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FICTIONALIZING THE UNWITNESSED HISTORY IN GERMAN LITERATURE: A CASE OF MARCEL BEYER

ALMAN EDEBİYATINDA TANIKLIK EDİLMEMEYEN TARİHİN KURGULANMASI: MARCEL BEYER ÖRNEĞİNDE

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ABSTRACT

The present study examines the perspectives of the third post-war generation of writers on history in German literature after World War II. The second post-war generation was replaced by the third generation, especially after the fall of the Berlin Wall, with the start of a "new post-war literature" (Garbe: 2002). Communicating styles of narrating historical events in literary texts indicate different reference points about the past. The present research seeks to understand the motives behind memory work related to the Nazi period and the Jewish Holocaust practised by third-generation authors who did not witness the Second World War and its aftermath by themselves, contrary to the first- and second-generation writers. The literary works of Marcel Beyer have been analyzed as an example of a third-generation author, along with the examination of the content and formal characteristics of communicative and cultural memory of different generations of authors. Marcel Beyer has used modern and post-modern narration techniques in his novels "Flughunde"(1995), "Spione" (2000) and "Kaltenburg" (2008) to stage historical information and details of the Nazi period and after, with fictional elements. The fact that Marcel Beyer constructs his novels based on people's memories and events in official history also indicates his responsibility towards his generation's history. Based on the author Marcel Beyer's work, this study examines why and how communicative and generational memory is transferred to the reader.

Key Words: *Second World War, Reminiscence Generation, Communicative memory, Generational memory, Marcel Beyer*

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ÖZ

Bu çalışmada Alman edebiyatında İkinci Dünya Savaşı sonrasında üçüncü anımsama kuşağının yakın tarihi nasıl hatırladığı incelenmiştir. Özellikle Berlin Duvarı'nın yıkılmasından sonra ikinci kuşağın yerini üçüncü kuşağa bırakması, "yeni bir savaş sonrası edebiyatı" (Garbe: 2002) akımını ortaya çıkarır. Edebi metinlerde anlatılan tarihi olayların aktarılma biçimleri geçmiş ile ilgili farklı referans noktalarına işaret etmektedir. Bu çalışmada birinci ve ikinci anımsama kuşağı yazarlarının aksine İkinci Dünya Savaş'ı ve sonrasına tanıklık etmemiş üçüncü anımsama kuşağı yazarlarının yapıtlarında neden Nazi dönemi ve Yahudi Soykırımını gibi konuları ele aldığı sorusuna cevap verilmeye çalışılmıştır. Bu sorunun cevabı Marcel Beyer örneğinde açıklanarak, farklı yazar kuşak bellekleri üzerinden iletişimsel ve kültürel belleğin içerik ve biçimsel özellikleri irdelenmiştir. Marcel Beyer, Nazi dönemi ve sonrasına ait tarihi bilgileri/belgeleri "Yarasalar"(1995), "Spione" (2000) ve "Kaltenburg" (2008) romanlarında modern ve post modern anlatım tekniklerini bir arada kullanarak, kurmaca unsurlarla sahneler. Marcel Beyer'in romanlarını resmi tarihte yer edinen kişi ve olaylardan hareketle kurgulaması kendi kuşağının tarihine karşı aldığı sorumluluğun da bir göstergesidir. Bu çalışmada, yazar Marcel Beyer'den yola çıkılarak iletişimsel ve kuşak belleğinin okuyucuya neden ve nasıl aktarıldığı incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *İkinci Dünya Savaşı, Anımsama Kuşağı, İletişimsel bellek, Kuşak belleği, Marcel Beyer*

Introduction

History and memory work have commonalities in dealing with past events. However, these disciplines significantly differ in interpreting and examining the past. Indeed, Halbwachs (1992) statement, "our memory is supported by the lived history, not the learned history," accentuates the divergence between history and memory work. According to Nora (2006, p. 19-20), history, as a conception of the past, implements analysis, discourse and criticism. On the other hand, memory is fed by blended, intertwined, imprecise, unique, and symbolic reminiscences as a bond that is constantly alive in the present. Memory sanctifies recollections, while history simplifies the memories. Thus, unlike memory, which originates from recollections of a specific group, history is considered a joint estate belonging to no one. Memory studies have recently gained great scholarly attention as a distinct discipline that deals with the past from different perspectives than history. In particular, the "history of the 20th century, known as the history of the present " (Traverso, 2019, p.20), has affected and changed the traditional approaches of many disciplines such as art history, psychology, sociology, anthropology and most importantly history, towards memory and memory studies. The subject of "oral history", which includes the memories revealed in the interviews with the witnesses other than the known written documents of the historian, is an excellent example of such developments (J. Assmann, 2015). New technological advancements have enabled researchers to create audio and video archives from the narratives/memoirs

of individuals and families. The most critical determinant of communicative memory¹ is communication and sharing the experiences of individuals (J. Assmann, 2015, p. 61).

The emotional transmission of memories or experiences from one generation to others cannot be the same in sharing reminiscences. Individuals of one generation who witnessed social, political, and cultural events in the same period have similar feelings and emotions. The collective experiences of the group reflect the identity² of their period. Each generation has certain boundaries and limits of experiences, and these boundaries cause each generation to interpret³ the past differently (A. Assmann, 2006, p. 20). The ideas adopted by each generation or the experiences they have cause social change and affect the next generation.

“The term ‘generation’ is used in public discussions in an ambiguous manner, such that several different meanings are often blended one with another. In everyday language, the term is used to refer to a member in the natural sequence of grandparents, parents, children, and grandchildren, a progression that traditionally assumes a distance between generations of about thirty years. In reference to the population structure of a society, ‘generation’ is used to statistically group all those born in the same year or the same five-year period or decade. A new understanding of the term which originated in the humanities and social sciences has now become common, however, which defines ‘generation as a group within a society that is characterized by its members having grown up in the same particular formative historical era. Often, such a generational identity exists throughout its members’ lives due to their having experienced times of radical upheaval and new beginnings and as a result sharing a specific habitud” (Reulecke, 2008, p.119).

The characteristics of a generation are defined by the political and social events attributed to an individual's years of birth. According to Strauss-Howe's Generation Theory, people born in the same period⁴ share similar tendencies and behaviours since major events affect and shape the lives of individuals (Strauss & Howe, 1992). However, only political, social, and cultural events do not always determine the characteristics of a generation.

¹Communicative memory is reminiscence of the recent past. These memories are generational experiences that the individual shares with his contemporaries. It is therefore limited to communicative memory carriers and the transfer time covers three to four generations. The generation that experienced Hitler's oppression and genocide of Jews as individual trauma can be given as an example of this type of memory. Since existing memories cannot be transferred over time, information will only be available through the media. For this reason, archival studies gain meaning in today's societies (J. Assmann, 2015, p.59).

²In terms of the relationship between generation and identity, the literary scholar Weigel (2005, p. 10) emphasizes that the concept of generation is a key word between tradition-custom or past-present.

³ On the other hand, German Sociologist Karl Mannheim (1928) emphasizes that intergenerational change reveals cultural transmission and collective creativity.

⁴ As in Karl Mannheim's theory, individuals born and raised in a certain time period and in the same age group have similar characteristics. Behaviors specific to this generation change with each new generation. Important historical events and social changes affect the identities, value judgments and behaviors of individuals belonging to that society (Strauss&Howe, 1992, p. 68).

In addition, the characteristics of the previous generation have an essential role in defining the identity of a generation. According to A. Assmann (2007, p. 31-44), the date of birth of individuals determines their opportunities, misfortunes, prospects, risks, and challenges during that period. Therefore, a history narrated through biographies comprising practical information is more critical than problematic events of history. In this context, cultural generation studies deal with who made history. How is it recalled? How is it neglected? And how has it reminisced again? These studies reveal the cultural differences between the two generations by analyzing and comparing their circumstances. For example, the characteristics of the 1968's generation cannot be understood without examining the generation of 1945. Although the political generation of the Second World War is very opposite to the 1968's generation, both are covertly connected by push and pull forces. Politicization, formative years, and historical transformation are three essential elements that distinguish the 1968's generation from the 1945's. Therefore, each generation remembers its history and past from different aspects. They learn and delimit the past from the stories and memoirs of previous generations. The process of history writing reveals that history always remains new. As each generation rewrites and interprets history with its identity, history is constantly renewed. For example, the effects of the Second World War differ greatly for an individual who was old, an adult or a child in 1945 based on the memory of generations⁵ (A. Assmann, 2007).

Depiction of Recent History in Reminiscences of Third Post-War Generation Author, Marcel Beyer

A “new post-war literature” (Garbe, 2002) movement reforming the German literary discourse started with the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. The most essential element of this literary movement was the transition from the subjective perspective of the second post-war generation to a more objective perspective based on historical documentation to address the issues of the past. Historical records are a reference point for locating forgotten or previously marginalized recollections. According to Agazzi (2005, p. 22), there are three generations of writers in post-World War II German literature. The first generation wanted to forget the past but could not; the second generation still couldn't forget the past despite their extreme ambitions, while the third generation could do with it, but the past could not allow them. Political and cultural events witnessed or experienced by everyone in society give each generation a different memory frame (A. Assmann, 2006). The concept of generation encompasses approximately every thirty years, further divided into three periods. With a generational change, the memory profile of that society also changes. In Germany, the first generation, “Flakhelfer Generation”⁶,

⁵ Generational memory is what a group collectively remembers and shares based on their experiences, thoughts, and emotions. Mannheim draws attention to the concept of 'the memory of generations' in the 1930s. According to the sociologist Halbwachs, it is clear in the generational memory that individuals between the ages of 12 and 24 are open to life experience, and what happened during this period is the determinant of the general development of the individual. Every individual lives the social, cultural and historical experiences of the period whether they want it or not. The world view shared by each generation reflects the identity of the generation. (A. Assmann, 2006, p. 26).

⁶ Although he had no military obligation during Second World War, young people, usually under the age of 18, who served at the front, served as reserves (Flakhelfer) in the air force anti-aircraft batteries, and this is why this generation is defined as the Flakhelfer Generation (Bude, 1987).

included individuals born between 1926 and 1930 who witnessed Second World War. The second generation of 1968 comprised individuals born between 1938-1948. The common characteristic of the 1968 generation was the silence of their families after Second World War, influenced by materialism and their desire for innovation in society. The third generation is Generation Berlin, which includes individuals born between 1960 and 1965. This generation learned about the past by reading and listening to the stories of the Nazi period and after. On the other hand, this generation witnessed critical political events such as the fall of the Berlin Wall, the Unification of Germany, the relocation of the Government from Bonn to Berlin, and the lifting of the Iron Curtain (Bude, 1987).

New ideas replace internalized feelings and thoughts with the change of generations when the past is evaluated from the present. For this reason, it is inevitable to talk about different generations' memories in the process of generational change. Political, socio-cultural, and economic events in the past have another place in the memory of each generation. "The memories of victors and the vanquished reveal the generation's identity and memory" (A. Assmann, 2006, p. 214-215) and the period of that generation. For example, individuals who witnessed Second World War and its aftermath in Germany have different viewpoints on the Nazi period and the war. The generation of writers Martin Walser and Günter Grass, known as the first post-war writers, witnessed political events such as Hitler's coming to power in the 1933 elections, the adoption of the one-party regime, and Second World War and its aftermath Uwe Timm and Bernhard Schlink were among the second post-war generation of writers (1968 generation) who learned the narratives of witnesses of Second World War and the aftermath from their families and society. Heinz Bude (1997, p. 296) states that the second-generation comprising individuals born between 1938-1948 had to take the burden of the past in the form of traumas of their families. Therefore, this generation's writers questioned the issues that emerged from collective family reminiscences in their literary texts as an example of "communication of intergenerational cultural narratives" (Erlil, 2005, p. 254).

The third post-war generation of writers learns history from witnesses, rumours, lectures, books, movies, and television. This generation is more confident as they have no crimes against history. Still, they have a lot of responsibilities (Braun, 2013, p. 16). The third-generation authors include Marcel Beyer, Julia Franck and Tanja Dückers, who acquired information regarding the Nazi period and Second World War through reminiscence tools such as history textbooks, television and radio. Beyer explains that the past follows the third generation like a shadow in the following statement:

“When the last members of the National Socialist party died in the late 80s and early 90s, it was thought that the past would no longer be in question. However, Neo-Nazis appeared on the stage suddenly and have survived to this day. It was clear that certain past events would never go away and that there would be no end to asking questions about what had happened in the past. So we must ask: How can we explain that all these young people put the

Nazis in the foreground while they had no interest in history?"
(www.berlinerzimmer.de, 2018)

This excerpt explains why the third-generation of reminiscence writer Marcel Beyer wrote his novels with a historical responsibility during the Nazi period and after the Second World War. But to explain the "why" question, it is also necessary to know other reasons. The first reason might be the identity awareness in their individual and communicative memory as a representative of a generation that has not witnessed the war years and beyond. Secondly, the negative historical⁷ consciousness was placed in the collective memory in the 80s. Beyer⁸ was educated at the age when negative historical consciousness entered education, and collective memory in Germany and historical consciousness courses were part of universities' curricula. Thirdly, in Germany, listening to witnesses' narratives of being victims and perpetrators' right to speak also played an essential role in the author's fictionalization of historical events⁹.

"Current German memory fiction draws on historical archives, poetic imagination, and autobiographical experience. Beyer, himself a resident of Dresden, brackets off his autobiographical background, but he does not dispense with his experience. In all his novels, literary imagination goes hand in hand with an ethos of extended research and heightened interest in accurate detail" (A. Assmann, 2011, p. 206).

The examination of the life and literary aspects of the author better helps us understand why the third generation took responsibility and fictionalized recent history. As an "artisan in both novel and poetry genres"¹⁰ (Abel, 2018), Beyer spent his childhood and youth years in prosperous times of Germany. He completed his master's in Germanistic, Anglistic and General Literary Science at the University of Siegen in 1991. He also worked as a research assistant with the literary scholar Karl Riha. Such experience in academic and research environments positively affects his literary work (Ammon von, 2018). Beyer also staged a musical show called "Sprechkonzerte"¹¹, in which he presented short texts to the audience accompanied by music during his stay at Siegen University. In addition, the author conducted literary works named "Vergessene Autoren der Moderne"

⁷ The concept of "negative history" in German society describes the socio-political events between 1933 and 1945. In particular, this concept refers to the systematic slaughter of people in concentration camps during the Second World War (Koselleck, 2002, p. 21).

⁸ Besides Marcel Beyer, the third generation of reminiscence writers also includes important names such as Ralf Rothmann (1953), Tanja Dückers (1968) and Julia Franck (1970), (Herbert, 2014).

⁹ In this context, Marcel Beyer, in his interview with Jasmin Herhold, has updated the history conveyed in literary texts by entering the experiences of the perpetrators and victims of Second World War II into the archive. (www.berlinerzimmer.de, 2018). On the other hand, faster and easier access to the archive in studies on memory has affected both the field of literature and other disciplines of art, and the interest/curiosity towards the past has increased. An example of this is the increase in activities related to commemoration days in societies.

¹⁰ In addition to his novels, the author Beyer is also successful in the genre of poetry. He published his first poetry essays in the books "Kleine Zahnpasta" (1989), "Walkmännin" (1991), "Brauwolke" (1994) and "Falches Butter" (1997). The author began teaching poetry at the University of Bamberg in 2000. His poetry book "Erdkunde" was published in 2002 and "Graphit" in 2014 (Abel, 2018).

¹¹ He staged this musical in 1987 with the poet and translator Norbert Hummelt.

(1989) and "experimentelle texte" (1988-1994) during his university education. In 1988, Beyer established an archive of the Austrian poet Friederike Mayröcker in Vienna City and State Library and wrote a master's thesis¹² covering Friederike Mayröcker's biography and publications from this archive work.

An archive provides valuable information for the researcher interested in archival studies. Thus, it becomes an objective entity, a physical place contributing to the collection of documents separated from the subjective and emotional imprints. At the same time, an archive also serves as a social place (Ricoeur, 2017, p. 189-190). Thus, archival studies are one of the essential methods through which cultural memories are transmitted to later generations. During his university years, Beyer's novel "Flughunde" and "Kaltenburg" demonstrate his working method based on research and archives. Hence, these novels provide a great source of research to the readers, conveying the historical process in the background of these novels guides the reader as a sourcebook. Understanding the subjects and motifs in his novels before and after the Second World War provides a tremendous literary archive study for future generations. Although there is no story about this dark period in Beyer's family history, he deals with these issues as an intellectual writer with a sense of historical responsibility. While fictionalizing his novels, he chooses events that have not been clarified in official history, for example, the death story of the Nazi Propaganda Minister Joseph Goebbels and his family and the experiments carried out during the Nazi era. He produces his literary texts with the method of archival and memory works evaluating communicative and cultural memory¹³.

After publishing his first novel "Menschenfleisch"¹⁴ in 1991, Beyer published his second novel "Flughunde"¹⁵ in 1995. The victims and perpetrators of the war are narrated from the viewpoints of Hermann Karnau and Joseph Goebbels' daughter Helga, who portray the political and social panorama of the Nazi era. The novel describes the last years of the Second World War, from October 1940 to May 1945, with semi-fictional, semi-real elements. The deeds of corrupt scientists, far away from the actual science, who served the Hitler regime are fictionalized in the novel. In 2000, he wrote his novel "Spione". In this work, Beyer narrates the past through the grandchildren's generation. The family's younger members, Nora, Paulina, Carl and their cousins decide to investigate their family

¹² The academic world helps the author to produce different literary genres. Beyer, who is also a versatile writer, has been a literary, music critic and poetry editor for different newspapers since 1989.

¹³ The bearers of cultural memory are special. The archive structure keeps the history up to date with tools such as text and images. Unlike communicative memory, cultural memory is organized and traditional. Because there is a certain unity of values and meanings. Literary works can be given as an example to this regular system. Because literary texts, as the most important transmitter of cultural memory, update history and transfer the remembered history to future generations (J. Assmann, 2015, p. 64).

¹⁴ In the novel, since the narrator wants to be close to K., the woman he falls in love with, he develops a language system that only he and K. can understand. Thus, the novel examines both the concept of love through language and the definition of language from the perspective of a person without language skills (Rode, 2003).

¹⁵ In 2013, Beyer published this novel, about the Nazi era, as a comic book with the cartoonist Ulli Lust (1967).

background during the vacation of 1977. Old photographs found by the fourth generation of the family put a question mark on the Nazi past of their grandparents. On April 26, 1937, during the Spanish Civil War, their grandfather participated in the air strike organized by Hitler's order to the Basque city of Guernica. Meanwhile, they also learn that their grandfather has a fiancée, an opera singer, in Italy. Hence, historical events in 1937 are fictionalized in a family story concerning historical sources, as in the novel "Flughunde".

The novel "Kaltenburg", published in 2008, describes historical events such as the National Socialist period, the Holocaust, the death of Stalin with the bombing of Dresden in February 1945, the construction of the Berlin Wall, and the Unification of the Two Germany. Fleeing from the Red Army in early 1945, the Funk family took refuge in Dresden with their eleven-year-old son, Hermann. But the day they arrive in Dresden, the city is bombed, and only Hermann of the Funk family survives. He studied in Posen in the 1930s under his father's colleague and close friend, the zoologist Prof. Ludwig Kaltenburg. Working at the institute of ornithology in Dresden, Hermann learns that Kaltenburg is a member of the Nazi party. The main character suspects that aggression toward animals is applied to humans in the Nazi regime.

“The world of birds is placed in the foreground; human relations and stories are relegated to the background and are largely represented through this prism. Approaching historical trauma through the animal world and the ecosystem is a new move in memory fiction, and in Beyer's case the traumatic past is literally approached from a bird's eye view Adorno's famous dictum prohibiting the writing of poetry after and refute them: No poem after Auschwitz.¹⁶ (...) In Kaltenburg Beyer does exactly that: he represents the trauma of Dresden from the point of view of the birds affected. In so doing, however, he adopts a stance that not only is detached, hypothetical, and speculative, but also links human and animal perspectives” (A. Assmann, 2011, p. 212).

The analysis of Beyer's writings raises several questions: What is the starting point of his works? Why did he fictionalize the 3rd Reich period, Second World War, and its genocide in his novels? The answer to these questions can be explained through the development of his interest and curiosity in these issues. Beyer describes in his own words as follows:

“I became interested in the period of the Third Reich while reading a medieval novel in a city museum in Cologne in 1990/91. Newspapers of historical importance were also presented in the museum. Some news about the British military power witnessing the death of Hitler after the Second World War caught my attention, and I took note of that news. I was not planning to write a text about this news, but it affected me. Then I was intrigued by how people in society could become monsters. I started reading books about the period of National Socialism and researched the stories of

¹⁶ “No poem after Auschwitz (Adorno): what is being imagined as a “poem” here? The presumption to consider or report hypothetically or speculatively on Auschwitz from the perspective of the nightingale or the song thrush” (A. Assmann, 2011, p. 212).

doctors doing experiments on humans. I focused on this topic and thought to write about that period" (stellwerk-magazin.de, 2018).

The historical information in the individual memory of the author and his experiences in his country show his interest towards German history, as Beyer has lived in the Rhineland for twenty-three years. From 1945 until the reunification of Germany, the Russian territory began on the other side of the Rhine, and this was almost dead land. In 1989, when the crossings at the German border became easier, the wall between East and West Germany collapsed. In this process, the author's interest in German Democratic Republic (Deutsche Demokratische Republik, DDR) increases because a different language was spoken there and there was a different cultural environment. Finally, when the border between the two Germanys is lifted, Beyer witnessed the changes that will shake the whole world (www.deutschlandfunk.de, 2018). Therefore, the author has re-examined the history and wanted to question the German collective past through literary texts in the light of official history. All the material destruction, moral violence and disasters caused by the wars in the 20th century are fictionalized in the novels to question the mistakes of the past and never being repeated.

Conclusion

Marcel Beyer constructs his works by evaluating people's historical political viewpoints and events mentioned in the official history of Germany. In his novels, Beyer selects historical facts, especially during the Hitler era, and transfers them to the reader from his generation's viewpoints. As the third post-war generation writer, he has experienced the political and cultural atmosphere of the 80s and 90s, such as the end of the Cold War, the Unification of Germany, and rapid technological developments. However, Beyer fictionalizes historical events before and after 1945, which he did not particularly witness in his novels. In the case of Beyer, his literary works depict the different perceptions of shared history from the perspective of different generations. As individuals' birth dates explain the characteristics of the period and important political and historical experiences, the narrations and memories also differ. At this point, it can be said that the memory objects that have taken place in the historical consciousness and communicative memories of the third generation of writers about Second World War and the Holocaust are constructed through literary motifs and symbols.

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