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Prägende Bindungen in Tanja Dückers's Novels: An Analysis of Transgenerational Family Memory

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The depiction of transgenerational memory and trauma within the family features prominently in novels by so-called third generation German authors, such as Tanja Dückers. This generation of authors in Germany has been labeled apolitical or unconstrained by the past. My analysis of Dückers' statements in interviews and non-fictional texts, and her novels, in particular, *Himmelskörper* (2002) and *Der langste Tag des Jahres* (2006), shows that this is not the case. In fact, her fictional portrayal of familial influences and transgenerational memory and trauma illustrates the way contemporary German families may continue to be impacted by their family members' experiences during Germany's National Socialism period.

I. Introduction

Between 2005 and 2015, over half of the winners of the renowned Deutscher Buchpreis were characterized in German press reviews as a *Familienroman* or *Generationenroman*.¹ This points to the ongoing profusion of this genre, which often features a family's experiences, conveys memories across generations, and references major historical time periods in the twentieth century. Many of the twenty-first century German *Familienromane* focus on the interactions or the relationship between Germany's *Zeitzeugen* of the Third Reich and subsequent generations, with an emphasis on the perspective of their grandchildren.² These narratives often consider the impact of family and collective memory of the Second World War and of the Holocaust on future generations (Forkel 99–100). Family and collective memories conveyed from one generation to another are called intergenerational or transgenerational memory.³ German authors publishing *Familienromane* that delve into the relationship between grandparents and grandchildren are increasingly members of the so-called third generation, whose

¹ Arno Geiger's *Es geht uns gut* (2005), Julia Franck's *Mittagsfrau* (2007), Uwe Tellkamp's *Der Turm* (2008), Melinda Nadj Abonji's *Tauben fliegen auf* (2010), Eugen Ruge's *In Zeiten des abnehmenden Lichts* (2011), Ursula Krechel's *Landgericht* (2012).

² See Mila Ganeva's discussion of Tanja Dückers's *Himmelskörper* as an example of *Enkelliteratur* (153, 158). Anne Fuchs also mentions the term *Enkelliteratur*, but prefers the designation "'family narrative' for all types of generational narratives that explore issues of lineage and tradition" (6).

³ See the discussion of memory studies later in this article.

grandparents have personal memories of the 1930s and 1940s.⁴ Born in 1968, Tanja Dückers is a third-generation German author whose two novels, *Himmelskörper* (2003) and *Der längste Tag des Jahres* (2006), fit the description of a *Familienroman* or *Generationenroman*. In this article, I explore how Tanja Dückers's German postwar-generation characters are influenced by transgenerational familial memories and the indirect transmission of ideas and values.

In conversation with Dückers (Personal interview),⁵ it is clear that she is concerned about the impact of transgenerational memories in German families. Although her generation appears far removed from the historical past of the Second World War, Dückers asserted that memories and beliefs passed down in familial circles continue to have an impact on certain individuals. She explained that her novels present "ein Kontinuum hinsichtlich der Beschäftigung mit der NS-Zeit und ihrer Auswirkung auf den Umgang der Generationen in Deutschland" (Personal interview). As such, her narratives center on family memories of the Second World War and the dynamics that emerge from the influence of these memories on the family. Dückers characterized these family influences as *prägende Bindungen* in a discussion of her novel *Der längste Tag des Jahres*, a work in which several characters unwittingly make life choices based on collective family memory (dk4television). While there has been considerable scholarship on family memories and family dynamics in Dückers's *Himmelskörper*, less attention has been paid to her depiction of the unconscious transmission of transgenerational memory in her novels. As I will show, Dückers is interested in revealing the unseen ways memories, ideas, and values are transmitted from one generation to the next in order to draw attention to how the past continues to play a role in contemporary German society. Using studies on transgenerational memory and trauma in the fields of psychology and psychoanalysis, as well as the concept of a "life theme", I will evaluate how transgenerational memories shape the identity and life decisions of the family members in Dückers's fiction.

II. Family Memory: Critical and Theoretical Explorations

Some scholars of family memory in German literature have argued that the younger generation of authors, the third (and now fourth) postwar generation, are less likely to present the past and the *Zeitzeugen* in a critical light due to their temporal distance from those historical events. Volker Hage asserted in his oft-cited *Der Spiegel* article from 1999, "Die Enkel der Nachkriegsliteratur treten an, befreit von mancher Beschwernis der vom Zweiten Weltkrieg geprägten Vorgänger-Generation" (245). Although, by 2006, scholarly attention had started to focus more on the way younger authors portrayed Germany's history, several scholars who published analyses of family memory and historical representation in Dückers's *Himmelskörper* remained skeptical of the third-generation perspective (the author's and the protagonist's).⁶ Anne Fuchs claimed in her 2008 book, *Phantoms of War*, that Dückers's depiction represents "a postmemorial position characterized by growing emotional distance and an increased sense of historical relativism" (54).⁷ She argued that

⁴ A few examples of third-generation German authors of *Familienromane* include Arno Geiger, Julia Franck, Uwe Tellkamp, Marcel Beyer, and Jenny Erpenbeck.

⁵ Personal interview with Tanja Dückers, 18 March 2014.

⁶ See also Petra Bagley, who continued to argue that German family narratives by third-generation authors such as Jenny Erpenbeck and Maike Wetzel appear to be less burdened by guilt than those by earlier writers and that this literature represents "the advent of a generation more at ease with itself" (152). This quotation is also in Caroline Schaumann's chapter on *Himmelskörper* in *Memory Matters* (2008). Schaumann concluded that "Bagley's [. . .] analysis deliberately excludes texts with a political agenda" (231).

⁷ Fuchs uses the term "postmemory" from Marianne Hirsch's groundbreaking study, *Family Frames, Photography, and Postmemory* (1997). In *Projected Memory* (1999), Hirsch explained that postmemory "describe[s] the relationship of children of survivors of cultural or collective trauma to the experiences of their parents [. . .] that are so powerful, so monumental, as to constitute memories in their own right" (8).

first-generation authors, such as Günter Grass, portrayed “lived experience” and that Grass provided a “discursive-analytical approach to history”, while Dückers’s novel instead ended up “re-mythologizing National Socialism” (5, 60–1).⁸ Likewise, Norman Ächtler claimed that the grandchild in *Himmelskörper* merely occupies the role of “Protokollantin [. . .] und nimmt in Bezug auf die Familiengespräche eine neutrale Beobachterposition ein” (278). He located the granddaughter’s first critical reflection of her family’s past in Poland as a memory space and later in her grandparents’ home after their deaths (287). Ächtler does not address the many moments in the novel that illustrate the strong influence the grandparents’ behavior and memory have on their grandchildren. In her article on the third-generation representation of *Heimat*, notions of Germanness, and the “expulsion and loss of home” in *Himmelskörper* and other family novels, Friederike Eigler posited that the third-generation characters discard the second generation’s emphasis on the past and instead focus on “the present and future that is informed, but not entirely determined, by the past” (89). Eigler concluded that *Himmelskörper* not haverepresents “forward-looking alternatives to a paralyzing focus on the past” (89); Laurel Cohen-Pfister similarly argued that the grandchildren in *Himmelskörper* have a “non-adversarial relationship to the generation of perpetrators” (123).⁹ However, as I will outline below, Dückers’s concern with the legacy of the past is illustrated by the language used by the third-generation protagonist in *Himmelskörper* to describe her grandparents and the references the character makes to the unsettling influences of the family’s memories and postwar denial of guilt. A careful examination of Dückers’s writings and statements shows that rather than minimize the atrocities of the wartime generation, she aims to highlight the continuing effect familial memories have in shaping present-day views.

Not only in her fiction but also in essays and newspaper articles, Tanja Dückers has been critical of Germany’s engagement with its National Socialist past. She has been particularly outspoken about the *Opferdiskurs*, the emphasis on normalization, the popularity of right-wing groups, and what she considers ineffective education about the Holocaust in Germany’s secondary schools. She has pointed to the incongruity between the official memory discourse that is taught in history courses and the private subjective memories and continuing prejudices relayed in the family and community.¹⁰ Several of Dückers’s newspaper articles and publications reflect on the impact of the past in Germany. Along with Verena Carl, Dückers edited *StadtLandKrieg* (2004), a collection of stories about the past with contributions from contemporary authors that describe the “untergründigen Erschütterungen vergangener Erlebnisse und Verbrechen” (1). In *Morgen nach Utopia* (2007), a volume of critical essays on a variety of current topics, Dückers’s critical stance is fueled by her concern over the increased “Geschichtsumschreibung” and public acceptance of ethnocentric views or rhetoric reminiscent of Nazi-era views (91). In the forward to the volume, she acknowledges that she has been preoccupied with the topic of “das Vermächtnis der NS-Zeit, das ‘Nachbeben’, das diese Ära immer noch oder: zur Zeit wieder verstärkt auslöst” (9). Her term *Nachbeben* evokes an image of strong overpowering waves of historical memory in present-day Germany.

There has been a sustained scholarly interest in the topic of memory in German family narratives in the last ten years, including discussions of the impact of history on the

⁸ Fuchs compared Dückers’s *Himmelskörper* to Günter Grass’s *Im Krebsgang* (2002), another novel that thematizes the sinking of the Gustloff ship and transgenerational memory.

⁹ Cohen-Pfister acknowledged that “Dücker counters the image of a young generation that is politically uninterested” (131). However, her analysis focuses on outlining Dücker’s construction of several generations, each with a particular perspective on the past, from the grandparents’ self-victimization and silence vis-à-vis their involvement in the Third Reich, to the second generation’s critical reproach of the wartime generation’s version of history, to the third generation’s quest for discovery of the past through stories and historical artifacts.

¹⁰ See also Harald Welzer, Sabine Moller, and Karoline Tschuggnall’s study *Opa war kein Nazi: Nationalsozialismus und Holocaust im Familiengedächtnis* (2002).

present day. In *Wende des Erinnerns* (2006), a volume of articles on the renewed emphasis on memory in German literature, Jens Stüben illustrated the way *Himmelskörper* portrays the continuing influence of history in familial circles. He argued that Dücker's novel provides a new third-generation perspective (171–177).¹¹ In *Memory Matters* (2008), Caroline Schaumann examined works by German women writers from three generations, including Tanja Dücker, to show how they “contribute to Germany's cultural memory” (5). Likewise, Katharina Gerstenberger and Patricia Herminhouse, editors of *German Literature in a New Century* (2008), explored how “the family novel [. . .] has become an important vehicle for writers across generations to reflect on not only the historical realities of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but also on how this history has shaped familial relationships” (6).¹² Scholars of Dücker's *Himmelskörper* have commonly focused on the oral transmission of historical events (the stories told by the grandparents), the relaying of historical information via objects (images and Nazi memorabilia), the incongruity between official school instruction about historical events and historical family memory, and the protagonist's search for her family history (including the search for the cloud and the trip to Poland).¹³

An important characteristic of Dücker's novels that has received little scholarly attention is the way she highlights indirect transmission of familial memories, as well as ideas and values, to subsequent generations. Examining these depictions of unseen transmissions helps to understand how Dücker illustrates the powerful influence of family memories on an individual's identity formation. Fuchs explained that the family novels she examined focused on “transgenerational communication of trauma” and that they show how the past has been “subliminally transmitted within the family unit” (*Phantoms of War* 46). However, in her analysis of *Himmelskörper*, she exclusively discussed examples in the novel of information transmitted directly and orally from one generation to the next. Furthermore, Fuchs and Schaumann did not examine the transgenerational memory in Dücker's *Der längste Tag des Jahres*, though this novel clearly centers on the theme of memory in the family. My analysis builds upon previous studies but focuses on the unconscious transgenerational transmission of memories in the novel. In this article, I analyze Dücker's portrayal of indirect or unconscious transgenerational transmission of memories, ideas, and values. These include the way family narratives about the past are constructed and the parents' and grandparents' behavior, actions, reactions, and tone or way of speaking (for example, how they speak versus what they say).

Important to my analysis of Dücker's novels are studies in the fields of cultural memory and psychology on transgenerational memory. These studies examine how memory functions, how memories are transmitted, and what effect vicarious and second-hand memories can engender. For Dücker, Jan and Aleida Assmann's theories on memory were foundational in providing insight into the impact of oral history in the family (Dücker, Personal interview). In Aleida Assmann's seminal study on cultural, personal, and political memory and trauma of the Second World War and the Holocaust, *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit* (2006), she described individual and collective memory as “soziale und kulturelle Konstruktionen [. . .], die sich in der Zeit verändern und ihre eigene Geschichte haben” (15). She located the main site of remembrance within the family: “Kinder und Enkel nehmen einen Teil der Erinnerungen der älteren Familienmitglieder in ihren Erinnerungsschatz auf, in dem sich selbst Erlebtes und

¹¹ See also Stuart Taberner's article on flight and expulsion in the volume *Representations of German Wartime Suffering* (2007).

¹² The authors cite the following examples: Dücker's *Himmelskörper*, Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003), Eva Menasse's *Vienna* (2005), and Zafer Şenocak's *Gefährliche Verwandtschaft* (1998).

¹³ See Sabine Kallweit's interpretation of the search for the cloud in *Verbalträume* (2005). Scholars also frequently discuss *Himmelskörper* in conjunction with other contemporary novels that deal with transgenerational memories, such as Günter Grass's *Im Krebsgang* (2002), Marcel Beyer's *Spione* (2000), and Uwe Timm's *Am Beispiel meines Bruders* (2003).

Gehörtes überkreuzen. Dieses 'Drei-Generationen-Gedächtnis' ist ein existentieller Horizont für persönliche Erinnerungen und entscheidend für die eigene Orientierung in der Zeit" (26). Assmann's emphasis on how family memory informs individual memory and identity is integral to my analysis of transgenerational memory in Dückers's novels. In particular, Assmann's explanation that in the formation of individual memory (Gedächtnis) "die Grenzen zwischen dem selbst Erlebten und dem nur Gehörten und identifikatorisch Nachempfundenen sind dabei nicht immer leicht zu ziehen" (33–34). This argument is exemplified in texts by clinical therapists, whose findings paradoxically reveal individuals to be suffering traumatic memories they did not directly experience. Interestingly, Dückers's fictional portrayal mirrors the findings of many clinicians and therapists who work with patients affected by the physical and psychological effects of transgenerational memory. In most instances, these individuals were affected by traumatic memory via a parent or family member who was traumatized in the past. In *Unverlierbare Zeit: Psychosoziale Spätfolgen des Nationalsozialismus bei Nachkommen von Opfern und Tätern*, Jürgen Straub, professor of psychology and sociology at Ruhr-Universität Bochum, and Kurt Grünberg, a psychoanalyst at the Sigmund Freud Institut in Frankfurt, explained that "Untersuchungen der psychosozialen Folgen des Nationalsozialismus haben nachgewiesen, daß sich solche unmerklichen unbewußten Überlieferungen über mehrere Generationen erstrecken können" (7). This transgenerational transmission of traumatic experiences results not only from oral or written communication between generations but also in the way memories and experiences manifest themselves in the body. According to Straub and Grünberg, memories may "sich auch in die Körper von Menschen einschreiben und die habitualisierten Praktiken leiblich Handelnder bestimmen" (8). Actions and behaviors are thus affected regardless of whether an individual is aware of the influences of the past (8).¹⁴

III. *Prägende Bindungen* in Dückers's Novels: Transgenerational Trauma

In her fiction, Dückers illustrates the lasting effects of transgenerational memories, or *prägende Bindungen*, in the family. Scholars on family memory in German literature have paid little attention to Dückers's novel *Spielzone* (1999), though it also contains a poignant example of transgenerational trauma. The novel portrays the lives of eclectic young characters in Berlin, but also includes "Gegenfiguren [. . .] [wie] Vertreter der älteren Generationen" (Dücker, Personal interview). The chapter "Ernie und Leo und Benno und Bert" in *Spielzone* outlines the relationship between Benno and his grandfather, a *Zeitzeuge*. For many years, Benno's grandfather has been telling his grandson the story of his traumatic experiences in 1945. In turn, Benno visualizes the scenes from his grandfather's transmitted oral history as he traverses the areas of Berlin where the events originally occurred. Benno has recently turned eighteen and experiences flashbacks as a result of having listened to his grandfather's vivid stories of mangled body parts in the streets: "Benno [. . .] sah diese Szene [. . .] immer wieder vor sich, nachts, wenn er einzuschlafen versuchte" (168). He exhibits unusual behavior, which the reader may attribute to his grandfather's stories. Benno breaks into a research hospital in order to steal the body of his baby twin brother, which is preserved in a jar, and takes it to the Tiergarten, eventually placing it in a tree. In effect, he recreates the episodes of his grandfather's stories about body parts in the streets and the park. One way to understand this depiction is with the help of Dominick LaCapra's theoretical work in memory and trauma studies.¹⁵ LaCapra explained

¹⁴ For an excellent example of a literary analysis of transgenerational trauma in a family novel, see Martina Ölke's article on Hans-Ulrich Treichel's *Der Verlorene*, which features a second-generation protagonist who exhibits psychosomatic symptoms from his parents' experiences of *Flucht und Vertreibung*.

¹⁵ LaCapra was director of the School of Criticism and Theory at Cornell University and has become known for using literary studies techniques, aspects of psychoanalysis, critical theory, and poststructuralism to shape history studies.

that the “intergenerational transmission of trauma refers to the way those not directly living through an event may nonetheless experience and manifest its posttraumatic symptoms” (108).¹⁶ With the character of Benno, Dücker shows how future generations may be haunted by the repeated exposure to oral family history of traumatic experiences.

Himmelskörper (2003) similarly thematizes traumatic family history relayed in the family from grandparents to their grandchildren, but close analysis shows that this transmission goes beyond storytelling about the war. The novel centers on the family of a pair of twins, Freia and Paul. The narrative is written from Freia's perspective, as she recounts her experiences growing up in Berlin and her relationship with her parents and maternal grandparents. The grandparents, Jo and Max, along with Freia's mother, Renate, fled westward in 1945 when Renate was five years old. As Fuchs and Schaumann have discussed, the grandchildren in the novel, Freia and her brother Paul, repeatedly listen to these traumatic tales of flight, which they consider “beängstigend” (142). Freia reports that during one of the grandfather's stories of the sinking of the *Gustloff*, “Paul schüttelte sich. Er hob vorsichtig den Kopf und blickte um sich, als würde er eine unmittelbare Gefahr wittern” (143). The portrayal of Paul's fear is similar to the description of Benno's response in *Spielzone*, as both react to the repeated stories of their grandfather's war trauma.

The transmission of memories manifests itself not only through oral history but also through the grandparent's behavior, to which the grandchildren react in various ways. According to Dücker, the grandparents, Jo and Max, are “typische Vertreter dieser nur halbherzig vom NS-Gedankengut abgekommenen Generation” (Personal interview). Freia searches for truth about her family's history and eventually learns that her grandparents were fervent Nazis who remained loyal to Nazi ideology. In fact, the family survived because their loyalty to the Nazi regime allowed them to board the vessel *Theodor*, while their neighbors perished on the *Gustloff*.¹⁷ After the grandparents' death, the family discovers Nazi memorabilia, such as a copy of *Mein Kampf* and greeting cards from high-ranking Nazi officials, that Jo and Max had kept hidden. However, the family stories the grandparents told left out any details that would have revealed this particular ideology. In these stories, they portrayed themselves only as victims. Nevertheless, Freia and Paul were influenced by their exposure to their grandparents' beliefs and the resulting familial conflicts over the secrets. One example of how the narrator illustrates this is with a scene from Freia's childhood involving her braids. While Freia's hair is being braided as a child, Jo remarks, “Das erinnert mich an früher”, and Freia realizes, “meine Zöpfe brachten Jo dazu, von früher zu erzählen” (62). Presumably, Jo's nostalgia while braiding Freia's hair serves as a reminder of her youth in the Third Reich. The scene may evoke National Socialist propaganda, with its iconic images of young girls and women depicted in braids. After Freia's brother is forced to get a haircut he does not want, she rebelliously cuts her hair as well. This marks an end to the hair rituals with her grandmother and thereby the stories about the past. Meanwhile, Freia's mother hordes the cut braids like relics. As an adult, Freia continues to rebel against her grandparents' “Gedankengut” and regularly shaves her head. The braids in the novel could be understood as a symbol of National Socialist values. Freia's choice to shave her head is an excellent example of the influence of unconsciously transmitted familial memories and values – values from which Freia distances herself as an adult.

Long before Freia discovers her grandparents' Nazi memorabilia, the narrator foreshadows the revelation through descriptions of the grandmother. In a scene set during Freia's childhood, the narrator uses the term *Täter* for the grandmother when she kills a fly:

¹⁶ See also Anne Fuchs's discussion of LaCapra's work in *Phantoms of War* (167).

¹⁷ The *Gustloff* was sunk by Russian torpedoes after leaving the harbor.

Die Augen meiner Großmutter funkelten, und auf einmal bekam ich Angst vor ihr. [. . .] Plötzlich fuhr die Klatsche nieder. [. . .] Sie ließ die Täterhand mit der Klatsche sinken . . . und starrte unglaublich zufrieden auf den zerquetschten [. . .] Fliegenleib. Kurz nahm ich ein Zucken in ihrem Gesicht wahr, das mir Erinnerung an einen fernen Schmerz zu sein schien. (89, 90)

This passage immediately follows the grandmother's frustration with Freia's repeated questions about the aerial bombings her grandfather had described. It is significant that the child narrator would refer to her grandmother as a "perpetrator" and interpret her expression as a mixture of satisfaction and pain. This scene is rich with symbolism: Dückers herself explains that the brown Nutella the fly is attempting to consume is an allusion to National Socialism (Personal interview). *Himmelskörper* also includes an encounter between the grandchildren and Max, their grandfather, that illustrates the grandfather's National Socialist prejudices. When Freia is eighteen, her grandfather, who is tending his bees, explains: "Für mich sind die Kuckucksbienen die Juden im Bienenvolk. Sie bereichern sich an den Grundlagen, die andere Völker für sie geschaffen haben. Nutznießerisch. Berechnend. Aber eine starke Bienenkönigin [. . .] läßt die Kuckucksbiene natürlich verjagen" (187). Upon hearing this, Freia begins biting her "Zeigefingerknöchel", while Paul tries to respond to his grandfather "mit zitternder Stimme" before he is cut off by Jo (187). Freia's mother tells Freia to disregard Max's statements, reasoning, "Er ist alt und redet ein bißchen wirres Zeug [. . .] er hat genug gelitten" (188).

The grandparents' lies and secrets take their toll on the family. Freia believes that her grandparents will haunt her dreams, that they "in vielen Träumen mich verfolgen würden [. . .] Immer dieses Schweigen, Geheimnisse, Halbschatten, lauwarmer Hände auf meinen Schultern, Hüsteln, Frösteln, Schluchzen. Nichts". (189). In one telling passage, the reader learns that Freia has nightmares and difficulty sleeping:

Ich schlief schlecht in dem tiefen, weichen Bett meiner Großmutter. Immer wieder liefen erst Wasser, dann Blut unter der Tür hindurch in mein Zimmer [. . .] Ich wachte auf und hielt selbst noch, als ich das Licht anknipste, einige dunkle Flecken auf dem Teppich in Nähe der Tür für Blutlachen [. . .] ich wollte nicht in dieses tiefe, weiche Bett sinken, mich fallen lassen, zurück in die Geschichte, dorthin wo ich herkam. (220)

Freia's mother is also affected. Unable to come to terms with her own guilt and her parents' denial, she commits suicide at the end of the novel. Straub, a professor of psychology I referenced above, explains that for some descendants of Nazi perpetrators, who are critical of their parents' actions and denial of guilt, "sind gravierende seelische Zumutungen unvermeidlich" (231). Furthermore, Straub emphasizes the potential for the "Weitergabe" of this mental stress (232). At the end of *Himmelskörper*, Paul, living in Paris and working as an artist, reiterates the continuing influence of the past on his life:

Ich bin so weit fortgegangen von zu Hause. [. . .] Und trotzdem: An all das, was passiert ist, denke ich täglich. [. . .] Alles was ich male, steht unter diesem Bann oder Fluch. [. . .] Wir sind glücklich, aber trotzdem spüre ich den Sog der Vergangenheit einfach immer. (316)

The narrator's choice of language, referring to the familial influences as a curse and the past as a "Sog" that continues to influence Paul, shows how transgenerational memories shape the life of the next generation.

IV. *Prägende Bindungen* in the Family as “Collective Instruction” or “Life Theme”

Susan Sontag has defined collective memory as a kind of “collective instruction”. She asserts that “collective memory is not a remembering but a stipulating: that *this* is important, and this is the story about how it happened” (85, 86). This means that transgenerational memories may provide a kind of instruction to future generations on how to interpret history. In some fictional texts this instruction is explicit, such as in Grass's novel *Im Krebsgang* (2002), in which a grandmother teaches her grandson to be antisemitic and he then shoots a young man he believes is Jewish. Similarly, in the German film *Anatomie* (2000), young, indoctrinated medical students conduct unethical medical experiments under the tutelage of old Nazis. Like the grandparents in *Himmelskörper*, these narratives contain characters with obvious National Socialist views. However, the transgenerational transmission of values and ideas in the family need not be direct and obvious to have a lasting influence. In fact, as discussed below, in Dücker's 2006 novel, *Der längste Tag des Jahres*, indirect *prägende Bindungen* can play a vital role in an individual's identity formation.

Dücker's narratives, such as *Der längste Tag des Jahres*, help us to understand the way repeated accounts of familial oral history – as well as the mindset and behavior of parents and grandparents affected by trauma – can establish memories, which form the framework from which identity is forged. In *Haunting Legacies*, a literary analysis of transgenerational trauma in selected German novels, Gabriele Schwab, who was born after the war, shared her own experience of growing up affected and shaped by her mother's traumatic memories of an air raid and the death of her infant son: “I carry it inside like a ghostly presence. Sometimes I think that my mother went insane that day” (85–6). Schwab's personal narrative and literary analyses provide some insight into the transmission of trauma simply through living with affected family members. As Assmann explained, there is a close connection between “Vergangenheitsbezug und Identitätskonstruktion” (35). Historical events and the facts surrounding those events may remain the same, but how the facts are interpreted is what matters. Dücker stated that her portrayal of the four male generations in *Der längste Tag des Jahres* (Paul's father, Paul, Paul's son Thomas, and Thomas's son Sami) exemplifies the concept of a life theme as each successive generation makes life decisions in connection with the desert (Personal interview). Dücker's use of the concept “life theme” is interesting in light of Dori Laub's and Nanette Auerhahn's explanation that “memory [is] [. . .] transformed to the level of life theme when a degree of distance from the traumatic event is established” (32). In “Knowing and Not Knowing”, Laub and Auerhahn argued that memory of trauma in the family contributes to the development of a symbolic narrative that influences the individual's personality and actions. This is an unconscious process by which the family memory forms a narrative that becomes a guiding principle around which an individual structures his or her life, a life theme.

In Dücker's *Der längste Tag des Jahres*, the postwar generations have no contact with and very little knowledge of their father and grandfather, who died in the Second World War, and yet they are also influenced by his experiences. The novel takes place in 2002, on the day that the five adult children of Paul Kadereit learn of their father's unexpected death at the age of sixty. The novel's structure exemplifies the main theme of the text, which is family memory. The narrative is divided into five sections, each told from the perspective of a different third-generation character. There is some continuity across the sections, though each functions like a short story, slowly unveiling more of Paul's character. This structure gives the novel a choppy feeling and adds to its overall sense of ambiguity. It exemplifies the uncertainty associated with memories and the unconscious process of transgenerational memory in the novel. In her review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, Ingeborg Harms pointed out that

Dücker presents a bleak picture, as the trauma of the war and certain ideals reminiscent of Nazi ideology are passed on to postwar generations, leading to emotional and psychological problems.

Paul, the father and patriarch of the family in *Der längste Tag des Jahres*, was born in 1942 and is thus part of the immediate postwar generation. He was raised in a small Bavarian town by his single mother after his father was killed fighting in North Africa during the Second World War. He married Eva in 1960 and together they had five children: Sylvia, David, Johanna, Benjamin, and Thomas. Over the course of the novel, an image emerges of Paul as the strong patriarch, a man obsessed with the pet shop business he owned and managed. The third-generation characters describe him as authoritarian, serious, masculine, not religious, distant or solitary, and melancholy, though with a firm and energetic demeanor toward others (24, 27, 55). Paul particularly valued a healthy lifestyle, hard work, and perseverance. After learning of his father's death, Bennie reminisces about how distant his father was toward him and his siblings. He wonders why his father insisted on having so many children, but "sich nur für sein Geschäft und die Viecher interessierte" (31). He is similarly puzzled as to why his father joined a "Heimatlieder singender Wanderverein" instead of rebelling or demonstrating in the 1960s (31). Paul's home is in the small town of Fürstenfeldbruck, Bavaria. The state of Bavaria is often depicted in literature as a region that values nature and in which nature is synonymous with *Heimat* and feelings of belonging (Decker and Krah 8–13). Bennie's girlfriend alludes to this image of Bavaria when she describes her feelings of security and family values in Paul's home. The house is described as a dark cave with green and brown furniture, while the walls are covered with images of German forest trails, hikers, or colorful desert animals (21). Thus, his home also reflects his interest in nature, although with a focus on the desert and desert animals, rather than a typical Bavarian landscape. Large terrariums containing desert reptiles and plants dominate the living room. Paul regards these terrariums, the bees he keeps, and his exotic pet shop as his life's work and the focus of all his attention. In this sense, his admiration for these animals may be seen as his life theme. As I will discuss below, this life theme is the result of family trauma stemming from the Second World War.

The novel explores the way Paul's identity is shaped entirely by his childhood in postwar Germany and his father's death fighting in Africa during the Second World War. Paul's office is dominated by a large, commanding portrait of his father in *Wehrmacht* uniform prior to his deployment to North Africa. Paul's beliefs, interests, his choice of occupation, the appearance of his home, and his death all reflect his father's legacy. Paul became interested in reptiles through a neighbor, whose exotic collection survived the bombings of the war (52). The obsession with such creatures functions as a metaphor for his admiration of hard work, success, and a Darwinian notion of "survival of the fittest". The animals' ability to survive adverse living conditions as well as prolonged hunger and thirst attracted Paul, as he admired their unique and effective form of "Überlebensstrategie" (26). His reverence appears to stem from his traumatic war and postwar experiences, including losing his father in the war. Ironically, Paul dies due to his obsession with desert animals. He collapses while tending to his desert bees in his *Wüstenbienenhaus*. His death is attributed to his insistence on working with the bees despite the summer heat. He had also started neglecting his health after his business went bankrupt (208). In other words, he lost his vitality for life once his life's work failed. Unlike Paul's three sons, who have part-time jobs or move from one business venture to another, Paul valued consistency and could not cope with the fact that his business failed despite his hard work.

Similar to Freia's decision in *Himmelskörper* to shave her head as an adult, Paul's son, David, chooses a lifestyle that opposes his father's values. Dücker's characters often make life choices that oppose their parents' and grandparents' values when it is clear that they disagree

with these values or are uncomfortable with them. David believes that he has inherited his father's tendency for "Ausblenden der Außenwelt" as Paul used all of his energy to care for his animals and to educate others about their superior qualities; David even refers to his father as a "Suchtcharakter" (103). As a child, David had nightmares; he felt ignored and "unglücklich und einsam" to the point that he wished he could turn into a creature to which his father might pay attention (103–4). As an adult, he works in the theater and, in contrast to his father's "Gesundheitstick", enjoys late-night parties, the atmosphere of the dark theater, and smoke-filled bars (107). Paul's daughter, Anna, is a therapist with a close-knit, loving family. She dotes on her children and her home is cozy and messy, which stands in stark contrast to the way her father lived.

Another aspect of the *prägende Bindungen* in the family in *Der längste Tag des Jahres* is the way preferences are unconsciously transmitted within it, from parent to child. This is most evident in how the narrator causes the reader to reflect on possible correlations between the characters' reactions and thoughts and their father's actions and values. While pondering her father's death soon after learning of his demise, Anna is reminded of instances in which she reacted negatively toward individuals with illnesses. Once, a classmate became carsick on a school trip and she hated him from that moment on (92). She knows that her reactions did not make any sense, and wonders from where these feelings stem. The narrative implies that Anna chose to become a therapist because of her childhood experiences with her father and that she developed prejudices against individuals with illnesses due to her father's beliefs. In conversation about values potentially passed on to the second and third generation, Dückers noted that where she sees a potential correlation to past National Socialist ideology is with "der Vorstellung der Deutschen von der perfekten Mutter" and that "im Umgang mit Behinderten hierzulande teilweise noch etwas von Euthanasie mitschwingt", though Dückers adds that in this area "hier eindeutig Fortschritte mit integrativen Kindergärten und Schulen erzielt worden sind" (Personal interview). As this quotation shows, Dückers's fictional depiction of one generation's influence over the life theme of the next mirrors these views she has expressed.

Paul's oldest daughter, Sylvia, is the only one of the siblings who felt a close relationship with her father. She was a sickly child and felt a sense of *Geborgenheit* in her father's presence as he cared for her. As an adult, she is portrayed by her siblings as self-centered, demanding, harsh, and mean, while the chapter narrated from her own perspective makes her appear frail and unsure of herself. She prefers her husband, Jan, in the role of protector and tries to please him, despite his anger and infidelity. Inexplicably, she keeps her father's death a secret from her teenage daughter and husband. She not only follows her normal daily routine, serving her husband breakfast and making love to him, but spends the rest of the day reminiscing about her father and dealing with her grief alone. Finally, at the end of the evening, she reasons that she has always avoided confiding in others – in other words, "niemandem etwas davon zu erzählen, niemanden einweihen, damit es 'nicht wirklich wahr ist'" (61). She has difficulty sharing her feelings, a trait that resembles her father's silent way of dealing with his traumatic experiences.

The characterization of Thomas, Paul's youngest son particularly demonstrates Dückers's notion of *prägende Bindungen* in the family, as she shared in an interview (dk4television). Thomas moved away from home at the age of twenty and has not seen his parents in nine years, though he often thinks about his father. He does not really understand why he left, only that he felt a kind of "Beklemmung zu Hause" and wanted to escape his father (154, 158). However, he invariably and ironically makes life decisions based on his father's legacy, such as living in the desert of the American Southwest. Thomas remembers Paul's emphasis on *Ordnung* and his desert terrariums in which nothing changed (156). As Dückers explains,

Thomas both follows his father's obsession with the desert and at the same time rebels against his father by living precariously in a trailer in the desert without any stability in his life (Personal interview). In contrast to Paul's home, where nothing changed and nature was contained and restrained, Thomas decides to live in the chaotic world of the ever-changing desert amidst debris (near a plane cemetery), leaves a well-paid job, and donates all of his money to a cult, the Sun people. He raises his seven-year-old son, Sami, whom he lovingly refers to as his *Wüstenkind*, as a single father. Despite these life choices that stand in stark contrast to his father's life, Thomas remains affected by his childhood experiences and his father's trauma. The narrative outlines the way that simply gazing at the desert surrounding his home reminds him of his father, long before he learns that his father has died. After a visit to a former military installation in the desert where soldiers in the Second World War were trained to fight in North Africa, Thomas considered calling his father. However, he decided against it out of fear: "Irgendwie hatte er Angst, daß ein solcher Anruf sein Leben hier durcheinanderbringen würde" (190). After the news of his father's death reaches him, Thomas considers taking Sami to Germany but comes to the realization that this will never happen, because Sami would not want to leave the desert. The narrator makes it clear that Sami knows very little about his father's childhood in Germany and even less about his grandfather, Paul, whom he has never met. Nevertheless, some of Sami's actions and preferences remind the reader of Paul's habits. For example, Thomas observes that both his father, Paul, and his son, Sami, enjoy spending hours gazing at the desert. Paul kneels in front of his terrariums on a well-worn pillow, while Sami sits still, viewing the vast desert and wants nothing more than to drive into it with his father and do nothing. This is a surprising choice of activity for a seven-year-old boy. Sami's behavior, Thomas's choice to live in the desert, and his efforts to rid his life of any kind of *Ordnung*, as well as his repeated reflections on his childhood with his father (before he learns of his death), appear to be tropes to further illustrate the transmission of transgenerational memories and values.

V. Conclusion

Interestingly, both *Der längste Tag des Jahres* and *Himmelskörper* contain scenes that exemplify different relationships to family legacy and memory. While Paul and Sylvia revere the legend of Paul's father as a war hero fallen in battle, David and Anna research the death of their grandfather and learn that he died three months after being deployed to North Africa while retrieving water at a well (116). Paul and Sylvia prefer their version of events regarding Paul's father, while Anna repeatedly and unsuccessfully questions her father about his experiences in the war and postwar period, including his image of his own father (84). These scenes recall the conflict in *Himmelskörper* between the grandparents' view of their flight from the East and their daughter Renate's extensive historical research, with which she attempted to correct their narrative to no avail. These differences illustrate how family memories can become part of those in the next generation's identities, influencing their life decisions. In *Memory and Political Change*, Aleida Assmann and Linda Shortt outlined the transformative power of memory as "a powerful agent of change" in society that is able to "revise former values [. . . and] create new frames of action" (4).¹⁸ My analysis of Dückers's statements and fictional depictions helps to illustrate how she draws attention to these influences.

In this article, I have examined the way the third-generation author Tanja Dückers portrays characters affected by the transgenerational transmission of trauma. The wartime

¹⁸ See also Gudrun Brockhaus's article on German postwar transgenerational transmission, which outlines "three stages in the process of facing the atrocities of the national past [. . . and] calls attention to perplexing effects of the emotional legacy of the Nazi past which continues to linger in the third and fourth generation" (Assmann and Shortt 11).

generation's stories of suffering in *Spielzone* and *Himmelskörper* continue powerfully to impact their children and grandchildren. The grandparents in *Himmelskörper* yearn to (re-) establish a sense of order and develop a narrative that becomes their life story, their life theme, which in turn influences the next generation. The transgenerational memory in the family, including lies and secrets, causes the second-generation character, Renate, to commit suicide and continues to haunt the grandchildren, Freia and Paul, into adulthood. Conversely, *Der längste Tag des Jahres* depicts a family influenced by the memory of a first-generation character that never interacted with the postwar generation. As I outlined above, the second-generation character Paul's choice of profession and interests serve as a tribute to the father he never met, while the third generation, Paul's children, unwittingly perform their father's obsessions in one way or another. In these novels, Dückers's portrayal of characters defined by transgenerational memories, in particular unconscious transmission of ideas and values, illustrates how the *prägende Bindungen* in the family shape the identities and life themes of future generations. A critical analysis of Dückers's work provides an important perspective from which to understand ongoing contemporary social and political debates in German society and the extent to which some German families may continue to be impacted by their family members' experiences during the National Socialist period.

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