

“Die geschriebene Version wollte geschrieben werden, die vielen anderen wollten es nicht”

The portrayal of Nazi perpetrators in German novels since 1990 and the role of historiographic metafiction

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**A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the
degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

2016

STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This is to certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work and that all the assistance received in preparing this thesis and sources have been acknowledged.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

My thanks go to:

Professor Yixu Lü – for her wisdom, kindness, guidance and constructive criticism throughout the PhD process.

Dr Andrea Bandhauer – for being such an inspirational teacher that I felt compelled to continue my studies in German.

Bernhard Schlink, Ulla Hahn, Tanja Dückers and Marcel Beyer – for providing the raw materials.

Erling & Merete Nielsen – for their example of lifelong study and for providing me with a home in Germany, despite being Danes.

David & Rosalie Morphett – for their constant support from my very first day.

Elizabeth – for being an angel and putting up with “Mum’s thesis” for most of her life thus far.

Ray – for his constant love, encouragement and support, and for making it possible for me to undertake this project.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION	1
1.	Historical background	4
2.	Literary background	19
3.	Choice of texts	27
4.	Postmemory and historiographic metafiction	32
II.	BERNHARD SCHLINK – <i>DER VORLESER</i>	44
1.	Introduction	44
2.	Perpetrator or victim?	46
2.1	Review of secondary literature	46
2.2	Hanna as a victim? – the justice system	50
2.3	Hanna as a victim? – illiteracy	62
2.4	Hanna as a perpetrator – Hanna’s own voice	76
2.5	Hanna as a perpetrator – the Jewish survivor	80
2.6	Hanna as a perpetrator – <i>Väterliteratur</i>	83
3.	Reading <i>Der Vorleser</i> as historiographic metafiction	95
3.1	Explicit thematisation of historiographical criticism	97
3.2	Use of metafictional elements to thematise historiographical critiques	100
3.3	The effect of historiographic metafiction on the portrayal of Hanna – a cause of controversy?	108
4.	Conclusion	112

III.	ULLA HAHN – UNSCHARFE BILDER	114
1.	Introduction	114
2.	Musbach – perpetrator or victim?	121
2.1	Musbach’s self-portrait	121
2.1.1	<i>Musterschüler der Vergangenheitsbewältigung?</i>	121
2.1.2	<i>Strategies of self-exculpation – identification with the resistance and distancing from the “real” Nazis</i>	124
2.1.3	<i>Strategies of self-exculpation – fear of reprisals</i>	128
2.1.4	<i>Strategies of self-exculpation – relativisation and other excuses</i>	131
2.1.5	<i>The trope of German victimhood</i>	133
2.1.6	<i>The purpose of Musbach’s narrative</i>	136
2.2	Counter-narratives	141
2.2.1	<i>Katja as a corrective to Musbach</i>	141
2.2.2	<i>The role of minor characters in the Thesenroman</i>	146
2.3	“Zweikampf zwischen Tochter und Vater” – Väterliteratur reprise	149
2.3.1	<i>Oedipal overtones</i>	151
2.3.2	<i>Intergenerational power play</i>	155
2.3.3	<i>Unrealised potential for consensus</i>	161
2.3.4	<i>Katja’s triumph over Musbach</i>	166
3.	Reading <i>Unscharfe Bilder</i> as historiographic metafiction and its effect on the portrayal of Musbach	168
3.1	Explicit thematisation of historiographical criticism – the narrativity of history	168
3.2	Historical source material – implications of limitations and multiplicity	172

3.3	Effect of historiographic metafiction on the portrayal of Musbach	182
4.	Conclusion	184
IV.	TANJA DÜCKERS – HIMMELSKÖRPER	188
1.	Introduction	188
2.	Jo and Mäxchen – perpetrators or victims?	194
2.1	Family conversations	194
2.2	“Germans as victims” – Jo and Mäxchen’s self-portrayal	196
2.3	Undermining Jo and Mäxchen’s “Germans as victims” narrative	204
2.3.1	<i>Jo and Mäxchen incriminate themselves</i>	204
2.3.2	<i>Incriminating physical evidence</i>	208
2.3.3	<i>Renate as a corrective – continuing the patterns of Väterliteratur</i>	212
3.	Freia – a third generation approach	220
3.1	Germans as perpetrators or victims? – the third generation view	220
3.2	Integrating the perpetrators – the third generation approach	228
4.	<i>Himmelskörper</i> as historiographic metafiction	238
4.1	The narrativity of history and the third generation approach	238
4.2	Questioning historical sources – how can we know the “truth” about the past?	242
4.2.1	<i>Eyewitness accounts</i>	242
4.2.2	<i>Photographs</i>	245
4.2.3	<i>Memorial locations</i>	247
4.3	Implications of historiographic metafiction for the portrayal of the perpetrators – comparison with <i>Der Vorleser</i> and <i>Unscharfe Bilder</i>	250

5.	Conclusion	254
V.	MARCEL BEYER – <i>FLUGHUNDE</i>	257
1.	Introduction	257
2.	Karnau – portrayal of a perpetrator	260
2.1	The reception of the novel, the intention of the author, and the <i>Täterperspektive</i>	260
2.2	Karnau’s crimes	267
2.3	Karnau – sympathetic human or psychopathic monster?	269
2.3.1	<i>The absence of victimhood</i>	269
2.3.2	<i>Humanising Karnau?</i>	274
2.3.3	<i>The Nazi scientist</i>	280
2.3.4	<i>The psychopath</i>	287
2.3.5	<i>Karnau’s psychopathy and the murder of the Goebbels children</i>	295
3.	Reading <i>Flughunde</i> as historiographic metafiction	303
3.1	<i>Der Verfremdungseffekt</i>	304
3.2	Blurring the lines between fact and fiction and the problems of representation	307
3.3	Problems with historical sources	311
4.	Conclusion	319
VI.	CONCLUSION	323
	BIBLIOGRAPHY	329

I. INTRODUCTION

*“Die geschriebene Version wollte geschrieben werden, die vielen anderen wollten es nicht”*¹. When German fiction authors have written about their country’s Nazi past after the caesura of 1990, which “version” of that past have they chosen to write? The reunification of Germany in 1990 set in train a number of dramatic changes in Germany’s political, social and cultural landscape which necessitated a reconstitution of German national identity, including a reassessment of the newly unified nation’s approach to its common Third Reich heritage. Have these developments altered German literary approaches to that heritage? Which “version” of the Nazi past have post-1990 fiction authors chosen to tell? These are the primary questions I will explore in this thesis.

In order to examine this topic, I propose to use the perpetrator/victim dichotomy which has formed a such an important focus of German discussions about the Nazi past from 1945 onwards as a key to determining the attitudes to that past expressed in post-1990 German literature because the post-1990 reassessment of the Nazi past has tended to manifest itself in the form of contests between competing conceptions of Germans as either perpetrators or victims. This continues a pattern which may be observed in German discussions about the Third Reich from 1945, in which literature has played an essential part both as a reflector of and contributor to the public discourse on this subject. This continuing importance of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in German public discourse of the post-1990 period shows that it

¹ Schlink, Bernhard *Der Vorleser* Zurich: Diogenes, 1997 (first published 1995) at 205 – 206.

remains relevant as a means of understanding contemporary attitudes to the Nazi past and its place in German identity and suggests that it will prove to be a useful key to answering questions about attitudes to the Nazi past in post-1990 German literature.

Does post-1990 literature portray Germans involved in the Third Reich as perpetrators or victims? Is this portrayal different from the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in literature prior to 1990? Does the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in literature mirror trends in public discourse after 1990? Are the attitudes to the past expressed in literature affected by factors unrelated to unification, particularly generational changes in German society? In this thesis, I will seek to answer these questions by conducting a detailed textual analysis of the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in the following German literary texts published after 1990:

- *Der Vorleser* by Bernhard Schlink;
- *Unscharfe Bilder* by Ulla Hahn²;
- *Himmelskörper* by Tanja Dückers³; and
- *Flughunde* by Marcel Beyer^{4, 5}

² Hahn, Ulla *Unscharfe Bilder* Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005 (first published 2003).

³ Dückers, Tanja *Himmelskörper* Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005 (first published 2003).

⁴ Beyer, Marcel *Flughunde* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch Verlag, 1996 (first published 1995).

⁵ For brevity and ease of reference, citations from these four novels will be provided in the following format throughout this thesis: *Der Vorleser* = (DV [page number]); *Unscharfe Bilder* = (UB [page number]); *Himmelskörper* = (HK [page number]); and *Flughunde* = (FH [page number]).

In doing so, I acknowledge that the categories of “perpetrator” and “victim” are, in reality, not always clear-cut and that both terms may encompass grey areas of greater complexity. Not all “perpetrators” are war criminals in the judicial sense, and not all “victims” are on a par with the victims of the Holocaust. Perpetrators may also be victims and vice versa. In this thesis, my use of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy will be as a device of convenience for the purpose of analysing the approach taken to the Nazi past in the selected texts.

In order to assess the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in post-1990 German literature in more detail, I will also analyse the selected texts as historiographic metafiction. Historiographic metafiction thematises critiques of historiography which suggest that the objective “truth” about the past cannot be known, and in doing so has the potential to destabilise the basis on which we judge guilt or innocence and characterise someone as a perpetrator or a victim. Given the importance of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the public and literary discourse about the Nazi past in Germany, it is surprising that the impact of reading recent texts dealing with that past as historiographic metafiction has not attracted more academic attention. In this thesis, I will demonstrate a reading of the selected texts as historiographic metafiction and analyse the impact this reading has on the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims. In doing so, I hope to provide a contribution towards an area of literary analysis which has received little academic attention to date and to deepen our understanding of the presentation of the Nazi past in post-1990 German literature, thereby enriching our understanding of the place of the legacy of the Third Reich in contemporary German society.

1. Historical background

“So viel Hitler war nie”⁶. With this observation, historian Norbert Frei summed up the overwhelming presence of the Nazi past in German public discourse in 2004. His observation can also be applied to the whole period from German unification in 1990 until at least the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in 2005. During this period, the Nazi past was a major feature of German cultural life, from public debates, through historical exhibitions and memorials, to novels, films and television shows. For the cultural industry, engagement with the events of the Third Reich and their extended aftermath was practically unavoidable.

Many scholars and commentators argue that German unification itself is the major reason for this intensification of interest in the Nazi past in the following two decades. They hold that the unification of 1990 intensified the need to establish a common German identity following decades of separation, an important part of which involved integrating attitudes to the most recent common past of East and West, namely the Third Reich. Unification also removed a series of Cold War political restraints which had shaped narratives about the past in both Germanys resulting in the breaking down of taboos. In addition, it did away with the ability to point to the “other Germany” as being in greater need of putting its house in order as regards the Nazi past, thus removing an excuse for avoiding further examination of one’s own role.

Further, the formation of a national identity which acknowledged a united

⁶ Frei, Norbert “Gefühlte Geschichte: Die Erinnerungsschlacht um den 60. Jahrestag des Kriegsendes 1945 hat begonnen. Deutschland steht vor einer Wende im Umgang mit seiner Vergangenheit” *Die Zeit* 21 October 2004. See also Frei Norbert *1945 und wir: Das Dritte Reich im Bewußtsein der Deutschen* Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009 at 22.

Germany's more powerful position in Europe required a reassessment of Germany's last period as a major power.⁷

Other reasons for the explosion of interest in the Nazi past in recent times are more general, and have primarily been a result of the increasing length of time from the events of the Nazi period to the present. The eyewitnesses of that era, both perpetrators and victims, had by 1990 entered old age, and their ageing has given rise to a perception of the need to take advantage of the last opportunity to hear their accounts of a time which was so significant for German history and society. Further, the ageing of the "second generation"⁸ has led to an apparent desire on their part to reassess their own previous attitudes to the past and to their parents. These "chronological" reasons for a heightened interest in the Nazi past have also happened to coincide with a period of economic uncertainty and the phenomenon of globalisation which have destabilised national identities generally. The renegotiation of national

⁷ Niven provides a concise discussion of the renewed focus on the Nazi past as a *result* of unification, with particular reference to the political restraints which had restricted public narratives about the past in both Germanys, as well as the tendency to push responsibility for confronting the past over the border in Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* London: Routledge, 2002 at 1 – 4.

⁸ The definition of "generation" is notoriously fraught. For the purposes of this thesis, I have employed the definition of "generation" widely used in the current discourse about how Germans have dealt with the Nazi past. According to this common usage, the "first generation" refers to those who were adults or came to adulthood during the period of the Third Reich, the "second generation" are their children, the "third generation" are their grandchildren, and so on. For a more detailed discussion of the concept of "generation" in this context, see Assmann, Aleida *Generationsidentitäten und Vorurteilsstrukturen in der neuen deutschen Erinnerungsliteratur* Vienna: Picus Verlag, 2006; Assmann, Aleida *Geschichte im Gedächtnis: Von der individuellen Erfahrung zur öffentlichen Inszenierung* Munich: Verlag CH Beck, 2007 at 31 – 69; Weigel, Sigrid "Generation as a Symbolic Form: On the Genealogical Discourse of Memory since 1945" *Germanic Review* 77.4 (2002): 264 - 277.

identity in the case of Germany in this context has involved an intensified look at its recent past.⁹

The widespread discussion of the Nazi past since 1990 has given rise to a number of controversies, prompting Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove to comment that “[i]n reunified Germany, the past is thus not so much another country where they do things differently, but a hotly contested territory”¹⁰.

They have described Germany’s post-unification discourse about the past as being characterised by “memory contests” in which different groups and individuals in a pluralistic memory culture advance their own identity-forming narratives about the past without any one narrative necessarily gaining the upper hand¹¹. A consideration of some of the controversies constituting these “memory contests” in the post-1990 period suggests that a perpetrator/victim dichotomy has been central to debates about German collective memory¹²

⁹ There are quite a number of overviews of the reasons for the intensified interest in the Nazi past after 1990, including for example Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms: The Legacy of National Socialism in Post-1990 German Fiction* Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2004 at 1 – 4. The idea of heightened interest in the past as a response to globalisation and economic issues arising from the collapse of socialism in East Germany has been raised in Fuchs, Anne and Cosgrove, Mary “Introduction” *German Life and Letters* 59.2 (2006): 163 - 168 and Schmitz, Helmut “Introduction” *Seminar* 43.2 (2007): 95 - 99.

¹⁰ Fuchs, Anne and Cosgrove, Mary “Introduction: Germany’s Memory Contests and the Management of the Past” in Fuchs, Anne, Cosgrove, Mary and Grote, George *German Memory Contests: The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* New York: Camden House, 2006: 1 - 21 at 2.

¹¹ Fuchs, Anne and Cosgrove, Mary “Introduction” op cit at 164; Fuchs, Anne and Cosgrove, Mary “Introduction: Germany’s Memory Contests and the Management of the Past” ibid at 2. Chloe Paver describes the situation similarly as being characterised by “*shifting memories - ongoing social negotiations about the way in which the Third Reich and its crimes are to be remembered*”: Paver, Chloe *Refractions of the Third Reich in German and Austrian Fiction and Film* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007 at 1.

¹² Jan Assmann has built on the “collective memory” theories of Maurice Halbwachs and further defined “collective memory” as being split into two

and national identity during this time. Throughout the period, narratives in which Germans are depicted as perpetrators and those in which Germans are portrayed as victims have competed with each other for dominance in German public discourse. The emphasis on Germans as perpetrators can, for example, be seen in the controversy surrounding Daniel Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, which argued that most ordinary Germans of the Third Reich shared Hitler's fanatical antisemitism, and that this was the primary reason for their involvement in the Holocaust. Although the book was widely criticised on historiographical grounds, many positions taken in the debate surrounding it showed that its portrayal of Germans as intentional perpetrators resonated with the German public¹³. Another example of the focus on Germans as perpetrators was the exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944* mounted by the Hamburger Institut für

subsets: "cultural memory" and "communicative memory". "Cultural memory" is a form of public memory. It is the history that a given culture remembers about itself in a process in which select historical facts are transformed into that culture's foundational myths. "Cultural memory" is used by a society to stabilise and convey its identity. The other subset, "communicative memory", consists of everyday, oral communication of the memory of the recent past amongst small groups of contemporaries, which necessarily dies out with those who were able to communicate it. Whatever remains becomes a mediated part of "cultural memory". Whereas participation in "communicative memory" is diffuse, "cultural memory" tends to be formed and propagated by the culture's elite. Although Assmann developed his theories in the context of his work on ancient cultures, his ideas have been widely applied: Assmann, Jan *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis: Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in frühen Hochkulturen* Munich: Verlag CH Beck, 1992 at 34 – 56; Assmann, Jan "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität" in Assmann, Jan and Hölscher, Tonio *Kultur und Gedächtnis* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1988: 9 – 19.

¹³ On the Goldhagen debate generally, see Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* op cit at 119 – 142; Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N *Lexikon der "Vergangenheitsbewältigung" in Deutschland: Debatten- und Diskursgeschichte des Nationalsozialismus nach 1945* Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2009 at 295 – 297; La Capra, Dominick *Writing History, Writing Trauma* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2001 at 114 – 140.

Sozialforschung, initially in Hamburg and subsequently in other cities around Germany and Austria from 1995 to 1999¹⁴. The exhibition aimed to debunk the myth of the *saubere Wehrmacht* by showing (primarily by means of photographic evidence) that not only the SD and the SS, but also ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers had been involved in war crimes and crimes against humanity on the Eastern Front in the Second World War. The exhibition gave rise to a significant debate as to whether *Wehrmacht* soldiers, who made up the majority of German men involved in military action, should be viewed as perpetrators rather than victims. A further example of the emphasis on Germans as perpetrators in public discourse arose in 2005 with the opening of the *Denkmal für die ermordeten Juden Europas* (also known as the *Holocaust Mahnmal*) in Berlin. The *Holocaust Mahnmal* placed the memory of Germany's guilt and shame right in the heart of its capital, something perhaps unique in the history of any country. As Frei has put it, "*Symbolpolitisch hat es das noch nicht gegeben: dass eine Nation im Zentrum ihrer Hauptstadt ihr größtes geschichtliches Verbrechen bekennt*"¹⁵. The

¹⁴ Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht: Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941 - 1944 - Archiv* <<http://www.verbrechen-der-wehrmacht.de/docs/archiv/archiv.htm>> (accessed 11 April 2016); Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht Dimensionen des Vernichtungskrieges 1941 - 1944: Begleitbroschüre zur Ausstellung* Hamburg: Hamburg Edition, 2004. See also generally Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* *ibid* at 143 – 174; Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N *Lexikon* *ibid* at 288 – 290. A second version of the exhibition (significantly altered in response to criticism of the original exhibition by historians) toured from 2001 to 2004.

¹⁵ Frei, Norbert "Gefühlte Geschichte" *op cit*. Schmitz also comments that "*Germany is virtually the only country in the Western world that commemorates the crimes committed in the name of the collective*". Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* *op cit* at 6. For a thorough discussion of the background to the *Holocaust Mahnmal*, see Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* *ibid* at 194 – 232. See also Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N *Lexikon* *ibid* at 290 – 293.

dominance of this “Germans as perpetrators” narrative in Germany’s public memory culture into the new millennium may be demonstrated by reference to the speeches given by Bundespräsident Joachim Gauck and Bundeskanzlerin Angela Merkel in January 2015 on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In his speech, Gauck highlighted the centrality of the Holocaust for German identity, saying “*Es gibt keine deutsche Identität ohne Auschwitz*”¹⁶. Similarly, Merkel described the memory of the Holocaust as something which “*prägt unser Selbstverständnis als Nation*” and emphasised the “*immerwährende Verantwortung*” of Germans to keep that memory alive¹⁷.

However, despite this predominance in German public discourse of the cultural memory paradigm in which Germans are seen primarily as perpetrators, the post-1990 period has also witnessed a renewed interest in German victimhood, particularly in the period after 2000. This interest has centred on the suffering of German civilians during the *Flucht und Vertreibung* of millions of Germans from Eastern Europe at the end of the Second World War and during the Allied bombing of German cities such as Dresden, as well as on the suffering of the “ordinary soldier” in the difficult conditions of the

¹⁶ Gauck, Joachim *Bundespräsident Joachim Gauck zum Tag des Gedenkens an die Opfer des Nationalsozialismus am 27. Januar 2015 in Berlin*
<http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2015/01/150127-Gedenken-Holocaust.pdf;jsessionid=76AA7AA99B9F033A831F907ADED99588.2_cid379?__blob=publicationFile> (accessed 11 April 2016).

¹⁷ Merkel, Angela *Rede von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel anlässlich der Gedenkveranstaltung des Internationalen Auschwitzkomitees zum 70. Jahrestag der Befreiung des Konzentrationslagers Auschwitz-Birkenau am 26. Januar 2015*
<<http://www.bundesregierung.de/Content/DE/Rede/2015/01/2015-01-26-merkel-auschwitz.html;jsessionid=24E7CC3C73F7F6369128FCDFC80447C6.s1t1>> (accessed 11 April 2016).

Eastern Front and on the rape of German women by Red Army soldiers. The focus on “Germans as victims” has been something of a mass media phenomenon, with Guido Knopp’s history programmes on ZDF television attracting large audiences¹⁸, and news magazine *Der Spiegel* publishing several special issues on the subject¹⁹. A number of historical and literary contributions have also been influential in turning the public focus towards German victimhood, including Jörg Friedrich’s *Der Brand*, WG Sebald’s *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, and Günter Grass’ *Im Krebsgang*²⁰. This wave of interest in Germans as victims has been claimed to be a result of the breaking down of taboos on discussion of the subject resulting from Cold War politics and the predominance of certain politically-inspired memory regimes in East and West Germany prior to unification, although it has also been argued that the extent of such taboos has been significantly overstated²¹. It has further

¹⁸ Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N *Lexikon op cit* at 341 – 344.

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

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

²¹ Regarding the presence of the Germans as victims narrative prior to 1990 and therefore the overstatement of the “taboo”, see also Moeller, Robert G “Remembering the War in a Nation of Victims: West German Pasts in the 1950s” in Schissler, Hanna *The Miracle Years: A Cultural History of West Germany 1949 - 1968* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001: 83 - 109; Langenbacher, Eric “Changing Memory Regimes in Contemporary Germany?” *German Politics and Society* 21.2 (2003): 46 - 68; Moeller, Robert G “The

been suggested that the renewed interest in German suffering may be partly attributable to a revision by the 68ers of their previously judgmental attitude towards their now ageing parents²², to generational change and historical distance²³, or to more global trends, such as the internationalisation of Holocaust memory and the tendency in many nations to identify with national victimhood narratives²⁴. The resurgence of the “Germans as victims” narrative in the post-1990 period has challenged the “Germans as perpetrators” paradigm for dominance in German public discourse, leading to concerns amongst some commentators that the new emphasis on German victimhood could lead to a reduced emphasis on German guilt and a relativisation of the suffering of Holocaust victims²⁵.

Politics of the Past in the 1950s: Rhetorics of Victimisation in East and West Germany” in Niven, Bill *Germans As Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 26 - 42; Niven, Bill *Representations of Flight and Expulsion in East German Prose Works* Rochester: Camden House, 2014; Niven, Bill “On a Supposed Taboo: Flight and Refugees from the East in GDR Film and Television” *German Life and Letters* 65.2 (2012): 216 - 236. In addition, Welzer has pointed to the continuation of German victimhood narratives in private family discourse, despite the focus on German perpetration at the public level: Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005. Aleida Assmann makes a similar point in Assmann, Aleida “On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory” *German Life and Letters* 59.2 (2006): 187 - 200 at 189 – 190, as does Cohen-Pfister in Cohen-Pfister, Laurel “The Suffering of the Perpetrators: Unleashing Collective Memory in German Literature of the Twenty-First Century” *Forum for Modern Language Studies* 41.2 (2005): 123 - 135 at 125.

²² Frei, Norbert “Gefühlte Geschichte” op cit.

²³ Schmitz, Helmut “The Birth of the Collective from the Spirit of Empathy: From the Historians’ Dispute to German Suffering” in Niven, Bill *Germans as Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 93 - 108 at 106.

²⁴ Niven, Bill “The globalisation of memory and the rediscovery of German suffering” in Taberner, Stuart *German Literature in the Age of Globalisation* Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2004: 229 – 246.

²⁵ See for example Frei, who has suggested that the focus on German suffering and private family memory has led to a blurring of the lines between perpetrators, victims and *Mitläufer*: Frei, Norbert “Gefühlte

Although German interest in the Nazi past and the perpetrator and/or victim roles played by Germans during the Third Reich may well have been particularly intense in the period after unification, it can be argued that this recent discourse about that past in many ways continues patterns established prior to 1990. Bill Niven has noted that the way in which the newly unified Germans have dealt with their past after 1990 has been, to an extent, “a continuation and radicalization of a process of coming to terms with the past, rather than its first phase”, acknowledging the continuity of certain aspects of post-1990 *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* with what had gone before²⁶. Recent debates about the past may have been shaped by the different social and

Geschichte” op cit. Similarly, Welzer has commented that the recent concentration on German suffering constitutes a complete renovation of German memory culture from a perpetrator to a victim society, and relativises the suffering of Holocaust victims (“*wer könnte Täter sein, wenn alle Opfer sind?*”): Welzer, Harald “Zurück zur Opfergesellschaft: Verschiebungen in der deutschen Erinnerungskultur” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 3 April 2002. Others consider that the interest in “Germans as victims” need not overturn the dominance of the view of Germans as perpetrators in German public memory culture. For example, Aleida Assmann argues that memories of German suffering need not challenge or eliminate memories of German perpetration as long as they are not in competition for the national master narrative, which since the 1960s has focused on German guilt and responsibility for the past. She considers that recent social interest in Germans as victims has not upset this normative national framework: Assmann Aleida “On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory” op cit at 197 – 198. See also Hage, Volker “Unter Generalverdacht” *Der Spiegel* 15/2002 for a review of the controversy as it applied to German literature.

²⁶ Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* op cit at 4. It should be noted that although the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* has been widely used, it has not been without criticism, including from two of the authors whose works are analysed in this study. In Hahn’s semi-autobiographical novel *Spiel der Zeit*, the narrator presenting authorial interjections comments that the past is not something that can be cured or conquered, as suggested by the term *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*: Hahn, Ulla *Spiel der Zeit* Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2014 at 40. In several of his essays, Schlink suggests that the past cannot be “dealt with” in the way suggested by the term, and that the concept exposes a desire to free of the past, in that it implies that the task of dealing with the past can be completed: Schlink, Bernhard *Vergangenheitsschuld: Beiträge zu einem deutschen Thema* Zurich: Diogenes Verlag, 2007 at 80, 118.

political context brought about by unification and the various other factors discussed at the beginning of this chapter, yet they have tended to repeat many of the points characteristic of discussions of the Nazi past prior to 1990. In particular, the contest between perpetrator and victim narratives which has been a focus for many recent debates about the past can be seen as constituting the continuation of a pattern which may be observed in Germany's attempts to come to terms with its Nazi past since 1945. An emphasis on Germans as perpetrators and German guilt can, for example, be seen in the war crimes trials²⁷, re-education campaigns and denazification procedures²⁸, and (arguably) the *Kollektivschuldthese*²⁹ imposed by the Western Allies in the immediate postwar years in West Germany and similar actions taken by the Soviet Union in East Germany during the same period³⁰. Some Germans also emphasised general German culpability for Nazi crimes during the postwar years and into the 1950s, including Karl Jaspers in his work *Die Schuldfrage*³¹ and Bundespräsident Theodor Heuss in his insistence

²⁷ Although the major war crimes trials at Nuremberg also tended to have the ironic effect of allowing the bulk of the German people to blame their leaders and exonerate themselves: see Fulbrook, Mary *German National Identity after the Holocaust* Cambridge: Polity Press, 1999 at 50 – 51; 55.

²⁸ For a brief discussion of these actions taken by the Western Allies in occupied Germany, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 18 – 24.

²⁹ The idea that the Allies were imposing a *Kollektivschuldthese* on the German population was widely discussed in the postwar period, but the extent to which it was really practised by the Allies is debatable. See Frei, Norbert *1945 und wir* op cit at 159 – 169.

³⁰ Niven describes denazification in East Germany in Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* op cit at 41 – 43.

³¹ Jaspers, Karl *Die Schuldfrage: Von der politischen Hoffnung Deutschlands* Munich: Piper Verlag, 2012. For a brief discussion, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 44 – 45.

on German “collective shame”³². Other instances in which the characterisation of Germans as perpetrators became the focus of public discourse about the Nazi past after 1945 include the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem in 1961 and the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial of 1963 – 1965. Both of these trials served to make the German public more aware of the details of the Holocaust as well as debunking exculpatory myths, such as the idea that the perpetrators were monsters who were unlike the majority of ordinary Germans³³, and the assertion that the perpetrators were forced to take part in crimes due to *Befehlsnotstand*, whereby they were unable to refuse orders³⁴. The part played by ordinary Germans in the Holocaust was further cemented in the public imagination by the screening in West Germany in 1978 of the American television series *Holocaust*³⁵, and examples of the continuing characterisation of Germans as perpetrators may be seen in a revival of interest in the memory of the Holocaust on the part of political dissidents in East Germany in the 1980s³⁶, as well as in Bundespräsident Richard von Weizsäcker’s speech on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the end of the

³² Herf notes that Heuss’ “singular accomplishment as Bundespräsident was to make the memory of the crimes of the Nazi era a constitutive element of national political memory”: Herf, Jeffrey *Divided Memory: The Nazi Past in the Two Germanys* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997 at 312. See also his general discussion of Heuss’ contribution to establishing a memory culture of which the memory of German crimes was a significant aspect at 312 – 331.

³³ Arendt’s report on the Eichmann trial, *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, in particular emphasised the very ordinariness of one of the Holocaust’s prime movers: Arendt, Hannah *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* London: Penguin Classics, 2006.

³⁴ Fulbrook, Mary op cit at 73.

³⁵ For a general overview, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 243 – 244.

³⁶ Herf, Jeffrey op cit at 362.

Second World War which put remembrance of German victimhood firmly in the context of German perpetration³⁷.

This recurrent, post-1945 narrative in which Germans were characterised as perpetrators faced competition throughout the period from a counter-narrative which understood Germans as the victims of Nazism and the ravages of war. Examples of this “Germans as victims” narrative can be seen in 1980s attempts by conservatives in West Germany to relativise the Holocaust and break free from the burden of the past, such as the visit by Helmut Kohl and Ronald Reagan to the military cemetery at Bitburg in 1985³⁸ and various positions put forward in the *Historikerstreit* of 1986³⁹. These 1980s controversies constituted something of a return to the understanding of Germans as victims which had dominated discussions about the Nazi past in West Germany in the 1950s, particularly in the political realm. In West Germany in the 1950s, the government under Konrad Adenauer, in large part

³⁷ Von Weizsäcker, Richard *Bundespräsident Richard von Weizsäcker bei der Gedenkveranstaltung im Plenarsaal des Deutschen Bundestags zum 40. Jahrestag des Endes des Zweiten Weltkriegs in Europa am 8. Mai 1985 in Bonn* <http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Downloads/DE/Reden/2015/02/150202-RvW-Rede-8-Mai-1985.pdf?__blob=publicationFile>(accessed 11 April 2016). See Beattie, Andrew H “The Victims of Totalitarianism and the Centrality of Nazi Genocide: Continuity and Change in German Commemorative Politics” in Niven, Bill *Germans As Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 147 - 163 at 154 for the view that von Weizsäcker’s speech encapsulated the shift of focus away from German suffering towards German contrition and emphasised the primacy of the Holocaust and extent of Nazi criminality. See also Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 232 – 235 for a more critical view.

³⁸ See Maier, Charles S *The Unmasterable Past: History, Holocaust, and German National Identity* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988 at 9 – 16 and Herf, Jeffrey op cit at 351 for further detail.

³⁹ See Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 238 – 240 for an overview. For more detail, see Maier, Charles S *ibid*.

out of practical necessity and in order to achieve its political goals⁴⁰, tended to focus on issues which emphasised German victimhood. These included the return of the remaining German prisoners of war, assisting the families of dead or wounded soldiers, and dealing with the influx of millions of German *Vertriebenen*.⁴¹ When Adenauer asked in 1950 “*ob in der Geschichte jemals mit einer solchen Herzlosigkeit ein Verdikt des Elends und des Unglücks über Millionen von Menschen gefällt worden [sei]*”⁴², he was referring, not to the Jews, but to Germans suffering as a result of the continuing detention of German prisoners of war in the Soviet Union. The gradual dismantling of the denazification process and the reintegration into economic and social life of Germans compromised by their involvement with Nazism also encouraged Germans to see themselves as victims of “victor’s justice”⁴³.

The nature of “Germans as victims” narratives in East Germany was different, but such narratives were arguably more pervasive and more foundational in terms of national identity. In East Germany, the early postwar focus on German culpability was soon replaced by the politically motivated narrative of antifascism, which became the dominant mode in which East Germans were

⁴⁰ Herf argues that Adenauer’s policies were motivated by his view that the establishment of a functioning democracy amongst a people who had until recently been supporters of Nazism required less memory of Nazi crimes and more integration of those who had gone astray into a Western democratic regime: Herf, Jeffrey op cit at 267; 389.

⁴¹ For a brief discussion of some of these issues, see Moeller, Robert G “The Politics of the Past in the 1950s” op cit at 30 – 34.

⁴² Adenauer, Konrad *Erklärung des Bundeskanzlers Adenauer in der 94. Sitzung des Deutschen Bundestages zum Gedenktag für die deutschen Kriegsgefangenen* 26 October 1950 <<http://www.konrad-adenauer.de/dokumente/erklarungen/kriegsgefangene>> (accessed 11 April 2016).

⁴³ Frei has discussed this process in detail in Frei, Norbert *Adenauer’s Germany and the Nazi Past: The Politics of Amnesty and Integration* New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. See also Fulbrook, Mary op cit at 51 – 55; 59 - 65.

directed to view their past. Identifying Nazism with the capitalists in the West, the East German regime established a foundational ideology of “antifascism”⁴⁴, under which the “workers and peasants” of their new communist state were encouraged to consider themselves “antifascists”, thereby identifying themselves with communists and others who had been “antifascist” victims of Nazism⁴⁵. This idea of antifascist victimhood was accompanied by official endorsement of the portrayal of East Germans as the victims of British and American bombing campaigns, particularly the bombing of Dresden⁴⁶. The narrative of antifascist victimhood tended to have the effect of suppressing the memory of Jewish suffering in favour of the suffering of the communist opponents of Nazism⁴⁷ and remained the dominant public memory paradigm in East Germany until 1989⁴⁸.

In the contest between competing visions of Germans as perpetrators or victims since 1945, different perpetrator and victim narratives gained

⁴⁴ Moeller, Robert G “The Politics of the Past in the 1950s” op cit at 29. See also Rothe’s discussion of antifascism as East Germany’s master commemorative discourse in Rothe, Anne “Das Dritte Reich als antifaschistischer Mythos im kollektiven Gedächtnis der DDR: Christa Wolfs Kindheitsmuster als Teil- und Gegendiskurs” in Zuckermann, Moshe *Deutsche Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2003: 87 - 111 at 92 – 102.

⁴⁵ See also Fulbrook, Mary op cit at 55 – 58.

⁴⁶ Moeller, Robert G “The Politics of the Past in the 1950s” op cit at 29; Niven, Bill “The GDR and Memory of the Bombing of Dresden” in Niven, Bill *Germans As Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 109 – 129.

⁴⁷ Rothe notes that the insistence of the East German regime on seeing the Holocaust through a Marxist lens negated the Holocaust as genocide because it viewed the „Jewish question“ as subordinate to the class struggle: Rothe, Anne op cit.

⁴⁸ Herf, Jeffrey op cit at 362; 393. Herf has suggested that East German memory politics remained more static than was the case in West Germany due to the increased ability of the East German dictatorship to maintain a tight control over memory politics. The openness of democracy to debate meant that the situation in West Germany was more fluid and open to change: Herf, Jeffrey ibid at 390. See also Beattie, Andrew H op cit at 153.

dominance at different times in both East and West Germany. It can, for example, be argued that, whilst both East and West Germany emphasised different versions of the victimhood narrative in the 1950s, its dominance was displaced in West Germany by a Holocaust-centred memory regime which depicted Germans as perpetrators and was the dominant public memory paradigm in the West at the time of unification. However, regardless of the positions of dominance at any given time, the very fact of the continuous coexistence of and competition between perpetrator and victim narratives since 1945 suggests that German debates about the Nazi past have tended to crystallise around the perpetrator/victim dichotomy across the whole period⁴⁹. The discourse surrounding the question of whether Germans should be seen as perpetrators or victims has been central to discussions about German collective memory and identity, not only in the post-1990 debates, but since 1945. The continuing importance of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy for German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* following unification indicates that the oscillation between “Germans as perpetrators” and “Germans as victims” remains relevant and still forms an important subject of exploration and analysis in the quest to understand contemporary German attitudes to the Nazi past and its place in Germany’s national identity.

⁴⁹ Frevert discusses the various portrayals of Germans as perpetrators or victims in both East and West Germany from 1945 through to the 1990s: see the chapters authored by Frevert in Assmann, Aleida and Frevert, Ute *Geschichtsvergessenheit Geschichtsversessenheit: Vom Umgang mit deutschen Vergangenheiten nach 1945* Stuttgart: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 1999.

2. Literary background

Literature has been an essential part of the way in which Germans have approached their Nazi past since the end of the Second World War. It has contributed significantly to the national memory culture and been understood as an important medium of cultural memory⁵⁰. Indeed, Birgit Neumann has described literature as a player in the battle for control of cultural memory, fulfilling its central function within memory culture by reintegrating different memory discourses, reviving forgotten or marginalised experiences, critically reflecting on the construction of memory, and through appropriation by the reader⁵¹. German authors have often played an active political role, particularly in the field of memory politics⁵², as can be seen in the memory debates inspired by authors such as Martin Walser, WG Sebald, and Günter

⁵⁰ Hardtwig, Wolfgang "Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur 1945 – 2005: Eine Einleitung" in Schütz, Erhard and Hardtwig, Wolfgang *Keiner kommt davon: Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008: 7 - 25 at 13; 15; Nünning, Ansgar "Beyond the Great Story: Der postmoderne historische Roman als Medium revisionistischer Geschichtsdarstellung, kultureller Erinnerung und metahistoriographischer Reflexionen" *Anglia* 117.1 (1999): 15 - 48 at 21. See generally Neumann, Birgit "Literarische Inszenierungen und Interventionen: Mediale Erinnerungskonkurrenz in Guy Vanderhaeghes *The Englishman's Boy* und Michael Ondaatjes *Running in the Family*" in Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar *Medien des kollektiven Gedächtnisses: Konstruktivität-Historizität-Kulturspezifität* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2004: 195 - 215; Erll, Astrid "Literatur als Medium des kollektiven Gedächtnisses" in Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft: Theoretische Grundlegung und Anwendungsperspektiven* Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005: 249 - 276.

⁵¹ Neumann, Birgit "Literarische Inszenierungen" *ibid* at 213.

⁵² On the subject of German authors as public intellectuals and political figures generally, see Bullivant, Keith *The Future of German Literature* Oxford: Berg Publishers, 1994; Brockmann, Stephen *Literature and German Reunification* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999. In relation to the position in East Germany specifically, see Bathrick, David *The Powers of Speech: The Politics of Culture in the GDR* Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1995.

Grass⁵³. All of these factors highlight the importance of literature as a contributor to and reflector of the formation of German memory culture and national identity, and suggest that an examination of German literature dealing with the Nazi past is likely to be a vital part of any attempt to gauge the state of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* at a particular point in time.

A consideration of German literature dealing with the past since 1945 suggests that the perpetrator/victim dichotomy has been as central to literary approaches to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* as it has been to German memory culture in general. German literature of the period 1945 – 1990 evinces the same kind of competition between narratives portraying Germans as perpetrators and those portraying Germans as victims as is apparent from the overall public memory discourse of that period. Sometimes these portrayals have mirrored developments in the dominant memory culture. Sometimes they have taken on a provocative role, challenging the dominant paradigm.

⁵³ On the controversy surrounding Walser's 1998 *Friedenspreisrede*, his approach to writing about the Nazi past in his 1998 novel *Ein springender Brunnen* (Walser, Martin *Ein springender Brunnen* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Taschenbuch, 2000), and his subsequent debate with Ignatz Bubis, see Niven, Bill *Facing the Nazi Past* op cit at 173 – 193; Schödel, Kathrin "Martin Walser's *Ein springender Brunnen* (A Gushing Fountain)" in Taberner, Stuart *The Novel in German Since 1990* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011: 108 - 122. On the discussion of Germans as victims of Allied bombing raids and the lack of representation of this in German literature sparked by Sebald's 1997 lectures on the subject of *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, see Arpaci, Annette Seidel "Lost in Translations? The Discourse of German Suffering and WG Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur*" in Schmitz, Helmut *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007: 161 - 179. On Grass' *Im Krebsgang*, which (amongst other things) drew attention to German wartime suffering in the context of flight and expulsion, and the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, see Taberner, Stuart "Literary Representations in Contemporary German Fiction of the Expulsions of Germans from the East in 1945" in Schmitz, Helmut *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007: 223 - 246 at 238 – 242; Schmitz, Helmut "Representations of the Nazi past II" op cit at 148 – 151.

An example of the literary reflection of the dominant narrative in collective memory can be seen in the West German phenomenon of *Väterliteratur*, which reached its peak popularity in the late-1970s and early-1980s. The body of texts commonly termed *Väterliteratur* emphasises the role of Germans as perpetrators, reflecting the growing contemporary focus on the Holocaust and on the role of ordinary Germans in Nazi crimes. It is also the literary expression of the 1968 student movement's rebellion against parents, teachers and other authority figures and of their desire to condemn and disown these figures for their involvement in the Nazi regime. Questions about the Nazi past of the older generation play a prominent role⁵⁴ and are often instrumentalised as part of a wider generational conflict. The *Väterliteratur* genre consists largely of works with an autobiographical base which deal with the Nazi past at a personal, family level and link the Nazi past of the authors' fathers (the "Täter-Väter") with the authors' own search for identity. They are usually aggressive in tone⁵⁵, feature accusations of guilt, and are often accompanied by a need on the part of the author to break away from the first generation members of his or her family⁵⁶. The genre is

⁵⁴ Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 180.

⁵⁵ Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008 at 20; 23; Ganeva, Mila "From West-German *Väterliteratur* to Post-Wall *Enkelliteratur*: The End of the Generation Conflict in Marcel Beyer's *Spione* and Tanja Dücker's *Himmelskörper*" *Seminar* 43.2 (2007): 149 - 162 at 155.

⁵⁶ For an overview of the topic of *Väterliteratur*, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 193; Barner, Wilfried *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart* Munich: Verlag CH Beck, 2006 at 617 – 620. For more detailed discussions, see Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* ibid at 20 - 24; Reidy, Julian *Vergessen, was Eltern sind: Relektüre und literaturgeschichtliche Neusituierung der angeblichen Väterliteratur* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2012; Ostheimer, Michael *Ungebetene Hinterlassenschaften: Zur literarischen Imagination über das familiäre Nachleben des Nationalsozialismus* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2013 at 159 - 199; Cameron,

particularly marked by the theme of generational rupture and rejection of biological parents⁵⁷, with the authors frequently using the Holocaust as an instrument with which to attack the older generation⁵⁸. In their portrayal of the *Täter-Väter* as perpetrators in the 1970s and 1980s, the *Väterliteratur* novels mirrored the growing acceptance of this view in West German society from the 1960s onwards and in this way provide an example of the reflection in literature of developments in Germany's memory culture.

However, a similar emphasis on Germans as perpetrators in some earlier works highlights the more provocative role literature has played in German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, as literary approaches to the past have moved in advance of changes in broader public memory regimes and encouraged a reassessment of German responsibility for Nazi crimes and of the question of how it should be dealt with in contemporary society. During the late-1950s and early-1960s, for example, at a time when West German society was keen to forget the past and enjoy its economic recovery, writers such as Heinrich Böll and Günter Grass highlighted continuities from the unconflicted Nazi past into the postwar period and asked questions about individual responsibility during the Third Reich. Their works resisted suppression of the past and suggested that Nazism was not an overwhelming, external force by

Jennifer *In the Shadow of the Family Tree: Narrating Family History in Väterliteratur and the Generationenromane* Dissertation, Columbia University, 2012 at 4 - 12.

⁵⁷ Regarding these characteristics of breach and condemnation in *Väterliteratur*, see Assmann, Aleida *Geschichte im Gedächtnis* op cit at 72 – 74; Assmann, Aleida *Generationsidentitäten und Vorurteilsstrukturen* op cit at 26 – 28.

⁵⁸ Schlant, Ernestine *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust* New York: Routledge, 1999 at 85 – 86.

which the Germans were enslaved⁵⁹, but something arising out of German society and culture, supported by a broad range of ordinary Germans who bore personal responsibility for their actions during that period⁶⁰. East German writers such as Christa Wolf performed a similar, provocative function in the 1970s and 1980s in their questioning of the antifascist myth central to the official version of East Germany's past and the impact of that myth on the present⁶¹. Rather than endorsing the idea of a "new start" with the creation of the German Democratic Republic, these authors pointed to the continuities between the Nazi past and the socialist present, particularly in the endurance of authoritarian patterns of behaviour, and recognised that the Holocaust did not have the dominant position it should in East German collective memory. The focus in these books shifted from the heroisation of communist resistance fighters to the responsibility of the ordinary German *Mitläufer*⁶². By contrast, other literature in East Germany dealing with the events of the Third Reich tended either to concentrate on "victims" in the form of idealised heroes of the antifascist resistance or on former Nazis and *Mitläufer* who saw the error of

⁵⁹ As had been suggested by earlier literary approaches to the Nazi past which had viewed Nazism in mythic terms and Germans as victims of an unstoppable evil: Michaels, Jennifer E "Confronting the Nazi Past" in Bullivant, Keith *Beyond 1989: Re-reading German Literature since 1945* Providence: Berghahn Books, 1997: 1 - 20 at 3 - 4; see also Ryan, Judith *The Uncompleted Past: Postwar German Novels and the Third Reich* Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983 at 14; Hardtwig, Wolfgang op cit at 23.

⁶⁰ Michaels, Jennifer E *ibid* at 7 - 10; Barner, Wilfried op cit at 373 - 383.

⁶¹ For a discussion of Christa Wolf's novel *Kindheitsmuster* as a *Gegendiskurs* to the prevailing East German memory regime of antifascism, see Rothe, Anne op cit at 102 - 107.

⁶² Emmerich, Wolfgang *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* Leipzig: Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, 1996 at 318 - 322; Michaels, Jennifer E op cit at 14 - 17; Barner, Wilfried op cit at 717 - 720.

their ways and were transformed into good socialists⁶³. In its emphasis on antifascist resistance, literature of this type both reflected and supported the development of East Germany's foundational antifascist myth, which tended to both obscure the suffering of the Jewish victims of Nazism in favour of Nazism's political victims and to encourage East German identification with those political, antifascist victims, thereby eliding their role as perpetrators. Since 1990, the rise in general interest in the common Nazi past has been accompanied by a boom in both fiction and non-fiction works dealing either directly with the Third Reich or with the effect of its legacy on German society and culture since 1945⁶⁴. These books have frequently appeared in the bestseller lists, pointing to the continuing interest of the German reading public in depictions of and enquiries into the nation's Nazi past. The popularity of these literary works further suggests that they struck a chord with Germans in terms of how they approached their past at the time of publication, and also that the way these works portray the Germans of the Nazi period is likely to have an impact on the formation of German national identity in the future⁶⁵. In view of the important role that literature has played in German

⁶³ Emmerich, Wolfgang *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* ibid at 131 - 136. The production of literature in East Germany was, of course, constrained by the demands of writing in a communist dictatorship: see Emmerich, Wolfgang *Kleine Literaturgeschichte der DDR* ibid at 40 – 69. See also Michaels, Jennifer E ibid at 4 – 7.

⁶⁴ *Der Spiegel* has devoted several articles to this literary phenomenon: Beyer, Susanne "Gesucht: die eigene Herkunft" *Der Spiegel* 29/2004 at 118 – 120; Hage, Volker "Die Enkel wollen es wissen" *Der Spiegel* 12/2003 at 170 - 173. Hardtwig has also commented on the overwhelming presence of the past in recent German literature: "*Warum so wenig Gegenwart in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur, wird da gefragt?*". Hardtwig, Wolfgang op cit at 8 – 9.

⁶⁵ On the nexus between literature, memory and identity, see Neumann, Birgit "Literatur, Erinnerung, Identität" in Erll, Astrid and Nünning, Ansgar *Gedächtniskonzepte der Literaturwissenschaft: Theoretische Grundlegung*

memory culture since 1945, the continuing popularity of literature about the Nazi past following 1990, and the potential impact of the genre on German identity and collective memory, an examination of the way in which Germans have dealt with their past in literature since 1990 is likely to contribute significantly to an understanding of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* during this period.

In the discussion above, I have drawn attention to the way in which the perpetrator/victim dichotomy has frequently functioned as a kind of litmus test for German views about the past, providing a focal point for public discourse which acts as a gauge against which changes in the landscape of Germany's memory culture may be measured. This focus on perpetrator/victim narratives and counter-narratives was both reflected in and promoted by literature in the period 1945 – 1990. In view of the continuing significance of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy for German memory discourse after 1990, it seems likely that the post-1990 memory contests which have focused on German guilt and German victimhood will have been reflected in German literature of the same period. In this thesis, I seek to examine whether the dramatic changes in the political, social and cultural landscape brought about by unification have altered German literary approaches to the Nazi past. In recognition of the importance of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in German memory culture generally and its role in German literature about the past in particular, I propose to explore this topic by using an analysis of the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in a selection of German literary texts

und Anwendungsperspektiven Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2005: 149 – 178 and Neumann, Birgit “Literarische Inszenierungen” op cit.

published after 1990 as a key to understanding German literary approaches to the past of this period. In my analysis, I will address the following questions:

- **Is there a discernible tendency in the way in which the literature of the post-1990 period portrays Germans involved in the Third Reich? Are they predominantly portrayed as perpetrators, victims, or some combination of the two?**
- **Is this portrayal a significant departure from the way in which they were previously depicted in German literature?**
- **Does the portrayal of Germans of the Nazi period as perpetrators or victims in literature of the post-1990 period mirror the memory contests played out in the public discourse of that period?**
- **Are there any differences in the ways in which authors of different generations approach the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in their writing?**

In view of the the nexus between literature, memory and identity in German culture, an exploration of these questions should not only illuminate the way in which Germans have approached the Nazi past in literature after 1990, but also provide a contribution to the ongoing debates about the extent the state of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* and the role of portrayals of Germans as perpetrators or victims in the formation of German collective memory and national identity.

3. Choice of texts

In order to address the questions I have posed, I will undertake a detailed textual analysis of the following four novels⁶⁶ published after 1990, with a focus on their portrayal of Germans as perpetrators and/or victims:

- ***Der Vorleser* by Bernhard Schlink;**
- ***Unscharfe Bilder* by Ulla Hahn;**
- ***Himmelskörper* by Tanja Dückers; and**
- ***Flughunde* by Marcel Beyer.**

The choice of these particular four novels has been determined by the following factors. The first is the level of public and critical attention that each of the novels and their authors has received in the public domain in Germany, a level of attention which itself suggests that literature forms an essential part of German debates about the past. *Der Vorleser* is without doubt the most widely known and read novel of this genre in the post-1990 period, not only in Germany, but also internationally. It has been translated into 51 languages, was turned into an Oscar-nominated film in 2008⁶⁷, and has featured in the German secondary school syllabus⁶⁸. Schlink has received a number of awards for the novel, including the Bundesverdienstkreuz 1. Klasse in 2003. The novel has also been remarkable for the longevity of its popularity, with interest in the book peaking several times. The original hardback edition

⁶⁶ The number of novels chosen for analysis has been dictated largely by constraints of thesis length.

⁶⁷ *The Reader*, director Stephen Daldry, writers David Hare and Bernhard Schlink, performers Kate Winslet, David Kross, Ralph Fiennes, produced The Weinstein Company, 9. Babelsberg Film, 2008.

⁶⁸ Mahlendorf, Ursula R "Trauma Narrated, Read and (Mis)understood: Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*" *Monatshefte* 95.3 (2003): 458 - 481 at 458 – 459.

reached number 17 in the *Spiegel* bestseller list in 1996, but it was not until the novel was chosen for Oprah's Book Club on 26 February 1999⁶⁹, followed by an appearance by Schlink on Oprah's talk show on 30 March 1999, that the novel achieved international fame, reaching number 1 on the *New York Times* bestseller list⁷⁰. The international attention reignited German interest in the novel, and *Der Vorleser* climbed to number 2 on the *Spiegel* bestseller list in 2000. The release of the film version of the novel in 2008 gave rise to another wave of popularity, with the book again reaching number 2 on both the *New York Times* and *Spiegel* bestseller lists⁷¹. *Der Vorleser* has therefore had the unusual distinction of being at the top of both German and international bestseller lists for over a decade.

Although not as well-known as *Der Vorleser*, the other three novels chosen for analysis have all sold well, and their authors are successful members of the German literary scene, indicating a capacity to influence thought on the relevant issues in German culture. Hahn, for example, was awarded the inaugural Deutscher Bücherpreis for her novel *Das verborgene Wort*⁷². Dückers publishes widely as a journalist and has gained attention as a significant member of the younger generation of authors, particularly in

⁶⁹ Oprah's Book Club <<http://www.oprah.com/oprahsbookclub/The-Reader-by-Bernhard-Schlink>> (accessed 11 April 2016).

⁷⁰ Heigenmoser, Manfred *Erläuterungen und Dokumente: Bernhard Schlink Der Vorleser* Stuttgart: Reclam, 2005 at 111 – 112.

⁷¹ See generally information from the publisher's website: Diogenes <http://diogenes.ch/leser/autoren/a-z/s/schlink_bernhard/biographie> (accessed 11 April 2016).

⁷² Hahn, Ulla *Das verborgene Wort* Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2010. See generally information from the publisher's website: Random House <http://www.randomhouse.de/Autor/Ulla_Hahn/p160006.rhd?mid=2#tabbox> (accessed 11 April 2016).

relation to the theme of the Nazi past⁷³. In 2006 she was named by the Deutsches Historisches Museum as one of the 10 most important writers under 40⁷⁴. Beyer has won numerous literary prizes for his work, including both the Kleist Preis and the Oskar Pastior Preis in 2014⁷⁵. An early version of *Flughunde* was accepted as a contender in the Bachmann-Wettbewerb in 1991⁷⁶. The popularity of these novels and the critical attention they have received indicate that these works have struck a chord with the public in terms of the way in which they deal with the Nazi past and can be regarded as representative of post-unification literary works which focus on *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*.

The second reason for the choice of these particular texts is that they have been written by representatives of two different generations. Born in 1944 and 1946 respectively, Schlink and Hahn are writers of the second generation, whereas Dückers (born 1968) and Beyer (born 1965) belong to the third. Writers of both of these generations have been claimed to have particular generationally-based attitudes towards the Nazi past in the period following 1990. It is often considered that authors of the second generation have broken with their previous attitude of harsh condemnation towards the perpetrator generation and that some of them have repented of their youthful rebellion and become more sympathetic towards their parents' suffering,

⁷³ Including in *Der Spiegel*: "Die Enkel wollen es wissen" and "Gesucht: die eigene Herkunft", both op cit.

⁷⁴ See author's own website: Dückers, Tanja <<http://www.tanjadueckers.de/preise/>> (accessed 11 April 2016).

⁷⁵ See generally information from the publisher's website: Suhrkamp <http://www.suhrkamp.de/autoren/marcel_beyer_369.html> (accessed 11 April 2016).

⁷⁶ Beyer, Marcel "Flughunde" in Felsbach, Heinz and Metelko, Siegbert *Klagenfurter Texte Ingeborg-Bachmann-Wettbewerb 1991* Munich: Piper, 1991: 40 - 47.

seeking to reconcile with them in their old age⁷⁷. This has been seen as leading to a tendency in literature to depict the first generation as victims, constituting a significant break with the perpetrator-focused portrayals typical of the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s. Of the third generation, it has been said that their distance in time from the events of the Third Reich and lower level of personal and emotional involvement with members of the first generation allows them to take a more balanced view of the past, enabling them to produce more nuanced perpetrator portrayals⁷⁸. Choosing authors from both generations for my analysis will allow me to ascertain whether there are differences in the approaches of these generations to the past and also to identify cross-generational patterns.

Thirdly, the publication dates of these four novels span the beginning and end of a period during which public discussion of the Nazi past in Germany swung between viewing Germans primarily as perpetrators and a concentration on Germans as victims. Around the time of publication of both *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* in 1995 there was a significant concentration in the public arena on Germans as perpetrators, sparked by events such as the opening of the

⁷⁷ Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf. Über die Konjunktur der Familien- und Generationenromane" *Mittelweg* 36 13.1 (2004): 53 - 64.

⁷⁸ Lensen, for example, sees "*nuance, objectivity, integration*" as the watchwords of third generation authors: Lensen, Jan "Perpetrators and Victims: Third-generation Perspectives on the Second World War in Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde* and Erwin Mortier's *Marcel*" *Comparative Literature* 65.4 (2013): 450 at 464 – 465. Ganeva surveys early responses to third generation authors writing about the past, in which they were described as having an "uninhibited", "easy-going" and "relaxed" attitude towards their family history: Ganeva, Mila op cit at 152. Dückers herself has commented that her generation is the first "*die einen nüchternen Blick auf dieses Thema wagen kann*" because, unlike earlier generations, they were not emotionally tied up in their own memories of the war or their generational conflict with their parents: Partouche, Rebecca "Der nüchterne Blick der Enkel: Wie begegnen junge Autoren der Kriegsgeneration? Ein Gespräch mit Tanja Dückers" *Die Zeit* 30 April 2003.

Verbrechen der Wehrmacht exhibition in 1995 and the Goldhagen debate of 1996. By around the time *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* were published in 2003, the pendulum appeared to have swung back in the other direction. The concentration on German suffering resulting from Allied bombings, flight and expulsion inspired by Friedrich's *Der Brand*, Sebald's *Luftkrieg und Literatur*, and Grass' *Im Krebsgang*, as well as the various *Spiegel* series and Knopp television productions at a more popular level had given rise to an impression that the image of Germans as victims had won the memory contest. Choosing texts from both ends of this period facilitates an analysis of whether portrayals of Third Reich Germans in literature have mirrored these changing positions in the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the wider public discourse about the past.

Finally, these four novels have been selected because they represent a range of literary approaches towards the theme of dealing with the Nazi past. For example, whereas *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* both focus their thematisation of the past on the relationship between first and second generation characters, the consideration of the Nazi past in *Himmelskörper* involves three generations and is set in the context of a broader coming of age story. *Flughunde* is significantly different from the other three novels, in that it is set primarily during the period of the Third Reich and related chiefly from a first generation perspective. Another difference in literary style between the novels can be seen in the open or closed nature of each text. Whereas *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* display a textual openness which allows for a higher degree of reader involvement in the creation of meaning in the text, both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* are relatively closed texts

in which reader response is significantly guided by literary features such as highly functionalised characters and overtly constructed conversations. Further differences between the novels will become apparent in the analyses which follow. The relative dissimilarity of the novels in terms of style and plot means that they are better suited to testing the emergence of broader patterns in the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in contemporary German literature. Similarities of portrayal in similar novels are to be expected. Such similarities in dissimilar novels, however, are of greater significance, in that they indicate that broader cultural influences are at play⁷⁹.

4. Postmemory and historiographic metafiction

Despite the differences in their thematic and artistic approach towards representing the Nazi past, all four novels do have this in common: they all reflect to some extent the postmemorial position of the authors. “Postmemory” is a term coined and developed by Marianne Hirsch⁸⁰ in the context of her work on the role of family photographs and other images in the memory of the Holocaust maintained by younger generations in the families of Holocaust survivors. Hirsch has defined postmemory in the following terms:

⁷⁹ This is the reason why, for example, I would not have chosen to analyse Beyer’s novel *Spione* (Beyer, Marcel *Spione* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2002) alongside Dückers’ *Himmelskörper*. The two novels are too similar in terms of plot and themes to provide a sufficient range (both deal with the attempts of grandchildren to uncover the truth about their family past).

⁸⁰ Hirsch, Marianne *Family Frames: Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997; Hirsch, Marianne “Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory” *Yale Journal of Criticism* 14.1 (2001): 5 - 37; Hirsch, Marianne *The Generation of Postmemory: Writing and Visual Culture After the Holocaust* New York: Columbia University Press, 2012.

"The term 'postmemory' is meant to convey its temporal and qualitative difference from survivor memory, its secondary, or second-generation memory quality, its basis in displacement, its vicariousness and belatedness. Postmemory is a powerful form of memory precisely because its connection to its object or source is mediated not through recollection, but through representation, projection and creation - often based on silence rather than speech, on the invisible rather than the visible."⁸¹

The descendants of Holocaust survivors have no first-hand memories of the events which have dominated their family narratives, but must form their own "postmemory" using "*imaginative investment and creation*"⁸². Postmemory is therefore a type of memory available in situations in which knowledge of the past is incomplete because of a traumatic rupture in the transmission of memory, the death of eyewitnesses, loss of records, or the erasure of memorial landscapes. Left with fragments from the past, later generations must combine these remains with their own imagination to create a memorial narrative. This becomes the "postmemory" of children and grandchildren who have grown up dominated by narratives of a trauma that preceded their birth⁸³. Although Hirsch developed the idea of postmemory in the context of the families of Holocaust survivors, she has suggested that the concept may have a broader application "*to other second-generation memories of cultural or collective traumatic events and experiences*"⁸⁴, including those of the

⁸¹ Hirsch, Marianne "Surviving Images" *ibid* at 9.

⁸² Hirsch, Marianne *Family Frames* *op cit* at 22.

⁸³ Hirsch, Marianne "Surviving Images" *op cit* at 12.

⁸⁴ Hirsch, Marianne *Family Frames* *op cit* at 22.

perpetrators⁸⁵. The term has often been used in the context of German novels dealing with the Nazi past⁸⁶, and Hirsch has herself explored its application to German perpetrator memory⁸⁷. Because the concept of postmemory highlights the fragmentary nature of sources of information about the past and the impact of present perspectives and identity concerns on the creation of historical narratives, it has the potential to destabilise ideas about the existence of historical “truth” and the basis on which guilt may be attributed. The concept of postmemory is, to a greater or lesser extent, an underlying theme in all of the novels selected for examination in this thesis, as will be identified at various points in the following analysis.

These ideas about postmemorial constructions of the past can be seen as part of a more fundamental critique of the way in which we construct historical narratives, a critique which is reflected and thematised in the novels analysed here and which raises additional uncertainty about ever ascertaining the “objective truth” about the past and the people who played a part in it. The type of historiographical critique reflected in these novels is most commonly associated with Hayden White. In his major work of 1973, *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe*⁸⁸, White analysed the narrative techniques used by nineteenth century historians and concluded that, by transforming their source material into coherent histories, historians make use of literary narrative patterns, imposing their narrative forms, or emplotments and tropes, onto the facts, thereby investing the facts with

⁸⁵ Hirsch, Marianne “Surviving Images” op cit at 9; 11 – 12.

⁸⁶ Various examples will be cited in the analyses of the novels considered in this thesis.

⁸⁷ Hirsch, Marianne *The Generation of Postmemory* op cit at 41.

⁸⁸ White, Hayden *Metahistory: The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth Century Europe* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

meaning. For White, histories are fictional constructs and all history writing is contingent on the narrative form chosen and events selected by the historian. History can therefore not justify its claim to present historical facts objectively. Taken to its extreme (which White does), there is no difference between history and fiction: “*history is no less a form of fiction than the novel is a form of historical representation*”⁸⁹.

White’s views are not uncontested, particularly when it comes to his equation of history with fiction⁹⁰, however, they have been highly influential, and this influence has been felt, not only in the field of history, but also in that of literature. Novels which thematise critiques of historiography have been

⁸⁹ White, Hayden *Tropics of Discourse: Essays in Cultural Criticism* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1978 at 122. For an overview of White’s views, see for example Nünning, Ansgar “Verbal Fictions? Kritische Überlegungen und narratologische Alternativen zu Hayden Whites Einebnung des Gegensatzes zwischen Historiographie und Literatur” *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch* 40 (1999): 351 - 380 at 354 - 363; Thompson, Willie *Postmodernism and History* Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004 at 58 – 62; Kansteiner, Wulff “Gefühlte Wahrheit und ästhetischer Relativismus: Über die Annäherung von Holocaust-Geschichtsschreibung und Geschichtstheorie” in Frei, Norbert *Den Holocaust erzählen: Historiographie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Empirie und narrativer Kreativität*“ Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013: 12 - 50 at 12 – 18; Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion: Band I – Theorie, Typologie und Poetik des historischen Romans* Trier: WVT Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 1995 at 136 – 140; Doran, Robert “Introduction” in White, Hayden *The Fiction of Narrative: Essays on History, Literature, and Theory 1957 – 2007* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010: xiii - xxxii; Engler, Bernd “The Dismemberment of Clio: Fictionality, Narrativity, and the Construction of Historical Reality in Historiographic Metafiction” in Engler, Bernd and Müller, Kurt *Historiographic metafiction in modern American and Canadian literature* Paderborn: F Schöningh, 1994: 13 – 33.

⁹⁰ See for example Nünning, Ansgar “Verbal Fictions?” *ibid* at 364 - 377; Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* *ibid* at 141 – 152; Neumann Birgit “Der Beruf der Geschichtstheorie und die Zukunft der Zeitgeschichte” in Frei, Norbert *Den Holocaust erzählen: Historiographie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Empirie und narrativer Kreativität*“ Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013: 206 - 212 at 206 – 210 (as part of a podium discussion).

commonly categorised as “historiographic metafiction”. The term “historiographic metafiction” itself was initially developed by Linda Hutcheon in her work on a poetics of postmodernism⁹¹. Hutcheon describes historiographic metafiction as comprising postmodern novels which internalise the challenges to historiography found in the work of White and others. These novels address historical material with a high degree of metafictional self-reflexivity combined with the exploration of historiographical critiques. Whilst acknowledging the reality of the past, historiographic metafiction emphasises that it is not accessible to us directly, but via texts. It does this by playing on the truth and lies of the historical record, using its metafictional self-reflexivity to foreground attempts to make narrative order out of a collection of historical facts. This type of fiction also utilises modes of narration which problematise the idea of subjectivity in the historical narrative, such as multiple points of view or an overtly controlling narrator⁹².

Whereas Hutcheon has tended to use the terms “historiographic metafiction” and “postmodern literature” interchangeably, Ansgar Nünning has rejected the idea that historiographic metafiction is identical with postmodernism and has called for a more detailed typological differentiation of historiographic metafiction⁹³. In his detailed study of the typology of contemporary historical

⁹¹ Hutcheon, Linda “Beginning to theorize postmodernism” *Textual Practice* 1 (1987): 10 - 31; Hutcheon, Linda *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* London: Routledge, 1988.

⁹² Hutcheon, Linda *A Poetics of Postmodernism* *ibid* at 105 – 123; Hutcheon, Linda *The Politics of Postmodernism (2nd edition)* London: Routledge, 2002 at 59 – 88.

⁹³ Nünning has also criticised the term “historiographic metafiction”, preferring instead terms such as “fictional metahistory”, “metahistoriographic fiction” or “fictional metahistoriography” because they emphasise the fact that the works use fictional techniques to thematise questions of history (or metahistory or metahistoriography) theory. However, in view of the widespread use of the

novels, Nünning has identified the following five types of historical novel: the documentary historical novel, the realistic historical novel, the revisionist historical novel, the metahistorical novel, and historiographic metafiction⁹⁴. He sees these five novel types as lying on a sliding scale between two poles. The first of these is represented by novels which can be described as fictionalised history, in which verifiable historical events are the dominant text-external point of reference and non-fiction text types are the dominant source of intertextual references. This type of novel usually concentrates on past events without drawing particular attention to the narrative process. At the other end of the scale are historical novels which display a dominance of fictional and metafictional elements. These novels clearly mark their fictionality through self-reflexive elements, tend to draw on historiography and history theory as their main sources of text external references, and often have a high degree of explicit reference to the narrative medium⁹⁵. Historiographic metafiction combines a high degree of fictional self-reflexivity with an explicit consideration of historiographical questions. The accent in this type of historical novel is moved from the portrayal of history to the

term “historiographic metafiction”, Nünning has continued to use it in his work: Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* op cit at 282 – 287. Nünning has provided several more concise versions of the theories detailed in *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* in Nünning, Ansgar “Von der fiktionalisierten Historie zur metahistoriographischen Fiktion: Bausteine für eine narratologische und funktionsgeschichtliche Theorie, Typologie und Geschichte des postmodernen historischen Romans” in Fulda, Daniel and Tschopp, Silvia Serena *Literatur und Geschichte: Ein Kompendium zu ihrem Verhältnis von der Aufklärung bis zur Gegenwart* Berlin: de Gruyter, 2002: 541 – 569 and Nünning, Ansgar “Beyond the Great Story” op cit.

⁹⁴ Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* ibid at 257.

⁹⁵ Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* ibid at 256.

reconstruction of historical connections and the thematisation of problems of history theory, including problems associated with the narrative representation of the past⁹⁶. Historiographic metafiction considers questions of the reconstruction, interpretation and depiction of history, with these themes being either explicitly explored by a character or narrator or applied in the narrative through the structure of the novel⁹⁷. As with the thematisation of postmemory, the exploration of criticisms of historiography characteristic of historiographic metafiction has the potential to unsettle depictions of Germans as perpetrators or victims in novels of that genre dealing with the Nazi past by questioning our ability to know the whole “truth” about that past. In the following analysis, I will argue that *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper*, and *Flughunde* may be read as historiographic metafiction. I will demonstrate that these novels use a variety of metafictional techniques to thematise the narrativity of history identified in the historiographical critique associated with White and will examine the effect such a thematisation has on the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in these texts.

While the concept of postmemory has been applied to the analysis of these and similar novels⁹⁸, there has been little discussion of the use of the concept of historiographic metafiction to analyse these types of novels. Hutcheon and Nünning have both explored their theories about historiographic metafiction

⁹⁶ Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* ibid at 282.

⁹⁷ Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* ibid at 287.

⁹⁸ The secondary literature in this regard will be further cited in the following chapters, but see for example Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* op cit at 45; Ganeva, Mila op cit; Anton, Christine “Historiography and Memory Politics: The Cultural-Historical Discourse in the Works of Bernhard Schlink” in Anton, Christine and Pilipp, Frank *Beyond Political Correctness: Remapping German Sensibilities in the 21st Century* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010: 51 - 83.

with reference to English language works, but detailed studies applying these ideas to German novels dealing with the Nazi past are lacking. Torben Fischer, Philipp Hammermeister and Sven Kramer refer to Nünning's work on English language historical novels and note that many of the German language texts analysed in their essay collection could be described as metahistoriographical and metafictional⁹⁹, however, the individual contributions contained in this collective volume do not pick up this idea in any level of detail. Meike Herrmann looks at the concept of historiographic metafiction in the introduction to her broad survey of German novels dealing with the Nazi past in the post-1990 period¹⁰⁰, but does not go very far in applying this concept to the large number of novels analysed in her work. Richard T Gray mentions the concept of metahistory in connection with German "holocaust fiction", but looks at its effect on holocaust fiction of the "documentary fiction" genre¹⁰¹ and Friederike Eigler refers to the relationship between contemporary *Generationenromane* and historiographic metafiction, but it does not play any significant role in her analysis of such novels¹⁰². A consideration of the effect of structuring a novel as historiographic metafiction

⁹⁹ Fischer, Torben, Hammermeister, Philip and Kramer, Sven "Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Literatur des ersten Jahrzehnts: Zur Einführung" in Fischer, Torben, Hammermeister, Philipp and Kramer, Sven *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014: 9 - 25 at 16.

¹⁰⁰ Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenheit: Erzählen vom Nationalsozialismus in der deutschen Literatur seit den neunziger Jahren* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010 at 83 – 86.

¹⁰¹ Gray, Richard T „Fabulation and Metahistory: WG Sebald and Contemporary German Holocaust Fiction“ in Zeller, Christoph *Literarische Experimente: Medien, Kunst, Texte seit 1950* Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2012: 271 - 301.

¹⁰² Eigler, Friederike *Gedächtnis und Geschichte in Generationenromanen seit der Wende* Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag 2005 at 61- 62. Eigler's analysis focuses on concepts of memory in contemporary *Generationenromane*.

on the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims, including in relation to the particular novels analysed in this thesis, remains outstanding¹⁰³.

Given the high level of attention the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators and/or victims in German literature has received, this omission is somewhat surprising. The main feature of historiographic metafiction is that it frequently thematises critiques of history suggesting that the past cannot be known objectively. It emphasises the unreliability of memory and the importance of the motivation of narrators when they retell a story from the past.

Historiographic metafiction tends to depict narratives about the past as being subjective, constructed and unreliable and poses fundamental questions about the possibility of knowing the objective “truth” about history, thus undermining the basis on which we can judge someone’s guilt or innocence.

The implication that we cannot know what truly happened in the past or reliably ascertain a character’s motivations has the potential to significantly affect the reader’s perception of whether a particular character is being portrayed as a perpetrator or a victim, and can also create tension for the author’s intentions regarding the depiction of Germans as perpetrators/victims, as shown in the numerous debates and controversies regarding the perpetrator/victim characterisation in these novels.

The level of controversy arising in response to some of these novels also highlights the problems arising in the application of these historiographical

¹⁰³ In relation to *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, the concept does not appear to have been discussed at all. As regards the brief references to the concept in relation to *Himmelskörper*, see page 193 of this thesis; in relation to *Flughunde*, see pages 303 - 304.

critiques to the history of the Holocaust and to Holocaust literature¹⁰⁴.

Holocaust literature has frequently been seen as “*scandalous*”, due to a concern that “*to write Holocaust fictions is tantamount to making a fiction of the Holocaust*”¹⁰⁵ and reservations as to the ability to represent an event as horrific as the Holocaust in aesthetic form¹⁰⁶. In addition, there is an inherent tension between the tendency of novels to encourage identification and the

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of such difficulties, see the reports of symposia in Los Angeles in 1990 and Jena in 2011 which dealt amongst other things with the impact of White’s theses on the representation of the Holocaust and which both included contributions from White himself: Friedlander, Saul *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992; Frei, Norbert *Den Holocaust erzählen: Historiographie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Empirie und narrativer Kreativität* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013. However, despite the identification of these problems in relation to Holocaust historiography, the implications of the presence of such ideas in historiographic metafiction with Holocaust-related subject matter has not been explored in the case of German language works.

¹⁰⁵ Vice, Sue *Holocaust Fiction* London: Routledge, 2000 at 1. Sicher provides a useful overview of the various controversies concerning Holocaust novels in Sicher, Efraim *The Holocaust Novel* New York: Routledge, 2005 at ix – xxiii. McGlothlin also provides a good overview of the Holocaust representation debate in McGlothlin, Erin “Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink’s *The Reader* and Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow*” in Spargo, R Clifton and Ehrenreich, Robert M *After Representation? The Holocaust, Literature and Culture* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2009: 210 - 230 at 210 – 214.

¹⁰⁶ For a discussion of the discourse on the unrepresentability of the Holocaust, see Fulda, Daniel “Ein unmögliches Buch? Christopher Brownings *Remembering Survival* und die Aporie von Auschwitz” in Frei, Norbert *Den Holocaust erzählen: Historiographie zwischen wissenschaftlicher Empirie und narrativer Kreativität* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2013: 126 – 150. See also Vice, who deals with Adorno’s famous dictum about writing after Auschwitz, Lanzmann’s preference for “direct” representation via eyewitness testimony, and Wiesel’s claim that the Holocaust as a literary inspiration is a contradiction in terms: Vice, Sue *ibid* at 4 - 5. See further Eaglestone, Robert *The Holocaust and the Postmodern* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004 at 16 – 19; Schlant, Ernestine *op cit* at 7 – 11; Gray, Richard T *op cit* at 274 – 282. Wiesel has summed up the view that it is not possible to represent the Holocaust in fictional form in his declaration that “*A novel about Treblinka is either not a novel or not about Treblinka*”: Wiesel, Elie “The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration” in Wiesel, Elie *Dimensions of the Holocaust: Lectures at Northwestern University by Elie Wiesel, Lucy S Dawidowicz, Dorothy Rabinowitz, Robert McAfee Brown* Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1977: 5 - 19 at 7.

position that only those who lived through the Holocaust can understand it, a position which resists identification by others¹⁰⁷. All of these arguments come down to the perceived importance of authority and authenticity in the context of Holocaust narratives. There is a concern to establish the veracity of even fictional accounts of the Holocaust, and in general a much higher level of concern about providing an authentic portrayal of the facts than is usual for historical fiction¹⁰⁸. Given this emphasis on authenticity and truth, the potential for friction in historiographic metafiction attempting to combine a Holocaust thematic with reflections on metahistorical theories which emphasise the inability of any narrative to convey the “truth” is obvious¹⁰⁹. Whether the novels analysed in this thesis can be categorised as “Holocaust fiction” is a moot point¹¹⁰, however, the fact that they do all in some way touch on the Holocaust and other German crimes goes a long way to explaining the sensitivity associated with the portrayal of Germans a perpetrators or victims in these novels and the way in which this is impacted by the status of the novels as historiographic metafiction.

¹⁰⁷ Eaglestone, Robert *ibid* at 132. On the flipside, McGlothlin has discussed the problems posed by the possibility of identification with Holocaust perpetrators in literature and the effect that this has had on perpetrator portrayal: McGlothlin, Erin “Theorizing the Perpetrator” *op cit* at 213 – 214.

¹⁰⁸ Vice, Sue *op cit* at 3 – 4.

¹⁰⁹ As Friedlander has commented with regard to the relation between various postmodern ideas and Holocaust discourse, “*the equivocation of postmodernism concerning ‘reality’ and ‘truth’ – that is, ultimately, its fundamental relativism – confronts any discourse about Nazism and the Shoah with considerable difficulties*”: Friedlander, Saul “Introduction” in Friedlander, Saul *Probing the Limits of Representation: Nazism and the Final Solution* Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992: 1 - 21 at 20. It is also the case that such reflections bring criticism of Holocaust fiction full circle, in that they put forward the idea that the Holocaust may indeed be unrepresentable after all.

¹¹⁰ As can be seen in relation to the debate about the classification of *Der Vorleser* as a “Holocaust novel”: see pages 49 - 50 of this thesis.

Due to the potential impact of these ideas on the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators and/or victims in the novels studied, as well as the limited amount of discussion of historiographic metafiction in this context, I consider it important that the questions for investigation posed earlier be augmented by the following further queries:

- **Reading these texts as historiographic metafiction, how are the ideas raised by critiques of historiography such as White's represented in these novels?**
- **What effect does a reading of these texts as historiographic metafiction have on the portrayals of Germans as perpetrators/victims in the novels?**

I will now proceed to examine the questions posed in this Introduction by analysing each of *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper*, and *Flughunde* in turn before drawing some final conclusions.

II. BERNHARD SCHLINK – *DER VORLESER*

1. Introduction

Of all the post-1990 literary works dealing with the theme of Germany's Nazi past, Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* has attracted by far the most domestic and international attention. The novel which has been the focus of this worldwide interest tells the tale of the legal historian Michael Berg and his relationship with Hanna Schmitz. The novel is in the form of a first-person retrospective narrative told from the point of view of Michael, who is looking back on the events related from a narrative present which coincides approximately with the time of publication of the novel¹¹¹. Michael first meets the much older Hanna by chance when he is 15 years old. She initiates a sexual relationship with him which is characterised by a ritual in which Michael reads aloud to her. The relationship ends abruptly when Hanna leaves town without explanation. Michael next sees Hanna some years later when he is a law student watching the proceedings of one of the trials following on from the main Frankfurt Auschwitz trial of 1963 – 1965 as part of his studies and Hanna is in the dock accused of committing crimes against humanity whilst working as an SS guard during the Second World War. At the conclusion of the trial, Hanna is sentenced to a lengthy prison term. During the course of the trial, Michael realises that Hanna is illiterate. He subsequently sends her

¹¹¹ The chronology established within the narrative indicates that the time of narration is around the early – mid 1990s. During Hanna's trial, the information as to her date of birth and her age at the time of trial place the trial date at 1965 (DV 91), which would fit in with the date of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. Hanna then remains in prison for 18 years until around 1983 (DV 175), and Michael describes Hanna's death as being 10 years prior to the time of writing (DV 205).

tapes of himself reading literary classics aloud. With the help of the tapes, Hanna teaches herself to read in prison. However, Michael does not visit Hanna until she is about to be released, after which Hanna commits suicide. In her suicide note, she asks Michael to deliver some money to a survivor of the concentration camp where she had been an SS guard, a commission Michael travels to New York to carry out.

Der Vorleser has given rise to considerable controversy. There has been both high praise for the novel (“a masterly work”¹¹², “Was für ein Glück, dass dieses Buch geschrieben wurde!”¹¹³) as well as unveiled derision (“postmodern pap”, “cultural pornography”¹¹⁴, “Holo-Kitsch”¹¹⁵). So extensive has critical discussion of *Der Vorleser* been that the novel’s reception has been the subject of academic analysis considering the various “waves” of criticism of the novel¹¹⁶. The scholarship on *Der Vorleser* has been divided on such matters as the literary quality of the book and its success or otherwise in

¹¹² Steiner, George “He was only a boy but he was good in bed. Well, good at reading anyway” *The Observer* 2 November 1997.

¹¹³ Moritz, Rainer “Die Liebe zur Aufseherin” *Die Weltwoche* 23 November 1995.

¹¹⁴ Adler, Jeremy, “Bernhard Schlink and The Reader” *The Times Literary Supplement* 22 March 2002. This letter was one of several written in response to Kathleen Bogan’s review of the English translation of Schlink’s short story collection *Liebesfluchten* (“Pressure of peace” *The Times Literary Supplement* 15 February 2002), all of which were scathing in their views on *Der Vorleser*. The other letters were written by Frederic Raphael (8 March 2002), Graham Chainey (15 March 2002) and Gabriel Josipovici (15 March 2002).

¹¹⁵ Winkler, Willi “Vorlesen, duschen, durcharbeiten” *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 30 March 2002. Winkler’s article continued the critical English discussion of *Der Vorleser* in the German-language feuilletons.

¹¹⁶ Hall, Katharina “Text Crimes in the Shadow of the Holocaust: The Case of Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser*/The Reader” in Cheesman, Tom *German Text Crimes: Writers Accused from the 1950s to the 2000s* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2013: 193 – 208; Brazaitis, Kristina “On Re-reading The Reader: an exercise in ambiguity” *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language Association* 95 (2001): 75 - 96; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 110 – 111.

dealing with the Holocaust thematic, and differences in the reception of the novel in Germany and in Anglo-American cultures have been identified. However, the greatest degree of controversy has concerned the question of whether Hanna is portrayed in the novel as a victim or a perpetrator (or both). In the first part of this chapter, I will analyse the text of the novel in order to take a position in this debate, and my conclusions will also contribute towards providing an answer to the questions posed at the beginning of this thesis regarding the portrayal of Germans of the Nazi period in post-1990 German literature. Following on from this analysis of the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the novel, I will consider the effect that reading the novel as historiographic metafiction has on the portrayal of Hanna and explore whether the elements of historiographic metafiction in the novel destabilise this portrayal in such a way as to account for the polarity apparent in the novel's reception.

2. Perpetrator or victim?

2.1 Review of secondary literature

Der Vorleser has attracted a considerable amount of criticism from those who allege that it portrays the Holocaust perpetrator Hanna Schmitz as a victim. William Collins Donahue in particular has been highly critical of the novel for approaching Hanna from a position of empathy, not examining her crimes against humanity in sufficient detail, and using Hanna's illiteracy to render her a victim in such a way as to push the actual victims of the Holocaust into the background¹¹⁷. This view that Hanna's victimhood tends to obscure the

¹¹⁷ Donahue, William Collins "Illusions of Subtlety: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* and the Moral Limits of Holocaust Fiction" *German Life and Letters*

suffering of Holocaust victims is shared by a number of commentators¹¹⁸, with Frederic Raphael seeing the novel as a whitewash on a level with Nazi apologists and historical revisionists¹¹⁹ and Moritz Baßler accusing Schlink of being *walsernd* in his attempts to dispense with a politically correct approach to the Nazi past¹²⁰. Some have also seen the portrayal of Hanna as a victim as an indication of a shift in German memory culture¹²¹ and Harald Welzer sees the novel as marking a significant break with the accusatory approach previously taken by the second generation towards Nazi perpetrators¹²². However, others argue that Hanna is an agent who has control over her

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

¹¹⁸ Hall, Katharina "The Author, The Novel, The Reader and the Perils of Neue Lesbarkeit: A Comparative Analysis of Bernhard Schlink's *Selbs Justiz* and *Der Vorleser*" *German Life and Letters* 59.3 (2006): 446 - 467 at 463 – 464; Sansom, Ian "Doubts about The Reader" *Salmagundi* 124-125 (1999-2000): 3 - 16 at 9 - 12; Moschytz-Ledgley, Miriam *Trauma, Scham und Selbstmitleid. Vererbtes Trauma in Bernhard Schlinks Roman Der Vorleser* Marburg: Tectum Verlag, 2009 at 72 – 73.

¹¹⁹ Raphael, Frederic "Judge not?" *Prospect*, March 1998 at 33.

¹²⁰ Baßler, Moritz *Der deutsche Pop-Roman. Die neuen Archivisten* Munich: CH Beck, 2002 at 71.

¹²¹ Schödel, Kathrin "Jenseits der political correctness – NS Vergangenheit in Bernhard Schlink *Der Vorleser* und Martin Walser *Ein springender Brunnen*" in Parkes, Stuart and Wefelmeyer, Fritz *Seelenarbeit an Deutschland. Martin Walser in Perspective* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2004: 307 - 322 at 314. Crownshaw also sees the novel as a shift, but in the sense that it attempts to overcome the binarism in German cultural memory: Crownshaw, Rick "Rereading *Der Vorleser*, Remembering the Perpetrator" in Taberner, Stuart and Berger, Karina *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic* Rochester: Camden House, 2009: 147 - 161.

¹²² Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" op cit at 55.

response to her illiteracy and question her characterisation as a victim. Jeffrey Roth, for example, considers that it was Hanna's choice to remain illiterate, and Daniel Reynolds similarly contends that the novel portrays Hanna as an agent who makes choices for which she is accountable, as does Stephen Brockmann, who holds that Hanna is largely responsible for the situation in which she finds herself¹²³. Bill Niven also rejects the idea that the novel forms part of the "Germans as victims" trend in the post-1990 period¹²⁴, arguing that, although Hanna is accorded victim status by Michael, the text shows that she is accountable for her responses to her illiteracy¹²⁵. The arguments of these critics suggest that Hanna's illiteracy does not render her innocent of her crimes, meaning that she remains a perpetrator.

The variety and polarity apparent in the interpretation of *Der Vorleser* suggest that it is a very open text, something I will explore further in the following analysis of the portrayal of Hanna and the effect of reading the novel as historiographic metafiction. The novel contains many gaps to be filled in by the reader, which further suggests that interpretation of the text has been significantly influenced by reader response, in this case leading to a

¹²³ Roth, Jeffrey I "Reading and misreading The Reader" *Law and Literature* 16.2 (2004): 163 - 176, particularly at 170 – 171; Reynolds, Daniel "A Portrait of Misreading: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*" *Seminar* 39.3 (2003): 238 - 256 at 244; Brockmann, Stephen "Virgin Father and Prodigal Son" *Philosophy and Literature* 27.2 (2003): 341 - 362 at 358.

¹²⁴ Niven, Bill "Representations of the Nazi past I: perpetrators" in Taberner, Stuart *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007: 125 - 141 at 136.

¹²⁵ Niven, Bill "Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* and the Problem of Shame" *Modern Language Review* 98.2 (2003): 381 - 396, particularly at 382 – 387; see also Niven, Bill "Intertextual References in Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*" in Rasche, Hermann and Schönfeld, Christiane *Denkbilder: Festschrift für Eoin Burke Würzburg*: Königshausen & Neumann, 2004: 277 - 285 at 278 - 279.

divergence in conclusions about the novel and its portrayal of Hanna¹²⁶. The influence of reader response on the reception of the novel can be seen in the variation in its interpretation by particular groups of readers. For example, it has been suggested that the interpretation of the Hanna/Michael relationship in what Schlink has identified as a typically “American” reading of his novel has been influenced by the higher degree of sensitivity to the topic of sexual and emotional abuse in US society¹²⁷. Similarly, much of the negative criticism of the portrayal of Hanna in Germany arose some years after publication of the novel, indicating that it may have been influenced by an increased German sensitivity to the portrayal of “Germans as victims” as a result of high media interest in this topic at that later time¹²⁸. Interpretation of the novel has also been affected by the assignment of the novel to the genre of “Holocaust literature” by some readers, who then criticise it for not adhering to principles arising out of that discourse, particularly the need to authentically

¹²⁶ Anton also discusses the role of reader response in producing the text of *Der Vorleser* and the implications for the polarity of the novel’s reception: Anton, Christine op cit at 72. In relation to reader response theory generally, see Tyson, Lois *Critical Theory Today: A User-Friendly Guide* New York: Routledge, 2006 at 169 - 207; Iser, Wolfgang *How To Do Theory* Maldon: Blackwell Publishing, 2006 at 57 – 69; Iser, Wolfgang *The Implied Reader* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974; Tompkins, Jane *Reader-Response Criticism: From Formalism to Post-Structuralism* Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986. Schlink also discusses the importance of reader response in his essay “Literatur als Institution”: “*Entsprechend erschliesst dann auch jede Interpretation nicht nur das Werk und nicht nur den Autor, sondern auch den Interpreten*” (Schlink, Bernhard *Vergewisserungen: Über Politik, Recht, Schreiben und Glauben* Zurich: Diogenes, 2005 at 308).

¹²⁷ Krause, Tilman “Gegen die Verlorenheit an sich selbst” *Die Welt* 3 April 1999.

¹²⁸ See for example the articles by Winkler and Welzer already cited, which were published in the early 2000s, at a time when the “Germans as victims” discourse reached its zenith.

describe Holocaust crimes and to place the suffering of Holocaust victims at the centre of the narrative¹²⁹.

Across the manifestly broad range of interpretations of *Der Vorleser* put forward in the secondary literature, it is apparent that the focal point of disagreement among scholars is the question of whether Hanna is portrayed as a perpetrator or a victim, a question which is central to the matters put forward for discussion in this thesis. In the following, I will look first at whether allegations that the novel portrays Hanna as a victim can be justified, before turning to consider the novel's portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator.

2.2 Hanna as a victim? – the justice system

One of the main features of *Der Vorleser* which has lead critics to conclude that the novel portrays Hanna as a victim is Michael's depiction of Hanna as a victim of the justice system. Michael's narrative of Hanna's trial contains repeated suggestions that Hanna has been a victim of legal incompetence, of

¹²⁹ For example, both Donahue and Bartov have criticised Schlink for evading specific mention of Holocaust crimes and avoiding Jewish suffering: Donahue, William Collins "Revising '68" op cit at 294 – 295; Bartov, Omer "Germany as Victim" *New German Critique* 80 (2000): 29 - 40 at 33. Herrmann has also noted the effect of both "Holocaust literature" and "Germans as victims" discourse on the reception of the novel: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 110. Schlink has rejected the categorisation of his novel as "Holocaust fiction" (Kilb, Andreas "Herr Schlink, ist Der Vorleser Geschichte?" *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 20 February 2009; Davis, Susan "An Interview with Bernhard Schlink" *Cardozo Life* Fall 2009 <http://www.cardozo.yu.edu/life/2009_fall/interview/index.html> (accessed 11 April 2016)), and others have also pointed out that the novel is not so much about the Holocaust as about generational conflict and the emotional and other problems of dealing with the past in postwar Germany: Herrman, Meike *Vergangenwart* ibid at 122 – 123; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 56 – 57. Miller thinks that the novel constitutes "Holocaust fiction" despite the fact that it does not concern itself with the details of the Holocaust, but with the difficulties of comprehending it for subsequent generations: Miller, Sally "Fantasy, Empathy, and Desire: Benjamin Wilkomirski's Fragments and Bernhard Schlink's The Reader" *Modernism/modernity* 20.1 (2013): 45 - 58 at 53.

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

personnel continuities in the West German justice system from the Nazi to the postwar period, as “*alte Nazis*” whose “*nationalsozialistischen Tiraden*” (DV 92) damaged their clients’ cases just as surely as the ineptitude of Hanna’s younger lawyer damaged hers¹³⁰. In addition, Hanna herself is largely responsible for any disadvantage she suffers in the court proceedings. She makes things difficult for her defence lawyer by refusing to confide in him (DV 106), and even if he had asked her questions in court designed to reveal her “humanitarian” motives for her “selections”, there is no indication that she would have made the responses Michael wishes for her (DV 113). On the contrary, the account of the court proceedings indicates that it is rather more likely that Hanna would have failed to respond at all, either because she did not understand what she was supposed to have done wrong, or because it would necessarily involve exposure of her illiteracy. Hanna has the power to alleviate her own disadvantage, but chooses not to do so.

Similarly, the presiding judge’s “irritation” is caused largely by an inability to understand why Hanna has difficulty with certain aspects of the proceedings which would be simple matters if Hanna were literate, such as making objections to the charges prior to trial or reading the account of one of the survivors of the fire (DV 104). It is entirely conceivable that, had the judge known Hanna was illiterate, his attitude may have been entirely different, and he certainly could not have given Hanna a higher sentence than her co-

¹³⁰ These personnel continuities in the justice system are also a repeatedly pointed out in the *Selb* trilogy, in which they are similarly criticised in negative terms: Schlink, Bernhard & Popp, *Walter Selbs Justiz* Zurich: Diogenes, 1987 at 147; 268 – 269; 298; Schlink, Bernhard *Selbs Betrug* Zurich: Diogenes, 1988 at 162 – 163; Schlink, Bernhard *Selbs Mord* Zurich: Diogenes, 2003 at 171. Schlink also criticises the way in which the legal profession dealt with its Nazi past in the short story “Johann Sebastian Bach auf Rügen”: Schlink, Bernhard *Sommerlügen* Zurich: Diogenes, 2012 at 222 – 223.

accused for writing the report on the church fire. The fact that he was not equipped with this information is largely Hanna's fault, meaning that her disadvantage before the judge is self-inflicted¹³¹. This point is emphasised during the trial when the judge gives Hanna every opportunity to explain her actions on the night of the church fire in a way which would make her appear less culpable. He asks her whether she had been afraid that she would be overpowered by the prisoners, or whether she failed to flee the situation because she was afraid of being imprisoned or shot (DV 122), but Hanna does not take up any of these opportunities to mitigate her guilt. In the same way, when Michael visits the judge in chambers, the judge gives him every opportunity to explain Hanna's conduct by revealing her illiteracy. The judge is described as being "*entspannt*" when out of the courtroom, with "*ein nettes, intelligentes, harmloses Beamtengesicht*". He is happy to talk to Michael and happy to see him again if he would like to talk further (DV 154 – 155). Given his failure to raise Hanna's illiteracy with the judge under these circumstances, Michael's motivation in suggesting that Hanna is a victim of the legal system could be understood as deriving from a desire to divert attention away from his own involvement in the severity of her sentence.

Likewise, Michael's suggestions that Hanna has been the victim of the machinations of her co-accused during the trial tend to gloss over any details which might tarnish the image he is trying to present, including matters such as Hanna's responsibility for the predicament in which she finds herself and his own role in this state of affairs. In his account of the trial, Michael uses

¹³¹ Tebben makes the same point: Tebben, Karin "Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser. Zur ästhetischen Dimension rechtphilosophischer Fragestellungen" *Euphorion* 104.4 (2010): 455 - 474 at 462.

negative comparisons between Hanna and her co-accused in order to present Hanna in a positive light. Compared with her co-accused, Hanna appears a pitiful, lonely figure who sits silently in her seat during court recess while her co-accused meet with friends and relatives (DV 95). The physical description of the co-accused is uniformly unflattering. One of them is described as “*eine derbe Frau, nicht ohne gluckenhafte Behändigkeit und zugleich mit gehässigem Mundwerk*“ (DV 111; 121). As a group, they are depicted as “*sichtbar älter, müder, feiger und bitterer*“ (DV 130 – 131) than Hanna, who is described as “*jung, schön*“ (DV 115), and later as “*die eine, die ganz passabel aussah*“ (DV 169). Michael also contrasts Hanna’s honesty (DV 105; 109; 131) with the attempts of her co-accused to lie in order to avoid any implication of guilt. Where Hanna admits to her actions on the night of the fire, in which prisoners guarded by Hanna and others were burned alive when locked inside a church which was hit by a bomb, her co-accused try to deny the charges against them altogether by asserting that they were not in a position to open the church (DV 119). They also accuse Hanna of writing a false account in the damning SS report (DV 120 – 121), an accusation the reader knows is a deliberate lie once Hanna’s illiteracy is revealed¹³². This positive presentation of Hanna garners sympathy for her, and although it should be remembered that having sympathy with someone is not quite the same thing as delivering a “not guilty“ verdict, the sympathy for Hanna created

¹³² Donahue, Hall and Anton have compared Schlink’s use of this technique of negative comparison between his protagonist and other Nazi perpetrators here with a similar application of it in his detective novel, *Selbs Justiz*, in which the protagonist, Gerhard Selb is portrayed as being neither as evil as his fellow-perpetrator, Korten, nor as unethical as his colleagues in the Nazi justice system. See Schlink, Bernhard & Popp, *Walter Selbs Justiz* op cit; Donahue, Williams Collins “The Popular Culture Alibi” op cit at 466; Hall, Katharina “The Author” op cit at 451 – 452; Anton, Christine op cit at 60 – 62.

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

As well as portraying a positive image of Hanna by suggesting that she has been a victim of the lawyers involved in the trial and of a conspiracy of her co-

accused, Michael also implies that Hanna has been the victim of an injustice resulting from the failure of the court to take a whole range of what Michael considers to be mitigating factors into account. Michael speculates during the trial as to various factors for which Hanna was not personally responsible, but which may have contributed both to the deaths and suffering of prisoners in the concentration camp and to the church fire disaster. In relation to Hanna's activities at the concentration camp, Michael notes that Hanna and her co-accused were not in charge of the camp, and makes particular mention of the camp commandant, who absconded and disappeared at the end of the war (DV 102), implying that his disappearance is an indication of his guilt. In relation to the fire in the church, Michael points to just about every other possible agent in the disaster in order to downplay Hanna's responsibility. He describes the evidence of the local villagers at the trial as self-serving, designed to cover up their own failure to rescue the women trapped in the burning church (DV 110). He further suggests that the villagers collaborated with the co-accused in painting a picture of Hanna as the leader of the pack because it suited them to depict the guards as an organised unit, rather than a group of confused women whom they ought to have overpowered in order to release the prisoners (DV 130 – 131). Michael also puts forward the idea that the disaster was the fault of the Allied pilots who bombed the church and surrounding buildings out of carelessness, either because they missed the intended target, or because they decided to unload some spare bombs with no thought as to where they might fall (DV 103). In presenting this list of mitigating circumstances, Michael implies that the court has failed to take the full range of factors relevant to Hanna's case into account and that Hanna

may therefore be innocent, or at least, less guilty. However, as with Michael's suggestions that Hanna has been the victim of her lawyers and her co-accused, his implication that she has been the victim of an unjust assessment of her case is based on suppositions not backed up by evidence. It also elides the crux of Hanna's guilt. Hanna's culpability arises because she failed to open the church doors, thereby condemning her prisoners to be burned alive. Whether others also failed in this way, or what caused the fire in the first place are beside the point. In addition, although Michael's speculations foster the idea that Hanna was not the only one responsible for the suffering of the victims, neither Hanna nor anyone else denies that she acted as alleged. A recognition of the involvement of other actors in the complex of events that occurred on the night of the church fire is unlikely to have made any difference to Hanna's guilt in relation to the principal charge.

In addition to these incidents in which Michael suggests that Hanna is at a disadvantage or subject to injustice during her trial, the novel contains further, more general criticisms of the justice system which could be seen as promoting the idea that Hanna is a victim of the legal regime. When Michael describes some of the matters discussed in the seminar he attended at university, he remembers that:

"im Seminar über das Verbot rückwirkender Bestrafung diskutiert wurde. Genügt es, daß der Paragraph, nach dem die KZ-Wächter und -Schergen verurteilt werden, schon zur Zeit ihrer Taten im Strafgesetzbuch stand, oder kommt es darauf an, wie er zur Zeit ihrer Taten verstanden und angewandt und daß er damals eben nicht auf sie bezogen wurde? Was ist das Recht? Was im Buch steht oder was

in der Gesellschaft tatsächlich durchgesetzt und befolgt wird? Oder ist Recht, was, ob es im Buch steht oder nicht, durchgesetzt und befolgt werden müsste, wenn alles mit rechten Dingen zuginge?" (DV 86)

His recollections here appear to raise doubts as to the legitimacy of Hanna's trial, particularly in view of problems arising from the lack of synchronicity between law, morality and justice. In addition, his attempts to mitigate Hanna's guilt point to the inability of the justice system to take every single factor in each individual case into account, implying the possibility of injustice. These questions about the interaction between law and morality reflect a much broader legal debate which has interested Schlink in other contexts, in which he points out that, whilst good laws aim to reduce the conflict between law and morality, they cannot completely eliminate it¹³³. The raising of such legal critiques in a narrative about a Holocaust trial has the potential to generate considerable controversy. A courtroom setting tends to promote an expectation of black and white answers, of objectivity, of judgment and of condemnation for the guilty. By thematising criticisms of the justice system in the context of a Holocaust trial and raising questions about the ability of the courts to dispense "justice", the novel invites controversy by implying that a "just" result may not be possible.

¹³³ Schlink has, for example, discussed the law/morality distinction in the context of German anti-terrorist laws in the essay "An der Grenze des Rechts": Schlink, Bernhard *Vergewisserungen* op cit at 176. Schlink's criticism of the capacity of the legal system to deal with Holocaust crimes is considered in Dreike, Beate "Was wäre denn Gerechtigkeit? Zur Rechts skepsis in Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*" *German Life and Letters* 55.1 (2002): 117 - 129; Tebben, Karin op cit; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 127 - 128; Morgenroth, Claas *Erinnerungspolitik und Gegenwartsliteratur* Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2014 at 268 - 276.

However, although the legal critique contained in the novel is provocative and may go some way towards explaining the controversy that has surrounded the portrayal of Hanna, the question for this examination of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy is whether the novel's criticism of the legal system has the end effect of portraying Hanna as a victim. My contention is that this is not the case. The fact that such considerations are not intended to seriously undermine the reader's belief that Hanna and her fellow-accused are justly condemned is shown by the interpolation of other voices in the text which clearly dismiss such a suggestion, thereby guiding the reader to an interpretation contrary to Michael's intention. This can be seen when the law professor leading Michael's seminar about the judicial processing of the Nazi past meets the legal arguments about retrospectivity with the statement: *"Sehen Sie sich die Angeklagten an – Sie werden keinen finden, der wirklich meint, er habe damals morden dürfen"* (DV 87). Likewise, when Hanna asks the judge what he would have done in her situation, he answers: *"Es gibt Sachen, auf die man sich einfach nicht einlassen darf und von denen man sich, wenn es einen nicht Leib und Leben kostet, absetzen muß"* (DV 107). Michael is critical of this response from the judge (DV 107 – 108), but it does emphasise the idea that, regardless of one's personal situation or the positive laws at the time, there are some things which ought, as a matter of morality, to be avoided¹³⁴. It should also be noted that the appropriateness or otherwise of raising the constitutional bar against the retrospective application

¹³⁴ Niven also sees the judge's response as placing moral responsibility on Hanna, despite Michael's biased views: Niven, Bill "Representations of the Nazi past I" op cit at 138.

of laws was a live issue at the time of the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial¹³⁵, and in this sense, Michael's recollections can be seen as representing a historicisation of contemporary legal debates, rather than a questioning of the correctness of the guilty verdicts reached.

The analysis so far of the portrayal of Hanna as a victim through Michael's narration in *Der Vorleser* indicates that, although Michael is frequently at pains to paint Hanna as a sympathetic person who may not be wholly responsible for her crimes and who is a victim of the legal system, the text as a whole encourages the reader to look behind Michael's gloss to ascertain whether the facts as otherwise presented in the text necessarily bear the meaning he ascribes to them. The necessity of questioning whether the interpretive gaps in the text must be filled in the way Michael suggests are indicated by other voices in the text, such as the law professor and the judge, but also by some aspects of Michael's own narrative. This highlights the importance of keeping the narrative perspective of the novel front of mind when considering the depiction of Hanna as a victim or a perpetrator. The novel is Michael's first person retrospective narrative of events, and, as is already apparent from the analysis thus far, he is often a biased narrator whose narrative is therefore not necessarily to be trusted¹³⁶. The text

¹³⁵ Schlink has considered the legal problems associated with dealing with the past in the legal system, including retrospectivity and limitation periods, in his non-fiction essay "Die Bewältigung von Vergangenheit durch Recht": Schlink, Bernhard *Vergangenheitsschuld* op cit at 80 – 111.

¹³⁶ The view that Michael is an unreliable narrator is widely accepted in the secondary literature, the main exception being Donahue, who strongly criticises those who consider Michael to be unreliable and sees the novel as a work of conventional realism in which belief in the veracity of Michael's narrative (and therefore his view of Hanna) is encouraged by various elements in the text, such as Michael's tendency to pre-empt and deal with potential doubts on the part of the reader: Donahue, William Collins "The

encourages the reader to take a critical view of Michael's narrative, indicating that Michael's views ought not to be accepted at face value or, worse, directly imputed to Schlink¹³⁷. By questioning Michael's representation of Hanna as a

Popular Culture Alibi" op cit at 475 – 476; Donahue, William Collins "Revising '68" op cit at 308. For a similar view, see Alison, Jane "The Third Victim in Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*" *Germanic Review* 81.2 (2006): 163 - 178 at 166. Schödel also notes Michael's tendency to pre-empt reader criticism, but considers that the novel makes it clear that his perspective is anchored in the portrayed world, a construction which gives the reader distance and allows a critique of Michael's narrative: Schödel, Kathrin "Jenseits der political correctness" op cit at 310 – 311.

¹³⁷ The danger of identifying author and narrator is heightened by certain biographical similarities between Schlink and Michael. Michael is about the same age as Schlink and, like his creator, studied law in Heidelberg. A further biographical similarity is that Schlink's father, like Michael's, did not fit the *Täter-Väter* mould, having been disadvantaged in his career during the Nazi period due to his Christian beliefs. Niven criticises the frequent conflation of Michael and Schlink, as do Mahlendorf, Reynolds and Worthington: Niven, Bill "Problem of Shame" op cit at 381 – 382; Mahlendorf, Ursula R op cit at 475; Reynolds, Daniel op cit at 249 – 250; Worthington, Kim L "Suturing the Wound: Derrida's On Forgiveness and Schlink's *The Reader*" *Comparative Literature* 63.2 (2011): 203 - 224 at 210. Moschytz-Ledgley provides a good example of the conflation of author and narrator, frequently referring to them as though they were the same person: see for example Moschytz-Ledgley, op cit at 66; 82. Corngold also deals with the implications of similarities/dissimilarities between author and narrator: Corngold, Stanley "Fürsorge beim Vorlesen: Bernhard Schlink's Novel *Der Vorleser*" in Borchmeyer, Dieter *Signaturen der Gegenwartsliteratur: Festschrift für Walter Hinderer* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1999: 247 - 255 at 248. Biographical similarities between Schlink and his characters are, in fact, endemic in his writing, with legal professionals, especially legal professionals from Heidelberg, featuring as major characters in many of his works. Works with obvious biographical similarities and main characters with a legal background include the *Selb* trilogy (Schlink, Bernhard & Popp, Walter *Selbs Justiz* op cit; Schlink, Bernhard *Selbs Betrug* op cit; Schlink, Bernhard *Selbs Mord* op cit); the short stories "Das Mädchen mit der Eidechse" and "Die Beschneidung" in Schlink, Bernhard *Liebesfluchten* Zurich: Diogenes, 2000; "Johann Sebastian Bach auf Rügen" in Schlink, Bernhard *Sommerlügen* op cit; Schlink, Bernhard *Die gordische Schleife* Zurich: Diogenes, 1988; Schlink, Bernhard *Die Heimkehr* Zurich: Diogenes, 2006; Schlink, Bernhard *Die Frau auf der Treppe* Zurich: Diogenes, 2014. Herrmann has argued in relation to *Der Vorleser* that these biographical similarities may lend authenticity to Michael's narrative (Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 121), but I would argue that it is a metafictional element which points outside the text to the author and therefore underlines the nature of the text as a construction, which tends to destabilise any feeling of authenticity.

victim, the text undermines his reliability as narrator, opening up the text and drawing attention to narrative gaps in a way that underscores the metafictional nature of the novel and cautions the reader against accepting Michael's depiction of Hanna as a victim at face value. It remains to be seen whether these sorts of considerations also apply to the matter of Hanna's illiteracy, which has formed the main focus for discussion of her portrayal as a victim.

2.3 Hanna as a victim? - illiteracy

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

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

erträglich machen wollte, ehe sie ohnehin nach Auschwitz mußten.”

(DV 128)

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

Many commentators have strongly criticised Michael’s use of Hanna’s illiteracy as an explanation for her crimes and have also been critical of the way in which the illiteracy theme plays out in the novel generally. Critics have argued that Hanna’s illiteracy is unrealistic and problematic because analphabetism was rather an anomaly¹³⁸, and that the concentration on Hanna’s illiteracy provides a distraction from the question of the culpability of average Germans¹³⁹. Schlink himself has repeatedly denied that he intended

¹³⁸ Johnson, Sally and Finlay, Frank “(Il)literacy and (Im)morality in Bernhard Schlink’s *The Reader*” *Written Language and Literacy* 4.2 (2001): 195 - 214; Wolff, Lynn “The Mare of Majdanek: Intersections of History and Fiction in Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser*” *Internationales Archiv für Sozialgeschichte der deutschen Literatur* 29.1 (2004): 84 - 117 at 115 - 117; Raphael, Frederic “Judge not?” op cit at 33; Schödel, Kathrin “Jenseits der political correctness” op cit at 314. Whereas Johnson & Finlay think that Hanna’s illiteracy makes her a victim and Raphael is concerned that it renders Hanna innocent, Wolff’s criticism is based more around the idea that Hanna’s unrealistic illiteracy violates the consistency of what Wolff believes to be a historical realist novel. Interestingly, when criticised at a seminar held at the Goethe Institut in Sydney on 25 August 2009 (which I attended) for structuring his novel around the unrealistic device of the illiteracy of a member of the SS, Schlink stated that he actually knew an illiterate man who had been in the SS, so he did not believe that Hanna’s illiteracy was unrealistic.

¹³⁹ Ozick, Cynthia “The rights of history and the rights of imagination” *Commentary* 107.3 (1999): 22 - 27 at 26 – 27.

Hanna's illiteracy to act as an excuse for her crimes¹⁴⁰, and pointed out that portraying a perpetrator as a human being was essential in order to understand the difficulties his own generation of Germans had when dealing with their parents' Nazi past:

“Wenn es nicht die menschliche Sicht auf die Täter gäbe, hätten wir kein Problem mit ihnen. Erst die menschliche Nähe zu ihnen macht das, was sie getan haben, so furchtbar. Wir hätten doch mit den Tätern schon lange abgeschlossen wenn es wirklich alles Monster wären, ganz fremd, ganz anders, mit denen wir nichts gemeinsam haben.”¹⁴¹

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

However, the view that Hanna's illiteracy exculpates her and has the effect of transforming her from an SS perpetrator into an innocent victim depends largely on reading certain passages of Michael's narrative in isolation from the rest of the text and without paying sufficient attention to the lacunae in the

¹⁴⁰ Wachtel, Eleanor “Bernhard Schlink interviewed by Eleanor Wachtel” *Queen's Quarterly* 106.4 (1999): 544 - 555; Tonkin, Boyd “In the court of history: Bernhard Schlink returns in a non-fiction book to the burdens of a savage past” *The Independent* 19 March 2010; Kilb, Andreas op cit.

¹⁴¹ Hage, Volker “Ich lebe in Geschichten” *Der Spiegel* 4/2000. In a similar vein, Niven notes that the novel attempts to take the mythological and depersonalising element out of the portrayal of the perpetrator: Niven, Bill “Literary Portrayals of National Socialism in Post-Unification German Literature” in Schmitz, Helmut *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past: Representations of National Socialism in Contemporary Germanic Literature* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001: 11 - 28 at 20.

novel. As was the case with Hanna's "victimisation" at the hands of the legal system, Hanna's "victimhood" said to arise from her illiteracy is undermined by various elements in the text, including gaps and the presence of alternative interpretations, as will be demonstrated in the following analysis. Again, these factors highlight the unreliability of Michael's narrative and the openness of the text, pointing to the importance of the metafictional aspects of the novel for identifying its approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy.

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

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

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

If Michael’s narrative is equivocal about Hanna’s illiteracy as either an explanation or an exculpating factor, are there other features of the text which provide more definitive support for the contention that Hanna’s illiteracy is a means of depicting her as a victim and/or as being somehow less culpable in relation to the crimes of which she is accused? Some critics have identified in the novel a resurrection of the Enlightenment idea that humanity’s moral deficiencies can be overcome by education¹⁴². Hanna’s illiteracy is interpreted as a metaphor for her moral illiteracy, which she overcomes by learning to read. According to this view, it was Hanna’s lack of education, her inability to read, that prevented her from realising that what she was doing was wrong, something of which she subsequently became aware when she

¹⁴² Hoffman, Eva “The Uses of Illiteracy” *The New Republic* 23 March 1998 at 35; Moschytz-Ledgley, Miriam op cit at 44; Durzak, Manfred “Opfer und Täter im Nationalsozialismus: Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser und Stephen Hermlins Die Kommandeuse” *Literatur für Leser* 23.4 (2000): 203 - 213 at 207 – 208. Niven, on the other hand, notes that the literature Hanna reads in prison is about the collapse of humanism rather than its triumph: Niven, Bill “Problem of Shame” op cit at 389, 393.

learnt to read in prison. This suggests both that Hanna was a victim of her illiteracy, in that it pushed her towards a criminality she would not have chosen had she been able to recognise it for what it was, and also that she is innocent, as her illiteracy renders her *unmündig*. In this reading, Hanna's victimhood due to her illiteracy has the effect of wiping out her status as a perpetrator.

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

“In Hanna's case, her illiteracy is a kind of metaphor for her moral illiteracy. You might say she really doesn't know the moral alphabet. Now, of course, that's not always the case; you can't say that illiterate people are less moral than literate people. But for Hanna, it can be understood as a metaphor related to what we know about her and her story and about what she has done.”¹⁴³

This interpretation put forward by Schlink some years after the publication of the novel does appear to be bolstered in the text when Michael specifically references the idea of learning leading to enlightenment and responsibility

¹⁴³ Wachtel, Eleanor op cit. Similarly, in Schlink's novel *Das Wochenende*, Jan, one of the characters in Ilse's "book within a book" finds that he has lost the ability to read once he commits himself to terrorism: Schlink, Bernhard *Das Wochenende* Zurich: Diogenes, 2008 at 138. However, Schlink has rejected the idea that Hanna's example implies that he supports the Enlightenment idea that education makes us moral: "*Reading, education, culture – they do not make us better people or make us moral people. Obviously that is wrong. We have seen plenty of examples; and as a German, I naturally think of the Third Reich, where very cultured, educated people were completely immoral*": Wachtel, Eleanor *ibid*. In an interview with *Der Spiegel*, Schlink makes a similar point: "*Was aber Auschwitz angeht: Die einzigartige Furchtbarkeit dieses Verbrechens hängt für mich entscheidend damit zusammen, dass es von einem Volk begangen worden ist, das auf hohem kulturellen Niveau stand, sich dieses Niveaus bewusst war und sich seiner rühmte*" Hage, Volker "Ich lebe in Geschichten" op cit. See also Kilb, Andreas op cit.

after receiving a written message from Hanna for the first time:

“Analphabetismus ist Unmündigkeit. Indem Hanna den Mut gehabt hatte, lesen und schreiben zu lernen, hatte sie den Schritt aus der Unmündigkeit zur Mündigkeit getan, einen aufklärerischen Schritt” (DV 178). As well as referring to enlightenment, Michael’s statement here also alludes to the legal concept of *Unmündigkeit*, which could be taken to indicate that Hanna was not capable of responsibility for her crimes, rendering her innocent. At law, there is a concept of *Unmündigkeit*, whereby certain factors (such as minority or insanity) limit the capacity of individuals to be held legally responsible in criminal matters¹⁴⁴. If Hanna’s illiteracy is read as a metaphor for her not knowing her moral alphabet, then this metaphor could be taken as suggesting that it makes her *unmündig*. Like a child, her illiteracy and lack of knowledge renders her unable to understand moral issues, and she therefore lacks legal capacity and cannot be held responsible for her crimes. This idea fits in with Michael’s conclusion that Hanna’s illiteracy gave rise to an absence of agency which caused her to “fall into” her work as an SS guard. Similarly, Hanna’s suicide could then be interpreted as the result of her acceptance of guilt and responsibility for her crimes after becoming enlightened by learning to read¹⁴⁵.

¹⁴⁴ In the context of German criminal law, see for example §§19-20 StGB, which provide that legal responsibility for criminal acts may not be attributed to persons under the age of 14 years or to persons suffering from mental illness. For an online copy of the German *Strafgesetzbuch*, see <<http://www.gesetze-im-internet.de/stgb/index.html>> (accessed 11 April 2016).

¹⁴⁵ Those who interpret Hanna’s suicide in this way include Durzak, Manfred op cit at 207; Hoffmann, Eva op cit at 35; Johnson, Sally & Finlay, Frank op cit at 210; Sansom, Ian op cit at 11; Tabensky, Pedro Alexis “Judging and Understanding” *Law and Literature* 16.2 (2004): 207 - 228 at 210; Parkes, Stuart “Die Ungnade der späten Geburt? The Theme of National Socialism in Recent Novels by Bernhard Schlink and Klaus Modick” in Schmitz, Helmut *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past: Representations of National Socialism in contemporary Germanic literature* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001: 87 -

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

Some aspects of the novel would seem to support this interpretation that Hanna's acquisition of literacy in prison leads her to finally understand what is morally right and to accept her own culpability, a development which makes her sympathetic and also suggests that her ability to appreciate moral issues was previously blocked by her inability to read. The prison governor's depiction of Hanna as leading a monastic lifestyle ("*Ordnung*"; "*Meditation*"; "*Kloster*"; "*einsame Klause*" (DV 196 – 197)), for example, seems to suggest that Hanna was penitent, indicating an acceptance of guilt which could point towards her acquisition of a moral compass along with her newfound literacy. A realisation of the enormity of what she has done could also be said to arise from her apparent engagement with Holocaust literature:

"Primo Levi, Elie Wiesel, Tadeusz Borowski, Jean Amery - die Literatur der Opfer neben den autobiographischen Aufzeichnungen von Rudolf Höss, Hannah Arendts Bericht über Eichmann in Jerusalem und wissenschaftliche Literatur über Konzentrationslager." (DV 193)

Michael certainly promotes this reading of Hanna's state of mind when he says to the Jewish survivor in New York: "*Jedenfalls wußte sie, was sie anderen im Lager und auf dem Marsch angetan hat. Sie hat mir das nicht nur gesagt, sie hat sich in den letzten Jahren im Gefängnis auch intensiv damit*

101 at 99; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 76; Conway, Jeremiah P "Compassion and Moral Condemnation: An Analysis of The Reader" *Philosophy and Literature* 23.2 (1999): 284 - 301 at 298 – 299.

beschäftigt” (DV 202). He interprets Hanna’s gift of the money to the Jewish survivor as an indication that her years of imprisonment were not merely an atonement imposed by others, but also something she wanted to invest with her own meaning which she wished to have acknowledged (DV 201).

However, these points in the text do not provide conclusive proof of Hanna’s journey from *Unmündigkeit* to *Mündigkeit* and her consequent acceptance of her own guilt as put forward by Michael. Even Michael acknowledges that his view of what Hanna was trying to achieve with her bequest to the Jewish survivor is simply his own “*Deutung*” (DV 201) of Hanna’s intentions.

Alternative interpretations of both her “literate” attitude towards her guilt and her suicide are supported by the text. For a start, the seemingly clear indications of Hanna’s enlightenment about the Holocaust put forward by Michael turn out on reflection to be rather less definitive. Hanna’s prison reading list, for example, is just that: a reading list. The prison governor specifically notes that she is unable to say what Hanna thought about the books, only that she ordered them “*mit Bedacht*” (DV 194) and went through a large number of books on the subject of the Holocaust. The list itself is revealing. Alongside the works of the victims (Levi, Wiesel, Borokowski and Amery) are Hannah Arendt’s report on the trial of Adolf Eichmann in Jerusalem¹⁴⁶ and the memoirs of Auschwitz commandant Rudolf Höss¹⁴⁷ (DV 193), two perpetrators who could never quite see what they were supposed to have done wrong and with whom Hanna may well have had some sympathy. The text provides no information at all as to Hanna’s attitude towards what she had read and the parallels she may have drawn with her own situation,

¹⁴⁶ Arendt, Hannah *Eichmann in Jerusalem* op cit.

¹⁴⁷ Höss, Rudolf *Commandant of Auschwitz* London: Phoenix Press, 2000

meaning that the reader has only Michael's word that Hanna reached the conclusions about her crimes that he says she did as a result of her reading¹⁴⁸.

Hanna's ultimate acquisition of literacy itself also tends more towards indicating that Hanna is a perpetrator responsible for her actions rather than emphasising the type of helpless victimhood put forward by Michael. Her illiteracy is not like *Unmündigkeit* at law, which refers to categories of disadvantage which excuse a person from legal responsibility because they affect a person's ability to understand right and wrong *and* because this lack of understanding cannot be overcome. By contrast, Hanna's *Unmündigkeit* flowing from her illiteracy could have been overcome, as Hanna herself demonstrates in prison. Rather than indicating an insurmountable incapacity, any *Unmündigkeit* arising from Hanna's illiteracy is *selbstverschuldet*, an interpretation suggested by the intertextual reference to Immanuel Kant, about whom Michael's philosopher father has written a book (DV 61)¹⁴⁹. By making the decision in prison to learn how to read, Hanna does indeed take an "*aufklärerischen Schritt*" because she chooses to overcome a disability that was self-inflicted. Hanna may be intensely ashamed of her inability to read,

¹⁴⁸ Worthington makes the same point: Worthington, Kim L op cit at 218. Schmitz suggests that it is Holocaust literature, rather than the bourgeois literary canon, which educates Hanna: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 76, but again, the text provides no direct evidence from Hanna about the effect of her reading materials on her understanding of her own culpability.

¹⁴⁹ In his work *Beantwortung der Frage: Was ist Aufklärung* of 1784, Kant describes enlightenment as the leaving of a state of *Unmündigkeit* which is *selbstverschuldet*. For a copy of Kant's original article in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift*, see: http://www.deutschestextarchiv.de/book/show/kant_aufklaerung_1784 (accessed 11 April 2016). Reynolds suggests that the references to Kant indicate that Hanna's *Unmündigkeit* is voluntary: Reynolds, Daniel op cit at 247.

and her shame brings her to the point of choosing to become an SS guard¹⁵⁰, but it was not the only choice open to her. In his criticism of *Der Vorleser*, Raphael asks “*might she not have gone to night school?*” and questions what precluded her from employment alternative to that as an SS guard, such as “*baby-minding*”¹⁵¹. But that is precisely the point¹⁵². Even Michael notes that Hanna could have chosen to apply her considerable energies to free herself of her disadvantage: “*Mit der Energie, mit der sie ihre Lebenslüge aufrechterhielt, hätte sie längst lesen und schreiben lernen können*” (DV 132). Hanna is not a victim, but an agent with choices who cares more about seizing any immediately available way of avoiding the exposure of her *Lebenslüge* she does about the lives of others¹⁵³.

Further, the idea that Hanna’s suicide should be read as the atonement of an enlightened woman following her acceptance of her guilt is challenged by the alternative interpretation of the prison governor supported by the chronology of the text. The prison governor’s various communications with Michael about Hanna’s impending release testify to her concern that Hanna may not be able to cope with the world outside the prison walls (DV 182; 190). She interprets

¹⁵⁰ Niven argues that Schlink’s main concern is not with Hanna’s illiteracy itself, but with her fear of exposure and her shame: Niven, Bill “Problem of Shame” op cit at 382 – 383. See similarly Swales, Martin “Sex, shame and guilt: reflections on Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser* (The Reader) and JM Coetzee’s *Disgrace*” *Journal of European Studies* 33 (2003): 7 - 22 at 11 – 13; Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s and Beyond: Normalization and the Berlin Republic* Rochester: Camden House, 2006 at 147.

¹⁵¹ Raphael, Frederic “Letter” *Times Literary Supplement* 8 March 2002; Raphael, Frederic “Letter” *Times Literary Supplement*, 29 February 2008.

¹⁵² As Niven also points out: Niven, Bill “Problem of Shame” op cit at 387.

¹⁵³ Schlink foreshadows this idea of the need to maintain a *Lebenslüge* as the prime motivation for involvement in murder in *Selbs Betrug*, when Selb comments that “*Sie morden überhaupt nur aus einem Grund: weil sie ihre Lebeslüge anders nicht retten können . . . Es gibt den kollektiven Mord um der kollektiven Lebenslüge willen – die Geschichte dieses Jahrhunderts ist voll davon*”: Schlink, Bernhard *Selbs Betrug* op cit at 238.

Hanna's suicide as being motivated by her fear of returning to that outside world: *"Kann einem die Welt in Jahren der Einsamkeit so unerträglich werden? Bringt man sich lieber um, als aus dem Kloster, aus der Einsiedelei wieder in die Welt zurückzukehren?"* (DV 197). She also suspects that Hanna's suicide may have something to do with her relationship with Michael: *"Und Sie sagen nicht, was zwischen Ihnen beiden gewesen ist und vielleicht dazu geführt hat, daß Frau Schmitz sich in der Nacht vor dem Tag umbringt, an dem Sie sie abholen wollten"* (DV 197). The chronology of Hanna's imprisonment lends support to this interpretation¹⁵⁴. Hanna had been immersing herself in literature concerning the Holocaust for some time prior to her suicide. If her literacy and enlightenment had lead her to the conclusion that she was guilty and that the only appropriate punishment was death, why did she not kill herself sooner? The fact that her death takes place immediately before her scheduled release and after her disappointing reacquaintance with Michael lends weight to the prison governor's interpretation and indicates that Michael's *"Deutung"* which insists on Hanna's atonement may be motivated by his desire to conceal his own responsibility. In the end, even Michael does not quite believe his own interpretation and

¹⁵⁴ Those who point to these alternative reasons for Hanna's suicide, such as her fear of the outside world and her rejection by Michael, include: Niven, Bill "Problem of Shame" op cit at 395 (also Niven, Bill "Representations of the Nazi past I" op cit at 136; 139); Weisberg, Richard H "A sympathy that does not condone: Notes in summation on Schlink's *The Reader*" *Law and Literature* 16.2 (2004): 229 - 234 at 234; Brockmann, Stephen "Virgin Father and Prodigal Son" op cit at 347 - 348 (although Brockmann also thinks that Hanna's awareness of the horrific nature of her crime may also contribute (at 348)); Paver, Chloe op cit at 39. Morgenroth suggests that, rather than being an acknowledgement of her guilt, Hanna's suicide is her way of aligning herself with the victims: Morgenroth, Claas op cit at 257.

sometimes asks himself whether he is responsible for Hanna's death, as the prison governor suggests (DV 205).

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

If Hanna's illiteracy does not exonerate her or make her a victim, what is its purpose? Why has Schlink chosen an unusual illiterate as his protagonist rather than someone more typical of the "ordinary Germans" from all walks of life who took part in the crimes of the Nazi regime? One reason could be to augment the novel's thematisation of critiques of the justice system by suggesting that system's inadequacy when it comes to taking individual characteristics of the accused into account in passing judgment. This can be seen in an analogy with the common law legal maxim which states that "hard cases make bad law"¹⁵⁵. According to this maxim, cases that have peculiar

¹⁵⁵ See for example *Winterbottom v Wright* (1842) 10 M&W 109:

features or unusual extenuating circumstances make bad law because the findings made in such cases are unable to be generalised and applied to the vast majority of cases in which such quirks do not arise. However, the flipside of the maxim is that hard cases, whilst making bad law, are good for jurisprudence. They raise tough questions about the limits of law, ethics and moral responsibility which the ordinary case does not because it is so clear-cut. Hanna's illiteracy makes her a "hard case", and it is precisely the extremity of her case which helps to raise difficult questions, such as whether there are any circumstances in which perpetrators of the type of crimes of which Hanna is accused may be exonerated¹⁵⁶. The openness of the text

"Hard cases, it has frequently been observed, are apt to introduce bad law"; also Northern Securities Co v United States (1904) 193 US 197: "Great cases, like hard cases, make bad law. For great cases are called great not by reason of their real importance in shaping the law of the future, but because of some accident of immediate overwhelming interest which appeals to the feelings and distorts the judgment" per Holmes J. Dreike also sees Hanna's case as an unusual one which is designed to raise questions, such as whether a court judgment can be just when the court is not aware of all of the factors which lead to the commission of the crime: Dreike, Beate op cit at 126. Hoffmann also sees the novel as being like a legal argument in which propositions are tested from different points of view: Hoffmann, Eva op cit at 34.

¹⁵⁶ Schlink has discussed this type of dilemma in his essay "Zwischen Säkularisation und Multikulturalität", asking whether individual factors, such as differing cultural standards, should be relevant in serious criminal cases: Schlink, Bernhard *Vergewisserungen* op cit at 105 – 107. He is aware that understanding the circumstances of the perpetrator can cause irritations in the process of judgment: see the essay "Vergeben und Versöhnen" in Schlink, Bernhard *Vergangenheitsschuld* op cit at 181 – 182. However, he does not think that personal factors, such as Hanna's illiteracy, amount to an excuse: *"I think you have to remember that all such perpetrators have their individual stories, and sometimes these stories help us to understand more about their psyche and why they did what they did. But that does not mean that such a personal history amounts to an excuse"* (Wachtel, Eleanor op cit); *"[Hanna's illiteracy] stood for me more for these things with which you go into life that lead you into whatever you finally end up doing. They don't excuse anything. They don't justify anything. In a way, they are unrelated to what you finally do. But they get you into it"* (Tonkin, Boyd op cit). MacKinnon thinks Schlink goes too far in this regard in *Der Vorleser*, in that he allows personal circumstances to mitigate even the most horrific crimes, thereby eroding moral distinctions

gives the reader room for contemplation of this issue, however, the undermining of Michael's prompts towards regarding Hanna's illiteracy as an exculpating factor indicate that the novel does point the reader in the direction of regarding illiteracy as something which helps to explain but does not excuse Hanna's conduct.

2.4 Hanna as a perpetrator – Hanna's own voice

As has been shown above, the portrayal of Hanna as a victim emanates almost entirely from Michael's account. To the extent that Hanna is allowed a voice in the text at all, she does not seek to depict herself in terms of victimhood. Nor does she view herself as a guilty party. During the course of her trial, she repeatedly fails to understand or acknowledge that what she did as an SS guard was wrong¹⁵⁷. When being interrogated about her participation in selections at the concentration camp, Hanna is asked whether she knew that she was sending prisoners to their deaths, to which she replies: "*Doch, aber die neuen kamen, und die alten mußten Platz machen für die neuen*" (DV 106). Similarly, when the presiding judge invites Hanna to explain her failure to open the church doors by pointing to a fear of being overcome by the prisoners, or of being arrested or shot if she let them go, Hanna says:

". . . nein, aber wie hätten wir da noch mal Ordnung reinbringen sollen? Das hätte ein Durcheinander gegeben, mit dem wir nicht

and suggests that formal legal reasoning should be supplemented by personal narrative: MacKinnon, John E "Law and Tenderness in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*" *Law and Literature* 16.2 (2004): 179 - 201 at 195; MacKinnon, John E "Crime, Passion and *The Reader*" *Philosophy and Literature* 27.1 (2003): 1 - 20 at 15.

¹⁵⁷ Schmitz is also of the view that, at least up to the point of the trial, Hanna has no guilty conscience about what she has done: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 74.

fertig geworden wären . . . Wir hätten sie doch nicht einfach fliehen lassen können! Wir waren doch dafür verantwortlich . . . Ich meine, wir hatten sie doch die ganze Zeit bewacht, im Lager und im Zug, das war doch der Sinn, daß wir sie bewachen und daß sie nicht fliehen.” (DV 122)

Here, the portrayal of Hanna strongly recalls the testimony of SS guards at the Frankfurt Auschwitz trial. She simply does not see the need for the type of excuses suggested to her by the judge because, in her view, she was just doing her job. Her uncertainty during the trial, as shown by her often hesitant speech (“*Ich habe . . . ich meine . . .*” (DV 107); “*Also hätte ich . . . hätte nicht*” (DV 108)) arises, not because she does not understand the factual circumstances underpinning the allegations against her, or because she did not know that her actions would result in the deaths of others, but because she does not appreciate that what she did was morally wrong¹⁵⁸. From Hanna’s perspective, her prisoners were little more than logistical problems to be dealt with as efficiently as possible because that was the job which had been assigned to her.

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

¹⁵⁸ In an early review of the novel, Hage suggested that the fact that Hanna was ashamed of her illiteracy rather than her actions as an SS guard indicated that she did not understand the problem with her past conduct: Hage, Volker “Der Schatten der Tat” *Der Spiegel* 47/1995.

“Aber auch der Henker haßt den, den er hinrichtet, nicht und richtet ihn doch hin. Weil es ihm befohlen wurde? Sie denken, daß ich jetzt von Befehl und Gehorsam rede und davon, daß den Mannschaften in den Lagern befohlen wurde und daß sie gehorchen mußten? . . . Nein, ich rede nicht von Befehl und Gehorsam. Der Henker befolgt keine Befehle. Er tut seine Arbeit, haßt die nicht, die er hinrichtet, rächt sich nicht an ihnen, bringt sie nicht um, weil sie ihm im Weg stehen oder ihn bedrohen oder angreifen. Sie sind ihm völlig gleichgültig. Sie sind ihm so gleichgültig, daß er sie ebensogut töten wie nicht töten kann.” (DV 146)

By viewing her prisoners as nothing more than problems to be dealt with in the course of her work, and by apparently lacking any sense of guilt about what she has done, Hanna’s attitude is analogous to the detached, bureaucratic perspective of perpetrators such as Eichmann¹⁵⁹ and Auschwitz commandant, Höss¹⁶⁰, both of whom seemed to have difficulty understanding how actions they carried out during the course of their employment could

¹⁵⁹ This image of Eichmann is drawn from Arendt’s account of his trial in Jerusalem in 1961: Arendt, Hannah op cit. Parry points to the remarks about the role of the hangman in the novel as reflecting Arendt’s “banality of evil”: Parry, Ann “The caesura of the Holocaust in Martin Amis’ *Time’s Arrow* and Bernhard Schlink’s *The Reader*” *Journal of European Studies* 29 (1999): 249 - 267 at 263.

¹⁶⁰ In his autobiography written in prison in 1947, Höss describes his work at Auschwitz with the same dominant concern for logistics displayed by Hanna in her account at trial: Höss, Rudolf op cit. Schlink has also noted this characteristic of Höss’ self-depiction (significantly in the context of an interview about *Der Vorleser*): “it reads like the mundane notes of any administrator running a large-scale factory. He managed to completely block out the moral or human dimension of what he was doing. And it is the absence of any understanding of the monstrosity of the act that is so horrifying”: Wachtel, Eleanor, op cit.

render them guilty of monstrous crimes¹⁶¹. Both Hanna's own testimony and the comments of Michael's driver on the way to Struthof find an echo in the findings of Welzer on the motivations of perpetrators in his influential 2009 study *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden*. According to Welzer, those involved in Holocaust crimes were able to carry out their horrific "tasks" because they were able to assign them to a particular frame of reference (such as "work" or "war") which allowed them to view what they were doing as something that was independent of them personally¹⁶². Welzer also concludes that this *Rahmenverschiebung* which allowed ordinary Germans to become mass murderers in the first place also explains the remarkable lack of guilt displayed by many of the perpetrators¹⁶³. Despite the fact that Michael's narrative frequently tries to excuse Hanna's conduct, portrays her in a sympathetic light, and depicts her as a victim, Hanna's own version of her conduct places her in the company of the likes of Eichmann and Höss¹⁶⁴. It could even be argued that Hanna attempts to transfer her position in the concentration camps into her postwar life in her relationship with Michael. By turning up on her doorstep, Michael provides Hanna with a

¹⁶¹ Schlink is of the view that Hanna, like Eichmann and Höss, never really understands what she has done: "*Ganz begreift Hanna Schmitz bis zum Schluss nicht, was sie gemacht hat*": Kilb, Andreas op cit. Dreike draws the same comparison between Hanna's lack of scruples and Eichmann: Dreike, Beate op cit at 119.

¹⁶² Welzer, Harald *Täter: Wie aus ganz normalen Menschen Massenmörder werden* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2009 at 13 – 14.

¹⁶³ Welzer, Harald *Täter* ibid at 218.

¹⁶⁴ In this way, Hanna's own statements, together with the views later expressed by the Jewish survivor when Michael visits her in New York provide an argument against McGlothlin's view that Hanna remains opaque, thus forcing the reader to endorse Michael's understanding of Hanna's motives, including in relation to events he did not witness: McGlothlin, Erin "Theorizing the Perpetrator" at 217 – 219.

random opportunity to reinstate the type of abusive power relationship she had with her Jewish prisoners¹⁶⁵.

It should also be noted that the text leaves no doubt that Hanna committed the crimes of which she is accused at trial, with the exception of writing the report¹⁶⁶. She herself never denies the charges. Her single discussion with Michael on the subject of what she thinks about the past remains cryptic (DV 187) and he accuses her of trying to wriggle her way out of her guilt (*“klagte sie an und fand billig und einfach, wie sie sich aus ihrer Schuld gestohlen hatte”* (DV 190)). She leaves no note explaining her decision to take her own life and to bequeath her savings to the Jewish survivor (DV 195 – 197). Hanna’s silence on these subjects leaves it open to Michael and other characters in the novel, and indeed to the reader, to interpret her final actions.

2.5 Hanna as a perpetrator – the Jewish survivor

Michael’s attempts to portray Hanna as a sympathetic victim are also undermined by the voice of the Jewish survivor who first appears as a witness at Hanna’s trial. She and her mother were inmates at the camp at which Hanna was an SS guard, were taken by Hanna and the other guards on the forced march westwards at the end of the war, and were the only survivors of the church fire. She knew Hanna at the time of the commission of her crimes and is therefore in a good position to provide an account of her actions during

¹⁶⁵ Niven makes a similar point: Niven, Bill “Problem of Shame” op cit at 386. Fricke also sees Michael’s reading aloud to Hanna as a reliving of Hanna’s concentration camp experiences, identifying it as an expression of post traumatic stress. However, there is no indication in the novel that Hanna found her camp experiences traumatic, and in this context, it is more likely that she is seeking to relive an experience she enjoyed: Fricke, Hannes *Interpretationen. Romane des 20. Jahrhunderts* Stuttgart: Reclam, 2003.

¹⁶⁶ McGlothlin makes the same point: McGlothlin, Erin “Theorizing the Perpetrator” op cit at 203 – 204; 212.

the war. She is depicted as a reliable source, with Michael describing her as a dispassionate observer who does not allow herself to be corrupted and who has the ability “*zu registrieren und zu analysieren*” with “*Nüchternheit*” (DV 115). She is characterised by Michael as a person of “*äußerster Sachlichkeit. Alles an ihr wirkte sachlich . . .*” (DV 200). Michael’s portrayal of the Jewish survivor may not be as sympathetic as his depiction of the prison governor, who is described in positive terms as someone with “*Kraft und Wärme*” (DV 192), but his descriptions of the Jewish survivor invite the reader to view her as someone whose testimony can be trusted, unlike the prison governor, whose positive and sympathetic view of Hanna is frequently related in a rather hopeful subjunctive. This is significant, because the survivor provides an alternative view of Hanna to that provided by Michael at key points in the novel, as for example when, during the course of the trial, testimony concerning Hanna’s “selection” of young, weak prisoners to be her “readers” emerges. These prisoners were afforded special privileges while they were reading to Hanna, but would invariably be sent back to Auschwitz for extermination (DV 111 – 112). Recognising echoes of his previous relationship with Hanna, Michael concludes that Hanna must have had a charitable motivation for making her “selections” of the young and the weak (DV 113). However, his suppositions are countered by the Jewish survivor, who questions whether being chosen as one of Hanna’s “readers” really was a better fate (DV 112). This contrast between Michael’s view and that of the Jewish survivor occurs once again towards the end of the novel, when Michael visits her in New York to fulfil Hanna’s testamentary bequest. During their meeting, Michael puts forward the idea that Hanna’s bequest was

intended to give her imprisonment a penitential meaning, but the survivor rejects this reading and insists that Hanna was “*brutal*”, not only in her actions in the concentration camp, but also in her abuse of Michael (DV 202). The survivor also rejects any implicit identification by Michael of Hanna as a victim of her illiteracy with the victims of the Holocaust by noting that “*Analphabetismus ist nicht gerade ein jüdisches Problem*” (DV 203)¹⁶⁷.

The Jewish survivor is someone who, as one of Hanna’s victims, had personally witnessed her conduct as an SS guard. The contrast between her first-hand knowledge and Michael’s belated suppositions is stark, and the depiction of the survivor as a reliable and almost impartial observer of the historical facts provides a strong element of guidance to the reader to prefer her version of events and her portrayal of Hanna. Her voice in the text provides a significant corrective to Michael’s obfuscation¹⁶⁸ and casts Hanna as a perpetrator in no uncertain terms. In addition, the presentation of strong alternative perspectives to Michael’s attempted portrayal of Hanna as a victim provided by Hanna’s own voice and that of the Jewish survivor once again expose Michael’s narrative as unreliable and highlight the important role played by the novel’s metafictional features, such as an openness to reader response created by lacunae and counter-narratives, in the portrayal of Hanna.

¹⁶⁷ Von Jagow, Bettina “Bernhard Schlink Der Vorleser. Differenzen der Wahrnehmung von Täter- und Opferbewußtsein” in Von Jagow, Bettina and Steger, Florian *Differenzerfahrung und Selbst. Bewußtsein und Wahrnehmung in Literatur und Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2003: 245 - 266 at 259. Schmitz makes similar points: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 75 – 76.

¹⁶⁸ Similarly Schmitz: Schmitz, Helmut “Malen nach Zahlen? Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser und die Unfähigkeit zu trauern” *German Life and Letters* 55.3 (2002): 296 - 311 op cit at 309.

2.6 Hanna as a perpetrator - *Väterliteratur*

The portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator is also underscored by the revival in the novel of themes and attitudes associated with *Väterliteratur*¹⁶⁹. Schlink was born in 1944 and belongs to the so-called “second generation” who began questioning the complicity of their parents with Nazism in the 1960s and were the proponents of the wave of *Väterliteratur* published in Germany in the 1970s and 1980s, in which the first generation were depicted almost exclusively as perpetrators¹⁷⁰. Schlink has confirmed that *Der Vorleser* is, in his view, largely concerned with the relationship between the first and second generations¹⁷¹, and the novel has been widely identified as a late contribution to the *Väterliteratur* genre, with the usual father/son conflict being transformed by its transposition into the context of a sexual liaison¹⁷². There has, however, been some disagreement as to whether the novel deviates significantly from the accusatory stance typical of the genre. Some have seen the effect of the love story element of the novel as a change from the usual demonisation of

¹⁶⁹ For a discussion of *Väterliteratur*, see the Introduction at 21- 22.

¹⁷⁰ Although it should be noted that Schlink has characterised himself as having been far from the radical end of the student movement spectrum in his essay “Sommer 1970” in: Schlink, Bernhard *Vergangenheitsschuld* op cit at 152.

¹⁷¹ “*Ich habe ein Buch über meine Generation im Verhältnis zur Elterngeneration und zu dem, was die Elterngeneration gemacht hat, geschrieben*” Kilb, Andreas op cit; “*It’s about the generation of Germans who grew up after World War II – what we call the second generation – coping with what our parents’ generation did*”: Davis, Susan op cit.

¹⁷² See for example Schmitz, Helmut “Malen nach Zahlen?” op cit at 298 – 299; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 57; Schlant, Ernestine op cit at 210; Parkes, Stuart “The Language of the Past: Recent Prose Works by Bernhard Schlink, Marcel Beyer, and Friedrich Christian Delius” in Williams, Arthur, Parkes, Stuart and Preece, Julian *Whose Story? Continuities in contemporary German-language literature* Bern: Peter Lang, 1998: 115 - 131 at 116; Paver, Chloe op cit at 29; McGlothlin, Erin *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* Rochester: Camden House, 2006 at 202 – 203.

the first generation figure¹⁷³ and heralded *Der Vorleser* as a work which turns away from the clear cut condemnation of *Väterliteratur* towards an attitude of moral ambivalence¹⁷⁴, whereas others have seen the novel as a continuation of the attitudes expressed in traditional *Väterliteratur*¹⁷⁵. In the following, I will consider the intergenerational relationship between Michael and Hanna in order to determine whether the novel does represent a deviation from the accusatory stance taken in *Väterliteratur* and the effect that the result may have on the portrayal of Hanna.

Michael's narrative is certainly critical of the actions of his 68er contemporaries and he rejects their wholesale condemnation of their parents and other members of the first generation, criticising their "*auftrumpfende*

¹⁷³ Durzak sees the love story as individualising the perpetrator, which moves it away from the demonisation common in the 68er student movement: Durzak, Manfred op cit at 206. Hall considers that the tropes of romantic fiction force Schlink into changing the *Väterliteratur* format and casting Hanna as a victim: Hall, Katharina "The Author" at 460.

¹⁷⁴ Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 125. Schmitz also sees the novel as an indication that the blanket attribution of guilt common to *Väterliteratur* is breaking up, with the perpetrators being focused on from a position of tentative empathy: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 60; Schmitz, Helmut "The Return of the Past: Post-Unification Representations of National Socialism – Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* and Ulla Berkewicz's *Engel sind schwarz und weiss*" in Flanagan, Clare and Taberner, Stuart *1949/1989 Cultural Perspectives on Division and Unity in East and West* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2000: 259 - 276 at 260 – 261; Anton, Christine op cit at 56.

¹⁷⁵ Parkes, for example, thinks that characterising the novel as being about intergenerational conciliation is a significant misreading, because Michael remains plagued by guilt and there is a fundamental breakdown of communication between the generations: Parkes, Stuart "Die Ungnade" op cit at 100 – 101. McGlothlin thinks that reading the novel as a story of intergenerational conciliation is a misreading in a different way, in that she considers that Michael has trouble describing his relationship with Hanna, so reaches for the trope of 68er generational discord and reinterprets their story along those lines. Michael's narrative promotes this reading, but his relationship with Hanna is in fact significantly different from the tropes he tries to assimilate: McGlothlin, Erin *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature* op cit at 205 – 214.

Selbstgerechtigkeit” and suggesting that the students’ desire to deal with the Nazi past was less about the exposure of Nazi crimes than an expression of intergenerational conflict (DV 160 - 163)¹⁷⁶:

“Manchmal denke ich, daß die Auseinandersetzung mit der nationalsozialistischen Vergangenheit nicht der Grund, sondern nur der Ausdruck des Generationenkonflikts war, der als treibende Kraft der Studentenbewegung zu spüren war. Die Erwartungen der Eltern, von denen sich jede Generation befreien muß, waren damit, daß diese Eltern im Dritten Reich oder spätestens nach dessen Ende versagt hatten, einfach erledigt.” (DV 161)

However, Michael does not translate these criticisms of the attitudes of his peers into a more nuanced approach to the relationship in which he lives out his own intergenerational conflict, namely his relationship with Hanna. Unlike his contemporaries, Michael did not have a perpetrator father whom he could simply dismiss as being a Nazi collaborator, denying him the chance to work out his intergenerational conflict in the same way as so many of his contemporaries. Michael’s father is a philosophy lecturer who lost his university position under the Nazis when he announced that he was giving a lecture on the Jewish philosopher, Spinoza (DV 88), meaning that, rather than

¹⁷⁶ The criticisms of the 68ers made by Michael here are echoed by comments Schlink has made in other works. His novel *Das Wochenende*, for example, contains numerous dialogues in which the pros and cons of the student movement and their methods are debated, and the second generation are strongly criticised by third generation characters: Schlink, Bernhard *Das Wochenende* op cit at 43 – 44; 100 – 103; 143 – 144; 155 – 162. He has also criticised the attitudes of his own generation in essays such as “Die erschöpfte Generation” in Schlink, Bernhard *Vergewisserungen* op cit at 77 – 85 and also in interview (see for example his description of his own generation as self-righteous: “*Mir ist er unheimlich, dieser selbstgerechte moralische Eifer*”: Hage, Volker “Ich lebe in Geschichten” op cit).

being a perpetrator, he could be counted amongst the victims of the Nazi regime. His father's victim status leaves Michael lacking a sense of belonging to his peer group. Although he is sometimes critical of his contemporaries, he also expresses a desire to be a part of their broader movement: "*Gleichwohl hätte es mir damals gutgetan, wenn ich mich meiner Generation hätte zugehörig fühlen können*" (DV 163); "*ich wollte das gemeinsame Eifer teilen*" (DV 89). Unable to satisfy his desire to belong to his peer group by locking horns with his father, Michael finds an outlet for his need for intergenerational conflict in his relationship with Hanna. Hanna is old enough to be Michael's mother, and he identifies his relationship with her as being subject to the same sorts of issues and conflicts his age cohort experienced with their parents. He characterises the suffering and conflict he experiences when the woman he loves turns out to have committed terrible crimes as reflecting "*das Schicksal meiner Generation, das deutsche Schicksal*" (DV 163). The imagery used in the first part of the novel in particular codes Hanna as Michael's "mother" figure even as it points to her sexuality, highlighting the oedipal nature of their relationship. When Michael first meets Hanna, she calls him "*Jungchen*" and cares for him when he is sick, but at the same time flusters him with the smell of her sweat and the feel of her breasts against him (DV 6 – 7). This oedipal imagery continues in Michael's description of his second meeting with Hanna. On this occasion, Hanna ushers Michael into her kitchen, a household space usually associated with the mother, yet the kitchen contains a couch covered by a red velvet throw more evocative of a boudoir. She is engaged in the motherly task of doing the ironing, but Michael becomes embarrassed as he observes her ironing her underwear (DV 13 –

14). Even Michael's description of his seduction by Hanna has motherly overtones. Prior to having sex with him, Hanna runs Michael a nice warm bath and dries him with a towel (DV 25 – 26), an experience which recalls memories Michael has of his mother bathing him when he was a small child (DV 28 – 29). Of course, no matter how hard Michael tries to draw the analogy between his relationship with Hanna and the relationships his peers have with their parents, the sexual nature of his relationship with Hanna clearly sets it apart. However, rather than detracting from the theme of intergenerational friction, the introduction of this oedipal aspect to novel serves to heighten the conflict, further emphasising the patterns of *Väterliteratur*¹⁷⁷.

In describing his relationship with Hanna, Michael often idealises their love for each other. When in the first flush of his love for her, Michael uses a series of intertextual references to paint their relationship as a romantic love that

¹⁷⁷ Schmitz has made the same point: Schmitz, Helmut "Malen nach Zahlen?" op cit at 298, as has Herrmann: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenheit* op cit at 125 - 126. The oedipal nature of the relationship has been frequently remarked upon, see for example: Alison, Jane op cit at 164; Lewis, Alison "Das Phantasma des Masochisten und die Liebe zu Hanna: Schuldige Liebe und intergenerationelle Schuld in Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*" *Weimarer Beiträge* 52.4 (2006): 554 - 573 at 558 – 559. I do not propose to conduct a gender analysis of the novel in this thesis, but useful discussions are provided in Metz, Joseph "Truth is a Woman: Post-Holocaust Narrative, Postmodernism and the Gender of Fascism in Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*" *German Quarterly* 77.3 (2004): 300 - 323 and Schlipphacke, Heidi M "Enlightenment, Reading and the Female Body: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*" *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook* 1 (2002): 310 - 328. Graf also briefly looks at the novel as a perversion of the old romantic model of women being taught by boys: Graf, Guido "Was ist die Luft unserer Luft? Die Gegenwart der Vergangenheit in neueren deutschen Romanen" in Freund, Wieland and Freund, Winfried *Der deutsche Roman der Gegenwart* Wilhelm Munich: Fink Verlag Munich, 2001: 17 - 28 at 24.

crosses age and class boundaries (DV 40; 42 – 43)¹⁷⁸. He is proud of his newly discovered manhood and sexual confidence (DV 29; 41; 64). However, their relationship quickly degenerates into a “*Machtspiel*” (DV 49) with each party fighting to retain control over the other. In the first part of the novel, it is Hanna who has the upper hand, using sex and affection as means of controlling Michael. She decides how and when they have sex, forcing Michael to keep to their bathing and reading ritual, creating a link between reading, sex and power which runs throughout the novel. Hanna’s attitude towards his body is “*besitzergreifend*” and he has the feeling that she is simply using him for her own sexual satisfaction (DV 33 – 34). She uses the withdrawal of sex to get Michael to do what she wants, as when she uses the threat of withdrawal to demand that he work harder at school (DV 37) or that he read to her (DV 43). She also maintains power in the relationship by withholding information and communication from Michael. When Michael asks Hanna for details about her life, she fobs him off with a non-answer (“*Was du alles wissen willst, Jungchen!*” (DV 40)). He does not even know whether Hanna really loves him (DV 37; 67), and they have “*keine gemeinsame Lebenswelt*” (DV 75) outside their ritual of reading aloud, bathing, and sex. Obviously, Hanna’s desire to conceal information about herself from Michael could be seen as arising from shame about her illiteracy and a wish to hide her SS past in a postwar world. However, her silence also prevents Michael from forming a more intimate relationship with her. As with the withholding of sex, this denial of communication allows Hanna to set the rules

¹⁷⁸ The references are to Stendhal’s *Le rouge et le noir*, Lessing’s *Emilia Galotti*, and Schiller’s *Kabale und Liebe*.

for their relationship and prevents Michael from obtaining knowledge which he might use to wrest power away from her.

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

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

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

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

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

When Hanna is unable to read the note Michael left for her on their cycling tour, her shame, frustration and fear about her illiteracy causes her to lose emotional control (DV 54 – 55). The loss of control is only momentary, but it results in Michael being able to take possession of her as she has of him (DV 57)¹⁷⁹.

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

Despite Hanna's initial play for control, the tables are turned when Michael realises that Hanna is illiterate¹⁸⁰. His discovery of her secret and acquisition

¹⁷⁹ The disparity in class between Hanna and Michael outlined in the first part of the novel (particularly when Hanna visits Michael at home (DV 58 – 62)) also gives Michael the opportunity to seize control from Hanna, but it is not an opportunity he takes up, perhaps because it is no great secret and is therefore lacking in the special power knowledge about her illiteracy has. For a discussion of class in the novel, see Paver, Chloe op cit at 44 – 45.

¹⁸⁰ Brockmann also sees Michael's discovery of Hanna's illiteracy as changing the power dynamic between them: Brockmann, Stephen "Virgin Father and Prodigal Son" op cit at 346. A number of critics have suggested that Hanna's illiteracy creates problems for the intergenerational conflict theme in the novel, in that the presence of the illiteracy excuse takes away Hanna's culpability and therefore the source of the dilemma of loving a perpetrator: Donahue, William Collins "Revising '68" op cit at 295; Franklin, Ruth "Immorality Play" *The New Republic* 15 October 2001 at 57; Conway, Jeremiah P op cit at 296.

of the knowledge Hanna has so long denied him transforms Michael from Hanna's victim into a player in the game with the power to act (or fail to act), as he himself realises (DV 131). He knows that if he tells the presiding judge that Hanna is illiterate, it will change the judge's attitude towards her and have a significant effect on the length of her sentence (DV 132). However (and despite advice to the contrary from his father (DV 137 – 138))¹⁸¹, Michael chooses to keep this vital piece of information to himself. Although he appears to consider the problem in a philosophical light, it is apparent from his reflections on his actions that the prospect of exacting revenge against Hanna for her abuse and humiliation of him is a prime motivating factor in his failure to reveal what he knows to her and seek to convince her to tell the judge about it¹⁸²:

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

However, this issue only arises if one takes the view that Hanna's illiteracy exonerates her, which I do not.

¹⁸¹ Knobloch notes the way in which Michael misuses philosophy in order to be free of Hanna: Knobloch, Hans-Jörg “Eine ungewöhnliche Variante in der Täter-Opfer-Literatur. Bernhard Schlinks Roman Der Vorleser” in Fischer, Gerhard and Roberts, David *Schreiben nach der Wende. Ein Jahrzehnt deutscher Literatur. 1989-1999* Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2001: 89 - 98 at 91.

¹⁸² Contra Conway, who thinks the judge is someone who is unlikely to take Hanna's illiteracy into account, and that it is Michael's realisation that saying something would be futile which causes his silence: Conway, Jeremiah P op cit at 294 – 295.

Even his visit to the presiding judge in chambers is, by his own admission, motivated by a desire to control Hanna:

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

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

Having obtained power over Hanna by uncovering her illiteracy, Michael continues to try and exercise power over her during her imprisonment. He does this by using the same denial of affection and communication that Hanna used to control him during the first stage of their relationship¹⁸³. When

¹⁸³ Schmitz sees the silence characterising the relationship between Hanna and Michael as an institutionalisation of the conflict between the first and second generations. By rejecting Hanna and refusing to talk to her, the second generation’s Michael continues the first generation’s silence about the past. Schmitz sees Michael’s identity crisis as continuing into the second generation the psychological constellation expressed in the theories of Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich about the dependency relationship of the Germans to Hitler which generated their inability to mourn (Mitscherlich, Alexander and Mitscherlich, Margarete *Die Unfähigkeit zu trauern: Grundlagen kollektiven Verhaltens* Munich: Piper, 2012 (originally published 1967)). Schmitz identifies an analogy between the Michael/Hanna relationship and the relationship posited by the Mitscherlichs as existing between Hitler and the German people: Schmitz, Helmut “Malen nach Zahlen?” op cit at 299 – 307; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 63 - 68. Others who make a similar point are: Lewis, Alison op cit at 563 – 564; Long, JJ “Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser* and Benjamin Wilkomirski’s *Bruchstücke*. Best-selling responses to the Holocaust” in Williams, Arthur, Parkes, Stuart and Preece, Julian *German-Language Literature Today: International and Popular?* Bern:

he sends Hanna tapes of him reading aloud, he tantalises her with the prospect of a renewal of their bond, but at the same time denies her any real communication by refusing to ask after her or tell her anything about his life in the outside world (DV 176). When Hanna starts writing to him, he does not write back (DV 179), something which the prison governor indicates was effective in causing Hanna pain (DV 195).

Michael is quite satisfied with this situation in which he is able to have as much contact as he wants with Hanna without her having access to him (DV 181). He enjoys confining her to a “*Nische*” and denying her a place in his life (DV 187), and would like the situation to continue indefinitely, even though he recognises that this is “*bequem und egoistisch*” (DV 181). In many ways, the relationship between Hanna and Michael in part three of the novel is a precise reversal of the dynamic that existed between them in part one, when Hanna was able to determine the circumstances in which Michael could have contact with her and deny him access to other areas of her life. In view of his happiness at having Hanna exactly where he wants her, Michael is not at all pleased when he is informed of her impending release, and puts off visiting her for as long as possible (DV 182 - 183). When he does finally see her in prison, he does not hide his rejection of her (DV 185), and her recognition that the time of reading aloud is over shows her acceptance of the fact that their relationship cannot go back to the way it was (DV 186). The final act in the power play that has characterised their relationship is Hanna’s suicide, which

Peter Lang, 2000: 49 - 66 at 51 – 52; Moschytz-Ledgley, Miriam op cit at 16 – 17; 30 – 31. The persistent silence between the generations about the Nazi past is a theme Schlink also picks up in a number of his short stories: Schlink, Bernhard *Sommerlügen* op cit (“Johann Sebastian Bach auf Rügen”); Schlink, Bernhard *Liebesfluchten* op cit (“Das Mädchen mit der Eidechse”; “Die Beschneidung”).

can be read as her final attempt to regain the upper hand¹⁸⁴. By removing herself from the world entirely, she forever denies Michael the ability to control her. By leaving him no note (apart from the instructions to deliver her money to the survivor of the fire), she continues the pattern of withholding communication typical of all of their interactions with each other, and Michael interprets her refusal to write him one last note as an attempt to hurt or punish him (DV 196). In writing their story, Michael makes one last attempt to seize control from Hanna and finally rid himself of her, only to find that he is unable to do so: “*Vielleicht habe ich unsere Geschichte doch geschrieben, weil ich sie loswerden will, auch wenn ich es nicht kann*” (DV 206).

The above analysis shows that, despite transposing the intergenerational conflict into a sexual relationship, *Der Vorleser* exhibits characteristics similar to *Väterliteratur*. The accusatory, condemnatory attitude typical of *Väterliteratur*, the themes of silence between the generations, the victimisation of the second generation by the first, and involvement in the Holocaust are all present in the novel and are utilised to justify the rejection of the parent by the child. Rather than fostering an atmosphere of love and reconciliation between the generations, Michael’s narrative is marked by frequent outbursts of anger against Hanna, and by a strong desire to keep Hanna out of his life as much as possible. The only significant difference between *Der Vorleser* and the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s is not a conciliatory attitude, as some critics suggest, but rather Michael’s ultimate failure to detach himself from Hanna. Whereas *Väterliteratur* was

¹⁸⁴ Mahlendorf also sees Hanna’s suicide and bequest as a final attempt to gain the upper hand in a power struggle that has been played out throughout the novel: Mahlendorf, Ursula R op cit at 466 – 470.

characterised by breach¹⁸⁵, Michael's narrative indicates that he has been unable to completely reject Hanna (much as he would like to do so). This position may reflect a recognition in post-unification Germany that walking away from the Nazi past is simply not possible and that engagement with that past will continue indefinitely. The novel certainly does not indicate a change in the condemnatory attitude towards the perpetrators. On the contrary, Schlink's continuation of patterns employed in *Väterliteratur* indicates the continuing characterisation of the first generation as perpetrators already established by the novel's portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator through her own voice and that of the Jewish survivor, and by the text's consistent undermining of Michael's attempts to portray Hanna as a victim.

3. Reading *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction

If the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator in *Der Vorleser* is as dominant as the above analysis suggests, why has the novel engendered so much controversy and so many claims that it promotes an image of Hanna as a victim? I have already suggested that the novel's reflection of critiques relating to the "justice" of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* may act to unsettle the characterisation of Hanna as a perpetrator by querying whether a just condemnation, and therefore a definitive consignment of a person to the category of "perpetrator", is possible. However, it will be my contention in the following that the main source of destabilisation of the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator arises from the nature of the novel as historiographic metafiction.

¹⁸⁵ Assmann, Aleida *Geschichte im Gedächtnis* op cit at 73.

The openness¹⁸⁶ of the text of *Der Vorleser* caused by elements such as gaps, multiple viewpoints and Michael's unreliable narration already referred to in the foregoing analysis of the portrayal of Hanna are all elements which point to the metafictional nature of the novel. This openness of the text suggests that the novel has been structured or prefigured with lacunae designed to open up the narrative to prompt reader intervention and reflection. This degree of openness has given rise to indeterminacy and uncertainty, as has been demonstrated by the widely varying reader response to the novel. I will argue in what follows that these elements suggest, not just that *Der Vorleser* is a work of metafiction, but that it is a work of historiographic metafiction, and that the novel's function as historiographic metafiction helps to explain the controversy that has surrounded it.

As already outlined in the Introduction to this thesis¹⁸⁷, Nünning has described historiographic metafiction as combining a high degree of metafictional self-reflexivity and other metafictional elements with an explicit consideration of historiographical questions. Novels fitting into this genre often have a significant level of explicit references to the narrative medium and thematise historiographical problems, including those associated with the narrative representation of the past. They consider questions of the reconstruction and

¹⁸⁶ Hall has argued that the text is not very open, as the operation of tropes from the genres of romantic and detective fiction effectively force the reader to fill the text's interpretative gaps in a particular way: Hall, Katharina "The Author" op cit. Hall sees the interpretative tensions caused by the demands of the popular literary codes embedded in the text as giving rise to the polarised reader response (at 456), but it is my view that such polarity would not arise if the reader response was as constrained by genre demands as she suggests. Long is also of the view that reading of the text is heavily guided by the conventions of detective fiction, including an expectation that mysteries will be explained and make sense in the end: Long JJ op cit at 55 – 56.

¹⁸⁷ See Introduction at 37 – 38.

interpretation of history, either explicitly or by way of implication through the structure of the novel¹⁸⁸. In the following analysis, I will identify the presence of these features in *Der Vorleser*, pointing to the nature of the novel as historiographic metafiction. I will then move on to consider what the effects of this might be for the portrayal of Hanna.

3.1 Explicit thematisation of historiographical criticism

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

“Es ist auch nicht so, wie der Außenstehende vielleicht annehmen möchte, daß man die vergangene Lebensfülle nur beobachtet, während man an der gegenwärtigen teilnimmt. Geschichte treiben heißt Brücken zwischen Vergangenheit und Gegenwart schlagen und beide Ufer beobachten und an beiden tätig werden.” (DV 172)¹⁸⁹

Michael notes that this is particularly true when dealing with the history of the Third Reich: *“Eines meiner Forschungsgebiete wurde das Recht im Dritten Reich, und hier ist besonders augenfällig, wie Vergangenheit und Gegenwart in eine Lebenswirklichkeit zusammenschießen.”* (DV 172)

¹⁸⁸ Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* op cit at 282 – 291.

¹⁸⁹ Schlink has made a similar point about the unavoidable presence of the present in the past in historical fiction: *“Die Gestalten historischer Romane sind heutige Gestalten in gestrigem Gewand”*: Schlink, Bernhard *Gedanken über das Schreiben* Zurich: Diogenes, 2011 at 7.

These reflections express scepticism towards the possibility of rendering an objective view of the past untainted by the present perspectives of the historian creating the historical narrative. This scepticism about the ability to reconstruct the past, particularly the Nazi past, independently of the present perspective of the historian is also emphasised by several instances in which Michael reflects on the way in which the presence of mediated images of the past in the present cause those attempting to imagine the past from a present perspective to fill in gaps in their historical knowledge with ideas and images familiar from a variety of media. In Michael's view, this problem is exacerbated in the case of reconstructing the history of the Holocaust. Images and narratives relating to the Holocaust have been repeated in German and international media so frequently that they have become such a steady part of Germany's (and the world's) cultural memory that they run the risk of degenerating into "*Klischees*" (DV 143). These mediated images are so pervasive that they influence the representation of historical people, places, events, and even eyewitness memory¹⁹⁰. Michael points out that, when considering the Holocaust from a present perspective, incorporating these well known cultural images is almost unavoidable, and they are frequently used as a basis for an imaginative filling of gaps which the narrator is not otherwise able to close:

¹⁹⁰ These images even affect the telling of family history narratives, particularly those featuring "Germans as victims". This phenomenon has been noted by Welzer, who has remarked on the way in which Germans telling these types of narratives about the past often transfer iconic Holocaust images and tropes onto their stories of victimhood and make them part of their historical narrative: Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* op cit at 88 – 98.

“Heute sind so viele Bücher und Filme vorhanden, daß die Welt der Lager ein Teil der gemeinsamen vorgestellten Welt ist, die die gemeinsame wirkliche vervollständigt. Die Phantasie kennt sich in ihr aus, und seit der Fernsehserie Holocaust und Spielfilmen wie Sophies Wahl und besonders Schindlers Liste bewegt sie sich auch in ihr, nimmt nicht nur wahr, sondern ergänzt und schmückt aus.” (DV 142 – 143)¹⁹¹

Michael’s reflections here are reminiscent of Hirsch’s ideas about the role of imagination in the creation of postmemory from fragments of the past¹⁹².

However, Michael elsewhere expresses doubts about our ability to recreate the past, even with the assistance of media-inspired imagination. When visiting the Struthof concentration camp for the second time at around the time of the narrative present, Michael reflects on his previous visit to the camp several decades earlier at around the time of Hanna’s trial. During that earlier visit, he had tried to gain an understanding of the past by imagining what life in the camp must have been like during the Nazi period. However, his imaginative endeavours failed (DV 148 – 150). Although this failure is partly due to what Michael identifies as a lack of images of the camps in circulation

¹⁹¹ Schlink has elsewhere expressed similar ideas about the role of iconic images and imagination in recreating the past: *“Wenn Sie ein KZ besuchen, erfahren Sie, dass dort eigentlich nichts zu sehen ist – außer Baracken, Bäumen, Zäunen. Und doch ist man hinterher völlig erschöpft. Warum? Weil der eigene Kopf hinzuphantasiert hat, was er aus Büchern, Filmen und natürlich auch aus der Wissenschaft kennt“* (Hage, Volker “Ich lebe in Geschichten” op cit); *“[on visiting Auschwitz] You don’t see much that looks like the pictures from 1945. It’s only by using what you see as a trigger for remembering that makes it an experience – what you have heard, what you have read, what you have seen in the photographs and films”* (Wachtel, Eleanor, op cit). See also Schlink, Bernhard *Liebesfluchten* op cit at 225.

¹⁹² Anton sees the novel as fictionalising Hirsch’s work on postmemory: Anton, Christine op cit at 54. For a discussion of Hirsch, see the Introduction at 32-34.

at that particular period in German postwar history (DV 142), when combined with his reflections on the role of media in historical narratives, it leaves the impression that either the past cannot be reached at all, or that it ends up being composed of a pastiche of contemporary tropes. It also provides a negative critique of the ability of memorial locations to provide insight into the past.

3.2 Use of metafictional elements to thematise historiographical critiques

As well as explicitly thematising historiographical problems by means of Michael the historian's reflections on the construction of history, the novel also contains a variety of metafictional elements, both explicit in the text and implied in the text's structure, which thematise the problems of the narrative reconstruction of the past. The novel is Michael's personal "history" of his relationship with Hanna, and towards the end of the book he comments explicitly and self-reflexively on the process of writing that history¹⁹³:

“Seitdem hat sich unsere Geschichte in meinem Kopf viele Male geschrieben, immer wieder ein bißchen anders, immer wieder mit neuen Bildern, Handlungs- und Gedankenketten. So gibt es neben der Version, die ich geschrieben habe, viele andere. Die Gewähr dafür, daß die geschriebene die richtige ist, liegt darin, daß ich sie geschrieben und die anderen Versionen nicht geschrieben habe. Die

¹⁹³ Reynolds also notes the novel's metafictional reflection on its own genesis: Reynolds, Daniel op cit at 243.

geschriebene Version wollte geschrieben werden, die vielen anderen wollten es nicht.” (DV 205 – 206)¹⁹⁴

Here, Michael very much reflects ideas about the construction of history as a narrative. His narrative about the past is one that has been constructed by him, the historian, from different “*Bildern, Handlungs- und Gedankenketten*”. The version of the past he has chosen to write down is one that has been selected by him via the inclusion of some events and the exclusion of others, but, as he himself acknowledges, it is not the only version of the past that could have been written. Moreover, his decisions in selecting some facts and omitting others have been motivated by the personal and present concern of dealing with and hopefully obtaining closure on his relationship with Hanna (DV 206). His reflections on this make his bias in constructing his narrative apparent. The idea that Michael’s narrative of his past with Hanna is the “right” version because it is the one that has been written down provides an even stronger parallel to White’s theories, in that it recognises that events in the past only become “historical facts” or “history” by means of their narrativisation by historians (involving all of the elements of selection and bias to which Michael alludes). The fact that Michael’s historical narrative remains a *Roman* supplies a further allusion to White’s conception of history as being little more than fiction¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹⁴ Self-reflexive references to the process of writing and to the incorporation of facts into a fictional narrative are something of a theme in Schlink’s work, particularly via the “story within a story” motif present in his novels, *Das Wochenende*, *Die Heimkehr*, and *Die Frau auf der Treppe*: Schlink, Bernhard *Die Heimkehr* op cit starting at 61; Schlink, Bernhard *Das Wochenende* op cit starting at 18; Schlink, Bernhard *Die Frau auf der Treppe* op cit starting at 177.

¹⁹⁵ See the discussion of White’s theories in the Introduction to this thesis at 34 – 35.

As well as referring self-reflexively to the process of its own genesis in the form of writing, *Der Vorleser* also makes metafictional reference to the process of reading¹⁹⁶. The theme of reading running through the novel explicitly underscores the novel's historiographical critiques, which are also further implied by the way in which this theme works itself out in the novel's structure. Michael is not only Hanna's *Vorleser*, he is the reader's *Vorleser* too¹⁹⁷, and the conjunction of Michael's role as both historian and reader further highlights the narrativity of his historical account. Reading in the novel is often viewed as an activity that is not positive, or even neutral, as when both Michael and Hanna use reading and literacy to block communication and the uncovering of the truth, and as a tool in their power play. The implication of the way in which reading is used here is that narratives can not only enlighten, but can also be used to block access to the truth. The same text can also be read in different ways, as the judge points out at Hanna's trial when he comments: "*Der Bericht lese sich anders*" (DV 119), indicating that it is possible for different interpretations to arise from the same raw materials. The theme of reading is, of course, highly self-reflexive, making the reader aware of his or her own activity in reading the book¹⁹⁸. By drawing attention to the activity of reading and making the reader aware of different purposes for which reading may be used, the novel creates a kind of

¹⁹⁶ See also Metz, Joseph op cit at 313; Reynolds, Daniel op cit at 239. Blasberg also considers the reading theme: Blasberg, Cornelia "Geschichte als Palimpsest: Schreiben und Lesen über die Kinder der Täter" *Deutsche Vierteljahresschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte* 76.3 (2002): 464 - 495 at 493 - 494.

¹⁹⁷ As Tebben points out, Michael ends up rejecting Hanna, but keeping his role as *Vorleser*: Tebben, Karin op cit at 455.

¹⁹⁸ Metz also notes the metafictionality of the reading theme in the novel: Metz, Joseph op cit at 313; as does Reynolds: Reynolds, Daniel op cit at 239.

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

The fair chance that the type of historical approach in which the reader is engaged will be prone to mistakes about the past and therefore produce a mistaken or incomplete history is shown by analogy with two incidents in the novel in which a situation is "read" incorrectly because the "reader" was not provided with all of the relevant evidence. The first occurs when Michael reads Hanna's sudden departure as being due to his failure to acknowledge her at the swimming pool, a false reading arising from the fact that, at this stage, Michael does not yet have any knowledge of Hanna's illiteracy as a

motivating factor. Similarly, the court in Hanna's trial reaches the wrong conclusion about her writing of the report because it, too, is unaware of her illiteracy. The centrality of Hanna's illiteracy in both of these cases of misreading points to its use as a symbol of the inability to read a situation accurately when key elements of evidence are missing. These incidents heighten the reader's awareness of the danger of producing a false narrative as a result of the absence of vital pieces of evidence, something which plagues history writing due to the lapse in time between the relevant events and the creation of the historical narrative.

The idea that the historian does not necessarily provide an accurate account of historical events and that the "objective truth" about the past cannot be ascertained is emphasised by Michael's status as an unreliable narrator. Unreliable narration in the novel is a further indication of its metafictional character, in that it promotes a questioning of the narrative itself. At the same time, it also provides an additional illustration of the problems inherent in historiography, in that the narrator of past events may be unreliable for a whole host of reasons, such as selection, bias, and use of unreliable source material. As a second generation narrator, Michael's narration of events which occurred prior to his birth or in his infancy and at which he was not present, such as the crimes of which Hanna is accused, is automatically suspect and involves mediation, supposition, and often imagination. Michael also reflects explicitly on his difficulties in constructing a reliable version of past events, even those forming part of his own eyewitness memory, and particularly highlights the problems for writing about the past posed by the

vagaries of the memory process¹⁹⁹. Writing many years after the events in question, Michael acknowledges the gaps and distortions of memory resulting from the distance in time between the events related and the narrative present. Throughout the text, Michael refers to the difficulty he has in remembering past events with accuracy, or in some cases, remembering what happened at all. This can be seen in the repetition of phrases such as *“ich weiß nicht mehr”* (DV 8; 58; 72; 86; 101; 189) and *“ich erinnere mich nicht”* (DV 13; 58; 78; 125). Michael also suspects that he is prone to invent details, as shown when he notes: *“Das wußte ich damals nicht – wenn ich es denn jetzt weiß und mir nicht nur zusammenreime”* (DV 18). He also recognises that he is capable of “imagining” a version of Hanna that suits him best (*“war nicht die gewesen, die ich in sie hineinphantasiert hatte”* (DV 153)). He is aware of the selectivity of his own memory process, as can be seen when he wonders whether his positive memories of his last years at school and first years at university are correct: *“Ich habe die letzten Jahre auf der Schule und die ersten auf der Universität als glückliche Jahre in Erinnerung . . . Ich frage mich auch, ob die glückliche Erinnerung überhaupt stimmt”* (DV 84). In addition, he shows an awareness that his memories are subject to alteration occasioned by subsequent events. He notes, for example, that his memories of the early stages of his relationship with Hanna were significantly affected by his subsequent knowledge about her past: *“Warum wird uns, was schön war, im Rückblick dadurch brüchig, daß es häßliche Wahrheiten verbarg?”* (DV 38). Further on, Michael points to the way in which his own positive memories of

¹⁹⁹ See also Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 116 – 117. Herrmann thinks Michael’s narrative is too well organised to be a reflection of the memory process, but Morgenroth thinks it is a mimetic depiction of that process: Morgenroth, Claas op cit at 250.

Hanna from the first part of their relationship have been altered, not only by the subsequent events of the trial, but also by his mind's application of Nazi clichés drawn from media and cultural memory to his own pre-existing memories of Hanna (DV 141 – 142). When considering how to describe the way Hanna looked at the beginning of their relationship, he reflects on this interference of subsequent images of Hanna with his ability to access his memories of her face at an earlier point in time. Past memories are overlaid with more recent ones, such that the original memories are distorted or can no longer be recovered. Instead, such "memories" must be reconstructed: *"Über ihr damaliges Gesicht haben sich in meiner Erinnerung ihre späteren Gesichter gelegt. Wenn ich sie vor meine Augen rufe, wie sie damals war, dann stellt sie sich ohne Gesicht ein. Ich muß es rekonstruieren"* (DV 14). These reflections on the problems of using memory as a source material directly call into question the ability of historical writing based on such sources to provide an accurate view of the past. They highlight the problem of representing the past with any degree of certainty, even when relying on the testimony of an eyewitness, the authenticity of whose recollections often goes unquestioned.

The unreliability of Michael's narrative is also emphasised by the other, conflicting portrayals of Hanna which compete with Michael's depiction for the reader's attention. Just as Michael explicitly refers at the end of the novel to the "other versions" of his relationship with Hanna that he could have written, so too there are present throughout the novel "other versions" of Hanna, most notably those of the Jewish survivor and the prison governor which have already been discussed. In many ways, these accounts are polar opposites,

and both accounts mirror different aspects of Michael's own conflicting feelings about Hanna. They also raise a number of issues in the context of the novel's thematisation of historiographical problems. Firstly, they openly question the reliability of Michael's narrative and his ability to present a complete or authentic picture of Hanna and her motivations. If two women who both knew Hanna personally provide such different characterisations, what chance does Michael's portrayal have of being accurate? Their conflicting views point to the impossibility of ever obtaining a clear view of Hanna and her past. Secondly, the way in which the two portrayals mirror aspects of Michael's own account underscores his tendency to vacillate between different conceptions of Hanna and to refuse to make a definitive statement, pointing again to his unreliability. Thirdly, by facing the reader with various conflicting accounts of Hanna, the novel highlights for the reader the position of the historian weighing up irreconcilable versions of past events. Along with Michael, the reader is put in the position of trying to synthesise these conflicting accounts into a cohesive narrative, which will often involve privileging one version over another or selecting elements from both so that some aspects of each version are left out.

The overwhelming impression left by these historiographical critiques is that a "true" or "objective" view of the past is impossible. Any attempt to provide an account of the past (or a "history") will be confronted by inconsistent testimony and evidentiary gaps, and all such accounts will therefore be, to a certain extent, synthesised or created by the history writer. In writing such histories, the historian is swayed by his or her own personal prejudices, chooses some elements over others, and applies imagination to fill in gaps so as to produce

a cohesive narrative that says what the historian wants it to say. Even eyewitness accounts are subject to inaccuracy due to the failures and vagaries of the memory process. Under these circumstances, the truth about the past must be considered irretrievable. This notion of the past as inaccessible is symbolised right at the beginning of the novel by the image of Hanna's house. Hanna's house no longer exists at the time of the narrative present, having been demolished some years earlier and replaced with a new building (DV 8). It is therefore no longer physically accessible and no longer able to be seen. Michael often dreams of the house, and in his dreams he tries to open the door, but is always prevented from doing so by his awakening (DV 10 – 11). The fact that waking up impedes his access to the house indicates that it is his present consciousness and perspective that prevents him from ever re-entering the past. Access to the past therefore remains impossible, rendering our accounts of it little more than a dream.

3.3 The effect of historiographic metafiction on the portrayal of Hanna – a cause of controversy?

As the above analysis shows, *Der Vorleser* is a novel which combines explicit consideration of historiographical questions with a high degree of metafictional self-reflexivity and implicit structures which serve to underscore this theme, and as such can be classified as a work of historiographic metafiction. It is my contention that the operation of *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction has been a major cause of the controversy apparent in the novel's reception, and that this effect arises in a number of ways. Firstly, the openness of the text's structure which serves to bring out some aspects of the historiographical critique lends itself to multiple

interpretations, as has already been discussed above in relation to reader response theory. The many metafictional elements of the text have spawned almost as many “readings” of *Der Vorleser* as there are readers of it.

However, the effect of the novel’s function as historiographic metafiction goes deeper than this. By questioning our ability to ascertain and depict the truth about the events of the past and the motivations of the actors in it, the historiographical critique in the book has the effect of destabilising its own stance on Hanna as a perpetrator.

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

If we cannot know the “truth” about the past or ever hope to truly understand a person’s past motivations as the historiographical criticism thematised in *Der Vorleser* suggests, how can we possibly be certain that our designation of

Hanna as a perpetrator in line with the text's prefiguration is correct? How can we judge whether someone is a victim or a perpetrator when our knowledge of the past is so contingent and uncertain? The function of the novel as historiographic metafiction stands in a relationship of insoluble tension with its characterisation of Hanna as a perpetrator, which explains why there has been so much confusion amongst readers of the novel as to the way in which Hanna is portrayed. In this way, the elements of historiographic metafiction in the text echo the novel's critique of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by highlighting the impossibility of knowing everything relevant to an attribution of guilt and thus running the same risk of provocation by questioning accepted modes of portraying Holocaust perpetrators.

It is this aspect of *Der Vorleser* which stands at the heart of the controversy surrounding the representation of the Holocaust, particularly a Holocaust perpetrator, in the novel. Much of the discourse on the representation of the Holocaust, including its ability to be represented in fiction, concentrates on the need for truth, authenticity, and definitive attributions of guilt and innocence in any portrayal touching on this terrible event²⁰⁰. Against this background, the

²⁰⁰ A number of critics have considered the requirements of Holocaust representation in the context of discussing *Der Vorleser*, including: Parry, Anne op cit at 252 – 253; Reynolds, Daniel op cit at 238 – 240; 254 - 255 (Reynolds also considers the implications of the novel's metafictional aspects for its Holocaust representation); Wolff, Lynn op cit at 86; Worthington, Kim L op cit at 220 – 221; Gray, Richard T op cit at 274 – 285; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 130 – 133; Blasberg, Cornelia "Zeugenschaft: Metamorphosen eines Diskurses und literarischen Dispositivs" in Beßlich, Barbara, Grätz, Katharina and Hildebrand, Olaf *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006: 21 - 33 at 24 - 27; McGlothlin, Erin "Theorizing the Perpetrator" op cit at 210 – 213; Lüderssen, Klaus "Die Wahrheit des Vorlesers" in Braese, Stephan *Rechenschaft: Juristischer und literarischer Diskurs in der*

problems of representing the Holocaust in historiographic metafiction are obvious. In other historical contexts, questioning the ability of narratives about the past to represent the truth of historical events is unlikely to be controversial²⁰¹, however, the very horror of the Holocaust seems to require an ethics of representation over and above what is usually demanded of historiographic metafiction. Metafictional representations of history often involve a textual openness which becomes problematic in relation to the Holocaust, because it gives rise to a risk that the reader will insert whatever Holocaust narrative he or she wishes, thereby compromising the demands of truth and authenticity in Holocaust representation²⁰². Historiographic metafiction is even more contentious due to its questioning of our ability to ascertain the truth about historical events. If historical narratives are fiction as White at his most polemic suggests, does this mean that histories of the Holocaust are fiction too? Does it mean that attributions of guilt and the assignment of people like Hanna to the category of perpetrator become impossible? The thematisation of our inability to pin down the historical truth in historiographic metafiction points to the problems of writing in the postmodern period about *the* event which demands truth, namely the

Auseinandersetzung mit den NS-Massenverbrechen Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2004: 165 - 176 at 175 - 176; Bartov, Omer op cit at 37. Schlink also considers the demands of writing Holocaust fiction in Schlink Bernhard *Gedanken über das Schreiben* op cit at 7 – 35.

²⁰¹ Ozick considers whether the recent questioning of historiography and the liberty of fiction give rise to problems in relation to Holocaust representation, noting that the conflict between invention and history is not problematic if the subject is the Homeric wars, but gives rise to difficulties in relation to the Holocaust: Ozick, Cynthia op cit at 23 – 25.

²⁰² Donahue has made this criticism of *Der Vorleser*, seeing the novel's postmodern elasticity as a problem: Donahue, William Collins "Illusions" op cit at 76.

Holocaust²⁰³. In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that many have been unsettled by the effect of historiographic metafiction on the portrayal of a Holocaust perpetrator, and that the reception of *Der Vorleser* has been so controversial.

4. Conclusion

In this chapter, I have argued that *Der Vorleser* portrays Hanna as a perpetrator, with Michael's attempts to portray her as a victim in his narrative being consistently undermined in the text. In portraying Hanna as a perpetrator, *Der Vorleser* reflects the image of ordinary Germans as perpetrators dominant in German public discourse at the time of the novel's publication in 1995. It also continues the dominant pattern of the depiction of Germans as perpetrators in literature prior to 1990, particularly in the genre of *Väterliteratur*, and in this sense the portrayal of Hanna does not mark a significant departure from the way in which first generation Germans were previously depicted in German literature. Indeed, the persistence of most of the main themes of *Väterliteratur* in the novel suggest an inability or unwillingness on the part of Schlink as a second generation author to break away from his generation's established mode of working through its relationship to the first generation and to the Nazi past.

Despite this reflection of the dominant paradigm of Germans as perpetrators current in both public discourse and literature at the time of the novel's publication, the portrayal of Hanna in *Der Vorleser* has given rise to considerable controversy. In this chapter, I have suggested that the controversy apparent in the novel's reception may be partially explained by

²⁰³ Metz, Joseph op cit at 313 – 316.

the wide variety of reader responses promoted by the openness of the text, as well as its reflection of critiques of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, but have also maintained that the main source of the debate about the portrayal of Hanna is to be located in the function of *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction. Having demonstrated the way in which the novel incorporates ideas about postmemory and reflects critiques of historiography which question the ability of history to establish the “truth” about the past, I have argued that the metafictional aspects and thematisation of historiographical criticism in the novel stand in constant tension with the novel’s attempted prefiguring of Hanna as a perpetrator, giving rise to confusion in the interpretation of her character. This destabilisation of the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator by the function of the novel as historiographic metafiction has created particular controversy due to its interaction with ideas about the representation of the Holocaust.

In the next chapter, I will consider the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy and the impact of historiographic metafiction in Ulla Hahn’s novel, *Unscharfe Bilder*. Like *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* was written by a second generation author, but unlike *Der Vorleser*, it was published at a time when the focus of public discussion about the Nazi past in Germany had shifted towards a portrayal of Germans as victims. In the course of my analysis of *Unscharfe Bilder*, I will also consider whether Hahn takes a similar approach to Schlink in her treatment of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, and whether the altered status of public discourse about the past at the time of publication affects the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators or victims in literature.

III. ULLA HAHN – UNSCHARFE BILDER

1. Introduction

Ulla Hahn's novel *Unscharfe Bilder* was written as a direct response to the exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941 bis 1944* mounted by the Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung from 1995 to 1999 and again (in altered form) from 2001 to 2004²⁰⁴. The exhibition was the subject of extensive public and private debate focusing on the perpetrator/victim dichotomy and, specifically, whether "ordinary" *Wehrmacht* soldiers should be viewed as perpetrators or victims. In relation to the exhibition as the inspiration for the novel *Unscharfe Bilder*, Hahn said:

“Ich habe die Wehrmachtsausstellung gesehen als sie hier gestartet ist, 1995 . . . damals schoss mir schon die Idee durch den Kopf, was wäre wenn, was wäre wenn ich hier als Tochter glaubte, meinen Vater auf einen dieser Fotos erkennen zu können?”²⁰⁵

This idea forms the basis of the plot in *Unscharfe Bilder*, in which Hamburg teacher Katja Wild believes she recognises her father, Hans Musbach, in one of the photographs depicting criminal activities carried out by the *Wehrmacht*

²⁰⁴ See further the discussion of the exhibition in the Introduction to this thesis at 7 – 8. The exhibition will be referred to in this chapter as the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*.

²⁰⁵ Deutschlandfunk *Hahn: Die Erinnerung an die Verbrechen wach halten - Interview mit der Schriftstellerin Ulla Hahn* transcript of radio interview on Deutschlandfunk, 29 January 2004 <http://www.deutschlandfunk.de/hahn-die-erinnerung-an-die-verbrechen-wach-halten.694.de.html?dram:article_id=60618> (accessed 11 April 2016). Hahn made similar comments in an interview in the women's magazine *Brigitte*: Gless, Lydia and Wittmann, Angela “In jeder Familie sitzt einer, der schweigt”, <<http://www.brigitte.de/kultur/buecher/ulla-hahn-195404/2.html>> (accessed 11 April 2016).

shown in an exhibition referred to in the novel under the title *Verbrechen im Osten* (UB 18). This leads her to initiate a dialogue with her father about his war experiences in the hope of uncovering the truth about what she believes she has seen in the photograph. During the course of their discussion, which takes place over a number of days, Musbach describes his life as a *Wehrmacht* soldier on the Eastern Front.

The secondary literature relating to *Unschärfe Bilder* has been more limited in volume than the response to *Der Vorleser*. However, it has been characterised by the same disagreement between those who criticise the novel for concentrating too extensively on German victimhood and those who consider that Hahn has neutralised the risk of casting Germans as victims by setting the novel's victim narratives firmly in the context of German perpetration. As was the case with *Der Vorleser*, the reception of the novel has, to a certain extent, been affected by the themes of the public memory discourse taking place at the time of publication. In the case of *Unschärfe Bilder*, the renewed public interest in "Germans as victims" around 2003 gave rise to a tendency to identify the novel as part of the "Germans as victims" wave and to expressions of concern as to the effect this novel and others like it might have on German memory culture and the dominant public memory paradigm which emphasised Germans as perpetrators²⁰⁶. Hannes Heer, for

²⁰⁶ See for example Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" op cit at 55 - 58; Höfer, Adolf "Himmelskörper und andere Unschärfe Bilder: Romane zur Thematik der deutschen Kriegsoffer im Gefolge der Novelle Im Krebsgang von Günter Grass" *Literatur für Leser* 28 (2005): 147 - 161 at 155 -157; Höfer, Adolf "Die Entdeckung der deutschen Kriegsoffer in der Literatur nach der Wende" in Valentin, Jean - Marie *Akten des XI. Internationalen Germanistenkongresses Paris 2005 Germanistik im Konflikt der Kulturen (Jahrbuch für Internationale Germanistik, Reihe A, Kongressberichte Band 86)* Bern: Peter Lang, 2007: 385 – 392 at 389 – 390.

example, has described Musbach's recollections as a "*Litanei des Grauens*" combined with a "*Singsang des Leugnens*"²⁰⁷, and Harald Welzer has criticised Hahn for promoting the "*Topos einer schuldlosen Schuld*"²⁰⁸. Others have expressed similar concerns to Heer and Welzer about what they see as the novel's tendency to blur the line between perpetrators and victims²⁰⁹. Helmut Schmitz sees the novel as an attempt to provide a more differentiated or balanced account of the dilemmas faced by ordinary German soldiers to the one-dimensional focus on soldiers as perpetrators in the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, however, he thinks the dominance of German trauma in the narrative renders the attempt at balance unsuccessful, with the emphasis falling too heavily on German victimhood²¹⁰. On the other hand, Sabine Fischer-Kania has noted that the novel can only be read as exculpating the perpetrators if the sections dealing with "Germans as victims"

²⁰⁷ Heer, Hannes "Die Nazi-Zeit als Familiengeheimnis: Beobachtungen zur zeitgenössischen deutschen Literatur" in Burmeister, Hans-Peter *Literatur und Erinnerung: Dokumentation einer Tagung der Evangelischen Akademie Loccum vom 29. bis 31. Oktober 2004* Rehburg: Loccum, 2004: 9 - 30 at 21.

²⁰⁸ Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" op cit at 56 – 57.

²⁰⁹ See Braun, Michael "Krieg und Literatur - Zu den neuen Romanen von Ulla Hahn, Klaus Modick und Uwe Timm" *Der Deutschunterricht* 56.3 (2004): 84 - 86 at 86; Höfer, Adolf "Himmelskörper und andere Unscharfe Bilder" op cit at 156 -157; Hummel, Christine "Unscharfe Bilder: Die Darstellung des Zweiten Weltkriegs im Osten bei Ulla Hahn, Uwe Timm und Heinrich Böll" *Literatur im Unterricht* 8.3 (2007): 193 - 213 at 195; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* op cit at 36.

²¹⁰ Schmitz, Helmut "Reconciliation between the Generations: The Image of the Ordinary Soldier in Dieter Wellershoff's *Der Ernstfall* and Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder*" in Taberner, Stuart and Cooke, Paul *German Culture, Politics and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization* Rochester: Camden House, 2006: 151 - 165 at 155; 159 - 160; Schmitz, Helmut "Representations of the Nazi past II" op cit at 152 – 154; 156; Schmitz, Helmut "Historicism, Sentimentality and the Problem of Empathy: Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* in the Context of Recent Representations of German Suffering" in Schmitz, Helmut *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2007: 197 - 222 at 208 - 209.

are detached from the novel's overall context and treated in isolation²¹¹. She considers that Hahn thematises the problem of viewing perpetrators as victims, such that criticism of the novel as an expression of the uncritical "Germans as victims" discourse is unjustified²¹². Similarly, Susanne Vees-Gulani notes that criticism of the novel should be seen in the context of broader concerns arising out of the "Germans as victims" debate taking place at the time of publication and considers that these concerns are not borne out by the novel itself²¹³. A review of the secondary literature indicates a concentration on the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the novel and a divergence of opinion as to whether the novel portrays Musbach as a victim or a perpetrator.

Another feature of the novel which has been commented upon in the secondary literature is the highly constructed nature of the text. Hahn has been widely criticised in relation to the artificiality of her novel. In book reviews at the time of publication, the novel was variously described as "*eine Fleißarbeit*"²¹⁴, "*pädagogisch anmutend*"²¹⁵, "*ernste Didaktik*" and "*lehrbuchhaftig*"²¹⁶. Academic literature on the novel has agreed with this

²¹¹ Fischer-Kania, Sabine "Das Medium der Fotografie in Ulla Hahns Roman *Unscharfe Bilder*" *Seminar* 41.2 (2005): 149 - 169 at 165.

²¹² Fischer-Kania, Sabine "Reden und Schweigen zwischen den Generationen: Erinnerungsgespräche in Ulla Hahns Roman *Unscharfe Bilder*" *Colloquia Germanica* 37.1 (2004): 73 - 108 at 92; 97; 103.

²¹³ Vees-Gulani, Susanne "Between Reevaluation and Repetition: Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder* and the Lasting Influence of Family Conflicts about the Nazi Past in Current Literature of the 1968 Generation" in Cohen-Pfister, Laurel and Veas-Gulani, Susanne *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture* Rochester: Camden House, 2010: 56 - 76 at 64.

²¹⁴ Roggenkamp, Viola "Die Bedeutung des Nichts" *die tageszeitung*, 3 December 2003.

²¹⁵ Bartels, Gerrit "Vergangenheit, sprich" *die tageszeitung* 8 October 2003.

²¹⁶ Kosler, Hans Christian "Immer dagegen und immer dabei – Ulla Hahns Roman *Unscharfe Bilder*" *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 10 September 2003.

assessment, with the novel being described as a “*Thesenroman*”²¹⁷ marked by a “*superficial inventory of current memory contests*”²¹⁸ and carefully constructed dialogues that lend it “*einen Anstrich von Künstlichkeit*”²¹⁹. These assessments of the novel suggest that *Unscharfe Bilder* is a tightly constructed work in which every detail of the text has been functionalised²²⁰. In the following analysis, I will argue that the novel is a closed text in which elements of the novel’s construction are clearly apparent, and that this level of construction is a metafictional element which self-reflexively highlights the novel’s own fictionality (something which also suggests that the novel may be read as historiographic metafiction). I will consider the implications that these elements of tight construction and functionalisation have on the portrayal of Musbach, suggesting that Hahn carefully structures the novel in this way in order to control reader response.

In the first part of this chapter, I will examine whether Musbach (as the principal first generation character in the novel) is portrayed as a perpetrator or a victim, looking particularly at Musbach’s self-portrayal in his “eyewitness” narrative of his time as a soldier on the Eastern Front and how his self-portrayal interacts with other voices in the novel. Does the portrayal of Musbach represent a departure from the way in which first generation Germans were portrayed in literature prior to 1990? Does it, as some critics have suggested, reflect the renewed concentration on “Germans as victims” in public discussions at the time of the novel’s publication? In the second part of

²¹⁷ Braun, Michael “Krieg und Literatur” op cit at 85.

²¹⁸ Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* op cit at 35.

²¹⁹ Hummel, Christine op cit at 197.

²²⁰ Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 219.

this chapter, I will analyse the novel as historiographic metafiction and consider the impact this has on the novel's portrayal of Musbach.

In this chapter, I will also compare the portrayal of Musbach in *Unschärfe Bilder* with the portrayal of Hanna in *Der Vorleser* in order to elucidate similarities and contrasts between the two works with a view to identifying potential patterns in approaches to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in German literature of the post-1990 period. Does Hahn take a similar approach to Schlink in her portrayal of first generation Germans? Has the wave of interest in "Germans as victims" at the time of publication of *Unschärfe Bilder* resulted in a different depiction? Does a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction destabilise the portrayal of Musbach, as was the case with Hanna, or does it serve to support the novel's depiction of him? Like Schlink, Hahn (born 1946) is a second generation author writing about the relationship between the first and second generations in the context of the Nazi past. Does she approach the subject of intergenerational conflict in a similar way? As with *Der Vorleser*, *Unschärfe Bilder* has been identified by a number of critics as constituting a late contribution to the *Väterliteratur*²²¹, but it has also been frequently suggested that the dialogue between Musbach and Katja results, not in the breach of classic *Väterliteratur* but in understanding and reconciliation²²², and that this alteration rather than

²²¹ Ostheimer, Michael op cit at 301 – 309; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* op cit at 21; 33 – 36; Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* op cit at 128; Veas-Gulani, Susanne, op cit.

²²² Reinecke, Stefan "Die Schatten der Taten müssen bleiben: Interview with Hannes Heer" *die tageszeitung*, 3 April 2004: "Da geht es um eine *Generationenversöhnung, die sich um die Tatsachen herummogelt*"; Räkel, Hans-Herbert "Warst Du das, Vater?" *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 18 September 2003: "Vater und Tochter sind am Schluss in einem schmerzlichen Idyll

continuation of the *Väterliteratur* pattern may result in a blurring of the line between perpetrator and victim by placing too great an emphasis on intergenerational reconciliation²²³. In examining the approach to the past taken in *Unscharfe Bilder*, I will consider whether the novel does mark a change from previous literary approaches or whether, like *Der Vorleser*, it continues the themes and attitudes of *Väterliteratur* into the post-1990 period.

vereint"; Kosler, Hans Christian op cit: "*Anerkennenswert auch, dass sie beiden Positionen Verständnis entgegenbringt*".

²²³ Welzer, for example, sees *Unscharfe Bilder* as following the same line as *Der Vorleser* in representing "*einen signifikanten Bruch mit der bis dato üblichen anklagenden Haltung gegenüber der Tätergeneration*" by shifting the blame from the first generation to the second, who traumatise their parents and deny them empathy, and by promoting the image of "Germans as victims" dominant in private family discourse. His concern is that such a shift blurs the boundaries between victims and perpetrators in a questionable way: Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" op cit at 55 - 57. Schmitz is likewise concerned about the implications of a move towards conciliation with the first generation, at least in the way in which he sees it being played out in *Unscharfe Bilder*. He considers that Hahn attempts to re-establish dialogue and heal the rift between the generations by promoting empathy and by replacing the image of the perpetrator with that of the suffering victim. The price of such a reconciliation is a failure to engage with the complicity of the first generation and an uncritical empathy with their suffering, giving rise to a suspicion that a move towards a more differentiated view of Germans beyond the perpetrator/victim divide may be motivated by a desire to legitimise a sentimentally empathetic approach to Germans as innocent victims: Schmitz, Helmut "Reconciliation" op cit at 154 - 160; Schmitz, Helmut "Representations of the Nazi past II" op cit at 152 - 154. Fuchs also agrees with this view, finding that Hahn blurs the line between victims and perpetrators by shifting the focus from the father's guilt to the child's lack of empathy, and that the reconciliation in the novel is one-sided, in that it is achieved by allowing the father to appear solely as a victim: Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* op cit at 35 - 36. Ostheimer also sees the novel as a departure from the methods of classic *Väterliteratur*. He considers that, although Katja's approach starts off as accusatory, she changes her views as a result of her confrontation with her father's narrative, rejecting her generation's previous approach to its parents and showing empathy and a desire for understanding: Ostheimer, Michael op cit at 301 - 309. Taberner thinks that the desire to re-establish an intergenerational consensus trumps the critical acuity implied in the juxtaposition of sources and perspectives, because Katja comes to share Musbach's image of himself as a victim: Taberner, Stuart "Introduction: The novel in German since 1990" in Taberner, Stuart *The Novel in German Since 1990* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011: 1 - 18 at 10.

2. Musbach - perpetrator or victim?

2.1 Musbach's self-portrait

A large part of the novel *Unscharfe Bilder* is taken up with Musbach's "eyewitness" testimony about his experiences during the Second World War. His account dominates the book, which may well explain the concerns of some commentators about what they see as the novel's portrayal of Germans as victims. In the following, I will concentrate on an analysis of Musbach's self-depiction and the counter-narratives presented by Katja and others with a view to assessing whether the text as a whole does indeed portray Musbach as a victim, or whether he is portrayed as a perpetrator.

2.1.1 *Musterschüler der Vergangenheitsbewältigung?*

The novel begins with a visit by Katja to her father Musbach, a retired high school teacher who has the financial resources to live in a fairly luxurious retirement home (UB 9; 12). Musbach is presented at this stage of the novel as someone who is very well-read, with his book shelves bending under the weight of his library and his shelf ladder having left scratches on the parquet floor from frequent use (UB 9). He is a man with an excellent memory (UB 24), who can be relied upon to intervene in a conversation to correct an error or provide balance when the discussion has become too one-sided (UB 15). He is valued by fellow residents for his knack with crosswords (UB 24) and talent with chess (UB 194 - 195), and is depicted as being a step above most of his neighbours in terms of learning and judgment (as, for example, when the contents of his own library are compared with the hodge-podge collection bequeathed to the home by other residents (UB 194)). He is also presented

as a man who has dealt with the legacy of the Nazi past in an exemplary way and whose credentials in relation to talking about the Third Reich appear impeccable. When Katja presents him with the exhibition catalogue for the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, he notes that he has always accepted German responsibility for the crimes committed during the Nazi period and has stressed this responsibility to younger generations:

“Wir wissen doch wirklich, was war. Jahrzehntelang, ja sicher jahrzehntelang hab ich das mit meinen Schülern diskutiert. Ein halbes Jahrhundert.” (UB 18)

“Wir alle kennen doch die Schrecken und die Verbrechen der Nazizeit. . . . Es gibt die historische Verantwortung aller Deutschen, dazu habe ich immer gestanden.” (UB 30)

“Wann immer er in den Unterrichtsstunden der Oberstufe auf die grausamen Kriege des Altertums zu sprechen gekommen war, nie hatte er versäumt, die Schüler über das Verständnis der Geschichte hinaus auch auf die Kriege ihrer eigenen Zeit, des zwanzigsten Jahrhunderts, hinzuweisen . . . Er wollte Warnung sein mit der Erfahrung seiner Generation und seinem Wissen und so die Verantwortung der Generationen stärken.” (UB 27)

As well as continually stressing German responsibility for the crimes of the Third Reich, Musbach is a keen reader of literary works relevant to the issue of German culpability, such as Peter Weiss' *Die Ästhetik des Widerstands* (UB 70) and Eugen Kogon's *Der SS-Staat* (UB 158). By contrast, he takes no interest in what he sees as the “*exhibitionistisches Heldensaga*” of *Das Boot*

(UB 195). Even his omission of “ordinary Germans” as possible victims of Nazism (*“Juden, politisch Verfolgten, Zigeunern, Homosexuellen, Zeugen Jehovas oder Euthanasieopfern”* (UB 164)) conforms to the prevailing paradigm regarding how to read the Nazi past.

In all of these instances, Musbach comes across as a veritable *Musterschüler* on the subject of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Combined with his learning and excellent memory, his conformity with the accepted, dominant norms developed in public discourse as to how Germans should approach the past marks him out as an example of a typical German *Bildungsbürger* of the first generation who appears to have learnt from the mistakes of the Nazi past. However, when Musbach is confronted with Katja’s implied accusations about his own conduct during the Nazi period and her demands that he explain his personal role in crimes of that era, it quickly becomes apparent that his exemplary attitude to the past and acceptance of German guilt is something which he has applied in the abstract, but has avoided considering in relation to his individual history. When Musbach does come to give his own testimony about his life under Nazism and his experiences as a soldier on the Eastern Front, he attempts to distance himself from the “real” perpetrators, brings forth a whole string of “Germans as victims” tropes, and engages in identification with the victims of Nazism. Although he occasionally refers to instances of German perpetration at a general level²²⁴, in his narrative as a whole he aims to deny personal involvement in Nazi crimes and to distance both himself and

²²⁴ For example, Musbach recalls the *Bücherverbrennungen*, the *Reichskristallnacht*, and the deportation and extermination of the Jews (UB 33; 58; 165; 181 – 182) and recalls the role of “ordinary Germans” in the persecution of the Jews when stumbling over some *Stolpersteine* outside his old house (UB 165).

other *Wehrmacht* soldiers from culpability. On the basis of an analysis of Musbach's self-depiction, I will argue that his narrative represents a typical first generation response to accusations of personal involvement in the activities of the Third Reich, a response which emphasises German victimhood and seeks to avoid individual responsibility, and consider what this means for the portrayal of Musbach in the novel as a whole.

2.1.2 Strategies of self-exculpation – identification with the resistance and distancing from the “real” Nazis

When Musbach finally agrees to talk to Katja about his wartime experiences, he is at pains to distance himself from the “Nazis” and the *Mitläufer* and to align himself with those who disagreed with or actively resisted the regime. He describes his life before the outbreak of war as being characterised by friendships with people who, if not actively, at least passively, resisted Nazism. At home in Berlin, he identifies himself with his friend Hugo and Hugo's bohemian family (UB 33; 183) who seem to live in a hotbed of dissent, with local households receiving regular visits from the SA and the Gestapo (UB 33; 36). They have no love for Hitler or his warmongering (UB 34; 36), and Musbach emphasises how he preferred them and their views to those of his own family, who celebrated every German victory with a bottle of wine (UB 36). He specifically points out that no one in his circle of friends or acquaintances thought that the persecution of the Jews was a good thing (although he does admit that neither he nor anyone else did anything about it) (UB 58 - 59). He lacked any ideological interest in Nazism, even choosing to study ancient languages because they provided a space in which he could escape from Nazi doctrine (UB 157; 216).

This pattern of distancing himself from the “Nazis” is repeated in Musbach’s descriptions of life on the Eastern Front. Again, Musbach is quick to place himself amongst the ranks of those who did not support the Nazis. He seems to be friends only with those soldiers who are against the Nazis (Hugo), or with those who are Nazis for “good” reasons, such as the promotion of socialism (Joachim (UB 92 – 93)), rather than “bad” reasons, such as racist ideology (Mertens (UB 90)). The number of deserters who feature in Musbach's account (Hugo (UB 142 – 144); Freißfrieze (UB 76); Leo (UB 82); Karl (UB 209 – 210); Musbach himself), is surely statistically much higher than in reality, indicating a concentration in Musbach's narrative on identifying himself with the resistance and the rejection of Nazism and of war. Musbach also likes to highlight any small acts of “resistance” or insubordination on his own part, such as giving Russian children pieces of chocolate when this was “*verboten*” (UB 45) and visiting Russian farmers “*obwohl es nicht gern gesehen war*” (UB 59). These patterns of identification with the “resistance” and distancing from the “real” Nazis are also apparent in Musbach’s description of his time with a group of Russian partisans. In this instance, Musbach’s language again indicates a desire to identify himself with the resistance to Nazism, but this time with a form of resistance more extreme than the occasional dissenting voices which were a part of his social milieu prior to the war. He also once again distances himself from “*den harten Nazis*” and their actions against the civilian population (UB 266) and from his former comrades by his use of terms such as “*dieses Hitlervolk*” and a rejection of his own “*Muttersprache*” (UB 251). Instead, he identifies himself with the resistance, this time in the form of the partisans, by taking on their language

and culture (UB 223; 226 – 227; 236; 248), carefully glossing over the fact that the partisans rejected his identification with them by leaving him behind (UB 250 – 251).

As well as aligning himself with those in the *Wehrmacht* who did not support Nazism (or did not support its racist ideology), Musbach also distances the *Wehrmacht* as a whole from the worst of Nazi crimes, instead pushing the blame towards other, more “culpable” organisations. Whenever war crimes, crimes against humanity, or general acts of everyday brutality are referred to in Musbach’s narrative, it always appears that “special” groups were responsible, such as the SS, the SD, or the *Einsatzgruppen*. This can be seen when Musbach is challenged by Katja about German actions against the Jews, in relation to which he says: “*Von den Deportationen, den Massenvernichtungen wußten wir an der Front doch damals noch nichts. Nur Gerüchte von den Greueln der SS und des SD in den besetzten Gebieten hinter uns. Wir selbst wußten nichts . . .*” (UB 98). He later makes a similar statement supporting lack of *Wehrmacht* involvement in crimes at or behind the Front:

“Gewußt? Ja und nein. Gemunkelt wurde viel. Von Erschießungsaktionen der Einsatzgruppen und der SS. Aber das Zuschauen und Fotografieren bei den Maßnahmen der Sonderkommandos war den Angehörigen der Wehrmacht strengstens untersagt” (UB 206 - 207; similarly in relation to reprisal actions by the SD against civilians see UB 212; in relation to SS, SD and *Einsatzgruppen* actions see UB 264 - 267; and regarding Himmler and his *Einsatzkommandos* see UB 211).

The suggestion in all of these passages is that it was the SS, the SD, and the *Einsatzgruppen* who were responsible for the horrors of the Third Reich, and that the soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* did not have anything to do with and knew very little about these actions in general and the Holocaust in particular. A similar implication as to the heightened culpability of the SS arises in Musbach's account of the incident which precipitates his involvement with a group of Russian partisans, namely his killing of the SS officer, Katsch, when he is in the process of raping a female Russian partisan called Wera (UB 217, 221). Katsch ticks all the boxes for the "evil Nazi" character to such an extent that he comes across as little more than a stereotype. He is a man of lesser intelligence, who uses his newfound power as an SS officer to inflict fear (and in Musbach's case, revenge) on others. He is described as being "arrogant", "kalt" and guaranteed to be at the forefront of any action against civilians, not to mention being a rapist (UB 264 - 267; 270). Again, Musbach draws a clear distinction between ordinary soldiers like himself and the "real" perpetrators of the SS like Katsch.

Musbach's distancing of the *Wehrmacht* from the SS and other special forces, to whom most criminal activity is attributed, implies that ordinary German soldiers such as himself were not perpetrators of Nazi crimes, thereby reinstating the myth of the "saubere Wehrmacht". The distinction Musbach makes between the *Wehrmacht* and the SS, SD and *Einsatzgruppen* is precisely the delineation that the photographic and other evidence presented in the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* was intended to break down²²⁵. In making

²²⁵ In another indication that Musbach represents a typical *Wehrmacht* soldier of his generation, this reflects a distinction which seems to have been made by *Wehrmacht* soldiers during the war. On the distinction between the

these distinctions, Musbach denies the findings presented in the exhibition, whilst at the same time implying that he was not personally involved in any crimes and had no concrete knowledge about the Holocaust. The inclusion of this material in his narrative exposes Musbach's attitude towards the Nazi past and acceptance of "*die historische Verantwortung aller Deutschen*" as superficial and represents a very standard response of a first generation *Wehrmacht* soldier to questioning about his past.

2.1.3 Strategies of self-exculpation – fear of reprisals

Musbach also suggests a lack of culpability on the part of himself and other members of the first generation by pointing to the actual or threatened punishments which accompanied any attempt to resist the Nazis. For example, the father of Musbach's childhood friend Hugo is initially open in voicing his opposition to Hitler and the war, but learns to shut his mouth after a visit from the Gestapo (UB 36). In a similar vein, the attempt of Musbach's father to administer first aid to a Jew is followed immediately by a reference to his having trouble with the police as a consequence of his act of kindness (UB 181). Musbach also gives the threat of Gestapo retaliation as a reason for at least appearing to toe the party line: "*Wenn schon ein nicht gehobener Arm, ein Witzwort, das falsche Lied, gedankenlos am Morgen auf dem Weg zur Arbeit gepfiffen, dir die Gestapo auf den Hals hetzen konnte, da paßte man sich eben an*" (UB 59; see also UB 33 for an example of the prospect of sudden arrest by the SA). The triviality of the things for which, according to

Wehrmacht and the SS in contemporary sources, see Neitzel and Welzer's discussion of transcripts of the conversations of POWs in British and American captivity in Neitzel, Sönke and Welzer, *Harald Soldaten: Protokolle vom Kämpfen, Töten und Sterben* Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag, 2011 at 361 - 390.

Musbach, one might be arrested by the Gestapo conveys an image of the ordinary German population living in fear of certain personal consequences in the event that they acted on any thoughts of resistance.

Musbach's emphasis on the high price of resistance and the fear of himself and his contemporaries of reprisals is continued in his descriptions of life on the Eastern Front. His anecdotes about life in the *Wehrmacht* repeatedly focus on the idea that any acts of disobedience or resistance on the part of *Wehrmacht* soldiers would be met with punishment. Acts of desertion or refusal to obey orders by soldiers result in immediate and drastic retaliation by the regime, including certain death if a deserter was caught by his own side (UB 83). When, in tragic circumstances, Musbach's comrade, Sönke Hansen (better known as Freßfrieze), deserts to return to his pregnant wife, he is captured, beaten, and executed following a court martial (UB 76 - 81; for a similar example, see UB 209 - 211; 213). Musbach also suggests that the soldiers lived under the constant threat of being punished for minor breaches of protocol when he recalls how Freßfrieze almost earned himself a court martial when he used a propaganda magazine to make paper hats and ships for the local Russian children (UB 79). At the lesser end of the punishment spectrum was the threat of other personal consequences, such as a failure to be promoted, a consequence suffered by Freßfrieze when he failed to follow an order to carry out a military action which would have resulted in unnecessary loss of life (UB 80). Musbach also applies the idea that ordinary soldiers who participated in acts of resistance faced serious reprisals to himself when he notes that he was at risk of being executed for killing Katsch (UB 271).

The implication of Musbach's long list of the punishments that awaited those who tried to resist is that resistance was either futile or too dangerous, thereby mitigating the guilt of ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers (including Musbach himself) for their failure to do so²²⁶. The importance of this exculpatory narrative for Musbach's self-depiction is particularly brought home by his lengthy and emotional description of the fate of Freßfrieze. Most of the minor characters in the novel are entirely functional, with the reader being provided with very little biographical information about them and with no real attempt being made to develop them or their relationships with either Katja or Musbach, yet Musbach devotes a considerable amount of time to his description of Freßfrieze, fleshing out his character by sketching his views, his background, and his fate. This contrast draws attention to the role of Freßfrieze in Musbach's narrative and raises the question of why Musbach accords him so much space in his tale. In the context of an extensive narrative in which Musbach is at pains to make excuses for himself, it is likely that Musbach is using the figure of Freßfrieze as a way of explaining the high price paid by soldiers who took action to break out of their military role and therefore excusing his own lack of action. When Musbach describes the letter he wrote to Freßfrieze's wife after his death, he says: "*Nur die Uniform mußte ich ihm ausziehen, den Soldaten wieder zum Menschen machen*" (UB 79). By showing Katja the man under Freßfrieze's uniform, Musbach aims to

²²⁶ Ostheimer points out that Musbach's emphasis on the difficulties faced by ordinary Germans such as himself in resisting the regime is undercut when he gives various examples of resistance which pick up on the 1990s discussion as to the *Handlungsspielräume* available to ordinary Germans stimulated, for example, by the Goldhagen controversy and the reception of the film *Schindler's List*: Ostheimer, Michael op cit at 304.

humanise himself by analogy in the hope of engendering her sympathy and warding off her condemnation.

2.1.4 Strategies of self-exculpation – relativisation and other excuses

Musbach also uses his narrative to suggest that, to the extent Germans such as himself did become involved one way or another in the actions of the Nazi regime, they had a variety of compelling reasons for doing so, many of which could operate to excuse their conduct. One factor put forth by Musbach is the youth of himself and his contemporaries, which might be thought to limit their ability to judge right and wrong (UB 59; 253). According to Musbach, these were young people whose impressionable minds were conditioned both by Nazi propaganda and an authoritarian upbringing that reduced the value of individualism and stressed obedience to authority (UB 31 – 32; 33; 37; 54 – 55; 183). There is also the suggestion that the Germans were lured into the right frame of mind to accept Nazism by the effects of First World War, Versailles and Weimar (UB 27; 35; 157 - 158). The implication is that this socially-created mindset inhibited their ability to clearly identify the dangers of Nazism and take action to prevent them occurring. In addition, Musbach also puts forward the idea that, as soldiers, he and his comrades were not in a position to make individual decisions (something which was significantly different from the situation in peace time), and were required to follow orders, an argument reminiscent of the now discredited *Befehlsnotstand* principle debated in many of the postwar trials (UB 36 – 37; 44; 55; 82; 139 - 140). Musbach also conveys the impression that most Germans were not willing participants in the war and that, as many soldiers were conscripted, they had little choice in the matter (*“Und vergiß niemals: Hugo und ich, wir hatten uns*

nicht freiwillig gemeldet! Ich hatte Hitler nie gewählt! Ich war in Rußland ein Gefangener meines eigenen Landes” (UB 107; see also UB 50)). In a similar vein, Musbach notes that by killing in war, he and his comrades were acting in self-defence, and were therefore justified in their actions (UB 56; 126). In combination, these factors suggest that Musbach and other *Wehrmacht* soldiers were socially conditioned to obey authority, forced into a war they did not want, lacked the free will to resist Nazism, and consequently that they were less than fully responsible for their participation in the actions of the Nazi regime.

Further, Musbach seeks to relativise German crimes by suggesting that German actions during the Second World War were not dissimilar to the actions of others in the many conflicts that have taken place throughout human history. He repeatedly draws comparisons between the horrors of the ancient wars he taught about as an ancient history teacher and the experience of the Second World War and puts the “*unveränderte Brutalität*” down to “*die Bestie Mensch*” (UB 27; for further ancient examples, see UB 67; 215 - 216)²²⁷. These references to similarities between the aggressive war waged by the Third Reich and other conflicts carried out by other parties are reminiscent of some of the arguments which arose during the *Historikerstreit* of 1986, in which some argued that the Nazi period should be treated (above all historiographically) as being no different from other historical periods²²⁸.

Musbach’s relativisation of German actions has a levelling effect, in that it

²²⁷ Fischer-Kania also notes that the references to ancient wars serve in Musbach’s narrative to decontextualise the *Vernichtungskrieg* by making it appear simply as one war amongst many others: Fischer-Kania, Sabine “Reden” op cit at 81.

²²⁸ For a summary of the progress and positions of the *Historikerstreit*, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 235 - 240.

suggests that German crimes during the Second World War were no different in nature from those of many others throughout history and are therefore understandable as part of the human condition. Such relativisation continues the pattern in Musbach's narrative of downplaying the specific responsibility of ordinary German soldiers such as himself in the unique crimes of the Holocaust.

2.1.5 The trope of German victimhood

In his description of his experiences on the Eastern Front, Musbach is also at pains to emphasise the victimhood of *Wehrmacht* soldiers such as himself. Large sections of his dominant narrative are devoted to detailed, overwhelmingly emotive descriptions of the trials endured by ordinary German soldiers. Musbach's narrative contains a veritable catalogue of suffering as he describes the everyday lives of the soldiers. He details the long marches to which the soldiers, heavily laden with packs and equipment, were subjected, as well as the heat, thirst, dust and lice with which they had to contend (UB 46), not to mention the terrible onset of the Russian winter (UB 49). He speaks of the overwhelming fear experienced by the soldiers (UB 51 - 52), and their close acquaintance with death (UB 104). He uses the familiar tropes of German suffering, recounting at length his memories of hunger (UB 104; 107; 208), extreme cold (UB 105 - 109), battles (UB 39), and lice (UB 106; 109). His description of the lack of food and other privations he suffered as a member of the partisan cell also continues his "Germans as victims" theme in another forum (UB 236 – 238). Further, Musbach attempts to co-opt the sympathy usually reserved for the "real" victims of Nazism, such as the Jews, by applying language typically used in relation to them to himself and his

comrades²²⁹. For example, he describes himself and other soldiers in terms usually associated with concentration camp victims, using the word “*Sträflingsarbeit*” to refer to the life of the ordinary soldier (UB 106) and referring to himself as “*ein Gefangener meines eigenen Landes*” (UB 107). A letter (written during the war and read in the present narrative time by Katja) from Musbach's childhood sweetheart, Barbara, also underscores this equation when she recounts how she thought he looked like a “*Sträfling*” in his *Wehrmacht* uniform (UB 190). Musbach's identification with the victims reaches a high point in his identification with the Russian partisans, particularly in his love affair with Wera, who turns out to be not merely a partisan, but also a Jew whose family were rounded up and killed by the SD (UB 227). Musbach's inclusion of a detailed, emotive account of his time with Wera and the Russians is so skewed towards identifying him with the victims of the Third Reich that it pushes his testimony towards becoming a parody of a biography of an exemplary *Wehrmacht* soldier inspired by the German memorial culture of the 2000s. In this, it suggests the influence of postwar expectations on eyewitness narratives about the Nazi past.

Not only does Musbach describe ordinary German soldiers as being victims of all sorts of horrors and privations during the war, he also portrays them as being victims of continuing psychological trauma consequent upon their war experiences. Musbach refers to the way in which horrific images of battle

²²⁹ Schmitz also notes this feature: Schmitz, Helmut “Historicism” op cit at 203; Schmitz, Helmut “Alternative Gründungserzählungen und andere Legitimationsmuster. Zum Status von Shoah und Nationalsozialismus in der Konstruktion von Erinnerung an ‘deutsche’ Kriegserfahrungen” in Fischer, Torben, Hammermeister, Philipp and Kramer, Sven *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014: 95 - 114 at 96.

stayed with him and others like him long after the war was over (something backed up by Katja's childhood memories of her father waking up screaming in the middle of the night (UB 171)): *“Glaub mir, ich hab es noch oft gesehen. Als längst nicht mehr geschossen wurde. Als der Krieg vorbei war, war er für die meisten längst nicht vorbei. In meinen Träumen, da wurde noch lange geschossen”* (UB 38). These references to continuing psychological trauma not only have the effect of categorising the surviving German soldiers as victims, they also represent an attempt by Musbach to shut down Katja's interrogation by appealing to her sympathy.

Several incidents in the novel point to the idea that Musbach is using these tales of German victimhood to deflect Katja's insistence on discussing German perpetration. Musbach's recounting of a generational conflict at the house of a colleague in the 1970s provides an analogy with his own methods when he recalls how his colleague's son attacked his father on the subject of his involvement in the war, in response to which a friend of the father's describes his war experiences with images as horrific as a Hieronymus Bosch painting (UB 64 - 65). Similarly, Musbach's sympathy-seeking discussion with his friend Barndorff about his current predicament neatly encapsulates his attitude to Katja's attempts to discuss the past:

“Die jungen Leute denken alle nur, wir seien an allem schuld, hätten alles falsch gemacht. Was man an uns gemacht hat, das scheint irgendwie uninteressant. Manchmal habe ich das Gefühl, es ist völlig sinnlos, darüber zu reden, man redet doch nur in die Luft.” (UB 135)

Here, Musbach criticises Katja's methods and emphasises his own victimhood, suggesting that talking about the past is likely to be a pointless endeavour and

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

2.1.6 *The purpose of Musbach's narrative*

The main purpose of Musbach's detailed, victim-focused and exculpatory account becomes apparent when he finally comes to address his involvement in what he sees as his "crime" in the "confession" towards which Katja has been prompting him for the entire novel. Throughout the novel, Katja pushes Musbach in the direction of telling her about his involvement in a crime she thinks he has committed based on her misinterpretation of one of the photographs from the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*. As it turns out, Katja

discovers that it was chronologically impossible for the man she thought she recognised in the photograph to be her father, meaning that he could not be guilty of the crime of which she has been accusing him. In the end it does not much matter that the crime to which Musbach ends up confessing is not the crime of which Katja initially thinks he is guilty. What is important is that there is a “crime” about which Musbach himself feels guilty, namely the shooting of Russian partisans. In his account of his involvement in the shooting of the Russian partisans, Musbach strongly suggests that his shot missed, but the point is that he nevertheless counts himself guilty for having pulled the trigger. Like Hugo, who effectively sentences himself to death by frost for killing the enemy in anger rather than self-defence (UB 142 - 144), Musbach considers himself to have been “*ein Mörder*” (UB 275) because he participated in a firing squad in circumstances in which he thinks he was in a position to have refused to do so. It is Musbach’s guilt about this crime which, whether consciously or subconsciously, has motivated his exculpatory victimhood narrative.

The way in which Musbach’s lengthy and detailed narrative of his time with the *Wehrmacht* has been constructed so as to lay the groundwork for his confession of his crime and anticipate Katja’s reaction to it is exposed by the repetition in his confession of patterns which have already characterised his previous testimony. In relating his participation in the shooting of the Russian partisans, Musbach follows a similar pattern of distancing the *Wehrmacht* from the SS and excusing ordinary soldiers such as himself by highlighting the likelihood of punishment for resistance and *Befehlsnotstand* that has been a feature of his previous anecdotes. In his account of his involvement in what

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

“confession” represents an attempt to avoid engagement with his own culpability.

What is the significance of this exposure of Musbach’s motive in telling Katja his story in such a way as to highlight the suffering and victimhood of German soldiers and provide excuses for their actions and his own? I would argue that the significance of making Musbach’s ulterior motive apparent is to call the veracity of his entire account into question, destabilising his characterisation of himself as a victim. In addition, by making the reader aware of the constructed and contingent nature of Musbach’s narrative, the novel points the reader towards considering the narrativity of history and particularly towards understanding even eyewitness testimonies as stories which are told with a particular agenda. A similar, metafictional *Verfremdungseffekt* prompting reflection in the reader is achieved by the typicality of Musbach’s account. This typicality may be seen in a comparison of the structure of Musbach’s narrative as described above with the features of first generation German eyewitness testimony observed by Welzer in his study of the cross-generational transfer of information about the past within the private sphere of German families²³⁰. In his study, Welzer found that stories about the Nazi past related in the context of intergenerational family conversations tend to contain recurring patterns which he describes as *Tradierungstypen*. Musbach’s testimony closely reflects Welzer’s findings in relation to first generation eyewitness narratives by incorporating many of the *Tradierungstypen* outlined by Welzer, including *Opferschaft*, *Rechtfertigung*, *Distanzierung* from the “real” Nazis, and recounting minor instances of

²³⁰ Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* op cit at 81 – 104.

Zivilcourage. Musbach's emotive language also typifies the first generation narrative technique of *Überwältigung*, in which stories from the past (particularly battle experiences) are told with great immediacy and intensity for the purpose of encouraging identification and a lack of critical distance in the listener. Musbach's transfer of images and vocabulary usually associated with the Holocaust to German "victims" in order to co-opt the sympathy usually inspired by such imagery is also typical of the process of *Wechselrahmung* identified by Welzer as being frequently used in first generation narratives. In fact, Musbach's eyewitness account of his experiences at home under Nazism and on the Eastern Front is so overwhelmingly typical of his generation that his narrative can be seen as a parody of this type of testimony. Hutcheon has noted the important role that parody can play in historiographic metafiction and in postmodern criticism generally²³¹, and by reflecting typical first generation accounts such as those observed by Welzer so closely, *Unscharfe Bilder* again highlights the idea that history is a tale told for a purpose. This points further to the importance a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction is likely to have on the interpretation of the novel's portrayal of Musbach, as will be explored later in this chapter. The way in which Musbach's narrative is carefully structured so as to portray him as a victim, whilst simultaneously undermining this very portrayal is a good example of the novel's operation as a *Thesenroman*, in which reader response is closely managed in order to reach the conclusion that, despite his assertions to the contrary, Musbach is a perpetrator.

²³¹ Hutcheon, Linda *A Poetics of Postmodernism* op cit at 124 – 140.

2.2 Counter-narratives

In order to further avoid the possibility that readers may interpret Musbach's self-depiction and the novel as a whole as forming part of the "Germans as victims" wave current at the time of the novel's publication, *Unscharfe Bilder* contains a number of strong correctives to Musbach's testimony which augment the metafictional questioning of his narrative and are unmistakably placed for the purpose of influencing the reader's response to Musbach's account, guiding the reader towards questioning his version of events and directing the reader back towards German perpetration.

2.2.1 *Katja as a corrective to Musbach*

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

Katja reacts with incredulity to the way in which Musbach's narrative fails to include any reference to German war crimes and crimes against humanity which were taking place in areas in which he and his comrades were posted

(UB 48) and also when his story takes a turn for the unlikely and places him with the partisans (UB 220 - 221). She critiques Musbach's use of language to distance himself from Nazism and Nazi crimes, noting his use of *“wir”* instead of *“ich”*, his use of euphemisms such as *“größere Unternehmen”* in the place of the more direct *“Massenmorde”* (UB 211) and criticising his reference to *“die Fehler beseitigt”* as *“eine Umschreibung für Völkermord”* (UB 90; see UB 53 -54, 103 for similar examples). Her criticism of Musbach's language establishes a pattern in the novel in which suggestions by Musbach that the Germans were less than criminal are met with scepticism by Katja. Katja draws attention to the one-sided nature of Musbach's account (*“du redest noch immer nur über eine Seite”* (UB 81); *“die Geschichten des Vaters umkreisten noch immer eine Welt, die diese Bilder [aus dem Katalog] nicht erzählten”* (UB 20)). She points to the apparent inconsistency between his long-stated promotion of the responsibility of all Germans for Nazi crimes and his failure to apply these principles to himself or his friends:

“Nie hatte sie bei ihm auch nur leiseste Anzeichen einer Entschuldigung für die Nazis, ihren Terror, ihre Verbrechen entdecken können. Warum versuchte er jetzt, um Verständnis zu werben für eine Welt, aus der doch die Verbrechen geboren waren? Wehrte ab, was er als Vater und Lehrer bisher immer gefordert hatte? Kann man es nicht ertragen, sich selbst als einen kleinen Fleck auf dem Schreckenspanorama der Nazizeit zu erkennen? Paßt das eigene Bild nie in das Bild dieser Zeit? Noch heute nicht?” (UB 128 - 129)

“Du hast doch selbst immer unser aller, also auch deine Verantwortung für diese Verbrechen betont. Und jetzt, wo ich dich frage: >Wo warst

du, Adam?<, da bist du an all dem vorbeimarschiert, singend und blind?“ (UB 48)

Katja also suggests that Musbach is carefully constructing his narrative in such a way as to align himself with the victims, thereby questioning both his motivations and his reliability:

“War das wirklich seine ganze Geschichte? Hatte er am Ende alles nur so ausführlich erzählt, damit er mit seinen Erinnerungen selbst auch auf der Seite der Opfer erschien? Hatte er sich in ihre Reihe erzählen wollen?“ (UB 255).

Katja’s interjections encourage the reader to be sceptical about Musbach’s version of events and to question his motives for telling the story in the way he does, as well as turning the reader’s mind back to viewing Germans as perpetrators. Her voice in the novel has the effect of undercutting Musbach’s depiction of himself as a victim and *verhinderter Widerstandskämpfer*, exposing his tales of trauma as a ploy to avoid facing his involvement in criminal acts. Significantly, whereas Musbach’s tale of victimhood mirrors the typical, private first generation narratives detailed in Welzer’s study of conversations about the Nazi past within German families, Katja’s response does not. In relation to victimhood narratives in particular, Welzer notes that it was surprising how easily such narratives were accepted by subsequent generations, despite the critical reception one might expect on the basis of their thorough education regarding German Nazi history²³². By contrast, Katja’s constant questioning of Musbach’s account is more reflective of public

²³² Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* op cit at 82.

memory discourse and of the patterns of classic *Väterliteratur* than it is of private conversations, something which emphasises her role as a corrective to Musbach²³³. Unlike real private family narratives, with their concentration on German suffering at the expense of the wider context of German responsibility²³⁴, private family memory in *Unscharfe Bilder* is full of Katja's pointed reminders of German culpability. This lack of congruence between Katja's approach to her father and the "real life" conversations observed by Welzer underscores the idea that the novel is an artificially constructed *Thesenroman*, a closed text designed to set forth a variety of positions expressed in the debate about the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, but to leave the reader in no doubt about the conclusions Hahn would like the reader to draw about them.

A further example of this can be seen in the way in which Katja's voice serves specifically to pre-empt the reader's likely response to Musbach's emotional narrative by explicitly reflecting on how she herself is responding to his account. She chastises herself for allowing her father to distract her from her main aim of uncovering the truth about his past as a perpetrator: "*Durfte sich nicht mit Ausflüchten abspeisen lassen. Von seinen Geschichten einwickeln*

²³³ It should be noted that Welzer would not agree with these observations - he is of the view that novel promotes the kind of blurring of the lines used to avoid moral dilemmas in the private family conversations in his study: Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" op cit at 56. He, in turn, is criticised by Steckel for disregarding in his criticism the differences between empirical research and working through experiences in literary texts: Steckel, Gerd "The German Left Post-1989: Toward an Emancipated Reading of German History" in Wright, Will and Kaplan, Steven *The Image of Power in Literature, Media, and Society: Selected Papers, 2006 Conference, Society for the Interdisciplinary Study of Social Imagery March 2006 Colorado Springs, Colorado, Pueblo: The Society, 2006: 161 - 165 at 162.*

²³⁴ This feature of private narratives has been noted by Schmitz: Schmitz, Helmut "Representations of the Nazi past II" op cit at 143.

oder wortlos umarmen lassen. Warum ließ sie sich immer wieder auf Nebenwege führen?“ (UB 255). In a novel in which Hahn rarely leaves the reader's reaction to chance, she also uses Katja to point directly to the problems inherent in the presentation of Germans as victims in Musbach's extensive narrative, one of which is that his images of victimhood may overwhelm images of German perpetration unless she (and the reader) are able to maintain a critical distance:

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

Katja also worries that in trying to accommodate her father, she will end up absolving him, a reservation which also reflects broader concerns about the effect of a concentration on “Germans as victims”:

“Katja schüttelte sich, als könnte sie so die Gedanken verscheuchen, ihr Verstehen verscheuchen. Es war nicht nur das Verständnis, das sie verscheuchen wollte, es war die Absolution. Die Vergebung.” (UB 174).

In this way, Katja's reflections are used to highlight precisely those dangers which critics of the novel have warned may arise from the large amount of space accorded Musbach's victim narrative in the novel. By self-reflexively referring to its own potential effect on the reader, the novel provides the reader with a critical distance which allows the reader to examine his or her own response and makes the reader aware of the potential pitfalls of

becoming uncritically absorbed in Musbach's narrative. Katja's questioning prompts the reader to also question Musbach's account, defusing any tendency on the part of the reader to get carried away with Musbach's self-portrayal. In doing so, it also encourages the reader to approach the depiction of Germans as victims in general more critically.

2.2.2 *The role of minor characters in the Thesenroman*

The reader is also firmly pointed in the direction of questioning Musbach's portrayal of himself and other *Wehrmacht* soldiers as victims by the responses given to similar opinions expressed by minor characters. Most of the minor characters in the novel are entirely functional, with the reader being provided with very little biographical information about them and with no real attempt being made to develop them or their relationships with either Katja or Musbach²³⁵. These minor characters exist solely as mouthpieces for different points of view on topics such as how Germans deal with their Nazi past and whether Germans who lived during the Third Reich should be described as perpetrators or victims. Examples of functionalised minor characters include Katja's teaching colleagues, Schöneborn and Walter, who appear in the narrative only to provide differing views on the *Wehrmachtausstellung* (UB 155). Schöneborn is graced with a very brief back story as Katja's potential love interest (UB 245), but the reader is provided with no information at all

²³⁵ Stephan has further suggested that they are constructed as "types", rather than positive identification figures, in order to critically work through the theme of suppression and silence between the generations. See Stephan, Inge "Hinterlassenschaften: Nachgetragene Erinnerungen. Die Wiederkehr des Nationalsozialismus in Familientexten der Gegenwart - Uwe Timm Am Beispiel meines Bruders (2003) und Ulla Hahn Unscharfe Bilder (2003)" in Stephan, Inge and Tacke, Alexandra *NachBilder des Holocaust* Cologne: Böhlau Verlag, 2007: 18 - 37 at 28.

about Walter, apart from his job description as a *Referendar*, which places him as a member of the third generation. Similarly, Katja's friend Friedel Ganten and her new Australian partner appear in the novel only to present the view that Europeans in general and Germans in particular are obsessed with history and should consider taking a leaf out of the "New World" book, closing the door on the past and concentrating on the future. All of these characters function almost solely as vessels for different points of view on the subject of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*²³⁶ and/or to direct the reader away from agreeing with Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim²³⁷.

This can be seen in several instances in which Musbach's views are parroted by other characters in the novel and meet with a negative response. For

²³⁶ See also Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 219. Hahn takes almost exactly the same approach to discussing reactions to the Auschwitz trials in her novel *Aufbruch*, with different views being placed in the mouths of various teachers, family members and others, many of whom the protagonist, Hilla Palm, interviews for a school project on the subject. The main difference is that, although the characters are used as mouthpieces in that particular section of the novel, they are not purely functional and are developed to a far greater extent than the minor characters in *Unscharfe Bilder*: Hahn, Ulla *Aufbruch* Munich: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2012 at 239 – 281; 296 - 297. A similar point can also be made in relation to Hahn's functionalisation of various characters in *Spiel der Zeit* to express different views about the interaction between the first and second generations about the Nazi past in and around 1968 (see for example Hahn, Ulla *Spiel der Zeit* op cit at 342 – 347).

²³⁷ A similar point can be made about the "documents" interpolated in the book (with the exception of the doctor's letter at UB 260 - 263, which serves to provide the reader with plot-related information from a third party which is otherwise unlikely to be explicitly provided by either Katja or Musbach). These documents do not serve to advance the plot or character development in any way, but function solely as a means of introducing further viewpoints on the subject of dealing with the German past. An example can be seen in the email from Katja's American friend Jan, who otherwise plays no role in the novel, which functions only to provide an image of perfect *Zivilcourage* in the present (Jan and his family's protests against the George W Bush regime provide a contrast to the Germans under Hitler) and a perfectly "correct" way of dealing with the past (Jan's daughter is in Berlin researching musicians who were exiled or silenced by Hitler) (UB 191 - 192).

example, Musbach's distinction between the *Wehrmacht* and the SD, SS and *Einsatzgruppen* is also made by the male relatives of Katja's friend Reni. When reminiscing about old times, the men draw a clear line between the ordinary soldiers of the *Wehrmacht* and the *Waffen-SS*. The latter are described as being set apart: "*Doch eine Truppe habe es gegeben, verschworene Gemeinschaft . . . die über allen anderen stand: Waffen-SS*" (UB 125). It was this special group which the men accused of being involved behind the lines in "liquidations" and "*Säuberungen*", rather than the "*normale Soldaten*" of the *Wehrmacht*, who were in the majority (UB 126). However, unlike Musbach, the old men of this group are depicted as being *unverbesserlich* and *Ewiggestrige*, emphasising the idea that, in putting forward these arguments, Musbach is consigning himself to their ranks. Katja's teaching colleague Schöneborn also echoes several of Musbach's points when he asserts his father's unwillingness to participate in the war and upholds the distinction between the *Wehrmacht* and the SS:

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

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

assertions are challenged by his younger colleague, Walter, who points to the photographic evidence presented in the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* as proof of the complicity of the “*ganz normale Männer*” of the *Wehrmacht* (UB 155)²³⁸. When Schöneborn places a notice in the paper in memory of his father containing similar sentiments, it is Musbach himself who criticises him (“*Schließlich wissen wir doch heute einiges mehr*” (UB 245)), thereby pointing to the tension between his exemplary attitude to the German past in the abstract and his contrasting approach towards his own involvement.

The negative responses which meet the reflection of Musbach’s views by minor characters in the novel, like Katja’s repeated questioning of Musbach’s narrative, serve to re-contextualise the talk of German victimhood within the setting of German perpetration and thereby further undermine Musbach’s narrative. The fact that these minor characters serve no purpose other than providing a corrective voice to Musbach’s self-exculpatory narrative of his wartime experience shows once again the extent to which the novel is a *Thesenroman* which is somewhat artificially structured so as to leave no room for speculation about the novel’s overall characterisation of Musbach as a perpetrator.

2.3 “Zweikampf zwischen Tochter und Vater” – *Väterliteratur* reprise

As with *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* bears many of the hallmarks of the genre of *Väterliteratur*, including the confrontation of a father and daughter about the father’s activities during the Nazi period, and the impact of the

²³⁸ Walter’s views here are more reminiscent of those of the second generation than those of the third. Fischer-Kania notes the contrast between the open and enquiring attitude of the third generation to the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* observed in that exhibition’s reception and the lack of empathy displayed by Walter: Fischer-Kania, Sabine “Reden” op cit at 96.

father's past on their relationship and the daughter's identity. In several interviews, Hahn has suggested that she intended in the novel to turn away from the aggressive stance of the 68ers towards their parents, thereby seeming to lend support to those critics who see the novel as a move away from the approach to the past taken in pre-1990 *Väterliteratur*.

“Was im Roman abläuft ist ja auch ein Zweikampf zwischen Tochter und Vater, und ich versuche, beide zu verstehen. Es gab in den 60er Jahren schon einmal eine Zeit, in der sich meine Generation intensiv mit ihren Vätern und deren Rolle im Zweiten Weltkrieg beschäftigt hat. Die wurden oft zu schnell pauschal verdammt, da gab es selten wirkliches Bemühen um Verständnis. Von Anfang an stand meist fest: Der Vater ist ein Täter oder zumindest ein Mitläufer, Wegschauer.”²³⁹

In certain respects, *Unschärfe Bilder* does mark a change from the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s. The novel accords a large amount of space to Musbach's wartime recollections²⁴⁰, meaning that he is allowed a voice that was denied to the first generation father figures in earlier forms of *Väterliteratur*. The concentration on the psychological dynamics of the father/daughter relationship, too, represents a change from earlier works of

²³⁹ Gless, Lydia and Wittmann, Angela, op cit. For similar comments, see also transcript of radio interview on Deutschlandfunk, 29 January 2004, op cit. Hahn has also expressed similar sentiments about wishing to break away from the 68er approach towards the first generation in interviews about her semi-autobiographical novel, *Aufbruch*: Florin, Christiane “Im Gespräch mit Ulla Hahn: In der Gegenwart verankert” *Die Politische Meinung* 480 (2009): 50 - 53; RP Online “Ulla Hahns ‘Aufbruch’” RP Online <<http://www.rp-online.de/kultur/kunst/ulla-hahns-aufbruch-aid-1.477907>> (accessed 11 April 2016).

²⁴⁰ Indeed, the sections of narrative about Musbach's past are so extensive that Herrmann has suggested that the novel has a “*doppelter Zeitbezug*”, despite the past narrative not constituting a completely independent chronological setting: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenheit* op cit at 216.

this genre, as does the move (at least at a superficial level) to a more conciliatory tone between the generations which marks a break from the polemical, moralistic attitude which previously typified the genre. Does the power play which characterises the interaction between Katja and Musbach about the past in the novel really represent a change in approach from the aggression, breach, rejection and instrumentalisation of the past for the purposes of intergenerational conflict typical of classic *Väterliteratur*? Or is it, like *Der Vorleser*, a continuation of those patterns? In the following analysis, I will explore these ideas and consider the effect the reading of the novel as *Väterliteratur* has on the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the novel.

2.3.1 *Oedipal overtones*

The father/daughter relationship between Musbach and Katja is unusually close and is marked by oedipal overtones. When Musbach greets Katja, his words are “*wie eine Liebkosung*” (UB 16), and a fellow resident in the retirement home teases him about his closeness to his daughter, saying “*Wenn ich nicht wüßte, daß die junge Dame wirklich Ihr Fräulein Tochter ist . . .*” (UB 138). When they leave the retirement home together, father and daughter sneak out the back door as though they were secret lovers (UB 148), and Katja cannot suppress the hint of an incestuous thought when she feels her father's stubbled cheek against her own (UB 254). The third person narrator underscores the point by noting: “*Von weitem konnte man sie für ein altvertrautes Ehepaar halten*” (UB 253). Katja is jealous of any other woman who has a relationship with her father and repeatedly stresses the primacy and exclusivity of her own relationship with him. In her eyes, the primary

relationship in her family was always between her and her father, to the exclusion of her mother (UB 22; 153; 187), and she always viewed her mother as competition for her father's affections (UB 153 - 154). When Musbach begins to tell her about his romantic involvements with women as a young man, she feels threatened and experiences feelings of jealousy more appropriate in a cheated wife than a daughter. When she reads a letter written to her father by his childhood sweetheart, she cannot help denigrating the young woman's views and even her writing style (UB 191). Later, when she embraces her father after finding out about his love for the partisan Wera, she experiences the same emotions she felt when she discovered evidence of her husband's unfaithfulness (UB 242), and the rash she develops when her relationship with Musbach is strained is identical to the symptoms she suffered when she uncovered Albert's adultery: *“Doch da sah sie die Flecken. Rote Flecken in Armbeuge und Achselhöhlen, in Leisten und Kniekehlen. Flecken, die sie schon einmal befallen hatten, damals, als sie die Briefe gefunden hatte”* (UB 147).

Typically for Hahn's construction of the novel as a remarkably closed text, the reader is not left to draw his or her own conclusions on this score, with the oedipal nature of Katja's relationship with Musbach being specifically spelled out in the letter from her psychologist interpolated in the text (*“Die Beziehung zum Vater könnte psychogenetisch durch eine ödipale Fixierung an den Vater bestimmt sein”* (UB 262)). There is no indication in the novel that Musbach shares Katja's view of the special, exclusive nature of their relationship, and to the extent his relationship with his wife is mentioned at all, it appears to have been loving, supportive, and even exclusive of Katja on occasion (UB 64; 66;

153 – 154; 171). As with the use of a similar constellation in *Der Vorleser*, the oedipal overtones in the relationship between Musbach and Katja serve to heighten the level of tension and conflict in the parent/child relationship, throwing the discussion of the past which becomes the *Zankapfel* between them into stark relief.

The oedipal nature of Katja's relationship with her father meant that she had always idolised him: “*Der Vater war schon immer ihr Held*” (UB 22).

Combined with Musbach's exemplary attitude to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, Katja's idolisation of her father prevented her from participating in the generational conflict of her peers. Her reservations about becoming involved in the rebellion of the 68ers against their father figures are highlighted in the novel by quotations interpolated from her diary from the “*unruhigen Jahren der Studentenbewegung*” (UB 130), in which she is critical of her own generation's treatment of their elders. In the diary entry, she describes the invasion of one of her lectures by student protesters, who accuse the lecturer of having written pro-Nazi material in the past. The confrontation is described by the young Katja as an “*unangenehme Sache*”, the protest as a “*Krawall*”, and the accusations of the protesters as unreliable (“*So jedenfalls die K-ler*”). The lecturer is depicted as being a well-liked and effective teacher, whose attempt to enter into a dialogue with the protesters is rejected. In this episode, the 68ers are portrayed solely in negative terms and criticised for being unwilling to allow those they accuse to put their side of the story²⁴¹.

²⁴¹ Hahn's third semi-autobiographical novel, *Spiel der Zeit* (Hahn, Ulla *Spiel der Zeit* op cit) deals with the period of the 1968 student revolution and includes a character called Katja Musbach, who is a university acquaintance of the main character (and Hahn's alter ego), Hilla Palm. By contrast with the image of Katja presented in *Unscharfe Bilder*, Hilla (as first person narrator in

Katja's trust in her dominant father figure (UB 262) appears to have prevented her from questioning his authority and uncovering his weakness during her adolescence and early adulthood. However, just as Michael's discovery of Hanna's crimes and her illiteracy allow him to assume a position of power in their oedipal relationship, so too Katja's discovery of Musbach's "crime" in the photograph from the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* gives her the belated opportunity to turn apostate and tear down her idol. Katja shows some inkling of this connection when she determines to turn the tables on her father and complete their unfinished generational business:

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

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

Spiel der Zeit) depicts Katja as a student radical (at 48 – 49; 127 – 128; 233; 405 – 406; 415; 544; 568 – 570; 575). According to Hilla, Katja was involved in attacks on lecturers (at 337 – 341) and became a Marxist and an activist as a reaction against her father (at 405; 553). Although *Spiel der Zeit* is a different work, the comparisons highlight some of the themes also present in *Unschärfe Bilder*, such as the problems of using eyewitness memory as a source, the contingency of historical sources (such as diaries) generally, and the difficulties in gaining an accurate or objective view of the past.

blameless image, leading to the instrumentalisation of the categories of perpetrator and victim for the purposes of their intergenerational power play²⁴².

2.3.2 *Intergenerational power play*

The extensive dialogues between Musbach and Katja are sparked when Katja sets down “*ein Buch auf den Schreibtisch*” in her father's room (UB 17). The book is the exhibition catalogue from the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, marking Katja's opening move in her conflict with her father as a reminder of the involvement of ordinary Germans of the *Wehrmacht* in Nazi crimes and signalling her intention to use the Nazi past to confront her father. No matter how often Musbach tries to push the catalogue away, Katja always returns the focus to the issues raised by it, as she does in their very first interaction on the subject, in which Musbach attempts to dismiss the findings of the exhibition as “nothing new” and suggests that she should not disturb his peaceful retirement with such matters. Katja remains determined not to let her father get away with failing to explain his part in German crimes on the Eastern Front (UB 18). She pushes the catalogue back towards him, with the hint that he is to be identified with the participants in crime depicted in its pages (UB 19). Later, when Musbach casually attempts to hide the catalogue beneath a cruise brochure, Katja pulls it out again and tells her father, “*Den habe ich nicht vergessen*” (UB 89). This pattern of attempted avoidance/insistence that involvement in German crimes be addressed is

²⁴² As noted in the previous chapter at 84 - 85, this point about the use of disputes about the Nazi past as an expression of generational conflict is made by Schlink in *Der Vorleser* and various other works. The same point is also made by Hahn in *Spiel der Zeit* (Hahn, Ulla *Spiel der Zeit* *ibid* at 233; 243; 376; 573).

repeated often throughout the novel (UB 30 – 31; 44 – 45; 51; 54 – 56; 61; 71 – 72; 81; 82 – 83; 89; 95; 98 – 99; 115; 206 – 207; 217; 255; 257; 259)²⁴³.

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

²⁴³ This pattern is also noted by Geier: Geier, Andrea "Bildgedächtnis und Bildkritik in der deutschsprachigen Prosa seit 1945" *Oxford German Studies* 37.2 (2008): 270 - 291 at 287.

relationship. By withholding key knowledge from her father, Katja attempts to control the conversation in order to move it towards the outcome she desires, namely the confession of her father to his crime (UB 262). Conversely, by maximising the amount of narrative he can devote to the depiction of himself as a victim, Musbach aims to predispose Katja towards forgiving him when he finally comes to speak about his role as a perpetrator.

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

in the same way as himself and his contemporaries if she had been threatened as opponents of the Nazis were in the Third Reich:

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

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

“Kein Schnappschuß kann es wiedergeben, nicht einmal ein Film. Nur das Dabeigewesensein kann es aufnehmen und - vielleicht und wie unvollkommen - erinnern. Dort habe ich meine Bilder. Im Kopf. Und nicht in solchen Fotos.” (UB 71)

By insisting on the priority of his own first-hand account over the photographs and other secondary sources available to Katja, Musbach suggests that, as she was not an eyewitness to the relevant events, she cannot really know or understand what occurred, and her opinion is therefore not to be regarded as authoritative or valid. In all of these manoeuvres designed to shut down the conversation about the past, as in his emphasis on his own victimhood and

desire to maintain his silence about his own role as a perpetrator, Musbach presents a response typical of his generation.

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

“Die Tochter war stärker als der Vater, viel stärker. Sie hätte ihn von sich stoßen können, wegstoßen, liegenlassen können. Sah ihn daliegen, hilflos im Sand, zwischen den Steinen, das Hemd blutig, die Knie in den Hosen seltsam verrenkt, zusammengekrümmt, das Gesicht zwischen den Armen, um sich zu schützen.” (UB 148)

The adversarial atmosphere between Katja and Musbach is further heightened by the constant game-playing between the two. This can be seen most obviously in their disagreement over their “coffee game”. Drinking coffee together is a ritual that they both enjoy, and something that has bound them together with “*Freude*” (UB 19; 35) and “*Treue*” (UB 35) since Katja was a child. When Katja first confronts Musbach with the exhibition catalogue, he tries to distract her by starting to make coffee, a ploy he later repeats (UB 18 – 19; 44). For her part, Katja shows her dissatisfaction with his refusal to say more about the past by withdrawing her collaboration in the coffee game (UB 31; 115; 216), and her occasional desire to try a more conciliatory approach is marked by a return to participating in the game (UB 88; 205). As well as playing the coffee game, Musbach likes to play tricks on Katja, as when he excites her anticipation by exclaiming, “*Ich war gestern in der Ausstellung*” (UB 114), only to reveal that the exhibition in question is a display of paintings by the Danish artist, Hammershøi.

During the course of their discussions about the past, the normally warm relationship between father and daughter cools rapidly, with their hugs “*entfernter als sonst*” (UB 19) and their customary exchanges “*eher höflich, beinahe unbeteiligt*” (UB 30). From the beginning, their discussions are punctuated by Katja's accusations, demands to know the truth about the past, and reminders of German guilt (UB 48; 49; 51; 54; 80; 82; 83; 95; 98; 155; 181; 206; 207; 217; 259). As discussed above, these points in the text prevent the reader from becoming too absorbed in Musbach's victimhood narrative, but they are also markers of Katja's continuing anger at Musbach's failure to confess to the crimes she thinks he has committed. Her tone in

these exchanges is far from conciliatory, with the dialogue reading more like the interrogation of an overly enthusiastic public prosecutor aimed at forcing a confession than a measured discussion. In these exchanges, Katja's attitude is variously described as *“auffordernd”* (UB 19), *“beharrlich”* (UB 31), *“unnachgiebig, fast hart”* (UB 44), *“erregt”* (UB 48), *“ungeduldig”* (UB 71), *“bitter”* (UB 80), *“kühl”* (UB 217), and *“drohend”* (UB 221). It could also be described as adolescent, particularly in the way in which she repeatedly responds to difficulty by running away from her father, slamming the door in his face, and leaving him alone, often in tears (UB 66; 120; 145; 173; 238; 259; 272 - 273).

2.3.3 *Unrealised potential for consensus*

There are moments in the conflict between father and daughter when Katja seems to suggest that consensus and conciliation with her father are possible, but such moments turn out to be deceptive. Some critics have suggested that Musbach and Katja are able to achieve a reconciliation, not because of any great change in attitude, but because Musbach turns out not to be guilty²⁴⁴. Musbach was not the man Katja saw in the photograph at the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, and however guilty he may feel about his actions, the basis for Katja's conflict with him therefore turns out to be unfounded. Consequently, the tension between Katja and Musbach disappears, not because they have resolved their differences through discussions and come to a mutual conclusion about a difficult past, but because the whole reason for

²⁴⁴ Hummel, Christine op cit at 198; Geier, Andrea op cit at 290. These views recall those commentators on *Der Vorleser* who consider that Hanna's illiteracy removes her guilt and consequently the source of Michael's dilemma: see the previous chapter at 90 – 91.

their dispute has fallen away. However, it does not necessarily follow that the lack of a crime as the basis for the intergenerational conflict between Katja and Musbach must lead to reconciliation because it removes the reason for dispute. Rather, the relative paucity of Musbach's "crime" exposes the confrontation between father and daughter as being in large part about the power relationship between two generations, with the Nazi past being used by Katja as a convenient weapon in her power struggle with Musbach and her attempt to exorcise her intergenerational demons.

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

“Und die anderen? Die gefragt hatten? Hatten die ihre Väter nicht zu erbarmungslos, voller Vorurteile gefragt? Ihnen keine Chance gegeben, offen zu reden? Hatten sie nicht allzu schnell die eigene Unschuld sichern wollen, indem sie ohne Unterschied eine ganze Generation zu Tätern, Mitläufern, Zuschauern machten, um ja nichts mit ihnen zu tun zu haben? Für die Väter galt dann: schuldig; für sie selbst: gewissenhaft. Sogar als Opfer konnte man sich sehen, als Opfer der Täter-Väter. Deren damalige Sorgen, Ängste und Hoffnungen ließen sie beiseite. Hatten sie jemals Nachsicht und Mitgefühl empfunden, zu verstehen versucht?” (UB 255)

However, these reflections form little more than a series of unanswered questions. They come directly after Katja's realisation that Musbach has

aimed his narrative towards putting himself on the side of the victims in order to deflect closer scrutiny and judgment (UB 255), and immediately before she forms her decision to push Musbach to answer her charges about his involvement in Nazi crimes (UB 256), suggesting that she considers an alternative, conciliatory approach to dealing with the Nazi past with her father, but rejects this in favour of continuing conflict. Her musings about the attitude of her contemporaries do nothing to change her own plans to confront her father (UB 256), and her continuation of her accusatory and frequently hostile approach indicates an unwillingness or inability to break away from the established patterns of *Väterliteratur*.

The extent to which Katja shows concern about the detrimental effect her questioning is having on Musbach's physical and mental health follows a similar pattern. Her misgivings about putting her father through the trauma of remembering and her expression of a desire for attentive listening and understanding in intergenerational dialogue are different from the attitudes expressed in earlier forms of *Väterliteratur*. She recognises that she will need to take the time to listen to her father and bear his memories if she wishes to uncover the truth (UB 40), and sometimes regrets taking an aggressive tone with him (UB 45, 49). She considers the possibility of unity between the generations following completed memory work ("*Eine Insel der Gemeinsamkeit für Vater und Tochter? Das wäre schon viel, für zwei Generationen*") (UB 105)) and contemplates the need to understand her father in order to maintain their relationship:

“Er brauchte diesen Umweg auf seiner Wanderung zu ihrem, Katjas, Ziel: seiner Antwort auf die Fotos der Ausstellung. Würde sie auch das

verstehen? Verstehen können? Verstehen müssen, wenn sie dem Vater weiterhin eine Tochter sein wollte?" (UB 174)

She also considers the need for the second generation to share the burden of the past (both guilt and suffering) with the first, rather than simply pushing it away:

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

"War sie, Katja, bereit, mit ihm die Erinnerung dann auch zu teilen? Wiegt geteilte Schande doppelt? Oder nur noch halb - wie geteiltes Leid?" (UB 151)

However, as with her thoughts about her generation's approach towards talking to their parents about the past, her thoughts on this score remain just that and are not reflected in her actions. Katja may have some scruples about putting her father through the trauma of reliving the past, but every time she asks herself whether she ought to stop, she answers her own question in the negative:

"War es richtig, den Vater so zu quälen? . . . Es war richtig, den Vater zum Sprechen zu bringen." (UB 145)

"Die Bilder, die sie umtrieben, waren sie überhaupt noch wichtig? Waren die Fotos wichtig? Fotos oder der Vater? Der Vater, gebrechlich, krank, verstört? Von seinen Erinnerungen aufgestört, am

Ende zerstört? Hatte sie dazu ein Recht? Wo es ein Pflicht gibt zu erinnern, dachte sie, muß auch einer ein Recht geben zu erfahren. Ein Recht auf das Erinnern und ein Recht auf das Fragen.” (UB 150 - 151)

“Bereute sie, mit dem Buch, mit diesen furchtbaren Fotos, diesen Sturzbach an Erinnerungen ausgelöst zu haben? . . . Nein, Katja bereute nicht.” (UB 105)

The many question marks peppering Katja's reflections about the need to listen to and understand the first generation (UB 145; 151; 174) are an indication that these thoughts are speculations, rather than concluded positions, and her actions in confronting her father tell a different story. Despite Musbach's rapidly deteriorating health and increasing signs of mental trauma, Katja is determined to force the issue and refuses to let him rest until she has achieved her desired outcome. Although she allows her father plenty of space in which to tell his story, she is reluctant to let the progression of their dialogue deviate from her intentions for it: *“Er sollte erzählen, was sie hören wollte”* (UB 81). She is impatient to reach her goal, namely her father's confession to a crime, which will expose his fallibility and allow Katja to dispose of him as her idol. In her view, only this confession, which places her in the position of power, will resolve the rift in their relationship, as she suggests when reflecting on the Wotan/Brünnhilde relationship in Wagner's opera: *“Wotan und Brünnhilde: Liebe, Nähe, Vertrautheit. Wotan, der seine Schwäche, seine Verfehlung, seine Schmach gesteht. Und Brünnhilde nimmt mit der Liebe und dem Vertrauen auch die Bürde des Vaters an”* (UB 188).

2.3.4 *Katja's triumph over Musbach*

Ultimately, Katja gets the resolution she desires. Although not guilty of the crime she initially thinks he has committed, Musbach does end up confessing to a different shooting (UB 268 – 269; 275). His precise involvement in the execution may be unclear, but it is something about which he feels deeply guilty. By coming to Katja for absolution, he is forced to admit both his own failings and her power. Katja's aggressive pursuit of her goal has left Musbach a physically and mentally broken man (UB 178; 269), but this destruction of her idol has allowed her to leave his orbit and rejoin her own generation by seeking dialogue with her estranged husband (UB 256; 275). At the conclusion of their conversation, Katja fails to embrace Musbach or look him in the eye, preferring to walk on into a new chapter with Albert²⁴⁵. Despite the opportunity given to Musbach to tell his story, the moments of tenderness between father and daughter (UB 146; 170 – 171; 251), and Katja's musings as to the possibility of a different, more understanding way of dealing with the past, the novel does not break with the model of intergenerational confrontation established in the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s. Rather than exploring the possibilities of the “understanding” approach she contemplates, Katja's attitude to discussing the past remains largely inquisitorial throughout and her reminders of German perpetration constant²⁴⁶. Despite Katja's criticism of her fellow 68ers, her confrontation

²⁴⁵ Veas-Gulani shares this view: Veas-Gulani, Susanne op cit at 70.

²⁴⁶ Fischer-Kania disagrees slightly with this view, in that she thinks that the novel *does* present a different model of intergenerational memory talk (although, unlike Welzer, she does not think that this different approach indicates a reduction of the guilt of the first generation or a shift of guilt to the second generation). However, she agrees that the novel fails to fulfil its own

with her father is as aggressive as any which might have taken place in the 1960s or 1970s, and can be seen as a belated version of the same approach. Rather than signalling a revolutionary break with the traditions of *Väterliteratur*, Katja's conduct is very much in keeping with the accusations, power play, and rejection of the first generation typical of classic *Väterliteratur*. The discussion may not end with a complete breach, but it does conclude with Katja leaving her spent and defeated father to rejoin her own generation²⁴⁷. By adhering to the patterns and conflicts characteristic of the *Väterliteratur* genre, *Unschärfe Bilder* guides the reader towards interpreting Musbach along the lines of the usual depiction of father figures in the genre, namely as a perpetrator. The instrumentalisation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the intergenerational conflict which becomes apparent through the use of typical *Väterliteratur* themes also has the effect of undermining Musbach's narrative by exposing his characterisation of himself as a victim as a part of his power struggle with Katja. By raising questions about the purpose of Musbach's narrative, the reading of the novel as *Väterliteratur*, like Katja's voice and other devices used in the novel to undermine Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim, causes the self-depiction in that narrative to fail, leaving Katja's assertion that he is a perpetrator the dominant view in the novel.

potential, in her view because Katja is too afraid to really empathise with a perpetrator: Fischer-Kania, Sabine "Reden" op cit at 85 - 90.

²⁴⁷ These views as to the failure of the novel to realise the potential of its own set-up and break with the 68er approach are shared by Vees-Gulani: Vees-Gulani, Susanne op cit at 66 - 71.

3. Reading *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction and its effect on the portrayal of Musbach

Like *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* can be read as a work of historiographic metafiction. I have already referred in this chapter to various metafictional elements of the novel, particularly the closed, tightly constructed nature of the text which is so clearly apparent and overtly artificial as to self-reflexively highlight the novel's fictionality, giving the reader an awareness of the functional nature of the novel and providing a critical distance which prompts reflection. In the following analysis, I will examine the way in which these metafictional elements combine with the novel's explicit thematisation of historiographical criticism to produce a work of historiographic metafiction and consider the impact a reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction has on its characterisation of Musbach as a perpetrator.

3.1 Explicit thematisation of historiographical criticism – the narrativity of history

As was the case with *Der Vorleser*, criticisms of historiography are expressly thematised in *Unscharfe Bilder* by means of the profession of a protagonist, in this case Musbach. Like Michael, Musbach works in the field of history, although as an ancient history teacher, rather than a legal historian. His profession provides occasion in the novel for reflection on the ability of historiography to truthfully represent historical events and the interaction between history writing and fiction. For example, on a family visit to Troy, the debates between Musbach and Katja's archaeologist husband, Albert, as to whether Troy was a genuine historical location and whether it existed on the

site identified by Schliemann expose history as a tale often spun on the basis of remarkably little evidence. Their discussion also specifically references the interaction between fact and fiction and the narrativity of history when Musbach and Albert wonder whether Troy really existed or was invented by the poet Homer, and whether “*ein Krieg um Troja Geschichte oder eine Geschichte war*” (UB 22). Further, the way in which Musbach uses history in his role as a history teacher prompts consideration of the influence of present concerns on how we tell stories about the past. When teaching high school students about ancient history, Musbach frequently shaped the narrative of ancient events so as to comment on recent German history, as noted by his fellow retirement home resident, Frau Sippel, mother of one of Musbach’s pupils:

“Wo Sie doch sonst ständig betonen, daß nichts vergessen werden darf aus dieser Zeit? Mein Sohn schwärmt noch heute von Ihrem Geschichtsunterricht. Egal, ob Kaiser Nero, Caesar oder Caligulla, irgendwie, erzählte mein Christoph bei jeder Familienfeier, kriegt der Musbach den Bogen zu Hitler und ins Dritte Reich. Wortwörtlich konnte der Junge wiederholen, was Sie den Kindern damals beigebracht haben. Daß alle Deutschen heute Verantwortung tragen und so.” (UB 24)

The idea that history is a narrative shaped for a present purpose is repeated when Musbach tells Katja about a nineteenth century shipping disaster involving a raft called the *Medusa* with the specific aim of underscoring his own authority as an eyewitness and dismissing Katja’s ability to judge him and his contemporaries for what they did during the Nazi period. The incident

highlights the idea that the writer of history selects certain elements from the historical record in order to create a narrative for a particular purpose, and that historiography therefore represents more than a mere presentation of “facts”. This exposure of bias in historical narrative is most apparent in the contrast between the way in which Musbach relates the history of the Nazi period as a history teacher and as a former *Wehrmacht* soldier speaking to his daughter. As a history teacher, Musbach relates the facts of the Nazi period so as to emphasise German perpetration, but when it comes to speaking to Katja about his individual involvement, he reframes the events to emphasise German victimhood.

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

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

werden die Dinge, ganz wie die Naturwissenschaftler der nächsten Generation, wieder anders sehen.” (UB 135)

Reference is also made in the novel to debates about the problems of aestheticising history, particularly the history of traumatic events such as the Holocaust. Musbach criticises the aestheticisation of battle on the basis that it has the effect of making trauma more palatable and consequently does not represent its true horror (UB 73). Katja also reflects on this problem:

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

Katja’s realisations here have the effect of disrupting her faith in the ability of words to represent the full story about the past: *“Seit er zu erzählen begonnen hatte, war sie mißtrauischer geworden gegenüber Wörtern und Sätzen”* (UB 158). In a further, self-reflexive move typical of historiographic metafiction, Katja’s train of thought at this point also reflects on Hahn’s writing of a novel which may have a tendency to aestheticise the past and make it more palatable:

“Trübe nicht auch einer, der von diesen Gesprächen zwischen Vater und Tochter schriebe, dazu bei, das Leiden, den Schmerz, den Krieg selbst, erträglicher zu machen? Ist nicht alles Erzählen am Ende nur dazu da, das Erlebte für das Leben, für die Zukunft erträglich zu machen?” (UB 158 – 159)

This self-reflexive element pre-empts the text's own reception by questioning the purpose of the recounting of Musbach and Katja's dialogue about the past, demonstrating an awareness of potential criticisms of Musbach's victim-focused narrative as a device which serves to make a desired reconciliation between the generations more achievable and prompting reflection on the purpose behind narratives about the past.

3.2 Historical source material – implications of limitations and multiplicity

As well as referring to these more general points of historiographical criticism, *Unscharfe Bilder* also refers specifically to contemporary debates about the representation, both in history and in fiction, of Third Reich Germans as either victims or perpetrators. The controversies surrounding Grass' novella *Im Krebsgang* (UB 27)²⁴⁸ and Walser's *Ein springender Brunnen* (UB 100)²⁴⁹ are referred to in passing, and in both cases the reference not only underscores the theme of the representation of the past, but also points in a metafictional way to the blurring of the line between fact and fiction. However, the main intertextual reference to contemporary controversies about the representation of the role of ordinary Germans in the events of the Nazi period is to the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*²⁵⁰. A significant aspect of the discussion of the exhibition in the novel is the critique of the accuracy of photography as a source of information about the past. This critique reflects a central element

²⁴⁸ Grass, Günter op cit.

²⁴⁹ Walser, Martin op cit. The controversy in this case is referred to indirectly when Musbach asks Walser's question as to whether it was possible for a German of his generation to tell his own personal story without having to discuss the Holocaust.

²⁵⁰ Hahn specifically refers to her use of the exhibition catalogue as a historical source at the end of the text (UB 281).

of the controversy about the representation of *Wehrmacht* soldiers in the exhibition, as well as making more general points about the fragmentary nature of historical source material and the openness of such material to misinterpretation.

In its original form, as displayed from 1995 - 1999, the *Wehrmachtsausstellung* consisted largely of photographic material alleged to depict *Wehrmacht* soldiers committing atrocities against civilians. Following a closer inspection by historians, it was discovered that a number of the photographs in fact depicted crimes of the Soviet secret service (NKWD), rather than the *Wehrmacht*. This led to a loss of confidence in the veracity of the images presented and the withdrawal of the exhibition in its original form²⁵¹. These events raised directly the question of the reliability of photographic evidence in relation to providing an accurate depiction of the past, and this issue is thematised throughout *Unscharfe Bilder*, beginning with the Ludwig Wittgenstein quote in the epigraph, “*Ist eine unscharfe Fotografie überhaupt ein Bild eines Menschen?*” (UB 7). The plot of the novel opens with Katja pushing the exhibition catalogue towards Musbach, stating cryptically, “*Dein Bild wirst du da ja nicht drin finden*” (UB 19), and from this moment onwards, the novel is concerned with the reliability of and battle for primacy between various sources, particularly the battle between the photographic evidence in the catalogue and Musbach's eyewitness account²⁵². Katja initially has a

²⁵¹ Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 288-290; Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht* website, op cit; Hamburger Institut für Sozialforschung *Verbrechen der Wehrmacht Begleitbroschüre*, op cit.

²⁵² Geier also describes the novel as being concerned with the media contest between image and text: Geier, Andrea op cit at 284 and generally.

strong belief in the reliability of photographic evidence and thinks that the static nature of photography makes it preferable to more changeable sources:

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

Musbach critiques this view in terms that will be familiar to anyone with a passing interest in photographic theory²⁵³ by pointing out that a photograph captures only a single, decontextualised moment. When considering Katja's question as to whether photographic images are always true, he replies: “*Ja, sicher . . . jedenfalls für den Augenblick, den sie festhalten - und für das, was sie einrahmen als Augenblick. Aber für jedes Bild gibt es ein Bild dahinter, für jeden Augenblick eine Geschichte, davor und danach*” (UB 63; see also similar reflections at UB 70, and the references to photographs excluding uncomfortable truths at UB 132). The attitudes displayed by both Katja and Musbach in these discussions about photographs as a historical source underscore the way in which Katja and Musbach both use historical sources as weapons in their intergenerational power struggle, highlighting both the continuation of the instrumentalisation of the past typical of *Väterliteratur* and

²⁵³ Fischer-Kania has considered the theme of photography in the novel in the context of photographic theory, noting the metaphotographic comments contained in the dialogue between Katja and Musbach and the contest between various forms of representation (photographic, artistic, eyewitness, etc) as it relates to memory: Fischer-Kania, Sabine “Medium” op cit 149.

the questioning of the biases inherent in the use and interpretation of historical sources often thematised in historiographic metafiction²⁵⁴.

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

²⁵⁴ This sort of reflection on the role of generational bias in the interpretation of historical sources also arises in *Spiel der Zeit*, when the character of Katja relates how, in the absence of her father's willingness to speak about the subject, she started obsessively researching the Third Reich, scouring the books for her father's picture, and stopped when she started seeing her father's face in every photograph (Hahn, Ulla *Spiel der Zeit* op cit at 344 – 346).

In addition to highlighting the problems associated with using photography as a historical source, the novel also thematises the problems inherent in using memory as a guide to the past. This is particularly significant in view of Musbach's insistence on the primacy and authenticity of his eyewitness testimony. Musbach is keen to attach the label of authenticity to his eyewitness account in order to stake a claim for the primacy of his version of events over the other versions promoted by Katja and thereby shut down her line of questioning. He promotes the idea that the photographs in the exhibition and other sources of information about the past are *"unvollständig ohne meine Bilder"* (UB 73) and that the images of the past presented in the exhibition are not representative of the past as he lived it: *"Siehst du! Von solchen Bildern, von meinen Toten, von meinen Freunden und Kameraden habe ich in deinem Buch kein Bild gesehen. Du hast schon recht, mein Bild, meine Erinnerung kann ich da nicht finden"* (UB 40; see also 31; 39; 49; 109; 120; 135). On a number of occasions, he asserts that only those who experienced the Nazi period and the war can truly know what it was like, implying that the first generation are the only ones who can know the truth about this past (*"nur wer das einmal erlebt hat, weiß überhaupt"* (UB 52); *"Das alles ist wahr und geschehen, und doch verstehst du nichts; kannst du nichts verstehen, wie es uns damals ging"* (UB 105); this is also a key point in Musbach's anecdote about the *Medusa* (UB 257 - 259)). Musbach's emphasis on the authenticity of his own memories is partly a ploy to gain the ascendancy in his generational power play with Katja, in that it devalues her opinions and removes her ability to judge his actions. Katja recognises her father's strategy, and is concerned that her own view of Germans as

perpetrators will be overwhelmed by his images of Germans as victims (UB 43). Yet, although she repeatedly resists his self-depiction by reminding him of his own culpability, to a certain extent she is also forced to agree that Musbach does have an advantage when it comes to commenting on past events, acknowledging the weaknesses of her second generation position: *“Konnte jemand, der nicht dabeigewesen war, jemals den Vater verstehen? Begreifen? Blieb ihr nicht alles, was der Vater erzählte, nur Wissen, nur der Versuch einer Vorstellung?”* (UB 174). She is aware that her lack of first-hand experience of the relevant events inhibits her ability to “feel” what the past was like, and that she is entirely reliant on secondary sources for her knowledge of the period (UB 176). No matter how hard she tries to “imagine” the past, the fact that all of her accounts of the past are mediated means that she is destined to failure (UB 175; 243). Musbach’s emphasis on the primacy of his eyewitness testimony based on its authenticity and reliability is also reflected in certain elements of the text. Although the story is told from the perspective of an omniscient narrator, the commentary provided by the narrator is limited, with most of the novel being given over to direct quotation dialogue, chiefly between Musbach and Katja. The rendering of Musbach’s narrative primarily in direct quotation dialogue lends it an air of immediacy and authenticity, and mirrors the oral nature typical of eyewitness testimony. Hahn’s indication at the end of the text that she used historical source materials such as collections of letters from the Front and interviews with eyewitnesses as the basis for Musbach’s account (UB 281)²⁵⁵ also appears to suggest authenticity.

²⁵⁵ Hahn's use of this source material has been criticised by Schmitz, who

The idea that eyewitness accounts are more “authentic” than other sources of evidence can only be supported if the memories relayed in those accounts can be said to be reliable, yet the novel repeatedly points to the unreliability of memory generally and of Musbach's memories in particular. Musbach may be envied by his neighbours and colleagues for his “*hervorragendes Gedächtnis*” and “*Registrierkassengedächtnis*” (UB 24), but in his retirement home lecture on the art of memory, he reminds them that forgetting is part of human nature and notes that forgetting can be advantageous (UB 25). Whether an event is remembered or forgotten can depend on a person's interest in remembering or forgetting a particular event, as can be seen when Katja clearly remembers a family outing during her childhood that Musbach has largely forgotten (UB 84 - 85), and forgetting can also occur subconsciously (“*was unser PC da oben scheinbar ohne Mausclick alles löscht*” (UB 133)). Further, the unreliability of memory is reflected in Musbach's realisation that there are many memories about the past that he has suppressed so successfully that he has made it as though they never happened (UB 40; 95), including the memory of his part in the execution of Russian partisans, which his guilt causes him to retouch so as to obscure his freedom of choice. Musbach may have an excellent memory, but he also realises that, even for an eyewitness, the precise details and emotional impressions of a particular event may not be able to be retrieved (UB 52). Katja also acknowledges the selective nature of memory when she accuses

claims that she uses these sources selectively to suit her own agenda: Schmitz, Helmut “Representations of the Nazi past II” op cit at 152 - 153; Schmitz, Helmut “Reconciliation” op cit at 157 - 158. This in fact reflects the selectivity of the use of source material by historians, highlighting the some of the similarities between historiography and fiction put forward by White.

Musbach of seeking some memories in order to avoid others (UB 61). Furthermore, as well as pointing to the ability of memory to be shaped by the interests of the individual, the novel also puts forward the idea that what is remembered is in part formed and selected by social and political forces²⁵⁶. In a passage reminiscent of Walser's arguments against the idea that eyewitnesses are obliged to present their memories of the Nazi period with reference to Auschwitz²⁵⁷, Musbach points to the influence of public memory dictates on the content of private recollections: *“Konnte denn kein Deutscher seiner Generation seine ganz private Geschichte erzählen, ohne daß irgendwann die Frage auftauchte: Und die Juden? Was hast du gewußt? Verblaßte denn alles vor dieser Frage?”* (UB 100; see also UB 58). By exposing eyewitness memory as being as partial, inconsistent and contingent as other historical sources, the novel undermines Musbach's insistence on the primacy and reliability of his own testimony and attempts to head off any tendency in the reader to accept Musbach's victimhood narrative as the “authoritative” statement about his Nazi past.

In addition, as well as pointing to the unreliability of memory as a historical source, the novel reflects in its own structure the way in which the very process of turning memories into a narrative of historical events necessarily

²⁵⁶ Fischer-Kania has also discussed the idea of the creation of memory in the novel against the background of various memory theories: Fischer-Kania, Sabine “Reden” op cit at 77 - 78; 88 - 90; 94.

²⁵⁷ Walser's novel *Ein springender Brunnen* expresses the idea that it ought to be possible to relate a subjective memory of the Nazi period without reference to the Holocaust. For a short summary of Walser's attack on “political correctness”, see Taberner, Stuart “Representations of German Wartime Suffering in Recent Fiction” in Niven, Bill *Germans as Victims* Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006: 164 - 180 at 167 - 168, and for a longer discussion of Walser's novel, see Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* op cit at 119 - 126.

involves selection and distortion. This can be seen in the constructed nature of Musbach's eyewitness testimony, which is apparent from the strict chronological order maintained in his narrative about the past (with the exception of his description of his involvement in a "war crime", which occurs out of order at the end of the novel), as well as his use of the imperfect tense and well-constructed sentences. These are features of narrative history which do not reflect real speech and memory patterns²⁵⁸, but instead point to the nature of Musbach's testimony as a composition. The orderly structure of Musbach's account points self-reflexively to its own nature as a constructed product, and the difference between his narrativised, aestheticised version of events and the more chaotic nature of "real life" memory both draws attention to the distorting effects of narrativisation on the representation of historical events and raises questions about the reasons behind Musbach's chosen order and his choice of historical events.

The novel's critique of the limitations of both the photographic medium and eyewitness memory in providing an accurate image of the past can be applied to the many other sources of information about the Nazi period present in the novel. The novel refers to a wide variety of sources of information about the past, both public and private, including oral testimony by eyewitnesses, mental images, family discussions (UB 24; 64 – 66; 125 - 126), school teaching (UB 18; 24), television documentaries (UB 23), photographs, art

²⁵⁸ Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 216. At 221, Herrmann compares Hahn's construction of Musbach's narrative as clear and detailed with the more realistic approach taken in their non-fiction family memoirs by Uwe Timm in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* and Dagmar Leupold in *Nach den Kriegen*, in which information about the past is presented in an ambivalent, fragmentary, and often opaque way. Hummel makes a similar point about the artificiality of the ordered chronology and seamlessness of Musbach's account: Hummel, Christine op cit at 197.

works (UB 72; 159 - 160), non-fiction texts (UB 128; 158), literature (UB 27; 71; 195), historical documents and memorial objects (UB 144; 164; 189). The multiplicity of sources and their mutual incompleteness and inconsistencies reflect the postmemorial situation described by Hirsch²⁵⁹. Indeed, as Katja points out, the availability of a variety of historical sources may make the past less clear, rather than more so:

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

The multiplicity of sources also emphasises the idea that, in order to form a narrative out of such a group of fragments, the historian must be selective. Musbach points to this selectivity when he asks: *“Mußte man aus dem Mosaik immer nur die Steine einer Farbe auswählen?”* (UB 27). Although Musbach’s question represents an attempt to deflect Katja’s insistence on individual German culpability as the dominant narrative about the past, it also exposes the selectivity involved in representations of the past generally. The overall impression created by the novel’s critique of historical representation is that historical sources are incomplete and unreliable, and that any attempt to provide a narrative of the past involves bias, selectivity, and some imagination. Under these circumstances, the prospect of establishing the “truth” about the

²⁵⁹ For a discussion of Hirsch’s concept of postmemory, see the Introduction at 32 – 34.

past fades away, as Musbach suggests when he says: “*Wie viele Seiten hat die Wahrheit? So viele, wie wir Bilder für sie haben. Oder Worte*” (UB 63).

3.3 Effect of historiographic metafiction on the portrayal of Musbach

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

The answer to these questions is tied up with the dominance of Musbach’s portrayal of himself as a victim in the novel and the presentation of his account as the stereotypical testimony of a *Zeitzeuge*, complete with tropes emphasising authenticity, primacy and victimhood and many of the *Tradierungstypen* observed by Welzer in first generation German stories about the Nazi past. These features of the portrayal of Musbach have led to concerns in the secondary literature that the novel as a whole re-establishes the narrative authority of the experiencing generation and privileges oral testimony, and that the novel’s suggestion that Musbach’s experiences are typical and have a representative quality is problematic because it prioritises

German victimhood and thus renders all “ordinary Germans” as victims²⁶⁰.

However, it is my contention that, in keeping with the closed nature of the text and its function as a *Thesenroman*, the novel sets up Musbach’s eyewitness testimony as a typical first generation narrative precisely for the purposes of undermining it and exposing it as just as incomplete, biased and problematic as the other historical sources and narrative histories questioned by the novel’s reflection of historiographical critiques.

The status of Musbach’s eyewitness testimony as the dominant narrative about the past in the novel means that questions of historical narratives and historical sources raised for the reader by a reading of the text as historiographic metafiction adhere primarily to Musbach’s own account, thereby undermining his portrayal of himself as a victim. The attempt by Musbach to take control of the historical narrative and exclude other versions means that his version is the primary one available to be destabilised by the novel’s historiographical critique. In this way, the novel’s criticisms of historiography and other representations of history, particularly eyewitness testimony, support Katja’s questioning of Musbach’s account, undermining his attempts to prefigure the listener’s (and therefore the reader’s) response. The reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction exposes Musbach’s eyewitness testimony as an account carefully designed to portray himself as a victim in order to gain sympathy, avoid judgment and retain control of the narrative about the past. In doing so, it turns attention back to precisely what Musbach was trying to avoid, namely his perpetration, and supports the novel’s overall characterisation of Musbach as a typical first generation

²⁶⁰ See for example Schmitz, Helmut “Reconciliation” op cit at 156; 159.

perpetrator who tries to manipulate narratives about his past so as to remove himself from blame. As such, the novel makes for a complex response to the issues raised by the *Wehrmachtsausstellung*, in that it not only considers the problems of photographic sources raised by the exhibition, but also takes a critical view of the typical responses of the *Zeitzeugen*. Together with the correctives built into the text and the repetition of themes from classic *Väterliteratur*, the reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction undermines Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim and reinforces the characterisation of Musbach and other ordinary Germans as perpetrators.

4. Conclusion

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

Musbach and Hanna as perpetrators. The continuation of the dominant depiction of Germans as perpetrators in literature prior to 1990 is particularly apparent in the persistence of patterns of classic *Väterliteratur* in both novels. Although both texts contain some acknowledgement that engagement with the Nazi past will be ongoing, the repetition in both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* of many of the elements of intergenerational accusation, confrontation and breach characteristic of *Väterliteratur* indicates a reluctance of second generation authors to break away from old attitudes towards dealing with past.

Where *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* differ is in the effect a reading of these novels as historiographic metafiction has on the portrayal of Hanna and Musbach. The reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction does give rise to the same type of tensions as such a reading exposes in *Der Vorleser*, in that criticisms of history writing which suggest that it is not possible to know the full, objective truth about the past or to represent it in a way that avoids bias and contingency tend to undercut the basis for assigning someone to the category of perpetrator or victim. However, whereas these tensions operated in *Der Vorleser* to destabilise Schlink's attempts to prefigure the designation of Hanna as a perpetrator, in *Unscharfe Bilder* they have the opposite effect, supporting the characterisation of Musbach as a perpetrator. Part of the reason for this difference is the dominance of Musbach's victimhood narrative in the latter text which means that it is primarily his portrayal of himself as a victim which is deconstructed by a reading of *Unscharfe Bilder* as historiographic metafiction. Another reason may be found in the relatively open or closed nature of the respective texts.

Whereas *Der Vorleser* is a fairly open text which may therefore be more prone to destabilisation, *Unscharfe Bilder* is a closed *Thesenroman* in which most aspects of the novel's structure, including its function as historiographic metafiction, are carefully constructed so as to leave the reader little room to conclude anything other than that Musbach is a perpetrator.

The continuing emphasis on Germans as perpetrators in both novels is particularly significant in light of the changing memorial landscape between the time of publication of *Der Vorleser* in 1995 and *Unscharfe Bilder* in 2003. During this period, public interest and debate swung from a focus on ordinary Germans as perpetrators to the "Germans as victims" wave which highlighted German suffering. Although Musbach's own testimony, particularly his use of "Germans as victims" tropes, does pick up on themes current in public discussion in 2003, the text's comprehensive undermining of his self-portrayal and consequent characterisation of him as a perpetrator does not precisely mirror the state of German memory contests at the time of publication. The fact that the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators in these two novels has remained constant suggests that literature in the post-1990 period may be adhering to the dominant paradigm in Germany's official memorial culture as regards the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, rather than altering to suit a broader public interest. The continuation of patterns of *Väterliteratur* and a focus on German guilt by both second generation authors despite changes in the German public discourse further suggests that generational attitudes may be more important a factor than the state of public debate in shaping the

portrayal of Germans involved in the Third Reich in novels of the post-1990 period²⁶¹.

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

²⁶¹ Vees-Gulani has argued in this vein that recent German memory literature ought to be distinguished along generational lines, and that, whereas works by the third generation constitute a genuinely new approach to writing about the past, works by second generation authors are heavily marked by old attitudes, no matter how much they try to fit in with the new mood of the younger generation. See generally Vees-Gulani, op cit.

IV. TANJA DÜCKERS - *HIMMELSKÖRPER*

1. Introduction

Himmelskörper and *Unscharfe Bilder* were both published in 2003 at a time of an increased level of public discussion of “Germans as victims”, which concentrated on tropes of German suffering such as the Allied bombing of German cities, the horrors faced by “ordinary soldiers” on the Eastern Front, and *Flucht und Vertreibung*²⁶². It is this last trope which is central to the plot of *Himmelskörper*, in which intergenerational discussions about the past in the family of the narrator, Freia Sandmann, take the flight of Freia’s mother and grandmother from Gotenhafen at the end of the war as their focal point. During their *Flucht*, Jo and Renate narrowly avoided becoming passengers on the *Wilhelm Gustloff*, which was sunk by the Soviets in the Baltic Sea on 30 January 1945. Uncovering the truth about this “lucky” escape is a key source of narrative tension in the novel and the main vehicle for Freia’s exploration of her family’s Nazi past.

The approach taken to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in *Himmelskörper* bears many similarities to that taken in *Unscharfe Bilder*. Both novels examine the Nazi past in the context of family relationships, and particularly through private conversations about family history. As in *Unscharfe Bilder*, the first generation figures in *Himmelskörper*, Freia’s maternal grandparents

²⁶² The theme of German suffering during the Second World War was widely canvassed in mainstream print media during this period, for example in a number of lead stories in *Der Spiegel* (*Die Deutsche Titanic*, 4 February 2002; *Die Flucht*, 25 March 2002; *Als Feuer Vom Himmel Fiel*, 6 January 2003) and on television (for example in the Guido Knopp television series *Der große Flucht* (directed Guido Knopp, Christian Deick, Anja Greulich, ZDF, 2001)). For an overview of the “Germans as victims” discussion, see Fischer, Torben and Lorenz, Matthias N op cit at 340 - 355.

Jo and Mäxchen, are allowed a significant amount of space in which to tell their own stories. As was the case with Musbach, and as I will argue in the following, Jo and Mäxchen use this opportunity to portray themselves as victims, concentrating on their own suffering as a way of eliding their complicity with the regime. The presence of themes of German suffering in *Himmelskörper* has given rise to concerns in the secondary literature (again as with *Unscharfe Bilder* and also *Der Vorleser*) that the novel promotes an understanding of Germans as victims and therefore represents a shift in the perpetrator/victim dichotomy²⁶³. This reception of the novel as part of the “Germans as victims” wave may be partly explained by the publication in the same year of Günter Grass’ novella *Im Krebsgang* (which also features the sinking of the *Wilhelm Gustloff*) and a consequent tendency in some of the secondary literature to associate the novels with each other and with an increased focus on German suffering²⁶⁴.

²⁶³ Höfer, for example, identifies the novel as part of a new trend of rediscovery of Germans as victims in post-1990 literature: Höfer, Adolf “Die Entdeckung der deutschen Kriegsoffer” op cit at 385.

²⁶⁴ The two works have often been discussed together in the secondary literature: Emmerich, Wolfgang “Dürfen die Deutschen ihre eigenen Opfer beklagen? Schiffsuntergänge 1945 bei Uwe Johnson, Walter Kempowski, Günter Grass, Tanja Dückers und Stefan Chwin” in Böning, Holger et al *Danzig und der Ostseeraum: Sprache, Literatur, Publizistik* Bremen: edition lumiere, 2005: 293 - 323; Guarda, Filomena Viana “The Familial and Generational Construction of History: The Gustloff Disaster in Recent Prose Works by Günter Grass and Tanja Dückers” in Silva, Helena Goncalves da *Conflict, Memory Transfers and the Reshaping of Europe* Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010: 24 - 35; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* op cit at 45; Jaroszewski, Marek “Das leuchtende Schiff: Der Untergang der Wilhelm Gustloff bei Günter Grass und Tanja Dückers” in Böning, Holger et al *Danzig und der Ostseeraum: Sprache, Literatur, Publizistik* Bremen, edition lumiere, 2005: 277 - 291; Höfer, Adolf “Himmelskörper und andere Unscharfe Bilder” op cit. Dückers has also written about the *Gustloff* disaster from the Polish perspective: Dückers, Tanja “Der Leuchtturmwächter” in Dückers, Tanja and Carl, Verena *stadt land krieg* Berlin: Aufbau Taschenbuch Verlag, 2004: 116 - 122.

However, other commentators question whether it is appropriate to position *Himmelskörper* as a “Germans as victims” novel on the basis of its references to *Flucht und Vertreibung* and the *Gustloff* disaster, pointing instead to aspects of the novel which set these references to German victimhood in the context of German crimes. Marek Jaroszewski, for example, argues that Dückers leaves no doubt in the novel that she is no revisionist and has no sympathy for Nazis, including Jo and Mäxchen²⁶⁵, and Jens Stüben considers that the novel does not re-establish the “Germans as victims” myth, as it is the question of guilt rather than victimhood which is at the heart of the novel²⁶⁶. As with both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, critical discussion of the novel has disagreed on the novel’s presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. In the first part of this chapter, I will examine *Himmelskörper*’s portrayal of its primary first generation figures, Jo and Mäxchen, with a view to taking a position in this debate. In the course of my analysis, I will address the following questions: How do Jo and Mäxchen portray themselves? Is their self-portrayal undermined by other characters or other features in the novel? Is the text closed and functionalised like *Unscharfe Bilder* and what effect does this have on the depiction of Jo and Mäxchen? Does *Himmelskörper* continue the patterns of intergenerational confrontation, powerplay and accusation characteristic of both the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s

²⁶⁵ Jaroszewski, Marek *ibid* at 282 – 283.

²⁶⁶ Stüben, Jens “Erfragte Erinnerung - entsorgte Familiengeschichte: Tanja Dückers Wilhelm-Gustloff Roman *Himmelskörper*” in Beßlich, Barbara, Grätz, Katharina and Hildebrand, Olaf *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006: 169 - 189 at 186; 188. See also Beyersdorf, Herman “Die Heimat, Verloren - Vertreibungsliteratur and the Younger Generation(s)” *AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Modern Language Association* 108 (2007): 93 - 109 at 101 – 102.

and 1980s, and of post-1990 works by second generation authors such as *Der Vorleser* and *Unschärfe Bilder*? Or does Dückers, as a third generation author, take a different approach?

The main difference between *Himmelskörper* and both *Der Vorleser* and *Unschärfe Bilder* is, of course, the fact that it is narrated from the perspective of the third generation. Dückers is a third generation author (born 1968) and the narrator of *Himmelskörper*, Freia, reflects the author's generational perspective. Freia is in her 30s and pregnant with her first child at the time of narration, which roughly accords with the time of publication of the novel. In the course of her narrative, she describes the childhood and adolescence of herself and her twin brother, Paul, in West Berlin during the 1970s and 1980s²⁶⁷, including their growing awareness of the role played by their grandparents during the Third Reich. What effect does this change in generational perspective have on the novel's approach to the Nazi past? Does it mark a significant change from patterns established in literature by second generation authors, such as the persistence of the classic *Väterliteratur* format? What effect does the change in perspective have on the portrayal of first generation Germans? For her part, Dückers has suggested that the third generation perspective provides a more balanced view of the Nazi past:

²⁶⁷ For a more detailed discussion of the chronology of the novel, see Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 248 – 249; Giesler, Birte “Der Satz ich erinnere mich nicht könnte zur Ausrede werden: Gender und Gedächtnis in Tanja Dückers' Generationen Roman Himmelskörper” *Freiburger FrauenStudien: Zeitschrift für Interdisziplinäre Frauenforschung* 19 (2006): 171 - 201 at 172 – 173; Giesler, Birte “Krieg und Nationalsozialismus als Familientabu in Tanja Dückers Generationenroman Himmelskörper” in Koch, Lars and Vogel, Marianne *Imaginäre Welten im Widerstreit: Krieg und Geschichte in der deutschsprachigen Literatur seit 1900* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2007: 286 - 303 at 287 – 288.

“Meine Generation ist die erste, die einen nüchternen Blick auf dieses Thema wagen kann.”²⁶⁸

“Wir haben mehr historische Distanz, sind nicht so involviert. Haben keine blinden Flecken in der Wahrnehmung. Das gibt uns die Möglichkeit, vieles anzusprechen, couragierter aufzutreten, ohne gleich ein Familiengefüge zu zerstören.”²⁶⁹

Some critics share Dückers' view that the third generation in this novel does have a more neutral and less judgmental approach towards their grandparents. Mila Ganeva, for example, maintains that the third generation characters in *Himmelskörper* avoid accusations and a confrontation with their grandparents²⁷⁰, and Friederike Eigler suggests that third generation authors are no longer dominated by the constellation of guilt and trauma affecting previous generations, leaving them free to explore alternative approaches to the past²⁷¹. Similarly, Laurel Cohen-Pfister considers that the grandchildren provide a more neutral audience for the stories of their grandparents²⁷², and

²⁶⁸ Partouche, Rebecca op cit.

²⁶⁹ Dückers, Tanja “Mir gefällt mein Geburtsdatum” *die tageszeitung*, 20 March 2006. For similar comments, see also Dückers, Tanja “Spuren suchen: Fehlt die NS-Zeit in den Romanen der Enkelgeneration?” *Edit: Papier für neue Texte* 29 (2002): 53 - 56 at 54; 56.

²⁷⁰ Ganeva, Mila, op cit at 160.

²⁷¹ Eigler, Friederike *Heimat Space Narrative: Towards a Transnational Approach to Flight and Expulsion* Rochester: Camden House, 2014 at 148; see also Eigler, Friederike “Beyond the Victims Debate: Flight and Expulsion in Recent Novels by Authors from the Second and Third Generation (Christoph Hein, Reinhard Jirgl, Kathrin Schmidt, and Tanja Dückers)” in Cohen-Pfister, Laurel and Vees-Gulani, Susanne *Generational Shifts in Contemporary German Culture* Rochester: Camden House, 2010: 77 - 94 at 89.

²⁷² Cohen-Pfister, Laurel “An Aesthetics of Memory for Third-Generation Germans: Tanja Dückers *Himmelskörper*” in Gerstenberger, Katharina and Herminhouse, Patricia *German Literature in a New Century: Trends,*

Stüben argues that the third generation has sufficient distance to be able to thematise German suffering as well as German guilt²⁷³. In the second part of this chapter, I will analyse the approach towards the perpetrators and the Nazi past taken by the third generation in *Himmelskörper* and compare it to second generation attitudes. Does the third generation indeed approach the past in a less accusatory, less emotionally fraught, and more neutral way? I will also consider the effect this alteration to a third generation perspective may have on the portrayal of Germans as perpetrator or victims. Does the third generation see the first generation as perpetrators as the second generation has tended to? Does their allegedly more “neutral” approach allow them to accept “Germans as victims”? Or do they shy away from taking a position regarding the perpetrator/victim dichotomy?

As with both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper* is a novel in which the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy may be affected by a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction. *Himmelskörper* as a work of historiographic metafiction has so far received almost no attention in the secondary literature. Although Norman Ächtler, Birte Giesler and Tina Strancar all describe the novel as a self-reflexive, metahistorical generation novel, none of them conducts a detailed analysis of the text along these lines, identifies the novel as historiographic metafiction, or considers the application of this insight to the portrayal of the perpetrators²⁷⁴. In the final part of this

Traditions, Transitions, Transformations New York: Berghahn Books, 2008: 119 - 134 at 123.

²⁷³ Stüben, Jens op cit at 171.

²⁷⁴ Ächtler, Norman “Topographie eines Familiengedächtnisses: Polen als Raum des Gegengedächtnisses in Tanja Dückers Roman *Himmelskörper*” *Seminar* 45.3 (2009): 276 - 298 at 277; Giesler, Birte “Krieg und Nationalsozialismus” op cit at 287; Strancar, Tina “Un(be)greifbare Bilder des

chapter, I will analyse *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction and examine the effect that this has on the novel's presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy. My analysis of this aspect of the novel will focus particularly on the effect the function of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction has on the portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen, and the relationship between a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction and the expression of the third generation perspective in the text.

2. Jo and Mäxchen – perpetrators or victims?

2.1 Family conversations

The discussion of the Nazi past in *Himmelskörper* takes place primarily in the context of multigenerational family conversations about family history, referred to by Freia as “*Erzählt doch mal vom Krieg – Diskussionen*” (HK 98) and “*Wir erzählen euch jetzt mal etwas vom Krieg – Abende*” (HK 124). Jo and Mäxchen play the lead role at these events, and the conversations focus on their narratives of German victimhood and suffering during and immediately after the Second World War. Their daughter (and Freia's mother), Renate, performs the role of counter-narrative, questioning her parents' take on events, and Freia and Paul listen and provide occasional prompts to propel the story along. These family conversations about the Nazi past evidence a high degree of construction and artificiality. They are structured like dialogues in a play, and Freia's descriptions of the family “*Erzählt doch mal vom Krieg – Diskussionen*” regularly include the vocabulary of the theatre (“*Kunstpausen*” (HK 99), “*Repertoire*” (HK 105), “*dramatisch schilderte*” (HK 105)). Freia and

Familiengedächtnisses in der deutschen zeitgenössischen Literatur: Tanja Dückers' *Himmelskörper*” *Acta Neophilologica* 46.1-2 (2013): 93 - 104 at 97.

Paul's responses to Jo and Mäxchen's stories ("gespannt"; "gebannt" (HK 145)) are reminiscent of the reactions that might be expected of children attending a play, and the "Stichwörter" used in the family dialogues function like theatrical prompts (HK 133; 144). The novel also repeatedly refers to the family dialogues as being rehearsed like a scripted drama (using language such as "immer" or "immer wieder" (HK 98, 123, 128, 148), "wiederholt" (HK 100), "jedesmal" (HK 124), and "stets" (HK 127, 139)). Jo's contributions are particularly well-rehearsed and marked by a high degree of dramatic over-acting, and Mäxchen takes on the attitude of a storyteller (HK 100 – 101). The recounting of the family's flight from Gotenhafen in particular is a tale so well-rehearsed that the family knows the story and their roles in it off by heart:

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

Dückers has been criticised, both in literary reviews and in academic comment, for the artificiality and overtly constructed nature of the family conversations in the novel. Thomas Wild has accused her of simply tipping "*Recherchematerial gestaltlos in seitenlange Dialoge*"²⁷⁵, Fuchs regards the

²⁷⁵ Wild, Thomas "Opas Mitgliedsnummer" *Süddeutsche Zeitung* 8 March 2004. Schneider makes an identical point: Schneider, Wolfgang "Zeitkritische

language used in the dialogues as clichéd²⁷⁶, and Herrmann notes that the conversations evince a “*Künstlichkeit*” which make them appear “*wenig realistisch*”²⁷⁷. However, as was the case with the careful construction of intergenerational family discussions in *Unscharfe Bilder*, this artificiality should not necessarily be seen as an indication of the author’s inability to craft vivid dialogue. Rather, the artificiality of the family conversations about the past in *Himmelskörper* and the way in which every detail is functionalised suggests that, as with *Unscharfe Bilder*, the reader is dealing with a text that has been carefully constructed to control the reader’s response and leave the reader in no doubt as to Dückers’ view of the Nazi past and the portrayal of the first generation. It is to that portrayal that my analysis will now turn.

2.2 “Germans as victims” - Jo and Mäxchen’s self-portrayal

The family “*Erzählt doch mal vom Krieg – Diskussionen*” in *Himmelskörper* are dominated by Jo and Mäxchen’s narratives about their experiences during the Nazi period, just as Musbach’s account of his time as a soldier dominates his discussions about the past with Katja. Like Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen use these conversations about their life during the Third Reich (whether consciously or subconsciously) as an opportunity to portray themselves as victims. Their narratives touch on many of the tropes of German suffering familiar from the “Germans as victims” discourse. In her accounts of the war

Betulichkeit - Tanja Dückers Roman *Himmelskörper*” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 17 July 2003.

²⁷⁶ Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* op cit at 58.

²⁷⁷ Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 253. See also Herrmann, Meike “Erinnerungsliteratur ohne sich erinnernde Subjekte oder Wie die Zeitgeschichte in den Roman kommt: Zu Erzähltexten von Katharina Hacker, Thomas Lehr, Tanja Dückers und Marcel Beyer” in Schütz, Erhard and Hardtwig, Wolfgang *Keiner kommt davon: Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008: 251 - 265 at 261.

years, Jo recalls times of hunger and deprivation (“*Mit Essen spielt man nicht! So was war mal kostbar!*” (HK 53)) and exposure to extreme cold when fleeing ahead of the Red Army:

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

“Es ging auf Ende Januar zu und war fürchterlich kalt. Die Straßen waren spiegelglatt, es hatte gefroren, und schneien tat es auch noch! Aber auf dem Landweg war ja nicht mehr viel zu machen. Der Russe . . .” (HK 127)

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

“Und dann hat die russische Meute sich über mein Königsberg hergemacht. Aus zwei Tagen Plünderung, wie sie angekündigt waren, wurden Monate voller Raub, Vergewaltigung, Mord. Und die Bewohner waren alldem einfach ausgeliefert.” (HK 106)

“Wir hatten ja mitbekommen, daß der Russe Ostpreußen abgeriegelt hatte und jetzt auf dem Vormarsch nach Westen war. Da kamen Tausende von Flüchtlingen nach Gotenhafen und erzählten Schreckliches!” (HK 126)

“Weißt du, wie der Russe in Ostpreußen gewütet hat? Leute in Kirchen gedrängt und erschossen, Frauen vergewaltigt, Kinder, das waren doch alles Unschuldige!” (HK 128)

The language Jo uses emphasises her own victimhood status and that of other “ordinary Germans” who experienced *Flucht und Vertreibung*. “Der Russe” is clearly identified as the villain of the piece and the references to plain brutality are piled one on top of the other in quick succession to achieve a cumulative effect, with the reference to the German victims being raped and killed in church suggesting that the Russian perpetrators are not only brutal but also godless. The Germans in Jo’s account appear as “*Unschuldige*”, who are powerless and passive in the face of the violence to which they are subjected (“*sich über mein Königsberg hergemacht*”; “*alldem einfach ausgeliefert*”; “*gedrängt*”). Her narrative is thick with tropes of German victimhood, but completely omits any discussion of German crimes.

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

“ . . . meistens sprach er nur von diesem und jenem U-Boot, dieser und jener Flakabwehr, vertiefte sich in technische Details. Wenn er plötzlich über seine eigenen Erlebnisse sprach, dann nur äußerst gefühlsbetont. Er fluchte und schimpfte, er schüttelte den Kopf, bohrte seinen Zeigefinger in die Luft, entwarf wirre Topographien im Wohnzimmer, trommelte auf die Tischplatte. Manchmal standen ihm auch die Tränen in den Augen. Und manchmal strich er über seine Prothese und sah Paul und mich, stellvertretend für diejenigen, die ihn in den Krieg geschickt hatten, vorwurfsvoll und unendlich traurig an.”

(HK 97)

The war itself is seen by both Jo and Mäxchen as something akin to a force of nature: *“irgendwann wurde der Krieg eben auch zu uns herübergeweht”* (HK 125). The use of the passive here serves to emphasise Jo and Mäxchen's assertion of a lack of agency, and therefore personal responsibility, in the disaster of the Third Reich. Throughout the family conversations about the past, Jo and Mäxchen consistently depict themselves as helpless victims of overwhelming forces beyond their control who acted bravely in the face of immense suffering.

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

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

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

“Jo war Ende der dreißiger Jahre in einem Lebensmittelladen gewesen, als sie bemerkte, daß neben ihr ein kleiner Junge mit Judenstern stand. Er war schlecht gekleidet und sah kränklich aus. Jo hatte Mitleid mit dem Jungen und überlegte nun, ob sie es wagen könnte, dem Jungen eine Banane zu geben, aber dann hatte sie zu große Angst, dabei vom Verkäufer beobachtet zu werden, und daher tat sie es nicht.” (HK 105)

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

Another way in which Jo and Mäxchen distance themselves from the “Nazis” is by pushing the bulk of the blame for the events of the Third Reich onto the Nazi leadership. This tactic also has the effect of reinforcing their portrayal of themselves and other “ordinary Germans” as victims, in that it depicts them as suffering abuse and betrayal at the hands of the regime. Jo and Mäxchen

depict the Nazi leaders as foolhardy, cowardly and hypocritical, at least as regards their conduct during the final stages of the war (*“Verrückte waren das. Kollektive Idiotie.”* (HK 127); *“die Bonzen sind anders weggekommen. Sicherer. Besser. Die standen sich da nicht die Füße in den Bauch und sind halb erfroren”* (HK 144)). The military leaders (including the *Führer*) in particular are blamed by Mäxchen for their faulty strategies:

“Der Fehler lag darin, der 4. deutschen Armee keine Verstärkung zu schicken . . . Das lag daran, daß die blöde OHL einfach immer noch an allen Fronten kämpfen wollte. . . Guderian, ihr wißt schon, ist Anfang 45 zu Hitler geflogen. Ins Führerhauptquartier. Da hat er seinem Führer' - Großvater sprach dieses Wort voller Ironie aus - 'die neuesten Zahlen mitgeteilt. Das hat den Führer nicht die Bohne interessiert! Guderian bestand auf einem strategischen Rückzug aus Italien, Norwegen und dem Balkan. Dort standen überall noch deutsche Truppen! Als das deutsche Kernland in Gefahr war! Verdammt nochmal!” (HK 130 - 131)

Mäxchen also implies that he and his fellow soldiers were victims of Hitler's misleading conduct and broken promises (*“sie konnten nicht, wie Hitler versprochen hatte, Weihnachten wieder nach Hause”* (HK 87)). Similarly, Jo depicts ordinary *Wehrmacht* soldiers such as Mäxchen as heroes willing to sacrifice themselves despite being forced by the regime into the futile position of fighting a losing battle:

“Also, wenn jemand ein Held ist, wenn es so etwas wie Helden gibt, dann sind das die Wehrmachtssoldaten für mich, die hinhaltenden Widerstand auf verlorenem Posten geleistet haben, ihr Leben riskiert

haben, damit wir Zivilisten noch fliehen konnten. Dabei ahnten sie ja, daß der Russe nicht mehr aufzuhalten und alles nur noch eine Frage der Zeit war und daß sie sich selbst mit jeder weiteren Kampfhandlung in Lebensgefahr brachten. Das sind für mich Helden.” (HK 129)

Like Musbach’s self-portrayal in *Unscharfe Bilder*, the way in which Jo and Mäxchen depict themselves in *Himmelskörper* is strongly reminiscent of first generation German eyewitness testimonies observed by Welzer in his study of multigenerational conversations about the past within German families²⁷⁸. Indeed, Dückers mentions Welzer’s study in a number of her non-fiction works published both before and after *Himmelskörper*, so the similarities between Jo and Mäxchen’s first generation narratives and those observed by Welzer is

²⁷⁸ For a further discussion of the study see the previous chapter at 139 – 140; 143. Others have noted the relevance of Welzer’s study for an analysis of *Himmelskörper*: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenheit* op cit at 251 - 252; Till, Dietmar “Kontroversen im Familiengedächtnis: Vergangenheitsdiskurse im Generationenroman (Klaus Modick, Uwe Timm, Tanja Dückers)” in Geier, Andrea and Süselbeck, Jan *Konkurrenzen, Konflikte, Kontinuitäten: Generationenfragen in der Literatur seit 1990* Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2009: 33 - 52 at 39 – 40; 43; Stüben, Jens op cit at 175; Schaumann, Caroline “A Third-Generation World War II Narrative: Tanja Dückers *Himmelskörper*” *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook* 4 (2005): 259 - 280 at 271; Ächtler, Norman op cit at 279 - 281; Strancar, Tina op cit at 99 – 102; Schaumann, Caroline *Memory Matters: Generational Responses to Germany’s Nazi Past in Recent Women’s Literature* Berlin: de Gruyter, 2008 at 309; Braun, Michael “Wem gehört die Geschichte? Tanja Dückers, Uwe Timm, Günter Grass und der Streit um die Erinnerung in der deutschen Gegenwartsliteratur” in Schütz, Erhard and Hardtwig, Wolfgang *Keiner kommt davon: Zeitgeschichte in der Literatur nach 1945* Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2008: 97 - 111 at 110; Braun, Michael “Die Wahrheit der Geschichte(n): Zur Erinnerungsliteratur von Tanja Dückers, Günter Grass, Uwe Timm” in Klinger, Judith and Wolf, Gerhard *Gedächtnis und kultureller Wandel: Erinnerndes Schreiben – Perspektiven und Kontroversen* Tübingen: Max Niemayer Verlag, 2009: 97 - 111 at 106 - 107. Herrmann has noted that the family dialogues in the novel follow those described in Welzer’s research so closely as to be almost a parody: Herrmann, Meike “Erinnerungsliteratur” at 260.

unlikely to be coincidental²⁷⁹. Like Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen's self-portrayal displays many of the *Tradierungstypen* occurring in the conversations analysed by Welzer, including *Opferschaft*, *Rechtfertigung*, *Distanzierung* from the "real" Nazis, recounting minor instances of *Zivilcourage* and, in the case of Mäxchen's emotive descriptions of his battle experiences, *Überwältigung*. The high degree of similarity between the accounts of Jo and Mäxchen and typical first generation narratives about the Nazi past suggests that they have been carefully constructed so as to identify Jo and Mäxchen as typical "ordinary Germans" of the first generation. In fact, Jo and Mäxchen could be seen as being even more typical than Musbach, in that they are not *Bildungsbürger* and do not have Musbach's exemplary attitude to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* (at least at an abstract level). In the following, I will argue that the novel sets Jo and Mäxchen up as typical "ordinary Germans" precisely for the purpose of undermining their self-portrayal and exposing their concentration on their own victimhood and suffering as a way of reducing the scope for accusations of culpability. As I will aim to demonstrate, the "Germans as victims" narrative established by Jo and Mäxchen is undermined in the novel by features apparent in Jo and Mäxchen's own testimony, by the discovery of memorial objects which indicate Jo and Mäxchen's complicity, and by the corrective role played by Renate in family conversations about the past and the way in which this role recalls patterns of *Väterliteratur*. The level of artificiality and functionalisation involved in structuring the novel in this way suggests that, like *Unschärfe Bilder, Himmelskörper* is a closed text which is carefully constructed so as to

²⁷⁹ Dückers, Tanja and Carl, Verena op cit at 8 - 9; Dückers, Tanja *Morgen nach Utopia* Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2007 at 89.

guide the reader towards a particular conclusion, namely that Jo and Mäxchen are perpetrators²⁸⁰.

2.3 Undermining Jo and Mäxchen's "Germans as victims" narrative

2.3.1 *Jo and Mäxchen incriminate themselves*

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

²⁸⁰ Dückers' intention to focus on Germans as perpetrators in *Himmelskörper* can also be seen in the way she has altered the historical basis for the novel's plot. In several interviews and articles, Dückers has noted that she based the story of Jo and Renate's flight on the *Theodor* rather than the *Gustloff* on the real life story of her aunt and uncle. However, whereas she did not know whether her aunt and uncle were involved in Nazism, she included a commitment to Nazism as part of her characterisation of Jo and Mäxchen: Metz, Johanna "Das Anrecht auf die Spurensuche in der Vergangenheit: Ein Gespräch mit Tanja Dückers über Erzähltraditionen und die Rolle der Literatur in der Gedenkkultur" *Das Parlament* 49 (2006): <<http://webarchiv.bundestag.de/archive/2010/0824/dasparlament/2006/49/Panorama/002.html>> (accessed 11 April 2016); Partouche, Rebecca op cit; Dückers, Tanja "Verdrängte Schuld" *Der Spiegel* 11/2002; Dückers, Tanja "Literary transformation of memories on flight and expulsion in consequence of WWII" <http://www.memory-culture-art.org/texts/tanja_dueckers.html> (accessed 11 April 2016); Gutzschhahn, Uwe-Michael "Das Flüchtige und das Doppelbödige: Interview with Uwe-Michael Gutzschhahn" *Neue deutsche Literatur* 51.2 (2003): 54 - 62 at 55 - 56.

account, in which she comments on her attitude towards the Nazi

Rassengesetze:

“Das war damals so eine Mode, aber ich hab das mit diesen Rassengesetzen nie recht verstanden. Mäxchen hat da mal ein bißchen was gelesen . . . Mäxchen ist ja ein theoretischerer Mensch als ich, aber ich glaube, er fand das auch alles etwas komisch . . . wir haben nicht darüber geredet, mir war das nicht so wichtig. Den Russen mochte ich nicht besonders, aber die Juden waren mir egal. Ich habe nicht begreifen können, wie man Kinder umbringen kann. Ich will doch auch nicht, daß Negerkinder umgebracht werden! Das hat für mich die Nazis endgültig diskreditiert, auch wenn ich viele gute Erinnerungen an diese Zeit habe.” (HK 104)

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

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

grandparents told about the past Freia observes that, alongside “*all die distanzierten und ironischen Bemerkungen . . . über die Nazi-Zeit und über Hitler selber*” (HK 262) her grandparents had made over the decades, there had also been “*viele kleine grenzwertige Äußerungen*” (HK 263) which, put together, formed a convincing picture of a commitment to Nazism.

Freia’s suspicions about Jo and Mäxchen’s involvement with Nazism are confirmed by both Jo and Mäxchen towards the ends of their lives. As both Jo and Mäxchen age and become affected by the onset of illness and dementia, they are increasingly unable to maintain the carefully constructed image of themselves as victims and opponents of Nazism, and it becomes increasingly apparent that their self-portrayal is a lie. When Freia and Paul visit Mäxchen when he is dying of prostate cancer, his discussion of the social structure of the bees he keeps reveals by analogy his adherence to the racist ideology of Nazism. As he shows Freia and Paul the beehives he has inherited from a neighbour, Mäxchen praises the “ordered” society in which the bees live, noting the way in which they need a “*Führer*” and how they expel the “*Kuckucksbienen*”, who lay their eggs in “*fremde Stöcke*” (HK 182 - 187). He finally makes the analogy with Nazi ideology explicit:

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

The negative connotations of Mäxchen’s revelation of his enduring commitment to Nazi ideology is underscored by the images of darkness and

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

2.3.2 *Incriminating physical evidence*

The disintegration of the façade of victimhood constructed by Jo and Mäxchen becomes complete when Freia and Renate go through Jo and Mäxchen’s belongings as a part of sorting out their estate after their deaths²⁸¹. When

²⁸¹ The re-evaluation of family narratives about the Nazi period as a result of the death and/or dementia of a grandparent is a frequent theme in Dücker’s work. The short story “Maremagnum” in particular contains many details that are similar to *Himmelskörper*, and it may have formed a basis for the later novel. In “Maremagnum”, Katharina and her mother clear out her grandmother’s flat, uncovering relics from the Nazi past, including her grandfather’s Nazi party papers. Like Mäxchen, the grandfather in this story had had his leg shot off whilst fighting in Russia, and spent the rest of his life

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

It is the discovery of this physical evidence which, even more than Jo's confession that she had been *“in der Partei”*, causes Freia to re-evaluate her grandparents' self-portrayal in their narratives about the past. Looking back

playing patience and claiming that he was not a Nazi. Like Freia and Paul, Katharina and her brother played games in which they only had one leg. As with Renate, the mother in *“Maremagnum”* knew nothing of her father until she was 4 years old, except a photo of him in uniform sitting on a horse: Dückers, Tanja *Cafe Brazil* Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2001 at 148 – 169. Indeed, Dückers has stated that going through the belongings of her grandparents after they died inspired her to write *Himmelskörper*. Gutzschhahn, Uwe-Michael op cit at 54. Similar themes occur in the short story *“Das Harmonium”*, in which the musician narrator discovers as a result of revelations made by his now aged mother who suffers from dementia that his beloved harmonium was acquired by his parents from their Jewish neighbours prior to their deportation: Dückers, Tanja *“Das Harmonium”* in Butkus, Günther and Göhre, Frank *So wie du mir – 19 Variationen über Die Judenbuche von Annette von Droste-Hülshoff* Bielefeld: Pendragon, 2010: 198 – 210. In the short story *“Die Badekappe”*, too, it is in the process of clearing out their grandmother's flat prior to her move to a retirement village that the grandchildren uncover photographs pointing to their grandmother's romantic relationship with another young woman who was killed by bombing during the war: Dückers, Tanja *“Die Badekappe”* in Waffender, Corinna *konkursbuch 49: Heimat* Tübingen: Konkursbuch-Verlag Gehrke, 2010: 90 – 93.

on her grandparents' testimony in a new light, she is finally able to uncover the image that Jo and Mäxchen had tried to conceal, namely that of themselves as Nazi perpetrators:

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

Even more so than Jo and Mäxchen's late-life confessions of their support for the Nazi regime, the revelation of the incriminating objects contained in the gold-wrapped boxes makes it extremely difficult for the reader to reach any conclusion other than that Jo and Mäxchen were Nazi perpetrators. The effect of Freia's discovery of these incriminating objects on the possibility of portraying Jo and Mäxchen as victims is in fact reminiscent of the effect similar evidence had on the family image of *Opa* in one of the families observed by Welzer in his study. In most families included in the study, even outright confessions of guilt and commitment to Nazism made by members of the first generation during family discussions were either omitted from the family narrative altogether, or substantially altered by subsequent generations so as to portray the relevant family members in a positive light²⁸². The exception to this pattern was the Meier family who, after the death of the family patriarch, discovered a *Chronik* written by him in which he revealed that he had committed crimes during the Nazi period and continued to be an adherent of Nazism. The discovery of the *Chronik* destroyed the favourable

²⁸² Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* op cit at 49 – 52.

image of the patriarch's actions during the Third Reich in the family narrative about the past by putting forward an alternative narrative which was not able to be synthesised with this positive image of *Opa*. The fact that the *Chronik* was in a form which was not able to be modified meant that its image of the patriarch as an unrepentant perpetrator was not negotiable and it therefore caused a fragmentation of the family narrative²⁸³. In the same way, Freia's discovery of the physical evidence of Jo and Mäxchen's Nazism prevents the development of a narrative that denies a portrayal of them as perpetrators. Jo and Mäxchen's confessions of their support of the Nazi regime could potentially have been explained away and synthesised into a family history which depicted them in a positive light, but as with the Meier family, the items of memorabilia are non-negotiable, providing an image of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators that cannot be destabilised or displaced.

In the same way that Freia's discovery of the incriminating objects destroys her family's ability to recast or rewrite their historical narrative in a way which avoids Jo and Mäxchen's guilt, the inclusion of this incident in the novel severely restricts the reader's ability to choose Jo and Mäxchen's victimhood narratives over the novel's overall portrayal of them as perpetrators. This conclusion is further supported by the structure of the novel as a detective story, in which Freia acts as investigator, determined to uncover the secrets hidden in her own family history. The tension in the plot of the novel is built around the gradual uncovering of the truth about Jo and Mäxchen's support of Nazism, and the discovery of the physical evidence which puts their complicity beyond doubt forms the high point of this particular plotline. By using the

²⁸³ Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* ibid at 21; 70 – 75; 203 – 204.

“crime novel” structure of the plot to make the reader focus on evidence of Jo and Mäxchen’s culpability, *Himmelskörper* leaves the reader in absolutely no doubt as to the conclusions he or she is supposed to draw about them.

2.3.3 *Renate as a corrective – continuing the patterns of Väterliteratur*

The novel’s characterisation of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators is further supported by the role played by Renate in the novel and in particular by the continuation in her interactions with her parents of patterns familiar from *Väterliteratur*²⁸⁴. In the family’s conversations about the past, Renate acts as a corrective to the self-portrayal presented by Jo and Mäxchen by repeatedly matching their tales of German victimhood with reminders of German crimes. When Jo speaks of the bitterly cold overland route travelled by the German refugees and the terrible fear they had of being caught by the Russians, Renate interjects with a comment which serves to place German victimhood in the context of preceding German aggression and the concurrent failures of the German leadership:

“Ja, aber daß die Russen nicht nett zu uns sein würden, nachdem die Deutschen erst einmal in ihrem Land herumgewütet hatten war wohl keine Überraschung. Die Flucht verlief doch deshalb für viele Millionen Deutsche so katastrophal, weil unsere teuren Befehlshaber den Leuten einfach viel zu lange verboten hatten zu fliehen.” (HK 127)

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

²⁸⁴ Ganeva also discusses *Himmelskörper* in the context of *Väterliteratur*, asserting that it contains both similarities and differences with that genre: Ganeva, Mila op cit at 150; 154 - 158.

“Ihr schimpft über die Russen . . . die wir zuerst angegriffen haben, aber die Verantwortlichen haben die Zivilisten doch genauso umgebracht, indem sie im Volkssturm vollkommen sinnlos an einer längst zusammengebrochenen Front verheizten. Anstatt sie zu retten.”
(HK 136 – 137)²⁸⁵

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

Further, again like *Unschärfe Bilder*, the performance of this role by a member of the second generation forms part of an intergenerational conflict which repeats the patterns established in *Väterliteratur*, and in this way further emphasises the characterisation of the first generation as perpetrators. As with *Der Vorleser* and *Unschärfe Bilder*, the relationship between the first and second generations in *Himmelskörper* is frequently characterised by conflict and power play, something which can be seen most clearly in the conduct of the family’s discussions about the past. During these discussions, Jo and Mäxchen fight with Renate for control of the family narrative as part of a wider battle to maintain control of the family. Jo’s tendency to dominate these family conversations reflects the dominant role she plays in the family’s overall life. According to Freia, Renate is jealous of Jo’s power over her

²⁸⁵ Further examples of the way in which Renate calls the idea of German victimhood into question by bringing the focus back onto the responsibility of Germans for their own suffering at the end of the war may be found at HK 105; 128 – 131; 134.

relatives: *“Ich wußte, irgendwo in ihrem Hinterkopf war Renate eifersüchtig auf ihre Mutter. Auf die Macht, die sie über mich, über alle, immer noch, hatte”* (HK 215). Freia suspects her mother of secretly wishing that Jo would one day be reduced to a helpless, infantilised *“Johännchen oder Hannilein”* (HK 217), just as Maximilian was reduced by his war injuries to *“Mäxchen”*. During the course of family conversations, Renate uses discussions about the past as a weapon in her conflict with her parents, particularly her mother. Her contributions to the family dialogues usually contradict Jo’s version of events in some way, and in this respect represent an effort to wrest control of the narrative away from Jo. However, Renate’s attempts at setting the tone for the narrative are usually unsuccessful:

“Wenn Renate jedoch in diesen >Erzählt doch mal vom Krieg<- Diskussionen das Wort ergriff . . . wurde sie meist sofort von Jo oder Mäxchen unterbrochen, die meinten, dieses oder jenes Detail hätte sie aber nun vollkommen falsch wiedergegeben. Nur manchmal setzte sie sich durch und behielt das letzte Wort. . . . Und immer wieder gab es an den gleichen Stellen dieselben Streitigkeiten mit meiner Mutter, und immer wieder verstummte meine Mutter irgendwann resigniert und ließ Jo weiterreden.” (HK 98)

Jo uses a variety of techniques to reassert control over the family narrative. One of these is forming a combined front with Mäxchen, despite their disagreements in other areas of life: *“Bei diesen Gesprächen vertrugen sich Jo und Mäxchen recht gut und bildeten eher eine gemeinsame Front gegen Renate”* (HK 125). She also emphasises her authority as a parent and her correspondingly superior place in the family hierarchy by using diminutives

such as “*Renätchen*”, “*Natilein*” (HK 105 – 106) and “*die Kleine*” (HK 211) to put Renate down. Jo further seeks to shut down alternative versions of the story by pointing to her authority as an eyewitness, denying the validity of the views of those who came after. She dismisses Renate’s interjections by saying “*Was weißt du schon, du warst doch damals ein Kind!*” (HK 128) and similarly dismisses the opinions of Freia and Paul on the basis that they were not born at the time of the relevant events, so are not in a position to judge how they would have reacted:

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

The way in which the conflict between Renate and Jo plays out in their conversations about the Nazi past bears marked similarities to the Katja/Musbach conflict in *Unscharfe Bilder*, with Renate and Jo using similar techniques to Katja and Musbach respectively in their efforts to maintain control of both the family narrative and of power in their relationships²⁸⁶. Both Katja and Renate instrumentalise the Nazi past as a weapon in a broader conflict with their parents. What is different between them is that Katja is much more direct, aggressive and personal in the accusations she makes against Musbach. Whereas Katja interrogates Musbach about his personal responsibility, Renate uses abstract facts and figures pointing to general German culpability in her attempts to contradict her parents and gain control

²⁸⁶ Giesler also points to the memory contest between the first and second generations as a theme in the novel: Giesler, Birte “Krieg und Nationalsozialismus” op cit at 290 – 291.

of the narrative. The reason for Renate's failure to confront her parents directly about their involvement with Nazism and use her knowledge of their membership of the Nazi party as a weapon against them is her fear of the exposure of her own "guilt" that such a confrontation would likely bring about. The "guilt" in question centres on Renate's role in the family's successful flight from Gotenhafen at the end of the war. As a five year old child, Renate secured her family's passage on the *Theodor*, rather than the ill-fated *Gustloff*, by denouncing their neighbours, who were also waiting to board:

"Da rief Natilein plötzlich . . . vorher war sie den ganzen Tag still vor Angst gewesen . . . also plötzlich rief die Kleine richtig laut: >Die ham gar nich mehr den Gruß gemacht. Schon ganz lange nicht mehr<.

Und Nati streckte ihren dünnen kleinen Arm sehr gerade nach vorn . . .

Renätchen hat uns das Leben gerettet . . . so war das." (HK 249 - 250)

The neighbours, including their five year old son, died in the *Gustloff* disaster, and although Jo regards her as a lifesaver, Renate is plagued by feelings of guilt over her role in the deaths of their neighbours and tries to prevent Freia and Paul from hearing about her actions. When Jo and Mäxchen first start telling their grandchildren stories about the war, Renate whispers a warning to her mother: "*Von dem Schiff erzählst du ihnen nichts*" (HK 85). Years later, when Freia asks Jo how it was that she came to flee aboard the *Theodor* rather than the *Gustloff*, Renate jumps in with a string of information about the sinking of the *Gustloff*, diverting the conversation away from Freia's question (HK 246). Renate's fear of exposure of her own secret prevents her from making accusations that would uncover Jo and Mäxchen's. The closest Renate comes to making personal accusations against her parents in the way

Katja does against Musbach is when she pushes Mäxchen to tell the story of the *“wertvollen Familien”* (HK 102 - 103), something that he is reluctant to do and deliberately downplays because it hints obliquely at the “privileged” position of his own family as Nazi party members in the evacuation of Gotenhafen. It is not until after both of her parents are dead that Renate is able to openly accuse them of being *“Nazis der ersten Stunde”* and confirm that their postwar assertions were a sham: *“Nachher waren sie alle so schön demokratisch und so weiter, aber ich habs anders im Ohr”* (HK 300).

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

numerous occasions, Renate is depicted as being trapped behind glass, looking out on the present world, but unable to get away from her history (HK 15; 36; 54; 84; 149; 226; 252)²⁸⁷. Her pale, blue and grey-garbed appearance (HK 14; 66; 167; 294) is suggestive of the inescapable sadness which surrounds her. Only on those occasions when she escapes to her cousin Kazimierz in Poland is she surrounded by vibrant red imagery (HK 16), as it is only to him that she is able to unburden herself by confessing her guilt and receiving absolution (HK 300 – 301).

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

At the time of her denunciation of the family's Gotenhafen neighbours as no longer being "*führertreu*", Renate was "*ein unmündiges Kind*" (HK 130) and

²⁸⁷ Kallweit has extensively investigated the novel's window and other motifs as they apply to Renate in Kallweit, Sabine "Cirrus Perlucidus und die Einsamkeit zwischen zwei Generationen: Tanja Dückers Roman *Himmelskörper* als Beitrag zum kulturellen Gedächtnis" in Bartl, Andrea *Verbalträume: Beiträge zur deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* Augsburg: Wißner-Verlag, 2005: 177 - 186. See also Stüben, Jens op cit at 180 – 182.

therefore not responsible for her actions, no matter how guilty she herself feels. It is Jo and Mäxchen who are responsible, in that they as parents so thoroughly indoctrinated her in Nazi ideology that she may well have thought that she was doing the right thing in accusing her neighbours of disloyalty to the *Führer*. Kazimierz makes this clear when he assures Renate: “*Du bist nicht schuld daran, aber deine Eltern. Die haben schon immer den Arm höher gekriegt als alle anderen*” (HK 301). Despite her feelings of guilt, Renate also acknowledges that her parents’ Nazism was the cause of her own actions: “*Warum habe ich das wohl gesagt, wer hat denn zu Hause Strichlisten über die Nachbarn geführt und mich dazu angehalten, meine Spielkameraden . . .*” (HK 251). In keeping with the pattern established in the classic *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s, *Himmelskörper* continues the depiction of the second generation as victims of their perpetrator parents. In the instrumentalisation of the past as a weapon in the intergenerational struggle for power and in the presentation of the second generation as victims of the first, the relationship between the first and second generations in *Himmelskörper* is very similar to that portrayed in *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* in its continuation of the established patterns of *Väterliteratur*. As with those works, the novel’s maintenance of aspects of a literary format marked by its emphasis on the first generation’s complicity with Nazism restates that genre’s emphasis on Germans, in this case Jo and Mäxchen, as perpetrators. However, whereas both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* concentrate closely on the relationship between the first and second generations, *Himmelskörper* views these relationships and the Nazi past through the perspective of a third generation narrator. Does the third generation narrator, Freia, view her

grandparents as perpetrators, or does she accept Jo and Mäxchen's account of themselves as victims? Is her approach to what she knows about her family history the same or different from that of the second generation? In the following section of this chapter, I will examine the third generation perspective on the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, as well as the third generation's approach towards the conclusions it draws about the Nazi past.

3. Freia – a third generation approach

3.1 Germans as perpetrators or victims? – the third generation view

In Freia's descriptions of her history lessons at school, the novel presents an image of a third generation which has grown up immersed in a dominant public memory narrative which highlights German perpetration. The emphasis on German guilt begins in primary school when Freia and Paul are exposed in their history lessons to horrific images of German crimes:

“Leichen, ausgemergelt und nackt, in Bergen auf Karren getürmt, in Gruben übereinandergeschichtet” (HK 92)²⁸⁸. German suffering is also covered (*“Brennende Häuser, Städte. Flugzeuge, die in Flammen vom Himmel fallen. Knisternde Schwarzweißfilme. Zitternde Menschen, Truppenmanöver. Landschaften, leer und weit. Bombenhagel. Explosionen.”* (HK 92)), but by placing these image after those of German crimes when describing her experience of learning about the Nazi period at school, Freia emphasises the idea that, to the extent Germans suffered during the war, this suffering was a direct result of their own criminal actions. The children are required to revisit

²⁸⁸ Dückers also criticises this early exposure to disturbing images elsewhere: *“In wohlmeinender pädagogischer Absicht wurden viele der heute jungen Erwachsenen im frühesten Alter zum Ansehen von Dokumentationen über das Dritte Reich und von Kriegsfilmen genötigt”*: Dückers, *Tanja Morgen nach Utopia* op cit at 88.

the history of the Third Reich repeatedly during their school career, to the extent that it becomes a chore (“*In der Oberstufe wurde der Nationalsozialismus noch einmal >durchgenommen<*” (HK 95); “*Einmal hatten Paul und ich, als wir in der Schule den Antisemitismus durchkauten . . .*” (HK 104))²⁸⁹.

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

²⁸⁹ Dückers’ concerns about the teaching of information about the Third Reich (both in the German school system and also in the home by overly earnest parents) also feature in some of her other works. In *Spielzone*, the teenaged Laura is unimpressed when her parents suggest that she stay at home and watch a documentary on the *Gedenkstätte Plötzensee* rather than going out with her friends. Laura’s reaction shows that she is thoroughly sick of being force-fed information about the Nazi period, both at school and at home: “*Ich bin schon zweimal höchstpersönlich in Plötzensee gewesen, einmal mit der Schule und einmal, falls sie sich erinnern können, mit meinen Eltern*”: Dückers, Tanja *Spielzone* Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2007 at 20. Another teenager, Ada, changed from doing Advanced German to political geography in order to avoid reading a lot of “*alte Schinken*” about “*Massenmörder*” (at 118). For Ada, the constant presence of the Nazi past in public life is oppressive: “*Quatsch, über-all in der Stadt stehen Denkmäler rum . . . und in der Schule fünfmal den Zweiten Weltkrieg diskutiert*” (at 154). Similarly, in *Hausers Zimmer*, the teenaged Julika is thoroughly sick of the dull repetition of information about the Third Reich: “*mir graute vor täglichen Gedenkstättenbesuchen und langatmigen Belehrungen*”: Dückers, Tanja *Hausers Zimmer* Frankfurt am Main: Schöffling & Co, 2011 at 125. In her essay “*Der 8. Mai und die jüngere Generation*” too, Dückers suggests that the concentration on the Nazi past in the German school system has given rise to an “*Übersättigungssyndrom*” whereby the younger generations avoid engagement with the Nazi past because it has been forced upon them too heavily in their younger years: Dückers, Tanja *Morgen nach Utopia* op cit at 88.

conversations, personal photographs and letters. Whereas the *Lexikon* focuses on Germans as perpetrators, the *Album* tends to depict Germans as victims. Welzer's finding was that, in order to synthesise these two, often conflicting sources of knowledge, German families tended to form their family narratives so as to exempt family members from the crimes described in the *Lexikon*²⁹⁰. How does the third generation narrator, Freia, deal with the conflicting information arising from her *Lexikon* and her family *Album* in *Himmelskörper*? Does she follow the second generation approach typical of *Väterliteratur*? Does she follow the pattern observed by Welzer and form her narrative about her grandparents so as to exempt them from implication in German crimes? How does the third generation approach the perpetrator/victim dichotomy?

Unlike the second generation characters of Katja in *Unschärfe Bilder* and Renate in *Himmelskörper*, who consistently meet their parents' victimhood narratives with accusations focusing on Germans as perpetrators, third generation Freia is willing to acknowledge her grandparents' suffering and accept that it forms part of their story. Rather than seeking to cast her grandparents in solely negative terms, she describes with sympathy her grandfather's decline from the strong, masculine, active "Max" (HK 97; 178) to the disabled "Mäxchen" who returned from the Eastern Front with an amputated right leg and weakened lungs (HK 48; 97; 217). His disability causes his emasculation and infantilisation, forcing him to wear a bib to eat

²⁹⁰ See Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* op cit at 10 – 13. Welzer draws an analogy between these categories of *Lexikon* and *Album* and the concepts of *kulturelles Gedächtnis* and *kommunikatives Gedächtnis* described by Assmann: Assmann, Jan *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis* op cit at 34 – 56; Assmann, Jan "Kollektives Gedächtnis und kulturelle Identität" op cit at 9 – 19.

(HK 49) and spend time each morning and evening lying on the bed with his legs splayed, waiting for Jo to rub cream into the skin of his leg stump like a baby waiting for its nappy to be changed (HK 77). Freia also observes how her grandmother has been physically marked by her traumatic experiences during the war: *“Wie das Wasser seine Spuren auf den verrosteten Buchstaben der Schreibmaschine hinterlassen hatte, hatte die Angst Falten, Rinnen und Furchen in das Gesicht meiner Großmutter gegraben”* (HK 143). Even as his injuries emasculated “Max”, the feminine, blonde-plaited “Johanna” was forced by Mäxchen’s dependency to transform into the more masculine Jo (HK 48)²⁹¹. Freia admires the tough single-mindedness shown by her grandmother in surviving the war years: *“Meine Großmutter hatte lange Zeit einfach nur ein Ziel vor Augen gehabt, und zwar: lebend durch den Krieg zu kommen.”* (HK 215; see also the description of Jo’s sufferings and strength at the end of the war at 267 - 268²⁹²). In these sections of her narrative, Freia demonstrates an acceptance of the suffering of her grandparents and promotes a degree of sympathy for them.

²⁹¹ Giesler considers the theme of gender in *Himmelskörper* in more detail in Giesler, Birte “Der Satz ich erinnere mich nicht könnte zur Ausrede werden” op cit. Several others also analyse the novel from a gender perspective: Hill, Alexandra Merley “Motherhood as Performance: (Re)Negotiations of Motherhood in Contemporary German Literature” *Studies in Twentieth and Twenty-First Century Literature* 35.1 (2011): 74 - 94; Mattson, Michelle “The Obligations of Memory? Gender and Historical Responsibility in Tanja Dückers’s *Himmelskörper* and Arno Geiger’s *Es geht uns gut*” *German Quarterly* 86.2 (2013): 198 - 219. See also the comments by Dückers and Carl on the way in which experiences of the first generation during the war served to shatter gender stereotypes and pave the way for the gender revolution of the 1960s: Dückers, Tanja and Carl, Verena op cit at 12.

²⁹² Dückers explores similar material relating to a grandmother’s courage and suffering at the end of the war in the short story “Lux Aeterna”: Dückers, Tanja *Cafe Brazil* op cit at 170 – 182.

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

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

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

“Das Absurde an der Bananengeschichte war, daß Jo ihr Abwägen, ihren Wunsch zu helfen, ihre Unsicherheit und Angst jedesmal derart

dramatisch schilderte, daß man am Ende fast den Eindruck bekommen konnte, Jo hätte ein KZ befreit. Irgendwie gelang es ihr, das Unterlassen einer Handlung zur Heldentat zu stilisieren.” (HK 105)

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

In addition, once she uncovers her grandparents’ membership of the Nazi party, Freia never tries to deny, conceal, or excuse that fact. She does not accept Jo’s excuse that she and Mäxchen were “*Kinder unserer Zeit*” (HK 252), but rather is so horrified and disgusted by the truth about her grandparents that she is physically sick (HK 251). What is significant about Freia’s reaction to her discovery of Jo and Mäxchen’s support of the Nazi regime is the way in which it deviates from the typical response observed in Welzer’s study of German family discussions about the Nazi past which Dückers has cited as an influence on her. In his study, Welzer found that first generation stories which revealed family members to have been complicit in Nazi crimes were blotted out of the family history by members of subsequent generations. Despite (or perhaps because of) their high level of general

knowledge about the Third Reich, members of the third generation tended to maintain an image of their own family members as victims²⁹³ and were very resistant to correcting this image when confronted with compromising information about their grandparents' activities under Nazism²⁹⁴. In family dialogues about the Nazi period, statements from the first generation showing them to be perpetrators did not lead to surprise or upset on the part of their third generation listeners, but rather to nothing at all. Welzer found that it was as though members of subsequent generations did not even hear the statement which implicated their beloved family member, and that such statements were not incorporated into family memory and family narratives about the past²⁹⁵. In contrast to these sociological findings, Freia does not try to ignore revelations of her grandparents' complicity with Nazism or resist correcting the image of Jo and Mäxchen as victims which forms a major part of her family's private narrative. Rather, instead of ensuring that the depiction of Jo and Mäxchen in the private family *Album* does not link them with Nazi crimes, Freia acknowledges the fact of Jo and Mäxchen's Nazism and incorporates it into the family narrative. In doing so, she uses her *Lexikon* knowledge to understand the victimhood narratives of her grandparents in the

²⁹³ Dückers also reflects on the tendency towards showing family members from their best side in the development of family narratives about the past in her novel *Der längste Tag der Jahres*, in which the family narrative depicts the grandfather dying heroically in the heat of battle, whereas military documents recorded that he had been shot in the back whilst getting a drink of water: Dückers, Tanja *Der längste Tag des Jahres* Berlin: Aufbau Verlag, 2007 at 116.

²⁹⁴ Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* op cit at 31 – 32; 47.

²⁹⁵ Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* ibid at 51 – 52.

context of their crimes²⁹⁶. This deviation from the norm again shows the way in which the novel is constructed so as to confirm German guilt and emphasise the portrayal of the first generation as perpetrators in a way that is consistent with the trend already observed in relation to *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*. In this sense, the third generation perspective in *Himmelskörper* does not mark a radical change from previously established patterns in German literature dealing with the Nazi past²⁹⁷.

²⁹⁶ Welzer himself has commented on the way in which Dückers' dialogues deviate from the findings of his study: Welzer, Harald "Schön unscharf" op cit at 62. Herrmann also agrees with this viewpoint: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 252. See also Stüben, Jens op cit at 181.

²⁹⁷ The emphasis on Germans as perpetrators in *Himmelskörper* is consistent with Dückers' non-fiction writing on this subject, in which she is critical of such matters as the transformation of the *Täter* into *Zeitzeugen*, the recent concentration on German suffering, and the transfer of vocabulary usually used in discussions of the Holocaust onto the German experience of the Allied bombing campaign. Dückers has also expressed concern that the representation of the theme of German suffering by prominent members of the Left (such as Günter Grass) has moved the topic from the Far Right into the political centre, and that German victimhood has become decontextualised and separated from German crimes: Dückers, Tanja *Morgen nach Utopia* op cit at 83; 91 -92; 95 -100; 101 - 107; Dückers, Tanja "Alles nur Opfer: Wie mit Hilfe von Filmen wie dem ZDF-Zweiteiler 'Die Gustloff' aus Nazi-Tätern und -Unterstützern wieder 'reine Zeitzeugen' gemacht werden. Ein medialer Geschichtsrevisionismus der neuen Art" *Die Zeit* 6 March 2008. See also the interview with Dückers in: Partouche, Rebecca op cit. Dückers has also noted that a rejection of Nazism and those who supported it remains a common denominator for her generation: "das Unverständnis gegenüber den Gräueltaten des NS Regimes und seinen Mitläufern wächst und nicht abnimmt" Hage, Volker "Die Enkel wollen es wissen" op cit. Her views on this subject are also reflected in the short story "Das Eckhaus", in which she points to the responsibility of Germans for their own suffering in the context of the Allied bombing of Düsseldorf: "*Bomben, die aus Flugzeugen fielen, die niemals gestartet wären, wenn das Land, aus dem ich komme, nicht zuvor andere Länder ohne Grund, ohne Not, mit Bomben übersät hätte*". Dückers, Tanja "Das Eckhaus" in Rambeck, Brigitta *Manche mögens Weihnachtlich: Von Weihnachtssucht und Weihnachtsflucht* Munich: Deutsche Taschenbuch Verlag, 2007: 84 - 88 at 88.

3.2 Integrating the perpetrators – the third generation approach

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

The move away from conflict towards integration is signalled in the novel by the very different role played by Freia and Paul in their family's multigenerational "*Erzählt doch mal vom Krieg – Diskussionen*". Whereas their mother Renate plays an active role in the discussions, repeatedly

challenging her parents' version of events, Freia and Paul remain largely passive²⁹⁸. Their role is mostly limited to providing occasional prompts as part of the ritual of the family narrative (for example at HK 144)²⁹⁹. Occasionally, Freia and Paul do decide to manipulate family discussions of the Nazi past to annoy their parents and grandparents for the sake of their own amusement, as when Paul stays up at night to write a "new" version of the family history "*welches am nächsten Abend den Eklat auslösen sollte*" (HK 87)³⁰⁰.

However, Freia and Paul never use the family's discussions about the past as an occasion to promote serious conflict, and they never openly challenge their grandparents' version of events. When Freia exposes the ridiculousness of Jo's "*berühmte Bananengeschichte*", for example, it is in the context of her narrative to the reader rather than in the middle of a family conversation. The different approach taken by Freia and Paul towards these family discussions indicates that, for the third generation, the Nazi past is simply not a source or

²⁹⁸ Neuschäfer also notes that the third generation does not take part in the conflicts between the first and second generations, but retreats into the role of observer: Neuschäfer, Markus "Vom doppelten Fortschreiben der Geschichte: Familiengeheimnisse im Generationenroman" in Lauer, Gerhard *Literaturwissenschaftliche Beiträge zur Generationsforschung* Göttingen: Wallstein, 2010: 164 - 203 at 180.

²⁹⁹ Welzer points to the use of *Stichwörter* as prompts in family narratives about the past: Welzer, Harald, Moller, Sabine and Tschuggnall, Karoline *Opa war kein Nazi* op cit at 29.

³⁰⁰ This use by the third generation of the past as a means to provoke older generations, particularly their parents, is a theme in Dückers' work. In *Spielzone*, the character of Ada, who is otherwise uninterested in the past, spouts forth the rhyme "*Maikäfer flieg, dein Vater ist im Krieg, Mutter ist im Pommerland, Pommerland ist abgebrannt*" as a deliberate ploy to upset her 68er parents: Dückers, Tanja *Spielzone* op cit at 117. Similarly, the granddaughter in *Der längste Tag des Jahres* uses the word "*Faschos*" as a means of annoying her mother: Dückers, Tanja *Der längste Tag des Jahres* op cit at 45. In *Hausers Zimmer*, Falk provokes his 68er parents by saying "*Bin ich hier im KZ oder was?*" when they tell him what to do: Dückers, Tanja *Hausers Zimmer* op cit at 61.

means of acting out intergenerational conflict³⁰¹. The tension between Freia and Paul and their parents in the novel is not caused by the discovery of a parent's involvement in Nazi crimes, but centres rather on the more universal "coming of age" experience of discovering that one's parents are not the people one thought they were, as when Freia becomes aware of her father's infidelities (HK 119)³⁰². The way in which the third generation deals with the burden of its family history thus marks a move away from using the tropes of *Väterliteratur*, indicating that the pattern may no longer be readily applicable to the new constellation presented by the third generation. All of this suggests that, for the third generation, the Nazi past no longer promotes the same kind of personal relationship crisis that it did for the second generation.

The fact that members of the third generation have moved away from the second generation approach of instrumentalising the Nazi past for the purposes of intergenerational conflict does not, however, mean that the past no longer has any significance for them. Freia recognises that the family's past, and particularly her grandparents' enthusiastic support of Nazism, forms an important part of her own identity³⁰³. Her interest in uncovering the truth

³⁰¹ Dückers has made a similar point in several interviews: *"Ich glaube, dass der Dialog der Großeltern- und der Enkelgeneration auf Grund der historischen und persönlichen Distanz leichter fällt als zwischen Eltern und Kindern, und das ist eine Chance – der nüchterne Blick der nicht unmittelbar Betroffenen"*: Dückers, Tanja "Verdrängte Schuld" op cit; *"Über Eltern urteilt man vielleicht anders als über Großeltern"* Gutzschhahn, Uwe-Michael op cit at 55. See also: Dückers, Tanja "Mir gefällt mein Geburtsdatum" op cit.

³⁰² Ganeva makes a similar point, noting that open confrontation with the parents is not an issue in the novel: Ganeva, Mila op cit at 159.

³⁰³ Neuschäfer considers the link between the historical references and the themes of family and identity: Neuschäfer, Markus op cit. Dückers has also explored the impact of the family past on individual identity in her short story "Der Wollmütze", in which the protagonist's battle with her woollen beanie symbolises her doomed struggle to escape her family's past which robs her of her own identity: Dückers, Tanja *Cafe Brazil* op cit at 103 – 106. For an

about her family's Nazi past is awakened by her pregnancy, which causes her to reflect on what the family history might mean, not only for her own identity, but for that of her unborn daughter:

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

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

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

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

analysis of this short story, see Vollmer, Hartmut “Metamorphosen des Alltags
Tanja Dückers kleine Erzählung großer Verwandlung: Die Wollmütze”
Literatur für Leser 34.1 (2011): 1 - 12.

This continuity with the past is a repeated theme in the novel, expressed particularly through the use of symbols which suggest links and interconnection. One of these is braiding, particularly symbolised by Freia's plaits. The act of braiding itself suggests interconnection, in that it involves intertwining different strands together to form a single cord. In the novel, the act of braiding is linked specifically with the transmission of information about the past. When Freia is young, both her mother and her grandmother take part in the ritual of braiding her hair, during which her grandmother in particular likes to show Freia old photographs in which she herself is wearing plaits, and to reminisce about "*der glücklichsten Zeit ihres Lebens*" (HK 27; 61 - 64). It is the plaits themselves which seem to Freia to stimulate discussion of the past: "*meine Zöpfe brachten Jo dazu, von früher zu erzählen, ohne daß Paul und ich drängeln mußten*" (HK 62). Looking into the mirror, Freia imagines she can see all of the other women in her family, linked together by their long hair in a chain of continuity from the past into the present (HK 62). Freia tries to escape this connection with the past by cutting off her plaits, but Renate, unable to let go of the past, preserves Freia's plaits by pinning them to a board in her room (HK 66 – 67)³⁰⁴. Freia's plaits and the link to the past they represent are almost disposed of when, prior to her suicide, Renate throws them in the rubbish bin along with her other memorabilia (HK 314), but they return once again when Paul rescues them, intending to use them in an artwork about Freia (HK 274). The amber necklaces worn by Jo and her sister Lena perform a similar symbolic function to Freia's plaits. As with the

³⁰⁴ Cohen-Pfister makes a similar point about Freia's discomfort as regards her links to the past, her attempt to break with the past by cutting her hair, and her ultimate realisation that the past will always be there: Cohen-Pfister, Laurel "An Aesthetics of Memory" op cit at 129.

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

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

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

The third generation in *Himmelskörper* not only accept the culpability of their grandparents, but they also realise that they are inextricably linked to the Nazi

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

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

“Doch diesmal erzählte Paul, wie das Mädchen und der Junge durch ein besonders finsternen Wald liefen. Vögel fielen blutig von den Bäumen, Kleidung lag herum. Schüsse fielen. Am Horizont brannte eine Stadt. Der Wald war riesig und schwarz und hieß 'Rußland'. Es war sehr kalt dort, und die beiden hatten erst rotgefrorene, dann weiße und schließlich schwarze Finger und Zehen, sie bluteten. Plötzlich traten ganz viele Männer in zerrissener Kleidung aus dem Wald. Hier unterbrach sich Paul und sagte, sie hätten einen besonderen Namen, den er vergessen habe, so ähnlich wie Party und Parmesan.

Parmisanen, glaube er.” (HK 83)

However, just as their childhood sense of wonder on hearing their father's fairytales about “*Waldgeister*” (HK 40) gives way to an adult realisation that

his stories are a cover for his infidelity, so Freia and Paul's imagination and reinvention of their grandparents' narratives about the past as a source of amusement gives way to the knowledge that this family past is a real part of their own identity. Freia and Paul respond to this realisation by creating a different, grown-up narrative as a means of taking possession of the past and making it part of their own story. Rather than telling another fairytale about fantastical creatures, they tell their own story, in which the history of their grandparents' culpability forms a part.

In a highly metafictional move, the story they tell is the novel *Himmelskörper* itself: "*Ich sehe es jetzt schon vor mir: Ein 6-Uhr-winterblauer Deckel . . . Die Buchstaben >Himmelskörper< gleiten über . . .*" (HK 318). In the final chapter, the novel points self-reflexively to its own genesis when Freia and Paul decide to write a novel as a means of processing their family past³⁰⁵. They had already tried to work through their family history by collaborating on a visual art project following the deaths of their grandparents (HK 55 – 59). The twins call this collaboration their "*Transformationsarbeit*" (HK 56), a term which reflects the postmemorial nature of their undertaking³⁰⁶. As members of the

³⁰⁵ A further self-reflexive reference to the novel's fictionality can be seen in the interpolation of the figure of Dückers and her husband into Mäxchen's account of the circumstances of the *Gustloff* disaster – they appear as two *Gustloff* personnel who miss the boat because they were ensconced in a harbourside pub (HK 142). Dückers has confirmed that this incident is intended to be a fictional appearance by herself: Dückers, Tanja "Ist das autobiographisch?" *Die Welt* 25 October 2006.

³⁰⁶ Hirsch's concept of "postmemory" has been widely applied to Dückers' work *Himmelskörper* in the secondary literature: Ächtler, Norman op cit at 294; Schaumann, Caroline "A Third-Generation World War II Narrative" op cit at 262 - 263; Ganeva, Mila op cit at 150 - 151; Fuchs, Anne *Phantoms of War* op cit at 47 – 49; 55; Braun, Michael, "Wem gehört die Geschichte?" op cit at 105; 110; Braun, Michael "Die Wahrheit der Geschichte(n)" op cit at 101; Strancar, Tina op cit at 98; Anastasiadis, Athanasios "Transgenerational Communication of Traumatic Experiences: Narrating the Past from a

third generation, Freia and Paul have no personal memories of the Nazi past. Instead, they combine fragments of mediated historical information with their own imaginations to form a new, postmemorial product. In undertaking their combined project, Freia hopes to transform the burden of the family past into “*etwas Leichtes, Klares, Transparentes*” (HK 271). However, she becomes increasingly dissatisfied with the project, as she fails to understand Paul’s work or to see her own view of the past reflected in his paintings: “*Ich wollte Klarheit gewinnen, nicht ein weiteres Labyrinth aufbauen*” (HK 271). To solve the problems arising in their visual art collaboration, Freia comes up with the idea of writing down what they have uncovered about their family history:

“Paul! Nach alldem, was wir in den letzten Wochen erfahren haben, ist mir eine Idee gekommen . . . laß uns doch all das aufschreiben . . . dann brauchen wir später nichts . . . nichts! . . . außer diesem Buch, unserem privaten Almanach . . .” (HK 272 – 273)³⁰⁷

Paul agrees with the idea, seeing the writing project as a means of unburdening themselves of their family past: “*Ich möchte hier in Frieden leben und Jacques nicht immer mit unserer Geschichte belasten, und deshalb*

Postmemorial Position” *Journal of Literary Theory* 6.1 (2012): 1 – 24. Dückers has also reflected on the postmemorial nature of writing about the past as a third generation author: “*Man kann nicht mehr über das ‘Dagewesene’, sondern nur noch über das ‘Abwesende’, über Bruchstücke, Fundstücke und leere Plätze schreiben*” Dückers, Tanja “Spuren suchen” op cit at 56.

³⁰⁷ The section in the novel goes against Schaumann’s assertion that the reference in the novel to the *Himmelskörper* project is not a reference to the novel itself, as in her view the project referred to also includes artworks and other media and is written by both Freia and Paul and not by a woman alone. However, this point in the text indicates that the text is meant, not to complement, but to replace the other fragmented attempts to process the past, and Paul’s statement at the end of the novel that *Himmelskörper* will be Freia’s story confirms a single, female authorship (HK 318): Schaumann, Caroline *Memory Matters* op cit at 314.

müssen wir dieses Buch schreiben, Freia” (HK 318). The twins hope that codifying their family past will help them to deal with what their grandparents’ guilt means for them. Rather than pushing the past away, the third generation makes it part of their own story, integrating the past into their own identity. They take charge of history by writing it into their story, which allows for a certain amount of emancipation. Their contextualisation of the Nazi past as a part, but no more than a part, of present third generation identity also marks a change from the second generation perspective. Whereas their parents’ guilt is the subject of a personal crisis for second generation characters like Michael and Katja, for Freia and Paul the guilt of their grandparents is simply one aspect of their identity, a single part of their wider story. The structure of the novel as a “coming of age” story³⁰⁸ in which the recognition of Jo and Mäxchen’s complicity with Nazism is but one element of Freia and Paul’s journey to adulthood along with struggles with sexuality and gender, first loves and first heartbreaks, and disenchantment with loved parents, shows the way in which the third generation views their family’s Nazi history as one thread in their larger story.

³⁰⁸ Jaroszewski sees “coming of age” as the *Hauptmotiv* of the novel: Jaroszewski, Marek op cit at 280; Taberner sees this integration of German history with more universal themes such as coming of age and identity as a feature of recent works by younger authors such as Dücker: Taberner, Stuart “Representations of German Wartime Suffering” op cit at 180. Höfer criticises Dücker for allowing these other themes to peripheralise the theme of German suffering: Höfer, Adolf “Himmelskörper und andere Unscharfe Bilder” op cit at 152; Höfer, Adolf “Die Entdeckung der deutschen Kriegsoffer” op cit at 387 - 388.

4. *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction

The metafictional self-reflexivity of Freia and Paul's *Himmelskörper* project and the way in which the third generation's transformation of the legacy of the Nazi past echoes White's ideas about the narrativity of history suggest that, like *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper* may be understood as a work of historiographic metafiction. I have already argued in this chapter that *Himmelskörper* is a closed text which is carefully constructed, even to the point of artificiality, so as to ensure that the reader identifies Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators. Do the elements of historiographic metafiction in the novel also form part of its careful construction so as to support the novel's points about the Nazi past? Or do they have a destabilising effect? In the following section, I will examine the way in which *Himmelskörper* both explicitly and implicitly thematises historiographical critiques to demonstrate a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction. I will also explore whether this aspect of the text fits in with the novel's overall construction so as to support what I have identified as the third generation's new, narrative approach to the Nazi past, as well as the novel's portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators.

4.1 The narrativity of history and the third generation approach

Unlike both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Der Vorleser*, *Himmelskörper* does not address historiographical critiques through a character involved in the history profession, such as Michael or Musbach. Instead, the novel thematises its criticisms of historiography most explicitly by reflecting White's levelling of the difference between history and fiction through its questioning of the distinction between art and science. This theme is expressed through the professional

work of Freia and Paul, who consciously combine elements of both art and science in their endeavours. Freia is a meteorologist with a particular interest in cloud formations, therefore seeming at first to represent “science”³⁰⁹, whereas Paul as a painter represents “art”. However, throughout the novel, the twins both combine these fields in a way which questions their traditional separation. Freia is influenced in her work by Dr Tuben, an unorthodox meteorologist who rejects the presumed opposition of art and science and proposes a multidisciplinary approach:

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

Similarly, Paul often incorporates scientific concepts into his visual artworks, such as the temperature markings which he uses as titles for his paintings (HK 24). His atelier is covered in notes and sketches, but also features “*eine ausrangierte Schulkarte mit den chemischen Elementen*” and a “*Sonnensystemmobile*” (HK 25). Paul also uses science as an artistic inspiration when he “transforms” Freia's talk of her scientific research into visual art works (HK 24).

³⁰⁹ Dückers has indicated that Freia's status as a scientist links in with the less emotional and more investigative approach to the past which typifies the third generation: “*Nicht umsonst ist die Protagonistin meines Romans Naturwissenschaftlerin, Meteorologin. Ich wollte diesen forschenden Zugang*” (Partouche, Rebecca op cit). However, the metafictional self-reflexivity of the novel and the thematisation of the links between art and science suggest that Freia's version of events is not “objective” or “factual”, and it may be that all Dückers meant by her remark was that Freia's approach to the past is “scientific” in that she looks at it with an enquiring mind and without the emotional conflict which characterises the approach of the second generation.

This questioning of the distinction between art and science is explicitly linked in the novel to history, fiction, and the representation of the past by Dr Tuben's understanding of clouds as "*Geschichtsspeicher*", an invented term which he uses in reference to both "*Geschichte*" and "*Geschichten*" (HK 307). Tuben's idea collapses the barrier between art and science, as well as pointing to the identity between "histories" and "stories", between "fact" and "fiction". A similar point is made through Paul's "transformation" of historical objects linked to the family's Nazi past into paintings. In turning past objects, information and events into new artworks, Paul's painting reflects the process of historiography, in which historical events are turned into a new narrative which is not identical with the past that it represents. The collapsing of the distinction between art and science in the novel and its direct application to the field of history recalls White's criticism of the idea of history as a "science", his description of history as a "fiction" and his emphasis on the use of "artistic" methods, such as literary narrative techniques, in historiography³¹⁰, clearly marking *Himmelskörper* as a work of historiographic metafiction.

A similar reference to the blurring of the line between fact and fiction in the weaving of historical "facts" and elements of the writer's imagination into a narrative can be seen in the metafictional process Freia and Paul employ as part of their third generation approach towards dealing with the Nazi past. The development of Freia and Paul's postmemorial project from fairytale to visual artwork and finally to the novel "*Himmelskörper*" thematises the narrativity of history. As was the case in *Der Vorleser*, the self-reflexive reference to the writing of the novel points to history as a narrative and the

³¹⁰ White, Hayden *Tropics of Discourse* op cit at 81 – 100; 121 -134; White, Hayden *Metahistory* op cit.

problems this causes for the idea of historical objectivity. In trying to write down a “definitive” version of their family history to prevent their lives being overwhelmed by the flood of information they have received about the past, Freia and Paul may reject other versions and elements which do not fit in with their new narrative, just as Michael at a similar point in *Der Vorleser* acknowledged that he had chosen to write down one particular version of the past, ignoring others. By referring to their narrativisation of their family history as “*Transformationsarbeit*”, Freia and Paul reflect the idea that the act of turning historical “events” into a narrative “history” involves changing them, so that they no longer represent a mimesis of the past. The link between history and fairytales in the novel, as well as the fact that Freia and Paul’s narrative of their family history is eventually produced in the form of a *Roman*, further alludes to White’s ideas about history as fiction³¹¹, and again displays significant similarities with *Der Vorleser*. This focus on history as a narrative arising from a reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction not only reflects critiques of historiography, it also forms an important part of the way in which the novel expresses the third generation’s new approach to dealing with the Nazi past. Freia and Paul do not reject their grandparents or try to deny their Nazism, but rather they accept these aspects of their family history as forming part of their own identity. In a postmemorial fashion, they combine elements from their *Album* and their *Lexikon* with their imagination to form a family history that is also a story in the form of a *Roman*.

This blurring of the lines between fact and fiction apparent in both the nature of the novel as historiographic metafiction and in the third generation’s way of

³¹¹ White, Hayden *Tropics of Discourse* ibid at 92.

dealing with the past through narrativisation points to history as subjective, partial, and sometimes arbitrary. As is often the case in historiographic metafiction, this questioning of the existence of a line between historical fact and historical fiction raises further questions about our ability to ever know the “truth” about the past and therefore have a basis for judging the perpetrators. Does this reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction therefore destabilise the portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators as it destabilises the depiction of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*? Or is *Himmelskörper* more like *Unschärfe Bilder*, in which the elements of historiographic metafiction undermine Musbach’s portrayal of himself as a victim? These are questions to which I will return later in this chapter.

4.2 Questioning historical sources – how can we know the “truth” about the past?

Himmelskörper is indeed similar to *Unschärfe Bilder* in the way in which it highlights the problems for historiography’s claims to objectivity and veracity posed by the fragmentary, contingent, biased and often conflicting nature of the source material with which historians and others investigating the past must work. As with *Unschärfe Bilder*, the novel focuses its questioning of whether we can ever know the “truth” about the past on querying the reliability of eyewitness accounts and photographs. It also questions the ability of memorial locations to mediate information about the past.

4.2.1 Eyewitness accounts

The transmission of information about the Third Reich in *Himmelskörper* takes place in large part via the eyewitness testimony of Jo and Mäxchen given

during the course of family discussions. The novel addresses the problems associated with using eyewitness testimony as a historical source by pointing to its basis in inherently unreliable memory and by highlighting the narrativity of eyewitness accounts. In terms of the problems associated with the basis of eyewitness testimony in memory, the novel highlights the unreliability of memory by emphasising the way in which people remember the same event differently. This becomes apparent to Freia when she is speaking to Renate about the times in Freia's childhood when Renate would plait her long hair. Renate remembers these episodes as times of closeness, when she and Freia spent time chatting to each other, whereas Freia remembers these moments as being characterised by silence. Freia's comment, "*Wie unterschiedlich die Erinnerung doch ist*" (HK 276)³¹², is indicative of her realisation that memory is not an objective means of capturing past experiences, but a subjective rendering of events. Her realisation is echoed in Paul's remark that "*Erinnerung*" is an "*einsame Angelegenheit*" (HK 272). All of these reflections on the subject of memory emphasise its partial nature and have obvious implications for eyewitness testimonies which necessarily draw on memory as their major source.

The novel also questions the "authenticity" of eyewitness testimony by pointing to the artificiality and narrativity of such accounts. In the parts of her narrative concerned with family discussions about the past, Freia deliberately prompts the reader to see the artificiality in Jo's stories about the past: "*Sie tat immer so, als müßte sie diesen Satz aus der tiefsten Versenkung ihres*

³¹² A similar general point is made by Dückers in *Der längste Tag des Jahres*, in which the events of the same day are described differently from the different viewpoints of a group of siblings: Dückers, Tanja *Der längste Tag des Jahres* op cit.

Gedächtnisses an die Oberfläche ihres Bewußtseins zerran, dabei konnte sie ihn - und wir derweil auch - natürlich im Schlaf aufsagen" (HK 99). Combined with the overt typicality of Jo and Mäxchen's first generation recollections, this sense of their eyewitness accounts as well-rehearsed plays presents an image of eyewitness testimonies as tales which have been constructed for a particular purpose. The artificiality of Jo and Mäxchen's accounts exposes them as a constructed narrative of events, and in this way thematises the narrativisation of history³¹³. The arrangement of past events into a dramatic format reminds the reader that any narrative of history is necessarily selective and partial, as events are either selected because they are inherently exciting, or altered for dramatic effect, or simply omitted. They are historical narratives, not mimetic representations of the past. Eyewitnesses select or discard information and events in the formation of their historical narratives in accordance with their own interests, as shown by the way in which Jo's desire to present herself as a victim and distance herself from Nazism dictates the stories she chooses to tell, those she chooses to omit, and how the stories are framed. Indeed, through the example of Jo the novel demonstrates the way in which "authentic" eyewitness narratives are capable of being outright lies, thereby criticising the tendency to automatically accord weight to eyewitness testimony. By making the constructed nature of the dialogues overt, the novel calls the authenticity and veracity of oral histories narrated by *Zeitzeugen* into question and highlights the bias, selectivity and distorting

³¹³ Herrmann makes a similar point that the accusation of artificiality may be defused by taking the metafictional observations about the construction of the novel seriously: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 253. Stüben agrees, noting that the artificial language is functional, in that it points to the constructed and distorted nature of Jo and Mäxchen's stories: Stüben, Jens op cit at 175 – 176.

effect that historiographic narrativisation can have on the representation of historical events. This questioning of eyewitness testimony is particularly significant in view of the heightened interest in the *Zeitzeugen* at the time of the novel's publication. Part of this interest arose out of the fact that the "Germans as victims" wave was fuelled primarily by private recollections, rather than promotion of the theme in official, public memory culture, but interest was further intensified by fact that the lives of the *Zeitzeugen* were rapidly coming to an end. The reflections on eyewitness testimony in *Himmelskörper* undermine such testimony as a historical source, thereby also calling its frequent emphasis on "Germans as victims" into question. The way in which *Himmelskörper* highlights the problems presented by the reliance on memory and the constructed nature of narratives about the past for the claims of eyewitness testimony to "authenticity" and "truth" are strongly reminiscent of similar points made in *Unscharfe Bilder*.

4.2.2 Photographs

Also highly reminiscent of *Unscharfe Bilder* is *Himmelskörper's* exposure of the photographic medium as an unreliable historical source. One facet of this unreliability arises from the fact that the interpretation of a photograph is not necessarily static, but can instead be significantly affected by the perspective of the viewer. This can be seen when Jo shows Freia a photograph of herself and her sisters as children. Knowing Jo as a strong figure who dominates the family even when she is old and dying, Freia at first assumes that Jo is the girl in the photograph "*die mit keckem Blick neugierig den Kopf wendete*", only to find that she was the one "*das schüchtern die Augen vor dem Fotografen niederschlug*" (HK 62). Her present perspective on Jo's character initially

causes her to misinterpret the photograph, recalling Katja's misinterpretation of the photograph in the *Wehrmachtsausstellung in Unschärfe Bilder*. Freia's present perspective also acts on several occasions as a block in her attempts to imagine her grandparents in their youth, as they were when various family photographs were taken. At several points, Freia expresses the difficulty she has in trying to reconcile the Jo and Mäxchen she knows as grandparents with the image they present in old photographs:

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

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

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

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

“Aber sind die Momente repräsentativ, die ein Foto einfängt? Man kann ihnen nicht trauen, diesen Schnappschüssen, die festhalten,

behaupten und verallgemeinern, wenn doch fast alle unsere Gesten, Mienen und Momente in ein Meer aus Nichts abgetaucht und vergessen sind . . .” (HK 250)

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

4.2.3 *Memorial locations*

A memorial location can also be a source of information about the past, but the discussion of these locations in *Himmelskörper* focuses on the way in which memorials as representations of the past can block understanding. The disconnect between historiography and the actual events it seeks to represent is explicitly thematised in Freia’s discussion of memorial locations, specifically the Warsaw Ghetto and Gdynia (the modern-day Gotenhafen). When Freia

takes a trip to Warsaw one school holidays, she visits the Warsaw Ghetto memorial and has trouble trying to visualise the Warsaw of the 1940s beneath the bustle of present-day life:

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

According to Freia, the ironic effect of the memorial at the Warsaw Ghetto is to block understanding of and emotional connection with the past by creating a *Verfremdungseffekt* by means of this self-reflexivity. The presence of a memorial makes it impossible to connect with the past because it is a specific reminder that that past is no more, and its nature as an abstraction resists emotional connection. Freia's inability to “relive” the past or to establish an emotional connection with it leaves her with a feeling of “*Beklommenheit*” (HK 172) and a sense of guilt at being unable to feel the “correct” emotions³¹⁴. In

³¹⁴ This concern at not having the “correct” emotional response to memorial locations also arises in *Spielzone*, when Laura comments on her response to the *Gedenkstätte Plötzensee*: “*mich hat das überhaupt nicht kaltgelassen, wie Wolf mir vorwarf, bloß weil ich da drin ‘ne Tüte Chips gegessen habe, was er*

a parallel to the experience of Michael in *Der Vorleser* when he visits the Struthof concentration camp, Freia notes: *“Daß ich nichts empfinden konnte, entsetzte mich. Ich konnte keine Verbindung aufnehmen mit alledem, was in dieser Stadt geschehen war”* (HK 172 – 173). The idea that the past cannot be recaptured, even when standing in the locations in which the relevant past occurred, is reinforced during Freia’s visit to Gdynia with her mother. When Freia visits Gdynia, she finds it difficult to reconcile the contemporary town with the “Gotenhafen” she knows from Jo’s stories and from old photographs: *“Die Fotos, die Erzählungen waren meine Wirklichkeit gewesen, und ich wußte nicht, wie ich sie auch nur im entferntesten mit dieser gelösten Strandatmosphäre in Übereinstimmung bringen sollte”* (HK 295). Rather than acting as an aid to an understanding of history, memorial locations in the novel serve to highlight the idea that the past can never truly be recaptured and that memorials in particular can actually act as a block to transmitting the past through the *Verfremdungseffekt* caused by their obvious status as representation rather than reality. Like Freia’s photograph of cirrus perlucidus, the cloud formation she seeks throughout the novel (HK 11 – 12; 303) and which symbolises her search for the elusive past³¹⁵, the memorial locations in the novel are a visual representation of something that has disappeared, and Freia’s reflections on the effect of memorials underscore the novel’s comment

aus irgendeinem Grund ‘sehr unpassend’ fand.” (Dückers, *Tanja Spielzone* op cit at 20).

³¹⁵ Some have seen Freia’s sighting of cirrus perlucidus in Gdynia towards the end of the novel as symbolic of her ultimate acquisition of the truth about her family’s past, or at least of a resolution of this plotline: Emmerich, Wolfgang “Dürfen die Deutschen” op cit at 312; Stüben, Jens op cit at 182; Kaminska, Ewelina “Die nötige Distanz der Enkelgeneration: Tanja Dücker’s Roman Himmelskörper” in Gansel, Carsten and Zimniak, Paul *Das Prinzip Erinnerung in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur nach 1989* Göttingen: V&R unipress, 2010: 149 - 160 at 155.

on the fundamental difference between actual historical events and their subsequent representation. Combined with the novel's reflections on the narrativity of historical accounts and its thematisation of White's equation of history with fiction, the identification of problems associated with historical sources such as eyewitness accounts, photographs and memorial locations points to the selectivity, fragmentary nature and bias of history. In doing so, it raises serious questions about our ability to ascertain the objective "truth" about the past. In the following, I will consider the implications these questions may have for the portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators in *Himmelskörper*.

4.3 Implications of historiographic metafiction for the portrayal of the perpetrators – comparison with *Der Vorleser* and *Unschärfe Bilder*

The consideration in *Himmelskörper* of matters such as the narrativity of history, the relationship between history and fiction, the lack of identity between historical events and their representation, and the problems for historiography created by incomplete and inconsistent source materials, mark the novel as a work of historiographic metafiction. In raising these historiographical issues, the novel calls into question our ability to gain an objective, comprehensive understanding of the past, and in doing so suggests that the past, like the "*hellbraunen undurchsichtigen Perlen*" (HK 267) of the amber necklaces which symbolise the biological transmission of the past in Freia's family, is opaque. Does this exposure of our knowledge of the past as contingent and uncertain mean that we cannot judge whether someone is a victim or a perpetrator? To return to the questions posed earlier in this chapter, does the reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction

destabilise the portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators as it destabilises the depiction of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*, in that the thematisation of historiographical criticism in the novel unsettles the basis on which our judgment is made? Or is *Himmelskörper* more like *Unscharfe Bilder*, in which the elements of historiographic metafiction undermine Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim and confirm the depiction of Germans as perpetrators?

It is my contention that the interaction between a reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction and the novel's portrayal of Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators resembles *Unscharfe Bilder* far more than it does *Der Vorleser*. In particular, the effect the reflection of historiographical critiques has on Jo and Mäxchen's accounts is very similar to the effect it has on Musbach's testimony. In *Unscharfe Bilder*, Musbach repeatedly emphasises the primacy and authenticity of his own eyewitness testimony as a means of preventing Katja from taking control of the narrative about the past. In *Himmelskörper*, Jo takes a similar approach, asserting her own superior ability to state the "truth" about the past by declaring all those who did not experience the Third Reich themselves to be "unmündig" (HK 95) and therefore incapable of expressing a valid opinion. However, just as Musbach's assertions of eyewitness authority in *Unscharfe Bilder* are undermined by exposure of the biases and unreliability inherent in his account, so the eyewitness testimony of Jo and Mäxchen is undermined by *Himmelskörper's* questioning of the reliability of historical sources, particularly eyewitness testimony. In *Unscharfe Bilder*, the reflection of historiographical criticisms which exposes historical narratives as constructed, biased, and frequently unreliable has the effect of undermining Musbach's portrayal of himself as a victim because his

is the primary historical narrative in the novel, and his narrative is therefore the principal target of the novel's historiographical reflections. Similarly, Jo and Mäxchen's tales of victimhood are the main subject of *Himmelskörper's* questioning of the reliability of narratives about the past because they are the primary eyewitness testimonies in the novel and therefore the main target of deconstruction via the novel's mirroring of historiographical critiques. This identification of Jo and Mäxchen's self-portrayals as the primary target of the questioning of the "truth" of historical narratives in *Himmelskörper* is further marked by the way in which Freia's characterisation of Jo and Mäxchen's stories as part of a drama carefully constructed so as to present a particular image of themselves is supported by the novel's reflection of White's ideas about the interaction and even identity between history and fiction, in that their "histories" are exposed as being "stories". As with *Unscharfe Bilder*, a reading of *Himmelskörper* as historiographic metafiction acts to support the novel's careful prefiguring of the reader's response in the direction of seeing Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators, because in both cases, the typical, first generation *Zeitzeugen*, "Germans as victims" narratives have been set up precisely for the purpose of being torn down by the considerations aroused by such a reading.

The way in which the features of historiographic metafiction in both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* fit in with the structure of both novels to support their portrayal of the first generation as perpetrators suggests that the key to the difference between these novels and *Der Vorleser* in terms of the role of historiographic metafiction may be explained by the closed or open nature of the texts. I have argued that both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* are

examples of closed texts which have been carefully constructed so as to leave the reader in no doubt that Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen are perpetrators. As regards Jo and Mäxchen in particular, their confessions of Nazi party membership and continuing sympathy with Nazi *Gedankengut* towards the end of their lives, combined with Freia's discovery of their treasure trove of Nazi memorabilia, all identify them so strongly and so clearly as perpetrators that even the questions about our ability to understand the past raised by historiographic metafiction are simply not enough to allow the reader to find Jo and Mäxchen to be anything other than perpetrators. By contrast, *Der Vorleser* is a much more open text, which to a certain extent allows the reader to fill narrative gaps with his or her interpretation, resulting in many readings of "The Reader". Whereas Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen have a lot to say about their lives during the Third Reich and all end up confessing in some way to Nazi crimes, Hanna says almost nothing, leaving her actions and motivations to be interpreted by the unreliable Michael. Combined with the emphasis on the problems in determining culpability raised by *Der Vorleser's* thematisation of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, the novel's openness allows the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator to be destabilised by the considerations of historiographic metafiction in a way that closed texts such as *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* do not. By combining an open text which gives the reader some room to contribute to the interpretation of Hanna with the thematisation of historiographical and judicial critiques, *Der Vorleser* therefore runs the risk of unsettling its characterisation of Hanna as a perpetrator. By contrast, both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* reduce this risk by dealing with the Nazi past in closed texts in which every detail is functionalised, so

that even the serious questions about judging the first generation raised by the nature of the novels as historiographic metafiction are used to support and confirm the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators in both novels.

5. Conclusion

Although Freia recognises that she may never understand what Jo saw “*in dem Mann mit dem kleinen Schnauzbart*” (HK 268), she nevertheless accepts that Jo and Mäxchen were Nazi perpetrators. Despite Jo and Mäxchen’s attempts to distance themselves from the “real Nazis” and portray themselves as victims, using typical tropes of the “Germans as victims” wave current at the time of the novel’s publication, overall *Himmelskörper* portrays Jo and Mäxchen as perpetrators. In a closed text which leaves the reader little room to develop alternative interpretations, Jo and Mäxchen’s victimhood narratives are comprehensively undermined by their own attitudes and confessions, by Freia’s discovery of the memorabilia confirming their commitment to Nazism, and by the questions raised by a reading of the novel as historiographic metafiction, which serve to break down Jo and Mäxchen’s claims to authority and authenticity as *Zeitzeugen*.

Himmelskörper’s maintenance of the dominant public memory paradigm in which Germans are portrayed primarily as perpetrators continues the pattern already observed in both *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* and indicates a persistence of the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators which marks a continuation of the position in literature prior to 1990. The similarity between *Himmelskörper* and *Unscharfe Bilder* in this regard is particularly significant, as it indicates a tendency even in German novels published during a period of

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

However, the move in *Himmelskörper* to a third generation perspective does set it apart from *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder* and indicates a new approach to the burden of German history. Although *Himmelskörper* repeats in its descriptions of the conflicts between Renate and her parents some of the patterns of *Väterliteratur* which so marked the intergenerational interactions about the Nazi past in *Der Vorleser* and *Unscharfe Bilder*, the novel shifts the dominant perspective on the past to Freia and the third generation. Whilst the third generation joins the second in characterising the first as perpetrators, what they do with this knowledge marks a break with the old patterns typified by *Väterliteratur*. Rather than being emotionally dominated by the burden of inherited guilt and conflict with their parents that characterised the second generation, the third generation sees the Nazi past

and the role of their grandparents in it as just one part of the mosaic making up their own identity. Rather than using the past as a weapon in an intergenerational conflict and seeking to eject the perpetrators from their lives, members of the third generation accept the guilt of their family members as part of their own identity and try to take control of the past by integrating it into their own story. *Himmelskörper* self-reflexively embodies this new approach and uses a focus on the narrativity of history characteristic of historiographic metafiction to underscore the third generation's new way of achieving *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by writing their own "history" in which German guilt is not denied.

In the next chapter, I will examine another novel by a third generation author: *Flughunde* by Marcel Beyer (born 1965). *Flughunde* is a very open, metafictional novel which breaks with the post-1990 literary trope of considering the Nazi past and its implications in the context of the type of postwar, intergenerational relationships central to *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*. Instead, *Flughunde* looks at the Third Reich from the first generation perspective of a perpetrator. Does this change in perspective result in a more nuanced portrayal of the first generation? Is it more sympathetic towards them? Or is the approach taken to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in this novel by a third generation author but told primarily from the perspective of the first generation similar to that taken in the other three novels analysed in this thesis? I will address these and other questions in the following chapter.

V. MARCEL BEYER - *FLUGHUNDE*

1. Introduction

*Flughunde*³¹⁶ was, like *Der Vorleser*, published in 1995, and is the first of three novels by Marcel Beyer which deal with the subject of the Nazi past, the other two being *Spione* and *Kaltenburg*³¹⁷. Both *Spione* and *Kaltenburg* are told from the point of view of members of the second and third generations who attempt to uncover the truth about the past of family members or mentors, and in this respect resemble *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*. By contrast, *Flughunde* is narrated from the perspective of the first generation who were directly involved in the Third Reich. The plot is set primarily in the last five years of the Third Reich³¹⁸ and the novel is comprised chiefly of two intertwining, first person, present tense accounts

³¹⁶ An early version of the novel can be found in the short story submitted by Beyer in the Ingeborg-Bachmann-Wettbewerb in 1991: Felsbach, Heinz and Metelko, Siegbert *Klagenfurter Texte: Ingeborg-Bachmann-Wettbewerb 1991* Munich: Piper, 1991: 40 – 47.

³¹⁷ Beyer, Marcel *Spione* op cit; Beyer, Marcel *Kaltenburg* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008. Georgopoulou has analysed the three novels as a trilogy: Georgopoulou, Eleni *Abwesende Anwesenheit: Erinnerung und Medialität in Marcel Beyers Romantrilogie Flughunde, Spione und Kaltenburg* Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2012. The Nazi past has also been the subject of some of Beyer's poetic work: see for example Beyer, Marcel *Falsches Futter* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1997 and the analysis of some of these poems in Mundt, Hannelore "Excursions into German History and Poetic Voices: Marcel Beyer's Falsches Futter" *German Quarterly* 84.3 (2011): 344 - 364. Beyer has stated that his interest in the Nazi period began when he read the works of the Nazi poet Josef Weinheber. He incorporated the figure of Weinheber into some of the poems in *Falsches Futter*, and used him as an inspiration for the character of Karnau in *Flughunde*: Deckert, Renuat "Gespräch mit Marcel Beyer" *Sinn und Form* 57.1 (2005): 72 - 85 at 76-77; 83. Weinheber receives a passing mention in *Flughunde* (FH 137).

³¹⁸ For an analysis of the chronological structure of the novel, see Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 142 – 144; Georgopoulou, Eleni op cit at 32 - 34.

narrated by the sound technician and researcher, Hermann Karnau, and by Helga Goebbels³¹⁹, the eldest child of Hitler's propaganda chief, Joseph Goebbels³²⁰. The novel charts Karnau's increasing involvement in the crimes of Nazism, culminating in his participation in experiments on human subjects as part of an SS medical team. It also tells the story of Karnau's relationship with the Goebbels children and investigates the possibility of his involvement in their murder.

In its use of first generation narrators and a Third Reich setting, *Flughunde* represents a significant departure from the majority of second and third generation writings about the Nazi past, including the three novels I have already analysed. Unlike Hanna, Musbach, or Jo and Mäxchen, who are forced to confront their Nazi past by family members or by the judicial system

³¹⁹ There has been some debate in the secondary literature as to the status of Helga's narrative. Baer has suggested that the sections narrated by Helga are tape recordings, with the reader "hearing" the recordings along with Karnau: Baer, Ulrich "Learning to Speak Like a Victim: Media and Authenticity in Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde*" *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook* 2 (2003): 245 - 261 at 245, 251. Schönherr thinks that Helga's narrative consists of "diaristic writings": Schönherr, Ulrich "Topophony of Fascism: on Marcel Beyer's The Karnau Tapes" *Germanic Review* 73.4 (1998): 328 - 348 at 331. Birtsch considers that she may be an inner voice of Karnau: Birtsch, Nicole "Strategien des Verdrängens im Prozeß des Erinnerns: Die Stimme eines Täters in Marcel Beyers Roman *Flughunde*" in Gansel, Carsten and Zimniak, Pawel *Reden und Schweigen in der deutschsprachigen Literatur nach 1945* Dresden: Neisse Verlag, 2006: 316 - 330 at 329. Graf thinks that the anonymous 1992 narrator may be behind the voices of both Helga and Karnau: Graf, Guido op cit at 21. Todtenhaupt sees part of Helga's narrative as a recording being listened to by Karnau: Todtenhaupt, Martin "Perspektiven auf Zeit-Geschichte: Über *Flughunde* und *Morbus Kitahara*" in Platen, Edgar *Erinnerte und erfundene Erfahrung. Zur Darstellung von Zeitgeschichte in deutschsprachiger Gegenwartsliteratur* Munich: iudicium, 2000: 162 - 183 at 165 - 166. Taberner thinks it likely that Helga's narrative is created by Karnau from the recordings he made of her: Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* op cit at 143.

³²⁰ An exception to this dual first person narrative and the chronological focus on the period 1940 - 1945 occurs when an anonymous third narrator appears briefly to describe a 1992 investigation into remains of the Nazi past (FH 219 - 225).

in postwar Germany, Karnau's participation in Nazi crimes against humanity is told as a kind of internal monologue by the perpetrator himself. By analysing the portrayal of a Nazi perpetrator crafted by a third generation author who dispenses with all the traditional tropes of this genre, such as intergenerational conflict or coming to terms with the past within the context of a family³²¹, I propose to test whether my conclusions regarding the portrayal of the perpetrators and the effect of historiographic metafiction on that portrayal in the previous chapters can be applied across a broader range of texts and whether it is therefore possible to establish the emergence of a pattern regarding the portrayal of the perpetrators in post-1990 German novels dealing with the Nazi past.

In the first part of this chapter, I will explore the possible implications of the novel's use of the *Täterperspektive* and conduct a detailed textual analysis of the portrayal of Karnau, as he is the primary perpetrator figure featured in the novel. Does the portrayal of Karnau via his own, first generation perspective result in a more balanced, nuanced or sympathetic depiction? Is it dominated by the type of "Germans as victims" narratives characteristic of the self-portrayals of Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen? Or is seeing directly inside the mind of a perpetrator far more frightening than the second-hand portrayals of

³²¹ Beyer himself has been critical of the tendency to deal with Nazism in the context of intergenerational conflict and has also criticised the inability of the second generation to adequately listen to either the perpetrators or the victims of the first generation: Beyer, Marcel "Eine Haltung des Hörens" *Die Zeit* 28 November 1997. Paver also notes this difference between *Flughunde* and other novels of the genre: Paver, Chloe op cit at 86; 90. See also Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 126 (this chapter substantially reproduces Schmitz, Helmut "Soundscapes of the Third Reich: Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde*" in Schmitz, Helmut *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past: Representations of National Socialism in contemporary Germanic literature* Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001: 119 - 141).

the other novels? Does the novel manage to use the *Täterperspektive* without allowing the reader to sympathise with a Nazi criminal? I will then go on, as with the other texts, to consider whether *Flughunde* may be read as historiographic metafiction and the effect such a reading may have on the portrayal of Karnau as a perpetrator. Does it destabilise or support the novel's overall depiction of Karnau? In answering these and other questions, I will examine the effect of the novel's unusual first generation perspective and Third Reich setting on the portrayal of Karnau and ascertain whether these features of the text result in substantial differences to the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder*, and *Himmelskörper*.

2. Karnau - portrayal of a perpetrator

2.1 The reception of the novel, the intention of the author, and the *Täterperspektive*

The reception of *Flughunde* has been far less controversial than that of *Der Vorleser*, even though both novels were published in the same year and both focus on main characters, Hanna and Karnau, who are undeniably Nazi perpetrators. Whereas the reception of Schlink's work has been marked by controversy regarding the moral implications of its portrayal of Hanna, the secondary literature on Beyer's novel has instead concentrated on the literary features of the text³²². The lack of controversy in relation to *Flughunde* suggests that Beyer's perpetrator fits well into the stereotype of a typical Nazi who is ruthless, callous and lacking in any human compassion. Unlike Hanna,

³²² Herrmann also makes this point: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 137.

whose conduct is frequently excused by Michael, Karnau is at no time depicted as a victim, which may account for the lower levels of debate about his portrayal among the novel's readers.

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

“Während meiner Arbeit an dem Roman bin ich immer mehr von diesem Klischeebild des Bösen abgekommen. Es hat sich herausgestellt, dass ich dieses Böse gar nicht auf Anhieb erkennen kann. Es ist ja auch sehr beruhigend zu denken: Das Böse ist alles andere als ich selbst. Genau von dieser Selbstgefälligkeit bin ich immer mehr abgekommen.”³²³

Instead, he intended to create a character who, on the one hand was involved in terrible crimes, but on the other *“ein ganz normaler Mensch ist, wie ich ihm alltäglich auf der Straße begegnen kann oder wie ich auch einer sein könnte”*³²⁴.

In these comments, Beyer puts forward an image of Karnau as an “ordinary German” who, though a perpetrator, is not a stereotypical Nazi monster, but rather someone just like the rest of us. Although Karnau's direct participation in crimes against humanity sets him apart to a certain extent from “ordinary German” figures such as Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen, Beyer's statements

³²³ Herold, Jasmin “Ich bin vom Klischeebild des Bösen abgekommen” (2003) <http://www.berlinerzimmer.de/eliteratur/marcel_beyer_interview.htm> (accessed 11 April 2016).

³²⁴ Bednarz, Klaus *Von Autoren und Büchern: Gespräche mit Schriftstellern* Hamburg: Hoffmann und Campe 1997 at 71.

recall Schlink's comments about his desire to portray Hanna as a human rather than a monster and suggest that Karnau could be interpreted in a similar way.

In a number of interviews, Beyer has also stated that, in writing the novel *Flughunde*, he tried to avoid providing any ethical comment or judgment from his position as author with the benefit of hindsight of a later generation:

“Der Leser ist die moralische Instanz. Das war wichtig. Ich wollte natürlich gerne bewerten. Immer wieder mußten Sätze herausgestrichen werden.”³²⁵

“ . . . das war gerade hier ganz wichtig und auch heikel, da es im ganzen Buch keinen moralischen oder ethischen Kommentar gibt und auch keine Ebene dafür.”³²⁶

“Etwa, daß es in ‚Flughunde‘ keine übergeordnete, eingreifende Instanz gibt. Es wird konsequent aus der Täterperspektive erzählt.”³²⁷

Beyer's statements suggest that, in order to tell the story from the *Täterperspektive*, he has attempted to introduce an openness and ambivalence to the novel which aims to immerse the reader in the *Täterperspektive* by avoiding the kind of judgments which adhere to the present perspective. One technique Beyer deploys to achieve this is to leave the novel porous and open to a wider degree of interpretation by its readers. *Flughunde* requires a great deal of what Beyer has described as

³²⁵ Schomaker, Tim “Spurenlesen: Marcel Beyer über Geschichte, die Sinne und Literatur” *Grauzone* 14 (1998): 12 - 14 at 14.

³²⁶ Biendarra, Anke and Wilke Sabine “Wenn Literatur noch einen Sinn hat, dann den, dass sie ein bevormundungsfreier Raum ist: Interview with Marcel Beyer” *New German Review* 13 (1997): 5 - 15 at 15.

³²⁷ Deckert, Renuis op cit at 80.

“*Lesearbeit*”³²⁸ on the part of the reader to grasp the novel’s plot. The text is often disorienting, requiring the reader to work to make sense of the narrative. The narrative voice shifts between Karnau, Helga and the anonymous 1992 narrator unheralded, so that it is often unclear who is actually speaking. There are no quotation marks to indicate dialogue, so the reader has to work out when the voice of one character ends and another voice begins. This can be seen, for example, in the episode in which Karnau relates a discussion with Hitler’s personal cook, in which it is unclear on the first reading where the words of Karnau end and those of the cook begin (FH 203 - 205). Locations and times are also often not specified, so that the reader must imply the setting of various parts of the novel. Similarly, the novel does not refer to Goebbels by name, but to his role, which changes depending on the circumstances. Goebbels is referred to as “*der Redner*” (FH 12), “*Papa*” (FH 33) and “*Vater*” (FH 46), requiring the reader to determine the identity of this major historical figure through other sources. Karnau’s description of his participation in Nazi crimes is also frequently related in a fragmentary and impressionistic manner which, particularly in relation to his participation in experiments on human subjects, requires the reader to complete the narrative by combining hints in the text with a broader general knowledge of crimes against humanity committed by Nazi scientists and medics³²⁹. In all of these

³²⁸ Schomaker, Tim op cit at 14.

³²⁹ Thomas has referred to Beyer’s technique of hinting at things rather than naming them explicitly as “indirect lighting”: Thomas, Christian “Marcel Beyers *Flughunde* (1995) als Kommentar zur Gegenwart der Vergangenheit” in Stephan, Inge *NachBilder des Holocaust* Böhlau 2007: 145 - 169 at 148 – 149; 161. Simon has also noted Beyer’s technique of using indirect rather than explicit references and suggested that Karnau’s observation that “*Das Märchen beschäftigt sie [die Kinder] offensichtlich so sehr, daß die kurzen Andeutungen genügen, um die ganze Geschichte wieder aufzurufen*” (FH

instances, the openness of the novel's text requires the reader to work to complete those parts of the narrative which are implied rather than explicit. The importance of the reader's role in generating meaning in the novel is also emphasised by the novel's high level of intertextuality³³⁰. Some of these intertextual elements are imported from historical events, such as Helga's quotation and distortion of elements of Goebbels' *Sportpalastrede* of 18 February 1943 (FH 157 – 158; 161 – 163; 165 – 166; 168 – 170) or the reference to the persecution of the Jews in the children's game of "spontane Aktion" (FH 144)³³¹. Other intertextual references are to fictional texts, such as the 1896 novel *The Island of Dr Moreau* by HG Wells (FH 172 – 179)³³² and Rainer Maria Rilke's *Ur-Geräusch* of 1919 (FH 225 – 227)³³³. In both

284) can be understood as a direction on how to read the novel: Simon, Ulrich "Assoziation und Authentizität: Warum Marcel Beyers Flughunde auch ein Holocaust-Roman ist" in Rode, Marc-Boris *Auskünfte von und über Marcel Beyer* Bamberg: Wulf Segebrecht, 2000: 124 - 143 at 126.

³³⁰ Blasberg also notes the demands such intertexts place on the reader: Blasberg, Cornelia "Forscher, Heiler, Mörder: NS-Mediziner und ihre Opfer in Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde" in Braese, Stephan and Groß, Dominik *NS-Medizin und Öffentlichkeit: Formen der Aufarbeitung nach 1945* Frankfurt am Main: Campus Verlag, 2015: 261 - 283 at 265.

³³¹ Thomas has commented in more detail on the use of the children's games in the novel to point to the broader historical context: Thomas, Christian op cit at 160-163, as has Schmitz: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 141 - 142 and Simon: Simon, Ulrich op cit at 127.

³³² Simon discusses this intertextual reference in some detail: Simon, Ulrich *ibid* at 133 - 135. See also Thomas, Christian *ibid* at 157; Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander *Die Poetik des Möglichen: Das Verhältnis von historischer Realität und literarischer Wirklichkeit in Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde* Stuttgart: ibidem Verlag, 2005 at 88 - 89.

³³³ This intertext has also been identified by Baer, Ulrich op cit at 249; Ostermann, Eberhard "Metaphysik des Faschismus: Zu Marcel Beyers Roman Flughunde" *Literatur für Leser* 24.1 (2001): 1 - 13 at 12; Schönherr, Ulrich op cit at 343; Stiegler, Bernd "Die Erinnerung der Nachgeborenen: Bernhard Schlinks Der Vorleser, Marcel Beyers Flughunde und Robert Schindlers Gebürtig im Kontext der Gedächtnistheorien" *Grauzone* 7 (1996): 11 - 15 at 13; Blasberg, Cornelia "Die Stimme und ihr Echo: Zur literarischen Inszenierung des Widerschalls von Herders Sprachursprungs-Theorie bis Marcel Beyers Topophonie des Faschismus" in Wiethölter, Waltraud and Pott,

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

The metafictional openness of the novel, combined with Beyer's statements about wanting to move away from the portrayal of Nazi perpetrators as a "*Klischeebild des Bösen*" and the need to avoid ethical commentary in order to tell the story "*konsequent aus der Täterperspektive*", raises the possibility that the shift to the first generation perspective in the novel may allow the reader to sympathise or even identify with a character who the novel clearly marks as a perpetrator of crimes against humanity during the Third Reich. However, an analysis of the novel shows that it may not necessarily be as open to reader interpretation as Beyer suggests. On the contrary, it strongly prefigures the reader's response towards the conclusion that Karnau is a perpetrator. The guiding hand of the author controlling the direction of the narrative is initially apparent from the careful construction of the text, which is

Hans-Georg et al *Stimme und Schrift: Zur Geschichte und Systematik sekundärer Oralität* Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2008: 235 - 249 at 237; Künzig, Bernd "Schreie und Flüstern – Marcel Beyers Roman *Flughunde*" in Erb, Andreas *Baustelle Gegenwartsliteratur. Die neunziger Jahre* Wiesbaden: Springer Fachmedien, 1998: 122 – 153 at 148; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 155 – 156; Paver, Chloe op cit at 92; Simon, Ulrich ibid at 135; Thomas, Christian ibid at 156; Winkels, Hubert *Leselust und Bildermacht. Über Literatur, Fernsehen und neue Medien* Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 1997 at 147; Parkes, Stuart "The Language of the Past" op cit at 120; Georgopoulou, Eleni op cit at 28; Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander ibid at 89 - 90.

itself a self-reflexive indication of the novel's artificiality³³⁴. The contrapuntal nature of the narratives of Karnau and Helga provides numerous examples of the overt construction of the text. This can be seen, for instance, from the way in which Karnau and Helga both frequently pick up a word or theme from the other's narrative and weave it into their own. Sometimes, the link occurs by repetition of a word or phrase, as when the words "*Welch ein Panorama*" (FH 115; 119) and the question "*Ist das Herr Karnau, der jetzt zu uns kommt?*" (FH 279; 283) finish one narrative and begin another, and also when various forms of the word *schrauben* are repeated in both narratives (FH 77 – 79). At other times, links arise from the echoing of themes or objects from one narrative in the other, as occurs in the juxtaposition of Helga's description of her father's *Sportpalastrede* with Karnau's description of human experiments. In this section, Karnau's concentration on the "*Kehlkopf*" of his victim (FH 156; 159) is mirrored by Helga's concentration on her father's throat as he speaks (FH 165), and Helga's references to urine and fur when relating her visit to see Moreau's flying foxes (FH 171) also pick up on Karnau's narrative of his experiments on humans (FH 155; 160; 170-171). Similarly, the horrors of the Front described by Karnau are echoed in Helga's narrative by Magda Goebbels' observation that the alpine cloud formations remind her of "*Schlachtengemäldewolken*" (FH 115; 119). The extent to which the novel has been very carefully arranged is made overt by these self-reflexive elements and points to the degree of control that Beyer as author has over the novel's structure.

³³⁴ Herrmann makes a similar point: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 145.

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

2.2 Karnau's crimes

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

"Wenn wir die Menschen in den Ostgebieten, in jener unermeßlich großen Landschaft, die, nach den ehrenwerten Berechnungen meines Vorredners, bald zu unserem Reich gehören werden, alle auf Linie bringen müssen, so kann sich diese Arbeit nicht darin erschöpfen, bestimmte Sprachregelungen durchzusetzen, die Ausmerzung

undeutscher Wörter, so wie im Elsaß - meine Herren, kenne das, war selbst dabei -, das ist doch alles Firlefanz . . . Denn nicht allein die Sprache, auch die Stimme, sämtliche menschlichen Geräusche müssen, wenn man schon einmal damit anfängt, auf Linie gebracht werden. Wir müssen jeden einzelnen greifen, wir müssen in das Innere der Menschen vordringen . . . Das Innere greifen, indem wir die Stimme angreifen. Sie zurichten, und in äußersten Fällen selbst nicht vor medizinischen Eingriffen zurückschrecken, vor Modifikationen des artikulatorischen Apparats." (FH 138 - 139)

Even the SS doctor Stumpfecker is impressed by the "*Radikalität*" (FH 140) of Karnau's suggestion that people in the occupied territories not only be forced to speak German, but be subjected to medical operations to physically alter their larynxes in order to bring them "*auf Linie*". Karnau's ideas catch the attention of the SS medical team and he is asked to lead a *Sonderforschungsgruppe* to put his ideas into practice, an opportunity which he is particularly keen to seize, as it will prevent him from being conscripted to serve on the front line (FH 141 – 143). Karnau's fragmentary account of his participation in these experiments on human subjects forms the core of the novel (FH 153 – 157; 158 – 161; 166 – 168; 170 – 171). His involvement in this "*gemeinsamer Forschungsarbeit*" with the SS doctor, Stumpfecker, reaches its gruesome end only as a result of circumstances dictated by the progression of the war:

" . . . so sah man sich unter den Bedingungen des fortgeschrittenen Krieges nicht mehr in der Lage, unsere Versuche noch länger zu unterstützen . . . Als eine Sondereinheit einen Schlußstrich unter

unsere Arbeit zog, indem sie die zu keinem Widerstand mehr fähigen Versuchspersonen in einer Ecke des Bettensaals zu einem Haufen auftürmte, mit medizinischem Alkohol übergieß und mitsamt der Baracke niederbrannte, da sah sich Stumpfecker schon um mehrere Ränge herabgesetzt." (FH 197 - 198)

In its description of his criminal activities with the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*, the novel leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that Karnau is a perpetrator who participated in some of the worst criminal excesses of the Nazi regime³³⁵. The extent of Karnau's crimes and the clear identification of him as a perpetrator raise important questions about how the novel deals with the fact that he is seen primarily through his own *Täterperspektive*. Does this perspective humanise Karnau, despite his transgressions? Does it allow for the same sort of presentation of sympathetic or mitigating circumstances and exculpatory motivations that arise in Michael's portrayal of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*? Or is the perspective carefully managed so that the reader is not in any danger of identifying with someone who has committed crimes against humanity?

2.3 Karnau – sympathetic human or psychopathic monster?

2.3.1 The absence of victimhood

A strong indication that the novel does not, in fact, allow much scope for the reader to sympathise with Karnau arises as result of a remarkable absence of

³³⁵ Beyer has indicated that the experiments in which Karnau is involved are fictional, but are designed to evoke the horror of actual experiments carried out by Nazi doctors: "zwar an der Historie orientierte, aber fingierte Versuche . . . jedoch keine beliebigen, sondern solche, die den Wahnsinn, die Menschenverachtung jener Mediziner erfaßten": Deckert, Renatus op cit at 80.

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

The novel’s rejection of a portrayal of Germans as victims is particularly underscored by the suspicion of victimhood and exculpatory narratives expressed in the text. Although Karnau does not portray himself as a victim, he does attempt to avoid the suggestion of culpability by using linguistic trickery in his narrative to subtly erase himself from the scene of the crime³³⁶.

In his description of his participation in the *Entwelschungskampagne* in Alsace, Karnau makes extensive use of the passive tense, suggesting his lack of agency or active presence in the oppressive activities taking place there. His

³³⁶ Other who have commented on Karnau's use of grammatical constructions and particular vocabulary to remove himself from the scene of a crime include Thomas, Christian op cit at 154 - 155; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 132 - 134; Fleishman, Ian Thomas “Invisible Voices: Archiving Sound as Sight in Marcel Beyer’s Karnau Tapes” *Mosaic* 42.2 (2009): 19 - 35 at 30; Schöll, Sandra “Marcel Beyer und der Nouveau Roman: Die Übernahme der Camera-Eye-Technik Robbe-Grillet’s in *Flughunde* im Dienste einer Urteilsfindung durch den Leser” in Rode, Marc-Boris *Auskünfte von und über Marcel Beyer* Bamberg: Wulf Segebrecht, 2000: 144 - 157 at 147; Beßlich, Barbara “Unzuverlässiges Erzählen im Dienst der Erinnerung: Perspektiven auf den Nationalsozialismus bei Maxim Biller, Marcel Beyer und Martin Walser” in Beßlich, Barbara, Grätz, Katharina and Hildebrand, Olaf *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006: 35 - 51 at 47.

narrative in this section of the novel contains a marked repetition of the passive construction “*es wird*” (FH 79 – 81) and a marked preference for the impersonal “*man arbeitet*” as opposed to “*ich arbeite*” (FH 83). He also describes his participation in the activities in Alsace in language which suggests that it is something which “happened” to him and for which he is not responsible: “*Gewissermaßen als Gegenleistung dafür muß ich unvorstellbare Anblicke **über mich ergehen lassen**: Verhöre, furchtbar, Prügelstrafe bis auf das Blut*” (FH 84, my emphasis). This linguistic pattern in Karnau’s narrative is continued in his description of his participation in the experiments of the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*, which is characterised by extensive use of the passive tense and the avoidance of first person pronouns (FH 158 – 161; 166 – 168; 170 – 171).

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

“Die Füße ruhen unbeweglich und decken einen kleinen Bereich des gleichmäßigen Musters aus weißen und schwarzen Bodenfliesen ab, die derart blank gebohnert sind, daß um die Füße herum die Fersen, sogar noch die sehnigen Fesseln widergespiegelt werden, als Bildpunkt, der aus dem Karomuster aufscheint und das Raster der rechtwinklig aufeinander treffenden Linien unterbricht, die Flucht der Fugen, welche sich durch den ganzen Raum zieht, her bis zu mir, wo

der Boden jedoch stumpf ist, nichts reflektiert wird: Nicht meine Hose, nicht die Strümpfe, noch nicht einmal ein schwacher Widerschein der schwarzen Lederschuhe.” (FH 153)

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

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

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

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

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

Stumpfecker’s advice can be seen as an interpretive guide to Karnau’s narrative³³⁷, pointing to the conclusion that gaps and absences in Karnau’s account should be read as attempts at concealment and therefore as positive indications of his participation in crime that he is trying to omit and therefore of his culpability. In this way, even the openness of the text, which would seem to give the reader room to move, in fact points to a pattern of gaps used in the

³³⁷ Graf also sees Stumpfecker’s advice as “*das Konstruktionsprinzip*” of the novel: Graf, Guido op cit at 22. Blasberg also sees this as a “*Schlüsselszene*” and uses it as a starting point for a psychological reading of the novel as a perpetrator narrative dressed up as the testimony of a victim: Blasberg, Cornelia “Forscher, Heiler, Mörder” op cit at 273.

descriptions of Karnau's crimes which identify him as a perpetrator. Karnau's attempts to conceal his culpability fail, meaning that the negative portrayal of him remains unrelieved by any hint that he may not be responsible for his crimes. The way in which the novel also points directly to the possibility of mimicry of the real victims in German postwar narratives about the Nazi past reveals a high level of scepticism about the German victimhood narratives in general. The absence of victimhood narratives in the novel, particularly in relation to Karnau, removes an important source of sympathy that is often available to the first generation, and provides a strong indication to the reader that Karnau is to be understood as a perpetrator.

2.3.2 *Humanising Karnau?*

Despite the novel's identification of Karnau as a participant in the crimes of an SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*, its exposure of Karnau's attempts to deny responsibility for his crimes, and its general suspicion of victimhood narratives, there are aspects of the novel which appear at first glance to humanise Karnau and make him a slightly more sympathetic character. Indeed, some aspects of Karnau's characterisation at first appear to recall elements of Michael's exculpatory presentation of Hanna, in that they suggest that Karnau may possess a degree of humanity and understandable motivations for his crimes. A number of commentators have, for example, described Karnau as a critic of totalitarian culture³³⁸, suggesting that he is an opponent of the Nazi

³³⁸ Schönherr, Ulrich op cit at 330 – 331. Beßlich similarly describes Karnau as an "*anfänglichen Gegner des Nationalsozialismus*", which also seems to overstate his opposition to the regime: Beßlich, Barbara op cit at 45. See also Blasberg, who asserts that Karnau is "*ein intellektueller Zivilisationskritiker*": Blasberg, Cornelia "Die Stimme und ihr Echo" op cit at 241. See also Ostermann, Eberhard op cit at 2.

regime, and therefore a potentially sympathetic character. Karnau is described in the novel as someone who, like Hanna, has no particular interest in or understanding of Nazi ideology. Karnau even finds some aspects of Nazism abhorrent, particularly the noise and emphasis on martial masculinity which permeate Nazism's totalitarian culture. Karnau's dislike of the loud, harsh voices of the regime is shown in his account of the party rally he attends as a sound technician at the beginning of the novel: *"[d]ie Stimme schneidet in das Dunkel hinein"* (FH 9); *"wie er [der Scharführer] brüllt, wie er im Ton seinem Führer nacheifert, indem er die Beschallungsanlage bis an die äußersten Grenzen belastet"* (FH 14); *"es dröhnt so laut es könnte einem das Mark aus den Knochen treiben"* (FH 15). The placement of Karnau's attitude of disgust towards aspects of Nazism right at the beginning of the novel implies an element of sympathy which may serve to draw the reader in to Karnau's narrative. Karnau also finds the Nazi regime's glorification of the physical and the masculine unpleasant and confronting. Karnau disliked sports lessons as a child (FH 18 - 19) and has a horror of the regimented world set aside for men in Nazi society. He is glad that he grew up before the advent of the HJ, with its emphasis on the martial and on physicality: *"Ein Glück für jemanden wie mich, vor diesem Reich aufgewachsen zu sein: das Lagerleben, die Appelle. Ertüchtigung, dann hinterher Männergestank und -sprüche in einer dunstigen Umkleidekabine"* (FH 28). His primary fear in being conscripted is not the fear of being killed but rather of being forced to participate in Nazism's masculine culture:

"Wenige Tage später traf dann auch noch mein Einberufungsbescheid ein. Das war ein Schock: Nicht die Furcht vor dem Tod, mit der die

Fronterfahrung mich auch schon als Zivilist konfrontiert hat, sondern vielmehr der Gedanke daran, unausweichlich in diese Welt der Männerkameradschaft hineingestoßen zu werden, mit Schweiß, mit derben Witzen, mit allen jenen Zügen, die mir schon als Kind den Hals zugeschnürt haben.” (FH 130)

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

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

“Hinter dem Rücken der Diätköchin gelang es mir, eine Tafel aus den großen Schokoladenvorräten zu entwenden, ein gefährliches Unternehmen, denn auf Lebensmitteldiebstahl stand die Todesstrafe, ohne Verhandlung eine Kugel durch den Kopf.” (FH 289)

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

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

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

In his interactions with the Goebbels children the novel appears to be creating an opportunity for Karnau to demonstrate his humanity by allowing him to care for them and to feel an obligation to protect them (*“Ganz instinktiv lag mir daran, die Kinder nicht aus den Augen zu lassen”* (FH 286)). They seem to

go some way towards humanising Karnau and distancing him from the “*Klischeebild des Bösen*” that Beyer has suggested he was trying to escape. Indeed, if these elements of the text which make Karnau appear more human and more sympathetic, and which appear to put forward some sort of an explanation for his criminal actions, were more substantial, or if they were not comprehensively countered, then it is possible that the novel would have given rise to the same sort of controversy as *Der Vorleser*. However, the novel repeatedly strips these humanising aspects back in a way that denies Karnau sympathy or exculpation and points the reader back to his crimes. This can be seen, for example, in the way in which the novel undercuts the implication that Karnau is an ideological opponent of the regime which may otherwise be derived from the novel’s references to Karnau’s dislike of various aspects of Nazism³³⁹. On closer inspection, the novel reveals that Karnau’s criticisms of the Nazi regime relate neither to totalitarianism nor to any ethical concerns. Rather, his problems with the regime are of an aesthetic kind and revolve around elements that he finds personally displeasing³⁴⁰. His “resistance” to Nazism arises from superficial and self-centred motives, rather than from moral concerns. In addition, the fact that he is not a member of the Nazi party or particularly interested in Nazi ideology does not prevent him

³³⁹ Indeed, the characterisation of Goebbels in the novel underscores the idea that occasional disagreement with aspects of Nazism does not automatically make someone a resistance fighter. In the novel, Goebbels does not send his children to the HJ (FH 46) and Helga speculates that he has withdrawn her and her siblings from school so that they can avoid classes in *Rassenkunde* (FH 163), but he is nevertheless clearly a perpetrator. Niven looks at the novel’s depiction of Goebbels in Niven, Bill “Literary Portrayals of National Socialism” op cit at 21.

³⁴⁰ Taberner also makes the point that Karnau’s criticisms of Nazism revolve around things he finds aesthetically displeasing: Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* op cit at 141. Schmitz makes a similar point: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 130.

from using Nazism as a means to achieve his own private ends, particularly in his work on a sound chart project of his own devising. Karnau may know so little about Nazi ideology and practice that he is confused as to the relevance of his ideas about the human voice to the aims of Nazism (FH 142), but he nevertheless agrees to join an SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe* in the pursuit of these aims in order to escape conscription and to further his own private research and his desire for control over the voices of others. Like Hanna in *Der Vorleser*, Karnau does not have any particular interest in Nazi ideology. However, both of them utilise the opportunities afforded by Nazism to avoid facing their fears and to realise their desire for power over other people. In doing so, they take part in the most horrific of crimes, and the fact that they did not pursue crime for ideological reasons is insufficient to excuse them from culpability³⁴¹.

In the following, I will explore the way in which, perhaps despite the author's intentions, *Flughunde* progressively dismisses its brief suggestions as to Karnau's humanity and exposes him as a psychopath with no valid excuse for his criminal actions. In doing so, the novel avoids a potential source of controversy arising out of telling the story from the *Täterperspektive*, in that it

³⁴¹ Beyer has made a similar point in several interviews about Karnau's utilisation of the opportunities provided by Nazism despite his dislike of it: "*Karnau würde sich nie als Nationalsozialisten bezeichnen. Er hat sogar widerständige Aussagen gemacht*": Schomaker, Tim op cit at 14; "*Karnau ist jemand, der sich immer weiter verstrickt in den Nationalsozialismus, dabei aber selber meint, er nutze den Nationalsozialismus nur aus für seine private Obsession*": Bednarz, Klaus op cit at 67; "*Das ist so jemand, der, wenn man jetzt in dieser Situation von 1992 auf ihn zukommen und ihn fragen wurde, was er eigentlich gemacht hat oder woran er beteiligt war, immer wieder sagen wird: 'Ich bin nicht in der Partei gewesen' was er auch nie war. Aber das reicht eben nicht.*": Biendarra, Anke and Wilke, Sabina op cit at 6. Lensen disagrees and considers that Karnau's initial apolitical scientific interest evolves into a political commitment to Nazi ideology, but does not provide any evidence for this finding: Lensen, Jan op cit at 464.

avoids reader identification with Karnau and the maintenance of any sympathy for him.

2.3.3 *The Nazi scientist*

The novel's undermining of potentially positive aspects of Karnau's character can be seen in the way in which it gives his lack of interest in Nazi ideology a decidedly negative connotation. Rather than indicating that he is a resistance figure, Karnau's lack of interest in Nazi ideology demonstrates his conformity, as least in part, to the stereotype of the Third Reich scientist who uses the opportunities afforded by the radical change in ethics brought about by Nazism to pursue his own research interests³⁴². As Beyer has pointed out in relation to Nazi doctors:

“Keiner davon wurde von ideologischer Seite aus, etwa vom sogenannten Ahnenerbe, angeregt. Es waren Mediziner, die für ihre vermeintlichen Forschungen eine ideologischer Begründung vorschoben, um an Gelder heranzukommen und sich so im internationalen Wissenschaftsbetrieb Vorteile zu schaffen.”³⁴³

Prior to his involvement in medical experiments on humans, Karnau had already taken up opportunities to pursue his “scientific” research under the guise of working for the Nazi regime. He takes part in cultural repression in

³⁴² In this regard, see also Pliske, Roman “Flughunde: Ein Roman über Wissenschaft und Wahnsinn ohne Genie im Dritten Reich” in Rode, Marc-Boris *Auskünfte von und über Marcel Beyer* Bamberg: Wulf Segebrecht, 2000: 108 - 123 at 121 – 122. Schmitz has also pointed to parallels between Karnau and Auschwitz doctor, Joseph Mengele: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 140 – 141.

³⁴³ Deckert, Rénatus op cit at 81.

Alsace, not because of any commitment to Germanisation, but because it will further his sound chart project:

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

“Meine Arbeitsbedingungen hier im Elsaß sind hervorragend. Aus der Unmenge an Aufzeichnungen, die gemacht werden, merke ich mir die interessantesten vor, um sie am Abend nach dem Dienst für den persönlichen Gebrauch umzukopieren.” (FH 84)

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

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

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

“Ich will diese unerträgliche Angst überwinden, ich will, wie ich es mir vorgenommen habe, mich nicht durch Angst davon abbringen lassen,

meine eigene Arbeit fortzuführen. Auf eigene Gefahr, in einer Feuerpause, will ich Aufzeichnungen machen, wie sie noch keiner gehört hat: Ich will die Laute der Kämpfenden da draußen auf Schallplatte bannen." (FH 112)

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

Not only does Karnau's exploitation of the opportunities created by Nazism to pursue his research align him with the stereotype of the Nazi scientist³⁴⁴, so too does his failure to produce any results from his "scientific" experiments. Karnau's "*gemeinsame Forschungsarbeit*" with Stumpfecker and others is futile, resulting in nothing but the destruction of human beings:

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

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

³⁴⁴ Karnau himself seems to have little insight into his own opportunism, displaying no self-awareness when criticising his superior as an "*Opportunist . . . der sich andient und dabei keinen Moment zögert, Menschenleben aufs Spiel zu setzen, wenn es nur hilft, die eigene Position zu halten*" (FH 106).

The identification of Karnau with the typical Nazi scientist also undermines his own attempts to portray himself as a gifted *Sonderling* whose work is more significant than the scientific ideas of the average Nazi medic. In his narrative, Karnau depicts himself as a freakish genius with a special gift for sound:

“Ich bin überwach, aufmerksam wie mein Hund, bin immer wach, verfolge die schwächsten Ton- und Lichtveränderungen, zu wach vielleicht, als daß hier etwas davon hängenbleiben könnte, weil schon wieder die nächste Erscheinung wahrgenommen werden will.” (FH 17)

As well as pointing to this “natural genius”, Karnau also emphasises his acquired technical skills by going into a high level of detail about the steps he takes to make various sound recordings (FH 97 – 98; 112 – 113). Karnau believes that his special skills set him above his fellow sound technicians, and he is consistently contemptuous of his colleagues, referring to one colleague who has had recent success with an invention as a “*findiger Stubenhocker*” (FH 100), to the lectures of other speakers at the *Sprachhygiene* conference in Dresden as “*Stammtischreden*” (FH 137), and to the standard tasks he has to carry out at work as “*stupide Arbeit*” (FH 20), unworthy of him. He likes to depict himself as someone who enjoys the respect and appreciation of his colleagues (FH 223 – 224) and sees his work as critical in the success of Goebbels:

“Ob er sich wohl jemals Gedanken darüber gemacht hat, daß er, der große Redner vor den Massen, von solch unbedeutend wirkenden Helfern wie mir in höchstem Maße abhängig ist? Begreift er, daß die

Akustiker einen entscheidenden Beitrag zu seinem Siegeszug geleistet haben?“ (FH 147 – 148)

Karnau's self-portrayal would seem to align him with the strange genius characteristic of Johannes Elias in Robert Schneider's *Schlafes Bruder*³⁴⁵ or that of Grenouille in Patrick Süskind's *Das Parfum*³⁴⁶, and has the potential to provide a justification, or at least an explanation, for the lengths he goes to in his pursuit of his ideas³⁴⁷. However, Karnau is unable to maintain this image of himself as a highly-skilled savant and his narrative is repeatedly punctuated by details of his technical ineptitude. When working with the *Entwelschungsdienst* in Alsace, Karnau manages to erase vital evidence by accidentally pressing the wrong button when attempting to rewind a tape recording (FH 85). This particular error is so egregious that his sound technician colleagues are still laughing about it some time later: “*Die ganze Firma lacht ja über meinen Elsaß-Patzer, da sagt nur einer: Stichwort Straßburg, und schon hellen sich die Mienen auf . . .*” (FH 101; see also FH

³⁴⁵ Schneider, Robert *Schlafes Bruder* Leipzig: Reclam Verlag, 1992.

³⁴⁶ Süskind, Patrick *Das Parfum* Zürich: Diogenes, 1985.

³⁴⁷ Pliske and Zilles have both pointed to this connection and noted that Karnau does not really fit into the genius mould of Elias and Grenouille, in that his genius emanates solely from Karnau's self-depiction and is contradicted at a number of points: Pliske, Roman op cit at 108ff; Zilles, Sebastian “Zwischen Bewunderung und Horror: Zur Genie-Konzeption in Patrick Süskinds *Das Parfum*, Robert Schneiders *Schlafes Bruder* und Marcel Beyers *Flughunde*” *LiLi Zeitschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Linguistik* 166 (2012): 150 - 167. Uecker has also noted a link between the “literary monsters” in *Flughunde* and the two earlier novels: Uecker, Matthias “Uns allen steckt etwas von damals in den Knochen: Der Nationalsozialismus als Objekt Faszination in den Romanen Marcel Beyers” in Beßlich, Barbara, Grätz, Katharina and Hildebrand, Olaf *Wende des Erinnerns? Geschichtskonstruktionen in der deutschen Literatur nach 1989* Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 2006: 53 - 68 at 57. Winkels also refers to the figure of Grenouille in connection with Karnau: Winkels, Hubert op cit at 149, as does Strebin: Strebin, Britta “Wenn die Stimme die Seele (z)ersetzt . . . Marcel Beyer über seinen Roman *Flughunde*” *Grauzone* 5 (1995): 15.

129 for another example of Karnau being mocked by colleagues). Similarly, when Karnau is giving his lecture at the Dresden Hygiene Museum, his speech comes to an abrupt end when he accidentally hits the arm of his record player, causing the needle to make an ear-splitting sound (FH 139). Further, his attempts to transfer his collection of sound recordings in the Dresden archive uncovered in 1992 to the latest media of sound technology are substantially unsuccessful (FH 220). These errors on Karnau's part undercut his assertions of genius and their corollary implication that the special importance of his work may provide a sufficient justification or motivation for his crimes.

Even more so than Karnau's technical ineptitude, what ultimately undermines Karnau's depiction of himself as a genius and reveals him to be just another mediocre Nazi "scientist" is the faulty conception and failure of his sound chart project. This "sound chart" is Karnau's magnum opus: *"eine Karte, auf der auch die unscheinbarsten menschlichen Laute verzeichnet werden müssen"* (FH 27). Karnau intends to make a visual record of every sound produced by human beings and uses the pursuit of this goal as the rationale for his involvement in ever-worsening scenes of human degradation. Karnau does not fully realise the futility of his endeavour until after he has played his part in Nazi medical experiments, but the problems inherent in the project are hinted at from the start. At the beginning of the novel, Karnau points to the fact that his project's pretensions to scientific rigour are an illusion when he notes that his sound chart is essentially indecipherable (*"da der Plan gar keine Legende hat?"* (FH 27)). His acknowledgement that his chart will always be incomplete because of his refusal to record certain voices (such as those of the Goebbels

children (FH 62 – 63) and his own (FH 94)), as well as his recognition that no two human voices are the same (FH 164) point to the futility and practical impossibility of the project. In addition, his visit to the specimen collection at the Dresden Hygiene Museum leads him to suspect that others have already explored the “scientific” questions he is examining, again indicating that his own project is otiose (FH 133). A further, even more fundamental problem with Karnau’s sound chart is identified by the SS doctor Stumpfecker, namely that a visual representation of his sound collection in the form of a chart necessarily involves distortion and compromise: *“Nur ein Einwand: Haben Sie diese Geschichte mit dem Atlas wirklich durchdacht? Ist Ihre Lautsammlung denn nicht zu einzigartig, um ohne den Verlust wesentlicher Nuancen in Sichtbares übersetzt werden zu können?”* (FH 140). However, it is not until his discussion with his friend Moreau about the problems caused for his project by ultrasound that Karnau finally admits that his great scientific cause has been destined to failure from the beginning. When Moreau points out that the human subjects of Karnau’s research produce ultrasound which neither they themselves nor Karnau can hear, Karnau realises that the project he has used as a justification for his participation in crimes against humanity is futile:

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

Despite the fact that he depicts himself as a scientist, Karnau's project has no scientific method and no real purpose. His pretensions to genius are comprehensively deconstructed. By portraying Karnau as a stereotypical Nazi scientist, the novel highlights the insanity involved in Nazi medical experiments and points to one of the many failings of the Nazi regime, which, rather than choosing the best and brightest of the "master race", instead provided the space for banal, mediocre criminals like Karnau to thrive. This portrayal of Karnau as a banal type who was able to take up the opportunities Nazism offered for the mediocre to exercise power reflects Arendt's depiction of Eichmann³⁴⁸ and also recalls the depiction of Hanna in *Der Vorleser*. The novel's portrayal of Karnau as a stereotypical Nazi scientist clearly marks him out as a perpetrator.

2.3.4 *The psychopath*

This identification of Karnau as a perpetrator is made even clearer by the novel's portrayal of Karnau as a psychopath. The depiction of Karnau as a psychopathic monster as opposed to a more "ordinary" criminal emanates, not so much from the crimes he commits, but rather from his attitude towards his victims. If there is one thing the Third Reich shows us, it is that psychologically ordinary people are capable of carrying out horrific acts³⁴⁹. Yet Karnau's dehumanising approach towards others distances him from this

³⁴⁸ Arendt, Hannah op cit. Künzig also sees Karnau as the personification of the "banality of evil": Künzig, Bernd op cit at 128; 132. See also Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander op cit at 35.

³⁴⁹ See for example the discussion of the psychology of Third Reich perpetrators in Welzer, Harald *Täter* op cit.

type of “ordinary German” and marks him rather as a psychologically abnormal outsider³⁵⁰.

Karnau’s psychopathic tendencies can be seen throughout the text in his confusion of humans, animals, and things in a way which suggests that he does not recognise human dignity and has trouble making any emotional connection with other people. These characteristics are particularly apparent in Karnau’s descriptions of his participation in “scientific” experiments on humans in which he consistently refers to the subjects of his “research” in a depersonalised, disjointed and dehumanising way. The reader is first introduced to Karnau’s victim as nothing more than a set of feet because Karnau views his victim as a set of component parts (FH 153 – 154). This dehumanising mode of reference continues throughout the section of the novel dealing with human experimentation. By breaking his “subjects” down into parts, Karnau denies them their identity and humanity. Karnau’s dehumanising attitude towards others is emphasised in his references to his victim as an object (“*die Figur*” (FH 154); “*die Schallquelle*” (FH 159)) and an animal (“*widerspenstigen Hundefell*” (FH 160); “*verklebt den Pelz*” (FH 160); “*Sie führen ein Tierleben*” (FH 170))³⁵¹.

³⁵⁰ Uecker agrees that the portrayal of Karnau distances him from the type of the “ordinary” Nazi intellectual and depicts him as a monstrous freak: Uecker, Matthias op cit at 57.

³⁵¹ Zilles also identifies Karnau’s perception of others as objects as an indication of insanity: Zilles, Sebastian op cit at 163. Similarly, Hanuschek notes that Karnau’s fragmented view of human beings is characteristic of the murderers who exploited Nazism for their own “scientific” purposes: Hanuschek, Sven “Jeder Zeuge ist ein falscher Zeuge: Fiktion und Illusion in Marcel Beyers Roman *Flughunde*” in Bobinac, Marijan and Düsing, Wolfgang et al *Tendenzen im Geschichtsdrama und Geschichtsroman des 20. Jahrhunderts – Zagreber Germanistische Beiträge Beiheft 8* Zagreb: University of Zagreb, 2004: 387 - 397 at 390 – 391. Schöll examines the deconstruction of humans in this scene as an application of the “camera-eye”

Rather than being something into which Karnau descends as he becomes increasingly involved in Nazi crimes, this tendency to view humans in a way that denies their humanity has always been one of Karnau's personality traits. In his very first narrative in the novel, in which he relates his experiences as part of the team of sound technicians at a Nazi rally, he refers to a group of youths as "*Befehlsempfänger*" and "*Welpen*" (FH 9). He repeatedly objectifies people by referring to them only as sources of sound ("*Schallquellen*" (FH 29; 30; 113; 123); "*Stimmträger*" (FH 99)). He also anthropomorphises objects, as when the needle of his record player "*tastet die Schallplatte ab unter schmerzlicher Berührung*" (FH 24), which hints at his failure to give human dignity its full value.

Karnau's desire to use violence against others is also not something which first arises in the context of his work with the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*, but rather is something that forms part of his character from the beginning of the novel³⁵². This can be seen in his aggressive and dehumanising responses to those who disturb his acoustic environment ("*Löschen. Man müßte die Laute solcher Kreaturen löschen können*" (FH 18); "*Nur löschen. Alles löschen*" (FH 23); "*die ein solch widerwärtiges Geräusch erzeugt, daß es mich bis aufs Blut reizt und in mir unversehens der Drang aufsteigt, denjenigen zu erwürgen, der so abstoßend tonlos pfeift*" (FH 27; also 29 - 30)). His desire to transfer the experiments he has already started carrying out on animals onto human subjects is also foreshadowed early in the novel when he refers with a degree of black humour to exchanging his animal skulls for the

technique: Schöll, Sandra op cit at 147 - 151. On the use of the "camera-eye" technique here, see also Zilles, Sebastian ibid at 165; Hanuschek, Sven ibid at 390; Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander op cit at 98 - 99.

³⁵² Simon also makes this point briefly: Simon, Ulrich op cit at 136.

Goebbels children: “*Und gestern nacht nun habe ich meinen letzten Schädel so überraschend verschwinden lassen müssen und gegen die fünf Kinder eingetauscht*” (FH 51)³⁵³.

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

The main source of Karnau’s psychopathy may be traced back to a childhood experience in which his hearing the sound of his own recorded voice precipitates an identity crisis from which he never recovers (FH 58 – 59; 93)³⁵⁴. This crisis is caused, not only by his inability to reconcile his own voice as he hears it in his head with that emanating from the recording, but also by his

³⁵³ Ostrowicz makes a similar point: Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander op cit at 33.

³⁵⁴ Bekes also identifies this incident as the source of Karnau’s obsession: Bekes, Peter “Ab diesem Punkt spricht niemand mehr: Aspekte der Interpretation von Marcel Beyers Roman *Flughunde im Unterricht*” *Der Deutschunterricht* 51.4 (1999): 59 - 69 at 63; 66. See also Geisenhanslüke, Achim “Geschichte und Abwesenheit im Roman der neunziger Jahre: Anmerkungen zu M Beyers *Flughunde* und H-U Treichels *Der Verlorene*” *Literatur im Unterricht* 2 (2002): 177 - 185 at 181; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 130.

conviction that the recording of a voice splits off a part of that voice and transfers it into the possession of another:

“Ist eine Stimmaufnahme, entgegen meiner Vorstellung, nicht allein dazu in der Lage, ans Innerste des Menschen zu greifen, sondern nimmt davon zwangsläufig auch etwas weg, so daß das Abgehörte, nachdem es auf Platte geschnitten ist, fortan als Klang, als Tonfärbung allein noch auf dieser schwarzen Lackfolie existiert? Wird dem Menschen mit jedem konservierten Laut ein, wenn auch nur geringer, Bruchteil seiner Stimme gestohlen?

Darum auch meine instinktive Furcht als Kind, die eigene Stimme aufnehmen zu lassen, das Unbehagen hinterher beim Abhören, als wäre, ohne daß ich vorher auch nur eine Ahnung davon gehabt hätte, ein Teil aus meinem Inneren abgespalten worden, worüber nun ein anderer verfügte.” (FH 93)

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

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

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

the soldiers of their voices by recording their final sounds, leaving them voiceless on the battlefield:

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

Karnau's obsession with acquiring the voices of others is shown by his frequent repetition of the vocabulary of possession. Various forms of the verb *greifen* are characteristic of his reflections on the human voice and his discussions of his “project”, as is the use of the term *Besitz* to describe his ownership of other voices via sound recordings. Frustrated at his inability to get his own larynx “*in den Griff*” (FH 59), Karnau seeks to control the voices of others. The terms *greifen* and *Besitz* both occur in Karnau's description of his recordings of the sounds of dying soldiers at the Front: “. . . *kann bis in die Tiefe jedes Menschen greifen, ohne daß ihm dies bewußt ist, hole aus der Tiefe etwas hervor und ergreife davon Besitz . . .*” (FH 123). At the *Sprachhygiene* conference regarding medical experimentation on the human vocal apparatus, Karnau's repetition of forms of the verb “*greifen*” indicates his predatory agenda: “*Wir müssen jeden einzelnen greifen, wir müssen in das Innere der Menschen vordringen, und dieses Innere äußert sich bekanntlich in der Stimme, die eine Verbindung von innen nach außen darstellt*” (FH 139)³⁵⁵.

³⁵⁵ Further uses of forms of *greifen* and *Besitz* in relation to Karnau's “scientific project” can be found at FH 220 and at FH 142 – 143 (where

Coupled with his idea that a recording of the human voice necessarily involves taking away a part of that voice, Karnau's vocabulary of possession indicates that he is not so much interested in taping human sounds as a method of procuring a record to add to his sound chart, but as a means of gaining ownership of other voices and power over other people.

Psychologically disturbed by the recording of his own voice, Karnau wants to be the one to control the "*Schneidstichel*" (FH 94) as a means of taking control of others. Significantly, subjecting others to violence and pain is key in Karnau's quest to possess their innermost identity. As Karnau explains, it is only in the most extreme vocal expressions, "*im Schreien, Krächzen, Wimmern*" (FH 64) that the core of another human can be acquired ("*Aufnahmen solcher Laute greifen an das Innerste der jeweiligen Schallquelle*" (FH 64)). It is therefore only by obtaining these "*Leidenslaute*" (FH 65) that Karnau's desire can be satisfied. Indeed, Karnau appears to obtain the most exquisite enjoyment from being able to obtain a recording of a person's last breath ("*bis hin zum letzten, intimen Atemzug, da ein Sterbender sein Leben aushaucht*" (FH 123)), perhaps because it allows Karnau to take complete and final possession of the person's inner being. In seeking to procure these precious cries of pain, Karnau is willing to stop at nothing, and his psychopathic ability to divorce a dying person from their own screams allows him to summon up the heartlessness required to make such recordings:

“Der darf selbst die extremsten Äußerungen nicht scheuen, der muß auch dort zur Stelle sein, wo die Gefahren lauern, damit er jeglichen

Stumpfecker parrots Karnau's language). Schmitz also notes this repeated use of *Griff* and *greifen*: Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* ibid at 130.

Ton aufzeichnen kann. Der darf auch nicht davor zurückschrecken, daß manche Klänge keineswegs angenehm sind, weder für das Ohr des Hörers noch für denjenigen, der sie hervorbringt. Die Schallquelle, welche in diesem Moment für den Hörer nur genau dies sein darf, Schallquelle, nicht etwa ein Mensch mit Schmerzen, dem es zur Hilfe zu eilen gilt.” (FH 29)

The perceived necessity of the use of violence to achieve his goals indicates that participation in crime is not something that Karnau fell into, but something he sought in order to fulfil his desires. It is Karnau’s psychopathic desire to possess the voices of others that motivates both his scientific projects and his ultimate participation in Nazi crimes. Indeed, the futility of Karnau’s great sound chart project only makes the psychopathic motivations for his crimes more apparent. “Science” and “Nazism” are simply convenient labels to cover over his real aim of possessing the voices of others. In some ways, Karnau’s disregard of his victims’ humanity is reminiscent of Hanna’s callous discarding of her “readers” once she has finished with them, and her treatment of her prisoners as little more than logistical problems. However, Karnau goes much further, both in his actions and in his attitudes towards his victims. Hanna at least seeks some sort of relationship with her readers, whereas Karnau does not even view the subjects of his various experiments as human. This portrayal of Karnau as a psychopath depicts him not simply as a perpetrator, but as the closest of any of the perpetrators analysed in this thesis to the stereotype of the Nazi monster³⁵⁶.

³⁵⁶ Baer, on the other hand, sees Karnau as an “ordinary German”: Baer, Ulrich op cit at 253.

2.3.5 Karnau's psychopathy and the murder of the Goebbels children

Karnau's relationship with the Goebbels children is almost the only really positive aspect of his characterisation in *Flughunde*, the one thing which seems to humanise him in a way which allows him to resemble Beyer's "ganz normaler Mensch". Even the discrepancy between the positive descriptions of Karnau's interactions with the children and what the reader knows about his criminal activities could be seen as depicting Karnau as a stereotype of the Nazi scientist who is a well-loved family member at home and a perpetrator of horrific crimes at "work"³⁵⁷, which, whilst not entirely positive, could at least function to alleviate the blackness of Karnau's portrayal by identifying him with more "ordinary" Germans. However, Karnau's interaction with the Goebbels children is not nearly as positive as he and Helga would like to make out. Rather than being typical of the catastrophic disconnect characteristic of the loving family men who nevertheless carried out horrific crimes under Nazism, Karnau's relationship with the Goebbels children shows him to be a psychopathic monster in his private life as well as his occupational activities. There are strong parallels between Karnau's treatment of his victims in the novel and his dealings with the Goebbels children. One of these parallels can be seen in the way in which Karnau attempts in his narrative to omit his own presence from the lives of the Goebbels children at the time of their deaths. This omission mirrors his descriptions of his participation in Nazi crimes, both in the *Entwelschungsdienst* and as part of the SS *Sonderforschungsgruppe*. As in those instances, Karnau uses his narrative to suggest a lack of agency

³⁵⁷ Niven puts forward this view of Karnau: Niven, Bill "Representations of the Nazi past I" op cit at 131. See also Blasberg, Cornelia "Forscher, Heiler, Mörder" op cit at 282.

and to erase his own presence from the scene. Karnau initially seeks to conceal his contact with the Goebbels children at the end of their lives by producing a narrative of his time in Hitler's bunker from which the children are "deleted" (FH 194 – 205; 208 – 216). When he is forced to acknowledge the presence of the children in the bunker following his discovery of tapes recording the children's final days, Karnau seeks to distance himself from responsibility for both the last recordings of the children's voices and for their deaths. He does this by repeatedly suggesting that he was absent at the time when the children were murdered:

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

“Er hat mich zum Kopieren unserer Aufnahmen geschickt, um mich für eine Weile fernzuhalten, während er zu den Kindern ging” (FH 292)

He also denies being the person who made the recording of the children's voices on the night they died: *“Nein, mit diesen Tondokumenten habe ich nichts zu tun”* (FH 234); *“Hier liegt ein Fehler vor, das habe ich nicht aufgenommen”*; *“Nein, diese Aufnahme habe ich nun wirklich nicht durchgeführt”* (FH 300). Given Karnau's obsession with recording voices and the fact that he had the trust of and direct access to the children, such a denial is unconvincing. That he did not put his signature on the last recording (FH 300) rather reinforces the reader's suspicion that, in keeping with his

pattern of asserting his absence at the scene of the crime, Karnau was involved in the children's murder, thereby strengthening the reader's perception of Karnau as a callous and calculating perpetrator.

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

This inference is made even stronger through the theme of possession which is prevalent throughout Karnau's discussion of the children's voices. When the children leave him after their stay at his flat, he wanders around seeking "*Spuren der Kinderstimmen*" which might have been left in his keeping, expressing a desire to retain their voices for himself (FH 73). He reflects on the idea that social pressures will make the children lose possession of their

own voices (*“Irgendwann wird den Kindern aufgehen, daß sie nicht mehr frei über ihre Stimmen verfügen”* (FH 75)), and later on describes his custody of the final tapes of the children’s voices in terms of ownership (*“Die Stimmen der sechs Kinder sind in meinen Besitz übergegangen”* (FH 284)). The same theme of possession is also apparent in Karnau’s account of his conflict with Goebbels over Karnau’s wish to record the children’s voices:

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

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

Indeed, Karnau’s approach towards the children is predatory from the beginning. As with his other victims, Karnau views the children primarily as the source of voices he wants to acquire. A hint of this identity between the Goebbels children and his other victims can be seen in the black humour of

Karnau's comment about exchanging the animal skulls on which he has been conducting his "experiments" for the children (FH 51). Even his initial decision that the voices of the Goebbels children will not be recorded demonstrates his possessive power over them:

"Gibt es auch Aufnahmen, die ich nicht durchführen würde? Ja, die Stimmen dieser Kinder, wenn sie schutzlos wären, wie jetzt, da sie sich allein und unbelauscht glauben. Ansonsten: alles, um der Vollständigkeit willen, die ganze hörbare Welt, da darf kein weißer Fleck bleiben. Bis auf den einen: Die Stimmen dieser Kinder werden auf meiner Karte nicht verzeichnet, wo sie dann offenlägen vor aller Welt, und, schlimmer noch, auch vor den Kindern selber." (FH 62 - 63)

However, he quickly leaves his resolution behind as he becomes obsessed with the children's voices. No matter what other sounds he plays on his record player, he finds them to be no substitute for the children's voices, which he feels are the only things that will satisfy him (FH 73). He becomes jealous of the idea that other people might be able to obtain the children's voices by acquiring a sound recording of them because he wishes their voices to be his own possession (FH 92 - 93).

The novel leaves no doubt that Karnau's desire for the voices of the Goebbels children is pathological. Karnau fantasises about possessing the voice of a child as a means of restoring his own voice to the state of innocence it lost when it was recorded: "*Kann man sich die junge, ungetrübte Stimme eines Kindes verschaffen, indem man einem Kind die Stimme nimmt?*" (FH 160 - 161). This fantasy is placed in the midst of a macabre scene in which a surgeon exposes the larynx of one of their victims, revealing the lengths

Karnau is prepared to go to in order to obtain what he desires. In order to satisfy his pathological need to possess the voices of the Goebbels children, Karnau decides to conceal a recording device in their room and switch it on (FH 235), which goes expressly against the instructions of their father:

“ . . . außerdem war ihr Vater auch strikt dagegen, aus Furcht vor der Existenz solcher Aufnahmen in meinen Händen. Gerade bei unserer letzten Begegnung, kurz vor seinem Tod, sperrte er sich so vehement dagegen, daß ich alle Hoffnung aufgab.” (FH 234)

Karnau sees himself as being locked with Goebbels in a battle for control over the children’s voices, and his reference to Goebbels’ “fear” of the existence of recordings of his children in Karnau’s hands reflects Karnau’s view of such recordings as a source of power.

The parallels between Karnau’s attitude towards the children’s voices and those of his previous victims point strongly towards Karnau as the children’s murderer. This is particularly so in view of the importance Karnau ascribes to sounds obtained by violence and his suggestion that the most complete possession of the human voice is best obtained by recording the last sounds of the dying, as he did at the Front and as part of the SS

Sonderforschungsgruppe. Karnau’s smile when Helga mentions the word “*Sterbenslaut*” (FH 259) points in the direction of his desire to extend his collection of the voices of the dying to include the voices of the children.

The identification of Karnau as the children’s murderer is further indicated by Karnau’s own narratives of his crimes, particularly in his tendency to omit himself from the scene of those crimes. In the last section of the novel,

Karnau reviews a selection of “evidence” concerning the possible involvement of a number of different individuals in the deaths of the Goebbels children, only to dismiss each one, leaving himself as the last suspect (FH 287 - 299). As Helga has already realised, Karnau is someone who *“kann gut Märchen erzählen”* (FH 276). Karnau’s narrative is littered with references to false witness (*“Jeder Zeuge ist ein falscher Zeuge”* (FH 291); *“falsche Angaben”* (FH 291); *“ein falscher Zeuge unter falschen Zeugen”* (FH 293); *“vollkommen unglaubwürdig”* (FH 296); *“verheimlicht”* (FH 297)). The suggestive tension in the narrative is heightened still further by the quadruple repetition of Helga’s question immediately prior to her death, *“Ist das Herr Karnau, der jetzt zu uns kommt?”* (FH 279, 283, 300 (twice)). Confronted by his own realisation that, as he was the only person who knew about the secret recording device under the mattress he must have been in the children’s room to make the recording of their final breaths, Karnau breaks off his narrative (FH 300 – 301)³⁵⁸.

³⁵⁸ Beyer himself has suggested that Karnau’s cessation of his narrative at this point indicates his desire to conceal his involvement in the murders: *“Auch der Punkt, wo der Text aufhört: Der nächste Satz müßte eigentlich eine Erkenntnis sein, daß er an der Ermordung der Kinder beteiligt gewesen ist, und genau dann hört dieser Mann auf zu sprechen.”*: Biendarra, Anke and Wilke, Sabina op cit at 7. The question of whether Karnau murdered the Goebbels children has been the subject of disagreement in the secondary literature. Some hold the view that the matter is unclear from the text: Avanesian, Armen *“(Co)Present Tense: Marcel Beyer Reads the Past” Germanic Review* 88.4 (2013): 363 - 374 at 371; Jaeger, Stephan *“The Atmosphere in the Führerbunker: How to Represent the Last Days of World War II” Monatshefte* 101.2 (2009): 229 - 244 at 239; Beßlich, Barbara op cit at 46; Parkes, Stuart *“The Language of the Past”* op cit at 122. Others think that the text does suggest Karnau’s complicity: Bekes, Peter op cit at 67; Beyersdorf, Erik Herman *“Telling the Unknown: Imagining a Dubious Past in Marcel Beyer’s Flughunde” AUMLA: Journal of the Australasian Universities Language and Literature Association* 117 (2012): 83 - 97 at 90; 94; Lensen, Jan op cit at 464; Ostermann, Eberhard op cit at 12; Schönherr, Ulrich op cit at 346; Birtsch, Nicole op cit at 324; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 142; Paver, Chloe op cit at 88; Schmidt, Thomas E *“Erlauschte Vergangenheit”* in Kraft, Thomas *Aufgerissen: Zur Literatur der 90er* Munich: Piper Verlag,

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

2000: 141 - 150 at 150; Schmitz, Helmut *On Their Own Terms* op cit at 142; Taberner, Stuart *German Literature of the 1990s* op cit at 144; Blasberg, Cornelia "Forscher, Heiler, Mörder" op cit at 272; Georgopoulou, Eleni op cit at 8; 24. Still others consider that Karnau is not involved: Geisenhanslücke, Achim op cit at 181.

3. Reading *Flughunde* as historiographic metafiction

Flughunde may be significantly different from the other three novels studied in this thesis in its use of a first generation narrator and Third Reich setting, but its combination of metafictional techniques with explicit consideration of historiographical issues is a point of similarity with the other works. Indeed, the high degree of openness, intertextuality and self-reflexivity in *Flughunde* mark the novel out as the most metafictional of the four novels analysed in this thesis. The application of these metafictional techniques to the historical material in *Flughunde* indicates that, as with the other texts examined here, this novel may also be read as a work of historiographic metafiction³⁵⁹. In the

³⁵⁹ A reading of *Flughunde* as historiographic metafiction has been little considered in the secondary literature. Ostrowicz discusses the theories of White and others as to the relationship between history and fiction, as well as Nünning's work on the categorisation of historiographic metafiction, as background to his detailed examination of the interaction between history and literature in *Flughunde*, but does not take the matter further in his analysis of the novel: Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander op cit at 12 – 19. Georgopoulou refers to Ostrowicz's work and notes that *Flughunde* may be seen as a postmodern examination of historiography and the literary depiction of memory, but also does not take the matter further or apply it to the portrayal of Karnau: Georgopoulou, Eleni ibid at 28. Jaeger hints at it in his suggestion that the novel is a metarepresentation of history reflecting on the possibilities and limitations of the representation of the past: Jaeger, Stephan ibid at 240. Herrmann has put forward such a reading in relation to Beyer's novel *Kaltenburg*, but not in relation to *Flughunde*: Herrmann, Leonhard "Kulturgeschichte des Wissens: Das ganze 20. Jahrhundert im Rückblick – fiktive Gelehrtenbiografien von Michael Köhlmeier und Marcel Beyer" *KulturPoetik* 11.1 (2011): 240 - 257. Mundt has likewise analysed *Kaltenburg* as historiographic metafiction, but does not include any analysis of *Flughunde*: "From Erdkunde to Kaltenburg: Marcel Beyer's Never-ending Stories about the Past" *GegenwartsLiteratur: Ein germanistisches Jahrbuch* 12 (2013): 321 - 345. Hammermeister also refers to *Kaltenburg* as a "metahistoriographischen Roman": Hammermeister, Philipp "Vergangenheit im Konjunktiv: Erinnerung und Geschichte in Marcel Beyers Kaltenburg" in Fischer, Torben, Hammermeister, Philipp and Kramer, Sven *Der Nationalsozialismus und die Shoah in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur* Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014: 237 - 257 at 239 – 240; 250. Herrmann refers to a number of metahistoriographic implications in *Flughunde*

following section, I will explore the way in which *Flughunde* operates as historiographic metafiction and determine the effect of this reading on the portrayal of Karnau as a perpetrator.

3.1 *Der Verfremdungseffekt*

As the only one of the four novels studied in this thesis to be set primarily in the Third Reich and to refer to historical figures and actual events occurring at that time, *Flughunde* could be seen as the closest of the four to a traditional “historical novel”. However, whereas the classic historical novel aims at a more mimetic representation of history coupled with a concealment of the novel’s fictionality and corresponding creation of the illusion of real events designed to draw the reader into the world of the novel³⁶⁰, *Flughunde* uses a wide variety of metafictional techniques to push the reader away from immersion in the past world and towards a critical engagement with the text and an increased awareness of the novel’s underlying present perspective. This move away from the mimetic representation of history typical of the classic historical novel helps to defuse potential ethical concerns which could adhere to the novel’s use of the *Täterperspektive*.

In addition to the various metafictional elements which serve to disorient the reader and make the reader aware both of the novel’s fictionality and of his or her role as reader, the novel also destabilises the narrative by building its plot

without specifically analysing it as historiographic metafiction: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* ibid at 150; 160 – 161; 166.

³⁶⁰ Nünning identifies and defines several types of historical novel which combine an avoidance of metafictional self-reflexivity with an attempt to provide the illusion of historical “reality”, namely the documentary historical novel, the realistic historical novel, and (to a lesser extent) the revisionist historical novel: Nünning, Ansgar *Von historischer Fiktion zu historiographischer Metafiktion* op cit at 259 – 275.

around a series of highly unlikely scenarios which further underline the novel's fictionality. The first of these is the babysitting scenario which brings Karnau and the Goebbels children together³⁶¹. This is a major feature in the construction of the plot, yet the text itself points to the sheer unlikelihood of such a connection. For a start, the Goebbels children already have a "*Kinderfrau*" (FH 33 – 36), whose presence would seem to render Karnau's oversight superfluous. In addition, Karnau is described as someone who is barely known to the children's parents, a mere "*Bekannter*" (FH 34 – 36) unlikely to be entrusted with the care of the children. Helga makes this point several times in her narrative:

"Er fragt sie aus über Mama und Papa. Komisch: Wenn er wirklich ein Freund von unseren Eltern ist, warum weiß er dann über sie so wenig?" (FH 49)

"Herr Karnau, Herr Karnau. Der kennt nicht mal unsere Eltern. Der ist noch nie bei Mama und Papa eingeladen gewesen." (FH 52)

As a single man living in a small flat, Karnau is also particularly unsuited to be the babysitter of 5 young children. Helga makes the ludicrous nature of this situation apparent when she comments: "*Ich habe mir diesen Bekannten viel älter vorgestellt, wie soll denn dieser junge Mann auf uns fünf Geschwister aufpassen?*" (FH 36). Karnau also points to the absurdity of his position:

³⁶¹ Herrmann also identifies this unlikely plot element as an indication of fictionality: Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 148. See also Paver, Chloe op cit at 88. Parkes also thinks that the link between Karnau and Helga lacks credibility, however, he thinks the purpose of it is to link Karnau's world of sound technology with Goebbels' propaganda: Parkes, Stuart "The Language of the Past" op cit at 120 – 121.

“Wie habe ich der Bitte ihres Vaters so unbedacht entsprechen können, die fünf Kinder auf ein Paar Tage in meine Obhut zu nehmen, wenn ihre Mutter niederkommt? Sie sind, als Kinder einer hochgestellten Persönlichkeit, schließlich ganz andere Verhältnisse gewohnt. Und wie ist ihr Vater auf die Idee verfallen, gerade mich darum zu bitten? Wir kennen uns doch auch noch gar nicht lange . . .” (FH 46)

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

Unlikely scenarios are the prerogative of fiction and Beyer is by no means obliged to make his plotlines realistic. However, by making key elements of the plot unbelievable and having the main characters reflect on the unlikelihood of the scenes in which they are playing a part, Beyer destabilises the novel’s narrative and underscores its fictionality. The artificiality of the plot creates a *Verfremdungseffekt* which prevents the reader from becoming absorbed by the story and makes the reader aware of his own role as a reader of narratives, thereby encouraging a more critical view³⁶². In a novel

³⁶² This identification of the way in which the novel puts distance between the reader and the narrative goes against Birtsch’s idea that the novel imprisons the reader in Karnau’s perspective: Birtsch, Nicole op cit at 319; 322; 328 - 329.

dealing with the past, this *Verfremdungseffekt* has the function of pointing the reader towards questioning the construction of narratives about that past and lays the ground for the novel's explicit thematisation of historiographical problems.

3.2 Blurring the lines between fact and fiction and the problems of representation

One of the historiographical issues explicitly thematised in the novel is the interface between fact and fiction in writing about the past³⁶³. The novel's metafictional self-reflexivity is overtly applied to its historical content and references, particularly in the afterword, in which Beyer asserts that: "*Obwohl einige Charaktere im vorliegenden Text Namen realer Personen tragen, sind sie doch, wie die anderen Figuren, Erfindungen des Autors*" (FH 302). The fact that the text is clearly marked as a *Roman* ought to make such assertions of fictionality superfluous. However, this element of self-reflexivity in a text which contains a large number of references to real historical people and real historical events prompts the reader to question whether he or she has a tendency to read aspects of the novel as history³⁶⁴, thereby highlighting the sometimes fine line between fictional accounts of history and the arrangement of historical facts in narrative in the form of historiography, as brought to a high point in White's contention that "*history is no less a form of fiction than*

³⁶³ Ostrowicz considers the interaction between historical fact and fiction in *Flughunde* in considerable detail: Ostrowicz, Philipp Alexander op cit generally, but particularly at 63 - 82. Blasberg has also noted the blurring of the line between fact and fiction in the text and its implications for uncovering the "truth": Blasberg, Cornelia "Zeugenschaft" op cit at 29.

³⁶⁴ In his *Nachwort* to the 2007 edition of *Flughunde*, Beyer notes the difficulties experienced by his readers in relation to the mixture of fact and fiction in the novel: Beyer, Marcel *Flughunde* Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2007 at 303 – 312.

*the novel is a form of historical representation*³⁶⁵. This fine line between fact and fiction is also thematised by the alterations made to historical figures or events in the text in order to “fictionalise” them. For example, the character of Stumpfecker in the novel is based on the historical person of Ludwig Stumpfegger, an SS doctor who was involved in medical experiments in the Ravensbrück concentration camp and later became Hitler’s personal physician in his Berlin bunker in the final days of the Third Reich. The novel contains many details that correspond to the biographical details of the historical Stumpfegger, such as the descriptions of his work at Ravensbrück (FH 198) and his death in Berlin (FH 228), but the alteration of his name to “Stumpfecker” indicates the fictionalisation of the historical character. Similarly, the character of Karnau is based on a historical figure, Hermann Karnau, who was a guard in Hitler’s bunker in the final days of the war and was the first eyewitness to confirm the death of Hitler to the Western Allies. In creating the character of Karnau, Beyer combines a few of the sparse factual details about the historical Karnau with a more expansive fictional biography in which the guard becomes the implausible sound technician with access to the inner circle of the Nazi regime³⁶⁶. In the same way, Helga’s reference to

³⁶⁵ White, Hayden *Tropics of Discourse* op cit at 122.

³⁶⁶ Beyer came across the historical figures of Karnau and Stumpfegger in an article in a May 1945 edition of the *Kölner Zeitung*. He discusses the creation of Karnau on the basis of the sparse historical details in: Wichmann, Heiko *Von K. zu Karnau: Marcel Beyer über seine literarische Arbeit* <<http://www.thing.de/neid/archiv/sonst/text/beyer.htm>> (accessed 11 April 2016); Bednarz, Klaus op cit at 66 - 67; Geisel, Sieglinde “Die Erfindung der Wirklichkeit” *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* 24 November 2000. Beyer uses a similar technique of fusing fact and fiction in his novel *Kaltenburg*, in which a number of main characters share significant levels of biographical similarity with historical figures, but are also substantially fictionalised. For a discussion of the use of this technique in *Kaltenburg*, see Assmann, Aleida “History from a Bird’s Eye View: Reimagining the Past in Marcel Beyer’s *Kaltenburg*” in Fuchs,

Goebbels' *Sportpalastrede* (FH 157 – 158; 161 – 163; 165 – 166; 168 – 170) contains a number of direct quotations from the transcript of the actual historical speech, but alters it slightly by interpolating fictional sections³⁶⁷.

This mixture of fact and fiction makes it hard for the reader to tell where in the narrative fact ends and fiction begins, thus highlighting a similar problem present in historiographic narratives in “factual” form.

Further the novel not only points to the way in which fact is transformed into fiction, but also the way in which fiction is transformed into fact. When Goebbels coordinates radio broadcasts about the fictitious exploits of *Werwolf* partisans operating behind enemy lines, he suggests that, by presenting these fictional stories as factual “news” and in a particular tone, he will make people believe them and inspire them to turn these fictions into fact by imitating the “bravery” of the *Werwölfe*:

“Begreifst du nicht, daß unsere Meldungen zur Wahrheit werden müssen? Begreifst du nicht, daß wir sie über den Äther senden, damit der Werwolf irgendwo da draußen sie rigoros zur Wahrheit macht? Der Werwolf setzt jede einzelne unserer Nachrichten in die Tat um, wenn sie nur im treffenden Ton gesprochen wird . . .” (FH 192)

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

Anne *Debating German Cultural Identity since 1989* Columbia: Camden House, 2011: 205 - 220; Hammermeister, Philipp op cit.

³⁶⁷ For the text of Goebbels' *Sportpalastrede*, see: http://www.1000dokumente.de/index.html?c=dokument_de&dokument=0200_goe&object=translation&l=de#top (accessed 11 April 2016).

Another theme of historiographical criticism in the novel is the questioning of the nature of historiography as representation. Karnau's sound chart, which is intended to illustrate all human voices, can be seen as a metaphor for all forms of representation. The sound chart transforms the recorded sound into a visual form which can only "represent" the human voice. The whole idea of a chart itself references the idea of representation as opposed to reality and the novel points explicitly to the problems inherent in the transcription of reality into an abstract format when Stumpfecker questions whether the whole process of transcription presents a fundamental problem for Karnau's project (FH 140). Karnau's sound chart also emphasises the idea that a representation is necessarily selective. Sometimes this selectivity reflects the agenda of the creator of the representation. At other times, selectivity is a result of practical concerns, such as the inability to include everything due to the constraints of space and time and the inability to record things we do not know about, as Karnau discovers when Moreau points out that his chart will not be able to include ultrasound (FH 179 – 180).

In the context of a reading of *Flughunde* as historiographic metafiction, Karnau's sound chart can be interpreted as a metaphor for the problems of historiography as representation. Karnau's attempt to transcribe human sounds onto a piece of paper is reminiscent of the process of historiography whereby historians translate past events, facts and objects into the two-dimensional, abstract format of a written narrative. Karnau's sound chart project displays particular parallels with the representation of oral testimony, which is especially significant in a time of increased interest in the testimony of the *Zeitzeugen* in Germany. By showing the limitations inherent in

representation through Karnau's sound chart project, *Flughunde* highlights the limitations of historiographic representation of the past. Combined with the novel's thematisation of the relationship between fact and fiction, the metaphor of Karnau's sound chart points to the lack of complete accuracy and objectivity inherent in historiography and thus questions our ability to know the comprehensive "truth" about the past and the people in it³⁶⁸.

3.3 Problems with historical sources

In addition, *Flughunde* also questions the reliability of various sources of historical evidence, namely eyewitness testimony, sound recordings, and photography. The novel is explicit in its thematisation of the unreliability of eyewitness testimony³⁶⁹. Karnau's narrative directly addresses this matter on a number of occasions when he expresses his view that all witnesses are fundamentally false ("*Jeder Zeuge ist ein falscher Zeuge*" (FH 291); "*ein falscher Zeuge unter falschen Zeugen*" (FH 293)). The novel is particularly explicit in its warnings against an uncritical acceptance of "Germans as

³⁶⁸ Avanesian has also suggested that another way in which the novel expresses the idea that narratives about the past are necessarily a representation is by using an asynchronous present tense to narrate the past as "non-present": Avanesian, Armen "(Co)Present Tense" op cit at 373. See also Avanesian, Armen and Hennig, Anke *Der Präsensroman* Berlin: de Gruyter, 2013 at 260ff.

³⁶⁹ Beyer has frequently pointed to the unreliability of eyewitness accounts. He is particularly interested in the way in which eyewitnesses can "remember" details of events that did not actually occur, but are rather derived from literary accounts or other fictional media. See for example Beyer, Marcel "Das wilde Tier im Kopf des Historikers" in Nünning, Ansgar *Historisierte Subjekte - subjektivierte Historie: zur Verfügbarkeit und Unverfügbarkeit von Geschichte*, Berlin: De Gruyter, 2003: 295 - 301 at 296; Deckert, Renatus, op cit at 84. He has also commented on the way in which eyewitnesses are also able to erase information from their memories, such as their involvement in Nazi crimes: Bednarz, Klaus op cit at 72. Georgopoulou considers the novel's thematisation of the problems of witness and mediality and their relation to communicative and cultural memory: Georgopoulou, Eleni op cit at 16; 24 – 74.

victims” narratives. Stumpfecker’s advice to Karnau about the necessity of learning to speak like a victim points to the need to exercise caution when faced with “Germans as victims” narratives and to be aware that such narratives may be designed to conceal a history of crime (FH 215 – 216)³⁷⁰. It is a warning against taking the word of the *Zeitzeugen* at face value that is fleshed out in Karnau’s reflections on life in postwar Germany in which he notes the speed with which the Germans executed a “*flächendeckende Stimmveränderung*” (FH 231), covering over their Nazi tones with postwar democracy. Karnau notes how the Germans swiftly exchanged their uniforms and medals for postwar rags and “*wie schnell ein Oberlippenbärtchen abrasiert ist*” (FH 230). This swift removal of traces of Nazism is symbolised by Karnau’s record player: “*Auf dem Deckel ein aufgerauhter Fleck: Dort ist vor Jahren das Emblem mit einem Küchenmesser weggekratzt worden, der Tonkopf, nein, der Totenkopf*” (FH 233). The way in which the Nazi emblem has been removed from the record player suggests that such attempts are superficial only. Traces of Nazism remain in German society just as the damage caused by the screams of Nazi hysteria remained as scars on the vocal chords of postwar Germans:

³⁷⁰ Beyer has written that he derived this idea of perpetrators learning to speak like victims from reading the memoirs of Hans Rosenthal, a Jew who survived the war in Berlin. When he emerged from his hiding place, Rosenthal wore his *Judenstern* to make it clear that he was a victim, but discovered that it did not provide the protection he thought it would because so many perpetrators had been disguising themselves as victims. “*Vielmehr vermutete die Soldaten der Roten Armee, denen Rosenthal sich gegenüber sah, hinter dem Judenstern verberge sich, wie mehrfach schon, auch hier ein Mitglied der Schutzstaffel, und so entging Hans Rosenthal bei Kriegsende allein dadurch den Tod ein zweitesmal, daß er sein Glaubensbekenntnis auf Hebräisch sprach*”: Beyer, Marcel “Kommentar - Holocaust: Sprechen” *Text und Kritik* 144 (1999): 18 - 24 at 19.

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

The persistence of the traces of Nazism in postwar Germany and the continuing attempts to cover over those traces is further emphasised by the images of concealment surrounding the discovery of Karnau’s sound archive in Dresden in 1992. The outer entrance to the archive is boarded up and “*verborgen*” (FH 219), and a further entrance has “*doppelt gesicherte Zugänge: Gitter und massive Eisentüren*” (FH 220). The archive is located at the end of “*unterirdische Gänge*” (FH 219), beneath the postwar veneer. Behind all of these barriers, however, the voices of Nazism remain archived, not erased. The novel’s explicit references to both the persistence of traces of Nazism in postwar Germany and the way in which postwar Germans changed their voices and adopted the sound of the victims to cover over their participation in Nazi crimes constitute a direct warning against being misled by the victimhood narratives which dominate the testimony of many German *Zeitzeugen*³⁷¹. Not only does *Flughunde* refuse to portray “Germans as victims”, but it specifically points to the possibility that such victim narratives could be mere mimicry used to conceal German crimes.

The reliability of eyewitness narratives is also called into question by the high levels of unreliability in both Karnau’s and Helga’s narratives. Helga’s

³⁷¹ Beyer has rejected the tendency to move away from a vocabulary which identifies Germans as perpetrators: “*Ich finde das ganz seltsam einen so apolitischen Begriff wie Zeitzeuge zu benutzen.*” Herold, Jasmin op cit.

narrative is unreliable, not because of any attempt at deception, but because her perspective is seriously limited by her youth³⁷². The limitations on her narrative are apparent from the restriction of her perspective to the private, family sphere that dominates the consciousness of a child. Although she comes into close contact with the most important people and major events of the Third Reich, she is unable to see these people and events in their wider social, political and historical contexts. This is demonstrated by her description of her father's *Sportpalastrede*, in which she does not connect what her father is saying with the implications of total war for the world around her. Karnau's narrative, on the other hand, is unreliable because he does attempt to deceive: his narrative is biased towards denying his own culpability (FH 234 – 235; 300 – 301)³⁷³.

The problems involved in relying on eyewitnesses as a source are also demonstrated in the novel by the inconsistencies arising from a multiplicity of often conflicting narratives. The effect of this multiplicity of narratives can be seen particularly in the account of the final days of the Goebbels children. The reader is presented with three different versions, firstly by Karnau in chapter VI, secondly by Helga in chapter VIII, and finally by means of fragments of the sound recording of the children conveyed by Karnau in chapter IX. In some cases, these narratives corroborate each other, for example, Karnau's observations regarding pornographic graffiti on the walls of the bunker and an increase in smoking in the bunker following the death of Hitler (FH 214) are confirmed in Helga's narrative (FH 268) and in the sound

³⁷² Beßlich also makes this point: Beßlich, Barbara op cit at 45.

³⁷³ Beßlich has also written about Karnau as an unreliable narrator: Beßlich, Barbara ibid at 44 – 48. See also Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 158; 162.

recordings of the children (FH 292). However, at other times their narratives are wildly divergent. Karnau's narrative in chapter VI completely omits his contact with the Goebbels children during their final days, but Helga's narrative in chapter VIII reveals that Karnau and the children were in the bunker at the same time, as do the sound recordings of the children in chapter IX. These inconsistencies point to the divergent evidence which frequently arises from eyewitness accounts, thereby calling the reliability of eyewitness testimony into question³⁷⁴.

As well as questioning the reliability of eyewitness accounts as sources of information, *Flughunde* also points to the limitations of various documentary media as historical evidence. The novel's criticism in this regard focuses on the use of sound recordings³⁷⁵ and photographs to obtain information about past people and events. The inability of photography to capture more than a decontextualised snapshot is demonstrated in Helga's description of her family's holiday photo shoot in the Alps. The static image of the happy family published in the papers is carefully designed to cover over her mother's mental illness and her father's affairs, and fails to record the children's boredom and Helga's disappointment that their mother will not be spending the holiday with them (FH 119 – 121).

³⁷⁴ Künzig also notes that the novel questions the claims to authenticity of perpetrator accounts, but also raises the question as to whether similar considerations might apply to victim testimonies: Künzig, Bernd op cit at 127.

³⁷⁵ The theme of sound technology in *Flughunde* has also been used in the secondary literature as an impetus to read the novel in the light of various media theories, including the idea that human experience changes in line with changes in the technology with which it is recorded: see Baer, Ulrich op cit; Morris, Leslie "The Sound of Memory" *German Quarterly* 74.4 (2001): 368 - 378; Herrmann, Meike *Vergangenwart* op cit at 151 – 153; Winkels, Hubert op cit at 152.

The problematic nature of the visual medium as a historical source is also highlighted through Karnau's suspicion of photography: "*Denn Photos kann man schönigen, man kann sie arrangieren: Jetzt lächeln und einander umarmen*" (FH 230). He prefers to place his faith in sound recordings and believes that, unlike the visual medium of photography, sound recordings are able to provide a reliable representation of the past, just as the scars left on vocal chords by the screams of the past are not able to be tampered with (FH 230 – 231)³⁷⁶. However, the novel undermines Karnau's confidence in sound recordings by showing that they are in fact open to manipulation by means of editing, for example by cutting sections of tape (FH 221). Just like photographs, sound recordings represent only the isolated moment in which they were recorded, and are therefore incapable of completely capturing a past event. This becomes apparent when Karnau attempts to piece together the events surrounding the murder of the Goebbels children from his collection of tapes (FH 283 – 301). Like eyewitness testimonies, photographs and sound recordings do not provide accurate, complete or objective evidence about the past.

The novel hammers its points about the deficiencies of historical source material home by means of two specific demonstrations of a failure to reconstruct the past due to the fragmentary, contradictory and biased nature of the source material. The first of these demonstrations is the experience of the *Kommission von Untersuchungsbeauftragten* sent to investigate a sound archive uncovered beneath the Dresden city orphanage in July 1992. The

³⁷⁶ Beyersdorf considers that Beyer also believes in the impartial nature of sound recordings, but this makes the mistake of confusing the view of the author with that of his created character: Beyersdorf, Erik Herman "Telling the Unknown" op cit at 86.

Kommission finds that most of the documents relating to the activities that took place in the archive have been destroyed (FH 219), and that the purpose of the many recordings kept there is not clear in the absence of further explanation (FH 222). Karnau is the only witness able to give the *Kommission* more detailed information about the hidden sound archive, but the *Kommission* quickly realises that Karnau's evidence is unreliable:

“Bei eingehender Untersuchung stellen sich in der Kommission jedoch verschiedene Zweifel an Karnaus Darstellungen ein.” (FH 224)

“Karnaus Behauptung, die Arbeit im Archiv sei bereits vor Kriegsende eingestellt worden, scheint unzutreffend.” (FH 225)

In any event, Karnau subsequently disappears (FH 225), preventing the *Kommission* from interrogating him further and leaving them with nothing but “*Gerüchte*” (FH 223). Faced with a variety of sources that are incomplete and unreliable, the *Kommission* is unable to form a definitive view about the purpose of the archive and about what occurred there. This is shown by the anonymous narrator's repeated use of language suggesting uncertainty: “*möglicherweise*”; “*weiß man allerdings nichts*” (FH 219); “*nicht klar*”, “*nicht bis in die Einzelheiten zu klärende*” (FH 222); “*liegt ebenfalls außerhalb der Kenntnis der Untersuchungskommission*”; “*All das läßt sich anhand des vorliegenden Materials jedoch nicht beweisen*” (FH 223). The setting of this demonstration of the problems associated with ascertaining the truth about the past in the post-unification context of 1992 throws particular light on the problems of assessing the Nazi past around the time of the novel's publication and points to the contemporary, postmemorial perspective underlying the novel's *Täterperspektive*. In doing so, it makes the contemporary reader

aware of the direct application of these issues to his or her own attempts to understand the past.

Similar problems are explicitly demonstrated by Karnau's attempt to piece together the final hours of the Goebbels children in order to identify their murderer. In the final section of the novel (FH 283 – 301), Karnau marshalls a variety of source evidence regarding the murder of the Goebbels children, including the sound recordings made in their bedroom, the interrogation evidence of Dr Kunz (FH 287 – 288; 290 – 292), the telephone operator Mischa (FH 289; 295), the chauffeur Kempka (FH 293; 295), the adjutant Schwägermann (FH 294 – 295) and anonymous others (FH 295), an anonymous "reconstruction" (FH 296), and Helga's postmortem report, including a photograph of her corpse (FH 297 – 299). Karnau also interpolates his own eyewitness testimony of the last days in the bunker (FH 283; 286; 289; 292). However, these sources are all exposed as being incomplete, unreliable or contradictory in some way, something that is underscored by Karnau's use of vocabulary such as "*unerklärlich*" (FH 285; 287) and "*unglaublich*" (FH 296), as well as the large number of question marks scattered throughout the final section of the novel. Except in relation to the file on Helga's autopsy and the accompanying photograph, it is also unclear from the text whether the evidence detailed by Karnau is in documentary form or part of his eyewitness testimony. The evidence given by Kunz, Kempka, and Schwägermann appears to be an interrogation protocol, yet is interspersed with observations as to their appearance and behaviour which suggest that this information may be part of Karnau's eyewitness account. However, this is never made explicit, and it remains unclear whether

Karnau was present at the interrogations detailed or whether he is embellishing a documentary source with his own imagination³⁷⁷.

The end result of Karnau's investigation into the final hours of the Goebbels children reveals the available materials to be disparate, fragmentary, contradictory, and difficult to form into a conclusive and cohesive account. This uncertainty results in an openness which puts the reader in the position of the detective or of the historian trying to make sense of and form a cohesive narrative from the fragmentary evidence available³⁷⁸. The reader mimics the work of the historian in trying to create an image of the past from disparate and contradictory sources and in doing so becomes aware of the limitations of historiography and the role of the historian in creating a historical narrative.

4. Conclusion

As with *Der Vorleser*, *Unschärfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*, *Flughunde* uses metafictional techniques to thematise historiographical questions surrounding matters such as source problems, fact/reality versus fiction/representation,

³⁷⁷ Beyer uses a similar technique of augmenting photographic sources with imagination to produce a narrative about the past in his novel *Spione*. In that novel, a group of third generation cousins create an imagined narrative of the events surrounding the still image captured by a photograph of their grandfather: Beyer, Marcel *Spione* op cit at 16 – 17. On the theme of photography in *Spione*, see Harris, Stefanie "Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer's *Spione*" *Gegenwartsliteratur: A German Studies Yearbook* 4 (2005): 162 - 184; Sicks, Kai M "Die Latenz der Fotografie: Zur Medientheorie des Erinnerns in Marcel Beyers *Spione*" *Monatshefte* 102.1 (2010): 38 - 50.

³⁷⁸ Beyer himself has drawn this link between the role of the reader in *Flughunde* and the way in which the assessment of eyewitness testimonies usually proceeds: "*Der Leser muß entscheiden, wem er glaubt, und sich sein eigenes Bild machen . . . Bei Zeugenaussagen herrscht genau dieses Prinzip. Aus fünfzehn verschiedenen Zeugenaussagen versucht man, ein Bild zu bauen.*": Biendarra, Anke and Wilke, Sabina op cit at 8.

and the narrativity of history. This thematisation of historiographical issues exposes historical sources as fragmentary, open to distortion and prone to at least some degree of unreliability, and raises questions as to our ability to identify the “truth” about the past. The metafictional openness of *Flughunde* and the resulting requirement of reader participation in forming the text particularly encourages scepticism regarding the creation of historical narratives and destabilises any belief that we may be able to form an accurate and objective view of the past.

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

historiographic metafiction has the effect of confirming the portrayal of Karnau as a perpetrator.

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

opacity caused by the emotion of family relationships. Rather than simply reinforcing the dominant public memory paradigm of Germans as perpetrators current at the time of publication, *Flughunde* portrays Karnau as a psychopathic monster who found that Nazism provided the ideal conditions for him to thrive.

VI. CONCLUSION

“Die geschriebene Version wollte geschrieben werden, die vielen anderen wollten es nicht” (DV 205 - 206). Michael’s reflections at the end of *Der Vorleser* draw attention to the possibility of many different, possibly conflicting, “versions” of the past, and indeed, all four novels analysed in this thesis highlight the existence of various, often competing, narratives about historical events. When German authors have dealt with their nation’s Nazi past in novels since 1990, which “version” of German history have they chosen to tell? Have the changes in the political, social and cultural landscape following unification altered German literary approaches to the Nazi past? Has there been a radical change in the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy which has been so central to German discussions about the Nazi period and its extended afterlife? Following on from my analysis of *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper* and *Flughunde*, I draw the following conclusions in relation to the questions posed in the Introduction to this thesis.

As regards the question of whether there is a discernible tendency in the approach taken to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy in the novels, my analysis of all four novels suggests that, regardless of the trends in German public discourse at the time of publication of the different novels, the literary style in which they were written, or the generational perspective of author or narrator, German novels about the Nazi past in the period after 1990 tend to depict Germans in the main as guilty and hence as perpetrators. Whether they are unusual outsiders who participated in the crimes of the SS like Hanna and Karnau, or Germans from the middle of society who participated in the Third

Reich in more minor ways, like Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen, all of them are portrayed in the novels as culpable. This portrayal does not represent a significant departure from the way in which Germans of the Third Reich were portrayed in German literature in the period immediately prior to 1990, as it continues the dominant trend prevalent in genres such as *Väterliteratur*. In this sense, the political, social and cultural changes brought about by unification appear to have had little effect on the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators in literature.

The consistency of the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators across all four novels also indicates that consideration of the Nazi past in German literature in the post-1990 period has mirrored changing trends in public debate in some aspects, but not in others. *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* were published in 1995, at a time when the emphasis in public discussion of the Nazi past in Germany was on Germans as perpetrators. By the time *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* were published in 2003, the focus of public debate had shifted to Germans as victims. The renewed interest in Germans as victims by 2003 did not, however, result in any radical change in literary approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, with the portrayal of Germans as perpetrators remaining steady across all four novels regardless of shifts in the focus of public discourse over the period. Nevertheless, the increased interest in Germans as victims in the early 2000s is reflected in the novels published at that time, in the sense that, whereas both *Unscharfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper* deal with the tropes of the “Germans as victims” discourse, *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* do not. Published in 1995, at a time when the focus was on Germans as perpetrators, *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* both

have first generation characters who do not view themselves as victims. Although Hanna is portrayed as a victim by Michael, it is on the basis of her unusual illiteracy and not because of her wartime suffering. Karnau is similarly not associated with the “Germans as victims” thematic, and the tropes of the discourse are largely absent from both novels. *Unschärfe Bilder* and *Himmelskörper*, on the other hand, both deal with “Germans as victims” tropes, including the wartime suffering of the ordinary German soldier and *Flucht und Vertreibung*, which reflects the public interest in this theme at the time of publication of both novels in 2003. Further, Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen all portray themselves as victims in terms familiar from the “Germans as victims” discourse and common in the accounts of first generation *Zeitzeugen*. However, these self-portrayals are comprehensively undermined in the novels, suggesting that they represent a literary response to contemporary memory contests which turns the focus back towards Germans as perpetrators.

To the extent that there is a substantial difference between pre- and post-1990 novels dealing with the Nazi past, that difference is to be found, not in their approach to the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, but in the different approach taken to literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* by third generation authors. The prevalence of patterns of *Väterliteratur* in *Der Vorleser* and *Unschärfe Bilder* indicates that second generation authors are reluctant to move beyond the confines of the *Väterliteratur* dynamic previously established in novels by their generation. These novels concentrate on the emotionally fraught relationship of the second generation with the first. They are characterised by accusation and the instrumentalisation of the past by the

second generation as a means of defeating their parental figures in their intergenerational conflict. Importantly, the way in which the second generation deals with the Nazi past in these novels is marked by a strong desire to reject the first generation and the implications of their guilt for those who come after. By contrast, the novels by third generation authors have moved away from the *Väterliteratur* model. In its description of the relationship between Renate and her parents, *Himmelskörper* identifies patterns familiar from *Väterliteratur* as a feature of the way in which the second generation deals with its parents, but its third generation characters take a different approach to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Rather than dealing with the past through accusation, conflict, and rejection of the perpetrators, the third generation accepts that the guilt of their grandparents is part of their own identity. They take control of this knowledge by taking the postmemorial approach of integrating it as one part of their wider story. *Flughunde* also turns away from the patterns of *Väterliteratur* by telling the story from the *Täterperspektive* and therefore removing the intergenerational bond entirely, allowing for an even darker portrayal of a Nazi perpetrator. These differences in generational perspective suggest that, to the extent there have been changes in literary *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in German novels since 1990, these changes have arisen, not as a result of unification or contemporary memory contests, but as a result of the coming of age of the third generation and their entry into the literary marketplace.

In relation to the questions about the role of historiographic metafiction explored in this thesis, the analysis shows that critiques of historiography such as those of White have been represented in various ways in all four novels.

The reading of each of these novels as historiographic metafiction has implications for the portrayal of Hanna, Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen, and Karnau. In *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper*, and *Flughunde*, the way in which a reading of the novels as historiographic metafiction questions the reliability of historical sources, including *Zeitzeugen* testimony, and highlights the narrativity of history tends to strengthen the depiction of the first generation characters as perpetrators. This is principally because the main historical narratives undermined by the reflection of critiques of historiography in the novels are those told by the first generation about their own past. The deconstruction of the victimhood narratives of Musbach, Jo and Mäxchen, and of Karnau's attempts to elide his own culpability by the function of the novels as historiographic metafiction supports the portrayal of those characters as perpetrators. By contrast, the effect of reading *Der Vorleser* as historiographic metafiction destabilises the portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator. Although elements of historiographic metafiction in the novel contribute to the undermining of Michael's attempts to exculpate Hanna, they similarly question attempts to depict Hanna as a perpetrator. Unlike Musbach, Karnau, and Jo and Mäxchen, Hanna creates no narrative of her own about the past and therefore no stories of exculpation or victimhood to be undercut by the questions of historiographic metafiction. This openness in Hanna's character combines with the role of historiographic metafiction and the novel's critique of judicial *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* to undermine the novel's portrayal of Hanna as a perpetrator. The way in which historiographic metafiction acts to destabilise, rather than confirm, the depiction of Hanna as a perpetrator may well be a factor contributing to the greater level of

controversy generated by *Der Vorleser* in comparison with the other novels. The demonstration of the relevance of historiographic metafiction to *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* in German novels since 1990, and particularly to the presentation of the perpetrator/victim dichotomy, will hopefully spur others on to further analysis in what is currently an under-researched area.

Which “*Version wollte geschrieben werden*”? Which “version” of the Nazi past have the authors of German novels after 1990 chosen to tell? The examination of *Der Vorleser*, *Unscharfe Bilder*, *Himmelskörper* and *Flughunde* in this thesis indicates that the story they choose to tell is one in keeping with the dominant public memory paradigm in which there is “*keine deutsche Identität ohne Auschwitz*” and expressing the “*immerwährende Verantwortung*” to keep the memory of German guilt alive.

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