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The Holocaust and Literature

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This new special issue of *Teksty Drugie, Twenty-First-Century Literature and the Holocaust. A Comparative and Multilingual Perspective*, notwithstanding the dynamic development of Holocaust research in recent years, provides an exceptionally interesting insight into its literary representations from nationally and methodologically diverse perspectives.

The division into sections adopted in this issue indicates its broad geographical and temporal perspective. While the two-part introduction, beginning with Agnieszka Dauksza's article, aims to provide an overview of the "conditions" of thinking and writing about the Holocaust in Poland, before mapping (as this short text also does) the volume's content, the next articles present the complex, heterogeneous, and – despite the passage of time – still extremely dynamic picture of literary representations of the Holocaust. The first of the sections proposed by the volume's academic editors, Sławomir Jacek Żurek and Kris Van Heuckelom, covers the subject of contemporary Holocaust writing, encompassing seven texts which deftly navigate the complicated memory universe of the Holocaust. These span articles dealing with third-generation German memory of the Shoah and the Sec-

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ond World War (Luisa Banki),¹ describing the complex mechanisms of creating and controlling Polish memory of the Holocaust (Przemysław Czapliński),² presenting the specificity of Flemish Holocaust representation and memory within the broader context of Dutch-language literary and cultural production (Kris Van Heuckelom),³ analyzing the poetics of the Holocaust narrative in modern Russian literature (Roman Katsman),⁴ and showing the nature of the multidirectional turn in post-Euro-aidan Ukrainian literature (Yuliya Ilchuk).⁵ This section also presents the intricacies of Israeli Holocaust memory, demonstrating how the figure of the survivor has been adopted by second- and third-generation authors (Erga Heller).⁶ The level of complexity and of the geographical and methodological breadth of the various authors is particularly visible in an article tracing how Jewish literature operates in Germany and in Poland (Elisa-Maria Hiemer).⁷

Adopting such a complex perspective (each of the articles is about either a different country or a fundamentally different angle within the given national memory) means that at least a few different problems of contemporary thinking about the Holocaust can be outlined smoothly. Firstly, it at least muddies, if not quite undermining, thinking in the simple oppositions of perpetrator and victim (as well as significantly modifying the well-known triad which also contains the bystander). Secondly, it shows in practice how the idea of multidirectional memory and the notion of the existence of implicated subjects⁸ can operate in the case of creating a truly comparative analysis of literature concerning the

1 Luisa Banki, "Remembering the Shoah and the Second World War in German Third Generation Literature," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

2 Przemysław Czapliński, "Managing Death. Polish Legitimate Cultures Concerning the Holocaust," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

3 Kris Van Heuckelom, "From Spectral to Real Jews: Recent Trends in Flemish Writing about the Holocaust," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

4 Roman Katsman, "Poetics of Twenty-First-Century Russian-Language Fiction about the Shoah," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

5 Yuliya Ilchuk, "The Multidirectional Turn in the Literature about Holocaust in Post-Euro-aidan Ukraine (On the Material of Sofia Andrukhovych's *Amadoka*)," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

6 Erga Heller, "The Creation of a 'Survivor' in Contemporary Israeli Holocaust Novels," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

7 Elisa-Maria Hiemer, "Entangled Identities and the History of Spaces in Twenty-First-Century Jewish Literature from Germany and Poland," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

8 Cf. especially Michael Rothberg, *The Implicated Subject. Beyond Victims and Perpetrators* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2019).

question of the Holocaust. I write here deliberately not of "Holocaust literature," but texts concerning the question of the Holocaust, as the articles in this volume are interested in something more than purely tracing the intricacies of Holocaust memory. They seek to show the ways in which our thinking about this definitive event of the twentieth century is changing as a result of events in the twenty-first century.

This intention is particularly visible in the next section, titled "Between Past and Future. Twenty-First-Century Holocaust Literature." A particularly noteworthy article in this section analyses the depictions of Hitler in literature, including in alternative, counterfactual portrayals contrasting with the actual events of the Second World War (Bettine Siertsema).⁹ The future as a point of reference and horizon of ideas¹⁰ is also present in an article analyzing, among other things, blurred temporalities, taking the example of American and Danish novels (Sarah Minslow).¹¹ The complicated relations between present and past, memory and ideas, are also explored in a text on the writing of Aharon Appelfeld (Michal Ben-Horin),¹² while the final article in this section analyses complex types of memory (including post-memories, sub-memories and non-memories) with reference to Polish and Hebrew memory of the Holocaust (Sławomir Jacek Żurek).¹³ Three cumulative movements can be used to outline the expansion of the subject area and methodology done by the authors of the articles comprising this part of the issue: firstly, leaning towards the future, including a counterfactual one that could have occurred if the Second World War had run a different course; secondly, going beyond typical representations of the Holocaust towards representing perspectives that have been examined less, of various types of unprivileged subjects including children and animals; thirdly, a movement towards building a supranational narrative beyond the framework of individual national memories.

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- 9 Bettine Siertsema, "Fictional Representations of Hitler," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).
- 10 Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).
- 11 Sarah Minslow, "Legacies of the Shoah in Jonathan Safran Foer's *Everything Is Illuminated* and Arnon Grunberg's *De Joodse Messias [The Jewish Messiah]*," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).
- 12 Michal Ben-Horin, "The Life of a Story: Aharon Appelfeld's Double as a Mode of Holocaust Representation," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).
- 13 Sławomir Jacek Żurek, "A Jewish Child in a Polish Hiding Place. Children, Adults and Animals in Nava Semel's *And the Rat Laughed* and Wilhelm Dichter's *God's Horse*," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

Particularly the last two of these movements are expanded upon and cumulated in the final section, titled "Jewish Childhood, the Holocaust and Twenty-First-Century." The articles grouped here not only explore the perspective of the child as Holocaust survivor, but also focus on the relatively new phenomenon of writing Holocaust literature for children and young people. The first of these articles enlarges this perspective further by investigating literary texts from various cultures translated into Polish (and thereby resonating with the Polish culture of remembrance) (Sylwia Karolak).¹⁴ Meanwhile, complicated temporal relations run through an article on young people's novels about the Warsaw ghetto, which they treat as a kind of chronotope, a breach in time and space (Daniel Feldman),¹⁵ existing as if "separately" to everything else. The separateness of children's or adolescents' experience of the Holocaust is also explored by the next article in the section, on the role of toys as memory transmitters in children's literature (Irena Barbara Kalla).¹⁶ These articles employ a consistently supranational research perspective, analyzing literary examples that always come from more than one culture and language, which makes for extremely interesting findings. There is a willingness in this section to ask the questions "what if?," referring not only to the poetics of alternative or counterfactual novels, but also the problems of a supranational sense of guilt and responsibility for the Holocaust – as with the article on the literary representations of Anne Frank (Pnina Rosenberg).¹⁷

The relations (and often frictions) between what could broadly be called the aesthetic and the ethical function of literature are also the subject of an article on the Dutch children's novel *Winterijs* [Winter ice] (Vanessa Joosen)¹⁸ as well one on Canadian children's novels (Mateusz Świetlicki),¹⁹ and especially its portrayal of Nazis.

I am presenting the articles featured in this volume meticulously, albeit briefly, not only to do justice to their authors and the scholarly editors of the volume, but also to show the complexity and transient nature of the topics analyzed here. Al-

14 Sylwia Karolak, "The Holocaust Literature for Children in Translation into Polish," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

15 Daniel Feldman, "Reading Time in Youth Novels about the Warsaw Ghetto," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

16 Irena Barbara Kalla, "The Unity of Subject and Object: Toys of the Holocaust Survivors as Memory Transmitters in Children's Literature," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

17 Pnina Rosenberg, "Anne Frank Is Dead and Is Living in New York," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

18 Vanessa Joosen, "Frozen in Sorrow: *Winterijs* [Winter ice] by Peter Van Gestel," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

19 Mateusz Świetlicki, "Trapped Between Hitler and Stalin: Nazi Bogeymen and Implicated Subjects in Canadian Children's Historical Fiction," *Teksty Drugie* English Issue 1 (2024).

though, as the well-known division into cultural and communicative memory²⁰ suggests, events whose eyewitnesses are no longer alive (which the Holocaust is gradually becoming, with 79 years now having passed since the end of the Second World War) should move into the realm of cultural memory, thus slowly disappearing from public discussion, as this volume shows, there is no sign of any gradual waning of interest in issues of the Holocaust.

Translated by Ben Koschalka

Abstract

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The Holocaust and Literature

Introduction to the special issue *Twenty-First-Century Literature and the Holocaust. A Comparative and Multilingual Perspective*.

Keywords

literature, Holocaust, memory, multidirectional memory

²⁰ Jan Assmann, *Cultural Memory and Early Civilization: Writing, Remembrance, and Political Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).