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Walter M. Diggelmann's
Die Hinterlassenschaft and the
landscape of Swiss 'Vergangenheitsbewältigung'

Switzerland and the Second World War

In the last ten years, Switzerland has undergone a very public process of critical reassessment of its involvement in the Second World War.¹ Until 1996, Switzerland enjoyed a reputation abroad as a neutral country with a strong humanitarian tradition, 'a democratic State, standing for freedom in self-defence among her mountains', as Churchill once described it.² However, this heroic image of Switzerland was destabilized in the mid 1990s by allegations from abroad that Swiss banks and financial institutions had aided the Nazis in economic affairs during the war. In December 1996, the *Unabhängige Expertenkommission*, headed by the eminent Swiss historian Jean-François Bergier, was appointed to undertake a thorough examination of Switzerland's role in European affairs during the Second World War. The publication of the Bergier Commission's Final Report in March 2002 finally brought into the public domain what Swiss intellectuals and historians had asserted for years, namely that for the duration of the war, Switzerland accommodated and supported the perpetrators in

- 1 A research grant from Pro Helvetia enabled me to travel to the *Schweizerische Landesbibliothek* in Berne to carry out essential background research for this article. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Pro Helvetia for its generous support.
- 2 Winston S. Churchill in a letter to the Foreign Secretary, 3 December 1944, in Churchill, *The Second World War*, vol. 11: *Triumph and Tragedy* (Geneva: Edito-Service, 1967), p.316.

important, mostly financial ways.³ The report, which had taken eleven historians more than five years to complete, represents a landmark in terms of both Swiss historiography of the Second World War and public engagement with the recent past.⁴

Findings of the Independent Commission of Experts

As well as examining the activities of Swiss banks and financial institutions during and since the war, the Bergier Commission also focused on the contentious issue of the country's refugee policy during the war years. Their report asserts that in sharp contrast to Switzerland's ostensible humanitarian tradition, the country's restrictive policies towards Jewish refugees during the Second World War went against all humanitarian principles. During the first three years of the war, the federal government insisted on very rigid control of the borders, aiming to keep out as many refugees as possible. From 1942 onwards, they introduced policies that were more directly concerned with Jewish refugees; they closed the borders to those who were fleeing on purely racial grounds, refusing to recognize the Jews as political refugees. Significantly, the Commission rejected out of hand the Swiss's justification that they had no idea of the fate awaiting the Jews turned

3 Independent Commission of Experts Switzerland – Second World War (ICE), *Switzerland, National Socialism and the Second World War. Final Report* (Zurich: Pendo, 2002).

4 Jakob Tanner describes the thorny task of the Bergier-Commission: On the one hand, they were charged by the government with the clearly formulated mission of examining all documents relating to Switzerland's wartime past and offering a balanced judgement of the country's activities. On the other hand, public opinion on these matters was erratic and unpredictable, and so they were faced with the more complex issue of addressing the concerns of a Swiss public whose expectations were difficult to determine. Cf. Jakob Tanner, 'Die Historikerkommission zwischen Forschungsauftrag und politischen Erwartungen', in Jakob Tanner and Sigrid Weigel (eds.), *Gedächtnis, Geld und Gesetz. Vom Umgang mit der Vergangenheit des Zweiten Weltkrieges* (Zurich: Adf Hochschulverlag, 2002), 19–38.

away at the border; their report maintains that by 1942, news of forced labour camps and even mass extermination of Jews was widespread in Switzerland.⁵

The Final Report of the Independent Commission of Experts presents a very different view of how Switzerland had managed to survive the war unscathed from that which had endured in the general public's memory of the war years. Popular narratives of history asserted that Switzerland had escaped invasion from Germany because of the strength of the army, who knew the mountainous terrain better than any foreign militia, and because of the Swiss people's spirit of nationalism and staunch belief in their country. The Bergier Report offers an image of a country that, in an attempt to placate and mollify its powerful northern neighbour, ultimately sacrificed its own morals.

As one might expect, reactions to the findings of the Bergier Commission were mixed. The Federal Government praised it as a historic undertaking, declaring 'Die Kommission hat ein würdiges Zeichen des Erinnerns gesetzt und zu einem besseren Verständnis unserer Geschichte beigetragen.'⁶ Representatives of Jewish groups and liberal Swiss political parties expressed their support for what they saw as a historic document that would enable Switzerland to finally confront its unsavoury past. Reactions from the right were less enthusiastic; conservative parties spoke out against the Commission and its findings, arguing that the report paid too little attention to the international situation at the time and to Switzerland's vulnerable geographical position.⁷

As controversial as the findings of the Bergier Commission might be, they ought to have come as no shock to the Swiss government and its people. The Bergier Commission was not the first official investigation into Switzerland's wartime associations. As early as 1954, the Federal Government authorized Prof. Carl Ludwig to write a

5 Ch. 3 of the *Final Report* is devoted to 'Refugees and Swiss Policy on Refugees' (ICE, *Final Report*, 105–176).

6 Ruth Dreifuss and Kaspar Villiger, 'Bundesrats-Erklärung zum UEK-Schlussbericht', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung (NZZ)* (23 March 2002).

7 Cf. 'Lob und Tadel für die Arbeit der Historiker', *NZZ* (23 March 2002).

white paper on Switzerland's refugee policy during the war years.⁸ Alfred A. Häsler's independent analysis, published in 1967, also deals with the issue of refugee policy during the war. Its title, *Das Boot ist voll*, refers to a statement made by Federal Councillor Eduard von Steiger in 1942, when he justified closing Switzerland's borders by comparing the country to a life-boat that was already full.⁹ Edgar de Bonjour's monumental *Geschichte der schweizerischen Neutralität*, published in 1970, was the second government-commissioned report to deal with foreign policy during the war years, and it cemented the image of a country that was more concerned with self-protection than humanitarianism. Nevertheless, it is important to note that these important and well-researched historical contributions gained little attention in the public arena.

The recent re-evaluation of Switzerland's wartime past, as embodied in the reports of the Bergier Commission, was thus not so much an assessment of new knowledge as a reframing of facts that had been in the public domain for many years. Nevertheless, the debate surrounding the investigations of the Bergier Commission and the friction it has caused amongst the Swiss people bear witness to a country that had not really acknowledged or dealt with its past.

Alfred Häsler, writing in 1997 – thirty years after he had first brought up the issue of Jewish refugees in the public arena – describes the 'return of the repressed' memories in the mid 1990s as an inevitable consequence of his country's lack of critical engagement with its history:

Geschichte heisst sich erinnern. Wer vergisst oder verdrängt, was geschehen ist, kann nichts aus der Geschichte lernen. Ausserdem: die Geschichte holt uns immer wieder ein. Archive bringen es an den Tag und kritische, wache Zeitzeugen verstummen nicht. Das erfahren wir Schweizer zurzeit in schmerzlicher Weise.¹⁰

8 Cf. Carl Ludwig, *Die Flüchtlingspolitik der Schweiz in den Jahren 1933 bis 1955* (Berne: Herbert Lang, 1957).

9 Cf. Alfred A. Häsler, *Das Boot ist voll. Die Schweiz und die Flüchtlinge 1933–45* (Zurich: Ex Libris, 1967).

10 Alfred A. Häsler, *Wahrheit verjährt nicht, Eine Orientierung in schwieriger Zeit*, (Frauenfeld: Huber, 1997), p.7.

Walter Matthias Diggelmann, *Die Hinterlassenschaft*

Although it has taken a long time for the comprehensive view of Switzerland's wartime dealings during the Second World War to emerge, many Swiss intellectuals sought to question the myths that had become accepted as historical fact, in the absence of any real debate on the subject. Even before the end of the war, Max Frisch was composing dramas that dealt in allegorical form with the issue of Swiss involvement in the Second World War. *Nun singen sie wieder*, which premiered at the Zurich Schauspielhaus in March 1945, or *Andorra* (1961) may not be located specifically in Switzerland, but the scathing critique of Swiss society that they represent is unmistakable.¹¹

However, there is one literary work that stands out amongst others from this era, since it was the first to deal explicitly with certain issues that had been collectively forgotten or repressed in the attempt to construct a positive national narrative in the aftermath of the Second World War. In 1965, twenty years after the end of the war, the Swiss journalist and novelist Walter Matthias Diggelmann published a novel called *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, which highlighted the human consequences of Swiss wartime foreign policy towards Jewish refugees and asserted in no uncertain terms Switzerland's culpability in the deaths of the thousands of refugees who were turned away at the

11 Max Frisch, *Nun singen sie wieder. Versuch eines Requiems* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1966); *Andorra, Stück in zwölf Bildern* (Frankfurt/M.: Suhrkamp, 1961). Many critics have pointed to similarities between Diggelmann's *Die Hinterlassenschaft* and Frisch's *Andorra* (1961). See in particular Hellmuth Karasek, 'Ein kleines Andorra', *Süddeutsche Zeitung (SZ)* (13 October 1965). Also: Wilhelm Grasshof, 'Die kleinere Schuld', *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung (FAZ)* (23 November 1965) and Barbara Bondy, 'Die Schuld der Neutralen', *Die Zeit* (20 May 1966). Michael Böhler discusses in more detail the methodological differences between Diggelmann's and Frisch's texts (cf. Michael Böhler, "'Auch hierzulande reden wir vom Heute, als stünde kein Gestern dahinter.'" – Literarischer Umgang mit der Vergangenheit des Zweiten Weltkriegs in der Schweiz', in Tanner and Weigel (eds.), *Gedächtnis, Geld und Gesetz*, 145–178.

country's borders.¹² Diggelmann makes his position clear from the outset, with a candid and very polemical declaration:

Auch wenn diese Geschichte in der Schweiz spielt, ist sie weder als Anklage gegen die Schweizer gedacht noch als Exkulpierung jener Deutschen, die sich am Massenmord beteiligt haben. Als Schweizer Bürger, der in der Schweiz lebt und dieses Land beim Namen nennt, statt eine Parabel zu konstruieren, meine ich aber auch, dass die größere Schuld die kleinere nicht kleiner mache.¹³

Die Hinterlassenschaft focuses on the plight of the protagonist, David Boller, as he comes to terms with the death of his putative father, Johann, in 1956, and the disturbing facts that this event brings to light. When David is going through Johann Boller's papers after his death, he discovers that the man who he always thought was his father was actually his maternal grandfather. His mother, Marianne Boller, married a German-Jewish poet, Reuven Fenigstein, against her father's wishes. In 1936, when their situation in Germany became untenable, Marianne asked her father to take their one-year old son David and to raise him as his own child. The Fenigsteins later attempted to escape to Switzerland, along with Reuven's elderly parents; however, all four were captured by the Swiss border guards and handed over to the German police. Johann Boller never heard from his daughter again.

Johann Boller's legacy to his grandson is a collection of letters, notes, newspaper articles, documents and other forgotten papers, all of which prove that Switzerland was responsible for handing Jewish refugees over to the German police. David is shocked to learn that his real parents lost their lives at the hands of the Nazis, but even more appalled to find out that the Swiss authorities were complicit in their murder. How could neutral Switzerland, with its reputation as a safe refuge for those in need, have sent his parents to their death? Burdened by this new knowledge, David begins to reassess everything he has believed in – his family, his country, even his own identity.

12 Walter M. Diggelmann, *Die Hinterlassenschaft* (Zurich: Edition 8, 2003). The novel was first published by Piper in 1965 and subsequently by Limmat in 1983.

13 *Ibid.*, p.20.

Diggelmann's argument in *Die Hinterlassenschaft* is unequivocal: His country and its people may not have been directly responsible for the Holocaust, but their unwillingness to defy the Germans and help the Jews during the war means that they were at least in part to blame for countless deaths. Diggelmann's novel distances itself from the parable form in a very deliberate way, and this can be understood as a veiled criticism of other writers' reluctance to deal with this sensitive issue directly.¹⁴

The story of David Boller-Fenigstein is not just a damning indictment of Swiss society during the war years; Diggelmann also raises some important questions about his country in 1965. In the months following Johann Boller's death, David embarks on a frenzied search for answers to his questions about his country and its people. However, everywhere he turns, he is met with hostility, defensiveness and resentment. 'Lass das. Du kannst nichts rückgängig machen',¹⁵ he is told, or 'Ihre Fragen sind sinnlos. Damit drehen Sie das Rad der Geschichte nicht zurück.'¹⁶ In his search for truth, he finds only a general sense of passivity. Ulrich Frauenfelder, a right-wing politician who was one of the foremost activists against Jewish refugees during the war years, points to the underlying reasons for this attitude:

Aber lassen wir das, David, lassen wir die Vergangenheit ruhen. Immerhin hat uns die Geschichte in allen Teilen Recht gegeben. Wir sind nicht in den Krieg hineingezogen worden, wir haben nicht Hunger gelitten, und das verdanken wir zu einem guten Teil dem Umstand, dass wir Leute an der Spitze unseres Landes hatten, die genau wussten, wie mit den Nazis umzugehen war.¹⁷

The fact that Frauenfelder is not the only character to caution David against disturbing the status quo suggests that his attitude is one that is shared by many of his fellow citizens.

14 Hellmuth Karasek puts the case thus: 'In Diggelmanns andorranaher Romanhandlung steckt der (halb) ausgesprochene Vorwurf, daß die Erfindung einer Modellsituation, daß die Verwandlung eines Stoffs zur Parabel statt der größeren Allgemeinverbindlichkeit eine gesteigerte Unverbindlichkeit einhandle' (Karasek, 'Ein kleines Andorra', *SZ* (13 October 1965)).

15 Diggelmann, *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, p.31.

16 *Ibid.*, p.47.

17 *Ibid.*, p.150.

As he tries to piece together his own and his country's history, David is confronted with an image of Swiss society in 1956 which has not learnt from its involvement in Nazi crimes, and the truth of the present is just as horrifying to him as the truth of the past. Where once the Jews were the object of society's anxiety and hatred, Switzerland of the Cold War era is in the throes of anti-Communist campaign which is fuelled by similar sentiments and whose consequences, Diggelmann suggests, are just as devastating. The aggressive Russian intervention into the popular uprising in Hungary in 1956 intensified anti-Communist feeling in Switzerland, and Diggelmann's novel describes a media witch-hunt against a Communist, Dr. Alois Hauser. Ulrich Frauenfelder, the same official who once canvassed against allowing Jewish refugees to enter Switzerland, is also at the forefront of this campaign. In making this connection, Diggelmann makes a more sinister point about Swiss society, and one which he expresses in unambiguous terms:

Die antikommunistischen Brandstifter von heute sind weitgehend identisch mit den faschistischen Brandstiftern des Antisemitismus der dreissiger Jahre und der sogenannten 'Vaterländischen' (lies Anpasser) der vierziger Jahre.¹⁸

In this way, Diggelmann's text is a challenge to Swiss society on two counts: it calls for Switzerland to confront her sins of the past and to acknowledge that the past is still very much alive in the present.

Diggelmann indicates that the anti-Communist tendencies in Swiss society and the struggle to exclude any non-conformist elements have at their core the same bigoted tendencies that led to the murder of millions of Jews during the Second World War. The marginalisation of known Communists in 1956 bears more than a passing resemblance to the persecution of the Jews in the 1930s and 1940s. At one point in the novel, David remarks: 'Ich habe Frau Hauser sofort erkannt, [...] sie ging, scheu und gedemütigt, als trüge sie den Judenstern... Berlin 1938... Essen 1938... der 16. November

18 Bernhard Wenger, 'Nachwort: Zur Rezeptionsgeschichte von Diggelmanns Hinterlassenschaft', in Walter M. Diggelmann, *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, 269–287; p.273.

1956...'.¹⁹ Moreover, in his account, Diggelmann makes a direct comparison between the Thalwil Pogrom and the *Reichskristallnacht*.²⁰ In repeatedly connecting the anti-Semitism of the 1930s and the anti-Communist tendencies of the 1950s and 1960s, Diggelmann suggests that the Swiss people will not manage to extricate themselves from the problems of the present until they begin to confront the past.

Structure and form of Diggelmann's *Hinterlassenschaft*

Diggelmann's novel was ground-breaking in terms of its portrayal of a topic that had, up until 1965, only been hinted at in Swiss literature. On a formal level, the text also integrates a number of innovative elements. Although *Die Hinterlassenschaft* is primarily a work of fiction, it incorporates quotations from historical sources, official documents and newspaper reports in documentary style. Diggelmann quotes extensively from the Ludwig report of 1957, letters from the Swiss Ambassador in Berlin, police directives, political speeches and newspaper articles from the 1930s and 1940s. The fictional story of the pogrom against Alois Hauser is also based on newspaper articles that dealt with a vicious campaign against the well-known Communist Konrad Farner.²¹ This authentic material suggests that the author intended his novel to be read as a contribution to a wider historical debate. By interweaving the fictional story of David Boller with genuine historical texts, the author emphasizes that the story of Jewish refugees turned away at the border is both personal and political, both historical and contemporaneous.

Another innovative aspect of *Die Hinterlassenschaft* is the shifting narrative perspective. Each chapter is written from a different character's perspective, allowing us an insight into the many different characters who are involved in David's fate – the lawyer, Walter

19 Diggelmann, *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, p.199.

20 Cf. *Ibid.*, p.206.

21 Cf. Wenger, 'Nachwort', p.272.

Bächtold, who served as the sergeant of a border regiment during the war and feels guilty about the refugees that his troop turned away at the border; David's mentor and colleague, the journalist Robert Kaul, who feels that he has sold his soul by going to work for Ulrich Frauenfelder at the *Demokratische Presseagentur*; even Frauenfelder himself, the right-wing government official who is known for his anti-Communist speeches in public and his anti-Semitic sentiments in private.

The characterisation of Frauenfelder is perhaps one of the weaknesses of this novel. From the outset, he is presented in very black and white terms, as the real villain of the piece. He is portrayed as being racist, devious, sly and prepared to take advantage of the weak. Due to his position as Head of the *Demokratische Presseagentur*, he is in a position to sway public opinion, and he uses his influence to convince the general public of his own right-wing political beliefs. Furthermore, certain details about his past – that he was once a member of the Communist party himself before turning against them, and that Alois Hauser, the famous Communist who is the focus of his media campaign, is actually his half-brother – serve only to present him in a more negative light.

Other characters in the novel are presented in more positive terms, and it is noteworthy that they are convinced by David's powerful ideas and passionate rhetoric. Walter Bächtold, the lawyer who spent the war years turning away Jewish refugees at the Swiss border, is all too aware of the truth in David's claims. His conversations with David force him to confront his own wartime past. In a conversation with his brother, he remarks: 'Wie kommen wir dazu, uns über die Naziverbrechen zu empören, wo wir eigenhändig Juden ihren Mördern ausgeliefert haben?'²² Bächtold's decision to support David financially is evidently motivated by his desire to make amends for his own sins of the past.

Similarly, Robert Kaul is swayed by David's fervour for his cause. In his work at the press office, Kaul is Frauenfelder's right-hand man, but he has become increasingly uncomfortable with Frauenfelder's prejudice and intolerance. His conversations with David

22 Diggelmann, *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, p.117.

prompt him to face his own demons. After their first encounter, Kaul notes:

Ich glaube, in diesem Augenblick geschah es. Nur weil David etwas ausgesprochen hatte, was schon all die Jahre an mir genagt hatte: Ich führte ein Doppelleben, und ich wusste, dass ich da aus eigener Kraft nicht mehr herauskäme. Ich glaube, in diesem Augenblick geschah es, auch wenn ich mir dessen noch nicht bewusst war: David Boller-Fenigstein wird dir helfen können.²³

Kaul responds to David's passion by promising to help him in his fight against Ulrich Frauenfelder. He furnishes him with newspaper articles, speeches and other evidence of Frauenfelder's dealings with the Nazis and his actions against the Jewish refugees during the war. Kaul is convinced of David's mission and he tries to help him in his own small way.

Like Frauenfelder, these two characters are more caricatures than fully-developed characters.²⁴ However, they have a functional significance in the novel that goes beyond the aesthetic. In Bächtold and Kaul, we are presented with positive role models, honourable individuals who realize their own failings and attempt to put them right. Implicitly, Diggelmann calls on his countrymen to be like Kaul or Bächtold, to acknowledge their sins of the past, but to recognize that they can and should make an effort to make good their wrongs now.

Nowhere is Diggelmann's political programme in writing his novel clearer than in David's last impassioned speech before his death:

Wir Schweizer [...] müssen endlich erwachen! Auch wir haben eine unbewältigte Vergangenheit, haben Schmach und Schande auf uns geladen. Es ist Zeit, dass wir damit ins Reine kommen. Was in T. geschehen ist, und es ist geschehen, war nur möglich, weil bei uns noch der gleiche Geist vorherrscht wie in den dreissiger und vierziger Jahren.²⁵

23 Ibid., p.63.

24 Cf. Michael Butler, 'The problem of "Heimat": Aspects of the "unbewältigte Vergangenheit" in German-Swiss Literature', in Gerhard P. Knapp and Gerd Labrousse with Anthony Visser (eds.), *1945–1995. Fünfzig Jahre deutschsprachige Literatur in Aspekten* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 141–159; p.152.

25 Diggelmann, *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, p.250.

David's message to his fellow Swiss citizens is well-informed and well-intended, but it is not well-received. His countrymen react to his passion by turning on him in a brawl which eventually brings about his death.

Reception of *Die Hinterlassenschaft* in 1965

In 1964, when Diggelmann first approached his Swiss publisher Benziger with his new novel, the matter of Swiss wartime activities was still very much a taboo topic in Swiss society.²⁶ The Ludwig report had not provoked any real debate in the public arena, and Alfred Häsler's examination of Swiss refugee policy and Edgar de Bonjour's report on Swiss neutrality had not yet been published. Thus, it was clear to all concerned that *Die Hinterlassenschaft* would ruffle a few feathers. However, Diggelmann was more concerned with this novel than with any other work. He worked longer and harder on it than on his other novels, and he reworked it a number of times at the request of his publisher to try to make this incendiary material more palatable to the Swiss public.²⁷

Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the political climate at the time, Diggelmann had great difficulty finding a publisher for *Die Hinterlassenschaft*. In late 1964, Benziger declined to print such a provocative novel, returning it to the writer with the categorical statement: 'Wir publizieren keine politischen Pamphlete'.²⁸ When no Swiss publisher would take on the work, Diggelmann was forced to look further afield. After the left-wing, liberal newspaper *Zürcher Woche*

26 For a more detailed account of the reception of Diggelmann's novel in 1965, see Bernhard Wenger's 'Nachwort', first included in the 1983 edition of the novel.

27 Klara Obermüller, 'Vorwort der Herausgeberin' in *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, pp. 7f.; p. 7.

28 'Diggelmann: Umherziehende Person', *Der Spiegel* (17 November 1965), p.147.

published excerpts in July 1965, the novel was finally published in its entirety by Piper in Munich the following October.

Literary critics were in general very negative in their response to *Die Hinterlassenschaft*. Many complained that the fictional elements of the story undermined the authenticity of the documentary evidence included in the narrative and that the frequent use of montage made the novel difficult to read.²⁹ Diggelmann was dismissed as a bad writer, who lacked skill and talent, and his novel was written off as 'kompositorisch und dokumentarisch schlampig' and 'literarisch unqualifizierbar'.³⁰ Even reviewers who praised Diggelmann's courage for tackling such a controversial topic criticized the novel's 'literarische[] Mängel'.³¹ However, for the most part, the reviewers focused only on the writing and avoided discussing the inflammatory content of the novel.

Also those critics who took into consideration the subject matter of Diggelmann's literary endeavour were not always positive in their appraisal. Some critics highlighted the overtly political tone of the novel, complaining that the fictional plot was little more than a framework for the writer's political rant.³² Diggelmann's finger-pointing hit a raw nerve with some of the critics, as the review of the novel by 'r.t.' in the *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* indicates:

Diese Vergangenheit zu bewältigen ist in der Tat ein Auftrag. Der schwierigste wohl, den uns die Geschichte unseres Staates bisher aufgegeben hat. Und vielleicht kann er nur von denen redlich noch erfüllt werden, die in der Reife ihrer Jahre mithandelnd und mitleidend dabei waren.³³

In particular, the author's two-pronged attack on both anti-Semitism in Switzerland during the war and anti-Communist feeling in post-war

29 Cf. for example rt., 'Geschichte oder Geschichten?', *NZZ* (16 November 1965); Grasshof, 'Die kleinere Schuld', *FAZ* (23 November 1965); Karasek, 'Ein kleines Andorra', *SZ* (13 October 1965); Reinhardt Stumm, 'Er kämpfte mit den Waffen der Literatur', *Tagesanzeiger* (5 July 2002).

30 Bondy, 'Die Schuld der Neutralen', *Die Zeit* (20 May 1966).

31 Cornelius Streiter, 'Die Hinterlassenschaft', in *Israel-Forum*, 3 (1966), p.9.

32 Cf. Streiter, 'Die Hinterlassenschaft', p.9.

33 rt., 'Geschichte oder Geschichten?', *NZZ* (16 November 1965).

Switzerland struck the critics as excessive; according to one reviewer, '[Diggelmann] hat ein zweites Thema an das erste gebunden und damit das Buch ruiniert.'³⁴

Some literary critics disregarded the novel as the author's therapeutic attempt to break free from his own tortured youth.³⁵ Diggelmann had had a very unhappy childhood and later spent time in a psychiatric clinic. He admitted himself that his writing helped him to overcome his own frustrations.³⁶ By emphasizing the troubled psyche of the author, literary critics found a way both to diminish Diggelmann's attack on his country and to avoid engaging with the incendiary content of the novel.

The reading public were even less forgiving in their reception of *Die Hinterlassenschaft*. This cannot have come as a surprise to Diggelmann, since the negative reaction of his fellow Swiss citizens is already woven into the narrative of *Die Hinterlassenschaft*. David is continually warned against delving too deep into his country's past, and in particular against publishing his findings. Old Bucher's advice to David has a resonance that goes beyond the limits of the printed page:

du willst ihnen ins Gesicht schreien, was sie getan haben, und dass sie mitschuldig sind. Aber sie werden dich nicht verstehen. Sie werden sagen, du verleumdest sie, sie werden sagen, er ist ein Kommunist und will unsere Freiheit untergraben, sie werden sagen, er ist ein Verräter.³⁷

There can be no doubt that Diggelmann was aware of the possible consequences of his actions, and David's answer to Bucher in the narrative also reveals something about Diggelmann's own attitude to this prospect: "‘Wenn es so ist’, antwortete David, ‘dann ist es so, ich wehre mich nicht.’"³⁸

34 Bondy, 'Die Schuld der Neutralen', *Die Zeit* (20 May 1966).

35 Cf. Stumm, 'Er kämpfte mit den Waffen der Literatur', *Tagesanzeiger* (5 July 2002).

36 Ibid.

37 Diggelmann, *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, p.239.

38 Ibid.

The reaction of the public was swift and severe. In the aftermath of the publication in the *Zürcher Woche*, the newspaper received a flood of letters from their readers, some praising Diggelmann's courage, but just as many objecting to his uncompromising claims.³⁹ Personal attacks on Diggelmann's character soon followed. The Berne historian Walther Hofer spoke out publicly against *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, describing the novel as 'böswillig, destruktiv, manchmal auch direkt verleumderisch, überheblich, unbelastet von Sachkenntnis' and the writer as 'einen dieser literarischen Gartenzwerge'.⁴⁰ The publisher Alfred Rascher denounced him publicly as a former SS-serviceman, a claim that he was later forced to withdraw.⁴¹

In an ironic twist, life began to imitate art to an extent that must have surprised even Diggelmann himself. In the months following the publication of *Die Hinterlassenschaft*, the media conducted a veritable witch-hunt against the novelist. This campaign, not unlike the campaign against Alois Hauser that Diggelmann had depicted in his novel, painted him as 'tollkühner linker Aufklärer', a 'Nestbeschmutzer' and even an 'Alkoholiker'.⁴² The public campaign against the writer culminated on 22 October 1965, when Diggelmann was prohibited by the Berne authorities from taking part in a public reading from his work.⁴³ Ultimately, the public antipathy towards Diggelmann and his provocative book destroyed the writer's reputation.

Although the controversy surrounding Diggelmann's *Die Hinterlassenschaft* meant that the book remained at the forefront of public consciousness for a year or so after its publication, the work itself was

39 The *Leserbriefe* published in *Zürcher Woche* (*ZüWo*) in the weeks following the publication of the excerpts from *Die Hinterlassenschaft* give some indication of the conflicting responses to Diggelmann's texts.

40 Wenger, 'Nachwort', p.276f. Wenger also makes the interesting observation that Diggelmann incorporated Hofer's criticisms into his book, allowing Frauenfelder to speak the same words against David (*Die Hinterlassenschaft*, p.254).

41 Wenger, 'Nachwort', p.277f.

42 Charles Linzmayer, '...dann reisse ich wenigstens eine meiner Seelen aus ...', *Der kleine Bund* 149 (29 June 2002), 1–2.

43 Wenger, 'Nachwort', p.279f. Cf. also Stumm, 'Er kämpfte mit den Waffen der Literatur' *Tagesanzeiger* (5 July 2002).

soon relegated to the realm of forgotten papers – not unlike the forgotten documents that the writer features in his novel. Ultimately, the novel and the issues it raises would become what Roman Bucheli calls a ‘Zeugen einer doppelten Verdrängung’:

verdrängt wurde die Erinnerung an eine jüngste Vergangenheit, die der Schweiz zwar, wie es Dürrenmatt formulierte, das Heldentum ersparte, die aber andererseits einen Mythos hervorbrachte, der die Gründe dieser Verschönerung verklärte. Verdrängt aber wurde die Thematik auch aus der Schweizer Literatur: die rührigen Journalisten und Historiker, die fortan zwischen Zürich und Jammers in hinterlassenen Papieren Aufklärung über ihre eigene oder die Schweizer Geschichte suchen, können nur notdürftig verschleiern, dass die Schweizer Literatur selber am Erinnerungsdefizit leidet, das sie beschreibt.⁴⁴

Die Hinterlassenschaft in the post-Bergier era

The events of recent years have shown that Diggelmann’s assessment of Switzerland’s involvement in the Second World War and her refugee policy was accurate. However, Diggelmann was ahead of his time, and Swiss society in 1965 was not yet ready to confront its wartime past. Thus, Diggelmann’s controversial novel has itself become a historical document on two counts: Firstly, the story of David Boller-Fenigstein and the many forgotten papers that Diggelmann integrates into his narrative bear witness to a past that had been collectively forgotten or repressed in the post-war era. Secondly, the book itself, and particularly the harsh reaction of the media and the reading public to its incendiary content also reveal much about the political climate in Switzerland in the 1960s.

Recent events in Swiss society have brought about a reconsideration of the past and a corresponding re-evaluation of those literary texts that deal with the Second World War. The Swiss publisher Limmat’s decision to print a new edition of Diggelmann’s *Die Hinterlassenschaft* in 1983 already points to fundamental changes in the

44 Roman Bucheli, ‘Blinder Spiegel?’, *NZZ* (21 March 1997).

political climate by that time. Although there are no documents to reveal the motivation behind the publication of the novel that caused such a furore in Swiss society in the 1960s, the reasonable sales figures for this edition suggest that by 1983, the reading public had become more open to contentious questions such as Swiss refugee policy during the war.⁴⁵

The recent publication of *Die Hinterlassenschaft* by the Swiss publishing house Edition 8 in 2003 comes at a crucial time in Swiss history, when the Final Report of the Bergier Commission has laid out the facts of Swiss wartime activities and proved that Diggelmann was right to point to the blind spots in Swiss cultural memory of the war. In the post-Bergier era, there is a wider acceptance amongst the Swiss population that Switzerland's dealings with Nazi Germany were not always above suspicion, and this in turn has opened up a cultural space within which novels like *Die Hinterlassenschaft* are acknowledged and valued. This edition of the novel has not had the same impact on Swiss society today; there have been no letters to the newspapers, no condemnations of the writer and equally, no praise for the new insights that the novel offers. Rather, this publication can be seen as a tribute to a writer who braved public condemnation and spoke out for what he believed in.

Conclusion

It is only now, more than sixty years after the end of the Second World War and more than forty years after the original publication of Diggelmann's *Die Hinterlassenschaft* that we can look back and recognize the pivotal role that it plays in Swiss literature of the post-war era. Despite its formal shortcomings, the novel is an important text, in that it laid the groundwork for literary works to come. It was the first work to openly criticize Switzerland's treatment of Jewish

45 According to the publishers, approximately 3000 copies of this edition were sold. My thanks are due to the Limmat Verlag for answering my questions.

refugees during the Second World War and the first to point to the blind spots in collective memory of the war. Diggelmann's outspokenness and candour won him no favours, as the reception of the book shows; nevertheless, his contribution to Swiss literature and society of the post-war era cannot be underestimated. Although it may have been inconceivable in 1965 that this novel would stand out as a testament to its time, history has proved that, as Roman Schürmann asserts, 'Die Hinterlassenschaft gehört zu den wichtigsten hiesigen Romanen des letzten Jahrhunderts.'⁴⁶

46 Schürmann, 'Spannende Reise in die eigene Vergangenheit', *Zuger Presse* (6 January 2004).