

Memory and Representation of World War II in Contemporary British and German Fiction: a Comparative Analysis

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Abstract

Memory and Representation of World War II in Contemporary British and German Fiction: a Comparative Analysis

This thesis constitutes the first detailed attempt to compare British and German contemporary prose fiction in relation to the representation and transmission of collective memories of the Second World War. The primary aim of this comparison is to establish the existence of a transnational literary approach adopted by authors to address questions of how to remember the events that occurred during the Second World War in the absence of living memory. I will argue that prose fiction contributes to the interdisciplinary field of what could be loosely called 'memory studies' and that the similarities between British and German fictional responses to the Second World War indicate that there is a development towards a subgenre of *memory fiction* that transcends national boundaries.

In my thesis, I have compared numerous contemporary examples of 'memory' fiction in Britain and Germany. These are: Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde* [The Karnau Tapes] and *Spione* [Spies], Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder* [Blurred Images], Dagmar Leupold's *Nach den Kriegen* [After the Wars], Thomas Medicus's *In den Augen meines Großvaters* [In the Eyes of my Grandfather], and Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* [The Reader], Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow*, Justin Cartwright's *The Song Before it's Sung*, Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs*, A. L. Kennedy's *Day*, Liz Jensen's *War Crimes for the Home*, Graham Swift's *Shuttlecock* and *Out of this World*. The texts were chosen on the basis that they are all examples of 'memory' fiction, a sub-genre of historical fiction which is mainly concerned with a self-reflexive representation of processes of collective remembering in the context of the legacy of the Second World War in the contemporary memory culture of the United Kingdom and Germany. My thesis compares these novels exploring absent memories, the relationship between 'private' and 'public' memory discourses, as well as memories of perpetration and guilt. It will show that aesthetic and thematic similarities are striking considering the differences in the national memory discourses of both countries and lead to the conclusion that we can see a development towards a subgenre of *memory fiction* beyond national boundaries.

Translations

All the translations in this thesis from German primary and secondary sources have been done by the author of this thesis. Below you will find a table including the translations of the German titles of my primary texts.

Author	German Title	English Title
Marcel Beyer	<i>Flughunde</i>	The Karnau Tapes
	<i>Spione</i>	Spies
Tanja Dückers	<i>Himmelskörper</i>	Heavenly Bodies
Günter Grass	<i>Im Krebsgang</i>	Crabwalk
Ulla Hahn	<i>Unscharfe Bilder</i>	Blurred Images
Dagmar Leupold	<i>Nach den Kriegen</i>	After the Wars
Thomas Medicus	<i>In den Augen meines Großvaters</i>	In the Eyes of my Grandfather
Klaus Modick	<i>Der Kretische Gast</i>	The Cretan Guest
Bernhard Schlink	<i>Der Vorleser</i>	The Reader
	<i>Die Heimkehr</i>	Homecoming
Uwe Timm	<i>Am Beispiel meines Bruders</i>	In my Brother's Shadow
Hans-Ulrich Treichel	<i>Der Verlorene</i>	The Lost
Stephan Wackwitz	<i>Ein unsichtbares Land</i>	Invisible Country

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Chapter One

Introduction

This thesis constitutes the first detailed attempt to compare British and German contemporary prose fiction in relation to the representation and transmission of collective memories of the Second World War. The primary aim of this comparison is to establish the existence of a transnational literary approach adopted by authors to address questions of how to remember the events that occurred during the Second World War in the absence of living memory. I will argue that prose fiction contributes to the interdisciplinary field of what could be loosely called 'memory studies' and that the similarities between British and German fictional responses to the Second World War indicate that there is a development towards a subgenre of *memory fiction* that transcends national boundaries.

The war and its aftermath have been a subject in British and German prose fiction alike since the early post-war era. There are countless fictional texts that are set during the war or that directly address its consequences. I would like to demonstrate that examples of *memory fiction* written in the last two decades differ significantly to previous representations of the war, often presenting a pluralist notion of 'collective memories' based a sense of secondary witnessing by the post-war generations. The recent emphasis on diverse memory discourses has caused critics to question single 'national' memory narratives. Kathryn N. Jones emphasises this point when she argues that in recent years:

critics have called homogenizing concepts of monolithic, 'national' memories into question, and instead have emphasised the plurality of ways in which individuals, groups, communities, and nations remember.¹

Monolithic national memory discourses are being slowly replaced by a more pluralistic approach in which issues of guilt, perpetration and victimhood become evermore relevant within fictional representation. Thus, the following thesis will aim to examine, through the close reading of British and German examples of *memory fiction*, a number of similarities such as the problem of absent memories, unresolved

¹ Kathryn N. Jones, *Journeys of Remembrance: Memories of the Second World War in French and German Literature, 1960-1980*, p. 6.

memories relating to guilt and trauma, and the complex relationship between 'private' and 'public' memory discourses. It will also examine to what extent these can be seen as the basis of a development towards a 'transnational' literary approach to collective memories of the war, despite clear distinctions between the national discourses of memorialisation. As Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad have observed in the Introduction to their edited volume *Memory in a Global Age*:

While some memories are currently anchored on a national level in museums and monuments, others are exported across national boundaries.²

This supports the notion that collective memories are not solely to be found within the limits of national 'public' and 'private' discourses, but rather that some have moved into transnational discourses. I would like to argue that this process of 'transnationalisation' of discourses can be found within the aesthetic fictional representation of Second World War memories.

Furthermore, during the early post-war era fictional representations of the war largely dealt with first-hand memories of people who experienced its terror. Texts such as, for example, Evelyn Waugh's *Sword of Honour* trilogy (published 1952 - 1961) and Lothar-Günther Buchheim's *Das Boot* [The Boat, 1973] echo the authors' own wartime experiences. As living memory gradually disappears, the focus of *memory fiction* has shifted from testimony to the transmission of memories and the problematic nature of these 'second-hand' memories. Many contemporary literary representations of the war in Britain and Germany thus focus on making the events 'meaningful and memorable' for post-war generations, rather than on portrayal of first-hand memories and testimonies.³

Indeed, some scholars today are arguing the possibility of a paradigm shift in contemporary historical fiction, away from questioning historiography and its problems of objectivity and truth towards a pluralistic notion of memory that contributes to defining a sense of identity.⁴ As Christoph Henke puts it:

² Aleida Assmann and Sebastian Conrad (eds.). *Memory in a Global Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), p. 6.

³ Richard Crownshaw, *The Afterlife of Holocaust Memory in Contemporary Literature and Culture* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010) p. vi.

⁴ Birgit Neumann, 'Fictions of Memory: Erinnerung und Identität im englischsprachigen Gegenwartsroman', *Literatur in Wissenschaft und Unterricht*, 37 (2004), 333-360 (p. 336).

Most recently the focus seems to have shifted, in [...] literary fiction from history to memory, and along with it, to questions of identity, be it individual, collective, national or cultural.⁵

We can find a large number of fictional texts that deal with memories of individuals and groups, questions of how they remember, what is remembered and what is forgotten, and how memories constitute identities of individuals, groups, and even nations. Moreover, one continuously encounters the problematic notion of transmitting traumatic memories to the following generations in some form of 'secondary witnessing'.

In her essay on identity and memory in English-speaking contemporary fiction, Birgit Neumann argues that there is such a high volume of contemporary novels dealing with memory that one can speak of the 'Entstehung einer neuen, veritablen Gedächtnisgattung' ['the development of a new, veritable category of memory'].⁶ She defines this new development as *Fictions of Memory*, literary texts which are interwoven with the cultural concepts and constructions of memory and identity. Such texts as described by Neumann not only represent the memories of a culture but they also retroact with these and thereby assist in the construction of memories and identity. Based on this shift of emphasis, this study will establish the possibility of *memory fiction* as a subgenre of historical fiction, its specificity being, on the one hand, to 'cut through forms and practices of remembering' and, on the other, to make these 'forms and practices of social memory its object of study'.⁷ Thus, these *memory fictions* are not only a mere representation of divergent forms of memorialisation but also have the ability to critically examine or actively shape the intergenerational transmission of wartime memories.

The authors to be examined and compared are Martin Amis, Marcel Beyer, Justin Cartwright, Ulla Hahn, Liz Jensen, A.L Kennedy, Dagmar Leupold, Thomas Medicus, Ian McEwan, and Bernhard Schlink. Reading and comparing their works in this thesis as *memory fiction* presents new interpretive possibilities with a focus on

⁵ Christoph Henke, 'Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction', *Fictions of Memory. Journal for the Study of British Culture*, 10 (2003), 77-100 (p.78).

⁶ Birgit Neumann, 'Fictions of Memory: Erinnerung und Identität im englischsprachigen Gegenwartsroman', p. 333.

⁷ Helmut Peitsch, 'Introduction: Studying European Literary Memories', in *European Memories of the Second World War*, ed. by Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett, and Claire Gorrara (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999.), p.xix.

aesthetic representations of memories and questions of how to remember the trauma of the war and the Holocaust. They belong to an increasing number of contemporary authors emphasising and critically exploring private and public memories of the war, taking into account the ever-widening gap between the traumatic events and the present, as well as the slow disappearance of living memories. They include numerous views on ongoing memory debates, asking questions of how memories are transmitted within social frameworks, and problematise the possibility of ‘secondary witnessing’. Their texts, furthermore, illustrate the interdependence between aesthetic representations of memory and the ongoing complexities within the many discussions of the notion of collective memory.

Memory in a Time of Transition

At this point it is appropriate to investigate where this almost “obsessive” interest in the processes of memory and the war is coming from, as well as the wider theoretical implications this has for the literary representation of memories of the war. Critics such as Andreas Huyssen, Kerwin Lee Klein, Susannah Radstone, and Anne Whitehead argue that we are currently experiencing a ‘boom’ in the subject of *memory* and *collective memory*.⁸ This latest ‘boom’ is shaped by the horrors of the war and, most notably, the Holocaust. The increasing awareness about the scale of the atrocities and its seemingly limitless human degradation has ‘permanently altered the moral, intellectual, and aesthetic climate’ in which post-war authors attempted to write about the Second World War and its lasting effect.⁹ William Cloonan reflects on the widely held belief that the ‘knowledge of the Final Solution challenged long-held assumptions about human decency and the possibility of progress in mutual understanding; it questioned the value of Enlightenment heritage, and for some, it even created a caesura in history.’¹⁰

Furthermore, the 2005 acts of commemoration to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War and the liberation of Auschwitz illustrate the centrality of the war in memory discourses in Germany and the United

⁸ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), Kerwin Lee Klein, ‘On the Emergence of *Memory* in Historical Discourse’, *Representations*, 69 (2000), 127-150, Susannah Radstone, ‘Working with Memory: an Introduction’, in *Memory and Methodology*, ed. by Susannah Radstone (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2000) pp. 1-24, Anne Whitehead, *Memory* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008).

⁹ William Cloonan, *The Writing of War: French and German Fiction of World War II* (Gainesville, FA: University Press of Florida, 1999), p. 1.

¹⁰ William Cloonan, *The Writing of War: French and German Fiction of World War II*, pp. 1 - 2.

Kingdom. These commemorations are examples of the lasting strength of the current 'boom' in memory. In Germany the opening of the much debated *Denkmal for die ermordeten Juden Europas* [Monument for the murdered Jews in Europe] coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. In the United Kingdom an annual national memorial day was hosted in London entitled *Survivors, Liberation and Rebuilding Lives*, for this particular anniversary. Moreover, London saw a VE day commemoration, including pageantry, memorial fly-pasts, and parades by veterans. These commemorations illustrate the differences between the two countries' wartime experience, Britain as one of the victorious nations fighting a so-called 'good war' and Germany as the perpetrator nation. Yet despite these differences, post-war generations in Britain and Germany alike grew up with the continuing presence of memories of the war, even if more recent events such as the Falkland and Gulf wars, in the case of Britain, and the fall of the Berlin Wall and subsequent reunification, in the case of Germany, have also entered the national memory.

In both memory cultures there is an acute awareness that we are currently witnessing the last anniversaries in which the eye-witnesses of the war are able to participate and to share their memories. This awareness leads to the paradoxical situation of 'fearing' memory loss, on the one hand, and the 'booming' debates about collective memories of the war on the other. According to the cultural critic Jan Assmann we are living through a period of transition in which the 'communicative memory' of the war is gradually being absorbed into the realm of 'cultural memory'.¹¹ For Assmann, communicative memory refers to an individual's shared experience of everyday life and is, thus, an interactive memory. It is dependent on the interaction between the members of various generations living together in a social framework. This means, with regards to the Second World War, the communication between the so-called witness generations and the following generations. Communicative memory, in contrast to cultural memory, is the short-term memory of a society; it is dependent on the existence of the surviving witnesses to an historical event and lasts for about eighty years, or approximately four generations; it is very personal and exists in smaller social groups such as the

¹¹ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in den frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1992), p. 50.

family.¹² On the other hand, the term cultural memory is defined by Assmann as a ‘Sammelbegriff für alles Wissen, dass im spezifischen Interaktionsrahmen einer Gesellschaft Handeln und Erleben steuert und von Generation zu Generation zur wiederholten Einübung und Einweisung ansteht’ [‘collective term for all knowledge that, within a specific framework, governs action and experience in a society and is applied through repeated instruction and exercise from generation to generation’].¹³

Cultural Memory, therefore, stands for all knowledge that is specifically linked to the interactions of a society that controls its actions and experiences and that needs to be learned by each generation:

Im Gegensatz zum kommunikativen Gedächtnis spricht sich das kulturelle nicht von selbst herum, sondern bedarf sorgfältiger Einweisungen. Dadurch kommt eine Kontrolle der Verbreitung zustande, die einerseits auf die Pflicht zur Teilhabe dringt and andererseits das Recht auf Teilhabe vorenthält.

Contrary to communicative memory, cultural memory is not just passed on, but requires careful instruction. By this means, a control of dissemination takes place which, on the one hand, urges the duty of participation and, on the other, the right to withhold participation¹⁴

Cultural memory is hence in need of careful and detailed instruction through various institutionalised means. In that respect, one could also understand the two types of memory as the collective memories of smaller private groups on the one hand, and larger public social groups on the other. Every member of a society has, to some extent, knowledge of both forms of memory. The main function of cultural memory is therefore to provide human societies with the means to maintain their cultures consistently through the generations. We are, according to Assmann, dealing with a ‘collective concept for all knowledge that directs behaviour and experience in the interactive framework of a society and one that obtains through generations in repeated societal practice and initiation’.¹⁵ Therefore cultural memory is developed as a longer-lasting replacement to communicative memory. However, both kinds of memory are socially mediated and relate to a larger group.

¹² Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in den frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1992), p. 50.

¹³ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, p. 52.

¹⁴ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis*, pp. 54 - 55.

¹⁵ Jan Assmann, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural Identity’, *New German Critique*, 65, (1995), trans. by John Czaplicka, 125 - 133, (p. 126).

A result of this transitional period, so aptly described by Assmann, is the fear in British and German memory cultures of the 'absence of memory' due to the loss of the eye-witness generations. Responding to this problem is Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory. She writes in her work *Family Frames*:

Postmemory is distinguished from memory by generational distance and from history by deep personal connection. Postmemory is a powerful and very particular form of memory because its connection to its object and source is mediated not through recollection but through an imaginative investment and creation.¹⁶

Here, postmemory effectively becomes a replacement for the 'lived' first-hand memories of the eye-witness generation. Hirsch specifically relates her theory to the children of Holocaust survivors and their relationship to the traumatic experiences of their parents. Postmemory describes 'experiences that they [children of survivors] "remember" only as the narratives and images with which they grew up, but that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right'.¹⁷ Hirsch is therefore implying a transmission of memories between the generations, creating the deep personal connection to a past that has not been lived.

Richard Crownshaw has observed that Hirsch broadens the application of this concept of 'familial inheritance' to a 'more general cultural inheritance that can transcend ethnic or national boundaries'.¹⁸ This allows the term to be applied outside the realms of Holocaust memory, justifying the usage of postmemory for other groups traumatised by the past of their forefathers. Especially in relation to memories of the Second World War, the term can be of use in describing the experience of other groups such as the children of 'perpetrators', 'victims' and other memories describing the events surrounding the conflict. Crownshaw believes that postmemory can effectively be described as the 'retrospective witnessing by adoption'.¹⁹ Members of the post-war generations thus adopt the experiences of the witness generation and use them as a part in their identity formation.

¹⁶ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames .Photography, Narrative and Postmemory* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard UP, 1997), p. 22.

¹⁷ Marianne Hirsch, 'Surviving Images: Holocaust Photography and the Work of Postmemory', *Yale Journal of Criticism*, 12 (Spring 2001), 5 - 37 (p. 9).

¹⁸ Richard Crownshaw, 'Reconsidering Postmemory: Photography, the Archive, and Post-Holocaust Memory in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*', *Mosaic: a Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature*, 37.4 (Winter 2004), 215 - 237 (p.215).

¹⁹ Richard Crownshaw, 'Reconsidering Postmemory: Photography, the Archive, and Post-Holocaust Memory in W.G. Sebald's *Austerlitz*', p. 215.

Hirsch's theory can be seen as a response to the transition from 'communicative' to 'cultural' memory. It highlights issues of memory transmission between the generations and is therefore particularly apt owing to the disappearance of 'first-hand' memories. Furthermore, postmemory becomes a highly mediated act of remembering that is to a large degree based on the imaginative representation of 'second-hand' memories. The cultural critic Andreas Huyssen has emphasised this interdependence of memory and representation, arguing that any form of representation – whether in narrative, image, or language – requires an act of memory and vice versa.²⁰

The resonance of these theoretical considerations is twofold. Firstly, they fittingly describe the transitional period in which current memory discourses about the war are set, as well as issues of transmission and representation of collective memories. The novels to be analysed do not exist independently of this transitional period. They are, at least to a certain degree, influenced by current memory discourses. It is therefore helpful to establish the main threads of current theoretical thinking relevant to the comparative reading of the primary texts. Secondly, they provide us with the necessary vocabulary for the analysis of the primary texts as examples of *memory fiction*. Taking into account the latter point, I will employ these theoretical considerations as tools for the further analysis of the primary texts. For example, many of the narratives discussed in this thesis represent a 'postmemorial' engagement with the past due to the generational distance between the protagonists and the events themselves. Employing Hirsch's theory for the reading of such texts helps us to recognise these instances of 'postmemory' within the aesthetic frameworks of the primary texts. In other words, these theories are used to understand and categorise the processes of memory represented in the aesthetic frameworks of the primary texts.

Furthermore, the primary novels also critically assess processes of remembering and thereby extend as well as complicate the theoretical tools themselves. As we shall see, Marcel Beyer's *Spione* does not simply represent the narrator's attempts in filling the gaps of absent family memory; it also problematises these attempts and, ultimately, their failure.

²⁰ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia* (New York and London: Routledge, 1995), p. 2.

It will not be the aim of this thesis to prove whether these novels readily take up the wider theoretical trends of the current memory boom. Furthermore, this thesis will not venture to establish whether the primary texts, grouped under the term *memory fiction*, are fictional implementations of social and cultural theories of collective memories. On the contrary, it is questionable whether the authors to be discussed are even aware of these memory theories. However, the theoretical background is deemed necessary as a key to re-evaluate methods employed by the authors in their aesthetic rendering of memory. All the primary texts to be analysed in this thesis, whether intentionally or unintentionally, deal with aspects of current memory debates. Within their narrative frameworks these *memory fictions*, often self-reflexively, thematise processes of remembering, encounter problems of recovering lost memories, investigate possible discrepancies between ‘private’ and ‘public’ collective memories, and illustrate the importance of memory for the characters’ identity formations. It should not be overlooked that the literary texts are created within a similar discursive environment to the theoretical assumptions on memory. Astrid Erll underlines this assumption when she writes that:

Literary versions of collective memory are culture-specific in the sense that they are created in a context of cultural configurations of collective memory, contexts of discursive constructions of communicative, cultural, and reflexive patterns of remembering.²¹

In essence, it can be argued that literary representations of processes of collective remembering are created within the same cultural context as the sociological and cultural theories which attempt to explain the phenomena of collective memory.

Comparing National Memory Discourses

The German novels which have been chosen for this comparative study have all been produced in the post-unification era, reflecting German memory debates after the reunification of the FRG and the GDR. There have, of course, been fictional responses to the Second World War in both German states prior to the 1990s as well as important debates on the notion of memory, most notably the infamous *Historikerstreit* [‘historian’s controversy’] in Western Germany. However, critics such as Bill Niven have emphasised that there had been a significant ‘political

²¹ Astrid Erll, ‘The Great War Remembered’, in *Fictions of Memory. Journal for the Study of British Culture*, 10 (2003), 49 – 76 (p. 67).

functionalisation of memory' in East and pre-1990 West Germany due to the political divide of the different blocs.²² He further argues that this, at times, 'resulted in the distorted and manipulative representation of themes such as bombing and expulsion'.²³ The GDR, in particular, saw itself as an anti-fascist state and therefore, arguably, only made limited attempts to officially deal with responsibility for the Nazi legacy. In the FRG the dominant discourse centred around German guilt and perpetration only gradually evolved in the wake of events such as the Frankfurt trials, the 1968 student revolt, Willy Brandt's seminal 'Kniefall' in front of the monument commemorating the victims of the Warsaw Ghetto uprising, and the influence of Holocaust representations (particularly the Hollywood mini-series 'Holocaust' broadcasted to West German audiences in the late 1970s). However, this perpetrator-centred discourse was by no means cemented into West German identity, as demonstrated in the 1980s by the controversy around Kohl's and Reagan's visit to the Bitburg military cemetery and the fiercely argued *Historikerstreit* ['historian's controversy']. German reunification constituted the natural end of this political rivalry between East and West German memory discourses.²⁴

From 1990 onwards the newly reunified Germany was able to re-evaluate its responsibility for the Nazi past as well as the discourse on memories of German suffering. What followed initially was a concentration on the issue of German perpetration and guilt as well as Jewish victimhood, illustrated by a number of important memory debates such as the discussions around Goldhagen's popular work *Hitler's Willing Executioners*, the debates following the 'Crimes of the *Wehrmacht*' exhibition, and the plans for the construction of the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin. These important debates on German perpetration and guilt characterise the German memory culture of the 1990s and happened despite political attempts to reinscribe a 'universalising approach on victimhood' with the reconstruction of the *Neue Wache* [New Guardhouse] in 1993.²⁵ The *Neue Wache* represents one such attempt to re-establish the newly unified German national identity on the basis of a universalised approach towards suffering during the Second World War which nevertheless places German suffering above that of all other groups. However, despite the concentrated

²² Bill Niven, 'Introduction: German Victimhood at the Turn of the Millennium', in: *Germans as Victims*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.4.

²³ Bill Niven, 'Introduction: German Victimhood at the Turn of the Millennium', p.4.

²⁴ Bill Niven, 'Introduction: German Victimhood at the Turn of the Millennium', p.1.

²⁵ Bill Niven, 'Introduction: German Victimhood at the Turn of the Millennium', p.7.

focus on German perpetration in the 1990s, the memory of German suffering reasserted itself, particularly with regard to the aerial bombardment of Germany and the expulsion of Germans from the East, and to the problem of empathy. There is a notion of a discrepancy between German public memory discourses, focussing on the Holocaust and Nazi crimes, and the private memories of a number of families focussing on German suffering during the Second World War. It can be highlighted with reference to the various memory debates since the 1990s - most notably the debate instigated by W.G. Sebald on the legacy of the air war.²⁶ Memories which have been discussed privately resurfaced and entered the public domain on a larger scale than before.

Within German families, memories of suffering have often been passed on orally, focussing on the effects of the bombings of German cities, flight, expulsion and mass rape. Indeed, as is illustrated in the sociological study of intergenerational memory and communication, *Opa war kein Nazi* (Grandad was not a Nazi, 2002), atrocities committed by close family members were often ignored, if mentioned at all:

Während die kollektive Erinnerung den Holocaust und die nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen ins Zentrum stellt, kreist die private Erinnerung in Familien um das Leiden der Angehörigen im Krieg, um mühseliges Überleben in schlechten Zeiten und die persönliche Integrität in düsterer Zeit.

Whilst the collective memory focuses on the Holocaust and the NS crimes, private memories of families evolve around the suffering of family members in the war, the arduous fight for survival in terrible times and personal integrity during a dark era.²⁷

Since then there have been a number of publications on German suffering – of which Jörg Friedrich's *Der Brand* (The Fire, 2002) was probably the most controversial. Bill Niven writes that there is a 'danger of universalisation' but that for 'all the tendency towards uncritical empathy within German victimhood, then, the theme is nevertheless subject to a genuine discourse in Germany in which different views compete for public attention'.²⁸ Thus, the discourse on suffering, so-far considered as a domain of revisionist right-wing historians, is becoming part of Germany's

²⁶ See W. G. Sebald, *On the Natural History of Destruction* (London: Penguin, 2004).

²⁷ Harald Welzer and others, *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, p. 53.

²⁸ Bill Niven ed. *Germans as Victims* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p.18.

mainstream memory culture, causing a polarisation between victim-centred and perpetrator-centred memory.

The current status of German memory culture is one of finding the right balance between the perpetrator- and the victimhood-centred discourses. This situation is very aptly described by what Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove define as ‘memory contests’:

the term memory contests puts emphasis on the pluralistic memory culture which does not enshrine a particular normative understanding of the past but embraces the idea that individuals and groups advance and edit competing stories about themselves and their changing sense of identity. The notion of memory contests thus gives expression to the fact that memories always offer heavily edited versions of selves, of groups and of their worlds.²⁹

The emphasis here is on a pluralistic notion of memory culture that allows both discourses to coexist. While it describes the current situation of German memory culture, it evades the question of the right balance between the two discourses. This is something that will be discussed in the closer analysis of the texts by the German authors. Consequently, the thesis has chosen to analyse only post-unification German prose fiction in order to avoid the problem of the highly politicised rivalry between East and West German memory discourses.

In contrast to German memory culture, in which private memories of suffering and public memories of guilt are often in conflict, it seems that British memory culture is far more stable. The general assumption that Britain fought and came out victorious in a ‘good war’ by achieving national unity in a calamitous situation, is still prevalent today and only rarely contested in public memory discourses.³⁰ The myth of the ‘People’s War’, as Angus Calder argues,

became current early on, defining the sense that rich and poor, civilians and fighters, were all “in it together”, that privilege was or should be in abeyance and that even conscripted effort had a voluntary character.³¹

This myth of the ‘People’s War’ has become the dominant narrative in post-war British cultural memory for a number of political reasons. It was used to support the

²⁹ Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote eds. *German Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), p.9.

³⁰ Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes: On War, Memory and Representation* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2004), p. 61.

³¹ Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes: On War, Memory and Representation*, p. 61.

implementation of social changes domestically. Inscribing it into the broader framework of cultural memory, however, did have some unwanted side-effects. Historians and cultural critics such as Angus Calder, Lucy Noakes, and Eve Patten argue that the dominance of the myth of the 'People's War' in British memory culture has caused a bizarre rift between private and public memory: private narratives of loss and suffering have been marginalised due to the feel-good factor of victory in the 'People's War'. Mark Connelly argues as follows:

The British myth of the Second World War is public and shared and has its own conventions. Public representations and memorials generalise the experience and form categories in which people can organise their memories, thus creating a self-perpetuating phenomenon and experience. It is a memory which tends to marginalise moments of misery, fear and loss and value episodes of bravery, resolution and humour. But the memory is not inaccurate, it simply emphasises certain elements.³²

The facts about the suffering endured during the Blitz, the early technical inferiority of the British army, the threat of industrial action, and the inequality between the classes, are, of course, documented and accepted by historians and sociologists alike. However, they are situated within an essentially positive public memory of the Second World War. For example, even today the evacuation of Dunkirk is celebrated as the result of British ingenuity and improvisation. While this view is certainly true to a considerable extent, it nevertheless hides the fact that a disastrous military campaign preceded the evacuation. Furthermore, the public memory of the people of London carrying on with their daily routine despite the bombing of the *Luftwaffe* marginalises the traumatic loss of homes and lives suffered by the population. These rather more traumatic memories remained within the privacy of the family 'album' instead of finding their way into the realms of public memory. Lucy Noakes maintains that 'public commemorations of the war illustrate both the continuing importance of the Second World War to British nationhood, and the ways in which some images and memories of the war have become marginalised'.³³ Angus Calder further refers to this phenomenon when he writes:

It is not at all strange or discreditable that the less attractive features of life in Britain and in the armed forces were not given prominence

³² Mark Connelly, *We Can Take It! Britain and the Memory of the Second World War*, p.5.

³³ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London and New York: Tauris, 1998), p. 2.

during the war. What is odder, both symptomatic and causative in relation to national complacency, is the shortage of really impressive works of art handling such subjects in the decades since.³⁴

Indeed, the myths created during the war to foster unity and keep up morale among the British population have since been turned into a ‘narrative of remembrance’.³⁵ Eve Patten interprets the 1995 VE Day, where many of the festivities were designed to mimic the emotions of the original victory celebrations, as the height of the public ‘narrative of memory’ based on the British myths.³⁶ The celebrations were the nostalgic accumulation of public memories of victory in what is perceived as a ‘good war’. This particular memory narrative of victory, however, caused a selective collective amnesia, pushing private memories of loss, suffering and shame to the margins of the public memory discourse.

However, as Keith A. Crawford and Stuart J. Foster have argued, when a socially constructed collective memory is assumed to exist, one must also acknowledge the existence of alternative and often competing sets of collective memories.³⁷ This is certainly true with regards to the fierce memory debates within post-1990 Germany. In contemporary Britain, however, commemorative events such as the 2005 VE-Day celebrations were a vivid manifestation that the memories embodied by the myth of the war are still dominant. This dominance, however, is slowly being eroded by the internationalisation of memory discourses and individual memories of loss and trauma, previously submerged under the dominant narratives of the myth. This leads Eve Patten to argue that there exists a ‘tension between private memory and public recollection’ in Britain since the end of the Second World War.³⁸ There is no doubt that the collective memory of the war in Britain is not static, and we have been witnessing more and more critical debates on memory. These are less intense than in Germany, but they happen nevertheless. What emerges is a less monolithic memory culture in both countries opening the discourse to an array of, sometimes conflicting, memory debates.³⁹

³⁴ Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes: On War, Memory, and Representation*, p. 68.

³⁵ Eve Patten, ‘Private Memory, Public Recollection: Narratives of the Second World War’, p. 29.

³⁶ Eve Patten, ‘Private Memory, Public Recollection: Narratives of the Second World War’, p. 32.

³⁷ Keith A. Crawford and Stuart J. Foster, *War, Nation, Memory – International Perspectives on World War II in School Textbooks* (London: Information Age Publishing, 2008), p. 6.

³⁸ Eve Patten, ‘Private Memory, Public Recollection: Narratives of the Second World War’, in: *Narratives of Rememberance*, ed. by Marianne Børch (Odense: Odense UP, 2001) pp. 21-36 (p.34).

³⁹ See Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger, ‘Introduction’, in *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 1 - 14; Eve Patten, ‘Private Memory, Public Recollection: Narratives of the Second World

The British texts chosen for in this thesis largely fall into a similar time frame having been published during the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century, with two notable exceptions. The works by Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock* and *Out of this World*, were published in 1982 and 1988 respectively. Both these texts represent important early evaluations of the notion of memory and the Second World War. These exceptions can be justified, as Britain has a far more stable national memory of the Second World War that does not entail the problem of two differing memory discourses as is the case in Germany. Furthermore, the thesis will argue that the recent 'boom' of academic and cultural interest in the subject of memory began in the 1970s, so that the above texts fall within the framework of the latest international trend with regards to the focus on the concept of memory.

This thesis will analyse the fictional responses by British and German authors to these problems and examine the similarities and differences in the approaches they employ to address and problematise these issues. It is the underlying hypothesis of this work that the markers of difference between British and German contemporary fiction representing the memories of the Second World War are no longer as important as the similarities. Indeed one can say that Britain and Germany are polarised at the opposite ends of a spectrum of comparison with regards to memories of the war, be they individual or collective. Consequently one would assume that contemporary fictional texts produced in Britain and Germany would provide the reader with different representations and memories of the event, dictated by the oppositional nature of the respective country's memory discourses as well as ongoing memory debates.⁴⁰ Yet, despite the different national discourses, this study will establish that there are some meaningful similarities to be found by the comparative analysis of literary representations of memories and the processes of remembering in Britain and Germany. As Kathryn N. Jones argues in her comparison of French and German literature representing the Second World War in the 1960s and 1970s

War', in: *Narratives of Remembrance*, ed. by Marianne Børch (Odense: Odense UP, 2001) pp. 21-36; and Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (eds.), *German Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006).

⁴⁰ I am referring here to past and present debates on how to remember the Second World War in the national discourses in Britain and Germany. For example the recent debates about the 'Crimes of the Wehrmacht' exhibition, the Holocaust Memorial in Berlin, the statue of Sir Arthur Harris at Whitehall, debates on the representation of the Holocaust and other Nazi crimes, the air war and German victimhood, and others.

although similar events of the Second World War were experienced very differently by each country, these nations share common cultural and historical references derived from the war.⁴¹

This certainly is the case not only in a Franco-German context but also in an Anglo-German context. The Second World War remains an important topic in the cultural memory of both Britain and Germany and is reflected upon in prose fiction to this day.

History, Memory, and Fiction

It is ever more evident that the experience of the war is discussed under the more elusive banner of 'memory' rather than 'history'. A major factor in this shift of emphasis is the widening gap between the traumatic events and the present, 'which has necessitated increasing efforts to remember and commemorate through memorials, exhibitions, special holidays or 'memory projects', such as archives and databases of Holocaust survivor testimonies and related historical documents'.⁴² This shift seems at first to be minor considering that the two concepts are essentially linked. The historian who researches the past and thereby creates a narrative of long-gone events based on historical facts does this, at least to some degree, to keep the memory of this event alive. Yet the empirical process of historical research differs from memory as an act of realisation of a specific historical experience.⁴³ While historical research focuses on the empirical facts surrounding the historical event, memory focuses on a continuous and never-ending process of realising and visualising the events of the past. Today's emphasis on memories of the war favours a greater interest in processes of remembering instead of detailed historical facts. This does not mean that history has become obsolete but the emphasis is clearly on the notion of what is and should be remembered and how we remember these events within society. James E. Young argues that the period of the Holocaust is today shaped by 'the survivors' diaries and memoirs, in their children's films and novels, public memory of this time is being molded in a proliferating number of memorial

⁴¹ Kathryn N. Jones, *Journeys of Remembrance: Memories of the Second World War in French and German Literature, 1960-1980* (London: Legenda, 2007), p. 3.

⁴² Christoph Henke, 'Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction', p. 78.

⁴³ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 23.

images and spaces'.⁴⁴ Accordingly, society's notion of the war and the Holocaust is directly shaped by its collective memories of the event through various media of memory in the form of memoirs, literary texts, and memorial sites. He further argues that these acts of memorialisation are 'never shaped in a vacuum; are never pure'.⁴⁵ He implies that acts of remembering are always conducted within a number of collective social frameworks including national myths, personal experiences, history, ideals, and political needs.⁴⁶ Thus, the reference point for the historian is always the past while the act of remembering takes place within the social and cultural frameworks of the present. Memory thereby becomes an amalgamation of past experiences and the need to understand these experiences within the cultural frameworks of the present. Consequently, the terms 'memory' and 'collective memory' are becoming increasingly relevant when discussing the events and experiences of the war today. Thus, calls for remembrance and discussions about collective memories of the war are taking place on an international scale, much in the same way as the conflict itself has impacted on people beyond many national boundaries. It comes as no great surprise that literary texts in both Britain and Germany have begun to reflect on questions of memory in connection with the war. Other disciplines such as for example historiography in the form of 'oral history', sociology and cultural studies, with the focus on issues of collective and cultural memory, have also addressed issues of memory.⁴⁷ Indeed, there are countless theoretical approaches to the term 'memory' and 'collective memory' leading to myriad definitions that at times lack cohesion. The danger here is that this constant usage of the term 'memory', at times, leads almost to it being employed as some kind of 'mantra' that lacks historical contextualisation.

We have also witnessed the postmodern renunciation of what Jean-Francois Lyotard calls 'grand-narratives' (the overarching narratives of modernity that construct accounts of society and historical progress) which result in the pluralisation of historical narratives.⁴⁸ The historian Hayden White refers to this process as

⁴⁴ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1993), p. 1.

⁴⁵ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. 2.

⁴⁶ James E. Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p.1.

⁴⁷ Christoph Henke, 'Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction', p. 78.

⁴⁸ Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. by Geoffrey Bennington and Brian Massumi (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 35 - 36.

'historical pluralism'.⁴⁹ According to White's theory, differing accounts of historical events can no longer be deemed true or false regarding their place within a historical grand narrative. A similar kind of 'pluralism' can be found within the realms of 'memory studies', especially in Germany, where differing individual and group memories find entry and contest each other in an inclusive and pluralistic collective memory.⁵⁰ Collective memory is therefore not a static construct but an ever-changing concept that is firmly rooted within the present. It is constantly open to 'social revision' which leads to the conclusion that we cannot talk of a single 'memory'. This pluralistic approach to memory culture, together with 'a globalisation of Holocaust memory which inscribes the Holocaust as universal victim narrative into a (western) transnational collective memory', significantly influenced the scientific, cultural and literary approach to memory during the current 'boom'.⁵¹ Thus, this thesis shall deploy a pluralist notion of 'collective memories' rather than 'memory'. The result of this notion is that we are not looking at a single memory discourse of the war but at a dialogue between numerous differing discourses.

This leads to the question as to fiction's role within this field of 'memory studies' and the differences between fictional and other representations of the past. Here exists a certain danger that should not be overlooked, namely that fictional texts are, after all, aesthetic products which are created for particular purposes and with their reception in mind. Thus we should not mistake fictional representations of the past for historical texts or, indeed, actual 'memories'. It is important to remember that these texts are, in opposition to historical writing or testimonials, primarily *fiction* and consequently a product of invention and imagination. In comparison to historical or sociological texts, these fictional texts are not bound by the strict rules of historical objectivity, authenticity and fact. On the contrary, fiction enjoys far greater freedom in representing the past and memories than history. Fiction has the benefit over 'histories', for example, in representing subjective memories and in experimenting with the complicated dialogue between 'private' and 'public' memories as well as their transmission. With its ability to, on the one hand, mimic memory discourses while, on the other hand, provide a self-reflexive and critical

⁴⁹ Hayden White, 'Historical Pluralism', *Critical Inquiry*, 12.3 (1986), 480 - 93 (p. 480).

⁵⁰ Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (eds.), *German Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), p. 9.

⁵¹ Helmut Schmitz, 'Introduction: The Return of Wartime Suffering in Contemporary German Memory Culture, Literature and Film', p. 6.

assessment of the present-day collective memory, it acts simultaneously as a tool of representation as well as one of intervention. Ansgar Nünning and Astrid Erll further emphasise that the ‘representation of memory in literature’ and the ‘mediality of literary texts and their functions in the formation and transformation of cultural memories’ belong to the main concepts of memory in literary studies.⁵² This thesis works from the premise that literature in general and prose fiction in particular has a unique role to play in the transitional period from ‘communicative’ to ‘cultural’ memory based on its ability to function as a representation of memory as well as being a medium of memory. As Kathryn N. Jones points out, writers can act as ‘important interlocutors in debates over the present meaning of the Second World War’.⁵³ Jorge Semprun, author and survivor of Buchenwald concentration camp, emphasised the unique role of prose fiction during this transitional period in his speech for the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Buchenwald. He writes in an article for the German newspaper *Die Zeit*:

In zehn Jahren, beim nächsten feierlichen Gedenken an die Aufdeckung und Befreiung der Nazi Konzentrationslager, wird unser Gedächtnis der Überlebenden nicht mehr existieren, denn es wird keine Überlebenden mehr geben, die eine Weitervermittlung der eigenen Erfahrungen leisten könnten, die hinausginge über die notwendige, aber unzureichende Arbeit der Historiker und Soziologen. Es wird nur noch Romanciers geben. Nur die Schriftsteller können, wenn sie frei beschließen, sich jene Erinnerungen anzueignen, sich also das Unvorstellbare vorzustellen, wenn sie also versuchen, die unglaubliche historische Wahrheit literarisch wahrscheinlich zu machen, nur Schriftsteller könnten die lebendige und vitale Erinnerung wieder zum Leben erwecken- das von uns Erlebte, die wir gestorben sein werden.

In ten years time, at the next commemoration of the liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps, our memory, the memory of the survivors, will have ceased to exist together with the survivors themselves. There won't be any survivors left who could pass on their experiences to the following generations, there will only be the necessary but inadequate work of historians and sociologists. Only novelists will be left. Only authors are capable, if they freely choose to do so, of gathering these memories and of imagining the unimaginable. Authors could resurrect the living and vital memory –

⁵² Astrid Erll and Ansgar Nünning, ‘Concepts and Methods for the Study of Literature and/as Cultural Memory’, in *Literature and Memory: Theoretical Paradigms – Genres – Functions*, ed. by Marion Gymnich, Ansgar Nünning, and Roy Sommer (Tübingen: Franke, 2006), pp. 11- 27 (pp.12-13).

⁵³ Kathryn N. Jones, *Journeys of Remembrance: Memories of the Second World War in French and German Literature, 1960-1980* (London: Legenda, 2007), p. 3.

the lived experience of us survivors who will have ceased – if they attempt to envision the inconceivable historical truth within their literary work.⁵⁴

Semprun's notion about the unique function that authors of fictional texts fulfil, namely in preserving some of the living memories of the deceased eye-witness generation, underlines the important role that fiction has as a part and a reflection of present-day memory discourses.

Furthermore, fiction is particularly well suited in portraying the complex nature of diverse and, at times, contesting present-day memory discourses. As we shall see in the course of this thesis, many authors such as Uwe Timm and A.L. Kennedy include a plethora of different 'private' and 'public' memories simultaneously whilst upholding a critical detachment. Thus, German suffering can be discussed in the same novel as issues of perpetration and guilt. Private memory can be combined directly with reference to historical texts (such as Robert Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors*, 1986), to testimonies of eye-witnesses (such as Primo Levi's *The Drowned and Saved*, 1989), or even to museum exhibitions (such as the 'Crimes of the Wehrmacht' exhibition, which opened in 1995). Thus, individual memory is seen to interact with other forms of collective memory within the boundaries of the narrative structure. This thesis will show that *memory fiction* is an ideal framework for the simultaneous representation of conflicting and dynamic memory discourses while itself being a part of these discourses.

Defining *memory fiction*

In the following section, the thesis will define the aesthetic characteristics of what it shall call *memory fiction*. These characteristics are relevant for the choice of the novels as they all combine a majority of them. While the definition of *memory fiction* is, partly, based on previous research, this thesis is exploring new territory by analysing British and German *memory fiction* as a basis for the development of a transnational subgenre of historical fiction.

Sabine Birchall focuses on what she calls *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] within contemporary British fiction. She hints towards the hybridity of the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] maintaining that its predecessors can be found in 'der klassische historische Roman einerseits sowie die autobiographische

⁵⁴ Jorge Semprun, 'Niemand wird mehr sagen koennen: "Ja, so war es"', in *Die Zeit* 16 (2005).

Schreibweise, fictional wie nicht-fiktional, anderseits' ['the classical historical novel on the one hand as well as the autobiographical writing, fictional or non-fictional on the other'].⁵⁵ Consequently Birchall defines *memory fiction* as a hybrid that has developed out of the genres of historical fiction and autobiography. Nevertheless, she reasons that the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] can be understood as a separate genre based on a different temporal structure, narrative perspective and moral understanding in comparison to its predecessors. In her understanding, the genre of the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] differs from its predecessors in being set on two differing temporal levels, namely the present and the past or in our case, more specifically, the time of war. Its temporal structure deliberately produces achronicity leading to a lack of linearity and continuity in the narrative. The act of remembering continually breaches the temporal causality of the narrative by a constant change of perspective between the present and the past.⁵⁶ This in itself does not differentiate the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] from postmodern works of historical fiction. In many examples of what Linda Hutcheon refers to as *historiographic metafiction* the temporal causality of the texts is deliberately breached in order to illustrate the man-made nature of both history and fiction. However, while *historiographic metafiction* seeks to deconstruct the notion of a single historical truth by breaching the temporal causality and linearity within fictional narrative, the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] seeks to create a connection between the present and the past as well as to fill the gaps within constructions of collective memories. In that respect the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] is far more relevant for the present and is written from a contemporary perspective. The memories that are represented are always memories that have been created within the cultural and private reference framework of the present. Undoubtedly the past in general and the Second World War in particular plays a pivotal role for the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel']; it does so, however, from the vantage point of the present.

Apart from the time levels in which the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] plays out its aesthetic acts of remembering, there is also the notion of a critical reflection on the relationship between individualised aspects of collective memory

⁵⁵ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 60.

⁵⁶ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 62.

and its public counterpart within cultural memory. Thus, there is a clear indication that *memory fiction* serves as a mirror of existing memory debates on the one hand, and, on the other, has the ability within its fictional framework to reflect on these notions of memory. Furthermore, we can observe that the aim of the ‘memory novel’ is to produce a usable past in order to aid individual and collective identity constructions within the narrative framework. According to Paul J. Eakin, identity can be understood as a specific self-awareness leading to the self-concept of an individual.⁵⁷ This, as Christoph Henke points out, can be applied to groups leading, to a collective self-concept based on shared features that create a sense of unity.⁵⁸ The memory of a shared past is a major requirement in the construction of individual and collective identities. In this sense the concepts of memory and identity are closely connected as John Gillis emphasises when he writes:

The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely, a sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.⁵⁹

In other words, memory and identity are two highly interdependent concepts and, consequently, fictions of memory are also narratives that represent, discuss and construct individual and group identities.

Friederike Eigler introduces a similar definition for the recently so popular form of German memory fiction which she calls the *Generationenroman* [‘generational novel’]. These novels, she argues, encompass:

die Auseinandersetzungen der zweiten und dritten Autorengeneration mit dem vielfach gestörten Generationengedächtnis und das neu erwachte Interesse an den “stummen Überbleibseln” der familiären Vergangenheit in Form von Briefen, Fotos und Tagebüchern. In diesen meist nachträglich rekonstruierten Genealogien geraten nicht nur Aspekte der Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts ins Blickfeld, sondern auch Prozesse des Erinnerns selbst.

the examination of the often disturbed generational memory by second and third generations of authors and the newly emerged interest in the “silent remains” of the family past in the form of letters, photographs and diaries. In these most subsequently reconstructed

⁵⁷ Paul J. Eakin, *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ Christoph Henke, ‘Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction’, p. 79.

⁵⁹ John R. Gillis, ‘Memory and Identity’, in *Commemorations: Politics of National Identity*, ed. by John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1994), pp. 3 - 24 (p. 3).

genealogies, not only aspects of 20th century history come into view but also the processes of memory itself.⁶⁰

Here Eigler turns her main focus to the existence of a disturbed family memory and the possibilities of a generational transmission of such memories or in many cases the absence of such a dialogue between the generations. Thus, in her definition of *Generationenromane* ['generational novels'], the later generations' obsession with the past is fuelled by its silent remnants, such as photographs, diaries and the like, which function as traces of disturbed family memories. Her concept of *Generationenroman* ['generational novel'] can be read employing Jan Assmann's theorem of 'communicative memory' and Marianne Hirsch's theory of 'postmemory'. It is the disturbed nature of 'communicative' memories within the social group of the family that causes the writers of the later generations to embark on a postmemorial endeavour to fill the gaps within their complicated family memory discourses in order to aid the construction of identities. Eigler continues with her definition:

Anhand der literarischen Darstellung von Generationenverhältnissen – dieser Nahtstelle von individueller und kollektiver Geschichte – lassen sich Brüche und Leerstellen in den Erinnerungsdiskursen, aber auch deren Identifikationsangebote und Sinnentwürfe herausarbeiten.

On the basis of the literary representation of generational relationships – this interface of individual and collective history – not only breaks and gaps in memory discourses can be worked out but also their identity and meaning.⁶¹

What is particularly interesting is Eigler's idea that the literary representations of generational relationships concurrently are, also, representations of the junction between the individual and collective past. This supports the hypothesis that it is a characteristic of *memory fiction* of the war to be situated at the border of private or 'communicative' group memories and public 'cultural' group memories. This leaves *memory fiction* in the ambivalent, but also unique position, of a hybrid text that can assume a relationship with both, private and public, memory discourses. Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger support Eigler's notion of *Generationenroman*

⁶⁰ Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte im Generationenroman seit der Wende* (Berlin: Erich Schmidt Verlag, 2005), p. 9.

⁶¹ Friederike Eigler, *Gedächtnis und Geschichte im Generationenroman seit der Wende*, pp. 10 - 11.

['generational novel'] in their analysis of the 'Germans as Victims' discourse within German contemporary fiction. They observe that:

we encounter time and again an emphasis on individuals and families: on how stories are transmitted between different generations, and how it feels to 'live' the tension between bonds of familial intimacy - the desire to relate to the suffering experienced by a parent or grandparent - and acquired knowledge about the manner in which such suffering often followed complicity, whether direct or indirect.⁶²

Thus, it becomes apparent that often complicated, intergenerational memory discourses are staged within many contemporary German and, indeed, British novels. Nevertheless, in order to emphasise the relationship between memory and fictional narrative, I believe it is appropriate to use the term *memory fiction* rather than 'generational novel'. Sabine Birchall's definition of the *Erinnerungsroman* ['memory novel'] in British fiction and Friederike Eigler's *Generationenroman* ['generational novel'] in contemporary German fiction share a number of common qualities that make up the definition of *memory fiction*.

Memory fiction represents and forges memories of the war within a respective memory culture and assists in the re-evaluation of the notion of identity. It is further identified by its generic hybridity, often resisting classical genre categorisations. The primary novels to be analysed in this thesis contain a number of elements from different genres such as historical fiction, memoir writing, travel writing, detective writing, as well as war and wartime novels. The themes represented in *memory fiction* differ in each text and range from representations of perpetration, guilt, suffering, the Holocaust, to heroism, to name but just a few.

A further aspect which is common to a great number of texts of *memory fiction* is their engagement in investigations of the past and the war as a literary strategy to overcome the memory gaps resulting from the increasing gap between the present and the horrific experiences of the war, as well as the absence of memories through a lack of generational transmission.

Furthermore, *memory fiction* can be characterised by its temporal achronicity, constantly moving as it does between several temporal levels. By breaching the temporal causality within the narrative framework, 'memory fictions' seek to create a

⁶² Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger, 'Introduction', in *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 1 - 14 (p. 7).

dialogue between the past and the present. However, the texts are usually firmly set in the post-war era, creating a presentness that allows them to critically examine present-day notions of collective memory. Bill Niven refers to this narrative strategy as ‘*diachronic contextualisation*’ where the Nazi past ‘is viewed through the lens of later generations’, thereby highlighting the problems that are encountered by post-war generations in reconstructing this past.⁶³ *Memory fiction* therefore plays out aesthetic acts of remembering in order to critically assess present forms of collective memory as well as to highlight conflicts such as the discrepancy between private and public memory discourses. The aim is to create a usable past upon which stable identities can be built. This, however, is at times denied, and the constructed nature of memories and identities are exposed through a critical self-reflexivity.

We have to differentiate British and German texts of *memory fiction* from the other numerous fictional treatments of the war that continue within the conventional narrative structures of the traditional historical or realist novel. While memory fiction can certainly be read as being in direct relation to the traditional historical and realist writing, indeed it possesses elements of both realism and historical writing, its achronistic temporality, the postmemorial engagement, and its critical self-reflexive view on the mediated nature of collective memories differentiate *memory fiction* from its predecessors. In this respect, it possesses a greater relation with the postmodern tradition of historical writing and shares a number of features with postmodern writing. Moreover, it has to be differentiated from traditional ‘war’ and ‘wartime’ novels such as Lothar Buchheim’s *Das Boot* (The Boat, 1973) or Derek Robinson’s *A Damned Good Show* (2003). Kurt Bangert and Jürgen Kramm differentiate between the ‘war’ and the ‘wartime’ novel.⁶⁴ The ‘war’ novel concentrates on a realistic representation of the experience of combat in what developed into the ‘total war’. Buchheim and Robinson attempt to transport the reader into the horrors of the battlefield creating a realistic immediacy, whether within a German submarine or a British Halifax Bomber. One could argue that ‘war’ novels also provide the reader with memories of the Second World War; however,

⁶³ Bill Niven, ‘Representations of the Nazi Past I: perpetrators’, in *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 125-141 (p. 128).

⁶⁴ Kurt Bangert and Jürgen Kramm, *Die Darstellung des Zweiten Weltkrieges im englischen Roman: Eine Untersuchung zum Problem der Fiktionalisierung von Zeitgeschichte anhand der Erzählwerke von Henry Patterson, Len Deighton, Evelyn Waugh und William Golding*, 2 vols (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang Verlag, 1987), 1, p. 3.

their narratives are exclusively set in the past, and the attempt to recreate the immediacy of war is not aimed at a critical assessment of collective memories of the past. In the wake of the traumatic horrors of the Second World War, the 'war' novel was in many cases considered as inadequate to represent the conflict, leading Bangert and Kramm to introduce the notion of the 'wartime' novel in order to capture the full spectrum of fictional representation.⁶⁵ The 'wartime' novel comprises a larger spectrum of fictional representations of the Second World War including narratives set in the private sphere away from the battlefield. It represents a less direct approach to the Second World War than the 'war' novel. Examples of wartime novels range from Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1946) to Sarah Waters' *Night Watch* (2006). Although the 'wartime' novel is far more inclusive than the 'war' novel, neither of the two is directly concerned with the notion of memory. They might represent aspects of Second World War memories but they do not represent aesthetic acts of remembrance or problematise issues of collective memory. Thus, while the generic hybridity of *memory fiction* allows for aspects of the 'war' and the 'wartime' novels to be incorporated, they, nevertheless, have to be differentiated.

Another point of commonality is the fact that the authors of these *memory fictions* were either children during the war or, as is the case for most of them, born in the post-war era, thus having no living memories or experiences of the conflict. This is important, as the experience of authors who consciously witnessed the war is very different from the experience of authors who did not witness the events. Consequently, all the authors chosen to feature in this thesis are to a larger or lesser degree removed from the event itself.

Comparing *memory fiction*

The past decades have witnessed the publication of a number of comparative works examining various European literatures with regards to the Second World War. The edition entitled *European Memories of the Second World War* (1999) focuses on German, French, and Italian responses to the conflict.⁶⁶ William Cloonan published his work on *The Writing of War: French and German Fiction and World*

⁶⁵ Kurt Bangert and Jürgen Kramm, *Die Darstellung des Zweiten Weltkrieges im englischen Roman: Eine Untersuchung zum Problem der Fiktionalisierung von Zeitgeschichte anhand der Erzählwerke von Henry Patterson, Len Deighton, Evelyn Waugh und William Golding*, 1, p. 4.

⁶⁶ Helmut Peitsch, Charles Burdett, and Claire Gorrara (eds.), *European Memories of the Second World War* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 1999).

War II (1999), which again focuses on canonical French and German novels, as does the latest publication by Kathryn N. Jones, *Journeys of Remembrance: Memories of the Second World War in French and German Literature, 1960-1980* (2007).⁶⁷ Peter Crosthwaite's book *Trauma, Postmodernism, and the Aftermath of World War II* (2009) discusses Anglo-American postmodernist fiction in relation to the Second World War. Peter Middleton's and Tim Woods' *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* (2000) also concentrates on Anglo-American literary representations of the conflict, while Sabine Birchall's *Erinnerung und kollektive Identitäten* reflects on the theory, debates and aesthetics of literature and memory from an Anglo-American perspective.⁶⁸ A further example is Marianna Torgovnick's *The War Complex: World War II in our Time* (2005), where she analyses, for instance, texts by Kazuo Ishiguro alongside those of W.G. Sebald.⁶⁹ Surprisingly, Torgovnick's volume is one of the rare examples where British and German memory fictions are compared and read alongside each other. However, this is only done within one chapter, and by no means wide-ranging. There are some other instances where British and German texts are compared, such as Erin McGlothlin's journal article 'Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*' which appeared in the journal *After Representation* (2009).⁷⁰ The comparison of British and German *memory fictions* has received little sustained attention up to this point. This is something the following thesis aims to rectify, as both countries played significant roles during the conflict, and their memory cultures are still dominated by the war. The comparison between French, Italian, and German writers seems more inviting as all the countries, albeit more so Germany than France and Italy, have public debates on guilt and perpetration as well as victimhood (I am thinking here specifically of the experience of collaboration in Vichy France). All of the studies above deal to some extent with

⁶⁷ William Cloonan, *The Writing of War: French and German Fiction of World War II* (Gainesville, FA: University Press of Florida, 1999), Kathryn N. Jones, *Journeys of Remembrance: Memories of the Second World War in French and German Literature, 1960-1980* (London: Legenda, 2007). Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 2003), Paul Crosthwaite, *Trauma, Postmodernism, and the Aftermath of World War II* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009), Peter Middleton and Tim Woods (eds.), *Literatures of Memory: History, Time and Space in Postwar Writing* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000).

⁶⁹ Marianna Torgovnick, *The War Complex: World War II in our Time* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2005).

⁷⁰ Erin McGlothlin, 'Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*', in: *After Representation? The Holocaust, Literature, and Culture*, ed. by R. Clifton Spargo and Robert Ehrenreich, (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2009).

questions of representing and transmitting memories through various literary genres. Yet surprisingly little work has been conducted comparing and analysing these texts with a view to understanding them as a subgenre which focuses on questions of memory.

The method of a comparative study of contemporary post-war British and German memory fictions is best suited to highlight the convergences and differences in the writer's interpretations of collective memories. Kathryn N. Jones argues that an 'analysis of these interwoven threads allows for a more nuanced view of literary responses towards shared issues of remembrance'.⁷¹ The interwoven threads she is referring to here are the common memories of the conflict which European countries have integrated into their memory cultures, such as the caesura caused by the effects of the 'total war' and the Holocaust. Other critics such as Jay Winter argue that the 'national approaches to memory have a 'distorted effect' when 'examined from a comparative perspective'.⁷² Indeed, a comparative approach is useful in highlighting the national memory debates and narratives, and in contrasting them, the constructed nature of collective memory becomes ever more visible. Considering that Britain and Germany are the two European countries with the least commonalities in terms of their public memory discourses regarding the war, any convergence could be interpreted as the result of a process of internationalisation and maybe even as proving the establishment of a genre of Second World War *memory fiction*. Particularly with regard to the latter, the comparative approach will provide an insight, not only into the fictional representation of memory discourses, but also into the narratological and aesthetic means utilised by the primary authors in order to examine issues of 'collective memory'. The juxtaposition of the primary literature will allow the identification of common strategies which may or may not be used by both national sets of authors to overcome problems such as absent memory, transmission of family and public memories, as well as the problematic notion of perpetrator related memories.

⁷¹ Kathryn N. Jones, *Journeys of Remembrance: Memories of the Second World War in French and German Literature, 1960-1980*, p. 4.

⁷² Jay Winter, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 11; cited in Kathryn N. Jones, *Journeys of Remembrance: Memories of the Second World War in French and German Literature, 1960-1980*, p. 4.

The Chapters

This thesis will work from the premise that despite some significant differences in national memory discourses, in Britain and Germany today there is a certain level of convergence. All the chapters of this thesis are comparative and are exploring the works of several British and German authors. The chapters are structured according to three major thematic and aesthetic commonalities which are confronted, discussed, and critically examined by authors of both nations.

Firstly, there is a clear interest in the problematic notion of absent and unreliable memory. The absence of memory particularly affects the post-war generations who have neither witnessed the war themselves nor have memories of the event. This interest in 'absent memory' is based on the increasing temporal distance to the events and their traumatic nature. The disappearance of the eye-witness generation, or its unwillingness to confront the past openly with the post-war generations often triggers a sense of *disruption* within 'communicative memory'. Some eye-witnesses do not want to talk about their traumatic experiences on the battlefield or during the aerial bombardments, while others might stay silent because of the guilt and shame they feel with regards to their actions. Even if members of the wartime generation share their memories with their family, they are often deemed unreliable in the sense that they might omit certain memories from their narratives. This causes a form of collective private memory that is in many cases absent, incomplete, or unreliable and at odds with the socio-historical context of the conflict. The critic Henri Raczymow refers to this phenomenon as memory 'shot through with holes'.⁷³ The result of this *disruption* in the process of memory transmission is the fear of long-term 'memory loss' having an effect on the foundations of personal and public identity formation. Thus, the subject of anamnesis, in which the recovery of lost memory is central, becomes a strong focus point for the representation of processes of remembering. The thesis will analyse the aesthetic strategies employed by some examples of *memory fiction* in Britain and Germany dealing with the narrators' attempts to recover lost memories. In Germany, in particular, the notions of guilt and empathy have a further impact on the literary responses to war and the Holocaust.

Secondly, we also encounter a particular focus on the 'family' as the main social network in which differing 'private' and 'public' collective memories are

⁷³ Henri Raczymow, 'Memory Shot through with Holes', *Yale French Studies*, 85 (1994), 98 - 105.

contested. As we shall see within the textual analysis of this thesis most of the primary texts make use of the notion of some kind of discrepancy between ‘private’ family memories and ‘public’ memory discourses. British and German primary texts alike demonstrate the ‘dialectic between continuity and rupture, between discontinuity and affiliation and between historical analysis and subjective memory’ as a hallmark of contemporary memory discourses.⁷⁴ This dialectic becomes part of the texts’ aesthetic strategies as they use the arising tensions between the ‘private’ and ‘public’ memories within the family framework. Based on the definition suggested by Lucy Noakes, the following chapters will use the terms as follows:

They [private and public memory] are used here to describe two different, yet interwoven, sets of memories. Private memories refer to memories that focus, at least in part, on the individual experience and memories of the war; public memories refer to the more general images of the war that appear in public sites of memory.⁷⁵

Thus this thesis will work from the premise that despite some significant differences in national memory discourses, in Britain and Germany today there is a certain level of convergence. Authors from both memory cultures are having to deal with issues resulting from discrepancies between private and public collective memories, whether they are caused by contesting memory discourses, as is the case in post-unification Germany, or by a powerful, myth-driven public memory discourse that has pervaded the national memory culture, thereby marginalising other, more private memory discourses, as is the case in the United Kingdom.

Thirdly, there is a particular focus on questions of perpetration and guilt within the British and German literary responses to the war. We see a high degree of reflection on questions of how issues of perpetration and guilt can or indeed should be represented within the aesthetic frameworks of fiction. The steadily growing internationalisation of the Holocaust and the increasing discussions on the legitimacy of the air-war has led to interesting literary discussions in both countries.

The chapter structure of this thesis is based on these three themes which are prevalent in the fiction of both countries. The following Chapter Two will be looking

⁷⁴ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films and Discourse: The Politics of Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 45.

⁷⁵ Lucy Noakes, *War and the British: Gender, Memory and National Identity* (London and New York: Tauris, 1998), pp. 12 - 13.

at issues of absent memories in Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs* (1992), Marcel Beyer's *Spione* (Spies, 2000), and Thomas Medicus's *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (In the Eyes of my Grandfather, 2004). All the four authors make use of an 'investigative' narrative style akin to that of crime fiction or thrillers, leading their narrative voices to investigate the past in the hope of filling the gaps that have been left by the absence of private memories. Here the issue of absent memory is not only relevant for the representation of processes of remembering, but it is also a literary strategy to create tension and suspense. The 'investigators' in the novels above have to rely on a peculiar mixture of previously transmitted communicative and cultural memories in order to make sense of the past and their own identity. The protagonists embark on a postmemorial engagement with varying degrees of success, following the lead of memory traces in the form of, for example, photographs and letters. Thus, in order to bridge the temporal gap between the generations, the narrators have to apply their imagination to historical events and memory traces in order to construct usable narratives of the past. Here Marianne Hirsch's concept of postmemory becomes a useful tool in the comparative reading of the narrative strategies employed by the authors. All of the novels feature the narrators' attempts to combine memory traces with varying degrees of imaginative fantasy in order to bridge the gap of absent memory. The aim is to create a usable past on which identities can be firmly based. However, as we will see in the textual analysis in this chapter the 'aesthetic' investment by the narrators often outweighs the 'testimonial' memory traces leading to largely fictional account of the past. This fictionality is often highlighted through self-reflexive literary strategies providing us with an implicit critique of the shortcomings of postmemory.

Chapter Three will focus on the family as the most important framework of collective memories. Here we particularly encounter the problem of a dichotomy between private and public memories. The family thereby becomes the framework in which these discrepancies are contested and confronted. Analysing Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (In my Brother's Shadow, 2003), Ulla Hahn's *Unschärfe Bilder* (Blurred Images, 2005), Dagmar Leupold's *Nach den Kriegen* (After the Wars, 2004), Graham Swift's *Shuttlecock* (1981), and Liz Jensen's *War Crimes for the Home* (2002), this chapter will concentrate on generational conflict within family memories, the discrepancies between private and public memories, and the problem

of finding the appropriate kind of empathy in the German texts. The chapter will further engage in a comparative reading of the primary texts analysing narrative strategies of relating private family memories to the institutionalised forms of cultural memory. Here Assmann's definition of 'communicative' and 'cultural' memory becomes a useful tool in differentiating between the two conflicting memory discourses portrayed in the novels. All the texts explore the relation of memories of individual fate with institutionalised memories of the war. Furthermore, the focus on the family framework allows the authors to highlight individual narratives, something for which fiction is particularly well suited. The texts thereby portray and engage with the plurality of memory discourses, often including difficult and uncomfortable subjects. Thus, German authors like Uwe Timm discuss the suffering of family members with a certain degree of empathy, while at the same time highlighting the historical context of German perpetration. British authors, such as Liz Jensen, are re-inscribing previously marginalised private discourses into the wider national discourse of the war.

Chapter Four provides a closer analysis of novels dealing with the representation of memories of perpetration and guilt. The chapter will begin with examining whether there is a 'taboo' or, indeed, as Ernestine Schlant argues a 'silence' on memories of perpetration.⁷⁶ This includes the problematic notion of actual perpetrator memories and testimonies. I will then continue with a close reading of Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde* (The Karnau Tapes, 1996) and Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (The Reader, 1995). Both novels engage in the problematic representation of Nazi perpetrator figures as well as ethical questions about the portrayal of perpetrator memories. Continuing the comparative approach, the chapter will introduce a number of British fictional texts representing Nazi perpetration as well as perpetrator figures. Here the interest in issues of Nazi perpetration is not derived from direct experiences, but rather a more general philosophical curiosity as to how this massive scale of Nazi perpetration could have been possible. The chapter will provide a close reading of Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991), which is a daunting portrayal of the split personality of a former concentration camp doctor. Additionally the chapter will introduce a number of fictional examples of a literary

⁷⁶ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) p. 2.

engagement with issues of ‘guilt’ in the British conduct of the War. It will provide a close reading of A.L Kennedy’s novel *Day* (2007) and Graham Swift’s *Out of this World* (1988). Here we have two texts which incorporate uncomfortable representations of guilt regarding the relentless bombing campaign against Germany. They both represent ‘private’ memories which result in trauma as well as feelings of guilt on an individual level and juxtapose them to the wider discourse of the ‘good war’. In conclusion this chapter will further argue that all the novels introducing memories of perpetrators use a number of literary strategies to avoid the possibility of identification with the perpetrator figures. It thus becomes obvious that there are ethical considerations included into the aesthetic rendering of perpetration. Furthermore, the representation of perpetrator memories as well as the theme of guilt in the novels is particularly well suited in highlighting a degree of interconnectedness between the otherwise often different national memory discourses. This underlines the advantages of the comparative approach, analysing works that are rarely juxtaposed.

Finally, Chapter Five provides a concluding statement underlining the development away from a representation of a monolithic memory discourse towards greater pluralism and transnationalism in fiction. It will re-iterate that the main problems within the current transitional period between ‘communicative’ and ‘cultural’ memories of the war are also major themes in the literary representation of memory in Britain and Germany. Thus, we can find similar aesthetic techniques in the novels exploring absent memories, the relationship between ‘private’ and ‘public’ memory discourses, as well as memories of perpetration and guilt. These aesthetic and thematic similarities are striking considering the differences in the national memory discourses of both countries and lead to the conclusion that we can see a development towards a subgenre of *memory fiction* beyond national boundaries. This study is a contribution to the ongoing debate on the representation of memories of the Second World War in literature. Memories of the war still resonate with a great number of people in Europe and beyond. This thesis reaffirms the need for further comparative analysis in order to further explore the aesthetic development of *memory fiction* and to see whether it will survive the current transitional period.

Chapter Two

Absent Memory and Detection

The main purpose of this chapter is to examine some of the literary texts under discussion in relation to how absent and unreliable memory is investigated by members of the second and, indeed third generations after the Second World War. The term ‘second generation’ is a problematic one in itself, as it has been closely linked to the legacy of the Holocaust. Erin McGlothlin uses the term ‘second-generation literature’ ‘to designate both literature from the perspective of survivors’ children and that from the point of view of the children of Nazi perpetrators’.¹ Thus, she combines the literature by second-generation Holocaust survivors and what she understands as *Väterliteratur* [Father Literature] by post-war members of perpetrator families. Her aim is to ‘investigate how individual second-generation texts imagine the Holocaust and mediate its legacy’ without amalgamating the two groups.² This is a very useful approach as it allows her to discuss the literature of the offspring of two groups that stand on the opposite sides of the legacy of the Holocaust. Her argument is that both groups alike, whether in relation to victimhood or perpetration, have to confront the consequences of an event that has taken place prior to their birth. This, however, does not suggest that the experiences of their parents and therefore the memories transmitted to the post-war generations are identical or even similar. In this respect, the groups differ a great deal. Nevertheless, the general position of the children, according to McGlothlin, is quite similar: ‘both groups feel marked by the Holocaust, an event that is ever present in their lives but not personally experienced, and both struggle to understand their own place in light of their link to the traumatic past’.³ In other words, the identity formation of the later generations is influenced and disrupted by a traumatic past resulting in stigmatisation. This notion is supported by the historian Dan Diner, who points out that the offspring of survivors and

¹ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), p. 16.

² Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration*, p. 16.

³ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration*, p.14.

perpetrators are profoundly conjoined in ‘a kind of communality of opposites’ much like two sides of the same coin.⁴

McGlothlin’s understanding of the *second-generation* is less narrow than that of Alan Berger and Naomi Berger, who argue that the members of the second generation, whether on the side of the victims or the perpetrators, need to have a direct family connection to the witness-generation.⁵ Instead, she uses Efraim Sicher’s understanding of the second generation. Sicher expands Berger’s term to include writers ‘of the same generation who are writing from the perspective of “after”’.⁶ Sicher explains this notion as follows:

I start out from the broadest possible view of the ‘second generation’ following George Steiner’s self-definition as ‘a kind of survivor’ and I incorporate all who write ‘after’ in order to survey a wide – but not exhaustive – range of themes and issues in the context of both the particular problems of the generation of children of survivors and the broader issue of writing identity after Auschwitz.⁷

Thus, Sicher uses the term more generally to include writings that explore the legacy of survival, whether or not the writer’s family had direct experience of the Holocaust. Consequently, the term ‘second generation’ becomes ever more inclusive to the point that one could easily argue that it should not only include the generation of children but also of grandchildren born decades after the event. In other words, in examining the contemporary texts one would have to take both the second and the third generation into account. Furthermore, it is also conceivable to broaden the definition to include not only the Holocaust but other events of the Second World War as a defining trauma of the twentieth century. Indeed, it is possible to expand McGlothlin’s comparative approach of second-generation Holocaust literature to a broader field of what I would like to call ‘post-war generation memory literature’. I will employ this term to designate fictional texts written in different national contexts, namely in Britain and Germany, which address the representation and the transmission of memories of the Second World War. The term is inclusive of writers

⁴ Dan Diner, ‘Negative Symbiosis: Germans and Jews after Auschwitz’, in *Reworking the Past: Hitler, the Holocaust and the Historian’s Debate*, ed. by Peter Baldwin (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1990), pp. 251 - 61 (p.251).

⁵ Alan Berger and Naomi Berger, *Second Generation Voices: Reflections by Children of Holocaust Survivors and Perpetrators* (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse UP, 2001), p. 1.

⁶ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration*, p. 13.

⁷ Efraim Sicher (ed.), *Breaking Crystal: Writing and Memory after Auschwitz* (Urbana, IL: U of Illinois P, 1998), pp. 13 - 14.

belonging to both the children and the grandchildren generation. The emphasis lies on the fact that none of these writers, whether in the British or German context, have living memories of the event, and that all they know of the Second World War is transmitted to them by means of collective memory, cultural and communicative memory. However, the memories that are transmitted to the post-war generation are often characterised either by discrepancies between the collective memories of private groups and the wider institutionalised forms of public collective memories or, in many cases, by the total absence of any form of reliable private memory.

The protagonist's journey into the past is often triggered by an absence of certain memories rather than their existence. The challenge for the main characters – in most novels, the narrator – is to attempt to fill the absence of memory and thereby bridge the gap between private memories and public recollection. This is often represented as an investigative journey into the past that allows characters to reassess forms of institutionalised memory and to discover or rediscover memories, mostly private, that have been absent hitherto. It is this investigative narrative approach that will be analysed in this chapter. It is a theme that seems to be a central feature in British and German novels alike. The aim of these investigations or mysteries is to find answers to questions that are impossible to solve. Most characters and also the authors of these novels did not experience the war and their witnesses are usually unreliable or have passed away. Thus, the reader witnesses the 'detective's' construction of the case, or rather of memories, in order to reach some kind of solution or closure. In most cases, however, such a closure is almost impossible to achieve. It also has to be remarked that the investigator is in almost all cases an *involuntary investigator*. The narrative voice in Thomas Medicus' *In den Augen meines Großvaters* [In the Eyes of my Grandfather], for example, receives a box full of memorabilia of his grandfather, who was killed in the war. It is this box, mainly of photographs, that triggers his journey into the past to find out about this man who, so far, has been absent from the narrator's life. This literary technique can be found in a number of German and British novels. It includes the use of memory aids such as photographs, texts, or memoirs which trigger the narrator's investigation into incomplete memories or forgotten events. Usually the aim of the investigation is to fill the gaps in memory that cannot be filled by cultural memory and, ultimately, it leads to a renegotiation of identity. All individuals or groups require memories in

order to construct identity.⁸ Memory can therefore also be seen as a present-time construction to aid the negotiation of identity. The *involuntary investigator* is, as part of the narrative strategy, forced into his journey into the past in order to solve present-day issues of identity. The novels discussed in this chapter are thus as much interested in the present as they are in memory and the past. After all, as John Gillis has argued:

The core meaning of any individual or group identity, namely the sense of sameness over time and space, is sustained by remembering; and what is remembered is defined by the assumed identity.⁹

In other words, identity is sustained by memory, and any change in the construction of memory on an individual or collective level is likely to be accompanied by a renegotiation of identity.

This chapter sets out to analyse the investigator figure in a number of British and German novels representative of a larger group of contemporary-generational memory fiction. I believe that all of the novels raise questions about the authenticity and continuity of memory and identity through their investigative narratives. Moreover, they attempt to deal with the increasing discrepancy between private forms of memory and public ways of recollection. If the individual cannot base his or her identity on existing institutionalised memories about the war there will be a need for the re-evaluation of the memory of the Second World War. This possibility is quite literally investigated within the framework of the novels. The outcome of these investigations is often problematic, a result of the existing generational gap between the narrators and the witnesses of the past. While memory seems to be the key to unlock the past, mystery often prevails due to absences and forgetting. Thus, the novels deal as much with what is remembered as they deal with questions of what has been forgotten and why it has been forgotten. Indeed, the recovery of lost memory is an important device in traditional detective fiction and helps in the reconstruction of the past.¹⁰ Victoria Stewart writes about the use of detective fiction as narratives of memory as early as the 1940s while the war was still ongoing. She argues that:

⁸ Christoph Henke, 'Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction', p. 79.

⁹ John R. Gillis, 'Memory and Identity. The History of a Relationship', in *Commemorations. The Politics of National Identity*, ed. by John R. Gillis (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1994), pp. 3-24 (p. 3).

¹⁰ Victoria Stewart, *Narratives of Memory: British Writing of the 1940s*, p. 61.

the detective story and the thriller rely on the memory of key pieces of factual information as the means by which a series of events can be established or reestablished, and in both cases, the central investigating protagonist acts as a filter, assisting the reader in distinguishing between relevant and irrelevant material.¹¹

This role is comparable to the investigative voice in the narratives of memory discussed in this chapter. There is, however, a crucial difference between detective stories, thrillers and contemporary memory novels. The former will, usually, lead the reader to a perpetrator and thus to a resolution while the latter stays in many cases ambiguous and rarely offers a clear-cut resolution. Although the methods are comparable, it has to be made clear that the novels discussed cannot be read as detective stories, thrillers or mystery novels.

This role of the ‘remembrancer’ as ‘investigator’ is a theme that is common to the texts discussed in this chapter. The British texts to be discussed in relation to absent memory are Justin Cartwright’s *The Song Before It Is Sung* (2007) and Ian McEwan’s *Black Dogs* (1992). The second part of this chapter will analyse two German texts, namely Marcel Beyer’s *Spione* (Spies, 2000) and Thomas Medicus’ *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (In the Eyes of my Grandfather, 2004).¹²

Yet it is important to distinguish between those novels where the protagonists have no access to first-hand memories at all, such as the above examples, and those where existing family memories are investigated and probed such as the texts by Uwe Timm, Ulla Hahn, and Graham Swift, which will be discussed in the next chapter. While the latter examples are evaluating existing family memories in relation to public memory discourses, the former are investigating sizable gaps within their private memory discourses. This clearly complicates their investigative tasks and leaves protagonists with great difficulties in creating a usable narrative of these absent memories. The question of authenticity is often replaced by a rather more imaginative approach to memory. This leads to a form of secondary remembering with very elusive boundaries between authentic versions of the past and imaginary fabrication. The reader is thereby often presented with pieces of metafictional writing much in the sense of Patricia Waugh’s definition:

¹¹ Victoria Stewart, *Narratives of Memory: British Writing of the 1940s*, p. 64.

¹² I have chosen these novels because I believe they demonstrate the use of this investigative method of writing about the memory of the Second World War most clearly. However, they are representative for a larger quantity of narratives of memory which all employ this style of writing. Some of them will feature in the later chapters of this thesis. Due to the scope of this thesis, it is impossible to discuss all the novels using the investigative method of writing within this chapter.

Metafiction is a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality. In providing a critique of their own methods of construction, such writings not only examine the fundamental structures of narrative fiction, they also explore the possible fictionality of the world outside the literary fictional text.¹³

As we shall see, the chosen texts employ metafictional narrative techniques, not only to highlight their own fictionality, but also to problematise the processes of remembering. Memories are thereby often exposed as problematic constructs or ‘postmemories’ developed by the protagonists in order to fill gaps and to produce a meaningful narrative of the past.

2.1 Investigating the Second World War in British Memory Fiction

The historical themes in Justin Cartwright’s *The Song Before It Is Sung* (2007) and Ian McEwan’s *Black Dogs* (1992) differ a great deal. Neither deals with the traditional myth of the war such as the Blitz, the Battle of Britain, or the heroic defiance of the British people against all odds. Rather, they explore personal narratives and individual memories, thereby also touching on important aspects of collective memory in Britain. The subjects vary from the friendship between two Oxford fellows divided by the war, to resistance in Germany and how this was perceived in Britain, guilt, the horrors of the genocide, occupation, and, most interestingly perhaps, the story of three Germans between 1933 and the present day. What is remarkable about the two texts is that they are not solely centred on the British experience of the war but that there is an interest in the German experience of it. Justin Cartwright’s text broaches the issue of German resistance during the 20th July 1944 plot to kill Hitler, while a scene in Ian McEwan’s text is set during the fall of the Berlin Wall and thematises the Nazi crimes in Europe.

¹³ Patricia Waugh, *Metafiction: The Theory and Practice of Self-Conscious Fiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1984), p. 2.

2.1.1 Secondary Witnessing in Justin Cartwright's *The Song Before It Is Sung* (2007)

Justin Cartwright describes his novel *The Song Before It Is Sung* in an interview with The Book Show at the Australian Broadcasting Corporation as a

contemporary novel, but looking backwards at another time, a time that had enormous significance for us. I think the thing about the war and why it's always going to be significant is that different generations will take something different out of it. It may well be that the thriller kind of war novel is now dated. But as Eliot said about art, every generation takes from art what it needs. And I think that's what's going to happen, and is happening with the war.¹⁴

His description of the novel – namely as a contemporary text that ‘remembers’ certain aspects of the Second World War and its significance for the different generations – resonates significantly with other fictions of memory examined in this thesis. The subject-matter of the novel is, more specifically, based on the ‘tragic friendship’ between the two fictional characters of Elya Mendel and Axel von Gottberg.¹⁵ The two fictional characters are clearly based, according Cartwright’s own account in his ‘Afterword’, on the figures of Isaiah Berlin and Adam von Trott and their historical friendship.¹⁶ Cartwright’s fiction is thus underpinned with elements of historical fact based on a relationship between the Jewish thinker and one of the failed assassins of the 20 July plot to kill Hitler. The fictional letters, memoirs, and the film material described within the framework of the novel are fictional versions of historical documents which still exist. Cartwright explains further that he has been ‘very conscious of the obligation to the known facts of these terrible events’, despite his obviously fictional and imaginative treatment of the subject matter.¹⁷ The novel is mainly set in present-day England and is told from the perspective of Conrad Senior, the protagonist. Conrad begins his journey into Mendel’s and von Gottberg’s past as a biographer and to a large extent as a historical researcher, but finishes it as a witness to the memory of his mentor and his friend.

¹⁴ Interview in: <http://www.abc.net.au/rn/bookshow/stories/2007/1860036.htm> (last accessed June 2008).

¹⁵ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung* (London: Bloomsbury, 2007), p. 266.

¹⁶ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 273.

¹⁷ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 273.

He struggles with the fear that in the process of writing about them [Mendel and von Gottberg] he is trivialising their story or introducing new falsehoods into it. As he progresses he has to decide what material to ignore and what to include. But he sees that there is no objective truth possible. To the one overwhelming fact, as far as he knows, he and Ernst Fritsch are the only living witnesses.¹⁸

It is this discovery, a journey that takes Conrad through the entirety of the novel, which is central to this narrative. Conrad begins his research into the past involuntarily when he is left with a collection of letters after the death of his Oxford tutor, Elya Mendel. Although unsure what exactly is required of him, Conrad begins this research much in the fashion of a historical researcher, or rather a ‘detective’ following the traces left by Mendel. Only at the end of the narrative does he realise that he has not been assigned to write an objective history or memoir but that his role is to bear ‘witness’ to the past and to conserve the memory of the tragic story of Mendel and von Gottberg. Conrad’s realisation that his role is less that of an objective storyteller than that of a witness is central to the narrative. He knows that, in the process of writing, he is unable to convey a fully objective truth as he has no ‘living’ memory of the events. By giving a voice to the witnesses, however, he can tell the story of their memories. This memory is transmitted to him through memory aids such as the letters between Mendel and von Gottberg, the film material which Conrad sees in the Imperial War Museum, the discovery of the lost film material of von Gottberg’s execution, given to him by Ernst Fritsch, and the eye-witness accounts of Elizabeth Partridge. The story jumps between the fictional representation of the present, and the past. The reader is constantly moving between the temporal spaces, the novel thereby creating a connection between the past and the present while at the same time indicating distance. The narrative is self-reflexively aware that its ‘version’ of the events around the 20 July is created in the present.

The protagonist’s account is named *A Tragic Friendship*, in reference to the rift between Mendel and von Gottberg. In writing it, Conrad imagines their past conversations by using the traces of memory that he finds in the present.¹⁹ Thus, he embarks very much on a postmemorial mission as defined by Marianne Hirsch and engages in a ‘retrospective witnessing by adoption’.²⁰ His aim is to create a memory

¹⁸ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 260.

¹⁹ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 266.

²⁰ Marianne Hirsch, ‘Surviving Images: Holocaust Photographs and the Work of Postmemory’, *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, 14 (2001), 3 - 29 (p.10).

of the relationship between Mendel and von Gottberg and, belatedly, to do justice to von Gottberg's sacrifice.

The concept of 'postmemory' is a relevant tool towards a greater understanding of Cartwright's novel because Conrad has to piece together Mendel's memories of his meetings with von Gottberg, which Mendel has left him in the form of various letters, anecdotes, and film material. Taking into account Marianne Hirsch's definition of 'postmemory', we can say that Conrad's task is characterised by his 'generational distance' from the event and that he has 'deep personal connection' that differentiates him from a historian or a biographer.²¹ Furthermore, his connection to Mendel and von Gottberg is not based on his personal memories of them – von Gottberg was executed long before Conrad was born – but rather on the 'imaginative investment and creation' that are so important for Hirsch's concept of 'postmemory'.²² This is highlighted in the novel when Conrad begins to 'imagine Mendel in his rooms', as well as von Gottberg 'at the People's Court'.²³ He realises that 'this is perhaps what novelists do. The reality they create is just as valid as any other'.²⁴ He further hints at the notion that the world he is so obsessed with, namely the past of Mendel and von Gottberg, is 'imaginatively constructed', and that this is his only possibility of representing it.²⁵ This indicates that Conrad is aware of his dilemma – namely that he has no personal memories of the past he is investigating, yet is too personally preoccupied with Mendel's and von Gottberg's lives to conduct objective historical research. The traces he is working with are not only archive materials, but mainly personal memories in the form of letters and conversations with eye-witnesses. Thus, Conrad's task, given to him by Mendel, is not to write objectively about the past but to bear witness to his mentor's memories and to keep them alive in order to commemorate von Gottberg's sacrifice. The protagonist comes to this realisation when the final eye-witness of the story, Elizabeth Partridge, the lover of von Gottberg and friend to Mendel, dies in London. Conrad realises that what 'Mendel wanted [...] was that he should collect all these conversations and letters and memories, and turn them into something coherent, a narrative'.²⁶ But above all, what Mendel wants is someone to preserve the memory of this tragic but

²¹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

²² Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

²³ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 57.

²⁴ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 57.

²⁵ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 57.

²⁶ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 98.

yet remarkable story, which is why he chooses Conrad as the ‘*most human*’ of his students.²⁷ Ultimately, Mendel believes that his failure to support his friend has possibly prevented dialogue between the Allies and the July plotters, and in his own words ‘*it may be that Axel would have been spared his appalling death*’.²⁸ Thus, the task Conrad inherits from his mentor is to find the film material of the trials and the lost material of the execution, compile the letters and commemorate von Gottberg as a ‘good German’.

The story presents the protagonist with an unmastered inheritance that leads Conrad into a journey that takes over his life entirely, causing his career and relationship to suffer. Conrad becomes obsessed with von Gottberg’s fate and the task assigned to him by Mendel. Indeed, the notion of an unhealthy obsession with the past is something that can be found in a variety of memory narratives discussed in this thesis. The narrators of Marcel Beyer’s *Spione* and Thomas Medicus’ *In den Augen meines Großvaters* are similarly obsessed with the past of their grandfathers. They all invest their historical research with varying degrees of imaginative fantasy and representation in order to bridge the generational gap between their present and the past. This fixation on the part of Conrad with Mendel and von Gottberg leads to the breakdown of his marriage to Francine, who does not show any understanding for his struggle with the memoir. Early on in the text, Conrad realises that his thoughts are continuously returning to the fate of Axel von Gottberg:

This is one of the mysteries of consciousness, Conrad thinks, the difference between the thoughts you bid to come to you and the ones that come anyway, sometimes as a blessing, also as a curse.²⁹

He cannot free himself from his thoughts and the memory of von Gottberg’s demise to the degree that he feels cursed by it. The notion of the past as a curse that returns to haunt members of the present-day generation is certainly common in memory fiction. It can be found in contemporary German fiction as well as in Holocaust fiction describing the trauma resulting from memories of the war and the Holocaust as a curse or even religious stigmatisation. McGlothlin uses the concept of stigmatisation in her comparison between second-generation Holocaust and perpetrator literature, arguing that both groups, children of victims and perpetrators

²⁷ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 6. (original emphasis)

²⁸ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 6. (original emphasis)

²⁹ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 2.

alike, feel marked by the extreme violence of the past at opposite ends of the spectrum.³⁰ The notion of the curse is comparable to that of the stigma. In both cases there is a feeling of being marked by the traumatic and violent past of the war. The difference between Cartwright's novel and German novels, such as Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* [In my Brother's Shadow] or Thomas Medicus' *In den Augen meines Großvaters* [In the Eyes of my Grandfather], is that Conrad has no family relationship with either Mendel or von Gottberg; and in Conrad's case there are no elements of perpetrator-centred guilt. His 'curse' stems from the indebtedness he feels towards his mentor Mendel, whom he understands as a father figure. When asked about his relationship to Mendel, Conrad avows that he 'loved him like a father, perhaps, a grandfather'.³¹ This explains his immense personal investment in his attempt to tell this story as well as the emotional connection to Mendel's past. This stands in complete contrast to Conrad's real father, who suffers from dementia and from whom he is estranged.

Conrad remembers that his father's decoration in the little [...] house was a blue-and-red blade from his old college, Balliol [...] It was all he chose to remember of his past life.³²

All he chooses to remember of his actual father is his connection to Oxford University, the place that has given Conrad a new home and provided him with a new father-figure in Mendel. This demonstrates the novel's critical engagement with the concept of memory and forgetting. While Conrad is burdened with commemorating his mentor Mendel and von Gottberg, whom he sees as a heroic resistance fighter, at the same time he attempts to forget his past and his real father. Conrad's close association with Mendel leads him into this attempt of secondary remembering while at the same time he voluntarily chooses to forget his real father and his 'real' memories. Thus, the readers learn very little about Conrad's past before his time at Oxford and the relationship between him and his father is markedly coined by silence. It is a double irony that Conrad's father is suffering from dementia and soon will not be able to remember his son. Indeed, it is only proper to argue that not only does Conrad understand Mendel as a father-figure but that Mendel has 'adopted' his student by choosing him to inherit the letters and memoirs about his

³⁰ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration*, p. 5.

³¹ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 222.

³² Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 119.

relationship to von Gottberg. In this sense, Conrad has been made Mendel's heir not only to the valuable archive material but also to his memories. They have quite literally been transmitted from one generation to another in order to keep the memory alive.

In order to fulfil this task, Conrad needs to find the evidence to piece together the events leading up to von Gottberg's execution after the failed 20 July plot. The investigation reminds one very much of a detective trying to find evidence in order to solve a mystery. Conrad retraces the steps of Mendel and von Gottberg to Jerusalem, Oxford, Berlin and finally von Gottberg's estate in the former East Prussia. In Jerusalem, he uses photographs to follow in the two friends' footsteps. One particular photograph describes them

[as] though they have been posed for Nazi propaganda, the tall, athletic, aristocratic Count Axel von Gottberg, of Pleskow, and the smaller, softer Elya Mendel, who could be thought by the ill-disposed, from his complicit smile, to have cabalistic knowledge.³³

The photograph is described by Conrad in hindsight, but it nevertheless already hints at the rift in von Gottberg and Mendel's friendship caused by Nazism. They could not, however, 'have had more than an inkling of the nightmare that was to come'.³⁴ Conrad begins to imagine what it must have been like for the two men 'without the knowledge of what was to come. The knowledge that has made us'.³⁵ He is, of course, referring to the Holocaust, a theme that is always present in the background of the novel despite the focus on German resistance. Mendel, himself a Jewish scholar in Oxford, is aware of von Gottberg's nationalistic tendencies and they frighten him. 'He felt that Axel's attitude was *my country, right or wrong*'.³⁶ This, which Conrad finds out from Elizabeth, the last surviving witness of that time, is the reason why Mendel undermined his friend's reputation, von Gottberg's patriotism and his 'fondness of putting himself in the middle of intrigue'.³⁷ Elizabeth Partridge is the only eye-witness to whom Conrad still manages to talk shortly before her death. The protagonist's role can again be compared to that of a detective as he is conducting an interview with Elizabeth in order to gather more evidence about her

³³ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p.20.

³⁴ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p.21.

³⁵ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p.22.

³⁶ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 68.

³⁷ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 68.

true relationship to Axel von Gottberg. Conrad wants to ask her what really happened between her and von Gottberg and when she saw him last, but he realises that

[a]fter years of reflection, old people reorder their lives. We all do it in our way. We construct our self-image as if we are hoping for some retrospective distinction, a vision of the person we believe we are supposed to be; without being able to see a template, we carry on relentlessly, like bees obeying an order they don't understand, until death makes it all irrelevant. Why is it important to practise wilful amnesia and invent myths?³⁸

This proves Conrad's awareness of the pitfalls of memory. He knows that Elizabeth's eye-witness account cannot be fully trusted because of the workings of memory. It is the most poignant part in the text dealing with the processes of remembering. Conrad's investigation is getting results, but he realises that his sources are to a certain degree unreliable, while the private memory of Elizabeth is tainted by her love of von Gottberg, and the more official traces at his disposal, namely the film of the trial of von Gottberg, are full of Nazi propaganda. The film of the trial is linguistically senseless as it is edited always to give the infamous judge Freisler the last word – although Conrad believes that von Gottberg has 'done his best to demonstrate that there is such a thing as a good German'.³⁹

Conrad's dilemma with regards to his evidence is one that can be found in a number of novels dealing with the workings of memory discourses. The literary critic Anne Fuchs, for instance, highlights the 'impasse of distorting family remembrance, on the one hand, and the dead end of didacticized historical discourse and official cultural memory, on the other'.⁴⁰ Just like Paul Pokriefke in Grass's *Im Krebsgang* (Crabwalk, 2002), Freia in Dücker's *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies, 2005) and the narrator in Beyer's *Spione* (Spies, 2000), the protagonist in *The Song Before It Is Sung* embarks on an investigation of the past. This investigative narrative model, whether it is seen as journalistic, historical research or detective-novel-like, is clearly being used in Cartwright's novel in order to critically highlight the problems of memory discourses. The two women who knew von Gottberg best, his wife and Elizabeth Partridge, are 'living with the memory of the man who meant most to

³⁸ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 90.

³⁹ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War in Contemporary German Literature, Films, and Discourse – The Politics of Memory* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), p. 59.

them', which leads their memories to be distorted 'after years of reflection'.⁴¹ Furthermore, Mendel's account of the story is distorted by the ideological differences between him and von Gottberg. As Conrad realises, the papers of Mendel contain 'some big issues, the man of ideas versus the man of action, the contemplative life against the active life'.⁴² The ideological difference between Mendel and von Gottberg becomes clear at the outset of the novel. Mendel dismisses von Gottberg's Hegelian ideas and sees the 'irrationality' of history while von Gottberg sees 'patterns'.⁴³ Their ideological differences ultimately lead to the tragic end of their friendship and von Gottberg's patriotism is often criticised by Mendel, who believes him to be sympathising with the Nazi ideology. It leads Mendel to discredit his friend on his mission to find support for his cause. Thus, Mendel's version of the events cannot be fully trusted either, and Conrad is surrounded by unreliable witness statements.

The private memory of the witnesses cannot be trusted enough for Conrad to gain a true picture of Axel von Gottberg. This becomes obvious after Conrad has read the memoir of von Gottberg's wife about the eve of 20 July 1944.

He sees Axel von Gottberg desperate to hold his wife and his children for the last time. He sees the tall, romantic figure striding to the fading light for home [...]. He sees Axel von Gottberg exactly as he is in the trial footage, tall, hollow-eyed, agonisingly thin, but resolved. [...] Was it courage or was it a kind of delusion, a *folie de grandeur*, that he, Axel, Graf von Gottberg, was destined to save Germany alongside his grand friend, Claus Schenk, Graf von Stauffenberg? But also Conrad sees the puzzled children [...] the children of a traitor – or a hero.⁴⁴

The more Conrad finds out about the count, the more elusive his picture of him becomes. While the memoirs, letters and interviews help Conrad's investigation into von Gottberg's character and his demeanour, the film material and other historical archive material provide him with information on von Gottberg's role during the 20 July plot. In order to fill the gaps of memory, Conrad uses various sources, some of which clearly belong to the realms of cultural memory. Chapter 19 of the novel presents the reader with the account of the 20 July plot in 1944. There is a clear change in narrative style away from the subjective thoughts of Conrad towards a

⁴¹ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 90.

⁴² Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 90.

⁴³ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, pp. 27 - 9.

⁴⁴ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 189.

more historical style of narrative representing the facts of the events of the day. However, neither the known events of the 20 July plot nor the film material of the trial provide Conrad with a definitive answer as to whether von Gottberg was a heroic figure or simply a deluded German patriot. This is, as it turns out, one of the main objectives behind Conrad's investigation into the past. Mendel wanted him to determine

in what state von Gottberg died. Did he die a German patriot or as someone who wanted to atone for the sins visited on the Jews, on Mendel's people? For Mendel that was the issue when all else was forgotten.⁴⁵

The only way of establishing this, for Conrad, is to find the lost film material of the execution which is rumoured to exist due to Hitler's express wish to witness the hangings of the plotters.

The unearthing of this evidence is given particular emphasis in the narrative as it allows Conrad to change his role from historical researcher to that of a belated witness. He travels to Berlin in order to meet Ernst Fritsch, a former cameraman with UFA who managed to hide his Jewishness and involuntarily became a witness to the execution. He was in possession of the film material throughout his life in the GDR, waiting for the opportunity to rid himself of this terrible evidence. He kept the film because he 'believed it was necessary to remember' but could not tell anyone about it during his time in the GDR.⁴⁶ The film material is invested with mythical significance in the course of the novel. It is the missing piece in Conrad's collection of evidence, and the handover, 'in the middle of Jewish Berlin', is reminiscent of Cold War spy thrillers.⁴⁷ The protagonist feels like 'a character in a thriller waiting for a drop'.⁴⁸ The comparison between Conrad and some sort of investigator figure of a 'detective' story or thriller is very striking in this scene. Conrad meets Fritsch in a vast Jewish cemetery for the handover of the film material to proceed. The absence of the Jews of Berlin is thematised in this part of the novel, and Fritsch, despite acknowledging the bravery of the plotters, begs Conrad not to 'forget that six million

⁴⁵ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 207.

⁴⁶ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 223.

⁴⁷ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, pp. 221 and 229.

⁴⁸ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 229.

Jews died also'.⁴⁹ Indeed, Fritsch criticises German memory culture when he tells Conrad that

nobody in Berlin wants to remember that. They want to make themselves feel good with the expensive memorials from famous architects, but the reality is now forgotten. And I think only those people who experienced those times can truly understand.⁵⁰

The difficulty of writing about the 20 July plot is clearly indicated here – how does one write about the resistance without forgetting the crimes of the Holocaust? It is comparable to the difficulty experienced by German authors when broaching the issue of German suffering without referring to Nazi crimes. Cartwright's narrative, however, deals adeptly with this conundrum by showing awareness of the memory issues within Germany, such as the Holocaust memorial mentioned above, while on the other hand introducing the notion of German resistance within the context of a particularly British memory landscape, namely that of Oxford scholars.

Oxford University becomes a symbol for a particular English memory and identity towards which both Mendel and von Gottberg are very drawn. They both feel like outsiders, however, because of their respective Jewish and German identities. Von Gottberg spells this out during his last meeting with Mendel, in a passage which also demonstrates the narrative's awareness of the connection between cultural memory and identity.

You have in your cultural memory, from your family, from your religion, an instinctive Jewishness. I have an instinctive Germanness.⁵¹

This simple calculation leads to the rift between Mendel and von Gottberg, and it shows a less than heroic side to the count. While von Gottberg is aware of the injustices done to the Jewish population of his home country, he cannot bring himself to leave it behind for Oxford. Instead, he tries to convince Mendel that there is a different Germany, an honourable Germany, of which he sees himself as a representative. Mendel, however, does not give much credence to his friend and thinks of him, if not as a Nazi, then as a deluded German patriot.

⁴⁹ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 224.

⁵⁰ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, pp. 224 - 5.

⁵¹ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 103.

Conrad believes that with the forgotten film material he can perhaps find out who von Gottberg really was and is very surprised when Fritsch hands him a letter written by von Gottberg to Mendel shortly before his execution. It is the final letter that, together with the film, concludes Conrad investigation. Within this letter von Gottberg reiterates that he has acted in pure faith in accordance with his beliefs, and that he always had his friendship with Mendel in mind. It is a moving self-defence on the part of a 'man of action' prepared to lay down his life for his principles, and shows that he knew of Mendel's suspicions about him. The figure of von Gottberg remains ambiguous to Conrad, even after he has read the letter and watched the terrible film material. The fact is that even the film of von Gottberg's last moments does not provide Conrad with the vital answers to the question as to who von Gottberg really was. Not even when Conrad is confronted with von Gottberg's and Elizabeth's son, a secret well kept by her and Mendel, does he find the vital final clues which he believes are still missing. Elizabeth, in her memoir, always knew that 'memory, famously, plays tricks', but she also insists that she always believed von Gottberg 'died a hero'.⁵²

None of this helps Conrad in his quest for truth, which leads him to come to the conclusion that the dead are unwilling to provide him with answers. The investigation fails to achieve its ultimate goal of unearthing the past fully, and the truth remains in part hidden. In contrast to the detective novel, Conrad's postmemorial engagement is insufficient to close the gap between the past and the present. Indeed, the novel highlights its own textuality when it is made obvious that Conrad regains his own sense of identity by 'assembling this story on paper'.⁵³ Cartwright's text certainly does draw attention to its own fictionality, and by doing that it ultimately questions the notion of memory itself. Tim S. Gauthier points out that the metafictional aspects of texts such as *The Song Before It Is Sung* 'declare their representationality, their blatant constructedness, and their foregrounding of textuality through various literary techniques that highlight the conditional representation of the past'.⁵⁴ Cartwright's text and other memory fictions use a similar method, described by Linda Hutcheon as *historical metafiction*, not so much to highlight the constructed nature of historical narrative as that of collective

⁵² Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, pp. 256 - 7.

⁵³ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 259.

⁵⁴ Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), p. 6.

memory. While Conrad is attempting to find a true account of the past, he comes to the conclusion that all he can do is to provide another text that compiles the evidence he has found. This evidence in itself is representational and does not account for the actual experience of the past. The reader is constantly reminded of the fact that Conrad has not experienced the events he is investigating. Thus, the investigation is flawed from the beginning and the outcome is far from conclusive. He compiles a narrative out of the polyphony of private memories as well as the cultural memory of the 20 July plot that exists in contemporary memory discourse. The gaps that appear are filled by Conrad's 'imaginative investment' turning his account into a 'postmemory' as defined by Hirsch. By revealing the act of poetic imagination in the final chapter, the novel reveals that the outcome of Conrad's investigation is not the discovery of the truth about von Gottberg and Mendel. As Conrad realises, 'he had been expecting something from the indifferent dead that they were unwilling to offer him. He was expecting some answers'.⁵⁵ His work, however, is not entirely in vain. The role ascribed to him by Mendel was never to unveil the truth but to construct a narrative representing the various memories of the main characters' experiences of the past. Conrad becomes a belated witness of the story of Axel von Gottberg and Elya Mendel by creating this narrative and constructs a text that can enter the realms of cultural memory rather than being forgotten. Conrad's investigation into the past therefore was never meant to lead to a discovery of the truth, but rather to a rediscovery of memory in order to prevent the events from being forgotten. Hence, the novel has to be read as a contemporary novel that is less concerned with the actual events of the past than with distinctly contemporary anxieties about forgetting them.

Cartwright's *roman à clef* is stylistically embedded in the temporal space of the present inhabited by the protagonist. The reader witnesses the troubled relationship between Mendel and von Gottberg not directly but, rather, filtered through the narrative voice. Thus, the past that is represented in the novel is mediated through the narrator's act of secondary witnessing. Even the parts of the text which transport the reader directly back into the prewar era, such as Mendel and von Gottberg's discussions during their stay in Jerusalem in Chapter 2, are later revealed as Conrad's own imaginative account.⁵⁶ The only genuine voices from the past are

⁵⁵ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 269.

⁵⁶ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 260.

those memory traces which the protagonist uncovers during his obsessive quest, such as Mendel's letters, the film reels of von Gottberg's trial and execution, and eye-witness accounts. These are clearly marked through the application of *italics* in order to differentiate the voices of the past from the present day narrative voice. In the absence of first-hand memories of the wartime era, Conrad was born postwar and has no living memory of the events described, these memory traces become pivotal in the narrator's quest. While it is obvious that we are by no means dealing with an epistolary novel, the importance of the letters as *voices from the past* is striking. As readers we are thereby constantly aware of the text's fictionality. The characters Mendel and von Gottberg are clearly fictional but the parallels to their real life counterparts remain based on the author's historical research and are striking.

The reader is invited to join the narrator on his obsessive journey to re-establish these memory traces into a coherent narrative which allows the story to be re-inscribed into the collective memory. With the perspective of the investigator the narrator pieces together the clues and the reader witnesses this process of reconstruction in which the 'case' for or against von Gottberg is made. The development of the plot and the perspective of the investigator, reminiscent of the detective genre, are thereby deployed, allowing the reader to participate in the problematic process of rediscovering lost memories. The memory traces, such important tools for the investigator narrator in this quest, are questioned from the outset in the Prologue. Conrad refers to 'half-remembered knowledge', the film of the trial 'is edited', and Mendel's own account is characterised by 'a slightly different telling' in each letter.⁵⁷ We consequently encounter the notion of memory's unreliability and that of its traces from early in the novel and this is consistently done throughout the narrative. By structuring the novel as a detective-novel-like quest, taking the narrator from London via Jerusalem and Oxford to Berlin, the novelist allows the reader to discover these problematic footprints of lost memories alongside the narrator. The uncertainty of memory is clearly countered by the empirical certainties of historiography. Describing the events of the 20 July plot and its aftermath, almost hour by hour, the narrative voice changes considerably. Its tone changes from that of the doubtful investigator to that of authoritative historian, using the all-knowing perspective of an omniscient narrator reminiscent of realist fiction.

⁵⁷ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, pp. 1, 3, 7.

Cartwright himself notes in his postscript to the novel that he attempted to reconstruct these historically relevant events as accurately as possible. We are thus led to believe that historical events can be told based on the knowledge inscribed, in history and cultural memory. This leads to juxtaposition between history, which can be told, and the rather more problematic notion of memory and the narrator's act of secondary witnessing. For the latter, Conrad is forced to fill the gaps of lost private memories with his own imaginative and largely fictional account, based on the memory traces he discovers. Stylistically, we thereby encounter two voices within Cartwright's narrative, on the one hand the investigative voice which tries to uncover the lost memories of the past, constantly highlighting its imaginative investment, and, on the other hand, the voice of historical certainty. Consequently, the text illustrates the difficulties the narrator experiences in trying to textualise the fluid and often unreliable memory traces he uncovers. The resolution to Conrad's difficulties in recovering the long lost memories of Mendel's and von Gottberg's story is reflected in the title of the novel and answered by Mendel himself.

Where is the song before it is sung? *To which Mendel replied, Where indeed? Nowhere is the answer. One creates a song by singing it, by composing it.*⁵⁸

Here we have the metaphorical answer to the *motif* of Cartwright's novel, namely that that a 'life' does not exist before it is lived and that a *memoir* of someone's past has to be composed. It emphasises Conrad's role as the *composer* of this particular narrative and his investigative act of recovering the absent memories as part of his creative process. His eventual success in writing the *memoir* also establishes Conrad's identity as a writer and ends his previous crisis as a would-be historian.

⁵⁸ Justin Cartwright, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, p. 267.

2.1.2 Absent Memory and Family Myth in Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs* (1992)

Ian McEwan's novel *Black Dogs*, first published in 1992, is, despite having been shortlisted for the prestigious Booker Prize, one of the lesser-known texts in the author's oeuvre. It has only recently been rediscovered by literary criticism with regards to its prevalent interest in the past as well as discourses of memory.⁵⁹ Within its framework the narrative portrays the legacy of the Second World War, the crimes committed by the Nazi regime, and the failures of Soviet Communism in late twentieth century European memory.⁶⁰ The plot concentrates on the attempt by the orphaned narrator Jeremy to write a memoir of his wife's parents, June and Bernard Tremaine. The pair married in 1946 after having survived the war rather comfortably. They are both idealistic young members of the British Communist Party and decide to travel through the ruins of Europe. On a stopover in Southern France, June has an encounter that estranges her from her young husband as well as her political beliefs forever. She endures a traumatic experience involving two 'black dogs' that were believed to have been left there by the Gestapo. After the birth of their daughter the two separate. June dies in a nursing home in 1987, after telling Jeremy a great deal about her life and marriage. In 1989, Jeremy and Bernard travel to Berlin, witnessing the fall of the Berlin Wall and, subsequently, the end of communism. Here, Jeremy hears Bernard's different version of his wife's experience and their estrangement. Jeremy is caught between the two different memories of Bernard and June and their account of the encounter with the 'black dogs' in 1946. He then travels to France in order to unearth the truth about the event. Here he encounters a variety of conflicting memories about the 'black dogs' and he begins to wonder whether they have only existed in local folklore and June's imagination.

Jeremy has to be seen as some sort of blank canvas, stuck between the two belief systems of the past represented by June and Bernard. But not only is he trying to fill the gaps in his family history, he is also attempting to construct his own identity. Orphaned from the age of eight and therefore lacking his own family history, Jeremy adopts June and Bernard in order to occupy their past. He does this

⁵⁹ The novel is discussed in greater detail in the texts by Sabine Birchall, Tim S. Gauthier, and David Malcolm. All these critics analysed the novel with regards to its representation of the past, especially the legacy of the Second World War and the Holocaust.

⁶⁰ David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2002), p. 132.

by taking over the role as their biographer in order to keep their memories alive and to make them his own.⁶¹ During his journey into the past he encounters two entirely different belief systems, namely Bernard's rationalism based on a historical materialism, and June's spiritualism. The narrator is forced to establish his own position located between the two extreme poles he is representing in the memoir:

In this memoir I have included certain incidents from my own life [...] that are open equally to Bernard and to June's kind of interpretation. Rationalist and mystic, commissar and yogi, joiner and abstainer, scientist and intuitionist, Bernard and June are the extremities, the twin poles along whose slippery axis my own unbelief slithers and never comes to rest.⁶²

Bernard and June's stories are in many ways incommensurate not least because at the centre of each is a firm and opposite idea about the nature of fact and truth, science and narrative, the spiritual and the material. Consequently their memories and explanations of their experience of the incident with the 'black dogs' differ a great deal. Jeremy cannot trust either of the eye-witnesses as their memories are tainted by their ideologies and belief systems. In order to incorporate both, Bernard's and June's memories of the event, he needs to conduct his own investigation of the incident with the 'black dogs'. In order to write a memoir he has to solve its mystery first. The story of the 'black dogs' becomes a family myth and the younger generation is constantly reminded of it, despite Bernard's misgivings.

It was family lore, a story burnished with repetition, no longer remembered so much as incanted like a prayer got by heart. I had heard of it in Poland years before, when I met Jenny. I had heard it often enough from Bernard who was not, in the strictest sense, a witness. It had been reenacted at Christmases and other family gatherings. As far as June was concerned, it was to be the centrepiece of my memoir, just as it was in her own story of her life - the defining moment ... It was a story whose historical accuracy was of less significance than the function it served.⁶³

This scene not only describes the immense importance of the family legend of the 'black dogs', it also indicates an awareness of the workings of 'communicative memory'. The story is repeated many times during family get-togethers and, thus,

⁶¹Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvergangenheit im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 210.

⁶² Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs* (London: Vintage, 1998), p. 19.

⁶³ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, pp. 49 - 50.

enters the collective memory of the family members and stays present even after June's death. Indeed, Jeremy acknowledges that it has to become the centrepiece of his memoir despite its questionable historical accuracy. Rather than focusing on a search for historical truth, he illustrates the important function this particular memory serves. McEwan's novel thereby highlights the constructed nature of family memories and identities. Both June and Bernard interpret this memory using different explanatory models, which have a major impact on their identities, leading to their separation.⁶⁴ It is interesting that Bernard, strictly speaking, has not witnessed the attack of the 'black dogs'. He was behind June during their walk through Southern France, preoccupied with his scientific sketches, while his wife was fighting off the dogs.⁶⁵ The experience of this encounter causes the rift between the two as reflected in their differing memory of the event. Bernard faithfully keeps hold of his common sense rationalism while June 'discovered something' that, according to her, set her free, namely her private mysticism that allows her to understand the dogs as 'emblems of the menace she had felt' and as an 'embodiment of the nameless, unreasonable, unmentionable disquiet' experienced during her travels through war-torn Europe.⁶⁶ They choose different explanatory models in an attempt to make sense of the catastrophe that has changed the world they inhabited. Jeremy is caught between the opposing memories of the once happy couple. Indeed, Tim S. Gauthier understands Jeremy as a kind of 'postmodern orphan' who does not possess a philosophy as such and seems to be stranded between the two different discourses represented by Bernard and June.⁶⁷

Jeremy adopts Bernard and June, just as Conrad adopts Mendel, to become the witness to their memories. He has, of course, no experience of the past events and is therefore relying on Bernard's and June's memories. He wonders why they never compared 'memories of these earliest days' and believes they would have 'enjoyed the differences'.⁶⁸ The differences in the two protagonist's memories of the event regarding the two 'black dogs' indicate the problem of memory as a whole, namely the unreliability of the memories of the two witnesses who base their interpretations

⁶⁴ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 207.

⁶⁵ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, pp. 144 - 153.

⁶⁶ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, pp. 59 and 144 - 5.

⁶⁷ Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, p. 119.

⁶⁸ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 48.

on distinct ideologies. It is the role of the narrator to unify and represent these different memories of the event into a coherent narrative that not only attempts to understand the past but also includes the fears of the present. Thus, the novel is structured as an investigation in which Jeremy, the narrator, struggles to unearth the true significance of the event. This analytical style of writing, as Sabine Birchall argues in her work on memory and collective identities, reminds one of the 'Indiziensammlung innerhalb der Gattung des Kriminalromans' ['evidence collection within the genre of a crime novel'].⁶⁹ Thus, the narrator is presented as a figure who is searching for evidence and traces of a lost past in order to solve the mystery. Tim S. Gauthier also highlights the narrative frame of the investigation in McEwan's *Black Dogs* in which the 'question is not whether the dogs existed but what precisely their existence represents'.⁷⁰ In writing a memoir, Jeremy attempts to bring at least some degree of coherence into the diverging memories of his adopted family. Like Conrad in Justin Cartwright's *The Song Before It Is Sung*, Jeremy displays detective-like qualities. He conducts private interviews with Bernard and June, attempting to reveal some sort of truth from their different versions of the past. Furthermore, he retraces June's steps and travels to Southern France as well as travelling to Berlin with Bernard where he confronts his own demons linked to the trauma of the war.

Jeremy encounters a number of problems during his investigation of the past. The polarization of the two eye-witnesses' memories highlights how memory can be constructed in order to fit present-day narratives. The question of what really happened during this summer afternoon in 1946 becomes ever more elusive due to the protagonists' unreliability. For instance, when Jeremy conducts his interviews with June, the decline of her mnemonic abilities due to her increasing dementia becomes apparent. He acknowledges that

there were only two visits towards the end when I managed to get June to talk about the past in an organised fashion, and from the very beginning we had quite different notions of what the true subject of my account should be.⁷¹

⁶⁹ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvergangenheit im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 219.

⁷⁰ Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, p. 108.

⁷¹ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 32.

He further describes how June had to ‘reconstruct her whole existence’ before she could ‘begin to remember’.⁷² This is a further indication that Jeremy is conducting his investigation into the event from a basis of flawed memory. Thus, right from the start of the text, the reader is confronted by a critical stance towards the objectivity of memory. Gauthier argues that the text ‘heightens our awareness of history as a construct’ and concludes that ‘[n]arrative remains the only means for establishing a meaningful link, however arbitrary, between our past and our present’.⁷³ Indeed, taking into account the narrative’s clearly indicated awareness of debates on memory, it is more suitable to argue that the text critically exposes identity as a construct of memory. Both Bernard and June construct their identities using opposing explanatory models in order to come to terms with their traumatic memories of their experiences in 1946.

During one of his interviews with June, Jeremy spots a photograph that depicts the couple before their journey through the ruins of the war-ravished continent. He is fascinated:

It was the innocence that was so appealing, not only of the girl, or the couple, but of the time itself [...]. The innocent time! Tens of millions dead, Europe in ruins, the extermination camps still a news story, not yet our universal reference point of human depravity. It is photography itself that creates the illusion of innocence. Its ironies of frozen narrative lend to its subjects an apparent unawareness that they will change or die.⁷⁴

The theme of innocence and the loss of innocence is a subject that permeates most of McEwan’s writing from early on.⁷⁵ In this case, the innocence that has been captured by the photograph is lost by the knowledge of the true cost of the Second World War and particularly the unimaginable violence of the Holocaust. For Bernard and June this happens symbolically in the aftermath of June’s encounter with the ‘black dogs’. It is after this episode that they renegotiate their identities and beliefs, as a rationalist and a mystic, in order to cope with the memory of the sheer violence that has transformed Europe and Britain forever. Jeremy envies their innocence portrayed in

⁷² Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 33.

⁷³ Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations – A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, pp. 85 and 110.

⁷⁴ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 37.

⁷⁵ One can find the theme of lost innocence in the case of Briony and Cecilia in *Atonement* (2001); in the case of Leonard in *The Innocent* (1990); or Joe in *Enduring Love* (1997), to name but a few examples.

the photograph, even if it is only an illusion, as he is aware that the Holocaust is ever present in his contemporary world. Thus, the loss of innocence experienced by Bernard and June is passed on to the following generation and Jeremy, despite having no living memory of the event, is nevertheless forced to remember. However, he is lacking the meta-narratives employed by Bernard and June to deal with this memory, and is therefore conducting his own investigation of their past. His ultimate goal is to find an explanation or some sort of truth for the ‘black dogs’ and the violence they symbolically represent. Looking back at the photograph, Jeremy formulates the question that underlines his memoir:

The question I really wanted to ask was, How did you get from that face to this, how did you end up looking so extraordinary – was it life?⁷⁶

The answer to this question does not simply lie in his attempt to gather June’s memories and turn them into a narrative. He cannot travel back to the ‘innocent time’ of the photograph’s origin. His problem is that he was not there, but yet the past, in the form of the family lore of the ‘black dogs’, haunts him. All he has to work with are the traces and the memories of Bernard and, more importantly, June, as well as his own investigation into the past.

In this respect, his engagement in recovering the past is to a large degree postmemorial and comparable to Conrad’s task of unearthing the traces of memory that have been left behind. Tim S. Gauthier illustrates this point specifically when he argues that McEwan highlights the significance of this ‘secondary memory’, namely as

the construction of memory in the minds of individuals who were not present when events in the past occurred, in this case the reader. Jeremy, the narrator of McEwan’s novel, is just such a reader who tries to disentangle the significance of an event that happened before he was born.⁷⁷

This description of Jeremy’s situation or what Gauthier calls ‘secondary memory’, a term he borrows from Dominic LaCapra, resembles Hirsch’s notion of ‘postmemory’. Hirsch argues that

⁷⁶ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 38.

⁷⁷ Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, p. 22.

[p]ostmemory characterizes the experience of those who grew up dominated by narratives that preceded their birth, whose own belated stories are displaced by the stories of the previous generation, shaped by traumatic events that can be neither fully understood nor re-created.⁷⁸

This certainly describes the narrator's experience in McEwan's novel as he tries to sift and organise a plurality of memories based around the central event of the incident with the 'black dogs'. Whether it really happened is of lesser importance than the symbolism it entails. Hirsch argues further that 'postmemory seeks connection' and that where it fails to 'recover' traces of the past it 'creates' and 'imagines'.⁷⁹ While memory itself is already highly mediated, 'postmemory' is even more so due to its lack of first-hand experience. The mediation in McEwan's novel, through the narrator, is highlighted early on when Jeremy states that he 'has taken a number of liberties', of which 'the most flagrant [...] has been to recount certain conversations never intended for the record'.⁸⁰ Hence, the readers are reminded that they are dealing with a fictional text about the past that is subject to manipulation and mediation by the narrator. This reminder further indicates the futility of his investigation, based on the unreliable memory of Bernard and June as well as the historical knowledge that has been passed on through institutions of cultural memory. Jeremy explains that 'indiscretions became an absolute necessity', thereby hinting at the text's own fictionality.⁸¹ Consequently, the reader follows the narrator's exploration of memory through the medium of the memoir with an awareness of the mediated and constructed nature of the text. Again, we can draw parallels to Cartwright's novel in which the narrator, Conrad, similarly exposes the mediated nature of his investigation into memory. Memory or, more specifically, postmemory is, thus, exposed as a highly constructed concept that is created in the present, albeit based on events that occurred in the past.

Gauthier refers to the novel as 'metamemoir', arguing that it 'unveils the creative process and puts in relief the difficulties of the historian who wishes to translate memory into text'.⁸² Jeremy's difficulty as a biographer and historical

⁷⁸ Marianne Hirsch, 'Past Lives: Postmemories in Exile', *Poetics Today*, 17 (1996), 659 - 686 (p. 662).

⁷⁹ Marianne Hirsch, 'Past Lives', p. 664.

⁸⁰ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 20.

⁸¹ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 21.

⁸² Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, p. 122.

investigator is the unreliability of memory, including his own. Due to his emotional connection to the past he set out to tell, he is unable to provide the objective view of the scientific researcher. This is emphasised by the novel's temporal structure, which defies linearity and jumps in time as well as space. It starts in a nursing home in Wiltshire, depicting Jeremy's last interviews with June, moves to Berlin in 1989 during the fall of the Wall, goes back to Madjanek in 1981, via Jeremy's visit to the Bergerie in 1989, concluding in St Maurice de Navacelles in 1946. Thus, the novel does not offer the reader a chronological or even a coherent narrative structure, but rather a constant dialogue between the present and the past. The aesthetic structure is comparable to the workings of memory itself, in this case Jeremy's, jumping between time and space, comparable to a person who remembers certain events in the past before being pulled back into the present. Indeed, Jeremy's empathic involvement in the narrative he attempts to tell and the fallibility of his own memory is exposed in various scenes. When he recollects his visit to the Madjanek concentration camp, where he first met his wife Jenny, he admits to his 'unreliable memory'.⁸³ More importantly, however, he is shocked by the traces of the atrocities they encountered during the visit while failing to imagine the scale of the murder:

The extravagant numerical scale, the easy-to-say numbers – tens and hundreds of thousands, millions – denied the imagination its proper sympathies, its rightful grasp of the suffering, and one was drawn insidiously to the perpetrator's premise, that life was cheap [...].⁸⁴

Jeremy's inability to comprehend the scale of the catastrophe that is the Holocaust translates into guilt and into his own loss of innocence. While he cannot imagine the trauma of the victims and the horror of their deaths, he does move towards a critical self-awareness:

We were strolling like tourists. Either you came here and despaired, or you put your hands deeper into your pockets and gripped your own warm loose change and found you had taken one step closer to the dreamers of the nightmare. This was our inevitable shame, our share in the misery. We were on the other side, we walked here freely like the commandant once did, or his political master, poking into this or that, knowing the way out, in the full certainty of our next meal. After

⁸³ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 109.

⁸⁴ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 110.

a while I could no longer bear the victims and I thought only of their persecutors.⁸⁵

This feeling of complicity and guilt evoking a shameful association with the commandant rather than an association with the prisoners is a key experience for the narrator. It is the first time he actually encounters the 'black dogs' in himself when he suddenly remembers Jenny mentioning her mother's story of these creatures.⁸⁶ McEwan clearly plays with the idea that Jeremy in a different time and a different place could have been just as easily a perpetrator as a victim. It is the idea that the capacity for evil remains hidden in all of us that makes it even more pivotal to remember Nazi atrocities. Gauthier even goes as far as to argue that 'the very commonality of survival links us with the perpetrators rather than the victims'.⁸⁷

There are two other scenes in the novel where Jeremy himself encounters the evil that June associates with the incident of the 'black dogs'. During his visit to Berlin with Bernard, they encounter a group of young Neo-Nazis who, during a racist attack, remind the reader in their rage that the evil symbolised by June's interpretation of the 'black dogs' still exists in contemporary Europe.⁸⁸ Jago Morrison confirms this reading when he writes that these

skinheads, bunched in a pack with their hot breath and lolling tongues, are explicitly paralleled with June's dogs.⁸⁹

It is inevitable that the group of Neo-Nazis appears precisely at the moment that the last remnant of the Second World War, the Berlin Wall, is about to be toppled. Furthermore, Jeremy encounters the capacity for violence in himself while travelling to the Bergerie in Southern France in order to retrace June's encounter with the 'black dogs'. In this part of the novel, his narratorial intervention is exposed several times as well as his role as active investigator rather than passive observer. At this point his investigation threatens to fail because of Bernard's and June's different accounts of the past and their failure to provide him with a coherent memory of the events during their travels in 1946. He decides that, rather than 'remain the passive

⁸⁵ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 111.

⁸⁶ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 112.

⁸⁷ Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, p. 90.

⁸⁸ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, pp. 95 - 99.

⁸⁹ Jago Morrison, 'Narration and Unease in Ian McEwan's Fiction', *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 42 (2001), 253 - 268 (p. 264).

victim of my subjects' voices, I had come to pursue them, to recreate Bernard and June sitting here', and aimed for 'taking control' of their memories. This is a further pivotal point in the novel as the narrator not only reveals his authorial control but also attempts to close the gap between his subjects' differing accounts of their memory by retracing their steps. It is at this point that Jeremy encounters the 'black dogs' again in his very own capacity for violence during the episode in the French restaurant. Indeed, Jeremy's feeling of complicity in violence almost leads him to omit this part in his narrative. He admits that it was his 'intention to end this section of the memoir' but he feels that he must 'recount what happened in the hotel restaurant that evening'.⁹⁰ He refers to his own violent reaction after witnessing a father's cruelty towards his child in the restaurant. Thus, the potential for evil does not merely exist externally but within Jeremy himself, since he has to be restrained from causing serious injury to the stranger. He is stopped 'by words usually spoken to dogs. Ça suffit!'⁹¹ This is a further indication that June's memory and interpretation of the 'black dogs' is haunting the narrator in the present. While he is unable to investigate the past by experiencing what has really happened, he nevertheless meets his own version of the 'black dogs' during his journey into the past. Although he refers to writing a 'memoir' concerned with the irreconcilable differences of his in-laws, in reality he is writing about his investigation into memory. The novel's self-awareness reflects back onto the narrator as he is motivated by discovering what these past events mean to him and his contemporary identity. McEwan's novel conveys a sense that some of the threat that has become inscribed into the Tremaine family memory still exists in the narrator's contemporary world and that it is therefore paramount to remember the past.

While the dogs belong within the realm of June's private memory, they are clearly symbolic of a larger framework of cultural memory. They represent the violence and the atrocities that occurred during the Second World War, and specifically the Holocaust. By institutionalising the memory of the 'black dogs' within the collective family memory through communicating it to the following generation at every given opportunity, June ensures the lasting legacy of the horrors of the past. This is why Jeremy has to investigate the 'black dogs' and why he makes the incident the central motif of his memoir. He encounters the legacy of the Nazi

⁹⁰ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, pp. 123 - 124.

⁹¹ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 124.

past on both a private level (when the Neo-Nazis attack Bernard, for instance), and on a cultural level during his visit to Madjanek. In both cases he draws connections to the Nazi past and June's memory of the 'black dogs', whether real or not. At the end of Part Four of the novel, he discovers some notes taken during one of his last interviews with June that strengthen this association. Here she describes her feelings about the encounter with the dogs:

that morning I came face to face with evil. I didn't quite know it at the time, but I sensed it in my fear – these animals were the creations of debased imaginations, of perverted spirits no amount of social theory could account for. The evil I'm talking about lives in us all. It takes hold in an individual, in private lives, within a family, and then its children who suffer most.⁹²

What June essentially describes here is the burden and the trauma that the knowledge of the Holocaust caused to later post-war generations. Indeed, Gauthier compares McEwan's novel with the work of W.G. Sebald as it 'presents the effects of the Holocaust-trauma to examine how people come to terms with the dark knowledge that becomes their burden to carry'.⁹³ The Holocaust is hardly narrativised at all, with the exception of the visit to Madjanek concentration camp, but alluded to through the family memory of the 'black dogs'. The nightmarish episode of the dogs' aggression and the recurring haunting images of them provide them with a ghost or phantom-like quality. They imbue the past with a quality that can be found in gothic novels and achieve what Anne Fuchs labels 'a gothicization of the past' during her discussion of Tanja Dücker's novel *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies, 2003).⁹⁴ Indeed, McEwan's novel does allow comparison with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's *The Hound of the Baskervilles* (1902). In this novel Doyle combines elements of the gothic novel with the detective novel, featuring a 'hell hound' that is haunting the Baskerville family. However, Sherlock Holmes is allowed to solve the mystery of the murderous dog through his scientific method of deduction. This is a denouement that Jeremy is not permitted in the post-Holocaust world he inhabits. While the parallels are there, a scientific resolution of the matter is unachievable due to Bernard and June's competing memories of the event. Despite these difference, June,

⁹² Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 172.

⁹³ Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations – A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, p. 93.

⁹⁴ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 61.

nevertheless, dismisses Bernard's accusation that she actually believes the dogs 'were Satan's familiars'.⁹⁵ She claims that she has not 'mythologised these animals' but rather 'made use of them' during her own journey of discovery.⁹⁶ What she implies here is that she made use of their symbolism in representing the Nazi atrocities and the traces of them she encountered in 1946. She implores Jeremy to ask Bernard about the eye-witness accounts of the Maire of St Maurice, and claims that he will surely remember those stories that support her view of the existence of the two dogs.⁹⁷ The eye-witness accounts June refers to are presented in the final part of the novel and comprise the stories of the Maire and Madame Auriac. They differ as to the actual role of the 'black dogs' but nevertheless do mention them. The Maire explains to Bernard and June that the dogs June encountered were the

Gestapo dogs. You see it wasn't long afterwards that everything changed. The allies were landing in Normandy. When they started to break through, the Germans began pulling units up north to fight. [...] The dogs were left behind and they ran wild. [...] For two years now they've been a menace.⁹⁸

While the story of the Maire seems credible, his statement has to be treated sceptically as he turns out to be an unreliable witness himself. He believes that the Gestapo trained the dogs to attack women who allegedly belonged to the French resistance. This part of the narrative, however, is disputed by Madame Auriac when she argues that the witnesses of this story 'are a couple of drunks' and that the Maire 'added to her [the victim's] shame with this story, this evil story'.⁹⁹ Hence, McEwan does not allow a straightforward explanation of the existence of the 'black dogs'. Just as Bernard and June are offering competing memories to the narrator, so do the stories of the Maire and Madame Auriac. They all offer differing and therefore unreliable accounts. Jeremy is not allowed the same privilege of Doyle's great detective. Holmes can expose the nightmarish hell hound conjured from the Baskerville's violent past as a very real and trained animal of the present used for Stapleton's sinister and criminal intent.

⁹⁵ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 59.

⁹⁶ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 59.

⁹⁷ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 59.

⁹⁸ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 162.

⁹⁹ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 161.

McEwan's narrator cannot expose the 'black dogs' as either the memory of a real event or family myth. Regardless of this unsatisfactory outcome of the novel's investigation into the past, the story of Bernard and June can be told. David Malcolm suggests that,

[d]espite the doubts that the novel casts on the possibility of any accurate narrative account of past events, it ends with just such an authoritative and authorized presentation of what happened that day in June 1946 in Southern France.¹⁰⁰

He further suggests that the use of traditional third-person omniscient narrative in this section indicates that Jeremy has come to a conclusion and that the story can be told with 'some probable accuracy and authority'.¹⁰¹ Malcolm's reading suggests that McEwan does finally commit himself to a version of the truth. Malcolm's observation about the change of narrative voice in the final chapter of *Black Dogs* is certainly accurate; however, his interpretation of it omits reference to the novel's critical discussion of collective memory. The version of the past that is presented in the final chapter is the result of Jeremy's postmemorial engagement with the past. He creates this narrative out of the traces he uncovers during his investigation and uses his imagination to fill the gaps. He incorporates parts of Bernard and June's diverging memories and combines them into a memory that is of use to him and his present-day situation. As symbolic representations of the Nazi atrocities and the Holocaust, it is important to Jeremy that the 'black dogs' are not forgotten but remembered by his generation. This is ultimately his main motivation in finishing his memoir with a coherent narrative of a memory that can impact on the present but, for him, even more importantly, on the future. This interpretation is to some degree supported by Gauthier's reading of the final chapter when he writes that 'it is how one uses and incorporate one's memories that matters and how the narrated events impact upon the present and the future'.¹⁰² Therefore, what the novel finally conveys is the narrator's version of the past and his mediated representation of memory. Consequently, the 'black dogs' become a warning against forgetting, and of all the protagonists, it falls to Bernard to voice doubt as to history's ability to remember the true cost of war:

¹⁰⁰ David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p. 148.

¹⁰¹ David Malcolm, *Understanding Ian McEwan*, p. 149.

¹⁰² Tim S. Gauthier, *Narrative Desire and Historical Reparations: A.S. Byatt, Ian McEwan, Salman Rushdie*, p. 129.

he was struck by the recently concluded war not as a historical, geopolitical fact but as a multiplicity, a near-infinity of private sorrows, as a boundless grief minutely subdivided without diminishment among individuals who covered the continent like dust, like spores whose separate identities would remain unknown, and whose totality showed more sadness than anyone could ever begin to comprehend; a weight borne in silence by hundreds of thousands, millions, [...].

For the first time he sensed the scale of the catastrophe in terms of feeling; all those unique and solitary deaths, all that consequent sorrow, unique and solitary too, which had no place in conferences, headlines, history, and which had quietly retired to houses, kitchens, unshared beds, and anguished memories.¹⁰³

This observation reflects the notion of the inability of public memory discourses to carry into the future the memory of the true horror and the sense of loss after the war. Indeed, the use of ‘dust’ is an obvious allusion to the Holocaust and its silent victims. Bernard believes that no conference or historical account will be able to represent the true scale of the atrocities. This makes the ‘black dogs’ an even more potent symbol of the evils of the past and a warning against forgetting. Jeremy’s investigation was never to find out what really happened in the past but rather to uncover its meaning for the present. It also highlights the ‘construction’ of memory, be it individual or social. Memories cannot bear any form of objective truth about the past of individuals or societies, but only subjective versions of this past. As Andreas Huyssen puts it:

Remembrance shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember define us in the present. As individuals and societies, we need the past to construct and anchor our identities and to nurture a vision of the future. In the wake of Freud and Nietzsche, however, we know how slippery and unreliable personal memory can be; always affected by forgetting and denial, repression and trauma, it, more often than not, serves a need to rationalise and maintain power. But a society’s collective memory is no less contingent, no less unstable, its shape by no means permanent. It is always subject to subtle and not so subtle reconstruction.

[...]

Given a selective and permanently shifting dialogue between the present and the past, we have to recognize that our present will inevitably have an impact on what and how we remember.¹⁰⁴

¹⁰³ Ian McEwan, *Black Dogs*, p. 165.

¹⁰⁴ Andreas Huyssen, *Twilight Memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, p. 249.

In other words, the process of remembering, as well as the representation of the remembered past, is always constructed in the present and never a complete and pure reflection of the objective truth. This does not imply that the events which are remembered have not occurred at all or are purely fictional. McEwan's novel highlights the importance of the act of remembering with regards to the atrocities of the war, and hence the meaning of memories is of greater importance than their authenticity.

2.2 Investigating the Second World War in German Memory Fiction

From very early on after the war we can find many writers who dedicated their writing to representations of the catastrophic legacy of the Nazi regime such as Heinrich Böll, Günter Grass, Gert Ledig, Christa Wolf . The period after German reunification, however, has witnessed a growing interest in the discourses of memory with regards to Germany's Nazi past. An abundance of literary texts have been published highlighting the workings of private and public collective memory. A great number of these contemporary German novels make use of the investigator-based narrative structure in order to highlight the complex and ongoing memory debates within Germany. For example, in Tanja Dücker's *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies, 2004), the protagonist Freia quite literally investigates her grandparents' Nazi past using methods reminiscent of the classic detective novel. Günter Grass's narrator Paul Pokriefke resorts to journalistic research methods to uncover his family's connection to the *Gustloff* disaster as well as his own son's nationalistic tendencies in *Im Krebsgang* (Crabwalk, 2002). Klaus Modick's *Der kretische Gast* (The Cretan Guest, 2005) depicts Lukas Hollbach's attempt to uncover his grandfather's involvement in the violent repression of partisan uprisings during the occupation of Crete. These are but a few examples of a wider trend in German fiction in which the investigative narrative style is used in an attempt to uncover the truth behind the silence of the witness generation. The problem often encountered by the various narrators is that of the absence of memory, of silence and of the general unreliability of witnesses seeking to mask guilt. In some cases, however, empathy on the part of the investigator leads to a focus on the subject of Germans as victims of the war. Some texts skilfully manage to incorporate both issues, that of German perpetration and of victimhood, into their discussions on memory. The two texts chosen for the discussion of the investigator structure and absent memory in this chapter, Marcel Beyer's *Spione* (Spies, 2000) and Thomas Medicus' *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (In the Eyes of my Grandfather, 2004), are representative of this trend in contemporary German memory fiction.

2.2.1 Spying on the Past in Marcel Beyer's *Spione* (2000)

Marcel Beyer's oeuvre is characterised by his emphasis on remembering the Nazi past. For example, his novel, *Flughunde* (The Karnau Tapes, 1995), explores a sound technician's involvement in Nazi crimes through his medical experiments. The novel to be discussed in this section of the thesis, *Spione* (Spies, 2000), shares the emphasis on memory of perpetration, guilt and innocence with the above. It differs, however, in one very important aspect: the narrator of *Spione* is looking back on a past that preceded his birth. Beyer uses the metaphor of spying in order to create as well as to assess critically his narrator's postmemorial imagination. In this respect, the novel is akin to the two works previously discussed in this chapter.

Spione tells the story of three generations of a German family and mainly revolves around the shared experience of four cousins growing up in post-war Germany, one of whom is an unnamed young boy and our narrator. The narrator tells the story of their quest to discover the lost story of their grandparents and to solve the mystery of their brown eyes – a rare pigmentation for which they are teased incessantly at school – as well as of their profound desire to meet their grandfather, a man who has long before cut ties with all of his family after the death of his first wife. The children's story is interlaced with that of the grandfather, a *Luftwaffe* pilot who flew on secret missions during the Spanish Civil War, and the dead grandmother, who was supposedly a famous opera singer from whom the children have inherited their unusual eyes. After finding an incomplete photo-album that shows pictures of the war time period, the children begin an investigation into their family's past. However, what begins as childish curiosity about the family's past turns into an obsession for the narrator. He continues his investigation well into adulthood, long after his cousins' interest in the past has ceased.

Beyer's novel is full of secrets, using the activity of spying as its central theme. The secrets encountered within the novel are manifold and mainly concern the narrator's family's past. Indeed, the whole novel raises more questions about their past than answers. Was the grandmother really an opera singer? Why have her photographs disappeared? Did the children inherit their brown eyes, or 'Italieneraugen' ['Italian eyes'] as they call them, from her? Why has their grandfather abandoned his family? What exactly was his role during the war? What

is the truth about his second wife? All these questions preoccupy the narrator, resulting in his act of spying into the past. The secrets that preoccupy him, however, are mainly the result of the four cousins' childish imaginings during the summer holiday in which they find the old photo-album. What they are confronted with is the evidence of an unknown family past, a past that is absent from their collective family memory. Due to this absence of memory, the past is transformed into a more sinister world of dark family secrets and ghosts. This reading is supported by Ernst van Alpen's argument that the transmission of trauma between the generations is the result of displaced memories rather than the existence of memory.¹⁰⁵ He implies that the failure of communication between the generations and the inability of later generations to develop their identities based on a stable collective memory within a family environment is often the cause for a postmemorial engagement with the past. Beyer's novel is certainly an example of how the absence of memory turns into an obsessive postmemorial engagement on the part of the narrative voice.

As Stefanie Harris has pointed out, Beyer's novel creates its web of family secrets on three temporal levels.¹⁰⁶ The reader encounters the grandparents' love story set in the 1930s and 1940s, the cousins' summer holiday in the 1970s and the narrator's search in the present (2000). Beyer allocates the roles of the family members very early on in the novel, presenting the grandfather as the 'keeper of secrets' and the grandchildren, especially the narrator, as 'spies' trying to unravel the grandfather's secrets. This becomes obvious when the grandfather sits in the audience during an opera performance, contemplating the importance of secrecy as a member of the *Luftwaffe* that has been established against the ruling of the Treaty of Versailles:

Wer nicht die Kraft hat, ein Geheimnis zu bewahren, erweist sich auch in jeder anderen Hinsicht als schwach. Wer das Vertrauen bricht, wer eines Geheimnisses nicht würdig ist, dem geht zuerst die Achtung der anderen, dann seine Selbstachtung verloren. [...] Geheimnis bleibt Geheimnis.

One who doesn't have the strength to keep a secret proves to be weak in every other way. One who betrays trust, one who is unworthy of a

¹⁰⁵ Ernst van Alpen, 'Second-Generation Testimony, Transmission of Trauma, and Postmemory', p. 487.

¹⁰⁶ Stefanie Harris, 'Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer's *Spione*', *Gegenwarts Literatur*, 4 (2005), 162 - 183 (p. 167).

secret, first loses the respect of others and then one's own self respect.¹⁰⁷

Later on in the novel his sworn secrecy is tested to a higher degree when he has to lie to his fiancée about his participation in the *Condor Legion* during the Spanish Civil War. Thus, from the outset of the novel, the grandfather's involvement in the development and later actions of the *Luftwaffe* is part of a secret that has to be kept from his family. His role as 'the keeper of secrets' or even the key to the truth continues into the post-war period following his alienation from his family after the death of his first wife. With the disappearance of all the evidence of his first wife's existence (there are no photographs or other traces left of her), he becomes the only surviving witness of the past. Hence, the narrator's search for his family's secret past becomes an act of spying into his grandfather's existence. While the German word for secret, ['Geheimnis'], is used in the text with relation to the grandfather, the words spies ['Spione'] and spying ['spionieren'] are reserved for the narrator and his cousins. The association between the narrative voice and the act of spying is evoked at the very beginning of the novel, when the narrator describes himself as a child spying through a peep-hole in his home:

Manchmal stehe ich eine Weile am Spion und sehe in den Flur, auch wenn ich weiß, ich werde keinen Menschen zu Gesicht bekommen. Ich stehe am Spion und warte. [...] Ich darf die Linse nicht berühren. Das Treppenhaus liegt keinen Schritt entfernt, nur diese Tür trennt mich von ihm. [...] Durch den Spion steht alles nah und zugleich ungreifbar vor meinem Auge. Flucht ist unmöglich.

Sometimes I stand for a while looking through the peephole into the corridor even though I know that I won't see anyone. [...] I mustn't touch the glass. The stairwell is just one step away, only this door separates me from it. [...] Through the peephole everything is close to me but at the same time unreachable before my eyes. Escape is impossible.¹⁰⁸

Here, the German word 'Spion' for the peep-hole in the front door of the narrator's family home aptly ties in with the wider symbolism of the scene. The narrator is portrayed as an observer who 'spies' through the looking-glass into a world that is yet very close but ultimately 'ungreifbar' ['unreachable'] due to the barrier represented by the glass of the spy hole. Thus, the child can look into the space

¹⁰⁷ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Verlag, 2000), p. 11.

¹⁰⁸ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 7.

behind the door, but it stays distant and unreachable as he is not allowed to cross the barrier. The opening scene thus establishes the narrator's role. In the novel, he follows clues and seeks traces of his grandparent's story, attempting to capture a glimpse of the past in the present. Just as when peeping through the door's spy-hole, he attempts to observe the past, knowing that he cannot cross the boundary between the past and the present. Under no circumstances can he enter the space that is behind the door as it disappeared long ago. All he is left with is the memory of the past that allows him to spy through the barrier between the past and the present. This explains Anne Fuchs' reading of the scene's iconography as strangely desexualized despite the immediate association with the voyeuristic gaze.¹⁰⁹ She further explains that the opening scene does not represent innocent child's play but rather evokes the image of spying as an 'obsessive activity' on the part of the narrator.¹¹⁰ The introduction of the obsessive nature of the narrator's act of spying is followed by the description of the grandfather as the key to the narrator's missing memory as the only living eye-witness. The grandfather's alienation from his family, however, creates a displacement of communicative memory, which is the origin of his grandchildren's investigation into the past. The ultimate goal of the investigation is to fill the gaps in the family memory and to provide a usable past on which the grandchildren can base their identities as family members.

The opening scene fulfils a second function that is of major importance to the novel's framework, for it also illustrates the importance of photography and photographic images in piecing together the memory mystery. The lens of the spy-hole is comparable with that of a camera. The importance of photographs as memory aids is a widespread phenomenon in contemporary German and British memory fiction. Examples of novels which reference photography are the works of W.G. Sebald, such as *Austerlitz* (2003), Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder* (Blurred Images, 2005), Thomas Wackwitz's *Ein unsichtbares Land* (Invisible Country, 2005), Klaus Modick's *Der kretische Gast* (The Cretan Guest, 2005), and Thomas Medicus' *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (In the Eye's of my Grandfather, 2004). In British fiction the use of photography as a tool for collective memory is also prevalent, albeit to a somewhat lesser degree. We can find it in the novels of Ian McEwan, such as *Black Dogs* (1992), Justin Cartwright's *The Song Before It Is Sung* (2007), and

¹⁰⁹ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, pp. 64 - 5.

¹¹⁰ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 65.

Rachel Seiffert's *The Dark Room* (2002). In these novels, photographs are often reproduced or described, forming the centre of memory narratives. They serve as a means of addressing issues of memory and identity. They very rarely represent the answers to questions about the past but rather function as the beginning of a recurring questioning of family memory and cultural memory. Some critics have argued that the works of W.G. Sebald have gained particular academic attention due to his aesthetic use of photographic and linguistic representation of the past. His novel *Austerlitz* is a particularly fine example of his technique of connecting the medium of photography with issues of memory on a personal and a cultural level. According to Harris, all 'these works draw attention to the role of the viewer of the photograph' as the 'one who spies on the past'.¹¹¹ This is certainly true for Beyer's novel, in which the action of spying on the past through the photographic gaze is meant quite literally. The problem of photographs as ways of looking at the past is that they only represent a moment in time or rather a fragment of that past. Without the memory of certain events they become almost meaningless, or at least only a piece in a puzzle. For example, looking at the picture of a man in German army uniform will tell you little about the exact circumstances in which the picture was taken. However, if one finds such a picture in a family album there is usually a collective family memory that accompanies the photograph. In this case the photograph acts as a memory aid to bring the stories of a certain family member to light, and hence a narrative of the past can be told. The next time the same person comes across the photograph in a family album he or she will know that it depicts an uncle on the eve of his posting to the Eastern Front, for example. If, for whatever reason, the family memory about the photograph is absent or lost, the questions that arise for the person who 'spies' into the past are manifold. A photograph then becomes a riddle that can only be solved by gaining access to this absent memory of the past. In this respect, the research into the past conducted by the narrative voice in Beyer's novel resembles the research of a historian on finding an archaeological artefact. While the historian scours the historical archive to piece together the historical puzzle, the narrative voice in Beyer combs through the realms of family memory in order to solve his mystery. The allusion to the historian, however, does

¹¹¹ Stefanie Harris, 'Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer's *Spione*', p. 165.

not allow for the personal element of the research into memory. As Stefanie Harris points out,

in this younger group of writers (my so-called “spies”), the primary concern is not [...] one of penetrating a veil of national silence but rather of bridging public and personal histories. After the crimes of Germany’s past have been exposed and thoroughly integrated into German society, the historical record runs risk of becoming entirely de-personalized. In other words, the past as a unified construct loses its affective power and its urgency. The allusion of photography highlights the specificity of the concerns of this younger generation of writers, functioning as a means by which to conceive a more complex set of generational interrelations, to present a multiplicity of voices in resistance to a monolithic view of the past [...].¹¹²

While Harris points specifically here to the role of photography, one could apply her argument to the role of memory narratives in relation to the scientific discourse of historicism. Taking this point into account, it makes sense for Beyer and others to create narrative voices that are more closely related to detectives and spies in order not to fall into the trap of representing depersonalised historical discourses. After all, it is the role of the detective, and to a certain degree that of the spy, to peek into the privacy of victims, suspects and perpetrators. By using elements of the detective or spy figure in memory narratives a demarcation from the work of a historian is created. Rather than looking at the historical event as a whole the ‘memory detective’ spies into the personal past of individuals. The difference between the investigation into the past in a memory narrative and that of a crime novel or thriller, however, is that it rarely leads to a conclusion. Indeed, in Anne Fuchs’ interpretation of Beyer’s text the narrative voice creates a family secret in the very act of unmasking it.¹¹³ And according to Stefanie Harris, we are dealing with a ‘reverse detective story of sorts, for if the detective gradually sheds light on the mystery at hand, here the narrator renders images that are increasingly ambiguous, veiled and full of blind spots’.¹¹⁴ Both critics acknowledge the narrator’s inability to render a coherent account of the past through his spying activity. In this respect he is similar to the narrators in Cartwright’s and McEwan’s texts discussed above. Both ventured into investigating the past equipped with largely unreliable witness accounts and some photographic as well as textual evidence. They both failed to find a truthful representation of the

¹¹² Stefanie Harris, ‘Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer’s *Spione*’, p.164.

¹¹³ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p.65.

¹¹⁴ Stefanie Harris, ‘Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer’s *Spione*’, p. 168.

memories they tried to represent but did manage to create memoirs to bear witness to the past through their postmemorial engagement. Despite the meta-fictional exposure of the textuality of the two novels within the narrative, the critical discussion of the limits of memory, and the disclosure of the postmemorial imagination, there is still the sense that a narrative can be told. The question that consequently arises is: what exactly does Beyer's narrator achieve during his obsessive investigation of almost a lifetime?

With the discovery of the old family photo album the cousins begin to peek into the past using the photographs as their clues. Two things strike them. On the one hand, the photographs depict their grandfather during his time as a member of the German *Luftwaffe* and, on the other hand, there are no photos of their grandmother. There is no photographic evidence that confirms their memories of her as a beautiful opera singer with exceptionally dark eyes. This awakens the narrator's curiosity and sparks his investigation of the past together with his cousins. Despite never having seen their grandfather, they immediately deduce that he is the man in the uniform on one of the photographs:

Der Mann im Photoalbum traegt auf keinem Bild eine Waffe. [But he wears Uniform] Er ist jemand, den wir noch nie gesehen haben, und dennoch haben wir gleich begriffen: Das muss unser Grossvater sein.

The man in the photograph album is not carrying a weapon in any picture. [But he wears a uniform] We have never seen him before, but somehow we realise at once: this must be our grandfather.¹¹⁵

The children try to acquire an image of their grandfather not only through the pictures that depict him, but also through the pictures he has evidently taken himself.

Er, den wir vorher betrachtet haben, ist nun selbst der Photograph, jetzt schauen wir mit seinen Augen, sehen mit ihm gemeinsam durch den Sucher.

He, who we were looking at before, is now the photographer, now we see with his eyes, together with him we look through the viewfinder.¹¹⁶

They use the photographs to see the world through his eyes. But the photographs thereby act not only as a bridge into the past, or as a means of connecting with it;

¹¹⁵ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 35.

¹¹⁶ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, pp. 35 - 36.

they also create distance. This distance is caused by the fact that the children view the photographs with an understanding of their present time that does not allow them to adopt their grandfather's gaze. Hence, they also represent the generational gap between the family members who lived in different times. When they see a picture of what is obviously the ruin of their grandparents' family home, they realise that it is not their way of viewing the world:

Wie stellt man sich, [...], am Morgen nach dem Bombenangriff vor das eigene Haus und knipst was uebrig ist. Es ist nicht unser Blick, wir schauen nicht mit diesen Augen.

How can one imagine [...] on the morning after the bombing, one's own house and take a snap of what remains. It is not our view, we are not seeing with these eyes.¹¹⁷

The photo album is ambivalent; it allows the children to 'spy' on their grandparents' past, but at the same time distances them from that past. The gaze they encounter is alien to them and it cannot be their own. As Stefanie Harris points out, 'the photo album enacts an inherent contradiction, embodying both fact and fiction, reality and fantasy, evidence and imagination'.¹¹⁸ This contradiction leads the novel to question the nature of photographic evidence and its use in the text's postmemorial discourse. The narrator can see the photographs taken by his grandfather but he cannot see them through the latter's gaze. Despite the evidence that the past has existed, it is still a closed territory that the narrator is unable to enter. Moreover, the photographs that the children do not find in the album become as important as the ones they have found. The absence of their grandmother represents the main mystery that has to be solved:

Wir wollten eine Opernsängerin finden [...] Wir wurden darum auf sie aufmerksam, weil sie unsichtbar war.

Eine Großmutter, deren Porträts in den Familienalben aufbewahrt werden, wäre uns wahrscheinlich niemals aufgefallen.

We wanted to find an opera singer [...]: We became aware of her because she was invisible.

¹¹⁷ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 36.

¹¹⁸ Stefanie Harris, 'Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer's *Spione*', p. 167.

A grandmother, whose portrait was kept in the family albums, would most probably not have been noticed by us.¹¹⁹

The narrator admits here that they wanted to find their very own version of their grandmother as the famous opera singer and they would not have taken great interest in her past if her pictures were readily available in the family photo album. What is highlighted here is the renewed notion of the photo album as a contradiction in its own right. Despite the inherent lack of evidence, the narrator and his cousins want to find this elusive figure of the opera singer, and so they create their own narratives around the album. Indeed, the lack of photographic evidence of her existence even serves as justification for the narrator's version of the past. The photo album becomes symbolic of the family's collective memory, one that is full of gaps because of the absence of eye witness accounts. Whether it is true, for instance, that it really was the grandfather's second wife who destroyed the pictures of the grandmother is never revealed. It is just as likely that the story of the 'Alte' ['old woman'] is a narrative created by the children to explain the absence of the pictures. Stories are attributed to the photographs, and where there are no traces or photographs, the narrator fabricates them. In that respect, he creates a postmemory in order to overcome the absence of eye-witness memory. Furthermore, the text addresses problems of memory and the media that depict them. The accounts of the narrator become increasingly unreliable in the course of the narrative, to the point that the reader does not know whether the grandmother ever existed or if she may still be alive. The narrator's cousin Carl points his unreliability out to him during a visit:

Du glaubst noch immer, die Geschichte unserer Großeltern aus einer gewissen Distanz zu betrachten, du meinst, die Bilder anschauen zu können, als wären es wirkliche Photographien, die du mit Fingern greifst, vor deine Augen hältst und danach wieder in das alte Album steckst. Ich fürchte aber, diese Vorstellung ist falsch: Du hast dich, ohne es zu merken, über die Jahre tief in die Geschichte unserer Großeltern verstrickt und bist schon lange nicht mehr in der Lage, das Photoalbum zuzuklappen, [...].

You still believe you can view the story of our grandparents from a certain distance, you think you can look at the pictures as though they were real photographs that you can touch with your fingers and then afterwards put them back into the album. I'm afraid this idea is wrong. Over the years without realising it you have become deeply

¹¹⁹ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 70.

entangled in the story of our grandparents and you are no longer able to close the photograph album [...].¹²⁰

What is questioned here is not only the narrator's distance from the story he is attempting to tell, but also the photographs themselves. While the two previous texts discussed in this chapter expose their own textuality as well as questioning the reliability of memory, Beyer's text progresses a step further. At this point, it questions the viability of the photographs as empirical fact. The narrator is so caught up in the narrative itself that they become part of a process of imaginative recreation. The narrator asks Carl whether he can remember one of the photographs depicting their grandfather during an opera performance, and Carl reminds him that this picture could never have been taken: '[d]ieses Erinnerungsbild kann es nie gegeben haben' ['This souvenir photo can never have existed'].¹²¹ Thus, the reader is left with the impression that some of the photographs described in the novel might not exist at all other than in the imagination of the narrator. Indeed, the narrator himself goes so far as to call his work a 'Märchenbuch' ['fairy tale'], adding:

Ich habe mir die Photographien ausgedacht, ich habe alle Geheimnisse verraten, jede Einzelheit vor alle Augen ausgebreitet, jeder kann diese Bilder sehen.

I made up the photographs, I betrayed all the secrets, I spread out every detail before all eyes, everyone can see these pictures.¹²²

The novel invokes, on a postmemorial level, a version of history that brings back the 'dead', or rather the past, and lets the narrator 'spy' on this past of his grandparents, while at the same time, on a second meta-fictional level, it exposes this postmemory as imagination, a fictitious account of the past. The stories are the direct consequence of two generations of silence.

Und nun ist ein erfundenes Familienalbum entstanden, indem nicht nur unsere Großeltern, unsere Eltern und wir zu sehen sind, sondern genauso die Alte, die immer unsichtbar hat bleiben wollen. Eine Sammlung ausgedachter Bilder [...].

And now a fictitious photograph album has been created, in which not only our grandparents, our parents and ourselves can be seen, but also

¹²⁰ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 249.

¹²¹ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 249.

¹²² Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 306.

the old woman who always wanted to remain invisible. A collection of made-up pictures [...].¹²³

Here the novel ultimately exposes the mediated nature of the private memories the narrator attempts to conjure up. The postmemory that is established in *Spione* is to a large degree unreliable, a part of the fiction that has been created out of the narrator's obsession with his grandparents' past. Even factual traces of the past, such as photographs, will not protect us from imagining memories that are to a large extent fictional. In *Spione*, the photographs that do exist have the reverse effect of distancing the narrator from his past to such a degree that he creates his own narratives of certain events. Although we come to know more about the grandfather's role as a bomber pilot, his love for an opera singer, and the role of his second wife in destroying the memories of this former wife, the novel invites us to question this knowledge. Carl explains that 'Verschwiegenheit prägt unsere Familie von Anfang an' ['secrecy was a family characteristic from the beginning']. The novel creates, as Stefanie Harris argues, 'an alternate set of memories' that is directly linked to the void of private memories created by 'two generations of silence'.¹²⁴ However, the narrator's postmemorial investigation, which leads to this alternate set of memories' is ultimately questioned by exposing its mediated nature and fictional qualities.

Despite this lack of family memories, there are some traces that link Carl's narrative to the legacy of the Nazi past. Early on in the novel he describes the appearance of white toxic spores in his family's neighbourhood, connected to the growth of a giant fungus. The fungus has developed over the post-war years underneath the surface of a nearby hill that was formerly used as a dump for rubble left over from the war. The narrative's imagery suggests that the past is still lingering under the surface of German memory culture, and the spores themselves, resembling grey ashes, are a stark reminder of the Holocaust. Furthermore, the intended word play involving 'Sporen' ['spores'] and 'Spuren' ['traces'] emphasises the existence of traces of the Nazi past close to the surface of the newly rebuilt German society. The narrative structure of the novel is built on these symbolic traces of the past. They linger marginally beneath the surface of society, but, at the same time, are difficult to grasp. These traces can be read as thinly veiled metaphors for memories. Traces of the guilt of German perpetration still exist, whatever the secrecy within individual

¹²³ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 306.

¹²⁴ Stefanie Harris, 'Imag(in)ing the Past: The Family Album in Marcel Beyer's *Spione*', p. 172.

family memories. One of the family secrets revealed in the novel is Carl's grandfather's involvement with the *Condor Legion* and the bombing of Guernica, a period that is literally a blank page in the photo album:

Es hieß, deutsche Luftwaffeneinheiten hätten in Spanien ein Dorf vernichtet, ein Fliegerangriff, wie es ihn vorher nie gegeben habe. Kein Stützpunkt, dieses Guernica, kein Waffenlager, nicht strategisch wichtig, die Bombadierung kam am hellen Nachmittag, die Opfer waren Zivilisten, Frauen, Kinder, es gab keine Gegenwehr.

People said that the German *Luftwaffe* has destroyed a village in Spain, an aerial attack, as there has never been one before. This Guernica had no army base, no weapons depot, nothing that was of strategic relevance. The bombing took place during the middle of the day and the victims were civilians, women and children, there was no defence.¹²⁵

The bombing of Guernica was a prelude of things to come, and the involvement of Carl's grandfather is one of the few things that can be established through his investigation. However, the description of the bombing is imagined and follows the gaze of the grandfather through the lens of the camera on board his Heinkel bomber.¹²⁶ His view of the destruction caused by his actions is filtered through the camera and thus becomes abstract and unreal as 'der Abstand zwischen Kamera und Objekt ist immer ausgesprochen groß' ['the distance between camera and object is always significantly large'].¹²⁷ The distance between the crew of the bomber and their victims is considerable, and filtered through the lens of the camera; as a result, the deaths of hundreds become invisible. Only later, when the family itself loses their house and possessions during the bombing raids on Germany does Carl's grandfather experience the consequences of his actions. His gaze on Guernica is replicated by the narrator's gaze through the spy hole. The distance between the past and the present is so large that individuals seem to disappear and the secrets surrounding the family's past do not allow the narrator to attach meaningful memories to the photographs in his possession. In response, he invents them. The postmemories created by the narrator are far from reliable and the outcome of his obsessive spying on the past is unsatisfactory. The photographs might illustrate a moment in the past, such as the grandfather in uniform, but cannot conjure up the family secrets. Without the

¹²⁵ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 170.

¹²⁶ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 163.

¹²⁷ Marcel Beyer, *Spione*, p. 163.

accompanying memories and stories, the photographs become distant traces similar to the spores that appear at the beginning of the novel.

2.2.2 Detection and Absent Memories in Thomas Medicus' *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (2004)

Thomas Medicus' text differs slightly from the previous memory narratives discussed in this chapter as it cannot be clearly identified as a completely fictional work. While the three preceding novels clearly play with the genre of memoir and biography writing, they are, nevertheless, entirely fictional with regards to their plots. Even Justin Cartwright's novel, while based on the historical personae of Isaiah Berlin and Adam von Trott, creates entirely fictional characters in Mendel and von Gottberg. Despite using certain techniques of memoir and biography writing, leading to a mixing of genres, the texts by Cartwright, McEwan and Beyer can unmistakably be defined as novels. Thomas Medicus' text, on the other hand, is more ambiguous in its application of different genres within its narrative framework. *In den Augen meines Großvaters* is concerned with Germany's Nazi past as much as it deals with Medicus' own family history and, particularly, that of his grandfather, Wilhelm Crisolli. The text itself cannot be categorised as either fiction or biography or, even, autobiography. Indeed, it combines elements of all these genres, simultaneously asking questions of the possibilities and shortcomings of memory, history and identity within its narrative framework. Medicus' text is consequently, even more so than the texts discussed above, characterised by the hybridity of narrative techniques that make up its core. The narrative voice of the text represents the author's textual alter ego investigating his grandfather's past and demise during the Second World War. The narrator adds to the confusion surrounding the definition of the text by referring to his work sometimes as a 'Familienroman' ['family novel'], while at other points focusing on issues of empirical fact and historical method as if he were creating a biography.¹²⁸ Close to the end of the text, he describes the development of the narrative as being 'wie ein Roman' ['just like a novel'].¹²⁹ Early on in the text, however, the narrator refers to his text as 'Biographie' ['biography'].¹³⁰ Thus, the text presents the reader with elements of autobiographical writing in the narrator's search for identity, of biographical writing in the story of

¹²⁸ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (München: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2004), p. 102 and 235.

¹²⁹ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 240.

¹³⁰ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 54.

Wilhelm Crisolti, and of fictional writing when the narrator fills gaps in the family memory. A very good example of the latter is, on the narrator's own admission, the imagined dialogue between his grandparents on their honeymoon.¹³¹ In this part of the text, the narrative voice changes into omniscient narration as associated with traditional realist novels of the nineteenth century. The events described so vividly here have taken place long before the narrator's birth, and the only means of describing them is by fictionalising them much in the manner of realist fiction.

In this respect, the text is similar to other recently published German memory narratives, of which the most widely known is Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (In my Brother's Shadow, 2003). It is worth noting that the title of Medicus' text echoes that of Timm's. In both texts the narrative voice represents the alter ego of the author investigating the family's entanglement in the Nazi past. They both make use of this hybrid form of writing, mixing real historic events as they are represented within the collective family memory with fictional representations of the past. Medicus does differ from Timm, however, in one significant detail. While Timm's text is interlaced with his family's memories of his dead brother, Medicus' narrative voice encounters silence and memory gaps when he makes enquiries about his dead grandfather.

One gets the feeling that Medicus in particular is aware of recent theories of memory studies, especially those of Aleida and Jan Assmann. He uses phrases such as 'kommunikatives Beschweigen' ['communicative silence'], and 'familiäres Gedächtnis' ['family memory'] indicating his awareness of Assmann's work on collective memory.¹³² This hybrid form of writing, paired with an awareness of theories of memory, allows Medicus to combine various layers within his plot structure. The family's flight from their former home in Eastern Prussia and their new existence as expellees in the West is as much part of the text as the grandfather's involvement in the Wehrmacht and possibly in war crimes in Italy. The family's silence on the fate of the grandfather and the appearance of certain traces of the past, mainly in the form of photographs, triggers the narrator's investigation into the past. This investigation, however, is as much a reconstruction of lost family memory as a means of developing the narrator's identity as he attempts to relate to his grandfather.

¹³¹ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, pp. 132 - 56.

¹³² Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, pp. 223 and 239.

After all, he has never met the man who is becoming the focus of his investigation. He makes this clear when he writes:

Mein Großvater erschien mir plötzlich als der geheime Fluchtpunkt meiner Biographie, auf den alles zustrebte, was ich je getan oder nicht getan hatte, geworden oder nicht geworden bin. Ich entschloss mich, nach Wilhelm Crisolli zu forschen und das Rätsel seines Todes zu lösen.

My grandfather suddenly appeared to me to be the secret vanishing point of my biography; this was the target for all that I had done or not done, what I had become or not become. I decided to investigate Wilhelm Crisolli and to solve the mystery of his death.¹³³

Medicus' grandfather, Wilhelm Crisolli, was a Major-General in the German Wehrmacht and was shot in Tuscany in 1944 during an ambush by Italian partisans. After the war the whole family kept silent and never mentioned him or the reasons for his death. To challenge this silence, the narrator embarks on his self-conscious journey to explore his grandfather's biography and the circumstances that led to his death. In this respect the text is similar to that of Beyer, where the grandfather also becomes the main focus of the investigation. The search to uncover the mystery of Crisolli's death is underpinned by a self-conscious quest for memory and identity on the part of the narrator. The quest into his grandfather's past begins in earnest when the narrator inherits a 'Zeitkapsel' ['time capsule'] after his grandmother's death.¹³⁴ The content of the little box is filled with belongings of the grandfather he never met. It is a reminder of Crisolli's Nazi past, in the form of his Iron Cross, which creates mixed emotions within the narrator:

In der kleinsten Schatulle, einem blauen Kästchen, das ich mir immer bis zuletzt aufhob, schlief Graf Dracula. Es barg ein Ritterkreuz.

In the smallest casket, a little blue box, which I had always kept until last, slept Count Dracula. It contained a 'Knight's Cross'.¹³⁵

He likens the Knight's Cross to sleeping demons of the supernatural world that have now been awoken. Due to the absence of his grandfather from the family's collective memory, this find has a profound effect on the narrator, triggering his journey into the past several years later. The fitting metaphor of the 'time capsule' is a common

¹³³ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, pp. 54 - 55

¹³⁴ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 39.

¹³⁵ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 39.

aesthetic ploy representing the start of the narrator's investigative journey. It can be likened to the mysterious long-lost photo album that is found by the narrator in *Spione* or the box of letters inherited by Conrad in *The Song Before It's Sung*. Thus, all the authors discussed in this chapter use some kind of symbolic manifestation of the lost past, whether physical or mythical, that is inherited by the narrator. This inheritance is by no means voluntary and, at times, causes great pain. It is an aesthetic rendering of the inter-generational inheritance of memory.

In Medicus' novel, the narrator's most important evidence of his grandfather's past, however, are the fifty-one black-and-white photographs that the narrator found in the time capsule together with the Knight's Cross. As in Marcel Beyer's *Spione*, the photographs become important memory aids. In an attempt to 'remember' a past that he has not experienced, Medicus' narrator sets out to visit the places that are depicted on the photographs in order to recover the lost memories of his grandfather. In this respect, it is not only the photograph that represents a factual trace of a lost past, but also the landscape in which the photograph is set. As Anne Fuchs argues:

Medicus uses these photographs to explore the limits of landscape discourse. By looking at landscape through a photographic lens, he exposes the gap between the aesthetic representations of the environment and the concealed historical reality that is blatantly absent from these pictures.¹³⁶

This becomes particularly obvious when he revisits a tranquil Italian garden depicted on a photograph which he has named the 'Rococo photograph'. It depicts the narrator's grandfather and one of his officers in uniform, sitting at a beautifully decorated 18th-century table in the garden in front of an ancient tree, drinking coffee.¹³⁷ The narrator is fascinated by the tranquillity and the 'träumerischen Unwirklichkeit' ['dreamlike unreality'] of the depiction. He further describes the photograph as

[...] das perfekte Erinnerungsbild. [...]. Der Krieg, der auf diesem Photo unsichtbar blieb, schien erst im Nachkrieg sichtbar geworden zu sein.

¹³⁶ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 85.

¹³⁷ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 67.

[...] the perfect memory snapshot [...]. The war, which remained invisible in this photo, seemed only to become visible after the war.¹³⁸

It is here that the fundamental problem in the narrator's method of connecting to his grandfather's past through landscape and photography is revealed. The aesthetic qualities of the photograph and the beauty and tranquillity of the landscape hide the context of the historic reality in which the picture was taken. The realities of the war remain invisible within the picture and only become obvious through a post-war perspective that is conscious of the historical context. Thus, while the picture captures the imagination of the narrator, it does so for the wrong reasons, namely for its aesthetic qualities that resemble a 'paradiesische Entrückung'. ['paradisical dissociation']¹³⁹ Consequently, the memories the picture evokes are far away from the horrors of the war and say almost nothing about Crisolli's role within this historical context. The fact that the photograph is simply there, depicting a moment in the past but without any form of memory narrative attached to it, causes almost insurmountable difficulties for the narrator and his journey of remembrance. Marianne Hirsch argues that photographs are ideal tools for a postmemorial investigation because of their 'fragmentary' quality.¹⁴⁰ She explains that photographs have the ability to connect the post-war generations to the past by affirming its existence, yet they also represent the gap between the past and the present. It is this fragmentary quality that allows the imaginative process to come into play and create 'postmemories'. This process erases the distinction between the documentary and the aesthetic quality of a photograph. According to Hirsch, it is

precisely the utter conventionality of the domestic family picture that makes it impossible for us to comprehend how the person in the picture was, or could have been, annihilated. In both cases, the viewer fills in what the picture leaves out: the horror of looking is not necessarily *in* the image but in the story the viewer provides to fill in what has been omitted.¹⁴¹

In contrast, the example of the Rococo photograph in Medicus' text shows that photographs can be problematic sources for a postmemorial investigation of the past. The narrator in the text ultimately fails in eroding the boundaries of the aesthetic and the documentary. He views the Rococo photograph from an aesthetic perspective

¹³⁸ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 68 – 69.

¹³⁹ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 68.

¹⁴⁰ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 23.

¹⁴¹ Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 21.

supported by his experience of visiting the beautiful landscape in which it is set. The photograph's documentary qualities are not reflected in his imaginative approach and the historical context of the war is in danger of disappearing. Anne Fuchs argues that this 'is precisely the focal point of Medicus' metacritical engagement with photography as an appealing but highly problematic medium for memory work'.¹⁴²

The photographs themselves do not provide sufficient background to reconnect with his grandfather's past, and the narrator decides to retrace Crisolli's steps and travel to Italy and the places depicted in the photographs. His first trip ends in disappointment as he is not particularly well prepared for his memory work. Without proper maps and information about the places he is looking for, he fails to find a connection with memories of his grandfather:

Ich fand nichts, was mit meinen Fotos zu tun gehabt und an meinen Großvater erinnert hätte.

I found nothing that was related to my photographs or that reminded me of my grandfather.¹⁴³

His second trip to Tuscany is slightly more successful. Equipped with the photographs themselves and better background information, he manages to find, among other things, the garden depicted in the Rococo photograph:

Wir sprangen wenige Stufen hinauf in den Garten und liefen direkt in die Fotografie hinein.

We jumped up a few steps into the garden and walked directly into the photograph.¹⁴⁴

However, despite his successful find, the narrator finds it difficult to connect the tranquil landscape with the realities of war which his grandfather would have encountered. Both the aesthetic representation and the beauty of the Italian garden, do not fit with the suggestion that his grandfather was involved in reprisals against Italian partisans. The memories of the Second World War remain hidden within photographs and landscape alike. Thus, the narrator's methodology is called into question. Indeed, it has led to an aesthetic rendering of his grandfather's past that has removed this past even further from the historical reality of the war, not least from the question surrounding the grandfather's possible involvement in crime.

¹⁴² Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 85.

¹⁴³ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 81.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 84.

However, the narrator does come to realise that a change in methodology is urgently needed to enable him to continue his investigation of the past:

Mein Verfahren, Vergangenheit durch die Unmittelbarkeit der visuellen Erfahrung zu erschließen, hatte ausgedient.

My method to establish the past through the immediacy of visual experience has failed.¹⁴⁵

His new approach is a more traditional historical research method, allowing him a 'critical-archaeological' perspective on his grandfather's past.¹⁴⁶ He returns to his family's origin in East Prussia and describes his grandparents' traditional Wilhelminian background. Here, his grandfather is portrayed as a career soldier in the Prussian tradition with a strong basis in conservative Lutheranism:

Bei den Crisollis waren Luthertum, Preußentum und Soldatentum beispielhaft miteinander verschmolzen.

The Crisollis were exemplary in intermingling Lutherism, Prussianness, and militarism.¹⁴⁷

In this part of the text, the narrator places his grandfather within the masculine Prussian military tradition and thereby creates a memory of his grandfather that is historically contextualised. Crisolli's marriage to Annemarie illustrates the connection of Prussian military and Pomeranian nobility and places the family ideologically close to the nationalistic *völkisch* ideology of the emerging National Socialist State. Yet the demise of the Third Reich also represents the demise of Crisolli and his family's East Prussian paradise. Crisolli is killed during a partisan attack in 1944, and at the same time the female members of the family have to leave their home in East Prussia to flee from the oncoming Russians. It is here that the narrator's journey into the past includes discourses of German suffering as well as guilt. The text refers to flight and expulsion as well as to crimes committed by the German Army in Italy. The narrator empathically recounts the flight of his family via the dangerous Baltic Sea, and their treatment during the first years of the FRG. Here, he contextualises his family memories clearly within the victim-centred German memory discourse, the gendered nature of which he appears to confirm in focusing on the flight and expulsion of the female members of the family. His grandfather,

¹⁴⁵ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 110.

¹⁴⁶ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 87.

¹⁴⁷ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 141.

however, is a rather more ambiguous figure. After having established his family's socio-historical background and depicted the history of his family's suffering, the narrator returns to the investigation of his grandfather's death in 1944. Here he argues that

Wilhelm Crisollis Schicksal besaß jedoch seine eigenen Tücken, Täterschaft und Opferschicksal waren in seinem Fall derart dicht miteinander verwoben, [...].

Crisolli's fate had its own perfidies, guilt and victimhood were, in his case, closely connected [...].¹⁴⁸

The narrator's turn to a more traditional method of unearthing the past includes conversations with eye-witnesses of the events in Italy and the researching of historical documents. However, even these established methods fail to provide the narrator with a clear image of his grandfather's past. Like the photographs, the memories of the eye-witnesses are tainted by the time that has passed, and by legends and myths:

Die stumme Augenzeugenschaft der Fotos besaß mit den lebendigen Erinnerungen der Augenzeugen, mit denen ich gesprochen hatte oder deren Aussagen schriftlich dokumentiert waren, eine auffällige Verwandtschaft. Sowohl die sprachlich erinnerte als auch die fotografierte sechzig Jahre zurueckliegende Realität eroeffnete einen von Fakten, Fiktionen, Legenden, Mythen und Gerüchten erfüllten vielstimmigen Raum [...].

The quiet eye-witnessing of the photographs had a remarkable resemblance to the living memories of the eyewitnesses I talked to or whose remarks were recorded in written documents. The orally remembered as well as the photographed reality of sixty years ago opened up polyphonous spaces that were filled with facts, fiction, myth, and legends [...].¹⁴⁹

Thus, the investigation of the narrator is foiled by the unreliable nature of the evidence of his grandfather's actions. The photographs reinforce the gaps in the family memory and only represent a fragmented view of his grandfather's past, while the eye-witness statements are underpinned by myths about his death. What does become apparent in the narrator's historical investigation is that reprisals against Italian civilians in the wake of partisan activity in 1944 took place during his

¹⁴⁸ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 243

¹⁴⁹ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 245.

grandfather's command. Although these actions were mainly carried out by the SS, the narrator knows that his grandfather is implicated.¹⁵⁰ Yet, some of the Italian eye-witnesses express support for the German general with the Italian name, claiming that

Nein, der Commandante war nicht schlimm. Schlimm wurde es erst, als die SS kam. Alle in Nocchi waren traurig, als der Commandante Crisolli weggegangen ist.

No, the Commander was not bad. It only got really bad when the SS arrived. Everyone in Nocchi was sad when Commander Crisolli left.¹⁵¹

However, despite this support and some evidence that the SS was responsible for the majority of the relevant atrocities, the narrator cannot completely absolve his grandfather. The fact that some of his superiors were charged and sentenced for war crimes against the civilian population has led to the family's fear that he was implicated in these atrocities and caused the silence that has all but erased Crisolli from the family memory. It remains unclear whether Crisolli's assassination might have been a direct act of reprisal by the Italian partisans, and the degree of his complicity remains unresolved. Nevertheless, despite the narrator's willingness to empathise with his grandfather, he does establish that in one particular case, namely the execution of a priest and two women who supported the partisans, Crisolli is directly implicated. The narrator concludes that there is little to be said in defence of his grandfather in this specific case, and is not greatly comforted by the fact that the execution of three people is a relatively small misdeed in comparison with the vast atrocities committed by German soldiers.¹⁵²

Die Erschießung von Nocchi sprach von einem spezifischen Vernichtungswillen, dessen Unbarmherzigkeit mich nicht an willkürliche Opfer glauben ließ.

The execution of Nocchi spoke of a specific will for annihilation, whose mercilessness did not let me believe in arbitrary victims.¹⁵³

The figure of Crisolli remains ambiguous. Some witnesses argue that he behaved honourably, and a US war crimes tribunal did not implicate him in the mass murder

¹⁵⁰ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 193.

¹⁵¹ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 95.

¹⁵² Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 239.

¹⁵³ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 240.

largely conducted by the SS. However, that he is implicated in the execution of the padre and the two women, whether through direct involvement in the decision-making process or indirectly through administrative rubberstamping, indicates that it would be mistaken to exonerate him of a more general will to annihilate by the German forces.¹⁵⁴ It is at this point in the text that the narrator is unable to absolve his grandfather from participation in war crimes. Thus, the narrator is torn between a sentimental empathy with his unknown grandfather as well as the hope that he ultimately remained an honourable man, and a more critical view based on the little historical evidence he finds during his later investigation. In reference to his own role, the narrator sees himself as a shaman who brings the dead back to life in order to solve mysteries and tell the story of his family, particularly his grandfather's past:

Wie ein Schamane hatte ich auch nichts anderes getan, als die Geister der Toten zu beschwoeren und zu den Ahnen zurueckzukehern.

Like a shaman, I also wouldn't have done anything else but to call on the spirits of the dead and return to my ancestors.¹⁵⁵

The narrator therefore sees himself as a postmemorial investigator using memory traces such as the photographs and the unreliable eye-witness statements to engage in a dialogue with the dead. Medicus, however, knows that the story he is telling is not complete and lacks final truth. He is aware of the fact that he is biased, and clearly indicates his personal empathy with his grandfather. He argues that

In fremder Erde als ein Stück Nazi-Deutschland einsam zu Staub verfallen, war das nicht die Verdammnis? Ich wusste nicht ,wie es geschah, aber ich begann mich dieses mir so gut wie unbekanntem Toten zu erbarmen.

Forlorn and falling to dust in foreign soil as a piece of Nazi Germany, is that not damnation? I did not know how it happened but I started to feel mercy for this unknown dead soldier.¹⁵⁶

Moreover, he knows of his own difficulty in representing his grandfather's story objectively, which could lead some people to read Medicus' text as an attempt to excuse the Nazi past of his grandfather. The narrator constructs his own position clearly as that of an investigator into his own family's past, not allowing himself the role of either persecutor or defender, let alone judge. He claims that his inner

¹⁵⁴ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 90.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 235.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 58.

reluctance was the challenge he needed to solve the mystery of his grandfather's death:

Der innere Widerstand war die Herausforderung, die ich brauchte, um dem Familiengeheimnis auf die Spur zu kommen. Weder wollte ich der Ankläger noch der Verteidiger meines Großvaters sein, geschweige denn sein Richter. Die einzige Rolle die ich mir zutraute, war die des Ermittlers, des Ermittlers in fremder wie zugleich eigener Sache.

My inner resistance was the challenge it needed in order to solve this family mystery. I did not want to be a persecutor or defender of my grandfather, let alone his judge. The only role I was confident in fulfilling, was the role of the observer or detective, an observer in a Stranger's as well as my own affairs.¹⁵⁷

Hence, the narrator can only take on the role of the detective observer in order to confront the position of his grandfather as a high-ranking member of Hitler's army and possible perpetrator of crimes. His role is deeply ambivalent. On the one hand, he wants to know the 'truth' about his grandfather's time in Italy and his death while, on the other, he is reluctant to fully condemn his grandfather. The conclusion is also ambivalent. The narrator neither completely condemns his grandfather for his crimes, nor does he finish with the grandfather's death, but rather presents his own version of these events. What remains is a gap between the historical reality and the narrator's family memories which are largely formed in the present. The narrator admits that, in order to overcome these problems, he had to revert to literary and fictional techniques. He explains:

Wo die empirischen Fakten nicht ausreichten, vertraute ich mich literarischen Einbildungskräften an.

I've trusted in literary imagination where the facts were not enough.¹⁵⁸

He explains that the passage describing a conversation between his grandfather and his grandmother on a train in 1927 is a product of fictional invention that is not based on any kind of empirical fact. It is here that the narrator exposes his investigation as an attempt to create a postmemory using a multiplicity of memory traces, empirical

¹⁵⁷ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 237.

¹⁵⁸ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 235.

facts, and fictional imagination. He does this, however, in a highly critical manner and constantly exposes the flaws in his own method. As Anne Fuchs says, the

narrator produces a patchwork of sorts, a historical *bricolage* that draws attention to the constructed nature of historical truth. He reproduces, rearranges and scrutinizes these biographical and historical materials in order to set the personal and the historical, the private and the public, the factual and the imaginary in dialogue with one another.¹⁵⁹

In other words, we have here an example of the type of memory fiction that attempts to 'bridge' the gap between communicative and cultural memory, creating a memory discourse that blurs the boundaries between private and public memories as well as exposing the constructed nature of memory itself. Rather than allowing himself to judge his grandfather's past the narrator exposes his own postmemorial investigation as a polyphone construct created out of facts, fictions, legends, myths, and hearsay.¹⁶⁰ He thereby acknowledges the possibility of his grandfather's guilt by including critical sources and memories but remains ambiguous in his own judgement. Ultimately the question of guilt remains unresolved in the narrator's postmemorial investigation, leading to a tension between a critical representation of his grandfather and his empathetic feelings towards him.

¹⁵⁹ Anne Fuchs. 'Landscape and The After-Images of History in Thomas Medicus' In den Augen meines Großvaters', *Gegenwartsliteratur*, 5 (2006), 252 - 271, (p. 254).

¹⁶⁰ Thomas Medicus, *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, p. 245.

2.3 Conclusion

The four novels discussed above all use an investigative narrative style akin to the detective or mystery novels in order to bridge the gap to the past and as a coping strategy to deal with the absence of memory. All their narrators embark on an investigative journey to create a postmemory of certain aspects of the past. Sparked by absences within the private collective memory of smaller groups such as the family, these narrators employ evidence, seek traces and use memory aids in order to recreate these memories.

The two British novels, although ultimately self-reflexive and meta-critical, allow their narrators a certain kind of closure on the past they attempt to remember. Conrad, for example, in Cartwright's *The Song Before It Is Sung* succeeds in his mission to tell Mendel's and, more importantly, von Gottberg's narrative. Although his prior investigation forces him to realise that the full truth of the events will always remain elusive and hidden within the past, he nevertheless manages to produce a version of the past through his postmemorial engagement. Ian McEwan's *Black Dogs*, on the other hand, differs thematically from Cartwright's novel. The former is concerned with issues of perpetration rather than resistance. However, they both critically examine the narrators' task of memoir writing and the difficulties they encounter in recreating the past through eye-witness memories and other private sources. Jeremy's investigation leads him astray on several occasions, and, despite the novel's constant questioning of the reliability of collective memory, he ultimately succeeds in producing his in-laws' 'memoir' of the incident with the 'black dogs'. Whether this version has actually occurred or, even, whether the incident with the 'black dogs' is based on a real or entirely fictional event, has become irrelevant. The incident is an important aspect of the family's collective memory and the symbolism of the 'black dogs' as representatives of the horror of the Second World War has become deeply ingrained in the narrative. Jeremy realises that his investigation of the past is flawed, and that the memories of Bernard and June are not only unreliable but highly mediated through their ideals and belief systems. Like Conrad in Cartwright's novel, he is forced to engage on a more imaginative route in order to fill the gaps in his family memory. Thus, we are dealing with two novels which illustrate the mediated nature of private memories through their self-reflexive nature and the

deconstruction of eye-witness accounts. The reader is constantly made aware of the text's own fictionality as well as the unreliability of the main protagonists. The postmemory that is constructed in both narratives, however, is plausible and provides a usable past for the individual identities of the narrators and their collective family identities.¹⁶¹ The result of the investigation is consequently not to establish an accurate illustration of what has really happened but to provide a memory that is usable in the contemporary worlds of the novels.

The problems for Beyer and Medicus are the same as for other writers of their generation: they can only access the past through mediation, i.e. through text and images. Both texts are characterised by the absence of private memories, and the narratives are constructed through factual and fictional sources. The missing family memory is in both cases personified by the absence of the grandparents, causing a rupture in inter-generational communication. Even where there are living 'eye-witnesses', they often refuse or are unable to give reliable testimonies. Issues of guilt, shame, or trauma weigh too heavily on them, and through their silence these feelings are transmitted to later generations. However, the narrators are ultimately unable to fill the void and to come to a satisfactory conclusion.

The narrator in *Spione* constantly deconstructs his own version of the past by acknowledging its fictionality, while the narrator in Medicus' text is unwilling to judge the deeds committed by his grandfather. All we are left with is a process of 'spying' on the blurred images of the past. Given the lack of reliable eye-witnesses, we are confronted with a postmemorial process self-reflexively juggling with fictional and factual sources to fill the gaps in family narratives. In contrast to the two British novels, the texts by Beyer and Medicus lack any kind of closure. The investigation into the grandparents' past remains unsuccessful, just like that in their British counterparts. However, the narrators are unable to construct a usable memory of the past, namely one that solves its mysteries and bridges its gaps. The reader is left with a number of unsolved questions. Was the narrator's grandmother in *Spione* ever an opera singer? Was the grandfather in Medicus' text guilty of war crimes?

The problematic notion of absent private memories is a clearly distinguishable *motif* in all of the four texts. Not only does this invite the reader to ask questions about the processes and the workings of various forms of collective

¹⁶¹ Compare the dual functionalism of memory in Wertsch, p 31.

memory, but it is also used as a literary strategy to create suspense. The investigative narrative model akin to the detective and thriller genre used in all four texts underlines this further. Here the narrative voices lead the readers on a difficult, sometimes traumatic, but always intriguing journey into the past for which memories become the building blocks. Indeed, the absence of memory immediately causes us to ask further questions about the reasons for this gap in memory, effectively creating suspense and tension. This clearly distinguishes literature from history and memory studies, as it needs to keep the reader engaged and entertained. Looking a little more closely, it is intriguing to see how *absence* immediately raises interesting questions.

Cartwright's novel *The Song Before It Is Sung* effectively begins with Mendel's letter to the narrator explaining the task he has been chosen for, hinting at his own guilt in his dealings with von Gottberg, and, most importantly, suggesting that there is some long-lost film material that may help in providing some answers. Immediately we are forced to ask ourselves a number of important questions caused by the loss of evidence and ultimately memory. Why has Mendel chosen Conrad, who is so clearly at a difficult point within his own private life and not at all a model scholar? Does the lost film material really exist or is it a myth? What was the cause of the rift between Mendel and von Gottberg? Is von Gottberg himself representative of the *Good German* or has he been ideologically supportive to the Nazi party? McEwan's *Black Dogs* similarly raises questions about the notion of the existence of the 'black dogs' themselves. Where do they come from and why have they played such an important role in the break-up of Bernhard and June's relationship?

In the opening of Marcel Beyer's *Spione* tension is created by the iconographic image of the narrator gazing through the spy hole, foreshadowing the mysterious narrative to follow. The image leaves the reader to question what it is that the narrator is spying on. Suspense is further created by the absence of the grandmother within the old photo album discovered by the narrator and his cousins as well as the silence of the grandfather. Here the grandfather's disassociation from his children and grandchildren as well as his silence about his wartime experiences in the *Luftwaffe* immediately evokes questions of guilt. Especially within the German memory discourses about the Second World War silence elicits suspicions of guilt. Similarly, the narrative voice in Medicus' text, clearly the author surrogate, immediately becomes suspicious about his grandfather's role in the struggle against the partisans in Italy. The absence of family memory about the grandfather's fate

leads to suspense about his wartime conduct and the narrator's attempt to piece together a narrative.

The examples in this chapter illustrate that the theme of absent memory is not only relevant for the fictionalisation of on-going memory discourses but also acts as a deliberate literary strategy in order to create suspense and tension within the plot structure. The role of the narrative voices in the texts, firmly based in the present and without first-hand memories of the Second World War, feeds into this strategy. By choosing to place the protagonists within a present-day context the absence of memory is felt more strongly and gains greater relevance. The reader is then invited to follow the protagonists in their attempt to interpret the memory traces they have discovered. In doing so they are drawing on eye-witness accounts, photographs, cultural memory, and largely on their imagination in order to re-establish meaning into the gaps of private memory. Thus, the absent memory is replaced by postmemory which is, according to Marianne Hirsch, 'as full and as empty, certainly as constructed, as memory itself'.¹⁶² While the British authors present the reader with a final version of their postmemorial work, despite indicating its fictionality, the German authors present the reader with versions of memories. They represent the multifaceted nature of contemporary German memory culture in which the discourses of perpetration, guilt and victimhood exist side by side and even in conflict with one other.

The absence of memory is made to be felt even more strongly by the novels' usage of the symbolic inheritance of memory traces. This strategy has two important functions within the aesthetic frameworks of the texts. Firstly, the memory traces trigger the investigation into memory by making their absence felt more strongly. Much in the style of a detective novel, which after all needs some kind of crime to get the narrative started, the memory novels described above need these traces of memory. Secondly, memory traces are an aesthetic rendering of the 'inheritance' of memory between the different generations. It is, of course, paradoxical that we can talk of inherited memory in conjunction with absent memory. However, the emphasis here is on the investigative effort the narrators have to employ in order to unearth the memories based on the insufficient traces such as photographs and textual evidence of the past. As we have seen the result of these investigations differs in the novels

¹⁶² Marianne Hirsch, *Family Frames*, p. 22.

discussed and success is by no means guaranteed. Memory novels, such as *Spione*, therefore problematise aspects of memory transmission and emphasise the unreliability of memory traces as means to re-construct disrupted generational memory discourses.

Finally, all the texts emphasise the desire of the members of the post-war generations to relate to the experiences of their parents or grandparents who lived through the Second World War within their narrative structure. In replacing absent memories with postmemories, the protagonists attempt to fulfil this desire for the purpose of grounding their own identities on a coherent narrative of the past. Yet the end products of the protagonists' postmemorial work are continuously questioned by highlighting the imaginative investment or by creating different versions of private memories. This illustrates an acute awareness about the difficulties and the limits of representation and the possibility of replacing absent memories with a stable narrative.

Chapter Three

Representing Family Memories

Many of the fictional texts which fall under the category of ‘memory fiction’ increasingly view the Second World War from the perspective of the family as the most important social framework of collective memory and subsequently identity formation. This applies particularly to German writing, as is demonstrated by texts such as Tanja Dücker’s *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies, 2005), Ulla Hahn’s *Unschärfe Bilder* (Blurred Images, 2003), and Dagmar Leupold’s *Nach den Kriegen* (After the Wars, 2006). Here, family narratives are utilised in order to address collective memories of National Socialism. If one considers the ‘memory novel’ as a tool that can critically examine both private and public collective memories of the Second World War, the family is, more frequently than not, the social framework in which this self-reflexive dialogue with the past is taking place. In the British national context, too, if to a lesser extent, the family is an important reference point for collective memories. Texts such as Julian Barnes’ *Staring at the Sun* (1986), Michael Frayn’s *Spies* (2002), Liz Jensen’s *War Crimes for the Home* (2002), Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* (2001), Rachel Seiffert’s *The Dark Room* (2001), Graham Swift’s *Shuttlecock* (1981) and *Out of this World* (1988), all centre around family narratives in order to engage with private and public collective memories of the Second World War.

The previous chapter highlighted some connections between British and German memory fictions about the war. Texts such as Justin Cartwright’s *The Song Before it is Sung* and Thomas Medicus’ *In den Augen meines Großvaters* employ a technique of ‘postmemorial investigation’ into the past as an attempt to overcome the absence of private memories. This postmemorial attempt to reconstruct private memories about the war aims to fill a gap in memory transmission. The present chapter analyses German texts in juxtaposition to British texts in order to highlight the importance of the social framework of the family for the ‘memory novel’. The chapter will argue that the family framework is an ideal setting for the portrayal of the complex relationship between collective memories based on ‘private’ and

'public' memory discourses. At first glance readers may note that the texts to be discussed in what follows do not differ significantly from the texts analysed in the previous chapter. We will find that the investigative approach to the past is also prevalent in the works of Uwe Timm, Ulla Hahn, Dagmar Leupold, Graham Swift, and Liz Jensen. Here, as we shall see, the protagonists are also probing their family memories and the investigative approach to family memory is a prominent aesthetic strategy. The protagonists in these texts, however, do have a significant amount of family memories at their disposal on which they can base their attempt to re-establish a link to the past. The problem is therefore not silence or the absence of family memory but rather the fact that family memories are tainted and often unreliable accounts of the past.

3.1 The Family as a Social Framework for Collective Memories

When Maurice Halbwachs introduced his theory of collective memory, he argued that social groups play a vital role in localising such memories. From early childhood onwards an individual is always surrounded by the society into which he or she is born. According to Halbwachs, '[n]o memory is possible outside the frameworks used by people living in society to determine and retrieve their recollections'.¹ Thus a human being is at every stage of his or her life a member of a variety of social groups, be they familial, political, religious, national, or whatever. This group membership can be of voluntary nature but is, in some cases, involuntary and an individual might not even be aware of his or her ties to a social group. Such groups, writes Halbwachs, provide the individual with a 'framework' into which memories are woven. At any given time an individual can be a member of numerous groups: 'it is individuals as group members who remember'.² Individual memory is therefore, for Halbwachs, merely a constituent of collective memory, and he views the distinction between individual and collective memory as paradoxical. Individual memories are formed within the collective of the group and therefore could not exist outside such social frameworks. Thus, when Halbwachs refers to individual memory, he does so with the understanding of it as part of a social framework. While there are critics of Halbwachs' theory who believe that we have to distinguish between individual and collective memories, there is no doubt that social frameworks influence individual remembering and our sense of identity. The family, next to institutionalised cultural memory, is the most prevalent social framework for an individual's collective memory. While we can choose to enter some social frameworks, such as religious and political groups, we cannot change the family or the national culture we are born into. Yet the relation between our family memories and our cultural memories are the most important factors in constructing identity. In other words, the family and the national cultural heritage constitute the essential social unity in which collective memories are formed. Even when the relationship between the family members is problematic or ruptured, the importance of familial

¹ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, trans. by Lewis A. Coser (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), p. 43.

² Maurice Halbwachs, *The Collective Memory*, trans. by Francis J. Ditter and Vida Yazdi Ditter (New York: Harper and Row, 1980), p. 48.

and cultural relationships impact on the way we remember our past. Halbwachs argues:

just as every family quickly acquires a history, and just as its memory becomes enriched from day to day, since the family's recollections become more precise and fixed in their personal form, the family progressively tends to interpret in its own manner the conceptions it borrows from society. Each family ends up with its own logic and traditions, which resemble those of the general society in that they derive from it and continue to regulate the family's relations with general society. But this logic and these traditions are nevertheless distinct because they are little by little pervaded by the family's particular experiences and because their role is increasingly to ensure the family's cohesion and guarantee its continuity.³

Halbwachs argues here that, despite the unique features of every single family's experience of its own past; it is nevertheless influenced by its relations with society and culture as a whole. Jan Assmann elaborates on this relationship by differentiating between 'communicative' memory and 'cultural' memory. Both terms are forms of memory in which the social unit of the family plays an important role in the transmission of memories. The 'cultural' forms of collective remembering are removed from the everyday and are shaped by a more distant past beyond living memory. Assmann characterises this form of memory as being retained through cultural formation or institutionalised commemoration.⁴ Collective memories are, thus, always influenced by communicative forms of remembering and a broader, cultural, knowledge-based form of remembering. With regards to the legacy of the Second World War, the relationship between these communicated forms of private memory and the institutionalised forms of public memory are complicated and often subject to debate.

³ Maurice Halbwachs, *On Collective Memory*, p. 83.

⁴ Jan Assmann, *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis. Schrift, Erinnerung und politische Identität in den frühen Hochkulturen* (München: C.H. Beck Verlag, 1992).

3.2 Family Wartime Memories in German Fiction

Anne Fuchs and Mary Cosgrove have strikingly argued that Germany is experiencing ‘memory contests’ with regards to the legacy of the Nazi past.⁵ The term relates to the competing memory discourses, mainly the notion of guilt and suffering, within present-day German debates on the legacy of the Second World War. It emphasises the discursive plurality of social memory ‘in the midst of varied and competing forces’.⁶ Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger also argue that the term ‘memory contests’ aptly describes the construction of public memory discourses:

To some extent, these memory contests arise more or less inevitably at the point at which ‘communicative memory’ passes into ‘cultural memory’, with the extent of contestation being, in the particular case of postwar Germany, directly proportional to the widespread perception that this or that group, most often the wartime generation or the ‘68ers’, has exercised a monopoly over representations of the period that must be challenged.⁷

This indicates that Germany is currently experiencing a ‘readjustment’ of the memory of the Nazi past. Themes such as German suffering and the expulsion of Germans from the East have started to enter the ongoing debates about the memories of the past, while issues of guilt and the Holocaust are still prevalent within memory discourses. This can lead to a multi-discursive or even pluralistic take on German memory.⁸ This notion of a diversity of social memory is to a certain degree supported by Aleida Assmann. She argues that ‘various levels of heterogeneous memory can exist side by side if they are contained within a normative frame of generally accepted validity’.⁹ She further argues that the narratives of German suffering are nothing new but have been the focus of private family memory from the 1950s onwards in the FRG. However, according to Assmann, the recognition of the latter within public memory discourses does not and must not lead to ignorance of

⁵ Anne Fuchs, Mary Cosgrove, and Georg Grote (eds.), *German Memory Contests. The Quest for Identity in Literature, Film, and Discourse since 1990* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), p. 9.

⁶ Aleida Assmann, ‘On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory’, *German Life and Letters*, 59.2 (April 2006) 187-200, (p. 199).

⁷ Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger, ‘Introduction’, in *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 1 - 14 (p. 3).

⁸ Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger, ‘Introduction’, p. 3.

⁹ Aleida Assmann, ‘On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory’, p. 187.

the ‘national memory of guilt’.¹⁰ Assmann and others counter claims that there has been a widespread taboo on narratives of German suffering.¹¹ Nevertheless, critics acknowledge the existence of a discrepancy between the private narratives of German suffering and the official memory narratives which, particularly since the late 1970s, focused on issues of German perpetration. This discrepancy between the private and the public versions of German memory is illustrated in the sociological study *Opa war kein Nazi* (Grandfather not a Nazi, 2002). Drawing on a series of case studies, Welzer et al. examine the intergenerational transmission of memories of the National Socialist past within German families. What becomes apparent is that memories are not simply handed down but rather ‘negotiated and re-created in intergenerational discourse’.¹² At the centre of Welzer’s study is the distinction between those memories that fall into the category of the ‘encyclopaedia’, covering factual knowledge about the Nazi past and the Holocaust, and those that are part of the ‘album’, which includes family memories of German suffering.¹³ The terms help us to differentiate between institutionalised knowledge-based memory discourses and private emotional family memory discourses. Welzer et al. argue that the pictures and ideas of the National Socialist past which are passed down in families are *different* to those transmitted in school or through the media.¹⁴ Younger family members, in a number of cases, exclude their family narratives from their otherwise critical understanding of Germany’s National Socialist past. Indeed, in some cases the members of the later generations actively reconstruct family memories in order to bring them into accord with the critical discourse extracted from the ‘encyclopaedia’.

It would be a simplification to see in current German memory discourses a binary opposition between memories of the ‘album’ and the ‘encyclopaedia’. Indeed, it becomes evident, not only from Welzer’s case studies, but also from fictionalised autobiographies such as, for example Dagmar Leupold’s *Nach den Kriegen* (After the Wars, 2006), Thomas Medicus’ *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (In the Eyes of my Grandfather, 2004), and Uwe Timm’s *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* (In my

¹⁰ Aleida Assmann, ‘On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory’, p. 199.

¹¹ See, for instance, *Germans as Victims*, ed. by Bill Niven (Palgrave: Basingstoke, 2006).

¹² Karoline Tschuggnall and Harald Welzer, ‘Rewriting Memories: Family Recollections of the National Socialist Past in Germany’, *Culture & Psychology*, 8 (2002), 130-145, (p. 130).

¹³ Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall (eds.), “*Opa war kein Nazi*” *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2002), p. 10.

¹⁴ Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall (eds.), “*Opa war kein Nazi*” *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis*, p. 11.

Brother's Shadow, 2003), that the two discourses influence each other and lead to a different perspective, allowing both, narratives of victimhood and perpetration, to co-exist. This is reflected in Bill Niven's understanding of a new 'inclusiveness', namely the notion that the internalisation of the perpetrator-centred memory discourse at the beginning of the 1990s allows the inclusion of memories of German suffering into German cultural memory.¹⁵ The concept of new 'inclusiveness', however, is by no means a straightforward marriage of discourses. It is accompanied by memory debates on the topic of German wartime suffering, with a particular focus on the problem of empathy. The failure to make clear the link between perpetration and suffering in memory narratives leads to an over-sentimentalised form of empathy that often lacks a critical vantage point.¹⁶

These developments need to be examined within the context of the recent re-emergence of the 'memory novel' in Germany. The interrelations between members of different generations within the family, on the one hand, and the transmission of memories, on the other, feature heavily in these fictional texts. Helmut Schmitz argues that these texts have to be read in the context of the recent changes in Germany, described by Niven as the new 'inclusiveness'. German suffering is certainly a topic for these writers, and Schmitz points out:

In contrast to the 'father-literature' of the mid to late 1970s, such novels are often written from a perspective of empathy with the parents or grandparents in conjunction with a reassessment of the highly judgemental perspective of the 68ers.¹⁷

Schmitz continues his reading of German 'memory novels' by differentiating between two types of empathy portrayed in texts such as Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* (In my Brother's Shadow, 2003) and Ulla Hahn's *Unschärfe Bilder* (Blurred Images, 2003). He argues that there is a critical 'didactic' empathy that remains conscious of the broader context of Nazi perpetration, and an emotional empathy which produces a highly sentimentalised image of German wartime

¹⁵ Bill Niven, *Facing the Nazi Past*, (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), p. 5 and Stuart Taberner, 'German Wartime Suffering in Recent Fiction', in *Germans as Victims*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 164 - 180 (p. 169).

¹⁶ Helmut Schmitz, 'Historicism, Sentimentality and the Problem of Empathy', in *A Nation of Victims? Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2007), pp. 197 - 222 (p. 202).

¹⁷ Helmut Schmitz, 'The Nazi Past II: German wartime suffering', in *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing in the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 142 - 158 (p. 145).

suffering. Rather than following the example of Schmitz in making a qualitative statement on the difference between the acceptable degrees of empathy portrayed in the respective texts, this chapter will focus on the relationship between private and public memories used to reconstruct family memory and identity. In this respect, the family framework turns into a battleground for the postmemorial engagement with the Nazi past.

Almost all of the German memory novels dealing with the legacy of the Third Reich are also, to some extent, novels about family memory. The conflict between the factual knowledge of the Nazi past and the emotional, private memories of family members who lived through that time is one that has haunted almost every family in Germany. Indeed, there are so many examples that it would be impossible to analyse them all within the scope of this thesis. Wibke Bruhns' *Meines Vaters Land* (My Father's Country, 2005), Tanja Dücker's *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies, 2005), Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder* (Blurred Images, 2003), Dagmar Leupold's *Nach den Kriegen* (After the Wars, 2006), Thomas Medicus' *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (In the Eyes of my Grandfather, 2004), Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (The Reader, 1995), *Die Heimkehr* (2006), Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* (In my Brother's Shadow, 2003), *Halbschatten* (Half-Shadows, 2008), and Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Der Verlorene* (The Lost, 1999) are examples of a booming trend in contemporary German writing. The question that arises at this point pertains to the relationship between these family memories and the underlying and culturally based memories of the Nazi period. In providing a closer examination of Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder* (2003), Dagmar Leupold's *Nach den Kriegen* (2006), and Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* (2003), I will analyse how these writers master the often complicated relationship between private and public memories.

3.2.1 Private and Public Memories in Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* (2003)

Uwe Timm is frequently reflecting on the German past within his oeuvre. His novella *Die Entdeckung der Currywurst* (The Discovery of the Curry-Sausage, 1993) and his latest work of fiction *Halbschatten* (Half-Shadows, 2008) both thematise the German Nazi past to a certain degree. However, his memoir *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* (In my Brother's Shadow, 2003) is without doubt his most poignant work, examining not only his family's past but also the complexities of current German memory debates. Like Thomas Medicus' *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (In the Eyes of my Grandfather, 2004), Timm's text is mainly autobiographical, employing some fictional elements. It focuses on his brother Karl-Heinz, who voluntarily joined the Waffen-SS and died in 1943 on the Eastern Front. Timm introduces his text with the only memory he has of his brother, wearing his uniform. This early recollection has a key function as it is Timm's first conscious memory and also the last of his brother.

[...] diese Empfindung begleitet die Erinnerung an ein Erlebnis, ein Bild, das erste, das sich mir eingepägt hat, mit ihm beginnt für mich das Wissen von mir selbst, das Gedächtnis [...].

[...] this feeling accompanies the memory of this experience, a picture, the first which made an impression on me, which marked the beginning of my self-awareness, my memory [...].¹⁸

Here he skilfully constructs the text from the outset combining his earliest self-conscious memory with the cloudy memory of his brother. Despite having virtually no memory either of his brother or the period that caused his demise, the shadow of his brother is omnipresent in the narrator's later life.

Auch wenn nicht von ihm die Rede war, war er doch gegenwärtig, gegenwärtiger als andere Tote, durch Erzählungen, Fotos und in den Vergleichen des Vaters, die mich, den *Nachkömmling*, einbezogen.

Even though he wasn't the topic of conversation, he was present, more present than other dead persons, through stories, photographs and in the comparisons to myself, the *latecomer*, made by my father.¹⁹

¹⁸ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), p. 7.

¹⁹ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 8. (original emphasis)

This constant presence triggers him to reconstruct his brother's life, subsequently analysing the relationship to his parents, from a variety of sources. He uses his parents' memories, his brother's letters from the battlefield and, most notably, Karl-Heinz's cryptic wartime diary in order to recreate a usable memory of his brother's past to help him understand his involvement in the Waffen-SS and to ask questions he did not dare to ask while the other members of his family were still alive. Most importantly, however, the retelling of his family's past is the attempt to redefine his own identity by filling the gaps in his family's past with memories and postmemories.

The narrator soon emphasises that the aim of his memory project is not solely to find out more about his brother, but also to uncover his links to his own father. He writes:

Über den Bruder schreiben, heißt auch über ihn schreiben, den Vater. Die Ähnlichkeit zu ihm, meine, ist zu erkennen über die Ähnlichkeit, meine, zum Bruder. Sich ihnen schreibend anzunähern, ist der Versuch, das bloß behaltene in Erinnerung aufzulösen, sich neu zu finden.

to write about the brother, also means to write about him, the father. The similarity to him, mine, can be recognised in the similarity, mine, to the brother. To approach him by writing is the attempt to dissolve the memory, to discover oneself anew.²⁰

The method Timm employs to reconstruct his family narrative evades the dangers noted by Welzer in the case studies in *Opa war kein Nazi*. Rather than excluding the memories of the 'album' from those of the 'encyclopaedia' in order to exonerate his own family from Germany's Nazi past, Timm uses both, private and public memories, in juxtaposition. As Brigitte Rossbacher argues, he includes the socio-historic context in his family narrative and 'turns to cultural memory to fill the gaps in his family story'.²¹ The outcome is a highly self-reflexive narrative that allows the narrator to address the family's memories of suffering with empathy *without* forgetting the historical context of the crimes committed during the Third Reich. This self-reflexive montage of memory successfully creates a dialogue between the family 'album' and the cultural 'encyclopaedia'. The narrator illustrates this self-reflexive awareness when he writes:

²⁰ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 18.

²¹ Brigitte Rossbacher, 'Cultural Memory and Family Stories: Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*', *Gegenwarts Literatur*, 4 (2005), 238-258 (p. 240).

Ein anderes deutliches Bild, mit dem Erinnerung einsetzt: die riesigen Fackeln, rechts und links der Straße die brennenden Bäume.

Und dieses: In der Luft schweben kleine Flämmchen.

Die Gefahr glättend zu erzählen. *Erinnerung, sprich*. Nur von heute aus gesehen sind es Kausalketten, die alles einordnen und faßlich machen.

A different clear picture appears with memory: the enormous torches, to the right and left of the road, the burning trees.

And this: tiny flames are floating in the air.

The danger of smoothing things over. *Speak, Memory!* Only from today's perspective are there causal chains which put everything in order and make it comprehensible.²²

This reveals the underlying principle informing Timm's memoir: namely the self-conscious awareness of the danger of reducing collective memories to the suffering experienced during the bombing of Hamburg. The memory of suffering is contextualised within the narratives of guilt, from a present-day perspective. The above excerpt points to the notion of new 'inclusiveness', whereby German suffering can be told while understanding its causal links to German guilt. It is this montage structure that led to the positive critical acclaim that followed the publication of Timm's memoir. Helmut Schmitz sees *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders* as a positive example of what he has defined as 'critical empathy'.²³ He argues:

The effect of this montage technique is to identify 'ordinary' Germans as members of the Nazi 'people's community' even as the reader is confronted with the traumatic nature of their wartime experience. As such, Timm draws attention to the simultaneity and interconnectedness of 'German suffering' and German complicity.²⁴

It is this narrative technique of dialogic investigation that sets Timm's text apart from the *Väterliteratur* [Father Literature] of the 70s and 80s, which is characterised by overt antagonism to the previous eye-witness generation, as well as from other contemporary texts that choose to over-sentimentalise aspects of German suffering by disassociating it from the broader historical context of German complicity.

²² Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 35 - 6. (original emphasis)

²³ Helmut Schmitz, 'Historicism, Sentimentality and the Problem of Empathy', p. 210.

²⁴ Helmut Schmitz, 'The Nazi Past II: German wartime suffering', p. 154.

Timm achieves this complex aim by telling the family narrative while at the same time constantly using the discourse of German complicity to question the very same. In doing so, the scale of the contest between the communicative memories transmitted by his parents and those which the narrator extracts from cultural memory becomes visible as the ‘leitmotif’ [central theme] of the text. The memories that constitute his parents’ ‘album’ are encapsulated as follows:

Ausgebombt und kurz darauf der Junge gefallen. Das war der Schicksalsschlag der Familie, und das war der Krieg. Alles vernichtet.

*Bombed out and shortly after the boy was killed. That was the family’s stroke of fate. Everything destroyed.*²⁵

It is this feeling of loss that characterises the family memory of war – loss of the beloved son, and of possessions in the Hamburg firestorm of 1943. Indeed, this trauma of loss is what constitutes the narrative of suffering as told by the narrator. The representation of the bombing is based on the memories of the parents and excerpts from letters written by Karl-Heinz and the narrator’s father. The narrator reconstructs these memories – the feeling of loss, the fear and the horror experienced inside the air raid shelter – from a genuinely empathetic perspective.²⁶ However, he quickly readjusts the balance between the discourses by adding ‘Juden war das Betreten des Luftschutzraums verboten’ [‘it was forbidden for Jews to enter the air raid shelter’].²⁷ Whenever there is a danger of falling into the trap of reproducing the over-sentimentalised perspective of his parents, the narrator counters this by referring to the wider context of German crimes and the Holocaust. He uses passages from texts by the Holocaust survivors Primo Levi and Jean Amery, and discusses books such as historian Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992) to keep his family narrative within the wider context of the legacy of the Nazi past.

At the centre of the family narrative is the void that is left by the narrator’s brother Karl-Heinz after his death in 1943. Despite Karl-Heinz’s membership of the Waffen-SS, his memory is still kept intact, albeit highly mediated by the parents, in the post-war family in which the narrator grows up. In contrast to Thomas Medicus’ *In den Augen meines Großvaters* (2004), where the past of Wilhelm Crisolti is met

²⁵ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 34. (original emphasis)

²⁶ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 37.

²⁷ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 38.

with silence by the older family members due to the fear of what might be found out about his time in the *Wehrmacht*, the narrator in Timm's text is constantly reminded about his absent brother. However, the memories of Karl-Heinz transmitted by the rest of the family are largely apologetic and even idealised. Uncomfortable questions about his motives and ideals are countered with an apologetic formula that became all too common in post-war German families.

Sie, wie auch der Vater, machte einen genauen Unterschied zwischen SS und der Waffen-SS. [...] *Die SS war eine normale Kampftruppe. Die Verbrecher waren die anderen, der SD. Die Einsatzgruppen. Vor allem die oben, die Führung. Der Idealismus des Jungen mißbraucht.*

She, as well as her father made a clear distinction between SS and Waffen-SS. [...] *The SS was a normal fighting force. The criminals were the others, the SD. The special task forces. Above all, the top men, the leaders. Who abused the idealism of the young men.*²⁸

As Robert G. Moeller points out, many Germans after the war 'favoured a version of the past in which soldiers were not killers but victims, defenders of the Fatherland who had served with honour'.²⁹ The family narrative employs this myth of the honourable soldier in order to exonerate Karl-Heinz from any potential guilt and to charge the Nazi leadership with exploiting the boy's idealism. It allows Timm's father to create a highly idealised memory of Karl-Heinz that exposes his own dated view of masculinity and authoritarianism.

Der Bruder, das war der Junge, der nicht log, der immer aufrecht war, der nicht weinte, der tapfer war, der gehorchte. Das Vorbild.

The brother, that was the boy who didn't lie, who was always honourable, who didn't cry, who was courageous, who obeyed. The good example.³⁰

The image of Karl-Heinz that is transmitted to Timm is evidently constructed by his father and illustrates the inability of the older family members to accept not only their son's but also their own guilt as part of the 'people's community'. In this respect, as critics such as Erin McGlothlin have pointed out, the memoir, despite the focus on the brother, eventually turns into an impression of the post-war German family in general and the father's failure to embrace ideological change in

²⁸ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 19. (original emphasis)

²⁹ Robert G. Moeller, 'Victims in Uniform: West German Combat Movies from the 1950s', in *Germans as Victims*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 43 - 61 (p. 43).

³⁰ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 18.

particular.³¹ Whilst genuinely empathetic towards his family's loss and traumatic experiences during wartime, the narrator nevertheless highlights his family's failure, and particularly that of his father, to accept any kind of complicity. The wartime memories that make up his parents 'album' are, as Helmut Schmitz puts it, 'a reminder of the continuities, both mentally and discursively, between war and post-war mentalities'.³² For the narrator, his father's ideals of masculine obedience, his idealised image of Karl-Heinz and, indeed, of himself as a victim, and the frequent discussions about hypothetical changes in military strategy that might have saved the 'old' Germany from its demise are 'aus heutiger Sicht kaum nachvollziehbar' ['hardly comprehensible from today's point of view'].³³ What becomes increasingly obvious is that the memoir is not solely the attempt to reconstruct the past of Karl-Heinz, but it is also a critical view of the post-war German family and its failure to accept complicity. However, in contrast to the earlier father literature of the 70s and 1980s, Timm's memoir does not simply revert to uniformly accusing the older generation. It seeks a level of balance. On the one hand, the memoir does empathise with his family's fate and accepts its status as a victim of the bombing and the war in general:

Fürchterlich war eben alles, schon weil man selbst *Opfer* geworden war, Opfer eines unerklärlichen kollektiven Schicksals.

Everything was just *dreadful*, the more so because one had also become a *victim*, a victim of an inexplicable collective fate.³⁴

But on the other, by constantly reminding the reader of the macro-historical context of Germany's guilt, Timm acknowledges his parents' complicity:

Es war nicht nur eine gekränkte, sondern auch eine kranke Generation, die ihr Trauma in einem lärmenden Wiederaufbau verdrängt hatte. [...] Sie erschlichen sich eine Opferrolle.

it wasn't only an injured but also a sick generation, which suppressed its trauma through noisily rebuilding [...] They acquired a victim role for themselves.³⁵

³¹ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration*, p. 220.

³² Helmut Schmitz, 'Historicism, Sentimentality and the Problem of Empathy', p. 213.

³³ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 95.

³⁴ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 87. (original emphasis)

³⁵ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 103.

The memoir consequently achieves a great deal of critical awareness, highlighting the family's trauma without failing to remember the Holocaust.

The image of the brother that is constructed in the memoir remains shadowy, despite the deconstruction of the illusory memories transmitted by the parents. All the narrator has to aid him in his investigation are the unreliable memories of the family and his brother's highly cryptic war diary, as well as a couple of letters. The parents' idealised memories of Karl-Heinz cause a feeling of inferiority during the narrator's youth comparable to that of the narrator in Treichel's *Der Verlorene*. Timm illustrates the unreliability of these 'eye-witness' memories by relating them to the narrative of victimhood that underlines the family's 'album'. This image of Karl-Heinz as a role model of German masculinity, whose idealism was exploited by the 'real' perpetrators in the Nazi party, does not provide the narrator with answers to his inquiry. The image does not correspond to the memories of German complicity transmitted through the 'encyclopaedia'. It is this cultural memory discourse that causes the narrator to conduct his belated inquiry and that provides the questions that need to be answered. Why did the brother join the Waffen-SS voluntarily? Was he aware of the crimes that had been committed by Germans in the East? Did he take part in the widespread killing of Jews and civilians? These questions, Timm feels, can finally be asked in the hope of a finding an answer that is closer to the truth than those provided by his parents' generation.

Tote soll man ruhen lassen. Erst als auch die Schwester gestorben war, die letzte, die ihn kannte, war ich frei, über ihn zu schreiben, und frei meint, alle Fragen stellen zu können [...].

The dead should rest in peace. Only after my sister died, too, the last person to know him, was I free to write about him, and free means to be able to ask all questions [...].³⁶

The process of writing about the long-lost brother, and the uncomfortable questions the narrator asks during this process, turns into a postmemorial investigation. There are hardly any real memory traces left to allow the narrator to recreate the fate of his brother, and Timm proceeds by filling the gaps using texts from the realms of cultural memory. Frank Finlay compares the process of writing to lifting the lid of

³⁶ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 10.

the 'memory box' that contains Karl-Heinz's diary, letters and his few belongings.³⁷ Nothing inside the 'memory box' provides the narrator with immediate answers in his quest. There is very little real factual evidence of his brother's motives and character other than the idealised version embedded in his collective family memory. The diary entries are fragmented and provide Timm with little information. Indeed, the language used by the brother in the diary is full of military and Nazi jargon that is marked by the absence of any kind of empathy with either his own situation or the suffering inflicted on others. It is a cryptic collection of daily incidents that mark Karl-Heinz as a member of the Nazi war machine. For example:

März 21.

Donez

Brückenkopf über den Donez. 75m raucht Iwan Zigaretten, ein Fressen für mein MG.

March 21

Donez

*Bridgehead over the Donez. 75m away Ivan is smoking cigarettes, grub for my MG.*³⁸

This provides Timm with almost no information about his brother's emotions or the situation he is in on the Eastern Front. The only hint that the narrator can take from the diary lies in the brutal and impoverished language that portrays the enemy as 'grub for my MG'. It becomes quickly apparent to the narrator that the brutality of the Eastern Front has consumed Karl-Heinz to the degree that his diary entries seem robot-like, lacking empathy and emotion:

Der Hintergrund der lakonischen Eintragungen läßt sich fast nie aufhellen, ihn, den Bruder, nicht sichtbar werden, seine Ängste, Freude, das was ihn bewegt hat, Schmerzen, [...], er klagt nicht, registriert nur.

The background to these laconic entries hardly ever brightens to make the brother visible, his fears, joys, what moved him, his pain [...]; he does not complain, he only registers.³⁹

³⁷ Frank Finlay, 'Jackboots and Jeans: The Private and the Political' in Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, in *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 192 - 204 (p.193).

³⁸ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 16. (original emphasis)

Indeed, this lack of concern for the suffering of the self and of others renders the diary all the more shocking, showing the brother more as a tool in the Nazis' campaign of total warfare than as a human being. Timm has to resort to other texts of cultural memory in order to create a multivocal perspective that allows him to counteract the unreliable 'communicative' memories of the other family members and the fragmented leftovers of the brother in the 'memory box'. By referring to texts such as Browning's *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (1992), and Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), Timm counters the absence of perpetrator-centered memories.⁴⁰ Frank Finlay likens Timm's method of constructing memory with Bakhtin's notion of 'polyphony', a dialogue of independent and separate discourses.⁴¹ It is only through the inclusion of the cultural texts representing perpetration and the suffering endured during the Holocaust that these discourses can enter Timm's postmemorial project. It is the knowledge of these texts that convince the narrator that his brother cannot have been ignorant of the crimes committed around him and, indeed, in all probability *by* him. Even if the brother did not himself take part in the organised killings of Jews and partisans by the SS, he must, nevertheless, have been aware of these crimes.⁴² The 'Unfaßliche' ['incomprehensible'] scale of the crimes committed by Germans in the East as depicted not only by Browning and Levi but also in the controversial *Wehrmacht* exhibition is of such a magnitude that Timm cannot absolve his brother, or even his father, by accepting the family narrative of victimhood.⁴³ Timm thereby deconstructs the father's defence of the '*anständige*' ['respectable'] *Luftwaffe* or Waffen-SS, a myth created in the aftermath of the Second World War which still exists within the realms of private family memories.⁴⁴ Despite the fragmented representation in the diary of the seemingly *normal* life on the battlefield, Timm fears that his brother could have been involved in the shooting of civilians and Jews.⁴⁵ The diary, however, does not provide him with enough evidence:

³⁹ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 141.

⁴⁰ Christopher R. Browning, *Ordinary Men: Reserve Police Battalion 101 and the Final Solution in Poland* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), and Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved* (New York: Vintage International, 1989).

⁴¹ Frank Finlay, 'Jackboots and Jeans: The Private and the Political', p. 199.

⁴² Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 25.

⁴³ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, pp. 100, 102, 103, 143.

⁴⁴ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 98.

⁴⁵ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 98.

Die Notizen verraten weder den Überzeugungstäter noch aufkeimenden Widerstand. Es spricht daraus – und das ist das Erschreckende – eine partielle Blindheit, nur das *Normale* wird registriert.

The notes do not show us a perpetrator by conviction or developing resistance. It speaks to us – and this is the shocking thing – of a partial blindness, only *normality* is registered.⁴⁶

The shocking aspect of the brother's diary is the portrayal of the seemingly *normal* brutality of the war at the Eastern Front, and its acceptance without complaint. Karl-Heinz becomes a cog within the Nazi war machinery, unable to empathise with either his own fate or the suffering of others.

Only the letters which Karl-Heinz sent home, which the parents have kept, hint at Karl-Heinz's humanity. He writes about his worries with regards to the bombing of Hamburg, condemning this as '*Mord an Frauen und Kindern – und das ist nicht human*' ['murder of women and children – and that is not humane'].⁴⁷ This notion of the inhumanity of war is, however, only mentioned in connection with his own family and Germany as a whole. In the same letter, he wishes for the rapid destruction of Russia, indicating that he does not share the same concern for the civilians who have to endure the destruction of their homes on the Eastern Front.⁴⁸ Furthermore, it is in one of the letters he sends home that the narrator finds a slight hint that the brother must have been aware of the actions of the SS during the war. He describes his armoured column entering a village in the Ukraine being welcomed by the civilian population:

Scheinbar haben diese Leute hier unten noch nichts mit der SS zu tun gehabt. Sie freuten sich alle, winkten, brachten Obst usw., bisher lag nur die Wehrmacht hier in den Quartieren.

*Apparently these people down here hadn't had anything to do with the SS yet. They were all happy, waved, brought fruit etc., up to now only the Wehrmacht were stationed here.*⁴⁹

This passage hints at the brother's, if not complicity in, then at least knowledge of the crimes committed by the SS. But it still does not provide the narrator with a definite answer about the degree of his brother's involvement. Did he only observe,

⁴⁶ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 148.

⁴⁷ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 24.

⁴⁸ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 24.

⁴⁹ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 88. (original emphasis)

or did he also take part in whatever those people in the village might have been afraid of? The ideological motives of the brother linger in the shadows of the past and the reconstruction of his memory remains uncertain. This is epitomised in the final entry of the diary, when Karl-Heinz writes:

Hiermit schlieÙe ich mein Tagebuch, da ich für unsinnig halte, über grausame Dinge wie sie manchmal geschehen, Buch zu führen.

*Here I close my diary because I think it's ridiculous to write about gruesome things that sometimes happen.*⁵⁰

Here he indicates that he witnessed horrible events at the Eastern Front, but remains silent on what these may have been. Furthermore, the victims of Nazi aggression remain unrepresented within Karl-Heinz's diary, and the letters and the final passage of the diary seem to suggest that they are deliberately excluded in order to avoid the issues of perpetration and guilt. In the end it is, as Brigitte Rossbacher suggests, Timm who 'bears witness for his brother'.⁵¹ Timm's memory project is thus a re-evaluation of the family 'album' of memories in the context of public memory discourses of perpetration. It is his critical view on the family memories that allows him to bear witness both to the suffering endured by his family and its complicity in Germany's Nazi past.

⁵⁰ Uwe Timm, *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, p. 147. (original emphasis)

⁵¹ Brigitte Rossbacher, 'Cultural Memory and Family Stories: Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*', p. 254.

3.2.2 Memory Contests in Ulla Hahn *Unscharfe Bilder* (2005)

In contrast to Uwe Timm's memoir, Ulla Hahn's novel *Unscharfe Bilder* (Blurred Images, 2005) has no autobiographical aspects but is solely a work of fiction. Reminiscent of the earlier father novels, it portrays the conflict between father and daughter over the father's past as a soldier at the Eastern Front. The novel uses the controversial exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg. Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941-1944* ['War of Extermination: Crimes of the *Wehrmacht*, 1941-1944'] as a background for a conflict-ridden dialogue between the retired, liberal teacher Hans Musbach and his daughter Katja. The original exhibition was designed to illustrate the involvement of ordinary soldiers in large-scale war crimes committed at the Eastern Front. It was a cause for controversy during the 1990s, as it not only aimed to deconstruct the myth of the 'clean' *Wehrmacht* but also included photographs that were proven to be historically inaccurate. Although Hahn uses a fictional exhibition in her novel, it is clearly modelled on the *Wehrmacht* exhibition. The narrator provides her father with a catalogue of photographs depicting crimes committed by ordinary soldiers, including one blurred image in which she believes she recognises him. This marks the beginning of a series of meetings between father and daughter in which she forces him to remember his past and to explain his actions to her. Again we encounter the two strands which dominate German collective memory of the Second World War: the public perpetrator-centred memories, represented by the *Wehrmacht* exhibition, provide the trigger to Katja's investigation into the private memories of her father. These, however, are clearly centred on his own suffering as a soldier at the most gruesome battlefield of the Second World War. He argues that the catalogue of photographs presented to him by his daughter does not represent his own personal memories and is thus incomplete and blurred:

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.

See! In your book I couldn't find any pictures of *my* dead, of my friends and comrades. You're right, I can't find my picture, my memory in there.⁵²

⁵² Ulla Hahn, *Unscharfe Bilder* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2005), p. 40.

Thus both father and daughter try to negotiate the subject from the different sides of the dichotomy between memories of suffering and perpetration. Katja, who is a member of the '68 generation, accuses her father, whom she hitherto has seen as a positive, liberal role model, for his actions during the war and demands an explanation. She tries to resist his narrative of suffering:

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.

The pictures that she had brought to her father were now overshadowed in her, too, by his, the bloody pictures of his memory. She couldn't allow that to happen. Where were the murderers? She sought an answer to this question. Father could not be allowed to evade this.⁵³

Here, she clearly states that she is looking for an answer to the question of what the perpetrators did, not for images of the suffering endured by her father during the war. At the centre of this tussle between the father's discourse of the suffering *Landser*, reminiscent of the early 1950s, and the daughter's question about the perpetrators, which reminds us of the charges put forward by the '68ers, is the leitmotiv of the 'blurred image'. Indeed, the novel portrays an extensive array of 'blurred images'. It is not only the photograph in which Katja believes she has recognised her father that is blurred; Musbach's own memories are increasingly blurred and unreliable, too.⁵⁴ Ulla Hahn bases her use of this leitmotiv of the 'blurred image' on Wittgenstein's idea, quoted in the preface to the novel, that a blurred image represents a human being more ably than a focused one. The dialogue between father and daughter thus, soon evolves into a contest between Katja's need for 'sharp images', as well as historical authenticity, and her father's notion of the 'truth of his subjective memories'.⁵⁵ While Katja has to rely on institutionalised forms of memory supported by photographs as authentic moments capturing the past, her father remains adamant that no image can capture the truth without the memories of eye-witnesses to put the photograph into context.

⁵³ Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 43.

⁵⁴ For a similar argument, see Sabine Fischer-Kania, 'Das Medium der Fotografie in Ulla Hahns Roman *Unschärfe Bilder*', *Seminar – A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 41 (May 2005) 149 - 170 (p. 158). Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 71.

⁵⁵ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 34.

Kein Schnappschuß kann es wiedergeben, nicht einmal ein Film. Nur das Dabeigewesensein kann es aufnehmen und – vielleicht und wie unvollkommen – erinnern.

No snapshot can reproduce this, not even a film. Only those present can take it in and – perhaps, and no matter how incompletely – remember it.⁵⁶

The father claims that the photographs are incomplete without his own personal memories, while Katja insists that they are after all ‘historische Wahrheit’ [‘historical truth’] and cannot change during the course of time.⁵⁷ What becomes apparent during the narrative is that both attempts to turn such images of the past into coherent memories are effectively mediated and can be manipulated, resulting in ‘blurred images’. During the conversations with her father, Katja gradually begins to see the war from his perspective.⁵⁸ Helmut Schmitz argues that this leads to a misplaced form of over-sentimentalised empathy resulting in ‘a validation of the collective status of his entire generation as victim’.⁵⁹ He contrasts the novel with the critical approach to empathy shown in Uwe Timm’s *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*. Similarly, Harald Welzer argues that the novel legitimises the blurred images of German family memory and that the question of the parents’ guilt is replaced by the question of the children’s lack of empathy.⁶⁰ Both Schmitz and Welzer ultimately criticise what they perceive as the novel’s unsatisfactory ending in which the daughter, through sharing her father’s trauma, relinquishes her critical perspective and embraces a rather more empathetic notion of her father’s blemished past.

This reading of Ulla Hahn’s novel is certainly justified if we subscribe to Schmitz’s notion of critical versus sentimental empathy in the representation of German suffering. Timm’s memoir is undoubtedly more adept in adding a critical viewpoint to his family’s narrative of suffering than Hahn’s narrative. However, applying a politicised notion of empathy to the reading of memory texts such as Hahn’s can be problematic. After all, it is the freedom of the literary form that allows fiction to play with different memory discourses and represent them in ways that stimulate further discussion. Dismissing Hahn’s text too readily as an example of sentimentalised empathy means disregarding some important aspects of the

⁵⁶ Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 71.

⁵⁷ Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 73.

⁵⁸ Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 121.

⁵⁹ Helmut Schmitz, ‘Historicism, Sentimentality and the Problem of Empathy’, p. 209.

⁶⁰ Harald Welzer, ‘Schön unscharf. Über die Konjunktur der Familien- und Generationenromane’, *Mittelweg* 36 (2004), 53 - 64 (p.57).

narrative's portrayal of memory discourses in Germany. In other words, if we read the text from the perspective of empathy, we will find it easy to agree with Schmitz's and Welzer's criticisms.⁶¹ However, if we read the text as exemplifying two contesting memory discourses which ultimately both fall short in their reconstruction of the past, it is possible to find a self-reflexive critique of the 'blurred images' of memory in general. As noted by many critics, the dialogue between father and daughter is not satisfactorily resolved. Their tearful reconciliation may suggest forgiveness and sentimentalised empathy on Katja's part, as she appears to identify with the suffering and the difficult circumstances encountered by her father during his service in the German army. But I would suggest that it is precisely this failure by Katja ultimately to grasp her father's guilt for his actions committed at the Eastern Front that provides the narrative with a critical stance. Here the criticism is not so much directed towards Musbach, who finally admits his guilt, but towards his daughter, who fails to accept her father's guilt in the interests of family harmony. Both discourses – that of the father, who focuses on experiential personal memories in his narrative, and that of the daughter, who focuses on photographs as markers for true memory – are ultimately shown to be unreliable. The novel becomes a critical reflection not only on the discourses of perpetration and victimhood, but also on the 'blurring' of memory through its highly mediated nature. By dismissing the novel too readily in applying a normative perspective on the problem of empathy, Schmitz and Welzer fall short in demonstrating the narrative's critical reflection on memory discourses.

Hahn's novel, in contrast to Timm's memoir, provides the reader with a coherent memory of Musbach's experience as part of the Nazi war machinery. While Karl-Heinz's diary provides Timm only with cryptic references to the experience at the Eastern Front, Musbach is forced to remember his time at the battlefield due to his daughter's accusatory insistence on an explanation. The dialogue that continues throughout the rest of the novel is that between two elements of memory culture. Katja's accusatory question about the murders depicted in the photographs of the *Wehrmacht* exhibition is answered by Musbach's claim that such photographs can only be understood in conjunction with the memories of the people they depict. During the course of the novel, however, it becomes increasingly evident that both

⁶¹ Harald Welzer, 'Schön unscharf. Über die Konjunktur der Familien- und Generationenromane', p. 57.

attempts to remember the past are flawed. Musbach begins to remember his own involvement after the confrontation with the horror depicted in the photographs. He admits to Katja that they are indeed authentic and depict the truth, but then relativises this when he says:

Aber für jedes Bild gibt es ein Bild dahinter, für jeden Augenblick eine Geschichte, davor und danach.

For each picture there is a picture behind it, for each moment there is a story, before and after.⁶²

Musbach insists that a photograph cannot represent a complete memory but only a fragment. Consequently, he attempts to fill the vacuum with his personal memories in the form of a type of confession to his daughter. The narrative he tells, however, is littered with formulaic apologies that remind the reader of the *Landser* texts of the early post-war era – namely such texts as Willi Heinrich's novel *Das Geduldige Fleisch* (Cross of Iron, 1956), as well as the early texts by Heinrich Böll, depicting ordinary soldiers bewildered by the senselessness of war. Here, soldiers are often portrayed as powerless and insignificant, absolving them of moral responsibility for the events.⁶³ Musbach constantly explains his powerlessness, together with his own suffering, in the face of the horrific violence he is confronted with.

Für den einfachen Soldaten ist der Krieg nichts anderes als eine ununterbrochene Notwehr. Ich haßte den Krieg. Ich wollte nichts erobern. Keinen erschießen. Aber: er oder ich.

For the simple soldier the war is an incessant self-defence. I hated the war. I didn't want to conquer. To shoot anyone. But: him or me.⁶⁴

This apologetic stance is countered by Katja's insistent questioning and the use of a number of literary as well as historical allusions to texts including Peter Weiss's *Ästhetik des Widerstands* (The Aesthetics of Resistance, 1975-1984), Eugen Kogon's *Der SS-Staat* (The SS-Nation, 1946), Christopher Browning's *Ordinary Men* (1993), and Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* (Crabwalk, 2002), designed to contextualise Musbach's private memories within public memories of perpetration. Musbach is aware of these texts of cultural memory, having taught them and

⁶² Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 63.

⁶³ Moray McGowan, 'German writing in the West (1945-1990)', in *The Cambridge History of German Literature*, ed. by Helen Watanabe-O'Kelly (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 440 - 506 (p.448).

⁶⁴ Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 56.

advocated the reading of them while working as a history teacher. It is this context that forces him to reevaluate his apologetic memory and leads to his confession at the end of the novel. At first he responds to questions of guilt by claiming ignorance of the crimes while at the same time pointing out his own suffering. When asked about the concentration camps, he answers

Wir sind im Krieg mit Überleben beschäftigt. Von den Deportationen, den Massenvernichtungen wußten wir an der Front doch damals nichts.

During the war we were too busy keeping alive. On the Front at that time we didn't know about the deportations or mass extermination.⁶⁵

This view, however, is immediately rebuked by Katja, who is well aware that the persecution of the Jews had started before the outbreak of the war. She argues that her father must have known something and must have had some experience of the violence committed during the early years of the Nazi regime. And indeed, Musbach begins to reflect on the Nazi legacy from a more private perspective, having, so far, been able to hide his own involvement behind his liberalism and his acceptance of the public memory discourses of perpetration:

Er hatte die Geschichte der Nazijahre als eine schreckliche Abfolge von Bildern betrachtet – auf denen es ihn nicht gab. Eine vergangene Welt – ohne Hans Musbach. [...] Die Frage nach den Juden, die Frage nach den Verbrechen mußte immer wieder gestellt werden – aber doch nicht an ihn!

He had viewed the story of the Nazi years as a terrible sequence of pictures – where he didn't exist. A past world – without Hans Musbach. [...] The question of the Jews, the question of the crimes had to be asked repeatedly – but not of him.⁶⁶

Despite acknowledging that the question of guilt has to be consistently addressed in post-war Germany and that his personal experience comprised part of the wider memory of the Nazi legacy, Musbach is still reluctant to accept his own guilt. Instead, he continues to narrate his private memories of 'images of extreme hardship among the ranks' in which issues of perpetration disappear 'behind the suffering victim of circumstances'.⁶⁷ The longer Katja listens to her father's narrative, the

⁶⁵ Ulla Hahn, *Unscharfe Bilder*, p. 98.

⁶⁶ Ulla Hahn, *Unscharfe Bilder*, p. 100.

⁶⁷ Helmut Schmitz, 'Reconciliation between the Generations: The Image of the Ordinary German Soldier in Dieter Wellershof's *Der Ernstfall* und Ulla Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder*', in *German Culture*,

more incompatible they seem to become with her image of perpetration represented by the photographs in the exhibition catalogue. She begins to question her own perspective, and the clarity of the photographic images becomes once again blurred in conjunction with his experience.

Klärte das, was der Vater hier aus immer tieferen Schichten heraufholte, den Blick auf die Fotos der Ausstellung oder nicht? [...] Noch wußte sie keine Antwort.

Do father's revelations, dug from ever deeper layers, make the photos in the exhibition clearer or not? [...] She still didn't know the answer.⁶⁸

During the course of the dialogue, Katja's critical and even accusing perspective based on public memories of perpetration, slowly gives way to a rather more conciliatory attitude towards the suffering he endured at the battlefield. This attitude turns into empathy when she claims:

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 [...].

If we want to be the heirs to the involvement of our fathers and mothers in the Nazi Years, if we want to take over an honest responsibility for this history, then we must also be the heirs of the suffering, the injuries [...].⁶⁹

It is at this point in the novel that Katja changes her attitude in response to her father's memories of suffering at the battlefield. She clearly implies it is not merely the guilt that has to be inherited by post-war generations of Germans, but also the suffering of their parents. It is this reaction to the father's narration that causes the problematic notion of empathy within the novel. The historical reality, the crimes committed by members of the German army depicted in the exhibition catalogue, move from the centre of her attempt to find the truth about her father's past, to the periphery. Here her ready acceptance of her father's memories replaces her previously critical stance with what Schmitz has called 'sentimental empathy'. It portrays the daughter's cathartic desire to reestablish her father as the liberal role-

Politics, and Literature into the Twenty-First Century: Beyond Normalization, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Paul Cooke (London: Camden House, 2006), pp. 151 - 165 (p. 159).

⁶⁸ Ulla Hahn, *Unscharfe Bilder*, p. 105.

⁶⁹ Ulla Hahn, *Unscharfe Bilder*, p. 145.

model in what many critics understand as a disappointing *dénouement* of the novel. What needs to be emphasised, however, is that Katja's move away from her critical stance is based on her father's private memories, which themselves are increasingly undermined during the course of the novel.

Indeed, the novel constantly highlights the mediated nature of Musbach's own memories by acknowledging that he is looking at his own past from a present-day perspective. He would like to believe that he was different from the other members of the German army, that he did not feel the excitement of soldiering; but his former self eludes him:

Da war doch auch noch so etwas wie Abenteuer, Neugier, ja Eroberungslust bei vielen. Und ich? Habe ich diese auch gespürt? Heute denke ich: nein. Aber weiß ich heute noch, wer ich damals war?

Many felt something like a spirit of adventure, curiosity, even the thirst for conquest. And me? Did I feel this, too? Today I don't think so. But what do I know today of how I was then?⁷⁰

Here he clearly questions his ability to remember what he felt as a young man, and points to the flawed nature of memory itself; memories are always created in the context of the present. This undermines the idea that his private memories could replace the public memory discourse and therefore provides the basis for the novel's critical examination of the fallacy of his private memories. There are other incidents which hint towards a contradiction in Musbach's memories of his experience as a soldier. At first he maintains that the members of the *Wehrmacht* were not involved in crimes against civilians and, indeed did not know anything about the atrocities committed. Yet later he talks of 'unsere Säuberungsaktionen' ['our cleansing activities'].⁷¹ After having argued at length that the fighting soldiers at the front were innocent, he contradicts this when he begins to talk about the remorseless revenge actions against the civilian population.

Freischärler und Kommunisten waren ‚feindliche Zivilpersonen‘ und konnten sofort ‚erledigt‘ werden.

⁷⁰ Ulla Hahn, *Unscharfe Bilder*, p. 235.

⁷¹ Ulla Hahn, *Unscharfe Bilder*, p.181, 264.

Resistance fighters and communists were ‘hostile civilians’ and could be ‘knocked off’ immediately.⁷²

When he appears to own up to having taken part in an execution, he continues his narrative of ‘either me or him’ by explaining that an SS officer with a drawn pistol forced him to shoot. This version, however, is undermined at the end of the novel when he confesses that no one stood behind him and that he did take part in executions.

Es stand gar keiner hinter mir. Hätte ich nein sagen können? Ja. Ich hätte nein sagen können. Das weiß ich heute. Trotz allem, was ich nach fünfundvierzig versucht habe, gutzumachen, ein Mörder war ich auch.

No-one stood behind me. Could I have said no? Yes. I could have said no. I know that today. In spite of everything that I have tried to do to make amends after forty-five, I was also a murderer.⁷³

This confession of his guilt questions the entire narrative, not least the memories of suffering he communicated to his daughter. Indeed, it undermines Musbach’s private memories and questions his reliability as an eye-witness. His attempt to defend his experience in emphasising his memories of suffering when confronted with contemporary discourses of perpetration is undone by this confession. Here, the novel adopts a meta-fictional approach similar to British novels such as John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969) and Ian McEwan’s *Atonement* (2001). In both cases, the final chapter self-reflexively questions the entire narrative. Fowles highlights this when he refers to ‘the tyranny of the last chapter, the final, the “real” version’.⁷⁴ Fowles offers the reader multiple endings to his narrative in line with various genres of novel writing. The endings are designed to highlight the postmodern move away from single master-narratives while, paradoxically, arguing that the final chapter will always assert a greater influence on anything that was written before and is thus often to be understood as the most likely ending of the novel. McEwan uses this technique in order to show that the narrative as told hitherto is far from the truth, indeed is a fictional construct, the narrator’s belated attempt to atone for her wrongdoings.⁷⁵ Ulla Hahn attempts to create a similar effect with the

⁷² Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 266.

⁷³ Ulla Hahn, *Unschärfe Bilder*, p. 275.

⁷⁴ John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (London: Vintage, 1996), p. 390.

⁷⁵ Ian McEwan, *Atonement* (London: Vintage, 2002).

last chapter of *Unscharfe Bilder*, with the difference that she does not want to expose her novel as fictional, but rather the construction of memory within the novel. Musbach's confession at the end is designed to highlight the fallacy of memory by exposing his narrative as unreliable. The same can be said for Katja's acceptance of her father's memories of suffering as she gives in to the temptation to replace the photograph with her father's narrative:

Es war verlockend zu sagen: Vergeben und Vergessen. Das Foto mit dem eigenen Bild des Vaters zu übermalen. Nicht mehr hinsehen.

It was tempting to say: Forgive and forget. To paint the photo over with a picture of father himself. Don't look at it again.⁷⁶

Here, the text does demonstrate a critical awareness of the temptation to replace the discourse of guilt with that of suffering. In the end, it is fair to say that both the father's and the daughter's attempts to remember the past are flawed. The novel presents us with a dialogue between two popular memory discourses and comes to the unsatisfactory conclusion that memory, whether private or public, is created within the present and that the mimesis of past events is thus always mediated and inexact. The result is that the images of the past remain blurred, whether they are photographs or remembered narratives. Critics such as Schmitz and Welzer argue that the confession of guilt at the end of the novel comes too late to effectively change the problematic portrayal of 'sentimental empathy' and 'guiltless guilt' and condemn the reconciliation between father and daughter. What they fail to recognise is, to borrow from John Fowles, the 'tyranny of the last chapter'.⁷⁷ The confession at the end questions the validity of Musbach's memories and therefore also questions his narrative. Thus, while the novel certainly poses questions about the problem of empathy and can be criticised for it, it would, nevertheless, be wrong to dismiss it completely as an uncritical example of 'sentimental empathy'.

Both texts analysed above exemplify the importance of familial perspectives on the Nazi legacy in contemporary German memory debates. The family constitutes one of the most important fora in which communicative memory confronts institutionalised cultural memory. Timm and Hahn both include elements of perpetrator- and victim-centred discourses. It leads to a highly self-reflexive and

⁷⁶ Ulla Hahn, *Unscharfe Bilder*, p. 272.

⁷⁷ John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, p. 390.

dialogic stance on contested issues of collective memory as a whole. The family, thereby, becomes a microcosm of the conflict-ridden dialectic between rupture and continuity that can be observed in German memory culture as a whole. However, in contrast to earlier texts that deal with the memories of Germany's complicated past, the most recent texts emphasise the 'new inclusiveness' that allows a broader entry into the discourse of German suffering within the context of the discourse of perpetration. The method used in order to achieve this goal is in many cases that of the postmemorial investigation as described in the previous chapter. Helmut Schmitz emphasises this when he argues:

The interface and friction between private family memories and public memory discourses are precisely what is reflected in all recent family novels, most of which are marked by 'epistemological anxieties' both with respect to the truth value of the family stories as well as to their own process of narrating these stories. The 'metacritical narrative perspective' that characterizes these family narratives marks them as a self-conscious contribution to a public memory discourse.⁷⁸

Furthermore, the focus on 'new inclusiveness' is paired with the problematic notion of empathy. This is a pitfall that some writers such as Timm certainly resolve in a more convincing manner. Nevertheless, it should not lead to a normative template for memory fiction as a whole. Hahn's *Unscharfe Bilder* demonstrates enough critical analysis of both discourses to justify its inclusion as an example of critical memory fiction.

⁷⁸ Helmut Schmitz, 'Family, Heritage, and German Wartime Suffering in Hanns-Josef Ortheil, Stephan Wackwitz, Thomas Medicus, Dagmar Leupold, and Uwe Timm', in *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009), pp. 70 - 83 (p.73).

3.2.3 Family Myth in Dagmar Leupold's *Nach den Kriegen* (2004)

There are a number of other examples of contemporary German memory fiction that could be mentioned when analysing family memories of the Second World War. For reasons of space, I can only examine one further example here: Dagmar Leupold's novel *Nach den Kriegen* (After the Wars, 2004). This novel can be read next to Uwe Timm's text as it is similar in its critical examination of family heritage. In a similar manner to *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, the narrator in Leupold's text critically examines her father's past after his death. She uses her father's diary and letters as well as her own memories of post-war family life in order to investigate her father's past that, so far, has been hidden behind a 'Schicht schützender Mythen' ['layer of protective myths'].⁷⁹ She presents the written memories of her father alongside her own memories of family life, and alongside texts of cultural memory such as Browning's *Ordinary Men*.⁸⁰ The text itself is the memoir that her father always wanted but never managed to write. The daughter has now taken it upon herself to compose these memories into her own version of his life. She thereby deconstructs his 'Legenden' ['legends'] as 'nahezu fiktiv' ['almost fictional'], and puts his self-image as a victim of expulsion and, later in West Germany, of discrimination in relation to his guilt as a member of the Nazi party and former soldier. From the beginning, the text emphasises that the post-war family narrative and the figure of the father are tainted by the war and the Nazi past.

Auch mir geht es hier um die vermißte Gestalt, eine Gestalt, deren Beschädigung durch Krieg geschah. Der Krieg geht mitten durch die Familie, ein Graben.

For me this is about the lost character, a character who was damaged by war. The war splits the family in the middle, a trench.⁸¹

Thus, right from the outset, the narrator makes clear that her family life has been marked by the events of the Second World War. As Anne Fuchs points out, 'the disturbed relationship between father and daughter was a legacy of the Second World War because the unmastered war experience had created deep trenches within post-

⁷⁹ Dagmar Leupold, *Nach den Kriegen* (München: Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 2006), p. 33.

⁸⁰ Dagmar Leupold, *Nach den Kriegen*, p. 136.

⁸¹ Dagmar Leupold, *Nach den Kriegen*, p. 7.

war German families'.⁸² While the father sees himself as the victim of war, having lost his home due to the expulsion of Germans in the East and having lost a finger during a partisan attack in Serbia, the daughter highlights his pre-war past. She establishes her father's early commitment and involvement in the rise of German nationalism in East Prussia. She compares it with the '*gedemütigte Nationalismus*' ['humiliated nationalism'] which Browning sees as partly responsible for the atrocities that followed.⁸³ Although the narrator cannot prove whether the father has actually taken part in '*Maßnahmen*' ['measures'] as a response to partisan attacks in Serbia, she is able to trace her father's nationalistic mindset back to that of the perpetrators. Leupold critically asks:

Wie kann ein kluger, gebildeter Mann so verblendet sein, daß er Krieg und Völkermord nicht mit einem einzigen kritischen Wort kommentiert, sondern diese als Wegbereitung wahrnimmt, die ihm das Erreichen seiner ehrgeizigen Ziele wesentlich erleichtert.

How can a clever, educated man be so blind that he doesn't have anything critical to say about the war and genocide, but rather sees these as staging posts making it much easier for him to achieve his ambitious goals.⁸⁴

Thus, by placing her father's private memories as expressed in his writing within a historical context, Leupold manages to expose him, if not as a perpetrator, then as a follower of the early German national movement in Poland pursuing his own academic ambitions. In doing so, her father shows nothing but disregard for the consequences of his nationalism. He quotes conversations between notorious members of the *Jungdeutsche Partei* [Young-German Party] in Poland about the planning of the imminent Final Solution. Leupold's father takes up a role as bystander, showing little emotion in recording these chilling conversations. *Nach den Kriegen* thus illustrates the psychological make-up of the father's generation, the intense nationalism steeped in fascist ideology, paired with the firm belief in the racial superiority of the German people. It is this prewar persona of the narrator's father that is in extreme contrast to his own memories of suffering as an effect of the expulsion from his homeland. The most traumatic element is her father's perceived loss of respectability in post-war western Germany.

⁸² Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 37.

⁸³ Dagmar Leupold, *Nach den Kriegen*, p. 136.

⁸⁴ Dagmar Leupold, *Nach den Kriegen*, p. 134.

A further interesting facet of Leupold's text are the references to texts by Ernst Jünger and Gottfried Benn, whose detached style of writing her father attempts to imitate. The novel thereby offers a critical analysis of Jünger's and Benn's influence on her father's generation. Her father's early post-war diary is littered with attempts stylistically to parody the detached and unemotional writing of Jünger and Benn. It is appealing to him as neither of them comment on the legacy of fascism or the atrocities that took place in the name of German nationalism.

Sie beziehen zum Krieg, zur nationalsozialistischen Ideologie und ihren verheerenden folgen nicht Stellung, sondern nehmen eine Pose ein – sie treffen also statt einer politischen (und damit verknüpft) ethischen Wahl eine ästhetische.

They don't take a stand on the war, the nationalistic ideology and the devastating consequences but they take on a pose – instead of a political (and related) ethical choice they make an aesthetic one.⁸⁵

Her father attempts to imitate his literary role-models by choosing aesthetic detachment over an ethical position that might explain his involvement in Nazism and his failed nationalism. Anne Fuchs argues that Jünger 'appealed to a man like Leupold's father because Jünger's aesthetic perspective on all the phenomena of this world justified the generation's profound lack of moral judgement' and avoided any kind of 'introspection'.⁸⁶ Leupold does not offer many reconciliatory options in her analytical investigation of her father's past. In comparison with Timm and, even more so, Hahn, Leupold is by far the most critical of her father, showing only the merest empathy for his own self-image as expellee. Leupold's text is also inherently self-reflexive when it comes to her family's collective memory, critically exposing the myths that are constructed and upheld within this memory:

Jede Familie erzeugt solche Legenden, kleinere oder größere literarische Zuschreibungen, welche die Verschiebungen im Inneren der Konstellation regulieren. Sie speisen sich mehr oder weniger aus der Wirklichkeit. Bei uns waren sie nahezu fiktiv.

Every family creates such legends, literary attributes great and small, which regulate the shifts within the constellation. They feed more or less on reality. In our case, they were almost fictitious.⁸⁷

⁸⁵ Dagmar Leupold, *Nach den Kriegen*, p. 179.

⁸⁶ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 41.

⁸⁷ Dagmar Leupold, *Nach den Kriegen*, p. 217.

In contrast to Harald Welzer's claim in *Opa war kein Nazi* that families often only refer to their own 'album' of memories without contextualising this within their post-war knowledge, Leupold aims to deconstruct the myths the father has created about himself by critically analysing his 'album' of memories.⁸⁸ She comes to the conclusion that the myth created within her own family is almost entirely fictional. Here, *Nach den Kriegen* is following the example of Timm and Hahn in exposing the problematic nature of private family memory.

⁸⁸ Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall eds., *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2002).

3.3 Family Wartime Memories in British Fiction

In comparison to Germany, where the new 'inclusiveness' has caused a significant change in public memory debates, the tensions between private memories and public recollection are present to a greater degree in Britain. Indeed, the journalist Jason Cowley even argued that Britain has fallen behind Germany in achieving a 'normalisation' after the Second World War. While Germany has been characterised by its lively memory debates ever since the end of the war, Britain had 'yet to embark on its own journey of normalisation, a process that would include a final reckoning with our own war crimes: the bombing of Dresden, say'.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, the hold of the wartime myths on British collective memory of the Second World War has grown somewhat weaker within the last decades. Despite the domination of the nostalgic memory narrative of the Second World War, there are some indications that Britain is about to enter its own phase of memory 'contests'. Bill Niven observes that there has 'in recent years been a cautious trend towards empathising with the German victims of the bombing of Dresden'.⁹⁰ The authority of the victory narrative is carefully questioned in dissenting academic and theoretical discourses. Such questioning can also spill over onto the streets. One of the most prominent examples was the strong protest accompanying the unveiling of the statue of Air Chief Marshal Sir Arthur 'Bomber' Harris in London (1992). Harris's role in the bombing and the strategy of aerial bombing has been heavily criticised by certain sections of the media since then. Simon Jenkins wrote in the *Spectator* that Britain should apologise for the bombing of Dresden.⁹¹ In 2006, A.C. Grayling published *Among the Dead Cities*, where he questions the morality of the strategy employed by the Allied Air forces. Here he calls for a 'mature perspective on the Second World War', allowing people to be critical about the actions of the victors without falling into the trap of a revisionist apology for the crimes committed by the German war machine.⁹² What is most curious about these tentative attempts to empathise with the suffering of the German population is that there seems to be a different kind of empathy with regards to the suffering of the British population during the Second World War. This is not

⁸⁹ Jason Cowley, 'Forgotten victims', *The Guardian* (27 Mar. 2002).

⁹⁰ Bill Niven, 'Introduction', in *Germans as Victims*, ed. by Bill Niven (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), pp. 1 - 25 (p. 19).

⁹¹ Simon Jenkins, 'Dresden: Time to Say We're Sorry,' *Spectator* (8 Feb. 2005).

⁹² A. C. Grayling, *Among the Dead Cities: Was the Allied Bombing of Civilians in WWII a Necessity or a Crime?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2006), p. 6.

due to any kind of taboo, but rather due to the fact that empathy with the suffering of the population has become an integral part of the dominant public memories of the Home Front. As Calder argues:

Popular memory of the Home Front has been adjusted, like that of old soldiers, to what has been published and screened since [...]. Of course one's morale was 'high' under aerial bombardment.⁹³

Anything else but the image of the 'brave and cheerful population' facing the might of the *Luftwaffe* would not fit into the narrative portrayed in the memory narrative influenced by the myth of the Blitz. Of course, there are a number of literary texts which do produce a more realistic representation of the Blitz, most notably Elizabeth Bowen's *The Heat of the Day* (1948) and Graham Greene's *The Ministry of Fear* (1943).⁹⁴ However, these novels were written during and immediately after the event. Indeed, W.G. Sebald's complaint about a lack of German literature adequately dealing with the aerial bombardment in Germany is, to a certain degree, just as valid for the British context.

The issue of empathy is, of course, far more problematic in Germany due to the guilt that is inscribed into German public memory. British memory culture does not have to address the colossal crimes that were committed as a result of the Nazi rule. Nevertheless, this thesis would like to argue that there is a gap between private and public memory discourses in Britain that has so far hardly been the subject of analysis due to the general acceptance of the narrative of the 'People's War'. Some critics, such as Richard Weight, argue that the changes in national identity through the effects of devolution are indirectly weakening the public memory narrative of the Second World War. He argues that:

For many English people the Second World War was a means of clinging on to their Anglo-British identity and they failed to notice that few celebrations of VE Day were held in Scotland and Wales.⁹⁵

Thus, the Second World War as a unifying notion of Britishness is currently being eroded and with it the uncontested acceptance of the myth of the 'People's War'. Undoubtedly the transmission of intergenerational memory is far less contested and

⁹³ Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes: On War, Memory, and Representation*, p. ix.

⁹⁴ Elizabeth Bowen, *The Heat of the Day* (New York: Anchor Books, 1948), and Graham Greene, *The Ministry of Fear: An Entertainment* (London: Penguin, 1974).

⁹⁵ Richard Weight, *Patriots: National Identity in Britain 1940-2000* (London: Macmillan, 2002), p. 669.

problematic than in German memory literature. Nevertheless, we shall see in the following that there are similar aspects that allow comparison and juxtaposition. Indeed, many British writers adopt a similarly critical, self-reflexive method in creating dialogues between the dominant public memory discourses and the private, familial memory discourses to their German counterparts.

3.3.1 Private and Public Memories in Graham Swift's *Shuttlecock* (1981)

This novel is one of the lesser-known texts by Swift, whose oeuvre deals with the themes of the subjectivity of history, the influence of the past on the present, the function of telling '(his)stories', and aspects of fictionalisation or, rather, construction of the past in the present. His other works include the novels *Waterland* (1983), *Out of this World* (1988), *Ever After* (1992), and *Last Orders* (1996).

The protagonist of *Shuttlecock* is called Prentis, a man who is estranged from his family and who works as a civil servant in a police archive that deals with so-called 'dead cases', i.e. past cases in which one or several of the involved parties are deceased. During his work at the police archive he comes across a file concerning his own father, and he realises that important parts are missing. Prentis becomes obsessed with his father's past as a spy behind enemy lines in wartime France, and constantly rereads his father's autobiography, *Shuttlecock*. He decides to follow up the missing files and attempts to find out the truth about his father's past. The narrative perspective the novel uses is that of a diary written by Prentis himself. This becomes all the more obvious through comments in the text that reveal its own textuality as well as being firmly rooted in the present.

I don't know that I ever intended to put pen to paper again, or, indeed to write as much as I have already. It all began when I remembered my hamster in the Tube and I had this urge to set my feelings and try to account for them.⁹⁶

The novel itself is the result of the narrator's attempt to investigate his father's past and to reevaluate his own identity. Prentis suffers from low self-esteem due to the imposingly heroic memory of his father as a wartime hero. He describes his lack of paternal authority towards his own children and the lack of respect shown towards him by his wife and employer alike. Thus, despite leading a comfortable middle-class lifestyle, he lacks self-respect as well as the respect of others. This is traced

⁹⁶ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 39.

back to the conflicted relationship he had with his father. Describing his father's role as an SOE liaison officer behind enemy lines in Nazi-occupied France, he concludes that his father was 'one of the war-heroes'.⁹⁷ With the publication of the father's memoirs, an account of extreme heroism and valour behind enemy lines, the estrangement between father and son begins. Prentis is unable to move out of the shadow of his father's memory and thus refuses to be associated with that kind of heroism.

When his book came out and reflected glory shone upon me at school
I made a point of not bathing in it and acting as if I found the whole
business a bore.⁹⁸

Indeed, he is unwilling to associate himself with the heroic memory of his father, leading to tensions in their relationship. It is ironic that the private narrative of heroism should lead to a similar estrangement between family members as the memories of guilt and suffering in the German context. As Del Ivan Janik argues:

Prentis' historical research in Dad's memoirs and Quinn's files becomes a quest for understanding, not only of Dad but also of himself and his motivations. He recognizes that part of his discontent comes from having a hero for a father; even now he goes to Dad as to a confessor, seeking explanation if not absolution, and he keeps trying, as he reads Dad's account of his wartime exploits, to put himself in his place. He measures himself against Dad and inevitably comes up short.⁹⁹

However, now that Prentis finally has finally decided to investigate his father's past and to reevaluate the memory of him, he is unable to rely on first-hand memories. His father has suffered a 'sudden breakdown' resulting in 'a kind of language coma'.¹⁰⁰ Hence, Prentis is denied a confrontational dialogue, such as that of Hans and Katja Musbach, which might have allowed him an insight into his father's role during the war. His only means of accessing the past is the memoir published by his father shortly after the war. He clearly hopes that the missing files he came upon in the 'dead case' archive will shed light on some of the questions he would like to put to his father. The absence of his father's private memories and the perceived unreliability of the memoir present a major problem for him.

⁹⁷ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 49.

⁹⁸ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 50.

⁹⁹ Del Ivan Janik, 'History and the "Here and Now": The Novels of Graham Swift', *Twentieth Century Literature*, 35.1 (Spring 1989), 74 - 88, (p. 80).

¹⁰⁰ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 40.

There are a thousand questions I want to ask about things that weren't actually stated in the book. About what Dad felt at the time, about what was going on inside him. Because Dad doesn't write about his feelings; he describes events, and where his feelings come into it he conveys them in a bluff, almost light-hearted way, as if in some made-up adventure story; so that sometimes this book which is all fact seems to me like fiction, like something that never really took place.¹⁰¹

Here Prentis clearly highlights the problem that his father's narrative, with its emphasis on facts and a distinct lack of emotion, creates the impression of a fictional text as opposed to a memoir. He relates the narrative to 'a whole spate of war books and war films' which appeared in Britain during the same period of the publication of his father's memoir.¹⁰² The narratives he is alluding to are the popular war films of the 1950s and 1960s as well as the countless adventure stories. Essentially, we can compare the father's memoir to films such as *The Great Escape* (1963), which are based on true events but ultimately designed to portray the general narrative of Britain's wartime myth. In both, his father's memoir and *The Great Escape*, true emotion is replaced by a light-hearted, stiff-upper lip heroism that renders these accounts of the past unreliable in the eyes of Prentis. In his reading of his father's memoir, it is only the final chapters including the dramatic account of capture, torture and subsequent escape that have 'other qualities'.¹⁰³ These final pages, despite some gaps which Prentis explains with reference to repressed traumatic memories on the part of his father, appear to be 'more vivid, more real, more believable than any other part of the book'.¹⁰⁴ Paradoxically, his father's style of writing changes in these final chapters of the memoir, which are described by Prentis as being 'more imaginative, more literary, more speculative'.¹⁰⁵ The paradoxical character of the narrator's reading of his father's memoir becomes apparent when we consider that, for Prentis, the introduction of emotional self-reflexivity paired with an imaginative use of language renders the memories more believable. The earlier factual and unemotional style of recounting memory is deemed to be more unreliable. Here, Swift emphasises the constructed nature of private memories but also plays with the idea that fictional texts can, at times, seem more authentic. Their

¹⁰¹ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 52.

¹⁰² Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 50.

¹⁰³ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 104.

¹⁰⁴ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 106.

¹⁰⁵ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 107.

fictionality is highlighted when the reader learns that the truth of these final two chapters is uncertain. This ambiguity is designed to emphasise the elusive border between memory and fictional construction. If, as suggested by the missing file, Prentis' father is guilty of collaborating with the Gestapo in order to save his life, then the last two chapters of his memoir not only appear to be more literary, but indeed *are* fictional. It is thus surprising that, to his son, these final chapters are the ones appearing to be more authentic than the memories based on factual experience. Therefore, the novel needs to be re-evaluated as a memory fiction that discusses the mediated nature of memory.

A further parallel to texts previously discussed in this thesis is the absence of a possibility to establish a dialogue with eye-witnesses, in this case Prentis' father. The father's inability to speak about his past due to his 'language coma' is a metaphor for the loss of memory that fuels the narrator's obsession to delve further into the past. According to Prentis, it is this absence of dialogue that spurs him to conduct his investigation further. He argues that 'until Dad ceased to speak I never had this need to talk to him'.¹⁰⁶ The result is that Prentis is constantly re-evaluating his father's memoir as the only access he has to his father's past. The authenticity of this textual form of memory is, however, questioned, and the narrator's hope is to find the truth within the missing case files, which seem to suggest that his father was caught up in a criminal investigation that relates to his wartime experience. As Sabine Birchall observes:

Im Text erbt die zweite Generation die Lebenslügen und auf einer metaphorischen Ebene die konkrete Sprachlosigkeit der ersten Generation, die letztlich durch die Kriegssituation verursacht wurden.

In the text, the second generation inherits the lifelong lies and, on a metaphorical level, the concrete speechlessness of the first generation which was ultimately caused by the situation of war.¹⁰⁷

Thus the absence of first-hand memories, symbolised by the father's inability or possibly unwillingness to communicate, has a direct effect on Prentis and his obsession about his family's past.

As a result of this investigation, the narrator is caught up in a conflict between finding the truth with regards to his private family memory, and his role as a

¹⁰⁶ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 43.

¹⁰⁷ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 232.

member of an institution that metaphorically protects public memory. The institution in question is a fictional ‘cold case’ archive that metaphorically stands for the collection of knowledge within a national memory culture. The role of the archive is revealed in the meeting between Prentis and his superior, Quinn, at the end of the novel. Quinn discloses that he deliberately left a trail for the missing files about Prentis’ father in order to test his suitability for the position as head of the archive. He explains that this role should be compared to that of a ‘guardian’ of the information that is stored by the archive. In his own terms, Quinn argues that he did not have ‘any qualms with keeping the truth from the public occasionally as, in some cases, the truth can actually have a harmful effect’.¹⁰⁸ Birchall argues that Quinn’s main role is to manipulate history ‘zu Gunsten menschlicher Behaglichkeit’ [‘in the interests of human comfort’].¹⁰⁹ In other words, the archive contains information that, if revealed, could undermine existing versions of collective cultural memory in a national context. Quinn points this out to Prentis, saying

[...] just think for a moment of all those innocent, unwitting people whose peace of mind might be shattered by some little titbit we have here.¹¹⁰

Prentis’s decision with regards to the missing files about his father’s actions during the war will thus determine his future in this archive of public memory. The novel illustrates the conflict between private memory and public memory, with the narrator being drawn into questioning his father’s past. Consequently, private as well as public collective memories are exposed as constructed narratives rather than authentic representations of the past. The archive’s role in safeguarding the perceptions of public memory, and to some degree knowledge, suggests a political motivation. Certain truths about the past are suppressed in order to protect the national myths and consequently the wider narrative of public national memory. During his final discussion with Quinn, Prentis learns more about the allegations that the missing files deal with. The actual truth, however, remains uncertain, with Quinn emphasising that ‘what we are dealing with here isn’t necessarily the one hundred percent truth’.¹¹¹ The files contain information about a blackmail attempt against

¹⁰⁸ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁹ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 232.

¹¹⁰ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 119.

¹¹¹ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 182.

Prentis' father, claiming that he did not escape German captivity but was turned by the Gestapo after revealing the names of his fellow agents within the French Resistance.¹¹² Prentis' reaction to this revelation is, contrary to expectation, not one of disgust about the possibility of his father being a traitor, but a 'strange feeling of release'.¹¹³ Prentis, who acts as the steward of his father's past due to his father's loss of speech, is freed from the shadow of his father's heroic deeds. He finds it easier to identify with memories that include normal emotions such as fear and a possible breakdown under physical duress than with his previous family memory of heroic deeds that he will be unable to emulate in his own middle-class existence. The family memory of his father as a lone warrior behind enemy lines or even a heroic action-man is too far removed from Prentis' middle-class identity. In this respect, his father's wartime experience as described in the memoir *Shuttlecock* is the cause of the rift in their personal relationship. While for German writers such as Timm and Leupold, problematic inter-generational relationships develop from conflicting attitudes to guilt and victimhood, in Swift's text the inter-generational conflict develops from an exaggerated image of heroism. In other words, the inter-generational conflict in Swift does not arise from family memories that differ from public memories, but instead are a perfect confirmation of public memories. His father's wartime memories are in line with the mythology of the British war effort. The deconstruction of this memory of heroism allows Prentis to accept his own imperfections without the constant comparison to his father's past. His father's past becomes more accessible to Prentis, whose own identity is steeped in human imperfection. Janik Del Ivan highlights this when he argues:

He is able now to live in the present. Not because he has conquered history but because he has learnt to live with its ambiguities.¹¹⁴

Indeed, not only has he learned to accept the ambiguous nature of memory, but he also favours this ambiguity in contrast to either the near-perfect heroic memoir of his father or the total desecration of his father's memory by exposing his treason. Quinn suggests burning the file in order to 'preserve the father who is in that book of his' as 'uncertainty is always better than either certainty or ignorance'.¹¹⁵ He is convinced

¹¹² Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 182.

¹¹³ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 182.

¹¹⁴ Del Ivan Janik, 'History and the "Here and Now": The Novels of Graham Swift', p. 81.

¹¹⁵ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 197.

that his role as the custodian of the archive occasionally involves keeping the truth from the public in order to keep the public collective memory of the people who fought the ‘good war’ intact. In giving Prentis a choice regarding the file, he is testing him for his suitability to be his successor and Prentis passes this test when he decides to burn the files without reading them. In this respect, as Sabine Birchall has pointed out, we can understand the work conducted by the ‘dead case archive’ as ‘kollektive Gedächtnisarbeit’ [‘collective memory work’] protecting the nation’s collective memory.¹¹⁶ The contents of the files with regards to Prentis’ father’s possible betrayal are viewed as a danger to the existing memory of British conduct during the Second World War. Birchall writes:

Wenn sich die Nation rückwirkend kollektiv als Widerständler und Verfechter einer guten Sache während des vergangenen Krieges definiert, so passt das moralische Versagen Einzelner, vor allem erklärter Kriegshelden, nicht in das konstruierte Selbstbild.

When the Nation retrospectively defines itself collectively as resistance fighters and advocates of a good thing in the past war, then the moral failure of individuals, above all declared war heroes, doesn’t fit into the constructed self-image.¹¹⁷

Consequently, the truth about Prentis’ private family memory is sacrificed in order to protect the constructed public memories of the British war effort. To accuse a decorated war hero of moral failure and betrayal would damage this collective self-image. Prentis thus chooses a position of power within the archive, allowing him to affirm the national collective memory as opposed to exposing the allegations made against his father. What is even more telling is that only in the privacy of their final meeting do Prentis and Quinn show understanding for the torture and the possible breakdown the father has endured during his service. This illustrates that there is only little room for trauma and breakdown in the public’s hero-worship within the wider framework of collective memory. Privately, however, both Prentis and Quinn know that it is more than likely that any agent could have broken down under severe torture.

¹¹⁶ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 232.

¹¹⁷ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 232.

He was tortured – that’s almost certain – probably severely tortured – you must have considered that. You can’t blame him for not dwelling on those things. [...] ‘Or,’ I said, ‘for quite naturally breaking down under them’.¹¹⁸

Quinn emphasises that everyone, despite previous daring and heroic deeds, has his or her breaking point. He illustrates this by recollecting his own service at the battlefield near Caen in 1944. He remembers an incident of heavy fighting and his own traumatic breakdown:

I obeyed my instinct. I ran like bloody hell – like everybody else. I ran *for my life*. That’s no joke. I would have killed any English soldier who got in my way, let alone a German.¹¹⁹

Quinn concludes that if anyone had witnessed his actions on that day, they would have been right to blame him for cowardice and betrayal. Thus, he acknowledges the traumatic personal memories experienced by British soldiers and agents during the Normandy invasion, while in his capacity as head of the national ‘dead case’ archive his responsibility is to keep this information from the public in order to protect the image of heroism that is part of the public collective memory. The archive consequently becomes a place that, metaphorically, stores the nation’s suppressed memories. The notion of empathy becomes central at this stage in the novel as neither Prentis nor Quinn condemns the father for his actions but both are empathetic to his situation. The memoir *Shuttlecock* is understood by Quinn as a final escape from the guilt and trauma that Prentis’s father must have felt ever since the war and his final breakdown in a language coma illustrates the pressure he has been under ever since. Thus, the problem of empathy, though not in the same way as in the German context with its emphasis on guilt and suffering, also exists within the British context. The image of the infallible hero figure allows only little space for an empathetic view of breakdown and trauma within the narrative of national memory. Swift’s novel *Shuttlecock* should be reevaluated as a work of British memory fiction dealing with the conflict between private and public memory narratives, the problems of hero-worship for the later generations, the deconstruction of wartime myths, and issues of empathy within the British narrative of the ‘good war’.

¹¹⁸ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 188.

¹¹⁹ Graham Swift, *Shuttlecock*, p. 191.

3.3.2 Re-instigating Private Memory Discourses in Liz Jensen's *War Crimes for the Home* (2002)

Liz Jensen's novel *War Crimes for the Home*, published in 2002, differs somewhat from the previous texts discussed in this chapter. The narrative perspective here is not that of a member of the post-war generation but that of a woman, Gloria, who lived through the war, working in a munitions factory together with her sister Marje after the loss of both their parents. The plot jumps between Gloria's present as a reluctant resident of a nursing home and her memories of her wartime past. These wartime memories, however, are slowly disappearing as she is diagnosed with Alzheimer's disease and her capacity to remember becomes increasingly unreliable. According to Victoria Stewart,

Jensen compounds these difficulties, because Gloria also suffers from a form of imposed memory loss, the result of the work of the stage hypnotist Zedorro. This somewhat outlandish plot twist in fact represents a darkly ironic wish-fulfilment on Gloria's part; her desire to forget then is countered by her inability to remember now.¹²⁰

Thus, after her life-long attempt to suppress her wartime memories, Gloria is now faced with severe difficulties in conjuring up her past due to her dementia. Her children bring in Dr Kaplan to help her recover her memory after her son Hank finds a box filled with pictures and papers about her wartime relationship with an American soldier. He begins to question Gloria about her past in the hope of finding out more about the identity of his father, something that she has attempted to hide from him previously. With the appearance of a fifty year-old woman, who later turns out to be her daughter, at her bedside in the nursing home, Gloria begins to realise that it is time to talk about her wartime experience despite her difficulty of remembering.

Hence, despite the different narrative perspective, there are nevertheless several parallels to the texts discussed earlier in this thesis. The investigation into Gloria's wartime past is triggered by her children's need to fill the gaps in their family memory and find out more about their own identities. These gaps appeared as a result of the self-imposed suppression of memories through trauma, and, later, due

¹²⁰ Victoria Stewart, *Narratives of Memory: British Writing in the 1940s* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2006), p. 171.

to her rapid memory loss. In other words, the memories of the eye-witness generation represented by Gloria are unreliable and incomplete. Indeed, Victoria Stewart goes as far as to describe Gloria as ‘a deliberate liar’ trying to hide her wartime past from her children through ‘fabulations’.¹²¹ However, Gloria is forced to remember her past by the pressure exerted on her by her children and the psychologist Dr Kaplan. This reveals the reasons for her fabulations, and results in a more accurate version of her past despite her attempts to hide it.¹²² The narrative framework of Jensen’s novel represents an interesting reversal of the memory novels discussed beforehand. Victoria Stewart has pointed out that ‘typically, the central protagonist will be the individual who is questing for the truth about their own identity’.¹²³ Jensen’s novel undoubtedly remains true to this central principle of memory fiction, but it also shifts the emphasis away from the post-war generation searching for the truth about their family memory towards a member of the wartime generation who attempts to suppress these memories. This change of emphasis shows that the difficulties in filling the gaps of family memory are linked not just to the problems in uncovering the past but also to the traumatic act of recollection itself.

The novel depicts the subject of memory in various layers, all of which are narrated by Gloria and linked to the enquiry of her son into his mother’s past. Memory is discussed in relation to conscious and unconscious forgetting, the problem of absent family memory for Gloria’s children, the memory of the British home front, and memory debates surrounding the Holocaust and German guilt. Jensen’s novel therefore combines a number of strands characteristic of contemporary memory studies.

The issue of personal guilt is central to the novel and is highlighted in the title, as it refers to ‘war crimes’. The war crimes in Gloria’s wartime experience, however, are only to a certain degree comparable to those talked about in some of the German texts. She has no association with Nazi sympathizers and has not committed any violent acts. Her war is an ‘ordinary war’ working in a munitions factory, doing her bit, experiencing the terror of bombing raids and falling for an American soldier. Thus, her ‘crimes’ are of a more personal nature and the biggest crime she has

¹²¹ Victoria Stewart, ‘The big war outside and the little war at home: Anamnesis and the Second World War in recent British fiction’, *English*, 54 (Autumn, 2005), 209 - 224, (p. 214).

¹²² Victoria Stewart, ‘The big war outside and the little war at home: Anamnesis and the Second World War in recent British fiction’, p. 214.

¹²³ Victoria Stewart, ‘The big war outside and the little war at home: Anamnesis and the Second World War in recent British fiction’, p. 214.

committed is to choose to forget the death of one of her twins and the abandonment of the surviving child. She chooses to undergo a hypnotic treatment by the Great Zedorro, who also works with shellshock victims, in order to erase the memory of the child she had with Ron, an American pilot who chose to marry her sister:

I remembered what Zedorro did. In the war. [...] The hospital they put me in with shellshock, that's where he worked. For the MOD. He worked with the ones who got amnesia, helping them remember stuff. But he did other memory things too. There were these soldiers who saw things that was so bad they went mad with it. [...] He wiped people's memories.¹²⁴

After having given birth to twins, one of which dies during birth, she chooses to give her daughter into the care of Zedorro and his wife, undergoing hypnosis in order to forget her shame and guilt. The figure of the stage magician appears to take the novel into the realms of a 'magic realism'. The notion of a hypnotist forcefully removing the painful memories from Gloria at first seems to be outlandish, and it certainly points to Gloria's unreliability as a narrative voice. However, the figure's real profession, as a psychologist working for the MOD, indicates the possibility of some kind of plausible explanation for Gloria's erasure of memory. He presents her with a solution to the unbearable situation she is confronted with: she has lost one child and does not want to keep the other because of her failed relationship to Ron. Back in Gloria's present, the hypnotist whom she knew as Zedorro is replaced by the more legitimate psychologist Dr Kaplan, who helps to unlock her suppressed memories before her illness progresses to the point where they become irretrievable. Hence, Gloria's narrative is not a wilful act of recollection but rather a forced confession of her wartime actions and the guilt she was trying to hide throughout her lifetime. This wilful act of suppressing memory is seen as a crime by her son, who is suffering under the gaps in his family memory. When he confronts his mother in the care home, Gloria argues that

forgetfulness isn't a crime as far as I'm aware.

-Can be, he says. – If it's done on purpose.¹²⁵

Here is a clear parallel to previous texts, illustrating the problematic issue of absent family memories for the subsequent generations. By choosing to forget or rather

¹²⁴ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home* (London: Bloomsbury, 2002), pp. 184 - 185

¹²⁵ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home* p. 119.

wilfully suppress her memories, Gloria commits a similar ‘crime’ to some of the members of the wartime generation depicted in German memory novels. Members of the post-war generations are often considered to be suffering from the absence of family memories. Examples can be found in texts such as Thomas Medicus’ *In den Augen meines Großvaters* and Marcel Beyer’s *Spione*, where the narrative voices describe the problems caused by absent family memories and the attempts to find the truth. In this respect, we can argue that Gloria has committed two crimes, firstly by forgetting the death of one daughter and the abandonment of the other, and secondly by causing pain to her children through this deliberate act of forgetting.

Her personal guilt and her attempt to erase her memory of this guilt are paralleled by her explanation of German memory. Gloria describes this as follows:

Mr Adolf H, he suggested plenty of things to the Germans. He suggested taking over France and Poland and all them countries and rounding up the Jews. And he suggested finishing them off using starvation and gas. He suggested bombing England. He made lots of happy suggestions like that, happy because they didn’t seem half bad to most people, they were ordinary greedy people like you and me. Then afterwards they blamed Adolf H for brainwashing them like that, and they had to try and forget that they ever did that stuff, and when their children found out there was a war, and asked them if they was Nazis, they shook their heads, and said, War? What war, son? There may have been one but it’s just a fuzzy memory to me. I just followed orders, you would do the same.¹²⁶

In this instance, the narrative not only shows awareness of post-war memory debates but weaves them together with Gloria’s memories of her own wartime experiences. Thus private experience is connected with the wider scope of collective memory of the Second World War, even going beyond national boundaries. Her view of the problems of memory in Germany, expressed in her own language at the beginning of the novel, is later paralleled by her relationship to her own past and guilt, albeit on a smaller and far more personal scale. When her son confronts her about his family’s past, Gloria, just like members of the German wartime generation, attempts to hide the truth from him, aided by her own ‘fuzzy memory’. Moreover, by referring to Gloria’s past as a ‘war crime’, as Jensen does in the title, the text creates an ironic parallel to German memory and memory novels.

¹²⁶ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 21.

The text continuously draws parallels between Gloria's personal wartime experience, including the horrors as well as the mundane little problems of civilian life in the 1940s, and the historical narrative or even the 'grand narrative' of the Second World War. When talking about her relationship to her sister, which was marred by jealousy, she says:

That is the start of our own little war, between her and me, I am Churchill and she is Hitler. [...]

So life goes on, the big war outside and the little war at home, all about territory and invasion by foreigners, in between my twelve-hour shifts.¹²⁷

Thus the text, more than others, combines the narratives of private memory with those of public memory. By weaving Gloria's little war into the narrative of the big war, the novel reinscribes her private memories into the context of the cultural memory of the British wartime myth without destroying it. Gloria is portrayed as a character who carries her own guilt within her; this guilt, however, is submerged beneath the horrors and subsequently the trauma she experiences. Consequently, by investigating the guilty secret of her wartime past through the sessions with Dr Kaplan, the text also rediscovers the traumatic memories of this period, introducing the notions of both guilt and victimhood. The juxtaposition of Gloria's domestic war and the wider events of world-historical importance illustrate the 'extent to which the war has disallowed any separation between private and public life'.¹²⁸ The violence against the civilian population and the establishment of the 'home front' and the myth of the 'People's War' have turned civilians such as Gloria into combatants. Indeed, at the end of the war, after having endured the bombing of Bristol and London, Gloria describes herself as being 'shellshocked', a term that is normally used to describe the trauma endured by frontline soldiers.¹²⁹ Her own involvement in the war effort and her dangerous work are highlighted when she remembers an incident in the munitions factory she was working in, when one of her fellow workers lost a limb.¹³⁰ The work in these factories was mainly done by women, and the incident described by Gloria was by no means unusual. Her work for the war

¹²⁷ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 93.

¹²⁸ Victoria Stewart, 'The big war outside and the little war at home: Anamnesis and the Second World War in recent British fiction', p. 216.

¹²⁹ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 167.

¹³⁰ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 6.

effort takes her out of the private sphere and into larger context of the war that is raging around her. A further aspect of the war entering every person's private sphere is the constant threat of violence and death from the air. Gloria remembers that she 'heard violence all the time, the Moaning Minnies wailing, the Germans overhead, the sound of doodlebugs'.¹³¹ It is this violent irruption of the public into the private that brings Gloria to perceive her role as that of a combatant and to describe her crimes as 'war crimes'. Her narrative, thus, represents the individual memories of a woman who was part of what Calder has termed the 'People's War'. Gloria's description of the war exemplifies the interdependence between the main events of the 'public' war and those of her 'private' war.

Our troops are rounding up Jerry, we've bombed Dresden and had the glory of D-Day and Hitler getting his comeuppance, and a letter from Ron is probably already in the post and we're all just waiting for this blinking war to be over with.¹³²

Here, using the collective 'we', Gloria shows the way the public in general and women in particular identified with the war effort. The boundary between her private war memories and the public memories of the Second World War is breached, and major events like D-day or Dresden are viewed similarly. This narrative technique of breaching the spheres of her private memories and interlacing them with major events frequently remembered within public discourses of collective memory allows the novel to reintroduce some aspects which are often marginalised in these public discourses. Gloria's private memories represent the 'little' war fought by millions of women on the British home front, including the brutal realities of the threats of aerial bombardments and the constant fear of losing loved ones on the battle front. But her memories also highlight narratives of a newfound sexual liberation, a change in moral certainties and the important role women played in Britain's war effort.

Gloria's memories underline but at the same time also demystify the public narrative of the 'People's War'. Her recollections of wartime Britain illustrate the unified effort of the civilian population and the role of the British 'people' to support the war effort. She describes, for example, a brief encounter with Churchill while he was inspecting the so-called 'Victory Gardens', a collective effort to grow food in all the available green spaces, a reference to the collective war effort enshrined in the

¹³¹ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 7.

¹³² Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 129.

myth of the 'People's War'.¹³³ Furthermore, her memories represent the important role women played during the conflict:

What war does to you is this. If you are a woman you are not out there having a crack at Jerry, are you. You are in a factory like Iris or driving ambulances or making tea in shelters or working as a land girl pulling up frozen beets with bare hands, and you are waiting to hear that your man's been killed, and getting the comfort of a little peach syrup once in a while, to make up for the youth you've lost and the coffee that's made of Spam and acorns and dead rats.¹³⁴

But while her memories support the public memories of the 'People's War', they also throw into relief the specific plight of women like herself, a group that has often been marginalised in the 'public' narrative. Her language clearly identifies her as a member of the working class, and her memories are the specific memories of a working-class woman. Furthermore, by introducing her individual memories of traumatic events such as the bombing and the death of her child, the narrative also emphasises that personal memories do not always live up to the ideal of the 'People's War'. Indeed, her memories at times collide with and contradict it, reinscribing the individual's plight into the wider collective memories. This obvious contradiction runs throughout her recollection of the war. For example, when she moves to London after having fallen out with her sister over her lover, Gloria describes the way many people, including herself, felt the war was 'the best time of their life', only immediately to challenge this common notion of the 'People's War' by describing a gruesome memory of an incident during the Blitz 'where the whole family was killed'.¹³⁵ Consequently, the novel adopts an ambivalent attitude towards wider British wartime mythology. It emphasises the role women played in the war effort while describing the suffering of the civilian population, questioning, but ultimately not seeking to displace the myth. Gloria's private memories, albeit highly unreliable, emphasise issues surrounding the 'People's War' that have previously been situated at the margins of the wider mythology. Thus, family and private memories act as an addition to the public collective memories of the Second World War instead of entirely deconstructing the existing mythology.

The narrative also displays an acute awareness of present-day memory debates. Gloria's confessional recollection of her wartime past is intertwined with

¹³³ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 69.

¹³⁴ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 99.

¹³⁵ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 167.

wider theoretical debates on issues of collective memories. In her discussion with the psychologist Dr Kaplan, wider theoretical debates are mentioned. In her attempt to resist the evocation of her lost memory, Gloria argues that the past should be left where it belongs and that one should look at the future. Here, she particularly refers to the Holocaust when she argues somewhat polemically:

Them Jews, they're always on about the war, I tell him. But they weren't the only ones suffered. Every chance they get and they're raking over that Holocaust of theirs, they won't blinking well let go of it. It's unhealthy. They should look to the future a bit more. Get some fresh air into their systems. It's not healthy, living in the past.¹³⁶

This passage shows her strategy of forgetting as well as the acknowledgement of her own suffering during the war. Thus far, she has attempted to suppress the suffering she has endured in the past as well as the guilt she carries inside her, which leads her to be defensive towards her family and Dr Kaplan. What is particularly interesting about her argument in support of forgetting is the fact that it mirrors some of the conservative voices within German memory debates, namely that it is unhealthy constantly to dwell on the past and that the Jews were not the only people who suffered during the Second World War. In Gloria's case, this line of argument is a defensive reaction against the memories of her own guilt. Again, one could argue that there are certain similarities to German memory debates. The above passage also indicates the centrality of the Holocaust for the notion of collective war memories. In the further course of Gloria's encounter with Dr Kaplan, the novel clearly introduces the concept of social memory:

Interesting I should mention the Jews, because he's [Dr Kaplan] got a theory about the function of memory, he's saying. A theory that we are our memories.

That memory is what we are, because we have no identity without memory. Our consciousness is a collection of things we have remembered. You know, history, general knowledge, practical expertise, our own life story and knowledge and emotional past ... When you think about it, personality without memory is like -

-Fish without chips, I go, to shut him up.¹³⁷

¹³⁶ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 148.

¹³⁷ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 149.

In this short passage, the narrative introduces several theoretical issues that have been discussed during the latest memory boom, such as the connection between the notion of memory and identity, the social frameworks that influence our collective memories and the urge to forget traumatic events that occurred during the past. The narrative's representation of memory goes beyond Gloria's individual recollections of her wartime past, and also includes the wider theoretical debates on the concept of memory and the Second World War. Consequently, Jensen's novel represents family memories on a micro-level and combines this, in the plot, with the macro-level of current memory debates. In combining all these strands within the narrative, it provides an important contribution towards ongoing memory debates. In doing so, Jensen's work of memory fiction does not remain exclusively within the boundaries of a solely British representation of the wartime past. Gloria's reluctance to remember her own personal guilt is often paralleled with examples from German memory discourses. In the chapter entitled 'Old Nazi', for instance, Gloria describes the trial of a Nazi perpetrator which she follows with interest on the news:

Today there's a man who was a war criminal, he was a guard at one of the death camps. Eighty thousand people were gassed there, but they weren't wanting to do him for the gassing, it was about some prisoners they say he shot for fun. It's worse, if you do it for fun and it's not part of the regular job. [...]

He's denying the killing of course, and the Jew man is saying that's making it worse, because the first crime is the first, he says, but the second crime is the crime of denial. You hide your crime, you deny the past, or you forget the evil you did, forget it on purpose, and you're committing another atrocity.¹³⁸

Having suppressed her own guilt, the news report causes a severe feeling of unease in Gloria and she immediately knows that there is a connection between her own past and that of the accused. Only later does she realise that she is also committing the crime of forgetting her past and that her situation is similar to that of the Nazi perpetrator, albeit on an entirely different scale. Hence, Gloria becomes a highly ambiguous character. On the one hand, her memories represent a discourse of civilian suffering, ranging from the difficulties of rationing to the constant threat of death during a bombing raid; on the other hand, they point to a discourse of personal guilt deriving from her past 'crime'. This crime of being responsible for the death of

¹³⁸ Liz Jensen, *War Crimes for the Home*, p. 58.

one of her twins and giving away the other is described as a 'war crime' because Gloria understands herself as a 'combatant' in her 'little war'. This 'little war' which she is trying to remember in the present is a mirror image of the 'big war' that is happening around her. In this respect, her actions are often paralleled to the major events of the Second World War and her guilt is paralleled with the guilt of Nazi perpetrators.

Jensen's novel brings together several issues pertaining to individual and collective memories of the war. Gloria's narrative is foremost a forced attempt to restore memories before they completely disappear through amnesia. This process of recovery is not voluntary but instigated by her children. In this respect, the novel follows the usual pattern of memory fiction where the later generations instigate an investigation into lost family memories in order to create a usable past on which stable identities can be based. This gives the novel an inherent presentness that can also be found in other examples of memory fiction. By choosing Gloria as the narrative voice of the text instead of one of her children, Jensen deviates slightly from the usual patterns; however, the significance of absent family memories for the following generations is still central to the novel. The fact that Gloria suffers from an increasing memory loss and her violent attempt to suppress traumatic memories make her an increasingly unreliable eye-witness to the wartime past. In this respect, the novel illustrates the unreliability of human memory as a source for historical knowledge. Furthermore, the vivid description of the British home front and suffering in the various recollections provided by Gloria reintroduce marginalised private memories into the greater mythology of British wartime memory. As Victoria Stewart argues, these are 'voices which challenge the very boundaries between margins and centre'.¹³⁹

¹³⁹ Victoria Stewart, 'The big war outside and the little war at home: Anamnesis and the Second World War in recent British fiction', p. 211.

3.4 Conclusion:

One of the most significant issues of Second World War memories is the fact that the conflict eroded the separation between the private and the public sphere. Civilians were no longer separated from the soldiers who fought the war, and the battlefield was extended to the home front. The violence of the Second World War was experienced in the private sphere, through Nazi persecution and through the aerial bombing which destroyed millions of homes and killed ordinary people with no connection to the military. These private narratives, however, were at times marginalised and did not find a central place within public collective memory discourses.

The British and German memory novels discussed above illustrate the significance of private family memories within the wider discourses of collective memories of the war. The global nature of the conflict and the uninhibited violence directed at the civilian populations of a great number of countries caused the boundaries between the private and the public to dissolve. This is clearly reflected in post-war memory debates and the notion of the discrepancy between private and public wartime memories. While the major events of the war have been represented in the wider domains of public collective memories, the individual suffering of parts of the population has, at times, been marginalised. This problematic relationship is clearly an issue within British and German memory fiction. However, it would be a mistake to describe texts such as those by Uwe Timm, Ulla Hahn, Dagmar Leupold, Graham Swift, and Liz Jensen solely as attempts to shift private family memories into the wider memory discourses in their respective countries. Rather, the writers attempt to create a dialogue between private family memories and the institutionalised forms of public wartime collective memories. The three German writers, in particular, focus on the importance of public memories as a source for a deeper investigation into the secrets of family memory. None of the writers attempt to deconstruct the perpetrator-centred memory discourses that are still prevalent within German public memories of the war. Moreover, they utilise these discourses to question certain issues of family memory, illustrating the difficulty of empathising with individual family members. The currently popular notion of German suffering thereby finds its way into the narratives through the representation of individual family memories. Helmut Schmitz has pointed to the great difficulty in finding the

right degree of critical empathy without falling into the trap of over-sentimentalising the discourse. The danger, as Harald Welzer has argued, is the problematic portrayal of a 'guiltless guilt' allowing family members to admit to their guilt while, at the same time, relativising this guilt with narratives of their own suffering. However, all the German authors discussed in this chapter provide some degree of critical analysis of family memories by using the public memory discourses as a counterpoise; and at times, as is the case with Leupold, they even reveal the mythical nature of the family memories. Thus, these texts exhibit an acute awareness of the problematic nature of the differences between representations of the wartime past which use either the private 'album' or the public 'encyclopaedia' as a basis. Within the narrative frameworks of the texts, however, these differences are often the subject of investigation, and a dialogue between them is created through the narrative voice.

The analysis of all the literary examples in this chapter illustrates a number of common aesthetic characteristics. First, we encounter a distinctive emphasis on the family as a social framework of memory and the problematic notion of transmitting these memories between the different generations. Narrative tension is achieved by relating these private family memories to the wider framework of cultural memory per se. The three German texts thereby specifically deal with questions of private suffering and empathy in relation to the overarching public memory discourse of German perpetration. The tension thereby lies in the difficult balancing act between over-sentimentalised empathy with the suffering of family members and the critical distance derived from the knowledge of the causality between German suffering and perpetration. The three German authors illustrate that this question of balance by no means results in a simple and ultimate answer. All three texts portray varying degrees of balance between empathy and critical distance, implying subtle and not-so-subtle differences in representing this tension. The two British texts also use tension between individual private memories and the dominant public memory discourse as implicit elements within their narrative structure. Here, however, the tension lies not in the problematic balance between empathy and critical distance but rather in the notion of marginalised private memories and the dominance of public collective memory. The family thereby becomes the framework in which both memories of individual fate and wider memories of the war are critically explored and related to each other. It allows fictional texts to focus on these individual stories without forgetting the wider historical context.

Secondly, similar to the texts in the previous chapter, we encounter the desire of the protagonists to establish a coherent narrative of the past within the present. Here they do not have to overcome the problem of absent memory but instead have to forge a usable past despite the discrepancies between family and public memory. Issues of representation are thereby implicitly or explicitly highlighted within the narrative frameworks. Uwe Timm, for example, utilises a montage technique which juxtaposes the subjective memories of his family members with references to historical works and testimonies depicting German perpetration. Graham Swift highlights the tension between the private experiences of Prentis's father and the dominant public memory discourse using the 'dead case' archive metaphorically for the national cultural memory discourse. Liz Jensen parallels her protagonist's 'little' war with the larger narrative of the Second World war in order to re-connect marginalised private memory discourses with the dominant narrative of the 'People's War'.

Thirdly, the focus on family memory allows the authors to tell individual narratives and readers to identify with the characters. After all, the question 'what did you do in the war' is one that has been asked by many members of post-war generations in Europe and beyond. Thus, the focus on individual fate and the transmission of memories is not only a critical reflection on the possibilities of representation, but is also designed to engage the reader. Ultimately, questions about a family member's role during the war are universal and transcend national boundaries.

Chapter Four

Perpetration and Guilt

In this chapter the thesis will provide a closer analysis of existing cultural discourses within Germany and Britain by asking whether cultural memory is undergoing a change and if there are certain themes that are either taboo or, at least, on which British and German memory discourses remain generally silent. There are several major themes in literature which have been critically discussed under the notions of 'silence' and 'taboo'. Two of these, namely the Holocaust and the air war against German cities, are the subject of this chapter. The texts to be discussed in this chapter are not merely concerned with the fictionalisation of issues of perpetration and guilt. They are also characterised by their reflection about the ethical limits of representation concerning the portrayal of perpetrator figures and feelings of guilt.

4.1 Nazi Perpetration in Post-Unification German Fiction

Ernestine Schlant has argued that post-war German fiction has approached the subject of the annihilation of millions of human beings during the Second World War with a strategy of blind spots that are operating to this day.¹ In this theoretical framework of the 'language of silence', Schlant focuses on the representation of the Holocaust not from the perspective of the victims, but instead from the perspective of the perpetrator nation: her focus is on the literary representation of the Holocaust by non-Jewish German writers. She acknowledges that despite 'frequent allegations that Germans prefer to forget the Holocaust, the enormity of these crimes and their legacy have become part of German self-understanding'.² Nevertheless, instead of openly confronting the Holocaust, Schlant argues that German post-war writers have developed a 'language of silence' as a strategy to 'omit, distort, or cushion this realization'.³ Schlant analyses a large number of canonical German novels from the

¹ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence: West German Literature and the Holocaust*, (London and New York: Routledge, 1999) p. 2.

² Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 2.

³ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 2.

early post-war era right up to the literature of the Berlin Republic.⁴ She maintains that West German literature has, despite showing a considerable awareness of the Holocaust, been driven by narrative strategies of avoidance, denial, and repression. She writes:

In fact, one can maintain, as I will in this study, that despite increasingly available knowledge about the Holocaust, Germans individually and collectively have been unable to work through and to mourn the crimes perpetrated, if working-through demands ‘the possibility of judgement’ that is ‘argumentative, self-questioning, and related in mediated ways to action’.⁵

According to Schlant, only the most recent German fiction, particularly the novel *Die Ausgewanderten* (The Emigrants, 1992) by W.G. Sebald, illustrates a break with her concept of silence. She argues that Sebald’s text is ‘steeped in images of the Holocaust and a language of mourning and melancholy’ and that *Die Ausgewanderten* is one of the rare texts in which the ‘victims speak’.⁶ Schlant’s theoretical concept of ‘silence’ received some criticism, amongst others from Stuart Taberner, who rightly argues in his review of *The Language of Silence* (1999) that Schlant fails to consider that the earlier texts analysed in her work use ‘silence’ as an intentional critique of social repression of memories.⁷ Thus the early approach to the topic of the Holocaust in West German literature deliberately highlights the social failure to confront the subject by using ‘silence’ as a narrative technique. Furthermore, Taberner demonstrates that Schlant does not take into account that the texts are written by members of the perpetrator nation ‘for German audiences and German problems (with the Holocaust) and not as an apology to victims or their descendants’.⁸ The second argument is of particular importance, as it demonstrates that the German confrontation with the Holocaust is not solely centred around the many victims of the horrific event, but concerned rather with the specifically German realities of guilt and perpetration. While Sebald’s works such as *Austerlitz* and *Die Ausgewanderten* stand out for giving a voice to the victims of the Holocaust, one would have to argue that the primary concern for German authors, rightly or wrongly, is to confront issues of perpetration and, as one can see in the previous

⁴ Here she deliberately focuses on West-German literature claiming that the literature of the GDR, with only a few exceptions, did not engage in efforts to confront the Nazi past.

⁵ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 13.

⁶ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 234.

⁷ Stuart Taberner, ‘Review: untitled’, *The Modern Language Review*, 97. 3 (2002), 764-765 (p. 765).

⁸ Stuart Taberner, ‘Review: untitled’, p. 765.

chapters, their own ideas of victimhood. Thus, we should not be looking for a 'silence' with regards to the victims of the Holocaust in German prose fiction, but asking rather whether the authors remained silent on aspects of German perpetration.

Indeed, as Erin McGlothlin has shown with regards to the experience of violence during the Holocaust, perpetration and victimisation, while at opposite ends of the spectrum, are closely connected.⁹ The victims of the Holocaust are a direct result of Nazi perpetration during the Second World War, and today we are subsequently dealing with legacies of survival and perpetration. In McGlothlin's understanding, the descendants of victims and perpetrators alike, 'in very different ways and from entirely different perspectives, share a common problem: both feel marked by the continued presence of the Holocaust past'.¹⁰ Hence, the experience of violence and the pain caused by this violence in the aftermath of the war affected the descendants of both perpetrators and the victims, albeit in radically different ways. A further common factor that links the different experiences of perpetration and victimisation is that they cannot 'be adequately transmitted by linguistic and narrative conventions'.¹¹ Dan Bar-On distinguishes between the indescribability of the traumatic experiences of the victims and the 'undiscussability' of the brutality of perpetration.¹² This is indeed a useful differentiation as it emphasises, on the one hand, the interrelated problems of transmitting memories of perpetration and victimisation, while on the other distinguishing between the radically polarised experiences. The indescribability of victimhood relates to memories that are often too painful to revive, while the undiscussability of perpetration is related to memories of inflicting violence that cannot be formulated in normalised discourse. McGlothlin and Bar-On make clear that descendants of Holocaust survivors and those of perpetrators are faced with similar problems when confronting the past, despite being situated on opposite sides of the horrific events. Indeed, with reference to the problems of representing either victimhood or perpetration, one could argue that Ernestine Schlant's concept of the language of silence is not solely a German problem. Debates over the ethics of literary representations of the Holocaust have,

⁹ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration*, p. 5.

¹⁰ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration*, p. 5.

¹¹ Erin McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration*, p. 6.

¹² Dan Bar-On, *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable: Reconstructing Human Discourse after Trauma* (Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999).

after all, been raging ever since Theodor Adorno's famous dictum on the barbarity of writing poetry after Auschwitz. Here, Adorno was specifically referring to the ethical problems that come with the depiction of the suffering of the victims and the survivors.¹³ The discussions that followed, including Adorno's later revision of his original claim in his *Negative Dialectics*, is largely centred on the depiction of suffering in art. As Erin McGlothlin has pointed out, there is only little discussion about 'an equally difficult aesthetic and ethical problem', namely the depiction of the agent of the atrocity.¹⁴ According to McGlothlin there is a multitude of representations of perpetration in texts about the Nazi atrocities, but only very little critical engagement with the whole question of the portrayal of perpetrators in literature.¹⁵ She argues that 'little extensive analysis has been written addressing the questions of the advisability and possibility of depicting the Holocaust perpetrator'.¹⁶ It seems quite understandable that Holocaust literature should focus on the perspective of the victims rather than that of the perpetrators; after all, it is the absence, suffering, and the memory of the victims that have shattered all the previous assumptions about the nature of humankind. Nevertheless, looking at relatively recent examples of German and, more surprisingly, British prose fiction, we can see that the subject of perpetration is a major theme. Some critics even see an increase in the representation of perpetrators. According to Helmut Schmitz, for example, 'we approach the third post-war generation for which National Socialism and the Holocaust are no longer authentic experiences but secondary and mediated. Simultaneously, perpetrator figures move closer into focus'.¹⁷ According to Bill Niven,

¹³ Theodor Adorno, 'After Auschwitz', in *Negative Dialectics*, trans. by E.B. Ashton (New York: Continuum, [1949] 1973), p. 362.

¹⁴ Erin McGlothlin, 'Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*', in *After Representation? The Holocaust, Literature, and Culture*, ed. by R. Clifton Spargo and Robert Ehrenreich (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers UP, 2009), p. 2.

¹⁵ Erin McGlothlin, 'Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*', p. 6.

¹⁶ Erin McGlothlin, 'Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*', p. 5.

¹⁷ Helmut Schmitz, 'Introduction', in: *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past. Representations of National Socialism*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 1-10 (p. 7).

while pre-unification literature by and large emphasizes the victim, outsider, onlooker, post-unification literature tends to prefer the perspective of the participant, colluder, perpetrator.¹⁸

However, elsewhere Niven argues that, despite having found a large number of post-unification German prose texts that deal with the issue and the perspective of perpetration, there are hardly any texts that can be classified 'primarily, as novels about Nazi perpetration'.¹⁹ One can certainly follow Niven's argument by taking a closer look at some of the German prose texts published after the fall of the Berlin Wall.

In both of Bernhard Schlink's novels, *Der Vorleser* (The Reader, 1997) and *Die Heimkehr* (The Homecoming, 2008), the theme of perpetration plays a significant role. Hanna Schmitz in *Der Vorleser* is a former concentration camp guard who admits to having willingly participated in mass murder by selecting women for the gas chambers. In *Die Heimkehr*, Schlink takes up the theme of the German soldier returning from the Eastern Front, which was particularly popular in the 1950s. Here, the narrator Peter Debauer embarks on a quest in order to find out the true identity of a returning soldier who has written an incomplete piece of pulp fiction about the journey back home from the Eastern Front. During his investigation into the past, the fatherless Peter finds out that the novel, based on Homer's *The Odyssey*, is not the only text written by the unknown author. He finds other examples of writing that support the Nazi ideology and which place the authorial voice firmly within the ranks of perpetrators. The unknown authorial voice turns out to belong to Peter's father, who has assumed a new identity, calling himself de Baur, and now lives in the United States with a new family and a flourishing academic career. Peter's father developed a deconstructionist legal theory that is reminiscent of his earlier ideological writings in support of fascism. In this novel, Schlink introduces a perpetrator figure who is as vague as Hanna in *Der Vorleser*. We only get a glimpse of him through the eyes of the narrator, who attempts to find out more about his father through his old texts and by enlisting incognito in a university course held by his father. There are clear references to the Holocaust, particularly during the January

¹⁸ Bill Niven, 'Literary Portrayals of National Socialism in Post-Unification German Literature', in *German Culture and the Uncomfortable Past. Representations of National Socialism*, ed. by Helmut Schmitz (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001), pp. 11-28 (p. 18).

¹⁹ Bill Niven, 'Representations of the Nazi Past I: Perpetrators', in: *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 125-141 (p. 126).

seminar which de Baur organises for his students, as well as in the texts he wrote during the war. The January seminar is an experiment in which de Baur humiliates, imprisons and scares his students in order to find out if their beliefs in democracy and law waver. He employs ex-Marines to scare and intimidate the group of liberal students, while he watches the experiment through a CCTV system. De Baur's experiment is a poignant reminder of the horrors endured during the Second World War and the Holocaust, and de Baur, who controls and conceived the experiment, is again fulfilling the role of the perpetrator. He is, however, a very different type of perpetrator from Hanna Schmitz. While Hanna is obeying orders without questioning them as a part of the Nazi killing machine, de Baur has to be seen as one of the intellectuals whose arrogant and extreme beliefs were responsible for conceiving the Holocaust in the first place. Under a pseudonym, he writes the following in an article for Goebbels' newspaper *Das Reich*:

Wir waren ein krankes Volk – die Kultur entartet, die Gesellschaft verjudet, das Erbgut verseucht. In den letzten zwölf Jahren haben wir, was unserem Geist und unserem Körper geschadet hat, abgestoßen und ausgemerzt.

We were an unhealthy people – culture was degenerate, society Jewish, our genes contaminated. During the last twelve years we have rejected and annihilated that which damaged our spirit and body.²⁰

Here he clearly demonstrates his anti-Semitic ideology, and he uses the language of the perpetrators (such as 'abgestoßen' ['rejected'] and 'ausgemerzt' ['annihilated']) with regards to the fate of the European Jews. Despite this clear focus on perpetration, however, the novel, told from the present-day perspective of Peter Debauer, does not concentrate solely on this subject. Other themes are legal theory and philosophy, the subject of coming home as well as the concept of home, the odyssey, and love.

A further text that certainly falls into the category of memory novel depicting the theme of perpetration is Klaus Modick's *Der kretische Gast* (The Cretan Guest, 2005). Modick's novel is conventional in its use of a typically diachronic narrative technique. The plot is set in Crete and jumps between the years of German occupation and 1975. It combines various strands of storytelling which can be

²⁰ Bernhard Schlink, *Die Heimkehr* (München: Diogenes, 2008) p. 177. (original emphasis)

typically found in memory fiction, such as the investigation of the past from a different temporal perspective, the use of photographs as memory traces triggering such an investigation, and the portrayal of perpetration and trauma. On one level, the novel tells the story of Lukas Hollbach's investigation into his father's past as a *Wehrmacht* officer on the occupied island of Crete and, on another level, it recounts the fate of the German archaeologist Johann Martens during the time of the occupation. Martens arrives in Crete, after having reluctantly agreed to join the Nazi party, in order to catalogue archaeological artefacts for conservation in the German Reich. The fate of the archaeologist and the investigation of Lukas are connected by the German officer Friedrich Hollbach, Lukas's father. After witnessing the brutality of the German occupiers against the civilian population, Martens decides to switch sides and join the Cretan partisan movement. Both narrative strands are used to portray the various crimes committed by the Germans on the island as well as Hollbach's involvement in them. However, while the investigative narrative strand focuses solely on uncovering the guilt of Hollbach and his involvement in atrocities against innocent civilians, the historical strand focuses not just on German atrocities but also on the British involvement with the partisan movement. Here, the British are portrayed less as liberators than as a colonial power using the Cretan partisans for their own purposes. For example, the novel demonstrates the successful kidnapping of a German general from the island by a British SOE commando with the help of the partisans (an episode based on a real event). However, during the course of the mission Martens informs the British about plans to deport the Jewish inhabitants from Crete and he encounters several excuses from the British agents. Thus, despite knowing about the fate of the Jewish population, the British show little interest in doing anything about it.

‘Deportieren ist ein zu freundliches Wort, Mr Martens. Es geht um Völkermord.’

[...]

‘Und was die kretischen Juden angeht ...’

‘Sin des nur wenig’, unterbrach ihn plötzlich Bloomfield, der am Fenster stand.

‘Ganz recht’, sagte Stiles. ‘Keine tausend. Vielleicht keine fünfhundert.’

‘Für die sich keine Invasion lohnt, sagte Bloomfield, und seine Stimme klang, als käme sie aus dem Grab.

‘Deportation is too friendly a word, Mr Martens. This is genocide.’

‘And as far as the Cretan Jews are concerned...’

‘There are only a few’, Bloomfield, who was standing by the window, suddenly interrupted him.

‘Quite right’ said Stiles ‘not even a thousand. Maybe not even five hundred’

‘For whom an invasion is not justified’ said Bloomfield, and his voice sounded as if it came from a grave.²¹

Consequently, the novel portrays the British involvement on Crete ambiguously. On the one hand, it depicts the daring missions against the Germans while, on the other, it becomes clear that Britain is not willing to lend any support to missions that are not in its national interest. This is particularly highlighted by the way the British make use of Hollbach’s expertise after the German surrender in order to round up communist partisans, resulting in a disturbing reversal of historical roles. The British do not hesitate to use *Wehrmacht* soldiers to prevent a communist uprising in post-war Greece and to keep the country in their sphere of influence. The former enemies now share a common cause in fighting communism, which causes the liberators to side with former perpetrators. Some critics, such as Bill Niven, understand this as an ‘example of relativisation’, albeit to a lesser degree than in the case of some other German authors.²² According to Niven, Modick’s novel could be read as an attempt to relativise German guilt by deconstructing the view of the Allies as righteous liberators of Crete. It is certainly true that some German authors are guilty of historical revisionism. Niven particularly highlights Thor Kunkel’s *Endstufe* (Final Step, 2004). In Modick’s case, however, such a charge is unjustified. It is a widely known historical fact that the British post-war involvement in Greece was messy, and that the rivalry between the Marxist and non-Marxist partisans resulted in a civil war. At no point in the novel does Modick try to hide the atrocities perpetrated by Germans, and the strand of the narrative dealing with Hollbach’s son focuses almost

²¹ Klaus Modick, *Der kretische Gast* (München: Piper Verlag, 2005), p. 270.

²² Bill Niven, ‘Representations of the Nazi past I: perpetrators’, p. 129.

exclusively on German atrocities. Although the British do not provide much support when it comes to saving the Cretan Jews from their fate, the agency for their deportation is clearly German. Moreover, the only perpetrator figures appearing within the text are German, particularly Lieutenant Hollbach, who murders Martens after the German occupation has ended in order to hide his participation in the killing of civilians. The relationship between the perpetrator figure Hollbach and the German archaeologist-cum-resistance fighter Martens does, however, suggest a dichotomy between perpetrator- and victim-centred debates of memory. Modick successfully introduces the perpetrator subject into his novel, illustrating German atrocities on the island of Crete and, through the investigation of Lukas Hollbach, deconstructs the myth of the honourable *Wehrmacht*. At several points in the novel, Hollbach's excuse of being a normal soldier who simply follows orders is challenged by Martens, who witnessed him ordering violent acts of retribution. Martens thus takes up the position of the 'good' German siding with the resistance, who finally becomes a victim of Nazi perpetration himself, as well as being betrayed by the British. By counter-balancing the perpetrator figure of Hollbach with the tragic hero of Martens who dies for an honourable cause, the novel drifts into the field of popular rather than memory fiction, and it is this artificial German-as-victim discourse that supports Niven's criticism of relativisation.

Another recent German memory novel including the subject of perpetration in its narrative is Tanja Dücker's *Himmelskörper* (Heavenly Bodies, 2005). However, as in so many recent German memory novels, the subject of perpetration is only one of many other themes. In Dücker's novel, for example, the narrator Freia investigates her family's escape from the East and their connection to the sinking of the ill-fated KdF (*Kraft Durch Freude*, Strength through Joy) cruise ship *Wilhelm Gustloff* in 1945, a subject that is closely linked with the wider theme of German victimhood and expulsion from the East. At the heart of the novel, therefore, lies the relationship between the two major strands in the German memory debate, namely the idea of Germans as victims and the more widely held view of Germans as perpetrators. Step by step, Freia investigates her family's past and finds out that her grandparents' dramatic memories of escape and suffering are only partly true, omitting some of the more uncomfortable private memories. During her investigation Freia, bit by bit, discovers that her family was saved because of the preferential treatment of members of the NS party and the continued belief of her grandparents in

Nazi ideology. *Himmelskörper* does not present the reader with the portrayal of a perpetrator figure, such as Schlink's novels for example, but rather it deals with family members who openly supported the regime and its ideology. Freia's family's discourse of victimisation is therefore overshadowed by their involvement with the NS regime which is uncovered by her postmemorial engagement with the past.

Finally, Marcel Beyer's novels *Flughunde* (The Karnau Tapes 1996), *Spione* (Spies, 2000), and *Kaltenburg* (2008) all deal to some degree with the theme of perpetration and depict characters which fall into the perpetrator category. In *Flughunde*, a novel that will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter, the protagonist Karnau is a scientist whose research into the human voice, sound, and physiology slowly leads him to support the ideological basis of Nazism by researching the Germanisation of speech acts. *Flughunde* is a novel that deals foremost with issues of perpetration, and it is worth stressing that it is one of the only examples of German memory fiction that provides a chilling and detailed portrayal of a Nazi perpetrator.

Beyer's other novel, *Spione*, as we have seen, describes a postmemorial investigation into family memory that tries to uncover the absent memories of the family's grandparents. During the course of the investigation it is revealed that the absent grandfather took part in the atrocities committed by the *Legion Condor* during the Spanish Civil War. The novel employs the notion of a dark family secret that lies hidden in the past and needs to be uncovered. Beyer's most recent novel, *Kaltenburg*, provides a perspective on Germany's more recent past, beginning with the destruction of Dresden and the history of the GDR. The narrative voice is that of the young ornithologist Hermann Funk, who describes his relationship to the famous scientist Kaltenburg, loosely modelled on the famous Austrian zoologist Konrad Lorenz. This is indicated by the character's name, which is a combination of Altenburg, a town in Austria where Lorenz spent the last years of his life, and the first initial of the Christian name Konrad. Hermann has survived the aerial destruction of Dresden, where his parents perished, and the novel deals with his personal memories beginning shortly before this incident. Here, he describes his first meeting with the famous zoologist Kaltenburg, who had come to visit his father near Posen. He describes Kaltenburg as a 'Zoologe, der in einer Nervenklinik tätig ist' ['a

zoologist who works in a psychiatric clinic’].²³ Kaltenburg’s profession appears inconsistent with this position, leading to the implied accusation that the hospital is run by the SS, and that Kaltenburg’s research is in aid of the Nazis’ racial hygiene institutions. This is further hinted at when Hermann remembers a vision he had of Kaltenburg:

Professor Kaltenburg in der Haltung eines Falkners, der Blick nach oben und sein ausgestreckter Arm: Ich sehe ihn – sehe ihn damals schon? woher nimmt ein Kind solche Phantasien? – mit festen Lederhandschuhen an einer medizinischen Apparatur hantieren, deren dicke Kabel zur Patientenliege führen.

Professor Kaltenberg in the pose of a falconer, looking up with his outstretched arm: I see him – see him at that time? Where does a child get such imagination? – working away at a medical apparatus with sturdy leather gloves, its thick cable leading to a patient’s bed.²⁴

Here the narrator conjures up a postmemory that evokes Kaltenburg’s involvement in some kind of medical experiment during his work for the racial hygiene institute. The accusation remains indirect, and the character of Kaltenburg ambiguous. It is by no means as clear a portrayal of a perpetrator as provided in *Flughunde*, and the novel is layered with many other aspects of German history. However, all three novels illustrate, the subject of perpetration and the Nazi past are prevalent in Beyer’s work. Moreover, it is curious that both characters, Karnau and Kaltenburg, have a scientific background. As we shall see in the closer analysis of Amis’ *Times Arrow* (1991) the portrayal of the perpetrator as scientist or doctor is not unique to Beyer’s work. It is an interesting aesthetic ploy that uses the paradox of employing a figure that stands for health and progress as mass murderer.

The numerous examples above illustrate that German post-unification memory novels are certainly not silent about issues of perpetration. However, Bill Niven’s view that there are no German novels which focus exclusively on the subject of perpetration is justified.²⁵ All the above novels introduce other themes of German memory into their narratives, most frequently debates around German victimhood and discrepancies between private and public discourses of collective memory.

²³ Marcel Beyer, *Kaltenburg* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 2008) p. 72.

²⁴ Marcel Beyer, *Kaltenburg*, p. 72.

²⁵ Bill Niven, ‘Representations of the Nazi Past I: Perpetrators’, in: *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 125-141 (p. 126).

Considering the prominence of debates on German guilt and perpetration in post-unification German memory culture, their absence from literary representations of memory would indeed be surprising. There are several points, however, which are in need of closer examination. Although there is certainly no ‘silence’ with regards to memories of guilt and perpetration, Ernestine Schlant is right to argue that we rarely find a representation that includes both victim and perpetrator.²⁶ The term ‘victim’ needs to be more closely examined in this context. There are several texts which refer to German perpetrators and German victims, but not that many giving a voice to victims of the Holocaust and German atrocities in general. Furthermore, one could argue that despite several portrayals of perpetrator figures, the characterisation of these figures remains vague and ambiguous, leading critics to refer to the ‘undiscussability’ of Holocaust perpetration. McGlothlin argues that

in contrast to the literary treatment and critical analysis of the voice of the victims, which abounds in both autobiographical survival accounts and fictional literature, the perspective of the perpetrators – in particular, the *narrative* perspective of perpetrators, meaning their subjectivity, motivations, thoughts and desires – has been all but ignored.²⁷

She goes on to claim that there is a strong taboo prohibiting the literary portrayal of perpetrator subjectivity. There are certainly several moral and ethical considerations to be taken into account when considering the literary subjectivity of the perpetrator, and the question whether such a portrayal is at all desirable. Furthermore, there is the question whether incomprehensible acts of violence such as occurred during the Holocaust can be depicted at all through perpetrator subjectivity; even if it is possible, there may be the danger that the reader or the author will ‘empathise’ with the perpetrator perspective in some way. This is what James Young means when he argues that the taboo on portraying perpetrators in any way other than one-dimensionally serves the function of avoiding association with the crimes, thereby ‘reperpetrating’ them.²⁸ This taboo would explain the lack of memory novels which

²⁶ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 13.

²⁷ Erin McGlothlin, ‘Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink’s *The Reader* and Martin Amis’s *Time’s Arrow*’, p. 5.

²⁸ James E. Young, ‘Holocaust Documentary Fiction: The Novelist as Eyewitness’, in *Writing and the Holocaust*, ed. by Berel Lang (New York: Holmes and Meier, 1988), pp. 200 – 215 (p. 209).

concentrate solely on the portrayal of the perpetrator identified by Bill Niven.²⁹ However, there are various aspects that need to be taken into consideration with regards to the notion of a taboo or silence in German perpetrator representations.

Firstly, there clearly is a political dimension with regards to German memory culture and the representation of perpetrators. While the acknowledgement of perpetration and guilt is now a central part of German memory culture, there is the perception that a full depiction of the perpetrator perspective might encourage empathy and thus could damage the international perception of the Berlin Republic. Bernd Eichinger's and Oliver Hirschbiegel's film *Der Untergang* (The Downfall, 2004), for example, caused significant discussion in and outside Germany because of its attempt to portray Hitler during the final days of the Nazi regime in a more human manner. Secondly, we have to consider the ethical question whether it is desirable to portray the perspective of Nazi perpetrators at all. Some critics argue that perpetrators have forfeited any right to a closer representation through their inhuman and cruel actions. Hence, the focus of Holocaust fiction has ever since been on the legacy of the victims and survivors and not on the perpetrators. Within German memory culture, however, the focus of the members of the post-war generations is on their parents or grandparents, which means to a large degree on the perpetrators, collaborators, and supporters of the NS regime. Thus, a closer examination of German perpetration and culpability in literary texts is unavoidable and an important aspect of German memory fiction.

²⁹ Bill Niven, 'Representations of the Nazi Past I: Perpetrators', in: *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 125-141 (p. 126).

4.1.1 Sounds of Perpetration in Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde* (1996)

Marcel Beyer's oeuvre is concerned with responses to memories of German perpetration as well as suffering. In the case of *Flughunde* (The Karnau Tapes, 1996) Beyer's focus is on issues of German perpetration in particular. The novel constitutes a highly unusual example of 'memory fiction' as it does not make use of visual or textual memory aids in order to conjure up the past, but instead focuses on the 'acoustic-auditive landscape of German fascism'.³⁰ Explorations of memory within the realm of the visual and the textual have been conducted by authors and critics ever since Marianne Hirsch's work on postmemory and on photography. Indeed, many authors, of whom W.G. Sebald is certainly the most accomplished, use photographic images as part of their narratives when exploring the depths of memory and the notion of absence. In Beyer's *Flughunde*, the images of the Nazi legacy are replaced by what Leslie Morris refers to as the 'sounds of memory', or, to be more precise, the sounds of perpetration.³¹ Morris shifts the focus of his examination away 'from the visual to the aural', exploring the ability of sound to generate collective memories.³² He further argues that the Second World War was the first conflict that resulted not only in an abundance of film material, but also of sounds. The radio was instrumental in the Nazis' rise to power, the means of distributing propaganda were perfected by elaborate sound systems amplifying the voices of the Nazi leaders, the wailing sounds of the Stuka dive bombers instilled fear across Europe, and the aftermath of the Holocaust is characterised by silence. The infamous recorded voices of Hitler or Goebbels, even today, conjure up powerful memories of the horrific fate millions had to suffer during the war. In today's global society, numbed by daily images of violence, the sound of the perpetrators and the sounds of perpetration still act as powerful reminders of the Nazi past. Beyer examines this powerful notion of the memories of sound in his novel *Flughunde*, relating the innovation in sound technology to the Nazis' rise to power. The voices and the propaganda of the Nazi leaders, amplified through advanced technology, act like the sirens calling the German nation towards violent anti-Semitism, the 'total war', and ultimately its own destruction. Ulrich Schönherr emphasises this point when he writes:

³⁰ Ulrich Schönherr, 'Topophony of Fascism: On Marcel Beyer's *The Karnau Tapes*', *The Germanic Review*, 73 (September 1998), 328 – 348 (p. 328).

³¹ Leslie Morris, 'The Sound of Memory', *The German Quarterly*, 74. 4 (Autumn, 2001), 368 – 378.

³² Leslie Morris, 'The Sound of Memory', p. 368.

Beyer's novel also refers, on a metanarrative level, to the void of an acoustic memory within our visually dominated culture in which the archives of writing have moved to the periphery. [...] Beyer's novel also represents the attempt to recover through writing what no historiography of the Holocaust has ever recorded: the forgotten history of the voices of both perpetrator and victim.³³

Thus, the novel presents a rather unique attempt to capture the memories of the war using recorded sounds and voices as memory aids, conjuring up the narrator's memories of his involvement in Nazi perpetration.

Following the trend of the other memory novels analysed in this thesis, the novel's time construction is largely diachronic. It describes events that have taken place between the years 1940 and 1945, before switching to the year 1992 shortly after Germany's reunification. This places the memories represented within the plot firmly into the sphere of post-unification memory debates. Considering that the early discussions of the Nazi legacy in the newly reunified Berlin Republic focused on issues of German perpetration and the Holocaust, it comes as no surprise that this is also the focus of *Flughunde*. By choosing the year 1992 as the vantage point from which the author is remembering the Nazi past, the narrative is highlighting that, despite the reunification of Germany, the issues surrounding the Nazi legacy are by no means resolved. Some commentators at the time were hoping that German reunification would mean the end of the fierce debates about Germany's Nazi past. They hoped that, following the end of the political divide between two states, the newly formed Republic could concentrate on the future rather than dwell on the past. However, the many debates about this past after 1990 illustrate that this hope was misplaced.

The novel describes the events of 1940 to 1945 from the perspective of two very different narrative perspectives. The main one is that of the sound engineer Karnau, who is obsessed with the scientific rendering of the human voice as well as with sound and acoustics. The second is the voice of Goebbels' youngest daughter Helga, describing the demise of the third Reich from the vantage point of an innocent child. Neither Goebbels nor Hitler is named, but it is obvious to whom Karnau is referring. It is his work as a sound engineer and his research theories about the Germanisation of human voices that first bring him to the attention of the propaganda minister:

³³ Ulrich Schönherr, 'Topophony of Fascism: On Marcel Beyer's *The Karnau Tapes*', p. 329.

Es war jene gigantische Beschallungsanlage und deren überwältigende Wirkung, die den Vater auf mich aufmerksam werden ließ.

It was the gigantic ultrasound system and its overwhelming effect that caused the father to notice me.³⁴

At first, his involvement with the Nazi regime is a purely professional one; he organises an elaborate sound system that makes the voices of the Nazi leadership heard even to everyone. From this point onward, Karnau describes his relationship to the Goebbels family, to which he gradually becomes closer, to the point where he acts as a carer and, at times, as ‘paternal stand-in for Goebbels within his family’.³⁵ The novel further describes Karnau’s gradual development from someone with a scientific fascination with the sound of the human voice to a Nazi perpetrator. This development is underlined by the increasingly close relationship to the Goebbels family up to their collective suicide during the final days in the *Führerbunker*. He becomes complicit in this final act of perpetration when he records the murder of the Goebbels children, including Helga. It is this recording that is rediscovered in his sound archive in 1992, in a secret cellar at the ‘Museum of Hygiene’ in Dresden, leading him to remember the events of the past. The murder of the Goebbels children and the suicide of their parents is a well-documented fact which provides the memories represented in the novel with additional authenticity.

While Karnau’s memories are undoubtedly those of a perpetrator, the perspective of Helga introduces the viewpoint of an innocent child born into the Nazi leadership and eventually falling victim to her parents’ fanaticism. Despite being the daughter of a high-ranking Nazi, Helga has to be seen as an innocent victim, introducing the victim-centred discourse into a narrative that primarily focuses on Karnau’s complicity with the Nazi regime. However, it is interesting that it is the voice of a German child that represents the memories of the victims of fascism in the novel. The other victims, such as the inmates of the concentration camps who are tortured in the name of obscure and racially motivated scientific obsession, remain anonymous and, more crucially, voiceless. One could criticise Beyer for interweaving a discourse of German suffering into the otherwise perpetrator-centred discourse. However, such a criticism would be unfair, because Helga’s perspective

³⁴ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 46.

³⁵ Leslie Morris, p. 375.

fulfils another important function, irrespective of her victim status. She provides an innocent and childlike view of the perpetrator figures that is untainted by Nazi ideology. One could, of course, argue that there were many thousands of children who survived the Holocaust and could have provided this childlike perspective. To a degree such criticism is justified, the victims of the Holocaust remain voiceless. Yet there is a point which exonerates Beyer's choice of victim. Helga has unprecedented access to the upper echelons of the Nazi party through her father and can thereby provide a perspective that a child in a camp could not. This perspective turns her into a rather more reliable witness than adults who have witnessed similar events. It is particularly highlighted when she describes her father's infamous speech calling for 'total war' at the *Sportpalast*, delivered to a carefully selected audience in Berlin in February 1943:

Jetzt aber fangen die Augen an zu glühen, Papa konzentriert sich, er will die ganze Euphorie der letzten Tage bündeln. Die Menschen spüren das, es wird ganz still. Papa beginnt zu reden. [...] Vielleicht hören sogar die Toten ihn, die letzten Stalingradkämpfer, die schon vor Wochen ihren Schlußbericht gefunkt haben. [...] Die Zuhörer hängen an seinen Lippen, Papa sagt: Kindisch, diese Erklärung ist kindisch. Wenn Papa kindisch sagt, sagt er das nie mit einem Lächeln, für uns ein Zeichen, mit ihm nicht zu scherzen. [...] Papa schreit jetzt richtig, um sich gegen den Krach durchzusetzen. [...] Papa meint: Das Totalste ist gerade total genug.

Now his eyes start to blaze, Papa concentrates, he wants to bundle the entire euphoria of the last few days. The people feel this, it becomes very quiet. Papa starts to talk [...] Perhaps even the dead are listening to him, the last Stalingrad fighters, who transmitted their final report weeks ago. [...] The audience hangs on his every word. Papa says: Childish, this statement is childish. When Papa says childish, he says it with a smile, for us a sign that he is not to be trifled with. [...] Papa is now really shouting to overcome the noise [...] Papa shouts: Totality is just total enough.³⁶

This part of the novel emphasises Helga's function as a 'critical diarist' untainted by Nazi propaganda and innocent of any involvement with the regime.³⁷ She describes her father as any other child would describe her father, providing the novel with a unique perspective on one of the most fanatical figures in the Nazi hierarchy. Beyer's novel fictionalises the perspective of a real-life historical figure, Goebbels's favourite

³⁶ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp Verlag, 1996) pp. 157-158.

³⁷ Ulrich Schönherr, 'Topophony of Fascism: On Marcel Beyer's *The Karnau Tapes*', p. 332.

daughter Helga, and cleverly intertwines this perspective with the vantage point of the fictional acoustician Karnau. The fictional character of Herr Karnau is a reference to one of Hitler's bodyguards, Hermann Karnau, who was present in the *Führerbunker* during the last days of Hitler's rule and at the time of the murder of the Goebbels children. Beyer uses 'history's dark areas' as a departure point for his fictionalisation of Karnau's memories.³⁸ These dark areas of the lives of Helga Goebbels and Hermann Karnau which remain outside the historical record are filled by the novel's fictional narrative and remembered by the fictionalised character of Karnau. The fictional Karnau has little in common with the historical person other than his name and his association with the Nazi leaders.

The connection between Karnau's development as a Nazi perpetrator and the Goebbels family is poignantly highlighted in Chapter 5 of the novel: while Helga witnesses her father's speech at the *Sportpalast*, Karnau describes the brutal torture of a 'Versuchsperson' ['experimental subject'] in the name of a perverse idea of science.³⁹ Thus, at the moment when Helga describes her father's fanatic speech about 'total war', Karnau becomes a part of this 'total war', moving from collaboration to active perpetration during scientific experimentation at a concentration camp on behalf of the SS. Karnau's development from opportunistic collaborator towards Nazi perpetrator is linked with the escalation of the conflict and his relationship to the Goebbels family.

The main narrative perspective represents the memories of Karnau, who recollects the events between 1940 and 1945 when his 'Schallarchiv' ['sound archive'] is discovered in secret cellars of the German Museum for Hygiene in 1992.⁴⁰ Karnau, who until this discovery has assumed the role of a caretaker, presents himself as 'recht gesprächig' and 'verfügt auch über ein Fachwissen' ['quite talkative' and 'possessing specialist knowledge'] which makes him immediately suspect to the commission of scientists investigating their find.⁴¹ They further find disturbing recording rooms resembling operating theatres, with traces of blood, which were in use until very recently. This indicates that Karnau has continued his research even after the end of the war, although this cannot be confirmed because he disappears in order to evade further examination. His recollection of the past takes on

³⁸ Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London and New York: Methuen, 1987), p. 90.

³⁹ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 159.

⁴⁰ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 219.

⁴¹ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 223.

the form of a confession, although he does not provide the reader with an understanding of guilt and shows no empathy for his victims, maybe with the exception of Helga. Schönherr argues that ‘Karnau does not simply embody the “willing executioner” type of fascist annihilation ideology’.⁴² Indeed, he is more complex than that, considering his, at times, critical description of the Third Reich as well as his close paternal relationship with the Goebbels children. At points he even criticises the ‘Herrenstimme’ [‘authoritative voice’] representing the fascist totalitarian regime.⁴³ Karnau represents a rather more opportunistic perpetrator figure, slowly developing from his initial collaboration with the regime towards a perpetrator. He does not subscribe to the Nazi ideology but rather uses the opportunities given to him by the totalitarian regime in order to follow his obsessive research into the human voice. The Nazi ideology, its brutal exercise of the Final Solution, provides Karnau with the possibility to conduct inhuman research that would not be possible within a democracy. In this respect, as some might argue, Beyer’s novel does not depict a typical Nazi perpetrator whose actions are driven by the racist ideology of the Nazi state and the undying belief in German superiority. While this is certainly true, it is also documented, among others by Goldhagen, that the opportunistic perpetrator was not uncommon during the Third Reich. Consequently, the novel describes, according to Bill Niven, the context and the ‘conditions under which individuals exposed to Nazism became criminals’.⁴⁴ Niven further describes Karnau as a character who ‘slips’ into supporting the Nazi regime and more as a tool of the Nazi organisation.⁴⁵ Karnau certainly ‘slips’ into supporting the Nazi regime but he uses the possibilities offered to him by the fascist superstructure as much as his research is used by the SS. His role in the Nazi persecution is the more shocking and immoral as he makes use of opportunities given to him without regard for the consequences and the suffering his actions cause.

At the beginning of the novel, his recollections take him back to the preparation of a Nazi rally where, as an expert acoustician and sound engineer, it is his role to amplify the voices of the Nazi leaders and bring their voices to the masses.

⁴² Ulrich Schönherr, ‘Topophony of Fascism: On Marcel Beyer’s *The Karnau Tapes*’, p. 330.

⁴³ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 11.

⁴⁴ Bill Niven, ‘Representations of the Nazi Past I: Perpetrators’, in: *Contemporary German Fiction: Writing of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) pp. 125-141 (p. 128).

⁴⁵ Bill Niven, ‘Representations of the Nazi Past I: Perpetrators’, pp. 125 - 126.

During the preparation for the event he observes the reaction of the German people to the voices of fascism:

Wie der Scharführer seine Burschen trietzt. Wie können diese Kinder noch vor Tagesanbruch solch ein schrilles Organ über sich ergehen lassen, ohne auch nur einmal zu mucksen? Ergeben sie sich da hinein, ertragen sie zähneknirschend die Erniedrigungen, diese halbstarke Herrenstimme, weil sie ihnen das Gefühl gibt, an einer Bewegung teilzuhaben, aus der sie selber als Herren erwachsen werden?

How the group leader torments his boys. How can these children put up with such a shrill voice before daylight, without even complaining at all? Once in there, they bear the humiliation gnashing their teeth, this bullying authoritative voice, because it gives them the feeling of belonging to a movement from which they will also emerge as masters.⁴⁶

Karnau observes the machinations of the fascist regime from the outside, describing cynically the ugly voices of the totalitarian regime, expecting the total obedience of the people. His role is simply that of a professional who collaborates with the Nazi movement rather than a member of the movement. However, Karnau is already guilty as a 'technician of power', underlining the close connection between media technology and the proliferation of Nazi propaganda.⁴⁷ The newly developed sound technology, recordings and radio transmissions were important tools used by the Nazis to communicate with the German people. It is no coincidence that his field of research brings Karnau to the attention of Goebbels, who, as Propaganda Minister, knew of the importance of the media.

Karnau continues to describe the meticulous preparation of the massive propaganda event while at the same time explaining his role as an outsider to the movement. The reader is, again, reminded that Karnau is not a typical perpetrator figure and not a Nazi supporter from day one. On the contrary, according to his observations, he does not fit the image of the ideal German as propagated by the Nazis. He refers to himself as 'feige' ['cowardly'] and 'der Feindberührung nicht gewachsen' ['not up to facing the enemy'].⁴⁸ He criticises the tone employed by the adrenaline-filled soldiers and argues that this is the reason for his decision to place himself on the periphery:

⁴⁶ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 11.

⁴⁷ Ulrich Schönherr, 'Topophony of Fascism: On Marcel Beyer's *The Karnau Tapes*', p. 330.

⁴⁸ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 28.

Wenn nur der derbe Ton nicht wäre, der offenbar stets dazugehörnde zwielichtige Ton dieser Männerstimmen. Der kann schon dazu führen, daß man sich ausschließt, weil man da einfach nicht zuhören kann.

If only there wasn't this crude tone, this dubious tone of the men's voices which is obviously always a part of all this. This can certainly lead to one excluding oneself, because one just cannot bear to listen.⁴⁹

However, despite these misgivings about the voices of fascism, he finds an entry into the movement through his obsessive research into the mystery of human voices, his ultimate goal being to map the entire spectrum of human sounds. Indeed, he is so fascinated with this field of study that he is willing to take risks and disregard moral implications:

Wer diese Karte aller Stimmfärbungen anlegen will, der darf, wie Gall, sich von den Mitmenschen in seiner Arbeit nicht beirren lassen. [...] Der darf auch davor nicht zurückschrecken, daß manche Klänge keineswegs angenehm sind, weder für das Ohr des Hörers noch für denjenigen, der sie hervorbringt.

If one wants to create these cards of all voice nuances, like Gall, one mustn't be deterred in one's work by fellow people [...] One mustn't stop because some tones are not at all pleasant, neither to the ear of the listener or to the person who utters them.⁵⁰

Here Karnau provides a coldly scientific justification for his actions, arguing that the aim justifies the means; he describes a willingness to inflict pain, if necessary, and to collaborate with the Nazi regime. Subsequently, he gets closer to Goebbels and his family, and his research career improves thanks to the influence of the 'hochgestellten Persönlichkeit' ['high-ranking personality'].⁵¹ With the military expansion of the Third Reich, Karnau receives new opportunities to conduct his research outside Germany. Claiming that his opportunities for mapping voices within Germany are exhausted, he looks to extend his research to the newly occupied areas of the Third Reich. However, further conduct of his research requires greater collaboration with the oppressive policies of the German occupying forces. He moves to the Alsace region of France and acts as an informer for the Gestapo, monitoring the strict rules on the Germanisation of the region forbidding the

⁴⁹ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 28.

⁵⁰ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 29.

⁵¹ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 46.

inhabitants the use of the French language. He accepts that in return for the excellent research conditions in Alsace, his greater involvement is required:

Meine Arbeitsbedingungen hier im Elsaß sind hervorragend. [...] Gewissermaßen als Gegenleistung dafür muß ich unvorstellbare Anblicke über mich ergehen lassen: Verhöre, furchtbar, Prügelstrafe bis auf das Blut.

My working conditions here in Alsace are excellent. [...] To a certain extent, in return for this I have to experience unimaginable sights: interrogations, horrible bloody beatings.⁵²

At this point in his career he is still more of a collaborator than a perpetrator, although his work, the secret recording of innocent civilians, leads to bloody repercussions wreaked by the German authorities. Despite showing some signs of scruples, he coldly accepts the persecution of French speakers as a necessary evil that allows him to work under ideal conditions. The campaign against Russia enables him to pursue his research under even more extreme conditions, making recordings of the last words and painful sounds issued by wounded and dying soldiers. His idea of introducing a battalion of deaf and dumb soldiers who are not susceptible to the horrific noises of constant bombardment has led him and his colleagues to the Eastern Front. This demonstrates that his actual research into the effects of sound can be used militarily, and it is no longer solely his work with sound and bugging technology that is useful for the Nazi regime. This development of the perpetrator figure is again paralleled with the observations of Helga, who describes a car journey her family is making from Wannsee towards Magdeburg. Her description of a spider's web that is attached to her father's new car and the fact that Wannsee is explicitly referred to, can be read as a reference to the Wannsee conference in January 1942 during which the 'Final Solution' was planned and decided upon. At the same time as the Nazi regime is planning the genocide of millions of people, Karnau becomes increasingly involved at the Eastern Front. His idea of a special battalion of deaf soldiers is implemented with great enthusiasm, and he has, in his own description, turned into a 'Stimmstehler' ['voice thief'].⁵³ He steals the last sounds of the dying and leaves them behind voiceless, their voices forever conserved in his recordings and thus in his control. Schönherr writes that 'Karnau's

⁵² Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 84.

⁵³ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 123.

fetishization of the voice is reflected in his collecting passion, which incorporates dispossessed voices in his sound archive like pieces of booty'.⁵⁴ His ultimate transformation from a collaborator to perpetrator soon follows at a conference on the subject of speech hygiene. Here, he presents his research in the context of the Aryanisation of the occupied territories in the East, claiming that the methods of language-cleansing do not go far enough in order to achieve the aims of the Nazi regime:

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 [...] das ist doch alles Firlefanz.

If we have to bring into line the people of the eastern territories, with their immeasurably wide landscapes, which, according to the worthy calculations of the previous speaker, will soon belong to our Reich, then it is not enough to enforce certain speech rules [...] that's just nonsense.⁵⁵

Here he criticises the regime's policy of attempting to homogenise the languages in the occupied territories in the name of Germanisation. With reference to his research in Alsace, he argues that these policies have failed, calling for a far more aggressive and brutal policy. He concludes that the inner nature of the voice needs to be attacked with all possible means, not excluding forced surgery in extreme cases.

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.

To grasp the inner nature by attacking the voice. To shape it and, in extreme cases, not to recoil from medical operations, from modifications of the apparatus of articulation.⁵⁶

Schönherr rightly observes that this is the point in the novel where the previously attempted separation between the policies of the Nazis and Karnau's scientific research collapses.⁵⁷ Any scruples Karnau might have previously had have disappeared, and the language he uses in his paper is that of Nazi perpetration. His

⁵⁴ Ulrich Schönherr, 'Topophony of Fascism: On Marcel Beyer's *The Karnau Tapes*', p. 336.

⁵⁵ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 138.

⁵⁶ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 139.

⁵⁷ Ulrich Schönherr, 'Topophony of Fascism: On Marcel Beyer's *The Karnau Tapes*', p. 340.

notion of attacking the voice by surgical means is comparable to the language of the 'final solution'. For example, his use of 'Modifikationen' ['modifications'] is comparable to Nazi terminology such as 'Säuberungsaktion' ['sanitation exercise']. The brutality of such actions is barely concealed by his quasi-scientific terminology; effectively, Karnau now speaks the language of the perpetrators. He is immediately approached by a high-ranking member of the SS medical department and offered a position that will allow him to conduct further research related to the Germanisation of the East. However, it is not only his membership in the SS that turns Karnau into a perpetrator, but more significantly his ability to speak the language of perpetration.

The next part of the novel parallels the brutal experiments conducted by Karnau on anonymous Jewish inmates in a concentration camp with Helga's critical description of her father's *Sportpalast* speech. Karnau, who always saw himself as an outsider, has now become a part both of the 'total war' advocated by Goebbels, and of the 'final solution'. The close link between Karnau and Goebbels indicates the connection between the private memories of an individual perpetrator and the public memories of Nazi perpetration. The escalation of the war and the genocide is reflected within Karnau's personal development, illustrating an interface between the individual and history. This reinforces the extent to which the war and the Holocaust have destroyed the separation between the private and the public. Karnau's private obsession as well as his profession led him on a parallel course with the Nazi regime, exemplified by his relationship with the Goebbels family.

Karnau begins to describe the terrible experiments conducted on humans who are reduced to 'Versuchspersonen' ['experimental subjects'] in a scientific language that throws these cold acts of perpetration into relief:

Der schwache, keineswegs gefährliche Stromstoß läßt den Kehlkopf zusammensucken. Jagt jetzt die Stimme hoch? In oberste Regionen? Nein, kippt vorher.

The weak, not at all dangerous electric shock makes the larynx jump. Does the voice level shoot up? To the highest regions? No, it collapses before it can.⁵⁸

There is no sign of scruples or empathy with the victims. Karnau coldly observes the fearful 'test persons', claiming that the listener can, with a little effort, get used to the most terrible noises. Yet instead of changing the voices of the numerous test persons,

⁵⁸ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 159.

the experiments lead to the death of many and thus silence them forever; the anonymous victims are rendered even more anonymous by medical experiments designed – and this is a poignant irony – to test their voices. For Karnau, this indicates the failure of his own private project, as there are areas of the human voice which he cannot reach and ‘mit einem Mal zerfällt die Stimmgebungskarte’ [‘all of a sudden the voice mapping card collapses’].⁵⁹ The failure of Karnau’s megalomaniac voice-mapping project is linked with the destruction of the Third Reich and the self-destruction of the Nazi leadership in Hitler’s bunker in Berlin, an event meticulously described by Karnau, who witnesses the final days of the Nazi regime. In his recollection of these final days, he presents the reader with a representation of Hitler himself; referring to Hitler as the ‘patient’, he explains how the voice that used to be so loud and clear is beginning to disappear.⁶⁰ The voice of fascism is dying and its supporters are left to face the consequences of the terrible acts they have committed. Indeed, Karnau, who has learned to speak with the voice of a Nazi perpetrator, is now being told by his superior, SS Doctor Stumpfegger that they need to adopt the voices of their victims.

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.

The most urgent task is to learn to speak like a victim. Remember the words exactly, the intonation of your own experimental subjects, recall it all from your memory.⁶¹

Thus, in order to escape the repercussions of their perpetration, Karnau and his colleagues will have to learn the language of their victims. The old ‘Herrenstimme’ [‘voice of the master’] has to be turned into the voice of victimisation. This describes the general situation in post-war Germany, where the perpetrators quickly disappeared and the emphasis turned to the suffering of the Germans. However, looking back from the early 1990s, Karnau argues very early on in the novel that we all have scars on the vocal cords which cannot be eradicated.⁶² In other words, the collective change of the voice from perpetrators to victims cannot be achieved. Karnau criticises the long silence that followed in 1945, arguing that no one wanted

⁵⁹ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 179.

⁶⁰ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 195.

⁶¹ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 215.

⁶² Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 21.

to be reminded of their former voices and that only the final years of the 1960s witnessed a renewed recording of voices.⁶³ He further argues that, despite having learned the new language of the Allies and of democracy, the scars on the vocal cords remain. Beyer's contribution here to post-1990 memory debates is thus to emphasise that Nazi perpetration will remain an integral part of German collective memory and identity.

Beyer's novel *Flughunde* is certainly the most poignant example of a post-unification novel that deals not only with the collective memories of German perpetration during the Second World War, but also attempts a representation of the memories of a perpetrator figure. Some critics such as Niven and Schönherr argue that the perpetrator figure in *Flughunde* does not represent the typical Nazi perpetrator but a figure whose obsession leads him to be used as a tool by the Nazi regime. However, as there are only a small number of other fictional representations of the subjective view of a perpetrator, one could argue that there is no 'typical' Nazi perpetrator figure in fiction. Karnau's progress from working as a sound engineer at the massive Nazi rallies to experimenting on humans in the perverse racial experimentations conducted by the SS is a plausible representation of the development of a perpetrator. The fact that his development is interlinked with the development of the Nazi movement and that he enters the realm of the perpetrator exactly at the same point as Goebbels calls for total warfare suggests that Karnau has to be read in connection with wider public memories of perpetration.

⁶³ Marcel Beyer, *Flughunde*, p. 230.

4.1.2 The Nazi Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (1995)

Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* (The Reader, 1995) focuses on the relationship between Michael Berg, a member of the second generation born shortly before the end of the war, and Hanna Schmitz, who was formerly a female guard in a smaller subcamp of Auschwitz. The representation of a Nazi perpetrator portrayed through her former juvenile lover has provoked a divided response from the critics ranging from praise to condemnation. *Der Vorleser* is divided into three parts and told from the retrospective narrative perspective of Michael Berg, who wrote this version of his memories of his past with Hanna. Michael explains in the final pages of the novel that the act of writing was, at first, an attempt to rid himself of this past; later, it turned into an attempt to hold on to his past before he just learnt to accept it as part of his identity.⁶⁴ The fact that he has worked on many previous versions underlines the mediated nature of his memories. The novel represents one of various slightly differing versions which exist in his memory, and which represent the struggle of post-war generations to comprehend the atrocities committed by their predecessors. This meta-fictional element of the novel is sometimes overlooked in critical readings. It lends the narrative an inherent 'presentness' that is typical of most works of memory fiction. The retrospective viewpoint places the text within the framework of post-unification German memory debates rather than within the immediate post-war era.

The first part of the novel deals exclusively with the sexual relationship between the teenager Michael and the thirty-six year old Hanna during the summer of 1958. This is more than an illicit affair and Michael's account of it is more than a coming-of-age narrative. According to Bill Niven,

Hanna is everything to Michael: older lover and seductress, second mother (who cleans up after him when he is sick), second father (in that it is her authority which motivates him to catch up on schoolwork), and child (who is dependent on Michael's reading skills). This totality makes Hanna an overpowering emotional reference point in his life.⁶⁵

⁶⁴ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser* (Zürich: Diogenes, 1997), p. 206.

⁶⁵ Bill Niven, 'Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* and the Problem of Shame', *The Modern Language Review*, 98 (April 2003), 381 – 396 (p. 389).

Instead of describing the generational conflict and the difficulties of coming to terms with the Nazi past of family members, as Uwe Timm does in *Am Beispiel meines Bruders*, Schlink varies the generational paradigm by focusing on the sexual relationship between members of the two generations. However, the fact that Michael's narrative represents the generational struggle between the eye-witness and the post-war generation places the novel within the sphere of *Väterliteratur*.⁶⁶ The unusual love affair between Michael and Hanna ends as abruptly as it began, however, when Hanna suddenly disappears without any explanation, leaving Michael devastated.

In the second part of the novel, Michael, now a law student in the mid-1960s, takes part in a special seminar dealing with Nazi crimes. He briefly encounters Hanna again when he attends a war crimes trial. It is here that the novel introduces the notion of Hanna the perpetrator: Michael realises that she is one of the women accused of terrible atrocities in their role as concentration camp guards. Michael is distraught when confronted with this fact, finding it difficult to comprehend. When he also realises that Hanna is accepting the main responsibility in order to hide her illiteracy, he immediately uses this information to generate an excuse for her horrendous actions. This part of the novel explicitly deals with the question of culpability and at no point does Hanna deny her involvement. But, Michael uses her illiteracy as an argument in her defence:

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.

No, I told myself, Hanna did not make a decision to commit crime. She decided against the promotion to Siemens and got herself into the job of guard. And no, she didn't send the delicate and weak with the transportation to Auschwitz because they read to her, but chose them to read because she wanted to make the last month bearable before they were sent to Auschwitz anyway.⁶⁷

⁶⁶ Erin McGlothlin has illustrated this connection in her book *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2006), p. 214.

⁶⁷ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 128.

Michael's emphatic defence of Hanna has led many critics to condemn *Der Vorleser* as a blatant attempt to transform the perpetrator into a kind of victim. Omer Bartov, for example, argues that the novel turns a perpetrator into the victim of her illiteracy, presents Michael's role as that of the 'victim's victim', and even portrays Germany as the greatest victim, crippled as it is by the guilt of its crimes.⁶⁸ Ernestine Schlant's argument is similar:

Schlink seems to suggest that her criminality and general brutality went hand in hand with her illiteracy, but that once she could read she became morally alert and wanted to know more about the Holocaust. This is not much of an argument. Illiteracy cannot serve as an explanation for cooperating in and committing criminal acts.⁶⁹

Similarly, both Stuart Taberner and William Collins Donahue point out that the revelation of Hanna's illiteracy and Michael's attempt to defend her on these grounds detract from the main atrocities of which she undoubtedly is guilty.⁷⁰ The problem here is that we do not get to know Hanna from a perspective other than that of Michael, who is constantly torn between the realisation of her guilt and his memories of their previous relationship. Erin McGlothlin has argued that the novel is centred around Michael's 'ethical conundrum' which leads him to accept Hanna's guilt while at the same time he makes 'continual efforts' to exonerate her on the grounds of her illiteracy.⁷¹ Thus, the third part of the novel deals mainly with Michael's identity crisis caused by his opposing feelings of guilt, anger, and empathy. Unable to maintain stable relationships with women, Michael decides to continue his reading to Hanna by producing tapes of countless classical literary works and sending them to her. He has no other contact with her, now serving her life sentence in prison, until she comes up for parole. The prison contacts Michael, the only person who has had regular contact with her, and asks him if he is prepared to support her when she leaves prison. During their last encounter, before she commits suicide, Michael learns that she has used his tapes to teach herself to read and write. He also finds out that she has been reading a lot of historical works about the Holocaust. However,

⁶⁸ Omar Bartov, 'Germany as Victim', *New German Critique*, 80 (2000), 29 – 40, (pp. 30 – 31)

⁶⁹ Ernestine Schlant, *The Language of Silence*, p. 213.

⁷⁰ William Collins Donahue, 'Illusions of Subtlety: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* and the Moral Limits of Holocaust Fiction,' *German Life and Letters* 54, (2001), 60 – 81, (p. 79); Stuart Taberner, Introduction to *Der Vorleser*, by Bernhard Schlink (London: Bristol Classical Press, 2003), p. 28

⁷¹ Erin McGlothlin, 'Theorizing the Perpetrator in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow*', p. 10.

their first encounter after the trial is also their last, as Hanna is not willing to leave the prison and takes her own life. The novel finishes with the verdict of one of Hanna's victims, who rejects the offer of her savings and does not allow her this gesture of atonement.

Although the novel clearly contains an unusual portrayal of a Nazi perpetrator, the aim of this representation remains ambiguous and is compromised by the subjective perspective of the narrator. There is no denying that Michael constructs a causal relationship between Hanna's culpability as a perpetrator and her disabling illiteracy, thus providing her with a kind of victim status. However, this has to be seen in connection with his emotional, almost obsessive, relationship with her. There is no evidence in the text other than Michael's attempts to alleviate her guilt that suggests that her illiteracy has caused her to commit atrocities. Thus, one of the most interesting questions that needs to be addressed when discussing her as a perpetrator figure relates to the function of her illiteracy. Before doing so, however, we will analyse her character a little closer.

During the first part of the novel, the reader encounters Hanna without the knowledge about her past in the SS. We get to know her through the eyes of the youthful Michael, who describes his emotional and sexual relationship with her. But there are already some clear signs that foreshadow the revelation in the second part of the novel. After all, a sexual relationship between a woman of Hanna's age and a teenage boy is far from usual, and Hanna shows clear signs of a dominating nature. She uses her power over Michael to make him read classical literary texts to her and rewards him sexually:

Aber als ich am nächsten Tag kam und sie küssen wollte, entzog sie sich. 'Zuerst mußt du mir vorlesen.'

Sie meinte es Ernst. Ich mußte ihr eine halbe Stunde lang 'Emilia Galotti' vorlesen, ehe sie mich unter die Dusche und mich ins Bett nahm.

When I came the next day and wanted to kiss her, she withdrew from me. 'You have to read to me first.'

She meant it seriously. I had to read to her for half an hour from 'Emilia Galotti', before she sent me to shower and then took me to bed.⁷²

⁷² Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 43.

The ritual of reading to Hanna before their love-making is thus imposed upon Michael by Hanna. In retrospect, there is an association between Michael and the other 'readers' who were forced to enact this ritual during Hanna's time at the concentration camp and who ultimately became her victims. Nevertheless, one should not overlook the fact that the agency in this domineering sexual relationship is not entirely Hanna's. It is, after all, Michael who voluntarily continues his visits and who also asserts a certain kind of power over her, even if he is not aware of this.

There are other subtle indications about Hanna's past within the early part of her relationship with the narrator. Her use of language, for instance, constantly changes between a caring and a commanding tone when she addresses Michael. At times, she lovingly refers to him as 'Jungchen', only then to shout at him with authority when he has unknowingly violated her rules.⁷³ When he admits that he might have to resit a year at school, she shouts at him and throws him out of her bed. At another point, she hits him with her belt:⁷⁴

Sie hatte den schmalen ledernen Gürtel in der Hand, den sie um ihr Kleid tat, machte einen Schritt zurück und zog ihn mir durchs Gesicht. Meine Lippe platzte, und ich schmeckte Blut.

She had the narrow leather belt in her hand, the one she wore around her dress, took a step backwards and whipped it across my face. My lip split, I could taste blood.⁷⁵

While her aggression is a result of the frustration she feels about her inability to read the note Michael has left for her, it also shows a leaning towards authority and violence associated with perpetrator figures. There are further hints of her past, some of these informed by a more stereotypical imagery of the Holocaust, such as her obsession with hygiene and the constant, almost ritualistic use of the shower prior to their lovemaking.

Ich hätte das Duschen lieber gelassen. Sie war von peinlicher Sauberkeit, [...].

I would rather have not showered. She was meticulously clean [...].⁷⁶

⁷³ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 35.

⁷⁴ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 36.

⁷⁵ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 54.

⁷⁶ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 33.

Finally, Michael portrays her as almost threatening and repellent when she wears her tram conductor uniform.⁷⁷ This is yet another pointer towards her former life. Thus, from early on, the novel portrays Hanna in a way that forebodes the revelation to come in the second part. Her authoritarian behaviour, sometimes bordering on sadism, towards the much younger Michael, paired with her abnormal sense of hygiene, her commanding language, and the repellent figure she strikes in her uniform are all part of previously known characterisations of Nazi perpetrators. Rick Crownshaw argues that this characterisation is so stereotypical that one wonders how Michael can desire Hanna in the first place.⁷⁸ Of course, one has to acknowledge that the entire story is told in retrospect. Michael knows about Hanna's past when he recounts his adolescent experience, and it is no wonder that he emphasises certain character traits that hint at her past. Furthermore, the narrative is in many ways more about Michael coming to terms with his mixed feelings towards her than about Hanna herself. This certainly explains his ambiguous description of Hanna once her guilt is revealed in the court room. Michael constantly alters between feelings of guilt for having had a close relationship to a perpetrator, feelings of love and empathy, as well as shame and betrayal. However, very early on in the novel, Michael reveals that his feelings for Hanna cannot hide the ugly reality about her past:

Warum? Warum wird uns, was schön war, im Rückblick dadurch brüchig, daß es häßliche Wahrheiten verbarg?

Why? Why, when looking back at the wonderful times, do they crumble because they hid ugly truths?⁷⁹

The second and third parts of the novel provide a clearer representation of Hanna as a perpetrator as well as of Michael's ambivalent feelings towards her. Michael is caught between wanting to understand and condemn the crimes she has committed.⁸⁰ In this respect, his approach to Hanna and to German memories clearly differs from that of other members of the 1960s' student movement. His description of the work he is undertaking with other students of his seminar group is also a

⁷⁷ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 37.

⁷⁸ Rick Crownshaw, 'Rereading *Der Vorleser*, Remembering the perpetrator', in *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, ed. by Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2009) pp. 147 – 161 (p. 152).

⁷⁹ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 38.

⁸⁰ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 151.

retrospective criticism of his own generation's verdict on and condemnation of their parents. He acknowledges that the initial aim of this work was a positive one:

Aufarbeitung! Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit! Wir Studenten des Seminars sahen uns als Avantgarde der Aufarbeitung. Wir rissen die Fenster auf, ließen die Luft herein, den Wind, der endlich den Staub aufwirbelte, den die Gesellschaft über die Furchtbarkeiten der Vergangenheit hatte sinken lassen.

Reappraisal! Reappraising the past! We students saw ourselves as the avantgarde of reappraisal. We opened the windows, let in the air, and the wind which finally blew away the dust which society had allowed to settle over the atrocities of the past.⁸¹

This initial aim of the student movement, however, has failed, according to Michael, due to its universal condemnation of the entire eye-witness generation. He criticises this universal condemnation when reflecting on the past of his own father, who lost his position as a philosophy lecturer during the Nazi reign.

Wie kam ich dazu ihn zu Scham zu verurteilen? Aber ich tat es. Wir alle verurteilten unsere Eltern zu Scham, und wenn wir sie nur anklagen konnten, die Täter nach 1945 bei sich, unter sich geduldet zu haben.

How could I have condemned him to feel shame? But I did. We all condemned our parents to feelings of shame, even if all we could accuse them of was having tolerated the perpetrators among them after 1945.⁸²

This criticism of his own generation vividly highlights the retrospective perspective of his memories. Michael's perspective on German collective memory discourses increasingly resembles the discourses of the post-unification era and locates his narrative within the present. In this respect, his narrative records his lifelong attempt to come to terms with Hanna's guilt and his own shame about his feelings for her. The novel uses Michael's ambiguous feelings to highlight the problems attached to the universal concept of German *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*; Michael is torn between the private wish to understand Hanna's perpetration and to some degree to defend her, and the public perception of universal condemnation of the perpetrator generation. Niven argues that the novel 'appears committed to exploring the existence of a disjuncture between public memory of the Holocaust and Michael's

⁸¹ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 87.

⁸² Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 88.

private position'.⁸³ What should not be ignored, however, is that Michael's attempt to alleviate Hanna's guilt represents an act that is inherently egoistic. By reducing Hanna's guilt, he is ultimately reducing his own feelings of shame caused by his previous feelings for her. Thus, when looking at the second part of the novel it becomes apparent that Michael functions as an increasingly unreliable narrator who uses Hanna's illiteracy as a means to reduce his own shame about the past. This causes a rupture in the portrayal of Hanna, as the facts of her crimes clash with Michael's attempts to reduce her guilt. Here, the novel shows the limits and the fallacy of memory in comparison with historical and judicial facts with regards to Nazi perpetration.

One could argue that the novel provides the readers with two versions of a Nazi perpetrator. On the one hand, we encounter a judicial version based on historical fact that does not challenge Hanna's culpability and guilt. On the other hand, however, the novel represents Michael's emotional portrayal of the perpetrator based on his memories of his former relationship to her. In combination, the two different perpetrator models produce an uncomfortable effect, leading some critics to condemn Schlink's novel as an attempt to represent the perpetrator as a victim. However, it is precisely this uncomfortable and perhaps unsuccessful balance act which lends the novel its critical perspective. Ultimately, there is no doubt about Hanna's guilt, leading Michael's private memories of her as lover to clash with the reality of her perpetrator persona. One could argue that Schlink has created a narrator who acts as a reflection of a wider collective German memory. Schlink's narrator can be understood better when looking at the discrepancies between public and private memories as a whole within German society. Indeed, one could argue that he is the fictional equivalent of some of the interviewees in Harald Welzer's *Opa War kein Nazi!* Michael completely accepts Germany's guilt and its historical responsibility in relation to the perpetration of the Holocaust. Thus, using Welzer's terminology, he fully accepts the collective memories that form part of the 'encyclopaedia'. Yet when it comes to the 'album' containing his personal memories, he encounters problems accepting that someone who was emotionally close to him has played a part in organised murder. He is consequently torn between these two sets of memories and, being a lawyer, constructs a case in the defence of the perpetrator for mainly selfish

⁸³ Bill Niven, 'Representations of the Nazi Past I: Perpetrators', p. 138.

reasons, namely to justify his own emotional involvement with the perpetrator. Thus, the text exposes a major problem with the concept of memory as a whole: the unreliability of the person who remembers.

Hanna admits to have joined the SS voluntarily despite the offer of a promotion by her previous employer.⁸⁴ While there is no evidence for or against her support for the Nazi regime, it is likely that she chose to volunteer for the SS in order to hide her illiteracy. Indeed, Bill Niven argues that there are many prominent examples of high-ranking Nazis who initially joined the movement in order to ‘wish to conceal or compensate for’ their personal shame.⁸⁵ He argues that Nazi Germany itself could be defined as a ‘culture of shame’, dating back to the humiliation experienced after the Great War, and highlights the fact that some prominent Nazis, such as Adolf Eichmann, failed in their previous lives. According to Niven, personal shame played a pivotal role in the establishment of the Nazi regime benefiting from the ‘support of the threatened sections of the lower middle classes’.⁸⁶ Niven’s view on the problem of shame helps to disarm the argument that Hanna’s illiteracy serves to exonerate her to some degree and therefore turn the perpetrator into a victim. Moreover, once Hanna takes on her new role as a concentration camp guard, she is fully absorbed into the SS hierarchy and follows orders supporting the Nazi genocide without question. Without emotion, Hanna describes the selection of female inmates who are to be sent to their deaths.

Hanna beschrieb, daß sich die Aufseherinnen verständigt hatten, aus ihren sechs gleich großen Zuständigkeitsbereichen gleich große Gefangenzahlen zu melden, [...], wer zurückgeschickt werden sollte.

Hanna described how the guards agreed to report from their six same-sized areas of responsibility the same number of prisoners [...] who were to be sent back.⁸⁷

Confronted with the question whether she was aware of the fate of the chosen inmates, Hanna concedes that she knew they were to be killed, arguing that the high numbers of new inmates necessitated these actions because of limited space.

⁸⁴ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 91.

⁸⁵ Bill Niven, ‘Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser* and the Problem of Shame’, *The Modern Language Review*, 98 (April 2003), 381 – 396 (p. 384).

⁸⁶ Bill Niven, ‘Bernhard Schlink’s *Der Vorleser* and the Problem of Shame’, p. 384.

⁸⁷ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 106.

‘Haben Sie nicht gewußt, daß Sie die Gefangenen in den Tod schicken?’

‘Doch, aber die neuen kamen, und die alten mußten Platz machen für die neuen’.

‘Didn’t you know that you were sending the prisoners to their death’?

‘Yes, but the new ones came and the old ones had to make room for the newcomers’.⁸⁸

Hanna demonstrates at this point during the trial that she was fully aware of the consequences of her deeds. When the judge further scrutinises her motivation of wanting to create space for the new arrivals by sending human beings to their death, she simply asks what he would have done in her place. She does not display much empathy with her victims at any point during her trial. Furthermore, it is revealed that she personally exploited the inmates by choosing so-called ‘favourites’ whom she would keep alive so that they could read to her. Later on, she disposed of these ‘readers’ in order to hide her illiteracy.⁸⁹ Here she uses her authority as an SS guard for her own personal reasons, and the title of ‘reader’ is not solely relevant for Michael’s later role but also for the countless ‘readers’ who have been exploited by her at the concentration camp. It is this particular point that shows she was not merely a perpetrator who passively followed orders, but also a perpetrator of her own doing. Michael’s attempt to explain her conduct as an act of mercy towards the weaker women whose death is inevitable does not alter the fact that Hanna exploited the prisoners for her own purposes and that she has thus become even more deeply involved in the act of perpetration.

Leaving aside Michael’s attempts to present her through his own self-serving perspective, there is no evidence in the text that exonerates Hanna of perpetration during the Holocaust. She openly confesses to being in full knowledge of the consequences of her actions, demonstrates little empathy with her victims during the trial, and seems unrepentant when suggesting that others probably would have done the same in her position. In other words, her role as a perpetrator is firmly established, yet the text offers no explanation with regards to her motives other than her attempt to hide the shame of her illiteracy. We do not know whether she supported the Nazi party ideologically or whether she is inherently anti-Semitic.

⁸⁸ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 106.

⁸⁹ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 112.

Helmut Schmitz argues that ‘the perpetrator figure Hanna remains psychologically colourless’.⁹⁰ Indeed, considering that she occupies the central focus of the narrative, the reader learns relatively little about her motivations. Her consciousness remains closed, and the reader only gets to know the perpetrator through the eyes of the narrator. While Beyer’s text deals with the motivation of the perpetrator, describing the development from simple collaborator towards perpetration, Schlink’s novel analyses the perpetrator figure from the perspective of the subsequent generation.

The novel ends with Michael’s encounter with one of Hanna’s victims in New York shortly after Hanna has decided to take her own life. Her suicide coincides with Michael’s realisation that she has finally overcome her illiteracy and that she has since read about the Holocaust. Whether her suicide is intended as a gesture of penance for her past remains open to discussion. Michael certainly sees it that way, and he obeys her last wish by travelling to New York. The daughter who survived the church fire and played a pivotal role during Hanna’s trial remains a nameless victim of the Holocaust, and is symbolic of its countless other victims. Michael explains Hanna’s last wish and thus the reason for his visit, presenting the daughter with a tin box containing Hanna’s savings. The victim, however, refuses to accept the gift and give her some kind of absolution.⁹¹ Hence, the last verdict on Hanna as perpetrator and on the possibility of her absolution is not given by Michael as a representative of the post-war generation of Germans, but rather by a first-hand victim of the Holocaust.

⁹⁰ Helmut Schmitz, ‘Mahlen nach Zahlen? Bernhard Schlinks *Der Vorleser* und die Unfähigkeit zu trauern’, *German Life and Letters*, 55.3 (July 2002), 296 – 311, (p. 299).

⁹¹ Bernhard Schlink, *Der Vorleser*, p. 201.

4.2 Perpetration and Guilt in British Fiction

Issues of perpetration and representations of the perpetrator figure are also relevant within the context of British memory fiction. However, we have to differentiate clearly between British national and private memories of perpetration and those models found within the German context. Initially, the interest of British authors in the Nazi genocide and issues of perpetration stems from the significance of the Holocaust as the ‘master rupture’ of the twentieth century.⁹² Yet this interest is to a lesser degree determined by direct experience and thus by the actual memories of perpetration, and can rather be described as a philosophical one. This implies that the interest of British writers who deal with the subject of perpetration is not derived from the intergenerational conflicts we witness in German memory debates but rather from a more general interest in the nature of Nazi perpetration. The questions posed within British perpetrator fiction are not framed along the lines of a specific culpability, but are of a more general nature: how could human beings conceive of the institutionalised murder of millions of innocent people? This is the benefit of dealing with the question of perpetration on the basis of a collective memory of having fought a ‘good’ and ‘honourable’ war.

There are, however, signs that other issues of guilt and collaboration are slowly entering British national memory discourses and that they can be found within literary representations of the war. These are not so much centred on the issue of perpetration as on the legacy of the aerial bombardment of Germany and the politics of appeasement. Indeed, there are novels such as A.L Kennedy’s *Day*, Kazuo Ishiguro’s *The Remains of the Day* (1989), Robert Edric’s *Kingdom of Ashes* (2007), and Michael Frayn’s *Spies*, which deal with issues of guilt pertaining to the British conduct of the war. Strictly speaking, it would be a step too far to label them ‘perpetrator novels’ and it is not the aim of this thesis to do so. However, they do introduce a critical view on controversial aspects of British wartime memories, in some cases resulting in the representation of feelings of guilt. They certainly provide a critical view that, while not having been taboo, has so far been largely marginalised by the mythological memories of the ‘good war’. Central to many of these texts is

⁹² John McCumber, ‘The Holocaust as Master Rupture: Foucault, Fackenheim, and ‘Postmodernity’’, in *Postmodernism and the Holocaust*, ed. by Alan Milchman and Alan Rosenberg (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1998), pp. 239 – 264, (p. 251).

the realisation that perhaps not everything about the British war effort was as ‘good’ and as ‘honourable’ as the collective memory suggests. It is thus justified to include these works in this analysis alongside those of other authors, such as Martin Amis, who have produced works that deal directly with perpetrator figures.

Paul Crosthwaite argues that the devastation suffered by the nations in continental Europe during the conflict was much greater than that in the United Kingdom.⁹³ This has led to a significant disparity in terms of the emphasis of national narratives of collective memories. Crosthwaite writes that, on the continent,

the experience of the Second World War was, and in many ways remains, defined by atrocities, whether these were perpetrated, suffered, or – more commonly and ambiguously – merely acquiesced in.⁹⁴

In comparison, the United Kingdom remained relatively untouched by the atrocities and the destruction that has been witnessed in other parts of Europe and the Far East. Britain did not have to endure the humiliation of Nazi occupation, followed by instances of collaboration, deportation and the Nazi genocide on home soil.⁹⁵ Especially after the full extent of the Holocaust and the German atrocities were revealed to the Allies at the end of the war, the United Kingdom could justifiably view its wartime conduct as necessary and honourable. This led to an increased belief in the mythic narrative enshrined within public collective memory, a narrative that emphasised the unifying aspect of the ‘People’s War’ and the heroic defence of democratic values. Angus Calder emphasises this, arguing that the British people strongly believed in their own wartime narrative and propaganda to the extent that the post-war period has witnessed a critical complacency with regards to the conduct of the war.⁹⁶ He argues that the public memories of the Second World War are to a large degree still based on the strong belief that

⁹³ Paul Crosthwaite, *Trauma, Postmodernism, and the Aftermath of World War II*, p. 23.

⁹⁴ Paul Crosthwaite, *Trauma, Postmodernism, and the Aftermath of World War II*, p. 23.

⁹⁵ The only exceptions were the Channel Islands which fell under Nazi occupation after the capitulation of France. It is particularly interesting that the occupation resulted in numerous acts of collaboration on the part of the local population. This subject has been fictionalised by Tim Binding in his historical novel *Island Madness* (1998) where he highlights instances of collaboration by the local police force.

⁹⁶ Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes*, p. 62.

they [the British] alone had kept the beacon of European democracy burning in the dark period between the fall of France and the US entry into the war.⁹⁷

This narrative of Britain's 'good war' is certainly based on historical facts. However, there are certainly parallels between Churchill's propaganda speeches proclaiming the war as the Empire's 'finest hour', and the ideas on which British wartime memories are built. As Calder argues, this memory of 'Britain's war' has successfully concealed some of the more uncomfortable realities of the war, such as the impending bankruptcy and the loss of hegemony to the United States.⁹⁸ While the war might have been the Empire's 'finest hour', it also contributed to its end. Furthermore, the imbalanced memory of the Second World War as the 'good' war has led, according to Calder, to a critical complacency that has marginalised some guilt, festering underneath the surface of national memory. Calder believes that the long-lasting effect of Britain's memory of the 'good war' was at least partly supported by 'the shortage of honest representations of wartime experience'.⁹⁹ Controversial issues such as the internment of Jewish refugees as 'enemy aliens' and the fact that the RAF had planned its strategy of aerial bombardment long before the *Luftwaffe* dropped the first bombs on British soil, have remained beneath the surface of the memories of the 'good war'. There is some evidence, however, that this critical complacency is now waning. In 2005, for instance, the *Guardian* newspaper published a story about the notorious London Cage, a facility designed for the interrogation of German POWs in Kensington that was deliberately hidden from the Red Cross and contravened the Geneva Convention. The article argues, that among thousands of documents stored at the National Archive, there is clear evidence of the 'systematic ill-treatment' and 'torture' of prisoners within the London Cage.¹⁰⁰ Indeed, one of the prisoners who was held by the Gestapo during the war and by the British afterwards, lodged a complaint after the war which found its way to the National Archive. He argued that the treatment he received at the hands of the British was not very different to that meted out by the Gestapo.¹⁰¹ Surprisingly, perhaps, this controversial subject had already featured in a novel, Robert Ryan's *Night Crossing* (2004), at first glance a very conventional piece of historical fiction representing a

⁹⁷ Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes*, p. 62.

⁹⁸ Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes*, p. 63.

⁹⁹ Angus Calder, *Disasters and Heroes*, p. 66.

¹⁰⁰ Ian Cobain, 'The secrets of the London Cage', *Guardian*, 12 November 2005.

¹⁰¹ Ian Cobain, 'The secrets of the London Cage', *Guardian*, 12 November 2005.

love triangle between a former member of Scotland Yard seconded to British Intelligence, a female German refugee, and a German submariner who was once a strong supporter of the Nazi party. However, within this conventional framework the author addresses some rather unconventional issues. He does not shy away from describing the internment camps for German refugees on the Isle of Man and includes representations of the interrogations within the London Cage.¹⁰² This is a development that can also be found in some of the memory novels dealing with issues of perpetration and guilt. In what follows I shall differentiate between memory novels which represent perpetrator figures as well as Nazi atrocities, and those which represent issues of guilt.

Images of the Holocaust entered collective memory discourse in Britain soon after the liberation of Belsen concentration camp. Joanne Reilly has recently examined the accounts of the British personnel who took part in the liberation of Belsen. She claims that 'experience and the recollection' of the liberation of Belsen had a considerable impact on 'British society and its view of the Holocaust'.¹⁰³ Indeed, the images coming out of Belsen and the experiences of the British liberators to a certain degree reinforced the strong belief of having fought a 'good war'. Any critical questions regarding British wartime conduct disappeared amongst the terrible images coming out of the remains of Germany and the former Nazi-occupied areas. In 1954, the author C. S. Forester, better known as the author of the popular Hornblower novels, published a collection of stories under the title *The Nightmare* which can be classified as Holocaust fiction. Within some of the stories, Forester introduces German perpetrator figures who, according to Robert Eaglestone, 'are a simple inversion of his usual heroic characters'.¹⁰⁴ Although all but forgotten today, Forester's *The Nightmare* demonstrates that there was an interest in the nature of Nazi perpetration in early post-war Britain. Since then, moreover, there have been countless British novels referring either implicitly or explicitly to the Holocaust and to Nazi perpetration. Both the dystopian futuristic vision of a totalitarian society in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949), and the savagery depicted in William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954) can be read as implicitly referring to the Holocaust and issues of Nazi perpetration. The fact that the United Kingdom did not

¹⁰² Robert Ryan, *Night Crossing* (London: Headline, 2004).

¹⁰³ Joanne Reilly, *Belsen: the Liberation of a Concentration Camp* (London: Routledge, 1998), p. 18.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Eaglestone, *The Holocaust and the Postmodern*, p. 104.

experience Nazi atrocities on home soil has led a number of authors to represent perpetration through the genre of alternative history thrillers. Len Deighton, for example, envisages in his thriller *SS-GB* (1978) a Nazi-occupied Britain in which Scotland Yard is under the command of the SS. The alternative history genre was helped to even greater popularity by Robert Harris's novel *Fatherland* (1993), which is set in a world where Nazi Germany has won the war on the Western Front. The protagonist Xavier March, as a member of the police force, is investigating a number of murders which are interconnected. His investigation leads him to uncover a trail of documents ultimately revealing the truth about the Holocaust and the Nazi atrocities in the East. The latest publication portraying an 'alternative history' is Owen Sheers' novel *Resistance* (2007), which assumes the invasion of Britain in late 1944 after the failed landings in Normandy. It depicts the relationship between the female population of a Welsh farming community, whose husbands have left to join the resistance, and a German Army platoon arriving in the desolate village. It describes instances of both resistance and collaboration on the part of the British population. Although the novel does not introduce a clearly recognisable perpetrator figure, the theme of British citizens joining the ranks of the perpetrator is present in the background. The novel finishes with the harrowing image of a 'Private Jonathan Stevens of the newly formed SS Albion division' walking among the remains of the small farming village after a raid.¹⁰⁵ In such what-if narratives, the memories of the 'good war' are turned into an opposite scenario through the inversion of historical facts. The authors' conclusions are sobering as the positive memories of the honourable war are turned around into a negative scenario invoking British SS volunteers, collaborators and perpetrators.¹⁰⁶

There are many other works by both Jewish and non-Jewish British authors which loosely fall into the category of Holocaust fiction, depicting both the victims

¹⁰⁵ Owen Sheers, *Resistance* (London: Faber and Faber, 2007), p. 349.

¹⁰⁶ Robert Harris's novel *Fatherland*, in particular, not only represents an alternative historical scenario but also alternative memories of the Second World War. The memories of the Holocaust and the perpetration have been deliberately erased by the perpetrators in order to create international credibility and to form an alliance with the United States against the Soviet Union. In attempting to solve the murders of a number of former high ranking party members the detective March encounters evidence of events that have been erased from his nation's and indeed the world's collective memory. Although these alternative histories belong to a niche genre of popular thrillers, they, nevertheless, illustrate a clear interest in aspects of Nazi perpetration and they leave the reader with little doubt that if Britain had followed France in falling under Nazi occupation instances of collaboration and perpetration would have followed. Ironically these alternative histories support the popular British national and cultural memory discourses of the 'good' war in providing a truly horrendous alternative to Allied victory.

and examples of German perpetration. Eva Figes' *The Tenancy* (1993), for example, describes a community of tenants in a housing block in an unnamed town experiencing an atmosphere of unexplained terror. Figes uses elements of gothic convention to invoke the terror experienced by the community. There are clear references to the Holocaust when an elderly Jewish pair of siblings, Martha and Fred Wolf, fall victim to a fire in their library. Figes' novel de-historicises the terror of the Holocaust and portrays it as an apocalyptic and universal threat to human existence.¹⁰⁷ Here, the perpetrator remains invisible but the memories of the Nazi atrocities continue to haunt the present in the form of an unexplained threat that causes terror. Similarly, as we have seen, in Ian McEwan's novel *Black Dogs* (1992) the Holocaust is alluded to in the form of the two mythical 'black dogs' which are believed to be haunting the French countryside.

Another British writer who integrates myth with the atrocities experienced during the Second World War is Lawrence Norfolk in his novel *In the Shape of a Boar* (2000). Norfolk creates a fictional account of the Greek myth of the hunt for the Boar of Kalydon, based on Paul Celan's poem 'In Gestalt eines Ebers', and combines this with a contemporary narrative centred around the effect of the Second World War on a number of characters. The entire first part of the novel represents a retelling of the mythical boar hunt, footnoted at great length. The second part tells the tale of Solomon Memel, a Romanian Jew and poet, who is the author of a poem, entitled 'Die Keilerjagd'. The non-linear narrative moves through various temporal and spatial levels. Memel's memories constantly take him back from 1970s Paris to his youth, his relationship with his best friend Jacob and their shared love for Ruth. As the narrative unfolds, we follow Memel's flight from the Nazis, which eventually take him to Greece, where he establishes a connection to the Greek resistance movement. Here he becomes witness or, at least, this is what his memories let us believe, to a more contemporary confrontation between the hunters and the boar. Philip Tew has observed that Sol's poem 'has fused the wartime struggle between a German officer, Oberstleutnant Heinrich Eberhardt and the resistance in Greece with the classical confrontation between the boar and the night-hunter'.¹⁰⁸ Thus, the perpetrator appears as the mythical manifestation of the boar of Kalydon. The

¹⁰⁷ Thomas Michael Stein, 'Prosa', in *Geschichte der englischen Literatur*, ed. by Peter Erlebach, Bernhard Reitz, and Thomas Michael Stein (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2004), p. 665.

¹⁰⁸ Philip Tew, *The Contemporary British Novel* (London and New York: Continuum, 2004), p. 119 - 20.

authenticity of Memel's memories, however, is questioned at the end of the novel by his former girlfriend Ruth and his friend Jacob, who both managed to flee Nazi persecution. Ruth confronts Memel with evidence of his plagiarism, doubting that he ever witnessed the destruction of the boar. According to Ruth, the boar 'didn't die at all' but indeed 'won'.¹⁰⁹ Thus, the novel challenges the authenticity of the protagonist's memories, leaving the reader torn between two versions of the past. Memel's version sees the symbolic evil hunted down and destroyed in a mythic battle, while Ruth and Jacob argue that the destruction of evil has never taken place in the manner remembered by Memel.

Rachel Seiffert's novel *The Dark Room* (2002) also focuses on issues of perpetration in telling three different stories of ordinary Germans. Seiffert's novel is particularly interesting, due to her Anglo-German upbringing. Although the author was born in Oxford, she now lives in Berlin, and the novel portrays German rather than British memory discourses. The novel is divided into three different personal stories depicting characters unconnected to each other. The first features Helmut, who becomes a victim of Nazi ideology when his physical disability turns him into an outcast within Nazi society. He longs for normality and wishes nothing more than to be able to join the Hitler Youth and, eventually, the *Wehrmacht*. Instead, he becomes the apprentice of a local photographer and is allowed to use the studio at the end of the day for his private photography project. He roams the streets of Berlin and creates a portfolio documenting the impact of the war on the city. The second part of the novel tells the story of Lore, a twelve-year-old girl who guides her younger siblings through the ruins of Germany in order to find their grandmother shortly after her parents are arrested by the Allies for their role during the Nazi period. The children encounter the scale of the destruction as they wander among the crowds of displaced people trying to get back home. However, it is not only the destruction of Germany itself that is revealed to the children but also the consequences of German atrocities. They see images of 'hundreds of skeletons; hips and arms and skulls in tangles'.¹¹⁰ The children themselves are now considered as the offspring of the perpetrators, being frequently described as 'the Nazi children'.¹¹¹ For Lore and her

¹⁰⁹ Lawrence Norfolk, *In the Shape of a Boar* (London: Phoenix, 2000), p. 341.

¹¹⁰ Rachel Seiffert, *The Dark Room* (London: Vintage, 2002), p. 103.

¹¹¹ Rachel Seiffert, *The Dark Room*, p. 97.

siblings, the world has changed dramatically, and she slowly begins to understand the true extent of her parent's guilt.

The final narrative takes place in the 1990s and explores lingering memories of guilt within contemporary German memory. It follows Micha's attempt to reconcile his fond memories of his grandfather with the revelation that he was a member of the Waffen SS during the war. Micha follows his grandfather's footsteps to a village in Belorussia, where he was stationed, and begins an obsessive investigation into his grandfather's past. The set-up of the narrative, portraying the narrator as an investigator of memory, is similar to other German memory novels (such as Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* and Ulla Hahn's *Unschärfe Bilder*). Seiffert's novel explores memories of German guilt and perpetration within the narrative framework of the three separate narratives. The fact that the author has family connections to Germany explains the way in which she introduces memory discourses that are rather more typical of Germany than of Britain. Nevertheless, the novel itself was first published in English and was shortlisted for the 2001 Booker Prize, suggesting that the subject of memories of German war guilt is relevant within British culture.

Indeed, all the above texts exemplify the persisting interest of memories of perpetration and issues of guilt within the British literary establishment. While the early texts, such as Forester's *The Nightmare*, focus on German perpetrator figures, the literary representation of Nazi perpetration becomes gradually more complex, changing the focus on the nature of perpetration itself. By far the most complex vision of memories of a Nazi perpetrator is rendered in Martin Amis's novel *Time's Arrow*, which I shall now discuss in greater detail.

4.2.1 The Nazi Perpetrator in Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* (1991)

In *Time's Arrow*, Amis presents one of the most daunting portrayals of a Holocaust perpetrator in contemporary fiction. He tells the story of Odilo Unverdorben who, as a former Nazi doctor in Auschwitz, was responsible for experiments on humans and euthanasia. His attempt to escape from his perpetrator identity is evidenced by his frequent name and identity changes. The reader gets to know Odilo Unverdorben under several aliases, first as Hamilton de Souza, then as John Young, until he finally settles on the name and identity of Tod T. Friendly after the relative insecurity of the early post-war years. As Tod T. Friendly, he manages to conceal his criminal past and assumes a relatively normal life as a doctor in the American suburbs. The name is telling. The Christian name 'Tod' is the German word for 'death', while the surname 'Friendly' marks the traditionally positive role of the family doctor within society. The protagonist's name thus incorporates the 'killing-healing' paradox described in Robert Jay Lifton's *The Nazi Doctors* (1986). Amis emphasises in the text's afterword that the novel 'would not and could not have been written' without Lifton's text.¹¹² According to Lifton, the 'killing-healing' paradox of the Nazi doctors refers to the 'reversal of medicine's foremost goal from healing to killing, euphemistically justified by the Nazi ideology of 'healing' the Germanic race'.¹¹³ Furthermore, Tod's original surname, 'Unverdorben', the German word for 'untainted', becomes even more ironic when his original identity as a Nazi perpetrator is revealed. Thus, one of the major tropes of the novel in describing the Holocaust is the notion of the reversal of the norm. The Nazi regime employed medicine for the purpose of killing. Science was used to create more efficient methods of extermination rather than for the benefit of a 'normal' society. Consequently, the Third Reich already represents the historical reversal of modernity and human progress in the name of a previously unthinkable and racially motivated genocide. The narrator emphasises this point when he says:

¹¹² Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow or the Nature of the Offence* (London: Quality Paperbacks Direct, 1992), p. 175.

¹¹³ Lifton, Robert Jay, *The Nazi Doctors. Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986).

It is a commonplace to say that the triumph of Auschwitz was essentially organizational: we found a sacred fire that hides in the human heart – and built an autobahn that went there.¹¹⁴

What the narrator describes as the ‘triumph of Auschwitz’ is essentially the logistical organisation towards the reversal of any norms that have been accepted as part of humanity previously. Based on this idea, Amis makes use of a very unusual narrative pattern by reversing the temporality of the narration. Instead of progressing forwards, the narrative moves backwards through time, beginning with the moment of death and ending with the birth of Odilo Unverdorben. The critic James Diedrick has likened this temporal reversal to a film that is watched in the rewind mode.¹¹⁵ For example, people are depicted walking backwards, conversation begins at the end and ends at the beginning, rubbish is thrown back onto the street, and Tod Friendly’s work as a doctor results in his patients arriving without injuries and leaving with them. Consequently, we follow Tod/Odilo’s life from the outskirts of Boston to New York, through a number of unsuccessful relationships, to Europe in 1948, until we arrive at the scene of his crime, Auschwitz. Here, Odilo’s language changes from English into German, and he finally reacquires his status as perpetrator. The chronological reversal of time, according to Henke, causes a ‘bitter and rather cynical irony’ where ‘not only time is reversed, but so are all interpretations and moral judgements of the narrator’.¹¹⁶ The Holocaust is reversed and the cruel extinction of life turns into the creation of life. In effect, the novel turns the ‘killing-healing’ paradox backwards in order to emphasise the dysfunctional subjectivity of the perpetrator. The narrative voice which, as we shall see in the following, is the alter-ego of the perpetrator figure, misinterprets his actions at Auschwitz due to the temporal reversal:

Creation is easy. Also ugly. *Hier ist kein warum.* Here is no why. Here there is no when, no how, no where. Our preternatural purpose? To dream a race. To make people from weather. From thunder and from lightning. With gas, with electricity, with shit, with fire.¹¹⁷

¹¹⁴ Martin Amis, *Time’s Arrow*, p. 132.

¹¹⁵ James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 2004), p. 133.

¹¹⁶ Christoph Henke, ‘Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction’, p. 87.

¹¹⁷ Martin Amis, *Time’s Arrow*, p. 128.

This reversal of the historical context of the Holocaust, often seen as scandalous and shocking, is by no means designed to diminish the guilt of Nazi perpetration. Christoph Henke argues that, on the contrary, the temporal reversal of the Holocaust constructs an ‘alienation effect’, producing a discrepancy between the narrator’s reversed private memory and the reader’s knowledge of the Holocaust based on the cultural memory of the atrocities.¹¹⁸ In a way, the alter ego of the protagonist becomes a reoffender of the initial act of perpetration by misinterpreting the offence. Sue Vice argues that the narrator is actually the protagonist’s split ‘Auschwitz self’ and, by reinterpreting his former deeds in the novel’s reversed temporality, he tries to obliterate his own guilt.¹¹⁹ The conscious attempt by Odilo to forget his past as a perpetrator is thus reversed into a bizarre act of denial by his alter ego’s act of remembering. Odilo’s Nazi ideology is turned upside down by his alter ego, leading the latter to misinterpret the Nazi doctor’s preternatural purpose. The ideologically motivated action of exterminating the Jewish race by dreaming up an Aryan master race is inverted and misinterpreted. However, Amis can only commence with this experimental narrative because of the secure knowledge that the Holocaust has become a central aspect of Western cultural memory, leaving little doubt about the true nature of the protagonist as a Nazi perpetrator.

Time’s Arrow portrays not only a temporal inversion but also a disintegrated perpetrator identity. The novel uses the first-person perspective of the protagonist’s subconscious alter-ego. Erin McGlothlin argues that the protagonist’s voice is ‘from a narratological perspective, disjointed and diseased’.¹²⁰ The narrator states at the beginning of the novel that he is a part of Tod Friendly, ‘awash with his emotions’, yet split from his personality; he describes himself as ‘passenger or parasite’.¹²¹ As a consequence, the narrative ‘I’ has no concrete memories of the protagonist’s past but senses the feelings of ‘fear and shame’.¹²² After a lifetime of changing identities and attempts to forget his guilt-ridden perpetrator identity, Tod/Odilo’s memories of the horror he inflicted upon humanity are deeply buried in his subconscious. The narrative ‘I’, however, has no access to those hidden memories and thus travels back in time ‘on a terrible journey, towards a terrible secret’ in order to rediscover

¹¹⁸ Christoph Henke, ‘Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction’, p. 87.

¹¹⁹ Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction* (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), p. 35.

¹²⁰ Erin McGlothlin, *Theorizing the Perpetrator*, p. 20.

¹²¹ Martin Amis, *Time’s Arrow*, pp. 15 - 16.

¹²² Martin Amis, *Time’s Arrow*, p. 15.

them.¹²³ Consequently, while Tod/Odilo attempted to forget his past, trying to shed his former identity through his numerous name changes, the narrative ‘I’ begins his journey back in time in order to uncover the secrets that are haunting Tod/Odilo’s dreams. Indeed, the dreams provide the alter-ego with a sense of foreboding, as there is ‘another language’ in those dreams, and in them there appears a ‘figure in white coat and black boots’.¹²⁴ This foreboding suggests that the protagonist was not entirely successful in his attempt to suppress his memories of the Holocaust. The man in ‘white coat with black boots’ could refer either to Tod’s former self, or to the infamous Dr Mengele whom he assisted in his work in Auschwitz. The other language of Tod’s dreams is German, in contrast to the language of his current identity. This leads Sabine Birchall to conclude that the narrative ‘I’ takes up the role of a detective trying to solve the secret of his own forgotten past.¹²⁵ In this sense, the text is thereby comparable to other examples of ‘memory fiction’ considered in this thesis. The narrative ‘I’ is aware of his role as the one who remembers, while Tod has lived his life as an attempt to forget. Describing the journey backwards in time, the narrator states:

[h]e is travelling towards his secret. Parasite or passenger, I am travelling there with him. It will be bad. It will be bad, and not intelligible. But I will know one thing about it (and at least the certainty brings comfort): I *will* know *how* bad the secret is. I will know the nature of the offence.¹²⁶

It is here that the narrator reveals himself to be quintessentially unreliable; there is a clear discrepancy between his perverted misinterpretation of the act of perpetration, and his knowledge about the crime that has been committed. Thus, in his inverted view of the world, the narrative ‘I’ understands the memories that plague the perpetrator figure in his dreams as premonitions.¹²⁷ His own interpretation of the reversed time is thereby constantly interlaced with the subconscious feelings of guilt and fear that appear in Tod’s dreams. Finally, the identity of the narrative ‘I’ as the protagonist’s disassociated alter ego is well established in literary criticism. James Diedrick has examined the perpetrator figure’s split personality, attributing it to his

¹²³ Martin Amis, *Time’s Arrow*, p. 12.

¹²⁴ Martin Amis, *Time’s Arrow*, pp. 15 - 16.

¹²⁵ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 173.

¹²⁶ Martin Amis, *Time’s Arrow*, pp. 72 - 3.

¹²⁷ Christoph Henke, ‘Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction’, p. 88.

experience as a Nazi doctor in Auschwitz and at Schloss Hartheim.¹²⁸ Indeed, just as the notion of the ‘killing-healing’ paradox was adopted by Amis from Lifton, some critics, such as Sara Horowitz, argue that the idea of a split perpetrator identity is also taken from Lifton’s work. She writes that

Amis’s device gives symbiotic existence to Robert J. Lifton’s idea of the Nazi doctor’s second self. In his psychological exploration of Nazi physicians who facilitated death and atrocity in concentration camps, Lifton posits a splitting of the Nazi perpetrator into two distinct selves – what he refers to as normal and the Auschwitz self.¹²⁹

In other words, the splitting of the protagonist into a narrative ‘I’ who tries to remember and a protagonist who attempts to forget allegorically reproduces Lifton’s concept of doubling. Lifton’s argument is that the doubling of the personality results directly from the psychic pressure of perpetration. The Nazi doctors, according to Lifton, underwent a personality split, constructing a largely ‘normal’ self and a ‘perpetrator’ self. The so-called ‘normal’ self allows the perpetrator to switch back into ‘normal’ society, fulfilling various professional and private roles, while the ‘perpetrator’ self had to be ‘both autonomous and connected’ to the prior self in order to commit horrendous atrocities without scruple.¹³⁰ The logic of the reversal of time, however, also affects the idea of the split personality within the narrative. According to Lifton, the doubling of the personality occurred as a result of the atrocities committed, underlining the ‘healing-killing’ paradox under the Nazi regime. Within *Time’s Arrow*, however, the protagonist’s identity is split during the post-war era, with the narrative ‘I’ claiming that some ‘sort of bifurcation had occurred, in about 1960, or maybe even earlier’.¹³¹ Here the narrative acknowledges the split that has caused his existence, but remains ambiguous about the exact time of the occurrence of this double identity. The return to some kind of ‘normality’ is considered ‘abnormal’ by the narrator due to the inverted world of the plot. Thus, the temporal inversion causes the split personalities to merge at the time when the doubling should originally have occurred, namely during the protagonist’s time at Auschwitz. The rewinding of the protagonist’s lost memories takes the narrator from

¹²⁸ James Diedrick, *Understanding Martin Amis*, p. 138.

¹²⁹ Sara R. Horowitz, *Voicing the Void: Muteness and Memory in Holocaust Fiction* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 193.

¹³⁰ Robert Jay Lifton, *The Nazi Doctors. Medical Killing and the Psychology of Genocide* (New York: Basic Books, 1986), p. 419.

¹³¹ Martin Amis, *Time’s Arrow*, p. 107.

the United States back to Europe from whence he had fled after the war, until he finally arrives back at the scene of his crimes in Auschwitz. Here, for the first time, the narrative voice does not refer to Odilo in the third person but instead makes a point of using the first-person pronoun:

I, Odilo Unverdorben, arrived in Auschwitz Central somewhat precipitately and by motorbike, with a wide twirl or frill of slush and mud, shortly after the Bolsheviks had entertained their ignoble withdrawal. *Now*. Was there a secret passenger on the backseat of the bike, or in some imaginary sidecar? No, I was one. I was also in full uniform.¹³²

Throughout the narrator's experience of genocidal violence, he remains united within a harmonious and stable identity for whom the world is finally 'going to start making sense'.¹³³ This supports Sue Vice's interpretation that the narrative voice is, indeed, the perpetrator's former 'Auschwitz self' which has remained hidden going forward in time, due to the protagonist's conscious attempt to forget.¹³⁴ His constant shedding of names and identities until he becomes Tod Friendly is, of course, designed to protect him from detection. However, it also helps him to forget the past and literally to become someone else. His conscious act of forgetting is described within the novel 'not as a process of erosion and waste, but as an activity'.¹³⁵ This act of forgetting, however, was never completely successful, and at the end of Tod's life his alter ego appears, in the form of the narrative 'I', following the arrow back in time and back to the scene of the horrendous offence against humanity. Due to the reversal of private memory into a rewinding motion, the narrative 'I' misunderstands his experience of perpetration, claiming to be involved in creating a race rather than exterminating it. Nevertheless, the text provides essential evidence that now links the newly reunited first-person narrator with horrendous acts of perpetration, underscored by a strong belief in the Nazi ideology of the master-race. For example, he describes his superior Dr Mengele as 'someone godlike – someone who could turn this world around', illustrating the Nazis' strong belief in racial superiority.¹³⁶ Furthermore, the narrator stresses his involvement in the Holocaust by again making

¹³² Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 124.

¹³³ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 124.

¹³⁴ Sue Vice, *Holocaust Fiction*, p. 35.

¹³⁵ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 89.

¹³⁶ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 127.

a point of using the first-person pronoun in connection with the genocide. He claims that it was

I, Odilo Unverdorben, who personally removed the pellets of Zyklon B and entrusted them to the pharmacist in his white coat. Next, the façade of the Sprinklerroom, the function of whose spouts and nozzles [...] was merely to reassure and not, alas, to cleanse [...].¹³⁷

This confession leaves the reader with no doubt about the true nature of the protagonist's involvement in the atrocities and his awareness of the perpetration, despite the narrator's revisionist interpretation of his inverted memories. His enthusiasm for what he describes as our 'preternatural purpose' suggests a deeply disturbed and ideologically tainted perpetrator identity that finally comes to the fore after several decades of active forgetting. Thus, despite the reversal of memory, the Nazi perpetrator figure is highly vivid and recognisable. After every reversed description turning the narrator's cruel behaviour into the opposite, the text provides evidence highlighting the unreliability of the narrator. For example, he describes the brutal and blatant act of stealing from the largely Jewish victims as an act of German charity in his reversal of memory:

But every German present, even the humblest, gave willingly of his own store – [...]. I *knew* my gold had a sacred efficacy. All those years I amassed it, and polished it with my mind: for the Jews' teeth.¹³⁸

The reader immediately recognises this blatant misinterpretation of the historical context due to his or her knowledge of the cultural memory of the Holocaust, and it throws into relief the brutal and cruel acts of perpetration committed by the protagonist. Indeed, a few sentences later, the narrator admits that there was 'a patina of cruelty, intense cruelty, as if creation corrupts'.¹³⁹ This admission leaves the suggestion open that the narrator is, after all, aware of the reality of the camp and the cruelty of his past deeds. In the end, he cannot escape from his own memories, and if the reversal of time is an attempt to undo his past, it is safe to say that he does not succeed. By remembering the atrocities in reverse, the narrator effectively recommits his original crimes and exposes himself as a perpetrator figure. The reversal of memory is designed to provide the perpetrator self with a surreal justification for his

¹³⁷ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 129.

¹³⁸ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 130.

¹³⁹ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 130.

deeds, but in fact it merely betrays his perpetrator identity. Ironically, while Odilo tries to suppress the memory of his 'Auschwitz' identity for most of his post-war life, in the end he is forced to reacquaint himself with his former self-wearing a white coat and black boots at Auschwitz.

One of the most interesting aspects of Odilo's perpetrator is the fact of his Anglo-German origin: he was born of an English mother and German father.¹⁴⁰ During his fugitive years in the United States, he is able to speak English without a hint of an accent:

Now John looked away shyly and said, 'My mother ...'

Kreditor seemed interested. 'That's a plus for us'.

'My first language'.

'Hey that's right, I remember. You're the one with no accent'.¹⁴¹

Thus, the identity of the perpetrator figure becomes even more complicated than his constant name changes suggest. His use of language plays a significant role in the text, with English quite literally being his 'mother' tongue and German being the language that haunts him.¹⁴² During his journey back in time, his use of German gradually becomes more prominent until, to his astonishment, 'German crashed out' after his arrival at Auschwitz.¹⁴³ German thereby remains the language of perpetration. However, the perpetrator's identity is complex, and his bi-lingualism as well as his ability to adapt to his new life in the United States without difficulty suggests that it is not solely rooted in a German national context. As a consequence, the perpetrator figure in *Time's Arrow* is not simply a representation of a typical German Nazi as one can find in earlier texts such as C.S. Forester's *The Nightmare*. In Odilo Unverdorben, the novel depicts an 'internationalised' perpetrator figure combining his German and Anglo-Saxon heritage. Some might argue that this is an attempt to reinforce the perpetrator's split personality, creating a German perpetrator identity and a detached Anglo-Saxon identity that might be able to feel remorse for the atrocities committed. Such an interpretation, however, would be unjust to the

¹⁴⁰ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 166.

¹⁴¹ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 82.

¹⁴² Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 178.

¹⁴³ Martin Amis, *Time's Arrow*, p. 125.

complex nature of Amis's perpetrator figure. In an interview, the author explains his motivation for choosing to represent the perpetrators rather than the victims:

People say, legitimately in a way, what am I as an Aryan doing with this subject? But I'm writing not about the Jews, I'm writing about the perpetrators, and they are my brothers, if you like. I feel a kind of responsibility in my Aryanness for what happened. That is my racial link with these events, not with the sufferers but with the perpetrators.¹⁴⁴

Here Amis explains, in his often typically critical and provocative manner, that his English identity does not allow him to write about the victims, but rather forces him to explore the role of the perpetrators. This suggests that it is by no means a coincidence that the perpetrator memories portrayed in *Time's Arrow* provide a link to a particularly English or Anglo-Saxon identity. In doing so, the novel offers a perspective that does not allow the reader to explore perpetration as a solely German phenomenon but instead invites a rather more critical view of shared responsibility. The disturbing memories of the Holocaust perpetrator are thereby inscribed into the wider context of Anglo-Saxon collective memories as a warning for the future.¹⁴⁵

¹⁴⁴ Eleanor Wachtel, 'Eleanor Wachtel with Martin Amis: *Interview*', in *Malahat Review*, 114 (March 1996), 43 – 58, (p. 47).

¹⁴⁵ Martin Amis is by no means the only British author who represents an association with collective memories of guilt and perpetration. Ian McEwan emphasises this point in his novel *Black Dogs* when Jeremy visits Madjanek concentration camp and cannot help himself but to associate with the perpetrator rather than the victims. Furthermore, Kazuo Ishiguro explores memories of culpability in his acclaimed novel *The Remains of the Day* and I have already referred to those popular alternative histories such as Len Deighton's *SS-GB* and Owen Sheers' novel *Resistance* imagining British collaboration and perpetration.

4.2.2 Guilt in British Fiction

There are other texts which focus on the issues of memory that have been marginalised by the narrative of the ‘good war’. Graham Swift’s novel *Out of this World* (1988) is primarily told through the alternating voices of Harry Beech, a former photo-journalist who gained fame by depicting the horror of war zones, and his estranged daughter Sophie. Their relationship breaks down because of their different memories of their father and grandfather Robert Beech, a hero of the First World War and owner of the *Beech Munitions Factory* who was killed by a terrorist attack during the Northern Ireland conflict. Sophie remembers her grandfather fondly as the person who looked after her while her father was travelling from one war zone to another. Harry’s memories of his father, on the other hand, are largely negative, due to his role in supplying the incendiary bombs used during the aerial bombardment of Germany during the Second World War. The novel explores the very different memories of a man who won the Victoria Cross in the trenches, was congratulated by Mr Churchill on ‘his production achievement’ manufacturing bombs for the RAF, and who was killed by the IRA, ironically, by a bomb.¹⁴⁶ On the one hand, Robert Beech is the embodiment of a British war hero who first fought valiantly in the trenches and then contributed a great deal to the unified effort of the ‘People’s War’. His son Harry, however, views his father’s contribution far more critically after his wartime experience as an analyst of aerial reconnaissance.

I looked down with a privilege no pilot ever had on target after target. [...] I learnt to distinguish the marks of destruction - the massive ruptures of 4,000-pounders from the blisters of 1,000-pounders and the mere pock-marks of 250-pound clusters – and to translate these two-dimensional images, which were the records of three-dimensional facts, into one-dimensional formulae – tonnage dropped as against acreage devastated, acreage destroyed as against acreage attacked (the tallies never included ‘people’, ‘homes’) – while someone in the hierarchical clouds above me refined these figures into the ethereal concept known as ‘progress of operations’.¹⁴⁷

Harry’s role as an analyst allows him to become an eye-witness of the large-scale destruction of German cities caused by the RAF tactics of aerial bombardment. The fact that his father actively supports this destruction by manufacturing the bombs that

¹⁴⁶ Graham Swift, *Out of this World* (London: Picador, 1997), p. 89.

¹⁴⁷ Graham Swift, *Out of this World*, p. 47.

are dropped force Harry to re-evaluate his relationship with his father and to turn down the opportunity to follow him into the munitions business. This critical view of the British tactics and his father's role in supplying the munitions intensifies when Harry himself joins the air-crews on the attacks in his role as photographer. Rather than analysing the effects of the bombing runs, he now witnesses their full horror.

So I went round the bases. And up (oh, just a few hellish times) at night with the crews. I flew. Saw. The whole works. Flak and tracer and vomit and kerosene and rear-gunners turned into meat. The photos on the desks, under the lamps and magnifiers, came alive and polychrome (so I could turn them into photos again), and I watched the light show of Dresden burning, far below, in the dark.

Half my pictures, of course, they buried. You aren't supposed to see, let alone put on visual record, *those* things. [...] But what I'd say is that someone has to look. Someone has to be a witness.¹⁴⁸

Thus, Harry's wartime experience and his documentation of it becomes one of the central themes within the text, influencing his personal development as well as emphasising the divergence between his personal memories of the war and his father, and the national narratives of memory. His experience reinforces his decision to become a photographic journalist documenting the terror of war and preserving these images within public memory. However, the scene also demonstrates that this has clearly not happened with regards to the British bombing campaign against Germany. The notion that the people are not supposed to see the tremendous destruction indirectly highlights the mediated nature of Britain's 'good war' narrative that feeds popular national collective memories of the war. Harry's pictures documenting the scale of the destruction and the death of civilians are suppressed beneath the narrative of victory. His father, on the other hand, who supported the strategy, turns into a hero of both World Wars, and any criticism by his son is countered by the morally questionable assumption that someone has to make the bombs.¹⁴⁹ Harry's critique of the British strategy of aerial bombardment is reinforced by his feeling of guilt at finding personal happiness with his future wife Anna within the ruins of Nuremberg during the period of the Nazi trials, when every day there are new revelations about German atrocities:

¹⁴⁸ Graham Swift, *Out of this World*, p. 49.

¹⁴⁹ Graham Swift, *Out of this World*, p. 48.

To be happy in Nuremberg! To fall in love in Nuremberg! In that city of guilt and grief and retribution, to think of only one face, one pair of eyes, one body.¹⁵⁰

Harry's feelings of guilt intensify further when his wife is taken from him in an accident; again he blames himself for having found love amongst the ruins and the stories of atrocities. Swift's text ably mixes the private memories of the Beech family with the collective memories of events of great historical consequence. Harry's role as a collector of images of war which bear witness to its terrible and traumatic consequences is shaped by his experience of the British bombing campaign during the Second World War. His critical view of this strategy has two separate functions within the narrative framework of the novel. On the one hand, it explains his conflicted relationship to his father and, on the other hand, it serves to de-mystify the memory of Britain's 'good' war. The novel thereby demonstrates that the collective memories of the British war experience have allowed his father to remain a heroic figure, while Harry's critical perspective highlights those traumatic memories of the war that have been forgotten and thus did not enter the narrative of national memory. This critical view is, however, set in opposition to his daughter's memories of the Beech family life. Sophie has a great deal of empathy with her grandfather and remembers his traumatic war experience and mourns his murder in the terrorist attack. In the end, both sets of memories are shown to be unreliable because they are marred by emotions towards the grandfather. Harry's cynical view of the past and Sophie's nostalgic memories result in their estrangement, and only at the end of the novel, when both characters question their own memories, is a harmonisation of their relationship possible.¹⁵¹

In 2007, A. L. Kennedy's novel *Day* turned its attention to the memories of the bombing war against Germany. Its protagonist is Alfred Day, who survived the war in a German Prisoner of War camp after serving as a tail-gunner in an RAF bomber squadron. The RAF presented Alfred with an escape route from his abusive father and victimised mother and the prospects of a working-class life in rural Staffordshire. After joining up, he adapts quickly to the highly regulated life and becomes part of a crew that eventually grows together into a new kind of family. After the war, Day, who is the only survivor, finds it difficult to readjust to civilian

¹⁵⁰ Graham Swift, *Out of this World*, p. 133.

¹⁵¹ Sabine Birchall, *Erinnerung und Kollektive Identitäten. Zur Wahrnehmung der Kriegsvorgänge im englischen Roman der Gegenwart*, p. 246.

life working in a bookshop in London. The novel introduces him to the reader in the early post-war era, engaged in a surreal attempt to come to terms with his loss. He has become an extra in a film production, reliving his imprisonment. Although mainly told from a third-person perspective, the text is interlaced with Day's first-person thoughts and memories of wartime. The 'fake' prisoner-of-war camp thereby becomes a bizarre *aide memoire* for Day, who ventures on a journey of personal memory in order to explain his feelings of guilt and his inability to re-enter society:

[...] sit down on the clean, fake steps of some other clean, fake hut and realise you were tearful, ached, because the pretend camp, pretend fences, pretend guards – they had been what you wanted. The bastard thing had made you miss it.¹⁵²

Back in the fake camp he realises that he misses the war because it gave him a sense of purpose and identity. However, this fictional reconstruction of the war not only serves as a reminder of Day's wartime experience, it also shows the constructed nature of the British wartime myth and of the media of cultural memory. All the extras Day encounters during the production of the film assume roles that are very different from their real wartime experiences. In this way, the cinematic representation of the camp is constantly undermined as a 'fake'. Day refers to one of the Germans who is 'hired to play a stern but ridiculous *Unteroffizier*' as the 'Good German'.¹⁵³ The 'good' German confesses to Day that he was classified as 'a grey – not white, not black – a grey person' during the de-Nazification process after he was shown the 'photographs and films' of the Nazi atrocities.¹⁵⁴ Some of the German guards are played by 'displaced people', amongst whom is the Ukrainian Vasyl, reveals himself as having been a Latvian member of the SS who committed a number of atrocities. Vasyl confesses to Day, coldly and without remorse, that

I killed all types – they don't expect you will do it, don't really expect, or anticipate? Believe. They don't want to. We are unbelievable for them. Is that a better word? If they don't understand us – sometimes this is why we can kill them. Some, I think, did begin to understand. Some few, they realise – turn into us and then you'll live. But you'll be us. [sic]¹⁵⁵

¹⁵² A. L. Kennedy, *Day* (London: Jonathan Cape, 2007), p. 19.

¹⁵³ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 162.

¹⁵⁴ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 163.

¹⁵⁵ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 227.

Thus, nothing is quite what it seems within the imitation of the wartime camp: all the inhabitants have a different past to the one portrayed in the movie. Consequently, the narrative introduces a clear discrepancy between the personal memories of the cast and the collective memories that are created in the movie. The German who plays the *Unteroffizier* is in reality a ‘good’ German because he is a ‘grey’ person and, to a certain degree, a victim because he is from Hamburg where his family died during the bombing raids. The Ukrainian Vasyl who is considered as a ‘displaced person’ and thus a victim of the war is in reality a perpetrator who is not German but Latvian. Here, the novel introduces a perpetrator figure into the midst of characters who are neither black nor white but grey. Vasyl’s perverse understanding that, in order to avoid becoming a victim, one has to become a perpetrator, is used by him as a cynical explanation for his atrocities. He even goes as far as to compare himself to Day when he argues

[t]his is the real truth – we don’t die. People like you and me, Alfred. It’s the other ones that die. We kill them.¹⁵⁶

Day is disgusted by this suggestion and, despite his feelings of guilt about his role in the destruction of German cities and the loss of his crew, he attempts to differentiate himself from Vasyl and the atrocities he committed. He consults a British official to inform him about Vasyl’s true identity and the atrocious acts he confessed to. Yet the official ignores his accusations, explaining that Britain needs to rehouse people in order to rebuild and prepare for the next conflict with the Soviet Union.

You have to remember, Mr Day, that Britain lost a great many people in the last war. [...] We need population. We need a healthy birth rate and good stock. Now either that comes from the colonies and refugees whose cultures are very unlike our own, or we take lads like your Vasyl, who were misled in their youth, and we live in a country that stays Christian and white. [...] I follow the line which is the government line. We must think of the future, not the past.¹⁵⁷

So the perpetrator is allowed to enter Britain, and begin a new life. The fact that he can do this, and that he is not prosecuted, rather calls into question Britain’s ‘good war’. Moreover, the reason for allowing Vasyl and his comrades to enter Britain is overtly racial, giving the impression that the British authorities would rather allow Aryan perpetrators to rebuild the country than members of other ethnicities from the

¹⁵⁶ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 229.

¹⁵⁷ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 263.

colonies who will have fought Nazi Germany alongside Britain. The effectiveness of the Nuremberg trials and the process of denazification are questioned, as some of the perpetrators, such as Vasyl, are not being made accountable for their actions. The narrative clearly introduces uncomfortable memories which have been ignored by public memory discourses. Indeed, this incident forces Day to question his own involvement in the war, and his feelings of loss and guilt intensify:

Maybe I never did exactly know what I was fighting for, but it fucking wasn't that.

*Grass should grow across the whole damn pack of us, clear us away.*¹⁵⁸

This questionable policy of prosecuting some perpetrators and letting others get away, depending on their usefulness for the Allied victor, is a subject that is also taken up in Robert Edric's historical novel *The Kingdom of Ashes* (2007). British authors are slowly introducing critical and uncomfortable facts about the post-war policies of the Allies into the domain of public memory discourse. While these revelations do not render the memories of the 'good war' entirely invalid, they do introduce other marginalised memories that provide more multifaceted collective memories of the war.

Day's comparison with Vasyl has another important function within the narrative. It emphasises Day's own feelings of trauma and guilt with regards to his personal wartime experience in the RAF. During his period as an extra in the fake POW camp, Day is haunted by memories of the bombing raids he took part in, and his interpretation becomes increasingly critical as well as infused by personal guilt. However, the novel does not engage in historical revisionism by suggesting that he is as guilty as the perpetrator figure Vasyl. There are clear moral boundaries between the protagonist and the perpetrator figure, demonstrated by Day's immense dislike for the Latvian and his emotional rendering of traumatic memories. Yet clearly he feels intense guilt because of the bombing raids and the fact that he is the only survivor of his crew.¹⁵⁹ He displays survivor's guilt when reflecting on his close friendship to his crew members:

¹⁵⁸ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 263. (original emphasis)

¹⁵⁹ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 39.

[...] you do realise that some night your crew will most probably get the chop. [...] But naturally the mercy is that when they go you'll be there with them: dying too.¹⁶⁰

Yet he did not die with the rest of his crew but survived. His return to Germany brings back the memories of his wartime past, and he contemplates things '*that you should never remember*'.¹⁶¹ He begins to remember not only the terror and fear he experienced on the bombing raids, but also the doubts about their effectiveness. Thus, his present-day existence in the fake POW camp is interlaced with his memories of the past, as when he recalls conversations with his navigator about the problems in finding the right target:

'And if I'm out by a mile, who else is out by a mile? What am I dropping my bombs on? Am I right? How often are we right? And if we are not right...'

'We do our best'.¹⁶²

However, it becomes increasingly clear that their 'best' was not necessarily good enough, and that the excuses he and the rest of the crew hid behind are not necessarily valid, given the scale of the destruction. He remembers the senseless loss of two crews in a failed bombing raid which destroyed an 'orphanage' instead of the intended target.¹⁶³ He also recalls his discussions with his former boss, Ivor, who worked in the fire services in London during the Blitz.

'Oh, yes. What did you do in the war? Because I was on the ground, cleaning up after bastards like you, putting out the fires, lifting out the bodies and the bits of bodies'. [...] 'You were cleaning up after Germans, not bastards like me'.

'And your bombs were different, were they? When they landed? Opened up and rained down chocolates for the kiddies, did they?'¹⁶⁴

The personal memories of the protagonist increasingly force him to re-evaluate his past in bomber command. The consequences of the British strategy of aerial bombardment become ever clearer while Day is passing his time helping to create a filmic representation of the same war. Yet the film itself does not represent these

¹⁶⁰ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 39.

¹⁶¹ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 23. (original emphasis)

¹⁶² A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 167.

¹⁶³ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 167.

¹⁶⁴ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 145.

horrific memories that are returning to plague the protagonist. The novel thus demonstrates the divergence between the protagonist's increasingly critical view of his own personal memories and the construction of more positive wartime memories in the film. Furthermore, it is the old bookseller Ivor who recognises that Day is, after all, suffering from guilt with regards to his wartime past, arguing that he 'definitely saw it. Passing like a tiny cloud. Definite guilt'.¹⁶⁵ His guilt is intensified by his memories of the last two bombing raids in which he and his crew took part before their plane was shot down. It so happened that these were the raids on Hamburg, and the worst Day has ever witnessed as he remembers the incredible destruction caused.

And slowly, slowly as you arc there is the shape of what you've done – a twist of fire – a whole new kind of fire – one solid flame that sees you and gives you a name that is no name, no word – christens you outside words.

[...] Imagining the war must be over tomorrow. It must surely be done after this. Who could stand this? [...] This is death. This is the edge of the real face of death, its size – we burned the sky open today and now death will come in.

*Trip twenty-six.*¹⁶⁶

Day's personal memories of the immense destruction caused by the British bombing strategy are clearly a major part of the character's search for his post-war identity. He needs to come to terms with his own guilt and the feeling of senselessness after returning to his civilian life as the only survivor of his crew. However, his personal traumatic memories are placed in opposition to the filming of an uplifting wartime story that portrays the fate of the British POWs. In the end, the destruction witnessed by Day and the often senseless death of his comrades have not entered the main narrative of British national memory. He becomes part of a representation in which '[n]obody seemed much concerned with the past'.¹⁶⁷ Indeed, the focus on the future results in the guilt of the perpetrators being ignored when their contribution to this future is needed, as is the case with Vasyl. This fact enhances Day's feelings of the senselessness of the destruction that has been caused by the bombings and the deaths of his comrades.

¹⁶⁵ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 204.

¹⁶⁶ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 236 - 7. (original emphasis)

¹⁶⁷ A.L. Kennedy, *Day*, p. 259.

4.3 Conclusion

In Beyer's novel, the reader is invited to follow the development of Karnau from a collaborator to a Nazi perpetrator. In a sense, Karnau is hardly an ordinary Nazi perpetrator, as his obsession with the science of human sounds is intrinsically pathological, placing him within the realm of mental abnormality. Beyer's perpetrator is not the 'ordinary' German, but neither are his motivations necessarily political or even anti-Semitic. Although Beyer represents some of the leading Nazi leaders within *Flughunde*, he only does so through the narrative perspective of his other characters. The novel consequently refuses its readers any sustained access to the subjectivity of infamous Nazi perpetrators. Karnau himself remains a perpetrator figure, understood in terms of his abnormal obsession with his scientific beliefs. He becomes an almost psychotic figure whose allegiance to the Nazi cause is driven by the benefits he gains for his scientific work rather than a strong ideology. In this respect, the perpetrator figure becomes easier to grasp, as his motives are beyond the normal and are instead driven by his obsession. Yet Beyer manages to convey a paradoxical 'abnormal normality' in the figure of Karnau, which is also inherent in the wider moral framework of the Third Reich. It would be wrong to dismiss the figure of Karnau as a single case on the grounds of his eccentric obsession. Beyer ably demonstrates how the Nazi regime caused people to develop from collaborators into perpetrators. His novel emphasises that the inhumanity of the Nazi state has caused a dissolution of basic moral boundaries that was used by many of the so-called collaborators to suit their own needs. This eventually leads Karnau into the realm of cruel and brutal experimentation on humans, serving his own purpose as well as that of the Nazi genocide. The novel demonstrates how the inhumane Nazi system allowed certain people to become perpetrators, but it falls short of accessing the consciousness of the Nazi perpetrators who conceived the genocide. Furthermore, Beyer's novel has to be read in the context of present-day memory debates on perpetration. The novel is a fictional representation of cultural memory debates in the wake of publications such as Goldhagen's *Hitler's Willing Executioners* and Browning's *Ordinary Men*.

The same can be said about Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* in its representation of the concentration camp guard Hanna Schmitz. Here, the portrayal of the perpetrator is filtered through the memories of the narrator Michael, who is a

member of the post-war generation. The representation of the perpetrator is thus intermingled with the narrator's own feelings of guilt and shame based on his emotional relationship to Hanna. Daniel Reynolds rightly emphasises that Schlink 'has presented us with an unreliable narrator' who attempts to defend Hanna on the basis of her illiteracy.¹⁶⁸ The perpetrator in Schlink's novel remains obscure as the reader only learns about Hanna through the interpretation and the memories of the narrator. Michael's understanding is influenced by the discrepancy between his public knowledge of the enormous crimes of which Hanna is a part and his emotional personal memories of his relationship to her. The novel is consequently less concerned with the representation of the perpetrator figure but rather with the question of how these perpetrators and the issue of German perpetration is remembered by later generations.

This is an important issue that characterises a great many contemporary German memory texts. The question of how the perpetrator should be understood and remembered in contemporary German memory discourses is addressed in diverse texts such as Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel Meines Bruders*, Thomas Medicus' *In den Augen meines Großvaters*, Ulla Hahn's *Unschärfe Bilder*, and Marcel Beyer's *Spione*. All of these novels, including Schlink's *Der Vorleser*, deal with the problems posed by issues of intergenerational conflict, the emotional bias of private family memories, and its contrast to wider frameworks of public memories. Niven argues that these writers

combine their examination of generational (mis)representations of the Nazi past with an attempt to understand Nazi perpetrators in terms of their own personal motivations and circumstances, and in terms of the moral, social and intellectual universes in which they became perpetrators.¹⁶⁹

Consequently, texts such as *Der Vorleser* and *Flughunde* show that the actual representation of the perpetrator is far less relevant for contemporary German memory novels today than the critical examination of the memories of perpetration. The emphasis lies on the issues of how the concept of perpetration is remembered within German collective memory.

¹⁶⁸ Daniel Reynolds, 'A Portrait of Misreading: Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser*', in *Seminar – A Journal of Germanic Studies*, 39. 3 (September 2003), 238 – 256, (p. 253).

¹⁶⁹ Bill Niven, 'Representations of the Nazi past I: perpetrators', p. 140.

The British texts discussed in this chapter also demonstrate an interest in the nature of Nazi perpetration. It seems to be that with the internationalisation of the Holocaust, the interest in Nazi perpetration and the question of how such a crime could have been possible has also entered the British collective memory of the war. Amis creates a perpetrator figure in *Time's Arrow* who clearly shows aspects of an Anglo-German identity and thereby opens the discourse of perpetration across national boundaries. Furthermore, there are parallels between Amis's perpetrator figure and that of Beyer as both are scientists. Consequently, both novels convey aspects of Lifton's 'killing-healing' paradox in their portrayal of two characters whose original profession for the benefit of humanity is reversed into the opposite. The significant difference is that the figure of Odilo Unverdorben demonstrates notions of Nazi ideology and thinking while Karnau does not. Nevertheless, the theme of the perverted role-reversal from scientist or physician to mass murderer is common to both texts.

Both Swift's and Kennedy's novels deal with uncomfortable British memories of the aerial bombing campaign against Germany. Together with novels such as Kazuo Ishiguro's *The Remains of the Day* (1989) and Michael Frayn's *Spies* (2002), which both deal with issues of culpability and the horror of the British bombing campaign, they provide evidence that recent British memory fiction has been incorporating previously marginalised memory discourses.¹⁷⁰ They respond to the strong public memory of the 'good' war by introducing private memories which add a new dimension to the accepted narrative of cultural memory; and they reinscribe uncomfortable memories of guilt, fear and horror into a memory discourse that has, so far, emphasised the positive aspects of the British victory in the war. On another level, however, the narrative voices in these novels are often exposed as being unreliable and faulty. Thus, the texts also emphasise the problems inherent in both cultural and individual constructions of memory.

The novels discussed in this chapter illustrate that there is a significant literary interest in the difficult notion of Nazi perpetration. Reflections on the nature of Nazi perpetration, such as how it could have been possible, and the problems of representing such a sensitive subject are inherent within the literary strategies of the

¹⁷⁰ There are other British novels which introduce wartime memories by previously marginalised groups. Thus, both Andrea Levy's *Small Island* (2004) and Zadie Smith's *White Teeth* (2000) reflect on the wartime memories of non-white colonial subjects and their contribution to the British war effort.

texts. Robert Eaglestone, claims in his work *The Holocaust and the Postmodern*, that fictional representations of the Holocaust are less relevant for memory studies than, for example, testimonies.¹⁷¹ He justifies his claim by referring to the reading experience of a novel, which often demands a greater process of identification on the part of the reader.¹⁷² Testimonies are certainly very effective in transporting first-hand memories and experiences to the reader. Fiction, however, has the ability to create a dialogue between opposed ideas and to test processes of remembering within its narrative framework. Both forms of representation, therefore, have their advantages without our having to impart greater importance to one or another. Nevertheless, Eaglestone raises an important point about the problematic notion of identification. Fiction does achieve a degree of identification causing difficult questions regarding with whom or what one should identify. It is difficult to identify with the victims because their fate and suffering is incomprehensible and it is ethically highly questionable to identify or seek identification with the bystanders or perpetrators. According to Eaglestone, this tension between fiction's demand to identify with the characters or the narrative and the demand of the Holocaust that we could not or should not achieve this identification causes an unbalance.¹⁷³ Yet, as the examples in this chapter illustrate, the need to represent issues of perpetration and guilt in British and German fiction exists and the authors discussed do use a number of strategies to counter the problem of identification in their representation of perpetrators. In Beyer's *Fulghunde* we encounter the portrayal of the 'abnormal normality' in the pathological character of Karnau. It is difficult to identify with someone who is abnormally obsessed with his research into the rather abstract field of sound. Yet his development from bystander to perpetrator is one that was rather typical within Nazi Germany. *Der Vorleser* portrays Hanna through the perspective of the narrative voice. While we may or may not identify with Michael's post-war perspective, there is little chance of identifying with Hanna, as her motives and her subjectivity are barely described. In other words, both Beyer and Schlink use perpetrator figures which are very difficult to identify with. Even Martin Amis's provocative portrayal of the perpetrator figure protects the reader from identifying too closely with the narrative voice. The split personality of the narrator does not allow

¹⁷¹ Robert Eaglestone, pp. 131 – 2.

¹⁷² Robert Eaglestone. p. 132.

¹⁷³ Robert Eaglestone. p. 132.

us access to the main perpetrator identity. We follow Odilo's alter ego on his bizarre journey back into his own past on the premise that there is only little understanding of the true nature of his offence. The outcome of this journey into memory, as thought-provoking and shocking as it is, does not require a great deal of identification. Indeed, I would like to argue that *Time's Arrow* alienates the reader from the narrative voice. I would like to argue that these are deliberate literary strategies employed by the authors to prevent their representation of perpetrators to become morbid and ethically questionable. This is achieved by creating 'barriers' between the perpetrator identities, whether through alienation or by employing different narrative perspectives, and the readers. The novels thereby reflect the difficult balance of representing perpetrator figures and readability.

Chapter Five

Conclusion: Towards a Pluralist Memory of the Second World War in Fiction

A guiding premise of this thesis has been the ongoing preoccupation of contemporary British and German literary writing with the aftermath of the Second World War. The ‘memory’ boom that has swept through many cultural, social, and scientific discourses in Europe and beyond has led to a greater emphasis on aspects of collective memories in relation to the conflict. Prose fiction, like all modes of signification, incorporates the discourses that exist outside the literary field within a symbolic field of representation. This includes the shift away from history towards memory and subsequently towards questions of identity.¹ Furthermore, the primary texts chosen for comparison within this thesis demonstrate that the war and its aftermath is still prominent in British as well as German contemporary fiction, even though it is now over sixty years since the conflict changed the face of the modern world. Regardless of which role an individual or, indeed, the parents and grandparents of post-war generations had during the conflict, the many different issues ranging from perpetration, culpability, and passivity through to heroism, fear, trauma, and victimhood are still being felt throughout social frameworks within Britain and Germany alike. This is particularly the case within contemporary British and German prose fiction of the last decades.

Our authors’ interest in the legacy of the Second World War on its own is not of particular significance. After all, there have been a multitude of British and German literary texts representing the conflict from the early post-war period up to today. War novels have depicted the immediacy of the battlefield experience, such as Lothar Buchheim’s *Das Boot*, Willi Heinrich’s *Cross of Iron*, Derek Robinson’s *Damned Good Show*, and Len Deighton’s *Bomber*, to name but just a few. Furthermore, there have been a number of novels such as the *Danzig* trilogy by Günter Grass, the *Sword of Honour* trilogy by Evelyn Waugh, and Elizabeth Bowen’s novel about her experience of the Blitz, *The Heat of the Day*. All of these

¹ See Christoph Henke, ‘Remembering Selves, Constructing Selves. Memory and Identity in Contemporary British Fiction’, p. 77.

novels are examples of early post-war as well as contemporary fiction which deal with the war and its aftermath. Nevertheless, there is a clear demarcation line between the above authors and their works and the fictional texts compared in this thesis. This can be explained by the generational shift that has occurred, as the authors of the texts and in many cases the characters depicted in the texts have no direct experience of the conflict. Consequently, the representation of historical wartime events, such as in war novels, is no longer central to the narratives compared in this thesis. Moreover, the focus of these texts, British and German alike, is on the perception of the past within present-day discourses, and the texts thus focus on diverse aspects of collective memories and identities. The generational shift that can be observed in the novels analysed here not only brings the authors to focus more prominently on aspects of collective memories, but also allows them to view the war from a distinctively present-day perspective. Issues that might have been absent or less noticeable in the texts of the eye-witness generations, such as the critical perspective on the strategy of aerial bombing, the suffering of the civil population, and the problematic memories of Holocaust perpetrators, have entered the list of topics that are critically addressed by the *memory fictions* depicted in this thesis.

The comparative analysis of these British and German examples of ‘memory’ fiction reveals a diverse representation of aspects of memory and identity in relation to the war. Nevertheless, there are a number of recognisable similarities that seem characteristic of much of contemporary *memory fiction* in Britain and Germany. These similarities, of course, have to be seen within the largely different national memory cultures that have developed in Britain and Germany with regards to the role both countries played during the war. First, all the novels draw attention to processes of remembering, whether in the private and public spheres or both. The generational shift from the eye-witness to the post-war generations has led to a process of anamnesis in which the recovery of lost memories plays a pivotal role.² This reflects the common situation in which ‘protagonists are themselves engaged in looking back on past events from the vantage point of the present’.³ As I have shown in this thesis, *The Song Before It Is Sung*, *Black Dogs*, *Spione*, and *In den Augen meines Großvaters* all deal with the recovery of lost memories using an investigative

² Victoria Stewart, ‘The big war outside and the little war at home: Anamnesis and the Second World War in recent British fiction’, p. 210.

³ Victoria Stewart, ‘The big war outside and the little war at home: Anamnesis and the Second World War in recent British fiction’, p. 209.

narrative style akin to detective novels. In doing so, they highlight the crucial link between personal memories of the past and identity formation as well as the protagonists' attempt to create a usable past through their postmemorial engagement. This specific process of remembering displays an acute awareness of the problematic status of memories of traumatic events as sources for the protagonist's investigation. The memory traces on which the protagonists base their construction of a usable past are often unreliable and distorted. The novels remind their readers that the memories constructed within the narrative frameworks are often problematic themselves and based on present-day needs rather than authentic historical facts.

Furthermore, I have established that both British and German contemporary 'memory' fictions show the problematic relationship between private family memories and public collective memories. The German authors Uwe Timm, Dagmar Leupold, and, to a degree, Ulla Hahn emphasise this problematic relationship by introducing the notion of 'empathy' with the suffering of the wartime generation. However, this notion is not used to create a kind of 'cumulative heroisation' as described by Harald Welzer and others.⁴ They all present the notion of memories of private suffering in relation to the public memory discourses of German perpetration, using the latter as a counterpoise. None of them renders the dominant aspects of perpetrator-centred memory irrelevant, but they rather employ them in order critically to assess the memories of German suffering that are becoming ever more established within German memory culture. British authors such as Graham Swift, Liz Jensen and Ian McEwan also highlight the problematic relationship between private and public forms of collective memories. Here, however, the emphasis is more on the marginalisation of some individual memories in the prevailing national memory of the 'good war'. Both *Shuttlecock* and *War Crimes for the Home* can be seen as attempts to introduce private memories of suffering and guilt into the wider discourse of national memory. Ultimately, these attempts remain unsuccessful: in Swift's case, the protagonist Prentis decides to uphold the myth of his father's heroism for the greater good of public memory, and in Jensen's case, the protagonist retraces her wartime past and the loss of her child only to confront the ultimate memory loss in the form of her dementia.

⁴ Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller and Karoline Tschuggnall (eds.), "*Opa war kein Nazi*" *Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (Frankfurt am Main: S. Fischer Verlag, 2002).

Moreover, both British and German memory novels portray critical examinations of memories of perpetration and guilt. The texts by Marcel Beyer, Bernhard Schlink, Martin Amis, Graham Swift, and A.L. Kennedy demonstrate the utilisation of critical memory discourses of perpetration and guilt. The perpetrator figures that are represented in the novels are filtered through the present-day need to understand how the immense violence and the atrocities of the Holocaust could have been possible. Again, we can argue that collective memories are constructed in order to create a usable past for the present. In Marcel Beyer's *Flughunde*, the perpetration of the protagonist Karnau is explained through a gradual development that leads from collaboration to perpetration. Karnau's motives, distorted as they are by his very particular scientific obsession, are in themselves unusual. However, the fact that he develops from collaborator to perpetrator, as many others did in the Third Reich, is anything but abnormal. Paradoxically, Karnau represents an abnormal 'normality'. He is certainly typical in the way he responds to the dissolution of moral boundaries in the Third Reich, a dissolution which led many so-called 'ordinary' Germans down the path of Nazi perpetration. Beyer's text, thus, can be seen in relation to wider German memory discourses such as Goldhagen's work on *Hitler's Willing Executioners*. The same could be said about Hanna Schmitz in Bernhard Schlink's novel *Der Vorleser*. Narrated through the perspective of the largely unreliable voice of Michael, the novel explores the difficulty of dealing with the notion of German perpetration today. Michael's portrayal of Hanna is constantly moving between the condemnation of Hanna's heinous crimes during her time in Auschwitz and his later emotional involvement with Hanna. Both texts examine the difficulty of portraying the memories of perpetrators to the extent that one might wonder why we should engage in the representation of perpetrator memories. However, the focus is not so much on the subjective evocation of private perpetrator memories as on the problems these memories cause in a wider cultural context. Similarly, Martin Amis creates a universal perpetrator figure in his text *Time's Arrow*, suggesting that the issues of perpetration are not solely relevant for German discourses of collective memory. Amis's perpetrator figure has close cultural ties to Britain and consequently has to be seen in relation to British memory discourses. His attempts to suppress unwelcome memories and guilt by facilitating the construction of several new identities are unravelled by his alter ego that travels back in time. The process of forgetting is reversed and the process of memory is displayed in a highly problematic rewinding

of time. In the end, the perpetrator figure is exposed and he becomes a warning from history similar to Benjamin's angel of history. Amis and Beyer share an interest in the 'killing-healing' paradox, as both their perpetrator figures develop from men of science into Nazi perpetrators. Furthermore, we can observe a recent shift in British novels that critically examine uncomfortable aspects of the British war effort, exploring instances of guilt. *Out of this World* by Graham Swift and *Day* by A. L. Kennedy both analyse memories of guilt with regards to the relentless bombing of German cities. While these texts do not aim to render the dominant national memory narrative of the 'good war' obsolete, they nevertheless add previously marginalised memories to the discourses of collective memories.

Prior to this thesis, comparative work dealing with literary memories of the Second World War, such as *European Memories of the Second World War* by Helmut Peitsch and others, Kathryn Jones's *Journeys of Remembrance*, and William Cloonan's *The Writing of War*, have mainly been focused on literary texts from Germany, France, and Italy. All of these nations are considered to have unresolved issues relating to aspects of guilt, perpetration, and suffering. My thesis demonstrates that British literary memory discourses, despite the overarching cultural memories of the 'good war', also contain unresolved issues of guilt over the mass killings of German civilians during the aerial bombing of Germany and of empathy regarding the suffering of the British population. Moreover, there are other issues, such as the marginalisation of the memories of non-white British soldiers, and the failure to address the heroism shown by members of the former colonies until recently. This suggests that collective memories of the war in Britain are undergoing a process of change, echoing the ongoing memory debates in Germany. It is, of course, true that Britain currently lacks a wide-reaching public discussion of memory discourses such as is currently being conducted in Germany. Yet the persistence of the subject of the war within canonical British writing, and the striking similarity to the narrative style employed by many German authors, leads to the assumption of the existence of an underlying trend. This points towards the conclusion that the war has left a transgenerational legacy in Britain and Germany alike and that both countries still struggle with a number of unresolved issues within their memory discourses. The focus has clearly moved away from historical representations of the conflict towards a literary examination of processes of present-day remembrance. In contrast to the hotly debated public controversies surrounding memory in Germany, and the

powerful narrative of cultural memory in Britain, literary narratives such as those discussed in this thesis have the ability to provide more subtle but nonetheless critical examinations of the war and National Socialism. Anne Fuchs rightly observes that as

a self-reflexive medium that scrutinizes language itself, literature has the ability to bring to the fore both the agitated nature of such memory contests and the silences and gaps that have punctuated these debates [...].⁵

Indeed, I believe that the narratives examined in this thesis demonstrate the unique role that fiction can play in representing and, to some degree, in the construction of collective memories of the war. All the narratives analysed in my work engage in the self-reflexive representation of the complex nature of a multiplicity of collective memory discourses. Many of the narratives discussed relate private memories to wider discourses of public memory, and engage in the investigation and the recovery of lost memory and the construction of postmemories. Yet, by self-reflexively referring to their textuality, the narratives emphasise the constructed nature of personal as well as public memories. This is not done to suggest that these forms of collective memory are inadequate, but to highlight the fact that the process of remembrance takes place in the present and is thereby much more a reflection of present-day needs rather than an accurate depiction of the past. Consequently, the narratives respond to currently fashionable concepts such as postmemory, theories of discrepancy between private and public memories, trauma, and generational transmission within their fictional frameworks. The fact that this can be found in British and German narratives alike suggests that these concepts are not solely relevant within the national boundaries of a memory culture but are, indeed, of a global nature. All the memory texts discussed portray individual narratives reflecting on issues of memory transmission and fear of memory loss through their narrative strategies. For example, we have seen that the absence of personal memory is not only a problem encountered by the protagonist, all members of the post-war generations, but also a literary ploy to create suspense. This illustrates that the so-called 'memory' texts not only critically discuss existing discourses of memory, but also employ them within their literary framework. Authors thereby tap into a universal interest in collective memories of the war which are not merely relevant for history and memory studies, but can also make interesting and compelling reading.

⁵ Anne Fuchs, *Phantoms of War*, p. 203.

The texts thereby are implicitly rather than explicitly taking up similar issues as current memory theories. Postmemory, for example, becomes a popular technique to even out some of the larger gaps in memory transmission between the different generations. This, however, should not be seen as evidence that all the writers are aware of Marianne Hirsch's theoretical concept. Instead, I would like to argue that the texts' critical reflection of absent memories and their strategies to overcome these gaps in memory are universal problems based on the fear of memory loss and forgetting. Here, currently fashionable theoretical concepts transcend the boundaries of memory studies and feed into literary representation. Thus we have a connection between the narrative structures of the texts and the theories of 'memory studies'. In other words, this is not a proof of the authors' attempt to incorporate theoretical memory discourse within their texts but rather that the epistemological questions asked within both discourses are identical. Unreliable narration and the highlighting of the texts' fictionality are literary ploys that allow the authors to reflect on the problematic nature of memory itself as well as the difficulties of literary representation. Consequently, some theories of memory, such as those by Marianne Hirsch as well as Aleida and Jan Assmann, provide us with useful tools to understand and to name the authors' attempts to reflect critically on the transmission of often contested memory discourses.

Furthermore, texts from both countries indicate a deep fear of memory loss and forgetting of personal memories of the Second World War, despite the fact that such memories often result in complex re-evaluations of the past. Liz Jensen, Ian McEwan, and Graham Swift introduce protagonists who suffer from dementia into their narrative frameworks. This leads members of the following generations to struggle to recover personal family members before they are lost forever. This very much reflects the threshold we have currently reached with regards to communicative memories of the war. Soon there will be no witnesses to talk about their often horrific experiences during the conflict, regardless of whether their memories constitute those of victims, perpetrators, or bystanders. German writers such as Uwe Timm, Marcel Beyer, Thomas Medicus, and Dagmar Leupold also demonstrate the fear of lost memories, yet very rarely is the reason memories are disappearing down to the physical deterioration of the eye-witness generation. Indeed, the narrative voice in Uwe Timm's narrative claims that he could only truly begin his reassessment of the past after the death of his parents and, similarly, the

recovery of lost memory in Dagmar Leupold's and Thomas Medicus' texts begins after the death of a member of the eye-witness generation. Here, the fear is of a different nature, based on the problematic relationship between private and public memories. The source of this anxiety is the fear that the critical impetus of German memory discourses could be lost and replaced by a longing for a resolution of Germany's National Socialist past during the redefinition of national identity in the wake of German reunification. Indeed, both Britain and Germany alike are currently undergoing severe changes in the wake of reunification and devolution respectively. This leads to a reformulation of national identity for which the cultural memory of the war is still of great importance. All the narratives in this thesis reflect on these changes, and the formation of collective identity and memory is closely linked within the narrative frameworks.

To conclude, this thesis demonstrates that there is a convergence of concepts such as unresolved guilt, the recovery of absent memories, memories of perpetration, the complex relationship between private and public memory discourses within a representative number of British and German 'memory' fictions of the Second World War. The current cultural and scholarly interest in the relationship between collective memory and identity based on the shared experience of the conflict is well reflected within the narratives discussed. Both British and German literary memories of the war present a pluralist notion of collective memories rather than a single collective memory. The literary discourse in both countries has created a space for competing and previously marginalised private and public memories of the conflict that has shaped the collective memories of European nations so greatly.

Finally, the considerable convergence between contemporary British and German examples of *memory fiction* discussed in this thesis suggests the existence of a transnational literary approach to the Second World War that exceeds national boundaries. Issues of memory and identity have become intrinsically linked with fictional approaches to the war in both Britain and Germany. The analysis of the narratives in this thesis has shown how the processes of how we remember the war and the Holocaust today has become such a dominant topic that it is appropriate to talk of 'memory' fictions. The shift away from traditional forms of literary representations such as war and wartime novels becomes even more striking when we compare contemporary fictional narratives from Britain and Germany. The old post-war discourses which left British and German representations of the war in stark

opposition to each other are slowly dissolving. Only rarely do we now encounter stereotypical portrayals of the classical polarisation into the 'evil' German and the 'honourable' Briton, or clear-cut perpetrator and victor. Clichés often used in popular British war fiction, such as the portrayal of Nazis as cold, calculated, and bureaucratic are rarely included in contemporary memory fiction. Instead, we encounter a plurality of memories representing existing tropes of cultural memory as well as previously marginalised critical voices. German authors of 'memory' fiction, on the other hand, have introduced more empathetic discourses of German suffering alongside the critical discourses of perpetration. The result is that perpetrator figures have become rather more complex, and that we can find characters who may have supported the National Socialists but who are, nevertheless, granted some empathy by their children or grandchildren with regards to their own suffering. This empathetic notion of often private, family memories, however, is in most cases viewed together with memories of German guilt in order to avert historical revisionism.

However, the most striking similarity of all between all the 'memory' fictions compared in this thesis is that the protagonists are very much members of the post-war generations and that their main impetus is to attempt to understand the brutal events of the Second World War and the Holocaust through the workings of collective memories. The authors are therefore less concerned with the authenticity of the memories than they are with the consequences of such memories for personal as well as national identity formations.

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