

Introduction to and Bibliography of Central European Women's Holocaust Life Writing in English

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Thematic Issue *New Work in Holocaust Studies*
Edited by Louise O. Vasvári and Steven Tötösy de Zepetnek

Abstract: In her "Introduction to and Bibliography of Central European Women's Holocaust Life Writing in English," Louise O. Vasvári discusses aspects and perspectives of women's life writing, including her criteria of selection, the problematics of sourcing, issues of translation, and processes of publication. While the authors listed in the bibliography are overwhelmingly Jewish and from Central and East Europe, there are works listed by others whose experiences also offer important testimony not only on the camps but also on other aspects of the Holocaust. The bibliography suggests that women have written as much and, especially during the last decades, more than men about the Holocaust. Vasvári postulates that life writing -- a term utilized mostly in gender studies but useful for other types of texts -- is a useful designation for the texts at hand because it elides generic boundaries between history, fiction, documentary, and literature. *nota bene*: for an updated version of this bibliography see *CLCWeb: Comparative Literature and Culture (Library)* (2012-): <<http://docs.lib.purdue.edu/clcweblibrary/vasvariceushoahbib>>.

Louise O. VASVÁRI

Introduction to and Bibliography of Central European Women's Holocaust Life Writing in English

Although the emergence of research on women in the Holocaust dates from the 1980s, the task of integrating the role of women -- and that of children -- into Holocaust Studies is far from complete, not the least because of the publication of so many women's life writing texts during the last decades, most of which remain virtually unknown. Holocaust scholarship still tends to privilege the Holocaust experience of men as universal and is reluctant to acknowledge testimony that does not follow pre-conceived gender stereotypes of suitable female behavior or pre-existing narratives of survival (see, e.g., Vasvári, "Women's Holocaust"; Waxman, "Unheard Testimony"; authors of texts of life writing in English are listed in the bibliography; other references in this introduction are listed in the works cited). How many people are aware, for example, that the very first civilian transport to Auschwitz was not of men but of female "volunteers"? For example, in Rena Kornreich Gelissen's (a book written with Heather Dunn MacAdam) *Rena's Promise: A Story of Sisters in Auschwitz*, Gelissen writes how at age seventeen, imagining mistakenly she would be protecting her family, she volunteered for a work brigade in Auschwitz.

As part of my larger project for the retrieval and incorporation into Holocaust scholarship of women's voices like that of Gelissen, the bibliography contains about 400 entries of women's life writing about the Holocaust written in English or available in English translation (see also my companion article in this volume, "Emigrée"; see also Biró). The majority of the texts listed in the bibliography are by authors originally from Central and Eastern Europe proper. However, based on the proposition that Holocaust scholarship altogether ought to be conducted in the context of the region and its cultures (on this, see Tötösy de Zepetnek and Vasvári, "Introduction" in this volume), texts by authors from Western Europe are also included for the obvious reason that in the camps all, from East and West, suffered and perished together, and even many of those who survived in hiding in places in Western Europe, such as Holland or France, were often first- or second-generation Central European Jewish women, in many cases without citizenship in the country of their residence even if they had already been born in a Western European country (note the examples of two French-language memoirs by women born in France, Claudine Burinovic-Herbomel, whose parents were Romanian Jews, and Ida Grinspan Bertrand, born to Polish parents).

It is in English that most Holocaust life writing has been written and published because so many survivors ended up in emigration in English-speaking countries; in addition, most scholarly work on the Holocaust has appeared in English (with scholarship in German a distant second: I list only selected items of such in the bibliography whether primary texts or scholarship), so that English has turned out to be the *lingua franca* of Holocaust Studies. For this reason in the bibliography a translator or translated edition may be indicated but without data about the original text. This lack of data in the bibliography is explained by a problem in bibliography work in Holocaust Studies as discussed by Bella Brodzki: for example, after reading Claude Morhange-Begué's memoir in English, Brodzki tried to locate the French original without success and when she tracked down the translator, she learned that an original had never been published. And this is more frequently the case when originals were written in languages of Central Europe, including Yiddish. The problem of the source text is complicated further when a text is published first in English and is later translated and published in the "original" language, as in the case, for example, of Ita Dimant's *A Diary of the Holocaust*, first published in English in 1993, followed by its translated version published in Polish in 2001. Most striking is the case of Mary Berg's Warsaw ghetto diary, written in Polish, and first published in Yiddish and then English in 1945, and not until the mid-eighties in Polish. The relative lack of Holocaust texts published in Central and Eastern Europe proper, including scholarship, is because in postwar communist countries, anti-

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Semitism continues today (see Marsovszky; Pető; Tötösy de Zepetnek, "Imre Kertész") and because under Communism the Holocaust was a taboo subject except in the context of the fight against fascism (see Kisantal). And the problematics of women's Holocaust life writing is also fraught with matters such as the situation in Israel where survivors' texts and scholarship about them were perceived for a time as a threat to the masculinized nation-building discourse of Zionism (see Bos; Vasvári, "Women's Holocaust"; Zertal) or the situation in Latin America where large numbers of survivors emigrated, yet there is no published corpus of such life writing, with only an occasional second-generation son or daughter writing in the US of their parents' experiences (see, e.g., Agosin; Spitzer). Some few memoirs of note have appeared recently, such as Eva Eisenstaedt's story of how she survived Auschwitz, only to end up becoming one of the the "Plaza de Mayo" mothers in Argentina (see also Isacovici, Hazan, Wapner-Levin). There are many other memoirs, however, which mention brief interludes spent in Latin American countries before further emigration to more hospitable places (to cite only two examples, see Prager on how she reached Australia via Uruguay and Chile, or Jacoby on her and her mother's life in Havana before emigrating to the U.S.)

While the authors in this bibliography are overwhelmingly Jewish, there are works listed by others whose experiences also offer important testimony not only on the camps but other aspects of the Holocaust. Texts by gentiles in the bibliography include Genéviève de Gaulle (niece of Charles de Gaulle), Nanda Herberman, a Protestant in the women's camp of Ravensbrück, who wrote one of the very first camp memoirs, and Charlotte Delbo, with her unusual collective [auto]biography in the first person of about 230 women in her convoy, as well as others in the French Resistance such as by Lucie Aubrac, Claire Chevillon, Christine Zamoyska-Panek, and Simone Arnold Liebster. Rescuers include Alicia Appellman-Jurman, Irene Gut Opolyke, and Corrie Ten Boon, while some gentiles might better be described as onlookers (e.g., Anonymous; Arnothy; Polcz; White; Zassenhaus). As the example of Krystyna Zywulska (Zosia Landau) illustrates, categories can be tenuous. In her *I Survived Auschwitz*, she wrote about being in Auschwitz as a political prisoner, which was true, but only twenty years later did she reveal to readers in her *Pusta Woda (Empty Water)* that she was a Jew who had walked out of the Warsaw ghetto in 1941 and worked as a gentile who was arrested and imprisoned as a resistance fighter. Zywulska's belated revelation at one point caused her memoir to be withdrawn from some Jewish institutions, a situation Elizabeth Baer argues against by pointing out that the question is not who is or is not a victim, or what is and what is not a Holocaust memoir, but "whether or not the memoir can contribute to that project of understanding" (22).

While I do not list in the bibliography collections of survivors' oral testimony such as those by Cynthia Crane, Jehoshua Eibeshitz and Anna Eibeshitz, Brana Gurewitsch, Vera Laska, Ilana Rosen, and Lore Shelley, such texts are, nevertheless, important with regard to the relevance of "ordinary" women who have not written themselves. Further, although I list items of texts by survivors and nonsurvivors, I emphasize the term "survivor" because of the larger corpus of writing by survivors. It is, therefore, important to remember that in spite of this, by far the two best-known female Holocaust voices -- Anne Frank and the Hungarian-born Hannah Senesh -- obviously do not fall into this category. While Anne Frank is known world-wide, Senesh is known only in Israel, where she has been promoted to heroic status as the Israeli Joan of Arc, precisely for her "nonfeminine" heroic traits (see Vasvári, "Women's Holocaust"; neither wrote about the camps and neither survived: it appears that for women survivors death is a necessary qualification for canonization, and the voices of these two women were until a decade ago available only in censored editions).

The posthumous works of other women Holocaust writers whom I list and who did not survive also merit consideration, including Etty Hillesum, Charlotte Salomon, and Irène Nemirovsky. It is interesting to compare Anne Frank with other teenage diarists who also did not survive, such as Hungarian Éva Heyman, who like Anne, began her diary on her thirteenth birthday and likely perished in Auschwitz at exactly the same time, or Ruthka Liebllich, who died in 1943 and whose diary was published in

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English only in 1993. There are also teenage diarists who survived, like Mary Berg, who published her diary of the Warsaw Ghetto in 1945 (earlier than Ann Frank's text) and Janina Bauman, who wrote her memoir only forty years later, partially based on the diary she had written in the Warsaw ghetto and hid under floorboards, as well as the Yiddish diaries of Vlada Meed and Lena Jedwab Rozenberg. Texts by survivors are still appearing over sixty years after the Holocaust, such as Hungarian survivor Erika Gottlieb's memoir, published only months after her death in 2008, as well as Edith Meyer Cord's 2008 story of her survival as a hidden child. More surprisingly, even diaries and letters from nonsurvivors are still surfacing at this late date, such as Ruthka Laskier's diary, who died at fourteen but whose diary was kept for sixty-three years by a girlfriend and published in 2007, and Hélène Berr's diary published in English in 2008.

Previous bibliographies on women's Holocaust texts are either outdated, owing to the increase of such texts since the 1990s, or they are limited. For example, the bibliography by Terence des Pres is now over thirty years old, while more recent ones, such as ones by Nehama Tec and Gisela Bock, list sixty-eight and about ninety entries, respectively, the latter including both men and women, with a predominance of German-language texts. While S. Lillian Kramer's, Esther Goldberg and Martin Gilbert's, and Alan Riggs's reference guides are useful for detailed entries on already well-known Holocaust writers, other bibliographies demote certain works by women into a separate category appropriate for "young adult" readers (e.g., Auerbach; Bitton-Jackson; Boraks-Nemetz; Ornstein; Richman; Roth-Hano; Soumerai). Some texts were written for such an audience -- as all those under the Puffin imprint -- but, as in the case of Isabelle Leitner's memoir rewritten for a younger readership, the borderlines are often nebulous. Interestingly, it is precisely those which are marketed to young readers that have stayed in print, such as prize winners for juvenile nonfiction, including Aranka Siegal's and Isabella Leitner's texts.

Most of the publications right after liberation were camp testimonies and some bibliographies have privileged these, sometimes rejecting those that did not devote "enough" space to that experience. However, more and more survivors who were not in camps but survived in hiding, in particular child survivors, including those who left on the *Kindertransport*, began to add their voices to the growing number of texts in life writing. Thus the steadily wider scope of writing has broadened the sense of the enormous dimensions of the Holocaust. In addition, with the largest number of survivors writing as late as half a century or more after their ordeal, equally relevant is how their Holocaust experience has marked their subsequent lives as survivors, and conversely, how their later -- often inter- and multilingual -- life has marked their memory of the Holocaust and their ways of narration (on the problematics of multilingualism, emotions, and the creating of new identity narratives in a new language, see Trahan; Polenko, Alan Rosen). These are issues I cannot discuss here, but as the single best memoir that addresses all these issues and does so from a feminist perspective, I recommend Ruth Klüger's *Still Alive*, an English-language recasting of her German-language text written a decade earlier (see Schaumann; Bos).

This bibliography suggests that women have written as much, and, especially during the last two decades or so, have written and published in fact more about the Holocaust than have men. It also shows how Holocaust testimonial writing began with liberation, with women's life writing always forming an important part: on this, see Zoë Waxman's *Writing the Holocaust*, who argues against the myth that survivors have come to tell stories only recently and discusses how gender affected how they narrate their stories. Note, for example, the following early works (as indicated, I list only those available in English), some based on diary material written during the war, all written in the first period between 1945-48, a few of which were published 1945-48, but many not until decades later. Today, with the possible exception of gentile Charlotte Delbo and perhaps Liana Millu, virtually none are known: Lucie Adelsberger, Seweryna Samaglewska, Mary Berg, Blanca Rosenberg, Pelagia Lewinska, Nanda Herberman, Sima Vaisman, Olga Lengyel, Ella Lingens-Reiner, Corrie Ten Boon, Gusta Da-

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vidson-Draenger, Liana Millu, Helen Warren, Juliana Tedeschi, Gisella Perl, Vladka Meed, and Krystyna Zywulska. Some of the earliest authors tended to be those who had special positions in the camps or were privileged in some other way, including some of the gentile prisoners or doctors and medical personnel such as Gisella Perl, the head gynecologist at Auschwitz, one of her assistants, Olga Lengyel (on Perl and Lengyel, see Vasvári, "Emigrée"), Sima Vaisman, and Lucie Adelsberger. On the other hand, as already noted, teenage diarists were also well represented. These first texts are particularly important because they were still written under the influence of the initial trauma and not yet influenced by other memoirs, testimonies, or scholarship. The testimony of Sima Vaisman illustrates particularly well many of these problems, and how, as I have pointed out, the lives and testimonies of Central and Eastern and Western European survivors are intertwined. Vaisman was born in Bessarabia (now Moldova) and received her medical degree in Bucharest, but, fleeing the increasing persecution of Jews in Romania, she moved to Paris, where she could only work as a dental surgeon. She was deported in January 1944 to Auschwitz-Birkenau, where she was relatively protected as she was assigned to the "hospital." Immediately upon her return she wrote for fear of losing precise memory. Her testimony, one of the earliest and the first written by a female doctor, was published in French as *Le Monde juif* in 1945. It was subsequently ignored, including by her, until a niece found it in a drawer in 1983; it was republished in the same journal in 1990, appeared as a small book in French in 1992, and in English translation in 2005.

As mentioned above, many other survivors had diaries or wrote recollections right after liberation but only published full works much later, for example, Isabelle Leitner, Rivka Leah Klein, and Judith Magyar Isaacson. Often details of precise dates, translators, and the like are impossible to trace for these earlier works. One illustration suffices: teenager Ana Novac managed to keep a diary in Hungarian on scraps she and her friend hid in their shoes in Auschwitz (see Vasvári, "Emigrée"). Although she became a successful writer, her diary was unpublishable in communist Romania after the war, a standard situation in communist countries, as I have noted. After she fled to Germany, it was published, surprisingly, in Hungarian (under her original name, Zimra Harsányi) in 1966, and the following year in German, but it is unclear if by herself. The subsequent year she emigrated to France, where the work appeared in her own translation. When, almost twenty-years later, there was interest in translating her work to English, she was dissatisfied with the quality of her earlier version and retranslated the text, with the aid of a magnifying glass, to French from her original Hungarian notes. It was this new and expanded 1996 self-translation that provided the basis for the 1997 English version.

Holocaust life writing continued to be published in a slow but steady stream, but it was not until around 1990, in what has been called by Leigh Gilmore "the age of trauma memoir," which includes survivor discourse and narratives of recovery (128-29), that a boom in such works started. That boom has reached such proportions that a *New York Times* commentary on a recent Jewish book fair could report that "Holocaust memoirs vied for time with cookbooks and diet books" (Donadio 31). The overwhelming majority of Holocaust texts are written today by women survivors or by their daughters, reflecting what was always true but not adequately theorized, that women tend to be able to talk and write about traumatic events more easily (on trauma and women's writing, see Henke; see also Vasvári, "Women's Holocaust").

Although most of the texts in the bibliography would be called, conventionally, "memoirs" or at times "testimonies," more useful is the more inclusive "life writing," a genre designation that avoids what Sidonie Smith and Julia Watson call the "ideologically fraught category of autobiography ... [in which] masculinist ideology has often dictated formal and epistemological terms of the genre" (18). I postulate that life writing is a useful designation for the texts at hand because it raises questions about issues much debated in Holocaust scholarship, including authorship versus narrator, witness, history, memory, interpretation, fact versus fiction, culture, identity, the processes of publishing, canon versus social perspectives of literature, and so on, and hence the contextual analysis of texts called

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"life writing," following the tenets of comparative cultural studies, results in new insight and avoids the relegation or exclusion of relevant writing and authors (on the framework of comparative cultural studies consult Tötösy de Zepetnek, "From Comparative Literature"; for the framework's application in the study of Central and Eastern European cultures and literatures relevant here, see his "Comparative Cultural"). Life writing -- although a genre designation applied mostly in feminist and gender studies -- is useful for many other types of texts. Life writing elides and blends generic boundaries between history, fiction, documentary, and literature in general, including the novel, to encompass autobiography, oral testimony, diaries, letters, the autobiographical novel, and other textual forms and genres. Smith and Watson propose fifty-two sub-genres of life writing, of which apology, autofiction, memoir, prison narrative, serial autobiography, survivor narrative, trauma narrative, and witnessing are the most frequent forms utilized by women survivors. Of these the most problematic is the category of autofiction, to which, for example, Imre Kertész's work also belongs (see Vasvári, "Emigrée"; Vasvári and Tötösy de Zepetnek), as do a number of other works from the 1960s and 1970s such as Zdena Berg's *Tell Me Another Morning: A Novel* or the work of Ilona Karmel and Ida Fink (see Milner). Marlene Heinemann has studied six survivors in this category who published such texts between 1957 and 1980: Gerda Klein, Charlotte Delbo, Judith Strick Dribben, Fania Fénelon, and Livia Bitton-Jackson (on factual and fictional elements in testimonials, see Richardson). Although Holocaust autofiction is less prevalent today, an occasional work still foregrounds its problematic nature, as Edith Hoffman's *Unfinished Tears: A Novel ... But not a Fiction* suggests.

A further category of women's Holocaust texts is transgeneric life writing, such as Edith Bruck's oeuvre (see Vasvári, "Emigrée"), all of it circling back on her Holocaust experience, for which the term memoir would be much too confining, located as it is on the boundaries of literary memoir, oral testimony, epistolary works, prayer, all "recycled" to portray the Holocaust from a woman's perspective and highlight the role of gender in the creation of memory. Among other examples are Susan Suleiman's memoir, built around a diary written during her postcommunist visit to Hungary and Poland and called a "postmodern memoir" on the book's dust jacket by Kate Shulman; Lilian Boraks-Nemetz's poems drawing on her experience as a child survivor in the Warsaw ghetto; Irene Klepfisz's feminist essays drawing on a similar experience; and several epistolary works such as by Hilde Verdoner-Sluiser or Lotte Strauss (a memoir begun in 1975 as a letter to her daughter that took twenty years to complete). Consider also Felicia (Sleigman) Carmelly writing as a survivor of the little-known Transnistrian slaughter, combining in her work scholarship, family memoir, and memorial, or Anette Kahn, whose father was executed by Klaus Barbie when she was two years old. As a courtroom journalist, Kahn covered the Barbie trial, producing a work combining courtroom drama, testimonies of survivors, accounts of Barbie's career, and accounts of her own and her parents' lives.

The term life writing also underlines the continuity of life and hence of survivor's stories after the war. Although many of the works listed here, even some written more recently, end with liberation, the majority understandably go on to recount life after. Contrast, for example, two Jewish-Italian survivors, Juliana Tedeschi, who limits her story strictly to her camp experience, ending it with liberation and not even letting the reader know the fate of her baby, left behind in hiding, and Liana Millu, who includes her postliberation psychological re-adaptation to freedom. Georgia Gabor devotes most of her book to her Holocaust experience and a following year of life in postwar Hungary, but includes a second part of sixty-seven pages on her new life in the US as a war orphan, which by her own testimony was psychologically even more devastating than her wartime near-death experiences. Only one-eighth of Evie Blakie's work is devoted directly to her Holocaust experience as a hidden child; the rest of her book describes her life feeling a perennially displaced person in four different cultures and not considering writing until she recognizes herself as a survivor at the first Hidden Children Conference in 1982. Similarly, Paula Marcus, a fifteen-year-old Hungarian survivor, started her first diary entry hours after liberation; three years later, by this time in the US, like Gabor, she felt isolated and bitter. When read-

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ing her diary thirty years later and translating it herself to English, she recalls how at age fifteen she found liberation life confirming, providing warmth, solidarity, and people who listened (see Greenspan 52-55).

A special case of life writing is two-voiced life writing, what Bella Brodzki referred to as the inter-generational and intercultural transmission of imperiled narratives, conceived as acts of translation, in and through a space of thick translation from orality to textuality. Brodzki studies the memoir by Morhange-Begué, originally written in French but published only in English translation, where the author describes how she and her mother survived. Since her mother cannot write her own story, it falls to the daughter to textualize the mother's narrative. Similarly, Susan Varga, whose mother had always said she was waiting for her daughter to write her story, tapes her mother's testimony, but constructs a story of both their lives, even as the wartime stories really belong to her mother, since she herself was an infant. Miriam Katin achieves something similar with the new form of "comix," akin to Art Spiegelman's work (see Vasvári, "Emigrée"). These authors all belong to the youngest members of the "1.5 generation" of child survivors with few or no independent memories of their own, thus, although in a physical sense they are survivors, their early stories have to be textualizations of their parental oral narratives.

In the bibliography I do not include the large corpus of so-called postmemory life writing by children of survivors, who started writing during the same boom of the early 1990s as their mothers and who are overwhelmingly women. I include, however, examples written by those second-generation daughters who are attempting to ventriloquize their parents' stories rather than, or in addition to, telling their own second-generation ones. Perhaps most notable are the sister pair, Elaine Kalman Naves and Judith Kalman, who each wrote the stories of each of their parents (on the Kalmans and other Central European women's texts in English, see Tötösy de Zepetnek, "English-language"; Vasvári, "Emigrée" in this volume). Ann Kirschner put together *Sala's Gift* about her mother's life from a cardboard box that contained letters her mother handed her when at age sixty-seven she was to undergo triple bypass surgery. The contents cleared up the life that the mother had until then been silent about, her large family who had perished in the Holocaust, her own wartime ordeal in 1940 when as teenager she volunteered (on behalf of her weaker older sister) to work in a Nazi labor camp, and the years up to 1946 when she arrived in New York as a war bride. The exceptional man in textualizing the maternal voice is Martin Lemelman (in French compare Jérôme Clément on his Russian-born mother's life), who in *Mendel's Daughter* taped the story of his mother, born in 1922 in a small Jewish village in Poland. In 1989, much like Spiegelman's father, she told her story to her son in fractured English combined with Yiddish (Lemelman claims for himself no more than the role of transcriber and editor of his mother's story; some of her story can be listened to at <<http://www.mendelsdaughter.com/broadband.htm>>).

Finally, life writing also elides the often value-laden and normative judgment of the literary merit of texts. Note the example of Ruth Klüger's work, initially rejected by the major German publishing house Suhrkamp on the grounds that it was not "literary" enough; in 1992, it appeared and met with enormous success, made its small publishing house Wallstein famous, garnered numerous literary awards, and was translated to several languages: never before had a Holocaust testimony been so successful in Germany (see Schaumann). At the other extreme is a memoir like that by Judith Jaegermann, whom Ilana Rosen would locate among the "so-called ordinary people" who normally participate, if at all, only in oral testimony or in communal memorial books (*Sisters in Sorrow*). In a slim fifty-seven pages, written in a simple style, an outcome of her attending courses in 1985 in Yad Vashem to learn to tell her story, Jaegermann talks about her prewar life as "perfect" and can say nothing substantially new. Yet her book contains poignant anecdotes that illustrate on a personal level the theoretical points I am discussing here about how so many survivors were silenced from speaking both in public and in private. In a chapter entitled somewhat ironically, "Free At Least!?" she tells how,

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from Bergen-Belsen to Prague, her group stopped in Pilsen and people asked about their tattooed numbers; when she told them about three-and-a-half years in concentration camp, they replied: "And why didn't you stay where you were? Who needs you here?" (18). When, as the sole survivor of her family she finally reached Israel, her sister, who had lived there since 1939 and whom she had hoped would show her sympathy and comfort her, never once asked what she went through. Finally, when Eichmann went on trial in Israel in 1961, people suddenly started asking questions, but then "after the trial, nobody asked any more questions" (57). As Esther Goldberg writes in her *Memoir Digest of Survivors*, "each memoir writer has a different story to tell and tells his or her story in a different way ... every memoir is informative ... [and] poignant" (x-xi) and as Alvin Rosenfeld writes in his *A Double Dying*, if we deny the centrality of Holocaust literature we would be falsifying not only the literary history of our time but also the moral history, a statement that becomes all the more true if we do not include the voices of women as well as other hitherto underrepresented victims, Jewish, gentile, Roma, gay and lesbian, communist, Catholic, and so on.

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