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 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 preconceived gender stereotypes of suitable female behavior or pre-existing narratives of survival (see, e.g., Vasvári, “Women’s Holocaust”; Waxman, “Unheard Testimony”; and texts of life writing in English are listed in the bibliography; other references are listed in the works cited). How many people are aware, for example, that the first civilian transport to Auschwitz was not of men, but of women “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 Vasvári, “Emigrée”; see also Biró). The majority of the texts listed in the bibliography are by authors originally from Central and East Europe proper. However, based on the proposition that Holocaust scholarship altogether ought to be conducted in the context of the region and its cultures, texts by authors from Western Europe are also included for the obvious reason that in the camps from East and West all 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 also largely been in English (with scholarship in German and French somewhat second). I list only select 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 with Holocaust Studies as discussed by Bella Ritter, for example, after reading Claude Montefiore’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-Semitism continues today (see Muszynska; Petö; Tóth, de Zepetnek, “Jmre Kertész”) and because under communism the Holocaust was a taboo subject except in the context of the fight against fascism (see Kisantal). And the problematic 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., Agusin; Spitzer). Some few memoirs of note have appeared recently, such as Éva Eisenstadt’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 those of 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 Chevrier, Christine Zambrzyska-Panek, and Simone Arnold Liebster. Rescuers include Alicia Appelman-Junman, Irene Gut Opolony, and Corrie Ten Boon, whose some gentiles might better be described as onlookers (e.g., Anonymous; Arnosti; 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 that she was in fact a Jew who had been deported from her Pustka wsi (Empty Wood) family. Describing how she was a nurse in 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 contributes to that project of remembering" (22).

While I do not list in the bibliography collections of survivor's oral testimony such as those by Cynthia Crane, Jehoshua Eibeshitz and Anna Eibeshitz, Banesa Gurweitsch, 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. Furthermore, though I list items by 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 Israel 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 only 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 Eddy Hillesum, Charlotte Salomon, and Irène Nemirovsky. It is interesting to compare Anne Frank with other feminine diarists who also did not survive, such as Hungarian Eva Heyman, who like Anne, began her diary on her thirteenth birthday and likely perished in Auschwitz at exactly the same time, or Ruthka Laskier, who died in 1943 and whose diary was published in 1993. There are also other 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 Leda Jedwab. Rescuer texts by survivors, such as Hungarian rescuer, Erik 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 diary entries 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 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-six biographies, with a predominance of German-language texts. While S. Lillian Kramer's, Esther Goldberg and John Gilbert's, and Alan Riggs' 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; Borasky-Nemetz; Orinstein; Richman; Roth-Han; 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 that are marketed to young readers that have stayed in print, such as prize winners for juvenile fiction, 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 living memory. This more recent and wider scope of writing has broadened the sense of the enormous dimensions of the Holocaust. In this 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 intergenerational — life experiences have marked their narrations (see problematic 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 most important memoir that addresses all these issues and does so from a feminist perspective, I recommend Ruth Klüger's Still Alive, an English-language reprinting of her German-language text, published a decade earlier (see Schumann; Bob).

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 where published 1945-48, but many not until decades later, with the possible exception of the excellent work by Corrie Ten Boon, Gusta Davidson-Draeger, Liana Millu, Helen Warren, Juliana Tedeschi, Gisella Perl, Vladka Meed, and Krystyna Zywulska. Some of the earliest autobiographies that were written by women who were imprisoned or were privileged in some other way, including some of the gentle prisoners or doctors and medical personnel such as Gisella Perl, the head gynecologist at Auschwitz, one of her assistants, Orla Lengyl (on Perl and Lengyl, 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 European female survivors were intertwined. Vaisman was born in Bessarabia (now Moldova) and received her medical degree in Bucharest, but in 1944, 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...
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 should be Anna Novac's Hana, a Hungarian on scraps of cloth in Auschwitz (see Vaszári, "Emigrée"). Although she became a successful writer, her diary was unpublished 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 English, but it is not clear if by then she had yin mind and 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 class, to French from her original Hungarian notes. It was this new and expanded 1996 self-translation that formed the basis for the 1997 English version of the novel. It was 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 Vaszári, "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, and identity, in the processes of publishing, canon versus social perspectives of literature, and so on, and hence the contextual analysis of texts called "life writing," following the tenets of comparative cultural studies, results in new insight and a sharper formulation or exclusion of core problems of the Holocaust. In their framework of comparative memoir studies consult Tótósy and 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 as well, for example, the essays of Edith Saban and gendered 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 witness 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 Vaszári, "Emigrée"); Vaszári and Tótósy 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 Fénélon, and Livia Bitton-Jackson (on factual and fictional elements in testimonial, see Richardson). Although Holocaust autofiction is less prevalent today, an occasional work still foregrounds its problematic nature, as Edith Hoffmann's Unfinished Tears: A Novel ... But not a Fiction suggests.

A further category of women's Holocaust texts are transgeneric life writing, such as Edith Bruck's oeuvre (see Vaszári, "Emigrée"), all of it circling back on her Holocaust experience, for which the term memoir would be all too conflating, located as it is on the boundaries of literary memoir, oral testimony, epistolary works, prayer, and "recollection" of the Holocaust from a woman's perspective and highlight the role of gender in the construction 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 Kamenik's essays drawn from several epistolary works such as her essay on her experiences as her little Hungarian twin, Slizer or Lotte Strauss (a memoir begun in 1975 as a letter to her daughter that took twenty years to complete). Consider also Felicia (Siegman) Carmelly writing as a survivor of the little-known Transnistrian slaughter, combining in her work scholarship, family memoir, and memorial, or Annette 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 coming 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 reactions and personal freedom. Georgia Gabor devotes a surprisingly long portion of her book to her Holocaust experience, ending it with a foreword, dedication page, and a farewell letter to her mother 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 initially even more devastating than her wartime near-death experiences. Only one-eight of Evie Blakie's work is devoted directly to her Holocaust experience as a hidden child, but because of her book describing all 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 reading her diary thirty years later, translating it herself to English, she was an 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 intergenerational and intercultural transmission of imperiled narratives, conceived as acts of translation, and in through a space of this tradition from orally ingenuity, originally written the memoir by Morhang but published only 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, tapers 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 Vásáry, “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 about their early 1990s as their mothers and other Central European women’s texts in English, see Tóth és 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 transcription and editor of his mother’s story; some of her story can be listened to at <http://www.mendelsdaughters.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; now it is a Holocaust memoir like that by Judith Jaegermann, whom Ilana Rosen would locate underrepresented victims, Jewish, gentile, Roma, gay and lesbian, communist, and so on. 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 Tóth és Zepetnek, “English-language”; Vásáry, “Emigrée”).

While these memoirists are celebrated as women in the Holocaust literature we would be falsifying a memoir writer 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 a different story, a different way of addressing the traumatic past, the narrator is subordinating his or her story to a larger context.” (57). The memoir writer has a different voice, a different story to tell and tells his or her story in a different way … every memoir is a different story, a different way of addressing the traumatic past, the narrator is subordinating his or her story to a larger context. She Axis and a Star: Memoirs of a Jewish Girl in Chile. 1994. Trans. Celeste Kostopulos-Cooperman. Albuquerque: U of New Mexico P, 1995.


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


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