

Martin Walser's Ein springender Brunnen (A Gushing Fountain)

Kathrin Schödel

In his 1998 'Peace Prize Speech',¹ Martin Walser complained that authors today are judged primarily for their public statements whilst their literary works are disregarded.² This may indeed be especially true for Walser himself, who has the dubious honour of having had two media debates in unified Germany named after him: the 'Walser–Bubis debate', or 'first Walser debate', which followed his polemic on the way National Socialism is remembered in the same speech, and the 'second Walser debate' concerning his novel *Tod eines Kritikers* (*Death of a Critic*, 2002) regarding the question of anti-Semitism in this book.³ His 1998 novel *Ein springender Brunnen* (*A Gushing Fountain*) is closely linked to the first debate: the author's speech can be read as his response to the reception of his autobiographical novel about a childhood and youth during the Nazi period.⁴ Literary works, therefore, do form a part of the discussions about the author, but in his opinion reviewers and commentators put contemporary social and political concerns 'before aesthetics'⁵ and thus neglect the specific quality of literature. Walser's critique of memory in the Peace Prize Speech runs parallel to this distinction: the 'spirit of the time' demands political correctness and creates a hegemonic discourse about the past, which in Walser's view is opposed to personal and literary memory but also to what he terms German 'normality'.⁶ In this way aesthetics and politics are uncomfortably intermingled in Walser's controversial speech. The author's insistence, however, that works of art should be viewed on their own terms is of course one with which literary scholars tend to agree. Questions of aesthetic autonomy are especially pertinent and sensitive when a fictional text depicts a politically contested past. The following analysis asks, then, what the specific qualities of Walser's literary form of memory are and whether his aesthetic approach is indeed free from memory politics.⁷

AUTHORIAL COMMENTARY – PRESENTING THE PAST

One of the distinctive features of Walser's *Ein springender Brunnen* is the voice of an authorial narrator offering meta-fictional commentary in three short chapters, each entitled 'Past as present', at the beginning of each of the three parts of the novel. The narrator describes an aesthetics of presenting the past to which the whole novel corresponds. The past is literally intended to appear as present, as direct experience, unfiltered through later knowledge or judgement. The narrator coins the phrase 'disinterested interest' ('interesseloses Interesse'),⁸ which is reminiscent of Immanuel Kant's theory of aesthetics, often summarised as 'disinterested pleasure'.⁹ The notion of a detached aesthetic perception is applied to the writer's relationship to the past. This idealist concept of the reception of art, however, cannot easily be transferred to the reconstruction of history with its various political and moral implications and the conflicting interests arising from them. Walser's narrator, too, knows that it can only be the 'aim of wishful thinking' (283) to be able to recreate the past – that is, in the case of *Ein springender Brunnen*, the experiences of a five- to eighteen-year-old in the years 1932 to 1945 – as present. Yet the narrator maintains that there is a difference between his own approach and other versions of a shared memory of the past. For the latter he uses the metaphors of the museum and play-acting to characterise, first, the fossilising and thus distorting nature of public memory (9), the museum being one of its institutions, and second, the way in which the past is all too often modified to fit present-day requirements (282).

In opposition to these images of cultured but lifeless codifications and hollow enactments of history, his own project of letting the past 'emerge as of itself' (283) aims at a dreamlike sensation of reliving experiences, not at classifying and explaining them. This concept forms a polemical contrast to the notion of critical engagement that has characterised public memory of National Socialism at least since the 1960s, namely the idea of avoiding a repetition of the Holocaust through knowing and understanding history and making moral judgements, of gaining political and ethical awareness by confronting the crimes of German history. Walser's narrator implicitly rejects even such well-meaning concerns as a guideline for turning towards the past because they would interfere with the ideal of an aesthetically detached openness towards memory. What the narrator aims at is not an objective depiction of history 'how it was', but an empathetically recapturing a subjective, but authentic viewpoint on the past. The narrator admits that even such a reconstruction of authentic

subjectivity can only ever be an approximation since the perspective of the reconstructing self will always interfere. Still this is what the whole novel attempts: to present as convincingly as possible how people may have thought and felt during the Nazi years and to abstain from moral judgement as well as from integrating their actions into history as we see it now, from an *ex post* perspective which has a much more complete overview of the consequences of their behaviour than any present observer could possibly have had.

NARRATIVE PERSPECTIVE

Indeed, if the recreation of the viewpoint of an other, be it one's own earlier self or someone else, is possible at all, then it is within fiction. The main body of *Ein springender Brunnen* is told from the perspective of its protagonist, Johann, who relates episodes of his childhood and youth in the village of Wasserburg on Lake Constance, Walser's own birthplace, and later of his experiences in the Wehrmacht. The choice of a limited point of view in a novel set during the Nazi period has been criticised as being incapable of conveying relevant insights into the past.¹⁰ Yet such a generalising criticism of the text's narrative strategy fails to take into account that the restriction to a figural narration potentially offers a new perspective on National Socialism. Walser's decision largely to do without an authorial or multi-voiced narrative was at the time of the publication of *Ein springender Brunnen* rather exceptional within literature set during the Third Reich. Autobiographies and novels at that time tended to employ a self-reflexive authorial voice connecting past experience with later knowledge, as for instance in Ruth Klüger's autobiography *weiter leben* (*Still Alive*, 1992).¹¹ This was an important text for Walser and may have influenced his decision to employ a different form of narration in his own fictional rendering of his childhood and youth.¹² His aim was to achieve what his narrator describes: a reconstruction of how things appeared then, not how they appear now. And he leaves it to his readers to draw conclusions and search for connections between the world of the novel and their own previous conceptions of the Nazi past.

Some critics of *Ein springender Brunnen* thought that to leave out any hint of our present knowledge about the crimes of Nazism necessarily has an apologetic tendency.¹³ The limitations of the protagonist's narrative must lead to a false image of the historical era. This would indeed be true if the reader's expectation was to find a comprehensive picture of the historical period in the novel. But the restriction of the narrator's point

of view, the novel's 'narrative perspective' to which Walser also refers in his Peace Prize Speech,¹⁴ does not raise such expectations. It offers a different view of history, the very quality of which lies in its limitations. The restricted horizon of the fictional world can provide an insight into, rather than automatically an apology of, the limited knowledge of its protagonists as well as their historical models. Walser succeeds in exposing how people were caught up in their everyday lives and personal worries and closed their eyes to the consequences of what was happening, even when they took an active part in it. When, for instance, Johann's mother joins the Nazi Party, she is shown to act on economical considerations – she wants to ensure that the party meetings take place in the restaurant owned by her family – and to consciously brush away ideological doubts, which arise from her religiosity and her husband's critical stance towards Hitler (87). The novel also reveals silences, forgetting and 'displacement' of Nazi crimes, for instance when the protagonist recalls a dialogue about 'Dachau' (123), the first concentration camp, and the fact that he forgot it, and even 'forgot that he had forgotten' (123). The whole village, indeed, is shown to be influenced by National Socialism. Walser is far from creating a provincial idyll when he describes the Nazi teacher, the 'Ortsgruppenleiter' (the leader of the Nazi Party in the village), and the protagonist's own urge to become a soldier, to mention only a couple of examples. Even critics who disapprove of Walser's narrative concept have praised the depiction of provincial Nazism in the novel.¹⁵

Yet the unease many critics have felt with regard to Walser's rendering of the past is not entirely unjustified. Something is indeed missing in his seemingly detailed and authentic portrait of a village during the Third Reich as seen through the eyes of a young boy. Even though Nazi camps are mentioned and the persecution of the Jews is hinted at in an early scene where one of Johann's classmates is excluded from the Hitler Youth because he is Jewish (133), Walser nevertheless creates a part of Nazi Germany which appears to be free of anti-Semitism. Not a single character, not even members of the SS or the radical Nazi teacher, mentions any of the well-known anti-Semitic clichés: when Hitler is praised, he is praised for averting the dangers of 'Bolshevism' (90); when the Jewish boy is expelled, the group leader refers only to a 'higher command' (133). There is not a single reference to anti-Semitism in schoolbooks, songs or public inscriptions. And this lacuna is not shown to be one of the protagonist's perception; the narrator hears – and relates to the reader – many conversations between grown-ups. Indeed, the family restaurant is a perfect setting for overhearing different voices, and even a radio broadcast,

where other aspects of Nazi ideology are present. There is no hint that there might be something else which the young boy does not understand, or any other clue calling attention to this omission.¹⁶ Whilst the narrator's limited perspective, as I have argued, is not in itself problematic, these gaps, which are in no way foregrounded, are nonetheless striking. It is not only that Johann's mother becomes a member of the Nazi Party without any interest in its actual ideology,¹⁷ but one of the main pillars of Nazi thought, namely anti-Semitism,¹⁸ appears to have no relevance for any of the characters. There is hardly a trace of racial ideology either, so no one, not even the school teacher, who for instance insists on the correct form of the Hitler salute, is presented as a proud 'Aryan' or utters any prejudice against 'inferior' races or Jews. Walser creates a German village during the Third Reich, which is not free of Nazis, then, but of anti-Semites and racists – this is the way in which his autobiographical novel offers a euphemistic interpretation of history. Yet is there really no indication within the text that the reader should be alert to the danger of idealising the past, especially one's own childhood memories, and be wary of taking the fictional work as historical truth? Does Walser in fact reckon with a reader who is on the lookout for distortions and lacunae such as the one identified here?

'THE MIRACLE OF WASSERBURG' – REALISM OR FANTASY?

One episode in particular might be read as a warning not to take the narrator's version of the past at face value: the chapter 'The miracle of Wasserburg' ('Das Wunder von Wasserburg'). Here, Walser introduces an obviously non-realistic element when a *Doppelgänger* of the protagonist appears. While Johann cycles to a nearby village to visit a girl who is travelling with a circus, his *alter ego* stays at home and becomes an especially well-behaved version of himself. This doubling is not explained in any way – as a dream, for example – but rather realism and non-realism are intermingled. The *Doppelgänger* figure thus highlights the fictional status of the text. It forces the reader to reflect on the constructedness of Walser's fictional world, despite its realist setting in a recognisable part of Germany during a well-known period of fairly recent history. Moreover, a number of intertextual references, not only in the 'Miracle' chapter, highlight the connection of Walser's novel to literary traditions and again foreground its fictional status. For example, the protagonist finds a piece of paper with the name Beatrijs written on it (233), which is an allusion to the legend of a nun for whom the Virgin Mary acted as a stand-in, and a literary model

for Johann's doubling.¹⁹ The title of the novel is, of course, also a quotation: it comes from Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*, which is mentioned within the text as well (164). But are these devices used to make the reader doubt the realism of the novel's detailed description of a childhood and youth in Wasserburg in its entirety? The double persona of the protagonist can indeed be read as a metaphoric incorporation of the problem of memory – that is, of the split into a remembered and a remembering self, or of the constructive and dynamic element of memory which can produce two versions of a past self. Potentially, this obviously fictional moment might thus unsettle the reader's view of the narrator and the status of his story. Can someone who relates a double presence of himself otherwise be a reliable narrator? Yet Walser's departure from realism most probably has a different function. Effectively, the 'Miracle' chapter does not disrupt the consistency of Walser's reconstructed past. Quite to the contrary, Johann's *Doppelgänger* is shown to be an illusionary version of the 'real' Johann, who, rather than seeming less realistic, appears as even more authentic in contrast to his inauthentic, angel-like double. In a similar way, Walser integrates the intertextual references into the level of the plot, as a reading of the protagonist, or a piece of paper he finds, so that they lose their potentially disrupting effect on the closed narrated world.

The *Doppelgänger*, then, rather than disturbing the realistic coherence of the text, functions as an impersonation of the way of representing the past against which the aesthetics of the novel is intended to work: the figure demonstrates the distorted picture which is generated when an author mixes past and present perspectives. It illustrates what the authorial narrator describes in the meta-fictional chapter that comes just after the 'miracle' episode: a case of 'slipping out' of the 'real' past (282). Johann's *Doppelgänger* corresponds to the politically correct version of the past that Walser's narrator criticises. Indeed, the *Doppelgänger* is an idealised Johann, who writes a critical essay about 'race' and 'Heimat' (252) that demonstrates an insight into Nazi ideology that his 'real' counterpart lacks. This is, in fact, the only instance where – *ex negativo* and on a plot level distinct from the realist reconstruction of the past – racist ideology is present. The protagonist, with his lack of interest in politics and his forgetfulness, for instance about the fate of the Jewish classmate (400) who was excluded from the Hitler Youth in Johann's presence, is made to look more realistic via the contrast with his 'guardian angel' (253). Other than in the idealised *Doppelgänger*, it seems, Walser reveals a version of his past self that is not adapted to present interests, such as proving that one had always been critical and aware of the full extent of Nazi ideology and

crimes, or – for Walser equally misguided – condemning one's youthful fascist self in an act of self-flagellation. In this way, the novel embodies the author's ideal of a non-judgemental perspective on the past, one that does not present the attitudes of people at the time according to categories that only emerged later. Rather than emphasising the literary construction of the text, this aesthetics of disinterested memory creates the illusion of historical accuracy: the protagonist's perspective on National Socialist, provincial Germany seems realistic, true to the narrated past rather than the present day with its need for justification and explanation.

Yet in view of the gap in Walser's depiction discussed above, this pose of aesthetic detachment and the supposed realism of the creation of a historically plausible viewpoint throw up some awkward issues. The fantasy of a German village free of anti-Semitism cannot be explained by 'narrative perspective' and it does not represent a 'disinterested' view of the past. Quite to the contrary, it fuels a politically problematic discourse of memory: a tendency towards marginalising the memory of the Holocaust, not so much by not mentioning 'Auschwitz', which may be justified by the restricted perspective of the protagonist. Rather, Walser subtly disconnects German everyday life during the Third Reich from anti-Semitic ideology and thus from its consequences. As a result, Nazi crimes appear as the responsibility of a few, whereas 'ordinary Germans' are exculpated. One could argue, of course, that Wasserburg most likely had very few Jewish inhabitants²⁰ and that a boy's perspective on a village untouched by anti-Semitism need not necessarily imply that anti-Semitism only played a marginal role in Nazi Germany. First, however, an actual encounter with Jews has never been a prerequisite for anti-Semitic ideology, and, secondly, Walser would easily have been able to find evidence of anti-Semitic activities in his region, other than a mere exclusion from a Nazi organisation. In a chronicle of Wasserburg that is even mentioned in the novel (84), for instance, a 1935 ban on Jews using the public lakeside resorts is recorded.²¹ Also, the novel gives no indication that it is supposed to be read as the depiction of an exceptional instance of a village untouched by its political surroundings – and the existence of such a place would have been a 'miracle' indeed.

ANTI-SEMITISM AND THE GERMAN–JEWISH RELATIONSHIP

It is surely an indication of a conscious decision on the part of the author, and not of aesthetic detachment, that there are only very few hints of

everyday anti-Semitism in a story that covers the period of 1932 to 1945 in Germany.²² In this way, Walser's autobiographical novel serves as fictional but realistic evidence for a view the author has also expressed in non-fictional texts: the idea that the centrality of the Holocaust within the history of the Third Reich is merely a perspective after the event, and one which distorts the reality of the importance of the Treaty of Versailles and its economical and political consequences.²³ In this argument, what is in fact a one-sided interpretation of German history is presented as an authentic historical perspective, whereas other views which stress 'the general experience of growing anti-Semitism'²⁴ are portrayed as later interpretations without historical pertinence. In *Ein springender Brunnen*, indeed, the villagers' turn towards Hitler is portrayed as a reaction to financial problems and anger about 'Versailles' (44). If these were presented as two of many reasons for the rise of National Socialism there would be little difficulty in accepting the novel's version of the past, but to the extent that they are depicted as more or less the only motivations, the novel risks playing down the enthusiasm for Hitler's racist and anti-Semitic political agenda as well as reducing German guilt by blaming others for the rise of Nazism, namely the victorious powers after the First World War.²⁵

In his Peace Prize Speech, Walser justifies this view of history as a desire to avoid seeing 'everything as a road that could only end in Auschwitz', because, according to the author, this transforms 'the German-Jewish relationship into a catastrophe that was predestined under any and all circumstances'.²⁶ The Jewish characters in *Ein springender Brunnen*, in fact, appear to feature simply in order to suggest a more differentiated and, above all, positive view of the German-Jewish past. There is a minor character Eberhard Wechsler,²⁷ for example, who emigrates to Switzerland and has no qualms about conducting illegal business across the border with the SA leader in Wasserburg, Herr Brugger (370). Wechsler, the Jew, is in effect positioned as a parallel figure to Brugger, the Nazi: they adapt to political circumstances, and their relationship – as far as the situation allows – is profitable for both. Their close connection is underscored by the fact that, after the war when Brugger is dead, Wechsler even offers to adopt his son, who bears the telling name Adolf. Neither the Jew nor the Nazi has any particular ideological conflict with the other, making this side-story an example of Walser's downplaying of Nazi anti-Semitism and its impact. A Jewish woman, Frau Haensel, furthermore, is said to have been in contact with Rudolf Heß, Hitler's deputy in the Nazi Party, and to have enjoyed 'protection from Munich' (398). Walser thus makes the Jewish figures look similar to his non-Jewish German characters – that

is, with their seemingly apolitical and non-ideological adaptation to National Socialism. Even the scene which most appears as an instance of anti-Semitic behaviour, the exclusion of Johann's classmate from the Hitler Youth, fits this pattern: the boy, although classified as 'half Jewish', wants to belong to a Nazi organisation. Later on, the same boy even reports that, like Johann, he volunteered to become a reserve officer (397). The absolute and lethal difference between the conditions of survival for non-Jewish Germans and Jews is thus blurred and the distinction between perpetrators and victims is relativised. Rather than being a differentiation, as Walser claimed in the Peace Prize Speech, this seems to be a strategy of exculpation.

BILDUNGSROMAN

With respect to the depiction of the inhabitants of Wasserburg, I have argued that despite the ideal of a 'disinterested' view of the past that the novel embraces, there is a manifest investment in the fantasy of a non-anti-Semitic collection of 'ordinary Germans', indeed even 'ordinary Nazis', as well as in the depiction of German Jews as parallel characters to these non-Jewish figures. Further to this, however, there is another, perhaps more harmless way in which the novel does not in fact allow the past 'emerge as of itself' (283). Despite his restricted point of view, the narrator-protagonist's development is structured as a gradual progress that eventually leads to him becoming a writer. This is a teleological structure that once again presupposes a perspective *ex post*. Johann goes through several stages of growing self-awareness, and several different aspirations, such as wanting to be a priest, a singer, a poet, and, in the end, a prose-writer, who – on the last pages of the novel (404–5) – invents precisely the aesthetics that the authorial narrator of the meta-reflective chapters propounds. And to characterise 'his language', he employs the title of the book, which thus forms the last sentence of the novel: 'Language, Johann thought, is a gushing fountain' (405). In this way, his closeness to the novel's author is reiterated.

This structure of the novel as autobiographical 'novel of artistic development' (*Künstlerroman*) suggests a proximity to Romanticism, but intertextual references evoke a stronger connection to Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister*, the prototype of the German *Bildungsroman*.²⁸ It would be easy to condemn Walser for the tastelessness in dwelling on the successful development of his fictional *alter ego* at a time when millions of others were being killed, but there is more to be said about this aesthetic

decision. Walser is making a point, not just trying to preserve a positive self-image, or indeed a positive image of German everyday life during the Nazi period. In so far as Johann is shown to be largely apolitical – and even though the influence of Nazi propaganda, for instance on his view of war (284), is made explicit – the novel as a whole celebrates the individual's subjectivity and independence from political circumstances. In the face of a totalitarian system, this is a rather bold thesis, but this is what Walser describes: how the influence of some critical grown-ups, especially Johann's father, and Johann's own interest in language and self-discovery lead him to a standpoint of distance to, and potential resistance against, those in power (see 355–6). In his Peace Prize Speech, indeed, Walser discusses Goethe's *Wilhelm Meister* and points out that the classical author did not mention 'the guillotine' (of the French Revolution and subsequent Terror),²⁹ even though the novel was published in 1795. In an earlier essay, Walser explains in more detail why he finds Goethe's aesthetics so attractive: political change, he argues, is not the only route to emancipation; there is, contained within writing and reading, a possibility of resistance ('Sichwehren') and of becoming the 'subject' of one's own life rather than being a mere 'object' of circumstance.³⁰

Certainly, *Ein springender Brunnen* may be seen as an expression of this view of history, which is decidedly non-materialistic and which emphasises the importance of private, individual life in opposition to politics, and the independence of personal subjectivity from socio-political conditions. This point is rather provocative and, I would argue, untenable in relation to a political system which meant death for so many. It is also a clear and deliberate departure from German cultural memory. At least since the late 1960s, the National Socialist period has been widely invoked as an argument for the need to develop civil courage and political awareness, and against any shape of blind conformism or blinkered focus on one's own individual development. In contrast to this form of memory, Walser attempts a re-evaluation of the position of 'inner emigration', favouring private integrity over critical engagement and individual growth, or 'Bildung', over political change. This position echoes the stance of German classical authors during the French Revolution but in relation to a radically different historical context – this is a difference that Walser refuses to recognise, for instance when he compares Goethe's omission of the guillotine and his own omission of 'Auschwitz'. Nevertheless, the emphasis on subjectivity does usefully remind us that not every aspect of life during the Nazi period was entirely infiltrated by politics and that individual attitudes do matter. Indeed, such an emphasis

on non-determinism could also draw attention to possibilities of resistance during the Third Reich that were not seized. This, however, is not the way *Ein springender Brunnen* works with its positive depiction of its apolitical artist-hero.

THE END OF THE NOVEL: JOHANN AND WOLFGANG

In the text's final pages, the protagonist's development towards becoming a writer who invents the aesthetics of the novel itself is set against the views his Jewish classmate Wolfgang expresses in a dialogue with Johann. The allusion contained within the juxtaposition of their names to (Johann Wolfgang von) Goethe seems to hint at a close connection between the two, perhaps evidence of the possibility of German–Jewish harmony after, and despite, the Nazi period. Yet their approaches to the memory of the Nazi period are contrasted, and not with the aim of synthesis but with a clear preference for the perspective of the non-Jewish German. Potentially, Wolfgang's point of view might provide a corrective to Johann's limited perspective, even to the lack of a depiction of anti-Semitism discussed above. The two young men meet shortly after the war and talk about the immediate past. Their exchange is, at first, another example of the way in which the novel highlights moments of silence and displacement. Johann's inability to talk about the scene when Wolfgang was excluded from the Hitler Youth is made explicit (396), and yet his insistence on defending his perspective against Wolfgang's is not presented as necessarily problematic. In contrast to the aesthetics of a disinterested view of the past and the search for one's 'own language' (402) which Johann sets out at the end of the text, Wolfgang's perspective on the past propounds the 'conventional' emphasis on political categories and moral judgement. Wolfgang reports, for instance, that an 'anti-fascist group is working to document the persecution of anti-fascists in Wasserburg' (398). This forms a marked contrast to the narrative style of the novel as a whole where politically and morally charged words such as 'fascist' or 'anti-fascist' do not appear. The aim of a 'documentation' is reminiscent of what the authorial narrator criticises in his description of public memory as a 'museum' (9) and contrasts with a dynamic, personal approach to the past. The 'anti-fascist group' is further shown to consist of privileged people living in the 'villas' (398) situated on the lakeside, not in the village itself, so that this early instance of a public, documentary memory is marked as coming from the outside. In the encounter between Johann and Wolfgang, Walser also subtly suggests that Wolfgang's view threatens to push the protagonist's experiences to the

margins. Johann takes on the role of 'the one who knows almost nothing' (398), even when the other boy starts talking about the protagonist's girlfriend. The information that Wolfgang gives, narrated in indirect speech – 'Lena and her whole family experienced the terrible air raid in April last year' and 'Lena's father had always held anti-fascist views' (398–9) – is contrasted with Johann's knowledge, which he keeps to himself: 'Lena had told him that for her the worst thing about the night [of the air raid] had been that, after climbing out of the air-raid shelter, she could not go to the toilet anywhere in the burning town of Friedrichshafen' (399). Johann recalls concrete, seemingly unimportant but intimate details whereas Wolfgang's memory is characterised by a more general, factual knowledge about historical events and political positions. The narrator emphasises the dominance this form of memory assumes: 'Wolfgang was so much the master of the specifics about Lena and her family that Johann felt excluded' (399). The term 'master' (in German '*Herr*') recalls the phrase the authorial narrator had previously used to describe his concept of memory: 'Wishing for a presence of the past which we cannot control', ('*Der Vergangenheit eine Anwesenheit wünschen, über die wir nicht Herr sind*', 283; my emphasis). In this way, the contrast between Johann and Wolfgang becomes the contrast between public memory and the novel's aesthetics of 'disinterested' memory: being 'the master' of the past is the opposite of the ideal of an aesthetic perception of it – that is, letting it 'emerge as of itself' (283). In the dialogue between Johann and Wolfgang, the perspective of the young Jewish German is thus portrayed as less aesthetically valuable, and at the same time less authentic, than the memory Johann as narrator has presented to the reader throughout the novel. Rather than offering a corrective to the protagonist's lack of knowledge about anti-Semitism and the victims of Nazism, it provides him – as well as the reader if he or she accepts the premises of the novel – with a further reason to turn away from the memory of the victims. This gives Walser's seemingly apolitical, or even anti-political, aesthetics of memory a highly problematic political inflection. To the extent that the fictional past the author creates is based on the assumption that German everyday life was far removed from anti-Semitism and thus from the Holocaust, it follows that the Jewish perspective does not appear as a necessary part of the memory of National Socialism but as a point of view from the outside, as it were. The close of the novel combines this falsifying interpretation of history with the problematic opposition between two forms of memory, in which the memory of the survivor is presented as a threat to the protagonist's aesthetic relationship to the past.

NOTES

- 1 Walser's speech on receiving the 'Peace Prize of the German Book Trade', 'Erfahrungen beim Verfassen einer Sonntagsrede' ('Experiences while composing a Sunday speech') was published in English in Thomas A. Kovach and Martin Walser, *The Burden of the Past: Martin Walser on Modern German Identity. Texts, Contexts, Commentary* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2008), 85–95.
- 2 See Kovach and Walser, *Burden*, 93.
- 3 See Matthias N. Lorenz, *Auschwitz drängt uns auf einen Fleck: Judendarstellung und Auschwitzdiskurs bei Martin Walser* (Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler, 2005), 79–220.
- 4 See my 'Normalising cultural memory? The "Walser-Bubis debate" and Martin Walser's novel *Ein springender Brunnen*', in Stuart Taberner and Frank Finlay, eds., *Recasting German Identity: Culture, Politics, and Literature in the Berlin Republic* (Rochester, NY: Camden House, 2002), 67–84.
- 5 Kovach and Walser, *Burden*, 90.
- 6 Kovach and Walser, *Burden*, 91.
- 7 See my *Literarisches versus politisches Gedächtnis? Martin Walsers Friedenspreisrede und sein Roman 'Ein springender Brunnen'* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2010).
- 8 Martin Walser, *Ein springender Brunnen* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1998), 283. Further references to the novel appear in the text with the page number in parentheses, in my translation.
- 9 See Kurt Wölfel, 'Interesse/interessant', in Karlheinz Barck et al., eds., *Ästhetische Grundbegriffe: Historisches Wörterbuch in sieben Bänden* (Stuttgart and Weimar: J. B. Metzler, 2001), vol. 3, 138–74.
- 10 See Gunhild Kübler, 'Martin Walser und die Unschuld der Erinnerung: Zu Martin Walsers Roman *Ein springender Brunnen*', in Moshe Zuckermann, ed., *Deutsche Geschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts im Spiegel der deutschsprachigen Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2003), 166–80, 172.
- 11 In the English version of the book, which came out in 2001, Klüger added a few pages commenting on Walser, whom she met as a student, and the memory of the Holocaust, including a reference to *Ein springender Brunnen*, which she calls his best novel. See Ruth Klüger [sic], *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 2001), 165–9.
- 12 See Walser's speech 'Ruth Klüger zur Begrüßung' published as a radio transcript in Stephan Braese and Holger Gehle, eds., *Ruth Klüger in Deutschland* (Bonn: Selbstverlag Kassiber, 1994), 31–3.
- 13 This was the argument of the critics in the popular TV show 'Das literarische Quartett', which Walser refers to in his Peace Prize Speech (Kovach and Walser, *Burden*, 90). See the transcript of parts of the TV discussion in Jochen Hieber, 'Unversöhnte Lebensläufe: Zur Rhetorik der Verletzung in der Walser-Bubis-Debatte', in Michael Braun et al., eds., *Hinauf*

und Zurück/in die herzhelle Zukunft': *Deutsch-jüdische Literatur im 20. Jahrhundert: Festschrift für Birgit Lermen* (Bonn: Bouvier, 2000), 543–59.

- 14 Kovach and Walser, *Burden*, 90.
- 15 See Kai Köhler, 'Die poetische Nation. Zu Martin Walsers Friedenspreisrede und seinen neueren Romanen', in Johannes Klotz and Gerd Wiegel, eds., *Geistige Brandstiftung: Die neue Sprache der Berliner Republik* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2001), 101–54, 143.
- 16 See Wulf D. Hund, 'Der scheußlichste aller Verdächtige: Martin Walser und der Antisemitismus', in Johannes Klotz and Gerd Wiegel, eds., *Geistige Brandstiftung: Die neue Sprache der Berliner Republik* (Berlin: Aufbau, 2001), 183–232, 205.
- 17 See Amir Eshel, 'Vom eigenen Gewissen: Die Walser-Bubis-Debatte und der Ort des Nationalsozialismus im Selbstbild der Bundesrepublik', *Deutsche Vierteljahrsschrift für Literaturwissenschaft und Geistesgeschichte*, 74:2 (2000), 333–60, 337.
- 18 See Werner Bergmann, 'Antisemitismus', in Wolfgang Benz et al., eds., *Enzyklopädie des Nationalsozialismus* (Munich: dtv, 2001), 365–7.
- 19 See Jakub Novák, *Martin Walsers doppelte Buchführung: Die Konstruktion und die Dekonstruktion der nationalen Identität in seinem Spätwerk* (Konstanz and Leipzig: Universitätsbibliothek und Deutsche Bibliothek, 2002), 167.
- 20 See Helmuth Kiesel, 'Zwei Modelle literarischer Erinnerung an die NS-Zeit: *Die Blechtrommel* und *Ein springender Brunnen*', in Stuart Parkes and Fritz Wefelmeyer, eds., *Seelenarbeit an Deutschland: Martin Walser in Perspective* (Amsterdam and New York: Rodopi, 2004), 343–61, 351.
- 21 See Erich Seitz, 'Hundert Jahre "Sommerfrische Wasserburg": Eine Sonderausstellung des Museum im Malhaus vom 16. April bis 29. Oktober 2000 und in erweiterter Form auch im Jahr 2001', www.wasserburg-bodensee.de/Malhaus/archiv/sommerfrische.htm (accessed 7 February 2005).
- 22 Only at the end of the novel, after the war, the reader finds out that the Nazi teacher had threatened a Jewish woman in the village with deportation (397–8), but she, like all other Jews mentioned in the novel, survives the Third Reich. See Joachim Garbe, 'Auf der Suche nach dem Idealdeutschen: Autobiographien deutscher Schriftsteller am Ende des 20. Jahrhunderts (Günter de Bruyn, Ludwig Harig, Sigmar Schollak, Martin Walser)', in Manfred Misch, ed., *Autobiographien als Zeitzeugen* (Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 2001), 199–212, 209.
- 23 See Martin Walser, *Das Prinzip Genauigkeit: Laudatio auf Victor Klemperer* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1996), 33–4, and, for example, the 2002 speech 'Über ein Geschichtsgefühl', in Martin Walser, *Die Verwaltung des Nichts: Aufsätze* (Reinbek: Rowohlt, 2004), 253–62.
- 24 Walser quotes Gershom Scholem in *Prinzip Genauigkeit*, 33.
- 25 See Hans Mommsen, 'Über ein Geschichtsgefühl: Der Schriftsteller Martin Walser ...', *Die Zeit*, 16 May 2002, 41.
- 26 Kovach and Walser, *Burden*, 90.
- 27 See Lorenz, *Auschwitz*, 388.

- 28 See Novák, *Martin Walsers doppelte Buchführung*, 164.
- 29 Kovach and Walser, *Burden*, 90.
- 30 Martin Walser, 'Des Lesers Selbstverständnis' (1993), re-published in Martin Walser, *Leserfahrungen, Liebeserklärungen: Aufsätze zur Literatur* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1997), 702–30, 713.