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WORLD WAR II 'VON UNTEN': CHILDHOOD AND YOUTH IN LISA TETZNER'S *IST PAUL SCHULDIG?* (1945)

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ABSTRACT

Literary presentations of children in war tend to present them exclusively as innocent victims. Indeed, even those texts featuring children who have been subjected to and ostensibly absorbed Nazi indoctrination continue to insist on a Romantic myth of childhood as the embodiment of a prelapsarian past and redemptive potential for the future. This essay however focuses on the way the exile author Lisa Tetzner (1894 – 1963) uses images of childhood to negotiate concepts of guilt and responsibility in her youth novel *Ist Paul schuldig?* (1945), the seventh volume of her series *Die Kinder aus Nr. 67*. It will argue that the novel anticipates debates about German guilt first fully articulated in Karl Jaspers's *Schuldfrage* (1946), as well as later debates about German wartime suffering. It will further suggest that by focusing on the moral guilt of an individual adolescent whose childhood backstory is very familiar to the reader, the novel creates a both challenging and sympathetic space where not only youthful German readers might have explored the extent of their personal responsibility for the Third Reich in 1945.

Literarische Kriegskinder werden zum großen Teil als ausschließlich unschuldige Opfer dargestellt. Auch in Texten, in denen Kinder der nationalsozialistischen Ideologie ausgesetzt werden und diese scheinbar übernehmen, wird ein romantischer Mythos von Kindheit als Verkörperung einer ursprünglichen Unschuld und eines erlösenden Zukunftspotenzials aufrechterhalten. Dieser Aufsatz aber analysiert *Ist Paul schuldig?* (1945), den siebten Band der Jugendromanserie *Die Kinder aus Nr. 67*, in dem die Exilautorin Lisa Tetzner (1894 –

1963) Kindheitsbilder benutzt, gerade um sich mit Vorstellungen von Schuld und Verantwortung auseinanderzusetzen. Es wird argumentiert, dass dieser Roman sowohl Debatten über deutsche Schuld vorwegnimmt, die zum erstenmal in Karl Jaspers *Die Schuldfrage* (1946) ausführlich dargelegt wurden, als auch spätere Debatten über deutsches Kriegsleiden. Ferner wird argumentiert, dass Tetzner durch ihre Beschreibung der moralischen Schuld eines einzelnen Heranwachsenden, dessen Kindheitsgeschichte dem Leser vertraut ist, nicht nur jugendlichen Lesern einen relativ geschützten Raum bietet, sich 1945 offen mit dem Ausmaß ihrer persönlichen Verantwortung für die Ereignisse des Dritten Reiches auseinanderzusetzen.

Manfred Karnick's discussion of German narrative texts in the immediate post-war period cites Wolfgang Borchert as the 'Stimme seiner dezimierten Generation', in particular for the way his figures blame the older generation for the fate of his own contemporaries, who are presented as the youthful victims of a war they did not start.<sup>1</sup> But while Karnick emphasises the prevalence of the voice 'von unten', the perspective of those ostensibly without agency and therefore responsibility, he only briefly discusses child figures, and then only with reference to Ilse Aichinger's *Die größere Hoffnung* (1947):<sup>2</sup> this might suggest that children have minimal significance in the narrative texts of this period, and that when they do appear, it is in their traditional guise as the most innocent of victims.<sup>3</sup> This essay however considers a text from the immediate post-war period which paradoxically uses childhood explicitly to negotiate ideas of guilt and responsibility: this is all the more remarkable for the fact that the novel is aimed at a younger audience.

I will argue that Lisa Tetzner's *Ist Paul schuldig?* (1945) anticipates debates about collective guilt that were first fully articulated in Karl Jaspers's *Die Schuldfrage* (1946), as well as those debates about German wartime suffering which, even if they were clearly not an exclusively post-1990 phenomenon, have certainly experienced a resurgence in the post-unification era.<sup>4</sup> The novel is set between 1942 and 1943 and relates the 16 to 17-year-old Paul's part in denouncing one of his teachers for defeatism; the teacher's arrest; the loss of Paul's family in an air raid; and the boy's subsequent flight to Switzerland with an escaped Soviet POW. Remarkably for a text produced in this early post-war period and from exile it avoids both evasion and excessive condemnation: it presents an adolescent protagonist who is old enough to have been implicated in the Nazi regime, yet too young to be held responsible for it. It uses images of childhood to enable understanding of and empathy with this representative of the perpetrator nation, but without presenting him as a mere victim. In this, Tetzner's work differs markedly from Borchert's: in an iconoclastic reading of *Draußen vor der Tür* (1947), prompted in part by the debates surrounding the controversial exhibition *Vernichtungskrieg: Verbrechen der Wehrmacht 1941–1944* (1995–1999), Jan-Philipp Reemtsma argued that Unteroffizier Beckmann's self-image as a victim of the war proceeds from a regressive adolescent refusal to accept responsibility, and the play's original resounding success had been a direct result of this refusal, which had allowed audiences too to take refuge in denial.<sup>5</sup>

Tetzner's work could hardly have had a more different reception from Borchert's in the years immediately after World War II. By 1933 Tetzner had already become an established name in the German cultural landscape. From 1918 onwards she had achieved considerable recognition and popularity with an increasingly broad audience: first as a travelling story-teller who made her way through the villages of central and southern Germany with the financial support of the German government, then, increasingly, as an

editor and writer of fairy tales, and in 1927 as the organiser of Berlin Radio's Children's Hour, in which children selected and read stories for other children. In 1933, however, she followed her husband, the socialist writer Kurt Kläber (pseud. Kurt Held) into political exile in Switzerland, where she continued to write for children, but turned her attention from fairy tales to contemporary political themes.<sup>6</sup> As Zohar Shavit points out, she thus shared the post-war fate of many exile authors who had written about the Third Reich, namely, to be seen simply as a 'Nestbeschmutzerin', and her novels on this topic had barely any critical or public reception in Germany before the 1980s.<sup>7</sup> Indeed, in the immediate post-war years Tetzner's friends and admirers tried to persuade her to give up her political writing and return to what they presented as her natural element of fantasy and fairy-tale writing: these efforts were entirely consistent with broader trends in children's publishing and indeed in the immediate post-war construction of the German war child on which those publishing trends were predicated.<sup>8</sup> The return to what Shavit calls 'a literary climate oriented around the "good book" – a tale with a happy ending, devoid of conflict, describing in fine German a world that was entirely good', indicates not just a reluctance to engage with the Nazi past, but also a view of children as the vulnerable innocents, the passive victims who had already suffered enough and now needed to be protected from depictions of war and suffering – or at least, as Shavit suggests, from suffering that their compatriots had inflicted: depictions of German suffering remained a topic in juvenile literature as elsewhere.<sup>9</sup>

I would suggest, however, that while the title *Ist Paul schuldig?* may have had a provocative immediacy that was deemed too much for German audiences in 1945, its openness accurately reflects the situation of the adolescent Paul, who is presented as standing between the assumed innocence of childhood and the assumed responsibility of adulthood; moreover, this representation of actual adolescence enables and indeed demands a more complex engagement with issues of guilt and responsibility than either the would-be

adolescent victim Beckmann or the contemporaneous condemnation of all Germans expressed in the Allied poster featuring images from Belsen, ‘Diese Schandtaten: Eure Schuld’.<sup>10</sup> As Reemtsma suggests, the former allowed a post-war audience to take refuge in denial, but the blanket accusation of the latter was no more helpful in enabling a devastated nation to come to terms with its recent past: indeed, Jaspers suggested that it was positively counter-productive, given the fundamental human tendency for an accused person to defend himself, ‘ob er nun mit Recht oder Unrecht beschuldigt wird’.<sup>11</sup>

Jaspers responded to the collective guilt thesis by differentiating between four different categories of guilt: criminal, political, moral and metaphysical (*S*, 19-20). In his view, all Germans could be held politically responsible, albeit to varying degrees, for the acts of their government (*S*, 46), but the criminal guilt for specific acts that could be prosecuted in a court of law applied only to a tiny minority of Germans (*S*, 35), and moral and metaphysical guilt were forms for which individuals were answerable only to their conscience or God respectively (*S*, 19-20). It therefore made no sense to refer to an entire nation as criminally, morally or metaphysically guilty (*S*, 28). Such distinctions were not, however, intended to promote collective exculpation, but rather to prompt individuals to consider the precise nature and extent of their personal responsibility for the Third Reich and the Holocaust (*S*, 55-6). Jaspers explicitly states that every individual has moral responsibility for actions that (s)he commits, even if those actions are in a political or military context: ‘Niemals gilt schlechthin: “Befehl ist Befehl”’ (*S*, 19). And while he uses the concept of moral guilt to refer to non-criminal acts, those of which only the individual’s own conscience or their closest intimates can accuse them, such acts are not insignificant, for ‘moralische Verfehlungen sind Grund der Zustände, in denen die politische Schuld und das Verbrechen erst erwachsen’ (*S*, 21). I will suggest that Tetzner’s focus on the moral guilt of an individual adolescent anticipates

Jaspers's arguments by providing a space in which large numbers of (not only youthful) Germans might have seen themselves reflected in 1945.

*Ist Paul schuldig?* is the seventh volume in Tetzner's series *Die Kinder aus Nr. 67*, written between 1931 and 1943, predominantly in Swiss exile, and first published under the collective title between 1944 and 1949. The first volume, *Erwin und Paul: Die Geschichte einer Freundschaft*, is set in 1931 in and around the eponymous Berlin tenement Nr 67; the two stories that made up this volume were first published in Germany in 1932 and 1933, before Tetzner went into exile.<sup>12</sup> The subsequent volumes relate the adventures of Erwin, Paul, their friend Mirjam, who is introduced in the second volume, *Das Mädchen aus dem Vorderhaus*, and a cast of increasingly international characters as the three principal protagonists make their very different ways through the war years. These different paths are clearly intended to be representative: Erwin leaves Germany for Sweden with his Socialist father not long after Hitler comes to power (volume 3, *Erwin kommt nach Schweden*) and will return only in 1945 fighting with the British Army, the subject of volume 8, *Als ich wiederkam*. Mirjam's Jewish origins result in her leaving Germany somewhat before Erwin; her story is related in the middle three volumes of the series (*Das Schiff ohne Hafen; Die Kinder auf der Insel; Mirjam in Amerika*). Paul remains in Germany as a member of the 'Hitlerjugend', and while his story is not the main focus of the series, the reader is given hints that he is increasingly implicated in the events of the Third Reich. The series culminates in the utopian ninth volume *Der Neue Bund* (1949), set in Switzerland in 1946: here, the now grown-up trio from the first two volumes come together with many of the characters they have met in the intervening years, intending to form a new international association to promote peace and harmony amongst the peoples of Europe.<sup>13</sup>

The fact that the reader knows the protagonists from their childhood until the end of the war and beyond is key to Tetzner's aesthetic strategy and her political and moral vision:

in the general preface to the series she writes of ‘meine Freunde Erwin und Paul’ who have told her the stories her readers are about to discover and pleads:

Ich bitte euch, gewinnt Erwin und Paul, auch Mirjam und alle ihre Schicksalsgefährten lieb, denn ihr werdet sie durch viele Jahre ihres Lebens begleiten. Wenn ihr von ihnen Abschied nehmt, sind sie schon keine Kinder mehr. Aber dann, meine Freunde, habt ihr eine große Zeit miterlebt, eine Zeit, in der sich vieles veränderte und große Dinge geschahen, von denen später die Menschen in den Geschichtsbüchern lesen müssen um sich die Jahreszahlen einzuprägen.

Uns drücken keine Jahreszahlen. Wir erleben nur, was ich euch erzähle, und das ist einfach das, was die Kinder aus Nummer 67 und ihre Freunde erlebten.<sup>14</sup>

Tetzner’s emphasis on immersing her readers in the daily experience of individuals (almost literally ‘the little people’), rather than learning about the big historical picture makes her work appear consistent with Karnick’s analysis of German literature in the immediate post-war period, and this, together with her insistence on her readers forming a positive relationship with those individuals over the course of several works and a long chronological span, has important consequences. At one level Paul might be seen precisely as a representative of that youthful generation that Jaimey Fisher describes as a convenient discursive means of shifting the focus from adult responsibility for the Third Reich during the immediate post-war years: the adolescents who could be deemed both perpetrators and victims of the Nazi regime, and who were thus ultimately redeemable if taken in hand by politically uncompromised adults.<sup>15</sup> And yet Paul is not represented merely as ‘einer von denen’: he is an individual whose childhood backstory the reader knows well, and at the end of the series we are left hopeful that he will be productively reintegrated in post-war society, not through the educative efforts of adults, but through his childhood friend Erwin. Tetzner’s references to Paul’s individual childhood and an implied construction of universal childhood innocence are used both to negotiate concepts of guilt and responsibility and to provide an ultimately hopeful message for German readers.

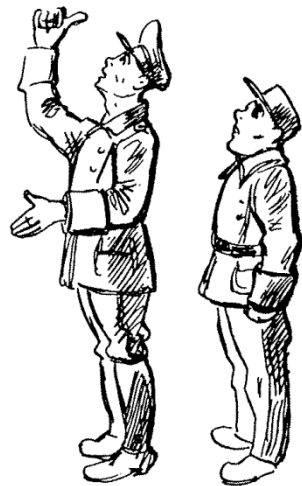


## PAUL'S GUILT

The reader of this volume who has read through Tetzner's series in order has had no direct encounter with Paul since the first pages of the third volume when he says farewell to Erwin.<sup>16</sup> We are thus somewhat alienated when, in the opening of this new chapter in Paul's story, we see him witnessing a procession of prisoners of war 'mit einem befriedigten Schmunzeln',<sup>17</sup> moreover, his new military status and interests are emphasised when a trio of boys who are explicitly described as much younger than him 'stramm grüßten' and he responds as a military superior (p. 95). Paul appears to relish his more adult status; we are explicitly reminded here that he is 'klein von Wuchs' and 'bewunderte große Leute' (p. 97), a feature that Tetzner has used throughout the series to suggest first his moral weakness when compared with Erwin, and later, as here, his susceptibility to Nazism's promises of greatness. His desire to prove himself a man rather than a child is already clear in his irritable response to his mother's comments that he is too young to carry out his expected duties during air raids (he 'wollte kein Kind mehr sein', p. 116), and in this Paul shows himself consistent with Nazi ideology about children and young people, who were left in no doubt about the regime's expectation that they would play their part in building (and increasingly of course, simply defending) the Third Reich; the fact that Tetzner explicitly refers to twelve to thirteen-year-olds helping with the work that Paul's mother thinks him too young to undertake underlines this (p. 117). His need to prove himself is further emphasised by his desire to attend the prestigious 'Reit- und Fahrschule', a 'Verlangen nach Beförderung' which overrides his initial intention to defend his teacher against accusations of defeatism in the 'Hitlerjugend' meeting (p. 113). In these respects, the reader is left in no doubt about the young man's commitment to and implication in the Nazi regime.

Yet in other respects, Tetzner continues to present Paul as the child the reader knew from the earlier volumes. It is not only his mother who refers to her son as 'das Paulchen'

when she fears for his safety during air raids; the narrator too occasionally refers to the sixteen-year-old thus, a gesture clearly intended to remind her readers of their long-standing relationship with this character. This is particularly necessary at moments when Paul's apparent enthusiasm for the Nazi regime might otherwise alienate the reader: for example, when, in a conversation with his father, Paul delights in the prospect of German bombers wiping out London, and the phrase 'triumphierte Paulchen' (p. 101) suggests a little boy excited by war-games, but with very little understanding of what is actually at stake. This is reinforced a few lines later when 'Paulchen' is again referred to, this time responding to a whistle from the courtyard below. For the reader of the earlier volumes this evokes the opening chapter of *Erwin und Paul*, as Erwin signals impatiently to his friend from the courtyard (*EP*, 13), but in this later instance, Paul is late not for a day out with Erwin and his father, but for a 'Hitlerjugend' meeting with the equally impatient Heiner and Willy (p. 102). Both of these lads are explicitly described as 'älter als Paul und fast schon erwachsen', and Heiner at least is physically more impressive, a 'großer, hochgewachsener Bursche' in contrast with Willy who is 'dick und massig' (p. 102); Heiner is also explicitly described as wearing uniform, and Theo Glinz's illustration (p. 102, Fig. 1) shows both older boys thus attired. Paul, on the other hand, has been described more neutrally as wearing 'Mütze' and 'Mantel' (pp. 94-5) and Glinz's initial illustration of him in this volume (p. 94, Fig. 2) does not suggest military attire. The reader is thus positioned to see the two older boys as the 'real' Nazis, while 'das Paulchen' continues to be presented as a childlike and, in the context of the 'Hitlerjugend', subservient figure.



*Hinter ihm stand Willi*

Figure 1: Theo Glinz's illustration of Heiner and Willi. © Fischer Kinder- und Jugendbuch Verlag.



*Darunter zeigte sich eine schwarze Hand mit ausgestrecktem Finger*

Figure 2: Theo Glinz's initial illustration of Paul in this volume. © Fischer Kinder- und Jugendbuch Verlag.

Moreover, the younger boys who have greeted Paul so respectfully to his face also refer to him as 'das Paulchen' behind his back, but here the diminutive is a mark of contempt: they consider him a coward for not yet having volunteered for active service (p. 98). It is the younger boys who are thus positioned as the fanatical Nazis, as is emphasised when Peter, explicitly described as 'einer der Jüngsten' (p. 125), denounces their teacher Köwel for

defeatism: Paul, on the other hand, is presented as much more conflicted. In the 'Hitlerjugend' meeting where Köwel's case is discussed, Paul is called upon only as a secondary witness, and indeed is reprimanded by his superior for not being quicker to report the behaviour that the younger boys have brought to light (p. 111). His inability to defend his teacher, and ultimately his willingness to contribute to the allegations against him are motivated not just by his physical fear of the older boys, but by his need for the validation represented by the place at the 'Fahr- und Reitschule', and these motives are evident and understandable to readers who know Paul's history. His inner conflict and distress at his weakness are further emphasised during the later air raid when Tetzner again strategically deploys the diminutive. 'Paulchen' tries to persuade his teacher to sell or exchange his radio, a desperate attempt to warn Köwel that he has been denounced in part for listening to enemy broadcasts (p. 124). The reader is thus reminded at key points of Paul's relative youth, and his weakness with regard to Köwel is rendered at least understandable, first by the reader's prior knowledge of and relationship with the character and secondly by the way Tetzner positions her figure and his anguished individual reflections between two representative groups of boys, his 'Hitlerjugend' superiors and the younger fanatical Nazis, whom the reader knows less well.

Tetzner uses images of uniform throughout the text to suggest the way that Nazi ideology has been imposed on the 'Paulchen' her reader knows and loves from the earlier stories. In the air raid episode, the clash between an older generation's perception of Paul as a vulnerable child and a self-perception conditioned by the regime is neatly captured when Köwel attempts to stroke the boy's hair in gratitude for his offer of help, but is prevented from doing so by Paul's steel helmet (p. 122). Similarly, the earlier contrast between Heiner and Willi, explicitly described and illustrated in uniform (p. 102), and Paul's more neutrally described attire is tellingly developed when Tetzner describes his arrival at the subsequent

‘Hitlerjugend’ meeting: ‘Außer Paul befanden sich noch ungefähr 20 Jungen in dem Raum. Alle trugen die gleiche Uniform der Jugendgruppen.’ (p. 104). The ‘alle’ here appears to refer to the other 20 boys and exclude Paul, though this seems unlikely; again, textually Tetzner draws a distinction between the Hitler youths and her Paulchen. Significantly though, Paul is pictured in uniform precisely at the moment when he denounces Köwel, an illustration captioned ‘Nichts hat er verschwiegen. Gar nichts’ (p. 114, Fig. 3), and this image functions as the pictorial equivalent of the narrator’s comment just as he begins his denunciation: ‘ein völlig fremdes Wesen hält in ihm Einzug’ (p. 113). Similarly the later image of Paul on his return from the ‘Fahr- und Reitschule’, captioned ‘Als Paul von der Reitschule kam, trug er neue Stiefel’ (p. 135, Fig. 4) shows him with the figure and facial features of an adult, and the knee-high boots, dress uniform and peaked cap create an elite image reminiscent of an SS uniform, reinforcing Paul’s own view of the Reitschule as a ‘besondere Auszeichnung’ for those who ‘Führerqualitäten haben und später befördert werden’ (p. 132).



*Nichts hat er verschwiegen*

Figure 3: Theo Glinz’s illustration of the ‘Hitlerjugend’ meeting. © Fischer Kinder- und Jugendbuch Verlag.



*Als Paul von der Reitschule kam, trug er neue Stiefel*

Figure 4: Theo Glinz's illustration of Paul in 'Reitschule' uniform. © Fischer Kinder- und Jugendbuch Verlag.

Significantly, when Köwel sees his former pupil in this uniform (p. 140) he does not immediately recognise him, but when the boy goes to his house that same evening to confess his part in the teacher's earlier arrest, Köwel sees through and beyond the uniform as mere evidence of what Paul has 'erreicht' (p. 140) and continues to address his former pupil as 'du' and refer to him as 'das Paulchen, der Kleine aus Nr 67' (p. 140). The adjectival noun here refers not only to Paul's diminutive stature, but also to Köwel's belief in the boy's fundamentally good nature, that of a 'guter Kerl' who would have been different (and here he is also made explicitly representative of his generation) had he not been subjected to Nazi indoctrination (p. 142). Paul's tormented attempts to confess are cut short by Köwel's own insistence that he knows the full extent of Paul's part in his fate and yet has forgiven him; indeed, he clearly does not see the boy as responsible for his actions.

The use of uniform to suggest a merely superficial engagement with an imposed ideology and Köwel's insistence that he forgives Paul may suggest an exculpatory message. Yet the reader continues to be positioned critically with respect to Paul, not only through the provocative title, but also through the third person narrative, which allows the reader to

experience much of the text from the boy's perspective, but does not allow for a complete identification with him: to use Murray Smith's terms, we are aligned without being emotionally and morally allied with Paul.<sup>18</sup> This is particularly obvious when he initially peeps through his teacher's windows and, unable to spot Frau Köwel, speculates on what has happened to her in the 'erlebte Rede' of

Paul erschrak. Sicherlich war sie [Frau Köwel] tot. Vielleicht war sie vor Kummer und Schreck gestorben. War er schuld? Immer lauter stieg die Frage in ihm auf. 'War er schuld?' (p. 139)

The use of internal dialogue makes explicit that Paul is suffering here from what Jaspers would later term moral guilt; this is emphasised by the contrast between the boy's anguished thoughts and Köwel's own much more neutrally expressed explanation of Frau Köwel's absence: 'Frau Köwel [...] ist gestorben. Sie bekam einen Schlaganfall an dem Tag als ich verhaftet und von der Schule gejagt wurde.' (p. 141) In Jaspers's terms, Paul's moral guilt is something of which only his own conscience, not another human being, whether Köwel or the reader, can convict him, and his own question thus not only echoes, but stands in productive tension with the novel's ostensibly abstract and universalising title. When read in conjunction with the dust jacket of the original 1945 edition, which featured images evoking acts of war and destruction, the question *Ist Paul schuldig?* might suggest not merely Paul's active participation in the war, but even the possibility that he is being made to represent national guilt. Yet any relief the reader may feel here as Paul's guilt is defined and ostensibly limited to one specific act is undercut by our knowledge – like Paul's – that his individual weakness has had dreadful consequences. Moreover such moral failure has wider ramifications: in Jaspers's terms, it was precisely what paved the way for criminal and political guilt (S, 21).

### PAUL'S SUFFERING

Tetzner makes particularly fruitful use of her reader's ambivalent relationship with Paul in the depiction of the air raid where he loses his family. The reader experiences this event largely from Paul's point of view: the passage when he returns to number 67 believing that it and his family have survived is narrated in part in the historic present to convey as immediately as possible first his false relief and then his crushing realisation that his childhood home is no more (p. 151). Once again, the image of Paul oscillates between that of a grown man and that of a child: he has been separated from his family precisely owing to his duties during the air raid. His heroic efforts both during the raid and afterwards as he digs through the rubble searching for survivors earn him praise from the adults working alongside him, something which ironically underlines both his pretensions to adulthood and his childhood status (p. 149). But the moment when he recovers consciousness, having been knocked out by a bomb blast, creates an image of him as a lost child seeking reassurance from his mother (p. 147), while the moment when he finds her body, focalised from his perspective, heightens this impression:

Paul schob sich durch und kniete davor nieder. Das war keiner der seinen. Nein! Das auch nicht! Aber dort, dort hinten, am Rand des Bombenkraters. 'Mutter', schrie er, 'Mutter!' Er versuchte die leblose Gestalt aufzurichten und schob ihr seine Hand unter den Kopf. Der Körper war mit einem groben Tuch bedeckt. Das Tuch zu heben wagte er nicht. An den Umrissen darunter konnte er sehen, daß er zerschmettert war. Auch die Hände, die ausgestreckt auf dem Schutt ruhten, waren keine Hände mehr. 'Mutter', stöhnte er. 'Meine Mutter.'

Er sah sich hilfesuchend um. Die Rettungsmannschaften begannen ihre Werkzeuge aufzupacken und wollten sich entfernen.

'Es ist meine Mutter', erklärte er ihnen.

Sie zuckten gleichgültig die Schultern. 'Laß gut sein! Der ist jetzt wohl.' (p. 153)



Significantly, while Paul has lost his entire family in this raid, Tetzner does not depict him finding either his father or his younger siblings, who have always been presented as an anonymous mass. She does not rely on the easier emotional affect of representing ‘innocent’ child victims of the raid, but, perhaps with a view to maximising the impact on a younger readership, aligns them with Paul’s perspective and thus positions them to empathise with his loss and grief, and to feel indignation on his behalf at the indifference of the ‘Rettungsmannschaft’; at the same time however, the adults’ response to Paul’s distress reminds the reader that our focaliser here is not, in fact, a helpless child, but a young man who has been implicated in this regime.

Indeed, in the midst of her depiction of the raid, Tetzner signals the idea of German guilt when, in a fairy-tale image that suggests focalisation through a childlike consciousness, Paul and his team are depicted running through the burning streets as though in ‘glühenden Schuhen’, the punishment meted out to the wicked queen in ‘Sneewittchen’.<sup>19</sup> This perfectly counterbalances Paul’s own slightly later use of phrasing reminiscent of fairy-tales to refer to his desolate state:

Jetzt habe ich keine Eltern und keine Geschwister mehr und kein Haus, um darin zu wohnen und kein Bett, um darin zu schlafen. Ich habe nur noch meine zwei Kaninchen und dies Stück Brot, das mir fremde Leute gaben. (p. 158)

This echo of the opening of the Grimms’ story ‘Die Sternthaler’, where the little girl is specifically described as ‘gut und fromm’,<sup>20</sup> suggests Paul’s own self-perception as innocent victim, phrased in a childlike manner which may initially elicit the reader’s sympathy but also strikes a jarring self-pitying note. This impression is reinforced in the very next paragraph, when the narrator reminds the reader behind Paul’s back that the regime in which he is implicated by no means sees him as a passive child victim: ‘Er hatte vergessen, daß er

sich in einem Mannschaftsquartier oder bei den Dienstbehörden hätte melden müssen' (p. 158).

### BEYOND GUILT AND SUFFERING

Tetzner's use of a character with whom the reader has a long-standing relationship and her images of and references to childhood thus enable her to create a genuinely empathetic image of German wartime suffering and loss, while also encouraging her readers to maintain a questioning, even critical response to Paul. Her strategy of focusing on individual children and young people allows a younger audience to engage intensively with the concepts of individual guilt and responsibility, while also allowing for the possibility of a wider readership, given the 'dual audience' so characteristic of much children's literature.<sup>21</sup> Having established Paul's moral guilt in the case of Köwel, Tetzner again anticipates Jaspers when she uses a conversation between Paul and the escaped Russian POW Sergey to suggest that a nation's political behaviour is the result of the way a majority of individuals behave, and that political freedom depends on every individual becoming aware of their own moral guilt as a first step towards an improved national and political climate (*S*, 22):

'Ich habe eben keine Überzeugung.' Pauls Stimme klang jämmerlich. 'Ich glaube, ich weiß überhaupt noch gar nicht, was eine eigene Überzeugung ist. Ich habe immer nur getan, was mir die andern vorsagten. Nie habe ich nachgedacht, ob das, was sie sagten, gut und richtig sei und was daraus werden könnte.'

'Das war falsch. Aber sie sagen, ihr wärt alle so. Nun gut.' Sergey erhob sich. 'Das muß in Zukunft anders werden.' Er sagte es so entschlossen, daß Paul lachen mußte. (p. 177)

In Jaspers's argument of course, Paul has some excuse for the guilt with which he has burdened himself, that of the 'falsches Gewissen' of young people who have little experience of life other than under Hitler, and who experience a brutal awakening, whether in 1943 like Paul, when the outcome of the war is increasingly clear, or at the latest in 1945, like Barbara,

the young woman Erwin meets when part of the British occupying force (*S*, 48-50). But this passage might appear to run the risk of creating an exculpatory message by extending an understanding of Paul's inability to think for himself to the whole German nation under Hitler, and anxiety about such messages of universal innocent victimhood may explain the omission of Sergey's comment 'Das war falsch. Aber sie sagen, ihr wärt alle so' from both the second edition of the text in 1982, now under the title *War Paul schuldig?*, and the 2005 edition timed to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the end of World War II.<sup>22</sup>

The fact that Tetzner's series was reissued in Germany in the 1980s was again consistent with broader social trends, namely a new willingness to engage with the Nazi past, including in children's literature.<sup>23</sup> If the text's presentation of the war child had initially fallen foul of a widespread post-war understanding of children exclusively as innocent victims, then the ambivalence in the way Paul is presented was entirely in tune with the different social and pedagogical climate of the 1980s. Not only did the school edition of 1982 praise Tetzner's text as one of the few books for younger readers 'die nicht bei einer Schwarz-Weiß-Zeichnung stehen bleiben, sondern eine Hauptfigur in den Mittelpunkt stellen, die auf Grund der Erlebnisse nachzudenken anfängt', but in the accompanying material, Paul is explicitly made to represent the vast majority of the adult population in the Third Reich, the 'Mitläufer'.<sup>24</sup> And indeed the text continues to respond to current debates: Reinhard Michl's image of Paul in uniform on the front of the 2005 edition (Fig. 5) clearly prompts the reader to consider the question of Paul's guilt in the light of new information, especially from the 'Wehrmacht' exhibitions, and to see Paul once again as a representative figure, even if the role of the 'Wehrmacht' is not a central focus of this novel. Yet this new cover also sends out interestingly contradictory messages when viewed in the light of recent debates about the German past: on the one hand, the revised title and the exclusive focus on Paul in uniform clearly ask a new generation to consider the role of the German military in World War II. At

the same time however, the image of Paul here, grimy faced and with helmet significantly held in his hands, allowing for the sight of his boyishly tousled hair, creates a much more vulnerable impression than that of him in Glinz's post-'Reitschule' illustration, and the smoke wreathing around his legs suggests the bombed German cityscape; these aspects hint at later debates about German wartime suffering.

Lisa Tetzner

# Die Kinder aus Nr. 67

War Paul  
schuldig?

Als ich  
wiederkam


 Sauerländer



Figure 5: Reinhard Michl's cover image of Paul for the 2005 edition of *War Paul schuldig?* /

*Als ich wiederkam*. © Fischer Kinder- und Jugendbuch Verlag.

The ambivalence of this cover captures the subtlety of Tetzner's work and its ongoing relevance to current debates about the German wartime past: her work and its reception are in far less need of reconsideration than Reemtsma sees in the case of Unteroffizier Beckmann, for Tetzner's construction of Paul enables the reader to see that, even for those young people who had known nothing but the Third Reich, choices – albeit difficult choices – were possible. She uses the transitional state of adolescence, images of childhood, and a split narrative perspective to make Paul's actions understandable but not excusable, and his suffering viscerally vivid, without giving him inappropriate, let alone representative, victim status.

## CONCLUSION

Tetzner's work does not shy away from showing the realities of childhood under Nazism. She frequently refers to children much younger than Paul playing their part in the war effort, and indeed shows these generally anonymous children as much more fanatical Nazis than Paul himself: the empirical state of childhood in the Third Reich leaves no room for idealisation. And the question of the title is genuine: for all the images of childhood that she deploys to suggest Paul's relative youth and vulnerability, Tetzner by no means acquits her protagonist, whose moral guilt is certainly proven, and who, in a final conversation with Sergey and the Jewish boy Lukas, finds the courage to admit that he has been to some extent complicit in his own seduction by the regime (p. 197). This confession too is clearly intended to resonate with and provoke self-examination in a much wider audience. Moreover, in *Der neue Bund*, Paul

for the most part cuts a rather unattractive, querulous figure; not only does his confession to Erwin in this volume provide the reader with much more unedifying information about his activities in the Third Reich and especially on ‘Kristallnacht’, but as the sole representative of ‘defeated’ Germany in the Bund he is already (in August 1946) asking how long Germans will be made to suffer for the Third Reich, and blaming the occupying forces for mistakes they have made since 1945.<sup>25</sup> The communication problems the old friends Erwin and Paul experience when they are reunited in this final volume highlight the abyss that had opened up between the representatives of the ‘better Germany’ in exile and those who had remained; the return to the Berlin dialect of their childhood merely emphasises the lack of shared language to talk about and understand Paul’s experiences in the Third Reich (*DNB*, 132-3). There is no way back to the future for Germany: a mere nostalgic yearning for the lost innocence of childhood days, such as Erwin displays when he seeks out his old haunts in *Als ich wiederkam*, will achieve nothing.

Yet at the end of *Der neue Bund* Tetzner does appear to reference the Romantic myth of childhood as a state of prelapsarian innocence with redemptive potential for the future, for ultimately it is the boys’ childhood friendship that is used to point the way to Germany’s future. The series ends as it began, with Erwin and Paul, who have decided to leave the rest of the ‘neue Bund’ behind in order to return to Germany and begin the task of rebuilding together. The ending itself is muted, characterised by physical darkness and uncertainty as the two young men set off together into the ‘dunkle Nacht’ (*DNB*, 247) and the rebuilding project is, in the first instance, a modest one: the repairing of a roof. Yet that roof, belonging as it does to the aforementioned Barbara, is significant. The pairing of the exile and the former ‘Hitlerjunge’ points beyond the end of the series to the implied new pairing of Erwin and Barbara, the young woman who was prevented from committing suicide in 1945 only by the needs of an orphaned child for whom she began to care, and who, by the time Erwin and the

reader meet her in *Als ich wiederkam*, has gathered a group of seven such children about her (WPS, 319-22). The implied new family to be constructed of a political exile, a wife who had remained in Germany until the end of the war, and a new generation of children too young to be implicated in Hitler's regime, though old enough to have been affected by it, has a contrived symbolic appropriateness that might seem geared to the young target audience. Yet in the light of Karnick's analysis of post-war narrative fiction, and when read in conjunction with the rest of Tetzner's series, this ending is still considerably less evasive about the past and more realistic about Germany's future than can be said for much of the adult literature of the same period.



## NOTES

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1. Manfred Karnick, 'Krieg und Nachkrieg: Erzählprosa im Westen', in Wilfried Barner *et al* (eds), *Geschichte der deutschen Literatur von 1945 bis zur Gegenwart*, Munich 1994, pp. 31-75 (pp. 56-7).

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 59-60.

3. Karen Lury, for example, points out that children are presented as the 'perfect victims' and therefore unquestioned recipients of our sympathies when they appear in war films; Lury, *The Child in Film: Tears, Fears and Fairy Tales*, London and New York 2010, p. 105. For further discussion of the Romantic myth of childhood innocence in this context, see Debbie Pinfold, *The Child's View of the Third Reich in German Literature: The Eye Among the Blind*, Oxford 2001, pp. 9-25 and 113-58.

4. On these debates, see esp. Bill Niven (ed.), *Germans as Victims*, Basingstoke 2006, pp. 1-25; Helmut Schmitz (ed.), *A Nation of Victims?: Representations of German Wartime Suffering from 1945 to the Present*, Amsterdam / New York, NY 2007, 1-30, and Stuart Taberner and Karina Berger (eds), *Germans as Victims in the Literary Fiction of the Berlin Republic*, Rochester, NY 2009, pp. 1-13.

5. Jan Philipp Reemtsma, 'Generation ohne Abschied: Wolfgang Borchert als Angebot' in *Der Vorgang des Ertaubens nach dem Urknall: 10 Reden und Aufsätze*, Zurich, 1995, p. 42.
6. The biographical information on Tetzner is from Zlata Fuss Phillips, *German Children's and Youth Literature in Exile 1933 – 1950: Biographies and Bibliography*, Munich 2001, pp. 212-13.
7. Zohar Shavit, *A Past Without Shadow: Constructing the Past in German Books for Children*, New York and London 2005, pp. 8-11 and 22.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.
9. *Ibid.*, pp. 5 and 11-12.
10. See <http://www.iwm.org.uk/collections/item/object/29110> (accessed 14 October 2015).
11. Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage: Von der politischen Haftung Deutschlands* (1946), Munich 2012, p. 33. Future references appear in the text as *S*.
12. Fuss Phillips, *German Children's and Youth Literature in Exile*, p. 221.
13. For a full account of the complex publishing history of the series, see Fuss Phillips, *German Children's and Youth Literature in Exile*, pp. 212-32. Remarkably, Tetzner had already completed a first version of *Der neue Bund* in October 1943, and was keen to see it published as soon as possible, but the novel's prophetic character was obscured by the Swiss authorities' determination to remain neutral; the volume was thus first published in 1949. (For further discussion, see Susanne Koppe's 'Nachwort' to *Die Kinder aus Nr. 67 Band 9: Der neue Bund*, Munich 1993, pp. 251-2).
14. Lisa Tetzner, *Die Kinder aus Nr. 67: Erwin und Paul: Geschichte einer Freundschaft / Das Mädchen aus dem Vorderhaus*, Frankfurt 2014, p. 8. Future references appear in the text as *EP*.
15. Jaimey Fisher, *Disciplining Germany: Youth, Reeducation and Reconstruction after the Second World War*, Detroit 2007, p. 14.

16. We do, however, see a letter from him to Erwin that indicates how far he has already succumbed to Nazi ideology; see *Erwin kommt nach Schweden*, Düsseldorf 2004, pp. 98-100.
17. Lisa Tetzner, *Ist Paul schuldig?*, Aarau 1945, p. 94. Future references appear in the text.
18. Murray Smith, *Engaging Characters: Fiction, Emotion and the Cinema*, Oxford 1995, esp. pp. 81-6.
19. ‘Sneewittchen’ in *Kinder- und Hausmärchen gesammelt durch die Brüder Jacob und Wilhelm Grimm*, Halle 1894, p. 192. This image is explicitly referenced earlier in Tetzner’s novel, p. 61.
20. ‘Es war einmal ein kleines Mädchen, dem war Vater und Mutter gestorben, und es war so arm, daß es kein Kämmerchen mehr hatte darin zu wohnen, und kein Bettchen mehr darin zu schlafen, und endlich gar nichts mehr als die Kleider auf dem Leib und ein Stückchen Brot in der Hand, das ihm ein mitleidiges Herz geschenkt hatte. Es war aber gut und fromm.’ ‘Die Sternthaler’, *Kinder-und Hausmärchen*, p. 496.
21. See Sandra L. Beckett (ed.), *Transcending Boundaries: Writing for a Dual Audience of Children and Adults*, New York 1999, for stimulating discussions of this concept.
22. Lisa Tetzner, *War Paul schuldig? / Als ich wiederkam*, Düsseldorf 2005, p. 173. Future references appear in the text as *WPS*. On the change of title, see Fuss Phillips, *German Children’s and Youth Literature in Exile*, p. 231 and Shavit, *A Past Without Shadow*, pp. 323-4.
23. Shavit, *A Past Without Shadow*, p. 22.
24. Lisa Tetzner, *War Paul schuldig? Kindheit und Jugend im Dritten Reich*, mit Materialien zusammengestellt von Dagmar Grenz, Stuttgart 1982, back cover text and pp. 120 and 126. This edition is still available on the Klett website, <https://www.klett.de/produkt/isbn/978-3-12-260970-2> (accessed 25 April 2016).

25. Lisa Tetzner, *Der neue Bund*, Munich 1993, pp. 133-43 and 143-4. Future references will appear in the text as *DNB*.