

# **Intermediary scientific report (01.01.2014 –31.12.2014)**

## ***Displacement, Deportation and Survival of the Jews from Bucovina. Literary Models of Identity and Memory Construction***

PN-II-RU-PD-2012-3–0233

### **1. Deepening the theoretical and thematic framework of the project**

#### *a) Theoretical, methodological and aesthetical aspects of Holocaust literature*

For this phase I have completed the documentation stage (see the scientific report for the year 2013) by consulting a series of theoretical studies about the aesthetics of the Holocaust literature in order to analyze the mechanisms of functioning of a particular literary segment with reference to the traumatic experiences lived by the Jewish deportees during the Holocaust. The aim of this stage was to particularize the literary analysis in order to highlight the specificity of the writings which refer to the traumatic experiences in the camps in Transnistria.

The experiences of the Holocaust survivors were so horrendous that the decision to “literaturize” them was considered by some literary theorists (such as Theodor Adorno, Elie Wiesel and others) as a failed attempt, unable to represent this kind of experiences in a truthfully way. Another aspect that some literary critics (Aleida Assmann, Geoffrey Hartman and others) have pointed out is the temporal distance to the historical events, many survivors started to write about their traumatic experiences after the Second World War. This process implied the filtering of the events making the appeal to the collective memory to an essential element.

#### *b) Holocaust literature – theories of trauma*

A central interest for this stage was the deepening of some methodological and interpretative issues on various theories of trauma. Although this theoretical position was not initially envisaged in the outline proposal, the study of these aspects has become a fundamental element for the analysis of the literary texts and documents selected to be investigated in the framework of the project.

After numerous discussions with several experts in this field of research, I decided that such an approach would reveal an important interpretative potential in order to understand the functioning

of the writings which address the topic of the traumatic experiences. In this connection such a critical and interpretative approach would overcome the narrowness of the descriptive analysis.

Evaluating a large corpus of prose texts that made the deportation of the Bukovina Jews to Transnistria to their subject, one could notice a tendency for many authors to include also the period preceding the Second World War in the writing process, presenting it in an idyllic and nostalgic manner, and at the same time in contrast to the abominable facts of the Holocaust. The mental return to the place of childhood reconstructs a world destroyed by war, deportation and genocide illustrating a universe which is present only in the memory of the survivors. "The golden age" of the Austrian monarchy acquires often in their writings or reports the shades of an important referentiality, reconstructing through a lens which reduces or increases a long-gone world from which only images and memory remain.

One could notice that the descriptions of these places and actors such as they have been presented in several texts written by Holocaust survivors, *in absentia* of the subject, has displaced the discursive and narrative intention on a nostalgic level. Thus we can say that the descriptions of the Holocaust experiences are re-presentations of human tragedies, re-updates of personal experiences and in the same time secondary narratives, which however are never objectives presentations of the reality.

Bibliographical apparatus that supported this scientific goal consisted of studies written by American, German, Israeli theorists. Some of these materials have been found at the National Library of Israel, at the Library of the Hebrew University, at Yad Vashem Jerusalem and at the Berlin State Library. I mention here selectively the following publications which were read and summed up: Assmann, Aleida / Geoffrey Hartmann (Ed.) (2012). *Die Zukunft der Erinnerung und der Holocaust*. Paderborn: Konstanz Univ. Press; Caruth, Cathy (Ed.) (1995). *Trauma. Explorations in Memory*. Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press; Caruth, Cathy (1996). *Unclaimed Experience. Trauma, Narrative, and History*. Baltimore, London: The John Hopkins University Press; Kellermann, Natan P. F. (2009). *Holocaust Trauma. Psychological Effects and Treatment*. New York, Bloomington: IUniverse; Kühner, Angela (2002). *Kollektive Traumata. Eine Bestandsaufnahme. Annahmen, Argumente, Konzepte nach dem 11. September*. Berlin: Berghof Forschungszentrum für konstruktive Konfliktbearbeitung; Laub, Dori / Shoshana Felman (Ed.). *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History*. New York: Routledge; LaCapra, Dominick (1994). *Representing the Holocaust: history, theory, trauma*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press; Quindeau, Ilka (1995). *Trauma und Geschichte: Interpretationen autobiographischer Erzählungen von Überlebenden des Holocaust*. Frankfurt am Main: Brandes&Apsel; Chare, Nicholas / Dominic Williams (Ed.) (2013). *Representing Auschwitz: at the margins of testimony*. Houndmills, Basingstoke [u.a.]: Palgrave Macmillan; Brunner, José / Nathalie

Zajde (Ed.) (2007). *Holocaust und Trauma: kritische Perspektiven zur Entstehung und Wirkung eines Paradigmas*. Göttingen: Wallstein-Verl.

Preliminary conclusions I have reached after reading these works are: the past is being continually shaped, reinterpreted and reconstructed in relation to its social, historical and cultural frame of reference; survivors tend to transmit and to present their traumatic experiences in a "communicable" manner that can be "told" and "understood" by listeners or readers; testimonies are not simply monologues, survivors testimonies address a listener they have waited for years; the act of testimony marks an essential component both for the complex process of healing and for the possibility to enroll in everyday life.

*c) Elaborating a model of text interpretation in order to understand the writings of Edgar Hilsenrath, Alexander Spiegelblatt and Aharon Appelfeld*

Framing Edgar Hilsenrath's, Alexander Spiegelblatt's and Aharon Appelfeld's texts in the interpretation context of the project in order to reveal and to analyze the identity constellation and the potential of their writings, represented an important goal for this stage. For this purpose I have worked with several interpretation models proposed by various research theories concerning the mechanisms of functioning of trauma (see [b]).

Activities: elaboration of a model of text interpretation in order to understand the writings of the three above mentioned authors, insisting on some less discussed texts of Edgar Hilsenrath, and Alexander Spiegelblatt; revealing the discursive, narrative and aesthetic dimensions of these texts.

Among the texts analyzed during this stage I mention selectively the following titles:

- Appelfeld, Aharon (2005). *Geschichte eines Lebens* (translated from Hebrew into German by Anne Birkenhauer). Berlin: Rowohlt.
- Spiegelblatt, Alexander (2003). *Durch das Okular eines Uhrmachers* (translated from Yiddish into German by Armin Eidherr). Salzburg, Wien: Otto Müller Verlag.
- Spiegelblatt, Alexander (2011). *Schatten klopfen ans Fenster: vier Erzählungen* (translated from Yiddish into German by Kay Schweigmann-Greve). Hannover: Wehrhahn.
- Hilsenrath, Edgar (1990). *Broskys Geständnis*. München, Zürich: Piper.
- Hilsenrath, Edgar (2004). *Jossel Wassermanns Heimkehr*. Berlin: Dittrich Verlag.

*d) Identifying in the libraries and archives a text corpus with literary and documentary character (diaries, testimonies, autobiographical writings) about the deportation of Jews from Bukovina in Transnistria.*

For the achievement of this objective I have used the research and documentation stages at the National Library of Israel, at the Hebrew University Library, at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel and at the Berlin State Library, Germany which represented an important stage for the realization of the project by identifying a series of relevant materials in order to have a comparative perspective on the function of the literary and documentary-literary discourse on the above-mentioned topic and to analyze it in the broader thematic and methodological context.

Because of the tense military situation which coincided with the research stage in Israel, travelling to the libraries was often difficult; a number of materials could not be fully read over.

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I also mention that during the year there were several meetings between the project leader, Dr. Francisca Solomon, and the postdoctoral advisor, Prof. dr. dr. Andrei Corbea-Hoişie, during them various theoretical, methodological and interpretative aspects were discussed.

## **2. National and International Visibility (Conferences)**

**1. 22.-24.05.2014:** Workshop „Storylines and Blackboxes. Konstellationen auto/biographischer Erzählungen über Gewalterfahrungen im Kontext des Zweiten Weltkrieges“, Wiener Wiesenthal Institut für Holocaust-Studien (VWI), Vienna, Austria.

**Paper:** „Vom Diesseits ins Jenseits des Dnjestr. (Auto-)biographische und narrative Dimensionen jüdischer Schicksale“ (currently being evaluated for publication).

**2. 12.06.2014:** Workshop „Zentrum und Peripherie in Literaturen der Nachfolgestaaten eines Imperiums: Österreich und Rumänien nach 1918“, Institut für Europäische und Vergleichende Sprach- und Literaturwissenschaft an der Universität Wien, Austria.

**Paper:** „Die Bukowina zwischen Traum und Trauma im Alexander Spiegelblatts Roman *Durchschpaktiv fun a sejger-macher* [Durch das Okular eines Uhrmachers].“

**3. 16.-18.09.2014:** „Deutsch ohne Grenzen – Tagung des Germanistenverbandes der Tschechischen Republik“, Pedagogické a Filozofické fakultě Jihočeské univerzity, České Budějovice, Czech Republic.

**Paper:** „Heimatverlust, Krieg und Deportation. Narrative Fragmente von erlebten Traumata bei Edgar Hilsenrath und Alexander Spiegelblatt.“

**4. 20.-22.11.2014:** „Das Bild des Anderen in Sprache, Literatur und Gesellschaft – Wissenschaftliche Tagung der Germanistikabteilung der Hermannstädter Philologischen Fakultät“, Sibiu, Romania.

**Paper:** „Traum und Trauma – die Bukowiner Dimension als erlebte Erfahrung der Andersartigkeit“ (currently being evaluated for publication).

### **3. Documentation stages**

- **10.07.-8.08.2014:** research and documentation stage at the National Library of Israel, at the Hebrew University Library and at Yad Vashem, Jerusalem, Israel.

- **23.11.-1.12.2014:** research and documentation stage at the Berlin State Library, Germany.

### **4. Publications**

Evgenia Grishina: „Ein Land im Licht. Studien zur Palästina-Reiseliteratur (1918-1934)“ (recension). In: *Medaon. Magazin für jüdisches Leben in Forschung und Bildung* / Ausgabe 14/2014: <http://www.medaon.de/archiv-14-2014-inhaltsverzeichnis.html>

Daniel Baric, Tristan Coignard, Gaëlle Vassogne (Hrsg.): „Identités juives en Europe centrale. Des Lumières à l’entre-deux-guerres“ (recension). In: Andrei Corbea-Hoişie / Sigurd Scheichl (Ed.): *Jassyer Beiträge zur Germanistik*, Bd. 18, Iaşi / Konstanz: Editura UAIC&Hartung-Gorre Verlag (in print, 2015).

„Jüdische Erziehung und Ausbildung im Cheder: Literarische Perspektiven in den Texten galizischer und bukowinischer jüdischer Autoren.“ In: Markus Winkler (Ed.): *Literatur – Kultur – Zivilgesellschaft: Zur Habsburger Prägung des Bildungswesens in der Bukowina und Nachbarregionen zwischen 1848 und 1940*, München: IKGS (in print, 2015).

„Heimatverlust, Krieg und Deportation. Narrative Fragmente von erlebten Traumata bei Edgar Hilsenrath und Alexander Spiegelblatt.“ In: *Deutsch ohne Grenzen*, České Budějovice (in print, 2015).

25.11.2014

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