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AGAINST OBLIVION

Jewish Women's Writing on the Holocaust

Stories or even poetry about the Holocaust call for special justification and remain under constant suspicion ever since Adorno's famous and controversial dictum of 1951: *"Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch"* ["Writing poetry after Auschwitz is barbaric"].[1] This statement was qualified, not to say revised, by Adorno himself,[2] but the debate about what he may have been trying to say or to imply, proved very productive. Whether he meant poetry 'after' or 'about' Auschwitz, whether it was 'only' fictional or also autobiographical writing that was questioned, remained open. One also has to admit the continuing urgency of the problem evoked by his statement. Could representing and narrating the Holocaust in art and literature lead to its trivialisation and commercialisation, that is, to terror as entertainement?[3] The debate about a Holocaust memorial in Berlin or the dispute between Martin Walser and Ignatz Bubis prove the point. At the same time, this debate as well as the Adorno-debate is dominated by at least two other, very fundamental questions. The first touches on our interpretation of the Holocaust. If one understands the mass murder of the European Jews as an irreversible break in the continuity of western civilisation, as the unimaginable "shock" experienced for example by Hannah Arendt,[4] the possibility of representing this break by artistic means will be regarded with deep scepticism. But we may also imagine the opposite case, which was, in fact, stressed by Adorno himself. Just because the "dialectics of Enlightenment" suggest, as it were, a necessary connection between culture and barbarity, just because Auschwitz is not only an atavism, a break with the achievements of civilisation, but also civilisation's dark side and an integral part of human history, art runs the risk of playing down, by conciliatory or harmonising gestures, something which has to be presented as a painful insight and constant warning to coming generations. It is obvious

1 T. W. Adorno, 'Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft', in *Lyrik nach Auschwitz? Adorno und die Dichter*, ed. P. Kiedaisch (Stuttgart: Reclam, 1995 [1951]), pp. 27–49.

2 T. W. Adorno, 'Meditationen zur Metaphysik', in Lyrik nach Auschwitz?, ed. Kiedaisch, pp. 55–63, here: p. 57.

3 See f.e.: *Kunst und Literatur nach Auschwitz,* ed. M. Köppen (Berlin: Erich Schmidt, 1993); *Bilder des Holocaust. Literatur – Film – Bildende Kunst,* ed. M. Köppen and K. R. Scherpe (Köln, Weimar, Wien: Böhlau, 1997); *Text und Kritik,* Vol. 144 entitled 'Literatur und Holocaust' (1999).

4 See Hannah Arendt's television interview with Günter Gaus, in H. Arendt, *Ich will verstehen. Selbstauskünfte zu Leben und Werk* (2nd edition, München: Piper, 1997), pp. 44–70, here: p. 59.

that the fundamental question of our interpretation of Auschwitz is closely related to the second fundamental question of the chances or risks we are willing to grant art as an instrument of addressing historical experience. No subject gives rise to such a close connection between historical understanding, or the possibilities of interpretation, and artistic understanding, or the possibilities of representation, as the subject of the Holocaust.

For a literary critic it is a challenge to see how the co-ordinates between the disciplines may shift. While poetry and art are suspected of trivialising terror, and while Adorno feared the risk of a "transfiguration" of horror and thus new injustice for the victims in Arnold Schoenberg's *A Survivor from Warsaw* (1947), Raul Hilberg has said in his memoirs *The Politics of Memory* that one had to be an artist or create a work of art in order to really comprehend and portray the Holocaust.

Here Hilberg explicitly agrees with the filmmaker Claude Lanzmann; according to Hilberg's own recollections the works of Beethoven and the strict principles of his symphonies and chamber music became a model for him:

> I had to control my work, to dominate it as Beethoven had fashioned his music. Beethoven's *Appassionata,* that supreme achievement of piano music, which proves that one keyboard can be the equivalent of an orchestra, showed me that I could not shout on a thousand pages, that I had to suppress sonority and reverberations, and that I could loosen my grip only selectively, very selectively. I grasped for an overall symmetry. Beethoven had sketched the finale of his *Eroica* symphony by pairing what he placed first with what he put down last, then what followed the first with what preceded the last, and so on in candelabra fashion toward the middle. I had done something very similar with my twelve-chapter work. The first chapter was thematically reflected in the last. The second was matched with the next to the last, and the third with the tenth. The longest of my chapters was the one on deportations. It was the Andante of my composition, with a theme and multiple variations that mirrored the special conditions under which deportations were carried out in each country.[5]

These analogies may be problematic from a musicologist's point of view. Yet this more-than-metaphoric blending of music and language and of sounds and texts is nothing unusual for literary criticism: just think of Paul Celan's *Fugue of Death* or of Nelly Sachs' *Choir of the Saved.* But if one of the greatest historians of the Holocaust sees Beethoven's way of composing his works as a pattern for the description of the greatest crime of the twentieth century, it comes at least as a surprise.

The debate surrounding Adorno has become much more sophisticated in recent years; its historiographical, epistemological and aesthetic implications have become evermore complex, as demonstrated in such studies as James Young's *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust* (1988) or Geoffrey Hartman's *The Longest Shadow. In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*

5 R. Hilberg, *The Politics of Memory: the Journey of a Holocaust Historian* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1996), pp. 85–6.

(1996).[6] Relatively simple questions like the possibility of getting direct testimony of the Holocaust after the death of the last survivors of the camps are connected with highly complex theoretical problems like the representational forms of collective memory, the "aesthetics of memory" and the role of the media in the process of remembrance. Paradigms from the educational utilisation of memorials, the didactics of literature, the theory of the media and the theory of culture dominate the scientific discourse about the Holocaust to a degree that one may almost confirm Adorno's warning against the "consumption" of terror or the widely used sarcastic term "Shoah business." The Holocaust is a popular subject in the humanities: think of the plethora of publications, research projects and conferences. I do not want to give a final, let alone one-sided verdict on this situation; it must be said, however, that the scientific processing of the Holocaust and the turning of Holocaust literature into a special subject which we can see everywhere, has its irritating aspects. It may seem a necessary concession to academic conventions that the mass murder of the European Jews has become the subject of academic careers, but sometimes in this academic flood of words about the Holocaust as an unspeakable and unimaginable event one misses an aspect which has become decisive in telling stories or writing poetry about this "epic event of the twentieth century," as Raymond Federman[7] put it. This aspect is present in autobiographical fictional texts, it speaks from testimonies and novels, it is there in poetry and in the great texts of Primo Levi, Jean Améry, Imre Kertész or Jorge Semprun: I mean the implicit or explicit reflection about the possibility of representing, of narrating the events in Auschwitz.

Elie Wiesel has found the most radical formulation for this problem: "Literature of the Holocaust does not exist, cannot exist. It is a contradiction in terms [...] A novel about Treblinka is either not a novel, or not about Treblinka."[8]

This paradoxical formula which – like Adorno's statement – is not necessarily a ban on representation, expresses scepticism, even discomfort about the possibilities of art and the risk of trivialising the crimes. Elie Wiesel himself has attempted the difficult tightrope walk between autobiography and novel in his great trilogy *Night, Dawn,* and *Day*. I do not intend to discuss here whether he was successful. But not only Elie Wiesel but a large number of authors have used very diverse literary and linguistic means to find a way out of the dilemma which accompanies the subject of the Holocaust up to the present day. It is the dilemma between the ethically

6 J. Young, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust. Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988); G. Hartmann, *The Longest Shadow. In the Aftermath of the Holocaust* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996).

7 R. Federman, *Die Nacht zum 21. Jahrhundert oder Aus dem Leben eines alten Mannes* (Nördlingen: Greno, 1988), p. 24.

8 E. Wiesel, 'Art and Culture after the Holocaust', in *Auschwitz: Beginning of a New Era? Reflections on the Holocaust*, ed. E. Fleischner (New York: KTAV, 1977), pp. 403–415; here: p. 405.

and politically founded imperative of bearing witness and of remembrance and the aesthetically and philosophically motivated ban on representation in the wake of Adorno. That no language, no artistic form, no human medium of representation is strong enough or even adequate to express the dimension of the crimes is the antithesis of the imperative of bearing witness, of narrating and of passing on what happened, what was experienced by the survivors themselves as a condition of survival. This imperative was felt not only in order to educate and warn, but also for the sake of the dead, of the victims, whose terrible death demands remembrance. Adorno himself accepted this point in his later writings, and Klaus Laermann put it wisely in 1992: "Where should the millions of dead be buried with dignity, if not in poetry?"[9]

Looking at the abundance of autobiographical and literary texts about the Holocaust, about life in the camps and strategies of survival, about equal or different ways, about situations and lifelong traumas, one notices that they try to confront this dilemma in different ways, be it by stressing the imperative of bearing witness like the so-called simple testimonies, video-interviews or autobiographies, be it by perceiving the authenticity of the experience as a guarantee against commercialisation. Indeed, a book like Stella Müller-Madej's memoirs *The Girl on Schindler's List* found much less resonance than did Steven Spielberg's film a few months earlier. In other cases, the problem of representation moves into the centre of the literary or autobiographical text. The novels of Grete Weil and the autobiography of Ruth Klüger are significant examples. A third possibility – among several others – is the extreme point of view technique of the narrative as employed by Carl Friedman, who tells in literary form of her childhood experiences as the daughter of a survivor. I would like to present these three texts, a novel by Grete Weil, the autobiography of Ruth Klüger and the novella *Nightfather* by Carl Friedman, as examples of different possibilities of literary memory. They reflect the theoretical dilemmas of the current discourse of memory, especially the topos of unutterability and unrepresentability, without, however, confirming them. Although the autobiographical background of these texts is evident, their authority and literary authenticity results not so much from the authors' lives, but from a specifically literary self-consciousness.

My first example is the novel *Tramhalte Beethovenstraat* [Last Trolley from Beethovenstraat][10] published in 1963 with little resonance by the photographer and writer Grete Weil, who was born in Munich in 1906 and died in 1999. In 1936 she followed her husband into exile to the Netherlands.

9 K. Laermann, 'Nach Auschwitz ein Gedicht zu schreiben, ist barbarisch. Überlegungen zu einem Darstellungsverbot', in Kunst und Literatur nach Auschwitz, ed. Köppen, pp. 11–15.

10 For further details: I. von der Lühe, '"Osten, das ist das Nichts." Grete Weils Roman *Tramhalte Beethovenstraat*', in *Wechsel der Orte. Studien zum Wandel des literarischen Geschichtsbewußtseins* (Festschrift für Anke Bennholdt-Thomsen), ed. I. von der Lühe and A. Runge (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1997), pp. 322–33.

During the German occupation, she managed to hide together with her mother. Her husband was arrested in 1941 and first sent to Westerbork, then to the Mauthausen concentration camp. At Mauthausen, he perished in the notorious "quarries".

Grete Weil's writings are attempts to break free from the "Morbus Auschwitz,"[11] they are a literary form of *"Trauerarbeit"* [grieving] which tries to transcend the "melancholic consciousness" by giving it form and expression. The novel brings together two time-levels: the occupation of the Netherlands from 1940 to 1945 and the West German economic miracle of the early 1950s. The protagonist Andreas, a journalist and correspondent in German-occupied Amsterdam, witnesses the persecution and deportation of the Jews. He hides a young Jewish man and forms a close friendship with him, but cannot prevent his death. These memories and past experiences are inserted into the narrative present. The formerly successful author cannot share the euphoria of the economic miracle; he cannot carry on his career, because the past that he witnessed and now tries to document does not set him free. Now he has only one objective, to speak out in accusation of the crimes in Amsterdam, of the deportation and extermination of the Jews. He develops a radical insight that becomes the real theme of the novel: "Words don't clear up anything, they only cover up" (p. 211). "For him, the time of story-telling is over; he has to accuse the people, the murderers" (p. 51).

The nightly deportations at the trolley-stop in Amsterdam's Beethovenstraat after 1941, just below his windows, do not let him rest: "It was impossible to write about any other subject. For this, however, there was no word, no sign, no fitting allegory" (p. 50). Grete Weil's novel addresses the problem of language and narrative with existential radicalism; the fundamental doubt about the expressive potential of language is opposed by the no less fundamental longing for the redemptive power of the word. Andreas tries everything: the intensive work of remembrance, the exact reconstruction of facts and events, the total concentration on the past accompanied by a total cutting off of all connections with the present. All to no avail. Even his journey to Amsterdam and Mauthausen in the hope of finding the impetus to write at the places of the past and of undigested experience, proves unsuccessful. The journey only aggravates what he tries to overcome: the inability to express his experience and to find the right words to describe terror. He cannot overcome the past; it is impossible to bear witness, and any identity in the present is totally destroyed. The specific narrative situation of Weil's novel lies in the fact of attributing to a non-Jewish German, a member of the nation of perpetrators, a loss of self and a feeling of guilt about his survival, which normally characterise the testimonies of Jewish victims and survivors. The constellation of characters and motives reads

11 G. Weil: '...daß ich trotz allem nicht aufhören kann, das Leben zu lieben', in *Schreiben zwischen Unbehagen und Aufklärung*, ed. L. Wieskerstrauch (Weinheim, Berlin: Quadriga, 1988), pp. 115–28, here: p. 125.

like an allegory of the much-discussed German–Jewish symbiosis. The fate of the murdered Jewish boy, whom Andreas could not save, is mirrored in his own life after 1945. Andreas' wish to belong to the victims equally stimulates and hinders his attempt to bear witness. The continuing shock of the barbaric events at the trolley-stop, that is, the realisation of the break of civilisation inherent in the mass murder of the Jews, appears in the novel as the existential break in the life of a, so to speak, normal and non-Jewish German.

Long before the debates about cultural memory and about the possibility of imagining the terror of the camps, and perhaps in conscious opposition to Adorno's much-discussed dictum, Grete Weil uses this configuration of characters to insist on the fact that the trauma of survival and the penetration of barbarity into culture symbolised by Auschwitz are not an exclusively Jewish problem, in other words, not only a problem of the victims. Within the context of the novel, racism and mass murder become the inescapable trauma of those who knew about it, not only those who suffered from it. What Ruth Klüger diagnosed as literary fantasies of "Wiedergutmachung"[12] – "compensation" with the implications of "atonement" – with regard to books by Hans Scholz, Bruno Apitz and Alfred Andersch, is already plainly opposed by Grete Weil in the 1950s.

Her novel stands in even more radical opposition to all literary and philosophically visions of the beneficial effect of visiting memorial sites: "Man kann einem Steinbruch nicht ansehen, ob in ihm gemordet wurde [...]" [You can't tell from looking at a quarry if murders were committed there].[13] Memory fails, the attempt to break the spell of past events by examining the scene of the crime is unsuccessful. We know this theme from Peter Weiss' famous story "Meine Ortschaft" [My village],[14] "what happened here is unaccessible to the visitor." Peter Weiss' text was published in 1965, after Weil's novel, and has become canonical. One may assume that for her, as for Peter Weiss, the commentary to Alain Resnais's film *Nuit et Brouillard* [Night and Fog], translated into German by Paul Celan, provided the literary model.[15]

"The feeling that I have to write it because no one else in the world can write it, was never so strong as with [the novel] *Tramhalte,*"[16] Grete Weil later said in an interview. The fictionalising of autobiography, the shifting of her own experience towards the characters of a young German writer in occupied Amsterdam becomes a means to analyse the burden of bearing

12 See R. Klüger, *Katastrophen: über deutsche Literatur* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1994).

13 G. Weil, *Tramhalte Beethovenstraat.* Roman (Frankfurt am Main: Fischer, 1963), p. 143.

14 P. Weiss, 'Meine Ortschaft', in *Rapporte,* ed. P. Weiss (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1968 [1965]), pp. 113–24.

15 P. Celan, *Gesammelte Werke,* vol. 4, ed. B. Allemann and S. Reichert (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1992), pp. 77–99.

16 L. Nussbaum and U. Meyer, 'Grete Weil: Unbequem, zum Denken zwingend', in *Exilforschung 11* (1993), pp. 156–73, here: p. 160.

witness without concessions to a naive belief in storytelling. By letting Andreas suffer what she suffered herself, Grete Weil creates distance on the autobiographical level, but intimacy on the literary level. Into the mouth of the young, initially unsuspecting intellectual Andreas, she puts the words: *"Sie mußten ihm glauben, vor den Trambahnen hatte er vom Wesen des Faschismus nichts begriffen. Das ist seine Schuld."* [They had to believe him, before the trolleys he had understood nothing of the character of fascism. That's his guilt.][17] In this way, she places the development of the literary figure in an important political context of the post-war years. Against the well-known claim of countless Germans to have "known nothing" which was used to minimise personal involvement in the crimes, Grete Weil emphasises the guilt of ignorance. The distancing of her own experience through fiction opens up the possibility of a literary examination of German opinions and attempts at self-justification after the war.

As a broken existence, the protagonist is not only the mirror-image or mouthpiece of the author, not only the literary embodiment of a threatening loss of speech or of a biographically founded search for identity. In contrast to the so-called *"Bewältigungsliteratur"* of the 1960s, in which authors like Böll or Andersch tended to portray ordinary Germans as victims of Nazism themselves, Weil's novel is first and foremost the literary invitation to a dialogue with the non-Jewish Germans who had first declared themselves innocent because of their ignorance and who later felt driven to organise memorials and places and rituals of remembrance, after suppression and ignorance of the truth became impossible. Long before current "discourses" about the public forms of remembrance and almost anticipating Ruth Klüger's provocative reflections in her autobiography *weiter leben,*[18] Grete Weil shows the total defeat of the protagonist in the attempt to search for the terror of the past at Mauthausen. The end of the novel, which is as programmatic as it is prone to misunderstanding, may be read as an invitation to rethink the problem of memorial sites:

> When the ferry had almost reached the opposite bank, he started up and looked at the camp, sitting enthroned on the hill and looking terribly impressive. But it was nothing. Nobody who looked at it would know anything about the events of the past. Nobody would get an answer to the question: how was it possible. The victims had taken their secret and the secret of their murderers with them [...]. But it wasn't good to leave it standing. Ready for use. It should have been torn down. Because one should not make things too easy for evil.[19]

17 G. Weil, *Tramhalte Beethovenstraat,* p. 42 (Trans. into English by E.-G. Richter).

18 R. Klüger, *weiter leben: eine Jugend* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 1992); The English version appeared under the title *Still Alive: A Holocaust Girlhood Remembered* (New York: Feminist Press, 2001).

19 "Dann, als die Fähre schon fast das jenseitige Ufer erreicht hatte, riß er sich los und blickte zum Lager, das auf dem Hügel thronte und nach Gott weiß was aussah. Aber es war nichts. Niemand, der es sich anschaute, würde auch nur das geringste von dem Vergangenen erfahren. Niemand würde eine Antwort bekommen, wie es möglich gewesen war. Die Gemordeten hatten das Geheimnis und das ihrer Mörder mit sich genommen. Man sollte auch

Various obstacles to narration and writing determine Ruth Klüger's autobiography *weiter leben*. They are formulated explicitly and form one of the central themes of this text which is intended as a dialogue with its readers like Weil's novel, but in a totally different way. This is not enough, however, to explain the book's unusual and continuing success. It may be the result of its sarcastic and laconic style and of the fact that the author speaks openly and provocatively as a woman. I would like to examine the passages and narrative strategies by which Ruth Klüger distances her text from the tradition of concentration camp literature and therefore from the wrong way of reading it. In view of the almost canonical texts of Primo Levi, Tadeusz Borowski, Elie Wiesel, Peter Weiss and Cordelia Edvardson, she emphasises:

> I cannot tell about the camps today, as if I were the first, as if no one had ever told about them, as if everyone reading this did not know so much about it already that he thinks it's more than enough, and as if all them hadn't been exploited – politically, aesthetically and also as kitsch (p. 79).

With great attention and the constant questioning of premature expectations and stock responses, the author reflects upon her own writing and its reception by the public. The attention does not take the form of a forced self-consciousness, but of a partly appealing, partly ironic dialogue with the reader. Let me quote one of many examples:

> Dear reader, books like these are often called 'deeply moving' in the reviews. This expression comes to mind easily, all too easily. A reviewer who writes in this way about my memoirs has not read up to this point (p. 199).

The problem is not so much the impossibility of imagining or even representing, but the plethora of words and images, the hackneyed repertoire of interpretations and representations of terror. It is hard to find a recent narrative text about the Holocaust with a similar degree of provocative radicalism in confronting the problem, that there are not too few, but too many patterns to describe and understand the Holocaust, and that this cannot be solved by the intensified search for originality, for extravagant, shocking or totally new narrative themes or techniques. Klüger's answer to the question she has put so radically may seem simple, but its literary shape leads to an unusual autobiographic text which I would like to describe using the words of Tzvetan Todorov[20] as "narrative thinking," a narrative about and in discrepancies and disruptions. In a special and analytical way, we are told about Klüger's childhood in Vienna, about reminiscences of her father, about the experience of deportation and the camps. This narrative is informed by the

(cont. from previous page) nicht darüber reden. Es kam nichts dabei heraus. Worte machten nichts klar, sie deckten nur zu. Aber es war nicht gut, daß es da noch stand. Fertig zum Gebrauch. Man hätte es niederreißen sollen. Denn es ist von Übel, es dem Bösen zu leicht zu machen." G. Weil, *Tramhalte Beethovenstraat,* p. 144 (Trans. Richter).

20 T. Todorov, *Angesichts des Äußersten* (München: Fink, 1993).

realisation that continuity cannot be provided by story-telling alone, nor by the literary form of autobiography. The childhood memories of the father are mere fragments, which neither imagination nor narrative form can turn into a unified story. The difference between memory and imagination, between images that are engraved in the mind forever and the experience that these images also function as an "attic of the mind" and a "prison," determines the text and its reflectiveness. The image of the father is not only ambivalent, because he is remembered as charming and tyrannical, caring and unpredictable, but it also conflicts with the imagination of the adult narrator who pictures the terrible circumstances of her father's death and who has to admit to herself that she is by now much older than he ever was. Setting herself against the norms of the autobiographic genre, Ruth Klüger does not design a coherent, closed form. The difference between memory and imagination, between the experience of the camp and the insights of later years is never smoothed out but remains present.

Although the text follows the order of places: Vienna – the camps – Germany – New York – Göttingen in a superficially chronological order, this structure is questioned in the text, just as patterns of narrative and interpretation, the norms of the mother–daughter relationship, the function of concentration camps as museums and memorial sites are questioned. The text is structured by breaks, flashbacks and anticipations, essayistic insertions (on Paul Celan and Anna Seghers), most of all by the dialogic reflection on the narrative and its techniques. This form of narrative thinking, this "critique of memory," as Martin Walser has termed it, refuses to carry on the tradition of scepticism about language and the possibilities of art; it can do without conjuring up the inexpressible, without terms like 'trauma' or 'survival-guilt'. Instead, the author speaks of "fear of death," and there are many variations on one of the oldest literary symbols of fear: the ghost. In the life of Ruth Klüger, her father and her brother, who was also murdered, take the place of unredeemed "ghosts," the already mentioned difference between memory and imagination has "ghostlike" or sinister dimensions, therefore Vienna may become, in the narrator's memory, a "city of ghosts" (p. 67), "I want to tell you about my brother's ghost," it says in one place, and in another passage that describes a visit to Theresienstadt long after the war, she speaks of children playing in the street as "my ghosts" (p. 104). At the end of the book, Klüger reveals the whole variety of meanings connected with her "ghosts": they are all that is extremely strange and frightening and also inescapably near. "I have had dealings with ghosts long enough to recognise them immediately. But even if you know where they are, dealing with them is disorientating" (p. 279). "One should be able to write ghost stories," it says ghost in connection with the "disparate father-fragments" which do not add up to a coherent story and which have made her father a "ghost" in her life, "walking unredeemed." But since ghosts are difficult to represent in words and images, since they withdraw because the living approach them in the wrong way, one has to find a real and appropriate room for them. The appropriate room in literature would

be the "ghost story" which Ruth Klüger has not written in her autobiography, but which is prepared intellectually and poetically by her text.

The decision to conceive autobiography not as self-therapy but as dialogue and the decision for the ghost-motif are the central features by which Klüger's text tries to escape the dilemmas of the Holocaust discourse and which allow individual life to be expressed without concessions to kitsch. Autobiography becomes a place of reflection and a dialogue not only as the result of individual experiences of difference, but above all because of collective patterns of response and interpretation. This is borne out by the provocative questions Ruth Klüger puts to the young German men painting fences at Auschwitz as part of their alternative military service. These questions cast doubt on the West German consensus about the educational value of memorials. In her eyes, these anti-museums do not serve to honour the dead and to preserve their memory, but to impress and appease the visitors themselves:

> The museum culture of the camp sites has been formed by the vagaries and neuroses of our unsorted, collective memory. It is based on a profound superstition, that is, on the belief that the ghosts can be met and kept in their place, where the living ceased to breathe. Or rather, not a profound, but a shallow superstition. A visitor who feels moved, even if it is only the kind of feeling that a haunted house conveys, will be proud of these stirrings of humanity. And so the visitor monitors his reactions, examines his emotions, admires his own sensibility, or in other words, turns sentimental. For sentimentality involves turning away from an ostensible object and towards the subjective observer, that is, towards oneself. It means looking into a mirror instead of reality. (p. 66)

One may certainly argue about such provocative statements, but it is equally certain that the radical critique of memory practised in Ruth Klüger's autobiography takes the dialogue principle so seriously because it includes areas formerly out of bounds. Its radicalism opens up the chance of which the title speaks: to speak on, to live on.

Let me came to the last example, a novella entitled *Nightfather*[21] by the Dutch female author Carl Friedman, who was born in 1952. The book was published in 1991, translated into German in 1993, and consists of forty episodes. The female author is the daughter of a survivor of the camps, and her narrative deals with a 1950s childhood in a family for whom the traumatic experience of the father, his illness, nervousness, depressions and nightmares form a part of everyday life. The father "has camp," an illness described by the first person-narrator:

> Even more than a place, the camp is a condition. 'I have camp,' he says. That's the difference between him and us. We've had chickenpox and German measles. And Simon lay in bed with concussion for weeks, after he fell from the tree. But we haven't caught camp yet.

21 C. Friedman, *Nightfather. A Novel* (New York: Persea Books, 1995).

Within the family, the illnesses of the father and his countless stories of the camp are a normal part of life, but the children's relation to their environment is different from that of others. The point of view of the first person-narrator is sometimes sober and factual, sometimes consciously trenchant, then again, it is childlike and naive. This perspective emphasises a customary grotesque but avoids any tone that could evoke empathy, pity or indignation. The everyday life of childhood is presented in short episodes with simple linguistic means; nevertheless this procedure is the result of a conscious construction. The order of scenes not only follows the chronology of a childhood in the 1950s, it also reverses the chronology of the father's life. The meeting between the returned father and the mother is described only in the last chapter. Although the child's experience of time may dominate, the ever-present past of the father informs the events (for example, playing games, school, dancing lessons, questions about the existence of God) with a specific meaning. Against the background of Auschwitz, the children's socialisation sometimes takes a macabre form. The "real experiences" of the father shape the fantasies and wishes of his children. To catch "camp," Max drinks rainwater from a ditch (p. 9), to share the experience of freezing, he puts his naked feet into the refrigerator, and in order to hide her toys from the SS, the narrator buries them in the garden. On being asked by her teacher, what she would like to be when she grows up, she does not answer "captain" or "nurse," but "invisible, so the SS cannot catch me" (p. 86). Identification with the father, but also the strangeness emanating from him, turn his past into material for the children's experience of reality. This can also be seen on the level of language: "camp" and "Lebensraum," "SS," "latrine," "shack" and "crematorium" are as firmly anchored in the children's vocabulary as the name of Adolf Eichmann. Even the fairy tale of Little Red Ridinghood, the stories of Ulysses or Karl May's novels on the wild west are interpreted as allegories of the cruelties of the camps and the experience of the father. The comic, grotesque and shocking effects are not morally qualified. The paratactic and laconic narrative style opens up a literary reconstruction of a special kind. The episodes never become the material of psychological or theoretical reflection. The ego of these episodes is not estranged from itself, and the strangeness of the father does not hinder identification with him. So the book is not about "coming to terms" with a difficult childhood, nor about the literary reworking of a "survival trauma" or a complicated relationship between father and daughter. In a very simple and at the same time sophisticated sense, it is about the presence of the past, a literary attempt to bear witness, beyond autobiography or confession.

I have presented three very different examples of the literary representation of the Holocaust. All three share an autobiographical background, without, however, drawing their authority and authenticity from this background. In all three cases the authority of autobiography is questioned: Grete Weil shifts the guilt of survival to a member of the perpetrator nation, Ruth Klüger experiences memories as mere fragments and haunting

ghosts, and Carl Friedman tells short, grotesque episodes. Three different narrative strategies against oblivion on the one hand and the mere consumption of terror on the other. We find different strategies in the texts of authors of the second and third generation: for instance, Maxim Biller's polemic and sarcastic position, Esther Dischereit's essayistic and monological style, Barbara Honigmann's search for traces, or Hanna Krall's unusual, poetic and thematically productive use of the interview. The examples I chose from the last three decades may illustrate the general questions I sketched out in the introduction. In response to the ban on representation and to the imperative of bearing witness, writers have developed narrative possibilities of representing the Holocaust that seek to circumvent the dilemmas I mentioned and to maintain or reopen the literary dialogue.