

Claudia Junk (Hg.)

Die Zeit danach – 80 Jahre Kriegsende

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Claudia Junk

Die Zeit danach – 80 Jahre Kriegsende

Mit vielen Gedenkfeiern¹, Ausstellungen², Lesungen und zahlreichen Veranstaltungen wurde nicht nur in Deutschland des Kriegsendes vor 80 Jahren gedacht. »Der 8. Mai ist für uns ein Tag der Dankbarkeit. Dass wir in einem freien Land in Freundschaft mit unseren Nachbarn leben, ist ein Geschenk – und ein Auftrag«,³ so Bundeskanzler Merz. Mit dem Krieg, der etwa 60 Millionen Opfer forderte, endete auch die Herrschaft der Nationalsozialisten. Doch was spätestens seit der Rede des damaligen Bundespräsidenten Richard von Weizsäcker 1985 heute als »Tag der Befreiung« bewertet wird, wurde in den ersten Nachkriegsjahren durchaus differenziert wahrgenommen, war es doch für Deutschland zunächst einmal die Kapitulation, ein verlorener Krieg und die Diskussion um die so genannte »Kriegsschuldfrage« – der schwierige Prozess der Aufarbeitung, der Übernahme von Verantwortung und auch des Wiederaufbaus eines weitgehend zerstörten Landes begann.

Die Beschäftigung mit Ursachen und Folgen des Zweiten Weltkrieges auf kultureller Ebene begann bereits kurz nach Kriegsende und lässt sich – zumindest für die deutschsprachige Nachkriegsliteratur – bis in die 1960er Jahre datieren.⁴ Verarbeitung und Verdrängung, »innere Emigration« und Exil, Opfer und Täter,

1. erinnert sei z.B. an die Kranzniederlegung durch Bundeskanzler Merz und Bundespräsident Steinmeier in der Neuen Wache in Berlin, der Zentralen Gedenkstätte in Deutschland für die Opfer von Krieg und Gewaltherrschaft.

2. So erstellte beispielsweise das Erich Maria Remarque-Friedenszentrum die Ausstellung *Verantwortung im Schutt. Die Geburtsstunde der Demokratie*, in der mit teilweise erstmals gezeigtem Foto-materiale die letzten Kriegsmonate und die ersten Jahre nach dem Ende des Zweiten Weltkrieges in Osnabrück dargestellt wurden. Siehe dazu auch den Beitrag von Sven Jürgensen in diesem Band.

3. Siehe <https://www.bundesregierung.de/breg-de/aktuelles/merz-bei-gedenkveranstaltungen-2345280> (letzter Zugriff 16.09.2025).

4. Siehe »Nachkriegsliteratur«, *Wikipedia*, <https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nachkriegsliteratur> (letzter Zugriff 16.09.2025).

Verantwortung und Leid, Vergangenheit und Zukunft – die Themenbreite war nicht nur bei deutschsprachigen Autoren breit gefächert.⁵ Die breite Bevölkerung war jedoch eher mit dem Überleben in den zerstörten Ländern und dem Wiederaufbau beschäftigt und nicht wesentlich an einer Vergangenheitsbewältigung oder gar der Diskussion um Mitschuld und Verantwortung, sei es in der Heimat oder als Soldat, interessiert. Mehr als ein Drittel der deutschen Bevölkerung lebte in Notunterkünften, Flucht und Vertreibung aus den deutschen Ostgebieten verursachten weiteres Leid, mehrere Millionen *Displaced Persons* wollten versorgt werden.

Erst Ende der 1970er Jahre erfolgte z. B. durch die US-amerikanische TV-Serie *Holocaust*⁶ eine wichtige Zäsur im Umgang mit den nationalsozialistischen Verbrechen, der Judenverfolgung und -vernichtung. Die Beschäftigung mit der eigenen Vergangenheit führte beispielsweise zu den seit den 1990er Jahren verlegten so genannten Stolpersteinen vor den ehemaligen Wohnungen von Opfern des NS-Regimes.

Für das vorliegende Jahrbuch KRIEG UND LITERATUR/WAR AND LITERATURE wurden Beiträge gesucht, die sich mit Literatur im weitesten Sinne (Belletristik, Drama, Lyrik), Kunst, Fotografie, Film und Erinnerung (in Tagebüchern, Erlebnisberichten etc.) beschäftigen. Voraussetzung war, dass diese zu untersuchenden Publikationen nach 1945 entstanden sind und sich vorwiegend mit den Folgen des Zweiten Weltkriegs beschäftigen. Dazu zählen Themenschwerpunkte wie

- Verarbeitung von und Umgang mit Kriegsschuld/-verbrechen; Eigenverantwortung, Verantwortung der Eltern-/Großelterngeneration
- Leben und Arbeiten in einer zerstörten Welt, der Blick nach vorne
- Leben und Arbeiten im Exil, verbunden mit Fragen wie »Rückkehr, ja oder nein?«, »Vergebung?«, »Neuanfang«
- Blick in die Zukunft, Gestaltung, Neuanfang.

Weitere Themenschwerpunkte konnten ebenfalls berücksichtigt werden, die behandelten Publikationen konnten aus allen am Zweiten Weltkrieg beteiligten Nationen stammen.

Die eingereichten Beiträge befassen sich mit bis heute eher kaum berücksichtigten Autoren und Autorinnen, mit fast vergessenen literarischen Erzeugnissen oder noch unzureichend ausgewerteten Akten und Zeitzeugendokumenten und werden durch weitere Beiträge zu anderen Themengebieten ergänzt.

5 Besonders genannt sei hier die *Gruppe 47* (1947–1967), die jungen Schriftstellern eine Möglichkeit bot, Literatur nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg angesichts der Erlebnisse neu zu denken. Siehe hierzu u.a. https://de.wikipedia.org/wiki/Gruppe_47 (letzter Zugriff 16.09.2025).

6 Siehe auch den Beitrag von Alice Cadeddu in diesem Band.

Beginnend mit kanadischen Romanen zum Zweiten Weltkrieg werden des weiteren Texte von Autor:innen wie Horst Bienek, Szczepan Twardoch, Erich Ebermayer, Heinz Piontek, Wolfdietrich Schnurre, Tadeusz Nieśpiałowski, Gustaw Morcinek, Józef Kret oder Hans Marchwitza vorgestellt, die sich mit so unterschiedlichen Aspekten wie dem Kriegsende in Schlesien, Räumen der zerstörten Lebenswelt oder Fahnenflucht beschäftigen.

Das sich Erinnern spielt in Aufsätzen zu Armando, Géraldine Schwarz oder Hanna Krall eine wesentliche Rolle. Biographische Skizzen zu Hans Marchwitza und Arnold Zweig beleuchten deren Exilzeit und die Schwierigkeit der Rückkehr nach Deutschland bzw. Israel. Den eher auf Literatur ausgerichteten Beiträgen schließt sich eine mehr politische Analyse der Nachkriegszeit anhand der Rede eines vehement für die Demokratie eintretenden Oberbürgermeisters, verglichen mit programmatischen Nachkriegs-Äußerungen Erich Maria Remarques, an.

Die dann folgenden Aufsätze befassen sich schwerpunktmäßig mit Lebensbedingungen unterschiedlicher Personengruppen nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg, seien es Holocaustüberlebende der Sinti und Roma, polnische *Displaced Persons* oder im Nachkriegsdeutschland lebende Polen unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der polnischen Jugend. Für einige dieser Beiträge wurden bisher nicht oder nur gering ausgewertete Akten und Zeitzeugendokumente herangezogen, deren Analyse allerdings nur vorläufig und stichpunktartig sein kann.

Hierzu zählt auch die Auswertung von Spruchkammer- und Polizeiakten der Marktgemeinde Isen hinsichtlich des schwierigen Umgangs mit Täter- und Opferperspektiven und somit des eigenen Umgangs mit der Vergangenheit.

Eine enge Kooperation mit der Schlesischen Universität in Katowice (Polen) erklärt die Anzahl polnischer Autoren und Autorinnen, vor allem aber versteht sich das Jahrbuch auch als Publikationsorgan für Studierende und junge Wissenschaftler:innen. So wurden auch zwei Beiträge aus dem Bereich Theologie aufgenommen, von denen sich einer mit sozial engagierter Theologie, den Prinzipien von Menschenwürde, Gemeinschaft, Solidarität und Hoffnung in den Schriften von Papst Franziskus beschäftigt, der andere sich der Offenbarung des Johannes bezüglich der von ihm verwendeten militaristischen Bildsprache im Zusammenhang mit aktuellen Ereignissen widmet.

Weitere eingereichte, nicht zum Hauptthema des Bandes gehörende Beiträge untersuchen das Russlandbild in der Osnabrücker Tagespresse zu Beginn des Ersten Weltkrieges, Döblins Erzählung *Die Schlacht! Die Schlacht!* unter Berücksichtigung von Marinettis »Krieg« als »einzige Hygiene der Welt« oder die armenische Antikriegsliteratur zum zweiten Bergkarabach-Krieg.

Ein weiterer Beitrag befasst sich mit dem Medium Film und analysiert das Thema der Grenze zwischen Mexiko und den USA in verschiedenen Spielfilmen. Eine Miszelle zu Söldner-Erinnerungen aus dem 19. Jahrhundert rundet den Band

ab, der – wie auch schon in den früheren Jahren – mit Rezensionen und Kurzvorstellungen eingegangener Bücher vervollständigt wird.

Die Art und Verwendung einer gendergerechten Sprache blieb den Autoren und Autorinnen überlassen.

Uwe Zagratzki

Individual Memorising in Selected Canadian World War II Novels*

Dagmar Novak states that World War II novels from Canada are more detached in comparison to the »outrage« and »violence of protest« of those written after the First World War.¹ The mood was different in Canada at the outbreak of the second war, less enthusiastic and patriotic, but more sober. New strategies of combat and new military technologies did away with the trench war and along with it with the separation of civilian population and soldiers as both suffered from the brutality of war in equal measures.

With regard to war novels the biggest change occurred with the arrival of a new notion of the individual soldier. Military planners had come to the conclusion that soldiers were distinct from each other in many respects, that they were individuals and their training therefore had to be geared to bringing out their best skills. The discovery of the »little man« is thus reflected in the novels as much as his individual consciousness and his personal moral responsibility in connection with his duty as a soldier.²

An even more drastic break-away from WW I novels and a further corroboration of the individualistic vein of post-WWII novels from Canada is documented in works of cultural memory reconstructing the events of up to nearly eighty years ago. Hence, under the surface of a World War II novel the texts transmute into meta-fictional reflections on the acts of memorising. The present article attempts to give proof to this hypothesis on the ground of five selected novels from seven decades.

* This article was first published in: Adela Catana, Alina Bottez (eds.). *Woes of Wars in Text and Context*. Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2025.

1 Dagmar Novak. *Dubious Glory: the two World Wars and the Canadian Novel*. New York: Peter Lang, 2000, 95.

2 Ibid., 96–98.

Earle Birney *Turvey* (1949)

Earle Birney's *Turvey* is a case in point of the early writing. The characterisation of the »little man« takes the shape of a comic (anti-)hero somewhere situated between a picaro and the good soldier Schwejk in Jaroslav Hašek's novel of the same name (1921–1923). This is how *Turvey* is depicted on the back cover of *The New Canadian Library* edition:

Private Thomas Leadbeater *Turvey* is nobody's idea of a capable recruit. FAMILY HISTOR: unusual. EARLY CHILDHOOD: accident prone. OCCUPATIONAL HISTORY: unstable. CRIMINAL RECORD: none admitted. INTELLIGENCE: doubtful. PHYSICAL ABNORMALITIES: involuntary grin.³

Strongly reminiscent of Joseph Heller's *Catch 22* (1961), Birney's satire revolving around the misadventure of the picaresque hero derides the follies of the military apparatus and simultaneously condemns the war it is responsible of. As with all satirists his protest is to correct the wrongdoings by holding up a mirror and to lead the agencies found faulty back to the road of decency. A satirist takes care about the conditions of a culture in grotesque manners as exemplified in a scene with *Turvey* at the martial court:

The young doctor bowed slightly, but charmingly to the president. [...] »Umm, yes, *Turvey*, Thomas Leadbeater. Private. Let me see. No admitted history of venereal disease, mental illness, fits. No present symptoms ... No apparent addiction to drugs or alcohol.« [...] »Memory and concentration normal. No certain mental deficiency. No vertigo, tinnitus, paraesthesia, incontinence, nystagmus, diplopia or rombergism. Normal stereognosis and two-part discrimination. Orientation for time and place probably ah – normal. Examination of glands, joints – ...«

»For God's sake, captain, was this an autopsy? The man is accused of being absent without leave! [...]«⁴

And about *Turvey*'s mental health he expounds:

»No signs of organic nervous or mental disease.« [...] »I rather think, however, [...] that the subject's personality *tends* toward that of the, ah,

³ Earle Birney. *Turvey*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1989, 397.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 86.

constitutional psychopath [...].« »A large percentage of our civilian jail population is made up of such psychopaths.« »[...] they are generally considered incurable.«⁵

Despite this shattering verdict on his mental abilities, the psychiatrist concludes that Turvey is »for all legal purposes, civil or military, in his ... right mind« and »fully aware of the nature of his act«,⁶ that is his absence without leave. The absurdity lies with the reversal of what is considered sane and insane or normal vs. unnormal. If the values of a society founder, it is for satirical discourses to put the finger in the wound and aim at remedies through humour and wit. Characteristically, Turvey's character does not change throughout. His »flatness« is an adequate means of upholding the reader's attention to the absurd environment without distraction by a complex characterization.

Satire had not been a prominent mode of writing with war novels after World War I when photographic realism – in particular with regard to the publications at the end of the 1920s⁷ – came to be an articulate expression of outraged authors.⁸ After 1945 a more rational approach came to replace expressive realism, thus putting a greater distance between the war actions, most of the authors had taken an active role in and the representation of the very events. In respect of relations between Canadian margin and British centre, it appears that for the novels under consideration the manifest alienation at the end of World War I which is strongly visible in war novels of the time⁹ is replicated to a degree that it is nowhere verbally discussed as if it were taken to be a matter of fact, the texts' silence speaks loudly.

Colin McDougall *Execution* (1958)

Satire is one possible mode of coming to terms with World War II. Colin McDougall takes a different direction. His *Execution*, a Governor of General Award-win-

5 Ibid., 87–88 (italics in the original).

6 Ibid., 88.

7 See also: Uwe Zagratzki. »Striking Many Chords – Selected Canadian World War I Novels in the Interwar Years«. Barbara Butrymowska, Uwe Zagratzki (eds.). *Perspectives on Canada: International Canadian studies despite Harper and Trudeau*. Hamburg: Dr. Kovač, 2018, 207–222.

8 Uwe Zagratzki. »Zwischen kolonial und postkolonial – Anglo-Kanadas Prosa über zwei Weltkriege«. Thomas F. Schneider (ed.). *Zwischen Kriegserlebnis und Legendenbildung – Das Bild des »modernen« Kriegs in Literatur, Theater, Fotografie und Film*. Osnabrück: Universitätsverlag Rasch, 1999, 547–558.

9 See Zagratzki, »Zwischen kolonial und postkolonial«, 549; Zagratzki, »Striking many Chords«, 212–213.

ning novel, is set in Sicily, June 1943, during the Allied attack on Montecassino and includes the author's personal experience in the Italian campaign, when he fought with the Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry.¹⁰ At the narrative heart of the novel we find the didactic impetus of a war prose culminating in deliberations of ethical issues caused by the war and leading, more generally, to contemplations about the fundamental dilemma of moral behaviour and human existence. McDougall's parable raises the question of legitimate violence, which is considered appropriate and therefore approved of when battling Nazi Germany, but senseless and abominable when defenceless enemies or Allied soldiers are executed. This is exemplified by two Italian prisoners of war and a Canadian rifleman who are ordered, though either harmless or innocent, to be shot. Regarded a criminal act, the events cause reflections on the state of Man's moral standards.¹¹ One character muses:

Execution is the ultimate injustice, the ultimate degradation of man. [...] »Perhaps it is man's plight to acquiesce. On the other hand, even recognizing execution as the evil may be victory of sorts; struggling against it may be the closest man ever comes to victory.«¹²

Though framed by soldiers in combat, the narration foregrounds the individual responses of those emotionally and intellectually affected by the executions. Trying to come to terms with their moral despair and a growing sense of futility in the face of uncontrollable external pressure and strain, three characters follow different paths to personal regeneration in the midst of unspeakable destruction. In line with Novak's notion of the »little man« the narrative shifts prominence to the philosophical and psychological dilemma of the individual soldier. John Adam, Lieutenant in the Canadian Infantry and the novel's protagonist, seeks a way out of »a series of greyish nightmares through which he moves like an automaton«¹³ after the executions of the Italians had taken place. He finally has a moment of healing when venting his feelings through an act of empathy. Asked by a young prostitute to confess his love to her, John against his real emotions, meets her longings: »It was pretence, but he had given her something; and oddly, he felt better at once, as though he had also given something to himself.«¹⁴

10 See the historical depiction of the battle in Alexander M. Ross. *Slow March to a Regiment*. St. Catharines: Vanwell Publishing, 1993, 125–145.

11 Michael M. Mason. »Execution: Heroism in a Modern War Novel«. *English Studies in Canada* 5 (1978), 94–104.

12 Colin McDougall. *Execution*. Toronto: Macmillan Paperbacks, 1988, 99.

13 Quoted in Novak, *Dubious Glory*, 114.

14 McDougall, *Execution*, 87.

Healing words with a cathartic effect on the listeners are repeated when Jonesy, the unjustly convicted Canadian rifleman, on the way to his execution comforts Adam and Padre Doorn (another Canadian soldier alienated by the injustice of the war regime):

Jonesy had understood all along; and after that it was almost as though Jonesy were trying to comfort *them*. He kept the talk going unflaggingly, he cracked weak jokes, and tried to make them join in his laughter. Adam had filled with astonishment and wonder – which remained with him now as they walked together toward the place of execution. Jonesy was trying to make it easier for them; and he had produced a dignity of his own which was stronger than the terror and the brute degradation of the coming moment.¹⁵

With its emphasis on moral arbitrariness and indifference, the entailing disregard of human values and the bitter struggle for ethic regeneration, McDougall's thesis novel thematises the project of civilisation and puts to the test the degree of practicability of its key ideas under extreme conditions. With this in mind one feels strongly reminded of William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (1954). Thus hedged in by a discourse of ethical issues considerations on war as a vehicle of nation building as can be found in earlier novels such as Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* (1945) are not implicated. Issues of national awareness or self-assertion, as they were raised in Canadian war novels of the First World War or a nationalistic discourse, as suggested in MacLennan's, are therefore absent from the narration: Canada (if mentioned at all) appears to be a strong, independent country with no need to prove it to the world in meta-fictional debates unlike twenty years before. Occasional references to national attitudes instead of being components of a full-fledged nationalistic panorama, simply imply a multi-ethnic concept of Canada or serve to satirize stereotypical Scottishness.¹⁶

Other than in World War I fiction where the stress is on protest or political involvement respectively up to the point of nation building, we have stated that World War II novels pinpoint individual morality at a time of extreme nationalist ideologies (Hitler-Stalin, Cold War) to be a means of re-building the post-war world.

¹⁵ Ibid., 222–223 (italics in the original).

¹⁶ Ibid., 63, 116–121.

Rudy Wiebe *Peace Shall Destroy Many* (1962)

Rudy Wiebe, a Mennonite of German descent, takes up the issue of strict morality in the shape of radical pacifism in his novel *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. A Mennonite community in Western Canada at the time of the Allied landing in Normandy 1944 has to come to terms with the inherent dilemma of its moral rigorism, when it faces the fact that

we Mennonites can practise our belief in Canada only because other Canadians are kind enough to fight for our right to our belief. [...] Mere refusal will not do: positive action alone is possible.¹⁷

War is an instigator of change, which is positively supported by the homodiegetic perspective of the narrator and narrative strategies including letters from Europe and radio broadcasts from Paris. War is inside and outside the community simultaneously, transcends boundaries of time and space and does away with traditional values as »the War is finally coming home« to Wapiti.¹⁸ Its character, however, remains blurred. Wiebe's metaphoric pattern is conservative: war is the epitome of misery and depravity on earth, sin itself. In the final analysis Canada – of the three novels it is only here that it is the setting of the plot – represents a secular intermediate stage on the way to Christ's ultimate reign on earth.¹⁹

Michael Ondaatje *The English Patient* (1992)

With hindsight of 50 years after the historical events, Michael Ondaatje's *The English Patient* utilizes the genre of the war novel for portraying a visionary microcosm of an international peace time community. Cohabiting in a half-destroyed Tuscan villa – previously a nunnery, a German army stronghold and an Allied hospital – four persons from three different countries – three males and one female – decide to stay behind the invading Allied troops on their way liberating Italy from fascist terrorism. Symbolically speaking, all three structural elements of the narrative plot – space, figures, time – exist in borderlands: the villa by its dilapidated state marked by the wounds of war and the beginning of a new life stands on the brink of collapse; the frame narrative covers the period between April 1945 and the

17 Rudy Wiebe. *Peace Shall Destroy Many*. Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1992, 60.

18 Ibid., 219.

19 On the ideological dimension of the novel see Hildegard E. Tiessen. »A mighty inner River. Peace in early fiction of Rudy Wiebe.« John Moss (ed.). *The Canadian Novel Here and Now*. Toronto: NC Press, 1978, 169–181.

nuclear bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, which defines a period of transition between the end of war and subsequent peace in Europe and the ongoing war in Asia.

The most vigorous indication of the novel's inherent blurredness, is represented by the figures which hover on the threshold of many identities: Hana, the Canadian nurse-cum-spiritual healer and object of sexual desire of Allied war victims, Caravaggio, an Italo-Canadian thief and spy in British service, Kip or Kirpal Singh, an Indian sapper in a British bomb disposal unit and the eponymous, though anonymous, English patient, modelled upon the historic Hungarian Laslo Almásy, explorer and spy under German command.

Wounded in body, mind and soul this heterogeneous community happens to meet in an effort to be healed in an environment out of time. Ursula Kluwick has pointed to the similarities between the novel and the Bible:

And yet, *The English Patient* has been explicitly linked to the story of the prelapsarian Garden of Eden and Man's eventual Fall and expulsion from paradise [...].²⁰

But before their community and along with them – on a symbolical level – mankind fall and disintegrate owing to the nuclear destruction of the two Japanese cities, the authorial visions of how healing can be accomplished are nourished by intertextual references. Ondaatje taps the »working and storage memory«²¹ of different cultural contexts as with Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), here subversively written into *The English Patient*,²² or with quotes taken from Leo Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* (1877/78) in order to highlight the English Imperialist power elite, the »English machine or the English web«²³ in Cairo. Or with Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826) where the reference to the false European naming of the indigenous nations in North America serves a post-colonial jab as much as foreshadowing Kip's future central role in his community in India:

she [Hana, U.Z.] pulled out *The Last of the Mohicans* and even in this half-light was cheered by the aquamarine sky and lake on the cover illustration, the Indian in the foreground.²⁴

20 Ursula Kluwick. »Waters of Paradise – *The English Patient*«. Helga Ramsey-Kurz, Geetha Ganapathy-Doré (eds.). *Projections of Paradise: Ideal Elsewheres in Postcolonial Migrant Literature*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2011, 183–197, 184.

21 Jan Assmann. *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2011, 80; the terms stand for »canon« and »archive«.

22 Michael Ondaatje. *The English Patient*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1992, 111–118.

23 Ibid., 237 (italics in the original).

24 Ibid., 11–12.

Text references to the original Caravaggio's painting *David with the Head of Goliath*²⁵ or a visionary tableau design fantasizing the Sikh Kip sleeping at the feet of Holy Mary and an angel in »the damaged Church of San Giovanni a Carbonara« in Naples²⁶ indicate arts to be a spiritual source of mental regeneration:

The colour of his turban echoes that of the lace collar at the neck of Mary [...]. Each of them has selected the most comfortable of positions to forget time. So *we* will be remembered by others [...]. The tableau now, with Kip at the feet of the two figures, suggests a debate over his fate. The raised terra-cotta arm a stay of execution, a promise of some great future for this sleeper, childlike, foreign-born. The three of them almost at the point of decision, agreement.²⁷

The reader-addressing authorial »we« implies the possibility of a boundless cultural and religious understanding standing in stark contrast to nationalisms responsible for the war destructions under consideration. Thus, Canada whenever hinted at in connection with Hana or Caravaggio is not more than a childhood memory (Hana) or a rejuvenation fountain as it is described as a country of lakes and water.²⁸

Moreover, Eastern philosophy and spirituality feature strong in the novel, concurrently backing a post-colonial sub-text;²⁹ and contrasting with Euro-American discourses of power, race and gender. Kip's personal degradation at the hands of the English³⁰ leads to an emotional outburst after the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Kip is aware of the white racism behind the atrocious act:

American, French. I don't care. When you start bombing the brown races of the world, you're an Englishman [...]. You all learned it from the English [...]. They would never have dropped such a bomb on a white nation.³¹

At the same time, he reflects the fragility and infirmity of British and American Imperialism.³² Consequently, he immediately dismisses himself from British military service, »travelling against the direction of the invasion«.³³ Finally, though »their continents met in a hill town«³⁴ the community breaks apart and with it the

25 Ibid., 116.

26 Ibid., 279.

27 Ibid., 280–281 (italics U.Z.).

28 Kluwick, »Waters of Paradise«, 189.

29 Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 217, 270–273.

30 Ibid., 105.

31 Ibid., 286.

32 Ibid., 218.

33 Ibid., 290.

34 Ibid., 226.

vision of global peace: Kip turns Kirpal Singh and ends up as a doctor in India, Hana has made it to an unknown place in Canada. Yet, the very last lines hold the possibility of a better world. After the scene has been set in his Indian household, Kirpal Singh watches »his daughter struggling with her cutlery [...]. At this table all of their hands are brown. They move with ease in their customs and habits.«³⁵ At the same time an anonymous I-narrator pretending to watch Hana in Canada synchronizes the two worlds apart:

And so Hana moves and her face turns and in a regret she lowers her hair.
Her shoulder touches the edge of a cupboard and a glass dislodges. Kirpal's
left hand swoops down and catches the dropped fork an inch from the floor
and gently passes it into the fingers of his daughter, a wrinkle at the edge of
his eyes behind his spectacles.³⁶

The visionary quality of the novel also shows in those parts set in the Arabic desert. David Jasper has pointed out that Western imagination was inspired by the desert from Herodotus (5th century BC) to the 19th century.³⁷ And further, if one thinks of T. E. Lawrence's seminal autobiographical *The Seven Pillars of Wisdom* (first published in 1922; abridged version in 1926): »The desert is a place of vision as all you can do there is to make up things.«³⁸

Ondaatje writes in line with this tradition when he establishes Herodotus's *The Histories* as a staple element in the text. In the act of writing over the original³⁹ the English patient writes forth new chapters of history based on »his own observations«.⁴⁰ On the one hand, Ondaatje's desert consequently is a no-place tending »to elide differences of culture, religion and even language«,⁴¹ either utopia or dystopia, where Westerners explore, map and name territory on their own behalf:

We were German, English, Hungarian, African – all of us insignificant to them [the desert tribes, U.Z.]. Gradually we became nationless. I came to hate nations. We are deformed by nation-states [...]. The desert could not be claimed or owned – it was a piece of cloth carried by winds, never held

³⁵ Ibid., 301.

³⁶ Ibid., 301–302.

³⁷ David Jasper. »Wanderings in the Desert: From the Exodus to the The English Patient«. *Literature and Theology* 18 (2004), 2 (June), 153–168, 153.

³⁸ Quoted ibid., 155.

³⁹ Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 16.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Jasper, »Wanderings«, 156.

down by stones [...]. It was a place of faith. We disappeared into landscape [...]. Erase nations! I was taught such things by the desert.⁴²

On the other hand, the desert is a cultural space of historical past and present, where nomadic Bedouins have lived for centuries⁴³ or explorers seek their souls or God as Jesus did:

There is God only in the desert, he [the English patient, U.Z.] wanted to acknowledge that now. Outside of this there was just trade and power, money and war. Financial and military despots shaped the world.⁴⁴

Neither being »the lost paradise« nor »the heart of the darkness«,⁴⁵ Ondaatje's image of the desert stands for a utopian no-place and a historical real space and hence reiterates the visionary blurredness found elsewhere in the novel.

The visionary vein finds an equivalent in the mode of writing. Continued shifts in narrative perspective (omniscience, figural narrative situation, I-narrator)⁴⁶ and tenses, flashbacks, fragmentary writing and the occasional bit of stream of consciousness technique⁴⁷ in combination with a substantial application of metaphorical language prove Ondaatje's purposeful synthesis of a war novel and philosophical reflections on the arrival of a meaningful world.⁴⁸

Michael Ondaatje *Warlight* (2018)

Whereas in *The English Patient* World War II triggers acts of memorising among war-traumatized combatants, Ondaatje's novel *Warlight* revolves around a war-traumatized young boy who makes an attempt at coming to terms with his broken past as a deserted and deceived child in immediate post- (and cold) war London. Again, the (re-)constructive energy of individual memorising is an important asset of the novel.

War in Ondaatje's prose epitomizes the absence of order and memory. Into the vacant spaces caused by the physical and psychic ravages of war his novels write

42 Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 138–139.

43 Ibid., 18–23, 241.

44 Ibid., 250.

45 Jasper, »Wanderings«, 166.

46 Ondaatje, *The English Patient*, 169–171. Occasional shifts of narrative perspective conform to the needs of an espionage novel, e.g. when certain identities are concealed (Ibid., 247).

47 Ibid., 246.

48 Karin Ebeling. »The Use of Metaphors in Michael Ondaatje's Novel *The English Patient*«. *Linguistic Insights: Studies on Languages* 37 (2014), 84–94.

individual (hi)stories from which the past is re-built and the present shaped. Revealing the artificiality, constructedness and inventedness – in short the self-referentiality – of the text identifies his recent novel *Warlight* as meta-fictional historiography. It is less the historical contents – though an essential trigger – which drives forward the story, but the protagonist's deliberations of how to come to terms with his past: a fourteen-year-old boy from London along with his sixteen-year old sister are abandoned at the very end of World War II in what turns out to be a cover-up. It is in the second book covering the years from November 1959 that we learn about the mother's involvement with the British Intelligence Service.

The I-narrator Nathaniel narrates his life from boyhood to adolescence from hindsight. The mysteries stereotypically surrounding an espionage plot govern the assemblage of the characters and the structural composition of the novel. In the majority of characters – including mother and father – we meet concealed identities and double lives. It becomes clear early in the novel that Nathaniel is from a »family of disguises«.⁴⁹

Chapter headings imitate the overall mysterious suspense which Nathaniel is bent on dissolving when he joins the Foreign Officer ten years after his mother's death: »The job I was being offered was to review various files in the archives covering the war and post-war years.«⁵⁰ Unearthing concealed truths⁵¹ – and Sherlock Holmes, the master sleuth, being an intertextual device supporting the idea of solving a puzzle⁵² – and revealing how truth is pieced together and memory works is Nathaniel's driving motive as well as the novel's motif. When the author has his I-narrator comment on the past meta-fictional constructedness is referred to as the ordering structure:

If I do not speak of my sister in this story so much, it is because we have separate memories. Each of us witnessed clues about the other we did not pursue [...]. I held on to my secrets, kept my distance. In any case, Rachel's version of our time at Ruvigny Gardens, though it might nestle with mine in certain ways, would be spoken of in a different tone, with an emphasis on different things.⁵³

Implied readers (»I'd need a good river map to show *you* the places we passed or paused at«⁵⁴) and authorial intrusions (e.g. a free-indirect discourse) underline the

49 Michael Ondaatje. *Warlight*. New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 2018, 6.

50 Ibid., 131.

51 Ibid., 133.

52 Ibid., 95–102.

53 Ibid., 69–70.

54 Ibid., 74 (italics U.Z.).

self-referentiality of the prose as does the assumed identity between author and I-narrator: »And so for us, a generation later in the 1950s, the job was to unearth whatever evidence might still remain of actions that history might consider unto-ward.«⁵⁵ It therefore sounds like the historiographer's duty when Ondaatje through Nathaniel elucidates:

Is this how we discover truth, evolve? By gathering together such unconfirmed fragments? [...] Will all of them who have remained incomplete and lost to me become clear and evident when I look back? [...] You return to that earlier time armed with the present, and no matter how dark that world was, you do not leave it unlit. You take your adult self with you. It is not to be a reliving, but a rewitnessing.⁵⁶

Memory – individual and collective⁵⁷ – Jan Assmann states:

works through reconstruction. The past itself cannot be preserved by it, and thus it is continually subject to processes of reorganization according to the changes taking place in the frame of reference of each successive present. [...] Thus collective memory operates simultaneously in two directions: backward and forward. It not only reconstructs the past but it also organizes the experience of the present and the future.⁵⁸

Ondaatje's novel participates in the reconstruction of the war and post-war years. Simultaneously it contributes to discourses about war and remembrance shaped through literature as a medium of cultural memory.⁵⁹ Assmann divides collective memory into »communicative« (everyday, recent past) and »cultural« memory,⁶⁰ the latter one

⁵⁵ Ibid., 133.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 114.

⁵⁷ »From the individual's point of view, memory is a conglomeration that emerges from participation in different group memories. From the perspective of the group, memory is a matter of knowledge that is distributed among and internalized by each member. [...] Collective memory is dependent on its bearers and it cannot be passed on arbitrarily. Whoever shares it thereby demonstrates his membership in the group, and so it is not only bound to time and place but also to a specific identity. In other words, it is related exclusively to the standpoint of one real and living community.« Assmann, *Cultural Memory*, 23–25.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 27–28.

⁵⁹ »The mass of primary, secondary, and tertiary texts [...] far exceeded the capacity of what any society of a particular era could remember and internalize. [...] And so gradually areas of discarded or obsolete or forgotten knowledge developed within a cultural tradition, blurring the borders between ›us‹ and ›them‹, or ›self‹ and ›other‹.« Ibid., 80.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 31.

focuses on fixed points in the past, but again it is unable to preserve the past as it was. This tends to be condensed into symbolic figures to which memory attaches itself [...] and that are [...] used to explain current situations. [...] What counts for cultural memory is not factual but remembered history.⁶¹

Cultural memory is carried by artists, scribes, scholars and others, in short »preservers of the common memory«. ⁶² From which results the question whose »cultural memory« Ondaatje addresses? The text remains unspecified, though seems to follow Assmann's notion:

We order our lives with barely held stories. As if we have been lost in a confusing landscape, gathering what was invisible and unspoken ... sewing it all together in order to survive, incomplete, ignored like the sea pea on those mined beaches during the war.⁶³

Using the first-person plural personal pronoun, the I-narrator, respectively the author, generalizes the reconstruction of the past and the organisation of the present through stories. It is worth having a closer look at the »Acknowledgements« for a more comprehensive understanding of Ondaatje's bricolage technique. From the start he admits a glance behind the scene of his workshop. While *Warlight* is a work of fiction, certain historical facts and locations have been used within its framework. In the following, a plethora of books and essays consulted on Intelligence Service, waterways, the Blitz, post-war Europe, botany, greyhound races and references to works of fiction are listed up. The author in addition informs the reader about meticulous research of regional history and topography and thanks numerous persons for their inspiration.

What does all this say about a novel which thematises World War II? With some good reason one can argue that *Warlight* is not meant to be a historical novel as the emphasis is less on the fictionalisation of historic events, but more on gathering perceptions of countless individual moments and efforts to filter through them in order to draw up a comprehensive image of the times. Thus, war is a particularly adequate subject of Ondaatje's post-modern project of revealing memorising strategies of collective and cultural memories.

61 Ibid., 37, 38.

62 Ibid., 39.

63 Ondaatje, *Warlight*, 284–285.