



DE GRUYTER

Elaine Martin

NELLY SACHS

THE POETICS OF SILENCE
AND THE LIMITS OF REPRESENTATION

Elaine Martin

Nelly Sachs

Elaine Martin

Nelly Sachs

The Poetics of Silence
and the Limits of Representation

De Gruyter

ISBN 978-3-11-025672-7

e-ISBN 978-3-11-025673-4

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Martin, Elaine, 1982–

Nelly Sachs : the poetics of silence and the limits of representation / by Elaine Martin.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references.

ISBN 978-3-11-025672-7 (acid-free paper)

1. Sachs, Nelly – Criticism and interpretation. I. Title.

PT2637.A4184Z719 2011

831'.914–dc23

2011016184

Bibliographic information published by the Deutsche Nationalbibliothek

The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek lists this publication in the Deutsche Nationalbibliografie; detailed bibliographic data are available in the Internet at <http://dnb.d-nb.de>.

© 2011 Walter de Gruyter GmbH & Co. KG, Berlin/Boston

Cover illustration: Detail of Nelly Sachs' apartment at Bergsundsstrand 23, Stockholm.

© National Library of Sweden, MS L 90:8:11. Photographer Harry Järv.

Printing and binding: Hubert & Co. GmbH & Co. KG, Göttingen

∞ Printed on acid-free paper

Printed in Germany

www.degruyter.com

Acknowledgements

I owe a particular debt of gratitude to Professor Florian Krobb, whose encouragement and enthusiasm helped me towards the completion of this book, and whose depth of knowledge has been and continues to be an invaluable resource. Thanks also to Professor Karen Leeder of New College, Oxford, whose input was greatly appreciated, and to Dr. Jeff Morrison, whose constructive feedback made the book a more pleasant read. Furthermore, I wish to extend a word of gratitude to all members of the German Department at National University of Ireland Maynooth for their collegiality during the past number of years.

Without the financial assistance made possible by the Irish Research Council for the Humanities and Social Sciences and the John and Pat Hume Scholarship from NUI Maynooth, this project would not have come to fruition. My thanks therefore to these two bodies for funding the doctoral dissertation from which this book evolved. Additionally, the book's publication was financed by publication grants from the National University of Ireland and National University of Ireland Maynooth. My thanks to both institutions for trusting in the merit of the book. I am also grateful to the Suhrkamp Verlag for its generous permission to reprint poems from the following volumes: *Fahrt ins Staublose. Die Gedichte der Nelly Sachs* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1961), *Suche nach Lebenden. Die Gedichte der Nelly Sachs* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1971) and *Nelly Sachs Werke. Kommentierte Ausgabe Band 1. Gedichte 1940–1950* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 2010). Articles related to parts of chapters two and three of this book have appeared in the following volumes: Gert Hofmann, Marko Pajevic, Rachel MagShamrain and Michael Shields (eds.) *German and European Poetics after the Holocaust: Crisis and Creativity* (Rochester/New York: Camden House, 2011) and Alfred J. Drake (ed.) *New Essays on the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009).

I must also mention close friends who never forgot to ask how it was going. A special word of thanks goes to Anne Marie, Suzanne and John, all of whom generously gave their time to proofreading the manuscript at various stages.

The most important word of thanks goes to my parents, who continually supported and encouraged me, and to Conleth for having been and continuing to be so supportive in ways too numerous to mention. Sadly, my mother is no longer here to see the final product. This book is dedicated to her.

Contents

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| Introduction | 1 |
|--------------------|---|

I Contexts

| | |
|--|----|
| 1 Nelly Sachs: A Tumultuous Reception History | 9 |
| 1.1 West Germany's Three Myths | 9 |
| 1.2 Peace with The Perpetrators | 18 |
| 1.3 Restoration in the Literary Arena | 24 |
| 1.4 Reception in the East | 27 |
| 1.5 Reception in the West: "Die Dichterin der Versöhnung" | 33 |
| 2 The Problematics of Holocaust Representation | 49 |
| 2.1 Adorno's 'after-Auschwitz' Aporia | 49 |
| 2.2 The Expropriation of Death and Adorno's Modernist Critique | 55 |
| 2.3 'The Extremity that Eludes the Concept' | 57 |
| 2.4 The Failure of Culture | 61 |
| 2.5 Adorno's 'Widerruf' | 63 |

II Practices

| | |
|---|-----|
| 3 Nelly Sachs' Poetics of Silence: Poetry at the Limits of Representation | 69 |
| 3.1 Defying 'Verstummen' | 69 |
| 3.2 The Decay of Language | 71 |
| 3.3 Addressing the Perpetrators | 83 |
| 3.4 Prosopopoeia as a Representational Device | 98 |
| 3.5 Sachs' Nacht-Metaphorik: Reversing a Traditional Image | 105 |
| 3.6 The Poetics of <i>Disfiguration</i> | 113 |
| 3.7 Adorno's Extremity in Sachs' Poetics | 122 |
| 3.8 Writing the Inability to Write: Sachs' Self-Reflective Poetics | 125 |
| 3.9 'Grabschriften in die Luft': Keeping Memory Open | 131 |
| 3.9.1 The Open Wound | 137 |

| | |
|---|-----|
| 3.10 The ‘Death of Death’: ‘Die Todentrissenen’ | 140 |
| 3.11 Archetypes as Representational Devices | 150 |
| 3.11.1 Sachs’ ‘Anti-Job’ | 152 |
| 3.11.2 Abraham: Refuting the Martyrdom Thesis | 167 |
| 3.11.3 Daniel: Interpreter of Nightmares | 179 |
| Conclusion | 183 |
| Bibliography | 187 |

Introduction

The positive reception of Nelly Sachs' poetry in the late 1950s and 1960s culminated in Sachs being awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1966, jointly with the Israeli author Samuel J. Agnon. Virtually unknown during the previous decade, Sachs was suddenly hailed as West Germany's "Dichterin der Versöhnung": she and her work became symbols of German-Jewish reconciliation in an era preoccupied with *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* – the attempt to critically address the legacy of the National Socialist past. A close examination of how Sachs' poetry was received in West and East Germany, and of the socio-political factors which led to her person and her work becoming icons of German-Jewish reconciliation in the Federal Republic, sheds a fascinating light on the social and psychological trends that dominated the post-war German landscape. The manner in which literary works are received in the public domain is, of course, inextricably linked with the prevailing socio-political conditions. Topics, Raul Hilberg writes, "may be suppressed or catapulted to public attention, but always for reasons that reflect the problems and needs of a society" (Hilberg 1996: 123). Correspondingly – so the premise of the first section of this study – the socio-political conditions of the post-war period reveal why the tables turned with respect to the reception of Sachs' work in the East and in the West as the events of the Holocaust receded in time. The initial disregard for Sachs in the Federal Republic, followed by the sudden discovery and ensuing appropriation of her person and work a decade later on the one hand, and the initial reception of and subsequent disregard for her work in East Germany on the other, can be attributed to the socio-political concerns of the day.

The focus is then shifted to the 'unspeakability' maxim associated with Theodor Adorno, whose position on post-Shoah art so pressingly requires a re-examination. The debate on what has mistakenly come to be known as Adorno's 'dictum' concerning the 'barbarity of poetry after Auschwitz' – "nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben ist barbarisch" (Adorno 1977: 30) – dominated academic discussion in the decades following its publication in 1951. This debate serves as an effective springboard from which to evaluate Nelly Sachs' Holocaust poetry given that the aporetics of Holocaust art identified by Adorno, namely, the impos-

sibility and indispensability of bearing witness, are so evident in Sachs' poetics. Time and time again Adorno's extensive theoretical considerations on the possibilities and limitations of art in the aftermath of the Holocaust have been reduced to this single sentence, itself constituting but a sub-clause of the original passage. This frequent tendency towards simplification and misinterpretation has arguably been facilitated by the erroneous inclination to separate Adorno's critique of modernity from his views on Holocaust art. This separation has done a disservice to Adorno's thought in light of the fact that his theoretical considerations on Holocaust art are intertwined with this same critique. By exploring the 'dictum' within his larger assessment of capitalist modernity, and specifically within his assessment of modernity's facilitation of the reification process, the 'dictum' can be restored to its original context. Reification, in conjunction with what Adorno viewed as the perilous legacies of modernity – all-encompassing instrumental rationality fused with irrational ends, technological domination and the reduction of all thought to the calculation of the efficiency of means – had its apotheosis in the Nazi death camps. The result was the liquidation of individualism which had formed the core of critical consciousness, the obliteration of the very *concept* of the autonomous subject. In light of this, Adorno considered any return to artistic subjectivism a problematical endeavour.

Of further significance for a recontextualisation of the so-called 'dictum' is the fact that Adorno, crucially, does not view Auschwitz as an accidental relapse or a temporary 'glitch' in an otherwise progressive culture. Rather, he views Auschwitz as part and parcel of that 'civilising' process which we call 'modernity.' The fact that the heinous mass murder of millions had been carried out within the framework of a society that had achieved so much culturally and artistically meant that the legitimacy of artistic discourse, after this culture had gone so catastrophically awry, was suddenly called into question. However, while Adorno makes clear that culture's complicity is irrefragable – and that of art as integral to this same culture – he nonetheless calls for testimony rather than an insistence upon silence. In the face of the seemingly insurmountable barriers which confronted the writer in the aftermath of Auschwitz, Adorno did not call for an end to art as has been claimed by critics such as Walter Jens (1997), Günther Bohnheim (2002), Susan Gubar (2003), Elrud Ibsch (2004) and Stephen J. Whitfield (2007) – to mention just a few relatively recent contributors to the debate. On the contrary; "das Bedürfnis Leiden beredt werden zu lassen," he stated in *Negative Dialektik*, "ist die Bedingung aller Wahrheit" (Adorno 1973: 27). Adorno's pronouncements were

never meant as silence-inducing taboos, but rather as theoretical reflections upon the moral status of art in the aftermath of the Shoah and as warnings of the moral peril involved in the artistic rendering of mass extermination.

Against the backdrop of Adorno's deliberations, Nelly Sachs' poetic works will be examined as illustrative of what Annette Jael Lehmann has described as "die Poetik des Scheiterns":

Für keine Art von Dichtung ist die 'Poetik des Scheiterns' so grundlegend wie für die Holocaust-Dichtung. Das Scheitern ist immer schon im Gedicht angelegt. Sein Scheitern muss nicht nur eingestanden, sondern gewagt werden. Jedes Holocaust-Gedicht muß zu einem bestimmten Grade an seinem Thema scheitern. [...] Jede literarische Äußerung und ästhetische Reflexion im Horizont der Shoah steht [...] in der Spannung zwischen einem traumatischen Verstummen und dem Dilemma der Inadäquatheit aller Artikulationsversuche. [...]: dem unbedingten Darstellungsgebot, der Unangemessenheit des Schweigens steht immer wieder ein Verstummen gegenüber, das die Unmöglichkeit bezeugt über und nach Auschwitz zu schreiben. (Lehmann 1999: xxv and 3–7)

Lehmann summarises the aporetic thread that runs through Sachs' entire body of poetry. Her work is marked by a three-pronged tension between speechlessness, the recognition of the inevitable inadequacy of all attempts at communicating the suffering, and an attendant cognizance of the necessity of bearing witness. Erhard Bahr has issued a similar thesis: "Daß im Extremfall des Holocaust die Leistung der Literatur eng mit ihrem Versagen verbunden ist, versteht sich von selbst." (Bahr 1980: 78) Sachs' poetry, so emblematic of this crisis within artistic discourse in the wake of the Shoah, lends itself particularly well to evaluation within the framework of Adorno's theoretical reflections. The crisis of language in her work, the aporetics of Holocaust representation, her dialogue with the perpetrators, her refutation of eschatological paradigms and, crucially, her refusal to impose a redemptive framework on the suffering by subverting Biblical archetypes together make Sachs' poetry a quintessential case-study of the problematics of post-Holocaust writing as elucidated by Adorno. Biblical archetypes in particular can be considered important representational devices in her poetry, since they serve as an effective means of refuting any redemptive or religious 'sense-making' framework for the horrors of Auschwitz. This is significant given the frequent references to Sachs as a supposedly redemptive poet, an erroneous claim that has found many willing proponents in critical discourse, to the detriment of what is in fact a denunciation of any such sense-making

schema. A consistent objective throughout the close reading of her work is to underscore the disintegrative, incoherent and fragmentary nature of her verse and to determine whether her poetry, in spite of the fact that it thematises the impossibility of adequate representation, has representational value. Representational elements are identified with the aim of assessing if and how, in the context of a poetics of unspeakability, the devices of 'Verstummen' become evocative and representational devices in their own right.

With respect to this close reading, an important methodological qualification should be mentioned at the outset. In an effort to consider the semantic intricacy of individual works effectively, the tendency within the secondary discourse on Sachs to analyse just fragmentary portions of individual poems is avoided. The analyses of two Sachs critics represent welcome exceptions to this trend. Beata Sowa-Bettecken writes: "Die gängige Praxis, Stellen aus dem Kontext des Gedichts herauszureißen und als Beleg oder Widerlegung einer These zu nutzen, wird weder der Textstellung noch dem Gedicht zurecht." (Sowa-Bettecken 1992: 33) While selecting lines can indeed be useful in terms of analysing certain motifs, an interpretation of her work on that basis alone can only provide piecemeal knowledge. Such an approach, as Sowa-Bettecken points out, cannot provide a sound foundation from which to infiltrate the complexity of Sachs' poetics, which is appreciable only within the complete framework of each individual poem. Birgit Stocker-Keller, in a similar vein, writes:

In vielen Aufsätzen [...] werden Gedichte von Nelly Sachs fragmentarisch ausgelegt; bestimmten Motiven werden nachgegangen, ohne dass aber das einzelne Gedicht, aus dem jeweils die Belege stammen, als Ganzes verstanden würde. Nelly Sachs hat aber einzelne Gedichte geschrieben, nicht eine Anzahl von Motiven in verschiedenen Texten abgehandelt. (Keller-Stocker 1973:1)

Matthias Krieg, by way of contrast to the methodological course chosen here, has argued that the "Bildwelt" of Nelly Sachs' work exhibits "ein in sich geschlossenes Ganzes" which makes the interpretation of individual poems "zwangsläufig fragwürdig" (Krieg 1983: 88). Paul Kersten also considers an interpretative methodology based on individual poems to be "zwangsläufig problematisch" in the case of a "von weitreichenden Bild- und Motivverknüpfungen konstituierten Werkes wie dem von Nelly Sachs" (Kersten 1970: 12). Krieg's and Kersten's objections are essentially one and the same: the assertion that the imagery and motifs employed by Sachs form a 'system,' and that it is the system as such that

must be analysed. Both approaches are equally puzzling, however. Why, after all, should Sachs' motif nexus render interpretation of individual poems 'necessarily problematic'? If anything, one would imagine that such a nexus would render such a method of interpretation rewarding in terms of untangling that very nexus in the first instance. Surely a deductive method is facilitated in the first instance by an inductive point of departure. As Sowa-Bettecken explains: "[D]er These Kriegen [...] ist entgegenzuhalten [...], daß er dieses Gesamtbild aus den Einzelgedichten erhält." (Sowa-Bettecken 1992: 33) In addition, it is on the basis of such an inductive method that the variations in Sachs' motif nexus become appreciable. Thus whilst individual poems are analysed in this study under various thematical headings, and whilst priority is given each time to the heading in question, the theme is consistently embedded within the framework of the respective poem, as opposed to selecting individual lines to suit the theme. This is, moreover, accomplished without losing sight of intertextual connections. A balancing of the analytical scales, in other words, is attempted by focussing on complete poems as opposed to the problematic method of isolating individual parts to accommodate the theme under consideration.

The ethical gravity of the human tragedy that lies at the core of Nelly Sachs' work must be emphasised in any commentary on a proposed study of her work. The suffering that occurred as a result of the depths to which human beings sank during the period of National Socialism makes humility imperative in any approach to her work. Johannes Anderegg expresses this unequivocally when he states: "In der Stille, die die Sprache von Nelly Sachs erzeugt, klingt jedes Wort einer wissenschaftlichen Kommentierung zu laut," and he criticises in particular the 'methodological self-assurance' that some Sachs criticism has displayed (Anderegg 1994: 137). He cites a letter that Sachs wrote in 1958 in which she makes reference to those literary critics who wrote to her requesting the 'meaning' of 'incomprehensible metaphors': "Zuweilen erhalte ich Anfragen über unverständliche Metaphern. Habe doch nicht 'gemeint,' sondern wurde aufgerissen." (Sachs 1984: 183) This state of being 'torn open,' of being denied the luxury of carefully pondering and choosing metaphors and imagery, expresses the torment of the poetic voice in its attempt to bear witness to the horror and the urgency of this undertaking. In line with Anderegg's call for humility in the face of the human disaster that shapes Sachs' work, and mindful of the state of 'aufgerissen sein' outlined by the poet, this study tries not to 'determine' what Sachs definitively 'means.' Such self-assurance has no place given the ethical magnitude

of the atrocities that lie at the core of her oeuvre. Rather, the objective throughout is to explore some ways of unravelling Sachs' intricate portrayal of the greatest human calamity in twentieth-century history.

I Contexts

1 Nelly Sachs: A Tumultuous Reception History

1.1 West Germany's Three Myths

Despite prolific poetic production, Nelly Sachs remained a largely anonymous figure in the West German cultural sphere for a considerable period in the aftermath of the Second World War. An analysis of how the very gradual reception of her work was replaced by marked popularity sheds a very interesting light on the literary scene in the years 1945–1966 in West Germany. The socio-political conditions of the immediate post-war period initially presented a formidable obstacle to the publication of Sachs' work in the West. The title alone of her first volume *In den Wohnungen des Todes*, dedicated to "Meinen toten Brüdern und Schwestern," left little doubt as to the overriding theme of her work. Leonard Olschner writes:

Wo man nach Texten düsterte, die vorgeblich dem Bedürfnis nach Zeitenthoheit entsprachen, dann eigneten sich die Texte von *In den Wohnungen des Todes* und *Sternverdunkelung* wenig dazu, dieses Bedürfnis zu befriedigen. [...] Der Poesie von Nelly Sachs blieb die angemessene Aufmerksamkeit versagt, da diese Dichtung [...] das leistete, was nicht gefragt war: Erinnern, Mahnung an Verantwortung, Jüdisches. (Olschner 1992: 279–81)

Ralf Trinks similarly outlines some of the criteria which governed reader tastes at this time: "Nur wenn die Autoren eine schlüssige Interpretation des Krieges und eine überzeugende Antwort auf die drängende Schuldfrage anboten, konnten sie den Erwartungen ihres Publikums gerecht werden." (Trinks 2002: 40) Sachs most certainly did not offer a coherent explanation for the war and, as for the question of guilt, her answer was not the exculpatory version sought by the West German populace. Herbert Marcuse has highlighted the three illusory longings which guided the West German populace and, by extension, national politics and, partly also, the literary scene in the post-war years. These were the myths of German victimisation, ignorance and resistance. They served, Marcuse argues, as "suitable tools for effacing the memory of genocide and replacing it with a much more palatable history" (Marcuse 2001: 74). These myths reveal some of the reasons for Sachs' absence on the West German literary stage for a considerable period of time in the aftermath of the war.

To the first of these – the myth of German victimisation. The immediate post-war years, and indeed right up until the late 1950s, saw not only an unwillingness amongst the populace to accept even partial responsibility for the Nazi crimes, but also the self-identification of the Germans themselves as victims – of Nazism, of Allied bombs and of the Red Army. They had been victims of ‘fanatical’ Nazis on the one hand and ‘vengeful’ Allied forces on the other. This illusion of double victimisation was one of the foundational myths that structured post-war memory in the Federal Republic, and it resulted in the long delay before widespread responsibility for the crimes perpetuated under National Socialism received honest recognition. This victimisation myth served two practical purposes in terms of exculpation. Firstly, the Holocaust was interpreted as some kind of ‘mysterious,’ ‘unfathomable,’ ‘extraneous force’ whereby the Nazi leadership had somehow ‘imposed’ its will upon an ‘unwilling’ German population; as the contemporary critic Joachim Boeckh wrote: “Es wird von geheimnisvollen Dämonen gemurmelt, die über die unschuldigen Volksgenossen hergefallen seien.” (Boeckh 1947: 15) This myth resulted in the automatic disassociation of the Nazi leadership from the national body. The consequent focus upon the leadership, and in particular upon the figure of Hitler himself, “dem es auf ‘dämonische Weise’ gelungen sei, das deutsche Volk [...] zu verblenden” (Kogon 1983: 19–20), served an obvious exonerative purpose:

Es existierte die Vorstellung der NS-Herrschaft als monolotischem [sic] Führerstaat unter dem Dämon Hitler, dem man erlegen war. Die Hitler-Zentrierung hatte für die Gesellschaft (und ihre Beteiligung an der NS-Diktatur) eine entlastende Funktion [...], die Faschismusinterpretation dieser Jahre [hat] einen Gutteil dazu beigetragen, daß sich niemand zu sehr mit der Vergangenheit beschäftigen mußte. (Kölsch 2000: 69, 78)

If blame could be laid at the door of the ‘Führer’ and his most senior henchmen, that would render self-examination superfluous, especially so given that the Nazi leadership had ‘led’ the German populace ‘astray.’ The second effect of this victimisation myth was the attempt to equate the German war victims of Allied bombings with the victims of Nazi persecution:

Neben dem verbreiteten Wunsch, das deutsche Volk in seiner Gesamtheit zum Opfer des Nationalsozialismus zu machen und es damit von seiner Mitschuld zu entlasten, fand sich eine Aufrechnungsmentalität, die mit dem Verweis auf die eigenen Opfer des Krieges die Opfer des Holocaust und der Verfolgung in eine Reihe mit den Kriegsopfern stellen wollte. (Bergmann 1992: 332)

Again, the purpose of this “Aufrechnungsmentalität” is clear: placing the deaths of German soldiers at the hands of the Allied armies on the same plane as the camp victims made sense in terms of allaying burdened consciences. In his lecture ‘Was bedeutet Aufarbeitung der Vergangenheit,’ Theodor Adorno provides a scathing critique of these tendencies:

Wir alle kennen auch die Bereitschaft, heute das Geschehene zu leugnen oder zu verkleinern – so schwer es fällt zu begreifen, daß Menschen sich nicht des Arguments schämen, es seien doch höchstens nur fünf Millionen Juden und nicht sechs vergast worden. Irrational ist weiter die verbreitete Aufrechnung der Schuld, als ob Dresden Auschwitz abgegolten hätte. [...] Kampfhandlungen im Krieg [...] sind kaum vergleichbar mit der administrativen Ermordung von Millionen unschuldiger Menschen. (Adorno 1997b: 32)

The attempt to equate German suffering with the suffering of the victims of Nazi persecution had the further effect of playing down the magnitude of the victims’ suffering. Labelling the attempt at understatement as a “Kollektiver Affekt,” Ralf Giordano writes: “Die Minimalisierer des kollektiven Affektes [...] erweisen sich an anderer Stelle [...] als ausgesprochene Maximalisierer von Opferziffern, aber stets nur, wenn es Deutsche betraf, zum Beispiel die Toten des alliierten Luftkrieges, und darunter wieder besonders die Dresdens.” (Giordano 1987: 37) Giordano goes on to state the obvious purpose of this “Affekt”: “Die Logik des Affektes: je niedriger die Zahl der ermordeten Juden gedrückt werden kann, desto beruhigter fühlt man sich.” (Giordano 1987: 37) Giordano thus highlights one of the more prevalent psychological mechanisms at work in the mind of the German populace, namely, the attempt to focus on and exaggerate the number of German losses in the war and to simultaneously lower the number of Jewish deaths.

The second widespread myth amongst the post-war West German populace was the myth of ignorance of what was happening in the death camps – the “davon haben wir nichts gewusst” claim. This myth served the same purpose as the myth of victimisation in terms of exoneration. It is, however, an assertion that can be easily dispelled:

Die Judenverfolgung durch das Regime [fand] in einem erheblichen Umfang öffentlich statt und [wurde] offen propagiert [...]. Diese prinzipielle Öffentlichkeit der Judenverfolgung gilt nicht nur für die Vorkriegszeit, sondern auch für die Phase der Deportationen und Massenmorde in den Jahren 1941 bis 1943, in denen zwar die präzisen Einzelheiten des Mordprogramms als Staatsgeheimnis behandelt wurden, das Regime sich zugleich aber öffentlich dazu bekannte, dass es dabei war, eine radikale, eine finale ‘Lösung’ der ‘Judenfrage’ zu betreiben. (Longerich 2006: 8)

Dedicated historical scholarship during the past two decades has demonstrated beyond doubt the extent of knowledge among the German populace about the concentration camps and the crematoria. Peter Longerich's monograph, *'Davon haben wir nichts gewusst!'* *Die Deutschen und Die Judenverfolgung 1933–1945* (2006), its title mocking the standard defence of ignorance, is an elaborate and very successful attempt to prove the very opposite: that the German populace was very much aware of what was happening in Auschwitz, Dachau, Treblinka and the other concentration and death camps. Indeed, as early as 1947, Eugen Kogon had already begun to forge this argument. His words are pertinent, since they provide a disturbingly lucid picture of the intricate web of culpability:

Kein Deutscher, der nicht gewußt hätte, daß es Konzentrationslager gab. Kein Deutscher, der sie für Sanatorien gehalten hätte [...]. Wenig Deutsche, die nicht einen [...] Bekannten im KL gehabt oder zumindest gewußt hätten, daß der und jener in einem Lager war. Alle Deutschen, die Zeugen der vielfältigen antisemitischen Barbarei geworden, Millionen, die vor brennenden Synagogen und in den Straßenkot gedemütigten jüdischen Männern und Frauen gleichgültig, neugierig, empört oder schadenfroh gestanden haben [...]. Nicht wenige Deutsche, die auf Straßen und Bahnhöfen Elendszügen von Gefangenen begegnet sind. [...] Kaum ein Deutscher, dem nicht bekannt gewesen wäre [...], daß im Lande unentwegt hingerichtet wurde [...]. Viele Geschäftsleute, die mit der Lager-SS in Lieferbeziehungen standen, Industrielle, die vom SS-Wirtschafts-Verwaltungs-Hauptamt KL-Sklaven für ihre Werke anforderten [...], Medizinprofessoren, die mit Himmlers Versuchsstationen, Kreis- und Anstaltsärzte, die mit professionellen Mördern zusammenarbeiteten [...]. Zahlreiche höhere Wehrmachtsoffiziere, die über die Massenliquidierungen russischer Kriegsgefangener in den KL, außerordentlich viele deutsche Soldaten und Feldgendarmen, die über die entsetzlichen Greueltaten in Lagern, Ghettos, Städten und Dörfern des Ostens Bescheid gewußt haben. (Kogon 1947: 412–14)

As Kogon's analysis lays bare, knowledge of Nazi crimes must have permeated the consciousness of the general populace to its core, and thus an assertion of ignorance, however untenable, provided welcome reprieve.

The third myth that pervaded post-war society was the sanguine illusion of an unsullied "other Germany" that had done its best to resist the "intruding barbarians" (Marcuse 2001: 74). This myth served the welcome purpose of gliding over the recent 'interlude' and reconnecting to the supposed 'true' soul of pre-National Socialist Germany. This desire was especially evident in the restorative cultural climate of the immediate post-war years. In an article subtly entitled "Kultur als Alibi," Max Frisch provided a picture of the extent of this restorative mood: "In Deutsch-