The Innocent Perpetrator

An Analysis of the Figure of the Perpetrator in Rachel Seiffert’s *The Dark Room* and *Afterwards*
Supervisor:
Prof. Dr. Stef Craps

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Table of Contents

Introduction 1

1 Perpetrator Theory ........................................................................................................... 7

2 Characterization of Perpetrators as Trauma Sufferers ................................................... 19
   2.1 Who Are the Perpetrators? .......................................................................................... 20
   2.2 Network of Identity ..................................................................................................... 34

3 The Dark Room and Afterwards as Trauma Novels ....................................................... 41
   3.1 Doubling of Scenes, Phrases, and Characters: The Other and the Self ...................... 43
      3.1.1 Doubling of Scenes and Phrases ........................................................................... 43
      3.1.2 Doubling in Characters: The Transmission of Perpetrator Status ...................... 46
      3.1.3 Doubling in Characters: The Other and the Self ................................................ 50
   3.2 Gaps ............................................................................................................................ 55
      3.2.1 Lack of Memory .................................................................................................... 55
      3.2.2 Failure of Communication between Characters .................................................. 57
   3.3 Unreliable and Unexpected Narration ......................................................................... 61
      3.3.1 Unreliable Narration ............................................................................................ 62
      3.3.2 Unexpected Narration .......................................................................................... 68
Through the Eyes of the Perpetrator: Focalization and Photography .......................... 73

4.1 Photography .................................................................................................................. 73

4.2 Identification .................................................................................................................. 77

Conclusion 81

Bibliography 85
Introduction

In recent decades literature studies has focused on trauma studies: analyses of literature based on traumatic events and the way these are represented in literature. The study of trauma literature has, however, long been one-sided focussing only on traumatic events of importance to Western society. In the decolonization of literature studies, the other has become a more central figure in trauma theory. The subaltern and other minorities e.g. gender, race, and sexuality, have been focussed on. However, the focus has always remained on those who are the victims of a crime. Yet, ironically, the iconic analysis by Cathy Caruth of the Tancred and Clorinda poem1 Cathy Caruth, one of the foremost researchers in trauma studies, used to describe the effects of a traumatic impact (8), sees the perpetrator of the crime as affected and not the victim, as noted by Ruth Leys (294). Clorinda is a black woman who has been the victim of Tancred, a white man. However, it is Tancred who suffers from an unwanted repetition of the crime (which according to Caruth is the main characteristic of traumatic impact) and not the subaltern feminine victim. In the decolonialization of trauma studies this iconic story is used as paradigmatic of trauma study’s lack of focus on the minorities, but as Leys (294) and later also Michael Rothberg (90) noted it is also paradigmatic of the lack of interest for the morally other: the perpetrator. After WWII, more interest in perpetrators arose from a different perspective, a political one trying to prevent anything similar ever happening again. Experiments and psychological studies on how a normal man could commit crimes as in WWII

1 By Tasso in La Gerusalemme Liberata (1581). Freud uses this poem to discuss trauma in Beyond the Pleasure Principle (1920).
surfaced. Examples of titles are: Hannah Arendt’s *Eichmann in Jerusalem*, Gitta Sereny’s *Into That Darkness*, Christopher Browning’s *Ordinary Men*, Stanley Milgram’s *Obedience to Authority*, Phillip Zimbardo’s *The Lucifer Effect*, Daniel Goldhagen’s *Hitler’s Willing Executioners*, Robert Jay Lifton’s *The Nazi Doctors*’ workings of the mind of the normal man. Robert Eaglestone goes as far as to no longer just examine the workings of the perpetrator’s mind, he stresses the typicalities of the genre of perpetrator writing:

[...] these texts [on perpetrators] seem to promise an answer to [why?] [...] many also serve an almost quasi-juridical function, in that they perform a ‘type’ of confession [...] These two functions are set in a complex interrelationship, and are set, in turn, into a series of questions, both philosophical and historical, that stem from the Holocaust about the very possibility of explanation at all. But these texts, too are also texts: that is, they are shaped by horizons of expectation, construction – in short, by genre rules. (124)

Similarly, in fictional literature, perpetrators have often been depicted as flat characters, without much depth. However, this is recently changing with perpetrators no longer being depicted as monsters, but as human beings as in *Time’s Arrow* by Martin Amis and *The Kindly Ones* by Jonathan Littell. In this dissertation I discuss two novels, *The Dark Room* and *Afterwards*, written by Rachel Seiffert that focus on perpetrator characters as human beings.

Rachel Seiffert is born in 1971 in Oxford to Australian and German parents. This diverse background is reflected in the content of her novels that focus on perpetrators in Germany and England. Her first novel, *The Dark Room*, depicts three generations of Germans during and after WWII. The novel is structured around these people: Helmut, Lore, and Micha. Helmut is a physically deformed Nazi supporter during WWII, who feels frustrated due to his disability and following exclusion from the army. He observes and photographs Berlin throughout the war years until the

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most wonderful time of his life when, because of a lack of able soldiers, he is allowed to participate. Lore is the eldest of four siblings born to Nazi parents. The story is set during the final year of WWII when Lore’s father, who is a Nazi SS soldier, and later also his wife are taken away by the Americans to prison camps. Lore is thus given the responsibility over her four siblings and is sent on a journey to their grandmother in Hamburg. Along the way she gradually starts gaining access to facts about the Nazi party’s perpetration in the war. The last part of the novel focuses on Micha and his quest for the truth about his grandfather’s involvement in the German army during the war. This last theme of a problematic grandchild-grandparent relationship is continued in Seiffert’s second novel, Afterwards. Alice is the grandchild of David, an English ex-soldier of the Kenyan Emergency. David took part in the air raids on the Kikuyu in the region. Afterwards depicts Alice’s quest for information about his past in this darker time of English history. Together with her relationship with her grandfather there is also a new relationship with her boyfriend Joseph, an ex-soldier who served in Northern Ireland. He too is closed about his past. His relation with Alice and so with Alice’s grandfather, who has a similar past, allows Joseph’s own repressed past to resurface.

Thus Seiffert’s novels centre on characters that are involved in histories of atrocities. The two conflicts of Afterwards are the Kenyan Emergency and the conflict in Northern Ireland. The Kenyan Emergency is a conflict connected to the British rule of Kenya from 1895 to 1963. The Kikuyu tribe, a minority in Kenya was living in such dire conditions that they started a guerrilla-type rebellion against British rule. Their attacks on British citizens were brutal and colonial power struck back to control this rebellion, the Mau Mau. The rhetoric of colonialism spoke of protection for the British citizens, but in reality much more damage was done to the Kikuyu than just opposing their attacks. There were air raids on the forests where the Kikuyu were told to be found, of which the fictional character David was part, mass slaughters of Kikuyu members and in later stages imprisonment of all Kikuyu in camps that liken the Nazi death camps. These harsh measures lead to the extensive decline in Kikuyu numbers and was devastation for them (Elkins). Emergency thus became a very dark mark in British history; it now being common knowledge that this was part of the enforcement
of colonial rule on the Kenyan people and not the proclaimed defence mission. The second conflict in *Afterwards* also involves a colonial opponent: the Troubles in Northern Ireland from 1963 to 1985. Similar critique that surrounds the Kenyan Emergency also shrouds the British presence in Northern Ireland: colonial and imperial connotations apart from the more obvious religious problems between Protestants and Catholics. So, both conflicts depicted in *Afterwards* are not just wars, but also have colonial implications. The perpetrator characters of the novel are thus also placed in the position of dominant oppressor which involves a psychological component of perpetration together with a physical one.

In the first novel on the other hand, the perpetrator characters Helmut, Lore, and Micha are connected to a situation that has mostly been described as war: World War II. The perspective of the characters gives a very limited view of the war. In Helmut and Lore’s stories there are only indirect references to the political situation outside of Germany. The reader is however supposed to know the bare essentials of WWII and the Holocaust as there are many indirect references to important events as Kristallnacht, the bombing of Berlin, and the Death Marches.

As this dissertation will deal with the description of perpetrator characters, it is important that I first outline some of the frequently used terms. These definitions apply only to individuals involved in crimes. As individuals cannot be seen separate from the communities they live in, their relationship to that community determines their degree of perpetration. In other words, an act or actor cannot be considered or categorized out of its/his context.

- **perpetrator**: a general term that encompasses active perpetrators, monster-perpetrators, and almost-perpetrators;
- **active perpetrator**: person who physically killed or committed a crime on another human being; I will mostly discuss perpetrators of war crimes, but there are also instances where a mirroring of these war crimes in the next generations takes on the form of non-war related crimes; in this category belong also the masterminds, the architects of systems of perpetration;

- **almost-perpetrator**: person associated with war crimes in various degrees ranging from being related to perpetrators, feeling responsible for a death, loving perpetrators, doing psychological damage to others;

- **monster-perpetrator**: a term I use to describe the way perpetrators have been depicted previously: as completely inhumane and the epitome of evil;

The categories that I describe here should not be seen as completely delineated. One could for example argue that persons, who feel responsible for a death that is not seen as a legal crime, could be categorized under the heading of perpetrator, as could those that are involved in doing psychological damage to their victims. Thus, the distinction between a physical act of perpetration and a psychological one is not as clear-cut as portrayed here. The distinction is based on whether there is (tangible) evidence of a perpetration or not; thus following the lines of legal judgement.

As said above, trauma writing has traditionally concerned itself with characters that are victims of traumatic experiences and have mostly ignored the perpetrators of these traumas. In cases of perpetrator characters in trauma writing, their portrayal has often involved the sketching of a monster-perpetrator, not one affected by the trauma. In *Afterwards* and *The Dark Room*, the reader meets with very different perpetrator characters: all-too-human and struggling with their past, signalling a personality change. Seiffert’s novels, however, follow in the tradition of victim-based trauma novels, using some of the narrative techniques of this tradition. So, they often include a mirroring of PTSD (Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder) symptoms. Thus, patterns of repetition and gaps of memory, indicate trauma writing. This can already be seen in the motto of *Afterwards*: «Again. As always, again. Why does this persist? What more have we to tell each other? I remember nothing
today. Absolutely nothing». This quote, from a play by Frank McGuinness, speaks of a repetition of war: the battle of the Boyne, where William of Orange won from Irish soldiers, echoing in the battle of the Somme, which I discuss into more detail in 3.1.3. The character speaking here mentions both a compulsive repetition of events and a lack of memory of them at the same time. These two components reflect the image-nature of traumatic memory; images compulsively return in the form of flashbacks, whilst at the same time there is no possibility of consciously grasping the traumatic event. Following this tradition of trauma writing is challenging for novels that place perpetrators in main positions, as there is a danger of equating the perpetrators to victims by using a style of writing associated with victims of traumatic events. The Together with showing the similarities between victims and perpetrators, the portrayal should also distance perpetrators from the victims. This last factor is enhanced through a distancing of the text and the narrator from the perpetrator characters. However, there are still many similarities to be found between Seiffert’s perpetrator characters and the usual main characters of trauma fiction, victims, which is unavoidable as both are sufferers of trauma. The perpetrator figures in Afterwards are similar to victims in that they display these characteristics of repetition and gaps, which is mirrored in the novel’s styles. So, I will first discuss the state of the field of theory surrounding the figure of the perpetrator, then I will analyse the characterisation of the perpetrator characters: who are they and how is their identity constructed? A third chapter concerns how The Dark Room and Afterwards relate to victim-centred trauma fiction through the workings of doublings, gaps, and narration. A last chapter concerns the visual: focalization, allowing for identification with the perpetrators, and the use of another medium in the novels, photography.
1 Perpetrator Theory

In this chapter I will first discuss social and historical studies of trauma and will then look at how literature discusses the figure of the perpetrator.

Perpetrator theory as a subdivision of trauma studies has only recently gained recognition. Previously, trauma theory mostly focused on trauma victims. Fassin and Rechtman describe an evolution in the field of trauma studies from doubt towards the authenticity of trauma victims to an ascription of superior morality to them. This development, according to them, leads to a problematic conclusion, as not every trauma survivor, for instance, a perpetrator, can be ascribed a morally superior status. They go on to claim that there should not be such an ascription of moral quality to trauma sufferers if one wants to objectively examine all sufferers involved. This would open up the possibility to also study perpetrators, who have been found to suffer in ways similar to the victims of traumatic events. Fassin and Rechtman start their description of the expansion of the field of trauma studies with the victims of a social disaster who could claim rights to compensation if there was evidence of a psychological trauma. Thus, psychological trauma could be used as a type of insurance fraud; victims were thought to feign psychological symptoms for financial gain. A second stage included hysterical women, whom Freud in “Aetiology of Hysteria” (1896), analyzed as being traumatized due to rape. During WWI a second stage in the acceptance of psychological trauma is reported as associated with weaker soldiers who were shell-shocked due to the war. The soldiers were not regarded as perpetrators, but as loyal servants of the army. Still, shell-shock was
not a popular concept, as at the time these soldiers were seen as abnormally weak. After WWI, with the rising popularity of Freud, war psychoanalysis similarly rose in popularity. The sufferers now became individual victims. During WWII, trauma was still unpopular in the patriotic war-affected nations. However, after WWII, trauma reached a height of popularity. Sufferers of what by then was called Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), were no longer seen as seeking financial profit, or as weak soldiers: quite the contrary, trauma was now associated with higher moral standing, being met with an empathetic point of view towards the victims, producing “a ranking of legitimacy among victims” (282). An indication of this change in attitude can be seen in the term survivor guilt, where survivors of traumatic events feel guilt for having survived while others died. This term ascribes a level of humanity to those who feel guilty for the deceased, signaling a change in the perception of psychological trauma. It is through this association of trauma with moral qualities, that it becomes difficult for perpetrators to lay claim on trauma suffering. Even if they did suffer similar symptoms, a claim to the term of PTSD was intertwined with a claim to a higher moral standing.

However, because of political developments in the colonial world, a decolonization of the field of trauma studies was on the agenda. Before WWII, only Western victims, i.e. those that are part of the colonizing group, were discussed in literary and psychological studies. The relationship of perpetration of the colonizer towards the colonized was not yet acknowledged. The process of decolonization after WWII triggers the study of both parties. This development creates a field where different people’s histories come into contact with each other. The contact can bring about a clashing of these pasts. Different groups of victims start claiming their moral superiority by struggling for the worst suffering. Michael Rothberg calls this type of position to the past ‘competitive memory’ (3). He also refers to Freud’s term ‘screen memory” (12-16), which comprises

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1 This term is first introduced in Freud’s paper “Screen Memories” in 1899. The International Dictionary of Psychoanalysis synthesizes Freud’s paper as follows: “In this paper Freud evoked one of his own memories of childhood (though he ascribed it to someone else), in which he saw himself playing with other children in a very green meadow across which vivid yellow flowers
a type of memory that is adopted from a morally higher group of sufferers to hide one’s own past. Such a screen memory, however, does not only work as a hiding place, it is also a screen on which the individual’s own past is projected. The way it then works is described by Rothberg as ‘multidirectional’, as the memory thus also reveals connections between the individual’s own memory and that of the other, whilst similarly indicating differences between the two memories. In multidirectional memories, comparisons of different people’s pasts may lead to productive cooperation between the different victim groups where the groups help articulate one another’s traumas. With respect to the decolonization of trauma studies, the colonized can gain recognition of its trauma using the articulations of the colonizer’s trauma. This may happen without reducing the particular traumas to universals whilst also not giving one group a higher moral standing than the other as illustrated by Fassin & Rechtman:

We can of course highlight the diversity of signifieds [those suffering from trauma] [...] and we might wonder if it is reasonable to group in the same category the adult who was sexually abused as a child and the earthquake survivor, the veteran who committed war crimes and the civilian whose family was massacred, the descendant of the captive rediscovering his or her history and the political activist tortured under an authoritarian regime. But we believe that the fact that all of these realities are today subsumed under the heading of trauma is an important indication of the way in which the tragic is understood in contemporary societies [...] anthropologically [...] (277, emphasis added)

As different histories start affecting one another the public field of memory is also no longer bound to nations creating a more fluid view of memory and group identity. Memory and identity had previously been seen as linearly connected to one another with one group’s identity bound by a nation through memory. But in Rothberg’s view of memory, there is no longer linearity between memory and identity as individuals are informed by the identities and the memories of others (2-6).
Rothberg uses these terms to discuss the memories of different people in a context of decolonization, but he also points to the impact that a multidirectional approach has on the justice system. The different concepts used in justice, like victim and perpetrator, are no longer as rigid as they used to be, creating a view of a more humane perpetrator who has similarities to a trauma victim, but retains its differences and thus its possibility for a judgement in court. The consequences of Rothberg's theory on the justice system, thus further inform the more humane portrayal of perpetrators.

After the recognition of trauma first in traditional Western victims and later in colonized victims, perpetrators are a third group of PTSD sufferers that are even now still developing a position of focus in trauma studies. Frantz Fanon is one of the theorists pointing out the lack of interest for colonial suffering by trauma theory and simultaneously showing how decolonization pushes the normal subject of trauma studies, the white man, into the position of the moral other: the white man is no longer victim, but perpetrator. Thus, gradually opening up of the field to other people's suffering has now paved the road for de-victimization of trauma studies, broadening the field to encompass more than just victim-related trauma. This dissertation will extrapolate the study of the colonial other to that of the morally other: the perpetrator. I will look at how the multidirectional view of Rothberg can be extrapolated to the difference between memories of victims and those of perpetrators contact each other without competition, creating a fuller image of history than if one group is ignored cf. 3.1.3.

The first instance where perpetrators were consciously discussed in a trauma context was the Vietnam War. Roger Luckhurst comments on the symptoms of American soldiers, who had committed war crimes in Vietnam, similar to those of the victims and thus needing a similar approach (19-20). Contrary to victims, perpetrators are still not 'de-monsterized' in the mass media. Hannah Arendt points out the dangers in only giving attention to the victims' points of view, as has been done in trauma studies by for instance Caruth and in society in general, as she explains by
commenting on the partiality of the Eichmann trial in her book *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil*. As a political philosopher reporting on his trial in Jerusalem for the *New Yorker* magazine, she states that while “[o]n trial are [Eichmann’s] deeds [...]” (5), the trial looked at suffering from the victims’ points of view. Seen from this angle, the truth is distorted and Eichmann, a key WWII perpetrator, comes out as a monster. Thus, the perpetrator’s humanity has to suffer because of the political intentions of highlighting the moral qualities of the Jewish victims’ suffering. In addition, these developments in the field of trauma studies led to a need to sever the bond between trauma sufferers and morality. Fassin and Rechtman argue for trauma to be used as a neutral category, thus creating the possibility for a more complex view of the relationships between victims and perpetrators and their position as trauma sufferers (284). Luckhurst, on the other hand, is more careful in his view of trauma as devoid of moral connotations. He notes that a view of trauma as a normal reaction ignores the “plurality of possible responses to traumatic impacts” (211). Trauma can also be met with resilience and does not always result in PTSD. In other words, Luckhurst shows how difficult it is to separate PTSD from any other aspects that give it a higher moral standing than a non-reaction.

Therefore, as there is room for a theory of perpetrators in trauma studies and as the need for a distinction between trauma and morality is established, more portrayals of perpetrators surfaced in the literature, with journalistic biographies of WWII perpetrators as the most influential, e.g. Arendt, Hannah. *The Banality of Evil*. In these biographies, perpetrators were no longer portrayed as monsters, but gained human characteristics. Empathy and identification were used as tools to establish a connection between the reader and the perpetrator; at the same time, however, distancing techniques were still needed, as legally and morally a judgement about these men was still to be pronounced.

Similar works appeared by Gitta Sereny and Christopher R. Browning. These authors lend a voice to perpetrators that were previously described as monster-perpetrators, showing their humanity
and the development from a normal human being into somebody capable of grave atrocities, a process which was referred to as the “banality of evil” by Arendt (252). The normality of these men is shown by descriptions of their personal lives: as Sereny questions whether “any man— or his deeds— [can] be understood in isolation from his childhood, his youth and manhood, from the people who loved or did not love him, and from the people he loved or needed” (40). The personality of the perpetrator Franz Stangl, commander of Treblinka during World War II, thus becomes almost more important than his actions. This is in contrast to Stangl’s own attempts “[…] to deny or rationalize [his ‘deeds’] rather than his total personality change” (129).

In the process of change, Arendt, but remarkably Eichmann himself, too, looks for a turning point that clearly marks the transition from innocence to guilt. However, the author thinks of another moment than Eichmann himself asserts. Sereny calls the process of finding this point of return a search for “some new truth which would contribute to the understanding of things that had never yet been understood” (23). The character of the interviews that Sereny had with Stangl and that are portrayed in her book at times even comes close to that of a therapeutic session where Stangl himself is “intent on finding a new truth within himself” (201). However, it often becomes difficult to judge “[…] at which point one human being can make the moral decision for another that he should have the courage to risk death” (134). On the other hand, she does continue to use the term ‘monster’ when describing the change of personality in Stangl’s splitting into “two men […] in order to survive” (167). With Arendt and Browning the term ‘monster’ is not present in this manner.

The guilt of the perpetrators is still important even if it is now discussed in a framework that also allows biographers to describe perpetrators as trauma victims. Arendt, writing during Eichmann’s trial, puts him on trial herself. As she writes about Jews who cooperated with the Nazis, Arendt shows that there is no such thing as pure evil nor such thing as pure innocence either. But even if

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* Franz Stangl was sentenced to life imprisonment in 1970 in West-Germany. He was interviewed by Gitta Sereny during his imprisonment up to the time of his death in 1971.
delineations of good and bad only surfaced after the war, the question of guilt remains. Key questions that surface throughout Arendt, Sereny and Browning are: does the perpetrator feel guilty? Is there remorse or a feeling of shame? What did the perpetrator know? Did the perpetrator personally kill anybody? Was there a possibility for resistance? Was there a possibility for choice? Were there others that did not make the same choices that led to perpetration? What was the ideology of the perpetrator? Were there any mitigating circumstances? How large was the perpetrator’s role?

The final question is closely linked to the issue of collective perpetration. During the decolonization process trauma theory showed, the suffering of whole communities; with perpetrator theory the individual is judged in comparison to his society (as trauma should be separated from morality). Society itself is in many cases also a perpetration society, as in Nazi Germany. As with Eichmann’s trial, an argument in the perpetrator’s defence was, his being only part of a perpetrating system, thus placing the blame on the community and releasing some of the blame from the individual. So, in order to establish a framework for practical analyses of perpetrator characterizations, the relationship of the individual with the community needs to be examined further. The broadening of the field of trauma studies leads to more attention for general societal phenomena as for example discussed by Fassin and Rechtman in their conclusion. They show how the past is now looked at as a traumatic event as opposed to before when “our gaze on the past [once] was a celebration of days of triumph” (275); similarly our “[v]iew of the future […] has turned to disenchantment” (275). Browning’s examination of the Reserve Police Battalion 101 takes apart the argument of just being a cog in the system and states that the system of war could never have worked without the efforts of individual people: “De holocaust heeft in wezen kunnen plaatsvinden doordat individuele mensen gedurende lange tijd andere mensen in grote aantallen hebben gedood” (13). He thus discusses those who actually performed the killings, as opposed to Arendt and Sereny who examine masterminds behind the killings. His style of writing reflects the need to place the individual in the larger picture: a combination of an almost fictional introduction
that facilitates an identification with the perpetrators of the Reserve Police Battalion at their according to Browning key point of change, and a historical survey of the workings of the battalion in relation to the system of perpetration.

The conflation of the individual with the collective is discussed in LaCapra's theory of the collapse of the other on the self while listening to trauma. Trauma is seen as infectious, because listening to trauma of the other results in the listener feeling the trauma (106-43). This process can be seen in Sereny's account of those related to the perpetrators. Franz Stangl's wife, Frau Stangl, for instance, consciously portrays her relationship to her husband as both one in which she felt he had changed, and one in which she insists on not having known anything. She thus distances herself from him so as to not be ‘infected’ with his perpetration. On the other hand, she cannot be left without blame and is confronted by Sereny about not pressuring her husband into not joining the Nazi party (234-35, 346, 348). Other people affected by the story are the (grand)children, something of concern to Stangl, who becomes angered and emotional when they are mentioned. However, Stangl was aware that the relationship between him and the family would be impossible if he were ever to have been freed (359). Apart from his relatives, the author (his interviewer), too, feels the threat of ‘infection’. Sereny feels “[…] an inverted kind of respect for someone who has the courage, or stubbornness, to admit to ideals which many others so rapidly disclaimed after the Nazi defeat’ but also finds it “at the same time frightening when a man of intelligence is so blind to the reality of the past” (80). These conflicting feelings between respect and disgust led to Sereny almost stopping the interviews when it became apparent how distorted his views were. As she feels the possibility of being associated with her interviewee, Sereny feels the need to defend her interviewing this “monster” (208). Apart from asserting her own moral views, Sereny also distances herself from their relationship, explaining it to be “completely one-sided” with him “never hav[ing] dream[t] of presuming to ask [Sereny] any personal question [during the interviews]” (253).
Thus, as Sereny feels affected by listening to the perpetration of Stangl, his individual perpetration spreads on towards her, which could lead to a collective feeling of perpetration if there were no possibility for distancing. According to Halbwachs, a French philosopher and sociologist, the individual is formed by the collective, but simultaneously also forms the collective memory (43). The collective in which the perpetrators of the novels that I discuss here are often perpetrative communities that function because of a political system. Extrapolating Halbwachs’s theory of the collective to these system, creates a position of the individual as informing the system. The system then itself could also not exist without the individual, a process Browning also discusses. Arendt, too, tells a chronological story of Eichmann’s change connecting his personal history to that of society. These collective memories, then, through processes of globalization and mass media, become shared memories, as defined by Margalit. This happens as memories with different perspectives integrated in one version of memory (50). The question of knowledge is also related to the issue of individual responsibility as opposed to being a cog in the system: knowledge of the workings of the system and yet still perpetrating a crime is seen as relating to a higher degree of guilt than unwittingly perpetrating. Knowledge is associated with visual perception in Browning. The judgement of whether the battalion is guilty or not relies partly on what the people involved saw (160).

Apart from just knowing the system, an even higher degree of responsibility is associated with initiative in constructing the system, something which Eichmann is guilty of, according to Arendt. These biographies, however, try to counter a tradition of only focussing on the system, by combining a stronger focus on the individual with that on the system. So apart from being seen as legally guilty, Eichmann also has a moral responsibility.

Next to a judgement of the perpetrator, Arendt also searches for the truth of his story and of history. Giving a voice to the perpetrators, means that they can build their own defence whilst trying to answer the questions asked by Arendt, Sereny and Browning. So, ample instances of
authorial involvement counter the deception of the perpetrators. Arendt thus combines empathy for the perpetrator with pointing out a system of self-deception\(^8\) and clichés, contradictions, and the unreliability of his memory. Simultaneously, the author’s objectivity is also needed for the truth. The position of the author balances on a fine line between an objective observer, who disappears into the background, and a subject, aware of unreliability. A way to block the deceiving recounting of Eichmann without intruding on the history is inserting plurality of points of view. This is taken further by Sereny who frequently compares different versions of history, showing how it is impossible to have just one version of history and indicating the degree of self-preservation in every witness statement. The way in which Stangl tells his story is also related to the truth of his recounting. Sereny for instance notices that he switches to the vernacular when expressing difficult truths. This gives the reader the opportunity for his or her own judgement on the truth of events. Browning’s attention to individuals as building the system stresses strong individuality from different perspectives and memories that accompany his study of a Reserve Police Battalion during WWII. The evidence that Browning uses to deal with the different versions is exactly these perspectives: he uses letters, and lets different people speak in their own words. Here as well, a strong suggestion of lying in witnesses occurs. Thus, in these biographies the role of the author coincides with that of the reader, as the author is also a reader of the past of the perpetrators. As a ‘reader’ of Stangl’s past, Sereny herself is influenced by the context in which she writes. She has not taken part in the war, thus her memories are influenced by the cultural constructs that have been passed on to her: the constellations of victims and perpetrators that she uses are informed by this context. These constellations are partly challenged in the biography on Franz Stangl.

The portrayal of perpetrators in non-fictional literature can thus be said to combine a quest for the truth, an examination of the factors that cause guilt in a perpetrator, and more strikingly a discussion of individuals through their own perspective. In fictional literature some of these

\(^7\) The system of self-deception was partially put in place by the regime: via the use of certain language, perpetrators distorted events whilst these events took place. (Arendt: ?)
techniques reappear together with techniques that are often associated with trauma fiction that only focuses on victims of a trauma.

One of the characteristics of this victim-based trauma literature is a mirroring of the ungraspable qualities of traumatic memory and its over-presence in the traumatized mind. Thus Luckhurst identifies trauma narratives as inherently both “anti-narrative” and “manic [in the] production of narratives that seek to explicate the trauma” (79). An overwhelming amount of image materials of the traumatic event, whilst there is a lack of narrative materials is also an important characteristic of victim-based trauma literature. Apart from photographic imagery, Luckhurst also points to the use of cinematographic language as particularly similar to flashbacks that occur in trauma. Ulrich Baer, too, points at the peculiar correlation between the traumatic experience and the media of imagery. Images “reveal [...] experiences that have not been, and possibly cannot be, assimilated into [...] a continuous narrative” (1). For Baer, images are almost more real than reality itself, thus both true and staged, which reflects the issue of reliability in trauma narration. The author proposes a Democritean gaze of trauma: a “[...] conception of the world as occurring in bursts and explosions as the rainfall of reality, privileging the moment rather than the story, the event rather than the unfolding, particularity rather than generality” (5). Following the democritean principle of the ever-changing river in which “[...] atoms [are] moving in a void”, photography and trauma both contest the view of time and history as “[...] inherently flowing and sequential” (2). This results in non-chronological fiction, or fiction interspersed with (literal) images. In decolonized trauma literature where two different histories meet, multidirectionality leads to intertextuality and fragmentation, according to Rothberg. The associations between different memories are reflected in associations between different works of fiction thus resulting in intertextuality. Fragmentation, on the other hand, mirrors a large number of perspectives (137).
2 Characterization of Perpetrators as Trauma Sufferers

The first part of this chapter discusses the perpetrator characters: who are they and how are they portrayed as perpetrators. The perpetrators that I will discuss here are Helmut, Lore, Micha and Jozef Kolesnik in The Dark Room and Alice, Joseph, David and Isobel in Afterwards. This selection encompasses characters that are active perpetrators and almost-perpetrators. The perpetrators depicted in Seiffert’s novels are all part of ‘perpetrating communities’: communities that have been criticized for their imperialist and colonial conduct and/or found guilty of war crimes. These perpetrators are all depicted as similar to victims: thus challenging the concept of a perpetrator as opposed to a victim. In the first section I will discuss who Seiffert’s perpetrator characters are. Seiffert includes perpetrators that are not legally guilty in her novels and simultaneously diverts attention away from their acts of perpetration showing the importance of the effects of the perpetrations on the surrounding characters. The active perpetrators are thus depicted as combining innocence and perpetration in one character. The communities that they are part of affect their status of innocence and perpetration as well as the role they play in these communities. However, not only the community is of importance, similarities between the perpetrators and traditional depictions of victims lead to a dangerous possibility of equation of these opposite groups. Thus Seiffert emphasizes the responsibilities of the perpetrator characters, whilst including innocence as a screen behind which the perpetrators hide. At the end, the text also raises the issue of the need of punishment for the crimes, and in this way it explores the justification of the social system that surrounds the perpetrators both legally and morally. A last aspect of the depiction of
perpetrators is the issue of whether perpetration is caused by the war, or whether it is inherently found in the characters. If the characters portray bodily signs of perpetration the question arises of whether the perpetrations and the feelings of guilt can be passed on, as has been claimed about trauma in victims. After my characterization of the perpetrators I will discuss how they are placed into categories by the characters of the novels.

2.1 Who Are the Perpetrators?

The perpetrators in *The Dark Room* are the active perpetrators Helmut and Jozef Kolesnik and the absent active perpetrators in the parents of Lore and the grandfather of Micha. Lore and Micha, on the other hand are only almost-perpetrators. In *Afterwards* the most prominent active perpetrators are Joseph and David; Alice, her mother, Isobel, Alice’s father and Alan are almost-perpetrators. The active perpetrators staged in *Afterwards* have not even been found guilty of any crimes of war. David has never been convicted for anything, nor has Joseph. Joseph seems to feel that he has committed a crime of war, and was interviewed by army superiors, but they repeatedly reassured him that the person he killed had been a terrorist who was reaching for his weapon. Thus, legally, both are innocent soldiers. In *The Dark Room* there is a combination of active perpetrators that were (possibly) convicted and those that were not. Micha’s grandfather too could have been innocent as Micha bases his presumptions on the length of his grandfather’s imprisonment. This is made more complex when experts tell him that it was very normal for German soldiers to be kept by Russians for a long time after the war, even if they were never convicted for any crimes. It is confirmed by a Belarusian collaborator, Jozef Kolesnik, that Micha’s grandfather has indeed shot many people in WWII; however this is never physically proven.
The lack of legal culpability in perpetrators is reflected in the lack of focus on acts of perpetration in *Afterwards* and in Micha’s, the final, part of *The Dark Room*. Here, much of the focus is on how people are affected by the actions of others. The active perpetrators in the novels affect the other characters in such a way that they themselves feel like almost-perpetrators. The focus of the novels does not lie on the acts of perpetration and even redirects focus from the active perpetrators to those who are almost-perpetrators. In *Afterwards* the acts of perpetration are mediated either through a traumatically informed memory or are so mediated that they become inaccessible. *Afterwards* can, thus be interpreted literally as that what happens after the perpetration, whereas *The Dark Room* does include actual acts of perpetration and can be seen as the dark place of perpetration.

In *The Dark Room* there is more direct access to the perpetrations of the almost- and active perpetrators. In Lore’s novella of *The Dark Room* there is a direct narration of the death of her little brother Jochen, something which she feels guilty for. The narration contains an abrupt change from an idyllic forest scene to violence:

Lore sits down on the mossy ground with Liesel and Jüri, pulse thumping in her ears. Thomas will be angry. Minutes pass in the cool leaves. Birds sing overhead. Peter is still asleep in her lap. Liesel shifts next to her, lies down. Lore dozes. Jochen shouts from across the clearing, then Thomas. Jüri stands up. Lore hears metal and boots; running and branches snapping [...] she hears the breath pushed out of [Jochen’s] lungs like hiccups. A gun is fired, three, four times. (164)

It is questionable whether this is an act of perpetration or not, as Lore is not the one who pulled the trigger that killed her brother, nor did she order his death. Yet, he was under her responsibility when he died. On the other hand, Lore is psychologically affected as she witnesses the violent death of her brother. The scene is even more potent as it is the first scene in her story that shows the violence of the war in which her parents, Nazi supporters actively took part. Thus the presence of this violence in the story calls for the reader’s empathy with the behaviour of the characters.
Yet, even if there is a lack of focus on the perpetrators, and if the perpetrators are not legally culpable, they still feel guilt. In *Afterwards* Joseph and David, both feel insecure with the justification of their actions. They both were part of British war endeavours that have been strongly criticized, and thus have been considered as perpetrating communities. As they were just cogs in the system, there is a lesser degree of responsibility than if they would have been the architects of imperialism. In *The Dark Room* too, the perpetrator characters are very low in rank, and just followed orders from higher up. It is striking that neither *The Dark Room* nor *Afterwards* portrays any perpetrator characters that were part of the politics and the architecture that created the perpetrations. These active perpetrators of the highest degree are not depicted in these novels. This implies that there is still a possibility for these perpetrators to be depicted as monster-perpetrators, but also implies a lack of interest in these people; everyday people are of importance and not the masterminds. This follows Browning’s theory: the cogs in the system are what let the system function.

However, there are still no black-and-white perpetrators to be found in these novels. The only reference to one of the architects of the Holocaust is to Eichmann. Micha is reminded of a picture he saw of Eichmann holding a child on his lap and not looking into the camera. Micha’s grandfather, an active perpetrator, also seems to not look into the camera, and thus Micha interprets this as a criterion of perpetration. He likens his grandfather, who was only a soldier, to an architect of the Holocaust; the gradations in perpetration are unimportant to Micha, who thinks in extreme contrasts: either guilty or innocent. He thus sees perpetrators as monster-perpetrators which clashes with the view he has of his grandfather as innocent. These correlations that Micha makes between his personal past and that of the larger history, remind of Browning’s introductory fictional chapter that places the individual in the larger history (1-3). In the museum that Micha visits in *The Dark Room* he focuses on the everyday life of the people then, trying to evade the scenes of war. He also records everyday sounds when the interview reaches a point of silence. These moments of everyday life are used as a reassurance for the humanity of the killers. But this humanity is also what is so frightening to him and what he wants the German children to learn at
school: “[r]he real, everyday people, [...] the ones who really did the killing [italics in original]” (290). For Micha, the mastermind perpetrator is thus connected to the normal active perpetrators. But apart from this one reference to a mastermind perpetrator there are no others of importance are mentioned. The novels involve no black-and-white perpetrator characters, reducing even those that I call active perpetrators to a more complex status.

The innocence of the active perpetrators is thus affected by their participation in a community of perpetration. This also applies to almost-perpetrators Alan and Mina. Alan, Alice’s stepfather at first seems innocent because of his distanced position from the rest of the family as he is not related through blood. However, in Afterwards of the blemish of two dark marks on the British past points to a collective culpability of the entire British community, of which Alan is a part, thus ruling out pure innocence. His position is similar to that of Mina in Micha’s narrative of The Dark Room. Both characters are associated with the family through marriage, and both are placed outside of the community they live in: Mina is part-Turkish and thus does not feel too involved in the German-guilt; one can even say she takes on a partially innocent position as she is subject to racism in the German community because of her immigrant background. She thus is positioned between the two extreme portrayals of innocence and guilt. Establishing herself as feeling more German than Turkish she takes part in the perpetrating German community, that through its racism even now perpetuates the perpetration. Micha, her boyfriend, is very critical of how Germany educates its youngsters about the war: “[...] it’s perverse, Mina. They identify with the survivors, with the victims [...] they should cry that we did this. We did this, it wasn’t done to us.” (288-89). Their past thus still affects them as they do not acknowledge their responsibility. Alan, similarly, is very critical of the British position towards Kenya and Northern Ireland. Via his political correctness he puts himself outside society that is to be blamed. This position enhances their innocent appearance; however, they are still strongly connected to the perpetrating community. Helmut, in The Dark Room, too takes on a similar outsider position due to his physical flaw which limits his participation in the community. These characters show the complexity of relationship in these communities, with different
memories active in them, similar to multidirectionality as defined by Rothberg. Especially Mina combines two different points of view, that of the innocent and that of the guilty, in one human being. This allows for a discerning between memory and identity as the characters take on the memories of others. An example of this is how Micha steals his grandmother’s photograph of his grandfather in *The Dark Room*. The reader too is encouraged to combine the different histories in the novels as explained below in 3.1.3.

So, the perpetrator characters are part of perpetrating communities and systems. Even if the individuals finally are what help the systems function, the systems also influence the behaviour of individuals. Even after the perpetration the communities continue playing a large role in their life. In times of need, Joseph visits his army comrades for help to survive in the civilian world. But though the army is still a place of refuge for Joseph, it can no longer reassure him. On hearing how other soldiers are being persecuted or are still part of the army, the reader is confronted with the degrees of innocence and the psychological weaknesses in Joseph. Yet, this confrontation has no such effects on Joseph; he still feels guilty. Thus, the community of the army has no control over him any longer, and he as an individual feels responsible even if the justice system does not perceive him that way. Strangely, the reader accepts the army’s point of view to assure Joseph’s innocence, thus holding the system responsible for the questionable conduct that made Joseph an active perpetrator. So, one should be mindful of the influence the army has on the reader, encompassing him in the perpetrating community. Choosing not to take part in this community, and to thus not rely on the army, still leaves the fact that Joseph is not being persecuted by the justice system either. As these two are so entangled in the novel, the reader cannot but become entangled as well.

Apart from playing a role in covering up the perpetrations and in actively ordering them, the community also establishes feelings of guilt in the family members of the perpetrators. Lore in *The Dark Room*, for instance, meets with both sympathetic and angry reactions along their journey; they are seen both as innocent children, and as too many extra mouths to feed. The members of the
community show strong hostility towards her mother who is called “your Nazi whore mother” (85) by members of the German community. These comments affect Lore’s faith in her mother and in a clumsy way she tries to incorporate her mother’s innocence with what society is telling her: “[...] perhaps it does make sense. The war is lost. The Americans have camps, not prisons. For people like Mutti who haven’t committed crimes” (89).

Yet, not all family members of perpetrators are this affected by the views of the community. Alice, in Afterwards, does not have the ethical problems with the war that her family members served in; her worry lies with whether they perpetrated war crimes or not and what effect this has on their relationships with her. As the relationship with the larger community is so problematic, The Dark Room constructs a situation where the characters retreat from society. Helmut cannot take part in any of the social games due to his physical disability, and Lore and Micha physically remove themselves from their normal surroundings. The characters become individuals that create their own networks of people on the way. Helmut connects with his boss Gladigau and Lore and her siblings start to form a family unit together with Thomas, a man they meet on the way. Micha’s journey also leads to a new community that he starts to form a part of, a Belarussian family. These new family constellations present in The Dark Room form groups where perpetrator constellations do not matter. Next to these blood relatives, those who fall in love with active perpetrators are also affected by them as they form a unit with them, creating their own perpetrating community. The severity of guilt is related to the possibility of choice in these relationships, implying that through loving an active perpetrator one chooses to associate with perpetration. Choice is a key element of perpetration both in Seiffert and in Arendt, Sereny and Browning.

The perpetrating community that Lore meets in The Dark Room is changing at this point in time. As that the war is coming to an end in defeat, members of the German community are distancing themselves from Nazi-ideology. The distancing is a negotiation of their status as members of a perpetrating community into a status as bystander or even victim. Micha portrays this type of
behaviour when he steals a photograph from his grandmother, who had helped to conceal the dark past of his grandfather. This act of dissidence towards his grandmother is continued when he physically distances himself from his grandmother after the birth of his daughter Dilan, refusing contact between the two. The same difficulty in accepting the family’s perpetration can be seen in Alice’s mother’s struggles with David’s active perpetration. As a relative of an active perpetrator she takes on a defensive role, excusing and reinterpreting the behaviour of the perpetrator as a way to create an innocent position for herself: “He didn’t get caught up in the hysteria [...] Dad said a gun was just a cumbersome nuisance where it wasn’t needed” (276-77). Apart from using his individuality, she also refers to the “spirit of the time” argument that is frequently used by perpetrators²: “[David is] a product of his times. He’s not going to feel responsible, in any case. However much I might wish it” (279). Alice’s mother thus does not distance herself from her father, but creates a distance between her father and the perpetration of the system. Lore, on the other hand, also screens the feelings of doubt about her family through a focus on a new relationship with Thomas, a man they meet on the way to Hamburg and who takes on the identity of a Jew.

Yet, not every member of a perpetrating community distances himself from that community’s ideologies; in The Dark Room there is also refusal of new facts emerging about the Holocaust as can be seen in the following conversation between two members of the German community that Lore overhears in The Dark Room:

- If you’ve seen enough of those pictures, you can tell they are all in the same place.
- But the newspaper said there were lots of camps, hundreds maybe.
- I’m not saying these camps didn’t exist. Every country has its own prison system, after all. I’m just saying they didn’t kill people.
- And the pictures of the bodies?

² As can be seen in Arendt, Sereny, and Browning.
It’s all a set-up. The pictures are always out of focus, aren’t they? Or dark, or grainy. Anything to make them unclear. And the people in those photos are actors. The Americans have staged it all, maybe the Russians helped them, who knows.

- Who told you this?
- Fahning, for one, and Mohn. Torsten and his brother heard it, too.
- Did they see it in the newspapers?
- Listen, I’ve seen the photos. The same ones keep getting shown everywhere. Different angles on the same scene. Any fool can see that. (175-76)

There are a multitude of reactions to the emerging rumors about the Nazi concentration camps and the reliability of the Holocaust photos that surface in the media. Lore does at first not actively involve herself in this type of conversation; she retains her position as a witness to this manifestation of innocence. However, later on, she feels reassurance in their words and starts to be involved in conversation with other members of society once again, which affects her status as perpetrator. The acts of distancing indicate the degree of infection that is associated with perpetration, as I will discuss in the next chapter.

As stated earlier, the perpetrators are not depicted as monster-perpetrators without either guilt or without innocence. The perpetrators are frequently depicted as trauma sufferers, which calls into mind depictions of trauma victims. Apart from the similarities to victims of trauma, the depictions of the active perpetrators as psychologically affected by what they did, creates an highly humane image of a perpetrator; an image that allows for sympathy towards the perpetrators. In Afterwards Joseph has a hard time keeping at bay continual flashbacks. In the descriptions of the flashbacks, the reader sees a character that tries to grasp what is happening to him, whilst the actual flashbacks force the reader to a personal experience. These flashbacks affect Joseph’s relationships and his job:

Days at a time out there, mostly. Turned into weeks when he was at his worst. No warning, no reason, but it was always the same routine: like everything was getting away from him and there was no way he could stop it. Could be anything that set him off, no way of knowing. Too
much noise, too much talking, a car driven too fast past him, wrong words said on a bad day and that would be it. Job chucked, or he’d get the sack [...] (90).

Lore too, experiences flashbacks, after seeing pictures of Holocaust survivors. For Lore, the emergence of these symptoms signals her growing awareness of the possibility of supporting the wrong side of the war. Whilst portraying her as similar to a victim of a traumatic event it simultaneously establishes a growing almost-perpetration position.

In Afterwards, the reader then follows Joseph’s struggles with finding a way to cope with his past. These kinds of portrayals do not show a perpetrator, but a victim of the war. However, he still feels guilt, as can be seen in his job position as a renovator and in the renovations he is doing on his home. These are metaphors for his attempts at reconstructing his past and patching it up to create a new future and a new life. Renovation implies both a way of mending a broken soul, and a way of covering up certain darker memories of the past that need hiding. David too shows signs of introversion, due to the war, and has also been renovating his house. Yet, he insists on not changing everything about it. It is through the process of renovation that the two meet; it is where they find common ground. Yet, it was actually David’s wife, Isobel, who had planned the renovation. Isobel met David in Kenya whilst she was working there as a nurse. The two thus share a colonial past, and Isobel, even when she has not committed a crime, still feels the need to hide her past. Apart from the renovation that David, Joseph and Alice’s grandmother partially use to cover up the mistakes in their past, Alice’s grandmother also stresses their moral qualities when discussing her romantic relationship with her father. She compensates their war-time wrongs with a correct behaviour in their actual personal life. In the beginning of her relationship with Alice’s grandfather she was still married to another man. However, she insists on narrating that they were in the process of divorce when she met David: «Gran always stressed this, and it made Alice smile, the insistence on propriety » (107). Apart from reassuring herself, her family too is given the opportunity to remain supportive of her and her husband. Helmut’s weakness is similar to the psychological weakness described in the active perpetrators in Afterwards. The weakness, however, already emerges before
he takes on an active role in the war, and is thus associated with his parents’ position as Nazi supporters. It also persists before he has felt any effects of the war as a victim, so it cannot be related to a victim position that he sporadically adopts.

As these characters’ portrayals are closely related to the portrayal of trauma victims, it becomes important to look at the responsibility of the characters. Both in *The Dark Room* and in *Afterwards* the degree of responsibility of the (almost-) perpetrating characters is of a high importance. The degree of responsibility creates differences between the individual perpetrators, thus allowing for a more complex view of a perpetrator as opposed to a monster-perpetrator characterization. Arendt, Sereny, and Browning cf. Chapter 1, who have written on non-fictional perpetrators, as discussed above, examine different types of evidence to come at a conclusion about the complexity of the perpetrators’ guilt. In Seiffert, these different criteria are also used as a way to judge the different characters. Therefore, even if there is much focus on the similarities between perpetrators and victims, because of their common status as trauma sufferers, there remains the possibility and the necessity of judgement on the perpetrating characters. One of these criteria is actual knowledge of the crime one committed. This criterion shows a first difference between the perpetrautions of Joseph and David in *Afterwards*. David was unable to see the victims that he made because of his function as an air bomber flying over dense woods where Kikuyu rebels had their headquarters. Joseph, on the other hand, was an infantry man who saw the person that he killed up-close. Seeing one’s victim implies knowledge of the perpetration that one is involved in. The excuse of not having known what was happening whilst being part of a perpetrating community cannot be used when one actually saw the concrete effects of what happened. Joseph, in this way of judging a perpetrator, has a higher degree of perpetration than David. However, the perpetrators themselves do not feel this way; as David has a nagging uncertainty about who he killed he too feels a strong sense of guilt. The way the community and the reader judge the perpetrators is rendered doubtful by showing a different attitude towards guilt in the perpetrators themselves.
A second component to knowledge of events is that of the political situation. Joseph was much more aware of the precarious position of the British army in Northern Ireland, which had often been criticized in the media and politics even before he signed up in the army. Joseph’s disinterest emphasizes the pointlessness of the whole conflict when the regiment “ended up spending most of one patrol in the Republic” (165) as the border, and thus the whole point of the army presence, was not clear enough. Yet, as a person he had a responsibility to be interested in the conflict. Not every soldier is as apathetic about politics as Joseph is; his friend Townsend “[...] reckoned most of the locals were happy enough with the way things were. Just like the law, they didn’t give a toss about the border” (165). The contrast contributes to a starker depiction of Joseph’s individual responsibility.

Joseph can thus be accused of a lack of interest in the situation; even after his return to Britain, the conflict is still a hot topic, and he is seen as the eye witness who can help clear things up for the civilians and he is still uninterested. This behaviour shows irresponsibility towards his position in the war. David, on the other hand served in a war that received criticism only after he came back to Britain. He is much more aware of his unethical past, which surfaces both as regrets about his ideas:

Wished it hadn’t ended the war [so he could have kept watching the war planes]. What a terrible thing to wish for (133)

and as a defence of his Kenyan period, as narrated here by Alice's mother:

The point [David] was trying to make was more about hindsight. Independence was still over a decade away when the Emergency started. Oh, God he just kept on saying that, didn’t he? The Mau Mau were killing white settlers and Africans loyal to the state, the country was being terrorised by a minority, blah blah, and so British forces were called in (114, emphases added).

As shown by the italicized passages of this fragment, the defence does not help alleviate his position. The defensive language has immersed the next generations even more with the guilt of the grandfather. Yet, though aware of his unethical position, or maybe because of this awareness, he
still hides behind his wife, thus avoiding responsibility. Isobel compensates his rough behaviour as she, on her part, feels shame for their lack of interest and knowledge of the Emergency. Together they try to redeem themselves through thoroughly researching the Emergency and evaluating their position in it.

In *The Dark Room* characters that are unaware of their unethical position are focused on more. Helmut acts like a Nazi throughout his whole story, even at points where violent acts could call for sympathies. During the scenes of war that show a devastated city, the reader may identify with Helmut, this is undermined by his holding on to Nazi-like behaviour. He is not officially involved in the war, but he writes lists of those entering and leaving Berlin, just as Nazis made lists about Jews who were shipped off to death camps. This type of behaviour shows how unaware Helmut is of the political situation. He mimics behaviour of Nazi’s unconsciously whilst these notes could have been used against the system. This is even literally pointed out to him by an officer, but Helmut is so much immersed in his own world that he cannot see the use of them other than as a hobby. The same detachment is seen when Helmut finds the bombing of Berlin “frightening but thrilling” (29). This scene, that could have invited empathy towards the inhabitants of Berlin, is seen through Helmut’s politically detached eyes and thus calls forth mixed sentiments amongst the readers. His family is also oblivious of the rest of Europe’s ordeals during WWII and can still go on holiday in the midst of war. Helmut is thus very unaware of the political situation and detached from society, living in his own world. A second moment where resistance or a change of ideology could have been possible is when Helmut witnesses Nazi officers rounding up gypsies and beating a gypsy woman. He tries to record this scene through photography, but fails. At this moment he sees the atrocities of the regime with his own eyes, which affects him greatly. He panics and is fearful for his life when an officer notices him taking photographs and starts shouting at him. His reaction afterwards is one of confusion and anger: “At first he can only cry. Angry tears: the panic of the day turned to rage. Turned against the photos, against himself, his failure to capture the scene” (39). Yet, as affected as he is, he once again redirects his energy to a detail of the event instead of looking at the whole
scene, just as he focused on the wheels of the train instead of looking at the war refugees. This key moment that could have been a turning point in Helmut’s life, thus does not change anything. Simultaneously with the failure of the photos there is a failure of Helmut to comprehend the event and with it an inability to act.

Apart from the problem of knowledge of events, Seiffert’s characters also portray irresponsible characteristics in the rest of their life. Irresponsibility is a complex factor in the guilt of the perpetrators; it indicates a reprievable state of disinterest but at the same time puts the perpetrator in a position of childlike innocence. David, in Afterwards, for instance relies on the help of his wife Isobel to organize the social aspects of his life, leaving him irresponsible for those aspects: « It was harsh, realising how little [Alice and her grandfather] knew of each other, how many years her gran had been compensating, providing ease and conversation » (85). He has, thus, always had somebody take care of him: either his wife or during his army time, his superiors. The position of innocence in which he positions himself is volatile: it implies a reprievable disinterest, together with an innocence that is impeded. The innocence is created and performed to hide a large degree of culpability; there is a strong likeness to Freud’s notion of screen memory that creates a more innocent memory to hide another, unwanted memory.

This childlike irresponsibility can also be seen in The Dark Room, in the character of Helmut. Helmut’s physical disability limits his growth as a person, which leads to those around him treating him as a child. However, mentally, he is an adult, a follower of Hitler. His innocence hides this side of him, whilst also excusing it. Because of his naïvety, the reader readily excuses his sympathies; however, the character grows into a more responsible person who starts to hide behind this veneer of innocence. Lore, in contrast, sheds her innocence early on in her part of The Dark Room, whilst acting as a parent towards her younger siblings. This strength of character implies a greater responsibility for her moral choices, as well as a higher political awareness. However, this responsibility is still entangled with naïve childhood as she still relies on her father’s words for
much of her knowledge: “Vati said. It will be over soon. [italics in original]” (77). This sentence becomes in her story a refrain that she desperately holds on to. So, she occupies a position between irresponsible childhood and complicit adulthood. Through the possibility of perpetration even in the traditionally ‘innocent’ it becomes difficult to maintain the idea of true innocence. The possibility of transference of guilt and perpetrator status, which I discuss in 3.1.2, underscores this. The youngest character in Lore’s part of The Dark Room, Peter, an infant, would be perceived as the ultimate presence of innocence. He is unaware of any political implications of his life, and also unaware of the role of his family members in society. However, the members of society surrounding him treat him as a part of the Nazi community that his parents were part of. The other children involved in Lore’s part too, are not as innocent as she assumed: Liesl and Jüri are both aware of their father having done something deserving punishment. Even Micha, who was less than an infant during the war, still feels connected to the perpetrations of his family; thus there is no pure innocence.

Part of the consequences and in a way also of the responsibilities of perpetration, is traditionally punishment. The characters in Seiffert’s novels have served different degrees of punishment. None of the main characters have served time in prison. Some of the side characters, on the other hand have. Jozef Kolesnik, in The Dark Room, has been in Russian prison after WWII for several years, just as Micha’s grandfather. Other absent perpetrators in this novel have also been imprisoned: Lore’s mother and father. Thus, the community expresses a need for punishment through these imprisonments; however, the perpetrating characters do not always share this view. Jozef Kolesnik points out how wrong he was: “I can give all these reasons […] Nothing changes. I chose to kill” (345), but he does not feel a need for punishment as there is no-one left to apologize to: “I think there is no punishment for what I did. Not enough sadness and no punishment” (356). This view is similar to Joseph’s in Afterwards: “Why [talk about it]? Cry long enough and loud enough and you’ll be a

* The lack of Holocaust victims to apologize to is noted by Primo Levi who argues that as no-one survived the gas chamber, there are no surviving victims left (Levi, Primo as discussed in Codde, 8 Oct 2010).
better person for it? Better than the man you were, when you dropped the bombs or fired the bullet? Joseph didn’t believe in that [...] there’s no end to it, it’s just self-pity ad it just goes on and on” (292). Those that surround the active perpetrators, on the other hand, take over the redemption and view their lives as punishment for the wrongs of their family members and of their own inheritance of guilt. Kolesnik’s wife, for instance, considers their lack of children after the war as a punishment, together with their being shunned by the villagers who all know what they did during the war.

2.2 Network of Identity

In the previous section it has become clear that there are no well-defined delineations between perpetrators and victims and between guilt and innocence. Yet, Seiffert’s characters find it difficult to deal with the fluidity of the (active) perpetrators as this means they all are a combination of ‘good’ and ‘bad’. So, the characters have constructed a way to classify them based on the performance of different roles. This way, different aspects of the characters’ personalities are seen as different roles that the characters perform, rather than expressions of their true nature. This need for an alternative classification to grasp the fluidity of characters is mostly apparent in The Dark Room. Micha, at first tries to define his grandfather among the lines of perpetrator or victim as he finds it very difficult to deal with the different aspects of his grandfather’s personality. This distinction coincides with the way the Holocaust information centres that he calls separate their archives into survivors and criminals. However, as his grandfather is not to be found in any of these categories, Micha is forced to think about him in a different way, assuming a role-performance in his grandfather’s personality.

This switching between roles is seen in the novels by the different names that people have. In The Dark Room, Lore and her siblings have both an official and a calling name. This distinguishes
their official status from their day to day life name. Apart from the official connotation of their full names, these names also strengthen the connection between the child and the perpetrating parent. When Lore in Hamburg settles back in, she is ascribed an old identity from before the war. She is no longer Lore, but is now called Hannelore Dressler. This thus connects her to her father, and similarly with reintegrating into society, Lore leaves the role of victim for that of an almost-perpetrator. Names also help create a distance between the characters. Micha, in *The Dark Room* calls Jozef Kolesnik by his last name, whereas Jozef calls Micha by his first name. Micha, thus distances himself from the perpetrations of Jozef, whilst Jozef associates himself with Micha’s assumed innocence. Micha also uses different names for his grandfather: Opa when he has the role of grandfather, and Askan Boell when he is the possible criminal; this signifies the different roles that he assigns to his grandfather:

In the evening, he writes to Mina, propping the photo of Opa against his knee. Micha tries to imagine him in uniform. In the doorway of Andrej’s kitchen with a gun, standing at the crossroads at the edge of the town. *The man in his head, with the SS insignia, he is Nazi Opa. The man in the photo is just Opa. Opa before Micha knew him, but still Opa all the same.* (269, emphasis added)

*There is Opa as New Husband on honeymoon. Askan in shirtsleeves by the lake; slotted in place again on page 1938. Micha turns over, seventeen years later, back to back: Opa as Papa. Opa with young Karin, holding hands.* (286, emphases added)

In the first fragment, there is a sign that Micha is starting to integrate the different roles of his grandfather in one person: “The man in the photo is just Opa, Opa before Micha knew him, but still Opa all the same” (269). But mostly, Micha refers to his grandfather as having different roles; this enables him to cling to the distinction between good and bad. In his mind he creates different versions of his grandfather, thus creating one version that is entirely innocent. Micha even mirrors this role performance and starts splitting up his own mind in two different personalities: the one who plays cards with the Belarusn Andrej: “Give and take: some German, some Belarusian variations, and some confusion and laughter too” (329), and the one who is an
The interviewer/interrogator of Jozef Kolesnik. The splitting up in two different personalities is also remarked upon by Sereny during her interviews of Stangl, as I discussed in Chapter 1. Lore’s grandmother too, asserts this compartmentalization, whilst reassuring Lore of the innocence of her parents: “Some of them [the Nazis] went too far, child, but don’t believe it was all bad” (189). This partial admission of guilt can both imply a combination of good and bad in one person, but could also be interpreted as denying guilt. The different roles that the active perpetrators take on in *The Dark Room* are not always the same for the different family members. In Micha’s family different views on the grandfather collide with each other. These different views seem to imply a difference in roles that the grandfather took on, thus forming a more complex view on identity. Micha’s view of a man who held him on his lap is disturbed by the other family members’ recounting of him being a mean drunk, which is difficult for him to handle and in this way causes a rift between him and the rest of the family.

In *Afterwards* the possibility of pure performance in taking on a role is noted, implying a deflection from a legal and moral reality. The perpetrator characters often perform the role of victims to enhance their moral qualities and to thus use their similarities to victims for personal moral gain. Even when it proves to be less black-and-white, the role-performance is shown to still have dubious implications. The roles that are taken on can in this way hide some of the worse parts of a person’s personality and also lead to a possibility of compartmentalization. In the legal and moral sense, this way of seeing the identity of perpetrators implies the possibility of retaining a pure innocent role that can deflect from culpability and punishment. In the beginning of *Afterwards*, Alice struggles to grasp the different roles that her grandfather, David, and her boyfriend, Joseph, take on. Later, she does show awareness of such a classification into perpetrator or victim, into guilty or innocent: “[...] whatever it was that Joseph didn’t want to tell them, it didn’t have to be criminal to be troubling, he could have been following the rules of engagement. Alice wasn’t sure that made her feel any better. Perhaps it wasn’t meant to” (302). Alice acknowledges the shades of grey in criminality in this passage and how there is no easy answer for the question of guilt. Mina,
Micha’s girlfriend in *The Dark Room* too proposes a more integrated view of the identity of her boyfriend’s grandparents. For her they can be both loving grandparents and have a Nazi past; their familial function proceeds for her. In a documentary that Micha and Mina watch, the question of being both Jewish and German can be seen as a metaphor for being both good and bad: “There was no internal hyphen, no line drawn between; no start of one, end of the other place inside” (246). Thus one can be both and these roles are all connected as in a network of different aspects of identity, but still forming one personality without compartmentalization. The view of Luise, Joseph’s sister in *Afterwards*, on perpetrators, approaches this more closely: “They just do [something terrible] and then they go on” (374). Even Micha, in *The Dark Room* comes to this conclusion about identity: “Nothing definite. Nothing for Micha to pin everything to.” (376).

Thus, an integration of different aspects into one personality can lead to identities where there are components of innocence integrated/contaminated with guilt. So, similarities between the traditionally good people and the traditionally bad people are of importance to this view of personality as expressed in Seiffert’s novels. Elena Kolesnik, Jozef’s wife in *The Dark Room* points out the lack of difference she saw between the different parties involved in the war. As the novels propose an integrated view of personality, it is remarkable that there is almost no mention of the victims of the wars that the perpetrators were involved in. A lack of victims in the novels implies a fictional world where there are no victims. This can lead to fluidity in classifications of victims and perpetrators, which in turn may result in denial of perpetration. To refer to victims of the perpetrators, the reader has to rely on similarities between these perpetrator-centred trauma novels and victim-centred trauma novels. In that way, the absence of victims coincides with an absence of monster-perpetrators, to enhance the lack of black-and-white categories.

There are some characters in Seiffert’s novels that can be seen as victims; yet, even they turn out to have perpetrating aspects. In Lore’s part of *The Dark Room*, she has contact with the possibly Jewish Thomas. Yet, it is not certain whether Thomas really is Jewish, as it is hinted that he may
have stolen Jewish papers to be able to pass security controls after the war. He could thus also be a Nazi camp guard from Buchenwald, who has stolen a Jewish identity. Lore remarks upon his uncertain position the following:

She [Lore] tries to unravel Thomas and prisons and skeleton people; lies and photographs; Jews and graves; tattoos and newspapers and things not being as bad as people say. In the middle of it all are Mutti and Vati and the badges in the bushes and the ashes in the stove and the sick feeling that Thomas was both right and wrong, good and bad; both at the same time. (210, emphasis added)

So, Lore mentions the possibility of a complexity of identity, which means that this possible victim is not as innocent as one would first assume. Micha, in the next part of The Dark Room also meets possible victims of WWII whilst travelling to Belarus. However, the people Micha meets are the local population of areas that have been stripped of Jews, with collaborators amongst the inhabitants. Even more striking, the members of the community assume that Micha is there to interview them as victims of the Chernobyl accident\(^{11}\) that did not happen far away from their town. Micha is so involved with his own (family’s) perpetration that he had not even thought about Chernobyl. But, the inhabitants too, prefer to use Chernobyl as their trauma; in their case they are clearly victims, and it enables them to hide their own collaborative perpetration. Their assumed role of victim is thus combined with that of perpetrator.

So, the characters of Seiffert’s novels struggle with the fluidity in the perpetrating characters. The performance of different roles seems to allow for some relief in the characters. The compartmentalization that ensues because of this role-performance, however, can lead to the denial of perpetration. It thus becomes clear that there is a need for a distinction between victims and perpetrators as society still needs a moral and legal judgement to ascertain guilt and perpetration. To include the voice and the perspective of the perpetrator in order to show a type of perpetrator

\(^{11}\)A devastating nuclear accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant on 26 April 1986.
different from monster-perpetrators is connected to the danger of ignoring the culpability of the perpetrator. Especially due to a lack of real victims in either novel, it becomes apparent that a distinction between perpetrator-based trauma fiction and victim-based trauma fiction is necessary, together with a relying on the latter fiction’s style to show the similarities. I will deal with this in the next section.
3  *The Dark Room* and *Afterwards* as Trauma Novels

After having discussed the characteristics of Seiffert’s perpetrator characters and their identity as a network of different aspects that are integrated, it has become clear that perpetrators are not as distinct from victims as would be depicted in traditional literature. Yet, the novels lack any victim characters, so the similarities between perpetrators and victims are drawn in a different manner: through the novels’ use of style. Seiffert’s novels are in line with a tradition of victim-based trauma fiction. Through the use of characteristics specific to victim-based trauma fiction, as described in Chapter 1, Seiffert likens her main characters to the main characters in victim-based fiction. In this way, connections between Seiffert’s perpetrator characters and victims can be made even without including victims in the novels. However, as the novels give voice to characters whose behaviour is criticized on a moral, legal, and ethical plane, it is important to retain the distinction between the perpetrator and the victim. The inscription of the novel in a tradition of victim-based trauma writing problematizes this distinction, though inscribing the novels in this tradition, Seiffert still maintains a distance between them and the victim-centred novels. In this chapter I will discuss how *Afterwards* and *The Dark Room* fit in the victim-centred trauma fiction and how they thus, together with similar novels, open up victim-centred trauma fiction to just trauma fiction.
The inscription of the novels in a trauma fiction tradition can already be seen in the motto of Afterw...
3.1 Doubling of Scenes, Phrases, and Characters: The Other and the Self

The characteristics of perpetrators that I have discussed in chapter 3, refer to the perpetrators and the perpetrating communities, individually. However, as stated in Chapter 1, there is a possibility of transfer of perpetration (characteristics) just as there is an intergenerational transmission of trauma in victims. The echoes that the possible transfers of perpetration bring forth in the novels are reminiscent of the acting out characteristic of trauma fiction, where the traumatic event is obsessively repeated. The literal repetition does not only occur on the level of events, there often similarities between and repetitions in a metaphorical sense, doublings, of the same type of character\textsuperscript{13} appear as refrains that resurface throughout the novels.

3.1.1 Doubling of Scenes and Phrases

The doubling of certain phrases and scenes throughout the novels confirms a relying on the previous generation and their knowledge. The connections between the first generation of perpetrators and their grandchildren are strengthened and imply irresponsibility in the grandchildren. They cannot express their own position of innocence whilst still relying on the previous perpetrating generation. Yet, not all repetition of scenes is done unconsciously; Alice and Joseph in Afterwards are consciously repeating and doubling phrases from their own and others’ pasts. Alice in Afterwards is for instance invaded by memories: “He [Alice’s grandfather] was crowded by the three of us for years. Me, Mum and Gran. ‘House full of blessed women’. Alice laughed. A refrain from her childhood. Bellowed from the corridor in the weekday morning bathroom rush” (40, emphasis added). Alice here notes the repetition

\textsuperscript{13} The repetition in main characters can, for instance, be seen in Judy Budnitz If I Told You Once (London: Flamingo, 1999). Ilana, Sashie, Mara, and Nomie, four generations of rape victims, perpetuate the acts of the previous generation throughout the novel. (Codde, 2011)
herself, indicating a consciousness about repetition of her family’s past in her life. Joseph in Afterwards, also repeats phrases, but he adopts them from his friends and does not assert his own past. He rehashes the excuses of his army colleagues for signing up: “Townsend was sixteen when he signed up. That’s my excuse […] Lee said he’d joined up to get himself sorted. Jarvis reckoned the army had done everyone a favour […]” (187-89). Here the repetition of the phrases is used as a way to bridge the gaps in his own narration, which I explain in more detail in 3.2. He too is conscious about the repetition of phrases in his story. The level of consciousness of the characters about this mechanism of relying on others should be regarded with caution. Doubling can be used as a screen behind which the characters hide their perpetration. They emphasize their reliability on previous generations or on others, so excusing themselves as they are only steered by the forces of a repetitive past, which releases them of individual responsibility. However, apart from the caution one should hold on the characters’ conscious assertions about a repetitive past, they also surface unbeknownst to the characters as illustrated throughout The Dark Room. The phrases that Micha uses to express his shock about his grandfather’s presumed perpetration are recycled from how he expressed his ambivalence about wanting to know this truth “I didn’t want to know. But it is too late” (332). These textual techniques enhance the inscription of the novels in the repetitive nature of trauma fiction; repetition of phrases in this way indicates both the ‘acting out’ of trauma and the intertextual character of ‘postmemory’ trauma fiction, which I explain in 3.3.

Apart from the repetition of phrases, a repetition of scenes and actions permeates Seiffert’s novels. Scenes of war frequently reappear unexpectedly in the past. This technique mimics the flashbacks that plague the trauma sufferers. An example of a resurfacing war scene is in Afterwards where Alice’s mother and Alan are shot at for trespassing during one of their walks. This scene reminds the reader of

\[\text{This term is introduced by Dominick LaCapra in History in Transit to denote the posttraumatic symptom of “compulsive repetition” (119)}\]
war; surprisingly, the characters do not associate it with the family’s war past. They revel in their position as victims in this scene and thus block out their original perpetrating position. Yet, once again, they are no absolute victims as the reason they are shot is that they committed the crime of trespassing. Apart from this more general scene of war as ‘being shot at’, there are frequent references to iconic scenes of WWII in The Dark Room. This type of repetition of scenes can be found in Lore’s part of The Dark Room where the iconic scene of the Nazi Germans entering the house of Jews to imprison the father is doubled in the scene where American soldiers come to look in on Lore’s house because of their suspected Nazi sympathies. A reversal of roles between the doubling scenes can be noted. The iconic saviours of the war, the Americans, take on the role of the Nazi Germans, whilst the Nazi German performs the role of the innocent Jew.

A second iconic scene in The Dark Room that connects perpetrators with victims through a role reversal, is an echo of the delousing that Jews were told they were to undergo when they were actually gassed. Like the Jews, Lore and her siblings are told they need to delouse, and so assume the position of victims. However, they are not the ultimate victim of the Holocaust as they are not gassed and survive; the paraffin that they use to delouse only costs them some of their possessions. Apart from this loss, which could have caused them to have less access to food and thus starve, the children feel humiliated when they are naked and shorn. So, the similarities between this scene and the gassing of the Holocaust victims are striking, yet, more important are the differences between the siblings and the Holocaust victims. Their ignorance towards the iconic scene renders their victimhood problematic in this scene, establishing the perpetrative qualities of humiliation at a much less invasive act than the gassing of Jews.

A third type of repetition of scenes is the physical repetition of the actions of previous generations in younger generations. Micha in The Dark Room physically repeats the isolation of his grandfather’s
prison time through his long hours of study in the library and his lone trip to Belarus. And more notably, he needs to go to the scene of his grandfather’s crime to fully understand what his grandfather did, as he notes while signing the local museum’s visitor’s book: “I was here; so was he” (275). The physicality of the perpetration asserts a genetical connection between the first generation of perpetrators and the third. Micha here is still acting out the perpetrative trauma of his grandfather, indicating a possibility of intergenerational transmission of guilt, which will be examined in the next section.

So, doubling and repetition of phrases and scenes is an indicator of postmemory trauma fiction. It shows the irresponsibility and the unreliability of the consciously doubling characters that rely on the previous generations to excuse their behaviours now. Yet, unconscious doubling and repetition connects the perpetrators and the victims, point in out the similarities between iconic scenes of victimhood and scenes of despair in perpetrators. The humane figure of the perpetrators is shown through these role reversals; yet, the differences between the scenes also manifest the difficulties in equating victims with perpetrators, so the role reversals are never absolute.

3.1.2 Doubling in Characters: The Transmission of Perpetrator Status

A second type of doubling is that on the level of the character. The perpetrator characters appear to pass on certain characteristics of perpetration through their body to the next generation, as illustrated in the photo exchange between Alice and her father who try to find similarities between the two. A radiation of perpetration through the body implies a possibility for the transmission of guilt from one generation onto the other, as an almost genetical fault, implying incorporative identification. LaCapra, in passing-by hints at the possibility of the transmission of guilt together with a transmission of trauma (116). In the active perpetrators of Afterwards and The Dark Room there seems to be a correlation
between the body and the perpetration. Joseph’s exterior signals his perpetrator status to the people around him in Northern Ireland. His uniform and his adherence to the army show a perpetrator to others and thus cause him to feel similarly about himself (the mechanics of how others influence the self will be explain into more detail in the next section). David too carries with him a physical marker of his active perpetrator past: his accent, which is colonially based. In The Dark Room Helmut’s exterior even more clearly shows his perpetration flaw: he is born “[…] missing a muscle in his chest” (3). The disability is described such a way that it could be interpreted as being his heart, enabling his perpetrations because of his lack of affect towards the rest of the world. Literally, this disability is similar to the wounded and disabled soldiers that return from the front, likening him to these active perpetrators, realizing his mental perpetration through his body. Yet, mentally he retains the mind of naïvety and innocence, clinging on to the idea of victory and heroism, even as the defeated and wounded are returning to Berlin with stories of war atrocities. Yet, Helmut was conceived before the Nazi regime had come to power, thus his perpetrations cannot have been passed on congenitally. In him they seem to indicate a character flaw separate from his parents’ perpetrations.

So, part of the perpetration can be ascribed to the perpetrators’ bodies and not to the situation they are experiencing: “What I [Alice’s mother] told you [Alice] this weekend, about your grandad[‘s character] [...] it might explain why Kenya’s difficult for him at least” (Afterwards, 275). So, some of their personality traits are just that, inborn personality traits. The war experience in a way becomes a provoking factor for certain negative personality traits, revealing something evil within them that can be transmitted to the next generation and those around them. This type of description almost leads to a monster-perpetrator description.

Together with his congenital disability, Helmut also has an acquired physical characteristic that emphasizes his perpetrator position: his overweight. This acquired fatness stands in stark contrast to
the skeleton-like Auschwitz survivors so iconic for the Holocaust. The abundance of food that Helmut eats is a crime on its own when compared to what the victims of his idol, Hitler, are suffering. Thus, through the exterior appearance, perpetrator characteristics are portrayed. So, together with the bodily passing on of something evil within the perpetrators, the surrounding environment they live in still plays a role.

The possibility of a transmission of perpetration and the accompanying guilt, would implicate the grandchild of the active perpetrator David, Alice. However, no allusion is made that their perpetrations, nor those of the generations even previous to them, are transmitted to her. Alice has her own traumatic event: her parents’ separation. Apart from the men in Alice’s life, Alice is angry at the decisions her mother made, and blames her for the hurt she feels. In the relationship with her mother and her father, Alice is mostly the victim; however, she feels guilty about not being able to keep contact with her father, and thus severing that relationship. Alice’s feeling of perpetration is not necessarily transmitted through her grandfather; rather his perpetration here works as a screen\textsuperscript{15} to hide, and simultaneously reveal, her own trauma where she is both a victim and an almost-perpetrator.

So, the physical qualities of perpetration enforce a connection between different perpetrator characters. The text increases these connections through a doubling in characters. An example is the doubling between David and Joseph. The reader, experiencing blanks in Joseph’s story, cf. 3.2, starts to fill them in through a shift in focus towards David’s story. A doubling between characters is often initiated at the moment of a death of a family member. This jumpstarts questions in the younger generations as to the dead family member’s past and how they themselves resemble that family member. The similarities between the grandchild and the grandparent are doublings that the

\textsuperscript{15} As discussed in Freud, S. “Screen Memories”, 1899.
grandchildren try to escape, but fail at. In Afterwards, Alice has lost her grandmother and because of her new relationship with another active perpetrator sees that relationship and herself reflected in her dead grandmother and her relationship with David. In the last part of The Dark Room Micha, feels affected by the perpetration of his dead grandfather and is thus more interested in his past. Not only the past plays a role in Micha’s anxiety towards the transmission of perpetration, the future, in his then unborn child frightens him. Micha decides to cut ties with that side of the family, and names the child after Micha’s girlfriend’s grandmother in order to strengthen the bond between the child and the ‘innocent’ family. Micha himself also feels affected by the perpetration of Jozef Kolesnik, the man he interviews who knew his grandfather; he cannot bear to be associated with him. He refuses to have his picture taken with him, and to sleep in his bed when visiting. Even with these ‘precautions’ he is still metaphorically dirtied by Jozef: “The bicycle chain broke on the way back to the village [from Jozef], and his hands are grimy with oil and rust; brown-black under his nails [...] He turns the tap on again, scrubs at his fingers under the cold jet, but the oil just spreads under the soap” (358-59). His hands are in this way implicated in what Jozef’s hands did. Jozef also mirrors his grandfather, so Micha’s hands are also implicated in in what his own grandfather’s hands did. He thus has difficulty not repeating the actions and identity of his grandfather. So, Micha sees himself as a perpetrator because of his grandfather as illustrated in how he brands himself with names for perpetrators: “He [Micha] turns back to the stove. Liar” (257). He also frequently lies to Mina, and refuses to apologize for his behaviour, never acknowledging any hurt he causes the people around him, even as this is what he is craving for from the rest of his family.

The doubling of characters that occurs in Seiffert’s novels thus constructs similarities between perpetrators and victims. It shows the similarities in the transmission of perpetration to the transmission of victims that has been discussed extensively in trauma studies. The textual doubling of characters associates the novels with other trauma fiction. However, the possibility of the acquired
perpetration that is not passed on but that is inherent in all the novels’ characters seems to undermine the transmission of trauma and proposes individual responsibility in the perpetrators. The novels propose a combination of transmission and personal acquisition. The combination between the two establishes a view of trauma where the individuals are still of importance in the community, whereas the traditional view of transmission of traumatic experience leads to the spread of trauma to the collective, thus leading to recognition and empathy towards the victims from the collective. So, in the case of the perpetrators Seiffert creates a situation where empathy is combined with individual responsibility.

3.1.3 Doubling in Characters: The Other and the Self

In trauma fiction, the other and the self have already been important factors in the American gothic genre, an earlier more romantic form of trauma literature than the more recent (post)modern trauma fictions (Lloyd-Smith 7). In this genre of fiction writing the other is often used as a way to delineate the own. The other is thus everything that the self is not. However, underlying these stark oppositions is often an undercurrent of a traumatic experience that is echoed in the other (Buelens, 2010). An example of this is the cat in Edgar Allan Poe’s The Black Cat who has a mark on its chest that echoes the murder of its predecessor (Lloyd-Smith 75-77). In more recent developments in trauma fiction, cf. 1, the growing diversity of memories and contact between them, has led to even more involvement of the other in literature. Contact between different memories can lead to a productive cooperation between the two parties, cf. 1. In Seiffert, this type of contact between the self and the other is present on both the individual and the collective plane. In the motto of Afterwards, a quote from the play Observe the Sons of Ulster Marching Towards the Somme by Frank McGuinness, the necessity of observing two different histories together is portrayed. The play is concerned with two important battles in British history: the Battle of the Boyne of 1690 between King James, catholic, and King William, protestant, and the Battle
of the Somme of 1916, where France and England fought German armies. The play examines how these two battles inform each other into becoming symbolic for Northern Irish Unionists. In *Afterwards* a similar undertaking takes place as the British presence in Kenya is brought into contact with that in Ireland. The histories are connected through the characters’ family relations; so emphasizing the similarities and differences between the different histories through a common social familial network. In Seiffert’s first novel there is no apparent combination of different histories. However, Mina’s multicultural background, cf. 2.1 confronts WWII with present-day racism.

Not only on the collective memory level is there an informing of the self through the other, the characters frequently gain insight about themselves through observing others. An example of this is the mirroring of the relationship between Isobel and David in *Afterwards* and that of Alice and Joseph as discussed above cf. 3.1.2. In this way Alice sees her double as a moral touchstone that she positions herself around, distancing herself from her grandmother’s precarious position of loving an active perpetrator, cf. 2.1. So the other, whilst nearing the self through similarities and unconscious doubling as discussed above, functions as a distancing mechanism as well. Emphasizing this, the text offers multiple opportunities for the reader to discern between the two doubling characters; for instance, Alice was never actively involved in any perpetrating conflict, whereas Isobel was present in Kenya just as her husband.

However many differences there are between the doubling characters and scenes, the similarities still unlock certain parts of identity in the characters. Yet, often, the characters themselves are not aware of the doublings, as explained above, so the reader is thus the one who is encouraged to use the other in the novels as an informing of the self. The death of Jochen in *The Dark Room* is not an explicit moment of informing the self through the other for the characters; yet, for the reader, this scene evokes an echoing of the childrens’ father. This is the scene in the novel where violence becomes
visible, making possible the imagining of the childrens’ father’s perpetration. Through the recounting of another narrative, the reader gains access to the absent active perpetration.

It thus seems that those surrounding the active perpetrators try to fill the gaps, cf. 3.2, in their stories through other similar characters’ stories. Anna Deavere Smith supports the view of the other informing the self (xxiii-xlii). She proposes a form of performance that allows the words of others to enter one’s self: “*I had not controlled the words. I had presented myself as an empty vessel, a repeater, and they had shown their power*” (xxv). So, even if there should be caution towards the view of the other informing the self, the characters do seem to need the other to help the self. This becomes apparent in Jüri’s incapability of placing Jochen’s death in a narrative memory until others tell him the story. A similar situation occurs in *Afterwards*, where Alice can only receive information about Joseph through talking to another soldier. This scene allows for access to the story of a soldier, which helps her understand Joseph’s situation. However, there looms danger: the story of the other can start to hide some parts of the self. This is at work when Joseph uses the excuses of his fellow soldiers to hide his own lack of reason to join the army cf. 3.1.1. The stories of others can thus also cover up characters’ perpetrations: “[a] don’t-ask-me dressed up as a story […] a careful way of not revealing anything” (180). However, this process would involve a unique knowledge of the other that helps inform the self; yet, in 2.2 it became clear how varied the perceptions of others are. Thus, it becomes difficult to discern where the other informs the self and where the opposite process is at work.

In the line of the narrative technique of the double, the characters in this novel do not only listen to the other characters, but also to themselves. They are witnesses to their own words, and are also affected by them: “My son-in law tells me it was brutal. How can I deny that? I [David]’ve heard myself talking, in this house all these years. *I can hear how brutal it sounds*” (249, emphases added). It is being a witness to one’s self that heightens the characters’ awareness of their own position as possible
perpetrators. Hearing one’s self talk is similar to hearing the words of another enabling seeing how others perceive one’s self. So, on the novel’s story level the characters are informed by others to perceive themselves. Stories unravel their hidden identities and reveal traumatic pasts, similar to how trauma is also hidden in victim-centred fiction. For the reader the novels imply a similar working, forcing him to relate to the perpetrator characters that call to the surface hidden parts of the reader’s identity. This facilitates similarities between the ‘innocent’ reader, cf. 3.2.2, and the guilty characters, confirming the complexity of identity constellations.
3.2 Gaps

The doubling present throughout the novels may seem as an overflow of information about the active perpetrators and their crimes; yet, as discussed in the introduction, this overflow of information is obsessive and not integrated into a narrative. It is thus a nuisance making it hard to discern the real traumatic experience. The use of the other to describe and to gain access to the self already indicated the difficulties experienced by the perpetrators to have access to a trauma narrative: the other’s story is of importance as the own story is so inaccessible. In the following section I discuss these gaps in the trauma narrative on the story level. Similar to victims, the active perpetrators struggle with the ungraspable and unreliable quality of memory. This whilst communication in those surrounding them is affected by the ensuing silence in the perpetrators resulting in stories that are “[…] wordless: another gap he [Joseph] was just going to leave wide open” (Afterwards 211).

3.2.1 Lack of Memory

In Seiffert’s active perpetrators, memory is obsessive and repetitive, cf. 3.1. Yet, it is very inaccessible and often comes in the unattainable form of flashbacks. A flashback contains a quick momentary lapse in time to the past. The traumatic flashbacks in Seiffert are both depicted directly and indirectly, as discussed in 2.1. A direct integration of a flashback experienced by Joseph in Afterwards is the following scene:

It was quick, the memory, when it came, and he was ready for it.

Up in Portrush [...] Three small boys at the side of the road, wouldn’t have been more than six years old: hard little faces, spitting, giving them the finger as they were passing.
[...] Been a while since he’d remember anything like that too, but it was more the kind of memory he was used to. (68-69)

The memory is structured within Joseph’s present time as a short paragraph of the past, with images. After this flash, he consciously reconstructs the past: « Stones thrown, people staring [...] » (68). The continual stream of flashes from the past proves to have a negative effect on Joseph’s memory in Afterwards:

It was like his [Joseph’s] mind got stuck sometimes, turning everything over again to have a closer look. Not like he didn’t know it already, but when he got that way, it was hard to stop [...] different parts of it on different days, and the order of things kept changing, but it was all the same memories and always the same people in them (161, emphasis added).

The flashes prove not to provide only too much information, but also unreliable information. The memories' unreliability in this way undermines the stream of information, morphing the overflow of memory to a lack of reliable memory. Yet, this is not typical of only traumatic memory; memory in se is always a distortion of the truth as noted by Joseph in Afterwards: “Might even have been an Irish pub, but that’s probably just memory layering it on” (177, emphasis added).

Apart from the unconscious unreliability of memory, the characters can also consciously manipulate their memories. In this sense, memory becomes a performance, similar to the way in which different roles are performed by the characters cf. 2.2; it becomes a script that can be rehearsed, a formulaic legend that is passed on throughout the family. Memory becomes an activity under the name of “rehearsing memories” in Afterwards (107). In the end it is a way of dealing with the past that evades the truth through a creation of a politically correct version of the past that highlights the wanted aspects and neglects those of shame: “Everything got repeated over the years, but it didn’t matter to Alice that she already knew [...] her gran enjoyed the telling, and that was part of the appeal » (108).
Apart from the memories inaccessible to the characters, and those manipulated by them, there are also memories that seem reliable, but through a new present context are revealed to have been wrong. David’s memories of Kenya are real, but do not belong in the present-day discourse about Kenya and therefore are unreliable:

For years afterwards, when I thought about Kenya it was to remember falling in love [...] All of what I’ve just described sounds so harmless doesn’t it? The Mau Mau shot a Kikuyu chief in the mouth [...] They hacked a Kikuyu politician to death with pangas [...] One farmer, a white man this time, his wife and young son, they were butchered like that, by their own workers [...] I never saw any of that. I didn’t see what our forces did on the ground either, the army. Or the Kenyan police. Any of the detention camps. Thousands passed through them. Thousands died. I know many were hanged. Many more were beaten, starved. Women and non-combatants among them. But I’ve only read accounts [...] Impossible to reconcile. Do you see? My memories with what I learnt later. (Afterwards 246-47)

Memories, in this way, are needed for the novels to have any type of story, but also prove to provide gaps in these narratives. It is either unattainable or unreliable, as in flashbacks; manipulated; or rendered faulty because of a new context. The characters are thus presented with a failure of narration and start to experience trouble communicating with each other.

3.2.2 Failure of Communication between Characters

So, the unreliability of memory leads to gaps in the stories of the past that need to be filled. The gaps affect the communication between the active perpetrators and those around them. Afterwards thematizes a difficulty in conversation between the perpetrating characters and their loved ones. In Afterwards the characters themselves feel the importance of good communication to enable a relationship between the active perpetrators and those around them. Yet, the information that they should share to attain this is rather kept secret as it would uncover a dark past. In The Dark Room, too, communication between the characters is not unproblematic as the almost perpetrators are
very deceptive towards the people around them, creating a communication based on lies rather than truths.

Communication involves different roles: listener (passive) – talker (active). The connotations of these positions are associated with the characters’ roles in perpetration. Thus, the active partner of conversation is a dominant person who is mostly associated with a guilty position, whereas the listener position is more related to that of the victim or witness. In *Afterwards* these positions play an important role in communication with the active perpetrators trying to position themselves in a passive role as a way of changing their perpetrator status into a status that is more acceptable. Joseph, for instance, even if reluctant to talk about his own past, is interested in sustaining communication with Alice, whilst taking on the role of listener rather than talker. Silence is thus part of evading one’s responsibility as can be seen in David’s muted irresponsibility when his wife facilitated all the social aspects of his life.

Joseph, thus, positions himself as the witness to the communicative event, rather than as actively involved in the event. When this position is threatened by David, who has found his voice towards Joseph there is a stark opposition between David’s technique of talking and Joseph’s silence:

-Is that you [David] done now?

It came out cold, and the old man looked up at him.

-Because I [Joseph]’ll get on with my work if you are.

His pale blue eyes were hurt behind his glasses. Joseph hadn’t come here to be cruel to him, but it was like he couldn’t stop himself. It turned his stomach [...]. He [David] used to talk about it with his wife, that’s what the old man had told him. Joseph pictured them both, sitting here in these rooms, years and years of talking and trying to work it out. Couldn’t see what it amounted to.
You feel bad about what you've done. My heart bleeds. I believe you. So you can let me get on. […] Joseph saw it happen, even before he'd started. Paint hurled across walls and banisters [...] (250-51).  

When Joseph is forced to listen, he hears the words he himself is unable to utter. He then violently puts an abrupt stop to the conversation trying to evade being put in an active position through the doubling technique of the other and the self (cf. 3.1.3). By doing so he ironically once again commits an act of perpetration, while trying to avoid association with perpetration. He ruins Alice's grandfather's house, and in doing so ends his relationship with both David and Alice.

Yet, even as Joseph insists on positioning himself as a passive listener, Alice, Joseph’s main conversational partner, does not always feel comfortable with this. She is then put in the perpetrating position of talker. For an innocent character a permanently active position in conversation would not be as problematic as for a perpetrator. A pure innocence would not call forward a doubling of guilt through an active conversation position, as was the case with Joseph; there would be no primary guilt to begin with. So, Alice’s reluctance to maintain a permanently active role in conversation seems to imply a perpetrating past in her as well: her perpetration position in the relationship towards her father is brought to attention once again, cf. 3.1.2.

The gaps in conversation are even more apparent as much information that is wanted by the almost-perpetrators is often told to others than these designated listeners. Lore, for instance, tells Wiebke and not her grandmother about Jochen's death in *The Dark Room*. In *Afterwards* David tells his story to Joseph and not to Alice who craves the story of both her grandfather and her boyfriend, something Joseph feels uncomfortable about:

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16 Towards Joseph and his wife David is talkative, but not towards the reader, whereas Joseph is silent towards the other characters of the novel, but is very talkative towards the reader.
The old man never asked him to keep it to himself, but Joseph thought he didn't have to: it was all private, about his wife, that was obvious enough, and he'd tell Alice himself if he wanted her to know. It even annoyed Joseph a bit then. Being let in on someone’s secrets. When you haven’t been asked [italics in original]” (142-43).

As hinted at above, lying is also a form of problematic conversation in Seiffert’s novels. In The Dark Room Lore and Micha frequently are depicted as deceptive. Lore hides the difficult parts of their journey for her grandmother in Hamburg. Even if lying is morally condemned by the family, Lore claims that “Things are different now […] that’s all. Everything’s changed” (138). She excuses her lying using the general perpetration argument discussed above, cf. 2.1. The lies are used to protect her younger siblings, just as she is being protected by the elder generation and by her parents, who were Nazis. By doing the same to the next generation, Lore perpetuates this way of thinking, and of acting: the perpetration. On the other hand, the reason for her lies is a question of survival. If she does not lie to her siblings, they might endanger her. Thus, lying as a form of difficult conversation is a combination of perpetration and an ethically acceptable act.

Even if communication is difficult because of the different roles it is associated with, the doubling it creates, and the lying that renders it unreliable, communication is also used as a tool to make active perpetrators feel at ease. The way one describes certain events and certain positions portrays events as acceptable in Afterwards “Both [Eve (Joseph’s sister) and Joseph] talking like this was normal made it feel that way too” (124). This sentence resonates in the stories that David tells about how active perpetrators were just part of a system. So, telling comforting stories mirrors the Nazi WWII rhetoric and the portrayal of the Kenyan Emergency in the then British Empire and that of Northern Ireland in the conflict’s beginning. Language is used to soften the characters’ perpetrations and to alleviate their personal responsibility. Yet, it does not deliver reliable information nor is it accepted by society.
3.3 Unreliable and Unexpected Narration

The failure of honest communication between the story’s characters, is mirrored in the narration texts’ style: the novels too, contain an overflow of factual information together with gaps that cannot be filled. To fill these blanks, the reader, together with the characters, has to rely on information other than the unreliable memory. In this way, the novels follow the structures used in much third generation trauma writing. I use the term third generation of perpetrators here following the terminology used to discuss victim-centred trauma fiction. The third generation is seen as having been transmitted with the trauma. The blanks caused through trauma cause inaccessibility of any information. Marianne Hirsch proposes a type of memory that works to fill up these gaps: ‘postmemory’. In postmemory the next generation of trauma sufferers has to rely on a memory that is based upon other sources than the trauma sufferers’ memories. To form an idea of the past of one’s family, the next generation bases its memories on other information as the memories of the trauma sufferers are so unreliable and inaccessible. In literature, a similar technique is at work. Third generation victim-centred trauma fiction relies on a high level of mediation (problematising attainable reliable narration), myth and fairy tales (intertextuality), quests (reflecting the search for the information to fill the gap), and unreliable narrators. In Seiffert’s novels this postmemorial technique is also at work, as could already be seen in 3.1, where I discussed how iconic Holocaust scenes are used to fill up the gaps of trauma narrative. However, even if postmemory can compensate some of the experienced gaps, the narration of many trauma novels remains unreliable. So, in this section I first look at how reliable the narration is, and then at how the concept of postmemory, that was mostly based on victim-centred trauma fiction, can be applied to Seiffert’s works of perpetrator fiction.

17 As I discussed above, in perpetration this is not as straightforward (cf. 3.1.2), yet, for the remainder of this dissertation I will use the term for clarity’s sake.
3.3.1 Unreliable Narration

In section 3.2 it was noted that the lack of memory and the deception in the perpetrator characters ensued in unreliable stories. Yet, the perpetrators’ stories are what Seiffert’s novels are based on. Thus the unreliability of the characters’ focalization causes a problematic reliability in the novels. This is especially the case in *The Dark Room*, presenting only one focalizer per part. In *Afterwards*, the perspective of both Alice and Joseph helps the reader to gain an objective view on their story. The characters’ unreliability and their strong presence as focalizers leads to the question of the strength of the narrator(s) of Seiffert’s novels. The narrators’ strength in depicting perpetrators is even more important as the legal and moral repercussions of their positioning in a story has an effect on their position in society. The authority of a narrative voice could normally function as a moral touchstone for the characters, however the unreliability of narrative voices problematizes this. In this section I discuss whether this narrative voice is still present in the novels or whether the unreliability in characters can through focalization be extended to the narrator.

The novels’ language gives an indication to the narrator’s position. In *Afterwards* the choice for English is natural as the novel’s setting is British and as the characters all speak English. In her first novel, however, Seiffert uses a domination of English in a German setting, where none of the characters would speak English to each other. There are some situational defined names that are in German, which place the novel in its setting, and more strikingly, German is also used in emphasized phrases that point to guilt and perpetration as noted in Helmut’s war language: “Fuhrer”, “Vaterland”, “Kamaraden” and “Lebensraum” (28-29). The effect of writing in English about German perpetrators is that the target audience is part of the non-perpetrating community thus pushed to empathize with the perpetrating community. This follows her other narrative techniques; however, it can also be said to perpetuate the lack of responsibility in the younger German generations as claimed by Micha, as the novel is not targeted to them. As the phrases where German is used outside of situational context are related to acts of importance mostly in connection with perpetration, the novel seems to continue the portrayal of German as associated with ethical
wrong. On the other hand, the mixture of the two languages underlines the multidirectionality of the characters’ personalities as examined above in 2.2.

So, the narrator of *The Dark Room* positions himself outside of the narration through his language use. In *Afterwards*, too the narrator appears to be an omniscient narrator. He, and with him the reader, has access to the characters’ thoughts, as often depicted through the usage of italics as in: “Her throat is too thick to speak. *There is too much to tell* [italics in original]” (188). Such a narrator is typically seen as strong and authoritative. Yet, even if the narrator of *Afterwards* is this strong there is still a lack of direct narration of the traumatic war experiences of Joseph and David. These are only directly narrated in the first two scenes. Narratively and structurally these two scenes are situated outside the rest of the novel. The first scene is Joseph’s traumatic experience, narrated through a heterodiegetic narrator who sometimes even seems to be homodiegetic: “two of *us*” 18. The narrator’s uncertainty in this scene is reflected in the narration’s uncertain quality. This scene is told in the present tense, conveying a still present past, and is also told in a very flashing, non-narrative style. It indicates how the traumatic experience is still not integrated in the mind of Joseph. The narration of this first scene of a still ongoing conflict for the English and for the novel’s characters stands in stark contrast to the very narrative second scene in which David looks back upon his role in the Kenyan Emergency. This narrator is clearly homodiegetic and much more stable than the previous. Yet, this narration is as unreliavle as Joseph’s trauma-afflicted narration: David uses a version of his story integrated into the larger history, so covering up his personal experience of trauma that is only narrated later on through the focalization of Joseph. In *The Dark Room* on the other hand, in Lore’s story there is a direct representation of her most traumatic experience: the witnessing of her brother’s death. This scene is narrated by an omniscient narrator in the present

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18 It is not specified what is referred to by ‘*us*’ in this scene. As the narration goes on to talk about Joseph in the third person and conveys information that is unbeknownst to Joseph, the narrator can either be seen as a heterodiegetic omniscient narrator. On the other hand, “*us*” could denote the English community, to which the target reader belongs. The narrator could thus also imply a larger community, this scene could show that the English community has not yet dealt with the still ongoing Irish conflict. It thus has both too much factual information about it and too little.
time of her story. The scene is chronological and much more easily accessible than those in *Afterwards*. On the other hand, the focalization of Lore is no direct access to the action, as she only heard the shots that killed him but did not see anything.

The narration also often evades the characters’ traumatic pasts. A veil of factual information and of reminiscence about other war time aspects, fogs the access to what the reader and the other characters are searching for: the trauma narration. So Joseph’s narration in *Afterwards* rather takes the form of a hymn of Ireland’s beauty than a report of his war experience, so do some of the stories about Kenya: “Summer nights in hostel rooms full of whispering mothers. Bedtime stories for sleepless children, confidences and shared cigarettes by a window open to the hot dark sky” (5). Thus, these types of descriptive language that is used to give different kinds of portrayals of the war experience function not only to fill in the gaps, cf. 3.3.2, but also as a veil. These stories locate them in a tradition of normality, away from the abnormal atrocities: “Alice was always relieved for her grandmother when their conversation returned to the safer ground of first meeting, courtship, proposal” (107). It is this glorified, romantic part of their past that consolidates their family unit and their collective correct position.

The novels’ audience also affects the trauma narration. It is similar to the characters listening to the stories, different from that during the war. David, in *Afterwards* is very aware of this. He places his experiences in another, more recent context: “the Sumners would probably have counted as liberal” (118). Helmut’s personal story in *The Dark Room* is not yet adapted to the larger historic picture and references to Kristallnacht occur only on the sideline. Political events are connected to familial milestones: “Puberty and the Third Reich arrive simultaneously. To Helmut’s shame, not only does he grow hair on his body, but the fluff that should be under his right arm grows higher [...]” (12), which is confronting to the reader. A historic event like the death of Adolf Hitler is thus perceived by the characters in the novel so differently from the perception in the reader’s community.
Lore hides her burning cheeks. There will be no battle in the valley now. No suffering or sacrifice. She is shocked and ashamed at her sense of relief. Breathes deep to fight her cowardice [...] (83)

The contrast between these contexts shows the responsibilities that the perpetrators did not take: "Alice could see it embarrassed her [grandmother], this admission. How could you have lived somewhere like that, at such a time, and not have been aware what was happening" (107).

So the direct narration of traumatic scenes is absent from Seiffert’s novels. This is not that surprising, the traumatic scenes are often not embedded in memory, and because of the unattainability of memory (cf. 3.2.1) reliable narration becomes problematic. The narrator, however, has access to memories that cannot be part of the focalizer’s memories. The beginning of Helmut’s part of The Dark Room starts with his own birth, something of which he cannot possibly have memories. It is not clear whether these fragments can actually be called memories, as they are written in the present tense. Yet, the narrator has access to the story’s future and through his position in that future, they become memories. The large degree of told pasts in Afterwards implies a greater possibility for a distortion of reality.

Unreliable as it may be, memory is the only material left for the characters to base their stories on (cf. 3.2.1). In Afterwards the narration is almost exclusively structured around the perpetrating communities’ memories. The scenes’ sequencing relies on associations between these scenes in the present and those in the past. Large leaps back in time, mostly to the scenes of perpetration, but also to scenes offering a clue to the ungraspable past, thus structure the novel, proving the need for memory as the substance of narration. The Dark Room is constructed chronologically, as opposed to Afterwards. The different parts follow upon each other and thus seem to show a whole German community. So, most of the narration is general, not about specific days, using the present tense to express habits and repetitions in Helmut’s part of The Dark Room. This way, scenes that are described in more detail, at once, are much more important than the others. The narrator thus gains power
over what is told and what not. The bombing fragments and the witnessing of Nazi violence against gypsies thus hold a larger importance than his day to day life, with the bombing scenes in Helmut’s part of *The Dark Room* being much longer than the other fragments.

The positions of communication discussed in 3.2.2. can be extended both to the position of the reader and to that of the narrator, as the narration of a story is also an act. The act of storytelling in all its unreliability becomes an act of deception associated with dominance and power. The omniscient narrator of Seiffert’s novels exerts such power over the texts that the stories become acts that can be likened to perpetration, rendering the narrator guilty of the text. This means that the narrator has control over the text and is not forced by the text to tell certain things. The element of control of the narrator is mirrored in the control that especially the characters of *Afterwards* hold over what information they share with the other characters, and what is being held back. The reader of the story’s position is then similar to that of the witness of a (traumatic) act.

The reader, however, has the power to position himself critically towards the text and to everything told and implied by the author, thus putting him in a position where there is a possibility of resistance as opposed to a passive ‘victim’ reader. It is up to the reader to listen to and identify with the narration, but at the same time through to take a step back and judge the narrator; this in the same way as the characters listening to the perpetrators both identify with them (as they are taken on by identification and are affected by the intergenerational transmission of guilt) and judge them (thus distancing themselves from them). These two acts are similar to how LaCapra (125) describes the act of witnessing a trauma narrative as being immersed in ‘empathic unsettlement’.

The reader is thus not just passive, he is also needed to piece together the different parts of the novel in *The Dark Room* and the different points of view in *Afterwards*. The characters that are listening to the previous generations’ stories and are trying to find out the truth about the history, have a position very similar to that of the reader, puzzling together bits and pieces of information.
The narration only very gradually inserts clues about the characters, as is the case in *The Dark Room* with how Lore, and the reader gradually start to discover the truth about Thomas. The clues about his position are interspersed throughout the narrative and are only gradually seen. The reader, however, is more aware of the significance of certain elements that Lore remarks upon. When Lore sees his tattoo, she is not very sure about the significance of it, whereas the reader is much more aware of the association between tattoos and Holocaust victims. Yet the certainty that starts to emerge in the reader about Thomas, is undermined by the introduction of a new possibility of a more perpetrating past associated with Thomas, cf. 2.2. Thus, the certainties and the upper hand that the reader has on Lore in *The Dark Room* are undermined, putting the reader once more in a more similar position to her as a reader of the history. In *Afterwards* the reader should be in much of the same position as Alice, discovering the past. However, Alice is shut out of the process by the other characters and through the access that the narrator gives the reader to the thoughts of Joseph and David, the reader becomes more knowledgeable than Alice. Thus, in a scene where Alice asks about Joseph’s reasons for signing up, he negotiates with the reader what he could tell Alice, so telling the reader all that he should be telling Alice, as discussed in 4.1.3.: “Joseph thought about telling Alice he’d hated it, because he had sometimes, especially out in Ireland [...] it all sounded too much like he was making excuses. Big mistake, not my fault, too young, I never wanted to be there in the first place [...] he wouldn’t have stuck his three years if it was that bad, would he?” (191-93). The reader thus becomes part of the perpetrators’ circle of knowledge, excluding the more innocent of the novel. So, even the reader is not just a victim of the text but an active participant in its development and in its control.

To encourage the reader to take a step back from the narrative, the narrative technique of the implied author offers an instancy of truth and morality, with its ability to call forth irony in certain passages of the novel. The implied author, together with the reader, knows the war’s outcome and plays off the characters’ identities against this. There is a sense of forthcoming doom in the first two parts, as one already knows it will not end in a positive way for the German characters. So it
becomes almost painful for the reader to know of the German defeat in a shrill contrast with Helmut’s trust and hope for a victory. Through the focalization processes that will be discussed below, cf. 4.3, the reader is put in the position of a perpetrator but at the same through the text and through general knowledge, also knows the war’s outcome, creating an ironic friction. This irony is not only established by the text, the narrator knows how the war will end and is aware of the historical situation the characters are in. They, however, cannot be aware of this, as is illustrated in the following fragment where the narrator shows his superior knowledge in *The Dark Room*: “It is a nothing time between war and peace” (70). The text thus, through a combination of the guilty narrators, the ambivalent readers, and the moral instancy of the implied author reflects the complexity of the interrelationships between the degrees of complicity and perpetration. A mix of the effect of the very unreliable focalization and the strength of the irony of the omniscient narration in *The Dark Room* create a possibility for both identification with the perpetrating characters, and a distancing from them. In *Afterwards* there is also an omniscient narrator, but the text is much less ironical, implying a stronger possibility for identification with the characters and thus implying less of a possibility for a distancing.

### 3.3.2 Unexpected Narration

The distance between the grandchild, Alice, and her grandparents in *Afterwards* is part of the difficulty in the narration of her grandparents’ traumatic past. Her inability to really see and grasp the life they lived before they became grandparents contributes to the difficulties Alice has with constructing a view of their perpetrations. The stories that they tell thus seem to her like myths almost, as she has no way of access to their memories. The gap between generations is always present, yet in through trauma afflicted families, it becomes even more problematic as the first generation too have a lack of access to their trauma. So, to compensate the gaps, the “nothing
conversation[s]” (Afterwards p. 198), reflected by the partially unreliable narration in the novels (as discussed above (cf. 3.3.1)) Alice searches elsewhere for information. This mechanism, that constitutes much of the characteristics of third generation victim-centred trauma fiction, is what Marianne Hirsch calls ‘postmemory’. So, the second part of this section will investigate the postmemorial technique of intertextuality reflected in the reuse of traditional structures and other genres.

The scenes of Afterwards and The Dark Room are structured in such a way that they recall traditionally structured scenes, yet end very differently, thus unsettling the reader’s traditional expectations. Along with the reader’s expectations, the traditional depicting of a monster-perpetrator or of an innocent-victim is so also unsettled. An example is when Joseph and his patrol witness a contractor accidentally dying of a bomb. It starts off as a scene calling for sympathy on the part of the reader for Joseph and his patrol members, but ends with the description of one of his mates “bulking his breakfast up into the grass and laughing” (145). This memory evokes feelings of shame and even hate in the reader, for whom it cannot be but difficult to accept such a reaction to such a devastating incident. Similarly, the reader is disgusted at the reaction of Helmut in The Dark Room after the bombing of Berlin where one expects a tragically affected victim but meets with an overjoyed Helmut because “[…] Berlin is full again. Full of children” (49). These techniques show the reader’s identification with traditional structures and then through a strong contrast calls for a distancing between the reader and the character.

On the text level, the novel’s closing is in a tradition of narration too. The traditional ‘happy end’ is present in both novels creating a closing end. Yet, in Afterwards it comes as a surprise to the reader that the central storyline of Joseph and Alice fails to come to a happy conclusion. The juxtaposition of reconciliation between Alice and her grandfather, and even a re-initiating of

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contact with her father, creates the expectation that Alice and Joseph will find a way to live together, however, their relationship ends. As the re-initiation of contact with her father signifies a novel’s closing, it becomes more apparent that the broken relationship with her father was an underlying perpetration for her. In the end of the novel she does not need to know what happened exactly in Kenya and how her grandmother reacted to it, but a re-establishment of the relationship with the grandparents on her father’s side does result in a conclusion.

Apart from the reuse of traditional structures, other genres are integrated into the novel to find a way to express and comprehend the trauma. As there is so much not said by the novels’ active perpetrators, the other characters feel a need to look elsewhere for information. Alice in Afterwards relies on the community to give her an idea of Joseph’s perpetration in the form of media depicting civilian related violence in Northern Ireland:

Teenage boy shot in the back while he was driving away: not a terrorist, a joyrider, but they baked him a cake all the same, the soldier who did it, threw him a party back at the barracks to celebrate. Another four, another time, stabbed a man with a screwdriver, because it was the end of their tour and they were still alive and they wanted to do over a local before they went home. Disconnected incidents. *Fragments, only half-remembered from the news, from years-old conversations in front of the radio and TV* (195, emphasis added).

The media genre represents the collective experience of the past. As the field of trauma studies is now focussing more on the non-dominant sides of the conflicts, the collective in Seiffert is also a strong contender. The media’s role in showing incidents of civilian related violence in Ireland, haunt members of the perpetrating community who had previously been unaware of their community’s position in such conflicts. Alice is aware of how biased this information is, and is willing to give the perpetrating characters the benefit of doubt. However, these other genres do not always reveal information to the characters: the active perpetrators use these versions to hide behind. Also for Alice, society also presents a challenge to her, as it expects of her to know about the past of her boyfriend Joseph. As a couple they are supposed to present a unit of identity, also
involving a unity of memory. Even if the tie between memory and identity is severed in Seiffert’s novels, cf. intergenerational transmission of perpetration in 3.1.2., the community still seems to associate identity and memory. So, not being able to “fill in [the gaps] for them [her mother and Alan]” (179) affects her relationship status with Joseph. As Alice has nothing but this media coverage, she starts digging into her personal past, looking for connections to the conflict but they do not fill the gaps that need to be filled. The media give only general background information and do not inform her personal history. For Micha’s grandmother and her relationship with Micha in *The Dark Room*, the cuttings of newspapers are a support. The sharing of this information between the two generations counterbalances the lack of information that Micha feels from the past. The personal relationship is based on their connection with the collective. So, the characters are looking for an objective form of communication to help them communicate. Apart from the objective form, the very personal genre of the letter plays an important role in the novels. The truth of the past for Alice in *Afterwards* and for Micha in *The Dark Room* could have only been found in letters written by the grandparents during the war, yet they remain unattainable for both characters. Alice has to wait for the death of her grandfather before she can read them, which does not happen in the novel, and Micha’s grandmother burned the letters.

Thus the quest for the truth is not satisfied in either of the novels even as it is so important in the novels. Micha travels to Belarus to visit Kolesnik and a similar structure is also found in Lore’s part of *The Dark Room* where she and her siblings embark on a journey to Hamburg. This style similar to the epic ‘road trip’ stories reminds of the Odyssey myth where the main character starts a supposedly short trip and encounters different types of obstacles along the way, refraining him from easily reaching his goal. Thus the quest motif does not only invoke the search for the truth in the third generation perpetrators, it also establishes an intertextuality within the novels.

This use of other genres to enhance the personal stories can be seen as a way of writing one’s personal history into a more collective genre. This is similar to the way in which traumatic
experiences call for a narrativization to be embedded in narrative memory, cf. 4.1.3. Thus, the characters look for ways to embed their stories and their personalities back into the larger picture, and so creating their own narrative. The novels in the same way use these structures from other genres to establish a connection with the reality in which they are read. The narratives are simultaneously supported by other types of truths than those in fiction, thus supporting the myriad of point of views and truths that make up these perpetrating characters, cf. 2.2. By doing this, the limitations of fiction are shown, and a need for other modes of representation is presented. The limits of fiction not only help underline the myriad of truths, but also support a distancing of the author from the types of characters that she describes. By reusing iconic imagery as discussed in 4.1.1., and by reusing structures from other genres, the author shows the limits of her own knowledge and thus the limits of identification, helping the novels’ ethics as not completely blurring the good and the bad characters. These textual tactics are noted by Stef Craps in his discussion of Caryl Phillips’ The Nature of Blood. The novel contains characters of very different types of backgrounds and shows the similarities between them, but still through the heavy reliance on intertextuality maintains the differences between the characters which lead to a productive comparison of different points of view (199-201).

So, the novels contain many of the characteristics of third generation victim-centred trauma fiction: a high level of mediation, unreliability in narration, intertextuality, and even the quest motif (cf. 3.1.1). This establishes a connection between victim-centred trauma fiction and the more new perpetrator-centred trauma fiction written by Seiffert. Yet, there are also differences: there is some attainability of trauma scenes, there are reliable omniscient narrators and intertextuality is often rendered visible and used to enable a productive comparison of perpetrators and victims.
4 Through the Eyes of the Perpetrator: Focalization and Photography

Seiffert’s two perpetrator-centred novels focus on the complexity of the characters of the perpetrators enforcing a diversity and fluidity in characterization. However, through certain narrative techniques the novels maintain a distance between the reader and the characters allowing for a judgement of the perpetrators whilst establishing their gray areas of character. The reader can thus maintain his a moral touchstone in society. Meanwhile, the reader is also encouraged to identify with the perpetrators. This happens mostly through focalization, but also photography and the novels’ visual nature is of importance. In this section I first discuss the importance of photography in The Dark Room and Afterwards, as another type of medium to express a trauma, and to conclude I discuss some of the methods of identification with the perpetrator present in Seiffert.

4.1 Photography

As, in much trauma fiction, narration becomes problematic due to the traumatic experience’s extraordinary quality, other mediums are sought after to express the trauma. One of these mediums
is photography. In Seiffert, especially in *The Dark Room*, photographs function in different ways for the perpetrator characters, thus revealing different positions towards the traumatic experience.

Photography is presented as an alternative for the faltering narratives of the traumatized characters. It could offer access to a clear past and thus to a truth underlying the perpetrative event. It could thus be evidence for a crime, which is related to how Micha in *The Dark Room* sees photography. He believes the pose his grandfather takes in pictures is evidence of his perpetration. Yet, when he himself takes a picture of the Kolesniks the performance and the picture’s arrangement is emphasized, implying unreliability of the photographic medium. Yet, together with seeing photographs as evidence, the lack of photographic evidence does not mean a lack of proof for Micha: “The camera was pointing elsewhere, shutter opening and closing on another murder, of another Jew, done by another man. But my Opa was no more than a few paces away. [italics in original]” (371). Similar to his use of photography for the recording of images is the use of speech recording for that of conversations. He records the interviews he has with Jozef Kolesnik which helps him gain access more directly to the story rather than in a version mediated through his own affected mind. However, the confessions of Jozef are done out of reach of the recordings, thus signifying the impossibility to record any traumatic experience.

Yet, the medium does not present a clear truth. It is also used as a veil to hide behind, similar to how stories are used cf. 3.3.1. Helmut, in the scene in *The Dark Room* where he witnesses gypsies being beaten up by Nazis, tries to capture this important moment through photographs, however, fails miserably:

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Helmut is afraid, exhilarated. His hands sweat and shake. He clicks and winds on and clicks again, photographing as quickly as the camera will allow: not quick enough. He reloads, curses his fingers, feeble and damp, fumbles and struggles with the focus. (37)
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Thus, whilst trying to see and remember this moment, Helmut is so upset that he cannot see the moment as he has to focus on his camera that also cannot focus on the scene. Afterwards, he only
has eye for the technical faults and not for the Nazis’ faults: “He also concludes that black and white stock was really not suitable for the subject-matter. The bright skirts of the gypsy women are just drab rags on his photo’s and don’t swirl and dart like they did that afternoon” (40). The importance of a focus on technical details as a way of closing off one’s conscious is noted by Stanley Milgram in his influential experiment that shows how subjects can hurt another human being because they are ordered to:

    [...] a number of adjustments in the subject’s thinking occur that undermine his resolve to break with the authority [ordering him to hurt another subject] [...] One such mechanism is the tendency of the individual to become so absorbed in the narrow technical aspects of the task that he loses sight of its broader consequences (7). 20

Helmut’s obsession with photography thus seems to alleviate his objections to what he witnessed. He, later in the novel, also uses photography as an art form, thus romanticizing Berlin through his eyes and the camera in a city where he does not have to see the darker side: “The low sun is gold on the stone walls and rubble, and casts long, crazy shadows through the ruins, across the pock-marked pavements and squares” (57)

Part of the photograph’s unreliability thus lies in the technicalities of the printing. In Lore’s part of The Dark Room, pictures of Holocaust survivors are said to have been tampered with and can thus be disregarded as evidence of a crime. The photographer too, like Helmut, is shown to exert a strong influence over the pictures as a growth in character coincides with a growth in his photographic abilities; Helmut is portrayed as having power over the pictures he takes, manipulating views into photographic frames and looking for the brightest colours to oppose all the grey. The images used in The Dark Room by the Berlin station show the unreliability of photos as “faked shopfronts” (31) are

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20 A similar experiment to that of Stanley Milgram is the ‘Stanford Prison Experiment’ created by Phillip Zimbardo, where the subjects where placed in a mock prison with one group was assigned the role of prisoners and the other that of guards. The goal was to see how the different groups would interact with each other and whether any cruelties would evolve. The behaviour of the guards became so appalling that the experiment had to be ended prematurely. Zimbardo, Phillip. The Lucifer Effect : Understanding How Good People Turn Evil. New York: Random House, 2007. (the experiment took place in 1971).
set up to disguise “their dark and damp interiors, the black graffiti, and the broken glass grinding underfoot” (31). Helmut’s photos create an even better setting: “Although the stationhouse façade is in reality rather square and plain, on Helmut’s photos it looks almost elegant, and full of energy of the flag-waving crowd” (31). Photographs are also selected based on how good they cause the photographed scene to look:

His [Helmut’s] right arm rests on his mother’s shoulder, and he is standing so that his left side favors the camera slightly. The combined effect is to minimise his lopsided chest, to mask the crooked hang of his arm [...] For the artful masking of a son’s disability, they are relaxed. Still proud, still a unit, gradually growing into a kind of prosperity. (11)

The pose however, shows the normality of the child’s arm hiding his fault. In Afterwards too, photographs are selected based on criteria of framing and composition not on the exact reproduction of reality.

The photographs thus do not present everyday aspects of life either. Throughout the novels they are mostly of important events that involve a level of tradition and performance e.g. marriages and births. So the photos are often selected and arranged in such a way that the darker moments of shame in a family’s past are hidden. So in Micha’s family photo album that is arranged so that the war is absent from it, tells only part of the family’s (hi)story: “[...] if Micha didn’t know, he would never guess there had been war and prison, too” (286). So, similar to the use of stories of others to fill the gaps of the own, photos of others are inserted mentally so as to complete the photo album. This is similar to Alan’s way of explaining some of David’s past in Afterwards through the use of newspaper images. Yet, the photos cannot represent the truth and thus cannot stand alone. Even if they frequently function as reminders of a past and as bases of stories, they cannot function without the stories. But stories can also be adapted to fit with pictures as is the case in Lore’s part of The Dark Room. Lore tells stories about how their father must look like now, rearranging details to make them fit with the more recent photo. In this way, the photo becomes almost easier to remember than the reality behind the photo. The opposite, where photos are arranged to tell another story than the
truth occurs more frequently. Lore and her siblings take pictures after the war in Hamburg thus using photography as a way of rebuilding life. The clothes they wear are borrowed and a scarf is used to cover up Liesel’s “spiky hair” (198) which she had gotten after the delousing. Even the bombed house is “hidden from view” (197).

Yet, pictures can also be spontaneous, but the difference between the spontaneous and the posed photos is not recognized by the characters who take for granted everything on the photos not realizing the photographic image’s complexity. Alice, for instance, talks about the camera having «caught him [Joseph] talking » (31). This implies a view of the camera as a spy almost, capturing hidden, secret, wrong moments, thus indicating a livelihood and truth behind the photograph; the photo becomes a way of seeing into the past. But the photo is accompanied by the story told by Joseph about what is happening on the photograph, so the photo alone does not suffice.

So, photographs are used as evidence, as truthful and as unreliable. A combination between narration and imagery seems to form the basis of the trauma narrative. The museum that Micha visits in The Dark Room seems to fulfill this function: a variety of photographs of the Holocaust together with narratives about the pictures.

### 4.2 Identification

The novel’s visual nature and the search for a new medium are connected to the way the reader is invited to identify and empathize with the perpetrators in Seiffert. The narrative technique of focalization invokes a relationship between the reader and the story through the eyes of the focalizing character. Thus, the focalizer’s point of view becomes the point of view of the character.
In *Afterwards* and *The Dark Room*, much of the focalization is through perpetrator characters, thus focusing the view of the reader through that of a perpetrator.

The process of identifying with a focalizer requires forming an image in the mind that is similar to that of the character’s mind image. So, much of this process is related to visualizations. Lore in *The Dark Room* for instance imagines the Hamburg she knows from her past and the discrepancy between her imagination and what she sees, shocks her:

[Lore] pictures the tram journey to Oma’s. The leafy weekend streets and white buildings; sitting still in her good shoed in the sunny-outside, cold-inside house. Can’t fit the images into the dark city that crowds the shore. (179)

This type of imagination also helps the characters fill up the gaps that are so frequent throughout the novels cf. 5.2.

The characters’ focalization can either increase or decrease their guilt; Lore’s focalization emphasizes her childlike innocence, whilst that of Helmut in *The Dark Room* shows the extent of his lack of a grasp on the reality around him as he sees everything as centered around him personally:

Shock and pain. Everything moves fast now and Helmut can’t keep up. He doesn’t run to the cellar, instead his legs carry him out on to the street. The first fires are starting [...] Helmut runs away from the heat and the light. Not fast enough. He knows he is not fast enough, because now the bombers are here. The roar. Directly overhead. Skimming the tops of the tenements, vast and frighteningly close, they follow Helmut’s bare and bobbing head as he runs (47, emphasis added).

The focalization in this scene causes an appearance of a personal attack on Helmut, not taking into account the world around him. These types of scenes thus affect the possibility of sympathy for the perpetrator.
The focalization’s strength emphasizes the different perspectives that exist on one and the same object. The limited point of view of the characters is taken over by the reader who then takes on the perpetrator’s point of view creating a danger of identification with a perpetrator position, problematizing the reader’s position. Yet, at many instances the narrator points out the characters’ limitations, initiating a possibility for different points of view that the reader could take on. Thus when Joseph in Afterwards remarks upon how different a view he has of David than Alice, the limitations of Alice’s point of view are emphasized: “Joseph thought Alice was wrong about her granddad on one count anyway: she’d told him David wasn’t good with people, but here he was, smoothing their way to the door. Making up for the stopped conversation, indulging Alice in a bit of friendly bickering” (121). David’s character is very much unattainable this way, as there is no focalization through him in Afterwards. Except for his very first scene, this main perpetrator whose story is used as a double for Joseph’s is thus a very ‘present absence’21 in the novel. Joseph is however a very present narrator and focalizer throughout the whole novel; however, he does not interact with the other characters the same way that David does. This results in the reader feeling more affinity with Joseph, and interacting more with him, whilst David becomes more enigmatic. For the other characters in the novel though, this would be the other way around: David talking to other characters, especially Isobel and Joseph, and Joseph not doing this.

The novel’s focalization has a second important consequence: the ‘colonization’ of the thoughts of the other characters around the focalizers. The focalizer is the only one who shows the reader the thoughts of the other characters around him, thus having power over how he depicts them, as I mentioned above. This, however, also means that the focalizer, a perpetrator, once again has a measure of power over the others around him, who are to his mercy when it comes to their

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depiction. So the focalizer appears to repeat once again his (psychological) perpetration through the novels. An example of this is the conversation between Micha and Elena Kolesnik in *The Dark Room*:

- I [Elena] mean, the Communists, the Germans, the partisans, the Red Army? Who was the worst?

  [italics in original]

  Elena has tears on her cheeks. Micha can see them in the lines around her mouth when she moves her face into the light. *She won’t answer.* Micha wonders if she is just being polite, even now, when he wants her to be honest. *The Germans. The Germans were by far the worst.* (353)

Micha here depicts the way he imagines Elena’s thoughts to be, possibly not how they really are, thus laying claim on her thoughts and imposing his own interpretation on them.
Conclusion

In this dissertation I have argued that Rachel Seiffert’s novels *The Dark Room* and *Afterwards*, contribute to the extension of victim-centred trauma fiction to a broader view of trauma fiction that can also encompass perpetrators. The novels thus follow parallel developments in trauma studies that has with authors like Rothberg, and Fassin & Rechtman, also started to expand. Studies now also include not only the ethnically and colonially other, but also the morally other, the perpetrator. Through including the perpetrator in a world so dominated by victims, Seiffert enables similarities to arise between victims and perpetrators. In section 2.1 I argued that the perpetrators in the novels are no traditional black-and-white characters, yet often combine aspects of innocence in their personalities and behaviours. Perpetrators are also depicted as trauma sufferers, a depiction often previously reserved for victims. So, a more fluid notion of victim-and perpetratorhood, and guilt and innocence appeared. A first suggestion for how the characters could include these dissimilar aspects in one person was that of role-performance as manifested in the different names used by the characters and the different views on the perpetrators that existed. Yet, this notion of role performing did not acknowledge the still present differences between the perpetrators and victims. So, identity proved to be more integrated, with the similarities between perpetrators and victims encouraging a network of identity.

After having examined the characterisation of the perpetrator characters, I focused on the style and structure of the novels and looked at the similarities and differences between Seiffert’s novels and victim-centred trauma fiction. For this examination I looked at the two main components of the traumatic experience as determined by Caruth: an obsessive repetition of the event together with a
lack of a narration of the event. In the discussion of both these components a two-fold mechanism was found: a nearing towards victim-centred fiction and a distancing from it. In the doubling and the gaps the consciousness of the perpetrators about their status and the built-in irony of contrasts between perpetrator-and victim-suffering imposed delineation between victims and perpetrators. So also the genre of Seiffert’s novels did not conform to that of victim-centred trauma fiction. The gaps that are similar in perpetrator-centred trauma fiction and in victim-centred trauma fiction illustrated the postmemory characteristics of trauma fiction: unreliable and unexpected narration. However, a strong body of authority (the implied author and the omniscient narrator) together with a twist on the intertextuality revealed an irony present in Seiffert’s novels that enable the reader to identify (through focalization) with the perpetrators but at the same time retain a moral touchstone to judge the perpetrators. Unfortunately, due to a lack of space, I could not include some other issues related to the subject of my dissertation. So is there the notion of guilt and shame that is associated with the gaze of the other as unravelling one’s identity; the differences between the two novels in, for instance, the differences between those actively involved in the war and the next generations that are much more present in Afterwards; the landscapes through which the characters travel and that are often visually associated with their position in society; the relationship between fiction and the act of confession and purging.

So, the conclusion of this dissertation is two-fold: firstly, there is no longer a stark contrast between the traditional victim and the traditional perpetrator; secondly, there is still room for an authoritative judgement on the figure of the perpetrator. In traditional literature the victim of the crime is purely innocent and thus ethically good; the perpetrator in contrast is guilty and thought of as evil. These black-and-white oppositions are challenged in Rachel Seiffert’s Afterwards and The Dark Room. The main characters of these novels are perpetrators, but their depiction shows fluidity in their character.: Helmut in The Dark Room was hardly involved in the war due to his physical

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inabilities, Lore and her siblings were children during the war, and Micha was born after the war. The only characters in *The Dark Room* that were without a doubt actively involved in the war, are never actually present in the narration. Because of their similar status as trauma sufferers many of their characteristics correspond: an obsessive acting out of the past and a lack of accessible memory. So these similarities imply a common ground humanity that connects them. Seiffert enhances these connections by using techniques associated with novels concerned with victims of trauma like unreliable narration, mediation, a quest motif, and intertextuality. The mechanism of focalization also establishes a connection between the reader and the perpetrator character. So Seiffert establishes a more fluid scale of perpetrator and innocence. It should not be seen as consisting of fixed points for the different characters, on the contrary, characters move between being guiltier and less guilty, between being more of a perpetrator and less of a perpetrator. The different characters are informed by each other and thus characteristics of the victim inform those of the perpetrator and the other way around. Seiffert, thus, construes a world in which the perpetrating characters are no longer the monster-perpetrators from before and where innocence is no longer pure.

Apart from this first conclusion on the characters of the novels’ stories, a second conclusion can be drawn from the text and narration of *Afterwards* and *The Dark Room*: there are still differences between the victims and the perpetrators, between victim-centred trauma fiction and perpetrator fiction, and so an instancy that advocates a judgement and authority still exists within the novels. The myriad of different individualities proposed in the previous conclusion is maintained on a personal level as the active perpetrators are surrounded by their loved ones. Yet, even if they are all trauma suffers, in society the perpetrators are still responsible for what they have done and can thus still be judged. The reliable omniscient narrators present in the novels together with the irony and other differences between the perpetrators and the victims show a world where there is still a distancing between the victim and the perpetrator. The reader is thus allowed room for a judgement of the perpetrator characters whilst also seeing the world through their humane eyes. The
perpetrators thus become ‘innocent perpetrators’: a fluidity of personality combining the victim and the perpetrator into a human being, but still retaining the core, the ‘perpetrator’.
Bibliography

Primary works


Secondary works


