehör und Schatten. (Faschisten-Melodie, was du auch pfeifst heute morgen, Henker-Tremolo und fascistisch noch das Hinsehen auf die Uhr am Handgelenk - ja das Handgelenk selbst ist brutal, ist fascistisch...” (Rumor, 30). Perception of the lingering impact of Nazism on post-war German society is evident in Vesper’s bitterness at German revisionism, “die Legende, die wir von uns gemacht haben ... die neue Legende. Daß wir einfach viel zu viel bereits vergessen haben, besser: daß wir mindestens zwanzig Jahre lang völlig falsche und belanglose Sachen gesehn haben...” (Die Reise, 22).

Vesper’s paeon of hatred to Germany is apocalyptic in its totality, and his rejection of Germany is self-annihilating: “…wäre es nicht besser, beim jetzigen Stand der Dinge sich an irgendeinen dieser Grenzpfähle aufzuhängen, ein Flammenwurf, ein Sternenstrich… (Die Reise, 18).

In Strauß’s text too, rejection of Germany is at times articulated in apocalyptic visions: “Doomsday läutet und im Kaufhaus die Auferstandenen [drücken G.S.] sich noch ins Gedränge...” (Rumor, 52). It is evident in Fichte’s furious denunciation of Germany, “Aber Deutschland wird untergehen, absaufen in seinem eigenen Blut ... Deutschland hat nicht genug mit dem alten Blut und mit der KLnummer von der Dolores ... Und deshalb wird die Atombombe kommen und alles verbrennen” (Die Palette, 132-133).

Sebald’s rejection of Germany is expressed in more complex imagery, but the meaning is the same: in the closing lines of Schwindel.Gefühle., the narrator’s dream conflates quintessentially German images of “Wälder” and “Alpen” (SG, 286), with the Great Fire of London, to produce a fantasy of apocalyptic destruction: “Zu hunderten die toten Tauben auf dem Pflaster, das Federkleid versengt ... Die Kirchen, Häuser, Holz und Mauersteine, alles brennt zugleich ... ist dies die letzte Stunde?” (SG, 287)

Sebald’s depiction of post-war Germany is cognate with the repudiative descriptions found in protest writing. Sebald’s Germany is characterized by imagery of void and desolation: on his return to Kissingen, the narrator of “Max Aurach” finds the streets menschenleer”, the hotel foyer “so leer wie der Bahnhof” (DA, 392). He is critical of German “Vergeßlichkeit und Geschichtsblindheit” (DA), and the obfuscating mania
of the Germans for order and sanitation, evident in “das bis in den letzten Winkel aufgeräumte und begradigte deutsche Land” (SG, 276). The narrator of “Max Aurach” describes his German hotel as “von Grund auf renoviert … in dem in Deutschland unaufhaltsam sich ausbreitenden neuimperialen Stil…” (DA, 329); the returning narrator of “Il ritorno in patria” describes his village as “auf das gründlichste renoviert, wo nicht gar verschwunden” (SG, 203). Austerlitz’ perceptions of Nürnberg focus on the erasure of the past: he is disconcerted by the tidiness of the city, “weder an den Eckkanten, noch an den Giebeln, Fensterstöcken oder Gesimsen eine krumme Linie … oder sonst eine Spur der vergangenen Zeit” (A, 322). In a reprise of his original journey as a Kindertransport child through Germany, he notices the “saubere Ortschaften und Dörfer, aufgeräumte Fabrik-und Bauhöfe … ordentlich aufgeschichtetes Brennholz … wohlgenutzte Waldparzellen, regulierte Bachläufe …” (A, 320). A renovated, sanitized Germany cannot disguise the lingering after-life of National Socialism: Austerlitz’ mythologizing, de-historicized perception of Germany is marred by “drei riesige Schlote” that evoke the crematoria of the extermination camps (A, 326). Löffler observes “die Kehrseite des deutschen Wiederaufbau-Optimismus” in Sebald’s melancholy depiction of a renovated post-war Germany, and detects in this the resistant stance to which Sebald alludes in “Die Beschreibung des Unglückes”: “Melancholie … ist eine Form des Widerstands … Die Beschreibung des Unglückes schließt in sich die Möglichkeit zu seiner Überwindung ein.” In this assertion, writing itself assumes a resistant function as a means of recording, and exposing, the destruction that is concealed by the Baueifer that, for Sebald, characterizes post-war Germany.

The trope of return to Germany is invariably associated in Sebald’s narrative prose with loss and lifelessness: returning after a long absence to Germany, Paul Bereyter’s companion, Lucie Landauer, perceives it as dead: “Es war kein Schnee gefallen, von irgendwelchen Winterbetrieb war nirgends eine Spur”, its extinction embodied in the apocalyptic image, “als seien wir angekommen am Ende der Welt” (DA, 89). Schwindel.Gefühle. concludes with a fantasy of a lifeless Germany:

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282 Löffler 2003,105.
283 Sebald, Die Beschreibung des Unglücks, 12.
Nirgends war ein Baum zu sehen, kein Strauch, kein Krüppelholz, kein Büschelchen Gras, sondern es war alles nur Stein ... Es herrschte die äußerste Stille, den auch die letzten Spuren des Pflanzenlebens ... waren längst verweht, und bloß das Gestein lag bewegungslos auf dem Grund.

In this vision of destruction, Sebald articulates a denunciation of Germany that resembles the apocalyptic negativity of protest writers such as Vesper, Fichte and Strauß.

The physical and moral deformity of Germans as a result of National Socialism is thematized in protest literature. In Die Wiederholung, Handke’s Kobal, returning to Austria, experiences disgust at the depravity of the Austrians: “Und in der Tat verstärkten sich mit jedem Schritt durch die Stadt in mir der Haß und der Ekel … Ich wollte Feuer speien gegen sie, wie sie da marschierten, stolzierten, trippelten, schllichen und schlurften…” (Die Wiederholung, 324). He sees, in passers-by, reminders of their complicity in National Socialism, “…wie in dieser Menge nicht wenige ihre Kreise zogen, die gefoltert und gemordet oder dazu wenigstens beifällig gelacht hatten, und deren Abkömmlinge das Althergebrachte so treu wie bedenkenlos fortführen würden” (Die Wiederholung, 325). In similar language, Vesper criticizes post-war Germany for the “Bewußtlosigkeit, Geschichtslosigkeit” of its cities (Die Reise, 125); his rejection is totalizing: “Alles hier ist Vegetable ... Ihre Straßen, Häuser, die Mißbildung der Fenster, der Türen ... alles verrät sie....” (Die Reise, 69).

To Vesper, the physicality of Germans becomes a reminder of Nazism, “die ganze Proletarierscheiße. Deutsche. Wiener. Fette Beckmannfiguren...” (22), the reference to the dissident artist Max Beckmann evoking his banning by the Nazis, and implying the continuing deformation of Germany by its Nazi past. Vesper’s hatred is overt and indiscriminate: “Ich hasse diese Straßen, ich hasse jeden einzelnen Bestandteil der Straße, einschließlich der Straßenbäume, Straßenwärter, Straßengräber ... Ich hasse Alte...” (Die Reise, 18). His hatred of Germany is self-lacerating: “Ich hasse alle, die mich zur Sau gemacht haben” (Die Reise, 20).

Vesper’s feeling of contagion by the fascist past is expressed in imagery of contamination and adhesion: “Ja, ich wußte genau, daß ich Hitler war, bis zum Gürtel, daß ich da nicht herauskommen würde, daß es ein Kampf auf Leben und Tod ist, der
mein Leben verseucht, seine gottverdammte Existenz hat sich an meine geklebt wie Napalm…” (Die Reise, 107). In his allegory of Hitler’s funeral in Der junge Mann, Strauß similarly uses imagery of adhesion to express the notion that post-war German society is inextricably bound to the Nazi past: “Doch in Wahrheit fand sich auch unter ihnen eine regelmäßige Anbindung der Kräfte, denn es herrschte hier ein weitgestaffeltes Aufeinander-fixiert-Sein und durchformte ihre Reihen ... Da klebte förmlich am Rücken des allerletzten Offiziellen des alten Reichs eben der erste aus dem neuen Lager der modernen Gewissensmacher…” (Der junge Mann, 297).

Hostility to Germany and Germans extends to the German language, perceived as contaminated by Nazism: “Das Wort kernig hat einen Stahlhelm auf. Das Wort abschnallen schläft über ihm. Andre Wörter kommen mit Kerze und Kreuz und Gasofen und wollen nach Ostland reiten…” (Die Palette, 49). It is implicit in the “Paletten ABC” of new and revised German words and usages that Fichte’s protagonist Jäcki creates. The sound of German is inimical to Handke’s returning protagonist, who hears it as “das Knarren eines Astes oder das Schaben eines Holzwurms … schadenfroh, weinerlich, frömmelnd…” (Die Wiederholung, 324). Similarly, the hostility of Sebald’s narrator to the sound of German is evident in his irritable observation: “Schwaben, Franken und Bayern hörte ich die unsäglichsten Dinge untereinander reden, und waren mir diese, auf das ungenierteste sich breitmachenden Dialekte schon zuwider, so war es mir geradezu eine Pein, die lauthals vorgebrachten Meinungen und witzigen Aussprüche einer Gruppe junger Männer aus meiner unmittelbaren Heimat mit anhören zu müssen” (SG, 107). Sebald’s tendency to use an archaic form of German in his narrative prose suggests a rejection of the German language contaminated by Nazism.

In criticizing the moral vacuity of post-war German society, protest writers expose the sublimation of the National Socialist past in the materialism of the Konsumgesellschaft. In Keiner weiß mehr, Brinkmann exposes the emotional emptiness the consumer society conceals, juxtaposing scenes of material abundance with the protagonist’s perception of existential emptiness, “alles um ihn herum war leer” (Keiner weiß mehr, 111). The profligacy of the Konsumgesellschaft is underlined by the cataloguing of objects, “Metallröhrchen, silbern oder vergoldet und daraus hochgeschoben glatte und ... verschiedenfarbige Lippenstifte, Puderdosen ... Kämme, Spiegel” (Keiner weiß mehr, 103), whose vivid physicality contrasts with the
protagonist’s perception of “schwankende Unruhe” (Keiner weiß mehr, 104). The materialism of the society is emphasized by the protagonist’s disenchanted focus on material possessions, rather than on human features, in his description of people in the street:


Brinkmann’s criticism of bourgeois consumerism shows it to be corrosive of relationships: “Ich liebe dich. Nicht. Lieber eine Cola. Aufmachen. Popcorn verteilen” (Keiner weiß mehr, 114). In the protagonist’s fantasies about abandoning the home he shares with his wife, imagery of void reflects repudiation of a materialist society:

Die Wohnung würde leer zurückbleiben, drei Zimmer, Küche ... Bad ... ein Toilettenbecken, ein Spülstein, eine Badewanne ... der Flur, leer, mit einigem Mobiliar versehen, würde leer zurückbleiben ... Eine leere Wohnung, in der Stadt, die hinter ihnen zurückbleiben würde...” (Keiner weiß mehr, 101).

In Bernhard’s Das Kalkwerk, Konrad’s retreat to “ein totes, aufgelassenes Kalkwerk” (Das Kalkwerk, 23) is a retreat from the Konsumgesellschaft:

Und dabei, denke er, habe er immer gedacht, daß sie beide, er und seine Frau, hier im Kalkwerk vollkommen isoliert und frei von den Menschen seien und endlich immer alles ruinierende Apparat der ganzen immer noch mehr aufgerregten, nervösen sogenannten Konsumgesellschaft, der sie durch den Entschluß, ins Kalkwerk zu gehen, entflohen zu sein glaubten...” (Das Kalkwerk, 63).
In a passage that contrasts the neglect of a Jewish cemetery with the dazzling new Komfortwohnungen and cars of the German consumer society, Fichte condemns post-war German forgetfulness and obfuscation of the past:

Niemand hat den Wald angefaßt. Zwischen Bettenholm und frischem Kinderspielplatz steht er – schwarz und doppelt so hoch wie die Nachkriegsgeneration. Auf die kleine Michaeliskirche wird ein glänzendes neues Dach gehandwerkt und die Königsstraße hinunter sausen die Autos und die Allee hinunter sausen die Autos, lassen kleinen Gaswölkchen. Das Tageslicht wird trüb davon. Ungejährt steht der Judenfriedhof gegenüber der kleinen Michaeliskirche und vielen gelben Backsteinen gegenüber, die Komfortwohnungen ergeben. (Die Palette, 53)

In Die Wiederholung, Handke’s protagonist returns to a consumer society of “reinliche Leute, wohlfrisiert, adrett gekleidet, blinkende Abzeichen auf Hüten und in Knopflöchern, duftend nach diesem und jenem, topmunikürt, in Hochglanzschuhen … und doch hatte der ganze Zug eine geradezu schuldhafte, strafwürdige Häßlichkeit und Unförmigkeit” (Die Wiederholung, 324-325).

Similarly, the narrator of “Max Aurach” is repelled on his return to Germany by the monstrous physicality and behaviour of Germans, epitomized by the “Unhold” on the train, and disgusted by the “Geistesverarmung und Erinnerungslosigkeit der Deutschen, das Geschick, mit dem man alles bereingt hatte …” (DA, 338). Austerlitz’ return to Germany depicts it as a prosperous consumer society: in Nürnberg, he is swept up in the flood of shoppers in an ironically designated “Fußgängerparadiese” (A, 322), and is struck by their affluent appearance, “wie gut und zweckmäßig alles gekleidet, wie bemerkenswert solide das Schuhwerk der Nürnberger Fußgänger war” (A, 322). An outsider, Austerlitz remains “am Rande des ohne Unterbrechung an mir vorüberziehenden Volks der Deutschen” (A, 323). His conflicted response to Germany is reflected in the image of the passers-by that buffet him like “eine immer stärker werdende Strömung” (323), and from which he feels forced to disengage himself. He

284 Sebald’s description of the narrator’s visit to the Jewish cemetery of Bad-Kissingen (DA, 334-337) bears a striking resemblance to this passage.
is unable to confront the eyes of Germans, and their *Tracht*, the “brauner und grüner Jägermäntel und Hüte” (A, 322), metaphorically represents the essential, and to Austerlitz, repugnant Germanness of the wearers.

**Rejection of genealogy**

In the writing of the protest generation, repudiation of Germanness is associated with the production of a new, post-fascist body. In their thematization of the body as a site of resistance, protest writers reveal an antipathy towards the fascist model of maleness investigated by Theweleit, and a desire to present an alternative model of masculinity. Fichte’s *Die Palette* graphically depicts male brutality: “Arnims Handfläche streift Annes Haar, schiebt die Haare bis zum Mund ... Arnim schlägt mit der linken hand ... er trifft das Ohr ...” (*Die Palette*, 100). Violent male behaviour is intrinsic to the alienating world Bernhard creates in *Das Kalkwerk*, in which it serves as a metaphor for the perceived violence of Austrian society. The text opens with various rumours about the nature of Konrad’s crime that emphasise the brutality with which the victim has purportedly been battered, “mit einer Hacke erschlagen ... mit dem Mannlicher-Karabiner angeschossen...” (*Das Kalkwerk*, 14). It is no coincidence that Konrad shoots his wife with a *Mannlicher-Karabiner*, the brand-name a reference to the violent model of *Männlichkeit* it represents. In Brinkmann’s *Keiner weiß mehr*, numerous passages of violent sex present male behaviour as brutal: “...was für ein Widerstand, wie tief mußte er noch in sie reintreten...” (*Keiner weiß mehr*, 145).

Langston, *Visions of Violence: German Avant-Gardes after Fascism*, investigates the post-fascist body imaginary in the work of avant-garde German writers such as Brinkmann. His findings show that the texts of such writers are pervaded by mutilated, assaulted, and tortured bodies in a replication of fascist violence: “West German avant-gardes undertake a fantastic archaeology of violated and violent bodies in order to substantiate those episodes from Germany’s past that have eluded the empires of

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287 A bolt-action rifle used by Austro-Hungarian army in WWI.
epistemology and historiography." This is consistent with McGlothlin’s 2006 study on the response of the German second generation to the Holocaust, in which she identifies the desire of second-generation children to vicariously inscribe themselves into their fathers’ violent pasts.

In the homosexuality and transvestism of many of its patrons, *Die Palette* depicts counter models to this form of masculinity; its protagonist, Jäcki, is homosexual, non-violent, and tolerant of difference. Vesper’s feminized appearance is a repudiation of the model of masculinity associated with Nazism: “Wenn man die Haare und Zähne in den Magazinen der Nazistischen Lager gesehen hat, dann wird man das Grauenvolle in einer bukolischen Szene begreifen. Wer Haare abschneiden will, will im Grunde Köpfe abschneiden” (*Die Reise*, 70). He constructs himself as weak and defenceless, emphasizing “die armseligen, empfindlichen Gewebe meines Körpers ... nur Gewebe, Fleisch, leicht zersetzliches Eiweiß, sezierbar durch jeden Schnitt, Kalk, der sich umsetzt, Haare, Zähne, die verfallen, ausfallen...” (*Die Reise*, 121). In imagery that draws attention to his vulnerability, “mit ausgebreiteten Armen, nackt zwischen Sternen und Erde” (*Die Reise*, 92), he presents an alternative to the defended, “armoured” male associated with the Nazis, and embodied by the image of the soldier in Jünger’s *In Stahlgewittern* (1920). In *Keiner weiß mehr* by contrast, Rainer’s disinhibited homosexuality is rejected by the protagonist in terms that expose his own brutality. Observing Rainer, he muses: “Du hast ein fettes schwitzendes Gesicht ... du hast dicke Augen ... und du stinkst ... Eigentlich bist du häßlich ... Dein Gesicht hat was von ’nem Schwein, dieses Fett und diese Schnauze und dann diese kugeligen Augen...” (*Keiner weiß mehr*, 245).

In similar vein, Sebald presents alternatives to the authoritarian model of masculinity associated with the rejected fathers. Sebald’s male characters are typically passive melancholics, such as Henry Selwyn, Ambros Adelwarth, neurasthenic *Verstandesmenschen*, exemplified by Austerlitz and Max Aurach, or flamboyantly eccentric artist-figures, such as Swinburne and FitzGerald. The crypto-homosexuality of characters such as Henry Selwyn, Ambros Adelwarth, and Cosmo Solomon, offers an alternative to the emotionally hardened male identified by Theweleit (2000) with

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the fascist body fantasy. Sebald’s resistance to the authoritarian German model of masculinity is explored by Finch (2007a, 2013), who argues that, in Sebald’s narrative prose, homosexual love offers a mode of opposition to the hegemony of oppressive patriarchal structures, and poses “a queer revolutionary potential” to disrupt the linearity of history with an alternative, disorientated, and suspended, poetics. To Finch, Sebald’s refusal of narrative closure and determinacy approaches a mode of resistance to oppressive structures:

Such characteristics are fundamental to the structures of Sebald’s prose, with its digressive sentence structure, backwards-looking narrative gaze, and associative rather than linear textual structure ... In keeping with his rejection of patriarchal systems of dominance, Sebald rejects any authoritative ‘master narrative’ under the control of a single narrative viewpoint in favour of a periscopic style, in which narratives are nested within narratives, and authority is distributed and undermined.289

Finch’s observation is consistent with a redemptive view of homosexuality articulated in her 2007 study. Her argument is weakened by the uncertain question of homosexuality in Sebald’s writing, in which homosexual attraction between characters such as Henry Selwyn and Naegeli, Ambros Adelwarth and Cosmo Solomon, Austerlitz and Gerald, is intimated, and always covert; the fate of Sebald’s crypto-homosexual characters moreover, undermines the revolutionary potential of their sexual dissidence: Henry Selwyn kills himself many years after the death of his presumed lover Naegeli, Ambros Adelwarth follows Cosmo Solomon to the ironically named Samaria Sanatorium, where, through a harrowing mimesis of the latter’s fate, he endures electro-convulsive therapy that extinguishes all cognitive processes, and dies. Gerald, the object of Austerlitz’ affection, is killed in a flying accident, and the homosexual fantasies of Kafka in Venice (*Schwindel.Gefühle*), remain unfulfilled.

Implicit in the rejection of the fascist body is a deeper ambivalence towards genealogical continuity. The desire for break from a genealogy contaminated by Nazism is fundamental to protest literature, and thematized in Sebald’s prose fiction. On an extreme level, protest is directed against existence itself, and takes the form of

289 Finch 2013, 6.
fantasies of abortion, negative portrayal of the female body, and depictions of the sex-act as alienating. Musing on his recurring fantasy of abortion, the protagonist of Brinkmann’s *Keiner weiß mehr* observes: “Es waren immer dieselben Vorstellungen gewesen. Daß sie mit weit gespreizten Beinen daliegen würde, die Beinen an den Tischbeinen angebunden, damit sie nicht zuckten, wenn er es mit der Nadel in ihr anpiekte...” (*Keiner weiß mehr*, 16). The desire to extinguish potential life is expressed with cold detachment:

> Mit einer gekrümmten Stricknadel wäre es so leicht herauszuziehen gewesen, mit viel Blut wahrscheinlich, dunklem, tränigem Schleim, verdickt, der langsam weggesackt wäre, verschwunden... (*Keiner weiß mehr*, 13)

Similar fantasies are expressed in Fichte’s *Die Palette*: “Dann würde es sich nur noch um Wasserdruck, Pumpkraft handeln und um die Reinigungskraft der Seife, um die Ätzwirkung auf Grund der Reinigungskraft, die Häute zerfrißt, die Eihäute zerfrißt, das Wasser läuft, Fruchtwasser läuft, der Fifi verreckt” (290). Here, the objective tone, and choice of lexicon, such as *Reinigung* and *verrecken*, evoke the language of Nazi genocide, and imply rejection of a genealogy contaminated by Nazism. In *Keiner weiß mehr*, rejection of the idea of procreation is expressed in repellent imagery relating to the female body, its “schleimige Flüssigkeit, etwas wolktig trüb”, and its “durchdringender Geruch” (*Keiner weiß mehr*, 20-21). Indeed, Brinkmann’s text is characterized by intense misogyny: “Was verwandelte Frauen so sehr, was, daß sie so werden ließ, auf einmal so viel älter geworden, dieses Unberechenbare, Gewalttätige, klebrig an ihnen klebend am ganzen Körper” (*Keiner weiß mehr*, 51). There is an emphasis on ageing and useless breasts as symbols of rejected maternity: “...hängende Brüste, Beutel, lose Säckchen, die sich in den Bustenhalterschalen stauen” (*Keiner weiß mehr*, 51). Fantasies of destruction reflect the protagonist’s misogyny: “...man konnte sie nur totschlagen, mit einem Knüppel, aus Notwehr” (*Keiner weiß mehr*, 45). The longing for genealogical rupture is, at times, conflicted. On the one hand, Vesper’s rejection of genealogy is aggressive: “Ich hasse diese Deutschen, diese auf den Straßen herumrollenden Gemüse” (*Die Reise*, 18). In a drug-fuelled fantasy, he betrays his consciousness of familial contamination by fascism: “Ich muß versuchen, die brennende Flamme zu löschen, aber es ist gar nicht Hitler, ist mein Vater, ist meine Kindheit...” (*Die Reise*, 107). On the other hand, a vision of rebirth paradoxically

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betrays a longing for Neuanfang and genealogical connection: “SO IST ES! Ich wurde geboren, ich sprengte die Haut, das warme Fruchtwasser lief aus, und an der Brust meiner Mutter trank ich... (Die Reise, 18).

Descriptions of sex in protest writing typically depict it as impersonal, “Hier ist sie. Hier ist er.” (Keiner weiß mehr, 33), or violent, “Tottrampeln würde er sie, den wenn hier einer überhaupt kaputtging, dann sie...” (Keiner weiß mehr, 104). In Keiner weiß mehr, the solipsistic alienation within the marriage is expressed through repetition: “Der eine konnte dabei dem anderen nicht helfen. Selbst eingesackt. Versackt. In sich selbst. Ich bin allein. Ein Trauriges Lied. Wer damit für sich zuerst angefangen hatte, er, sie, ich bin allein, ich bin allein...” (Keiner weiß mehr, 147). The pervasive motif of void conveys the meaninglessness of the relationship:

Man hörte nichts mehr. Sämtliche Geräusche waren verstummt ... da gab es jetzt nur diese helle, körperlose Leere ... Die Leere nahm zu, der Raum ein Loch, das so in sich selbst zurückging, bis nichts mehr übrigblieb. (Keiner weiß mehr, 7)

Resistance to fatherhood and reproduction, and to family as a bourgeois institution is encapsulated by Achternbusch: “Ich mag keine Kinder, nur Waisenkinder” (Der Tag wird kommen, 153). Alienated marriage is exemplified by Brinkmann’s text in which the partners are reduced to atomized body parts, “Beine, Knie, Gesichter, Abdrücke von Brüsten” (Keiner weiß mehr, 109), the human body mapped as a geographical form, a “plattgedrückte Fläche” (Keiner weiß mehr, 7), a “Hohlraum” (Keiner weiß mehr, 17). In Das Kalkwerk, Bernhard depicts a marriage in which the couple is radically estranged from each other and the outside world. As the protagonist, Konrad, observes: “Zwischen ihnen sei schon lange nichts mehr als ein Zustand, den er sich nurmehr noch als Ignoration zu bezeichnen getraue” (Das Kalkwerk, 193). In his construction of the lime quarry, Bernhard consciously inverts the bourgeois notion of marriage: “In Wirklichkeit ist aber das Ehepaar Konrad ... genau in das Gegenteil einer Idylle hineingegangen, wie es ins Kalkwerk hineingegangen ist” (Das Kalkwerk, 85). The couple is both utterly estranged, and inextricably bound, by “festgeschlossene, festverriegelte Türen, festvergitterte Fenster, alles festverschlossen und festverriegelt und festvergittert” (Das Kalkwerk, 20). In Strauß’ Rumor, the narrator’s observatations of marital abuse, embodied by the image of the wife’s
“brauner Prellfleck ... wäßriger Rotz” and “Krümmungen der Folter” (Rumor, 21-22), suggest the violence prevalent to this damaged society. That such violence is part of an endemic history of German violence is suggested by the Holocaust imagery that describes the site of abuse, the couple’s bedroom, a “stille Folter und Vernichtungsraum. Eine Blutgrube das Bett. Das Lager in jedem” (Rumor, 23).

In protest writing, the notion of home as emblematic of family and nurture is challenged. The cold sterility of Bernhard’s lime quarry radically undermines the domestic picture of home as a source of affective warmth and refuge: imagery of stone conveys the sterility of the marriage, the lime quarry itself, “vollkommen frei von Zierat” (Das Kalkwerk, 20) is a metaphor for the coldness that characterizes this marriage. The apartment of Brinkmann’s nameless protagonist is defined by “helle, körperlose Leere” (Keiner weiß mehr, 7) that metaphorically conveys its alienating quality. Sebald similarly subverts the positive connotations of “home” to present the family home as a site of congenital contamination: In “Il ritorno in patria” (SG), the room in which the narrator was born has a Hengge fresco, and the Blut und Boden iconography for which the Nazi artist, Hengge, was known, continues to exert “einen vernichtenden Eindruck” on the narrator (SG, 227). The notion of “home” here is contaminated by the ideology of Nazism, and the narrator, it is suggested, is destroyed by it from the moment of his birth under its sinister sign. As Niehaus observes, “The apartments and homes in Sebald’s books are not places to meet or to encounter other people, they are not part of a social environment. The characters have not established their inner selves, their living quarters or their habits.”

Austerlitz’ London home is described as austere and utilitarian, the “Feldbett” (A, 240) a sign of his intinerancy. In Sebald’s prose fiction, the family home as a functional concept is relegated to the past, and restricted to Jewish homes, such as the Lanzberg family home depicted in “Max Aurach.” The elaborate description of Henry Selwyn’s house presents it as a metaphor for the false nature of his marriage: observing it, the narrator is reminded of the facade of Versailles, “eine ganz und zwar zwecklose, aus der Entfernung allerdings sehr eindrucksvolle Kulisse, deren Fenster geradeso glänzend und blind gewesen waren wie die des Hauses, vor welchem wir standen” (DA, 9). The English manor house, a metaphor for ancestral continuity, becomes in Sebald’s writing, a symbol of

290 Niehaus 2006, 320.
genealogical decay: Somerleyton has been ausgebrannt, abgerissen, ungenutzt, verstaubt, verschlossen, its family portraits disintegrating, “von furchtbaren scharlachroten und violetten Flecken unterlaufen” (RS, 49).

Like the writing of his 1960s generation, Sebald’s work reveals a rejection of genealogical continuity in the sense of procreation. Descriptions of sex are rare, and where they occur, are detached and suggestive of repelled fascination. In Die Ringe des Saturn, the narrator observes a couple on the beach:

Es war ein Menschenpaar, das dort drunten lag, auf dem Grund der Grube ... ein Mann, ausgestreckt über dem Körper eines anderen Wesens, von dem nichts sichtbar war als die angewinkelten, nach außen gekehrten Beinen. Und in der eine Ewigkeit währenden Schrecksekunde in der dieses Bild mich durchfuhr, kam es mir vor, als sei ein Zucken durch die Füße des Mannes gefahren wie bei einem gerade Gehenkten ... Ungestalt gleich einer großen, ans Land geworfenen Molluske lagen sie da ... ein von weit draußen hereingetriebenes, vielgliedriges, doppelköpfiges Seeungeheuer, letztes Exemplar einer monströsen Art...” (RS, 88)

The association of the sex act with monstrousness and death is a repudiation of procreation. Indeed, other conflations of monstrousness and reproduction in Sebald’s writing, such as the “Monstrum auf dem Grunde des Baikalsees bei seinem Paarungsgeschäft” (RS, 33) suggest a view of reproduction as part of a deforming order, to be resisted.

In Sebald’s prose fiction, the idea of family and generational continuity is challenged through the depiction of marriages and relationships that are loveless, such as that between Henry Selwyn and his wife, or sterile and platonic, such as those between Austerlitz and Marie de Verneuil, Paul Bereyter and Lucy Landau. Meaningful relationships, exemplified by Henry Selwyn and Naegeli, Austerlitz and Gerald, Ambros and Cosmo, tend to be, at least implicitly, homosexual and without the prospect of children. Indeed, children, as a symbol of generational continuity, are largely absent from Sebald’s world. Where children do occasionally appear, they are invisible, such as the Jewish children whose singing the narrator overhears outside a Jewish community centre in Vienna (SG, 44), or ghostly “Schattenfiguren”, encountered by the narrator of “Max Aurach” in the empty lots of Manchester (DA,
None of Sebald’s protagonists has children, and children are generally relegated to the realm of memory, appearing in “Paul Bereyter” and “Il ritorno in patria” in the narrator’s recollection of childhood and school days, and in “Max Aurach,” in Luisa Lanzberg’s memories of family life before the war. By consigning the idea of children and family life to the past, Sebald proves himself to be more repudiative of genealogical continuity than paradigmatic protest writers: both Brinkmann and Vesper present their protagonists as fathers, indicating a degree of futurity that is absent in Sebald’s writing.

Sebald’s depiction of isolated individuals establishes him as more resistant to the bourgeois norm of family than his generation of 1960s writers. While the protagonists of Brinkmann, Fichte, Handke, and Bernhard’s texts are situated, and often alienated, within the context of a family or couple, Sebald’s protagonists are typically isolated individuals, separated from society in a form of voluntary hermitism. Sebald’s hermits are people who have suffered trauma or who retreat from a shameful past: Henry Selwyn suffers dispossession and displacement; his denial of his Jewish origins fills him with shame. Paul Bereyter, Max Aurach and Ambros Adelwarth suffer the loss of loved ones; Dr Abramsky and Major Le Strange witness horror, the former as a psychiatrist at the Samaria Sanatorium, the latter as part of the tank regiment that liberated Belsen, and who lives “gleich dem heiligen Hieronymus in der Wüste” (RS, 83). Max Aurach lives and paints alone in his crepuscular studio, Henry Selwyn inhabits a small “Einsiedelei, der von ihm sogenannten Folly” (DA, 18), and describes himself as “ein Bewohner des Gartens, a kind of ornamental hermit” (DA, 11). The isolated individual’s withdrawal from society is an expression of resistance to a society from which he feels extruded: Ambros as a homosexual, Henry Selwyn as a covert Jew, Aurach as an exile. The allusion to the author-narrator’s namesake, the hermit St Sebolt in his “Einsiedelei im Reichswald” (RS, 107), aligns Sebald himself with these alienated individuals, and serves as a reminder of his self-imposed outsider position.

There is a marked difference between Sebald’s depiction of Jewish and German families. Luisa Lanzberg’s memoirs (“Max Aurach”) depict a close and nurturing family life, its rhythm dictated by Jewish festivals, one lived within the context of a tolerant German society, the embodiment of the idealized “German-Jewish symbiosis”. With its emphasis on family and tradition, Jewish family life, exemplified by the Lanzbergs, the Aurachs, and the Landauers, is depicted in *Die Ausgewanderten*.
as a more desirable alternative to German family life. The latter is shown in “Il ritorno in patria” to be haunted by violence, secrets, and xenophobia, symbolized by the attic of a neighbour, Mathild, a *Wunderkammer* in which the objects are symbols of the dissolution and tragedy perceived by the narrator to underlie German family life. To the youthful narrator exploring the attic, the ghostly tailor’s dummy of the “bei Marengo gefallener Jäger” is a reminder of “ein durch nichts auf der Welt mehr auszugleichendes Unglück vor Augen” (SG, 250), an embodiment of an inescapable and negative legacy.

In their rejection of genealogical continuity, protest writers thematize the trope of the incompetent or diseased body, incapable of continuing the generational line. Describing the psychopathology of the second generation, Eckstaedt observes: “Das Totalitäre, das die Elterngeneration unter dem Nationalsozialismus erlebt, aber auch geduldet hatte, trat in der ‘zweiten Generation’ in Übertragungen als eine Krankheit in Erscheinung.” She notes the prevalence of headaches amongst these patients, and links these to a burden on rational function dating back to childhood. Sickness, particularly headaches, disable the protagonist, of *Das Kalkwerk*: “Wie oft habe er in der Kindheit im Bett liegen müssen, fiebernd, in Schmerzen ... fast die ganze Kindheit entlang habe er an dem sogenannten Kinderkopfschmerz gelitten...” (*Das Kalkwerk*, 49-50). Illness becomes a pervasive metaphor in *Das Kalkwerk* for rejection of a society perceived to be sick: “Die ganze Landschaft um das Kalkwerk sei eine ständige immer gleich alles und alle ansteckende Quelle aller möglichen Krankheiten...” (*Das Kalkwerk*, 54). Konrad’s wife is depicted as chronically ill: “Schon vor der Heirat sei die Krankheit plötzlich ihrer ganzen Fürchterlichkeit in ihr zum Ausbruch gekommen, er, Konrad, habe seine Frau aber schon als schwer Kranke und Verkrüppelte geheiratet...” (*Das Kalkwerk*, 228). Konrad himself suffers increasingly from “Organschwäche ... deren Auswirkungen unter Umständen schon sehr bald tödlich sein könnten” (*Das Kalkwerk*, 229). The thematization of the incompetent body in *Das Kalkwerk* is graphically portrayed in the description of Konrad’s attempts to get rid of his murdered wife’s corpse: “Ungefähr in der Mitte des oberen Vorhauses habe Konrad das Vorhaben, die Tote ans wasserseitige Fenster zu schleifen und hinauszuwerfen,

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aufgegeben, möglicherweise wollte er auch plötzlich die Leiche gar nicht mehr wegschaffen ... und er habe die stärker und stärker Blutende wieder in ihr Zimmer zurückgeschleift und unter Zuhilfenahme aller seiner Kräfte wieder in ihren Sessel gesetzt..." (Das Kalkwerk, 13). In a densely hypotaxic passage that trails inconclusively into ellipsis, the image of the wife’s bleeding, lifeless, and burdensome body expresses absolute negation of life. In Rumor, Strauß uses the metaphor of Grit’s diseased body as “verwundet, hingefällt” (Rumor, 101) to suggest “irgendetwas ist los” in post-war German society (Rumor, 12). The physical and mental deterioration of the protagonist too, are symptomatic of a society in decay. Observing her father, Grit notices

...wie die Haut fahler und faltiger geworden ist. Der Mund hängt oft etwas schlaff herab. Die Augen haben einen seidigen Glanz, scheinen offen für alles ferne, müde fürs Greifbare ... Es scheint, als sei ein Teil seines Wesens und auch seines Körpers in einem plötzlichen Vorsprung ins Alter vorausgestürzt. (Rumor, 44-45)

In Sebald’s narrative prose, broken, failing or diseased bodies are symbols of a damaged perception of the future, and of a society perceived as beyond healing. Ambros Adelwarth is described as suffering from “schwere Melancholie … verbunden mit stuporöser Katatonie” and “heilloses Leid” (DA, 162), and his psychiatric treatment is described as “eine Folterprozedur oder ein Martyrium” (DA, 163). The description of the body of the Chinese emperor Hsien-Feng is graphic and visceral: “Das Wasser war ihm aus dem Unterleib bereits bis ans Herz gestiegen, und die Zellen seines allmählich sich auflösenden Körpers trieben in der aus den Blutbahnen in sämtliche Zwischenräume des Gewebes einsickernden salzigen Flüssigkeit wie die Fische im Meer” (RS, 176). The diseased body is an object of disgust, epitomized by the “flatterndes Herz, purpurfarben angelaufenes Gesicht, gelbe Zunge” (RS, 184) of the young emperor, Kuang-Hsu. The journey to Jerusalem in the story of Ambros Adelwarth thematizes disease, evident in the vertiginous listing of hospices and hospitals, “das Johanniterspital  ... das Montefiorehospiz und das moravische Leprosenhaus” (DA, 205), the “ausbrechende Epidemien” (205), the wells that have become “ungenießbar”, and the miasmic “Tümpel und Senkgruben” (DA, 207). The emphasis here on sickness and filth suggests a fundamental rejection of the regenerative potential of the body.
Sebald shares with his generation a fascination with abnormality. Fichte’s relentless catalogue of human deformity, of “Lurchlein ... ohne Hände und Füße, mit Pellen und Knorpeln statt der Gesichter ... Delphinköpfe, weinende Gnomenchefs ohne Pupillen ... Köpfe mit kalkigen Ringelnatteraugen, Köpfe, deren Ohren an den Backen sitzen...” (Die Palette, 289) reflects a profound repudiation of procreation. Fichte adopts a detached documentary tone to discuss human reproduction, using extracts from a gynaecological textbook that evoke for the narrator, depictions of German atrocities published after the war (Die Palette, 289). Like Fichte, Sebald is fascinated by the abnormal body as a metaphor for rejected genealogy. Austerlitz’ visit to the Museum of Natural History dwells on grotesque specimens of animal and human abnormality, “pathologisch verformte Organe, Schrumpfherzen und aufgedunsene Lebern ... Monstrositäten jeder nur denkbaren und unendbaren Art” (A, 378), that negate a positive notion of reproduction. Intrinsic to this fascination with abnormality and monstrousness is a resistance to the normative discourse of clinical medicine that distinguishes the normal from the aberrant. As Long points out, these “archives of the monstrous … are the product of a certain medical gaze, a conception of the body that differentiates not between the healthy and the sick, but between the normal and the deviant.”293 In the work of second-generation German writers, it expresses extreme negativity about genealogical continuity.

Critique of institutions of authority

For the student protesters of 1968, the most overt area of protest involves institutions of authority: the State, the Justice system, and education, in particular, the universities. The continuity of Nazi ideology in post-war German institutions is seen as pervasive and contaminating. In Keiner weiß mehr, Brinkmann’s denunciation of the post-fascist German state is total, and his use of Nazi terminology, originally applied to Jews - “Juda, verrecke!” - points to the persistence of National Socialism in post-war Germany that constitutes the underlying cause of his fury:

Deutschland, verrecke … verrecke damit, auf der Stelle, sofort, verreck.

Damit es still wird, endlich, nach solange Zeit, still. Keine

293 Long 2007, 37.

By comparison with the overtly denunciatory tone that marks protest literature, Sebald’s critique of state power tends to be oblique. His works of narrative prose expose the capacity of the state to control, distort, and shape consciousness, and his depiction of institutions of power, such as the school and the lawcourt, imply his dissident stance. Sebald’s mistrust of state power is articulated in an essay on Canetti, in which he states: “Das System der Macht ist somit nicht nur eines der Hierarchisierung, sondern auch der Kontiguität. Es wuchert nach unten ... breitet lateral aus, so daß es zuletzt nirgends mehr ein Entkommen gibt.” Such attitudes are mirrored in Austerlitz’ reflections on “die Familienähnlichkeiten” between buildings that reflect capitalist power, and on “Ordnungszwang und den Zug ins Monumentale, der sich manifestierte in Gerichtshöfen und Strafanstalten, in Bahnhofs- and

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Börsengebäuden, in Opern- und Irrenhäusern und den nach rechtwinkligen Rastern angelegten Siedlungen für die Arbeiterchaft” (A, 48). State control of knowledge through the institution of the school is implicitly criticized in the Borgesian story of Tlön and Uqbar, retold in Die Ringe des Saturn (89-91), in which it becomes a parable of the potential for insidious state power to obliterate reality:

Die labyrinthische Konstruktion Tlöns ... steht im Begriff, die bekannte Welt auszulöschen. Schon ist das ... Idiom von Tlö in die Schule eingedrungen, schon überdeckt die Geschichte Tlöns alles, was wir vordem einmal wußten oder zu wissen glaubten, schon zeigen sich in der Historiographie die unbestreitbaren Vorteile einer fiktiven Vergangenheit … Alle Sprachen, selbst Spanisch, Französisch und Englisch, werden vom Planeten verschwinden. Die Welt wird Tlö sein. (RS, 91)

This Borgesian parable reminds the reader of the infiltration of German society by Nazi ideology, and functions here as a condemnation of, and warning against, state-controlled knowledge. In Rumor, Strauß’s protagonist condemns a media-saturated society, and articulates a similar concern: “Statt Geschichte und Entziffern der Kulturen lernen sie vernünftig fernsehen … Ich sage dir: ein, zwei Generationen noch, und es werden vollkommen erinnerungsfreie Menschen durch ihr Schicksal schweben. Nach uns werden sie alles vergessen, was einmal war…” (Rumor, 31-32).

As Long (2007) points out, in Sebald’s prose fiction, the power of the State to control knowledge and history is explored in institutions devoted to collecting and ordering information. In Austerlitz, twenty-two pages are devoted to the Grande Bibliotheque in Paris, depicted in terms that emphasise the asymmetrical power relationship between the state as ordering and shaping knowledge, and the powerlessness of those wishing to acquire knowledge. As an archive of information, it is calculated “zur Verunsicherung und Erniedrigung der Leser” (A, 395). Likened to a Zikkurat, the library is an overt symbol of state power, evoking the omnipotence of the Babylonian kings. Built on the site of a storage depot of confiscated Jewish property, the library symbolizes the corrupt basis of state power: “Die ganze Geschichte [ist G.S.] ... unter den Fundamenten der Grande Bibliotheque unseres pharaonisches Präsident [begraben]” (A, 409). Sebald’s depictions of commemorative sites as structured,
petrified versions of history challenge state-sanctioned memory by exposing the potential for historical revisionism inherent to such sites, and reflect his consciousness, as a second-generation writer, of the problem of representing a violent past. Young notes that Germans are “heirs to a double-edged postwar legacy: a deep distrust of monumental forms in the light of their systematic exploitation by the Nazis…”\textsuperscript{295} In *Die Ringe des Saturn*, the lengthy description of the Belgian Waterloo memorial, the *Löwenmonument*, reflects this distrust, and offers an ironic depiction of the state memorial as a way of structuring public consciousness. The pretentiousness of this Belgian state memorial is deflated by comparison of its “mächtige Kuppelrotunde” and “Riesenrundgemälde” (RS, 151) with the pitiful reality of its inept construction, embodied by the rotunda resembling a “Zirkusbau”. The Waterloo memorial as an emblem of state control serves a deeper function as a metanarratorial metaphor for the writing process itself, and the impossibility of recreating the past: “Das also, denkt man, indem man langsam im Kreis geht, ist die Kunst der Repräsentation der Geschichte. Sie beruht auf einer Fälschung der Perspektive. Wir, die Überlebenden, sehen alles von oben herunter und wissen dennoch nicht, wie es war” (RS, 152).

The catch-cry of the student protesters, “Unter den Talaren Muff von tausend Jahren”, encapsulates the accusation that post-war German universities continued to propagate the spirit of National Socialism. Condemnation of post-war education, particularly of the universities as institutions of Nazi continuity, is central to protest writing, and evident in educational initiatives of the protest movement, such as the role of the left-wing forum, *Das Argument*, and the exposure of ideological-structural continuities with fascism in German universities, including the continued presence of Nazi-implicated teachers.\textsuperscript{296} Vesper’s pejorative attitude to an education system perceived as anachronistic is seen in his dismissive remark, “Die Germanistik ist eine Archäologie, die sich mit den Fossilien jener Epoche beschäftigt” (*Die Reise*, 46).  


Condemnation of post-war education as inculcating historical amnesia is stridently articulated in Strauß’s *Rumor*: “Die Schule! Hand in Hand mit den täglichen Löscharbeiten des Fernsehens ... der in den Kindern jeden Brand von Gier und Ach erstickt” (*Rumor*, 31-32).

Sebald’s resistance to post-war university education, and to the teaching of *Germanistik* in particular, is, for the most part, implicit in his narrative prose. An exception to this is the explicit criticism offered by the narrator of *Austerlitz*, who describes the eponymous protagonist as his first significant teacher, comparing him with *Germanistik* teachers at his German university, “den seinerzeit dort amtierenden, größtenteils in den dreißiger und vierziger Jahren in ihrer akademischen Laufbahn vorangerückten und immer noch in ihren Machtphantasien befangenen Geisteswissenschaftlern [von denen G.S.] er so gut wie gar nichts gelernt hatte” (*A*, 51-52). Sebald’s narrative prose reveals a resistant stance towards education *per se*, and the deficiencies of post-war German Catholic schooling in particular. Condemnation of schooling is inherent to *Austerlitz*:’ description of schools as embodying “die verschiedensten Formen der Großtyrannei und des Kleindespotismus, der erzwungenen Dienstleistung, der Versklavung, der Hörigkeit, der Begünstigung und des Zürückgesetztwerdens, der Heldenverehrung, des Ostrazismus, des Strafvollzugs und der Begnadigung…” (*A*, 90). The story of “Paul Bereyter” (*Die Ausgewanderten*) reveals the deficiencies of the repressive Catholic post-war German schooling by presenting Bereyter’s unconventional “Anschauungsunterricht” (*DA*, 58) as an alternative educational model. Paul’s educational method reflects Sebald’s awareness of the anti-authoritarian education programme which in the 1960s, established alternative “Kinderläden” based on the notion that children should follow their own inclinations and intuition. Paul’s teaching echoes the educational theories of Swiss educational reformer Pestalozzi297 regarding the natural unfolding of a child’s abilities, and is presented as the antithesis of the authoritarian German education system, based on “das Einmaleins, die Grundrechenarten, die deutsche und die lateinische Schrift, Naturlehre, Heimatkunde, das Singen und die sogenannte Leibeserziehung” (*DA*, 53).

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297 Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, Swiss educational reformer 1746-1827.
Sebald’s critical attitude to post-war German education is seen in his ironic descriptions of Catholic educators, such as the “lispelnde Katechet Meier” (53), and his dismissive reference to “katholische Salbaderei” (DA, 53). The Weihwasser episode reveals the Benefiziaten as stupid and gullible, vacillating between “der Vermutung systematischer Böswilligkeit und der bisweilen aufflackernden Hoffnung, es handle sich hier um einen höheren Fingerzeug, wo nicht gar um ein Wunder” (DA, 54). His condemnation of the Catholic education system is expressed though Paul’s small acts of subversion: removing the whitewash from the windows, failing to go to Church on Sundays, associating with a known atheist, and chastising a pupil for his “geradezu ungläublichen Grad an Bigottheit” (55). Through the description of “das flammende Herz Jesus darstellendes Weihwasserbehältnis” (DA, 54), the Catholic religion is depicted as tawdry. Reflecting on his schooling in the post-war years, the narrator of “Il ritorno in patria” remembers learning the “Unglückschronik” of German victimhood, according to which the world wars are remembered in terms of local losses: “1914-1918 – für die Heimat starben 68 Söhne des Ortes. 1939-1945 – aus dem zweiten Weltkrieg kehrten 125 der Unsrigen nicht mehr heim.” (SG, 263) The language of Heimat and heim underlines the role of post-war schooling in promoting the centrality of German victimhood to the German discourse on the Nazi past.

The continued tenure of former Nazis in the Judiciary is a significant focus of protest in the 1960s, the decade that saw the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt (1963-64), and the Eichmann trial of 1966. In his discussion of the criminal prosecution of Nazi crimes in the 1960s, von Miquel notes the ambiguous German judicial response to these trials, reflecting, on the one hand, unease at the re-integration of Nazi perpetrators without trial, and on the other, a Schlußstrich mentality and an unwillingness to confront the reality that the genocidal acts of the Third Reich were accomplished with the active cooperation of the German population. Lillteicher observes a churlish and

legalistic approach taken by the judiciary with regard to issues of restitution. The microcosm of the lime quarry (*Das Kalkwerk*) represents Bernhard’s condemnation of post-war Austrian society and culture: the law that finally catches up with Konrad is shown to be lawless itself; the *Gendarmen* who arrest Konrad for the murder of his wife, are depicted as drunk and corrupt, the unreliability of their testimony suggested by their conflicting versions of the crime, and the destabilizing use of the conjunctive to indicate uncertainty. Konrad is unimpeded by any moral institution from torturing his wife. Bernhard’s condemnation of the justice system is total: “Die Justiz verfolge größtenteils Unschuldige, die Unschuldigsten ... die Ärmsten der Armen, jeden von der Justiz Gejagten habe man zu schützen, mit allem Mitteln...” (*Das Kalkwerk*, 218).

He protests against what he sees as the partiality of the Justice system: “Nichts sei letztten Endes charakterloser und von Launen und Wetter und Sympathie und Antipathie abhängiger als die Gerichte...” (*Das Kalkwerk*, 87).

Sebald’s condemnation of the institution and administration of Justice is expressed in figurative terms that emphasize its capacity to disorient, intimidate, and to disempower the subject. Imagery of stone, labyrinth, and monstrosity conveys his negativity towards the Justice system, portrayed as inherently cruel and inhumane. Thus the Brussels Palace of Justice is described in terms that imply the cruelty carried out in the name of Law. The narrator and Austerlitz meet at the “Brüsseler Galgenberg” (A, 46), the name evoking the hangings in the past; the building itself is described as an “architektonischen Monstrosität” (A, 47), an exercise in futility, with its “Korridore und Treppen ... die nirgendwo hinführten ... türlose Räume und Hallen, die von niemandem je zu betreten seien und deren ummauerte Leere das innerste Geheimnis sei aller sanktionierten Gewalt” (A, 47). The images of “steinerne Gebirge”, “Säulenwälder” and “kolossalen Statuen” (A, 47) that characterize the Brussels Palace of Justice, contribute to a perception of the Law as unassailable and archaic, while the simile of “wie Packeis ineinanderverschobenen bleigrauen Dächern” (A, 47), emphasizes the cold remorselessness of Judicial power. The barber, Achterbos, who pursues his profession in the basement of the Palace of Justice (A, 48) evokes Herbert

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Achternbusch, seditious German writer and dramatist. By alluding to this subversive figure through the absurd figure of the Friseur, Achterbos, plying his trade in the labyrinthine basement of the Palace of Justice, Sebald undermines the dignity of Justice as an institution. Achterbos’ presence in the context of the sinister Palace of Justice exposes the institution of Justice as not only cruel, but fundamentally absurd.

Sebald depicts the power of the state to control all aspects of human life, including sexual behaviour. In the story of Irish revolutionary, Roger Casement (Die Ringe des Saturn), tainted state evidence, in the form of “Fälschung der Tatbestände” (RS, 159), and Casement’s so-called black diary, containing details of his homosexual exploits (RS, 160-161), are used in evidence against him by a legal system shown to be contaminated by homophobia. The cruelties of the Venetian system of Justice under the Doge rulership are described in “all’estero” (Schwindel.Gefühle.) in a paraphrase of Grillparzer’s Tagebuch auf der Reise nach Italien. The narrator refers to the Doge’s Palace, “in dem die Gerichtsbehörden ihren Wohnsitz aufgeschlagen haben und in dessen innerster Höhle ... das unsichtbare Prinzip brütet. Die Vergeblichen, Verfolger und Verfolgten, die Mörder und die Gemordeten steigen vor ihm auf mit verhüllten Häuptern...” (SG, 63). The story of Casanova that follows illustrates the Kafkaesque injustice of the “Erfindungsreichtum der damaligen Strafjustiz” (SG, 63), according to which “nur ehrenswerte Leute, die man jedoch aus Gründen, die nur den Exzellenten bekannt sind und die den in Haft genommenen nicht eröffnet werden” are condemned. (SG, 65) The system of justice is shown to be corrupting of all, including the interned, who discover, “daß man sich zu einem gewissen Grad mit der Macht in ein Einvernehmen setzen kann” (SG, 66).

Sebald’s narrative prose displays a fascination with the body tortured by the administration of justice: ekphrastic passages relating to Pisanello paintings depict “Galgen, dessen baumelnde Gehenkte - ein beliebter Kunstbegriff jener Zeit...” (SG, 86); the Grünewaldbilder at Colmar exert an annihilating effect on Max Aurach, who is horrified by “die durchbohrten Leiber … und die vor Gram wie Schilfrohr durchgebeugten Körper der Zeugen der Hinrichtung...” (DA, 253). Reflecting on Rembrandt’s “The Anatomy lesson” in Die Ringe des Saturn, the narrator observes the execution of justice as “das archaische Ritual der Zergliederung eines Menschen, um die nach wie vor zum Register der zu verhängenden Strafen gehörende Peinigung des Fleisches des Delinquenten bis über den Tod hinaus” (RS, 23). The question of justice
and its violation structures the text of *Austerlitz*: the fortress of Breendonk appears near the beginning of the text, and again at its close, providing a disturbing picture of the institution of Justice. The former Nazi “Auffang- und Straflager” (A, 32) is depicted in imagery that suggests the deformation of justice it represents: it is “bucklig”, “verbacken”, “ein Ungetüm”, “eine einzige Ausgeburt der Häßlichkeit und der blinden Gewalt” (A, 35). The singular monstrousness of the crimes committed there is implied by the uniqueness of the structure:

Sie ließ keinen Bauplan erkennen, verschob andauernd ihre Ausbuchtungen und Kehlen und wuchs so weit über meine Begriffe hinaus, daß ich sie zuletzt mit keiner mir bekannten Ausformung der menschlichen Zivilisation, nicht einmal mit den stummen Relikten unserer Vor- und Frühgeschichte in irgendeinen Zusammenhang bringen konnte. (A, 34)

The fortress is compared with a monster, “mit den Auswüchsen seiner Glieder und Scheren, mit den an der Stirnseite des Haupttrakts gleich Augen hervortretenden halbrunden Bollwerken und dem Stummelfortsatz am Hinterleib...” (A, 35-36). The “steinharten Furchen durchzogenen Lehmboden” (A, 37) evoke the Nazi use of lime to dissolve human remains, while imagery related to primitive industry and farming, the “Schaufeln und Schubkarren” (A, 36) with which the inmates performed their slave labour, are a reminder of the connection between Justice and industry that facilitated industrialised genocide. The notion of Justice as opaque is conveyed by the concealed nature of the Nazi torture chamber, where the “verschärfte Verhöre” (A, 41) took place, while the metaphor of darkness, the “für immer vom Licht der Natur getrennten Welt” (A, 38), points to the singular delinquency of this system of Justice. The narrator’s own sense of implication in the events he describes is expressed through the domestic images evoked by the torture chamber of Breendonk: its sinister “Abflußgitter” and “ekelhafter Schmierseifengeruch” (A, 41), remind him of the laundry of his childhood home, and indirectly, of his father.
The influence of Adorno and the Frankfurt School

The critical theory of Adorno, Horkheimer and Marcuse, particularly relating to the authoritarian state and the authoritarian personality, provides a philosophical underpinning to the protest movement. The significance of Adorno to the protest movement is confirmed by Briegleb in his analysis of protest literature:


Co-authored by Adorno and Horkheimer during their wartime exile from Germany, *Dialektik der Aufklärung* challenges scientific and industrial progress associated with the Enlightenment. In the light of genocide, the work is a profound critique of the instrumentalisation of reason for irrational causes. In the writing of the protest generation, the influence of the Frankfurt School is manifest in a sociological approach to literature, an awareness of the limitations of representation, a tendency to documentary realism, and concern with marginalized groups and forms of expression. Adorno comments on the potential for destruction inherent in the concept of progress: “Wir hegen keinen Zweifel … daß die Freiheit in der Gesellschaft vom aufklärenden Denken unabtrennbar ist. Jedoch glauben wir … daß der Begriff eben dieses Denkens, in die es verflochten ist, schon den Keim zu jenem Rückschritt enthalten, der heute überall sich ereignet.” 301 In protest literature, Adorno’s *Fortschrittskritik* is reflected in dystopic representations of urban landscapes:

Weit war draußen die Straße zu überblicken gewesen ... mit der Wimpy Bar rechts an der Ecke ... Balkone, die scheinbar nie benutzt wurden ... alle Fronten verwahrlost … mit dem abblätternden Anstrich, dem schuppigen Putz und total vernachlässigten kleinen Vorgärten, mit altem Zeitungspapier gefleckt, verrosteten Dosen, eine allgemeine

300 Briegleb and Weigel 2008, 25.
301 Adorno and Horkheimer 1988, 13.
Verwahrlosung überall, die besonders abends bei der Straßenbeleuchtung auffiel, eingetaucht in dieses Licht, das die Gesichter, überhaupt alles Bloßliegende krank aussehen ließ, die Haut fahl und ausgebleicht und die Lippen kaum merklich blau angelaufen.

(*Keiner weiß mehr*, 154)

In Strauß’s *Rumor*, scepticism about rationality and scientific method is expressed in Bekker’s alienation from his work:

> Das Institut ist ein Scheißhaus des Geistes und eine Zuchtstätte des Idiotismus. Man gleicht diesem Leuchtpunkt mit seinem züngelnden Schweif, ein Geißeltierchen, der immer die gleiche Bahn fällt auf dem Oszillographen ... wieder die gleiche Bahn ... und mit einer Differenzbreite von plus minus 2mm die Präzision einer Systemverschweißung mißt ... Ich muß unablässig an die Vernunft denken, wie ein Idiot, der sie längst verloren hat und ihr trüb nachsinn.

(*Rumor*, 10-11)

Critics note the significance of the Frankfurt School to Sebald’s writing. Hutchinson observes that “the writings of the Frankfurt School were central to his oppositional stance ... Sebald’s work is permeated by the thought-forms of Adorno, Horkheimer and their circle. Although Sebald’s geographical move was an attempt to distance himself from his homeland, intellectually he remained firmly anchored in the thinking of the ‘Jewish’ Frankfurt School.” To Robertson, “Sebald derived from Adorno, Horkheimer and Benjamin an imaginative vision of history. In this deeply pessimistic vision, inspired especially by Adorno and Horkheimer’s *Dialektik der Aufklärung* (1947), ‘progress’ is an illusion.” Sebald’s engagement with the thinking of the Frankfurt School underlines his connections with the protest writing of his generation. Like theirs, his narrative prose reveals a pervasive *Fortschrittskritik*, a sociological approach to literature, a privileging of documentary realism, and an interest in marginalized groups and forms of expression. Through a negative dialectic of progress and destruction that resembles Adorno’s definition of modernity as “an age in which

302 Hutchinson 2011, 268.

303 Robertson 2011, 308.
the real possibility of utopia ... converges in the possibility of total catastrophe,”
dystopic city- and landscapes in Sebald’s narrative prose reflect his condemnation of
the modern world. Paul Bereyter’s bleak observations concerning the connection
between “dem bürgerlichen Utopie- und Ordnungskonzept, wie es in den Entwürfen
und Bauten des Nicolas Ledoux sich manifestierte, und der immer weiter
fortschreitenden Vernichtung und Zerstörung des natürlichen Lebens” (DA, 67) reveal
a debt to Marcuse’s *Fortschrittskritik*:

The more “material” society became in the developed industrial
countries, the more it became evident to what extent such progress
stabilizes misery and misfortune, how this productivity carries
destruction within itself, and to what a great extent it changed technology
from an instrument of liberation into a means of enslavement.  

Hutchinson (2011) observes the influence of Adorno on Sebald’s syntax, in the
juxtaposition of progress and regression that resemble a form of syntactical pendulum:
“Je mehr die Entfernung wächst, desto klarer wird die Sicht” (RS, 30), or “Je mehr
Bilder aus der Vergangenheit ich versammle, desto unwahrscheinlicher wird es mir,
daß die Vergangenheit auf diese Weise sich abgespielt haben soll” (SG, 231). In
Sebald’s writing, Adorno’s negative dialectic of progress and dissolution is apparent
in passages that contrast technological progress and urban decay: surveying a dystopic
urban scene, the narrator of *Ambros Adelwarth* observes

über einem dort aufgeworfenen wahren Riesengebirge aus Müll einen
Jumbo wie ein Untier aus einer ferner Vorzeit schwerfällig in die Luft sich
erheben ... Er zog einen schwarzgrauen Rauchschleier hinter sich her ... Dann ging es hinaus in eine ebene Gegend in der es ... nichts gab als
Krüppelholz, verwachsenes Heidekraut und von ihren Bewohnern
verlassene, teils mit Brettern vernagelte Holzhäuser, umgeben von
zerfallenen Gehegen und Hütten... (DA, 105)

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304 Theodor Adorno 2004, *Ästhetische Theorie* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1995),
156.

305 Herbert Marcuse, *Kultur und Gesellschaft* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968)
10.
Wandering the decaying streets of Manchester, the narrator juxtaposes this dystopic reality with the image of Manchester as a former “Industriejerusalem” (DA, 245), a symbol of industrial progress:

Ich bin auf diesen Wanderungen ... immer wieder erschüttert gewesen von der Rückhaltlosigkeit, mit der die anthrazitfarbene Stadt, von der aus das Programm der Industrialisierung über die ganze Welt sich ausgebreitet hat, die Spuren ihrer augenscheinlich chronisch gewordenen Verarmung und Degradiertheit dem Betrachter preisgab. (DA, 231)

The deterioration of Deauville is depicted in imagery that emphasizes a negative dialectic of progress and decay: the “einst legendäre Seebad” is presented as “hoffnungslos heruntergekommen ... und ruiniert vom Autoverkehr, vom Boutikkenkommerz und der auf jede Weise und immer weiter um sich greifenden Zerstörungssucht” (DA, 171-172), its once luxurious hotel, “eine zur Hälfte bereits in den Sand gesunkene monumental Monstrosität” (DA, 174). In Die Ringe des Saturn, airports and train stations embody a dialectic of progress and dissolution: Schippol airport is likened to “der Vorhof des unbekannten Landes, von dem kein Reisender mehr wiederkehrt” (RS, 111), an allusion to Sebald’s essay on Kafka, “Das unentdeckte Land”,306 in which the “undiscovered country” is a metaphor for death thereby implicitly linking technological progress with death. The narrator’s view from the air juxtaposes industrial progress and desolation in a negative interplay:

Unter uns ausgebreitet lag eine der am dichtesten besiedelten Regionen Europas, endlose Reihenhauszeilen, mächtige Trabantenstädte, business parks und glänzende Glashäuser, die gleich großen vierkantigen Eisschollen zu treiben scheinen auf dem bis in den letzten Winkel ausgenutzten Land … Nirgends aber sah man auch nur einen einzigen Menschen … es ist immer, als gäbe es keine Menschen, als gäbe es nur das, was sie geschaffen haben und worin sie sich verbergen. (RS, 112-113)

Contemplating the alienating new national library of Paris, Austerlitz observes that

...in jedem von uns entworfenen und entwickelten Projekt die Größendimensionierung und der Grad der Komplexität der ihm beschriebenen Informations- und Steuersysteme die ausschlaggebenden Faktoren sind und daß demzufolge die allumfassende, absolute Perfektion des Konzepts in der Praxis durchaus zusammenfallen kann, ja letztlich zusammenfallen muß mit einer chronischen Dysfunktion und mit konstitutioneller Labilität. (A, 398-399)

Scepticism about progress that derives from the Frankfurt School is manifest also in the valorization, in protest literature, of non-rational modes of expression associated with marginalized groups. Sebald’s narrative prose is pervaded by outsider figures. His essays on Herbeck\textsuperscript{307} and Walser\textsuperscript{308} reveal his interest in non-canonical literature and in the thinking and modes of expression of marginalized groups, such as schizophrenics. This is consistent with the fascination with the marginalized, the non-canonical, the criminal, and the mentally disturbed in the writing of the protest movement: “Die Gefängnisse und die geschlossenen Abteilungen der psychiatrischen Kliniken werden zu heimlichen Zentren der Schreibbewegung … für die Sich-frei-Schreibenden bot die Innenwelt der Außenseiter, boten die Frauen-, Schwulen- und diversen gemischten Schreibgruppen neue Geborgenheit.”\textsuperscript{309} The outsider as constructed in second-generation writing is typically a passive Gesellschaftskritiker, exposing the deformity of society, its “Blinde, Irre, Krüppel, Roboter und Decadenter”\textsuperscript{310}, functioning in 1960s literature as a mouthpiece for the writer’s own socio-political critique. Neubert observes

…daß die Romangestalten der sechziger Jahre auf die bundesrepublikanische Gesellschaft vornehmlich hysterisch reagieren,

\textsuperscript{307} W.G. Sebald, “Eine kleine Traverse”, 131-148.,
\textsuperscript{308} W.G. Sebald, “Le promeneur solitaire. Zur Erinnerung an Robert Walser”, in Logis in einem Landhaus (Frankfurt am Main, Fischer, 2003), 129-168.
\textsuperscript{309} Briegleb and Weigel 2008, 170-171.
\textsuperscript{310} Brigitte Neubert, Der Außenseiter im deutschen Roman nach 1945 (Bonn: Herbert Grundmann, 1977), 109.
daß sie Neurotiker und Neuroastheniker sind und zuweile unter schweren Psychosen leiden ... Die Schriftsteller werden in einer solchen Zeit von ideologischen, politischen, ökonomischen, philosophischen und kunstprogrammatischen Jargons zu deren Kritik und Entlarvung mit Hilfe der Außenseiter herausgefordert. So erscheint deren Auftauchen nur natürlich.311

Konrad in *Das Kalkwerk*, Brinkmann’s nameless protagonist, Fichte’s Jäcki, and Achternbuschs’ Happy are *Randfiguren*, whose existence challenges social norms. Through his withdrawal to the lime quarry and exploitation of his invalid wife, Konrad subverts familial, social, and moral norms. The protagonist of *Keiner weiß mehr* challenges the conventions of marriage, family and social life, Jäcki’s homosexuality flouts the sexual mores of bourgeois society, and Happy’s anarchic existence transgresses social strictures. Fichte’s *Die Palette* is a voyeuristic inventory of marginalized society, composed entirely of outcast individuals: prostitutes, homosexuals, blacks, and drug-addicts. The *Paletten-ABC* is a catalogue of marginalized behaviours that resist bourgeois values relating to family, sexual mores, the body, and drugs. The narrator styles himself as an isolated critical observer of society: “Ich sitze jeden Tag in der Palette. Ich greife nicht ein. Ich beobachte die Bewegungen anläßlich Raubüberfällen und Parties. Ich beobachte, wie geschwiegen wird. Ich sage nichts...” (*Die Palette*, 106). By subverting notions of German cultural *Erbe*, the protagonist constitutes himself as outside of cultural boundaries:

Ich war nicht in der Hamburger Staatsoper. Ich besuche sonntags nicht die Studienmatinee in Kunst- und Gewerbemuseum ... Ich nehme an keinen Führungen durch die Kunsthalle teil ... Ich lese Hegel nicht und keinen Wittgenstein. Befasse mich nicht gründlich mit der Neuen Sachlichkeit ... Ich sitze täglich in der Palette. Die Palette ist alles das nicht. (*Die Palette*, 105)

Protest writing, exemplified by Fichte’s *Die Palette* and Vesper’s *Die Reise*, resists conventions of structure, syntax, and lexicon, and reflects the expressive mode of the author as marginalized figure. Both texts are structurally fragmented, Fichte’s

311 Neubert 1977, 111.
consisting of seventy-six abbreviated chapters, arbitrarily arranged, offering a prismatic perspective that subverts the idea of a linear plot, and with interpolated documentary extracts that prefigure the Bastelei that Sebald describes as his preferred style of writing. Vesper’s text oscillates between rational reportage and psychotic rambling, between present and past. In both texts, syntax is radically subverted: Vesper’s precarious mental state is reflected in syntactical incoherence, capitalized and italicized passages, dialogue and reflection, interpolation of hand-drawn sketches, and arbitrarily inserted documentary materials, such as an hotel bill (Die Reise, 258). Written while he was interned in a psychiatric clinic, his chaotic “stichwörter 1961” consist of colloquialisms, esoteric abbreviations, elipses, mathematical equation signs, and typographical symbols that reflect his incoherence: “die bourgeoise (gogol) \////////\: (kontra) wilde” (Die Reise, 654). Fichte’s use of nonsense words, exclamations, and invocations, reflects his protagonist’s chaotic life and resistance to social norms: “Hokla hübi, glök, glök!” (Die Palette, 49).

In Sebald’s narrative prose, as in protest literature, marginalized individuals offer a form of resistance to hegemonic social norms governing sexuality, morality, and consciousness. Sebald’s prose fiction presents biographical details of numerous marginalized artist figures, including Kafka, FitzGerald, Stendhal, and Swinburne. All his protagonists are outsiders, whose lives resist the values of bourgeois incorporation: Henry Selwyn, in his “hermitage”, repudiates social life; Paul Bereyter subverts post-war educational values through his unconventional pedagogy. The homosexuality of Ambros Adelwarth flouts bourgeois sexual mores, while Max Aurach’s destructive artistic process challenges artistic and social conventions. Austerlitz’ solitary and rootless existence evokes the image of the ‘Wandering Jew’, an image that undermines Western socio-cultural conventions of domesticity and national identity. By portraying characters outside of society, Sebald challenges the norms of society they subvert. Ambros and Cosmo (“Ambros Adelwarth”) are portrayed as parodies of the eccentric dandy: in a dream, the narrator of “Ambros Adelwarth” visualizes them at the Deauville races, the former in a bizarre “gelben Leinenanzug ... und auf dem Kopf einen spanischen, schwarzlackierten Strohhut”, the latter with “einen dicken Teddymantel und eine Fliegerhaube, unter der seine blonden Locken hervorschauten”

312 Löffler 1997, 35.
Sebald’s eccentric outsiders engage in repetitive and apparently meaningless behaviour: Henry Selwyn counts blades of grass, Aurach destroys what he has painted. In Die Ringe des Saturn, the eerie inhabitants of Somerleyton engage in seemingly futile activities: Mrs Ashbury collects seeds, her daughters unpick what they have sewn, and her son works on a boat that he will never complete. Alec Garrad’s endless labour on his model of the Temple of Jerusalem is explained as a form of “sinn- und zwecklosen Bastelarbeit” (RS, 290), that rests solely on “Ideen, Ideen, die sich im Verlauf der Zeit andauernd verändern und die einen darum nicht selten veranlassen, das, was man für bereits vollendet gehalten hat, wieder einzureißen und von neuem anzufangen” (RS, 291). McCulloh, in his discussion of Sebald’s “stylistics of stasis”, notes the sense of suspension inherent to his writing, and a “cumulative sense of purposefulness” that emerges from the apparent aimlessness of the narrative. While the activity of Sebald’s outsiders appears futile, the perception of temporal immobilization created by repetitive and seemingly endless activity is subtly subversive, challenging the teleological convention of temporally contingent life, and undermining the narrative convention of temporal linearity. Indeed, such endless and repetitive activity serves to suspend time and finds expression in Strauß’s notion of Gleichzeitigkeit as liberating: “Dazu brauchen wir andere Uhren, das ist wahr, Rückkoppelungswerke, welche uns befreien von dem alten sturen Vorwärts-Zeiger-Sinn. Wir brauchen Schaltkreise, die zwischen dem Einst und Jetzt geschlossen sind” (Der junge Mann, 11).

Protest literature reflects the anti-authoritarian belief that mental disturbance is both a symptom of social oppression and a potential site of resistance against it. Protest writing reflects the view that the incoherent and transgressive language of

313 Wolf Lepenies, Melancholie und Gesellschaft (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 94.

schizophrenia offers creative potential, and the writing of Sebald’s 1960s generation is informed by the anti-psychiatry movement of that decade, embodied by R.D. Laing (The Divided Self) and Szasz (The Myth of Mental Illness). Achternbusch uses the disordered language of schizophrenia to criticize psychiatric treatment. In Der Tag wird kommen, this is expressed through the character of Lena, who describes her sister’s maltreatment at the Haar Nervenheilanstalt. The episode is narrated in the fractured, repetitive syntax of the thought-disordered:

…die ganz Irrsinnigen sind da drinnen gewesen und da kannst du dir denken ... daß du da auch noch ... dann haben sie mich hinübergeschleppt. Einfach packt und hinübergeschleppt in die Station und hinübergeschleppt und da haben sie mir die Hände haben sie mich auf den Boden hingeschmissen zu Viert sind sie her: die eine hat mir die Hände hinaufdreht die andere die Füße am Buckel herauf...

In Die Reise, Vesper documents his own drug-related mental decline. In imagery that prefigures Sebald’s depiction of the suffering of Ambros Adelwarth (DA), Vesper condemns the extinction of emotions by psychiatric treatment: “Die Medikamente blocken dermaßen ab, daß man vermutlich sein eigenes Todesurteil nur mit einem Schulterzucken quittieren würde ... Die Medikamente wirken so stark, daß man nicht einmal mehr weinen, auch nicht lachen kann – man geht umher wie der steinerne Gast” (Die Reise, 587). The creative potential of psychiatric disorder is implied in his plaintive query: “Ist die Psychose praktisch die Antwort auf den Bewuβtwerdensprozeß?” (Die Reise, 587). In a letter from a psychiatric clinic, Vesper reflects: “Durch diese komische ‘Krankheit’, die in Wirklichkeit eine Gesundheit ist, habe ich als Schriftsteller einfach ganz neue Qualitäten erhalten, d.h.: die große Übersicht” (Die Reise, 619).

Excluded, mentally ill artists and writers, such as Swinburne, Stendhal, Kafka, and Herbeck, pervade Sebald’s prose work; Sebald’s protagonists, Austerlitz, Ambros Adelwarth, Henry Selwyn, and Paul Bereyter suffer from nervous conditions, as does the narrator of Die Ringe des Saturn, whose mental suffering, in the form of “Krankheiten des Gemüts” and “lähmendes Grauen” (RS, 11) is portrayed in the opening of the text. Sebald valorizes the creative potential of Herbeck’s schizophrenia:
Was wir für ein Randphänomen zu halten geneigt sind, wäre damit von zentraler Bedeutung, zumal angesichts der stets zunehmenden Digitalisierung unseres Artikulationsbedürfnisses ... Auf die gegenwärtige Situation übertragen ... bedeutet das, daß die der verwalteten Sprache diametral entgegengesetzte kreative Tendenz zur Symbolisierung und Physiognomisierung, von der die Sprache der Schizophrenen geprägt ist, den Ort unserer Hoffnung genauer bestimmt als der geordnete Diskurs ... In dem Maße, in dem die Kultur, wie die Wissenschaft von ihr, selbst in den Bann der Verwaltung gerät, wächst die potentielle Bedeutung der kleinen Literatur, als deren Botschafter man Herbeck verstehen sollte.315

Sebald’s thematization of exclusion goes beyond the predominantly socio-cultural implications of marginalized groups and behaviours in protest literature. Sebald sees the language of excluded individuals, such as schizophrenics, as having a positive resistant function. To Sebald, subversion of normal language offers the hope of renewal, of expansion of thought and expression, and of recapturing an authenticity that he sees as lost in the modern utilitarian world: “Dem symbolischen Denken ist das utilitarische Konzept der Sprache fremd beziehungsweise abhanden gekommen.”316 Sebald is drawn to the writing of marginal figures, such as Achternbusch, and the schizophrenic writer, Herbeck, detecting in their “wildes Denken” and “sprachliche Unordnung” a “Reservoir regenerativer Energien”, and “der Ansatz zu einer neuen Verbindung zwischen Gefühl, Wort und bezeichnetem Gegenstand.”317 Of Achternbusch, Sebald writes: “Näher sind noch nicht viele an die Sprache der Schizophrenie herangekommen, ohne selber den Verstand zu verlieren”; to Sebald, Achternbusch’s writing is “der Tribut eines davongekommenen an seine leider in der Reservation lebenden Brüder.”318 Sebald takes from such excluded writers the idea of bricolage: “Ich arbeite nach dem System der Bricolage – im Sinne von Levi-Strauß. Das ist eine Form von wildem Arbeiten, von vorrationalen Denken, wo man in

317 W.G. Sebald, ibid, 133.
In summation

My research has indicated that Sebald’s resistance to structures of social and political authority is pervasive and powerful, aligning his narrative prose with the protest movement that engages his generation in the 1960s: while Sebald’s attitude to his “sixty-eighter” generation vacillates between fatalistic acknowledgement of a shared legacy of guilt, and disavowal of engagement with the political conflicts of the 1960s, his writing, like theirs, reflects an awareness of Nazi-continuity as a deforming presence in post-war Germany. My findings contribute to our understanding of Sebald’s narrative prose by revealing unsuspected affinities between his subdued and allusive narrative writing and the provocative texts of dissident writers of his generation, such as Brinkmann, Achternbusch, and Fichte.

In Sebald’s world, the institution of justice is depicted as merciless, corrupt, and ultimately, absurd. His bitter critique of an insidiously deforming system of education, one that continues to be contaminated by Nazism, clearly reveals his affinity with the concerns of his 1960s generation. Rejection of Nazi continuity becomes, in the writing of Sebald and his “sixty-eighter” generation, a resistance to the notion of genealogical continuity, and a repudiation of the authoritarian model of masculinity represented by their fathers. While his style and tone differ markedly from the strident confrontations of his “sixties” cohort, Sebald’s narrative prose reveals a deep-seated anti-authoritarianism, aimed primarily at institutions of education and justice. Indeed, Sebald’s resistant stance is, in some respects, more radical than that of his generation.

In Sebald’s prose narratives, ambivalence about genealogy is reflected in negative depictions of family, home, and reproductive sex that can be seen in the conflicted writing of his protest generation, exemplified by Brinkmann, Fichte, and Achternbusch. Sebald’s protagonists, such as Henry Selwyn, Paul Bereyter, and Ambros Adelwarth, are constructed as antithetical to the fascist ideal of masculinity,

his repudiation of family as the symbol of genealogical continuity is unconditional, and his characters are generally depicted as alienated outsiders, inhabiting inhospitable spaces. Through association with death, heterosexual sex in Sebald’s writing becomes a renunciation of the idea of genealogical continuity.

Sebald’s prose fiction, like the protest writing of his 1960s generation, is deeply imbued with the philosophy of the Frankfurt School, evident in pessimism towards progress, experimentation with documentary realism, and concern with the marginalized and marginalized forms of expression. A negative dialectic evident in his syntax and structure of Sebald’s prose narratives reveals a debt to Adorno. Like his “sixty-eight” generation, he thematizes the detached outsider position as a privileged perspective on society.

Sebald shares with his generation a rejection of a renovated Germany, and a sense that the Wirtschaftswunder merely obfuscates a contaminated society. In his prose texts, the West-German Konsumgesellschaft is depicted through imagery of void and lifelessness, and in apocalyptic visions of a land laid waste. Sebald’s writing, like that of his “sixty-eight” generation, reveals hostility to Germans, depicted as physically and morally deformed; indeed, the trope of disease and abnormality in the writing of Sebald and his 1960s generation reflects a perception of a society beyond healing.
Chapter 4

Sebald and Väterliteratur

Introduction

Sebald’s connections with the so-called Väterliteratur seem unlikely, and efforts to align his narrative prose with this somewhat discredited genre appear unsustainable. Indeed, this is an area of my research that reveals an unsurprising gap in critical attention. Sebald’s subdued tone, antiquated language, and figurative writing would seem to preclude a connection with the intensely personal and often inquisitorial style of Väterliteratur through which the sons and daughters of perpetrator parents confront their parents, principally, their fathers, in attempts to expose a past that has remained closed to them in the pervasive post-war “conspiracy of silence” to which Sebald refers. 320 Sebald’s distanced, eschatological worldview does not immediately invite comparison with this historically contingent genre. Unlike the writers of Väterliteratur, Sebald does not engage explicitly with the family as the site of conflict.

In this largely autobiographical genre, unresolved conflicts are enacted within the family; intense ambivalence is directed towards the generation of the perpetrator father as the embodiment of the Nazi legacy of shame. Awareness of this legacy as a malign and disfiguring burden for the children of the perpetrator generation is articulated by Grass’ character, Paul Pokriefke, “Das hört nicht auf. Nie hört das auf” 321, and by Härtling’s admission: “Er hinterließ mich mit einer Geschichte, die ich seit dreißig Jahren nicht zu Ende schreiben kann.” 322 My analysis of Sebald’s narrative prose works nevertheless reveals that he employs and transforms the tropes of Väterliteratur

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320 Sebald refers to “a conspiracy of silence” in an interview with Wachtel 2007, 44.
to express an ambivalence towards genealogy that resembles, and at times, exceeds, that of Väterliteratur writers.

A literary phenomenon of the late 1970s and early 1980s, Schneider’s reference to a “Flutwelle” of “Väter-resp. Autobiographien”\(^{323}\), and Grimm’s observation of “eine wahre Sturzflut von einschlägigen Veröffentlichungen”\(^{324}\), indicate the impact and scale of this genre. In Väterliteratur, history is enacted in the context of the German family, as the children of Nazi perpetrators attempt to come to terms with the complicity of their parents, principally, their fathers, in National Socialism. As LaCapra observes, through the psychic process of “acting-out”, “the past is performatively regenerated or relived as if it were fully present rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed.”\(^{325}\) Väterliteratur is motivated by the quest to understand the father’s role as Mitläufer or Täter in the Nazi regime;\(^{326}\) Meckel’s self-interrogation, “Wer bin ich, wo komme ich her?”\(^{327}\) touches on the question of personal identity that is central to this quest. Bude encapsulates the predicament of the second generation as the children of perpetrators:

Die Kinder der Täter fühlten sich “schuldig geboren” … In ähnlicher Weise wie die Kinder der Opfer unterliegen sie einem Identifikationsschicksal, das den Nationalsozialismus nicht vergehen läßt. Die Kinder sehen sich in eine heillose Ambivalenz ihrer Gefühle


\(^{326}\) With few exceptions, the fathers represented in Väterliteratur are Mitläufer, not perpetrators. Exceptions to this rule include the fathers of Gauch and Seuren, the former described as “ein Schreibtischtäter” in Vaterspuren, the latter, a member of the SS, in Abschied von einem Mörder.

verstrickt: Ihre Eltern sind für sie Helden und Verbrecher zugleich.
Neben dem Bild des stolzen und gebieterisch blickenden Offiziers steht
das Bild des feigen Mitläufers und Mittäters.\footnote{Bude 1992, 30.}

In *Väterliteratur*, the father is typically seen as the representative of a traumatic
history, transmitting a burden of unresolved guilt and shame to the child. *Väterliteratur*
thematizes the ambivalence between the desire for genealogical break, and the
yearning for continuity, between a longing for “ein vaterloses Leben,”\footnote{Meckel 2005, 68.}
and conflicted feelings of affection and loyalty: “Ich habe keinen Haß und keine Trauer für
den Mann empfunden, der sich von der Macht anlernen ließ und uns die Prämien
schickte, der vielleicht aus Scham nicht heimkehren und sich nicht in die Familienkreis
verkriechen wollte…”\footnote{Günter Seuren, *Abschied von einem Mörder* (Hamburg: Rowohlt, 1980), 136.} Many *Väterliteratur* texts are attempts at posthumous
conversation, with writers such as Härtling\footnote{Peter Härtling, *Nachgetragene Liebe* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011).} and Schwaiger\footnote{Brigitte Schwaiger, *Lange Abwesenheit* (Vienna: Czernin Verlag, 2011).} addressing and
interrogating their fathers directly. That confrontation can only occur after the father’s
death is suggested by Kersten, “Zu Lebzeiten hatte es zu ihm und mir immer nur ein
verkrampftes Distanzgefühl gegeben … Neugierig, meinen Vater kennenzulernen …
wurde ich erst, als er tot war.”\footnote{Paul Kersten, *Der alltägliche Tod meines Vaters* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer und Witsch, 1978), 30.} In these works, ambivalence towards the father
generation takes the form of reproach (Henisch)\footnote{Peter Henisch, *Die kleine Figur meines Vaters* (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2010).}, exculpation (Härtling 2011),
castigation (Schwaiger 2011) and apocalyptic fantasies of destruction: “Es ist Zeit, zu
zerstören … es ist Zeit, die Schönheit der Zerstörung zu begreifen: den Erfahrungen
vertrauen, die Erfahrungen in Haß, den Haß in Energie verwandeln.”\footnote{Vesper, Bernward, *Die Reise*, (Berlin: März Verlag, 2009), 14.}
"Väterliteratur" represents an intensification of the post-war discourse on National Socialism, heightened by the revelations of the Eichmann trial of 1961, and the Auschwitz trials of 1963-65. While the writers of "Väterliteratur" constitute the student protest generation of the 1960s, "Väterliteratur" as a genre lacks the passionate political engagement that distinguishes the protest writing of the 1960s. The family narratives of "Väterliteratur" are associated with the increase in autobiographical novels associated with the “New Subjectivity” of the early 1970s. McGlothlin notes:

Whereas the student revolutionaries of 1968 had previously denounced the entire parent generation for its activities in the Nazi period and had combined these incriminations with often violent protests against what they saw as the “fascist”, authoritarian character of the West German state, the authors of New Subjectivity now grappled with their parents’ past in a much more intimate form: the father novel.336

In his discussion of themes and tropes of "Väterliteratur" as manifest in Meckel’s "Suchbild", Moser identifies the ambivalence of sons towards their fathers as a “Doppelbewegung … ein Hereinnehmen und ein Herauswerfen.”337 The quest for the father, a trope central to "Väterliteratur", becomes

Eine moralische Unternehmung, und der Forschende findet sich zugleich in der Rolle des Anklägers oder Richters … Damit wird ein Generationsproblem sichtbar, bei dem die private Vergegenwärtigung des Toten zugleich zum Tribunal wird, in dem seine Lebensgeschichte nach ethische Kategorien abgehandelt wird, die wiederum eingebettet sind in eine kollektive Schuldvermutung, aber auch einem kollektiven Gefühl der Berechtigung zur Schuldzuweisung.338

337 Tilmann Moser, Romane als Krankengeschichten. Über Handke, Meckel und Martin Walser (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1985), 49.
338 Moser, ibid., 50.
Critics have tended to adopt a generalising approach to *Väterliteratur*, indeed, Schlant describes these works as “virtually formula novels,”\(^{339}\) noting the overwhelming resentment towards the parent generation motivated by a perception of personally sustained psychological damage. She observes the instrumentalization of the Holocaust as a weapon to attack the parent generation, and the use of diaries, memoirs, fragments, photos, dreams, and letters in the reconstruction of the father’s life. Schlant notes in these works the focus on the *Ich*-narrator, presented as a victim of the parent generation, and burdened by a legacy of psychological damage. The malign impact of the returned father and the effect of depressive parental behaviour on post-war family life are common concerns of *Väterliteratur*. In his analysis of *Väterliteratur* by Handke, Plessen, and Härtling, Mayer (1989) observes a number of recurring tropes: the death of the parent as a catalyst for the quest to “discover” the father, a quest that is often a life-long one, revealing elements of the *Bildungsroman*; discovery of the father’s diary as evidence of his complicity in Nazi crime; the theme of an “unheilbarer Bruch” between father and child, and the vicarious experience, by children, of their parents’ suffering. Mayer typifies a view of *Väterliteratur* as a phenomenon related to the student revolts of 1968:

> Die Bewegung der Achtundsechziger war alles in einem: Generationsrevolte, ideologischer Konflikt, Abrechnung in fast allen Einzelfällen mit der eigenen Kindheit und Pubertät. Man arbeitete mit neuen literarischen Formen und Ritualen … Man empfand … die bekämpfenswerte Wirklichkeit als eine solche der Väter und Großväter.\(^{340}\)

Like Schlant, Briegleb and Weigel tend to treat *Väterliteratur* in an undifferentiated manner, identifying in the genre a perception of injury on the part of sons and daughters of the perpetrator generation, and a desire for alternative affiliation through identification with Jewish characters, who nevertheless remain an objectified rarity. The case studies of Eckstaedt (1992) provide a psychological background to the relationship of the second generation with their parents, and to their belated


\(^{340}\) Mayer 1989, 129.
engagement with their parents’ past. Her interviews shed light on post-Nazi family relationships, the tendency of fathers to violence, coldness, or contempt, and of children to see themselves as victims of such fathers. Her studies uncover the somatisation of repressed psychological symptoms, feelings of mental and physical deformation, and the experience of a diffuse sense of grief among second-generation children. Resentment at the parents’, and particularly fathers’ concealment of past crimes, and refusal to speak about the incriminating past, is fundamental to the psychological profile of the second generation. Indeed, Moser describes the “überprivates Schweigen” that makes the father’s past unknowable and inaccessible to his children.341

A second-generation writer himself, Schneider presents a more differentiated analysis of the relationship between second-generation children and their fathers, describing as “Hamlet-esque” the situation of the child in relation to the perpetrator father, a figure perceived as split between murderous Nazi apparition, and upstanding democratic citizen. A vengeful desire to expose the father’s past is central to Väterliteratur: as Schneider (1981) observes, fathers who had failed to indict themselves were “prosecuted” in the writing of the radicalized sons and daughters in 1968 and thereafter. In relation to the fathers, Schneider notes the tropes of self-pity, retreat to Innerlichkeit, and the tendency to desubstantiation of history that typify the response of the perpetrator generation to their implication in Nazism. He traces the passivity and self-absorption of the second generation to a damaged relationship with their parents:

Es ist, als ob schon früh ein Geschoß den Lebensnerv dieser Generation getroffen habe, eine Art Wandrogeschoß, das im Laufe der Zeit all ihre gesellschaftlichen Organe ... gelähmt hat; ein Geschoß, das offenbar noch aus der Waffenkammer der Kriegsgeneration stammt.”342

The generational relationship he outlines is ambivalent, at once antagonistic and exculpatory: the parent generation is the focus of resentment and protest, but implicitly exculpated by the notion of the “stray bullet” for which no-one is held accountable.

341 Moser 1985, 50.
342 Schneider 1981, 61.
For the second generation, the *Wirtschaftswunder* created by the generation of their parents cannot obscure the deformation of spirit and ideals by the defining event of the Holocaust.

The growing tendency to examine the German second generation in relation to the survivor second generation has broadened the context in which *Väterliteratur* texts are understood, and sheds light on attitudes that underlie *Väterliteratur*. Sichrovsky (1997) exposes attitudes and symptoms common to the German second generation; his findings indicate a variety of responses that present a more ambivalent picture of fathers, and a defensive desire to exculpate the father even in the face of indisputable evidence of Nazi implication. In his study of the children of survivor and perpetrator groups, Berger (2001) confirms the themes of *Väterliteratur*, including the perception, among the children of perpetrators, of a burden of transgenerational guilt, a sense of exclusion from their parents’ past, and a need to discover their own identities through discovering those of their parents, primarily their fathers. In her analysis of Holocaust writing of the survivor and perpetrator second generation, McGlothlin (2006) describes tropes common to both groups. One such trope is the suffering body, manifest in the masochistic transformation of the body into a site marked by trauma, to express the proxy suffering of the second generation child. *Väterliteratur* texts tend to dwell on descriptions of the decaying or suffering body, the father’s, or the narrator’s own. Descriptions of self-mutilation are common in *Väterliteratur*, and reflect the attempt by the second-generation child to insert him- or herself into the father’s world of Nazi ideology, thus experiencing vicariously an unlived past.

McGlothlin describes the trope of seeing and looking away that pervades *Väterliteratur*, and that reflects the desire on the part of the second-generation child to “see” or “know” the parent’s complicity, and the fear or inability of doing so. The obsession with “seeing” as a trope in second-generation writing is explored also by Hell (2003), who attributes it to the sense of authorial inadequacy, and loss of epistemological privilege experienced by this generation in relation to a past it has not experienced, but by which it feels nevertheless determined. She describes theirs as “an
aesthetic project driven by the craving for the visible, for a gaze that would render the past visible and thereby gain mastery over the visual field, the past, and the present.\textsuperscript{343}

My readings on \textit{Väterliteratur} indicate an evolving critical approach to the genre. As early as 1982, Grimm takes issue with Schneider’s perception of the second generation as expressed in \textit{Väter und Söhne, posthum}.\textsuperscript{344} Prefiguring a shift in approach to \textit{Väterliteratur} in relation to the resurgence of family novels in the 1990s, he argues for a more diversified approach to the second generation, describing it as more heterogenous in terms of social and national background than Schneider suggests. Since the 1990s, critics have taken an increasingly differentiated view of \textit{Väterliteratur} in relation to the \textit{Generationenromanen} of the 1990s. Mauelshagen (1995) and Eichenberg (2009) argue for a more nuanced approach to \textit{Väterliteratur}. Cameron (2012) traces a trajectory from \textit{Väterliteratur} to later, more self-reflexive \textit{Generationenromanen}, contending that the former genre presents a more ambivalent approach to fathers than is generally acknowledged. This perception is reflected in Kraft’s contribution to the \textit{Väterliteratur} debate,\textsuperscript{345} in which he argues that \textit{Väterliteratur} writers in many instances attempt, through documents, letters, and dialogue, to give the father a “voice”, citing Henisch’s text as an example. Fuchs, too, argues for a more differentiated approach to \textit{Väterliteratur}, observing in these texts an ambivalence towards genealogy that is reflected in “the longing for the very ideas that they attack so vehemently, namely family, heritage and tradition.”\textsuperscript{346}

The family novels of the 1990s and beyond represent a re-evaluation of the relationship of children, and grandchildren with the perpetrator generation. The tendency to greater empathy and nuance in relation to representing the Nazi past and the implication of family members in it, throws into relief the repudiative tropes of \textit{Väterliteratur} and the

\textsuperscript{343} Hell 2003, 36.
\textsuperscript{344} Grimm 1982, 167-182.
\textsuperscript{346} Fuchs, “The Tinderbox of Memory: Generation and Masculinity in \textit{Väterliteratur} by Christoph Meckel, Uwe Timm, Ulla Hahn, and Dagmar Leupold”, in \textit{German Memory Contests} 2006, 44.
antithetical relationship between children and parents posited in *Väterliteratur* texts. While the sons and daughters vent their resentment, grief and fury in expository and punitive narratives that reflect the conflicted desire for genealogical break, the work of Fuchs, Vees-Gulani, Cohen-Pfister and others indicates an emphasis in the later family texts on transgenerational continuity. Fuchs (2006) sees *Väterliteratur* as characterized by an unresolved and ambivalent approach to lineage that vacillates between rupture and continuity, an ambivalence that begins to resolve in the transgenerational continuity thematized in the later family novels. This is confirmed by the work of Schmitz and Eigler (2005), who observe in these family texts a tendency to reevaluate the Nazi past in more empathetic, self-reflective, and pluralistic terms, in keeping with what Bathrick describes as the ongoing “democratization of memory.” The research of Cohen-Pfister and Wienroeder-Skinner (2006) suggests that the antithetical relationship between children and parents evident in *Väterliteratur* has yielded to a more reconciliatory approach. The socio-political dimension to this shift in attitude is explored by Vees-Gulani and Cohen-Pfister (2010), for whom the plethora of family novels of the 1990s reflects a post-unification need for connection as a means of defining a new national identity.

My research into the evolution of *Väterliteratur* indicates the regressiveness of Sebald’s position in relation to the more empathetic approach to the perpetrator generation evident in the later writing of his generation. My analysis of Sebald’s narrative prose suggests that he continues to articulate the resentments of his generation that, in the 1970s and early 1980s produced the confrontational body of *Väterliteratur*. Sebald’s writing thematizes the ambivalence towards genealogy, conflicted child-father relationship, the desire for alternative affiliation, and the sense of victimhood in relation to the parent generation that are the hallmarks of this conflicted genre:


Sebalds Prosa ist die Arbeit eines Nachgeborenen gegen das unverständliche Schweigen und steht schon wenige Jahre nach seinem Tod im Kontrast zur harmonisierenden Tendenz der Enkelgeneration, in der “Einheitlichkeit und Praxis des Erinnerns” die “Fiktion einer kanonisierten Familiengeschichte” zu begründen, die vollständig, konsistent und linear erscheint.349

My analysis of the tropes of Väterliteratur focuses on the writing of Henisch (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 1987), Härtling (Nachgetragene Liebe, 1980), Rehmann (Der Mann auf der Kanzel, 1979), Schwaiger (Lange Abwesenheit, 1980), Plessen (Mitteilung an den Adel), Schwaiger (Lange Abwesenheit, 1980), Plessen (Mitteilung an den Adel, 1976), Kersten (Der alltägliche Tod meines Vaters, 1978), Meckel (Suchbild: Über meinen Vater, 1980), Vesper (Die Reise, 1971), Seuren (Abschied von einem Mörder, 1980), Schneider (Vati, 2001) and Gauch (Vaterspuren, 1979). Following this, I examine tropes common to Väterliteratur in Sebald’s narrative prose, and demonstrate his connections with the earlier, conflicted writing of his generation.

The tropes of Väterliteratur

In search of fathers

In Väterliteratur, the son or daughter typically embarks on a quest to understand and reconstruct the life of a father generally represented as cold and defended,350 and whose complicity in a murderous regime leaves unanswered questions that touch on the child’s identity and genealogical inheritance, as Briegleb notes wrily: “Söhne, die


350 Lethen describes the cult of coldness to which the generation of the fathers adhered, of which the paradigmatic expression is Jünger’s “steel warrior” as described in In Stahlgewittern, 1920. Helmut Lethen, Verhaltenslehre in der Kälte. Lebensversuche zwischen den Kriegen (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1994).
ihre Wunschdistanz zum Vater durcharbeiten wollen, müssen immer gewärtig sein, ‘hinter’ dem Vater-Bild sich selber zu entdecken, scheinlebendig, nicht erwachsen.”

The narrator of Seuren’s *Abschied von einem Mörder* describes his quest:

Manchmal habe ich mir vorgestellt, ich würde meinen Vater plötzlich in einer der fleißigen Illustrierten entdecken ... Ich habe auf abgedruckten Gruppenfotos nach ihm gesucht, habe mir jedes Gesicht genau angesehen ... Die Uniformen und die in die Stirn gezogenen Schirmmützen täuschten, sie sehen sich alle ähnlich ... Vor unscharfen Fotos von Todesschützen, deren Gesichter man nicht erkennen konnte, habe ich gesessen und mir gesagt: das könnte er sein. Ich habe ihn nicht wiedererkannt, nicht gefunden, er war immer in einem anderen versteckt.

This quest is usually, but not invariably, catalysed by the death or imminent death of the father that brings to the fore questions of legacy and genealogy. Plessen’s text begins with “Die Nachricht vom Tod ihres Vaters”, while Schwaiger’s opens with the narrator at the grave of her recently deceased father. *Nachlaß* haunts the opening of texts by Rehmann and Härtling (2011). The father’s death causes soul-searching, regret, anger over missed opportunities, and a sense of loss: “Ich will, was ich verloren habe, deine Gegenwart.”

*Enthüllung* is central to the quest for reconstruction and understanding. For the sons in *Väterliteratur*, this often involves the discovery of an ugly secret that sheds light on the father’s life under National Socialism. Meckel’s book is motivated by the traumatic discovery of his father’s war diaries; Seuren finds his father’s pornographic drawings, “ein paar verächtliche Karikaturen, seine private Abrechnung mit dem bisherigen

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351 Briegleb 2008, 89.
355 Härtling 2011, 68.

The process of discovery and revelation involves “seeing” the father’s life, in order to reconstruct what has been hidden. Since the uncovering of a shameful past is a confronting process, the symbolic act of “seeing” is accompanied by that of blindness, or looking away. In relation to second-generation writing, Laub and Auerhahn observe:

> We all hover at different distances between knowing and not knowing about trauma, caught between the compulsion to complete the process of knowing and the inability or fear of doing so. It is the nature of trauma to elude our knowledge, because of both defence and deficit.356

*Väterliteratur* texts are motivated by a quest to reconstruct the father’s life, to metaphorically “see” or reveal, what has been hidden, in an effort to comprehend how a loved, even revered individual could be part of the Nazi machine, as active participant (Henisch), or bystander (Rehmann, Härtl ing, and Schwaiger). Hell (2003)

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describes the “side-long glance” of the second generation as the guilty desire to see and not to see what defines them. The theme of “seeing” pervades Vesper’s text, his self-scrutiny revealing the self-rejection that characterizes second-generation writing:


In Henisch’s text, the theme of “seeing” is pervasive: as “der BESTE KRIEGSBERICHTER DER GESAMTEN DEUTSCHEN WEHRMACHT” (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 13), his father, as part of the Nazi propaganda apparatus, takes refuge in the role of neutral observer: “Ich habe den Krieg … in erster Linie VOM FOTOGRAFISCHEN STANDPUNKT betrachtet” (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 20). Thus his participation in the French defeat becomes a detached, filmic experience: “Die Erinnerungen an das vor kurzem Geschehene sind dann wie ein teils im Zeitraffen-, teils im Zeitlupentempo aufgenommener Film durch mein Hirn gelaufen. Menschen verschmoren in einem Panzer, ein Bauernhaus fliegt in die Luft, eine Stadt wird zerbombt…” (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 59). The father’s memories of the Nazi parades are ekphrastically described: “Gläubige Augen, erhobene Arme, singende Münnder … Es war eine Freude, das wirksam ins Bild zu bringen …” (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 68). The son allows the father to reveal himself through his own words, and through the strongly visual recollection of the war that shows his “kalte Leidenschaft … Dokumentationsmanie” (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 109): “Hier hast du zum Beispiel das Bild eines zu den Widerstandskämpfern übergelaufenen Italienerns. Du siehst, er liegt auf den Knien, jeden vorübergehenden deutschen Soldaten bettelt er um sein Leben an…” (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 143). The destructive effect on the son of the father’s complicity in the war is evident in Henisch’s transgenerational identification with the “seeing” role of his father: “Ich war der brille deutsche Soldat, sah die Szene, die das Bild

357 Vesper 2009, 190.
darstellte, durch seine Brille. Neben mir ein Kamerad … Und mitten auf diesem Weg ein Mann ohne Kopf” (*Die kleine Figur meines Vaters*, 96-97). The suffering this causes him is experienced as an affliction of sight, “ein Gefühl … jemand drückte mir mit größer und größer werdenden Daumen auf beide Augäpfel” (*Die kleine Figur meines Vaters*, 97). The trope of “seeing” suggests here his reluctance to confront his father’s guilt, and at the same time, his own vision of himself as a victim of his father’s cruelty, reflecting Eckstaedt’s findings (Eckstaedt, 1992) on the tendency of the second generation to somatise the unacknowledged guilt of the fathers.

In Rehmann’s *Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, the acute description of her father’s room is an attempt to reveal, or to “see” the ambiguities of her father, and to reconcile his role as a *Pfarrer* with that of passive bystander in the Third Reich. There is a sense of belatedness to her investigation, and a need to amplify the child’s perspective, “über die Fensterbank spähend” (*Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, 24), on a father she was too young to evaluate. Thus the room is described in intimate visual detail, from a child’s innocent viewpoint. The division of the room suggests the fatal compartmentalization of the father’s life into “drei Bereiche … Jedes von ihnen hat ein anderes Licht, einen anderen Schwerpunkt, dem in wechselnder Gewichtigkeit die übrigen Gegenstände sich zuordnen” (*Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, 20). With its detailed listing of his religious tracts, family photos, and “Hitlerbüste aus rötlichem Ton” (*Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, 22), the description of the father’s room is aimed at giving a comprehensive picture of his intellectual, domestic, and political life. Such ambiguities remain irreconcilable, and the *Vaterzimmer* remains a site of repressed anxiety, “in dem die bösen Träume ihr Unwesen treiben. Über dieses Linoleum … schleift der Schinderhannes das Kind an den Haaren … Unter dieser blauen Decke liegt der Vater und wehrt sich nicht, wenn von oben das blitzende Metallblatt niedergeht und seinen Kopf in dünne, sacht zur Seite sinkende Scheiben schneidet” (*Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, 30).

Metanarratorial reflection on authorial inadequacy is a common trope in *Väterliteratur*, and is evident in Rehmann’s self-interrogation: “Wie überliefert man Väter, die weder Naziverbrecher noch Widerstandskämpfer waren? Wie bringt man sie einzeln und lebendig durch die Mühle der Pauschalvorstellungen und -Urteile?” (*Der Mann auf der Kanzel*, 17). Meckel’s reflections on writing his father’s life story betray similar doubts:


Die Erfindung offenbart und verbirgt den Menschen. (Suchbild: Über meinen Vater, 42)

Such feelings of inadequacy reflect a conflicted loyalty towards the father, a sense of ambivalence about exposing him to public scrutiny through the literary project, and the desire to do justice to the complexity of lives lived under National Socialism. This awareness suggests the vacillation between “Hereinnehmen” and “Hinauswerfen” that Moser detects at the heart of the Väterliteratur genre.358

Rupture and continuity: the ambivalence of the second generation

The ambivalence of second-generation children towards their parents is expressed through a dialectic of rupture and continuity that imagines genealogical rupture on the one hand, and affiliation on the other. The conflicted desire for genealogical break and continuity is expressed by Gauch’s admission: “Ich kenne doch meine eigene schizophrenen Situation sehr gut: den Vater als Person zu lieben und vor seiner Persönlichkeit entsetzt zu sein” (Vaterspuren, 130). Härtling’s reflection, “Ich habe gegen dich geschrieben Vater, nicht für dich, noch immer gegen dich” (Nachgetragene Liebe, 115), is contradicted by his desire for affiliation with his father: “Du warst weit weg, Vater, jetzt nähern wir uns einander ... ich empfinde, je weniger Zeit uns bleibt, um so stärker deine Nähe. Ich fange an ... dich zu verstehen, zu lieben. Ich bin soweit,

358 Moser 1985, 49.
daß ich dich von nun an mit jedem Satz zu mir heranholen möchte” (Nachgetragene Liebe, 144). The protagonist of Schneider’s Vati rationalizes his desire to embrace his father: “Warum hätte ich ihn nicht umarmen sollen? Tausende von Söhnen haben ihre Väter umarmt, gleichgültig was diese Väter getan haben mochten” (Vati, 6). Conversely, Väterliteratur expresses a longing for generational rupture that frequently becomes an ill-concealed desire for the father’s death. On her way to her father’s funeral, Plessen’s narrator confesses: “Wann sie angefangen hatte, seinen Tod zu wünschen, wußte sie nicht mehr. Sie hatte sich vorgestellt, wie sie sich verhalten würde. Seltsam” (Mitteilung an den Adel, 7). A sense of avid expectancy is reflected by the narrator of Schwaiger’s text: “Das Warten auf dein Sterben, wie wenn man im Theater sitzt und der Vorhang sich nicht hebt” (Lange Abwesenheit, 14).

Schwab (2010) notes the gaps, silences, and imagery of emptiness that characterize the sense of dislocation experienced by the second generation in relation to the contaminated past. This is reflected in the fragmented structure of Väterliteratur texts, such as Gauch’s Vaterspuren, constructed as a series of fragments that shift between present and past; Rauch’s resentful Brief an meine Erzieher359 follows a similar structure. Rupture is thematized by Henisch, whose examination of his father’s war album reveals “einen Bruch. Übergangslos folgen Bilder, auf denen Soldaten in Aktion zu sehen sind” (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 75). Imagery of absence and emptiness characterize Vesper’s childhood:


Väterliteratur is characterized by the vacillation of second-generation sons and daughters, between resentment at the perceived contamination of their genealogy on the one hand, and on the other, a thwarted desire for affiliation with their fathers. The

psychological impact of generational position on this generation is manifest in a perception of betrayal and powerlessness, and a tendency to cling to the past and to devalue the future. Eckstaedt notes the ambiguity central to the relationship of second-generation sons to their fathers: “Bewußt strebte er das Gegenbild zum Vater und war dabei in seinen Phantasien mit dem ‘Fertigmachen’ und dem Sturz des anderen, väterlichen Autoritäten, beschäftigt.”360 Father-hatred is reflected in the writing of Niklas Frank: “Das Knacken deines Genicks ersparte mir ein verkorkstes Leben, wie hättest du mir mit deinem Gewäsch das Hirn vergiftet. Wie der schweigenden Mehrheit meiner Generation, die nicht das Glück hatte, den Vater gehenkt zu bekommen.”361 The desire for genealogical break contrasts with a conflicted desire for continuity: Henisch detects in himself the “brutale Neugier” his father displayed as war photographer: “Was Dir zum Foto wird, Papa, wird mir zum Text” (Die kleine Figur meines Vaters, 106). The bitter Oedipal struggle that Moser diagnoses between fathers and sons is reflected in the sense of grievance Meckel directs towards his father: “Das Schweigen umkreiste sein Monopol: die Sprache. Er ließ mich fühlen, daß ich ein Dummkopf sei … Das Untier in seinem Gehege dehnte sich aus. Mit grausamer Ungeduld nahm es den ganzen Platz und drückte den Vorbesitzer an die Wand” (Suchbild, 155).

The desire for alternative affiliation

The desire for genealogical rupture is often accompanied by a desire for an alternative genealogical connection. In the context of the Auschwitz trials and student revolts of the 1960s, the slogan, “Wir sind alle Juden”362 is less an expression of identification with Jewish victimhood than a self-construal of victimhood, a response that Assmann traces to the tendency of this generation to take upon themselves the guilt that the parent-generation refused:

361 Niklas Frank, Der Vater: Eine Abrechnung (Munich: Wilhelm Goldmann, 1993), 27.
362 The slogan, in French, is attributed to Daniel Cohn-Bendit, French student protest leader.
In dieser Rhetorik der Aufrechnung wird die eine Schuld durch die andere aufgewogen und damit gleichsam annulliert. Leid und Schuld, die hier als unvereinbare Gegensätze eines Rechtfertigungsdiskurses aufeinander prallen, standen sich später in der Haltung der Generationen ebenso unvermittelt gegenüber. Viele Angehörige der Elterngenerationen negierten weiterhin beharrlich ihre Mitverantwortung für die NS-Verbrechen durch eine konsequente Selbstinszenierung als Opfer, was dazu führte, daß ihre Kinder sich der trägerlosen, von den Eltern bestrittenen Schuld annahmen. Die Übernahme der von den Eltern bestrittenen und abgespaltenen Schuld und ihre Bearbeitung war die eine Seite der Erinnerungsmission der 68er Generation, die andere Seite war die Hinwendung zu den jüdischen Opfern, deren Zeugnisse sie anhörten und mit deren Geschichten und Kultur sie sich identifizierten.363

In Väterliteratur, the putative desire to be a Jew is essentially symbolic, and empathy with the historical victims is displaced by a self-perception of victimhood: “In dieser Symptomatik, dem Wunsch, an die Stelle der Opfer zu treten, ist die Abwesenheit der Juden verkörpert: mit dem Leid an der Abwesenheit des ‘helfenden’ Vaters verwachsen.” In Väterliteratur, the Holocaust becomes primarily a weapon of reproach and castigation in relation to the parent-generation. In an interview with Sichrovsky, a Täterkind makes the following observations:

Ich war der Jude in meiner Familie. Der Vater, die Mutter, die Großmutter, alle haben sie den Terror in der Familie weitergeführt. Man redet immer so viel von euch Juden als den eigentlichen Opfern des Krieges. Aber für die, die überlebt haben, war er vorbei, als Hitler sich umbrachte. Nur für uns, die Kinder der Nazis, ging er weiter. Das Schlachtfeld Familie entdeckten die Helden des Dritten Reiches, als ihr eigenes in Schutt und Asche fiel … Ich kann nichts dafür, was mein Vater getan hat … ich fühle mich … als einer, der genauso unter ihm leidet wie

364 Briegleb and Weigel 2008, 94-95.
all jene im Dritten Reich. Seine Brutalität und Aggressivität ist heute vor allem für mich gefährlich.\textsuperscript{365}

Many \textit{Väterliteratur} texts allude to Jewish ancestry: on his deathbed, Henisch’s father hints at Jewish ancestry, Härtling’s mother is part-Jewish, the fatal “Webfehler” in his family.\textsuperscript{366} Vesper’s travelling companion in \textit{Die Reise} is Burton, a New York Jewish artist, and their ambivalent relationship vacillates between resentment and need. The relationship with an often stereotyped or idealized Jewish figure becomes, in \textit{Väterliteratur}, a stilted form of “German-Jewish symbiosis”. Thus Vesper claims to identify with the feelings of a Jewish victim:

\begin{quote}
Sie beschrieb ihre Angst. Eine Angst, die ich wiedererkannte. Eine Insel der Angst und der Verzweiflung in einem Meer von Feinden. Ich kannte diese Angst, es war die Angst meines Traumes, der jede Nacht zurückkehrte, die Angst in einem furchtbaren Kampf umzengelt zu werden und zu sterben. Wie durch einen unterirdischen Tunnel war ihre Angst mit der meinen verbunden.\textsuperscript{367}
\end{quote}

In Seuren’s \textit{Abschied von einem Mörder}, the narrator’s relationship with the Jew, Silbereisen, is predicated on a contrived parallel: narrator and Jew are both artists, Silbereisen a copyist of the work of others, perhaps an unwitting echo of Wagner’s claim relating to Jewish lack of creativity.\textsuperscript{368} Indeed, Silbereisen’s “book” is a \textit{Fälschung}, a diversion to distract from having to engage with people over the past. Silbereisen is in many respects a Jewish stereotype: a wandering Jew, “etwas gebeugt” (129), who travels “durch die europäischen Touristenzentren und schläft im Altmännerasyl” (127). With his \textit{Reiseschreibmaschine}, he represents the stereotype of the cosmopolitan Jewish intellectual, the “Verstandesmensch” as described by

\textsuperscript{365} Sichrovsky 1997, 151-154.
\textsuperscript{366} Härtling 2011, 25.
\textsuperscript{367} Vesper 2009, 486-487.
Reichmann. He is also the quintessential victim, “er sieht wie der Gekreuzigte aus…”

The protagonist of Schwaiger’s *Lange Abwesenheit* rejects her father in favour of a fraught sexual relationship with an older Jewish man, a relationship that is also an idealized father-child relationship: “Birer war da für mich, als ich Fragen hatte. Wann hättest du dir Zeit genommen, mit mir zu reden?” (*Lange Abwesenheit*, 11) The opposition of the father and Birer sets up contrasting models of masculinity, the cold, xenophobic German father in negative contrast with the liberal, physically demonstrative Jew, Birer. The narrator’s position is, however, ambivalent, torn between oedipal desire for her father (“leg deine Hände auf meine Hüften…”) and revulsion towards Birer that reflects anti-Semitic notions inculcated by her father: “Mit den Juden, die überlebt haben, geht es mir wie die Spinnen, die mir Angst einjagen, weil es immer dieselbe Spinne zu sein scheint, die ich erschlage, die Rächerspinne” (*Lange Abwesenheit*, 12, 27). The narrator’s vision that conflates her father in hospital with a Jewish camp inmate, “Ein Gefangener. Mit gestreifter Jacke” (*Lange Abwesenheit*, 37) is a metaphor for the tortured triangular relationship of Jews, Germans and the Holocaust.

The victimhood of the second generation

Second-generation writers perceive themselves to be the inheritors of a legacy of guilt for a crime they have not perpetrated, as the protagonist of Schneider’s *Vati* remarks bitterly: “Der Spruch von ‘der Gnade der späten Geburt’ war damals noch nicht erfunden und stand mir nicht zur Verfügung; ich spürte lange, bevor ich es wußte, daß

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370 Seuren 1980, 130.
Indeed, this is the theme of Sichrovsky’s 1987 exploration of second-generation responses to the implication of their parents in Nazism. Parental guilt is perceived to irrevocably contaminate the identity of the second generation: “Ja, ich wußte genau, daß ich Hitler war, bis zum Gürtel. Daß ich da nicht herauskommen würde, daß es ein Kampf auf Leben und Tod ist, der mein Leben verseucht, seine gottverdammte Existenz hat sich an meine geklebt wie Napalm...” To Vesper, the childhood memory of a pig’s slaughter is symbolic of the violence in which he feels implicated: “Ich hörte das Krachen des Hammers, sah, wie der Nippel tief in den Schädel des Tieres eindrang, hörte das entsetzliche Schreien, das das Tier aus weit aufgerissenem Rachen ausstieß ... sah, wie die Männer sich über das schreiende, sich verkrampfende Tier stürzten, es auf den umgekehrten Trog zerrten, so daß es jetzt etwas erhöht dalag, während der Gärtner zum größten Messer griff ...” (Die Reise, 318-319). His feeling of guilt and complicity is expressed in the notion of having transgressed a prohibition: “… und weit davon entfernt, mich schuldig zu fühlen, weil ich etwas Verbotenes getan hatte ... daß ich in ein Geheimnis eingedrungen war...” (Die Reise, 320).

Return to scenes of childhood such as these constitutes a common trope in Väterliteratur, in which children metaphorically revisit their childhood in their quest to understand their fathers and the impact of National Socialism, embodied by their fathers, on family life. Meckel’s Suchbild begins with his earliest memory of childhood, constructed as a carefree Heilsraum: “Das Wagendach geöffnet, ein heller Tag, ich legte den Kopf zurück und sah in den Himmel, dort flatterte Laub und schlug über mir zusammen, schwindelerregend, ein Schwirren von Schatten und Licht...” Härting’s Nachgetragene Liebe opens in similar fashion with imagery of boundless energy and freedom: “Ich bin fünf und aufgebrochen zu einer großen Reise. Ich habe ein Ziel, wie ich es von den Erwachsenen kenne, die verreisen und schon wissen, wo

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371 Peter Schneider, Vati (Bamberg: Buchners Schulbibliothek der Moderne, 2001), 10.
372 Peter Sichrovsky, Schuldig geboren: Kinder aus Nazi Familien (Cologne: Kiepenheuer and Witsch, 1987).
Härtling’s text, Hebel’s story, *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen*, becomes a metaphor for redemption: “Ich mußte weiter zurück, wieder die Hand im Nacken spüren, wieder von deinem Schweigen gedrückt werden, ich mußte aufhören, mich zu wehren und die Spuren lesen, die du mir hintergelassen hast.” Härtling’s text ends with an allusion to Hebel’s story that expresses the longing for a resurrected relationship with his father: “Kehrtest du zurück, Vater, wie der Mann aus dem Bergwerk von Falun, könntest du mein jüngerer Bruder sein.” Childhood is often depicted as vaguely threatened, by “böse Träume” in Rehmann’s recollections of her father’s room, or in Plessen’s recollection of her childhood home at Einhaus, by its “Gramspelunke.” For Seuren, the space of childhood is haunted by incipient violence:

Durch den Türspalt des Wohnzimmers sah ich einen Mann, der bis auf eine dunkelblaue wollene Badehose … nackt war … Wir waren allein im Zimmer, ich wollte ihm körperlich nah sein, mich mit der Hand am Tisch festhalten und nichts berühren, was ihm gehörte, die Pistolenbürste und der schmierige Putzlappen, das winzige Ölfäschchen und die verstreuten Patronen auf Zeitungspapier. (*Abschied von einem Mörder*, 7)

Implicit in these conflicted depictions of childhood is the children’s sense of victimhood in relation to their fathers, reflected not only in the memory of actual physical injury, but in the masochistic tendency to somatise the father’s unexpiated guilt that becomes a trope in *Väterliteratur*.

A self-perception of victimhood is reflected in a sense of loss that is metaphysical as well as material,

Früh, durchdringend und unbegreiflich, bildete sich die Erfahrung eines ungeheuren Mangels … Es fehlten die Freude, der Luxus und das Glück … Die Vaterlosigkeit fehlte … es fehlte Verschütten,

Eckstaedt’s case studies confirm the tendency of the children to perceive themselves as victims of their fathers:

Die Söhne mußten ständig an der Wahrheit in der Objektbeziehung zweifeln. Sie hatten damit keinen festen Boden. Für den Identifizierungsprozeß mit der Ausbildung von Repräsentanzen wurde folgenschwer den Söhnen das Bild der Väter als eindeutiger Elternimaginies vorenthalten, das für die integrale und konstante innere Gültigkeit von Vergangenheit, Gegenwart und Orientierung für die Zukunft notwendig ist. Ihre Möglichkeit war, sich mehr oder weniger bewußt als Opfer ihrer Väter zu begreifen.380

In her case studies of second-generation patients, Eckstaedt observes a feeling of loss and inauthenticity on the part of sons in relation to their fathers, experienced as a “Defekt an seiner Seele, er sei wie amputiert, ihm fehle etwas”, and which she interprets as a “Metapher für die Stelle, an der er mit dem Vater bisher verbunden war.”381 Loss and betrayal are central to Vesper’s denunciation of post-war German life:

Wo sind die Linden, unter denen ich aufwuchs? Es gibt sie nicht und hat sie nie gegeben!/

ES WAR NIE DA! Man hat mich betrogen, es mir vorgemacht. Geh nachts durch diese Stadt, sieh dir die Häuser an, die dumme, kleinliche Strategie der Straßen, die niedersächsischen Glubschaugen (*Die Reise*, 88)

The victimhood of the second generation takes the form also of vicarious suffering and a fascination with the suffering body. Laub and Auerhahn (1993) postulate that the

self-infliction of suffering enables the second generation child to identify with the father’s legacy of Nazi perpetration and guilt, and to insert him- or herself into the father’s world, becoming both victim and perpetrator. Eckstaedt describes the tendency of sons to somatise the father’s guilt: “Wenn der Schmerz aus seiner Seele kam, ließ er ihn wie der Vater als solchen nicht zu, sondern konkretisierte ihn in seinem Körper, dem er peinigend wie der Täter seinem Opfer gegenüberstand.” There is a masochistic dimension to this act of appropriation, and a sense in which the children of perpetrators somatically inscribe the guilt of their fathers, and their own sense of complicity in National Socialism, on their bodies. This process is described by Anhalt, daughter of an SS officer: “Immer häufiger setzte ich mich auf die feuchten Steine, die vom Hof in den Keller führten, und ritzte mir Hakenkreuze in die trockene Haut meiner Schienbeine.” A fascination with the body in pain, and descriptions of the suffering body of the father, are evident in Väterliteratur texts. Obsession with the father’s dying body is evident in graphic and objective descriptions of his death. Regarding her father’s corpse, the narrator of Lange Abwesenheit observes: “Den Verwesungsgeruch atme ich ein, der durch Vaters Mund aus den Eingeweiden kommt … Die ausgetrocknete Zunge klebt auf der Unterlippe … Mager, zugespitzt und rot liegt [das Gesicht] auf dem Kissen … Der Leinensack ist verrutscht, als hätte ihn jemand aufgehoben und achtlos wieder hingeworfen. Der Mund steht offen. Ein violetteres Loch…” Lange Abwesenheit, 57). Meckel describes his father, dying in “zerfleischenden, wachsenden, unabwendbaren Schmerz, im qualvollen Elend, das alle Organe erfasste” (Suchbild, 90-91). The father’s decomposing body is imagined by Gauch, “Beim Aufwachen denke ich gleich daran … Daß sein Körper in der vergangenen Nacht in einem zugeschraubten Holzkasten in der kalten Leichenhalle weiter verfallen ist” (Vaterspuren, 65). Detached fascination characterizes Vesper’s description of his dying father: “Ich tat [Opium] in den starren Mund … Die Lippen

waren aufgesprungen. Er war gelähmt und atmete acht Tage, vertrocknete also” (*Die Reise*, 39).

For the children, fascination with the decay of the father’s body is paralleled by a masochistic concern with their own physical decay: “Ich war abgemagert, die Haut spannte sich bleich über den Schädel. Sie wirkte sich verletzlich, wie ein Bongo-Fell ... manchmal schien sich die Haut bis zu den Ohren zu lösen, eine lederne, bemalte Kriegermaske” (*Die Reise*, 220-221). Fascination with death and decomposition at times evokes the Christian discourse of the mortification of the body, “Sie haben ihn vom Kreuz genommen … Vorbei, vorbei, es ist vollbracht” (*Lange Abwesenheit*, 58). Scrutinizing himself in the mirror, Vesper is appalled by his appearance: “Im ersten Augenblick weigerte ich mich zu akzeptieren, daß ich das war. Das Gesicht da drinnen schwankte wie vom Rumpf abgetrennt in einiger Entfernung über dem Hals. Der Kopf eines Massakrierten … Ich sah die Hand des Henkers, die nach den dünnen Strähnen meiner Haare griff” (*Die Reise*, 189). Such descriptions lead Silverman to conclude that “what is being beaten here is not so much the body as the ‘flesh’, and beyond that sin itself, and the whole fallen world,”384 emphasizing the irredeemably tormented nature of the child and perpetrator-parent relationship.

The generational conflicts of *Väterliteratur* recur in Sebald’s prose writing of the 1990s and beyond. In what follows, I analyse Sebald’s writing to support my argument that his work is not impervious to the cultural and political currents that influenced his contemporaries in the 1960s and 1970s. Indeed, his narrative prose engages with many, if not most of the themes of *Väterliteratur*, suggesting that, for Sebald, the conflicts that troubled his generation two decades earlier were not resolved, but repressed. As a product of the ongoing *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* of the second generation, Sebald’s work represents a belated and intensified engagement with these conflicts.

The detachment of Sebald’s authorial perspective seems antithetical to the historical specificity of *Väterliteratur*. In contrast with the passionate subjectivity of *Väterliteratur*, Sebald’s *Ich*-narrator remains anonymous, and it is only through autobiographical hints, and, at times, a disingenuous game of autobiographical hide-

and-seek, that the reader is led to identify the narrator with Sebald himself.\footnote{Sebald’s evasiveness on the question of narratorial identity is demonstrated in interview with Martin von Doerry and Volker Hage, Der Spiegel (December 12, 2001): “Die bürgerliche Person ist etwas anderes als der Schriftsteller. Der Schriftsteller ist etwas anderes als der Erzähler. Und der Erzähler ist wierderum etwas anderes als die Figuren, die er beschreibt.”} The German father, subject of intensely conflicted feelings in Väterliteratur, rarely appears in Sebald’s prose; in infrequent allusions to this figure, he embodies menace and brutality.\footnote{In the Breendonk fortress, former Nazi torture site, the Ich-narrator of Austerlitz experiences a moment of overwhelming repugnance at the memory of his father, and the vision of “Die Familienväter und die guten Söhne aus Vilsbiburg und aus Fuhlsbüttel ... wie sie hier nach getanen Dienst beim Kartenspiel bieinander saßen oder Briefe schrieben an ihre Lieben daheim, den unter ihnen hatte ich ja gelebt bis in mein zwanzigstes Jahr” (Austerlitz, 37-38).} Given these unpromising signs, Sebald’s affinity with Väterliteratur is an area that critics have tended to avoid. Davies remains an exception, drawing attention in her 2011 article to “the remarkable homology” that exists between Sebald’s “Il ritorno in patria (Schwindel.Gefühle.) and Vesper’s paradigmatic Väterliteratur text, Die Reise,\footnote{Davies 2011, 291.} and pointing to parallels that include the depiction of childhood overshadowed by patriarchal violence, the journey of return to childhood, and the uncovering of secrets relating to adult transgression.

There are persuasive connections between Sebald’s narrative prose and the Väterliteratur of his generation, suggesting that he remains preoccupied with the conflicts that exercised his generation in the 1960s and 1970s. Sebald’s writing reflects the central tropes of Väterliteratur: the quest for the father, rejection of Germany and Germans as representing a tainted identity, return to childhood, and the uncovering of secrets. The extent to which Sebald’s prose fiction is informed by the tropes and concerns of Väterliteratur is explored with reference to Die Ausgewanderten, the collection of stories discussed below.
**Die Ausgewanderten and the tropes of Väterliteratur**

In *Die Ausgewanderten*, a collection of four “lange Erzählungen”, Sebald explores the lives of four individuals, three of whom are Jewish or partially so, in whose lives emigration and displacement are central themes. The malign impact of the Holocaust is evident in the lives of three of the protagonists, two of whom commit suicide. The narratives are linked through recurring tropes and imagery, and unified by the presence of an anonymous *Ich*-narrator, biographically seemingly identical with Sebald, who edits and filters the emigrants’ narratives, and whose own life intersects, often mimetically, with theirs. *Die Ausgewanderten* reveals tropes and themes of Väterliteratur, reconfigured in inverted and metaphorical form, confirming Sebald’s connection to the socio-cultural preoccupations and narrative strategies of his generation. My analysis of *Die Ausgewanderten* is based on a perception of the narrator-subject relationship as a reinterpretation of the son-father dyad thematized in Väterliteratur, and draws on Cosgrove’s interpretation of the affiliation between German narrator and Jewish protagonists in *Die Ausgewanderten* and *Austerlitz*. (Cosgrove, 2006).

“Henry Selwyn”

In “Henry Selwyn”, a German writer-narrator, biographically suggestive of Sebald, goes to England to work. In Norwich, he encounters the elderly Henry Selwyn, in whose eerie house the narrator and his wife live for a period. A relationship is established between the young German narrator and the melancholy, reclusive Englishman, in the course of which Henry Selwyn confesses to the narrator the secret of his Lithuanian Jewish origins, and his illicit love for the Swiss Alpine guide, Johannes Naegeli, whose disappearance in the Alps many years previously continues to haunt him. Henry Selwyn is consumed with guilt relating to his love for Naegeli, as well as his denial of his Jewish origins. Overwhelmed by despair, he takes his own life. More than a decade later, the narrator, on a train journey through the Swiss Alps, notices a newspaper report describing the discovery of Naegeli’s remains.

In second-generation writing, the topos of redemptive return to a prelapsarian time, often signified by the *heile Welt* of childhood, is a metaphor for a fantasy of restoration.
It is common in *Väterliteratur* texts, in which the children of perpetrator parents return to scenes of childhood in search of answers to their parents’ past, and to redeem relationships that have been “lost” through the transgression of the parent, and the resentment of the child. Rehmann’s imagined “return” and literary reconstruction of her father’s room evokes the lost intimacy between father and child; in Härtling’s text, Hebel’s story, *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen*, becomes a metaphor for the redemption of their relationship. While the trope of return is a metaphor for redemption of loss in *Die Ausgewanderten*, the stories are primarily about impossible returns and failed journeys:388 the narrator of “Max Aurach” wanders aimlessly around Manchester, undertaking journeys with no destination; Henry Selwyn recounts to the narrator the failed journey of his family to the “gelobtes Land” of America (DA, 32). His “return” to a happier past by watching the film of Crete is illusive and marred by a symbolic “Riß” that implies the rupture of his past from the present. Paul Bereyter’s sojourn in France is punctuated by the trope of the unhappy, and ultimately fatal return to Germany. Ambros’ and Cosmo’s journey to Jerusalem is a negative messianic “return”, and the narrator’s journey to Germany on Aurach’s behalf fails in its mission, to discover the fate of Aurach’s family.

In “Henry Selwyn”, Sebald, like Härtling, uses Hebel’s story to convey the notion of retrieval of the past. In Hebel’s story, a young miner leaves his fiancée to go down the mine, where he dies. Many decades later, his remains, perfectly preserved, are brought up and he is “reunited” with his now aged fiancée in a poignant conclusion. In an inversion of Hebel’s story, Selwyn’s beloved Naegeli disappears in the Alps, and his remains, in the form of “ein Häufchen geschliffener Knochen und ein Paar genagelter Schuhe” (DA, 37), are brought down from the mountains many years after the death of Henry Selwyn. In both texts, there is a suggestion that the dead are redeemed by the resurrective power of literature, with Hebel’s *Unverhofftes Wiedersehen* a metaphor for the literary project, through which the past can be resurrected. However, in Sebald’s story, the resurrective potential of literature is undermined by its underlying association with Kafka, and by the symbolic implications of Sebald’s imagery. In a parable that inverts Hebel’s story, Kafka exclaims: “Wie viel Worte in dem Buche

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388 This notion is explored by Katja Garloff, “The Emigrant as Witness: W.G. Sebald’s *Die Ausgewanderten.*** German Quarterly (Winter 2004): 76-93 (71).
stehen! Erinnern sollen sie! Als ob Worte erinnern könnten! Denn Worte sind schlechte Bergsteiger und schlechte Bergmänner. Sie holen nicht die Schätze von den Bergeshöhn und nicht von den Bergestiefen."  

The bones and shoes that constitute Naegeli’s remains, evoke common Holocaust images, this association undermining any redemptive interpretation that the retrieval of Naegeli’s remains might suggest, and rendering ironic the conclusion to the story: “So also kehren sie wieder, die Toten...” (DA, 36). These words evoke Nietzsche’s doctrine of “die ewige Wiederkehr des Gleiches”, and in the context of Sebald’s melancholy world view, Benjamin’s notion of history as endless catastrophe, of which the small, personal history of Henry Selwyn is an expression.

The trope of hidden secrets is common to Väterliteratur, in which such secrets typically relate to transgression, and crucially, the father’s complicity in National Socialism. In “Henry Selwyn”, Hebel’s Unverhofftes Wiedersehen is a metaphor for the trope of the buried secret: Selwyn’s love for Naegeli, and his concealed Jewish identity. The story of “Henry Selwyn” is pervaded by imagery that suggests concealment and secrecy: Henry Selwyn’s house is “verborgen hinter einer mannsbaren Mauer und einem dicht ineinandergewachsenen Gebusch aus Stechholder und lusitanischem Lorbeer” (DA, 8); Henry Selwyn himself is hidden “in dem Halbschatten...” (DA, 10), and the narrator becomes aware, in Henry Selwyn’s house, of “verborgene Gänge” (DA, 17), and of a hidden, spectral life “hinter den Wänden der Zimmer” (DA, 17). The hidden secret of Selwyn’s life implies transgression, as it does in Väterliteratur: his love for Naegeli must be hidden, and his concealment of his Jewish origins results in guilt, despair, and withdrawal from the world. As the interlocutor for Selwyn’s confession, the German narrator fulfils the expository role of the son in Väterliteratur, uncovering the secrets of Henry Selwyn’s

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390 For discussion of Holocaust imagery see Silke Arnold-de Simine, Mediating Memory: Trauma, Empathy, Nostalgia (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013).

life; the writing of the story itself becomes a metaphor for the Väterliteratur trope of uncovering the secret of past transgression.

The trope of the secret raises the question of Sebald’s strategy of conflating victims and perpetrators in Die Ausgewanderten. Sebald’s portrayal of Henry Selwyn is deeply ambiguous: on the one hand, like the perpetrator fathers of Väterliteratur, he represses transgressive aspects of his past; his denial of his Jewish origins aligns him with the silence and denial of the perpetrators: like them, he cannot speak about the Holocaust, other than to refer to it cryptically as “eine blinde und böse Zeit, über die ich, selbst wenn ich wollte, nichts zu erzählen vermöchte” (DA, 35). On the other hand, Sebald’s faceless and annihilated character, with his “gesenktem Kopf … gebeugte, fast bittstellerische Haltung” (DA, 10), resembles Levi’s absolute victim, the “Musulmann.” At the same time, Henry Selwyn’s mendicant posture and withdrawal from the world conforms to the stereotype of the Jew as “living corpse”, a spectral, wandering, and homeless figure, “disrupting and haunting [the homes of others].” The perpetuation of such culturally questionable tropes in Sebald’s narrative prose implies the desire to amalgamate victim and perpetrator in a new “symbiosis”, and contributes to the ambivalent picture of post-war German-Jewish relations that Sebald portrays:

The symbolic confusion of German and Jewish identity … could be regarded as a further wishful expression of the desire for a renewed German-Jewish symbiosis; along with the behaviour of the devoted Austerlitz narrator, it testifies to a fundamental narrative position that wishes to retrieve a golden past of German-Jewish relations…

392 Primo Levi, Survival in Auschwitz: The Nazi Assault on Humanity, trans. Stuart Wolf (New York: Touchstone, 1996), 90. Santner describes the Musulmann as “the human in the neighbourhood of zero”, a figure whose being has been “fully reduced to the substance of a cringe, whose existence has been reduced to its pure, ‘protocosmic’ being, who is there yet no longer in the world.” Santner 1995, 25.

393 Shapiro 2004, 65.

394 Cosgrove 2006, 243.
The themes of redemptive return and the uncovering of secrets, opaque in the story of “Henry Selwyn”, are developed in “Paul Bereyter”, a story in which the trope of a son’s quest to discover the life of a father-figure is reimagined.

“Paul Bereyter”

The story deals with the narrator’s former teacher, Paul Bereyter, who lives the earlier part of his life as a patriotic German, ignorant of his Jewish ancestry. The advent of National Socialism sees the death of Paul’s parents, the aryanization of the family business, and Paul’s prohibition from teaching on the grounds of being a quarter Jewish. His Jewish fiancée is deported and dies in a concentration camp. Paul flees to France, but, driven by ineradicable patriotism, returns to Germany when war breaks out, and voluntarily joins the Wehrmacht, permitted on the grounds of being three-quarters Aryan. As a member of the Wehrmacht, he sees active duty in occupied Europe. After the war, Paul Bereyter returns to Germany, where he tries to put the war and Nazi era behind him by returning to teaching, but remains depressed, and filled with repressed resentment. It is at this time that the youthful narrator encounters him as a charismatic teacher, imbued with German culture, and obsessed with trains and railways. Tormented by unresolved guilt, and at times, hostility even towards his students, Paul Bereyter abandons teaching, living out his final years of encroaching blindness in France. On a return journey to Germany, he commits suicide on the railway line outside his former hometown.

The story of Paul Bereyter is motivated by the desire, common in Väterliteratur, to posthumously “search” for the father, in order to fill in the lacunae of knowledge about the life of a father, or in this case, an alternative father-figure. To the extent that Paul is presented by the narrator as a victim of Nazism, an enlightened, sensitive, and cultured teacher, who both educates and nurtures his students, among them, the youthful narrator, and whose obituary refers to the “Fürsorge, die er seinen Schülern habe angedeihen lassen” (DA, 42), he can be considered an idealized, if somewhat remote, alternative father-figure in the eyes of the narrator, who, in adult life, anxiously seeks to understand him better. The narrator’s quest for understanding is motivated by feelings of compulsion, regret, and guilt on receiving news of Paul’s death:
Diese gänzlich unverbundene und unverbindliche Feststellung sowohl als die drastische Todesart waren die Ursache, weshalb ich mich während der nachfolgenden Jahre in Gedanken immer häufiger mit Paul Bereyter beschäftigte und schließlich versuchte, über die Versammlung meiner eigenen mir sehr lieben Erinnerungen hinaus, hinter seine mir unbekannte Geschichte zu kommen. (DA, 42)

Similar feelings characterize the quest for the father’s life in Väterliteratur, with Henisch confessing, “Lieber Papa ... ich bin mir nicht ganz klar darüber, warum mich deine Lebensgeschichte plötzlich interessiert, aber mir ist, als wäre ich auf eine Spur geraten, der ich folgen will, obwohl ich noch nicht weiß, wohin sie führt.”395 Regret underlies Härtling’s exploration of his father’s life: “Wir haben uns nie als Männer unterhalten, nie unsere Erinnerungen messen, tauschen können.”396 In “Paul Bereyter”, the quest involves the German narrator in a re-examination of his own past, and return to S., the hometown of his childhood. Consistent with the many autobiographical clues that conflate the identity of Sebald’s narrator with Sebald himself, this suggests Steinach, Sebald’s childhood home. The news of Paul’s death, expressed in the passive mode, “Im Januar 1984 erreichte mich aus S. die Nachricht...” (DA, 41), catalyses in the narrator a change from passivity with regard to the past, to an active quest to understand, to reveal, and to redeem the past. Fundamental to this change is guilt at not having known or cared about the circumstances of Paul’s life: “…den wenn auch der Paul uns gekannt und verstanden hat, so hat doch keiner von uns gewußt, wer er war und wie es aussah in ihm. Darum habe ich - sehr verspätet - versucht, mich ihm anzunähern, habe versucht, mir auszumalen, wie er gelebt hat” (DA, 44). For the narrator of Paul Beryter, the quest is undertaken to compensate for the deficiency of knowledge that is commonly experienced by second-generation sons in relation to their fathers’ lives. Imagery of deficiency and emptiness pervades the story of Paul Bereyter: the narrator notes the gaps and silences in Paul’s death notice concerning significant facts relating to his life and suicide; the quest to reconstruct Paul’s life involves, as it does for the writers of Väterliteratur, the ordering of “bruchstückhafte Erinnerungen” (DA, 63).

396 Härtling 2011, 18.
Similar to *Väterliteratur* texts, such as *Vaterspuren, Lange Abwesenheit,* and *Nachgetragene Liebe,* the story of Paul Bereyter follows a narrative trajectory from the death of the father, through the quest for knowledge and understanding this catalyses, to eventual *Abschied* from the father, and the achievement of a degree of acceptance. As opposed to the visceral realism of the *Väterliteratur* texts, the death of Paul Bereyter is suggested rather than described, implied by a blurred photograph of a railway track, and a cryptic obituary. While the graphic realism of the father’s death in *Väterliteratur* conveys the resentment felt by the second-generation child towards a perpetrator parent, Sebald’s distanced treatment of Paul Bereyter’s death has a symbolic function that goes beyond the autobiographical dimension to the story: here, Sebald uses a common *Väterliteratur* trope as a metaphor for the loss of an untainted, pre-Holocaust past, symbolized by the so-called German-Jewish symbiosis. The German narrator’s quest for Paul Bereyter reflects the wistful desire to recapture this past. As Taberner notes with regard to *Die Ausgewanderten,* “Each of these German-Jews is mourned as a representative of a cultural flowering that has been smothered.”  

Sebald’s depictions of the connection between Germans and Jews is fundamentally nostalgic; these portrayals express a melancholy resuscitation of the nineteenth-century ideal of German-Jewish symbiosis in a self-consciously sentimentalizing way that rather too eagerly sidelines the alienation of German-Jewish relations in the post-Holocaust context.  

In his quest for knowledge, the narrator encounters the “conspiracy of silence” in the unwillingness of the German populace to speak about Jewish fate, and seeks out another Jewish character, Lucie Landau, to fill in the gaps. Through her recollections, that stimulate the narrator’s own memories, Paul emerges as an enlightened and enlightening figure, whose anti-authoritarian teaching methods contrast with the narrowness of the post-war German education system. Through Lucie Landau, he learns of Paul’s persecution as a Jew, and the fate of his family. The photo album functions as a form of *Enthüllung* here, as it does in *Väterliteratur;* through this device,

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397 Taberner 2004, 181.
398 Cosgrove 2006, 234.
the narrator learns about Paul’s youth, love, and the idealized “German-Jewish symbiosis” experienced by the Bereyter family before the war. In the story of Paul, the significance of the photograph album as an implicatory device is inverted, becoming a means of “visualising” the life of a more positive father-figure. Photographs of an emaciated Paul after the deportation of his fiancée emphasise his tragic vulnerability.

Following the narrative path of many Väterliteratur texts, the narrator’s quest in “Paul Bereyter” concludes with contemplation of the father’s death. Gauch’s novel ends with a physical attempt to come to terms with his father’s death: “Meinen Kopf beuge ich vor, in den Kleiderschrank hinein, rieche an seinen Anzügen. So roch Vater, denke ich; ich versuche, mir all das ganz genau einzuprägen.”³⁹⁹ At the grave of her father, the daughter in Lange Abwesenheit reflects: “Behutsam werfe ich meine Rosen in die offene Grube, aber sie rutschen vom Holz ... Ich spüre, es wäre meine Pflicht, mich zu dir zu legen und dich zu wärmen. Aber würde ich es dir den diesmal recht Machen ... Vater, wir liegen so schlecht miteinander.”⁴⁰⁰ For the son in Schneider’s Vati, a belated visit to his father’s grave gives rise to reflection: “Ich bin dann noch einmal nach Belem gereist, um das Grab meines Vaters zu besuchen ... lange habe ich dort gestanden und über meinen Vater nachgedacht...”⁴⁰¹ Sebald’s treatment of this trope, like that of the father’s death, is indirect. In the final pages of “Paul Bereyter”, an understanding of Paul’s death as, in a sense, preordained, is established by the conjunction of Paul and the Holocaust image of the train that aligns him with his fellow Jews transported to their death by train, and renders logical his method of suicide. The narrator’s quest for understanding concludes with a sense of the inevitability of Paul’s death as a symbol of the doomed “German-Jewish symbiosis”, and reflects Paul’s own understanding, “daß er zu den Exilierten und nicht nach S. gehörte” (DA, 88).

Paul Bereyter’s insight is ironic, occurring as he begins to lose his vision, and corresponds to the trope of “seeing and blindness” that is common to Väterliteratur texts, in which it signifies the desire to confront or avoid the shameful past. In the story of “Paul Bereyter”, this trope becomes also a metanarratorial reflection on post-Holocaust writing and representation, in which the narrator undertakes a quest to fill

³⁹⁹ Gauch 1996, 142.
⁴⁰⁰ Schwaiger 2011, 64.
⁴⁰¹ Schneider 2001, 82.
in the gaps of Paul’s life, to “see” what he was born too late to witness, and to learn what has been withheld from him in the putative post-war “conspiracy of silence: “Darum habe ich - sehr verspätet - versucht, mich ihm anzunähern, habe versucht, mir auszumalen, wie er gelebt hat…” (DA, 44). The narrator’s quest to “see” expresses what Hell describes as the desire of the second generation to see “that which cannot be seen, can no longer be seen, could never be seen … the desire of the Nachgeborenen to see what determines them.”\(^{402}\) The narrator’s efforts to visualize Paul’s life produce only fractured impressions: “Ich sah ihn liegen … ich sah ihn hingestreckt auf dem Geleis…” (DA, 44), and he concedes that

Solche Versuche der Vergegenwärtigung brachten mich jedoch dem Paul nicht näher, höchstens augenblicksweise, in gewissen Ausuferungen des Gefühls, wie sie mir unzulässig erscheinen und zu deren Vermeidung ich jetzt aufgeschrieben habe, was ich von Paul Bereyter weiß und im Verlauf meiner Erkundungen über ihn in Erfahrung bringen konnte. (DA, 45)

Such fragmented impressions resemble the “zerbrochene oder zersprungene Bilder” that are symptoms of Paul’s increasing visual impairment, and connect the two characters metaphorically: through the metaphor of vision and blindness, the quest for the father in “Paul Bereyter” becomes both an exploration of the protagonist’s failure to “see” his own predicament, and the narrator-writer’s self-reflexive realization of the limits of authorial imagination.

The story, the second in the collection, is prefaced by an epigraph from Jean Paul’s *Vorschule der Aesthetik*: “Manche Nebelflecken/löset kein Auge auf.” A compendium of classicist aesthetics and poetics, the work deals with the incomprehensibility of philosophical discourse; in the context of this story, it is a comment on the impossibility of knowing the Other, an admission of authorial limitation, and an acknowledgment that, in the reconstruction of the past, certain things remain impenetrable. The story of Paul Beryter reveals an almost obsessive concern with seeing and visual impairment as a metaphor for the incomprehension of those, like Paul Bereyter, who experience the Holocaust indirectly, and cannot bring themselves

\(^{402}\) Hell 2003, 36.
to imagine its horrors. Thus Paul’s inability or refusal to comprehend the fate of his family and fiancée is expressed as a failure to “see”: “Darum war Paul … lange Zeit auch nur unzulänglich im Bilde über das, was sich in S. 1934-35 abgespielt hatte, und mochte an die von blinden Flecken durchsetzte Vergangenheit nicht rühren” (DA, 80).

During his active service in the 
Wehrmacht
, Paul is described as witnessing more “als ein Herz oder Auge hält” (DA, 82), suggesting his metaphorical blindness as a refusal to “see”. His growing alienation during the war is described in imagery that implies an increasingly impaired view of a world that becomes “unbegreiflicher, eigenschaftsloser und abstrakter” (DA, 83). The metaphor of vision and blindness expresses Paul’s post-war ability to paradoxically “see” his predicament: faced with growing blindness, he undertakes to reconstruct the tragic fate of his family, previously obscured by the “blinde Flecken” that symbolize his reluctance to confront their fate.

In his final years, he immerses himself in the work of suicidal German-Jewish writers whose status as outsiders in German society mirrors his own, and confirms his belief of belonging to “den Exillierten und nicht nach S” (DA, 88), insight he achieves as he ironically loses his sight.

Paul’s German-Jewish background, and the story of his exclusion and death are a metaphor for the end of the German-Jewish idyll, and a re-imagining of the 
Väterliteratur
 theme of rupture and continuity. In 
Väterliteratur
 texts, the thematicization of rupture and continuity implies the genealogical conflict that characterizes the genre. In “Paul Bereyter”, Sebald develops this trope into a radical rejection of Germany that equates it with death: after the persecution and dispossession of his parents, his own exclusion, and the deportation and murder of his fiancée, Paul’s thwarted love of 
Heimat
 leads to a series of failed returns to Germany that are a metaphor for the conflicted desire for affiliation and break; his suicide there suggests that it is only in death that this “wahres Innbild” of Germanness can be “at home.”

As a metanarratorial comment on the difficulty of reconstructing a life, the theme of discontinuity in “Paul Bereyter” is suggested by the fragmented nature of the text, in which interpolated photos function as resurging memory fragments that fracture the narrative flow. The obituary, with its “nicht erläuterte Bemerkung” (DA, 42) hinting at Paul’s Jewish identity, suggests the gaps in knowledge to which the narrator alludes: “…denn wenn auch der Paul uns gekannt und verstanden hat, so hat doch keiner von uns gewußt, wer er war und wie es aussah in ihm” (DA, 44). The multiplicity of
sources, including interviews with villagers, the photo album, interviews with Paul’s companion, and the narrator’s own recollections, merely serves to underline the gap in authorial knowledge to which the narrator refers when he admits that “solche Versuche der Vergegenwärtigung brachten mich jedoch, wie ich mir eingestehen mußte, dem Paul nicht näher…” (DA, 45). The use of elipses suggests the inconclusive and fragmentary nature of the narrator’s recollections, “darum habe ich - sehr verspätet - versucht, mich ihm anzunähern…” (DA, 44).

Historical rupture is central to Paul’s tragedy: the “gewisse Unterbrechungen” (DA, 43) that characterize Paul’s relationship with his hometown, emphasize the discontinuity that lies at the heart of his alienation. In the life of Paul Bereyter, the Gunzenhauser pogrom of 1936 and the advent of the Third Reich are markers of ruptured historical time, key events that separate history into “before” and “after.” The pogrom, which presages the end of the Bereyter family’s experience of the “German-Jewish symbiosis”, dramatically breaks into the narrative outlining their “gutbürgerliche Existenz” (DA, 79), the absence of narrative break emphasizing the inevitability of the event, constructed as following naturally from the German-Jewish relationship. The Third Reich as a decisive historical rupture is marked by a paragraph break in the narrative (DA, 83), separating Paul’s war experience from his post-war life. It corresponds to the Schlußstrich that Paul hoped to draw under his experience during the Third Reich, and the Neuanfang to which he aspired. Both terms reflect the post-war discourse on Vergangenheitsbewältigung, in relation to which, Paul’s suicide is a pessimistic comment on the possibility of restoring German-Jewish relations. The term “Aberration” (DA, 83) to describe Paul’s post-war return to Germany suggests a break with normality, disruption and discontinuity, and as such, implies the dramatic breach in German historical continuity between “before” and “after”.

In the story of Paul Bereyter, imagery of permanence and connection symbolizes the spurious hope of continuity symbolized by the “German-Jewish symbiosis”. The Bereyter Emporium in rural Franconia is described with “reinst Traumklarheit” by Paul. In this Gedächtnisort⁴⁰³, imagery of preservation suggests both the belief in

⁴⁰³Nora understands the “Gedächtnisort” as a sacralised island of remembrance in the modern, de-ritualized world, a literary strategy to redeem the past through the sentimental evocation of a lost world. In Sebald’s narrative prose, the memoirs of
continuity - the *Einweckgläser* for preserving fruit from decay, the *Mottenkampfer* for protecting clothes against disintegration - and the idea of inevitable death and decay. Imagery related to trains and railways provides an ironic metaphor for continuity and break, the train, on the one hand, an image of connection, on the other, a Holocaust icon symbolizing death. The story of “Paul Bereyter” is pervaded by allusions to trains and railway lines, from the opening photograph of the train tracks on which Paul commits suicide, to the *Sonderzüge* that carry his fiancée and other Jewish victims to their death, and Paul’s obsession with “Bahnhöfe, Gleisanlagen, Stellwerke, Güterhallen und Signale” (DA, 91) that give his uncle’s observation, “er werde noch einmal bei der Eisenbahn enden” (DA, 92) a prescient power.

The preoccupation of *Väterliteratur* writers with genealogical rupture and continuity is implicit in the topos of alternative affiliation problematized in the story of “Paul Bereyter”. Both victim and perpetrator, an “echter Melammed” and a member of the *Wehrmacht*, he is a complex and problematical “father-figure” to the German narrator who anxiously seeks to reconstruct his life. An ambiguous figure, like many of the fathers depicted in *Väterliteratur*, devoted teachers, lawyers, or doctors, he is shown to be capable of perpetrating, or at the very least, passively witnessing atrocity. Paul’s position as a member of the *Wehrmacht* aligns him with many of the fathers explored in *Väterliteratur*. His return home after the war reflects the *Väterliteratur* theme of the returned father, his hopes of drawing a *Schlußstrich* under the events


405 Hebrew word denoting teacher. Sebald’s use of the Hebrew here draws attention to Bereyter’s Jewishness.

of the war mirroring the returned fathers who responded similarly to their war experiences. He is, simultaneously, a victim of the regime for which he perversely volunteers, motivated by an unassailable belief in himself as “ein Deutscher … gebunden an dieses heimatliche Voralpenland” (DA, 84), and a perpetrator on behalf of the same regime. In an interview with Poltronieri, Sebald discusses his construction of this ambiguous figure, observing “daβ es Leute gibt, die in beiden Lager gehört haben. Es ging mir darum, die Gradationen dieser Verhältnis zwischen Deutschen und Juden auszuloten.”407 On a deeper level, the controversial figure of Paul Bereyter combines the desire for both rupture and continuity that haunts the writers of Väterliteratur.

“Ambros Adelwarth”

In “Ambros Adelwarth”, the narrator traces the life of his great-uncle, born in 1886, who leaves his native country and travels the world, working in hotels in countries as far-flung as Japan, and developing a facility for languages. In America, he works as major domo to the Solomons, a wealthy Jewish family in New York, becoming the companion, and, it is hinted, the lover of the wayward and unstable Cosmo Solomon. Together with Cosmo, he undertakes extensive travels, including a journey to Jerusalem in 1913. Following Cosmo’s breakdown and death at the Samaria Sanatorium, and several years as a carer to Cosmo’s parents, Ambros has himself committed to the Sanatorium, where he voluntarily undergoes electro-convulsive therapy that damages his memory and ultimately kills him. Ambros’ life is pieced together by the narrator from interviews with surviving relatives who knew him, information derived from photo albums, and an extensive diary kept by Ambros on his journey with Cosmo to Jerusalem. “Ambros Adelwarth” differs from the other stories that make up Die Ausgewanderten in significant ways: it is the only story that does not have a Jewish or partially Jewish protagonist; indeed, it is a narrative in which the roles of German and Jew, established in “Paul Bereyter” and “Max Aurach”, are reversed, with the German Ambros acting as guardian to the needy Jewish figure of Cosmo

Solomon. Unlike the other stories in Die Ausgewanderten, it features a protagonist whose life precedes the Holocaust, a member of the Sebald family who attempts to identify, even to the point of death, with a Jewish protagonist.

The narrator’s quest, in the form of his journey to America, stems from a perception of deficit, and is motivated by the desire, “mehr über die Lebensläufe der auf [den Fotographien im Album G.S.] Abgebildeten in Erfahrung zu bringen” (DA, 103). Unlike the explicitly confrontational quest for the father in Väterliteratur, here the quest is a search for genealogical connection arising from an undefined perception of loss. This is symbolized by the painting of the Heimatort W. (DA, 104), depicted in the album, and described as verschollen. The term evokes its wartime usage, and suggests a German past irrevocably lost, “missing in action.” The quest for knowledge about Ambros as a “father-figure” takes multiple forms, including interviews with those who knew him, and interrogation of the narrator’s own memories; as in Väterliteratur, notes, documents, and a family album reflect Sebald’s connection with the documentary literature of the 1970s. A layering of details is provided, none of which is individually reliable: Kasimir admits, “über den Ambros Adelwarth weiß ich leider nicht viel…” (DA, 127), and Fini confesses, “über diese Reise [nach Jerusalem] kann ich dir freilich keinen Aufschluß geben…” (DA, 137), and “Selbst nach der Ankunft in New York erfuhr ich lange Zeit nichts über die Vorgeschichte des Onkels Adelwarth, trotzdem ich andauernd in Kontakt stand mit ihm” (DA, 143).

The visit from the American relatives at the opening of the story, and reference to Verwandten, Vorfahr, and Sippschaft (DA, 98), hint at the theme of origins and genealogy. As in “Paul Bereyter” and “Max Aurach”, the central “father-son” relationship in “Ambros Adelwarth” is a surrogate one: the childless Ambros is a substitute-father to Cosmo, his task, “über [Cosmo] zu wachen wie über ein schlafendes Kind” (DA, 133). Much is made of Cosmo as “ein braves … Kind” (DA, 142), “ein wohlerzogene[s] Kind” (DA, 184), underlining his filial relationship to Ambros. Here, Sebald presents an inversion of the father-son relationship found in “Paul Bereyter” and “Max Aurach.” The characters represent stereotyped notions of Jewishness and Germanness, the putative German mania for order and discipline exemplified by the “vorbildliche Korrektheit des Ambros” (DA, 184), contrasting with the “Exzentrizität Cosmo…” Indeed, Cosmo’s neuroticism and effeminacy evoke Weininger’s controversial portrayal of the Jewish male in Geschlecht und
Roles established in “Paul Bereyter” and “Ambros Adelwarth” are reversed here, with Ambros as the rational Verstandemensch and guardian, watching over the dependent Cosmo as “Hüter” (DA, 131), “Freund und Führer” (DA, 132), and performing a similar role to Silbereisen, the enlightened Jewish character in Seuren’s text, and Birer, the Jewish intellectual in Schwaiger’s Lange Abwesenheit. The identities of Ambros and Cosmo merge ultimately in their common fate: both succumb to catatonia and die at the ironically named Samaria Sanatorium at Ithaca. As an allegory of pre-war German-Jewish relations, Sebald expresses a nostalgic longing for a more enduring “German-Jewish symbiosis”, based on an amalgamation of the qualities of both groups. Thus, Germans too, are depicted as wanderers, and given stereotyped Jewish traits of alienation and otherness: the narrator’s uncle Kasimir admits to feeling “a long way away, though I never know quite from where” (DA, 129), while the photograph of Ambros in Arabic costume casts him in the role, commonly reserved for Jews, of the “exotic other” (DA, 137).

By contrast with the positive depiction of Jewish characters in “Paul Bereyter” and “Max Aurach”, Jews in “Ambros Adelwarth” tend to be negatively characterized. Cosmo, as the principal Jewish figure in “Ambros Adelwarth”, is portrayed as a mentally unstable and rootless cosmopolitan, indeed, his name suggests this role, and his restless peregrination through Europe and the Middle East evokes the image of the wandering Jew, while his decline into catatonia evokes the cultural image of the Jew as a “living corpse.” The Jews encountered by the narrator’s German relatives in America are depicted as mendacious and exploitative: Seckler, “ein Brünner Jude … hat [Kasimirs G.S.] Arbeit gelobt, aber gezahlt hat er ungern und wenig” (DA, 123). His comical grammatical errors are a parody of Yiddish. The new Jeschiva is characterized as a “morgenländische Palast” (DA, 124), a term that suggests


stereotyped notions of Jewish exoticism and fabulous wealth.\textsuperscript{410} As an allegory of pre-Holocaust German-Jewish relations, Sebald’s negative and stereotyped portrayal of Jews in “Ambros Adelwarth”, and his portrayal of Ambros as a virtuous guardian or father-figure to Cosmo, are ambiguous, perpetuating a notion of German tolerance and Jewish exploitation that resonates with Wagner’s scurrilous tract;\textsuperscript{411} at the same time, it suggests an image of a post-Holocaust German-Jewish symbiosis that sees the German role as one of guardianship. This vision recurs in “Max Aurach” and “Austerlitz” in moments of symbolic significance, in which the Jewish protagonist hands over to the German narrator his legacy for guardianship.\textsuperscript{412} Sebald is aware of the ambiguity of Jewish tolerance in Germany, and in an essay, confirms it as “eine Form der Verfolgung”\textsuperscript{413}, predicated on a “Bereitschaft zur Selbstnegierung.”\textsuperscript{414} Nevertheless, his ambiguous portrayal of Jewish figures, exemplified in “Ambros Adelwarth”, evokes pejorative images of the mendacious Jew, the wandering Jew, and the Jew as pariah, confirming Barzilai’s observation that, in the German imagination, Jewish difference continues to be configured as negative and culturally alien.\textsuperscript{415}

Sebald’s depiction of the journey of Ambros and Cosmo to Jerusalem has distinct affinities with Vesper’s iconic \textit{Väterliteratur} text, \textit{Die Reise}, suggesting the shared experience by these authors of a generational context. Comparison of these texts expands on Davies’ 2011 study, in which she demonstrates Sebald’s affinity with

\textsuperscript{410} This is a misunderstanding of the term, \textit{Yeshiva}, which denotes a rabbinical place of study, and unlikely to resemble the ostentatious building Sebald describes.

\textsuperscript{411} Wagner, 1850.

\textsuperscript{412} In “Max Aurach”, the eponymous protagonist gives the German narrator his mother’s memoirs for safe-keeping; Austerlitz entrusts the German narrator with his photographs and the keys to his home and the adjacent Jewish cemetery, implying his transferral of custodianship of Jewish legacy.

\textsuperscript{413} Moses Mendelssohn, \textit{Gesammelte Schriften}, V (Leipzig: Brockgaus, 1844), 676.


Väterliteratur through comparative analysis of “Il ritorno in patria” (Schwindel.Gefühle) and Vesper’s Die Reise.

“Ambros Adelwarth” and Vesper’s Die Reise

There are notable similarities between the journey to Jerusalem that forms the lengthy final part of “Ambros Adelwarth”, and Vesper’s autobiographical Romanessay, Die Reise (1977): on the level of plot, both texts explore the journey of a German protagonist, accompanied by a Jewish travelling companion, a relationship that reflects the writer’s consciousness of the problematic German-Jewish relationship; narratively diffuse and fragmented, 416 Die Reise and the journey to Jerusalem episode include material that contrasts first-person accounts with documentary evidence and visual material, such as sketches, handwritten diary extracts, tickets, and photos. Both texts are intertextually dense and dispose over a huge range of literary works. Both journeys are negative messianic narratives predicated on the impossibility of redemptive return, expressed in post-apocalyptic imagery. Neither journey liberates the protagonist from the past, or from conflict relating to national identity.

An extreme example of Väterliteratur, Vesper’s text radicalizes rejection of the father-generation and German identity in an explicitly anti-authoritarian, confrontational style that contrasts with Sebald’s more subdued tone. Vesper’s journey from Dubrovnik to West Germany via Italy and Austria is a paean to hatred 417, and a drug-fuelled journey of self-destruction. His autobiographical novel of a return journey to Germany in the late 1960s is a deeply negative narrative that traces a personal journey of disintegration. The Germany to which he returns is disparaged as “eine Kolonie degenerierter Fötusse. Vegetables – über ihrem Kopf mindestens drei Meter Erde…”


417 Vesper announces to his travelling companion Burton, that “The title of the book will be HATE … Ich hasse Deutschland. Ich hasse diese Deutschen, dieses auf den Straßen herumrollende Gemüse … Ich hasse meinen Vater. Ich hasse alle, die mir zur Sau gemacht haben” (Die Reise, 18).
Die Reise, 20), and marked by imagery of “stinkende, vergammelte Orte” (Die Reise, 32) and LSD-induced visions of post-apocalyptic landscapes:


In this “Welt ohne Menschen” (Die Reise, 106), the narrator perceives himself on “eine Fahrt in den Abgrund, in dem die Zeit feststeht…” (Die Reise, 110). It is a landscape of eternal daylight, of remorseless exposure to the sun, in which “das Hakenkreuz … das Zeichen der Sonne” (Die Reise, 489) symbolizes the continuing and destructive presence of National Socialism in post-war Germany. The messianic dimension to his return is suggested by his self-stylization as “ein Heiliger, von allen verlassen” (Die Reise, 219), and specifically, as Jesus: “Und ich wußte, daß ich nur noch wenige Stunden zu leben hätte, und ich stand im Garten von Gethsemane und ich … wußte, daß ich verraten war von allen, die ich liebe” (Die Reise, 220). Vesper’s journey is a putative messianic return to Heimat: “Jetzt, hier in der Kühle des Morgens, Tau noch auf dem Gras … die Rückkehr aus der Wüste: die Nacht voll tausend Blumen, der erträumte Anblick, nach Monaten aber alles synthetisch” (Die Reise, 270). The drug-induced parable that follows frames his journey as a messianic return in the Christian sense, with its notions of suffering and sacrifice:

Einmal, vor Jahren, hatte sich einer von ihnen auf den Weg gemacht. Man fand ihn, in den Anlagen liegend, von Sinnen, betäubt von den unerhörten Dingen, die er gesehen hatte. Man identifizierte ihn und brachte ihn in seine Heimat zurück, wo er, sich langsam erholend, Schreckliches zu berichten wußte. Und niemand lockte es, das gleiche Schicksal zu erleiden wie er. (Die Reise, 270)

The 1913 journey of Ambros and Cosmo to Jerusalem plays on the idea of redemptive return to Jerusalem that is central to Jewish messianism. Here too, the messianic

dream is inverted, and return is marked by dystopia, disorientation, and aversion. The journey of Ambros and Cosmo to Jerusalem is characterized by imagery of stone, dust, and dessication that resembles Vesper’s arid landscape, and in the context of Sebald’s theme of impossible Heimat, expresses a bitter renunciation of return as a metaphor for reconciled German identity:

...die gepriesene Stadt – a ruined and broken mass of rocks ... In den Straßen große Mengen von Unrat … Knöcheltief mancherorts der pudrige Kalkstaub. Die wenigen Pflanzen nach der seit Mai andauernden Dürre von diesem Steinmehl überzogen wie von einer bösen Krankheit … Verfall, nichts als Verfall, Marasmus und Leere. (DA, 202-204)

Visceral imagery conveys decay, “geronnenes Blut, Haufen von Eingewänden, schwärzlich braunes Gekröse, an der Sonne vertrocknet und verbrannt…” (DA, 204). As in Vesper’s text, relentless sunlight dessicates the landscape, the vineyard is “verdorrt” … “die Erde unter den schwarzen Stöcken rostfarben, ausgezehrt und versengt. Kaum irgendein wilder Olivenbaum, ein Dornenstrauch oder ein wenig Ysop” (DA, 208). Such imagery prefigures the “Verödung und Einebnung des kranken Subjekts” (DA, 166) that, beyond the journey to Jerusalem, is to be the ultimate fate of Cosmo and Ambros at the Samaria Sanatorium. In the light of this negative messianic narrative, imagery of dessication suggests the reversal of the redemptive promise that Jerusalem traditionally offers, and an allegorical foreshadowing of the destruction of the “German-Jewish symbiosis” represented by Ambros and Cosmo.

Both texts explore the relationship between a German and a Jewish travelling companion that becomes a speculation on post-Holocaust German-Jewish relations. In Vesper’s text, the narrator’s passenger is a New York Jewish artist, Burton, who supports himself by working in an advertising agency, and who hitches a lift with him from Dubrovnik to Munich. Burton functions as Vesper’s interlocutor, and occasionally, his guardian, and represents a living, if irksome, Jewish presence. As his listener, Burton is privy to Vesper’s vitriolic tirades against the “Vegetables” (Germans). Vesper’s feelings towards Burton vacillate between guilt (München is mentioned, a reminder of the massacre of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in 1972), and resentment at the perceived superiority of Burton’s Jewish victimhood, his “Sensibilität einer durch Jahrhunderte verachteten Rasse” (Die Reise, 154) in relation
to Vesper’s own self-validating sense of victimhood: “Ich habe alles geopfert…” \textit{(Die Reise, 114)}. As in other \textit{Väterliteratur} texts, the Jewish figure is stereotyped as a \textit{Verstandesmensch}, with Burton’s rationality constructed as a foil to Vesper’s self-destructive tendencies:

\begin{quote}
\end{quote}

German and Jewish characters in both texts are presented in a close but complex relationship: Ambros and Cosmo’s relationship is based on the notion of German guardianship and Jewish Otherness; Vesper’s characters are bound by numerous parallels: both are artist-figures, each has a child about whom they are conflicted; they share LSD trips and an anti-authoritarian suspicion of police. That this relationship is a negative “German-Jewish symbiosis” is implied by Vesper: “Da gehen wir nun: aneinandergekettet durch Trip, Burton, New York … und ich, Bernward Vesper, gekommen aus den schwarzen Wäldern in einem Körper, durch den ich geisterte, von dem ich mich löste, um ihn von außen zu betrachten mit den Augen eines ewigen Lebens…” \textit{(Die Reise, 155)}.

Both journeys culminate in the annihilation of the protagonists: the narrator-author Vesper ends in a \textit{Nervenklinik}. Ambros emulates the fate of Cosmo and has himself admitted to the Samaria Sanatorium, where he voluntarily undergoes electroconvulsive-therapy that results in the “unwiderruflichen Auslöschung seines Denk- und Erinnerungsvermögens” \textit{(DA, 167)}. The journey to Jerusalem in 1913 is a prelude to the greater destruction, both collective, and individual, that will follow: for the protagonists of “Ambros Adelwarth”, self-annihilation is a proleptic allegory for the destruction of the “German-Jewish symbiosis” that, in 1913, still lies in the future. Vesper’s longing for annihilation reflects his generation’s unassuagable sense of loss and betrayal: “Denn wie ich sind wir alle betrogen worden, um unsere Träume, um Liebe, Geist, Heiterkeit” \textit{(Die Reise, 55)}. 

165
The parallels between Vesper’s text and Sebald’s underline Sebald’s connections with the concerns that shaped *Väterliteratur*: both texts play with the idea of an alternative father-son relationship, based on a reconfigured German-Jewish “symbiosis”; both reflect a perception of *Heimat* as “verschollen”. *Die Reise* and “Ambros Adelwarth” thematize the journey as a negative messianic narrative that ends in self-annihilation. This reflects the self-rejection that characterizes the conflicted writing of the second-generation in the period that saw the outpouring of *Väterliteratur* texts.

“Max Aurach”

The story involves Max Aurach, German-Jewish artist, sent in 1943 at the age of fifteen by his parents from Germany to England. Unable to obtain exit visas, his parents are deported and die in Auschwitz. In England, Aurach attends a boarding school, is conscripted into the British army, but does not see active service owing to illness. He studies art in Manchester, the former “Industrie-Jerusalem” and asylum for German-Jewish refugees. It is here that the young German narrator encounters him in the 1970s, when he is inexplicably drawn to his studio. A relationship is established between the reclusive artist and the lonely young German student, the narrator-writer of the story, once again, biographically identifiable as Sebald. The narrator leaves Manchester, but returns two decades later, after reading an article about Aurach’s work that motivates his quest to find out more about Aurach’s life, his Jewish origins, and the tragic impact of the Third Reich on his family. Intensive conversations follow between the German narrator and the Jewish artist, during which the narrator learns of Aurach’s experience of the Third Reich, one that encompasses exclusion, dispossession, and the murder of his entire family. At the conclusion to this account, Aurach gives the narrator his mother’s memoirs, written during 1939-1941. From this nostalgic record, the narrator learns of the illusory “German-Jewish symbiosis” experienced by the Lanzberg family in Franconia, an idyll that ends in deportation and murder. The memoirs motivate the narrator to return to Germany and to visit Kissingen in a quest to discover more about the fate of Aurach’s family. The quest does not prove illuminating, indeed, his return to Germany is a dispiriting experience. The story ends with Aurach’s imminent death and the narrator’s stark reminder, through a hallucinatory episode, of his complicity, as a child of perpetrators, in the Holocaust.
The *Väterliteratur* topos of the quest is central to this story, catalysed by the narrator’s shame and guilt at learning about Aurach’s past: “Wochenlang trug ich das Magazin mit mir herum, überlas den Artikel, der in mir ... ein Verlies aufgetan hatte ... und versuchte wenigstens im nachhinein zu begreifen, aufgrund welcher Hemmungen und Scheu wir es seinerzeit vermieden hatten, das Gespräch auf der Herkunft Aurachs zu bringen...” (DA, 265). Sebald inverts the *Väterliteratur* theme of the quest to understand the father’s life by replacing the perpetrator-father with a more desirable father-figure, who, unlike Paul Bereyter, is unambiguously a victim, with the positive connotations of the pariah-figure. In relation to the young German narrator, Aurach is a more obvious father-figure: elderly, a fellow-artist and a mentor-figure, to whom the narrator is drawn for knowledge and guidance, and from whom he inherits the memoirs of Luisa Lanzberg that describe a lost and idyllic “German-Jewish symbiosis.”

Aurach’s life has an allegorical meaning that goes beyond the autobiographical investigation that motivates the *Väterliteratur* quest. Like the life of Paul Bereyter, it is a metaphor for the Jewish experience in Germany, and the failed “German-Jewish symbiosis”. The narrator’s quest to find out more about this experience begins when he decides to go to Manchester in 1966, in unconscious imitation of Aurach’s journey from Germany to England in 1943. As an allegory, this decision is laden with meaning: Manchester was, both before and after WWII, the city to which many German Jews were drawn. The narrator’s decision is thus defined by his unstated motive: to encounter, and to establish relationships with German Jews, no longer possible in post-Holocaust Germany of the 1960s. Aurach and the narrator are bound by “a dystopian entwinement of histories and identities.”

419 The pariah as a positive figure is explored by Weber in *Ancient Judaism* 1961, in which he observes the redemptive potential of such “negatively privileged” figures, and relates this to their “providential mission.” Max Weber, *Ancient Judaism* (New York: The Free Press, 1967), 190. To Arendt, the Jew as pariah figure reflects the dilemma of the modern assimilated Jew, whose rebellious outsider position is potentially positive. Hannah Arendt, “The Jew as Pariah: Jewish Identity and Politics in the Modern Age” (*Jewish Social Studies* 6:2, April 1944), 99-122.

Asyl” (DA, 269), its large German-Jewish population offering them the possibility of establishing a renewed “German-Jewish symbiosis” in a new Heimat. Aurach describes being drawn to Manchester: “…und so bin ich, obwohl ich mich in die entgegengesetzte Richtung auf den Weg gemacht hatte, bei meiner Ankunft in Manchester gewissermaßen zu Hause angelangt” (DA, 287). Both Aurach and the narrator go to Manchester in the hope of escaping Germany, only to discover that this is impossible, as Aurach observes: “Aber gerade Manchester hat mir alles ins Gedächtnis gerufen, was ich zu vergessen versuchte…” (DA, 286), a bleak comment on the possibility of a new beginning for German-Jewish relations.

The narrator twice undertakes a quest to learn about this father-figure. The first, unconscious quest leads him inexplicably to Aurach’s studio. Here, he encounters the latter’s uniquely destructive art form, a continuous “Staubproduktion” (DA, 239) that points to the central tragedy of Aurach’s life, the Holocaust; the “lange Ahnenreihe grauer, eingäscherter, in dem zerschundenen Papier nach wie vor herumgeisternder Gesichter” (DA, 240) that he produces is a reminder of his destroyed genealogy. In a gesture of identification, the writer-narrator later mimics this in his own writing process, through which most of what he produces is destroyed, “durchgestrichen, verworfen oder bis zur Unleserlichkeit mit Zusätzen überschmiert” (DA, 345). The second quest, twenty-five years later, is a conscious one, motivated by the narrator’s shame and guilt at discovering, on reading about Aurach in a magazine, how little he knew about the tragic impact of the Holocaust on the latter’s life. As in Väterliteratur texts, the quest for the father becomes, for the narrator, a quest for an alternative identity.

In Väterliteratur, the desire for alternative affiliation at times takes the form of identification with a diffuse notion of Jewishness, or dark allusions to Jewish ancestry as a more desirable origin. Grimm observes this tendency in second-generation writing: “Motive und Themen verbinden sich vielmehr zum fast einhelligen Versuch von Seiten der Schreibenden, sich dem Jüdischen aufs engste zu assimilieren, ja sich mit ihm womöglich zu identifizieren.”421 The narrator of “Max Aurach” seeks

affiliation with a Jewish father-figure as an alternative to his own, reflected in the narrator’s mimicry of Aurach’s movements, work process, and symptoms. Like the writers of Väterliteratur, Sebald’s ambivalence towards genealogy becomes a desire for alternative affiliation. In Die Ausgewanderten, the creation of relationships between Germans and more vulnerable Jewish characters, like Henry Selwyn and Cosmo Solomon, posits a fantasized relationship in which the German is responsible for, and protective of, the Jewish figure. Exploration of the trope of alternative affiliation in his writing reveals that Sebald conflates German and Jewish identity in hybrid figures such as Paul Bereyter, and in experiences of intense identification with Jewish subjects. This conflation has the potential to obliterate the distinction between perpetrator and victim, and runs the risk of instrumentalizing Jewish lives to compensate for the loss of a positive sense of personal identity. Taberner observes:

> Even as he excavates Jewish lives, the author also—perhaps unintentionally—opens up a form of melancholia that frames Jews and Germans as traumatized victims of the catastrophe of modernity. If we look beyond the “bonus” Sebald has enjoyed by virtue of his (undoubted) integrity and supposed distance from German debates, do we begin to glimpse a German psyche haunted by the disappearance of an idealized German-Jewish symbiosis? Is his literary work, in truth, as much about a German loss as about the murder of Europe’s Jews?422

The narrator and Aurach see Manchester through a similar, Holocaust-damaged filter: the narrator’s first impressions of the city seen from the air prefigure, in a distortion of chronology, what the reader learns about Aurach’s first impressions, gained decades earlier. The smoky, post-industrial city of German-Jewish migrants becomes, through their eyes, a metaphor for the Holocaust: the narrator perceives the landscape around Manchester as a “seltsam gerippte Flanke ... gleich einem ungeheuren liegenden Körper” (DA, 220), evocative of skeletal bodies of camp inmates (220), the city below as illuminated by “von Asche nahezu ersticktes Glosen” (DA, 221). The narrator’s wanderings through the streets of Manchester lead him through a post-apocalyptic landscape that, with its “flackernde Feuerschen”, “kahle Gelände”, “Schattenfiguren”, and ominous “Gasanstalt” (DA, 234), evokes the concentration camp. Aurach’s first

422 Taberner 2004, 182.
impressions of Manchester echo this imagery, through the overdetermined allusion to the *Gaskessel, Chemiewerke, Fabrikationslager*, “herausragende Schlote,” “ungezählte Kamine,” and sinister “gelbgrauer Rauch” (DA, 250-251).

On the narrator’s later quest, the parallels between Aurach and narrator multiply: we learn that the narrator is, on this occasion, the same age as Aurach was when they first met; Aurach observes that the narrator’s position is at this time “so weit schon von Deutschland entfernt, wie er es im Jahr 1966 gewesen war…” (DA, 270). Aurach’s negative perspective on Germany as “ein zurückgebliebenes, zerstörtes, irgendwie extraterritoriales Land, bevölkert von Menschen, deren Gesichter wunderschön sowohl als furchtbar verbacken sind” (DA, 270) is reflected in the narrator’s own dismal perception, formulated on his return to Kissingen, of a newly renovated Germany, and of the “Geistesverarmung und Erinnerungslosigkeit der Deutschen, das Geschick, mit dem man alles bereinigt hatte” (DA, 338). The narrator’s identification with Jewish identity is expressed as “eine Art Erkennungsschreck” (DA, 335) on recognizing his own birthdate on a grave in the Kissingen Jewish cemetery. The grave is that of Meier Stern, whose initials correspond to Sebald’s preferred name, Max, compounding the autobiographical coincidence. At the Kissingen cemetery, the narrator identifies so deeply with the deceased writer Friederike Halbleib, that he imagines himself genealogically connected to her, and feels her loss as his own: “…jetzt kommt es mir vor, als hätte ich sie verloren und als könne ich sie nicht verschmerzen trotz der langen, seit ihrem Ableben verflossenen Zeit” (DA, 337). As a final gesture of identification, the narrator, appropriating Jewish custom, places a stone on the empty grave that stands as a memorial to Aurach’s family who perished in the Holocaust. As Taberner observes, “it is not just the Holocaust that the narrator mourns. It also is the former ordinaries of a German-Jewish coexistence in which Jews could die of natural causes.”

Cosgrove too, reads in the affiliation of Sebald’s narrator with Jewish fate an element of self-interest:

> In my view, Sebald’s depictions of the connection between Germans and Jews is fundamentally nostalgic; these portrayals express a melancholy resuscitation of the nineteenth-century ideal of German-Jewish symbiosis in a self-consciously sentimentalizing way that rather too

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423 Taberner 2004, 183.
eagerly sidelines the alienation of German-Jewish relations in the post-Holocaust context … when read in conjunction with Sebald’s essays, this nostalgia becomes a thin veneer for his struggle with his identity as a German writer.424

The identification of Sebald’s German narrator with Aurach extends to the appropriation of his suffering, a trope that derives from the tendency on the part of second-generation sons and daughters to somatise the suffering of their fathers. Wandering the streets of Manchester, the narrator of “Max Aurach” experiences a sense of “Unverbundenheit” that is suicidal in its intensity. The “lähmende[r] Skrupulantisismus” (DA, 344) which the narrator experiences in the process of writing about Aurach evokes Aurach’s “Schmerzlähmung” (DA, 255), connecting Jewish protagonist and German narrator through a narrative of suffering.

As a Jewish refugee from Nazi Germany, Aurach’s life is traumatised by rupture from family and Heimat. By contrast, the memoirs of his mother, Luisa Lanzberg, represent a fantasy of continuity. In Väterliteratur, the trope of rupture and continuity reflects the second-generation writer’s unease about origins, the desire to break with a past perceived as contaminated by National Socialism, and the conflicted longing for continuity and wholeness. In “Max Aurach”, the notion of a violent break in continuity is suggested by imagery of fracture: the communication between Aurach and his parents is described as abruptly torn, “als die immer mühseliger werdende Korrespondenz im November 1941 abriß...” (DA, 285). In the context of the narrator’s return to post-war Germany, the allusion to Goethe’s aphorism, “Unsere Welt ist eine Glocke, die einen Riß hat und nicht mehr klingt” (DA, 330), suggests the fracture in German historical continuity as a result of the war. Imagery of destruction, such as the Kissingen synagogue, “in der Kristallnacht demoliert und anschließend über mehrere Wochen hinweg abgerissen worden” (DA, 332), expresses the violence intrinsic to the caesura of the war, and the severance of the past from the present. The final episode of “Max Aurach” implies rupture: in this highly symbolic scene, the narrator imagines himself in the Litzmannstadt ghetto, confronted by three young Jewish weavers whom he interprets as the three Parcae or goddesses of fate: “Ich überlege, wie die drei wohl geheißen haben – Roza, Luisa und Lea oder Nona, Decuma und Morta, die Töchter

424 Cosgrove 2006, 234.
der Nacht, mit Spindel und Faden und Schere” (DA, 355). In this tableau, the relentless gaze of the young weaver is perceived by the narrator as a condemnation of his complicity, as the child of perpetrators, in the Holocaust, while the Schere, with its connotations of severance and pain, is a reminder of the hiatus between the German present and past, and of the suffering that aligns him with Aurach and Jewish fate. As Morgan observes: “Situated as observer in the position of the original camera, Sebald’s narrator himself is the object of the relentless stare of those faces from the Litzmannstadt ghetto.”

In the story of “Max Aurach”, the motif of salt, the “salzfleckige, aufgequollene Kalkputz” of Aurach’s studio (DA, 237), and the “kühle Salzluf“ of his mother Luisa’s memories (DA, 305), functions as a subtle image of discontinuity, suggesting the transformation of living things into lifeless, crystallized form. The narrator’s visit to the Salinengebäude of Kissingen is the culmination of his return to Germany, and his description of “die seltsamsten Versteinerungs-und Kristallisationsformen” (DA, 344) can be read as a metaphor for German post-war life, echoing Aurach’s perception of Germany as forever fixed in the 1930s. The motif of salt relates to the redeemed substances, ash, sinter, and dust, that form the essence of Aurach’s art production, described as “Auflösung in Nichts”: such substances are what remains when the fire goes out, and are a reminder of the Holocaust that is central to Aurach and the narrator’s consciousness, and the origin of the latter’s desire for genealogical break. Aurach’s destructive artistic method expresses a conflicted desire for continuity and rupture, for the resurrection of a “lange Ahnenreihe graue, eingeäscherte … Gesichter” (DA, 239-240), and for their annihilation: “Nirgends befinde er sich wohler als dort, wo die Dinge ungestört und gedämpft daliegen dürfen unter dem grausamtenen Sinter, der entsteht, wenn die Materie, Hauch um Hauch, sich auflöst in nichts” (DA, 238).

By contrast, a conflicted desire for continuity is implied by the moment of symbolic transference, in which Aurach gives the narrator an envelope with his mother’s

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426 Santner discusses the function of “redeemed substances” in Sebald’s work and links these to the writing project itself: the transformation of what is living into text. Eric L. Santner, On Creaturely Life: Rilke/Benjamin/Sebald (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 102-103.
memoirs, written for her son during the fateful years from Hitler’s ascendancy in 1939, to her deportation in 1941. This suggests a fantasy of continuity in the form of legacy: through this act, the second-generation German narrator becomes heir to Luisa Lanzberg’s “nachgelassene Blätter” (DA, 289), and through the mediating role of the narrator, the story of Luisa Lanzberg posits a continuing connection between Jewish and German destiny. To the extent that the memoirs of Luisa Lanzberg offer the hope of infusing lost objects with life, and giving voice to the dead, they represent the technique of prosopopoeia that Guyer identifies in post-Auschwitz writing. In Luisa’s memoirs, thematization of continuity symbolizes the ironic belief in the permanence of the “German-Jewish symbiosis”: the Gedächtnisort she creates in the description of her childhood home in Steinach is filled with references to objects that denote permanence, and reflect the hope of withstanding decay and death. Such objects include the “immergrüne Brautbukett unserer lb. Mama” (DA, 292), the “Naphthalin” (DA, 302) and the “Gläser mit dem Eingemachten” (DA, 308), preserved against decay. Reference to the Lanzberg genealogy dating from the seventeenth century, and the description of photos of various relatives, indicates the strong sense of family continuity that pervades this episode, and that distinguishes it in a story that otherwise thematizes discontinuity. Much emphasis is placed on tradition and cultural stability, such as the cycle of Jewish festivals, observance of the Sabbath, the collected works of Heine, and the German myths. Luisa’s description of the village, with its Schloß and Kirchturmsspitze within the natural surroundings of Wald, Rhönberge, and “freie Felder” (DA, 290), evokes a sense of tradition and continuity. Her passing reference to a “von einem riesigen Kastanienbaum überschatteten Platz” (DA, 291) in the village connects her memoirs to her son, who compares the malign impact of the Holocaust on his life to an enormous tree, whose “giftige Blätterdach über mir aufwölben konnte, das meine letzten Jahre so sehr überschattet und verdunkelt hat” (DA, 286). This image of familial continuity connects mother and son through the shared experience of victimhood.

427 The protagonist of Austerlitz performs a similar act by giving the German narrator his family photos, and the keys to his London home.

In the reconstruction of Aurach’s life, imagery of emptiness and dissolution, of absence, gap, and loss, constitute a metanarratorial reflection on authorial inadequacy that is a common trope in Väterliteratur and evident in Rehmann’s self-interrogation:

Wie schützt man sich vor der Verzerrung durch Schreckens-oder-Wunschbilder? Wie erklärt man den Unterschied zwischen erlebter und in Rückschau betrachteter Zeit?429

In “Max Aurach”, the “menschenleere Straßen” (DA, 230), “kahle Geländer” (DA, 233) and the “Geräuschlosigkeit und Leere” (DA, 226) that characterize the narrator’s first days in Manchester create a desolate sense of his dislocation, and reflect an awareness of absences and breaches in authorial memory. Indeed, the writer-narrator of “Max Aurach” acknowledges his fear of trespass, and a crippling feeling of inadmissibility and inauthenticity: attempting to write Aurach’s life story, he is overcome by “lähmende[r] Skrupulantismus. Dieser Skrupulantismus bezog sich sowohl auf den Gegenstand meiner Erzählung, dem ich, wie ich es auch anstellte, nicht gerecht zu werden glaubte, als auch auf die Fragwürdigkeit der Schriftstellerei überhaupt” (DA, 344-345), a sense of authorial inauthenticity that relates to the anxiety of the second generation about representing what cannot be represented, but ought to be.

Sebald uses the metaphor of “seeing and blindness” to explore the authorial inadequacy that haunts the second generation, troubled by a sense of belatedness and deficient knowledge in relation to the past. The opening passage of “Max Aurach” expresses a sense of uncertainty: the view of Manchester from the air is obscured by the “Wölkenwand … Dunkelheit, schwaches … Glosen … Nebeldecke” (DA, 220-221). Authorial inadequacy is expressed in imagery that suggests impaired vision, the “blinde Korridoren” of the narrator’s boarding house (DA, 225), the “unstete Lichter” that flicker in the ruined warehouse of the Great Northern Railway Company (DA, 226), and the impenetrability of Aurach’s crepuscular studio: “Betritt man das Atelier, so braucht es eine beträchtliche Zeit, bis die Augen sich an die dort herrschenden seltsamen Lichtverhältnisse gewöhnen, und indem man wieder zu sehen beginnt…” (DA, 236-237). Authorial legitimacy is thematized in the account of the exhaustive

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passport check of the young German narrator, “mit verschiedenen Legitimationen, Briefen und Ausweisen [versehen] … der vorgab, hier in Manchester sich niederlassen und seinen Forschungsarbeiten nachgehen zu wollen…” (DA, 221). The metaphor of the theatre that pervades the story of “Max Aurach” conveys the idea of fraudulence: to the writer-narrator on his lonely wanderings through Manchester, the derelict buildings resemble “eine … aufgeführte Fassade-oder Theaterarchitektur” (DA, 231). The freighters on the Manchester harbour, “[die G.S.] auf einmal auftauchten aus dem Nebel, lautlos sich vorbeibewegten und gleich danach wieder verschwanden in der weißen Luft”, remind Aurach of “ein ganz und gar unfaßbares, aus irgendeinem Grund tief mich erschütterndes Schauspiel” (DA, 246). The book-burning photograph (DA, 275), dismissed by Aurach’s uncle as a “Fälschung” (DA, 274), becomes a metaphor for the question that torments second-generation writers: the problem of writing authentically, and of resurrecting faithfully, that which the writer has been unable to witness first-hand; on an allegorical level, the false book-burning photograph suggests, as Aurach’s uncle claims, that everything was “eine Fälschung von Anfang an” (DA, 274): that the entire German-Jewish relationship was predicated on false hopes and beliefs.

In summation:

By demonstrating Sebald’s unlikely connection to Väterliteratur, I address a substantial deficit in Sebald research, and make an original contribution to Sebald scholarship. Unlike Väterliteratur, Sebald’s prose texts do not deal directly with the family as the centre of conflict; his muted tone differs markedly from the denunciatory tenor of Vesper and the expository urgency of Meckel and Seuren. My analysis of Sebald’s stories in Die Ausgewanderten nevertheless reveals tropes that are central to Väterliteratur: the quest to discover the father, the uncovering of secrets, a dialectic of rupture and continuity, conflicted identity, the desire for alternative affiliation, and a sense of victimhood in relation to fathers. Sebald shares with his generation of Väterliteratur writers the ambivalence towards genealogy that Moser (1985) refers to as “ein Hereinnehmen” and “Herauswerfen”; while the desire for genealogical rupture often takes the form of patricidal fantasies in Väterliteratur, Sebald’s narrative writing is pervaded by apocalyptic fantasies that suggest a more categorical desire for
annihilation. Sebald’s depiction of the broken, diseased or mutilated male body is congruent with the rejection of fathers that is fundamental to Väterliteratur.

The Väterliteratur trope of the quest is reconfigured in the stories of “Henry Selwyn” and “Paul Bereyter” in which a symbolic son’s quest for discovery exposes the transgression of a father-figure, as it does in Väterliteratur. In “Max Aurach”, the mission to discover the life of the father reveals a desire for alternative affiliation. While the theme of alternative affiliation in Väterliteratur takes the form of tokenistic identification, frequently with Jewish characters, it is an elaborate and fundamental theme in Sebald’s prose texts, and raises ethical questions relating to inappropriate identification with, or appropriation of, Jewish victimhood. Sebald’s reconfiguration of the conflicted father-son relationship is evident in relationships between Naegeli and Henry Selwyn, Ambros Adelwarth and Cosmo Solomon, and Aurach and the narrator. Such relationships are predicated on an idealized notion of paternal guidance and German guardianship of Jewish legacy, and posit a new “German-Jewish symbiosis” that reflects a problematic and wishful desire to recreate a “German-Jewish symbiosis” metaphorical of a Germany uncontaminated by genocide. The impossibility of its realization is acknowledged in negative messianic narratives, exemplified by the journey to Jerusalem, and the failed returns to Germany undertaken by Paul Bereyter and the narrator of “Max Aurach.” The ethical implications of Sebald’s reinterpretation of the Väterliteratur trope of alternative affiliation are the subject of critical concern; as a controversial aspect of Sebald’s narrative prose, they merit further investigation.

Sebald’s metanarratorial awareness of authorial inadequacy betrays the anxiety of his generation in relation to writing about a past that is closed to them through the silence of their parents; his prose texts, like Väterliteratur, thematize the transgenerational appropriation of parental guilt and trauma. In the paralysing episodes of self-doubt experienced by his protagonists, Sebald expresses the sense of victimhood and self-annihilation that characterizes the damaged, “Hamlet-esque” relationship of second-generation children to their parents, as described by Schneider (1984).

Examination of Sebald’s prose fiction in relation to that of his generation exposes the regressiveness of Sebald’s position. Family novels of the 1990s and beyond suggest that many writers of Sebald’s generation have moved beyond anger and resentment.
towards a more reconciliatory relationship with perpetrator parents. In relation to the trajectory followed by many of his contemporaries, Sebald’s narrative prose indicates that he remains mired in the conflicted discourse of bitterness and victimhood that characterizes Väterliteratur.
Chapter 5

Sebald’s narrative prose and post-1968 neo-Romanticism

Introduction

Regressive tendencies in Sebald’s writing are not confined to affinities with the politically engaged writing of his 1960s generation, or the conflicted Väterliteratur of the 1970s. In the final part of this study, I argue that Sebald’s writing reflects also the inclination to neo-Romanticism that distinguishes one direction of the writing of his generation in the period following the socio-political tumult of the 1960s. The “Hinwendung zur Natur, zum Mythos und zur Innerlichkeit”\(^{430}\) that characterizes the work of Handke, Strauß, Roth and others, is evident also in Sebald’s narrative prose. For Sebald’s generation of disillusioned “sixty-eigers”, Romantic poetics offers a retreat from politically engaged realism, to a more metaphysical engagement with the German past. Novalis’ assertion, “Die Welt muß romantisirt werden”,\(^{431}\) implies dissatisfaction with reality; for these second-generation writers, Romanticism posits a compensatory response to a reality perceived as deficient, “entzaubert,”\(^{432}\) and dominated by a pervasive sense of loss: of a positive national identity, of an integrated relationship with the natural world, and of belief in progress. Predicated on infinite longing and inconclusiveness, Romanticism resonates with second-generation writers troubled by an unlived but traumatic past, and by a post-Holocaust sense of authorial inadequacy.\(^{433}\) Tropes of post-Auschwitz Romanticism\(^{434}\) are evident in their writing.


\(^{433}\) In *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (1951), Adorno writes: “Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch.”

\(^{434}\) Post-Holocaust Romanticism is explored by Sara Guyer, *Romanticism after Auschwitz* (2007), Susan Gubar, *Poetry after Auschwitz* (2003), Amy Hungerford,
in the notion of endless wakefulness, and the prosopopoeic desire to give life and voice to the dead. Such tropes are consistent with the often conflicted redemptive mission of these writers. For the post-1968 generation, and for Sebald, decades later, neo-Romanticism presents the possibility of negotiating the question that continues to haunt them: “Wie trägt man [einer historischer Erfahrung G.S.] aber Rechnung, wenn sie zum Teil traumatisiert ist? Wie kann man einem Trauma gerecht werden?”

While connections have been drawn between Sebald’s writing and Romantic antecedents, Sebald’s neo-Romantic tendencies remain a relatively neglected aspect of his work. This may be attributed to the contested nature of German Romanticism itself, a conservative aesthetic associated with a deep-seated irrationalism in German culture, and one that still carries the stain of its association with Nazi ideology. German Romanticism has been identified as a “peculiarly German cultural disorder”, and as representing “alles was in der deutschen Geistesentwicklung gefahrdrohend und verwerflich ist.” Placing Sebald in the company of notoriously conservative writers, such as Botho Strauß, would seem to undermine the universality of his perspective and the empathy for which he is often lauded.

Examination of Sebald’s narrative prose in the context of post-1968 German neo-Romanticism is, however, productive in exposing undisclosed connections with the neo-

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437 Peter Viereck, Metapolitics: From the Romantics to Hitler (New York: Knopf, 1941), 89.

Romantic writing of his generation, thus contributing to a more complex view of Sebald’s work. Sebald’s writing shares with these writers certain key thematic concerns: dissatisfaction with reality, the desire to transcend time and history, and awareness of repressed traumatic undercurrents in German consciousness. Correspondences of structure and imagery through which such themes are expressed suggest that Sebald’s affinity with post-1968 neo-Romanticism is significant.

I examine definitional problems relating to neo-Romanticism, and the literary position of the genre as a reaction to 1968 and as a post-Holocaust literary response, and review the critical reception of Sebald’s neo-Romanticism. The structure and imagery of the Romantic Kunstmärchen are explored with particular emphasis on the creation of Das Märchenhafte as the source of tropes, figures and motifs that contribute to the creation of alternative realities, and express the utopian longing for the reversal of history in neo-Romantic German writing. I explore the construction and function of Das Märchenhafte in the writing of Sebald in relation to neo-Romantic texts by Roth (Winterreise) and Handke (Die Abwesenheit). In the final part of the chapter, I investigate the restitution of the Romantic artist in the writing of Sebald, Handke, and Strauß. I contend that for Sebald, the Romantic artist offers a model through which to express the sense of loss, nostalgia, and consciousness of historical rupture that characterizes the neo-Romantic writing of his generation. The suffering and itinerancy of the Romantic artist are considered with reference to early Romantic Germanists and literary figures, and to their reconfiguration in the writing of Sebald, Handke, and Strauß.

**Romanticism and neo-Romanticism: problems of definition**

As a term, Romanticism is diffuse and polyvalent. It denotes not merely a period, as Schmitz-Emans notes, but a stylistic concept or psychological typology. The term is used to designate literature that thematizes yearning for a lost, integrated society, the tension between the individual and community, and writing that reflects a pervasive and unresolved sense of immagrancy. It describes literature that is resistant to closure, and

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in which conjecture displaces certainty. 440 As a post-revolutionary response, Romanticism is characterized by a subjective perspective, an awareness of loss, and a yearning for the past. The term, “Romantic” is applied colloquially to suggest an aesthetic position that posits expansion of human imagination and consciousness, enacts future imaginative possibilities, and reveals an adversarial response to historical and technological change. The term embraces literature that is concerned with the irrational, with the extremes of the human condition, and that reflects nostalgia for an unfulfillable project, such as the return to a “Golden Age.”

Ziolkowski engages with the problem of how Romanticism is reconfigured in later literature, distinguishing between historical and typological Romanticism: the former relates to the literary movement between 1790 and 1850, and comprises writers and poets whose works offer historical sources for later writers, the latter a more general Geisteshaltung in the form of stylistic, formal, and motivic elements that can be traced to Romantic texts. 441 Typological Romanticism is not bound to any particular time or writer, and is the form of Romanticism to which the works under discussion are affiliated. Wellek contributes to Ziolkowski’s discussion of neo-Romanticism with three theses of his own that acknowledge the primacy of myth, symbol, and nature to Romantic writing:

Die typologische Romantik betrachtet Dichtung als (ganzheitliches) Hauptmittel der Erkenntnis; Die Dichtung, wodurch diese organische Einheit erfaßt und erkannt wird, ist eine Dichtung des Mythos und des Symbols; Sie faßt Natur als eine organische Einheit auf, in der die


Dualität von Ich und Welt, von Subjekt und Objekt restlos aufgehoben wird.\textsuperscript{442}

My textual analysis in this chapter is based on a definition of neo-Romanticism that sees it as a \textit{Geisteshaltung} privileging the mytho-poetic and the symbolic, and as a literary tendency that utilises topoi, symbols and structures associated with early German Romanticism, epitomized by Novalis, the Schlegels, and Tieck, among others. This definition encompasses works that explore the tension between the real and the imagined in fantastical narratives, engage with Romantic topoi such as \textit{Wandern}, \textit{Zeitaufhebung}, and \textit{Schwellenüberschreitung}, and experiment with the Romantic genre of the \textit{Kunstmärchen}.

Neo-Romanticism and the failure of 1968

There is general consensus that the neo-Romanticism of the 1970s and 1980s is a response to the failure of the protest movement to achieve meaningful social change, and associated with the tendency towards \textit{New Subjectivity} that arises as a reaction to the politicized literature of the 1960s. Neo-Romanticism posits art as “eine Gegeninstitution … gegen die moderne Rationalität am Werk, dessen die Moderne bedarf, wenn sie nicht an sich selber zugrundegehen will.”\textsuperscript{443} The generation following 1968 manifests a prevailing sense of disappointment with the failure of the student movement to achieve its socio-political aims, amongst these, ending the war in Vietnam, reforming the universities, and curbing the power of the media. Worker-Student unity remains an elusive ideal, and the problem of National-Socialist continuity continues to be a troubling undercurrent in West German consciousness. In his assessment of post-1968 West German culture, Kraushaar (2000) observes a pervasive pessimism that can be traced to the failure of the protest movement, awareness of ecological destruction,\textsuperscript{444} and disillusionment with Marxism. Jorgensen draws parallels between the socio-


\textsuperscript{443} Peter Bürger, \textit{Prosa der Moderne} (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988), 17.

\textsuperscript{444} The \textit{Club of Rome} was founded in 1968 to promote awareness of ecological destruction.
political contexts of nineteenth-century Romanticism and post-1968 neo-Romantic writing as post-revolutionary phenomena, marked by “Die Angst, von den selbstgeschaffenen Maschinen zur Maschine gemacht zu werden.”445 Indeed, suffering at the mechanistic soullessness of Enlightenment rationalism becomes a central issue of neo-Romantic writing, reflecting Eichner’s claim that “Romanticism is, perhaps predominantly, a desperate rearguard action against the spirit and implications of modern science.”446 To Hagen, the post-1968 tendency to Romanticism constitutes a reaction to politicized literature: “Die Literatur der Gegenwart führt sowohl die tendenzielle Entpolitisierung der Verständigungsliteratur als auch die Sprachkritik der stärker um die Ästhetik einer radikalen Innerlichkeit bemühten Texte der neuen Subjektivität weiter.”447 The recoil from political engagement is expressed in a renewed emphasis on “Das Gehorchen der inneren Stimme”,448 and a reformulated relationship between the individual and society, manifest less in social engagement than in subjective self-construction.

The neo-Romantic writing of Sebald and others reflects an awareness of the Holocaust as a continuing and unresolved trauma in German consciousness. Many of Sebald’s characters are Jews, surviving with the memory or guilt of what they have evaded, exemplified by Henry Selwyn, Paul Bereyter, Max Aurach, and Austerlitz. Sebald’s narrative prose reveals the trope of prosopopoeia, through which the dead are given a voice, and that “holds out the promise of an unsettling empathic identification [with the dead].”449 While Sebald’s work is lauded for “[respecting] the voice of the ‘other’ as it celebrates [their G.S.] own culture and simultaneously mourns its destruction”,450 this is a controversial aspect of his writing, and one that has been explored by Taberner

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447 Anja Hagen, Gedächtnisort Romantik. Intertextuelle Verfahren in der Prosa der 80er und 90er Jahre (Bielefeld: Aisthesis, 2003), 446-447.
449 Gubar 2003, 189.
(2004), Prager (2005), Cosgrove (2006), and Heidelberger-Leonard, among others. The work of Handke and Strauß too, reveals a troubled awareness of the Nazi past as an oppressive burden; their writing, like Sebald’s, reflects themes and motifs associated with post-Holocaust writing. Tropes of incompleteness and wakefulness in their writing imply the post-Auschwitz notion of “lyric vigilance” that imbues the writing project with the responsibility to bear eternal witness.

Romantic tendencies in Sebald’s narrative prose have been described by a limited number of critics, among them, Chandler, Morgan (2005), Finch (2007a, 2007b) and Pakendorff (2009). Sebald’s perception of himself as a marginalized Romantic artist has been noted, among others, by Wolff, Sheppard, and most recently and comprehensively, by Schley (2012). Chandler traces evidence of a Romantic afterlife in Sebald’s work, claiming that “Romanticism haunts these books in a way that argues a more than casual involvement, that it deeply ‘informs’ them.” Morgan identifies Sebald’s writing as part of a German cultural tradition that has its origins in “the romantic nihilism of … the disappointed heirs of 1792 and of 1848. While his ‘Götterdämmerung’ takes place without the expansive gestures of Schopenhauer or Wagner, it repeats established cultural patterns of frustrated destructiveness, of the avoidance of self-knowledge, and of the rejection of history and espousal of myth.” Finch (2007a) offers a sustained engagement with Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to the neo-Romantic writing of his generation, exemplified by Handke and Botho


452 Guyer 2007, 142.


456 Chandler 2003, 259.

Strauß. In Finch’s view, neo-Romantic poetics, and the *Bildungsroman* in particular, offer these writers a strategy for escaping the dialectic of the Enlightenment, and with it, the burden of generational guilt. In the contemplative and melancholy response of Sebald’s narrator towards a disturbing world, Pakendorff observes a Romantic subjectivity, and sees in Sebald’s approach to history and nature elements congruent with German Romanticism, such as the pervasive trope of *Wanderschaft*, a Romantic view of nature, and a Romantic subjectivity embodied by Sebald’s *Ich*-narrator. To Pakendorff, Sebald’s thematisation of the lost past reflects the Romantic dream of a vanished golden age, situated in an unattainable mythical past, or a *Märchen*-like realm.

**The Romantic *Kunstmärchen*: structure and tropes**

Implicit in the utopian dream of a lost golden age is the desire for an alternative reality, a notion central to the Romantic *Kunstmärchen*, and to the evocation of *das Märchenhafte* in German neo-Romantic writing, in which it offers a space in which to project the loss, anxiety, and utopian longings of the second generation. “Unbehagen an der Normalität” and the quest for an alternative reality are fundamental to Romantic writing; indeed, Pikulik identifies Romantic writing as an aesthetic compensation for the monotony and vacuity of everyday life. The Romantic *Kunstmärchen* provides the structural basis of numerous neo-Romantic texts, and is the source of tropes, figures and motifs that configure the alternative realities that characterize neo-Romantic German writing. In the *Kunstmärchen*, everyday reality is contrasted with fantastic episodes that embody “alles Unbegreifliche, alles, wo wir eine Wirkung ohne eine Ursache wahrnehmen.” Novalis notes the affinity of the *Märchen* with the magical-


459 Safranski 2013, 193.


fantastical, “Ein Mährchen ist eigentlich wie ein Traumbild … ein Ensemble wunderbarer Dinge und Begebenheiten.” In the opening of the Kunstmärchen, the protagonist is typically encountered in a discontented state, and contact is established with a guide or mentor figure, who guides the protagonist on a journey of self-discovery. Through the symbolic act of Schwellenüberschreitung, the protagonist undergoes a transition from a world ordered according to natural laws, to a magical Gegenwelt, in which laws of time, space, and causality are suspended. In the magical realm, the protagonist experiences confusion, encounters mythical or fantastical figures, and often undergoes a form of test. Returning to the everyday world, the protagonist’s original discontent has been alleviated, usually, through love or wealth. Final contact with the mentor figure is made, before he or she typically disappears, having effected a positive change in the protagonist’s outlook, and leaving the protagonist in the real world.

The structure of the Romantic Kunstmärchen is determined by the confrontation between two opposing realities, both of which dispose over specific temporal realms, figures, and topography. In the fantastic realm, the hegemony of linear time is suspended. In this realm, a number of stock figures, such as the hermit, the wanderer, and the miner, fulfil allegorical functions, and are re-configured in neo-Romantic writing. Describing the Romantic hermit, Fitzell observes: “No figure or type, recurrently appearing in German literature, reveals to such a degree the inwardness, the inner experience of the most basic problems of human experience.” The antinomy between artist and society is embodied by the figure of the wanderer, driven by powerful longings to reject society and to explore the external and the inner world. The wanderer figure represents the open-ended teleology that characterises Romantic thought as articulated by Schlegel: “Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja, das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet seyn kann.”

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462 Novalis, Schriften I and II (Berlin: Reimer, 1837), 230.
The topography of the magical realm is distinguished by motifs with rich symbolic significance, such as Gebirge, Höhle, Wildnis, and Wald. In the Kunstmärchen, the contrast between mountains and plains reflects the disjunct between the enchanted, transcendental realm, and the “flaches Land”\textsuperscript{465} of everyday bourgeois life. Romantic literature sacralises mountains and the mines excavated in their depths as the creative source from which poetry arises: “Aus seiner Wiege dunklem Schoße,/Erscheint er in Kristallgewand;/Verschwiegener Eintracht volle Rose/Trägt er bedeutend in der Hand.”\textsuperscript{466} The subterranean journey into the mountain or cave commonly signifies the release of repressed feelings and sexual desires, as it does for the protagonist of Heinrich von Ofterdingen and the princess in the “weite und hohle Höhle.”\textsuperscript{467} The wilderness in the Romantic Kunstmärchen is an ambiguous metaphor, a terrifying space of dystopic emptiness, and a quasi-religious sanctuary from the turmoil and anxieties of society. Fascination with the wilderness arises from a Romantic primitivism that valorizes the wildness of nature as “the natural, unfallen antithesis of an unnatural civilization that has lost its soul.”\textsuperscript{468} The forest too, is a multivalent motif in the German Kunstmärchen: “Im mittelalter gilt der wald als ein unwirtlicher ort, wo wilde thiere und böse geister ihr wesen treiben, wo der mensch aber nicht gerne weilt.”\textsuperscript{469} By contrast, the notion of the forest as a sanctuary is reflected in Eichendorff’s 1836 poem, Im Walde: “Schlag noch einmal die Bogen/Um mich, du grünes Zelt.” The motif of the forest is pervasive in neo-Romantic writing, in which its positive meaning as a refuge is typically inverted, for example, in Strauß’ Der junge Mann, and in Sebald’s writing, in which it becomes an emblem of conflicted German identity. The Romantic landscape is scattered with the ruins of temples, abbeys, and cathedrals. As Wilkins observes, the contemplation of ruin

\textsuperscript{465} Tieck, Der Runenber (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2009), 37.

\textsuperscript{466} Novalis, Klingsohr’s song, Heinrich von Ofterdingen (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2008), 102.

\textsuperscript{467} Novalis, Heinrich von Ofterdingen, 41.


\textsuperscript{469} Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm, Deutsches Wörterbuch, Band 27 (Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1984), 1072-1075.
embodies the sublime aesthetic of German Romanticism through its symbolic connotations which acknowledge the passage of time and the inevitable cycle of life and death.470

For second-generation German authors writing after the turmoil of the 1960s, the structural duality of the Kunstmärchen offers a model for positing an alternative reality to one perceived as deficient. In their neo-Romantic writing, Romantic tropes, stock figures, and topographical motifs contribute to the creation of alternative realities that posit the transcendence of time and history, and permit the enactment of repressed anxieties relating to the war. In what follows, I examine Das Märchenhafte in the writing of Sebald, Roth, and Handke in relation to the construction of alternative realities, and the transcendence of time and history. I argue that Sebald follows similar strategies, and is motivated by desires consistent with those of the neo-Romantic writers of his generation, with whom he is connected through theme, structure, and imagery.

Das Märchenhafte and the creation of alternative realities in the writing of Roth, Handke, and Sebald.

Dissatisfaction with reality and a Romantic antipathy to modernity underly the construction of Das Märchenhafte in the neo-Romantic writing of Sebald and his contemporaries. In the texts discussed, passages thematizing the everyday world, typically perceived as dystopic, are juxtaposed with the surreal realm. In the writing of Sebald and Roth, the transcendent potential of Das Märchenhafte is subverted in dystopic alternative realities pervaded by visions of the traumatic past. By contrast, the Gegenwelt created by Handke in Die Abwesenheit offers a utopian resolution to the discontents of its protagonists.

Roth’s Winterreise471 ironizes the structure of the Kunstmärchen in his thematization of the identity conflict that burdens the second generation. Here, the protagonist’s journey of discovery culminates in the desire for self-annihilation in the “ewigen Eises” of

471 Gerhard Roth, Winterreise (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 2007).
The opening depicts him as discontented and deficient: “Immer hat er das Gefühl, daß etwas fehlte” (Winterreise, 135). The text begins in the real world of Automaten and Kaufmannsladen, the disillusionment of the protagonist expressed in the apocalyptic observation, “Es war der letzte Tag des Jahres” (Winterreise, 6). His reality reflects a repudiation of all value: of love, symbolized by his failing affair with the wife of the gendarme; of Heimat, symbolized by the satirical description of the vet’s funeral, with its völkisch imagery of “Männer in Tracht und Lodenmantel...” (Winterreise, 7), and finally, of his work as a teacher, symbolized by “das leere Klassenzimmer” (Winterreise, 8). On his journey, enigmatic guides lead him to dreamlike settings, where the normal laws of time and space are suspended. An emphasis on doors and walls, the “Ziegelwand”, “Hafenmauer”, and “Eisentor” (Winterreise, 40), suggests the Schwellenüberschreitung the protagonist must undertake from the real to the fantastical. Everyday reality is constituted as dystopic: “Am Automaten vor dem Kaufmannsladen waren alle Fächer aufgerissen und mit Bananenschalen, Pappbechern und anderem Abfall vollgestopft ... Niemand nahm den Mist heraus und warf ihn weg” (Winterreise, 5). Approaching the harbour of Naples, Nagl and his lover observe “eine tote Ratte mit schlaffem, langem Schwanz und spitzen Zähnen” (Winterreise, 40). The sensuality of Italy is depicted as visceral and repellent, subverting the liberating potential of the Romantic journey to the South exemplified by Goethe’s Italienische Reise (1816): “Je länger Nagl die Gassen hinunterging, desto mehr kam es ihm vor, als ginge er durch Bäuche von geschlachteten Riesentieren, deren Innereien traubenförmig zu Boden hingen, seltsame Organe ... die noch Sauerstoff und Blut enthielten, Melonen, die riesige, erblindete Augen waren” (Winterreise, 33). In an inversion of the Romantic journey of enlightenment, the protagonist is guided on his journey of self by a former lover, Anna, and mysterious figures, who lead him to absolute repudiation of identity:


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472 This resembles Sorger’s self-annihilating desire to go to Alaska in Handke’s Langsame Heimkehr (1984).
erinnern, kein Baum, kein Bach, keine Blume, kein Tier wird eine Spur zurücklassen ... Die Zukunft ist ein Scheißdreck. (Winterreise, 43)

The protagonist’s self-description as “niemand” evokes the myth of Odysseus and the Cyclops whom he blinds in order to escape. As Zschachlitz observes, the figure of Odysseus is significant as a symbol of the modern subject’s loss of identity. In psychoanalytical terms, the myth of Odysseus and the cyclops suggests the father-son conflict that lies at the heart of second-generation writing. Roth’s use of the myth here suggests the specifically German implications of the myth for second-generation writers, whose sense of personal and national identity has been damaged by the implication of their fathers in National Socialism.

In the Vesuvius episode, the spiritual implications of descent into the mountain is subverted, becoming a metaphor for self-annihilation: “Wie oft hatte er daran gedacht, in Pompeji zu verschwinden oder sich in den Vesuv zu stürzen...” (Winterreise, 11). The protagonist is guided to the crater of Vesuvius by “ein kleiner Mann mit einer weißen Kappe ... [der] bestimmte, daß er sie auf den Vesuv führen würde” (Winterreise, 69). At the crater of Vesuvius, an alternative reality is created by a Romantic blurring of boundaries, “doch der Himmel über ihm war derselbe undurchsichtige Nebel, in dem sich die beschneiten Hänge verliefen” (Winterreise, 71), and “Das Licht war blendend und silbergrau, und dort, wo sich die Lava mit dem Schnee vermischt hatte, schimmerten violette Flecken” (Winterreise, 74). In this surreal realm, the transcendence of time is posited in imagery of stillness: “Er blieb stehen und schaute tief hinunter, in die Erde hinein ... Nicht einmal der Nebel stieg hoch oder senkte sich...” (Winterreise, 71). Roth inverts the Romantic association of mountains with the attainment of enlightenment.

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475 Christian in Tieck’s Der Runenberg describes “blaue Berge … groß und ehrwürdig im Hintergrunde. Eine neue Welt war mir aufgeschlossen…” (Der Runenberg, 32).
concentrating instead on the terrifying abyss intrinsic to the mountainview. Here, the experience of an alternative reality catalyses the protagonist’s nihilistic consciousness of the world as extinguished:

[Er] stand so nahe am Kraterrand, daß er abstürzen drohte; ihm war schwindlig, er spürte ein Ziehen in den Schläfen, aber er blieb stehen. Ein riesiges weites Loch öffnete sich vor ihm, in dem Schnee lag erkaltete Lava und Nebel. Kein Mensch war zu sehen. Er blieb stehen und schaute tief hinunter, in die Erde hinein. Nichts war zu sehen. Nichts war da unten. (Winterreise, 71)

To Roth’s protagonist, this sense of annihilating collapse of time and space is comforting: “Es war ihm, als könnte er einen großen Teil der Welt überblicken, und so leer sie auch war, so hatte sie doch ihre Schönheit und Richtigkeit” (Winterreise, 71). Romantic imagery of transcendence implies an illusory sense of redemption, “als plötzlich die Sonne aufging und den Nebel mit einem goldenen Licht durchleuchtete” (Winterreise, 73). This sense of transcendence is short-lived, and is replaced by an image that suggests a world extinguished and without meaning: “Ganz kurz nur hielt die Witterung an, dann, ohne Übergang, zerriß der leuchtende Nebel, der sie beschützt hatte, und senkrecht, tief unter ihnen lag der Boden des erloschenen Kraters” (Winterreise, 73).

By contrast with the dystopic nature of the surreal realm in Winterreise, Handke’s creation of a mythical Gegenwelt in his neo-Romantic text, Die Abwesenheit, posits a utopian resolution to the loss and discontent that trouble his protagonists. In his explicitly named Märchen, alienated characters are guided on a journey of self-realization from dystopic reality to utopian transcendence. The structure of Handke’s story follows that of the Romantic Kunstmärchen, with alternating episodes in which the dystopic reality of a consumer society, represented by “Reifen, Gestänge … vergilbte Zeitungsfetzen” (Die Abwesenheit, 97) is juxtaposed with an alternative and enchanted realm. The first part of the Märchen reveals the discontent of the protagonists, all of whom are constructed as isolated figures: the old man, alone in his “mittelalterlichen Gelehrtenstube” (Die Abwesenheit, 13), is unable to write coherently,
or to decipher his own scribblings; the woman is depicted as lonely, unhappy in love, and castigated by her former lover as “zielloser, frühverdorben, profan und ohne Sehnsucht” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 24). Indifferent to history and knowledge, her grasp on life is tenuous, “mit mir sei keine Beständigkeit, und damit kein Alltag möglich” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 25). The soldier too, is an isolated figure, whose introversion is perceived as alienating, evident in his mother’s reproach: “Statt dessen bist du der Abwesende ... Für deine Kameraden bist du Luft” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 30-31). The gambler describes himself as “einschneidig, unfruchtbar und schlagbereit”, uncertain of his own reality, “so auf ständige Geistesgegenwart bin ich eingestellt, daß ich zugleich gar nicht da bin, für niemanden, auch nicht für mich selber” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 46). In Handke’s depiction of the deficiencies of the everyday world, the four characters fulfil allegorical roles: the old man symbolizes loneliness, the woman, narcissistic self-absorption; the soldier represents alienation, while the gambler in his Spilscheibe is the embodiment of materialism and avarice. The everyday reality of the protagonists is characterized by emptiness, darkness, artifice, and silence: “Die Sonne ist untergegangen ... auf der leeren Wand des Souterrain-Zimmers der Abglanz des gelben Himmels, durchquert von inzwischen umrißlosen Schemen” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 8). The world outside is “entvölkert” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 37), “es wird fast nirgends gesprochen” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 38). To the alienated soldier on guard at a war memorial, a passing group is perceived as “Teil einer fremden Rasse ... die Augen wie aus Glas...” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 56-57).

Consistent with the *Kunstmärchen*, the protagonists undertake a journey that involves a transformative encounter with the fantastical. Here, a tram journey takes them to a mysterious cul de sac on the fringe of a forest, itself a Romantic motif. The *Alte* functions as the guide on this journey, and with his “Stock in der Hand” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 13), resembles Romantic mentor-figures such as the old miner in Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, and the “fremder Mann” who offers to guide Christian in Tieck’s *Der Runenberg*. With his Haselstock and Rucksack, the *Alte* symbolizes the Romantic wanderer, and articulates the notion of eternal wandering: “O mein unsterblicher Appetit auf das Gehen, auf das Zum-Ort-Hinaus-Gehen, auf das Ewig-So-Weitergehen” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 117). As it does in the Romantic Kunstmärchen, transition to the fantastical realm involves the crossing of a threshold: “Auf dem Platz stocken die vier dann, ein paar Schritte vor dem Waldsaum, vor einer Art Grenze: hier
ist der Übergang von der gelblichen Lehmfläche in den buckligen, unter den Füßen federnden schwarzen Torf” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 86). A number of further boundaries, the “umkämpfte Grenze” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 104), the “Grenzbaum zwischen ziegelig-brauner Erde und glatthellem Stein” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 125), and the mysterious *Schwelle* they cross into the curious *Felsenhaus* (*Die Abwesenheit*, 152-153), demarcate the world of fantasy from the everyday world.477

The representation of the fantasy world beyond the symbolic threshold is overtly Romantic. In this mythical *Waldraum*, the trees on their *Moospolstern*, and the path with its sprinkling of white stones, are reminiscent of the Grimms’ *Märchen*. The topography of the fantastical is Romantic, with its “kleiner See” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 88), “hölzerne Hütte, hellgrau verwittert” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 89), its *Märchenbaum* and *Höhle*. Time is suspended in the forest episode: “Die ganze Lichtung hat jetzt im Umkreis die Gestalt eines Gartens, wo keine Zeit mehr zählt” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 93), and the narrator exclaims, “Wie viele Tage sind mir vergangen an diesem einzigen Tag!” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 159). The ahistorical nature of the enchanted realm is marred momentarily by the vision of the *Soldatenfriedhof* with its graves marked by the word, “ANWESEND” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 124), symbolising the continuing consciousness of the war in German memory, and the conflicted perception of *Heimat* that haunts second-generation writers. The protagonists’ perception of inherited implication in the war is suggested by violence of terrifying proximity: “Plötzlich dann schrumpfte die Landschaft zum bloßen Gelände. Beidseits der Straßen führen Panzer auf, die Geschoßrohre dem Anschein nach auf uns gerichtet. Aus allen Mündungen blitzte und krachte es uns entgegen” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 194).

Transcendence of traumatic history is posited by the “Höhle hinter die Höhle”. Here, linear time is magically suspended: “Hier ist es. Wir sind da. Jetzt haben wir Zeit. Heute ist unser Tag und morgen wird wie heute sein … Hier herrscht der Winter im

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Sommer…” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 132). In this enchanted space, the soldier and the gambler experience a redemptive sense of integration with their past:

Und auch mir kommt es vor, als hätte ich an dem heutigen Tag mehrere Tage durchlebt, so wechselhaft war die Geschichte der Blicke: Abscheu, sich in Staunen verwandelnd, sich in Nachsicht verwandelnd, sich in Gutheißung verwandelnd, sich in Einverständnis verwandelnd - bis am Ende des langen Tages der Blick der Ahnen eins mit dem meinen war und überging auf etwas Drittes, eine Stimme, welche, so wie mich mein Vater und Mutter endlich betrauern ließ, auch mich erstmals in meinen fünfzig Jahren auf Erden willkommen hieß und zugleich mich aufrief, mich um jemanden zu kümmern, für ihn zu sorgen, etwas für ihn zu tun, alles für ihn zu tun, im Augenblick, jetzt! (*Die Abwesenheit*, 162-163)

Following this episode, the *Alte* leaves, having fulfilled his function as a guide to self-realization: the “verstummte Sänger” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 19) is able to sing “mit hoher heiserer Kehlkopf-Stimme” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 175), the writer can write his experiences “in die Luft” or retain them “als Bild” (*Die Abwesenheit*, 181). The protagonists return to the real world, on foot, by bus, and finally, by train. The soldier’s dream re-evokes the experience of the magical realm, and posits a continued search for the *Alte*, a search that enjoins the literary quest for transcendence:

Und der Wind erhob sich, wie aus uns selber, welcher durch alle Dinge ging:
der Wind der Poesie, der Wind der Fantasie, der Wind der Ankunft in einer
ganz anderen Abwesenheit. (*Die Abwesenheit*, 224)

Such redemptive visions are absent in Sebald’s neo-Romanticism, explored below in *Die Ringe des Saturn* and *Austerlitz*.

**Sebald’s neo-Romanticism: *Die Ringe des Saturn* and *Austerlitz***

The structure of Sebald’s *Die Ringe des Saturn* resembles the Romantic *Kunstmärchen*, insofar as the diegetic narrator undertakes a journey on which he is confronted with opposing realities. In shifting, *Märchen*-like episodes, Sebald posits the transcendence of history and treats the themes of *Heimat* and identity that connect his writing with the
neo-Romantic writing of his generation. One such episode arises in response to the protagonist’s awareness of eco-destruction in the context of the lonely heathlands of Dunwich. In the opening of the Dunwich episode, following the Kunstmärchen, Sebald’s narrator is depicted in a state of unease: “Es war ungewöhnlich dunkel geworden und schwül als ich ... zu der einsam über dem Meer gelegenen Heide von Dunwich hinaufstieg” (RS, 201). His disquiet, expressed as pathetic fallacy, is engendered here by awareness of the “über viele Jahrhunderte, ja über Millennien fortschreitenden Zurückdrängung und Zerstörung der dichten Wälder...” (RS, 201). A negative picture of the modern world is revealed in Adornian comments that ally progress and commercial expansion in a negative dialectic: “Die Verkohlung der höheren Pflanzenarten, die unaufhörliche Verbrennung aller brennbare Substanz ist der Antrieb für unsere Verbreitung über die Erde...” (RS, 202). The landscape is scattered with Romantic motifs, such as the ruined Franciscan abbey that embodies the narrator’s consciousness of the lost past. A thicket, “ein ... aufgeschossenes, verwahrlosten Gehölz ... daß ich nur mit viel Mühe vorankam” (RS, 204), acts as a threshold to the fantastical realm the protagonist enters. The protagonist’s sudden discovery of the heath, “da tat sich auf einmal vor mir die Heide auf” (RS, 204), sees his transition from reality to a surreal and de-historicised realm: “Wie betäubt von dem wahnsinnigen Blühen, wanderte ich auf der hellen Sandbahn dahin, bis ich zu meinem Entsetzen, mich wiederauf vor demselben verwilderten Wäldchen, aus dem ich vor etwa einer Stunde oder, wie es mir jetzt schien, in irgendeiner fernen Vergangenheit hervorgetreten war” (RS, 204).

Confusion of perspective and reality sees the “seltsame Villa” magically change appearance, “ja einmal war der Aussichtsturm sogar innerhalb kürzester Frist gleichsam wie durch eine Rochade vor der einen Seite des Gebäudes auf die andere geraten, ganz als hätte ich unversehens statt der wirklichen Villa ihr Spiegelbild vor mir” (RS, 204). The protagonist’s loss of orientation and rational thought are symbolized by the indecipherability of the “Wegweiser an den Gabelungen und Kreuzungen ... [die] ausromantisches unbeschriftet waren und statt einer Ort-oder Entfernungsangabe immer nur ein stummer Pfeil in diese oder jene Richtung deutete” (RS, 205). His “wachsende
Panik” is reflected in an intensely subjective perception of nature: “Der tief herabhängende bleierne Himmel, das krankhafte, die Augen trübende Violett der Heide, die in den Ohren wie das Meer in einer Muschel rauschende Lautlosigkeit, die Fliegen, die mich dauernd umschwärmten, beängstigend und grauenvoll kam mir das alles vor” (RS, 205). A Romantic awareness of Zeitauflaufung implies transcendence of time: “Ich kann nicht sagen, wie lang ich in dieser Verfassung herumgeirrt bin…” (RS, 205), but the meaning of the episode remains obscure to the protagonist.

The protagonist’s return to everyday reality occurs as suddenly and inexplicably as his experience of the fantastical realm begins, “Bloß daß ich plötzlich draußen auf der Landstraße unter einem großen Eichenbaum gestanden bin ... und daß ringsum der Horizont sich drehte, als sei ich gerade abgesprungen von einem Karusell” (RS, 205). The episode remains “unbegreiflich” to him, and insight into the meaning of his surreal experience only comes with its dream sequel. The dream that follows the Dunwich episode is highly Romantic in its temporal setting, “bei Einbruch der Dämmerung”, while its “unendlich verschlungene Wege” and topographical motifs of Irrgarten and Eibenlabyrinth (RS, 206) point to the protagonist’s loss of orientation. In this dream episode, time and history are suspended: “Es war, als befinde ich mich am obersten Punkt der Erde, dort, wo der Winterhimmel immer nur stillsteht und funkelt; als wäre die Heide im Frost erstarrt...” (RS, 206-207). The laws of time and space are magically altered: “Obzwar ich in meinem Heidetraum reglos vor Staunen in dem chinesischen Pavillon saß, stand ich zu gleicher Zeit auch drauß en, einen Fuß nur vom äußersten Rand...” (RS, 207). From his dream-perspective in the Aussichtsturm, the protagonist is able to recognize that the labyrinth in which he has lost himself resembles a transsection of his own brain, a metaphor for his intra-psychic confusion. Into this de-historicized dream world, the war intrudes: “Gleich unterhalb der Klippen aber, auf einem schwarzen Haufen Erde, lagen die Trümmer eines zerborstenen Hauses ... Zwischen

Mauerbruchstücken, aufgesprungenen Kleiderkästen, Stiegengeländern, umgekippten Badewannen und verbogenen Heizungsrohren waren eingeklemmt die seltsam verrenkten Leiber der Bewohner…” (RS, 207). The image of the distorted corpses evokes the “groteske Verrenkungen” and “grauenvoll entstellte Leiber” described by Sebald in relation to the bombing of Hamburg,\(^{479}\) and is a reminder of the war as the repressed source of the protagonist’s turmoil.

The protagonist’s return to reality evokes the *Kunstmärchen*: “Die Nacht geht ihrem Ende zu, das Morgengrauen kommt”\(^{480}\) (RS, 208). His encounter with the fantastical is neither redemptive nor life-affirming, but rather, a subversion of the Romantic journey of enlightenment around which the *Kunstmärchen* is structured: the reality to which he returns is dystopic, and his reflections express a profound sense of loss, of past, present, and, in the reference to the potentially destructive power plant, future: “Auf einer Insel draußen auf dem fahlen Meer zeichnen die Umrisse des einem Mausoleum gleichenden Magnox-Blocks des Kraftwerks von Sizewell sich ab, dort, wo man die Doggerbank vermutet, wo einst die Herringschwärme laichten, wo früher noch, vor langer Zeit, das Rheinstromdelta war und wo im Schwemmsand grüne Auen wuchsen” (RS, 208). The allusion to the Rhine, emblematic of German national identity, serves to implicate the German protagonist in this picture of potential destruction.

The themes of exile and *Heimat* are implicit in the alternative reality of Orfordness. Following the apocalyptic hurricane of 1987, the protagonist-narrator of *Die Ringe des Saturn* reaches Orford in a state of “Benommenheit.” The promontory of Orfordness, with its defunct *Secret Weapons Research Establishment*, is constituted as isolated and sinister, resembling a “fernöstliche Strafkolonie” (RS, 278), an allusion to Kafka’s desolate novel\(^{481}\) and a refutation of transcendence. The protagonist’s reflections present a bleak picture of modernity, focusing on its destructive capacity, implied by “ein unsichtbares Netz von Todesstrahlen, ein neuartiges Nervengas oder sonst ein in seinen

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\(^{480}\) See Novalis, *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*: “Die lange Nacht war eben angegangen ... endlich standen sie im reinen, milchblauen Schimmer...” (121) Compare Strauß: “Da entwich die Nacht ... Ein erster milchiger Lichtstrahl berührte uns wie ein tastender Blindenstab...” (*Der junge Mann*, 304).

\(^{481}\) Franz Kafka, *In der Strafkolonie* (Frankfurt am Main, Suhrkamp, 2006).
Auswirkungen jedes Vorstellungsvermögen übersteigendes Massenvernichtungsmittel” (RS, 275). Described as an “extraterritoriale Landzunge” (RS, 278), Orfordness offers a world beyond the real, an island of exception that the protagonist reaches by ferry in an act of Schwellenüberschreitung that draws on the myth of Charon, conducting the Dead across the river Styx to the Underworld, and that prefigures the eschatological nature of the realm to which he is transported.

The topography of this “geheimnisvolle Insel der Toten” (RS, 282) is marked by death, symbolized by the concrete buildings like prehistoric “Hügelgräber” (RS, 281). The dystopic landscape is scattered with Romantic motifs, exotic structures and ruins that convey a magical and bizarre world beyond history. The noumenal nature of the protagonist’s experience is expressed in his bemused perception: “Der Eindruck, daß ich mich auf einem Areal befand, dessen Zweck über das Profane hinausging, wurde verstärkt durch mehrere Tempel-oder Pagodenartige Bauten...” (RS, 281-282). In this extraterritorial space, perceived by the protagonist as “ein unentdecktes Land” (RS, 279), he feels both fleetingly liberated and “maßlos bedrückt” (RS, 279). Temporally and spatially displaced, he describes himself as “unter den Überresten unserer eigenen, in einer künftigen Katastrophe zugrundegegangenen Zivilisation” (RS, 282). Here, all movement is suspended: “Es war ... so windstill, daß nicht einmal die Ähren des haarfeinen Steppengrases sich regten” (RS, 279). The fantastic realm is emptied of meaning, a space in which even rational thought ceases: “Nicht ein einziger Gedanke war in meinem Kopf. Mit jedem Schritt den ich tat, wurde die Leere in mir und die Leere um mich herum größer und die Stille tiefer” (RS, 279). The experience of the surreal brings a degree of melancholy self-understanding: in a moment of Romantic empathy with nature, the protagonist experiences an awareness of his own creatureliness at the sight of a frightened hare: “Ich sehe, in seinem ... vor Furcht fast aus dem Kopf herausdrehenden Auge, mich selber, eins geworden mit ihm” (RS, 280).


The protagonist’s return to reality is signalled by Romantic imagery of redemption: “Als ich ... auf den Fährmann wartete, brach die Abendsonne aus den Wolken hervor und überstrahlte das weithin sich krümmende Ufer des Meers” (RS, 283). This redemptive moment is undermined by the intrusion of imagery of war and destruction, the “neue Waffensysteme”, the bunkers with their sinister “Haken”, the “Barackenlager” (RS, 282-283), and the “schmerzverrenkte, verkohlte Leichen” (RS, 276) that once again evoke German suffering as depicted in Luftkrieg und Literatur, and create a sense of universal and inevitable suffering. The protagonist’s final reflections are indicative of loss, of the past, and of Heimat: “Die Dächer und Türme von Orford, zum Greifen nah, schauten zwischen den Baumkronen heraus. Dort, dachte ich, war ich einmal zu Hause...” (RS, 283). Orford, as an extraterritorial, fantastical space, is emblematic of the protagonist’s predicament as a self-exiled German, suspended between an adopted land that can never be home, and an irrecoverable homeland, and for whom the notion of “zu Hause sein” remains elusive.

In the Breendonk episode of Austerlitz, the transcendent potential of the Kunstmärchen is subverted. Here, the surreal realm of the Kunstmärchen offers a space beyond the real that implies the extraordinary system of oppression of which this torture camp is an emblem. The narrator’s descent into the fortress of Breendonk is a katabasis into the German unconscious, and an encounter with the Nazi past that enacts second-generation conflicts relating to origins and identity. Imagery relating to barriers suggests that the Breendonk episode lies outside the real: surrounded by a Stacheldrahtzaun and a Wassergraben, the fortress resembles “eine Insel im Meer” (A, 33). In an act of Schwellenüberschreitung, the narrator crosses the bridge to the fortress. Imagery that emphasizes the unique nature of the Breendonk building, and the oppressive system of which it is an emblem, serves to distinguish the episode from the quotidian: its lack of coherent design renders the building “unbegreiflich” to the narrator, to whom it resembles an “Ungetum” surrounded by “unnatürlich tiefgrünes, fast blaufarbenes Gras” (A, 33), a unique structure incompatible with any “bekannte Ausformung der menschlichen Zivilisation, nicht einmal mit den stummen Relikten unserer Vor- und Frühgeschichte” (A, 34). The singular monstrousness of the barbarism enacted there renders it “eine einzige monolitische Ausgeburt der Häßlichkeit und der blinden Gewalt” (A, 35). Once inside the fortress, the dissolution of light and colour associated
with Das Wunderbare imply that it is a “getrennt[e] Welt”, the darkness a metaphor for the morally tenebrous acts perpetrated there:


The narrator’s descent into the dungeon of Breendonk inverts the positive meaning of the Romantic trope of descending into the earth, associated with the experience of the surreal in the Kunstmärchen, in which a mentor figure typically guides the protagonist to the experience of enlightenment. Here, by contrast, the narrator descends alone into the dungeon, used by the Germans as a torture chamber, where he experiences shameful and distressing visions and sensory hallucinations that are projections of his anxiety about origins, and his father’s implication in Nazism. Peering into the socalled “Kasino der SS-Leute”, the narrator’s self-implicating recognition of “die Familienväter und die guten Söhne aus Vilsbiburg und aus Fühlsbüttel, aus dem Schwarzwald und aus dem Münsterland, wie sie hier nach getanem Dienst beim Kartenspiel beieinander saßen … denn unter ihnen hatte ich ja gelebt…” (A, 37), reflects the shame and guilt of the second generation in relation to their fathers. Here, the alternative reality of the surreal realm allows the exploration of repressed and unresolved anxieties relating to the Nazi past.

Conflicted notions relating to Heimat and origins are central to Austerlitz and the episode of the “Liverpool Station Ladies’ Waiting Room.” In this defining episode, Sebald borrows from the Romantic Kunstmärchen to create a mythical and uncanny realm that reflects a yearning to transcend history. In this “falsches Universum” (A, 199), the laws of time and space are suspended: “Es mögen Minuten oder Stunden vergangen sein, während derer ich, ohne mich von der Stelle rühren zu können, in dem, wie es mir schien, ungeheuer weit hinaufgehenden Saal gestanden bin…” (A, 197). Imagery implying opacity and illusion, “das eisgraue, mondscheinartiges Licht, das durch einen … Gaden drang und einem Netz oder einem schütteren, stellenweise
ausgefranste Gewebe gleich über mir hing” (A, 197-198), suggests the distortion of optical perspective that disorientates the protagonist in this dreamlike space. Austerlitz’s entry to the Liverpool Station Ladies’ Waiting Room occurs through the motif of Schwellenüberschreitung: “Ich zögerte, an die Schwingtür heranzutreten, aber kaum hatte ich meine Hand auf den Messinggriff gelegt, da trat ich schon, durch einen im Inneren gegen die Zugluft aufgehängten Filzvorhang…” (A, 197). The “Waiting Room” is a space beyond history, in which Austerlitz experiences a shattering epiphany of self-identification that is also a longing for the elimination of history:

Tatsächlich hatte ich das Gefühl, sagte Austerlitz, als enthalte der Wartesaal, in dessen Mitte ich wie ein Geblendeter stand, alle Stunden meiner Vergangenheit, alle meine von jeher unterdrückten, ausgelöschten Ängste und Wünsche, als sei das schwarzweiße Rautenmuster der Steinplatten zu meinen Füßen das Feld für das Endspiel meines Lebens, als erstrecke es sich über die gesamte Ebene der Zeit. (A, 201)

The historical specificity of Austerlitz’ trauma, implicit in the station’s function as an emblem of the Holocaust, is subsumed in a dehistoricizing mythology of suffering, futility, and rupture, symbolized by the myths of Heracles, Odysseus, and Orpheus. Austerlitz’s katabasis into this Underworld echoes Odysseus’ descent into Hades to seek the shade of his mother, as well as Orpheus’ longing to be reunited with Euridice; the enigmatic station cleaner engaged in the task of sweeping evokes Heracles’ pointless sweeping of the Augean stables; like the mythical ferryman, Charon, the mysterious station cleaner conducts Austerlitz to the Underworld and his encounter with the dead in the vision of his youthful self as a Kindertransport child, and his Welsh foster-parents. The Liverpool Station itself, an edifice from the colonial-imperial era, symbolizes the myth of historical progress. Its archaeological layers reveal the ravages of industrialization that involve the destruction of human habitation “damit die Eisenbahnstrassen … herangeführt werden konnten bis an den Rand der City” (A, 194), and embody a negative dialectic of enlightenment. This mythical realm reflects the

desire to transcend a painful history that marks the neo-Romantic writing of the second

generation.

The Waiting Room is a metaphor for the negative messianic narrative of Austerlitz’
existence, indeed, the illusory “Staubglitzern” that illuminate the station (A, 198) evoke
the evanescent redemptive power of Benjamin’s “chips” of messianic time. The
notion of the “Ladies” Waiting Room implies the salvific function of women, embodied
by his companion Marie de Verneuil, and his nanny, Vera, in Austerlitz’ life story.
Redemption is implied by the description of the station, built on the remains of a
crusader (A, 190-191), but is undermined by the counter-image of the dust and bones of
the Bedlam skeletons upon which the station is constructed, and that evoke Holocaust
images. To Eshel, Liverpool Station embodies “Austerlitz’ direct and implied ‘historical
metaphysics’ … Humans and human remains are removed from their ‘natural’ place,
and nature itself is crushed by the nonhuman, indeed inhuman body of modernity.”
His observation supports Jackman’s conclusion that “Sebald’s melancholy
understanding of history permits not even the faint messianic hope which Benjamin
sought to maintain in the face of the apparent triumph of fascism.” Austerlitz’
confrontation with his past in the Ladies’ Waiting Room of Liverpool Station is not
redemptive, but leads to further anguish and dissolution, manifest in the “Lähmung
meines Sprachvermögens … Vernichtung meiner sämtlichen Aufzeichnungen …
endlose Nachtwanderungen durch London…(A, 206). Here, as in Die Ringe des Saturn,
the alternative reality borrowed from the Romantic Kunstmärchen reflects Sebald’s
preoccupation with the themes of impermissible Heimat and conflicted origins that
connect his writing with that of his generation.

In the final part of this chapter, the argument is pursued that for Sebald, and two other
significant writers of his generation, Handke and Strauß, the Romantic artist offers a
model for expressing the sense of loss, nostalgia, and the consciousness of historical

486 Amir Eshel, “Against the Power of Time: The Poetics of Suspension in W.G.
487 Graham Jackman, “W.G. Sebald’s ‘Metaphysik der Geschichte,’” German Life &
rupture that characterize the thinking of the second generation. Focusing on the Romantic artist, I seek to draw connections between Sebald’s reconstitution of this figure in *Die Ausgewanderten*, *Die Ringe des Saturn*, and *Austerlitz*, and the neo-Romantic writing of Strauß (*Der Junge Mann*), and Handke (*Die Wiederholung*).

**The Romantic artist**

Sebald’s narrative prose is pervaded by artist figures who conform to a Romantic model of the artist that valorizes suffering and itinerancy. The Romantic artist is embodied in his work by fictional artists, such as Max Aurach (*Die Ausgewanderten*), and Austerlitz, and by actual writers, such as Stendhal, Kafka, Hölderlin, Herbeck, and Amery, whose lives Sebald weaves into his narratives; the Romantic artist is represented also by the writer-narrator, whose creative struggles are manifest in bouts of incapacitating depression and hysterical paralysis, and whose itinerancy is suggestive of the Romantic wanderer. Strauß’s “Romantischer ReflexionsRoman”,488 *Der junge Mann*, traces the allegorical *Bildungsreise* and torments of the young theatre-director, Leon Pracht, while Handke’s *Die Wiederholung*489 explores nascent writer Filip Kobal’s often anguished journey of artistic development. Comparison of the restitution of the Romantic artist in the work of Sebald, Strauß and Handke reveals that these writers engage with, and interrogate the Romantic artist in ways that suggest a more than superficial connection between them, and supports the argument that Sebald’s narrative prose reflects cultural and aesthetic concerns manifest in the neo-Romantic writing of his generation. Comparative analysis reveals also that Sebald differs from these writers in significant ways.

Suffering, of a mental or physical nature, is a defining characteristic of the Romantic artist, of which Goethe’s Werther is the paradigm.490 In *Künstler und Melancholie in der Romantik*, Loquai observes the nexus between Romantic creativity and melancholy:

489 Peter Handke, *Die Wiederholung* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1986).

Ich trauerte; aber ich glaube, daß man unter den Seeligen auch so trauert.
Sie war die Bote der Freude, diese Trauer, sie war die grauende Dämmerung, woran die unzähligen Rosen des Morgenroths sprossen.493

In Görres’ Korruskationen, melancholy is a path to transcendence and a precondition for creativity: “Kennt ihr nicht das wahre Medium der Poesie, die Schwermuth, die wie ein Frühlingsmorgennebel die Phantasie umhüllt, und ihre Zaubergeschichte reflektirt?”494 In German Romantic writing, artistic sensibility is often associated with mental disorder, and viewed as a Gegennorm to health, utility, and positive activity:

Zu einer gewissen Art des Wahnsinns ins besondere entwickelt sich bey dem Dichter, der in der idealen Welt nicht allein schafft, sondern auch mehr lebt und webt, als in der realen, eine Anlage, die in sein Genie verwebt ist. 495

491 Franz Loquai, Künstler und Melancholie in der Romantik, (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1984), 1.
495 J.C. Hoffbauer, Die Psychologie in ihren Hauptanwendungen auf die Rechtspflege (Halle: 1823), 102.
Madness is not confined to poets, but is common to all artistic individuals who manifest “eine höhere Einbildungskraft.” The tendency to valorize suffering, even madness, reflects the idea that such conditions release creative and imaginative energies, and can be a precondition for creativity, as Chiarugi suggests: “Ich muß hierbei noch bemerken, daß man das Genie im Wahnsinn einen sehr hohen und bewundernswürdigen Grad von Vollkommenheit erreichen sieht.” The fascination of German Romantic writers with madness is evident in Wackenroder’s depiction of the musician, Berglinger, and in Hoffmann’s artist figures in Der Sandmann, Das Fräulein von Scuderi, and Kreisleriana. The Romantic artist is frequently assailed by mental suffering in the form of self-doubt, as Loquai observes: “Für die meisten [romantischen G.S.] Künstler sind ständige Zweifel, unaufhörliche Identitätskrisen charakteristisch.” This is evident in Berlinger’s self-interrogation:

Was bin ich? Was soll ich, was tu’ ich auf der Welt? Was für ein böser Genius hat mich so von allen Menschen weit weg verschlengen, dass ich nicht weiss, wofür ich mich halten soll? 

Physical suffering too, is valorized as a path to transcendence. Indeed, Sebald’s artist figures suffer from a variety of physical ailments that include Beyle’s syphilis (Schwindel.Gefühle.), and the narrator’s macular degeneration (Austerlitz). Krell examines the Romantic idealization of disease as a path to higher spirituality, evident in Novalis’ Poetik des Uebels: “Fängt nicht überall das Beste mit Krankheit an? Halbe

496 Hoffbauer 1823, 144.
499 Loquai 1984, 171.
501 David Farrel Krell, Contagion: Sexuality, Disease and Death in German Idealism and Romanticism (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1998).
Krankheit ist Übel - Ganze Kr[anckheit] ist Lust - und zwar Höhe.\textsuperscript{502} In its most extreme form, German Romantic fascination with disease finds expression in the idea of death as the apotheosis of art, and the price of artistic fulfilment:

Er [Berglinger G.S.] lag tief daniedergedrückt und vergraben unter den Schlacken dieser Erde. Endlich riß er sich mit Gewalt auf und streckte mit dem heißesten Verlangen die Arme zum Himmel empor; er füllte seinen Geist mit der höchsten Poesie, mit lautem, jauchzendem Gesange an und schrieb in einer wunderbaren Begeisterung … eine Passionsmusik nieder, die mit ihren durchdringenden und alle Schmerzen des Leidens in sich fassenden Melodien ewig ein Meisterstück bleiben wird.\textsuperscript{503}

Berglinger’s transcendent suffering reflects the notion of the Romantic artist as a Sonderling, whose extraordinary sensitivities distinguish him from society. Such artists are metaphysically marked by “ein böser Stern”,\textsuperscript{504} an inner “Karfunkel,”\textsuperscript{505} or a “kindlich poetisches Gemüt”\textsuperscript{506}, and an enhanced self-perception that sets them apart from the rest of society:

Wir Genies - denn ich bin auch eins - machen uns aus der Welt ebenso wenig, als sie sich aus uns, wir schreiten vielmehr ohne besondere Umstände in unsern Siebenmeilenstiefeln, die wir bald mit auf die Welt bringen, gerade auf die Ewigkeit los.\textsuperscript{507}

The artist’s physiognomy too, is extraordinary. Bonaventura’s Nachtwache describes himself as “einem Vexirgemälde gleich, das von drei verschiedenen Standpunkten

\textsuperscript{502} Novalis, “Poetik des Übels,” in: Schriften I (Berlin: 1837), 245.
\textsuperscript{503} Wackenroder, Herzensergießungen, 129.
\textsuperscript{505} Hoffmann, Sämtliche Werke VII, 456.
\textsuperscript{506} Hoffmann, Sämtliche Werke I, 284.
betrachtet, einen Grazi, eine Meerkatze und en face den Teufel dazu darstellt.”508 The anomalous nature and appearance of the artist are both a reflection of, and contribute to, his outsider status, manifest in the tendency to itinerancy that constitutes one of the most familiar tropes associated with the Romantic artist, and popularized in Schubert’s song-cycle, *Winterreise*, and in the paintings of Caspar David Friedrich.509

Immermann, *Memorabilien* (1840) notes the overwhelming Romantic urge to journey as an end in itself: “Noch tiefer greift das Reisen in den Zustand der jetzigen Menschen ein ... Sie reisen um zu reisen.”510 The Romantic wanderer is depicted as a non-conformist figure on his aimless journey, following unconscious promptings to unaccustomed paths. In the Romantic *Künstlerroman*, such as Goethe’s *Wilhelm Meister*, Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen*, and Tieck’s *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen*, the artist is depicted as a wanderer, whose itinerancy becomes a metaphor for existential unhousedness. This is exemplified by Hölderlin’s Hyperion, who feels “dazu geboren, heimathlos und ohne Ruhestätte zu seyn.”511 The artist’s itinerancy becomes a metaphor for art as infinite process: “Die romantische Dichtart ist noch im Werden; ja, das ist ihr eigentliches Wesen, daß sie ewig nur werden, nie vollendet sein kann...”512 The Romantic journey is marked by increasing separation from ties of friendship and society, and the artist’s isolation is implied by the metaphor of the orphan: Sternbald appears “verwaist und verachtet”,513 Florentin is “eine Waise und ein Fremdling auf Erden”,514, condemned, by his artistic quest, to eternal homelessness: “Mich treibt etwas Unnennbares vorwärts, was ich mein Schicksal

509 Schubert’s *Winterreise* op. 29 (1828), and Friedrich’s *Der Wanderer über dem Nebelmeer* (1818).
512 Schlegel, Athenäum Fragment 116 (1798), 182-183.
nennen muß.” The artist’s withdrawal is literal, into nature as the antithesis of society, or metaphysical, “in die Hohlräume der Innerlichkeit.” For Hoffmann’s Anselmus, loneliness becomes a path to self-knowledge:

Am liebsten war es ihm [Anselmus], wenn er allein durch Wiesen und Wälder schweifen und wie losgelöst von allem, was ihn an sein dürftiges Leben fesselte, nur im Anschauen der mannifachen Bilder, die aus seinem Innern stiegen, sich gleichsam selbst wiederfinden konnte.

The lonely Romantic artist, keeping vigil in the night, is epitomized by the protagonist of Bonaventura’s *Die Nachtwachen*, the poet and nightwatchman, Kreuzgang. Bonaventura’s *Nachtwache* stays awake to expose and censure the everyday world while others sleep. In its most radical form, withdrawal from society is embodied in Romantic writing by the hermit figure, whose voluntary isolation represents the conflict between social responsibility and a life devoted to the pursuit of metaphysical meaning.

The suffering and itinerancy of the artist as represented in Romantic writing are responses to the trauma of historical rupture that follows the French Revolution and are manifest in “a deepening sense of melancholy, a feeling of disconnection with the past,

515 Schlegel, *Lucinde*, 163.
518 The authorship of the novel has been variously attributed to F.W.J. Schelling, E.T.A. Hoffmann, and Friedrich Gottlob Wetzel. It is currently thought to be the work of August Klingemann.
519 The hermit-figure appears as a spiritual guide in Novalis’ *Heinrich von Ofterdingen* and Wackenroder’s *Das Wunderbare Märchen von einem nackten Heiligen*.
a growing dread of the future, and uncertainty over the capacity to act…” Such traits accord with second-generation writers for whom the Romantic artist offers a model for expressing their own sense of trauma and loss. The “ceaseless iteration of loss” that characterises post-Revolutionary thought is evident in the portrayal of the artist in the neo-Romantic work of Strauß, Handke, and later, Sebald. Loss of certainty, and rupture of continuity are thematized in their work in uncertain and inconclusive journeys that evoke the trope of the wanderer-artist. The engagement of Sebald, Strauß and Handke with the trope of the Romantic artist reflects their individual aesthetics: Sebald’s reconfiguring of the Romantic artist, and implicit yearning for the lost past, is a projection of his inability to resolve issues of generational conflict and national identity. Incapacitated by melancholy, the creative process for Sebald’s artist is likened to torture and romanticized as martyrdom. Sebald’s narrator-artist is endlessly itinerant, his Wanderschaft a metaphor for his inability to recover a Heimat. By contrast, Strauß’s restitution of the Romantic artist offers a more affirmative attempt to reconnect with earlier, uncompromised German culture, while Handke’s construction of the Romantic artist allows him to explore a redemptive dimension to art.

The Romantic artist in the writing of Strauß, Handke and Sebald

The suffering artist

Strauß’s depiction of the suffering Romantic artist in Der junge Mann is consistent with a restitutive view of art that sees the role of the artist as one of heroic sacrifice, and is embodied by Weigert, the young artist’s mentor, to whom artists are “die letzten Zeugen eines machtvollen Menschseins … die einzigen unter uns, die noch mit hohen Charakteren, mit Schicksal, Tragik, Heldentum in Berührung kommen…” (Der junge Mann, 52). The artist-protagonist of Der junge Mann embodies the tradition of the tormented Romantic artist, and like Romantic prototypes, exemplified by Tieck’s blond Eckbert and Novalis’ Heinrich von Ofterdingen, suffers from the disapproval and incomprehension of his father: “Der Regisseur? Was ist das überhaupt für einer? … Er


522 Fritzsche 2001, 1591.
ist nicht einmal ein richtiger Künstler!” (Der junge Mann, 28).523 For the young theatre director, initiation into art involves “Tortur” (Der junge Mann, 49) in the form of “die tausend Widrigkeiten, Infamien und Wechselfälle” (Der junge Mann, 20) at the hands of the “zwei grausame Schauspielerinnen”, dedicated to his “schmerzhafte Weihe” (Der junge Mann, 45, 59). His response to the failure of his artistic project, the production of Genet’s Die Zofen, is expressed in self-dramatising misery that construes art as torture: “Mir ist … als liebe ich in einem unterirdischen Kerkerlabyrinth unentwegt hin und her und fände nicht heraus” (Der junge Mann, 50). His artistic apprenticeship is a “Höllenreise zum Theater” (Der junge Mann, 21), and his suffering and sacrifice in the service of art mark him as a Romantic artist in the tradition of Wackenroder’s Berglinger:

Und dafür hatte ich nun mit den höllischen und herrlichen Gewalten gerungen, war ich durch Ohnmacht und Kälte, durch Feuer und Sumpfe geschritten. Aber so ist wohl das Theater: ein gewundenes Instrument, in das man seine ganze Seele hineinblasen muß, um am Ende wenigstens einen kleinen geziemenden Ton herauszubringen. (Der junge Mann, 32)

Der junge Mann reflects Strauß’s valorization of suffering, and regret at its socialization in contemporary society:

Wie die Langeweile so ist auch das Leidwesen durchgreifend sozialisiert worden. Allgemeine und öffentliche Befindlichkeit sorgen, das auf den Einzelnen nur in verdünnter Emulsion einwirkt und ihn, der eigentlich verstummen müßte, bloß mitreden macht, mitfordernd, mitklagend auch

523 In Tieck’s Der blonde Eckbert, the father’s disapproval centres on the non-utilitarian nature of the son’s chosen occupation: “…es wurden nun ernstlichen Anstalten gemacht, dass ich etwas tun, oder lernen sollte.” (5) Heinrich von Ofterdingen’s father dismisses his son’s artistic fantasies: “Mich dünkt der Traum eine Schutz gegen die Regelmäßigkeit und Gewöhnlichkeit des Lebens…” (Heinrich von Ofterdingen, 13).
The artist-protagonist of Der junge Mann embodies the egotistical vision of the Romantic genius congruent with Wackenroder’s notion of the artist as “Werkzeug der göttlichen Kunst”.

Ich wuβte genau, wie es auszusehen hatte, mein Theater, meine Zofen, mein ekstatisches Spiel. Ich nannte es nicht mit geringen Namen. Die Gegen-Welt, die Mythenwanderung, die Überschreitung, die Bühne als Eingangspforte zur Groβen Erinnerung, Tanz der Reflexionen mit den Geistern, das Gebärd-Zeremoniell… (Der junge Mann, 32)

Intrinsic to this enhanced self-perception is the dissonance between the artist and society. Strauß’s artist conforms to a Romantic genius-aesthetic that accepts social isolation as a precondition for artistic creativity: “Ja, es fiel mir sehr schwer, aus dieser engen, bewegten Gemeinschaft, in die ich mich begeben hatte, so plötzlich wieder ausgeschieden zu sein und vollkommen alleine zurückzubleiben. Ich fühlte mich hundeeinsam” (Der junge Mann, 20). Indeed, social alienation is valorized through the image of the artist as an heroic outsider, a “Wächter auf der Mauer, der nur sieht und nicht schießt” (Der junge Mann, 42), a “schwache Stimme in der Höhle unter dem Lärm.”

In relation to Strauß’s valorization of an ascetic perspective, Gottwald observes: “Die Wiederaufwertung der Poesie in der entzauberte Welt im Rahmen einer ‘Kunstreligion’ erfordert künstlerische Askese von der ‘Bilderflut’ … Holismus … ‘Hören’ und ‘Gesang’.” There is a messianic dimension to Pracht’s sacrifice and suffering: “Ich muß [die Schauspielerinnen G.S.] moralisch besiegen. Ich muß ihnen...

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525 Wackenroder, Herzensergieβungen, 204.
527 Herwig Gottwald, Mythos und Mythisches in der Gegenwartsliteratur. Studien zu Christoph Ransmayr, Peter Handke, Botho Strauß, George Steiner, Patrick Roth und Robert Schneider (Stuttgart, Hans-Dieter Heinz Verlag, 1996), 107-108.
Eine Botschaft bringen” (Der junge Mann, 56). His suffering at the hands of his actresses ultimately contributes to his failure as an artist and withdrawal from artistic life:

In Wahrheit hatte ich aber von den beiden Schauspielerinnen, mit denen ich damals arbeitete, allzu viele Demütigungen einstecken müssen, es hatte mich nachhaltig verschreckt. Ihre unbarmherzigen Spiele, die blutige Beutegier, mit der sie sich mehr auf mich als auf die Rollen und das Stück gestürzt hatten, ließen mich daran zweifeln, ob ich der richtige Mann für diesen entsetzlich eitlen und unberechenbaren Betrieb wäre. (Der junge Mann, 334)

Ultimately, for Strauß, suffering has redemptive potential. In the mature Pracht who emerges in the closing chapter of Der junge Mann, the pain, failures and humiliations of his early Lehrjahre have been tempered, and replaced by resignation and mature self-acceptance reflected in his rejection of a compromised artistic project, and a closing vision of poetic serenity: “Die Sonne strahlte zart und gültig; sie war noch angenehm warm. Ich blickte mich nicht mehr um” (Der junge Mann, 388).

For Handke too, the suffering of the artist has redemptive potential. His novel, Die Wiederholung, records a nascent writer’s quest for his lost brother, a quest that is also a metaphor for the artist’s development, and a thematization of exile, Heimat, and the transcendence of history. Filip Kobal, the artist-protagonist of Die Wiederholung, is an often tormented, solitary wanderer, who, in the tradition of the Romantic artist, undertakes his journey on foot, leaving behind the remnants of his family: “Es drängte mich, ewig unterwegs zu sein, unseßhaft, ohne Bleibe” (Die Wiederholung, 67). His journey of return to the homeland of the Kobals, the mythical “Neuntes Land” of Slovenia, is motivated by the redemptive ideal of family reunification. The writing of Die Wiederholung, like his journey in search of traces of his brother, is a restitutive project, for which the brother’s Werkheft and Wörterbuch provide a guide and impetus. In his essay on Handke’s Die Wiederholung, Sebald draws attention to the messianic nature of Kobal’s quest and its fulfilment:

Filip, dem das Fahren und Unterwegssein schon während der letzten Schulzeit zu seiner wahren Heimstatt wurde und der auf der Wanderschaft nach Süden … weiter sich einübt in den für ihn vorgesehenen Part, ist als der still dabei sitzende fremde Gast derjenige, von dem die Erlösung zu gewärtigen ist.  

Sebald makes much of the messianic connotations to Kobal’s quest for his lost brother: “Seine messianische Verkleidung ist die des unvermutet die Schwelle des Hauses betretenden Gastes.” Handke’s text is imbued with messianic immanence, exemplified by the tropes of endless Unterwegssein and Warten that characterize Kobal’s journey: “So wurde meine Heimstatt damals das Fahren, das Warten an Haltestellen und Bahnhöfen, überhaupt das Unterwegssein” (Die Wiederholung, 63). Kobal’s messianic role involves suffering. He describes the creative process as annihilating, the artistic vocation as a destructive compulsion, and himself as a “stammelnder Zwangsarbeiter, aus dem kein brauchbarer Satz herauskam, in der nur mit dem Tod zu beendenden Umklammerung der zum Ungeheuer aufgewachsenen Erzählung, mit wachen Sinnen doch empfunden als die Sanftheit selbst. Der Geist der Erzählung - wie böse konnte er werden!” (Die Wiederholung, 109-110). The image of the “Zwangsarbeiter”, and Kobald’s terrifying dreams “in denen der Krieg erklärt wird” (Die Wiederholung, 107), are reminders of the war, and of the ambivalence towards the German identity and language that inhibit Kobal’s ability to express himself. Kobal’s chaotic attempts to give literary coherence to his perceptions evoke Aurach and Austerlitz’ tormented difficulties with writing:

Das schlimmste war, daß kein Satz zu seinem Ende kam, daß alle Sätze mittendrin abgebrochen, verworfen, verballhornt, für ungültig erklärt wurden, und daß zugleich das Erzählen nicht aufhören durfte, daß ich, ohne Atempause, immer wieder neu anfangen, einen neuen Anfang nehmen, einen neuen Ansatz finden mußte, daß ich zu diesem so wortreichen wie sinnlosen, keinen Sinn ergebenden, auch den am Tage

bereits gefundenen Sinn im Rücklauf vernichtenden, entwertenden Rhythmus lebenslänglich verdammt schien (Die Wiederholung, 109).

In imagery that evokes the myth of Polyphemus, Kobal is constructed as an alienated Romantic Alleingänger, tortured by his inability to express himself:

War es im Traum von der wortverdrehten Erzählung beim Gespensterwirbel geblieben, so wirkte solches Erwachen als die da schon angedrohte Bestrafung. Und diese bestand … in einem allgemeinen Verstummen: So außerhalb der menschlichen Gesellschaft hatten auch die Dinge keine Sprache mehr und wurden zu Widersachern, ja Vollstreckern. Wohlgemerkt: Das Vernichtende war nicht etwa, daß die aus der Stollenwand ragende, einwärts verdrehte Eisenstange an Folter oder Hinrichtung erinnerte – vernichtend, bei lebendigem Leib, war, daß ich, ohne Gesellschaft und auch mir selber nun keine Gesellschaft mehr, vor ihr, so wie sie vor mir, stumm blieb. (Die Wiederholung, 111-112)

Here, the “Eisenstänge” evokes the stake with which Odysseus blinds the cyclops, Polyphemus, thus freeing himself to return home. It is a metaphor also for the tormented Bildung of the artist, and the Romantic notion of suffering and disability as revelatory. As Finch points out, both Sebald and Handke “privilege the motif of partial sight as a more poetic and more ethical mode of seeing than the direct vision of Enlightenment.” In Handke’s writing, “blindness allows for a poetic space of productivity that integrates childhood into his poetic project.” For Kobal, blindness is a reminder of his brother, blind in one eye, the quest for whom motivates his journey of artistic self-validation. Thus the “blind” or empty window becomes, in Die Wiederholung, a space of poetic imagination, and a symbol of personal commitment:

Die Bedeutung des blinden Fensters blieb unbestimmbar, aber wurde, einmal, zum Zeichen, und im selben Augenblick war es beschlossen, ich würde mich umkehren. Und das Umkehren, weitere Kraft des Zeichens, war nichts Endgültiges, sondern galt allein für die Stunden bis zum

531 The Odyssey, Book IX.
532 Finch 2013, 192.
533 Finch 2007a, 192.
kommenden Morgen, wo ich dann erst richtig aufbrechen, mich erst richtig auf den Weg machen würde, mit den sich wiederholenden blinden Fenstern, gleichwo, als meinen Forschungsgegenständen, Reisebegleitern, Wegweisen. (*Die Wiederholung*, 97)

The image of the “blinde Fenster” functions as a metaphor for the blank page that the writer must fill, as Fuβ observes:

Kobals Aufbruch steht im Zeichen eines blinden Fensters, das in seiner Insignifikanz zweierlei vermittelt: zum einen weist es auf die Kindheit als einen blinden Flecken der eigenen Biographie; zum anderen, wenn es einen leeren Rahmen setzt, der mit Bildern aufzufüllen ist, welch die Erinnerung wieder sichtbar machen muß.534

The suffering of exile is implicit in Kobal’s messianic mission of family reunification, indeed, the Kobal family exist in a condition of metaphorical exile, redemption from which is embodied by the return of Filip Kobal to Slovenia, ancestral Heimat of the Kobals, and the longed-for Heimkehr of the lost brother: “Zwanzig Jahre nach dem Verschwinden meines Bruders war unser Haus immer noch ein Trauerhaus” (*Die Wiederholung*, 69). Hope of his return is embodied in the vision of the festive preparations that culminate in the image of the “blankgeputzte Kalesche” in which the family set out to greet the returning son (*Die Wiederholung*, 185). For Sebald, Handke’s novel posits the redemptive power of writing: “Das Buch ist die Osterkalesche, in der die einander abhanden gekommenen Mitglieder der Kobal-Familie noch einmal beisammensitzen.”535 Handke’s suffering artist postulates redemption from history, reflected in the utopian scene of family unification that confronts Kobal in the closing chapter of *Die Wiederholung*:

Ich trat an das Fenster und erblickte drinnen in der Stube auf dem Bett das Elternpaar. Es war eng unschlungen, nebeneinander, und der Mann hatte das eine Bein auf die Hüfte der Frau gelegt. (*Die Wiederholung*, 330)

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In Sebald’s prose fiction, such redemptive visions are absent, indeed, Sebald’s construction of the artist as suffering and endlessly exiled repudiates the redemptive power of art. His suffering artists are unable to transcend the historical contingencies of exile and dislocation, rendering ironic the messianic visions of reunification that occur in his writing. Sebald’s fictional world is populated with people who suffer, and an overwhelming number of these are artists and writers. Exposed to historical catastrophe in the twentieth century, many of these melancholy figures suffer from post-traumatic symptoms. For others, melancholy appears to be a response to irrational and incomprehensible forces. For only a small number, such as Herbeck and Swinburne, melancholy is a function of mental illness.

Max Aurach is depicted as a Romantic artist, a sombre and reclusive Alleingänger. His art is a never-ending process of creation and destruction, in which individual faces, recreations of his genealogy, emerge like “eine lange Ahnenreihe … Gesichter” (DA, 239-240), only to be destroyed again. Aurach’s studio, accidentally encountered by the narrator in “einem anscheinend verlassenem Gebäude” (DA, 236) in the Manchester Docks area, adheres to the Romantic notion of the artist as outsider; a crepuscular space, its interior, like Aurach’s artistic process, is characterized by dissolution: “Nirgends befinde er sich wohler als dort, wo die Dinge ungestört und gedämpft daliegen dürfen unter dem grausamtenen Sinter, der entsteht, wenn die Materie, Hauch um Hauch, sich auflöst in nichts” (DA, 238). Ash, dust, sinter, and charcoal are the materials of Aurach’s art, their nullity undermining the redemptive potential of the artist’s suffering. Aurach’s artistic process and materials are evoked in an essay by Sebald that encapsulates the suffering Romantic artist:

Das Hochemotionale an dieser Passage [Walser’s sketch of Brentano, G.S.] … liegt darin, daß hier, in der quasi beiläufigen Abhandlung über Asche, Nadel, Bleistift und Zündhölzchen, der Schriftsteller in Wahrheit über sein eigenes Martyrium schreibt, denn die vier Dinge, um die es ihm geht, sind ja nicht willkürlich aneinandergereiht, sondern die Peinigungsinstrumente des Autors beziehungsweise das, was er braucht.
zur Veranstaltung seiner Selbstverbrennung und was übrigbleibt, wenn das Feuer niedergegangen ist. 536

_Selbstverbrennung_ suggests the self-annihilating potential of art, a Romantic notion which, in its extreme form, is evident in the idea of death as the price of artistic fulfilment, and exemplified by Wackenroder’s Berglinger.537 Aurach’s art too, is potentially annihilating: his hands absorb a “Graphitschimmer” from the charcoal he uses for drawing, and he becomes, as it were, part of his own art work; his anecdote about photography and silver poisoning becomes an allegory for the fatal potential of art: “Im übrigen, so fuhr er, jeder weiteren Erklärung ausweichend, fort, erinnere ihn die Verdunkelung seiner Haut an eine Zeitungsnotiz … über die bei Berufsfotografen nicht unüblichen Symptome der Silbervergiftung” (DA, 244). In Sebald’s writing, the self-annihilation of the artist is a repudiation of the redemptive power of art.

Pain, in the form of physical and mental suffering, is the subject of all artwork in the story of “Max Aurach”: the Grünewald paintings at Colmar, ekphrastically described by Aurach, catalyse his reflections on human suffering, and reveal an intensely melancholy view of human destiny:

_Dabei begriff ich allmählich, auf die durchbohrten Leiber schauend und auf die vor Gram wie Schilfrohr durchgebeugten Körper der Zeugen der Hinrichtung, daß an einem bestimmten Grad der Schmerz seine eigene Bedingung, das Bewußtsein, aufhebt und somit sich selbst … Fest steht hingegen, daß das seelische Leiden praktisch unendlich ist. Wenn man glaubt, die letzte Grenze erreicht zu haben, gibt es immer noch weitere Qualen. Man fällt von Abgrund zu Abgrund. (DA, 254)

There is an absence, in Sebald’s narrative prose, of counter-images to those of the suffering body. As Maier observes, “Die menschliche Physis tritt hier vornehmlich mit Leid und Elend konnotiert auf und ist immer im Verfall begriffen.”538 Aurach’s bouts


537 Wackenroder, _Herzensergießungen_.

of neurotic paralysis mimic the *Handlungshemmung* of the Romantic artist, but unlike the latter, considered a prerequisite for creativity, Aurach’s mental paralysis is an incapacitating response to the resurgence of painful memory:

> Der Erinnerungsstrom, von dem mir heute nur weniges mehr gegenwärtig ist, setzte damit ein, daß ich mich entsann, wie ich an einem Freitagmorgen vor einigen Jahren überwältigt worden war von dem mir bis dahin völlig unbekannten Schmerzensparoxysmus. (DA, 254)

Art as a tormenting process is evident in Aurach’s thwarted attempts to paint the enigmatic “Schmetterlingsfänger”:

> Die Arbeit an dem Bild des Schmetterlingsfängers habe ihn ärger hergenommen als jede andere Arbeit zuvor, denn als er es nach Verfertigung zahlloser Vorstudien angegangen sei, habe er es nicht nur wieder und wieder übermalt, sondern er habe es … mehrmals völlig zerstört und verbrannt. (DA, 260)

Aurach’s dying voice, like “das Geraschel vertrockneter Blätter im Wind” (DA, 345-346), evokes Kafka’s enigmatic creature, Odradek.\(^539\) The allusion to Kafka, paradigm of the suffering artist, and to his peculiar creation, an emblem of remnancy and meaninglessness, suggests the “absolute Referenzlosigkeit”\(^540\) that characterizes Aurach’s pain; indeed, there is no redemptive dimension to the nexus of pain and art in Sebald’s world.

In Sebald’s narrative prose, the German writer-narrator too, is constructed as a suffering Romantic artist: “Aber der größte Melancholiker von allen ist Sebalds eigentlicher Protagonist, sein Ich-Erzähler … Die Ich-Figur … wird von depressiven Verstimmungen niedergehalten, bis hin zur Schlaflosigkeit, zum Verstummen, zu kataleptischen Erstarrungszuständen.”\(^541\) Alone in his dingy Manchester boarding house, the narrator of “Max Aurach” is overwhelmed by feelings of “Unverbundenheit” (DA, 228), and, like the Romantic wanderer-artist, roams the city streets, overcome by

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\(^540\) Maier 2006, 118-119.

\(^541\) Löffler 2003, 107.
a sense of “Ziel- und Zwecklosigkeit” (DA, 230). He experiences art as a torment, reflected in his thwarted efforts to write the story of Aurach’s life, a struggle that mirrors Aurach’s painful artistic process: “Hunderte von Seiten hatte ich bedeckt mit meinem Bleistift- und Kugelschreibergekritzel. Weitaus das meiste davon war durchgestrichen, verworfen oder bis zur Unleserlichkeit mit Zusätzen überschmiert” (DA, 344-345). The writer-narrator of Die Ringe des Saturn is a suffering Romantic artist-wanderer, whose pilgrimage along the Suffolk coast reveals a Romantic perception of nature and civilization in a state of dissolution. The opening presents him as overwhelmed by “bestimmte Krankheiten des Gemüts und des Körpers”, manifest as “lähmendes Grauen” and “gänzliche Unbeweglichkeit” (RS, 11-12). Here, the incapacity of the narrator-artist evokes the suffering protagonist of Kafka’s Die Verwandlung: like Samsa in his incarnation as a beetle, the narrator manages “halb bäuchlings, halb seitwärts … über den Bettrand auf den Fussboden zu rutschen und auf allen vieren die Wand zu erreichen, trotz der damit verbundenen Schmerzen…” (RS, 13). In Sebald’s narrative prose, the artistic paralysis of the narrator suggests the authorial inadequacy of the second-generation writer, incapacitated by a sense of belatedness and inauthenticity.

Austerlitz is presented as a Romantic Dichterfigur, whose symptoms signify his Sonderling status and resemble the pathological melancholy of the Romantic artist such as Hoffmann’s Kreisler. Austerlitz’ journey of return through Germany results in the resurgence of repressed trauma that is manifest in a “Gefühl des Verstoßen- und Ausgelöschtseins” and “schreckliche Angst” (A, 330-331). His physical suffering is expressed in a metaphor of nomadism that implies the trauma of exile and dislocation at the heart of his unhappiness: “In kürzester Frist trocknete die Zunge und der Gaumen mir aus, so als läge ich seit Tagen schon in der Wüste…” (A, 331). Indeed, in Austerlitz’ suffering, Ilsemann detects a topographical dimension that relates the experience of pain with that of exile:

Converted into a psychologically unfounded, completely unspecified feeling of disorientation … the biographical contingency becomes a universal experience, weighing on all those who confront history. This transformation involves the creation of a highly sophisticated topography, a

542 Hoffbauer1823, 144.
543 Kreisler’s pathological tendencies are discussed in Loquai 1984, 109-110.
system of spatial metaphors that revolves around the leitmotif of disorientation or “going astray.”

A crippling sense of disorientation and “lostness” is revealed in Austerlitz’ tormented attempts to write:

Wenn man die Sprache ansehen kann als eine alte Stadt, mit einem Gewinkel von Gassen und Plätzen … mit abgerissenen, assanierten und neuerbauten Vierteln und immer ins Vorfeld hinauswachsenden Außenbezirken, so glich ich selbst einem Menschen, der sich, aufgrund einer langen Abwesenheit, in dieser Agglomeration nicht mehr zurechtfindet…” (A, 183)

A self-dramatizing pathos is reflected in Austerlitz’ perception of the artistic creativity as painful and incapacitating:

Keine Wendung im Satz, die sich dann nicht als eine jämmerliche Krücke erwies, kein Wort, das nicht ausgehöhlt klang und verlogen. Und in dieser schandbaren Geistesverfassung saß ich stunden- und tagelang mit dem Gesicht gegen die Wand, zermartete mir die Seele und lernte ich allmählich begreifen, wie furchtbar es ist, daß sogar die geringste Aufgabe oder Verrichtung … unsere Kräfte übersteigen kann. Es war, als drängte eine seit langem in mir bereits fortwirkende Krankheit zum Ausbruch, als habe sich etwas Stumpfsinniges und Verbohrtes in mir festgesetzt, das nach und nach alles lahmlegen würde. (A, 181-182)

Like Aurach, Austerlitz suffers bouts of neurotic paralysis, such as the “fast vollkommenen Lähmung meines Sprachvermögens” (A, 206) that follows his epiphanous moment of self-recognition in the Liverpool Station Ladies’ Waiting Room. His inability to write in this condition is expressed as self-annihilating paralysis: “Wäre damals einer gekommen, mich wegzuführen auf eine Hinrichtungsstätte, ich hätte alles ruhig mit mir geschehen lassen, ohne ein Wort zu sagen…” (A, 182). Like Aurach’s, Austerlitz’ *Handlungshemmung* is not a precondition for creativity, but a metaphor for

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the sense of authorial impotence of the second generation, and a manifestation of profound scepticism towards the artistic project.

Strauß’s restitution of the Romantic artist is congruent with his literary project, to reclaim a metaphysical dimension to German culture: “Ohne Mythen und Metapher ist unser zentrales Organ … nicht angeschlossen an die Ordnung des Lebendigen…” (Der junge Mann, 214). He creates a Romantic artist-wanderer whose journey of self-discovery and initiation exposes him to paradigmatic examples of German cultural legacy, while at the same time revealing the lingering German propensity to fascism, and the spectre of Nazism as a continuing undercurrent in German consciousness. Strauß’s artist-wanderer functions as a metaphor for Schlegel’s “progressive Universalpoesie”, conveyed in Der junge Mann through the imagery of Strömung that marks the wanderer’s conduction through the archives of German literary Erbe. Thus the protagonist, incarnated as a Bankkauffrau, becomes aware of invisible “Strömungen und Sogkräften” that transfer her to the “Turm der Deutschen”, repository of “alles … was in unserem Land und in unserer Sprache je nur beim Namen genannt worden ist” (Der junge Mann, 77). Müller observes: “Im Jun gen Mann versucht [Strauß G.S.], gleichzeitig von einem erhöhten und vertieften Standpunkt aus den Verlauf von Energieströmungen zu beobachten – schreibend Stromkreise im Bewußtsein zu schließen.”

On her Irrweg in the forest, Strauß’s artist confronts the “Turm der Deutschen”, an evocation of the “Turmg esellschaft” Goethe depicts in Wilhelm Meisters Lehrjahre. The implicit comparison with Goethe’s society emphasizes what Strauß perceives as the loss of enlightened humanistic culture in the West-German consumer society. Here, the “Turm der Deutschen” becomes a symbol of the traducement and commercialization of German cultural heritage which, in the form of German “voices” from all epochs and regions, is offered for sale:

In einer nächsten Etage gab es Stapel von Jargons und Redensarten aus den verschiedensten Epochen und Gebieten … Jugenddeutsch um 1920 war ebenso erhältlich wie Teufelsaustreib ung oder Vaterlandspathos. Natürlich gab es auch eine Pornographieecke sowie unter besonderem

Verschluß die Sprache der Dichter und Philosophen, ähnlich den edelsten Weinen, die man im Kaufhaus in der Vitrine oder hinter schmiedeeisernem Gitter verwahrt. (*Der junge Mann*, 79)

In Strauß’s reconfigured *Bildungsroman*, the *Wanderschaft* of the artist becomes a journey into the repressed post-fascist unconscious, with dreamlike and bizarre sequences exploring the trauma of the Third Reich and its continuing hold on West-German society. With his “dunkelblondes Lockenhaar” (*Der junge Mann*, 85) evoking Heinrich’s “goldene Locken”, buried in an “unterirdische Kanalanlage” (*Der junge Mann*, 83), the “Besitzer der Deutschen” symbolizes the collective German unconscious, designated the “Grundwasser des Menschen” (*Der junge Mann*, 83). To reach him, the protagonist is led on a subterranean journey, a common trope in the Romantic *Kunstmärchen* in which it leads to enlightenment, but which Strauß subverts to expose *Erbeverlust*: here, the protagonist’s descent into the German unconscious leads to confrontation with the “buried” embodiment of fascism, the sinister “Besitzer der Deutschen”, characterised by the seductiveness of his voice:

Diese Stimme erklängte vielmehr dicht hinter ihrem Ohr und sie war so einschmeichelnd und wohltonend, wie es eine heutige Menschenstimme gar nicht sein kann. Nur ein untergegangener Überirdischer konnte so machtvoll und zärtlich eine Frau ansprechen. (*Der junge Mann*, 86)

In his subterranean grave, the “Besitzer” is shown to preside over the continuing “deutsches Gemurmel” (*Der junge Mann*, 8), an allegory for the continuing, repressed German fascination with fascism, as Berka suggests: “Was untergegangen ist oder ins Unbewußte abgeschoben wurde, übt eine Fernsteuerung aus auf das philosophische Gedankengut, das nicht nur der Faschismus, sondern auch die Verdrängung der Liebe zum Faschismus kontaminiert hat.”

On her journey of initiation in the forest, the wanderer-artist experiences a vision of the *Bauerarbeiterprozession*. In a parody of Romantic imagery, the “absteigende Sonne”

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546 Heinrich von Ofterdingen, 45.
547 See Tieck’s *Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen* and *Der Runenberg*.
and “Tannenwipfel” (Der junge Mann, 74) provide a Romantic backdrop to the disturbing image of the procession, comprising all sections of West-German society and headed by the Bauerköning, who, with his “geradeausschauende, treu ihm folgende Kolonne”, resembles Hitler. Like the intimations of the war and the Holocaust in Sebald and Handke’s construction of Das Märchenhafte, this episode touches on repressed anxieties relating to the war and the perceived tendency to fascism in West-German society. This scene is allegorical of the tendency to rigid social conformity that marked German behaviour under National Socialism, presented as “das grausamste und widernatürlichste Schauspiel, das den nüchternen Augen der Geschäftsfrau je dargeboten wurde” (Der junge Mann, 75).

Strauß’s wanderer-artist functions as a mouthpiece for his Gesellschaftskritik, and the fantasy of Hitler’s funeral, a ceremony ironically designated a “kunterbunte Parade … ein karnevalistisches Zwischenspiel” (302), is a bitter parody of the German fascination with Nazism and the fascist ideal of aestheticized politics. Through imagery of adhesion, “denn es herrschte hier ein weitgestaffeltes Aufeinander-fixiert-Sein” (Der junge Mann, 297), West-German society is depicted as inextricably attached to the Nazi past, which continues to pervade its moral and creative consciousness. Hitler’s Leichenzug is described acutely through the eyes of the wanderer-artist:

Zuvorderst erschien ein weicher Jüngling mit blondem Pagenschopf und im schwarzen, mittelalterlichen Rock. Er hielt die Standarte des Herrschers mit ausgestreckten Armen in die Höhe und schritt in gestochenem Maß und Takt heraus auf die Terrasse. (Der junge Mann, 295)

Strauß uses the figure of the itinerant Romantic artist to express a sense of loss, of morality, history, and legacy, that derives from the persisting impact of the “dahingeschwundener Geist” of the Nazi past (Der junge Mann, 297). The burial itself is characterized by Manichaean imagery of darkness and light that juxtaposes the “tiefe und feuchte Keller” with the “himmlische Heerscharen (303), the former associated with

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German wartime trauma and suffering,\textsuperscript{550} the latter evoking German cultural legacy epitomised by Goethe’s \textit{Faust} II. Through the Romantic motif of \textit{Verschmolzung}, conflicting images, such as “Die Toten mit den Heiligen, die Teufel mit den Seraphen, die Verdammten mit den Erlösten” (\textit{Der junge Mann}, 303), combine to suggest ambivalence towards the German past, depicted as both sublime and traumatic. The postlude to the funeral offers a tentative vision of redemption: “Wir blickten für einen Augenblick in die unendliche Reinheit des Tagens. Doch es war nur eine kurze Vorschau auf einen viel späteren Frieden der Stunden” (\textit{Der junge Mann}, 304). The appearance of a mysterious “verhüllte Person” on the palace balcony (\textit{Der junge Mann}, 304) endows the scene with a mythical significance that expresses a longing for the transcendence of history and the redemption of the German past.

Through the figure of the Romantic wanderer-artist, Sebald, like Strauß, explores conflicts relating to \textit{Heimat}, national identity, and the ongoing trauma of Nazism. But while the latter is deeply concerned with questions of \textit{Erbe} and loss of tradition, expressed in intensely visual episodes, Sebald’s oblique treatment of these themes relies on recurring motifs and emblems of itinerancy and exile that reflect his second-generation conflicts. Wanderer-figures pervade Sebald’s narrative prose, as Klüger observes: “W.G. Sebald’s Geschöpfe wandern durch die Vergangenheit Europas, so wie sein Erzähler … In seinen Geschichten sind fast alle Figuren unterwegs. Sebalds Wanderer sind Geisteskrankte, Melancholiker oder Neurotiker … besessen von Scham und Grauen, wiederkehrende Motive.”\textsuperscript{551} Many of his wanderers are artists, including his narrator-figure, a writer who undertakes a pilgrimage along the Suffolk coast in \textit{Die Ringe des Saturn}, and, in “Max Aurach” and \textit{Austerlitz}, mimetically shadows the protagonist’s movements. The titles of a number of Sebald’s works reflect the trope of wandering: “all’ estero”, “Dr Ks Badereise nach Riva”, “Il ritorno in patria”, and \textit{Die Ausgewanderten}. For Gunther, the title of \textit{Die Ausgewanderten} implies “a continuing

\textsuperscript{550} The cellars of Hamburg as sites of German suffering are discussed in Sebald’s \textit{Luftkrieg und Literatur}, 44.

process of immersion into a state of diasporic liminality … The underlying metaphor, then is one in which the self, inescapably is always in a state of limbo.”

The painter Aurach is constructed as a Romantic artist, an *Einzelgänger* whose original journey on foot to Manchester establishes him in the tradition of the Romantic wanderer. Aurach’s *Wanderschaft* is metaphorical rather than literal, emblematic of expulsion and exile, and suggested by imagery of nomadism and itinerancy. It is implied by the *Wadi Halfa* transport café Aurach frequents: here, a fresco depicts a desert caravan from which Aurach, with his charcoal-impregnated skin, appears to emerge, suggesting that he has become indistinguishable from his own art, and that the nomadism depicted in the fresco is intrinsic to him too. The infinite journey of Kafka’s “Jäger Gracchus” is a metaphor for Aurach’s exile, and Aurach’s story is pervaded by intertextual references to this figure in the form of the enigmatic Butterfly Hunter who appears to Aurach at crucial moments of resurgent memory, and whom he is unable to recapture through his art. In Kafka’s Fragment, the *Jäger* describes himself as a “Schmetterling”, engaged in endless, unfulfilled activity: “Ich bin … immer auf der großen Treppe, die hinaufführt. Auf dieser unendlich weiten Freitreppe treibe ich mich herum, bald oben, bald unten, bald rechts, bald links, immer in Bewegung. Aus dem Jäger ist ein Schmetterling geworden.” In the context of Aurach’s life, the hunter’s predicament embodies the state of exile in which Aurach exists.

The writer-narrator of “Max Aurach” is an artist-wanderer, a young German academic and writer, who, in the tradition of the Romantic artist, leaves his home to pursue his *Bildung*. He imitates Aurach’s movements, a mimesis that begins when he goes to Manchester in 1966, in unconscious imitation of Aurach’s journey from Germany to England in 1943. The narrator’s decision is defined by an unstated motive: to encounter German Jews, no longer possible in post-Holocaust Germany. The trope of the journey to Manchester unifies Aurach and the narrator in a community of exile that differs in its implications: for Aurach, a refugee from Nazi Germany, exile is total and irretrievable,

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and return to Germany cannot be contemplated; by contrast, the narrator’s exile is voluntary, a repudiation of a Heimat deemed impermissible. Manchester, as a destination for many German-Jewish Holocaust survivors, is a symbol of exile motivated by expulsion and suffering. That Aurach considers the city his home is ironic, and indicative of his radically displaced position: “Und so bin ich … bei meiner Ankunft in Manchester gewissermaßen zu Hause angelangt … I am here, as they used to say, to serve under the chimney” (DA, 287). The reference to the chimney evokes the Holocaust and the fate of his family and suggests that it is only in death that Aurach can find a “home” and end his existential Wanderschaft. Indeed, Sebald’s artist figures are “homeless” in the sense of being unable to secure a rooted, socially integrated existence: Aurach’s home is a dust-covered, unlit studio, and Austerlitz occasionally inhabits an inhospitable house in Alderney street. On his return to Germany, the narrator of “Il ritorno in patria” (SG) registers at an inn as a “foreign journalist”, indicating his alienation from “home.” Niehaus observes: “The metaphorical homelessness of Sebald’s wanderers achieves an ontological quality … the emigrants are travellers because they are not able to live in the sense that they cannot create a comfortable place for themselves. This is also the case for characters who never leave their home.”

When the reader first encounters Austerlitz, he is presented as a Romantic wanderer, with his rucksack and “schwere Wanderstiefel” (A, 14). His Sonderling status is suggested by his resemblance to the mythical Germanic hero, Siegfried as he appears in Lang’s film, Die Nibelungen. The resemblance underlines Austerlitz’ significance as an ambiguous embodiment of Germanness, one that implies both the untainted mythical German past, and its traducement by Wagner and Nazi ideology. The waiting room of the Antwerp Central Station in which the narrator encounters Austerlitz for the first time is itself a symbol of Wanderschaft, with its travellers resembling “die letzten Angehörigen eines reduzierten, aus seiner Heimat ausgewiesenen oder untergegangenen Volks…” (A, 14). The metaphor of exile implicit in this description reflects Sebald’s second-generation sense of expulsion and exile, a perception mirrored by Austerlitz’

554 Niehaus 2007, 318.
555 Die Nibelungen: Siegfried, directed by Fritz Lang (1924).
556 Siegfried is the third opera of Wagner’s opera cycle, Der Ring des Nibelungen. Wagner’s anti-Semitic tract, “Das Judentum in der Musik” (1850) prefigures anti-Jewish Nazi ideology.
visualization of himself as a Romantic Wanderer, represented by a photograph of a lone wanderer on a seemingly endless path (A, 179), his “einsames Gehen” (A, 186) suggesting the existentially vagrant Romantic artist in the tradition of Tieck’s Franz Sternbald. Echoing Sternbald, Austerlitz describes his “verwaisten Verfassung” (A, 376) as he wanders the depopulated streets of outer Parisian suburbs; his aimless Nachtwanderungen and melancholy observations on social decline evoke those of the Romantic poet and Nachtwaehre, Kreuzgang. Austerlitz’ insomnia reflects also the trope of eternal wakefulness that Guyer identifies in post-Auschwitz Romanticism, in which it implies the responsibility to bear witness. This is consistent with Sebald’s project, to investigate the corrosive impact of the Holocaust on “Leute, die spät eingeholt werden von der Erkenntnis dessen, was damals wirklich war.” Like the Romantic wanderer-artist, Austerlitz is an outsider, whose journey through Germany reinforces his feeling of “Verstossen- und Ausgelöschte” (A, 330); in Nürnberg, he remains “am Rande des ohne Unterbrechung an mir vorüberziehenden Volks der Deutschen…” (A, 323). Austerlitz’ wandering is motivated by a Romantic sense of loss: “Der Wellbrookbach … der Hirschgarten Paul Pindars, die Kopfkranke von Bedlam und die Hungerleider von Angel Alley … waren verschwunden, und verschwunden sind jetzt auch die Abermillionen zählenden Scharen …” (A, 194).

Austerlitz’ story is pervaded by imagery of nomadism that illustrates Sebald’s themes of exile and Herkunft. Reflecting on the response of his younger self to an illustrated Bible, Austerlitz remembers intuitively identifying with the “furchtbare Einöde” of Jewish exile: “Tatsächlich … wuβte ich mich unter den winzigen Figuren, die das Lager bevölkern, an meinem richtigen Ort … Was damals in mir auch vorgegangen sein mag, das Lager der Hebräer in dem Wüstengebirge war mir näher als das mir mit jedem Tag unbegreiflicher werdende Leben in Bala” (A, 87-88). As a Jewish child of Middle Eastern origins, adopted by Welsh parents, the exotic music of a nomadic circus troupe stirs Austerlitz’ ethnic memory, “Doch schien es mir … als wehte es aus einer großen Ferne herüber, aus dem Osten dachte ich mir, aus dem Kaukasus oder aus der Türkei”

557 In Franz Sternbalds Wanderungen, Sternbald describes himself as “verwaist und verachtet.”


559 Poltronieri 1997, 143.
(A, 389), and reflects Sebald’s theme of conflicted origins. The cavernous interiors of colonial stations function in *Austerlitz* as potent symbols of the protagonist’s *Wanderschaft*; indeed, Austerlitz’ journey of self-discovery is marked by stations, Antwerp Station, where he is first encountered, and *Gare d’Austerlitz*, from where he embarks in the final part of the text in search of traces of his father. For both Austerlitz and the narrator, train stations are emblems of itinerancy, and metonymic of the Holocaust and its network of implication. Stations unify them through a shared burden of guilt: Austerlitz’ feelings of “Scham und Kummer” in the Liverpool Station relate to repressing his Jewish identity and to surviving the fate for which he was destined; the narrator’s guilty response to a fire that destroyed the Lucerne station reflects his sense of implication, as the child of the perpetrator generation, in the Holocaust.

Sebald’s wanderer-artist and the trope of return

Through real and imagined journeys, Sebald undermines the trope of redemptive return. The trope is enacted in the imagined return of Sebald’s wanderer-artists to the lost realm of childhood, and exemplified by Aurach’s dream of going back to the *Wohnzimmer* of his youth, and Austerlitz’ *Heimkehr* to Prague. In his dream of return to his childhood home, Aurach traverses time and space, but in reality, he never goes back to Germany; in Prague, Austerlitz’ finds his family home, but his quest for family reunification remains unfulfilled. The narrator of *Austerlitz* revisits the fortress of Breendonk, but his longing for redemption of the past is thwarted, in keeping with Sebald’s second-generation awareness of the Nazi past as an inescapable burden.

In an hallucinatory dream, Max Aurach returns to the home of his parents in Germany. The dream occurs in the context of Aurach’s tormented attempts to capture through his art, the elusive “Schmetterlingsfänger” who, as an embodiment of painful memory, saves him from falling to his death on Mount Grammont. Return is motivated here by desire for redemption of the past and lost wholeness. In his dream, Aurach enters the livingroom of his parents through elaborately painted *trompe-l’oeil* doors that convey the illusory nature of his dream of re-entering the past. The impossibility of return is implied by the presence, in the *Wohnzimmer* of his parents, of Frohmann of Drohobycz. With his perfected model of the Temple of Solomon, Frohmann wanders from ghetto to ghetto, an embodiment of Jewish exile and the messianic dream of its fulfilment.
represented by the Temple. That this hope is illusory is suggested by the fragile nature of the Temple model, constructed from paper mâché and balsarwood. Here, the trope of impossible return implies the predicament of the second generation in relation to a Heimat perceived as impermissible.

Austerlitz’ return to Czechoslovakia is motivated by the desire to discover his Herkunft. His dream of family reunification takes him to Prague and the discovery of “den Ort meiner ersten Kindheit” (A, 220). The city to which he returns is constituted as a mythical place, beyond history, its State Archives described as a “weit in die Zeit zurückreichende … außer der Zeit stehende Bau” (A, 211), with its “dämmrige Tonnengewölbe” and “um den Hofraum herum in gleichsam illusionistischer Manier aufgeführten Flügeln” (A, 212). The utopian nature of his dream is implied by imagery of beauty and serenity, such as the “Mandelbäumchen” he notices growing over the garden wall, and the “Kühle beim Betreten des Vorhauses” he experiences on entering his family home (A, 221). Austerlitz’ home is a Gedächtnisort, reminiscent of Luisa Lanzberg’s home as described in her memoirs (“Max Aurach”). Like hers, it is characterized by imagery of permanence and tradition, symbolised by the Meißen figurines and the leather-bound classics. Such objects are rendered ironic by the imminent caesura of war and genocide, and by allusions to the Nazi period, such as the star-shaped mosaic in the floor that evokes the structure of the Breendonk Nazi torture camp, and the “Kalkgeruch” in the hall that is a reminder of mass extermination. The description of the mosaic flowers as “taubengrau” (A, 221-222) is a delicate allusion to the doves that in Kafka’s “Jäger Gracchus” story are harbingers of the hunter’s imminent arrival, and reminders of his eternally itinerant state, and functions here as a metaphor for Austerlitz’ exile, and the impossibility of redemptive return to the past. Austerlitz’ childhood memory of watching the tailor Moravec at work focuses on “die Nadel … Faden, die große Schere” (A, 228) that constitute his instruments and are symbolic of the irreparable break in historical continuity that defines Austerlitz’ life. The imagery of needle, thread and scissors connect Austerlitz’ fate with that of the second-generation German narrator of “Max Aurach”, for whom, in the final episode of Aurach’s story, they symbolize a legacy of implication. As Taberner observes, “The German was born

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560 Lime was used to dissolve putrifying bodies as part of the process of mass extermination.
into the world scarred by the “Spindel und Faden und Schere” of industrialized mass murder … from the moment of his birth, his fate as a German was inseparable from that of the Jews murdered by his parents’ generation. Indeed, the Jewish victims are his fate.”

In the final episode of *Austerlitz*, Sebald’s themes of legacy, exile, and *Herkunft* are explored through the trope of return, enacted by the wanderer-artist. In this episode, the narrator-writer returns to the former Nazi torture camp of Breendonk. His decision to go back to the fortress thirty years after his initial visit follows *Austerlitz’* departure on an open-ended journey to trace his father, and juxtaposes the divergent nature of the journeys undertaken ultimately by the Jewish protagonist and the narrator. The narrator approaches the fortress in the guise of a Romantic wanderer, on foot, and with a rucksack. The image of “ein langer Lastkahn … [der G.S.] anscheinend führerlos dahinglitt” (A, 417) evokes the infinite journey of the hunter Gracchus on his barge; together with the allusion to “der heilige Sankt Julian auf dem Weg durch die Wüste” (A, 418), it is a reminder of the narrator’s metaphorical itinerancy. The fortress itself, referred to as a “Strafkolonie” (A, 418), is a reminder of the Nazi legacy of shame and guilt, expiation of which motivates the narrator’s journey of return. Pointless and repetitive activity is metaphorical in this episode of the narrator’s futile quest for redemption, exemplified by the goose that swims from one end of the moat to the other.

Discussion of *Heshel’s Kingdom*, Dan Jacobson’s exploration of origins, completes the episode, the book itself a narrative of unredeemed return that thematizes loss and destruction, symbolised by the image of the “Abgrund, in den kein Lichtstrahl hinabreicht … Jacobsons Bild für die untergegangene Vorzeit seiner Familie und seines Volks” (A, 420). The conclusion to *Austerlitz* thematises a double return, that of Jacobson, who goes to the Kaunas camp where many of his family were killed by the Germans, and the narrator, who completes his circular journey by going back to Mechelin. For Sebald, the trope of return, enacted by the wanderer-artist, has no redemptive dimension. For the Jewish subjects, Aurach and Austerlitz, return to the lost

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561 Taberner 2004, 184.

562 In Kafka’s “Jäger Gracchus” story, it reads: “Eine Barke schwebte leise, als werde sie über dem Wasser getragen.”
world of childhood offers no reprieve from exile; for the second-generation narrator, the sites of German atrocity offer no release from the burden of guilt and shame.

In summation:

My research into Sebald’s narrative prose in the context of post-1968 German neo-Romanticism reveals significant thematic and structural connections between his writing and the writing of his generation that have not to date, been comprehensively examined. In the neo-Romantic writing of Handke, Strauß, Roth, and later, Sebald, the resistance of the 1960s remains an undercurrent to a more diffuse melancholy and a Romantic Sehnsucht for the transcendence of history. In their neo-Romantic writing, this is reflected in pervasive dissatisfaction with modernity, persistent awareness of the Nazi past as a malign undercurrent in German consciousness, and in the desire to overcome a traumatic history. In the surreal episodes that form part of the Wanderschaft of his protagonists, Sebald’s prose fiction reveals a debt to the Romantic Kunstmärchen, and an affinity with the writing of his generation for whom the tropes and structures of Romanticism offer a compensatory response to a deficient reality.

Sebald shares with Strauß and Handke a Romantic perception of the artist that sees suffering as intrinsic to the creation of art. For the young artist-protagonists of Handke and Strauß, the artistic Lehre is marked by torment. Sebald’s mature artists, Aurach and Austerlitz, are no less plagued by questions of inadequacy and self-doubt. In painful visions of the war and the Nazi past, all reveal themselves to be opposed by a sense of exile in relation to a German Heimat perceived as compromised. For Strauß and Handke, suffering has a redemptive dimension that is absent in Sebald’s construction of the suffering artist, whose pain is never mitigated. This is acknowledged by Aurach: “Fest steht dagegen, daß das seelische Leiden praktisch unendlich ist” (DA, 254). Sebald’s Romantic yearning for the lost past, and re-creation of the Romantic artist as tormented and displaced, is a projection of his generational discontent, a repudiation of the idea of Heimat and of the possibility of transcending history. By contrast, Strauß’s restitution of the Romantic offers a more affirmative attempt to reconnect with an earlier, untainted German cultural tradition, while Handke’s construction of the Romantic artist allows him to explore a redemptive dimension to art as a Heilsraum that offers the modern subject a refuge from existential homelessness. In the narrative prose of Sebald and
Roth, the transformative potential of the *Kunstmärchen* is subverted in visions of post-apocalyptic dystopia and evocations of unresolved allegorical exile.
Conclusion

W.G. Sebald is widely perceived as a unique literary phenomenon, arising “out of nowhere” (Schwartz, 2007). His narrative prose has been described as “belonging, mysteriously, nowhere” (Wood, 2013), its elusiveness reflected in descriptions that emphasize its indeterminate quality. Critics tend to extract Sebald from a shared generational and literary context, and there is a pervasive sense that his writing transcends the generational and parochial contingencies that shape contemporary German literature.

My aim in writing this study was to challenge the view that Sebald is detached from his generational context, and in doing so, to address a notable deficit in Sebald scholarship. I believe that my comparative analysis of Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to the earlier writing of his generation is the most wide-ranging study of its kind to date, and constitutes a significant and original contribution to Sebald research. It confirms that Sebald’s writing is deeply informed by the “verwandte Lagerung” he shares with his generation, and also exposes significant differences between Sebald’s treatment of generational anxieties and the articulation of such concerns in the earlier writing of his generation. A second-generation Kriegskind, Sebald’s narrative prose is characterized by a subtext of loss and resentment that is evident in the younger writing of his generation with whom he shares a legacy of trauma and guilt in relation to the National Socialist past. My study established that Sebald’s narrative writing continues to reflect the ambivalence towards national identity and traumatic history manifest in the conflicted writing of his Kriegskinder generation. Focusing on the protest writing and Väterliteratur of the 1960s and 1970s, and the tendency to neo-Romantic writing that follows, I demonstrated connections between Sebald’s narrative prose, and themes, structures, and imagery evident in these genres. Examination of Sebald’s prose texts in relation to the earlier work of his generation indicated not only unsuspected thematic and structural connections with protest writing, Väterliteratur, and neo-Romantic writing, but revealed an intensification of the anger and ambivalence that characterize the early writing of his cohort. While the acute resentment of the second generation has moderated over time, my comparative study found that Sebald occupies a regressive position relative to his generation: in his writing of the 1990s and beyond, he continues
to thematize the resentment and loss that pervade the earlier writing of the second generation. This confirmed the premise on which my study is based, namely, that Sebald’s work is connected, but not congruent with the writing of his generation.

This study contributes to a broader understanding of Sebald’s narrative prose writing by relocating him, as a second-generation German, in his German context, and a shared generational experience of war, damaged childhood, and generational conflict. By comparing and analysing Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to an extensive range of second-generation genres and texts, I contributed to the limited body of critical work by Morgan, Taberner, Davies and others who examine Sebald’s prose writing from a generational perspective. I demonstrated that, despite efforts to distance himself from his generation, Sebald shares thematic concerns with radically anti-authoritarian writers like Achternbusch and Brinkmann; while Sebald’s narrative prose lacks the polemical tone of Vesper, or the accusatory tenor of Meckel and Schwaiger, his stylistic subtlety disguises a conflicted approach to generation and identity that aligns his narrative texts with protest writing and Väterliteratur. Beyond these ambivalent genres, Sebald’s narrative prose reflects a nostalgia for the lost past, and a reconfiguration of the Romantic Kunstmärchen and suffering artist that connects his work with the neo-Romantic writing of contemporaries such as Strauß and Handke.

Beyond establishing Sebald’s connections with the earlier writing of his generation, my study makes an original contribution by exposing differences between the writing of Sebald and that of his generation: belated, he proves, in certain respects, more intensely repudiative than they were, decades earlier; identification with Jewish subjects, tokenistic in Väterliteratur, becomes in Sebald’s writing, a fundamental trope and an ethically problematical means of achieving an alternative and more desirable identity. While neo-Romanticism offers second-generation writers the possibility of transcending a deficient reality and a painful history, Sebald’s Romanticism is without redemptive promise, and the Romantic Gegenwelt he constructs lacks the utopian dimension it presents in the writing of Handke and Strauß. While Handke and Strauß permit themselves to envisage the redemption of history, Sebald’s writing precludes such visions, focusing instead on Romantic notions of suffering and malign modernity. My study contributes to our reading of Sebald by exposing his cultural conservatism in relation to other writers of his generation. Such differences do not, however, obscure the significant connections between Sebald’s prose fiction and the earlier writing of
his generation; in both, the legacy of National Socialism is a continuing burden, and Sebald’s continued engagement with second-generation concerns is a reminder that Vergangenheitsbewältigung remains an ongoing process.

Relocating Sebald in a generational context has significant implications for our understanding of his work. A generational reading of Sebald’s narrative prose allows us to recognize, in his narrative texts, a belated confrontation with second-generation issues, informed by memory, transgeneration- and trauma theory. Comparison of Sebald’s narrative prose with the earlier writing of his generation helps us to read his epochal melancholy and incapacitating pessimism as late expressions of the unresolved anger and resentment of the German second generation, his Endzeitigkeit as a belated manifestation of the post-Marxist disappointment of his 1960s generation. Reading Sebald in a generational context allows us to discern in his writing the often paralysing awareness of authorial inauthenticity and epistemological inadequacy that mark the writing of his generation. Comparison of Sebald’s narrative prose with the more direct style employed in the protest texts and Väterliteratur of his generation draws attention to the self-conscious artifice of Sebald’s elaborately figurative style and archaic intonation; his tendency to view the world \( \text{sub specie aeternitatis} \) raises troubling questions relating to the avoidance of historical specificity and the universalization of suffering and trauma in literature that deals with the National Socialist past. A generational reading of Sebald throws into relief his refusal to acknowledge the cultural and political shifts in German consciousness with which his contemporaries engage, and exposes the incongruity of Sebald’s position in relation to the trajectory followed by many writers of his generation: while their concerns change over time to reveal a more reconciliatory approach to the National Socialist past and the imbrication of the parent generation in it, Sebald remains focused on the damaging impact of National Socialism on national identity and belonging.

My review of the literature in chapter one uncovered a significant deficit of research on the subject of Sebald’s writing in a generational context. Given the overwhelming scholarly interest in diverse aspects of Sebald’s work, this is a surprising anomaly. While a growing number of critics address connections between Sebald’s critical and academic writing and the protest literature of his generation, affinities between Sebald’s narrative prose and the protest writing, Väterliteratur and neo-Romanticism of his generation remain a significantly under-explored area of Sebald scholarship. As
a comprehensive examination of Sebald’s prose writing within a generational context, my study is thus an important contribution to Sebald research. In Chapter two, building on an extremely limited body of research, I explored the concept of generation as a paradigm for interpreting Sebald’s work. My decision to base this study on the notion of generation was determined by the significance of generation to German culture. To this culture, fractured by frequent caesura, generational change is important to the processing of traumatic or shameful experience. I discussed competing theories of generation, with particular emphasis on Mannheim’s concept of generation as shared social experience, and on the temporal concept of generation that, in the post-war German context, implicitly assigns guilt, responsibility, and implication in relation to relative distance from 1945. I interrogated the meaning of the appellation, “second generation” in relation to Sebald, and analysed his position, as the progeny of the perpetrator generation, against the background of research into the troubled second generation. My readings of Sebald’s narrative prose revealed that Sebald shares with his generation the psycho-social experience of a childhood dominated by the repressive silence of the parent generation, damaged familial relationships, internalized trauma, and a post-war landscape marked by ruin. Sebald shares his generation’s ambivalence towards origins, evident in the longing for, and repudiation of, kinship with the generation of their parents.

Sebald’s generational position is complicated by the implications of transgenerational trauma, understood as the internalization of experiences and memories belonging to the culpable parent generation, whose repression of guilt has resulted in its transmission to their children in the form of an inherited legacy of trauma. Transgenerational trauma is implicit in Sebald’s perception of a “Zeitheimat” that originates in preconscious memories, and in his affiliative identification with the traumatic memories belonging to his Jewish subjects. Weigel’s work exposes multiple problems with the application of transgeneration theory in the German context, not least of which are the de-stabilization of the temporal model of generation, and more importantly, the ethical problem of appropriating memory and conflating victim-perpetrator positions. This is particularly pertinent to Sebald’s narrative prose which thematizes affiliation with Jewish identity and destiny. Sebald’s Jewish affiliation is an area of ethical controversy that merits further investigation.
My readings revealed Sebald’s conflicts in relation to his generational position. These are reflected on the one hand, in his fatalistic acceptance of generational destiny and in occasional observations that indicate a sense of shared generational experience, and on the other, in his tendency to disavow affinity with his generation. My study was based on the validity of the temporal paradigm of generation that designates Sebald a member of the “second generation”, the progeny of the “first” or perpetrator generation, and on a Mannheimian notion of generation as shared social experience, in Sebald’s case, that of the post-war German environment of fractured family relations and unresolved conflicts relating to the National Socialist past.

In the third chapter, I analysed Sebald’s narrative prose in relation to the protest writing of his 1960s generation. Sebald’s narrative writing does not, at first glance, suggest affinities with the ideologically charged anti-authoritarian writing of his 1968 generation. By comparison with their confrontational texts, his prose style is subdued and allusive. The world of Sebald’s narrative prose reveals little acknowledgment of the major political events that have changed the course of German post-war history, and would seem to confirm the perception of his prose fiction as aloof to national and parochial contingencies. My comparative reading of his narrative prose nevertheless exposed significant connections with the ideology and literary manifestations of the 1960s protest movement, suggesting that Sebald continues to be troubled by key issues that engaged his 1960s generation. While there is a substantial body of critical work that explores anti-authoritarian elements in Sebald’s critical and academic writing that align him with protest literature and the philosophy of the Frankfurt School, research on dissident elements in Sebald’s prose fiction forms a small part of Sebald research. I believe that my findings make an original contribution to our understanding of Sebald’s narrative prose by revealing unsuspected affinities between his narrative writing and the work of aggressively dissident writers of his generation, such as Brinkmann, Achternbusch, and Fichte. I demonstrated that his writing, like theirs, reflects a consciousness of Nazi-continuity as a deforming presence in post-war Germany. Indeed, Sebald’s resistance to institutionalized authority is, at times, more radical than theirs. In Sebald’s world, the institution of justice is depicted as merciless, corrupt, and ultimately, absurd. His critique of an insidiously deforming and contaminated system of education clearly reveals his kinship with the concerns of his 1960s generation. Sebald’s repudiation of the notion of family is a radical rejection of authority, and a refutation of
genealogical continuity consistent with the protest writing of his generation. Sebald’s depiction of isolated individuals establishes him as more resistant to the bourgeois norm of family than his generation of 1960s writers: while the protagonists of Brinkmann, Fichte, Handke, and Bernhard’s texts are situated within the context of a family or couple, Sebald’s protagonists are typically isolated individuals, detached from society in a form of voluntary hermitism.

My investigation of Sebald’s prose fiction with respect to the writing of his 1960s generation uncovered striking homologies between Sebald’s depictions of post-war Germany and the repudiative descriptions found in protest writing. For Sebald and his generation, Germany is characterized by imagery of emptiness and desolation, and the Wirtschaftswunder cannot disguise the horror of the National Socialist past that, in Sebald’s more figurative style, emerges in a network of Holocaust imagery relating to chimneys, ash, smoke, and railways. Like other writers of his generation, Sebald depicts Germans as repugnant, both physically and morally deformed. He shares with his generation the repudiation of a contaminated genealogy, and rejection of the masculine model associated with National Socialism; in Sebald’s writing, this becomes a rejection of the body itself, evident in pervasive thematization of disease and incapacitation. An oppressive consciousness of the National Socialist past as an ongoing burden, and a conflicted approach to national identity connect Sebald with the anxieties of his 1960s generation of writers.

By establishing Sebald’s connection to Väterliteratur, the subject of chapter four, I addressed a substantial deficit in Sebald research, and made a highly original contribution to Sebald scholarship. In this largely autobiographical genre, unresolved conflicts are enacted within the family, and intense ambivalence is directed towards the generation of the perpetrator fathers as the embodiment of the Nazi legacy of shame. Awareness of this legacy as a malign and disfiguring burden for the children of the perpetrator generation is articulated in the earlier writing of Sebald’s generation, including Härtling, Vesper, Rehmann, Meckel and Gauch. Sebald’s connections with the so-called Väterliteratur seem unlikely, and efforts to align his narrative prose with this somewhat discredited genre appear, at first glance, unsustainable. Sebald’s muted, densely-layered narratives, eschatological worldview, and antiquated language would seem to preclude a connection with the intensely personal, historically contingent and expository genre of Väterliteratur, in which the sons and daughters of perpetrator
parents confront their parents, principally, their fathers, in attempts to expose a past that has remained closed to them in the pervasive post-war “conspiracy of silence” to which Sebald refers. My analysis of Sebald’s narrative prose nevertheless revealed that he employs, transforms, and intensifies the tropes of Väterliteratur to express an ambivalence towards genealogy that matches, and at times, exceeds that of Väterliteratur writers. Comparative analysis of Sebald’s Die Ausgewanderten with Väterliteratur texts revealed a striking similarity of themes: the trope of the quest to discover the father’s life is evident in the expository mission of Sebald’s German narrator to learn more about the life of a “father”-figure, in Sebald’s stories, typically, but not invariably, Jewish or partially so; the uncovering of secrets thematically connects Sebald’s prose fiction with Väterliteratur; in Sebald’s narrative prose, and in Väterliteratur, the suffering body is thematized in a vicarious somatization of the father’s legacy of perpetration and guilt. Imagery of rupture and continuity, fundamental to Väterliteratur, is pervasive in Sebald’s narrative texts, and suggests a conflicted desire for genealogical break and connection.

My comparative analysis of Sebald’s writing in the context of Väterliteratur exposed one of the more controversial aspects of his narrative writing. Sebald’s reconfiguration of the Väterliteratur trope of alternative affiliation raises problematical issues of inappropriate identification, and of the appropriation of Jewish victimhood as an alternative to a repudiated German identity. The trope of alternative affiliation is evident in Väterliteratur in the desire of German characters to associate or identify with Jews. While this tends to be casual or tokenistic in Väterliteratur, in Sebald’s narrative prose, this trope is intensified in the relationships Sebald creates between German and Jewish characters. Such characters are often conflations of German and Jewish identity; many of these relationships constitute metaphorical child-parent affiliations. Sebald’s reconfiguration of the Väterliteratur trope of the conflicted father-son relationship is predicated on German guardianship of Jewish memory, and posits a questionable “German-Jewish symbiosis” that reflects a wishful desire to recreate a Germany uncontaminated by genocide. The impossibility of doing so is suggested in negative messianic narratives that, in their allegorical complexity, are far removed from the direct and confrontational style of Väterliteratur. The subtlety of Sebald’s style should not, however, obscure the underlying connections between his narrative prose and Väterliteratur. My readings on Väterliteratur indicated an
evolution of the genre, from the accusatory autobiographical texts of Sebald’s generation in the 1970s, to the later family novels of the 1990s and beyond that offer more nuanced and empathetic explorations of the Nazi period and the implication of the parent generation in it. The evolution of the relationship between the second generation and their parents exposes Sebald’s regressive stance as a writer who continues to present the conflicts and anxieties evident in Väterliteratur.

In the final chapter, I examined the neo-Romantic dimension to Sebald’s prose writing. My study revealed a reluctance on the part of critics to engage with neo-Romantic tendencies in Sebald’s narrative texts. This may be attributed to the contested nature of German Romanticism, tarnished by its putative irrationalism and its association with the imagery of National Socialism. I demonstrated that Sebald’s regressive tendencies extend also to the neo-Romanticism that engaged significant writers of his generation in the period following the socio-political tumult of the 1960s. Basing my approach on the reconfiguration of aspects of the Kunstmärchen and the Romantic artist in the writing of Sebald, Handke, Strauß and Roth, I argued that Romantic poetics offer a retreat from politically engaged realism to a more metaphysical involvement with the German past. For second-generation writers, Romanticism posits a response to a reality dominated by a pervasive sense of loss that can be traced to a perception of damaged national identity, and an unlived but traumatic past. My readings were informed by research on German Romanticism, on the neo-Romanticism of Sebald’s peers, and on the limited body of research on Romantic tendencies in Sebald’s narrative prose. My analysis of Sebald’s narrative prose in the context of post-1968 German neo-Romanticism revealed significant thematic connections with this literary tendency of his generation. Like the neo-Romantic writing of Handke, Strauß, and Roth, Sebald’s narrative texts reflect dissatisfaction with quotidian reality, awareness of the Nazi past as a malign undercurrent in German consciousness, and the desire to overcome a traumatic history. In the surreal episodes that form part of the Wanderschaft of his protagonists, Sebald’s prose fiction reveals a debt to the Romantic Kunstmärchen and an affinity with the writing of Handke, Strauß and Roth, for whom the tropes and structures of Romanticism offer a compensatory response to a deficient reality. Sebald shares with Strauß and Handke a Romantic perception of the artist that sees suffering as intrinsic to the creation of art. In harrowing visions of the war and the Nazi past, all reveal themselves to be oppressed by a sense of exile in relation to a German Heimat.
perceived as compromised. Sebald’s Romantic yearning for the lost past, and re-creation of the Romantic artist as tormented and displaced, is a projection of his generational discontent, a repudiation of the idea of Heimat and of the possibility of transcending history. By contrast, Strauß’s restitution of the Romantic artist offers a more affirmative attempt to reconnect with an earlier, uncompromised German cultural tradition, while Handke’s construction of the Romantic artist allows him to explore a redemptive dimension to art.

Here, as in all areas, Sebald’s style sets his writing apart from that of his generation. His neo-Romanticism is less overt than that of Handke (Die Abwesenheit) and Strauß (Der junge Mann), who reformulate the Kunstmärchen and Romantic tropes in often lurid, fantastical settings. The redemptive dimension evident in the neo-Romantic writing of Handke and Strauß is absent in Sebald’s narrative prose, which, like Roth’s, subverts the transformative potential of the Kunstmärchen, offering instead, visions of post-apocalyptic dystopia and evocations of unresolved allegorical exile. Sebald’s engagement with Romanticism is evident in the fragmentary structure of episodes in which alternating realities are conveyed. Like Handke and Strauß, he borrows from the Romantic Kunstmärchen the tropes of Schwellenüberschreitung and Zeitauflösung.

The topography of das Märchenhafte in Sebald’s writing is Romantic, conveying the sense of loss that informs the neo-Romantic texts of Handke, Strauß, and Roth. In the endless wakefulness of Sebald’s protagonists, and those of Strauß, Handke and Roth, and in Sebald’s prosopopoeic desire to give life and voice to the dead, I detected tropes of post-Auschwitz Romanticism as described by Guyer and others.

In terms of future research, my study has exposed a number of gaps in Sebald scholarship. In Sebald’s narrative writing, the tropes of Väterliteratur tend to be subtle and often obscure, but are evidence of his continued and indeed, intensified thematization of the generational tensions and conflicted Heimatgefühl his generation articulated in the 1970s. This is an area of potentially rewarding exploration. The ethically troubled question of Sebald’s reconfiguration of the Väterliteratur trope of alternative affiliation merits more critical evaluation than it has received to date. Sebald’s neo-Romanticism is likewise an under-researched area that justifies further investigation. Post-Holocaust Romanticism and its significance to the writing of Sebald and his generation holds potential for future research.
Establishing connections between Sebald’s narrative prose and the earlier writing of his generation contributes to a broader picture of Sebald as a writer, exposed to a social and cultural location that he shares with other second-generation writers. Such a view does not constrain our perception of Sebald’s narrative prose, but provides another dimension to our understanding of Sebald’s writing by removing him from the isolation in which he is commonly perceived, and contributing to a less mystifying view of his work. Comparison of Sebald’s work with the protest writing of 1960s, the Väterliteratur of the 1970s, and the neo-Romantic writing that followed, demonstrates that he is not impervious to the context that shaped the early writing of his generation. Unlike many other second-generation writers, however, Sebald continues to articulate, and to intensify, the regressive discourse of loss and resentment that distinguishes their earlier writing. This confirms the premise of my study, that Sebald’s narrative prose is connected, but not congruent, with that of his German generation.
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