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Dismantling hegemonic conceptions of victimhood: German and peripheral narratives of wartime suffering in contemporary World War II fiction

by

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DECLARATION

I hereby declare that

Dismantling hegemonic conceptions of victimhood: German and peripheral narratives of wartime suffering in contemporary World War II fiction

is my own work and that all the sources I have used have been acknowledged by the means of complete references.

Tracey Ruff

5 August 2018

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I would also like to dedicate this dissertation to my grandfather, who passed away at the beginning of the year.

ABSTRACT

In recent years, scholars Michael Rothberg and Stef Craps have dedicated much of their work to the discussion and dismantling of competitive memory – a term that has featured prominently in Holocaust studies. In *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), Rothberg emphasises how we can use the memory of the Holocaust as a platform to articulate other, lesser-known forms of trauma and suffering, such as historical sites of colonial violence and genocide. His theory is fundamentally concerned with the narrative of the marginalised Other (for example, Native Americans or African American slaves) and how we can contribute to the dismantling of hegemonic narratives of suffering through recognising the Other's suffering. The central argument presented in this dissertation is that the selected fictional texts, Eva Weaver's *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw,* Jim Shepard's *The Book of Aron,* Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*, and Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, are multidirectional in nature because they are fundamentally concerned with discussing other, lesser-known World War II narratives of suffering (i.e. they dismantle the hegemony of the Holocaust narrative). While I also discuss French and Polish suffering, I mainly focus on German suffering during the wartime period. I analyse German suffering in each of the texts through the lens of Primo Levi's concept of the gray zone and by discussing the figure of the ordinary German. By drawing on Levi's concept of the gray zone and reading the characters in the selected texts in an empathetic manner, my study aims to contribute to a growing body of literature that has begun to rethink German and other peripheral World War II narratives of victimisation and suffering that were largely overshadowed by the memory of the Holocaust. This dissertation, therefore, contributes to broadening the field of Holocaust memory in memory studies, extending literature on multidirectional memory, and demonstrating how memories of the past can interact productively

and thus enable us, in the contemporary moment, to think dialogically and help us recognise that not all memories are equally (and fairly) represented in both the public and scholarly sphere.

List of key terms: Michael Rothberg, multidirectional memory, Primo Levi, the gray zone, Holocaust fiction, World War II literature, German literature, postcolonialism, Weaver, Shepard, Doerr, Zusak, hegemony, competitive memory

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Introduction

In *Caché*, history is an orphan and hidden children abound (Rothberg, 2009: 293).

In recent years, scholars Michael Rothberg and Stef Craps have dedicated much of their work to the discussion and dismantling of competitive memory – a term that has featured prominently in Holocaust studies. With his book titled *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization* (2009), Rothberg emphasises how we can use the memory of the Holocaust as a platform to articulate other, lesser-known forms of trauma and suffering. His theory is fundamentally concerned with the narrative of the 'Other' (i.e. the marginalised or peripheral figure) and how we can contribute to the dismantling of hegemonic narratives of suffering through recognising the Other's suffering. He suggests that scholars, historians, and academics need to start considering memory as multidirectional rather than competitive (Rothberg, 2009: 3), as this "new kind of comparative thinking" (Rothberg, 2009: 17) can help in the task of "reframing justice in a globalizing world" (Fraser quoted in Rothberg, 2009: 19).

In the epigraph to this introduction, Rothberg refers to director Michael Haneke's film *Caché* (2005). Rothberg considers it a multidirectional text, as the film is "structured around the return of the colonial repressed" (Rothberg, 2009: 281). The film revisits the events of 17 October 1961 when pro-independence Algerian demonstrators were massacred in Paris, and it explores the "ripple effects of late colonial brutality" (Rothberg, 2009: 281). The protestors were peaceful, but the French security forces killed as many as 200 people (McAuley, 2017: 1). Haneke's film and the Paris massacre are, therefore, fundamentally concerned with the figure of the Other: the foreign, powerless, and demonised figure (Al-Saidi, 2014: 96).

In this dissertation, I use terms that are typically associated with postcolonialism, such as powerless and demonised. I also refer to concepts of Otherness, peripherality, and marginalisation. However, it is crucial to note that I am only using these postcolonial terms loosely. For example, in postcolonial theory, the figure of the Other typically refers to a colonised or dominated group that is perceived by the dominant group as inferior, devalued, and lacking an identity (Staszak, 2009: 1). In more general terms, the Other is "anyone who is separate from one's self" (Ashcroft et al., 2007: 154). In the context of the Holocaust, for example, Jewish people and other groups deemed 'inferior' by the National Socialist regime, such as the Roma, Sinti, and LGBT, are usually referred to as the Other because they were defined by their faults, devalued, dehumanised, persecuted, and discriminated against (Staszak, 2009: 1). Therefore, while my overall use of the terms Other, alterity, marginalisation, and peripherality are rooted in postcolonial theory, I largely use these terms to refer to people who are not usually considered as the Other or belonging to marginalised groups during the wartime period.

Furthermore, I also use the postcolonial concept of hegemony. Ashcroft et al. define hegemony as "domination by consent" or "the power of the ruling class to convince other classes that their interests are the interests of all" (2007: 106). In this dissertation, however, my use of the term deviates from such a rigid definition, as I use it to indicate that the Holocaust narrative played (and perhaps continues to play) a dominant role in both the public and literary spheres to the point where it overshadowed other narratives of historical suffering. Ashcroft et al. discuss how marginalised subjects have slipped "between the boundaries of the grand narratives of history" (2007: viii), and within the context of this dissertation, I suggest that the Holocaust, as portrayed by the media, public, and academia, is a grand (hegemonic) narrative of history that has contributed to the marginalisation of other histories of suffering during the World War II era. For example, I focus

predominantly on the topic of German suffering during the war, which I refer to as a marginalised narrative, particularly because the topic of German suffering was vehemently disregarded in the wake of Holocaust memory from the 1960s onwards.[1] It is clear, therefore, that I am not using the Other and marginalisation as strictly postcolonial definitions, and while Rothberg does refer to the subject of the Other in a postcolonial sense, I apply his theory to a non-postcolonial setting to demonstrate that memory competitions or hierarchies of suffering do not necessarily need to exist with a Western versus non-Western context.

On a fundamental level, multidirectional memory "considers a series of interventions through which social actors bring multiple traumatic pasts into a heterogeneous and changing post-World War II present" (Rothberg, 2009: 4). It is a model based on recognition (Rothberg, 2009: 309) and attempts to rewrite hegemonic sites of memory by dismantling hierarchies of suffering where one suffering trumps another (Rothberg, 2009: 3). Furthermore, it is a theory that seeks to "renarrate important dimensions of post-World War II intellectual, cultural, and political history by revealing how coming to terms with the Nazi genocide … has always been intertwined with ongoing processes of decolonization" (Rothberg, 2009: 309). Between 1945 and 1962, there was a rise of consciousness of not only the Holocaust as an unparalleled form of modern-day genocide but also of the recognition and articulation of the political independence of colonised subjects, especially in Africa. In other words, the violence of decolonisation and the Nazi genocide has created, in Rothberg's words, "a multidirectional network of memory that facilitated the emergence of survivor testimony as a powerful genre for expressing both forms of violence" (Rothberg, 2009: 25). Thus, the Nazi genocide, as Rothberg contends, does not need to be viewed in isolation to

[1] This dissertation aims to build on Holocaust scholarship by suggesting that my analyses of the texts can contribute to a reframing and reworking of both Holocaust and German literature by encouraging debate on contentious and once-taboo topics. I discuss this further in the following chapter.

other events but rather in conjunction with other historical victims of suffering, such as the ones I explore in this dissertation.

The primary texts chosen for discussion in this dissertation, which all focus on contemporary Holocaust and World War II fiction, include *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* (2013) by Eva Weaver, *The Book of Aron* (2015) by Jim Shepard, *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) by Anthony Doerr, and *The Book Thief* (2005) by Markus Zusak. Each text contains child protagonists of differing nationalities who suffer the machinations of the war. In *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* and *The Book of Aron*, I look at the suffering of two orphaned Jewish boys, Mika and Aron, in the Warsaw ghetto. In *All the Light We Cannot See*, I focus on the narratives of Marie-Laure and Werner, a German private. And lastly, I concentrate on how two ordinary German children, Liesel and Rudy, in *The Book Thief* try to navigate life during the war and bomb raids in a small German town. As the epigraph to this introduction states, if history is an orphan, then hidden children abound. It is these two words, 'orphan' and 'children', which highlight the concerns of this dissertation: to explore hidden or marginalised narratives as embodied by the child protagonists. However, while the texts largely focus on the child figure, I also discuss certain adult figures, such as Max Meierhauser, a German Wehrmacht soldier, in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*, and Hans Hubermann, the foster father of Liesel Meminger, *The Book Thief*'s protagonist. Furthermore, the Holocaust narrative is distinctly absent from the texts, particularly in *All the Light We Cannot See* and *The Book Thief*. I therefore argue that these specific texts are multidirectional in nature, as they use the memory of the Holocaust to articulate other forms of suffering,[2] German suffering in particular, during World War II. They can, I contend, provide insight into the workings of multidirectional memory, thereby

[2] These other forms of suffering include, for example, how Marie-Laure, as a blind girl in *All the Light We Cannot See*, becomes orphaned and has to fight for survival in the occupied city of Saint-Malo or how Liesel Meminger, in *The Book Thief*, loses everything in the Allied bombing of her town near Munich.

encouraging further discussions on such an important topic in German studies, Holocaust studies, and postcolonial studies in the age of decolonisation.

As can be seen by the dates of publication, these texts form part of contemporary Holocaust and World War II literature (in the post-post Holocaust era [Lang, 2009: 47]) and, as I will discuss in the following chapters, can be viewed through a postcolonial lens as they deal with peripheral suffering and trauma (in terms of exploring narratives that have been overshadowed by the Holocaust) during the World War II era. The main criteria for the selection of these texts is three-fold: barring *The Book Thief*, they are recently-published texts that have received very little literary criticism, they arguably lend themselves to an analysis through the lens of multidirectional memory (where there is an overlapping of Holocaust/ wartime and postcolonial literature), and they offer a different perspective on suffering during World War II by focussing on lesser-known (or lesser-discussed/ controversial) narratives.[3] As mentioned previously, the texts are fictional and apart from Weaver, the authors are non-German (Zusak is an Australian author with German ancestry). These are important considerations as discussions on fiction/ non-fictional texts and who has the right to write about the Holocaust have pervaded – and continue to pervade – the Holocaust literary canon.

What is important about the texts is that they are all linked thematically in terms of using the Holocaust as a starting point to discuss German and other (for example, French) narratives of suffering and conceptions of victimhood. These texts are concerned with peripheral geographies (such as Saint-Malo in France and Essen and Molching in Germany) in the greater World War II narrative, and each text features child protagonists, most of whom are orphans. In this way, the

[3] With their depictions of peripheral narratives of wartime suffering in unique and interesting ways, these texts have essentially paved the way for further discussions on such themes and concerns.

texts underscore the voices of the marginalised – the orphaned, dispossessed, unidentified child and German people living in peripheral locations ravaged by the war. Therefore, by using these peripheral narratives, my study aims to contribute to Holocaust scholarship that seeks to dismantle hegemonic narratives of suffering through a multidirectional lens. For example, in Doerr's Pulitzer prize-winning novel, Doerr details the story of a young, blind French girl (Marie-Laure LeBlanc) living in Saint-Malo during its occupation by Germans in the 1940s. In this text, I consider French suffering, the suffering of a disabled child (Marie-Laure), and the use of Saint-Malo[4] as peripheral narratives. This allows us, I argue, to consider other forms of trauma and suffering beyond the realm of the Holocaust narrative.[5] Furthermore, it is important that these texts use the Holocaust and World War II as their basis for discussing other forms of suffering because in doing so, the uniqueness of the Holocaust is maintained and respected (i.e. it is not pushed aside and is still given the respect that it deserves).

The second theoretical framework that I use in this dissertation to explore German suffering is Primo Levi's concept of the 'gray zone'. In his book, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989), Primo Levi dedicates a chapter to what he terms the gray zone. He uses this concept to discuss the prisoners of Auschwitz (and not the German guards/ soldiers, for example) moral actions within the concentration camps. Levi himself was imprisoned in Auschwitz which, therefore, gave him unique insight into how the victims (the prisoners) themselves became demoralised to the point where they would harm each other and commit other acts of violence in an attempt to survive (Aull, 2001: 1). Although "poorly defined", the gray zone is a space where "the two camps of

[4] To provide brief historical context, Hitler used Saint-Malo to defend France from attack on the Atlantic coast. The city was almost completely destroyed by Allied shelling and gunfire and the Nazis were eventually forced to surrender in 1944 (Akbar, 2017: 1).
[5] It must be emphasised that multidirectional memory takes "remembrance of the Holocaust as its paradigmatic object of concern" (Rothberg, 2009: 5). Rothberg argues that "collective memories of seemingly distinct histories – such as those of slavery, the Holocaust, and colonialism – are not so easily separable from one another" (2011: 524). In using the Holocaust as a reference point, Rothberg is clear that he is neither trivialising nor pushing the Holocaust aside (2011: 523).

masters and servants both diverge and converge" (Levi, 1989: 42). This space "possesses an incredibly complicated internal structure and contains within itself enough to confuse our need to judge" (Levi, 1989: 42). At a rudimentary level, the gray zone is a morally ambiguous space where the lines between victim and perpetrator become blurred and one feels morally trapped. In the following extract from Bernhard Schlink's novel, *The Reader* (1995), the text's narrator, Michael Berg, provides an example of the workings of the gray zone in relation to Hanna Schmitz, who participated in Nazi crimes:

> All survivor literature talks about this numbness, in which life's functions are reduced to a minimum, behaviour becomes completely selfish and indifferent to others, and gassing and burning are everyday occurrences. In the rare accounts by perpetrators, too, the gas chambers and ovens became ordinary scenery, the perpetrators reduced to their few functions and exhibiting a mental paralysis and indifference, a dullness that makes them seem drugged or drunk. The defendants seemed to me to be trapped still, and forever, in this drugged state, in a sense petrified by it. (Schlink, 1998: 101)

Here, Michael refers to a moral paralysis by discussing how the perpetrators in the text have become almost drugged or drunken-like, trapped or even petrified (a seemingly permanent state) by their past actions. Noticeably, Schlink's text was published over 20 years ago, and the concept of the gray zone continues to be explored in literature. As I discuss in the following chapter, literary depictions of the perpetrator and victim of the Third Reich continue to evolve in both Holocaust and German literature (Shields, 2014: 39). This dissertation, therefore, aims to build on existing Holocaust literature, particularly in terms of the gray zone and exploring German suffering, and contribute to debates on "how the past can be understood in the present" (Shields, 2014: 15).

As scholarship on the Holocaust, naturally, focusses on the fate and suffering of Jewish people at the hands of the Germans, I am fully aware that discussing German suffering – and suggesting that it is a 'peripheral' narrative of World War II suffering – is precarious terrain. Although Levi uses

the gray zone in relation to the prisoners of Auschwitz and not the German guards and officials, I apply his framework in a more 'general' manner, as I use it to discuss the German perpetrators, bystanders, and victims[6] within the chosen texts. For example, in his chapter on the gray zone, Levi does recall one specific incident involving a German SS man (Erich Mühsfeldt) attached to the death installations in Auschwitz. A teenage girl manages to survive the gas chamber, but, after some hesitation, Mühsfeldt (notorious for his acts of cruelty) decides that she must be killed anyway. However, Mühsfeldt does not kill the girl himself; he gets someone else to do it. In this way, Mühsfeldt (despite his refined cruelty) displays the workings of the gray zone: he is morally ambiguous, on some level (Levi, 1989: 57). I am therefore using this framework in a more generalised form of universal context because the gray zone describes how victims can become perpetrators and vice versa.

In an article titled 'Why Germans Can Never Escape Hitler's Shadow', Michael Sontheimer (2005: 1) points out how the shelves of German bookshops are "overflowing with new publications on every imaginable aspect of the Nazi period". In 2005, local officials in Berlin passed a motion stating that "victims of Nazi oppression are not the only ones who should be memorialized and honoured" (Sontheimer, 2005: 1). They declared that German women raped by the Soviet army and regular soldiers and civilians who were killed should be remembered too (Sontheimer, 2005: 1). However, it is important to note that the topic of German suffering is certainly not a new one. Aleida Assmann notes in her work on guilt and suffering in German memory that discourse on German suffering has, in fact, been present since the ending of World War II – it just belonged to the more private and familial spheres (2006: 187). Nevertheless, in recent years, there has been a marked increase in the discussion of this controversial and complicated topic (Assmann, 2006:

[6] I elaborate on these terms in the following chapter.

187), and as I discuss extensively in the following chapter, it is becoming easier to discuss contentious topics like German suffering as the taboos of one generation are succeeded by those of others (Reiter, 2000: 3). Moreover, Shields, referring to Bill Niven's work on the Nazi past, highlights how, since 2000, German literature has not only historicised German suffering but has also begun to explore the idea of German self-pity (Shields, 2014: 51).

Why I have chosen to focus on German suffering particularly (and not just French suffering, for example) is epitomised in the following excerpt from a controversial essay by Walter Benn Michaels:

> Why should what the Germans did to the Jews be treated as a crucial event in American history, especially when, given the absence of any commemoration of American racism on the Mall, what Americans did to black people is not? (Michaels, 2016: 55)

The argument Michaels makes here is that the memory of the Holocaust has essentially trumped the history of slavery and the genocide of Native Americans in the USA. Relating to this notion, Rothberg asks the thought-provoking questions: "Does the remembrance of one history erase others from view? When memories of slavery and colonialism bump up against memories of the Holocaust in contemporary multicultural societies, must a competition of victims ensue?" (Rothberg, 2009: 1). I therefore use these questions to look at different forms of suffering[7] during the Second World War – and this includes looking at German suffering and victimisation through the lens of the gray zone.

When reading the characters of the chosen texts through the lens of the gray zone, it is necessary to note that the German characters[8] I analyse do not portray the typical demoniacal Nazi figure.

[7] I argue that Holocaust memory has the potential to crowd out other forms of suffering. In this sense, German suffering and victimisation has not, until recently, had 'space' to be articulated, analysed, and discussed.
[8] I explore the figure of the 'ordinary' German living everyday life (*Alltagsgeschichte)* in this dissertation. I elaborate on this figure in the following chapter.

For example, Doerr's character Werner Pfennig is a teenage boy who is conscripted into the war. He is constantly plagued by a guilty conscious and comes to realise that what he is doing is morally abhorrent. I argue that Werner, although he is the enemy as a German, suffers immensely in terms of witnessing death and destruction, starving, being involved in a war he wanted nothing to do with, growing up in poverty, and dying in a landmine explosion. The same can be said of Weaver's character Max Meierhauser, a Wehrmacht soldier, in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*. Max, who befriends a young Jewish boy in the Warsaw ghetto, is also plagued by guilt. After Germany's capitulation, he is captured as a prisoner of war (one of the main aspects of German suffering that I discuss in detail) and taken to a gulag in Siberia where he undergoes extreme physical and psychological torture. I suggest that through the authors' portrayal of their German characters using various narrative techniques (such as the humanisation of Death in *The Book Thief* and the shifting between past and present and first- and third-person narration) and their portrayal of different forms of suffering and critique of stereotypes (such as the demoniacal Nazi figure), the reader ultimately comes to feel sympathy[9] for these characters or views them in an empathetic light. This empathy is once again tied to multidirectional memory, as discussing other, lesser-acknowledged narratives of suffering can help create an empathy for and solidarity between victims of different trauma. The gray zone, as a theoretical framework, is important in helping the reader of this dissertation understand that I am not desacralising the Holocaust narrative. I use the gray zone in a way that allows one to rethink German suffering, hopefully in both an empathetic[10]

[9] "One of our human goals, we are frequently reminded, is to try to understand the suffering of others. Sympathised with, yes, but can someone else's suffering be felt?" This question, posed by novelist Norma Rosen (quoted in Eaglestone, 2004: 34), is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I quote it to emphasise that the purpose of my work is not to understand suffering but rather to rethink it using the framework of multidirectional memory.

[10] Although Shields does not explore the gray zone extensively in his PhD thesis, he does highlight how it is becoming more common for authors to reflect upon the Nazi past with more empathy for the German people (2014, 162).

and critical manner, where the chosen characters are 'ordinary' Germans, who are mostly children, and not the stereotypical monstrous, sadistic Nazi figure.

My dissertation comprises four chapters. Chapter 1 functions as an in-depth extension of this introductory chapter. I provide a more comprehensive discussion of the theoretical frameworks used in this dissertation (by referring to the works of Michael Rothberg, Stef Craps, and Jenni Adams). I then delve into discussing the controversial nature of this dissertation (in relation to German suffering) by referring to research conducted by Kirril Shields, Aleida Assmann, and Elisabeth Krimmer. I also outline and discuss the aims and purposes of this dissertation and discuss Rothberg's theory in more detail. I then provide an overview of Holocaust literature past and present and focus on Holocaust literature in the contemporary moment (largely based on works by Robert Eaglestone and Bill Niven), as the texts under analysis are temporally located in the post-post Holocaust era. The overview of Holocaust literature past and present takes the form of a literature review where I focus on issues of representation, the development of Holocaust literature, and the importance of genre. I end this chapter by re-summarising my aims and purposes and emphasising why multidirectional memory is important in the post-post-Holocaust era.

The second chapter centres on both *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* and *The Book of Aron* as they are thematically linked. The primary aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that these two texts can be considered as multidirectional texts because of their exploration of German suffering (embodied in the ordinary Wehrmacht soldier, Max Meierhauser, who is captured as a prisoner of war, and his granddaughter, Mara, in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*) and the suffering of the orphaned, dispossessed child figure presented in both texts. Furthermore, I use the gray zone to demonstrate how it may be used to understand both Max Meierhauser and Lejkin, a member of the Jewish police in the Warsaw ghetto, and how they can be viewed in an empathetic light. Both Max and

Lejkin are morally ambiguous and complicated characters, and it often becomes difficult to distinguish between the victim and 'perpetraitor'. I analyse Max's narrative extensively by exploring the various ways in which he suffers, particularly in a gulag in Siberia. Moving on from Max's narrative, I discuss the idea of a double-fold Otherness present in both Aron and Mika. Lastly, I provide a brief section on the transmission of guilt from one generation (in this case, Max) to another (Karl, Max's son, and Mara, Max's granddaughter). I include this section as the transmission of memory and guilt is another facet of multidirectional memory. I have deliberately chosen to analyse these texts in a way that breaks from the more 'dominant' 'Jewish versus German' narrative by exploring how Max and Lejkin subvert this narrative and how Mika and Aron, as orphaned children, epitomise the marginal narratives of World War II.

The third chapter is concerned with Anthony Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*, which foregrounds the forgotten, untold stories of World War II. I argue that the text contributes to the dismantling of the hegemonic Holocaust narrative as it moves away from the Holocaust narrative completely through its focus on German and French suffering. Central to this third chapter is the voice of the child that surfaces in the stories of the child/ teenage characters in the novel. I explore Marie-Laure's journey through her years spent in German-occupied Saint-Malo, particularly paying attention to how she can be viewed as an Other figure due to her blindness (or disability) and gender. By viewing Werner's and Frederick's (Werner's friend) actions and complicity (or lack thereof) through the lens of the gray zone, I provide an in-depth analysis of how these characters (along with other Germans) suffer immensely throughout the course of the text. Drawing on the notion of multidirectional memory, I discuss how Doerr portrays Germans and allows the reader to empathise with the perpetrators (or those complicit in war crimes). I then turn to an important chapter towards the end of the book that provides an example of how

multidirectional memory can be used to discuss different histories of suffering in relation to one another where both parties – in this case Jutta (Werner's sister) and Marie-Laure – are able to create dialogue around the horrors of the past without negating or dismissing each other's traumatic experiences. This chapter is, therefore, an exploration of the peripheral, forgotten narratives of people – mainly children – dotted across the map of Western Europe (Saint-Malo Essen, and Vienna), suffering unspeakable fates, disappearing into oblivion as lights we can no longer see.

The fourth chapter is dedicated to the analysis of Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*, iconic in itself for its representation of the German fate. This text, with its focus on the sufferings of impoverished families living in the small town of Molching[11] on the outskirts of Munich, exposes the German narrative of suffering and chooses to concentrate on the story of a select few Germans trying desperately to survive the machinations of a war where death – the unlikely narrator of the novel – serves the Reich faithfully by collecting the souls of a nation assigned a horrific fate by the Führer. Ironically, the main setting of the text is on Himmel (or rather Hölle) Street, notable for its poverty, struggling Germans, and peripheral location to the greater Munich. The main part of this chapter focusses on Liesel's (the protagonist) and the Hubermann's narrative (Liesel's foster parents) by discussing how they, as a unit, subvert the German-Jewish (or the hegemonic Holocaust) narrative by displaying qualities of sacrifice, compassion, and the refusal to be subservient to Nazism. Although the Jewish character of Max Vandenburg makes a prominent appearance throughout the text, this is not his story – it is the lesser-told German story of ordinary

[11] Interesting to note is that there are many parallels between Zusak's fictional text and Andrew Stuart Bergerson's non-fictional *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times* (2004). For example, Bergerson's work refers to the German town of Hildesheim, ideal for its depiction of how ordinary townspeople went about their lives (*Alltagsgeschichte)* during the Third Reich. He refers to people who went about doing their daily jobs, such as washing other wealthier people's clothes, just like Rosa Hubermann in *The Book Thief*. Bergerson provides an interesting argument where he states that "ordinary Germans did in fact make Germany and Europe more fascist, more racist … during the 1930s" (2004: n.p.). This argument is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but I do, however, briefly discuss this idea in the chapter on *The Book Thief*.

families who struggle to comprehend a war where a soldier returns home only to kill himself, where air raid shelters are an intrinsic part of life, where stealing means survival, and where ordinary, vulnerable citizens are expected to serve the Reich dutifully, faithfully, and mechanically. By referring to literature of the gray zone and complicity, I closely analyse how Zusak has garnered support and praise for his portrayal of German suffering through his creation of lovable characters. Once again, this argument is linked to multidirectional memory and how texts, like Zusak's, can help contribute to the dismantling of hegemonic narratives of suffering.

Therefore, the overall aim and purpose of this dissertation is to use the theoretical concepts of multidirectional memory and the gray zone to discuss what I contend are the peripheral narratives of suffering of the World War II era. Rothberg's work is both powerful and necessary, as it addresses the urgent need to focus on both historical and present traumas that have been overshadowed by dominant political powers. Essentially, Rothberg's work concretises the idea that there should be no hierarchy or competing narratives of suffering[12] and if these hierarchies are dismantled, then it will become easier for the creation of "new forms of solidarity among traumatized victims and new visions of justice" (Skitolsky, 2009: 2). It is important to emphasise, at this point, that the chosen texts do not pit German suffering against Jewish suffering and certainly do not marginalise the Holocaust by presenting German suffering. I claim that the texts provide an important example of how multidirectional memory can be used to discuss different types of historical suffering in relation to each other "without erasing their differences or fetishizing their uniqueness" (Rothberg, 2011: 527). Overall, it is my argument that Weaver, Shepard, Doerr, and Zusak have managed to create emotionally-charged and thematically-

[12] Robert Eaglestone is also aware of how the Holocaust "can be compared with other historical cases of mass murder and genocide" (2004: 1). Importantly, Eaglestone's work was published before Rothberg's, suggesting that using the Holocaust to discuss other narratives of suffering has long been a topic of discourse.

important texts that offer a multidirectional perspective on the World War II era by interweaving German, French, and Jewish histories, suffering, and memorial legacies.

Although multidirectional memory is usually considered in relation to other Non-Western histories of suffering (such as the Native Americans and slavery), I use the concept in the context of World War II to highlight that all forms of historical suffering deserve recognition – no matter how controversial they are or in which temporal and historical context they have occurred. It is my hope that my argument on how these multidirectional texts dismantle hierarchies of suffering will contribute to the interdisciplinary field of Holocaust studies becoming less, as Skitolsky argues, "conceptually isolated from postcolonial and African American studies"[13] (Skitolsky, 2009: 1). Furthermore, I hope that by looking at World War II literature from a different and less-researched angle, this dissertation will contribute to scholarship on Holocaust, German, and postcolonial studies. In doing so, I aim to establish how Levi's concept of the gray zone can be used in the context of German suffering and empathetic portrayals of German characters and how my chosen texts challenge hegemonic narratives of suffering in terms of character, trauma, and geographical setting. Lastly, I hope that my work will extend scholarship on multidirectional memory, help reframe Holocaust literature, and show how different ways of thinking about the Holocaust and other historical forms of suffering contribute to providing, as Eaglestone suggests, "new perspectives on a range of issues in our understanding of the Holocaust and its aftermath" (Eaglestone,2004:2).

[13] Once again, it is important to remember that multidirectional memory is concerned with the colonial past, particularly in terms of slavery (African history) and the genocide of the Native American Indians (American history). Using the Holocaust to discuss other narratives of suffering is important for postcolonial discourse, particularly in relation to the contemporary moment with ongoing memory wars and conflict regarding, for example, the Israeli-Palestinian crisis. In this way, I argue that my dissertation is useful when discussing such problems, including the dominance of the Western world (Rothberg, 2011: 523).

Chapter 1:

Theoretical framework and literature review

> Remembering is an ethical act, has ethical value in and of itself. Memory is, achingly, the only relation we can have with the dead. – Susan Sontag (quoted in Aarons, 2014: 43)

Memory competition and comparative victimisation are the main concerns of Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory in the age of decolonisation.[14] Memory, as Roskies and Diamant note, has, for a long time, been the "catchword of Holocaust studies" (2012: 227). Studies on memory relating to the Holocaust began (with great urgency) in the 1980s, and since then, scholars like Marianne Hirsch and Maurice Halbwachs have coined important terms like postmemory and collective memory[15] respectively (cited in Craps, 2014: 199). As the final generation of actual witnesses and survivors passes away, the evolution of the post-post-Holocaust era begins (Lang, 2009: 47) where the "memory of those events [is] no longer embodied in a real human presence, whether that of the perpetrator or the victim" (Leak & Paizis, 2000: 3). Thus remembrance, memory, and the 'never forget' trope take on new and dynamic meanings. However, while the 'never forget' trope will remain central to Holocaust studies, Rothberg's innovative theoretical framework has paved the way for the integrative discussion of Holocaust and postcolonial memories in a manner that will hopefully contribute to "new forms of solidarity among traumatized groups and new visions of justice" (Skitolsky, 2009: 2).

[14] The age of decolonisation refers to the dismantling of Western or Eurocentric narratives and the need for a greater representation of non-European thinkers, scholars, writers, and politicians in both literary and public spheres. The process of decolonisation essentially asks us to "look at our shared assumptions about how the world is" and re-evaluate our current biases in terms of knowledge, diversity, and world-views. The age of decolonisation is thus an ongoing period of transformation and renegotiation where we attempt to change the world to be more inclusive (Sabaratnam, 2017: 1).

[15] To define these terms briefly, postmemory refers to "the relationship of the second generation to powerful … experiences that preceded their births but that were nevertheless transmitted to them so deeply as to seem to constitute memories in their own right" (Hirsch, 2008: 103). On a fundamental level, collective memory refers to how groups remember their past and can occur at all levels, be they local (families remembering a salient event, for example) or national (a nation remembering the 9/11 attacks on the World Trade Centre) (Roediger & DeSoto, 2016: 1).

In this chapter, I discuss, in detail, the two theoretical frameworks (multidirectional memory and the gray zone) that I use to analyse the four texts chosen for this dissertation. I explain why these frameworks offer a viable critical lens for the study of contemporary Holocaust fiction. Furthermore, I provide a brief overview of the concepts (German suffering and the 'ordinary' German figure, Otherness, literature of complicity, and the child figure, especially the orphaned child in Holocaust literature) that inform my analysis of the texts. Notably, all four texts contain an orphaned child protagonist, and I will, therefore, focus on how the protagonists' orphaned statuses contribute to their alterity, peripherality, vulnerability, and suffering. In *All the Light We Cannot See*, I also focus on Marie-Laure's disability. I then move on to review Holocaust literature (both past and present) to demonstrate how the selected novels contribute to the study of Holocaust, German, and postcolonial literature in the contemporary moment.

1.1 Approaching multidirectional memory

Despite the ever-increasing temporal and spatial distance from one of history's most horrific and unique events, literature engaging with the Holocaust and the greater World War II narrative continues to capture the minds and imaginations of authors, scholars, and critics of the twenty-first century. Holocaust literature, which Jenni Adams defines as encompassing "a diverse body of work, from testimony and other writing by survivors through to poetry, fiction, drama and memoir by those who did not experience the events themselves" (2014: 1), is continually evolving and never fails to provide scholars with complex questions (be they political, social, or cultural) and ethical quandaries. One such ethical quandary is presented in Rothberg's work on multidirectional memory, a theory that challenges hegemonic structures of suffering and victimisation and offers an alternative frame through which scholars may view the Holocaust and use it to discuss other histories and scenes of violence, genocide, racism, and dehumanisation (Kaplan & Herrero-

Matoses, 2014: 147). Rothberg illuminates the multidirectional orientation of collective memory, and his work offers an alternative to the well-researched competitive memory model, which limits our "capacity to remember historical tragedies" (quoted in Craps, 2014: 203) and creates a hierarchy of suffering where one tragedy often trumps another. Rothberg highlights the need for a new way of considering memory (i.e. multidirectional), which allows for "ongoing negotiation, cross-referencing, and borrowing" and "draws attention to the dynamic transfers that take place between diverse places and times during the act of remembrance" (quoted in Craps, 2014: 203). Rothberg's persuasive work on multidirectional memory adds a new and crucial dimension to the field of postcolonial and Holocaust studies, as it highlights the need to bridge the gap between the two (Rothberg, 2011: 527).

In our present world, it would seem that we are becoming increasingly desensitised to traumatic events that occur on a frequent basis. Thus, it is imperative that the Holocaust and events of World War II continue to remain in the public memory as a reminder to us that we should never become simple "bystanders of atrocities" (Sundquist, 2007: 73). Craps and Rothberg discuss the importance and the "increasing awareness in academia of the need to think [of] the Holocaust and other historical traumas … together in order to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the dark underside of modernity" (Craps, 2014: 199). The fundamental reason for this is to avoid what Rothberg calls a competition of victims or a hierarchy/ hegemony of suffering and to create a "relationality of different histories" (2011: 527). Furthermore, Rothberg creates an alternative framework for viewing and discussing the Holocaust, which, as Skitolsky notes, allows one to examine "the connections and interactions between Nazi Germany, slavery, colonialism, and decolonization" (Skitolsky, 2009: 1). This framework allows readers to use the Nazi genocide to rethink his/ her understanding of other traumas, both past and present (Rothberg, 2011: 527).

It is important to note that the "interrelatedness of the Holocaust and other histories of victimization" is not a recent development (Rothberg, 2011: 199). Numerous scholars, such as Hannah Arendt (1951), Aimé Césaire (1950), Vivian Patraka (1990), Kai Hammermeister (1997) and, more recently, Bryan Cheyette (2000), David Moshman (2001), Timothy Snyder (2010), and Stef Craps (Craps, 2014: 203), have dedicated their efforts to comparative genocide studies. Furthermore, the idea of 'Holocaust hegemony'[16] in this dissertation is not a novel concept and has been well discussed and researched. For example, both Patraka and Hammermeister deal explicitly with this hegemonic discourse. In a widely-cited article, Patraka mentions that "we run the risk of magnifying one current perception: that the discourse of Jewish Holocaust functions as a kind of controlling or hegemonic discourse of suffering that operates at the expense of the suffering of other groups" (1990: 90). This is further emphasised in Hammermeister's 'Inventing History: Toward a Gay Holocaust Literature' where he discusses the need for an exploration of gay Holocaust literature (1997: 18). Hammermeister stresses this point, emphasising that the number of documented accounts of homosexual suffering under the Nazi regime is exceptionally minimal and that "the presence of their absence is everywhere" (Hammermeister, 1997: 19). For example, in a recent article in *HuffPost UK* titled 'Holocaust Memorial Day: The 5 Million Non-Jewish People Killed By The Nazis', the author, Louise Ridley, mentions the murdered six million Jewish people but further emphasises that there were, in fact, an estimated 11 million victims of Hitler's regime – a number comprised of LGBT people, priests, gypsies, people with mental or physical disabilities, communists, black people, and resistance fighters (2018: 1). In the article, Ridley points out how gay men were forced to "renounce their sexuality under the Nazi regime"

[16] An article published in *The Weekly Standard* by Sam Schulman, which discusses a Master's thesis that explores the 'Racism of Hegemonic Holocaust Education', uses the term 'Holocaust hegemony' (2013: 1). I also use the term based on an article by Alvin Rosenfeld, titled 'The Assault on Holocaust Memory' (2002). In it, he discusses how numerous critics have questioned the prominence of the Holocaust in the public and scholarly sphere (Rosenfeld, 2002: 84).

and that between 5 000 and 15 000 LGBT people were sent to concentration camps and forced to wear a pink triangle (2018: 2). Moreover, Hammermeister's point on 'absent' narratives is largely echoed in postcolonial literature on World War II. For example, in a review on Biyi Bandele's novel *Burma Boy*, Giles Foden highlights how the stories of West Africans fighting for the British in World War II have "existed only in the margins of the official record, as cameos and asides" (2007: 1).

Craps, who bases much of his research on Rothberg's multidirectional memory, considers an important linkage between Holocaust and colonial narratives. In his article 'Holocaust Literature: Comparative Perspectives', Craps references the Native American writer Sherman Alexie. Alexie is a key figure in this comparative discussion, for his work "negotiates various comparative perspectives on the Holocaust" (Craps, 2014: 205). In his poems, 'The Game between the Jews and the Indians is Tied Going into the Bottom of the Ninth Inning' (1993) and 'Inside Dachau' (1996), Alexie "considers Jews and Native Americans as similarly oppressed ethnic minorities" (Craps, 2014: 205). The idea here is that Alexie is attempting to dismantle inherent hegemonic hierarchies of suffering by using Holocaust rhetoric in relation to Native American history. This is linked to Rothberg's work, which emphasises America's ability to recognise and acknowledge the Holocaust (consider the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum) and its inability (or perhaps unwillingness) to engage with its own violent colonial history relating to both African-American slaves and Native Americans. Lilian Friedberg also underlines this political and ethical concern in her article 'Dare to Compare: Americanizing the Holocaust' (2000). As she has observed, the Holocaust and Nazism have achieved global recognition, whereas peripheral historical sufferings, such as the Native American genocide, continue to be "denied or dismissed" (quoted in Craps, 2014: 206).

Crucially, Rothberg is also highly cognisant of the quandary that arises when relating the Holocaust to other traumas. To compare the Holocaust to other traumas runs the risk of either trivialising its historical significance or negating its uniqueness. He speaks of the imperative to develop an "ethics of comparison" so as to avoid competition, appropriation, or trivialisation (Rothberg, 2011: 525). Like Rothberg, I use the Holocaust as a starting point in this dissertation to discuss other World War II traumas without, however, equating these traumas to the unique suffering of the Holocaust.[17] My aim, as Rothberg puts it, is to "see history as relational and as woven from similar, but not identical, fabrics" (Rothberg, 2011: 528) and to concretise the idea that there should be no hierarchy or hegemony of suffering.

Although the chosen texts are written in English and deal with the dominant Western space, my discussion intends to address the critical gap between Holocaust and postcolonial studies identified by the above-mentioned scholars. While multidirectional memory uses the Holocaust to discuss other colonial narratives of suffering, I intend to bring Rothberg's theory in conversation with a World War II setting to emphasise that all narratives of trauma and suffering deserve recognition and are worth exploring. For example, there is still the need for the further exploration of the Eastern European space and marginalised narratives, such as those of LGBT people, Roma, Sinti, and people living with disabilities within the Holocaust narrative (Stevenson, 2001). Lastly, none of the chosen texts have yet to receive much scholarly attention, and my discussion promises to provide crucial insights into recent developments in Holocaust fiction in the Anglo-American context.

[17] Debarati Sanyal (2009: 94) references the example of Alain Resnais's documentary on Auschwitz called *Night and Fog* (1955). Resnais deliberately omits the Judeocide, choosing to focus on France's own evils committed against Algerians in the war for independence. Once again, this highlights multidirectional memory, as the documentary uses the Holocaust to refer to the colonial past. However, Sanyal argues that such omissions (or comparisons) of the Judeocide "inevitably [erase] the Jewish specificity of the Final Solution" (2009: 94). I have used this example to highlight Sanyal's opinion that by focussing on the colonial past, the Holocaust is potentially pushed aside, which is a critique of multidirectional memory.

1.2 Approaching the gray zone: Applying Levi's work to German suffering

Primo Levi, who was a prisoner of Auschwitz himself, defines the gray zone as a morally complex space with a convoluted internal structure where perpetrators become victims and vice versa (1989: 42). In his chapter titled 'The Gray Zone', which appears in his book, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1986), Levi discusses the hierarchies of power that formed among the prisoners of Auschwitz and how some prisoners became dehumanised and demoralised to the point where they committed crimes against their fellow inmates in an often-futile attempt to survive. As I have discussed in the introductory chapter, it is important to consider that Levi applies the concept of the gray zone directly to the prisoners of Auschwitz, focussing especially on the *Sonderkommando*: the Jewish inmates who were assigned work in the gas chambers and crematoria. However, there is a brief section in the chapter where he refers to a German perpetrator, known as Mühsfeldt, who "momentarily … showed pity when a Jewish girl remained alive in Auschwitz after gassing" (Petropoulos & Roth, 2005: xviii). As this demonstrates, the "network of human relationships inside the Lagers was not simple: it could not be reduced to the two blocs of victims and persecutors" (1989: 37). Levi, therefore, challenges "the tendency to over-simplify and gloss over unpleasant truths of the inmate hierarchy" in Auschwitz (Aull, 2001: 1) and stresses that judgement should be suspended when considering those who inhabit this gray space (Levi, 1989: 44).

Other scholars and writers have also addressed the gray zone and, in many cases, have built-on Levi's definition. For example, Phyllis Lassner (2009: 184) eloquently discusses how there are "no conflicts between good and evil" in Holocaust literature. There exists only a "one-sided assault or imprisonment" where prisoners of Auschwitz's *Sonnderkommando* experienced a profound "moral strangulation". In his essay 'Missing the Holocaust: My Father's Account of Auschwitz

from August 1943 to June 1944', Philippe Bourgois (2005) summarises Levi's concept of the gray zone as follows:

> The Grey[18] Zone [is] a morally ambiguous space of structurally imposed mutual betrayal where victims are forced to collaborate with the enemy in order to survive … In the Grey Zone, everyone is capable of betraying anyone because life and death stakes are so high and ethical lines so impossible to decipher. (Bourgois, 2005: 102)

Indeed, Levi himself states that there "exist[s] gray, ambiguous persons, ready to compromise" because as Thomas Mann says, "[m]an is a mixed up creature" (in Levi, 1989: 64).

In this dissertation, I apply the concept of the gray zone mainly to the German characters in the texts, and I do so in an attempt to discuss German suffering during World War II. I do, however, also use the gray zone to refer to other non-German characters, and I explain this in the following chapters. While Levi by no means intends to erase the distinction between the victims (i.e. the prisoners) and the persecutors and murderers (Craps, 2014: 1), I propose that the gray zone can be extended and applied to perpetrators and bystanders (i.e. the German characters in the texts) as their actions are morally ambiguous and complex. Furthermore, the gray zone blurs the lines between victim and perpetrator, suggesting that it can be applied to anyone, who may either be a victim or a perpetrator, when subjected to extreme situations of stress. However, I am aware of the possible implications of applying the gray zone to a broader, more general context. For example, in his paper titled 'Primo Levi's *Gray* Zone: Implications for Post-Holocaust Ethics', Sander Lee discusses how the gray zone has been misappropriated and misunderstood over the years (2016: 276). He believes that numerous scholars, such as Tzvetan Todorov, have misused the term to the point where "it is now in danger of losing its essential meaning" (Lee, 2016: 276). Furthermore,

[18] I use the American spelling – 'gray' – in this dissertation, as this is how it is spelled in Levi's text, *The Drowned and the Saved* (1989). For the remainder of this dissertation, I only use the British spelling of the word when quoting directly from a text.

Lee also believes that it is only appropriate to expand Levi's zone beyond Auschwitz so long as its population comprises only victims (2016: 285). He also opines that perpetrators and bystanders during the war "did not face extenuating circumstances sufficient to justify their inclusion in Levi's gray zone" (Lee, 2016: 292). Lee's argument, therefore, demonstrates how the Holocaust continues to call into question the very possibility of ethics (2016: 276). While I do not necessarily agree with Lee's sentiments, it is clear that the gray zone is an important ethical concept that continues to be re-evaluated in response to changing times.

To provide an example of how I use the gray zone in reference to German suffering, I consider three of the protagonists in the chosen texts (namely Max Meierhauser in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*, Werner Pfennig in *All the Light We Cannot See*, and Liesel Meminger in *The Book Thief*). I suggest that they epitomise German suffering and victimhood,[19] which is a narrative I consider peripheral as the discussion of German suffering has only become less of a taboo in recent years. I further suggest that the depiction of the respective suffering of Max (a Wehrmacht soldier captured as a prisoner of war and forced into a labour camp),[20] Werner (a young soldier recruited to serve as a detector of enemy radio broadcasts), and Liesel (a young girl living in a small town who befriends a Jewish man and loses her family and friends in the Allied bombings) allows the reader to view these characters in an empathetic manner. In this way, I hope to encourage readers of texts dealing with German suffering during the war to view German characters through the lens

[19] Once again, I reiterate the controversial nature of this dissertation. In 1995, the Hamburg Institute for Social Research presented an exhibition titled 'War of Annihilation: Crimes of the Wehrmacht between 1941 and 1944' (Niven, 2002: 152). The aim of this exhibition was to present the 'real' victims of the war – the Jewish, the communists, the partisans – and emphasise that Germans during the war were not the real victims (Niven, 2002: 152). Therefore, it is possible to argue that the Germans I have chosen to portray as victims in the texts are not actually 'real' victims as they were, either by default or not, perpetrators and bystanders.

[20] In a chapter titled 'The crimes of the Wehrmacht', Bill Niven discusses how during the post-war period, Germans had images of the Wehrmacht, reinforced by the soldiers themselves, that included soldiers returning home to tell of the "devastating effect of Russian winters, of inadequate clothing, hunger and brutal treatment at the hands of Russians" (2002: 152). This is the historically factual narrative that Weaver has chosen to depict in her fictional creation of the Wehrmacht soldier, Max Meierhauser.

of the gray zone where they (the readers) suspend their judgement and potentially come to view the characters in an empathetic light.

Lastly, I am aware that by using the gray zone to discuss German suffering, I may be detracting from the actual Holocaust narrative and the machinations of the Auschwitz concentration camp where prisoners, subjected to extreme dystopian and incomprehensible conditions, were the only ones deserving a suspension of judgement. It is important, at this point, to highlight that using the gray zone in relation to German complicity is not a novel idea. Perhaps one of the most renowned and critically-acclaimed novels dealing with this theme is Bernhard Schlink's fictional novel, *The Reader* (1995). Its reception has only increased over the years, and the novel has been lauded for its "bold attempt to conflate victim and perpetrator in the character of the illiterate former SS guard Hanna Schmitz" (Revesz, 2015: 3). However, numerous scholars, including Omer Bartov, Eva Hoffmann, and Cynthia Ozick, have raised concern about Schlink's portrayal of a Holocaust perpetrator as a victim. They argue that Schlink pursued a revisionist agenda in an attempt to minimise German guilt or even exculpate them (Revesz, 2015: 3). Moreover, certain critics, like William Collins Donahue, suggest that the text draws an analogy between Michael Berg's (the text's narrator) and Hanna's Jewish victims' suffering. However, I demonstrate throughout this dissertation that I am not equating German victimhood and suffering with that of the Nazis' intended victims. Therefore, while the exploration of German complicity and the gray zone is not a new one, I am attempting to reframe Holocaust literature by viewing German suffering through the lens of the gray zone in a manner where I do not draw parallels between German and Jewish suffering.

1.3 German suffering: The perpetrator becomes the victim

The texts chosen for this dissertation, which (barring *The Book Thief*) were published after 2010, are part of a rising and wider body of literature dealing with similar themes of German suffering[21] (MacKay, 2009: 1). In terms of literary texts, there appears to be a shift, or rather a reframing, in dealing with the World War II narrative, particularly in relation to German suffering, which began to garner more attention in the early 2000s[22] (Assmann, 2006: 187). As Marina Mackay notes, the fact that "Germany … surely had to be defeated scarcely means that their citizens did not suffer in wars waged on their behalf" (2009: 1). It is important to acknowledge that the topic of German suffering is not a new one. Assmann emphasises in her work titled 'On the (In)Compatibility of Guilt and Suffering in German Memory' that the widely-held belief of German suffering being absent from literary discussion is actually incorrect (2006: 187). German suffering and victimhood were topics of discussion in the years immediately after the war both in the private and political sphere, although they were, naturally, overshadowed when discourse on the Holocaust and the fate of the Jewish people began to take precedence (Assmann, 2006: 187). However, in recent years, the topic of German victimhood has made an unexpected and intense return to the public and literary sphere, largely owing to the well-known and transformative voices of Günter Grass, W.G. Sebald, and Jörg Friedrich. This renewal of the discussion of German suffering has, however, led to "memory contests" (Assmann, 2006: 187), and Grass has emphasised in public discussions that now is the time for the "gypsies and forced labourers to assert their claim to remembrance" (Assmann, 2006: 188). This suggestion by Grass ties in with the aims of this dissertation, as it

[21] It is perhaps easier for me, as a non-German, to engage with the theme of German suffering. An *Economist* review of Friedrich's *Der Brand* states that it is still "rare for a German to take a public look at the second world war from a German perspective" (quoted in Barnouw, 2005: 124).
[22] Eva Revesz (2015:7-8) points out that there was an increasing tendency in German literature since 1990 to move away from the "German-as-perpetrator" to the "German-as-victim" figure.

implies that there is a need to dismantle hierarchies of suffering and give voice to peripheral narratives.

My dissertation thus draws on the idea of German suffering[23] as presented by W.G. Sebald,[24] Günter Grass, and Jörg Friedrich. In three of the chosen texts, there are German characters with whom the reader can, I argue, identify and empathise. For example, Doerr's Werner Pfennig and Zusak's Hans Hubermann, Liesel Meminger, and Rudy Steiner all appear as likable characters who – despite their complicity to varying degrees in the war – undergo trauma and are, indubitably, victims themselves. As I have discussed and will discuss extensively in the following chapters, I offer a reading of the texts through the lens of the gray zone to demonstrate that it is arguably possible to identify and empathise with the chosen German characters. With characters like Werner, Liesel, Rudy, and Hans, the reader is able to see their willingness to do the 'right' thing, which is often prevented by their circumstances. At this point, it is important to mention that I use the term 'morally complex' to refer to the German characters in the texts. In his PhD thesis, Shields uses the terms "innocence" (2014: 184) and "good-hearted" (2014: 189) when discussing the German characters of Zusak's text. However, I have chosen to refrain from using 'innocence' and 'goodness' when describing the German characters of the texts, as both terms are highly subjective and tend to exculpate the characters from their perpetration and complicity, which is not my intention. Therefore, while I understand that presenting and discussing German suffering is precarious terrain,[25] I hope that in examining German trauma and suffering through the lens of the

[23] These forms of German suffering include the Allied bombings, the air wars, and the mass rape of German women (Nolan, 2008: 7).
[24] The publication of Sebald's essay, 'A Natural History of Destruction', in 2002 led to a public outcry, with readers declaring it immoral to give any sympathy to the Germans. Many argued that whatever the experience was of the war, it would forever be trumped by what they did in Auschwitz, Dachau, and Buchenwald (Barnouw, 2005: 102). From this, it is thus clear that Zusak, Doerr, and Weaver have opened new avenues for exploring this complicated topic.
[25] There is a great "moral difficulty" in saying "we suffered too" in the context of German suffering as this can potentially elicit the response that "they brought it on themselves, and … the crimes committed against them were dwarfed by those committed in their name" (MacKay, 2009: 4).

gray zone, I shall contribute to Rothberg's postulation that there should be no competition between victims but rather a sense of solidarity in suffering that "enables alliances … that transcend race, ethnicity, nationality, religion and culture" (Rothberg, 2011: 199).

In a speech given in October 2000, Grass emphasised the consequences of and the impact World War II had on German soldiers and civilians. He highlighted the destruction of German cities via Allied bombings, the death of hundreds of thousands of civilians, and the refugee crisis that ensued when 12 million East-Germans had to flee from their homes (Assmann, 2006: 188). He then further emphasised how German civilian experiences simply became a background theme in the wake of Holocaust literature (Assmann, 2006: 188). Echoing these sentiments, critic Robert Holub suggests that German suffering should be part of a "more complex historical totality" (quoted in Revesz, 2015: 9). As the following chapters demonstrate, my chosen texts (barring *The Book of Aron*) capture these 'background' themes through their visceral and emotionally-charged depictions of Allied bombings, prisoner-of-war camps, and the mass rape of German women. By discussing and unearthing these *Hintergrund* (background) themes in the texts, I contend that by depicting German suffering, these novels are multidirectional in nature and can contribute to new ways of productively thinking about and discussing Holocaust literature in relation to German and postcolonial studies.

1.4 The figure of the 'ordinary' German

As emphasised earlier, this dissertation does not concern itself with the demoniacal Nazi figure. I therefore use the concept of 'ordinariness' to examine German characters. In the context of this dissertation, I use the term ordinariness to refer to both the common citizens of Germany living everyday life through the Third Reich and the Wehrmacht soldier. In my understanding of the term in relation to the texts, ordinariness refers to the unexceptional, such as the working-class citizens

who maintain the ritual of daily – if not banal – routines, and the Wehrmacht soldier who is separate from the higher ranking Nazi officials, such as the Sturmabteilung (SA) or Schutzstaffel (SS). In the following section, I discuss German scholar Daniel Jonah Goldhagen's controversial doctoral thesis on the role of ordinary Germans during the war, as well as Kirril Shields' recent analysis of Zusak's *The Book Thief* and its portrayal of ordinary Germans.

At the beginning of 1996, Goldhagen's doctoral thesis *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* was published in the USA. The provocative nature of *Hitler's Willing Executioners* lies in its belief that ordinary German involvement in the persecution of Jewish people during the war was more substantial and wide-spread than what was originally thought. While Goldhagen does believe that Nazi leadership planned the mass killings of the Jewish population, he also, to an extent, exculpates Hitler's actions in the sense that he (Goldhagen) believes that Hitler's intention was the "logical conclusion of an exceptionally virulent tradition of anti-Semitism inherent within German history" (quoted in Niven, 2002: 122). Goldhagen further marks three sets of killers of the Jewish population: the police battalions; those who oversaw the death-marches; and those who ran Jewish labour camps (Niven, 2002: 122). Goldhagen concludes, with special reference to members of the Police Battalion 101, that these members simply killed Jewish people because they wanted to. He cites an example where Heinrich Himmler had forbidden further killings of Jewish people, yet members still continued to kill. The crux of his argument is where he suggests that these killers were "typical" Germans who represented a "cross-section of German society" (Niven, 2002: 123):

> These were 'ordinary Germans', only one third of whom were members of the National Socialist Party, and thus in the main not brainwashed by party ideology. 'What these *ordinary* Germans did', wrote Goldhagen of the police battalions, 'also could have been expected of other *ordinary* Germans'. (Quoted in Niven, 2002: 123)

Naturally, both German and non-German historians and scholars have heavily criticised, challenged, and opposed Goldhagen's work. While I could discuss these various criticisms and oppositions, I have chosen solely to focus on Goldhagen's conclusion that ordinary Germans were Hitler's willing executioners. One of the more vigorous objections to Goldhagen's thesis was his use of the term "the Germans" (quoted in Niven, 2002: 128). At the time, journalists and historians berated his use of such a generalised term, which viewed Germans as one homogenous mass of anti-Semitic people. His critics believed that he failed to differentiate between specific sets of Germans (such as battalion members or the SS or SA) and that his use of "the Germans" appeared both accusatory and persecutory[26] (Niven, 2002: 128). Essentially, Goldhagen opined that the perpetrators were "Germans first, and SS men, policemen, or camp guards second" (quoted in Niven, 2002: 129). This suggestion (or hierarchisation) was, according to Niven, a gross generalisation of the German people, which implied that there was no differentiation between "those who killed and those who did not" (Niven, 2002: 129). It is arguments and criticisms such as these that are central to my dissertation, as I largely discuss ordinary Germans during the war.

As critics have pointed out, Goldhagen positions the German during the war as a "murderously anti-Semitic monomaniac" (Niven, 2002: 129) who wanted to kill Jewish people. By positioning the Germans in this manner, Goldhagen makes execution arbitrary where killers become interchangeable with non-killers (Niven, 2002: 129). Yet, as Niven argues, Goldhagen rejected other important factors that led to Germans committing deplorable war crimes. For example, he never took circumstantial pressures, the obligation to be obedient,[27] and the extreme stressors of

[26] An interesting argument, which bears resemblance to Goldhagen's, is made by Hilberg where he states that "[t]he German perpetrator was not a special kind of German. What we have to say about his morality applies not to him specially but to Germany as a whole" (quoted in Eaglestone, 2004: 309). However, I argue that by making an individual German as part of a homogenous whole, the individuals are, in some way, being exculpated for their actions.

[27] For example, Oskar Gröning, a member of the SS, believed that the Nazi crime of killing children was justifiable. In an interview with the BBC for a documentary titled *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution* (2005), Oskar tells the interviewer (translated from German): "We were convinced by our worldview that we had been betrayed by the entire world and there was a great

war seriously (i.e. in terms of my argument, he completely overlooked the ideology of the gray zone). Whereas Goldhagen argued for a monocausal explanation of the Holocaust, historians like Hans Mommsen, Norbert Frei, and Hanno Loewy sought to rectify this by presenting a multicausal explanation. For example, Frei insists that "anti-Semitism is only one, and not an adequate explanation for the holocaust" (quoted in Niven, 2002: 126) and, as Niven summarises, motivation for Nazi crimes was incredibly complex and comprised a "mixture of racist ideology, obedience to authority, careerist zeal, opportunism, frustration … moral blindness and … fear" (Niven, 2002: 126).

Although Goldhagen's work has been repeatedly challenged, his work does provide the basis for important discussion on the gray zone. While the term 'gray zone' is not explicitly referenced in Niven's analysis of Goldhagen's work, it seems implied when Niven quotes various historians and critics who discuss the complexity behind the motivations of Holocaust crimes. In the following chapters, I make extensive use of the figure of the ordinary German. Goldhagen posits that (mostly ordinary) Germans killed Jewish people simply because they wanted to. This gross generalisation stands in contrast to an article by Shields (2016), which I use extensively in my discussion of the gray zone and the ordinary German figure. This article discusses the personal and collective exculpation of what Shields terms the 'everyday' German in Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief*. Shields draws on the work of German historian Martin Broszat (who looks at 'everyday' life during the Third Reich) and analyses how the *The Book Thief* suggests that Hitler's rise to power was unpopular among the general German population and that the population was itself a victim of the nation's intense political situation. Furthermore, I note here that although I do not refer to his work

conspiracy of the Jews against us … The children, they're not the enemy at the moment. The enemy is the blood inside them. The enemy is the growing up to be a Jew that could become dangerous".

in detail in this dissertation, Andrew Stuart Bergerson's work on *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times* (2004) is more in line with Goldhagen's thinking: Bergerson argues that ordinary Germans living everyday lives played a large role in alienating and abandoning their Jewish neighbours and, therefore, contributed to the rise of the Nazi regime's power in the pre-war years (Begerson, 2004: xxvii).

Many critics have argued that Goldhagen overstated the extent of anti-Semitism among ordinary Germans during the Nazi period (Niven, 2002: 126). This sentiment is echoed in Zusak's novel where it is intimated that the Nazis (in their hateful and vitriolic form) were a "minority" group that "existed at the periphery of German society" (Shields, 2016: 1). Moreover, both *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* and *All the Light We Cannot See* also depict 'ordinary' Nazi soldiers[28] who are by no means completely vitriolic and anti-Semitic. It must be noted that the war was largely a "civilian experience", meaning that many "ordinary" people (like the characters in my texts) either lost their lives or suffered unspeakable traumas (Lassner, 2009: 179).

1.4.1 The perpetrator, bystander, and victim

Before I move on to the next section, I clarify my use of the terms perpetrator, bystander, and victim in this dissertation. In *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw, The Book of Aron,* and *All the Light We Cannot See*, I refer to Max, Lejkin, and Werner as perpetrators. In *The Book Thief*, I contend that it is difficult to label the German protagonists as perpetrators, for they try to resist the Nazi regime in varying degrees and do not actively commit crimes that are intended to hurt someone else. According to Shields, the victims of the war period were traditionally defined as those who were

[28] When I say 'ordinary' Nazi soldiers, I am implying that the German soldier protagonists in the texts are, for example, nothing like the unstable and extremely morally digressive protagonists presented in controversial texts like Edgar Hilsenrath's *The Nazi and the Barber* (1971) and Jonathan Littell's *The Kindly Ones* (2006).

gassed, euthanised, or incarcerated in concentration camps (2014: 18). These victims were typically Jewish people, Gypsies, Roma, Sinti, LGBT individuals, political dissidents, and those who were disabled or mentally ill (Shields, 2014: 18). Moreover – and more generally – the traditional victim is any person who has been subjected to the perpetrators' crimes (Shields, 2014: 18). However, as Shields highlights, the role and definition of the victim are continually changing and shifting (2014: 19). In this dissertation, I argue that the authors largely portray their German protagonists as victims. These victims, therefore, cannot be defined traditionally but rather as victims of circumstance, bad luck, history, and political propaganda (Shields, 2014: 19). For example, Werner can be viewed as a victim of both history and propaganda, and Liesel as a victim of circumstance and bad luck (such as when Molching is mistakenly bombed by the Allies).

Perpetrators are traditionally defined as the Nazis and any European who subscribed to or supported Nazi ideology (Shields, 2014: 20). Furthermore, Shields extends the definition of perpetration to include those who benefitted from the Nazi regime in varying degrees (2014: 20). As I have already discussed, my dissertation is not concerned with the "archetype of the Nazi perpetrator", such as Otto Adolf Eichmann or Rudolf Höss (Shields, 2014: 20). However, I do assign the label of perpetrator to both Max and Werner, as they undeniably perpetrate crimes that cause harm and destruction. Therefore, while the authors of the texts position their German characters as victims of circumstance and history, these characters are still perpetrators – or at the very least complicit bystanders – to some degree and cannot be exculpated for their crimes.

Lastly, I use the term 'bystander' (or rather complicit bystander) mainly in relation to the discussion on *The Book Thief*. I do so because according to Shields, "[b]ystanders are those Europeans who remained indifferent or passive to the regime's crimes" (2014: 21). They are the German citizens who "lived a conventional existence" and are deemed complicit for they either

"benefit[ted] from the pain of others" or were viewed as apathetic due to their lack of protest against the regime (Shields, 2014: 21). Hilberg is less accusatory in his approach to the bystander figure and regards this figure as someone who was "not willing to hurt the victims and not wishing to be hurt by the perpetrator" (1993: xi). In Zusak's text, Molching is home to a number of complicit bystanders. Yet as I argue in the fifth chapter, I contend that it is difficult to mark Zusak's protagonists as bystanders, for they actively try to resist the regime and help the victims as best they can. Having said this, however, some characters in the text, like Alex Steiner (Rudy's father), move from bystander to perpetrator, because they, like Alex, take advantage of Jewish misfortunes. Moreover, when discussing complicity and perpetration in each chapter, I also refer to Mark Sanders' and Debarati Sanyal's[29] work on this complex theme. I also define complicity as "participation in wrongdoing, or collaboration with evil" (Sanyal, 2015: 1), which extends to being a passive bystander.[30]

In addition, I briefly discuss the concept of the implicated subject in relation to my discussion on *The Book Thief*. The implicated subject, which is a recent concept defined by Rothberg, is essentially an in-between or liminal subject – someone who is neither a victim nor a perpetrator (Leeds Memory, 2016). It is a theory that stems from Levi's concept of the gray zone, and as Rothberg suggests, we should start considering the idea that an individual does not necessarily have to be classified as either a victim or a perpetrator. Although it is not within the scope of this dissertation to delve into Rothberg's research on this topic, I do suggest that the implicated subject

[29] Interestingly, Sanyal's (2015) work draws on multidirectional memory. She suggests that complicity and solidarity are two sides of the same coin (2015: 1) and that recognising different forms of historical complicity can "spark affiliations between various identity groups in the collective pursuit of recognition and justice" (2015: 2).

[30] In a legalistic sense, complicity is defined as being accountable for a criminal offense committed by another due to previous knowledge of the other's crime (Duhaime's Law Dictionary, 2016). Therefore, this definition suggests that one must have knowledge of the potential outcome of a crime to be complicit. This can be complicated in relation to German complicity because it has been claimed that "ordinary [Germans] simply did not know about Nazi crimes against humanity" (Bergerson, 2004: xxxv). However, I will not elaborate on this and will simply contend that all Germans under analysis in my dissertation are complicit in some way.

can possibly be applied to the main characters in *The Book Thief*. For example, central to my argument is that Zusak's text is ultimately concerned with the German fate of its characters who are depicted as multidimensional characters (neither completely innocent nor wholly evil). In this way, Zusak positions his German characters as victims. However, because I contend that Zusak's protagonists are neither true victims (in a traditional sense) nor perpetrators of horrific crimes, perhaps the term implicated subject would be more applicable in this context.

It is thus evident that defining the perpetrator, victim, and bystander in a non-traditional sense is not an easy task. Moreover, changing representations of these figures in contemporary literature dealing with the Holocaust can lead to controversy and contention. For example, texts like Weaver's and Doerr's de-demonise and humanise perpetrator figures, thereby enabling the reader to relate to and empathise with them (Shields, 2014: 25). However, it is this de-demonisation and humanisation that rewrites the perpetrators and bystanders and contributes to the reframing and reworking of both Holocaust and German literature by encouraging debate on controversial and once-taboo topics.

1.5 Dismantling hegemonic narratives through marginalised narratives of suffering

Having discussed how I will approach the topic of German suffering as a peripheral World War II narrative through the lenses of multidirectional memory and the gray zone, I now move on to how I use the child (and orphaned) figure in the novels to discuss and give prominence to the marginalised narratives of World War II suffering. Central to postcolonial theory is the concept of Otherness (or alterity) where the Other has "made claims to speak, indeed to speak back [thereby] disrupting the realm of politics in radical ways" (Singh, 2011: 1). As I have already mentioned in the introduction, I use the term Other loosely to discuss the "statistically marginal part of the

Holocaust" (Anderson, 2007: 10), which includes the figure of the morally complex German, the child, the orphan, and the female figure. I am also aware that Jewish people, including other groups that were traditional victims of the Nazi regime, are still considered as the ultimate Othered groups. In his video on the Other and Otherness, Kael Moffat (2017) discusses how the Other is a source of negative feelings and the Self (or ego) wants to dominate this outsider group because it is fundamentally different. For example, I refer to the footnote (see number 28) I included previously on Oskar Gröning, a member of the SS, who fully believed that the Jewish people were his enemies and that their blood was dangerous not only to him but to the German nation. Here, it is clear that the Self perceives itself as under threat and, therefore, acts accordingly by wanting to control and dominate the outsider group. However, it is beyond the scope of this dissertation to delve further into the Othering of groups of people targeted by the Nazi regime.

Crucially, all of the novels contain child protagonists, thus adding to the growing canon of Holocaust literature (targeted for an adult readership) dealing with both child protagonists and child narrators. Key texts in this body of literature include Elie Wiesel's *La Nuit* (1958), Ruth Klüger's *Weiter Leben: Eine Jugend* (1992), Binjamin Wilkomirski's *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939-1948* (1995), Jonathan Safran Foer's *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2005), and much more recently, Irma Joubert's *The Girl from the Train* (2015). With the addition of the texts under analysis, it is evident that using child protagonists (who may or may not be the narrators themselves) for an adult readership is becoming a popular choice for authors wishing to pursue the Holocaust and World War II genre. As Mark Anderson states in agreement with other critics, "children have consistently proved to be the most moving and believable witnesses [of the Shoah]" (2007: 2) because, as Andrea Reiter discusses, they force readers to look at the events of the Holocaust through "new eyes" (quoted in Leak & Paizis, 2000: 84). This, therefore, adds to the

representational issues of the texts analysed: although they are all works of fiction, the child protagonists arguably give the text a distinctive accessibility, believability, and genuineness. This is done so, as Reiter emphasises, through their "unprejudiced and uninformed attitude", which allows them to interpret situations and events in a way that "makes them seem more horrific" (quoted in Leak & Paizis, 2000: 85).

As mentioned above, the child of a text, who witnesses the horrors of the war, typically begins his/ her life in a "situation of naiveté or ignorance" (Kertzer, 2014: 122). This situation is quickly replaced by the loss of childhood and innocence where the child either gains 'knowledge' of the unfolding events, becomes "old enough to understand what's happening" (the idea of the Bildungsroman), or fails to understand "the terrible meaning" of the Holocaust (Kertzer, 2014: 124). The protagonists in the selected texts, who are all over the age of ten, view or witness the grotesqueness of war from varying perspectives. Werner in *All the Light We Cannot See* is continually haunted by a young girl with a bullet-hole in her head; Liesel in *The Book Thief* has nightmares about the death of her brother and bears witness to the emaciation and struggle of her Jewish friend, Max; and Marie-Laure, who is blind, comes to 'witness' the war through her other heightened senses. All of these child protagonists begin in "a situation of naiveté", which emphasises their vulnerability (Kertzer, 2014: 122) and contributes to the "conventional association between childhood and innocence" (Kertzer, 2014: 125). As the war progresses, they invariably lose their childhood innocence and become "old enough to understand what's happening" (Kertzer, 2014: 124). Marie-Laure, for example, realises that she needs to be part of the French resistance in an effort to bring her father back, and Werner becomes morally conscious of his actions and comes to understand, like Liesel, that there is nothing heroic or brave about serving the Reich. Essentially, all of the child characters move from innocence/ ignorance to

knowledge (Kertzer, 2014: 129) and can be understood more fully when read through the lens of the gray zone. None of the child characters are "the ultimate innocent child protagonist" (Kertzer, 2014: 133) and all exhibit complicity or morally ambiguous decisions.

I argue that by analysing the child figure, I aim to contribute to the dismantling of hegemonic narratives of suffering through a multidirectional lens, as I consider the narratives of the child, orphaned, and female figures in the texts as peripheral or marginal in the greater World War II context.

1.6 Aims and purposes

Having examined and provided definitions for both the primary and secondary frameworks used in this dissertation, I now discuss the aims and purposes of my research. The crux of my discussion is to use Rothberg's work on multidirectional memory and Levi's concept of the gray zone to bridge the "gaping disciplinary divide that has long separated Jewish and postcolonial studies" (Craps, 2014: 201) and, in using the Holocaust as a starting point, discuss other histories of suffering in the context of World War II. While the "other histories of suffering" I intend to study still relate to World War II and do not feature a postcolonial setting, I aim to contribute to studies of Holocaust narratives that focus on marginal or peripheral traumas (set in France, Poland, and Germany) that are separate from the deportations and the concentration camps. In this way, I move from the micro– (World War II suffering) to the macro– (suffering on a global scale) narratives of past and present traumas. I argue that multidirectional memory is a much-needed concept in the discussion of the hegemony (or hierarchies) of suffering that still exists today (take, for example, the Western dominance of trauma narratives). I have chosen to focus largely on German suffering as I believe it provides a useful example of how peripheral and even controversial forms of

suffering may be articulated in the public and literary sphere in a manner that is, I argue, respectful and mindful of diverse forms of historical tragedies.

As Rothberg continuously emphasises in his work, I believe it is important to raise questions about the historical dominance of certain narratives of suffering. Alvin Rosenfeld, a critic on Holocaust literature, makes the following argument about William Styron's *Sophie's Choice* (1979), which is central to the aims of my dissertation:

> While he (Styron) acknowledges Jewish suffering under the Nazis, he insists on seeing Auschwitz in general or universalistic terms, as a murderous thrust against "mankind" or "the entire human family"; in line with the above, he sees his own role as "correcting" the view that the Holocaust was directed solely or exclusively against the Jews by focusing attention on the many Christians, and particularly the Slavs, who also perished in the camps … (in Mathé, 2004: 453)

In a similar thread, Timothy Snyder, in his review 'Holocaust: The Ignored Reality', draws attention to the forgotten stories and histories of many Europeans – whether Jewish or not (2009: 1). His argument that the Holocaust was not necessarily the epicentre of World War II is encapsulated in the following statement:

> Auschwitz is only an introduction to the Holocaust, the Holocaust only a suggestion of Hitler's final aims. [Vasilly] Grossman's novels … daringly recount both Nazi and Soviet terror, and remind us that even a full characterization of German policies of mass killing is incomplete as a history of atrocity in mid-century Europe. (Snyder, 2009: 1)

Most notable about literary criticism on the Holocaust is that it centres on the German versus Jewish narrative where, on a fundamental level, the German is the perpetrator and the Jewish person the victim. This binary was concretised immediately after the war when Germans were brought to trial and many were unable to speak of what had happened (Luhmann, 2000: 174). I address this form of 'unspeakability' throughout my analysis of the texts by drawing attention to

different narratives of suffering during the wartime period. According to Rothberg's epilogue on *Multidirectional Memory*,

> [Multidirectional memory] has sought to accomplish two central tasks: to renarrate important dimensions of post-World War II intellectual, cultural, and political history by revealing how coming to terms with the Nazi genocide of European Jews has always been intertwined with ongoing processes of decolonization; and to extrapolate the theoretical consequences of that newly understood intertwining for thinking about public memory and group identity.[31] (2009: 309)

Therefore, the aims of my dissertation are to support (or add to) Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory through an in-depth analysis of wartime fictional texts that use the Holocaust as a starting point to discuss other World War II traumas and sufferings. As I have briefly mentioned above, little academic research has been conducted on the texts under discussion and I believe they function as multidirectional texts that can add an important dimension to the expansion of Holocaust literature in a unique way that explores the connections between Holocaust and postcolonial memories. Furthermore, it is my hope that the exploration of the gray zone and how it is applied to German suffering will refashion the way Holocaust literature has been previously explored and provide a "more rounded picture of the war" (Hodgson, 2009: 117).

Before I move on to an analysis of Holocaust literature in the past and present, it is crucial that I consider the arguments or criticisms that could be made against this dissertation. Shields contends that novels like *The Book Thief* suggest that the Nazi past should not be read as a site of guilt but rather as a period "in which those Germans who led everyday existences were as traumatised and victimised as the traditional victims of the German-Jewish population" (2016: 2). Assmann

[31] Crucial to note is that "Rothberg considers memory to be inherently comparative, but he disputes the idea that comparisons between atrocities inevitably erase the differences between them and imply false equivalence" (Craps, 2014: 203). Thus, while Rothberg looks at memory comparison; he does so in an ethical way that does not equate different types of sufferings. Essentially, Rothberg attempts to dismantle "memory competition" and "comparative victimology" (Craps: 2014: 208).

believes that "perhaps it is German suffering which once again pushes aside memories of the Holocaust and blunts the consciousness of German guilt" and essentially creates a certain form of exculpation (quoted in Shields, 2016: 2). Furthermore, Andreas Huyssen has opined that deploying Holocaust discourse "in the land of the perpetrators in reference to their own suffering is particularly inappropriate and inflammatory" (quoted in Nolan, 2008: 31). While these are some of the concerns put forth by scholars regarding the discussion of German suffering, I argue that by using multidirectional memory, I am not pushing the Holocaust aside,[32] detracting from its uniqueness, or exculpating the German people. Nevertheless, I do want to discuss other narratives of suffering (even though they are controversial) in an attempt to dismantle hierarchies of suffering. Lastly, I always discuss complicity in relation to German suffering in each chapter. In this way, I demonstrate that I am by no means exculpating individual Germans of their actions.

1.7 Holocaust literature: Past and present

While this dissertation is concerned with Holocaust literature in the contemporary moment (or in the post-post-Holocaust era), it is important to consider how Holocaust literature has evolved over the decades.

1.7.1 Concerning the past: The ethics and aesthetics of representation

Artistic and literary engagement with the Holocaust has been a largely contentious and debatable issue among survivors, authors, and academics for decades. As Jenni Adams notes, critical reception of Holocaust literature has drastically changed over time (2014: 1). The field of Holocaust literature, and the complexity and diversity of questions that come with it, is one that

[32] This idea of pushing the Holocaust aside is mentioned by numerous scholars, such as Aleida Assmann (2006), Debarati Sanyal (2009), and Mary Nolan (2008).

has been researched, critiqued, and documented extensively. It comprises a diverse and rich body of work that continues to be subjected to criticism, research, and analysis. Numerous scholars, such as Jenni Adams, David Miller, Michael Bernard-Donals, and Mathew Boswell (to name but a few), continue to address the difficulties of representation. According to Adams, the nature of Holocaust literature is "continually evolving" and critical reception of it has, naturally, changed significantly over time (2014: 1). One of the larger concerns regarding Holocaust literature is the question of representation. How can fictional texts narrate what is often considered the unspeakable? Who has the authority of writing about the Holocaust? Which linguistic devices and genres do writers use to communicate both fictional and non-fictional experiences (Adams, 2014: 1)?

Many, if not all, of these questions do not have a single, definite answer. While the issue of representation may not be as significant as it was a few decades ago, it is still important for writers to consider the ethics and aesthetics of representation when writing about such a sensitive topic that continues to fascinate readers, writers, and scholars more than 70 years later. In the years following the aftermath of World War II, numerous writers chose not to write about what happened either because they perceived the events of the Holocaust as unspeakable or they could not find the 'adequate' means of expression, language, or genre to describe what happened (Foley, 1982: 330; Reiter, 2000: 2). Many critics and scholars, such as Theodor Adorno, Michael Wyschogrod, and Lawrence Langer, have argued against the use of artistic expression when it comes to representing the Holocaust (Foley, 1982: 330). Langer believes that it is simply not possible to create "a literature celebrating the growth of the human spirit" without "violating the complex and contradictory truths of the … death camps" (quoted in Reiter, 2000: 3). For example, he criticises the works of Bruno Bettelheim and Viktor Frankl where he "accuses them of using linguistic

devices from the sphere of 'normal' life to interpret a meaningless death as meaningful" (quoted in Reiter, 2000: 3). Wyschogrod opines that "art [essentially] takes the sting out of suffering … [thus] it is … forbidden to make fiction of the holocaust … [as] any attempt to transform the holocaust into art demeans the holocaust and must result in poor art" (quoted in Foley, 1982: 330).

In his work on the ethics of Holocaust representation, Bernard-Donals explores the tricky and complex terrain of aesthetics and ethics in Holocaust literature. He cites the prominent Holocaust scholars Berel Lang, Lawrence Langer, and Elie Wiesel, who believe that "only certain forms of representation can adequately serve as vehicles of its [the Holocaust's] representation" (2014: 105). It is important to re-emphasise here that for a long time following the aftermath of the war, many scholars believed that the Holocaust's uniqueness "warrant[ed] only historical writing or the use of … the trope of the eyewitness, writing that represents events directly" (Bernard-Donals, 2014: 105). Lang and post-Holocaust philosopher Emmanuel Levinas were particularly vocal about the issue of representation, continuously asserting their belief that artistic forms are simply not adequate enough when it comes to representing an event as morally confounding and horrific as the Holocaust (Aarons, 2014: 29). Levinas, at one point, claimed that in using artistic forms and aesthetics to represent the Holocaust, readers and audiences are simply responding to "dead celluloid" and "carefully chosen words" (quoted in Bernard-Donals, 2014: 100). Moreover, Tamas Dobozy argues that "the believability of the Holocaust depends on its degree of aestheticization" (2005: 44). If this is true, does this mean, then, that texts, which are more "aesthetic" in nature, are not as believable as testimonies, diaries, and eyewitness accounts? Does this mean that "aesthetic" texts cannot be truly defined as belonging to the canon of Holocaust literature? While these questions are, once again, heavily loaded and still widely referenced and analysed, it is enough, for the purposes of this dissertation, simply to understand that with temporal and spatial distance,

critical reception of the aesthetics and ethics of Holocaust representation has, and will continue to, change significantly (Adams, 2014: 1).

As the taboos of one generation succeed another (Reiter, 2000: 3), writers become more and more exploratory in their works on the Holocaust. Temporal distance from the ending of the war has indubitably led to an increased proliferation of and experimentation with artistic forms in representing the Holocaust. Earlier examples of such experimentation include Art Spiegelman's *Maus* (1991), Robert Coover's *The Public Burning* (1977), and Edgar Hilsenrath's *The Nazi and the Barber* (1971). Furthermore, writers such as Tadeusz Borowski, Isaiah Spiegel, and Cynthia Ozick were key figures in turning to "unconventional [literary] means … to represent the Holocaust" because "traditional forms of literary expression show themselves to be inadequate to its moral enormity" (Aarons, 2014: 30). In 1984, David Roskies also set a new precedent when he "cleared the path for detailed linguistic investigation" (quoted in Reiter, 2000: 5) and showed how the Holocaust needed the development of new archetypes (Reiter, 2000: 5).

Furthermore, Barbara Foley argues that "some literary forms provide better frameworks than others for conveying the subject matter of the Holocaust" (1982: 333). While this argument was once a disputation of Adorno's, Langer's, and Wyschogrod's ideas, it is clear that, with the increasing temporal distance from the Holocaust, it became more common and acceptable for writers to explore any number of artistic avenues that could help shape one's understanding of the Holocaust and fascism. Thus, while the Holocaust remains perhaps figuratively unspeakable, decades of artistic license and the ability to remove one's self temporally from the events of World War II have led to the rise of prominent Holocaust authors who have created 'new' ways of dealing

with such monstrosity.[33] Take, for example, D.M. Thomas' 1981 publication of *The White Hotel*, which was considered by many critics and readers as shocking, scandalous, and offensive at the time. With the novel's Freudian psychoanalytical approach and interpretation of the protagonist's – Elisabeth (Lisa) Erdman's – subconscious mind, readers are introduced to a nonsensical world of dreams, hallucinations, and overtly sexual fantasies that seemingly have little to do with the World War II narrative. However, after this rather Bakhtinian carnivalesque world of grotesqueness, hyperbole and violence, the novel presents a more conventional form of narration and structure by following the journey of Lisa up until she is killed and raped at Babi Yar in the Ukraine (a site infamous for Nazi extermination). What Thomas achieves is the creation of a text that intertwines imagination and history (in a way that is perhaps multidirectional too) by using Lisa's dreams and fantasies as foreshadowing techniques of the grotesqueness and horror to come (Roskies & Diamant, 2012). It is, therefore, authors like Spiegelman and Thomas who have drawn attention to the difficulty of dealing with the aesthetics, ethics, and politics of Holocaust literature and transformed the Holocaust literary canon in terms of both inventive style and narrative technique (Budick, 2015).

In relating these changes and transformations in Holocaust literature to the contemporary moment, it is important to reflect on how the texts analysed in this dissertation all depict these significant changes by allowing the reader to identify with the perpetrator and view Germans, too, as victims of the war. Furthermore, as Reiter discusses, topics deemed taboo, such as the Jewish man inflicting violence on others, are becoming 'easier' to discuss (2000: 234). For example, Lejkin, a

[33] Matthew Boswell, who is part of a new generation of Holocaust scholars, argues for the impiety of the Holocaust. His work is a reaction to Gillian Rose's critique of 'Holocaust piety', which is defined as "a mode of artistic engagement which argues for the ineffability of the Holocaust" (quoted in Popescu, 2012: 68). Boswell argues that the objective of experimental or transgressive artistic forms of Holocaust literature is to be "deliberately transformational" and "to shock the audience into adopting a new point of view" (quoted in Popescu, 2012: 68).

member of the Jewish police in *The Book of Aron*, is portrayed as a violent and selfish character who does not hesitate to persecute his fellow Jews. Discussing and representing German victimhood during the war remains a difficult topic, as it points to the idea of exculpation. For example, Shields, in his analysis of Zusak's *The Book Thief*, argues that "while [the novel] does not disregard the Shoah, [it] suggests that the suffering experienced by non-Jewish Germans was equal to that of the persecuted minorities, and it is this equation of sufferance[34] that creates, in part, the possibility of a … means of exculpation" (2016: 5). Seeing as the novels under discussion consider the perspective of the Nazi perpetrator, does this mean that "such works ask us to betray the Jewish victims whose experience should remain central to the understanding of the event?" and do they push the Holocaust aside in their attempt to portray the suffering of the perpetrator? (McGlothlin, 2014: 159; Shields, 2016: 5). It is thus evident that the texts (despite their recent publication dates) may be ethically or morally questionable in their portrayal of both German suffering and the perspective of the Nazi soldier. It is crucial to note, however, that although the narrative focalisation of the perpetrator has long been regarded a taboo perspective by critics, it has become a more accepted medium through which "the post-Holocaust reader can engage imaginatively with the legacy of the Holocaust" (McGlothlin, 2014: 60). Although the texts will (in time) be subjected to literary criticism, it is evident that portraying the perpetrator and depicting German suffering and complicity are much more accepted forms of literary representation (although still controversial) in the post-post-Holocaust era.

1.7.2 Genres

[34] Historian Norbert Frei, in an article published in *Die Zeit*, "warned against the dangers of levelling differences between different kinds of victims" (quoted in Krimmer, 2008: 274) as he argues that "the perception of Germans as victims goes hand in hand with expressions of anti-Semitism and a problematic re-evaluation of the past" (quoted in Krimmer, 2008: 274).

In the following sub-section, I consider the form and fictional nature of the texts discussed in this dissertation, particularly due to their controversial nature and progressive narrative forms. According to Foley, there are numerous genres that Holocaust literature encompasses (1982: 344). Although this list is neither exhaustive nor comprehensive, Foley discusses the following genres: the diary, the memoir, literature of atrocity, poetry, fiction and non-fiction, the realistic novel, the irrealistic novel, and the pseudo-documentary. Each genre thus employs its own varying degrees of veracity and verisimilitude. This is, however, problematic for defining what exactly 'Holocaust literature' is. Purists will attach profound importance to the memoirs, testimonies, and documents of actual survivors, whereas more progressive and 'detached' writers (i.e. not directly or necessarily personally afflicted by the Holocaust, like Doerr and Shepard) will explore other modes and versions of veracity. Holocaust literature "encompasses a diverse body of work" (Adams, 2014: 1) that is continually evolving, and it is thus not possible to have a totalising definition of what Holocaust literature is because to do so would "schematize this body of literature in ultimately restrictive and reductive ways" (Adams, 2014: 1). The field is simply too complex to encompass a singular definition. For the purposes of this dissertation, I will focus only on the fictional novel.

In *Holocaust Literature: A History and Guide*, Roskies and Diamant (2012) have categorised the history of Holocaust Literature into "Wartime Writing in the Jew-Zone (1939-1945)", "Communal Memory (1945-1960)", "Provisional Memory (1960-1985)", and "Authorized Memory (1985-Present)". In their research, Roskies and Diamant have discovered that narratives dealing with the destruction of the Jewish people actually began to make an appearance during the course of the war – hence the definition of the term "Wartime Writing in the Jew-Zone". These texts were largely characterised by commemoration, protest, songs, poetry, performed plays (such as the

puppet shows in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*), diaries, calls to arms, and elegy. Professional writers and public intellectuals also took to literary methods in order to "combat the apathy" of the general population (Roskies & Diamant, 2012). Communal Memory dealt with the "immediate aftermath" (Roskies & Diamant, 2012) of the war where the choice of "literary" reproduction abjured any artistic licence, metaphor, and creativity (essentially documentaries, testimonies – both oral and written – and eyewitness accounts). The ascendant style of this period of literary production was "deadpan" and stripped of metaphor where the "mundane" was set against the horrific (Roskies & Diament, 2012). Provisional Memory was defined as a period of discovery where the "witness survivors assumed a human face" (Roskies & Diament, 2012) and were excavating new ways of dealing with the buried past. A key author of this period is Elie Wiesel, who gave a "public voice to [the scandal] of silence" (Roskies & Diamant, 2012). This period was defined by a generation of speakers, identifiers, questioners, and philosophers where "works of the literary imagination … came to represent counter-reality, a wound that could not be healed" (Roskies & Diament, 2012). Lastly, Authorized Memory has seen a bold shift towards individualising the Germans and the Nazi perpetrators. They became "men and women of conscience, victims in their own right" (Roskies & Diamant, 2012). Literature of this period has become (and still continues to become) more exploratory in form and content, notably more so as the last survivors of World War II cease to exist. Today, literature of the Shoah[35] – and the greater war narrative – "is marked by a tremendous diversity of styles and is truly international in scope" (Roskies and Diamant, 2012).

[35] According to the Yad Vashem Organisation, the term Holocaust is defined as the "sum total of all anti-Jewish actions carried out by the Nazi regime between 1933 and 1945" (n.d., 1). The Holocaust also refers to the oppression and murder of other ethnic and political groups targeted by the Nazis. The term Shoah is a biblical term, which has become the standard Hebrew term for the murder of European Jewry (Yad Vashem, n.d.: 1). Therefore, Shoah refers more specifically to the murder of the European Jewry, whereas the Holocaust, which came into use in the 1950s, can be used as a general term for the crimes perpetrated by the Nazis (Yad Vashem, n.d.: 1). I use the term Holocaust as opposed to the Shoah, as the Holocaust encompasses the crimes against other persecuted groups, not just Jewish people.

For the purpose of this dissertation, only texts dealing with Authorized Memory are considered. Holocaust scholars are now exploring works on Holocaust literature (both previous and new) through the lens of postmemory, a concept developed by Marianne Hirsch, which is the idea of post-Holocaust generations delving into a past they themselves did not experience (cited in Kaplan & Herrero-Matoses, 2014: 139). According to Sundquist, the post-post-Holocaust era is defined as the "age when no living witnesses will remain and the staggering project of collecting and recording their first-hand testimony in memoirs and interviews will come to a close" (2007: 73). This term is potentially problematic because the double usage of the word 'post' signifies a sense of further detachment from the events of the Shoah, perhaps leading to a numbness and emotional apathy towards any further reproductions of Holocaust literature (a concept that Sundquist describes as "exhaustion for our capacity for empathy" [2007: 73]). The era (not just the term) is problematic in itself because it marks the end of living witnesses – and if there are no living witnesses, it will be as if the event never even existed (Sundquist, 2007: 74).

World War II narratives that have emerged in the latter half of the 2000s are predominately fictional, thus deviating from factual historicity with the creation of fictionalised characters, settings, and events that are often embellished with carnivalesque-type detail. Dobozy notes that this may be a form of "Holocaust entertainment" (2005: 40). Considering that Holocaust argumentation has largely dealt with questions of representation and who has the authority to write on such atrocity, the literary canon of World War II literature is certainly on a new trajectory. As Leak and Paizis note in *The Holocaust and the Text: Speaking the Unspeakable,* none of the authors featured in this volume of work is writing from the perspective of the survivor, nor are they particularly concerned with "historiographic modes of representation" (2000: 3). It is evident that with temporal and spatial distance from the Shoah, present-day authors of texts dealing with

this topic and the war are becoming increasingly creative and artistic in their works, and as Marina MacKay emphasises, "World War II and its literature are still subject to revision in the light of changing cultural priorities, needs, and interests"[36] (2009: 1). Once again, it is my hope that my analysis of literature in the contemporary moment will contribute to a rethinking of the Holocaust narrative in the age of decolonisation.

1.8 Conclusion

With the ongoing refugee crises, racial and xenophobic attacks, threats of terrorism and, more recently, nuclear war; it appears that the world is becoming increasingly apocalyptic. One of the main concerns, however, is how attacks on the Western world continue to overshadow tragedies[37] occurring in other parts of the world, particularly in countries in the global South. For example, an infographic and article published in *The Washington Post* indicates that "since the beginning of 2015, the Middle East, Africa and Asia have seen nearly 50 times more deaths from terrorism than Europe and the Americas" (Gamio & Meko, 2016: 1). Yet the Western world continues to remain silent on these issues, only paying attention when attacks happen in Europe, America, or other First World countries. These statistics pose an ongoing debate in the media, with people questioning why such tragedies are overlooked. While the answers may be both obvious (the Western world has always been powerful and influential) and psychologically complex, it is not the purpose of this dissertation to answer 'why' this happens. Instead, I seek to explore 'how' one may look at German and other (peripheral) narratives of trauma and suffering by using

[36] Assmann suggests that because there is now a social framework and discourse for discussing German suffering that has come into existence, Germans have more of a chance to be heard with empathy (2006: 198).
[37] Avishai Margalit makes an important point where she says, "because they are generally better remembered, the atrocities of Europe are perceived as more significant than atrocities elsewhere" (quoted in Craps & Rothberg, 2011: 518).

multidirectional memory, which aims to dismantle hegemonic narratives where one suffering is viewed as 'more important' than another.

From my research on the Holocaust, it is evident that "its literature attests to the centrality of the Holocaust to any considerations of the war" (Lassner, 2009: 179). Holocaust writing has created its own canon, but its "significance affects the criteria by which we define modern literature and its relation to the war and its memorialization" (Lassner, 2009: 179). Once again, I reiterate my argument that while I am using a multidirectional perspective to discuss other traumas and sufferings of the war period, I am by no means detracting from the sacredness of the Holocaust. It is important to understand that the selected texts encompass a diversity of characters, scenarios, and suffering. By looking at four different texts dealing with World War II, I aim to analyse numerous characters of different nationalities, cultures, and religious beliefs and discuss their suffering through both the lenses of multidirectional memory and the gray zone. I believe that the novels are suitable for post-memorial debates surrounding multidirectional memory and hierarchies of suffering, as they present differing perspectives on transnational and transcultural trauma.[38] It is crucial to note that all works analysed here are works of fiction published in the 2000s and each author, barring Weaver, who lives in England, and Zusak, who is both German and Australian, is neither German nor Jewish. Due to recent publication (excluding, once again, Zusak's *The Book Thief* published in 2005), scholarship on these texts and its authors is extremely limited, thus the necessity for academic research and criticism. Many newspaper and book reviews exist on these texts, yet these reviews are not enough to convey insight and depth into the scholarly world of Holocaust and World War II literature. I believe that the texts, to use the words of Petra

[38] According to the Oxford English Dictionary, transnational is defined as extending across national boundaries and transcultural relates to or involves more one than one culture (i.e. cross-cultural) (OED,2018).

Rau, "reintroduce little known or suppressed aspects of war and attend more carefully to the experiences of a total war whose strategies redefined civilians as legitimate targets" (2009: 209). Moreover, these texts add to both Holocaust and World War II literature, ensuring that the memory, the event, and the destruction of the war will continue to be interred and exhumed in the minds and imagination of people.

Chapter 2:

Ghettos and gulags: Orphaned children and prisoners of war in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* and *The Book of Aron*

> I wanted to render the experience of one of those figures we wouldn't ordinarily single out as all that important, so I wanted to imagine a protagonist whom everyone would consider the opposite of extraordinary and imagine his loss as terrible as well. (Shepard, 2016: 256)

Jim Shepard is no stranger when it comes to creating historical fiction and basing his fictional subjects on real-life figures (Ferris, 2015: 1). Regarded as one of America's finest writers, Shepard has published "long-admired" collections of short stories based on historical topics that range from the Minoan civilisation circa 1600 BC to finding a cure for the flu in the 19th century (Charles, 2015: 1). Yet, with *The Book of Aron* (2015),[39] Shepard has created a novel set in a "vastly different context" (Brooks, 2015: 2). Ron Charles, in his review for *The Washington Post*, believes that Shepard has created a "remarkable novel destined to join the shelf of essential Holocaust literature" (2015: 1). Geraldine Brooks, writing for *The New York Times*, echoes this sentiment: she contends that *The Book of Aron* "is a grain of sand added to the vast shore of literary and scholarly reflection that has accumulated in the past 70 years" (2015: 2). Other reviewers, like Joshua Ferris and Jan Stuart, have also remarked on how Shepard has given a new perspective on the "unfolding atrocities" of life in the Warsaw ghetto (Ferris, 2015: 3).

In the epigraph to this chapter, Shepard emphasises his intention to create a novel that renders the experience of a character existing on the margins. The character Shepard refers to is Aron Różycki: a "chronically depressed" young boy who is continuously subjected to various abuses (Schaub, 2015: 1). *The Book of Aron* is narrated by Aron himself and centres on his tumultuous and tragic journey in the Warsaw ghetto where he loses his entire family and ends up in an orphanage run by

[39] *The Book of Aron* is Shepard's seventh novel.

the historical figure, Janusz Korczak.[40] Aron, who is eight years old when the reader first encounters him, is "difficult to educate, prone to the illnesses that accompany poverty, emotionally stunted, underestimated by his family and disliked by his peers" (Brooks, 2015: 2). Aron is the complete opposite of an extraordinary character, as Shepard states. Ferris reads him as a "misbegotten boy" whose behaviour confounds his mother (2016: 1). Stuart describes him as "easy fodder for the ghetto's enterprising no-goodniks" (2015: 2), and Brooks views him as a doomed character, whose journey goes from "misery to … more misery" (2015: 3). He is, in the words of Ferris, a "historically irrelevant" (2015: 2) figure who becomes lost in the homogenous masses[41] of the Warsaw ghetto and, as I maintain in the following chapter, is the embodiment of dispossession.

Similarly, Eva Weaver in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* narrates the story of Mika Hernsteyn, a teenage boy also navigating life in the Warsaw ghetto. Unlike Aron, however, Weaver portrays Mika as a resourceful and courageous character who fights for his life and the lives of others despite being coerced into performing puppet shows for Nazi soldiers. Like Shepard, Weaver conducted extensive research into life in the Warsaw ghetto to create her very first novel (Moore, 2014: 3), which contains a multitude of narrative perspectives (including the child Mika and adult Mika, Max Meierhauser, Mara Meierhauser, and third-person narration). I argue that Weaver's text provides a useful example of multidirectional memory, as it offers differing narrative perspectives that are tied to the journey of a puppet. The puppet, referred to as the prince, belongs to Mika, but it is given to Max and passed on from one generation to the next. Therefore, while

[40] Joshua Ferris states that "Shepard's fidelity to the historical record is impressive" (2015: 2). Korczak is a renowned historical figure, famous as an activist for children's rights and his work in a Jewish orphanage in Warsaw. He was forced by the Nazis to relocate his orphanage to the ghetto (Brooks, 2015: 3).
[41] In 1942, German soldiers removed almost 200 starving children from an orphanage in the Warsaw ghetto and deported them to Treblinka. Such depraved acts, argues Charles, threaten to "eclipse the individuality of the victims" (2015: 1).

the puppet stays the same, the narrative perspectives and forms of focalisation change as the owner changes (Lüneburg, 2014: 3). One of these narrative focalisations belongs to Max – a Wehrmacht soldier in the Warsaw ghetto who is later captured as a prisoner of war and sent to a Siberian gulag with other German soldiers. One of the reasons why I chose to analyse *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* is because of this unique perspective on World War II history. Weaver herself has called her text "unusual" because it contains "two main perspectives in one book, that of victim and that of the perpetrator", which creates "a more powerful and complex story" (quoted in Moore, 2014: 4). Furthermore, Weaver emphasises that she wanted to tell a "different side"[42] of the war by creating a narrative based on the German soldiers who perished after the war (quoted in Moore, 2014: 4).

The Book of Aron and *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* are the only two texts in this dissertation that directly engage with the Holocaust. However, in an attempt to dismantle the hegemonic Holocaust narrative, I will focus on two main narratives of suffering: that of the orphaned, dispossessed child (Mika and Aron) and that of Max, who represents German suffering during the wartime period and its aftermath. Considering that I am moving away from the Holocaust narrative, it is important that I do not focus on Mika and Aron as Jewish. I choose to approach these characters rather from an intersectional angle and view them as orphaned, ordinary children in order to emphasise that multidirectional memory is concerned with a multitude of differing perspectives. Therefore, the aim of this chapter is to bring *The Book of Aron* and *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* into conversation with one another by offering a comparative reading of the two texts. Although multidirectional memory tends to avoid the term 'comparison', it does take a comparative approach to suffering. I therefore argue that by providing a comparative reading of both texts, I illuminate how both texts

[42] Important to note, however, is that Weaver's exploration of German prisoners of war is not a novel idea. For example, Herta Müller's *Atemschaukel* (2009) details the narrative of Romanian Germans sent to labour camps in Ukraine and is characterised as a form of *Nachkriegsliteratur* (Schaefer, 2009: 2), a genre to which Weaver's text could also belong.

are multidirectional in nature through their exploration of various narrative perspectives of suffering. Lastly, by looking at the suffering of the orphaned child and the German Wehrmacht soldier, I argue that these multidirectional texts can help us become more cognisant of the importance of dismantling hierarchies or competitions of suffering.

Both *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* and *The Book of Aron* detail the lives of two boys trying to survive and navigate life in the Warsaw ghetto. Despite these commonalities, these characters are, for the most part, opposite in nature. Aron grows up in a difficult home – one filled with "erratic beatings, constant disparagement and unending illnesses" (Charles, 2015: 1). He constantly puts himself down, confessing that "it [is] terrible to be the person he [is]", and refers to himself as "something that ha[s] been raised in the wild" (Shepard, 2016: 4-5). In one *kheyder*[43] report, Aron receives "unsatisfactory" in all subjects, and his father calls it the "most miserable report he'd ever seen" (Shepard, 2016: 4). Mika, on the other hand, has a more stable home environment and is doted on by his grandfather. His grandfather was a professor of mathematics at the University of Warsaw, and Mika considers himself an "excellent pupil [who] loved school" (Weaver, 2014:16-17). Although scared, he is brave, loyal, caring, and is willing to sacrifice his safety and life on numerous occasions to smuggle young children out of the ghetto (McMillan, 2013: 1). Where Aron has a family that holds out little hope for him, Mika has a grandfather and mother who worry about and see great potential in him.

I divide this chapter into four sections, beginning with Max's journey from the Warsaw ghetto to his imprisonment in a Siberian gulag. I analyse his narrative of suffering in relation to the gray zone and also place brief emphasis on how place accentuates or contributes to the peripherality of

[43] *Kheyder* was the first educational setting for Jewish boys in the small towns of Eastern Europe (Gotesdyner et al., n.d.: 1).

his narrative. I then provide a brief discussion of Lejkin (a member of the Jewish Yellow Police in *The Book of Aron*) and how Shepard has boldly included the theme of Jewish collaboration with the Nazis in the ghetto. Once again, I apply the lens of the gray zone when reading Lejkin's character and discussing his perspective, suffering, and complicity. The third section is dedicated to the suffering of Aron and Mika respectively. In relation to Mika's narrative, I highlight another aspect of multidirectional memory – the transmission of memory from one generation to another – by looking at how Max's granddaughter, Mara, tracks Mika in his elderly years and tells Mika and his family how she came to be in possession of the prince puppet and struggled to come to terms with the crimes of her grandfather. The final section concludes this chapter by re-emphasising how both texts extend scholarship on multidirectional memory and German studies and help reframe Holocaust literature.

The texts are similar in that they both depict life in the ghetto where disease, confined spaces, death, starvation, and smuggling become an intrinsic part of everyday life. As Shepard's novel progresses and the situation in the ghetto deteriorates, Aron loses all of his family members and the people he considered friends. He is eventually left orphaned and dispossessed and begins to give up on the idea of "thinking ahead" and surviving (Shepard, 2016: 154) until Janusz Korczak finds him on the streets and takes him in. Towards the end of the novel and after spending more and more time with Korczak, "Aron's scarred heart begins to heal and expand", and he develops into a "brave and empathetic human being" in Korczak's presence (Brooks, 2015: 1). This development, which can possibly categorise the text as a Bildungsroman, results in Aron desperately trying to save Korczak when they are rounded up for deportation to Treblinka. However, Saul Friedländer (cited in Vloeberghs, 2009: 52) provides a counter argument to the idea that some Holocaust fictions can be read as a Bildungsroman. He argues that the Bildungsroman

implies that even a "descent into the hell of the Holocaust can be overcome" (quoted in Vloeberghs, 2009: 52). In this sense, Shepard's novel can perhaps be classified as an anti-Bildungsroman. Furthermore, the reader never gets to know what happens to Korczak, Aron, and the children, as the text ends in medias res (Brooks, 2015: 1). It is more than likely, however, that their lives end in Treblinka. This, once again, complicates the idea that the text can be read as a Bildungsroman. For example, the traditional European definition of the Bildungsroman describes a coming-of-age story wherein the young protagonist or Bildungsheld must overcome ordeals and challenges in order to learn important life lessons and develop as a character (Avery, 2015: 1). While it is clear that Aron does develop as a character and overcomes many hardships, the text's ending in medias res leaves the reader questioning what becomes of Aron. Does he die in Treblinka? Does he manage to survive? Does his descent into the hell of the Holocaust suggest that he can still be read as a Bildungsroman character? Furthermore, if he does die, the text cannot be read as a coming-of-age story, as Aron would die as a mere child. He would, therefore, have no future and no time to discover his "true identity and purpose in the world" (Avery, 2015: 1).

Weaver's novel, on the other hand, has a more positive outcome, with Mika surviving well into old age. The novel begins with Mika spending time with his grandson, Daniel, in New York City. While on a walk together, Mika sees a puppet theatre advertising the play, *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*. Mika is naturally confounded, as he has no idea how this play, which is the story of his life in the Warsaw ghetto, has come to New York City decades later. This experience sets in motion a series of events where Mika narrates his past to his grandson for the first time. Through his narration, the reader learns about Mika's childhood in the ghetto, how he discovered puppets in a coat belonging to his grandfather, how he was forced into giving puppet shows to German soldiers by a Wehrmacht soldier named Max Meierhauser, and how Max's granddaughter, Mara, came to

learn about Mika, which resulted in her creation of the puppet show. The chapters of the text that are dedicated to Max's story detail his imprisonment in a Siberian gulag, his journey of escape, and his discordant life back home in Germany following the aftermath of the war. The novel ends with Mika in a hospital bed surrounded by Hannah (his daughter), Daniel, and Mara. Mara has returned the prince puppet to Mika – the puppet Mika gave to Max just before the destruction of the ghetto. The puppet has thus come full circle, from its 'birth' with Mika (who created it when he was a child) to lying with a dying Mika over 60 years later. Thus, it is evident that Weaver's text, unlike Shepard's, takes a more sentimental, happy-end approach.

Why Weaver has opted for a happy-end approach can perhaps be explained by Adrienne Kertzer's observation that every few years, "bestseller lists are dominated by remarkable child survival stories" (2014: 130). Reasons for this may include a need by third generation writers to explore more creative or controversial ways of narrating the wartime story. Indeed, Toby Lichtig, blogging for *The Guardian*, believes that second and third generation writers are beginning to "tire of the Shoah" (2010:1). Thus, writers, who have no affiliation whatsoever to the Holocaust, are exploring this period in new ways from their outsider perspective, thereby employing various narrative devices, like the happy-end trope, in their works. However, it is important to take note here of Rothberg's suggestion that "stories of victimized children can often lead to sentimentality" (2009: 279), and while I argue that this is not the case with Shepard's text, I believe that Weaver's text does come across as overly sentimental, which is a potential critique of her work.

In her review of *The Book of Aron*, Brooks states,

> [m]any Holocaust narratives begin with the easier, more familiar trope of a bourgeois, assimilated family, warm and prosperous, gathering for aromatic Shabbat dinners in comfortably appointed, candlelit dining rooms. The war breaks in on these happy families and drags them under,

> stage by stage, stripping away their joys in an inevitable descent through hell's concentric circles. (2015: 2)

In a way, this view may be applied to Mika and his family, although the death of Mika's father before the start of the war interrupts this idea of an assimilated and prosperous bourgeois family. Shepard, however, opposes this generic template completely. Aron is born into misery and into an impoverished and emotionally disconnected family. To begin with, there never was joy for Aron, so the war only exacerbates his misery. The overall doomed and pessimistic feel of Shepard's text is created by Aron's first-person narration of his life just before and during the establishment of the ghetto. Being young, difficult to educate, and emotionally stunted, Brooks suggests that "Shepard has … shackled himself to a severely constrained narrator" and by doing so, has had to forgo "a great many writerly tools and props … [such as] richness of vocabulary, any hint of lyricism or deep introspection, the flashy metaphor, [or] the deft allusion" (2015: 2). However, Shepard's use of the "deadpan adolescent voice [that] is never cute … never cloying" allows the reader to experience Aron's world as he experiences it: as a child living a simple life based on survival in a world where nothing surprises him anymore (Charles, 2015: 3). This simplicity is reflected in Shepard's uncomplicated narrative mode: one narrator, first-person narration throughout the book, and no changes in space and time.

Standing in contrast to this simplicity is Weaver's more complex narrative structure. The novel is divided into three parts and there is a constant shift between past and present. This achronological mode of narration can, in the words of Rothberg, "provide the narrative structure for a necessary, ethical reckoning with pasts that remain unprocessed" (2009: 279). Part One is narrated by Mika in the first person where Mika is not as constrained a narrator as Aron, mostly due to the fact that there is retrospective narration where an adult Mika possesses greater insight and a more-

developed vocabulary.[44] Parts Two and Three are narrated by an omniscient narrator where Max is the focaliser in Part Two. Thus, the novel's employment of different narrative perspectives (mainly Mika and Max) allows the reader to enter the minds of victim and perpetrator, with Weaver complicating Max's perpetrator identity by largely portraying him as a victim. Through Max's narration, Weaver allows the reader to "probe the mind of the Nazi perpetrator, a figure that in contemporary cultural imagination is often regarded as the embodiment of concrete evil" (McGlothlin, 2014: 159). Through this probing, Weaver subverts this stereotypical view of the Nazi perpetrator and permits the reader to witness a human being who is genuinely remorseful. Furthermore, I suggest that by presenting Max's suffering, Weaver, like many authors before her, relocates him "from the realm of myth into the sphere of human action and responsibility and [allows] the reader to imagine that she, too, might, under similar circumstances, become involved in the perpetration of genocide" (McGlothlin, 2014: 174). Considering that Mika and Max occupy almost equal narrative space, I argue that Weaver places Mika and Max's suffering in conversation with each other in a way that is multidirectional: Weaver ensures that both forms of historical suffering are recognised and given narrative space.

2.1 German and Jewish suffering and complicity through the lens of the gray zone

The following section is divided into two parts in which I analyse how Max Meierhauser (*The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*) and Lejkin (*The Book of Aron*) experience suffering in the ghetto and, in Max's case, the gulag. Their actions, complicity, perpetration and suffering, I argue, invite a critical reading through the lens of the gray zone.

[44] There are very few reviews on Weaver's text, however, one reviewer believes that the writing is too emotive and contrite (Ansara, 2014: n.p.).

2.1.1 Max Meierhauser: German suffering and complicity in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*

Weaver's protagonist, Max Meierhauser, is an integral character in the exploration of the gray zone.[45] Max, as a Wehrmacht soldier, is complicit in and the perpetrator of Nazi crimes in the Warsaw ghetto. The reader is first introduced to Max in Chapter 6 when he discovers Mika and his puppets. Mika attempts to help a woman caught by the Polish police and manages to diffuse the situation and help the woman escape by using one of his puppets to talk to Max and the policeman. Max begins to laugh at the scenario (an action that seems discordant with a Nazi soldier) and asks Mika to perform "the whole show" (Weaver, 2014: 68). When Mika objects, Max coerces Mika into doing so by saying, "[t]here is no but. *Komm*, follow me" (Weaver, 2014: 68) and threatens him with his gun. In Mika's very first encounter with Max, Max commands Mika to perform a puppet show for the soldiers at the barracks and just before Mika performs his play, Max says:

> 'This is your chance, boy. You make them laugh, I'll bring you back in one piece; if you bore us, you know where you're headed.' (Weaver: 2014: 74)

From this initial encounter between Max and Mika, it is easy to assume that Max is nothing more than the stereotypical figure of the coercive German soldier. He forces Mika to obey him, commands him to perform puppet shows for the German soldiers, and essentially uses him as a marionette in a perverted show of suffering.

Yet, as the novel progresses (with little textual evidence of Max perpetrating other crimes), it becomes apparent that Max's threats seem to be empty. As he gets to know Mika when walking

[45] Once again, I reiterate that although Levi uses the the gray zone to discuss members of the *Sonderkommando*, I apply the term to a German character because firstly, Levi does discuss the actions of a Nazi soldier in Auschwitz in relation to the gray zone, and secondly, the gray zone is being used in present-day literature and scholarship in relation to discussions on perpetration/ sites of violence, indicating that it is becoming a useful and widely applicable concept to a variety of situations and circumstances.

him to and from the puppet shows at the barracks, Max provides him with food and medicine for the sick children in the ghetto hospital and even protects him from other German soldiers (Weaver, 2014: 102). One night after one of the weekly puppet shows, Max offers to help Mika, which confounds him:

> Max noticed me struggling with the suitcase. 'Come, give it to me, I can carry it.' 'No.' My voice was sharp … I couldn't bring myself to trust a German's random act of kindness, even if he had given us some medicine. (Weaver, 2014: 115)

Here, Mika uses the expression "random act of kindness" as opposed to simply "kindness". This suggests that Mika is incapable, at this stage, of believing that Max can be kind and compassionate. Mika's idea of Max as the enemy is simply incongruent with his displays of kindness, and Mika cannot bring himself to trust that Max can be kind without a hidden agenda. When he sees Mika for the last time, Max asks Mika for his prince puppet (Mika's favourite puppet) to send to his son, Karl, who lives in Nuremberg, Germany. I contend that this is a significant part of the development of Max's character, as he asks for, rather than demands, the puppet. It is also an innocent exchange, as he has come to appreciate Mika and his puppetry and wants to send something home to his son. At this point, it appears as though Mika and Max will not meet again. However, towards the end of Part One of the text, as the situation in the ghetto intensifies, Max manages to rescue Mika's mother and aunt (with great personal risk) from deportation. Reflecting on this act of kindness and self-sacrifice from Max, Mika narrates:

> I felt as if I was drowning. Max was an ordinary Wehrmacht soldier, not a member of the SS, but he was also part of the deadly squad that delivered us to the *Umschlag*. And yet he had taken a risk and rescued my mother, my aunt, let me go. Why? … Was there a spark of human kindness left in him that was aching to show itself in one last gesture? (Weaver, 2014: 143)

Although Mika remains incredulous and sceptical of Max's behaviour, this extract highlights the development of Mika's perception of Max. He has moved from describing Max's 'good' deeds as

random acts of kindness to human kindness. This shift from random to human is an important one: the Nazi soldier is often portrayed as a demoniacal figure, but in this case, Weaver is emphasising Max's ability to display more than just 'random' acts of kindness. Furthermore, the word 'aching' in the excerpt is a powerful one as it conjures images of pain, discomfort, and longing. Therefore, Mika's use of this word could indicate the moral torture Max faces: on the one hand, he is expected to perform his duties diligently; and on the other, he wants to help Mika as best he can without putting himself at too much risk. Mika, reflecting on Max's behaviour, ponders: "How could we distinguish between the soldier who would remember his humanity and the one who would simply obey orders and kill?" (Weaver, 2014: 144). Once again, this typifies the gray zone where many were torn between obedience and humanity.[46] Max occupies the "vast zone of gray consciences" that is placed between the "great men of evil" and the "pure victims" (Mengoni, n.d.: 1). From Weaver's characterisation, Max is neither a pure victim nor is he a man of malevolent and sadistic evil. Max is essentially an ordinary soldier or even an ordinary German citizen. He is not depicted as a malicious, sadistic, and vindictive Nazi who kills, rapes, and destroys (Shields, 2016: 2).

However, Max cannot be exculpated of his crimes simply because he displays kindness and remorse – and I argue that Weaver is cognisant of this. He is still a member of the Wehrmacht and commits a number of crimes that lead to the death and deportation of thousands of Jewish people. Interesting to note here is how Weaver's text challenges the myth of the morally clean Wehrmacht. For decades after the war, it was believed that the Wehrmacht was not involved in war crimes, especially not those of the Special Squads. However, two German researchers recently debunked

[46] In a documentary *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the Final Solution* (2005), an ex-SS member tells the interviewer: "And if you ask yourself if this is really necessary, you say to yourself yes of course. We've been told that these are our enemies and there is a war on." Another ex-SS member says, "The order said, they're to be shot. And for me that was binding." Nothing further is given by these men, yet their comments suggest that "the crime had become for the criminals accepted, routinized, and implemented without … resistance" (Butler, 2011: n.p.). However, Max contradicts this idea, showing that, although he commits crimes that have become routinised, he is still conscious of his actions and is morally repulsed by them.

this myth when secretly recorded conversations between German prisoners of war were published (Fleischhauer, 2011: n.p.). One example of these recorded conversations reveals two German soldiers talking about the war where the one says he shot a Frenchman from behind simply because he wanted to take the Frenchman's bicycle. Another recording reveals how a fighter pilot said it was "fun" to shell crowds of people at an event in a market square (Fleischhauer, 2011: n.p.). While Weaver does not depict such activities, she portrays a much darker side of the Wehrmacht in the Warsaw ghetto. In one scene, for example, a soldier arrives at Mika's house ordering everyone out. Mika describes how a soldier kicks earth and plants from his balcony, "hitting them with [such] force" that his "face shone with sweat and satisfaction, the ugly joy of destruction" (Weaver, 2014: 132).

While Max, on the other hand, does not commit such malevolent acts, I consider Niven's argument that "… impulses of empathy do not make … exploitation anything less than exploitation" (2002: 385). The fact remains that Max exploits Mika by forcing him to perform puppet shows for German soldiers. He holds a gun to Mika's back and threatens him. He participates in the deportations, rounds up Jews, and is part of the final destruction of the ghetto. However, what defines Max's narrative is his ability to feel extreme guilt and remorse, and as the novel progresses, the reader witnesses Max's descent into despair and anguish.

After the Warsaw ghetto is destroyed, Max is captured as a prisoner of war and imprisoned in a Siberian gulag. The character that the reader (and Mika) first encounters is vastly different from the character the reader gets to know in the gulag. Throughout his imprisonment, Max becomes increasingly aware of and guilty about the crimes he committed, and because of this conscious awakening, I suggest that the gulag represents a morally torturous and psychologically damaging space for Max:

> 'But what about the Jews, the women? Don't you ever think about them?' Max's voice grew louder. 'It was wrong, all wrong. I know it was.' … 'But that's what happens in war, people die. Look, Max, we weren't SS or SA, we were just ordinary soldiers. We did what we had to do. Now give it a rest'. (Weaver, 2014: 210)

In the above excerpt, in which Max despairingly discusses what he did in the ghetto with his fellow soldiers, it is clear that Max is becoming increasingly conscious of his actions. Key in this excerpt is how Max's comrade says, "We did what we had to do", suggesting that he felt trapped in his role as a soldier and, therefore, had to be obedient to orders from above. This 'justification' for committed Nazi crimes, however, is something that Max vehemently rejects:

> 'Maybe we deserve it after the war. After Stalingrad, Warsaw, Cracow, all that killing. And whatever happened to Mika … He was the same age as my boy.' (Weaver, 2014: 208)

While she consistently highlights the perpetration of atrocities by the soldiers in the texts, Weaver spares no detail in depicting Max's and the other Germans' suffering in the gulag. This section of the text (Part Two) that is dedicated to Max's story is interestingly titled *The Prince's Journey*. Weaver's decision to name this section after Mika's favourite puppet could potentially symbolise the interweaving of Mika's and Max's narratives. This, then, could suggest that suffering is, in Rothberg's words, "woven from similar … fabrics" (Rothberg, 2011: 528). In relation to the text, this symbolises that even though Max and Mika suffer and experience hardships in different ways, their suffering is tied to the same historical setting and can be read in relation to one another.

Part Two of the text opens with a description of Max covered in "a black crawling pelt" of lice (Weaver, 2014: 193). He is on a train – or inside "bare cattle trucks" – taking him to the Siberian gulag:

> It had been snowing on the January day when the Russian tanks arrived … rolling through a ghost town … Max remembered the moment they were marched out of there … It was all over – or so he thought. For nothing

> could prepare him for the white hell of Siberia … All sense of time had slipped away. How long since they were pushed into the trucks in a cruel reversal of what they had done to the Jews? (Weaver, 2014: 194)

According to Ashely Kaplan and Herrero-Matoses, "snow relates to the resonance between dead and living and ash cannot help but evoke the Holocaust" (2014: 146). Naturally, snow is synonymous with Siberia and instead of snow being typically equated with innocence and purity, it functions as form of purgatory for Max. Snow also stands in direct contrast to ash: thus, instead of being burnt to death (as the Jewish people in the German concentration camps were), Max risks freezing to death. The paradox of Max's situation also lies in Max referring to Siberia as a white hell. Hell is usually associated with an inferno and unbearable heat, but, in Max's case, hell takes the form of sub-zero temperatures and a vast expanse of white. Thus, hell becomes subjective and possesses many forms – just like suffering.

Furthermore, the peripherality of Max's suffering is emphasised by the location of the gulag in the "white nothingness" of Siberia. As mentioned earlier, I consider German suffering during the war to be a marginal narrative, and Max's description of the gulag epitomises the peripherality of his narrative:

> A sudden jolt ended the journey, slamming the soldiers into one another … Sharp, commanding voices chased the soldiers out of the carriage. The cold hit them like a fist. Guards … growling thick-pelted dogs by their sides and a glaring … white nothingness … blinding, sky and earth swallowed up as if they had never existed. (Weaver, 2014: 197)

Max and his fellow soldiers are swallowed up by the gulag, barely existing on the periphery at the very edge of the world. Max and his fellow soldiers are trapped in the "utter boundlessness" and "limitless vastness" (Weaver, 2014: 226) of Siberia – forgotten and unreachable. For Max, the infinitude and expanse of Siberia become a place of torture, pain, and trauma. The gulag adds to Max's peripheral narrative because he is dehumanised in this icy, parallel universe where "all sense

of time" slips away (Weaver, 2014: 194). An important image Weaver uses to depict the gulag is that of a "single watchtower" that stands "like a lone chess piece" (Weaver, 2014: 200) at the "very core of the cruel, white wilderness" (Weaver, 2014: 200). This is a place of imprisonment where Max, along with his comrades, becomes a mere forgotten pawn in the callous game of war – pawns that are disposable and easily destroyed. The gulag, similar to the Warsaw ghetto, becomes a place of unbearable suffering and torture. Max and the other prisoners of war are constantly covered in lice, are fed "watery soup", and have "scarcely any bedding" (Weaver, 2014: 207). Just as the Jewish prisoners were reduced to faceless numbers in the camps, Max, too, is reduced to a number when he becomes prisoner 3587 of gulag 267 (Weaver, 2014: 201-202).[47] However, as much as I provide a comparative approach to their suffering, I reiterate that their suffering is, of course, different, as Max is taken to the gulag for the crimes he committed, whereas the Jewish people, of course, were the victims of a war they had nothing to do with.

Through the prince, Weaver employs personification to heighten Max's suffering. Max, who is freezing, starving, overworked, and fearful, turns to the puppet in his moments of greatest need. Just as the puppets were a salvation for Mika in the ghetto, the prince and other hand-made puppets become a saving grace for the soldiers in the gulag. In having the soldiers turn to puppets for entertainment and survival, Weaver depicts the German soldiers as "ordinary" (2014: 210) humans who are by no means entirely evil. Max meets one soldier named Anton, "a quiet young man who dreamed of going back to medical school" (Weaver, 2014: 206). Another soldier, Willi, is described by Max as "a quiet and sensitive man" (Weaver, 2014: 214). During inspection one day, the gulag guards find Willi has been keeping a Bible which the guards then trample on. All these

[47] I am not equating Max's suffering with Jewish suffering. I am merely highlighting the reversal of roles where Max undergoes 'similar' forms of imprisonment and punishment in the gulag.

minor descriptions of the German soldiers serve to highlight their humanity, vulnerability, and ability to display compassion for their fellow inmates.[48]

After years in the gulag, Max – aided by the prince, who,[49] in a sense, becomes Max's 'inner voice' – decides to try to escape. Along with two other soldiers, Max manages to escape the gulag without being caught. In what may be considered an 'unrealistic' part of Max's narrative, he makes it back to Nuremberg after "almost three years and a lot of luck" (Weaver, 2014: 236). He is motivated by his overwhelming desire to make it back home, believing that if he were to make it back his suffering would end. Yet this illusion is quickly shattered when he realises his son Karl, whom Max remembers as an 11-year-old boy, is now a "tall young man" (Weaver, 2014: 242) who seems as distant to him as the limitless expanse of Siberia. Max is never able to adjust fully and integrate into society. His wife, Erna, also briefly mentions her and Karl's suffering when they "lost everything … when the bombs fell" (Weaver, 2014: 244). In the end, Max's suffering – despite being home – only becomes worse. He tries to talk to Erna about Warsaw and the deportations, but she refuses to listen (Weaver, 2014: 247). He begins to believe that he is a "burden to everyone" and just a piece of discarded scrap metal (Weaver, 2014: 247-248):

> 'Thousands of us were sent to Siberia, millions they think, can you imagine? And the few of us who returned were only a ghost of our former selves. We'll never know how many died, the Russians never cared about numbers' … 'We died like flies and now nobody wants to listen.' (Weaver, 2014: 251)

In this encounter with Bert, a soldier Max meets at home, Bert agonises over the fact that Germany never cared about their fate. In the end, Max finally comes to the realisation that "he would never

[48] For example, Max's only photograph of his wife and son is torn up by the guards and Anton, one of the prisoners, puts his hand on Max's shoulder, telling him how sorry he is that this has happened to him (Weaver, 2014: 214).
[49] I use the human qualifier 'who' in relation to the prince because this puppet becomes personified. It is as if Mika and Max live through the puppet where the prince takes on their fears and encourages them to be fearless and to remain brave.

be free of the past but would always carry the ghetto in his soul, next to gulag 267 and his home town of Nuremberg, which lay in ruins" (Weaver, 2014: 252). The above extract perhaps highlights how the discussion of German suffering in the years after the war ended belonged mainly to the private and familiar spheres, and how talking about their suffering was overshadowed and deemed taboo in the wake of the aftermath of the Holocaust. Furthermore, the text also points to the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*[50] where Bert and Max try to come to terms with what happened but inevitably fail due to a lack of support and having nobody willing to listen to their story of suffering.

Max's narrative of suffering essentially portrays him as a victim for whom the reader feels sympathy. However, Max's constant struggle with his guilty conscience reminds the reader that despite his victimhood, he is still a perpetrator and experiences this emotional and mental anguish because of the crimes he has committed. While the reader may potentially empathise with Max and, in many ways, 'understand' what he did, his exploitation, perpetration, and complicity remain just that and can neither be 'weakened' nor exculpated. Rothberg suggests that the "rhetoric of complicity [is] both a form of binding and a degree of distance: to be complicit is to be responsible" (2009: 250). He further proposes that complicity "suggests an *ethical* binding distinct from *legal* guilt, although they can surely overlap" (2009: 250). Therefore, regarding his complicity, Max is guilty of the crimes he commits – be it murder, setting a flat alight, or assisting in deportations. However, he is also complicit in the greater scheme of Nazism – i.e. he is therefore complicit, by default, in racism and xenophobia. Rothberg further suggests that recognition of complicity can be linked to "solidarity across differences" (2009: 250). In this case, Max, in recognising his guilt,

[50] Translated as "overcoming the past", *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* is typically associated with Germany's process of coming to terms with its history of National Socialism and the Holocaust (DW, 2018).

attempts to break the complicity he sees around him in the ghetto and gulag by performing acts of solidarity, such as his relationship with Mika.

According to Krimmer, "the effort to shine a compassionate glimmer on Germans as victims of World War II is an attempt to turn the spotlight away from the average German as perpetrator", thereby exculpating him in some sense (2008: 272). In an interview, Weaver states that Max is able to acknowledge his guilt, which points to a Bildungsroman-type of development and, as mentioned above, the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Naturally, "the discourse of victimization is problematic" (Krimmer, 2008: 272), and this is arguably the case with Max's narrative. Weaver has painted him as a complex character, and it is perhaps easy for the reader to feel sympathy for him. This can, therefore, detract from the horrific crimes he either committed or was an accomplice to. However, I maintain that discussing Max's suffering only occurs in relation to Mika's in a way that is multidirectional – i.e. Max's story does not exist in isolation, and Weaver has used Jewish suffering as a starting point to discuss Max's narrative. I conclude part one of this section by arguing that as a German soldier and, therefore, the perceived enemy, Max's suffering is both a peripheral and controversial one that is still worthy of recognition. Weaver captures this idea succinctly where she states: "I could have written two separate books, but I felt that these stories somehow belonged together and together would create a more powerful story" (Weaver, 2014: 327).

2.1.2 The yellow in the gray: Jewish complicity in *The Book of Aron*

In this section, I move from German to Jewish complicity because I argue that Shepard has added a bold and interesting dimension to his text by challenging the idea that Jewish people were the

ultimate victims.[51] Moreover, both Max and Lejkin[52] display similar characteristics and operate under similar circumstances in the Warsaw ghetto. Important to note here is that I do not intend to equate Lejkin to Max (as this would oppose the concept of multidirectional memory). I simply explore their complicity through a comparative reading of the texts. Lejkin is a member of the Jewish Order Service (or the Yellow Police) in the ghetto, meaning that he has some authority and influence. Historically, the Jewish Order Service police units were recruited by German authorities to perform certain duties, such as fetching people for forced labour, guarding the ghetto walls and gates, conducting random round-ups of Jewish people to be sent to labour camps, and participating in the deportations to concentration camps (Holocaust Research Project, 2008: 1). Like Max who 'chooses' Mika to 'look out for', Lejkin finds Aron and protects him to a certain extent – although this protection comes at a price when Aron's fellow smuggler is killed. However, unlike Max, Lejkin tends to draw little sympathy from the reader. Yet despite this lack of sympathy, it is important to keep in mind that Lejkin, as a Jewish man imprisoned in the Warsaw ghetto, is a victim himself and subjected to the abnormal and extreme pressures of life in the ghetto.

One of the first incidents where the reader witnesses both the depravity and 'helpfulness'[53] of Lejkin is when Aron's older brothers are rounded up and forced to join work battalions. As the brothers are being marched along in the ghetto with other victims, Aron notices Lejkin and attempts to save his brothers by offering Lejkin money.

> 'Look who it is,' Lejkin said when I fell into step alongside him … 'But I also have a deal for you.' I showed him the money I held inside my coat.

[51] This links to the idea that Jewish people were the ultimate victims and, therefore, could not be perpetrators. Levi discusses Jewish complicity typified by Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski who was the controversial head of the Jewish council in the Łódź ghetto. The story of the Łódź ghetto is an infamous one because "administered by the Jews themselves under the control of the monstrous Jewish elder Mordechai Chaim Rumkowski, it became a major source of supply for the German war machine" (Calllil: 2011: n.p.).
[52] Jakub Lejkin was a real-life historical figure who briefly took over the Jewish Order Service in the Warsaw ghetto (Holocaust Research Project, 2008: 5).
[53] This paradox of depravity and helpfulness epitomises the gray zone, as this zone is itself a paradox of good and evil, of perpetration and victimhood.

> 'Who's being saved?' he asked. I pointed out my brothers a few rows up … 'And what's in it for me?' he added … He let us march another street just to let me suffer. (Shepard, 2016: 72)

From this excerpt, it is evident that Lejkin is not a very likable character. As much as he helps Aron by rescuing his brothers, he does so for selfish gain. He deliberately makes Aron suffer and uses him for various other activities as the novel progresses. Here, under the stress and intensity of suffering in the ghetto, Lejkin begins to wield power against his own people. I argue that his character can be linked to Levi's description of the gray zone in *The Drowned and the Saved.* Analysing how victims, mostly Jewish, behaved in the concentration camps, Levi (1989: 40) discusses how victims themselves became perpetrators, especially ones who were considered 'privileged'. Some prisoners became "low-ranking functionaries" whose tasks included checking for lice and scabies, smoothing beds, washing kettles, and performing the roles of interpreters or night watchmen (Levi, 1989: 44). Levi goes on to describe how these 'privileged' prisoners, who were "coarse and arrogant", were essentially the same as every other prisoner who would meet the same fate. The only difference was that they were 'prepared' to carry out these "tertiary functions" for extra food rations (Levi, 1989: 44). Lejkin, I suggest, is like these prisoner-functionaries, as he is willing to collaborate with the enemy to further his chances of survival. He too is coarse and arrogant but not necessarily regarded as the enemy, an assertion made by Levi in relation to the prisoner-functionaries (Levi, 1989: 45).

One of the more sinister moments in the text is when Lejkin manipulates Aron into telling him where he (Aron) will be smuggling as he has his own quotas of finding smugglers to fill.[54] Ironically, in this moment, Aron unwittingly becomes complicit in a Nazi crime. By telling Lejkin

[54] To contextualise this scene briefly, Lejkin asks Aron to help him because he (Lejkin) helped rescue Aron's brothers (something Lejkin calls "tit for tat" [Shepard, 2016: 140]). Lejkin needs to fill quotas, meaning that he needs to find smugglers and bring them to the German police. Aron then tells Lejkin where he and Lutek (his fellow smuggler) would likely be and "an hour later two blue policemen" catch Aron and Lutek carrying a sack of turnips and throw them in the back of a car (Shepard, 2016: 140).

where he and his friend Lutek are likely to be smuggling because he is afraid of what Lejkin will do if he says no, Aron signs Lutek up for a premature death sentence, which is depicted in the following excerpt:

> We couldn't tell if they understood Polish. Lutek said to them, 'Are you really going to kill me over some turnips?' and the German who'd pushed him shot him … The other German was so upset by the noise I made that he knocked me to the ground. (Shepard, 2016: 136)

Lutek is killed, while Aron is spared thanks to his forced connection to Lejkin. Here, Aron displays the typical characteristics of the gray zone: out of fear of what Lejkin would do to him if he did not tell him where he and Lutek would be smuggling, Aron, acting out under an extraordinary situation of stress, gives Lejkin the power to arrest the two teenage boys, which ultimately leads to Lutek's brutal and unnecessary death. Bourgois summarises the gray zone as "a morally ambiguous space of structurally imposed mutual betrayal where victims are forced to collaborate with the enemy in order to survive" (2005: 102). Applying this description here, it is clear that Aron, although unwittingly, betrays Lutek because he is essentially forced into telling Lejkin where he and Lutek would be smuggling. There is essentially a "bond of complicity" (Levi quoted in Card, 2000: 514) that has formed between Lejkin and Aron, even if Aron does not know about or understand it. The above excerpt also highlights the inability of all parties involved to understand or make sense of anything anymore because the world of the ghetto, to quote from Levi's reference to the Lagers, is simply "indecipherable" (Levi, 1989: 38). In this case, this "indecipherable" world is reflected (by referring to the above excerpt) in the German policeman being linguistically unable to understand Aron and Lutek. They also fail to acknowledge the desperate noise, devoid of language, that Aron makes. The one German is so overwhelmed by the indecipherable noise that Aron makes that all he can do is knock Aron to the ground. The idea that

Germans (and Lekjin) readily and willingly killed Lutek over turnips suggests a world devoid of any sense and moral comprehension.

In one of Aron's last encounters with Lejkin, Lejkin tells him that he needs to be selfish and possess a measure of self-preservation in order for a few to survive. As Lejkin emphatically states, "[a]re we to dole out spoonfuls to everyone, with the result that no will survive? Or give a fuller measure to the few?" (Shepard, 2016: 170). At this point, I suggest that although Lejkin is selfish and largely only thinks of himself and his survival, he is, to an extent, both resourceful and tactical. He understands that "refugees are like autumn leaves" (Shepard, 2016: 171) with only a few able to survive the impending winter (i.e. the totality of death and war). Whereas Max develops his conscience and a sense of guilt throughout the text, Lejkin never endears himself to his readers. He seems to possess very little emotion and guilt for his actions and is willing to exploit Aron so that he may escape the wrath of the Gestapo. In order to save himself (or so he believes), Lejkin becomes both complicit in and a perpetrator of Nazi crimes. Stuart contends that Lejkin's "instinct for self-preservation is only exceeded by the impulse to emulate the enemy he serves"[55] (2015: 3). In one particular scene, he leads the Gestapo directly to a Jewish woman the Germans want to execute. Lejkin is thus a perpe*traitor* to his own people, which points to both his character and his moral ambiguity as he is willing to betray his own people and perpetrate crimes against them in an attempt to save himself.

From the above discussion of Max and Lejkin, it is clear that *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* and *The Book of Aron* complicate the idea that Germans were the sadistic tormentors during the war and that Jewish people were vulnerable and helpless victims. Whereas Weaver's text emphatically

[55] In the words of Levi, "an infernal order such as National Socialism exercises a frightful power of corruption, against which it is difficult to guard oneself. It degrades its victims and makes them similar to itself, because it needs both great and small complicities" (1989: 68).

highlights the idea that Germans could be more than just sadistic tormentors, Shepard spares no detail in describing the atrocities committed by Jewish people against their own kind. To conclude this section, my reading of Max and Lejkin through the lens of the gray zone shows that the texts provide useful examples of the workings of multidirectional memory. In the words of Mary Honan, "it is clear that the Third Reich had monstrous consequences for so many of all nationalities, ethnic backgrounds, religious persuasions, and those with no religious beliefs" (2017: 4). I use Honan's quote to emphasise the multidirectional nature of the texts: all the characters, whether German, Jewish, religious, or atheist, can be read through the lens of the gray zone in an empathetic manner because they were all subjected to exceptional circumstances and unthinkable suffering. Through discussing the perpetrator and the victim and how they navigate life in the Warsaw ghetto, I maintain that these two texts give different perspectives on both perpetration and suffering, thereby allowing the reader to recognise varying perspectives on suffering and survival during the wartime period.

2.2 We were faceless characters, like ghosts: The dispossessed children of the ghetto

In this section, I analyse how Weaver and Shepard portray the peripherality of their child protagonists. Yet, before my discussion of this section begins, it is crucial to emphasise that although Mika and Aron are Jewish and thus victimised and tormented by German soldiers, their narratives are essentially part of the periphery because they are children of no particular significance who, through the course of the texts, become orphaned. Importantly, both texts do not deal with the concentration camps explicitly, and they detail the narrative of children during the

greater scheme of war and point to a suffering that is not just Jewish – it is a suffering of orphaned children whether they are popular (like Mika) or ostracised (like Aron).

The child's point of view in Holocaust literature is often associated with being limited in perspective due to its world view still being in a state of flux and impressionable (Reiter, 2000: 3). For example, the child's interpretation of its perceptions is not guided by logic (Reiter, 2000: 3), and according to Katrien Vloeberghs, "[t]he narratological choice for a child perspective is one of the most complex strategies of alienation in literary texts about the Holocaust" (2009: 52). Furthermore, Aharon Appelfeld, quoted in Reiter (2000: 1), argues that child survivors simply cannot recollect the Holocaust the way adults do due to their limited experience. Moreover, the child figure is often associated with innocence, ignorance, "speechless vulnerability",[56] and "an unstable relationship to temporality" (Vloeberghs, 2009: 53). These qualities stand in stark contrast to the "calculated violence of the Holocaust" and to "time mercilessly running out" (Vloeberghs, 2009: 53). Both Aron and Mika are young boys when the reader is first introduced to them but instead of the texts detailing their coming-of-age and journey into adulthood, the young boys' agencies are "being subverted into a dark reality of extreme powerlessness and indifferent death" (Vloeberghs, 2009: 53-54). This extreme powerlessness and indifference to death is particularly applicable to Aron who is completely and utterly defeated just before Korczak rescues him. Both boys are also propelled into adulthood prematurely where they have to take on adult responsibilities even though they are still children (Vloeberghs, 2009: 56).

[56] Although I have already discussed the narrative techniques of the texts at the beginning of this chapter, it is important to highlight further key aspects of Shepard's use of Aron as the novel's narrator. According to Nick Romeo, the "bare prose style reflects [Aron's] dazed psychology" (2015: 1). He narrates in "simple, visually evocative sentences that barely register the distinction between, say, stealing a turnip and watching his father get beaten" (Romeo: 2015: 4). Thus, the "blunted and spare" language Shepard uses depicts Aron's desensitisation to a world stripped of all meaning and sense (Romeo, 2015: 4).

In both texts, Aron and Mika become orphaned. Abandoned children and orphans have been a recurring and prominent theme in literature for centuries (for example, in fairy tales such as *Cinderella* (1698) and *Hansel and Gretel* (1812); *Jane Eyre* (1847), *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), and, more recently, Harry Potter in the renowned *Harry Potter* series (1997-2007)). According to Cecilia Friis, orphaned protagonists are typically children who grow up outside of the nuclear family, without parents, and the way in which they are depicted often creates a feeling of sympathy and admiration for these children (2013: 1). Poverty, isolation, and despair are typical characteristics of the orphaned child where he or she is dispossessed and neglected. However, it is these conditions that often push the characters into becoming something more (Friiss, 2013: 3). As Friis highlights, orphaned characters in literature usually overcome adverse circumstances and develop into heroes or heroines (2013: 1). While Weaver's text perhaps falls in line with this typical theme of the heroic orphan where Mika's journey ends with a happy ending, Shepard's text does not. Although Aron does overcome certain challenges and develops as a character (in fact, he may even be considered as a heroic character at the end), the reader never gets to witness what becomes of him and assumes that his life ends in Treblinka. In this sense, Shepard's text, which neither takes the sentimental nor happy-end approach, can be considered as more realistic than Weaver's.

Throughout Shepard's text, Aron is characterised as "a perfect nobody of a kid" (Ferris, 2015: 1). He wholly fits the description of Otherness with his seemingly insignificant ways: he is the family's scapegoat, the subject of constant verbal and emotional abuse, always landing up in risky situations, and a "something that ha[s] been raised in the wild" (Shepard, 2016: 3). The word "wild" itself suggests Otherness and alienation, and in this sense, Aron is like a dispossessed cub, shunned by his family (Ferris, 2015: 1). Throughout the text, Aron is constantly told he is disliked

and made to feel useless and insignificant. He frequently hides behind a "rubbish pile" (Shepard, 2016: 2) whenever he witnesses his parents and brothers fighting, and his father tells Aron's mother that even "if God gave [Aron] a second or third life [he'd] still understand nothing" (Shepard, 2016: 3). Nick Romeo describes Aron as "the sort of anarchic and undomesticated boy who would be dubbed a rapscallion in the lexicon of Mark Twain" (2015: 1). He is essentially a paragon of dispossession and disembodiment. He loses all his family members, never makes any true or lasting friendships, and is not particularly good at anything.

His dispossession and suffering are made complete in the following excerpt:

> I was a thief that caretakers and porters chased away from their doorways with sweeps of their brooms … When I went out for food starving people slipped out of dark corners and followed me and when one beggar got hold of something the rest of the pack knocked him down and ripped what he had from his hands and then others stole it from them … I tried to make myself invisible but kids who had nowhere to go were everywhere … (Shepard, 2016: 145)

Aron is no longer 'someone' to 'somebody' and is reduced to a thief, beggar, and a starving, rabid animal. He is swept away like the dust on someone's doorstep and is victimised by other children and beggars just like him. He is a defenceless animal amid a 'pack of wolves' trying to stave off the hunger for a few more hours. Aron becomes the embodiment of everything '-less': defenceless, homeless, parentless, countless. He is simply another kid, another beggar, wandering aimlessly "without a plan" (Shepard, 2016: 145).

Up until Aron is rescued by Korczak, Shepard underlines how Aron is consistently a victim of bullying by the very people he considers his friends. For example, in one of the novel's more vivid scenes, Boris, one of the smugglers of similar age to Aron, tells Aron to accompany him on a mission. Boris intends to get revenge on a rival smuggling gang for stealing their goods and wants Aron to help him punish the leader of the rival gang. On the mission, Aron is oblivious to what is

about to take place. He keeps asking Boris what will happen, but Boris refuses to answer. After performing his role of guiding the leader to Boris, Aron witnesses him swing a brick at the leader of the rival gang, knocking him to the sidewalk. Boris then dumps him in a cellar, picks up another brick, and hits him again, which, to Aron, sounds like "a shovel going into dirt" (Shepard, 2016: 103). Aron is shaken up by the event and screams at Boris: "What did you *do*?"(Shepard, 2016: 103). He is incredulous when Boris walks away, but similarly leaves the injured boy behind,[57] perhaps indicating his lack of courage and inability to stand up to Boris.

Aron is an incredibly humble child who has internalised what others have said about him. For the most part of the novel, he is treated as unimportant and no one of any significance. At one stage, he says in front of Korczak that he has "never been useful" and "can't make up for what [he has] done" (Shepard, 2016: 224). It is ultimately Korczak who 'adopts' Aron and makes him feel special, worthy, and important. At the very end of the text when they are about to be deported and Aron cannot stop wailing, shaking, and jabbering (Shepard, 2016: 238), Korczak bends down to Aron in a fatherly manner and tells him his Declaration of Children's Rights:

> "The child has the right to respect," he said. "The child has the right to develop. The child has the right to be. The child has the right to grieve. The child has the right to learn. And the child has the right to make mistakes" (Shepard, 2016: 238).

In doing this for Aron, Korczak empowers him and makes him feel loved and respected – something that he has rarely experienced in his short life. These rights have been denied Aron since his introduction to the reader, and it is significant that this is how the book ends. Aron, although presumably about to die, is finally given the attention and understanding he has so

[57] Due to the word limit of this dissertation, I only discuss how Aron and Mika, as orphaned children, suffer. I am aware of the complicity of both Aron and Mika, which is highlighted, for example, in this scene. Aron understands that what Boris has done is wrong, but he is unable to act and do the right thing by helping the injured boy.

desperately needed. Korczak, as an actual historical figure, places his orphaned children on a pedestal and becomes the "father of orphans", working "for those who should come first but always came last" (Shepard, 2016: 165).

Like Aron, Mika too loses his family, although he has Ellie, his lover and confidante, right up until the end of the destruction of the ghetto. Unlike Aron, however, Mika is neither aimless nor without a plan, and although similar in certain ways, Mika's suffering is quite different to Aron's. Mika comes to realise that his "puppets infuse [him] with energy, purpose and even morsels of joy" (Weaver, 2014: 61):

> From that day I didn't go out without my coat and the puppets and a plan grew in me like a seed germinating in the dark, a seed that instinctively knows that someday it will break through into the sun and grow to its size. (Weaver, 2014: 61)

Despite all the setbacks, tragedies, and trials Mika experiences in the ghetto, it is evident that he displays a profound resilience and is a constant cultivator of hope – qualities that Aron lacks. He performs puppet shows for the children of Korczak's orphanage and for the sick children in the ghetto's dilapidated hospital. He smuggles infants to the other side and joins a resistance force during the final days of the ghetto's existence. He possesses a fighting spirit and courage that sees him survive the war and ultimately make a life for himself and his family in New York City. Where Shepard has created a doomed character in Aron who has very little to no hope, Weaver has taken the opposite approach by ensuring her protagonist survives the war through intelligent, brave, and (in many instances) morally superior actions.[58] However, despite these qualities, Mika still remains an orphan after the war's ending.

[58] However, there are instances in the text where Mika is complicit in crimes. For example, towards the end of Mika's narrative in the dying days of the Warsaw ghetto, Mika wants nothing but murderous revenge on the Germans, driven by pure hatred (Weaver,

At this point, it is also important to highlight the similarities in the suffering of Aron and Mika. As I have already mentioned, Rothberg emphasises that history is "relational and … woven from similar, but not identical fabrics" (2011: 528). Thus, while it is clear that Aron's and Mika's histories are woven from the same fabric, their stories, suffering, and how they have survived tragedies are also unique to themselves and their circumstances. Just before the ghetto uprising, Mika describes his and Ellie's situation:

> I can't remember much about the next few weeks. We hid in another flat, scurrying about like stray dogs, searching out any scraps of food that people might have left behind … 'Damn it, doesn't the world know what's happening to us? And what about the people on the other side of the wall? They could see into the ghetto, they saw us being taken away.' (Weaver, 2014: 154)

Similar to Aron's suffering, Mika also describes himself in animalistic terms, saying that he has become like an abandoned and homeless stray doing its best to survive on scraps and morsels of food. Mika, too, has lost all of his immediate family members, yet he is driven to survive and fight against the German soldiers. Where Aron plays a largely passive role by accepting his fate and doing little to change the outcome, Mika challenges authority and constantly questions the morality of people and the crimes of the Germans.

Mika appears to be a more courageous and determined character than Aron – an attempt by Weaver to show that even when those in the ghetto were in their "deepest despair", people still managed to rise up and "risk their daily lives to help each other" (Weaver, 2014: 326). Moreover, Mika often uses his puppets as a means to communicate, highlighting (as Weaver states) the "power of the arts to strengthen the human spirit even in the most horrendous circumstances" (Weaver, 2014:

2014: 167). Here the reader witnesses the paradox of Mika's character. He risks his life on numerous occasions to smuggle babies out of the ghetto in an attempt to give them a future; yet he is also driven by a bitter desire to kill the German soldiers.

326). While both Mika and Aron are of similar age (their early teens), one gets the impression that Mika is mature and wise for his age. However, this could be due to the differing narrative devices employed by the two authors: Shepard recreates the linguistic register of a young boy with little education, whereas Weaver employs an adult narrator, Mika, who retrospectively narrates his story to his grandson. Yet through Mika's eyes, it is evident that the child Mika is constantly and painfully aware of his surroundings:

> When I turned into Krochmalna Street, I saw a thin arm sticking out from under some newspaper like a dry branch. My stomach heaved and I began to run as fast as I could. What would happen to all these people? … Or would they end up in a hole, thrown in with other bodies, covered with chalk, no one even remembering their names? (Weaver, 2014: 50)

Looking at these excerpts, it is clear that Mika is acutely cognisant of the suffering of those around him. Whereas Aron is depicted as a young boy and quite child-like in nature, Mika appears to be more adult-like psychologically and emotionally. This may be due to the adult Mika narrating his past (and, therefore, recalling and remembering situations from a different, more adult-like perspective),[59] or Weaver may be deliberately portraying Mika as a defiant and resilient character in order to give a louder, bolder voice to the child figure. On a closer reading of Weaver's text, it becomes evident that many of the children, who make a prominent appearance throughout the course of the novel, display a profound sense of courage and resilience. For example, Mika comes across a young orphan, who is about five years old, named Hannah. When he first sees her, he calls her an "it" and compares her to a "nervous dog" rummaging for food. He then moves away from this comparison, individualises her, and gets to know her as a fiery young girl with a talent for

[59] Once again, this highlights the difficulties inherent in having a child narrator. As I have discussed above, the child narrator is often associated with having a limited perspective.

puppeteering. Once again, Weaver's child characters are older and wiser for their age, with Hannah being incredibly smart for her mere five years.

In his review of Nicholas Stargardt's *Witnesses of War*, David Cesarani speaks of how the "war disrupted children's lives differently" and made them suffer in ways that were not necessarily identical or for the same reasons (2005: 2). This is true of both Aron and Mika: although they are both Polish Jewish children living in the Warsaw ghetto, the way they suffer and cope with the stressors and trauma of living under the Nazi regime are vastly different. At one point, Boris tells Aron that nobody likes him – an assertion with which Adina (a girl in the smuggling gang) agrees. He is also repeatedly called 'Sh'maya' because he "only thinks of himself" (Shepard, 2016: 95) according to his family, Boris, and Lutek. Yet as Shepard's text evolves, it becomes clearer that Aron is a remarkable character in many ways (akin to Mika). Brooks (2015: 3) echoes this sentiment too where she suggests that because of Korczak, Aron becomes brave and empathetic – qualities that were there all along. Where Mika, in an attempt to do good and 'atone' for performing for the German soldiers, helps to smuggle babies out of the ghetto, Aron fervently tries to save Korczak:

> 'You might be able to get *everyone* out,' I said. 'So I should leave them here, all by themselves, in this place?' he asked me. 'I'll watch them. You could hurry,' I said … 'Please,' I said … '*Listen* to me,' I shouted. (Shepard, 2016: 237)

In this final scene, Aron pleads and tries frantically to persuade Korczak to leave the *Umschlagplatz* and save himself. Here, the reader witnesses Aron's fight for Korczak's life, even though he (Aron) knows death awaits him. Both Aron and Mika are inimitable protagonists with their own idiosyncrasies and ways of dealing with their traumatic circumstances. And although the texts are comparable in numerous ways; they provide an example of how different forms of

suffering can be brought into conversation with each other without negation, denial, or competition. Furthermore, I argue that Weaver and Shepard have created characters who are Othered not only on the basis of being Jewish but individually by the people closest to them – particularly in Aron's case. This Othering, combined with Aron's and Mika's orphaned status, contributes to their peripherality and marginalisation, once again drawing attention to the historically irrelevant and faceless child of the war. In putting *The Book of Aron* in conversation with *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*, Rothberg's concept of multidirectional memory becomes largely applicable, as both Mika and Aron share a similar yet unique suffering that is equally tragic and moving.

2.3 The transmission of memory in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*

Having discussed German suffering and the suffering of the Other embodied in the orphaned child figure, it is also important to consider briefly one other aspect of the text that makes it multidirectional, namely generational transmission of memory. In *Multidirectional Memory*, Rothberg discusses a multidirectional text (*Meurtres pour mémoire* [1991]) that uses the "foregrounding of children" to highlight "the question of generation and intergenerational transmission" (2009: 278). In Weaver's text, the transmission of trauma and guilt from the first to the third generation of German families is embodied in Max's, Karl's (Max's son), and Mara's (Max's granddaughter) narratives. Mara comes to know of Max's past through the puppets. Every year, Max gives Mara a new puppet on her birthday (Weaver, 2014: 259) and through stories of his life and the puppets, Mara is able to see behind Max's 'mask' and recognise his pain (Weaver, 2014: 260). Just before his death, Max asks Karl to give Mara the prince puppet, and as she grows up, she begins to unearth Germany's dark past. Confused and overwhelmed, she approaches her father one evening:

> 'God, Mara, all this happened such a long time ago! And you're a young girl, you had nothing to do with this dark time.' 'But I'm German, I'm made from the same blood and bone as the people who created those camps, aren't I? How could this have happened?' (Weaver, 2014: 268)

These questions fuel Mara's determination to find out more about her father's and grandfather's past. She questions herself too, wondering what she would have done had she been alive during the war. Then one night, Karl finally tells Mara about what happened. Without using euphemisms to tell the story of German suffering (Lüneberg, 2014: 2), Weaver has Karl narrate his experiences and memories of the dying days of the war. He talks of how he was in and out of bomb shelters, how the Allies bombed his hometown in 1942 and 1943, and how his mother, Erna, saved his life. He was ordered to join the army during the last few months of the war, and in order to protect him, Erna took him away and they went into hiding. They were considered deserters, traitors of the Fatherland, and if they were caught, they would have been killed by their own people:

> 'One day we came across an orchard. Mother tried to pull me away but I had already seen it: four bodies … swaying in the wind with cardboard signs around their necks bearing the word *Deserter!* (Weaver, 2014: 271)

After narrating his experience of the war, Karl tells Max's story to Mara. At the end, he tells her about Mika and how Max wanted to find him. Decades later, after working as a nurse, Mara returns to her beloved puppets and decides to become a puppeteer. From her research and based on Max's information, Mara recreates Mika's story and develops *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* play, which she gets to perform in New York City. She also manages to track down Mika, although by the time she finds him, he is on his deathbed. However, in a series of events leading to the end of the novel, the text brings Mika's suffering and his family's history of suffering into an engaging conversation with Mara's history of guilt and quest for atonement.

Mara manages to meet Daniel, Mika's grandson, and although Mara is initially defensive and Daniel angry, they engage in a constructive and emotional conversation about the past and their experiences growing up as children of grandparents who lived through and fought in the war. In the final scene of the text, Mara visits Mika at the hospital where she meets Mika's daughter, Hannah, as well. Hannah embraces her, and this act of kindness makes Mara feel as though a "taboo" has been broken (Weaver, 2014: 306). I read this use of the word "taboo" as the breaking of German silence about suffering during the war and the ability for two perceived enemies (German and Jewish families) to come together and share meaningful discourse about their respective histories of suffering in an empathetic and respectful manner. In the end, the reader assumes that Mika dies surrounded by his family, Mara, and the prince puppet – a symbol of the interweaving of histories and the ability for generations to move forward united, rather than divided, in their suffering. Once again, I emphasise Weaver's sentimental or happy-end approach to the text. Discussions of memories of suffering are never straight-forward and will not always end in resolution, forgiveness, or a sense of having moved forward or moved on. As Rothberg highlights in an interview with Philippe Mesnard (2016: 26), there will always be conflicts or competition between memories to a certain extent, but it is these very conflicts and competitions that can be productive, as Weaver has demonstrated in her text.

2.4 Conclusion

> I was shocked to hear about the extent of just how many German soldiers had been taken to Siberia after the end of the war. As many as one million are estimated to have perished in the Siberian gulags … This is a different side of this terrible war that I felt I wanted to attend to as well. (Weaver, 2014: 327)

Nolan argues that "[s]ince 2002 German suffering, rather than German guilt, has become the principal theme in discourses about the past" (2008: 7). Written 12 years later, Weaver's text is

indicative of the continued need to address how Germans suffered during the war. What is distinctive about *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* is that Weaver does not solely focus on Max's suffering and trauma: she also deals with important questions of guilt and shame, and Max's narration and moral conflict all point to the concept of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*. Max exemplifies this concept because he is morally, emotionally, and psychologically conflicted. He is trying to process what happened, come to terms with his guilt, and atone for his crimes. He believes in his duty to the Fatherland but is not without a conscience, and through Mika, Max becomes unable to continue to see a "homogenous mass of Jews" (Weaver, 2014: 314). However, more important to point out is how Weaver gives equal voice to victim and perpetrator. In an interview about her novel, Weaver states, "Germany and its people, as well as Jews everywhere, will forever carry this wound … I believe that the only way forward is genuine, open dialogue, an exploration on both sides of how Jews and German non-Jews have been affected by the Holocaust and the horrors of the Second World War" (quoted in Moore, 2014: 4). Weaver believes that there is a continued need for open dialogue and exploration of both narratives of suffering and trauma, which is something she has, I contend, achieved in her novel. This is both Mika's story and Max's story and both stories carry equal historical significance in her text. I maintain that she does not pit German suffering against Jewish suffering and provides a useful example of a multidirectional text in which she brings two histories "into relation without erasing their differences or fetishizing their uniqueness" (Rothberg, 2011: 527). Both texts, I argue, offer unique perspectives and insight into life during and after the Third Reich, particularly in relation to the perpetrator and victim.

With reference to both texts, I quote from John Boyne, author of the acclaimed Holocaust novel, *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* (2014):

> In April 2004 an image came into my mind of two boys sitting on either side of a fence. I knew they had been taken away from their homes and

> friends and brought, separately, to a terrible place. Neither of them knew what they were doing there, but I did, and it was the story of these two boys … that I wanted to tell. It's the responsibility of the [Holocaust] writer to uncover as much emotional truth within that desperate landscape as he possibly can. The lost voices must continue to be recounted. For they represent the ones who didn't live to tell the stories themselves. (Boyne, n.p.: 2014)

Like Boyne, both Shepard and Weaver have undeniably told the story of the "lost voices" of World War II. While Weaver's story is more sentimental and hopeful, both texts, however, have uncovered much emotional truth within the desperate landscape of the Warsaw ghetto and Siberian gulag. The aim of this chapter was to explore how *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* and *The Book of Aron* may be used as examples in the discussion of multidirectional memory despite their detailing of World War II narratives. While the following two chapters discussing *All the Light We Cannot See* and *The Book Thief* are primarily centred on the ordinary German figure as a peripheral World War II figure, this chapter focussed extensively on both the figure of the ordinary Wehrmacht soldier and the figure of the Other embodied in the dispossessed children of the Warsaw ghetto and how they have each suffered in different ways. Lastly, this chapter has evaluated how these texts provide a site for potential productive discussion on how the Holocaust narrative can be reframed to include other World War II histories of violence and suffering.

Chapter 3:

The intersection of French and German histories of suffering and perpetration of war crimes in Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See*

> … Doerr's novel spotlights history in vivid primary colours. He makes us not only see but also feel the desolation and barbarism of war … This new novel imagines the unseen grace, the unseen light that, occasionally, surprisingly, breaks to the surface even in the worst of times. – Dan Cryer, 2014, *San Francisco Chronicle*

Anthony Doerr's Pulitzer prize-winning novel *All the Light We Cannot See* (2014) is an intriguing story that details the narratives of two ordinary children during World War II: a young, blind, French girl fighting for survival in the small town of Saint-Malo in France during its occupation by the Germans and a talented orphaned German boy drafted as a Wehrmacht soldier and sent to the front to trace illegal radio transmissions. Doerr's novel is rich in complexity, questions of morality, and different forms of historical suffering. The text is a representation of the untold narratives of World War II and brings peripheral narratives to the fore in its detailing of insignificant towns and marginal characters. As the title suggests, the text focusses on telling the marginalised or more 'forgotten' stories of suffering during the war – i.e. all those 'lights' we can no longer see. It is a novel that depicts how light or grace can be found in the darkness of wartime (Maslin, 2014: 1) – an idea that Marie-Laure in particular epitomises. Despite being unable to see and, therefore, engulfed in a world of literal and figurative darkness, she is still able to 'see' the light, grace, and innocence in the people and places around her. As a child, who is regarded as 'disabled', Marie-Laure is, in the context of this novel, an archetypal example of a peripheral narrative or 'unseen light'. Furthermore, it is her very blindness that acutely "spotlights history in vivid primary colours" (Cryer, 2014: 1): how she thinks and what she 'sees' and describes using her hands allows the reader to imagine the war from an atypical or singular perspective. One would imagine everything to be enveloped in blackness or darkness for Marie-Laure, but her descriptions

of the small world around her bring the town and its inhabitants, many of them sacrificial and defiant, to life. In order to navigate her way around, Marie-Laure uses her fingers and other senses. This, I argue, is an interesting narrative technique that makes the reader feel, rather than the see, the barbarism of a war that engulfs its children in darkness and extinguishes their light.

This chapter is therefore concerned with exploring and analysing the peripheral narratives of Marie-Laure and Werner Pfennig. Courtney Maum, in an interview with Doerr, comments on how *All the Light We Cannot See* "oscillates between the viewpoints of Marie-Laure … and Werner" and is "peopled with the voices of so many other characters" (n.d.: 1). I argue that Doerr's exploration of these different voices is what gives the text its multidirectional nature. Most notable, however, is the absence of Jewish voices. Unlike *The Book of Aron* and *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*, the fate of the Jewish people and the Holocaust narrative are distinctively absent from the text. I contend that this, too, adds to the multidirectional nature of the text as it subverts the hegemonic Holocaust narrative with its emphasis on German and French suffering.

Doerr's novel begins in 1934 and focusses on two ordinary children of separate nationalities living thousands of miles apart: Marie-Laure LeBlanc, the blind daughter of a widowed master locksmith at the French National Museum of Natural History in Paris and Werner Pfennig, a young German orphan from Zollverein in Essen who is conscripted into the war as a private (Vaill, 2014: 1). As the war intensifies, Marie-Laure and her father, Daniel, flee to the coastal town of Saint-Malo near Brittany to live with Marie-Laure's great-uncle, Etienne. Daniel, as the master locksmith of the museum, has been entrusted with keeping a rare diamond, called the Sea of Flames, belonging in the museum safe. Unaware that he has the real diamond (as two copies of the original were made), Daniel, who is captured as a prisoner of war, hides the diamond in a miniature model of Saint-Malo he has made for Marie-Laure to help her navigate her way around the city. The rare diamond,

which is believed to possess magical properties that grant its keeper eternal life, then becomes the focus of the German Nazi Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel. Riddled with cancer and desperate to believe that the diamond's magical properties will save him, Von Rumpel, who becomes increasingly depraved as the text progresses, manages to track down the diamond's location in Saint-Malo. It is interesting to point out here that the inclusion of an object with magical properties is not something unusual in Holocaust literature. The magical strand in Holocaust literature has been a predominant feature for decades (for example, magical realism was already appearing in texts like Thomas' 1981 novel *The White Hotel*) and has been used as a platform for "interpretive engagement" and to disrupt the realist tradition in Holocaust writing (Zolkos, 2014: 286). While Doerr's text does not explicitly engage with the Holocaust, his inclusion of a magical object not only adds a mysterious and intriguing sub-plot to the text but also demonstrates the willingness of authors writing about this period of history to experiment with various artistic forms and create new ways of thinking about and imagining the past.

Werner, who is selected to attend the prestigious yet nightmarish National Political Institute of Education at Schulpforta, is an engineering prodigy. His affinity for fixing radios and solving complex mathematical problems earns him favour at the Nazi elitist school, and soon he is sent out to the front to hunt down illegal radio transmissions (Vollmann, 2014: 2). Just after the Allied bombings of Saint-Malo, Werner manages to find Marie-Laure by tracing her illegal radio transmissions (an act she courageously performs as part of the resistance), and after rescuing her from Von Rumpel, he leads her to safety. The unlikely collision of their lives results in a love story, and until his premature death, Werner cannot stop thinking of Marie-Laure. Soon after rescuing her, however, he is captured by the Allies and placed in a hospital tent where he becomes ill and delirious. One night, he leaves the tent and wanders into a minefield where he triggers a

mine and is killed. His sister, Jutta, who is taken to Berlin and forced to work in factories, receives the news that Werner has been killed, although she is never given any information on where he is buried.

After the end of the war in 1945, the novel jumps to 1974 where Doerr's narrator reveals what has happened to Frank Volkheimer – one of Werner's comrades – and Jutta. Volkheimer receives Werner's belongings from an organisation dedicated to returning dead soldiers' belongings and gives them to Jutta. Jutta, in an attempt to find closure, travels to Saint-Malo to find out more about her brother's final days and, in the process, is directed to Marie-Laure who has returned to Paris. The novel ends in 2014, the year the book was published, with Marie-Laure, who is sitting with her grandson, reflecting on the past and all the lights we can no longer see. Perhaps the novel's achronological structure is a form of "displaced temporality", an idea taken from Rothberg in his analysis of another text (2009: 279). Doerr's layering of two temporally disjoined events on top of each other can suggest, in the words of Rothberg, two lessons about postmemory: "first … it can provide the narrative structure for a necessary, ethical reckoning of the pasts that remain unprocessed; second, that such reckoning will … require a multidirectional excavation of intersecting histories" (2009: 279).

The text has a complex narrative structure that contains various narrative devices and techniques that emphasise suffering and the tragic nature of war. It is mainly narrated in the third person with an omniscient narrator, yet the prose allows the reader to "listen to the thoughts of Marie-Laure and Werner" as if they themselves are narrating the text (Callil, 2014: 2). The text, mostly narrated in the present tense, also shifts back and forth in time and is told in "short and usually pointed chapters" (Vollmann, 2014: 1), which perhaps serve to mimic or symbolise the intensity, unpredictability, and fast-paced nature of life during the war. Furthermore, Carmen Callil attributes

the "short sharp sentences" of the text to the "echoing of the static of the radios" and suggests that Doerr has created an "unusual edifice" comprised of "fable and … prodigious inventions" (2014: 2). Lastly, the text is enmeshed with various genres, including (according to Ulrich Greiner) "*ein Kriegsfilm"* (war film), *"ein Kriminalfilm"* (criminal film), and a love story (2015: 1). The novel's mystery, suspense, drama, and exploration of science and technology all come together to create a memorable text that tells the war story from an inimitable perspective of two ordinary children engulfed by the darkness of war.

I begin this chapter by analysing the narratives of Werner and Frederick (Werner's friend at Schulpforta) in relation to one another where I discuss their actions, suffering, and complicity (or lack thereof) through the lens of the gray zone. I elaborate on the peripheral quality of German suffering by focussing on both Werner and Frederick as child-figures and how Doerr barely alludes to the Holocaust narrative in an attempt to focus on the more 'forgotten' aspects of German suffering during the war. I then move on to examining Marie-Laure's narrative, emphasising her peripherality through her disability, gender, and displacement. Following on from this, I provide a comparative reading of Marie-Laure and Werner and demonstrate how Doerr's text dismantles hierarchies of suffering through his creation of "a skein of ties" and an unexpected love story between the two child characters (Maslin, 2014: 1). Lastly, I provide an analysis of how Doerr adds to, or rather supports, multidirectional memory by creating open dialogue about the past through Marie-Laure and Jutta. In creating these dialogues between his characters of different nationalities, I argue that no narratives of suffering in the text are competitive or remain unrecognised. I conclude this chapter by summarising why *All the Light We Cannot See* can productively be read as a multidirectional text, and I re-emphasise how it contributes to 'new' forms of narrating Holocaust literature and extends scholarship in the field of German studies.

3.1 Morality, guilt, and perpetration of war crimes: Werner, Frederick, and Sergeant von Rumpel

> … I longed to tell a war story that felt new … In the war I read growing up, French resistance heroes were dashing, sinewy types who constructed machine guns from paper clips. And German soldiers were evil blond torturers, marching in coal scuttle helmets alongside barbed wire …Could I tell a story about how a promising boy got sucked into the Hitler Youth and made bad decisions that led to terrible, unforgivable consequences yet still render him an empathetic character? (Doerr for *Scribner Magazine*, 2015: 2)

Doerr's sentiments in this interview with *Scribner Magazine* encapsulate the themes and concerns of this chapter. In the decades following the war, Germans were widely portrayed in literature as demoniacal, with Nazis reduced to nothing more than "demons and criminals" (Shields, 2016: 2). However, since the early 2000s, German suffering (rather than German guilt) has become a principal theme in discourse on the German past (Nolan, 2008: 7) and it is clear that through his portrayal of Werner, Jutta, Frederick, and other German characters, Doerr makes German suffering a prominent theme in his text. However, as Grass (quoted in Nolan, 2008: 7) emphasises, "[t]he German preoccupation with the Nazi past, with issues of guilt, responsibility, and victimization … doesn't end" and Doerr is careful to address such issues too. The constant moral dilemmas and feelings of guilt that some of Doerr's German characters face are indicative of the continued need to address and navigate such quandaries that still persist in the contemporary moment.

Like Max Meierhauser in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*, Doerr creates a remarkably likeable and empathetic character in Werner Pfennig. I argue that this is largely due the omniscient narrator's emotionally plangent descriptions of the boy's innocent youth to his realisation that he is, in fact, a war criminal aiding Hitler's reign of terror. Werner is first introduced to the reader on page seven of the text where the town of Saint-Malo is about to be bombed by the Allied forces:

> Five streets to the north, a white-haired eighteen-year-old German private named Werner Pfennig wakes to the faint staccato hum … Where is he? … Of course. L'hôtel des Abeilles, the Hotel of Bees. (Doerr, 2015: 7)

Notably, Doerr first introduces Werner as a victim and not as a perpetrator. After the bombing, he becomes trapped in the basement of the Hotel of Bees with little hope of survival – almost like a frantic bee trapped on the inside with no window from which to escape. Also key to note are Werner's name and rank. Firstly, Doerr introduces him as a German private, not as a Nazi, which, to an extent, could be seen as 'diluting' or 'weakening' his responsibility for the war crimes he commits. Secondly, Werner's surname, Pfennig, relates to a former German currency and suggests that he is a mere, disposable penny in the economy of war.

A few pages later, when the text moves from present to past, Werner is once again introduced to the reader, but this time as an inquisitive, intelligent, and innocent seven-year-old boy:

> Werner and his sister, Jutta, are raised at Children's House, a clinker-brick two-storey orphanage on Viktoriastrasse whose rooms are populated with the coughs of sick children … Werner's earliest years are the leanest … rheumatic fever stalks Children's House like a wolf … He is undersized and his ears stick out … the whiteness of his hair stops people in their tracks. (Doerr, 2015: 24)

From the outset, it is clear that Werner stands out, exuding a worldly otherness with his shock of white hair. Dominic Green, in a rather scathing review of the text, believes that Werner is an albino (2015: 1), which would make his selection for the Nazi training school unusual and ironic. Green's belief that Werner is an albino stems from Doerr's descriptions of Werner's hair. For example, Doerr describes Werner as having hair so white that it stops people in their tracks – it is "a color that is the absence of color" (Doerr, 2014: 24). According to a basic definition of the term, an albino is a "person or animal having a congenital absence of pigment in the skin and hair (which are white) and the eyes (which are usually pink)" (OED, 2018). Thus, it is this absence of colour of Werner's hair that potentially links him to albinism. This idea of the albino child figure also ties

in with my discussion of peripheral narratives, as people living with albinism would have been considered genetically inferior by the Nazis during the war.

Werner's marginality is further emphasised by his orphaned status. Although he himself is not sickly – merely undersized – he is surrounded by sickness that stalks the children like a predator, and he is often left to go hungry because of diminished food rations. It is therefore evident that Doerr, in narrating Werner's background, portrays him as vulnerable and a victim from the outset of the text, arguably making it easier for the reader to read him in an empathetic light. Furthermore, the peripherality of his narrative is accentuated by the orphanage and town in which he grows up. For example, Zollverein is a small, industrial town in North-West Germany just outside of Essen and is described as a "place full of holes" where "leafless trees stand atop slag heaps like skeleton hands shoved up from the underworld" (Doerr, 2015: 24). This image suggests that Zollverein is a hopeless, other-worldly place, a Hades of sorts, where the city's children have little prospect of ever becoming more than blue-collar workers, who, like Werner's father, will meet untimely deaths.

In my reading of the text, I argue that Werner also depicts Otherness intellectually, emotionally, and physically:

> But seven-year-old Werner seems to float. He is undersized and his ears stick out and he speaks with a high sweet voice … He makes things too: paper boxes, crude biplanes, toy boats with working rudders. (Doerr, 2015: 24)

While the other children "play hopscotch in the alley or swim in the canal, Werner often sits alone in his upstairs dormer, experimenting with the radio receiver" (Doerr, 2015: 38), and as the text progresses, it becomes evident that Werner is intellectually superior in many ways and has a remarkable affinity for repairing radios. His physical Otherness is depicted in what may be

described as his albinism, and his emotional Otherness, which I discuss in more detail later on in this chapter, is emphasised by viewing his actions through the lens of the gray zone.

The text then moves forward to a few years later when Werner, who is now fourteen years old, is selected to attend the National Political Institute of Education at Schulpforta. In the following excerpt, Doerr's narrator implicitly points to the vulnerability of the boys selected to attend this Aryan school:

> In the afternoon, the recruits run. They crawl under obstacles, do push-ups, scale ropes suspended from the ceiling – one hundred children passing sleek and interchangeable in their white uniforms like livestock before the eyes of the examiners. (Doerr, 2015: 113)

The significant words from this extract are "children", "interchangeable", and "livestock", as they imply a sense of victimhood and vulnerability where the children have little control over their fate. Yet, it must not be overlooked that Werner, although ambivalently, wants to attend the school (Doerr, 2015: 114), which suggests that he has the motivation to be part of the war machine even though, as a fourteen-year-old boy, he is yet to understand what this means. In his paper on the memoir *WARCHILD: A child soldier's story* (2009), Maurice Taonezvi Vambe discusses how "child soldiers are vulnerable, and easily intimidated into fighting in adult wars" (2014: 101), irrespective of whether they are "coerced, reluctantly recruited, or enthusiastically participating" (Mamdani quoted in Vambe, 2014: 2014). I argue that Doerr portrays Werner as vulnerable and afraid to stand up to authority, therefore suggesting that he is essentially intimidated into participating in the war.

Werner's ambivalence develops during the entrance exams for the school where the narrator depicts the following scene:

> And yet, at other times, despite his ambitions, he is visited by instants of vertigo; he sees Jutta holding the smashed pieces of their radio and feels uncertainty steal into his gut … Soon almost everyone in the dance hall has stopped to watch … They boy sways twice more, until it's clear he's about to faint. Even then no one moves to help him. (Doerr, 2015: 115)

Here, there is already a growing uncertainty gnawing at his conscience – and he notices immediately that when a boy falls during an exercise from a dizzying height, no one helps, making him, along with the other boys, complicit in their first wrongdoing at the school. Perhaps it is interesting to comment on the use of the word 'vertigo'. Vertigo is defined as an abnormal sensation of motion and can occur without motion or when a motion is sensed inaccurately (Konrad, 1990: 1). In this context, the vertigo Werner experiences is perhaps more figurative: his world is being thrown off balance, and the uncertainty caused by this vertigo symbolises his descent into a world devoid of goodness and morality. In a sense, Jutta, with her "anti-fascist integrity", is the force that can keep Werner grounded and without her, Werner struggles to correct what William Vollmann calls his "flawed moral compass" (2014: 2).

One of the text's most memorable scenes happens during Werner's time at the elitist Nazi school. On one freezing February morning, commandant Bastian, a sadistic Nazi, brings a chained prisoner of war (whom he describes as a "creature" or "*Untermensch"* [Doerr, 2015: 227]) to the boys and commands them to throw buckets of icy water on him. When it is Werner's turn to do so, he just wants to flee, and as he faces the prisoner, he thinks to himself, "[e]veryone trapped in their roles: orphans, cadets …" (Doerr, 2015: 229). Here, Werner seems to recognise an important facet of the gray zone: entrapment where the room for choices is reduced to zero (Levi, 1989: 50). I argue that the concept of the gray zone is a useful framework for reading this scene because Werner is essentially trapped in a foreign, complicated world where he is, I argue, corrupted by Bastian and subjected to an extremely stressful and unique situation. Furthermore, this scene highlights

Werner's moral ambiguity, and it is this ambiguity that Levi stresses is inherent in human nature (cited in Craps, 2016: 3). He is trapped in his role of cadet, made to throw water on the freezing, tortured prisoner. As he performs this cruel act, he realises that what he is doing is wrong. He performs the act out of necessity or stress, knowing that he will be punished should he refuse to perform the task. In this particular moment, Werner collaborates with his oppressors (Bastian) because he is coerced into doing so. In this pivotal moment, Werner is part of what Craps terms an "in-between" group: he is undeniably a perpetrator in this act, but he is also, as a young boy, a victim of a harsh, foreign, and complex environment where he is forced to collaborate out of fear. It is clear that he does not want to perform the callous act of throwing water on the prisoner, but he feels as though he has no choice. According to Levi, this can be referred to as *Befehlnotstand:* "the state of compulsion following an order" (Levi, 1989: 59).

In her dissertation on 'The Innocent Perpetrator', Liisa Buelens argues that individuals cannot be seen as separate from the communities in which they find themselves, meaning that "their relationship to that community determines their degree of perpetration" (2011: 4). This means that a perpetrator "cannot be considered or categorized out of his/her context" (Buelens, 2011: 4). From this argument, it is clear that the environment in which Werner finds himself determines how he acts, and it is crucial to keep this in mind when analysing his behaviour. Furthermore, Buelens also suggests that the perpetrator can be viewed as the figure of the "morally other" (2011: 1), which, once again, marks Werner as an Othered figure. She also comments on how it is becoming increasingly common to depict perpetrators as human beings (and not as monsters) (2011: 1). Therefore, even though Werner is the "morally other" figure, Doerr also seeks to humanise him in numerous ways, especially when he is faced with such morally challenging situations.

What makes the above-mentioned scene even more haunting is when Frederick, one of the cadets at the school whom Werner befriends, refuses to throw the water on the prisoner:

> Five boys later, it's Frederick's turn. Frederick … Who has not been cheering when each bucketful of water finds its mark. Who is frowning at the prisoner as though he recognizes something there. And Werner knows what Frederick is going to do … "Throw it," commands Bastian … Frederick pours the water onto the ground. "I will not." (Doerr, 2015: 229)

Werner is moved by Frederick, for he (Frederick) is able to recognise something in the prisoner that no one else can (whether that be humanity or realising that they are both imprisoned in different ways). In one poignant chapter, Werner recognises Frederick for who he truly is: someone who "hardly ever thinks of himself", who is "stronger than he [Werner] is in every imaginable way" (Doerr, 2015: 194). Frederick, in contrast to Werner, appears to be a paragon of innocence, particularly when he is left intellectually disabled after he is brutally and malevolently punished for refusing to throw water on the prisoner. He does not appear to display any characteristics of a gray zone character, thus making him seemingly less realistic than Werner.[60] His innocence and inability to commit atrocity under extreme duress make him an almost "saintly" character and one who constantly haunts Werner, reminding him of his "wrongdoing". Whereas Levi (1989: 50) argues that the victim has little choice or agency when under extreme duress, Frederick transcends this idea, choosing morality and respect for the victim even though he knows he will be punished. However, it is crucial to reiterate here that Levi refers to the victims of the Lagers in his work on the gray zone – i.e. he is very clear on separating the victims (the prisoners) from the murderers (the Nazis, for example) (Craps, 2016: 1). Frederick, as a German, is still in a more powerful

[60] Vollmann believes that Frederick is a "casualty of inadequate development" and that Werner is far more "interesting and more believable" (2014: 2-3).

position than those transported to the Lagers, meaning that while Doerr seems to portray him as a 'true' victim, his victimhood is not the same as those incarcerated in the Lagers.

Perhaps Frederick acts as a foil to Werner[61] because he appears to be the very opposite of what the Nazi training school demands of a boy about to step out onto the battlefield to kill, destroy, and demolish. Frederick cannot see well, is obsessed with birds, displays no physical or intellectual superiority; and, worst of all in the eyes of the Nazi, is unable to commit atrocities in the name of the Führer. Werner's moral ambiguity is heightened in the presence of Frederick. It is clear that Werner cares deeply about him, considers him a friend, and has a great reverence for him; yet it is Werner's inability to speak out against the injustices and cruelty inflicted on Frederick at the school that marks him as the iconic prisoner of the gray zone. Although "every part of him wants to scream" (Doerr, 2015: 194) when Frederick is maliciously beaten up, Werner, to refer to Levi's work on the gray zone, is paralysed by his inability and confusion in a place characterised by extreme tension and stress (Levi, 1989: 64).

> Frederick lasts seven blows before falling ... He never cries out and never asks to leave … Frederick's dreaminess, his otherness – it's on him like a scent, and everyone can smell it … Werner tries to lose himself in his work … but even in those late hours, it is as if the sky has dimmed and the school has become a darker, even more diabolical place. His stomach bothers him. He gets diarrhea … Werner tells himself that he tries. Every night he polishes Frederick's boots for him until they shine … one less reason for a bunk master, or Bastian … to jump on him. Sunday mornings in the refectory … Werner helps him with his schoolwork. (Doerr, 2015: 238-239)

This extract points to Werner as both a guilty and empathetic character. He considers Frederick as a friend and tries desperately to help him, given the circumstances. The fact that he gets diarrhoea is a physical or somatic manifestation of the guilt he feels. Schulpforta becomes a place of

[61] Jill Owens suggests that Frederick is, in some ways, "a part of Werner's conscience" (2014: 2).

incarceration, darkness, and evil for him – a place where he cannot see any light, in the proverbial sense. When Frederick is finally tortured and essentially left for dead, Werner is the only one to go to the infirmary to find out what has happened. Unable to comprehend the machinations of his fellow cadets, Werner believes Frederick will be coming back – only to realise that Frederick will only become a background phantom haunting his conscience. Vulnerable to the social forces of the school, Werner has essentially failed Frederick, choosing self-preservation over punishment. While Werner feels trapped in his role of cadet, Frederick portrays an incredible stoicism, suggesting that one does have agency and power to do the right thing in the face of punishment.

In a chapter devoted solely to Frederick towards the end of the novel, Doerr describes Frederick 30 years on. He "sits on the back patio most days … [and] makes pencil drawings of spirals, messy, heavy-leaded corkscrews" (Doerr, 2015: 521). Since the end of the war, Frederick's mother's "instinct … has been to hide … hide what happened to her boy" (Doerr, 2015: 521). Frederick has to be spoon-fed and his brain "maintains only basic functions" (Doerr, 2015: 522). The full trauma and suffering of the war – irrespective of nationality and ethnicity – is evident in Frederick's narrative, as his trauma has been emotional, intellectual, and physical. He retains no memories of what happened and has been rendered speechless, almost lifeless. Mark Anderson, in his work on the child-figure in Holocaust literature, states that "the figure of the persecuted child turns the Holocaust into a moving and accessible story" (2007: 3). However, through the creation of Frederick's tragic narrative, Doerr creates a "moving and accessible" story of a persecuted German child during the war, thereby reframing the Holocaust or war narrative to include the suffering of Germans. By looking at these two characters in the context of the gray zone, I suggest that the sympathy the reader arguably develops for both characters is heightened. The reader sees and

understands the moral quandary that Werner faces and recognises Frederick as a paragon of moral virtue, making his narrative all the more tragic.

After the end of World War I, 2.7 million disabled and ill veterans returned home, meaning that disability in the German public sphere came into view in new and different ways. However, economic and social struggles in post-war years meant that Germany struggled to provide adequate support and resources to integrate intellectually and physically challenged citizens back into society (Poore, 2007: 7). While Frederick comes from an affluent background and has his mother to look after him, it is clear that he (now as an intellectually disabled character) can never reintegrate into society. There is also no mention in Doerr's text of anyone, aside from Werner, visiting him or offering him support. Carol Poore asks a difficult question in her work on disability during the Weimar Republic: "Were men with such bodies [disabled] to be viewed as heroes, pitiful victims, or ordinary citizens?" (2007: 7). In Frederick's case, it might be easy for the reader to label him as both hero and victim, but for the post-war German government, he would remain nothing but a forgotten casualty of the war.

Where Frederick no longer has the chance to display any more acts of courage and moral virtue, Werner's conscience continues to weigh on him more and more as the story progresses. While still at the school, Werner has disturbing nightmares where "shapes of boys close over Frederick", but when "he draws closer, Frederick transforms into Jutta, and she stares at Werner with accusation while the boys carry off her limbs one by one" (Doerr, 2015: 330). In his work on memory and forgetting in Post-Franco Spain, José Colmeiro asserts, "[t]he past is recovered from the present, but it is not simply past, since the process of recovery of the past can have direct and indirect repercussions for actions in the present" (2011: 21). Werner's persistent nightmares, guilty conscience, and remembering Frederick's and Jutta's moral actions point to the idea that Werner

is never free of his past and is continuously haunted by it. Trauma theorists argue that the "structure of trauma imposes a recursive process of reliving the past" and that a reaction to a traumatic or overwhelming event takes the form of dreams, thoughts, behaviours, or hallucinations stemming from the event (Froula, 2011: 175). Werner's repeated thoughts and nightmares about Frederick and Jutta, therefore, point to his reaction to the overwhelming and traumatic events he faces. This naturally has implications in the present as later in the text, he tries to atone for his sins by rescuing Marie-Laure and comes to realise that he is the perpetrator of shameful crimes. Later, Werner recalls Frederick saying to him, "we don't have choices, don't own our lives" (Doerr, 2015: 397). In the end, however, Werner realises that "he was the one who pretended there were no choices" (Doerr, 2015: 407).

Werner is constantly troubled by his failure to act when he knows things are wrong. By failing to help Frederick and watching his commander Volkheimer torture and kill insurgents on the battlefield, Werner's perpetration of war crimes and bystander complicity, where he fails to act on what he knows is right, are unmistakable. However, it is Werner's ability to recognise his crimes and complicity that makes him, as Doerr explains in an interview, all-too human (in *Scribner*, 2014: 3). I argue that this all-too-human quality draws the reader closer to Werner, allowing the reader to empathise with him and feel his remorse and guilt. Werner is troubled by his choices, mistakes, and guilt. He is plagued by death and he comes to realise, upon much reflection, that he did have a choice to act differently in many situations. Important to consider at this point is that perpetrators "have been found to suffer in ways similar to the victims of traumatic events" (Buelens, 2011:7). According to Buelens, perpetrators – after Western victims and later colonised victims – are now a "third group of PTSD sufferers that are … still developing a position of focus in trauma studies" (2011: 10). Yet, despite this recognition of suffering, it is important to keep in

mind that Werner is still a perpetrator of war crimes. Although the concepts of victim and perpetrator are no longer as rigid as they used to be (Buelens, 2011:10), Werner cannot be considered as a true (i.e. traditional) victim who should not be held responsible for his perpetration of war crimes.

Elaborating on Werner's complicity, it is important to consider how Werner resists, tolerates, and collaborates with the Nazis throughout his journey as a German soldier. He must tolerate death, violence, and brutality. His actions both at the school and on the battlefield make him complicit in Nazi and war crimes, and his resistance to the regime is evident in his extreme guilt and saving Marie-Laure's life. Philippe Bourgois, detailing his father's account of Auschwitz, provides critical information on both the gray zone and the concepts and manifestations of resistance, tolerance, and collaboration with the Nazis. In the account, Bourgois' father places emphasis on the "limits of agency both with respect to positive and negative actions, whether it be resisting, tolerating, or collaborating with the Nazis" (2005: 91). Although initially applied to the prisoners of the Lagers, this limiting of agency can arguably be applied to Werner. Furthermore, Mark Sanders, in his book titled *Complicities: The Intellectual and Apartheid* (2002), argues that responsibility can only be achieved when one acknowledges his or her complicity. I contend that this is true of Werner for he (like Max in Weaver's text) is able to recognise and acknowledge his complicity and perpetration, thereby taking responsibility for his actions. Once again, I argue that Werner cannot be judged for his actions. Far from being "evil" or any sort of "monster", Werner's story is "pregnant, full of significance, asks more questions than it answers, [and] sums up in itself the entire theme of the gray zone" (Levi: 1989: 66). Once more, I stress that I am using Levi's statements in a very different context where I apply his concept more broadly to include the events of the war that are unrelated to the world of the Lagers.

To an extent, Werner's moral development marks Doerr's text as a Bildungsroman. Werner moves from the "snowy-haired dreamer plucked out of the soot" (Doerr, 2015: 123) to a young man conscious of his actions. Akin to Max in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw,* Werner is not the stereotypical Nazi sadist. Rather, he is an ordinary Wehrmacht soldier. According to Claudia Card's analysis on the gray zone, the gray zone comprises three notable characteristics: the person in question is placed under insuperable pressure to carry out duties faithfully, he/ she is a victim of evil, and he/ she is complicit in committing Nazi crimes (Card, 2000: 517). I argue that these characteristics can easily be applied to Werner and thus serve to make him an ambiguous character (Card, 2000: 518). Furthermore, I suggest that Werner transcends the figure of the stereotypical Nazi German, as he is neither patriotic nor robotic in the sense that he blindly follows orders. He is a young boy, talented in what he does, who remembers his sister telling him: *"Is it right to do something only because everyone else is doing it?"* (Doerr, 2015: 246). During his time at Schulpforta, Werner thinks he is succeeding, as he is being loyal and doing what "everybody agrees is good" (Doerr, 2015: 250). Yet "every time he wakes and buttons his tunic, he feels he is betraying something" (Doerr, 2015: 250). In an interview with Jill Owens (2014: 4), Doerr says that his aim was to make Werner a sympathetic character, which, I argue, he has achieved. Yet, despite this sympathetic portrayal of Werner, I contend that Doerr is careful not to exculpate him for his crimes.

Arguably, Werner can be characterised as a "child victim", a term taken from Anderson's work on the child figure in Holocaust literature (Anderson, 2007: 1). During his time at Schulpforta, Werner comes to realise that "what the führer really requires is boys" (Doerr, 2015: 277):

> Great rows of them walking to the conveyer belt to climb on. Give up cream for the führer, sleep for the führer, aluminium for the führer. Give

> up Reinhard Wöhlmann's father and Karl Westerholzer's father and Martin Burkhard's father. (Doerr, 2015: 277)

The idea of Hitler wanting to use boys suggests the perverted use of innocence and vulnerability. The narrator's description of the boys on the conveyor belt calls to mind my earlier interpretation of Werner's surname, Pfennig. The boys on the conveyor belt are nothing more than disposable coins in the economy of a doomed and futile war. However, it is crucial to note that while Werner is a victim of the Nazi war machine, his victimhood, to use Card's work on the gray zone, does not imply that the victim, in this case Werner, has the character of an angel (2000: 512). Apart from the beginning of the text where Werner is described as an innocent, inquisitive dreamer, Doerr neither romanticises him nor characterises him as angelic. He does, however, represent him as a character with a conscience who both recognises and understands his guilt.

One of the more prominent scenes in the text, in which Werner recognises and understands his guilt, is when a little girl in Austria is "accidentally" shot by Neumann Two (one of Werner's comrades) during a raid. When Werner first sees her emerging from a doorway and running across the street to play in the park, he is reminded of his sister, Jutta. This little girl, with "big, clear eyes" and her "maroon cape", manages to "open some valve in Werner's soul" (Doerr, 2015: 366). She reminds him of his younger days at the orphanage, and he wants to join her as she sings a counting song he recognises from his past. The innocence of this moment – of this little girl playing on a swing at the height of the war – is incredibly rare that she, for a fleeting moment, helps Werner, Bernd, Neumann One, Neumann Two, and Volkheimer "escape their defilement" (Doerr, 2015: 366). The climax of this particular passage is when, moments later, Werner and his comrades enter the apartment belonging to this little girl and a woman, thinking that this apartment block is emitting "illegal" radio transmissions. At first, the apartment is thought to be empty until Neumann

Two discovers the child and the woman hiding in a closet. As he is not expecting anyone to be in the closet, he shoots the woman and the child out of fear and shock.

The act of shooting the young girl is not intended to be deliberate or malicious. The girl is shot in a moment of blind panic, suggesting that the stress of the war (and always being on both the defence and offence, ready to strike the perceived enemy) causes Neumann Two to perform in ways otherwise unimaginable should he never have been conscripted into the war. In moments that underline the moral complexity of Werner and his comrades, Doerr's narrator describes how Bernd covers the dead woman with a blanket in an attempt to preserve her dignity, Neumann One "shoulders out [with] something rancid in his eyes", Volkheimer "tucks the child's foot gently back inside the closet" (Doerr, 2015: 368), Neumann Two stands there in a state of disbelief, and Werner, once back inside the Opel, "sits with his forehead against the listening decks and is sick between his shoes" (Doerr, 2015: 369). The girl with the hole in her head continues to trouble Werner until his death,[62] reminding him of his defilement and the devastating loss of his innocence – which serves to emphasise that Werner, too, is a victim in some ways.

Doerr's depiction of this rare moment of the child playing in the park singing a song serves to amplify the utter perversion of war. Werner, a mere teenager himself, has to witness the gruesome death of this little girl. According to Kremer (2004: 252), Holocaust literature aimed at educating children about this historical period often uses censorship and various narrative devices to limit intentionally the child-reader's understanding of the horrors of the Holocaust. While Doerr's text is targeted for an adult readership and not children, it is clear that Doerr does not use any "reader-

[62] In his book titled *A double dying: reflections on holocaust literature* (1980), Rosenfeld argues that the trauma a child soldier experiences is a result of 'double dying' because he, the child soldier, witnesses "the actual physical dying and death of fellow child soldiers" (quoted in Vambe, 2014: 101). Although the little girl is not a child soldier, I contend that in this moment, perhaps Werner experiences this 'double dying' because he witnesses the death of a young, vulnerable child.

protective strategies" (a term used in Bosmajian's work on children's literature [quoted in Kremer, 2004: 252]) when portraying the atrocities of the war experience. This climatic moment in the text is not a hopeful one: the innocent child dies and offers no reprieve for the adult reader of Doerr's tragic novel. I thus suggest that *All the Light We Cannot See* is a powerfully visceral text that spares no detail in describing the horrors of war and the atrocities committed in its name.

Before concluding this section, it is important, at this point, to discuss briefly Doerr's portrayal of one of the more minor German characters in his text, Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel. Most of the characters, who are German, display redeeming qualities, and I argue that Von Rumpel is not solely evil. Doerr's depiction of Von Rumpel's malicious cancer that ravages his body (a "murderous bloom inside his body" [Doerr, 2015: 447]) arguably makes the reader pity him. He is consumed by his desire to find the Sea of Flames because he believes, according to legend, that it offers immortality. His futile quest has led him to an extreme form of depravity as he roves Marie-Laure's house looking for the diamond like a "slavering demon" (Doerr, 2015: 452). Von Rumpel is an intriguing character in this text as he is the representation of the insanity that may consume a person when he/ she is placed under extreme duress. He is driven by his evolutionary instinct to survive and is prepared to sacrifice any semblance of morality in order to live longer. Interesting to point out is that perhaps Von Rumpel can be read as a type of Faustian figure. Rather than selling his soul to the devil, Von Rumpel essentially 'sells' his soul to the Sea of Flames (tantamount to an elixir of life), sacrificing any inherent goodness in him in an attempt to defeat his cancer. The name Sea of Flames is ironic as it conjures images of Hades and hellfire, which symbolises Von Rumpel's pact with this 'devil'. In a sense, Von Rumpel is a victim of the 'evil' of cancer and is 'oppressed' by it, thus turning him into a 'perpetrator' who is willing to inflict evil

upon others.[63] Perhaps Von Rumpel's cancer can be read as a malignant metaphor for the cancer of Nazi ideology eating away and destroying all in its path. In a sense, Von Rumpel's body can be viewed as Germany and the German people; with the tumor representing Nazism. Furthermore, Doerr, in an interview with Owens (2014: 4), says that it is "unfair to brand [Von Rumpel] as singularly evil" and that he was his (Doerr's) "gesture towards the types of Nazis that [readers] are much more used to seeing". Doerr also compares Von Rumpel to Werner, stating that in order to make Werner a sympathetic character, he "had to balance him [Werner] with a German that contemporary readers are more familiar with [i.e. the demoniacal Nazi figure]" (Owens, 2014: 4).

In the above section, I have provided a comparative reading of Frederick and Werner (and more briefly, a comparative reading of Werner and Von Rumpel) where I have predominantly focussed on reading Werner's actions, complicity, and perpetration through the lens of the gray zone. I have suggested that the gray zone provides an adequate explanation of Werner's moral ambiguity where he is constantly torn, to cite Niven's work unrelated to *All the Light We Cannot See*, between authority and will, between social codes and personal morality, and between political and subjective motivations (Niven, 2002: 135). He is in a constant state of moral flux where he is aware of his wrongdoings; yet continuously tries to justify them. However, I have also emphasised in this section that Doerr does not exculpate Werner in any way and consistently reminds the reader of his "increasing tolerance for ugliness and violence" and "his struggle to find volition and redemption in a life that offers a few apparent choices" (Cha, 2014: n.p.). Lastly, I have proposed that Doerr, in contrast to Von Rumpel, explicitly sets out to portray Werner as more of an ordinary

[63] In a sense, the text perhaps suggests that Von Rumpel commits atrocities as a result of his cancer, which seems to exculpate him.

soldier who is neither sadistic nor malicious. In doing so, Doerr therefore proposes a "more complicated portrait of heroes and villains" (Doerr in *Scribner* Magazine, 2015: 3).

3.2 Vulnerability and resistance: The war through the eyes of a blind French girl

> In a corner of the city, inside a tall, narrow house at Number 4 rue Vauborel, on the sixth and highest floor, a sightless sixteen-year-old named Marie-Laure LeBlanc kneels over a low table covered entirely with a model. The model is a miniature of the city she kneels within, and contains scale replicas of the hundreds of houses and shops and hotels within its walls. (Doerr, 2015: 5)

Crucial to Doerr's introduction of Marie-Laure is the reference to her blindness. By positioning her at the beginning of the text as a sightless sixteen-year-old, Doerr intimates that the reader is about to navigate a young girl's experience of World War II through her non-functioning eyes. This is an inimitable move by Doerr, as it positions Marie-Laure as a societally-Othered character not only in terms of her age and gender but also because of her visual impairment.[64] Furthermore, Marie-Laure is Othered as both a female and as a child-figure, which adds to her vulnerability. It becomes quickly apparent that Marie-Laure uses the miniature model of Saint-Malo (that was created by her father) to learn how to navigate the real city. In a sense, Marie-Laure has to rely on her imagination and her other senses to acquaint herself with the foreign city. Like Werner with radios, Marie-Laure finds comfort in the miniature model. Both the radios and the mini-city represent more innocent and untainted times gone by – times when Werner was just a young boy playing in the streets with Jutta and Marie-Laure was reading with her father, comfortable and safe. Yet the war destroys the sentimental meanings behind the radios and the miniature cities:

[64] Doerr's use of a blind protagonist needs a significant amount of attention considering how people living with disabilities were treated in Germany both during and after World War II. According to a recent article published in *HuffPost*, historians estimate that at least five million non-Jewish people were killed by the Nazis (Ridley, 2018: 1). Included in this figure were those who were both mentally and physically disabled. Therefore, it is important to understand that Marie-Laure could have easily been a victim of the Nazi regime for her disability. Poore's work on disability in German culture during the twentieth century is focussed on showing how disabled people in Germany "have moved from being relatively passive objects to more active subjects and from being represented by others to telling their own stories" (2010: 14).

Werner's affinity for radios leads him to seek out illegal (or rather anti-German) transmissions on the battlefields, and Saint-Malo is eventually destroyed, leaving Marie-Laure orphaned.

Undoubtedly, Marie-Laure is an otherworldly character: when Werner first sees her, he sees her as possessing an "air of otherworldliness" (Doerr, 2015: 423). She is intelligent and inquisitive and has a fascination with sea snails:

> With her fingers, she finds the lock; from her coat she pulls the iron key … The water is icy and shin-deep; her toes go numb in an instant. But the grotto itself comprises its own slick universe, and inside this universe spins countless galaxies: here … lives a barnacle and a tiny spindle shell occupied by a still smaller hermit crab. And on the shell of the crab? A yet smaller barnacle … she tends to the snails as though plants in a garden. Tide to tide, moment to moment: she comes to listen to the creatures suck and shift and squeak. (Doerr, 2015: 341-342)

Notably, Marie-Laure's fascination with sea snails adds an interesting dimension to the text. The snails are blind, entrapped in a cave on the outskirts of Saint-Malo, and have shells for protection. They thus seem to represent a microcosm of Marie-Laure's world. They are recluses, like her great-uncle Etienne, with whom she stays in Saint-Malo after fleeing from Paris with her father. Like the miniature of Saint-Malo, the grotto with her beloved snails represents an entire different universe for her – a different, otherworldly place far removed from the battle surrounding her. The snails are infinite and eternal, simply sucking and shifting without fear and without knowledge of the evils infiltrating Saint-Malo.

Like Werner, Marie-Laure is a likeable character. She typifies innocence and purity and is, to an extent, a "child victim" and "witness" to the war (Anderson, 2007: 1). Her innocence and purity are also signified by her surname, LeBlanc, which means white (Barron, 2015: n.p.). However, despite being a victim of the malevolence of war, she is neither defenceless nor helpless. She is intelligent, resourceful, and exemplifies morality. Perhaps her character can be read in relation to

Judith Butler's recent work on vulnerability and resistance. Firstly, Butler posits the idea "that freedom can only be exercised if there is enough support for the exercise of a freedom, a material condition that enters in the act that makes it possible" (2014: 3). Butler further discusses how the body (human, in this case) is "less an entity than a relation, and it cannot be fully dissociated from the infrastructural and environmental conditions of its living" (2014: 8). Therefore, a human's dependency on infrastructural support reveals that humans possess a particular vulnerability when they are unsupported and when the infrastructural conditions begin to fail. In Marie-Laure's case, I argue that there is not enough support for her freedom of movement in Saint-Malo. She is fully dependent on the miniature model of the city to navigate around the city, and her blindness makes her even more vulnerable when she walks the streets occupied by German forces. She is thus unsupported in her environment, with the destruction of the city imminent at any moment, which is depicted in the following excerpt from the text:

> Again her fingers find the outer ramparts, the Bastion de la Hollande, the little staircase leading down. In this window, right here, in the real city, a woman beats her rugs every Sunday. From this window here, a boy once yelled, *Watch where you're going, are you blind?* ... Beneath her fingertips, the miniature of rue d'Estrées intersects the miniature rue Vauborel … How many times has she done this? … Number 4 … [w]here she has lived for four years. Where she kneels on the sixth floor alone, as a dozen American bombers roar towards her. (Doerr, 2015: 12)

In the above excerpt, it is clear that Marie-Laure is dependent on the model city. It gives her comfort and familiarity and perhaps helps her feel slightly more contained, for it is the real city that is about to collapse around her. Moreover, as indicated by the boy yelling at her, Marie-Laure is subjected to the insensitivities of others. As I have argued above, Marie-Laure displays profound resistance, resilience, and tenacity in the face of great adversity – it is why she manages to survive. Therefore, I suggest that she is simultaneously vulnerable and resilient. Butler argues that vulnerability is not necessarily the opposite of resistance and that it is "understood as a deliberate

exposure to power" (2014: 12). Furthermore, Butler attempts to reformulate the fundamental concept that the group that has been termed vulnerable is presumed weak and in need of protection, which therefore discounts the political agency of those who are subjugated (Butler, 2014: 12; Butler, 2016: 1). Butler thus dismantles the opposition between vulnerability and resistance (political agency).

While I believe that Marie-Laure is undeniably vulnerable in numerous ways (being a young female, being blind, being a victim of war etc.), she certainly is depicted as an agentic character who takes on a form of political resistance and does not necessarily need protection simply because she is female and has a disability. An example of her agency is illustrated in the following excerpt in which she and her great-uncle Etienne discuss their plan to broadcast illegal radio transmissions:

> Etienne comes down the seven ladder rungs and squeezes through the back of the wardrobe and takes her hands in his. Before he speaks, she knows what he will say. "Your father asked me to keep you safe." "I know." "This will be dangerous. It is not a game." "I want to do it …" (Doerr, 2015: 322)

In a conversation with her great-uncle Etienne, Marie-Laure assures him that she is ready to take on the task of going to the bakery and getting bread with secret resistance messages baked inside. Etienne will then broadcast these messages via his old radio. Later, after Etienne is captured, Marie-Laure takes to reading one of her books over the radio in the hopes of being saved. When Werner firsts sights Marie-Laure leaving her house one day, he notes how her "long pale neck seems to him … incredibly vulnerable" (Doerr, 2015: 412) and that she is the "pure they were always lecturing about at Schulpforta"[65] (Doerr, 2015: 413). Yet despite her perceived vulnerability; it is clear that she is defiant and ready to fight.

[65] Naturally, the 'pure' those at Schulpforta were lecturing on relates to the Aryan race, having pure German blood, and not belonging to any minority group, such as being disabled. However, in this context, I read Werner's interpretation of pure as meaning strong, resilient, and possessing a remarkable strength of character.

A few chapters later, when Werner finally comes to save her from Von Rumpel, she is ready to trust him and accept his help, and the first thing she says to him is, "*Mes souliers* … I have not been able to find my shoes" (Doerr, 2015: 468). There is no bitterness or cynicism. She tells Werner humbly that she is not brave, that she simply wakes up and lives her life because she had "no choice" (Doerr, 2015: 469). She is, in some ways, Werner's redemption and salvation – his miracle. She redeems him from his sins and his moral complexity is greatly emphasised in her presence. When he finds her at Number 4 rue Vauborel, he immediately says to her in his broken French, "I am not killing you. I am hearing you. On radio. Is why I come" (Doerr, 2015: 468). For the first time, Werner feels brave and that he has taken responsibility for his life and his own moral decisions. When he helps her get to a collection point for refugees, Werner notices how her voice is like a "bright, clear window of sky", how her face is a "field of freckles" (Doerr, 2015: 411), and how he realises he never wants to let her go. He describes her in natural terms (sky and field), further highlighting her purity. This specific event in itself is traumatic for Werner, as he realises that he has lost Marie-Laure forever. When he is finally captured by French resistance fighters and taken to a disarmament centre, he keeps lingering over images of Marie-Laure (Doerr, 2015: 479).

Lastly, by including female characters, like Marie-Laure and Jutta, who are resilient, courageous, and autonomous, Doerr inverts the hegemony of a wartime narrative that has more often than not favoured patriarchy or male activity. For example, Gill Plain discusses how historically, the wartime narrative (and those who have written about it) has largely been a gendered one, with its focus on the binary oppositions of male activity and female passivity, combatant and non-combatant, and soldier and mother (2009: 166). Therefore, instead of intensifying "hierarchical gender relations" (Plain, 2009: 167), Doerr's text placates this by portraying both Marie-Laure and Jutta as morally superior, independent, and courageous women who survive the war through sheer

determination and a willingness to defy the enemy. This is clearly demonstrated in the scene where Jutta is raped by Russian soldiers in Berlin. Frau Elena tells the girls to keep their eyes shut, but Jutta defiantly says, "I want to see them" (Doerr, 2015: 490). During the grotesque violation, Jutta "does not allow herself to make a single sound" (Doerr, 2015: 490), thereby taking ownership of herself and her body. The same can be said of Marie-Laure, who – with great agency, intelligence, and bravery – forms part of the French resistance and does everything in her power to stop Von Rumpel from pilfering the Sea of Flames. For both Marie-Laure and Jutta, their journeys are typical of those belonging to the Bildungsroman. Both move from (to quote Lassner's work on witnesses of the war) "childhood innocence" to "adult disenchantment" (Lassner, 2009: 184) and manage to integrate themselves into a traumatic and disillusioned post-war society.

3.3 The intersection of German and French suffering

Before further discussing the novel in relation to Rothberg's work on multidirectional memory, I would like to draw attention to an argument put forth by Alvin Rosenfeld that seemingly echoes Rothberg's sentiments. Rosenfeld argues that many other histories of victimisation and suffering have been marginalised and forgotten in the wake of the Holocaust and Jewish suffering, which tends to dominate literature and discourse dealing with World War II (2002: 86). Indeed, Doerr's text moves away from this "Holocaustmania" (2002: 86) and details the more marginalised stories that are 'further down' the hierarchical ladder of suffering. However, it is imperative to note that while Doerr's text focusses on Europe and deals with the suffering of white Europeans, it is still a text that details marginal narratives of suffering. Doerr's entire text is dedicated to the stories outside of the death camps, deportations, and ghettos. At its core, *All the Light We Cannot See* is

essentially, to use the words of Anderson in his work on the child figure in Holocaust literature, "restor[ing] the identities of victims whom [the war] … reduced to faceless numbers and statistics" (2007: 17).

Furthermore and far removed from being a text solely concerned with Europe's Nazi past, Doerr includes the traumas of non-Nazi Germans[66] and the French. In this way, he dismantles hegemonic trauma and Holocaust narratives that tend to focus mainly on Jewish suffering. I argue that the need for texts like Doerr's in the twenty-first century is of paramount importance in a world suffering from "historical amnesia" (Broomfield, 2017: 1). Although Doerr himself has no direct experience of the war, he has produced a contemporary fictional war novel that creates what Petra Rau terms "prosthetic memories"[67] (2009: 207). *All the Light We Cannot See* is thus a critical text for an audience "whose 'prosthetic memories' shape individual politics and identities" (2009: 207). His novel, which distinctly avoids "wallowing in the evident", reintroduces "little known or suppressed aspects of war" in an attempt to raise pertinent and complex questions about hegemony, moral ambiguity, the universality of suffering, and the representation of history (Rau, 2009: 209).

Doerr's depiction of both French and German suffering through marginal characters is central to my argument regarding the dismantling of hegemonic narratives. After helping Marie-Laure to safety, Werner is captured and is transferred from place to place where he starts to realise that his body might be giving up. He walks with "pairs of men who fought side by side" but are now strangers to one another, all carrying unspeakable traumas and events they wish to forget (Doerr, 2015: 480). One night, in a "tent full of dying men" (Doerr, 2015: 480), Werner wanders outside,

[66] On a basic level, I consider non-Nazi Germans as those who never supported the regime or did their best to resist it.
[67] Prosthetic memory "emerges at the interface between a person and a historical narrative about the past … In this moment of contact, an experience occurs through which the person sutures himself or herself into a larger history" (Landsberg quoted in Adams, 2014: 240). This suturing, according to Landsberg, creates room for ethical thinking whereby a sense of empathy and ethical-political solidarity is fostered across cultural differences (cited in Adams, 2014: 240).

thinking about Mari-Laure, Jutta, Frau Elena, and the innocence of his childhood. Under a clear, moonlit sky, Werner "cross[es] the edge of the field … and steps on a trigger land mine set there by his own army three months before and disappears in a fountain of earth" (Doerr, 2015: 483). I suggest that when Werner crosses the edge of the field, he is being emancipated from the gray zone and is essentially "crossing over" from a real-life Hades to what the reader hopes will be some sort of peaceful afterlife. In having Werner die by a landmine, Doerr depicts Werner's death as both gruesome and tragic. Werner's entire story – from the death of his father in a coal mine, to becoming a soldier, to losing Marie-Laure, and finally dying in a trap set by his own people – is a tragic one that highlights the fate of thousands of Germans (many of them just boys) during the war. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the term tragic is defined as "causing or characterized by extreme distress or sorrow" (OED, 2018). I contend that Werner's story is therefore a tragic one because it is characterised by both extreme sorrow and distress. Moreover, he is essentially still a boy when he is killed, and as Doerr portrays, Werner realises as he grows up that he does not want anything to do with the war and serving the Reich.

The historical traumas and suffering of both Jutta and Marie-Laure collide when Jutta visits Marie-Laure in Paris and gives her the model house of Saint-Malo, which Werner had in his possession at the time of his death. During this poignant scene, Marie-Laure and Jutta talk about Werner's character. They have a conversation about him where Jutta explains to her that Werner "was little for his age, always. But he looked out for me. It was hard for him not to do what was expected of him" (Doerr, 2015: 515). Jutta tells Marie-Laure that it was not "very easy to be good then", and Marie-Laure describes Werner as having a glowing soul with "some fundamental kindness" in it (Doerr, 2015: 515). This moment of meeting, which occurs sometime after 1974, provides an important link to one of the basic tenets of multidirectional memory. In discourse on competitive

memory, contact between people, who have experienced different histories of suffering, typically leads to the different groups of victims trying to claim "moral superiority by struggling for [who has] the worst suffering" (Buelens, 2011: 8). However, when Jutta and Marie-Laure meet, Marie-Laure does not attempt to claim any form of moral superiority or argue that she has suffered more because she is French and was essentially held captive by the Germans. What Jutta and Marie-Laure achieve in their encounter is a forging of a relationship based on empathy and solidarity.

In this intersection of traumas, Marie-Laure and Jutta recognise each *other's* traumas – i.e. they bear witness to and recognise the "suffering of the other" (Doerr, 2015: 500). This recognition of each other's suffering can be tied to Emmanuel Levinas' work on the figure of the Other. Levinas provides an ethical reading of Otherness and contends that when a person comes into contact with another person whom he/ she perceives as the Other, it is the proximity of this Other figure that demands a response (Beavers, n.d.: 1). For Levinas, human beings are essentially good, and he therefore suggests that we have a personal and ethical responsibility to the Other. By thinking of the Other as separate from ourselves, we give the Other the right to exist, thereby allowing us to act ethically towards him/ her (Hamblet, 2006: 185). I therefore suggest that Jutta and Marie-Laure respond personally and ethically to each other and are able to recognise each other's pain. In this way, neither Marie-Laure nor Jutta view each other as intrusive or threatening strangers. As Germans, both Werner and Jutta are seen as the collective "enemy", yet Marie-Laure allows Jutta to talk about Werner and articulate her pain and suffering. This moment of contact between Marie-Laure and Jutta demonstrates how Doerr's text can potentially add to discussions on multidirectional memory. At the core of multidirectional memory is how "comparisons of different people's pasts may lead to productive cooperation between the different victim groups where the groups help articulate one another's traumas" (Buelens, 2011: 9). Therefore, this small encounter

between Marie-Laure and Jutta serves as an example of how two people of opposing nationalities and histories of suffering can come together and articulate past experiences in a manner that is non-competitive or non-hierarchical.

In this section, I have argued that Doerr illustrates a tragic, moving, and disturbing portrayal of the sufferings of different characters of French and German nationality. As I have already discussed in the initial sections of this chapter, Werner is a likable character for whom the reader feels a great amount of sympathy. His journey from Germany and ultimately to France sees him become increasingly guilty and cognisant of the crimes he has committed in the name of war. Through Doerr's depiction of Werner, he allows the reader to "see him as a human who is not the embodiment of evil" (McGlothlin, 2014: 159). Furthermore, I have proposed that Doerr's emotional portrayal of Marie-Laure and Jutta allows the reader to view peripheral sufferings where each character is afforded her own story and narrative space. Lastly, I argue that when reading any text that deals with the World War II narrative, the Holocaust simply cannot be pushed aside or forgotten. Thus, I opine that Doerr has provided a useful example of how the Holocaust and other historical traumas (German and French suffering in the case of this chapter) can be thought together without any sort of competition of victimhood (Craps, 2014: 199).

3.4 Conclusion

By applying Rothberg's theoretical framework on multidirectional memory, it is evident that Doerr's *All the Light We Cannot See* allows us (to quote Skitolsky's work on Rothberg) to "understand how we can *imagine* different sites of violence together without reducing them to either the same type of suffering or to utterly separate events" (2009: 1). To elaborate, it is clear that we can delve into the narratives of Saint-Malo, Essen, Schulpforta, Austria, and Eastern European countries and view them as different sites of violence that are interlinked where suffering

is both personal and collective. For example, Werner suffers in a way that is very different to Marie-Laure, yet their suffering is both as a result of World War II. Essentially, Doerr brings together sufferings and histories that are usually kept separate. I argue that Doerr allows us (and once again, in the words of Skitolsky on Rothberg) to see an "appreciation for diverse forms of suffering" (Skitolsky, 2009: 2) without detracting from the specificity and uniqueness of the Holocaust. In his mapping of the World War II terrain, there are "no contested spaces" (Skitolsky, 2009: 2) where, say, Marie-Laure's suffering trumps Werner's or Jutta's suffering.

In this chapter, I attempted to demonstrate that there is no zero-sum logic in Doerr's text. Rather, Doerr portrays Werner's suffering and his empathetic nature in an emotionally plangent manner without minimising or dismissing his complicity and perpetration. Furthermore, in having Marie-Laure and Werner, and Marie-Laure and Jutta collide and connect with each other, Doerr has successfully created a narrative that demonstrates how multidirectional memory can, albeit hypothetically, create conversation and empathy between victims of different forms of historical trauma.

Overall, it has been my argument that *All the Light We Cannot See* is indicative of the continued need to address not only how Germans suffered during the war but also other peripheral narratives, such as French citizens living during the German occupation of Saint-Malo. What is distinctive about this text is that Doerr does not solely focus on Werner's and his comrades' suffering and trauma: he also deals with important questions of guilt and shame. More important to point out, however, is how Doerr gives equal voice to victim (Marie-Laure) and perpetrator (Werner), with the text offering voices to other less-prominent characters (Jutta and Frederick). I contend that the novel does not pit German suffering against French suffering and certainly does not marginalise the Holocaust simply because it excludes its narrative. I suggest that Doerr has managed to create

an emotionally-charged and thematically important text that contains a multidirectional perspective on the World War II era by interweaving German and French histories, suffering, and memorial legacies.

Chapter 4:

Leben, Er-leben, und Über-leben: The suffering of the ordinary German figure and complicity in Zusak's *The Book Thief*

> Germans who lived during Nazi Germany rarely, if ever, liked to talk about life under Hitler's rule, particularly if they found themselves complicit in its horrors. Taking this aspect as its subject makes Markus Zusak's bestseller "The Book Thief" … genuinely unique in the annals of Holocaust [literature]. (Prigge, 2013: 1)

Markus Zusak's *The Book Thief* is certainly no ordinary text. Marianne Brace believes Zusak has written "a fresh story about the Holocaust" (2006: 1), and Philip Ardagh, in his review for the *USA Today*, suggests that *The Book Thief* "deserves a place on the shelf with *The Diary of Anne Frank*" (2007:1). What sets *The Book Thief* apart from the myriad of texts concerned with the Holocaust is that it mainly focusses on the suffering of ordinary Germans during World War II. While the narrative of the Holocaust is not completely absent from the text (unlike in *All the Light We Cannot See*), Zusak has written a "daring" (Pierce, 2005: 1) and ambitious novel that offers an interesting and thought-provoking perspective on German suffering at the height of World War II. With its depiction of "all shades of German, from truly committed Nazis to the likes of Hans Hubermann (Liesel's, the novel's protagonist, father)" (Ardagh, 2007: 1), Zusak's novel, although controversial in numerous ways for its portrayal of German suffering during the war,[68] was, at the time, a monumental step forward in bringing the discussion of German suffering into the public and literary sphere. As I have previously discussed, it was only in the early 2000s, with the proliferation of texts by authors such as Günter Grass and W.G. Sebald, that the discussion of the German nation's suffering and victimhood was finally addressed in a more intense and public way.

[68] It is important to bring in Shields' critique on the text here. While he states that *The Book Thief* does not disregard the Shoah, he believes the text suggests "that the suffering experienced by non-Jewish Germans was equal to that of the persecuted minorities" and that it is this "equation of sufferance that creates … the possibility of a personal or cultural means of exculpation" (2016: 5). Furthermore, despite its exceptional poignancy and emotional rawness, there is little room for doubt that Zusak's text is controversial in numerous ways, particularly as it describes the ordinariness of perpetrator identities (2016: 5).

Indeed, as John Green remarks, "everything is upside down in Zusak's Nazi Germany" and the "entropy of the world is near complete" (2006: 3). It is a world where "sounds are tasted, visions are heard, death has a heart, the strong do not survive, and [one's] best chance of living may be a concentration camp" (Green, 2006: 3). Green's remark on everything being "upside down" is a good starting point for the discussion of German suffering in this chapter because it brings to mind the idea of subversion and inversion – which is precisely what Zusak does in terms of challenging the hegemony of the Holocaust narrative.

While the focus of the previous two chapters was on German suffering, I addressed this in relation to other peripheral types of suffering, such as Marie-Laure as a blind French girl and Mika and Aron as orphaned children in the Warsaw ghetto. However, in this chapter, I solely focus on the suffering of ordinary Germans living in a small, peripheral, fictional town called Molching. I do not delve into other narratives of suffering, and I only centre on what it meant to be an ordinary German, away from the battlefront, during World War II. I therefore argue that by honing in on and exploring how Germans suffer in his text, Zusak contributes to the dismantling of hegemonic narratives of suffering, particularly in relation to discourse on the Holocaust that overshadowed any discussion of German suffering in the decades following the aftermath of the war. Once again, this dismantling of hegemonic narratives is directly linked to multidirectional memory, and I demonstrate how, like all texts under discussion in this dissertation, *The Book Thief* is a powerful example of a multidirectional text that can contribute towards and reshape the way one thinks about German suffering and the very complicated behaviour of ordinary Germans during the war.

In an interview on 'Multidirectional Memory and the Implicated Subject' (Leeds Memory, 2016), Rothberg answers questions on his latest research that deals with the notion of the implicated subject. Drawing inspiration from Levi's work on the gray zone, the implicated subject is

essentially an in-between figure – someone who is neither a victim nor perpetrator (Leeds Memory, 2016). While this theory builds on Levi's concept of the gray zone, it seems to add another dimension to it. In other words, instead of looking at the 'victim can become perpetrator' dynamic, Rothberg suggests that an individual does not have to be classified as either a victim or a perpetrator. In this way, the individual can essentially be exculpated from crimes and does not need to be labelled as solely a victim (where it is implied that the individual has no agency) or perpetrator (where the individual is only seen as evil). While it is not within the scope of this dissertation to delve into Rothberg's research on this topic, I suggest that the implicated subject can perhaps be applied to the main characters under discussion in this chapter, thereby creating room for further analysis and research of this topic in relation to *The Book Thief* and other texts dealing with similar themes. For example, Liesel and her foster father, Hans Hubermann, can possibly be categorised as implicated subjects because they are neither true victims (in the traditional sense of the word regarding the Holocaust) nor true, sadistic perpetrators.

The Book Thief is primarily a book about Liesel Meminger, a young girl who is nine years old at the beginning of the novel and is sent to live with foster parents (Hans and Rosa Hubermann) in the small town of Molching, near Munich. The main events of the novel occur between 1939 and 1943 in Nazi Germany. Liesel's biological father was likely murdered for his affiliation to the Communist Party, and she witnesses her little brother die on the train journey to Molching. He is buried in a small town and this is where Liesel steals her first book, *The Gravedigger's Handbook*. It is interesting that the first thing she steals is a book considering that at the start of the text she is illiterate. Once in Molching, she forms a close relationship with her foster father, Hans, and her next-door-neighbour, Rudy Steiner – both of whom resist the Nazi regime as much as possible. Hans teaches her to read and she begins to steal and consume books voraciously – a symbolic act

of defiance against Hitler's book-burnings (McLeod Gipson, 2017: 2). According to John Green (2006: 1), Liesel is a "very well-drawn character", but he believes that young readers will find "the going-slow" until Max Vandenburg, a Jewish fist-fighter in his early twenties, arrives unexpectedly at the Hubermanns' door one night. Hans owes a favour to Max's father, who died during World War I, and so Hans, at an immense risk to his and his family's safety, provides refuge to Max in the basement of his house. This is the start of Max's and Liesel's unique and unshakable friendship, and as the novel progresses, the reader witnesses Liesel's continual development into "a good and generous person despite the suffering around her" (Green, 2006: 2). Towards the end of the text, Liesel loses everyone she loves in an accidental Allied bombing of Molching.

From the first pages of the text, it quickly becomes apparent that Zusak portrays German suffering and victimisation in an emphatic manner. However, despite its controversial subject matter, reviews of Zusak's text seem to be overwhelmingly positive. Philip Ardagh describes the text as a "beautifully balanced piece of storytelling" that is "unsettling, thought-provoking, life-affirming, triumphant and tragic" (2007: 2). For Brace, the book has an "innocent sensibility … [that] wears its heart on its sleeve" (2006: 2). Deborah Stevenson comments on how Zusak successfully uses "the war as a lens to examine the destruction we wreak upon ourselves as a species and the significance of seemingly small redemptions" (2006: 389). Marked as crossover readership for child and adult audiences[69] (McLeod Gipson, 2017: 1), Green suggests that "a book so difficult and sad may not be appropriate for teenage readers" and maintains that the book was probably written for adults (2006: 3). However, Green also states that it is a "great young-adult novel" that "can be life-changing … because it offers us a believable, hard-won hope" (2006: 3). Furthermore,

[69] Amy Bright (2016: ii) points out that adult readers buy 80% of all young adult novels despite this category being targeted at teenage readers.

Peter Pierce remarks on how the text's "oblique angle on the German homefront never exalts the courage of the young, but quietly tells of how days and months are managed" and that Zusak has written "one of the most unusual and compelling … Australian novels" (2005: 2). It is therefore clear that from these reviews, *The Book Thief* has been a remarkably well-received text over the years despite its daring and controversial topic.

One of the most iconic and memorable features of Zusak's novel is his use of Death as the narrator. Erin McLeod Gipson persuasively argues that Zusak's Death is more of a "performative omniscient" narrator (as opposed to the well-known omniscient narrator form) because he is simultaneously "anthropomorphised and constitutively nonhuman" (2017: ii). She makes this assertion based on the idea that Zusak's Death "strategically pretends to be omniscient" although "natural explanations prove he is not" (McLeod Gipson, 2017: 1). For the purposes of this chapter, however, it is sufficient to remark simply on Death's omniscience, his ability to know the characters' thoughts and their future, and his possession of human-like qualities (although limited) (McLeod Gipson, 2017: 1). By using Death as the text's narrator, Zusak "mirrors the pervasive sense of death" felt by those living during the turbulent Nazi period (McLeod Gipson, 2017: 2). Moreover, Zusak's text includes typographical symbols, illustrations, visually strong images, and hand-written passages, marking it, once again, as an ambitious text designed for both adults and young adults alike (Brace, 2006: 3). Through Death, the reader is introduced to "all shades of German" and while he is no apologist, Zusak is able to give a "remarkable insight into the human psyche" and the life of an ordinary German during World War II (Ardagh, 2007: 2).

The following chapter presents a detailed discussion of how the main characters (all of whom are German, barring Max Vandenburg, who is Jewish) come to inhabit the gray zone and how Zusak carefully and artistically tells the story of the everyday German citizen who, in the end, has to

endure tragedy and pain and eventually meet an untimely death. I begin this chapter by analysing Zusak's much-talked about and unusual narrator, Death, and how this narratological device enhances the (peripheral) theme of German suffering. Following on from this, I discuss how the text's protagonists suffer in various ways and how their behaviour and actions can be viewed through the lens of the gray zone, which helps portray Germans in an empathetic light. In this section, I also briefly refer to Sanyal's work on complicity. I conclude the chapter by looking at the multidirectional nature of the text and how, through its depiction of suffering, victimhood, and complicity, it reframes the Holocaust narrative in order to give prominence and meaning to German suffering.

4.1 The depiction of German suffering through the text's unlikely narrator

In the following section, I discuss how Zusak's unusual narrator, Death, both heightens and pacifies the death, suffering, and destruction surrounding him. While I mainly focus on how Death accentuates the trauma, pain, and anguish experienced by the ordinary German characters of his text, I also briefly include a few paragraphs on how Max's suffering as a German-Jewish man is presented and narrated. Importantly, I discuss Max's suffering in relation to Liesel's in order to underline the multidirectional nature of this text. Therefore, the following section is primarily concerned with how Zusak approaches the topic of German suffering by using Death as both a character and narrator and various other devices, such as the inclusion of illustrations.

Apart from being the most striking and interesting feature of the text, Zusak's use of Death-with-a-capital-d as the narrator intensifies the horrific events that German civilians experience during the war, making the text all the more poignant, heart-rending, and human (Pierce, 2005: 1). Death, as both an anthropomorphic figure and the narrator, possesses many human qualities, which is

ironic in a text that details the demise and dehumanisation of humans. McLeod Gipson suggests that readers tend to misread Death as an omniscient narrator: they assume he is simply omniscient because "he is immortal, knows the characters' thoughts, and reveals the tragic future awaiting each character" (2017: 1). However, as I have mentioned above, McLeod Gipson proposes that Zusak's narrator should be classified as "performative omniscience" (2017: ii) because Zusak has crafted a peculiarly "naturalized version of Death with human appearance, behaviours, and emotions" where he "extends this humanization to Death's narrative ability" (2017: 3). In other words, McLeod Gipson contends that Death's narrative ability is "limited to the restrictions of a human homodiegetic, or first person, narrator" (2017: 16). Therefore, Zusak's Death is an all-too-human figure or, as Mcleod Gipson suggests, "a character within the world he creates" (2017: 16). All these qualities and characteristics of Zusak's narrator serve to engage and even befriend the reader where he/ she "becomes gradually acclimated to a version of death as familiar to them as another human" (2017: 4). Zusak's Death is described as having an immortal heart (Zusak, 2013: 491), meaning that he is able to experience emotions like stress, pain, and sadness. This allows the reader to feel what Death is feeling, thereby heightening the trauma and victimisation experienced by Zusak's German characters.

At the very beginning of the text, Death describes himself as amiable, agreeable, affable, and fair (Zusak, 2013: 13), and in order to emphasise his humanisation further, Death identifies himself with male pronouns, which, according to McLeod Gipson (2017: 5), can be easy to miss. She quotes an example from the text, which says, "And then. There is death. Making his way through all of it" (in McLeod Gipson, 2017: 6). For this reason, I will thus refer to Death as male. Important to note is that Death also speaks in colour[70] (which brings to mind the idea that colour usually

[70] In other words, he uses colours to narrate and accentuate the scenes he describes.

brings life to a situation), and one of the first colours Death presents to the reader is "something white [o]f the blinding kind" (Zusak, 2013: 16). The first death in the text is that of Liesel Meminger's younger brother, Werner. He dies on a train (presumably of some kind of chest infection), where Death narrates the following scene:

> Yes, it was white. It felt as though the whole globe was dressed in snow. Like it had pulled it on, the way you pull on a jumper. Next to the train line, footprints were sunken to their shins. Trees wore blankets of ice. (Zusak, 2013: 16)

It is important to comment on the name of Liesel's brother, Werner – the same as that of Werner Pfennig in *All the Light We Cannot See*. While it may be seen as a typical or common Germanic name, it may also point to the idea of a shared German trauma. Werner Pfennig dies in a minefield set by his own troops and Werner Meminger dies on a train in his own country – an action set in motion because his parents are communists and thus enemies of the Reich. It is also conventional to assume that snow is equated with innocence and purity, and Death's reference to snow thus emphasises the loss of a young boy about to be orphaned because of circumstances created by the Nazi regime. Death's description of the whole globe being dressed in snow underlines the idea that Werner, Liesel, his mother, and those burying Werner are encapsulated in a snow globe where only they exist. The scene is eerily peaceful, yet also cold and sorrowful. It is a moment where the war and chaos temporarily stop so that Liesel and her mother can mourn the loss of a six-year-old brother and son. Notable here, and once again echoing Doerr's text, is the burial of Werner in an unknown location, a peripheral or insignificant place. Liesel can only stare at the "faded lettering of the sign in front of her" (Zusak, 2013: 30) in the nameless town, knowing that she is on her way to another place, which only adds to her sense of abandonment and displacement.

The next colour Death discusses is black, which is the exact opposite of the blinding white snow. This time, Death comes "for a man perhaps twenty-four of age" and describes the scene as a

"beautiful thing in some ways" (Zusak: 2013: 19). The language employed by Zusak throughout the text is paradoxical, where beauty and brutality often go hand-in-hand. In this particular scene of blackness, Rudy Steiner places a teddy bear on the chest of a dying pilot whose plane has crashed. The pilot, a non-German, is the supposed enemy of the Reich, yet in this moment, Rudy, abandoning any ties to what it means to be a citizen of the Reich, displays a powerful form of compassion and solidarity. The moment is beautiful in its brutality, and through this powerful paradox, Zusak succeeds in emphasising the humanity of war (or rather the humanness of war). Against the blackened sky and the pallor of the dead soldier, Death ironically brings the story of the individual to life and thus gives a face and a name to what would have been another faceless casualty of war. Interesting to note here is that Death usually sees colours first before he sees the humans (Zusak: 2013: 13). By doing so, he humanises his victims and eschews categorising them in terms of race, gender, religion, or political affiliation.

> As the sky began to charcoal … We both observed the boy as he reached into his toolkit again … to pull out a small, stuffed, yellow toy. Carefully, he climbed to the dying man. He placed the smiling teddy bear cautiously onto the pilot's shoulder. (Zusak, 2013: 495)

The idea of Rudy reaching into his toolkit alludes to the idea that he is trying to fix something that he recognises as extremely broken and entropic. Furthermore, the fact that he pulls out a teddy bear from this kit serves to illuminate both his child-like innocence and painful awareness of living during the war.

In Molching, where death and destruction reign, Death almost seems to pacify the brutality of war and the events that happen with his calming demeanour, gentle spirit, and assurance that he will be picking up souls and taking them away to an imagined better place. This is not the same death evident in *All the Light We Cannot See* where Werner is swallowed by a landmine and buried in

an unknown location. It is not the malicious and cancerous death that ravages through Sergeant Major Reinhold von Rumpel's body. It is not the death of Aron and the children from the orphanage in the concentration camps in *The Book of Aron*. It is a Death-with-a-difference and a unique narrative device that somehow appeals to the need for something good, hopeful, and positive to come from a time of immense tragedy – a sentiment echoed by Ardagh who believes that Zusak's narrative device "gives a unique and passionate voice to a narrator who can comment on [a] human's inhumanity" (2007: 1).

While Green believes that death is too innocuous (2006: 1), I argue that it is Death's very innocence and geniality that creates a "freshness" (Brace, 2006: 1) in a novel dedicated to the inhumaneness of war. The idea of 'Death versus death' adds to the text's ability to magnify death in a way that says *each* death and *each* casualty of the war *is* important, and while Zusak may be slightly romanticising death, he does so in a way that adds beauty and hope – and most importantly raw honesty – to the brutality. Death's honesty and vivid use of imagery is flagrant throughout the course of the text and often leaves little to the imagination. For example, when Max Vandenburg is first introduced, Death describes him as "scum" and a man who is famished, emaciated, and afraid (Zusak, 2013: 145). He further implores the reader "not to look away" (Zusak, 2013: 145) and thus bear witness to Max's suffering. As Max begins his journey to Hans Hubermann on Himmel Street, Death describes him as follows:

> With a clean-shaven face and lopsided, yet neatly combed hair, he had walked out of that building a new man. In fact, he walked out German. Hang on a second, he *was* German. Or more to the point, he *had* been. In his stomach was the electric combination of nourishment and nausea. (Zusak: 2013: 166)

Interesting to point out is how Zusak first says that Max walked out of the building (where he was initially hiding) as German because he is German. Here, Zusak is suggesting that Max is German

first and then Jewish, which emphasises Zusak's ability to subvert the Holocaust narrative in a unique and memorable manner. Furthermore, Death's emphasis on the auxiliary verbs *was* and *had* augments the irony inherent in Nazi politics: Max *is* German, but in the eyes of the Reich, he is less German and more Jewish. As can be seen from the above extract, Death makes use of oxymoronic language (nourishment and nausea) to amplify Max's anguish and anxiousness. In Max heading towards potential salvation on Himmel Street, he believes that even if he were to be killed, he would essentially "die alive" (Zusak, 2013: 175) because he was not incarcerated in the camps like other Jewish people. When he finally arrives at Hans' door, Hans witnesses a man who is described as a mere shape with an echo of a voice (Zusak, 2013: 181) – symbolic of his diminishing freedom in Nazi Germany.

It is the figurative language employed by Death that captivates the reader and forces him/ her to 'imagine' and picture Max's incarceration, struggle, hunger, thirst, and agonising wait for some sort of salvation. A stand-out example of Death's use of figurative language when describing Max's suffering is illustrated below:

> He had eaten only the foul taste of his own hungry breath for what felt like weeks … There was sleep, starving sleep, and the irritation of half-awakeness, and the punishment of the floor … His eyes did not do anything that shock normally describes. No snapping, no slapping, no jolt. Those things happen when you wake from a bad dream, not when you wake *into* one. (Zusak, 2013: 146)

In this excerpt, it is important to note the use of the second person "you", a mode of address that Death uses quite frequently throughout the text (for example on page 358 when he picks up the "weary" souls from a German prison and says, "[t]hey were French, they were Jews, and they were you"). He even introduces himself to the reader by saying "[y]ou are going to die"[71] (Zusak, 2013:

[71] McLeod Gipson states that this "you" refers to all readers to emphasise that "mortality is universal" (2017: 9).

3). In doing this, Death draws the reader in, talking directly to him/ her and making him/ her painfully aware of life's ephemerality. He also suggests that any of us could, at any moment, be thrown into chaos and a waking nightmare of facing death. The second-person address also suggests transience, and as Dewald Steyn observes, "… Death does not allow us the luxury of distance but rather forces us to confront the reality of the suffering of others, as well as our own" (2016: 112). Moreover, McLeod Gipson proposes that by using strategies of engaging narration that allow him to speak "directly to the reader", Death creates a relationship with the reader where he strives to get the reader to "sympathize with the writer's cause" (2017: 8). In this way, Death tries to persuade the reader to interpret the narrative as he intends, thereby "adopting his perspective on humanity" and suffering (McLeod Gipson, 2017: 11). Therefore, the reader is forced to witness the suffering of both Max – metonymic of the Jewish people – and the German people, where both forms of suffering are given narrative space and prominence.

The introduction of Max's suffering is immediately contrasted with the 'ordinariness' and 'simplicity' (Zusak, 2013: 149) of Liesel's life on Himmel Street. Death describes Liesel's experience of the summer of 1940 as having four attributes:

1. Advancing through *The Shoulder Shrug* each night.
2. Reading on the floor of the mayor's library.
3. Playing football on Himmel Street.
4. The seizure of a different stealing opportunity. (Zusak, 2013: 149)

The simple acts of reading and playing football on Himmel Street highlight both the "innocence of childhood" (Shields, 2016: 8) and the "banal rituals" or the "minutiae of everyday life in Nazi Germany" for the residents of Himmel Street (Green, 2006: 2). With reference to the above extract, it is necessary to point out that Liesel begins reading *The Shoulder Shrug,* which features a Jewish man as a protagonist who is "presented in a positive light" (Zusak, 2013: 149). This is a

foreshadowing technique employed by Zusak to introduce the idea that Liesel's life is about to move from seemingly simple to complex and dangerous. This is perhaps encapsulated in the idea of Liesel moving from being illiterate and unaware to literate and conscious of the evil threatening those she loves. It is this transition from Liesel's childhood innocence to her sudden awareness of the reality of Nazi Germany that invokes a sense of sympathy in the reader. With little warning, Liesel is thrown into the tumult and chaos of wartime Germany, marking her, as an "everyday" German living an "everyday" life (Shields, 2016: 2), a victim of her own country's malicious regime.

There are many stand-out moments in the text, but one of them is Death's description of Molching's "The road of yellow stars" (Zusak, 2013: 57), which poignantly captures the daily scenes Liesel and her family and friends have to witness:

> It was a place nobody wanted to stay and look at, but almost everyone did. Shaped like a long, broken arm, the road contained several houses with lacerated windows and bruised walls … Those houses were almost like lepers. At the very least, they were infected sores on the injured German terrain … Further down, some people were moving around. The drizzle made them look like ghosts. (Zusak, 2013: 57)

Here, Death's narration illustrates the brokenness and division between German and Jewish people in a town that is meant to be home to both groups. While this excerpt specifically describes Jewish suffering, it can also be read as an allusion to German guilt[72] and suffering. The guilt is evident in nobody wanting to stay and bear witness to the destruction and hurt, and the suffering is manifest in the description of Germany having an "infected sore". This image of the infected sore arguably suggests two things: either the sore will heal (and is thus metaphorical of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*) or it will fester and cause death. Furthermore, at the end of the text

[72] I contend that German suffering cannot be read without any sort of relation to guilt.

when Himmel Street is bombed by the Allies, Death describes the scene of devastation, which is similar to his description of the road of yellow stars:

> The bombs came down and soon the clouds would bake and the cold raindrops would turn to ash. Hot snowflakes would shower the ground. In short, Himmel Street was flattened. Houses were splashed from one side of the street to the other. (Zusak, 2013: 502)

This parallel of the obliteration of Himmel Street with the devastation of the road of yellow stars suggests that Zusak's text can once again be linked to multidirectional memory: two different sites of violence and different versions of historical suffering. The Allied bombings have been an important topic in recent years as they have been a much-overlooked part of the fate of many German people (Nolan, 2008: 7). Zusak brings the Allied bombings to the fore in an intense and vivid way with Death describing baking clouds and hot snowflakes – oxymoronic images which point to a world turned on its head. The hot snowflakes perhaps indicate that nothing is natural or pure anymore – the insanity of war has created an entropic world where snowflakes are no longer cold and clouds bake as if the world is aflame. Lastly, Death mentions that Molching was not meant to be bombed in the first place – it was a mistake, which, of course, only magnifies the tragedy of the situation and suggests that the people of Molching are victims of bad luck, circumstance, and history.

Before moving on to the next section where I look at ordinary Germans and their suffering through the lens of the gray zone, I briefly consider other narrative devices employed by Zusak to heighten the tragedy experienced by his characters. *The Book Thief* can be classified as a multimodal text because it incorporates experimental typography and images in an otherwise text-heavy book (Bright, 2016: 173). Eliza Drang notes that the inclusion of graphics creates a higher level of reader engagement and a "new level of synergy" between the reader and the text (quoted in Bright, 2016:

173). These multimodal forms offer multiple perspectives for the reader (2016: 174), which, I argue, can be related to multidirectional memory as this theory is fundamentally concerned with different perspectives and a plurality of voices. For example, pages 451 to 456 of Zusak's text include a font that is representative of Max's scribbled handwriting and illustrations he drew himself. He creates a small, inspirational story for Liesel, and this emphasises the unshakable, emotional bond created between them. Max's story also gives the reader insight into his character, showing his compassion and care for Liesel despite his own suffering and fear. Another example of the text's multimodality is Death's inclusion of definitions from the *Duden* Dictionary, which are set apart from the text and written in bold. On page 383, Death gives a definition and translation of the German word for fear, *Angst*. He also provides synonyms for this word, which include horror, fright, alarm, terror, and panic. The definition of *Angst* is given in relation to how Liesel and other Germans feel when the siren for potential air raids sounds. These dictionary definitions with their respective synonyms, which frequently appear throughout the text, therefore serve to make the situation more tangible for the reader by describing exactly how the characters must be feeling.

To conclude this section, Zusak's use of interesting narratological devices gives the reader a unique perspective on German and Jewish suffering. The devices are used to develop intense emotion and heighten the hardships, suffering, fear, and trauma the characters experience as part of everyday life in a small German town. To link this section further to multidirectional memory, I have argued that because Death is used to emphasise both German and Jewish (Max's) suffering, Death is, to an extent, a 'neutral' figure that offers two different perspectives of suffering in Germany. Therefore, because of this 'neutrality', there is no zero-sum logic where one person's suffering is perceived as worse than the other. Death narrates all types of suffering – even the death of an

assumed-foreign soldier in a plane crash – and because Max is given narrative space, Zusak is using the Holocaust as a point from which to explore German suffering. Lastly, the formation of the friendship between Max and Liesel points to a form of solidarity, which, once again, is one of the central tenets of multidirectional memory.

4.2 From Himmel Street to the gray zone: Analysing perpetration of war crimes and complicity

4.2.1 Children of complicity? Reading Liesel and Rudy through the lens of the gray zone

In the following section, I discuss the concepts of perpetration, complicity, and victimhood in relation to the characters – some of them children – in the text. Thus, this section is dedicated to reading the characters through the lens of the gray zone. It is crucial to acknowledge that the Germans in Zusak's text are either perpetrators or, at the very least, complicit bystanders by default as they belong to the perpetrator nation. Here, it is important to emphasise Gabriele Schwab's statement that "Germans became victims because they were perpetrators or at least belonged to a perpetrator nation" (quoted in Shields, 2016: 11). Interestingly, Schwab suggests that even though Germans were perpetrators or were complicit by default, they could still be classified as victims, which is what, I argue, Zusak achieves with his text (cited in Shields, 2016: 11). In her work on memory and complicity, Sanyal (2015: i) notes that the term complicity is "a word typically used to mean participation in wrongdoing, or collaboration with evil."[73] I address the meaning of complicity in the text in relation to perpetration, witness without involvement, and the bystander

[73] However, Sanyal also comments on the elusiveness and capaciousness of the term. For example, complicity can denote being a partner (or involved) in wrong-doing. It can also indicate collusion or collaboration and ties in with the French *complicité*, meaning understanding or intimacy.

figure. For example, it seems difficult to read Liesel and Rudy as perpetrators of Nazi crimes. They may steal food in order to survive, but I suggest that this act of thievery is a result of the Nazi regime destroying the lives of ordinary Germans, thereby marking Liesel and Rudy more as victims than perpetrators. Furthermore, in one poignant scene that I discuss later, Rudy attempts to give bread to passing Jewish people on their way to Dachau. While many Germans of Molching witness this 'parade' without doing something to help (witness without involvement), Rudy at least tries to do something. I thus contend that he cannot be viewed as a perpetrator – only complicit by default. In a sense, this complicity by default may suggest the opposite of perpetration. However, it is not within the scope of this dissertation to unpack this further. It is sufficient to discuss complicity in relation to perpetration where even complicity by default points to wrongdoing. While Shields argues that Zusak exculpates his German characters in various ways (2016: 1), I argue that Rudy and Liesel, for example, cannot be exculpated, even if they are complicit by default.

In his study on the child victim as witness to the Holocaust, Anderson proposes that children are "defenceless" and that their persecution "turns the Holocaust into a moving and accessible story" (2007: 3). There can be no doubt that the stories of Liesel and Rudy are captivating and moving. However, I would like to disagree here with Anderson's statement that child victims are defenceless. Both Liesel and Rudy, in contrast to defencelessness, are resourceful, guileful, and street-smart. Pierce, in his review of the text, remarks that "Liesel's struggles are those of any child in such perilous times" (2005: 2). His usage of the word "any" once again points towards a universality of suffering – one experienced by *both* German and Jewish civilians. This idea is supported by the arrival of Max, who – just like Liesel, Rudy, and the inhabitants of Himmel Street – is starving, thirsty, and dispossessed. I use the term dispossessed particularly to describe the

situation of the Steiners and Hubermanns: they have essentially been dispossessed by their own government. As gray zone characters who are reluctant to conform to Nazi ideologies, they have been made to feel (like Max) as 'outsiders' who do not belong in their own country.

Liesel, from the very outset of the novel, has been depicted as an 'outsider' and, as I discussed in the previous chapter in relation to Marie-Laure, her peripherality can be emphasised by the insignificant town of Molching that "exists on the periphery of Munich" (Zusak, 2013: 33). Death even refers to her story as a "small" one (Zusak, 2013: 15). She believes that she has been abandoned by her mother, loses her brother, is taken into care by foster parents, has "dangerous eyes" (Zusak, 2013: 38) because they are brown and not Germanic-blue, and arrives at school illiterate. Perhaps Liesel's illiteracy calls to mind that of Hanna Schmitz's in Bernhard's Schlink's *The Reader*.[74] However, while Schlink uses Schmitz's illiteracy to symbolise German silence in the years after the war; Zusak demonstrates how Liesel manages to transcend her illiteracy and use words and books as a means of both survival and protest. Like *The Reader*, which is centred on German trauma, suffering, and guilt, *The Book Thief* provides an interesting example of how one can use the gray zone to discuss the characters' actions, motives, and complicity. Both Liesel and Rudy inhabit the gray zone, albeit to a much lesser extent than their parents. They are both members of the Hitler Youth[75] and frequently lie and steal in order to stay alive. While such acts

[74]Schlink's novel has widely been read as a psychological text that addresses the themes of silence, guilt, ethics, and atonement both personally and collectively. Critics have remarked that Hanna has been painted more as a victim than a perpetrator and that readers feel a sense of empathy for her (Doering, 2009: 1). She is ashamed of her illiteracy and lived in a time where she thought she was merely performing her duty. Despite her only seeing things in black-and-white, the text provides an excellent exploration of the gray zone and how – like Werner Pfennig or Max Meierhauser – many Germans serving the Reich were mere pawns in a malicious political game (Doering, 2009: 1).

[75] The second book Liesel steals is from a public book-burning bonfire held by the Nazis. This can be seen as both a small act of resistance and defiance against the Nazi regime because it is at this very bonfire where she realises that the Nazis are responsible for the death and disappearance of her Communist parents (Percival in Hoffman, 2013: 3).

can hardly be classified as 'terrible' or 'malicious', they point towards questions of amorality, coercion, and how far one would go in order to stay alive. For example,

> As for Liesel's other activities, she was still causing havoc with Rudy Steiner. I would even suggest that they were polishing their wicked ways. They made a few more journeys with Arthur Berg … keen to prove their worth and extend their thieving repertoire … Their biggest victory, however, they performed alone. (Zusak, 2013:168)

The victory Death refers to here is when Rudy and Liesel make sure Otto Sturm, a boy from their school, falls off his bicycle so that they can steal the groceries he was delivering to the priests:

> 'All those priests,' Rudy explained as they walked through town. 'They're all too fat anyway. They could do without a feed for a week or so.' … Liesel could only agree … she was pretty hungry herself. (Zusak, 2013: 169)

Although their plan of making sure Otto skids on the extra layer of ice put in place by Rudy is "perfect", Liesel does feel "a small portion of guilt" for what she does (Zusak, 2013: 169). When Otto falls off his bike and does not move, Rudy begins to panic that he may have killed him. This is one of the numerous examples in the text that can productively be read through the gray zone. Liesel and Rudy are driven by their hunger to inflict hurt on someone they know in order to satisfy their own needs. Yet, it is clear from how Death narrates this incident that both Liesel and Rudy feel a sense of guilt and shame for their actions (i.e. they recognise their complicity).

However, in an act of loyalty to Arthur Berg, the leader of a food-stealing gang, Liesel and Rudy then share the food stolen from Otto with Arthur. When Arthur finds out where the food comes from, he says to Liesel and Rudy, "[w]e might be criminals, but we're not immoral" (Zusak, 2013: 170). In response to this, Death comments: "Much like the book thief, he at least drew the line somewhere" (Zusak, 2013: 170). Liesel and Rudy then decide to give Otto his basket back, and on the way to Otto's house, Liesel asks Rudy if he feels bad for what they did. Rudy replies by saying,

"[o]f course I do, but I'm not hungry anymore" (Zusak, 2013: 171). Here Death, once again, makes a critical remark concerning moral ambiguity:

> But Rudy Steiner couldn't resist smiling. In years to come, he would be a giver of bread, not a stealer – proof again of the contradictory human being. So much good, so much evil. Just add water. (Zusak, 2013: 171)

The above excerpt is arguably a simplistic, yet accurate, description of the gray zone. Rudy and Liesel, both prepared to steal as much as they give back, demonstrate what it means to sacrifice certain moral values under stressful situations. Their thievery, of course, is a much 'lesser' moral duplicity when compared to Levi's description of the gray zone in the concentration camps, but it draws attention to the paradox of good and evil inherent in all humans when "water" (i.e. stressors) is added to the equation.

One of the more poignant scenes in the text is when Rudy decides to throw pieces of bread into the road that a parade of Jews and "other miscreants" (Zusak, 2013: 445) are travelling on to Dachau:

> The road was cold and straight. It wasn't long till the soldiers came with the Jews. In the tree shadows, Liesel watched the boy. How things had changed, from fruit stealer to bread giver … She heard his stomach growl – and he was giving people bread. (Zusak, 2013: 446)

Two key points stand out in the above scene: first, Rudy's sacrificial nature, and second, the fact that Death says that he was giving *people* bread. This humanises the situation as he does not refer to the prisoners as Jews and miscreants. Moreover, while this scene refers to the concentration camps (the *people* are on their way to Dachau), it is centred on both the moral complexity of Germans and the "child's 'pure' vision of … events as they unfold" (Anderson, 2007: 3). Here,

Zusak is explicitly rewriting the Holocaust narrative by telling the story of German civilians and portraying them in both a morally complex[76] and multidimensional manner.

Rudy's character is further underlined in an inimitable scene where he covers himself in charcoal in order to imitate the famous African American athlete, Jesse Owens. When his father, Alex Steiner, finds out about the incident, he tells Rudy that he "can't go around painting [him]self black" (Zusak, 2013: 65). Rudy, unable to comprehend what his father is saying, asks innocently why he cannot be like Jesse Owens. Alex replies by saying, "[b]ecause you shouldn't want to be black people or Jewish people or anyone who is not … *us*" (Zusak, 2013: 66). I suggest that Alex only makes this statement as an attempt at self-preservation and to protect his family. It is extremely dangerous for both Rudy and his entire family to be seen as supporting or favouring any other race that is not Aryan. Here, unlike the ambiguity of the gray zone, Alex is drawing a clear Manichean binary between 'them' and 'us' – something which Rudy, as a child, fails to comprehend.

In the above section, I have attempted to show how Zusak portrays Rudy and Liesel as multidimensional characters with strong consciences – which, I contend, emphasises their suffering as children of a war they had nothing to do with. Similarly, Maria Kissova suggests that "the emotional appeal of the story is strengthened through the depiction of suffering and dying children" (2009: 62). It is clear, then, that despite their complicity and wrongdoings (which, perhaps, are not so wrong in the greater scheme of things), Zusak is positioning them as victims of circumstance and the nation's political situation (Shields, 2016: 1). Furthermore, Shields

[76] I use the term morally complex instead of 'good', as good is a highly subjective, complicated term. If I use the term 'good' to refer to the German characters, it tends to exculpate them, which is not my intention. Furthermore, the perception of what a 'good' German is will differ from person to person. I thus choose to use the terms morally complex or multidimensional in order to provide a more careful, nuanced reading of the text.

contends that the novel's reliance on portrayals of the everyday German citizen (especially the child-figure) creates empathy in the reader, which possibly serves as a present-day means to create positive imagery of the German figure during the war (Shields, 2016: 5). In the next section, I extend my analysis of reading German characters through the lens of the gray zone to Hans Hubermann and Alex Steiner, whose complicity, collaboration, and guilt are more evident in comparison to Liesel and Rudy.

4.2.2 The contradictory politics of Alex Steiner and Hans 'Übermann'

Critical literature on *The Book Thief* does not pay much attention to Alex Steiner, Rudy's father. Most reviews tend to discuss Hans Hubermann, describing him as the "proverbial 'Good German'" (Hoffman, 2013: 1). Here, it is crucial to mention that it is arguably very difficult to unpack what the figure of the 'good' German entails. The definition of good is subjective but in the context of this dissertation, I quote from Hoffmann to demonstrate that others have read Hans as a morally good character. I prefer to use the term morally complex, as this allows me to tread carefully on what remains a difficult and sensitive topic.[77] In order to paint a fuller picture of Zusak's depiction of the moral quandary and suffering faced by his German characters, it is important to include Zusak's portrayal of the more 'peripheral' German characters in his text. Therefore, I will focus on both Hans and Alex in this section and include a brief discussion on Frau Holtzapel's tragedy and Frau Diller's unwavering support for the regime.

[77] For example, one may describe the real-life actions of Major Karl Plagge, a Nazi officer, as 'good' for he created an "elaborate deception that saved about 250 Jewish lives" (McGreal, 2005: 1). Having joined the Nazi party in 1931, Plagge became disillusioned by the Nazi's racial policies and felt that it was his duty to help Jewish people because he believed he had helped create the monster that was the Nazi Party (McGreal, 2005: 1). One could possibly describe his actions as 'good' or that he 'did the right' thing. Yet, he was still complicit in Nazi crimes. I therefore argue that it is better to use the term 'morally complex', 'morally superior', or even simply 'moral' in place of the 'good German', as no one can be described as wholly good or innocent.

In his review of the novel, Green cleverly refers to Hans as Hans Übermann. There are various translations for the German word *über*, but in relation to Green's description, the word means "above", "more than", or "higher than" (dict.cc, 2018). This suggests that Hans is the morally superior figure in the text, who, despite the circumstances, does his best to be "more than" a simple bystander and witness to the horrors surrounding him and his family. For example, Death notes the following about Hans:

> Since 1933, ninety percent of Germans showed unflinching support for Adolf Hitler. That leaves 10 percent who didn't. Hans Hubermann belonged to the ten percent. (Zusak, 2013: 68)

Here, it is evident that Hans is continuously and vehemently reluctant to participate in anything that supports the Reich and Nazi Party. Death describes him as being not even remotely patriotic (Zusak, 2013: 79). His ultimate sacrifice comes in the form of him willing to hide, feed, and support Max. During World War I, Max's father sacrificed himself so that Hans could survive. He therefore returns the favour by sacrificing himself and his family to hide and protect Max. Thus, the Hubermanns, including Liesel, serve humanity above anything else. In fact, it is extremely rare for Hans to commit any sort of duplicity or perpetration and, therefore, indicates that he is less of a gray zone character than others in the text. True to the novel's paradoxical nature, Zusak creates the character of Hans Junior, Hans Hubermann's son. The complete opposite of Hans, Hans Junior supports the Reich with fervour. He believes that his father belongs to an "old, decrepit Germany" (Zusak, 2013: 110) and much to his embarrassment and ire, he is aware that his father has been called "der Juden Maler" (Zusak, 2013: 110).

The moral quandaries in which Hans finds himself are further depicted in a significant scene that occurs after the book-burning ceremony. After the event is over, Liesel says to her foster father, "I hate the Führer … I hate him" (Zusak, 2013: 121). After a moment's thought, Hans slaps Liesel

across the face and tells her never to say that again. He of course does this to protect her, but this act of slapping her, something he did not want to do, depicts his moral dilemma in a dangerous Germany. In the streets, Hans is essentially coerced into performing the Nazi salute "Heil Hitler!" in order to protect his family and Max. However, his voicing of this salute, despite his reluctance to do so, makes him complicit. Kaplan and Herrero-Matoses elaborate that perpetration can simply include not doing anything or "refusing to see" the suffering (quoted in Adams, 2016: 139). Yet Hans always tries to do something, and he acknowledges the suffering of the Jewish people in his village. For example, in one memorable scene, Hans repaints the door of a Jewish man. He does so because someone had written the words "JEWISH FILTH" on the door (Zusak, 2013: 189). This dangerous act costs Hans his application to become a member of the Nazi Party, which is needed to help him protect his family, and makes him a target among fervent Nazi Germans in Molching. Nevertheless, Hans still tries – out of extreme necessity – to perform the Nazi salute when asked of him and fly the flag when required (Zusak, 2013: 191).

In the following excerpt, Death, once again, draws attention to Hans' morality:

> Exactly what kind of people Hans and Rosa Hubermann were was not the easiest problem to solve. Kind people? Ridiculously innocent people? (Zusak, 2013: 207)

The question marks in this excerpt perhaps indicate that it is not easy to depict Germans as 'innocent' when discussing World War II. Death leaves these questions open-ended, essentially asking his readers to decide for themselves if the Hubermanns, despite being German, can be described as innocent and "ridiculously" kind. Card, in her work on the analysis of the gray zone, discusses how "oppressive social structures … offer an inhospitable context for the development of good character" (2000: 509). Nevertheless, it is evident throughout the text that both Hans and his wife, Rosa, display a profound moral armature. In the end, when Death comes to collect Hans'

soul after he dies in the bombing, Death describes his soul as having sat up to meet him, because this is what the best kind of souls do (Zusak, 2013: 535). Death then speaks of Rosa, saying that "she *had* a heart … a bigger one than people would think" (Zusak, 2013: 536). Therefore, while it is arguably easy to say that the Hubermanns are good and kind, Death, in the above excerpt, suggests that the answer is much more complex

More so than Hans', Alex Steiner's predicament is a classic example of the gray zone in many ways. Alex has had to develop what Card calls a "pseudo-identity as a survival strategy" (2000: 510) for not only himself but his family too. Highlighting Alex's contradictory politics, Death notes:

> *Point one:* [Alex] was a member of the Nazi Party but he did not hate the Jews, or anyone else for that matter. *Point Two:* Secretly, though, he couldn't help feeling a percentage of relief … when Jewish shop owners were put out of business … *Point Four:* His family. Surely, he had to do whatever he could to support them. If that meant being in the Party, it meant being in the Party. *Point Five*: Somewhere, far down, there was an itch in his heart, but he made it a point not to scratch it. He was afraid of what might come leaking out. (Zusak, 2013: 65)

By being a member of the Nazi Party, Alex is therefore automatically complicit in wrongdoing, but as Card suggests, "evildoers", if Alex can be called that, "need not be sadists" (2000: 513). As an occupant of the gray zone, Alex is both a victim and a perpetrator who is morally ambiguous and "ready to compromise" (Zusak, 2013: 518). For example, like Hans, he becomes a member of the Nazi Party for the sake of protecting his family. His relief at Jewish Germans being put out of business is more economic than it is 'evil' – and, as Death narrates, he does buy into the propaganda of Nazi Germany that Jewish people were stealing his customers.[78] Furthermore,

[78] Many Germans, who supported the Nazi regime, did so because they believed that it would boost the country's flailing economy and restore Germany's fortunes (McGreal, 2005: 1). Therefore, their motivations for joining the Party were initially motivated by moving Germany forward economically more than anything else.

Death speaks of how, amid a mass of Germans supporting a Nazi parade, Alex Steiner was one of the "odd-men out … who stood like a human-shaped block of wood, clapping slow and dutiful … [s]ubmission" (Zusak, 2013: 67). This line, steeped in contradiction, shows how Alex occupies the gray zone and is torn between submission to the Reich in order to protect his family and guilt (the scratch that he is afraid to itch).

In a few short pages, and thus deviating from the main narrative of Hans, Liesel, and Rudy, Death narrates the tragic story of Frau Holtzapfel (who lives on Himmel Street) and her sons. One day when visiting Frau Holtzapfel, Liesel is greeted by one of Frau Holtzapfel's sons, Michael, who has just returned from Stalingrad. Death vividly describes his appearance: his eyes are "painful and loud" and his bandaged hand has "cherries of blood" seeping through it (Zusak, 2013:471). When Liesel sees him again later, his "cherries" of blood have turned into "plums" (Zusak, 2013: 471), indicating that his wounds are not healing. Soon after his return from the battlefront, Michael commits suicide. His brother, Robert, had, as Death describes without tact, his legs blown off at the shins and Michael watched him die. When Frau Holtzapfel finds out about Michael's suicide, she lies in the street, no longer able to walk, and "pierces the street of heaven with her screams" (Zusak, 2013: 508). From this scene, it is clear that Zusak portrays most of his German characters as victims and survivors – rather than perpetrators – of the Nazi regime, and it is arguably very difficult not to have sympathy for the outcome of Frau Holtzapfel's life.

Before I conclude this section, I briefly refer to two fervent Nazi supporters in the text: Frau Diller and the Mayor of Molching. Frau Diller, who owns the corner shop at the end of Himmel Street, has an "evil look", a "refrigerated voice", and "breath that smelled like *Heil Hitler*" (Zusak, 2013: 55). She lives for the Third Reich, has a picture of Hitler hanging in her shop, and refuses to serve anyone who does not deliver a Nazi salute when they enter (Zusak, 2013: 56). Shields contends

that Zusak's depiction of ordinary Germans living during the height of Nazi Germany places the Nazis as a "minority group who exist[s] at the periphery of German society" (2016: 1). In other words, this argument suggests that in Zusak's interpretation, the general German population was, in many ways, similar to the Steiners and Hubermanns (although perhaps not as proactive and helpful as Hans Hubermann, for example). The few staunch Nazi followers that are depicted in the text are few and far between, and Zusak's depiction of the absent Nazi figure is problematic and concerning in many ways, as Shields believes this acquits such Germans of personal and collective guilt (2016: 2).

From the discussion above, it is clear that the Nazi perpetrators in Zusak's text have been pushed to the periphery where "their presence and their role as substantive characters [are] mostly absent" (Shields, 2014: 13). Thus, while the perpetrators remain, Zusak has positioned his characters largely as war-torn victims, who should be admired for their "bravery, resilience, and moral fortitude" (Shields, 2016: 14). While this is, of course, problematic in many ways as it points to a means of both personal and collective exculpation and suggests that the majority of Germans were victimised, I argue that by reading the text through the lens of the gray zone, it becomes difficult for the reader to view the characters solely as victims. In other words, the gray zone reminds us that the characters are morally ambiguous and have the potential to commit crimes. Furthermore, I argue that by including Max's narrative and using the Holocaust as a starting point to discuss German victimhood, Zusak is careful to remind his readers that Max is the true victim in the traditional sense of the word.

4.3 **Alltagsgeschichte: The fate of ordinary Germans in an ordinary town**

The word *Alltagsgeschichte* was developed in the 1980s by German historians Alf Luedtke and Hans Medick. Its name comes from the German words *Alltag*, meaning everyday, and *Geschichte*, meaning history. The term was formulated to answer questions about "everyday history" during the Third Reich (University of York, 2012: 1). As I have yet to explore what the concept of the ordinary German entails in the context of Zusak's novel, the final section of this chapter is thus concerned with the figure of the ordinary German maintaining the ritual of daily routine during the Third Reich. As argued by Shields, "relying upon small-town banality means the reader develops empathy for those who suffer due to the presence of Nazis" (2016: 10). In other words, the insignificance of the impoverished inhabitants of Molching – who are mostly tradespeople – makes them ordinary, 'everyday' non-Jewish German citizens who are depicted as victims of the Nazi regime. In his article dealing with the exculpation and the everyday German in the novel, Shields draws on both a "segment of historiography concerned with *Alltagsgeschichte*" and German historian Martin Broszat's work to argue how highlighting the ordinary, 'everyday-ness'[79] of Germans (the proletariat) living during the Nazi era is an important facet in understanding how Nazi Germany operated (2016: 2). Broszat developed his own historiographical methods for examining the everyday life of ordinary German citizens who had endured the Third Reich. Broszat contends that the Nazi Party was not a "monolithic and static political dictatorship influenced solely by Hitler", and he suggests that everyday life under National Socialism had remained a "normal continuation of centuries-old traditions, including elements of antisemitism" (quoted in Shields, 2016: 2). He further argues that the National Socialist past should not focus

[79] Moran describes the "everyday" as a term "used to refer to an extremely wide range of mundane activities undertaken by 'ordinary' people" (2010: 52). In the context of *The Book Thief*, these mundane activities would include, for example, Rosa Hubermann washing and ironing clothes for the town's wealthier people and Hans Hubermann painting/repairing things and playing his accordion at pubs.

solely on acts of perpetration but on other socially nuanced factors as well (cited in Shields, 2016: 3).

Zusak uses the 'ordinariness' of Liesel, the Hubermanns, and Rudy to depict an echelon of German people who are multidimensional and, therefore, victims of a powerful regime to which they are 'automatically' subservient. The text is saturated with traumatic stories, and while Max's story plays a prominent part in the text, it is ultimately the story of how ordinary Germans experience life, death, and trauma during the war. As with my analysis of suffering in *All the Light We Cannot See*, it is evident that Zusak reframes the Holocaust trauma paradigm by discussing how Germans were affected during the war and depicting them in a moral light, which, for Shields, is highly problematic. This is where Zusak, according to Shields, places the "everyday German in a moral community [like Molching] who suffers the burdens of a situation that is not of his or her own making" (2016: 2):

> On the ration cards of Nazi Germany, there was no listing for punishment, but everyone had to take their turn. For some it was death in a foreign country during the war. For others it was poverty and guilt when the war was over, when six million discoveries were made throughout Europe. Many people must have seen their punishments coming, but only a small percentage welcomed it. One such person was Hans Hubermann. (Zusak, 2013: 423)

When Hans is conscripted into the war after having been accepted into the Nazi Party because he tried to help a Jewish man out in the streets, Liesel begins to wonder how many conscription letters were sent out as punishments to "Germany's Hans Hubermanns and Alex Steiners – to those who helped the helpless, and those who refused to let go of their children" (Zusak, 2013: 424). The departure of Liesel's and Rudy's fathers has an immense impact on them both, with Rudy losing his ability to speak for a while and finally saying to Liesel that he wants to find the Führer so that he can kill him (Zusak, 2013: 432). Far from depicting the vitriolic and fervently dutiful Nazi

German, it is clear that Zusak has created an emotionally haunting story about a nation of people traditionally viewed as sadistic perpetrators.

Although the Jews of Europe – and the Roma, Sinti, disabled, and LGBT individuals – are essentially the Other in the World War II narrative, it is perhaps plausible to suggest that the Germans, particularly in the *The Book Thief*, are representative of the Other, too. Dan Diner, as quoted in Shields' article on German exculpation, suggests the following:

> … The Nazi period represents the exact opposite, an absolutely exceptional state of affairs, one distinguished from everyday normalcy and continuity precisely by its incisive and catastrophic character … two worlds [therefore] exist side by side … (2016: 4)

Relating this quote to my argument on how Germans can possibly be seen as a representation of Otherness during the war, it is evident in Zusak's text that there are two diametrically opposed 'worlds': the everyday German who is portrayed as having moral armature (and is therefore the 'Other' in terms of victimhood) and the demoniacal figure of the sadistic Nazi. Shields critiques this oppositional framing, suggesting that Zusak's work portrays Germans "who led everyday existences" as traumatised victims, with only "one select stratum of society"[80] actually being the 'real' perpetrators of Nazi crimes (2016: 4). This, of course, is one of Zusak's more contentious moves. As Shields purports, portraying this dynamic serves to exculpate Germans and create empathy in the reader (2016: 5). Important to note, however, is that this is not my line of argument. I neither exculpate Germans of their personal and collective guilt nor do I claim that 'some'

[80] In his work on *Ordinary Germans in Extraordinary Times* (2004), Andrew Stuart Bergerson provides a potential counterargument to Zusak's portrayal of ordinary Germans and the Nazis existing on the periphery. Bergerson conducted research on the German town of Hildesheim during World War II and in his book, he explores how "ordinary people maintained a culture of normalcy while nonetheless transforming friends and neighbours into Jews and Aryans*"* (2004: xxxi). In other words, Hildesheimers would greet their neighbours selectively by "alienating some and integrating others" (Bergerson, 2004: xxxii) and would acclimate themselves to Nazi habits (such as performing the Nazi salute) in seemingly insignificant ways (Bergerson, 2004: xxxiv). These small seemingly insignificant acts would then become part of the building blocks of Nazi totalitarianism. However, Bergerson also points out that "the Nazi regime [always] stood close by to enforce compliance with the threat of violence" (Bergerson, 2004 140), suggesting that people would comply because they were fearful of the consequences.

Germans during the Nazi period were essentially 'guilt-free' or complete victims. Instead, I try to bring German suffering and victimisation to the fore in a way that evaluates the complexities of their characters while still discussing complicity and perpetration. I reiterate my earlier discussion that I use the term Otherness loosely, as I do not want to detract from the 'true' Otherness of the Jewish people and other marginalised groups.

Another interesting feature of Zusak's text is his intimation that Liesel's (German) suffering and Max's (Jewish) suffering are, in fact, similar in some ways. For example, in the basement of her house on Himmel Street, where Liesel comes to befriend and love Max, Death describes how they both – "the German and Jewish lungs" – breathe the same air (Zusak, 2013: 247). Both Liesel and Max bond over their shared love for reading and writing. They are both orphaned. And they both experience terrifying nightmares about their respective pasts. This idea of unity is also emphasised in Hans' and Erik Vandenburg's story. Whereas Hans and Erik were united by music, Liesel and Max are united by words and their hatred of Hitler. What Zusak achieves is perhaps the integration – and not the separation – of perpetrator and victim histories – an idea I have taken from Houwink ten Cate's work on Holocaust studies unrelated to the text (2010: 33). This integration is thus a catalyst for important dialogue around hegemonic ideologies of trauma and suffering.

Arguably, Zusak has created a novel that eliminates any so-called competition of victimisation. The text is not about who suffers most – it is about a shared victimisation where both Jewish and German people suffered, oftentimes alongside each other and not as separate entities. Looking at this form of historical synchronism, Shields makes the observation that there is a distinct divide that appears in the text, where the Nazi perpetrator and the common German "are two distinct entities" (2016: 12). However, this argument, as Shields points out in the extract below, relates

more to the lower-class echelons of society (i.e. the working and impoverished people of Himmel Street).

> [T]hose who take Nazi ideology seriously are rare amongst the lower-to-middle class echelons of society. Party members are predominantly from upper-class Germany, and any Nazis of similar caste to the inhabitants of Himmel Street … are portrayed as socially inhibited, inhumane, and selfish … Nazi ideology pervades and shapes Himmel Street, but only a marginal few police the government regulations. The Nazi menace to the occupants of Himmel Street is not removed, but is pushed to the novel's periphery. (Shields, 2016: 12)

Interesting to highlight is Shields' use of the words "marginal" and "periphery". The overall focus of my dissertation has been on 'peripheral' narratives of suffering and trauma during the war, yet it is ironic that Zusak has chosen to represent the Nazis as a peripheral group that is distinctly separate from the novel's central narrative. Therefore, as Shields seems to suggest, the text's portrayal of Germans does not consider morally complex spaces, such as the gray zone. However, while I do agree with Shields that the text creates a divide between the Nazi and the common German; I oppose his view that the text does not consider morally complex spaces. Nevertheless, I recognise that it is perhaps more difficult to read Zusak's protagonists through the lens of the gray zone in comparison to the other texts I analyse in this dissertation.

At the end of the novel, when Himmel Street is bombed and obliterated, there is a sense of unity and universality in death: no German escapes it.

> *The sun stirs the earth. Round and round, it stirs us, like stew* … On Munich Street, she remembered the events of the previous week there. She saw the Jews coming down the road, their streams and numbers and pain … The world is an *ugly* stew, she thought. It's so ugly I can't stand it. (Zusak, 2013: 523; original emphasis)

Zusak uses both pathetic fallacy and personification to mimic feelings and events. In the above image, the sun is punishing and constant and stirs people like a stew. The above excerpt, instead

of being narrated by Death, is written by Liesel[81] and depicts her emotional state. The world for her is simply unbearable. Even when she sees the Amper River, which is "glorious and emerald and rich" (Zusak, 2013: 523), she believes that the world does not deserve such a beautiful river. Liesel bears witness to just about everything *ugly* in this world: the death of her brother, the loss of her real mother, a young man "hung by a rope made of Stalingrad snow" (Zusak, 2013: 524), the death of a bomber pilot, Max's suffering, and finally, the death of her foster parents and the Steiners, including Rudy. Once again, it is clear that Zusak has done little to depict vitriolic Nazis, for this is ultimately not their story. It is a story of survival and victimisation rather than perpetration and one which, according to Shields, arguably allows for both acts of redemption and personal exculpation (Shields, 2016: 14).

W.G. Sebald, in his collection of essays, *The Air War and Literature*, "argued forcefully for the recognition of German victimization during the Allied air war in 1945" (Kaplan & Herrero-Matoses, 2016: 142). Sebald's main preoccupation was to examine how the trauma and horrors suffered by the German people during the period 1942-1945 have been remembered and to what extent they have been acknowledged and discussed in the public and literary spheres (Costabile-Heming, 2003: 1). Zusak's text is informed by semi-autobiographical elements, such as the Allied air wars discussed by Sebald. For example, Hans Hubermann, as punishment for helping a Jewish man, seems to be forced into battle. He is first sent to Stuttgart and then Essen where he is given the position of Lufftwaffen Sondereinheit (Air Force Special Unit) (Zusak, 2013: 437). His task, in layman's terms, is to collect dead bodies and clean up after bombings. Here, Hans and the rest of the men in his unit have to "perfect the art of forgetting" (Zusak, 2013: 441). In one tragic

[81] Liesel, having been taught how to read and write, writes her own short story in the text, which she titles 'The Book Thief'. According to Shields, this implies that the novel, although narrated by Death, may be a memoir or testimony (2016: 6).

moment, Hans, running from a building, trips over the corpse of a young boy the same age as Rudy. Ironically, this young boy's name is Rudolf – Rudy for short – and in a display of compassion, one of the men in Hans' units cannot bring himself to tell the mother that they found her child dead. In these particular scenes from Essen, the presence of Nazi officials is distinctly absent. There are just ordinary German people, children, and old men dying in masses with the likes of Hans trying to clean up what cannot be salvaged.

In conclusion, it is critical to mention that the victimisation of Zusak's Germans is, in many ways, contentious and problematic. Critics have been quick to point out that the depiction of German suffering (in the corpus of literature dealing with this theme) tends to "push the Holocaust aside" (Shields, 2016: 4) and exonerates the Germans of their complicity. For example, Saul Friedländer believes that the portrayal of German victimhood "excludes the victims' perspective on the Holocaust", and Otto Dov Kulka contends that the Holocaust is then made "irrelevant" (quoted in Shields, 2016: 4). Assmann contends that today, "it is perhaps German suffering [that] pushes aside memories of the Holocaust and blunts the consciousness of German guilt" (2006: 193). Heidemarie Uhl, an Austrian historian, probes further into this concept of German victimhood, suggesting that it may function as a "counter-narrative to Holocaust memory" (in Assmann, 2006: 193). Again, I must emphasise that I am in no way exculpating ordinary Germans. Germany is synonymous for its perpetration against the Jewish people and other minority groups, and I contend that one cannot discuss German victimisation and suffering without keeping the Holocaust in mind. It is thus my argument that Zusak has created a memorable text that not only places emphasis on German suffering but also manages to refer to the pain and death of the persecuted groups.

4.4 **Conclusion**

In an interview, Zusak says that the inspiration for writing *The Book Thief* came from two real-life events related to him by his German parents: the bombing of Munich and a young boy offering bread to a starving Jewish person being marched through the streets (Ardagh, 2007: 1). Ardagh suggests that what makes Zusak's text unique is his combination of terrible events with "such believable characters and the minutiae of everyday life in Nazi Germany" (2007:1). It is these minutiae of everyday Nazi life – and the life and suffering of the ordinary German citizen – that has been central to my argument and discussion in this chapter.

In the early 2000s when the theme of German suffering was starting to gain public attention, there was a large consensus that "whatever the war experience of German civilians [was], it would 'forever be trumped by Auschwitz, Sobibor, and Buchenwald'" (Barnouw, 2005:102). And when Sebald's essay, 'A Natural History of Destruction', was published in *The New Yorker* in 2002, it sparked a public outcry that it was "immoral" to declare "any sympathy" for the German wartime experience (2005: 102). Dagmar Barnouw, in opposition to these outcries, explains how during the post-war period, ordinary Germans were viewed as collectively responsible for and guilty of the Holocaust and other World War II atrocities. This meant that Germans were "silenced by this presumed guilt" where "even German war remembrances maintained an exclusive focus on Jewish victims of the Nazi regime" (quoted in Stewart, 2008: 2). Furthermore, Barnouw (quoted in Stewart, 2008: 2) asserts that there has been an "enduring hierarchy of suffering" that has removed many aspects of wartime suffering from historical memory. Zusak's text, I suggest, has the potential to extend scholarship on multidirectional memory because it dismantles hegemonic World War II narratives of suffering by focussing on "… stories in history [that] are layered within the often-muted experiences of ordinary people in everyday life" (Jaquet quoted in Shields, 2016: 7).

The Book Thief is a text that decentres, or rather reconstructs, the Holocaust narrative by emphatically and vividly depicting the notion that "we [the Germans] suffered too" (MacKay, 2009: 4). As MacKay elucidates, "World War II … was very substantially a civilian experience … experienced not as a war or movement and battle but as a daily degradation, in the course of which men and women were betrayed and humiliated, forced into daily acts of petty crime and self-abasement, in which everyone lost something and many lost everything" (MacKay, 2009: 7). Perhaps like Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* (2003), *The Book Thief* is a signifier of the "possibility of a greater public openness on the subject of the troubled German past" (MacKay, 2009: 100). More so than Germany simply being a "collective of guilty perpetrators" (McKay, 2009: 102), Zusak's text is a critical novel not only about the humanness of Germans but of humanity as a whole.

Andreas Huyssen, as quoted in Sanyal's work on memory and complicity, indicates that the Holocaust is beginning to function "as a metaphor for other traumatic histories and memories" and can be used as a "powerful prism through which we look at other instances of genocide" (2015: 3). Furthermore, Sanyal proposes that literature on complicity can function as a "mode of reception and engagement with other histories" (2015: 2). Therefore, I argue that by using the Holocaust as a starting point (or as a prism), Zusak has created a multidirectional text that thematises German complicity to explore the German past in a way that neither relativises nor negates the historical specificity of the Holocaust (Sanyal, 2015: 7). Moreover, while Zusak's novel may cause some controversy (Shields, 2016: 14), I contend that it is a critical and important text that reconfigures traditional literary representations of Nazism and the Holocaust and extends scholarship on both German and Holocaust studies by adding to the debate on how we can remember and recognise this past both culturally and artistically (Shields, 2016: 14).

Conclusion: Reframing the past

In a recent video interview on his book *Multidirectional Memory* with Ann Rigney (Humanities UU, 2017), Rothberg discusses the inspiration behind his work. While working on his dissertation relating to the Holocaust, he realised that while he was writing about one of the greatest crimes against humanity, there were other genocides happening in other parts of the world (such as in Rwanda and Bosnia) that the world was silent about. This is when he began to work on the idea that it is critical to talk comparatively about the Holocaust in relation to other extreme sites of violence. Furthermore, he also recognised that when talking about other histories of violence, there would always be one history that would crowd out the memory of another. This thinking therefore gave rise to his theory of multidirectional memory, which seeks to explore the connection between different histories of violence in a comparative or parallel way that is both non-competitive and non-hegemonic.

As I conclude this dissertation, I once again need to draw attention to how I have applied Rothberg's theoretical framework to the texts discussed in this dissertation. Multidirectional memory is fundamentally concerned with using the Holocaust as a starting point to discuss other historical sites of colonial violence, such as slavery in the United States, the destruction of Native American Indians, and the French war in Algeria in the years following the aftermath of World War II. It is clear from my analysis of the texts that I do not discuss or deal with any traditional colonial or postcolonial setting: the texts are set in Western Europe (and can, therefore, be considered as Eurocentric) and focus solely on the events of World War II. While this may seem to break away from Rothberg's original aims of multidirectional memory, it has been my argument that multidirectional memory can be applied to any form of historical suffering, irrespective of the context or controversy of this suffering (i.e. German suffering and the discussion of the perpetrator

figure). Furthermore, I have argued that my texts are multidirectional texts and, therefore, extend scholarship in this field because they use the Holocaust as a reference point to discuss other marginalised or peripheral narratives of suffering without, as I have shown, diluting or detracting from the enormity and significance of the Holocaust itself.

However, I am aware that my discussion and argument has been controversial, and this is why I chose to read the characters in each text – specifically the German characters – through the lens of Levi's the gray zone. While the gray zone, to re-emphasise my earlier discussions, was used by Levi to describe the incredibly complex internal structure of Auschwitz, which led prisoners – the *Sonderkommando* in particular – to behave in morally ambiguous ways; I have suggested that the gray zone does not need to be confined to any one time or place (Petropoulos & Roth, 2005: xviii) and can be applied to any situation where individuals are subjected to extreme or abnormal pressure and stress. Furthermore, it is clear that the authors of the novels have created characters that are "less traditional representations of the Third Reich triad [perpetrator, bystander, and victim]" (Shields, 2014: 222) and the novels therefore reflect the shifts and changes in and response to Holocaust literature over the decades (Shields, 2014: 222).

In Chapter 2, I explored and analysed the narrative of Max Meierhauser, an ordinary German Wehrmacht soldier, in Weaver's *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw*. In many ways – but without detracting or exculpating him from his crimes – Weaver humanises Max and positions him, in varying degrees, as a victim, especially when he is imprisoned in a Siberian gulag. Apart from this humanisation, which allows the reader to view Max in an empathetic light, Weaver also seems to position him as a victim of historical circumstance and the National Socialists – a theme that I have argued is also evident in *All the Light We Cannot See* and *The Book Thief* regarding the young German Private, Werner Pfennig (discussed in Chapter 3), and the Hubermanns and the Steiners

(discussed in Chapter 4). Yet despite positioning their protagonists as victims and bystanders (as in Zusak's text, for example), I maintain that the authors are careful not to exculpate them from their crimes or overlook their moral duplicity. Importantly, the German protagonists in the texts all recognise their guilt and complicity, with Max Meierhauser, for example, saying at one point that he, along with his fellow comrades and soldiers, deserves to be punished for what he did.

In Chapter 2, I also investigated Shepard's *The Book of Aron*. I chose to analyse Weaver's and Shepard's texts together as they are thematically linked, and this was the only chapter wherein I discussed two texts simultaneously. Unlike Weaver's text, which focusses on German perpetration and guilt, Shepard's text focuses solely on the figure of a Jewish orphaned child trying to survive in the Warsaw ghetto. While Weaver's text also centres on the figure of the Jewish orphaned child (Mika), *The Book of Aron* is fundamentally concerned with Aron – a marginalised, dispossessed, and abandoned child left to fend for himself. Chapter 2 was thus my starting point for the discussion of the marginalised and peripheral narratives of World War II as epitomised by the child figure. I further explored this marginalisation embodied by the child figure in Chapters 3 and 4 by centring on the narratives of Werner, Frederick, Marie-Laure in *All the Light We Cannot See* and Liesel Meminger and Rudy Steiner in *The Book Thief*. Importantly, Aron, Mika, and Marie-Laure were the only child characters I read and analysed without using the lens of the gray zone. This was because none of these children were German, and I only used the gray zone in relation to the analysis of the German characters (both child and adult).

While Chapters 1 and 2 were also concerned with the figure of the ordinary German Wehrmacht soldier (i.e. Werner Pfennig and Max Meierhauser), my main discussion and analysis of the ordinary German living an ordinary, everyday life during the Third Reich was reserved for Chapter 4, which was dedicated to my analysis of *The Book Thief*. In this Chapter, I commented on and

analysed how Zusak portrays his German protagonists largely as victims and complicit bystanders. The Nazi perpetrators are present, but they have been pushed to the periphery of the novel and their inclusion is only by association with the German bystander (Shields, 2014: 13). Furthermore, Zusak's novel is explicitly concerned with the suffering of ordinary Germans despite its inclusion of Max Vandenburg's narrative as a Jewish man fighting for survival. Max's story is situated alongside Liesel's, as it is ultimately Liesel's story that Zusak is interested in. I have thus argued that it is this changing narrative perspective between German and Jewish characters, which, as I have discussed in Chapter 2 occurs in *The Puppet Boy of Warsaw* as well with Mika, Max, and Max's granddaughter, that classifies these texts as multidirectional.

In *Multidirectional Memory*, Rothberg refers to numerous texts he considers as multidirectional, as many of these texts call upon "multiple contexts", such as the Algerian War on Independence, the war on terrorism, and the plight of undocumented migrants in Europe (2009: 271). One such example of these texts is Didier Daeninckx's 1984 thriller, *Meurtres pour mémoire*, which challenges the reader on what it means for "histories to be hidden and what it means to bring them to light" (Rothberg, 2009: 273). The text is ultimately concerned with the "dark pasts of both Vichy and the Algerian War" (Rothberg, 2009: 273). It has been my overarching argument that like Daeninckx's text, the novels considered in this dissertation can be qualified as multidirectional texts because firstly, they consider the "dark pasts" of German suffering and other peripheral narratives of World War II and, secondly, highlight what it means for "histories to be hidden" (like German suffering) and what it means to bring them to light in the public and literary sphere. Thus while my dissertation is controversial to varying degrees and possibly asks more questions than it answers, I hope that my analysis of the novels, which allow interesting perspectives to enter public

discourse, extends scholarship on both Holocaust and German studies and contributes to important ethical debates surrounding memory and memory competitions.

Before I conclude this dissertation, it is important to recognise that the concept of multidirectional memory is not always necessarily 'good' (HumanitiesUU, 2017). For example, my choice to explore and comment on German suffering may still be considered an unpopular topic for some. Nevertheless, I chose the theme of German suffering because I was interested in studying peripheral narratives of suffering where I, in line with Rothberg's work, ask complicated questions, such as: how do we navigate more isolated or marginalised memories of suffering? Do we ignore some histories simply because they are too controversial to discuss in the public sphere? How do we think about the relationship between different social groups' histories of victimisation, especially if it was, or still is, deemed taboo to discuss one's victimisation, as it was with German people following the aftermath of the war? These questions are, of course, incredibly complex and have no simple answers. But I do hope that my dissertation, despite being unable to answer such questions, can contribute to how we can ethically and productively think about the suffering of different groups of people, especially within the contemporary moment.[82]

At the end of his book, *The Drowned and the Saved*, Levi illustrates the following regarding the contemporary moment:

> The experiences that we survivors of the Nazi Lagers carry within us are extraneous to the new Western generation and become ever more

[82] For example, the USA is still grappling with horrific racial crimes, South Africa is trying to navigate its dark past now more than ever with issues of land redistribution; the Palestine versus Israeli conflict seems to be intensifying, and the world is trying to tackle the issue of refugee crises and immigration, especially within the European Union. Furthermore, Rothberg provides an important and useful example of the workings of multidirectional memory in present-day Germany: immigrant women from a community in Berlin pursued a project to learn about Germany's National Socialist past (Rothberg & Yildiz, 2011: 38). These women come from war-torn countries and have thus led difficult lives marked by racism, violence, and poverty. Talking about the project, one Tamil woman from Sri Lanka states that learning about the destruction of Jewish people by the Nazis made her reflect upon the persecution and murder of the Tamil minority by the Sri Lankan government (cited in Rothberg & Yildiz, 2011: 41). Another Sri Lankan woman, also referring to the project, opines: "Nobody knows the truth about Sri Lanka. We don't have enough possibilities to draw attention to the suffering of our people" (quoted in Rothberg & Yildiz, 2011: 41).

> extraneous as the years pass … For the young people [of today] … [they are] besieged by today's problems, different, urgent: the nuclear threat, unemployment, the depletion of resources, the demographic explosion, frenetically innovative technologies to which they must adjust. (1989: 198)

While Levi wrote the above excerpt in the 1980s, the manmade cataclysms that he mentions are perhaps even more serious today than they were back then in the 1980s. The world today compared to the world of the Holocaust is markedly different, yet also markedly the same[83] and Levi was all too aware of this. In his conclusion to *The Drowned and the Saved* (1988: 199), Levi mentions that what happened in the 1940s in Europe can happen again and can happen anywhere. With its propensity for violence, government lawlessness, and the continuous rise of power-hungry political candidates, the world remains vulnerable to hegemonic, over-powering, and destructive machinations. Importantly, Levi, in his conclusion, refers to non-Western countries that have been and continue to be afflicted by genocide and racial and political hegemony. It cannot be ignored that Western countries and media have substantial power and influence over the non-Western world. Peter Childs and Patrick Williams (2014: 9) make the important assertion that "the Western-ness of history would appear to be inescapable", and although I am aware that the texts I have analysed in this dissertation take place within a European context, I contend that these texts still challenge the idea of textual hegemony because firstly, they explore lesser-known and marginalised narratives of suffering and, secondly, do not place great emphasis on the Holocaust narrative.

To conclude this dissertation, it is my hope that by using Levi's concept of the gray zone to read the German characters in the texts in an empathetic manner, I have contributed to how we can rethink and re-recognise German and other peripheral World War II narratives of victimisation

[83] For example, there has been a marked increase in the number of right-wing extremists in Germany displaying anti-foreigner and anti-Semitic behaviours (Niven, 2002: 236).

and suffering that were largely overshadowed by the memory of the Holocaust. Furthermore, I also hope that my analysis of the texts will broaden the field of Holocaust literature in memory studies, extend literature on multidirectional memory, and contribute to scholarship on trends seen in recent German literature that seem to neutralise Nazi atrocities and German responsibility[84] for them (Shields, 2016: 14). By looking at different perspectives of historical suffering through the characters in the texts and how some of these characters have addressed their pasts by engaging in productive dialogue and forging relationships based on solidarity with other characters, I am optimistic that I have chosen multidirectional texts that demonstrate how memories of the past can interact productively and therefore enable us, in the contemporary moment, to think dialogically and help us recognise that not all memories are equally (and fairly) represented in both the public and scholarly sphere (Rothberg quoted in Humanities UU, 2017).

Furthermore, I have suggested that it is possible to recognise suffering in very diverse and different contexts. Moreover, I am confident that my argument and analysis of the four texts, which have yet to receive much scholarly attention, will help reframe and rewrite scholarship on the Holocaust. By drawing on both Michael Rothberg's and Stef Craps' work on multidirectional memory, I maintain that I have demonstrated how the authors of the texts provide good illustrations of how German and Jewish (and French) suffering can be brought into conversation with each other where neither version of suffering is negated nor reduced to a zero-sum logic of comparison. I hope that my dissertation has provided further insight into the workings of multidirectional memory and highlighted why there is "the need for several [historical] voices and dialogue" (Däwes, 2007: 540)

[84] Rothberg states that while it is important to recognise that times are changing, it remains essential to guard against relativisation and denial (Rothberg & Yildiz, 2011: 38).

in contemporary texts and why it is important to address such question as those posed by Rothberg above.

Finally, I refer briefly to an article by Toby Lichtig (2010: 1) titled 'Is this the end of Holocaust literature?' Lichtig understands that the Holocaust will always have a prominent place in the narrative of Jewish experience (2010: 1), but he also recognises that many writers, especially those of the second and third generation, are "beginning to tire of the Shoah" (2010: 1). However, Norman Mailer (quoted in Lichtig, 2010: 2) argues that "no topic can ever be 'finished' with" – least of all one such as the Holocaust". Perhaps, then, the question is not "is this the end of Holocaust literature", but rather, 'how can we reframe the Holocaust narrative and use it in different ways to discuss other forms of both historical and present-day extreme sites of violence, slavery, racism, terrorism, and genocide?' Lastly, I leave the reader with Rothberg's final paragraph in his epilogue in *Multidirectional Memory* (2009: 314),

> [m]emories are mobile; histories are implicated in each other. Thus, finally, understanding political conflict entails understanding the interlacing of memories in the force field of public space. The only way forward is through their entanglement.

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