4. “One Must Tear Aside the Flowers…”: Melita Maschmann’s *Fazit*

Melita Maschmann’s autobiography tells the story of a female protagonist who was fifteen when the Nazis came to power. Brought up in Berlin in a wealthy middle-class family, Maschmann joined the Hitler Youth against her parents’ wishes in 1933. Having completed her education she worked for the press and propaganda section of the “Bund Deutscher Mädel” (BDM) [League of German Girls] in East Prussia. From 1939 she was in charge of the press in “Reichsgau Wartheland” and in 1942 she became a leader of a Women’s Labour Service camp there. During this time she was involved in the expulsion of Polish civilians. She returned to Berlin in 1943 and worked in the Reich Youth Leadership. She was interned at the end of the war and, following ‘denazification’, became a journalist and novelist in West Germany. Her autobiography, *Fazit. Kein Rechtfertigungsversuch* [Taking stock: No attempt at justification], was first published by the West German Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt in 1963 and was an immediate commercial success. Within a year it had been reprinted, translated into both French and English, and the office of education in North Rhine Westphalia had recommended it to teachers involved in political education (Offers 1965, 20). It was republished by Deutscher Taschenbuch-Verlag sixteen years later with the title *Fazit. Mein Weg in der Hitler-Jugend* [Taking stock: My journey within the Hitler Youth] and subsequently reprinted several times until 1987.¹

Yet, this is not an uncontroversial text. While the autobiography was praised by many reviewers for its forthright and authentic stance, it was dismissed by others as a perpetuation of fascist rhetoric. Such diversely opposing reactions are a result of the seemingly self-critical, but often highly contradictory, depiction and interpretation of the memories of the protagonist’s Nazi past. In this chapter I will consider how competing narratives within the text allow for such significantly divergent readings. I will suggest that the structuring of the protagonist’s memories can be read as contradicting the explicitly stated and frequently reiterated narrative claims of the introduction: that the text is not an attempt at justification.

At the start of the text the protagonist confronts her motive for writing. A narrative intention is clearly demarcated by the first person narrator who states that the purpose of the text is “um […] meinen

¹ Further references in the text will be given to the edition from 1983.
politischen Weg bis zu dem Punkt, an dem ich heute stehe, deutlich zu machen” (22) [to explain […] my political road up to the point where I now stand (23)²]. The teleological nature of the narrative is preempted in this trope of a journey, with the reader later learning that the narrator’s present position supposedly marks the successful “innere Ablösung vom Nationalsozialismus” (214) [inner break with National Socialism (198)]. The positioning of the protagonist as a detached observer of her own past and the repeated denial of any justificatory motivation in writing are two themes repeated throughout the text. Indeed, they are embodied within the original title of *Fazit. Kein Rechtfertigungsversuch*: “Fazit” suggests a certain closure and distance (Schaumann 1999, 1). However, in this chapter I will contend that the very way in which memories of fascism are constructed contradicts these claims of separateness of past and present identities of the protagonist. I argue that *Fazit* can indeed be read as providing a framework of justification; in particular, I will consider how the appeal to various addressees promotes justificatory notions of victimhood and show how concepts of youth and gender are integral to them.

### A Jewish School Friend as Addressee

*Fazit* is written in the first person as a letter to a Jewish schoolfriend. The voice of the narrating present enters into the autobiographical pact, suggesting sincerity and authenticity, through an addendum to the text, which reads:

Für diesen Bericht wurde die Briefform gewählt, weil sie es in einer lebendigeren Darstellungsweise ermöglicht, die Tatsachen der Vergangenheit aus der doppelten Perspektive von damals und heute zu betrachten. Der Brief ist jedoch nicht fingiert. (243)

The letter form was chosen for this account because it enables the facts of the past to be presented more vividly. They can be viewed in the twin perspectives of those days and our own time. But the letter is not fiction. (6)

The dust cover of the 1963 edition states that the Jewish textual addressee serves to put the protagonist “unter eine[n] unerbittlich