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Wheeler, Alexandra-Mary

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“How do I speak about the Past?”

Bernhard Schlink and the Genre of *Väterliteratur*.

A dissertation submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

In the department of English Literature at the University of the Witwatersrand

By

Alexandra-Mary Wheeler

Supervisors: Dr. Michelle Adler and Prof. Anette Horn

July 2013, Johannesburg

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Keywords

Bernhard Schlink, Germany 1968, Mourning, Mothers, Nazism, Nazi Women, Psychoanalysis, Silence, Student Movement, West Germany, *Väterliteratur*

Declaration

I declare that this dissertation is my own unaided work. It is submitted for the degree of Master of Arts at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, and has not been submitted before for any other degree or examination at any other university.

Alexandra-Mary Wheeler

July 2013

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Introduction

Filial ties to the atrocities of the Holocaust have, and most possibly will continue to influence how German individuals belonging to the postwar generations view themselves in relation to the Nazi past. In an attempt to address not only the atrocities committed in the German name, but also the silence that surrounded this historical period during the initial postwar years, German writers - particularly those with connections to the 1968 Student Uprising - generated a large body of autobiographical novels during the mid 1970s and early 1980s. The texts produced, during this time, were primarily concerned with postwar German family life, containing a particular focus on the 'figure of the authoritarian father' and his impact on the lives of his children. (Fuchs, "The Tinderbox of Memory: Generation and Masculinity in *Väterliteratur* by Christoph Meckel, Uwe Timm, Ulla Hahn, and Dagmar Leupold", 41) These texts, which are usually dominated by an exploration of the postwar relationships between fathers and sons, were so prolific that they are now considered to constitute their own separate genre: *Väterliteratur* (Literature about Fathers).

While admittedly there exist far more prominent authors and texts associated with the genre of *Väterliteratur* than those chosen for this analysis - such as Paul Kersten's *Der alltägliche Tod meines Vaters* (The everyday death of my father, 1978), Ruth Rehmann's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel: Fragen an einen Vater* (The man in the pulpit: Questions for a father, 1979), Christoph Meckel's *Suchbild: Über meinen Vater* (Image for investigation about my father, 1980) and Brigitte Schwaiger's *Lange Abwesenheit* (Long absence, 1983) - none of these have received as much critical attention from an English audience as Bernhard Schlink's German novel *Der Vorleser* (1995), which was translated and published under the English title *The Reader* in 1997[1].

As a novel, *The Reader* does not conform entirely to the conventions found in the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s, making it an interesting example of what has been referred to as a new wave of father writing by critics such as Ernestine Schlant and Erin McGlothlin. It is the presence of this new wave of *Väterliteratur*, as exemplified by Schlink's novel, that has led to my desire to further explore other examples of his work and ascertain to

[1] For the purposes of my study I will be using Carol Brown Janeway's translation of *Der Vorleser* published by phoenix in 1998.

what extent these have originated out of the initial concerns and considerations present in the first wave of father novels, and whether or not Schlink has adapted or manipulated the conventions found in this particular form of (auto)biographical writing. Although *The Reader* has been looked at extensively by both Schlant and McGlothlin as a continuation of the thematic concerns found in the first wave of *Väterliteratur*, I would like to extend this analysis to two of Schlink's later texts so that I might further explore the extent to which Schlink has made use of these conventions. By conducting such an examination, I am hoping to demonstrate that the experiences narrated by the second-generation in the earlier (auto)biographical father novels, are still being addressed in the post-unification space. Furthermore, I will examine how the questions and concerns raised by the first group of (auto)biographical texts have been rewritten by Schlink into an easily accessible fictional format that overcomes the problems of context and language so that these experiences can be read and understood by an English target audience.

For the purposes of this study I have selected three texts written by Bernhard Schlink (that have been reasonably successful with an English audience in their translated form) where the narratives have been set against the historical catastrophe of the Holocaust, and explore the legacy of such a past both trans-generationally, and within the postwar family. These include the novels *The Reader* (1998) and *Homecoming* (2009), and the short story *Girl with Lizard* (2002).[2]

One of the most challenging aspects of this dissertation lies in my decision to examine what is ostensibly a German experience largely written about in the German language. Instead of choosing to engage with these texts within their source culture and language I have chosen instead to discuss them in terms of their English translations, firstly because it was the English translation of *The Reader* that arguably gave Schlink his status as an internationally acclaimed author, and secondly because I believe that much of this study into second-generation postwar writing could be used as a starting point for examining other texts that have been born out of contexts where an event of such historical magnitude has taken place; post-Apartheid South Africa, postwar Bosnia and post-Genocide Rwanda.

I do not believe that because one chooses to examine texts in translation, that the texts themselves lose either their impact or their message (a consideration which has been thoroughly

[2] The dates of publication cited here, are the dates of publication for the translated texts to be used for this study, and not the first dates of publication for the German originals or first English translations.

examined by Albrecht Neubert and Gregory Shreve, whose discussion on the problems inherent in working with translated texts will be looked at in Chapter Two), although both of these are admittedly more readily and easily understood by an audience living in the source context and who speak the language in which the text originated. Having said that, I am not suggesting that any of the events to which I have gestured are not unique in their own right or even comparable, after all how does one compare one historical atrocity with another? However, it is difficult to ignore the remarkable similarities that can be seen in these instances, especially in terms of how it is left primarily to the second-generation to address the horrors of the past, since it is often the case that (what I will loosely refer to as) the perpetrator generation is either psychically unable or unwilling to do so. What I would like to suggest is that postwar German writing, particularly the earlier *Väterliteratur* texts, functions as an example of how past events can be addressed both on a national and personal level, and although it does not offer an absolute method for coping with or mourning atrocity it does offer a model for engaging with a traumatic history through the act of mourning. As such, this dissertation should not be viewed as an examination of German literature, although the work chosen for discussion was born out of this particular context; rather it should be seen as an exploration of world literature, because Schlink's texts have travelled beyond the confines of their context of origin, generating new discourse from their target audiences about how one should address and mourn the past.

This brings me to the other challenge of this dissertation; my choice of both author and texts. As suggested by the first part of the title of this dissertation, 'How do I speak about the Past?', my interest lies in examining how German individuals born during or after World War Two (that is to say individuals who were children during the war, and therefore could not have been directly involved in the event) try to engage with their national past, which is also in many respects a personal past. The personal nature of the Holocaust past lies in the very fact that the war in Germany affected everybody belonging to the war generation; whether they voted Hitler into power, remained silent when faced with the knowledge of extreme persecution, assisted with nursing the injured, were active members in the Schutzstaffeln (SS) or indeed were part of the anti-Nazi resistance[3]. The result was that many members of the second-generation were born into families where their parents bore the psychological wounds of war, specifically in this instance a

[3] Anti-Nazi resistance movements include The White Rose, The Red Orchestra and the 20th July Plot in 1944 where an attempt was made to assassinate Hitler.

lost war. It is this generation, the second-generation, that would give rise to the 1968 Student Movement and go on to generate the genre of *Väterliteratur,* where they would attempt to address their father's pasts, which in the case of these novels is closely associated with Nazi atrocities.

Structurally, this dissertation has been broken up into four chapters dealing with various aspects of postwar German writing, and a final chapter that will draw conclusions about the research material in order to address the question of whether or not Schlink is a writer of a new form of *Väterliteratur* as has been suggested by Schlant and McGlothlin. Rather than dedicating a chapter to each of the selected texts, I have instead broken the research into two theoretical chapters (Chapters One and Two) and two chapters where the theory discussed will be applied more rigorously to the texts. Because *The Reader, Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* share similarities in terms of thematic content and narrative structure I believe that it is more beneficial, in terms of this particular analysis, to examine these texts firstly as adaptations of *Väterliteratur* and later as texts that address the largely marginalised figure of the Nazi woman or the postwar German mother. On this basis, it follows that Chapter One will examine how German writers have attempted or avoided dealing with the Nazi past, Chapter Two will explore the genesis and form of the early *Väterliteratur* texts, Chapter Three will examine Schlink's application and adaptation of some of the conventions found in the earlier father novels in *The Reader*, *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard*, and finally Chapter Four will address the problematic and often over looked representation of women and mother figures in texts that are primarily concerned with fathers and sons.

The first chapter titled "Addressing the Past: Setting out a Psychoanalytic Framework for Reading Schlink's Texts", examines the rise of psychoanalysis as a legitimate framework for engaging with postwar German literature. The reason that I have chosen such a lens through which to examine the texts selected for discussion lies in the idea that *Väterliteratur* generally explores the inability of the war generation to come to terms with its own history, and how this inability to mourn the past has resulted in the need for the second-generation to perform the act of mourning which the war generation could not. This desire to enact the failed work of mourning by the parents, is undertaken by the second-generation and often manifests in postwar literature as an oedipal narrative where the son (belonging to the second-generation), rises up

against the actions taken by the father during the war period. Thus the first wave of *Väterliteratur* (which appears to be the reference point for Schlink's work) does not so much engage with trauma as it does the need to enact the process of mourning at a generational remove. I will primarily be looking at how Freudian psychoanalysis has become a widely accepted and applied framework for understanding the German postwar setting; not only in literature but also within German postwar society generally. Much of the work done on the subject of mourning takes as its starting point Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917) which is viewed as being one of the most influential and comprehensive analyses on the difference between mourning and depression, drawing attention to both the experience as well as the result of both states of mind, which can be applied not only to the individual, but also to broader national psychologies/ pathologies.

Critics of postwar German literature and psychology, such as Schlant and Bernhard Giesen, have described how the German nation passed through a 'coalition of silence' during the initial postwar years, where the trauma of the war years was embodied in 'haunting personal memories'. (Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators: The Holocaust as the Traumatic Reference of German National Identity", 134-135) The *Unfähigkeit zu trauern*, 'the inability to mourn', a phrase coined and explored in social psychologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's 1967 study of the same name used, as a point of reference, Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" applying Freudian principles to the postwar German environment so as to examine the psychological impact of the Holocaust on the war generation and their progeny. Their study indicated that the silencing of history (by the war generation), and the haunted memories of the parents had a continued affect on the second-generation who grew up not only in the shadow of such a catastrophic history, but were also directly affected by their parents damaged psyches. Marianne Hirsch, Judith Kestenberg and Anita Eckstaedt, whose insights will be invaluable in deconstructing Schlink's second-generation narratives, have all examined the impact that the trauma of the war generation has had on the second-generation, specifically in terms of trans-generational memory transference which manifests as transposition or postmemory. The psychoanalytic arguments that will be put forward and explored will foreground the discussion of the emergence of *Väterliteratur* in Chapter Two and will act as a framework through which to examine the earlier *Väterliteratur* texts, as well as Schlink's material.

Of interest in Schlink's texts *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* is how the characters that represent the parent generation, particularly the mother figures, choose to omit, distort or fabricate narratives which directly impact the interactions that they have with their sons. How the second-generation (represented by the sons in these texts) chooses to cope with, address, or mourn their parents' actions appears to be strongly governed by how they perceive their own relationship to this Holocaust legacy, particularly through a paternal connection[4].

Having demonstrated the relevance and function of psychoanalysis as a means to exploring postwar German writing, I will begin Chapter Two by situating Schlink's material within the broader context of West German literature. Here, I will also discuss the rise of the first wave of *Väterliteratur*, paying specific attention to how such a form came to dominate the German literary scene during the late 1970s and early 1980s, as well as what conventions have become associated with the genre. Historically, *Väterliteratur* was first identified as being 'part of a massive postwar generational conflict that began as a political rebellion with the student movement of the late 1960s and only emerged as a literary topos in the late 1970s' by Michael Schneider in his essay titled "Fathers and Sons, Retrospectively: The Damaged Relationship between Two Generations".[5] (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature*, 145-146) Because many of the autobiographical novels that emerged during the late 1970s and early 1980s in Germany contained similarities in terms of content and theme, they have been grouped together under - what is now considered - the problematic umbrella term *Väterliteratur*. The reason that this term has been deemed problematic more recently, is due to the presence (however marginal) of mother figures who, despite not occupying particularly important roles within the narratives, are nevertheless present. Thus the genre of *Väterliteratur* has been extended to include texts written in the late 1970s and early 1980s that contain an exploration into the life of the mother as well as that of the father. The content of these novels suggests that the sons belonging to the second-generation witnessed what has been described as a 'dramatic

[4] *The Reader* stands out as an exception to this exploration of the second-generation tie to atrocity via the father figure, replacing it instead with the figure of an S.S. woman, who was once the protagonist's lover.

[5] Schneider's essay, "Väter und Söhne, posthum: Das beschädigte Verhältnis Zweier Generationen" ("Fathers and Sons, Retrospectively: The Damaged Relationship between Two Generations", 1984) has become a frequently cited analysis of this genre and has led to him being called the 'father' of the *Väterliteratur* genre[5]. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature*, 146)

transformation' from the 'heroic-omniscient-father' to the 'defeated-father', which finally ends with the image of the father as perpetrator leaving 'profound [psychological] scars that inevitably impact male subjectivity'. (Kosta, "Väterliteratur, Masculinity, and History: The Melancholic Texts of the 1980s", 229)

This form of writing emerged only once the silence about the past, associated with the initial postwar period, was broken through in 1968 with the student rebellion, signalling the beginning of West Germany's overt engagement with the Nazi past from the perspective of the student revolutionaries. The young men and women who had been involved in the Student Uprising of 1968 had not only been involved in a generational revolt or protest, but were also attempting to address the traumatic origin of German national identity and trying to reconstruct it by bringing the issue of guilt 'to the fore of public debates' and replacing the 'narratives that had presented the Germans as the victims of Nazi tyranny' with an accusation of 'tacit and overt collaboration'. This act, in many respects, oversimplified the nature of complicity by the war generation Germans, and did not take into account the many German political prisoners and dissenters who were also imprisoned and executed during Hitler's Reich, nor did it consider the nature of complicity associated with the victims. This narrow conception of war-time guilt generated a new narrative that stigmatised the entire war generation and by doing so, the generation of 1968 felt that they could legitimately represent the victims of Nazism by 'cut [ting] the links to the nation of perpetrators.' (Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators ...", 128*)* However, theirs (the student revolutionaries) was a failed rebellion since it managed to avoid the crucial confrontation of the Nazi past within the context of the postwar family by focusing the protest in the public arena. This failure to address atrocity within the family sphere was then reflected on in the (auto)biographical writing that began dominating the German literary scene in the late 1970s, expressing a desire to work through the unresolved filial connection to the Holocaust. In many instances, these texts contained tropes associated with the uncanny such as repression, haunting and the uncertainty of experience to explore this often elusive connection to the past, a device which is also evident in Schlink's work particularly in terms of how he chooses to present the conflicted experiences of his characters.

Chapter Three will function as a dual exploration, firstly into the resurgent interest in the Holocaust past that emerged quite strongly after German reunification and then into how Schlink

(whose international writing career only began in 1997, and so might be understood as a result of this renewed interest) can be viewed as an author who engages with and adapts the conventions found in the earlier wave of *Väterliteratur*. Schlink's texts *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard*, although quite different in their presentation of the experiences of the second-generation, should possibly be understood as a continued exploration of the concerns that were put forward in his first text of this nature, *The Reader*. A prominent feature of his later work lies in his choice of catalyst for the exploration of the Nazi past. Instead of using the death of the father figure - a key convention found in the earlier father novels - to create a space where the silence of the war years can be addressed, Schlink uses his protagonists' interest in what I will call mysterious objects (often discovered or first seen during their [the protagonists'] childhood) to initiate their research. Their research then leads them into an exploration of the past where the object of interest becomes a device connecting them not only to the historical past, but to a filial tie to that past since these objects are discovered within the family space.

While on the surface *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* appear to conform more readily to the exploration of the father-son paradigm as seen in the earlier father novels, there exists a strong and troubling female presence within these stories that, as in the case of *The Reader*, is often misunderstood due to the accompanying eroticism. Instead of focusing on the often failed romantic/ erotic relationships present in *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard*, I have instead chosen to focus on how Schlink has presented his audience with the presence of the postwar mother, who despite being considered unimportant in terms of engaging with the Nazi past in the postwar family context (a concept attributable to the allegedly non-political role occupied by German women) still appears to play an important role in Schlink's narratives. Of course the most obviously different of these texts is *The Reader*, which does not conform to the father-son paradigm, nor indeed to the confrontation of the Nazi past within the family context. In this novel Schlink has situated the generational conflict present in the father novels, completely outside of the postwar family context and has also sexualised the relationship between the generations. In so doing he has managed to emphasise, not only the continued struggle between the generations, but crucially the historically elusive role played by women during the Third Reich. Additionally he has also managed to explore the idea that the generational conflict present in postwar Germany permeates all relationships between the generations, not just those of a familial nature. As such, Chapter Four titled "Nazi women and Postwar Mothers: Schlink's

Women and *Väterliteratur*" will firstly examine *The Reader* in terms of Schlink's interesting and problematic portrayal of a Nazi woman and how he has debunked, through such an exploration, the masculine myth of Nazism. Turning to *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* I will then examine how Schlink has given his mother figures not only the problematic status as victims of Nazi patriarchal attitudes, but also uses them as the point of connection between the Nazi past and the second-generation. While *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* do appear to be largely dominated by the protagonists' desires to understand their father's activities during the war, it is difficult to omit a discussion of the women, specifically the mother figures, present in these texts since they play a vital role in either assisting or hindering the protagonist's progress in his quest. Of course it is less easy to ignore Schlink's choice of female characterisation when analysing a text such as *The Reader*, since the relationship between Hanna and Michael is at the centre of the novel, but in *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* the roles played by the female characters initially appear far less dominant.

Chapter 1

Addressing the Past:

Setting out a Psychoanalytic Framework for Reading Schlink's Texts

"No country has been more vexed by the topic of national identity and no country, I would venture to say, has dealt as consciously with its past as Germany."

- Barbara Kosta[6]

"In grief the world becomes poor and empty; in melancholia it is ego itself. The patient represents his ego to us as worthless, incapable of any effort and morally despicable; he reproaches himself, vilifies himself and expects to be cast out and chastised. He abases himself before everyone and commiserates his own relatives for being connected with someone so unworthy."

- Sigmund Freud[7]

Since the advent of World War Two, it has become increasingly difficult to discuss anything 'German' without addressing the haunting presence of the Holocaust, and it is problematic to discuss the Holocaust without giving some thought to the long term psychosocial implications for the nation in which such an event has taken place. Reflections on the Nazi past comprise a large part of postwar German writing in general and, contrary to expectations[8], have re-emerged quite strongly

[6]From Kosta, Barbara, "Väterliteratur, Masculinity, and History: The Melancholic Texts of the 1980s". *Conceptions of Postwar German Masculinity*. Ed. Roy Jerome. New York: State University of New York Press, 200, p. 219

[7] From Freud, Sigmund, "Mourning and Melancholia". *General Psychological Theory: Theories on paranoia, masochism, repression, melancholia, the unconscious, the libido, and other aspects of the human psyche*. Ed. Philip Rieff. United States of America: Collier Books, 1963, p. 167

[8] The fear that German reunification would lead to the proclamation that Germany had fully mastered its Nazi past is explored by Erin McGlothlin in *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (2006) and Bill Niven in *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (2002). Contrary to expectation, after reunification there was a resurgent interest in Germany concerning the Nazi past, instead of cessation as had been feared, a phenomenon that is discussed in Chapter Three of this dissertation.

amongst authors – notably Bernhard Schlink - writing after German re-unification. Historically, these efforts to address or master the past (*Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) were provoked by 'key political and cultural events'[9] that led to 'brief periods of intense confrontation with this past', and have influenced the discourses of mourning and memory in what was the Federal Republic. (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, XI-XII) To understand how these confrontations with the Nazi past have been represented in literature one needs to look at the psychology of the postwar German people; specifically those who belonged to the war generation and their progeny.

The conflict that arose between the war generation and the second-generation over their actions (or inaction) during the war period led to two subjective forms of writing in the mid 1970s and early 1980s that tried to address the Nazi past through the postwar generation's confrontation with its fathers as perpetrators of the Third Reich: these were the New Subjectivity movement and the genre of *Väterliteratur*[10] (Literature about Fathers). Since this dissertation concerns itself with literature I would like to consider how these experiences, on an individual level, have been reflected on in the literary space taking the form of (auto)biography (as is the case with *Väterliteratur*) as well as fiction that mirrors this form of (auto)biographical writing; specifically the material produced by Bernhard Schlink.

Schlink's novels *The Reader*, *Homecoming* and short story *Girl with Lizard* show a thorough acquaintance with the concerns and conventions contained within the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s – absent or psychologically damaged fathers, and an exploration into the Nazi past - adapting these to a fictional format and generating what could be considered a new form of father writing. In order to foreground an understanding of how and why Schlink might have used these conventions, this chapter will examine the psychological mechanisms at play in Germany on a national level during the first postwar period and how these gave rise to the generational conflict, the 1968 Student Movement and the resultant *Väterliteratur*. Additionally, I will address the use of psychoanalysis as an effective framework for reading German postwar

[9] Santner cites the performances of the Anne Frank story in German theatres in the late fifties, the Eichmann trial in Jerusalem in 1960-61, the Auschwitz trials in Frankfurt in 1963-65, the student revolts (also called the Student Movement) in the late sixties and the broadcast of the American television film *Holocaust* in 1979 as examples of these key political and cultural events that make up some of the efforts at *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. (*Stranded Objects*, XI)

[10] The New Subjectivity movement and *Väterliteratur* are discussed in depth in Chapter Two.

writing in general, how this mode of interpretation came to be accepted, as well as how it might be used to analyse the texts selected for this dissertation.

Psychoanalysis has been applied to several postwar German literary texts, particularly but not limited to those that have become associated with the genre of *Väterliteratur*. This application of psychoanalysis to German postwar literature appears to have become widely accepted with the 1967 publication of social psychologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's study *The Inability to Mourn*: *Principles of Collective Behaviour*. What appears to have struck the Mitscherlichs most about the postwar German social setting was a seeming lack of psychological reaction to the defeat of 1945, a lack of reaction that has been revisited more recently by another social psychologist, Bernhard Giesen. What the Mitscherlichs asserted in their study was that the German population (during the period when this study was conducted) did not seem to be experiencing any outward symptoms of depression after the war, a phenomenon that Giesen attributes to the 'coalition of silence' surrounding the immediate postwar period (Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators ... ", 117):

> To millions of Germans the loss of the "Führer" (for all the oblivion that covered his downfall and the rapidity with which he was renounced) was not the loss of someone ordinary; identifications that had filled a central function in the lives of his followers were attached to his person. As we said, he had become the embodiment of their ego-ideal. The loss of an object so highly cathected with libidinal energy – one about whom nobody had any doubts, nor dared to have any, even when the country was being reduced to rubble – was indeed reason for melancholia. Through the catastrophe not only was the German ego-ideal robbed of the support of reality, but in addition the Führer himself was exposed by the victors as a criminal of truly monstrous proportions. With this sudden reversal of his qualities, the ego of every single German individual suffered a central devaluation and impoverishment. This creates at least the prerequisites for a melancholic reaction. (A. and M. Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn*, 26)

When Germany lost its Führer, the nation not only lost a leader, but also a father figure. Moreover, the loss of such a highly cathected political figure should have, at the very least, resulted in national mourning or depression. However, during the first postwar period that is to

say between 1946 and the publication of The Inability to Mourn neither of these states of mind were observed by the Mitscherlichs amongst the German populace. The discussion and diagnosis offered by the Mitscherlichs, created a new framework of interpretation that 'promised to extend the reach of analysis and moral evaluation of social and political behaviour in postwar Germany'. (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 2)

Santner claims that the ability to perceive the full extent of the 'crimes committed in the name of the fatherland and to mourn for the victims of Nazism' would have necessitated a working through of the trauma of breaking with a narcissistic identification with Hitler and the *Volksgemeinschaft*. Essentially, a sense of self would have first needed to be reconstructed on the 'ruins of this narcissism'. (3-4) However, as already pointed out by the Mitscherlichs, this opening up to a potentially crippling melancholic response, did not take place in the initial postwar period. The Mitscherlich's attributed this seeming lack of response to the efficient deployment of a set of defence mechanisms that served to burn emotional ties to the past. Amongst these were the derealisation of the past, the sudden shift of identification with Hitler to the Democratic Allies, and finally, identification with the victim (4):

> The Federal Republic did not succumb to melancholia; instead, as a group, those who had lost their "ideal leader," the representative of a commonly shared ego-ideal, managed to avoid self-devaluation by breaking all affective bridges to the immediate past. This withdrawal of affective cathecting energy, of interest, should not be regarded as a decision, as a conscious, deliberate act; it was an unconscious process, with only minimal guidance from the conscious ego. The disappearance from memory of events that had previously been highly stimulating and exciting must be regarded as the result of a self-protective mechanism triggered, so to speak, like a reflex action. This rejection of inner involvement in one's own behaviour under the Third Reich prevented a loss of self-esteem that could hardly have been mastered, and a consequent outbreak of melancholia in innumerable cases. (A. and M. Mitscherlich, *The Inability to Mourn*, 26)

However, this break with the past is something that had to be continuously maintained at great psychic cost to the population, the result of which was a prevention of any true feelings of sympathy and guilt for the victims. Through the deployment of defence mechanisms the German

population as a whole was unable to grieve for the victims and experience guilt for the suffering that had been caused both directly and indirectly, because such an experience (the capacity to empathise) only manifests when one can identify the other as being other. (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 6) The mourning process that should have arisen under such circumstances could not take place because the defence mechanisms at play prevented the population from empathising ("I" and "you" are separate) with the victims, giving rise to a situation where identification ("I" and "you" are the same) became possible. The result of this, what I will call here, mass psychosocial repression was not only the inability to mourn the past, of which silence and uncertainty are only two aspects, but a sense of shame that has been passed onto future generations.

Much of the theory presented by the Mitscherlichs in *The Inability to Mourn* and cited by postwar German critics such as Schlant and Santner, seems to have its origins in Sigmund Freud's essay "Mourning and Melancholia" (1917). It was here that Freud posited two different patterns of bereavement - mourning and melancholy - which require some form of explanation in order to understand the psychological problems beginning to emerge in the postwar German space, and that would continue to have long reaching effects for the second-generation.

In "Mourning and Melancholia" Freud claimed that it is only possible for mourning to take place when an object that a person has loved for its intrinsic qualities, as being separate and distinct from the person, is lost, whereas melancholy occurs when the object of love was not viewed as separate and distinct but rather as a reflection of the person's sense of self and power. Because Freud has formulated such a distinction between these two forms of bereavement, there is necessarily an expectation that the psychological working through of either state will take on different forms with different results.

In the case of mourning, because the person has a capacity to tolerate the potentially painful awareness that 'I' [self] and 'you' [other][11] have boundaries/ edges, and that 'inscribed within the space of this interval [between self and other] are the possibilities of misunderstanding, disappointment, [and] even betrayal', the person who has experienced the loss

[11] Words placed in square brackets are mine.

is able to detach themselves from the lost love object enabling them to seek out another (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 2):

> The testing of reality, having shown that the loved object no longer exists, requires forthwith that all libido shall be withdrawn from its attachments to this object ... Nevertheless its behest cannot be at once obeyed. The task is now carried through bit by bit, under great expense of time and cathectic energy, while all the time the existence of the lost object is continued in the mind. Each single one of the memories and hopes which bound the libido to the object is brought up and hyper-cathected, and the detachment of the libido from it accomplished...The fact is, that when the work of mourning is completed the ego becomes free and uninhibited again. (Freud, "Mourning and Melancholia", 165-166)[12]

With Melancholy, the loved object has fulfilled a different function in the psychological life of the bereaved and so the pattern by which loss is worked through is also different. Because melancholy does not allow for the distinction between self and other, when a loved object is lost it follows that a part of the self is lost, making it difficult for the ego to achieve detachment from the object. The primary difference between the experience of mourning and that of melancholy lies in what Freud identifies as being the melancholic's erotic cathexis to the loved object, which when lost results in a form of sadism that is explanation enough as to why melancholic's tend to fall into a suicidal depression. He says that it 'is this sadism, and only this, that solves the riddle of the tendency to suicide which makes melancholia so interesting – and so dangerous.' (173)

The idea of melancholia as being of interest because of the melancholic's tendency toward suicide seems somewhat callous. But what I think Freud was emphasising in this statement is not suicide itself, but rather the 'riddle'; the reason as to why melancholics, or depressives as they have become known, commit suicide. After all, in a species renowned for its desire towards self-preservation, self-destruction or suicide seems anomalous.

[12] "Mourning and Melancholia" was first published in *Zeitschrift*, Bd. IV., 1916-1918; Reprinted in *Sammlung*, Vierte Folge. [Translated by Joan Riviere] – This information has been taken from Freud, *General Psychological Theory: Theories on paranoia, masochism, repression, melancholia, the unconscious, the libido, and other aspects of the human psyche.* (ed.) Rieff, Philip, United States of America: Collier Books, 1963

Freud observed that the distinguishing mental characteristics of melancholia involved a 'profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings' that are articulated in 'self-reproaches and self-revilings' which culminate in 'delusional expectation[s] of punishment'. (165) He also acknowledges that mourning [grief][13] and melancholia [depression] bear several similarities in terms of their external manifestation with the exception of the loss of self-esteem:

> The fall in self-esteem is absent in grief; but otherwise the features are the same. Profound mourning, the reaction to the loss of a loved person, contains the same feeling of pain, loss of interest in the outside world – in so far as it does not recall the dead one – loss of capacity to adopt any new object of love, which would mean a replacing of the one mourned, the same turning from every active effort that is not connected with thoughts of the dead. It is easy to see that this inhibition and circumscription in the ego is the expression of an exclusive devotion to its mourning, which leaves nothing over for other purposes or other interests. It is really only because we know so well how to explain it that this attitude does not seem to us pathological. (165)

In reality, the experience of love and loss as experienced in the 'pure' states of either mourning or melancholy are rare, because love/ loving does to some extent include an element of resistance to the perception of the separateness of self and other. It seems more appropriate to speak of a 'continuum or a layering of more primitive[14] and more mature modes of mourning' in a specific experience of loss. (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 3)

While Freud's focus is centred more on the individual experience of either mourning or melancholia, the Mitscherlichs applied his principles to Germany on a national level,

[13] The bracketed words are used by myself to show that there exist two alternative words for Freud's terms 'mourning' and 'melancholia'.

[14] Here Santner is referring to the melancholic state, where the predisposition is that 'the self lacks sufficient strength and cohesion to tolerate…the reality of separateness'. This is the situation faced by both the 'primary narcissist' (infant) and the 'secondary narcissist' (adult melancholic). This, he states, results in a more primitive form of grieving; different from 'healthy' mourning. (*Stranded Objects*, 3)

demonstrating that an act of national mourning would be necessary in order to adequately come to terms with the past, but that such an act might lead to mass melancholia, which considering the urgent need for postwar reconstruction to return Germany to some semblance of economic viability (i.e. a positive outlook for the country's future), was most undesirable.

Margarete Mitscherlich, an acclaimed psychoanalyst with a particular interest in postwar German guilt and co-author of *The Inability to Mourn*, reasserted the 'centrality of the psychological dimension in general and the question of mourning in particular for any understanding of the generations born during and after the Nazi period'. (Quoted in Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 34) Such an observation becomes increasingly relevant when looking at the father novels of the 1970s and 1980s. In her work *Erinnerungsarbeit: Zur Psychoanalyse der Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (1987), published just before the fall of the Berlin Wall and the reunification of Germany, she asserted that these generations, born too late to be complicitous in the crimes of Nazism, can still be understood in terms of an inability to mourn:

> Since the publication of *The Inability to Mourn*, much has changed in the political landscape of Germany. It is doubtful, however, whether our collective attitude toward the unmastered core of our past has been affected by these transformations. And that is because the working through of the foundations of National Socialism – each individual's involvement in the movement, his or her emotional and spiritual identification with this period – has not yet been achieved. Even those in their twenties today, whose parents passed along their own defenses against the past, continue to live in the shadow of the denial and repression of events that cannot be undone by acts of forgetting. [15]
> (Quoted in Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 34)

In this work Mitscherlich argues that the postwar generations have not inherited guilt so much as the denial of guilt and lost opportunities to mourn losses. Additionally, these postwar generations have also inherited the psychic structures that prevented mourning in the generations of their parents and grandparents. In an analysis of Mitscherlich's comments about this inheritance of an inability to mourn, Santner claims that:

[15] Here I have quoted M. Mitscherlich through E. Santner because there does not seem to be a readily available English translation of her book *Erinnerungsarbeit: Zur Psychoanalyse der Unfähigkeit zu trauern* (1987).

> These remarks suggest that the legacies – or perhaps more accurately: the ghosts, the revenant objects – of the Nazi period are transmitted to the second and third generations at the sites of the primal scenes of socialization, that is, within the context of a certain psychopathology of the postwar family. The postwar generations face the complex task of constituting stable self-identities by way of identifications with parents and grandparents who, in the worst possible cases, may have been directly implicated in crimes of unspeakable dimensions...even where direct culpability is absent, these elders are individuals whose own self-structures are likely to have been made rigid by a persistent core of repressed melancholy as well as the intense aggressions associated with unmourned narcissistic injuries, namely, the sudden and radical disenchantment of Nazi phantasms. (*Stranded Objects*, 35)

Extensive studies have been done on the long term effects of the Holocaust on the children of survivors. More recently, the effects of the psychic legacy of the Nazi period on the children of perpetrators has become of interest, with close similarities having been discovered between the case histories of the children of the oppressed and those of the oppressors. What is of particular interest in these case studies was the responsibility felt by these children to perform the work of mourning that had not been done by the parents (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 35-36).

In "A Victim of the Other Side" (1982), psychoanalyst Anita Eckstaedt examines her sessions with Dietrich L., a thirty-four-year-old man whose parents were both Nazis, which led her to conclude that the children of both perpetrators and survivors (in the case of the Holocaust) share many similar experiences in the postwar space. The most notable of these similarities lies in the desire of both groups to 'repair the fatal events in the histories of their parents'. (225) She says that 'since they [the second generation] were burdened with a task [repairing their parents' history] stemming from a past reality that was incomprehensible to them they could only act out what had been engraved, but not integrated, in their parents' memories'. This was in and of itself problematic because for the parents the past was still alive placing them [the parents] in a situation where they were unable to 'talk with their children in a way that would have helped them to understand the past'. For the children of both victim and perpetrator there was a distinct lack of verbal communication about the past in the family sphere, but as Eckstaedt points out,

both groups were given 'important mission[s] via nonverbal channels'. In the case of Jewish children, they were to 'rehabilitate their parents and restore to them their lost dignity' and for German children – as seen in Dietrich's case – they were to 'undo the loss of the war and attain victory'. (225) For these children a 'second reality' was actualised in the present – a 'suspension of time ... [that] allowed the illusion that the parents' past fate could still be changed'. Drawing on Kestenberg's[16] work with survivor's children and her formulation of how this 'artificially actualised second reality' relies on an 'overlapping time scheme' or 'time tunnel' where the past is integrated into the present, Eckstaedt demonstrates how this phenomenon can also be observed in the case of second-generation Germans. Kestenberg calls this movement of the parents' past into the child's present 'transposition' and claims that this integration of the past into the present helps strengthen the ego's desire to fulfill the non-verbal mission as set out by the parents. (225)

Closely linked to Kestenberg's concept of transposition is Marianne Hirsch's[17] term 'postmemory'. Postmemory describes the relationship of the second generation to powerful, often traumatic, experiences that preceded their births but that were transmitted to them so deeply as to appear to form part of their own memories. ("The Generation of Postmemory", 103) This 'received memory' is distinct from the memories of witnesses and participants, thus Hirsch's insistence on the qualifying adjectives 'post' or 'after', that attempt to define both a specifically inter- and trans-generational act of transfer and the resonant after effects of trauma. Hirsch views postmemory as a structure for the transmission of inter- and trans-generational trauma; of knowledge as well as of experience at a generational remove. The term describes the relationship of the proceeding generation, after a cultural or collective trauma, to the experiences of the generation who came before. These experiences are remembered through the stories,

[16] Judith Kestenberg was a psychoanalyst specialising in childhood development and the emotional state of Holocaust survivors and their children. She was also a member of the Group for the Psychoanalytic Study of the Effect of the Holocaust on the Second Generation and noted that fragments of memories, dreams and fantasies presented by some of their patients were related to the experiences of their parents under the Hitler regime, but were not connected in this way by analysts in the therapeutic situation. (Eckstaedt, "A Victim of the Other Side", 97)

[17] Marianne Hirsch is currently Professor of English and Comparative Literature at Columbia University and Professor in the Institute for Research on Women and Gender.

images and behaviours amongst which they grew up and are transmitted to the second-generation so deeply and affectively as to appear to constitute memories in their own right. (106-7)[18]

For the writers of the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and1980s, this interplay between past and present is thoroughly explored in their (auto) biographical writing, since it was only after the Student Movement of 1968, that German authors, usually belonging to the second-generation and who were involved in the Student Movement, began the belated process of coming to terms with the ghosts of the past. Their novels, as will be elaborated on in Chapter Two, typically took the form of a reconstruction of the father's biography. This biography, or 'literary obituary' was woven together with an 'autobiographical narrative that registered the wounds inflicted on the psyches of the author by the father'. (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 36) Some examples of more prominent texts from the period include: Paul Kersten's *Der alltägliche Tod meines Vaters* (The everyday death of my father, 1978), Ruth Rehmann's *Der Mann auf der Kanzel: Fragen an einen Vater* (The man in the pulpit: Questions for a father, 1979), Siegfried Gauch's *Vaterspuren* (Traces of a father, 1979), Christoph Meckel's *Suchbild: Über meinen Vater* (Image for investigation about my father, 1980), Brigitte Schwaiger's *Lange Abwesenheit* (Long absence, 1983), Ludwig Harig's *Ordnung ist das ganze Leben: Roman meines Vaters* (Order is the essence of life: Novel of my father, 1985). (36)

These biographies suggest not only that the second-generation bears deep psychological wounds (as discussed by the Mitscherlichs and Eckstaedt) left by parents whose own inability to work through the past drove them to use their children as a resource for psychic replenishment, but that they [the second-generation] were also emotionally 'blackmailed into complicity with the parents' inability to mourn'. (37) For those traumatised by the experience of the Holocaust, the family became the primary site where a 'damaged self could be refurbished' under the 'mirroring gazes of spouse and offspring'. A space, where it appeared possible for the traumatised parent to make themselves whole if only through the eyes of the child. The result was that, to a large extent, members of the second-generation inherited the 'melancholy' that their parents had managed to keep at bay through their defense mechanisms. (37)

[18] Other important scholars who deal with the mechanisms of traumatic memory for various generations of trauma survivors include Mieke Bal, Cathy Caruth, Shoshana Felman, Dominick La Capra, Leo Spitzer, Nancy K. Miller, Michael Rothberg.

As a genre, *Väterliteratur* exemplifies how the events repressed by the war generation haunt their children in the form of dysfunctional family units, abusive or unresponsive fathers, personal experiences that seem inexplicable and fractured or distorted memories.[19] In terms of the texts chosen for the purposes of this study, Schlink's work does not seem thematically different from the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s, despite having been written in the mid 1990s and 2000s. According to social psychologist Bernhard Giesen the student protests, despite having achieved very little tangible change (simply because one cannot change what has already happened), played a pivotal role in generating genuine discourse about the war period. Through their act of protest the young Germans terminated the 'coalition of silence' exposing the trauma of the war years - which had become embodied in haunting personal memories and the inability to mourn by the war generation - to national critique. The German youth who had been involved in the Student Movement of 1968 'brought the issue of guilt to the fore of public debates and replaced the narratives that had presented the Germans as the victims of Nazi tyranny with a charge of tacit and overt collaboration'. Of course this act was not about creating 'reassuring illusions' about their own guilt, but rather the guilt of their fathers' from whom they were trying to create a moral distance. This new narrative of collaboration with the Nazi powers 'turned the trauma [of the war] into the stigma of an entire generation'; going beyond the 'limits of individual criminal guilt'. Indeed it encompassed 'the preceding but still present generations, the voters of 1933 as well as the *Hitlerjugend*' since all were considered collectively responsible for the national trauma 'as voters, party members, bystanders, collaborators and fanatic supporters, as well as contemporaries who had not prevented the horrible crime'. By stigmatising the generation of their fathers, the young Germans...represented the victims, and in doing so they could cut the links to the nation of perpetrators.' ("The Trauma of Perpetrators ... ", 128)

Väterliteratur, as will be further discussed in Chapter Two, tries to negate the importance of lineage and tradition (connected here to the war generation) and so create a rupture with the past. This is done so as to create an obvious distinction between the two generations as far as their perceived guilt about the Holocaust is concerned. However, while these texts refute the importance of family heritage and tradition they still display a longing for

[19] *Väterliteratur* and its conventions are discussed in Chapter Two of this dissertation.

these ideas. The texts written during the 1970s and 1980s use the death of the father as a catalyst to launch an exploration into his life and possible Nazi affiliations, engaging with the memories of the protagonist/ author to mourn the loss of the parent, and in some cases a damaged childhood, where as far as the psychology of the protagonist is concerned, 'continues to generate distrust and an artificially forced autonomy'. (Eckstaedt, "A Victim of the Other Side", 225) However this device might also be viewed as a tool used by the protagonist/ author to work through his/ her own sense of melancholy regarding both the historical and personal past – specifically the father's past.

While his is a work of fiction, Schlink's texts do draw on many of the thematic conventions found in *Väterliteratur* engaging with questions about the Nazi past, and adapting these to form narratives that deal more directly with some of the primary issues present in the genre. These adaptations, which are looked at more closely in Chapters Three and Four, can be seen most noticeably in *The Reader*, *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* making these, in this instance, ideal examples of the re-emergence of this genre in the German post-unification space.

One of the problems that emerges strongly in these texts – those belonging to the *Väterliteratur* genre as well as Schlink's more recent material – is the nature and working through (mourning) of traumatic experience. As has already been discussed in terms of the (auto) biographical work of the 1970s and 1980s, and here must be emphasised as being equally true of Schlink's work, the trauma that is present in these texts is at a generational remove, and yet affects the protagonists in much the same way as if they themselves had experienced it. This goes back to Santner's observation that it was the second generation (both victim and perpetrator) who felt that it was their responsibility to 'perform the work of mourning that had not been done by the parents', and to Margarete Mitscherlich's assertion that a major hindrance to this work of mourning lies in the second-generation's inheritance of the denial of guilt, lost opportunities to mourn losses as well as the inherited psychic structures that had prevented mourning in the parent generation. (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 34-36) Unlike texts where the protagonists experience traumatic events directly, the work written by the second-generation lacks the element of the witness, for they did not witness firsthand the events that resulted in silence, repressed melancholy and the denial of guilt. What they have instead (as has already

been suggested by Eckstaedt and Hirsch) is the experience of a second-hand trauma, one where the traumatic experience has been passed onto them within the context of the postwar family.

Much of the trauma that the second-generation has to work through stems from the loss of 'self-respect and moral integrity' that followed the defeat of 1945, and the exposure of the extent of the atrocity that has now become associated with the Holocaust. For Germany, moral justification for the war effort was 'entirely and radically' denied because the victors labelled the aim, form and circumstances of the war criminal. (Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators ... ", 115) To return to Bernhard Giesen's discussion; after 1945 Germany passed through a 'coalition of silence' which was terminated by the student rebellion of 1968. This 'coalition of silence' marked the first postwar period where the traumatic experiences were embodied in 'haunting personal memories. The Unfähigkeit zu trauern ("the inability to mourn") resulted in public silence and the expulsion of the perpetrators'. (134-35) Even though the literature produced during this period appears to write around its subject matter, rather than addressing it directly (a problem that has been explored by Ernestine Schlant in her work *The Language of Silence* (1999) and which will be examined in Chapter Two), the presence of the Holocaust and its aftermath is quite evident as can be seen in the early postwar writing of Wolfgang Borchert, particularly his play *Draußen vor der Tür* (*The Man Outside*, 1947), which narrates the story of a soldier's homeless homecoming.

Borchert was labelled 'the first writer to successfully find language again' and 'claim for himself the right to speak for his generation' (the war generation). Accordingly, he became the reference point for writers such as Alfred Andersch, Wolfdietrich Schnurre, and Heinrich Böll. (Winter, "Brutal Heroes, Human Marionettes, and Men with Bitter Knowledge: On the New Formulation of Masculinity in the Literature of the 'Young Generation' after 1945 (W. Borchert, H. Böll, and A. Andersch)", 193) After 1945 *Trümmerliteratur* (Literature of the rubble) searched for language that would be able to describe the suffering of the German population. An attempt was made to create a new start, 'to proclaim a "zero hour" from which to go forward'. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 23) During their search for this 'new language' the young writers of *Trümmerliteratur*, many of whom like Heinrich Böll and Wolfgang Borchert were war veterans, 'experimented in a spare, colloquial style in the manner of newly accessible writers like Hemingway and Faulkner.' (23) Some of the writers of *Trümmerliteratur* - particularly Andersch who alongside Werner Richter, founded *Der Ruf* (The Call) an American, German

camp newspaper - had been prisoners of war in the United States where they had been exposed to American literature and to 'courses in the social sciences as training for becoming the future administrators of a liberated Germany.' (23)

Der Ruf continued to be published for approximately a year in the American occupation zone after the return of the German prisoners of war. However, its license was not renewed by the United States Military Government. Continuing their discussions, the contributors to the journal held a meeting in 1947 near the Bavarian Alps and established what came to be known as the Group 47:

> However, the mood and outlook of the members of the group changed, not least because of their growing conviction that political statements and involvement would not achieve success. In contrast to the *Trümmerliteratur* of the young writers, quasi-mystical journeys of quest were composed by members of an older generation, such as Elisabeth Langgässer and Hermann Kasack, much of it influenced by the French existentialists, notably Sartre and Camus.
> (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 23)

As the reconstruction effort gained momentum so *Trümmerliteratur* and stories of the quasi-mystical journeys of quest, both of which focused on the postwar experiences of the German population, began to vanish. Instead of being replaced by a sustained inquiry into the recent Nazi past all energy was focused on reconstruction. The knowledge of the Nazi past was simply repressed, resulting in texts that wrote around their subject matter rather than engaging with it directly. This problem of engaging with the past came to a head with the 1968 Student Movement, where the second-generation openly pointed towards the war generation as being at the heart of the recent traumatic history.

In terms of the texts chosen for this study Schlink has engaged with the generational conflict that was embodied by the Student Movement of 1968 and later took the form of the father texts. In his texts, Schlink's protagonists are faced with seemingly insurmountable barriers as they investigate their father's lives through their own memories as well as historical documentation; barriers that do not fall away as the narratives progress, but become permeable as they reflect, research and discuss their findings either with other characters or with

themselves. This reflection, research and discussion seems reminiscent of the psychoanalytic space where the patient/ client sits or lies, talking about their difficulties, 'about unresolved bits of one's self and past' to a silent listener. (Gunn, *Psychoanalysis and Fiction*, 1) The *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and early 1980's reflects a desire to discuss the past, specifically the unresolved filial connection to the atrocities of the Holocaust. Mirroring the texts associated with *Väterliteratur*, Schlink's narratives do not offer any absolute solution or resolution to the problems that they explore. Instead the stories remain open for discussion and interpretation by his readership.

Psychoanalysis is one method that can be used to access past events - more specifically those events that exist within an individual's memory - the other is historical documentation. *Väterliteratur*, broadly speaking, makes use of both methods of investigation, the analysis of memory combined with documentation (photographs, interviews, documented historical occurrences) in order to understand and create an image of the father figure both pre- and postwar. While the act of undergoing analysis is not a literal one - that is to say that the authors do not attend sessions with a therapist and then write about their experiences - they do seem to subject their own memories and experiences to scrutiny via reflection and/ or discussion within their texts.

An interesting and well documented example of this dual strategy used to engage with the past comes not from the world of postwar Germany, but rather postwar England. In *Psychoanalysis and Fiction* (1988) Daniel Gunn, a Professor of Comparative Literature, English, and European and Mediterranean Cultures, discusses oral historian Ronald Fraser's memoir *In Search of a Past* (1984), specifically focusing on how Fraser made use of his sessions with a psychoanalyst to overcome 'the limits of his own preferred mode of investigation when he had to enquire into his own past'. (1) The limits to which Gunn refers are the limitations in terms of concrete evidence (documentation, photographs) experienced by Fraser during his time spent researching his youth. In Fraser's case, the interviews that he conducted with the servants who had worked in his parents' Manor House in Berkshire during his childhood conflicted with his memories of that period of his life. What he did uncover through his qualitative research was a 'world of privilege which seemed to disappear with the Second World War', but this did not

account for the ‘mental anguish’ from which he suffered and believed had ‘its roots in his childhood’. (1)

By entering into the psychoanalytic space, Fraser was able to fill in some of the spaces left by the servants’ accounts with his own memories that were ‘recounted - or discovered or invented’ in the present moment of utterance during analysis. (2) However, as Gunn has proposed, in order to achieve a full understanding of his personal past, Fraser had to write his story ‘which is both an oral history and a case history; ... a fiction of sorts, which subsumes both “cases” and “histories” - public and private - into a narrative to which he can put his name’. (2) By doing so, Fraser managed not only to come to an understanding about his past, but also - to some extent - resolved the conflict between his memories and the servants’ accounts, claiming the story as his reality, despite being in a situation where the truth of what he remembers can never be proved using concrete methods.

Despite having taken place in a different context, Fraser’s experience is an interesting one to keep in mind when examining *Väterliteratur* and the fiction of Bernhard Schlink. Schlink’s protagonists in *The Reader*, *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* have experiences which mirror Fraser’s during their search into their own pasts. All of these protagonists experience anguish in adulthood that can be traced back to a childhood or adolescent source and all seem to be unable to form friendships - other than a relationship with an immediate partner - which in Eckstaedt’s opinion is a typical problem experienced by the second-generation. (“A Victim of the Other Side”, 226) For Schlink’s protagonists, their internal conflict begins when they become aware that a seemingly innocuous experience, event or object has the capacity to bind them directly to the events of the Holocaust, forcing this national history into the personal sphere. Although none of Schlink’s characters enter into the psychoanalytic space in order to work through their relationship to this historical atrocity, they do actively search out concrete evidence in the form of documentation and interviews that support or add to their growing awareness or pool of knowledge concerning this personal connection. In all three of the texts, the information that the protagonists uncover conflicts either with what they have been told (Peter in *Homecoming*), the assumptions they had made about another person (Michael in *The Reader*) or the way in which they remember an occurrence (protagonist in *Girl with Lizard*).

Memory, as has been well documented, is fallible and is largely an unreliable and inconsistent source of information about experience. Yet memory and memories of experiences remain our only source of internalised information about the past. These problems centred on the uncertainty of the truth of memory and knowledge as understood and experienced by the protagonists in the texts selected for this dissertation, have about them the feeling of the uncanny. This uncanniness in Schlink's texts is attributable to both his choice of subject matter as well as the way in which he chooses to drive his narratives forward, posing increasingly difficult moral questions as the narratives progress. There is about these texts the sense of being haunted by a past that is omnipresent, but seemingly difficult to confront. This problem with confronting the past goes back to Margarete Mitscherlich's postulation that the generations born after the war 'continue to live in the shadow of the denial and repression of events that cannot be undone by acts of forgetting' and Santner's claim that the 'ghosts, the revenant objects of the Nazi period' are transmitted to the second generation within the context of the postwar family. (*Stranded Objects,* 34-35) Additionally, the metaphors used to describe the past - 'ghost[ly]', 'revenant objects' or 'shadow[s]' - resonate with Roger Luckhurst's[20] discussion of Freud and Breuer's formulation of psychic trauma (rather than physical) which describes such trauma as being:

> ...something that enters the psyche that is so unprecedented or overwhelming that it cannot be processed or assimilated by the usual mental processes. We have, as it were, nowhere to put it, and so it falls out of our conscious memory, yet is still present in the mind like an intruder or ghost. ("Mixing Memory and Desire: Psychoanalysis, Psychology, and Trauma Theory", 499)

This ghostly presence of the past - a past that pervades the present in seemingly intangible ways - forms part of what has been described as the uncanny. In order to understand or define what the uncanny actually is, as well as how Schlink has used this concept in his writing, I would like to examine how Nicholas Royle, a Professor of English, whose work takes as a starting point Freud's essay 'Das Unheimliche' ('The Uncanny', 1919) describes this phenomenon and its use in literature.

[20] Roger Luckhurst is a Professor of Modern and Contemporary Literature.

In *The Uncanny* (2003) Royle describes the experience of the uncanny as being ghostly; concerned with the strange, weird and mysterious, with a sense, but not conviction, of the supernatural. (1) While Schlink's texts, and indeed those that make up the genre of *Väterliteratur*, do not make use of obvious devices such as ghosts or spectres to convey the 'ghostly', there exists for the reader of such texts a pervasive feeling of being haunted. On one level, this haunted feeling is generated by the narratives' constant movement between past and present, memory and current experience; a haunting of the present by the past. But I would also like to suggest that in terms of Schlink's fiction uncanniness lies in his exploration of the psyche of his protagonists. By making use of a diegetic narrative Schlink delves into the psychology of his protagonists presenting his audience with a host of plausible motivations for their actions, which leaves his readers in an equal state of uncertainty. The uncanny, as explained by Royle, involves feelings of uncertainty, particularly in terms of the reality of who one is and what is being experienced, which is certainly demonstrated in Schlink's narratives. Yet, it is not only the experience of alienation or strangeness but a commingling of the familiar with the unfamiliar:

> It [the uncanny] can take the form of something familiar unexpectedly arising in a strange and unfamiliar context, or of something strange and unfamiliar unexpectedly arising in a familiar context. It can consist in a sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home. A feeling of uncanniness may come from curious coincidences, a sudden sense that things seem to be fated or 'meant to happen'...The uncanny can be a matter of something gruesome or terrible, above all death and corpses, cannibalism, live burial, the return of the dead. But it can also be a matter of something strangely beautiful...or eerily reminding us of something, like déjà vu...It comes above all, perhaps, in the uncertainties of silence, solitude and darkness. The uncanny has to do with the sense of a secret encounter: it is perhaps inseparable from an apprehension, however fleeting, of something that should have remained secret and hidden but has come to light...It would appear to be indissociably bound up with a sense of repetition or 'coming back' – the return of the repressed, the constant or eternal recurrence of the same thing, a compulsion to repeat. At some level the feeling of the uncanny may be bound up with the most extreme nostalgia or 'homesickness', in other words a compulsion to return to an inorganic state, a

> desire (perhaps unconscious) to die, a death drive. Above all, the uncanny is intimately entwined in language, with how we conceive and represent what is happening within ourselves, to ourselves, to the world, when uncanny strangeness is at issue. (Royle, 1-2)

Taking this rather extensive quote as a starting point to reading the work of Schlink, it becomes a little easier to see what it is that is uncanny about his texts. By having made use of the Holocaust as a background to his narratives, the primary example of uncanniness is his use of the idea of 'the return of the dead', or rather the revenant. While Schlink does not use this concept in a fantastical sense it is nevertheless still present in the form of a desperate need to address the past. Drawing from *The Reader*, the exploration of this idea begins in part two, chapter two of the novel. As a Law student, Michael attends one of the smaller trials of Nazi atrocities for a seminar. Through this trial, Michael is confronted by his past in the form of Hanna, who he has not seen since her abrupt disappearance:

> I did not recognise her until she was called, and she stood up and stepped forward. Of course I recognised the name as soon as I heard it: Hanna Schmitz. Then I also recognised the body, the head with the hair gathered in an unfamiliar knot, the neck, the broad back, and the strong arms. (*The Reader*, 93)

Despite his initial statement, 'I did not recognise her', Michael does indeed recognise his former lover in this older body and in a setting in which he had never expected to see her. Here we not only see the 'return of the dead', a concept that could be understood as being the return of something lost or something that has been rediscovered, but also the idea of an interplay between what is familiar and what is not. Both the setting and the person are familiar to Michael. What is not familiar is this particular person within this particular context, and that is why in order to recognise her, he must first recognise her name or rather recognise her name within his memories, "Of course I recognised the name ... " i.e. of course I remember her name. He finds himself in an unexpected situation, one that seems coincidental, but almost 'meant-to-be'. As a result of Schlink's formulation of events, a space is created where Michael can examine his relationship with this woman, and confront not only his feelings of abandonment, but also the Nazi past that Hanna embodies.

Of course one could say that the situation present in *The Reader* is not really uncanny in any sense but rather a device used by Schlink to firstly drive his narrative and secondly to demonstrate the greater problem at hand; the relationship between the war generation and postwar generation Germans. Even if one takes this far more simplistic explanation to be true, the situation still feels strange, possibly contrived, but the fact remains that Hanna's testimony reveals a completely different 'Hanna' to Michael; a woman capable of extreme cruelty born out of a misguided sense of responsibility. This aspect of her personal history and indeed personality, had she not been caught, might have remained hidden instead of being unveiled so publically.

Also present in the relationship between Michael and Hanna is the idea of something repressed that has come to the forefront of the conscious mind, or something hidden that has suddenly been exposed. Theirs is an extremely secretive affair; all of their amorous encounters take place away from the public gaze. During the only holiday that they share, they pretend to be mother and son instead of exposing their relationship to judgement from the outside world. There is a sense of excitement surrounding their relationship (especially for the young Michael), but also shame. It is this shame, this sense of having acted/ behaved wrongly that plagues Michael especially when Hanna's past as an SS guard is revealed to him, generating great internal angst. Michael's psychic conflict is born out of his love for this woman, a woman capable of terrible cruelty. His love for her, co-mingled with fear and desire, is given its most obvious expression in his dreams where 'a hard, imperious, cruel Hanna' arouses him sexually; and from which he awakes 'full of longing and shame and rage' and fear about who he really is. (*The Reader*, 146) This psychic conflict bearing many marks of the uncanny – silence, repression and uncertainty – along with Michael's inability to reconcile the two images that he has of Hanna makes for an interesting exploration where the traditional generational conflict found in the earlier forms of *Väterliteratur* takes new shape in the form of a traumatic love story.

Uncanniness as represented through silence, repression and uncertainty - in Schlink's work - is by no means unique to *The Reader,* being strongly present in *Homecoming* as well as *Girl with Lizard*. In *Homecoming* uncanniness is embodied in Peter's rediscovery of a series of texts that act as clues which guide him during his search for his father. On the surface, this novel takes the form of a quest or detective narrative where Peter, who after having discovered that his parents' marriage certificate is a forgery, begins to question the veracity of his mother's accounts

of her relationship with his father. His search for the elusive father figure takes him to America where he becomes embroiled in a bizarre psychosocial experiment in obedience to authority – following a similar structure to Milgram's Obedience study[21] – orchestrated by a Professor of Law whom Peter is convinced is the man he has been searching for. Many of Peter's discoveries made during his search for his supposedly deceased father, seem to be the result of coincidence. These curious coincidences are the result of a series of clues that Peter must discover in order to come to the conclusion that his father is alive (which is possibly one of the main aspects of this narrative), arguably the most important of which is the appearance of the book *The Odyssey of Law*, which not only reiterates previous ideologies expressed in the propaganda texts with which he becomes well acquainted, but gives him the name of the author. It is the presence of a name which allows Peter to move forward with his search.

Girl with Lizard takes this concept of literally searching out the past a step further, with the irony lying in the fact that the painting which is inherited by the protagonist- which he thinks of as *Girl with Lizard* - has been painted over the very painting for which he is searching titled *Lizard and Girl*. Uncanniness here is the result of the paintings' resemblance to one another which, as is later discovered, is due to them having been painted by the same artist. In this story, the uncanny likeness of the two paintings acts as the catalyst for this particular protagonist's enquiry into his father's past. For it is to find the origin of the painting that he spends time researching both his father and the artist, in an attempt to uncover whether his father was involved in Nazi art theft or if the painting was received as a token of appreciation for assisting the artist in escaping Nazi persecution. As with *Homecoming* it is through a series of uncanny coincidences or discoveries that the protagonist comes to realise who the artist is, as well as formulate a series of possible situations that may have brought his father and the painting together.

Given the discussion thus far, I believe that psychoanalysis functions as a most effective framework for reading the texts chosen for this dissertation. Historically, psychoanalysis has been used both as a means to understand the psychology of the postwar German environment as well as a lens through which to examine the literature that emerged as a result of the 1968 Student Movement. While this method of analysis is very much founded on the writings of

[21] Milgram's study is discussed in Chapter Three

Freud, specifically in this case "Mourning and Melancholy", important contributions to the discipline in terms of the postwar German space were made by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich, Bernhard Giesen and Anita Eckstaedt. The Mitscherlich's examination of the war generation's inability to address the atrocities of the Nazi period sheds new light on the problems faced by the second-generation. Giesen's discussion of how and why the Student Movement came into being, and what it was that this movement was trying to achieve (but failed to do) opens an interesting starting point to reading the *Väterliteratur* written by these student revolutionaries. Finally, Eckstaedt's work with Dietrich L. emphasises the similarities in the psychological makeup of both second-generation Germans and second-generation Holocaust survivors. These similarities demonstrate that the trauma associated with World War Two has had far reaching effects not only on survivors and perpetrators, but also on their children. Marianne Hirsch and Judith Kestenberg further explore the idea of a generationally removed traumatic experience coining the terms 'transposition' and 'postmemory' to describe the relationship of the second-generation to the memories of their parents. Royle's argument, based on Freud's "Das Unheimliche", demonstrates that reading texts where there is an exploration of uncertainty, the strange and the repressed also includes a personal decision on the part of the author as to how one might choose to represent these experiences to others in writing, relying to some extent on a psychoanalytic understanding or interpretation of the material. Applying psychoanalysis as a framework to such texts (which on first reading might appear to be fantasy or the result of wishful thinking) opens such material to a metaphorical interpretation based on a Freudian understanding of how repression and denial might find expression in literature.

All of the theories explored within this chapter provide a useful set of tools that can be applied when reading the work produced by Schlink and selected for this dissertation. However, in order to understand why these theories are relevant to a discussion of post-unification German writing it is necessary to situate Schlink's work within the broader spectrum of the West German narrative as well as examine his rise as a popular author in the English language.

Chapter 2

Schlink and the West German Narrative:

An Overview of Postwar German Literature

Ghost: I am thy father's spirit,
Doomed for a certain term to walk the night,
And for the day confined to fast in fires,
Till the foul crimes done in my days of nature
Are burnt and purged away. But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes like stars start from their spheres...

Hamlet: ...The spirit that I have seen
May be a devil, and the devil hath power
T'assume a pleasing shape, yea, and perhaps
Out of my weakness and my melancholy,
As he is very potent with such spirits,
Abuses me to damn me...

- Shakespeare[22]

In the previous chapter, I put forward and explored theories linked to the general practise of psychoanalysis and how such a paradigm might be useful in exploring some of Bernhard Schlink's texts. Building on the discussion presented in the previous chapter, I will now turn attention to why an examination of Schlink's work in its English translation, rather than its

[22] From Shakespeare, William. *Hamlet,* Acts 1 and II

original German, should be considered a worthwhile exercise. I will then situate Schlink's work[23] within the broader spectrum of writing that emerged in West Germany[24] after World War Two, with particular attention being given to the rise of *Väterliteratur* in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Since the texts chosen for this study were written after German reunification, a discussion of the writing that was produced in postwar West Germany will be beneficial in situating Schlink's work within the greater postwar narrative. Such a discussion will foreground the later comparison between the selected texts and the genre of *Väterliteratur*, which is the focus of Chapter Three.

In her introduction to *The Language of Silence* (1999) Ernestine Schlant[25] states that in terms of its approach to the Holocaust, the West German literature of four decades has been a literature of absence and silence contoured by language. She says that the Holocaust has been a presence in German literature from the early postwar period to the present, and that the strategies used to circumvent, repress or deny that knowledge of that past are as indicative of the knowledge itself as the efforts to face up to the crimes of the Nazi regime. (1-2) This argument echoes the earlier discussion in Chapter One of Bernhard Giesen's postulation of a coalition of silence that pervaded Germany during the first postwar period. Schlant points out that the period leading up to German reunification was filled with a 'powerful, ambivalent and conflicted preoccupation with the holocaust' which was sustained after unification. (209) She also states that despite frequent allegations of preferring to forget the Holocaust, the enormity of these crimes and their legacy have become part of German self-understanding. How Germans choose to cope with this understanding, through strategies that omit, distort or cushion this realisation is at the centre of her concern with the West German narrative. (2)

[23] This refers only to the texts chosen for discussion in this dissertation.

[24] Once Germany had been divided into East (occupied by Russia) and West (occupied by what were the Allied forces), it fell upon those living in the Western regions to undertake an examination of the Nazi period since the Eastern regions understood themselves as being part of a communist regime hostile to fascism, and therefore under no obligation to acknowledge the past. The result was a large body of literature that attempted to depict postwar German suffering and engage with the Nazi past. Notable writers include Günter Grass, Heinrich Böll and Alfred Andersch.

[25] Ernestine Schlant is Professor of German and Comparative Literature at Montclair State University.

Like Schlant, the focus of this dissertation - as the title *'How Do I Speak About the Past'* suggests - is largely centred on the psychological impact that the legacy of the Holocaust has had upon those generations of West Germans who have had the misfortune of inheriting this history. As already mentioned, this discussion concerns itself with a specific author - Bernhard Schlink - and by making use of three of his texts I will examine the extent to which the second-generation (as far as Schlink's work reveals) continues to live in the shadow of such a past, and how this experience manifests in Schlink's texts. My basic premise is to trace the evolution of a particular movement found in German writing called *Väterliteratur* (Literature about Fathers) so as to ascertain to what extent Schlink has adopted and adapted this form (on at least three notable occasions), demonstrating that even after reunification there still exists a need for those born after the war to address their parents' past. Before embarking on such a discussion, I believe that it is necessary to have a fair understanding of the origins and nature of *Väterliteratur* as well as where Schlink's work, ostensibly the work of a best-selling author, may be positioned within the general context of West German literature.

Born in Bethel[26], Germany, in 1944 to a German father and Swiss mother, Bernhard Schlink belongs to what has been termed the 'second-generation': Germans who were either children during the Second World War or were born shortly afterwards, and so did not have any personal involvement or direct moral responsibility for the crimes committed by their countrymen. Schlink became famous with the 1997 publication of *Der Vorleser* (1995) in the United States under the English title of *The Reader*[27]; a novel depicting the story of a heterosexual love affair between a fifteen year old high school boy and a thirty-six year old former concentration camp guard. Having achieved the largest international success of any German novel since Günter Grass's *The Tin Drum* (1959), he went on to publish the short story

[26] Bethel is a small German town which lies near the city of Bielefeld situated near the Dutch border. Bielefeld was the site of a synagogue burning in 1937, and sustained considerable damage during the allied bombing. (Wroe, "Reader's Guide to a Moral Maze", n.pag.)

[27] For the purposes of this dissertation I will be using Carol Brown Janeway's translation of *The Reader* from the German *Der Vorleser,* first published in English by Pantheon Books in 1997. The edition to be used here was published in 1998 by Phoenix.

collection *Flights of Love* (2002[28]) and the novel *Homecoming* (2009)[29]. (Begley, "Lonely in Germany", n.pag.)

According to Louis Begley, a novelist and retired lawyer writing for the *New York Review of Books* in 2002, Schlink's success in the United States was not entirely the result of critical recognition, but is rather attributable to *The Reader* (Schlink's first novel to be published in English) having received a 'powerful boost in 1999 from its selection by Oprah's Book Club' which assisted its mainstream success. ("Lonely in Germany", n. pag.) In Begley's opinion Schlink is a 'remarkably gifted novelist' who in *The Reader* (a *Bildungsroman* set in a small West German city) has managed to subtly explore the problematic relationship between the second-generation and the war generation through issues of trust, distrust, love, hatred and indifference. Furthermore, he states that Schlink's anthology *Flights of Love* (the short story *Girl with Lizard*[30] forms part of this anthology) continues and extends Schlink's research into, and exploration of, the difficulties associated with living in postwar Germany. As such, Begley believes that Schlink's later work should be read with *The Reader* as background. (n.pag.)

At the time of having written his article, *Homecoming* had not as of yet been published. However, Begley's observation that Schlink seems to be building on, or further exploring the initial research that made up *The Reader* in *Flights of Love* could equally be applied to *Homecoming*. This observation is of some importance, since I believe that Schlink has chosen to engage with adaptations of *Väterliteratur* not only in *The Reader*, but in several of his other texts[31].

[28] Originally published in German under the title *Liebesfluchten* (2000) by Diogenes Verlag.

[29] Originally published in German under the title *Die Heimkehr* (2006) by Diogenes Verlag. For the purposes of this dissertation I will be using Michael Henry Heim's 2008 translation. Homecoming was first published under its English title by Weidenfeld & Nicolson in 2008. The edition to be used here was published by Phoenix in 2009.

[30] Here I will be using John E. Woods's translation of *Flights of Love* from the German Liebesfluchten, first published in English in Great Britain in 2002 by Weidenfeld & Nicolson. The edition to be used for this dissertation was published in 2002 by Phoenix.

[31] *The Reader* has been examined as being an adaptation of *Väterliteratur* by critics such as Schlant and McGlothlin, the work of whom will be examined during the course of this dissertation. I will make use of, and extend their arguments and evaluations in this regard beyond Schlink's most famous text, applying them to *Girl with Lizard* and *Homecoming* in order to demonstrate that Schlink has not chosen to write in this way in only one instance, but has used this method of exploration to engage with the past in several pieces of work.

Having described the international and German reception of *The Reader* as 'nothing short of amazing', Ursula Mahlendorf - now Professor emerita of the German Department and Women's Studies Program at the University of California - observed that after its publication the novel not only made the German best seller list, but that its English and French translations followed suit on the respective lists of France, Great Britain and the United States, testifying to its accessibility and popularity with a diverse audience. By 2002 the novel had been translated into 30 different languages and had become a canonical text in German high school instruction, adopted by the school systems to teach German youth about the Holocaust. ("Trauma Narrated, Read and (Mis)understood: Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader* ' ... irrevocably complicit in their crimes ... '", 458)

Despite having received a largely favourable critical reception in Germany, the book received quite divergent reviews in the United States. Whilst critics like George Steiner found it 'A masterly work that ... speaks straight to the heart' writers such as Cynthia Ozick professed it to be 'the vilest novel I have ever read'. (Mahlendorf, "Trauma Narrated ... ", 459) Ozick sheds some lights on her statement by saying that in her opinion the novel 'is the product, conscious or not, of a desire to divert [attention] from the culpability of a normally educated population in a nation famed for Kultur'. (Wroe, "Reader's Guide to a moral maze", n.pag.) What Ozick appears to find objectionable is the probability of an illiterate concentration camp guard (a person who might not fully comprehend the very nature of the crime that they are committing) within the context of a country where illiteracy certainly was and is not a problem, and where it was quite difficult to ignore the suffering of the prisoners. For her, it would seem that this representation is not only highly unlikely, but is simply preposterous.

Professor Frank Finlay[32] and Sally Johnson[33] addressed the use of literacy in *The Reader* in their 2001 article "(Il)literacy and (im)morality in Bernhard Schlink's *The Reader*" arguing that the novel's depiction of illiteracy is problematic since it contains a number of textual inconsistencies regarding the definition and portrayal of illiteracy. Their conclusion is that the novel should not be viewed as a realistic account of the relationship between literacy and an individual's capacity for moral and aesthetic judgement. Finlay says that while the novel does

[32] Professor Finlay is head of the German department at Leeds University.

[33] Sally Johnson is a Senior Lecturer in German Language and Linguistics at Lancaster University.

not ‘fit into the usual model of postwar German literary fiction - which has often tended to be cerebral, avant-garde and difficult – it reflects on-going recent strands of debate in both German publishing and thought.’ (Wroe, “Reader’s Guide ... ”, n.pag.) Additionally Finlay claims that German publishers had difficulties in selling German writers to German audiences (presumably this was because the material was too ‘cerebral, avant-garde and difficult’ as he suggests) and so had been on the lookout for more ‘accessible Anglo-Saxon style German fiction’. The publication of *The Reader* in 1995 coincided with a general increase in international interest in the Holocaust during the 1990s[34], as well as the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides, forcing many to reconsider why Genocide occurs, and to become cognisant that this phenomenon in the 20th Century was not a peculiarity of the German experience. (Wroe, “Reader’s Guide ... ”, n.pag.)

Another problematic interpretation of the novel stems from an issue that the Oprah audience, unexpectedly for Schlink, ‘latched onto’. This particular interpretation involved an understanding of the relationship between Michael and Hanna as constituting ‘child abuse’ rather than as a consensual love relationship through which the trans-generational conflict is explored. Dismissing such an interpretation, Schlink himself claims that the main theme of the novel is the generational divide and accommodation, and not the Holocaust itself (or child abuse). If anything it is ‘a book about how the second generation attempted to come to terms with the Holocaust and the role in it played by their father’s generation’. (Wroe, “Reader’s Guide ... ” n.pag.)

Mahlendorf feels that in their treatment of the text, many readers and teachers miss the central issue being put forward by the author. Because *The Reader* appears in the guise of a love story, discussion has been focused on the relationship between the lovers, the nature of guilt, the historical background of the Holocaust and illiteracy, instead of its core concern which, in terms of Mahlendorf’s understanding, is actually the ‘continued traumatisation of the postwar generation by their elders’. Following Mahlendorf’s interpretation, discussions about this text should centre on power relations, emphasising ‘the issues of power at stake in all human social relations whether familial or personal and intimate’. Schlink’s decision to sexualise the conflict between generations should focus attention on the inequality of power - ‘whether or not the power is properly used (parents/ adults fostering and protecting their immature young); the power is abdicated (adults allowing danger to the young either by their negligence, their silence,

[34] The reemergence of the Holocaust in public debate after reunification will be examined in Chapter Three.

their self-absorption); the power is abused/ misused (adults seducing/ forcing the developmentally immature into actions or situations they are not equipped to handle)'. Mahlendorf interprets Schlink's sexualisation of the generational divide as being demonstrative of the seductiveness of power, and that such a text should encourage its audience to speculate about 'the price the seduced pays for his seduction'. ("Trauma Narrated ... ", 459) So what is it about the text that has led to this consistent misreading?

This particular misunderstanding of the novel appears to be traceable to the earlier popular reviews by Irene Nemes[35] in August 1998 and Oprah Winfrey[36] in March 1999, where an overemphasis on the sexual relationship presented in the novel first became apparent. (Levor, *Guilt and Ambivalence of Second Generation Germans in Bernhard Schlink's Novel The Reader and in the Short Story The Circumcision*, 8) As already discussed, Oprah's audience seemed to have difficulty with the idea that the text functioned as an exploration of generational conflict, and instead viewed it as a tale of abuse. I believe that the problem lay in a lack of understanding of the text as allegory, with the initial lay readers choosing to interpret the material literally and without a general understanding of the context out of which such a novel has emerged. The point that I am making here, is that without an understanding of the postwar German context and the literature that emerged during this period (particularly post 1968) it is difficult to reliably interpret and understand what a text like *The Reader* is actually aiming to accomplish. Given this problem, it should then become apparent why a discussion of the postwar space and the emergence of *Väterliteratur* is a relevant and informative pursuit in a discussion of Schlink's work.

Because Schlink's novel received such widely divergent reviews in the United States, but still went on to become a best-seller in English speaking countries - and that it was within these countries that certain misunderstandings of the text become evident - I feel that an examination of his work in its English translation is a warranted and worthwhile exercise. Although the aim of this chapter is to situate Schlink's work within the broader context of West German writing, it is also partly concerned with the way in which the English translations of his texts (or audiences

[35] Irene Nemes is currently a Visiting Fellow at UNSW Australia where she teaches Criminal Law in the undergraduate programme and Conceptualising Criminal Laws in the postgraduate programme.

[36] Oprah Winfrey was the host for the popular American television talk show *The Oprah Winfrey Show*, which recently came to an end after two-and-a-half decades of airtime.

who have read his work in English) assist in creating an understanding , through the world of fiction, of an experience that may be considered unique to Germany. Because Schlink's work was originally published in German, a brief discussion of translation and how translation affects the structure and understanding of texts seems applicable.

In *Translation as Text* (1992) Albrecht Neubert and Gregory Shreve open a discussion where both the benefits as well as the problems associated with translating texts are examined extensively. Their claim is that while the act of translation might appear unnatural, it is a necessary component when living in a complex global civilisation. According to their hypothesis, the need for translation has exploded with the growth of international communication, making its seeming unnaturalness natural. By viewing translation as a natural act, rather than an unnatural one, the similarities amongst disparate languages and cultures become emphasised. In the past, some theorists have preferred to focus on obvious cultural differences, leading some to believe that there are fewer 'human universals than we would care to admit' making the very nature of translation almost impossible. (2) Such critics claim that translators actually do violence to texts when they rip them from their natural settings. Lawrence Venuti[37] expresses such an opinion when he says that translation is akin to terrorism. He claims that 'the power of translation' is its ability 'to (re)constitute and cheapen foreign texts, to trivialise and exclude foreign cultures, and thus potentially to figure in racial discrimination and ethnic violence, international political confrontations, terrorism, and war.' However, he proposes *resistive translation* as a solution to this problem, where the translation of the source/ original text emphasises the foreign nature of the source/ original text by 'embedding stylistic or other discontinuities in the target [translated] text'. (2) This view stresses the potential destructiveness of the act of translation on the nuanced message contained within a source text. To a certain extent, the act of translation always involves some form of loss because it dismantles the original linguistic form of the source text. However this is a necessary occurrence because it is by doing this that the target community is able to absorb the foreign text through the apparent obliteration of difference. It is possible that the target audience may be enriched by reading a translated text, even if some aspects of the text are lost during the process of translation. Even if the translation

[37] Lawrence Venuti is an American translation theorist and translation historian who believes that it is almost impossible for a translated text to adequately communicate the intricate meanings inherent in source or original texts.

cannot transfer everything in the source text, it can still be beneficial to the target culture. If there was nothing of value to be found within a translated text, then there would not exist a demand from readers across cultures for translations. The desire or need for translations, as Neubert and Shreve understand it, arises from a deep-seated need to understand and come to terms with otherness. Many human beings want to come to an understanding (however incomplete) of other people's experiences; essentially 'we want to know what other people know and feel what other people feel'. (2-3)

With Schlink's work the source text appears in German and as such reflects an understanding of the problems faced by Germans from a German standpoint. The target audience for Schlink's work when it underwent its first translation was an English speaking audience, specifically a British and American audience, with its own preconceived notions of the German experience, possibly influenced by these countries' own experience as victors against Nazi Germany in World War Two. The success of *The Reader* as a translated text acts as testimony to Neubert and Shreve's postulation that target audiences (whoever they might be) want to understand (even if the understanding is incomplete) the experiences of others as represented in source texts.

Speaking about his work Bernhard Schlink - a professor of Law at the Humboldt University of Berlin, a judge and frequent visitor to the United States - says that as a writer he wants to break through the German wall of silence about the Holocaust, especially in the context of the German family. (Mahlendorf, "Trauma Narrated ... ", 460) Schlant believes that it is Schlink's association with the generation of 1968, those who led the student rebellion and later published their autobiographical novels in the late 1970s and early1980s, that allows his work to demonstrate 'a thorough acquaintance with the issues addressed in the literature about "fathers and mothers" ' making his work a latter-day example of this trend. (*The Language ...* , 210) Even though this statement was made with specific reference to *The Reader*, it appears to hold true with regards to some of the stories published in *Flights of Love* as well as the novel *Homecoming*. Schlink says of his work:

> I live with my plots and characters and play with them in my mind until I'm ready to write down the novel or story I have in my head. And since my characters think

> and feel within the parameters of my own thoughts and feelings, political, moral and philosophical themes enter into my fiction. (Schlink, *Guilt About the Past*, 4)

This statement may lead one to believe that a large part of Schlink's writing contains autobiographical elements. Because he states that his characters' interactions are governed by his personal thoughts and feelings and because his protagonists are usually male and belonging to the second-generation, one could logically hypothesise that his characterisations are in many ways representations of himself. However, in an interview with *The Guardian's* Nicholas Wroe, Schlink states that he is not in fact an autobiographical writer, but rather a writer who makes use of some of his personal experiences in his fictional work:

> … because I have experienced some of these things I use them. We can only write about what we know on some topics … sometimes I see afterwards that my writing is linked to a problem I deal with as a legal philosopher. But I never think 'this is an interesting problem, let me deal with it in my literature.' (Wroe, "Reader's Guide ... ", n. pag.)

Perhaps it is this fictionalisation of real-world situations and experiences, a form of fictional (auto)biography, that enables Schlink to construct narratives seemingly more complex and personal than merely the sum of World War Two atrocities; depicting individuals attempting to create an acceptable and cohesive identity within a hyper-sensitive sociohistorical context. What I find interesting about Schlink's work is that despite the complexity of the ideas present in his stories, the texts themselves appear to have remained accessible to the general public globally.

The use of literature as a medium of analysis of the German attempt to come to terms with the crimes of the Nazi regime probably deserves some explanation if not justification. Schlant points out that 'as the boundaries between historiography and fiction as repositories of memory become ever more blurred and the problematics of narrativity dominate current scholarly debates, it is important to point out the differences between the two fields; focusing on the qualities that distinguish literature from historiography'. Whereas historians, political scientists, economists and journalists work within the constraints of fact and other objective criteria, literature 'projects the play of the imagination, exposing levels of conscience and

consciousness that are part of a culture's unstated assumptions which are often unacknowledged elsewhere'. Because these assumptions are unconsciously held, they 'provide greater insight into the moral positions of a work than its explicit opinions and images, which may have been censored or the product of wishful thinking'. Therefore literature may be seen as an instrument by which people's moral positions and failures can be measured, laying bare their dreams and nightmares, hopes and apprehensions. Schlant believes that of all the literary genres, the novel is probably the richest in terms of sub-texts, which while having eluded authorial consciousness, do not elude careful literary critique. It is within these sub-texts that unconsciously held assumptions are revealed to both the critic as well as the reader. (*The Language ...* , 3)

Within postwar German literature, it is often the case that no distinction is made between East and West German writers or between Jewish and non-Jewish writers. Schlant deems this a 'grave oversight, since the perspectives under which Jewish and non-Jewish writers write and the perspectives they bring to their work are separated by the abyss of the Holocaust'. She argues that:

> The elimination of the crucial distinction between victims and perpetrators can itself be viewed as an attempt to level and equalize their separate histories. There is a large body of literature by survivors and witnesses, and it is vastly different in tone, perspective, and outlook from that written by the generation and successor generations of the perpetrators. (6)

The literature produced by the victims has become the literature of atrocity, concerned with an order of reality which the human mind had not confronted before and where the language of fact appeared insufficient in conveying the events. In an effort to find a means of expression, 'techniques of irony, of the macabre, of the laughter of despair and of gallows humour' formed part of the narrative strategies specific to the victims, whereas the perpetrators who had not 'experienced the suffering, torture and death, shied away from inappropriate attitudes seeking safety in *Betroffenheit* (consternation)'. (6)

Continuing her discussion, Schlant acknowledges that a focus solely on the literature produced by perpetrators and their successors may be considered objectionable based on the argument that such an analysis perpetuates the view of the victims as 'other', turning them into

objects and depriving them of individuality. (6) Unfortunately, it is necessary to work within a limited paradigm so as to examine any material adequately. This does not imply that the literary work of second-generation victims is in any way less important or appropriate to analyse than that of perpetrators. Indeed, both groups share many similarities in terms of addressing their respective pasts, a topic that has been convincingly explored in Erin McGlothlin's work *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature: Legacies of Survival and Perpetration* (2006) as well as in the research conducted by Eckstaedt which was discussed in Chapter One. However, because this study is necessarily limited I will follow the example set by Schlant, Kosta, McGlothlin and others, confining my enquiries to the prose fiction of West Germany, specifically to the fiction written by Bernhard Schlink after reunification, with a focus on how the successor generations try to explore and represent their often uncanny experiences and relationship to the Holocaust through the medium of literature. In order to begin such a discussion a rudimentary exploration of why the literature that emerged out of West Germany became the primary material that tried to address the Holocaust past will be complimentary.

Until reunification, German was the language of four distinct types of literature being produced in four different areas. These were East (German Democratic Republic) and West (Federal Republic) Germany, Austria and Switzerland. However, it has been put forward that this compartmentalisation of four distinct national literatures matching the four major German-speaking states is no longer a possibility because of the postmodern dismantling of master narratives. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 4) However, whilst this might become problematic, one has to take into account historical and national boundaries when examining a specific author within a specific context, and so it may be helpful to have at hand a brief overview of the literature which emerged from these four different states after World War Two.

While there was a lessening of hostility and an increase in 'harmonious relations' between the literatures of East and West Germany in the decade before the fall of the Berlin wall, their commonality lay in addressing the division of Germany from their own particular perspectives. The majority of East German literature leading up to reunification appears to make little effort to come to an understanding of the Nazi period, because 'as a Communist regime, East Germany saw itself *ipso facto* as inimical to fascism and hence under no obligation to

acknowledge its own Nazi past', the burden of which fell squarely on West Germany. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 4)

In Switzerland, the perceptions about itself and its role during the Nazi regime were moulded by an understanding of itself as a neutral country. This perception was maintained until the more recent discoveries of its banks' collusions with the Nazis. In the postwar era, playwrights such as Max Frisch and Friedrich Dürrenmatt addressed some of the psychological mechanisms that gave rise to and perpetrated the Holocaust, but this was done by both appealing to reason and from a distant vantage point, neither of which were available to the writers of West Germany. Meanwhile postwar Austrians having been somewhat misled by the politics of the time which, as discussed by Schlant , 'cultivated the myth of having been annexed instead of admitting that Austria actively courted the 1938 annexation to Germany, finding its special status confirmed in the separate peace treaty of 1955, which guaranteed Austrian neutrality on the Swiss model'. (*The Language ...* , 5) In the early postwar decades, Austria regarded its 'special status' as leaving it free from blame for the atrocities of the Holocaust, creating the impression that these events were a unique problem to be dealt with by Germans. It was only after the emergence of the postwar generation of Austrian writers, many of whom were born in the 1940s or later, that there was a sustained and vigorous investigation into Austrian complicity during the Nazi era. (5) This type of investigative enquiry into the acts of the war generation and the resultant aftermath, had already been happening in West Germany for close on two decades, producing a wealth of texts in various forms. However, despite the volume of material that came out of West Germany, the problem of representing the Holocaust in literature manifested in a series of narrative strategies that seemed to circumvent, repress or deny knowledge of the event itself. Two primary problems inherent in West German writing, prior to the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s, concern silence about the Nazi period and as a result of this silence, the difficulty of directly addressing the atrocities of the Holocaust.

Schlant differentiates between two kinds of silence present in German postwar literature: 'The first comes from too much knowledge, while the second is a refusal to become aware. This second silence is the escape into which memory and guilt are repressed'. (*The Language ...* , 7) Explaining the difficulty in ascribing these two types of silence to specific groups of people after an event, Schlant says that:

> One might be tempted to identify "too much knowledge" with the silence of victims and the "refusal to become aware" with the silence of perpetrators, but such an identification ignores the undoubted fact that the perpetrators kept silent because they had "too much knowledge" and that many victims, in an effort to survive after they survived the Holocaust, took refuge in a "refusal to become aware" of the atrocities to which they had been subjected. A more useful separation may be one that distinguishes between the silence of the Holocaust and the silence about the Holocaust. (7)

Withholding information is a common characteristic of post-Holocaust German writing and so 'silence about the Holocaust' can be seen as both the silence into which victims retreat as well as the silence of the perpetrators. This silence and the narrative strategies, conscious or unconscious, that make it possible; denial, repression and avoidance (defence mechanisms identified by psychoanalysts) are in Schlant's opinion an equally expressive indicator of knowledge. Accordingly the question becomes, 'What knowledge about the Holocaust is being repressed, denied, avoided, and how does this avoidance find expression?' (10)

In the texts to be examined for this study, the silence about the Holocaust is recognisable in Schlink's portrayal of the parent generation. The enquiries made by the protagonists into the respective parent's past (or lover's past in the case of *The Reader*) appear to be constantly thwarted by a barrier of silence. Their persistent enquiries eventually break through this silence about the past, resulting in short bursts of revealing dialogue (as seen in both *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard*), before the silence descends once again. There is a distinct feeling of reluctance, from the characters representing the war/ parent generation, to discuss the period preceding 1945 even if what is being discussed is of a more personal nature and not necessarily directly tied to the Holocaust itself.

In 1967, a year before the student uprising, social psychologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich published *The Inability to Mourn*, a study which examined the psychological mechanisms that were at play in the postwar German environment. They concluded that the West German 'inability to mourn' was rooted in the country's inability to mourn the loss of its leader (Führer), who had also functioned as a national father figure. A process of mourning would have necessitated an understanding of themselves and of the sociopsychological reasons as to why

Hitler was, and had become an all-powerful idol, but as previously discussed this mourning or working through such a loss was not undertaken by the war generation. Rather it became the responsibility of the second-generation to explore and work through their parents past. Bernhard Giesen takes up this discussion saying that for those who were involved in the student uprising, breaking the silence surrounding the holocaust past was of great importance, for in doing so the generation of 1968 were attempting to address the traumatic origins of German national identity and trying to reconstruct it. (" The Trauma of Perpetrators ... ", 128)

According to Mahlendorf, the rebellion of the late 1960s against the generation of perpetrators 'took a radical political form with demonstrations, manifestoes, leftist political action groups, and even terrorist attacks on public institutions viewed as remnants of Nazi and fascist ideology and havens for Nazi personnel'. Crucially however, by focusing their protests in the public realm, the 'sixty- eighters' managed to avoid personal confrontations within the context of the family and 'side tracked the potential for facing the Holocaust personally ...'. Once this had happened, the generation of 1968 became complicit with the denial and silence of the parent generation. The resultant literature of the 1970s, the *Väterliteratur*, therefore reflects this generation's failed confrontation with the Nazi past instead of a release as suggested by Giesen. ("Trauma Narrated ... ", 474)

It is not possible for the construction of a collective identity to completely dispense with memory. Memory supports and even creates the illusion of stability, permanence and continuity which is distinct from the incessant change of the phenomenal world. In so doing, memory sets up a space of possible pasts constituted by references to both past traumas and triumphs. For Germans, the defeat of 1945 and the disclosure of the Holocaust resulted in the ultimate trauma of recent German history and is possibly at the centre of why it became important for the second-generation to reassert or recreate a national identity post-holocaust. (Giesen, "The Trauma of Perpetrators... ", 112) Mary Fulbrook has observed that the belief in a collective national identity and the desire to define such a human construct, though remarkably strong in many quarters, has been particularly the case with respect to Germany. She says that such a construct is only evident when sufficient people believe in some version of a collective identity in order for it to become a social reality. These ideas surrounding the nature of the collective's identity are then transmitted through various institutions, laws, customs, beliefs and practices to the rest of a community.

(*German National Identity after the Holocaust*, 1, 5) Giesen touches on the complexity involved in the formation of a postwar German national identity due to the interplay between history and memory, and Marianne Hirsch expands on this problem through the introduction of the term 'postmemory' and its function as a trans-generational transference of memory. These concepts of national identity, collective guilt and memory as related to the Holocaust do to some extent, play a pivotal role in Schlink's narratives. The interactions between his characters, within their individual contexts, appear to be unconsciously governed by the way in which they perceive their own relationships to this Holocaust legacy.

Because Schlink's work is set against the historical catastrophe of the Holocaust, it poses questions about how such a past may influence both the present and the psyche of individuals living in that present. In a collection of essays titled *Guilt About the Past* (2009) he states that:

> After the Third Reich, the burden of guilt about the past became a German experience and a topic of cultural life … it is the experience and discussion of guilt about the Third Reich past that have infused the concept of collective guilt with its real meaning. (Schlink, *Guilt ...* , 1-2)

In the years between 1969 and 1972 the Student Movement in West Germany had reached its climax and spent itself. 'Fear of reprisal, disappointment and disillusion with the movement' as well as a deteriorating economic situation, led to the revolutionaries of 1968 withdrawing from political engagement. This period became known as the *Tendenzwende* (a change of tides) and was viewed as an 'intellectual response to the changing political and intellectual climate'. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 81) During this time, student protests had been a common phenomenon in many countries, with the youth taking up specific issues. For West German youth, the concern was predominantly with the Nazi past, a cause they knew they could not win, 'for no amount of demonstrating could alter an abhorrent past or change the recalcitrant, self-defensive posture of the parent generation'. (81) Despite this movement having started with the hope that West Germany's future could be influenced for the better, it became apparent that this battle with the past extended on several levels into the present; the historical legacy of the Holocaust, the continued self-defensiveness, silence or lack of acknowledgement of past crimes by the parent generation and the psychological impact of these on the psyche of the youth. The attacks on the parent generation by the youth were meant to demonstrate that the youth were in

no way similar to their parents and were therefore released from the crimes of the past. However, this 'shortcut avoided any true confronting of the past and its legacy and any concern for the victims; motivated as it was not by sorrow and shame but by rage and despair'. (82) What the two generations have in common is their self-perception as 'victims who cannot be held accountable for their deeds. The older generation saw itself as "duped" and "betrayed", and thus victimised by Hitler and Nazism; the younger generation "crippled" by the acts of the parents'. (83) The younger generation found itself in a conflicted situation where whilst they attacked their parents, they also wanted to free them from blame, and in so doing free themselves. In the words of German novelist Peter Schneider, 'If National Socialism was the "conspiracy" of a couple of powerful industrialists, our parents, no matter what they had done, were the victims of the conspiracy.' (84)

These discussions of generational experience appear to have become particularly prominent once the maturing members of the 1968 Student Movement began to critically examine their protest and the possible long term effects it had on German society. In the postwar landscape the term 'generation' was widely used among many social groups, the obvious one being the war generation, whose 'first-hand involvement with and experience of National Socialism and of the Second World War was a constant reference point for its self-understanding':

> Born around 1905, this generation had actively supported National Socialism and, after the war, adopted a position that the historian Norbert Frei describes as "reflexartige Schuldabwehr" (reflexive denial of guilt) and Auskunftsverweigerung" (refusal to communicate). (Fuchs, "The Tinderbox of Memory: Generation and Masculinity in Väterliteratur by Christoph Meckel, Uwe Timm, Ulla Hahn, and Dagmar Leupold" ,42 -43)

According to Fuchs, it was this 'reflexive denial of guilt' combined with the 'refusal to communicate' that acted as a catalyst for the inter-generational contest between the war generation and the '1968ers'. What the postwar generation was attempting to do was break with the idea of the importance of lineage and tradition and regenerate their society by creating a rupture with the past. However *Väterliteratur* is ambiguous since it simultaneously refutes the importance of family heritage and tradition whilst displaying a longing for these ideas:

> ... since the rejection of tradition is the main ideological force behind *Väterliteratur*, this longing for lineage is never properly addressed in these texts; it only finds indirect expression on the level of subtext. The need for tradition and heritage thus remains an unresolved issue in the first wave of *Väterliteratur*.
> ("The Tinderbox ... " , 44)

Once the attacks on the parent generation, by the student revolutionaries, were replaced by introspection and self-assessment, the search for 'self-identity assumed national dimensions. In literature the term "New Subjectivity" or "New Sensibility" came to designate this literature of self-exploration. In prose, there appeared a great number of self-exploratory, autobiographical novels':

> In the autobiographical fiction written after the *Tendenzwende*, remembrance is an essential element of the quest for self-identity; it propels and structures the narrative together with the newly rediscovered freedom to fabulate and to experience the irretrievable losses of childhood.
> (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 84 - 85)

Along with the increase in autobiographical fiction, the phenomenon of *Väterliteratur*[38] became prominent from the mid 1970s to the 1980s, around the time of the 30th anniversary of the Federal Republic. The autobiographical novels that were produced in this form bear close similarities in both theme and content. As already mentioned most of the authors who engaged with this form of writing were part of the student generation of the 1960s and have approached the difficult task of forging an identity by exploring the impact their parents had on their lives. (85)

Anne Fuchs considers *Väterliteratur* a by-product of the 1968 student movement, in that some of the former members of the movement 'embarked on a literary exploration of postwar German family life'. ("The Tinderbox ... " , 41) These texts are usually concerned with the figure of the authoritarian father who, through the eyes of these authors, dominated family relations during the postwar period. Many of these novels attempt to demonstrate how the National

[38] Although the term *Väterliteratur* (Literature about Fathers), is largely made up of novels about fathers, the term has been extended to include novels about both fathers and mothers.

Socialist past of the war generation affected or infiltrated family life; however these narratives have been dismissed by some critics for 'their apparent lack of critical distance and the shrillness of their tone'. (41)

These novels (that made up the *Väterliteratur* of the late 1970s and early 1980s) usually contain a first-person-singular narrative, suggesting extreme closeness to the subject, deliberately blurring the boundary between fiction and autobiography and all engage in 'the autobiographical "dialectic of the public and private sphere"', where the subject is representative of generalities within a society. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 86) This closeness between subject and author might account for the movement in these narratives between 'a whimsical style on the one hand and outright aggression towards the domineering father figure on the other'. (Fuchs, "The Tinderbox ... ", 41)

In his article "Fathers and Sons, Retrospectively: The Damaged Relationship Between Two Generations" (1984), Michael Schneider describes the experiences of the student revolutionaries as 'Hamletesque', in so far as the ghost of Hamlet's dead father and his surrogate father (the father's criminal brother) can be understood as representing a 'theatrical concretization of a split father-image'.(9) Schneider says that for the student revolutionaries it was as if:

> ... the ghosts of their fathers had suddenly appeared before them in Nazi uniforms, and their living fathers, with whom they had sat down at the supper table for twenty years, had been indicted in the most horrible collective crime committed by any generation during this century. And, like Hamlet, they often did not know whether this apparition was only a ghost of their imaginations, of their suddenly unfettered suspicions, or whether it was a genuine indication of the true natures of their fathers which had previously been kept from them. (9)

In terms of Schneider's interpretation, the ability for the second-generation to legitimately think of their fathers in this way (as 'Nazi phantom figures') was the result of their (the fathers) silence about the period. The suspicions of the second-generation 'assumed limitless proportions' and the more they questioned the war generation the more 'secretive, impenitent and mistrustful' the war generation became. (9) Out of this circular process another problem began to emerge; the

refusal by the second-generation (as well as Western countries) to acknowledge the 'hardships, deprivation and suffering' which the war generation had experienced. (12) Schneider believes that by refusing to acknowledge the war generations experiences, the second-generation contributed to their own lack of knowledge about their 'parents' ... victimisation by the Nazis', their role as 'Nazi supporters or sympathisers', and in some cases as members of the anti-Nazi resistance. As such, the second-generation unintentionally prevented their own comprehensive understanding of the war generation which was as 'ridden with suffering as it was with guilt'. Schneider believes that it was this genuine lack of understanding between the generations that is responsible for the 'accusatory attitude' that the authors of *Väterliteratur* exhibit towards their fathers, even in the cases where the father is already deceased. (13)

In the case of most of the novels that form part of the genre of *Väterliteratur*, the search for self starts with or shortly after the death of the father. The father's death leaves behind a series of unanswered questions which the narrator or protagonist was unable to explore during the father's lifetime because the relationship between parent and child did not allow for such a discussion, or because the parent could or would not answer the questions put forward by the child. This relationship forces the protagonist, after the father's death, to reconstruct the father's life in an attempt to answer their own questions. This reconstruction, a fictional device, usually comes in the form of the narrator or protagonist piecing together the father's life by means of personal recollections, conversations, interviews with people who knew the deceased and research into official documents, photographs or material such as letters that the father has left behind. Unfortunately, these multiple perspectives do not usually lead to a well-rounded representation of either the father or the protagonist. And whilst the research aspect of the story places the father figure within a historical context, it does not assist the narrator or protagonist with integrating the memory of the father with this social and political past. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 86)

That the 'need for heritage and tradition' remained unresolved in these novels helps to explain why a new form of the genre has gained popularity in German literature since the late 1990s. In its new form, the longing for tradition emerges as a trans-generational legacy that needs to be worked through instead of remaining unresolved. (Fuchs, "The Tinderbox ... ", 44) This working through of the Holocaust legacy can be seen quite strongly in the texts chosen for

this study. Faced with the monolithic barrier that is the war generation's silence, the individual characters feverishly pursue the past in an attempt to establish a sense of what took place.

Schlant cites the work of German literary scholar and author Hanns-Josef Ortheil as being demonstrative of how the concern with the parents' role during the Nazi period can be so consuming that the lives of both parents require some form of analysis:

> While an exploration of the life of the mother provides the male protagonist with some understanding of his own burdened childhood, only the journey into the self after the death of the father can set the protagonist free on the road to mature adulthood. The Holocaust is here seen as an event that has significantly - and silently - shaped the lives of both parents, who then raise their son as they labour under this burden. (*The Language ...* , 16-17)

We see this concern played out in both the short story *Girl with Lizard* and in the novel *Homecoming*, with both texts exploring the protagonists' desire to know and understand the roles which their parents played during the Holocaust[39]. Whilst the nature of the death of the father in *Homecoming* is not an actual death, but rather an absence constructed by both parents so that the father might escape prosecution, both the reader and the protagonist are led by Peter's mother to believe that his father is in fact dead for the majority of the novel. By fabricating the story of a heroic Swiss soldier dying during the war she is able, for a time, to shield Peter from the truth of his father's wartime activity as a Nazi propagandist.

In contrast, *Girl with Lizard* contains a protagonist who lives in a home filled with his parents' silence about the war. With the exception of the occasional emotional outpouring, he rapidly comes to the realisation that he knows very little about their lives. In this story the father's literal death opens up a space were his mother has the opportunity to give voice to her postwar experiences. In both stories it would appear that it is the mother figure who attempts to keep 'the devastating impact of knowledge at bay'. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 17) However, in terms of the texts to be discussed, the devices employed by the mothers to prevent the flow of information between generations, are noticeably similar to those employed by the fathers in the

[39] While in Chapter Three I will discuss Schlink's use of *Väterliteratur* and representation of father figures in the texts, in Chapter Four I will examine the problematic role played by women during the Third Reich, and how this has been explored in *The Reader*, *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard*.

earlier *Väterliteratur* texts. Silence is of course the main and most obvious method used to prevent discussions about the past, however I would also like to suggest that a certain coldness present in both the mother's persona and interactions with the son make it possible for the war generation to maintain this silence.

In this family dynamic, there appears to be little room for a close bond to form between mother and child, due to the overwhelming desire to omit, or keep secret, any involvement in the war so as not to burden the child with the parents' past. The mother's cold persona may be partly the result of wanting to protect the father from the condemnation of the child, but equally, as Schlant has noted, to prevent the devastation that such knowledge might unleash.

Trauma as presented in the selected texts, does not result from exposure to the event itself, but is rather a more subtle and personal experience. It is an insidious seeping of the past into the present, the transference of trauma as it is remembered and passed on from one generation to another. In these texts, it is the child who through his/ her incessant searching ultimately forces the floodgates of memory open, behind which lurks the horrors of the past. Schneider observes that these 'coincidental discoveries' (that can take the form of confessions, hidden documents, photographs) made by the second-generation are often as 'grotesque' as they are 'ghastly', and that these discoveries come as less of a surprise than they do as a vindication of their suspicions. ("Fathers and Sons ... ", 10-11)

I would like to put forward that the trauma inherent in these discoveries, lies not as much in the knowledge wrestled from the parents as in the ability to imagine or re-imagine the events that are now explicitly tied to the identity of child through lineage. To not know, but suspect that one is linked to such a past is quite different from having concrete proof of such a connection. The difference lies in the potential to be free from the guilt of the collective; to be free of blame and from having to atone for the sins of the fathers. One could however argue that even though having knowledge of an event/ act destroys the potential for an alternative and more favourable outcome; it does to some extent liberate the mind from undue imaginings (which as Schneider points out, is certainly an affliction suffered by the second-generation). For example, in *Homecoming*, Peter's search for the identity of his father uncovers the life of a Nazi propagandist who chooses to abandon his family so that he might escape prosecution. I think that for Peter,

this discovery is liberating in the sense that he no longer obsesses about why his father was absent nor what his role was in the war.

Before the emergence of *Väterliteratur* many members of the second generation had dismissed their parents from their lives saying '[t]his is the generation of Auschwitz – you can't have a discussion with them'. (Kosta, "*Väterliteratur*, Masculinity, and History ... " , 222-223)

> [T]he fathers who were condemned as representatives of the state, as agents of history and sculptors of a fascist nation, were held accountable for the war atrocities and were first called upon to answer the difficult question of their involvement. As *Zeit* journalist Ulrich Greiner notes in a discussion of postwar father-son relationships, "Their conflict, however, knows no precedent since their fathers did something that human beings had never done in this way: the systematic annihilation of a whole group of people executed with modern efficiency." (Kosta, "*Väterliteratur*, Masculinity, and History ... " , 223)

Sometimes referred to as those who are 'blessed by being born late', these sons and daughters were among the first generation of Germans to openly address the trauma of Auschwitz and begin a 'fascism debate' which would critique the middle class and capitalism's role in making it possible for an event like Auschwitz to take place. The West German Student Movement channelled the postwar generation into a protest against the 'silence that had stifled their adolescence, and against the structures that comfortably rested on an insidious fascist past. This intellectually inflamed youth dissented against the knowledge that strove to cover up, distort, deny, or forget the past'. (Kosta, "*Väterliteratur*, Masculinity, and History ... " , 223)

This generation, believing that it had been historically, intellectually and emotionally orphaned, was in search of an intellectual heritage, of emotional stability and of figures to idealise. The postwar sons replaced their family fathers with ersatz fathers like Marx, Lenin and Che Guevara, attempting to attach themselves to symbolic father figures who empowered their followers and kept at bay the experience of melancholia and loss, even if only momentarily. However, these iconic fathers were only useful for as long as the student movement had momentum. (Kosta, "*Väterliteratur*, Masculinity, and History ... " , 223-24)

Once the *Tendenzwende* began, the sons again found themselves fatherless in the sense that they had lost the figures that had come to represent a model of masculinity that was different to the 'deficient images that they had internalized and learned to abhor'. (Kosta, "*Väterliteratur*, Masculinity, and History ... " , 224) The traditional image of masculinity that the '1968ers' had been provided with was one of 'discipline, endurance, and self-control'; the result of a long psychco-cultural heritage where war or figures associated with war (Hero, Commander, General) represented the ultimate masculine identity. This idealised image of the wartime man was strained in the postwar setting, owing to the damaged identities of the men belonging to the war generation and was further confounded by the 'disparagement of patriarchy in the emerging climate of the women's movement and feminism'. (Kosta, "*Väterliteratur*, Masculinity, and History ... " , 224) However, there exists in Kosta's understanding of postwar German masculine identity another important factor; traumatic exposure. She believes that the exposure of two generations of German men to events that can be deemed traumatic is a reality that one cannot overlook.

In his foreword to *Conceptions of Postwar German Masculinity* (2001) Roy Jerome says that:

> The experience of trauma destroys the potential for building a mature erotic relationship. Trauma extinguishes any real opportunity for mature erotic contact and replaces it with an axis of power relations...Sexualization becomes a means of keeping the self alive while also providing an agency for controlling the Other – an Other who might remind the subject of his traumatisation, his lack of manliness." (7)

Jerome states that in cases where a person has experienced traumatic exposure 'mature erotic contact is not [possible], because merging with the Other, surrendering the self and allowing the boundaries of the self to become permeable without losing the self, is remindful of the original traumatic exposure itself.'(7) Jerome's brief discussion of trauma and the impact it has on close romantic relationships is of some assistance in explaining why the relationships in Schlink's novels and short story appear to be void of genuine unrepressed expressions of love after the protagonists' encounters with the Nazi past. Jerome's explanation also ties in with Eckstaedt's

observation that the second-generation (both victims and perpetrators) appear to be unable to form friendships with other people, with the exception of an 'immediate partner who is needed for self completion'. ("A Victim of the Other Side", 226) What Eckstaedt seems to be saying is that the only relationship that appears to be able to withstand the realisation/ or exposure to the Holocaust trauma is one where the creation of a family unit, and so a continuation of existence, is possible. Relationships, as presented in both the novels and the short story seem to be plagued by fear. This fear is generated by the unknown or unknowable acts of the father, and the possibility of a filial connection to the Nazi past. For how can one be capable of loving someone who has committed criminal acts against other people? Of course those who belong to the second-generation cannot be faulted for having loved their parents, or more specifically their fathers. However, there appears to be a certain shame inherent in loving a person who you know has committed atrocities. The experience of shame appears to develop only after the acknowledgement that they, the second-generation, do not know what role their father's played during World War Two. It is the desire to know, that drives them to explore the life of the father through any available means.

The experience of having loved a person who is/ was capable of such deeds cannot simply be dismissed. At the very least it must impact on an individual's ability to trust others. By using the somewhat formulaic structure seen in the novels that attempted to demonstrate or address generational discord, Schlink allows his protagonists to undergo the experience of uncovering the Nazi past belonging to the people whom they love. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 19) Drawing from *The Reader*, Schlant says that within the figure of Hanna, 'Michael confronts the crimes of the Nazi past in a direct and unmediated way, and experiences the pain of those who ignorantly and innocently become guilty through association'. (214) In the other texts that I shall be exploring, it is undoubtedly the father who is at the centre of this confrontation with the crimes of the Nazi past, making the experience of the confrontation an extremely personal one. In many cases, the protagonist 'cannot find an explanation for the acts of the past except a duty-driven obedience to orders,' a banal answer cited innumerable times. (213) Because of the difficulty inherent in reconciling the idea or image that the protagonist has of the father with the historical reality of the father, the protagonist attempts to salvage the image of the person he loved by trying to form an understanding of what took place, even if that understanding is incomplete.

Chapter 3

Schlink and the Genre of *Väterliteratur*

For the inheritors of the Nazi legacy, a moral life seemed to require a condemnation of their parents – an excruciating, an almost impossible, conflict. How do you feel about someone you love whom you have a duty to hate?

- Eva Hoffman[40]

'But I know it is not Johann Debauer or John de Baur I long for; it is the image I made of my father and hung in my heart.'

- Bernhard Schlink[41]

As discussed in Chapter Two, *Väterliteratur* was a phenomenon that emerged on the postwar West German literary scene in the late 1970s after the second-generations difficult and partially failed attempt to address Germany's past through public protest. This introspection on self and identity, termed by various critics *Neue Subjektivität* (New Subjectivity), *Neue Sensibilität* (New Sensibility), and *Neue Innerlichkeit* (New Inwardness), 'transformed the literary agenda of the second generation'. Where previously the student revolutionaries of 1968 had publicly denounced the entire war/ parent generation for its activities during the Nazi period and combined these activities with violent protest against what they perceived as being the 'fascist, authoritarian character of the West German state'. The change in focus, from the public to the private sphere, allowed authors to explore their parents' past in a more intimate way. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature*, 200)

This chapter focuses on what led to the resurgence, after German reunification, of literature that attempts to address the Holocaust past, as well as how Bernhard Schlink has

[40] Hoffman, Eva. "The Uses of Illiteracy." Review of *The Reader*, by Bernhard Schlink. *The New Republic*, 23 March 1998, 33-36

[41] From Schlink, Bernhard. *Homecoming*. trans. Michael Henry Heim. London: Phoenix, 2009, 331

chosen to adopt and adapt some of the conventions found in *Väterliteratur* in his novels *The Reader*, *Homecoming*, and the short story *Girl with Lizard*. As with the earlier *Väterliteratur*, there exists within Schlink's texts a concentration on the effect of the war years on the postwar family with a particular emphasis on how decisions taken by the war/ parent generation continue to affect the second-generation. G*irl with Lizard* and *Homecoming* take a more traditional form in terms of the centrality of the postwar father figure in the narratives, reflecting the impact that the father's wartime actions has had upon the protagonist within the close, intimate world of the family. *The Reader* breaks with this traditional exploration of the father as being the link to the Nazi past, but still retains an exploration of the generational conflict which is a unifying theme both within these texts, as well as *Väterliteratur* in general. Although *The Reader* forms part of my exploration into new methods of writing *Väterliteratur* and exploring the Nazi past, the novel is not centred on a father-son narrative. Instead the generational discord that is strongly present in *Väterliteratur* has been used to new purpose when Schlink represents the bond of love between the generations as sexual rather than biological. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 210) This novel also contains a stronger focus on the female characters present in the narrative. As a result I will address this novel further in Chapter Four where I will specifically look at Schlink's engagement with and representation of Nazi women and postwar mother figures.

Despite a shift in focus from the specific representation of the parents as perpetrators, *The Reader* does share commonalities with *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* in terms of narrative development. All three texts open with an exploration of the protagonists' respective childhoods where certain key events/ experiences are introduced into the narrative. The stories then shift into the present where the protagonists explore their parents'- or in the case of *The Reader*, the lover's - respective pasts alongside these important childhood experiences that exist as memories in the present timeframe of the text.

One of the most obvious differences between Schlink's work and the first wave of *Väterliteratur* - as discussed in Chapter Two - is that his stories are not autobiographical and so do not appear to suffer from the shrill accusatory tone which both Fuchs and Schneider describe[42]. Rather, these texts seem distanced from the material that they explore and appear to

[42] Fuchs's and Schneider's discussions of *Väterliteratur* were explored in Chapter Two.

be more objective in how they address the problem of the Nazi past within the family context than their autobiographical counterparts. Also under consideration in this chapter is how Schlink chooses to represent the war generation's silence about the Holocaust (as formulated by Schlant and discussed in Chapter Two) through their withholding of vital factual information about the period from the protagonists, and the trauma experienced by the second-generation as a result of their growing awareness of their own uncertainty, and their parents denial/ repression of the past.

In the first wave of *Väterliteratur* there was a 'focus on the parents' role in the crimes of the Nazi regime, the authoritarian structures that dominated postwar childrearing', and importantly, the ways in which both of these factors affected the author's sense of self. These father texts came to be viewed as a 'new sub-genre of the new subjective trend of investigating one's own emotional and social roots'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 200) However, as discussed by McGlothlin[43], New Subjectivity and *Väterliteratur* should be viewed as separate movements despite having originated during a similar period and generating similar types of texts. *Väterliteratur*, whilst linked to the autobiographical writing and self-exploration found in the New Subjectivity movement, which seems to have ceased towards the late 1970s, only became prominent around the year 1980. Although it is often thought to have terminated around the same time as the New Subjectivity movement, *Väterliteratur* and 'the second-generation's engagement with the Nazi past did not end in the mid-1980s'. (200)

Throughout the 1980s public discourse was dominated, in a way that it had not previously been, by the Nazi and Holocaust past fuelled by controversies such as the Historians' Debate, Ronald Reagan's visit to the SS cemetery at Bitburg and the fiftieth anniversary of *Kristallnacht*. The unification of East and West Germany 'saw a brief lull in German dialogue about the Holocaust, when the anniversary of the fall of the Berlin Wall threatened to eclipse the anniversary of *Kristallnacht*' and both German and Jewish intellectuals feared that 'Germany would now proclaim its past as fully mastered'. (200) This fear that the Holocaust past would no longer form part of a continued intellectual debate after reunification was proved false with the Holocaust past re-emerging as a prominent topic in the early 1990s.

[43] Erin McGlothlin is Associate Professor in the Department of Germanic Languages and Literatures; Jewish, Islamic, and Near Eastern Languages and Cultures and Comparative Literature at Washington University in St. Louis

In his book *Facing the Nazi Past: United Germany and the Legacy of the Third Reich* (2002), Bill Niven sees this re-emergence as a direct outcome of unification between the two Germanys which had undergone very different postwar experiences:

> Yet while the political impact of National Socialism and its aftermath had come to an end, there was a veritable explosion of discussion about the National Socialist past in the public realm. The media, intellectuals, politicians of all parties and the general public were involved in this discussion. Indeed the Germans set about debating the Nazi past as never before. (1)

There were a number of events which sustained this public discussion of German crimes during the Holocaust for most of the 1990s. Some of the more prominent of these were the release of Spielberg's film *Schindler's List* (1993), the controversial book *Hitler's Willing Executioners* (1995) by Daniel Goldhagen, the attention given to the photographs displayed at the *Wehrmachtsaustellung* (Wehrmacht exhibit 1994), the ongoing debates about the planned Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe (which opened in 2005), and the conflict between Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis, head of the Central Council of the Jews in Germany, about the speech Walser gave in 1998 upon receiving the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 201) According to Niven, this 'increased interest since 1990 in the true extent both of crime, and of involvement in it, has been matched by an increased interest in learning about the range of victims[44]' which had not been limited to the European Jewry. (*Facing the Nazi Past ...* , 3) Given an increasing renewed interest in the subject of the Holocaust in this context, it should not be surprising that a novel of the likes of *The Reader,* which was published in German in 1995 would become a mainstream international success.

Before having published *The Reader* and subsequently the anthology *Flights of Love* and novel *Homecoming,* Bernhard Schlink had established himself in the German market as the writer of a trilogy of detective novels. These included *Selbs Justiz* (*Self's Punishment*, 1987), *Selbs Betrug* (*Self Deception*, 1994), and *Selbs Mord* (*Self Slaughter*, 2001) which record the exploits of Gerhard Selb, a former Nazi prosecutor working as a private investigator. (Begley,

[44] In *Mosaic of Victims: Non-Jews Persecuted and Murdered by the* Nazis (1990) Michael Berenbaum explores the Nazi treatment of homosexuals, political prisoners/ dissenters, Russian prisoners of war, Jehovah's witnesses, and gypsies all of whom were tortured and murdered in as equally a ruthless manner as the Jews of Europe.

"Lonely in Germany", n.pag.) This is interesting to note because present in the narratives under discussion, especially in *Homecoming*, are aspects that seem particular to the detective/ crime novel. In the material to be discussed, Schlink gives his protagonists a series of clues that assist them in piecing together a puzzle, partially made up of interviews with other characters and documents, which eventually prove to be useful in accessing their filial connections to the Nazi past.

As has already been pointed out, Schlink's work is not autobiographical, but rather takes the form of fiction that contains autobiographical elements.[45] In both of the novels, his protagonists seem to be aware of a reader or follower to their respective stories, where they (the protagonists) first recount their childhoods and then enter into a discussion of their more recent and current experiences in relation to whatever event is taking place in the present timeframe of the text. This form of first-person narrative is broken in *Girl with Lizard* where a third person narrator recounts the experiences of a nameless male protagonist. However, despite being a linear narrative, the text's exploration of the effects of the past on the protagonist still remains a focal point. Of particular interest in this text is how Schlink has altogether managed to avoid naming those characters who make up the nuclear family present in the story. Their apparent anonymity perhaps emphasises the idea that the experiences of this fictitious family, in the postwar German context, are in no way unique. The parent generation's silence about the war, faced by the son, is a battle faced by many, if not all second-generation Germans. What may perhaps be unique is the way in which the protagonist goes about researching his father's involvement, or rather what it is that prompts him to do so. Unlike *Homecoming*, which moves away, however marginally, from the death of the father as a catalyst for the enquiry into the past, *Girl with Lizard* makes use of this convention found in earlier forms of *Väterliteratur*. This short story appears to follow the general formula present in these novels with the exception of its concluding chapter where the son burns the painting that has been the source of his anxiety, and in so doing erases the evidence of a connection to his father's past.

[45] In Chapter Two I discussed how in an interview with Nicholas Wroe, Schlink explained that his work as a writer is not necessarily autobiographical even though he uses some of his personal experiences in his fiction. He also explained that even though his writing is often representative of problems that he has explored in his role as a legal philosopher, he does not make a conscious decision to use these in his fiction.

Originally published under the German title *Die Heimkehr*, *Homecoming* [46]shares many similarities with its predecessor *The Reader*. On the surface, the narrative is essentially one of a quest - a quest for a father and a manuscript - or as the title might suggest; a movement across boundaries, or a return to a place. It is a novel that bears many similarities to the *Väterliteratur* of the 1970s and 1980s and yet it seems strange, unfamiliar and certainly contains aspects of the uncanny; particularly in the form of the revenant and the return of the repressed (which in the text takes the form of the father figure and the mother's confrontation with her own past). In this novel, through his use of subject matter that the audience of *The Reader* should be familiar with; the Holocaust, memory and emotional betrayal, Schlink creates a story of exploration that culminates in a social psychological experiment along the lines of Milgram's study[47], and leaves his protagonist in a state of bitterness and depression at not having achieved an emotional connection with the father figure or any resolution to the questions about his [the father's] past.

[46] Based on McGlothlin's discussion of Peter Schneider's 1987 novel *Vati* (Daddy) I have come to the conclusion that in terms of the contents of its narrative Schlink's novel *Homecoming* bears many similarities to this earlier text. *Vati* explores the relationship between a Nazi concentration camp doctor and his adult son who, in the late 1970s, travels to Brazil to meet his father for the first time since his infancy. Taking the form of a letter to a childhood friend, the narrative describes the son's attempt to know his father and his struggle to come to terms with his father's culpability in the perpetration of the Holocaust. As the narrator tries to make explicit to his friend, his father's legacy is not simply a matter of involvement in an event that happened in the past, but that as the child of such a man, he (the son) has inherited his father's crimes both in a biblical sense as well as the father's genetic character; both of which are fundamental to his identity. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation Holocaust Literature*, 143) Schlink's *Homecoming* follows a similar narrative structure in that the narrator-son documents his attempts primarily through the narration of his experiences, to firstly find and then get to know a father whom he has never met. Unlike *Vati*, *Homecoming* is not written in a letter format and the narrator-son, Peter Debauer, is ultimately unsuccessful in his confrontation with the Nazi propagandist turned Professor of Law, as well as with coming to terms with his father's culpability.

[47] Designed to examine obedience to a perceived authority, Milgram's initial experiment included participants drawn from various social and educational backgrounds ranging from unskilled workers to highly skilled workers within an age range of between 20 and 50. The participants were given one of three roles in the experiment; 'teacher', 'experimenter' or 'learner'. It was the behaviour of those given the role of 'teacher' whom Milgram wished to study. For each wrong answer given by the learner, the teacher was - as instructed by the experimenter - to administer electrical shocks of increasing voltage to the learner. Milgram's aim was to investigate the extent of an individual's obedience to a perceived authority figure in the hope of shedding some light on the question of why so many Germans participated directly and indirectly in the extermination of Jews and other people considered undesirable in the Third Reich. Milgram was particularly interested to find out how far the participant would comply with the experimenter's instruction before refusing to carry out the instructions. 65% of the teachers submitted to the experimenter's demand by continuing to increase the shock voltage to the learner. Having observed the behaviour of participants under investigation, Milgram came to the conclusion that: Many subjects will obey the experimenter no matter how vehement the pleading of the person shocked, no matter how painful the shocks seem to be, and no matter how much the victim pleads to be let out. (Assmann, *Authority and Obedience in Bernhard Schlink's* Der Vorleser *and* Die Heimkehr, 2010, 11-13)

By adapting some of the conventions found in *Väterliteratur* - an examination into the life of the father, a barrier of silence surrounding the war years, and a lack of resolution in terms of how the protagonist should understand the war generation's motives - Schlink has created a story where the absence of a father figure has far reaching effects on the psyche of his protagonist. For most of the story, the reader, like Peter, is led by his mother to believe that his father had died during the war. Peter's pursuit for the ending of an incomplete manuscript leads to his discovery of historical documentation, which he then uses to trace multiple pseudonyms to the work of a particular propagandist during the Nazi period. This active research coupled with a series of interviews with various characters, brings him to the conclusion that his father is in fact alive.

Of all the texts chosen for this study, *Homecoming* contains many of Schlink's own experiences within its narrative, making it the best example of his use of autobiographical detail in a work of fiction. In 2008, Schlink was interviewed by Edward Marriot, writing for *The Observer,* where he discussed the extent to which this particular novel reflects aspects of his early life. Based on the interview, it would appear that Schlink has written much of himself into his character, Peter Debauer - particularly in the first and second parts of the novel where Peter first discovers the incomplete manuscript and then spends time in California as a massage therapist. ("On the Moral High Ground", n.pag.)

The first part of the novel recounts Peter's early travels between his mother's home in Germany and his grandparents' home in Switzerland which was something that Schlink, himself, spent much time doing in his youth. (While in the text Peter is visiting his father's parents, Schlink was visiting his mother's.) Schlink's own grandparents, as with Peter's in the novel, ran a publishing company, reprinting pulp novels and giving the page proofs to the young boy so that he could use the reverse blank pages for his homework, but prohibiting him to read the texts that had been printed on these. Disobeying this request, the young Schlink did read the proof pages and found himself enjoying the story of a returning soldier, which unfortunately lacked its closing pages (Peter's story mirrors this sequence). In the interview with Marriot, Schlink states that it was his 'love of mystery, of solving problems ... [that] led him, like [his character] Debauer, to do everything in his power to locate the missing pages'. He even managed to track down the son of the original publisher, but because it was 'a pulp-publishing house there was no

archive' so he could not find the rest of the novel. ("On the Moral … ", n.pag.) The contents of this interview have led me to believe that Schlink's experiences seem to function as the prototype narrative on which *Homecoming* is based.

Due to the sheer size and complexity of this novel, I would like to focus discussion of the text on aspects related to the original conventions found within *Väterliteratur*. Therefore my analysis will focus on three pivotal moments that not only drive the narrative, but reflect the exploration into the Nazi past which is a key feature of this form of writing. The areas making up the discussion are Peter's discovery that his parents' marriage had never taken place which leads him to question his mother's account of their relationship (this includes her fabrication of his father's death, as well as her silence about the war years), his decision to travel to America to meet Johan de Baur, the author of *The Odyssey of Law* (who at this point in the novel, Peter correctly deduces is his father), and Peter's embroilment in Professor de Baur's January retreats designed to demonstrate what he calls 'the truth of the exceptional situation' – an experiment that examines how stripped of the comfort of rules and expectations people will resort to extreme methods to preserve themselves. (*Homecoming*, 318)

Each of these episodes contains a specific aspect of the father novels which I would like to explore; Peter's discovery that his parents' marriage certificate is a forgery creates a situation where the past must be addressed and the silence is broken, his meeting with Professor de Bauer allows Peter to physically confront the past (something that could not take place in the earlier *Väterliteratur* novels because, as pointed out by Schneider, the father is often deceased), and the experiment becomes demonstrative of the war generation's desire to defend the decisions that they had made during the period.

From part three of *Homecoming*, the specific autobiographical references discussed earlier fall away as the quest aspect of the narrative (as far as the incomplete manuscript is concerned) gets under way, and the novel starts to reflect the beginnings of an exploration that will lead the protagonist into the Nazi past. The incomplete manuscript, discovered by Peter in the first part of the novel (which will also be referred to as the 'Karl story') becomes the primary text around which parts two and three of the novel are structured. Peter is so taken with this story (since it poses a mystery to him) that he wants to find out how it ends, and having failed to

source a complete version of the manuscript, believes that the best way to solve the mystery of its ending is to find the author.

Part of Peter's search is informed by his understanding of the manuscript as being a reworking of Homer's poem *The Odyssey*, a realisation that he comes to after taking Max (the son of his former girlfriend whom he appears to have in part adopted) to see 'the adventures of Odysseus with Kirk Douglas':

> ... suddenly everything was clear ... The model for Karl and his companions, for their wanderings, their adventures, the dangers they succumbed to, was none other than *The Odyssey*. (*Homecoming*, 85)

On rereading the manuscript, Peter decides that the 'last part of the novel showed too many discrepancies with the model' (*The Odyssey*) to allow him to 'use it as the solution to the riddle of the ending' which spurs his interest, and generates further questions concerning both author and text (*Homecoming*, 87):

> Why had the author deviated from his model at the end? Though the analogous question is equally interesting: Why had he followed the model until the end? (*Homecoming*, 88)

Here Schlink has innovatively used the discovery of the incomplete manuscript as a catalyst for Peter's investigation, instead of the traditional death of the father. Through his pursuit of the author of the text Peter unwittingly uncovers the identity of his father who he believes to be deceased. This aspect of the narrative, the discovery of the father and possibility of a literal confrontation with the past, will be explored further on in this chapter. However, before delving into the idea of literally confronting the past, one needs to look at how Schlink leads his character to make this discovery.

In the earlier parts of the novel, the Karl story and its narrative of return begins to plague Peter, not initially because he wishes for his own father's return, but because the woman that he is romantically involved with, Barbara, is married and he fears what her husband's return might mean for their relationship. Peter actually meets Barbara as a direct result of his research into the

manuscript, having found the resemblance between her apartment building at 38 Kleinmeyerstrasse and the house in the manuscript (which is presumably Karl's home) 58 Kleinmüllerstrasse uncanny.

Having decided to make enquiries at the apartment, Peter has his first encounter with Barbara to whom he relays the story of the manuscript. During the initial phase of their romance, Peter's interest in the Karl story almost ceases, being replaced by their relationship and Peter's concerns about Barbara's marriage. His fears about the consequences and the possibility that her husband might return are realised. In the interim between this part of the novel, Barbara's divorce and their (Barbara's and Peter's) romantic reconnection, Peter recommences his search for the author of his manuscript to numb the pain of what he perceives as being Barbara's rejection.

Returning to his former search for the author, Peter makes enquires at the register office about who had lived at 38 Kleinmeyerstrasse and is told about a woman called Gerda Wolf . It is this rather marginal character who plays a crucial role in offering Peter information about both the apartment, as well as its inhabitants. Their ensuing interview acts as the first indicator that Peter's search will lead him into a difficult and personally motivated exploration of Germany's Nazi past.

While speaking to Frau Wolf, Peter is told about the presence at the apartment of a 'nice young man who sorely regretted that his bad heart kept him from being conscripted' as well as her friendship with the Baroness von Fircks, and her husband Karl Hanke, the Gauleiter of Silesia. (*Homecoming*, 137) Peter asks if this elusive young man might have been the author of the manuscript to which Frau Wolf replies that as a student, he must have at least done some writing. Following another train of thought, Peter asks after Freda and Karl, and in so doing realises where his search will lead him:

> 'Freda remarried and lives with her husband, a man named Rössler, in Bielefeld. As for Karl Hanke – can you young people be so ignorant of your own history? There were rumours he fled via Spain to Argentina or ended up in an American POW camp or was hanged by German soldiers or executed or beaten to death by the Czechs. In any case, Freda needed to have him declared dead in 1950, but I

> believe he is still with us. He was the best of them all.' She pulled herself up and beamed at me. 'His chivalrous treatment of Magda, his commitment to the panzers – he volunteered, you know – his defense of Breslau: little wonder the Führer loved him so.' (*Homecoming*, 137-38)

After this interview Peter researches the life of Karl Hanke, and decides to further his enquiries about the inhabitants of Kleinmeyerstrasse by interviewing Barbara's sister, Margarete. Margarete reveals that her mother kept letters, 'letters from her parents, her best friend, my father, and us. There are also a few letters from a man who is a stranger to me. I don't know anything about their relationship'. (*Homecoming*, 144) The letters from the stranger, addressed to Fraulein Beate (Barbara's and Margarete's mother), and signed Volker Vonlanden, are written over a three year period from1942 to 1945 and while in many respects are love letters, occasionally contain newspaper articles related to the war and signed by the same person. These articles, one titled 'Yet another Cause' and the other 'The Iron Rule' (as well as a missing article that Peter manages to obtain later) reveal that Vonlanden was not merely a suitor, but also deeply involved in Nazi propaganda. The article titled 'The Iron Rule' which seems to shock Peter, re-emerges later in *Homecoming* in a book titled *The Odyssey of Law*, which is the text that leads him to his father. In the article, Vonlanden formulates the 'Iron Rule' in the following way:

> ... the golden rule is a rule of submission...It goes against the very first of all legal rights: the right to defend oneself against attack...The law rests not on this golden rule but on an iron rule: whatever you are willing to take upon yourself you have the right to inflict on others...It is the rule that supplies the foundation for all authority and leadership...If I am prepared to be killed, I have the right to kill. I am prepared to be killed when I enter into a life-and-death struggle, be it declared or not and no matter who declares it. The Jews do not attack us? All they want is to make deals, jack up prices, and charge high interest? The Slavs do not attack us? They care only about plowing the land, baking bread, and making moonshine? Neither Jews nor Slavs will be saved thereby. Germany has entered into a life-and-death struggle with them. (*Homecoming*, 149-50)

Peter's search for a connection between Hanke and his elusive author proves unfruitful forcing him to explore the possibility of a connection between Vonlanden and the author. Writing to the

Institute for Military History, Peter manages to obtain three articles from their archives written by Vonlanden. However, the institute is unable to furnish him with further information about the man hypothesising that the name might be a pseudonym, 'pseudonym's and altered names having been common among war correspondents'. (*Homecoming,* 156) Of the articles that he receives only one, 'Yet Another Cause' is familiar to him from Beate's letters. The other two 'The Battle', which applies Vonlanden's formulation of the Iron Rule to the Siege of Leningrad, and 'Indestructible', proclaiming the success of National Socialism through the purge of Jews, are not. At this point, while researching the Siege of Leningrad, Peter is contacted by a 'historian friend' who has information about Hanke. The information that the historian imparts reflects a sequences of events within the unfinished manuscript that Peter believes act as sufficient evidence to suggest that Vonlanden is the author:

> I had the author of my homecoming story. In 1940-41 he had studied in the city I was living in, lodging with the Lampe family at Kleinmeyerstrasse 38 and making an unsuccessful play for Beate Lampe. During the winter of 1941-42 Hanke took him under his wing and sponsored or appointed him as a war correspondent. During the summer of 1942 he saw Beate again and had greater success. It is highly likely that he was in Hanke's orbit during the latter's last few weeks or months. It is also highly likely that he went back to Kleinmeyerstrasse 38 after the war. He would have written the novel sometime between this second visit and the midfifties, when my grandparents gave me the bound galleys. (*Homecoming,* 161)

By incorporating the historians account, Beate's letters and the interview with Frau Wolf, Peter manages to put together a comprehensive series of events that led to the formulation of the manuscript, as well as who the author is. At this point he does not know that the man for whom he is searching is his father, but his method of research used to find the author mirrors the methods used and described in Chapter One by Ronald Fraser (here he was researching his childhood) and the writers of *Väterliteratur* (researching their fathers).

How then, does Peter come to the idea that Vonlanden and his deceased father are the same person? The answer to this question comes in the form of Peter's mother. Earlier in the narrative and after having located the house at Kleinmeyerstrasse, Peter visits his mother and asks her if she had ever recommended authors to his grandparents. She is immediately defensive,

asking ‘is this an interrogation? May I at least be informed of what I stand accused?’ (*Homecoming*, 82) Of course Peter has to placate her and so reveals his search for the end of the manuscript, finishing his tale with his deduction that ‘the author must be from here.’ (*Homecoming*, 82) Unlike Peter, his mother does not share the same enthusiasm for his search for the author of the manuscript (reasons as to why this is the case will be explored shortly) asking him if he does not ‘have anything better to do?’ (*Homecoming*, 83) Despite this rebuke they enter into a conversation about homecoming stories were she tells him that ‘[t]here are a number of ways for that story to end. You have no idea how many homecoming stories were told and published after the war. Homecoming novels were a genre all their own, like war novels or romances.’ (*Homecoming*, 83)

This sequence of events takes place quite early in part two of the novel, and while initially does not seem terribly important, becomes relevant later in part five. The defensiveness and emotional distance seen in Peter’s mother, especially when he speaks to her either about the manuscript or his grandparents is not fully understood until Peter makes certain discoveries about his parents’ relationship while trying to apply for a marriage certificate. It is Peter’s mother who actually presents the greatest frustration to his search for his author and father, and who betrays him the most, although this only becomes apparent much later in the narrative. Interestingly, she is the character who in order to keep the devastating knowledge of the Holocaust at bay, fabricates a personal history that is slowly unravelled by Peter through his search for the writer of the manuscript- which is why she does not share his enthusiasm for his search. She literally embodies the silence and repression found in the war generation. For her the past is still very much alive in the present (to borrow Eckstaedt’s discussion from Chapter One), since she knows who Peter’s father is and suspects that he might be alive. This places her in a situation where she is ‘unable to talk with [her] child in a way that would have helped [him] to understand the past’. (Eckstaedt, “A Victim of the Other Side”, 225) In the narrative, she comes to represent the barrier between past and present, trying not to expose Peter’s father for who he is, so that Peter does not have to undergo the experience of discovering a filial link to the Nazi past. In this text, Schlink has used the literal escalation of conflict between mother and son over the identity of the father, firstly to represent the generational conflict so prevalent in *Väterliteratur*, as well as to create a space where the silence about the past can no longer be maintained through emotional distance.

As already mentioned, Frau Debauer's account of what happened during the war is scrutinized by Peter as he gets closer to his goal of finding the manuscript's author. Her claim that Peter's father had been shot 'walking down the street' becomes increasingly implausible as Peter uncovers more information about their time together. (*Homecoming*, 173) However, the extent to which she has fabricated certain events only becomes clear when Peter and Barbara decide to marry. (During the time between her husband's unexpected arrival and Peter's discovery of Vonlanden, Barbara has divorced her journalist husband and reconsidered her relationship with Peter).

During their time spent at the registry office it emerges that Peter's mother's documents pertaining to her marriage are forgeries, and that Peter was born in Breslau under his mother's maiden name, Graf and not Debauer as he had been led to believe. This discovery marks the beginning of Peter's doubt concerning the truthfulness of what his mother has told him. The idea that his name, Peter Debauer, is not in fact his real name shatters everything that he has come to know and understand as being part of himself, throwing his identity into question. The realisation that his mother has betrayed him by not having told him the truth leads Peter to confront her about the past. Still, there are parts of the story that she continues to omit, possibly in a last effort to uphold the agreement that she and Peter's father had made:

> 'They wrote to Poland. There was no Debauer/ Graf wedding celebrated in Neurade in 1944 and no Peter Debauer born in Breslau in April 1945. But there was a Peter Graf. They want me to go by the name of Peter Graf from now on.'... She shook her head. 'You act as though I owed you something. If not your father himself, then his memory, a portrait, a life story. But I don't owe you a thing. I did you no harm by telling you your father and I were married; I just made both our lives easier and gave you grandparents who had no problem seeing you as their grandson and loving you. Would you rather have been known as an illegitimate child, a bastard by your schoolmates? ... So just be glad it hasn't come out till now.' (*Homecoming*, 214-15)

For Peter this speech is a revelation and the only opportunity he has of finding some answers to his questions. He promptly asks, 'How did he [Peter's father] get you a Swiss passport with that false married name?":

> 'How should I know? I didn't pry into who forged it and how; I was just happy to have it. Not that it helped in the hospital: they wanted to see the marriage certificate. But it impressed the Poles and the Russians. I don't know what I would have done without it. Or you for that matter. No offense meant, but the more I talk about it the angrier I get. I'm not asking you to forgive me; I'm asking you to recognise what I did for you. I brought you out of Breslau, I brought you together with your grandparents, I brought you up.'(*Homecoming*, 216)

Two important pieces of information can be gleaned from this paragraph. The first is that given the difficult situation in which she found herself, Frau Debauer or rather Graf, made decisions that would ensure their continued survival during the postwar years. The other is that despite having been born to a German mother and Swiss father, Peter is in fact Polish which should place him outside the problems faced by second-generation Germans. By introducing this complexity into the narrative, I believe that Schlink is demonstrating that the problem of the Nazi past is not a problem that should only be addressed by Germans. Rather it is a problem that has to be dealt with by all those countries, and indeed their people, that were involved no matter the nature of the involvement.

After Peter's discovery that his parents had never been married, he begins the arduous task of working through all this newly acquired information. However, it is the uncertainty of his name that takes precedence, because it poses not only a problem in terms of his identity, but also in terms of family heritage – a problem that was reflected in the first wave of *Väterliteratur* as discussed in Chapter Two. Up to this point Peter's mother has been silencing facts about the reality of her wartime love-affair apparently to protect her son, but more importantly to create an acceptable reason for his father's absence, by simply claiming that he had died. From her standpoint, the past is undiscussable because it threatens the very existence of Peter's legitimate

biological link to his Swiss grandparents, a tentative connection that he himself is made aware of when he considers why it is that his surname is so important to him:

> Peter Graf. Why not? Why not Peter Bindinger for that matter? Because I liked my name. It represented the bond between my grandparents and me, and that meant a lot. The bond between my father and me was weaker and less important, but if it broke what would happen to the other one? Then I reconsidered: the bond between my father and me may have been weaker, but it was not less important. My father was a stranger to me, but whether as a child riding a hobbyhorse and wearing a paper hat or as an unsettled young man in knickerbockers or as an adventurer loath to sit out the war at home or as the charmer who turned my mother's head, he was of great interest to me, and I liked seeing myself as his son and him as my father, in the open, not behind closed doors. He was part of me, and our having the same name proved it. (*Homecoming,* 219-20)

Peter tries to implement some order within the upheaval of these revelations, only to discover that his increasing happiness in his relationship with Barbara only emphasises his unhappiness with his existence and the monotonous work that he does for the publishing house. Yet it is the very work that he does that puts him in a situation to make the greatest breakthrough not only with his search for the author of the manuscript, but also the discovery of his father. The sudden and uncanny arrival, at the publishing house, of a book titled *The Odyssey of Law* written by one John de Baur proves to be the missing link between Vonlanden, who is the manuscript's author, and Peter's father. This book, accompanied with a review from *The New York Times*, provides Peter with some biographical information about the author which he later uses to find him. But it is not the author or the title of the book that leads Peter to the realisation that Vonlanden and John de Baur are the same person, rather it is its contents. For within its pages he finds not only references to the *Odyssey*, but also to Vonlanden's formulation of the 'Iron Rule'. While reading *The Odyssey of Law* Peter comes to the realisation that he does not like this man, specifically because his theories 'freed him of all responsibility, the responsibility for what he had written and for what he had done.' (*Homecoming*, 239) Peter now confronts his mother about Vonlanden/ de Baur, but she shuts him out, repeating the same thing to each of his

questions, 'As far as I am concerned, he's dead.'(*Homecoming*, 240) Then 'one day' she arrives at his office and tells him a story that is closer to the facts as he understands them:

> '...he [Peter's father] offered me a deal: if I confirmed that he was dead, he would leave everything he had to me as his wife and to you as his son and you would get Swiss grandparents. For both your sake and mine I accepted. I wrote to his parents that I had seen him get shot and had found a letter on him. The letter, which I enclosed, said that we had married.'...
> 'Why did Father want to get away?'
> 'He said he was in danger, he couldn't afford to be caught, he had to hide, he needed to emigrate. I didn't believe him...He was the one who took care of you while I was at work...He was waiting for false papers, a visa, a ticket, who knows what. He stayed at home, looked after you, and wrote novels for me to sell...' (*Homecoming*, 242- 243)

The thought that his father may have abandoned his mother during her pregnancy does not seem to affect him as strongly as the idea that he had abandoned them after his birth. This final rejection results in Peter's decision to travel to America and confront his father, but as was the case with many members of the second-generation he is uncertain about what it is that he is trying to achieve. This uncertainty becomes evident once he arrives in New York and he asks himself, 'What was I doing here? What ghost was I after?' (*Homecoming*, 252)

Assuming the false name of Dr. Fürst, Peter finds himself sitting across from John de Baur in his office and although he sees no similarities between himself and the man whom he is looking at he feels that his physicality is overwhelming, for up to now Vonlanden/ de Baur has been a concept and not a physical entity:

> Till then he had been an idea, a construct made of stories I had heard about him and the thoughts he had put on paper. He had been both all-powerful and powerless: he had stamped my life without my having a chance to react, and I had created an image of him without his having any input into it. Now he was a body – tangible, vulnerable, visibly older and presumably weaker than I was. But the

> physicality have him a palpable presence, a dominance that I had yet to come to grips with.' (*Homecoming*, 253 -254)

Having achieved what might have seemed impossible - the discovery of not only the author of the manuscript, but also his father - Peter feels a sense of 'triumph' at having gained access to the man, as well as the knowledge that he has about his past. (*Homecoming*, 255) However, having met Professor de Baur, Peter begins the troubling and difficult process of equating him in the present, with the knowledge he has of the man. Professor de Baur and Volker Vonlanden appear to be different people (much in the same way that Michael struggles to equate Hanna the lover to Hanna the concentration camp guard). During his attendance at de Baur's seminars, Peter sees him as being a 'brilliant teacher' who 'kindled true passion in his students' instead of the way that he had imagined him to be; 'shallow' and 'vain'. (*Homecoming*, 259) Here too he first hears about the January retreats that de Baur organises in the Adirondacks.

Having been invited, with the rest of the seminar group that he has joined, to a dinner party at de Baur's home, Peter encounters de Baur's family for the first time and finds that he is unable to either connect with them, or to create a situation where he can tell them who he is. During the dinner party a conversation is generated around a play called *Mosaic* which Jane (a former psychoanalyst) and Anne (a former French Professor), two of the seminar attendees, had gone to see. It is worth taking note of the discussion of this play, since it not only acts as a precursor to the events that take place later in the Adirondacks, but also, as has been done in *The Reader*, demonstrates Schlink's own knowledge of influential critical material and studies that have been done or are related to Nazi history. The play *Mosaic*, we are told by Anne and Jane, is based on Stanley Milgram's Obedience study, described earlier in this chapter. The contents of the play disturb Jane, particularly because of the continued sadistic behaviour as seen in those who played the role of the teacher in the experiment. (Teachers were the participants who administered electric shocks, at the request of the experimenters to the learners):

> Jane was shocked by the subject's behaviour. 'It shows that Hannah Arendt[48] was right, doesn't it? That evil is banal, that normal people are willing to commit atrocities when egged on by somebody in power.'
> Anne disagreed. 'You think thirty to sixty-five percent of the human race are Eichmanns?...I don't believe that Eichmann and all the others were just being obedient either. They enjoyed what they did. They were eager to be cruel.'...One of the students blurted out... 'you just can't experiment on people like that!'
> 'Is that so?' de Baur chimed in. 'Milgram's subjects did not see it that way. They regarded the experiment as an enriching experience, an opportunity to get to know themselves and fear themselves.' (*Homecoming*, 265-266)

Enraged by de Baur's statement and failed connection with the family Peter retaliates saying that, 'If everything that offers us an opportunity to get to know ourselves is positive, then everything in the world is positive', and citing de Baur's own Iron Rule in a bid to force him to reveal himself as Vonlanden. (*Homecoming*, 266)

Despite this minor argument or perhaps because of it, Peter receives an invitation to the January retreat, but never has another chance to confront de Baur with the knowledge that he is his son, or that he knows what he did during the Nazi years. The retreat, as it turns out, is de Baur's own social experiment following a similar formulation to Milgram's study as far as obedience is concerned, but designed to demonstrate the extent to which – given difficult circumstances – the participants would deny or betray the 'principles [they] professed as good'. (*Homecoming*, 315) Peter is the first of the participants to realise that the retreat is in fact an experiment, speculating that given the length of time that these retreats had been taking place, de Baur has no real interest in studying his participants. What he is doing is 'molding' them, teaching each participant to 'look evil in the eye, the evil in others and ourselves' and experience 'doing evil with determination', as he himself might have done during the war. (*Homecoming*, 315) Having come to this realisation Peter leaves the retreat and furiously goes through a series of imagined confrontations with de Baur about the nature of the experiment, engaging with the 'Hamletesque' fantasy of 'publicly

[48]The reference here is to the philosopher, Hannah Arendt's book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1963) where she examined not only the Eichmann trial, but also the desensitisation and normalisation of atrocity.

compromising his father'. (Schneider, "Fathers and Sons ... ", 10) Having chosen to follow through with his fantasy, Peter writes an article titled "The Story of the Youth Who Went Forth to Teach What Fear Was", recording everything that he knows about de Baur, which is submitted to *The New York Times* on his behalf.

His article never does get published because *The New York Times* requests an interview with him so that they might 'run through all the facts' and 'find out more about his stake in the story', which he is unwilling to do because he does not want to 'stir up the relationship' between himself and John de Baur. (*Homecoming*, 328) Despite this, de Baur's story does come out, but Peter is not cited as being a source. However, the revelation made to the public about de Bauer's Nazi past does not destroy his reputation, instead he uses it to his advantage, demonstrating his considerable intelligence, writing off his past to his 'youthful desire for adventure and susceptibility to be led astray'. (*Homecoming*, 328) This is not the reaction that Peter had anticipated, the betrayal the he feels deepens and the novel closes with his consideration that it 'was the image', the idea of a father that he longed for and not what he found to be the reality. (*Homecoming*, 331)

Despite starting as a quest narrative where the protagonist is searching for the missing pages of a manuscript, *Homecoming* rapidly evolves into the search for and exploration into the life of a father. The most obvious difference between this novel and the majority of the novels that make up *Väterliteratur* is that Peter's father is not in fact dead. This father is merely absent, which creates the possibility for the protagonist, the son, to confront him about the past. An interesting possibility, especially since one of the criticisms of *Väterliteratur*, put forward by Schneider, is that the very people who these novels are concerned with cannot respond or defend themselves against the material written about them. ("Fathers and Sons ... ", 4) Bearing this in mind it is then fascinating to speculate why Schlink gives Peter a chance to confront his father, and then allows him to fail.

Manifesting towards the close of the novel, Peter's confrontation seems to fail for three primary reasons. The first is upon his arrival in New York he finds himself uncertain as to why it is he has come at all asking 'What was I doing here? What ghost was I after?'(*Homecoming*, 252) He is unsure whether he has come to find de Baur to confront him about abandoning him, or his

Nazi past, or whether he would just like to meet him. Secondly, this uncertainty feeds into his interaction with de Baur and later with his family during the dinner party episode. Instead of telling de Baur why he is there during their first interaction in his office, Peter creates a false identity and gives false information as to why he is in New York. By fabricating such a story, I believe that it becomes increasingly difficult for Peter to engage with and accomplish his initial although uncertain reasons for making the journey. Indeed after the retreat and during his internal furious dialogue with himself about the events that he has just experienced, he speculates about what would happen should he confront de Baur about the retreat, as well as with who he is and how he had found him:

> He [de Baur] would take me on. He would enjoy it even. If I took a light, playful approach, it could turn from a father-son confrontation to a father-son encounter. He would enjoy following the road that led me from the Reading Pleasure novel to him, and would tell me the ending of Karl's homecoming ...
> (*Homecoming*, 321-22)

But he chooses not to do this justifying his decision on the basis that de Baur's persona acts as a 'façade for his demons', and so any confrontation would be worthless because it would only be met with a series of defence mechanisms. (*Homecoming*, 322) This reveals the third reason; knowing what he does about de Baur, Peter no longer desires a connection with him. For most of the novel Peter does not know he even exists, so why then should he formalise a filial connection not only with a man who condones atrocities and is capable of justifying them, but also a direct connection with the Nazi past? Given this, it is little wonder that he chooses not to tell de Baur who he is, and by making this decision redeems his mother for her own part in silencing the past.

Because Schlink's novel evolves into an exploration into the life of the father it may be viewed as a latter day example of the concerns and narrative strategies employed in the *Väterliteratur* of the mid 1970s and 1980s. In order to conduct his research Peter has to make use of whatever documentation is available to him, including interviews, manuscripts, books and letters. Schlink has thoroughly explored all avenues available to those who enter into an exploration of the past, and although he does not include any direct reference to the use of psychoanalysis as a method of accessing memory, does use reflection on the part of the protagonist to portray the importance of internalising events and formulating a personal

narrative. The story is innovative, because it uses as its catalyst, not the death of the father, but rather the search for the end of a manuscript. Furthermore, rather than condemning the entire war generation for their actions, Schlink actually generates sympathy through the redemption of Peter's mother, for their plight.

The short story *Girl with Lizard,* also contains a focus on the relationship between the second-generation and its predecessors from a specifically male point of view. Published under the German title *Das Mädchen mit der Eidechse*, *Girl with Lizard* predates *Homecoming* in the translated anthology *Flights of Love* by eight years, and appears to be the first of Schlink's texts where the exploration into the past manifests not only as the result of the father's death, but also as an enquiry into the origins of an object. In *Homecoming* , the exploration is centred on an incomplete manuscript, where as in *Girl with Lizard* it is a painting that piques the protagonist's interest. The story's focus on the relationship between the two generations, particularly in terms of conflict, is sharpened in this text through the examination of the relationships within one nuclear family; mother, father and only child. In this story the role played by the mother is of key importance, since in this case the father is actually dead, and she has the ability to either assist or hinder the protagonist with his investigation into the father's past.

As already suggested in the discussion of *Homecoming*, the narrative belonging to the father figure in these stories is often shrouded in silence, punctuated in various places by some form of documentation or brief moments of interaction with the mother, through which a narrative of war time deeds becomes accessible. These brief moments, where the barrier of silence is fleetingly punched through, reveal pieces of information which the protagonist puts together in an attempt to understand what took place during the period. What becomes a motivating factor in this pursuit of the past is a pervasive desire to know and understand what role the parent generation played during the Third Reich. In particular, what atrocities were committed by the parent generation and how to address or silence (depending on the case) the 'trauma of Auschwitz'. (Kosta, "*Väterliteratur*, Masculinity, and History ... ", 223)

Explorations such as these, break through the silence surrounding the 'secret familial heritage on Nazism' within the family, allowing the second-generation to either condemn or redeem their father figures. (Mahlendorf, "Trauma Narrated ... ", 459) This redemption or

condemnation appears to have long reaching effects on the psyche of the second-generation, especially in terms of how they then perceive themselves in relation to the past.

As was the case in the discussion of *Homecoming,* discussion of this text will also be limited to an examination of how Schlink has manipulated conventions found in *Väterliteratur*. Here too I will look at the exploration into the past undertaken by the protagonist, the generational conflict that emerges as a result of such an exploration, and the lack of resolution that the protagonist has to come to terms with. In order to do so, I will examine the protagonist's search for the painting that he inherits, his deceased father's documents which reveal his time in Strasbourg, his mother's implication of the true nature of her relationship with his father, and the protagonist's decision to finally destroy the painting.

Unlike *The Reader* and *Homecoming*, *Girl with Lizard* does not open with a childhood memoir, but follows a linear narrative that begins during the protagonist's childhood. The story is narrated by a third person, rather than the protagonist himself, who recounts the story of a young law student whose interest in his father's role during the Third Reich is prompted by his inheritance and search for the origins of an unusual painting upon his father's death. Despite the family's change in financial fortunes, first brought on by the father's sudden and unexplained resignation from his post as a municipal judge - and later exacerbated by his alcoholism - they make no move to sell the painting even though it is thought to be valuable.

The protagonist's initial and tentative research into the painting commences after his first unintentional visit to the Museum of Modern Art. His exploration of the museum leads him to make the uncanny discovery of the work of René Dalmann, finding himself captivated by a particular painting on display titled *At the Beach*. The chance discovery of Dalmann and his work marks the beginning of this protagonist's exploration into the past through the world of art.

Most of the narrative is centred on the protagonist's search for Dalmann and his paintings, (in *Homecoming* it was the incomplete manuscript and an elusive author) which becomes increasingly feverish once he has inherited the painting that he calls *Girl with Lizard*. However, the protagonist's initial interest in Dalmann's work is prompted much earlier in the text during his chance viewing of the painting *At the Beach*. It is after having seen this work that he first displays an interest in the painting that he is to inherit. The subject of the painting's

origin appears to be an undiscussable subject in the text and the protagonist is met with considerable antagonism from his father when he does try to broach it.

'[P]urely by chance' the protagonist manages to retrace his steps to the Museum of Modern Art. (*Girl with Lizard*, 20) This time he requests to be shown work by Dalmann and manages to view a piece titled *Order Restored after War* which depicts:

> ... a woman sitting on the ground, head bent forward, legs drawn up, propping herself on her left arm. With her right hand she was pushing a drawer back into her abdomen; her breasts and belly were drawers as well, with nipples as knobs for the one and her navel as the pull for the other. The drawers at her breasts and stomach were slightly open and empty, but beneath them in the abdomen drawer lay a dead soldier, twisted and mutilated. (*Girl with Lizard*, 20-21)

There are several descriptions in the text of work done by Dalmann, a well known 'Jewish-French surrealist painter' (Mueller, "Forgiving the Jews for Auschwitz? Guilt and Gender in Bernhard Schlink's Liebesfluchten", 514). The pieces described in the story are comprised of paintings as well as sketches, including a series of wounded, maimed and dying soldiers and religious motifs; 'Adam and Eve lost in a battlefield paradise, the healing of a crippled soldier by a crippled Christ'. (*Girl with Lizard*, 29) All the pieces present in the text contain some form of disfiguration or imagery of destruction. On the surface one could read this as Dalmann simply portraying his experiences through art, since we are told that he served as a volunteer in the French medical corps during the war (presumably the First World War). On the other hand, one could read this move by Schlink as a visual representation of the effect of war on the psyche. More specifically I would like to suggest that Schlink uses this selection of paintings and sketches as a visual representation of the maiming of the psyche of the war generation, later transferred to the second-generation which, as Schlant puts it, has resulted in a 'psychic crippling' brought about by the acts of the parents. (*The Language ...* , 83)

Dalmann's paintings *At the Beach* and *Girl with Lizard* depict young, beautiful girls on a beach with a sea in the background, and both seem to elicit discomfort from the viewer, possibly attributable to the way in which the subject matter has been composed. In *At the Beach* a nude

girl is doing a handstand on a rock, but one of her legs appears to have been carved out of wood. We are told that the leg is not a 'wooden leg, but a female leg of perfectly ingrained wood'. (*Girl with Lizard,* 19) This emphasis on the leg as being a natural part of the figure, rather than a prosthesis, is disconcerting and unsettling for the very reason that such a leg cannot be considered natural. Despite the subject matter being very different, the young man still feels that the painting bears some similarities to the one that his parents own, yet is unsure of what it is exactly that makes him feel this way:

> No, he neither recognized the girl doing the handstand as the girl with the lizard nor could he say that it was the same rock, the same beach, the same sea. But it all reminded him so powerfully of the painting at home...When he compared the two at home, the differences between painting and postcard were obvious. And yet there was something that linked them ... (*Girl with Lizard,* 19)

The similarities between the paintings might lie in their stylistic representation, or in the feelings of discomfort and unease elicited by the images themselves. The protagonist's search for the 'link' between the paintings (or rather why he feels that there exists a link) leads him to research Dalmann's life and work. Unlike *Homecoming* where Peter openly discusses his search for the manuscript, in *Girl with Lizard* the protagonist tries to avoid sharing his research and painting with anyone else. (This secrecy shares some commonalities with *The Reader* where Michael does not tell anyone about his relationship with Hanna.) But by not sharing his experiences, he is also unable to share the emotional burden of his suspicions, which begin to plague him as the narrative progresses.

Secrecy and silence as represented in the text, not only burden the older protagonist, but have burdened his parents as well. That they [his parents] seem to have once shared a secret, or have knowledge of something that he does not, had not escaped his notice as a child and first becomes evident to him through his observation of their interactions with others:

> ... everything was done in proper style, which meant with the obligatory formality and distance of the 1950s. It was not this formality or distance that the boy perceived as the distance between his family and other people, but something else.

> It had to do with the way his parents themselves seemed to be holding back, hiding something. They were on their guard. (*Girl with Lizard*, 7)

For the reader, the first instance in the text that the young boy's observation is grounded in reality takes place when he is given a school assignment that requires him to describe a picture. Because of his interest in the painting *Girl with Lizard*, he chooses it as his subject. His father finds him working in his study and asks him what he is doing in there:

> "I'm sitting here because we've been assigned the description of a picture, and I'm describing this painting here."
> It took his father a moment to reply. "What painting? What're you doing?"...From the way his father was standing there scowling as he looked at him and the painting, he knew that he had done something wrong. (*Girl with Lizard*, 10-11)

Reading his description to his father, he receives praise for his work, but is told that the painting 'is not for other people'. His father also tells him that 'it's worth a great deal' and that he does not know if he 'could protect it if people wanted to steal it', as such 'wouldn't it be better if they [other people] didn't even know we have it?' (*Girl with Lizard*, 12) Later when he does inherit the piece his search involves solving the mystery surrounding the painting; specifically why his father claimed that it is 'not for other people'. (11)

His search as already stated, starts at the Museum of Modern Art, where he first sees Dalmann's work and notices the similarities between the work exhibited and the painting that belongs to his father. After the unsuccessful discussion with his father about who the artist of their painting is, he later returns to the museum to look at the paintings again, and this time to purchase a book on Dalmann. The contents of the Dalmann book provides the protagonist with essential information about the artist that assists him with his own search.

The search that takes place in *Girl with Lizard*, is a far less complicated version of the one that takes place in *Homecoming*, and could be viewed as Schlink's first, less developed exploration on which the *Homecoming* search is later based. The protagonist in *Girl with Lizard*, makes use of a limited number of tools available to him during his quest. These include the book

on Dalmann, the archives at the university's art history institute (Schlink does not provide a name for the university, telling us only that the protagonist attends a university on the Baltic), one revealing discussion with his mother, and a file that contains newspaper clippings about his father's service on a military court during the war where he had been accused of having 'condemned an officer to death for having helped Jews escape the police'. (*Girl with Lizard*, 41) Despite such limitations, it is interesting to see how Schlink uses each of these tools not only to progress the story, but also to bring his protagonist in contact with the Nazi past. For it is as a result of his discoveries at the art history institute, that he decides to speak to his mother about the painting, a decision that uncovers much of the mystery of the painting, as well as what it is that his parents have been hiding:

> "Tell me what's the story with the painting?"
> "Oh my boy..." She looked at him sadly. "I'd rather not. I think your father was proud of the painting, to the end." (*Girl with Lizard*, 24)

Unlike *Homecoming*, the protagonist's mother does not fabricate a story in order to protect him from the past, rather she maintains her silence, and through her lack of response hopes that he will not take up the matter again. This hope remains unfulfilled as the protagonist's research at the university's art history institute adds to his growing suspicions. While going through the photo archives he comes across a painting much like the one he now owns. This painting is titled *Lizard and Girl* and depicts the figures in his painting in reverse. Further enquiry about this painting reveals that it was last seen in 1937 at the exhibition of 'Degenerate Art' in Munich. Going back to his book on Dalmann, the protagonist reads that Dalmann and his wife vanished with the 'entry of the Germans into Strasbourg', but in 1946 there was an exhibition by an artist who called himself Ron Valomme who 'as some critics suggested, [was] the same person as René Dalmann'. (*Girl with Lizard*, 38) As a result of this revelation that Valomme and Dalmann might be the same person (a moment that mirrors Peter's intuitive understanding of Vonlanden and de Baur as being the same person), and that the painting *Lizard and Girl* is missing, the protagonist decides to return to his mother's apartment, but this time to ask her a simple question that proves difficult to answer; 'What did father do during the war?' (*Girl with Lizard*, 39)

In part, what prompts him to do this is his awareness that despite his growing knowledge of Dalmann, he does not know very much about his parents, specifically his father, and therefore cannot even begin to speculate about what brought to the two (the Dalmann painting and his father) together. By asking the question, 'What did Father do during the war?' the protagonist places his mother in a situation where she, and only she, can break the silence that has been maintained for so long. During the course of the narrative there have been no confrontations between mother and son either about the father or about the painting. But in her opening response to his question -which is, 'Here we go.' (*Homecoming*, 39) the reader is given the impression that she has been long awaiting such a moment. What emerges in quick succession is that his father had served on the military court in Strasbourg where he had assisted some Jews in escaping the Nazis, and that the painting had been a gift, 'their way of thanking him'. (*Girl with Lizard*, 39) While she is recounting these events the protagonist remembers how his mother used to refer to the painting as being the 'painting of that Jewish girl', and asks her about why she thought of it that way. (*Girl with Lizard*, 3, 40) Surprised that he even remembers this she tells him, 'I thought the girl was the painter's daughter, and they were Jews.' But her explanation, as he points out, does not account for her 'scorn'. (*Girl with Lizard*, 40) Intuiting that there must be another reason, he then openly accuses her (a move often seen during the Student Movement) of not having believed his father's story, an accusation that she does not deny:

> "No, you didn't believe Father. You didn't buy his story about helping Jews. Or you thought it wasn't the whole story and that there was something between him and the girl. Was he blackmailing her? Did he force her to have an affair with him? You knew that she was the painter's wife, is that it?"
> (*Girl with Lizard*, 40-41)

Although he does not know it, the protagonist has come very close to the truth of what has taken place, but takes her silence as a refusal to communicate rather than the desire to repress what she knows. Understanding her silence as an indication that this part of the conversation is over, he asks her about why his father had lost his job after the war. This question seems far easier for her to answer, possibly because it is not caught up in her memory with infidelity and emotional betrayal:

> "They (Schlink does not specify who) said he condemned an officer to death for having helped Jews escape the police [in Strasbourg during Nazi occupation]. Since you think you have to know everything – the officer was his friend and they said he turned him in himself." ...
> "What did father say to the charges?" But no sooner had he asked than he didn't want to hear anymore. "That he and the officer plus another officer had helped a lot of Jews and that the one he condemned had had to be sacrificed so that they wouldn't all end up dead, especially the Jews who were in danger. And that it was all by dumb chance that he ended up presiding over the case and having to pronounce sentence." (*Girl with Lizard*, 41-42)

At this point the protagonist is beginning to come to his own conclusions as to why his mother had initially not wanted to discuss the painting, and while mulling over the events remembers a photograph that he had seen of her that had been taken during his parents honeymoon where she had a 'soft, surprised, [and happy] look on her face'. (*Girl with Lizard*, 43) He immediately regrets having dug up the past because he could not recall ever having seen that expression on his mother's face except in the photograph, and so he deduces that something irrevocable had happened to her.

Initially, one might ascribe the mother's coldness to the difficult relationship that she has with her husband, whose alcoholism drags the family into financial ruin. However, the protagonist begins to consider that perhaps there is something else underlying her emotional distance:

> ... he couldn't recall ever having seen her so happy or so soft, either with him or his father. Was the war to blame? Or events in Strasbourg? Had his father done things to her or to others that she could never forgive him for? But why had she been so hard on him, too? Because he was his father's son? (Girl with Lizard, 43)

The last question which also acts as a statement, 'Because he was his father's son?', points towards the heart of the problem in their relationship. The mother appears to think of the child as being inextricably linked to the father, which biologically, he is. However, he is also an

independent being with a separate identity from that of the father; a reality that the movement of 1968 tried to make explicit. This separation in the identities of father and son remains unacknowledged by the mother who views the protagonist as being the father's son rather than her own, the reason for which becomes apparent in the last and final confrontation that they have. However, before this takes place, she gives him a file containing newspaper articles about his father's case, which not only note the source of each article, but have also been annotated by his father.

In the file, the protagonist comes across several pages of an unpublished article written by his father titled 'Rebuttal'. The article corrects statements made by various journalists and defends the decisions that he took while serving on the military court in Strasbourg. Here too he claims that he did not illegally enrich himself with the property of Jews – an important statement for if he was given the painting by a Jewish escapee as he had told his wife, it is easy to understand that why, given the circumstances, he did not want people to know about it. After reading this article, mother and son enter into the last of their conversations which infers not only what happened to her and why it is that he has 'no childhood memories of his mother's attention and tenderness', but also provides an explanation as to why she views him as his father's son and not hers. (*Girl with Lizard*, 43)

This discussion starts off concerning the file which she gave him and the protagonist comes to the understanding that his mother wants him to 'leave her and her husband in peace', to leave the past in the past and to no longer pursue it. It suddenly occurs to him that '[a]s far back as he could remember, she had left him in peace, wanted him to leave her in peace. As if she had nothing to do with him. As if he had once troubled her too strongly ... '. (*Girl with Lizard*, 47)

The idea that he had 'troubled her too strongly' prompts him to make an uncanny leap in logic which turns out to be correct:

> "When you conceived me, did Father rape you? Was it while he was in Strasbourg, doing awful, things, and having an affair with the Jewish girl? Did he arrive one night, and you knew about this other woman and didn't want to sleep with him, and he didn't give a damn what you knew or what you wanted, and

raped you? Is that how I came into the world? You've never forgiven me for that, have you?" (*Girl with Lizard*, 47)

As with the earlier episode where he manages to guess correctly about his father's relationship with the painter's wife, here too his mother remains silent, but this time he understands her silence for what it is, confirmation that he has uncovered the truth. The shame of being a rape victim and her resultant silence 'suspends the apparent association with Nazi guilt on the part of the mother', an association that would have been made through her generational affiliation with the generation of perpetrators. (Mueller, "Forgiving the Jews ... ", 515) Here Schlink seems to be redeeming the figure of the mother, but quite strongly condemning the father, not only for his actions in Strasbourg, but also for the destruction of the family unit.

After this traumatic series of events, the protagonist returns to his apartment, retrieves the painting, wraps it in a sheet and takes it to the beach where he burns it. Having discovered his father's infidelity, the questionable nature of how he obtained the painting and his mother's rape, he no longer wants to be so literally connected to the past. In a brief moment before the 'canvas blazed up' he sees the very thing for which he had been searching. (*Girl with Lizard*, 51) The edge of the canvas curls back and reveals another painting – the one that (the protagonist believes) Dalmann had wanted to protect and take with him as he fled. He makes no move to save the painting, for it has come to represent more than just the suffering that Dalmann and his wife had to endure, but also the suffering that his parents had undergone.

This scene is troubling for two reasons. The description of the painting as being wrapped in a sheet and burned, conjures other images related to the Holocaust, more specifically the murder of the Jews, since here the painting as we come to understand, is painted by a Jewish artist and depicts a Jewish woman. The other problem is that through this act, that one should probably view as an attempt at catharsis, the protagonist resolves nothing, not his entrapment in his father's guilt, the suffering of the Jewish painter or his mother's suffering. What he achieves instead is the destruction of evidence that such a past existed, but not the memory or indeed the past itself. Effectively this protagonist does not even begin to undertake the process of mourning, instead it would appear that Schlink has given his audience a protagonist who, like the parent/ war generation has retreated into silence because he, as Schlant suggested in her discussion, has 'too much knowledge' and is simply unable to psychically cope with what he knows. (*The Language ...* , 7)

The trauma experienced by the protagonist in this text is twofold. Firstly, it is the uncertainty surrounding his father's actions which are the cause of great angst, and his mother's inability to answer his questions about the past only add to his suspicions that his father may have committed a multitude of criminal acts. Acts which he as the son, can neither prove nor disprove, but by virtue of being the son of such a man, has inherited. Secondly it is the discovery of his mother's rape and his resultant birth which ultimately changes his understanding of their family dynamic. This unexpected revelation explains her emotional distance, why it is that she refers to him as his father's son rather than as her own, and ultimately why she abhors the painting. (This will be further explored in Chapter Four.)

What is most interesting in both of these texts, *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard*, is the role played by the mother in preventing any discussion of either the past or of the father. In both cases the mother figure represents an almost insurmountable barrier between the sons and the fathers. Not only is the figure of the mother a literal, familial barrier to accessing the past, but she also embodies those aspects more commonly found in the representation of the postwar father; authoritarian, tacitly abusive and silent. Both of these texts (as well as *The Reader*) portray the 'wall of silence and the hostility' that the second-generation encounters 'when it does try to break through the silence'. (Mahlendorf, "Trauma Narrated ... ," 474) If they choose to confront their parents they must deal with their own 'protective wall of silence so as to keep intact the image of their parent' while simultaneously encountering their parents' and society's silence'. This seems like an unmanageable task and so the pressure to maintain silent, 'appears almost irresistible'. (Mahlendorf, "Trauma Narrated ... " , 474) In these two texts Schlink has given some attributes typically associated with *Väterliteratur* to his father figures. Both of them are relatively silent about their respective pasts, are absent either literally or emotionally, and have committed or were involved in some form of undiscussable atrocity which has led to either the creation of a new identity in order to avoid prosecution, or a break in psychic functioning. Despite this, it is difficult not to notice the importance of the mother figure in these narratives, or the effect that she has on the protagonist, since the mother becomes an important figure in the protagonist's exploration into the father's life. Because Schlink imbues his female figures with the ability to break the silence which all the other figures appear to hold on to, and makes them victims of the Nazi father/ lover either through rape or abandonment, I believe that further exploration of Schlink's representation of women is warranted.

Chapter 4

Nazi Women and Postwar Mothers: Schlink's Women and *Väterliteratur*

When there is a clear fact, a major sequence of events which someone tries to keep out of the discourse, intentionally, we have a mythical, almost religious belief that at some point in time, the truth will come out, and the order, differentiating good (genuine) and evil (normalized), will be restored.

- Dan Bar - On[49]

The worst were the dreams in which a hard, imperious, cruel Hanna aroused me sexually; I woke from them full of longing and shame and rage. And full of fear about who I really was.

- Bernhard Schlink [50]

In Chapter Three I set out to examine the effect of the resurgent interest in German identity and wartime participation in German writing after 1990, as well as the extent to which Schlink had used and adapted the conventions found in the first wave of *Väterliteratur*. After German reunification, the removal of the symbols of division between East and West Germany, which were also the symbols of a lost a war as well as what might be viewed as being the 'product of horrendous national aberration', placed Germans in a situation that demanded that they redefine their concept of self both in terms of the way in which they see themselves and the way in which they would like to be seen. (Williams, "Introduction: On Individuals, Identity and Innovation", 1-2) Central in trying to generate an answer to this question of identity, is the exploration of 'perception and memory'. The existential questions facing Germany might include the now symbolic terms 'Auschwitz', 'Holocaust' and 'Nazi', but the question that really needs to be addressed concerns the effect that such a history has had on the generations that have

[49] From Bar-On, Dan. *The Indescribable and the Undiscussable: Reconstructing Human Discourse after Trauma*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 1999, 278

[50] From Schlink, Bernhard. *The Reader*. trans. Carol Brown Janeway. Great Britain: Phoenix, 1998. p.146

grown up since World War Two. (8) Arthur Williams warns that in terms of understanding the inter-generational difficulties faced by the second-generation it is easy to over simplify their actions as being born out of the 'critical negativity' with which they approached their society:

> It is easy to create a (somewhat simplistic) picture of two generations which have been deprived of a healthy respect for their roots, for themselves; many of whom, particularly of the first post-war generation, were thus led to reject the generations of their parents and grandparents while embracing with abandon the media, high technology, and borrowed cultural or social norms. (8)

As already discussed in Chapter Two, the term *Väterliteratur* is somewhat misleading because, as both Schlant and Figge point out, the genre is not comprised solely of texts about fathers, but also texts written about mothers. As such this genre is possibly better described as being an exploration into the dynamics of the postwar family in its entirety - strictly from the second-generation's viewpoint - rather than solely the exploration of father-son relations as the name would suggest. Although Schlink's texts are usually dominated by a father-son narrative – *The Reader* being an exception – present within these narratives are strong female characters who seem to have a greater impact on the protagonist than the father figures. These women often act as guardians of secret and sensitive information either about themselves (Hanna in *The Reader*), the elusive father figure (Frau Debauer in *Homecoming*) or of the past (the mother figure in *Girl with Lizard*) much in the same way that Hannah Arendt describes those Nazi officials connected with the Final Solution as 'bearer[s] of secrets'[51]. (*Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*, 27) Two notable critics of the genre who focus some of their research on the representation of women in Schlink's texts are Erin McGlothlin and Ernestine Schlant. Since they appear to be the leading theorists on this subject it is primarily through their arguments that I will further my own exploration into Schlink's representation of German women.

[51] In *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (1994) the philosopher, Hannah Arendt, after having attended the trial of Adolf Eichmann, claimed that 'Eichmann, like everyone connected with the final solution, was officially a 'bearer of secrets'. By this she was referring to the injunction to remain silent about what the euphemistic term 'Final Solution' implied, as well as how it was to be carried out. Those officials who knew the reality behind the term become 'bearer[s] of secrets' since they were to remain silent on the matter except when conveying orders concerning its execution.

This chapter will first examine *The Reader* in terms of how Schlink has attempted to portray a Nazi woman and debunked, through such an exploration, the masculine myth of Nazism. (The masculine myth will be looked at during the course of this chapter.) I will then turn to *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard*, and by exploring these texts, demonstrate that Schlink has given his mother figures not only the problematic status as victims of their Nazi lovers/ husbands, but also uses them as the point of connection between the Nazi past and the second- generation . While *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* appear to be dominated by the protagonists' desires to understand their father's activities during the war, one cannot omit or ignore a discussion of the women present in these texts, because these characters play a vital role in either assisting or hindering the protagonist's progress. Of course it is less easy to ignore Schlink's choice of female characterisation when analysing a text such as *The Reader*, since the relationship between Hanna and Michael is at the centre of the novel, but in *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* the roles played by the female characters (in this case the mothers) seem far less dominant.

Previously, critics of *Väterliteratur* had centred their focus on father-son narratives at the expense of father-daughter narratives. Susan Figge, Associate Professor of German at The College of Wooster, re-examined Michael Schneider's father-son paradigm (as put forward in his essay "Fathers and Sons, Retrospectively: The Damaged Relationship Between Two Generations") arguing that there exist a large number of texts within *Väterliteratur* that were written by women, rather than men, and who, as is the case with the texts written by the sons, attempt to discover their fathers' involvement in the Nazi past as well as the fathers' role as representatives of patriarchy. While this does not seem particularly important in terms of the texts chosen for this dissertation, since these are father-son narratives (once again *The Reader* being an exception), it is interesting to note what led to this preference (father-son narratives being of more importance than father-daughter narratives) and what impact such preferential reading has had on how one could interpret or represent the role of women in these father-son texts. Figge says that:

> It is helpful to look first at some early 1980s general assessments of the father literature ... In this interpretive tradition, by no means limited to the twentieth century, the literary, the literary overthrow, defeat, or death of the father is

> understood to signify both the individual son's liberation from the bonds of particular authoritarian psychological and familial constraints and the potential creation of wider social and political freedoms ... Clearly, however, the use of this literary paradigm of father and son conflict must either subsume or exclude consideration of fathers and daughters. ("Fathers, Daughters, and the Nazi Past: Father Literature and Its (Resisting) Readers", 275 -276)

Väterliteratur, as conceived by Schneider, is representative of the student rebellion by the sons against the fathers. In these texts the sons, who were unsuccessful in their rebellion of 1968, 'revenge themselves again on the father who was psychologically unavailable to them in the postwar family'. (Figge, "Fathers, Daughters ... " , 276) This model, which might be considered oedipal in its formulation because of the sons battle of authority with the father, does not appear to work when applied to other relationships within the postwar family (that is to say father-daughter relationships/ mother-son relationships.) However, like Schneider, Figge accepts that it is the father, and not the mother, who is at the centre of these texts, attributing the authoritarian nature of postwar child-rearing and the oppressive family environment to this figure. However, this is not necessarily true since mothers in the postwar family were also active members within the family structure, and in many cases headed single parent households both during and after the war. Contrary to expectation, in Schlink's novel *Homecoming* and short story *Girl with Lizard*, it is the mother, rather than the father, who in these texts seems to dominate postwar family life. In these texts the father is either physically absent (*Homecoming*) or psychologically damaged (*Girl with Lizard*). Although the majority of *Väterliteratur* focuses on the figure of the father and his participation during the Nazi period, the figure of the mother is not completely absent. Rather than viewing the 'mothers as apart from fascist discourse or as victims of Nazi policy, narrators often identify them as representatives of Nazi society to the child, especially if the father is absent'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 180) According to Ulla Roberts, the absence of the father meant that the mother became the mediator of the outside world for the child:

> Certainly the other division of roles in the family was of considerable importance. The mothers henceforth had to be for the children the leading mediator of both worlds of socialization: that of the intimate inner space in the family and that of the position in the world outside, which up to then had belonged to the duties

passed down to the fathers.

(Quoted in McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 181)[52]

Not only were mothers often the sole parent present during the war years since the fathers were serving in the German military, but in many cases they were the sole parents postwar. In terms of *Väterliteratur*, while it is true that the 'majority of autobiographical narratives written about the postwar family focus on the father and the legacy of his participation in the Nazi period' there still exists within these narratives the figure of the mother, even though she is appears as a 'small presence'. (180)

As texts, *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* both explore the effect of the Nazi past through the discovery and then exploration of the father's role. Here the mother and her account (or silence) of the Nazi years acts as the only link that the narrator has to the absent father and to the memory of the past. It is for this reason that much of what Hulse terms the 'historical hatred or despair' that the author/ protagonist feels towards the father is simultaneously and unconsciously directed at the mother in these texts. (181) Through the examination of family life, Schlink opens a window onto social and political history as well as the role of the mother in the lives of his protagonists. As such, he seems to be engaging in a revisionist narrative, moving away from a focus on the father by exploring the mother. Keeping this in mind, Schlink's use of childhood memory to open his narratives then takes on a different importance from that suggested in Chapter Three. This device not only gives a background to his characters, but also demonstrates through their act of remembering, the extent to which the mother has shaped the psyche of the protagonist through her omission or distortion of history.

This being the case, in order to investigate what Schlink might be commenting on through his fiction, it becomes necessary to ask how involved women were during the Nazi years and what the nature of their involvement was. Eveline Kanes states that:

> ... one might ask about the commitment of the mother, aunts, or grandmothers involved in these histories. By and large, there is little discussion of the

[52] I have quoted Roberts through McGlothlin since there was not a readily available English translation of her book *Starke Mütter – ferne Väter: Töchter reflektieren ihre Kindheit im Nationalsozialismus und in der Nachkriegszeit* (1994).

> women's views on the Nazi regime and its policies.
> (quoted in McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* ... 176)[53]

Kanes seems to imply that because there is a distinct lack of discussion centred on the views of postwar women about the period, their commitment to Nazism might be deemed questionable or simply unknowable. Taking up the question of the relevance of the mother figure in *Väterliteratur*, critics such as Konrad Kenkel and Michael Hulse, claim that the representation of the mother in *Väterliteratur* is of little relevance since women played no prominent role in political life in either the Nazi period or in postwar West Germany. Accordingly, in terms of *Väterliteratur*, the very fact that women's roles were marginalised implies that 'they bore little culpability for Nazi crimes or the subsequent repression of them and therefore cannot expect to be objects of an attempt to come to terms with the past'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* ... , 177) On this basis, Kenkel dismisses texts written about mothers or attributes the seeming lack of texts to the supposed non-political role played by women:

> As one might expect, in the father novels, the respective relationship to the father occupies the centre of such a figuration of the past. The fact that it is thus a matter of fathers (that is to say, men), excluding to a large extent mothers, reflects the society of the late 1960s and its political history, which was dominated by men both publicly and in the family.
> (quoted in McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* ... , 176)[54]

Hulse, who is in agreement with Kenkel says that:

> Perhaps because the element of historical confrontation is absent, or at all events not present in the same degree, German writing about mothers has not had the same intensity as writing about fathers. Writers come *after* their mothers just as they come *after* their fathers, it is true; but it was the fathers who created the Nazi Reich and who fought its war, and so it is rightly the father who must answer to

[53]I have quoted Kanes through McGlothlin due to the unavailability of her article "In Search of Fathers." *Denver Quarterly* 18.1 (1983): 3-13

[54]Here, Kenkel has been cited through McGlothlin since I cannot find an English translation of his article "Der lange Weg nach innen: Väter-Romane der 70er und 80er Jahre", which appears in *Der Deutsch Roman nach 1945*, ed. Manfred Brauneck, Bamburg: Buchners, 1993

> the generation that is left its legacy of doubt and barbarity. Mothers are often approached in a more intimate mood, not without recrimination but nonetheless without that extra dimension of historical hatred or despair.
> (quoted in McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 177)[55]

Looking at these two quotes, it seems apparent that both Kenkel and Hulse 'privilege' readings that concentrate on father figures because 'only in the writer's engagement with the father does the historical moment make itself known'. Because of their supposedly 'intimate subject matter, narratives written about mothers cannot be classified as historical texts that address the continuing influence of Nazi discourse in the family'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 177)

Possibly the most problematic statement in terms of both Hulse's and Kenkel's work is their assertion that women of the Nazi period carry little responsibility for 'its legacy of doubt and barbarity' and so can be excluded from any study of *Väterliteratur*. As McGlothlin points out, it is difficult to determine the actual roles that women played in the Third Reich because most of the historical data available is primarily concerned with the political and military arenas. Furthermore, she emphasises that women did not number among the high-ranking Nazis who developed German fascism, and for the most part very few of them were among the agents to whom one would usually assign responsibility for the Holocaust:

> However, it cannot be denied that many non-Jewish German women were at some level complicit in the Nazi regime. Women belonged to the electorate that voted the Nazis to power and they did live and function in a fascist state. In many cases, they benefited as much as their male counterparts from the racist and militaristic policies of the Third Reich. While it is true that women were oppressed by the Nazi gender policy and the biological role it assigned to them, it is historically inaccurate to describe them only as victims of fascism. (*Second-Generation ...* , 178)

What McGlothlin demonstrates is that this pervasive idea that women were repressed by the Nazi state, and were therefore not involved, and so not complicit in Nazi crimes is misleading. She substantiates her claims by using Ulla Roberts' text *Starke Mütter – ferne Väter:*

[55] I have quoted Hulse through McGlothlin due to the unavailability of his article "Fathers and Mothers: Recent Works by Christoph Meckel, Brigitte Schwaiger, Jutta Schutting and Waltraud Anna Mitgutsch." *The Antigonish Review* 64 (1986): 133-41

Töchter reflektieren ihre Kindheit im Nationalsozialismus und in der Nachkriegszeit (1994) which examines the complexities inherent in the role that women played in Nazi society:

> But women were not merely and predominantly passive recipients or victims of National Socialist women's politics ... Rather, in view of the current state of critical women's studies, we can assume that many women welcomed the early changes in the quality of life in Germany after the assumption of power by Hitler and the National Socialist Party. Furthermore, the majority of women were silent during the horrifying persecution of Communists, Socialists, Jews, and resistance fighters, which began as early as 1933; and more than a few "just" did their duty by reporting to the Gestapo neighbours who were Jewish or political dissidents. From this we can conclude that there was an affirmation, at the very least, of authoritarian measures and, in many cases, even of violent solutions to social conflicts. (Quoted in McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 178)[56]

Roberts points out, that despite a lack of evidence concerning their role, women might actually have embraced the initial changes in Germany brought about by Hitler's rise to power and chose to either ignore or remain silent on the topic of persecution. Through this act of silence, they were in some respects condoning the policies and ideologies that made such abuse and consequent genocide possible.

For the most part, historians have dismissed women as part of the backdrop against which Nazi men made history, choosing to view men as active 'subjects' and women as the passive 'other', but as historian Claudia Koonz has put forward this is a history that does not stand up under scrutiny:

> From the earliest beginnings of his Party, Hitler promised to eliminate Jews from 'Aryan' society and expel women from public influence. Within the 'master race,' policy and ideology divided man and mother...Women who decided to support Nazism accepted their inferior status in exchange for rewards...Because Nazi contempt for women was so blatant from the beginning, it would be easy to

[56] Here I have used McGlothlin's translation of Roberts' text because of the unavailability of an English translation of *Starke Mütter – ferne Väter: Töchter reflektieren ihre Kindheit im Nationalsozialismus und in der Nachkriegszeit*.

> assume that women ought not share in the question of German guilt...After all, the image of politically inert women reinforces cherished myths about motherhood. A fantasy of women untouched by their historical setting feeds our own nostalgia for mothers who remain beyond good and evil – preservers of love, charity, and peace, no matter what the social or moral environment ... Far from being helpless or even innocent, women made possible a murderous state in the name of concerns defined as motherly... [and were] allowed considerable latitude to interpret Hitler's ideas as they wished... They gave men Nazi's the feeling of belonging not just to a party but to a total subculture that prefigured the ideals of the Nazi state for which they fought. Women kept folk traditions alive, gave charity to poor Nazi families, cared for SA men, sewed brown shirts, and prepared food at rallies. While Nazi men preached race hate and virulent nationalism that threatened to destroy the morality upon which civilisation rested, women's participation in the movement created an ersatz gloss of idealism.
> (*Mothers of the Fatherland*, 3-4)

Koonz's research examines the extent to which women were actively involved in the Third Reich and establishes that despite theirs not being a very public participation, for the most part women were at least involved in the private sphere (caring for the sick and injured, sewing shirts) and certainly had knowledge of what was happening during the war effort. This being the case, it should come as little surprise that after the defeat of 1945 mothers would want to suppress, deny or distort the knowledge that they themselves had obtained. In Schlink's texts, the mother's desire to silence what she knows emerges as a prominent problem which the protagonist has to overcome if he is to ascertain the extent of his own complicity in the crimes of his parents.

Contrary to what critics such as Hulse and Kenkel would lead one to believe, more recent research shows that women's roles under Nazism were far more active and diverse than historians had previously thought. However, the idea that German women under the Third Reich were 'passive victims' in some respects is not entirely untrue, but to characterise them wholly in this way is both 'misleading and historically deceptive, for it effectively relegates millions of women to one narrow category':

> To deny German women's various activities in support of the Nazi regime and its criminal policies is to exhibit historical bad faith and to court an essentialized view of women that promotes a notion of their inherent 'goodness'. Unfortunately, this essentialist view of women as morally superior pervaded much of the research on women in the Nazi era until the late 1970s. Not only does the critical literature on *Väterliteratur* tend to view mothers as innocent (and therefore unimportant to the author's engagement with the Nazi past), but a great deal of feminist scholarship has held the same view.
> (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 179)

During the 1980s scholars began looking at the roles and activities of women in the Third Reich, paying particular attention to the ways in which they participated in Nazi crimes both actively and within the domestic roles that supported the Nazi men's activities. In her text *Mothers in the Fatherland* (1987), Koonz concluded that women were at the centre of the Nazi regime and could not have existed without having been touched by its evil. (6) More recently, Gudrun Schwarz documented the involvement of German women, especially single women, in the Nazi military occupation of Eastern Europe:

> These women [white-collar, blue-collar, and medical workers employed by the Wehrmacht, SS-Women's Corps, and the German Red Cross] were involved in the crimes committed by the Wehrmacht and the SS in various ways. They lived and worked in an atmosphere of murder and crime, were bystanders and, as such, witnesses. Many were profiteers, some became accomplices, and still others became perpetrators themselves. ("During Total War, We Girls Want To Be Where We Can Really Accomplish Something': What Women Do In Wartime," 131)

Schwarz argues that despite evidence pointing to the participation of German women in activities associated with war crimes and the Holocaust, the memory of their involvement was wiped from historical record. This repression was made possible through a 'masculine myth' that denied the pervasive influence of Nazi ideology and the war in all aspects of society, particularly in the areas in which women operated. Postwar narratives of women's involvement in the Nazi era 'reinscribed German women back into the supposedly non-political, transhistorical sphere of the family, thus ignoring the ways in which the "intimate" arenas of women's lives (not to mention

their very public presence as employees of the German military) were in their own way permeated by Nazi society and its crimes'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 180) Given the compelling case made by both Koonz and Schwarz, it is difficult to give credence to Hulse and Kenkel's claim that mothers should be excluded from a discussion of the Nazi past on the basis that they were not active members of the Third Reich.

As far as Schlink's work is concerned, while the texts chosen for discussion conform to the typical father-son paradigm (once again, *The Reader* being the exception), there exists some representation of the impact of the mother or other female characters on the life and experiences of the protagonists, which as pointed out earlier is unusual in terms of *Väterliteratur*. In *The Reader*, the concept of the non-political, family-oriented woman is brought under scrutiny with Schlink's representation of two very different female characters. Dominating the narrative is Michael's lover Hanna who is a former Concentration Camp guard on trial for her wartime activities. Hidden in the background is Michael's mother, the more typically benign and nurturing family woman. Whereas Frau Berg is married to a professor of philosophy, has four children and is presumably educated (since this would have been normative), Hanna is single, childless and illiterate. Professor and Frau Berg also appear to have had little direct contact with the events of World War Two, since Professor Berg had in fact lost his position as a university lecturer after having scheduled a lecture on the Jewish-Dutch philosopher Spinoza, and had taken up a job as an editor for a publishing house. In contrast to the Berg's, Hanna had joined the SS (presumably the Women's Corps) at twenty-one years old, after having worked at the Siemens' factory from age sixteen. It would appear that in this text, Schlink has actively engaged with the problematics of representing the role of women during the period and by presenting his audience with such drastically different representations has further emphasised the complex nature of dissent, complicity and involvement on the part of German women during the Third Reich.

Structurally, this novel is divided into three parts where Michael (both character and author) recounts his experiences ten years after Hanna's death. Part one, which makes up the majority of the novel, concentrates on Michael's and Hanna's early relationship, setting up a series of instances which Michael later reflects on in parts two and three (e.g. Hanna's illiteracy, his earlier misunderstandings of her behaviour, her sudden disappearance). Part two explores Michael's attendance at a trial dealing with Nazi war criminals, where he recognises Hanna as

one of the defendants. Thereafter the narrative concerns itself with Michael's personal experiences both during and after the trial, his realisation that Hanna is illiterate and his difficulties in reconciling the dual image of Hanna as lover and perpetrator. Part three chronicles the impact of the trial on both Hanna's and Michael's lives, his decision to start sending her recordings of him reading aloud, their first meeting since the end of their affair, and Hanna's suicide. Because the narrative in *The Reader* is centred on Michael's relationship with Hanna, much of the content, particularly parts two and three of the novel, is focused on his discovery that she was part of the SS, and the psychological effect that his attendance at her trial has had on him. It is clear from the very beginning of the text that this Nazi woman has had an indelible impact on Michael; however it does not appear to be their unconventional relationship, containing certain sadistic elements as discussed by Schlant (*The Language … ,* 211), which has had such a devastating impact, but rather Michael's discovery of her voluntary enrolment in the SS. For him, such a discovery changes the way in which he understands his relationship to her. Through his attendance at her trial, their affair, which he had considered as simply being part of the experience of first love, becomes imbued with 'the dimension of historical significance when Michael is presented with the question of Hanna's culpability as a Holocaust perpetrator'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 203)

This interesting adaptation of the problematic father figure as being representative of the Nazi past into the problematic lover necessarily changes how Michael addresses or silences his now personal connection to history. By sexualising the connection between the war and second-generation, and placing the generational conflict outside of the family, Schlink presents his audience with a far more difficult moral dilemma than originally posited in the first wave of *Väterliteratur* (i.e. it was not only the fathers who were involved in the Nazi past). By giving Michael the agency to choose to love someone who has committed terrible atrocities, and to continue to do so after he has become aware of these, emphasises one of the most difficult problems faced by second-generation Germans. For how can anyone 'honour thy father and thy mother', which being one of the Ten Commandments would have been the cornerstone of a Protestant upbringing, while simultaneously denouncing them? A question that becomes even more problematic since as far as the second-generation (as revealed through *Väterliteratur*) was

concerned, everyone affiliated with the war generation was regarded as having been complicit, even if only for remaining silent.

Michael's is an interesting conundrum, for while his peers openly condemn the actions of the war generation, Michael finds that by condemning Hanna, he is condemning himself, because unlike his peers he actively chose to love this woman. Of course it cannot be said that Michael is truly complicit or guilty for anything that Hanna chose to do, primarily because he was a teenager during their time together, and had no knowledge of her past. However, this does not alleviate his conscience and so he chooses to remain silent about their relationship because he feels incriminated. William Donahue claims that by appealing to the erotic (Michael's earlier affair with Hanna), Schlink has managed to evoke 'categories of human attraction and bonding that appear to require no explanation whatsoever' in the earlier part of the text. (Donahue, "Illusions of Subtlety: Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser and the Moral Limits of Holocaust Fiction", 64) But during the trial Michael finds himself in a situation where he begins to wonder why he was attracted to her in the first place, and what hidden psychopathology this reveals. In terms of her interpretation McGlothlin believes that Michael's difficulties with accepting Hanna's guilt lie primarily in his inability to reconcile the image of her as perpetrator with his memory of her as his lover:

> While the facts of Hanna's criminal actions are indisputable – she was a guard at Auschwitz and a subcamp, she participated in the forced march of Jewish prisoners, and she was involved in an incident in which prisoners on the march were left to burn to death inside a locked church – Michael finds it difficult to believe in her guilt, for he is unable to reconcile his knowledge of Hanna the perpetrator with his experience of Hanna the lover. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 203-4)

This inability to reconcile the two images, perpetrator and lover, is part of the reason that Michael becomes increasingly disturbed by the relationship that they shared. The most explicit demonstration of this problem can be seen in the dreams that Michael has, where he states that the worst of them were the ones 'in which a hard, imperious, cruel Hanna aroused me sexually; I woke from them full of longing and shame and rage. And full of fear about who I really was.' (*The Reader*, 146) This problem is also evident in the passage below, where during the trial

Hanna's hair and birthmark remind Michael so vividly of their passionate affair; memories of her which appear to be seemingly at odds with the information about her wartime activities:

> During the weeks of the trial, I felt nothing: my feelings were numbed. Sometimes I poked at them, and imagined Hanna doing what she was accused of doing as clearly as I could, and also doing what the hair on her neck and the birthmark on her shoulder recalled to my mind. (*The Reader*, 98-99)

One of the symptoms that he consistently experiences during his time documenting Hanna's trial is a type of emotional paralysis, a numbing of his feelings, which seems to prevent him from fully understanding what is taking place. He describes this emotional numbness as a form of anaesthesia that affects not only him during the proceedings, but also the judges and the lay members of the court. By claiming that this experience does not only belong to him but to all those who are in attendance at the trial, Michael implies that such a response to 'the horror of the subject matter' is 'natural' and maintains that 'the same sort of insensibility had plagued both prisoners and guards in the camps', thus linking himself and the postwar spectators at the trial with the victims and perpetrators of the Nazi period. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 210)

Donahue claims that Michael uses this emotional numbness to excuse himself from 'recounting details of the trial, particularly those pertaining to the testimony of the Jewish witnesses' and in so doing spares the reader of the story the barbarism associated with having to witness or observe (even if second hand) such atrocity, which 'can indeed damage the psyche'. ("Illusions of Subtlety ... ", 68) This description of Michael's experience of an emotional numbness during and after the trial as well as in part three of the novel where he recounts how he studied 'so uninterruptedly, so obsessively, that the feelings and thoughts that had been deadened by the trial remained deadened', seems similar to the experiences of Germans on the national level as described by Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich in their work *The Inability to Mourn*[57]. (*The Reader*, 165) Indeed Michael's struggle to perceive the full extent of not only Hanna's crimes, but by extension all of the 'crimes committed in the name of the fatherland' places him in a situation where he has to try to empathise with the perpetrators so that he might understand their motivations. (Santner, *Stranded Objects*, 3). However, his desire to remain busy

[57] The concerns and problems raised in social psychologists Alexander and Margarete Mitscherlich's work *The Inability to Mourn* have been discussed in Chapters One and Two.

(before deciding to write about his experiences), which on a microcosmic level could be likened to the manic reconstruction effort that took place in Germany after the war, essentially prevents him from initially engaging with his own horror at what has been uncovered during the tria,l and guilt about having loved a criminal. It is only much later in part three of the novel, when Michael begins to record books to send to Hanna, that he begins the necessary mourning process that would eventually result in his novel: 'Maybe I did write our story to be free of it, even if I can never be.' (*The Reader*, 216) His experience of piecing together a personal narrative through memory is very similar to the experiences of the historian Ronald Fraser, discussed in Chapter One, who in order to achieve a comprehensive understanding of his personal past, had to write his own story.

Even though Michael's parents, as presented in the novel, had not been directly involved in any of the Nazi atrocities, he follows the example of his peers and actively condemns them without being sure of what it is exactly that they are guilty of having done:

> Our parents had played a variety of roles in the Third Reich. Several among our fathers had been in the war, two or three of them as officers of the Wehrmacht and one as an officer of the Waffen SS. Some of them had held positions in the judiciary or local government. Our parents also included teachers and doctors, and one of us had an uncle who had been a high official in the Ministry of the Interior...My father did not want to talk about himself, but I knew that he had lost his job as a university lecturer ... How did I decide that he too was under sentence of shame? But I did. We all condemned our parents to shame, even if the only charge we could bring was that after 1945 they had tolerated the perpetrators in their midst. (*The Reader*, 90)

It is this last part of the passage, 'after 1945 they had tolerated the perpetrators in their midst', that is of most importance. For by doing so, by tolerating the existence of war criminals and remaining silent about what they knew, the war generation (as far the second-generation understood it) demonstrated their complicity, and it is this act (of silence/ tolerance as discussed by Schneider in Chapter Two) that seems to condemn the entire generation no matter the specifics of each case. As Hannah Arendt commented during the Eichmann trial:

> At least one German newspaper, the *Frankfurter Rundschau*, asked itself the obvious question, long overdue - why so many people who must have known ... had kept silent – and then came up with the even more obvious answer: "Because they themselves felt incriminated." (*Eichmann in Jerusalem* ... , 18)

Before the trial gets underway Michael describes the atmosphere to be found amongst the law students - of which he is one - who have been assigned the task of recording the trial's progress:

> Exploration! Exploring the past! We students in the camps seminar considered ourselves radical explorers. We tore open the windows and let in the air, the wind that finally whirled away the dust that society had permitted to settle over the horrors of the past. (*The Reader*, 89)

Michael's seeming excitement about being involved in such a project and being able to access a past that his family was not actively part of resonates with Schlant's discussion (discussed in Chapter Two) of the two forms of silence that emerged in German postwar literature: silence that emerges as the result of 'too much knowledge', and silence that is the result of the 'refusal to become aware'. (*The Language* ... , 7) Before encountering Hanna at the trial, Michael shares in the other students' enthusiasm for interrogating the past. However, this initial enthusiasm dissipates with the realisation that Hanna is one of the defendants. In contrast to his peers who retain their 'outrage with the older generation', Michael becomes increasingly distanced emotionally, registering 'no surprise at all' when the woman whom he had 'so passionately loved is suddenly accused of brutal crimes'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* ... , 210) His lack of reaction contrasts sharply with his previous enthusiasm. Far from being at a personal distance from the events, Michael now realises that he has a direct and personal link to the atrocity in the form of Hanna. When Michael recognises Hanna at the trial, he realises that he too is embroiled in this history, despite his parents' apparent lack of direct involvement, far more directly than he had previously realised. However, Michael's reaction to Hanna's Nazi past does not resemble the way in which he describes the response of his peers, despite his deliberate attempt to connect his experience to that of the generation of 1968, and therefore cannot be viewed as 'prototypical' for that generation. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation* ... , 208)

In this text one sees a shift in the narrative structure of the father novels, from 'finding out about the perpetrator generation's heinous activities to a search for their motives'. (*The Language ...* , 210) Despite this shift, Michael still understands his relationship to 'the guilt of his lover through the lens of the student movement' and the generational conflict. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 203) What prompts this apparent shift in focus is Schlink's interesting, yet problematic decision to represent Hanna as illiterate, since it is not only unlikely, but highly improbable that any member of the SS would have been illiterate, for even Eichmann - one of the least educated of its members as Arendt repeatedly points out, could at the very least read. Illiteracy as presented in the novel, I would like to suggest, acts not only as a mitigating factor in Hanna's case, generating questions about the nature of her culpability both for Michael as well as the reader, but has also been used by Schlink to force a change in the focus of the narrative, since the facts of Hanna's case are readily available and so do not have to be sought out, as is the case in the earlier father novels. Because of the way in which Schlink has structured Hanna's trial and through this, given Michael easily accessible information about the perpetrators, he has created a space where, based on the information, speculation about motivations is possible. This was of course not the case for the writers of the autobiographical novels in the first wave of *Väterliteratur*, who had 'tried so hard and futilely' to piece together the information that they were searching for, and therefore had little time to reflect on what may have motivated their fathers. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 210)

For Hanna, her desire to silence (what to her seems a terrible secret) her illiteracy eventually leads to her being sentenced to life during the trial. It is only during 'an intuitive moment, [that] Michael realises that Hanna cannot read or write' (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 131-132). His own intense reaction to this realisation, emphasises his earlier lack of reaction about her Nazi past, after which he spends much time considering the implications of her 'handicap for unresolved incidents in their relationship and her crimes'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 211) This intuitive revelation gives Michael, a means or a way of, if not justifying, then explaining some of the decisions that Hanna made. In terms of the way in which Michael understands her psychology, Hanna's postwar life has been dominated more by the fear that her illiteracy might be discovered, rather than her participation in Nazi crimes, and that it is this that prompted her sudden disappearance and the termination of their affair. Sifting through his memories of his time with Hanna, Michael manages to connect some of her previously unexplained actions to events he had

heard in court. He rapidly comes to the conclusion that the behaviour that seemed to condemn her during the trial, is attributable to her illiteracy:

> Hanna could neither read nor write.
> That was why she had had people read to her. That was why she had let me do all the writing and reading on our bicycle trip and why she had lost control that morning in the hotel when she found my note, realised I would assume she knew what it said, and was afraid she'd be exposed. That was why she had avoided being promoted by the tram company; as a conductor she could conceal her weakness, but it would have become obvious when she was being trained to become a driver. That was also why she had refused the promotion at Siemens and become a camp guard. That was why she had admitted to writing the report in order to escape a confrontation with a handwriting expert. Had she talked herself into a corner at the trial for the same reason? Because she couldn't read the daughter's book or the indictment, couldn't see the openings that would allow her to build a defence, and thus could not prepare herself accordingly? Was that why she sent her chosen wards to Auschwitz? To silence then in case they had noticed something? And was that why she always chose the weak ones in the first place? (*The Reader*, 131)

His realisation that Hanna is illiterate prompts him to ask a series of questions about her motivations regarding her selections for Auschwitz. Initially, he views her decisions as being born out of cruelty and grapples with why she would choose being condemned as a criminal instead of an illiterate:

> I could understand that she was ashamed at not being able to read or write, and would rather drive me away than expose herself. I was no stranger to shame as the cause of behaviour that was deviant or defensive, secretive or misleading or hurtful. But could Hanna's shame at being illiterate be sufficient reason for her behaviour at the trial or in the camp? To accept exposure as a criminal for fear of being exposed as an illiterate? To commit crimes to avoid the same thing?

> How often I have asked myself these same questions, both then and since. If Hanna's motive was fear of exposure – why opt for the horrible exposure as a criminal over the harmless exposure as an illiterate? Or did she believe she could escape exposure altogether? Was she simply stupid? And was she vain enough, and evil enough, to become a criminal simply to avoid exposure?
> Both then and since, I have always rejected this. (*The Reader*, 132)

The difficulty he has in accepting that Hanna was 'vain enough' and 'evil enough' to consciously choose exposure as a criminal instead of as an illiterate is ultimately rejected. What she seems to be avoiding, as far as he understands her, is a double exposure. She is responsible for the choices that she had made once joining the SS, this much she understands and acknowledges, and is probably why she tries to clarify or correct what she perceives as being inaccurate information during her trial. However, in doing so she manages to alienate the judge and jury as well as further implicate herself. But this does not seem to worry her, so much as the information being correct. Michael decides, that given Hanna's disability her motivations might in fact be different from what he had first imagined.

> No, Hanna had not decided in favour of crime. She had decided against a promotion at Siemens, and had fallen into a job as a guard. And no, she had not dispatched the delicate and the weak on transports to Auschwitz because they had to read to her; she had chosen them to read to her because she wanted to make their last month bearable before their inevitable dispatch to Auschwitz. And no, at the trial Hanna did not weigh exposure as an illiterate against exposure as a criminal. She did not calculate and did not manoeuvre. She accepted that she would be called to account, and simply did not wish to endure further exposure. (*The Reader*, 132-133)

Despite his conflicted feelings towards Hanna concerning their relationship as well as her SS past, Michael surprisingly chooses to view her plight with sympathy rather than outright hostility, which once again is very different from the way in which his contemporaries were dealing with their parents. It would seem that this is only possible because he remembers her as

being his first love, where their ritualised relationship - reading, showering and then making love - was for the most part, even if unconventional, at least mutually beneficial. However, his sympathy does not change the facts presented at the trial; Hanna was still involved in Nazi affiliated atrocities - the death march and selection of prisoners for the gas chamber at Auschwitz - and therefore will have to face punishment. Despite this, the nature of her culpability and of their early relationship haunts Michael right up to the last page in the novel where he discusses how he can never be freed from his past with her. There is, however, another mitigating factor in terms of how Michael views Hanna. Because he knows about her illiteracy, it is possible that he sees her as a victim, if not of Nazism itself then of a failed education system, that has placed her (through a series of choices that admittedly she makes so that she might continue to hide her disability) in such a position – that of a criminal. As Donahue puts it, Schlink has written a text that contains the 'problematic conception of dual victimisation' where Hanna is portrayed as a victim of circumstance and Michael as a victim of Hanna - specifically her Nazi affiliation. ("Illusions of Subtlety ... ". Abstract, 60)[58]

Schlink uses Hanna's silence over her own disability in what appears to be a story predominantly concerned with Germany's recent traumatic history as well as the generational conflict, to lead his readers to speculate about motivations instead of actions. As with the other texts, the characters in *The Reader* experience chronic trauma once the silence about the past has been broken. In Hanna's case, her illiteracy, while being a personal problem, has possibly shielded her from many of the realities of that period. Hanna's exposure and understanding of what is taking place seems to be flawed, possibly because she does not have the knowledge - nor the means to acquire it - to fully comprehend the events around her. It is during her incarceration that this protective shield falls away, as she learns to read, and she discovers both the extent of the suffering of the prisoners as well as how extensive the genocide was. It is also this realisation that, I believe, leads her to take her own life just before she is due to be released.

By sexualising the relationship between the generations (Hanna is 21 years Michael's senior) and marginalizing the role of the parents in the text, Schlink has managed to emphasise

[58] This interpretation is also taken up by Joseph Metz in his article " 'Truth is a Woman': Post-Holocaust Narrative, Postmodernism, and the Gender of Fascism in Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser". *German Quarterly* 77.3 (2004)

the problems faced by the second-generation; silence, the maintenance of power relations, the condemnation of the war generation:

> 'When Michael realises on the first day of the trial that Hanna is one of the defendants, the summary condemnation of the parent generation is particularised and personalised. He now has to undergo a process of self-questioning that the other students, he feels, can avoid because 'love of our parents is the only love for which we are not responsible.' It would seem that he however had deliberately chosen to love a criminal and feels that he should take some responsibility for this choice. (Schlant, *The Language ...* , 170, 211)

For Michael, this exploration into the Nazi past begins at the trial and does not conclude until he has chronicled his story, specifically his affair with Hanna 'in order to consolidate it with all the events that followed: the trial, Hanna's imprisonment, her death, and his own troubled relationships with women'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 204) His desire to view his experiences as being similar to those of his contemporaries act as an attempt to link his own failure with confronting Hanna's past to the student revolutionaries failed confrontation with their parents.

McGlothlin states that with the movement of 1968 the student revolutionaries were not so much working through (mourning) the past as they were engaging with what Dominick LaCapra calls 'acting out', which bears similarities to Kestenberg's 'second reality' (discussed in Chapter One). An important difference, since in *The Reader* Michael desperately wants to equate his experiences to those of his peers, and that a large part of the text reflects on these revolutionaries activities through the presentation of Hanna's trial. 'Acting out', as LaCapra defines it, is a psychic response to traumatic loss where the past is regenerated or relived as if it were happening in the present 'rather than represented in memory and inscription, and it hauntingly returns as the repressed'. ("Trauma, Absence, Loss", 716) LaCapra distinguishes 'acting out' from 'working through' on the basis that 'working through' enables the person to overcome traumatic loss by recognising that something has happened in the past which 'is related to, but not identical with, here and now'. (713) However, acting out may signal that a person, while still struggling with the past is 'oriented toward a more critical perspective that could result in working through'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 213) For the student revolutionaries, while they had been

'acting out' during their protests, their working through of the past did manifest later in the form of the father novels. This does bear similarities to Michael's story where one might say that he was acting out during the trial as seen in his detachment towards Hanna's crimes and emotional response to her illiteracy and then later, worked through his past during the act of writing his novel. In this way *The Reader* explicitly connects itself to the generational struggle, even though it situates its exploration outside the postwar family, demonstrating that the Holocaust legacy exists within all inter-generational relationships and not just father-son relationships.

Through the creation of a character such as Hanna, Schlink has effectively broken open the 'masculine myth' exploring the psyche, even if fictionalised, of a Nazi woman which is a new concept in terms of *Väterliteratur*. He has also successfully situated the generational conflict outside the family sphere demonstrating 'how the postwar German struggle over the past transcends conventional inter-generational or Oedipal struggles and points to the extent to which not only familial bonds but also all interpersonal relations in postwar Germany are affected by its legacy of fascism and genocide'. (McGlothlin, *Second-Generation ...* , 207) Furthermore, the presence of Hanna as an illiterate may also be read as a metaphor for the secrecy that many postwar mothers maintained about their husbands activities during the period. Her illiteracy functions as a disability that she wants to keep outside of the public realm, in the same way that postwar mothers wanted to keep their own and their husbands' activities (what might become a psychic disability if exposed) silent. Because Schlink has chosen such an overt representation of a Nazi woman, I find it curious that in *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* he has chosen not to continue such an exploration in his narratives, and has instead represented the women (mothers) in these texts as passive figures who are to some extent victimised by their Nazi lovers/ husbands.

In *The Reader*, *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* the greatest obstacle to the protagonists' search for the past, lies not in a lack of information, but rather in the active roles played either by the mother or other dominant female characters belonging to the war generation. These female characters create the possibility for a disconnection between the protagonist and the Nazi past through the implementation of strategies that allow their silence, as well as what it is that they are silencing, to go unnoticed for most of the narrative. Some examples of this silence observable in the respective texts exist in the following instances: Hanna's omission of

her duties as an SS guard in *The Reader*, Frau Debauer's fabrication of her husband's death and denial of his time spent writing both fiction and Nazi propaganda, and in *Girl with Lizard* the mother's repression of (what is implied in the text) her confrontation with her husband and rape. In the case of both *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* the reason for this silence or imagined history on the part of the mothers, possibly lies in a desire not to reveal the role of the father in Nazi atrocities, and perhaps their own problematic status as victims of the father, thereby creating the impression that their children have no direct link to the Holocaust legacy and are therefore in no way complicit in the acts of their parents. Following this train of thought as put forward by the parent generation in the texts, these children are then merely born into the aftermath of historical atrocity (as is Michael's case) rather than having a direct filial tie to it. Of course for the older protagonists in these texts, this idea of not being connected to the Holocaust legacy in anyway is the product of fantasy, simply because of the problem of complicity which appears to be central. For the protagonists, their respective explorations into the past, at least in *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard*, are the result of a personal investigation into something - a painting, a manuscript - that has become of interest because it presents a mystery that might be solved, rather than a genuine desire to uncover their filial connection to Nazi history, which was the case in the earlier father novels. For the protagonists in *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* their investigations result in an often unwanted and unexpected discovery of a filial connection to Germany's traumatic history (as explored in Chapter Three). And so it is to prevent these discoveries that the parent generation tries to maintain its silence, and in the case of the mothers in these stories, it is the reason why they do not want to discuss the fathers' past.

The mother's silence about the past seems to be a central problem around which Schlink has constructed these texts, rather than the traditional version of the father's silence, which in most cases is partially attributable either to his death or defence mechanisms. How the protagonist works through or around the mother's silence about the father creates the right climate for confrontation concerning the past. Schlink appears to set up a series of situations where confrontation between mother and child is possible, but not achieved for most of the narrative. Eventually this series of progressively aggressive conflicts reaches a pinnacle where the discussion about the father and his past is no longer avoidable, resulting in a brief moment of terrible revelation which takes the form of a disclosure between mother and child. During this series of escalating conflicts the protagonist usually makes a discovery that alters his perception

about the personal narrative that his mother has actively created, either through omission or distortion of fact, in order to protect him from the reality of the situation. Schneider terms these discoveries 'coincidental' since the war generation has often gone to some length to hide their existence. (Schneider, "Fathers and Sons ... ", 9) This change in perception compounded with additional information which has emerged as a result of a coincidental discovery opens a window for the protagonist to then confront the mother about the past by using a particular strategy of questioning to elicit the truth.

In The *Indescribable and the Undiscussable* (1999), Professor of psychology Dan Bar-on says that silenced facts:

> ...have a paradoxical relationship to discourse: they are not framed in our mind in any meaningful way, yet they may affect our thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. We know something and we don't know it, simultaneously. The silenced facts create a structure which is coherent, creates rules we follow, even frames the legitimate ways through which we make sense of the relationships among events. For example, "Never think of father as an abuser/ perpetrator, even if he has abused you." Once we have captured its impact within our words and feelings, these facts may not differ in their "facthood" from other discussable facts. Still, their content may be so threatening that we will let them easily become undiscussable again, lost in oblivion. (155)

This problem of what is discussable and what is not is examined in both *Girl with Lizard* and *Homecoming*, and feeds into the representation of repression and silence as portrayed by the mother figure. However, it is in *Homecoming* that one sees a most direct acknowledgement from the protagonist of the undiscussable. During a visit to his mother, Peter decides to speak to her about his search for the author of the incomplete manuscript. However, before he does so, he describes his awareness of certain topics that remain undiscussable between the two of them, specifically his father and 'her relationship with him'. (*Homecoming*, 81) Despite such an awareness, during their trip to canton of Ticino Peter tries albeit unsuccessfully to open a discussion with his mother about his father. During this enquiry Peter comes to the conclusion that his mother's behaviour is choreographed; that it is not a true reflection of her feelings

towards him or his father, but is rather a tool employed by her to maintain control over the flow of information about the past:

> 'Weren't you ever curious about where Father grew up?'
> She held out her open hand again and threw the swans more crumbs. 'I know what's coming now. What was Father like anyway? How did you meet, fall in love, get married? When did he leave? How did he die?' She shook her head. 'Why do you think I haven't told you? I don't like to talk about it. I hate to talk about it.'
> By the end she was in such a frenzy I couldn't say a word. I knew her frenzies: I had to be prepared for the worst: insults, shouts, even violence. Only the disciplinary structure of the words and sentences kept her from going off the deep end. As a child I was sometimes spanked, not so hard it really hurt but enough to through me off balance. She hit me as if she wanted to push me away, get rid of me. Whenever she threw herself into a frenzy, I would panic. But now I could see that she could turn the frenzy on and off at will: it was all a game.
> (*Homecoming*, 171-172)

His understanding of her reaction as being a device used to derail his probing questions about his father is initially misunderstood by Peter as being indicative of her feelings of guilt about his death. However, this is not the case, since he later discovers that his father is alive, which leads Peter to the new understanding that her behaviour is the result of her desire to honour the agreement that she and his father share: namely that if she 'confirmed that he was dead', she would inherit 'everything' including Swiss nationality. (*Homecoming*, 242-243) As Peter gets ever closer to finding the author of his manuscript, so Frau Debauer and her actions come increasingly under threat of discovery, which is why she does not want to discuss either Peter's father or the manuscript. However, Peter's breakthrough in terms of uncovering the past emerges primarily through his application for a marriage licence. It is through the process of applying for the certificate that he discovers that his mother has not been completely truthful about her relationship with his father[59]. Armed with the new information that his parents were never

[59] This was discussed in Chapter Three.

married, Peter confronts his mother with this fact. She in turn defends her position by claiming that she had lied so as to protect him from being known as 'a bastard' by his schoolmates, which as with all her previous explanations is at least a possibility. (*Homecoming*, 215)

It is only once Peter has made the tentative connection between the Nazi propaganda writing of Vonlanden, specifically his (Vonlanden's) formulation of the Iron Rule and the book written by Prof. de Baur, *The Odyssey of Law,* that he decides to try broach this taboo topic with his mother once again. During this last confrontation, there is little interaction between the two. However, and unbeknown to Peter, he has managed to whittle away at his mother's reticence by telling her all that he has uncovered, as well as his own suspicions. Shortly after this last confrontation where she repeatedly tells Peter 'as far as I am concerned he (Peter's father) is dead' and perhaps because Peter has uncovered far more than she thought he ever would manage to, she suddenly and unexpectedly breaks her silence about her relationship with his father. (*Homecoming*, 239) She tells Peter about the 'deal' that they made, why she accepted it and that she did not believe that what he (the father) had told her was entirely truthful. (*Homecoming*, 243) What also becomes apparent is that she does not know, or does not appear to know, very much about his father's participation in war, but despite this agrees to assist him in his escape because she is pregnant, and he had offered he a way of not only legitimising her circumstances, but also a means to continue an existence after the war. Her silence and complicity regarding the escape might therefore be seen as the result of her desire to protect both herself and her child, not from the father's Nazi past (of which she is not fully aware), but rather from societal judgement.

What Schlink appears to have done, is moved the focus of the mother's silence from the Nazi past onto postwar survival and acceptability. By fabricating a story of the father's death, the absence of Peter's father postwar seems legitimate and shields both him and his mother from questions not only about his role in the war, but also the nature of their (the parents) relationship. In some respects, one might be tempted to view her as a victim of this man, and on at least some level feel pity for her. However, her participation in his escape makes her complicit in his crimes, complicating her situation. Either way, the problem of whether or not she is indeed a victim is not fully explored, because the narrative moves onto Peter's interaction with Prof. de Bauer and does not revisit the figure of the mother.

In contrast, *Girl with Lizard* presents its reader with a more easily understood representation of the victimised mother. In this narrative, while the mother acts as a barrier to the protagonist's search into the father's past, it is not in fact only his past that she is repressing. What is repeatedly implied in this text is that this mother has in some way been abused by the father – a fact that the protagonist intuitively guesses, but is never actually told. Unlike Frau Debauer in *Homecoming*, this mother does not aggressively defend her husband, or her own decisions as far as the two are related. What emerges during the text, as far as it concerns the mother, is that the perpetrator father may have had an affair (whether forced or consensual is never ascertained) with the wife of a Jewish painter, and that when his own wife confronted him about it, was raped in a fit of rage and demonstration of authoritarian dominance. This series of events, although not explicitly stated by the mother, are inferred by her son who comes to understand that his birth is directly linked to her rape, and as such has to cope with the problem of his mother's occupation of a dual role as both victim of the Nazi father, but also perpetrator and apparent anti-Semite. This complex problem is never fully negotiated by the protagonist and incorporated into his narrative. Instead he decides to burn the inherited Dalmann painting, erasing the evidence of his father's Jewish mistress (the painting depicts a young girl, whom his mother believes may be the same woman) and links to his time in Strasbourg. Despite the protagonist's inability to reconcile this dual role, he comes to understand that his mother's anti-Semitism is the result of his father's infidelity and abuse, which his mother had repressed and then displaced onto the figure of the Jewish girl in the painting. Her anti-Semitism can then be read as an 'acting out' to use LaCapra's term, instead of working through her trauma which would necessitate that she views her husband as both perpetrator and rapist, and the Jewish mistress as possibly having also shared the same experiences.

As a result, her silence then functions in two ways. The first is as a barrier between the protagonist and his father's Nazi past, the discovery of which would lead him to uncover his wartime affair. The second is as a shield from the knowledge of her rape and his resultant birth, which would further burden the protagonist since he is not only the son of a Nazi, but also a rapist. Even though she never actually states what happened to her, the protagonist guesses at the events and takes her lack of denial as being confirmation that he is correct:

> She kept shaking her head, over and over. Then he saw that she was crying. At first she sat rigid and mute, tears rolling down her cheeks, dangling for a moment from her chin, and then dripping on her skirt. When she raised her hands to wipe the tears from her face, she began to sob. He stood up, went over to her chair, and tried to hug her. She sat there rigid and stiff and refused his hug. He talked to her, but she refused his words. She was still silent when he said good-bye.
> (*Girl with Lizard*, 47)

In this way Schlink presents his reader with the experience of absolute silence about the past, since this mother never discusses any of the events, and it is only through implication, body language and research that the protagonist manages to acquire any knowledge about his parents' relationship and the painting. Furthermore, it is here that Schlink best portrays the futility and emotional turmoil inherent in addressing the past without the comfort of objectivity or distance. For the protagonist's mother can do nothing but cry over all the wrongs that have been done and he cannot erase the past from memory.

Although these texts do to some extent focus quite heavily on male participation during the war period, Schlink has given the women in these narratives a central role in which their own silence, repression or denial becomes important. In so doing he has broken with the traditional representation of women as being unaffected by Nazism and the events of World War Two, as well as with the postwar construct of the masculine myth of Nazism, which denied the pervasive influence of Nazi ideology in all aspects of society. Additionally, Schlink has also confronted his audience with the problematic concept of what I will call a perpetrator -victim. In all three of these texts the women present could be considered victims in various ways: Hanna through her illiteracy, Frau Debauer's abandonment and the rape of the mother in *Girl with Lizard*. However, despite this apparent victim status, neither the protagonists nor the reader are inclined towards thinking of them solely as victims - possibly due to their affiliation with the war generation - and so such a device does not detract from the texts' exploration into the atrocities of Nazism, but rather demonstrates the added complexities of addressing such a past.

Conclusion

This dissertation set out to examine the extent to which one might consider the work of Bernhard Schlink as exemplifying a renewed attempt, in the reunified German space, to address Germany's problematic and traumatic past through the medium of *Väterliteratur*. In order to explore this topic, I have focused my discussion on three of his texts (two novels and a short story) which appear to engage with the considerations found in the earlier forms of the German father novels written during the late 1970s and early 1980s, and reflect similarities in terms of content, structure and thematic exploration.

Bernhard Schlink's *Der Vorleser* emerged on the German literary scene in 1995, and became one of the most prominent pieces of second-generation writing on the Holocaust past with its 1997 publication in English as *The Reader*. Since then it has become one of the most controversial and critiqued texts of its kind, partly attributable to its portrayal of an unconventional romantic relationship, as well as its seeming desire - as discussed by Joseph Metz - to represent its two central characters Michael Berg and Hanna Schmitz as victims of Nazism (first put forward by Donahue); Michael through his relationship with Hanna, and Hanna through her seeming inability to grasp the magnitude and relevance of the events in which she finds herself (which is in part attributed to her illiteracy). Indeed Schlink's later texts *Girl with Lizard* and *Homecoming* also engage with this complex representation of guilt and complicity, as well as physical (rape of mother in *Girl with Lizard*) and emotional suffering (the angst that drives the interrogation of the Nazi past by the second-generation) largely through his male protagonists and his mother figures.

Through the texts selected for this study, it would appear that Schlink does rework the conventions found in the earlier forms of father writing into what might be considered a new and atypical form, often revising the crucial elements and problems brought forward by the 1968 Student Movement, and articulated in the first wave of father novels. Whilst undeniably all three of the texts can be viewed as 'trauma' or 'crisis' texts that remain 'suspended between the uncanny repetition of gendered paradigms' and 'postmodern self-deconstruction' they still exist as narratives that desire to address and mourn the past, rather than simply reiterate the accusations (described by Fuchs and Schneider and discussed in Chapter Two) made by the second-generation. (Metz, "'Truth Is A Woman': Post-Holocaust Narrative, Postmodernism, and

the Gender of Fascism in Bernhard Schlink's Der Vorleser", 301) Therefore, it is perhaps better to think of Schlink's texts as narratives that demonstrate the difficulties encountered during the act of mourning as experienced and implemented by second-generation Germans.

By understanding Schlink's texts as narratives that engage with the act of mourning national trauma rather than as texts that address direct traumatic exposure and its aftermath, it becomes easier to speculate why Schlink has chosen, perhaps unconsciously as he has suggested in some of his interviews, to engage with the issues presented in the first wave of *Väterliteratur* and critique them through his fiction. One of the most interesting and enigmatic aspects of Schlink's work has been the rather dominant presence of female characters in texts that on first reading appear to share strong similarities with the earlier German father novels. His choice to represent the mother figures in *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* as having been victimised by the patriarchal Nazi system echoes Schlink's initial representation of Hanna in *The Reader* as straddling what might be considered the binary positions of both perpetrator and victim (She is a victim of her illiteracy, but carries out her duties as an SS guard. Similarly, Frau Debauer is turned into a victim through her Nazi lover's abandonment after the birth of their son, but is made complicit in his crimes by accepting forged documents in return for fabricating his death). By doing this, Schlink has radically changed one of the more problematic conventions found within the genre where, in terms of how the second-generation perceive them, German women existed largely outside of and untouched by the crimes of Nazism. In the case of Schlink's characters, while they are not completely exculpated from their Nazi connections, they are represented as complex characters who have also suffered in differing ways during the regime, instead of simply as perpetrators of atrocity and injustice.

While *Homecoming* and *Girl with Lizard* contain more readily identifiable aspects of the conventions found in *Väterliteratur* - particularly a narrative which focuses on the postwar father-son relationship, a lack of resolution as to how to adequately cope with/ redress the parents' Nazi past, and an exploration of the historical and traumatic origins of current German national identity - *The Reader* situates its narrative near the beginning of the Student Movement, and then explores the impact of the Nazi past on its protagonist via sexual power relations and traumatic exposure at Hanna's trial. Despite the obvious structural differences found within this particular group of Schlink's texts the focus appears to be relatively similar since they all engage

with the traumas of Nazism at a generational remove, and explore the impact of the war generation and its activities as a collective (not just the impact of parents) on the psyches of the second-generation.

An aspect of these narratives that stands out quite strongly, but was not of primary concern in my research, is that for Schlink's protagonists (who in this case, are all second-generation German men) it becomes increasingly difficult to form new relationships during their interrogation of the past. It is only in *Homecoming* that we are given a protagonist, Peter, who does manage to overcome the seeming difficulties that emerge as a result of this post-trauma and pursue a mature erotic relationship once he has travelled to America and confronted his father. For Michael in *The Reader* and the protagonist in *Girl with Lizard* the ability to dissolve the boundaries between self and other without losing a sense of self (as discussed by Jerome in Chapter Two) is not attained. Instead they remain unable to resolve their experiences and engage in what could be viewed as acts of psychic exorcism – Michael writes a novel chronicling his experiences with Hanna, and the protagonist in *Girl with Lizard* burns the Dalmann painting. This aspect of Schlink's narrative structure could warrant further exploration, especially if one were to examine the impact of post-trauma on interpersonal and romantic relationships.

As seen in his work, Schlink presents his readers with a complex psycho-social world that is often masked by the readability of his prose (particularly in the English translations). In these narratives, the second generation has been deeply affected by the psychological wounds of a lost war borne by the war generation, and continues to live in the shadow of silence and uncertainty about the past. However, it must be pointed out that trauma experienced at a generational remove is of course different from that experienced by the war generation and as such the long term impact, as Margarete Mitscherlich points out, affects the second-generation in the guise of a lost opportunity to address the guilt and shame associated with the Nazi past.

The re-emergence of the genre of *Väterliteratur* in the reunified German space demonstrates that this need to address the past is still very much in existence, and might be attributable to the very act of reunification. Through reunification the differences between the East and West German postwar experience became a new problem that needed to be addressed and obviated. Thus German literature that concerns itself with fathers, mothers, postwar family

life, inter- and trans-generational conflict is by no means an exhausted topic. Indeed it would be greatly interesting to do a comparative reading between postwar West and postwar East German family life as experienced by the second-generation, and articulated in literature that addresses their differing perspectives through the opposing lenses of capitalism and socialism. Furthermore, the concerns expressed and strategies employed by Schlink's protagonists in their bid to work through the past could be used as a model or guide that could be implemented in reading South African post-liberation literature that attempts to address the impact of Apartheid within the family context. I am not suggesting that one should equate these socio-historical atrocities to one another, however I do think that they share some similarities in terms of how the second-generation attempts to address and mourn the past.

Schlink's work does not merely engage with familial or oedipal conflict, but also inter- and trans-generational conflicts across German society that have as their source the Nazi past. His sophisticated representation and exploration of the experiences of the second-generation as they grapple with the problems of complicity, silence and abuse both within the family sphere and the public domain lend his narratives a subtlety that demonstrates the nuanced complexity inherent in addressing the historical past.

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