

Responses to Nazi
Perpetration in Fiction
Complicity and Continuities

STEPHANIE BIRD



B L O O M S B U R Y

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BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
LONDON • NEW YORK • OXFORD • NEW DELHI • SYDNEY

BLOOMSBURY ACADEMIC
Bloomsbury Publishing Plc
50 Bedford Square, London WC1B 3DP, UK
1385 Broadway, New York, NY 10018, USA
29 Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2, Ireland

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First published in Great Britain 2024

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A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Bird, Stephanie, author.

Title: Responses to Nazi perpetration in fiction : complicities and continuities /
Stephanie Bird, University College London, UK.

Description: London ; New York : Bloomsbury Academic, 2024. |

Includes bibliographical references.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024013310 (print) | LCCN 2024013311 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781350424098 (hardback) | ISBN 9781350424135 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781350424104 (pdf) | ISBN 9781350424111 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: East European fiction—History and criticism. |

German fiction—History and criticism. | Nazis in literature. |

Criminals in literature. | Responsibility in literature. | LCGFT: Literary criticism.

Classification: LCC PN849.E9 B57 2024 (print) | LCC PN849.E9 (ebook) |

DDC 809.3/935—dc23/eng/20240712

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024013310>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2024013311>

ISBN: HB: 978-1-3504-2409-8

ePDF: 978-1-3504-2410-4

eBook: 978-1-3504-2411-1

Typeset by Integra Software Services Pvt. Ltd.

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For Zora and Chiayé

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Acknowledgements

I am very grateful to the UK Arts and Humanities Research Council for its generous funding of the interdisciplinary research project 'Compromised Identities? Reflections on Perpetration and Complicity under Nazism', from which this book emerged. The project was supported throughout by our advisory committee, who offered critical and constructive feedback from the outset: Kjell Anderson, Susanne Knittel, Andy Pearce, Paul Salmons, Dorothee Wierling and Michael Wildt. Huge additional thanks to Susanne for her stimulating, challenging and informed series of multidisciplinary workshops on 'Teaching on Perpetrators' in 2015–2016, and for ongoing conversations, which have given me much to think about. Likewise, I am indebted to Cornelia Wächter for including me in her DFG network 'Complicity: Enfoldings and Unfoldings' and to Ivan Stacy for alerting me to it. My work has been thoroughly enriched by fascinating and thought-provoking discussions with all the participants in the network. Thank you too to the many colleagues and students who have talked to me about perpetration and complicity and helped me refine my ideas.

Many thanks indeed to Dana Ariel for her kind permission to use her image 'Hainich Forest (excavated)' for the book cover. Ariel came across Hainich Forest when her grandfather suggested visiting the concentration camp Buchenwald and she struggled to go with him. Hainich Forest was the place they visited instead. For Ariel, the notion of complicity is rooted in her wider project 'Hainich Forest', as is the struggle to speak of it within her family and in Israel, where she grew up. Visiting sites, Hainich in particular, stands in many ways for the lack of words and the difficulty of revisiting this past, or more personally for the absence of a shared language with her grandfather. This absence made its way to the site, and manifests in Ariel's many visits to this place over different seasons and in the various layers of the printing process.

I am deeply grateful to Mary Fulbrook, Stefanie Rauch, Christoph Thonfeld, Bastiaan Willems and Zoltán Kékesi for our close collaboration over the past few years. The book has been forged and enhanced through rigorous and critical discussions with them and through the support they have given me throughout. Finally, profound thanks to Erica Carter and John Martin for their encouragement and for tolerating the miseries of the writing process.

Introduction: Open to all voices

When Elizabeth Costello writes her statement of belief, she describes herself as '*a trader in fictions*', and as such someone who changes beliefs according to her needs.¹ Costello, J. M. Coetzee's writer-protagonist is compelled to write this statement for a panel of judges who are evaluating whether she may pass through the gate into what appears to be paradise. She cites Czesław Miłosz to describe herself as a 'secretary of the invisible', open to 'all voices, not just the voices of the murdered and violated [...] If it is their murderers and violators who choose to summon me instead, to use me and speak through me, I will not close my ears to them, I will not judge them.' She will speak for murderers 'as long as they speak the truth'. The judges are not happy and ask Costello whether she is 'bankrupt of conscience' by not judging between a murderer and his victim.² She is further irritated by their hackneyed question about how she feels able to judge that truth. She tells them she neither has 'faith in art' nor do her books seek to teach anything, they 'merely spell out [...] how one person lived, one among billions'.³

The judges articulate a disquiet that is frequently discernible in responses to representations of perpetrators that give them a voice, present their point of view, or give access to their subjectivity and motivations. Anxiety about how to communicate the perspectives of those involved in implementing mass violence is common in reactions to historical or documentary representations, museum exhibitions or fictional accounts, not least because such accounts may be neither truthful nor accurate. It can be difficult to verify people's accounts, particularly what is omitted from them, which in turn makes it hard to recognize strategies of denial and evasions built upon self-deception. When perpetrators voice their perspective, we might be persuaded by their position, seduced by the fascination exerted by a perpetrator or even into mythologizing evil. Listening to them might validate their point of view and erode the moral certainties with which they are condemned. In George Steiner's *The Portage to San Cristóbal of A. H.*, the Nazi hunter,

Emmanuel Lieber, warns against letting the aged Hitler 'speak freely', for if he does, those who hear will 'grow uncertain [...] and no longer believe what he did'.⁴ Anxiety around perpetrator accounts betrays a concern with emotional and moral contamination. Empathy might facilitate a listener or reader becoming complicit with an exculpatory narrative by lending credibility to the moral and emotional context within which the perpetrator affirms himself. In the case of fictional accounts, unease is also fuelled by ethical worry that any aesthetic enjoyment of their representation might be morally inappropriate.

Like Costello, Jorge Luis Borges and Steiner resist moralizing about voicing perpetrator perspectives. Borges is unapologetic about letting Otto Dietrich zur Linde speak as 'the Platonic idea of a Nazi' in his fictional monologue *Deutsches Requiem*.⁵ Borges insists on the separation of his political beliefs from his fiction: 'I think a writer's duty is to be a writer [...] Everybody knows my opinions, but as for my dreams and my stories, they should be allowed their full freedom.'⁶ Steiner too defends his freedom as a writer to have his fictional Hitler speak freely in his own defence, letting him point to the complicity of other nations in the Holocaust and the fact that his crimes were exceeded by the crimes of others. Steiner was criticized for '[putting] in Hitler's mouth [...] provocations and dialectical arguments either unanswered or, indeed, in some degree unanswerable'. In response, he argues that his fictional Hitler's questions are valid and unavoidable, but that he has no answers. Indeed, Steiner 'has grown to distrust those who confidently and eloquently do', for the many examples of mass murder present us with 'unthinkable paradoxes'.⁷

Taking the tension between anxiety and 'speaking the truth' as a starting point, this book emphasizes the ways in which fiction explores unthinkable paradoxes without the need to resolve them. The genocidal policies of National Socialism form the central case study for approaching representations of perpetration and complicity in state-sanctioned violence, an example of historical trauma that continues to fuel debates about narrative ethics and appropriate modes of representation. It is an example that has too often resulted in 'attitudes and platitudes' that shape and even prescribe how to interpret and respond to such representations.⁸ The study is not designed to be representative, but to be suggestive. It focuses on selected authors and texts from countries that were directly involved in or affected by the genocidal policies of National Socialism: Imre Kertész from Hungary, Borislav Pekić and Aleksandar Tišma from Yugoslavia, Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Volker Kutscher and Merle Kröger from Germany, Nir Baram from Israel and Olga Tokarczuk from Poland. The novels demand our engagement with perpetration and complicity and

question literature's critique of and participation in the perpetration of mass violence and structures of oppression. By doing so they sharpen our awareness of representational orthodoxies, pieties and platitudes. The authors invite us to consider the distinctive role that fiction plays in challenging norms through its adherence to the realm of play and speculation. They interrogate boundaries that seek to contain people's involvement in mass atrocity, be this in conceptual categorization, moral evaluation, temporal distancing or exculpatory discourses, including cultural and philosophical discourses.

Perpetration to complicity: the German shift

In Varlam Shalamov's story 'The Red Cross', the narrator wonders how the escort guard, who has often killed prisoners in the Kolyma camp, will talk about his job: 'what is he going to tell the girl he marries about his work in the Far North? Will he tell her about using his rifle butt to hit starving old men who could no longer walk?'⁹ The answer is that he probably will not and that were he to talk about his involvement in state-condoned violence, he would do so in a way that upheld his view of himself as a good person. Self-justification is core to perpetrator narratives, both when they are committing violence and after the event. They shape a version of their behaviour that sustains a positive view of themselves, drawing on the discourses available to them at the time of their actions and in the changing social and moral contexts that follow. The potential to construct narratives that help uphold a positive self-image is already given in the context of genocide and mass violence, in as far as these are complex and dynamic processes. As the conditions shift, so too do the 'actors' relations, perspectives, motives, and identities.¹⁰ Indeed, within this fluid process, someone who perpetrates violence may also be a victim of violence and a rescuer. Participants in violence have different, often competing motives and adapt the ideological script that advocates violence to their own needs.¹¹ Whether they act for instrumental (material benefit, career advancement) or ideological (anti-Semitism, social change) reasons, 'the decision to perpetrate, like all decisions, is made not in terms of absolute values, but rather according to the ranking of values.'¹² Such ranking means that a person's course of action need not rely on jettisoning certain core values at the expense of others, which further enables an individual to sustain a belief in their positive identity. They adapt their identity to conform to changed moral contexts, such that later lies and excuses 'represent the psychological reality they have created for themselves.'¹³

Although, of course, the reality is not simply created by themselves. Participants in state-sanctioned violence act within a moral context created by state power that enables and condones violence: 'Perpetrators of genocide are both criminals and good citizens.'¹⁴ Yet even a moral context within which murder is encouraged does not necessarily require a fundamental shift in the values of participants. They can act in accordance with beliefs and qualities that are lauded in non-violent societies, such as doing a good job, obeying the law or taking care of one's family. This also applies to institutions. As Stefan Kühl argues, 'a very large number of "ordinary organizations" – [...] remarkable for the normality of their programs, their communication channels, and their personnel – were involved in the Holocaust.'¹⁵ They could do so because the ways in which they motivated their members to act did not essentially alter: attractive aims; internal discipline and high penalties for leaving; collegiality and comradeship; money; and job satisfaction. Continuity of beliefs and motivations meant that in post-war West Germany, individuals and institutions involved in perpetration had their view of themselves condoned through the values promoted by the Cold War. The myth of the 'clean' Wehrmacht was accepted by the American military not least because of a shared attitude towards the threat of the Bolshevik, and Slavic, enemy.¹⁶

The broader context is vital to rationalizations of perpetration and the form they take. Rationalizations at the time of committing violence, and later, involve adapting one's narrative to dominant norms, be that at a social level or that of the immediate peer group. It is in relation to these wider norms, even if only those of a like-minded group, and the social and moral recognition they confer, that individuals constitute their identities and view of themselves. The affirmation granted by these relations, the meaning and self-respect they offer, or, conversely, the undermining of identity posed by the threat of exclusion, is a powerful motivating force in enabling people to commit systematic mass murder. This 'reciprocal relation' of recognition is vital for building and reinforcing the boundaries between the in and out group that collective violence relies on.¹⁷ It is also vital for securing the cooperation and complicity of the wider social group in the persecution of members of the out-group that normally precedes violence. State-condoned violence depends upon a community or nation whose members share the same 'politically salient identity' as the perpetrators.¹⁸ In the case of National Socialism, this was race: membership of the *Volksgemeinschaft*, the people's community, depended upon being 'aryan'. But does sharing an identity equate to being complicit in violence carried out in the name of the group? After all, being defined as 'aryan' in 1935 was not determined by the individual but by

a change in the law. Non-Jewish Germans varied in their degree of support for the National Socialists, in how much they knew and in how much they could change anyway.

These were all arguments used by Germans after the war to deflect accusations of complicity and the negative judgement it brings. They demonstrated the same impulse to legitimize themselves as those directly involved in genocidal violence, drawing on narratives that maintained their integrity as decent people over time, be that as parents, citizens or workers. Such narratives depended centrally on denial. There was a marked shift from Germans admitting knowledge of mass murder of Jews before April 1945 to never having known what was happening.¹⁹ 'All of a sudden no one was a Nazi!'²⁰ People claimed internal opposition to the Nazis all along and emphasized their lack of agency and with it reduced responsibility: they acted out of fear of Nazi terror or they were following orders or, as members of the Wehrmacht, had sworn an oath (raising an oath to the status of moral absolute that obviates individual responsibility). Agency plays a crucial role in fashioning narratives. The less an individual, group or institution can affect circumstances, the more credible their claims of non-culpability become. Thus, from the 1950s there was widespread recourse to a victim narrative, with a small Nazi elite blamed for the evils that had been visited upon the Germans; in their eyes, they were the main victims.²¹ In the 1950s and 1960s the focus of the historiography on a discrete group of ideologically committed Nazis at the head of a repressive totalitarian regime reinforced this narrative. In parallel, historians in the German Democratic Republic (GDR) worked within an ideological framework that reduced the culpability of workers and peasants by understanding Nazism as a product of monopoly capitalism and imperialism.²²

Interest in the relationship of the wider German population to the functioning of the Nazi regime grew from the 1970s with the influence of social history. Historians considered the significance of class, religion, locality and gender in influencing support for the Nazis, all of which eroded any clear delineation between actively perpetrating Nazis and quiescent, ignorant or victimized Germans. During the 1980s, the top-down totalitarian power model of the regime gave way to the understanding of the regime as polycratic, with competing bases and institutions of power resulting in dynamic relations between centre and periphery. Furthermore, comprehension grew of how fundamental race was to the organization and functioning of the state, accompanied by widespread conformity of the general population and indifference to the fate of Jews and other persecuted groups. Christopher Browning's 1992 study of the 'ordinary

men' involved in the mass murder of Jews after 1941 demonstrated that perpetrators did not have to be ideologically anti-Semitic to murder. It also threw into stark relief the question of what it meant to be an 'ordinary German' in a genocidal dictatorship in which individuals benefited from racial policies even if they were not ideological Nazis. Many motives interacted in people's willingness to support the regime, of which profiting from the persecution of Jews was one. From the 2000s, the Nazi notion of the *Volksgemeinschaft* was advocated by some historians as a helpful heuristic term to explore both the acquiescence of gentile Germans in the structuring of society around inclusion and exclusion and their modes of engagement with the regime. Research pointed to the concurrent existence of racist ideology and a positive vision of the future that offered opportunities for individual and national self-fulfilment for those who belonged to the national community.²³

The developments in historiography have entailed fundamental shifts in how agency is conceived of and, therefore, of who might be considered complicit with persecution and mass murder. Increasingly, it is the changing interactions of individuals with the norms and structures within which they operate that historians have emphasized. For those Germans not excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft* and therefore not subject to systematic and legalized persecution and exclusion, coercive measures were undoubtedly implemented. However, as Frank Bajohr argues, 'the regime seldom exercised direct compulsion', preferring to '[set] parameters within which [the population] could act fairly independently'. As a result, many Germans 'moved in an extremely flexible way between quite divergent systems of norms and values, if they found that they were meaningful to them and in keeping with their own personal interests.'²⁴ Bajohr's notion of 'community of action' reflects the dynamic way in which individuals and organizations used Nazi ideology for their own ends, which might in some cases be more accurately described as 'alliances of collective self-interest'.²⁵ Certainly, Michael Wildt's insistence on the possibilities for individuals' 'self-empowerment' captures the opportunities and rewards that opened up, such as, for example, getting forced labourers.²⁶ Harald Welzer points out the sobering irony that it was a dictatorial system that granted to many citizens an 'expansion of their personal freedom'.²⁷

What is clear is that even while people's identities and values are themselves constituted by wider norms, their actions or inaction in turn contribute to the process of attitudes and values becoming accepted as norms. Kühl points to the 'fictional' anti-Semitic consensus under Nazism, an untested assumption that others agreed with anti-Semitism and which therefore put the onus on those

who protested against it to justify themselves. Similarly, within institutions, members contributed initiatives from below and their behaviour, be it active or compliant, contributed to the shifting parameters of the 'zone of indifference', a range of tasks that members of any organization accept as part of their expected work.²⁸ Social psychologists too have highlighted the mutually constituting relationship between values and behaviour, pointing to the role that cognitive dissonance plays in causing attitudes to change. Beliefs affect behaviour, but if people behave in a way that contravenes their norms, 'they resolve the tension [...] by evaluating that behaviour more positively', for example, by negatively changing their attitudes to people they have harmed.²⁹ The complex process of how norms of behaviour and values are negotiated and reinforced is also important for understanding the nature of leadership and obedience. The post-war defence of having to follow orders, which, in keeping with the top-down totalitarian model of power functioned to absolve most of society of blame, has been thoroughly challenged. At the level of individuals, the evidence showing that those (few) men who refused to kill Jews were not disciplined refutes the later appeals to *Befehlsnotstand*. At the governance level, Hitler's subordinates did not require specific orders to carry out genocide, but interpreted and enacted policies in the spirit of what he wanted ('working towards the Führer'). These examples point to the importance of wider relations of power and how they intersect with identity. People do not automatically or passively inhabit roles in an 'agentic state', but assume them 'only to the extent that these roles make sense – or, rather, have been made to make sense – in the context of a salient social identity'. Effective leaders must give sense to action by representing themselves as 'an actualization of group beliefs, values and norms'.³⁰ They thereby promote not enforced conformity but 'engaged followership'.³¹

German historians' understanding of National Socialism has increasingly underscored the dynamic relationship between members of the national community and the regime and the extent to which actors' behaviour, be it passive or active, both shaped and consolidated the norms and structures that facilitated persecution and mass murder. The difficulty in thinking about these mutually constitutive and dynamic interactions, and how perpetration and complicity become conceptualized and used analytically, is again evident in discussions over the term bystander; a term that is constantly problematized but that continues to be widely used. Highlighted by Raul Hilberg in 1992, it is the third category in the now commonly invoked trio of 'Perpetrators Victims Bystanders'.³² Its continued use resides in the combination of its descriptive simplicity and its moral reproach: those standing by while violence occurs

might have influenced events and even prevented the violence, had they not remained passive onlookers. But both as a category and as an analytic term, it is problematic. First, using a noun to categorize people not only reinforces the notion that people can be neatly classified, but it also suggests that an individual's identity is reducible to that classification. This concern is not limited to 'bystander'. It is also directed at the term 'perpetrator', since it obscures the social processes whereby individuals become involved in inflicting violence. In relation to 'victim', it risks diminishing the richness of individual and social identity to the very position that was violently forced upon them. Second, the category of bystander is extremely broad, resulting in the weakening of its analytic value at the expense of a 'more differentiated spectrum'.³³ The generality of the category leads to the third challenge, which is the term's moral flexibility. Despite initially raising questions of culpability of those who witness or are aware of the violence, the 'bystander' is positioned outside the act of violence, thus facilitating a sense of neutrality or even slippage into the 'alluring alibi' of 'innocent' bystander.³⁴ Finally, 'bystander' suggests a static state, whereas both the immediate and broader social context are in flux. Bystanders help constitute the situation, with the failure to act itself a form of response; whatever an individual may think privately, inaction can be understood to endorse violence or show that it will be tolerated.³⁵

These reservations have led to calls for a more nuanced framework for exploring 'bystanding', understood as 'intrinsically a temporally unstable, relational concept'.³⁶ As was the case with *Volksgemeinschaft*, the inherent instability of a term culminates in the call for its use 'as a heuristic device', as a starting point for analysing the complex interaction of individuals with changing social structures and processes.³⁷ Just such discussions have taken place in relation to the term complicity, with similar tensions between specificity and generalization, between individual agency and social relations. Here too, recognition of the complexity of the relations that the concept seeks to define has resulted in affirming 'complicity' as a productive heuristic tool.

Unsettling complicity

Dividing lines between the perpetration of state violence and complicity are hard to draw. With the exception of the small ideologically driven vanguard and the few sadists who enjoy violence, people's involvement in violence exposes the complex and dynamic interplay of identity, social processes and behaviours and

the different, often conflicting ways in which individuals position themselves in relation to social formations and groups. Analysis and debate about the nature of complicity has often been at its most acute in the face of state-sanctioned mass atrocity, when, of course, it is recognized as such either at the time or afterwards. Adam Kelly and Will Norman argue that interest in its broader, rather than specifically legal conceptualizations, has been particularly evident at three historical points: the slavery abolition campaigns; following the emergence of unprecedentedly powerful state regimes, in particular the Nazis; and in the present, early twenty-first century. The concern with complicity and responsibility at these times is a response to the different articulations of global capitalism and economic imperialism, which produced and continue to sustain a radically uneven distribution of resources based on exploitation, often murderous violence and 'systematic, state-sanctioned racialization'.³⁸ By interrogating complicity, the relationship between distance and harm is acknowledged that becomes all the more crucial as human relations are ever more mediated by the flows of capital, finance, commodities, information and so on, to the point that there is now no outside of 'coercive markets'.³⁹

As this historicization of complicity makes clear, the notion of complicity is not new and nor is it unique in signalling complexity. Guilt too thinks about an individual's 'being-with-others, both synchronically (within a community) and diachronically (within a history and heritage)' and has also long functioned as a 'figure for thinking relationality'.⁴⁰ In his engagement with the question of different types of culpability in the immediate aftermath of the Holocaust in 1946, Karl Jaspers outlined four notions of guilt: criminal guilt, political guilt, moral guilt and metaphysical guilt.⁴¹ Hannah Arendt recognized the danger that metaphysical guilt in particular might result in guilt being de-politicized, but she too insisted on the responsibility that people have by virtue of being social beings: 'This vicarious responsibility for things we have not done, this taking upon ourselves the consequences for things we are entirely innocent of, is the price we pay for the fact that we live our lives not by ourselves but among our fellow men.'⁴²

Such broader conceptualizations of guilt and responsibility influence or find new articulation in current discussions about complicity. Work on complicity has generally sought to widen its meaning and reach, with considerable theorization of the term as a signifier of complexity. Etymologically, complicity is derived from the Latin *complicāre*, meaning to fold or lay together, or to complicate. The term thus signals how humans are enfolded within intricate structures, situations and relations that, in keeping with the negative connotations of the word, do

harm. Christopher Kutz was instrumental in thinking about how the standard legal principles for apportioning responsibility to individuals who act in groups could be extended, in recognition of the fact that the 'most important and far-reaching harms and wrongs of contemporary life are the products of collective actions, mediated by social and institutional structures'. Even if one individual rarely makes any difference to the harm, Kutz proposes a relational conception of accountability such that 'those who contribute to collective acts on an ongoing basis will fall into the category of intentional participants so long as they see themselves as part of a collective act, and whether or not they favor the collective goal'.⁴³ This would include, for example, 'just doing my job' within an institution.⁴⁴ Kutz insists on the ethical value of this re-conceptualization of complicity. It both reinvigorates the importance of the individual sense of self in the face of anonymizing systems and it depends on recognizing the reality of community, with its mix of 'cooperation [...] with discord'.⁴⁵

Mark Sanders also placed the ethical significance of community at the heart of his exploration of complicity in relation to South African apartheid. He argues that humans are 'folded-together' with others as human beings, a recognition of complicity with others that enables the individual 'to assume responsibility for what is done in one's name'.⁴⁶ Complicity is therefore not in opposition to responsibility but its precondition: '[i]n the absence of an *acknowledgment* of complicity in a wider sense of foldedness with the other, whether welcomed or not, there would have been no opposition to apartheid'.⁴⁷ Like Kutz's invocation of community, Sanders's understanding of complicity as 'the basic folded-together-ness of being, of human-being' brings to the fore the potential for positive ethical connotations of complicity. Debarati Sanyal articulates a similar position when she describes complicity as the 'foundation of responsibility since it is the *refusal* of complicity that is the traditional hallmark of commitment'.⁴⁸ Nevertheless, she cautions against the danger of universalizing the term, and is critical of how Giorgio Agamben's conflation of Primo Levi's 'gray zone' of the death camps with the human condition results in 'historical and ethical distortions'.⁴⁹ The risk that the notion of complicity becomes so universalized that its value as a heuristic term is lost is what Stephen Clingman warns against. He observes that if we accept Jacques Derrida's assertion that '[e]ven if all forms of complicity are not equivalent, they are *irreducible*', then to the extent that they are irreducible, they are also equivalent: 'All roads lead to complicity, in such a version, and what this means is a certain reconciliation with (if not short-cut to) the irreducible, and the preclusion of any history in an analytical or sequential sense'.⁵⁰

Arendt knew this when she criticized collective guilt as a version of mass exoneration: 'Where all are guilty, no one is.' She targets white liberals as particular culprits of the fashionable 'we are all guilty' reaction to racism, a position that protects against determining actual culprits and that serves as 'the best excuse for doing nothing' in the face of the 'very magnitude of the crime.'⁵¹ The same danger extends to complicity, especially in view of the term's necessary concern with social relations and systems. In a recent iteration of thinking about the scope of complicity, Michael Rothberg extends the established notion of being implicated in something into a near-ontological subject position: the 'implicated subject'. The 'implicated subject' both continues in the established tradition of recognizing complicity's ethical foundation for opposition and commitment and at the same time renders it peculiarly ahistorical and unpolitical. Peculiarly, because Rothberg is very much concerned with countering the persisting legacies of historical injustices and the continuing power structures that perpetuate privilege and victimhood. The implicated subject is someone who inhabits a privileged position in these structures and benefits from them, even if she or he did nothing to bring them about. Self-critical awareness of one's implicatedness, the dangers of narcissistic self-reflection notwithstanding, can lead to people responding to power by forging long-distance political solidarity that seeks justice. Such solidarity 'has greater purchase than a politics premised on identification, purity or the absolute separation between locations and histories.'⁵² Yet Rothberg's very term suggests that being an implicated subject is an existential state. Not only do 'structures of power produce implicated subjects as a necessary effect', but also 'most subjects find themselves enmeshed in histories and structures of violence they may not realize they inhabit and help prop up.'⁵³ As Jarula Wegner points out, the implicated subject is negatively constructed solely in opposition to manifestations of power but never as grasping power, which makes it difficult to see how social organization can take place. Power is redirected to solidarity but with Rothberg's emphasis on aesthetic responses it is symbolic solidarity that is privileged and not a political response. Somewhat laconically, Wegner refers to the 'implicated object' to describe the limited effectiveness of Rothberg's pejorative subject construction.⁵⁴

The capaciousness of this 'umbrella term that gathers a range of subject positions',⁵⁵ as well as terms such as 'solidarity', is that consideration of actions, their specific context and causes, are easily blurred or disregarded. Attributing complicity is 'contingent on [...] actions.'⁵⁶ Furthermore, and this is crucial to Sanders's compelling analysis of complicity, solidarity may itself bring the potential for harm. The existential 'project of human folded-together-ness' can

be undermined by the specific complicity of holding a particular loyalty, of belonging to a particular party or cause, when 'the actors in question ultimately accept responsibility only in front of their own'. As a result, 'any profession of responsibility – be it in the name of justice, resistance to injustice, or merely in the cause of solidarity – entertains the possibility of *doing* injustice'.⁵⁷ Awareness of past injustice, a sense of victimhood or solidarity with victims, or assertions of responsibility based on historical trauma are common to any number of political positions, including those that re-establish a strong sense of in-group identity and a politics aimed against an out-group. Here the relationality of complicity is again evident: what one person may judge as complicity, another might praise as solidarity; working with a group that is inflicting harm might be viewed as complicit by some and by others as a necessary or positive compromise that mitigates worse harms. The ascription of complicity, rather than compromise, to an individual or group assumes agreement on the harm done and the rightness of non-involvement, which is precisely what is disputed in people's view of themselves. Both complicity and compromise involve moral discomfort arising from involvement in wrongdoing,⁵⁸ but how that involvement is morally evaluated depends on the position of the observer.

Making the claim that a person or group is complicit with a harm easily implies that a position of purity is possible and maybe that the observer inhabits it or at least knows what it is. The ethics of withdrawing from situations in which any action might involve the subject in relations of harm is not a new concern, as Hegel attests in his criticism of the beautiful soul who 'is too conscientious to dirty his hands by acting decisively, but self-righteously condemns the actions of others as wrong and hypocritical'.⁵⁹ Determining that someone has dirtied their hands by doing the dirty work of the state can inflict stigma and moral injury on those who do that work but who are not deemed to be victims of the power hierarchy.⁶⁰ Judging others is also a way of maintaining one's view of oneself as not complicit and is thus a clear articulation of one's own position. Such positioning, as Paul Reynolds argues, is what makes the concept of complicity useful not just analytically but also rhetorically. In addition to cases where evidence for specific claims of complicity can be adduced, the 'rhetorical power of complicity narratives lies in their capacity to evoke cohesive and persuasive narratives as narratives, or stories that capture attention and belief in the political milieu'. The rhetorical effect depends not on substantiation but creates negative associations through reference to 'indirect, veiled, and loose associations'.⁶¹ Thinking about complicity and using the term is therefore not just about the complicit person. It is about the way in which that person is defined as complicit and what that also

reveals about how the person making the evaluation wishes to be seen. Claiming that others are complicit, or indeed that one is complicit oneself, is a way of locating oneself morally, socially and politically, just as denying complicity is.

Professions of empathy, or the lack of it, can have a similar rhetorical function. The distrust of empathy in relation to perpetrators and those who are complicit with them is based on the suspicion that it heralds moral compromise, relativizing the seriousness of the harm. It is the obverse of hailing empathy as ethically valuable, as an affect that structures the encounter with the other in recognition of their shared humanity and therefore necessarily positive. The work of historians and those working on collective violence has long demonstrated the limits of this view, since empathy, like other emotions, can be channelled to cause just as much harm as good. Following Fritz Breithaupt's definition of empathy as 'the coexperience of another's situation', which encompasses cognitive processes as well as emotions, it is evident that empathy can forge bonds for members of an in-group that sustain the values of that group and facilitate violence against others.⁶² Denying empathy for those who perpetrate or are complicit with violence is perhaps a way for those (of us) who do not wish to get their hands dirty to shore themselves up in their in-group. We sustain our easy identification with victims and carefully guard society's 'tacit agreement' whereby the executioners are found guilty for deeds the world did nothing to prevent but where the perpetrators' guilt serves to redeem others.⁶³ In the realm of narrative fiction, professions or refusals of empathy with a fictionalized figure are particularly in danger of becoming a form of performative morality, since such empathy does not necessarily extend beyond the book covers (or credits in the case of narrative cinema).⁶⁴

The notion of complicity is a useful heuristic tool for understanding people's position relative to collective harms and perpetration and how they justify themselves and normalize their behaviour at the time and after.⁶⁵ It opens enquiry into the many ways in which individuals and groups, and their own self-understanding, are situated within wider structures and social processes; and how identities shift over time in relation to changing circumstance and norms. Used as a 'marker for complexity' in this way is to accept an imprecision that runs the risk of diluting the term's function as a moral and legal charge.⁶⁶ Nevertheless, theoretical and historiographical debates about terms demonstrate that a lack of definitional precision, or debates over the nature of the boundaries, itself results in productive research and the analysis of specific case studies. Furthermore, understanding the notion as one whose influence stems also from its rhetorical force allows for an awareness of the moral and political positioning

of those using it analytically. As Joel Pfister so persuasively puts it: ‘complicity critiques can be historically decorated forms of a self-liberatory therapeutic confessionalism that partly purges the professional-managerial-class complicity critic as the critic announces his or her guilt and complicity.’⁶⁷

The novels

Literature is unique in its ability to explore structures and processes of perpetration and complicity. Literary texts have long been interested in the complex motivations and emotional dispositions of characters and how they are situated within and respond to their social context. At the same time, literature frequently scrutinizes its own processes of representation and forms of mediation and how these relate to systems of power and hegemonic discourses.⁶⁸ The reader participates in linguistic and cultural constructions of identity, which may of course result in the naturalization of discourses that tolerate harms and affirmation of the political structures they support.⁶⁹ Yet texts also solicit ways of reading that challenge or unsettle readers, precisely by inviting them to assume perspectives that they would find emotionally or morally objectionable, or repellent, outside the boundaries of fiction. There are many different aesthetic strategies for ensuring that the reader ‘is drawn and enfolded into ethically compromised situations,’⁷⁰ not least through the use of voice and mode of address, seduction, eliciting identification and intense emotions. These strategies help undermine attempts by the reader to maintain a disinterested moral stance that would position her outside the complex entanglements, and naturalization of discourse, about which she is reading. Indeed, they may also confront the reader with the question of her own enjoyment, for what does it mean if we find ourselves empathizing with a perpetrator or faced with an ‘invisible admiration of the murder; the decisiveness and ruthlessness, the audacity’?⁷¹ Or, as Coetzee asks of the writer who is preoccupied with state violence and torture: ‘[i]f the novelist finds in squalor the occasion for his most soaring poetic eloquence, might he not be guilty of seeking out his squalid subject matter for perversely literary reasons?’ He points to the fundamental problem faced by the writer of how to avoid either ignoring the state’s obscenities or producing representations of them,⁷² a dilemma that extends also to readers.

This returns us to the anxiety of giving Holocaust perpetrators and those complicit with them a voice, not that this has hindered the surge in fiction that focuses on perpetrators across Europe and America in the last twenty years, as

Robert Eaglestone affirms. He suggests that this results from a combination of the extensive historical research into perpetration and complicity, the appetite for historical novels set fifty years in the past, and the dominance of the memory of the Holocaust and its role as a 'proxy', or 'screen memory', for different and subsequent atrocities, central to which are colonial atrocities.⁷³ The more recent literary interest in Holocaust perpetration and complicity is thus also part of the wider resurgence of concern with complicity relating to global networks and harms inflicted at a distance, particularly the violence and harms of colonialism, and the question of how to conceptualize such entanglements. However, the evident fascination with perpetration and complicity and the attempts to understand them through fiction, do not necessarily reflect a lessening of moral anxiety. One response is to 'swerve' away from actually 'engaging or explaining this evil', even while seeking or purporting to explore it.⁷⁴ Concerns about being drawn into the perpetrator's perspective, of being fascinated by and seduced by his outlook, are mitigated if his perspective is contained or framed in some way. This might be achieved with a conventional redemptive narrative in which the perpetrator shows remorse and insight into his own evil; through unambiguous moral contextualization; or by conformity to clear genre expectations in which good triumphs over evil or the perpetrator is a comic figure of fun. Such moralizing or fundamentally didactic representations do not generally trigger worry and might themselves be considered ways of steering away in good time before a swerve becomes necessary.

Many perpetrator novels do not anchor their depiction of the interior emotional and psychological life of their protagonist in clear moral agendas. Nevertheless, they use distancing and defamiliarizing techniques to limit and problematize empathy with them. Joanne Pettitt points to the way in which Holocaust perpetrator fiction often adopts either a first-person narrative or a metafictional mode to both draw the reader into the narrative while refusing an immersive experience. Thus, the reader can think about the questions raised by perpetrator fiction while rejecting 'true empathetic connections', a process that allows for ethical judgement.⁷⁵ Erin McGlothlin also points to a dynamic of revelation and occlusion in her analysis of constructions of Nazi perpetrators. She highlights the historical connections between journalistic and non-fictional constructions, such as Gitta Sereny's book on Franz Stangl, *Into That Darkness*, or Hannah Arendt's description of Adolf Eichmann in *Eichmann in Jerusalem* and later novels: Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* and Martin Amis's *Time's Arrow* and *The Zone of Interest*. Pointing to the almost 'continuous trajectory in cultural representations of the mind of the Holocaust perpetrator', McGlothlin

argues that earlier non-fictional texts provide a structural and aesthetic basis for fictional works that follow.⁷⁶ She suggests that all the texts she examines encourage a degree of identification with the perpetrator to enhance our understanding of them while at the same time deploying filtering strategies to limit this very understanding. They thereby attest to an anxiety about potential sympathy with the murderers. In the non-fiction, the presence of the mediating figure of the interviewer or interpreter is such a filter. In the novels, the array of literary strategies includes an unreliable narrator, be that first or third person, and a sustained tension between mimetic and antimimetic elements (such as temporal instability). In all cases, the evident filtering inhibits the reader's 'affective and cognitive connection [...] to the perpetrator's consciousness' while also ensuring that the representative process itself becomes the object of readers' reflection.⁷⁷ McGlothlin's study thus reinforces the traditions of self-reflexivity in literature and in (oral) history that insist on the awareness of the mediated nature of narratives and representation more generally; in her examples these traditions are being deployed for the particular effect of interrupting proximity with the perpetrator and mitigating anxiety, unlike narrative forms that deliberately create and play with an illusion of unmediated closeness.⁷⁸

It is in the partial obstruction yet the partial movement forward achieved by the various 'filtering strategies' that McGlothlin locates the texts' ability to 'broach the ethical dilemma of imagining and understanding the perspective and self-understanding of the perpetrator without solving it or neutralizing its problematic implications.'⁷⁹ Here McGlothlin homogenizes the ethical dilemma of fiction and non-fiction as though they are the same. Sybille Schmidt writes of the risk of engaging with perpetrator testimony that 'the perpetration and the annihilation of the victim are repeated on a symbolic level'.⁸⁰ Yet even if historical and literary constructions of perpetrators share certain narrative and aesthetic features, such as, for example, the use of the confessional mode, to equalize the ethical risks in this way is to run a different risk: that of too hastily overlooking the distinction of fiction and its ethical potential. The critical approach to perpetration and complicity is often hedged with references to understanding, learning from, reflecting on, not exceeding the 'boundaries of appropriate enquiry',⁸¹ rather than discussion of enjoyment, the thrill of horror or the pleasure of a 'moral holiday' from inhabiting different personas, including morally repulsive ones. One of the unique features of fiction is its capacity for play. It does not have to reconcile paradoxes, ambiguity or competing perspectives, and its interpretative openness resists the constraints of argument or moral clarity. This is not to say that fiction does not present ethical dilemmas

about its own complicity in norms; it can reinforce orthodoxies, just as it can challenge orthodoxies of 'anti-complicity'. But to emphasize the ethical potential it offers through play and pleasure, including the potentially disturbing play of emotions, is to remember its qualitatively distinct contribution to thinking and feeling otherwise and of imagining different relations.

But here again a word of caution: Elizabeth Costello has no faith in art. A heightened awareness of complexity, or reflection on the various ways of being complicit, does not determine a particular moral outcome. Nor, if such awareness were to result in action, would it necessarily be action that all agreed was positive.⁸² Interpretative openness is not comforting for it creates an ethical space in which the encounter with the other remains unassimilable.

An interest in the distinctiveness of fiction, its interpretative openness and the nature of the ethical space it opens underpins the analysis of the eight different authors. I consider how the novels contribute to our understanding of perpetration and complicity in mass violence, taking the violence under National Socialism as the starting point. I analyse how authors construct and play with complex justificatory and post hoc exculpatory narratives to think about their own socio-political contexts. Finally, I explore how the novels interrogate their own constructions of mass violence and potential complicity in or resistance to it; and, inseparable from this self-reflexive dimension, what this means for the novels' address to and positioning of the reader. A pervasive theme raised by the novels is that of disturbing continuities. At the diegetic level, such continuities may manifest themselves in questions of an individual's agency and compulsion and how retrospective justifications enable an individual to continue to function in society (or not). The novels also explore the continuities of practice evident in institutions and occupations, such as the army, the police, engineers and intellectuals, as well as political and economic continuities across ostensibly very different forms of state systems. At the textual level, the novels engage with discursive and cultural continuities. I examine the ways that conceptual, moral and political narratives about complicity persist over time and how the novels themselves question those wider narratives. The mode of representation and the form the novels take can also function as a significant intervention in how perpetration and complicity are understood.

Part One, 'Victims and perpetrators: East European dictatorships', focuses on authors who can in different ways be understood as victims of dictatorship. Imre Kertész survived Auschwitz and Zeitz, Borislav Pekić was imprisoned for five years and interrogated by the Yugoslavian regime for his pro-democratic activities and Aleksandar Tišma, whose mother was Jewish, saw himself as a 'bug who

survived the bug spray'.⁸³ All write about Nazi perpetration to explore notions of victimhood and perpetration and to complicate the boundaries between them. Their positions as writers who lived and worked under the post-war dictatorships of Hungary and Yugoslavia, and for Kertész and Tišma their experiences of National Socialism and its legacies, gives them a perspective on perpetration, complicity and the possibilities of resistance that challenges notions of choice. In Part Two, 'Beneficiaries: (West) German liberal democracy', I polemically extend the term 'beneficiaries' to include three contemporary German writers who were not involved in National Socialism but who by virtue of being Germans might arguably be said to have benefited from a state whose post-war reconstruction involved a failure of justice (especially in the Federal Republic), the reintegration of Nazis into the mainstream democratic life and public and private narratives of self-exculpation. I consider why Hans Magnus Enzensberger, Volker Kutscher and Merle Kröger combine archival, historical and extra-textual references with fiction to understand different types of complicity with National Socialism. The texts intervene in current discussions around social democracy, its legitimacy and its limits. I ask whether the interplay of historical research and fiction betrays a concern with history and literature's own responsibility in representing and interpreting the past to consolidate liberal democratic ideals. Finally, Part Three, 'Ordinary people: complicity, counter-narratives and globalization', considers what it means to be 'ordinary' and become complicit in violence or try to resist violence. Taking as its starting point the violence of National Socialism and its links with capitalism, the section broadens out to consider complicity in relation to global capitalism and globalized networks. Developing themes arising in relation to the constraints of and resistance to dictatorships, the pervasive sense of globalized networks also leads to questions about the possibility of counter-positions. Indeed, both Nir Baram and Olga Tokarczuk raise the question of whether resisting complicity must in turn involve ordinary people themselves perpetrating violence.

Notes

- 1 J. M. Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello* (London: Vintage, 2004), 195.
- 2 *Ibid.*, 199; 204.
- 3 *Ibid.*, 207.
- 4 George Steiner, *The Portage to San Cristóbal of A. H.* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 45.

- 5 Jorge Luis Borges, *Jorge Luis Borges: Conversations*, ed. Richard Burgin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 21; 'Deutsches Requiem', in *The Aleph*, trans. Andrew Hurley (London: Penguin, 2000).
- 6 Thomas Di Giovanni, Daniel Halpern and Frank MacShane (eds), *Borges on Writing* (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1973), 59.
- 7 Steiner, *Portage*, 171; 174.
- 8 Rebecca Jinks, *Representing Genocide: The Holocaust as Paradigm?* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 187. See also: Stephanie Bird, *Comedy and Trauma in Germany and Austria after 1945* (Cambridge: Legenda, 2016), 1–30.
- 9 Varlam Shalamov, *Kolyma Stories*, trans. Donald Rayfield (New York: New York Review Books, 2018), 176.
- 10 Lee Ann Fujii, *Killing Neighbors: Webs of Violence in Rwanda* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2009), 8; Kjell Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide: A Criminological Account* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), 62.
- 11 Fujii, *Killing Neighbors*, 12.
- 12 Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 142.
- 13 Alette Smeulders, 'Perpetrators of International Crimes: Towards a Typology', in *Supranational Criminology: Towards a Criminology of International Crimes*, ed. Alette Smeulders and Roelof Haveman (Antwerp: Intersentia, 2008), 262.
- 14 Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 7.
- 15 Stefan Kühl, *Ordinary Organizations: Why Normal Men Carried Out the Holocaust*, trans. Jessica Spengler (Cambridge: Polity, 2016), 155.
- 16 Esther-Julia Howell, *Von den Besiegten lernen? Die kriegsgeschichtliche Kooperation der U.S. Armee und der ehemaligen Wehrmachtseile 1945–1961* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2016), 302.
- 17 Ernesto Verdeja, 'Moral Bystanders and Mass Violence', in *New Directions in Genocide Research*, ed. Adam Jones (New York: Routledge, 2012), 155. See also: Anderson, *Perpetrating Genocide*, 144–5; Kühl, *Ordinary Organizations*, chapter 4; Thomas Kühne, 'Male Bonding and Shame Culture: Hitler's Soldiers and the Moral Basis of Genocidal Warfare', in *Ordinary People as Mass Murderers: Perpetrators in Comparative Perspectives*, ed. Olaf Jensen and Claus-Christian W. Szejnmann (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).
- 18 Verdeja, 'Moral Bystanders', 154.
- 19 Stefanie Rauch, 'Good Bets, Bad Bets and Dark Horses: Allied Intelligence Officers' Encounters with German Civilians, 1944–45', *Central European History* 53, no. 1 (2020): 120–45.
- 20 Hertha von Gebhardt, quoted in Nicholas Stargardt, *The German War: A Nation under Arms, 1939–45* (London: The Bodley Head, 2015), 543.
- 21 Stargardt, *German War*, 548.
- 22 *Perpetration and Complicity under Nazism and Beyond: Compromised Identities?*, ed. Stephanie Bird, Mary Fulbrook, Stefanie Rauch and Bastiaan

- Willems (London: Bloomsbury, 2023), 271. For a full summary of the shifts in historiographical understanding of complicity in Nazi crimes and relevant references, see 270–3.
- 23 For a history of the term and the debates around its use as a heuristic term see Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto, 'Volksgemeinschaft: Writing the Social History of the Nazi Regime', in *Visions of Community in Nazi Germany: Social Engineering and Private Lives*, ed. Martina Steber and Bernhard Gotto (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).
 - 24 Frank Bajohr, "'Community of Action' and Diversity of Attitudes: Reflections on Mechanisms of Social Integration in National Socialist Germany, 1933–45', in Steber and Gotto, *Visions*, 189; 191.
 - 25 Habbo Knoch, 'Gemeinschaften im Nationalsozialismus vor Ort', in 'Volksgemeinschaft' als soziale Praxis, ed. Dietmar von Reeken and Malte Thießen (Schöningh: Brill, 2013), 50. See also John Connelly, 'The Uses of Volksgemeinschaft: Letters to the NSDAP Kreisleitung Eisenach, 1939–1940', *The Journal of Modern History* 68 (1996): 899–930.
 - 26 Michael Wildt, 'Volksgemeinschaft: A Modern Perspective on National Socialist Society', in Steber and Gotto, *Visions of Community*, 44.
 - 27 Harald Welzer, 'On Killing and Morality: How Normal People Become Mass Murderers', in Jensen and Szejnmann (eds), *Ordinary People*, 167.
 - 28 Kühl, *Ordinary Organizations*, 48–9; 41–3.
 - 29 Leonard S. Newman, 'In What Way Is Evil "Banal"? Hanna Arendt's (Interactionist) Thesis', in *Confronting Humanity at its Worst: Social Psychological Perspectives on Genocide*, ed. Leonard S. Newman (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 233.
 - 30 S. Alexander Haslam, Stephen D. Reicher and Jay J. Van Bavel, 'Rethinking the Nature of Cruelty', *American Psychologist* 74, no. 7 (2019): 809–22, 812.
 - 31 Ibid., 818.
 - 32 Raul Hilberg, *Perpetrators Victims Bystanders* (New York: Aaron Asher Books, 1992).
 - 33 Mary Fulbrook, 'Bystanders: Catchall Concept, Alluring Alibi, or Crucial Clue?', in *Probing the Limits of Categorization: The Bystander in Holocaust History*, ed. Christina Morina and Krijn Thijs (New York: Berghahn, 2019), 19. See also: Morina and Krijn, 'Introduction'.
 - 34 Verdeja, 'Moral Bystanders', 155; Fulbrook, 'Bystanders', 21.
 - 35 See: Fulbrook, 'Bystanders', 17; Verdeja, 'Moral Bystanders', 160–1; Mary Fulbrook, *Bystander Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2023), 2–6; Froukje Demant, 'The Many Shades of Bystanding: On Social Dilemmas and Passive Participation', in Morina and Thijs, *Probing the Limits*.
 - 36 Mary Fulbrook, 'Conformity, Compliance and Complicity', in Bird et al., *Perpetration and Complicity*, 38.

- 37 Christina Morina, 'In Search of the Bystander', in Bird et al., *Perpetration and Complicity*, 70.
- 38 Adam Kelly and Will Norman, 'Literature and Complicity: Then and Now', *Comparative Literature Studies (Urbana)* 56, no. 4 (2019): 673–92, 675.
- 39 Ibid., 674.
- 40 Juliane Prade-Weiss, 'Guilt-tripping the "Implicated Subject": Widening Rothberg's Concept of Implication in Reading Herta Müller's *The Hunger Angel*', *Journal of Perpetrator Research* 3, no. 1 (2020): 42–66, 49.
- 41 Karl Jaspers, *Die Schuldfrage* (Heidelberg: Lambert Schneider, 1946).
- 42 Hannah Arendt, *Responsibility and Judgment*, ed. Jerome Kohn (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 158.
- 43 Christopher Kutz, *Complicity: Ethics and Law for a Collective Age* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 113; 162.
- 44 Thomas Docherty agrees that institutional compliance 'is not neutral; rather, it is an acknowledgement (if tacitly held) that we subscribe to the institution's aims'. In *Complicity: Criticism Between Collaboration and Commitment* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016), 10.
- 45 Kutz., *Ethics and Law*, 259.
- 46 Mark Sanders, *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2002), 4.
- 47 Ibid., 11.
- 48 Debarati Sanyal, *Memory and Complicity: Migrations of Holocaust Remembrance* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2015), 12.
- 49 Ibid., 48.
- 50 Stephen Clingman, 'On Ethical Grounds', *Law and Literature* 17, no. 2 (2005): 282.
- 51 Hannah Arendt, *On Violence* (New York: Harcourt, 1970), 65.
- 52 Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject: Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2019), 203.
- 53 Ibid., 35; 49.
- 54 Jarula Wegner, 'Subjects Implicated in Imperial Intimacies: Identity, Reason, Power, and the Reparatory Justice Movement', article under review, 18. Similarly, in his discussion of the interdependence of Rothberg's concepts of 'implicated subject' and 'multidirectional memory', Wegner points out that Rothberg has never historicized his 'politics of memory' and that the concept of multidirectional memory 'continues to outline an ahistorical and universal map of greater and lesser "political potential", or [...] of good and bad forms of remembrance'. See: 'Michael Rothberg. The Implicated Subject', *Memory Studies* 14, no. 2 (2021): 551–8, 554. Zoltán Kékesi and Máté Zombory also offer a detailed analysis of the process of de-politicization in Rothberg's work: 'the model of multidirectional memory as a politico-ethical framework of cross-cultural solidarity ultimately

- fails because of its underlying social ontology and presentist-ahistorical method of interpretation.' See: 'Beyond Multidirectional Memory: Opening Pathways to Politics and Solidarity', in *Memory Studies*. <https://doiorg.libproxy.ucl.ac.uk/10.1177/17506980231176040>. 2023.
- 55 Rothberg, *Implicated Subject*, 14.
 - 56 Ivan Stacy, *The Complicit Text: Failures of Witnessing in Postwar Fiction* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2021), 5.
 - 57 Sanders, *Complicities*, 11; 8.
 - 58 Chiara Lepora and Robert E. Goodin, *On Complicity and Compromise* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).
 - 59 Michael Inwood, *A Hegel Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), 190. See also: Alexis Shotwell, *Against Purity: Living Ethically in Compromised Times* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016).
 - 60 Eyal Press, *Dirty Work: Essential Jobs and the Hidden Toll of Inequality in America* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2021), 14.
 - 61 Paul Reynolds, 'Complicity: Narratives, Articulations, and the Politics of Representation', in *Complicity and the Politics of Representation*, ed. Cornelia Wächter and Robert Wirth (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019), 122; 125.
 - 62 Fritz Breithaupt, *The Dark Side of Empathy*, trans. Andrew B. B. Hamilton (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2019), 10.
 - 63 Imre Kertész, *Fiasco*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville, 2011), 305.
 - 64 See also: Andrea Timár, 'Dehumanization in Literature and the Figure of the Perpetrator', in *The Routledge Handbook of Dehumanization*, ed. Maria Kronfeldner (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 214–15.
 - 65 See also: Afxentis Afxentiou, Robin Dunford and Michael Neu, 'Introducing Complicity', in *Exploring Complicity: Concept, Cases and Critique*, ed. Afxentis Afxentiou, Robin Dunford and Michael Neu (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2017).
 - 66 Juliane Prade-Weiss, 'Complicities, Re-presented: Literary Portrayal in Totalitarianism and Neoliberalism', in Bird et al., *Perpetration and Complicity*, 56.
 - 67 Joel Pfister, *Critique for What? Cultural Studies, American Studies, Left Studies* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006), 138.
 - 68 See also: Cornelia Wächter, 'Introduction: Complicity and Politics and Representation', in Wächter and Wirth, *Politics of Representation*, 6.
 - 69 See also: Stacy, *Complicit Text*, 25.
 - 70 Kelly and Norman, 'Literature and Complicity', 682.
 - 71 Yishai Sarid, *The Memory Monster*, trans. Yardenne Greenspan (New York: Restless Books, 2020), 33.
 - 72 J. M. Coetzee, 'Into the dark chamber: The novelist and South Africa', *The New York Times*, 12 January 1986. <https://www.nytimes.com/1986/01/12/books/into-the-dark-chamber-the-ovelist-and-south-africa.html> (accessed 3 November 2023).

- 73 Robert Eaglestone, *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 48–9; 162.
- 74 Ibid., 49.
- 75 Joanne Pettitt, *Perpetrators in Holocaust Narratives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 11.
- 76 Erin McGlothlin, *The Mind of the Holocaust Perpetrator in Fiction and Nonfiction* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2021), 13.
- 77 Ibid., 15.
- 78 For discussions about the representation of perpetrators in museums, see: Sarah Kleinmann, *Nationalsozialistische Täterinnen und Täter in Ausstellungen: Eine Analyse in Deutschland und Österreich* (Tübingen: EKW-Verlag, 2017); Stephan Jaeger, 'Challenging the Museum Visitor? Complicity and Perpetration during and beyond the Second World War in Contemporary Museum Exhibitions', in Bird et al., *Perpetration and Complicity*.
- 79 McGlothlin, *Mind of the Holocaust Perpetrator*, 21.
- 80 Sybille Schmidt, 'What and How Can We Learn from Perpetrator Testimony?', *Journal of Perpetrator Research* 1, no. 1 (2017): 85–104, 100.
- 81 Jenni Adams, 'Introduction', in *Representing Perpetrators in Holocaust Literature and Film*, ed. Jenni Adams and Sue Vice (Edgware: Vallentine Mitchell, 2013), 2.
- 82 On complicity as a reading practice see also Sanyal, *Memory*, 16–17.
- 83 Charles Simic, 'Introduction', in Aleksandar Tišma, *The Book of Blam*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: New York Review Books, 2016), vii.

Part One

Victims and perpetrators: East European dictatorships

Complicity and comedy: Imre Kertész

Imre Kertész is not commonly thought of as a writer interested in representing perpetrators. He survived deportation to Auschwitz-Birkenau and Zeitz as a fourteen-year-old boy, where he worked as a slave labourer at the Brabag-Werk in Tröglitz-Rehmsdorf. His writing is more immediately associated with the victim's experience; his best-known novel, *Fateless* (1975), is about such a boy who survives the camps and his subsequent works have as their protagonist or narrator a man who has survived Auschwitz. For most of his adult life, Kertész was writing in the context of what he saw as a communist dictatorship, first under Mátyás Rákosi from 1949 to 1956 ('utterly brutal, one had a clear goal: to survive') and then under the regime of János Kádár from 1956 to 1988.¹ After the war, and under both regimes, forms of anti-Semitism persisted. In the immediate post-war period the Communist Party ignored victims and even fomented anti-Semitic action in order to win popular support. From 1949, the communist-dominated government followed the 'Soviet-led antisemitic campaign against "cosmopolitanism" and Zionism' and awareness of the Holocaust was generally low, with commemoration omitting the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust.² These 'mute decades' which 'stifled' the expression of the trauma of the Holocaust gave way to what Kertész describes as an 'eruption' of symptoms.³ Unlike other Eastern bloc countries, in the 1970s a large number of novels and memoirs by Hungarian Jewish survivors were published, among them Kertész's *Fateless*, although they were still subject to official narratives of liberation.⁴ For this reason, *Fateless* was initially rejected for publication, since it did not conform to official expectations of how the Holocaust, or Jews, should be represented. It was not an 'outcry against injustice' that the regime 'could plug into its story of occupation, persecution and liberation', and, according to the head of the publishing company, a high-ranking functionary, it was anti-Semitic.⁵ When it was finally published, Kertész found piles of copies waiting to be pulped just two or three weeks later.

However, Kertész's profound concern with the Holocaust, the shadow it casts over European civilization and its existence as the 'vital questions of our culture,' does not stem solely from his experience of victim and survivor. Under the Kádár regime, Kertész had to do compulsory military service and was assigned to the role of prison guard. He wrote in 2001 that 'It was not Auschwitz – which I bore – that made me into a writer, but the military prison – the situation of the executioner, the *Täter* [perpetrator]'.⁶ Indeed, it was under Kádár that Kertész 'really began to understand the workings of total dictatorship'.⁷ It was an era that, like Proust's madeleines, revived 'the tastes of Auschwitz'.⁸ This inversion of roles, the continuity of structures and systems that it betokens and the individual's position in relation to such systems is core to Kertész's work. Kertész is centrally concerned with the themes of perpetration and complicity, and the enforced collaboration exacted by dictatorships and society more generally. His fiction offers some of the most complex and provocative explorations of perpetrators and of the relationship of perpetration to the whole society, and the responsibility of those who are complicit with or conform to the demands of the state.

Executioners and conformists

In *Fiasco*, the executioner is awaiting trial for the murder of 30,000 people. He does not speak of what he has done but theorizes that individual perpetrators like him are locked together in 'miserable camaraderie' with his audience; they all belong to a world, 'which allowed, tolerated, and thus wished for' his fate.⁹ The executioner refuses any simplistic reduction of guilt to an individual, monstrous figure. He points to the 'vitality of the relationship' between him and those who condemn him; the 'tacit agreement' whereby he is found guilty for deeds the world did nothing to prevent but where his guilt serves to redeem others.¹⁰ He accuses his audience of using moral censure to silence him, thereby denying the relevance of his actions to their lives. He also insists on the significance of his account for understanding the human condition generally and for exposing the self-righteous innocence of the 'not-guilty'. The old boy in *Fiasco*, the writer depicted in the novel's framework narrative and author of the novel 'Fiasco', is also vexed by the relationship of an individual perpetrator to her context. He muses on Ilse Koch's motives and the way that Buchenwald was created by one 'state of affairs', which in turn created many others, including the specific context that created Koch herself. The ever-determining state of affairs makes her individuality increasingly insignificant, so that her role as camp commandant's

wife 'could have been filled by essentially anybody else with similar feelings and actions'.¹¹ In this cumulative 'state of affairs', each step contributes to a given and, at one level, impersonal fate. Yet, at the same time as being impersonal, everyone takes the steps that enable that fate to occur. For this reason, everyone is implicated.

Throughout his work Kertész points to the responsibility of wider society both in facilitating mass murder and in continuing to deny the conditions that enable it to occur. In *Detective Story*, state-condoned violence occurs in a society whose members have, within only a few months, 'grown accustomed' to the repressive dictatorship.¹² In *The Pathseeker*, complicity most obviously takes the form of a cover-up of historical atrocity. The commissioner is visiting an unnamed country, but it becomes evident that the state in question is East Germany, the town is Weimar, the two sites visited by the commissioner are Buchenwald memorial site and a factory near Zeitz and that the commissioner is a Holocaust survivor. The cover-up of the past is ubiquitous. Buchenwald has become a tourist site, offering an excellent opportunity for diminishing the crime's importance while ostensibly doing the opposite. Similarly, Weimar's baroque beauty and 'guise of [...] timelessness' serves as the best disguise for a murder scene.¹³ Yet the buildings' imperial yellow suddenly reveals the town to him as decrepit and decomposed, a colour that combines the glory of Prussian history, the yellow of the Jewish stars and the hydrogen cyanide content of Prussian yellow, which was the main component of the Zyklon-B gas used to murder Jews. The people of Weimar remain as blind followers, living a 'mundane horror with the indifference of habit and [...] self-delusion'.¹⁴ They are part of the cover-up but also oppressed. In interview, Kertész recalls the popular joke from the Hungarian dictatorship: what differentiated their situation from the Nazis was that 'everyone now wears the yellow star, not just the Jews'.¹⁵

The oppressive daily reality of dictatorships and the threat of state violence is the context within which Kertész's characters generally move. The explicit violence of *Detective Story* is unusual, as are the accounts of the treatment of Dutch Jews in Mauthausen in *Fiasco*. The ironic distance of *Fateless*, whereby violence assumes an air of absurdity, is more in keeping with the sense of detachment with which the quotidian threat of state violence is mediated. In *Fiasco*, the customs men shadow Köves, he witnesses people being transported off in the back of trucks, he is aware that executions take place and there is a pervasive and justified fear of arrest. In *The Union Jack* the party bigwig is arrested and, years later, is a 'broken old man'. The terror instilled by such an event is powerful, reducing the editor to 'a mere existential jelly'.¹⁶ It is this

ubiquitous state violence that the narrator of *The Union Jack* seeks to convey to his audience of much younger former students. He describes the 1956 uprising as a time of mass arrests and summary courts, 'when everybody [...] indiscriminately, could be regarded only as a prisoner released on indefinite parole'.¹⁷ Crucially, despite this era being one of widespread denunciations, the narrator does not invoke any notion of complicity. Rather, he challenges not only the way in which events are later categorized and evaluated but also the moral framing that the students give the many trials. He tells them that the trials had no moral meaning for him, that in that world 'of lies, terror and murder [...] it never so much as crossed my mind that every single one of those trials might *not* be lies'. The only truth that existed was that 'of arrest, imprisonment, execution, the shot in the head, and the noose', all of which reinforced his perception of arbitrariness and impermanence. However, the narrator provocatively admits that he has only formulated this response because he has been asked for one; he has been 'obliged [...] to attribute significance to something which has only subsequently acquired significance in the public mind [...] but which in the reality of those days, at least as far as I am concerned, had only very slight, or an entirely different, significance'.¹⁸ He thus casts doubt on the relevance and motivation of later moral evaluation of behaviour in a situation of existential threat in which the very nature of 'choice' is put into question.

This is Köves's situation when in *Fiasco* he describes his experience of signing the piece of paper committing him to become a prison guard in the central military prison despite not wishing to assume the role. He recalls the unreality of the moment, of how his 'existence went to sleep' so that he felt no 'twinge of unease' to alert him to the importance of his decision. But he questions whether it was even a decision, for he had to choose 'between two things, neither of which I wished to choose' – sign up or be punished.¹⁹ Köves tries to be a decent guard, but the point comes at which, overcome with anger at a prisoner's scornful resistance to his attempts to persuade him to eat, he strikes this defenceless prisoner in the face. Köves views this violent act as one that 'may [...] open up the route to the 30,000 corpses'; it demonstrates how an ordinary man makes choices 'under the pressure of external compulsion' and how his first act on the path to perpetrating violence can be 'governed by a purely helpful intention'.²⁰ Even though Köves did not himself graduate from striking the prisoner to becoming a mass murderer, his actions have made him aware that any individual may take the steps into perpetration. As Kertész remarks, 'you can't know' whether you will be someone who would strike somebody in the face: 'it can easily *happen* – the first and decisive step, from which there is no turning back'.²¹

This 'pressure of external compulsion' permeates daily existence. Kertész repeatedly points to the way that mass murder, including Auschwitz, is an organic and necessary part of wider society and culture. In *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*, the narrator B recounts his experience of entering the concentration camp latrine one day after the liberation and seeing a German soldier cleaning. This reversal of events demonstrates to him precisely that 'the world order [...] had not changed at all', for '*the Germans might return at any moment*'.²² The world order is not only that of the German dictatorship, for the failure that Auschwitz continues to represent has grown out of the way in which 'for centuries now, mankind has been thinking and acting'.²³ B condemns the culture he grew up in, at home, at school and the outside world, as rooted in the 'principles of respect and authoritarian paternalism', the same 'virtues' that he recognized in exaggerated form in Auschwitz.²⁴ This is why for Kertész the experience of the camp epitomizes something more universal:

the ordeal of the death camps becomes a human experience where I come across the universality of the ordeal, and that is fatelessness, that specific aspect of dictatorships, the expropriation, nationalization of one's own fate, turning it into a mass fate, the stripping away of a human being's most human essence.²⁵

The fate of the masses is conformity and it is this, not revolt, that turns people into fascists and promotes a 'mindless situation'.²⁶ The most mindless aspect of a regime's 'primitive trick of organization' is its enforced collaboration. Thus B complains that 'merely by sustaining our lives, we ourselves contribute to sustaining totalitarianism', a view echoed by Kertész when discussing the successful dramas he wrote as the Kádár regime stabilized: 'That's a well-organized dictatorship for you! The need to make a livelihood turned me into a collaborator'.²⁷

Kertész's emphasis on the 'state of affairs', the denial of an individual fate and the absence of choice in the face of threatened violence under dictatorship, seem to absolve individuals of responsibility for violence. There appears to be little scope in this view for a subject position that is not that of perpetrator, victim or collaborator, each of which involves the deadening of personality. Yet despite insisting in *Dossier K.* that 'the secret of survival is collaboration', Kertész is far from empathetic to the general population. He refers disparagingly to the 'emergence of a collective morality (or rather immorality) of the functional man' in Hungary. Although he admits that consensus was motivated by survival, it remains only 'cheap conformity that undermined every moral and intellectual stand'.²⁸ Resistance and opposition do not fare any better and are depicted as

either futile or based on suspect motivations. In *Detective Story*, the final execution of Enrique and Federico Salinas underscores the futility of resistance, for little changes despite the international outrage. Similarly, in *Liquidation*, Kürti, who has been imprisoned and beaten up by the secret police, sees his resistance as pointless, for the overthrow of the regime in 1989 has nothing to do with his actions. Resistance movements are even worse. In *Ich – ein anderer*, the narrator's revulsion at the resistance movement rivals that for the regime.²⁹ And B insists that he has always guarded himself 'against the cheap and perverted seductions of any sort of communal idea'.³⁰

Such derogatory language contrasts sharply with that used to explore the perpetrators. In *Detective Story*, Martens's defence lawyer is positive about the torturer's desire to write. He echoes Borges's scepticism about the self-pity of Nazis when they were brought to trial, 'all apologizing and crying' rather than facing their crimes.³¹ The lawyer points to Martens's departure from the usual strategies of denial or the 'tearful remorse whose true motives are brutal unconcern for the victim and self-pity'. Rather, Martens wishes 'to speak out and make sense of his fate' which 'is the rarest case of all'.³² In *Fiasco*, the executioner describes the inner peace he feels, the state of 'strange grace' that comes from the ability to look back on his life 'with composure'.³³ The executioner's use of 'grace', loaded with redemptive significance, is not the perpetrator's alone, but is given broader credibility through different layers of narrative authority. The notion of grace is repeated by Berg, the author of the section, 'I, the Executioner'. Even more provocatively, Berg explains that the only two paths to grace are those of a perpetrator or victim, both of whom 'redeem [their] superfluousness' in the modern world by the 'service of order'.³⁴ Kertész reiterates this position in *Dossier K.*, where, like Berg, he refers to Baudelaire's 'My Heart Laid Bare': 'It might perhaps be pleasant to be alternately victim and executioner.' He explains that both roles involve 'a complete release from the burden of personality'. For the victim, such grace is exemplified in György's description of his fatelessness as living through what happened to him. For the perpetrator, the path to grace is triggered by a 'definitive act'. This act is one in which the individual frees himself from the 'colossal tension' of a situation over which he has no command and 'relinquishes [himself] to the line of least resistance'.³⁵ It is precisely such an act that Köves acknowledges when he struck a defenceless prisoner in the face.

The perpetrators in Kertész's work are characterized by their ability to recognize the logic they have operated within. For Martens's lawyer this is a sign that the 'sovereign human person' is once again stirring to make sense of his fate. In his view, 'everyone has the right to do so, and to do it in his own way'.³⁶

The right to speak out is a sentiment that is at the heart of Kertész's work and is inseparable from the need to recognize the truth.

Writing and non-conformity

In *Ich – ein anderer*, the narrator states that 'life is either demonstration or collaboration'.³⁷ The demonstration he evokes is not the political demonstration of opposition movements or the terrain of risky political gestures. In *Liquidation*, B, a writer who was born in Auschwitz and has committed suicide, always refused any participation or form of revolt. For him, the 'great insubordination is/for us to live our lives to the end'.³⁸ Revolt is inconsequential in an era in which every individual is 'a carrier of the disaster', for '[t]his being without Self is the disaster, the true Evil [...] though, comically enough, without your being evil yourself, albeit capable of any evil act'.³⁹ As a result, freedom cannot come from the outside. Living under a dictatorship facilitates the recognition of this existential state. The narrator of *Galeerentagebuch* remarks that it is his post-war life in a 'Stalinist' system that saved him from a belief in freedom, liberation or catharsis, thereby preventing the wave of disappointment that led to the suicides of Borowski, Celan, Améry and Levi. Nevertheless, the denial of self that characterizes the modern condition is not limited to the constraints of dictatorship, even if it is dictatorship that crystalizes it. For this reason Kertész describes being 'Jewish' as the situation under totalitarianism, explaining that he sees being Jewish not as a people, religion or history, but as an ethical task, 'a large school for the experience of helplessness, of modern wretchedness, of ostracism'.⁴⁰ The ethical task of living the truth of this knowledge is not limited to being Jewish, but, as B adamantly proclaims in *Kaddish*, the experience of Auschwitz has brought him knowledge that he will never relinquish. In *Dossier K.*, Kertész discusses the common fears that Jews share, but insists that expecting shared responsibility of one Jew for another purely on grounds of birth is to move into the realm of ideology and 'destructive [...] collective accusations'. It is Auschwitz that turned him into a Jew, not anything he has in common with other Jewish modes of life that existed before Auschwitz. This strictly ethical understanding of Jewishness is foundational for his view of conformity: it 'is our *decision*, our decision to carry out total assimilation, or not to carry out total assimilation'.⁴¹

An extreme example of the decision to refuse total assimilation to external constraints is the story of Teacher in *Kaddish*. The young B was lying on a

stretcher to be taken from the *Lager* on a hospital transport in a cattle truck in mid-winter. Teacher risked his life to safeguard B's one ration and was then indignant at the young B's surprise. For the older B, it is not Auschwitz that is inexplicable, as is so often professed, but Teacher's action. Reason would dictate that Teacher double his survival chances by keeping B's ration. But Teacher had a pure, inviolable concept in his mind, the safeguarding of which was in fact his '*sole genuine chance* of staying alive'. This concept was freedom. Teacher was free because he 'did not do what he *ought* to have done' according to the situation he was in, but what he '*ought not* to have done'.⁴² Freedom in refusal is also evident in the way Köves pretends to be ill to escape being a prison guard and in his refusal to leave Hungary because of his decision to write a novel. The cost of this decision becomes evident later, when we learn that the novel is initially rejected. After getting the rejection, the by-now old boy bumps into two acquaintances, one who is part of the literary establishment in Hungary, the other who is making a successful career in the West. Both have accepted the need to make compromises with their respective publics to achieve what they consider success. The old boy realizes that he has decided his fate: 'I am not a consumer, and I am not consumable'.⁴³

The refusal of the 'ought' as a way of assuming one's own fate perhaps offers a spark of redemption. Kertész, like his writer-protagonists, assumes his own fate and writes about it, submitting himself to 'the onerous and boring ethics of absolute authenticity'.⁴⁴ In a society in which individuals cannot decide their fate, the source of such authenticity can only be the writer, and the only identity that of writing, '[a]n identity writing itself'.⁴⁵ Like the wardrobes in the old boy's flat that are re-fashioned into shelves, the self is the subject that is constantly re-worked: 'in my work everything is connected with everything else'.⁴⁶ As a result, Kertész's whole oeuvre can be seen as made up of 'ever-developing auto-fictional representations that together form a sort of life-novel'.⁴⁷ However, such authenticity is not achieved through recounting personal experience. It requires a transformation of anecdotal experience into the 'realm of the whole and the general' as the narrator of *The Union Jack* says, quoting Dilthey.⁴⁸ Indeed, anecdotal episodes must even be repudiated, as they are explicitly four times in *Dossier K*.⁴⁹ Aesthetic transformation necessitates the abstraction of the self into a generalizable truth, expressed in the very form of the fiction. Even if every detail overlaps with the facts of a known biography, the 'world of fiction is a sovereign world' that is '[r]emorseless in its laws'.⁵⁰ These laws demand of a real artist that he tell the radical truth, which has nothing to do with the normal expectations of morality, for a moralist cannot be an artist. The moralist judges the world in

which he moves and merely re-creates the status quo, he does not create a new world.⁵¹ This is the complaint of Berg's executioner, that 'the world places greater weight on the immutability of its notions of morality than on admitting the truth.'⁵² So when, in an exchange reminiscent of Elizabeth Costello's questioning by the judges, Kertész's alter-ego expresses concern over the argument that the first steps into perpetration can 'easily *happen*', claiming that this position makes it '*impossible to call any mass murderer to account*', Kertész is unambiguous in his response: 'You are forgetting that as a writer I am not concerned with calling people to account but with accurate portrayal.'⁵³

Accurate portrayal is the counterpoint to anecdote, kitsch and the popular combination of what Kertész describes as 'blood, lust and the demon.'⁵⁴ In *The Pathseeker*, the commissioner is critical of Goethe's *Iphigenia in Tauris*. According to him, it is not only 'tawdry romanticism', it is also 'cheating and lies set in blank verse.'⁵⁵ Goethe's play dramatizes how Orestes seeks to flee the Furies by stealing the statue of Artemis from Tauris to bring back to Athens. Like Euripides's version of *Iphigenia*, Goethe's Orestes succeeds in his task, pacifying the Erinyes and bringing his exiled sister Iphigenia back with him. For the commissioner, however, the benevolent and forgiving outcome of Goethe's play represents 'what they want us to believe', and is a cover-up of real violence. He presents his own version of what happened, one that reflects the reality of his concentration camp experiences near Weimar, the centre of German classicism. He describes a *mise en abyme* scenario: Iphigenia is raped by the king's soldiers in front of Orestes and his men, who are then hacked to pieces in front of her. After finally murdering her too, 'they all went to the theatre to watch the barbarian king exercising clemency on the stage as they, snug in the dress circle, sniggered up their sleeves.'⁵⁶ In the commissioner's version, the familiar image of perpetrators enjoying culture at the end of a hard day's murdering is intensified into a scathing criticism of art's complicity in deceit. Indeed, art's aesthetic cover-up itself becomes a further source of satisfaction and amusement for the perpetrators.

Resonating with Coetzee's question of how the torturer can be represented without falling into clichés of evil, a faceless functionary or a 'tragically divided man doing a job he does not believe in', for Kertész the combination of blood, lust and the demon is tantamount to lying.⁵⁷ The mass murder of totalitarian regimes involves organization, not personal passions or proclivities. Unlike tragic murderers like Richard III, who vow to do evil, totalitarian regimes claim to be working for the common good. There is no place for tragic individuals, or tragic representation, in response to mass murder, and nor can 'the demon' be found in

individuals like Ilse Koch. Far from being 'a great sinner worthy of Dostoevsky's pen', she epitomized a moral order rather than opposing it; she was the product of a state of affairs devoid of any aggrandizing demonic traits.⁵⁸ In a totalitarian world equipped for murder, the demon cannot be found in an individual, for individuals have no fate. The hunt for the demon is part of the attempt to 'salvage your souls', as B accuses his readers, part of the strategy of denial that comes with the assertion that there is no explanation for Auschwitz.⁵⁹ What is left for modern literature is to show that the demonic can only be understood as meaning the destruction of the individual. Literature that does not do this is akin to artistic perpetration: 'Like the records that are played in torture chambers to drown out the screams of those being tortured, the muffled rumbling of truth is suppressed by the cheap racket of so-called humanist literature.'⁶⁰

Articulating the truth of the 'ought not' in fiction through the aesthetic transformation of the self leads Michael J. Shapiro to describe Kertész's 'embrace' of Kant's notion of the supersensible, as his 'second freedom' after the first liberation from the camp.⁶¹ But, as is clear from Kertész's 'surviving survival', liberation is no cathartic or happy ending but a liberation into a world in which nothing has changed. It is not freedom associated with sovereignty of the self and the expression of free will but is freedom and distance from the self.⁶² Ironically, given the terminology, in its negative form it is what Kertész presents as the 'state of grace' shared by the perpetrator and victim, the 'release from the burden of personality'. The constraints that deny the possibility of individual fate do not change. So the fate that Kertész and his alter-egos assume is that of being carrier of the disaster in the 'age of disaster' and of bearing witness to being that carrier; of bearing witness to the truth of fatelessness, a life that is externally determined in a world that has not changed since Auschwitz. There is nothing heroic or tragic in this. Rather, the process of assuming one's fate is a fiasco. Köves's revelation that he must write a novel is not the happy ending it appears, for he becomes the old boy in front of the filing cabinet, a writer for whom writing is a relentless struggle. Furthermore, for Köves, the decision to write a novel was a choice that felt like a necessity, and this is why the old boy's search leads inevitably to the same choice and the same outcome: 'the creative life proves to be an inescapable curse, its end product failure – the fiasco.'⁶³ Köves's compulsion to write persists in the figure of the old boy, who muses about whether to start work on his new novel again '(... like someone who still has a choice) (but all the while knows full well that he doesn't) (even though we always have a choice) (and we always choose ourselves ...)'. Focalizing the old boy's thoughts, the narrator wonders what sort of freedom it is if the only choice

is to choose ourselves, and suggests at the end of the novel that the choice of self is what 'subverted necessity'.⁶⁴

The necessary choice to assume one's own fate and bear witness to the disaster is a struggle and presents a ceaseless demand, akin to Sisyphus (*Fiasco*) or digging graves in the air (*Kaddish*). But, if this is the only form of freedom available, the question arises whether there are alternative possibilities that would offer a way out of the determining state of affairs that deprive individuals of their fate. What is the point of bearing witness if this is not possible? A frustrated Köves asks Berg precisely this question in response to the executioner's account: 'Does there exist another world?' And in response to Berg's denial, Köves persists: 'In that case, [...] who is your "executioner" addressing all along?'⁶⁵ This is also the problem Kertész laboured with when he started writing: 'If power is totalitarian, and the accommodation to it is total, then for whom is one to portray man dominated by totalitarianism? [...] Who would be left and be in a position to judge outside of the totality?'⁶⁶ There are two further aspects of Kertész's work that gesture to the possibility of another world and that act as irritants to the notion of total accommodation. The first of these is the centrality of dialogue to his work and the progressively growing voice of women in those dialogues. The second is the comic aesthetic that is characteristic of his work, but that is often overlooked because of its unsettling intersection with the centrality of the Holocaust.

The challenge of women

The aesthetic transformation that turns the author into an object and effects the move from autobiography into fiction is also manifested in the shift from the first person to the third person. Thus, for example, the old boy's notes are written in the first person, but *Fateless*, the novel about which he is writing his notes, is written in the third person. This is the 'single bound' with which the old boy 'switched from the personal into the objective and the general', a bound that characterizes Kertész's work including in *Letzte Einkehr*, when the 'I' of the diary switches into the third person for the two planned novel extracts.⁶⁷ It is the process of abstraction, the postulation of I as someone else, that leads to the prevalence of dialogue in the texts. B states in *Kaddish*, 'if one writes, one *engages in a dialogue*', which as Sára Molnár comments ensures that 'polyphony appears in the language of one narrator'.⁶⁸ As soon as there is dialogue, different perspectives and challenges to any single position are voiced. Frequently these dialogues are conducted between figures who can be understood as Kertész's alter-egos, such as

Berg and Köves, Federigo and Enrique Salinas, the commissioner and Hermann, the two interlocutors in *Dossier K.*, 'I' and 'K' in *Someone Else*, and Kingbitter and B in *Liquidation*. Often, the dialogues might be ironic in tone, as in the case of the old boy's internal dialogues. Crucially, they increasingly take place with the figure of the narrator's wife. It is through these dialogues that the cost of non-conformity is exposed.

Dialogue by no means leads to compromise, resolution or certainty. In particular, it is the polarity between theory and life, manifested in various forms, that runs through the texts and remains unresolved. The aesthetic implications are evident when Köves is indignant that Berg's story, 'I, the executioner', is based on assertions and 'lacks the colour of life'. There is no plot to explore how the executioner gets to his position, it is lacking in the 'simple, grey, absurd' aspects of life that lead an individual to perpetration and he accuses Berg of 'banishing the accidental and all other chance'.⁶⁹ The conflict between theory and life assumes its most radical form in the relationship with the narrator or protagonist and his wife. In this relationship the dialogue is of a different order from the dialogues between two more obvious alter-egos, however robust and unreconciled they may be. The figure of the wife is not a writer and represents a radically different 'someone else' in the texts.⁷⁰

In Kertész's early works, the wives and women are negatively portrayed through their alignment with the trivialities of life. In *Detective Story*, Enrique's girlfriend, Jill, is a superficial conformist who looks away from the regime's violence so that she can enjoy domestic happiness. In *The Pathseeker*, the commissioner's wife is 'absorbed in [...] female whimsy', but it is precisely this that makes her 'a stubborn and very dangerous opponent', for she wants to get to the seaside, subjects him to time-limits and likes the love story and noble principles of Goethe's *Iphigenia*.⁷¹ Unusually in Kertész's work, another woman is juxtaposed to the commissioner's wife in the figure of the veiled woman that the commissioner meets at the Buchenwald memorial. A modern Antigone, this woman lost her father, her brother and her fiancé in the Holocaust and has become consumed by an unassailable belief that only injustice exists. Her stance is absolute, and she accuses the commissioner of having too many distractions from the difficulty of bearing witness, including his wife. Yet when the veiled woman reveals her face, he is repulsed. It has been transformed into a 'desiccated, petrified simulacrum', on which the only sign of life is 'an insatiable calling to account [...] an all-engulfing demand, like a monument to implacability'. She is later found hanged in her room. Thus, the commissioner is caught between the veiled seduction of righteous anger at injustice that in its absolute but impossible

demand must end in death and his wife (life). The commissioner is repelled by what the veiled woman represents, but also resents his wife's support, for he wants to carry his 'consuming emptiness' alone.⁷² Life as represented by his wife is not an option, he has no choice but a life of bearing witness and surviving survival.

Berg shows a similar resentful and bad-tempered attitude to his partner, Alice, in *Fiasco*. In Berg's presence her breezy bravado is replaced by worry about disturbing him and his wellbeing. She complains to Köves how her husband isolates himself for weeks, getting ever more absorbed in his thoughts. In response to Alice's concern Berg's expression is 'accusatory even in its plaintiveness, irritated even in its wordless sufferance'.⁷³ This unflattering portrayal of Berg, who, despite Köves's sympathetic response to Alice, is the obsessive man that Köves may become, opens an alternative perspective on the impact of Berg's compulsive writing on those close to him. This more critical perspective on the corrosive effects of bearing witness becomes more clearly developed in Kertész's later work, where the opposition of writing and 'life' takes the form of a polarity between living the truth of Auschwitz on the one hand and love and children on the other.

The figure of the wife becomes increasingly important as someone who plausibly challenges the narrator-protagonist's position. In *Kaddish*, B regrets any encroachments by his wife into the sanctum of his work, his 'real life'. She does not understand his need to write despite his lack of success and cannot comprehend that he must write because, in Paul Celan's words from 'Death Fugue', he is 'whistled up every day to drive the spade deeper'. It is impossible for B to combine writing, a process of constant self-liquidation, with its being 'put to use' by anyone, including his wife, for this is what success would bring.⁷⁴ However, the tone with which the wife is presented has fundamentally shifted. B recognizes that her desire for his success would help her forget her own bad luck in life. Both her parents were Auschwitz survivors and she has grown up under its sign, feeling that she herself does not exist because by being 'born a Jew she could have only *Jewish feelings* and *Jewish thoughts*'.⁷⁵ By thinking about his wife's views, B gives them credibility, even if he is unable to exist any differently. Furthermore, he reports her critical view on the relationship at length; how she had hoped to save him with her love but that he constructed freedom by creating a dependence on her, in order then to struggle against it. He allotted her this shameful role 'like a hangman to its victim' and then dropped her, returning to his 'poisoned and poisoning [...] intellect'.⁷⁶

The wife's point of view is in reported speech, but is no less powerful as a result. It is delivered with the same uninterrupted vigour and emotional force as

the rest of *Kaddish*, which is a non-stop, vehement outpouring, punctuated with his repeated 'No!': his refusal to have a child. B's waves of words are a passionate elucidation of his position, in which the repeated interweaving and elaboration of themes and phrases (something 'bellowed and howled inside me') offer a formal re-working in prose of 'Death Fugue'. Alongside the quotations from Celan's poem, B thus reinforces the necessary choice of bearing witness. At the same time, B's narrative waves are engulfing. The 'I' dominates, and the increasingly frequent repetitions of 'I said to my wife' reinforce precisely the relationship of speaker and audience that the wife has described. B's narrative replicates the process his wife has experienced, that he first 'bowled her over with [his] mind, then aroused her sympathy, then [...] made her [his] audience'. The outcome cannot be compromise. She leaves him and has two children while he continues his '*cerebral mode of existence*'.⁷⁷ In *Liquidation*, Judit also describes how she left her husband B and had two children, but in this novel she speaks for herself. She recounts the story of her relationship with him in very similar terms to B's wife in *Kaddish*, describing how living with him was to live 'a voluntarily accepted, domesticated Auschwitz', for he sought to 'apprehend Auschwitz [...] in the way he lived'.⁷⁸ She feels humiliated by the fact that she '[sank] to the Auschwitz horizon' with him, which meant denying her own desires and sense of self and reaching 'the point where a person loses her bearings, her will, abandons her goals, loses herself'. Judit's 'instinct for life awakened' when she met Adam on a trip to Venice, a trip that B refused to join her on because to do so would be to behave as though 'the world was not a world of murderers'.⁷⁹ Judit finally left him in order to live in the world and act on her desires.

Alongside the wives' gendered positioning on the side of 'life', they are also aligned with love and children. Judit declares that love is 'our only chance' and Sarah, B's lover, asserts that 'it was easier to hate than to love, and love for losers was hate'.⁸⁰ In contrast, Kingbitter sees love as an obstacle to '[finding] our way back to ourselves', just as Berg rejects love as a humiliating tyranny that 'eats away at the conscience like the disgrace of the bloodiest crime'.⁸¹ The repeated 'No' in *Kaddish* is B's passionate refusal to have children in a murderous world, so that his wife, and also Judit, can only have children once they have left a 'voluntary Auschwitz'. But, as with so many of the dialogic juxtapositions in Kertész's work, there is no resolution. B commits suicide and Judit's hope for love's redemptive force is relativized. Not only are her words taken from a draft ending of the play manuscript written by B, but this draft then has Judit and Adam laughing hysterically over the word 'love', verbally flinging it at each other along with other objects around them, as though it is a frivolous game between

two people. Furthermore, there is no escape from Auschwitz. B's request for Judit to burn his final manuscript is an action which he describes as 'revoking Auschwitz' for her and her alone. Adam, assuming the familiar role of the man for whom Auschwitz undermines the possibility of 'life', insists that Auschwitz cannot be revoked, for 'everyone is Jewish'.⁸² Life is only possible if Auschwitz is denied, and such denial is impossible.

Nevertheless, love does not go away: 'It survives. Like shame, like anguish.'⁸³ In *Ich – ein anderer*, love promises happiness: the narrator refers to M's talent for making him happy and he thinks he was happy sitting with M at the foot of Mont Blanc.⁸⁴ In *Dossier K.*, Kertész not only describes 'love as [Magda's] sole implement', but also how she persuaded him to rent a workspace in Berlin to achieve the inner freedom to write.⁸⁵ Here, the opposition of truth and life that is so stark in Kertész's earlier work is breaking down. Magda is also a key figure as the narrator's wife and constant presence in *Letzte Einkehr* and as the mother of a son with his own family, the narrator is also occasionally drawn into family life. It is significant that *Liquidation* is dedicated to Magda, for the novel marks an end for Kertész. He later said in interview about the book: 'With *Liquidation* I brought something full circle, and this circle really is complete ... Now I'm interested in age and death.'⁸⁶ The burning of B's final manuscript is one mark of this transition, as is B's suicide. Kertész encourages the reader not to read this suicide literally when he writes in *Letzte Einkehr* that we should imagine *Liquidation* as a novel written by B, the narrator of *Kaddish*, who is exploring possibilities and dangers that B recognizes within himself.⁸⁷ B's death can be understood as a feasible mirroring of other survivor-artists' suicides, but also as the symbolic death of a self. Such a death is powerfully and movingly portrayed at the end of *Someone Else*, when the narrator expresses his complex anguish over the death of his wife, A. The self that dies with A, with all its history and creative struggle, means that whoever makes the next step 'will no longer be me but someone else ...'⁸⁸

Comedy and pleasure

As Sára Molnár observes, the irony and self-irony of Kertész's work have been misunderstood, facilitating interpretations that focus on his texts as autobiography and simplistically identify the author with the protagonists. Yet Kertész consistently incorporates a comic aesthetic into his work and this adds a vital and radical dimension of freedom to his writing, gesturing to another

world. Kertész castigates Adorno's dictum that 'To write poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric' as 'a moral stinkbomb', for 'as far as aesthetic "pleasure" is concerned, did Adorno expect these great poets to write bad poetry?' 'Like it or not' says Kertész, 'art always regards life as a celebration.'⁸⁹ Kertész's comic aesthetic replaces a moral stinkbomb with an ethical explosion. The intrinsic ambiguity of the comic, its playful ability to generate and hold together incompatible perspectives, is unsettling and thus vital for Kertész's rejection of moral and political schematization.

The abstraction of the self and its aesthetic transformation into someone else or another frequently creates the distanced tone that enables irony to flourish. This is evident already in *Fateless*, when, on seeing the crematoria in Auschwitz, György comments that they elicit in him a 'sense of certain jokes, a kind of "student prank"'. This reaction is provoked by the incompatibility of murder and civility he witnesses, with the gas chambers surrounded by lawns and flower beds and people being treated with solicitude. He gets the impression of a stunt: gentlemen in imposing suits, smoking cigars, who actually came up with the idea of the gas, then the bathhouse, next the soap, the flower beds 'and so on.'⁹⁰ In *Dossier K.*, Kertész ascribes the initial rejection of *Fateless* to the challenge it represented to the authority of the Hungarian dictatorship, and refers to the 'sarcasm inherent in its language.'⁹¹ The language of *Fateless* also incorporates his sense of the absurd, for György observes the torment of the camps while at the same time remaining fascinated by the 'most peculiar' impressions. So, the tightly and ruthlessly controlled column of marching prisoners at Buchenwald, of which he is part, reminds him 'of those caterpillars in a matchbox that as a child I had guided with the aid of slips of paper and prods, all of which somehow slightly intoxicated, even utterly fascinated, me.'⁹² The physical and mental degradation of the prisoners are registered by György when he nearly fails to recognize one of the boys he was deported with. The once dapper Fancyman is now a 'strange creature [...] his face all sunken, pinched, and peaky', who shuffles past unable even to respond to György's greeting: 'and I thought to myself: Can you beat that! Who'd have thought it!'⁹³ György's startlingly laconic observations continue once he returns home and in response to the journalist who refers to 'the hell of the camps' the boy responds: 'I had nothing at all to say about that as I was not acquainted with hell and couldn't even imagine what that was like.' He goes on to assert that 'In any case [...] I didn't notice any atrocities.'⁹⁴

In *Fiasco*, the old boy's notes regarding the process of writing about the concentration camp offer a surprising and funny metaphor for remembering his time there, which was not 'exactly a bowl of fun'. The reality of Auschwitz

swells within him like ‘a yeasty dough’, its presence like an ‘undigested dumpling, its spices belching up.’⁹⁵ His metaphor encapsulates the mixture of pleasure and difficulty he feels, as well as illustrating the comic edge of his self-representation. This trait dominates the framework narrative of *Fiasco*, which is characterized by self-deprecation, irony and an often incongruous combination of hyperbole and scrupulous accuracy. This results in some very funny writing, not least when the old boy is harsh in his self-deprecation, repeatedly exclaiming ‘Good God!’ or ‘My God!’ in response to his own notes, or chuckling in response to ‘the question of my future, my social status.’⁹⁶ The old boy’s former writings also demonstrate this trait, especially when he compares Goethe’s opening assertion in *Dichtung und Wahrheit* that ‘the constellation was auspicious’ with the ‘earthly signs (I have no idea about the heavenly ones)’ into which he himself was born, which ‘attested to the superfluosity [...] of my birth.’⁹⁷ Such self-irony is matched by his often extreme and witty responses to his environment. He refers to the ‘odious street’ he lives in as ‘The Slough of Deceit’, not made any better by the signposts, which are ‘symbols of futility.’⁹⁸ The old boy’s all-consuming task of writing the truth is hampered by the noise made by Oglütz, the overweight, television-watching female Cyclops in the flat above. The old boy intones a special text as he softens the wax of his earplugs, which is in marked contrast to the narrator’s overall tone: ‘You fucking miserable, scummy, old Nazi bag.’ And, resorting to an absurd comparison, this noisy neighbour has forced him to lay in a stock of earplugs so large that they, ‘(like Josef K.’s shame) (would in all likelihood outlive him)’. So startling is the metaphor of the old boy’s mother’s voice, that ‘drilled like a laser beam into mashed potatoes’, that the narrator himself comments on it as neither ‘graphically [nor] logically apposite’ but nevertheless a faithful representation of the old boy’s thoughts.⁹⁹

Hyperbole underlies much of *Fiasco*’s framework, often combined with exaggerated pedantry. One of its most obvious visual and formal manifestation is the constant use of parentheses. The narrator’s descriptions of the old boy and his environment are qualified by comments in parentheses, which are at the same time both detailed and superfluous, as when he offers the product specifications of Maya II model armchairs or the name and place of manufacture of his German earplugs. Often the parentheses combine precision with a surprising and incongruous emotional response, as when he describes a bit of protruding wall, the purpose of which has never been established, as being ‘covered over (out of bashfulness, so to speak) by a glued-on (and very messily glued-on at that) wooden board (an appurtenance of the bookcase, as it were).’¹⁰⁰ These parentheses even build up into whole paragraphs of step-by-step elaboration,

such as when the narrator relates the situation at the wife's bistro and ends up referring to eternal recurrence, or describes the paperweight lump of stone and then digresses into commenting on general ignorance.¹⁰¹ The parenthetical comments are sometimes opportunities for a notable change of tone from ironic distance to momentary flurry of flamboyant metaphor. The narrator describes someone of about fifty as coming to a standstill '(on the hook of time ...)' which may pull him '(... into the wasteland of the other shore, into a shadowy, desiccated abstraction amidst succulent colours and palpable forms)'.¹⁰²

Kertész's comedy has a powerful satirical edge to it, pointing to the absurdity of life under a dictatorship. Thus, the endless parentheses formally reinforce the enclosed world in which the old boy lives and writes. He recalls the ludicrous situation years before, when his wife-to-be was released from prison and assigned her old flat which was in fact now confiscated and sealed off. She then returned to the officer who had released her so that she could at least sleep in her cell and ended up sleeping in his office. Later, the old boy and she tried to clear her name, but could not do so because in the absence of any wrongdoing and record of arrest and imprisonment, there was 'nothing to be cleared'.¹⁰³ The absurdity of memory culture is starkly conveyed in *The Pathseeker*, when a funny looking man with gold teeth, dressed in plus-fours and checks, directs the commissioner and his wife to Buchenwald's entrance. This is a fitting portent for the ludicrousness of the camp itself, which has become a tourist attraction with guided tours and a cinema; good for a Sunday outing. It reinforces the difficulty of speaking of atrocity and how to respond to it, which also takes on a comic aspect when Hermann's and the commissioner's difficult discussion disintegrates into a ridiculous search for the commissioner's umbrella. It is no coincidence that in *Kaddish*, B describes an umbrella as 'that shining symbol of our earthly grotesqueness'. And it is difficult not to think of the umbrella in Borislav Pekić's *How to Quiet a Vampire*, published in 1977, the same year as *The Pathseeker*. The umbrella is central to Pekić's exploration of atrocity and the absurd dimensions of totalitarian logic.¹⁰⁴

However, as with all facets of Kertész's work, the absurdity of the dictatorship is generalized to become existential. The murderousness of the world is pithily conveyed by the narrator of *The Union Jack* when, after eagerly reading thrillers, he is suddenly 'uninterested in who the murderer was: everybody was'. And with an Auschwitz metaphor so extreme it becomes funny, he describes his feeling of alienation after being re-categorized as an untalented journalist: 'The diabolical wooden spoon had once again scraped the very bottom of the human soup in the cauldron of *so-called world history* in which we all stew'.¹⁰⁵ The accumulation of

parentheses in *Fiasco* reflects how the old boy can only live as though incidentally, constantly having to qualify himself as a result of having no fate, compared to the figure of Goethe who lives his fate as his main text, and whose coherent self attracts no interruption. The old boy exemplifies the general condition of man as B explains: when man is reduced to nothing he is 'not tragic but comic, because he has no fate'; but 'he lives with an awareness of tragic fate'.¹⁰⁶

The discrepancy between the awareness of tragedy on the one hand and having as one's only ethical choice the necessity of choosing one's own questionable and accidental existence on the other, means that writing itself must be comic if it is to articulate truth: 'To produce a literary work [...] nowadays, here, in this situation, is in any event a humorous if not to say comic act'.¹⁰⁷ The comedy at play here is ironic and absurd and echoes Adorno's insistence on the importance of the absurd, not because it has no meaning, but precisely because it demands a negotiation of meaning: 'The logical figure of the absurd [...] negates all the meaningfulness logic seems to provide in order to convict logic of its own absurdity'.¹⁰⁸ The absurd is only one dimension of comedy, one in which elements of weirdness and alienation are most distilled, but they are intrinsic to 'the situation', in contrast to comedy written for entertainment. Writing light comedy for a living is very different. It is 'an onerous, depressing' labour and forms part of a complicit life, with a refusal to acknowledge the murderous world. As the old boy very funnily says to his mother when she asks him why he no longer writes comedy pieces: 'Because I don't want people to laugh. It makes me envious'.¹⁰⁹

Thus, the comic in Kertész's work is a necessary articulation of having no fate while having an awareness of a tragic fate, and is frequently a product of the narrative mode. In *Kaddish*, it arises out of B's sustained tirade, which combines intense emotion with sarcasm, and ironic and often very humorous deprecation of himself and others. Dr Obláth, another alter-ego, is a philosopher of 'middling means, middling talents and middling prospects professing middling views on a mediocre mid-Hungarian hill range', whom B talks to surrounded by 'sickly oaks [...] the stinking brook and the mucky-hued canopy glimmering through the consumptive foliage'. When B visits his former boarding school, he imagines himself as somewhat ridiculous, evident in how he 'speaks to children in the measured, fastidious manner of a sex killer'.¹¹⁰ At the same time his rant reflects his alienation and horrified rejection of a murderous world. B assumes the 'faculties of a comic or fool',¹¹¹ and his relentless outpouring tips into hyperbole, not least in the repeated expressions of horror with which he recounts his shocking adolescent encounter with an aunt, the '*bald-headed woman [...] in a*

red negligee. The 'traumatic disruption' of B's recurrent memory, which triggers his examination of what it means to be Jewish, does not exclude its comic effect.¹¹² It does, though, complicate B's perspective and the modes of identification it elicits, undoubtedly adding a self-critical component. And the very conception of *Liquidation* points to a playfulness in Kertész's work that is often overlooked, with the narrator of *Letzte Einkehr* describing it as a game with the reader and as the 'satyr play' to *Kaddish*.¹¹³ In the novel, characters are faced with extracts of a play by B entitled *Liquidation: A Comedy in Three Acts*, a play that accurately predicts how they react to B's suicide. Even the play with names has a comic edge, for B is short for Bee, as B 'liked to call himself', joking with the reader's desire for coherence between the Bs in *Kaddish* and *Liquidation*. In *Dossier K*, the exchange between Kertész and his alter-ego is often witty and ironic, with echoes of the old boy's acerbic comments. So Kertész asserts at one point, in contradiction of much of his oeuvre, that 'I'm on the side of cheeriness. My error is that I don't elicit that feeling in others'. And of his mother's survival of the war he remarks that 'Faust made a pact with the devil, my mother with a Gestapo officer, and she came off best'.¹¹⁴

In *Letzte Einkehr* the comic aesthetic often manifests itself as self-deprecating irony, as when the narrator sees watching tennis on television as evidence of a new type of conformity that Kertész participates in: as a brand. He cannot keep pace with the operating speed of the new writing business. The brand 'Kertész' causes a new form of alienation, for he carries a person around within himself who he has nothing to do with and whose existence he has to perform before he can fall back into becoming a mistake-making nobody again. Yet he appreciates the fact that 'Kertész de luxe' allows him to stay in excellent hotels and earns him a good income. He has become an institution and is sent books about Auschwitz daily, which is a perversity as he says, but also has its ironic funny side.¹¹⁵ As with his previous works, the comic inheres in the mismatch between the writer's alienated reality and his awareness of a tragic fate, which in his role as feted 'Holocaust writer' is now being projected upon him. But as he reiterates, 'humour is like plot: you should have both'.¹¹⁶ Indeed, he regrets the lack of comic appreciation in those close to him. When he discusses with M the question of who should look after his literary estate after his death, he feels unable to say 'we can discuss that when I'm dead' because his family 'are characterized by a total lack of cosmic humour'.¹¹⁷

Kertész certainly cannot be accused of lacking a sense of humour, let alone a cosmic one. His comic aesthetic points to a key facet of his work, which is that even if its 'raw material looks fairly cheerless, the form is able to transform it

and turn it into pleasure.' Indeed, the comic is itself a crucial element in turning content that is not a 'bowl of fun' into aesthetic form. Kertész's emphasis here is on writing: 'writing [...] is heightened life.'¹¹⁸ So although, as Philipp Schönthaler argues, comedy, as the awareness of the impossibility of a tragic fate can be understood in Kertész's work as a symptom of 'the loss of an ethical order',¹¹⁹ comedy is not limited to this negative function. Undoubtedly, the act of writing is central to Kertész's highly individual conception of an ethical stance, whereby the transformation of the self into the abstracted aesthetic object is the only way to secure freedom and with it the legacy of bearing witness. The necessary choice of the self results in the capacity to make other choices that might be deemed forms of resistance, such as feigning illness to escape being a prison guard (as Kertész and Köves do), risking one's life to bring a boy his food ration (as 'Teacher' did) or refusing to write literature for the satisfaction of the state or his readership, struggling with the marginal and impoverished lifestyle that it brings. These choices remain resolutely individual; they are neither political nor collective, and they have no pre-determined outcome. Crucially, however, even though Kertész's ethical emphasis is on the act of writing, his persistent comic aesthetic, involving not just irony but also humour and wit, opens an ethical space for readers. This space eludes what Robert Eaglestone describes as Kertész's 'negative space' or later as 'stasis-as-resistance', his refusal of 'the basic principles [...] of narrative'.¹²⁰ It ensures that readers are challenged in their response to his work and potentially liberated from totalizing schemes in the texts. The unpredictable and arbitrary dimension of comedy exceeds narrative control and safeguards individuality against dehumanizing systems. As Simon Critchley writes in his critical study of the philosophical privileging of the tragic paradigm, laughter acts as 'a site of resistance to the alleged total administration of society'.¹²¹ It also acts as a site of resistance to any totality or stasis that Kertész seeks to portray.

Coda

Perhaps there is some cosmic humour to be found in the struggle to assimilate Kertész into wider political narratives, particularly in response to the Viktor Orbán governments from 2010; one final *Comedy in Three Acts* to remind us of the fiasco of assuming a fate and of posthumously having a fate imposed. The political attempts to co-opt Kertész and his work take place against a background of what Randolph Braham vigorously criticizes as the active

distortions of Hungary's 'history-cleansers'. They have since 1989 increasingly sought to "safeguard the national honor of Hungary" by absolving that nation of any responsibility' of its role in the Holocaust.¹²² Hungarian historians, initiated by Braham's *The Politics of Genocide* in 1982, have long debated the extent to which Hungarian collaboration affected the fate of the Jews: whether the German occupiers had the express goal of murdering Hungarian Jewry; whether despite having some 'room for maneuver' the Hungarian government 'assigned no importance at all to efforts to save the Jews'; or whether 'the fate of the Jews depended ultimately on the Hungarian decision-makers'.¹²³ As András Kovács argues, this debate has had implications for how the Horthy era (1920–44) more generally is understood in relation to the history of Hungarian anti-Semitism from the end of the nineteenth century.¹²⁴ However, these academic debates have become increasingly overshadowed by and enmeshed with government memory politics and policy. Braham points to the ways that consecutive democratically elected governments from 1989, and particularly under Orbán's governments from 2010, have pursued efforts to exculpate Hungary of guilt from the Holocaust by making the Germans the sole perpetrators, focusing on the rescue activities of gentile Hungarians and through the 'rehabilitation of the Horthy era and the revitalization of the national-Christian principles that had guided it'.¹²⁵ This extends to presenting 'the Hungarian majority society as a victim of Nazi Germany', with the House of Fates Holocaust Museum in Budapest remaining 'largely silent about the involvement of the Horthy regime in the Holocaust'.¹²⁶ Furthermore, by equating National Socialism with communism and Auschwitz with the Gulag, the Hungarian majority can be presented as subject to the 'double occupation' and doubly victim.¹²⁷

Act 1 of the comedy might take as its subject Kertész's ambivalent, sometimes even contradictory statements about the Orbán era. In his conversation with Thomas Cooper in 2010, Kertész recalls the critic who said he should return the Nobel Prize for 'soil[ing] the memory of the Kádár era', remarking that 'even today' there are those who remain nostalgic about it.¹²⁸ This apparent criticism is reinforced in his interview given with *Le Monde* in 2012, when he states that 'today we are in the same situation as in the time of Janos Kádár. Hungary is enchanted by Orbán as by the Pied Piper of Hamelin'.¹²⁹ He refers to when Hungary became a 'supposedly democratic' country and agrees that parallels can be drawn between the contemporary Hungary and the 1930s. But in a later conversation with Cooper in 2014, he describes an interview with a *New York Times* reporter who was 'surprised' that Kertész described the situation in Hungary as 'fine'.¹³⁰ Kertész also got the impression that the journalist wanted

him to criticize Orbán's Hungary as a dictatorship, 'which it isn't', and that the interview was never published because he did not; 'a kind of censorship'.¹³¹ Part of Act one would be the apparently incongruous friendship between Kertész and Mária Schmidt, generally acknowledged to be the chief historian of the Fidesz government and key advocate of nationalist re-writes of history.¹³²

The first act could culminate in Kertész's acceptance from Orbán of the Hungarian Order of Saint Stephen, Hungary's highest honour. Gregor Dotzauer describes his acceptance as 'condoning the unfortunate tradition of the originally Habsburg award, which had last been given in 1944 under the anti-Semitic regent Miklós Horthy'.¹³³ This view has credibility in the light of Randolph Braham's gesture in 2014, when he returned the Medium Cross of the Order of Merit of the Republic of Hungary that he had been awarded in 2011. He was also a Holocaust survivor (his parents were murdered and he worked in the slave-labour units under the Hungarian army 1943–45), and in an open letter to the Chairman of the Board of the Holocaust Memorial Centre in Budapest, he is scathing about the attempt to 'whitewash the historical record of the Horthy era' and the government's attempt to 'detract attention from the Horthy regime's involvement in the destruction of the Jews'.¹³⁴ As though another alter-ego for Kertész, he writes: 'I [...] cannot remain silent, especially since it was my destiny to work on the preservation of the historical record of the Holocaust.'

Act 2 could follow the vagaries of Kertész's estate. In 2012 the German Academy of Arts acquired his estate for a six-figure sum, following his express wish for his documents to be kept in Berlin. On 30 August 2016, ten days before her death, Magda Kertész left all rights to the use of her husband's intellectual estate to the Foundation for the Historical and Social Research of Middle- and Eastern Europe. The Foundation, with close links to Mária Schmidt, had committed to establishing an Imre-Kertész-Institute that would prepare the Berlin documents for publication.¹³⁵ There followed a lawsuit by Magda's son from her first marriage and only heir, Márton Sass, challenging his mother's gift. His challenge failed, and the court confirmed that the copyright is permanently held by the Budapest Institute.¹³⁶ The Berlin Academy of Arts only has the right to publish short quotations or paraphrase, the Budapest Institute can only look at the archive in the reading room in Berlin. Furthermore, the Hamburg Rowohlt Verlag has the world rights to Kertész's published works (except Hungary) until copyright expires after seventy years. It is not just Kingbitter who may be wondering 'whether he was handling the literary estate with due diligence'.¹³⁷

Act 3 of 'the comedy (or tragedy?)' would focus on the work itself,¹³⁸ starting with the omission of the holder of the Hungarian Order of Saint Stephen's works

from the new Hungarian National Core Curriculum. Introduced on 31 January 2020, it left out Kertész as an author and made mandatory works by controversial nationalist authors such as József Nyirő (member of the fascist Arrow Cross Party) and Albert Wass. This is not surprising, for Kertész's work would not fit easily into a curriculum which, according to the Hungarian Association of History Teachers, prescribes a one-sided and nationalist ideological focus and places a disproportionate emphasis on Hungary's national defence in civic education.¹³⁹ More broadly, although Kertész insists on the continuities of experience under the National Socialist and communist dictatorships, he does not set up a comparison that diminishes the uniqueness of the Holocaust. Indeed, he insists upon the importance of seeing events in their context and that the Holocaust is 'unique in history, even in Jewish history'.¹⁴⁰ At the same time, he generalizes its relevance beyond a Jewish experience to reveals the truth of the wider social order of control and the transformation of the individual into a 'functional man'.¹⁴¹ His work therefore refuses assimilation into political attempts to instrumentalize history and continues to offer a compelling critique of complicity.

But the refusal to be assimilated works in more ways than one. For those lulled into believing that Kertész would assume the mantle of liberalism following his experiences of Auschwitz and the Kádár regime, he continues to resist 'any sort of communal idea'.¹⁴² In *Letzte Einkehr*, the narrator points a few times to the gulf between the brand 'Kertész' and himself the writer. Adding a further layer to Kertész's explorations of complicity and the extent to which an individual necessarily conforms, he remarks on how his new public role enforces a different type of conformity from that of a dictatorship: it is now impossible for him to say things openly. He has started to understand the pressure that feeds a general lie and which he feels cannot be fought against for fear of losing his popularity: 'Lying and total self-abandonment belong to having good manners'.¹⁴³ On the face of it, this view seems uncontroversial. However, the narrator's regrets about the need to lie follow immediately upon his assertion that Europe is being flooded by Muslims, who will overrun and destroy it. Europe is facilitating its own decline through its suicidal liberalism and the stupidity of democracy, a view linked to his assertion that stupidity and sales statistics are democratic, unlike the 'lonely and aristocratic task' of writing.¹⁴⁴ The narrator feels unable to state his view on Islam openly and so is drawn into the lie. This is one of three places in the text where the narrator expresses islamophobia. He asserts that Islam knows only the language of hate in relation to other peoples and religions and he positions Europe as being in a clash of civilizations against the

East, starting with the war against the Persians. He condemns Europe for its self-destructive and naive liberalism; it produced Hitler and has been unable to get out of its moral quagmire since Auschwitz.¹⁴⁵

These are shocking and challenging assertions. But any such response should alert the reader to her own assumptions and projections. The status of these comments is of course debatable, for *Letzte Einkehr* is, after all, a fiction in Kertész's terms, a 'diary-novel', and to that extent one more articulation of 'someone else'. And, contrary to what the narrator says, he very much does go public with his views in the form of the text *Letzte Einkehr*. Nevertheless, these moments remain disquieting. Kertész seems to offer an example of precisely the sort of crossing over into 'collective accusation' and 'ideology' that he condemns as destructive in *Dossier K*. The islamophobic utterances seem to lack the aesthetic framing of many of the other challenging areas that Kertész explores. In contrast, for example, to Köves hitting the man in the face, in which the self is implicated, the generalizations about Islam place the narrator above the situation he is condemning. As it is, Kertész's work offers a powerful criticism of Europe and its failed liberalism, without raising the spectre of an external threat. As a result, the narrator's remarks seem more akin to post-9/11 moralizing than the pursuit of truth through writing. And, as such, the remarks are instructive, for the narrator's islamophobic words recall Kertész's insistence that 'you can't know' who is 'the sort of person who would strike somebody in the face'.¹⁴⁶

Notes

- 1 Imre Kertész, in conversation with Thomas Cooper, *The Holocaust as Culture*, trans. Thomas Cooper (London: Seagull, 2011), 32.
- 2 Randolph L. Braham, 'Hungary: The Assault on the Historical Memory of the Holocaust', in *The Holocaust in Hungary: Seventy Years Later*, ed. Randolph L. Braham and András Kovács (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2016), 262.
- 3 Kertész, *Holocaust as Culture*, 42.
- 4 Gábor Gyáni, 'Hungarian Memory of the Holocaust in Hungary', in Braham and Kovács, 215–30, 219–20. Gyáni makes the point that there were significant publications about the fate of Hungarian Jews during the war as early as the 1960s. These included Jorge Semprún's *Le grand voyage* (1963) and the film *Utózezón/Late Season* directed by Zoltán Fábri (1967), 224.
- 5 Kertész, *Holocaust as Culture*, 34–5.

- 6 Imre Kertész, *Letzte Einkehr. Tagebücher 2001–2009*, trans. Kristin Schwamm (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2013), 69.
- 7 Kertész, *Holocaust as Culture*, 32.
- 8 Imre Kertész, *Dossier K.*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville, 2013), 69.
- 9 Imre Kertész, *Fiasco*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville, 2011), 308.
- 10 Ibid., 305; 307.
- 11 Ibid., 51.
- 12 Imre Kertész, *Detective Story*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage, 2008), 31.
- 13 Imre Kertész, *The Pathseeker*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville, 2008), 44.
- 14 Ibid., 97.
- 15 Imre Kertész, 'Ein Leben nach dem Tod', *Der Standard*, 13 November 2009. <https://www.derstandard.at/story/1256744776006/imre-kertesz-ein-leben-nach-dem-tod> (accessed 20 October 2023).
- 16 Imre Kertész, *The Union Jack*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (New York: Melville, 2009), 27.
- 17 Ibid., 44.
- 18 Ibid., 21–2.
- 19 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 335.
- 20 Ibid., 348; 331.
- 21 Kertész, *Dossier*, 129.
- 22 Imre Kertész, *Kaddish for an Unborn Child*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage, 2010), 57.
- 23 Kertész, *Dossier*, 107; 65.
- 24 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 102; 112.
- 25 Kertész, *Dossier*, 68.
- 26 Imre Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, trans. Kristin Schwamm (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 1999), 56. *Gályanapló* (1992), 'Galley Boat-Log' has not been translated into English.
- 27 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 71; *Dossier*, 179.
- 28 Kertész, *Dossier*, 66; 170.
- 29 Imre Kertész, *Ich – ein anderer*, trans. Ilma Rakusa (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2002), 25. *Valaki más* (1997) has been translated into English as *Someone Else: A Chronicle of the Change*, trans. Tim Wilkinson, *Common Knowledge* 10, no. 2 (2004): 314–46. However, not all sections are included in this translation.
- 30 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 59.
- 31 *Jorge Luis Borges: Conversations*, ed. Richard Burgin (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1998), 22.
- 32 Kertész, *Detective*, 4; 5.
- 33 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 306.
- 34 Ibid., 311.
- 35 Kertész, *Dossier*, 130–1.
- 36 Kertész, *Detective*, 5.

- 37 Kertész, *Ich*, 86.
- 38 Imre Kertész, *Liquidation*, trans. Tim Wilkinson (London: Vintage, 2007), 57.
- 39 *Ibid.*, 55–6.
- 40 Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 21; 131.
- 41 Kertész, *Dossier*, 115; *Kaddish*, 118. For an analysis of the subject positions of Hungarian Jews after the Holocaust, see Máté Zombory, ‘Conceptions of the Catastrophe: Discourses on the Past before the Rise of Holocaust Memory’, *Holocaust Studies* 23, no. 1–2 (2017): 176–98. He emphasizes the diversity of conceptions of the Holocaust in the immediate postwar years, with subject positions differing ‘according to particular institutional discourses: religious Jewish utterances had more in common with Christian utterances than with Jewish secular ones. They also differed according to the discursive distinction between the “Jew” and those “qualified as Jew”’, 193.
- 42 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 43; 46.
- 43 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 109.
- 44 Imre Kertész, *Letzte Einkehr. Ein Tagebuchroman*, trans. Kristin Schwamm (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2015), 326.
- 45 Kertész, *Ich*, 56.
- 46 Kertész, *Dossier*, 193.
- 47 Bernhard Sarin, *Lot auf der Terrasse des Kempinski: Fiktion und Realität im Werk von Imre Kertész* (Books on Demand, 2020), 11.
- 48 Kertész, *Union Jack*, 73.
- 49 Kertész, *Dossier*, 48; 54; 78; 139.
- 50 *Ibid.*, 10.
- 51 Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 317; 13.
- 52 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 300.
- 53 Kertész, *Dossier*, 129. See Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 204.
- 54 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 45.
- 55 Kertész, *Pathseeker*, 83; 84.
- 56 *Ibid.*, 86; 87.
- 57 Coetzee, ‘Dark Chamber’.
- 58 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 49.
- 59 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 39.
- 60 Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 33.
- 61 Michael J. Shapiro, *Punctuations: How the Arts Think the Political* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 163.
- 62 Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 243.
- 63 Kertész, *Dossier*, 124.
- 64 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 86; 360.
- 65 *Ibid.*, 312.

- 66 Kertész, *Dossier*, 149.
- 67 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 75.
- 68 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 18; Sára Molnár, 'Imre Kertész's Aesthetics of the Holocaust', in *Imre Kertész and Holocaust Literature*, ed. Louise O. Vasvári and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek (West Lafayette: Purdue University Press, 2005), 164.
- 69 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 331; 313.
- 70 See Sarin's argument that the female figures are allegories for Hungary and the reading public, and represent Kertész's developing relationship with them. Sarin, 29; 99.
- 71 Kertész, *Pathseeker*, 14; 31.
- 72 *Ibid.*, 81; 76.
- 73 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 211.
- 74 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 86; 84; 85.
- 75 *Ibid.*, 79.
- 76 *Ibid.*, 116; 117.
- 77 *Ibid.*, 116; 119.
- 78 Kertész, *Liquidation*, 110; 111.
- 79 *Ibid.*, 108; 114.
- 80 *Ibid.*, 125; 81.
- 81 *Ibid.*, 48. *Fiasco*, 315.
- 82 Kertész, *Liquidation*, 121; 122.
- 83 Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 301.
- 84 Kertész, *Ich – ein anderer*, 86; 95.
- 85 Kertész, *Dossier*, 208.
- 86 Imre Kertész, 'Man schreibt als ein glücklicher Mensch', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 9 November 2004. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:n:contentItem:4DRW-4FJ0-TWB6-B2Y7-00000-00&context=1519360> (accessed 20 April 2023).
- 87 Kertész, *Einkehr. Tagebuchroman*, 232.
- 88 Kertész, *Someone Else*, 345–6.
- 89 Kertész, *Dossier*, 104–6.
- 90 Kertész, *Fateless*, 111.
- 91 Kertész, *Dossier*, 183.
- 92 Kertész, *Fateless*, 119; 122.
- 93 *Ibid.*, 154; 155.
- 94 *Ibid.*, 248; 256.
- 95 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 71.
- 96 *Ibid.*, 17; 34; 38.
- 97 *Ibid.*, 91.
- 98 *Ibid.*, 3.
- 99 *Ibid.*, 21–2; 95.

- 100 Ibid., 3.
- 101 Ibid., 30; 16.
- 102 Ibid., 8.
- 103 Ibid., 68.
- 104 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 96. See Chapter 2 for a discussion of Pekić's novel.
- 105 Kertész, *Union Jack*, 17; 32.
- 106 Kertész, *Liquidation*, 18.
- 107 Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 86.
- 108 Theodor W. Adorno, *Notes to Literature I*, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991), 263.
- 109 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 255; 60.
- 110 Kertész, *Kaddish*, 10–11; 96.
- 111 Molnár, 'Aesthetics', 104.
- 112 Magdalena Zolkos, *Reconciling Community and Subjective Life: Trauma Testimony as Political Theorizing in the Work of Jean Améry and Imre Kertész* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 158.
- 113 Kertész, *Einkehr. Tagebuchroman*, 232.
- 114 Kertész, *Dossier*, 59; 93.
- 115 See Kertész, *Einkehr. Tagebuchroman*, 90; 121; 154–5; 131; 105; 221.
- 116 Ibid., 265.
- 117 Ibid., 280.
- 118 Kertész, *Dossier*, 58.
- 119 Philipp Schönthaler, *Negative Poetik: Die Figur des Erzählers bei Thomas Bernhard, W. G. Sebald und Imre Kertész* (Bielefeld: transcript, 2011), 250.
- 120 Robert Eaglestone, 'The Aporia of Imre Kertész', in Vasvári and Zepetnek, *Imre Kertész*, 47; *The Broken Voice: Reading Post-Holocaust Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017), 70.
- 121 Simon Critchley, *Ethics-Politics-Subjectivity: Essays on Derrida, Levinas and Contemporary French Thought* (London: Verso, 1999), 235.
- 122 Braham, 'Hungary', 269.
- 123 András Kovács, 'Hungarian Intentionalism: New Directions in the Historiography of the Hungarian Holocaust', in Braham and Kovács, *The Holocaust in Hungary*, 10; 12.
- 124 See also Rigó Máté, 'A Hungarian version of the Historikerstreit? A Summary of the Romsics-Gerő Debate among Hungarian Historians (2013)', in *Cultures of History Forum*. https://digital.herder-institut.de/publications/frontdoor/deliver/index/docId/31/file/Rigo_A_Hungarian_Version_of_the_Historik.pdf (accessed 22 March 2024).
- 125 Braham, 'Hungary', 263. He describes the Hungarian Ministry of Culture's plan for a new exhibition for the Hungarian pavilion in Auschwitz, which was shelved following widespread critical responses and the threat of an international scandal, 277–9.

- 126 Hana Kubátová and Jan Láníček, 'Jews and Gentiles in Central and Eastern Europe during the Holocaust in History and Memory', *Holocaust Studies* 23, no. 1–2 (2017): 1–16, 3.
- 127 Mónika Kovács, 'Global and Local Holocaust Remembrance', in Braham and Kovács, *The Holocaust in Hungary*, 235.
- 128 Kertész, *Holocaust as Culture*, 32.
- 129 'La Hongrie est une fatalité', *Le Monde*, 9 February 2012. https://www.lemonde.fr/livres/article/2012/02/09/imre-kertesz-la-hongrie-est-une-fatalite_1640790_3260.html (accessed 20 April 2023).
- 130 'Document and Fiction. Imre Kertész interviewed by Thomas Cooper', *The Hungarian Quarterly* 54, no. 209 (2014): 4–10, 8.
- 131 Ibid.
- 132 See Braham, 'Hungary', 282–4; 296.
- 133 Gregor Dotzauer, 'Nachlass von Imre Kertész. Schicksal eines Schicksallosen', *Tagesspiegel*, 1 March 2018. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/schicksal-eines-schicksallosen-8422162.html> (accessed 20 April 2023).
- 134 Randolph L. Braham, 'Open Letter to Professor György Haraszti', in *Hungarian Spectrum*, 26 January 2014. <https://hungarianspectrum.wordpress.com/2014/01/26/randolph-l-brahams-open-letter/> (accessed 25 April 2023).
- 135 See Iván Sándor, 'Lebenswerk von Kertész enteignet?', *Frankfurter Rundschau*, 14 March 2017. <https://www.fr.de/kultur/literatur/lebenswerk-kertesz-enteignet-11648820.html>; 'Ungarn: Nachlass von Imre Kertész geht an regierungsnaher Stiftung', *Der Standard*, 22 December 2016. <https://www.derstandard.at/story/2000049706514/ungarn-nachlass-von-imre-kertesz-geht-an-regierungsnaher-stiftung> (both accessed 20 April 2023).
- 136 'Imre Kertész. Die Rechte am Archiv bleiben in Budapest', *Tagesspiegel*, 2 February 2019. <https://www.tagesspiegel.de/kultur/die-rechte-am-archiv-bleiben-in-budapest-4034656.html> (accessed 25 April 2023).
- 137 Kertész, *Liquidation*, 13.
- 138 Ibid.
- 139 See 'Summary' in the 'Position Statement of the Association of History Teachers on the new National Curriculum published on 31 January 2020', Budapest, 2 February 2020. <https://tte.hu/a-tortenelemtanarok-egylete-allasfoglalasa-az-uj-nemzeti-alaptanterv-2020-január-31-en-megjelent-szovegerol/> (accessed 20 April 2023).
- 140 Kertész, *Holocaust as Culture*, 38–9.
- 141 Kertész, *Dossier*, 170.
- 142 Kertész, *Liquidation*, 59.
- 143 Kertész, *Einkehr. Tagebuchroman*, 194.
- 144 Ibid., 100.
- 145 Ibid., 190; 268.
- 146 Kertész, *Dossier*, 129.

Philosophy, secrets and lies: Borislav Pekić

In *The Apology and the Last Days*, Andrija Gavrilović is an uneducated lifeguard who never has anyone to save, a collaborator who perhaps never really collaborates and a tried murderer of the one man he did save from drowning, a charge that he denies.¹ In *How to Quiet a Vampire: A Sotie*, ex-SS officer Konrad Rutkowski is confronted by the dead clerk, Adam, whom he was responsible for executing during the German occupation of D.² His reasoned attempts to explain his behaviour culminate in his conclusion that the source of evil is a vampire umbrella, upon which he is finally and fatally impaled in a car crash. These summaries convey the comedy that is central to both of Borislav Pekić's novels, and which resonates strongly with Kertész's incorporation of a comic aesthetic to explore the possibility of an individual fate within a determining state of affairs. Pekić uses comedy, particularly satire, as a central strategy to expose the various levels at which perpetration is denied or justified.

Gavrilović and Rutkowski retrospectively tell the story of their collaboration and involvement with the National Socialists. Yet, although the novels ostensibly portray perpetration under National Socialism, Pekić repeatedly asserted that when he was writing the novels in the 1970s, he 'had no regard for national socialism', which 'as an ideology and practice was historically dead'. He describes National Socialism as a vehicle for the critique of ideology, insisting that, other than in the memories of the survivors, it remained alive 'in the propaganda of a regime whose ideology carried a complete view of the total solution to the human question'.³ In his *Political Notebooks*, Pekić 'repeatedly compares Lenin, Stalin, Hitler, the Soviet Union, the Third Reich, Tito's Yugoslavia and the People's Republic of China', which, 'despite their differences [...] are related through their reliance on dialectics and historical determinism, as developed in German philosophy of the nineteenth century'.⁴ Pekić himself suffered direct persecution under Tito's regime. He was arrested in 1948 for being part of the anti-communist Association of Democratic

Youth of Yugoslavia and sentenced to fifteen years in jail. He was released on probation after five years, and his experience of prison and interrogation 'decisively affected his life, ideas, and subsequent writing career'.⁵ Pekić left Yugoslavia in 1971 to live in London. He returned to Belgrade in the late 1980s following the collapse of the one-party system and was an active member of the Democratic Party. In 'an uncanny twist of irony, exactly fifty years after his first clash with the police in Cetinje in 1941, he again was beaten by security forces in 1991' at a demonstration in opposition to the ruling socialist of Slobodan Milošević.⁶

Pekić's explicit evocation of Nazi genocidal language to refer to communist ideology and practice underscores the parallels with post-war communist regimes drawn in Kertész's and Tišma's work. More immediately, these parallels are reinforced by Pekić's dedication of the novels to two contemporary Serbian writers. *The Apology* is dedicated to Dragoslav Mihailović, who was imprisoned for over a year in the labour camp for political prisoners, Goli Otok, and who continued to experience considerable difficulties under the Yugoslavian regime, not least for his attempts to document the highly secretive camp.⁷ *How to Quiet a Vampire* is dedicated to Danilo Kiš, who, like Pekić, was concerned with the general functioning of terror inflicted by National Socialism and communism: 'Evil can be affiliated also to the socialist idea.'⁸ Pekić's critique of ideology inevitably encompasses an examination of language and the different strategies for giving legitimacy to competing narratives. Each novel draws on cultural forms that are culturally and ethically valorized for demonstrating that an individual recognizes that he has done wrong by harming another: apology and confession. These are deemed to be appropriate forms for recognizing wrongdoing and therefore important steps in achieving justice, be that legal or moral. Pekić shows, however, how both modes of self-exposure and truth-telling are sophisticated attempts at evasion and give a structure for weaving convincing exculpatory narratives. Confession and apology are techniques that allow the two men to perform candour to disguise their deeds and to present themselves as virtuous. Furthermore, he places philosophy at the heart of his scathing dissection of complicity, with both narrators using the language of philosophy to consolidate and elevate their positions. Yet fiction too is suspect. Both novels draw on the device of a fictional editor, closely identifiable with the author Pekić, to expose fiction as another narrative form that participates in struggles of legitimacy and claims for privileged insight.

Lies as apology

Gavrilović is not an obvious contender to assume Socrates's mantle. Son of a seamstress and an unsuccessful fisherman who drowned, Gavrilović never finished school, and after the First World War he becomes a lifeguard. He is posted by the Serbian state to a beach on the southern shore of the Danube, but his pride in his job is undermined by the fact that he never has anyone to rescue. During the occupation of Serbia by the Germans, Gavrilović unknowingly saves the life of the Kreiskommandant, Standartenführer SS Erich von Rüdter. He is now trapped between German suspicion that he is a partisan and partisan suspicion that he is a collaborator. Now ostracized as a collaborator, he flees to Germany in 1944. Here, he has a chance encounter with Rüdter. This ex-SS man and war criminal has metamorphosed into the highly respected local dignitary, and he offers Gavrilović work as a guard of his wealthy villa on condition that his identity is kept secret. The events then later occur for which Gavrilović is imprisoned for murder. Gavrilović claims that he tries to rescue Gruber from his pool, who is drowning after hitting his head on the side. The prosecutors argue successfully that Gavrilović hit Gruber with a poker before he fell into the water.

Gavrilović recounts all this from a prison in Munich in 1959. His inspiration for writing is Plato's *The Apology and the Last Days of Socrates*, for he identifies closely with Socrates as a 'brother in sorrow' (15). Just as Socrates was charged with believing in demonic beings rather than the pantheon of Athenian gods, so Gavrilović 'signed a pact with the Devil' (15) during the war. Both were sentenced. The identification is so close that Gavrilović simply paraphrases key extracts of Socrates's account. He invites his readers ('Gentleman comrades' rather than 'Men of Athens') to dismiss the lies of his accusers, particularly the warning that readers should be careful not to be deceived by him because he is 'such a skilled speaker'. Like Socrates's jury, we will 'hear the complete truth'. Both men are faced with the more 'formidable' and 'numerous' accusers from 'a long time ago', who in Gavrilović's case are his compatriots who believe him to be a collaborator.⁹ Socrates must face three contemporary accusers, who represent the anger of the poets, the craftsmen and politicians, and the rhetoricians respectively. Gavrilović is faced with Oberleutnant Kulman, the West German investigator, Dr Eugene Hamm, his assigned defence lawyer, and Comrade Ozren, from the consulate of the People's Republic of Yugoslavia. It is against these three skilled professionals that Gavrilović pits his purported simplicity, just as Socrates claims to counter the 'ornate speeches' of his accusers with 'whatever occurs to me to say, in a random manner'.¹⁰

Plato's style, 'folksy without any claptrap' (15), is central to Gavrilović's claims to be an innocent victim. Ostensibly, his is the story of a poor, misunderstood man for whom even his wife has no respect. He emphasizes his foolishness, telling the story of his invention of a life-saving double boat hook, designed to reel in a drowning person without endangering the lifeguard. On the one occasion he is called upon to rescue a drowning man, he gets entangled in his clever device, knocks himself out and falls into the water. He is rescued by the drowning person, who is in fact faking drowning to give Gavrilović the chance to demonstrate his skill in front of municipal inspectors. He is sacked for incompetence. Perhaps Gavrilović is as foolish as he makes out, but the fact that he is so willing to display it suggests that it is also a strategy. For all his talk of wishing to save lives, not only is he not endangered in his job, his one invention is designed to further protect him. His apparently silly obsession with saving lives is an effective way of avoiding any statement on the war, let alone political alignment: 'with all my dreams and misfortunes I was so muddleheaded I didn't even notice when [the Krauts] came in' (45).

At one level, Gavrilović's innocent persona exposes the tendentiousness and arbitrariness of the categories 'perpetrator', 'victim' and 'collaborator'. The crime that concerns him is not Gruber's murder but that of being a Quisling. He rejects the label, invoking Socrates's ironic commendation of young men's 'great fortune [...] if only one man corrupts them and everyone else does not'.¹¹ Gavrilović points to the absurdity that he alone is held to be guilty of collaboration when doctors and bakers who worked for them are seen only as 'doing [their] job' (93). The grave sin of collaboration is in its nature strange because it 'at one moment exists and at another doesn't: sometimes it ends well and sometimes it turns into evil' (27). Undoubtedly, Gavrilović's account suggests a level of naivety and inconsistency that enhances his foolish persona. He admits first to collaborating with the Germans only because he likes wearing a uniform and is desperate to keep his job, since the alternative is unemployment. We therefore do not believe him when he describes his reinstatement in the job as a 'misfortune', or when he asserts that the pay rise 'didn't matter' or that 'the worst thing' (95) was having to wear a German uniform. Gavrilović then also casts himself in the role of fool by claiming that he only became a collaborator so that he could receive a medal at a public award ceremony.

Gavrilović's persistent emphasis on his innocent foolishness is undermined by his astute and strategic use of Plato. Writing from prison he asserts that he originally confessed to a murder he did not commit because it would 'cleanse the word traitor' (118) from his name and enable him to return to Serbia for burial.

He is now revealing his actual innocence for the higher moral purpose of saving the reader from transgression. In Socrates's words: 'I am not making my defence on my own behalf, as someone might presume, but on behalf of yourselves, lest you make a mistake concerning the gift god gave you, by condemning me'.¹² Few readers would choose Gavrilović to safeguard their morality and his claim resonates as one more manifestation of his strategic attempt to disguise self-interested calculation with a guileless façade. Nevertheless, his adoption of Socrates's irony does serve to expose the hypocrisy of the 'three devils' and wider society. Thus Kulman praises the West German belief in the rule of law whilst pressuring Gavrilović to admit that the Yugoslav communists persuaded him to murder Gruber. Hamm submits an appeal for leniency on grounds that the Balkan people are primitive, the custom of blood feuds is rife there and that it is not possible for Gavrilović to adapt to German civilization. Both Germans are eager to point to the barbarity of the Balkan people, their disrespect of the Hague Conventions, their brutality during the war and their disregard of the law. Here the post-war Germans blithely continue to articulate attitudes that were used to justify mass atrocities by the Germans in the Balkans following the invasion of Yugoslavia, and display a belief in German law that simply ignores the complicity of the *Rechtstaat* with a genocidal dictatorship. As Gavrilović observes, Germans are strange because they 'never remember anything' (114), especially evil.

Yugoslavs fare no better in his account. Comrade Ozren represents the official communist line. He wants to turn Gavrilović into a victim of fascism and a communist hero, a downtrodden worker in Germany who took his revenge on a perpetrator. This narrative will help expose how former Nazis are living the good life in the Federal Republic and will give Yugoslavia, with its failing economy, greater leverage in the negotiations over war reparations. Ozren is repeatedly willing to 'arrange' things to corroborate his victim-of-fascism version of history, even being ready to claim that Gavrilović's family were killed by Germans. Yet as Gavrilović observes, despite being a good comrade, Ozren nevertheless enjoys the luxuries of fur-lined winter coats. In his eagerness to expose the iniquities of the 'capitalist bastards' (115), he makes sure that he secures from Gavrilović the addresses of all the women who visit Gruber's villa 'for relaxation'. Ozren claims he needs to be thorough in his documentation, a thoroughness that clearly involves him experiencing those iniquities in person: the women work at the villa's secret brothel.

The searing irony of Gavrilović's account is an effective weapon for imposing authority on his narrative and for revealing the cynicism and hypocrisy of the three officials who want to manipulate and then use his confession to support

their own respective outlooks. The struggle over meaning is not resolved, however, because *The Apology* remains inconsistent and cleverly so. Gavrilović's narrative ruses are perhaps there to hoodwink the reader into focusing more on the moral complexities of complicity and collaboration in the past than his recent criminal activities. After all, there are good reasons to be sceptical of Gavrilović's claims to innocence, not least because of the contested interpretations of the evidence from the crime scene: the poker Gavrilović was carrying when he heard Gruber's cries for help was later found to be covered with the German's blood and hair; the wheelbarrow was conveniently covered with nylon to prevent grime from the swimming pool (Gavrilović) or blood from Gruber's body (the prosecution) leaking; Gavrilović was found collapsed and half drowned from the exertion of trying to save Gruber (Gavrilović) or from being dragged into the pool by his victim (the prosecution). Furthermore, the ambiguity around the account of Gruber's death builds upon Gavrilović's ambivalent relationship with his 'benefactor' (117). What he rosily portrays as Gruber's goodness towards him in recognition that he saved the Nazi's life, is actually blackmail. Gavrilović repeatedly addresses him as Herr Standartenführer to remind Gruber that he can be exposed as a former Nazi at any moment.

It is also significant that Gavrilović includes all the information we need for us to doubt his reliability, question his motives and recognize his strategic insistence on his oafishness. He is quite open about his manipulation of his story and his adept duplicitousness. He makes no secret of his role as an informant for Ozren. Since his arrival in Germany he has reported on his own whereabouts and activities, 'without omitting anything, although [...] I probably added something' (14). He has years of experience of having to account for himself and having those accounts scrutinized and interrogated by Ozren, becoming so 'lost that I knew neither where and when I was born nor what my name was' (16). Gavrilović's unreliability is an un-reasonable response to the demand for coherent and reasonable explanations, and this is how Gavrilović asserts himself as 'nobody's victim' (5). His narrative also resists any hope for coherence on the part of the reader. Such hope may be kindled through his use of Socrates, and the implication that Gavrilović's is righting an injustice through his version of events. This is one level of lending credibility to his account and putting himself on the side of the good under the guise of naivety. But his corrective counter-narrative extends much further than assuming a direct identification with Socrates and with it the strategies of philosophical reason. After all, he tells us that he is 'tired of living [his] life according to someone else's script' (6). That script is also philosophical, and Gavrilović will use and abuse it as

much as he does any other as part of his overall narrative of self-interest. His play with apology, which is no such thing, and with obfuscation is, through his easy assumption of Socrates's voice, directed at the reader. Philosophical discourse too can be taken out of context and manipulated to serve a particular point of view. If Gavrilović is using philosophy to disguise his own complicity or perpetration in crimes, then it too must be approached with scepticism, as providing the language of a cover-up.

The un-reasonable and dissembling counter-position taken in *The Apology* is a revolt against the physical restraints imposed by imprisonment and the restraints of explanatory discourses. It is not simply denial; after all, Gavrilović tried that and was tortured in pursuit of the right answer. Unreliability takes on even more radical form in *How to Quiet a Vampire*, in which the limit of reason assumes the form of a malevolent umbrella.

Lies as confession

How to Quiet a Vampire: A Sotie, like *The Apology*, presents numerous competing interpretations of the past through a highly untrustworthy narrator, ex-Obersturmführer Konrad Rutkowski, now professor of medieval history at the University of Heidelberg. The main body of the novel consists of the twenty-six letters and two postscripts that Rutkowski writes to his brother-in-law, Hilmar Wagner, assistant professor of twentieth-century history at the same university. He is writing from the Croatian town of D in 1965, where he is taking a holiday with his wife Sabina. But he entered the town for the first time in the summer of 1943 as a Gestapo interrogator, a history about which his wife knows nothing. This history dramatically confronts him in the form of Adam Trpković, the municipal clerk whom Rutkowski tortured and executed. Not only does Adam's ghost challenge Rutkowski directly, but a vast monument to the clerk as a figure of resistance is unveiled while they are there. The clerk has been turned into a hero, hailed as a prisoner who did not betray his comrades and who spat in the face of his torturer. Rutkowski is indignant at this historical misrepresentation, for, as only he knows, it was another prisoner, Maresciallo Dagllione, who kept silent, spat in Rutkowski's face and who was then beaten to death by him. So Rutkowski starts the process of explanation. The letters initially give the impression of a candid and tortured confession, in which he tries to explain how he was forced into making compromises with the 'demonic spirit' of National Socialism and the logic of interrogation techniques. Yet increasingly

his letters betray an exculpatory narrative in which in seeking to explain the logic he inexorably gets drawn into it again, in the end blaming the evil events on a vampire umbrella that belonged to Adam. In a further layer of the novel, an editor who has collected the letters and postscripts provides a commentary in the form of endnotes that offer an additional layer of interpretation, including competing interpretations by three psychiatrists of Rutkowski's emerging madness. We learn from the editor that Rutkowski is killed in a car accident, impaled on the umbrella. And, in the third layer of the novel, the editor has compiled the book in London, has the umbrella chained up carefully in the basement, and is called Borislav Pekić.

Rutkowski is clever and by placing compromise at the heart of his identity, he constructs a framework within which he can absolve himself of guilt. His open acknowledgement of his compromises, his apparent willingness to be self-critical, and the seemingly candid confession that he makes, give the impression of a man who is attempting an honest assessment of his role in violent occupation and torture. He thus admits to hating himself for being opposed to the 'demonic spirit' of National Socialism, on planning to take action against it, but in the end only 'serv[ing] as its slave' (44). Yet Rutkowski's insights and his emphasis on compromise are intertwined both with self-deception and willed deception. He approvingly ascribes the success of the last twenty years of his life in post-war West Germany to his 'compromising attitude toward the past' (278), where others would more accurately call it denial. Rutkowski is adept at casting compromise as resistance and claiming that he resisted the extremes of Nazi violence from within. He dignifies his behaviour by presenting it as a case study for the clash of the Spirit and Reality: entering the war as a Gestapo officer was a compromise between being unable to avoid it (Reality) and making it more bearable (Spirit); slapping Adam was a compromise between a serious beating (Reality) and not wanting to harm an inviolable human being (Spirit); beating up the worker was a compromise between murdering him and only wanting to slap him. Rutkowski presents each example of compromise as a 'contribution to the humanization of reality' (359). So, even though his colleague, the enthusiastic Nazi Rotkopf, also beat the worker, in Rotkopf's case it was senseless torture because 'the beating wasn't an expression of an effort to humanize the war'. In contrast, because Rutkowski's motive was to save the worker from death, the fact that he subsequently died from his injuries anyway is of no significance for Rutkowski's argument: 'That was an error in dosage, not in the motive. I did what I could. You can't expect the impossible, not even from an intellectual.'

Rutkowski's exaggerated and comically excessive view of himself as acting out the titanic clash between Spirit and Reality is not limited to his past actions. His violent attack on Sabina is because she placed herself 'in the path of an intellect in pursuit of deeper realizations about man and being'. Indeed, by being beaten up, she has attained every intellectual's dream: 'to cease being human and become an intellectual act [...] Now she's a logical symbol, with two or three references and several Ibidems' (298). The hospitalized Sabina is oblivious to her new status, just as no prisoner of Rutkowski's was convinced that he was being tortured 'exclusively for *his own good*' as a substitute for electroshocks (267). Rutkowski's re-casting of violence into acts of resistance allow him to assert that he was a '*virtual* conspirator' (29), comparable to the Stauffenberg group, even though theirs was a 'stupid venture' (29). And, in a further strategy to evade responsibility, he combines his resistance narrative with one of victimhood, claiming that he was forced to join the Gestapo. His narrative is steeped in self-pity and he identifies with his prisoners as 'my brothers in arms' (164). Indeed, he views his position as worse than theirs, for his suffering is compounded by the superior moral sensibilities he possesses as an intellectual. Whereas the prisoners are free because they can assert their will, Rutkowski's limitations are 'deeply rooted, moral'. He is forced to suffer the 'utter indecency of a pizzle whip in the hands of an intellectual' (262). He is caught between the embodiment of brutality, Rotkopf and that of the 'spirit of universal and omnipotent police control' (28), Standartenführer Steinbrecher, who forces him to listen to histories of execution methods, interrogation and torture.

Steinbrecher is the key person whom Rutkowski holds responsible for corrupting him, a humanist scholar, by advocating, perfecting and proselytizing a malignant world view and forcing him into repeated compromising behaviour. Steinbrecher is a crucial prop in sustaining Rutkowski's narrative of forced compromise, of victimhood and resistance from within. Steinbrecher's approach to interrogation is based on 'will and pure reason' (32), understood specifically as the absolute application of logic. The task of interrogators is not to learn the truth but to '*make* truths' (39) by using a strict logic: if a prisoner's truth is inconsistent with the foundations of the Third Reich, then the prisoner's truth needs to be altered. If, by being altered, this truth then ceases to be true, then 'it wasn't a truth to begin with' (48). Rutkowski dubs this process of false confession under torture 'Steinbrecherization: accepting logic in the place of reality, assuming responsibility for probable events that were never even actualized' (145).

Rutkowski's account of the logic of interrogation accords with that given by Antonio Rojas Martens, Imre Kertész's state interrogator in *Detective Story*,

which, like *How to Quiet a Vampire*, was published in 1977. Martens is writing about his involvement in the torture and public execution of Federigo and Enrique Salinas, who were wrongly accused of plotting against the unnamed South American regime. Martens's superior, Diaz, is 'ever-unruffled and ever-soothing', yet like Steinbrecher's hold over Rutkowski, it is Diaz whose 'diabolical meekness' is so troubling for Martens.¹³ Diaz is the one who recognizes the workings of power, assuring Martens that they serve not the law but those in power. Echoing Steinbrecher's views, Diaz believes that a global police revolution would transform the world, for there has never been a time when police have been hostile to each other. Indeed, the 'function of the police [...] is to bring logic to bear on Creation.'¹⁴ Transcripts are a vital part of this logical order and its appearance of objectivity, but objectivity is no more than a self-referential logic that confirms a pre-determined outcome: 'Anyone who wants something else is Jewish. Otherwise, why would he want something else?'¹⁵ Thus, opening a file on Enrique Salinas is proof of his wrongdoing and seals his fate, just as finding Adam in the cells with an umbrella seals his. Martens tells his lawyer that he has now 'grasped the logic' of his actions; he also insists that everyone is caught up in the 'net of logic'.¹⁶

In Kertész's novel, the torturer's desire to understand his actions is affirmed by his lawyer's preface, as is Rutkowski's by the editor's explanation that it is the ex-Obersturmführer's guilty conscience that drives him to confront his past. In *Detective Story*, the confessional mode is linked to the possibility of a 'sovereign human person' stirring once again and to the recognition of truth through assuming one's fate. However, through Rutkowski, Pekić presents confession as sophisticated evasion, another form which cannot escape the net of logic. Rutkowski claims to be Steinbrecher's staunchest critic, hating what he represents; the embodiment of the totalitarian mindset. Yet he increasingly assumes his superior's language and logic and their voices become increasingly indistinguishable. Both invoke the language of performance and game to describe interrogation and murder. Steinbrecher sees the Jews as equal players in the game of choosing their fate, and their 'passion for the game increased as the selections became more complicated and their numbers continually diminished' (243). For Rutkowski, his interrogation of Adam is a complicated chess game in which the 'Black King of the Secret' faces the 'White King of the thirst for a confession of the Great Secret' (191). Most obvious, however, is how Rutkowski explicates Steinbrecher's ideas and assumes them. So, for example, when recollecting Steinbrecher's yearning for a language of interrogation that would enable 'us' to be 'absolutely unambiguous, universal,

and logically consistent' (224), Rutkowski effectively completes Steinbrecher's project for him by imagining how interrogation transcripts might be expressed as formulae: 'Steinbrecher: $(x - y) + (x + y) = ?$ Prisoner: $2x!$ ' (225).

Rutkowski is persuasive in his argument that he was resisting external pressure. Dr Holtmannhäuser, one of the fictional psychiatrists analysing Rutkowski's letters, is convinced that Rutkowski 'began gradually to turn into Steinbrecher' both in terms of the content and form of his utterances, becoming 'what he deeply hated' (388). The critic, Olga Nedeljković, also lends his account credibility, describing his 'gradual transformation [...] from a humanist scholar into a Nazi policeman' despite demonstrating 'intellectual resistance'.¹⁷ Yet there are numerous reasons to doubt Rutkowski's version that he was victim of a coercive process against which he was struggling. Rutkowski manifests a persistent pattern of lying, concealment or extreme self-deception about his role in the SS. His description of how he interrogated Adam so that he would be proven innocent, directly contradicts his remark that Steinbrecher and Rotkopf congratulated him on getting Adam to confess (262). He minimizes his role in Adam's interrogation by claiming that his 'careless fascination' for Adam's umbrella attracted Steinbrecher's attention. But Rutkowski's fascination is anything but careless; it is typical of his systematic approach to interrogation in which any anomaly, here a prisoner in possession of an umbrella, must be forced into the logic of the interrogator. So when, in recognition of his growing similarity to Steinbrecher's voice, he admits to being 'prone to inappropriate mimics' (173), we can recognize again his strategy of combining apparent honesty with his surrender to external discourses. His construction of Steinbrecher as the forceful super-spreader of perpetration may more accurately be seen as ventriloquism, with Rutkowski projecting his voice onto Steinbrecher. Indeed, bearing in mind that the editor can find no evidence that Steinbrecher committed suicide as Rutkowski asserts, we are left to wonder whether he is altogether Rutkowski's projection. There is, then, every reason to doubt Rutkowski's tale of an intellectual's valiant struggle, who was 'selected' (264) to work for the Gestapo and found his job as interrogator so terrible that he requested a transfer to the front.

Thanks to Rutkowski's careless letter writing and developing madness, there are plenty of clues that he was a willing Nazi from the outset. He received funding 'of dubious origin and purpose' (373) to study at Heidelberg, an actively National Socialist university. His failure to join the Yugoslav High Command in 1941 indicates his ideological allegiance to the Nazis. Hilmar, a historian of the Third Reich, is of the view that Rutkowski joined the police to avoid being sent to the

Eastern Front (264) and to find a legitimate outlet for his intolerance of suffering and 'nervous indisposition' (21) towards those who suffer, as Rutkowski admits. Rutkowski's own career as historian offers one more opportunity for escaping his responsibility. When he is not analysing Roman Catholic symbols in the embroidery of Prince Mieszko Piastowicz's coronation robe, he is writing a history of the city of Cracow, excluding the challenge of its '*modern history*', a euphemism for the Holocaust. His real interest lies with the period of the Christianization of the Slavic Wislans, who became 'the basic purpose of our ethnic, spiritual, political, and military *Drang nach Osten*' (18). Here he betrays an emotional and ideological worldview that sits comfortably with National Socialist beliefs, as does his casual reference to 'southern slovenliness' (25) and his remark about the 'glorious contribution of our concentration camps to medicine' (29). His historical practice is, like his self-presentation, a combination of evasion and active suppression of facts that do not accord with his version of events. Indeed, Hilmar reported him to the university chancellor for correcting 'errors' in published books by scraping or cutting the mistakes away with a little knife (22), which Rutkowski defends as a craving for perfection and a symptom of a 'higher intellect'.

The voice of a younger historian with subject expertise in National Socialism gestures to the possibility of a more reliable response to perpetration inflicted by the Germans. Hilmar's current project is on Nazi perpetrators, with a focus on 'the biographies of criminals and the chronologies of crimes' (267), which is a direct threat to Rutkowski's post-war position. Yet any hope for a reliable counter-narrative being put forward by a generation of post-war German historians is deflated by Rutkowski's accusations against Hilmar. According to him, Hilmar was in the Hitler Youth and is a hypocrite and apologist for the Germans, for whom not everything was bad in the Third Reich (263). Hilmar seeks to combat Sabina's German guilt by explaining that 'we were all both [...] victims and murderers, pawns in the very same historical game' (67). In his book, *The Collapse of the Third Reich*, Hilmar refers to the 'repressions in the East' as 'very regrettable excesses' and blames Nazism on the Versailles Treaty. Although Rutkowski has every interest in discrediting Hilmar and for all that Hilmar is mediated through Rutkowski's accusations, they nevertheless serve as reminders of responses to the Holocaust that were pervasive in the historiography of the 1950s and 1960s. Hilmar seems to be an example of the prevalent interpretations that by pointing to the culpability of the elite Nazis and the terror they imposed, characterized most Germans as victims.

Academic history is thoroughly satirized here, with interpretations of history no more than falsely dignified versions of personal interest. A similar

debunking of professional knowledge takes place in relation to psychiatry. The three psychiatrists from whom the editor has requested expert opinion on Rutkowski's growing madness each offers a different interpretation. Dr Schick thinks he was insane all along, possibly with a hereditary illness, and that Rutkowski's descriptions of Adam's appearances, his ascension when he is executed and his view of the umbrella as demonic are clear evidence of this. He also thinks Rutkowski was murdered. In direct contradiction, Dr Birnbaum thinks that Rutkowski's actions, however bizarre, are normal, albeit extreme, manifestations of typical processes of rationalization or psychopathic instability, including the combination of mistrust Hilmar, yet still confession to him. Dr Birnbaum expresses a '*temporary* hypothesis of *voluntary* insanity (392) and thinks his death is suicide. Dr Holtmannhäuser's position lies between the two: Rutkowski was perfectly healthy before 1943, then 'went insane only when he was faced with a set of circumstances that his mind could not comprehend and his conscience could not condone' (372). His death was an accident caused by dangerous driving. These inconclusive verdicts can perhaps be seen as evidence of the success of Rutkowski's confession, which, after all, is not meant to be challenged: he tells Hilmar that he does not require either a response or advice. Like Gavrilović's unreliability, Rutkowski undermines coherent interpretations of his unreliability, including the suspicion that the whole thing, madness included, is an elaborate cover-up. In the vain quest for clarity, the editor approached the psychiatrists. Yet they too have no more evidence than Rutkowski's letters and postscripts. The reader is forced to look to the editor's erudite and reasonable analysis for an explanation of what is happening.

The reasonable, all too reasonable, editor

The editor is generally dismissive of the largely conventional views and bitter disagreements of the psychiatrists, presenting himself in contrast as authoritative, scrupulous and objective from the outset. He is familiar with scholarly conventions, offering a bibliography and explanatory notes. The only changes he has made to the manuscript has been to alter names to protect individuals or places, to reconstruct certain points in the last six letters where they were illegible or incomplete, or to make some technical adaptations in his translation of the German into Serbian. His research is extensive and detailed. He has conducted interviews in D, visited archives in D, Belgrade and Berlin and has read extensively about the Holocaust and interrogation methods over time.

He is knowledgeable about leading thinkers in psychology and psychoanalysis as well as with key post-war novels. Finally, he is steeped in Western philosophy. He thus appears as someone who has privileged insight into Rutkowski. And he undoubtedly offers a persuasive analysis of Rutkowski, suggesting in his preface that Rutkowski's guilty conscience drove him 'to find a *modus vivendi* with its own past' but that 'in his attempt to erase his old mind-set, he renewed it in a still darker version' (10). He recognizes that in his repeated subjection to Steinbrecherian logic, Rutkowski is an example of how a totalitarian mind-set can arise out of the very conflict with totalitarianism, with devastating consequence. Rutkowski's 'bitter polemic' against the European intellectual tradition, which he largely blames for his and Germany's downfall, itself feeds off and radicalizes the logic he is railing against. Through Rutkowski, the editor wishes to demonstrate the ongoing threat of totalitarian oppression, and that it can emerge again if it is countered using the same logic from which it arose in the first place. The editor returns to the precise detail of his theory about how attempted erasure leads to renewed fervour in the final stages of the text in endnote 37. He argues that 'self-manipulation' is 'the most frequent form of adaptation to the world' (394). As a man who was attempting to reconcile his conscience with his past, Rutkowski had three choices: changing the past, taking drugs to alleviate the stress of his internal conflict, or changing his attitude to the past. He argues that to change his attitude to the past in a way that would resolve his internal conflict, Rutkowski would have to agree with the past, which he could only do if he changed 'his entire intellectual disposition' (398).

The editor is convincing; rather too convincing. On closer scrutiny, he displays a surprising willingness to accept Rutkowski's version of events, despite his unreliability, including Rutkowski's self-positioning as a victim. He refers to Rutkowski's rejection of the bloodstained Nazi reality at the time, as though this is not open to question, asserts as 'true' that he 'tried wildly to resist' Steinbrecher's logic (399) and accepts that Rutkowski had no choice but behave as he did, for he would otherwise have been 'destroyed (leaving the SS was impossible)' (401). Even when the editor's position seems nuanced about Rutkowski's culpability, the tenor of his analysis remains uncritical. He refers to Rutkowski's 'individual war against fascism' and his pitiable position of being 'alone, morally broken, and desperate' (402). He gives his interpretation of Rutkowski's struggle as one of tortured self-indoctrination further credibility by establishing a direct parallel with the nine phases of indoctrination outlined by Robert Jay Lifton in his book *Thought Reform*, a study of 'brainwashing' in China. He shows how Rutkowski effectively passed through all stages. First, he experiences 'the

destruction of identity' when he arrives in D with Sabina, despite attempts at initial resistance in the form of rationalizations and complicated justifications of his 'treachery' (399). Rutkowski then progresses through accepting guilt, self-betrayal, a compulsion to confess and find reasons for his war-time conduct, the channelling of guilt, his re-education as a Nazi and finally the 'state of complete harmony' of full conversion (405).

The editor's analysis is fascinating, not least because it focuses on the powerful psychological mechanisms at play when an individual tries to maintain a coherent self-image, and the lengths he will go to avoid cognitive dissonance and a fractured sense of identity. However, much of the persuasive force of the editor's explanation rests on an unacknowledged rhetoric of equivalences. Lifton's is a study based on interviews in 1954–5 with 'people who had been put through intensive reform experiences', both Western civilians who had been imprisoned in China and Chinese intellectuals, now refugees in Hong Kong, who had undergone thought reform at university or 'revolutionary colleges' in China.¹⁸ This immediately aligns Rutkowski, a free man of high status living in a prosperous Western democracy, with victims of persecution and torture. The editor totally ignores the differences in physical violence and trauma of existential threat between the different cases. Even if we accept that Rutkowski 'must' write a confession and suffers insomnia, this is not the same as sleep deprivation as torture. Rutkowski's disorientation when he arrives on holiday in D is not the same as being imprisoned. And if a high number of American prisoners 'broke' because they 'lacked group morale, the possibility of joint resistance', Rutkowski's decision not to attend a single post-war meeting of SS veterans and not to speak about 'his problem' are hardly 'the exact same reasons' (402). The editor slips into indulgent analogies here in order to lend authority to his interpretation. It culminates in an emotional plea: 'how [would] we conduct ourselves if we were deprived of sleep [...] spit on [...] connected to the city electrical grid [...] pierced with needles [...] thrown strappado onto stone floors?' (406). The editor transforms Rutkowski into a torture victim whose only escape from himself is to embrace the Nazi ideology against which he has been so valiantly fighting.

The editor is less objective and authoritative than he would like us to believe. He primes the reader with a certain interpretation at the outset and over the course of his endnotes pushes us to accept Rutkowski's version of events with growing sympathy for his position and adoption of Rutkowski's idiom. In endnote 12, the editor refers to the events surrounding Adam's interrogation taking place on the 'day that would kill the future professor of Heidelberg

University' (407), which is surprising given that it is Adam who is killed. In endnote 10, the editor gives an overview of the SS, so that the reader can become familiar with the 'spiritual environment' that Rutkowski had to struggle with. A brief historical summary includes a reference to 'the process of transforming the racially unsuitable into higher beings, which was dictated by historical necessity' and which meant that 'Slavic subhumans' came to be included in its ranks. The editor describes this as an 'inevitable degeneration that befalls all great historical creations' (378), and concludes that the defeat of 1945 'prevented the successful conclusion of one of the most daring mass experiments of an [...] already fairly *experimental human race*' (379). The contamination of his writing by the language of the SS is marked here and actively pushes us to question the editor's perspective on the events he is commenting upon.

The editor clearly derives intellectual pleasure from the whole exercise. He is well aware that the information he gives or withholds actively structures how the letters are read. He casts himself in the role of storyteller (7) and admits to presenting the results of his independent research only in the penultimate note partly so as 'not to take the suspense out of it', which also conforms to his view of a good detective story in which 'the truth always arrives *late*' (406). The most obvious sign of his intellectual enjoyment is the 'vain burst of artistic imagination' (5) that he has allowed himself in giving titles to Rutkowski's letters and postscripts. Each title is 'a masterpiece of human thought from a different epoch' (6), ranging from Marcus Aurelius to Camus, and is based on the associations that the editor makes between the content of the letter and the philosophical work, however indirect. One of the tasks for the reader is to decipher the connection if she wishes; another element of the detective story, perhaps. This vain display of erudition not only mirrors some of Rutkowski's intellectual arrogance (vanity being a trait that Adam accuses him of), it also directly reinforces and extends Rutkowski's discussion of interrogation as a form of applied reason and logic. In particular, Rutkowski establishes direct parallels between Steinbrecher's theory of the logic of interrogation and Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, which he sees as a type of 'practical application of one of the cornerstones of contemporary philosophy' (146). Rutkowski's mapping of phrases from the *Tractatus* onto statements by Steinbrecher is akin to the editor's mapping of philosophical texts onto Rutkowski's letters. And Rutkowski's second postscript, the form of which imitates that of the *Tractatus* with its numbered propositions and hierarchically numbered statements, sets a precedent for the editor's systematic numbering and use of Lifton's work in note 37.

The editor knows that he might be misunderstood and that the associations he makes through his letter headings might 'lead to the erroneous conclusion' that he agrees with Rutkowski. He seeks to pre-empt any suspicion by assuring us that he is a 'devoted admirer of the European philosophical tradition' (6). Yet the effect of his roll call of major philosophical works is precisely to lend the weight of his own learning to Rutkowski's exculpatory narrative by implicating 'the European intellectual tradition' in National Socialist ideology and atrocity. But is it learning? He refers to works from Marcus Aurelius, Plato, Erasmus, Locke, Augustine, Abelard, Descartes, Leibnitz, Hulme, Bergson, Sartre, Camus, Berdyaev, Kant, Hegel, Marx, Freud, Husserl, Jaspers, Wittgenstein, Schopenhauer, Nietzsche, Spengler and Heidegger. It is more akin to name-dropping with almost no attempt to establish a link between a particular work and the origins of National Socialism, or indeed totalitarian thought. Hobbes, Bentham, Darwin and Schmitt are notably absent. 'The European intellectual tradition' is invoked as part of the editor's intellectual play, using the veneer of academic gravitas to lend weight to his analysis. However, it is more than this. It also disguises the editor's increasing identification with Rutkowski and his own contamination with the idiom and thought processes of the ex-SS man.

In the final two endnotes, the editor reaffirms his status as careful researcher as he describes his investigations into Adam Trpković. He has used 'various sources' to put together a picture of Adam, although the only source he then actually cites is Rutkowski's first letter, which describes Adam's status as 'the lowest and last gutter of the payroll'. He assures us that his impression of the clerk 'was not reached exclusively by means of logic (if x then y)'. But he then presents four truths ($4x$): Adam 'was an insignificant cog in the municipal administration'; he was a member of the People's Liberation Movement like everyone else; 'he was not expected to do what he did'; and he was 'very *unusual*', an 'eccentric' (407). He then goes on:

I, of course, don't know whether the story about the evil umbrella was one of his jokes. It would be logical if it were. Nevertheless, I would not make that claim. We at least know how things are with that 'logic'. What I do think, in light of all this information, is that he simply took in Obersturmführer Konrad Rutkowski – hook, line, and sinker.

Whilst claiming to avoid the dark arts of logic, whereby truths are made or created to fit logic, the editor does just that: he concludes from what he knows about Adam that he did indeed dupe Rutkowski. He seems to be offering his own, albeit milder version, of 'if x then y ': 'in the light of all this information'

(if 4x ...), Adam 'simply took in Obersturmführer Konrad Rutkowski – hook, line, and sinker' (... then y). And indeed the editor's so-called logic is creating a new truth, for the notion that Adam told the 'story about the evil umbrella' is an editorial sleight of hand: Adam reported being arrested by the Italians because he was holding on to the umbrella and so could not salute the Italian flag (117). It is Adam's wife who, according to Rutkowski, describes the umbrella as evil, a tale that Rutkowski increasingly accepts and actively perpetuates. The editor's assertion that Rutkowski was 'taken in' echoes Rutkowski's image of interrogation as a game of equals, and distracts from the reality that Adam was imprisoned, tortured and humiliatingly executed.

The editor's slippage into Rutkowski's idiom culminates in his final assertion that the umbrella is evil and that it exists: he has it chained up in his basement in London, where he is writing. He now fully succumbs to logic, since the 'only logical solution' to Rutkowski's death is that the umbrella was the murderer. Just as the editor sought to persuade us that Rutkowski succumbed to the logical discourses he abhorred, so the editor now reveals himself to be adept at so-called logical thinking, that is no more than tautology: 'the umbrella was cursed, from which it follows logically that it was the murderer, just as its evil nature inevitably and logically followed from that crime' (408). Here we have final confirmation that the editor has assumed Rutkowski's outlook and way of thinking. It is he who, to use his characterization of Adam, has sought to take the reader in, 'hook, line and sinker' (407) by increasingly assuming Rutkowski's assessment of events and by sophisticatedly, and therefore all the more insidiously, condoning his victim narrative. He may not yet be echoing Rutkowski's 'call for the extermination of all Umbrellas in the world' (288) as his chosen 'final solution of the Umbrella question' (289), but his language is shifting closer as he certainly agrees that there is an 'Umbrella problem' (408).

There is certainly an umbrella problem for the reader. We cannot dismiss the umbrella as a sign of Rutkowski's madness without seeing the editor as also mad; or we must accept the incursion of the supernatural. Furthermore, the editor's name is 'Borislav Pekić', who dates his notes 'London 1971–72', and his preface 'London, August 1976'. This creates a confusion of ontological levels by suggesting that the author is the editor, enhancing the credibility of the editor's interpretation and in particular those parts of his commentary that are erudite and echo Pekić's own views. It is an invitation for readers to align the editor's analysis directly with the author's, as Bogdan Rakić does when, in his 'Translators' Foreword' he quotes the words of the editor as though they are the author's own: 'Pekić claimed' (xiii). Pekić has undoubtedly encouraged the critical tendency to identify him

with the editor by using his own name and place of writing. He reinforces the autobiographical overlaps that exist between his own experience of interrogation and the processes described by Rutkowski. In commenting on Rutkowski's death he confirms an important dimension of the editor's analysis: that Rutkowski 'came to believe that his past was unmanageable [...] because he had not dealt with it at the time [...] but rather it had taken over when it was already completely beyond the reach of every change [...] The past that plagues us can only be destroyed by suicide or total acceptance.'¹⁹ And he supports the editor's theory that 'the illogical is harnessed in the game of the logical',²⁰ Rutkowski's and the editor's concern with the relationship of totalitarian thinking and philosophy accords with Pekić's interest in dialectical thinking at the core of theoretical Marxism and how it functioned as a justification for imposing and sustaining totalitarian regimes.²¹

And yet, as Milan Orlić rightly argues, Pekić himself warns against identification between private author and constructed authorial identity: 'between my personal worldview and my books there is always a greater or lesser discrepancy. In my books never look for me. Only my way of thinking.'²² The bridge between the supernatural elements in the novel and their implied presence beyond its pages should alert us to the fragility of the identification between Borislav Pekić the author and 'Borislav Pekić' the editor. By giving the editor his name, Pekić is not straightforwardly condoning the editor's interpretation, for this would be to remove him from necessary scrutiny. Rather, he is including himself in the demand for scrupulous reading by adding himself as a third layer of unreliability to those already presented by Rutkowski and the editor. He is inviting his reader to be aware that he, like his editor, is susceptible to the seduction of cleverly reasoning and that, in seeking to explore the logic of totalitarian thought, he may become complicit with its degradations of thought and people. There is a reason that the umbrella is chained up. Crucially, by implicating Pekić in the world of the umbrella, the extra-fictional world within which the novel is read, and its readership, are subsumed into the critique. Totalitarian logic is neither limited to the past, nor to the contemporary communist dictatorships of Eastern Europe, nor to the pages of fiction. It lurks in London cellars.

How to quiet reason

The question of how to quiet a vampire extends to the novel itself. If, as Adam's wife, Rutkowski and finally the editor assert, the umbrella is the vampire, the source of demonic forces, then incarceration offers a temporary solution (although it

has not prevented the editor from falling prey to destructive logic). But such an externalization of evil is a vital structuring component of self-exculpation. As Sidney Eric Dement argues, the status of the umbrella is complex, uniting four thematic axes within the novel. First, the umbrella is inherently dualistic (it is either up or down) and any attempt at synthesis would be illogical. The umbrella thus serves as a critique of the logic of dialectics and the totalitarian mind-set that it supports, as embodied by Steinbrecher. Secondly, through its appearance in the work of artists from communism's critical intelligentsia, such as the Serbian painter Mica Popović and the Moscow Conceptualist Georgy Kizevalter, it also symbolizes resistance to totalitarian regimes. Thirdly, the umbrella serves as a dualistic symbol of both memory and the repression of memory. As Derrida commented in *Spurs* on Nietzsche's note 'I have forgotten my umbrella', it is a note about the remembering of the forgetting of an umbrella; the umbrella is remembered primarily because it was forgotten. Finally, the umbrella is one of many vampires in the text. Rutkowski sees vampires all around, in German nationalism, history, philosophizing, Adam, Maresciallo Dagllione and the umbrella itself. Yet it is the umbrella that in staking Rutkowski also quiets 'the memories of his "deeds," the "words" of his philosophical quandaries, his nationalism, his self-justification.'²³ This leads Dement to the conclusion that the 'impaled Rutkowski seems to suggest that his solipsistic obsession with the mind games of Hegelian dialectic is the true vampire, and the umbrella, in all its dialogical glory, an antidote that, as an un-finalized word, halts the idealized progress of the dialectic like a stake halts a vampire.'²⁴

Dement's argument that not the umbrella but Rutkowski's obsession is the vampire is convincing. We should therefore hope that the umbrella will break its chains and impale the editor. This in turn raises the question of what stake Pekić can use to quiet the vampire of the novel's circular mind games and to prevent it being mired within the terms of its own logic: a logic whereby the only alternative to the rational is the irrational (the impossible supernatural), from which it follows that the irrational determines that meaning can only be found through reason – if x then y . For as Pekić writes in his essay 'The Myth of Literature and the Myth of Reality', a novel, like any other text, lives 'another, independent reality, a *vampire existence*, in which it [the literary reality] will be fed by the blood from our common reality.'²⁵ Literature is 'an artificial creation, yet another apparition in the system of apparitions in which we are imprisoned without hope'.

Pekić's resolute denial of a redemptive function of literature is reinforced by his reconfiguration of the Faust myth. The demonic, of which the vampire is a

manifestation takes numerous forms. Rutkowski refers to Steinbrecher's 'diabolic power' (40) and his 'satanic ability' (133) to find people's moral weaknesses. At the same time, he describes Adam's appearance as 'Beelzebub's great aria' (75), with Adam being either 'one of the devil's companions, or the devil himself' (287). He sees the confrontation with Adam as part of a conspiracy of 'Demonic powers' involving the 'offer of an alliance with Satan' (301). By referring to an alliance, Rutkowski promotes himself to Faust, which is in keeping with his vanity. Nevertheless, the editor reinforces the comparison by pointing us to Goethe's *Faust*. He prefaces Rutkowski's letters with the extract from the tragedy in which the frustrated academic Faust re-writes John's Gospel in four stages: 'In the beginning was the *Word*' becomes 'the *Mind*', then 'the *Force*', until he finally settles on 'In the beginning was the *Deed!*' (11). He thus explicitly situates Rutkowski within the Faust tradition, eager to confer tragic grandeur upon him by referring to his 'personal tragedy' (6) and 'the tragedy in D' (407). But Rutkowski is not the tragic figure that the editor would like him to be, nor does he show any signs of genius. Rutkowski did not need a pact with the devil to secure twenty good years, he just needed to do one year's de-Nazification and for his former professor to set him up in a post at his alma mater (373). Indeed, if anything, Rutkowski reverses Faust's move from the word to the deed by turning from his deeds (interrogating, torturing, killing) to the word (academia, books about embroidery). His death-by-umbrella is the most ludicrous counterpoint to the affirmation by the three angels at the end of *Faust Two* that '*He who strives on and lives to strive/Can earn redemption still.*'²⁶

In this reversal of Goethe's redemptive version of the Faust myth, Pekić also decisively reinforces the negation that is already so central to Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus*. In it, the composer Adrian Leverkühn succumbs to temptation, and accepts the devil's promise of creative authenticity. This will release him from 'the deadly reins of reason' and 'ravaging criticism' that constrain creativity to mere forms of parody.²⁷ It is not surprising that Pekić's editor puts Mann's novel on his list for further reading, recognizing in *Doctor Faustus* a worthy precursor to his own search for redemption. Like the editor, Mann's narrator, Serenus Zeitblom, is unreliable and himself implicated in the patterns of thought and social conformity that contributed to the rise of National Socialism. He wants to find some sort of deliverance for the composer, for himself as a gentile German and for Germany, even while comprehending that Leverkühn's creativity springs from the hell of lovelessness. The 'archaic, primal' authenticity of his music derives from the rejection of human warmth: 'Your life shall be cold – hence you may love no human.'²⁸ Zeitblom understands that Leverkühn's great

symphonic cantata, 'The Lamentation of Dr Faustus', 'permits no consolation, reconciliation, transfiguration'. As pure lament, an 'Ode to Sorrow', it functions as 'a formal negation of [Beethoven's] Ninth', the revocation of the humanist promise of Beethoven's symphony and its ode to joy.²⁹

Yet Zeitblom nevertheless raises the question of whether hope beyond despair is still possible. The composition is strictly structured around the twelve-syllable phrase 'For I die as a good and as a bad Christian', a reference Leverkühn has taken from the original chap-version of the Faust myth, in which Faust justifies the good Christian in himself in terms of his repentance and because he had always hoped for mercy. Leverkühn has already discussed a similar idea in his conversation with the devil, when he argues that a 'sinfulness so hopeless that it allows its man fundamentally to despair of hope is the true theological path to salvation.'³⁰ Zeitblom repeats this notion, wondering whether pure despair might paradoxically function as a transcendence of despair out of which hope might germinate. Thus, the silence left by the final high G of the cello transforms its pure expression of grief into a 'light in the night.'³¹ Zeitblom's reference to John's Gospel (1:5 'The light shines in the darkness') conveys his yearning for redemption. It also points to Zeitblom's final question at the end of the novel about the possibility of hope for Germany: 'When, out of this final hopelessness, will a miracle that goes beyond faith bear the light of hope?' Thus, In *Doctor Faustus*, Mann achieves a double gesture through the figures of Leverkühn and Zeitblom. In a parallel act to Leverkühn's negating lamentation, Mann takes back Goethe's affirmation that man is redeemed through striving. And in a parallel sentiment to his narrator's, Mann asks the question of whether hope remains possible in hopelessness.

Pekić radicalizes Mann. There is no silence left by a high G, but rather the despair of apprehending the horrifying alternative of demonic reason or the traumatic incursions of unreason. Love does not figure at all. In *Doctor Faustus*, even though the devil forbids love, its echo persists. Leverkühn's 'Lamentation' is structured around the principle of the echo, 'employed to unutterably mournful effect'.³² Crucially, however, Echo is also the nickname of Leverkühn's beloved nephew Nepomuk, who brings the composer a brief period of happiness. At the mythic level of the novel, Echo must die as part of Leverkühn's pact, a profound loss that underpins the 'Lamentation' and his intention to revoke Beethoven's Ninth. But the echo of love remains a structuring principle; negating the good confirms its trace, with Beethoven's setting of Schiller's 'Ode to Joy' remaining a clear reference. In contrast, in *How to Quiet a Vampire*, love is disavowed through an absence that is not even named: Fyodor

Dostoevsky's *The Karamazov Brothers*. Ivan Karamazov's encounter with the devil is the unstated presence behind Rutkowski's conversation with Adam, as it is for Leverkühn's encounter with the devil. Given the editor's enthusiastic references to Faust, it is striking that he ignores Dostoevsky's novel and fails to recommend it as further reading. It is almost as though he is heeding the old boy's words in *Fiasco*, that 'the demon' cannot be found in individuals like Ilse Koch, nor can such a person be 'a great sinner worthy of Dostoevsky's pen'.³³

The absence of *The Karamazov Brothers* is made all the more obvious because Rutkowski does refer to *Crime and Punishment*. He describes the early interrogators in Stalin's purges, who showed warmth towards their prisoners, as descendants of Porfiry Petrovich, the police investigator in the novel. The silence in relation to *The Karamazov Brothers* is particularly surprising because of the fundamental link between the devil and the figure of the interrogator, the Grand Inquisitor. In Ivan's tale, in which the Grand Inquisitor interrogates Christ, the Inquisitor has just ordered the burning of one hundred heretics in Seville, foreshadowing later atrocities committed in the name of the good. The Grand Inquisitor argues that, by doing away with freedom, the Church has made mankind happy. In contrast, the 'freedom of choice in love' that Christ gave man 'burdened man's spiritual domain with its torments for ever'.³⁴ But by recognizing men's weakness, and building the Catholic Church on '*miracle, mystery, and authority*', their suffering was lifted and 'men were delighted that once more they were led like sheep'. The Inquisitor describes how men give up freedom and moral choices in return for order and bread: 'they will accept our judgement with joy, because it will spare them the great burden and terrible torment of personal and free choice that they suffer today'.³⁵ The Grand Inquisitor's utopia justifies the violent subjugation of free will and the imposition of authority needed to achieve it. He draws on the tools of reason and enlightenment to improve the lot of humanity, and in doing so he anticipates the psychology of the totalitarian state. Later in the novel, Ivan is visited by the devil, who, like Ivan, claims that he 'loves truth and genuinely desires good'. Ivan hears the echoes of his own ideas and accuses the devil of 'dishing up as new to me all that's most stupid in my own nature, all that I've [...] spat out as junk!'³⁶ The devil thus functions 'to travesty Ivan's diabolical intellectual revolt and to undermine its aesthetic dimension, both of which are drawn largely from European or Europeanized sources'.³⁷ Dostoevsky's constellation of European reason, the devil and a powerful, repressive interrogator is an evident intertext for *How to Quiet a Vampire*, as it is for *Doctor Faustus*. The parallels are clear: the demonic is associated with Western traditions of rational humanism and

logic, modes of thought that presage totalitarian systems and that claim to be working for the greater good. Yet Dostoevsky offers a counter-position that Pekić radically rejects.

Unlike Faust, Ivan does not enter a pact with the devil. Even though he, like Rutkowski, is driven insane by an internal conflict, Ivan's conflict is based upon his inability to reconcile the reasoned arguments for the greater good and justice with his love of life: 'I love the tiny, sticky spring leaves, the blue sky, so there it is! There's no sense in it, no logic.' His internal dispute is whether to 'Love life rather than the meaning of it', where his experience of loving creation is beyond reason, and as such is a force external to it.³⁸ This countervailing force is powerfully present in *The Karamazov Brothers*, extending beyond Ivan's emotional response to new leaves to Alyosha's belief that love 'must certainly come before logic, for only then can one come to understand the meaning', and culminating in the account of the life and teachings of the Starets Zosima. However idealistic the articulations of this love may be, however unpolitical, and however inseparable for Dostoevsky from the Christianity of Russian Orthodoxy, it remains a strong and seductive force in the novel. That is not to say that Ivan's tale of the Grand Inquisitor does not also remain strong and seductive; 'Dostoevsky himself suspected that, on the level of ideas, at least, he had given the Devil all the best tunes'.³⁹ What is significant is that although love lies beyond reason and is in that sense un-reasonable, it is no less real. Love is not the converse of reason but a different type of experience altogether.

Pekić decisively repeals Dostoevsky's redemptive vision of love. It is invoked only as a powerful absence, not as an echo structuring the form of a desperate lament or a word that is tossed around and laughed at, but still articulated as a yearning, as in Kertész's *Liquidation*. It does not exist as a form of authentic counter-experience to rationalizing modernity. In the words of Mann's devil to Leverkühn, *How to Quiet a Vampire* comes close to depicting a 'total chilling of your life and of your relations to humans'.⁴⁰ But it only comes close. For despite asserting that literature is one more apparition 'in which we are imprisoned without hope', Pekić goes on to write: 'On the other hand, I am the most fervent advocate of that artificiality as its authentic and sovereign nature.'⁴¹ Central to the transformative artificiality of *How to Quiet a Vampire*, as of *The Apology*, is the comedy. It is the comic aesthetic that, mirroring the comic incursion of the umbrella in Rutkowski's and the editor's worlds, is the stake that stops the novel being no more than a repetition of recessive circularity. Whereas Rutkowski seeks to eliminate the incongruity of the comic incursion into his

life of serious discourse, and the editor has it safely under control, Pekić gives it free play.

It is the novel's ludic dimension that undermines any attempt to respond to Rutkowski's letters in the way the editor does. It is not possible to emulate the seriousness with which the editor treats his subject precisely because he finally succumbs to Rutkowski's idiom and perspective. He consequently enters the comic frame himself, assuming some of the comic veneer with which he treats the psychiatrists. Pekić labels his novel a 'Sotie', a satirical play common in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century France in which 'fools' commented on contemporary political events.⁴² The novel stages the encounter between modes of serious discourse, philosophy, history, confession, psychiatry, that, in terms of how they engage with the world, seek to eliminate incongruity and paradox, or explain it. But by incorporating a comic aesthetic into the novel, Pekić insists on them and refuses the truth claims of totalizing systems. He guarantees the reader the space to play with her own interpretation and with it the potential frustration of not having a clear explanatory framework. This is not a redemption narrative; after all, the umbrella/stake seems to be a somewhat unpredictable, threatening and unempathetic thing. Pekić plays with our desire for redemption and epistemological closure and invites us to play, but, unlike the battle of the black and the white Kings, his play is not directed to a specific outcome.

Notes

- 1 Borislav Pekić, *The Apology and the Last Days*, trans. Bojan Mišić (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2012). Page numbers will be given in parentheses in the main text.
- 2 Borislav Pekić, *How to Quiet a Vampire: A Sotie*, trans. Stephen M. Dickey and Bogdan Rakić (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005). Page numbers will be given in parentheses in the main text.
- 3 Borislav Pekić, cited in Olga Nedeljković, 'Do Supernatural Elements Exist in Borislav Pekić's *How to Kill a Vampire*: The Poetics of a Magical Umbrella', *Serbian Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001): 35–50, 38, fn. 4.
- 4 Sidney Eric Dement, 'Umbrellas, Dialectic, and Dialogue in Borislav Pekić's *How to Quiet a Vampire*', *The Slavic and East European Journal* 56, no. 2 (2012): 153–72, 162, fn. 2.
- 5 Bogdan Rakić, 'Borislav Pekić: Sisyphus as Hero', *Serbian Studies* 15, no. 1 (2001): 9–24, 10.
- 6 *Ibid.*, 12.

- 7 See Harold B. Segel, *The Walls behind the Curtain: East European Prison Literature, 1945–1990* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2012), 384; Vesna Cidilko, 'Wie ein Fleck zurückblieb: Mihailović, Dragoslav', *Zeitschrift für Slawistik* 64, no. 1 (2019): 153–6.
- 8 Danilo Kiš, quoted in Vladimir Zorić, 'The Poetics of Legend: The Paradigmatic Approach to Legend in Danilo Kiš's "A Tomb for Boris Davidovich"', *The Modern Language Review* 100, no. 1 (2005): 161–84, 163.
- 9 Plato's *Apology*, trans. David Horan, 18B; 18C. <https://www.platonicfoundation.org/apology/> (accessed 30 March 2023).
- 10 Ibid., 17B, 17C.
- 11 Ibid., 25B, 18.
- 12 Ibid., 30D, 22.
- 13 Kertész, *Detective Story*, 11; 88.
- 14 Ibid., 78.
- 15 Ibid., 13.
- 16 Ibid., 4; 104.
- 17 Nedeljković, 'Supernatural Elements', 38.
- 18 Robert Jay Lifton, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1989), 8.
- 19 Pekić, quoted in Nedeljković, 'Supernatural Elements', 48, fn. 21.
- 20 Pekić, quoted in Nedeljković, 'Supernatural Elements', 49.
- 21 See Dement, 'Umbrellas', 159.
- 22 Pekić, quoted in *The Dostoevsky Journal* 16 (2015): 92–107, 102.
- 23 Dement, 'Umbrellas', 169.
- 24 Ibid., 169–70.
- 25 Pekić, quoted in Olga Nedeljković, "'The Destruction of Reality, or the Myth of Man" in Borislav Pekić's Essay-Manifesto: "The Myth of Literature and the Myth of Reality"', *Serbian Studies Research* 1, no. 1 (2010): 69–101, 72–3.
- 26 Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, *Faust. Part Two*, trans. David Luke (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11936–7.
- 27 Thomas Mann, *Doctor Faustus*, trans. John E. Woods (New York: Vintage, 1999), 252.
- 28 Ibid., 252; 264.
- 29 Ibid., 515; 514.
- 30 Ibid., 262.
- 31 Ibid., 515.
- 32 Ibid., 510.
- 33 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 49.
- 34 Fyodor Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*, trans. Ignat Avsey (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 319.

- 35 Ibid., 322; 325.
- 36 Ibid., 812; 813.
- 37 W. J. Leatherbarrow, *A Devil's Vaudeville: The Demonic in Dostoevsky's Major Fiction* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 2005), 167.
- 38 Dostoevsky, *The Karamazov Brothers*, 289.
- 39 W. J. Leatherbarrow, *Fyodor Dostoevsky: The Brothers Karamazov* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 72.
- 40 Mann, *Faustus*, 264.
- 41 Pekić, quoted in Nedeljković, 'The Destruction of Reality', 72.
- 42 Tomislav Z. Longinović, *Vampire Nation: Violence as Cultural Imaginary* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2011), 156.

Victims as perpetrators: Aleksandar Tišma

When she reads Paul West's novel of 1980, *The Very Rich Hours of Count von Stauffenberg*, Elizabeth Costello is tormented by what, in Kertész's terms, might be characterized by the conflict between 'blood, lust and the demon' and a novelist's accurate portrayal.¹ Or by the question, drawing on Pekić, of whether a novelist becomes a vessel for the very devil he is seeking to portray and understand. In depicting the executioner's torture and humiliation of the Stauffenberg plotters, Costello feels that West has come into contact with 'absolute evil'. The encounter is in one way a blessing because it enables West to do his 'writerly duty' and bring 'inert matter to life'; he '*has ventured into the labyrinth of Europe's past and faced down the Minotaur and returned to tell his tale*'.² It is a curse because it is obscene to bring what was already an obscenity into the light. She suspects that if literature has the power to make people better, it must also be able to make them worse. Costello cannot resolve this contest and struggles to articulate her view, recognizing that at its root is her emotional experience of reading West's depiction of the hangman's cruelty. She is sickened by the 'wanton [...] *obscene* energy that exceeded his commission', a satanic energy that in turn '*excited* her to read'. Here she locates an excess of energy at the level of aesthetic transformation, a 'flap of Satan's leathery wings' that is discernible but hard to determine. There is no scope for an artist's pact with the devil in Costello's conceptualization of Satan. She suspects that the 'grand Lucifers of Dante and Milton have been retired for good', and far from being a seductive figure with whom the artist enters a pact, Satan has taken the form of a parasite in the gut or liver, unbeknown to the host.³

Costello might have heard the flap of Satan's wings if she had read Aleksandar Tišma's short story 'The School of Godlessness'. Published in 1978, two years before West's novel, it recounts a day in the life of Dulics, an interrogator in the Hungarian secret police in 1943. In graphic detail it describes how he tortures to death the prisoner Ostojin, a suspected communist, who is not yet

eighteen years old. The story is written from Dulics's perspective and links his brutality to his hatred of weakness, which he recognizes in himself but has overcome. He has suffered individually from his appearance as a small and unprepossessing man, and socially from poverty and because his Hungarian identity is shaky. Although his parents were both Hungarian, he was as a boy taken to be Serbian, which at the time was an advantage. He welcomes the Hungarian invasion because he feels he has suffered, and joins the police, a job that would not otherwise have occurred to him and which lifts him out of the menial jobs he has been doing. His sadistic torture of Ostojin, encouraged by his superiors, is also strongly informed by projecting his own self-loathing onto this good-looking young man with a Hungarian mother. However, what gives further complexity to this portrayal of a torturer is that alongside his violence is his desperate worry that his son will die of scarlet fever. His final pulping of Ostojin is the attempt to destroy what resists his will in both the prisoner and his son, whom he is impotent to help. After his final murderous frenzy, and faced with Ostojin's corpse, Dulics is horrified by the realization that he is a 'beast', 'a deviant monster', and is convinced that he will be punished by his son's death. Dulics intimately links the two deaths, seeing one as god's punishment for the other, so when he hears the news that his son is improving, his remorse is revealed as being no more than transferred guilt for his son. His sense of divine justice is extinguished and he feels fundamentally affirmed: 'So life went on as though nothing had happened, he remained human.'⁴ He prays to God, thanking him for not existing and leaves with a new sense of vigour and empowerment.

If Costello had approached Tišma at breakfast, or had him in her audience, rather than the silent West, she might have had a more robust response to her concerns. He might have accused her of 'ostrich politics', as he did the Belgrade critic Novak Simić in 1956, who averred that writing a story from the point of view of an Ustaša soldier was morally wrong. For Tišma, it is the necessary and ethical task of the artist to explore violence from the perspective of the perpetrators, and, even more so, those who collaborate with or are complicit with them:

The evil that has accumulated in our times can only be purged with long-term catharses, for which art is the appropriate medium, and the artist, who brings to life and motivates evil within himself, the most appropriate mediator. To stifle evil with silence or black and white declarations – which is the same thing – means covering it up, allowing it to go on existing, killing, while it waits for a moment of darkness in which it might impose itself.⁵

Perhaps this response would have ‘illuminate[d] the landscape’ for Costello, even if only temporarily, but it seems unlikely.⁶ ‘The School of Godlessness’ exemplifies many of the central concerns of Tišma’s writing: the attempt to understand what motivates violence; the relationship of violence to an insecure identity; and the social power dynamics within which an individual identity is undermined or strengthened. In his three ‘Holocaust novels’, these themes are further complicated by the role of anti-Semitism and the violent effects of internalized anti-Semitism. What the story hints at, which is at the forefront of the three novels, is the importance of power and violence in relation to gender relations and the question of how far these relations are manifestations of historically specific social hierarchies or irreducibly ‘human nature’. But what ‘The School of Godlessness’ also manifests is precisely the sense of excess energy or libidinal investment that Costello considers obscene in West’s novel. This energy is in tension with the texts’ social criticism and persists as an irritant, eliciting the question of whether Tišma’s novels remain sophisticated versions of ‘blood, lust and the demon’ or mirror to us our excitement to read.

Perpetration, complicity and the grey zone

Tišma was born in 1924 and brought up in the Vojvodina, a northern province of Yugoslavia, now Serbia, to a Hungarian, Jewish mother and a Serbian, Christian father. He lived most of his life in Novi Sad, a multi-ethnic city with a population of Serbians, Hungarians, Germans, other South Slavs and Jews. During the Second World War, the Vojvodina was occupied by the Hungarians from 1941 to 1944. Tišma and his family survived the Novi Sad raid of 20–23 January 1942, in which around 2,500 ‘suspicious’ people were murdered by the Hungarian occupation authorities, almost entirely consisting of Serbs and about 800 Jews. His grandmother was rounded up and spared only because the order to stop the murders arrived from Budapest. Tišma and his mother moved to Budapest in 1942, where he studied at the university, but he was sent to a labour camp in Transylvania in 1944 to help build defences against the oncoming Red Army. After returning to Novi Sad, he joined the Yugoslav Third Army Group and had a job as a censor. From 1949–81 he worked as a writer and publisher for Matica Srpska, then based himself in France during the civil wars of the 1990s. As Yvonne Zivkovic writes, during this period of renewed nationalism, he ‘advocated for a common Yugoslav identity’.⁷ However, Tišma’s advocacy was not an extension of the idealizing socialist vision of Yugoslavian unity asserted

under Josip Broz Tito's regime, based on the foundation myth of the People's Liberation War. In this version of the war, complex divisions along political, ethnic, class and regional lines, the murder of the Jews and atrocities perpetrated against gentile civilians, were simplified into a clear demarcation between the enemies who collaborated and the heroes who resisted. Inter-Yugoslav violence was blamed on the German or Hungarian occupiers or obvious collaborators such as the Ustaša, the Croatian fascist and ultranationalist organization, and the government forces of Milan Nedić in Serbia, ignoring questions of how widely they were supported. The general population were equalized in the attempt to ensure identification with the post-war multinational state.⁸

In contrast, Tišma's 'Holocaust novels' expose a history of violence, 'in particular the deep imprints of the Holocaust along with the crimes committed in the name of communism, whether as retribution for fascist killings or as the consequence of a new system of oppression.'⁹ His work confirms the re-appraisal of the notion of a 'memory vacuum' in Eastern Europe under the prescriptive memory politics of the various socialist regimes. Challenges to official versions of history took place in art and literature and in particular 'Yugoslavia's authors and artists were not subjected to the same restrictive censorship policies that were characteristic of the Soviet satellites.'¹⁰ *The Book of Blam* was published in 1972 and is set in Novi Sad. It focuses on Miroslav Blam, whose walks through the streets of the post-war city trigger memories of his youth and the events of the brutal Hungarian occupation. Blam is the sole survivor from his Jewish family, murdered in the Novi Sad raid, and he now lives in an unhappy marriage, isolated and tormented by survivor's guilt. He was spared by marrying a gentile, Janja, and converting to Orthodox Christianity. Blam's recollections and associations serve as the narrative framework for the omniscient third-person narrator to portray historical events, including from perspectives that are not his.

In *The Use of Man* (1976), three main characters are used to explore similar themes: the invasion and occupation of Yugoslavia, the Jewish genocide, collaboration and resistance, and the trauma and despair of surviving. Vera Kroner is deported with her wealthy, cultured Jewish father, Robert Kroner, and grandmother, and unlike them survives because she is selected to work in the Auschwitz brothel. Milinko Božić is poor, studious and fascinated by German culture, which he learns about from Robert Kroner. After witnessing the deportation of the Kroners, Milinko joins the resistance, is left without limbs, blind, deaf and mute after stepping on a mine, and finally dies incognito in a German veterans' hospital when he is 'euthanised' by the medics. Sredoje

Lazukić, whose father is a Serbian nationalist and whose mother is the daughter of a Croatian Catholic, escapes with his father to Belgrade at the start of the April 1941 invasion of Yugoslavia. He works for the Germans to avoid being enlisted in the Serbian National Guard, first in the military police, then as a translator. But after killing the German Captain for making sexual advances, Sredoje joins the partisans for the rest of the war. Like Vera, whom he eventually meets again in Novi Sad, he finds the return to any normal existence almost impossible. Other family members also have significant roles in the novel. Vera's brother, Gerhard Kroner, is tortured and killed by the Gestapo as a member of the communist resistance. Her gentile mother, Tereza, takes a German NCO as a lover and escapes with him to Munich when the Soviet army invades. And Sep Lehnart, Tereza's brother, is an SS officer who participates in the mass murder of Jews following Operation Barbarossa.

Kapo (1987), like *The Book of Blam*, is set in the post-war present of socialist Yugoslavia of 1983. It also uses the technique of the protagonist's associations and memories to depict pre-war life, his persecution and life in Auschwitz, and his isolation and despair in post-war Yugoslavia. Vilko Lamian is the son of Jewish parents who have him baptized to secure his status as a catholic Croat. This attempt to safeguard their son fails, since he too is defined as Jewish under the race laws of 1941. He initially evades deportation, but is denounced and then sent first to Jasenovac, the Ustaša concentration camp, and then on to Auschwitz. He does what he can to survive, culminating in becoming a brutal Kapo. He also uses his position of power to exploit female prisoners, giving them food for sex. One such woman is Helena Lifka, who, when he discovers that she is a Yugoslavian Jew like him, he gets transferred to an easier work unit. Many years after the war he feels compelled to track her down, both because he fears that as the sole surviving witness of his violence she may denounce him and because he identifies with her as a Jewish survivor. His quest to locate her drives the plot in the narrative present. When he does finally find her address in Zagreb, he is too late, for she died a few months earlier.

The perpetrators in Tišma's novels are brutish and sadistic, cruel individuals who enjoy murdering and inflicting pain. They are generally Nazi Germans, Hungarians and members of the Ustaša, and to this extent the novels fit with the ideological simplifications of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia. In *The Book of Blam*, the Hungarians are the primary perpetrators, with descriptions of horrifying violence, and in *The Use of Man*, too, Hungarian troops are responsible for extreme cruelty. But the SS are the main evil-doers, their depiction reinforcing stereotypes of Nazi perpetrators. Sep Lehnart, always in his black boots, appears

as the 'embodiment of horror, brutality, bloodthirstiness' and feels a visceral urge to kill directly, as he did when massacring Jews. He is not horrified by his involvement in mass murder, recounting in detail his experience of shooting Jews into pits and 'cleansing the earth of vermin'. Rather, he fears that this task is insurmountable and that he will 'never be able to exterminate them for good'.¹¹ The SS personify sadistic brutality: Handke smiles as he systematically beats two girls to death; Pfalzig kills prisoners by pressing his staff down their windpipes; and Corporal Sommer amuses himself by pouring water over Lamian and forcing him to stand motionless on the parade ground of Auschwitz in the middle of winter.¹² Operating alongside the Germans, the Ustaša are their equals in brutality, carrying out the mass murder of Gypsies at Gradina with frenzied knife attacks. For the former priest Blažuj, the zealous stabbing to death of four prisoners is like an extension of stuffing his mouth with bread and meat. Be it the Germans or the Ustaša, when Lamian thinks about the violent deaths he has survived, he recalls the 'squeals and whoops of the murderer's dance [...] and the astonishment [...] at such overwhelming hatred'.¹³

The graphic violence of Tišma's novels undoubtedly forces a confrontation with the physical horror of extreme violence; it asserts that the obscenity of violence should not be off-stage, effecting an aesthetic cover-up. The lack of nuance in the depiction of the sadistic perpetrators is from the point of view of the victims, for whom there is no nuance and for whom the motivation of the perpetrators is irrelevant. The novels' emotional interest lies not with what drives these apex perpetrators, whose power is unambiguous, but with figures who are situated in complex and ambivalent structures of power and whose responses are inseparable from their individual desires. Thus, for example, the figure of Predrag Popadić offers a sympathetic study of complicity. Charming son of a wealthy local landowner, he becomes the Blams' lodger when, following the anti-Jewish laws, Vilim Blam loses his job of twenty years as a newspaper reporter and they need a replacement income. Popadić enjoys the good life, and manoeuvres to achieve it, 'sid[ing] with the murderers' to become the editor of the propagandistic new Serbian newspaper. This paper determinedly presents 'happy occasions' in Novi Sad and does not report the raids of January 1942 at all.¹⁴ Popadić helps those he favours: he secures Vilim an inconspicuous position at his newspaper and helps him find out what has happened to Estera Blam (she has been shot trying to escape arrest as a communist); he arranges for Blam to convert to Orthodox Christianity through marshalling his connections, thereby helping secure his survival; and he acquires jobs for both Blam and Janja, as well as a flat in the Mercury building where he lives. This of course facilitates

his affair with Janja, having already had an affair with Blam's mother. Popadić collaborates with the occupiers, but uses his participation in the Novi Sad raid to protect the Mercury residents from arrest. Later, it is his participation that de facto later makes him a traitor in the eyes of some. Indeed, he is arrested by the partisans and shot without investigation or trial as a collaborator.

The figure of Sredoje Lazukić, whose perspective dominates much of the narrative of *The Use of Man*, is a more complex figure. He is a victim of a brutal war and a violent abuser of women. He flees Novi Sad in 1941 with his father and brother, since his father is a well-known Serbian nationalist and publicly anti-German. Each member of his family is killed by the occupying forces and he loses everything of his previous life. Unlike his father, Sredoje harbours no political affiliations; he is motivated by the desire to survive and the ability to pursue his desires. He collaborates with the occupation forces and exploits this position to rape women. He also enjoys his outings into the Serbian interior with Captain Waldenheim in the spring and summer of 1943, giving no thought to the reason for these visits. Even witnessing the public hanging of a 'Communist hireling' by the Germans does not elicit a political response. Rather, having had no interest in joining the resistance, he becomes a partisan out of necessity: on the same day, he kills Captain Waldenheim to escape his sexual advances. It is his newly developed 'fascination [...] for killing, for violent death', acquired by the combination of witnessing a hanging and killing a man for the first time, that spurs his action as an effective partisan, not political commitment.¹⁵ Sredoje's range of behaviour refuses the fixed subject positions of victim, perpetrator or resistance fighter. His character challenges any notion of identities conceived of as mutually exclusive and morally clear-cut.

This challenge is further radicalized in the figure of Vilko Lamian, a victim and a kapo. Lamian is subject to genocidal race laws, interned in Jasenovac, starved as a slave labourer, ferried to Gradina to dig graves with the intention that he then be slaughtered himself, and deported to Auschwitz where he nearly freezes to death as punishment for taking a pullover to stay warm. He finally escapes from a death march. Lamian is in constant fear of imminent, violent death, whether that is by starvation like the prisoners of section 3c at Jasenovac who resort to cannibalism, by being shot or stabbed like his fellow gravediggers, by being gassed, or by some other method that he witnesses. It is terror that drives him to promise gold to the SS Kommandoführer Alfred Riegler, in exchange for which he is made the workshop kapo. But survival comes at a terrible cost. He is imprisoned in a system of violence in which the murder of others offers momentary 'intervals of peace' and the selection of others elicits

a 'sigh of happiness' because it means that he is spared.¹⁶ Yet, more than this necessarily perverse source of happiness, the drive to survive ensures that he becomes part of the system of violence, exchanging 'powerlessness for power'. Lamian adapts to the law of the camp by which kapos can 'postpone their death by hastening it for others'.¹⁷ If he had not drowned the Stark brothers in the lime pit or smashed people's heads then he would have been drowned or clubbed to death himself. Instead, he was rewarded with the job of corpse carrier, which in turn delays death and allows for another attempt at survival.

Kapo was published in 1987 and offers a powerful depiction of the drive for survival and the brutal moral collapse that makes a simple distinction between good and evil possible. It was published one year after Primo Levi's *The Drowned and the Saved*, with its hugely influential chapter, 'The Gray Zone'. Here, Levi puts the agonized issue of victims' involvement with their murderers beyond the realm of normal moral judgement. He writes about the impossibility of dividing the world of the concentration camp into good and evil. Indeed, the destruction of comprehensible boundaries was an immediate lesson on arrival in the camp: 'the enemy was all around but also inside, the "we" lost its limits [...] one could not discern a single frontier but rather many confused, perhaps innumerable frontiers, which stretched between each of us.'¹⁸ Levi's 'gray zone' was the space in which a perverse state of extreme coercion resulted in victims becoming kapos and instruments of the authorities in order to survive. It was a space so morally complicated that it becomes almost impossible to judge those within it; certainly, Levi knows 'of no human tribunal to which one could delegate the judgement'.¹⁹

Levi's book, as Laura Jockusch and Gabriel Finder argue, was instrumental in creating a space for discussing collaboration and victimhood without denying victimhood.²⁰ It had, and continues to have, a considerably greater impact than Tišma's *Kapo*, but they both forcefully, and distressingly, expose the structures and workings of power that facilitate mass atrocity. The figure of the kapo embodies one of the many extreme cruelties of the Jewish genocide, since victims were forced to be part of the organizational system of murder. The emotional, moral and judicial challenges presented by the figure of the kapo, as well as Jewish cooperation more broadly, is exemplified in the painful experience of the Jewish collaborator trials of the 1950s in Israel and then the Eichmann trial of 1961. In 1950, the Nazis and Nazi Collaborators (Punishment) Law was passed, ostensibly in response to cases when survivors recognized kapos and accused them of collaboration with the Nazis. Yet, contrary to the argument that the Law allowed survivors legal redress against kapos, Idith Zertal argues that the law functioned 'to appease society's disgust at "Jewish conduct"

during the Holocaust' and 'to purge the new and "pure" state of Jewish shame.'²¹ Michael Bazyler shares the view that the law helped 'to distance Israelis from what they regarded as the shameful response of Europe's Jews to their destruction',²² a shame that was also reflected in the minimal media attention paid to the trials: 'A kapo trial was a filthy and embarrassing story.'²³ This wider ideological and affective context marked the law itself, which Orna Ben-Naftali and Yogev Tuval describe as 'unique for the distinction that it does not draw between the Nazis and their collaborators' and because it does not 'differentiate explicitly between various forms and degrees of collaboration'.²⁴ Indeed, the law did not define what a 'collaborator' was.²⁵ As a result, the law reinforced a view of the Holocaust that ignored its complexity and the reality of those who were subjected to genocidal policies: 'the experience of ordinary people was overshadowed by a culturally constructed dichotomy between "slaughtered lamb" and "heroes"'.²⁶

In practice, the sentences delivered by the trial judges were often relatively lenient compared to the language with which the defendants' behaviour was described. During the 1950s the Israeli courts increasingly expressed dissatisfaction with applying the criteria of 'war crimes' and 'crimes against humanity' to Jewish defendants. By the early 1960s trials against Jewish collaborators came almost to a complete end. Nevertheless, the trials left a legacy that simplified the question of complicity or responsibility. The Eichmann trial of 1961 was also significant in this regard. By focusing on the narratives of victims of the Nazis, the trial served as an affirmation of Jewish and Israeli identity. The image of Eichmann as 'total villain' became dominant, overwriting that of the Jewish collaborator.²⁷ Following the trial, the 'classification of victims and perpetrators and their public evaluation became frozen into two inflexible categories: Jewish victims and Nazi perpetrators. As a result, it became widely unacceptable in Jewish society to discuss any questionable behaviour by some Jewish victims'.²⁸ Thus the 1950s collaborator trials and the Eichmann trial in different ways contributed to putting 'a mental ceiling on the space of indeterminacy'²⁹ and consolidated a process whereby the question of Jewish collaboration became taboo in Jewish circles during the 1960s.³⁰

Like Levi, Tišma dramatically brings attention back to this debate and the extreme anguish of the individual involved. Lamian refers to the 'power of the club', the violence that he must inflict to maintain his disguise as Kapo Furfa. Underneath he is a Jew 'whose heart quaked in fear and horror as he beat those to whom he secretly belonged'.³¹ The distinction Lamian makes here allows him to defend himself as a victim despite his violence. He even casts his brutality as a form of compassion, for if he can literally 'knock [the] truth into their heads',

the truth being that they will not survive, then he can give them a 'quick' and 'simple' death.³² Obscuring the truth of imminent death, even by giving a child who is going to be gassed the next day a toy, is merely a prolongation of suffering. Lamian thus violently carries out the truth 'in all its rigor'. Lamian's convoluted self-defence in an extreme situation is motivated by his fervent wish 'to have survived without betraying' and without having joined those who caused the suffering.³³ This profound articulation of despair, a moment when he wishes for the impossible, points to the origins of his violence.

The power of the club: anti-Semitism and social critique

Lamian's self-justification that his violence is a form of compassion is unconvincing. Rather, his violence as a kapo is rooted in self-loathing and internalized anti-Semitism. From childhood he has felt different and this has alienated him from both Jews and gentiles. His anger, even horror, at this difference is overwhelmingly directed against Jews. He is repelled by what he sees as the variously 'secretive', 'obsequious, doglike', 'beseeching and mistrustful' behaviour of Jews around him, who 'bring a discordant note' wherever they appear. Lamian adopts an external gaze on them and himself, seeing Jews as 'repugnant [...] offensive', recognizing some truth in the rabidly anti-Semitic Croatian pamphlets that denounce Jews and Orthodox Christians as 'foreign dogs'.³⁴ Even after the war he thinks of Gabelić, the fanatical Croatian nationalist, as 'striving for something great', namely a future full of 'blond, energetic people devoted to the common good'. In contrast, Lamian comes to identify with the fury levelled against rootless Jews, who have no national or linguistic allegiance and who pit universal values against what is 'indigenous and unique'.³⁵ In an internal frenzy of loathing, Lamian thinks to himself that the Germans should not have erected camps but should simply have slaughtered outright in order to rid the world of 'luxury, the intellect, art, imagination, meditation, discovery, assimilation – everything, in short, the world's Jews had used to dazzle and corrupt'. It is this hatred and resentment that lies behind his brutality as a kapo; it is 'his parents he beat when he beat the Jews who shirked'.³⁶

In the figure of Lamian, Tišma offers an extreme example of how persecution and social exclusion result in the victims' feelings of shame and self-abnegation, reinforcing the very structures of oppression and affect to which they are subjected. He recognizes in his desperate pre-war attempts at public conformity and his concern to assemble an identity that was of value to society, the

behaviour of a kapo, who likewise assembles gifts of value to the Germans. Like Lamian, but in less extreme form, Blam too felt humiliated by the 'rolling eyes' and 'guttural voices' of the Jewish merchants before the war, for they reminded him of his origins. He too juxtaposes his 'original shame', inseparable from his being connected to 'foreign models and influences', with Janja's 'primordial [...] rootedness in the soil'.³⁷ Gerhard Kroner's shame, too, is manifested in his aggressive self-hatred. Frustrated by what he perceives as the Jews' resignation and weakness, he becomes antagonistic and insulting towards them, a pattern of behaviour that only stops when he is recruited by the communists to fight. In each of these cases, the increasingly extreme affective responses of the individuals are rooted in a context of escalating and extreme persecution and violence. In this way, the novels depict how persistent self-loathing and shame are historically contingent; after all, when Lamian was a boy, '[n]o one noticed any evil' and he had a 'secure place' in Bjelovar.³⁸ The novels are a ruthless critique of ethno-nationalist and racist ideology and the violence it engenders at all levels. They suggest that anger, be it wielded against the self in the form of shame and self-loathing, or against others, is not only understandable, but shockingly commensurate.

Tišma refuses to ascribe to victims of violence any redeeming counter-narrative. Gerhard is not idealized as a heroic resistance fighter and alternative to Jewish passivity but diminished by his enthusiasm for violence and desire to become a killer like his SS uncle, Sep Lehnart. In turn, it is Lehnart's apprenticeship with the merchant Solomon Heim and the many beatings he received from him that confirms in him 'the idea of supremacy through fear'.³⁹ This basic idea was then reinforced with 'darker, severer tones' during his SS training. So, for all that Heim is far from being a killer, a pattern of using violence to impose one's power is repeated across very different allegiances, from Jewish merchant, to Nazi, to partisan. The fact that a Jewish merchant is at the start of the chain is discomfiting, with the suggestion that the Jews sow the violence that is ultimately turned against them. This discomfort is, though, in keeping with Tišma's generally unforgiving insistence that everyone can be caught up in cycles of violence and power, which, under certain political conditions, escalate into mass atrocity.

The shame of Jewishness fuels the stark and violent power relations that are directed against women, since anti-Semitism directly distorts Jewish men's sexual relationships. Blam's fascination with Janja is stoked by his desire for what he sees as her natural rootedness in the land, an idealization of her that serves to abate his yearning for belonging. His proposal of marriage is founded on the 'insecurity

and cowardice' of his need for identity and her lower status, which offers him a sense of empowerment. When Blam's attempt to use Janja to secure his identity inevitably fails, when repeated experiences of 'the uncertainty of the promised encounter' compound his doubts, then his isolation and sense of difference intensify.⁴⁰ Blam's alienation from Janja is echoed in that of Robert Kroner's from his wife Reza, also a gentile from a 'lower order' than him. Sex with her allows him moments of 'play and self-forgetfulness' and escape from the 'menacing, crooked smiles' of the Jewish girls that his mother hopes he will marry.⁴¹ In *Kapo*, Lamian's self-loathing as a Jew is inseparable from his abuse of women, which he ascribes to his humiliating perception of difference. He rejects Branka because she is Jewish despite the ease and fulfilment he feels in her company, since public association with her might lead to his Jewishness being exposed.

These Jewish men are not simply victims but participate in and perpetuate the wider social dynamic of 'prey on others or be preyed upon [...] use or be used', with women largely forming the prey or being used.⁴² Blam and Robert Kroner use their economically privileged status to participate in the hunt, demonstrating, as Ana Antić points out, a 'related critique of bourgeois morality' and 'the Jewish role in its constitution and perpetuation'.⁴³ Kroner's marriage with Reza brings shame to his wealthy merchant family and his mother, with the unrestricted playfulness of sex presented as a liberating counterpoint to narrow expectations. It is Vera's experience as a sex slave in the Auschwitz brothel that makes most evident the extent to which society generally condones the oppression of women. As a girl she makes an 'enticing target' for boys throwing snowballs, a game that quickly turns into them taking the chance 'to hug and kiss her, as if she were a piece of food'. Her tears are irrelevant, an apt indication of what is to come when she is older and repelled by how men 'openly desir[ed] to undress her, to run their hands over her'.⁴⁴ The concentration camp brothel is a radicalization of the Novi Sad norms, where the women who work in Madame Herzfeld's brothel usually need money urgently, for example to pay for an abortion. Indeed, Vera's eyes make her father think of the women in the brothel, where he is a frequent visitor.

Upon Vera's return from Auschwitz, the sexually abusive norms continue. At work she is 'assaulted' by 'roving, hungry eyes', and chased by men who are like 'a pack of wolves [...] baring their teeth and snapping'.⁴⁵ It is these entrenched patterns of sexual power that facilitate Vera's cyclical return to sexual abasement after the war. She has sex with any man who knocks on her door despite her disgust and fear of attack, for her body is 'accustomed to its servitude'. When no man comes, her feeling that she has 'escaped something ugly' is reminiscent of the

days in the camp when she received no visits.⁴⁶ Her response to limit experiences of deportation, mass murder and the camp is one of profound trauma. But her trauma is also a response to continuities of abuse in which a woman's vulnerability is fair game for men. Thus, Sep Lehnart's 'humorous' anecdotes about his war experiences include his 'adventures' with girls who sell themselves for food. Both the war and the camps represent an intensification of power dynamics that structure society. As Vera realizes, 'This was camp, too [...] a continuation of [...] the camp in which she had been walled for a year and a half.'⁴⁷

Tišma ruthlessly explores the specific distorting social and individual effects of anti-Semitism. And, while elucidating the specificity of anti-Semitism's corrosive distortions and genocidal consequences, he also situates it and its victims in relation to other social hierarchies and power dynamics. He embodies at the level of character and psychology what Kertész argues more abstractly about the experience of Auschwitz and the understanding of Jewishness it gave him: that it exemplifies 'the experience of helplessness, of modern wretchedness, of ostracism.'⁴⁸ Tišma's characters make comparisons that emphasize how violence, and the structures of power that facilitate it, are socially pervasive and not limited to the exceptional brutality of the Second World War. As Antić writes, in Vera's attempted reintegration, Tišma offers a 'powerful analysis of political, cultural and, above all, social continuities.'⁴⁹ When Vera works at the Post Office after the war and the list of names of those who have been late for work is read out, she instantly feels the terror of the camp roll call, where being singled out could result in brutal punishment or death. Social continuities depend upon the ubiquitous disavowal of persecution and murder in favour of living the good life. Vera experiences the 'mania of cheerfulness' in West Germany as 'the same cheerfulness that had produced the signs in the camp [...] or the training of the dogs to tear the flesh of insubordinate prisoners'. The laughing men are indeed 'former policemen, SS men, camp guards.'⁵⁰ In post-war Novi Sad, the audience listening to a concert in the converted synagogue can enjoy 'inner experiences' by ignoring the fact that the former congregation was massacred.⁵¹ It is a repetition of how the Novi Sad population ignored the deportation of the Jews.

The power of desire: the human condition

By showing the distortions of anti-Semitism, the process of disgust and violence it fuels, Tišma refuses to conceptualize victimhood as an exclusive and fixed subject position that confers virtue. Victims can become perpetrators of violence

at an individual and political level. Thus, Lamian is revolted by Israel's wars, where former inmates of camps drive tanks 'through human flesh [...] rounding up the survivors in camps fenced off with barbed wire'. In a possible reference to the Sabra and Shatila massacres of 1982, he thinks of the sons of survivors in Israel, who now 'fenced off others with wire, opening the wire only to let in the mercenaries who slaughtered in their stead, just as the Ustaši used the starving Gypsies in Gradina'. Similarly, using starvation as a method of control is far from unique to the Ustaša or the Nazis. They needed only to learn from the 'the shantytown unemployed' that starving people resort to violence if they can get additional food; the only difference from concentration camps is that there the poverty was artificially produced.⁵²

Lamian's comparisons are interesting. At the level of character, through the internal focalization, the parallels are his own. Indeed, Lamian's casting of Israeli soldiers as perpetrators fits with his wider attempts at self-exculpation: he is not the only Jewish man to have perpetrated violence, and, even more broadly, he is no exception to the universal pattern that all starving people kill each other for food. However, the use of free indirect speech means that the narrative voice necessarily converges with that of the character in what Pier Paolo Pasolini describes as 'an exchange of linguistic ardors'.⁵³ The origin of the utterance remains indeterminate and cannot be reduced or limited to the perspective of the character alone. Lamian's revulsion at survivors and their sons inflicting types of violence on others that they themselves were subjected to coexists with making generalizations about human behaviour. Such generalizations are part of the character's self-serving narrative but they also point to the strong currents of Tišma's texts that see violence as one of the many immutable manifestation of the human condition. In *The Use of Man*, the narrator gives explicit structural form to what are essential human experiences, with six thematic chapters. 'Habitations' describes the characters' contrasting living conditions and 'Evening separations' offers brief sketches of their sleeping arrangements. In 'Bodies', essentializing characteristics are evident: the German Tereza possessing an 'iron constitution' in contrast with her Jewish husband's 'uneasy blood'. 'Natural deaths and violent deaths' emphasizes the leveller of death, with suffering common to almost all of the characters. Even in peacetime, individuals are subsumed into patterns of behaviour that are repeated and timeless. In 'Street Scenes', Novi Sad is full of people at work and at leisure, with pursuits that are more constant than the changing name of the Queen Mary Hotel ('formerly Queen Elizabeth, subsequently Erzsébet Királynő, still later Vojvodina'). The 'column of soldiers' that marches through Novi Sad in 1940,

1942 and 1956 is effectively the same, with only the uniforms indicating that one is the Royal Yugoslav army, one the Hungarian army and one the Yugoslav People's army.⁵⁴

Fundamental to how human nature is conceptualized in the novels is the centrality of men's domination of women and often violent sexual desire. It is not incidental that Lamian uses his position of power as a kapo for sexual satisfaction. He recognizes that his violence against women differs from the 'violence of the club', for his abuse of women is something that he chooses to do and plans for systematically. He buys Riegler's approval with further promises of gold and carefully prepares the toolshed with a secret hole to the women's barracks. He can then have two different women sent to him when he demands, 'rat-catching' as he calls it, except unlike rats these women fear death and therefore submit to him rather than run away. He does not care about the cost to the women, but 'he exulted in it [...] just as the SS men exulted when they felt their pulsing violence crush the instincts of the obedient millions beneath them'. Whereas as a kapo he does not wield his club 'with desire', the 'exultation' he derives from his sexual power over women functions as confirmation of his individuality.⁵⁵ This trait is not new. His rejection of Branka is compounded by her 'unnatural' active enjoyment of sex and her willingness to take the initiative, which emasculates him, unlike the 'resistance and protracted negotiating' of other women. His subsequent exploitation of Branka's isolation in order to have sex with her on his terms sets a pattern for the isolation of his later victims that makes his power 'absolute'.⁵⁶

Lamian's profound feeling of exultation is like Sredoje's, who is not Jewish, but whose misogyny is also linked to the restrictions of sexual-social norms. His desire to dominate and humiliate women is a means to achieve the 'violent demolition of [...] hypocrisy', whereby women perform 'unattainability' while craving 'to be penetrated until it hurt'.⁵⁷ Yet it is precisely the terms in which Sredoje thinks of social hypocrisy that undermines any social criticism he is purporting to make. In projecting onto women the blame for constraints on his desire, it is clear that his libidinal freedom is the concern and social power structures matter only in as far as they inhibit him. He is quick to take advantage of power structures that facilitate his hunts. He sees German soldiers as heroic and collaborates with the German military police, graduating from paying prostitutes to pretending he is a policeman in order to blackmail them into 'supplicating submission'. Believing that he can arrest them, the women do whatever he demands of them. Sredoje knows he is a 'rapist' and excitedly dreams of a new 'form of violation' before each 'attack'.⁵⁸ After the war too, he

uses the threat of reporting Dominika for having a relationship with a German to coerce her into sex and a relationship on his terms.

Tišma has been much praised for his ability to explore the 'internal life of numerous loners who did not always find their way' and for showing the 'dangerous and ominous conditions' that reside 'in the depths of the human shell'.⁵⁹ The empathetic treatment of characters that are so violent towards women, for which the use of free indirect speech is key, does not equate to condoning their behaviour or views. Yet, in the novels, the exploration of male desire and the sense of liberation and affirmation that it can bring is invested with a level of fascination that privileges it over social critique and the commensurate powerlessness of women upon which it depends. Thus, far from offering social criticism, the narrative voice reinforces an order in which Madame Herzfeld's brothel 'perhaps [...] represented, if pleasure in love can be accepted as the most powerful of all experiences, a summit for the whole of Novi Sad'.⁶⁰ Pleasure in love or 'amorous trysts' are described from the perspective of men paying for sex, with the universalizing language of love disguising both the asymmetrical power structures underlying prostitution and the exclusion of women's desire from that pleasure.

As Antić persuasively argues, the converse of this male point of view is the failure 'to provide a convincing insight into female sexual desire outside the social convention of male domination and sadism'.⁶¹ The crassest example is Gisela, the German criminal in charge of the camp brothel, who conforms to the pulp fiction image of the Nazi dominatrix with her uniform, boots and whip, deriving her own pleasure when demonstrating to the naked prisoners what to do with the soldiers. Vera's return to sexual abasement after the war offers a more complex case. Her behaviour can be read as a form of social criticism of women's 'violent process of socialization not only in the camp but also outside of it',⁶² so that her traumatic response also encompasses a reaction to normalized male violence against women. However, this interpretation does not obviate the textual fascination with violent male desire and the intensification of that desire through domination of women, be that through using prostitutes or coercing women through blackmail or physical force. The absence of women's points of view is a precondition for their role as objects of sexual satisfaction but also as a means to men's salvation. Women are invested with a hope that must necessarily be disappointed, since it rests only on the needs of the desiring men. The missed opportunity of relationship, or the recognition of belonging when it is too late, is a repeated theme in the novels. Blam does not leave Novi Sad with his cousin Lili Ehrlich, and he does not receive the loving letters she sends him after the

war, urging him to join her. Although this missed chance is not of his making, it nevertheless exemplifies this central theme and stands in stark contrast to his determination to achieve a sense of identity and belonging by marrying the uneducated Janja. In *The Use of Man*, Vera's and Sredoje's post-war encounter initially offers mutual hope, but is eroded by dissatisfaction and the inability to see the other's worth. Both die alone and in despair. In *Kapo*, the recognition of failed encounters overlaps strongly with the theme of forgiveness. Lamian realizes with considerable pain that his desire to survive led him to abandon his parents before they died, to the extent of not even thinking about them. He sees that he 'had failed to complete the gesture of approach' to his mother, Branka and Ella Cohen, a woman who offered him an equal relationship.⁶³

Lamian's quest to find Helena Lifka increasingly becomes the gesture of approach that he has hitherto denied, as his fear of being denounced by her makes way for a desire for her forgiveness. His insights into his culpability offer some evidence of remorse. Yet the ambivalence of his position as kapo, a victim doing what he can to survive, also informs his quest for forgiveness. The novel traces a process of vacillation in Lamian between analysing and acknowledging his guilt and then seeing himself compelled to behave as he did. This vacillation plays out in the persistent comparisons he makes of himself and Helena and the attempt to lessen his responsibility for abusing her by thinking of her as an equal: both were victims and both did what they needed to survive. They both felt 'opposing hungers, the wish to obtain food in exchange for submission and the wish to obtain submission in exchange for food'.⁶⁴ With this lexical sleight of hand, Lamian negates the difference between existential necessity and the desire for libidinal self-affirmation. There are moments when Lamian glimpses the difference and even admits that he could have fed the women without demanding anything in exchange. Yet following these moments he quickly reverts to the logic of survival in which the law of the camp was threat, and he had to participate in it to secure his position. To find a way out of his tormenting moral equivocation, Helena must remain a projection of Lamian's fears and desires, a means to his salvation. She is no more than his object in his 'game of restitution', the person who can give him a final word, be it of 'damnation or forgiveness' to achieve 'an inner completeness'.⁶⁵ He does not give Helena any thought as an individual and is astounded to hear from her cousin that Helena always emphasized the bright side of things. He has simply never considered what her thoughts and emotions might be. Lamian's missed encounter with her – she dies a few months before he tracks her down – is thus a physical manifestation of his impossible, because solipsistic, approach.

In transposed form, the novels themselves perform the failed approach to the women that they depict. Tišma's libidinal investment in his protagonists interrupts the aesthetic transformation of experience that he strives for. The fascination with male desire and its coupling with control directly echoes the young Tišma's war-time diaries. There he writes in 1943 of his irritation with his lover's passion in bed: 'I need an object for my desire and don't want to be someone else's object'.⁶⁶ Like Sredoje, he blackmails prostitutes to do what he wants by pretending to be a detective and 'feasts on their fear'.⁶⁷ It follows that a prostitute is 'the ideal woman' precisely because 'she really is just an object through which I can realize my passion'.⁶⁸ Tišma's concern in 1943 that his treatment of women means that he might be a 'sadist', mentally ill or 'merely a backward Oriental' is still evident in 1950 when he sees himself faced with the choice of giving up women or sticking with the women he considers weak and inferior and 'that *I* can torment'.⁶⁹ Just like his protagonists Blam and Lamian, Tišma links the need to torment weaker women to his Jewishness. There are frequent references in the diary to his 'race shame' and his attempts to hide and repress his Jewish origins on his mother's side. This he sees as contributing to his alienation from people, along with his dislike of convention.⁷⁰

An emotional identification with his younger self enters Tišma's novels in a way that invests his male protagonists' desire with compelling energy. Thinking in his diaries about the relationship of author to his work, and of life to art, Tišma recognizes that 'the general grows out of the personal' and that an author must use '*everything*' that nourishes creativity, even his own fear of death.⁷¹ He is caught between wanting to 'participate actively in life or be an observer', a split that also assumes aesthetic implications for him with the implied gulf between personal experience and universal meaning.⁷² The shift from the personal to the general that is his task as a writer brings formal challenges, one of which is the need to guard against two traps: 'telling anecdotal, attractive events and clichéd description'.⁷³ Another is the choice between writing in the first or the third person: 'The I-form would be easier for me and make the story more intimate and warm; conversely the more objective version would be the greater achievement'.⁷⁴ Tišma's writing is powerful and nuanced when he evades the traps of anecdote and cliché, and succeeds in relating the personal and the general, not least through narratives that combine free indirect speech and internal focalization with broader social and historical overviews and comparisons. Individuals' quotidian lives are the starting point for portraying complex intersecting social dynamics of ethnicity, class and sex. He explores the corrosive personal effects of anti-Semitism within the context of competing

power structures. He challenges simple moral categories by delving into the perspectives of men who are trapped in oppressive and life-threatening power structures and he seeks to understand how their different responses are informed by their singular desires.

However, it is Tišma's singular desires that, while nourishing his creativity, also intrude to render aspects of his work clichéd. And, in an ironic reversal of the move from the personal to the general, he seeks to validate the general by imposing it on individual women. In both cases the poverty of his aesthetic transformation stems from his inability to give women a voice. The exchange of linguistic ardors of free indirect discourse frequently becomes more than linguistic, with the narrative displaying the same fascination with dominating or violent male desire, as the men who abuse women in the pursuit of its satisfaction. As a result the narrative is both restricted by, but also generalizes, the protagonist's individual perception. In its most extreme manifestation, in Vera's account of her deportation, brothel experience and ongoing sexual debasement on her return, the exceptional use of the first person disguises what is frequently little more than a projection of male fantasy about female masochism. Vera's narrative assumes the conventions of presenting her perspective, yet does not adopt any individual idiom that makes it psychologically persuasive as her voice. It remains the least compelling section of *The Use of Man*. Furthermore, it is markedly at odds with her inability to write about her experiences in the camp because 'so much of her suffering [...] was general, and the personal could not be recounted'.⁷⁵ Ironically, the narrative anomaly of this first-person section confirms precisely that and her account of her experiences depends on 'very well-known tropes of eroticized narratives'.⁷⁶ Tišma falls into the trap of cliché that he hoped to avoid. And, duplicating the projection of redemption onto women of the male protagonists, the names of the fictional women suggest a projected redemptive function: Lili Ehrlich and Vera Kramer both suggest truth or honesty; Helena evokes a torch or shining light; and Branka means defending glory. The names resonate with Tišma's yearning for the 'fairy tale princess' who will 'save' him.⁷⁷

Complicit writing and failed redemption

Lamian is not saved by Helena Lifka, but in his surprise and acknowledgement of women's autonomous outlook, the novel perhaps gestures towards its own omission. More generally in Tišma's work, it is only through a consciousness

of an absence, of a failed encounter, that its opposite is conceived of, namely the fulfilment of a reciprocal approach. Knowledge of its impossible realization is the closest the novels get to what Karl Jaspers sees as tragedy's burst of transcendence that brings a seed of hope.⁷⁸ Thus, *The Book of Blam* ends with Blam's insight into how he has lived a life of apparent assimilation. He is enjoying a concert in the former synagogue but becomes increasingly aware of his distance from others and how this attitude typifies how he lives his life generally, a way of avoiding a confrontation with violence and death. Now less at ease, he recognizes that music is part of social avoidance, a 'game' played by the social collective to be transported into a realm where impulses and injuries are felt but rendered unthreatening. This social function of music is emphasized by his conversation with Funkenstein in the interval, the sole survivor of a family of seventeen who survived Bergen-Belsen by playing the violin for prisoners on their way to being murdered. Blam's redemptive moment comes not from the music, but from the realization that listening to music in the former synagogue is one of the many lies and half-lies that constitute his 'pretence of life'.⁷⁹ It is the synagogue from which the Jews of Novi Sad were transported with only dogs to mourn them and from which their blood has been 'wiped clean'. He leaves the concert, unable now to re-enter the 'game' of music or the 'game' of life he has hitherto played. He resolves no longer to 'dodge death' when he is summoned, as he feels he did to avoid the Novi Sad raid, thereby affirming himself as belonging to 'his people'. He is 'thus committing [...] an act of the most profound truth'.⁸⁰

The redemptive spark that glimmers in the final words of *The Book of Blam* posits a moment of individual internal transformation and a recognition of belonging in the face of death. It is, though, a harsh insight, for the death that Blam invokes is a violent one and the community of 'his people' are those that died before him, not a forward-looking projection of future belonging. It thus presages Lamian's arrival at Helena Lifka's door as too late. Furthermore, it functions as a redemptive moment because the novel ends before the spark has burned out, excluding the possibility that his insight is lasting. Indeed, *The Use of Man* then revokes whatever hope Blam's insight has triggered. The tragic failed approach of Vera and Sredoje would also have been redemptive if the novel had ended with Vera placing her head on his shoulder. Instead, the redemptive promise dissolves as they fall into patterns of behaviour that prevent them taking responsibility for committing to the other's worth. Together, they burn Fräulein's diary, 'the last thing that bound them together'.⁸¹ The *Book of Blam*'s redemptive spark becomes in *The Use of Man* a conflagration of hope. Similarly, Lamian's insights vacillate with his need to defend himself.

Vera and Sredoje's act of burning the diary also echoes the critique of music as a redemptive alternative to 'life' at the end of *The Book of Blam*. The diary is Fräulein's attempt to stave off the solitude she feels in Novi Sad. When Sredoje and Vera finally read it, it offers no insights into a rich inner life but rather the mundane notes of a woman who is frustrated in her desires. And not only her diary but also her books and culture are no defence against violent or natural death. The impression Robert Kroner gives of 'serenity acquired by knowledge' is illusory, for, as Vera sees, Robert's faith that books 'contained clues to salvation, as if they could rescue one from being [...] killed' rests upon the 'self-absorbed delusions of the ineffectual father'.⁸² Events confirm Vera's fears. When policemen scatter books in a raid, they become nothing more than paper, exposing the promise of culture and civilization is illusory. Tišma thus thoroughly undermines any redemptive promise in writing and in culture more generally. Rather he points to their role in reinforcing certain points of view or courses of (in)action. His uncompromising and often brutal writing is an attempt not to fall into the trap of countering evil with the higher and transformative good of culture, of which his novels are inevitably a part, but to strip aesthetics of its role as an alternative.

In this respect, Tišma's writing refuses an aesthetic cover-up by rubbing people's faces in horrifying violence and its corrosive individual and social effects. He graphically explores the corrosive psycho-sexual impact of anti-Semitism on men to illuminate the deforming impact of power structures more generally, the exclusions they produce and the dynamics of pleasure they facilitate. However, his writing teeters on the edge of the trap called 'blood, lust and the demon'. Countering Kertész's contention that there is no place for personal proclivities in the execution of mass murder of totalitarian regimes, Tišma's exploration of the inter-relationship of individual desire and social dynamics in the process of mass murder exemplifies Kertész's concern with accurate portrayal. He writes honestly about the seduction of power and violence and how the exultation in wielding power through social, violent or sexual domination exists in ordinary men. Tišma demonstrates the thrill of power, violence and sex without making those who experience it seductive. His work might, to that extent, be understood as a radical version of Köves's criticism of Berg's theoretical engagement with perpetration, which lacks plot. But the accurate portrayal is fragile and does at times collapse. The energy of Tišma's libidinal investment, 'the evil within himself', loses its value for understanding the relationship of individual to society when it falls into cliché – unless, that is, the unsettling combination of cliché and the exultation of power/desire is understood as integral to that relationship. This would be the 'wanton [...] *obscene* energy' that Costello is distressed by.

Notes

- 1 Kertész, *Fiasco*, 45.
- 2 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 176–8; 168.
- 3 Ibid., 176–9.
- 4 Aleksandar Tišma, *Die Schule der Gottlosigkeit* (Munich: dtv, 2003), 68; 71.
- 5 Aleksandar Tišma, 'Ustaški satnik i kniževnost' [The Ustaša Captain and Literature] (1956), in *Pre Mita* [Before Myth] (Banja Luka: Glas, 1989), 7. Cited in Yvonne Zivkovic, *The Literary Politics of Mitteleuropa: Reconfiguring Spatial Memory in Austrian and Yugoslav Literature after 1945* (London: Camden House, 2021), 205.
- 6 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 182.
- 7 Zivkovic, *Literary Politics*, 202.
- 8 Jelena Dureinović, '(Trans)national Memories of the Common Past in the Post-Yugoslav Space', in *History and Belonging: Representations of the Past in Contemporary European Politics*, ed. Stefan Berger and Caner Tekin (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2018), 111–12.
- 9 Zivkovic, *Literary Politics*, 203–4.
- 10 Ibid., 165.
- 11 Aleksandar Tišma, *The Use of Man*, trans. Bernard Johnson (New York: New York Review Books, 2014), 85; 88–9.
- 12 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 250–1; Aleksandar Tišma, *Kapo*, trans. Richard Williams (New York: New York Review Books, 2021), 219; 179.
- 13 Tišma, *Kapo*, 188; 176; 106–7.
- 14 Aleksandar Tišma, *The Book of Blam*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: New York Review Books, 2016), 91; 95.
- 15 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 277; 190.
- 16 Tišma, *Kapo*, 199; 201.
- 17 Ibid., 160; 264.
- 18 Primo Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, trans. Raymond Rosenthal (London: Abacus, 1989), 33.
- 19 Ibid., 41.
- 20 Laura Jockusch and Gabriel N. Finder, 'Introduction', in *Jewish Honor Courts: Revenge, Retribution, and Reconciliation in Europe and Israel*, ed. Laura Jockusch and Gabriel N. Finder (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 2015), 13.
- 21 Idith Zertal, *Israel's Holocaust and the Politics of Nationhood*, trans. Chaya Galai (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 65.
- 22 Michael J. Bazyler and Frank M. Tuerkheimer, *Forgotten Trials of the Holocaust* (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 205.
- 23 Tom Segev, *The Seventh Million: The Israelis and the Holocaust*, trans. Haim Watzmann (New York: Hill and Wang, 1993), 262.

- 24 Orna Ben-Naftali and Yogev Tuval, 'Punishing International Crimes Committed by the Persecuted: The Kapo Trials in Israel (1950s–1960s)', *Journal of International Criminal Justice* 4 (2006): 128–78, 130; 138.
- 25 Bazyler and Tuerkheimer, *Forgotten Trials*, 207.
- 26 Ibid., 149.
- 27 Dan Porat, 'Changing Legal Perceptions of 'Nazi Collaborators' in Israel, 1950–1972', in Jockusch and Finder, *Jewish Honor Courts*, 320.
- 28 Jockusch and Finder, *Jewish Honor Courts*, 12.
- 29 Ben-Naftali and Tuval, 'Punishing International Crimes', 178.
- 30 Jockusch and Finder, *Jewish Honor Courts*, 3.
- 31 Tišma, *Kapo*, 262.
- 32 Ibid., 195–6.
- 33 Ibid., 216; 196.
- 34 Ibid., 40–1.
- 35 Ibid., 209; 211.
- 36 Ibid., 221; 193.
- 37 Tišma, *Blam*, 22; 113.
- 38 Tišma, *Kapo*, 37.
- 39 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 78.
- 40 Tišma, *Blam*, 145.
- 41 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 40–1.
- 42 Ibid., 47.
- 43 Ana Antić, 'Eroticization of the Holocaust: Sexuality, Evil and Fascism in Aleksandar Tišma's *The Use of Man*', *Pacific Coast Philology* 44, no. 1 (2009): 46–69, 51.
- 44 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 63; 170.
- 45 Ibid., 165; 167.
- 46 Ibid., 180; 168.
- 47 Ibid., 81; 160.
- 48 Kertész, *Galeerentagebuch*, 131.
- 49 Antić, 'Eroticization', 58.
- 50 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 192; 187.
- 51 Tišma, *Blam*, 224.
- 52 Tišma, *Kapo*, 128; 191; 161.
- 53 Pier Paolo Pasolini, quoted in Joan Copjec, *Imagine There's No Woman: Ethics and Sublimation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1994), 211.
- 54 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 72; 107–8.
- 55 Tišma, *Kapo*, 272; 262.
- 56 Ibid., 51; 212.
- 57 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 48.

- 58 Ibid., 269–70.
- 59 Milivoje Marković and Miroslav Egeric, cited in Antić, ‘Eroticization’, 67.
- 60 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 46.
- 61 Antić, ‘Eroticization’, 62.
- 62 Ibid., 62.
- 63 Tišma, *Kapo*, 219.
- 64 Ibid., 161.
- 65 Ibid., 148; 107.
- 66 Aleksandar Tišma, *Reise in mein vergessenes Ich*, trans. Barbara Antkowiak (Munich: Carl Hanser Verlag, 2003), 24. This volume includes Tišma’s diaries 1942–51 and ‘Die Meridian Mitteleuropas’ of 1961 (‘The Meridians of Central Europe’). Translations from the German are mine.
- 67 Ibid., 25.
- 68 Ibid., 56.
- 69 Ibid., 25; 243.
- 70 Ibid., 185. See also: 79; 147; 256.
- 71 Ibid., 127; 237.
- 72 Ibid., 135.
- 73 Ibid., 212.
- 74 Ibid., 241.
- 75 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 180.
- 76 Antić, ‘Eroticization’, 53.
- 77 Tišma, *Reise*, 167. See also: 152.
- 78 Karl Jaspers, *Von der Wahrheit* (Munich: Piper, 1958), 925–6.
- 79 Tišma, *Blam*, 224.
- 80 Ibid., 26.
- 81 Tišma, *Use of Man*, 141.
- 82 Ibid., 99; 119.

Part Two

Beneficiaries: (West) German liberal democracy

Obstinate silences: Hans Magnus Enzensberger

Hans Magnus Enzensberger's 'defence of wolves against the lambs' rests predominantly on a vicious attack on lambs. The wolves cannot be expected to pull out their own teeth, nor vultures to eat forget-me-nots, but the lambs are desperate for their own oppression. Enzensberger's juxtaposition of wolves and lambs in his poem of 1957 is not that of perpetrators and victims, but of those with power and those that position themselves as innocent. His criticism is directed at West Germany society, the continuity of former Nazis in the government, judiciary and business, and the willing subservience and self-deception of the Germans. He accuses them of being 'cowardly/shying away from the hardship of truth' and acquiescing in illusions: 'inviting rape/you throw yourselves on the putrid bed/of obedience, whimpering still/you lie'.¹ Enzensberger's anger against peoples' willing complicity in rapacious power structures and their desire to be lied to is rooted in his own experience of National Socialism and its demise. Born in 1929, he belongs to the 'Davongekommenen', the generation that was too young to carry responsibility for the Third Reich, but that still experienced it first hand. As someone who was always 'incapable of being a good comrade', Enzensberger was expelled from the Hitler Youth for his dislike of being ordered around.² In 1945 he escaped from his compulsory enlistment into the Volkssturm, the mass militia of men aged sixteen to sixty formed in September 1944 to defend Germany.³ In contrast to the experience of imposed conformity under the Nazis, the end of the war offered Enzensberger 'an anarchy that appealed', and he worked as a translator, a dealer on the black market and as a barman in the officers mess.⁴ He later described his experience of these historical events as formative, saying in interview in 1979: 'Once the historical process has got under your skin, you never again quite trust the orderly everyday life with its polished façades'.⁵

Just as Kertész's commissioner sees beyond the disguise of the timeless yellow façades of Weimar to the 'suicidal assiduity of self-delusion' beneath,

Enzensberger sought to pierce the façade of conformist or orthodox thinking.⁶ His social and media criticism was rooted in Marxist thought. In the late 1960s he showed solidarity with the extra-parliamentary movement and in 1968 very publicly relinquished a scholarship at Wesleyan University in protest against United States imperialism, departing for Cuba instead. However, his disillusion with Cuba's 'real socialism' was typical of his willingness to criticize left-wing dogmatism and moral smugness. He countered accusations of betrayal and ideological inconsistency with a rejection of idealism and the privileging of argument and doubt over feelings and convictions.⁷ Enzensberger's independent scepticism was articulated in poetry, essays, founding what became the leading intellectual journal, *Kursbuch*, and translating and publishing unknown authors from around the world. Yet his wilful independent-mindedness did not make him an outsider. Common to the obituaries following Enzensberger's death on 24 November 2022 is the emphasis on his cultural importance in West Germany and the German Republic, even his representative status. He was not only 'the intellectual pulse of a more interesting and impertinent Federal Republic; he was its most urbane representative'.⁸ *The New York Times* cites A. S. Byatt's description of him as 'the ironic German par excellence' and an 'ideal European – polyglot, polymath, sceptical and humane'.⁹ Helmut Böttiger describes how as a 'public authority', Enzensberger 'shaped discourse in Germany as almost nobody else did'. Böttiger also vividly describes Enzensberger's position in the literary establishment: 'he didn't get involved with the media, he was part of them from the start. And if you don't stand in front of the media like a rabbit in front of a snake, but are the snake yourself, you can safely mock them'.¹⁰

This tension between independent scepticism and representative figure is evidently what drew Enzensberger to write about General Kurt von Hammerstein-Equord (1878–1943), Commander-in-Chief of the Reichswehr from 1930 to 1934 and opponent of Hitler. Enzensberger's identification is clear from the German title of his book, *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn: Eine deutsche Geschichte* (2008), in which the notion of both *Eigensinn* and a German story, or history, are as significant as the figure who embodies them.¹¹ Enzensberger is partial to the concept of *Eigensinn*, and insists on an English translation with positive connotations. Dismissing 'selfishness', 'obstinacy' and 'intransigence' as unsuitable translations of what is literally 'self-sense', he opts, uniquely, for 'man of character', since this reflects the quality of 'having your own value system'.¹² If nothing else, Enzensberger's typically 'wilful' or 'idiosyncratic' (also options) translation reveals much about his approach to his historical subject matter, which combines conventional historical methodologies, essay and fiction. The book is

‘not a novel’, as he insists in the postscript’s title, but history that is based on sources, adheres to facts and is verifiable. Enzensberger draws on a range of sources, including the personal archive and private accounts by members of the Hammerstein family, interviews with family members, including the youngest siblings, Franz and Hildur, memoirs of contemporaries, archive evidence from Germany, Russia and the United States and the work of historians. The sources are listed in a bibliography and are explicitly presented as sources in the sixty-one biographical sections; they are not subsumed into a synthesizing narrative voice.

Enzensberger’s assertion that his book is not a novel, that he wanted to ‘manage without fiction’, underplays the influence of the subjective and fictional elements of the book.¹³ In seven ‘glosses’, Enzensberger offers short essays on a different theme, often summaries of the wider historical context, such as ‘the horrors of the Weimar Republic’ or ‘some points about the aristocracy’. The author’s personal voice and views are evident in these essayistic commentaries. He moves into the realm of fiction when, in the tradition of Lucian’s dialogues of the dead, he holds thirteen posthumous dialogues with eight key characters: Hammerstein; three of his children, Helga, Ludwig and Marie Luise; Schleicher; his friend, Ruth von Mayenburg; Werner Scholem and Leo Roth. Enzensberger does not, however, use these fictional conversations to give him more scope for imagining the past, but to ‘bridge the gulf that separates us from people who were being ground between two millstones.’¹⁴ The essays and dialogues are integrated with the historical sections and so play an important part in framing the reader’s interpretation of the period and in suggesting certain emotional responses. In interview, Enzensberger seeks to reinforce a separation between what is subjective and objective, stating that the glosses and dialogues do not conform with the demands of verifiability and are, therefore, ‘on my head.’¹⁵ The objectivity of the historical sections is apparently secure and evidence-based, and reinforced by his practice of judiciously pointing to conflicting accounts or gaps in the evidence. He also makes it evident when he is speculating and draws attention to disagreement amongst historians.

Or he appears to. As is clear from Pekić’s fictional analyses of how candour can be an effective disguise of partiality, I argue that Enzensberger reinforces popular West German exculpatory narratives about National Socialism under the guise of forthrightness and critical self-awareness. The writer’s self-conscious reflections on the limitation of historical sources mask his own silences and omissions, which give his ‘German story’ a very particular emphasis. Enzensberger can present his story of Hammerstein and his family as a German one because of its scope. It is largely chronological, spanning the

period of Hammerstein's marriage to Maria von Lüttwitz in 1907 to summaries of the post-1945 lives of their children, with the bulk of the text devoted to 1930 to 1945. As members of the aristocracy, with Hammerstein moving in the highest army and political circles, three of his daughters involved in the Communist Party and two of his sons active in the 1944 Stauffenberg plot, the family offers a personal starting point for exploring broader historical events: regime change, German relations with Russia, the failure of the resistance, the allure of communism and the Cold War.

Yet the story is also German, and West German, in ways that the author does not acknowledge. By focusing on Enzensberger's treatment of the military, the nobility and communist violence, and by analysing his approach to history in the glosses, I show the ways in which his own textual silences are typical of post-war West German discourses. Most obviously, he privileges a family story that highlights examples of resistance, which, by being designated as a 'German story', conjures a vivid impression of resistance to the Nazis as a common rather than exceptional response. The Jewish genocide and the degree to which it was known about is pushed to the margins whilst focusing on the fates of elite Germans. Conversely, greater emotional weight is placed on Stalinist than on National Socialist violence. The myth of the 'clean Wehrmacht' is sustained by omitting questions around the army's involvement in the planning and execution of genocidal policies. Complementing these historical silences, Enzensberger is also most discreet about his susceptibility to the charm of the nobility. Their allure for him is pervasive in the text, but is not subject to critical self-scrutiny. And, crucially, he is seduced by his own identification with obstinacy (the translation of *Eigensinn* I shall use). Again echoing the strategies of Pekić's unreliable narrators, Enzensberger invokes obstinacy to privilege and even to dignify silence and the withdrawal from politics. An utterly ahistorical term, his deployment of it becomes a sophisticated refusal to evaluate historical complicity and responsibility and a justification of his own strategic silences.

The military

Peter Fritzsche argues that Enzensberger makes little attempt to analyse military circles. He points to a crucial omission:

while Enzensberger dramatizes Hammerstein's alleged warning against Hitler's appointment, he ignores both Hammerstein's own 1935 account in which the general claimed that he urged Hindenburg not to appoint Papen *without* Hitler

and the political aim of ‘taming’ Hitler [...] which Hammerstein and Schleicher pursued to the point of wrecking the Social Democratic government in Prussia, one of Weimar Germany’s remaining democratic foundations, in the ‘Papen coup’ of 20 July 1932 [...] In other words, to get Hammerstein posthumously included in 1944’s July 20th, Enzensberger must discount his role in 1932’s.¹⁶

Selective omission pervades *The Silences of Hammerstein*, but is skilfully combined with selective criticism, which gives an aura of even-handedness and hence reliability. Enzensberger is, however, systematically kind to Hammerstein, and alongside him to the army. Through the personal focus on the Hammersteins and their immediate circle, the author confers emotional credibility onto the long-standing German narratives of the army as an apolitical force and to the association of army officers with resistance. The effect in both cases is to distance the army from National Socialism and its precursors as well as from active participation in atrocities and genocide. His forgiving approach is made easier by the exclusions he makes and by the forceful opinions he at times offers.

Certainly, Enzensberger is critical. He points to the Reichswehr’s role in the failure of the Weimar Republic and its lack of support for democracy, often under the guise of remaining ‘apolitical’. He is scathing about the army leaders’ inaction in the face of the illegal Röhm purge (30 June–2 July 1934), when on Hitler’s orders the SS murdered Röhm, the SA leadership and some conservative opponents of the National Socialists, including Schleicher and his wife. Most generals were ‘not unhappy’ about the massacre, because it removed the threat of the SA to the army’s monopoly of arms, but by accepting Schleicher’s murder without protest they ‘made themselves accomplices’ (200). Yet Enzensberger’s lenience is already apparent in these examples. That the military never ‘really’ backed the Republic is a misleading understatement. From the early days of the Weimar democracy, a policy to keep the army ‘free from parliamentary control’ was pursued by the chief of the army command, General Hans von Seeckt, with ‘the full support of his fellow-officers.’¹⁷ Far from being neutral, Seeckt’s machinations against elected government was continued by his successors, including Schleicher. ‘The disloyalty of the army, and the repeated intrigues of its leading officers against civilian governments’ were actively destabilizing.¹⁸ Similarly, the army leaders were not ‘not unhappy’ about the Röhm massacre. On the contrary, General von Blomberg, the Minister for Defence, congratulated Hitler for his ‘exemplary courage’, while in the same sentence reiterating the Wehrmacht’s position as being ‘aloof from internal political conflict’ and pledging the Wehrmacht’s ‘fidelity’.¹⁹

A different form of understatement is evident in the way Enzensberger treats Hammerstein's, and the army's, active contravention of the Versailles Treaty by its secret and illegal dealings with the Soviet Union. He personalizes the relationship, reducing it to Hammerstein's views and experiences. This promotes a positive impression of Hammerstein's trip to Russia, his good relations with Soviet generals, and their harmonious discussion about the development of chemical weapons. Hammerstein's policy of cooperation is treated as a perspicacious policy pursued by a man of integrity in the face of strong criticism in the nationalist press, a depiction that is reinforced by Enzensberger's section title referring to his trip to the Soviet Union as a 'pilgrimage'. Such personalization draws a veil over the wider effect of the army's secret policies on the stability of democratic governance. And altogether absent from Enzensberger's account is the damaging way in which the army 'was constantly eyeing the paramilitaries as a potential military reserve'.²⁰

The treatment of Hitler's speech to the leadership of the Reichswehr on 3 February 1933 again demonstrates how Enzensberger softens potential criticism of the army chiefs. In this speech, Hitler outlined his aims for 'dictatorship at home and the conquest of 'Lebensraum' in the East' (144). While Enzensberger studiously discusses disparities between the various accounts of the evening, he does not evaluate the military chiefs' response to the substance of the talk. Rather, his interest is in how the information got to Moscow and whether this major security breach could have occurred without Hammerstein's 'tacit toleration' (145). He thus focuses on Hammerstein's potential resistance to Hitler, distancing him from the generals' reported opinion that Hitler was 'very logical and good, convincing as far as internal policy problems concerned. Not very clear on foreign policy' (138–9). Enzensberger also seeks to cast doubt on the extent of the generals' support by citing General Beck, who later underplayed the importance of the speech by asserting that he immediately forgot it. However, in his detailed analysis of the speech, not included in Enzensberger's bibliography, Andreas Wirsching points to the consensus in near-contemporary sources about the overwhelming support for Hitler. It is only later, post-1945 sources that document the army leaders' distance to Hitler. Andreas Wirsching points to the overwhelming support for Hitler that is reported in sources from the time. In contrast, accounts that document army leaders' distance to Hitler originate later, after 1945. For even if their underestimation of his foreign policy was understandable, with its vague and theoretical aims, there was no such scope for misunderstanding his immediate domestic policy, which planned for 'a programme of terror and legalized civil war'. Their general support reveals

how dominant the categories of power, expansion and rearmament had become for the army leaders at the expense of the rule of law and morality.²¹

A generous representation of the Reichswehr bolsters a positive image of Hammerstein. Such generosity is also shown to the Wehrmacht, where it functions to revivify the stature of the Stauffenberg plotters and, by association, Hammerstein. Hammerstein did of course associate with officers who, like him, later opposed Hitler, and two of his sons, Kunrat and Ludwig, were involved in the plot. There is, therefore, every reason for Enzensberger's interest in it. Nevertheless, his positive advocacy for its participants involves giving a partial view of the army. This is clearest, and *Hammerstein* is at its weakest, when Enzensberger addresses the resistance group's relation to the Jewish genocide, and by extension the involvement of the Wehrmacht in mass murder. On the one hand, he acknowledges that their resistance was not motivated by the genocide (323), a fact that Kunrat Hammerstein also objected to: 'As long as Hitler keeps on winning victories for them, they don't care about the Jews' (324–5). Enzensberger also cites Carl-Hans Graf von Hardenberg, who in his memoirs of 1945 recalls that it was their duty 'not to let *German* youth go on dying senselessly' (303, my emphasis). On the other hand, Enzensberger is determined to lessen the officers' responsibility for the genocide. He does this in two ways: by reiterating the myth of ignorance and by excluding evidence about the Wehrmacht's active role in it.

Enzensberger reports that Hammerstein spoke to his family about organized mass murder in early 1942 and heard about Jews being gassed in December 1942. He then asserts that only after Hammerstein's death in April 1943 did such information '[harden] into certainty' (324). Enzensberger emphasizes the strict secrecy around the Wannsee Conference of January 1942, at which senior government officials discussed how to achieve effective administrative implementation of the 'final solution'. He states that the officers were dependent on others' eye-witness accounts from the occupied Eastern territories or on rumours, thereby implying not only that the officers' knowledge was patchy and unreliable, but also that they were not themselves active in those areas. But to suggest that officers were ignorant and to consider when reliable knowledge of the Holocaust 'hardened into certainty' is to respond to the wrong question. The question is not what and when officers knew of mass murders; Wehrmacht officers and soldiers were involved in and facilitated atrocities from 1939 and genocidal murder from the summer of 1941. Already in the first two years of the war, the Wehrmacht implemented 'brutal combat and occupation practices that violated international law', particularly in Poland, Greece and

Yugoslavia and also in France.²² But it was Operation Barbarossa in June 1941 and the preparations for it that 'committed the German Eastern Army to the most radical and criminal waging of war imaginable'.²³ In preparation for the invasion of the Soviet Union, the German High Command drew up a set of orders, later to be known as the 'Criminal Orders' because they 'demanded that the army itself commit murder'.²⁴ The Martial Jurisdiction Decree of 13 May 1941 placed Soviet citizens outside the German military justice system and also annulled the obligatory prosecution of members of the Wehrmacht for offences against Soviet civilians. Soldiers could now act with impunity so long as their actions were not deemed to threaten discipline. The Commissar Order of 6 June 1941 commanded the systematic murder of Soviet political officers who were part of the regular army. It was a crucial step in legitimizing the murder of Jews, since the ideological notion of a 'Judeo-Bolshevik' threat made all Jews intrinsically suspect as Bolsheviks or partisans.

In addition to the Criminal Orders was the Wehrmacht's agreement in early May 1941 to implement what has become known as the 'hunger plan', whereby Germans would take food from civilians in the USSR to feed the troops and the Reich. 'By agreeing to this plan, German military and civilian authorities quietly accepted that up to thirty million Soviet citizens would starve to death'.²⁵ Reference to the hunger plan and Criminal Orders are significant here because they lay bare how far the high command of the Wehrmacht and its officers were active proponents of and participants in systematic violence against civilians. They demonstrate 'how deeply the Wehrmacht had integrated itself in the Nazi state and how far its concepts of the enemy overlapped with the ideology of the regime'.²⁶ The invasion of the Soviet Union marked the point at which the mass murder of Jews became systematic, with Wehrmacht involvement. The participation of the Sixth Army in the massacre of over 30,000 Jews at Babi Yar was one example of the 'thousands of Babi Yars across the Soviet Union'.²⁷ Many regiments had orders to kill all Jews as they advanced, Wehrmacht security divisions hunted down Jews under the guise of anti-partisan operations ('where the partisan is, there is the Jew'), and individual Wehrmacht soldiers participated as shooters or as spectators, often taking photographs or writing home about what they had seen.²⁸ By the end of 1941 'German units and their auxiliaries had already shot, clubbed, starved, and burnt to death as many as eight hundred thousand Jewish people in the occupied Soviet territories'.²⁹ This was no secret, for knowledge and evidence was widely shared. Nicholas Stargardt describes how 'photographic evidence flooded back to Germany' in the summer and autumn of 1941 and how 'remarkably precise information was circulating as far

afield as Minden in the Ruhr'. The details of mass execution of Jews 'were precise – though not strictly accurate – and they were publicly discussed'.³⁰

For Enzensberger to give no consideration to the Wehrmacht's involvement in mass murder and the Holocaust, and for him to underplay so radically how far knowledge of mass murder had permeated the public sphere, let alone elite army circles, is a fundamental distortion of history. It is all the more surprising in the light of the 1995 exhibition 'War of Annihilation: Crimes of the Wehrmacht 1941 to 1944' (revised and re-opened in 2001 following criticisms of some details) and the public discussion and controversy it gave rise to in Germany. Yet it is an omission that Enzensberger also repeats at the level of individual players. In 'War', Enzensberger describes how Franz Halder, Chief of Staff of the Army High Command, attended Hammerstein's sixtieth birthday celebration in 1938 and that Halder belonged to a group who planned to stage a coup against Hitler should he start a war over the Sudetenland. The only other mention of Halder is his appearance in Enzensberger's list of prominent prisoners of the Gestapo, where he keeps company with, amongst others, members of the Stauffenberg family and Martin Niemöller. Enzensberger thus actively positions Halder alongside those who were opposed to Hitler, seamlessly adopting Halder's own post-war self-representation.³¹ He ignores Halder's keen support for the attack on Poland and his crucial role in its planning, including the decision to use SS and police units to help the army in the brutal suppression of the civilian population.³² Halder refused to take action when some German officers complained about the murder of the Polish intelligentsia.³³ Far from being opposed to Hitler, he withdrew from further support for a coup against him, was key to the planning of Operation Barbarossa and held 'definitive responsibility' in drafting the Commissar Order.³⁴ He 'clearly knew' what the Einsatzgruppen were doing and, with other generals, was 'cognizant of the fact that the military itself would be integrated into a process of murder that ignored all moral scruples and international laws'.³⁵

In relation to the circle of conspirators and friends around Hammerstein there is another noteworthy omission. Enzensberger refers to Carl-Hans Graf von Hardenberg and Heinrich Graf von Lehndorff as part of the group. Both men witnessed the massacre of seven thousand Jews at Borissow in October 1941, an experience that was crucial in cementing their resistance to Hitler.³⁶ That this particular example should have been omitted is surprising, since it suggests that some officers were horrified by the murder of Jews and willing to take action as a result. Yet, at the same time it offers concrete evidence that the officers in Hammerstein's circle were not dependent on rumour, but were

themselves witnesses. It is difficult to imagine that Hammerstein did not know what was happening in the East before his death in April 1943.

The nobility

The circle of conspirators and friends around Hammerstein often met at Schloß Neuhardenberg to hunt. In an interesting contrast to what is not said, Enzensberger lingers on the image of a day's hunting. He quotes Reinhild Hardenberg's description of a typical day, which always ended with a display of the shot game, followed by a celebratory dinner. Quite unlike the satirical hunting scene in Jean Renoir's film *The Rules of the Game* (1939), the images of dawn, hunting bugles, mulled wine and elegant dinners offer a nostalgic homage to the nobility that complements the benevolence shown to the army. The magnetism of the nobility for Enzensberger permeates the book and is most apparent in his gloss, 'Remarks on the Aristocracy'. The gloss functions as an apologia for a class and its mores as Enzensberger moves between advocacy and defence, even to the point of self-contradiction. He berates those who resent the nobility and belittles the 'collective memory' of serfdom and peasant wars as the stuff of the boulevard press. He dismisses preconceptions about the nobility that ignore their heterogeneity and many 'subtle' gradations. Yet having used the minute variation within the nobility as an argument against its detractors, Enzensberger then uses the nobles' array of common characteristics to praise them as a class. Their old-fashioned virtues include a strong sense of family and Enzensberger crassly opposes the 'anxious' (335) family planning of the middle classes with the positive abundance of children in noble families, the Hammersteins included. He praises the nobles' 'self-evident' hospitality and their disregard for national borders, and nostalgically evokes the long summers spent on each other's estates. His desire to commend the nobility extends to concluding that the difficulty some nobles find in breaking out of this caste points to a 'kind of stigma' surrounding it, bestowing on them an aura of victimhood.

Characteristically for Enzensberger, his criticism and evaluation of the nobility seems in many ways judicious. He points out that they were no different from other parts of society in terms of 'moral integrity' (336) or political intelligence. He is explicit about their deep-rooted anti-Semitism. Nevertheless, his use of language is telling. The nobles' 'self-evident' anti-Semitism was something they had in common with the whole of Western Europe and which, he suggests, remained within civil boundaries. Indeed, in the first of their fictional dialogues,

Enzensberger has Hammerstein say that anti-Semitism in the army was not fanaticism but more like a 'bad habit' (29). Unfortunately, the habit was not enough to immunize the nobles against the Nazis' 'eliminator hatred of Jews' (337). However, Enzensberger's apparently balanced evaluation of the nobility's anti-Semitism is inaccurate. Their anti-Semitism was not, as he implies, limited to a milder form that politely respected the boundaries of civility. In his study of the nobles and their relationship to the Nazis, Stephan Malinowski argues that the figure of the Jew became a cipher for everything the nobility hated, ranging from democracy and liberalism, through the 'rootlessness' of city life and intellectualism, to free trade and finance capital.³⁷ Anti-semitism was ubiquitous in all parts of the nobility, although the active promotion of the most radical forms of race-based anti-Semitism was largely done by the protestant lesser nobility. Malinowski concludes that it 'is difficult to overstate how important anti-Semitic codes were for facilitating the nobility's rapprochement with the National Socialist movement'.³⁸

In 'Remarks on the Aristocracy' Enzensberger returns to the theme of the nobles and resistance. Although he points out that 'not a few' of the Wehrmacht generals were involved in crimes against Russia and tried after the war, he is keen to point to the demographic over-representation of aristocrats involved in the 20 July plot. This overlooks the fact that they had greater access to Hitler by virtue of being officers. Furthermore, an interesting counter-statistic that gets no mention indicates that in January 1933 nobles were demographically over-represented in the NSDAP. Members of the nobility streamed into the National Socialist German Workers' Party (NSDAP), the SA and the SS in 1930, which explains why the conspirators were actually in a minority in opposing Hitler compared to the overwhelming majority of their peers, who opposed resistance.³⁹ Concepts that were central to the nobility, 'Blut, Boden und Führertum', were undoubtedly instrumentalized by the National Socialists, but instrumentalization went both ways. The mutual attempts to make use of the other were possible because the concepts formed part of a shared language and a shared antipathy to democracy and the Weimar Republic. Most nobles between 1918 and 1933 were aggressively opposed to the Republic and refused to adapt to the changing socio-economic and political realities: 'the contribution the nobility made to the disastrous political landscape of twentieth-century Germany was very considerable indeed'.⁴⁰ When Enzensberger refers to the oath of allegiance, with its 'aristocratic connotations', as one of the concepts that the National Socialists exploited, he does not mention how the oath was used by the officer corps after the war as a way of exculpating themselves.

Nor does he point out that the officers had sworn just such an oath of loyalty to the Weimar Republic, which committed them to upholding its constitution and institutions and to follow the international agreements to which it was party. As Megargee scathingly observes, German officers 'routinely, casually, and even enthusiastically violated' the oath: 'From that fact one can gather than an oath, in and of itself, held no particular power for them.'⁴¹ Yet in *Hammerstein*, the 'oath of allegiance' is lent positive lustre by being listed alongside 'Honour', 'Patriotism' and 'Loyalty' as conventionally virtuous characteristics.

Enzensberger's regard for the nobility is barely tempered by these fundamental criticisms. Even in a small way, his remarks distort the very reality he himself observes. He praises the custom in the nobility of mutual help offered in difficult times. This positive generalization is not modified by his later list of those who helped Kunrat von Hammerstein escape after the 1944 coup attempt. They came from a wide range of backgrounds including a nurse, a locksmith, a Baroness and a masseuse. He does not mention that one of Kunrat's (noble) von Lüttwitz grandmothers only let him stay for one night because her (noble) son would shoot his putschist nephew.⁴²

Communism

Enzensberger's extensive interest in German communists is driven by the fact that Hammerstein's daughters, Marie Luise and Helga, were communists and Maria Therese was interested in it for a time. Marie Luise, his eldest child, was a lifelong communist. She joined the Communist Party during her first term at university in 1928, had a close liaison with Werner Scholem at that time, and started to pass information to the Comintern through Nathan Steinberger and Leo Roth. They both worked for the M-Apparat from 1930, the intelligence body that was directly responsible to the Politbüro. Marie Luise was under suspicion from the Gestapo from 1933 and after interrogations and house searches in 1937 she left Berlin. In 1949, she moved to East Berlin and became a member of the SED. When after 1989 her Stasi file became available, it emerged that from 1950 to 1960 she worked for the KGB. Hammerstein's third child, Helga, fell in love with Leo Roth at the age of fifteen in 1928, joined the youth branch of the KPD in 1929, and the KPD proper in 1930. She was Roth's partner until he was recalled to Moscow in 1935, where he fell victim to the purges in 1937. She escaped this fate because Walter Ulbricht refused her application to join Roth in Moscow. Helga worked for the Comintern until 1937.⁴³ Marie

Therese, Hammerstein's second child, was initially interested in historical materialism but did not commit to any party. Maria Therese helped victims of Nazi persecution escape Germany by driving them to Prague on her motorbike.

It is through Marie Luise's and Helga's membership of the KPD and their work for its intelligence arm that the wider history of the Communist Party in Germany becomes part of the Hammerstein story, a context that is further intensified by Helga's partnership with Leo Roth and Marie Luise's interaction with Werner Scholem. Enzensberger's inclusion and presentation of this wider context serves to emphasize the possibility of active resistance. The opposition of the KPD and the Hammerstein daughters act as a foil both to the widespread popular support for the Nazis, or general compliance, and to Hammerstein's '[retreat] to the position of an aristocrat' (232). Enzensberger's depiction of the KPD and his references to the brutal suppression of the communists in 1933 also reinforce the risks taken by opponents of National Socialism. Thus he quotes Franz Feuchtwanger to describe the collapse of the KPD in 1933 'under the blows of the uncurbed National Socialist terror' (152), which led to the Party's fragmentation and isolation of its leadership. He also cites Arthur Koestler's novel *Darkness at Noon* to convey how KPD members were hunted down and beaten to death. Yet how Enzensberger cites Koestler, and what he misses out, reveals in microcosm his wider approach to communist violence. He quotes an extract that describes the desperate attempts of the hunted communists to survive on the run, meeting clandestinely and only exchanging first names. The extract culminates in the sentence: 'Each gave his life into the other's hand, and neither trusted the other an inch' (133). Enzensberger omits Koestler's description of the KPD as 'a thousand-armed and thousand-headed mass of bleeding flesh'.⁴⁴ This small cut shifts the emphasis of the passage. By excluding an image that vividly conveys the extent of Nazi violence, Enzensberger stresses not Nazi brutality but the suspicion between KPD members. This minor omission is doubly hidden because Enzensberger fails to use ellipses to indicate that text is missing. It is indicative of a wider trend in the text: *Hammerstein* lays particular emotional weight on the Stalinist regime's heinous violence towards its members rather than National Socialist violence.

Enzensberger depicts the catastrophic violence unleashed against KPD members at the hands of Stalin, pointing out that in 'March 1938, 70 per cent of the German Communists in the Soviet Union were arrested. Hundreds were sentenced to death, thousands to imprisonment in the Gulag' (261). Roth serves as the link between the Hammersteins and the wider network of betrayal and execution. Roth's superior, Hans Kippenberger is a horrifying case study

of Stalinist violence. He was subjected to sixteen months of interrogation and torture, during which time he incriminated others, before he was executed in October 1937, five weeks before Roth. The woman who denounced him, Grete Wild, died in the camps; Werner Hirsch, incriminated by Kippenberger and who denounced him in return, died of the effects of years of imprisonment in Moscow in 1941; Anna Kerff, Kippenberger's partner, was sentenced to eight years' labour camp and released in 1946. Seven pages and a photograph taken in prison are devoted to Kippenberger's interrogation. Enzensberger offers no National Socialist equivalent to this account of degradation, interrogation and torture by Stalin's regime. The fact that Werner Hirsch survived extensive torture under the Nazis in 1933 is referred to only in a sub-clause (264).

Helga's and Marie Luise's respective relationships with Roth and Scholem are used as a bridge to elaborate in detail on the fate of the KPD and to convey an impression of the internal violence of communist parties. In contrast, Marie Luise's marriage to Mogens von Harbou (1933–36) is only referred to in passing and not used as an equivalent bridge to investigate Nazi violence. Enzensberger first establishes the positive credentials of Mogens's father, Bodo von Harbou, by introducing him as an old friend of Hammerstein's and one of the three Majors (with Hammerstein and Schleicher) who in 1918 acted to prevent civil war during the transition to democracy. This sets the scene for Mogens von Harbou, whose membership of the NSDAP, which he joined in May 1933, is not mentioned. Nor is there any reference to his later involvement in the civil administration of the *Generalgouvernement* of the occupied Polish region, where he was acting Director of Police in Lublin for eight weeks in 1941 and Kreishauptmann in Sambor and Tarnopol from 1941 to 1944. Here he was involved in implementing genocidal policies and in 1943 he was indeed praised in a report by the SD, the intelligence branch of the SS, for his professionalism and for being 'above-average calibre' in 'leading the non-German population'.⁴⁵ Marie Luise and Mogens had long been divorced at this point, but Enzensberger's lack of curiosity in him as a figure for thinking about the relationship between the NSDAP and the nobility, is strikingly at odds with the interest he shows in Stalinist violence.

Similarly, Enzensberger gives a one-sided impression of Franz Josef Schöningh, whose wife, Irmgard Wegener, was key in the politicization of the Hammerstein sisters and good friends with Marie Luise. Enzensberger presents Schöningh as a founder of the *Süddeutsche Zeitung* in 1945, a centre-left, liberal national newspaper. This positive link is mentioned, but Schöningh's role alongside Mogens in the *Generalgouvernement* is not, nor is the fact that he too was praised in the SD report. It is true that Enzensberger did not have the

benefit of the 2013 biography of Schöningh written by Mogen's son, Knud von Harbou, when writing *Hammerstein*. This biography substantiates both men's involvement in the Holocaust. It includes a letter from Schöningh to his wife on 24 February 1942 in which he refers to his happiness that Mogens entrusted him with the forced relocation of Jews in Sambor. He claims that 'the goal is achieved without cruelty, though with harshness'.⁴⁶ However, it seems equally to be the case that Enzensberger did not avail himself of existing historical expertise on the civil administration of the genocide, as he did for understanding German communism.⁴⁷ Furthermore, like Knud von Harbou, he did have access to Schöningh's articles in the *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, in which Schöningh consistently advocated the collective innocence of the Germans and overlooked the Jewish genocide and the war of annihilation. Schöningh clearly cast Germans as the victims of the Nazis in his article of 2 September 1948: 'Thus a people was led to the slaughter that, like every other people, would have wished only for peace if they had not been endlessly lied to.'⁴⁸

Throughout *Hammerstein* a strong sense of anger and betrayal is directed at communist parties and their apparatus. In the section 'From the thicket of deviations', Enzensberger describes how communist parties have always 'displayed virtuoso skills in discovering and punishing real or fictitious failings of their members' (257). He lists fifty-three possible deviations that ensured no one could be free of ideological suspicion and therefore open to party persecution, including 'Adventurism', 'Lack of principles' and being 'Two-faced' (257). Nevertheless, Enzensberger does what he can to shield Helga and Marie Luise from being thought of as complicit with an oppressive party or state ideology. With Helga, he focuses on unambiguous acts of resistance, such as her role in spying in the Hammerstein household or helping victims escape. He combines this with the suggestion that she was exploited, especially in view of her young age. In his two brief fictional dialogues with her, he points out that Moscow interrogation records show that Roth was assigned to her: 'You were instrumentalized' (227). Enzensberger's job is harder with Marie Luise, because of her unofficial work for the KGB, which, he tells us, is disputed by her two daughters. So he points to the 'noteworthy radicalism' with which she devoted herself to the GDR, working as a criminal lawyer and defending 'absconders from the Republic' (404). She was also the only delegate to vote against the resolution to expel Robert Havemann's defence lawyer, Götz Berger, from the *Anwaltskollegium* (Council of Lawyers) in 1976.⁴⁹ Marie Luise's personal actions and resolution thus serve as redeeming counterpoints to the oppressive regime to which she was committed. This is precisely the distinction that helps

Enzensberger cast a positive light on individuals even while they are working for an institution that is murderous, and it helps maintain a sympathetic image of the Hammerstein daughters. It is in keeping with this wider tendency to prioritize individual agency that Enzensberger's last words to Marie Luise, in his dialogue with her, compare her to her father. Like him, she did what she could, even if they failed. Enzensberger ensures that they act as a positive mirror for each other.

Glossy history

The prominence Enzensberger gives to communism means that it sits alongside National Socialism in his 'German story', exemplified in his description of Feuchtwanger's flight to Mexico as his rejection of 'Hitler, Stalin and their acolytes' (154, adapted). This is not done to offer a real comparison, to consider the differences and similarities between forms of state-condoned collective violence. It feeds rather into a nebulous sense of equivalence that ignores specificity and readily feeds apologist discourses that depend on undermining the singularity of the Holocaust.⁵⁰ The imprecision is in keeping with Enzensberger's charismatic self-presentation as an intellectual who maintains a sovereign overview of a complex past that he is seeking to assess fairly. This approach is most obvious in the seven glosses. Enzensberger admits that they are his personal views, and so not part of his source-based research, but this is disingenuous. The glosses contribute significantly to how the whole book is read and expose the assumptions that underlie his processes of selection of sources, his silences and his evaluation of events and people.

The glosses are, as the name suggests, short commentaries or explanations of a topic. In German, a 'Glosse' may contain a polemical element. In English, a gloss may also be a smooth shiny appearance on the surface. All meanings pertain here. The scholarly tradition of the gloss is performed by Enzensberger in various ways: in his informed approach to each topic, the confidence with which the commentary is presented, the range of knowledge that he draws on to give the impression of even-handedness and in occasional references to historians or recent publications. These aspects help mask the glosses' subjective basis and moments of polemic and help put a seductive sheen on the commentary: a glossy gloss. The 'Remarks on the Aristocracy' is typical. Enzensberger approaches the topic with a tone of authority and offers enough criticism of the nobles to suggest that he has considered all aspects. He refers

to 'recent publications', though he does not specify what they are, while concurrently resorting to numerous generalizations. He writes of 'the Americans', 'the media', of a single 'collective memory' and of the 'middle classes', while also creating a distance between actions and the people who carried them out: 'mutual help' is 'customary'; 'mésalliances are accepted'; 'one rides' (335). These generalizations are then combined with specific examples of noble families or individuals notorious for their active Nazi involvement: the houses of Hessen and Schaumburg-Lippe and Field Marshall Erich von Manstein, who was tried for war crimes. This singling out of specific culprits contributes to the overall forgiving tone of the gloss by implying that most nobles were not 'bad enough' to be named. Enzensberger concludes by returning to the aristocratic resisters and to Hammerstein himself, leaving us with the dominating emotional impression of aristocratic virtue.

An attractive veneer on a plausibly reasoned position is also apparent in the first gloss 'On the Horrors of the Weimar Republic'. Enzensberger starts by describing the Weimar Republic as a miscarriage from the outset.⁵¹ He pre-empts the obvious criticism of this stance by simply denying that his is the retrospective view of a know-it-all, and then proceeds to list the many determining factors that guaranteed the Republic's failure. These causes are all well-established: the elites remained hostile and developed the 'stab in the back' legend; the judiciary and police remained entrenched in their Wilhelmine methods; the left was anti-democratic; and the terms of the Versailles Treaty led to economic devastation and deep resentment. In short, the country was in a state of civil war and the politicians of the centre appeared helpless. Feeling powerless and isolated, people sought community in the *Volksgemeinschaft* or in Soviet communism. Enzensberger is right that each of these factors played a part in undermining the Republic. However, his fluently written summary decontextualizes the causes, distances them from specific historical actors and simplifies to the point of inaccuracy. His narrative floats above chronology and ignores the relationship between changing context, structure and action. Yet it is precisely consideration of such interplay that would inform any analytic appraisal of the Republic's collapse and allow an evaluation of whether different outcomes to specific situations might have been possible. To offer just two examples: the weaknesses of the early years of the Weimar Republic were partially alleviated by 1924, leading to the question whether its collapse was much more a result of the 1929 depression; and Chancellor Brüning's deflationary policies after 1929 considerably worsened unemployment and the plight of millions of Germans, suggesting the possibility that the economic turmoil and social unrest

exploited by the National Socialists was avoidable.⁵² The transparent evaluation of different causal factors, whatever the conclusion reached, is the opposite of the rhetorical assertion that 'one glance at Joseph Roth's early novels and reports should be enough to convince anyone who has doubts' (30) about the Weimar Republic being doomed from the start.

Enzensberger's slick insistence on the Weimar Republic's inevitable failure in his first gloss establishes a non-negotiable framework for understanding what follows: that nothing could have been done to prevent the rise of Hitler. Events happen, but the responsibility for them remains nebulous. It is true that in his second gloss, 'A tangle of manoeuvres and intrigues', he initially seems to qualify his 'doomed from the start' outlook. He mentions the collective failure of leading politicians like Brüning, Schleicher and Papen, rule by emergency decree, Hindenburg's incapacity and the sheer size of the SA. However, these historically valid points are marshalled to reinforce the 'tangle' of the title. Historians have minutely analysed the collapse of the Weimar Republic, Enzensberger tells us, but the more the non-expert delves into the sources, the less comprehensible this collapse becomes as he is faced with an 'impenetrable jungle' (50). So rather than drawing on the work of historians, it is the 'dispiriting' impression of the non-expert that is given primacy. A clever sleight of hand has occurred here. Enzensberger invokes the detailed work of historians, thereby lending credibility to his knowledge base. But he then aligns himself emotionally with the purported impact made on a non-expert, that the collapse of the Weimar Republic is a knot that cannot be undone. The gloss then concludes by invoking Hitler, whom Enzensberger presents as the 'only actor who from the beginning had pursued a clear goal' (51). Both structurally and in how he is described, Hitler is figured here as the only solution to the knot. Repeating the vocabulary of 'On the Horrors of the Weimar Republic', Germans become 'the masses', who either veer from left to right or whose desperation allows them to be mobilized by Hitler's ruthlessness. Again, we are left with a powerful sense of inevitability but with no understanding of social processes and agency.

The vocabulary of irresistible forces and generalized statements is also evident in 'On discord', this time to elicit greater understanding for the state of mind of the 20 July 1944 conspirators. The main aim of the gloss seems to be to pre-empt criticism of and garner sympathy for the internal conflict and failures of judgement that those involved showed, since many of them initially supported the National Socialists. Indeed, as Enzensberger is right to point out, even Hammerstein's stance was 'not free of ambivalences and misjudgements' (126) despite his opposition to Hitler, and he and Schleicher both made the mistake

of thinking they could 'tame' Hitler. In seeking to elicit empathy for these men's dilemmas and for the horrifying punishments they suffered, Enzensberger forecloses on further questioning and critical evaluation. The gloss starts by casting doubt on the morality of those who pass judgement, since 'the speaker is invariably too lenient on himself' (134). Enzensberger amplifies this moral failing into the '*moral insanity*' (126) of anyone who, with the benefit of hindsight and knowing that the conspirators were executed, holds their mistakes against them. Enzensberger has a point: people make political mistakes and most people do not risk their lives in political opposition. However, his emotive and forceful assertion constructs anyone who does not agree with his view as lacking moral insight and as holding an invalid position. In order to justify the prevailing sympathetic tone of the gloss he refers to general wisdom: 'many said later' that one is not born an opponent of the Nazis, one becomes one. This statement naturalizes support for the Nazis, ignores the changing historical context in which support or opposition of the Nazis varied and disregards those who opposed Nazis consistently from the outset. Enzensberger also cites Gottfried Benn, who wrote in 1934, 'How grandly it all began and how squalid it looks today', as though the fact that Benn welcomed the 'purity of a new people [Volk]' in 1933 was not based on visible systematic violence against Jews and political opponents. Enzensberger also does not explore why if the squalor of the Nazis was evident in 1934, it took until 1944 for the officers to act. He settles for the vague image of magnetism, with most officers initially 'unable to withstand the pull of the "National Revolution"' (109). Here again he substitutes questions of responsibility for irresistible natural forces and ignores the fact that the 'pull' persisted until the war started to turn against Germany.

History is again reduced to an easily visualized metaphor in 'The Russian seesaw', which offers an overview of the history of the German-Russian relationship since 1793. This is characterized by fluctuations in state alliances or hostilities and in German cultural attitudes. Russia was variously viewed as the vast threat in the East or as a country offering salvation, be that in the form of communist utopia or as a kindred soul in the defence against Western 'civilization'. The seesaw image reduces two centuries of interaction to zero-sum movements that are pre-determined to move rigidly up and down. The seesaw seems to have a life of its own, moving 'ever more senselessly' (282) with the Hitler-Stalin Pact in 1939 and needing to be 'screwed down by international law' (283) after 1945. Enzensberger writes of the perpetual 'dizziness' (277) and 'giddiness' (283) generated by the seesaw from which Germans finally 'freed themselves', an image that casts them as prisoners of the

relationship and rendered helpless by it for a period of over two hundred years. 'The Russian seesaw' is typical of how Enzensberger encourages an emotional yet 'common sense' approach to German history. His generalizing summaries, sovereign assertions, the absence of historical detail and the suggestive use of strong images or phrases (knot, seesaw, horrors) discourage further questions or analysis. Between them, the glosses consolidate a feeling that Germans were helpless in the face of history, that National Socialism was unstoppable in the face of a doomed democracy and that aristocratic resistance was central. Drawing on similar methods, it is the glosses 'On the scandal of synchronicity' and 'The silence of the Hammersteins', that return us to Enzensberger's ideological and emotional investment in obstinacy as German.

Obstinacy and silence

In 'On the scandal of synchronicity', Enzensberger is fascinated by the coexistence of terror and normality and how examples of mundane activities point to the limitations of state control. Pockets of normality that persisted beyond the state's surveillance included people's pastimes (beekeeping, stamp collecting, football) and even activities that continued within the extremes of concentration camps, like bartering, whispering or arguing (though with these examples of 'normal' it would be hard to conceive of any situation that is not so). As a result, he concludes, the *Volksgemeinschaft* remained a fiction. However, Enzensberger's juxtaposition of 'normal' and 'terror' reinforces the polarity of 'normal German' and 'terrorizing Nazis' and ignores a more complicated intersection. As Michael Wildt argues, the experience of participation and wellbeing can coexist very well with repression and domination. Thus, for example, members of the *Volksgemeinschaft* could get forced labourers and have the feeling of power and superiority while being part of the terror system which they would be victim of if they did not conform.⁵³ By opposing normal activity with state terror, Enzensberger obscures this more radical point: that the coexistence of wellbeing and repression was normality. Or, to draw on Enzensberger's examples, it is not stamp collecting that is normal, but the fact that stamp collecting (and football and bee keeping) can be happily enjoyed as an integral part of a popular repressive regime.

This more radical understanding of normality is advanced by the social historian Alf Lüdtke. Resonating with Enzensberger's point about normality, and placing the notion of obstinacy at the centre of his analysis, Lüdtke argues

that under National Socialism individuals forged niches in which 'they took [...] refuge in moments and spaces that allowed evasion of the gazing eyes and listening ears of the authorities.'⁵⁴ Similar to Wildt's points on the *Volksgemeinschaft*, he rejects the simplistic opposition of acceptance or rejection, of cooperation or opposition, as one-dimensional.⁵⁵ Rather, he points to continuities in the everyday life of workers before and after 1933, and how these reflect individuals' 'multilayered' objectives.⁵⁶ To understand the everyday behaviour of workers, Lüdtke draws on the notion of obstinacy. Obstinate or self-willed behaviour was an integral part of the ongoing negotiation between the individual worker and the bosses, manifesting itself in isolated moments of self-affirmation such as pranks or violent horseplay. It has been characteristic of workers across different regimes, and is a manifestation of an individual's dominant concern: that of 'securing [...] one's own sphere in everyday practice.'⁵⁷ Obstinate behaviour is a means for individuals to secure distance, mainly vertical (to the bosses) but also horizontal (to their peers), thereby demonstrating to themselves that they are not products of their workplace. Obstinacy does not, therefore, give rise to patterns of behaviour that can be understood as resistance. Rather, Lüdtke emphasizes how under National Socialism individuals participated in many forms of behaviour, meandering in and out of assent, acceptance, wanting to be part of things, lying low or distancing themselves. Crucially, he insists that 'it was on this blend that German fascism's system of domination and exploitation relied, right down to its final moment.'⁵⁸

It is this final point that Malinowski considers the 'analytic highlight' of Lüdtke's work on obstinacy and which Malinowski brings to bear on his conclusion about the obstinacy of the nobles' habitus. It was precisely because the nobles maintained protected spaces in which they could continue to live by their own codes that they did not challenge the National Socialist regime. 'In this sense the aristocratic *Eigen-Sinn* [...] led, nolens volens to the stabilization of the regime.'⁵⁹ This is what Enzensberger fails to explore. Indeed, at the point where he does discuss the very niches that Lüdtke describes, what Enzensberger calls the 'normality' that coexists so shockingly with terror, he refuses to take the analytic step of recognizing 'normality's' contribution to the system. Instead, he remains indebted to Alexander Kluge's and Oskar Negt's valorization of obstinacy in their *Geschichte und Eigensinn (History and Obstinacy)* of 1981. They radically reframe the didactic moralizing of the Grimm's tale 'The obstinate child'; whom God allows to become ill and die because the child did not do as its mother wished. Even after death, the child remains stubborn, pushing its arm out from the grave. Only when the mother has beaten its arm does the child find

peace in the ground. For Kluge and Negt, the ethical potential of obstinacy is reconceived. It is a 'fundamental current observable throughout human history' and always accompanies History, which is the product of 'the human ability to change matter purposefully'.⁶⁰ But obstinacy exists in opposition to history; it is 'resistance to primitive expropriation' and as such is intrinsic to the 'social evolution of intelligent beings'.⁶¹ Always marginalized, obstinacy remains nevertheless a 'fundamental current' that is ever-present in constantly mutating forms. It counters the directives that are issued from above, but far exceeds the limitations of organized opposition. It is, in one of Kluge's definitions, the 'guerrilla warfare [Partisanentum] of the mind'.⁶²

Kluge's and Negt's notion of obstinacy is so broad and all-encompassing as to become effectively ontological. It is part of the condition of socialization, or in psychoanalytic terms, the inalienable remainder of becoming a subject, and is reminiscent of arguments that lionize the unconscious as a site of resistance. As a necessary accompaniment to History, the notion of obstinacy here is both abstracted from any specific context and can be attached to any behaviour at any time. Its universality makes it devoid of specific moral or political tenets, yet it is nevertheless easily conceived of as being imbued with positive radical potential by virtue of being defined in opposition to 'History' in the first place. Enzensberger invests obstinacy with precisely this positive connotation of resistance, seeing its very presence in Hammerstein and his family as admirable. This is evident in his appraisal of their silence.

'The silence of the Hammersteins' is the final gloss and concludes the book, excepting the postscript. Enzensberger is quite insistent on the 'mutual agreement' to be silent even though he provides evidence to the contrary. His bibliography lists two memoirs and an article on Hitler's assumption of power by Kunrat, and three publications by Ludwig; one about his father for the family journal and two in his role as a contemporary witness. The bibliography also refers to an interview with Maria Therese and a jointly authored piece by her and her husband, John Paasche. Nevertheless, Enzensberger is invested in the family silence and makes a virtue of the family's reluctance to speak publicly of their experiences. He even goes as far as to present it as 'a silence of a special kind' (419), for it has been learned from living under a dictatorship and becomes second nature. He then makes an extraordinary claim: that such habitual silence is akin to that of many genocide survivors, who remained silent for decades. Quite apart from the fact that Holocaust survivors did not remain silent, but discovered quickly that people did not want to hear of their experiences, this is a tendentious comparison.⁶³ Enzensberger creates an association of the

Hammersteins with victimhood despite them having the choice to opt in and out of opposition. Hammerstein's status proffered a degree of protection for himself and his three eldest daughters. The family and all those around them were not systematically dehumanized and determined for murder, nor did they carry the memory of ghettoization, deportation and mass killing with them as survivors. To point this out is not to detract from the suffering that accompanies any one individual's experience of loss, persecution, fear, interrogation or emigration. Nor is it to belittle the consequences of involvement in the July plot, be that living in hiding for Ludwig and Kunrat, or being imprisoned and taken hostage in Buchenwald and Dachau for Maria, Franz and Hildur. The silences of genocide survivors and the silences of the Hammersteins remain, though, fundamentally different in nature and scope.

Silence also serves in this final gloss to consolidate a theme that runs through the text: the notion that those born later cannot know what it was like. The impossibility of knowing is no mere statement about the unreliability of memory, sources and witnesses, but is used as a defence against enquiry. Enzensberger approvingly reports Hildur Zorn's scepticism that 'People today can't understand it any more, because they think they know everything' (419). The author consistently reinforces this notion in his dialogues with the dead, with Hammerstein, Schleicher and Helga all telling him that he cannot understand or does not have a clue. When he asks Marie Louise about the state security file stating that she worked for the KGB, there are even echoes of Hamlet in her response, bestowing upon her a whiff of tragic grandeur: 'there are more possible reasons for such a note in the files than you could dream of. But how should you know? You live in normal times' (415).⁶⁴ In the postscript, Enzensberger justifies his dialogues with the dead precisely because those who 'got away' often believe they 'know better than those who lived in a permanent state of emergency and risked their necks' (439).

It is self-evident that hindsight may offer clarity or that it can be hard to comprehend the complexity of competing pressures in a historical situation. It is, however, also self-evident that recourse to 'you can't understand' is a defensive strategy and one that 'misrecognises the task of historical scholarship [...] to analyse historical events from a rational position.'⁶⁵ Enzensberger neither explores how the various silences relate to the self-representation of the Hammersteins nor how far they might be defensive. He also does not consider whether individuals have a responsibility to break silence under certain conditions. This is the problem for Fritzsche, for whom silence is at the root of the book's failure. He contends that the lack of any evidence of self-reflection

on the part of the Hammersteins means that they ‘cannot suggest an alternative civic sphere as Enzensberger argues’.⁶⁶ Taking Fritzsche’s point further, I would argue that the silence of the Hammersteins, presented as a collective virtue, is elevated to having an unassailable moral value, for Enzensberger proposes that it is this ‘unspoken remnant’ that is, perhaps, ‘what counts’ (421). But just as he does not specify what it should count for, so too he positively juxtaposes the Hammersteins to the undifferentiated mass of the ‘later generations’, who are unlikely to possess ‘sufficient imagination to do justice to what happened many decades ago’ (419).

Conclusion

Enzensberger stated in an interview with Jorge Semprún that Hammerstein ‘was neither an ideal nor a martyr’, but ‘someone who behaved in a ... very acceptable way’.⁶⁷ This may be. But in Enzensberger’s determination to make the case for an individual’s behaviour, he construes the wider context as ‘acceptable’ too. He is right to describe his book as ‘a German story’, but not for the reasons he suggests. The story of the Hammersteins is an extraordinary one, without doubt, and spans a remarkable, desperate and murderous period. He writes in his postscript that the family’s story encompasses ‘all the essential motifs and contradictions of the German emergency’ (436). He also claims that the family history is an exemplary one, thereby suggesting a certain typicality. But the story is not exemplary, it is exceptional. As he himself points out, most German families could not claim to have no Nazi supporters in it, did not work for Comintern, did not have a powerful father to protect them if they were taken in for questioning by the Gestapo and did not participate in plots against Hitler. The family story that Enzensberger tells neither includes anti-Semitic persecution nor the widespread support in Germany for National Socialism. The glosses reinforce the impression that aristocratic resistance was central, not least by ‘[framing] the achievements of exceptional individuals as evidence of the merits of the nobility as a whole’.⁶⁸ The book offers a selective and misleading representation of the army and it frequently shifts attention to the iniquities of Stalinist violence. It is precisely these aspects that make the book ‘a German story’, for Enzensberger draws on established exculpatory post-war German, and especially West German narratives, to offer a sophisticated apologia of German responsibility in relation to National Socialism. These are narratives that have long been overtaken by the historiography and were being actively challenged

by historians at the time that Enzensberger was writing. He asserts in interview that his source-based approach means that ‘the reader must be able to rely on my account.’⁶⁹ However, the truth claim he is making is undermined by his silences, which, like the silences of his protagonist, are in turn privileged as being an ineffable quality of a ‘man of character’.

Notes

- 1 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *Verteidigung der wölfe: Gedichte* (Frankfurt a. M.: Suhrkamp, 1963), 90–1.
- 2 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, quoted in Philip Oltermann, ‘A life in writing: Hans Magnus Enzensberger’, *The Guardian*, 15 May 2010. <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2010/may/15/hans-magnus-enzensberger-interview>. See also: Volker Hage, ‘Ich wurde rausgeschmissen’, *Der Spiegel*, 30 December 2007. <https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/ich-wurde-rausgeschmissen-a-d4ce1862-0002-0001-0000-000055231894> (both accessed 16 May 2023).
- 3 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘Lebenslauf’, *Studienstiftung des deutschen Volkes*, June 1951. https://www.studienstiftung.de/pool/sdv/public/images/Enzensberger_Lebenslauf.pdf (accessed 16 May 2023).
- 4 Oltermann, ‘A Life’.
- 5 Hanjo Kesting, *Dichter ohne Vaterland. Gespräche und Aufsätze zur Literatur* (Berlin: Dietz Nachf., 1982), 191.
- 6 Kertész, *Pathseeker*, 97.
- 7 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, ‘Eine Kontroverse’, *Kursbuch* 6 (1966): 165–76, 170.
- 8 Paul Ingendaay, ‘Geist in Siebenmeilenstiefeln’, *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, 26 November 2022, 13.
- 9 Melissa Eddy, ‘Hans Magnus Enzensberger, 93, leading light in German letters, dies’, *The New York Times*, 3 December 2022, A21.
- 10 Helmut Böttiger, ‘Er war eine öffentliche Instanz’, *Zeit-online*, 25 November 2022. <https://advance.lexis.com/api/document?collection=news&id=urn:contentItem:-66Y4-MYH1-F15W-B2M9-00000-00&context=1519360> (accessed 17 May 2023).
- 11 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, *The Silences of Hammerstein*, trans. Martin Chalmers (London: Seagull, 2009). References will be to the English translation and be given in parentheses in the main text; *Hammerstein oder der Eigensinn: Eine deutsche Geschichte* (Frankfurt a.M: Suhrkamp, 2008).
- 12 Oltermann, ‘A Life’.
- 13 Enzensberger, ‘Ich wurde rausgeschmissen’.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.

- 16 Peter Fritzsche, 'Review', *Central European History* 42, no. 2 (2009): 350–52, 352.
- 17 Richard J. Evans, *The Coming of the Third Reich: How the Nazis Destroyed Democracy and Seized Power in Germany* (London: Penguin, 2004), 218.
- 18 Ibid., 219; 220.
- 19 John Wheeler-Bennett, *The Nemesis of Power: The German Army in Politics, 1918–1945* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 325.
- 20 Evans, *Coming of the Third Reich*, 220.
- 21 Andreas Wirsching, 'Man kann nur Boden germanisieren'. Eine neue Quelle zu Hitlers Rede vor den Spitzen der Reichswehr am 3. Februar 1933', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 49, no. 3 (2001): 517–50, 544.
- 22 Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford and David Stahel, 'Introduction', in *Nazi Policy on the Eastern Front 1941: Total War, Genocide, and Radicalization*, ed. Alex J. Kay, Jeff Rutherford, and David Stahel (Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2012), 2.
- 23 Felix Römer, 'The Wehrmacht in the War of Ideologies: The Army and Hitler's Criminal Orders on the Eastern Front', in Kay et al., *Nazi Policy*, 73.
- 24 Ibid., 75.
- 25 Geoffrey P. Megargee, *War of Annihilation: Combat and Genocide on the Eastern Front, 1941* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006), 34.
- 26 Römer, 'The Wehrmacht', 94.
- 27 Peter Fritzsche, *Life and Death in the Third Reich* (Cambridge, MA and London: Harvard University Press, 2008), 198.
- 28 Ibid., 200.
- 29 Kay et al., 'Introduction', 2.
- 30 Stargardt, *The German War*, 233; 235.
- 31 Ronald Smelser and Edward J. Davies, *The Myth of the Eastern Front: The Nazi-Soviet War in American Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 56–7.
- 32 Megargee, *War of Annihilation*, 3.
- 33 Smelser and Davies, *Myth of the Eastern Front*, 58.
- 34 Wolfram Wette, *Die Wehrmacht: Feindbilder, Vernichtungskrieg, Legenden* (Frankfurt a. M.: Fischer, 2002), 99.
- 35 Smelser and Davies, *Myth of the Eastern Front*, 61; 60.
- 36 See: *Lexikon des Widerstandes 1933–1945*, ed. Peter Steinbach and Johannes Tuchel (Munich: Beck, 1998), 84; 126–7; Horst Mühleisen, 'Patrioten im Widerstand: Carl-Hans Graf von Hardenbergs Erlebnisbericht', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 41, no. 3 (1993): 419–77, 427–8 and 427 fn 49; Antje Vollmer, *Doppelleben. Heinrich und Gottliebe von Lehnendorff im Widerstand gegen Hitler und von Ribbentrop* (Eichborn, Frankfurt am M.: Die Andere Bibliothek, 2010), 151.
- 37 Stephan Malinowski, *Nazis and Nobles: The History of a Misalliance*, trans. Jon Andrews (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 274.

- 38 Ibid., 275. See also 272–7.
- 39 Ibid., 316.
- 40 Ibid., 333.
- 41 Megargee, *War of Annihilation*, 8.
- 42 Margret Boveri, 'Querschnitte Durch 1944. Kunrat Freiherr von Hammerstein: *Flucht*', in *Der Spiegel*, 5 December 1966. <https://www.spiegel.de/spiegel/print/d-46415369.html> (accessed 12 February 2021).
- 43 Wirsching, 'Man kann nur Boden germanisieren', 523.
- 44 Arthur Koestler, *Darkness at Noon*, trans. Daphne Hardy (London: Vintage, 2005), 31.
- 45 Knud von Harbou, *Wege und Abwege. Franz Josef Schöningh, der Mitbegründer der Süddeutschen Zeitung. Eine Biografie* (Munich: Allitera, 2013), 137.
- 46 Ibid., 99.
- 47 Enzensberger is particularly reliant on Reinhard Müller, whose expertise on the history of German communism and his knowledge of the Moscow and Berlin archives and other sources, is central to the book, as Enzensberger makes clear in his acknowledgements.
- 48 Von Harbou, *Wege und Abwege*, 234. See also 'Schöningh mochte die Nazis nicht', *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 6 March 2013. <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/ns-vergangenheit-von-sz-mitgruender-grosse-luege-der-grauen-maenner-1.1616664-2> (accessed 28 January 2021).
- 49 'Der Verteidiger Rudolf Havemanns' (*Hammerstein*, 330) has been mistranslated as 'the defence lawyer Robert Havemanns' (*Silences*, 405). It should read 'Robert Havemann's defence lawyer'.
- 50 See Magnus Brechtken, 'Einleitung', in *Aufarbeitung des National-sozialismus. Ein Kompendium*, 14–17.
- 51 The English translation gives 'fiasco' (*Silences*, 30) instead of 'Fehlgeburt' [miscarriage] (*Hammerstein*, 31), which completely misses the point about it being dead from birth.
- 52 Mary Fulbrook, *A History of Germany 1918–2014* (Oxford: Wiley, 2015), 41; 48–9.
- 53 Michael Wildt, '"Volksgemeinschaft". Eine Antwort auf Ian Kershaw', *Zeithistorische Forschungen / Studies in Contemporary History* 8 (2011): 102–9.
- 54 Alf Lüdtke, 'Introductory Notes', in *Everyday Life in Mass Dictatorship: Collusion and Evasion*, ed. Alf Lüdtke (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 11.
- 55 Alf Lüdtke, 'What happened to the 'Fiery Red Glow'? Workers' Experiences and German Fascism, in *The History of Everyday Life: Reconstructing Historical Experiences and Ways of Life*, ed. Alf Lüdtke, trans. William Templer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 204.
- 56 Ibid., 206.
- 57 Ibid., 235.

- 58 Alf Lüdtke, 'People Working: Everyday Life and German Fascism', *History Workshop Journal* 50 (2000): 74–92, 90.
- 59 These points are in the German edition of Stephan Malinowski's book: *Vom König zum Führer. Sozialer Niedergang und politische Radikalisierung im deutschen Adel zwischen Kaiserreich und NS-Staat* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2003), 546.
- 60 Alexander Kluge and Oskar Negt, *History and Obstinacy*, trans. Richard Langston et al. (New York: Zone Books, 2014), 390, 73.
- 61 Ibid., 390.
- 62 Ibid., 36.
- 63 Mary Fulbrook, *Reckonings: Legacies of Nazi Persecution and the Quest for Justice* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 175–6.
- 64 Hamlet says to Horatio, 'There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, / Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.' William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, Act 1, scene 5, lines 167–8.
- 65 Brechtken, 'Einleitung', 18.
- 66 Fritzsche, 'Review', 352.
- 67 Hans Magnus Enzensberger, in conversation with Jorge Semprún, *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 8 June 2011. <https://www.nouvelobs.com/culture/20110608.OBS4702/mort-de-jorge-semprun-l-ecrivain-dans-les-debats-de-l-obs.html> (accessed 8 November 2023).
- 68 Malinowski, *Nazis and Nobles*, 339–40.
- 69 Enzensberger, 'Ich wurde rausgeschmissen'.

Crime in defence of liberal democracy: Volker Kutscher

Crime fiction lends itself to questions of legitimacy and justice, be this through the reinforcement of stratified notions of right and wrong with the detective (in whatever guise) as the reliable arbiter of value, or through the questioning of moral norms by a cynical, even corrupt, detective, who barely differs from the criminals. Or, as in *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, where the murderer is the person whose values seem more positive than those of the state and upright members of society, or at the very least, where society, its institutions (including the police) and representatives are exposed as corrupt and culpable. The figure of a detective working under National Socialism, or indeed other dictatorships, is particularly tantalizing. It extends the terrain of the detective operating within a morally corrupt force (*Serpico*, for example, and now a staple theme of much crime and spy fiction) to his working within a morally corrupt state, one that considers itself neither corrupt nor lacking in legitimacy and that purports to be working in the service of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. There is no recourse to another authority 'beyond' the corruption, most obviously to an independent judiciary, nor indeed to a notion of justice other than the state's own, arbitrary definition. The complex interaction of personal and institutional motivation, of individual moral codes and social norms, all with their competing claims for legitimacy, offer a rich opportunity for exploring how detectives, and anyone else for that matter, are caught up in social processes that enable them to work within a dictatorship without necessarily feeling that they have made any more than the usual moral compromises, or even any compromise at all.

Crime fiction is 'a very good way of looking at society [...] from the people who've got everything down to the people who've got nothing.'¹ For this reason it is also a very good way of analysing the relationship of individual and state, and questioning the assumptions that underpin that relationship. As Sean McCann

so convincingly suggests in his analysis of American hard-boiled crime fiction and its engagement with New Deal liberalism, the detective story is inseparable from liberal theory, with its central emphases on the free individual and the rule of law. The genre is concerned with tensions that are fundamental to democratic societies and which threaten these liberal premises. The classical detective story, in the tradition of Edgar Allen Poe and Arthur Conan Doyle, reinforces the liberal understanding of a society formed by the consent of free individuals, who agree to submit to rules they may not agree with and to contain their personal desires out of rational self-interest. Detective fiction exposes the weakness of this position by first depicting a society as chaotic and irrational, only then for the detective to step in and rid it of the threat, and for life to return to normal. Normality does not necessarily mean ideal social harmony: the rule of law is not always just and the powerful continue to use institutions to safeguard their interests. Nevertheless, the stability of the re-imposed social order offers the potential for resolving conflict. The 'legal order, which can be impotent or even be an obstruction, can be brought in line with the demand for justice.'² Interestingly, and against a popular critical view that detectives and the work of detection are forms of disciplinary surveillance and social control, McCann argues that the detective is no different from other social members in how she or he reads the signs or makes connections, but does so with greater acuity. The affirmation of the liberal social order is reinforced in the exceptional detective's commitment not to heroic virtues but to living within the order of bourgeois habits. Thus, 'the ethical drama of the detective story is a drama of the commitment to civil society'.³

McCann describes how the growing concentration of economic power in the United States in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, with the attendant urbanization, social stratification and political conflict, meant that liberal assumptions were fundamentally challenged. This was the context in which hard-boiled detective writers criticized the traditional detective novel as unrealistic for ignoring the extent of social fragmentation and conflict. Hard-boiled fiction radicalized the tensions in the liberal world view between individual desire and social cohesion, and pointed to the 'paradoxes of liberal democracy'. Writers envisaged different solutions, some imagining 'the emergence of a redemptive popular voice' that would overcome fragmentation, others denying the possibility of such a collective and portraying society as an 'aggregate of alienated private meanings', and others depicting a mixture of both poles.⁴ As McCann stresses, what is integral to the genre is its misogyny, frequent racism and depictions of violence.

Volker Kutscher's series of novels, featuring the detective Gereon Rath, is an active defence of democracy. As Kutscher asserted in interview in 2018, democracy is in danger and it is vital to fight for its survival and to protect the rights that have been so hard won: 'the separation of powers, a constitutional state, freedom of the press, freedom of expression, the equality of men and women'. People should never forget how quickly these rights are destroyed.⁵ Kutscher's injunction not to forget permeates the novels. When the series is complete, it will cover the period from April 1929 until November 1938, thus spanning the transition from the Weimar Republic to National Socialist dictatorship, culminating in the dramatic escalation of violence against the Jews on *Kristallnacht*. Kutscher refers to this as the collapse of civilization, the point at which it became clear even for any remaining 'unpolitical' individual, that the Nazis were 'heading to world war and the Holocaust, to the great human catastrophe'.⁶ At the time of writing, nine of the ten novels have been published, starting with *Der nasse Fisch (Babylon Berlin)* in 2008 and with the final novel, *Rath*, planned for publication in October 2024.⁷ The crime series thus engages with two periods: first, the time in which Germany's first liberal democracy collapses in the wake of the Wall Street Crash of 1929 and the promise of social cohesion in response to social fragmentation is pursued in the form of a murderous dictatorship; and, secondly, with the current period of the early twenty-first century. The novels have been written in the context of the global financial crisis of 2008, the most severe since 1929, and the subsequent Euro debt crisis. These events have fuelled challenges to the assumptions of neo-liberalism and its re-assertion of free-market capitalism, the de-regulation of the financial sector and the ideological emphasis on small government and shrinking of the welfare state in favour of privatization. Concurrently, there has been resurgence of far-right and increasingly nationalist populism in Germany and globally. The Alternative für Deutschland (AfD), established in 2013 and always anti-immigration, nationalist and Eurosceptic, has moved enough to the far-right that in April 2023 the party's youth wing was confirmed as an extremist organization. The threat to liberal democracy in Europe has played out starkly in the dismantling of an independent judiciary in Hungary and Poland, and attempts to undermine it in the UK, to name but three examples, and perhaps takes its most emblematic form in the march on the Capitol in January 2021 in the United States.

The novels are bestsellers, with their popularity further enhanced by the television series *Babylon Berlin*, the most expensive series ever made for German television. They are meticulously researched, with Kutscher

describing how he works from contemporary maps, photographs and films, and reads the daily newspapers from the period. These show him what was in the headlines, what was reported, what was being advertised, what people were buying and what the relative costs of living were.⁸ At the same time, he explicitly signals that the novels relate to the present. He plays games with the reader by, for example, quoting from the cult Austrian television detective series *Kottan ermittelt*, which aired between 1976 and 1984, or by having his heroine Charlotte Ritter (Charly) ask for a martini 'stirred, not shaken'. Crucially, he includes epigraphs from much later sources than the historical period to emphasize the novels' contemporaneity.⁹ He shows precisely how the horrific inversion of the liberal vision became a murderous historical reality in order to affirm the liberal democratic tradition. He is not, however, uncritical of this tradition, as is evident from his association of uncontrolled capitalism with organized crime. Rather, he uses the collapse of Weimar democracy and the Nazi dictatorship to advocate for a vision of post-Rawlsian liberalism in which the ideas that citizens are free and equal find expression in a democratic society that is based on 'reasonable pluralism' and justice as fairness. Rawls's notion of justice as fairness affirms 'that all citizens should have the familiar basic rights and liberties', 'fair equality of opportunity', including access to the political realm, regardless of birth inequalities, and that any economic inequalities should 'be to the greatest advantage of those who are advantaged least'.¹⁰ A society is thus defined by fairness and inhabited by citizens who possess the 'two moral powers': a sense of justice and a conception of the good, meaning that they have the 'capacity to pursue and revise their own view of what is valuable in human life'.¹¹

Kutscher's aesthetic strategies organize political affect so as to naturalize liberal social democracy as the political system that best guarantees the combination of individual freedom and social justice. Identificatory aesthetics are key. Events are mediated through individuals' perceptions, following the conventions of mimetic realism, making character the central interpretative device. It is through a wide array of characters that the novels imagine the social and emotional conditions under which people act in certain ways. Strategies for eliciting empathy are deployed so that certain characters or groups are given legitimacy and are privileged, as is their response to political events. Thus, Charly possesses a sense of justice and a strong conception of the good. Kutscher reinforces this ideological commitment in his use of epigraphs which frame the fiction. Finally, Kutscher considers the relationship of individual agency and institutional structures in safeguarding liberal social democracy and its values. By setting the novels over nine years, he envisions how people and the

institutions they work for are integrated into wider processes of social change and how individuals transform their conceptions of their social self through daily interaction with others and with organizations.

Identificatory aesthetics

Kutscher's novels start on 28 April 1929 and revolve around Department IV, Section A, the elite Berlin murder inspection. It is directed by Ernst Gennat, a historical figure who was largely responsible for the creation of a dedicated and centralized murder inspection in 1926. He introduced systematized working methods, including an index card catalogue of murders, a rota system of detective teams to whom cases were assigned, a fast response to the crime scene in a specially designed 'murdercar', and the insistence on securing the crime scene. Gennat reportedly eschewed the use of violence in interrogation and advocated instead the use of 'brain and nerve' for his detectives.¹² Whether this was the case or not, it was Gennat's directorship that helps explain why only few detectives in the murder inspection were sympathetic to the National Socialists. His colleagues described him as 'democratic to the bone', 'the personification of the classical criminalist: undogmatic, incorruptible, dedicated to the defence of individual rights'.¹³ In his colleagues' view, Gennat could only have supported liberal democracy. By starting his novels during the final prelapsarian days of the murder inspectorate, Kutscher establishes a fundamental democratic sensibility as the norm, against which individual, institutional and political shifts are evaluated.

Rath is firmly in the tradition of the loner detective, one who resents the line of command and being given drudge jobs and who prefers working independently. He is the figure through whom Kutscher explores corruption, the motivations for it and the self-deceiving narratives that are used to vindicate an individual's complicity with violence. Over the course of the novels, Rath becomes increasingly involved in illegal behaviour. His main adversary is Marlow, a gangster mastermind, who is connected to the Berolina gang, one of the Berlin 'Ringverein' criminal organizations. His intelligence, elusiveness and business acumen conjure associations with Dr Mabuse, Professor Moriarty and Stringer Bell. Rath initially accepts cocaine from Marlow, then various favours and, most importantly, considerable sums of money that allow him a lifestyle far beyond what his salary can sustain. Rath's motives for getting so dangerously involved with Marlow are mixed, involving personal gain and professional ambition, since Marlow can help him with information from the criminal world. Rath

represses thoughts of corruption, not least by rationalizing his actions. He tells himself that he is 'owed' the extra money because the Prussian State is neither promoting him nor paying a proper salary; or that certain of Marlow's favours have a worthy outcome, as, for example, when he uses Marlow to get medical support for Hannah Singer.¹⁴

As Primo Levi observes in his analysis of the grey zone, criminal organizations and the Mafia have always operated by ensuring an individual's complicity.¹⁵ Only when the gangster's methods are directed at him and his family does Rath fully realize that he is in too deep to extricate himself and acknowledge his own corruption.¹⁶ This combination of individual responsibility and coercion, of baser motives with motives that are rationalized in the moment, offers an excellent example of how complicity develops without the need for political or ideological conviction. Rath does not like Marlow and the criminal violence he represents but ends up working with him. It is then no surprise that Rath should end up working with the Nazis, the even bigger gangsters, despite disliking them intensely. Rath is blackmailed into cooperating with the SS security service (SD), coercion that is made possible by Rath's illegal and personally motivated activities. The SD possess a recording in which he admits to having stolen a secret dossier and using it to engineer the murder of Marlow and his son Liang.

Rath's conflicting motives are made vivid and immediate to the reader through Kutscher's narrative focus on subjective perspective. The narrative combines immediate access to the emotions and reflections of key individuals through internal focalization and free indirect speech, with the external and multiple perspectives offered by the extensive use of dialogue. The fact that Rath is one of the main focalizers encourages an empathetic bond with the reader, steering us to understand and emotionally inhabit his behaviour. The reader feels the urgency that moves him to get information from Marlow and the temptation of a 'thank-you' envelope filled with cash. It is easy to be on Rath's side when he uses Marlow to save Hannah Singer's life or when out of a sense of justice he covers up Artur Radlowski's murder of Wengler at the end of *Die Akte Vaterland* even though his cover story undermines Gennat's trust in him. However, the reader's empathy remains ambivalent, since other people's perspectives on Rath ensure that we do not lose sight of his corruption and lies. Charly is key here and offers a moral and political counterpoint to Rath and anyone else tempted to transgress the democratic rule of law, be they gangsters or Nazis. As the other main focalizer in the novels, Charly forms the moral centre of the books. It is predominantly through her that Kutscher asserts a commitment to social justice and democracy and explores non-compliance

and resistance. In a rejoinder to the misogyny and frequent racism of the hard-boiled tradition, she embodies the struggle for women's emancipation, for she is constantly faced with the prejudices of colleagues and wider society. She is on the side of the downtrodden, harbours no prejudices against homosexuality, is horrified by anti-Semitism and is appalled at the racism she sees directed against her friend from German East Africa, Husen. She acts as a counterpoint to Rath, who articulates many of the entrenched prejudices she opposes: his jealousy is exacerbated by the fact that Husen is black, and his friendship with his colleague Reinhold Gräf is as much undermined by Gräf's homosexuality as by his Nazi sympathies.

Charly's belief in social justice underpins her resolute defence of democracy and opposition to the Nazis. Once the Nazis are in power, she resigns from the women's criminal police. She cannot work for a boss who is an enthusiastic Nazi, for a police force whose main task is to hunt communists, or for a state that is undermining people's rights. Her political astuteness and her principled resignation contrast sharply with what she sees as Rath's political idiocy.¹⁷ She is horrified by his decision knowingly to work for Arthur Nebe, a historical figure whose commitment to the Nazis lay behind his rapid rise from detective to the Head of the Prussian Criminal Police by 1935, Head of the German Criminal Police by 1937 and commander of Einsatzgruppe B in 1941. Clearly, Charly cannot know about Nebe's later involvement in genocidal atrocities, but she is clear-sighted about the implications of National Socialist politics. History proves Charly right. Her 'correct' assessment of historical figures, her condemnation of Nebe and Papen on the one hand and approbation of Gennat and police vice-president Bernard Weiß on the other, functions to affirm her ethical position overall. This retrospective historical legitimacy adds a pedagogic dimension to the texts: if everyone had followed Charly's example, none of that would have happened. Furthermore, the texts seek to confer legitimacy onto Charly by naturalizing her. She is the only adult character whose first name is used. She is positioned as a daughter in relation to her older male mentors, Gennat and Wilhelm Böhm. Böhm structurally assumes the role of father, for he directly stepped in to secure her employment when her father was killed. Charly's daughterly qualities are then coupled with her pronounced sensitivity to those who suffer disadvantage. Here she conforms to the cultural ideal of the caring woman, which is reinforced by her maternal care for Alex, Hannah and Fritze. She instinctively recognizes them as good people, and the plot ensures that her instinct is, of course, proved correct. In the case of Husen, the former Askari who is in Germany to claim pay he is owed by the state, her concern for his

welfare is facilitated by his characterization as a victim. Kutscher skates over any references to Askari brutality in German East Africa and complicity with German colonial violence.¹⁸ Such simplification helps consolidate Charly's dual positioning in the culturally desirable roles of caring mother and vulnerable daughter, and makes her version of social justice appear natural. In contrast, Nazi claims to legitimacy are a perversion of what is normal and right, as the violence needed to impose their values demonstrates.

The textual privileging of Charly's value system is the fulcrum around which a wider hierarchical schematization of character, and with it of values, is constructed. The hierarchy of empathy, with Charly at the apex, sets a limit to which points of view are deemed legitimate. Point of view is vital for eliciting empathy for a character's motivation and the conflicts that may lie behind the choices they make. The narrative method replicates liberal democratic ideals of hearing varied and conflicting points of view in the public domain. It also replicates the limits of what is tolerated: it is important to listen to the views of others on condition that they accept the liberal democratic framework. It follows that empathy with conventional criminals is tolerable, even desirable, in as far as the context which caused their behaviour is made explicable through mimetic realism. Understanding the individual, institutional and political failings that have contributed to criminality offer a form of critique from within. Society and politics can be improved but the fundamental ideology of the system remains unchallenged. However, state criminality is of a different order, for this undermines democracy and the values of the liberal individual. Consequently, the views of those who challenge those basic precepts are marginalized or drained of credibility through formulaic characterization. Members of the SA are systematically excluded from an empathetic exploration of motives, speak like brutal thugs and are given no subjective focalization. Historically, the SA was a violent organization, with violence seen as integral to comradeship. However, Kutscher does not imagine the attraction of the SA for young men caught in a 'descending social trajectory', often with permanent unemployment at the end, and how membership offered a structure and purpose.¹⁹ Members of the SA are variously corrupt police, gangsters who are so extreme that they have breached the gangster code, brute torturers and stupid teenage boys. Violent communist characters are given somewhat more leeway, but generally their voices are barely heard and they are often bigoted. Violent resistance is not seriously entertained in the texts as a viable political tool. On the rare occasions it is condoned, it is in defence of democratic values. Thus it is Adenauer, best known as the first Chancellor of the later German Federal Republic and adamant

opponent of communism, who says in early March 1933 that 'Hitler should have been opposed with force'.²⁰ When Charly shows some sympathy for communist resistance to the brutal Nazis, this is firmly within the context of her commitment to the Republic.

The hierarchy of empathy also determines which forms of justice and violence are deemed legitimate. A pattern emerges whereby taking justice into one's own hands is emotionally condoned if it is done for the good of the powerless and persecuted. In a state in which law enforcement has become a political weapon, justice is enacted through an individual's moral responsibility to act for others. A logic of justice as moral responsibility for those who are disempowered is what effectively condones Charly's evident breaches of police rules. She protects Alexandra Reinhold and Hannah Singer, who have been raped and abused by men and are homeless, and defends Hannah's murderous arson as a desperate act of liberation from a slave existence when the state did not help her. Charly rationalizes her behaviour using a combination of social justice and criticism of the National Socialist state. She feels she has no choice because the German state has turned into a 'misformed monster' that bears little resemblance to the Republic.²¹ Charly's motives for contravening the law become the yardstick with which to evaluate others who take justice into their own hands. In *Lunapark*, Leo Juretzka ruthlessly pursues the SA men and ex-Nordpiraten gangsters who tortured him and murdered his wife. By having his treatment by the SA troop narrated from his point of view, we are even invited to empathize with his revenge. However, its excessive nature lacks any aspiration to social justice. In contrast, the Spindler couple take revenge on the sadistic SA man Horst Kaczmarek for almost identical reasons, for he has beaten their son so badly that he suffers permanent brain damage. Yet this pair is textually privileged because as communists fighting the Nazis and hunted by them, they are positioned within a political and moral framework that aspires to social change. So even though their revenge is personally motivated, they are figured as political and moral victims. This position is further consolidated by their criticism of Stalin, reassuring us that their beliefs are non-dogmatic and idealistic – they are 'better' sorts of communist.

Textual legitimacy

In *The Resistible Rise of Arturo Ui* (1941), Bertholt Brecht links Al Capone with Hitler through the figure of Arturo Ui in order to make an explicit link between Nazis and gangsters. He wishes to expose how a bourgeois capitalist

economy is founded on the same modes of behaviour and economic systems as organized crime, with fascism a logical consequence. The play was informed by Brecht's trip to New York in 1935–36 and by Fred Pasley's work: his article on the 'Gang Wars of New York' and his 1931 biography of Al Capone. Brecht's view that crime and capitalism were aligned was further confirmed by Louis Adamic's 1931 book *Dynamite: The Story of Class Violence in America*, which described the formation of protection rackets.²² Central to the critique that Brecht makes in *Arturo Ui* is his use of blank verse. The play is entirely in blank verse except for one central scene in which Ui is taught by an ageing actor how to speak the language of high culture, epitomized here in blank verse. The acquisition of this 'grand style' is a necessary step for the self-made gangster, for it is the language of bourgeois acceptability. The incongruity of blank verse for a play about a Chicago gangster and Hitler is the same incongruity that exists between the 'grand style' of bourgeois culture, with its claim to moral improvement and superiority, and the gangster-like capitalism which that culture entrenches as the status quo. Brecht's play is thus centrally concerned with the complicity of bourgeois culture in sustaining exploitative political systems.

Kutscher too makes an explicit link between gangsters and National Socialists. Initially, this is most obvious in relation to the SA, which, like the criminal gangs, sets itself up as an organization with its own moral code, internal structures of command and violent methods of control and coercion. Certainly Rath sees the SA as little more than a criminal gang.²³ The identification of Nazis as gangsters is central to the plots of *Märzgefallene* and *Lunapark*, as the former members of the Nordpiraten gang have seamlessly become members of the SA-Sturm 101. The former Nordpiraten boss is now Sturmführer, and in the SA he has found an effective outlet for violent extortion. Wealthy Jews are held and tortured in the SA 'wild prisons' and only released on the payment of huge ransoms. Although this scheme is done under the cover of the SA and in contravention of their rules, it is nevertheless a forerunner of what is later to become the state-sanctioned theft from Jewish Germans in the form of 'Arianization'. Leading Nazis are no less criminal. It is under the Nazis that Marlow finally seeks to legalize his business concerns, which in practice means donning an SS uniform. The gangster can 'go straight' because theft and extortion against certain groups are given legitimacy and Marlow can now enrich himself legally as a result of anti-Semitic policies. Conversely, Marlow observes that Göring would have made a good 'protection money collector' the way he enriches himself with kickbacks from building contracts and the sales of Jewish businesses.²⁴ Marlow has no doubt that the

rulers of the new Germany are worse than gangsters because they are more violent, unpredictable and make up their own rules.²⁵

Where Kutscher departs radically from Brecht's analysis is in his active affirmation of identificatory aesthetics and historical realism in defence of social liberal democracy. Kutscher's approach to the question of cultural complicity in exploitative political systems does not stem from a structural critique of capitalism and its normalization through bourgeois culture. Rather, it takes the form of re-inscribing democratic pluralism, not least in the very form of the detective novel. In the tradition of the hard-boiled American authors who sought 'to reconcile the world of literary expertise with the spirit of pulp fiction largely associated with urban working class', Kutscher uses detective fiction to merge historical expertise with popular culture and to imagine popular citizenship within structures that enable democratic diversity.²⁶ The texts' strong focus on forms of popular culture during the period, on film, the emergence of talkies, jazz music, varied night-life and radio, are part of this vision. Likewise, the restrictions on culture by the Nazis, exemplified in the repression of live jazz performances in *Transatlantik*, casts the problem of cultural complicity with oppressive regimes as one belonging to dictatorships and not democracies.

Kutscher gives explicit authorial legitimacy to this vision of democratic pluralism through the epigraphs which frame the fiction. The epigraphs are not all of one type and their use varies across the novels. Many are pointedly political, particularly as the Nazi take-over of power becomes a greater focus, and are taken from political opponents of the National Socialists. For the epigraph to *Der stumme Tod*, Fritz von Unruh pithily advocates audience awareness when he responds to fears over the impact of talkies: '*Also dient der Tonfilm Unbeseelt? Mein werten Schauhörer: Wem der dienen wird, das liegt allein bei uns*'.²⁷ Von Unruh's 1929 warning about the potential instrumentalization of cultural forms is not explicitly politically aligned, but the implied demand for alertness is in keeping with his political commitment. He helped found the Republican Party in 1924, joined the *Eiserner Front* in 1931, warned of a war of annihilation in 1932 and left Germany in 1933, after his books were burned and he was excluded from the Prussian Academy of Arts. The epigraph to *Die Akte Vaterland* cites Karl Höltermann, who was head of the Reichsbanner Schwarz-Rot-Gold, an organization that aimed to defend parliamentary democracy from its opponents of both the extreme left and right. Höltermann had to flee Germany in 1933 for his resistance to the Nazis. His words of December 1931, in which he hopes that 1932 will be the year of '*des endlichen Sieges der Republik über ihre Gegner*', serve as tragic irony as we see the Republic fatally undermined by the Prussian

putsch.²⁸ The epigraph for *Märzgefallene*, which depicts the final assumption of power by the Nazis from February to May 1933, is beyond irony. It uses the artist Max Liebermann's words at the sight of the Nazi torchlight procession on 30 January 1933 as a summary of their whole power-grab: '*Ach, wissen Sie, ich kann ja nicht so villig fressen, wie ich kotzen möchte.*'²⁹ Just twenty-two days later, on 21 February 1933, the *Weltbühne* wrote: '*Mit Neid blicken Journalisten jetzt auf so gefahrlose Berufe, wie sie Seiltänzer oder Dachdecker ausüben.*'³⁰ This is the epigraph for part three of *Märzgefallene*, in which the character of the journalist Weinert is used to show the dramatic assault on the independent press.

The epigraphs in *Olympia* reinforce the juxtaposition depicted in the novel between the feel-good propaganda of the 1936 Olympics and the violence that was central to the regime. The statement by the British Olympian Arthur Brown describing the Olympics as a '*piece of political propaganda*' rather than a '*sports meeting*' is reinforced by a quotation from an internal SS memo that emphasizes the importance of the Olympics for raising the international reputation of the Nazi regime. This potential benefit 'must not be put at risk by any measures that are not absolutely necessary to defend against any dangers that arise at the time.'³¹ The euphemistically described 'measures' are given clear contours in the next epigraph by SS-Gruppenführer Theodor Eicke, who systematized the organization of concentration camps from 1933 to 1937. By asserting that 'tolerance means weakness', Eicke justifies 'ruthless intervention when it appears necessary for the interests of the Fatherland'. Whereas any decent member of the Volk will not come into contact with the penal provisions, if 'political and intellectual agitators' are caught they will 'be grabbed by the neck' and killed by their own means. And so it is that the novel depicts both the Olympics and the concurrent opening of Sachsenhausen concentration camp just north of Berlin, also in the summer of 1936. The implications of the same event for those who are excluded from the *Volksgemeinschaft* or part of it is exemplified in the juxtaposition of three responses to the end of the Olympics. In the first, from his diary of 13 August 1936, Viktor Klemperer fears the abreaction that will be targeted against Jews. In contrast, on 16 August, the last day of the games, Goebbels looks forward in his diary to being able to sleep and relax. On the same day, Thomas Mann combines pedantry and irony in his observation that the lord mayor of Berlin mispronounced Tokyo and spoke about world peace.³²

Even when they are not explicitly political, certain epigraphs offer a clear framework for interpretation. The epigraph to *Goldstein* part one, is taken from Augustine, *De Civitate Dei*, book IV: '*Remota itaque iustitia quid sunt regna nisi magna latrocinia? Quia et latrocinia quid sunt nisi parva regna?*' ('Justice

removed, then, what are kingdoms but great bands of robbers? What are bands of robbers themselves but little kingdoms?') The quotation comes from the paragraph headed, 'How like kingdoms without justice are to bands of robbers'.³³ This assertion confirms the negative evaluation of the *weiße Hand* in the novel, but also corroborates the overall construction of the Nazis as gangsters; or worse than gangsters, because they do it at the level of the state. For as the pirate hauled before Alexander the Great says to him, he is doing the same at sea as Alexander on land: 'because I do it with a little ship I am called a robber, and because you do it with a great fleet, you are an emperor'. The Coda of *Goldstein* depicts the Kurfürstendamm-Krawall of 12 September 1931, Jewish New Year, a major anti-Semitic riot by the SA. The Coda's epigraph is taken from W. H. Auden's 'If I Could Tell You': "*Time will say nothing but I told you so,/Time only knows the price we have to pay;/If I could tell you I would let you know.*"³⁴ Written in 1940, Auden's words figure the riot, organized before the Nazis took power, as a warning about the Nazis that was not heeded. Included by Kutscher in 2010, the warning is directed to the reader's present and the novels are a way of letting us know. Similarly, by citing Fehlfarben's track from 1982, "Ein Jahr (Es geht voran)", Kutscher warns of the pace of history: *Keine Atempause/Geschichte wird gemacht/Es geht voran!*" (No breathing space/History is being made/it's moving onward!)"³⁵ The subsequent verses link the advance of history to widespread forgetting and the prediction that soon 'grey B-film heroes' will rule the world. Yet if history is made, and events are remembered, it can also be made differently. Marcel Duchamp's witty epitaph, '*D'ailleurs c'est toujours les autres qui meurent*' also assumes a political edge in the context of Nazi persecution, functioning as a critique of political complacency.³⁶

Some of the epigraphs form a vital function for the novels to 'let us know' by making more general observations on liberty and oppression. The epigraphs for parts two and three of *Die Akte Vaterland* emphasize the fragility of liberty. Goethe's Werther remarks on the way that people everywhere spend most of their time working, and are so scared of the bit of freedom left, that 'they strive by all available means to be rid of it'.³⁷ If Werther's observation points to Kutscher's concern with people's own complicity in their loss of freedom, by citing David Hume Kutscher emphasizes the incremental nature of how people are deprived of liberty: '*It is seldom that liberty of any kind is lost all at once.*'³⁸ In *Marlow*, in which racism is a key theme, Charly's emphasis on anti-racism and social justice is affirmed by the novel's sole epigraph, taken from Mark Twain's 'Concerning the Jews' of 1899. Although Twain is eager to claim that he is without prejudices (excepting the French, but this is excluded from Kutscher's quotation), his clear

rejection of racial (and any other) hierarchy reinforces his counter-position as a tenable one already at the end of the nineteenth century: *'I am quite sure that I have no race prejudices, and I think I have no colour prejudices nor caste prejudices nor creed prejudices. All that I care to know is that a man is a human being – that is enough for me; he can't be any worse.'*³⁹

Most of the remaining epigraphs are taken from popular culture since 1965, and largely from texts that could be considered counter-cultural or socially critical. Some of them act as commentaries on Rath and the dilemmas he faces, such as the Rolling Stones' 1969 lyrics *'You can't always get what you want. But if you try sometimes you might find You get what you need'* and their echo in the Sex Pistols' 1976 *'Don't know what I want but I know how to get it.'*⁴⁰ The citation from Ed Brubaker's *Sleeper* (2003–7) is a nihilistic comment on nature and death, but the reference to the graphic novels also points to a thematic link. Like Rath, the protagonist, Holden Carver, struggles with the question of whether there is a difference in his actions whether he is acting for law enforcers or the criminals. The Bob Dylan lyrics from *'Gotta Serve Somebody'* (1979) prefacing part two of *Märzgefallene*, reiterate this theme: *'Well, it may be the devil or it may be the Lord/But you're gonna have to serve somebody.'*⁴¹ An answer to this dilemma is given in the epigraph from Tom Wolfe's *Bonfire of the Vanities* (1987), which precedes part two of *Lunapark*, the section in which Rath is unable to murder Leo Juretzka: *'He ain't got the heart for being on the wrong side a the law. I don't care who you are, sometime in your life you're gonna be on the wrong side a the law, and some people go the heart for it and some don't.'*⁴² In *Transatlantik*, Led Zeppelin's *'There's a feeling I get when I look to the west, and my spirit is crying for leaving'* encapsulates Rath's desire, and need, to escape to the United States.⁴³ However, the epigraph is not limited to Rath; it applies equally to Marlow, who is already there, and Marion, Goldstein's widow. Indeed, some of the epigraphs seem more obviously to relate to other characters than Rath. The lyrics from the Nine Inch Nails 1994 track *'Hurt'* summarizes the state of mind of the murderer in *Der stumme Tod*, who is dragging everyone into his *'empire of dirt'*.⁴⁴ And Bob Dylan's *'Highway 61 Revisited'* from 1965 is a witty inversion of the task given to Abe Goldstein. Rather than being asked by God to *'Kill me a son'*, Goldstein's dying grandfather asks his Abe to ease his very painful death with an injection of morphine.⁴⁵ The line *'I need you so much closer'* from Death Cab for Cutie's *'Transatlanticism'* (2003) can be read as an indication that Rath's and Charly's transatlantic separation will end, but also, more ominously, that Rath's return to Germany at the end of the novel places him within Tornow's reach.⁴⁶

The post-1965 epigraphs are not explicitly political and are often open to interpretation, but they demonstrably situate the novels within Kutscher's lifetime and concerns. They reinforce the sense that the historical content is germane now and signal that the novels are as much an intervention in contemporary debates as comments on past ones. Two further epigraphs make very clear the author's interest in critical popular culture. The epigraph to *Goldstein* part 2 has Paulie and Christopher from *The Sopranos* (1999–2007) talking about purgatory and how long they will have to serve time there. The epigraph to *Lunapark* part 1 cites Lester Freeman from *The Wire* (2002–8): 'A life, Jimmy, you know what that is? It's the shit that happens while you're waiting for moments that never come.'⁴⁷ Kutscher's novels are thematically close to *The Sopranos* with their interest in complicity with organized crime, processes of rationalization and self-justification, and the role of parallel moral codes. Like *The Wire*, the novels explore the relationships and parallels between a homicide unit, organized crime, politics and capitalism. The novels also draw on similar conventions of realism that the two television series do. By citing these two series, that finished just before his first novel was published, Kutscher signals the contemporaneity of his themes and how the distance of historical events facilitates a sideways look at current social and political processes.

Ordinary people, ordinary organizations

Any defence of social liberal democracy must advocate both for individual agency and for social institutions that necessarily limit individual freedom in order to safeguard freedom and justice for all. By setting the novels over a period of radical social discontent and regime change, Kutscher considers the interaction of individual and institution and how they affect and are affected by social processes. In relation to individuals, the author offers what might be considered a type of Nazi *Bildungsroman*. In his reading of Gillian Rose's critique of 'Holocaust Piety', the insistence on the non-representability of the Holocaust, Richard Crownshaw suggests that the philosopher 'imagines the possibility of something like a Nazi *Bildungsroman* in which the future allegiances of the protagonist are unknown to the reader, and by the time they are known, the reader has already empathized'.⁴⁸ This is an apt way of describing the reader's relationship with many of Kutscher's characters, for their shifting loyalties and changing motivations are often not predictable. The fact that key fictional protagonists operate alongside men who historically were complicit with

National Socialism, or became key perpetrators, makes concrete their agency and adds a different type of suspense to the detective genre. If the 'possibility that anyone could be a perpetrator is the element that maintains suspense in crime fiction', in these novels suspense is compounded by the possibility that anyone can become a state-condoned murderer.⁴⁹

Thus, both Reinhold Gräf and Rath have career paths that have parallels with Arthur Nebe's. Initially Charly's favourite colleague and a good friend of Rath's, Gräf is a character with whom the reader empathizes before his allegiance to the National Socialists develops. His basic decency gradually assumes a political inflection and he initially becomes an idealistic Nazi out of concern for Germany's future. As his loyalty is rewarded, he becomes increasingly ambitious. He starts to enjoy the greater authority that comes with working for the state secret police and adapts to violent police interrogations. By 1935, he is no longer merely 'a little conservative', but SS-Untersturmführer in the SD.⁵⁰ There are also evident parallels between Nebe and Rath. Nebe's advancement depends on his links with the Nazis, and Rath is protected by Karl Zörgiebel, the president of the Berlin police from 1926 to 1929. He secures Rath his first position as a Berlin detective and again comes to his assistance when Rath admits to him killing a man and then covering it up. Nebe acted illegally by being a member of the NSDAP in 1931, and Rath acts illegally in his dealings with Marlow. Like Nebe, Rath moves from a department where value is put on scrupulous evidence-based detective work to one which is proudly National Socialist and ideologically driven. Nebe betrays his former mentor and police vice-president, Bernard Weiß, and Rath is disloyal to Gennat and the wider values he represents. In this *Bildungsroman* of complicity and potential perpetration, Rath's desire for career satisfaction and progression leads to his move to the *Landeskriminalamt*, now directed by Nebe, who has personally picked him to work there. So, precisely because Rath hates the Nazis, the parallels with Nebe act as a strong reminder that complicity need not involve political sympathy.

The notion of individual agency and rational choice is fundamental to the novels' appeal to personal responsibility in the resistible rise of Adolf Hitler. Rath's irresponsibility is compounded by his avoidance of politics and he rejects Bernard Weiß's view that all our actions are political whether we like it or not.⁵¹ In contrast, Böhm becomes increasingly politicized. A stickler for order and disciplined behaviour, Böhm is appalled by the Prussian coup of 20 July 1932, that transferred direct control of the Free State of Prussian to the Chancellor, and expresses vocal support of the Republic. In early 1933, he is denounced for going to an election rally for the Social Democrats and is demoted to

work as a porter at the police school in Köpenick. By 1935, in *Marlow*, he is working as a private detective and secretly helping individuals escape from Nazi Germany. Böhm does not set out to resist the National Socialists and does not become a private detective by choice. But at the point when Rath opts to work in Nebe's department, Böhm is practising the very career that Charly suggested as an alternative for Rath, were he to be sacked admitting to his cover ups. It is Rath's choice to prioritize his career and stay in the police. More generally, it is people's choice to use the Nazis for their own benefit that draws Kutscher's particular ire, as is clear from the negative representation of Gräf and other ambitious careerists. The middle classes are particularly targeted. Rath is shocked when he sees a shoe shop taking advantage of the Jewish boycott, commenting on the speed at which 'the Christian German middle class recognized how it could profit from the problems faced by its Jewish competition'. The pathologist, Karthaus, goes along with anti-Semitism even though he is not a Nazi, because he derives immediate benefit from his colleague Schwartz's resignation.⁵² His is one instance of the removal of Jewish Germans from jobs and the resulting flood of new doctors, lawyers and officials, nearly all of whom have become convinced Nazis. The pervasiveness of such profiteering is given in the neat example of the flag factory in Franken. It used to belong to a Nathan Rosenstein and is now flourishing from the production of flags for the 1935 Nuremberg rally.

Kutscher's insistence on individual agency and personal responsibility is no naive endorsement of unqualified personal freedom, but contributes to his vision of individual freedom facilitated but also constrained by ideals of social justice. So, for all that Rath likes to work independently, Kutscher's interest is not in the figure of the autonomous private detective, but in the relationship of individuals to an organization of state power. Framing the character-driven dimensions of the texts, with their psychological explorations of how people respond to events and how their self-perception alters, is the scrupulously detailed depiction of the impact on the police of regime change and the shifts in institutional identity that ensue. By focusing on the continuities and changes within the police force, the novels explore how quickly and extensively discrimination and violence can become structurally entrenched as new norms and how through the lives of individuals such norms are enacted and consolidated. Before 1933 and the Reichstag fire, the novels depict a largely stable police force, institutionally committed to the Weimar democracy, but caught between state and national political developments on the one hand and social unrest and the attendant rise of violent street politics on the other. They trace the growing infiltration of the police by National Socialists and the end of the police force as an institution

of a democratic state with the Prussian coup. The coup facilitated the later consolidation of Nazi power after 1933, but it resulted immediately in the arrest of police president Albert Grzesinski, his vice-president Bernhard Weiß and the commander of the *Schutzpolizei* (uniformed police), Magnus Heimannsberg.

The full power-grab by the National Socialists is starkly depicted in *Märzgefallene*. Not explicitly referred to in the novel, but fundamental to the changes it depicts, is Göring's edict of 17 February 1933, issued in his capacity as Prussian Minister of the Interior. His 'Advancement of the National Movement' ordered that the Prussian police should avoid even the appearance of hostility towards the SA, SS or national parties and that they should counter opposition with the ruthless use of their weapons. On 22 February, Göring formed the *Hilfspolizei* (Auxiliary police), forty-thousand out of the fifty-thousand of whom were staffed by the SA and SS. The novels show how from 1933 the police as an organization starts to undergo marked changes. Police work is politicized, investigations are increasingly ideologically steered, NSDAP members are promoted and, following the cynically named 'Law for the Restoration of the Professional Civil Service' on 7 April 1933, Jewish colleagues are compelled to leave and are replaced by 'aryan' Germans. The police are increasingly undermined by alternative Nazi institutions. *Lunapark* and *Marlow* have inter-agency rivalry as central themes, with Rath's murder investigations also of interest to the Geheime Staatspolizei, the SS, the SA-Feldjägerkorps (military police), the SD, the *Landespolizeigruppe General Göring* and the Landeskriminalamt.

Such inter-agency rivalry is not, of course, unique to National Socialism or dictatorships, nor is it unique to Kutscher's detective stories. Inter-agency competition serves as a background to much detective and spy fiction, offering fertile ground for plot twists, while also implicating state institutions in wrongdoing and exposing their corruption, be it by individual, structural or both. Kutscher's depiction of the growing polycratic National Socialist regime thus functions as a more extreme example of a general norm. Indeed, by depicting the shift from the Weimar Republic to the National Socialist dictatorship, the novels demonstrate parallels in the ways the police organization works in the two different systems. In both, the police president is appointed for political reasons: Grzesinski because he is a member of the SPD and Levetzow because he is in the NSDAP. Under Zörgiebel, the police respond violently to communists, particularly in May 1929, just as they do under Levetzow. In both systems, careers are helped by being well connected. Rath's career is saved twice by the fact that Zörgiebel is a friend of his father's, just as other police are rewarded for their political commitment to National Socialism. Indeed, Rath's father benefits

from being friends with Conrad Adenauer. In both, police chiefs are willing to be economical with the truth if this is politically expedient. Zörgiebel's version of the shoot-out at the end of *Der nasse Fisch* glosses over the inconsistencies and the fact that a group of policemen have been illegally trafficking weapons. Levetzow is happy to accept Rath's account of the how he shoots Leo Juretzka, not only because he is the leader of the Berolina gang, but because it fits the narrative of a violent communist resistance group assassinating SA men. In both, the police chiefs can rely on their men to collude in the cover-up if their ambition is suitably rewarded. In both, there are corrupt police and those who have a strong moral code. The corrupt individuals abuse their position of power to exploit prostitutes, falsify evidence and benefit from close connections to gangsters, be that by taking bribes or buying morphine.

These parallels draw our attention to the ways that an organization like the police functions similarly under different regimes. Structures of power and patronage persist, and there are fundamental continuities in the varied motives of those working there. Recognizing these continuities is an important aspect of understanding compliance with a genocidal regime, as Stefan Kühl argues in his study of 'ordinary organizations'. His analysis focuses on the involvement of state organizations of violence (the army, militias or police) in the Holocaust, and is therefore concerned with a period beyond the projected period portrayed in the novels. Nevertheless, his emphasis on the dependence of the National Socialist state on normal state institutions for carrying out the Holocaust is also pertinent to the period depicted in the novels. These organizations, including the police, were 'remarkable for the normality of their programs, their communication channels, and their personnel'.⁵³ Kühl analyses the ways that they, like all organizations, motivate members through a combination of attractive aims and sanctions, collegiality, financial rewards and job satisfaction, all of which can be met without specifying in detail and in advance what daily tasks will be. Organization members are indifferent to many tasks asked of them, a 'zone of indifference' which can change over time, allowing the organization to adapt without having to negotiate changes to specific tasks. Thus, for example, the task of maintaining order remains a core duty, but the understanding of who is causing disorder ('Jews') and how they are policed (the use of weapons is now encouraged) may shift. Kühl argues that the ability of organizations to satisfy a variety of motives and to manipulate and expand the zone of indifference is what ensures that organizations can shift their members to accept changing organizational aims: 'certain social conditions seem to allow for members' level of aspiration to shift in such a way that they will accept the organization's

transformation into a killing organization', meaning that genocidal policies could be enacted with the existing personnel.⁵⁴

It is this process, the interaction of common and ongoing motivating factors with a shifting zone of indifference, that the novels convey so convincingly. Böhm remarks on how the criteria for policing seem to be shifting when he is told not to bother much with the death of a homeless man.⁵⁵ Under both systems of government, most police focus on the immediate task at hand, as given to them by their superiors. Indeed, it can be a sense of professionalism that facilitates a widening of the zone of indifference and acceptance of shifting aims. So, in response to the Prussian coup, it is Gennat of all people who exhorts his colleagues to continue working with their usual professionalism, which includes obeying the orders of their superiors. Charly is of course unwilling to slip into indifference, and she exemplifies the important role of an individual's agency within an institution. As Kühl argues, individuals are not the victim of changing demands, but 'play an instrumental role in determining how the zones of indifference in their organizations are reshaped'.⁵⁶ Their willingness to behave in certain ways, or to act in response to new demands made by an organization, is what allows change to occur. Charly is furious with Rath when he expresses an apolitical indifference to whether colleagues are Nazis or socialists, so long as they are good policemen: 'Has it ever occurred to you that there's a difference between Nazis and Socialists?'⁵⁷

However, what the novels also make very clear is that, for all the continuities between regimes, the notion of 'normality' in relation to an institution, as well as the indeterminate idea of the 'zone of indifference', are not adequate to account for some of the drastic changes that occur. The novels explicitly draw our attention to the violence involved in regime change, the unrestrained use of force to consolidate the National Socialist regime and the reliance on parallel organizations precisely to bypass the 'normal' police when necessary and to impose new networks of loyalty and legitimacy. Extreme violence and coercion by the National Socialists to eradicate opposition and inculcate fear is shown as fundamental to why people do not actively oppose them. *Die Akte Vaterland*, *Märzgefallene* and *Luna Park*, which span the period from 1932 to 1934, are saturated with the brutality and cruelty of the violence directed against communists, Jews and political dissenters. The SA incarcerate, torture and murder their victims in their own 'prisons', operating with no restraint exerted on them by due process. Journalists are threatened and must flee, people are cowed by SA ruthlessness and voters are intimidated at the elections of 5 March 1933. Terror of the SA is shared even by those who are law-abiding or even positively

disposed to the regime, as is the growing power of the SS, whose members also act with impunity in their use of torture.⁵⁸ The ongoing basis of violence for sustaining the regime, and a clear signpost of the network of camps to come, is starkly illustrated in Kutscher's depiction of the building of Sachsenhausen concentration camp. The direct violence lays the foundation for the more nebulous fear of denunciation and the effectiveness of public intimidation in cases of '*Rassenschande*', when the law forbidding sexual relations between 'aryans' and 'non-aryans' was contravened.⁵⁹

The immediacy of violence in the novels ensures that the functional continuities in the police that they depict do not serve to equalize the regimes. As Kühn makes clear, the zone of indifference depends on the social context. In a dictatorship, which aims to control the role of citizens, it is much harder for individuals to find social fields that support points of view that counter the regime's evolving aims. Similarly, an absence of competing interpretations allows an organization to direct and sway its members to accept its aims. These are characteristics of normal regimes and organizations that are amplified and exploited. Through the continuities and parallels that Kutscher represents, he exposes the pathway from a form of state power that is contained, even if imperfectly, by the balances of an independent judiciary, a parliament that is accountable to the people through voting, legal political opposition and an independent press, to state power where these balances are destroyed. The novels' juxtaposition of the police in the Weimar Republic, under National Socialism and with organized crime exposes not only important points of confluence but also vital differences. Unlike the criminal gangs, who are defined in relation to and restricted by laws that are legitimized through a liberal democratic system, from 1933 first the SA and then later the SS and SD determine and impose the law. They are defined only in relation to their own arbitrary power and so become worse than common gangsters.

Kutscher's novels are a warning from history, made palatable and popular in the form of detective genre fiction. They offer a defence of liberal social democracy with the ideal of justice as fairness at its centre. They unapologetically reject contemporary critical attacks on liberal democracy, particularly from capitalist excesses (the gangsters) and the growing populist far-right (the Nazis). The promise of a social democratic civic order, best articulated by Charly, is something to be aspired to in the present and defended. Identificatory aesthetics and mimetic realism, based on scrupulous historical detail and an informed understanding of the period, are at the core of Kutscher's didactic political and moral tales. However, Kutscher is well aware of the limitation of their impact,

beyond the pleasures of reading. There is no pretence about the inability of writers and writing to stand up to those willing to use violence and the novels themselves illustrate the weakness of journalists and liberals when faced with force. After all, finishing the book series with the violent November pogroms of 9–10 November 1938 and the horrific escalation of violence they herald, clearly reinforces that weakness.

Notes

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- 2 Sean McCann, *Gumshoe America: Hard-Boiled Crime Fiction and the Rise and Fall of New Deal Liberalism* (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 2000), 16.
- 3 Ibid., 15.
- 4 Ibid., 32.
- 5 Volker Kutscher, interview with Jörg Steinleitner, *Buchszene.de*, 16 November 2018. <https://buchszene.de/interview-volker-kutscher-marlow/> (accessed 21 July 2023).
- 6 Volker Kutscher, interview with Jan Sternberg, *ReaktionsNetzwerk Deutschland*, 2 November 2020. <https://www.rnd.de/politik/volker-kutscher-fur-viele-meiner-figuren-wird-es-nicht-gut-ausgehen-S4LXDAF5TBFJLP6CWJ7OT3TXUE.html> (accessed 7 July 2023).
- 7 Only the first five have been translated into English to date.
- 8 Volker Kutscher, interview, SWR, 16 December 2022, (23:37–24:51). <https://www.ardmediathek.de/video/swr1-leute/volker-kutscher-oder-schriftsteller-oder-babylon-berlin-so-wurde-aus-den-buechern-eine-serie/swr/Y3JpZDovL3N3ci5kZS9hZXgvczE3Nzc2NDA> (accessed 9 November 2023).
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- 10 Leif Wenar, 'John Rawls', *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.). <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2021/entries/rawls/>.
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- 12 See: Michael Bienert and Elke Linda Buchholz, *Die Zwanziger Jahre in Berlin: ein Wegweiser durch die Stadt* (Berlin: Berlin Story, 2006), 243; Nathalie Boegel, *Berlin – Hauptstadt des Verbrechens: Die dunkle Seite der Goldenen Zwanziger* (Munich: Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, 2018), ebook, no page numbers.

- 13 Hsi-Huey Liang, *The Berlin Police Force in the Weimar Republic* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1970), 141.
- 14 Volker Kutscher, *Goldstein* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2011), 149; *Märzgefallene* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2014), 180; 408.
- 15 Levi, *The Drowned and the Saved*, 39.
- 16 Volker Kutscher, *Lunapark* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2017), 369.
- 17 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 177.
- 18 Many of Mohamed Husen's biographical details are based on the life of Bayume Mohamed Husen (born Mahjub bin Adam Mohamed in Dar es Salaam in 1904 and died in Sachsenhausen concentration camp in 1944). See: Marianne Bechhaus-Gerst, *Treu bis in den Tod* (Berlin: Ch. Links, 2007). A nuanced fictional representation of the Askari and the complex positions of complicity and victimhood that they inhabited, which also includes a figure based on Husen, is Abdulrazak Gurnah's *Afterlives* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).
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- 20 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 35.
- 21 Ibid., 426.
- 22 Jan Knopf, *Brecht-Handbuch: Theater* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1980), 230.
- 23 Volker Kutscher, *Die Akte Vaterland* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2014), 330.
- 24 Volker Kutscher, *Marlow* (Munich: Piper, 2018), 473.
- 25 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 179; *Marlow*, 78.
- 26 McCann, *Gumshoe America*, 5.
- 27 Volker Kutscher, *Der stumme Tod* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2017), 5.
- 28 Kutscher, *Akte Vaterland*, 5.
- 29 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 6.
- 30 Ibid., 415.
- 31 Volker Kutscher, *Olympia* (Munich: Piper, 2018), 5; 15.
- 32 Ibid., 429.
- 33 Kutscher, *Goldstein*, 7; Augustine, *The City of God against the Pagans*, trans. R. W. Dyson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), IV, 4.
- 34 Kutscher, *Goldstein*, 557.
- 35 Kutscher, *Lunapark*, 361.
- 36 Volker Kutscher, *Transatlantik* (Munich: Piper, 2022), 5.
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- 38 Kutscher, *Akte Vaterland*, 177; 383.
- 39 Kutscher, *Marlow*, 5.
- 40 Volker Kutscher, *Der nasse Fisch* (Cologne: Kiepenheuer & Witsch, 2017), 7; *Goldstein*, 5.

- 41 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 157.
- 42 Kutscher, *Lunapark*, 245.
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- 44 Kutscher, *Der stumme Tod*, 5.
- 45 Kutscher, *Goldstein*, 5.
- 46 Kutscher, *Transatlantik*, 319.
- 47 Kutscher, *Goldstein*, 281; *Lunapark*, 13.
- 48 Richard Crownshaw, 'Perpetrator Fictions and Transcultural Memory', *Parallax* 17, no. 4 (2011): 75–89, 77. See also: Gillian Rose, *Mourning Becomes the Law. Philosophy and Representation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 41–6.
- 49 Bruce B. Campbell, Alison Guenther-Pal and Vibeke Rützou Peterson, 'Introduction: Closing a Bildungslücke – Genre Fiction and Why it is Important', in *Detectives, Dystopias, and Poplit: Studies in Modern German Genre Fiction*, ed. Bruce B. Campbell, Alison Guenther-Pal and Vibeke Rützou Peterson (Rochester, New York: Camden House, 2014), 14.
- 50 Kutscher, *Marlow*, 383.
- 51 Kutscher, *Akte Vaterland*, 181.
- 52 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 460; 270; 508.
- 53 Kühl, *Ordinary Organizations*, 155.
- 54 *Ibid.*, 160.
- 55 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 32.
- 56 Kühl, *Ordinary Organizations*, 43.
- 57 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 177.
- 58 *Ibid.*, 207; 541; 52; *Lunapark*, 115; 177.
- 59 Kutscher, *Märzgefallene*, 506; *Marlow*, 295.

Thrilling archives, polemic history: Merle Kröger

Merle Kröger's *The Experts* [*Die Experten*] is mainly set in Cairo from 1961 to 1963, when German and Austrian rocket and aeroplane specialists were recruited to work on Gamal Abdel Nasser's rocket development programme, begun in 1958. Many of the specialists were former Nazis. The history of the experts lends itself to a spy thriller. Nasser's rocket programme was top secret and took place in the midst of intense geo-political tensions. Against the background of Operations Paperclip and Osoaviakhim, the post-war US and Soviet programmes that removed former Nazi German scientists to the United States and Soviet Union respectively, Nasser's plan was far from unique. But it also challenged the Cold War power dynamic by interjecting it with post-colonial complications, since Nasser strove for independence, including military independence from the Soviet Union. Israel viewed the programme as a direct threat to its existence, and wanted it stopped. At the same time, the Israeli government was seeking to establish better relations with Adenauer's government in West Germany, which in turn wished to normalize relations with Israel. The governments negotiated secret arms deals and loans, despite many former Nazis being active in government, security services and the judiciary. Indeed, some in the West German government recognized the advantage to the Federal Republic of conducting secret research in Egypt as a way of evading the post-war ban on German research into rocket technology. Mossad launched Operation Damocles to halt Nasser's programme, which included the murder of five Egyptian scientists by letter bomb, the attempted assassination of Hans Kleinwächter, one of the rocket scientists who formerly worked on the V2 rocket, threats against the scientists and their families, and the probable abduction and murder of Heinz Krug, who was supplying military hardware to Egypt. Israeli Prime Minister Ben-Gurion saw Mossad's actions as a threat to the relationship with West Germany and the operation was halted. Nevertheless, diplomatic

pressure and the threats meant that most scientists left Egypt by the end of 1963. The rocket programme petered out by 1967.

Kröger uses this febrile background to explore how state self-interest and pragmatism took precedence over bringing Nazi perpetrators and collaborators to justice, and how the Egyptian, German and Israeli governments worked with former Nazis for their own purposes. She does this through the story of Rita Hellberg, daughter of one of the scientists, who initially works as a secretary for the team developing rockets, then for Johnny, an investigative journalist who himself turns out to be an Israeli spy. Rita is the hinge between the world historical events and family history. The novel has 'thriller' prominent on the book cover, but it is no simple spy thriller. Kröger combines the genre fiction of Volker Kutscher with the documentary approach of Hans Magnus Enzensberger to draw attention to continuities between the National Socialist past and the present. In the afterword, Kröger describes her novel as a documentary novel, one in which the central fictional characters have been interwoven into historical events and interact with historical figures. She characterizes herself as walking a narrow path 'between documentary essay and literary novel, between historical research and political thriller'.¹ Documentary material is constantly in evidence, textually highlighted through the use of sans-serif font for all citations and with a list of references given at the end of the text. This forms part of Kröger's emphasis on truth. She states that this writing project has led her, just as she hopes it will her readers, to question how historical truth is constructed out of various stories, whose interests are being served in those narratives and what is forgotten in the process. Relating her novel firmly to the present, she juxtaposes our present-day experiences of 'fake news' to the importance of researching all possible archives, ranging from political and academic to private. In her definition archives extend to places, all of which have their own secrets, harbouring things that are 'lost, hidden, under lock and key' (676).

Kröger's linking of historical archives to the present resonates with the view of archival practice articulated by Stefanie Schulte Strathaus, whose family history forms the foundation of the novel. In her essay 'The Cairo Blanket', included at the end of the novel, she gives an account of the genesis of *The Experts*. Her grandfather was one of the specialists working on Nasser's programme and he lived in Cairo in the early 1960s with Schulte Strathaus's grandmother and their two daughters. In the novel, they become the Hellberg family. Crucially, for Schulte Strathaus archives are more than historical sources. She introduces herself as 'a film curator. Archives form the basis of my work, which I understand

as a contemporary practice [...] Archives live' (650). She describes the process of investigation and discovery of her family's past, how she finds material objects from the time like letters, photographs and short stories, and uncovers memories through her discussions with family members. Her investigation leaves her feeling both 'surprised and overwhelmed, which always occurs when family history comes into contact with perpetrator history' (654). She also points to the way in which family history and German memory culture are inextricably linked: 'they stick together' (659). Schulte Strathaus further emphasizes the importance of archives as living in the present by interweaving the story of her research into her family history with her professional trips to Cairo. She gets to know the city 'at a turning point of history': the events and aftermath of the Arab Spring from 2011 to 2013, including the demonstrations in Tahrir Square and the brutal suppression of many protesters. These circumstances reinforce the notion of the living archive as itself political, since films, alongside other sources, offer numerous counter-narratives for understanding events. Thus, for example, Schulte Strathaus ensures that two Egyptian short films from 1975 are given their world premiere in Berlin. Responding to the urging of others, she also writes for the German newspaper *TAZ* that on the day of President Sisi's inauguration, downtown Cairo is quiet compared to the full opening screening at the new film centre and hours' long lively discussion that follows. They are screening Griffith's experimental film *Intolerance*, a film that offers a 'passionate indictment of power and oppression' (666).

With her notion of the living archive, Schulte Strathaus insists on a continuity between what is past and present, and it is a two-way continuity. When she watches footage of the Cairo demonstrations, shot before anyone knew what the consequences would be, she asks: 'How can these images now be put together, without the present working its way in?' (662). Kröger's answer in *The Experts* is precisely to emphasize the continuities between past and present. Indeed, the theme of continuity is key. The novel focuses on the continued influence of former Nazis in West German government ministries, security services and business after the war. Furthermore, it exposes the continuities in practice between the different national spy agencies. In both cases, appearances are not what they seem, 'fake truths' about national and individual identity and behaviour mask what is really going on. The documentary and thriller form complement each other in the quest for unmasking the truth: the thriller offers the suspense of submersion into mimetic realism and the vicarious experience of confusion followed by gradually uncovering what is really going on; the

documentary mode offers retrospective assurance of that historical reality. However, in *The Experts* the advantage of hindsight conferred by a wide array of archival sources does not function as a form of historical closure but, as with Kutscher's novels, as a way of drawing attention to the relevance and danger of those continuities in the present. Furthermore, Kröger's novel represents a fascinating intervention in two contemporary discussions about the National Socialist past.

In what follows, I consider how Kröger's emphasis on the archive and the truth claim with which it is associated, is nevertheless used to underpin two very different types of intervention in current German memory politics, or polemics. I argue that there is no clear juxtaposition of documentary/archive with thriller as Kröger suggests, since archival elements are used to enhance the veracity of each mode of fictional representation. Rather, in addition to the reciprocal interplay between documentary and thriller, the novel is also characterized by a tension between two modes of literary emplotment: the family drama as well as the thriller. Each representative mode is associated with a different emotional and political response and constructs a different subject of address in its implied reader. The thriller dimension focuses on Nazi networks and their influence in the West German state and the shenanigans of international spying. It has both a politicizing function (do not be complacent; remain alert to extreme right-wing infiltration of state organizations and the privileging of state realpolitik over justice) and a sensationalizing effect (conspiracies everywhere; trust no one). With both, the thriller mode affectively reinforces contemporary public polemics about Nazi (and neo-Nazi) infiltration of the state that are actually at odds with current historical analyses of Nazi post-war plots and personnel in government organizations. Through the thriller mode of representation, the novel uses the archive to simplify debates over the legacy of the Nazi past and works against processes of archival research that underpin the historicization of that past. At the level of personal, family drama, Kröger uses character and point of view to demonstrate nuance in competing political positions and invite empathy for them. Through this mode, the novel casts doubt on the value of political polemic and advocates for the importance of historicization for understanding the complexity of historical contexts and their legacies. In particular, it serves as a critique of the very public, simplifying and polarizing polemic that has been raging in Germany since 2019 over the relationship of the Holocaust, colonialism, German memory politics and Israel.

Nazis were everywhere

The Experts follows the stages of Rita's gradual realization that the rocket research programme is not innocent but is connected to the secret development of atomic, biological and chemical (ABC) weapons. Central to the development of the weapons and to the secret manoeuvres to control who should have them are former Nazis and others who held high position in the National Socialist regime. One of the narrator's aims is to make clear the continuities between regimes in Germany and also to highlight what she sees as their role and influence in emerging geo-political tensions. Former Nazis are everywhere and the narrator makes sure that we are aware of it, even if the characters are not. The narrator explicitly intervenes in the fictional diegesis to supply the reader with information that the characters cannot know. She commonly introduces a historical character within the framework of fiction and then furnishes the reader with biographical details and context within which he is operating. So, when Rolf Steinhauser introduces himself to Rita on the Ausonia, the narrator explains that this is the name assumed by former Obersturmbannführer Otto Skorzeny, who, amongst other things, participated in the successful Gran Sasso raid to free Mussolini from Badoglio custody. He was also part of Operation Panzerfaust, involving the kidnap of Miklós Horthy's son as a ploy to secure the abdication of the Hungarian president. The narrator further points to his ongoing involvement with his old Waffen-SS comrades, especially with his travelling companion on the boat, Hermann Valentin, whose real name is Gerhard Mertins. Both are to be found in gatherings of the European right and where arms deals are to be made, be that in Europe, the Middle East or South America. Mertins is connected to the Colonia Dignidad, the anti-communist community founded by emigrant Nazi Germans, which was involved in the torture and detention of political prisoners under Pinochet. And looking to these men's future, the narrator tells us that two years later Skorzeny and Mertins will ground the firm MEREX, to sell weapons from Bundeswehr stocks to countries abroad, including to the fascist dictatorships of Latin America through the MEREX representative there, Klaus Barbie, second on the list of wanted Nazi war criminals after Eichmann.

The narrator's technique of interjecting historical updates into the diegesis reveals the presence of Nazis and their networks lurking just below the surface. When Rita and Hani win the dance competition organized by the German embassy, the ambassador Walter Weber's presentation of a bottle of Henkell Sekt triggers a domino-effect of connections: Weber joined the NSDAP in 1937; his

boss was Reich Foreign Minister Joachim von Ribbentrop (executed for war crimes and crimes against humanity); Ribbentrop's wife, Anneliese Henkell von Ribbentrop had a lawyer called Rudolf Dix; Dix defended Reich Economics Minister Hjalmar Schacht at the Nuremberg trials; Schacht is in close contact with Willy Messerschmitt and with Skorzeny (257–8). Similarly, when Rita and her sister Pünktchen are on holiday on Sylt, eating ice cream on the steps of the town hall in Westerland, the narrator uses the opportunity to describe the mayor sitting inside. He is Heinz Reinefarth, former SS-Gruppenführer and known as the Executioner of Warsaw for his role in suppressing the Warsaw uprising of 1944. Typical of her exposure of these men, the narrator exceeds the temporal framework of the diegesis to point out that not until 2014, the seventieth anniversary of the uprising, was a memorial stone erected in Westerland to commemorate the victims. She points out that the wording of the memorial, 'We bow our heads in shame before the victims and hope for reconciliation' (191), is controversial for the inhabitants.

The surprise revelations of these historical thumbnail sketches are designed to elicit a sense of righteous anger at the seamless integration of former perpetrators into civil society and commerce. Although the narrator's interventions draw substantially on historical sources, her tone is infused with indignation, even anger, at the post-war success of many former Nazis. Her irony is cutting. She describes Reinefarth three times as 'a man of action' (190) because of his success as an executioner and later politician, an epithet she also bestows on Skorzeny for his implementation of Operation Panzerfaust (191). Ferdinand Brandner, the head of the engine research centre in Cairo was formerly SS Standartenführer. The narrator cites from a lecture he gave in 1938, promoting good management of German firms through the virtues of equality in the workplace, mutual reliance on each other and comradeship (70–1). The narrator is scathing about his hypocrisy, remarking that he would most likely have thought of these values when the Russians deported him to work on developing their Tupolev bomber after the war. She is similarly caustic about Günther Quandt's sudden death in 1954, in a hotel suite with view of the pyramids. After recalling the fifty thousand slave labourers and concentration camp prisoners forced to work in Quandt factories, and the huge fortune that was saved by virtue of Günther Quandt being categorized by the Americans only as a 'Mitläufer' ('fellow-traveller'), she laconically observes that he might in his dying moments have heard the prophetic voice of the Sphinx, as conveyed through the nightly *Son et Lumière* show: 'Human works are transient, but the spirit that created these signs is eternal' (246).

Central to *The Experts* is the impression that the West German police and security services have been contaminated by former Nazis from the outset. The narrator holds up Theodor Emil Saevecke as an example, who in 1962 was the deputy director of the Sicherungsgruppe ('Protection Division') of the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA, the Federal Police Agency). He was formerly SS Hauptsturmführer and head of the Gestapo in Italy, and had also been involved in recruiting Tunisian Jews for forced labour under Rommel. The fact that Saevecke oversaw the raids on the offices of the left-wing weekly journal *Der Spiegel* in 1962, implies a continuity of authoritarian practices against press freedom. A charge of treason had been brought against the paper following publication of an article pointing to the inability of the Bundeswehr to protect Germany from Soviet aggression. The narrator also points out that the head of the Sicherungsgruppe until 1962, Wolfgang Fränkel, had been in the NSDAP since 1933, was long active in the Nazi judiciary and was involved in at least thirty-four death sentences. She refers to a later study confirming that in 1963 former Nazi Party members formed a majority in the Sicherungsgruppe of the BKA and up to a half of West Germany's Federal Public Prosecutor's Office.

One of the narrator's main historical sources for the spy thriller is the archive of the Federal Intelligence Service, the BND (Bundesnachrichtendienst), extracts of which are cited in the novel to expose the thrilling history. But the BND is also presented as an institution with uninterrupted continuities of personnel from dictatorship to democracy. Reinhard Gehlen, the head of the BND from 1956, although not a former Nazi, was nevertheless a man with a problematic history. He was a lieutenant-general in the Wehrmacht, was involved in the planning of Operation Barbarossa and in 1942 became head of the military intelligence unit on the Eastern front, Fremde Heere Ost. As the narrator says, no one has more information about what was happening on the Eastern front, not least the genocide of Jews and murder of Soviet prisoners of war and gentile civilians than he (537). Yet he still claims to have known nothing about the massacres and the deportations to the concentration camps. His successful post-war career as West German spymaster was based on the anti-communist expertise of his spy network. With the knowledge and support of US intelligence services, Gehlen established his 'Gehlen Organization' in 1946 to continue anti-communist intelligence work, with a high number of former officers of the Wehrmacht, SS and SD. His organization was the precursor to the BND, which was officially established in 1956. Mertins (code name Uranus) was one such former Nazi who worked for the BND, as did Johann von Leers. In the novel Leers makes an appearance at a Christmas party attended by Rita and

her father. The narrator tells us about him: Leers was a fervent Nazi and desk perpetrator, who is now at a new desk writing anti-Semitic articles in support of the resistance of Arab nations against the West. Unknown to the party-goers is that Leers was employed by the BND from 1957 to 1959 and in 1961. But perhaps the most infamous case of brazen continuity between regimes is that of Hans Globke, who as Chief of Staff of the German Chancellery was the most powerful civil servant in West Germany with oversight of all West German intelligence services. Adenauer appointed him to this position knowing of his work as a lawyer on the Nazi race laws. Indeed, in 1938 Globke received a glowing reference from the Interior Minister for his capable and efficient work on the law against 'Rassenschande' ('race defilement'), the 'defence of German blood', the Civil Status act and the compulsory change of family names for Jews.

The thriller: Nazis are still everywhere

In structuring the novel as a thriller, Kröger is to some extent doing no more than reveal what was historically the case: that many people were not what they seemed, and that a lot of secrecy and spying was going on under the surface of events. From this point of view the history is itself thrilling. However, by using the thriller genre to give form to archival material, the narrator constructs an imagined reader who will both enjoy the pleasure of the thrill and the pleasure of political indignation. Kröger makes good use of suspense, with characters feeling they are under surveillance and chapters ending with a sense of threat, and there are frequent spacial and temporal cuts that help dramatize the action. The novel is structured around the movement of investigation and revelation. The narrator 'leaks' extracts from BND files in a way to heighten tension and show the enmeshed, if not conspiratorial, relationship of former Nazis, the agency and big business. She thereby intensifies the thriller aspect by hinting that further secrets remain to be solved.

In one example of this practice, the narrator juxtaposes facts in such a way to suggest that West Germany actively contributed to Israel's development of nuclear weapons (474).² She reports that in 1963 the Palestinian–Arab delegation at the UN sent a telegram to the German Chancellor accusing the Federal Republic of supplying NATO weapons to Israel and supporting the development of their nuclear weapons programme. Although the narrator offers no evidence that would confirm or deny the accusation, she points out that Dimona, where the Israelis were secretly building a nuclear reactor, is in the Negev desert, and that by

1966 the first Israeli nuclear bomb was ready to be launched. At a secret meeting in New York in 1960, the two Prime Ministers, David Ben-Gurion and Konrad Adenauer, agreed a secret loan of over \$500m to Israel for the development of the Negev desert. Her juxtaposition of these facts fuels sensationalizing speculation. In a similar example, the narrator cites a BND file, which reports the withdrawal of a document drawn up three days after Eichmann was sentenced to death on 15 December 1961, partly to protect an unnamed third party (40). The narrator is persuasive in her conjecture that this person is Globke. She refers to Eichmann's request that Globke appear as a witness at his trial, which could have led to the fall of the Adenauer government. This was not in Ben-Gurion's interest, given the financial benefits of collaboration. It is therefore conceivable that Israel colluded in keeping Globke out of the Eichmann trial or suppressing his file to ensure the Adenauer government remained in power. She also implies, given that Gehlen wrote to Globke assuring him that 'appropriate measures have been initiated' (142), that the BND suppressed any compromising material on Globke.

Which sources are chosen and how they are presented is key to whether history becomes sensationalized. The narrator's thrilling dramatization of the past is at its most evident in the references to Frederick Forsyth and his thriller, *The ODESSA File*. Her references to the novel and film could be understood as drawing attention to the fact that Nazi conspiracies are the stuff of bestselling thrillers, perhaps alerting the reader to remain vigilant to the seductions of the thriller genre. Yet this reading is weakened by the narrator's presentation of Forsyth's material as historically valid. Thus, when she describes the film adaptation, she cites, without comment, the text panel asserting that the film 'is based on carefully documented research. There really was a secret society called ODESSA' (529). The citation is given in the same sans-serif font of all citations, generating the impression that the film's statement is historical evidence rather than a quotation from a fictional film. Similarly, she refers to the information Forsyth sees and hears as an MI6 operative in East Berlin. She reports how his research leads him to Simon Wiesenthal, who 'confirms' the existence of networks that reach from the smallest West German police stations to the highest offices of state (535). Wiesenthal was also 'documentary advisor' for the movie production.³ The narrator omits to mention that the general consensus among historians is that there was no such thing as the Odessa organization of closely connected SS men, but rather various kinds of loose networks designed to help former Nazis, or other war criminals, whose work was facilitated by sympathetic governments in South America and elsewhere. On the contrary, the existence

of Odessa is given further narratorial weight when she includes a document, now held by the Hamburg Institute of Social Research, that she describes as the only existing minutes of a meeting of Odessa, purportedly held in Marbella in 1965. Although she refers to the fact that historians have for years questioned the veracity of the document, she nevertheless continues to present the letter as authentic. Indeed, she states that Odessa includes six former SS officers who are now Israeli citizens, of whom two have infiltrated the Israeli secret services (627). Here we enter the thriller territory of the Nazi disguised as a Jew, given its most racy form in Robert Fish's 1978 novel *Pursuit*, in which the 'monster of Majdanek' becomes Benjamin Grossman, later Israeli military hero and leader. He is blackmailed by Odessa into stealing enriched uranium.⁴ In *The Experts* it is not uranium that the Nazis are after, but another of the ABC family: the suspense of the novel's final section arises from the suspicion that Hans Eisele's asylum in Egypt is inseparable from his secret experiments on the use of Typhus as a biological weapon.

References to *The ODESSA File* film as a constructed medium are also used to reinforce the sense that the thriller is the appropriate genre for this history. There is a scene set in Teufelsbrück in Hamburg, in which Johnny and Rita confront each other about Johnny being a Mossad spy. Kai, Rita's brother, repeatedly feels as though 'we're acting in a film. This isn't really happening' (530). Given what he is hearing, this is no surprise. But more importantly, the narrator reinforces the filmic quality of the scene with an abrupt interruption, in which she informs us that four months later, at exactly the same spot, the journalist Peter Miller will meet with an old man called Marx. What she conjures up here is the scene from *The ODESSA File* that was shot at the same location that she chooses to place her characters. Kai's feeling that he is in a film does not therefore remain a diegetic comment articulating his sentiment that 'truth is stranger than fiction'. Rather, it becomes a narrative device that justifies emplotting history as a thriller. Similarly, when Rita and Johnny are discussing the testimony of Otto Joklik, who with another Mossad agent was accused of threatening the daughter of Paul Goercke, one of the experts, they agree that Joklik's account of procuring radio-active material and then being recruited by two Israeli agents 'sound like a gangster film' (495). The thriller emplotment is normalized as intrinsic to the historical events, underpinning an epistemology of distrust which understands events as constantly masking a conspiratorial reality.

The end of the novel reinforces the sense that the danger and reach of former Nazis and/or the secret services is not a thing of the past. The secret photo Rita takes of Skorzeny having treatment in a Hamburg hospital in 1970 has been

mysteriously removed from her album, along with the negative (647). This theft signifies that she must still be under surveillance and that malign forces continue to be at work. This submerged reality persists into the present: the narrator describes the manoeuvrings of former Nazis as having occurred 'in broad daylight' (365) but then switches to the present tense: 'it's happening again. In front of everyone and in broad daylight' (643). This emphatic assertion alerts us to the relevance of the novel's themes in the present. Kröger draws attention to the continuity of Nazis in post-war German institutions, but also to the topic of infiltration of institutions by the far-right and question of institutional cover-ups in the present. The novel is thus both testament to and resonates with wider concerns in contemporary Germany.

Official and public disquiet with the issue of the continuity of former Nazis in government agencies after the war has been active from the start of the millennium. Over twenty German government ministries and public authorities commissioned historical research into their past between 2005 and 2021, with the trend continuing.⁵ Concern was intensified by two scandals. The first was the shock at Edward Snowden's revelations in 2013 about the illegal digital surveillance by the US National Security Agency. The second was the widespread anger at the failure of the Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz (BfV – Germany's domestic intelligence agency) to identify and prevent the terrorist activities of the Nationalsozialistischer Untergrund (NSU – the National Socialist Underground) over twelve years, between 1999 and 2011. The NSU carried out murderous attacks largely on people of immigrant descent. Suspicions that the BfV's culpability stretched to infiltration by or use of agents and informants who were connected to the NSU were strengthened when BfV agents illegally shredded files relating to the case in 2011, once investigations into the affair started. The BfV, which in the popular imagination was often characterized as the 'heart of darkness' of the security services, was one of the agencies that commissioned research.⁶ However, in contrast to the public imaginary, Constantin Goscler, one of the historians involved, points to the absence of 'juicy personal scandals' that were uncovered by research. This was due not least to the thorough examination of the BfV following the scandal in the early 1960s about precisely the presence of former SS men in the service.⁷ These unsensational results are in keeping with the research more broadly. Although research has so far confirmed the high numbers of officials with a burdened National Socialist past who were working in government institutions after the war, Niels Weise writes that the overall results have not hitherto delivered any 'spectacular revelations and radical new research conclusions.'⁸ In his view, one

of the most significant results of the research has been to gain access to archives for the first time.

Particularly pertinent to *The Experts* is Gerhard Sälter's analysis of the figure of 'the expert'. In the West German master narrative of the post-war years, which sought to justify the integration of former Nazis in public office, 'expertise – albeit not clearly defined – was weighed up against political encumbrance – described in an equally vague and heterogeneous way'.⁹ This discursive opposition of expertise and encumbrance has persisted. In 2012, the political party Die Linke requested that all BND files relating to the topic of *NS-Belastung* be opened. In response, CDU member Manfred Grund repeated the argument that there was a lack of professionals able to organize state organizations after the war following the Nazi purge of public offices. He admitted that in balancing encumbrance with professional ability, the latter too often won out.¹⁰ However, Sälter questions the very basis for setting expertise and encumbrance up in opposition, since both refer to skills gained from working within the National Socialist state and its organizations: 'in the early Federal Republic, public officials were not re-employed *despite* their individual encumbrance, which was in some cases considerable, but *because* of their activities up until 1945'.¹¹ One of his examples is the Bundeskriminalamt (BKA), which valued the professionalism and experience of personnel who had fought criminality as members of the Gestapo, the SS and the Wehrmacht secret military police. These individuals had internalized the view, reaching back to the Weimar Republic, that communism was a threat to the state. Their understanding of how to deal with crime showed a clear continuity from the Nazi period. Such continuity was also strong in the BND, not least because at the end of the war the US secret services did not particularly differentiate between those who were more or less encumbered by their involvement with National Socialism, and employed who they considered useful. Former members of the Nazi security services were employed in the BND because of their participation in the fight against communism, experiences that 'made them into experts in the perception of their bosses'.¹² Ironically, Sälter also points out that although the Nazi past of these 'experts' represented a staunch anti-communist stance, in practice their 'dilettantish' investigations exposed the fact that they did not possess the very expertise with which their positions were justified.¹³

Overall, the historical research points to the significance of an anti-communist mentality in West German ministries as central to the integration of former Nazis, attitudes that were condoned by the (Western) allies.¹⁴ Indeed, some continuities in behaviour and mentality stretched back beyond the

Weimar Republic to the Kaiserreich, such as the BKA's fight against terrorism or treatment of Sinti and Roma.¹⁵ Most former Nazis did not aim to rekindle any Nazi activity, which would anyway have been prevented by the allies. In the BfV, where there were high numbers of former Nazis, there were no Nazi cliques, even if in both the FRG and the GDR there were informal recruitment networks.¹⁶ The constitutional state of the FRG compelled former Nazis to conform, and during the 1960s the generational shift also made these individuals less significant.¹⁷ Furthermore, the historians emphasize the importance of historicizing key terms for understanding the wider political and social dimensions of *NS-Belastung* (being encumbered by a Nazi past). Goschler and Weise point out that the definition of who was in fact a Nazi is a complex one and one that has changed over the last seventy years.¹⁸ It is vital to historicize the notion of *NS-Belastung*, which means 'using the variations in the political gauge of *NS-Belastung* as a probe for changes in the meaning of National Socialism and its social, biographical and institutional dimensions'.¹⁹ The approach of the historians involved in researching ministries and institutions does not sit well with popular desire for scandal. Goschler identifies a tension between scandal and the political pressure it evinces on the one hand, with the publicly very loaded concept of 'old Nazis' playing an important part in pushing public bodies to provide funding for research. On the other hand, disillusion and lack of sustained interest sets in when faced with the 'comprehensive and nuanced' analyses by historians.²⁰

In her emplotment of the past as thriller, Kröger reinforces and even condones the sensationalizing concerns around Nazi networks and their role in government agencies. The novel works against the conclusions of the historical commissions to encourage contemporary fears of infiltration and conspiracy. In contrast, those aspects of the novel that rely more closely on family drama make a different intervention in current debates. Here, Kröger uses character to explore the historical roots of contemporary political perspectives and thus aligning the novel closely with processes of historicization that do not fit well with polarized approaches.

The family drama: ordinary Germans

When *The Experts* moves away from thriller conventions and the concern with elite Nazis and seeks to explore the period and politics through the mode of mundane family drama, a more nuanced picture is presented of Nazi continuities.

Characters and characterization become the main vehicles for depicting different political positions, the reasons behind them and the emotional investment they carry. These aspects of the novel draw on a conventional third-person narrator who has access to the characters' interior worlds and moves in and out of their perspectives at will. The Hellberg family, and the array of characters they interact with, function as a reminder of the heterogeneity of both political outlook and motivation amongst West Germans, even within the individual. The family drama invites a more complex and changing empathetic response from the reader than the thrill of moral outrage elicited by the novel's thriller elements.

If references to film are used to naturalize the thriller mode for representing history, the family drama uses photography to convey historical authenticity. The novel is divided into three sections, each of which is based on a family photo album covering a particular time period: December 1961 until July 1962; August 1962 until June 1963; and August 1963 until February 1970. Within each 'album' (or novel section), chapters follow the chronology of when the photos were taken, with the start of each chapter marked in the text by a description of the image and its caption. Most of the family snaps are taken by Rita with her new Afga camera, some are taken by other family members, friends or someone present. Every photo is of a scene at which Rita or a member of the family is present and which forms part of the narrative. The act of reading thus emulates that of looking through family photo albums, with each photo functioning as a trigger for remembering the family and what was happening at the time. Inclusion of the 'photos' aligns the novel with other texts that bring together personal experience and family memory with the Second World War and the legacy of the Holocaust, most notably in the German context W. G. Sebald's prose works and Monika Maron's *Pawels Briefe*.²¹ Thus, although the photographs are not reproduced in the text, as they are in Sebald or Maron, the descriptions of the photographs are given in sans-serif font. The non-existent, fictional photographs are therefore given the same status as historically verifiable archives. This undoubtedly reinforces a number of points: that personal archives are too often excluded from historical accounts but need to be reconstructed to be seen and heard; that reconstructing the past involves an element of imagination; and that the materiality of photographs (and film) cannot be taken for granted because they degrade over time. However, for all that Schulte Strathaus's family archive forms the basis of the family drama, the sans-serif font nevertheless invites, if not demands of, the reader to equate the mimetic realism of the family drama with historical authenticity.

The thick description of the period that is facilitated by mimetic realism results in a much less racy impression of Nazi continuity. The mundane reality of what an encumbered Nazi past can look like is made clear in the figure of Friedrich. He was a member of the NSDAP, worked during the war on building jet fighter planes, and in the final year of the war belonged to the Jagdverband 44, the so-called 'experts', who were directly under the command of Hermann Göring. Friedrich has always derived considerable career satisfaction from combining his love of flying with engineering. This is a key reason for him to go to Cairo, along with the career opportunities and the higher income and standard of living the job brings. He is not interested in politics but is passively steeped in uncritical, conservative thinking. He is not an ideological anti-Semite and shrugs off the admiration of the Egyptians for Hitler as not his concern. He happily indulges in admiration of Rommel and his 'clean war' against the British, but resents it when links are made between the Nazis and his choices, such as when the Israelis link the work of the German experts with the 'Hitler-spirit' (402). Friedrich rejects the connection outright, choosing to see his work purely in relation to his family and refusing to reflect on politics. He is far removed from the intrigues and networks of the 'real' Nazis. He derives little benefit from networks, even loose networks of acquaintances, and struggles on his return to West Germany to find satisfactory employment. He certainly gets no support from Messerschmitt, and once aerospace expertise is consolidated in the company Messerschmitt Bölkow Blohm AG in 1968, it is young Egyptian experts that get job offers in West Germany, further reducing his employment chances.

In the figure of Friedrich *The Experts* portrays more mundane continuities that are nevertheless pervasive and culturally endemic, not least the willingness to ignore or forget the National Socialist past and to deny its legacy. Friedrich is ignorant of the international plotting that is going on, but chooses to ignore the presence of committed Nazis when he interacts with them. Indeed, the Hellberg family doctor, as for many of the ex-pat Germans, is Eisele, known for his cruel experimental surgery on and torture of prisoners at Buchenwald when he was a camp doctor there in 1941. His blinkered view of the past enables Friedrich to fall back on self-exculpatory narratives of German victimhood – 'we suffered too' (17) – which further fuels his hatred of communism (including of *Der Spiegel*, which he regards as a communist smear-sheet). Finally, Friedrich is imbued with the racist assumptions and nationalistic stereotypes of ex-pats. Like many other experts in Egypt, he is not ideologically committed to National Socialism, but displays attitudes that are typical of European colonial views and practices. He

and his peers assume the superiority of Germans over Egyptians, whom they regard as 'freedom loving sons of the desert' (72) who struggle with order and discipline. Consequently, unremarkable Germans like Friedrich are transformed into 'important people' (146) in Cairo, with the words 'German expert' working as magically as 'open Sesame' (356). The experts enjoy the benefits of a much enhanced living standard and have no interest in Egyptian culture unless it is ancient or suitably orientalized to match their fantasies. They keep themselves apart from their Egyptian co-workers, viewing them as naturally inferior because they are 'lacking in creative drive' (305) and unable to transform their knowledge into inventions.

Nevertheless, the Hellberg family is a key device for representing very different post-war positions among Germans. It is through Kai's story that the growing generational tension and political conflict in West Germany are most starkly conveyed. Kai is burdened by his father's Nazi past and assertively opposed to his conservative politics. He is left-wing, pro-Israel, demonstrates against nuclear weapons, and sees his father's work in Egypt as a perpetuation of his Nazi fantasies. Rita's younger sister Pünktchen offers a portrait of progressive Catholicism, as her beliefs lead her into training as a nurse and recognizing the political force of the American Civil Rights movement. The characterization of Ingrid, the family mother, allows us to see the individual cost of a violent history, without it being valorized as a German victim position. Ingrid's experiences of expulsion in the face of the advancing Soviet army at the end of the war have resulted in repeated bouts of mental illness, obsessive Catholicism and the attempt to control her environment through compulsive cleaning. She is, typically, treated with Valium.

Rita's perspective dominates the narrative and it is through her that the novel complicates political and moral positions and undermines the polemic investment in any one. Thus, as her and her father's political positions move further apart, she is able to combine a growing critical perspective on him with an underlying love and sympathy, unlike her brother. Similarly, her interest in exposing the military aims of Nasser's rocket programme and the potential development of ABC weaponry combines with her repulsion at Mossad's murderous attacks on scientists. Her relationship with Hani, the Egyptian engineer with whom she falls in love and who is then killed by one of the Mossad letter bombs, is the mechanism for sympathetically depicting Nasser's drive for independence and self-sufficiency as a response to colonialism. Her work with Johnny is the means for elaborating how the security of Israel is perceived as existential for Israelis and is inextricably linked with the Holocaust. And her

good relationships with her politically opposed father and brother, as well as her own being German, reinforces the notion of heterogeneity of positions. Rita represents a position of doubt rather than dogmatic conviction. Through conversations with Johnny, Rita must revise her view that German scientists are working ‘innocently’ in a political vacuum. Both are increasingly caught between moral imperatives in such a way that precludes alignment with one position, and doubt becomes the dominant position. As the realpolitik of Germany and Israel becomes increasingly clear, along with the compromises on justice and morality it involves, Rita welcomes Johnny into the ‘Doubters’ Club’ (604). His conviction that Israel is existentially threatened has enabled him to ignore the question of the Palestinians’ own sense of existential threat (414), a conviction that is then eroded when he discovers that Mossad have recruited Skorzeny, and possibly also Mertins.

Memory polemics

Kröger writes in her afterword that she considered it essential to understand the Arab–Israeli conflict, ‘perhaps the most complicated conflict of the world’ (678), in order to write *The Experts*. By having at its centre a character who wants to understand the complications of this earlier point in the conflict and who responds empathetically to different perspectives without losing her sense of moral outrage at its methods and costs, Kröger is addressing a reader who is willing to engage with complexity. The reader is expected to combine doubt with empathy for different political positions taken by ordinary people. The thriller dimensions of the novel of course guard against this empathy extending to influential former Nazis. Nevertheless, the emplotment of the past as human, family drama here mitigates against simplification and polarization of response. It is at this level that the novel makes a telling intervention into discussions around the relationship between the legacy of colonialism, the Holocaust and the Arab–Israeli conflict. Echoing the tension between scandal and political pressure versus historical research that characterizes the discussion of Nazi continuity in government institutions, this debate takes the form of a polemical public debate on the one hand and wider developments in comparative historiography on the other.

The editors of *Beyond the Racial State* identify the ‘central tension in thinking about Nazi Germany’ as ‘the conflict between locating the regime in the wider world and maintaining a sense of the Third Reich’s distinctiveness.’²²

Thus, discussions of the centrality of anti-Semitism for understanding Nazi Germany, or explanatory frameworks that place anti-Semitism and the Holocaust within wider traditions of European racism, modernity or a history of European colonialism and imperialism, have been seen as relativizing its uniqueness. Yet, as Donald Bloxham argues, the dichotomy between uniqueness and contextualization need not be 'so sharp'. He advocates historicization in the tradition of Wilhelm Dilthey, a process whereby what is general and what is specific about the Holocaust is mutually elucidated by putting it in a wider transnational context. Historicization is not done to render the event 'safe through distancing', which is one of the accusations made against it.²³ Bloxham does this by putting Nazi Germany in the context of wider European genocide and ethno-nationalism, advocating the importance of geopolitics in comprehending European genocides. He argues that the Final Solution was 'an only partly discrete episode in a wider European process of violent flux' and that it belonged to 'an age of wider European genocide and ethnic cleansing in which similar patterns can be discerned across very different states.'²⁴ The history of imperial rule and colonialism is vital in this regard, and Bloxham points to the 'fruitful debate about (settler-)colonial continuities' of Nazi Germany with other colonizing powers. However, he also points to the limits of this model, suggesting that imperial ambitions cannot be reduced to settler-colonialism. Not only does the British Empire provide examples of racist, white minority rule over vast populations that does not involve land-theft and extermination of indigenous populations, but traditional patterns of behaviour of great powers and their spheres of influence is also a key component in explaining genocide.

Other historians too challenge the view that the Nazi regime 'was both uniquely racist and as a result uniquely violent'.²⁵ Devin Pendas analyses the NS regime by comparing it to other 'racializing regimes', such as European colonial empires, the Jim Crow South and apartheid-era South Africa. He argues that the Nazi state was 'neither the only racial state, nor was it ever purely racial' and he points to similarities between the *Generalplanost* and settler-colony land-grabs and genocides. He does not, however, see the Holocaust fitting this paradigm, proposing that the Nazis' greater radicalism lay in the fact that they could not fall back on the colour line as a marker of difference.²⁶ Pascal Grosse also does not consider Nazi racism to be unprecedented, seeing evident correspondences between German colonial and National Socialist racial politics, not least in 'an expansionist and militarized setting; the segregation of biologically defined social groups; the militarization of society at all levels [...] and, perhaps most importantly, the implementation of anthropo-legal practices that barred selected

individuals from citizenship'.²⁷ However, in contrast to Grosse's argument that there was a tension between racial, colonial space and the nineteenth-century model of the nation-state, Mark Roseman situates Nazi racial views precisely within a wider set of narratives of radical nationalism. He suggests that Nazi policies are akin to 'the radical nationalist pursuit of unity and world power by (biopolitically minded) regimes that did not primarily speak the language of race. Where Nazi policies were distinctive, as in the Holocaust, it is not clear that racial ideas account for the difference'.²⁸

These four analyses serve as recent examples of how the context within which National Socialism and the Holocaust is understood among historians continues to broaden, challenge or reinvigorate previous research. As Frank Bajohr and Rachel O'Sullivan argue, the 'question of an appropriate contextualization of the Holocaust and Nazi politics has for decades repeatedly occupied scholars and has produced a wealth of theoretical debates and empirical results'. They share the view that only through contextualization and 'systematic comparison' is it possible to evaluate the unique characteristics of the Holocaust and of the NS regime.²⁹ That is not to say that disagreements and doubt about what constitutes 'appropriate contextualization' do not persist. So, for example, in their evaluation of research seeking to understand National Socialism in relation to colonialism, Bajohr and O'Sullivan align themselves with historians who remain sceptical of arguments that there is a direct connection between colonialism and the Holocaust, although attempts to construct such connections are not taboo. In contrast, they see as productive projects that draw on the field of colonialism to elucidate the mass murder perpetrated by the Nazis beyond the Holocaust as well as project of achieving 'Lebensraum' through the war of annihilation in the East.³⁰

Complex debates that have been conducted by historians for decades but have received little public attention have since 2019 taken on a scandalous, and scandalized, dimension in the public realm. Questions around the comparative contextualization of National Socialism, the racial state and colonialism have become polemical and highly politicized in a way that sharpens the dichotomy between the uniqueness or generalizability of the Holocaust by introducing the whetstone of Israel. In May 2019 the Bundestag ruled that 'Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions' (BDS) movement used patterns of arguments and methods that were anti-Semitic and that no anti-Semitic organization should be supported through access to Federal resources. Felix Klein, Germany's Commissioner for the fight against anti-Semitism, objected to the invitation proffered to the philosopher Achille Mbembe to open the Ruhrtriennale in 2020, citing his close

connections to the BDS movement, his comparisons of Israel with South African apartheid, and his questioning of the right of Israel to exist. There followed a raging debate in the newspapers about the line between anti-Semitism and legitimate criticism of Israel. As Bill Niven writes, this debate, given further impetus by the German translation of Michael Rothberg's *Multidirectional Memory*, became increasingly focused on the relationship between colonialism, National Socialism and the Holocaust. The core, polemical questions were whether the characterization of the Holocaust as unique means that other violent histories, particularly colonial history, are marginalized; and whether Holocaust Remembrance in Germany has ossified into ritual and dogma that in turn dictates Germany's absolute loyalty to Israel and leads to the suppression of legitimate criticism of Israel by discrediting that criticism as anti-Semitic.

Niven points to the irony of how Rothberg's notion of multidirectional memory, which argues that Holocaust memory and the memory of colonial violence need not be in competition in some sort of zero-sum game, has been instrumentalized for political ends. Rather than being used as a basis for comparing and understanding different historical events, a competition of victims is being staged.³¹ He offers various examples of how this polarization has occurred, with Jürgen Zimmerer's and Rothberg's claims and the language they use at the forefront. Their assertions, without providing evidence, that there is a 'taboo' on comparing the Holocaust to other histories and that German memory culture is 'provincial' and based on an 'absolute claim', is straightforwardly polemical.³² Rather, it is they who turn the uniqueness of the Holocaust into an absolute and seek to break through an imagined taboo with calls for more focus on the memory of colonialism. Thus they give the impression of 'attacking a caricature'.³³ In a similar vein, Niven considers Mbembe's statement that the occupation of Palestine is the 'biggest moral scandal of our time' to be a 'markedly one-dimensional or pointedly one-sided opinion'.³⁴ Niven agrees that supporting Israel's right to exist has been central to German policy following the Holocaust. However, he disputes that this has been coupled with a refusal to criticize Israeli policy, pointing to the seventeen UN resolutions that have been critical of Israel, most of which Germany has signed.

The Experts was published in the midst of this polemical debate and through the mode of domestic drama the novel functions as a counter-balance to caricature or one-dimensionality. In its articulation of irresolution and doubt, the novel offers a commentary on competing memories, politics and memory politics: it privileges an understanding of the many perspectives that historically merged to contribute to the current polarization. This is all the more the case in the face

of the Gaza–Israel war following the Hamas massacre in Israel on 7 October 2023. It historicizes the debate by exploring a period and location in which the legacies of National Socialism and the Holocaust interacted directly with the ambitions of the emerging post-colonial UAR and nation-building Israel. Its use of character encourages a willingness to empathize with the different Arab and Israeli perspectives at a crucial point in the development of the conflict, although it does not condone either position. And herein, perhaps, lies one of the disadvantages of historicization. If polemic is politically galvanizing, geared towards achieving change now, an understanding of historical complexity can mitigate against a single, clear message and a drive to a solution (however contested). Indeed, in *The Experts*, a greater understanding of the situation is associated with political withdrawal. Kai abandons political engagement to set up his music bar, and Johnny, after landing in prison for his part in the German anti-government protests, ends up learning levitation in Rishikesh. Rita, who does not know whether any meaning will emerge from what she has experienced and learned, looks determinedly forward, but the future is not articulated in political terms. Rather, the novel ends with her dreaming of rockets to the moon and the fantasy of leaving the Earth's orbit with her daughter.

Fictionalizing archive

The two different modes of emplotment that are used to shape the archive in *The Experts* are necessarily interwoven. They nevertheless underpin different epistemologies for understanding the past. The thriller mode reinforces a sensationalizing distrust of appearances, events and institutions, with a political justification for remaining alert and refusing complacency. The domestic drama mode advocates polyphonic understanding, where clear political perspectives are put into question by other points of view. Each mode offers a distinct commentary on current debates relating to National Socialism and Nazi perpetrators. The thriller element is aligned with the dramatizing concerns around Nazi networks and their role in government agencies and contemporary fears of infiltration and conspiracy. This contrasts actively with the work and conclusions of the historical commissions. Conversely, the family drama mode points to the importance of historicizing conflict and functions as an active criticism of simplifying complex issues through polemic. There is a tension here in how the archive is conceived. On the one hand, to construct an effective thriller, the archive is treated as source for revelation. The process of

historicizing archival work practised by historians is demoted in favour of thrill and what might be seen as a thriller's sensationalist call for vigilance. On the other hand, to offer an understanding of the historical context through different perspectives, the multi-directionality of archival material is privileged, rather than the construction of a polemical message to support an aligned political position.

Central to the attempt to impose coherence on the tension between documentary essay and literary novel, between thriller and family drama, is the capacious definition and presentation of the archive. The use of sans-serif font equalizes all sources. The font is used for citation of historical sources, be they official archives (such as those from the BND), contemporary newspapers, music or radio broadcasts. But it is also used to confer archival status on fictional elements, and with it to suggest that they are historically authentic. Thus, Kröger presents a citation from a fictional film or descriptions of fictional photographs as equal to that of the documents from the BND, newspaper sources and so on. This is in keeping with her approach to the fictional short stories written by Schulte Strathaus's grandfather, which are taken as direct evidence of his thoughts (655).

A generous interpretation of Kröger's approach might argue that she succeeds in explicitly thematizing how history is made from different stories. By so obviously laying bare how archives are emplotted, she exposes the processes of historical construction and political instrumentalization. She points to the malleability and manipulability of narrative by explicitly practising such malleability herself. People around Schulte Strathaus tell her that her story 'is a film' (658). Schulte Strathaus herself asserts that she feels as though she is 'in a book by Merle Kröger', her friend who is known for her detective fiction. She gives her story to Kröger, because she is able to navigate paths through the confusing material in such a way that 'makes the essence comprehensible' (659). Arguably, Kröger challenges this notion of an 'essence' by bringing to our attention the different types of film or novel that archive material can be moulded into and the type of epistemology it promotes. In this view, the obviousness with which photographs blur the difference between fact and fiction serves as an ongoing reminder throughout the novel of the untrustworthiness of images and how a limited 'snapshot' of the past is limited to the point of misrepresentation. However, a less kind reading would be more sceptical of Kröger's expansive understanding of the archive, that extends even to that which is secret, lost or hidden. The definition enables her to blur fact and fiction while retaining a notion of verifiability and still making assertions about the value of truth and

the danger of fake news. The equalizing effect of the sans-serif font effectively undermines the very different truth claims of history and fiction. Historical sources are mingled with those that are fictional or unsubstantiated, and fiction is validated by being presented as historically documented. This comes close to nudging both history and fiction into the realm of fakery.

Notes

- 1 Merle Kröger, *Die Experten* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2021), 675. References will be given in parentheses in the main text.
- 2 Hans Rühle sets out how the Federal Republic financed the Israeli nuclear programme under the name 'Aktion Geschäftsfreund' in his article of the same title. In *Internationale Politik*, 4 June 2015. <https://internationalepolitik.de/de/aktion-geschaeftsfreund> (accessed 13 June 2020). Peres denied the account.
- 3 <https://catalog.afi.com/Catalog/moviedetails/55280> (accessed 1 July 2022).
- 4 Robert L. Fish, *Pursuit* (New York: Doubleday, 1978). The figure of the Nazi disguised as a Jew has long lent itself to crime fiction and thrillers. See also *Twist of Fate* (1989), the sentimentalized TV adaptation of *Pursuit*, in which the Jew is a Nazi is a Good German, and Arne Dahl's *Europa Blues* (Stockholm: Bra Böcker, 2001). In Emanuel Litvinoff's *Falls the Shadow* (London: Michael Joseph, 1983), the murder of such a figure is used as a starting point for a complex exploration of Israeli national narratives and questions of justice and collaboration. Here too the machinations of Mossad in protecting state interests play a major role. For a full discussion of this figure, see my article 'Nazis Disguised as Jews and Israel's Pursuit of Justice: The Eichmann Trial and the *kapo* trials in Robert Shaw's *The Man in the Glass Booth* and Emanuel Litvinoff's *Falls the Shadow*', *Holocaust Studies* 24, no. 4 (2018): 466–87.
- 5 Niels Weise, "'Mehr als Nazizählerei". Die Konjunktur der behördlichen Aufarbeitungsforschung seit 2005', in *Aufarbeitung des Nationalsozialismus. Ein Kompendium*, ed. Magnus Brechtken (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2021), 386.
- 6 Constantin Goshler, 'Auftragsforscher im Herzen der Finsternis? Das Geschichtsprjekt zum Bundesamt für Verfassungsschutz im Kontext der jüngeren Aufarbeitungsforschung', in Brechtken, *Aufarbeitung*, 405.
- 7 *Ibid.*, 410.
- 8 Weise, 'Mehr als Nazizählerei', 402.
- 9 Gerhard Sälter, 'Professionalität, NS-Belastung und die Integration der Staatsbediensteten: Über die Argumentationsfigur des Experten', in Brechtken, *Aufarbeitung*, 417.
- 10 *Ibid.*, 418.

- 11 Ibid., 430.
- 12 Ibid., 429.
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Weise, 'Mehr als Nazizählerei', 399.
- 15 Ibid., 400.
- 16 Ibid. Weise also points out that in the GDR, research has uncovered a higher number of state officials with an encumbered past than previously thought, but a more rigorous break with the past at higher levels.
- 17 Sälter, 'Professionalität', 421.
- 18 Goschler, 'Auftragsforscher', 411; Weise, 'Mehr als Nazizählerei', 399.
- 19 Goschler, 'Auftragsforscher', 411.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 The pattern of starting each chapter with a photograph comes closest to Ronit Matalon's use of photographs in her novel *The One Facing Us*, trans. Marsha Weinstein (New York: Holt, 1999).
- 22 Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman and Richard F. Wetzell, 'Introduction', in *Beyond the Racial State: Rethinking Nazi Germany*, ed. Devin O. Pendas, Mark Roseman, and Richard F. Wetzell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 5.
- 23 Donald Bloxham, 'The Murder of European Jewry: Nazi Genocide in Continental Perspective', in Pendas et al., *Beyond the Racial State*, 58.
- 24 Ibid., 60; 59.
- 25 Pendas et al., 'Introduction', 11.
- 26 Devin O. Pendas, 'Racial States in Comparative Perspective', in Pendas et al., *Beyond the Racial State*, 135–6.
- 27 Pascal Grosse, 'Meanings of Race and Biopolitics in Historical Perspective', in Pendas et al., *Beyond the Racial State*, 108–9.
- 28 Mark Roseman, 'Racial Discourse, Nazi violence, and the Limits of 'The Racial State Model'', in Pendas et al., *Beyond the Racial State*, 32.
- 29 Frank Bajohr and Rachel O'Sullivan, 'Holocaust, Kolonialismus und NS-Imperialismus. Forschung im Schatten einer polemischen Debatte', *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 70 (2022): 191–202, 192.
- 30 Ibid., 197; 202.
- 31 Bill Niven, 'Jüngere Strömungen deutscher Erinnerungskultur – einige Beobachtungen', in Brechtken, *Aufarbeitung*, 667.
- 32 Ibid., 663.
- 33 Ibid., 664.
- 34 Ibid., 666.

Part Three

Ordinary people: complicity, counter-narratives and globalization

Model complicity: Nir Baram

‘This juncture [...] this encounter between your personal ethic and the ethic of [...] institutions, corporations, states, government, ideology, is the most crucial point in *Good People* and [...] a very crucial question in our time.’¹ Nir Baram is fascinated by the question of how individuals interact with their context and become complicit with ideologies that they despise, or to which they feel no adherence. His context is Israel, where he was born into a left-wing political family in Jerusalem in 1976. Both his father and grandfather were elected to the Knesset for the Labour party (or its precursors) and served as government ministers. Baram thus grew up in circles which emphasized and worked for peace with the Palestinians based on a two-state solution, with the borders of 1967 as the basis for negotiation. (Baram describes accompanying his father and other politicians on a visit to Yasser Arafat in Ramallah in 2000, before the Camp David summit).² Although he has not chosen to enter politics, Baram is known for his political activism in relation to the conflict, as well as being one of Israel’s best-known authors. Alongside other writers, he called for a ceasefire in the 2006 Lebanon war and was also outspoken about the responsibility of writers at his opening address at the Jerusalem Writers’ Festival in 2010. Here he criticized the ‘systematic confiscation of the rights of non-Jews in Israel and the territories’ and accused Israelis of no longer noticing the segregation between Jewish and Arab Israelis.³ Commenting on his speech afterwards, Baram expressed his irritation that writers ‘don’t react to politics enough’ and are therefore failing in their responsibility: ‘I think that the writers should say that this is a state not only for the Jewish; it is a state for all Israelis.’⁴ However, Baram’s political engagement does not translate into engaged, or committed, novels in which he seeks to make political or ideological points. In part this is because he is ‘too much involved.’⁵ But perhaps more importantly it is because, unlike a non-fiction book, Baram refuses the notion that a novel should contain a moral. Echoing Kertész’s sentiment that a moralist cannot be an artist, Baram

asserts that if a novel 'tries to convince you of certain ideas, it's not really a good novel'.⁶ Fiction is an exploratory space for 'multiple explanations for everything', in which competing ethical demands, and personal and political perspectives, are presented without resolution.⁷ For Baram, this means assuming the mask of his characters, which is 'very easy' and then believing in them, which is not, for such belief requires him to understand terrible people too.⁸ Such understanding is central to Baram's interest in how people become complicit with systems that they oppose and how they interpret their actions to themselves. As he says, 'the story you tell to yourself is always in a way positive towards your ideas and your intentions'.⁹

In *Good People* (2010), the Second World War is the setting for understanding how an individual's personal ethics evolve and are compromised. It tells the story of how two 'good' people come to collaborate with the violence of the National Socialist and Soviet regimes. Baram seeks to undermine stereotypes of who is complicit with perpetration and why: it is 'much more troubling when we think about brilliant people [...] with critical ability' who cooperate than when we think of 'monsters'.¹⁰ Although the setting is historical, Baram is keen to stress the novel's contemporary relevance and he frequently refers to Robert Musil's assertion that a historical novel is only interesting if it also raises questions about the time in which it is written. For him, writing the book was a 'rebellion' against what he felt was the often suffocating Israeli and Jewish discourse about the Second World War, with its conclusion that 'it shall not happen to us again. [...] We will protect ourselves, we will be strong.' This dominant narrative was, for example, used to justify Israel's cooperation with apartheid South Africa, 'but clashes with the more important conclusion that [...] racial profiling of people and [...] racism in general is what caused the Second World War and the Holocaust, and we didn't learn the universal lesson'.¹¹ It is such a universal lesson that is relevant to many contemporary contexts, and Baram values the way in which readers have sought to interpret their own situation through the novel's themes.¹² Baram's interest in complicity and the ways in which events are understood and narrated continues in more evidently contemporary form in his subsequent novel. *World Shadow* (2013) can be considered a thematic sequel to *Good People*. It moves from a focus on complicity with two major ideologies with the question of compliance with and resistance to the all-dominating reach of capitalism. In *A Land Without Borders* (2016/2017), Baram turns away from fiction to consider complicity in relation to the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In all these works, he thematizes modes of storytelling, justificatory discourses and the responsibility of writers in fuelling discourses

that contribute to violence and atrocity. By turning to non-fiction, Baram explicitly places himself at the centre of his interrogation about complicity and the possibility of resistance.

Good people

Eschewing any reservations about comparing the National Socialist regime and the Soviet Union, Baram juxtaposes them directly in *Good People*. He depicts the fates of Thomas Heiselberg and Alexandra (Sasha) Weissberg from autumn 1938 until the start of Operation Barbarossa in 1941. Thomas is an apolitical young German, whose successful career at the American marketing research company Milton is brought to an abrupt end when the company withdraws from Germany in 1939. He subsequently uses his market research skills and expertise to write an analysis of the Polish and their attitudes that finds favour with the German foreign office. However, Thomas's individualism and ambition make him enemies, and he is finally demoted to work on a project to plan a joint peace parade with the Soviet Union, even as the Germans are amassing troops in preparation for Operation Barbarossa. It is here that he meets Sasha. She too suffers a dramatic change in her life when her parents and their 'Leningrad group' of friends are arrested by the secret police, the NKVD. Her twin brothers are also taken away. To survive, she marries her former boyfriend in the NKVD and, with great success, herself starts to work for the agency as a literary editor of confessions. Determined to find her surviving brother, she seeks a posting in Brest, and it is here that she is assigned to work on the peace parade. The novel is character-driven, with events narrated in the third person but with the point of view limited to that of Thomas and Sasha. The novel's contemporary relevance is not left to chance. Baram gives Thomas and Sasha jobs that did not exist at the time, however much they might evoke jobs that did, precisely to expose parallels and continuities with the present. Thus, Thomas is no 'typical German of the thirties' but was sent by Baram from 'our time to the historical period as [...] a subversive element inside the Nazi organization'.¹³

The character-driven narration is central to Baram's interest in ethical compromise, for he presents two characters who evoke a shifting response in the reader 'between sympathy and repulsion'.¹⁴ At the same time, he presents Thomas's and Sasha's rationalization of their behaviour from their point of view. The reader thus needs to negotiate their credibility and processes of self-deceit from a position of sustained emotional ambivalence. Certainly, to think

of Thomas and Sasha as the good people of the title presents either a strong challenge to rethink conventional notions of what it means to be good, or it casts the novel as ironic from the outset. Or it does both, for neither character complies with expectations of virtuous or moral behaviour. Rather, they are both good at various things, not least at seeking to develop their talents, constructing effective and persuasive narratives, and at casting themselves as good people in their own eyes.

Gifted at creating stories and worlds that others believe in, Thomas uses his impressive eloquence to achieve career success. He knows that his talent is to seduce people to enter the world he creates and to pay for the dream he and Milton are selling. He is proud of his market-related skills, of having no world view other than 'a view of the project I'm working on', characteristics that give Sasha the impression that he is 'artifice personified'.¹⁵ However, Thomas's critics, particularly his former childhood friend Hermann, now an avid member of the SS, deride his adaptability and his willingness to see the world as a game to be played. They view Thomas's apparent lack of steadfastness and commitment to a communal value system as signs of moral decadence and corrosive individualism. Yet his faith in his very real abilities, his ambition and his understanding of the world through the lens of individual adaptation, is a combination of traits that facilitate his complicity with Nazi genocide despite disliking the regime, despising its ideology and being repulsed by its violence. He directly experiences the extreme violence that the regime is willing to use against its enemies when on *Kristallnacht*, Hermann leads a group of men to his home. There, they brutally murder the Jewish Frau Stein, former housekeeper and friend of his mother's. His ill mother also dies as a result. Thomas is appalled at what he sees, but this does not interfere with his desire to excel and develop his talents. So when the precipitous departure of Milton from Germany leaves Thomas unemployed, he draws on his Milton research to develop 'A Multi-Disciplinary Model: The Ideal Type of the Polish People'. The model offers recommendations on how to rule Poland and is well received, securing him a post in the foreign office.

Thomas sees his work as professional and based on 'strict research principles'.¹⁶ He avoids politics and writes to comply with the expectations of those at whom it is aimed. He is imbued with market values and approaches, describing the marketing research skills and 'know-how' that he acquired as 'a kind of *Bildung* for business'.¹⁷ By inhabiting the world of policy and the market opportunities of European expansion he can ignore the political implications of his actions or the question of how his research recommendations fit with and may be implemented by an openly anti-Semitic and anti-Slavic regime. So he touts his

involvement in the confiscation of the Jewish-owned Bamberburg Bank as good work experience for transfers of property in Poland.¹⁸ His model advises against moving 'harmful Polish elements' into a future Soviet zone because of the Polish intelligentsia's hostility to the Soviet Union. His recommendation that such elements be dealt with by "the hastening of emigration by severe measures", or expulsion' is, for him, no more than good theoretical analysis.¹⁹ And he sees the destruction in Warsaw following the German invasion as a career opportunity, for his model will both allow Warsaw 'to fulfil its potential' and make him the 'most influential German in Poland'.²⁰ Thomas ignores what 'fulfilling potential' means in practice: the empty apartments and bloodied clothes he sees after the murder of the Polish intelligentsia or 'sacks of corpses' carried out of Lublin castle. A telling episode betrays the disjunction between Thomas's desire to succeed and the effects of his work. From his window in Lublin, he sees 'a knot of naked bodies' in the courtyard of a Jewish labour camp, run by the German munitions company. He blocks this horrifying sight by permanently drawing the curtain, his disgust at the treatment of Jewish slaves masking his contribution to their fate. It was Thomas himself who signed the recommendation encouraging the 'welcome and useful' employment of Jewish prisoners in the munitions factory. But as he explains to the man from the munitions company: 'I wasn't referring to a camp like this.'²¹

By dissociating his model from what he sees, Thomas evades responsibility for the interpretation and practical implementation of his ideas. He dismisses the violent measures as a debasement of his ideas. His work has been 'stripped of its style' to become 'a monstrous imitation of his hopes and plans', as though being in Warsaw after the invasion was not evidence enough of what was happening.²² Even as Thomas becomes aware of his contribution to violence and genocide, he persists in telling himself that he could not have known that his model would be used to eliminate Polish archaeologists. He continues with work that facilitates genocidal policies, researching a new Model of the Belorussian People and daily advising the SS on the deportation of Jews from Lublin; his advice that the SS cooperate with the Judenrat proves to be particularly effective. Thomas is motivated by his own ambition. Consequently, in the middle of mass murder, the event he perceives as 'murderous' is his own humiliation by Hermann in the competition for favour and power.²³ Thomas's pride in having no world view, in being able to adapt his skill creatively and professionally to whatever project he is working on, blinds him to the anathema his individualism and commodification of dreams provokes in those people who actually believe in a cause or ideological fantasy. As Sasha observes, he will never understand

people who live by their principles rather than rationally accepting inducements or career enhancements.

Sasha too is ambitious. As a girl she wanted to be a poet. Now her skill is in telling convincing stories. Her job at the NKVD, as literary editor of confessions, is created for her because she submits an application that reads like the perfect autobiography: 'sincere, organised, correct, connecting awareness of her errors to "the reshaping of consciousness" with an artistic touch.'²⁴ Her talent for crafting persuasive and coherent narratives leads to her precipitous advance within the organization. Sasha's initial collaboration with the NKVD is an attempt to protect her family and herself. She hopes that her betrayal of Nadya, a poet who she realizes will be arrested anyway, will prevent the arrest of her parents and removal of her twin brothers, Vlada and Kolya. When it does not and Sasha's survival is also at risk, she agrees to marry Podolsky, her former boyfriend and NKVD operative, and to help 'root out' the Leningrad group. Sasha considers these steps to be her side of an implicit bargain: marriage in exchange for Podolsky helping the twins; working for the NKVD in exchange for her boss getting information about her brothers. She consoles herself that she has no choice but to survive out of duty to the twins, even asserting that dying would have been easier.²⁵ However, the reasons for Sasha's success in the NKVD are complex and undermine her moral high ground.

Like Thomas, Sasha derives huge satisfaction from her work and is arrogant about her undoubted abilities and intelligence. She also enjoys strength and power. She is initially attracted to Podolsky because he is stronger than the other boys, is not afraid of blood and has a Chekist father who tortures people. Once in her job, she laughs at how easy it is 'to toy with a person's weaknesses', to persuade the prisoner into confession by identifying the one thing they do not wish to lose and stripping them of it.²⁶ She delights in the praise and preferential treatment she gets because of her success, relishing her status and her rival's humiliation. Conversely, Sasha despises weakness and people's failure to recognize the reality of a situation and to act in that knowledge. She scorns the passivity of those who are terrified of imminent arrest and the 'weepy women who [...] beg for information about their arrested relatives.'²⁷ Their 'illusory hope' is typical of the prisoners whose confessions she hears, for they too do not understand their own insignificance. Sasha's disdain for weakness and enjoyment of power feed her indifference to state violence. In Brest, she is confronted with sights of extreme hardship and persecution, including prisoners digging a canal with their hands. She is momentarily assailed by the thought of her parents having to do just that. She also weeps when she hears that Emma Rykova, a poet from

the Leningrad group, has committed suicide. Yet these instances of personal anguish are fleeting and kept separate from her work and the task of 'purifying the district of destructive factors. All of them.'²⁸ When she sees the merchants crowded together awaiting deportation from Brest, she advises on how to improve efficiency in the process. Her realization that her family's case would have been shunted across a desk just like hers does nothing to alter her creative engagement with her work. She diminishes her personal responsibility in state violence against civilians by thinking that '[i]n any case, [her] work changed nothing.'²⁹

Sasha's skills at crafting convincing confessions are precisely those that allow her to sustain a view of herself as a good person. She regards her interrogation work as helping prisoners, persuading herself that by assisting them to express remorse, she is increasing their chances of a reduced sentence. She vigorously defends her positive view of her motives. She is insulted by Emma's question of why she is working for the NKVD and promptly blames the Leningrad group for their fate, casting herself as the victim who has lost most but is still trying to help them. Similarly, Sasha believes in her self-image as the sister who gave up everything to try and save her brothers and is horrified at the suggestion that she is a female Pavlik Morozov. This boy was hailed as a Soviet martyr when, after denouncing his father to the authorities, he was then killed in revenge by his family. She insists to Nikita Mikhailovich, her boss in Brest, that she is not remorseful for denouncing the Leningrad group, pointing rather to her own suffering: she lives in agony because she has no choice but to survive for the sake of her twin brothers.

Baram, for one, does not believe that Sasha's reasons for cooperating with the NKVD are credible.³⁰ It becomes evident that revenge plays a part in her denunciation of Nadya, the poet who was having an affair with her father. Sasha is disappointed that Nadya survives imprisonment and wants to see 'that whore dead!', even exhorting her husband to ensure she dies. Her venomous outbursts betray her desire for vengeance for the break-up of her family, the humiliation that the affair brought to both parents and for Nadya's barely veiled condemnation of Sasha in her poems.³¹ And possibly, too, retribution for Nadya being the successful poet that Sasha failed to become. In addition to revenge, Sasha's husband believes that survival has been her primary motivation. This is the 'blood-curdling' truth of her terrible actions, from which the 'veil of her denial' has protected her. Podolsky describes her stories about helping others as straws to stop her drowning and as manifestations of the 'tricks our cunning souls can play on us' to disguise the fact that '[w]e're survival machines.'³² The

biggest threat to Sasha's self-image comes from her beloved brother Kolya, who, when they finally meet, is a malnourished soldier. He asks her whether her rise to power depended on murder and she is devastated at his failure to understand 'that she had sacrificed everything for him'.³³ Her willed blindness to the fact that she has blood on her hands is manifested in her insistence on keeping her hand bandaged unnecessarily. She wants to cover the scar left when one of the Leningrad group threw boiling water on her during his confession. She is hiding her responsibility while presenting herself as the victim.

When Sasha interrogates Emma Rykova, she observes how people 'cling to the image they've invented for themselves. They have nothing else.' Similarly, Thomas tells his psychoanalyst that people 'would believe whatever you told them, if you made it sound credible'.³⁴ Neither character recognizes that they are no different from the people they feel superior to. Both consider themselves to be realists, and echo each other's vocabulary in hating (Thomas) or being incredulous at (Sasha) those who 'deny the simplest facts'.³⁵ Yet they cannot face their own denial of facts. In a near farcical exposure of their fragile narratives, Mikhailovich lays bare their hypocrisy: they are 'gentlefolk' who from behind a desk are responsible for the murder of possibly thousands of people, but who cannot do the dirty work of killing themselves. Mikhailovich condemns their 'almost absurd' position, confirmed by their refusal to acknowledge the futility of the peace parade despite the signs of an impending German invasion. Yet even this dramatic moment of being 'thrown [...] into reality' brings no insight.³⁶ Sasha continues to hope that she might be able to rescue Kolya in the face of a massive German attack. She cannot, of course, and in the middle of the onslaught on Brest, with her death almost inevitable, she dismisses life as a 'bundle of lies'.³⁷ Thomas's strategy is to re-cast himself as a rebel who refused to give the authorities a Model of the Belorussian People out of remorse for his former complicity. He conveniently forgets that his refusal, which he knows carries little risk, is no more than an attempt to save face by not giving in to the orders of those who humiliated him. In a final comic distortion of Thomas's ability to sell fantasies, he wanders Germany 'creating confusion' by offering contradictory predictions of the war's outcome.³⁸

Echoing Baram's insistence that a writer needs to believe the mask she or he puts on, *Good People* demonstrates how effectively masks adopted by the protagonists become transformed, through the layers of self-narration, and self-deception, into their faces.

Researchers and capitalists

Their creative skills bring Thomas and Sasha success because they are valued by those in power. The narrative manipulations and distortions at which they excel, and which facilitate the construction of a new reality, is not limited to individual agency, however restricted it may be. Advertising, like propaganda, leads to shifts in collective behaviour, and state policy is based on self-flattering but coherent projections of superiority. Thus, Thomas and Sasha's naive commitment to the impossible peace parade functions as an ironic reflection on the larger, devastating, geo-political narratives which affect them. The parade's ludicrous celebration of German–Soviet cooperation appears no less ludicrous than the 'wishful thinking'³⁹ of Operation Barbarossa and its aim 'to defeat the Soviets in one season'.⁴⁰ The plans for invasion, based upon expectations of rapid victory, were informed by 'broad biases' and 'denial', with arrogant narratives determining events: 'By the spring of 1941, the assumption of a short campaign had turned into an obligation'.⁴¹ Academia too is adept at manipulating knowledge and presenting it as truth, with Thomas remarking how academic disciplines are in the business of 'stretching or shrinking [...] knowledge according to the spirit of the age'.⁴²

Unfortunately, Thomas is right. His Polish model, stretched and shrunk according to the spirit of his National Socialist employer, offers a fictionalized and condensed representation of the importance of *Ostforschung* to genocide and mass atrocities under National Socialism. Academic research on Eastern Europe was an area of inquiry that from its origins during the Weimar Republic had at its centre a notion of *Volk* as a 'community of blood'. Its adherents sought to provide an ideological basis for revising the borders established by the Versailles Treaty and for 'reordering' local populations along ethnic grounds. From the outset, *Ostforschung* aimed for political impact through consulting, and from 1933 it became increasingly established as an academic discipline based in research institutes and universities, thereby also accruing intellectual legitimacy.⁴³ Researchers used established statistical and cartographical research strategies to offer expertise and 'scientific' legitimacy to policymakers. Ingo Haar describes how reports sent by researchers in 1939 and 1940 offered population statistics of Eastern territories, ethnic composition of regions, 'the numerical strength of Polish national democracy down to the local level' and historical settlement data going back to the eighteenth century.⁴⁴ Haar is careful not to present the researchers as homogeneous in their views, pointing to the growing

influence of radical thinkers over others in the field. Indeed, only one *Ostforscher* spoke publicly in support of the 'Final Solution' in 1941. Nevertheless, Haar concludes that the researchers contributed both directly and indirectly to the deportation and genocide of the Jews and of non-Jewish Poles.⁴⁵ Similarly, Michael Fahlbusch highlights the role of the various Ethnic German Research societies, which supplied material to the SS, including registers of people and institutions. Resonating with the interdisciplinary approach of Thomas's model, research was based on 'cooperation between geographers, historians, archivists, *Volkskundler* (folklorists), sociologists, *Rassenkundler* (racial experts), and art historians'.⁴⁶ Before the attack on Yugoslavia, the director of the Southeast German Research Society in Vienna, Otto Brunner, 'presented the Balkan germanization policy exactly as it was implemented in practice a short time afterward'.⁴⁷

A major difference between Thomas and many of these historical researchers is that Thomas has no political agenda and is certainly not an admirer of National Socialist policy. This difference is significant, for it highlights key aspects of the collaboration of the *Ostforscher*. Thomas's commitment to modern methods of research, to its breadth and his compartmentalization of theory and application are all sufficient to make him complicit with genocide without any ideological commitment or even political interest. Reviewing the work of Barbara Klain and others, Robert Gellately points to the modernity of the research and planning that underpinned the *Generalplan Ost* and the plans to transform the population structure of Poland. The modernity of the maps and sketches co-existed with the freedom that planners experienced when they were not faced with the constraints of planning restrictions in Germany.⁴⁸ He confirms Michael Burleigh's emphasis on the central role of 'card indexes, card-sorting machines, charts, graphs, maps and diagrams', and how these research methods 'dovetailed usefully with Nazi policy'.⁴⁹ Indeed, these were modern methods that continued to help the careers of their practitioners after the war. The German ethnographer Karl Stumpp conducted research in occupied Ukraine with the specially named Sonderkommando 'Dr Karl Stumpp' and was active in the Zhitomir region at the same time as Einsatzgruppen C and D. His 'journey from genealogy to genocide, then back to genealogy' allowed for findings that he gathered while working for the National Socialists to be published after the war in non-political academic journals.⁵⁰ As Eric Schmaltz and Samuel Sinner argue, his 'rehabilitation', like that of colleagues in similar positions, exemplifies amongst other things 'the traditional respect enjoyed by German academicians'.⁵¹

The modernity associated with Thomas and with the historical researchers, and which gives their methodology credibility beyond Nazi ideology and the Nazi regime, is also crucial to *Good People's* criticism of capitalism. As Baram states in interview, the novel 'tackles the three biggest ideologies of the twentieth century: fascism, communism and capitalism'. The book's title is apt in this collective respect, for each ideology advocates its models for the good of the people.⁵² Thomas is again an interesting figure for representing the sometimes tense but often productive relationship between capitalism and National Socialism. He initially likes to believe that politics and business can be kept apart, praising how Milton has kept its distance from politics. For that reason, he is dismayed to hear that Milton is getting involved in the 'aryanization' of Jewish property under cover of doing market research for Dresdner Bank. Thomas's commitment to the notion that business and politics can operate separately is of course fundamental to his own self-deceit and ability to ignore the importance of his model for the implementation of National Socialist politics. However, this belief also makes him misjudge the form that business's involvement in politics might take. What appears to him to be overt political involvement in Nazi 'aryanization' policies is actually the cynical and effective pursuit of Milton's interests, including profit. Conversely, what looks like Milton's retreat from politics by withdrawing its branch from Germany, is later revealed to be a calculated move, for they never left Germany and continue to advise clients. It was Thomas that they abandoned and they continue to seek friendly relations with the Nazis for their branch in Paris. Thomas and Milton exemplify the commitment to the pursuit of profit and the necessary adaptation that it entails. But Thomas refuses to acknowledge that the separation he idealizes is itself a form of politics. The values of capitalism, exemplified in Thomas's vision for Milton's European growth, mirror the Nazi regime's aim. They are based on 'a great expansion plan' and the ambition to 'redraw the map' and 'conquer Europe'.⁵³ And, although Thomas is opposed to the persecution of the Jews, he quickly slips into thinking of people using economic terminology. He describes the hurdles that Jewish Germans face in seeking emigration visas in terms of economic laws: 'the supply of Jews exceeded the demand by thousands of per cent'. His arguments against erecting a ghetto, particularly in the centre of Warsaw, are based on his prediction that it will 'seriously damage the economy'.⁵⁴

In Thomas, Baram presents us with a figure whose work resonates not just with the work of the *Ostforscher* but also with that of German market researchers in the 1930s and 1940s. This reflects the historical proximity of academic social research and commercial market research both in the United States and

Germany, with Germany's oldest market research company, the Gesellschaft für Konsumforschung (GfK), growing out of a department at the Nuremberg Business School in 1934.⁵⁵ Just as Thomas's Polish model provides a detailed analysis of Poland and serves as an important reference point for various agencies, so too the GfK's aim was to give detailed data, rather than advice, to commissioning companies, so that they could develop their strategies based on that data. As Jonathan Wiesen argues, as the war proceeded, 'the Nazi regime found ways of exploiting a consumer research organization well versed in observational techniques'.⁵⁶ In the GfK's case, it agreed to collaborate with the Vienna-based Südosteuropa Gesellschaft, which made important contributions to the planning of economic policy in Southeastern Europe. In 1943, they provided a report 'focused on Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Yugoslavia, Greece, and Turkey' which ranged across ethnic make-up, climate, social divisions and potential for German exports of finished goods. Wiesen is scathing about what is excluded: 'Reading the report, one could almost forget that across the territories under examination [...] Jews and "partisans" had been murdered as part of this broader economic-ethnic engineering'.⁵⁷

The GfK was not officially affiliated with the Nazis and the organization largely maintained intellectual autonomy.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, its critical response to the United States and its commitment to the idea that the consumer is rooted in community, meant that it could contribute productively to the nationalist agenda. The GfK could not have been ignorant of the fact that after 1933 the marketplace became linked to policies promoting the racial purification of the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Nor could they have been ignorant of the violent racist policies in the Balkans; 'the GfK cannot claim to have stood on the sidelines, merely beating out a marginal existence while the war raged'.⁵⁹ The story of the GfK, like Thomas's, is not a one-dimensional tale of complicity, but 'of opportunity, exploitation, conformity, and survival'.⁶⁰ Unlike Thomas, however, the story of his historical predecessors in the GfK, as with the academics involved in *Ostforschung*, is one of ongoing post-war career successes. Wilhelm Vershofen, who signed the Vow of Allegiance to the Nazis in 1933, remained the 'main intellectual force behind German consumer research' into the 1950s. Wilhelm Mann, president of the GfK from 1935 to 1945, was an NSDAP and SA member, and as Director of IG Farben he was responsible for the production of Zyklon-B gas and knew it was being used for extermination purposes. Acquitted of charges of plundering and mass murder at the Nuremberg IG Farben trial, he again became president of GfK until 1955 and head of pharmaceutical sales at

Bayer. In the light of these biographies, Baram's novel becomes more of a moral tale, with Thomas coming to the type of bad end that the historical people evaded.

Through the figure of Thomas, the novel illustrates the intertwining of Nazi and capitalist ideology and the ease with which the aims of the market could be combined with the ideals of the *Volksgemeinschaft* and the genocidal policies in which it was grounded. It shows how Thomas's advocacy of capitalist tenets actively contributes to a political system that he does not support. It concurrently enables him to conceive of his 'open admiration of capitalism', and the emphasis on individuality and individual adaptability it promotes, as unpolitical.⁶¹ Scenarios change and the model can be superficially adapted: the Model of the Polish People can be renamed the Model of the Asiatic Slav if necessary. In this respect, Thomas's commitment to certain economic assumptions and methods is crucial in sustaining his self-belief as a non-political person. In Sasha's case, the relationship between the individual and the ideological system she navigates is more suffocating. Thomas has scope for making choices without the risk being great, as he admits. Sasha's options are much more immediately determined by the question of survival in an arbitrary system of confessions and denunciations, in which one arrest leads to a further fifty. Podolsky summarizes the all-enveloping threat, in which 'actions or consequences' do not determine guilt, but people 'ought to fear their every criminal thought [...] and to remember that no place is so dark that we won't find them.'⁶² This, perhaps, makes Sasha an easier character with whom to sympathize, for the consequences of not co-operating with the NKVD pose a known and terrifying threat. Nevertheless, the sympathy the reader may feel for her predicament is not sustained, undermined by her self-justifying and non-reflective narratives. This is a real strength of Baram's figures: it is precisely the reader's ambivalence that signals the urgency of the ethical issues raised by the novel.

Networks of global capitalism

Capitalism presents a particular problem for understanding complicity, for in Baram's view it is by nature 'inclusive'. Unlike National Socialist and communist regimes, which do not tolerate opposition, capitalism is more sophisticated and cares only about exploiting talent. 'It basically says to you: you criticise me, you don't like me [...] but come and work for me and in the evening, you can say on Facebook that you don't like me.'⁶³ It is this inclusivity that concerns Baram in

World Shadow, which focuses on the global reach of capitalism, the nature of the complicity it demands and what type of resistance is possible.

World Shadow is constructed around three narrative strands. The first is the account of a UK-based group of young people, who are in different ways economically and socially marginalized and who have nothing to lose. The group decides to call a world-wide strike of one billion people on the eleventh of the eleventh. They start to promulgate this aim on Facebook and then to draw attention to it by organizing and calling for protest events, some of which become violent and receive widespread media coverage. As a result, the movement grows, with different groups forming and initiating their own protests, but all having in common the call for global strike as a protest against 'the system'. What is meant by 'the system' varies locally, but the movement is fundamentally united against global capitalism and the neo-liberal institutions and thinking identified with it. The increasing international success of the movement and its disruptive effect, even before the strike day, results in ever more systematic government and institutional responses, including the attempt to undermine and discredit the revolutionary discourse and its proponents. To the surprise of the British government, the ideological battle and the struggle to gain control of the narrative is fought with great sophistication by the protesters. This is due to the advice of Daniel Kaye, a former employee of the elite electoral consultancy company, MSV. Kaye has left the company and gone underground to support the strike movement. MSV, in contrast, is hired by the government in its attempt to counter the surprising adeptness of the protesters in advocating their actions.

The narrative strand that focuses on the protesters is a retrospective narrative of events from the perspective of the core group and is told using the collective 'we'. There is little scope for psychological insight, for the account of what happened is driven largely by action. The second strand of the novel focuses on the US company MSV. It explores how the company functions and maintains its corporate image through the correspondence between its members. Emails reveal how individuals compete internally, how they accommodate themselves to and advocate the company's ethos and how they understand themselves as helping to construct a better world. The company ethos is ostensibly progressive, advocating 'responsible globalization'.⁶⁴ Jordan Steinbeck, the founder, defends the benefits of globalization and the influence of corporations. He points to how it has lifted the living standards of numerous countries, extended life expectancy for many and improved education. Global competition has also raised the incomes of workers in Asia. In line with this ethos, the company supports election campaigns that they believe are furthering the aims of democracy and

progressive globalization. However, these benevolent aims are dramatically thrown into question when Daniel Kaye starts to question the sources of MSV's funding. His concern is triggered when he works as a campaign adviser for the elections in the Democratic Republic of the Congo in 2006. The MSV campaign seeks to transform the image of Congo from one associated with violence and mass graves to a new, peaceful post-conflict Congo which is holding the first 'real' democratic elections in the nation's history. This new image will encourage international investment and a flourishing private sector. However, as charities and NGOs start to report on mass atrocities in the east of the country, and on the abduction, forced labour and murders linked to the lucrative mining industry, MSV resorts to denying the reports and discrediting both the victims of violence and the agencies reporting it. MSV's ethical self-promotion is increasingly eroded as it becomes clear that the funding for this campaign and others is linked to individuals and corporations who stand to make huge financial gains from the outcome of the elections.

The final narrative thread tells the story of Gavriel Manzur. Along with the sections of the novel that recount Daniel Kaye's tale, Gavriel's financial rise and fall is told using a conventional third-person omniscient narrator. In the 1980s, Gavriel becomes the Israeli representative for a hedge fund, with the task of investing in projects that strengthen ties between US and Israeli Jews, including the establishment of the Jewish Foundation for Democracy. Gavriel starts mixing with the Israeli elite and by the early 1990s he has established his own company with four partners. He becomes wealthy and is involved in million-dollar projects, just as Israel also becomes more outward-looking and global in its ambitions during the 1990s. Echoing the progressive self-image of MSV, Gavriel's partners see themselves as acting in harmony with their politics and their vision for a peaceful Middle East. They pursue projects with businesses in Arab states and with Europeans who seek contact with Arab states. Like Kaye, Gavriel gradually realizes that his partners are involved with MSV and their investors, including arms dealers and mine owners from Congo. After dissolving the joint firm, Gavriel continues to be highly successful in his own right until disaster strikes with the bank crash of 2008. Gavriel follows instructions to transfer money from the Foundation and other investors into the struggling hedge fund, even though that money has already been committed to charitable organizations and NGOs. The fund fails, all money is lost and Gavriel becomes the face of financial corruption in Israel, ostracized from society.

Similar to the structure of *Good People*, in which the stories of Thomas and Sasha operate in parallel sections, with the protagonists moving geographically

closer to one another until they meet, so too in *World Shadow* the three narrative threads are juxtaposed, but the connections between them gradually emerge until they culminate in the violent ending. The protests of the strike movement assume a new tactic based on the notion of an individual's 'personal responsibility'. Protesters confront directors and managers, people who normally evade responsibility, smear them with filth, film them making a confession of their exploitative behaviour and complicity with oppressive policies and then upload their confessions on the internet. In Israel, Gavriel is targeted as one such capitalist perpetrator. In the meantime, the exposure of MSV's connections with unethical investors by Kaye has caused its collapse. The violence escalates, culminating in far-reaching battles on 11.11. The novel ends with the remaining 'we' describing their post-strike position: that of torpor. It is unclear what the strike achieved, but the sense is that it achieved little. The group now wishes to forget the events and the authors insist that they wrote their account out of numbness.

There are strong overlaps with *Good People*, linking that novel's engagement with questions of complicity with perpetration with urgent concern in the present. The figure of Thomas in part resembles Gavriel, who also combines a lack of political commitment with the desire to adapt to circumstance. Sasha's literary editing skills and the importance of narrative presentation to construct a persuasive reality are reconfigured in MSV's election consultancy. Thomas's and Sasha's rationalizations of their behaviour and their investment in sustaining a view of themselves as good people is evident in the smooth and sophisticated defences of the management and employees of MSV as well as in Gavriel's partners. However, with a shift away from exploring collaboration with dictatorial regimes to modes of complicity with globalized capital and systems, *World Shadow* offers a more dystopian outlook than *Good People*. Both novels end with violence. In *Good People*, the horrifying violence of the Eastern front and the Jewish genocide are still to come, but the reader may take some comfort in the knowledge that Hitler was defeated. In *World Shadow*, the extent of the violence on 11.11 remains unclear, but the final 'Torpor' chapter implies that the strike was a one-off event and that the status quo ante continues even if the protesters 'lit fires all over the world' that are 'still smoldering'.⁶⁵ The novel dissolves any complacency about the success of post-war democracy by showing that world in the grips of an inescapable capitalism. The ostensible apolitical trajectory of Thomas's position has triumphed, with a new ethical veneer becoming part of capitalism's ideological efficacy: the good of the *Volk* and the good of the workers has now become the good of all.

In *World Shadow*, Thomas's ambition to adapt his model and techniques to different political and social contexts is re-figured as the successful networks of elites operating in the globalized world of the 1980s onwards. Kaye observes that regardless of what country MSV is operating in, he seems to be the only person in the room who has not attended an elite university in Europe or the United States. This newly emerging international class of young people is connected through work, be those 'campaigns, investment banks, high tech companies, foundations for improving the education of the socially disadvantaged' (230). But, just as significantly, they are connected through the common vocabulary, ideas and vision of the future that they have acquired at their renowned universities and which they do not question. Gavriel's experience is comparable. His success is predicated on being accepted at the weekly meetings of the Jerusalem elite, including journalists, high-ranking civil servants, television producers and businesspeople, a group from which he graduates naturally to international circles as he becomes more successful. One of the core members in Jerusalem is David Horowitz, former head of the Department of Foreign Relations at the Hebrew University and then representative of the Friedrich-Ebert Foundation, which is dedicated to propagating the values of social democracy. Horowitz is later a business partner of Gavriel's, who unbeknown to Gavriel is involved in the deals between MSV, a French arms dealer and a Congolese mine owner. So it is that elite universities are central to the formation of these globalized networks, fostering less the capacity for critical self-reflection and independent scrutiny, and more the justifying discourse for economic globalization and the social goods they claim it brings.

The universities are complicit with propagating a pervasive orthodoxy: that globalization and democracy is the best way to offer people a good, or even just a better life. It is an orthodoxy that offers no easy position from which to criticize. Even political campaigns, as Kaye points out to MSV's directors, may well be a technique that 'frames political conflict in ways that do not threaten our lifestyle, our connections, our money'.⁶⁶ The normalization of the orthodoxy is radically rejected by the protesters and is a reason why they are willing to condone violence: the notion that social protest should not be violent has become entrenched in people's consciousness and itself needs to be challenged. However, the protesters only oppose the conviction that there is no place for violence with acts of violence and do not offer an alternative vision of social and political reform. Indeed, the irony of their position is that the success of their movement mirrors the success of global capitalism: their system of protest is malleable, rewards creativity, responds adroitly to local conditions and

increasingly uses the language of personal responsibility. Success is measured more in the accumulation of Facebook members and number of protests than in material and social outcomes.

The absence of political direction or alternative beyond the day of the strike proves, unsurprisingly, to be a fundamental limitation of the protesters' position. The group tries to justify this weakness by insisting that the strike is not future-oriented, as a form of redemption, which is how the left wish to see it, but as a result of having their faces 'shoved [...] deep in the shit'. The strike 'was a desire to return to a nil point in which all familiar rules were invalid' before any talk of the future can begin.⁶⁷ But their final state of torpor offers little potential for envisaging change. Furthermore, and in a further undermining of any political trajectory, they recognize in retrospect that the key motivation for their actions was simply group dynamics. The group and the idea of the group gave the members certainty and something to cling on to. As the 'warmth' of belonging fades, so too does their faith in any movement. The importance of the group dynamic is reflected in the indivisible 'we' of their account, which has a stultifying effect. The torpor from which they write infects their narrative, making it often lack dynamism and feel wearisome. Their retrospective account manifests surprisingly little of the anger, passion and hope that they describe as they ponderously recount events, plying the reader with a surfeit of detail about group interactions and their reasons for action. There is little here that can be salvaged for a positive vision of a post-globalized world.

The ambivalence with which Thomas and Sasha are represented, with fluctuation between empathy and repulsion, is mirrored in the portrayal of the protesters. The ambivalence is signalled not least in the section and chapter headings that both share. Part One of *Good People* is entitled 'Preparations for a Great Deed', pointing to the preparations that both protagonists must make for the breakthrough in their careers after disaster has struck. In *World Shadow*, it is under an almost identical title, 'Preparations for Something Big', that the protesters are introduced and the first stages of their campaign are recalled, culminating in the arson attack on a London gallery. Part three of *Good People*, 'The World is a Rumour', depicts Thomas's and Sasha's futile involvement in the Peace Project, their growing despair and the invasion of the Soviet Union. In *World Shadow*, the chapter of the same heading depicts the next stage of the core protesters' development during the weeks they spend hiding out in County Clare, Ireland. Here too, the gap between ideals and reality is thematized, as the protesters enjoy a communal life but one that is sustained by Julian's inheritance. Julian is a core member of the protesters, whose increasing

intellectual and strategic leadership has already caused tension. The fact that he is now financing the group consolidates his leading position: their lifestyle is dependent on his money. These intertextual references remind us to be wary of self-justifying narratives and their link to material self-interest, personal ambition and satisfaction. The text insists that the reader keep a critical distance to the protesters and their methods.

Nevertheless, the ethical position of the original protesters remains very different from the many protesters for whom it is the latest oppositional stance. The core group are, as disempowered and marginal members of society, seeking to change a pervasive system that benefits elites. As Gavriel says to the Israeli protesters who target him as a capitalist perpetrator, the 'gang in London [...] were screwed by the system, and so were their parents'. He is impressed by their call for world strike and feels that after the violent repression of the protesters across the world, 'every person with a conscience must support the strike'.⁶⁸ However, Gavriel distinguishes between this marginalized group and those that position themselves as victims of capitalism who have been beneficiaries of the very system they are protesting against. The hypocrisy of this position is exemplified in Lior, the daughter of his corrupt and fraudulent former business partner, Horowitz. She is a documentary film-maker and assumes with that role a self-righteous critical stance. Her access to Gavriel through her father is a convenient boost for her career and for her status as a protester, since she films his humiliation. Not only is her fraudulent father not subject to the modern form of tarring and feathering they inflict, but, as Gavriel points out, she and others of her generation have gained mightily from the wealth that 'the system' produced. They have enjoyed the privileges of education, contacts and funding without acknowledging it, including his own daughter Noa, who is studying at the Sorbonne, and, of course, also protesting.

Gavriel reiterates Baram's criticism of capitalism, that its genius resides in the fact that it 'enslaves everyone, including its opponents' because 'as long as you keep working for it, it doesn't care how much you whine about it'.⁶⁹ For many adherents of the protest movement their involvement is little more than moral posturing, a means to see themselves as virtuous despite not renouncing privilege. Indeed, their involvement offers yet another opportunity for younger elites to forge networks and assert their narrative of events. Lior and Noa are typical of the many who do not think about how pension funds, universities, charitable foundations or research are funded, and how these organizations depend upon and encourage globalized networks and movements of capital and finance. This compartmentalization and self-righteousness of individuals

is similar to that of cultural institutions. Culture and its representatives are the first to be attacked by the protesters, who wish to 'horrrify the consumers of culture [...] including those who worked to advance their personal goals while nurturing the illusion that this world can keep on operating [...] undisturbed'.⁷⁰ Banks and businesses are obvious targets, but culture is the place for hypocrites, where artists and authors are feted if they criticize capitalism or colonialism, even though they are most concerned with fulfilling their own ambitions. The protesters are scathing in their irony when they describe the highly commodified culture industry and the way that producers and consumers of culture 'turn up at rallies against the banks with their pockets stuffed with money, and at the same time profiteer in cultural assets and foster the illusion of diversity'. These hypocrites are happy to go on demonstrations, sign petitions, support the Labour Party, but they are part of the chain of consumption and profit that culminates in the 'diamond traders [...] who wipe the filth and blood off their faces with the art they buy'.⁷¹

The criticism of culture's central role in reinforcing the capitalist model precisely through its commodification of progressive criticism, functions at a meta-level to include *World Shadow*. The novel is one more object of cultural consumption with which members of the reading elite can wipe from their mouths the taste of hypocrisy. And Baram, as he knows, may be understood as one of those authors who is offering culture while 'people are being trampled'.⁷² Indeed, like David, one of the core protesters who secretly signs a million-pound contract for the inside story of the strike once it is over, Baram is profiting from the criticism of capitalism through the mechanisms of international bookselling and promotions. But just as the protesters come to understand that David's action does not undermine his belief in the strike, Baram's critique of global capitalism remains far-reaching and incisive. He is well aware of the difficulty, even impossibility, of standing outside it to propose something new. The language of protest itself cannot be new, for, as the protesters conclude, everything they do has already been said. Perhaps all that is possible is to offer 'new combinations of quotations'.⁷³ The protesters here echo Baram's defence of fiction, that it is uniquely able to 'inject new characters into the discourse' thereby creating something new. Characters have the potential to be 'a rare and unique amalgamation of qualities'.⁷⁴ Baram is referring here to *Good People*, which is structured around character. Nevertheless, his point about new alignments offering a fresh perspective is valid for *World Shadow's* analysis of the difficulty of evading complicity and the embeddedness of individuals within wider institutions and structures.

Like *Good People*, *World Shadow* is interested in the power of narration and storytelling for moulding peoples' view of themselves and shaping events. The protesters' joint retrospective account frequently refers to the way in which past events have been reported and interpreted in various ways. Indeed, they point out that 'there are so many versions going around that it's difficult to reconstruct how any particular idea came to be'.⁷⁵ As a group, they cannot offer a definitive account of what occurred and their memory is itself influenced by other people's versions of events. What started as a compelling story told by the London protesters – Gavriel remarks that they 'know how to tell a story' – has been transformed into an at times tiresome and lacklustre group effort.⁷⁶ The protesters' state of torpor is an emotional condition also shared by Thomas and Gavriel by the end. Thus, telling a good story is not aligned in Baram's work with a positive outcome. On the contrary, he explores how central and effective it is for justifications of individual and institutional actions, state oppression and violence. To look to fiction for redemption is to fall prey to the trap of nostalgia against which the poet Nadya warns Sasha: 'true poets resist the enchanting spells of nostalgia'.⁷⁷ In this respect, it is significant that Baram ends *World Shadow* with the anti-climax of ossification. He undermines the utopian promise that the revolution holds, the open future onto which desires can be projected. He strips the notion of revolution of its nostalgic idealization, of its seductively abstract ethical and political promise.

From ethical space to moral encounter

A real strength of Baram's novels is the unforgiving light he shines on complex characters, exposing their motivations, ambitions and rationalizations, while at the same time approaching them with empathy. It is the empathy that elicits an ambivalent emotional response from the reader, ranging from sympathy to repulsion, from understanding to dislike. The novels are vehemently un-nostalgic. They eschew idealization and are intent on dissecting how ordinarily good people, characterized as they are by personal ambition and the desire to achieve their aims and use their talents, become complicit with institutions and systems they neither support nor give much thought to. Baram also enfold the reader into the moral complexity he depicts. She is asked to think about the compromises she makes and the narratives she uses to justify her involvement in broader systems of power. And, particularly in *World Shadow*, readers are charged to consider their complicity with their sector, industry or

organization, including the culture industry, or university, and the relentless demand for shareholder dividends from which their own pension fund will profit. Readers are prodded to think about how they, their networks and institutions develop stories that affirm their self-image and their intentions as good, however that is understood and whatever their political position. Baram's fascination with character and storytelling, with the powerful narratives with which people offer reasons for their actions, shifts into the non-fictional realm in his book *A Land Without Borders*. The subsequent documentary film of the same name was released in the fiftieth anniversary year of the occupation, in 2017.⁷⁸ Here, Baram addresses questions of individual involvement in structures of oppression, and with communal or state-condoned violence, from within his own Israeli context as he holds conversations with people living in the West Bank and East Jerusalem. In contrast to the two novels, where protagonists living at considerable geographical distances converge, in *A Land Without Borders* the participants reside within a small area, but with radically divergent lives. Baram's refusal of nostalgia continues to be evident and the documentaries might also have been entitled 'Good People', with similar ironic ambiguity about who or what is 'good'. Baram presents interviews with Jewish and Palestinian residents holding a range of views, who tell stories that affirm their outlook and that of the social group with which they identify. His interlocutors elicit complex and often ambivalent responses, sometimes evoking precisely the combination of sympathy and horror that is at the heart of *Good People*.

The veteran PLO man, Fathi Darwish, who has long worked with Israel, has come to feel insulted by the indifference shown to the Palestinian issue: 'The Palestinians are constantly engaged with Israelis because we have no choice, the Israelis interfere with every aspect of our lives. But we just seem to bore you now, don't we?'⁷⁹ Dani Dayan lives in the El Matan settler outpost. Director of the Yesha Council from 2007 to 2013, an umbrella organization of Jewish settlements, he became Consul General of Israel in New York in 2016 and Director of Yad Vashem in 2021. He is concerned about Palestinian human rights and considers the ability of Palestinians to lead normal lives to be a moral and political problem for Israel. At the same time, he wants the entire Jewish people in the Land of Israel and seems unconcerned about the legality of the settlements: 'What does "legal" mean? [...] It means the government says: You build it, and everything will be okay.'⁸⁰ Dayan is 'willing to give the Palestinians everything except their own state or the right to vote in a binational state' and is also prepared 'to commit injustices for the sake of the Jewish people's existence'.⁸¹ Former Hamas member and now school director in Ramallah, Jalal Rumana,

argues that Jews have caused 'a second Holocaust for the Palestinian people' and that the only solution is 'for the Jews to go back to the countries they came from' or to a third state.⁸² Abu Ashraf, who defines himself as a Jerusalemite, but lives in East Jerusalem beyond the separation wall, is subjected to the 'humiliation, the uncertainty' of the checkpoint whenever he wishes to enter Jerusalem.⁸³ Sarah Eliash, 'one of the most influential women of the settlers movement' and someone who 'integrate[s] universal concepts of morality in [her] position', does not 'lose sleep' over seeing Arabs at the checkpoint. Along with giving Palestinians more rights, she believes 'we must help Palestinians emigrate from here with dignity'.⁸⁴ Not dissimilarly, Yosef, from the Itama yeshiva, believes that every human has 'the right to live in dignity [...] as long as he recognizes the Jews' control of the state'.⁸⁵ In what is almost light relief, Yusuf Jassem from Barta'a tells Baram that in his town, 'no one is interested in politics. With us, people compete over who makes more money'.⁸⁶

Baram's shift to documentary is a rejection of the torpor with which *World Shadow* finishes. He seeks to affirm the importance of hearing people's stories to transform an intransigent political context. His choice of non-fiction allows him to take the political stance that, in his view, writing a good novel precludes. He also curtails the scope for the play of fantasy and the nature of the enjoyment it offers. He shifts his attention from fictional exploration of the 'terrible elasticity of the human soul' to representing a complex contemporary reality in less mediated form.⁸⁷ This is no step from the apolitical to the political, since all culture is political: 'When you publish something in a certain atmosphere, in a certain world with a certain struggle in a certain state, then this book becomes part of a political discourse and a political zeitgeist. This is inevitable even if you want to deny it'.⁸⁸ By moving away from fiction and play, Baram traverses from the realm of ethics, a space in which the very concepts of what determines the good is explored, to that of morality, the realm of codes and practice. His non-fiction texts make a moral intervention, directing questions of complicity, personal responsibility and the possibility of protest to himself, Israelis and Palestinians.

As with the novels, Baram juxtaposes different perspectives, leaving the reader to make her own evaluation. Nevertheless, he makes his views evident, writing that the 'perpetuation of the status quo is a real danger to those who do not wish to live in an apartheid state'.⁸⁹ He is one such person, referring in the film to the 'Apartheid in the West Bank'. In response to the objection that this is too severe a description, he repeats that 'to me this a clear-cut Apartheid'.⁹⁰ Baram is far from confident that change will occur, fearing that nothing is

being done to end the occupation, not least because Israel is growing stronger with it. But he seeks 'a much more sincere discourse' that would also challenge the orthodoxy of the political left within which he grew up, that rules out the right of return of Palestinians and advocates a two-state solution.⁹¹ Here too, those who 'are supposedly liberal' cannot speak of 1948 because to do so undermines their view of themselves as 'the good guys in all of this, that they have the moral upper hand'.⁹² The Oslo Accord and all attempts at a solution will fail if discussions continue to revolve around 1967 while the fundamental significance of 1948, including the right of return for the Palestinians, continues to be ignored. Baram concludes that any solution 'must begin with [...] the 1948 war and the Palestinian Nakba, then with the 1967 occupation, and finally with the present reality'.⁹³ For him, such a beginning is being forged in the 'Two States One Homeland' meetings that he participates in. This is a joint Israeli and Palestinian civil society group, originally conceived by Awni al-Mashni and Meron Rapoport, that seeks 'an acceptable midway point between the one-state concept and the familiar 1990s two-state solution'.⁹⁴

Baram is, of course, in control of the persona that he wishes to present and that serves his moral viewpoint. This includes not elevating himself above his context. He is firmly within the frame, subject to his interlocutors' disagreement and criticism. In the most incisive example, Jalal Rumana tells Baram 'You are my enemy.' After interviewing Sara Haetzni, a settler who is intent on not ending the occupation, Michael Alalu (presumably) asks Baram, '*Do you think you're more ethical than Sara Haetzni?*'⁹⁵ Baram, like Haetzni, is honest about his role in the occupation, replying that they are both responsible for what is going on. This responsibility is emphasized in the concluding images of the film, which show Baram and his family enjoying what looks like Israel's Independence Day celebrations, with the Israeli flag dominating the public space. These shots seem to affirm the wellbeing of the Jewish family within Israel, and contrast with the preceding emphasis on political divisions and the threat of conflict. Yet by depicting the apparent ease with which he can inhabit celebratory national narratives Baram is, unlike the privileged protesters of *World Shadow*, showing how aware he is of his own privilege. The shots vividly demonstrate the immediacy of 'Israel's indifference to the Palestinian issue'.⁹⁶ However, the ubiquity of the flags at the end of the film also serves another crucial purpose: it is a statement that the national narrative cannot be claimed by any one group. Baram's vision of what Israel might become is as valid as the growing identification of Israel and its flag with Jewish ethno-nationalism. Thus, the final images serve as a seismograph, warning of eruptions to come. The Israeli flag was

central to the demonstrations of 2023, at which Israelis protested, and counter-protested, against the government's judicial overhaul. Both sides used the Israeli flag to claim legitimacy for their national narrative, a narrative in which the occupation of the West Bank and the Palestinian issue was 'a blind spot' or 'elephant in the room' for defenders of Israeli liberal democracy⁹⁷ – the blind spot explicitly raised in *A Land Without Borders* and encapsulated in Baram's question when he visits the Itamar outposts: 'Where are the Arabs?'⁹⁸ *A Land Without Borders*, the book and the film, represent both a powerful articulation of Baram's desire for 'things here to be better' and a political intervention to achieve that hope.⁹⁹ But from the later perspective of the massacre of Israeli citizens by Hamas on 7 October 2023 and the subsequent Israel–Gaza war, *A Land Without Borders*, with its many conflicting voices, is like a herald of this later violence. It becomes a bleak ironic echo of *Good People's* peace parade before the next terrible escalation of violence.

Notes

- 1 Nir Baram, interview, *Cultuur* 247, 2015, (7:56). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=E1C8-OfQdSI> (accessed 13 July 2021).
- 2 Nir Baram, *A Land Without Borders*, trans. Jessica Cohen (London: Text Publishing, 2017), 66–7.
- 3 Nir Baram, quoted by Ethan Bronner, 'Israelis and Palestinians hail writers and the word, just not with one another', *The New York Times*, 7 May 2010, A8.
- 4 Nir Baram, interview, 2010, (00:40). <https://vimeo.com/11528350> (accessed 9 August 2023).
- 5 Nir Baram, quoted by Sophie Cohen, 'Nir Baram Talks Tachlis about *A Land Without Borders*', *Forward*, 5 September 2017. <https://forward.com/community/381818/nir-baram-talks-tachlis-about-a-land-without-borders/> (accessed 9 August 2023).
- 6 Nir Baram, interview, *Haaretz Weekly*, 20 September 2022, (21:50). <https://www.haaretz.com/israel-news/podcasts/2022-09-20/ty-article-podcast/is-anything-still-left-of-the-israeli-left-listen-to-nir-baram/00000183-5ae9-d216-a9df-7eeb95af0000> (accessed 9 August 2023).
- 7 Nir Baram, 'Nir Baram spricht über *Gute Leute*', *Interview Lounge*, 8 February 2013, (1:37). <https://interview-lounge.tv/nir-baram-spricht-uber-gute-leute/> (accessed 9 August 2023).
- 8 Baram, *Haaretz Weekly* (22:23).
- 9 *Ibid.*, (25:14).

- 10 Nir Baram, 'Nir Baram, writer in residence November 2012', *Nederlands Letterenfonds*, 2013, (3:23). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0CFwwen7tY> (accessed 13 July 2021).
- 11 Baram, *Cultuur 247*, (12:30–13.30).
- 12 Nir Baram, 'On *Good People*', 2016, (0:57–1.22). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=20mukY6pmG8> (accessed 19 July 2021).
- 13 Nir Baram, 'Gute Leute Roman von Nir Baram part 5', interview, Jüdisches Museum Hohenems, 28 September 2013, (2:54 and 4:07). <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vmx791s-BNk> (accessed 19 July 2021).
- 14 Baram, *Cultuur 247*, (16:20).
- 15 Nir Baram, *Good People*, trans. Jeffrey Green (London: Text Publishing, 2016), 339; 323.
- 16 Ibid., 165.
- 17 Ibid., 161.
- 18 Ibid., 251.
- 19 Ibid., 170.
- 20 Ibid., 187.
- 21 Ibid., 297.
- 22 Ibid., 318.
- 23 Ibid., 299.
- 24 Ibid., 141.
- 25 Ibid., 287.
- 26 Ibid., 146.
- 27 Ibid., 151.
- 28 Ibid., 309.
- 29 Ibid., 303.
- 30 Baram., *Cultuur 247*, (16:55).
- 31 Baram, *Good People*, 362.
- 32 Ibid., 359.
- 33 Ibid., 286.
- 34 Ibid., 147; 89.
- 35 Ibid., 13; 116.
- 36 Ibid., 394; 395.
- 37 Ibid., 421.
- 38 Ibid., 406.
- 39 Robert Gordon, 'The Wages of Destruction: The Making and Breaking of the Nazi Economy. By Adam Tooze', *The Journal of Economic History* 69, no. 1 (2009): 312–16, 316.
- 40 Megargee, *War of Annihilation*, 28.
- 41 Ibid., 30.

- 42 Baram, *Good People*, 180.
- 43 Ingo Haar, 'German *Ostforschung* and Antisemitism', in *German Scholars and Ethnic Cleansing, 1919–1945*, ed. Ingo Haar and Michael Fahlbusch (New York: Berghahn, 2007), 2–3.
- 44 Ibid., 18.
- 45 Ibid., 19. Haar's wider conclusion is a scathing criticism of post-war academic historians who were involved in the deportation of Jews and Poles but retained an 'eloquent silence' about their roles. His criticism of the detrimental effect they had on post-war German historiography by then researching the very deportations they had participated in, is by extension a severe criticism of academic complicity.
- 46 Michael Fahlbusch, 'The role and impact of German ethnopolitical experts in the SS Reich Security Main Office', in Haar and Fahlbusch, *German Scholars*, 33.
- 47 Ibid., 35.
- 48 Robert Gellately, 'Review: *Vom Generalplan Ost zum Generalsiedlungsplan* by Czeslaw Madajczyk; *Der "Generalplan Ost." Hauptlinien der nationalsozialistischen Planungs- und Vernichtungspolitik* by Mechtild Rössler and Sabine Schleiermacher', *Central European History* 29, no. 2 (1996): 270–74.
- 49 Michael Burleigh, *Germany Turns Eastwards: A Study of Ostforschung in the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 10.
- 50 Eric J. Schmaltz and Samuel D. Sinner, 'The Nazi Ethnographic Research of Georg Leibbrandt and Karl Stumpp in Ukraine, and its North American Legacy', in Haar and Fahlbusch, *German Scholars*, 53.
- 51 Ibid., 53.
- 52 Baram, *Cultuur* 247, (29:30).
- 53 Ibid., 53.
- 54 Ibid., 93; 236.
- 55 Stefan Schwarzkopf, 'In Search of the Consumer: The History of Market Research from 1890 to 1960', in *The Routledge Companion to Marketing History*, ed. D. G. Brian Jones and Mark Tadajewski (Abingdon: Routledge, 2016), 64.
- 56 Jonathan Wiesen, *Creating the Nazi Marketplace: Commerce and Consumption in the Third Reich* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 219.
- 57 Ibid., 223.
- 58 Wiesen argues that the GfK was not particularly Nazified and that its leaders 'had little use for the regime's biological racism'. However, Wilhelm Mann, president of the GfK 1935–45 and 1949–55, was an NSDAP and SA member, and as Director of IG Farben he knew about the use of Zyklon-B gas and about the experiments conducted by Joseph Mengele. See: Schwarzkopf, 'In Search of the Consumer', 77; Wiesen, *Nazi Marketplace*, 189.
- 59 Wiesen, *Nazi Marketplace*, 225.
- 60 Ibid., 226.

- 61 Ibid., 177.
- 62 Ibid., 59.
- 63 Baram, *Cultuur* 247, (7:34).
- 64 Nir Baram, *World Shadow*, trans. Jessica Cohen (London: Text Publishing, 2022), 212.
- 65 Ibid., 361.
- 66 Ibid., 185–6.
- 67 Ibid., 238.
- 68 Ibid., 317; 318.
- 69 Ibid., 317.
- 70 Ibid., 16–17.
- 71 Ibid., 17.
- 72 Ibid.
- 73 Ibid., 243.
- 74 Baram, *Cultuur* 247 (10:38–10:59).
- 75 Baram, *World Shadow*, 246.
- 76 Ibid., 319.
- 77 Baram, *Good People*, 44.
- 78 Michael Alalu, director, Nir Baram, writer, *A Land Without Borders* (2017).
- 79 Baram, *Land Without Borders*, 29.
- 80 Ibid., 37.
- 81 Ibid., 50; 49.
- 82 Ibid., 72–3.
- 83 Ibid., 171.
- 84 Ibid., 133; 134; 135.
- 85 Ibid., 145.
- 86 Ibid., 237.
- 87 Baram, *Good People*, 220.
- 88 Baram, *Cultuur* 247, (30:37).
- 89 Baram, *Land Without Borders*, 283.
- 90 Alalu and Baram, *Land Without Borders*, (38:53); (39:04).
- 91 Ibid., (52:27).
- 92 Ibid., (51:45).
- 93 Baram, *Land Without Borders*, 283.
- 94 Ibid., 202. 'A Land for All' (formerly 'Two States, One Homeland') was awarded the Luxembourg Peace Prize for Outstanding Peace Support prize in 2020/2021.
- 95 Alalu and Baram, *Land Without Borders*, (10: 06); (22:44).
- 96 Baram, *Land Without Borders*, 29.
- 97 Dov Waxman, 'Israel enters a dangerous period', *The Conversation*, 14 February 2023. <https://theconversation.com/israel-enters-a-dangerous-period-public-protests-swell-over-netanyahu-plan-to-limit-the-power-of-the-israeli-supreme->

court-199917 (accessed 24 November 2023); Omer Bartov, 'Both Netanyahu's cabinet and Hamas see this crisis as an opportunity', *The New Statesman*, 29 November 2023. <https://www.newstatesman.com/ideas/2023/11/benjamin-netanyahu-cabinet-hamas-crisis-opportunity> (accessed 14 December 2023). See also the original letter and petition entitled 'The Elephant in the Room', published on 4 August 2023. <https://sites.google.com/view/israel-elephant-in-the-room/aug-23-elephant-in-the-room-petition>.

98 Baram, *Land Without Borders*, 223.

99 Alalu and Baram, *Land Without Borders*, (59:06).

Flight or fight: Olga Tokarczuk

Olga Tokarczuk exemplifies Nir Baram's point that 'when you publish something in a certain atmosphere, in a certain world with a certain struggle in a certain state, then this book becomes part of a political discourse and a political zeitgeist'.¹ In her case, the state is Poland and the struggle is between 'the liberal social projects after 1989' and 'acute identification – with the nation, with primitive patriotism, with childish religiosity'.² Like Baram, Tokarczuk has been politically active, protesting against the growing authoritarianism of the Law and Justice Party (PiS), which came to power in Poland in 2015. This right-wing, populist party advocates nationalist discourses that construct Poland as a catholic, culturally conservative and ethnically homogeneous country that needs to defend itself against the liberalizing elites of the EU. They are backed 'by sympathetic smaller parties, ultra-Catholic media, nationalist youth organisations and an assortment of cranks and cynics who share a hostility to liberalism in all its guises'.³ This hostility is justified and naturalized by situating it within long-standing traditions of Polish historical consciousness.

Contemporary narratives of Polish history have been 'shaped by nineteenth-century European Romanticism set against the decline, fall, and occupation of Poland as a state', or by what Dirk Uffermann conceptualizes as the 'idyllic' and 'traumatic' memory modes.⁴ 'Traumatic memory' originated in the notion of 'the guilt of the fathers', the Polish nobility 'whose uncompromising individualism' enabled the three neighbouring empires of Prussia, Russia and Austria to partition Polish territory between 1772–95, resulting in the elimination of the sovereign state of Poland.⁵ There followed further partitions,⁶ culminating in the 1939 division of Poland between Germany and the Soviet Union, as well as the subsequent occupation by Germany, loss of territories in the East after 1945 and oppression by the Soviet Union. This 'traumatic' mode of historical consciousness supports a narrative of Poland as 'eternally under siege' from enemies, however conceived: 'it could be Russia or the European Union, it

could be multiculturalism, it could be homosexuality, it could be western consumerism, it could be Jews.⁷ The focus on Polish victimhood also facilitates the marginalization or denial of Poland's role as colonizer in its relations towards Ukraine, Belarus and Lithuania, and specific engagement with the history of the Holocaust.⁸ Romanticism, or the 'idyllic' mode, offers a compensatory, redemptive narrative to this history of catastrophe. The nineteenth-century romantic poet, Adam Mickiewicz, idealized Poland as the 'Christ of Nations' whose suffering served a moral purpose. National resistance to the loss of state independence assumed mythical status, articulated culturally in a 'love for a spiritual heritage' as well as in 'the ideal of military service to the nation.'⁹ This nostalgic construction of history provides a yardstick by which action, morality, art and history are evaluated, since all should be primarily attuned to the good of the nation. Thus, both the PiS's 'insubordination, the lack of solidarity [...] and rebellions against EU policies' and 'the messianic belief that Poles will bring the moral transformation of the West' can be read as manifestations, and certainly instrumentalizations, of Polish Romanticism.¹⁰

In contrast, modernization narratives that take Western European forms of secular democracy as a model run counter to such a nostalgic gaze. They present a vision of Poland as integrated in Europe, international in outlook and secular, and open to free movement and trade. However, following the disappointment of high expectations of the European modernizing process, there has been an illiberal turn against both liberal democracy and the advocates of Western-looking modernization, particularly liberal and intellectual elites. They are cast by the PiS and their supporters as heirs to the individualist nobility who betrayed Poland at the end of the eighteenth century and criticized as having benefited through positions of high office from the post-1989 settlement. Defenders and advocates of liberal secularism are dismissed as privileging rights-based values and 'a new mixture of cultures and races' over 'love of country, faith in God and normal family life between a woman and man.'¹¹

Tokarczuk is a prime example of this elite and has been targeted as a writer who undermines a Polish identity rooted in tradition (as defined by the ultra-catholic and nationalist conservatives). In 2011 the PiS chairman, Jarosław Kaczyński, accused Tokarczuk of being 'bought by Germany' in his book *Poland of our Dreams*, because of her status in Germany at the time.¹² Opposition to her was further intensified when in 2015 she very publicly rejected the history of Poland as 'tolerant' and 'open', claiming that this was 'invented history'. Rather, she asserted that 'we did horrific things as colonizers, the national majority which suppressed the minority, as slave-owners or murderers of Jews'.¹³

Her challenge was part of her acceptance speech for the prestigious Nike Award for *The Books of Jacob* (2014), a novel that through the figure of Jacob Frank (1726–91) presents a period in Polish history that was culturally and religiously diverse and in which she explores questions of orthodoxy and heterodoxy through multiple perspectives. Increasingly, Tokarczuk was constructed in the right-wing media as ‘a recreant to the nation and diligent agent of foreign forces’,¹⁴ an image that was maintained following her Booker International award in 2018 and the award of the Nobel Prize for literature in 2019 (awarded for 2018). She and her literary achievements have been denigrated in various ways: by criticizing the Nobel Prize as ‘socialist’ and ‘left-wing’; by belittling her in order to undermine the significance of her literary works; through attacks in social media; and by dismissing her criticism of growing authoritarianism in Poland as mere hatred of the homeland.¹⁵

It is no surprise, therefore, that in interview in 2017, Tokarczuk should describe an increasingly violent situation in Poland, in which fanatics are resorting to lies and propaganda to build a xenophobic world in which women, strangers and those who think differently are excluded. This ‘national and fascist vision of the world’, in which religion too is used as a foundation for ideologies, presents a threat to freedom. She advocates ‘resolute action’ to prevent the dismantling of the democratic order.¹⁶ As is clear from the interview, Tokarczuk is outspoken in her political views, in her criticism of racism and inequality and her defence of human rights and the rights of minorities. Like Baram, she sees art as having a crucial political function, not as political commentary or in the form of committed literature, but because it violates boundaries and ‘teaches people to think, asks questions, forces them to reflect’. This approach is anathema for those for whom art should serve the construction of a defined identity, for the themes of Tokarczuk’s work undermine the notion of a homogeneous Polish, or any other, identity. They demonstrate an interest in cross-cultural boundaries, complex forms of identity and religious and ideological heterogeneity. Thus, although her work is not directly concerned with perpetration and complicity under National Socialism, it raises crucial questions about resistance to endemic violence and the nature of resistance that can be achieved from the margins. As in Baram’s work, perpetration and complicity are features of pervasive social norms, be they sustained by religion, intellectual traditions or networks underpinned by capitalism. In relation to these norms and interlocking networks, it becomes difficult even to define what complicity or perpetration mean, since the terms assume at least some consensus on what constitutes a crime. The dilemma of the Nazi detective, who has no recourse to another authority ‘beyond’ the corrupt

state, is in Tokarczuk's work extended to the insidious hegemony of social and cultural values that are accepted as more universally legitimate.

Tokarczuk's response is to root her critique in marginal figures. Here, I consider two of her novels in which a counter-position to social norms is presented through a female narrator. In *Flights* (originally published in Polish in 2007) the marginal perspective is associated with what is unusual and freakish. The narrator proposes that it is in these 'abnormal' exceptions that a different understanding of the world is reached. The more overtly political *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (originally published in Polish in 2009) reinforces the privileged outsider perspective, with the eccentric female narrator questioning the very philosophical and ethical foundations of enlightenment Western culture. However, although in both texts the figure of the socially overlooked but potentially wise woman questions orthodoxy and, as Tokarczuk hopes, forces people to reflect, the figure remains morally ambivalent. The narrators' moral ambiguity plays out in the narrative form. In *Flights* the 'constellation' form of putting together very different stories and anecdotes undermines claims of polyphony and disguises the ways in which the reading experience is constrained by the narrator's perspective. In *Drive Your Plow*, the comic framework masks the futility of resistance fuelled by solipsism.

Disruptive flights

Flights does not present a coherent narrative. It consists of 116 titled prose sections of varying length, ranging from a couple of lines to many pages, which are interspersed with twelve reproductions of maps. A very loose structure is given by the narrator's itinerary of museum visits, listed at the end of the book, all of which are museums that house collections or displays of the human body. Her itinerary is, however, barely discernible, for, as critics have observed, the text is like a cabinet of curiosities, with each section like one of the specimens. The specimens are eclectic but not random, for they relate to the narrator's 'Recurrent Detoxification Syndrome', the insistent need to return to or search for 'all things spoiled, flawed, defective, broken'.¹⁷ This includes anything that 'deviates from the norm [...] for teratology and for freaks', for it is in freaks 'that Being breaks through to the surface and reveals its true nature' (23). 'Anything that deviates from the norm' is a very wide category, and the sections are consequently extremely broad in their range. They also vary in the narrative focalization. Some sections take the form of conventional narrative fiction, with

the third-person heterodiegetic narrator relating more or less unusual events. These include the story of Kunicki, whose wife and son disappear for three days when they are on holiday on Vis, the story of Annushka, who leaves her Moscow home for a few days and lives as a vagrant, and Dr Blau's travels in search of the perfect plastination methods. Other sections recount episodes from the lives of historical people, such as Filip Verheyen, the Flemish surgeon and anatomist, or Chopin's sister, Ludwika, who smuggles his heart back to Warsaw in a jar of alcohol. In some sections the narrator tells of her experiences and observations of travel, like her encounters with travel psychologists, other travellers or her 'pilgrimages' (274) to anatomy museums.

The narrator privileges freaks and abnormal events or things because of the greater access they give to the truth of being. In tandem, she extols movement as a mode of being: 'a thing in motion will always be better than a thing at rest [...] change will always be a nobler thing than permanence' (9). For her, movement denotes 'real life' (61), but not all motion is equal. The novel explores three types of movement: travel that is simply a means to arrive somewhere, including ending up back at a point of departure; motion associated with the radical rejection of society and its static norms, measurements and regular patterns; and, finally, the modern travel of liminal spaces that offers the potential for a different perspective on time and experience. Those who travel in order to arrive and return, like tourists, are barbarians, for they 'simply go to destinations or conduct raids' (58). They are acting contrary to the quality of fluidity, which is what makes people civilized. This barbaric movement is associated with straight lines. Thus, Eryk's work as a ferryman is 'a parody of travel', with the straight lines of the navigation buoys offering 'a perfidious geometry' that is humiliating and 'makes us into idiots' (98).

In radical contrast to the constraints of this constricting geometry is the movement through which people remove themselves from society and its expectations. Such a step is most succinctly encapsulated in Eryk's sudden decision to navigate the morning ferry out to sea. Here, life asserts itself in Eryk's deviation from straight lines. Although this will mean another prison sentence for Eryk, the narrator refuses any notion that his gesture is futile. She compares the fluctuations in fortune of his life to the movement of waves, thereby affirming his brief rebellion as part of a fluid motion. Another radical example is that of Annushka, who one day does not return to the family flat where she cares for her chronically ill son. She spends five days travelling around the Moscow metro, happy because this mindless travel makes her feel free and allows her to shed all thoughts, cares and expectations. On the fifth evening of this vagrant

existence, her grief about her son's condition and the normal life it has denied him leads her to attack a girl who is mistreating her horse. She is arrested for disturbing the peace and when she is released she returns home.

The importance of Annushka's vagrancy for her to feel both happiness and grief is reinforced by her significant encounter with a shrouded runaway. This woman stands at Kievsky Station cursing the passers-by and is a modern manifestation of a wanderer, also known as a *beguny* or *stranniki*. This group emerged from the Old Believers, Eastern Orthodox Christians who refused to conform to the liturgical reforms in the Russian Orthodox Church in the mid-seventeenth century. In the belief that the Antichrist was impersonating the tsar and governing the 'static world,' they moved constantly and rejected the bureaucratic developments of the state: 'In order to thwart the Antichrist, one must renounce his identity – destroy documents and constantly change location.'¹⁸ The shrouded woman articulates these views, seeing the traps of the Antichrist in any stable place and everything 'that is defined,' be that institutions, things that are displayed or labelled, or anything that involves hierarchy. 'Move,' she says, 'Get going. Blessed is he who leaves' (267–8). The wanderer reflects the narrator's affirmation of motion as always better than being at rest. Her view, associated as it is with spiritual insight, is given particular textual authority because the section in which Annushka pursues her own flight and meets the wanderer bears the same title as the book, *Bieguni*.

The spiritual importance of leaving, of departing from the norms of stability, categorization and modern bureaucracies, is reinforced in the section 'Kairos'. This tells the story of Karen, the religious studies professor and her much older husband, a professor of Greek history, who is giving lectures on a luxury Greek cruise. The narrator is on the cruise and recalls her favourite lecture about little-known Hellenic gods. She specifically names Kairos, lauding him as the god who operates 'at the intersection between place and time, at that moment that opens up for just a little while, to situate that single, right, unrepeatable possibility' (394–5). This unique moment is the meeting point of linear, human time and circular, divine time. Here again, as with the wanderer, a form of spiritual affirmation is proffered from the margins, conferring blessing on 'leaving' linearity and experiencing the singular possibility that opens up as an exception to the norm. Women seem particularly attuned to the potential represented by Kairos. It is Karen who suggests a lecture on gods who have been ignored but who have therefore uniquely retained 'divine volatility and ungraspability, a fluidity of form' (394). Kunicki's wife disappears with their son for forty-nine hours, saying that they got lost and then spent the time eating grapes, swimming and

sleeping in a stone hut. She has 'Kairos' written on the back of a museum ticket and sees her disappearance as something that 'just happens' (344) and does not need further explanation. In contrast, Kunicki cannot accept an inexplicable gap in knowledge and is consumed by suspicion and the drive to fix meaning, not least by determining a precise definition of 'Kairos'.

The narrator's fascination with Kairos is another manifestation of her interest in deviations from the norm and the fluidity and uniqueness of 'unrepeatable possibility'. She imbues her own experience of travel with an aura of alternative perception. Thus, with any journey she undertakes she 'fall[s] off the radar' by being in some liminal space between the point of departure and arrival, perhaps like the particle that 'may exist in two places at once' (58). A traveller's time is transformed into 'a lot of times in one', encompassing the order of conventional time, the 'hectic' or 'lazy' time of cities and prairies' (59), the lost hours of flying or the 'one moment, a great, peaceful Now' (232) of the flight that both leaves Irkutsk and arrives in Moscow at 8.00 am. She values her experience of travel as integral to the encounters and observations that in her view manifest 'real life' (61) through the 'errors and blunders of creation' (24). By collecting and exhibiting eclectic textual specimens collected on her journeys in her own novelistic 'cabinet of curiosities', she positions herself on the side of the 'embarrassing oops' that 'shamelessly debunks [...] illusion' (23). So, although the narrator does not share the gloomy mood of the melancholic observer, she retains his claim to having a 'keener eye for the truth'.¹⁹

It is her concern with truth that leads to the narrator's disillusion with psychology, her first career, unable to reconcile herself to its methodological assumption that individuals are constant and predictable. She is sceptical of its claim to be able to understand the world through statistics and measurement. Her alternative approach to knowledge is manifested precisely in her writing. It is not typical of a 'real' writer, but rather depicts life as fragmentary, as 'incomplete stories' or in 'cross sections' (19), drawing on different genres and mixing fact and fiction. As a result, 'it would be almost impossible to reach any conclusions as to the whole' (19). The narrator articulates Tokarczuk's views here, who has described her writing as a way of looking on relations between people from above, which she also sees as incorporating a 'multiplicity of points of view'.²⁰ She describes being fascinated by 'the amalgamation of various stories from her life and experiences, superimposed to create some contrapuntal image', without 'the meaning of the resulting image [...] [being] pre-inscribed in the novel'.²¹ The ethical potential of what Tokarczuk labels a 'constellation novel' has received considerable critical praise. For Benjamin Paloff, the novel comes close

to realizing Bakhtin's notion of a polyphonic novel, in which characters and plot are not organized around an authorial design. Such openness and indeterminacy of characters and events requires readers 'not to read "for" anything at all' but 'to listen'.²² Przemyslaw Czaplinski and Bartosz Wozniak argue that the unfinished form of her writing undermines epistemic certainty and requires the reader to create temporary and unstable 'constellations' as she reads.²³ In the freedom to identify new constellations and relations of connection, and the desire to disrupt conventional norms of travel, geography and perceptions of time, *Flights* heralds the ethical promise of worlding; ways of thinking and imagining 'along other scales that are sub- or supranational: the local, transnational, ecological or global' and which challenge conventional hierarchical models through attention to different flows of inter-connectedness.²⁴

Certainly, Tokarczuk invites us to listen to varied perspectives and be aware of different types of special and temporal connections. Frequently we hear the point of view of a woman at the fringes, so that oppressive norms and hierarchies become particularly visible. The narrator herself has such an oblique gaze. Her fascination with the history of plastination and anatomy inevitably draws attention to the values and power dynamics that underlie the preservation of bodies, how they are displayed and who gets credit for contributing to knowledge. The young woman preserved by Ruysch is 'some Italian whore' (206) who was hanged for killing her baby. Her value comes from her body continuing to satisfy male desire, now in more intellectual form, with Ruysch dissecting her in front of an eager audience of men. Similarly objectified as a curiosity is the body of Angelo Soliman, born Mmadi Make, who was captured as a child in his home in what is now Nigeria, and sold into slavery in Marseilles. Soliman was highly educated. He became a companion of princes, was highly respected in the cultured circles of Vienna, was friends with Emperor Joseph II and became grand master of the 'True Concord' masonic lodge. After his death in 1796, his skin was preserved and stuffed, then dressed and displayed as a 'savage' in the cabinet of curiosities that Joseph had established. Soliman's daughter, Josefine Soliman von Feuchtersleben, petitioned Francis I, Emperor of Austria for the remains of her father be returned to the family for a Christian burial. Tokarczuk imaginatively re-creates these petitions in three letters, presenting Josephine as a 'Fighter' against the racist Hapsburg Empire, embodied in its emperor.²⁵

In contrast to the post-mortem humiliation of Angelo Soliman, a brief section describes how the Maori mummify the heads of dead family members as objects of mourning, a spiritual and communal honouring of the dead. In complementary ways, these examples serve to question the motivation for

plastination, the objectification of specimens on display and the degradation of certain categories of humans (black, prostitute, deformed). Such objectification continues in the present. Blau works in the Berlin Museum of the History of Medicine and is determined to find the perfect preserving technique. However, his endeavours are inseparable from his sexual predation. He seeks out opportunities to photograph vaginas, seeing his students as a 'natural hunting ground' (140) and taking a photo after sex to add to his collection of 'dozens, maybe hundreds' (134) of images. Each vagina is different, and the collection reflects his bigger dream to preserve bodies as a testament to the uniqueness of every individual. He imagines anyone being able to preserve their body rather than 'destroy what is sacred' (135). But uniqueness or sacredness does not extend to older vaginas. Blau is preoccupied and repelled by Taina Mole's ageing body even though, at nearly sixty, the age difference between them is not great. As becomes clear from his rejection of her vagina, some bodies are more worthy of preservation than others.

An older woman, like a vagrant, a woman of colour or a prostitute, is also pushed to the margins. As the unnamed biologist remarks: 'all you have to do to become invisible is be a woman of a certain age [...] it's automatic' (308). Ruysch's daughter, Charlotta, is unseen at fifty and will 'not go down in history' (223) despite her important contribution to her father's collection. Nevertheless, marginalization and invisibility can be empowering. In Karen's view it reflects the reality that men are more dependent on women and that left to themselves they would 'atrophy faster' (378). For the narrator, the invisibility of being an older woman is fundamental to her writing, for she can 'move around like a ghost', observing and listening to people who are unaware of her, but whose words she will 'soon pronounce for them' (25).

Solipsistic flights

This promise to pronounce for others who do not even know she is listening points to a dimension of *Flights* that sets a limit to the unreserved ethical promise of Tokarczuk's 'constellation novel'. The text is infused with the primacy of the self. The narrator's alternative approach to knowledge is, as she indicates, dependent on radical solipsism. She makes no secret of this, describing writing as 'a play staged by the self for the self' (19). As for listening, she admits that when working as a psychologist she was bored by others' confessions and would much rather talk about herself. The narrator's different understanding of the world is

thus a form of extreme subjectivity, best described in the conclusion of the travel psychologists whom the narrator, ironically, is so fascinated by: 'selfhood has grown and gained a foothold [...] Now it swells and annexes the world' (181). The world is comprehended not through the methods of psychology but the extension of an unchallenged self that imposes a different type of coherence. This swelling of the narrator's self is manifested in microcosm in her categorization (the wanderer would not like that) of the stages of disorientation she has passed through in her extensive travels. First, she thinks she is at home when she wakes up, then there is a period of not knowing where she is, until finally she achieves the pinnacle of "It Doesn't Matter Where I am." It makes no difference. I'm here' (403). She views this development as progress. Her emphasis on the insignificance of place and its negligible impact on the self reflects the narrator's broader tendency to value "people like us – restless people" (89) as well as types of motion that affirm her understanding of the world.

The narrator's self-alignment with privileged motion obscures the ways in which her own movements differ from the radical departures of Eryk, Kunicki's wife, Annushka and the wanderer. The narrator may be disparaging of tourists, but she is one of the passengers on the luxury Hellenic cruise. She may scorn her parents' holidays because they returned to a settled life each time, but it is by viewing her home as though it is a hotel that she becomes aware of new details. She may dislike the 'perfidious geometry' of straight lines, but she is constantly using the network of global flight paths. In order to inhabit a position that aligns her with positive motion and the ability to perceive 'real life', the narrator then idealizes the process of flying. Yet, as James Wood argues, Tokarczuk 'effaces the labour of travel' in *Flights* and 'is sometimes prone to whitewash even the first world travel experience'.²⁶ She eulogizes airports as a special category of city state, with remarkable amenities and a soundtrack of airplane engines that closes 'with an amen descending into landing' (63). She praises the beauty of airport maps and of flight attendants, whose smiles hold a 'kind a promise that perhaps we will be born anew' (410). In contrast, sleeper trains are a source of embarrassment because they are designed for cowards who fear flying and 'safely [escort]' (69) their passengers back to their lives.

Unlike Eryk, Annushka and the wanderer, the narrator can afford to fly, to pursue her own itinerary or go on luxury cruises, as can many of those she encounters or writes about. She is like the widower who, after his wife's death, visits any location that bears his wife's name, Ruth. This is what qualifies the widower as a curiosity in the narrator's eyes. Yet he finances his travels using the payout from his wife's life insurance, which is curiously un-freakish.

Critics have observed that the narrator is concerned with 'voluntary travel, mostly around Europe [...] rather than a tale of forced migration and exile',²⁷ and that she 'mingles with the implicitly white populations she visits'.²⁸ But she does not actually even mingle, personally or culturally. People are interesting in as far as they mirror her and her interests. Eryk's life is one of adventure and misadventure and he learns English in prison through the sole medium of Melville's *Moby Dick*. This novel is one of the narrator's two guiding texts in life. Another alter-ego for the narrator, Menchu, is a writer who earns a living by being a tour guide for American groups travelling to Arabic countries. Like the narrator, who has learned to write wherever she is (trains, waiting rooms, hotel stairwells), using whatever materials available (postcards, napkins, book margins), Menchu writes down her ideas whenever she has them. She too undermines the importance of place, excusing her lack of specialization in Arabic cultures by claiming 'It's just one world' (112). The narrator concurs, commenting that it is not specialist knowledge that is needed but imagination. Menchu entertains the groups with stories embellished with 'some Arab colour', for which even Borges is a good source, until she finally 'simply stopped bothering' (113) about facts. We are then offered two of Menchu's tales, which are dripping with the 'Arab colour' of stereotypes: a timeless past of desert rulers, harems, court intrigue, tribal and religious conflict, silks and spicy fragrances.

The narrator's encounters with people are superficial and transient. She eschews meeting her compatriots when she is abroad, preferring anonymity and the position of observer. Unpleasant experiences do not challenge her or provoke reflection. Rather, she states that 'If something hurts me, I erase it from my mental map' (103). Yet even when she dips in and out of people's lives, a type of erasure occurs. The most marked example is Annushka, who is only interesting at the point when she leaves the house for a few days. The burden of responsibility she bears for her disabled son is not the stuff of anecdote. The focus on Annushka's absence undoubtedly fits the narrator's fascination with the combination of 'blessed is he who leaves' and the singularity of 'kairos'. However, it demotes her care for her dependent son and the story of a family that has been emotionally devastated by a child's chronic illness. Indeed, Annushka's husband left for two years, doing a job that has traumatized him, probably in the military, and that pays for Petya's medication and a nurse. This is not interesting movement. Similarly, Petya's pain and illness, his father's trauma and the demands of care are not forms of being flawed or broken that would qualify as freakish, and would therefore reveal the true nature of Being.

These examples set a compelling limit to the claim of polyphony. Far from shaping the prose text around characters in a way that allows competing voices to be heard, they are very much shaped around an authorial design. It is the narrator's constellation that is imposed upon her surroundings, that governs her itinerary and that determines her selection of anecdotes. Indeed, the 'constellation' often seems to be more of a conceptual stencil, an extension of her dual faithfulness to Melville's *Moby Dick* and Benedykt Chmielowski's encyclopedia, *Nowe Ateny*, her other guiding text. But whether constellation or stencil, both terms point to a certain stasis discernible at the heart of *Flights* that is at odds with the privileging of movement. As Wood so astutely notes, 'mobility is in danger of becoming an abstraction, and, because Tokarczuk repeatedly returns to her themes, the ironic effect is of a certain fixity'.²⁹ This irony is compounded by the narrator's fascination with the preservation of bodies. Her background itinerary takes her to nine museums dedicated to the history of medicine, anatomy or pathology, all of which house displays of the body and its organs in various ways. Although both Blau and Verheyen describe their exploration of the preserved body as forms of travel, producing 'accurate maps' (219), the consistent emphasis on conservation is at odds with the privileging of motion. Rather, the fight against decay seeks to impose absolute inertia. It is more reminiscent of the parody of travel that Eryk's ferry represents, with the buoys making the vastness of the ocean measurable and 'giving a false impression of control' (86). The conserved bodies are kept in stasis, just as the display objects in any cabinet of curiosities are removed from circulation and stuck in their static displays.

A similar sense of stasis is produced in the narrator's interest in maps and mapping. She wants her gaze to set her apart and dreams of becoming 'the perfect observer' (185), '[s]eeing only the world in fragments' (186). What she sees is not 'life' but 'lines, planes and bodies, and their transformations in time' (186). As though illustrating what it means to be such an observer, she includes twelve maps in *Flights* taken from *The Agile Rabbit Book of Historical and Curious Maps*. The book is published by Pepin Press which focuses on art and design products, and which in its marketing emphasizes that the maps have been 'chosen for their visual impact and rarity'.³⁰ The narrator gives no obvious selection criteria for the maps, although most seem to relate to human domination and power, albeit in different ways. The first shows the comparative lengths of the major rivers, placed alongside each other in a way that is reminiscent of blood vessels and that also imposes a measurable hierarchy. The final one is a map of the *Odyssey* (1911), a tale that is central to constructions of European civilization and identity. A map of St Petersburg (1850) is testament to the triumph of a city built on inhospitable

marshes. The map of Boufarik (1882) shows the fortress town established by the French in 1836 following the French conquest of Algeria. A German map of Southern Manhattan from the late nineteenth century accentuates the grid system of the roads and names at least five stock exchanges and the chamber of commerce amongst the key institutions it labels. A linguistic map of Europe from circa 1750 confirms the centrality of European languages to global expansion, and a map of Novaya Zemlaya (dated 1855 but copied from an earlier map from 1599) celebrates the exploration and 'discovery' of new trade routes. A map of the Parc Monceau in Paris, dated 1878, depicts the park as it was in the eighteenth century, when it was created by Phillippe d'Orléans, an extremely wealthy and powerful cousin of Louis XVI. With strong echoes of the narrator's love of curiosities, the garden at that time included reconstructions of buildings from different times and continents, such as a tatar tent, a temple of Mars and a Dutch windmill. The first of two maps labelled simply 'Chinese map (1984)' is a map of the Old Summer Palace in Beijing, the main residence of the Qianlong Emperor and his successors. The second of these 'Chinese maps', which shows lines penetrating an area of high terrain, is a map of the thirteen tombs of the Ming dynasty.

The way the maps are included in the text undoubtedly conform to the narrator's desire to see the world as fragmentary and in 'fleeting configurations' (186). Other than a cursory list at the end of the text, they are neither contextualized or historicized and again expose the ethical limitations and blind spots of the narrator's approach. The maps capture and categorize the world in stable images that freeze topographies of hierarchy and power. They evoke the seduction of travel and time travel; the images can be alighted upon, admired and then left. But the histories of the places depicted and the images themselves remain unimportant, echoing the narrator's category: 'It Doesn't Matter Where I Am' (403). Ultimately, the privileged gaze of the narrator dominates. Temporary glimpses of objects, lives and emotions are selected for inclusion in the novel cabinet, which imitates the movement of international travel: dipping in and taking what is interesting to the traveller, without responsibility. The narrator equates observing from the margins or choosing to see the world in fragments with a gaze that is better able to identify the true nature of being. She confers authority onto her perspective by sacralizing her travel, repeating five times that 'each of my pilgrimages aims at some other pilgrim' (25; 129; 274; 329; 404) as she arrives at one of her anatomical museums.

In *Flights*, the counter-position to social norms and orthodoxies is radically individual. The narrator seeks to re-evaluate 'freaks', or freakish events, but she

determines what falls into this category. Change is possible in the individual selection of knowledge, the fleeting constellation that a person imposes upon experience or in the unique moments where a person's perception is altered and they see a different possibility. Such a self-affirming position in which the self is arbiter of the true nature of Being is undoubtedly empowering, and might enable an individual to resist conformity on their terms. But in *Flights* the ethical limits of this individualism are in evidence. The narrator describes herself as 'a citizen of a network state' (329), but, more than that, she is an eager citizen of a network world, amplifying her privileged position as a voluntary international traveller by granting ethical distinction to her movement. The privileging of her own capacity to travel, to see, the way she casts her journeys as a pilgrimage, are ways of surfing the network while also constructing herself as seeing greater truths and connections that others do not. The narrator is in this regard not dissimilar to the 'eccentric tourists who [...] prefer to pay more to not have running water or electricity' (37). Her freedom from the grid is temporary, the product of wealth and does not come at a cost. At the narrative level, this radical individuality does not simply generate freedom for the reader, for it is a text 'by the self for the self' (19). The apparent freedom from the constraints of monologic narrative and the constructions of plot is restricted, even illusory, since different constraints are imposed. The constellations determined by the narrating self impose their own rigidity on the reading experience.

Disruptive fight

Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead shares the concern of *Flights* with people and types of knowledge that exist at the margins. It explores the political and social implications of a woman who takes radical action in response to the systematic injustice she observes and experiences. The novel takes the form of a combination revenge and whodunit parody, told by the likeable protagonist, Janina Duszejko. She lives alone in a remote hamlet near the Czech border, and here, over a period of a few months, she murders four men to avenge their murder of animals. At the diegetic level, Duszejko diverts suspicion from herself by conforming to the stereotype of eccentric older woman. She attempts to fool the reader through her first-person narrative, only admitting to the murders in the final twist by which time we have experienced the cathartic pleasure of justice being meted out to the villains.

For Tokarczuk, the story is 'a tragic parable of helplessness, anger and civil disobedience' and her novel explores the question 'what can a decent citizen do when he or she finds that moral law and established law are being violated, ignored, circumvented? To what extent do we have the right to rebel against an authority that does not adhere to moral standards? Do we have a right to civil disobedience and how far can it go?'³¹ Murder is rather more than civil disobedience and the novel is also rather more than a tragic parable. The novel returns us to Pekić's satirical device of the unreliable narrator-perpetrator seeking to deny and justify his deeds through a confession that moves between disclosure and concealment. It confronts us with our willingness to accept strategies of justification and exculpation when presented by a figure we are invited by Tokarczuk to accept as 'decent'. Herein lies the final satirical twist of the novel and its greatest tragedy: that the protagonist who sets herself up in opposition to the traditional norms of Christian-conservative Polish society becomes herself a form of one-woman Law and Justice Party, asserting her role as moral arbiter and knower of truth.

In Duszejko, Tokarczuk offers a radical re-casting of Coetzee's Elizabeth Costello. Costello is tormented by questions of how to represent the horror of violent perpetration; she is also tormented by the moral status of animals, historical and current, that in her view lies at the root of the atrocities and mass murder exacted upon animals by humans. She is unable to comprehend a life in which she has normal relations with people whom she regards as fundamentally kind, while at the same time faced with evidence that they are 'participants in a crime of stupefying proportions'. She compares being offered meat to people being proud of lampshades made of the 'skin of young Polish-Jewish virgins' or using soap labelled 'Treblinka – 100% human stearate'.³² Indeed, she asserts that the meat industry 'dwarfs' the murderousness of the Nazis and their extermination camps by producing livestock for the sole purposes of killing it in a never-ending process.³³ Costello's willingness publicly to challenge philosophical arguments about the inferior moral status of animals is linked to her age (she is sixty-six), for she no longer has the time not to say what she believes. However, her son, and by implication others, sees her age as a weakening of her faculties and uses her age as a defence against her views. So, when Costello tells him of her desperation at witnessing a life in which normally kind people are participating in a horrendous crime, he 'inhales the smell [...] of old flesh' and tells her '[i]t will soon be over', as though her death is the solution.³⁴ He wishes she could be 'an ordinary old woman living an ordinary old woman's life', and that she would stay at home and 'open her heart to animals'.³⁵

Duszejko, another 'old woman' or 'old crone', opens her heart to animals but is certainly not ordinary.³⁶ Like Costello, she is a vegetarian and evokes the history of Nazi genocide to emphasize how the crime of eating meat has been normalized: 'That's just how the world would look if concentration camps became the norm. Nobody would see anything wrong with them' (113). Duszejko does not articulate her views with the language of academic philosophy and literary criticism as Costello does, but takes a different form of action. She confronts a large group of hunters, exhorts the forester to stop felling trees (the natural breeding ground of the *Cucujus baematodes* beetle) and repeatedly reports her neighbour Big Foot to the police for poaching and cruelty to his dog. She goes to the police and then the City Guard to report the killing of a boar outside the hunting season and publicly challenges the priest's praise of hunting at a packed mass on St Hubert's day, the patron saint of hunting. She also murders four men for their involvement in hunting and killing animals: the local police chief, known as the Commandant; Innerd, the richest man in the area and owner of the fox farm; the President, a local self-important functionary; and the priest.

Duszejko does not think of herself as a murderer, but as a tool for the animals' revenge (257). She has been chosen to be their secret hand of justice, '[f]or they have no voice in parliament' (251). Her actions are akin to divine vengeance. The anger that empowers her is like 'Divine Anger' (72); it is a 'state of clarity, divine Wrath, terrible and unstoppable' that makes her feel as though her body is 'being flooded by a bright aura, gently raising [her] upwards' (112). The deer trotter taken from the deer that Big Foot snared, and that she uses to make deer prints at the crime scenes, is aptly named 'the Finger of God' (223). For Duszejko, the vocabulary of divinity is not an articulation of conventional religious belief but of her absolute conviction that everything in nature is interconnected. Thus, she is a warrior for the good, with the battle against evil raised to the level of duty: 'if evil created the world, then good must destroy it' (253). Aligning oneself with 'the good' or 'the divine' has always been a powerful justification for anyone committing violence or killing. It is a justification all the more compelling for Duszejko because she has tried to use the normal channels for seeking justice and been variously rejected, scorned and humiliated. The men in authority, including those implementing the law, take no action against poaching and hunting out of season, because they or their hunting comrades are involved. Furthermore, the laws themselves, and the assumptions of personhood upon which they are based, exclude animals from criminal categories that would enable them to be seen either as murder victims or as murderers. Duszejko wishes them to be considered as both victims of the hunters and responsible

for their murders, for this would confer upon them their proper status as full subjects in law. She writes to the police encouraging them to take seriously the notion that the deer killed the men and points them to precedents in European jurisdictions when animals were tried for transgressions. These examples include the sow who was sentenced to hanging in 1394 after some pigs killed and ate a child, rats who were acquitted of the charge of causing destruction in 1521 and caterpillars who in 1659 were summonsed to court after destroying vineyards.

This reader is probably not alone in remaining unconvinced by Duszejko's letter. It is certainly not a leap to understand why the police consider her a 'crazy madwoman' (41). Even Dizzy, her friend and fellow William Blake fan, thinks she must be in shock when she first talks about animals appearing in court. And when Oddball, her neighbour, advises her to keep to herself her 'highly improbable' (96) theory that the animals are the murderers, she grasps that he too considers her a madwoman. Realizing that her friends regard her 'as a crank' (122), she tries not to discuss her passion for astrology with them, although she does not refrain from sending the police a letter using astrology as evidence that Big Foot and the Commandant were murdered by animals, enclosing their horoscopes. Her relationship to animals is inseparable from this passion, for animals form part of an integrated cosmos in which strict laws apply, from the 'starry sky down to moral conscience' (66) and in which 'the largest things are contained in the smallest' (150). Relationships between things are causally inter-related, with the movement of the stars and planets influencing all events. Although there is scope for humans to act within the nets that the stars have designed, celestial patterns are what explain late-running trains or failed mayonnaise (53–4), Oddball's reticence or Big Foot's unpleasantness. Duszejko believes that horoscopes show us what to expect in life and how to understand behaviour. By completing with 'our own weft' the warp that the stars have woven, humans can 'transform the suffering, aching world into a happy and peaceful one' (211).

Duszejko's holistic understanding of the universe resonates with Costello's combination of sceptical reason and profound empathy. Costello does not denigrate reason as such, indeed, she makes powerful use of it. But she sees it only as one aspect of human being, one that has been elevated to the status of 'the being of the universe' or even the 'being of God' with disastrous consequences.³⁷ Against the abstraction of reason, which has determined that animals are inferior, she advocates the need to understand the 'unabstracted, unintellectual nature' of animal being, if necessary by accompanying an animal on its way down the abattoir chute.³⁸ Duszejko's empathy for animals and visceral repulsion

at their suffering dominate her interaction with her environment and find wider justification through the explanatory framework of astrology. For her, astrology is an intellectually demanding exercise that is comparable to psychology. Both are skills learned through practice and empirical observations of patterns of behaviour (66). She also likens it to socio-biology, a discipline that points to 'mysterious' influences on human personality, exerted by molecules rather than cosmic patterns: 'They're really talking about the same thing, except that they're using different scales' (123).

The potential of Duszejko's advocacy of a different epistemology is, unlike Costello's persistent doubt, undermined both by her dogmatic certainty and her lack of critical self-reflection. In her casual comparisons of astrology with other interpretative frameworks, Duszejko utterly disregards questions of scientific falsifiability, the importance of testing hypotheses and the different types of causality and effect postulated by different explanatory approaches. She has adopted a system for understanding the world that offers form, but which is elevated to the status of truth and is not open to challenge. Duszejko is adept at constructing meaningful shape and then asserting it as truth. She is, however, as little able to recognize her belief as a construction as those around her whom she criticizes for this failing. The Grey Lady, a writer and summer resident in the hamlet, remarks to Duszejko that people fabricate their own world: 'we draw maps of meaning for ourselves' (223), including what is good and what is not and people therefore cannot understand each other. Duszejko is very taken with this comment, not comprehending that she is as much implicated as anyone else. Reflecting on the Grey Lady's comment, Duszejko agrees that 'people are only capable of understanding what they invent for themselves and feed on' (228). Again, she is not thinking of herself here, but is annoyed that people are speculating about Mafia involvement in the murders, rather than accepting the explanation that the animals are the murderers. Her theory, that 'the human psyche evolved in order to defend us against seeing the truth' (223) does not result in self-reflection on her part.

What becomes increasingly clear throughout Duszejko's narrative is the extent to which her maps of meaning are rooted in personal motivation. The importance of order and form are inseparable from her inability to keep order around herself. She lives in a cold house, cannot keep her kitchen or bathroom clean, has dirty fingernails, looks rumpled and sleeps in far too long, wasting the daylight. Yet she approves of and respects Oddball's 'fondness for order' (34), his clean, bright kitchen and his cared-for kitchen utensil drawer that brings her 'total calm' (206). She is attracted by straightforward, simplifying typologies,

such as her division of people into skiers (hedonists), drivers (who take their fate in their hands) and allergy sufferers (people who, like her, are always at war) (53). Such categorizations seem no less formulaic and reductive than some scientific typologies. Her former job as a bridge-construction engineer and her love of horoscopes both reflect the pleasure she gets from 'transforming concepts into figures' which then assume a 'meaningful shape' (119). Similarly, but more powerfully, the motivation that drives the narrative and which Duszejko's version of events also seeks to conceal, is that of personal revenge for the murder of her dogs. Seeing the photograph of her dead dogs, shot by the hunters, is what triggered her murder spree. Yet by omitting from her account the image she has seen until her final confession, Duszejko seeks to lend greater ethical and philosophical justification to her actions.

Solipsistic fight

Duszejko's story is full of strategies that help her avoid the truth and hide it from herself and others. She, of course, does not see it that way, asserting that she has been honest throughout. She insists that she was not lying when she claimed that the murders were all cases of the animals taking revenge: 'That was the truth. I was their Tool' (257). She sees herself as part of nature's design. Her unmediated relationship to nature is manifested in her association with darkness and twilight, the times particularly favoured by the wild woodland animals. Like them, and like bats in particular, she has an alternative view, seeing 'the world in other spheres, upside down' (146). She prefers dusk, because it 'favours people like [her]' (243). Her ailments appear as a direct symptom of the human destruction and cruelty that she witnesses. She refers to her 'Ailments' frequently, describing the debilitating effects of fevers, cramps and numbness, unpredictable attacks of pain in her bones, constant weeping and extreme sensitivity to sunlight. In the past her ailments have led to her hospitalization and by the end of the novel they are so bad that she can do little more than sit. She observes that they are exacerbated 'as a result of stress and other unusual occurrences' (56), inviting us to link her suffering with nature's. This immersive identification with animals, nature and the cosmos allows her to believe in her narrative of being a mere tool. This lack of agency is further reinforced by claiming that her actions did not depend on intent or an awareness of what she was doing. She asks her friends, 'will you believe me when I say I didn't do it entirely consciously? I instantly forgot what had happened' (257). She suggests that this amnesia has protected

her as a 'powerful Defence Mechanism' (257–8) and that it too might be a result of her ailments.

Duszejko's friends probably do believe her claim about lacking full consciousness and forgetting her actions. It is easier for them to help an avenging tool of nature escape to Czechia, especially one that seems virtuous and vulnerable, than to think of themselves as complicit in a serial killer's getaway. Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik, too, believes the narrator, ascribing her obfuscation of the truth to the fact that she forgets her actions, and insisting that this 'does not fashion her into an unreliable narrator' because her account 'remains painfully honest till the very end'.³⁹ Neither amnesia nor painful honesty guarantee the reliability of a first-person account, especially when forgetting doing the murders is crucial to the defence. And confessions may be painful, but that is not evidence of their reliability. There are good reasons to remain sceptical of Duszejko's account, not least in relation to her erratic memory loss. Just before claiming that she forgot all her actions, she admits that 'sometimes the memory [of Innerd's murder] came back to me' (257). These recollections galvanize her to be ready for further action and load her car with her tools of revenge. Her preparedness for murder render implausible her claims of forgetting. She obfuscates about the equipment in her car, describing it first as necessary in case of an accident (127) or claiming the need to be self-sufficient (184). It is only at the point of her final confession that the reader fully realizes how thoroughly prepared she is: Oddball describes her car as 'looking like a commando vehicle' (247).

Her confession also suggests that she knew precisely what she was doing. She follows the Commandant for days to familiarize herself with his movements and she sets a wire-trap for Innerd, luring him towards it by implying she has the money from the Commandant. When the wire-trap does not break his neck as she intended, she resorts to her carefully prepared back-up plan of hitting him over the head with a plastic bag of ice. She also steals the *Cucujus haematodes* pheromones from the entomologist Boros, an impressive example of premeditated murder: the President is killed by suffocating on the beetles that enter his mouth and lungs after Duszejko pours the pheromones into his mouth. Her actions contradict her claim that she is 'no expert on Murder' (256). She is also adept at diverting attention from murder. She does everything she can to prevent Dizzy investigating the strange light and thus discovering the Commandant's murder scene. And when the old gentleman tells her of Innerd's disappearance and the release of the foxes, she makes a 'desperate attempt to divert the conversation onto less sinister tracks' (136). There is little reason to distract from something that has been forgotten.

Furthermore, these attempts at deflection point to Duszejko's skill in crafting a narrative and what to omit and include in order for her version of events to dominate. As she says to Dizzy when he points out that animal revenge is impossible, 'One has to tell people what to think. [...] Otherwise someone else will do it' (156). Starting her whole narrative with an emphasis on her age and fragility, and repeatedly underscoring these characteristics, is as effective a strategy for distracting the reader as it is those around her, especially the police: 'Nobody takes any notice of old women who wander around with their shopping bags' (251). Her persistent references to her ailments disguise her considerable strength: she can pour concrete with no adverse effects, a task that gives Oddball lumbago; she bends a medium-sized birch tree; and the force of her death blow to the Commandant was due to being national vice-champion hammer thrower in 1971. 'Didn't I tell you?' (253) she asks disingenuously. Yet even here she distances herself from her crime, portraying it as involuntary, for she acted 'without thinking', with her 'wise' body making the decision: 'it', not 'I', struck the blow (253).

Far from being a naive narrator, Duszejko knows about narrative unreliability. She is wary of the Grey Lady's writing skill and fearful of how the Grey Lady might depict her, since it could be so different from how she sees herself. Duszejko effectively alerts the reader to the danger of writers, for they trigger 'a suspicion of fakery [...] – that such a Person is not him or herself, but an eye that's constantly watching' (61). By transforming what she sees into words, a writer also divests what she describes of its very essence, which is its 'inexpressibility'. Duszejko herself points to another aspect of fakery when she asks the Grey Lady for advice about how to write her memoirs. Far from welcoming the recommendation not to self-censor and to write down everything, Duszejko considers it strange: 'I'd only want to write down the things that I find good and positive' (152). This sounds like a description of her own writing practice, which is precisely to cast herself in a favourable light. And, as she says, she 'could have been a pretty good writer', leaving little doubt that she is as adept at constructing a convincing account of herself in prose as she is at constructing bridges and horoscopes and executing four murders.

Like so many perpetrators of violence, Duszejko's self-representation reinforces her view of herself as a good person and makes it easier to overlook her flaws. She fashions herself as an avenger seeking justice, dividing the world into good and evil as determined by her. Claiming that it is cowardly to 'mock or belittle everything' as cold ironists do, and that she would 'never venture to call someone a stupid person' (97), she does venture to denigrate those who are 'evil'

with the vocabulary of infection and dehumanization. Big Foot, for example, is not even seen by her as human; with his hairy, prehensile toes and ugly, squinting face he is like 'a small, evil sprite, malevolent and unpredictable' (20). She likens his death to a 'disinfectant' (18). Similarly, the Commandant's alignment with the dark side is manifested in his red-faced baldness and an enormous belly that sinks down over the 'forgotten vicinity of his genitals' (40). Her violent anger, which for her is the 'source of all wisdom' (27) and confers 'Clarity of Vision' (42) is for her a sign of the unchallengeable rightness of her beliefs, it is a mechanism for transforming subjective opinion into a moral crusade against those that are diseased: 'anyone who feels Anger, and does not take action, merely spreads the infection' (65).

Not everyone is disturbed by this violent, purging anger. Kowalcze-Pawlik sees in Duszejko's escape from justice a relatively happy ending, for it suggests 'that the law itself should be changed to accommodate the non-human, the suffering, the neglected and the despised'. She argues that the narrator's escape from arrest and support by her friends give credibility to her anger as a 'generative force'. The successful parody of the stereotype of the 'crazy old woman' enables the novel 'to establish a new parameter for female agency, pointing to just anger as that emotive and moral dimension that has been refused to women in culture'.⁴⁰ The stereotype of the crazy old woman is undoubtedly played upon to great effect by Duszejko herself, as is her identification with non-human beings and her advocacy for equal rights for animals in law. The stereotype is part of the seduction that encourages the reader to affirm Duszejko's outlook and justificatory framework, eased, possibly, by too quick identification of the narrator with Tokarczuk. But the satire of the novel reaches beyond parody of the crazy crone. Crucially, it parodies exculpatory narratives ('it wasn't really me', 'I was obeying (animal) orders', 'I don't remember', 'the victims deserved it', 'it was for the general good', 'divine will') while concurrently placing them in the mouth of a likeable narrator, who has sought justice but whose concerns have been dismissed as eccentric. The novel thus faces the reader with her willingness to believe justificatory narratives if she is more sympathetic to the values the violent action is upholding or the individual advocating them.

Drive Your Plow is of course a comedy. The comic constellation of the apparently bumbling woman with her motley crew of friends pitted against cut-out villains and the narrow-minded and incompetent police offers the pleasurable fantasy of radical revolt. The comedy encourages us to enjoy cathartic violence without anxiety. Yet the novel also offers for scrutiny an ironic alternative manifestation of law and justice from that embodied in the Law and

Justice Party, the PiS. Duszejko too establishes her claim to truth on a traditional belief system, in her case astrology rather than Catholicism, and is not open to argument and criticism. She imposes her moral system onto her enemies through violence, acting as legislator, judge and executioner. And she tries her best to control the narrative. There are undoubtedly crucial differences between her version of law and justice and the increase in violent discourse and threats of violence that become politically instrumentalized and exploited, not least by the PiS when they were in power. Duszejko's radically individualistic expression of law and justice is from the margins of society and the violence is directed against powerful men who are themselves abusing their positions of power. And, most importantly, she cannot use the institutions of state to support her beliefs. Nevertheless, the parallels cast a critical light on Duszejko's slide into dogmatism and violence and on 'the process by which violence is born',⁴¹ which includes the denigration of those with a different perspective. The novel's comedy disguises its final futility; it is, after all, a 'tragic' parable. Duszejko lives in near-total isolation, hiding at the edges of the Białowieża forest and spending most of her time 'just sitting and gazing out of the window' (267). In this unheroic and lonely solipsism, in the very un-comic image of Duszejko's obsessive scrutiny of her own horoscope, the figure of the maverick outsider who is convinced they have privileged insight into truth is finally exposed as inadequate.

Notes

- 1 Baram, *Cultuur* 247, (30:37).
- 2 Olga Tokarczuk, interview with Janusz Wróblewski, 'o "Pokocie" i o tym, że świat stał się brzydki', *Polityka* 3121, 1 August 2017. <https://www.polityka.pl/tygodnikpolityka/kultura/1714178,1,olga-tokarczuk-o-pokocie-i-o-tym-ze-swiat-stal-sie-brzydki.read> (accessed 21 August 2023).
- 3 Christian Davies, 'The conspiracy theorists who have taken over Poland', *The Guardian*, 16 February 2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/16/conspiracy-theorists-who-have-taken-over-poland> (accessed 22 August 2023).
- 4 Jan Darasz, 'The History Men', in *Poland's Memory Wars: Essays on Illiberalism*, ed. Jo Harper (Budapest: Central European University Press, 2018), 133; Dirk Uffelmann, 'Theory as Memory Practice: The Divided Discourse on Poland's Postcoloniality', in *Memory and Theory in Eastern Europe*, ed. Uilleam Blacker, Alexander Etkind and Julie Fedor (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 104.
- 5 Uffelmann, 'Theory as Memory Practice', 104.

- 6 Norman Davies, for example, sees the 1807 creation of the Duchy of Warsaw, the 1815 Treaty of Vienna and the 1918 Treaty of Brest–Litovsk as further partitions. See: *God's Playground: A History of Poland 1795 to the Present* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 218; 225; 285.
- 7 Christian Davies, 'The conspiracy theorists'.
- 8 Uffelmann, 'Theory as Memory Practice', 106; 118.
- 9 Joanna Średnicka, 'The New Romantics', in Harper, *Poland's Memory Wars*, 123.
- 10 Ibid., 119; 129.
- 11 Witold Waszczykowski, then Polish Foreign Minister, in interview with Bild Zeitung, 3 January 2016. <https://www.bild.de/politik/ausland/polen/hat-die-regierung-einen-vogel-44003034.bild.html> (accessed 22 August 2023).
- 12 Dorota Kołodziejczyk, 'The Landscape of Hate – Olga Tokarczuk in Populist Discourse in Poland', *European Review* 30, no. 4 (2022): 545–55, 546.
- 13 Tokarczuk, quoted in Kołodziejczyk, 547.
- 14 Kołodziejczyk, 550.
- 15 Ibid., 550–1.
- 16 Tokarczuk, interview with Wróblewski.
- 17 Olga Tokarczuk, *Flights*, trans. Jennifer Croft (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2019), 22. Page numbers will be given in parentheses in the main text.
- 18 Przemysław Czaplinski and Bartosz Wozniak, 'Concatenations: On the Works of Olga Tokarczuk', *The Polish Review* 66, no. 2 (2021): 8–35, 27.
- 19 Sigmund Freud, 'Mourning and Melancholia', *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, vol. 14: (1914–1916): *On the History of the Psycho-Analytic Movement, Papers on Metapsychology and Other Works*, trans. James Strachey (London: Hogarth Press, 1917), 200.
- 20 'I Believe in the Novel: Olga Tokarczuk, interviewed by Robert Kusek and Wojciech Szymański', in *Conversations with Biographical Novelists: Truthful Fictions across the Globe*, ed. Michael Lackey (New York: Bloomsbury, 2018), 243.
- 21 Jerzy Jarzębski and Joanna Trzeciak Huss, 'Olga Tokarczuk's Portrait of Jacob Frank against the Backdrop of His Times', *The Polish Review* 66, no. 2 (2021): 118–27, 120.
- 22 Benjamin Paloff, 'Olga Tokarczuk: Listening', *The Polish Review* 66, no. 2 (2021): 36–55, 42.
- 23 Czaplinski and Wozniak, 'Concatenations', 28–9.
- 24 Hans Demeyer, 'Worlding Dutch Literary Studies', *Dutch Crossing: Journal of Low Countries Studies* (2022): 1–15, 3.
- 25 Claudia Unterweger describes Josefine Soliman as 'The Fighter', emphasizing her act of resistance in not keeping silent. See *Talking Back: Strategien Schwarzer österreichischer Geschichtsschreibung* (Vienna: Zaglossus, 2016), 130. For further discussion about Angelo Soliman and how he has been represented see: Iris Wigger

- and Spencer Hadley, 'Angelo Soliman: Desecrated Bodies and the Spectre of Enlightenment Racism', *Race & Class* 62, no. 2 (2020): 80–107.
- 26 James Wood, 'Departure Lounge', *The New Yorker*, Vol. XCIV, Issue 30 (2018): 66.
- 27 Katarzyna Bartoszyńska, 'Two Paths for the Big Book: Olga Tokarczuk's Shifting Voice', *Genre. Forms of Discourse and Culture* 54, no. 1 (2021): 67–87, 75.
- 28 Marta Figlerowicz, 'Rewriting Poland', *Boston Review*, 17 September 2018. <https://bostonreview.net/literature-culture/marta-figlerowicz-olga-tokarczuk> (accessed 10 November 2021).
- 29 Wood, 'Departure Lounge'.
- 30 <https://www.amazon.co.uk/Agile-Rabbit-book-Historical-Curious/dp/9057680513> (accessed 19 November 2021). The same phrase is used by all booksellers.
- 31 Tokarczuk, interview with Wróblewski.
- 32 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 115.
- 33 Ibid., 65.
- 34 Ibid., 115.
- 35 Ibid., 83.
- 36 Olga Tokarczuk, *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*, trans. Antonia Lloyd-Jones (London: Fitzcarraldo, 2018), 115; 19. Page numbers will be given in parentheses in the main text.
- 37 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 25.
- 38 Ibid., 114.
- 39 Anna Kowalcze-Pawlik, 'Madwoman at Large: Prophetic Anger and Just Revenge in Olga Tokarczuk's *Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead*', *The Polish Review* 66, no. 2 (2021): 187–202, 194.
- 40 Ibid., 202.
- 41 Tokarczuk, interview with Wróblewski.

Conclusion: 'a wall that she comes up against'

What I like about Elizabeth Costello is her irritability at having to defend her writing and her doubt; doubt which makes her sit on the toilet for too long while she wrestles with the problem of how evil is represented in novels. She does not know what to think: '[s]he did not want to read but she read; a violence was done to her but she conspired in the violation.' This is the 'wall that she comes up against time and again'.¹ We do not have to agree with the formulation of Costello's doubt to understand its importance. I, for example, would argue that notions like conspiring or being complicit with the violence done in and by a fictional text attach not to the reading but to the response to a text. And I would further want to question the notion of fictionalized violence doing violence, for fear that the term becomes diluted. Nevertheless, the point remains that Costello's irritability and doubt direct us to the value of trading fictions. Fiction does not require coherence, closure or answers. It thrives on indeterminacy and contingency, and on opening worlds in which emotions, encounters, choices and perspectives can be explored with low stakes (unless readers are punished for reading censored texts). The ethical potential of fiction resides in the interaction of competing voices and discourses and its interpretative openness, which is also what makes it unsettling when it addresses mass violence and complicity in less than clear-cut moral terms. At the same time, novels' particularity of form and content, 'how certain people lived in a certain time and place', matters.² For how questions about perpetration and complicity are framed and explored in relation to National Socialism is integral to the way in which the novels situate themselves in their present.

What unites most of the novels in this study is that they stoke irritability and doubt, albeit in very different ways. Imre Kertész's narrators see the necessary choice to assume one's own fate as the only form of freedom available. The glimpse of another world comes through the aesthetic transformation and abstraction of the self through writing. I have argued that there are two further

crucial and overlooked aspects of his work that gesture to the possibility of countering total accommodation. The first is the centrality of dialogue to his work and the progressively growing voice of women in those dialogues. The figure of the wife is increasingly important as someone who plausibly challenges the narrator-protagonist's position as bearing witness by being aligned on the side of 'life' and love. In his later work, the opposition between the truth of bearing witness and life is breaking down. The second dimension of his work that counters fatelessness is a comic aesthetic that is often disregarded because of its unsettling intersection with the centrality of the Holocaust. Kertész's comic strategies are a vital element in his process of turning traumatic content into aesthetic form that also gives pleasure. They thus not only form part of his ethical stance but also open an ethical space for readers. The comic dimension of his writing ensures that the reader is challenged in her response to his work and potentially liberated from totalizing schemes in the texts. The chapter finished by pointing to Kertész's sceptical response to his new public fame following the Nobel Prize, and the new type of conformity and lying it demands of him, including the need to stifle his views on the threat posed to Europe by Muslims. Here Kertész refuses to assume the mantle of liberalism often associated with the position of victim.

Borislav Pekić openly uses comedy as a central strategy to expose the various levels at which perpetration is denied or justified. In *How to Quiet a Vampire* and *The Apology*, the narrators use the forms of confession and apology to disguise their perpetration while offering the performance of candour. Furthermore, both narrators use philosophy to justify their behaviour and bolster their exculpatory accounts, thereby implicating philosophical discourse and the language of reason itself in the language of cover-up. In *How to Quiet a Vampire* this critique is further developed to incorporate the figure of the vampiric umbrella. Both signifier of the failure of reason and constructed as the source of evil, the umbrella serves as a bridge that incriminates all levels of the text. Not only does the editor become contaminated by the material he is working on and persuaded of the existence of the malevolent umbrella, but by revealing his name to be 'Borislav Pekić', the author is implicated in complicity. Pekić refuses the desire for redemption. He radicalizes Thomas Mann's refusal in *Doktor Faustus* of Goethe's redemptive vision of Faust. He also disavows the alternative to reason offered by Fyodor Dostoevsky's *The Karamazov Brothers*, by omitting it as intertext. Where Dostoevsky posits love as the irrational counter to the demonic seduction of reason, Pekić emphasizes the totalizing circularity of logic and its alternative irrationality. However, in the novel's ludic dimension

a space is retained for the reader's play of interpretation and the possible refusal of totalizing systems.

A complex causal interaction between social factors and desire lies at the heart of Aleksandar Tišma's novels. They elucidate the specific multi-ethnic and multicultural society of pre-war and war-time Yugoslavia and expose how individuals' actions are inseparable from social processes and hierarchies of power. The figure of the kapo offers a radical example of how anti-Semitism can result in self-loathing and a level of brutality that helps the kapo survive but also exceeds the need to survive. This extreme figure is emblematic of the way that victims may reinforce the very structures of oppression to which they are subjected, and is typical of Tišma's refusal to ascribe to victims a redeeming function in the text. Intertwined with the historical specificity, the novels also point to immutable power hierarchies as intrinsic to the human condition. An essentializing drive becomes evident in the portrayal of sexual violence against women. Sexual politics forms part of the social critique, with the abuse of women by the perpetrator-protagonists linked to a sense of alienation conferred by their Jewish heritage. Yet Tišma's exploration of male desire and the forms of affirmation through dominance that it can bring reinforces the hierarchies that it depicts. In contrast to the challenge offered by women's voices in Kertész's work, in Tišma's novels the absence of women's perspectives is a precondition for their role as objects of (violent) sexual satisfaction, as a means to men's salvation and as nourishment of the male writerly project. This project remains incomplete precisely where the texts replicate the perspectives of the male protagonists and the ideological implications of their desires; where the texts repeatedly perform men's failed approach to women.

In the chapter on Hans Magnus Enzensberger, I criticized the author's selective silences in *The Silences of Hammerstein*. Under the guise of forthrightness and openness Enzensberger reinforces popular West German exculpatory narratives about National Socialism. The text privileges a family story that highlights examples of resistance by officers of the Wehrmacht with Enzensberger's fascination with the nobility pervasive in the text. The myth of the 'clean Wehrmacht' is sustained by omitting evidence of the army's involvement in the planning and execution of genocidal policies. The Jewish genocide and the degree to which it was known about are pushed to the margins whilst the text lays particular emotional weight on Stalinist, rather than National Socialist, violence. Furthermore, and again echoing the strategies of Pekić's unreliable narrators, Enzensberger invokes the term *Eigensinn*, obstinacy, to dignify silence and the withdrawal from politics. As a term saturated with connotations of

resistance, Enzensberger deploys it to offer a redemptive narrative, effectively avoiding the need to evaluate the complexity of complicity and responsibility. His positive evaluation of silence as a form of obstinacy serves as an apologia for his own strategic silences. In a final irony, Enzensberger's obstinate silences echo the obstinacy of the nobility in maintaining their protected spaces and contributing to the stabilization of the Nazi regime. His account of 'the German story' similarly contributes to the stabilization of German exculpatory myths that have long been overtaken by historiography and maintains the desire for the 'good Germans'.

Volker Kutscher's 'Gereon Rath' detective novels are a warning from history and an active defence of democracy. Crime fiction has at its centre the themes of moral legitimacy, the rule of law and questions of appropriate justice. Exploring these themes against the backdrop of the collapse of the Weimar Republic and the consolidation of the Nazi dictatorship, Kutscher's novels articulate a commitment to liberal social democracy in which individual freedom is balanced with social justice. He does this by using identificatory aesthetics to structure political affect, with character and point of view providing the framework for interpreting and evaluating the past. Kutscher constructs a hierarchy of empathy to delineate clear ideological boundaries, which determine that individual and state criminality that endanger democracy are condemned. Kutscher gives explicit authorial legitimacy to liberal democracy through his choice of epigraphs. Some are pointedly political, others offer a clear framework of interpretation for the diegesis, and others are taken from popular culture since 1965. Taken together they reinforce the novels' contemporary significance as a warning against indifference and the fragility of democracy. Finally, the novels' historical span draws attention to the importance of social processes for understanding individuals' compliance with violence. Kutscher also emphasizes the continuities in structures of power and patronage within institutions like the police, that, as part of the 'zone of indifference', are necessary for the functioning of normal organizations and which facilitate institutional and individual compliance with genocide.

In her spy thriller, *Die Experten*, Merle Kröger makes a complex intervention in current discussions about the National Socialist past. The novel is dominated by a tension between two representational modes, each of which supports a different type of critical response to two contemporary political and historiographical debates. The thriller mode sensationalizes the fear of the persistence of Nazi networks and plays into post-millennium concerns about Nazi continuity in government agencies and the infiltration of security agencies

by the far-right. Here the novel is at odds with historical research and works against processes of historicization. In contrast, the emplotment of the archives as family drama serves as a critical commentary on the current controversy over the relationship of the Holocaust, colonialism, German memory politics and Israel. It advocates for the importance of historicization, not polemic. Both modes aestheticize the archive, a process that Kröger highlights by presenting archive sources in sans-serif font, thereby explicitly thematizing how history is made from different stories. She points to the malleability and manipulability of narrative and practices such malleability herself. However, Kröger's expansive understanding of the archive results in fact and fiction being blurred, in part by using the sans-serif font for fictional sources while insisting on the importance of truth. Historical sources are mingled with those that are fictional or unsubstantiated, and fiction is validated by being presented as historically documented. Consequently, elements of the novel move close to the territory of fakery, both of history and fiction.

The malleability of storytelling is also a central theme for Nir Baram. He depicts its significance in enabling the process of ethical compromise and imagining alternative ethical spaces, often with violent consequences. He is interested in how the encounter between an individual's ethics and those of other bodies can result in 'good' people collaborating with violence. In *Good People*, both protagonists are gifted story tellers. A market researcher and literary editor of confessions, they excel at manipulating narrative to facilitate the construction of a new reality, be that in relation to state policy and ideology or how they interpret their actions to themselves and others. Baram is fascinated less by coercive measures of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes than by the success of ideologies through their promise of individual reward, particularly the sophisticated allure of capitalism. In *World Shadow* Baram thematizes the unique problem posed by capitalism for understanding complicity: it cares about exploiting talent, and knows even how to harness opposition. Ordinary people are part of networks in which protest becomes another form of self-promotion and reinforces the status quo. Literature, too, affirms the capitalist model by profiting from its own critical stance. In Baram's work, telling a good story is not aligned with a moral outcome. Fiction's value lies in its ability to offer a new perspective and pose questions, which is also a form intervention in political discourse. It is interesting that he shifts to reportage in *A Land Without Borders*, to consider complicity in relation to the West Bank and East Jerusalem. Here, he directs questions of complicity and the possibility of protest to himself, Israelis and Palestinians.

Olga Tokarczuk explores how complicity with oppressive social norms and dominant epistemologies might be resisted from the margins, with emphasis on the figure of an older woman. In *Flights*, the marginal perspective is associated with what is unusual and freakish. The narrator aligns herself with the margins by observing and recounting various examples of abnormality she encounters. She privileges purposeless motion as a means for people to remove themselves from social constraints and the stasis of conformity. Tokarczuk's writing practice, by eschewing linearity in favour of 'constellations', seeks to challenge narrative norms and points to the ethical promise of polyphony and worlding. Yet the text lacks what might be understood as an ethical encounter. The narrator's meetings with people are transient and she is the arbiter of value, imposing her own constellation on her surroundings. The apparently liberating constellations of *Flights* function more like conceptual stencils that impose their own rigidity on the reading experience. The more overtly political *Drive Your Plow* has the eccentric Duszejko question the philosophical and ethical foundations of enlightenment Western culture. She espouses animal personhood and considers astrology the ultimate epistemological framework. By having a narrator who murders humans to avenge the murder of animals, the novel questions the legitimacy of violence and the justificatory discourses that underpin it. The ethical ambivalence of the outsider figure is mirrored in the ambiguity of the text's comedy. By parodying the stereotype of the ageing crone and her exculpatory narratives, the novel presents an ironic alternative embodiment of law and justice to that of the Polish PiS (Law and Justice Party). However, the comedy also disguises the final futility of Duszejko's isolation and solipsism, which gestures to the inadequacy of the self-styled privileged outsider.

All of the works point to different types of troubling continuities; troubling because they almost all reinforce the proximity of violence. They suggest that individually and socially the road to perpetrating violence is not only paved with indifference, but with the types of structures, behaviours and justifications that are considered normal, sometimes even admirable or desirable, in non-violent situations. To understand perpetration and complicity under Nazism is to understand the ease with which state-sanctioned violence is executed and integrated as normal at all social levels, while at the same time the normality is disavowed through narratives that attribute responsibility to others. One of the key continuities that emerges is, precisely, that between ordinary people and either complicity with violence or direct perpetration. This is a central concern for all the authors, most evidently through the treatment of characters. They depict the psychological processes that lead people to enact, support or tolerate

violence. At its most radical, this continuity questions the boundaries between victims of violence and perpetration. One of the provocations of Kertész's work is his comparison of the position of the perpetrator and the victim as experiencing a 'state of grace', through their loss of personality. Tišma, too, scrutinizes the connections between genocidal violence and the pleasures of violence against women, showing how victims can also be perpetrators. Baram and Tokarczuk both raise questions about the legitimacy of violence when it is a response to hegemonic power structures.

The interest in causality extends to questioning institutional, social and political continuities between National Socialist violence and beyond. A particular focus for Kertész, Pekić and Tišma is the nature of totalitarian logic and practice. The parallels they draw between the Nazis and post-war socialist dictatorships function as a strong criticism of communist ideology, but extend to other political systems. Kertész is scathing about the pressure to be complicit with certain liberal discourses under democracy, and Pekić's umbrella is restrained but very much present in London at the end of *How to Quiet a Vampire*. Baram's juxtaposition of Nazi Germany and Stalinist Russia in *Good People* is a means to show the importance of narrative and storytelling in shaping ideology and, crucially, in then implementing it. The comparison also encompasses a concern with capitalist ideology and global networks that even exploit oppositional discourse and positions. Kröger and Kutscher engage directly with institutional and cultural continuities across regimes, both in terms of personnel and in cultural attitudes that persist, particularly in anti-Semitic and anti-communist sentiment. Professional skills remain constant across regimes, be that the skills of the police (Pekić, Kutscher), security services (Baram, Kröger), the army (Enzensberger), prison guards (Kertész), engineers (Kröger), marketing or academia (Baram). Enzensberger is the only author where an emphasis on continuity discourages critical reflection on the proximate relationship of mass violence and normality. Stalinist violence helps distract from Nazi violence and characteristics of the nobility that persist across time serve to lessen their responsibility for supporting Hitler and genocide.

All the authors either explicitly or implicitly address the relationship of discursive and representational modes for understanding complicity and perpetration. Pekić insists upon the complicity of philosophy in providing ways of thinking and analysing that support and justify violence. The tradition of instrumental reason, culminating in the logic expounded in Wittgenstein's early work, provides an effective analytic methodology (however bastardized) for justifying interrogation methods. The availability of philosophy for exculpatory

narratives is also satirized by having Plato's *Apology* used as a cover-up for crime. Kröger considers the nature of history and the archive, demonstrating how archive material is selected and transformed to construct history. In both these cases, fiction is the means through which philosophical and historical discourse are reflected upon, which raises the question of fiction's role. After all, there are plenty of philosophical critiques of logic and instrumental reason and historians who interrogate narrative and perspective in writing history. Crucially, by having these concerns mediated through fiction, both writers explicitly draw our attention to how fictional representations construct, reinforce or challenge wider cultural discourses that enable and constrain a subject's behaviour and her understanding of that behaviour. By interweaving two modes of emplotment in *Die Experten*, Kröger directly demonstrates how narrative form shapes and constructs political affect in the present. Similarly, Tokarczuk both parodies genre fiction and seeks an alternative to narrative conventions in her notion of the 'constellation' novel. Kutscher too, commits to using genre fiction to warn of the fragility of democracy and justice, even while the diegesis demonstrates the irrelevance of fiction to preventing state-sanctioned brutality and murder. More radically, Kertész is adamant that literature is a cover-up unless it exposes the destruction of the individual in modernity, while Pekić articulates a bleak vision of literature as one more form of hopeless imprisonment.

And yet: despite seeing literature as a type of incarceration, Pekić opts for fiction to articulate this vision. And as a result, whatever his views may be, he cannot limit the productive openness of his text nor determine its effect. However much the novels cast doubt on, or outright deny, the possibility of counter-narratives, since they in turn beg new relations of complicity and strategies of self-deception in a nightmare *mise en abyme* (or Pekić's prison) of mediated reality, there remains our enjoyment. The pleasures of the text are varied and gratify us emotionally and intellectually. But this gratification is not always predictable and straightforward. Our enjoyment of a text can be surprising and can vary from reading to reading. Some forms of gratification and excitement may repel us, as Costello indicates in her resentment of Paul West 'exciting' her to read. Her conflicting emotions and the contradiction between emotion and intellect compound her doubt and irritability. We might, in our encounter with fictionalized perpetrators, however close they are to historical figures, find ourselves seduced by their perspective, or even by them. There is great pleasure in being seduced, whether the means are emotional or intellectual. The allure of fantasy, the excitation of succumbing to empathy with a horrifying other, is not tantamount to being seduced beyond the frame of

fiction. It may be play, including serious intellectual play. Nevertheless, play with seduction and a fascination with representations of perpetration may alert one to 'information about oneself that one would rather not have'.³ So it is not the pleasures of empathy or the enjoyment of seduction that we should be anxious about, but what we do with the awareness of our gullibility and how we respond to our doubt.

Notes

- 1 Coetzee, *Elizabeth Costello*, 180–1.
- 2 Ibid., 207.
- 3 Simon Critchley, *On Humour* (London: Routledge, 2002), 74.

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