

## VI THE VALIDITY OF FICTIONAL RECONSTRUCTION

The summer of 1947 saw Gesine's first deliberate attempt to reconstruct the past, and so her first recognition of the associated problems. The description of that attempt is in effect a reconstruction of a reconstruction, but provides a number of insights into the creative process which Gesine later felt herself compelled to enter on. The fourteen-year-old returned to what had been the Paepckes' home, hoping to rediscover her time there with Alexandra. She naïvely seeks not just memories, but what might be termed authentic memory; experience in fully the same broad, vibrant, yet intelligible terms as it was originally perceived. Gesine soon realizes the futility of her hopes, however, despairing of anything more than isolated stimuli from the past, which, though intense, are almost devoid of life, and certainly neither coherent nor comprehensive:

Einmal ging sie durch die Boddenwiesen, bis zum Knöchel im quatschenden Wasser,<sup>1</sup> wollte Paepckes Katen heimlich von hinten ansehen, hoffte gar nicht mehr als auf den Anstoß. Sie sah die verwilderte Hecke, den Rundlauf, ein Stück Fenster vom Boddenzimmer. Die Stahltür mit dem Maschendraht war mit Kette und Vorhängeschloß gesichert. Sie hörte eine Frau sprechen, wie man es tut mit kleinen Kindern, die schon Worte annehmen. Alles das brachte die verlorene Zeit nur wieder als einen Gedanken: Als wir . . . ; die gedachten Worte kamen nicht zum Leben. Fast jeden Abend beim Milchholen geriet sie in die Nähe des Moments, in dem Grete Nagel Alexandra und ihr ein Glas Milch angeboten hatte, jedoch frisch aus dem Euter, und die Kuh wandte ihre Augen um zu ihr. (*JT*, 1494)

The gap between Gesine's expectations and what she finds to be the case presupposes two separate, yet overlapping, ways of thinking. Firstly, thought using images, which are fragmented, and organized in no perceptible pattern. Secondly, thought formally structured as language; that is, not some linguistic representation of anterior images, but thought in the form of language, only existing by virtue of its formal linguistic organization. In order to make sense of the remembered images and sensations, Gesine needs to place them in a coherent framework. Her striving is for a depiction of the past which includes non-linguistic images, but structured in a way which only language can offer. As the sense-impressions which go to make up parts of immediate experience fade to fragmentary glimpses, Gesine is left with no formal apparatus with which to reconstruct them faithfully in their original entirety. While language is the only means available for Gesine to make a previous experience intelligible, it cannot

fully encompass such remembered sensations as were not originally grasped in linguistic terms. So in the end Gesine cannot incorporate the images which would revivify the past into the coherent organization of language. Efforts to integrate such images into a comprehensible vision almost result in their obliteration: 'Sie versuchte, beschreibende Ausdrücke zu finden für Alexandras Stimme in jenem Augenblick; da entging ihr fast die Ahnung davon' (*JT*, 1494). This is the fundamental dilemma which the process of memory engenders. Words obscure the unarticulated image, yet only with words can she construct any view of the past which consists of more than fleeting glimpses:

Abends saß das Licht von Malchen Saatmanns Hinterzimmer im Gebüsch. Sie konnte denken: Der Abend, als wir noch Brot von Malchen holen mußten, Alexander saß vornehm auf dem Sofa, angedübelt wohl, sagte zu seiner Tochter: Nun, du braves Kind? als kannte er sie nicht wieder. . . Gesine konnte es denken. Sie konnte es sich vorstellen als geschrieben. Es war nicht da. Sie war sich bewußt, daß in dieser Minute Stillstehens vor Frau Saatmanns freundlich verstreutem, heimlichem Licht der Wind stillstand, als verhalte er den Schritt. Sie fragte sich, ob sie das dereinst auch werde vergessen haben und bloß noch in Worten aufbewahrt. (*JT*, 1494–95)

Gesine thus fails in her search for authentic memory. This failure is shattering enough, it seems, to lead her at least to consider committing suicide, although in the event she makes no attempt to do so. But she does make records of the present in every way possible (as indeed Johnson did): 'Das Fotografieren ging erst mit mir an; ich war die erste von uns, die das Vergessen fürchtete' (*JT*, 937). But these are only ways of preserving scraps of what has gone before; the Paepcke experience taught Gesine that, however, inadequate, language is the only practical means of regaining even some small part of what has been lost.

That means enables Gesine to produce an extremely detailed — though inauthentic — version of the past. In her first taped letter to Marie 'für wenn ich tot bin', Gesine describes how the process of linguistic rebuilding and enlargement takes place, by citing the example of Jakob:

Dein Vater ist gestorben als er noch nicht einmal das Wort Sterben ordentlich denken konnte. Von deinem Vater weiß ich nur das Notwendigste. Und ich traue dem nicht was ich weiß, weil es sich nicht immer in meinem Gedächtnis gezeigt hat, dann unverhofft als Einfall auftritt. Vielleicht macht das Gedächtnis aus sich so einen Satz, den Jakob gesagt hat oder vielleicht gesagt hat, gesagt haben kann. Ist der Satz einmal fertig und vorhanden, baut das Gedächtnis die anderen um ihn herum, sogar die Stimmen von ganz anderen Leuten. Davor habe ich Angst. Mit einem Mal führe ich in Gedanken ein Gespräch, bei dem ich gar nicht dabei war und Wahrheit ist daran nur die Erinnerung an seine Intonation, wie Jakob sprach. (*JT*, 387).

Gesine's doubts about her version's validity are very apparent; even if the original memory does provide a reliable foundation of truth (which it is not certain to do), the edifice which subsequently arises is to all intents and purposes invented, but plausibly invented. The above passage describes literary composition, to which, although it is a method wanting in many respects, Gesine can

find no alternative. But memory, while it provides the foundation stones on which Gesine may build her story, is quite inadequate on its own to help her complete that task. Gesine's account extends back to before her memories began, so for that period at least documentary and hearsay evidence must have formed the basis of her invention. But invention, while it circumvents the deficiencies of memory, gives rise to new problems of its own: Gesine's doubts about the truth and validity of her story and her efforts to overcome such doubts are apparent in several ways.

Early in the novel Gesine realizes that to forestall accusations of untruth and potential invalidity from Marie, she must explore the potential for supplementing her knowledge, memories, and imagination, the first two of which may be unreliable, and the last in need of restriction. In a taped letter to DE she describes first Marie's views of the story, and then her own:

. . .was sie wissen will ist nicht Vergangenheit, nicht einmal ihre. Für sie ist es eine Vorführung von Möglichkeiten, gegen die sie sich gefeit glaubt, und in einem andern Sinn Geschichten. (Gefragt habe ich sie nicht.) So verbringen wir einige Abende. Mein Erzählen kommt mir oft vor wie ein Knochenmann, mit Fleisch kann ich ihn nicht behängen, einen Mantel für ihn habe ich gesucht: im Institut zur Pflege Britischen Brauchtums. (*JT*, 144)

At this point Marie still regards Gesine's 'possibilities' as matters foreign to her own concerns. Later on she will relinquish this disinterested attitude and begin to question the stories and their status as truth, having recognized their relevance to her life. Possibly Gesine had already foreseen the problem by accounting for her information sources in advance. The image she chooses corresponds to her realization that the dead past is beyond hope of revivification in the strict sense; she can only weave a coat to cover the bones of her memory, creating an unsatisfactory but better than nothing representation. The approach she describes here involves consulting contemporary newspapers, namely the *Richmond and Twickenham Times* of 1932. Other documentary sources may include photographs, diaries, and letters. But this kind of evidence can only provide the coarsest of threads with which to weave her coat, inadequate for the purpose of creating an acceptable version of the past. The threshold of acceptability will be defined as far as possible in Chapter VIII of this study; for the moment suffice it to recall the definition of how fiction may reconstitute the past which Uwe Johnson advanced with reference to *Jahrestage*: 'da handelt es sich dann um den Versuch, eine Wirklichkeit, die vergangen ist, wiederherzustellen. Und das heißt nicht etwa, eine Wirklichkeit in verkleinerter Form nachzubauen, sondern eine Wirklichkeit in allen ihren Beziehungen zusammengefaßt noch einmal möglich zu machen' (Simmerding, *Literarische Werkstatt*, p. 71).

By using photographs and textual evidence, Gesine may reconstruct with some accuracy a certain sequence of events, but elucidating why and how the life of her family influenced her own life requires the explanation of personal

motivations and interpersonal relationships. Remembering a picture she had seen of her parents' wedding, Gesine surmises the feelings of those portrayed towards each other, what they were saying, and so on.<sup>2</sup> Immediately before, she had reconstructed a picture she had never seen from what she knew of the wedding. The effect of such reconstruction emerges in literary terms as omniscient narration, which is not restricted to the time before Gesine's memory began; the perspectives of both Jakob and Frau Abs are adopted as the story progresses into the 1950s, for example. In effect, Gesine has to fill in the gaps between documentary evidence with invention. As Marie puts it in the 'Interview with Marie H. Cresspahl': 'Als Gesine nachsehen konnte in Richmond, durfte sie nicht mehr zurück zu ihm [Cresspahl] und vergleichen. Was sie gesucht hat, es wird ihr geholfen haben zum Erfinden'.<sup>3</sup> But Gesine's citing of her sources and subsequent attempts to persuade Marie of her procedure's validity show her to be aware that the advantages offered by detailed re-creation of her past in this manner are partly offset by an inevitable reduction in credibility. Nor is she spared the wider problem of omniscient narration, namely the moral objection that such an approach automatically repudiates limitation; Gesine could invent entirely at will, giving rise to an account devoid of regulation which may, as a result, be conscious or unconscious falsification. Without any means of arbitration, a claim to fictional truth is morally unsupportable. Moreover, Gesine's approach plainly does not share the mistrust of fiction's ability to elucidate motivation which is apparent in *Mutmaßungen über Jakob*. In addition, therefore, to the external constraints imposed on Gesine by both Marie and GS, her narrative has an ingenious inbuilt safeguard which both accounts for a proportion of her knowledge and delimits the extent of her invention; that safeguard being the voices of the dead.

The nature and status of these voices is not entirely straightforward, however. Gerlach equates the conversations between Gesine and the dead with the frequent snatches of conversation from the New York present (also italicized in the text), and explains them as a way for Gesine to counteract her inability to communicate in daily life: 'In dieser Situation, in der Gesine kaum ein offenes Gespräch mit einem Partner führt, gewinnt die Tendenz zum Schweigen mehr und mehr die Oberhand. Trotzdem verstummt Gesine nicht völlig. Sie führt "Gedankengespräche", fiktive Dialoge mit lebenden oder — öfter noch — mit toten Personen ihrer Umgebung. In diesen Gesprächen wird gesagt, was sonst nicht zur Sprache kommt' (Gerlach, *Auf der Suche nach der verlorenen Identität*, p. 57). Yet there are certain differences between the two kinds of dialogue. The main distinguishing feature is that the dead have access to Gesine's thoughts. They can see through her dishonesty, detect her motives, and, consequently, discuss her mental reconstruction of the past with her, allowing an exchange of views which would otherwise be impossible since that version of the Jerichow story remains physically unexpressed by Gesine. The New York voices do not

possess this facility, but appear instead to be bits of genuine discourse italicized to indicate their removal from original context. While the dialogue from New York does sometimes apparently rationalize unspoken feelings in the form of conversation such as Gesine might conceivably imagine to have taken place, there is mostly no real proof that they did not in fact occur. Furthermore, whether Gesine actually hears the voices in the New York present is not made clear except in one case, and that is negative, referring to Amanda Williams: 'Aber es ist so, ihre Stimme hören wir nicht in Gedanken' (JT, 291). It seems more likely that in general they represent actual conversations or the kind of imaginary brief mental exchange which is a familiar element of human thought processes. The voices of the dead, on the other hand, seem to arise quite independently in Gesine's mind. Gerlach says of the phenomenon 'Mit derselben intuitiven Einsicht, mit der sie sich in lebende Personen zu versetzen vermag, denkt sie sich in Tote hinein und "hört" auch deren Stimmen' (Gerlach, p. 58). But Gesine really hears the voices, involuntarily; they are no purposefully imagined constructs of the mind.

More than just echoed memories from the past, the dead communicate reciprocally with Gesine in a way which takes account of the whole *Jahrestage* world, including both the Jerichow and the New York levels. The conversations are set in the fictional present, referring back to what has gone before. They are able to argue with Gesine, confronting her with unpalatable facts about her own life, cajoling and persuading. She seems unable to control or silence them: 'Wenn nur die Toten das Maul halten wollten' (JT, 278) she says despondently at one point, expressing her inability to curb their garrulity. Gesine cannot simply ignore the voices' nagging even if she would rather be left in peace. 'Diese Ausfragerei immer! Nur weil ihr es hinter euch habt!' (JT, 581) she bursts out angrily before a renewed bout of questioning, and on another occasion: 'Ich will nichts von den Toten jeden Tag' (JT, 1178). The exchanges occur most frequently between Gesine and Cresspahl, although the 'Ausfragerei' is usually conducted by the dead as a collective entity. But other characters less close to Gesine also figure as conversation partners: Aggie Brühshaver for example (JT, 761). It is unlikely, then, that Gesine reconstitutes their identities in her mind because she has been unable to come to terms with their death. And while Gerlach's view of the voices as a substitute for deficient communication has its merits, Gesine does undeniably spend many hours a week in conversation with her daughter, and may talk to DE almost whenever she likes. Nor does Gerlach explain the voices' independent status. A further complication is introduced when it becomes clear that neither being dead nor being previously known to Gesine are apparently essential qualifications for the voices from the past.

While recounting how she was named after a woman from Heinrich Cresspahl's past, Gesine hears the voice of that woman, Gesine Redebrecht,

describing her childhood meeting with Cresspahl in 1904. Strangely, however, neither the identity nor the circumstances of the voice's owner are immediately apparent to Gesine:

*Du bist das, Gesine?* [asks Gesine Cresspahl]

*Das bin ich, Gesine.*

*1904 in Malchow am See?*

*Ich war fünfzehn. Er war sechzehn. Ich war die Enkelin von Redebrecht.*

*Gesine, bist du auch tot?* [asks Gesine Cresspahl]

*Das muß nicht sein, Gesine. Ich wär ja erst neunundsiebzig. Die Olsch, die dir 1952 auf dem Bahnhof von Wendisch Burg im Weg stand, ich könnte sie gewesen sein. Die Olsch mit dem Stock auf der Bank vor dem Altersheim in Hamburg, vielleicht war ich sie. Das kannst du doch denken, Gesine.*

*Kann ich, Gesine.* (JT, 217)

Gesine Redebrecht sketches in her own outline in Gesine Cresspahl's mind, not definitively, but suggestively, offering various possibilities for Gesine to accept or reject. The main criteria are probability and consistency; if Gesine Redebrecht fits harmoniously into Gesine's picture of the past, then she can take her place there. She may or may not be dead, for instance, since she might plausibly still be living. There is, then, a curious quality of independence coupled with a lack of definition in this case, which we might regard as an example of the genesis of the fully-formed characters who speak to Gesine in her mind. Once the fundamental features are established in this way, the figures acquire complete freedom from Gesine. One is reminded of Johnson's description to Dieter E. Zimmer of how he realized that Gesine lived in New York: 'So kam ich in New York auf die Erkenntnis, daß Gesine seit 1961 dort leben müsse, wahrscheinlich in der Nähe des Viertels, das ich bewohnte, daß sie wahrscheinlich in dem kommerziellen Viertel auf der Ostseite Manhattans in den vierziger Straßen arbeitete. Da konnte ich dann nach ihr suchen, weil ich schon genug von ihr wußte' (Zimmer, in Bengel, p. 102). The use of the subjunctive in both cases is striking; the possibility that certain parallels may exist presents itself.

That possibility is strengthened when Gesine hears the voice of Kliefoth. During their conversation he apparently detects a further presence, perhaps that of Heinrich Cresspahl, who, like Gesine with Gesine Redebrecht, cannot determine Kliefoth's circumstances:

*Denn hört mich noch einer?* [asks Kliefoth]

*Ja, Herr Kliefoth. Ich hör Sie gut. Sind Sie nun auch tot?*

*Die verlangen ja nur den einen Mitgliedsbeitrag für ihren Club. Den hab ich.*

*Wann, Herr Kliefoth?*

*So gegen Abend, wenn in New York Mittag vorbei ist. Ich denke so kommenden November.* (JT, 1177)

Although Kliefoth is obviously aware of his impending death (an awareness which constitutes the 'Mitgliedsbeitrag'), he is certainly still alive when this

conversation is held. His position is identical with that of the dead, however, for he, like them, is able to comment on the story told in *Jahrestage*, and explain his own part in it, as for instance when Gesine asks him about his enforced retirement during another dialogue:

*Aber Sie sind doch erst abgesetzt worden im April danach.*

*Dunn kem dat dicke Enn rut. Oewerall in Mecklenburg müßt ein Upsatz schrewn warn, und von mine Schaul kem kein. "Was mir mein Lehrer von Stalin erzählt hat." (JT, 1633–34)*

Finally, Gesine even places her past self in the same category as the dead: 'Ich habe gelebt in Jerichow, Mecklenburg, Sachsen, Frankfurt, Düsseldorf, Berlin. Da sind die Gegenden übrig, nicht die Toten, Cresspahl, Jakob, Marie Abs. Sie, die ich war' (JT, 1008). The common denominator is neither death nor merely an emotional closeness to Gesine, but the fact that all the voices Gesine hears figure prominently in the Jerichow story. They are akin to literary characters, whom Gesine creates by a mental process which she herself does not fully understand, but who then acquire their own independence and freedom of thought.<sup>4</sup> In that sense, therefore, they stand in the same relation to Gesine as Gesine does to GS. The impression of such a relationship is reinforced by the perplexing chapter for 12 November 1967.

The chapter comprises less than a page of italicized conversation, or rather unilateral accusation, which at first sight appears to lack continuity. The beginning is preceded by no explanation:

*Jetzt halten wir die jährliche Rede auf deinen Tod. Es kommt auf den Tag nicht an.*

*Du bist tot, verstanden. Das ist deine Sache.*

*Es ist unsere Sache, ob wir dich behalten wollen. Immer willst du gedacht werden. Es ist genug ohne dich. (JT, 286)*

The pronouns in the passage are never expressly identified, but the 'du' undoubtedly refers to Lisbeth, who died on 10 November 1938; 12 November 1967 is therefore not only Lisbeth's sixty-first birthday, but also almost exactly the twenty-ninth anniversary of her death ('Es kommt auf den Tag nicht an'). An elapsed time of twenty-nine years mentioned near the end of the passage confirms this suspicion. 'Wir' stands partly for Gesine and GS in their capacity as co-narrators of *Jahrestage*, which explains the assertion that they decide 'ob wir dich behalten wollen'; their rebukes are those of narrator to character. Although she wants to be a part of the mental reconstruction ('Immer willst du gedacht werden'), Lisbeth is not essential to the Jerichow story, which is 'genug ohne dich' (or at least so Gesine and GS maintain for the purposes of their argument). While they may be deduced with little difficulty, Lisbeth's answers to this threat of exclusion are not recorded. This imparts a disjointed effect to the passage, which throughout comprises only one side of a dialogue between Lisbeth and a collective consisting of Gesine, GS, and perhaps Cresspahl. Yet the suppression of her replies underlines the point that exclusion from the story is a sanction

which may well be employed against the accused. It is already evident that the passage, and the charges against Lisbeth, may only be understood in terms of Lisbeth as a literary character in Gesine's mental reconstruction of the Jerichow past.

Gesine/GS go on to reproach Lisbeth for her suicide, repulsing, one may infer, her protest to the effect that no help was available, with the suggestion that she was too proud to accept help, and self-centredly 'ging weg'. 'Weggehen' belongs to the Johnsonian concept of death as a journey to another place; at the very end of *Jahrestage* the dying Kliefoth is described as 'ein Mann unterwegs an den Ort wo die Toten sind' (*JT*, 1891). Again Lisbeth's defence may be surmised; she had not intended to upset anyone.<sup>5</sup> That excuse elicits the rejoinder 'Du wolltest nicht alle kränken. Ihn hast du gekränkt. Du hast mich gekränkt. Ein Kind. Wir verzeihen dir gar nicht. (*JT*, 286). This is the only time where an 'ich' which undoubtedly refers to Gesine appears, yet it is enough to specify that component of the first-person plural used in the passage. 'Ihn' refers of course to Cresspahl. As the passage continues, imagery drawn from travel is taken up once more:

*Du sollst deinen Willen haben. Wir machen die Reise. Wir träumen das Flugzeug, wir träumen den Flug, wir reisen in der Nacht, wir hängen in der Luft, wir steigen um an einem Ort, wir müssen weiter durch die Zeit, umso undurchdringlicher als vergangener. Jetzt sind wir wo du warst. Da wo du tot bist, sehen wir dich nicht.<sup>6</sup> Und nichts wie zurück über England und Irland und Neufundland und Canada nach New York mit zehn Minuten Verspätung. Dahin kannst du nur folgen mit unserer Erlaubnis. (*JT*, 286–87)*

Association of the past with flying is a concept which has already been established in *Jahrestage*; on 25 September 1967 Gesine had dreamed of a flight to Minneapolis she undertook in April 1962. Marie woke her up with the question: '— Gesine, wach auf. Wo warst du', to which Gesine replied, conflating time and space, '— Vor ein paar Jahren' (*JT*, 120).<sup>7</sup> In the passage under discussion here, the past is reached by flying through time.<sup>8</sup> This image represents the act of narration: Gesine and GS 'träumen das Flugzeug', that is, tell the story, and Lisbeth can only follow (take part in the story) with their permission. The narration, as a means of access to the past, is depicted spatially by the geographical distance between New York and Jerichow. Such representation of temporal differentiation in terms of physical displacement has corroboration elsewhere in *Jahrestage*. When, in the years after the war, Gesine tries to find her time with Alexandra Paepcke again, she looks for the 'Eintritt in die ganze Zeit der Vergangenheit, der Weg durch das stockende Herz in das Licht der Sonne von damals' (*JT*, 1494). That entrance can only be effected with words, however inadequate the result: 'Sie konnte es sich vorstellen als geschrieben. Es war nicht da' (*JT*, 1494). The image of narration as a round trip into the past and back to the present is finally confirmed by Marie's exclamation near the end of the book: '— In New York wurde ich vier. Endlich sind wir angekommen, wo

meine Erinnerung Bescheid weiß. Welcome home!' (*JT*, 1875). But whether Lisbeth may take part in the journey (and her very existence depends on participation) is a matter for Gesine, GS, and the dead to decide:

*Es gäbe dich nicht, wenn wir dich nicht mehr wollten.*

*Mach dir keine unnützen Hoffnungen.*

*Sei nicht ungeduldig. Haben wir dich seit 29 Jahren je im Stich gelassen?*

*Benimm dich. Widersprich nicht. Nicht heute. (*JT*, 287)*

There is no middle ground of control between inclusion and omission (and therefore extinction); if Lisbeth wants to join in the narrative (and her excuses show that she does) then she must not abuse her independence, according to the final stern admonition.

Further evidence appears in *Jahrestage 4* to support a view of 'die Toten' as literary characters which only exist in Gesine's mind, and therefore in *Jahrestage*, by virtue of her efforts to re-create the past through storytelling. Five weeks before departing for Prague, Gesine seeks some reassurance that the voices she hears are not indicative of mental instability or illness. Driven by a fear of being unable to carry out her duties in Czechoslovakia, and worried not only that Marie may inherit the illness (if it is one) but that the child might even need to be protected from her, Gesine writes for advice to an eminent psychiatrist in Frankfurt, who, we may deduce from the initials A.M., is almost certainly Alexander Mitscherlich.<sup>9</sup> She has forgotten when the phenomenon first began, but assumes it was at the age of thirty-two (in 1965).<sup>10</sup> She has no idea of the cause, and is powerless to affect the symptoms:

Ich will es nicht. Dennoch gelange ich (manchmal fast vollständig) zurück in vergangene Situationen und spreche mit den Personen von damals wie damals. Das ereignet sich in meinem Kopf, ohne daß ich steuere. Auch verstorbene Personen sprechen mit mir wie in meiner Gegenwart. Etwa machen sie mir Vorhaltungen wegen der Erziehung meiner Tochter (geb. 1957). (*JT*, 1539)

Gesine goes on to explain that she also speaks with dead people she hardly knew, both from the standpoint of a thirty-five-year-old and that of an eight or fourteen-year-old child. She mentions changes in perspective: 'Gelegentlich wechselt beim Hören die eigene Situation von damals, des vierzehnjährigen Kindes, in die des Partners von heute, die ich aber doch kaum habe einnehmen können' (*JT*, 1539). This is a clear enough reference to the narrative circumstances of *Jahrestage*; 'der Partner von heute' is GS. The dead are established as a functioning part of the narrative process to which they owe their existence. The letter proceeds with an illuminating account of the characters' inception in Gesine's mind:

Viele solcher imaginären Gespräche (die mir wirklich vorkommen) erschaffen sich selbst aus geringfügigen Ansätzen, aus einem Stimmtönen, aus einer charakteristischen Betonung, aus Heiserkeit, aus gleichen Wortwurzeln [*sic*] des Englischen und Mecklenburgischen. Diese Fetzen genügen, in meinem Bewußtsein die Anwesenheit einer

vergangenen Person zu erzeugen, ihr Sprechen und damit einen Zustand weit vor meiner Geburt, so den März 1920 auf dem Pachtgut meines Großvaters, als meine Mutter ein Kind war. (*JT*, 1539–40)

Gesine's explanation is very reminiscent of a comment Johnson once made concerning the creative process: 'Diese Personen sind erfunden, sind zusammengelaufen aus vielen persönlichen Eindrücken, die ich hatte' (Simmerding, p. 65). The dead are reconstituted in Gesine's consciousness too from a multitude of impressions. Even more striking is Johnson's description of how he came to write *Mutmaßungen über Jakob*. First reporting Ernst Barlach's experience of unexpectedly encountering a complete work in some mental recess while washing hands or cleaning teeth, Johnson then outlines his own experience:

Bei einer von solchen nichtigsten Verrichtungen war das Bewußtsein des Verfassers plötzlich fertig mit der gestellten Aufgabe, ohne seine Aufsicht hatte es die Lösung gefunden und warf sie ihm in die Gedanken: Er hörte seine Leute reden. Es war ein Ton, der aufbegehrte gegen eine Gewissheit, die war so unwiderruflich, die war in ein Grab getan; ihm wurde deutlich vorgesprochen, und gehorsam schrieb er nach:

Aber Jakob ist immer quer über die Gleise gegangen.

Er hörte sie reden, ihre mutlose, ihre unentwegte Gegenwehr. . . . (*BU*, 133)

Once more the parallels with Gesine can hardly be ignored. Gesine's interaction with the dead may be regarded as a model of the author's interaction with his characters, represented in its own fictional context and so comprehensible in its entirety.

Gesine's attitude to the dead, particularly her inability to control them, are recalled when Johnson reveals his own perception of Gesine:

. . . sie zu erfinden, war zwar der Anfang der Bekanntschaft gewesen; spätestens seit sie einen Namen hatte, war sie unabhängig geworden als eine Gesine Cresspahl. Was sie einmal bezogen hatte an Herkunft, menschlicher Umgebung, Ausbildung, Arbeitsstelle, alles hatte sie sogleich in Besitz genommen, sich anverwandelt als Eigenschaft und jenes unverlierbare Eigentum, das beschlossen ist in der Vergangenheit einer Person. Das machte sie zu einem ebenbürtigen Partner in dem Bewußtsein, in dem sie umging, so wirklich anwesend wie sonst Personen des Alltags, von denen Mimik, Sprechweise, Gangart erinnerlich waren. (*BU*, 299)

In their autonomy the dead are able to influence Gesine just as she influences GS. The details of that arrangement's operation, however, remain a mystery.

Whether the dead should be thought of as actual independent beings, or whether they are a rationalization of a process of creation and invention which Gesine does not fully understand herself, cannot be said. As we have seen, it seems probable that the dead fictionally represent Johnson's perception of his own literary characters. On occasion he did refer to 'die Toten' in interview: 'Und selbst die Toten sind ja in der Literatur nicht völlig beseitigt, weil sie in der Erinnerung der Personen weiterleben und durch die Vorstellung ihrer Wirklichkeit immer noch einwirken können auf Entschlüsse, auf Emotionen, auf

Zustände (Zimmer, in Bengel, p. 102). As far as Gesine is concerned, they exist in a much more real sense than Johnson allows in the above description. In answer to Gesine's enquiry, 'A. M.' offers the opinion that Gesine is unlikely to be suffering from any clinical illness other than psychological effects which began with her mother's death. The gist of his reply is reported: 'Sie (Gesine) ist auf dem richtigen Wege mit der Vermutung, hier wirkten Folgen von Verletzungen fort, von Verlusten; sie irrt sich, wenn sie da an Jakob denkt, an Cresspahl; angefangen hat es in der Tat mit der Mutter, die sich aus der Welt "ver-rückt" hat. Wir reden von dir, du Lisbeth geborene Papenbrock! Entfremdung ja, keine Wahnbildung. Nur daß sie unerledigt ist, die erste Verstoßung durch die Mutter (die zweite, die dritte)' (JT, 1856). As we shall see, Lisbeth is indeed one of the major reasons why Gesine looks to the past in the first place; the voices result from the narrative which arises in consequence. Mitscherlich does conclude with some friendly advice to see a psychiatrist in person, but makes no claim to a postal diagnosis. Schizophrenic tendencies are, however, apparent in the pronoun alternations; it is perhaps worth noting that another common symptom of schizophrenia is hearing voices in the head. Defining the precise psychological circumstances surrounding the dead's existence is, however, of slight importance, because, whatever those circumstances might be, the voices' importance lies in their independence, even if that independence is no more than a rationalization of the inventive process in Gesine's mind. In practical terms the dead exert a tangible, autonomous influence on the narrative method by virtue of their editorial power as an information source.

To turn, therefore, to the original question: the dead are clearly an important means by which Gesine can acquire sufficient data to make up the information necessary to such passages of omniscient narration as quoted earlier, in which Horst informs Lisbeth of his decision to join the *Wehrmacht*. 'Was kann ich wissen?' Gesine asks the dead, 'Was du von uns gehört hast. Was du gesehen hast' (JT, 1029). The dead may be referring to what Gesine heard from them when they were alive; indeed the appendix to volume 2, 'Mit den Augen Cresspahls', apparently consists of 'Auskünfte, gegeben unter den Umständen des Jahres 1949, auf die Fragen einer Sechzehnjährigen. Er war 61 Jahre alt'.<sup>11</sup> But there are enough instances of Gesine obtaining previously unknown information directly from the voices in her head. The Jerichow story in the autumn of 1938, for example, is narrated from Lisbeth's perspective, encompassing a multitude of detail such as that week's cinema programme in Lübeck. Facts of that kind may have been gleaned from contemporary newspapers, but a short conversation with the dead Lisbeth shows that Gesine has been tapping her for at least some of the necessary information:

*Clark Gable?*

*Und Coca-Cola gab es auch, Tochter.*

*Das hiesige? Wie deine Marie es trinkt, Tochter.*

*Hab ich es als Kind getrunken?*

*Gewiß, Tochter. Aufdem Schlüsselbuden in Lübeck, und du mochtest es nicht. (JT, 686)*

In this case the information imparted is factual, and intended by Lisbeth to show that her treatment of Gesine was not always detrimental. But more usually Gesine is interested in motives; why Cresspahl remained in England for eight months after Lisbeth returned to Germany, for instance, or why he agreed to remain in Germany rather than following the original plan of returning to England after Gesine's birth.

This arrangement presents one major difficulty. If Gesine has free access to the figures from her story in this way, why can she not simply ask them for all the information she needs? On the face of it Gesine could have been in the same advantageous position as Karsch; as a defined figure on a previous time level, who is the narrator in the fictional present, she could have had clearly limited cognizance. But that useful possibility is squandered by the apparent omniscience which Gesine enjoys by courtesy of the dead. While certain constants, such as the weather, or a quality of light, may be described without any special knowledge, other more specific matters are less susceptible of resolution through comparison with previous experience, and it is those matters which one might expect the dead to be capable of clarifying effortlessly on Gesine's behalf. The answer is that in practice, the dead do not dispense what they know freely. This imposes vital constraints on the material available to Gesine; without such restrictions, the apparently omniscient narration would violate the moral code which underlies *Wahrheitsfindung*, a moral code to which Gesine must also subject herself if her story is to have any validity as fictional truth. Thus, in the Jerichow story, what under other circumstances one might assume to be unlimited cognizance is not just theoretically limited, but shown to be so in practical terms, since the sources of information and their restrictions in turn are defined. Cresspahl, for instance, does not balk at simply refusing information which he seems to possess. Gesine, at a loss, finally asks her dead father, one may assume, just why he did stay in England for the statutory six months to work out his contract when he could easily have goaded Gosling into firing him on the spot:

*Wenn ihm um Bedenkzeit zu tun war, so hatte er sich reichlich damit eingedeckt.*

*Nich, Gesine?*

*Oder sollte Lisbeth sich besinnen können?*

*Nich, Gesine?*

*Du hattest noch was vor in Richmond, Cresspahl!*

*Nich, Gesine? (JT, 353)*

Despite Gesine's evident frustration, she is unable to elicit a satisfactory response from Cresspahl. Whatever the reasons for his refusal, it is clear that the dead do not provide unlimited access to the past for Gesine, and so do not imbue

her with complete omniscience. But that is not simply a conscious decision on their part, for they are not always capable of answering her enquiries fully. Early on in the *Jahrestage* year, on 6 September 1967, Gesine wants some information on the Papenbrock family:

*Papenbrock wurde die Pacht von Vietsen nicht verlängert, weil er nicht nach Vertrag drainiert hatte.*

*Weil alle über sein Kinderzimmer lachten.*

*Weil er nicht drainiert hat.*

*Wir wissen es nicht, Gesine.*

*Warum willst du das wissen, Gesine.*

*Wegen Cresspahl. Was wollte Cresspahl in einer solchen Familie. (JT, 59)*

Although facts seem to present less of a problem, information evidently becomes restricted as far as motives are concerned. Why things happened, cause and effect sequences, are the real object of investigation for Gesine's story. Relationships between people tend to belong to that complex. Gesine is puzzled about the peculiar relationship between Cresspahl and K. A. Pontij, but is unable simply to ask the dead Cresspahl for help: 'Könnten wir Cresspahl fragen! Der Umgang der beiden hatte, von einem Kind gesehen, oftmals die Manieren einer heftigen Freundschaft, taumelnd zwischen schlichter Treue ohne Bedingung, mörderischem Streit und innig-mürrischer Versöhnung' (*JT*, 1063). Recognizing Cresspahl's disinclination to clarify such questions, Gesine is forced to rely on her own unsatisfactory child's perspective of 1945; once more legitimate and plausible restrictions are placed on her narrative cognizance. Problems of motivation are thus left for Gesine to pursue in her attempts to understand the moral issues confronting her in New York by reference to those which her parents faced. (The solving of such problems, it will be seen, is a matter for the narrative relationship between Marie and Gesine.)

The influence of the dead extends beyond their ability to supply or withhold information, however. On at least one occasion they criticize Gesine for her treatment of the Jerichow narrative, comparing her approach to the past with the way she views her life in New York. In particular they are unhappy with the extent to which Gesine apparently provides an authoritative version of the past. Gesine mistrusts the motives of Annie Fleury in her opposition to the Vietnam war, yet as far as the Jerichow story is concerned, she seems to be on certain ground, the dead contend:

*— aber bei uns gibt es keinen Zweifel. "Papenbrock wollte nicht dem Juden Semig aus dem Land helfen und begnügte sich damit, daß er nun auch noch selber von sich wenig hielt." Punktum. Kein Wort über den Rest.*

*War es so?*

*Selbst wenn es stimmt, du erfindest das doch!*

*Das mache ich zurecht, damit es zu verstehen ist. (JT, 584)*

The sentence quoted presumably derives from Gesine's story to Marie, since it does not appear in our text. Nevertheless, Gesine makes no attempt to refute the charge of having invented the final elements which her story lacks, nor does she deny that she has been selective in her use of material. Although the dead apparently entertain no doubts about the accuracy of her conclusion, they do object that Gesine's reconstruction of motive presents speculation as fact. Gesine argues that she uses such fictive components in the interests of imposing a comprehensible form on what would otherwise be an amorphous, eclectic mass. Indeed this is the very nub of her efforts to re-create the past with the only practical means possible, namely those of fiction. Towards the end of this study it will become clear that the reproaches made by the voices Gesine hears are part of much wider moral and political issues implicit in the narrative relationships of *Jahrestage*. On this occasion, their strictures are in fact rather unfair, ironically recalling Gesine's reproach to GS over Ginny Carpenter. But in both cases an essential check is placed on the narrative authority, drawing the respective narrator's attention to the strict requirements of honesty and openness to external arbitration so essential to *Wahrheitsfindung*. The dead simultaneously expose at this early stage a problem which is to dog the narrative relationship between Gesine and Marie, and constitute an important counteractive force to the narrative's natural forward inertia; namely the degree of validity which can be accorded to Gesine's story.

All in all the dead are able, by virtue of their autonomy and facility to supply essential information (even if that facility is no more than an unconscious rationalization of the inventive process which takes place in Gesine's psyche), to influence Gesine just as she influences GS. In the same way that GS tells her story, she tells theirs, although of course GS is involved in the latter narrative process as well. The dead therefore represent an additional lateral force whose ability to modify the narrative direction is not confined to the Jerichow level. Their activity as the voice of Gesine's conscience in the New York present is a vital means of warning Gesine of the dangers of self-deception, a fault which would lead to a distorted expression of Gesine's life in New York, filtered as it is through her consciousness. The activities of the voices Gesine hears therefore effect a further distribution of narrative authority. They act as a watchdog committee to which Gesine is answerable and which she is incapable of ignoring. Any temptation on Gesine's part to be less than wholly honest with herself, even in thought, can be dealt with swiftly by the dead. While the dead are in a position to influence the means of production, Marie, as consumer, surveys the goods produced with an ever more critical eye. But before looking at the narrative relationship between mother and daughter, which works both against the narrative flow, necessitating frequent self-criticism and analysis (which prevents the story's natural inertia from running out of control), and with the narrative flow (when the story seems to be in danger of grinding to a halt), it will be necessary to distinguish the original impetus, the motive power for Gesine's story; namely her motivation to narrate.