

Emigrée Central European Jewish Women's Holocaust Life Writing

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**Louise O. Vasvári,**  
**"Emigrée Central European Jewish Women's Holocaust Life Writing"**  
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**Edited by Louise O. Vasvári and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek**

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**Abstract:** In her paper "Emigrée Central European Jewish Women's Holocaust Life Writing," Louise O. Vasvári analyzes voices of women survivors from a gendered perspective in order to provide insights for both Holocaust studies and gender studies. Vasvári considers whether it can be claimed that there is a specifically female style of remembering and of testifying about these traumatic experiences. Vasvári's selection includes the writings of some two dozen Central European emigrée survivors, all native speakers of Hungarian, later writing and publishing in languages of their adopted countries. The first group of women consists of adult survivors who must bear witness in an incompletely mastered foreign language, while the second group, the "1.5 generation" (Suleiman) were children during the time of trauma and no longer speak their first language or speak it only at a basic level. In her analysis, Vasvári highlights translation and gender issues as well as the variety of narrative techniques the authors make use of, some of which overlap with those of oral testimony.

**Louise O. VASVÁRI**

### **Emigrée Central European Jewish Women's Holocaust Life Writing**

This study is part of a larger research project to integrate in the study of the Holocaust the voices of women survivors, specifically their experiences of the catastrophe, as well as their ways of post-Holocaust narration (see Vasvári, "Trauma"). I pay particular attention to texts by Jewish-Hungarian women: the women whose texts I list and discuss here did not publish in Hungarian, although in some cases their texts are based on diaries or earlier drafts in that language. The texts are divided into two categories I designate as 1) texts of "translated trauma," referring to narratives of self-translation adult survivors in emigration face in writing about their self-altering, even self-shattering, experiences: they bear witness in an incompletely mastered foreign language or texts located between two languages (see, e.g., Trahan) and 2) "1.5 generation" texts by authors who were children or adolescents during the time of trauma who may no longer speak Hungarian or speak it only at a child's level (I take the notion of "1.5 generation" texts from Suleiman). The writers of the texts I discuss represent various social classes, ages, religious backgrounds, and a variety of Holocaust survival strategies, ranging from the better-known stories of camp survivors to the experiences of hidden children. I do not discuss the matter of genre designation or categorization with regard to "memoir" versus "fiction" versus "autofiction," and so on. The designation of "Central European" women's Holocaust life writing is based on the fact that owing to the frequent changing of borders of countries in the region since World War I, as well as the sociocultural and linguistic situation of the Jewry of the region, a "national" categorization of the authors does not prove appropriate (see Rosen; Tötösy de Zepetnek, "English-language Memoir"; for an annotated list of Hungarian Holocaust survivors' texts, see, e.g., Biró; Várnai; for a bibliography of Central European women's Holocaust writing, see Vasvári, "Introduction").

Olga Lengyel's *Five Chimneys: A Woman Survivor's True Story of Auschwitz*, one of the first Holocaust memoirs published, has a complicated publication history and three different titles. The date given in most sources is a 1947 London edition, but, actually, the first edition was a 1946 French translation. Lengyel wrote her text in Hungarian and in that first edition a translator is indicated. Although there is no indication that she herself could possibly have written in English, in subsequent English editions no translator is given, only acknowledgment in the preface to three different people for "translation" work (on the difficulty of piecing together the publication history of memoirs, see Suleiman, "Monument"). The work initially received some attention, with even Einstein supposedly having written Lengyel a letter of appreciation in 1947. Nevertheless, she died in obscurity in New York in 2001 at the age of 92 with only a brief paid obituary in the *New York Times*. It has been claimed that the novel by William Styron, *Sophie's Choice*, with its controversial choice of a Christian heroine and exploitation of eroticism in Auschwitz, may have been partially based on Lengyel's memoir (see Mathé). Lengyel—who avoided admitting her Jewish origins and misled some scholars to believe she was gentile—lived a privileged life as a Jewish physician's wife in Cluj/Kolozsvár in Transylvania (today Romania). Lengyel devotes relatively little space to her life before the concentration camp, with most of the book about the some seven months she spends in Auschwitz. Because she had attended medical school, her chances of survival were increased by being able to work for Gisele Perl, the head obstetrician at Auschwitz, whose own memoir is discussed below. Lengyel's recruitment into the underground resistance in the camp and the need to tell her story is what she claims gave her courage to keep fighting since she had lost her family, including her two young sons. She confesses her guilt that in Birkenau she had unwittingly sent her younger son of twelve, who could have passed for older, to the line for gas to accompany his grandmother, thinking she was saving him. One unusual aspect of Lengyel's book is its frank, detailed discussion of sexual activity in the camp. For example, she tells of a Polish prisoner who would have given her food for sex but she refused while later another woman

who accepted the offer was then infected with syphilis. She recounts stories of the horrible competition among women to barter sex for food. Lengyel also details at some length and with much distaste numerous cases of lesbianism in the camp, including a cross-dressing lesbian whom the Nazis had wanted to put among the men and whom she depicts as courting her. Lengyel is one of the first to describe Dr. Mengele and Irma Grese, the sadistic "blond angel" who was the head of the women's camp.

Gisella Perl published *I Was a Doctor in Auschwitz* in 1947, one year after Olga Lengyel, her fellow Transylvanian Hungarian. In Sziget, Perl faced both gender and religious barriers to become a physician, as her father forbade her to study, fearing that she would stray from Judaism. In Auschwitz, she vowed to remain alive in order to save the life of pregnant women by aborting their fetuses. Neither her husband nor son survived, and she was one of the first survivors to emigrate to the US in 1946. It is implausible that she wrote her text in English, but, as in Lengyel's book, there are no translators credited. In the US, Perl was soon to suffer the further indignity of being attacked by a Catholic prelate who equated her humanitarian acts with Nazi crimes. She died in Israel in 1988.

Edith Bruck, born in 1932 in Tiszakarád (Hungary), is an exception among memoir writers in multiple respects. Bruck contrasts herself with Anne Frank, saying she came from the Jewish poverty of *shtetl* life, with a father who drank and a pious mother whose last unwanted child she was. Coming from such an impoverished background and with virtually no education, writing in nonliterary Italian, she became an unlikely best-selling author. Bruck's most important books are *Chi ti ama così* and *Lettera alla madre*, the latter in the form of a dialogue with her dead mother, whose voice she ventriloquizes. *Chi così ti ama* was translated to five languages including Hungarian, as early as 1965, and some of her subsequent works have also been translated to Hungarian, making her the only Jewish-Hungarian emigrée with some name recognition. Her total oeuvre, all of which describes her survivor's search for self-identity, consists of more than a dozen volumes of prose and poetry, creating what might be called a postmodern mosaic of an interface between orality and literacy in the form of testimonial narratives, a fusion of memoir and fiction. Nelo Risi, Bruck's husband, writes in the prologue to *Chi ti ama così* that as she wrote, "many pages sported goulash grease spots or red paprika fingerprints" (ix) and that she wrote with an ear for oral history and a sententious and folksy flavor, with roots in a now-vanished peasant culture. She had to "invent" a new language, both because her Italian was more than imperfect but also because with a rudimentary education she knew nothing about literary style. Shortly after Edith's twelfth birthday she was herded to the trains with her mother and one of her older sisters; she was menstruating and also miserable because she had had her hair cut short and her mother "looked through the little we had and found a miserable red ribbon, and she put it in my hair. Then she caressed me as if I really had long braids" (25). In Auschwitz the mother was sent immediately to the gas chambers but Bruck and her sister survived largely through their mutual support of each other. Originally, Bruck had begun to write her memoir at the end of 1945 in Hungarian but lost her notebook, along with poems written in childhood and dedicated to her mother. The introduction to the 2006 Modern Language Association of America edition of *Letters to My Mother* -- which now signals Bruck's acceptance into the US-American feminist canon -- attempts to relate her sparse nonliterary style also to the influence of postwar cinematic neo-realism, with which it has at best only glancing contact. It can much better be read as a postmodern lament, ironically echoing aspects from Jewish Passover Haggadah, since Bruck is not passing on patrilineal tradition but attempting to connect herself to her matrilineal genealogy, at the same time that she constantly contrasts her female subjectivity to that of her mother.

Ana Novak (née Zimra Harsányi), sometimes dubbed as the "Romanian Anne Frank," was born a Hungarian Jew in Romanian Transylvania. Like Bruck, she was born in 1929 to a multilingual milieu, as she says, a poor woman born in Transylvania, a region where the inhabitants -- Romanians, Hungarians, Germans, and Roma -- spoke several languages. That is why she says that she has had the greatest difficulty in trying to establish her national identity and native language: at eleven she found

herself a Hungarian citizen after Hitler's return of Transylvania to Hungary, at fifteen she was deported to Auschwitz, and on release in 1945 she was once again Romanian. In Auschwitz on scraps of German propaganda posters she kept a diary and wrote poetry she hid in her shoes and then memorized before she had to get rid of the scraps. She writes about many women-centered issues such as the "angel-makers," women who abort the fetuses of pregnant women to save them from the gas chambers. After the war, Novak became a playwright in Romania, then escaped to Germany in the 1950s where she wrote in German. Although her diary was first published in Hungarian in 1966 under her original name, she is today totally unknown in Hungary. In 1968 she emigrated to France where she began a prolific career writing in French and where her memoir was first published as *Les beaux jours de ma jeunesse*, and retranslated by her from the Hungarian in 1991. It is this second version that is subsequently published in English as *The Beautiful Days of My Youth: My Six Months in Auschwitz and Plaszow*. Ana is thus a literary phenomenon of multilinguality, whose voice is special because she describes not only weakness and hunger but also raucous, grotesque laughter, something not existing in the majority of Holocaust narratives.

Isabella Leitner's *Fragments of Isabella*, like Novak's text, also grew out of real fragments, scraps of paper on which she wrote, in Hungarian, shortly after she arrived in the US in 1945. Its sequel, *Saving the Fragments: From Auschwitz to New York*, appeared in 1985, followed by two later rewritings, *Isabella: From Auschwitz to Freedom*, which merged to the works, and *The Big Lie: A True Story*, a version for children. Although Isabella was actually twenty-years old when she was deported with her mother, who was killed, and with three sisters, two of whom survived with her, she writes her memoir as of a coming-of-age narrative without divulging her age, making herself seem a child. Although, thematically, Leitner might be compared to Bruck in that her work represents, in the words of Adrienne Kertzer, "a daughter's endless mourning" (77), her tone is different from that of Bruck's. Her memoir belongs to that subcategory that is shaped for the supposed narrative requirements of children, especially in *The Big Lie* for young readers where she tells a different story with a significant muting of the dead mother's voice and erasing the voice of anger and grief (see Kertzer 83-85; Schiffrin).

Similar to Olga Lengyel, born to a well-to-do family in Mármaros Sziget/Sighetu Marmăției (today in Romania), Hélène Stark's *Memoires d'une juive hongroise* appeared in 1981 where she lived with her husband in Brussels. Stark's text is an unusual Holocaust memoir because of its idyllic pastoral nature, punctuated almost in cinematic fashion with several episodes of high terror, including that of a group almost being caught as partisans (but not as Jews because their identity is safe-guarded by all the villagers). The text is a veritable folkloric description of village life, of a place with no bakery, no seamstress, no stores, and where Stark, speaking no French, much less the local patois, ends up teaching the locals how to do everything, from making cheese from their excess milk to making croissants and other baked goods by making flour with an old, rusted hand mill. In the midst of it all she gives birth to a child after being talked out of an abortion by the local doctor and her host. Interestingly, although Stark is an expert at absolutely every rural task, she never explains how she knows it all. This naturalistic idyll is interspersed with horror stories such as one of a Jewish boy of sixteen visiting his parents hiding in a French town when the S.S. arrive and cut off his hand, emasculate him, and kill him, which makes her mother go insane. Another is one where Stark is almost killed by two S.S. who suspect her of transporting food for the Resistance. But the couple and the two children born to them in the village survive thanks to false papers provided by the villagers. Although Stark talks about her faulty French as well as her insufficient narrative authority, she actually subverts her surface story of idyllic nature with extreme manipulation of gaps and secrets. Her memoir belongs to the type that maintains an ongoing tension between the concealed and the revealed, the guilt of the mother who feels she has abandoned her child and to preserve her defenses has created a tellable tale (in 1981, the same year Stark's book was published, Isabelle Vital-Tihany published *La Vie sauve* about how she survived in Budapest in 1944-45).

Aranka Siegal was born in Beregszász/Berehove (today in the Ukraine). Her 1981 *Upon the Head of a Goat: A Childhood in Holocaust, 1939-1944*, followed four years later by *Grace in the Wildness: After Liberation, 1945-1948*. Like Leitner, Siegal achieved fame as an author of children's literature and received several book awards. In *Upon the Head of a Goat* she writes with the voice of a nine-year-old, detailing with nostalgia rural family life in a world similar to one that Bruck critiques for its cultural tensions of gender, such as those concerning women burdened with too many children. Siegal was herself the fifth of her mother's seven children, two by a second marriage to a much younger man; however, she develops no details that would disturb the idyllic picture of prewar life. The subtitles of the two volumes are deceptive, as they appear to cover a nine-year period, but they omit precisely the time between June 1944, when the door shuts on the cattle car at the end of the first volume, and spring 1945, the moment of liberation from the Nazis. The narrative of *Grace*—the more successful of the two volumes—focuses on postwar events, with flashes back to camp experience while recounting how she sought to live a normal teenager's life.

Livia Bitton-Jackson's *Elli: Coming of Age in the Holocaust* -- similar to Bruck's *Lettere alla madre* and Leitner's work -- is centered on the mother-daughter relationship (see, e.g., Schiffrin). Like Leitner's and Siegal's memoirs, it has become well known by having won book awards and been adapted in a version for younger readers as *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing Up in the Holocaust*. In the sequels *Bridges of Hope: Searching for Life and Love after Auschwitz* and *Hello America: A Refugee's Journey from Auschwitz to the New World*, she describes emigration to New York, where she experiences difficulties such as panic attacks on the subway, which reminds her of the cattle wagons to the camp. Bitton-Jackson, born to a lower-middle class religious household in the mostly Hungarian Pozsony/Bratislava (then Czechoslovakia, today in Slovakia), was deported to Auschwitz at thirteen where she was spared by passing for sixteen ("selected" by Mengele because of her blond hair). For those who had not been sent directly to the gas chambers, passing through the "sauna" in Auschwitz was the first stage of the dehumanization process, where they were stripped of their clothes, had all their body hair shaved, and were tattooed with a number. The process was far more humiliating for women because they were forced to undress in front of male guards and exposed to verbal, physical, and sexual abuse. Yet, Bitton-Jackson felt that this process, which some women described as depriving them of their femaleness as well as their humanity, for her lifted the burden of identity. She survives by human contacts, helping to save her mother's life and having her own life saved by a friend of her mother's who had a daughter her own age. In 1951 Bitton-Jackson emigrated from Czechoslovakia to the US where she eventually became a professor of Jewish Studies; today she lives in Israel.

Rivka Leah Klein's *The Scent of Snowflowers: A Chronicle of Faith, Hope and Survival in Budapest* tells of daily life in Budapest (including segments from her diary of May, July, August, and December 1944) and how women took responsibility when Jewish men had to report to work brigades and forced labor. Klein's story is that her extended family of eleven survived in Budapest because a gentile couple, Károly Bitter and his wife Magda, who, unrelated and unknown to the Kleins, put them up in an apartment they rented for them.

Judith Magyar Isaacson begins her memoir, *Seed of Sarah: Memoirs of a Survivor* in 1938, when she was thirteen in Kaposvár (Hungary), dreaming about studying at the Sorbonne. She was deported in 1944 and liberated near Leipzig by the US army in 1945. While in a DP camp she met an intelligence officer, Irving Isaacson, whom she wed and with whom she still lives today in his native Maine. In the US, escaping as far as possible from her former interests, Magyar Isaacson became a scholar of mathematics and eventually a dean at Bates College. However, in 1976, after being invited to speak about her experiences during the war, she began to write. Her book is suffused with women's experiences, where, for example, in contrast to Bitton-Jackson, she mentions how traumatic head shaving was for women and how she did not even recognize her own mother, shunning her when she came forward to embrace her. Here she details the importance of the handkerchief in the camp, a detail described in a number of other women's memoirs as well, for example, Tedeschi's *There is One Place on Earth*. Alt-



though most of the book is devoted to her survival in the camp with her mother and aunt, Magyar Isaacson also gives a fascinating accounting in a style that has been called "parahistorical life history" (Rosen, "Literaried" 43), from a teenager's standpoint, of life before the war for a family that was both Jewish and very Hungarian (on the assimilation and acculturation of Jews in Hungary, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Comparative Cultural" 19-20). She attempts to show what it meant to be a Jewish-Hungarian girl nicknamed Jutka who lived a secure upper-middle-class life that fell apart.

The second category of texts is that of the "1.5 generation" children of Holocaust survivors and the texts of testimonies of children and adolescents who survived in hiding (on hidden-children survivors, see Marks; Reiter; Stein). Most were girls, because the hiding of boys was more dangerous owing to their being circumcized (see Kessel). As Jean Marcus shows, the hiding was full of constant fear and menace; the children often emerged from the war more damaged than their elders because they had no nostalgic memories of a "normal" existence to fall back on, and because they still had an undeveloped sense of identity (complicated by having to hide under false names they had to memorize at the cost of their and their family's lives).

Susan Varga's *Heddy and Me* is a cross-cultural and cross-historical double-voiced collaborative autobiography, based in part on a series of tape-recorded conversations with her mother. Varga describes the process of recording and the ensuing change in relationship between her mother and herself. She intersperses her mother's testimony with her own recollections of their life in Australia after their immigration in 1948, when she was five, and before which, she confesses, she had virtually no memories. Although Varga starts her memoir as a search to know more about her father, who perished in a labor brigade, it ends up being a matrilineal narrative. However, unlike Bruck's text, it is not about an irretrievably lost and mourned mother; rather, it is more in the line of stories of emigrant daughters, such as those by Maxine Hong Kingston or Audrey Lorde, in conflict with their mothers from another culture and another language. Varga tells her mother at the beginning that "it won't be her life story, not properly. It will be filtered through my reactions, through my second generation eyes" (5). She tells us that although "of course" they love each other, her mother finds her "evasive and disappointing," while Varga finds her mother's "intensity both invasive and disconcerting" (27). The mother, Magda's, story of how she survived in hiding with infant Susan, her two-year-old sister, and an aunt and a grandmother is fascinating, as is her apparent honesty in describing scenes like how the three women were all simultaneously raped in one room but also how later she had a six-month affair with a Soviet-Russian officer. As Ronit Lentin points out, sex, rape, abortion, and sexual abuse have tended to be skirted in memoirs (697). Varga, for her part, is open about her own lesbianism, about which she talks in more detail in her *Happy Families*, in part a fictionalized sequel to both the daughter's life and the story of the mother's youth, both psychologically oriented around deep secrets including family violence and incest, with the violence of the Holocaust implicitly compared.

Susan Rubin Suleiman's *Budapest Diary: In Search of the Motherbook* has possibly the best title for a memoir dealing with translated trauma. Suleiman, who survived the Holocaust in Budapest and escaped in 1949 at the age of nine, returned for the first time briefly in 1984. When in 1993 she returned for a semester's scholarly visit she began to keep a diary—which forms the core of the book and the first part of the title—and describes her search for traces of her family history by hunting for copies of official documents such as birth and marriage certificates in Hungary and in Poland, and hence the second part of the title, *Motherbook*, which sounds vaguely feminist and exotic in English but is merely a literal translation of *anyakönyv*, the registry of such documents (on Suleiman and the following three memoirs I discuss, see also Tötösy de Zepetnek, "English-language Memoir"). As Suleiman says in *Budapest Diary*, as a mother herself she seeks to establish her identity by reference to her own mother, although struggling with an earlier dislike of her, but realizing that resolving the conflict with her mother is resolving history. If Magyar Isaacson posed the question of what it meant to be a Jew in Hungary just before the Holocaust and then what it means to forgive half a century later, in her prologue Suleiman poses another question that is central for all the texts discussed here: what

does it mean to be a Jewish Hungarian born around World War II at a moment when being Jewish meant for many the opposite of being Hungarian? Furthermore, what does it mean to be a Jewish-Hungarian immigrant to North America (the US and Canada)?

The focus of Magda Denes's *Castles Burning: A Child's Life in War* is on her absent and despised father, who, when she was five in 1939 abandoned the family to flee to New York with forty-five custom-made shirts and twelve suits, leaving his wife and two children destitute. At the end of the memoir she is thirteen and briefly meets her father in New York before embarking for Cuba with her mother and aunt, and the two take an intense dislike to each other. In the intervening time we learn how the not very likeable child Magda -- "I was impossibly sarcastic, big-mouthed, insolent, and far too smart for my own good" (67) -- survived in hiding with the help of a series of gentiles, starting with the superintendent of their building, who hid the family in the toilet. Later they were repeatedly saved through her teenage brother's and cousin's connections as Zionist activists. There are many interesting details in the book, such as how her blond brother who looked Aryan passed as a Nazi in rescue efforts and how both he and their cousin at fourteen in wartime led adult sexual lives. Eventually both disappeared in the course of the war. Over half of the book is dedicated to the family's difficulties in postwar Budapest until they managed to escape in 1948, once again with Zionist help from her brother's former comrades. While some reviewers have praised the depiction of the integrity of the voice of a willful and sarcastic child protagonist without a mediating adult voice (see Hampf), the technique has also been criticized for the implausibility of perfectly extended recall, thus raising the question of how much is fantasy and how much testimony. Denes's memoir exemplifies two more types of memoirs posited by Rosen ("Literaried" 43), namely, that it tells so much in direct form that it tends to be perceived as too literary even if narrated by adults; and that it tells much more about her family and family relations in the shadows of war than about the events themselves. Denes's hard-edged child's voice is somewhat akin to that of Bruck's older protagonist, but in sharp contrast to Siegal's nostalgic child's voice.

On the one hand, Denes's life writing is as much about her obsession with the missing father as about wartime suffering, but on the other, she evinces no curiosity about what made him what he was; there is not one word about his family or how he became so successful, or how he had come to marry her uneducated provincial mother; and there is little about his womanizing beyond a few veiled quotes from the grandmother. While the child seems to know far more than any child could understand, the adult author seems uninterested in filling in the gaps. Tragically, Denes passed away suddenly at sixty-two, very shortly before her book was published (she is survived by her mother, Margit, who was instrumental in saving her, her aunt, and her grandmother). Denes said that she had long struggled to break her silence: "The hidden children are in a curious position . . . They were not deported and they were not killed. So they never felt entitled to talk about their own experiences. Holocaust survivors tend to be totally absorbed with that experience, while hidden children have tried to forget what happened to them" (qtd. in Blumenthal).

Elaine Kalman Naves, author of *Journey to Vaja: Reconstructing the World of a Hungarian-Jewish Family*, and Judit Kalman, author of *The County of Birches*, are sisters who have, in a sense, written matching stories, the first about her father's history and the second about both of her parents. The parents were survivors and the father's first wife and daughter were killed, while the mother's first husband was thought dead but resurfaced after her new marriage. The sisters, who forever felt they lived in the shadow of their murdered half-sister, Évike, were born in Hungary after the war, in 1947 and 1954, respectively, and are thus second generation. Their story would then technically belong to a third category after "Translated Traumas" and "1.5 Generation" to that of "Second Generation" daughters. However, Kalman Naves's aim is to tell her father's story and she divulges very few details about herself. Kalman's memoir, on the other hand, might also be referred to as a "proximate collaborative autobiography" (Eakins 27), where a second- or even third-generation child tries to articulate the life narrative of parents and grandparents into their own life experience. Kalman devotes about half of her



book to her mother's and aunt's life before she was born. Unlike Kalman Naves, however, and more like Varga, she also blends the story of her own life with that of her parents and mentions her older sister, never giving away that she had earlier written a book of her own on the family. Kalman Naves's text is "part autobiography, part family chronicle and part immigrant saga," as she calls it in her introduction (ii). She records her father's stories and myths (she had access to some family letters) and, as a trained historian, weaves in archival research. She admits that certain scenes were dramatized, and "at times dialogue has been reconstructed based on what people have told me" (xiii). After her father's death Kalman Naves went back with relatives to visit the town Vaja in Hungary (where the Weinbergers owned extensive property since the nineteenth century) with relatives from Hungary and realized that she felt nothing, although in childhood she had believed in her father's myth and that she "was" from there. Kalman Naves has also written, in her *Shoshanna's Story: A Mother, a Daughter and the Shadows of History*, her mother's story from a new angle, emphasizing the tragedy of her settling for a new life and of being pregnant with Kalman Naves, her first daughter, only to have her beloved first husband reappear as a survivor.

Judit Kalman's *The County of Birches* is a series of linked stories, divided into three parts, each with 4-5 chapters: The Old World, The Grey World, the New World, with the second referring to London, their initial place of emigration to the father's brother, and the last to Montréal, where they joined the mother's surviving sister. Their relatives in both places hid from their children that they were Jewish. In Montréal, Kalman's parents pushed her to attend Hebrew school, where twenty-years after the Holocaust Jewish children made jokes about lampshades and ovens. She quit the school but would not tell the parents why. Kalman's own story fits into the literature of double emigration (see Castel). As Eva Hoffman described her first impressions of Canada after immigration as inhospitable, rigid, cold, and conformist, so Kalman and her family found England, after which they sought a new life in Canada that involved yet a new identity. Kalman recreates her mother's and then her father's stories from their childhood through their Holocaust tragedies in a lyrical style but full of direct discourse, a strategy some readers find poetic (e.g., Tötösy de Zepetnek, "English-language Memoir" 348), but one that can be judged as too fictionalized. She concludes that her parents were plain people but their stories were heroic; this discrepancy irked her because the circumstances of their past imbued them with a grandeur that did not fit. They were elevated further when these events were shaped through the father's stories, who thus grafted meaning to their lives.

Evie Blaikie's *Magda's Daughter: A Hidden Child's Journey Home* has the most literally inexact but symbolically significant title, because it is, appropriately, much less about her life during the Holocaust as a hidden child than about its aftermath, with only a small amount of narrative devoted to the war. Although a continuing thread is Evie's primal connection with her mother, it is about recurrent separations, beginning when Evie was a year old and was left in Hungary with relatives, and repeated both during hiding and after the war in France and England, until the mother's early death at fifty-two. Like Denes's memoir, Blaikie's is really a family saga of exile, displacement, and the wrecked lives of all members of her large and close-knit family. Her narrative begins with her 1939 birth in Paris followed by her return to Budapest during the war and ends over fifty years later, in 1991, when she first began to consider herself a survivor when she attended the 1991 Memorial Day Conference of Hidden Children.

Miriam Katin's *We Are On Our Own* is a double autobiography of her survival with her mother in hiding when she was three, composed as a graphic memoir similar to Art Spiegelman's *Maus* "comix." It is a multitiered metanarrative, a co-mingling of words and image. Like Varga's mother, Katin's mother is also amazingly forthcoming about the sexual abuse she suffered while hiding with her three-year-old daughter, disguised as a peasant woman, and her pregnancy by a German officer who guessed her identity and the later looting and raping by Soviet-Russian soldiers. Katin juxtaposes such scenes in black and white with a sudden change to color frames of herself as an adult, playing with her own two-year-old child in an autumn-leaves setting. She does this for one frame and then reverts

to bleak drawings of the two of them fleeing in the snow. Then again one page of the present, with the mother telephoning her daughter to say it is snowing, an obvious flashback to the horrible snow then and the good snow now. At the end Katin says: "I could somehow imagine the places and the people my mother told me about, but a real sense of myself as a small child and the reality of the fear and confusion of those times I could understand only be reading the last few letters and postcards my mother had written to my father. They survived the war with him" (198).

There are still new memoirs being written by women, such as Erzsébet Fuchs's unusual love story, *Le Dernier bateau d'Odessa*, about how she met an escaped French prisoner in Hungary who was a physician, and how they survived the war together and married and are still married today. Published just months after the author's death is Erika Gottlieb's *Becoming My Mother's Daughter: A Story of Survival and Renewal*: similar to Denes's memoir and with some of the same problems pertaining to the reliability of the recall of memories by a small child, it is a recollection of a six-year-old in hiding in Budapest with her mother and eight-year-old sister, framed by the protagonist's life as an adult in Canada. And there are many more women's Holocaust texts we will never read because the survivors were only able to reconstruct an identity after the war by building a wall of secrecy around their experiences and about their Jewishness. Occasionally, daughters nevertheless struggle to reconstruct the lives of mothers and grandmothers (see, e.g., Foster) and examples of such include Irene Reti's *The Keeper of Memory*, about how her Jewish-Hungarian family kept their identity a secret from her and how she found out the truth only when she was seventeen. Vivien Chocas recounts, in her fictionalized *Bazar Magyar. Les Saveurs du passé au bout de la langue*, her heroine's parents' silence about their past and refusal to speak Hungarian after they emigrate to France after the 1956 Revolution. She needed to explore the void thus created by studying Hungarian in secret, traveling to Hungary, and even conducting a brief affair with a Hungarian there, and, most of all, by savoring Hungarian dishes (each chapter is named after a Hungarian dish such as stuffed cabbage [*töltött káposzta*]). Eventually she found out that her mother and maternal grandmother were Jews who survived the war in Budapest but that her grandmother had sworn the whole family to secrecy, never to divulge their history. Interestingly, Chocas's book was immediately translated to Hungarian in 2007 as *Magyar bazár*.

The cumulative testimony of the prewar lives of the women whose texts I discuss here "belong not only to the history of the Holocaust but to the history of Hungary" ("Ennek a könyvnek a tárgya nem 'a' zsidó sors. Amit ez a könyv elbeszél, az magyar történelem") to quote Mária Ember on the cover page of her 1974 *Hajtű-kanyar (Hairpin Bend)*, in words printed to mimic her written hand, as if in a dedication to the reader. Ember's autobiographical novel is arguably the most important writing by a woman on the Jewish-Hungarian Holocaust, in some senses competing with Imre Kertész's *Sorstalanság (Fatelessness)*, published a year later (see Várnai; on Kertész, see Vasvári and Tötösy de Zepetnek). Yet, it was repeatedly out of print until its reprintings in 1994 and 2006, and it has only been translated to German. The works I analyze, on the other hand -- with the exception of Bruck's writing -- are almost uniformly not available in Hungarian, nor are they, except those that have been adapted as texts for young people, often much better known in the languages in which they were published. It may be a literary irony that by far the best seller of all time by a Hungarian woman emigrée about her World War II experience is gentile Christine Arnothy's 1955 *J'Ai quinze ans et je ne veux pas mourir*, translated into English the following year as *I'm Fifteen and I Don't Want to Die* and aimed at a juvenile audience. Currently, the best-known work of the genre in Hungarian is again by a gentile, Alaine Polcz's 1991 *Asszony a fronton. Egy fejezet életemből*, translated as *One Woman in the War: Hungary, 1944-45*.

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