

# Between Documentary and Provocation. New Tendencies (not only) in Contemporary Polish Holocaust Literature



Hans-Christian Trepte

Institut für Slavistik, Universität Leipzig  
treptus@t-online.de

## RÉSUMÉ

### **Between Documentary and Provocation. New Tendencies (not only) in Contemporary Polish Holocaust Literature**

The Holocaust can be seen as a transnational crime, and a collective trauma of universal extension. Therefore national approaches could be seen only as an example out of many others. The year 2000 was the starting point of a new area, since the transformation of Holocaust memory went global. A sensitive subject is the problem of poetization and aestheticization of the Holocaust between fact and fiction. In the meantime the generation of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren has taken over the responsibility in memorizing the Holocaust. New literary approaches are made in different artistic forms and expressions, expressing the Holocaust in forms of the satire, humor, irony, and grotesque, and we may state a remarkable 'visual turn', too. Giving evidence is still very important to prevent collective amnesia, also reacting on forms of Holocaust fatigue. In my paper I am concentrating mainly on Polish literature after two turning points (1989 and 2000). Representatives of the younger generations want to find out more about the former lives of their relatives, searching for traces and lost places. Another important issue is the massacre of Polish Jews in 1941 in Jedwabne as well as the literary anticipation of the Holocaust. Joseph Conrad's writing deeply affected Arendt's analysis of imperialism as an element of totalitarianism and the banality of evil. Interesting items of writing about the Holocaust are books written for children. Next to concentration camps and the former Jewish shtetl, also ghettos became a popular place in contemporary Polish Holocaust literature. The power of words, in all likelihood holograms, will become the only way of hearing a testimony in the future, making sure that the Holocaust is not forgotten.

## KEYWORDS

Holocaust, Jews, literature, testimony, memory, post-memory, remembrance, survival, survivor, concentration camps, documentary, facts, fiction, witness, displacement, trauma, history.

*I want to go on living even after my death! And that's why I am so grateful to God for having given me this gift, which I can use to develop myself and to all that's inside me. When I write I can shake off all my cares; my sorrow disappears, my spirits are revived. (Anne Frank: diary 5 April 1944)*



## THE LONG SHADOW OF THE HOLOCAUST

There is a strong urge to bear witness, to convert personal experience of suffering and death in literary testimonies. But due to biology there are less and less eyewitnesses left, one out of many other reasons for telling more and more fictional stories. Let me remind you, concerning this matter, of one of the greatest writers of holocaust literature, who died on 4 January 2018 in Israel. Aharon Appelfeld was born 16 February 1932 in Stara Schadowa close to Czernowitz as Erwin Appelfeld. His first name Aharon was an adaptation to the Zionist credo of the newly established Jewish state. Assimilation had become an expression of his new life in Israel. Appelfeld is 'a dislocated writer, a deported writer, a dispossessed writer and uprooted writer' writing 'displaced fiction' made of 'displacement and disorientation a subject uniquely his own' (Appelfeld 1993, p. 4). The inability to express the horrors of war and the Holocaust, combined with guilt feelings of the (Holocaust) survivors towards those, who were murdered, led often to silence or to special literary returns to their former home countries they had to leave for the sake of mere survival. As a matter of fact most books of expelled Jewish writers and Holocaust survivors make the world of Eastern European Jews often a subject of their literary works. It is mainly their own life story or their family history, like Appelfeld's *My parents* (Appelfeld 2017). Appelfeld's own story as well as the story of his parents expressed an everlasting trauma, a shocking experience the author never could get rid of. His mother was shot by Nazis while he was confined to bed. Father and son could survive the pogrom, and were deported to different working camps. Years later they met by chance in Israel again. Appelfeld's fate seems to be typical of many other holocaust writers. In his book dedicated to his parents Appelfeld does not write 'remembrance literature', because this might be seen as an 'unartistic approach' (Appelfeld 1993, p. 4). Things he had to go through were just the fertile soil for his writing, his emerging poetic fabric between reality and fiction, an inextricable texture of scraps of memories, of documenting and alienation. It is a literature of an ostensible idyllic world before the catastrophe took place. The holocaust occurs here as a contemplated unique and fatal event and it was also a kind of anticipation, that everything what existed up to now, would never come back, a feeling closely connected with fatal melancholy and death expectation.

## THEORIZING HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

There have been many approaches made to theorize holocaust literature. In this regard we might see the Holocaust as a European, even a global memory as Aleida Assmann raised this question in her research work on the extensions and limits of a new memory community. The Holocaust seen as a 'transnational crime', and a collective trauma 'of universal scope and global extension' (Assmann 2010, p. 97) had a global impact historically and a transnational character, since it implied different spatial movements and crossings of many national borders. Therefore 'national' approaches to this theme could be only an example out of many others. That's why Primo Levy spoke about a 'perpetual Babel' (Levy 1996, p. 38). As a matter of fact the memory of the Holocaust was often fragmented and dispersed in literary works published after

the Second World War, it was often subsumed or even included in the national history of war, occupation and extermination like the Polish word 'zagałada' (annihilation, extinction) suggest, namely the extermination of Polish citizens, irrespective of their ethnic and cultural descent. Aleida Assmann recognized in the year 2000 the starting point of a new area, when the transformation of Holocaust memory 'went global' (Assmann 2010, p. 98). The problem of 'facta and ficta' turned out to be one of the most crucial items in theorizing Holocaust literature as well as the intersection of memory and ethics in artistic expressions. Concerning this we may state a dilemma of the writer, to write first of all as a true witness to the Holocaust or to keep an imaginative but also creative distance from the genocide of the Jews on a fluent 'borderline between fact and fiction' (Eaglestone 2010, p. 190). Another sensitive subject, made by Theodor W. Adorno a subject of discussion, is the problem of poetization and aestheticization of the Holocaust. Relating the Holocaust to poetic, literary, and aesthetic phenomena has often been discussed as a taboo, or at least as an inadequate, insufficient literary device in dealing with the atrocities of the genocide of the (European) Jews. Only authentic testimony as well as reliable facts and documents were proved as suitable. Meanwhile the generation of the grandchildren and great-grandchildren has taken over the responsibility in memorizing the Holocaust. New approaches are made affecting mainly aesthetic and artistic questions also in forms of provocation, taboo-breaking or even scandals, mainly to evoke new attention. New literary strategies in literary texts are giving evidence that such new approaches are not only possible, but necessary, also with the important aim to prevent collective amnesia in form of different cultural transgressions, new artistic forms and expressions. A common tendency is therefore more and more referring to questions of aestheticization expressing the Holocaust with means of the satire, humor, irony, and grotesque. Another important development is concerning the Holocaust poetry between 'poeticity' and 'prosaization', frequently in experimental poetic forms or in a demonstrative 'unpoetic style' de- and reconstruction the Holocaust by stories relations of victims but also perpetrators, or of scholars constructing a new, special form of a 'meta-poetry' (Ibler 2016, p. 6). Currently we can still find traditional but also new narratives, situated mainly between documentary, fiction, and arts. Often authentic material and personal relations are used, but new tendencies may often lead to superficiality and triviality, too, evoking and mixing different time levels (past, present and future), and provoking different interactions, a 'multi-layered temporality' as well as different ideological interpretations and manipulations (Ibler 2016, p. 7). That's why we may figure out more and more new tendencies and 'Holocaust effects' in contemporary art, literature, and theory (van Alphen 1997), and they are also concerning children's literature as an important theme (Kidd 2005).

## FACTA AND FICTA IN HOLOCAUST LITERATURE

For the 'generation of post-memory', the Holocaust is a historical event, at the same time also an important part of their family history. But it is a cultural artifact, too. In this context we also have to do with narratives of non-Jewish writers, introducing new aspects, problems, associations, and reflections on the Holocaust between





documentary, and non-fiction (Żurek 2016). But nonfiction is still seen as the most reliable source, and there are up to now icons of the international holocaust literature ranging from Anne Frank's *diary* to Elie Wiesels *Night*, which are well known all over the world and remain influential on readers of different age groups. It is mainly literature bringing to life personal stories of holocaust victims in quite a different way, from documentary, eye witness, fiction, comics, fantasy up to opera and ballet. Hereafter I would like to concentrate mainly on Polish literature, facts, fiction, and tendencies after two serious turning points, 1989 and 2000, concerning memory and post-memory of the Holocaust. I will use the term Holocaust, although I am aware that the term Shoah would be more adequate (Young 1988). In my paper I will mainly deal with literary works written by representatives of the first and second generation, the 'children and grandchildren' of Holocaust survivors, and there is another important turning point in contemporary literature caused 'by growing distance of time' leading to 'new methods', more or less 'fictional interpretations and critical evaluations' (Trepte 2016, p. 57). Memories and traumas are frequently 'transferred onto the following generations, connecting a horrifying past with an often unpleasant present [...]' (ibid.). Mostly such transmissions are linked with questions of ethnic and cultural identity. Frequently children and grandchildren of Holocaust survivors are 'haunted by phantoms and ghosts of the murdered Jews' (ibid.). Representatives of the younger generations want to find out more about the former lives of their relatives. They start searching for traces and lost places. But they also want 'to engage themselves in different acts of Holocaust remembrance' by telling old, new 'stories that are not of their own' (ibid, p. 58). In contemporary Holocaust literature we may state a remarkable 'visual turn', especially towards famous movies (Hirsch 2012). For many children and grandchildren experiencing the Holocaust means 'descending into the abyss of time, of despair, pain and horror', provoking their readers in terms of language, historical, political, religious and sexual taboos but also 'recognizing in it an important public resource for reflections' on humanity, history, culture, religion (Trepte 2016, p. 57). The list of Polish texts on the Holocaust is very long. Especially after the year 2000 several key prose works were published, almost all of the authors that belong to the generation of Holocaust children. Some of them are also late debuts like Michał Głowiński's autobiographical work *Czarne sezony* (Black Seasons), published after his outing as a Jew and a gay man in 1999. In his debut book the author writes mainly about his experience as a Jewish boy, who survived on the (Polish) Aryan side (Żurek 2016). Other late debuts were written by Wilhelm Dichter or Roma Ligocka. Ligocka's narrative became famous in the context of Steven Spielberg's film *Schindler's list* (1993). She recognized herself in the film as 'the girl in the red coat' (red was the only splash of colour in Spielberg's film). In 1940 Ligocka, being a child, was taken with her mother to the ghetto. In her book the female narrator begins a harrowing journey into her own past, putting together pieces of a tragic childhood. Ligocka's novel, *Dziewczynka w czerwonym płaszczyku* (The Girl in the Red Coat), is a remarkable memoir of survival and its aftermath published in 2001. The Jewish Telegraph Agency (JTA) reached out about '7 new books about the holocaust you should read, according to scholars', that were recently published (Dolsten 2017). What seems to be interesting is the fact that among these publications one can find several books dealing with the massacre of Polish Jews in 1941 in the Polish town Jedwabne. The Polish journalist

Anna Bikont discovered, that she was Jewish, when she was in her thirties, and she was stressing the tabooed problem in her courageous book *My z Jedwabnego* (We from Jedwabne). Bikont was awarded in 2015 with the National Jewish Book Award. But it was Jan Tomasz Gross demonstrating in his controversial book *Neighbors: the destruction of the Jewish Community in Jedwabne, Poland* before Bikont that not German fascists but Polish anti-Semites committed the mass pogrom of about 1.600 victims in July 1941 (Gross 2000). The historic fact was successfully concealed for about 50 years. Gross' book, also seen as a provocation, initiated a controversial discussion not only in Poland. Some Jewish inhabitants of Jedwabne were killed by their Catholic Polish neighbors by axes and clubs, but most of the Jews were burned alive in a wooden barn on the outskirts of the Polish town. The cover image of Gross's book, a barn engulfed in flames, became a horrific symbol of war crimes and turned into a cultural icon in dealing with the holocaust in literature, film and arts. Gross' publication could also be seen as a kind of starting point for many other items in literature, film and art, dealing with the Jedwabne crime became an important theme in literature, film and art. Thus Anna Bikont's book, based on extensive archival research and written like a journal of her travels, investigations, conversations and interviews, is one out of many other publications, dealing with the Holocaust, tracing Jewish fates but also in searching identity. Bikont succeeded in reconstruction the context of the massacre and she developed a convincing theory, how and why it could happen: First of all on the base of deep hatred, envy, and suspicion of Jews, supported by the Polish Catholic Church and nationalist politicians and intellectuals, too. Jews were accused by Polish nationalists also in postwar Poland that they had collaborated willingly with the Soviet occupiers from 1939–1941 as well as with the Polish Communist after the Second World War, leading to postwar pogroms, first of all in Kielce (Poland) on July 4<sup>th</sup> in 1946. But in her controversial book Anna Bikont points out the support given by compassionate Poles to Jews, too, mentioning for example Antonia Wyrzykowska, a simple peasant woman, saving the lives of seven Jedwabne Jews. The burning actuality of Bikont's book is the fact that when myths go unchallenged, when fears are exploited and when a society refuses to accept a horrific, sad truth, genocides may happen again. With the help of such publications, showing the dark sides of Polish history, the controversy on Polish-Jewish relations and of different forms of Polish anti-Semitism is going on. That's why memories, showing various ghosts of the past, are becoming more and more a key issue in contemporary Polish literature and art.

### JOSEPH CONRAD (JÓZEF TEODOR KONRAD KORZENIOWSKI) AND THE CONTROVERSIAL ANTICIPATION OF THE HOLOCAUST

Another important issue is the challenging question of a disputed anticipation of the Holocaust. There is an unavoidable indignity in reading and writing after the Shoah. Thus the holocaust 'has projected its impact on both forward *and backward* in time, an explosion of destructive energy at the heart of Western civilization that compels us to rethink our assumptions about the nature of humanity and culture, history and progress, politics and morality', as the historian Omer Bartov suggests (Bartov 2000, p. 25). It is the temporality of reflections on the holocaust which we may see in a close





context of imperial and colonial encounters and ‘limit events’ such as genocide before and after the Second World War interwoven in recent Holocaust studies like the relationship between representations and responses to the Holocaust in fiction, memoir, history, ethics and responsibility to other literary texts non strict on the holocaust, and even written before it (Spargo — Ehrenreich /eds./ 2010). Therefore we have to take into account new considerations, concerning last but not least Joseph Conrad’s literary works in the ‘light of the anticipation of the Holocaust’, too (Laskowsky 1982, p. 93). Especially Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness* (as well as *Lord Jim*) is evaluated as a prophetic work, even as a ‘Primer of Holocaust’ (ibid.) and this would mean that both narratives have to be investigated with clear references to the Holocaust. Conrad’s narratives are re-read and re-interpreted as a special kind of reading and translating the Holocaust today, since Conrad witnessed the genocide in Africa, the murder of millions of black Africans by civilized white Europeans (Clendinnen 2002). The Polish scholar and expert of Joseph Conrad, Wiesław Krajka, recognizes a distant kinship of Joseph Conrad to other writers of contemporary Holocaust literature, for example to Jerzy Kosinski. It was bringing history to fiction on the base of today’s reader’s knowledge of historical events entering the reading of works of fiction published before these events even took place as a ‘special kind of reading the Holocaust’ (Krajka 1996). It has been the concentration camp Auschwitz that became the incarnation of the heart of darkness, a symbol, even an icon of all evil, and it was none other than Hannah Arendt, who made clear, that the colonial atrocities in Africa, which Conrad saw and described in his books, became the first proving ground for the systematic destruction of European Jews through the ideology of race (Reifer 2007). Conrad’s writing affected deeply Arendt’s analysis of imperialism as an element of totalitarianism and the banality of evil. The Polish journalist and writer, Wojciech Tochman, by the way a mentee of the Polish writer on Jewish problems, Hanna Krall, is visiting troublesome and dangerous places all over the world, connecting the Holocaust with genocides happening today like the mass murder in Bosnia in his text *Jakbyś Kamień Jadła* (Like Eating a Stone) (Tochman 2008). As eyewitnesses we are travelling with the author through the post-war landscapes in Bosnia, observing the aftermath of the genocide with graveyards, memorials, depressed survivors and we are listening to most harrowing and moving stories on human suffering. Other Polish writers, following Ryszard Kapuściński, masters of the Polish literary report, are writing in the context of the Holocaust about genocides happening in Africa and all over the world like Mariusz Szczygieł, Małgorzata Rejmer or Wojciech Jagielski.

### **TRANSGRESSION, CULTURAL CROSSING AND REWRITING — THE EXAMPLE OF EWA KURYLUK**

A good example for transgressions in art, religion, literature, arts and literature is the Polish writer and artist Ewa Kuryluk. Born in Cracow in 1945, she studied at the Academy of Fine Arts of the Jagiellonian University painting and art history, gaining a Ph.D. with a thesis on the art of the grotesque, published in Poland and in the US in 1987 simultaneously. In her artistic and literary works different narratives, media and aesthetical vernaculars merge, transgressing the borders between essay and nar-





rative, between drawing and writing, between installations and written words, but also between different cultures and traditions in a postmodern way. This becomes especially notable in her novel *Century 21* (Kuryluk 1992). In all her postmodern arrangements we find historical references to historical events, including Jewish history, and the aftermath of the Holocaust. Being still a child, Kuryluk, came across Janusz Korczak's *Memoir*, written in the ghetto. She was deeply influenced by a scene, in which Korczak recalls the death of his beloved canary bird provoking his strong wish, to put a cross on his pet's grave. But the boy was not allowed to do so, since a bird was something lower than a man, and the superintendent's son declared, that his bird was a Jew like him. This story brought also back memories to Ewa Kuryluk's mother, pointing once at yellow birds in the sky, wearing frequently a scarf imprinted with Van Gogh's *Boats*, framed in yellow. It was the yellow colour, she loved most of all. But soon yellow should get a different, symbolic meaning, changing into the infamous yellow star Jews had to wear. In 2002 Ewa Kuryluk finished finally her installation *Yellow Birds Fly* (2001–2003) and her book, *Art Mon Amour. Szkice o sztuce* (drafts on art) was published with a yellow cover (Kuryluk 2002). In the same year (2002), Ewa Kuryluk learnt in a telephone talk with Menachem Sharon, at that time cultural attaché of Israel in Warsaw that her father had helped many Jews to survive. Based on Sharon's testimony Kuryluk's father was declared a 'righteous among the nations of the world' in Yad Vashem. The yellow memories and different Jewish encounters lead to a more and more intensive occupation with Kuryluk's up to now unknown Jewish identity. In her retrospective, *Air People — Retrospective 1959–2002*, going back to the German expression 'Luftmenschen', was shown at Zacheta Gallery in Warsaw in 2003. In art and literature Kuryluk is not only referring to Jews but also to outsiders of every kind, to nomads, exiles, migrants, lonely people in general, and Shakespeare's *Tempest* served for her art as a kind of motto:

*Her These our actors, As I fortold you, were all spirits, and are melted into air, into thin air. And like the baseless fabrics of this vision, The cloud-capped towers, the gorgeous palaces, The solemn temples, the great globe itself, Yea, all which it inherit, shall dissolve, And like this insubstantial pageant faded, Leave not a rack behind.* (Shakespeare 2008, p. 12).

*Only after her mother's death in 2001, Kuryluk learnt that she had been a Jewish girl, named Miriam Kohany, and that she was picked up by her father, Teddy Gleich, from a park bench. After her mother's death she found letters written by her father and some family photos, too. Finally her mother and her brother Peter with his pet, a golden hamster named Goldi [sic!], became the main heroes of her novel Goldi, published after the sudden death of her brother in 2004 (Kuryluk 2004).*

## HOLOCAUST LITERATURE WRITTEN FOR CHILDREN

An interesting prevailing paradigm is Holocaust literature written for children. Ryszard Marek Groński's novel *Szlemiel* (2010), it means in Yiddish an unlucky person, a loser, for whom things never turn out right (Groński 2010). The title reminds



of a German romantic fairytale, *Peter Schlemihls wundersame Geschichte* (Peter Schlemihl's Remarkable Story), published by Adalbert von Chamisso in 1813 (Chamisso 2014). But in Groński's book Szlemiel is the name of a white bulldog living with a little girl, named Joasia and her parents in Warsaw. The dog is looking at the Warsaw ghetto, most likely an allusion to Jan Błoński's book *Biedni Polacy patrzą na getto* (The poor Poles are looking at the ghetto) (Błoński 1987). Everything that's happening inside and outside of the ghetto is seen through the eyes of the dog, a special interesting perspective and form of telling children about the Holocaust, war, discrimination and death. But Groński's story is also an example of an important trend of fictional stories told to children: How can a writer tell them about the atrocities of the war and the Holocaust today? One important method was already mentioned, namely comparing the Holocaust with genocides, happening still nowadays. But how can writers tell children about it, how can they give evidence of all that what they had to experience in their childhood? It took decades until the American writer Louis Begley alias Ludwik Begleiter surviving the Holocaust as a child, was able to write his autobiographical confession about a childhood spent in occupied Poland. His book *War Time Lies* (1991) translated in many languages became world-famous as an important (semi-biographical) narrative on the Holocaust (Begley 1991). The boy, assuming different non-Jewish identities, could only survive on Aryan papers by lying and denying his Jewish identity, and transforming his entire life into a constant fiction. Warner Brothers planned a film with the title *Aryan Papers*, based on Begley's book, but when it became known that Steven Spielberg would be a competition to Stanley Kubrick's film, the project was canceled. Addressing children depends on the age, and the ability to relate to the Holocaust experience, to bare brutality and cruelty, it demands furthermore a special emotional way of describing, telling things in different writing strategies. What should a writer have in his/her mind, when writing about the Holocaust? Of course a child should be the main character with whom the infant reader could identify. And the intimate, moving story with an exciting plot should also be embedded in a broader family context. Further on the language should be understandable. Seen through children's eyes, such a text could be a narrated confession, too. Different narratives may overlay, cross, run simultaneously, bringing different time levels and spaces together. Various realities are confronted, the Holocaust reality, fantasy, but also different dream-worlds. Very often facts and creative fantasy mingle, adequate to a child's imagination. Sometimes horrific stories seem to come out of cruel fairytales, too. Intertextuality, references to literature, music, art, architecture, cultural codes and last but not least films are artistically woven into a colourful narrative carpet. On the other hand books read in unbearable times can also be a welcome escape into another, better, fictional world. Regarding this I would like to mention an interesting book *Arka czasu* (The Ark of Time) that got the Astrid-Lindgren-Prize in 2013, and was written by the Polish journalist and writer Marcin Szczygielski (2013). Rafał, a little boy, is living with his grandfather in the Warsaw ghetto. He hardly can remember the time before his family had to leave their home in Saska Kępa, a prosperous Warsaw district. Only while reading, Rafał is able to avoid all the misery, hunger and death surrounding him. And it was Herbert George Wells' novel *The Time Machine* that became his favorite reading in the Warsaw ghetto, recognizing in the SS-men around him Wells' Morlocks. Travelling in time



and space, that's the central motif in Szczygielski's book. In the end the little boy is able to leave the ghetto, but he returns voluntarily to it again because of his beloved grandfather left behind.



## HOLOCAUST PROVOCATIONS – IGOR OSTACHOWICZ AND BOŻENA KEFF

Next to concentration camps and the extinguished world of the Jewish shtetl, the Warsaw ghetto turned into a popular topos in contemporary Polish Holocaust literature. Here the murdered Jews were still present, and their ghosts seemed still to live in the basements of the socialist blocks built on the area of the former ghetto after the war. The undead come out of the basements like in Igor Ostachowicz's novel *Noc Żywych Żydów* (The Night of The Living Jews) (Ostachowicz 2013). Ostachowicz succeeded in giving a literary imagination on a still unsettled and still repressed (again!) topic, the fate of the Jewish inhabitants of the Warsaw ghetto, a huge graveyard left, and an important Polish, Jewish, and German memory place. (By the way it is the same place, where Willy Brandt fell down on his knees in front of the ghetto memorial). In the former Jewish district the murdered Jewish inhabitants materialize as phantoms, as walking dead in face-to-face encounters with the living Poles. In Ostachowicz's novel we have to do with an 'inappropriate', ironic, comical, and shocking form of pop-culture. It is an intended provocation, with many modern associations, first of all to famous international horror films. The title of the book is paraphrasing a classic horror film, *Night of the Living Dead* by George A. Romero. But in this novel we have also to do with a symbolic object of desire, a magic silver amulet, once stolen from its Jewish owners. The amulet should guarantee its possessors everlasting wealth and success, a motif well known from many fairytales, too. The main character becomes more and more a super-hero trying to save the modern world, last but not least with the help of the walking Jewish dead. The modern Warsaw shopping mall Arkadia (sic!), a place of consumers' happiness, is turning into a common place, where the undead Jews are recognized as a threat again. Open-minded European Poles unite in a joint action and struggle with the undead walking Jews against nationalistic Polish skinheads and fascists. Another example of Holocaust provocation is closely associated with the name of the Polish journalist, essayist and poet of Jewish descent, Bożena Umińska Keff. Umińska is her Polish assumed name, whereas Keff is the original Jewish name, used by the writer again. Her book is titled *Utwór o matce i ojczyźnie* (On Mother and Fatherland) (Keff 2008), but Keff is also the author of another most remarkable textbook, *Anti-Semitism: An unfinished History* (Keff 2013). Her literary book on her mother and her fatherland, staged by the famous Polish stage director Jan Klatwa 2011 in Wrocław, could be regarded as a mixture of opera, tragedy and oratory, even as a Polish version of Art Spiegelman's *Maus*. It is the life story of a mother, called Meter, who survived the Holocaust and her daughter Kora, sacrificed to her mother. Kora is her mother's only audience. That means the mother has trapped her daughter in her own suffering, giving her no rights to lead a life of her own. Keff's book demonstrates how the child could find a way out of the Holocaust mausoleum, built by her own mother, first of all with the help of art.



Another interesting example of Holocaust literature and art is the first holocaust opera, *The Passenger*, by Mieczysław Weinberg, based on the literary text, *Pasażerka*, written by Zofia Posmysz (1962). The Polish writer had survived the death camp of Auschwitz and her book was not only one of the first literary works on concentration camp realities but was also considering the perspective of the Holocaust perpetrators. Although Weinberg's opera had been finished in 1966, it was performed in Moscow only in the year 2000 and after it in 2010 in Bregenz. Zofia Posmysz, at that time 86 years old, had been invited to this great event. And Weinberg's opera was performed with great success also at Semper Opera in Dresden in June 2017.

## HOLOCAUST MEMOIR FAKE

Contemporary Holocaust fakes respective false Holocaust memoirs could be seen in a close context with Jerzy Kosinski's controversial bestseller *The Painted Bird* (Kosinski 1965). In the United States the novel was classified as an authentic testimony, as a trustworthy story about the holocaust in (Eastern) Europe. There is a long list of made-up stories of supposed holocaust survivors (Kirsch 2014). Among them one can find also Misha Defonseca and her novel *Misha: A Memoir of the Holocaust Years* as well as Herman Rosenblat and his wife Roma Radzicki making up a sentimental love story, *Angel at the fence: The True Story of a Love That Survived*. The book was scheduled for publication in February 2009 but then it was cancelled. And I would like to mention another famous case, connected with the so-called Wilkomirski syndrome. Binjamin Wilkomirski (his real name was Bruno Dössekker and Bruno Grosjean) constructed, pretending to be a Holocaust survivor, an identity of his own, and wrote an extraordinary book, *Bruchstücke: Aus einer Kindheit 1939–1948* (Fragments: From a Childhood 1939–1948) (Wilkomirski 1998). It is a narrative about surviving as a child in the Nazi concentration camps of Majdanek and Auschwitz. Wilkomirski's book was even evaluated as a classic of holocaust literature before and translated immediately into 12 languages, and holocaust historians saw in the book even a true masterpiece. That's why sales were high, Wilkomirski started touring the world, relating his faked life story, moving even hard-bitten listeners to tears. But in the long run his memoirs turned out to be a fraud, a work of pure fiction and an assumed Jewish identity, and the German publishing house Suhrkamp had, after his story turned out to be a complete fake to withdraw the book from the German book market. Wilkomirski's work, demonstrating clearly the mechanism of pure fiction, was evaluated by the author by himself as follows: 'It was always the free choice of the reader to read my book as literature or to take it as a personal document, [...] nobody has to believe me' (Redstone 2009, pp. 80–81).

## REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST TODAY

Frequently there is a question asked: Was the Holocaust a unique event which should not be compared with other forms of genocide? Or may we compare it to genocides that happen after it? Especially for representatives of the younger generation new forms of genocides and terrorism compete with the experience of the Holocaust, leading to 'Ho-

locaust fatigue' (Assmann, p. 105). Following Dan Diner's argument, that the Holocaust is particular and universal we may recognize the Holocaust as a 'paradigmatic collective trauma', too (Diner 2007). This trauma can be 'embraced by other victim groups, recognizing their own suffering in the fate of Jewish victims' (Levy 2001, p. 56). Concerning this question I would like to refer to another important tendency in literature not only dealing directly with the Holocaust. It means travelling into the past in searching traces of relatives lost during the Holocaust. The writer Deborah Feldman belongs to a special group of orthodox Jews, who, after surviving the Holocaust, escaped to America. In Williamsburg, New York, she was brought up isolated in an orthodox Jewish neighborhood, here Holocaust survivors tried to continue the conservative life of East European orthodox Jews, maintaining also Yiddish as their first language. It was a bigot way of living following the old Chassidic traditions in order to be reconciled to God again. The main character of Feldman's novel, *Überbitten* (Feldman 2017a), is fleeing from the ultraconservative, orthodox Jewish community, going to an anonymous and liberal metropolis, and finding in Berlin her intellectual and sexual liberation. Nobody did actually know her here, nobody was interested in her fate, and nobody saw in her a child of Holocaust survivors coming from the East borderlands of Europe. Germany seemed to her a strange but at the same time familiar country, where she found many traces, and places associated with the fate of her family. The narrator is convinced that her inner anxiety and fear within her veins might be due to her childhood spent in Williamsburg but also concerning the hidden fate of her family. That's why she decided to follow family traces in Europe, finding to new kinds of remembering her family, and the Holocaust. As a 'global Jew' Feldman rejected her 'scandalous Hasidic roots', about which she wrote in her book *Unorthodox: The Scandalous Rejection of My Hasidic Roots* (Feldman 2012b). After finishing this book she started to write another literary work in German with the help of her translator Christian Ruziczka. And she was convinced that there would not be a single 'innocent' word in the German language (Smolczyk 2017, p. 129). Feldman's language seems to be old fashioned, sometimes even archaic, and coming from prewar times. The title of her novel, *Überbitten*, is an outdated German word, still used in Yiddish as 'Iberbetn', and it means: 'Abbitte tun' in the sense of reconciliation, but not on the base of collective family memory but by observations and discoveries made by the writer herself. In the end Germany, the country of the murderers of her Jewish family, became her new home. Feldman's book, a kind of coming-of-age novel, includes seven chapters situated on different time levels and dealing with various identities. Every chapter begins with a quotation from world literature on the Holocaust such as Primo Levi or Imre Kertész, and each chapter is introducing another realized journey to different countries on the search of Jewish traces and identity (Hungary, Bavaria, Andalusia, Sweden...). That's why Feldman's novel could be read as a documentary, a report or a travelogue, too.

## ARTISTIC BORDER CROSSINGS – LUIGI TOSCANO'S HOLOCAUST INSTALLATIONS

A new type of visualization of the Holocaust is an action made by the German Italian Luigi Toscano taking pictures of the last still living holocaust survivors. But it was not





only taking photos, Toscano also talked to these Holocaust survivors, learning a lot about their history of surviving, about their personal lives and tragedies. The photographer started talking about, what he had learnt, what made him shiver, what was hardly to bear. One moving story was about the Holocaust survivor Walter Frankenstein. 93 years old, he came from Sweden to Germany again giving evidence with the help of personal pictures and by telling about his dramatic life. Frankenstein pointed out clearly that his generation was dying, and who would remind people of the atrocities of the Holocaust after their death? Toscano's installation *Against forgetting* (Gegen das Vergessen) is a moral obligation. The exhibition of about 200 portraits was shown 2016 in Babi Yar in the Ukraine and published in form of an illustrated book (Toscano 2015). Toscano's portraits came also back to Berlin, to a place close to Sophienkirche, where Walter Frankenstein once had lived. But Toscano's installation came also to New York, to the headquarters of the United Nations, in January 2018. It cannot be excluded, that the personal documents, letters, and pictures verified by Toscano could become the beginning of a new kind of storytelling. The Shoah Foundation (Survivors of the Shoah Visual History) founded by Steven Spielberg initiated a new project: 'New Dimensions in Testimony'<sup>1</sup> connecting life-stories with interactive and virtual elements. The power of words, in all likelihood holograms, will become the only way of hearing a testimony in the future, to make sure that the memories of the Holocaust survivors are not forgotten.

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1 [www.youtube.com/watch?v=cThsZ-paonI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cThsZ-paonI).

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