

**FILE NAME: 090617-Session-4-Ulrike-Draesner Safra****Speaker Key:**

I Interviewer

UD Ulrike Draesner

00:00:00

I Okay. Good afternoon everyone. It's my great pleasure, at this point in the afternoon, to introduce the writer, Ulrike Draesner, to you, who is going to read and to demonstrate in multi-media fashion. Ulrike Draesner was born in Munch, she read law, English and German literature as well as philosophy there, and also at Oxford. And she worked as a lecturer at the Institute for German Philology, from 1989-1993. In 1992, she received her doctorate for a dissertation on the middle high German romance, *Passivale\**. And soon after that, she quit her academic career in order to work as a full-time author, so she's sort of moonlighting back in academia doing this conference, and indeed during her current life in Oxford. She's a poet, a writer of long and short fiction and cultural essays. She's made numerous appearances in anthologies and magazines, she's published five major poetry collections, five novels, two of which were nominated for the German book price. Three collections of stories and two collections of essays, and also as I've suggested, she works in multi-media, her multi-media collaborations involve ... I'm sorry, include videos, operas and space poems. She's been awarded poetic readerships at German and international universities, and received numerous literary prizes, most recently the Nicholas Borne prize for literature in 2016.

Her cross-media projects with other artists merge literature with sculpting, performing arts and music. She's a regular guest at international literary festivals as well. And her work has been translated into numerous languages, although not yet, unfortunately for us, the work she's going to be talking about most today, I think. She was a visiting fellow at Oxford working with Karen Leader, the Head of the Mediating Modernity Project on the topics of bilingualism, poetry and translation, and negotiating identities and writer. Sorry, as a writer in residence rather at the Faculty for Medieval and Modern Languages at the University of Oxford, and she's currently a poet in residence at New College, Oxford until the autumn.

She's going to talk today about her latest novel, which in German is [0:0:3:06 inaudible], which I think translates roughly as *Seven Jumps from the Edge of the World*, though has an even better translation in the version of it that is being translated at the moment. Never try this at home, and that's what she's going to talk about today, the title of the talk is, *How I was forced to write a novel on forced migration and forced the novel to migrate*. So, please join me in welcoming Ulrike Draesner.

[APPLAUSE]

0:03:44

UD

Hello everybody and thank you very much for this wonderful introduction, including the commentary on the translation, [0:03:56 inaudible] a potential English book, Never try this at home, only occurred to me about a week ago. I brought along this novel, which is quite what they call in Germany, call it a break. It is very thick isn't it? You would assume it has about 800 pages, it doesn't have 800 pages, only 550 and 5. I'm going to talk about it, and I want to start with a quote. 'On a good day my hat could cope with the [0:04:31 inaudible] from the Alps. The adverts curled around the pillar reassured me, and the story went like this.' We had saved one child, saved our lives through our pension. We lived in a landscape we had known since childhood, as somewhere to go on holiday, not in some sort of exile weakened and eroded by the climate. We had made friends, the city had grown around us, and [0:04:58 inaudible] gossip and scandal. Crucially, we were rid of all of the members of mothers turning her clan who had once merrily raked us through the mud. We spoke the same language, and there were many people with whom we shared our story. I would never have to go to war again, that much was clear. On nights like that, I slept without remembering almost well. When the [0:05:28 inaudible] a little harder, the story went like this, we had lost a child, lost our inheritance and all our graves, lost a piece of ourselves, a rootedness in our past, an anchor in stability and ownership, our faith in being allowed to exist. The landscape we lived in was good for holidays but remained a stage set. The people around us spoke the wrong dialect followed the wrong religion. We were alone. It was everyman for himself, and our story could not be shared. I'd never have to go to war again, but the war wasn't over. We sat in an oven, sleep did not come easily. Outside the front door, a fire was burning but nobody saw but us.

The voice you just heard belongs to Hana Schulman, and what he says here, he said in the early 70s when he looks back onto his life. His life, actually, spans the 20<sup>th</sup> century in Middle East Europe. He, Hanas is one of the nine narrators of this novel, that's one of the reasons why it's fairly thick. Seven leaps from the edge of the word, never try this at home. It's just the novel I never wanted to write. After my first novel, I was sued by an aunt. The content of the novel was biographical, but I had taken care to disguise everybody which didn't help. Law nowadays is very much in favour of protection of personal rights, and lawyers trying to console me by making it quite obvious and clear to me that Thomas Munn couldn't publish his novel, [0:07:29 inaudible] in contemporary German. It shouldn't help me at all. There was a stronger second reason for not wanting to write the novel, [0:07:42 inaudible]. I definitely didn't want to return to stories, I had heard all of my childhood. Heard and had become tired and wary of them and learnt to shone stories of flight and loss. Something seemed to be all wrong about in them. They were told by Germans, especially my German fatherly family. So, my grandparents and their friends, and partly but very rarely by my father who had been at the age of 14 in 1945. Something was wrong about them. Shame, guilt, I suppose so. But there was something else in the stories, and that meant that we had bargains struck up at the time because as I now know, a bargain it was, these grown-ups were dealing in memories. And they handled them down onto us, and these memories did not only refer to things which were said, they mostly referred to things which

couldn't be told. They were, perhaps, hinted at. They were the remainders of sentences which weren't finished. They were emotionally past onto us.

0:09:09

Someone had to take it all on. In case of our family, it was me, as you can easily guess from the existence of the novel. But all this was quite clear to me before I even started writing, and I think it was a very strong reason for me not to want to write the novel in the first place. I saw that if I did it, I would be acting as the memory of those long dead. I would be fulfilling a family role which I never had wanted to take on in the first place. And I saw all of this and didn't like it, and I didn't know what to do, and how to deal with this conflict, and I tried to put up some resistance. This resistance, for example, took the form of me signing a contract with my publishers for the next novel, about an entirely different topic a man who tries to swim the English Channel, but I couldn't write this novel, I really tried. In the meantime, something else had happened, and I call it, 'Lilly had appeared.' Lilly, now ... sorry. I'm trying to show you this, something on the website if I can click it finally right. Now, I found out what you do. I want to go down. This is so slow. I want to show this.

The novel tells the story of two families. One is German and one is Polish, I'm coming back to this in a minute. Here you see Lilly and her position in the family tree. In a way, and I'm going to talk about this as well in a bit more depth. This novel relies on a part of the family group of my father's family. Lilly would be in the position of my grandfather, my paternal grandmother, sorry.

This figure, or character, had come up in writing one afternoon when I didn't have any intention of writing about her. And I recognized the situation from which this character was talking. I recognize it as a situation my grandmother had sometimes fleetingly mentioned when she arrived in [0:12:23 inaudible]. They had been told to go to retreat to a certain house in a village, but the train stopped five kilometers before that because [0:12:33 inaudible] was broken anyway, and they had to walk these last five kilometers on a hot July day. And I, all of a sudden, had found myself in that situation, writing and giving Lilly a voice, which definitely wasn't my grandmother authentic voice. This was quite clear from being as well, this person was much more outspoken and in a way, seemed to be to me much more, clever, and linguistic than my grandmother would ever have been. But still, I just didn't know what I had produced and tried to forget about it. It was about 20 pages which are now, the beginning of the fourth chapter of the novel, and they, in the end, turned out to be it's nucleus, but at that time, and I'm talking about a time at about 2003 or 2002, I just tried to forget all about it and signed this other contract.

Still, the topic didn't want to be suppressed and after a while I found myself unable to write anything else, and I knew I would probably have to tackle it. There was another obstacle now in the way, and this was very simple and straightforwardly called, 'my father'. I knew that I would want to tell the story of a man, the life story of a man whose life would be

modelled on my father's life. And I didn't know what to do with this proximity. My relationship with my father has always been a difficult one, an ambivalent one, and I just told myself, I saw two alternatives. One was to wait until my father died, and the other one was, to tackle the project right now and then to talk to him about it and do it openly. And I decided, I went for the second option, fortunately enough because I found it would be so weird just to be sitting there and waiting whether would my father would die with the book project. I couldn't possibly do it. I'm glad I haven't. And it dawned on me at the time as well that these would be two very different books.

0:14:53

So, I told him that I was going to write a book about the family story at least in part. And to my surprise, he didn't object. He didn't even seem to notice. There was no reaction at all. Now, many years later and after a lot of research into post traumatization and post-memory and all of these things, I have at least partly the illusion that I understand why. He must have been very surprised and obviously he couldn't react to it at all emotionally than I would take this on.

And yet there was a fourth problem. For this I want to go very shortly back in the literary context of dealing with this topic of false migration of German's after the second World War, in German contemporary literature. As you can easily imagine, we had, as you know, we had a lot of literature about the years, 1933-45 and the generations after, especially the generation of 1968 coming to terms with their parents and their involvement or behaviour during the Nazi regime. At the turn of sixth century, [0:16:20 inaudible] started a new discussion and new literary vein of production on the topic of, let's call it, 'German Suffering'. So, the German population as refugees, for example, are bombed and so on. And quite a number of novels has been written since, especially by third generation people and they relate their stories of their grandfathers or grandmothers. And in this, a phenomenon has come up which I call the grandfather polishing, or grandfather shine and shrine. So, many of these novels [0:17:04 inaudible] have been excused of, unconsciously most of them, just recreating very noise images of grandfathers. Which is no wonder because what you obviously find what you are in danger of, if you're trying to produce a text on these issue is, is that you get caught up in family taboos, and family [0:17:29 inaudible], though you might be trying to fight them off.

So, and this was the fifth novel I was about to write, so I had this idea, and I kind of know what I am embarking on, and the traps which will be awaiting me, and how could I possibly deal with this because a trap it is, and I knew that [0:17:50 inaudible] would have to fall into, but I wanted not to fall too deeply. And I felt, and I had started to write, and I felt like obstacles I didn't get on. And I came up with a solution which worked for me for this novel. I divested all of the characters of my family history. So, what I took, I only took a skeleton, a basic structure. I took structures of lives, I took some dates, I took ... my grandfather had been requisitioned by the Nazi army eleven times between 1939 and 1945. So, he always tried to get home. He was quite old at the time, 50, but they took him again and again. So,

and he took this because as factual material, it's in the novel, but otherwise I divested the characters and gave new characteristics, new bodies to them, in order to try to escape from that trap, and in order to be able to give voice to them which would be as [0:19:00 inaudible] the basic challenge and problem of this novel.

0:19:04

And yet, another qualm arose. I didn't feel comfortable with all of this third generation literature, and this dealing with the German suffering. I still thought that this too was wrong. And so, I decided that my novel would need to be different in one important aspect, and this actually concerns the basic approach. I refused to tell a story of forced migration only for a German family. I thought I would capture more of the impact and the relevance of these things for today if I combined two family stories I mentioned, there was a Polish family and a German family. And I tell two family stories through the generations, and both of these families are affected by forced migration. And here again, research had helped me and brought this idea to my mind, and actually it happened in an article by a Polish author that I had read in the 90s already. And there [0:20:23 inaudible] described how he was bought up in Wadsworth, Breslau in Germany, in the 60s, and how he felt about it. And all of his maternal family had come from East Poland which now is Ukraine, and they had come from Lambach, and all of his maternal family sat in Breslau, Wadsworth and looked towards the East and said to this boy, "You know, the only place where real life takes place, where there are proper winters and actual happiness, and where there are proper nightingales and proper [0:21:00 inaudible] as possible, that's in Lambach and it's lost. And now, here, in Breslau, this is all staged and nothing else." And for that boy, it meant that he always felt dubious about his hometown, and he also felt that he was the wrong kind of child because if this family hadn't been forced to migrate his parents would never have met and he would not exist. And when I read this, I was in my 30s at that time, and I was really dumbstruck because for the first time in my life ever someone voiced what I had felt as a child, and nobody had ever talked about it. They said exactly my feeling because half of my family was sitting in Munich, looking Eastwards towards Breslau, Wadsworth telling me, 'The only real life or real happiness, proper nightingales my dear and proper skiing and slashing are only possible in Wadsworth'. I had the exact experience with the same splits as he had.

And so, I thought, 'Oh what a potential, what we as German's share with our Polish neighbours. Millions of people have this in their family records. An experience of forced migration and post memory which cascades through the generations, and we never exchange, we never talk about this, we haven't discovered this potential of neighbourhood.' So, at least, I want to take it into the novel and in a way, and it's [0:22:31 inaudible] because it's so un-fashioned in a way, but I felt that if I want to approach something like the inner truth of this part of [0:22:38 inaudible], I need to broaden and to jump national boundaries. And I felt then, after I had discovered this, I felt happy and confident to write it. Now I want to introduce you into the world of this novel.

0:22:54

There's one chapter which is a book in the book which has been translated, and it is the chapter which belongs to Hanna's, that grandfather figure. So, he's the father of my protagonist, the person born in 1892, who is [0:23:15 inaudible] and he fights as a soldier in both World Wars and goes to a Siberian camp in 1945 and returns, and finds his family in [0:23:25 inaudible] in 1947, and lives on, up to the early 70s. He's actually the only one of the characters who knows that he is dead and talking in this book.

With our resettlement money, we brought two armchairs, and the rest I gave to [0:23:50 inaudible]. Back home my son would never have gone into animal research, but he seemed happy enough, and though I had once been worried by his choice of career, I had accepted it since he started earning so much money, that two months salary was equivalent to my whole life savings. His inheritance. It hurts that I couldn't offer him more, though I had inherited nothing from home. Ashamed, I prized the small wad of cash into his hand, along with a list typed on grey paper at my writing desk in [0:24:25 inaudible]. I had drawn up a meticulous inventory of the apartments in [0:24:31 inaudible] on the market square, ours a few streets further on, and the bakery. The official who took my application form for the money refused to believe that was laid as 1942, we had managed to import a fully automated tunnel oven from the USA. It carried some lumps of dough along an 18 meter conveyor belt, moving quickly or slowly depending how long they needed to bake, the latest transatlantic technology. After six months I won my case. The Texan manufacturer had been sowed, but it's enterprise in new management found our order in its books and sent proof of purchase. As I stood in the doorway of the dimly lit apartment allocated to us in [0:25:23 inaudible], where we had remained even though rental controls had long been opened up, removing the carbon copy of the invoice from the American airmail envelope. I saw the familiar [0:25:36 inaudible] address, and the considerable sum of money, and Hanas. The Hana's, who always remembers, cried. And now you come to me and whisper, "Tell us something of our lives ... of your lives." [0:25:54 inaudible] pressed me for answers because I won't speak, can't prize my teeth apart, always unable or unwilling to talk. With Lilly, I've waged wars of silence, I Hanas, the warrior, the man of stones and [0:26:13 inaudible] bloody frozen, the man with the plum soft throat, the heavy bones and splinters in his skull, the root of all evil, Hanas imposing a ladies man sentimental now. Hanas, the wreck.

Did I prepare [0:26:33 inaudible] for the life he was leading? After years of study, it seemed endless to Lilly and me. He came back from the USA. I wanted his girls to curtsy for me, but the little one didn't even know what that meant. She and Sandra wore metal studied jeans, nobody listened to me. I was a fossil. I lost [0:26:57 inaudible] to a six year old. At 77, I would get off the bus straight as a ramrod but leaning on a stake. Yes, that wasn't [0:27:05 inaudible] of sorts. I had been a fossil even at 64. At 55. Around the pillar, the corner of [0:27:13 inaudible] curved, pert, new bodies advertising silk stockings. Back at the apartment, I lived through Lilly's anatomy book. She had packed it in a suitcase when they had to leave [0:27:26 inaudible] expecting to be back home again in a fortnight.

0:27:33

Lilly, her smell so tantalizingly of violets and naivety when I first met her. I couldn't ride a bike; I refused to go swimming and would never learn to drive. A grand young lady French in piano. At Christmas time in 1943, during my 10 luxurious days of leave from the front, she had baked cakes, her mother, Clara, having saved the bakery time and time again, brought her the poppy seeds and the lard. There was greying coffee, and there were two Lilly's. On Lilly number two, I could smell secrecy and cunning, that Lilly knew that nothing [0:28:18 inaudible] still had installed for us would be over with in a fortnight. We would be over with.

He wanted me to talk about [0:28:30 inaudible], and I am just waffling on about myself, alright then, who do you think I am? I am the father. I am trying to be objective. Yes, I can hear you. In 1916, a bullet went through my righthand and into my chest making first one hole then two. It grazed the bone and got stuck. My hand knocked it of course, but it wasn't far from the heart. No wonder I can sense your presence. Hole one, two, three, there's a terrible draft through there. It clicks and whistles, [0:29:13 inaudible]. When you drop in someone like this, the customary thing is to bring them wine, I would rather cognac, and sit with them on the sofa. They are supposed to tell you something but doesn't outrage the sofa sense of propriety. It will be my pleasure. Pass me one of those short, fat cigars, and I will give you a be guiding sentence in return. Let it blur into your brains, consider its consequences, feel its joy, it's lovely, it quickens, a coat of its honor, that patch of numbness near your heart that you sense from time to time but can't name. And as glorious of all, it is true, it's the sentence I grew up with that sacked me. The guiding light I thought to live by. Germany won the war.

Now he is, of course, talking about the war of 1870, 1871.

Breslau was modern, clear cut, proud. They were planning a steel suspension bridge to span the river [0:30:47 inaudible]. Inside the radiant, [0:30:49 inaudible] department store, I ascended to dizzy heights on Germany's first escalator. Immense choir sang, the foundation stone of the bridge was led, and the fair began. It wasn't one of those stalls that I was allowed to fire guns for the first time. As I took aim, I sensed the correct positioning of the barrow, like a kind of jolt in the air. The gun moved of its own accord making me jump so violently that I missed my shot by a mile. The next ones hit home, and someone handed me a paper rose which my father carried because I didn't want to touch it, thoroughly bewildered as it was by the way in which the weapon had slipped into the right position by itself, I felt that there was an invisible tube in the air connecting barrel to target. Later, this peculiar feeling for the mark diminished, or became more abstract but it always had a tree. Whenever I took a gun into my hands, a connection unfolded. I concentrated that magnetic force took hold, and the bullet followed in the wake of my gaze, drawn by a magical cord hidden from all other eyes. One direct hit then another. So, in on the secret, never betrayed, those who knew themselves, saw it in others. My other was [0:32:32 inaudible] he had

mastered in too, or it had mastered him. I knew him from the large heavily wooded park outside the palace, there between tall [0:32:45 inaudible] trees and beeches, relaying by the stream and fished. We had to handover our catch, everything here belonged to the crown prince, so we used to call around at the servant's entrance. If you were lucky, the thin, friendly cook, or the crown princes' lady in waiting would appear. Both would let us keep whatever was thriving around in the pave. And they would throw in something else for good measure, never an ordinary tweed, always a French biscuit. Broad maple trees lined the drive towards the imposing main building, the sheer height of which emphasized but gave us the multi-story roof and pressed me just as much at the [0:33:34 inaudible] eagles talons, twice the breadth of my father's hands that encircled the codes of arms either side of the porter.

0:33:41

[0:33:44 inaudible] kept an eye on the fishing rods as jays flitted through the bushes. The twins, [0:33:50 inaudible (s.I Ricard and Franc)], who had to have their father, the butchers, in the morning were asleep, and I was lying on the bank daydreaming about [0:33:57 inaudible] when I heard something snap behind me. Stan was sneaking towards us. No sooner had he seen that we were looking, then he began sauntering along as if he had bumped into each other among the painted houses, and cobbled streets of the town square, although he knew perfectly well that we didn't want him there, just as we knew, he had sought us out. He was relentless and trekking our younger boys down. He was 17, a blonde and slender, his trousers worn around the seat. But his mouth, pursed as if to whistle, he had an insulant air. His face a triangle with a protruding spout. When silent, he seemed wary. His uncle, the station master, had given Stan who wanted us to call him, Stan, a whistle that you couldn't hear. He used it to attract dogs, then he would grab them around the belly and blow it into their ears until they whimpered in pain. "What are you lot up to then?" As if the stream belonged to him. Picnic, said [0:35:13 inaudible]. Only the French do that kind of stuff. He was always trying to make up prove something. This time, we are supposed to laugh. We were supposed to catch the undertone behind the French, he said, "You know they do each other in the arse." We were too slow and awkward for that comment, I think. No one answered. I stared at my shoes. Stan sat down on the grass a few meters away from us. After a while, he pointed above him into one of the maple trees, "See that nuthatch, I will nab it for you." He got up and drew a slingshot from his pocket. The bird was sitting on one of the middle branches preening itself, its long black eye stripes running smoothly underneath its wings and out again. I saw Stan position himself, and apparently without taking aim, he let go of the elastic with a snap.

The nuthatch fell to the soft needle and leaf covered ground as if turned by the stone into a stone itself. Stan hand closed around its dazed body. Nuthatches wear dark grey jackets, open a little above their bright red breasts, their throats are white. Sticking out of Stan's fist was this one's delicate head with its eye stripe and grey [0:36:50 inaudible]. Every creature here belonged first to the Crown Prince and then to God. Stan had the nuthatch, and he had us. He fetched a tin box from his outer other trouser pocket, took out a pair of scissors, all with one hand, carefully turned the creature so that the side of its head was facing



upwards and waited until we were crouching in a circle around him. The nuthatch's bill was open as if that was the only way it could breathe, its eye glinted, but the swift movement of the scissors, Stan, slipped the pupils straight across from top to bottom. The nuthatch made no sound, I got back away for nausea. Stan, was growing up alone with his mother, [0:37:49 inaudible] he told us later, it hardens a man. He laughed at that, [0:37:55 inaudible] knew what he meant. "Men are like boiled sweets, sugary on the inside [0:38:02 inaudible] outside." And turned his hand, [0:38:07 inaudible] fluid motion of the scissors, he cut the nuthatch's other eye in two from top to bottom. He let the bird go and scrutinized us. His triangular face seemed rounder, his nostrils moving as if he had scented something. Then, without taking his eyes off of us, he wiped the scissors on his fore trousers and put them carefully back in the box. Inside lay a pair of tweezers and a file. His fingers were like spiders' legs, long and slender, with scrupulously clean nails. The nuthatch had flown into the air. For a minute it lurched between the trunks bumping into branches, and against the maple trees from which Stan had brought it down, spiraling higher and higher. It was a female, it's flanks a bright rust red. At the time I thought, 'she must have been in pain', but later I found out that immediately after a life threatening injury you feel nothing at all.

The blind animal found the branch it had been sitting on before it was hit by the stone, groping its way sideways towards the trunk. It stumbled up to its hole, its or some other birds, and crawled inside. I asked [0:39:35 inaudible] to give me a leg-up. The maples bark was rough, it shrunk wide and tall, safe, I thought, it's safe now. I was carrying a knife in my pocket. The twins shouted something up to me, their faces were blanched, their mouth enormous, they heard pigs squealing in terror every day of the week, but this was in an altogether different category. We all felt it, we all knew it. I hurried on because I was afraid, Stan, would follow me. As I climbed the tree, it seemed to grow. Below me, Stan, gave a yelping laugh. I wanted to kill the bird to put it out of its misery. It was the only decent thing to do. The honourable thing as a human being and mindful of god's creation. Just before I reached the hole, I heard a soft plaintive tweet, tweet. I tumbled through the branches falling like another stone.

[0:40:44 inaudible] and Franc accompanied me to the palace. The kitchen maid scampered off, returning not with the lady in waiting, but with the grand princess herself, a young and lively woman. She wore a floral patterned dress with puffed sleeves and led us into a drawing room. My memory of her dress is probably false, like the curtain fabric in an [0:41:08 inaudible] painting [0:41:10 inaudible] my memory. But painting those odors, still the artist was borne in Breslau. Time winds itself up as a phone. Stan, accompanied us too, although he had no business being there, and in the drawing room where they led me down on an armchair and put a footstall beneath my grace legs, he took a seat without asking, on the other chair. Crown Prince [0:41:36 inaudible] fed me cognac, the first I had ever tasted. Instead of going straight to my stomach, it shot through my arm into my head making it red and throbbing. My face was throbbing too with joy [0:41:52 inaudible]. I looked at my feet, and saw my shoes on the upholstery, made to put them down. The Crown Princess tried to [0:41:57 inaudible] me by touching me on the shoulder, which hurt so much that I groaned softly. Luckily, she didn't hear. Her attention was on Stan, "You're the eldest? Then you may stay if you behave quietly. I see you've already taken a seat." She herself sat down on a chair next to me, [0:42:18 inaudible] graceless or embarrassed

[0:42:21 inaudible] lips. I could almost have laughed with greedy, appraising eyes full of admiration and shyness appeared all around him. Then I forgot the bird and my defeat. The Crown Prince's wife was smiling at me. For a moment, I was pleased about the nuthatch, without Stan, I wouldn't have been sitting here. Everything seemed so tangled up. If someone had granted me a wish, I would have used it to make Stan miss the bird but missing the bird would have meant missing being fussed over in the palace, and that was definitely not something I wished. I laughed giddily, drunkenly, intoxicated for the first time. The Crown Princess was so close to me, so incomprehensibly lovely. My upper arm throbbed and there were smells of violets and cinnamon and something else too. It borrowed into my chest, new and exciting.

0:43:31

She helped me take my shirt off. Her Lady in Waiting had already called for a doctor who confirmed when he examined me that my right arm was broken. Not badly enough, unfortunately, as we later came to realise other than a few aching nerves when the weather changed, it did no lasting damage.

Her skin was like paper thin, translucent gloss. I thought of her in Paris, in 1940, in a women's boutique full of lace and silk. I thought of the female nuthatch more often. Sometimes in the park, I imagined I heard her sad soft tweet, tweet. I took [0:44:18 inaudible] to a maple tree year after year. I must always, I found a pair of nuthatches brooding their eggs in the hole, but that was cold comfort to me.

[0:44:36 inaudible] and so we would take [0:44:41 inaudible] now into another chapter another in the spring of 1945 when Hanas, being in his 50s, has been recruited for the last time into Hitler's army into the [0:45:03 inaudible] to defend his hometown, Breslau against the Russians, and actually the destruction which is [0:45:11 inaudible] onto this town by the Nazis themselves. I'm reading this part because it is quite a mixture of research and some biographic memories about what my grandfather mentioned but never said anything more than fleetingly, and a fictional report, the scene is invented but on good grounds, I hope.

And I have to mention that in the course of this chapter of Hanas loses his best friend, [0:45:55 inaudible] next to him in Paris in 1940. And from that very moment on, he loses his capability to say, I. So, the duration, he is lost as an innovator, and the durations which is to third person narrative. So, it's a he now who talks, whereas, and then when he comes to [0:46:15 inaudible] is reunited with the family and fears what it means to live as a refugee. He tries to commit suicide, but he is saved in time, and when he wakes up his eye has returned, but he is a split figure ever since, and he is a double identity now. And he calls this kind of second person, which was created in him through his life, he calls him 'the rememberer', and that is actually the title of that chapter, it's called, 'the rememberer'. So, the rememberer is a figure, a person, a character in his own right, and we are close to him here in this chapter, or in this extract.

0:46:52

At first, he could hardly believe his luck. He was allowed into the [0:46:59 inaudible] beneath the streets, into the safety of the bunkers deep inside the cities air. In 1944, a system of bunkers connected to nearby Government buildings, and household palace had been constructed underneath [0:47:12 inaudible] square. Through large halls are rings of smaller rooms flowed water, gas and electricity, bodies moved sleekly and uncaged. Ventilation shafts hummed, ladders were full to bursting.

In the evenings, an exclusive brothel opened, safe, secure, screwed in nice and tight. Connected to the ring of bunkers was a second underground front, strayed roads with real street signs, they were beneath the road, clean and unchanged. This very likeness of the old Breslau a silhouette of rigid shadows had a [0:47:53 inaudible] effect on him. The [0:47:56 inaudible] to a distant grumble, and the air stayed clear. Hanas, ran errands for the staff, navigating effortlessly by the street names alone. Some streets burned with electric light, but they used flaming torches too. Above ground, the thorough affairs had fallen into ruin, above ground children lay dead on the pavements, above ground, your own destruction, and your enemies were so closely intertwined, it could drive you mad. House to house fighting where the Russians had begun. Man against man to the thousand rest of the city. The Russians, they said, were small and tough and wiry. Street by street they edged forward. On the last Monday in April, he met Lieutenant [0:48:43 inaudible] at one of the check points where you had to give a password. They knew each other from the great wall, although not well, "Hey there, [0:48:53 inaudible], come here." [0:48:56 inaudible] was unshaven, his uniform dotted with plaster. He let Hanna through a row of cellars that smelt of fleeting germ of urine, mold, paper and soil. Their past wooden sheds blockaded entrances having to stoop and, even once, crawl. Out of niche a wall, a bat flew with a hiss. [0:49:18 inaudible] carried a torch. The stony after taste of salmon hung in the air. Hanas followed the Lieutenant at the distance of a few paces. Parallel strips of flight fell across an uneven wall, three steps [0:49:34 inaudible]. [0:49:33 inaudible] knew the password here too, speaking it under his breath. Only after going through a second barrier did they make it back into the system of bunkers. Hanas didn't understand why they had gone through the cellars. Later he thought, it had been done to confuse him or grind him down, or both. [0:49:55 inaudible] showed him into a grey painted room with two chairs, a wooden table and three pistons. Two men had three weapons, one of them a back-up. The chap who was supposed to do it had keeled over, had wound, said, [0:50:13 inaudible] half contentiously, half genuinely. "And you, [0:50:17 inaudible], still an impeccable shot? Well, it doesn't matter, not like in need to aim much anyway." The Lieutenant handed him a cigarette, he took it, they smoked, each selected a pistol and checked it. Six bullets. "It's one of us", said, [0:50:36 inaudible], "Deserted yesterday afternoon, took a shot to the [0:50:41 inaudible], only the calf, mind you, but it will still hurt like hell." He got the confession. [0:50:46 inaudible] satisfied. Someone came to fetch them. The execution room was like the waiting room, only without a table or chairs.

0:51:00

The man lay on the canvass plankered, with his legs drawn up, his back turned to them, pot belly, blonde sideburns, his hands panicked behind his back. Though this was where the courts martial convened down here or was it just where the Nazis carried out their sentences. No one knew. No sense of direction. They're lined up parallel to each other. On the opposite wall hung a poster, a young soldier in uniform besides a rigorous old man with iron grey hair and red black, red [0:51:37 inaudible] band around his sleeve. Both men held the firearms ready, gazing resolutely to the left like hawks, strongly profiled against a yellow background with blood red, slightly windswept lettering that read, 'For life and freedom'. High Hitler shouted [0:51:55 inaudible] flinging his arm into the air. Hanas squeezed his eyes shut. "You know what you've got yourself into, if you don't shoot them no one else will. If you don't shoot within three hours you'll be nearly here yourself." He heard [0:52:11 inaudible] whisper, one forward loss examples. No one's even seeing this, bad luck, [0:52:17 inaudible] recognized you. Bloody awful luck, you are such a coward. No, you are clever, be a man. [0:52:30 inaudible] retched this. You don't see the enemy when you shoot, and if you do, you're not so close, and if you are, then not from behind like a coward, otherwise they would be firing at you. This is one of ours, a piece of you, Hanas, of bullets in this room, always found the mark. Even when you shut your eyes. You fire at the hat, as ordered. The final shot to the heart was [0:52:56 inaudible], and he, Hanas, somehow thought that was decent of him.

Later, he was so ashamed, he never used that word again. Three bullets, he thought, as he trots up the stairs, three bullets wasted. The body had been rolled up in a canvass blanket, and [0:53:15 inaudible] had sent him, Hanas, back out into the dreadful air. "Bloody hell, [0:53:22 inaudible]. You're a bit green around the gills." It was impossible not to hear the accusation, the astonishment." I am only in the [0:53:33 inaudible] he had said. Everything was hateful coming to him across an abyss.

Now, in the time left I want to tell you about the lost act of forced migration which became evident to me while I was working on this novel, which all in all it took ten years, like four years of evading strategies and research before I started to write, and then the writing and research, I travelled to Poland and everything. And I think about a year before finishing, it became clear to me that it wouldn't do just to let all of these people talk about migration in a kind of traditionally set up novel, but that I had to apply the topic of forced migration to the literary [0:54:35 inaudible] and the literary form that I was using. I couldn't be content with just letting sit the novel in its very comfortable, historical bag, like a 19<sup>th</sup> century book. It's a beautiful book, it's beautifully and I want to show you the inside because you will see it wrote on the website again. It's here, we have clouds with words, and it's nicely printed. It's actually thick because the paper is very thick because it uses symbols from [0:55:02 inaudible] and you can come up if you want to look at it later after the talk.

0:55:08

But as I said, I've felt uncomfortable with this, and I decided that as part of the novel, the novel will be forced to migrate. So, on its last page, there is a QR code, and if you trigger it, you will be migrated onto this website. Now this website, for me that's important, it's my website, there are no adverts on it, you can't buy the book, and it's part of the novel. It is like reversing a jumper, and now showing the left side, so the inner side. As you can see, there are seven chapters, there are seven, the seven leaps from the edge of the road are in the book, actually are six leaps because it's six refugees who count, recount their stories. And the seventh leap is done by the novel itself. So, this website has seven chapters, and it talks about ... it's unfortunately not in English, it's partly in Polish which won't help so much I suppose. I'm basically in German. So, I should explain what it is and what it contains. So, [0:56:23 inaudible] would give you some samples of chapters and, actually, two bits of an essay which I wrote, and which contains some of the things I just talked about, how I came about to tackle this biographical topic in the first place. I don't have enough space, sorry if I'm modelling this.

Right. So, here we are. And then there is a chapter on my sources, my German sources and you click on it and then you will be given more material and shown more material. There is a chapter on my Polish sources, and partly, I'm quite proud of them because one of my problems when I did research was, of course, a language barrier and the accessibility of oral history in Poland about this time, I needed reports of Polish refugees from East Poland to West Poland, who still could remember the summer of 1945. So, as I said, necessity, they would be quite old. I needed people who were able and willing to talk to me, and if you click on any of these, you will partly be guided to audio 5, presenting the interviews I did with the help of an interpreter. So, you can hear the Polish original, the interpreter in between and my questions. And, it's quite unique material, at least at the time when I did research, the last research was in 2012. Nothing of that kind existed on the internet.

Then there is a whole kind of vein of the story where apes play an important role, and you will be guided to this on this page, which I know ... just jump. Also, this page also contains some parts of the novel which I didn't publish in the end. You will be, I think it's important to talk about this dictionary of travelling words, which takes up the sky motive partly of the book cover, and it contains, at the moment, 99 words, and if you just click on one of these words there are all words which are important in the word of the novel. You are given an explanation and these explanations are very different in character, some of them are just a word explanation as here a very simple, and sometimes you are given more literature on the topic and sometimes it's just a very funny commentary.

Here, there is a page of mixed media, so there were various films made on the novel, or the writing of the novel, and some TV teams came to Breslau, Wadsworth with me. So, you could click on this and would hear the [0:59:27 inaudible] today, and hear me talk about it. And an artist made a one hour feature, radio feature on the writing of the whole thing, he

accompanied me for five years and he went with me to Wadsworth, and so this is a one hour feature in [0:59:41 inaudible] done here.

0:59:44

What is most important to me, in a way, is the last chapter which is called, 'It's you. It's up to you to narrate, it's a block element', and this actually is important, I think, for this aspect of forced migration of the novel itself. I open up the space of the novel to other people's voices, everybody is invited to write or comment, and to tell their own story of forced migration and post memory, and how their families were affected by it. Actually, I was happy that some people took this up, and some wrote really long, long stories and started to talk about it. It was interesting for me to see that some people write this in order to get in touch, but then refused to tell more on the public side, but started a private exchange, a very pressing feeling after the publication of the novel that the topic is really, it's topical impressing and a lot of taboos are still around, and a lot of difficulty in talking about it.

And just as my final stance, so that we have a bit of time left for questions. Let me relate this forced migration of the novel back to what I, in the end, found at the core of my writing and my venturing out in these biographical waters. Because as I had mentioned, I divested most of my characters of much of the biographical living material which I would have found in my family, but what I found essential for the writing while I was doing it was where my personal memories, specifically of one very specific room, which was the living room of my paternal grandparents in Munich. They lived in a tiny flat which had been given to them, and never moved out of it in the middle of Munich, and was on the ground floor, it was quite damp and dark. And there having these funny meetings, my Bavarian mother came along as well, it was my father, my mother and my sister and me, and when we turned up there my mother would immediately leave and go shopping. It only struck me while I was thinking of it again that you always returned without having bought anything, and obviously, she spent a couple of hours sitting in a coffee with one coffee and waited for a time to return. Because what happened there, there was a kind of unspun and unwritten law that no Bavarians were allowed in, and what happened was, the friends of my grandparents would be around, all of them were refugees, none of them they had known before 1945, but they all shared this experience. And my sister and I, we were allowed in as half Bavarians because we were the new generation and the ones who had to carry on the memory. And I remember this space as having been peculiar and [1:02:44 inaudible] because after a while these grown ups always forgot that we were around. They had [1:02:51 inaudible] songs and [1:02:52 inaudible] cakes, and I liked it because nobody watched out how much of it I ate, and I also like it because I liked the sound of the languages, it was very different from Bavarian because I liked the peculiar words, and because I always had been curious and wanted to listen. And because these grown ups forgot us, they started to talk about things which weren't just the anecdotal stuff [1:03:15 inaudible], but they had lively political discussions and sometimes they were on the brink of telling something of these traumatizing experiences. And this is ... I needed to go back into this room, it's a collective room, it's collective voices close to some in dialect, and on the border, on the brink between speech and silence, in order to kind of tune myself in to be able to write this novel.

And something of this, I've tried to create in that block element. It's an [1:03:51 inaudible] space for collective voices in a contemporary form.

1:03:52

Right. So, thank you for your attention, but now will be for questions.

I Thank you very much, Ulrike, that's interesting.

[APPLAUSE]

I So, a really interesting mixture of the reading and the analysis and the multi-media visuals and other material. To talk about it as the novel that you never wanted to write, is to pose the writing as a forced migration, isn't it? And I wondered if you could say a little bit about that experience of writing in relation to the migration?

UD I think right from the beginning of my writing I can't write without thinking about form and about, without using form. So, and, as I mentioned, it's my fifth novel, and the other four novels, they are just books but they too try to deal with the form of the novel to mold what it is, what would it mean to ... what does it mean nowadays to create a character? What would be this kind of realist, and what kind of reason could we have. How do I deal with media and everything like that? And I think this novel and the topic with which I was dealing just put this idea into me that I could be more courageous, and I just opened new words to use transmedia or new media, media forms in order to really kind of make it most uncomfortable for the novel, and to test the vitality of the form, and to test interaction. So, I forced it to migrate, but by the migration, of course, it changes, and it becomes something entirely different. It isn't the novel which is on the internet, and the internet, you feel very much. If you do a website like this, it's a lot of writing which goes into it, it's 100s of pages it contains, and it's an entirely different sort and form of writing. And I feel like this is where I want to continue to work, so I won't give up this idea of forcing novels to migrate, and actually, this is going to be a thing for a first book of a trilogy, and I'm working on the second project. And I'm inventing a new method of forcing novels to migrate this time between languages. So, I think migration, of course, that's why I read the first passage to you, where Hanas talks about the good days and the bad days. It doubles the story to say the least. IT has lots of advantages as well. So, I was a profiler in a way of my topic.

I Can we take some questions from the audience if you would like to ask some questions?

V1 Thank you very much. I'm not quite sure if I can phrase my sentence very precisely. I think it's broadly got to do with the relationship between [1:07:23 inaudible] because you said at the beginning there was a [1:07:27 inaudible] to digest your characters of the [1:07:31

inaudible], and if [1:07:34 inaudible] from the website, the website contains a lot of documents. Do you document your research? So, it seems to be that there is some kind of effort towards [1:07:49 inaudible]. Is that so? Or how do you get it back from being ... [1:07:57 inaudible] impulse of some sort. There is a trajectory [1:08:04 inaudible] which makes certain things easier, but then there must be some way back to the biographical, and I'm just wondering how this can [1:08:12 inaudible]? Is there a necessity to authenticate by giving the readers the notes in the book? [1:08:26 inaudible] wondering how you think about this relationship, or what kind of [1:08:33 inaudible]?

1:08:31

UD Yeah. It's a lovely question. I think it has to do a lot with what I experience of the creative process in trying to engage with so much reality, though this reality, of course, it's gone, it's not ... its as intangible as those in my head. So, I use it in the writing process, I use it as a field of inspiration. So, what really happens, I need something to get me going like I had this Lilly character, she turned up, and I write to a certain extent, up to a certain degree. And then there sometimes is a point in the writing where I go back to something which might the reality of it, a testimonial of someone remembering something, and take it in order to gain some detail which I couldn't ... it's funny, but sometimes reality is so much stronger than what you can make up. I want to give you an example, in 2012 I went to Wadsworth for a week, so that's fairly late. I handed in the manuscript in 2013, yes, [1:09:55 inaudible] writing have been in it already. I was in these scenes, which there are various characters who will have scenes, or live in Wadsworth. And I talked to these Polish, old men and women, and by chance ... the longest talk was eight hours, and as a researcher for a novel I have these kind of really weird questions, which is one of the problems of research for a novel, it's so different from normal historical research. I'm not interested in the facts, and I'm not interested in dates, I'm in diaries, for example, and weird things like, which toys did you discover? Do you remember? How did it smell? Where did you wash? What did you drink? Where did your mummy get the food from? This man, he was 88 or something of that, said to me, "Well, you know, I loved these tins, and we played a lot with, in Poland, we hadn't had these tins." So, it was ... "and you know, all of us, we were red." And I thought, he's talking about himself as a ten year old boy being red, what does he mean by it? Is this a kind of an early communist pride or an illusion or whatever, and I asked him, and I thought, 'Oh, did you all play red Indians all of the time?' He looked at me and said, "No, we were red because the city was still on fire, and so many buildings had been destroyed and I had redness everywhere." This is in the history books. Bombed and destroyed and so on, but he said, "We were red because it wasn't only ashes and cinders which were around in the air. But most of the houses had been built of red bricks. So, the dust was red. And I had red, again in historical monographs that the water supply had broken down, so obviously nobody ... you were happy if you had something to drink. Nobody could really wash very often. So, what happened with what he told me then, that after a couple of weeks the red dust would be in your skin, you couldn't wash it off any longer.



1:11:57

So, everybody was red in the city. I had never come across this. And this is just the detail, you invest a month of research, but this is detail you wouldn't come up in with your imagination, but if you find it, this is wonderful, I take it back, not to authentic anything, but because it enables me to invest my characters now. To give them life, to give life to the detail and the concrete one historical moment. And since I'm writing, I'm trying to write something in this very specific genre. It is a historical novel. So, I want to play exactly along this border of, what is authentic, and what isn't. Now, in these scenes like with Hanas, the shooting of this German person who tried to flee from the army. My grandfather never told anything of the like, so it's invented, but all the things about the topography and the bunkers is deeply and thoroughly researched. And there is a moment, I know that my grandfather in that time, in that Spring, awful things happened within the army. So, it is, it's possible but it was never ... there weren't so many voices for it, and this is the intricate thing, I think, and this is something with literature can do because it is fictional, well those are the basis to its historical like the red dust. I hope it gets close to what you wanted to know.

I Okay. Let's take one more question.

V2 I have a [1:13:42 inaudible] and now you can imagine, [1:13:51 inaudible]. Now I have [1:14:05 inaudible]-[0:1:14:21 inaudible].

UD Yeah. How does one create a nine eye voices which are different?

V2 Yeah.

UD Now, there is, of course, the great ... the art of the magicians, and in the magicians' hat as a writer you would have all of these little tricks. So, you give a [1:14:42 inaudible] to one and a dialect to another one, and so on, which I think never does the job. You could do it and it doesn't do it. So, this is obviously ... this would be a trap again. That is not the way to deal with it. So, one of the reasons probably why the novel took so long to write was that I needed to invent each of these voices, and it took me sometimes months when I couldn't write because I had ... oh dear. I'm not supposed to tell you this, obviously. I'm trying to get into them. I needed to feel them, and I take the sign before the sprinkler goes on. I thank you very for your interest. Thank you very much.

I Yes. Let's thank Ulrike for showing such fantastic insight into this really fascinating work and do come up and have a look at the book. If you can see it in the slides ...

UD We can go around.

I        Having the conversation over the break. Thank you very much.

UD       Thank you.

[APPLAUSE]