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THE QUEST FOR LITERARY CELEBRITY

GHOST WRITERS IN ULRICH WOELK'S

JOANNA MANDELBROT UND ICH

AND KLAUS MODICK'S *BESTSELLER*

»Um wahr zu wirken, muss die Wirklichkeit gefälscht werden.
Das ist das ganze Geheimnis der Literatur.«
Klaus Modick, *Bestseller*

In her analysis of editors as literary figures, Alessandra Goggio claims that authors writing about the German-language literature industry exploit the systems of the publishing world for their own aesthetics, showing that they are not passive victims of the industry's vagaries, but instead active co-creators of it.¹ Ulrich Woelk and Klaus Modick are two authors who interact critically with the literature industry in their novels, *Joanna Mandelbrot und ich* (2008) and *Bestseller* (2006) respectively. They take the literature industry to task for its excessive focus on marketability and profitability over the production and reception of high-quality literature. Both novels introduce writer-protagonists experiencing existential crises as they succumb to pressures from their editors, publishing houses, and literary critics to produce a bestseller.² Though these author-protagonists have achieved moderate success, their books never win prizes or attain bestseller status. In their quest for literary celebrity and monetary success, these protagonists abandon their ethics, pilfer stories, adopt pseudonyms, and turn to ghostwriters and ghost writing.

1 Alessandra Goggio: Der Verleger als literarische Figur. Narrative Konstruktionen in der deutschsprachigen Gegenwartsliteratur, Bielefeld 2021, p. 70.

2 Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, German-speaking authors have parodied aspects of the literature industry in their prose fiction. See Friedrich Christian Delius, *Der Königsmacher* (2001); Martin Walser, *Tod eines Kritikers* (2002); Bodo Kirchhoff, *Schundroman* (2002); Hanns-Joseph Ortheil, *Die geheimen Stunden der Nacht* (2005); Wolf Haas, *Das Wetter vor 15 Jahren* (2006); Thomas Glavinic, *Das bin doch ich* (2007); Marlene Streeruwitz, *Nachkommen* (2014); Marlene Streeruwitz als Nelia Fehn, *Die Reise einer jungen Anarchistin in Griechenland* (2015); Getraud Klemm, *Hippocampus* (2019).

The use of ghostwriters is a widely accepted practice and not generally considered a form of *Fälschung*. Celebrities, who typically have no formal training in writing as a craft, often employ the help of professional writers. Michelle Obama's *Becoming* (2018) and Prince Harry's *Spare* (2023) were not authored exclusively by them.³ Nevertheless, when reading these books, Obama's and Harry's voices clearly come through. Some writers who desire anonymity write under a pseudonym; others choose pseudonyms for economic reasons. In the case of Steven King, for instance, he convinced his publisher to allow him to write under the name Richard Bachmann in order to sell more books, without oversaturating the market with the King name.⁴ Because the use of ghostwriters and pseudonyms is common practice, readers do not doubt the authenticity of the texts. Ghostwritten texts like *Becoming* and *Spare* have been authorized by the individuals and their ghostwriters in a contractual agreement. Legal documents stipulate copyright, ownership, and royalties, and certify the authenticity of the texts. Nevertheless, authors' use of ghostwriters or adoption of pseudonyms forces readers to contemplate what constitutes an authentic text, what determines a text as a fake, and what authorship entails. In order to explore these questions, this essay analyzes how Woelk and Modick utilize ghostwriters and pseudonyms to create intricate authorial identities that highlight the complexity of literary celebrity in the contemporary German-language literary landscape.

Woelk's and Modick's protagonist-writers confront the day-to-day realities and uncertainties of life as freelance authors, a profession with no guarantees for wealth and fame. Convinced, however, that there is a specific recipe for success, their attempts to outfox readers (consumers) fails to account for the intricacies of the literature industry. French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu's seminal writing on the field of cultural production allows us to understand the contemporary German-language literature industry as a network of interdependent fields operating within specific power structures: it is a singular field comprised of the sum of its parts – production – distribution – consumption. A literary work derives from complex social and institutional frameworks, which authorize and sustain literature and literary practice. Within this literary field, the author produces a product, whose reception is dependent on complex social relations, which at a given historical moment also determine the value of that literary work. The critical

3 Michelle Obama: *Becoming*, New York 2018; Prince Harry: *Spare*, New York 2023.

4 Andrew Housman: *Stephen King's Pseudonym Explained (& Where He Used It)*, in: *screenrant.com*, 29 May 2020 (<https://screenrant.com/stephen-king-pseudonym-richard-bachman-explained/>, accessed: 18 December 2023).

perspective through which Woelk and Modick cast the literature industry accentuates Bourdieu's claim that objective competition within the literature system creates tensions, whereby »the various categories of producers tend to supply products adjusted to the expectations of the various positions in the field of power.«⁵ The assumed authorial identities that Woelk's and Modick's protagonists take on do not adequately account for the expectations of critics and readers, creating unanticipated legal and ethical complications for them. They rely on the whims of their agents and publishers, who, rather than promoting literary quality, opt to focus instead on marketability, in other words, »What sells?« Though they reside in a fictional realm, the economic, moral, and legal dilemmas that these author-protagonists face illuminate for readers the complexities of the contemporary German-language literature industry and raise valid criticisms of the literature industry as a market- and profit-driven one that has forsaken any devotion to aesthetic quality.⁶

1. Ulrich Woelk: *Joana Mandelbrot und ich*

The protagonist of Woelk's *Joana Mandelbrot und ich* is the mathematician, Paul Gremont, a university mathematics professor whose research on Benoit Mandelbrot's investigations of fractal geometry focuses on how seemingly complex structures in nature, such as snowflakes, actually derive from simple rules. Woelk, a trained astrophysicist whose novels often introduce scientists and scientific themes,⁷ allows coincidences to overtake Gremont's life, to which the very first sentence of the novel alludes: »Alles, was mit uns geschieht, ist eine Mischung aus Zufall und Notwendigkeit; aber nur auf den Zufall ist Verlaß.«⁸ When the famous literary critic, Nico E. Arp, sees Gremont leaving his literary agent's office, Arp erroneously assumes that

5 Pierre Bourdieu: *The Field of Cultural Production*, ed. by Randal Johnson, Cambridge 1993, p. 45.

6 As Matthias Schaffrick and Marcus Willand argue, the intentional staging of authorship makes the structures of the literature industry more visible. See Schaffrick and Willand: *Autorschaft im 21. Jahrhundert. Bestandsaufnahme und Positionsbestimmung*, in: *Theorien und Praktiken der Autorschaft*, ed. by Schaffrick and Willand, Berlin 2014, pp. 3–148, here p. 99.

7 Woelk wrote his thesis on chaos theory. *Joana* is the third novel of a trilogy about scientists, following *Einstein on the Lake. Eine Sommer-Erzählung* (2005) and *Schrödingers Schlafzimmer* (2006).

8 Ulrich Woelk: *Joana Mandelbrot und ich*, Munich 2008, p. 7.

Gremon is the author hiding behind the pseudonym Leon Zern.⁹ Gremon had met with his agent, Cora, to finalize the contract for a non-fiction book on mathematics for the general public. Focused on his anger at the paltry 5,000 Euro advance offered, he did not immediately react to or deny Arp's assumption. Zern, who never appears in the novel as a character and whose identity is never revealed, is the bestselling author of *Abgezählt*, a crime fiction novel about a serial killer. The crimes in the novel seemingly follow mathematical formulas. As a mathematician, Gremon recognizes that the formulas are nonsensical. Rather than being flattered that a famous literary critic considers him capable of writing a bestseller, Gremon views the assumption as an affront to his professional credibility. For Gremon, the novel is nothing more than »Schund«.¹⁰ Following the encounter with Arp, Gremon pursues his regular Friday evening routine, visiting, Joanna, his mistress who is also the bordello owner.

This simple case of mistaken identity quickly spirals out of control, overtaking all aspects of Gremon's life. The day after the unexpected encounter, Arp exposes Gremon in a leading newspaper as the man behind Zern. Gremon's home and office phones ring incessantly as newspaper editors try to interview him. Unsure how to respond to this misdirected attention, Gremon seeks Cora's help. Here the tale takes a comedic twist: Cora, who is also Zern's agent, proposes that Gremon assume the role of Zern, whose real identity cannot be revealed. Zern is »einer der anerkanntesten Literaten der mittleren Generation. Das sind die Autoren zwischen vierzig und sechzig. Sie leben in der Hauptsache von Preisen und Stipendien. Das literarische Renommee ist ihr wichtigstes Kapital«.¹¹ Cora's statement validates Bourdieu's claim that the »field of cultural production is the site of struggles in which what is at stake is the power to impose the dominant definition of the writer and therefore to delimit the population of those entitled to take part in the struggle to define the writer«.¹² Moreover, she underscores the tension between an author's cultural capital (reputation) and their quest for economic capital (book sales). Here Woelk reproaches the literature industry directly: writers, publishers, and agents like Cora benefit

9 Woelk has stated that the novel reflects his own experiences with the German Feuilleton. Aura Heydenreich and Klaus Mecke: *Romane schreiben wäre eine Lösung. Über die Vernetzung von Naturwissenschaft und Literatur*, in: *Physik und Poetik. Produktionsästhetik und Werkgenese. Autorinnen und Autoren im Dialog*, ed. by Heydenreich and Mecke, Berlin 2015, pp. 262–285, here p. 266.

10 Woelk (fn. 8), p. 18.

11 Ibid, p. 51f.

12 Bourdieu (fn. 5), p. 42.

financially from the success of pulp fiction like *Abgezählt*, which simultaneously can tarnish the author's reputation as a man of letters. Gremon, who, because of the shoddy math employed in the novel, also fears for his own reputation, becomes the fall guy. Nevertheless, Cora's promises of wealth and her assurances that more people will be interested in his non-fiction book if they think it is written by Zern, entice him to assume the role. This role-play complicates our understanding of authorship, raising suspicions of ›Fälschung‹: Gremon is not the real author of *Abgezählt* and Zern is merely a pseudonym. These multiple layers of deception force Gremon to grapple with questions of identity; he receives letters from the readers of *Abgezählt*, addressed in various ways: »Leon Zern-Gremon oder Paul Gremon-Zern, Paul Zern oder Leon Gremon sowie Paul Leon und Leon Paul«. ¹³ Some letters are even addressed to Olven Hochehgk, the book's serial killer protagonist. These diverse forms of address highlight readers' wish to equate authors with their protagonists and view novels as largely autobiographical. Over time, Gremon's own identity slips away as he increasingly becomes nothing more than a legal delusion »das nur in Paragraphen und Unterparagraphen von Verträgen existierte«. ¹⁴

The novel takes a second comedic turn, when Joana informs Gremon that she has written a novel about her life as a sex worker and wants him to publish it under Zern's name. Gremon balks, recognizing himself in the main character, a regular customer and mathematics professor, named Manuel Grop, an anagram of Paul Gremon. Though Gremon has no qualms about visiting a bordello in private, he worries that readers will assume he is also Joana's primary client, thus tarnishing his professional reputation and jeopardizing his relationship with his young daughter. Because the story is well-written however, he also thinks it has the potential to become a best-seller. He presents the idea to Cora, and even Zern acquiesces. For Gremon, Joana's novel offers him the opportunity to regain his identity and become »Autor meiner selbst«. ¹⁵

Throughout the novel, Gremon's attempts to maintain a low profile are repeatedly thwarted. The publishing house designs a marketing prospectus with a picture of the book's author, Gremon as Zern. Because of the sexual nature of the book, Gremon does not want to be photographed. He suggests that his doctoral student Fruidhoffs stand in for him, reasoning: »Leon

¹³ Woelk (fn. 8), p. 75.

¹⁴ Ibid, p. 139.

¹⁵ Ibid, p. 120.

Zern besteht jetzt schon aus zwei Personen. Warum also nicht aus drei?«,¹⁶ another layer of deception. The photograph depicts Fruidhoffs in a distorted and sexualized crucifixion scene, and identifies Fruidhoffs by the name Paul Gremon. This unwanted publicity sends Gremon's soon-to-be ex-wife into a frenzy and his desire to stay out of the limelight backfires.

Despite the publishing house's extensive marketing and Zern's popularity, Joana's novel is a critical flop. Critics complain: »Alles in ›Joana‹ sei klischeehaft und holzschnittartig geraten. Statt kraftvoller lebendiger Figuren würden dem Leser nur skizzenhafte Abziehbilder ohne jede Glaubwürdigkeit präsentiert.«¹⁷ Such comments infuriate Gremon, who is insulted that ›his‹ novel is treated so shabbily, even though he is not the real author. Yet, his hands are tied; he cannot rebut any of the critiques without exposing himself as a regular customer of Joana's sexual establishment, nor without revealing that he did not write the novel, or even potentially admitting that he is not Zern. This necessitates a conspiracy of silence, for as Cora remarks: »Der Literaturbetrieb wird sich nicht ungestraft an der Nase herumführen lassen.«¹⁸ Despite the novel's lack of acclaim, it ultimately becomes a successful film with the real Joana in the starring role. Gremon, who had hoped to achieve financial security by playing the role of Zern, must sacrifice his royalties to his ex-wife as alimony.

In publicity materials, the publishing house mischaracterizes Paul's academic interest as chaos theory. His non-fiction book focuses on mathematical principles based on predictability and order. Despite the seeming randomness of a snowflake, for instance, there is an orderly organization to the constellation of crystals. While what happens to Gremon in the plot of *Joana Mandelbrot und ich* appears to be governed by chaos, the sequences of events are actually predictable. And, as Gremon grapples with his own duplicity, he takes increasing interest in mathematicians who also led duplicitous lives, including Felix Hausdorff (1868–1942), who published philosophical and theatrical texts under a pseudonym, and Georg Cantor (1845–1918) who questioned the existence of Shakespeare.

¹⁶ Ibid, p. 128.

¹⁷ Ibid, p. 157.

¹⁸ Ibid, p. 131.

2. Klaus Modick: *Bestseller*

Like Woelk, Modick's *Bestseller* plays with the concepts of authorship and authenticity, though from an even more critical perspective. The protagonist is a moderately successful author named Lukas Domcik, who describes himself as a writer who »seit Jahrzehnten regelmäßig Bücher schreib[t], den Misserfolg des letzten mit dem mäßigen Erfolg des nächsten ausgleich[t],« a predictable author, upon whom the continuity and profile of a publishing house depends.¹⁹ The protagonist's name, an anagram of Modick's own, blurs the line for readers between the author and his protagonist, a practice that emphasizes the author as intentionally constructed.²⁰ Domcik describes his first novel as a »Kritikererfolg [...] wohlwollend besprochen«²¹ in the national Feuilleton, but without the sales numbers to match. Having enjoyed steady, but measured success with his highbrow texts, he now feels slighted by his publisher, Ralf Scholz, who intends to publish Domcik's next novel only as »Autorenpflege«, a euphemism »für jene Bücher, die ein Verlag nicht publizieren will, weil er sich keinen Erfolg davon verspricht, die er aber dennoch publiziert, um den Autor nicht zu vergrätzen und womöglich vom Hof zu treiben«.²² Because Scholz doubts the book's potential to be a bestseller, the publishing house plans to print the novel without any publicity, signaling greater interest in profits than a long-standing relationship with a house author.²³ Though the term *Autorenpflege* suggests the publishing house's loyalty to its established author, Domcik cynically decries the current state of the German publishing landscape: »[Es] gibt zwar immer noch Verlage, aber keine Verleger mehr, sondern nur noch Verlagsmanager, Verlagsleiter, gut geölte Verlagsmaschinen«.²⁴ Here Domcik clearly articulates the twenty-first century trend: the evolution of publishing as attention shifts from

19 Klaus Modick: *Bestseller*, Cologne 2015, p. 65.

20 Schaffrick and Willand suggest that the »Autor als Konstrukt« is central to understanding authorship in the last decade. See Schaffrick and Willand (fn. 6), p. 37.

21 Modick (fn. 19), p. 67.

22 Ibid, p. 71.

23 In »Die geheimen Stunden der Nacht« (2005), Hanns-Josef Ortheil presents the generational transfer of publishing house ownership from a father, who turned his fledgling publishing house into an industry leader, to the eldest son, who is less focused on author relationships and more on profits. Like Modick's *Bestseller*, it describes the literature industry on the cusp of economization, where marketing, profits, and publishing house visibility outweigh the publishing house's historic role as an initiator and facilitator of culture. Hanns-Josef Ortheil: *Die geheimen Stunden der Nacht*, 6th edition, Munich 2007.

24 Modick (fn. 19), p. 72.

managing author relationships to courting markets and profits. Domcik's suspicions are confirmed when Scholz states what types of books he wants to promote: »Wichtig ist aber, was geht und was nicht geht. Was die Leute lesen wollen. Welche Bücher sie kaufen.«²⁵ Scholz allows market forces to dictate how he promotes his authors and their books.²⁶ He encourages Domcik to explore historical fiction, specifically a book about »den absolut krisenfesten Dauerbrenner [...] Nationalsozialismus, Zweiter Weltkrieg, Holocaust, Widerstand«;²⁷ »die Aufarbeitung der deutschen Schande [ist] zu einem kulturindustriellen Faktor ersten Ranges geworden, zu einer multimedialen Bonanza«.²⁸ Neither the lack of publicity for his current project nor the idea of pandering to reader interests sits well with Domcik at first. Indeed, he is surprised that his publisher is encouraging him »eine dieser Betrügereien, Hochstapeleien und Fälschungen aus den Fingern [zu] saugen«,²⁹ a bitter commentary about documentary fiction alluded to in the novel that earned authors and publishing houses substantial financial gains.³⁰

Domcik ultimately follows Scholz's suggestion, hatching a scheme he believes will ensure stardom. In good comedic fashion, the plan backfires. Domcik finds inspiration for a docufiction book in the personal papers of a recently deceased distant relative, his aunt Thea. As the sole heir of her estate, Domcik inherits a suitcase filled with a chaotic assortment of papers, her memoirs. Domcik finds them »ekelhaft« but »nicht unbedingt uninteressant, rein historisch jedenfalls«.³¹ They relate Thea's late-life confession, reflecting on her complicity with National Socialism – she was an ardent Nazi. The »Bonanza« Scholz suggested has simply fallen into Domcik's lap. Thea's ac-

25 Ibid, p. 73.

26 Modick ties this pointed criticism of publishers to the case of the fake lyricist and publisher Karl Emerich Krämer, who, publishing under the name Georg Forestier, managed to trick West German publishers, readers, and critics into believing that Forestier was a highly skilled lyricist. For further discussion of the Forestier case, see also Sarah Gaber's chapter in this volume.

27 Modick (fn. 19), p. 75.

28 Ibid, p. 77. Here Modick references Martin Walser's 1998 Friedenspreisrede, in which Walser criticized that the media's constant reminders about the Holocaust were becoming instrumentalized. Rather than promote remembrance, the incessant media reporting seems only to pay lip service to the past.

29 Ibid, p. 97.

30 Birgitta Krumrey reads this as intentionally situating the literature industry »in einem Feld zwischen Fakten und Fiktion«. See Krumrey: Autorschaft in der fiktionalen Autobiographie der Gegenwart: Ein Spiel mit der Leserschaft, in: Schaffrick and Willand (fn. 6), pp. 541–564, here p. 557.

31 Modick (fn. 19), p. 81.

count explains, even legitimizes her Nazi fervor. As he commits to reworking Thea's musings into a historical novel, he bristles at the thought of writing it under his own name and risking his professional reputation: »Als Herausgeber von Tante Theas gesammeltem Schwachsinn müsste ich mir eine Alias-Identität andichten und mich hinter einem Pseudonym verschanzen.«³² Like the author hiding behind Woelk's Leon Zern, Domcik fears tarnishing his cultural capital. Moreover, as the analysis of *Joana Mandelbrot und ich* demonstrated, it is impossible to remain anonymous with a pseudonym in today's literary marketplace because of the active role that the media plays in creating and promoting literary celebrity. Domcik realizes that print books are not sellable without the surrounding »Eventkultur«³³ of readings, talk shows, interviews, et cetera., all of which require the personal appearance of the author.

In order to achieve his dream of a bestseller, Domcik refashions Thea's biography with the help of a young English exchange student, Rachel Bringman, whom he accidentally meets in his favorite pub. She is an aspiring writer, who seeks Domcik's assistance with her fledgling novel *Wilde Nächte*, a series of poorly written and machine-translated stories. Domcik resents the success of emerging women writers, attributing such achievements to the marketability of the person rather than to the literary quality of their books:

Irgendjemand musste Rachel erzählt haben, dass derzeit in Deutschland gutaussehende Mädchen und junge Frauen, die das Abc auswendig konnten und mit

32 Ibid, p. 103. Modick's publisher played with authorship in titling his 1984 novella, Moos: »Der komplette Titel der Erstausgabe lautete übrigens: ›Moos. Die nachgelassenen Papiere des Botanikers Lukas Ohlburg. Herausgegeben von Klaus Modick.‹ Dieser Titelzusatz war seinerzeit eine Idee des Verlegers gewesen, gegen die ich mich vergeblich wehrte. Mir kam das zu pompös vor. Es stimmt zwar, daß der Text mit einer Herausgeberfiktion arbeitet, aber ich kann glaubhaft versichern, daß ich mir das ganze Buch selbst ausgedacht und es auch selbst geschrieben habe, nicht nur das Vorwort des angeblichen Herausgebers. Dieser Zusatz hat dann zu dem Mißverständnis geführt, daß ausgerechnet mein Debüt in manchen Bibliotheken nicht unter meinem Namen katalogisiert wurde, sondern unter ›Ohlburg, Lukas; Nachlaßedition, herausgegeben von Klaus Modick.‹.« As a result, the book sold fewer than 2,000 copies. See Modick: Dichter wollte ich nicht werden. Eine bio-bibliografische Langnotiz, in: Umstrittene Postmoderne. Lektüren, ed. by Andrea Hübner, Jörg Paulus, and Renate Stauff, Heidelberg 2010, pp. 229–241, here p. 234.

33 Modick (fn. 19), p. 157.

der Tastatur eines Computers halbwegs zurechtkamen, in der Riege des literarischen Fräuleinwunders beste Karrierechancen hatten.³⁴

This statement reveals the existential anxieties that moderately successful writers like Domcik experience as they struggle to negotiate the market-driven forces of the literature industry. Despite his reservations about Rachel's talent, Domcik readily recognizes that combining aunt Thea's story with Rachel's good looks would be »der totale Bringer!«³⁵ In order to turn this magic formula into a reality, he presents the idea to Rachel as »eine Mischung aus authentischem, historischem Quellenmaterial und literarischer Aufarbeitung«.³⁶

Domcik and Rachel strike a deal: he will write the text, and she will submit it to his publishing house as her own work under a pseudonym. Drawing from the realms of theatre and television, he describes this arrangement as »Inszenierung« where he serves as »Produzent, Regisseur und Drehbuchautor in Personalunion«.³⁷ Domcik falsifies Thea's biography: in his fictional version, she is Rachel's great-aunt. He transforms the real-life Nazi into a rueful former fellow traveler who redeemed herself helping Jews escape Berlin; after the war, she married one of the men she saved.³⁸ Just as his publisher Scholz suggested, Domcik taps into all the topics that sell: National Socialism, Second World War, Holocaust, and Resistance. His well-orchestrated (and well-written) ruse results in a sensation – the publishing house utilizes its entire marketing capacity: Rachel becomes the star of the Leipziger Buchmesse. When the story takes an unexpected turn – Rachel

34 Ibid, p. 124. This is a direct commentary on the so-called »literarische[s] Fräuleinwunder«. See Volker Hage: Ganz schön abgedreht, in: Der Spiegel, 1999, no. 12, 21 March 1999 (<https://www.spiegel.de/kultur/ganz-schoen-abgedreht-a-bf9d1ff9-0002-0001-0000-000010246374>, accessed: 28 Dezember 2023). As Kniesche notes, Domcik feels threatened. See Thomas W. Kniesche: Inszenierte Autorschaft und imaginierte Weiblichkeit in Literaturbetriebsromanen der Gegenwart, in: German Studies Review 45.1, 2022, pp. 129–149, here p. 136.

35 Modick (fn. 19), p. 177.

36 Ibid, p. 178.

37 Ibid, p. 199. Here Domcik directly criticizes the eventization of promoting literature. See Kniesche (fn. 34), p. 131.

38 Anne-Kathrin Reulecke cautions that such falsified biographies can damage the trustworthiness of eyewitness documentaries, particularly among a reading public interested in identificatory material. See Reulecke: Fälschungen – Zu Autorschaft und Beweis in Wissenschaften und Künsten. Eine Einleitung, in: Fälschungen. Zu Autorschaft und Beweis in Wissenschaften und Künsten, ed. by Anne-Kathrin Reulecke, Frankfurt am Main 2005, pp. 7–43, here p. 17f.

excludes him from her contract negotiations with Scholz, Domcik's dream of fame and fortune remains unfilled. Appalled that she had swindled him out of his expected riches, Domcik consults a lawyer. Because he and Rachel never signed a contract, Domcik has no right to compensation. Divulging the truth would expose him as a »Fälscher«³⁹ and subject him to possible legal action by the publishing house, essentially ending his career as a writer. Even more disappointing, because he was preoccupied with finalizing the fake manuscript, he failed to return the proofs of his own novel on time. As a result, his book is displayed at the Frankfurt Book Fair as a *Blindband*, a dummy unavailable for purchase.

Throughout the novel Domcik tries to rationalize his duplicitous approach to writing a bestseller by emphasizing the fictional nature of literature. Equating fiction with *Fälschung*, he suggests that fiction writers walk a fine line between fiction and fate: »Wir flunkern die Wahrheit zusammen«.⁴⁰ While Domcik initially balked at Scholz's suggestion to write documentary fiction, Scholz repeatedly emphasizes the financial success that books about the German Nazi past achieve, particularly one recent volume that Scholz had published: »[das] Tagebuch aus einem sibirischen Straflager für BDM-Führerinnen, veröffentlicht unter Pseudonym«.⁴¹ Though Domcik reminds Scholz that the book was a »Fälschung«,⁴² Scholz's past willingness to publish inauthentic material lends legitimacy to Domcik's reimagining of Thea's life story as a similar fake.

Readers are seemingly unprepared for such a twist, though Modick hints that something untoward is likely to happen from the very outset of the novel, which begins with a confession: »Höchste Zeit, die Wahrheit zu sagen«.⁴³ The first chapter implies that the protagonist will reveal a truth; the subsequent use of the term »Bericht«⁴⁴ to describe the text further fuels readers' expectations for factuality. It is only after reading the entire novel, however, that readers understand the following statement as a confession: »Um wahr zu wirken, muss die Wirklichkeit gefälscht werden. Das ist das ganze Geheimnis der Literatur. Und im Fall meines Bestsellers hat es ja im Grunde auch bestens funktioniert«.⁴⁵

39 Modick (fn. 19), p. 255.

40 Ibid, p. 99.

41 Ibid, p. 76.

42 Ibid, p. 76.

43 Ibid, p. 7.

44 Ibid, p. 9.

45 Ibid, p. 10.

3. Conclusion

The protagonists of Woelk's and Modick's novels try to manipulate the literature industry in order to attain a level of fame and fortune that has not been accorded to them. Though both protagonists also fail miserably, these novels successfully underscore, as Kniesche notes, that the ways in which the contemporary literature industry expects authors to perform authorship can have far-reaching repercussions.⁴⁶ The secondary cast of characters in Woelk's novel, including Gremon's agent Cora and the literary critic Arp, show a side of the industry that typically is not revealed to readers. Cora readily admits her own role in the industry's duplicity: »Leon Zern ist eine Konstruktion. Eine virtuelle Figur. Leon Zern ist ein Trick, um Geld zu verdienen.«⁴⁷ Woelk's novel accentuates the literature industry's quest for profitability, lack of scruples, and willingness to deceive the reading public, all in an effort to make profits, achieve bestseller status, and best other agents, critics, and publishing houses. Modick's *Bestseller* is decidedly more critical than Woelk's novel, particularly in its characterization of the publisher Scholz, who was more interested in betting on a bestseller by an unknown (female) debut writer than supporting a stable house author like Domcik. In its pointedly critical characterization of the publishing industry and its insatiable interest in the German past, *Bestseller*, which at first appears to be a trivial novel, draws readers in to current dialogues, events, and debates, like the controversy surrounding Walser's *Friedenspreisrede*.

Through fictional portrayals these novels reveal the ethical, moral, and legal intricacies that underlie the use of ghostwriters and pseudonyms, circumstances that are normally hidden from the view of readers, the consumers of these novels. By highlighting these entanglements, both Woelk and Modick give readers a peek behind the curtain of the publishing industry, revealing the extent to which profit margins dictate which books actually get promoted and into the hands of readers in the twenty-first century. As Woelk's *Joana Mandelbrot und ich* illustrates, pulp fiction books like Zern's *Abgezählt* fill the pockets of publishers, agents, and authors. The revelation of Zern's identity in the form of Paul Gremon further fueled a frenzy among the reading public, pushing profit margins even higher. Likewise, Modick's *Bestseller* chastises the literature industry for its desire to make profits at all costs. Scholz markets aunt Thea's story as if it were true. His focus is on what sells, not on what is good. Though Domcik ultimately feels remorse

46 Kniesche (fn. 34), p. 131.

47 Woelk (fn. 19), p. 130.

for his deception, it is because he did not attain the riches he had hoped, not because he was party to a successful *Fälschung*. Though both novels highlight the direct affects that the literature industry's quest for profits have on writers, Woelk's novel also considers the relationship between author and reader: »Bücher werden gedruckt, wir lesen, sie, und letztlich glauben wir, daß sie wahr sind«.48 Readers believe that the authors behind the books are real. The use of pseudonyms and unacknowledged ghostwriting breaks the trust between author and reader. In making this visible to readers, Woelk and Modick encourage readers to think seriously about the role that the trappings of the literature industry play in swaying them to buy particular books over others that may be aesthetically even better.

48 Ibid, p. 121.